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Antigone's Lament: Care, Death and Subjectivity in Hegel and Irigaray

A Dissertation Presented

by

Sabrina Lea Hom

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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In this project I explore the work of caring for the dead through the work of Hegel and Irigaray. My work demonstrates both that this work is indispensable for fostering and sustaining political subjectivity and that it is distributed along gendered lines. My analysis focuses on the figure of Antigone, whom Hegel takes as the exemplar of familial ethicality through her work of caring for her dead brother. Irigaray interprets Antigone's care of her brother as containing the trace of a repressed, maternal ethical principle that she metonymically calls *blood*. Irigaray's reading, with Hegel's, describes the importance of the care of the dead for sustaining subjectivity as well as the way that this work is historically appropriated to the ends of the patriarchal state. I argue that her reading also gestures toward the limitations and precariousness of Antigone's political agency, an aspect that has been elided by much of the feminist political theory that lionizes Antigone.

Through a close reading of Antigone's lamentation in Sophocles' play (a section that is ignored by most readers), I develop a reading of Antigone's lament as a lucid acknowledgment of the limits of her political subjectivity, which is threatened by her lack of mourners. Through the paradoxical work of lamenting herself, Antigone works to resist the abjecting machinations of Creon, who wishes to elide her death as an apolitical and ethically neutral event. While this lament necessarily negates Antigone's political subjectivity, it also demonstrates the power of mourning as the work of resistance.

As a result of her precarious subjectivity and what I will describe as a partial and distorted ethical practice, I take Antigone to be a useful figure for feminist theory but by no means an exemplar. I argue that the work of caring for the dead deserves recognition as a crucial means of sustaining political subjectivity, and that this work should be read as contiguous with other forms of care work. In fact, one of the limits of Antigone's exemplarity is her exclusive focus on the dead. Antigone's broken relations with her

sister and her fiancé also testify to an overarching failure of subjectivizing care except that directed toward the dead, a failure that renders all political resistance precarious. I argue that, in order to explore means of sustaining politically resistant subjectivities, we need to reimagine and reappropriate mourning and memorial practices, to broaden the set of subjects benefiting from them, and to reconcile the care of the dead with other forms of care.

**To Electra,
In Memory**

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Key to Abbreviations

PR: Hegel, G. W. F. *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. Trans. T. M. Knox. London: Oxford University Press, 1967.

PS: Hegel, G. W. F. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford University Press, 1977

BEW: Irigaray, Luce. *Between East and West*. Trans. Stephen Pluháček. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

ILTY: Irigaray, Luce. *I love to you: a sketch for felicity within history*. Trans. Alison Martin. London: Routledge, 1996.

DBBT: Irigaray, Luce. *Democracy Begins Between Two*. Trans. Kirsteen Anderson. New York: Routledge, 2001.

SOTOW: Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press: 1985.

ESD: Irigaray, Luce. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.

TSWINO: Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985.

SG: Irigaray, Luce. *Sexes and Genealogies*. Translated by Gillian C. Gill. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

TTD: Irigaray, Luce. *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution*. Trans. Karin Montin. New York: Routledge, 1994.

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Introduction

In this project, I will argue that Hegel's account of the family in *The Philosophy of Right* and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* provides a useful account of the ways in which crucial labor is distributed along gendered lines. Drawing on Irigaray, I will argue that Hegel's family is the site of labor which reconciles first and second nature, fulfills certain natural needs and guarantees care for those who fall outside of the scope of civil society. The work of the family is characteristically performed by women, for Hegel, but this work invariably benefits others—largely, male heads of household. I hold that Hegel's account of the family, as read through Irigaray's work, provides an account of the key work of the family in creating and sustaining subjectivity and the ways that women are literally *without* family; they do not benefit from the work that takes place in the family and, as a result, have at best a precarious and dangerous subject position *outside* of the family, in the sphere of civil society and the state.

Here I am specifically interested in the care of the dead, which is the central example of the family's work for Hegel. Characteristically, this is work that is performed by women, while women are excluded from these funeral and memorial practices. Within a system that privileges the risk of death and the mastery of nature, this exclusion has dire consequences for women's political subjectivity. I will investigate the care of the dead with the aim of emphasizing an understanding of subjectivity as an achievement that

must be sustained by the family in myriad ways and insured, again by kinship care, against threats. I will also look at the ways that the care of death and the ethos underlying it—the “divine law”—can be refigured both to sustain feminist political agency within the confines of the partial, masculinist subjectivity defined through risk, war and mastery, as well as the ways that such refigurations can reach beyond the limits of this subjectivity.

This project is fundamentally concerned with the achievement and sustenance of subjectivity in the context of western culture; as such, it is concerned with the intangibles of psychic life rather than the material conditions of existence. I will argue that subjectivity and political agency are accomplished through fostering care and ongoing support, both primarily sited within the family. This care takes many forms, as feminist theorists and observers have documented; it is overwhelmingly performed by women, for others. Many of the more tangible forms of labor and goods provided within the family have been subject to recent sociological and political attention; housework and the care of children, for instance, have been observed to be unequally distributed (not to mention inadequately supported) in ways that systematically disprivilege women, and this distribution is understood as a hindrance to individual women and to women’s political subjectivity more generally. In this project, drawing on Hegel’s and Irigaray’s account of a gendered division of labor regarding the care of dead kin, I will focus on a form of labor that, for all the attention given to Hegel’s account of Antigone as a paradigm of feminist agency, is not fully theorized in feminist work. The focus on the least tangible, psychic effects of such distributions is meant to supplement, not displace, crucial feminist work on the political, economic and physical effects of oppression and injustice.

The care of dead kinspeople is a contentious and ambiguous case at best—in terms of both a framework of care and of gendered social goods. After all, care provided to a dead kinsperson does not sustain the kinsperson’s subjectivity, which is already foreclosed. Nor can such care sustain a relationship, as is the focus of contemporary care theory. In this sense, it may seem more like a quaint superstition than as ethical care. Hegel’s account of the care of the dead, however, can explain how such care affects the subject, both as a promise that sustains subjectivity while we live, and as an institution that sustains the community. It is the former aspect that will be my main concern.

By means of my focus on the sustaining and subjectivizing power of the care of the dead, I wish to revisit the figure of Antigone. While Antigone is often taken up in discussions of feminist political theory, as well as psychoanalysis and queer theory, she is rarely considered in light of her particular ethic and its significance. Since it is the exigency of the divine law that gives Antigone her inspiration and her lasting efficacy, I hold that the necessity of caring for the dead and the drama of endangered subjectivity that motivates it must be at the centre of any account of Antigone’s action. By starting from Antigone’s ethic, and Hegel’s and Irigaray’s readings of it, we can achieve a more nuanced and comprehensive reading of Antigone than is ordinarily found in feminist accounts of Antigone and gain some surprising lessons.

While Antigone is such a popular figure in feminist theory that focusing on her almost requires no explanation, I have chosen to dedicate a significant amount of this project to the story of Antigone not only because of her popularity in feminist theory and topical relevance to the care of death but because I feel that my interest in the gendered distribution of the care of death and its consequences for subjectivity can illuminate an

undertheorized aspect of the *Antigone*. Antigone is often held as a political paragon, site of contention over the proper strategy and ethos of feminist political activism. I hold that, if we consider Antigone carefully, and in light of the exigency of caring for the dead which she obeys so painfully, she has two surprising, related lessons for feminist political action that have not been recognized in the considerable feminist literature on Antigone.

Firstly, Antigone's readers overwhelmingly take her as a self-possessed and unapologetic political agent, many lauding her powerful and subversive action, others taking her as a strident extremist who troublingly rejects her own sister in the name of fraternity. I present a reading of Antigone that is somewhere in between: a faltering, nuanced Antigone who is neither a paragon nor a failure, but a partial and instructive example of feminist political agency. Considering the particular ways in which Antigone falters—ways that are bound up with the gendered distribution of the care of the dead—illuminates both the power of her political actions and the instructive limits against which her project founders.

Secondly, the attention to Antigone's imperfections and failures underlines the inadequacy of the divine law as defined by Hegel. I will argue that Antigone's faltering results not only from the failure of those around her to obey its demands but also a failure intrinsic to its logic. With inspiration from Irigaray, I will argue that the divine law must be refigured or rediscovered on its own terms, not merely as a principle of resistance, but on the basis of blood, solidarity and subjectivizing care that gives it its special power and resiliency. On this account, I will argue, we must exceed Hegel's account of the divine law and, indeed, of subjectivity. A rediscovery of the divine law in its fullness promises to sustain revolutionary subjectivities as subversive as Antigone's and more so.

In the first chapter, I review Hegel's account of the family in order to observe the gendered division of labor and goods therein and the gendered subject that results. This account of the family is neither a coincidental and unfortunate aspect of Hegel's work that can be avoided in favor of aspects more favorable to a feminist project (as Ravven and Hutchings suggest) nor is it an error that dooms Hegel's work to irrelevance or to inadequacy (as Lonzi and Oliver, respectively, argue). Instead, Hegel's family structure is a necessary and internally consistent undergirding of his systematic apparatus. Observing the workings of the family for Hegel helps us to consider the ways in which the gendered distribution of family goods creates obstinate, gendered inequality, while attention to his writings on Antigone and the care of the dead are, in their excessive hermeneutic fecundity, a site where we can begin to theorize resistance to Hegel's political and familial apparatus.

Since Irigaray's reading of Hegel both inspires and guides my own, in the second chapter, I introduce Irigaray's project and her distinctive means of reading Hegel, amongst others. Irigaray grounds herself in Hegel's thought, particularly his philosophy of nature, in order to develop her radical claim of sexual difference; in this mode, he appears as a foundation and condition for her work. Hegel is a fellow-seeker, too, sharing Irigaray's spirit of nostalgia for the ancient Greeks and, as such, providing just the sort of mythologized history which she analyses most ably. Hegel appears as thus a *resource* for Irigaray's project, since she treats his text, like other canonical pieces of philosophy, as the analysand in her project of psychoanalyzing Western culture. Since Hegel observes and systematizes the social, his work, particularly in the *Phenomenology*, he is (insofar as Irigaray takes him, as I will, as a correct observer) especially fruitful for her purpose.

Finally, Irigaray takes inspiration from the form and the focus of the *Phenomenology*, aiming to disrupt what she takes to be a thoroughly phallic epistemology by observing the possibility of epistemologies of sexual difference from the beginning of Hegel's project.

The third chapter addresses the feminist fixation on Antigone particularly in response to Irigaray's work. Irigaray is often taken as a representative case of the feminist lionization of Antigone as an exemplary feminist political actor. I will argue, firstly, that it is a misreading of Irigaray's project to take Antigone as its exemplar; instead, like many other figures in Irigaray's oeuvre, she represents a limited field of both potential and danger for feminist actors. I will begin by pointing to other key figures in Irigaray's work, such as the female mystic, that disrupt Antigone's claim to the role of exemplar of feminist resistance. Second, I will offer a reading of "The Eternal Irony of the Community" that emphasizes both the subversive potential that Irigaray finds in Hegel's Antigone, particularly in the principle of blood, and the violent reprisal that makes Irigaray's account of Antigone more an elegy for lost life and lost potential as it is a paean to political success.

In order to explain Antigone's aforementioned loss—which I interpret as a partial failure of subjectivization—I will next attend to the role of the care of the dead in Hegel's system. The guarantee of posthumous care, I argue, sustains masculine subjectivity both at the level of the individual, who lives toward the guarantee of such care, and in the community, which depends upon kinship care to correct the disturbance that death creates in the masculine community. Care of death is privileged, I argue, because the risk of mortality is instituted as the absolute condition and everpresent risk of social life for Hegel. Using both Irigaray and Beauvoir (the play *Bouches Inutiles*) I will demonstrate

how funeral care, mourning and memory are gendered in the western context and discuss the consequences, which destabilize female political subjectivity.

The fifth chapter aims to demonstrate the latter point while explaining a heretofore neglected aspect of Sophocles' *Antigone*, the point at which Antigone's resolve falters as she begins to lament her fate. I argue that this lamentation reflects both Antigone's horror that she will herself lack proper care in death and a paradoxical and ultimately defeated attempt to provide herself with a proper funeral. This denial of care in death, I argue, disrupts Antigone's attempt to attain political subjectivity and renders her subject position unsustainable (an unsustainability that culminates in her inability to provide her own funeral lamentation.) Similarly, I argue that Creon's insistence on a very strange and highly gendered form of punishment for Antigone—one that cannot, I believe, be counted as an execution per se—underlines the ways in which the denial of a recognized and mourned death to female political actors serves as a refutation of female political subjectivity in general. And finally, I will consider the ways in which Antigone's lack of care in death—a lack that she can foresee during her life—structures her relations to others and renders those closest to her unable to work to sustain her subject position.

In the final chapter, I will draw on the lessons of Antigone's faltering in the face of a strange and unmourned death to find insight about the need to refigure and reimagine the care of death in order to sustain female subjectivity. This requires, firstly, opening and renegotiating the gendering of such care so that women become proper recipients and men, proper providers. Secondly, after Irigaray, I will argue that we must look beyond Hegel's morbid and masculine understanding of the social to recover aspects of the divine law that go beyond the care of the dead; what Hegel defines as the "divine law" is

only a small piece of subjectivizing care, and the piece that is most salient to his warlike state. One lesson of Antigone, I will argue, is that female political subjectivity, in all its promises, contradictions and dangers, requires ongoing subjectivizing care, in life as well as in death; this should be considered a fundamental point of feminist solidarity. A second lesson of Antigone regards the harms of patriarchally formulated mourning and memorialization practices that inherently exclude women, not least by excluding women from familial genealogies. I will anecdotally consider some contemporary practices that disrupt and refigure mourning and memorial genealogy along feminist lines.

HEGEL'S PLACE IN FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY

- I. Hegel's ambivalent daughters and sons
- II. Familial Equality?
- III. The Gender of Spirit
- IV. Antigone's Excess

Hegel's ambivalent daughters and sons

In this chapter I will review and analyze recent feminist writings on the place of women in Hegel's oeuvre. Many of these works provide useful exegesis of Hegel's account of women and unearth serious difficulties therein--points that seem dissonant with and in some cases fatal to Hegel's larger project. My analysis of women in Hegel's system is deeply indebted to these insights, although I will often argue against the fundamental aims of these works.

As I will review, feminist scholarship on Hegel tends to start from one of two theoretical standpoints: what Linda Singer calls the *good daughter* and the *rebellious daughter*¹. The first of these theoretical standpoints seeks to rescue a "father", the canonical male philosopher, from accusations of misogyny by demonstrating how useful and liberating his work can be in a feminist context (often, albeit, with considerable revision to correct for the contingent biases of a bygone era); here we can situate Hegel apologists like Ravven and Hutchings and revisionists like Deranty. The rebellious

¹ Singer, Linda. "Defusing the Canon: Feminist rereading and textual politics". *Erotic Welfare: Sexual Theory and Politics in the Age of Epidemic*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

daughter, on the other hand, prefers to unearth the deep, systematic, and fatal sexism of the father's teaching; this reaches its apotheosis in Carla Lonzi's article "Let's Spit on Hegel", which argues that Hegel can be of no use to the contemporary feminist. In my analysis, both approaches ultimately fail as feminist rereadings of Hegel²; the latter runs aground against the entrenched and asymmetrical division of labor between the sexes in Hegel's schema, while the latter rejects potentially useful tools and as such lacks the grounding necessary for insightful and constructive feminist theory.

The final mode of contemporary feminist theory described by Singer is that of "reading against the grain", a technique epitomized by Irigaray. In my second and third chapters, I will discuss further how Irigaray achieves her reappropriation of Hegel's writings, unearthing tools and insights for feminist theory through and often in spite of Hegel.

Feminist scholarship on Hegel tends to coalesce around several (by no means exhaustive) goals or interests. Some feminist scholars take as their explicit aim to rehabilitate Hegel's larger project from his belittling claims regarding women. These thinkers hope to show that Hegel's larger project can accommodate and even advance feminist philosophical and political ends. Heidi Ravven, for instance, hopes that Hegel's liberatory account of the development of consciousness can, given the revisioning of his most antifeminist remarks, become a tool for feminist activism. Deranty sets out to ground an alternative division of activity and representation between husband and wife. It will become clear that I find this approach untenable. The passivity and unconsciousness of woman is systematic and foundational for Hegel: it imbues not only the account of the

² Lonzi, Carla. "Let's Spit on Hegel". In *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel*, ed. Patricia Jagentowicz Mills. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1996.

family but that of Spirit itself too deeply to be excised in local and minimally invasive surgeries. While this point will be demonstrated in piecemeal and reactionary fashion in this chapter, later I will consider more thoroughly the reasons for which Spirit, in Hegel's account, can never become equally the premise of women.

A second school of thought aims to show that Hegel's account of woman is so inadequate and self-contradictory as to precipitate the collapse of his project. The tensions and lacunae in Hegel's account of women indicate an outside: the possibility of a very different and incommensurable project. I am sympathetic to the claim that women represent a new shape of consciousness for which Hegel cannot account, although I will argue that Hegel's account of women in itself, despite its difficulties, does not represent the downfall of Hegel's larger project. Indeed, I will argue that the tremendous resilience of Hegel's schema to feminist opposition, along with his account of the precariousness and suffering native to women's public agency, can offer useful insights to feminist thought.

I will argue that Hegel's work is not simply or easily reconciled with feminist aims or with women's public activity. Antigone and Lucinde are not easily interpreted or implemented templates for feminist activism. Hegel does not conveniently hoist himself on his own petard; his system, complete with its denigration of women, in many ways a coherent whole worthy of philosophical attention, not least because it provides an impressive account of human life in all its interweavings. It is in these linkages, especially, that feminists and other political theorists may find fruit in Hegel. It is the very resistance of Hegel to women's public agency, and the account he gives of the extreme and often fatal tension between the family and public life, that can be a

productive site for feminists. It is here that Hegel can be read to usefully unearth the connections and interdependences between family and public life that negatively effect women's lives when we attempt to straddle the two.

Familial Equality?

The Hegelian family is necessarily characterized by inequality and asymmetry between the men and women who belong to it. Hegel, in almost all instances, defines the family as a “nuclear” family—the married couple and their unmarried children³; the two adult members of this family, the husband/father and wife/mother, are prescribed very different roles. For Hegel, a woman's role is confined to the familial sphere and excludes external political, intellectual or spiritual pursuits. While some readers may accept this prescription, the feminist readers I am concerned with will not. Those interested in rehabilitating Hegel from claims that detract from a liberatory programme will try to demonstrate that a more symmetrical division of labor in the family is consonant with Hegel's system—perhaps more so than that familial dynamic that Hegel himself advocates. I will argue that these attempts misrepresent the necessity of Hegel's familial dynamic and its foundational role in the development of spirit.

Hegel claims that women are ill-suited and disinclined to public agency, and the Hegelian family is organized in order to obviate the need or the opportunity for all but the briefest and most limited acts of public citizenship on the part of women. Mills points out that “in the *Philosophy of Right* the bourgeois woman seems to be entitled to equal rights

³ One exception is Polynices, who is treated as family by his sisters although he is already married; this suggests that, while Hegel usually focuses on the nuclear family, the familial institution that he is concerned with when he describes the work of burial, establishing an ancestral pantheon, and (more clearly) the inheritance of property, is the paternal line as transmitted through generations of nuclear families.

but... she does not share the world equally with bourgeois man in the Hegelian system.”⁴

Both the male and female are citizens of the state and media for rights and duties, but the male is driven toward activity in the external world while woman, in her inclination and her capabilities, belongs in the private sphere of the family. Woman, the passive member of the family, does not exercise her rights and her agency in the greater world; since her understanding is marked by particularity and her ethical allegiance is to a law that is not that of the state, she has no place in the world beyond the family, where man’s law of universals rules. While a woman retains rights to inherit property from her parents and also has a right to family capital as a wife⁵, she has no administrative right. She is capable of claiming rights and fulfilling duties, though one of her ironies is that she never fully understands these rights and duties; she is capable of entering into a contract on an identical footing to that of the man, despite her supposed inferiorities, but the only contract that she will enter into as an individual (that is, not with her husband as her representative) is the marriage contract, that contract which is immediately transcended, along with her individual agency, by the unity of the family. The family is the proper sphere of the private citizen within the state and the purely private citizen can fulfill the role of the citizen at the familial level of ethical life, though no further. In Hegel’s account, the integrity of both the family and the state depends on a gendered division of the roles and responsibilities of public and private citizenship between men and women—a division that denies woman her own part in public life.

⁴ Mills, Patricia Jagentowicz. “Hegel and ‘The Woman Question’” in *Sexism of Political Theory*, ed. Loranne Clark and Lynda Lange, University of Toronto Press, 1979. P 94.

⁵ PR §180 (comment), §171

Many commentators argue that the exclusion of women from public citizenship, and correlative unequal status of men and women in marriage, are apposite to the larger goals of Hegel's project and, indeed, even to those of marriage itself. The essence of marriage is love as self-and mutual-recognition, and in 167 we see that this requires a relationship between the parties that is to some extent symmetrical, relationship. However, the mere fact of monogamy in marriage does not, as we have seen, make it a sphere of gender equality. Landes concludes that there is a "contradiction in Hegel's attitude toward women," for

On the one hand woman is an individual subject who possesses rights and transcends the standpoint of formal personality when she recognizes and is recognized by another individual within the love union. On the other hand, woman remains inferior, trapped in the immediacy and contingency of natural life rather than participating in the social order. As a result, monogamous marriage... is marred by the subordinate status and incomplete individuality of the woman.⁶

The unequal status of woman seems to be in tension with Hegel's demand for mutual recognition between the husband and wife; are they not too disparate, too completely opposed, to recognize themselves in each other?

Deranty, who accepts, with Mills and Landes, that this gendered division is in contradiction with the systematic project, argues that the division of labor within marriage can be remedied with a gender-neutral redistribution. Deranty believes that access to the discrete spheres of private, family life and public life ought not, by Hegel's own logic, to be distributed exclusively according to gender:

⁶ Landes, Joan B. "Hegel's Conception of the Family". *Polity*, 14,1 (Fall 1981) p.22

The weight of Hegel's own time prevented him from conceiving a sharing of tasks that would preserve the speculative richness of the family. According to speculative logic, this sharing would mean that each individual would be in charge of each moment of the concept of family. Each, that is the woman and the man, as a member of the family, must at the same time preserve the home and work as a Self for the free universality outside... This particular dialectic must operate in each individual, or else the sexual division of labour will make the primary ethical unity burst and hence dissolve society itself.⁷

By Hegel's own lights, then, we can reconceive of this division of masculine and feminine, family and public life, the natural and the ethical moment, in such a way that the male and the female partners have equal and identical roles; such a reconception, according to Deranty, will not do violence to Hegel's system but in fact would constitute a fulfillment of Hegel's own method and a rescue of his project from a pernicious error born of socio-historical contingency. Deranty's argument is flawed, of course, in that it takes the individual man or woman, in his or her relation to public or private labor, as the more or less cohesive units of which society is constituted. In fact, the family itself, with its individual members as mere aspects or parts, is the fundamental unit of civil society and the state, a unit that necessarily contains both the private and public moment. He is mistaken, also, in claiming that an equal sharing would in fact be out of place in the system: Deranty's criticism that the family, split into "an active and a passive pole", cannot be a "real unity"⁸ shows a basic misunderstanding of the nature of unity in Hegel and the structure of his system, as we will discuss later.

⁷ Deranty, Jean-Philippe. "The 'Son of Civil Society': Tensions in Hegel's Account of Womanhood". *Philosophical Forum*, Vol. XXXI, No. 2, Summer 2000 p.149

⁸ Deranty 150

This apparent contradiction, of opposition and unity, is actually perfectly sustainable in Hegel's system and, in fact, is necessary. Mere logical opposition does not add up to irresolvable contradiction; in fact, the resolution of such seemingly intractable conflicts is the very movement of Hegel's system. The oscillation of similarity and difference in the relationship of husband and wife, and in Hegel's account thereof, represents the admixture of unity and difference that is necessary, in Hegelian terms, to true unity. A unity that did not unite differences would be as empty as a tautology. Unity is unity in unity and difference, and marital unity is possible only because the two parties share enough to enter into a pseudo-contractual relationship, and yet different enough for their union to be a rich and meaningful one: they must need each other, or, in other words, oppose each other. This movement toward unity via unity and difference characterizes all the logical triads of the system; the relationship between the wife and husband is perhaps best understood in analogy—indeed, it is more than an analogy—to a logical pair of universal and particular, of opposites that contain each other. In the modern family, the woman embodies the particularity of the familial sphere, wherein members relate to each other with unashamed bias and specificity, while the man finds his destiny in the world of civil society and the state, where he moves toward universalization. The husband and wife are opposites who contain each other and who must reconcile themselves, as the universal and the particular as logical categories must reunite themselves in the singular. The difference, and the similarity, of man and woman are then entirely cogent within the system.

Furthermore, while the opposition of men and women has a positive content—each has his or her own proper ethicality and proper work—this content is unequally

valued and is broadly construed in terms of a merely negative opposition. Women's efforts are always passive in nature, as ordained by anatomical differences. Less conscious, less rational, and less developed, she does not take part in spirit or public life. Her part in ethical life is tenuous, tragic, and necessarily sublated, and her work is confined to immanent labor that supports man's more meaningful achievements. In her relation to her husband and his civil activities, women represent the preservation of an earlier moment of natural determination, a moment that must be preserved (men and women both retain their animal aspect and animal needs) even as it must be surpassed in more advanced human endeavors. Women's work is necessitated by natural determinations, and the division of labor is similarly determined by nature, which has conveniently provided a gender that is less able to and less inclined to surpass nature than the male is. This natural disparity allows for a necessary, rather than arbitrary, division of labor in the family.

Halper has investigated thoroughly alternative divisions of labor in the family and has shown that Hegel's is the most probable, if not the only, division of labor in light of his systematic project⁹. Halper points out that within, at least, Hegel's conception of femininity, the woman must take part in the particular as a mother and therefore cannot represent the universal while her husband represents the particular; therefore a complete gender role reversal would be impossible. If the couple were each to share in both of these spheres, the universal and the particular, the family and society, the logical opposition that allows their union would be erased. The most plausible alternative, Halper believes, would be a distribution of elements of each sphere such that the partners would be in perfect, point-for-point opposition to each other while still having a part in each

⁹ Halper, Edward C. "Hegel's Family Values". *The Review of Metaphysics* 54 (June 2001) pp. 851-853.

sphere. The arbitrary division, however, of the public and private spheres to insure total, ungendered opposition would be contingent--and therefore anathema to the system—as well as, in practical terms, quite silly. We have also seen that Hegel has reasons—if not, from our point of view, good ones—to divide male and female labor in such a way; for him sex and gender were no arbitrary divisions.

Furthermore, that the opposition between man and woman should be accounted for in such a way as to avoid sexual inequality seems to be impossible within Hegel's system. As Halper points out, the only logical pairs that could reasonably be applied to the marriage relationship are unequal;

Since no pair from Being or Essence offers any hope of unity or morality, we can only look toward categories from the sphere of Concept that come after and, therefore, include Universal/individual. However, there is no pair of equal but different Concepts and, thus, no pair likely to produce an equitable relationship. Since the *Logic* includes all categories of thought, there would seem to be no possibility of using alternative Hegelian categories to produce an equitable relationship.¹⁰

Hegel's system, at the level of ethical life and beyond, must then be characterized by inequality. This inequality is not only something to overcome, as in the oft-quoted (on the subject of Hegelian family) Master-Slave dialectic, but also, for instance, in the relation of the sovereign to his subjects, which is an ethical and a necessary relationship. Inequality is not an error of Hegel's speculative logic but rather a necessity thereof. It is not, then, possible, as Deranty hoped, to simply jettison or revise Hegel's writings on sex and gender difference without undermining his project: as Kelly Oliver writes, we cannot

¹⁰ Halper, 852

take as accidental the misogynist elements of Hegel's philosophy¹¹. Within Hegel's schema, gender differences are justified and necessary: they are not arbitrary divisions but natural and logical distinctions that allow for the unfolding of the family, civil society and the state.

One might argue that Hegel, in his use of sex and gender difference, re-naturalizes and therefore reverses the movement toward the ethical. Sex difference, of course, is originally a purely physical, indeed, anatomical moment, and this anatomical difference is of a piece, for Hegel, with the gender difference of active man and passively receptive woman. The natural form of the family may prove to be a problem for its systematic sustainability—is not the continued significance of this difference in ethical life a naturalization of the ethical? Does the persistence, in the figure of woman, of the physical/natural moment represent the smuggling of something illicit into ethical life?

Deranty argues that

The problem is that to attach an ethical significance to natural difference is a way of naturalizing or biologising the spirit. As such it is a fault of speculative logic. In formal terms, spirit is nothing but the dialectic identity of the two moments of substantial unity and scission. But in a non-dialectical separation into two natural poles, the dialectic richness of spirit is lost. If family is really the figuration of spirit, it must reunite in one identity the two contradictory moments... which means negation of the family itself¹²;

¹¹ Oliver, Kelly. "Antigone's Ghost: Undoing Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit" *Hypatia* vol 11, no. 2 (Winter 196) p. 69. The necessary, sexed inequality of Hegel's system ought not, I think, to be seen as condemning Hegel's ethical and political thought to irrelevance and anachronism; it may be that all of Hegel's accounts of inequality (and not just the Master-Slave dialectic) can offer insight into issues of inequality and oppression.

¹² Deranty 148

Hegel's dependence on sexual difference naturalizes the ethical, regressing to natural determination at the moment it claims to progress. This accusation of regression is repeated with variation in the allegation that Hegel has "re-naturalized"¹³ woman, reappears in several critiques.

That a figuration of Spirit should evince a natural moment or determination is not, in fact, a fatal contradiction. Spirit does not simply unmoor itself from the physical; rather it negates and therefore contains its natural moment. Thus, in the *Anthropology*, Hegel argues that nature determines us, and that its determinations will not disappear but rather unfold through the levels of development¹⁴. It should not surprise us, then, that the family—which is, after all, the natural moment of ethical life—has natural determinations. We must not make the mistake of understanding this, the natural form of ethical life, to be a return to some previous, natural figuration of the spirit, nor that the "re-naturalization" of woman indicates that she has somehow been knocked down to the logical level of lichen. That the natural reappears at the beginning of the ethical should be taken not as a sign of regress but of progress. This progress is, in inverse to Deranty, the process of spiritualizing the natural. Thus, we see in *the Philosophy of Right* and in the *Phenomenology* that the natural difference between man and woman takes on an ethical significance: the natural difference, we are to believe, is not mere accident but reflects with fractal perfection the tension, at the higher, ethical level, between the law of the state and family piety.

The Gender of Spirit

¹³ Landes 25

¹⁴ Hegel, G. W. F. *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit; Volume 2: Anthropology* trans. M. J. Petry. D. Riedel, 1978 (hereafter *Anthropology*). §391

Feminist exegeses of Hegel's account of women in the family have drawn light to the passive, semi-conscious, and selfless lives that Hegel justifies and prescribes for women in the *Phenomenology* and the *PR*. As Ravven points out, the family is parallel to the state in ancient times, but does not develop alongside the state. Women and their role within the family do not, then, develop greater self-understanding or reflective knowledge through time. Instead, the family is frozen at the level of unselfconscious unity. Those who are confined to the family—women, children and others—do not, strictly speaking, take part in Spirit, although they play a necessary role in its maintenance and reproduction; Spirit is the formation of consciousness shared by those in civil society. Many feminists have argued that Hegel's account of gender is not only oppressive to women, but also fatal to his own project.

Woman denied a part in the progress of the Spirit beyond the family, and in the full realization of self-consciousness. This inarguable exclusion of woman from the higher levels of the Spirit presents a problem to some readers of Hegel and gives rise to the fourth and final family of objections that I will treat here. Spirit is the unity of individual consciousnesses, and the realization of spirit must take the form of self-consciousness; woman, then, appears as an obstacle to the goal of philosophy, which is, Kelly Oliver argues,

To articulate fully the meaning of consciousness such that there is no difference between that meaning and its articulation. If this goal is reached, nothing remains unconscious or unspoken. To say that the rational is the real and that the real is the rational is to say that only what can be conceptualized is real and that everything real can be conceptualized.¹⁵

¹⁵ Oliver, Kelly. "Antigone's Ghost: Undoing Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit" *Hypatia* vol 11, no. 2 (Winter 1996) p. 70

Woman, who is in principle inarticulate, whose law is the unspoken and unconscious law of the underworld, represents that which is cannot be brought to consciousness, that which resists the movement toward self-consciousness and which stands in opposition to the articulate rule of the State. Hegel's own figuration of woman, then, seems to be at odds with his philosophical project and perhaps a threat thereto. Oliver maintains that

If there is some part of the experience of consciousness that cannot be conceptualized, then Hegel's project is called into question.... If the feminine is not conceptualized and brought into the level of the social, and subsequent levels of the dialectical progression of consciousness, then there is an element that is left behind by the *Phenomenology*. Hegel's analysis of the feminine in the section "The Ethical Order" undermines the entire project of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹⁶

The feminine itself, as that which remains in principle at the pre-conceptual level, seems to stand as a barrier to the self-realization of the Spirit.

The individual woman must be distinguished from this feminine principle insofar as she seems to, in a sense, exceed her femininity. Woman in the modern family inarguably enjoys some part in consciousness, since marriage is, for Hegel, in itself a form of self-consciousness (albeit consciousness of a self that not her own, but rather the hermaphroditic self resultant from marriage). Women, Hegel concedes, are "capable of education" and "may have happy ideas"¹⁷; woman herself, in opposition to the feminine principle, is capable of conceptualization and articulation. Despite these faculties, however, women lack the "universal faculty" that would allow them to participate in Spirit. Woman is excluded not only from the realm of the Absolute Spirit but the higher

¹⁶ Oliver 83-84

¹⁷ PS, addition 107

figurations of the Objective Spirit: the fact that woman has “has her substantive destiny in the family”¹⁸ establishes, as we have seen, that she has no part in public ethical life, and Hegel indicates that she has no understanding of philosophy or science. She is not capable of taking up a place in the State: “when women hold the helm of government, the state is at once in jeopardy, because women regulate their actions not by the demands of universality but by arbitrary inclinations and opinions”¹⁹ and therefore lacks the faculties for effective political agency. Hegel, Ravven summarizes, “concluded that the difference between women and men must be a stunting of woman’s rational, universalizing capacity. A phenomenology of *woman’s* consciousness would, for Hegel, stop with Antigone.”²⁰ The woman will remain forever confined to the family, in a role that has changed little since ancient times, never taking part in further maturation of the spirit.

With the exclusion of woman, whether as an individual or a principle, Hegel seems to set a limit on the Spirit and on the possibilities of conceptualization—a limit incommensurable with his project. As Mills points out,

While Hegel is in search of a philosophical system which embraces all there is, his acceptance of male domination and patriarchal rule sets a limitation to his system such that a male rather than a human world is what is described.²¹

¹⁸ PR §166

¹⁹ See above

²⁰ Ravven, 160. I believe that Ravven is incorrect when she continues this quotation by describing Antigone as “the quintessential spirit of the ever selfsame family”; the ancient family of Antigone is, of course, not the same as the modern family of the Philosophy of Right, differing in their very structure and end. Nor could Antigone be easily transposed on the modern family. Ravven, however, is correct insofar as woman’s sphere of activity and interest is contained forever in the family.

²¹ Mills (see note 11) p. 95

This remainder—of the feminine principle, which is unconceptualizable, and the woman herself, who is, we might say, conceptually impoverished—would seem to undermine Hegel’s system, if the end of this system can indeed be characterized as the achievement of a self-consciousness from which that nothing is excluded.

Similarly, Ravven argues that the continued confinement of women in the family represents an indefensible failure to fully achieve Hegel’s ideals of development. The family, as an undifferentiated harmony based on feeling (in this case, love) is analogous, Ravven argues, to the Greek *polis*. Neither the citizens of the Greek state nor the inmates of the family can reach full maturity and individuation—achievements that depend on participation in the risks and struggles that come only once one leaves this state of harmony and security. Proper development demands that the Greek state be left behind in favor of the modern state, but, Ravven observes, women’s role is all but indistinguishable between the two states; at best, in the modern state women have certain rights of property and citizenship that are executed by her male relatives. Hegel, of course, defends women’s exclusion from the state and from Spirit on the basis of their lesser capacities, an argument that Ravven considers to be disproved by the situation of women in the late 20th century (although, of course, this state of affairs continues to evince many inequalities and differences).

If we accept that Hegel ought to have deemed women “fully human and rational” (Ravven 150), then the liberatory narrative of male consciousness ought to be extended to women. Hegel’s pursuit of freedom and development, neither of which is attainable while confined in the family, necessitates women’s integration into civil society and the state. Ravven’s liberatory revision of Hegel, unfortunately, is open to two serious objections.

Firstly, the family cannot be surpassed in the same way as the Greek state has been; civil society and the state are founded on its continued existence within the modern state. As defined, these families require a gendered division of labor; if women's role within the family were to change, the family itself would be denied its necessary structure (even beyond those dangers which female participants might bring to the political sphere.) Of course, it seems unjust and arbitrary, granted woman's capabilities, to confine her to a lesser life for the benefit of her family and the state. However, as I will address further in the next section, granting the argument that women have the capacity to participate in reason and public activity, Hegel might still argue that women are best served if they avoid such undertakings; it might be worthwhile to settle for a merely vicarious part in public life if the alternative endangers not only the interests of men and of the state but those of women themselves.

Finally, these arguments fail in that it does not seem that Hegel's system requires that every individual become self-conscious, that nothing and no one remain unconscious, in order that Spirit be realized as self-consciousness. The self-realization of spirit surely does not mean that people will cease to sleep or that babies will be born full-grown; the tension or differentiation of waking and sleeping, physical and spiritual, is omnipresent for Hegel and in fact a key feature of the system. The preconscious moment is negated, but not annihilated, and instead is preserved in its negation. In fact the exceeded moments—for instance, the preconscious, feminine moment of ethicality—*must* be preserved within their negations.

Woman, then, only presents a problem for Speculative Logic if she represents not a negation but a sort of dead end. This is the problem that Oliver approaches when she

points out that woman does not “contain the dormant seed of her opposite,”²² and therefore, as an individual, seems to be just such a developmental dead end. The individual, however, is not necessarily of importance to Hegel—after all, the master, too, is sublated in the development of spirit through the dialectic of the master and the slave. Individual people are mere contingencies; it is the Spirit itself that is the ethical substance. The story of Spirit’s development is, incidentally, the story of human individuals, but this is not its essence. Women, Oliver correctly points out, are not, then, real—but neither is the individual man. Only the Spirit is real and actual.

In order to understand Hegel’s account of family, then, we must remember that the persons who ascend the levels of the system, of the social and spiritual world, need not be individuals at all. In “The Family” section of *The Philosophy of Right*, the masculine and feminine are united by nature and will in “a spiritual bond... inherently indissoluble.”²³ This unity is not dissolved by the dissolution of family into civil society, but rather multiplied; therefore we must consider the men in civil society to be not only men but men *qua* heads of household, men who are the externalizations of their families. The capital traded and accumulated in civil society, after all, is not the property of individual men but the collective property of families, administered by the husband/father but owned by all²⁴. Family is necessarily present in civil society, both logically and ontologically; it is invisible only because it is, at this level, contained within the head-of-household. Hegel has sublated the feminine in the figure of her husband as head of household. Insofar as the woman is a part of the union of the masculine and feminine that

²² Oliver 72

²³ PR §163

²⁴ PR §171

is modern marriage, she does contain the seed of her opposite and of that which will exceed her—the masculine. Thus women and children, the denizens of the family and the individuals who have no place in civil society or the state, and no place in the further development of spirit, nonetheless have their part in these, insofar as they are logically contained in their husbands and fathers. Woman, then, is not, as Mills suggests, excluded from the system—instead she is preserved/negated in an unattractive formulation that nonetheless seems to be quite consistent with Hegel’s system: woman will have her part in the Spirit as plants and animals do, insofar as she is sublated by a superior being.

The person who ascends toward spirituality, then, is not an individual man but the single person into whom the masculine and feminine have willed themselves in marriage. The unconscious, feeling principle of the feminine takes on more obvious role within the system: it is the unconscious, the particular, and the physical moment of this unity, that which is never left behind but must be negated. If the active, conflicted, struggling citizen of civil society indeed finds a “tranquil intuition of unity” and an existence on the level of feeling (166) in the family—presumably, when he is literally in the family, in the evenings—then the family is both the literal and the figural sleep of the citizen—his respite from the conflict of civil society and from the necessity to universalize. It is also the place where he will feed his physical needs, the appetites for food and sex²⁵ and the

²⁵ This confinement of the sensual to the sleep-life of man is surely a precaution against the dangers of Schlegel’s *Lucinde*—the seductive, sensual figure of who muddies gender roles and saps the active energy of her lover—described by Krell (Krell, David Farrell, “*Lucinde’s Shame*” in *Feminist Interpretations of Hegel* ed. Patricia J. Mills, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA, 1996.) The presence of woman, as the seductive power of the natural and physical world, might indeed “[condemn] spirit and its system to a fate worse than death” (89) if man were less able to divide his worlds than Hegel assumes; if thus seduced by the natural, he would lack the drive and the energy to exceed it. By confining woman to the family, civil society should be delivered from the threat of her seduction and allowed to develop rationally. This confinement of woman also seems to be a limited antidote to her dangers as the destructive, irrational, anarchic principle of sexual passion (a passion which, in the ancient world at least, threatens the patriarch because it prefers the son.) This confinement, however, does not disengage woman

need for literal sleep. The family as the sleep of the citizen will be beneficial as is the sleep of the individual, enabling more progressive and powerful activity in waking hours and public undertakings:

Sleep invigorates this activity not simply negatively, as a rest from it, but as a withdrawal from the world of determinateness, from the diversion of becoming fixed in singularities, into the universal essence of subjectivity, which constitutes the substance and absolute power of these determinatenesses.²⁶

Like sleep, the retreat into the family refreshes the citizen, nurturing him and preserving in him some conceptual fluidity necessary to his ascent through the system. Woman is identified entirely with the family, such that when Hegel speaks of “the family”—as when he discusses the burial of bodies²⁷, which, it turns out, is a specifically female duty—it is often clear that “the family” is in fact the woman. The woman, then, is the sleeping, the sublated part of this family-person, its ever-present, negated Unconscious. The family, and woman’s role therein, is then no more problematic to the realization of spirit than the fact that, even in the state, the citizens and even the sovereign must sleep.

In the above instances, at least, no evidence is to be found that Hegel’s exclusion of women from spiritual development is fatal or dangerous to his project. Indeed, his schema resists attempts at deconstruction; the place of women therein is not only defensible but, it seems, necessary. The denial of full self-realization to women does not

from her fundamental opposition to man, but rather reconstructs her as a new kind of enemy, as the irony of inarticulate agency and the opposing, familial moment of ethicality.

²⁶ *Anthropology* §398

²⁷ PS §451-452

deny the self-realization of spirit, and her natural determination does not prevent the ethical from negating the natural. Her relationship to her husband—in some ways mutual and symmetrical, in some radically unequal, contradicts neither itself nor the systematic project. In fact such a seemingly contradictory coexistence of natural and ethical, equal and unequal, is a necessary result of Hegel's logic: the section on sex difference fits easily into the pattern of Hegel's system. Its most objectionable aspects—the inequality of the man and woman united in marriage, the hardening of natural differences into insurmountable barriers in the ethical realm, and the denial of full self-consciousness to woman—in fact echo many previous movements in the system and reflect the very structure of the dialectic.

Hegel's treatment of women is neither irreconcilable with his larger project nor extricable from the project. Hegel's system cannot easily be rebalanced if women's role in the family is disrupted; it is too firmly enmeshed in the structure of civil society and the state, as well as in human nature. As such, Hegel's harsh treatment of women is, from the standpoint of the system, justified in a complex and rich fashion. It is not the case, as some commentators have written, that Hegel's family system is in place merely due to Hegel's mistaken beliefs about women's passive anatomy and lesser rationality. Commentators such as Ravven are mistaken to claim that, granted that it is now obvious that women are equal to men in rational capabilities and able to participate in family life, the family and women's role therein ought to simply fall aside, to be replaced, perhaps, by a Hegelian ideal of rational development for both sexes, some structure more fitting to the modern state than the ancient family. Instead, Hegel's account of the family is founded ultimately on his sense of human needs and the necessary bases of human

communities. It is these needs that necessitate a moment of passivity and a-rationality for all people, preserved within the family through women's work.

The active, conscious subject position of men in civil society is dependent on the complementary and opposite subjectivity (or rather, non-subjectivity) of women in the family, who maintain the pole of passivity and unconsciousness even as the head-of household sublates it. Male passivity and unconsciousness—as in the case of sleep or death—is confined to the feminine realm of the home, allowing for a homogeneously masculine public sphere. Those who hope for a rehabilitation of Hegel's liberatory narrative so that it might offer women, too, the possibility of agency and development beyond the family run up against a logic which all but requires the exclusion of women. The necessity of female exclusion for Hegel, however, opens another field of objections and threats to his schema: how can Hegel account for those female figures—particularly those to be found in his own writings!—who transgress against these boundaries?

Antigone's Excess

Feminist Hegel scholarship, and indeed all Hegel scholarship, has paid special attention to the figure of Antigone. While Hegel is arguably responsible for much of the rapturous regard of Sophocles' *Antigone* and of the heroine herself²⁸, the allure of this figure no doubt rests, in part, on her excess; the *Antigone* offers a rich and inscrutable text, and a protagonist whose extraordinary complexity and sublime depths have never been satisfactorily surveyed by a single author. Antigone is a contrary figure, who matches her heroism with self-pitying wretchedness, her gender-disruptive actions with a girl's conventional laments, and her devotion to her dead brother with puzzling

²⁸ Steiner, George. *Antigones*.

indifference to her living sister and, she claims, to any husband or child she might have had. She immediately transgresses, in Sophocles' text, any simple account of her character. Among Antigone's most notable transgressions is that against the very account of female ethical action that Hegel uses her to illustrate. While Hegel insists that this action must be, in some important sense, unconscious, Antigone is certainly—he admits—aware of her crime and actively chooses it. Ethical action in pursuit of the divine law, furthermore, is supposed to remain humbly and quietly in the sphere of the family; the female gender is not active in public life for Hegel. Antigone, as many readers have argued, is in fact the effective political agent that Hegel claims women never become.

Hegel's rapturous accounts of Antigone's virtue are founded on the clear-sighted and deliberate character of her actions. Unlike Oedipus, he says, she knows exactly what she is doing²⁹. She is aware of Creon's edict forbidding the burial of her brother and knows that she will be severely punished for doing so. In Hegel's interpretation, she even acknowledges her guilt before the law of the city, without slackening in her devotion to the divine law; as such her ethical consciousness seems to exceed that of Creon, who acknowledges the power of the divine law only when the backlash against his condemnation of Antigone begins. In this sense Antigone's ethical consciousness is less "one-sided" than is Creon's and therefore, in Hegelian terms, more true. We can hardly describe Antigone as a sleepwalker or a ghost in the ethical sphere: instead, we find in her a character who knows full well her actions and their consequences, and indeed, has a wide view of the tortured topology of the antique ethical world. She is, with Tiresias, the most lucid of the characters in Sophocles' *Oedipus* trilogy.

²⁹ PS sect. 470.

While Antigone knows that she must bury her brother, and knows that this is a grave crime meriting terrible punishment, Hegel claims that her ethical law remains at the level of the unconscious, all but inarticulate law of the underworld. Antigone, presumably, is filled with horror and dismay at the thought of her brother's corpse decomposing, unburied and disgraced. This is an instinctual human response rather than a rational judgment. Antigone sees no need to articulate and justify her actions as Hegel does; she takes for granted that the Theban people will empathize with her instinct. Even Hegel, in his attempt to theorize every moment of human consciousness, cannot fully articulate Antigone's motivations: as Irigaray demonstrates, there is implicit in Hegel's account a principle which he cannot bring to light, that which Irigaray will thematize as blood.

If we grant that such an account of Antigone's lack of ethical consciousness holds, it is striking that her actions can *only* be considered unconscious due to their basis in the divine law. In Antigone we find many of the elements of self-conscious subjectivity: ethicality, self-awareness, and understanding of the laws of the polis. Hegel casts Creon and Antigone as well-matched adversaries, while it is possible to read Antigone as exceeding Creon in virtue and strength. In this sense, again, she seems to exceed the place that Hegel would have for her; a more ignorant and base character might have better matched the hardheaded Creon. As Mills writes,

Sophocles creates a conflict in which Antigone represents not only eternal familial values but individual moral choice, in opposition to Creon who represents not only temporal legal authority but dictatorial rule... Antigone's tragedy is the result of strength and moral courage—the so-called “masculine” virtues—not simply a response to feminine intuition.

Hegel's account of Antigone as an unconscious, paradigmatically feminine ethical agent fails to contain her "masculine" virtue and deliberate, public activity. Since Antigone has the capacity for "masculine virtues", the difference between her and Creon seems to be less one of capabilities than of the gendered division of labor and of interests which directs Antigone toward the divine law and Creon toward the human. In the service of divine law, strength, courage and lucidity are unnecessary. Antigone's latent capacities appear as the sublime but unnecessary ethical comprehension occasioned by the ultimately unconscious law: a woman who performed her burial duties unconsciously and without ethical value—as would the dead man's mother or wife, according to Hegel—would be equally effective at the task of reasserting the dead man's agency and individuality.

Antigone exceeds Hegel's account of her by choosing her fate clearsightedly, by challenging power in the political sphere, and finally by her suicide. These excesses are not irreconcilable with Hegel's text—as we have seen, it is still possible to defend the claim that Antigone is unconscious, and while Antigone is an exception to the rule of female passivity, it is clear in Sophocles that such noncompliant activity is silenced and stilled. Still, the figure of Antigone stands as a challenge to Hegel's claims, at once the emblem of female ethicality and the defiant figure of a woman who exceeds Hegel's facile dichotomies of male and female, active and passive.

There is a considerable disconnect between the respectable wife and unconsciously ethical sister described by Hegel and the public citizen. This tension can

be seen even in the otherwise conservative *Philosophy of Right*, where the passive and asymmetrical role of women in marriage contrasts to the genesis of marriage itself-- which begins as a contract, like any other, between two property-holding agents. The evident tension between these moments is relieved through the conceit that upon marriage, even as contract is transcended, the individuality of the woman is lost, again, in the undifferentiated unity of the patriarchal family, and her agency is always to belong to her husband and proxy. Women achieve their citizenship in a moment that at once passes away and is replaced by the plantlike contentment of the wife and mother. It seems that Hegel must acknowledge the potential of female selfhood, but he prescribes that it ought to immediately be reabsorbed into the familial unity. Hegel does not believe that women are fundamentally incapable of citizenship and activity, but rather that in the properly ordered society these capacities are suppressed or appropriated through the institution of marriage.

Hegel does not argue for the impossibility of public activity for women, despite the fact that such agency is always excessive and dangerous to the family and the state. Instead he argues that the appearance of female subjectivity is unnatural, and describes a social formation which ensures that such subjectivity is always precarious and momentary, always already being reabsorbed into the unity of the family or into natural determination. The literary figures of Lucinde and Antigone, as well as the life of Hegel's contemporary Caroline Schlegel, demonstrate that Hegel admitted to the possibility of women's "masculine" activity. Such women are acknowledged in Hegel's schema, albeit in marginally, and often in clear tones of condemnation. Antigone's activity, which is

marked as feminine and also as ethical, is a particularly interesting excess, as is the violent reaction against Antigone.

The rarity and, to Hegel, inappropriate nature of women's assumption of the role of the public agent lies in the unsustainability of these roles and their painful, perhaps catastrophic fate. Hegel holds that public subject positions for women are always dangerous, precarious, and obscene. On these grounds he prescribes that women be denied such positions whenever possible. Rather than approaching the prescriptive weight of Hegel's observation, in this project I will begin by defending his descriptive insights. Hegel chooses examples, like Antigone's, that dramatize the precariousness and violent quashing of such subjectivity: he finds such women to be tormented, shameful, dangerous—and ephemeral. In the following chapters I will argue that, granted the state and familial structures prescribed by Hegel, women's participation in public life must indeed always be marked by risk and suffering. This is because women, within the Hegelian family, are not provided with the same basis for subjectivity as are men, particularly in regards to their relations to nature and to death.

READING IRIGARAY WITH HEGEL

- I. Phallogocentrism and the logic of the same: Irigaray's occult**
- II. Description and Resource: Irigaray's reliance on Hegel**
- III. Difference and Essence: sexual difference and Hegel's philosophy of nature**
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- VI. Phallic Epistemology: Irigaray rewrites the *Phenomenology of Spirit***

In order to effectively account for the work of Luce Irigaray, one must begin with her most controversial and variably interpreted assertion, that of irreducible sexual difference. Some readers have taken Irigaray, not unlike Hegel, to be a sexual essentialist of the most simplistic sort—taking women's anatomy to determine women's destiny as passive and subordinate. Many other readers, particularly of Irigaray's early work, have taken Irigaray's assertion to be a political and philosophical strategy as opposed to an ontological statement. I will argue that Irigaray's project, even in her earliest works, can only be fully appreciated through acknowledgement of sexual difference as irreducible and real. This key point underpins Irigaray's theoretical and political project and illuminates her often misunderstood relation to her forerunners, including Lacan, and the mainstream of contemporary feminist theory. Sexual difference is the insight that determines Irigaray's elusive and poetic style of writing and inspires her positive, if often naïve, political interventions. Most importantly for my project, it allows us to understand

the workings of the so-called “exemplar”, Antigone, in the context of Hegel and of Irigaray’s thought.

Hegel considers women’s nature to be essential and determinative, a position encapsulated in the quotes from the philosophy of nature that Irigaray selects; this essential determination cunningly determines women as ideally suited to the necessary support work detailed previously. The female part in reproduction, as (mis)represented by Hegel³⁰, requires passive receptivity to the male organ and gamete, while Hegel’s understanding of the female anatomy itself is simply as a less mature, stunted development of the male³¹. This account of female anatomy is taken to justify and obligate women to take a less active role in public life, and remain less developed than men in Hegel’s schema. Irigaray disagrees with Hegel’s disparaging account of female potential—a classic example of what she terms the logic of the same—but her disavowal is not the dissent common to much contemporary feminist work, which dismisses sexual difference as essentially insignificant or fictive. Instead, Irigaray affirms the truth of thoroughgoing sexual difference; it is worth some reflection to determine in what sense this “essential” claim is made and what it can mean within contemporary feminist theory.

Phallogocentrism and the logic of the same: Irigaray’s occident

³⁰ The inadequacy of this sort of account is demonstrated in, for example, Emily Martin’s “The Egg and the Sperm”: *Signs*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Spring, 1991), pp. 485-501

³¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. M.J. Petry. London, Allen & Unwin, 1979. 175; this is a frequent trope in accounts of female sexuality, as per Nancy Tuana’s account: “Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the epistemology of Ignorance” *Hypatia* 19 (2004): 194-232

Luce Irigaray's assertion of irreducible sexual difference is one of her most significant and controversial contributions to feminist theory; it is also her most notorious. Sexual difference is a truth that, she claims, is at once natural and social, ontological and political. While Irigaray has not opposed the projects and aspirations of "equality feminism" per se, the central practical insight of her "difference feminism" is that attempts to equalize access to public goods and privileges for men and women cannot fully address the distinctly sexed interests and needs of women. Women differ from men *both* in their embodiment and in the ways that this embodiment is interpreted and incorporated into a self-image and subject position (these claims will be discussed further in the appropriate section). Irigaray demonstrates that, in the west, this difference has been systematically denied in a way that renders women's subject positions tenuous and unhealthy. Feminist projects claiming the equality of women and men (a potential or ideal equality contrasted against certain measurable inequalities) leave no space to conceptualize these deep differences on the level of subjectivity, and, indeed, risk contributing to a "logic of the same" that systematically obscures difference. Thinking, and living, through sexual difference is the only way to escape from the adverse effects of the logic of the same on forming and deforming women's subjectivity.

In *Speculum* Irigaray is, first of all, a cultural critic and psychoanalyst of Western culture. As such, she identifies the core pattern—indeed, it is a neurotic fixation—of the West, a paradigm she describes as *phallogocentrism*³². The West fetishizes the phallus

³² In doing so, Irigaray no doubt, as Alison Stone (2006, 32) alleges, reifies the complex and multiple nature of the western tradition. Irigaray herself acknowledges that the tradition which she critiques contains tools for its dismantling and that some prominent thinkers—Nietzsche especially—have departed from phallogocentrism in important and useful ways. Evidently Irigaray feels that the phallogocentric

and a collection of metonymically associated traits including activity, rationality, and solidity³³, while reducing all that is outside of the valued category to an opposite, degraded status. Indeed, all that falls without the privileged category is thought only as negativity—the lack of value or meaning. The phallus as such is the originary symbol of language, the guarantor of linguistic exchange, as the sole object of value; all other currencies, be they words, women or gold, are valued as a placeholder of the phallus. The symbolic formation that results is limited in its representational capacity by this origin; any value or pleasure outside of the phallic is an unspeakable excess. This fetishization is a historical event both in the development of the West and in the development of the individual; this universalizing logic supplants a more prior value and pleasure, and indeed a more prior and valid *origin*, rooted in the infantile bond to the mother and in prehistory prior to patriarchy and the demise of goddess worship³⁴. Irigaray’s psychoanalytic perspective allows her to explain this formation through the well-known psychoanalytic tropes of the phallus as (a) centre of pleasure and of male anxiety over castration (though for Irigaray, the central trauma that shapes contemporary masculinity is difficulty in separating from the mother, a trauma that manifests secondarily in the oedipal drama.)

Irigaray differs from many feminist critics in taking the set of binaries related to masculinity and femininity as fundamentally *one* as opposed to *two*. The devalued part of

tradition is influential and widespread enough—deeply entwined with, as she argues, most scientific, technological, economic, philosophical and political developments—as to justify and indeed necessitate a myopic focus on phallogocentric trends as the core of the western tradition.

³³ In these observations, Irigaray is in the tradition of feminist critics of binaristic thinking and “masculine science”, Irigaray’s critique differs in that she takes this binarism to be fundamentally a logic of the same rather than a dualism.

³⁴ In Irigaray’s dependency on such a prehistory, she resembles many other feminist thinkers influential in the 1970’s, such as Mary Daly and Riane Eisler. While many of the claims of such thinkers have been discredited or remain unsubstantiated, Irigaray’s frequent reference to known histories of goddess worship—especially Demeter and Kore, who will be salient to my project—situate her arguments within known history and within the tradition of speculative historians such as Hegel and, indeed, Freud.

the binary, she argues, has a purely negative character—that is to say, it is characterized only as lack--and its sole conceptual function is to guarantee the value of the masculine (hence the title of her famous essay, which characterizes women, both genitally and as a class, as “the sex which is not one”³⁵). There is, then, no true other in the phallogocentric system, as the other is pure lack, while phallus has absolute value. As such, Irigaray describes the phallogocentric system as a *logic of the same*, in which difference from the masculine norm can only be expressed as lack and devaluation. This is not merely the subordinating and hierarchical tendency of binaries observed by many feminist observers of conceptual binarism, but the total denial of value outside of the masculine, such that the feminine is characterized only by its lack—lack of rationality, lack of activity, and cardinally by the simple lack of a phallus. In this schema, the woman is only, to paraphrase Irigaray’s gloss only a man without a penis.

The goal and motivation of the phallogocentric system, for Irigaray, is to assure the sole value and integrity of the male sex against the threats of devaluation and castration. Irigaray describes the woman as a flat (that is to say, sexless) mirror that, thanks to its own lack, can reflect the value and wholeness of the male sex in an entirely nonthreatening manner. Hence Irigaray repeatedly casts the woman as the ground or foundation of male constructions; the guarantor of value in a system on exchange; the mirror that founds the male imaginary and the male subject. It is because she is understood as lacking—less, castrated, underdeveloped—that woman can support the outsized efflorescences of male ego: individuated and seemingly *sui generis* selfhood; mastery of nature and death; philosophy and science; language. On Irigaray’s analysis,

³⁵ I note here the negativity observed by Irigaray in this title; it also refers to the fluidity and multiplicity which she finds to be immanent in the female sex.

then, the asymmetry of the sexes in Hegel's schema, and particularly the underdevelopment of female consciousness, is not a minor and remediable mistake, but rather a crucial foundation for the development the subject who is capable of participating consciously in Absolute Spirit; that is to say, in an individuated, rational, civilized subject who has mastered and surpassed his natural determinations. In addition to Hegel's account of the subject of true knowledge, then, Irigaray submits a psychoanalytic account of the sexed development of such subjectivity, an addition that is necessary to fully understanding Hegel's.

Irigaray adopts a psychoanalytic practice because psychoanalysis is a discourse both deeply rooted within the phallogocentric system and one that is particularly well situated to observe it. Irigaray, unlike Freud or Lacan, takes the phallogocentric formation, and the psychic dramas that sustain it on the individual level, to be a contingent cultural phenomenon rather than a necessary characteristic of human psyche. As such, Irigaray disdains the phallogocentric formation not only as unhealthy on the psychic level but as a repressive social and political phenomenon, and one that is solidly within the scope of ethical criticism and political transformation. Psychoanalysis is, of course, originally concerned with individual development and health, and as such offers Irigaray insight into the development of individual women and men—a development that is neurotogenic (that is to say, tends toward illness and misdevelopment) but will offer, as we will see, moments of contemporary promise in disrupting phallogocentrism as a social formation. Psychoanalysis is particularly well-suited to Irigaray's needs—since it takes the “natural” drives as significant but not exclusively determinative of the psyche, it is well-sited to bridge the dichotomy of nature and culture that Irigaray considers a

phallogocentric confusion; properly deployed, it can analyse body and mind, nature and culture together. This practice allows for an analysis of the way in which people live out their embodiment and the sexual and animal drives that form the natural basis of human life. Further, psychoanalysis is a method that can reveal and evaluate the ways in which our embodiment and the familial drama in which we find ourselves shape our self-image and subjectivity, illuminating the interplay of the political and the psychodynamic that is key to Irigaray's analysis. As both of these processes take place at a deep psychological and familial level that is resistant to traditional philosophical and political analysis—in the incommunicable realm of sense-experience and on the cusp of the symbolic (that is, in that familial scene which immediately precedes the child's entry into the symbolic), the psychoanalytic focus on interpreting the counter-representational language of the unconscious is necessary for Irigaray's project. Finally, the psychoanalytic dogma of the return of the repressed and the expressivity of the unconscious is key not only to Irigaray's methodology but to her theoretical commitment; her political and metaphysical claims rest upon the idea of a return of the real, a resurgence of a pre-symbolic excess that disrupts the current phallogocentric symbolic formation and offers a viable alternative; this will be discussed further below.

It should also be noted that Irigaray's grounding in psychoanalysis situates her project, and my own, in a particular relationship to politics and philosophy. As Carolyn Burke (1981, 289) and Diana Fuss (1989, 55) point out, Irigaray's is a "psychophilosophy", albeit a politically engaged one; her primary interest is in "questions of subjectivity, desire and the unconscious, than in questions of power, history and

politics.”³⁶ While her work engages deeply with the social and the political, and indeed offers political guidelines and suggestions, she rarely speaks specifically of institutional power or political oppression per se. The institutions in which she is interested are chiefly familial (although within this familial sphere she includes the political, the divine, the economic, etc.), as she takes these institutions to be constitutive of individual psychic development. While Irigaray is ultimately concerned with the health of individuals and intimate relationships, she is inevitably concerned with how overarching “phallic” forms of familial, political and conceptual organization limit, distort, and suppress these relations, as well as with the ways in which individual experiences and relationships (especially mother-daughter relationships) can exceed and disrupt these organizations. As such, she is able to observe, analyse and oppose systematic and institutionalized oppression, but her analysis always takes the individual subject, and intimate intersubjective relations, as its focus. After Irigaray, my own project is concerned with oppressive practices and institutions, but takes the psyche as its unit of analysis.

While the phallogocentric formation described by Freud is at least metaphorically resonant with the male anatomy, and serves to give meaning and value to this anatomy, it is not sustained or justified through reference to anatomy. Instead, this formation is constantly troubled by certain enduring characteristics and capacities of the female morphology. The troubling resurgence of these subversive matters is evinced repeatedly in Freud’s own narrative, which is marked by avowals of surprise, inexplicable omissions, and contradictory statements. These peculiarities mark the many references to facts of female body and the development of the little girl that cannot be accounted for in his schema and hence are either omitted, distorted, or consigned to the “dark continent”

³⁶ Fuss 1989, 66-67

of femininity, that which can never be illuminated or understood (given, at least, the language at Freud's disposal.) For instance, Freud is repeatedly surprised by evidence of a deep attachment of daughter and mother that precedes and troubles his attempts to assimilate feminine psychic development as a facsimile of male development distinguished only by the lack of the phallus. As Irigaray repeatedly points out, the existence of female sexual organs, both internal and external, gives lie to any attempt to describe penis envy or castration anxiety as natural consequences of male and female anatomy. Indeed, the female genitalia itself denies the phallogocentric claim that women are simply not-men, understandable through the lack of the phallus. After all, the female, as Irigaray points out both in *Speculum* and in *This Sex Which is Not One*, has access to her own self-pleasure—albeit pleasure that is consistently discouraged—and are outside of the economy of the phallus, allegedly the cardinal site of pleasure. Anything but a “flat mirror” passively reflecting the wholeness and tumescence of the male, she has sexual organs, evident to tactile investigation. She has multiple erotogenic sites subverting the phallic claim to a monopoly on pleasure; the continual, pleasurable contact of her two lips marks a tactile pleasure that is entirely outside of the penetrative, reproductive, oculo-centric pleasures of phallogocentrism; and the ambiguous topology of these multiple sites, doubled lips, and fluid pleasures disrupt the solid and sharp boundaries of whole, unitary persons central to much western thought.

Description and Resource: Irigaray's reliance on Hegel

Irigaray reads Hegel in the interest of two goals: firstly, to better understand the workings of phallogocentrism, and secondly, to explore its weaknesses and alternatives. Where Audre Lorde famously insists that “the master’s tools cannot dismantle the master’s house”³⁷, Irigaray’s methodology (explored at greater length below) takes Hegel’s work to provide both the tools to dismantle his schema and an indispensable floor plan detailing its weak points and secret entrances. Irigaray’s account of “the west” relies upon many thinkers, with certain of these (Plato, Freud, Heidegger, Hegel) playing an especially large role in her oeuvre. The apparatus developed by Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is particularly germane to Irigaray’s goal of systematic cultural criticism, and she often treats it as paradigmatic of the West; at the same time, Hegel’s *Philosophy and Right* and *Philosophy of Nature* are referenced. As such, she relies on Hegel to ground her analysis of phallogocentrism. At the same time, the omissions and peculiarities of Hegel’s text are taken to indicate instabilities in this system, often inadvertently referring to alternatives to the phallogocentric system.

My project straddles the two modes of Irigarayan work, the descriptive/disruptive and the positive, which I consider to be a germane site of feminist theorizing at present. I hope to, first, describe the ways in which an existing phallic system, as described by Hegel, colludes with the maintenance of a phallic system, particularly in the care of death and the establishment of genealogical history, and to discuss the means by which such a genealogical history can be established to the benefit of women.

Difference and Essence: sexual difference and Hegel’s philosophy of nature

³⁷ Lorde, Audre. “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” in *This Bridge Called My Back*, ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1984.

Irigaray's focus on sexual difference sets her clearly apart from the strand of feminist thought claiming women's equality with men. While Irigaray writes that equality is often a necessary goal, and tends to support the political projects of equality feminism, she holds that equality-based theory only reinscribes the centrality of a masculine ideal, "scapegoating femininity" (As Julia Serano puts it) as inferior while insisting women can be just as "good" at masculine undertakings (including violence and warmaking) as men. This masculine ideal, according to Irigaray, puts us all at risk, and specifically degrades and objectifies those who do not adhere to it adequately; and, given her analysis of masculinity as dependent on a degraded other to maintain its exclusive value, "equality feminism" is necessarily doomed in its goal to obtain equal rights and status for all people, regardless of gender (indeed, it is clear that middle-class women's attainments in North America is dependent upon the persistence of a degraded and feminized class of household and care workers.³⁸) This ideal, along with the social and legal practices that enshrine it, must be disrupted, rather than adopted, in order to ensure women's survival and thriving. Finally, by assenting completely to the logic of the same—accepting the exclusive value of masculinity while disavowing the feminine—such a move can only reinscribe a confining logic of the same. While Irigaray is determined to disrupt the exclusive valuing the masculine by rediscovering and revaluing female experience, there has been some controversy among her readers as to how, exactly, to take this assertion. While some have taken Irigaray (often disparagingly) to be an adherent of "difference feminism", devoted to revaluing the intrinsic characteristics of femininity, others take her

³⁸ See, for instance, Tronto, Joan, "The "Nanny" Question in Feminism". *Hypatia*, Volume 17, Number 2, Spring 2002, pp. 34-51.

insistence on irreducible sexual difference to be a political strategy ,and one sympathetic to social constructionist feminism, rather than an ontological claim.

Irigaray's political and philosophical goals are often focused on disrupting the phallic schema, a project that depends upon the disruptive potential of figures such as the two lips and the mother and daughter. Many readers—among them Jane Gallop, Margaret Whitford, Gayatri Spivak and, in her earlier writings, Elizabeth Grosz—have taken the relation of the phallus to the penis to be contingent and metaphorical (that is to say, the logic of phallogentrism defines the male sex to its specification, claiming natural and anatomical justification in the metaphorical resonance constructed thereby) and the relation of Irigaray's revolutionary politics and philosophical subversion to female bodies is similarly contingent and strategic. According to this reading, Irigaray offers the metaphor of the two lips not as a description of the reality of female bodies but as an invention that strategically opposes the metaphor of the two lips to the metaphor of the phallus. While these figures are seemingly material, Irigaray's project in fact has nothing to do with bodies themselves—rather, she intends to disrupt or supplant one arbitrary symbol with another, more useful symbol. This representation serves not to retrieve female anatomy or guide a positive feminist vision of women's future, but merely to disrupt and subvert the logic of the phallus. In this reading, Irigaray does not offer a positive account of what women are or a reference to the truth of bodies; she instead makes use of what Spivak calls strategic essentialism, the disingenuous operation of fictitious essentialist claims in order to intervene productively in a essentialist political discourse. Her claims, then, intend only to disrupt the phallic schema, not in favor of some alternative dogma of bodies and sexes but rather in order to escape the repressive

aspects of phallic power—among them, the fiction that natural-anatomical determination can either justify or subvert a symbolic or political schema.

Such readings tend to have their roots the currently predominant (in the USA and Canada), radically antiessentialist strand of feminist theory. From this perspective, any claims resting on natural or anatomical justification must be fictitious, as they will mistake the priority of the symbolic realm. These thinkers hold that our concepts, experiences and identities are always already embedded in our symbolic formation, and are thoroughly shaped thereby. Bodies have no meaning or form before symbolic forces have defined and delimited them, determining their value and their meaning. What Hegel or Freud describes as male and female bodies are inventions of a repressive system, tenuous metaphorical ties that hold individuals in their place and justify relations of dominance and subordination. Similarly, what Freud takes to be cardinally important and biologically necessary relationships and formations—in a flagrant instance, the heterosexual nuclear family—are creations of a social formation rather than natural factors that can explain that social formation. Given the priority of the symbolic, of the cultural over the natural, essentialist claims are either fundamentally misguided or cunningly dishonest. Recent feminist and queer theory in particular has dismissed all recourse to the inherent or “natural” character of bodies as restrictive and mistaken. While feminists have traditionally been concerned with the ways in which fictive essentialist claims have oppressed women, queer theorists and gender theorists have focused on the ways that the construction and ascription of sex and gender has restricted and harmed all people. Politically, thinkers of this camp resist the group-and rights-based identity politics of an earlier generation, fearing that legal protections and social

movements centring on “women” and other oppressed groups only reinscribe the repressive fictions of gender, race and other categories. Rather than proposing specific new rights and variations to be instituted legally and socially, thinkers of this stripe tend to favor negative action—undertakings designed to transgress borders, subvert categorizations and disrupt institutions—and open-ended attempts to multiply possibilities in inventive and always-provisional ways.

Attempts to interpret Irigaray as a strategic essentialist—one whose deployment of natural and anatomical determinants is always mendacious and negative—are often motivated out of desire to reincorporate Irigaray into the mainstream of feminist thought, a field that has from its inception grappled with the oppressive potential of essentialist thought. These interpretations are difficult to sustain especially in regard to her late work, which has made increasingly explicit reference to the determinations of the sexed body and to the necessity of enshrining these determinations into social and political life. In Irigaray’s early work, too, she evinces a reliance on the resurgence of the female morphology and a repressed maternal bond that distinguishes her from strategic essentialists; already these appear not merely as a useful new metaphor to dismantle the phallogocentric system but as the promise of a viable and already-present alternative.

Irigaray is not simply critical of Freud’s belief in determinative anatomy, although she certainly rejects his formulation that “anatomy is destiny”. Irigaray accepts, after Freud, that certain aspects of the body will determine, in a developmental context, the social and psychological formation of the subject; and, further, she accepts that these determinations are not merely matters of social readings of the body—rather, the body and natural relations contain their own logic, resilient enough to resist and disrupt those

imposed socially. This bodily logic is conceived of as a rhythm rather than an essential form, one that structures lived experience of the body without determining it in a fixed way. Hence the powerful and mysterious bond of mother and daughter that unnerved Freud, and the antiphallic account of female sexuality that, Irigaray argues in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, is immanent in the female sex and hence immediately accessible to a female audience.

By beginning her admittedly nonlinear narrative with an account of Freud, Irigaray draws the reader from the beginning to that insight on which her so-called “difference” feminism is founded: the evident and concrete difference between men and women, not simply at an epistemic or metaphysical level, but also anatomical. The irreducible particularities of the female body may be unnamed and forbidden, but Irigaray takes it that the female reader they are immediately accessible (and, as such, its excess in respect to the phallic system is a useful resource). It is clear in Freud’s terms that a woman’s lack of the phallus means that she cannot develop the same as a male in a phallogocentric milieu. It is nonsensical to argue, in this context, for women’s essential sameness: insofar as embodiment effects personal development, women are necessarily different. Irigaray argues, however, that this development need not be impoverished, any more than the female body needs to be understood as lacking. Instead, we can imagine—paying special attention to the moments of surprise and omissions in Freud’s work—specifically female desires and pleasures which cannot be reduced to the same scale—either the same, less than or even more than—the male’s.

Of course, one could argue that outside of the phallic context, the genitals would be of much less significance, and at any rate need not be understood binary (as reference to intersexed people would suggest). In deemphasizing the importance of binary, genital sexuality, we might take one of two approaches. Firstly, we might hope to downplay the social significance of genitality, dismissing differences between the male and female as insignificant relative either to deep similarities between the two or to significant, non-sexual differences between persons. Irigaray argues, however, that this is merely a return to the logic of the same, and a grave misstep for feminist thought. Understanding the woman's pleasures as *the same as* the male's requires that we take male pleasure as our standard, a metric from which the trace of phallocentrism has never been challenged or worked through. On this metric women's pleasures are at a disadvantage and have generally been less—rarer, more laborious, mysterious. Even if we assert that these pleasures are the same or even more than the man's, they remain in a hierarchical relation that refuses to recognize the irreducible and embodied difference of women's experience.

Secondly, one might assert that, in the absence of restrictive and artificial categories of sex and gender, myriad permutations of sex, gender and sexual orientation would proliferate, multiplying beyond all possibilities of categorization the possibilities for sexual agency. These unconstrained possibilities would accede to no limits or determinations, including those of "nature". There are two serious difficulties with this possibility; firstly, when sexual identities have multiplied to this extent, it is no easier to name or represent the alternative or alternatives to phallicism, leaving this polymorphous perversity unequipped to seriously oppose the epistemic and social edifice of phallic heterosexuality; secondly, this path leaves the specifics of the female body—its

erotogenesis, reproduction, and embodiment—untheorized and unspoken, just as in the phallic economy. If we accept, with Irigaray, that there are sexed determinations of our bodies, not socially constructed, some of which limit or shape our relations (for example) to pleasure and reproduction, then the latter is a serious failure to acknowledge the real difference of the female body. It leaves us without a language and a system of representation with which to imagine ourselves as women, to explore the needs, pleasures and possibilities specific to our bodies, and to renew relations between women. By imagining sexuality as essentially divorced from embodiment and generation, this theoretical move also returns to the logic of the same, that of the disembodied and self-generated male subject without meaningfully theorizing excluded, female experience.

The dream of unrestricted permutation of sex, gender and sexuality does not merely neglect to theorize the embodied experience of women. In fact, the erotogenesis and embodiment of all bodies, male, female, and other, is omitted; the result is a mute chaos of bodies and subjects with no morphology to bind them—that is to say, subjects and bodies with no language to express the constitutive connections between the two. The pleasures inherent in various intersex morphologies, for instance, can not be spoken any more than those of female morphologies. While male pleasures have a central place in the phallic system, clearly these pleasures are, as Grosz argues (1989, 118), the pleasures necessary to maintaining the system, imposed upon the male body, not an expression of its essence per se (although aspects of the male body clearly inspire and fit the phallic system). Just as the morphologically grounded experiences of subjects excluded from the binary sex system is not readily considerable if we cannot theorize the determinations of

the sexed body, the possibilities for male sexed experience beyond phallogocentric determinations will remain unexplored.

While, in this interpretation, bodies have meanings and forms that are independent of, and potentially disruptive of, the symbolic and social meanings placed on them, early Irigaray does not take the natural determinations of sexed bodies as deterministic³⁹. For two reasons, Irigaray neither defines the specific content of sexual difference nor shapes her philosophical and political endeavors to accommodate this specific difference. Firstly, we are not in a position to determine the true import of sexual difference on pleasure—let alone politics—from our position within the logic of the same: all that we can discover of sexual difference is in negative spaces, inexplicable anomalies, strange contradictions that appear in the dominant account. We can know enough of the morphology and capacity of the female sex, for example, to disrupt Freud's narrative of phallogocentric feminine sexuality, but this knowledge remains at the obscure, barely representable level performed by so much of Irigaray's writing, as an intuition that has no proper language in which to be expressed. Furthermore, these resurgences of the feminine repressed are always already distorted by a patriarchal tradition; hence, for example, Antigone—whom Irigaray takes to reassert a matriarchal principle—appears as a dutiful daughter to her father and loving sister to her brother, very much an inmate of a patriarchal family. Antigone disrupts the phallogocentric system not by reminding us of a prior, utopic way of life but merely by hinting at the possibility of alternatives to our current one. These traces of sexual difference are, as such, too faint and impure to found

³⁹ In her late work, Irigaray sometimes makes claims that seem to contradict her earlier agnosticism as to the content of sexual difference.

a positive representation of female sexuality; this predicament demands of us openness to differences rather than attachment to a fixed, binary axis of difference.

Secondly, as Alison Stone argues, the essence of sexual difference that inheres in the body is not an essence in the fixed and determinative sense of Aristotelian metaphysics. As Stone points out, Irigaray draws on the Pre-Socratics to develop an account of essence as rhythm rather than as *telos*. Irigaray frequently describes sexual difference, for example, as a difference in temporal rhythm, describing women's temporality as both cyclic (as, of course, in the menstrual cycle) and periodic, marked by a series of clearly defined dividing points, such as menarche and menopause; this temporality is distinct, she argues, from a male temporality that is neither cyclic nor periodic and is instead marked by periods of building tension and moments of release. This rhythm provides a certain shape and tendency, rather than a determining end, and its expression is in orderly movement rather than a fixed state⁴⁰. For Irigaray, then, bodies are not dumb matter to be interpreted through social formation, but expressive material that resists certain interpretations and tends toward other, more appropriate or healthy means of life. These expressive bodies can give lie to certain interpretations or ways of life that impose on them foreign and disharmonious rhythms, because they have their own proper rhythms, prior to and separate from those imposed through language and social determination. However, these rhythms are not *teloi* but nondeterminative patterns that are, in themselves, dynamic. They are rhythms that regulate a *becoming* rather than a fixed achievement of being; they are in continual flux and, given the dynamic play of embodied expressions, no set definition or meaning can be attributed to the feminine or

⁴⁰ For Irigaray, then, the *telos* or proper end of the body is not death, as Freud writes; it has no ultimate end. ("The goal of all life is death", *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. John Reddick. London: Penguin, 2003, p. 78)

the masculine. These poles of sexual difference are distinguished not by opposing content but by the different rhythms governing their continual variation. Given the active and dynamic content which Irigaray attributes to the rhythms or essences of the sexes, no fixed meaning or ends can be attributed to them; instead, one can aim toward a formation more accommodating to these rhythms and to the constant flux that they shape.

Irigaray's account of expressive and dynamic bodies superficially appears to reiterate a masculine/feminine binary, but on a deeper level her account transgresses binaries of form/matter, culture/nature and active/passive that are closely entwined with gender. Irigaray reimagines nature and matter as having inherent form/rhythm, while antiessentialist thinkers consistently reinscribe the phallogocentric account of bodies and nature as the passive and meaningless adjunct to cultural formation⁴¹. Irigaray declines to interpret the relation between nature and culture as the complete colonization and exploitation of passive and feminine nature by creative, culture-producing man. In taking nature and matter to have its own formal and constructive character, Irigaray is in fact quite in accord with Hegelian philosophy of nature, as Stone points out. In Hegel's account of nature, as in the *phenomenology* and the *philosophy of right*, natural determinations are neither exhaustive of human possibilities nor irrelevant to eventual cultural achievements. Political and social development stem from natural determinations, which are transformed but never effaced by this development. The Hegelian overcoming of nature transforms natural determination and, in some cases, suppresses it, but the results are never free of this determination, a circumstance that

⁴¹ While antiessentialist feminists such as Judith Butler have sometimes shown an interest in returning to and revaluing the body, radical social constructionism is irreconcilable with an account of expressive bodies. Butler's attempt in *Bodies The Matter* and *Precarious Life*, for instance, attributes inherent, yet already socially constructed, meaning to bodies only insofar as bodies suffer and die—a curious reiteration of traditional accounts of the bodily *telos* as death.

becomes clear in Hegel's account of family and of sex, and especially in any account of the proper work of women. As women, within a Hegelian division of labor, responsible for caring for the body and reconciling natural determination to the demands of second nature, the continued determinations of nature becomes clear, as does the necessity of a carefully and laboriously negotiated reconciliation of nature and culture that is the substance of this overcoming.

Alison Stone has argued that Irigaray is paradigmatic of a move toward a feminist "real essentialism"⁴², a movement that she opposes to both the concept of a sex-gender distinction and a contemporary move in some circles of feminist theory to cast both sex and gender as oppressive social constructs which must be continually troubled. While the former position takes material and natural determination to be separate from, and generally trivial to, the cultural world, the latter rejects material determinations altogether, privileging the human world over the natural and physical. Stone argues that this latter move reproduces the oppressive, phallic binarism that takes nature and the physical body to be separate from and subordinated to culture and mind. Such binaries are centrally related to gendered oppressions, among others, since oppressed peoples are constitutively identified with the subordinated term, and are characteristic of the logic of the same, since the second term is defined negatively. Rejecting sex and gender as oppressive social constructs disrupts certain overt forms of sexed and gendered oppression but fails to challenge the conceptual framework of phallocentrism and radically devalues the material. Rather, Stone argues, Irigarayan difference feminism reasserts the independent, determinative value of body and of nature against that of the

⁴² Stone, "From Political to Realist Essentialism", *Feminist Theory*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 5-23 2004.

social determination. Irigaray insists that we take the body, in its lived specificity, as a significant determinant of subjectivity.

While Irigaray holds that materiality is co-determinative alongside the social, she does not accept the binary distinction between the two. Indeed, any attribution of formal characteristics to matter is itself a departure from the binaristic tradition. Irigaray characteristically resists extreme antibinaristic moves⁴³, considering conceptual divisions between male and female, nature and culture fruitful and necessary, and argues that an intermediary distance between the two is necessary to prevent the violent subsumption of one to the other. Irigaray maintains binaristic dyads as both true (reflecting irreducible characteristics of both cultural and natural phenomena) and useful (as revaluing and rediscovering the subordinated sides of such binaries is a crucial political and philosophical project for our time); at the same time, she disrupts the integrity and order of the overarching, binaristic system, recognizing, for instance, necessary elements of passivity and irrationality in the masculine (as in *The Eternal Irony*) in a way that disrupts those interconnections and associations between binaries that lock together into an oppressive system. Irigaray takes binary categorizations such as mind/body and male/female to be complexly interconnected and mutually dependent. In *The Eternal Irony of the Community* she treats the male-female dyad as a dynamic, intersubjective oscillation between extreme poles—rhythms in counterpoint—rather than pair of fixed, distinct subject positions.

⁴³ Compare Irigaray's defense of nature against cultural and technological incursion to, for instance, Haraway's account of "naturecultures". Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York; Routledge, 1991), pp.149-181

Typical of her subtle approach to bodies and essences, Irigaray speaks of morphology as opposed to anatomy as destiny. In the move from bodies to morphologies, as in the attribution of intrinsic form to matter, Irigaray denies that binaristic poles can be characterized along lines of independent/dependent or active/passive pairs; rather, she attributes meaning and self-determination to both poles, independence to neither. Grosz describes morphology as a middle point at the collision of the social and the bodily— morphology as the socially inscribed body. This interpretation may serve to draw Irigaray closer to a constructionist viewpoint, but in ultimately privileging the social over the body yet again, Grosz falls back into a logic of the same in which the body and nature, like the feminine, *is not*. An understanding of morphology as the body together with its formal and logical capacity—that is, the body as inherently ordered by its own language and seeking its own ends—is more true to Irigaray’s project to rehabilitate sexual difference and to reimagine the nature/culture relation

As I have said, nature for Irigaray has its own logic and its own ends, ends which have a determinative force. This is not to say that nature is in itself purposive (although certainly parts of nature, such as humans, are purposive); nor is Irigaray the sort of radical naturalist who suggests that we must leave nature to its own purposes, pure and unadulterated by social constraint or purpose. Nature, for Irigaray, has specific patterns of orderly development as its goal, but these dynamic and changing goals can, in the case of *human* nature, only be attained to through purposive action. It is a flaw of phallogocentric reasoning that nature is effected only as a resource to be exploited, as a separate and degraded adjunct to human culture; as such, natural rhythms—including those within ourselves—can only be repressed or distorted. A healthier relationship to nature,

according to Irigaray, is one of *cultivation*—and here she plays on the double meaning of “culture” as both cultural formation and the fostering of organic growth—in which natural rhythms and tendencies are self-consciously and reflectively cultivated. These tendencies may sometimes be transformed or sublimated⁴⁴, though never repressed. Nature and culture are both seen as continually developing, mutable domains, closely intertwined and both shaped through both conscious action and essential determination. Anatomy, then, is never destiny, as in Freud’s phrase, but it is the starting point of a serious ethical undertaking—to cultivate nature in a healthy and responsible way. In doing so, what appears as natural determination is transformed into deliberate and rational human action, a transition familiar both to Hegel (as we will see in his account of both death and sexual desire) and, Irigaray observes, to the yogic tradition. This cultivation, by which the natural and contingent is transformed through conscious practice, is epitomized in yogic breathing exercises; what had been involuntary become conscious, deliberate and controlled; this process spiritualizes the body in both a Hegelian and a religious sense. This transformation of the breath alters both the lived experience of the body and the potential of the subject, as mindful breathing allows for greater attention to embodied phenomena and greater mental focus⁴⁵.

While a radically antiessentialist feminism has been in vogue for some time, my account of Irigaray’s essentialism underlines some of the drawbacks and oversimplifications inherent in this position. Indeed, some, like Alison Stone and Diana Fuss (1989, 4-6), have suggested that this approach is in its own way essentialist, posing social construction as the essence or sole determining truth of bodies. Irigaray is

⁴⁴ See, for example, the work of Lawler, 2008; Schiller, 2008; Stone, 2006, 149-155.

⁴⁵ BEW, 11-12

concerned, as below, with the dangers inherent in dismissing the formal capacities of matter itself, a move which threatens to reinscribe hierarchical and gendered binaries of nature/culture and matter/form. Essentializing differences as merely, entirely socially constructed also universalizes these differences, insisting that differences such as sex, gender, race, ethnicity, physical and mental ability will all be understood and addressed through the same, radically constructionist apparatus. Irigaray consistently holds that these differences are heterogeneous; while her writings sometimes lapse into what sounds like a hierarchy of differences, she does give differences of, for instance, race and gender separate consideration, rather than assimilating, for example, racial difference into a preexisting theory of sexual (in)difference. Irigaray's account of difference makes it possible to consider that differences have disparate origins and meanings, and can be taken up in very different ways politically.

While Irigaray is not only a strategic essentialist, her claims of essential sexual difference are self-consciously political claims. The sexual difference she speaks of is a difference that does not exist—no longer, and not yet. Sexual difference is impossible and the unspeakable within the phallogocentric system, and only the faintest reminders of it persist. As Whitford points out (71), Irigaray's strategy is to create difference—that is, to create both the conceptual and political space for difference to be rediscovered or reconstructed, by disrupting the logic of the same. This transformation is necessary before any political formation can be built around difference, or a language can be found to speak it properly, since Irigaray's irreducible difference is as yet a placeholder, ensuring openness toward future possibilities rather than enshrining contemporary “differences”. This reconstruction of sexual difference is what Whitford terms the

“advent of woman as subject’ (74); women will be able to speak as women, *different* as opposed to merely *less*, rather than assimilating to the logic of the same as a condition of subjectivity. Clearly this opens the possibility of new means of life for women, who will no longer have to adapt themselves to the ill-suited rhythms of masculine life, but such a reconstruction is similarly radical for masculine subjectivity. Lacking the psychological and material support of the devalued and appropriated feminine, phallogocentric masculinity is unsustainable, as ill-suited to healthy human lives as is its feminine counterpart. There is no reason to think that the reimagining of male and female subjectivities would not also create the space to cultivate forms of sexed subjectivity neither masculine nor feminine. Nonetheless, Irigaray focus on feminine subjectivity instead of masculine or other sexed subjectivities for, no doubt, largely strategic and personal reasons: femininity, she demonstrates, is a key site of instability in western discourse, ripe for subversive investigation; women will suffer greater repression and neurosis than men in the phallogocentric formation and thus invite great attention from one who, like Irigaray, sees herself as a health practitioner; and finally, Irigaray frequently claims that the reimagining of masculine subjectivity must begin with men, as the embodied experience of masculinity is not available to her.

What sorts of political and legal maneuverings can open a space in which sexual difference can appear? While Irigaray is sometimes accused of overly great faith in the transformative power of law, she has, at least, been so concrete as to offer an account of legal reforms that could be undertaken to this end. Irigaray advocates enshrining “sexed rights” into law (indeed, she campaigned to introduce such rights into the European Union Constitution.) These rights include strengthening the rights of mothers over their

children, particularly the rights of mothers to protect their children (a hedge against patriarchal tradition and a recognition of the close relation between a child and a gestational mother); the right to beautiful but non-commercial public representations of female bodies; and enshrining the right of women to protect their “virginity”, here defined as the right to physical integrity and to independence from compulsory heterosexuality; such a right would presumably protect from civil and economic penalties for unmarried persons and nonnuclear families (for example, an adult daughter living with her mother, a unit that is often not considered a “family” entitled to benefits and rights) and protect women who commit acts of violence in self-defense from prosecution. Irigaray has also advocated installing dignified and beautiful images of women, often mothers and daughters together, in public spaces, to begin to remedy the pervasive degradation of the female imaginary⁴⁶. These interventions would help women to create more positive and independent self-images; reassert the rights of mothers over their children and aid in repairing the often fraught relationship between mothers and daughters; and counteract the tendency to identify women, civilly, through their relationships to men.

While Irigaray takes the concept of sexed rights to apply to civil codes overall, it is easiest to understand their specific import in relation to reproductive rights. Irigaray is a proponent of sexual and reproductive rights as a necessary precondition to women’s individual and cultural development; to negotiate reproductive possibilities freely is a form of self-cultivation—one necessary if women are to own and explore their natural possibilities. Without such freedom, women cannot become what they are, or express true

⁴⁶ Irigaray, 1994, 59-63.

and undistorted sexual difference. As Serene Khader has argued, women's reproductive rights are necessarily not the same as men's and cannot be adequately protected without attention to sexual difference⁴⁷; unless women's unique gestational role is privileged, then women's distinct interest in decisions regarding abortion and contraception—as with women's distinct connection to their children—cannot be recognized legally. Finally, the ability to freely negotiate their reproductive possibilities without constraint or coercion is crucial if women are, indeed, to enjoy a loving and ludic relationship to their mothers—a relationship in which the mother appears as a distinct though deeply connected individual rather than the placeholder of a maternal role whom the daughter is destined to supplant. So long as mothers appear as an unasked-for destiny rather as fellow women, daughters cannot be expected to heal their fraught and fractured relations to their mothers.

I will not dwell on what Alison Stone calls “the argument from intersex”⁴⁸, wary of the exploitative character of reducing marginal subjectivities to a point of argumentation. It is crucial to note, however, that Irigaray's focus on sexual difference as binary and as paradigmatic of difference dismisses the experience of many people for whom sex does not appear as binary or easily resolved; and seems to be counterfactual in the face of many natural phenomena. On the one hand, Irigaray's argument that the human species is *at least two* seems credible; unlike, for example, racial difference, the two sexes appear to be naturally determined and necessary to reproduction (radical practices of artificial sexual reproduction still require two different sorts of gamete.) This is a natural limit on human ingenuity and universalizing tendencies—in the case of sex,

⁴⁷ Khader, 2008.

⁴⁸ Stone, 2006, p. 108

there must be at least two. Sexual difference is an important site for Irigaray in its irreducibility--unlike differences of race or class, it is a necessary condition for all human subjectivity--and in its thoroughgoingness—it is always already present as a determinant and mediator of phenomenal experience⁴⁹. One must take care not to mistake the ontological irreducibility of this difference for political or theoretical primacy; at her best, Irigaray treats it as the ultimate insurance against homogenization and the ever-present resource for disrupting the logic of the same rather than as the most important or productive difference between subjects. On the other hand, Irigaray determinedly takes the sexes to be *two* and privileges heterosexual contact as productive and ethical, a conceptual move which either specifically excludes people who cannot be reconciled to a binary sex system or, perhaps worse, participates in the ugly history of forceful imposition of binary sex on ambiguous persons⁵⁰. I do not take a counterfactual commitment to only two sexes to be necessary for a cogent reading of Irigaray's early and middle works. Instead, I hold that there are, no doubt, more than two forms of sexed subjectivity and that all require philosophical recognition; that the irreducibility of the sexes need not foreclose the possibility of transsex subjectivity but rather can be a useful tool in theorizing such subjectivities⁵¹; that sexual difference can neither exhaustively account for nor counterbalance oppression; rather, I will read Irigaray's work as insisting

⁴⁹ This thoroughgoingness is not, I argue, exclusive to sexual difference. Certain differences in ability, for instance, no doubt shape the subject's potential experience of the world as significantly. I would argue that the experience of congenital blindness provides at least as much potential for insights disruptive of a phallic, specular economy as does female morphology.

⁵⁰ See Chase, Cheryl. "Affronting Reason". *Looking Queer: Body Image in Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, and Transgender Communities*. London: Haworth, 1998; Fausto-Sterling, Anne. "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are not Enough" *The Sciences* (May/April 1993) and "The Five Sexes Revisited", *The Sciences* 40 (4), 2000.

⁵¹ See Poe, Danielle. "Can Luce Irigaray's Notion of Sexual Difference Be Applied to Transsexual and Transgender Narratives?" in *Thinking With Irigaray*. ed. Mary C. Rawlinson, Sabrina L. Hom and Serene Khader. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, forthcoming.

that difference be rediscovered and revalued, with a productive focus on the suppressed, disruptive potential of the female subject.

Penelope Deutscher's recent work on Irigaray's politics has demonstrated the potential of an Irigarayan approach to cultural difference, while acknowledging the disappointing character of Irigaray's explicit pronouncements on cultural politics. Deutscher shows that, while Irigaray's own writings on cultural difference do not develop in this direction, it is appropriate to read her overall project as supporting work toward culture(s) of cultural as well as sexual difference—a direction that can contribute greatly to contemporary debates over multiculturalism. Indeed, Deutscher argues that Irigaray's simultaneous emphasis on revaluing and reinventing sexual difference ought to develop into a fruitful feminist attempt to embrace cultural difference not only as it *is*, (and especially, as it is defined its most powerful representatives) but as culture might be; that is to say, to value and protect both preexisting cultural differences and those that could develop under more just and healthy circumstances. Approaching cultural difference as Irigaray argues we should approach sexual difference could avoid to significant pitfalls of feminist multicultural politics; the reification and preservation of the most oppressive aspects of cultures⁵², and opposes innovative reimaginations of cultural traditions to protected and “authentic” established practices⁵³. Irigaray's dedication to making difference possible, where difference is at once an irreducible truth and a potential to be cultivated, creates the possibility of a creative and revolutionary multiculturalism that would respect and harmonize different cultures not only as they are (and indeed, few

⁵² See, for example, Susan Moller Okin, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

⁵³ Note Deutscher's discussion of the false opposition of authentic and innovative cultural expressions in *The Politics of Impossible Difference*, 47-49.

cultures have been generated in the absence of oppression or colonization) but as fields of potential becoming.

While I hold that it is most fruitful to read Irigaray as asserting that difference is always *at least* two, this reading cannot account for the overwhelmingly heterocentric cast of Irigaray's ethics, which implies that, for Irigaray, difference—and hence the ethical negotiation of difference—is always between the two sexes. This claim serves to locate sexual difference as the cardinal difference—the difference that must be disrupted first in order to disrupt oppressive systems, and the difference whose rediscovery and renegotiation is ethically and politically primary. While I hold that Irigaray's positioning of sexual difference as ontologically primary is an ingenious move against the logic of the same, mistaking this ontological primacy for political or ethical primacy is both dangerously exclusive and reductive, risking a return to a naively monolithic feminism, and a serious abdication of the promise of what Deutscher calls a “politics of difference”. The irreducibility of sexual difference subverts the phallic logic of the same, creating the possibility of a political and conceptual scene that would take differences as positively elaborated, meaningful and non-hierarchical—that is to say, a scene in which difference need not be the sign of inadequacy and oppression but rather the occasion of an ethical relationship between two irreducibly different subjects. In her most heterocentric moments, Irigaray fails to embrace the potential of this politics of difference, positing instead a politics of *the* difference—a politics in which only binary sexual difference is attributed ethical and political significance, reiterating the foreclosure of many axes of difference which historically has plagued feminist theory.

Irigaray naturalizes heterosexual desire to the extent of, for instance, casting families to be the natural outcome of (exclusively) heterosexual desire and reproduction⁵⁴. Irigaray also seems to argue in some later work that fruitful horizons of desire and becoming exist only between the two sexes. These writings contrast with earlier texts, which advocate a temporary retreat from heterosexuality and point to the potential of developing cultures of desire and love between women⁵⁵. Despite these early texts, Irigaray has overwhelmingly privileged the relations between men and women in her ethics and politics. Grosz argues that Irigaray's heterocentric focus is a strategy to counter what Irigaray calls the west's predominant hom(m)osexuality (a culture built exclusively around between relations between men:

Although these texts are avowedly concerned with the hetero to the exclusion of the homo, they must at the same time be understood as a continuation of her project of deconstructing phallogocentric discourses and systems of representation. The very question of exchange between the sexes must be seen in the context of a cultural and representational system that resolutely presents exchange modeled on relations between one sex, with the other as its object of exchange.⁵⁶

The necessity of inventing genuine heterosexual relationships in order to create a culture of sexual difference goes some way to excusing Irigaray's focus on heterosexual relationship, but the troubling character of her late writing must be acknowledged. In the work that will follow, I will take up the earlier strand of Irigaray's writing, to the exclusion of the later and troublingly heterocentric move in her later work, particularly in the last chapter.

⁵⁴ BEW 139

⁵⁵ Irigaray, 1985. (TSWINO), p. 33.

⁵⁶ Grosz, "Irigaray, the Hetero and the Homo", *Engaging Irigaray*, ed. C Burke, N Schor and M Whitford. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 345

Danielle Poe has drawn out the resonance of Irigaray's account of sexual difference with that of some transgendered individuals, demonstrating that Irigarayan thought need not be confined by either heterocentric or binary-sexed assumptions. Of course, like so many theoretical attempts to account for that (collected from omissions) category, this undertaking privileges the experience of some transgender persons, those who identify with and embody a sex through medical intervention, over those who identify as beyond or between genders (for example, genderqueer subjects) or sexes (some intersex and transsex individuals). While Irigaray asserts the importance of the body and its determinations, she at times indicates the possibility of a more dynamic relationship between poles. While Irigaray's writings, particularly in her late work, have put great emphasis on the two, even insisting that twoness is the fundamental characteristic of not only humanity but all of nature⁵⁷, her overall framework need not foreclose the two sexes as intransitive or exhaustive. Irigaray does not defend the naïve mapping of gender characteristics to physical sexes (although, arguable, some of Irigaray's claims about women—for instance, women's special relationship to nature—seem to be descriptions of contingent, gendered relations rather than aspects of sexed experience.) Irigaray's theory is more evidently apt to transsex experience and, indeed, contravenes many accounts of, for instance, genderqueer or intersex experience. Nonetheless, if her approach can be reconciled to varieties of queer experience, Irigaray's

⁵⁷ SG, 108; of course, if Irigaray is taken to claim universal, sexual binary difference throughout nature, she is clearly in error; some have suggested that this difference can be understood in other, more plausible ways, for instance as some form of cyclic alteration; see Stone, 2006, 89; Schwab, Gail. "Sexual Difference as Model: An Ethics for the Global Future". *Diacritics*. 28:1, 1998.

focus on physical determination and embodiment could contribute to a focus on embodiment in queer studies.⁵⁸

Irigaray's brand of essentialism is, as I have discussed, problematic in several ways. Essentialist claims have a repressive history and hold a great danger of distorting and constricting individual possibility. Irigaray's writings often play to precisely these fears, tending toward reification of both the East and West and to the degradation of "secondary" differences such as race and class; especially in the late work, she is deeply heterocentric and dismissive of persons who do not fit into a binary system of sex⁵⁹. It seems clear that she is ignorant or dismissive of the individuals, relations and phenomena that fail to adhere to this binaristic system, a frightening myopia that threatens to turn her creative essentialism into just the sort of constrictive schema her opponents fear. Finally, especially in her late work, Irigaray is prone to specific statements on the character of women, These statements are sometimes ambiguous as to their origin, as it is possible that Irigaray is describing women's current situation (for instance, when she describes women as more pacific or closer to nature than men), but often seem to daringly and specifically describe women's natural determinations (an undertaking that, I would argue, is hopeless in a phallogocentric system and dangerous under any circumstances), arguing, for instance, for women's distinct, sexed relation to time, a relation that is embedded in her menstrual and developmental rhythms. These tendencies in Irigaray's late work, combined with the admittedly strategic elusiveness of her writing, have contributed to

⁵⁸ For example, Butler, 1993, 2006; Alfonso, 2008; Braidotti, 1994, 2002.

⁵⁹ Indeed, Irigaray sometimes seems dismissive even of animals, plants and natural phenomena that do not fit into such a binary sex system.

widespread unease regarding Irigaray's work in general and especially with the most overtly essentialist aspects of her thought.

While I acknowledge these concerns regarding Irigaray's essentialism—some of which have never been satisfactorily addressed, even by Irigaray's defenders⁶⁰--I consider recognition of Irigaray's essentialism to be both crucial to properly understanding her project and quite useful to contemporary feminism. As Stone notes, Irigaray's work has always exceeded the nature-culture binary that has so often lingered in feminist, queer and gender theory⁶¹, and has done so in ways that allow embodied experiences—including those of the divine--to reenter feminist conversation. Irigaray's focus on natural determinations and ethical horizons is disturbingly heterocentric, but her account of constitutive limits allows her a more robust account of selfhood and human potential than that of many antiessentialist opponents, who tend to take norms and borders as barriers to overcome rather than horizons that determine possibilities for future growth. While Irigaray's emphasis on binaristic sexual difference can be exclusive—both of other possibilities of sexedness and of other axes of difference—it provides a more significant opposition to and bulwark against the logic of the same than is found in the alternatives. Finally, Irigaray's approach of analyzing moments of instability as resurgences of a repressed, prior principle allow her to take destabilizing and subversive action as part of a positive and reconstructive project, one that can unearth clues suggesting a healthier and less repressive political and philosophical path.

⁶⁰ I have in mind the inadequate and objectifying accounts of intersexed persons that appear in the work of several of Irigaray's commentators, such as Alison Stone (2006) and Elizabeth Grosz (2004).

⁶¹ As such, Irigaray's work resembles that of Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti, though Irigaray's precise understanding of the nature-culture relation is distinct from theirs, as she maintains nature as a distinct category of analysis.

“For a Peaceful Revolution”

There are three effects of the omission and suppressions of the phallic system which give Irigaray’s feminism a prescriptive force even in the absence of a narrative of justice or liberation. Firstly, the omission of the embodied reality of female bodies and female subjects leaves each thinker’s work incomplete and unstable by its own standard; we cannot achieve our own standards of truth within phallogocentrist discourse. Secondly, Irigaray discovers in these historical texts evidence of an alternative—obscure yet compelling—to the phallogocentric system. This alternative—the very existence of which destabilizes and challenges the “logic of the same” instituted by western philosophy—indicates the possibility, first of all, of escaping a set of epistemological limits and commitments that have, Irigaray argues, confined Western thought to an incomplete and flawed corpus while enabling the suppression of difference. In a Hegelian move, Irigaray reveals that these epistemological commitments shape and, mutually, are shaped by our subject positions, our relations to others, and our social and political world. Finally, Irigaray appropriates Freudian tools to diagnose the innate neurosis and malaise of the phallogocentrist system, demonstrating that it is inimical to the health and integration of the individual and the community.

In Irigaray’s later work, the psychoanalytic strand of her thought will develop a more pronounced prescriptive weight, as she offers guidelines which will, she argues, improve the health (that is, the physical and psychological integration) of women and men. Irigaray’s insights into the contingencies and pathologies of phallogocentrism allow

her to indicate practical interventions that can help to overcome female hysteria, reconcile people with nature and spirit, and to make loving and respectful relations between sexes possible.

It should be clear that, while Irigaray's exemplars or subversive representations offer a certain promise, their ill fates are everpresent. As such, their liberatory promise is always admixed with disaster, often inextricably so (after all, Antigone's heroic reputation is dependent on her tragic end.) These representations alone cannot explain the extent of Irigaray's positive vision, or precisely limn the outlines of her prescriptive weight. Irigaray's prescriptive vision—most evident in her later work—is indebted to her clinical and psychoanalytic training and, indeed, constitutes another return to her readings of Freud and Plato in *Speculum*. For Freud, health is defined through the integration of the somatic and the psychic, the individual and the community. This integration is, at Freud's most genuine, non-normative; neurosis becomes treatable when it interferes with work or love, not social congruence per se. The thriving, well-integrated subject is the blazon of health for Irigaray as for Freud; a subject capable of recognized and valued work and of love (two spheres which, Irigaray argues, are denied to women in the world Freud takes for granted); and a subject who is able to speak, to sublimate, to articulate a separate ego as well as form stable and intimate relations with others. This is a subject who has been able to integrate the bodily to the social—which, Irigaray argues, has not truly been possible for either male or female subjects in the phallic system. Like Plato, Irigaray takes this model of health to be applicable not only to the individual but to the *polis*, in which balance and integration are privileged. This balance and integration is impossible for either Freud or Plato, Irigaray will argue, given their suppression of the

feminine and bodily. Nonetheless, the integrated, reconciled and thriving subject is an Irigarayan ideal, one that is inherently antioppressive and liberatory, but which does not take liberation per se (a model that has too often entailed liberation from much of that which allows us to thrive) as its goal. As such, the female melancholia, hysteria and masochism, and the male hyperaggression and fetishistic sexuality, that follow from the phallic model represents its indictment. Irigaray's analyses of the inherent neurosis and maladaptation of the phallic system demonstrate its inadequacy, while a vision of psychic and political health delimits her prescriptions.

In her Freudian commitment to health, I take Irigaray to diverge significantly from Hegel. The pattern of Hegelian dialectic ensures that formations are surpassed when and only when they become unsustainable—when their internal tensions and contradictions cannot be suppressed. While the internal tensions and contradictions of the phallic economy are dire and thoroughgoing in Irigaray's analysis, it is not their fundamental unsustainability that allows her to condemn them. In fact, as we can observe in Irigaray's account of Antigone and the other disruptive exemplars enumerated here, it is opposition to the phallic system which tends to prove unsustainable, while the system itself evinces repeatedly "to what lengths masculinity goes in order to sustain itself"⁶² or what Irigaray describes as the "double lock" of Hegelian patriarchy (SG 110). For Irigaray, phallic masculinity is intransigent in its ability to recuperate from subversive challenge, silencing and burying all opposition and rendering oppositional claims literally unspeakable. The attachment of the little girl to her mother, then, is forcibly cut off and, furthermore, excluded from language and rendered mysterious and unintelligible to an

⁶² Lorraine, 68.

observer such as Freud—one for whom the impenetrability of the “dark continent” or lost, prehistoric civilization⁶³ of femininity/female sexuality seems a natural determination rather than a fatal limitation of his conceptual framework. No wonder Irigaray often seems to identify deeply with Antigone—her opposition to the phallic order comes to resemble that of Antigone’s struggle with an opponent who cannot acknowledge the soundness of the other’s position (of course, Antigone has her own blind spots, which I will discuss in the next chapter); her analysis depicts a phallic system which is founded on illusion, omission and suppression, but which is firmly sustained thereby. Irigaray’s analysis of this system emphasizes both its sustainability and its infelicity or maladaptive character. Overcoming this system is, for her, the project of opening the possibility of more persuasive representations and more healthful modes of living—possibilities that may render phallic logic unsustainable, but do not take their normative weight from a crisis of reason but rather from a crisis of health.

Nostalgia: Returning to the Greeks

Hegel turns to Antigone in the spirit of nostalgia with which the German Romantics contemplated the Ancient Greeks; the Greek polis appears as proof that it was possible, in the pre-modern era, for men to live in harmony with their community, free of the alienation which the nineteenth-century German experienced in relation to the state. While Hegel concludes that such harmonious, immediate unity of individual and state is no longer possible—this possibility is foreclosed by the violent transition from clan to

⁶³ Freud, “Female Sexuality” SE, xxi:222-3, as quoted in Irigaray, SOTW, 43n27; Freud, SE, 225-227/SOTW 64.

monarchy, from familial to state law, effected by Creon—his nostalgia is evident, as Irigaray points out, in his account. The harmonious relation of brother to sister, and the ethical exemplarity of the familial sphere, inspire in Hegel rapturous elegy, even as he describes their subjugation as a necessary step in the destiny of Spirit. Hegel's Antigone must be punished; her continued defeat and confinement underpins the further development of the state and of civil society as coherent wholes. The principle of familial nurturance and assurance which she represents must be tamed and appropriated to the ends of the public sphere, to which this principle is both crucial and threatening. For Hegel, the Ancient Greeks linger as an inescapable memory of the immediate and harmonious unity that can never be recaptured by the speculative movement of Spirit, and Antigone represents the trace that reminds us of the heroism and power of familial labor even as this labor is domesticated.

Irigaray, like Hegel, approaches Antigone in a spirit of nostalgia, though for her Antigone will be more than the appealing dead end that she is for Hegel. For Irigaray, too, Ancient Greece is a privileged historical site where we can observe traces of a world predating the victory of Western phallic thought. The persistence of Goddesses in the Elysian Mysteries, and of the mother-daughter pair Kore and Demeter, evince to Irigaray the trace of prior, matriarchal, goddess-worshiping societies. Similarly, the trace of the maternal principle of blood in the story of Antigone speaks to a *historical* transition to patriarchy and belligerent state power. These mysterious traces also serve, for Irigaray, as a metaphor for the traces of a *real* maternal bond that persist in the individual after the imposition of the symbolic. While these traces are enigmatic, they are hardly the irretrievably dark continent that Freud and Lacan describe—for Irigaray, the real has its

own logic and its own language, one that we have lost the ability to interpret—hence her frequent references to the as-yet-undeciphered “prehistoric” and “hieroglyphic” languages (SOTW 140) (like the famously untranslatable writing of the Minoans, precursors of Greek civilization) in *Speculum*. The ancient world, and Antigone herself, represent mementos of a very real history, one that is covered over but still present. Irigaray’s nostalgia is, unlike Hegel’s, a positive strategy: rather than ruling out any return to the ancient order, Irigaray takes such stubborn and peculiar traces of the ancient world—traces which, she points out, exceed the contemporary understanding, as in the case of the Minoan language—open unto viable alternatives for contemporary life.

Phallic Epistemology: Irigaray rewrites the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

A system of exchange which recognizes only the phallus as organ of pleasure is a system that must have certain epistemic characteristics or limits; this is the overall pattern of masculine consciousness within the phallic economy. This paradigm (one quite evident in Hegel’s system, and, in varying degrees and flavors, in most of the philosophers Irigaray writes about, with Nietzsche among the exceptions) is, first of all, oculocentric; in order to privilege the penis over the female genitals, one must privilege that which is immediately visible (the evident protrusion of the male genitalia) over that which comes to be known primarily through tactile exploration (the labia minora, vagina, and in many cases the hooded clitoris.) The supremacy of the visible allows for a distanced and disembodied form of knowledge which characterizes, for instance, natural science and, metaphorically, philosophy. Science—as, for instance, in microscopy, is invested in

freeze-framing small, isolated pieces of nature in order to study them as a remove, where touch as a means of knowledge is more grounded in the world and the relation to the object. As we see in Plato's allegory of the cave, vision is privileged as the medium of knowledge, but embodied, sensory vision is the lesser image of a more true "vision" that is attained by surpassing the embodied. Touch seems particularly grounded in the body—while scientific imagery is rife with literal views from nowhere (say, compound images, or images created from invisible media such as radio telescoping) the sense of touch remains more firmly grounded in phenomenological experience of the body in contact with other bodies. Phallic forms of knowledge penetrate the world with the gaze, the sense that serves as both the assurance and the extension of the phallus; no wonder the fear of being blinded mirrors the fear of castration.

The freezing, dissective vision of science is one which emphasizes the gap between subject and object. Here the object of knowledge must be passive, cold and dead, the better to divide and fix in knowledge. This pattern insists on the characteristic binarism of western epistemology⁶⁴, which depends upon the dyad of seer and seen, active and passive, dynamic and fixed—and which maps the reification and passivity of the object of knowledge onto the female and onto nature. Furthermore, this epistemic tendency emphasizes the part over the whole, seeking to "carve nature at the joints"⁶⁵. Fox Keller has argued that a very different, female-gendered epistemic approach, grounded in what geneticist Barbara McClintock experiences as a "feeling for the

⁶⁴ See Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985; Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp.149-181; Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism", *Feminist Social Thought*, ed. Diana Tietjens Meyers, New York: Routledge, 2007; Le Doeuff, *The Sex of Knowing*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

⁶⁵ Plato, *Phaedrus*, ln. 265

organism” and an intuition of wholeness and interconnection, can lead to scientific insight that is impossible under the dissective gaze.

Similar to the overcathexis of sight, the phallic system values the solid over the fluid or mucous. That which is receptive, which can flow into, around, and about the other, the changeable and lacking in fixed form, is dismissed or abhorred. Luce Irigaray, particularly in her “elemental” series (Elemental Passions, The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger, Marine Lover, and, arguably, The Way of Love), has argued that the privileging of the element of Earth in western philosophy is a symptom of phallicism and argues for a revaluing of the more mutable and flowing elements. Of course, the solidity of the male erection is an illusion created by the collection of blood, the hidden, fluid element which, Irigaray argues, underlies the phallic economy. Closely related to the overvaluing of the solid is a focus on enumeration. Fluid female sexuality, with its many and mutable erogenous areas, cannot be counted easily; instead the phallic system registers it as a *minus one*, the lack of the one evident site of value offered by the male body. The ambiguous is dissected into the fixed and delimited.

The phallic system assumes linear and progressive time and emphasizes a pattern of building tension followed by a crisis of release. Irigaray regards this in contrast to what she describes as a distinctly female relationship to time—or, at least, an aspect of women’s relation to time which is influenced by the cyclic temporality of female bodies. Irigaray argues that women experience temporality as both cyclic—epitomized by the menstrual cycle—and as a series of distinct stages, as defined by events such as the onset of menstruation, gestational stages, and menopause. She argues that a temporality metonymically related to the male body and reflective of male experience imposes a

linear and largely undifferentiated experience of time—one in which differentiation is defined not by cycles or natural alterations but by an allegedly progressive series of violent explosions; hence a history defined by wars and power struggles, by the violent defeat of polities and epistemes. This progressive history is always incomplete and distorted—omitting, for instance, oppressive practices from histories of political liberation, conquest from histories of discovery and any practices or experiences that do not fit its pattern—for instance, women’s traditional work or embodied experience of time. The understanding of time as inherently progressive and violent distorts our understanding of history and determines that those who become a part of a political or genealogical history must collude in an aggressive illusion of progress. To *not* become a part of history is to fail to influence systems of governance or representation, to leave no evident genealogical trace for later generations, and to fail to significantly participate in an epistemic formation—in other words, to exist in the ahistorical stasis to which, many have observed, Hegel confines women (Oliver, Mills, etc.). To enter into history without accepting the warlike entrance requirements of phallic history is a pressing necessity for Irigaray, one that at once would disrupt the dominant historical narrative and provide a solid starting point for the development of feminist theorizing and action—feminist theorists would no longer sift through a male canon to find some clues to feminist genealogies of thought and divinity and counter phallic paradigms, as Irigaray does in her early work, but might, as she does in her late work, focus on more positive aims. Hence Irigaray’s focus on a “peaceful revolution” leading to “felicity within history”—establishing a feminist history, with both feminist form and content, is key to her project.

The characteristics of the phallic episteme are closely related to the male anatomy and sexuality, but, crucially, are not necessitated by these natural determinations. Indeed, the male body is itself shaped and interpreted in light of the exigency of phallic logic. Instead, both this episteme and this male morphology are necessary *in order to privilege the masculine over the feminine* and, particularly, to institute the sole value of the phallus. The female body as subject of self-knowledge demands alternative epistemic forms and gestures toward their shape; presumably, in a paradigm that does not seek to institute the phallus as the only locus of value, the male body, also, indicates its own special but inclusive forms of knowledge. In the next chapter, I will consider what these forms might be in relation to Irigaray's "La Mysterique".

Irigaray argues that the oedipal system, with its incessant threat of castration, in fact serves to reassert the value and the unitary presence of the phallus for the man. If castration is a threat to the little girl and the mother, then the little boy must have the item of value, an item that others lack. In the mirror stage, the child discovers himself (admittedly, an alienated self) as a unified and capable whole in his reflection; this reflection establishes him as an individual and founds his self-esteem. Women's lack of a phallus, and of any recognized alternative, establishes her as an ideal or *flat* mirror, an ever-present affirmation of the man's wholeness and value⁶⁶.

⁶⁶ This mirroring ability is crucial to women's role as the medium of exchange in patriarchal economies (well established, for instance, by Levi-Strauss and Rubin); more than any other currency, the exchange of women establishes the parties of the exchange mutually as subjects. If the male parties of exchange were to mirror each other, this would be a dangerous and potentially disruptive encounter. As Hegel describes in the scene of the first meeting of the lord and bondsmen, two men meeting in the absence of a preexisting social fabric of recognition and exchange are potential enemies: the existence of another subject with like desires threatens consumption and subjectivity. The mirror of woman acts as a screen or mediation between these gazes, one which recognizes each man with a passive and unthreatening desire, a recognizer who will never be reciprocally recognized. Irigaray's account of the flat mirror and the exchange in women should be compared to Rubin, "The Traffic in Women", *Feminist Anthropology*, ed. Ellen Lewin, Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

The phallic episteme prescribes ignorance of the female sex as the necessary condition of the phallic economy. By disrupting this ignorance and fostering the resurgence of the repressed female sex, Irigaray's threat Hegel's schema is more than an ordinary supercession; it cannot be taken as a further step along a linear course of development. Instead, Irigaray puts into question the workings of each preceding moment of the dialectic, opening up new possibilities at every turn and destabilizing the "necessary" course of each following step. By prescribing more senses and a more fluid understanding of a living, resistant object—often, an object who is herself subject, and hence irreducibly strange—Irigaray multiplies possibilities for knowledge and development much as she multiplies possibilities for recognition (as discussed in the next chapter.) As such, she threatens Hegel's dialectical form itself (a form that she repeatedly insists is a violent distortion, one that unnecessarily subordinates the first moment and violently denies the possibility of any irreducible excess.⁶⁷) Furthermore, she puts into question all of his phenomenal accounts, even the most basic, as distorted by his reliance on phallic epistemic patterns; hence Irigaray's consistent emphasis on the senses, as we can experience sense-certainty in diverse ways, with diverse limitations, depending on the object of knowledge and the senses emphasized.

Irigaray's dependency on Hegel is clear, though he is by no means the only philosopher through whom it is fruitful to read Irigaray. In her early work, Irigaray not only welcomes but insists upon being read with, even through, another philosopher. Her

⁶⁷ See Irigaray's lengthy footnote on the limitations of the three-part dialectic at SOTW 90n93, which we can compare to her comments in "Sorcerer Love" (ESD, Irigaray 1984) where she argues that a intermediary must be added between the first and second terms, which cannot be synthesized without excess

method is one that depends upon both the fruitfulness and the failings of the canon, and Hegel proves to be a considerable resource on both counts. Hegel is one of several

Reading Hegel with Irigaray can explicate her own project considerably, elucidating her account of sexual difference, her interest in health and sustainability, and her epistemological goals, as well as her mythopolitical⁶⁸ undertaking in rereading Antigone. Further, Irigaray's manner of reading Hegel serves both to explicate Hegel's statements on women, statements which have puzzled many readers, and to open new horizons of investigation in, for instance, Hegel's writings on Ethical Spirit, as I will discuss further in the chapter on Antigone. Together, Hegelian and Irigarayan insights lead us to a feminist reconsideration of the rites of death.

⁶⁸ That is to say, Irigaray's approach to Antigone aims both to achieve political ends through the use of mythical and literary tools and to channel a political interest in women's activism and subjectivity into the crucial work of restoring a robust female imaginary, not least by recreating a feminist mythos.

IRIGARAY'S WOMEN: STRATEGY AND EXEMPLARITY

I. Antigone and the Irigarayan exemplar

A. An Authoress without Words: Irigaray's mimetic style and the speechless lover

B. The little girl

C. "La Mysterique"

II. The Eternal Irony of the Community

A. Oscillation and Recognition

B. The Significance of Blood

C. Dispersion and violence

Antigone and the Irigarayan exemplar

Irigaray's essay on Antigone must be interpreted within the framework of *Speculum* as a whole. *Speculum* surveys the history of western philosophy, adopting methods and assumptions native to each thinker whilst demonstrating that each tells an incomplete, self-contradictory story by its own standards. These moments of surprise, tension and unaccountable silence are unearthed to display—in a kind of negative space—that which is omitted or suppressed in discourse: that of sexual difference. Each of these moments also provides strategic and conceptual tools through which to oppose phallogocentrism, and not the least of these tools is the image of the resistant woman herself, an image that can create the occasion for women to reimagine themselves in new and surprising ways. These figures, especially that of Antigone, are frequently interpreted as exemplars of feminist thought and activism.

Before I begin my discussion of *The Eternal Irony of the Community*, which is probably the most famous example of Irigaray's subversive reading of western philosophy, I will consider three other ironic moments that appear in *Speculum*. While I am indebted to the rich and insightful readings of Antigone as a feminist heroine in *The Eternal Irony* given by figures such as Butler, Benhabib, Chanter, and Jagentowicz Mills, as well as that strand of feminist political philosophy which takes Antigone as the exemplar of feminist political agency (Elshtain, Dietz, Zerilli.)⁶⁹ I am concerned that these readings treat Antigone as the exemplar of disruptive, feminist irony in Irigaray's thought. If we take Antigone as the exemplar of irony or of resistance to phallic logic, we must concern ourselves with whether the figure of Antigone can be universalized to apply to all women⁷⁰ and with the particular limitations of Antigone, for instance, in her rejection of sisterly love and her entanglement in the Oedipal scene. Given the diversity of disruptive female images in Irigaray's work, I would argue that treating Antigone as the exemplar of female resistance is misguided, neglecting alternative figures and overemphasizing the importance of Antigone's peculiarities. In fact Antigone is only one of a series of disruptive female images offered by Irigaray; this series begins with figures such as the playful little girl and the female mystic, and continues beyond *Speculum* in Irigaray's attention Demeter and Kore and to the Virgin Mary (whom we might call the

⁶⁹ Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. Benhabib, Seyla. "On Hegel, Women, and Irony" and Mills, Patricia Jagentowcz, "Hegel's Antigone" in *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel*, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996. Chanter, Tina. "Antigone's Exemplarity: Irigaray, Hegel and Excluded Grounds as Constitutive of Feminist Theory". *Thinking with Irigaray*, ed. Mary C. Rawlinson, Sabrina L. Hom and Serene Khader. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, forthcoming.; Elshtain, Jean Bethke. "Antigone's Daughters". *Democracy* 2:46-59, 1982; Dietz, Mary G. "Citizenship with a Feminist Face: The Problem with Maternal Thinking" *Political Theory* 13:19-37, 1985. Zerilli, Linda. "Machiavelli's Sisters: Women and 'The Conversation' of Political Theory." *Political Theory* 19:252-76, 1991.

⁷⁰ Chanter, Tina. "Antigone's Exemplarity: Irigaray, Hegel and Excluded Grounds as Constitutive of Feminist Theory". In *Thinking with Irigaray*, ed. Mary C. Rawlinson, Sabrina L. Hom and Serene Khader. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, forthcoming.

eternal irony of Christianity.) Each of these figures embodies irony much as Antigone does: she represents an irresolvable excess, a surprising and inexplicable phenomenon, within phallic logic. As such, these figures present an alternative to the phallic economy, showing an excessive outside that disrupts and endangers the supposedly total logic of the phallic system and presenting the possibility of new ways to live as women. None of these figures alone is an exemplar in that none is, in any simple way, a figure to be emulated; nor does each, in her partial and imperfect way, represent the “essence” of feminist disruption. Perhaps Antigone is the most popular of these figures given her location at the border of the familial and the public, the ethical and the political; this gives the reading of Antigone, at least superficially, a greater relevance to feminist political concerns. In this project, I surrender to a fascination with the richness and complexity of Antigone’s story, though I will argue that Antigone should be read as a warning as much as a heroine. While Antigone is key as a figure of resistance to Hegelian political and ethical logic, I hold that the more neglected exemplars in Irigaray’s texts are more effective in presenting alternatives to phallogocentric epistemology, spirituality, and psychoanalysis, and in many cases offer more promising representations of the relationships between women than does the lonely and unforgiving Antigone. In my concluding chapter, I will return briefly to Demeter and Kore; here, my goal in this section is to disrupt and enrich readings of Antigone as the exemplar of irony in *Speculum*.

An Authoress without Words: Irigaray’s mimetic style and the speechless lover

Many disruptive and surprising women appear in *Speculum*, not least of whom is the authoress herself. *Speculum* is not written in the voice of scholarly or scientific authority, or in the style of a philosophical argument. Indeed, it is deliberately circular and elusive, enacting the fluid, flighty and irrational style of which women are sometimes accused. Irigaray's writing in *Speculum* is deeply dependent on the writings of the thinkers she comments upon; one chapter contains only quotations⁷¹. Indeed, she avoids pronouns assiduously, especially "I"; in this sense hers is a narration without a subject. Irigaray narrates her engagement with the philosophers as one without access to the words and to the authority of philosophical convention, describing herself as a woman "hav[ing] a fling with the philosophers"⁷² rather than writing a thesis on them. The Freud section provides a vivid performance of Irigaray's mimetic method; in counterpoint to Freud's "impossible speech" (for his speech on femininity was written after oral cancer had robbed Freud of the ability to speak), Irigaray engages in her own impossible narration, piquantly repeating and revising Freud's words in the absence of her own discourse. Irigaray's as narration serves as a sort of echo which repeats back Freud's own words—often in the form of lengthy quotations—but with distinctive stutters and cadences which serve to point out Freud's peculiarities and discontinuities: for instance, the mimetic narrator will pause to point out, with an air of naïvete rather than rhetorical victory, a seeming inconsistency in Freud's thought. When the Freudian narrative is interrupted, it is in the voice of a distinctively feminine (in Freud's sense: shallow, chatty, often incoherent) character, one who is less an interlocutor than an interruption. This feminine voice points out Freud's peculiar emotional states, as reported in the text; she

⁷¹ "On the Index of Plato's Works" in SOTW.

⁷² Irigaray, 1985, (TSWINO) 150

offers ingenuous questions that point out inconsistencies and contingencies in Freud's work; and, in her freeflowing yet imperfectly fluent language, she slowly and tentatively indicates that which Freud has neglected or covered over. As is fitting of the feminine subject, this female narrator exhibits an oedipal desire for the father of psychoanalysis, but she is exquisitely attuned, also, to Freud's desires—the father's desire for the daughter and, ultimately, his "homosexual" desire for the same. Irigaray's performance, then, serves to disrupt Freud's account and to point to its inadequacies.

In this distinctive and original style, which we might call an *écriture féminine* or, in Irigaray's term, *parler femme*, Irigaray develops keen insights and cutting critiques of Freud's analysis of femininity. For instance, Freud posits that little girls suffer from envy of the penis. When the little girl or little boy is approaching the age of three—the time of the oedipal crisis—he or she discovers that the female lacks a penis. In the little boy this is more easily understood: he has a phallus and assumes that everyone does; the discovery that some people have lost their penises prompts him to fear for the loss of his own. The desire to preserve his own penis causes him to submit to the demands of his father—the father appears as the figure with the power both to preserve the phallus, as he has his own, or to castrate the son—that the little boy cease to compete with the father for the mother's affections. The fear of castration leads the boy child to relinquish his desire for his mother and enter into the greater male community of laws, property and exogamy. His encounter with the law of the father forces the boy to give up a specific object of desire, the mother, but in doing so he can both preserve the heterosexual orientation of his desire and guarantee his safety against castration.

Her desire for the phallus leads the little girl to turn away from her mother (who had previously been the locus of oral and genital pleasure) and, indeed, to reject her mother for having failed to preserve her own phallus and her daughter's. The little girl transfers her homosexual attachment to the mother onto the father, the owner of the desired organ, and hopes that he will give her a child. This child, if it is a little boy, will "give" the little girl a phallus. The little girl desires her father and imagines that he reciprocates her desire: however, in his function as lawgiver, he proscribes any incestuous relation between them. As a result, the little girl transfers her desire toward other men, also in the hopes of having a child (despite the fact that her love affair with her son can only last until the oedipal phase interrupts his desire for her). Hence the development of adult female heterosexuality, which both necessitates the marital family and, as Freud says, ensures that the partners in a marriage are always out of phase: the woman desires her son, and the man desires his mother.

Irigaray does not—like certain other female and feminist readers of Freud, such as Klein and Horney—dispute the reality or the predominance of penis envy. Without ruling out the possibility of, for instance, a male envy of the womb or the umbilicus, she accepts Freud's clinical observations that women do experience trauma at the discovery that they lack the phallus, and envy it. Freud's account of the development of the little girl into the woman involves several traumas and reversals that are not present for the boy child, for instance, the change of affection from the mother to the father, and the change of bodily identification from father to mother (on the discovery of her castration.) These reversals and discoveries shake the little girl deeply, resulting—Irigaray and Freud agree—in the regressions observed in little girls: girls, at first in advance of little boys in language and

maturity, quickly fall back after the oedipal stage, suffering particularly in their linguistic fluency. Postulating penis envy explains a number of phenomena which Irigaray considers well-established and evident in our milieu: that, in becoming women, girls react against their mothers with resentment; women's sense of inadequacy and the myriad attempts—for instance, through makeup and fashionable clothing—to disguise their lack⁷³; and the peculiar characteristics of female heterosexuality, in which women would seem to desire the phallus for its own sake, rather than for the sake of any pleasure or good it might offer them⁷⁴.

Unlike Freud, however, Irigaray does not view the oedipal scene, and its disastrous results for women (even at best, Freud's femininity is essentially a state of melancholia or hysteria, she argues) as necessary and naturally prescribed. Where Freud considers it inevitable that the little girl should take her anatomical difference from the little boy as the sign of lack and castration, Irigaray suggests, through a series of questions and observations, that this result is by no means anatomically preordained. In fact, the variety of erotogenic zones in the human body means that the equation of penis with phallus (the signifier of pleasure or desire), and phallus with penis, is not foreordained. The little girl, after all, has her own sources of pleasure—not merely in her clitoris, that undersized penis analogue, but throughout her genital region—and, as in the case of the little boy, this pleasure is no doubt stimulated by the mother in the course of

⁷³ Irigaray describes such women as wrapping themselves up brightly and attractively, in the fashion of a commodity on the market, hiding their lack of the phallus by making themselves into the phallus—that is, into the object of exchange.

⁷⁴ For instance, as Irigaray points out, Freud's reduction of the female body's polymorphous and multiple erogenous zones to the vagina reduces female pleasure, in all its possibilities, to the simple mirror of male pleasure—female pleasure comes to be defined as the act of pleasuring the male. The ultimate desire for the boy child, as a means of “having the phallus herself”, is similarly and puzzlingly reductive, since, in the patriarchal family, the mother has minimal claim on the child. Female desires, then, are solely governed by the figure of the phallus, and delimited by a masculine logic.

caring for the child. Freud believes that the little girl is castrated by nature and that this castration is imputed into history (that is, the little girl believes that at some point someone has taken her penis). On the contrary, Irigaray demonstrates that Freud imputes to nature what is, in fact, the historical castration of the little girl—a castration that takes place when the girl’s mother imposes on her those social norms which forbid her from pleasuring herself or exploring her genitalia. This law, which renders the little girl’s genitals a blank, flat, and frigid area, represents a real castration or denial of the female sex.

The same law that denies the female sex serves to institute the male sex as the primary source of pleasure and of value. In her reading, Irigaray discovers that Freud’s account of the phallus as the point of desire and envy is not a necessary consequence of anatomy (in fact, it can only be instituted through violence to anatomy); instead, she will argue that it is a pervasive system of exchange, a system in defense of certain insecurities characteristic of the male sex. Freud’s account of the necessary genesis of penis envy must posit that, as Irigaray puts it, “the little girl is only the little boy”. Prior to the discovery of her “castration”, the little girl must experience only second-rate ‘phallic’ pleasure—that is, centered only in the clitoris, which is analogous to the penis, and relatively unsatisfactory. The frail pleasures afforded by the clitoris will have no continued place in the development of femininity, but seem to fall away silently as a result of the little girl’s newfound dissatisfaction and not due to any imposition of the law. Since the little girl’s development and embodied experience has been *the same* as that of the little boy, the discovery of her difference can only be the revelation of a lack, and the ensuing development of femininity can only be a contorted and imperfect

reflection of the male's. By alluding to distinctly female pleasures and by emphasizing the surprise Freud himself experiences in observing the excesses of desire and eroticism in the little girl, Irigaray underlines the unsustainability of Freud's interpretation.

Freud holds great interest for Irigaray, for while she does not take him to be describing invariable structures of nature, she does treat him as an authoritative student of psychic development in the phallogocentric formation. The overcastration of the phallus and correlative erasure of the female sex has grave consequences for the development of female subjectivity, as the valuation of the phallus grounds the development of the male ego. This individual unit of value defines the male child as an *I*, grounding him as a linguistic subject, while the oedipal stage corresponds to what Freud observes as a sudden falling-behind of the previously precocious little girl in terms of linguistic expression. The phallus, then, grounds the individuation and development of the male ego, allowing for the development of a linguistically fluent subject capable of sublimation and mastery. The female must, on Freud's reasoning, lack a strong ego, Irigaray observes, leaving her lacking in both language and value, constrained to masochistic and hysterical defense mechanisms, sidelined in the work of mastery and civilization. It is this mute and permeable femininity that Irigaray performs in her writing, both disrupting the necessity of the development of such femininity and suggesting that there is a meaningful discourse buried in this seemingly inchoate and unconscious litany.

While the phallogocentric formation described by Freud is at least metaphorically resonant with the male anatomy, and serves to give meaning and value to this anatomy, it is not sustained or justified through reference to anatomy. Instead, this formation is constantly troubled by certain enduring characteristics and capacities of the female

morphology. The troubling resurgence of these subversive matters is evinced repeatedly in Freud's own narrative, which is marked by avowals of surprise, inexplicable omissions, and contradictory statements. These peculiarities mark the many references to facts of female body and the development of the little girl that cannot be accounted for in his schema and hence are either omitted, distorted, or consigned to the "dark continent" of femininity, that which can never be illuminated or understood (given, at least, the language at Freud's disposal.) For instance, Freud is repeatedly surprised by evidence of a deep attachment of daughter and mother that precedes and troubles his attempts to assimilate feminine psychic development as a facsimile of male development distinguished only by the lack of the phallus. As Irigaray repeatedly points out, the existence of female sexual organs, both internal and external, gives lie to any attempt to describe penis envy or castration anxiety as natural consequences of male and female anatomy. Indeed, the female genitalia itself denies the phallogocentric claim that women are simply not-men, understandable through the lack of the phallus. After all, the female, as Irigaray points out both in *Speculum* and in *This Sex Which is Not One*, has access to her own self-pleasure—albeit pleasure that is consistently discouraged—and is outside of the economy of the phallus, allegedly the cardinal site of pleasure. Anything but a "flat mirror" passively reflecting the wholeness and tumescence of the male, she has sexual organs, evident to tactile investigation. She has multiple erotogenic sites subverting the phallic claim to a monopoly on pleasure; the continual, pleasurable contact of her two lips marks a tactile pleasure that is entirely outside of the penetrative, reproductive, oculo-centric pleasures of phallogocentrism; and the ambiguous topology of these

multiple sites, doubled lips, and fluid pleasures disrupt the solid and sharp boundaries of whole, unitary persons central to much western thought.

Irigaray narrates *Speculum* as a woman without her own language or conceptual framework; indeed, the possibility of wielding such tools can only be the endpoint of the political and philosophical project Irigaray is beginning in *Speculum*. Through her distinctive, mimetic style and her attunement to the contradictions and omissions of texts such as Freud's, she is able to engage in incisive cultural criticism and to discover subversive moments in the western canon, such as those discussed below. By performing this project in a distinctly feminine voice, one that refuses the conventions of male academic writing, she both points out the limits and inconsistencies of such writing and invents an alternative.

The little girl

The first disruptive figure to appear in *Speculum* is the generalized little girl who figures in Freud's writings on femininity. While Freud's understanding of masculinity as the default position and standard of human sexuality demands that the little girl appear first as "only" a little boy, then as something less—the castrated boy, whose healthy development will transform her into exactly the ego-sustaining, pleasure-giving, maternal figure that is needed to sustain husbands and sons—the actual development of the little girl gives lie to this in many instances. The little girl appears first as something more and different than the little boy, with her precocious linguistic development (a precocity the loss of which is attributed to the trauma of castration); her excessive abilities disrupt the description of the little girl as "only" or less than the little boy. Furthermore, Freud finds

in his research the trace of a “surprising”, “unexpected” and stubborn attachment to the mother, a fixation which is later transferred to the father; this fixation disrupts the supposedly phallic desires of the little girl, especially since, as Freud observes, they may persist beyond the discovery of the little girl’s castration (34). Involving both the desire to impregnate the mother and to be impregnated by her, the little girl’s attachment to the mother “would lead us to suppose that the little girl is not simply a little boy, that bisexuality is already at work in her libidinal economy, and that as a girl she can desire a child from her mother at the same time that, as a bearer of a small penis, she wishes to test its potency by getting her mother with child” (35). Most importantly, in some cases the little girl may desire that her mother impregnate her with a girl child—a desire that is incoherent within the Freudian economy, in which the desire to bear a child is always the desire for the son, a phallus of one’s own. These desires on the part of the little girl point to an economy of desire between women that would not take the phallus as the signifier of value, an economy where mothers and daughters might desire each other as women; this alternative economy, painstakingly covered over by the phallogocentric development of femininity, profoundly challenges the Freudian economy in which the phallus is the only currency, the only signifier of value and object of desire.

Against the Freudian fetishization of the phallus and the collapse of all women into aspects of the maternal function, the little girl presents a dangerous practice that persists indefinitely through her girlhood. When the little girl plays at mothering a baby doll, Freud interprets her actions as an attempt to supplant the mother as the father’s consort and an expression of the girl’s desire to have her own phallus by bearing a boy child; if, however, the baby doll is taken to be a girl child—and, Irigaray points out,

Freud curiously fails to specify the doll's sex, eliding this difficulty—it gives lie to this phallogocentric interpretation. If the little girl can love and desire a girl doll despite this doll's lack of a phallus—modelling her mother's desire for her *as a little girl*—this indicates a hidden economy in which there is an *other* signifier of value. Importantly, in playing at being the mother of a girl, the little girl does not only enact a non-phallic economy, but also discovers a way to relate to her mother that subverts the patriarchal collapse of femininity into the maternal function. By *playing at* being the mother, the little girl creates a “ludic” relation that neither entirely differentiates her from the mother nor collapses her absolutely into the mother's role. This is the sort of relation between mother and daughter—deeply intertwined, yet individuated—that Irigaray prescribes in “Et l'un ne bouge pas sans l'autre”⁷⁵. This sort of relation rejects both the masculine model of absolute, atomic individuation and the utter indifferenciation of patriarchal maternity. Instead, it allows for a relation of loving (that is to say, non-assimilative) identification between the mother and daughter—allowing the daughter to take the mother as an image of womanhood toward which to develop even as the ludic space between the mother and daughter allows the daughter to reimagine and redefine her own relation to femininity and maternity.

This little girl—with her desire for her mother and her play at non-phallogocentric maternity—is far from the sort of little girl Freud imagines entering the oedipal scene, whose attempts to seduce the father necessitate castration and the imposition of phallic law. In Freud's interpretation, the little girl has always earned the punishment of castration and femininity through her illicit desire for the father; the little girl who appears in his case studies, however, is not necessarily or primarily concerned with

⁷⁵ Irigaray 1993.

seducing the father. In Freud's surprise, and in his evident desire to impose a desire for the father onto the little girl, Irigaray discovers the father's need for the daughter's desire, and indeed, Freud's desire to seduce his hysterical patients. This scene of seduction establishes the phallus as the necessary object of desire, and the father as the lawgiver who controls access to it. The reading of Freud unearthed through the little girl's unruly desires reveals the truth of the phallic economy, founded, as it is, not on the girl's desire for the phallus, but on the father's need for her desire—a desire that confirms him as whole, potent, and valuable.

The little girl is ostensibly the observational basis of Freud's account of femininity, but, as Freud admits on his late-life essay on the "puzzle" of femininity, case studies of little girls repeatedly contradict and exceed the theoretical framework that he imposes on girls' development. Since much that is evident in little girls' development cannot be reconciled with Freud's phallic episteme, Freud considers femininity a sort of dark continent at the epistemic fringes, a lasting puzzle that may not be fully susceptible to analysis (despite the fact that, as Irigaray points out, the treatment of hysteria and other maladaptations of femininity were the bulk of his practice.) In Irigaray's reading, the unruliness of the little girl is intelligible and informative: the little girl's surprising attachment to her mother indicates the limited and partial nature of the phallic system of value, and her ludic relation to her mother presents an alternative to repressive, patriarchal modes of relation between mother and daughter, woman and maternity. Finally, attention to the disjunction between the little girl and Freud's account of her opens the possibility of analyzing the analysis, in this case allowing Irigaray to diagnose the paternal desire for seduction that motivates Freud's theoretical commitments.

While the little girl is a surprising and disruptive figure—she is not, after all, only a little boy—like Irigaray’s other figures, she is not ultimately successful, and hence acts more as an indication of disruptive possibility than an exemplar of proper action. The little girl, after all, is unambiguously the loser in Freud’s sexed division of goods; the little girl’s intense connection to her mother and non-phallic eroticism are repressed by the exercise of the law of the father, a law which obliges the daughter’s desire for the father’s phallus, Irigaray points out, even as it forbids the expression of such desire. The girl is left with a weakened and underdeveloped ego, an imperfect mastery of language, a sexual life defined (in Freud’s best-case scenario) by impossible desire, an embittered and fraught relationship to her mother, and—unable to verbalize the suffering inherent in her position—a persistent case of hysteria.

“La Mysterique”

Soon before *The Eternal Irony of the Community*, Irigaray considers the only straightforwardly historical women to appear in *Speculum*, female mystics of the middle ages such as Angela of Foligno and Theresa of Avila. Of the medieval vogue of female mysticism, Irigaray writes that “this is the only place in the history of the west in which woman speaks and acts so publicly”(191). In “la mysterique”, Irigaray’s own coinage, she finds both the apotheosis of femininity—unconscious, masochistic, hysterical, mute, passively receptive to a male god—and a radical departure from the logic of the phallic economy and episteme.

The histories of “la mysterique” are strikingly apart from the phallic economy. These Christian mystics frequently had visions of Christ, particularly of his suffering, and

often with a strong erotic overtone. The erotics of mysticism are neither masturbatory nor copulatory, but somehow both at once; the pleasures of the mystic, and her feeling of unity with God, indicate a genuine mode of relating to an Other and a rediscovery of female pleasure. The religious significance of Christ's wounds serves to redeem the "wound" of castration that is the female sex; "could it be true that not every wound need remain secret, that not every laceration was shameful? Could a sore be *holy*? Ecstasy there in the glorious slit where she curls up as if in her nest, where she rests as if she has found her home—and He is also in her. She bathes in a blood that flows over her, hot and purifying"(200). If the female mystic embraces a bloody and masochistic tradition, the mystical fetishization of the holy wounds will allow her to represent herself as whole, without shame, even divine. The sacred body of Christ, figuratively castrated, redeems the "lack" of the female body, offering, firstly, a means of representing that wound which is covered over, flat, and blank in the logic of phallicism, and, secondly, a means of conceiving this wound not as a lack but as a source of pleasure (albeit masochistic) and a sign of a relation to the divine. Since the sanctification of the female "wound" denies the exclusive value of the phallus (a value that sets the standard for the phallic economy), the religious experience of the female mystic violates the system of value that structures the phallic economy, just as does the existence of unmarried women who, without relation to any living man, accede to religious and political authority. The female mystic attains social and religious value without doing the ordinary work—reproducing the phallus in the form of a child, caring for a husband and his family, turning her body into a fetish of male desire—that can accord secondary value to women in the phallic economy. Female mysticism necessarily exceeds and subverts the governing economy: "nothing has a price

in this divine consummation and consumption. Nothing has value, not even the soul herself, set apart from standardization, outside the *labor* market. The soul spends and is spent on the margins of capital. In a strictly non-negotiable currency”(195). Considering the tradition of the female mystics reveals a hidden resistance to phallicism within the Christian tradition.

The re-valuation of the wounded body in the Christian mystical tradition has the paradoxical effect of valuing the female body over and above the male body; where the penis has been sublimated into the phallic symbol of value, the standard of a system in which the male subject conceives of himself as disembodied and pure, the mystical experience reinscribes the body of the mystic as having an intrinsic spiritual value. The particular suffering and debasement of the female body in the Christian tradition creates a sympathetic relation to the suffering of Christ, which becomes a powerful conduit for mystical experience. Similarly, the sensual, concupiscent capacity of the female body is sublimated into a desire for God more passionate and thoroughgoing than a desire living in the soul. The female mystic serves as a reminder that venerating Christ must include venerating his embodiment, his birth and death, which serve to spiritualize the human body. Irigaray writes that, in the false division between “body” and “soul” elides “that the delicacy and sensitivity of the “body” have great importance, that the division at the “heart” of man is the fault, the crack, in which love is lost in controversies that merely scratch the surface of the problem” (198); the sensitivity of the mystic’s body, to both the pleasure and suffering of union with Christ, is key to understanding her holiness. As the conduit to this holy experience, the female body takes on a value that the male body— forgotten and cut off from the soul—cannot.

The experience of the mystic is an epistemic experience, albeit one at the border of consciousness and cogency. It is in stark contrast to disembodied and rational “enlightenment” or the linear journey into the world of Forms put forward in Plato’s myth of the cave. The mystic comes to her knowledge not through what Irigaray describes as the “freezing” and dissecting impulses of science, but through a burning passion and a sensation of oneness between subject and object. Her body, as we have seen, is the key to her knowledge of Christ. Her guide is not the light of reason but the heat of passion, which draws her into darkness and unconsciousness: “...in this nocturnal wandering, where is the gaze to be fixed? The only possibility is to push onward into the night until it finally becomes a reverberating beam of light, a luminous shadow. Onward to the *touch* that opens the “soul” again to contact with divine force, to the impact of searing light” (193). Lost in the dark womb of the cave, rambling deeper and deeper into darkness, the mystic finds her way blindly to knowledge that cannot be “seen” in the oculocentric episteme, a knowledge born of heat and touch (and, to some extent, hearing) rather than vision and light. This is knowledge that “resists all speech, that can at best be stammered out” (193); far from the universally intelligible language of Forms, the mystic inhabits a world of limitlessly multiple shadows from which she gleans a highly specific, embodied, unspeakable knowledge of God. The epistemic journey of the mystic offers an alternative to the phallic episteme which is all the more significant in that the mystic—as a public, authoritative figure—commands recognition and respect for her special and exclusive knowledge; her epistemic subjectivity becomes a (limited and endangered) part of the community of spirit, an inclusion that challenges western epistemology—not only the Platonic but the Hegelian schema—and reveals its limits.

While the mystic, probably more than any other figure in *Speculum*, lives an alternative to the phallic economy, she does not escape it entirely, particularly in the end. The mystic's transcendence of phallic logic comes only by means of her masochistic identification with Christic suffering and her hysterical predisposition to the unconscious and the unspeakable. While this masochism, in the context, serves to facilitate the female mystic's experience, it is ultimately a symptom of an unhealthy, neurosis-generating phallic economy that hinders the full realization of female spirituality; Irigaray argues that a central fault of the mystic's understanding is that it fails to see that "physical ills are always an obstacle to the highest good" (198), a realization that would seem to be a corollary to the intertwinement of body and soul. This masochism prevents the mystic from flourishing in her position of epistemic authority. Furthermore—in a figuration that will reappear in our consideration of Antigone—the mystic's experience is unsustainable, at least within the given context. While this is partially attributable to the mystic's masochism (which is, of course, also a symptom of the phallic economy), it is also a result of the resistance of the (necessarily male) church hierarchy to female religious authority, the isolation of the female mystic (despite the efforts of women such as St. Theresa to create officially sanctioned communities of religious women) and of the episodic and epiphanic character of mystical insight (at least within the Christian tradition; the mystic, in her passive receptivity, is less a stable conduit between the human and the divine than an occasional and undependable lightning rod.). As such, the mystic's special abilities—her capacity for receptive silence and passive suffering—become fatal:

...alone and without help, alas! The soul cannot prevent herself from being buried and sealed off in her crypt. Hidden away, she waits for the rapture to return, the ecstasy, the lightning flash, the penetration of the divine touch. These come intermittently, briefly, rarely, hastily, and the soul is left in great sorrow. She is all comprehension and consent, but her two lips, parted to receive other embraces, soon become dry and retracted over their mourning, if the wait is too long. No voice is hers to call, no hands can fill the open hungry mouth with the food that both nourishes and devours. Abandoned, the soul can barely keep faith. (195)

While the position of the female mystic gives her insight, pleasure, and public agency unmatched in the history of women in the west, it also, in its masochism and unsustainability, necessarily leads to her silencing and destruction.

Though the women whom Irigaray explicitly cites, Theresa of Avila and Angela of Foligno, were eventually accepted in their authority—albeit with serious opposition—Irigaray is surely aware of the violent or masochistic ends met by other mystics. Women such as Clare of Montefalco and Joan of Arc were killed either for heresy or for the abnormal behavior inspired by their vocations; others were not condemned by the power of the church, but nonetheless live stifling or brutal lives. Julian of Norwich was immured for the last years of her life, while the mystical experience itself was, for women mystics like Theresa of Avila, Marguerite Marie Alacoque and Kateri Tekakwitha, bound up with severe acts of bodily mortification. Pain, starvation, and interment are not mere metaphors, then, for the mystical experience or the backlash against female religious figures, but the historical circumstance of the female mystic. The suffering and burial that Irigaray describes as the fate of the mystic—and, I would argue, of Antigone—is crucial to understanding these figures, not only in their pleasure and their potential to disrupt the system but in the means by which this potential is denied or buried. While temporary

disruptions to the phallic economy are both hopeful and instructive for feminist projects, the impossibility of sustaining these disruptions—which we might also describe as the durability of the phallic system, a durability that owes more to entrenched power than to self-consistency and completeness—must be considered in order to imagine more sustainable forms of resistance. We will return to the suffering and silencing that so often afflicts the female mystic as we consider Antigone, whose interment and strangulation represents an extreme reaction to women’s claims on the behalf of a disruptive divine prerogative.

I have argued that the female mystic is an exemplar of disruptive female agency in Hegel, one often neglected in favor of Antigone. While Antigone is, indeed, the primary focus of this project, Irigaray’s relation to Hegel—a crucial point in her reading of Antigone—can only be understood through reference to the epistemological critique which, I argue, finds its apotheosis in *La Mystérique*. Irigaray’s account of limited and distorted phallic epistemology—linear and progressive, unambiguous, exclusively specular, reifying, dispassionate, dissecting and penetrative—is immanent throughout her work, and in *Speculum* particularly. The potential for alternative forms of knowing, for passionate, relational methods that rely on senses such as touch, and which rely on fluid and circulating motion, is repeatedly emphasized in Irigaray’s work. The meaning of these indications, however, is never more clear than in her account of the female mystic’s revelatory journey. If we take the female mystic to be an exemplar of a feminine and feminist epistemic undertaking, it is clear that this epistemic model is not merely additive to the preexisting phallic model (as, for example, in attempts to recognize knowledge produced in emotionally charged contexts as equally valid to as supplemental to

dispassionate forms of knowledge⁷⁶). Like many feminist epistemologists⁷⁷, Irigaray holds that masculinist forms of knowledge are fundamentally incomplete and distorting. She differs from many other critics in the depth of the reformation which she holds to be necessary; in *La Mystérique*, she prescribes a thorough, *ab initio* assessment of epistemology and of the self-understanding immanent in those knowledge practices.

The mystic as epistemic paradigm aims neither to reform or to surpass linear, phallic standards of knowledge. In the negative mode, Irigaray's critique of the western episteme takes her up and out of Plato's cave, at least as far as a living, embodied woman can journey; the mystic, who represents Irigaray's positive account of truth, never undertakes such a journey. The mystic, instead, journeys deeper into the cave, refusing the break with the origin and the authoritarian linearity imposed by he who leads one out of the cave. Wandering without a specific destination, she has already declined a progressive and singular account of knowledge. Since her path is a dark one, characterized by heat but not light, hers is neither a specular undertaking nor one that can suborn the disembodiment or ghostliness of a Platonic or Hegelian ideal. Her refusal of the phallic system begins not from the position of a philosopher or a scientist, one who has already begun an outward journey and accepted certain epistemic perimeters, but from the very beginning point of all knowledge for Plato, the depths of the cave. For Irigaray, then, a true undertaking of feminist knowledge production—one that is perhaps

⁷⁶ Arguments for the acceptance of Barbara McClintock's methods in genetics, for instance, tend to accept the validity of the biological field against which she reacts and within which her work is embedded. Fox Keller, 1984.

⁷⁷ See Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 2000. Lloyd, *The Man of Reason*. University of Minnesota Press, 1993; Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985; Le Doeuff, *The Sex of Knowing*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

not possible, or cogent, under our current circumstances—is one that does not originate in the contemporary epistemic scene but instead radically departs from the standards and histories (both cultural and personal) of phallic epistemology.

Irigaray's epistemological commitments are telling as regards her relationship to Hegel, and particularly to the *Phenomenology*—an account of epistemology that develops into an account of the development of subjectivity and of culture. Hegel's epistemology is one that is necessarily and constitutively social; the question of truth, to him, is empty unless we consider the conditions of possibility of a truth claim's recognition and acceptance, and much of the progression toward truth detailed in the *Phenomenology* concerns not the relation of the subject to the object of knowledge but his relation to himself—whether he is conscious of the extent to which his individual and cultural situation shape his epistemic possibilities. This element of social analysis and critique is, of course, an important aspect of feminists' interest in Hegel. Irigaray's epistemological critique demonstrates that, while Hegel's account may be an excellent descriptor of the phallic economy, it cannot be taken as an exhaustive account of possibilities for either epistemology or subjectivity. In fact, the development of knowledge and self-knowledge described in the *Phenomenology* is not only a distortion but a *maldevelopment* of both self and knowledge. The epistemic practices omitted in the phallic production of knowledge, and the bloodless universal subject who ultimately engages in such a production, represents the end point of a long and profoundly misguided development.

Irigaray repeatedly returns to the importance of the senses, particularly touch, as an antidote to a phallic overemphasis on the specular. This commitment demonstrates that Irigaray's epistemic critique extends deeper than thethetic episteme—the world of

self-conscious, institutionally embedded truth-claims generally central to feminist epistemic critique, one characterized by explicit, if inaccurate, methodological and conceptual commitments. Just as Hegel demonstrates, by beginning the *Phenomenology* with the most reductive, isolated and seemingly simple form of knowledge (sense-certainty), that the need for the continual disruption and development of knowledge and self-knowledge is immanent in every moment of knowledge, Irigaray seeks to demonstrate that there is no epistemic moment that has not already been determined through the phallic episteme, no moment that does not require reexamination and reimagination. Irigaray's sustained emphasis on touch and hearing—particularly, the touch and sound of an other as opposed to an object—indicates that sense-certainty itself might have a different shape and progression than that laid out in the beginning of the *Phenomenology*⁷⁸. Like nearly every feminist critic of Hegel, then, Irigaray seeks to surpass Hegel and to find a way beyond the possibilities and strictures defined in the *Phenomenology*. At the same time, she refuses that her sublation of Absolute Knowledge will continue in the progressive shape of the Hegelian system; rather, Irigaray's attempt to surpass Hegel imposes a circular and reiterative logic of her own, in which her surpassing requires that the philosopher begin again from the start of Hegel's project, sense-certainty, in order to rediscover possibilities lost or omitted in Hegel's own investigation.

Whether the truths that are sustainable and widely accepted in a reimagined episteme would be radically different from those we presently hold—as Irigaray's

⁷⁸ Hegel's rejection of sense-certainty as a sufficient and conclusive source of truth about the world rests on his account of the sensible object as the object of desire—that is, an object always about to be negated, and with no capacity for self-renewal (an attribution that is puzzling given Hegel's simultaneous citation of agricultural fertility rites!)

infamous rejection of $E=MC^2$ suggests⁷⁹—is, I take it, a trivial question here, as well as one that has, at present, no conclusive answer; as in Hegel’s project, individual factual claims are far less important than the self-understanding that such claims oblige. That this self-understanding would be quite different from that produced by the epistemic and cultural practices of the phallic economy is clear, for Irigaray posits potential points of divergence that touch many points in the *Phenomenology*, and also posits that the shape of Hegel’s project is fundamentally flawed, as his dialectical movement necessitates the foreclosure and subsumption of the subordinated term and ensures the continuation of a logic of the same. Irigaray’s notion of a four-part dialectic (see *speculum*, 90, n.93) ensures that the two parts of the dialectic exceed themselves without negation, since the two parts of the dialectic are held apart, in productive juxtaposition, by a third party. The standards and potential paths of knowledge, furthermore, are expanded, as are the means to recognition and self-understanding; the shape and the content of knowledge, then, are significantly expanded and altered.

The means and standards of knowledge in a nonphallic episteme clearly transform the means of subjectivization and self-knowledge put forward in Hegel’s primary accounts. The goal of Irigaray’s “The Eternal Irony of The Community” is to underline ways in which Hegel himself indicates inadequacies in and alternatives to his account of Spirit, subjectivity and recognition. While not fundamentally concerned with Hegel’s epistemic claims, “The Eternal Irony” focuses on three characteristics of Hegel’s schema that are of significance to this project, all found in his account of the divine law; firstly, the potential for paths to recognition, albeit temporary and unstable, that do not in themselves impose a logic of the same; secondly, the exclusion and suppression of

⁷⁹ Irigaray. “Le sujet de la science est-il sexué? ”, *Hypatia*, Volume 2, Number 3, Fall 1987.

women themselves in the epistemic, political and historical aftermath of the victory of human over divine law; and the suppression of what Irigaray calls the principle of *blood* in Hegel's account of the development of Spirit.

The Eternal Irony of the Community

Irigaray has a complex relationship with the figure of Antigone, sometimes identifying herself with this figure, and at other times distancing herself; her interpretation of Antigone varies through her writings⁸⁰. In this work I focus on the Antigone of “The Eternal Irony of the Community”, both because this account presents such a fruitful and thorough account of Hegel's Antigone and because it is the overwhelming focus of feminist attention to Irigaray's politics and her relationship to Hegel.

Irigaray's essay “the eternal irony of the community” begins with two epigraphs from Hegel's philosophy of nature, one describing genital anatomy, the other the human eye. Hegel's account of women's and men's subjectivity has its natural basis in his understanding of genital anatomy; here he finds the first, natural moment of femininity and masculinity in the male anatomy—active, generative, swelling forth—and in the female anatomy, which appears as the passive and less developed moment of the masculine. For Hegel, then, sexual difference is never true difference, but a moment of self-diremption, one that has as its destiny a reconciliation of sorts in the marital union of man and woman. The distinction between the male and the female is the difference between the active and the passive, or between that which moves forward and that which

⁸⁰ Carol Jacobs has an excellent account of this variation in “Dusting Antigone”, *MLN* 111.5 (1996).

is at rest; it has no content beyond this relational distinction. Irigaray will challenge Hegel's account of femininity also at the level of culture and the family, but, like Hegel, she begins with "life" or nature.

[Irigaray's second epigraph refers to Hegel's claim that, as the result of an ever-finer network of capillaries, the eye is nourished not by blood but by a clarified and purified distillate; the significance of this will be discussed further in my section on blood.]

The duality of the active and progressive with the passive and static is central to the gendered division of Hegel's schema. After the events of the *Antigone*, these distinctions have hardened, and structure the gendered division of labor within the state. At the moment of the *Antigone*, Irigaray points out, there still seems to be some potential for play between the two, a harmonious oscillation between the two; the sister attains ethical agency by actively caring for the brother in the moment of his passivity. It is in playing at or switching into the active role of the brother that the sister takes on the public and ethical agency that allows a woman like *Antigone* to erupt into the political realm. The harmonious coexistence of the divine and human laws allows male and female each his or her own proper sphere of influence and ethicality, separate yet, so far, reconcilable. Irigaray points out, however, that firstly, the harmony of human and divine law, male and female has always already been destroyed, by the imposition of a logic that confines the divine law to the care of the dead (excluding it from the political realm) and ascribes the passive pole to the woman as a matter of anatomical destiny. This "guilt already weighing heavily on the development of the subject"⁸¹ —the crime of arbitrary privation— renders the period of Hegel's nostalgia not a primordial moment of harmony between

⁸¹ SOTW 217

masculine and feminine principles but a middle point in the imposition of phallic logic. Secondly, given these already-established limits on the divine law and female agency, feminine ethicality and the cycle that creates it is unsustainable. Far from being a point in a sustained, perpetual cycle, the passivity of the brother is absolute—in the case of Polynices, he is dead. As such, the subjectivity which inspires and sustains the sister's agency is already gone, and unable to recognize her as an agent, while the occasion of this agency—the burial of the brother—is ephemeral.

Oscillation and Recognition

Antigone and Polynices appear at the border of matriarchy and patriarchy, of the rule of the family and that of the state. Between them, there is an equivalence between masculine and feminine that is absent in the rest of Hegel's writings (in which the two appear in hierarchical relation.) Between this brother and sister, ethical achievements of similar stature, though very different natures, are possible, and mutual recognition seems to take place (otherwise absent between the man and woman). They have an extraordinary relationship, one rarely reproduced between a man and a woman, which allows Antigone to achieve a sublime ethical perfection. Antigone and Polynices represent the last moment, both logical and historical, at which masculine and feminine principles were able to coexist in equilibrium, before their mutual destruction. This moment is a Hegelian peculiarity; while it precedes the diremption into mutually exclusive extremes that is Antigone's and Creon's clash, it is nonetheless internally differentiated. For this reason, Irigaray points out, for Hegel himself this moment of equilibrium is a "Hegelian dream", nostalgia for a state that only existed as an

unsustainable and transitional moment. Hence, while Irigaray finds in this tale signs of the limitation, the incompleteness, and the irony of the phallogentric apparatus, and the resurgent power of female ethicality and genealogy, she does not find Antigone to represent a sustainable subject position for women.

Firstly, Irigaray points out that Antigone's action is made possible only through a relationship of mutuality with her brother, one that she describes as *already* unsustainable at Antigone's historical moment. Antigone, Hegel writes, is able to achieve her extraordinary agency for several related reasons. Ethical relations require independence of the two parties and necessity of the action. Polynices is her brother, not her child or parent; as a result, they are fully individuated from one another, while children have their origin in the parents. Unlike a husband and wife, Hegel writes that there is no desire between the brother and the sister (though this is a strange claim to make in a family such as theirs; both are, of course, the products of incest) and given that they are not drawn to one another as objects of desire, they relate to each other as "free individualities" (457). The relation between the brother and sister is the paradigm case of the relation between man and woman insofar as this is an *ethical* relation (that is, apart from the merely natural level of the satisfaction of animal needs.) It is because this relationship is free of the natural moment (the brother and sister, according to Hegel, have no sexual desire for one another, and furthermore the sister is not generally responsible for the brother's other natural needs) that it can comprise a "pure" ethical relation.

Antigone's care for Polynices is significant not only as a pure ethical action but because, as such, it can be the occasion for the *recognition of mutual subjectivity in difference*. Hegelian recognition, Irigaray points out, is almost never between two

different individuals. The encounter of the master and the slave reduces one subject to an object; marital love is not the recognition of an other but of oneself as a member of the marital unity; and the network of mutual recognitions that ground the spiritual community is founded on the sameness of the community's members, who are all subjects of the same kind at the same moment. The recognition between Polynices and Antigone must be something different. Antigone's ethical actions demand the acknowledgement that she, as woman, is not only the stationary passive pole in the familial unity. She has a proper ethical activity, one which bears directly on the community even if its end is not in the community per se.

The brother's death, although a natural event, occasions an imperative which is universal (all men die) and spiritual (burial provides a service to the community, while the dead man, although nominally the recipient of care, is no longer the subject of needs.) While, in his life outside of the family, a man is constantly in the midst of individuated, non-natural relationships, a woman, who remains in the family, has only her brother to turn to. While her brother is also a part of her family, familial unity between the brother and sister is complicated by several matters. As Hegel points out, the brother and sister neither receive their being from one another nor do they desire one another. For another, their familial unity is never made external and concrete through a marriage, a child, or the inheritance of family property; instead of maintaining or improving its solidity through institutions of marriage, inheritance, and paternity, the unity of the brother and sister weakens as they reach adulthood and leave their natal family. When they are adults and, like Polynices, married, the brother and sister retain a special relationship, but one that is only ambiguously located within the family. After all, the majority of Polynices and

Eteocles is in principle the dissolution or obsolescence of the natal family for Hegel, and, in this case, the spurious integrity of their natal family has been destroyed by violence and scandal. Hegel does not fully acknowledge this ambiguity, noting only that the brother and sister lack certain of the unifying factors that parents and spouses share. We see in this ambiguity, however, the first sign that the ethical relation of the brother and sister exceeds the logic of the patriarchal family and that *this excess is the source of its ethicality*. It is because Antigone and Polynices share a bond that is outside of the unity of the Hegelian family that they can enter into the oscillatory relation that Hegel idealizes.

Antigone's ethical subjectivity, and her import for the polis, comes to her only because Polynices has lost the same. In, at least, a small vestige of the sort of harmonious oscillation Hegel dreams of in his account of the ethical relation between the brother and the sister, Antigone momentarily takes on an aspect of the masculine, adopting the brother's ethical agency as a part of herself. By seeing to the deliberate destruction of her brother's body, his reabsorption into the maternal bosom, Antigone "digests" the masculine and becomes a political subject. "And if Antigone gives proof of a bravery, a tenderness, and an anger that free her energies and motivate her to resist that *outside* which the city represents for her, this is certainly because she has digested the masculine. At least partially, at least for a moment." (*Speculum* 220). Antigone's digestion of the masculine allows her to play out a role on the political stage that is nonetheless marked, particularly by its tenderness, as belonging particularly to the divine law. While there are any number of figurations, for Hegel, of the masculine digesting the feminine without destruction, it is only possible for Antigone to "digest" her brother by destroying his

already-dead body. Thus, any oscillatory return is cut off; indeed, the temporariness and partiality of Antigone's digestion, according to Irigaray, rests in part on the arrest of any cyclic harmony between the brother and the sister.

The Significance of Blood

While Antigone's ethical subjectivity is necessarily ephemeral, its uniqueness allows us to glimpse an ethical principle which is genuinely apart from and inassimilable to the logic of the state. Antigone's action in service of the divine law indicates an enduring bond between daughter and mother, a powerful axis that threatens the patriarchal order (much as the attachment of the daughter to the mother disrupts the Freudian scene). Antigone's enduring attachment to her mother cannot be assimilated to the logic of either the patriarchal family or of the state which grows out of it. In the *Antigone*, we see her resisting Creon, who is both the patriarch of her family and the ruler of her state, in the name of her attachment to "the mother's son" (SOTW 219); as Irigaray points out, where Ismene is described as having "the same blood" and Eteocles as "born of the same mother", Polynices, the brother for whom Antigone violates the law of the city, is explicitly described as a full-blooded, co-uterine sibling: "of the same father and the same mother" (SOTW 217).

As Irigaray points out, in caring for her brother, Antigone is reconnected with her mother and in fact carries out her mother's desire. Of course, insofar as the mother's desire is not simply for a child but for a son, the divine law is already appropriated to the oedipal logic of the patriarchal family. To the extent that Antigone assumes and carries out her mother's desire, her tribute to the feminine principle of blood would seem to slip

into that patriarchal logic that refuses to individuate mother and daughter, treating them rather as moments in the execution of a maternal function—a maternal function reduced to the desire for and reproduction of the phallus. Hence, Irigaray does not share Hegel’s nostalgia for the alleged harmonious coexistence of the brother and sister, human and divine laws prior to their tragic, final conflict: she points out that the moment for which Hegel longs is already preceded by a “rape”, the distortion and appropriation of the divine law (a distortion that begins, as Irigaray argues, with its separation from and opposition to human law). However, Irigaray argues that the divine law carries the vestige of a moment prior to this appropriation, which she describes as red blood.

Irigaray correlates the divine law to “blood”, the fluid, vital, and natural (yet also intrinsically human) principle that is repressed in the development of Spirit. Blood represents the matriarchal principle that connects the mother to the child. In the womb, the blood is a medium of exchange between the mother and fetus; it represents the enduring link between mother and child, and between co-uterine siblings; in the adult woman, menstrual blood marks a fecundity that indicates her special sexed relation to nature and to the creation and sustenance of life. Like death itself, blood is repressed and obscene, a sign of gore and violence, within the logic of the phallic economy; however, it retains an original aspect of vitality and nourishment.

Blood provides the fundamental and evident links of familiarity (particularly, that between mother and child, and co-uterine siblings) which cannot be fully assimilated to patriarchy. Antigone’s claim that she would not sacrifice herself, as she has for her brother, to bury a husband or child, indicates a co-uterine bond that exceeds any allegiance she might have to her husband and his children. It is arguable whether

Antigone's exceptional allegiance to her brother is in itself revolutionary; while the relation to the sibling is seemingly outside that patriarchal logic in which a woman is defined through her father, husband, and son, Mary Rawlinson points out that the relation of the brother to the sister (and, through her, to his brother-in-law) is a foundational point for the fraternal order of the state, in which male heads of household understand themselves as brothers⁸².

While Antigone's preference for a brother over a husband or child has been frequently pondered, Hegel's account of the divine law of family piety elides entirely the issue of in-laws; while in a patrilocal community, presumably the family members whom a woman buries are in-laws and not blood relatives, Hegel implicitly acknowledges that the relationship of a woman to her in-laws cannot supplant the blood tie to her natal family. A woman's allegiance to her husband's family, presumably, is an act of will like her unity with her husband, one mediated by the human laws governing the marital contract; even when she buries her husband's elder relatives (which is presumably the most common form of burial work for women in a patriarchal and patrilocal community) this act of piety is only a dilute and impure expression of the divine law. Since the tie to one's in-laws is mediated through the law of the state and the patriarchal family, it would be nonsensical for Antigone to violate the laws of Creon—who is both the head of her household and the ruler of her state—to fulfill her obligations to them. The woman's relation to the natal family, however, is independent of the obligations imposed by the state, and therefore can require an ethical act that is criminal and shameful by the standards of the state.

⁸² See Rawlinson, 2007.

The principle of blood is instantiated in the divine relation between Demeter and Kore. When Irigaray speaks of the loss of female ancestry, she often refers also to the fall of the mystery rites that worshiped these goddesses—since the obscuring of female ancestry correlates the obscuring of female spirituality (TD 100). Demeter represents the fecundity of the Earth, while her daughter represents virginity—a concept that Irigaray has widened and re-read as a principle of women’s self-determination and integrity, both physical and spiritual. Together, they also evince a historical representation of the spiritual significance and sanctity of matriarchal lines of descent, of the desire of the mother for a daughter and of the daughter for the mother *quâ* woman; such representations are rarely visible, Irigaray points out, in our time. The loss of figures such as Demeter and Kore is not only a loss of female divinity but of female ancestry, language, and self-representation:

we women, sexed according to our gender, lack a God to share, a word to share and to become. Defined as the often dark, even occult mother-substance of the word of men, we are in need of our *subject*, our *substantive*, our *word*, our *predicates*: our elementary sentence, our basic rhythm, our morphological identity, our generic incarnation, our genealogy (SG 71).

The rebellious principle of blood is perhaps best shown in the special love that bonds the Demeter and Kore, for this is a love that resists those economic norms that traffic in women; it transgresses the boundaries between the worlds of the living and of the dead; and it values virginity and fecundity against the gods’ practice of rape and war. The mother and daughter have no interest in the power struggles between the male gods, Zeus and Hades, and concern themselves instead with growth and, particularly, with the human cultivation of nature (hence, Demeter and Kore represent also a bridge between

the natural, the human and the divine.) When Zeus and Hades conspire in the rape of the daughter and the destruction of the mother-daughter pair, Demeter resists this trade between father and husband and acts to preserve the virginity of her daughter. While the sharp and adversarial distinction between Zeus' and Hades' realms (of the living and the dead) is fundamental to the logic of kingdoms, the blood tie between Demeter and Kore is indifferent to such a distinction. Blood is, in the case of Demeter and Kore, the sign of the power of female genealogy; the site of women's representations of themselves as divine; and a means for the spiritualization of virginity, fecundity, and even of death.

As the mark of fecundity and vitalism, blood is a point of resistance to the logic of death and war imposed by the victory of human law. It may seem strange to correlate the divine law, now exclusively concerned with the care of the dead, with the respect and preservation of life. Unlike the warfare and struggle that characterizes public life, however, which is concerned with ending the life of another and mastering one's own death, the work of caring for the dead is fundamentally concerned with sustenance and continuation. The burial of the dead—which, as Hegel puts it, comprises the return of the dead man to the nourishing bosom of the Earth—is a gesture of quasi-maternal care. As we see in the example of Demeter's love for Kore—undiminished when the daughter goes to the underworld—in the logic of blood, death is neither radical nor terminal, and does not disrupt the fabric of care and connection represented by blood. The sister's care of the dead brother represents not only his reintegration into the fabric of a community (a community which, in the case of Polynices, has effected his death through its logic of fraternal competition) but also his reintegration into the loving couple of the sister and brother, mother and son; therefore burial reasserts not only the logic of the polis but the

bonds of love. These acts of sustenance and love, deeply intertwined with the work of giving and sustaining life, are hardly a concession to the phallic logic of death; rather, they effect the return of death to life.

After the violent clash of human and divine law, blood has been dispersed, and women's preference for younger, less authoritarian men is ruthlessly crushed through mobilizing these young men for war (SOOW 226). Hegel writes that war is necessary to the coherence of the state, not in order to fend off external threats but so that dangerous collectives within the state—such as guilds and families—must focus their energies on the good of the state rather than the smaller unit. When young men—sons and brothers particularly—are sent to war, families are pressured to understand themselves as sacrificing their member to the good of the state, even if that sacrifice is coerced. When the young man dies, this loss is presented as a loss to the community and for the sake of the community; in tending to the grave of a fallen soldier, his kinswoman is building a monument to the endurance of the state and creating for the state a history of victory. The work of memorializing the dead, so dangerous to the state in the moment of Antigone's confrontation with Creon, is appropriated in the interest of memorializing young men's sacrifice of their lives to the state.

Blood is by no means an intact site of resistance; instead, it has been, along with female genealogy, all but erased, dispersed into a series of patriarchal families. When the bond between mother and daughter is broken in each generation, then the principle of blood cannot be a healthy current flowing through the generations; instead, Irigaray describes it as a sort of clot, a trace still apparent, but only insofar as it evinces a severe wound. This clotted blood cannot provide the goods that a full female genealogy might,

allowing women to become fully legitimate, self-represented, speaking subjects. As such, the ethical agency even of women such as Antigone is at least partly appropriated to the patriarchal order—there is no remaining matriarchal order in which to situate familial ethicality. By burying the brother or other kinsman within this system, the woman cannot escape the logic of the patriarchal family; her work is appropriated to building the “house” of familial lineage of a patriarchal family, in which the memory of the generations provides stability and legitimacy.

Even after blood ties have been buried or appropriated to the logic of the patriarchal family and city, they retain their own special ethical significance, one which is independent of human law, and they maintain special and, to the city, largely invisible bonds which are impossible within phallic logics: special and loving relations between mother and daughter, brother and sister, living and dead. These relations, insofar as they indicate alternatives to a Hegelian logic which claims to be exhaustive, are unaccountable and potentially disruptive. What remains after the appropriation of blood is, in Irigaray’s famous turn of phrase, woman as “the eternal irony of the community”. One might hope that this is the sort of dramatic irony that proved so dangerous to Oedipus. Irigaray’s early work in analyzing the history of philosophy is founded on the ironic scene of a female reader observing subversive currents in men’s writing of which they, the writing subjects, are unaware. These currents, hidden to the subject of philosophy, include omissions and contradictions that often point to weaknesses in the philosopher’s logic or reveal an alternative to his certainties.

The disruptive power of blood comes from the impossibility of representing this principle within the Hegelian apparatus. The powerful bonds of blood, rooted in natural,

familial and divine relationships, are often incoherent within the logic of the state. Like women's fecundity, blood is largely appropriated to the patriarchal family and the state, but—with its disdain for dichotomies, its passionate dedication to the maternal family, and its allegiance to life against an economy of death—blood can only be partially and precariously assimilated, in a process Irigaray describes as the filtering of red blood into white fluid as it enters the eye. Blood is that reality which *cannot be seen* if the eye is to function, the necessarily omitted truth of specular epistemology. While the Hegelian system offers a begrudging acknowledgement of the sustaining importance of blood, it can safely contain only a partial distillation of blood, necessarily burying its unrepresentable, excessive and dangerous aspects (as Hegel dismisses Antigone's unique allegiance to her co-uterine brother, over against her marital family, as a relic of a now-impossible past). The trace of white fluid left after this distillation is only a "neuter and passive" semblance of blood (SOOW 221). Nourished by the pale, dilute reflection of blood, the laws of the state, like its knowledge, can only be arbitrary and incomplete, sustainable only through constant repression.

Attention to the divine law and the principle of blood leads us to disruptive ironies that persist in the phallic economy of death, and that indicate the possibility of reappropriating the divine law from the Hegelian schema of death and mastery. While it is in the interest of Spirit that the natural accident of a man's death should be recast as chosen and mastered, women's work in caring for the dead is not actually concerned with mastery, but rather with the shadowy work of reconciling the masculine community's need to for mastery with the exigencies of nature. As such, the care of the dead represents an intriguing middle point between natural determination and rational self-determination,

one that resists the binary logic of animal/human, life/death, and reason/nature. In reconciling the needs of the human community with nature, the divine law indicates the possibility that the tensions between nature and culture for Hegel might not necessarily end in conquest and repression but rather in mutual accommodation. Drawing out from the shadows the ethical law of caring for the dead, then, presents a challenge and an alternative to Hegel's logic of mastery.

Hegel's own dismissal of blood—which, Irigaray demonstrates, is necessarily excluded from Absolute Spirit—at the same time acknowledges the necessity of blood to the apparatus that achieves Spirit. Like the divine law itself, blood remains a crucial element in the sustenance of the community, albeit one that is excluded from the community itself. In Hegel, then, blood may be dispersed and degraded, but it must also remain in some subterranean or appropriated form—one which, Irigaray suggests, can be rediscovered and reappropriated.

Dispersion and violence

The conflict between human and divine law draws to a close with the wholesale appropriation of the divine law to the human, such that the divine law can no longer claim an independent and self-evident basis. The violent suppression of the human law disperses, truncates and distorts blood and produces a new kind of tension in the polis. Without this independent basis, the divine law can no longer oppose itself to the human law, but nor can it provide the basis for an unalienated, unreflective relation of individual to polis. Now the whole of political life is in question; it lacks any justificatory basis. The tension between the individual and his social formation evolves through the political

history that follows and can be resolved only through the advent of Absolute Spirit (a conclusion, as Irigaray points out, that cannot resolve the ironical trace of blood but can only deny it.)

The dispersion of blood is of a piece, in Irigaray's interpretation, with the move from matriarchy to patriarchy. The dispersion and entombing of blood accomplished by dispersing women "among the men", confining them to private homes and disrupting maternal genealogy through the exclusive appellation of the paternal name and lineage. Women, here, are exclusively identified with the family and confined thereto. Antigone is confined, starved, and suffocated; she is denied sustenance, speech, and even a proper burial (to the latter, we will return in the next chapter.) As women are denied an independent ethical basis (the divine law), so to are they denied a voice or a sustainable place in the polis.

As Pinkerd points out⁸³ the confinement of women's energies to the narrow sphere of the family is dangerous to the state; women's ambitions and energies are now directed specifically at the advancement of the family, rather than that of the state. Women dispersed thus may not represent a coherent opposition grounded in the principles of the divine law, but as self-interested matrons pressing their husbands and sons to act in the interest of the family rather than the state, they nonetheless present a threat to the state's interest. The appropriation of the divine law to the human law, however, at the same time provides the means to draw these disruptive pockets of opposition—families and, to a lesser extent, other private affiliations—into the service of the state. The practice of the divine law—most importantly, the burial of the dead—now

⁸³ Unlike Pinkerd (142-144), I do not interpret this tension, between the familial and the state interest, to be at the heart of the "eternal irony" of the woman in the Hegelian apparatus; after Irigaray, I interpret this "eternal irony" as the disruptive trace of blood.

has no autonomous justification, no underlying principle under which all dead kinsmen are equal.

By going to war, the state obliges the family to give up its sons as soldiers, supposedly in the simultaneous defense of the family and the state. The state needs an external threat, real or invented, in order to draw together the interests of the state and the family. This martial threat requires each family to recognize that, in its own interest as well as the state's, it must entrust its future, in the form of the male heir, wholly to the state. The son, at the same time, is forced to transfer his allegiance from the mother and the family to the state. Risking one's life in the name of the state's survival simultaneously privileges individual freedom over animal survival and the state interest over that of the individual; it produces both the free individual and the authoritative political community in which he lives. This drawing-together is brought to its apotheosis with the death of the soldier-son. If mourning requires the interposition of rationality and mastery to the individual's death, mourning the dead soldier will incline the mourners to interpolate reason and necessity to his death and, thereby, to the struggle in which he is entrenched.

The memorialization of the dead soldier is appropriated to the ends of the state, as the burial grounds and monuments of war dead become the sacred monuments of state power. The burial site and other memorial constructions that would make the subjectivity of the individual male a permanent part of the community now also materializes the power of the state. Coffins and headstones are marked with national flags; the dead are interred in special cemeteries for war dead and veterans, providing the site for state-sanctioned veneration even in the most secular nation. The most public and democratic

spaces in the polity—the National Malls and Red Squares—become problematic sites for opposition and appropriation as they are also memorials to both specific national heroes and to veterans and war dead in general. The cult of the ancestors, the institutionalized respect for the dead and their practices, now lacks any justification independent of the particular political formation and becomes of a piece with respect for the state and its survival, the cause for which they fought and died. The enduring character of the family, then, is colored by its ancestral allegiance to the good of the state. The work of memorializing the dead, both in burial and in family lore, is appropriated to the interests, the permanence, and the authority of the state.

The appropriation of the divine law into the logic of the state as an anodyne, non-resistant element requires a double violence, directed inward toward women in the family and directed outward in the form of warcraft. The conflict between familial and state interest necessitates war as their reconciliation, but this conflict is in fact secondary to the primary conflict between female and male ethicality, a conflict that requires the dispersal, silencing and entombment of the female (both in principle and literally), and, corollarily, the appropriation of female ethicality through institutionalized war. The entombment, suffocation and starvation of Antigone is both a metaphor for this ongoing violence and a mythical account of the historical advent of this logic of violence⁸⁴.

⁸⁴ A tendency among Irigaray scholars to refer to obstacles to her career—particularly, the oft-repeated story that Lacan dismissed her from the University of Vincennes in the aftermath of *Speculum*—indicates a tendency to see her—the first of the four disruptive figures detailed in this chapter—as also ultimately succumbing to violent or silencing retribution; I do not take this to be an apt description of Irigaray’s career, which has also enjoyed considerable attention and notoriety.

CARE AND RISK: THE GENDERING OF MORTALITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

I. Nature, Care and Reconciliation: The Making of Masculine Subjectivity

II. The Rational Corpse: The care of death in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*

A. Mastery of Nature and Death

B. Memory and Monument

III. Anthropological Interstice: An Invitation to a Funeral

IV. Unseen and Unmourned: the sex of memory and mortality

A. Subjectivity in Danger

B. Citizenship and Risk: Beauvoir and Mortality

The confined and immature position of women within the Hegelian family should be understood not only as a natural determination but as a necessary division of labor given Hegel's account of citizenship. I will argue that this division can be understood through the feminist rubric of care, while Hegel and Irigaray's work suggests that this rubric ought to be expanded to explicitly account for the work of caring for the dead. This variety of care work has intriguing ethical properties and promises a better understanding both of the work of care in general and of the particular privations and obstacles that hinder the development of female subjectivity and political agency. Finally, this work can, as Irigaray argues, embody useful strategies to counter the entrenchment of oppressive political, epistemological and spiritual practices.

Antigone evinces the deep and subversive undercurrents of power that lurk in women's care of death and in the valuation of blood that this shows. At the same time, her story shows how thoroughly repressed and appropriated is this power. The female

ethic of the care of the dead is appropriated on the one hand to strengthen the state against the threat of internal dissent, and on the other to protect the men of her family from the negation of their spiritual achievements in death. This ethic is never expressed as a purely female and feminist principle, but instead is always already in the service of the paternal family and/or the fraternal state. Moreover, in the economy of death we see a stark proletarianization of women; the work of caring for the dead benefits men as individuals (guaranteeing their subjectivity) and as citizens (sustaining the state), while these same benefits are systematically denied to women themselves. Beginning from the story of Antigone, I will argue that women are denied the care and security that is provided to men in death; as a result, women cannot have the same relationship to death as do men, and thus cannot pass through the founding battle of fraternity, the mutual risk of death, as do men. Since it is on this moment that recognition, freedom, self-consciousness, and the basis of the public community of men are founded, a different relationship to death will determine a different sort of subjectivity for women, and one ill-suited to thrive in civil society.

In the following chapter, I will treat two literary examples, not least among them Antigone herself. Each example reveals the gendered asymmetry of care in death. Each example presents a contrast between male agents, who, in part thanks to their relation to death, are able to successfully endure as political agents, and women who cannot maintain public subject positions because of their exclusion from the culture of the memorialization and spiritualization of death. Finally, I'll take a detour into the late work of Freud to explore the psychoanalytic bases of men's and women's relations to death.

Nature, Care and Reconciliation: The Making of Masculine Subjectivity

The family, for Hegel, is the preserve of first nature. Thus it contains the passive moment that contrasts with the activity and danger of civil society. The necessarily inert and unresponsive aspect of the subject—for instance, the sleeping citizen—cannot be reconciled to active and rational citizenship, but rather is confined to the family. The family serves as a refuge for those who are not ready for the rigors of civil society (the children) and offers a necessary respite to the head of household; no human being can survive without care of the passive moment (represented by sleep) and the other physical needs. The family represents a haven in which animal necessities such as sleep and sex can be provided without necessitating a distraction from civil life for the head of household or intrusion into civil society. These needs cannot be effaced, but they can be rationalized—made deliberate and regulated through the norms of family life, norms that regulate everything from where one sleeps to acceptable sexual outlets.

The family serves as the segregated site in which the physical and animal determinations of the body are confined. This labor allows patriarchal human culture, “second nature”, to claim its independence from and, in face, opposition to “first nature”. To be a civilized man and a citizen is to master “natural” urges and assimilate to the rhythms and norms of the social world. This segregation and devaluing of work that cares for the body and satisfies what have been classed as “animal” needs—sex, food, rest and so on—has as its radical end the ideal of the disembodied, rational man as citizen. The civilized man—the philosopher, for instance—has no physical or animal preoccupations, having left behind the futile work of care and the messy whims of desire emotion; he is free, like Descartes, to assert the total separation between mind and body, where the body

is only a temporary and contingent encumbrance; or, like Hegel, to argue that it is only in dissociating himself completely from his bodily existence that man becomes free. The attribution of sustaining care labor to women, in the meantime, associate women firmly with the demands of physical and animal nature, as do the exigencies of processes such as pregnancy and childbirth, which are often mistaken for the resurgence of the natural against the social where they are in fact an inseparable admixture of the two. The denigration of the body and the idealization of a disembodied subject has been thoroughly treated by feminist critics, as has the binaristic and hierarchical identification of women with the body, men with the mind (for example, Genevieve Lloyd, Susan Bordo, Elizabeth Fox-Keller, and indeed, Beauvoir and Irigaray); for my purposes it suffices only to point out that largely unrecognized, female-gendered familial labor sustains the fiction of the disembodied subject while decisively gendering this subject as male.

The family sustains the relationship to first nature in two distinct ways. As sleep or passivity, the family seems little more than a vessel of containment, providing a refuge for necessities that cannot in principle be admitted to civil society. In most aspects, however, the family works to reconcile first nature with second: it rationalizes sensuality and immediacy (in the form of marriage); it ushers children toward rational citizenship; and, as discussed below, ensures that death (otherwise accidental and natural) is reconciled with the ethical order. The site of the family contains all that is irreconcilable with a masculine ideal of citizenship and accomplishes the hidden “shadow work”⁸⁵ that sustains the masculine subject.

⁸⁵ MacDonald, Cameron A. “Manufacturing Motherhood: The Shadow Work of Nannies and Au Pairs”. *Qualitative Sociology*. Volume 21, Number 1. March, 1998

In addition to rest, sexual outlet, early education and physical care, the family provides a preserve of nourishment and replenishment. This is represented not only by sleep, food and other physical care, but by the mirroring aspect of the feminine as described by Irigaray, an aspect that serves to insure and reiterate the value and wholeness of the masculine subject. The family reflects back the wholeness and power of the citizen, as it epitomizes the devalued aspects of life that he has left behind and the natural impulses that he has—or seems to have—mastered. Since the family’s care and esteem is unconditioned—it recognizes its members as members of its circle and worthy of care regardless of their rationality, obedience to the law, or even survival—the family insures the value of the subject in a far more radical way than civil society or the state can ever accomplish.

The nourishment or replenishment of the subject is necessarily a matter of natural determination, according to both Hegel and Irigaray. While needs are transformed through cultural activity, these transformations are shaped by certain perimeters: nutritional needs, the need for rest, for clean air and water, for rhythms of day and night. Hegel, for instance, can never excise the messy and contingent matter of sexual desire, but rather describes the transformation of this desire into a domesticated and highly regulated matter that helps to bond marital partnership, as a means to the end of reproduction. Hegel and Irigaray both conceive of nature, and particularly the earth, as the enduring source of nourishment and refreshment; Hegel, for instance, speaks of the dead man’s return “to the bosom of the earth”, an eternal source of sustenance and care. Irigaray’s middle works have developed a conception of nature as a source of both spiritual and physical sustenance, often speaking of the return to nature as necessary for

all subjects and decrying the contamination of the natural world with pollutants—toxins, noise, and insensitive development—that deny the subject its necessary sustenance⁸⁶. The ability to return to untainted and fruitful nature—to clean air and water, sunlight, diurnal and nocturnal rhythms—is particularly important for women, Irigaray writes; I take it that this is not due to some innate tendency of the female sex toward nature but rather precisely a result of the division of labor I describe. Lacking familial care and sustenance, the respite and nourishment provided by nature is the primary source of sustaining care for women.

Despite her identification with the natural, a woman in civil society has no means to reconcile her activity (second nature) with first nature and thus always experiences the two as a conflict. Sexual life, reproduction, rest, health and food are under the purview of women whether or not they participate in public life, and it is left to individual women to endure the contradictions (say, between the temporalities of public and reproductive life, the demands of the polis and the family, the exploitative ethos of capitalism and the maintenance of health and ecology⁸⁷) alone. As a result, women are, as Irigaray puts it, a “sexual proletarians” (SOTW 56), structurally denied access the goods that they produce. A woman within Hegel’s schema does not have access to the rest and refuge of the family; she rather is inseparably one with the refuge itself. When she enters into civil society, she does not cease to do this work for others; rather, she works in the home to

⁸⁶ TTD, 22-24. Irigaray could aptly be criticized for her simplistic conception of nature as separable from culture and her tendency to speak of nature as a *place* of retreat; compare, for instance, Vandana Shiva’s account of nature as an overarching principle inseparable from human culture and survival. It should be noted that Shiva’s analysis, however, concurs that women are particularly dependent upon the preservation of natural spaces and rhythms.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Hochschild, Arlie. *The Time Bind*, New York: Holt, 2001; Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* Shiva, Vandana. *Staying Alive*. London: Zed Books, 1989; Thoma-Slayter, B. and D. Rocheleau. *Gender, Environment and Development in Kenya: A Grassroots Perspective*. Boulder: Rietter, 1995.

provide refuge and physical satiation. There is no location of rest or nourishment for her within the family. This is exacerbated, as Irigaray points out, by the colonization of the natural world and the world of the senses by technology and pollution. Women suffer the most from these modifications because their only reservoir of nature and respite is the natural world itself, while male counterparts have refuge in the family.

Women, then, do indispensable work in the family, producing and sustaining the subjectivity of the citizen as civilized, rational, and active. This work has often been described by feminists, often under the rubric of care work, the seemingly futile and trivial labor of maintaining homes and caring for bodily needs that enables the valued and enlightened work of the citizen. The necessity of such work in sustaining the disembodied, disinterested, autonomous ideal of masculine political theory has been demonstrated by many feminist theorists. This role is difficult to reconcile with public life because of its distinct and demanding rhythms; because its devalued state degrades those who do it as unskilled and unsuited to other undertakings; and because those who perform it necessarily lack the support for public undertakings that their male counterparts enjoy.

As many feminists have hopefully pointed out, the exercise of care work, in moderate and justly shared amounts, is by no means incompatible with participation in public life; it is, of course, often a complicating factor in such participation. The rhythms of care are both unrelenting and unpredictable, and do not easily integrate into the rhythm of the workday or the career in business or politics; the tasks often monopolize the attention of the caregiver; the skills developed in care work are deeply devalued and degraded in the market. Public life is constructed on the assumption that each citizen is

supported by others who see to the unpredictable and fleshly exigencies of life, freeing him to a disembodied and stable existence. To enter public life without such support is both to take on a “second shift” of care work—self-care and, often, care for others—to the exclusion of leisure and rest; it is also to live precariously, with precious little insurance against accident, illness or other disruption. Precariousness, of course, is the truth of all human undertakings, regardless of family support. In this project, however, I will attend to the ways in even which the most radical aspect of this precariousness, mortality, is spiritualized and rationalized through the work of the family.

To the panoply of indispensable care-work tasks discussed by feminist theorists, I suggest that we can add the care of the dead. This labor differs from other care work in that it does not, properly speaking, have a recipient (or at least, the recipient is no longer a subject, and the true beneficiary is the community.) It fits into the extreme end of a spectrum in which much care work is undertaken, as care for ill and disabled persons, as well as young children, is often care for those who seriously deviate from social ideals of rationality, independence, activity and individuality⁸⁸. Care of the dead resembles other care work, as well, in that it is indispensably confined to the family; the recipient of this care, like the disabled or minor family member, is not recognized as a full citizen outside of the family. Care of the dead also, in Hegel’s analysis, aims to reconcile first and second nature and to sustain the ideal of man as active and deliberate. And finally, care of the dead has a similar ethical character to other forms of care work in that it is inherently

⁸⁸ In fact, many care theorists define care work as only that care directed at those who cannot care for themselves, omitting the care that sustains the independent citizen. As should be clear from my account of women’s labor in the family, I decline this definition, which I take to elide much of the most crucial substance of care work, as well as the need of *all* subjects for sustaining care.

asymmetrical and irreducibly particular—there is no universal imperative to bury *this* man, since such an imperative can only be recognized within his family.

I have said that the beneficiary of the care of death is not the dead man *per se*, who is no longer a subject of harm and reward; rather, the men of the community together benefit from this act of care and reassurance. Nonetheless, the individual who knows that he or she will lack proper burial rites does indeed suffer from this knowledge as she lives. This privation inhibits the development of political subjectivity, a position that is founded on the promise of memorialization.

The Rational Corpse: The care of death in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*

Death presents special ethical needs on the part of the subject and the state. The dead man represents, in his natural state, a negation of the subjectivity that the individual, his family and the state strive to engender. While he is now purely and abstractly universal, he is also rendered passive and indifferent, a mere object in the world. The dead man, after all, can neither give nor receive the recognition that makes one a subject, and he is not capable of self-consciousness. What had been a powerful, purposive, rational creature, one that superceded natural determination, has ceased, due to both natural exigency (each must die) and accident (the particular circumstances of the death.) Death thus would appear as the necessary limit of human subjectivity, whence rational self-consciousness would lapse back into being-in-itself.

Mastery of Nature and Death

In death, the citizen “has raised himself out of the unrest of the accidents of life into the calm of simple universality” (PS § 451). While this may sound like a caricature of Spirit itself, the death of the citizen in fact represents a crisis for Spirit. The individual who had mastered nature, spiritualized his body, and discovered his community with other subjects, now falls catastrophically back into impotent passivity, natural determination, and inert isolation. The eyes that once looked upon other men as the paradigmatic organ of the subject of consciousness, first objectifying and then recognizing the object of their gaze, have become unseeing, vulnerable objects—food for wild animals and, in a terrible reversal, the object of their gaze (Sophocles *In.* 29). The vital and turgid male body, which prefigured consciousness’ voracious swelling toward self-completion, has gone limp and bloodless, a mere object. In fact, death feminizes the male body, or rather represents a return of the male body to a less spiritualized form: the dead man is passive, weak, the object of men’s gazes and animal depredations; he exists only in the sphere of the family, and only at the level of the universal; thus Hegel describes the dead man and the female body. The eventuality of death puts into question the progressive development of Spirit and the permanence and universality of its achievements. If consciousness is no more than a passing accident in the life of certain animals, then it can never complete itself as the perfect, unconditioned, Absolute Spirit.

The dead present a special class of ethical imperative, one whose destiny lies entirely within the family. Most ethical imperatives concern the life of contract and conflict without the family, and are out of place in the sphere of loving, unconscious care within. The imperatives of a familial ethic must be both universal—that is, not concerning the accidental travails of an individual—and have their end within the family.

Since almost all of the work of the family has as its end the sustenance of the state and its citizens (for example, the education of children and the orderly dispersal of property), Hegel finds only a single imperative which is truly both familial and ethical: the care of the dead. Death itself is universal, and there is a universal imperative to care for the dead. The dead man, however, has no longer any place in civil society; he is no longer active or conscious, no longer a citizen among the other citizens. To the other citizens the dead man is now an “unreal impotent shadow” (PS §270) who belongs only to the family. It is only his family—his sisters, wife and daughters—who can recognize the ethical imperative presented by the dead man and act upon it.

Fortunately for the dead man and the living philosopher, women’s work in caring for the dead and their cult respiritualizes the dead man. The work of death guarantees that, even at his most passive and re-naturalized moment, man will retain his part in the unfolding of Spirit. He does not fall back into indifferent nature, but rather is maintained as a rationally determined agent by his family’s efforts to protect his body from natural depredations, and preserved as a particular individual in the memorials his family constructs for him. These guarantees arise from the immediate rites that follow a death; from the structure of family genealogy as a strongly gendered memorial; and of the oedipal dynamics of the family, that deny women lasting individuality. Together, they ensure that, while women’s work in caring for the dead ensures stable and self-conscious subject position for men, women themselves lack the necessary support to attain stable subject positions as agents without the family.

By deliberately burying the dead man and intervening in his natural decomposition, the family asserts rational control and mastery over the dead. Where

death was, in its particulars, accidental (a man need not die at any given time or from any given cause) and, in its universality, a natural determination, the act of burial sees that the dead man “shall not belong solely to nature but shall be something *done*, and the right of consciousness be asserted in it.” (PS §452) The women of the family destroy the body of their dead blood-relation so that his destruction will not be an act of nature. The only ethical action native to the women of the family is, then, those actions which preserve and continue eternally the action and consciousness of their dead men; their proper public activity, the duty that draws Antigone out of the city’s walls, is to act on behalf of their men who can no longer, themselves, act.

The burial place serves as the materialization of the individual’s enduring place in the fabric of the community, as does his family and his estate. Hence these memorials tend to emphasize solidity and endurance—indeed, the erectness of the stone obelisk; such memorials reassert the masculinity of the dead man against the limp, passive, decaying reality of his remains—a reality that might be described as the “feminization” of the dead man’s remains. The grandeur of the monument, where possible, also attests to the wealth and power of his family and his heirs. Most importantly, the burial and monument transforms nature itself; burial intervenes into the course of natural decay, while raising a monument, even a humble mound of earth, transforms the landscape and reaffirms man’s mastery over nature in the face of nature’s ultimately fatal mastery over man. Even Antigone’s feeble efforts to bury Polynices—she manages only to coat the corpse thinly with dust—endeavor to rescue Polynices from his objectified, natural state, as the food for carrion birds, and to transform the site of his corpse from an unclear and desecrated site into the proper site for mourning and memorialization. While this

transformation of nature is properly accomplished by the women of the family, credit of mastery is given to the dead man and, by extension, to the men of his community, in another instance of the alienation of women's labor in the family. The dead man is raised to the level of the universal, as Hegel says, in a manner that sustains or, indeed, establishes the masculine universal: all men are mortal, but also rational and active, master of nature and subject of his own experience. This site, especially in the case of soldiers and other national heroes, becomes a site for the materialization of the wealth, strength and permanence of the state. Such locales become sacred instantiations of state power and the allegiance of the citizens.

As we see in Hegel's account of the family, of course, subjectivity requires not only an initial foundation but continued sustenance. In burying the dead man, the women of the family "[wed] the blood-relation to the bosom of the earth, to the elemental imperishable individuality"(PS §452), ensuring that he will always have the rejuvenating care that sustains subjectivity. Here the Earth represents a principle of receptive and imperishable nurturance, one which maintains the dead eternally. By burying the dead and thus mastering the resources of the Earth's depths, "the family thereby makes him a member of a community which prevails over and holds under control the forces of particular material elements and the lower forms of life, which sought to unloose themselves against him and to destroy him." (PS §452) Burial rites represent human dominion over the forces of decay and depredation that threaten the dead man, and over the nourishing and maternal Earth herself.

Memory and Monument

The “universal individuality” of the dead man is perpetuated not only in the anonymous womb of the earth but in the memory of his family. A less noted duty of the dead man’s family than burial itself is the ongoing task of enshrining the dead man as one of the *Lares*, part of the “ancestral pantheon,” as an “imperishable presiding part of the family” (PS n452). As a household god, a venerated ancestor, that a man’s individual name and life is remembered across the generations. It as a member of this ancestral pantheon—that is, as the forefather and sire of a lineage—that man performs his “supreme service to the community” (PS n.452) and thus it is in this enshrinement that the accident of the dead man’s death takes on a universal meaning. Women’s work in memorializing the dead involves both the isolated actions of veneration that preserve “imperishably” the dead man’s individuality and the more general work of perpetuating his line and, therein, his name.

The memory of the dead man makes a tangible and indispensable mark on the community insofar as it is enshrined into a patriarchal genealogy. The dead ancestor lends his name to a lineage and as such is an architect of the family, a necessary condition of the existence of the community and the state. While the family is, of course, often at cross purposes with the state, familial affiliation is also deeply admixed with allegiance to the state, at least where any variation of *jus sanguinis* is practiced. Affiliation to the family obliges allegiance to the ancestral “fatherland”, while blood marks the individual as a citizen. In ancient Greece, for example, as mourning progressed it was subsumed from familial mourning for an individual into annual, public celebrations of dead citizens—days of the *genesia*, the community’s collective forefathers⁸⁹; this epitomizes the process by which the care of the dead, as Hegel says, “succumb[s] to the national

⁸⁹ Burkett, 1985, 194.

Spirit” (PS sect 475). This affiliation does not only confer citizenship but also organizes and justifies the distribution of goods among citizens, since lines of descent are also, crucially, lines of inheritance, which organize the material logic of the state⁹⁰. In the case of Thebes, of course, these lines of inheritance also organize and justify claims to political power; Creon, uncle of the dead Eteocles and Polynices—twin princes who represent a crisis of primogeniture—takes the throne in an attempt to recuperate orderly norms in this familial transfer of power. Enshrining the memory of the dead man both affirms that he is, even in his absence, an enduring and sustaining part of the community, and serves to justify the political and material organization of the state.

War, of course, is Hegel’s answer to the enduringly disruptive power of familial allegiances, and particularly of women within the family. War forces the women to give up their most cherished (in the Freudian paradigm) family members, their sons; the risks of war not only test the spiritual resolve of the young man—his rationality, independence, disembodiment—but force individuals in the community to perform the conviction that the good of their families is secondary to the good of the state by offering up the future and destiny of the family, the son, to the needs of the state. When the son dies in the name of the state, the work of glorifying and memorializing the dead kinsman is appropriated to the glorification and strengthening of the state; to glorify the son’s death is to glorify the cause that he fought for. The cult of the *Lares* becomes the cult of nationalist heroes; the tomb of the dead soldier becomes a national shrine, his memory inextricable from the history of the state, his funeral an exercise in military pageantry. When the son dies in the service of the state, “the eternal irony of the community”, his

⁹⁰ Philosophy of Right, sect. 170-172.

mother, is often finally appropriated to serve the state unambiguously in mourning for him. (PS sect. 475; Irigaray SOTW 226)

Even the mothers of soldiers, of course, can be unruly in their mourning; Cindy Sheehan is one example. Mourning has the potential to deeply transgress and disrupt the order of the state; the Mothers of the Disappeared insist on publicly mourning their lost children, even denied access to their childrens' bodies or certain knowledge of their demise. Members of Act Up, dying of AIDS, bequeathed their remains to the group for use in strikingly transgressive acts of public disobedience. Individuals who are "martyred" to seeming injustice become powerful rallying points of political resistance. While mourning and memory, then, do not always serve to strengthen the state, and sometimes specifically challenge it, the *regulation* of memory is crucial work of statecraft, an effort accomplished, for example, by withholding the bodies of enemies of the state; refusing to confirm their deaths; disallowing the public memorialization of these figures; and, of course, through efforts to build elaborate memorials to obedient servants of the state.

Memorial genealogies establish the citizenship and material right of the family's sons, granting them their names and their individual places in the family lineage. Hegel's individuated and disembodied subject has a social and a familial origin; he comes forth from the sustaining and defining logic of the family, from which he separates himself, but also receives his inheritance and his patronymic. The individual citizen is only the rational and active aspect of the family, in my reading of Hegel, and while the family may no longer be governed by the divine law over and against human law, it continues to be the shrine of the *Lares* or ancestors. As Irigaray points out, the man within patriarchy

is not only one individual but one in a long line of similarly individuated citizens; one function of the patriarchal family is to produce this individual, while another is to contextualize him within a lineage of men, one that has contributed to the esteem of his name, defined his place in the political and material life of the community, and already placed him in allegiance to pre-established laws and norms. Such a context not only assimilates the individual to civil society but obliges the larger community to recognize him as a political agent and citizen, as an owner of property and the worthy head of a family. Genealogy, then, both enforces civil norms and establishes the individual man as a citizen.

Women such as Antigone do not benefit from these guarantees of the care and memory of death; nor does their memory become incorporated into the substance of the state. Instead, their role is always to provide care and memorials for the dead. The lack of such benefits for women limit their capacity to participate in public life and to achieve subjectivity: the result can be seen in the transformation that Antigone undergoes as she approaches her death.

Anthropological Interstice: An Invitation to a Funeral

*“My father, Dr. Phil. Horst Lohr, passed away on Friday, March 7, 1997.
In quiet mourning,
His son, Detlev Lohr, and Prinz.*

*The funeral ceremony will take place at 2:00pm on April 4, 1997,
at the “New Cemetery” in Potsdam.*

Quoted in Borneman, 41

John Borneman's anthropological fieldwork in the former East Germany yielded, among other things, enduring friendships with some of the individuals he studied; the death announcement reproduced above, a bit of seemingly banal ephemera, follows up one such relationship.

The relationship between Horst and Detlev Lohr, as described by Borneman, displays many characteristics typical of end-of-life care in the west. The relationship exemplifies the multiple senses of care that Borneman take to epitomize kinship. Firstly, the longstanding intimacy and mutual interest between Detlev and Horst is care or *sorge* in the Heideggerian sense of an orientation toward someone or something that structures our temporality (Borneman 42). Borneman's focus on kinship as care also draws on feminist care theory: Detlev and other close friends of Horst's perform the daily tasks of caring for Horst during his terminal illness, maintaining his comfort and dignity and meeting basic needs that Horst can no longer satisfy on his own. After Horst's death, Detlev provides for what I have called "the care of death" or memorial care, carrying on the family name and arranging for memorials such as a funeral and death announcements mailed to their friends. While Horst requires specific sorts of care in his illness and death, Detlev is also cared-for by Horst in familiar ways: as Horst's son, he inherits Horst's property and the home that they had shared, ensuring Detlev's material well-being. The inclusion of Prinz, Horst and Detlev's dog, in this kin network is notable from the perspective of the malleability and creativity of kinship—a point to which I will return shortly—but this transgression of species boundaries reflects quite ordinary intimacy between humans and their companion animals.

Horst and Detlev Lohr exemplify, in many ways, normative and typical relations of care between a father and son, or other kin. Borneman, of course, is chiefly interested in “queer kinships”, that is to say, configurations of “enduring solidarity” and care that exceed the ordinary borders of heteronormative kinship, and Horst and Detlev are no exception. Horst adopts Detlev as an adult, after years of friendship, cohabitation and, many years before, sexual intimacy. This adoption allows Detlev to participate in Horst’s medical care as a family member and permits Detlev to take on Horst’s family name and to inherit his property, the home that Horst and Detlev share. Although Detlev and Horst are forced to conceal their history of sexual intimacy from the courts in order to accomplish the adoption, their father-son relationship should not be interpreted as an imitation of heteronormative kinship⁹¹; there is a significant filial aspect to their relation, and Detlev describes Horst in court as the person who “has always taken care of me” (Borneman 32) unlike his estranged mother and abusive father, now dead. Borneman describes instead a reductive flattening of Horst and Detlev’s complex relation, as legal recognition of the filial aspect of their relation mandates the elision of other aspects.

Horst and Detlev Lohr only achieve legal recognition (albeit distorted) for their kinship after a prolonged legal battle in which the men are forced to repeatedly affirm that the adoption will not transgress the incest taboo. Horst and Detlev never attempt to pass as heterosexual—in fact, when questioned in court Detlev insists that he would not have had a sexual relationship with the much-older Horst because “you know I like boys” (a reference to Detlev’s previous conviction for having sex with underage boys) (Borneman 32)—but nonetheless Borneman observes that Detlev and Horst must

⁹¹ It is helpful here to reference Butler’s critique of the original status of the heterosexual, as in “Imitation and Insubordination”; she argues that queer performances that seem to “imitate” the heterosexual underline the arbitrary and performative status of the so-called original.

navigate a set of heteronormative kin categories that are rendered nonsensical in their application to their situation. In particular, the incest taboo that they, in the eyes of the court, might violate is a taboo the meaning of which lies in its ability to structure heterosexual relations: when the category of incest is applied to an adult adoptive father and son in regards to a consensual relationship that occurred years before their adoption, the taboo itself is stretched beyond meaning. Borneman is interested both in the “queering” of kinship—that is to say, the ways that families like the Lohrs subvert and rearticulate kinship norms—and in the lived experience of such families, particularly in the phenomenology of care and the negotiation of legal and social norms that structure kinship. In the latter sense, it is clear that Detlev and Horst are neither kinship outlaws nor a normative father and son, but rather two men who navigate kinship norms in ways that simultaneously repeat and subvert filiality. Finally, Borneman is interested in how to track and comprehend queer kinships that exceed and challenge heteronormative kinships; kinships like Detlev and Horst’s, he suggests, like many other he encounters, can best be understood through the sort of broad rubric of care discussed above⁹².

Detlev and Horst’s battle for legal recognition dramatizes several aspects of their relationship that might be elided in a more normative story. In particular, this case emphasizes the role of the state in recognizing, regulating and policing the norms of kinship (especially, in this case, the incest taboo.) While this family is constrained and regulated by the state in specific and highly visible ways, it would clearly be a mistake to take the Lohr family as merely a state-sanctioned filiation; Horst and Detlev’s

⁹² Borneman here is distinguishing himself from, for instance, Weston, who suggests a rubric of “families we chose”, and Faubion, who suggests we understand kinship as *assujettissement*.

relationship always exceeds the bounds of the filial, and insofar as they are subject to state recognition and regulation, this regulation is transformed and subverted.

In particular, the incest taboo that they, in the eyes of the court, might violate is a taboo the meaning of which lies in its ability to structure heterosexual relations: when the category of incest is applied to an adult adoptive father and son in regards to a consensual relationship that occurred years before the adoption, the taboo itself is stretched beyond meaning.

As I have said, Detlev's memorializing of Horst is notable for my project, as is the way that the adoption allows Horst to provide for Detlev after his death. This emphasizes death as a moment of visibility and articulation of kinship and as a site where care and kinship flow. Death is not a terminus in this relation but a point of flow, where care, kinship, and subjectivization are rearticulated, redistributed and activated in sometimes unexpected ways. While Detlev and Horst's father-son relation is recognized in one sense through the courts, it is re-emphasized here even both in Detlev's memorializing of his father and in Horst's patriarchal passing-down of what Hegel calls the "family capital". Death here is a point where a relation of care comes to fruition: Detlev buries Horst and carries on the Lohr name, while Horst passes on his property to Detlev. Horst and Detlev's example underlines a key point of my argument—that the care relations around death are a fruitful site to theorize unexpected and transformative moments of care.

The Lohrs' case exhibits one specifically transgressive and transformative aspect of kinship care that I wish to emphasize in this work: this is the capacity of such care to counter the abjection of marginalized subjects and, indeed, to function as a form of

subjectivization. Borneman describes the task of anthropologists and judges to “re-present the relation between [Horst and Detlev]—to turn abjection into inclusion”, (Borneman 37) and, while clearly both anthropologists and judges could go much farther in accurately representing and recognizing their affiliation, and this failing is an evident injustice, it is also evident that Horst and Detlev—in their own partial and sometimes extralegal way—have managed to sustain each other’s subject positions against abjecting institutions. Both men have sustained their relation, for instance, in the face of pressure from Communist Party bosses to regularize their home life, and in the face of community and media disapproval after Detlev’s conviction for having sex with underage boys. Horst cares for Detlev in the aftermath of his conviction, ensuring his livelihood and his home, while Detlev cares for Horst, who has no kin according to heteronormative reckoning, in his illness and death, even taking on his family name. Borneman, like Butler, holds that this familial resistance to dehumanization is not external to the institutions and practices that demand Detlev’s abjection, but rather mediated by these institutions. I take this as an instance in which familial care creates and sustains subjectivity in ways that are internal to heteronormative discourse but that are nonetheless creatively organized and disjointed, in specific ways, from the state’s and community’s exercises of normative power. Horst and Detlev, then, stand as an example of familial care’s capacity to sustain subjectivity, and to do so in unexpected and creative ways.

Unseen and Unmourned: the sex of memory and mortality

When Creon first encounters Antigone about the burial of Polynices, she is defiant and fearless, but once she has been sentenced, she becomes distraught, not over

her impending death but over what she takes to be its wretched and ignoble quality. Unlike the chorus, which lauds her heroism, Antigone evaluates herself from the point of view of the daughter's position within the patriarchal family—one who does not attain significance until she is married, and whose accomplishments will take the form of children. She is firm in the conviction that her death is wretched as opposed to heroic, at least in part because, unlike Polynices and Eteocles, she has no family member to mourn for her (Sophocles, *ln.* 881ff). Perhaps we should not be too disappointed with Antigone's refusal to take upon herself the role of a feminist heroine in death: one should be cautious in glorifying women's masochistic and self-immolating tendencies even when these represent the only possibility of resisting oppressive power. Antigone does not lose sight of the fact that, while she may be a noble and godlike woman, hers is a very different fate than a male hero: she is choked into silence, starved, buried alive, and most of all to be denied the proper rites of burial and mourning. We should take seriously her claim that, without anyone to mourn her—with no woman to see that her burial is as it should be—she cannot take up the noble role that the chorus offers to her: that is, that she cannot fully inhabit the subject position of the ethical agent and public figure.

Antigone cannot accept the role of the hero and political agent, at least in part, because she lacks the familial structure that allows men such as Polynices to be counted as significant figures even after their death. This is not only because all of Antigone's family members are dead or disowned, but also because the care of the dead is strongly gendered as work that women do in order to preserve the public agency of the their men. According to Hegel, it is only the funeral rites performed by women such as Antigone that ensures that men's rational and necessary subjectivity does not collapse into

meaningless accidents at the moment of death. Antigone must suspect that, with no one to bury her properly or enshrine her memory as a household deity, her hard-won subject position as a public agent will evaporate. In fact, with her last male relative buried and the ethical work that had so motivated her done, it seems that Antigone's resolve is already fading.

Even if Antigone had living family members to ensure her proper burial, the initial burial rites would be only the beginning of the process of memorialization. While Antigone has, in some sense, a tomb, as I will argue in the next chapter, its peculiarities make it an inappropriate site for memorialization; indeed, its enclosure serves to hide Antigone's mastery of nature (by suicide) rather than proclaim it. Defined in her work and her social status as a servant of nature, slave to maternal demands, bodily rhythms, and irrational bouts of emotion, women are ill-placed to claim mastery of nature, even if their tombs be sturdy and grand. The logic the gendered division of labor denies women the permanent, rational, active place in public life that women's labor establishes for their male kinsmen.

As Irigaray points out in *Speculum*, the paradigm of patriarchal reproduction produces a lineage of individuated males, while there is no place for women's individuation, only a generational cycle in which women successively hold the place of maiden, mother and grandmother. Her role in the patriarchal family is to reproduce the name and line of her husband. Women are only placeholders in this paradigm, providing a site to reproduce a name and a subjectivity that is never their own. Antigone's very name suggests that she is a placeholder for her mother, and Irigaray points out that her activities seem to be a continuation of her mother's desire (itself a desire founded on the

desire for the phallus) rather than her own (Butler, 22). Like Antigone, women have no name and no line to continue or pass on. Lacking even a proper name, no marked tomb can establish a female genealogy or a place in history. Unless the non-individuated maternal site is unfolded, allowing for individual subject positions to arise among generations and lineages of women, there can be no history of female genealogies and therefore no institutionalized means of intergenerational memorialization for women. Furthermore, hidden and nameless maternal genealogies are denied the material reality of male genealogies, for they do not represent the inheritance of property or social status through the generations. Male lineages order political and material life, while women's lack of genealogies inhibit political and economic agency as well as individuation.

Subjectivity in Danger

A woman such as Antigone always has more to risk than Polynices does when she risks her life. Unlike him, she has no guarantee that she will receive that care which saves the dead from the cruel contingencies of nature, no guarantee that her individuality will be enshrined within the memory of a family and a city (in the next chapter, I will further discuss this certainty in relation to Antigone's surviving kinswoman Ismene). This makes for an unequal entry, for women like Antigone, into that struggle unto death that marks the entry into public life;

The first encounter between consciousnesses, producing the master and the slave, is also the founding moment of self-consciousness. It is in this moment that natural being and simple desire become conscious and reflective, and win mastery over the natural. The mastery of natural being is achieved when the individual risks his life and physical well-

being for the sake of his self-consciousness, which is accomplished only when an other has been encountered and forced to recognize it. In overcoming the fear of death and the natural inclination toward self-preservation and the avoidance of pain, the individual proves himself to exceed the instinctual determinations of nature. This risk represents a privileging of consciousness over the body, and declares that the individual is not an object (the physical body prone to damage at the other's hands) but a subject not prone to objectification by the other:

it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the *immediate* form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing in the present that could not be regarded as the vanishing moment, that it is only pure *being-for-itself*. The individual who has not risked his life may be recognized as a *person*, but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness (PS 187)

It is in risking his life that he accomplishes fully human subjectivity, the ability to recognize himself, and be recognized by others, as a conscious and desiring subject.

The risk of life is in its negative moment, independence from animal nature, physical life and objective determination. Life, which Hegel defines as the passive substance of the world, is here distinguished from the active subject. By risking his life, the individual declares that he is not an animal, not a body, not a passive object among the many objects populating the world. This negativity, the lack of any existence except for that always-already-vanishing moment of consciousness, is freedom, and the individual discovers his freedom through a sustained reflection on fear and mortality.

To begin with, of course, these realizations must be achieved unequally. If the two individuals encountering each other are equally strong and determined, they would fight to the death, a result that would negate all possibilities of self-consciousness. The originating struggle of self-conscious humanity is one between ill-matched opponents: the more fearful contender concedes, giving up his independence in order to preserve his life. The less fearful party is now the master of the other, and in doing so he transforms the dangerous opposing consciousness into a mere object. The master is simply consciousness, while the bondsman has shown himself to be an embodied creature, one who depends upon the master's goodwill for his continued existence. In this mastery of the bondsman, the master has not only power over another consciousness but also mastery of nature; he compels the bondsman to work at his behest, transforming natural objects into those that fulfill his desires. The master no longer must struggle against other objects to satisfy his needs, but has mastery over the bondsman, who works to satisfy his needs (for instance, food, shelter, weapons). Here the mastery over a worker is equated to the mastery of nature.

Of course, the relationship of the master and slave undergoes a famous reversal. The master is dependent on the bondsman's his continued existence; it is the bondsman who is the independent and essential of the two. The lord has his being-for-self only in the other, and it does not truly belong to him. The master, who no longer must work in order to survive, depends on the bondsman not only for recognition but also for the work that sustains his being. It is interesting to note that the master, who willingly faces harm and death in the struggle against the other, proving himself to be nothing but the vanishing moment of consciousness, is very much an embodied and self-preserving being

when we take him from the battlefield to the dinner table. The master might die of violence rather than be dependent on another, but he will not consent to die of starvation. In the moment of mastery, when he charges his bondsman with the work of sustaining his physical needs, he frees himself of animal concerns, allowing him to live as if a pure consciousness; however, he also gives proof to his profound need of certain animal satisfactions, those needs so fundamental, and grounded in the body, that he entrusted them to the bondsman.

While the bondsman is essential to the master, and the master is dependent on him, he does not yet realize this. Similarly, he does not yet know, as the master does in the moment of his risky victory, that his essential truth is pure negativity, the vanishing moment of self-consciousness. The worker experiences his negativity only through his profound fear of death. While fear, like the willing risk of life, reveals the negativity of the bondsman's being, in fearfulness this negativity is presented as dependent on the master; it is the master's power that inspires the fear, and the master's whim that allows him to survive.

It is the bondsman's work that eventually leads him to consciousness of his independence and freedom. While the master's desires are easily satisfied and, in satisfaction, both the desire and its object is annihilated, the bondsman's work is desire sustained over time, desire for an object that is not consumed but rather is shaped into a tool. The tool, and along with it the desire which originates the tool, take on a permanent being. In the independent and permanent being of his tool, the bondsman sees his own independence. To begin with, the tools created by the bondsman are destined to be the master's, whether overtly (as chains or weapons) or not (the plow made and used by the

bondsman is at this point an emblem of the master's mastery of nature). In his transformative power, however, the bondsman sees that he can transform the very tools that he fears: "in fear, the being-for-self of the bondsman is present in the bondsman himself; in fashioning the thing he becomes aware that being-for-self belongs to *him*, that he exists essentially in his own right." (PS 196) Where fear is complacent and passive, work is transformative and independent, actively contradicting the master's claims to independence and power. It is by working that the bondsman overcomes his fear and comes to recognize himself as independent and free, and realizes his mastery of nature. It is this moment of self-consciousness that the bondsman will strive to actualize through the course of history.

The moment of servitude, then, is for the bondsman the dawn of self-consciousness, and the beginning of an arduous progression toward Spirit, the full achievement of self-consciousness on the social level. For those identified with the position of servitude, the narrative of lordship and bondage is ultimately a hopeful one: it promises that the very conditions of oppression are already in themselves destined for reversal—that the master's tools will, by their very nature, dismantle his house.

Some feminist theorists, Beauvoir most prominent among them, have seen the historical role of women (including that described by Hegel) in that of the bondsman. There are clear parallels between the wife/mother and the bondsman: both work so that the master can benefit from the effortless mastery of nature and the satisfaction of his animal needs⁹³. Both sustain self-consciousness and independence in another, while they are denied the same. Both, one could plausibly argue, live and work in fear of the

⁹³ While in *The Second Sex* Beauvoir draws the domestic work of the married woman out as the "most concrete application" of the dialectic of lordship and bondage to gender relations (454) in other places she resists a direct correlation of man and woman to master and slave (see 130-131).

master's violence. Unfortunately, this (and, I would argue, any) narrative of necessary liberation is not suited to the position of women. First of all, Hegel would argue that neither fear nor individuality are characteristic of the woman in the family; since her consciousness of herself is of one part of a familial whole, there can be no dialectic of independence and dependence for her, and since the family is characterized by this harmonious unity, presumably fear ought not belong to it. In fact, as Beauvoir herself acknowledges, women in the family do not simply fit the role of the bondsman because in her familial role:

she the wished-for intermediary between nature, the stranger to man, and the fellow being who is too closely identical. She opposes him with neither the hostile silence of nature nor the hard requirement of reciprocal relation; through a unique privilege she is a conscious being and yet it seems possible to possess her in the flesh. (130)

While a strong analogy exists between the woman and the bondsman, as Beauvoir emphasizes in her discussion of domestic work within marriage, it is also the case that the ideal of marital unity, and the representation of passive and other woman, insist that within the marital relation a harmonious and non-threatening coincidence of consciousnesses is created. Indeed it is for this reason, Beauvoir acknowledges, that man can gain much-needed, temporary escape from tension in the family, for "man is incessantly in danger in his relations with his fellows (130). Insofar as the family fulfills its prescribed function as a refuge from individualization and danger, despite the similarity of gender relations to those of the lord and bondsman, the family lacks for revolutionary potential.

Even if fear of death should sometimes appear, obscenely, within the family unity (and, of course, it sometimes does), the domestic work Hegel assigns to the wife/mother's does not have the same transformative character as that of the bondsman. The bondsman's work causes him to realize his independence because its product is permanent; he realizes his power and mastery, over nature and over the master, because his labor is to transform objects into tools. Women's labor in the home, as Beauvoir herself argues, does not have this transcendent quality. Housework is labor that maintains rather than creating; instead of making tools, the household laborer cleans floors and repairs torn clothing. The wife or mother maintains the status quo rather than transforming nature to her own ends. The work of cooking, cleaning and otherwise maintaining a household is futile; the work is impermanent and must be repeated indefinitely. In cleaning laundry or cooking dinner, a worker does not have the same sense of independence or mastery as does the worker that makes tools, since her work is not permanent and does not represent the mastery of nature. Where this work, as in the case of the care of death, does involve the transformation of nature, agency is paradoxically attributed to the dead man, alienating the kinswomen from their labor. The work women do to care for their sons and husbands does not lead to a reversal as does that of the bondsman, and does not lead to female self-consciousness.

The narrative of the lord and bondsman, then, does not describe the man and woman, at least insofar as the former relationship represents the origin of self-consciousness in the subordinate. I will argue that, given women's different relationship to fear and death, women can never enter into the master-slave struggle in the same way as men do. This is a crucial point in that living through and working through the risk of

death is the entry point to both full consciousness and to civil society. The community of men is one in which, to begin with, brothers vie against one another; when civic peace has been established, active citizenship is marked by making war against other cities. The story of Antigone demonstrates both that the risk of death is a necessary condition of political action both within and between states, and that women are not in a position to risk death in the same way that men do.

To enter into the struggle that results in self-consciousness, one must risk death. This risk results in the realization of one's freedom insofar as it is accompanied by the an act of will—either in the act of risk itself or in a transformation of nature—that establishes one's mastery over the material world—that is to say, over the exigencies of nature and the determinations of embodied existence. Man only risks death when he can affirm that he is not, in fact, an object in the world that can be annihilated through death. He is more than his body; he is a willing subject who leaves a permanent mark on the world. As I have argued, this permanency and freedom from natural and bodily determination are not the intrinsic state of man, but the product of endless, sustaining care labor which creates the appearance of mastery and disembodiment. Risk and self-conscious subjectivization, then, both result from this labor, while the laborers themselves necessarily lack the guarantees of mastery and memorialization that sustain male subjectivity. With exclusive responsibility for the sustenance of bodies and the care of natural exigencies, and enjoying no sustaining care of her own, the women of the family are attributed exclusively to natural and bodily existence, and indeed, are responsible for the natural and bodily existence of the entire family. Thus identified with the body, and lacking the familial infrastructure to assert her mastery of nature and her

freedom from her body, women cannot risk their lives with the impunity of the disembodied master, who asserts that his rational will is separate from his body, or the slave, confident in the permanence of his mark on the world.

Self-consciousness is won only through the willingness to risk one's life in the face of the other in the Hegelian schema. Overcoming the fear of death and daring to risk one's life is the key to mastery over nature, to the realization of freedom, and to self-consciousness. This attitude toward death is the condition of entry to society amongst individuals (clearly, the relations between persons within the family are governed by different principles and lead to a different destiny). The conflict and competition that characterizes the development of Spirit at all levels carries the risk of annihilation for both the individual and the collective. In order to sustain the subjectivity that results against the resurgence of accidental and natural determination, individuals must have the guarantee of care after death. Risk for a woman must have a radically different meaning in this context, as she, lacking institutionalized care and memorial after death, can be annihilated by the act of violence, leaving no trace of her will and returning conclusively to natural, animal existence.

Citizenship and Risk: Beauvoir and Mortality

Simone de Beauvoir was fascinated by the seemingly simple premise *all men are mortal*. How can we interpret, she asked, this seemingly universal statement which is nonetheless gendered as male? Are *women* mortal? I argue that the mortality of men and women is in fact a very different matter in a patriarchal community, as Beauvoir herself argues in *Bouches Inutiles*. I suggest that we take this verity, "all men are mortal", in

relation to Hegel's claim that in dying the individual attains the universality of pure being. This universal, however, belongs "solely to Nature" and must be recuperated through the family's effort, an effort that reconciles the universality of the dead man with the community. In burying the dead man, his inert, universal being is reconciled with the universal tenets of masculinity—all men are rational, all men are active, all men have the capacity to shape nature through acts of will. It is through the care of death that the universality of mortality is reconciled with the universality of male mastery and self-determination; death becomes a deliberate and human act. This rationalized, human mortality makes sense of the specificity of "all *men* are mortal"; the universality of death is also the universality of masculine reason and self-determination in the face of death. In fact it is the very ability to assert mastery in the face of death that defines a man as free, masterful, a man among men in the community. Mortality and masculinity here are inextricably bound, while the mortality in question—a death that is also a rejection of the body as an indifferent object and a statement of transformative human will—is incompatible with women's place within the Hegelian family. In this context, Beauvoir argues, the deaths of individual women never have the universal and political significance of men's deaths, a situation that inhibits women's political agency.

Irigaray's relation to Beauvoir, characterized by filial indebtedness and bitter disappointment, cannot be justly treated here. Beauvoir deserves consideration as an influential feminist reader of Hegel, particularly the master-slave dialectic. Her reading of women's place in this dialectic remains exceptionally insightful, and Irigaray herself returns again and again to the figure of the woman as slave. In our context, however,

Beauvoir's hopes that women might follow the same path to self-consciousness and citizenship as men will seem faint.

Beauvoir writes that man's work, from the earliest moment of known history, men have done that work that has a transcendental character, while women have cared for the immanent. Beauvoir argues that this division is founded on anatomical differences, and particularly, women's entrenchment in the natural and physical demands of reproduction. Pregnancy and childbirth, for Beauvoir, is lived as a natural exigency rather than a rational choice; furthermore, the demands of maternity and the relative weakness of women prevent women from entering into other activities. Men, on the other hand, engage, from the dawn of man's history, in activities that allow them to define themselves in contrast to immanence. These activities allow men to show mastery over nature both as an external force and their own animal nature: Beauvoir describes hunting and fishing excursions both as exercises in conquest of the land and sea and as the opportunity to show, through the risk of bloodshed, that "life is not the supreme value for man, but on the contrary that it should be made to serve ends more important than itself," (1961, 58) that is, ends determined by rational will.

Beauvoir expresses hope that women, in part through changes in the practices of reproduction and maternity, will free themselves sufficiently from the arbitrary demands of nature so that they will be able to shed their blood in pursuit of power and mastery. Indeed, contemporary to and post Beauvoir, women have avidly pursued traditionally male occupations and activities. I will argue that this does not lead women to take up the transcendent subject positions. Women do not only lack the opportunity, technology or strength to participate in male activities; rather we should see women's exclusion from

these activities as at least as solidly founded in women's inability to enter into the masculine economy of death. This is inability and its dire consequences are demonstrated in Beauvoir's play *Bouches Inutiles*, the story of a town on the brink of death.

The people of Vaucelles have expelled a tyrant, and as a result they are under siege and starving. Catherine, the wife of the town's leader, is a woman who has achieved transcendence through labor—importantly, she has laid the cornerstone of the city's belfry. She is kind, wise, and courageous, willing to lay down her life, or to fight in a war, in order to preserve the city. However, she finds that her subjectivity is entirely negated by the actions of the city councilors, who decree that women will be cast out to starve in order to preserve rations for the fighting men of the city. "Death is nothing, but you have erased me from the world," (WSD 53) she exclaims, pointing out that the councilors have condemned her to something less than the heroic death of the men who willingly risk their lives for love or freedom. With no choice, the women are to be cast out like "refuse, and bones, old rags" (38) Furious, the women argue with the men's decision, demanding a reversal. When the men refuse, they angrily demand that the men at least kill them outright, with their swords, instead of casting them off like refuse; without this, the women will have had less consideration than the Burgundians outside the gate. Finally, after many of the councilors have been discredited, the men of Vaucelles are convinced that the ideals of freedom they are fighting for are best served if the people of the town make a last stand together—men, women, children and the elderly.

In Vaucelles, the condition of citizenship is the ability and willingness of an individual to risk his life for the city. These men discover their freedom, their mastery over nature and the significance of their own consciousness, through risk; they become

citizens of the state when they put their mastery of death in the service of the state by fighting on its behalf. Catherine and some of the women of her family are, Beauvoir makes clear, capable of the same courage in the face of death as the men, if only because of their exceptional circumstances and abilities. Catherine's predicament sheds light on the difficulty of attaining either a truly human death or true citizenship even for a woman who is ready to fight.

In her familial role, Catherine is necessarily not a soldier or one who bears arms. In war-making society, exclusion from the risk of life is exclusion from citizenship. To be a part of the brotherhood is to be one who can risk his life with the others. Women in the Hegelian family have never been able to enter into the brotherhood of civil society—the world of men who recognize themselves and each other as free men who have mastered nature. As the wife and mother of a family she stands for the safety and nurture of the home, and the guarantee of memory of her dead menfolk. Regardless of her public activities, her familial role marks her as something other than the dangerous and life-risking men of the city—a creature determined by nature rather than one who masters it. As such she is not recognized as an individual who might be able to act, risking her life, for the benefit of the city. Beauvoir's Catherine is able live a respected and productive life in the city of Vaucelles, but she finds that neither she nor any other of the women will be permitted to die a similarly meaningful death—the sort of freely chosen death that is the ultimate determinate of citizenship.

Despite Catherine's achievements, she has never been accorded that "imperishable individuality" which the men of the city accord themselves and each other. Catherine, although she has woven the city's banner and also laid the foundation of the

new tower (weaving, after all, is too shameful and ephemeral an achievement to ensure a woman's memory alone), does not appear to the citizens of the town as an individual in whom the fate of the city is concerned; the men of Vaucelles are able to claim that they are casting out the womenfolk for the sake of the "community". To them she appears as an undifferentiated member of her husband's family, useful for bearing children and other work in peacetime but "useless" in war and famine. Her death and that of the other townswomen does not appear as a serious obstacle to the reestablishment of the city or of the families that constitute it; the men reason that, should they survive the siege, they will be able to replace their wives with other women who are equally able to fulfill their function. Despite her public achievements, Catherine is denied citizenship by a state that recognizes her only as a placeholder and a nonindividuated functionary, easily replaceable by any other woman.

Beauvoir argues that, within the warlike paradigm of recognition Hegel sets forth, women, lacking a guarantee of memorialization and spiritualization in death, cannot take up a fully human subject position. Extra-familial society is conceived of as a battle--one in which women are not even granted the questionable privilege of fighting. Assimilated within the placidly unified family as non-individuated and non-autonomous beings, women are not interpreted by men as competitors even when lives are at stake. Indeed, perhaps women's last stand as free beings, in solidarity with the men and children of the city, is made possible by the men's betrayal of their families, which allows the women to fight not as appendices of their families, for the sake of their husbands and children, but as individuals on behalf of freedom. Beauvoir, then, argues that gendered economies of

labor and care mean that women are *not* mortal as men are, but in fact have a very different relationship to death and, as a result, to political subjectivity.

While I have focused on the Hegelian paradigm of recognition in this chapter, I do not affirm this warmongering and inimical schema as the only means of subjectivization. Indeed, it should be clear that this paradigm is necessarily oppressive, as it depends on the labor of a permanent underclass to sustain the stable subjectivity of the citizens. In the next chapters, I will review Irigaray's rediscovery of one alternate paradigm of recognition in *The Eternal Irony of the Community*, and consider how feminist activism might be inspired by the desire to create new and different practices to sustain subjectivity in liberatory or reciprocal ways. I will consider the specific consequences of the lack of care of death for Antigone; while Antigone demonstrates that the gendered distribution of care labor does not exclude the possibility of female subjectivity or political agency, she also attests to the instability and suffering attendant on such subjectivities. By reading Antigone through the moment of faltering in which she deplores her lack of proper care in death, I argue for the importance of rediscovering feminist means of sustaining subjectivity and mourning the dead.

ANTIGONE FALTERS: DEATH AND THE SUSTAINABILITY OF SUBJECTIVITY

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Introduction: Antigone as a flawed exemplar of feminist political activity

Antigone is often read through the logic of the exemplar, not only by Irigarayans but by feminists in general. Judith Butler takes her criminality and incestuous origins to exemplarize a queering of familial and political logic that allows for new and inventive approaches to both. Similarly, Zerilli takes her to exemplarize political action that is intrinsically resistant to the political discourse and in excess of extant political theory and possibility; Jacobs and Gourgouris, too, take her to epitomize “the limits of intelligibility” (Gourgouris, 2003, 131). Gourgouris takes the *Antigone* to exemplify the site of prethetic decision that serves as the fruitful presymbolic resource allowing philosophical innovation⁹⁴. Elshtain, in contrast, takes her to embody a powerful force

⁹⁴ Gourgouris, Stathis. “Philosophy’s Need for Antigone” in *Does Literature Think?* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

that has already been theorized, albeit in a devalued fashion: the power of the private sphere to resist the state. Dietz, in opposite fashion, takes Antigone as the exemplar of a straightforward female political agent, one who fits neatly into the logic of masculine political activity and therefore represents an ideal of equality feminism. These thinkers agree on Antigone's exemplarity as a feminist political agent while disagreeing thoroughly as to just what it is that she exemplifies. Nussbaum, while taking Antigone's ethical and political positions to be flawed and partial, nonetheless takes her to exemplify the fragility and contingency of good in general, while Lacan dismisses her ethical claims entirely and takes her to exemplify the monstrosity of one who refuses the symbolic law of the father. Given this embarrassment of exemplars, many thinkers have recently rebelled against the latter-day cult of Antigone; Chanter has argued that Antigone's complexity and specificity cannot be universalized to all women, while pointing out the very different and politically fruitful readings of *Antigone* that have developed internationally; Butler similarly points out that Antigone, as the product of a strange and incestuous family, is altogether too strange to be an imitable model of feminist or queer activism. At the same time, Rawlinson, Chanter and Honig have looked to the figure of Ismene as an alternate exemplar, one who values survival and sisterly solidarity over the divine law. While the exemplification of both Antigone and Ismene has evident political and imaginary value, I suggest that reading her as Irigaray does in *The Eternal Irony*, as a promising but ambiguous figure, one who retains an unmistakable tragic countenance, draws out another valuable aspect of Antigone: an Antigone who suffers and falters, an Antigone whose political achievements are considerable but form only a foundation, rather than the apex, of potential feminist political action.

Antigone is an extraordinary model for feminist politics and activism for two closely related reasons. Firstly, she offers, as Butler points out, an alternative to a feminist politics that demands recognition and inclusion within the state. Instead, Antigone challenges not only the laws of the state but the laws of kinship that condition the state⁹⁵. In Irigaray's reading, her actions at once reveal the injustice of the state, founded as it is on a set of arbitrary norms and the violent suppression of another, separate realm of justice, and indicate the possibility of acting and speaking in a way that destroys this logic. Antigone is able to do, speak and live the impossible, to be recognized within the state as acting according to a law that cannot be represented within the state.

Of a piece with the impossibility—the unintelligibility and the forbiddenness—of Antigone's action is that she acts *as a woman*. While in some sense she must take on a masculine role to act as she does, as an ethical and a political subject, her behavior is overtly and necessarily gendered as female. Her crime, burying her brother against the King's orders, is to perform a traditionally female duty in accordance with an ethical imperative that belongs solely to the feminine sphere. From the duty which opens the play to Antigone's death in her bridal chamber/crypt, she is taken as a woman—and insofar as her accomplishments are meritorious, impressive or dangerous, it is because they are a woman's actions. Antigone, therefore, escapes the trap of gendered subjectivity set in the phallogocentric state, in which an individual—male or female—can only act ethically and politically by taking up a male-gendered subject position.

⁹⁵ Irigaray and Butler disagree over the nature of this challenge. Irigaray argues, as I will discuss below, that Antigone refers to an alternative paradigm of kinship based on maternal genealogy. Butler holds that kinship disintegrates around the figure of Antigone due to the parodic repetition of kinships within the incestuous Oedipal family; she doubts Irigaray's claim, however, that the matrilineal focus of Antigone is a genuine alternative to patriarchal kinship.

For all the promise inherent in the figure of Antigone, however, feminist theory also has much to learn from her faltering, her suffering, and the incompleteness of her accomplishments. Firstly, Antigone's faltering underlines the questions of how her agency becomes possible in the first place; secondly, it demonstrates the precariousness of this subject position; and lastly, it invites us to reflect on how an impossible subjectivity like Antigone's might be sustained. Part of the significance of the figure of Antigone, for feminist analysis, is the unique perspective that she provides on the brutal functioning of repression and the consequences of women's alienation from the goods produced in the work of burial and memorialization. Just as the ethical import of Antigone's action and the power of her resistance turns on the undertheorized relation of women to death and dying, so to does her suffering and her moments of weakness. Furthermore, as the faltering of Antigone's political subjectivity turns in part on the failure of her and her allies to act to sustain each other's revolutionary subjectivities in specific ways (and here I am thinking particularly of the tragic break between Ismene and Antigone), attention to this faltering also leads us to consider what such revolutionary acts of co-sustenance would look like. Taken together, an understanding of both Antigone's power and her weakness helps us to understand the significance of the funeral economy in sustaining male subjectivity and undermining female subjectivity; furthermore, this understanding of Antigone indicates the necessity of reimagining our relations to death not only as a limited strategy to disrupt state power but as a crucial step in providing sustainable subject positions to women.

While Antigone is remembered chiefly as a figure of insurrection and determination, this account elides a key portion of Sophocles' play. In the middle portion

of the play—between her fearless defiance of Creon and her interment—Antigone falters, evincing regret and despair. Antigone’s sudden change from a defiant and righteous young woman, passionately dedicated to her troubled natal family, to a pitiful girl rueing the loss of a possible marital family, seems inconsistent on the terms of Sophocles alone. Reading these passages through Hegel’s account of divine law reveals that Antigone’s faltering is *necessary* within Hegel’s economy of agency and death. A feminist rereading of Sophocles and Hegel shows that within the Hegelian schema of agency and citizenship, a woman’s agency is always ephemeral and already-disappearing. I will offer a reading of Antigone’s moment of weakness that elucidates one aspect of this ephemerality: the impossibility of sustaining female subjectivity in the face of death in the Hegelian funeral economy. Further, I will consider the ways in which this impossible subjectivity might be made possible through alternative funeral practices.

This reading is not offered in order to discourage resistance, particularly that which has taken Antigone as its guiding spirit. Antigone’s story, as Tina Chanter points out⁹⁶, can be translated to speak to many communities fighting against repression; by offering a model of resistance that radically refuses the logic of the state, Antigone inspires those who struggle against systemically unjust communities. Feminists and others fighting against repression, then, may do well to read *Antigone* as the inspiring tale of one woman’s profound challenge to a repressive and arbitrary regime; if, as Irigaray argues, we suffer terribly from the relative lack of a women’s history and genealogy in which to plant and cultivate ourselves, of positive images and deities in whom we might discover what is transcendent and divine in ourselves, then the historico-mythical figure

⁹⁶ Chanter, Tina. “Antigone’s Exemplarity: Irigaray, Hegel and Excluded Grounds as Constitutive of Feminist Theory”. *Thinking with Irigaray*, ed. Mary C. Rawlinson, Sabrina L. Hom and Serene Khader. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, forthcoming.

of Antigone, a figure who bridges thousands of years of history, is an invaluable resource. Antigone's resistance, furthermore, points us to principles—for instance, the importance of what Irigaray calls *blood*—which remain undertheorized and underutilized in feminist work; by indicating the importance of the maternal bloodline, of the care of the dead, and of the divine, Antigone still stands, I would argue, at the vanguard of feminist theory, promising new avenues of analysis and new modes of resistance.

Faltering Resolve

In Sophocles' play, Antigone is from the beginning an example of self-certain, determined righteousness. She knows that Polyneices must be buried, and that the repercussions for doing so will be awful. She never doubts the exigency of the divine law or hesitates in the face of the King's decree that Polynices go unmourned, on pain of death. While her actions clearly defy both the laws of the state—which forbid the burial of Polynices—and the norms of the community, which demand that Antigone renounce political life in favor of marriage and motherhood, Antigone knows that her choices have value in an alternative paradigm. Later, when she is brought before Creon, the King, she does not deny her guilt or protest her punishment; instead, she bravely and forthrightly accepts her guilt. Once her punishment has been brought to bear—Creon “[buries] her alive in a chamber of rock, giving her just enough food to avoid guilt” (Sophocles ln. 723)—Antigone again asserts her ethical agency by hanging herself. She refuses to passively accept the cruel fate Creon has devised for her⁹⁷, and instead asserts her agency

⁹⁷ Antigone's fate should be read as an especially degrading one. By burying her alive, Creon asserts that Antigone is neither of that class of (male) persons who live and die on the political scene, or eligible for the

by mastering death—an action which, for Hegel, is emblematic of fully developed masculinity and agency⁹⁸. Repeatedly, Antigone defies the law of the state at the deepest level, challenging their claim to exclusive authority and discovering ways to assert her agency in the face of the state’s degrading punishment.

These actions have earned Antigone undying admiration, particularly from those invested in resisting tyranny and repression. In a crucial, interstitial moment, however—after Antigone’s condemnation and before her interment—Antigone’s resolve falters radically. In a play where nearly every other passage has proven a fecund point for feminist analysis and an inspiration for activism, it is unwise to dismiss or elide this passage merely because it seemingly contradicts the established character of Antigone.

Antigone:
Unmourned,
Without loved ones,
Without my marriage-song,
I am led in misery
On the journey that is prepared.
No longer do I have the right
To see this sacred light of the sun,
Wretched as I am.
My fate is unwept,
And no loved one
Mourns for me.
(Sophocles, ln. 877-885)

When Creon first encounters Antigone about the burial of Polynices, she is defiant and remorseless. Creon’s men have caught her in the act of burying her brother and brought her directly to the king, and she is still heady with the righteous sense of

kind of proper burial that she has sought for her brother. Instead, this punishment seeks to reinscribe her feminine role (especially as, in Sophocles, this punishment is clearly analogized to a marriage) as a kind of living death, confined within the family, denied either recognition or agency.

⁹⁸ See Patricia Jagentowicz Mills’ account of Antigone’s suicide.

purpose that animated her actions. Antigone shows no reluctance to admit her crime and accept her punishment: she issues no denial, and shows no desire for mercy; instead she embodies heroic determination and a clear-sighted acceptance of her fate. When Antigone next appears, she has a very different attitude. Now that she has discharged her duty to her brother as best as she can, Antigone is seized with self-pity and, it seems, overwhelmed with fear. Creon accuses Antigone of dawdling with the chorus, “pouring out songs and lamentations” (Sophocles *Ln 854*) in order to delay her punishment, and indeed, her lengthy lamentations contrast to her earlier, terse purposefulness. Antigone is striking in the hubristic extremes of her self-pity, at one point comparing her suffering to that of the goddess Niobe. She is despondent that she will not live to be married or have children, that she is about to die and that her death will transgress the proper funeral rites.

The chorus treats Antigone as an exceptionally noble and accomplished figure even as it rues her unhappy fate; to these observers, it seems that Antigone has lived a meaningful life despite her unmarried and childless state. It argues that Antigone has achieved extraordinary feats for a woman: “for a dying woman, it is a great thing even to hear that she has won the destiny of the godlike in life and afterwards in death” (Sophocles *Ln790*). To the observers, it seems that Antigone is a more noble and memorable than most women and, indeed, most of the men in Thebes; her actions merit enduring fame and respect. Antigone has disrupted the political sphere of Thebes, taking her ethical mission outside of the domestic spheres and sparking dissent amongst Creon’s subjects. Antigone, however, cannot see herself in this heroic light; rather, she is overcome with grief at what she sees as the failure and pathos of her position.

Perhaps we should not be too disappointed with Antigone's refusal to be cast as a feminist hero in death: one should be cautious in glorifying women's masochistic and self-destructive tendencies even when these represent the only possibility of resisting oppressive power. Antigone does not lose sight of the fact that, while she may be a noble and godlike woman, hers is a very different fate than a male hero: she is choked into silence, starved, buried alive, and denied the proper rites of burial and mourning. We should take seriously her claim that, without anyone to mourn her—with no woman to see that her burial is as it should be—she cannot take up the noble role that the chorus offers to her: that is, that she cannot fully inhabit the male-gendered subject position of the ethical agent and public figure.

Antigone's hesitancy, and the failure of her resolve as she moves toward her death, illuminates the unsustainability of female agency in the Hegelian schema, and casts light, particularly, on the predicament of a woman who, like Antigone, is excluded from the crucial rites of burial and memorialization. Firstly, we can understand Antigone's faltering as a symptom of the ephemeral and oscillatory conditions under which female political agency becomes possible for Hegel; the precariousness of this agency ensures that Antigone's ethical determination will falter. Antigone's ethical agency can only appear under special and limited circumstances within the Hegelian family, circumstances which do not provide long-term sustenance. Secondly, Antigone's specific concerns—that she will be denied a proper burial and familial mourning—reveals the alienation of women within the Hegelian funereal economy and the necessity of rediscovering a feminist memorial practice.

Sustainable Subjectivity and Familial Recognition

Recognition, ethics and sex

Antigone is able to accede to a political and ethical subject position *as a woman*—that is to say, on a basis that radically departs from the masculine logic of the state—because she finds in her brother a path to subjectivizing recognition that does not lead through the state. Since the state is already conceived as the brotherhood of men, to enter into it may be a path to recognition and subjectivity, but it is one that requires the subject to already accept the masculine law and ordering of the state. Within the family, the vestige of an alternate ethical law—one, furthermore, which is not entirely assimilated to patriarchal ends—allows Antigone to be recognized as an ethical subject on the basis of a law that does not belong to the state, or indeed to the patriarchal family. This is possible not because the family is independent of the state—the relation of the patriarchal order of the family and the sovereignty of Creon is clear, as is the ability of Creon to disrupt and regulate the norms of the family (not least by interceding in Antigone’s burial of her brother.) The family, however, both conditions the state and—as a reservoir of particularity and nature—contains that which is in excess of or dangerous to the state. An intrafamilial path to subjectivity offers the possibility of a different kind of subject, a subject who represents both an unrepresented group and an unrepresentable law. Such an unruly subject can oppose the state thoroughly—without relying in its own standards—and positively, with reference to the alternate possible order of the divine law.

The concept of recognition in Hegel generally refers to the encounter between like, unrelated subjects which produces first the dangerous encounter of enemies, then the lord-bondsman relation, and finally the community of mutual recognition. While it is at

first violent, this recognition is also necessarily subjectivizing—that is to say that in recognizing me as a subject like himself the other constitutes me as such. Self-conscious subjectivity emerges when we realize that we are recognized as both the subject and object of consciousness by others. It is progressive, emerging from non-self-conscious subjectivity and developing, ineluctably, into a stable community in which the dangerous gaze of the other has been transformed, through social practices, into that which dependably establishes and sustains my subject position. This recognition is necessarily the recognition of sameness—the other is a subject like me—even if at first it also takes the form of a threatening alterity. The brother’s recognition of the sister does not, however, follow this path. It emerges instead from the peaceful unity of the family, in which recognition is always self-recognition. This relation can exceed the logic of the family, however, in that, since there is (according to Hegel) no desire between them, or no principle of destruction and incorporation. Without desire, the brother and sister can each recognize the other as separate from the family unity, each individuals acting according to radically different laws. Between the brother and the sister there is sufficient space (given the position of each, as an adult, at the cusp of leaving the natal family or, in Polynices’ case, as a young husband) for each to recognize the other as an individual.

The recognition between brother and sister has a distinct character from either intrafamilial or intersubjective recognition. The brother and the sister find themselves in a unique position to attain to a “pure” recognition which is not otherwise possible within the family. The familial origin of their recognition, however—that which allows the sister to enter into this scene—also ordains that it will have a unique, oscillatory shape. The sister is passive, non-individuated, and unconscious, but these characteristics are still

those of an immature citizen and do not yet have the positive and finalized status as they will for the adult matron; the brother seems to share these characteristics insofar as he is not yet a full citizen, though his destiny is in civil society. The brother and sister, then, can recognize something that is the same in one another, even as their different destinies determine that this is ethical, rather than natural, recognition. This ethical recognition, however, lacks either the mutuality of fully developed ethical recognition or the enmity of the initial scene of recognition, which deceptively denies one side of the mutual recognition. Instead, the brother and the sister negotiate the scene of recognition in a way that is unique within Hegel's account; as Irigaray observes, they are neither passive and unconscious (as in natural recognition) or active and conscious (as in ethical recognition) but rather oscillate between the two in complementary fashion.

Antigone's proper ethical activity is confined to the family—it is literally only visible or cogent within its confines. In fact, it is only because her ethical imperative—to bury her dead brother—is incoherent from the point of view of the community, to which Polynices has simply ceased to exist, that this ethical work is not already destined to fall beyond the scope of the family. Thus confined, she is also destined not to be recognized in her ethical individuality except under specific circumstances—that is to say, by her brother. Within the family, most recognition is “natural recognition”—that is to say that Antigone's family members recognize her as a member of a unity of which they are also a part, non-individuated and passive insofar as she has no part in the outer world of ethical recognition. Antigone's husband, if she had one, would be bound to such a natural unity by the sexual desire that is spiritualized in the marital relation. Similarly, the parent and child are bound naturally by the fact that the child has his or her origin in the parents,

which the parental couple have their destiny in the child. The brother and sister, in contrast, have separate destinies in their marital families; they do not have their origin in one another; and their relation, according to Hegel, is free of desire. The brother, then, is uniquely situated—at the border of his marital and natal families—to recognize his sister as an ethical individual. This recognition differs from other instances of ethical recognition in several ways however; it is not at any point inimical; it depends as much on the ethical difference between the two parties as their sameness; and it is inherently and irredemiably unstable.

Brother and sister, Antigone and Polynices, find themselves at both a historical and a personal juncture at which a certain fluidity is still possible; Irigaray contrasts them to the more purely masculine and feminine types, Ismene and Eteocles, who to her represent the future of sexual difference in the polis after the suppression of divine law. Antigone, then, lives at a moment when it is still possible to be recognized as an ethical agent on the basis of feminine activity. She is also, as a young adult and an unmarried woman, one who has not yet adopted the rigid role of a wife and mother (a role which, as I will discuss later, cuts her off from the ethical principle of blood.) Her natural destiny is to become a wife and mother, but in order to do so in accord with the norms of the community, according to Hegel, she will need to accede to a moment of self-conscious activity, for long enough to contract a marriage. Ethicality, activity and individuality have not yet been foreclosed for Antigone, even as Creon hands down his law; the divine and human laws have been divided between male and female, but the appropriation of the divine law to the purposes of the state is not complete, and divine law is still respected independently, even as a possible opponent to the human law. At this fluid moment,

recognition is possible that does not immediately reduce to the logic of the same.

Antigone and Polynices are indeed similar in their passivity, but also share a potential to become active in the world beyond the family. If both were to simultaneously assume this activity, they would be cut off from one another—Polynices because the focus of his ethical life is now the polis and the family that he heads, and Antigone because she is wholly confined to her marital family. Mutuality is impossible in this mode of ethical recognition, as is any stable accession to ethical individuality. Instead, brother and sister are able to recognize each other only insofar as they are able to move fluidly and complementarily between the family—their shared home and the origin of the sister's ethicality—and the active individuality of the world beyond the family.

The sister, of course, will never move freely into the polis as does her brother. However, at this moment of fluidity it is still possible for the brother and sister to *digest* one another—to recognize themselves in the other and sympathetically inhabit the place of the other. This movement requires each party to contain both poles peacefully in a single moment, though—since each pole is always dominant in one and only one party—this cohabitation never entails the loss of difference, either through simple admixture or *aufhebung*. The ethical relation of brother and sister requires a reciprocal trading of places—active and passive, conscious and unconscious, masculine and feminine—more reminiscent of Romantic accounts of love than anything else in Hegel or, indeed, in the Greek world to which he refers (I am thinking especially of Schlegel's *Lucinde*, a text which Hegel in fact condemns). Hegel seems, as Irigaray observes, nostalgic for this harmonious cycle of complementary movement, a cycle which would seem to reflect the harmony and balance of family and polis, divine and human law, posited in Greek life.

Just as Hegel discovers that the harmony of Greek life is already dirempted, Irigaray points out that the harmonious flow of ethical recognition between the brother and the sister is already disrupted and untenable.

The untenability of the recognition of the sister's ethical individuality is, firstly, a historical and personal-historical fact. The ethical position which the sister demarcates as her own, a specifically familial ethic, is already being appropriated by the polis as Antigone confronts Creon. Furthermore, the position of the brother and sister at the cusp of adulthood is untenable; their destiny is to leave the natal family and therefore the scene of sibling recognition. As long as the brother and sister—or in the case of Polynices and Antigone, one of the two—remain within the natal family, there is the possibility for an ethical relation between the two. As both Irigaray and Jagentowicz Mills have pointed out, however, neither the brother nor the sister is destined to remain in the natal family once he or she reaches adulthood. The sister will marry and become an inmate of her husband's house, cut off from her parents and siblings. The brother must mature into a citizen whose ethical interests are in the polis and in the family to which he will become head of household. The relation of brother and sister, then, is possible only in the brief window of adolescence where the siblings are ethically mature but have yet to leave the natal family. Feminine ethicality, then, is confined to the transitional moment of adolescence—a fact which might be metaphorically extended to explain the possibility of this ethical relation at the border of the ancient and modern world.

Death, agency and recognition

Beyond these historical factors, the oscillatory ethical recognition of the brother and sister is limited more radically by death. This limit functions in two ways; first of all, Hegel's dream of harmonious flow between the brother and sister's ethical agency is given lie by the circumstances of the sister's agency—her ethical activity consists in the burial of another ethical individual, her brother. The necessity of the brother's death both places a clear limit on the oscillation of the brother-sister relationship and demonstrates the necessary untenability of a feminine ethicality that is already possible only through the digestion of another. Secondly, Antigone's ability to be recognized as a subject on the part of her community, unlike Polynices', is limited by her own death.

It is notable that Antigone, when she no longer has any prospect of burying her brother, loses that moral passion which had driven her to such extreme and public acts. Her actions were a mere continuation of her brother's agency; once the work of burial is finished, the strength and determination that had driven her—manly attributes, in the Hegelian schema—evaporate. She can only lament that she will never be a wife and a mother (perhaps her despondency rests, in part, on the fact that will never complete the work of enshrining her dead as household gods) or have a proper burial of her own. I will argue that this reflects both the dependency of Antigone's agency on the temporary necessity of digesting and continuing the brother's projects and the impossibility of sustaining a subject position without a family member willing to care for her in death.

Antigone's ethical agency is never permanent or sustainable. Instead, it is produced by a set of circumstances that are *necessarily* unsustainable. Unlike the brother, the sister has only a small opportunity of ethical personhood. The brother enters the ethical world of men as he leaves the natal family and begins to function as a citizen. As

one who obeys laws and enters into contracts, he regularly has the opportunity to act in ways that have ethical significance. For Hegel, ethicality is distinguished by universality and necessity, and the actions of women in the family lack these characteristics in almost all cases. The only ethical activity native to the sister—that is to say, the only universal and necessary act which has its destiny within the family—is the burial of her dead relative, and it is only in the burial of the brother that this act takes its purest form⁹⁹. It is only in accomplishing this act, burying her brother, that the woman's ethical personhood becomes recognizable.

Antigone's ethical subjectivity, and her import for the polis, comes to her only because Polynices has lost the same. In, at least, a small vestige of the sort of harmonious oscillation Hegel dreams of in his account of the ethical relation between the brother and the sister, Antigone momentarily takes on an aspect of the masculine, adopting the brother's ethical agency as a part of herself. By seeing to the deliberate destruction of her brother's body, his reabsorption into the maternal body, Antigone continues and completes her brother's masculine destiny. In doing so, she "digests" the masculine and becomes a political subject. "And if Antigone gives proof of a bravery, a tenderness, and an anger that free her energies and motivate her to resist that *outside* which the city represents for her, this is certainly because she has digested the masculine. At least partially, at least for a moment." (Speculum 220). Antigone's digestion of the masculine allows her to play out a role on the political stage that is nonetheless marked, particularly by its concern for the dead, as belonging particularly to the divine law. This action,

⁹⁹ Relations to other male kin are said to be tainted either by desire (in the case of the husband) or by generation (in the case of the father or son.)

however, is also marked as masculine, for she is unconsciously accomplishing her brother's ends for him.

Of course, as Luce Irigaray points out, Antigone's ethical agency is not merely a reappropriation of male activity. Antigone is able to act publicly and politically *as a woman* because her actions grow out of the divine law and, ultimately, a maternal principle. Her actions are also a rediscovery of the origin, the mother, and of a principle which Luce Irigaray calls *blood*. Blood represents the embodied vitality that underlies the edifice of disembodied knowledge; a "flow" that subverts artificial boundaries between body and Spirit, human and divine, family and state, the living and the dead; and the powerful bond between mother and child and between co-uterine siblings. The divine law which reflects this principle, of course, touches many aspects of life—not only the care of the dead but the family, the state and spiritual life; however, in most instances its workings have been distorted and appropriated to the interests of the patriarchal family and the state. As a result, the ethical activity founded in blood—for instance, care of one's children—has its destiny in the state. This work is assimilated to a family and state which render it invisible and exclude it from the polis. Only in those limited moments where the work of the divine law is not thoroughly appropriated—and Hegel says that the care of the dead is the only such instance—can Antigone realize her political agency and rediscover her relation to the maternal. In those moments where she is reconnected to the maternal, either in burying her brother (the fulfillment of her mother's desire) or when she herself is "returned to the bosom" of mother Earth. Nature, like Antigone's mother, seems to be a resource for her ethical agency. Nonetheless, even for Antigone, situated as she is at the edge of the victory of human law over the divine, her ability to return to

blood is already limited, and this victory ensures what Irigaray describes as an all but irredeemable dispersal of blood.

While Antigone's actions only become possible with the death of Polynices, the realization of her ethical individuality can only come about when her brother recognizes her as an individual like himself. The dead Polynices, then, plays a strange and contradictory role in the development of his sister's individuality. His death, and fall from human subjectivity to indifference, creates the ethical imperative that his sister should restore his individuality and mastery over nature; at the same time, it is his recognition of her ethicality that allows her to fully assume this ethical role. Antigone's agency, then, seems all but impossible, dependent on the recognition of a man who must already be dead (if Antigone had other living brothers, the quandary would be concealed, since her other brothers might have offered her recognition; however, Antigone, the "highest ethical ideal", has already buried her other brothers, Oedipus and Eteocles). The individual whom Antigone recognizes in the presumably reciprocal moment of assuming her ethical individuality is not another living subject but her dead brother, who has fallen into muteness and sightlessness, and whom she recognizes not as a subject like herself but as a universal.

It may seem that the ephemeral character of Antigone's agency is contingent on her specific and extreme situation. While Antigone is the paragon of divine ethicality, she is also a woman whose immediate family happens to have met with extraordinary tragedy. It so happens that all three of Antigone's brothers (Eteocles, Polynices, and Oedipus, who is also her father) are dead, but perhaps a scenario is possible in which a surviving brother would recognize his sister's ethical actions in burying another family

member. While Antigone's family situation is extreme in many ways, from its incestuous intensification of kinship to the degree of tragedy that has decimated her house even before Antigone goes to bury Polynices, it is equally impossible to imagine a sustained system of mutual recognition in a more typical family. This impossibility is due to the fact that the sister never has the benefit of the familial institutions and practices that will sustain her brother's subject position in the face of death.

Antigone Unmourned

The curious and partial state of gendered recognition is only part of the precariousness of Antigone's subject position. Antigone's work in burying her brother is crucial to establishing and maintaining the male subject position; without similar care, Antigone's subject position is ephemeral. Within the logic of the Hegelian schema—which, for Irigaray, is taken as the blueprint of the phallic economy—burial of the dead is necessary in order to transform what is natural (that is, not chosen or deliberate) and accidental (in that the particular circumstances of an individual's death are, in most cases, arbitrary¹⁰⁰) to a human and necessary destiny. Burial ensures that the dead man is not prey to natural forces that would devour him, but is instead deliberately destroyed by the efforts of his kinswoman. Since in burial she is said to “return to the bosom of the earth” the dead man, her funereal activities extend man's mastery over nature past the point of

¹⁰⁰ Arguably, Antigone's own death is the exception to the rule that death is natural and arbitrary. Her suicide, including the specifics of her asphyxiation, is consciously willed. Since her annihilation would seem to be the necessary outcome of the historical clash between divine and human laws, it might be argued that—as a world-historical personage—Antigone's death is not arbitrary but necessary to the movement of Spirit.

his death. The woman who cares for the dead man removes the dangerous trace of death from the community and maintains the dead man's respectable place in the community.

The death of the individual, on the one hand, occasions that the individual falls suddenly and totally out of the community of rational, self-determined agents as a result of this natural accident; indeed, only his family—not members of the community at large—can recognize him as the continued subject of ethical needs and duties. On the other hand, his death leaves a dangerous trace—a corpse that not only threatens contagion, as in the case of Polynices, but also evinces the contingent, inert, animal destiny of each in the community. The dead man is maintained as a rationally determined agent by his family's efforts to protect his body from natural depredations, and preserved as a particular individual in the memorials his family constructs for him. Burial and memorial practices maintain the dead man's place in the community as an individual who exceeds natural determination, as the family members symbolically master death for him—they deliberately destroy his body even as—by consigning him to the “bosom” of the immortal earth—they ensure that he is sustained eternally by “his” mastery of nature. Family genealogy contributes to the permanent sustenance of a subject position in the community by producing a family line which memorializes the dead man's individuality in the form of his name; hence, instead of challenging the order of the community through the contagious strangeness of his inanimate form, the dead man's name and genealogy becomes a permanent part of the community's institutions, while his obscene body is destroyed.

As Antigone makes clear in her lament, she has no family member to bury her, and therefore to sustain her individuality and self-determination in the face of natural

degradation. Antigone's condemnation to an obscene, improper burial must be understood as part of Creon's attempt to re-feminize her subject position by reasserting her as naturally determined and non-individuated. This is only one aspect of Antigone's disenfranchisement within the Hegelian funeral economy, however. Even if Antigone had living family members to ensure her proper burial, the initial burial rites would be only the beginning of the process of memorialization. Her role in the patriarchal family is to reproduce the name and line of her husband. As Irigaray points out in *Speculum*, the paradigm of patriarchal reproduction produces a lineage of individuated males, while there is no place for women's individuation, only a generational cycle in which women successively hold the place of maiden, mother and grandmother. Women are only placeholders in this paradigm, providing a site to reproduce a name and a subjectivity that is never their own. Antigone's very name suggests that she is a placeholder for her mother, and Irigaray points out that her activities seem to be a continuation of her mother's desire (itself a desire founded on the desire for the phallus) rather than her own (Butler, 22). Like Antigone, women have no name and no means of establishing or continuing a family line in their own right. Unless the non-individuated maternal site is unfolded, allowing for individual subject positions to arise among generations and lineages of women, there can be no history of female genealogies and therefore no institutionalized means of intergenerational memorialization for women. Furthermore, hidden and nameless maternal genealogies are denied the material reality of male genealogies, for they do not represent the inheritance of property or social status through the generations.

The vulnerability of Antigone, and women like her, to death as a force of natural and accidental destruction underlies the ultimate unsustainability of her place as an ethical individual in the community. As we see in the figure of Antigone, it is in principle possible for a woman to act on the political scene as an ethical individual and to be recognized as such. However, this position is not sustained by the two pillars of male subjectivity—the stable recognition of a community of like subjects and the guarantee of familial care in death. As such, it can appear only under contingent circumstances (while the movement of the brother into the polis is naturally and socially ordained) and can evaporate at any moment. Antigone’s position in the family, as the mourner rather than the mourned, ensures that her ethical individuality is always temporary and on the edge of collapse.

A Fate Worse than Death

Antigone’s position as un-mournable is underlined by the gendered punishment which Creon devises for her. When Creon forbids the burial of Polynices, he declares that any violators will be executed. Creon clearly assumes that anyone wishing to violate this edict will be a man and a political opponent; after all, Creon consistently and fatally fails to recognize the divine law’s command and insists on interpreting Antigone’s crime on the terms of human law. After he discovers, to his shock and horror, that the violator is a woman, he devises a new and different punishment for her. Antigone, he declares, will be buried alive in a rock chamber with just enough food “to avoid guilt” (Sophocles *ln.* 889).

Antigone's punishment clearly entails her eventual starvation, but it is, in an ethically curious move, not conceived of as an execution.

There are three peculiarities involved in this punishment which I would like to draw out. Firstly, Antigone's punishment is an obscene breach of the divine law. She is condemned to be buried alive in a mockery of the order of the divine law, unable to either live or to be properly buried. The rite of burial which she has honored is parodied as the living woman is walled up in a tomb, in a way that denies rather than fostering her subject position in the polis. In this act, Creon seeks both to reject the divine law and to avoid another resurgence of its power. In the aftermath of this blasphemous act, no ethically pure mourning of Antigone is possible. If her loved ones wished to mourn her, they could hardly do so appropriately; after all, they cannot know whether Antigone is living or dead so long as she remains sealed in her tomb, and any attempt to either rescue her or care for her corpse must (as we will see in the actions of Haemon) irreverently violate the integrity of the tomb. While the people of Thebes overwhelmingly recognize the necessity of seeing to Polynices' unburied corpse—a situation which threatens Creon's authority—it is not clear what sort of physical intervention Antigone requires, and it is doubtful that such an intervention would produce the same groundswell of sympathy as Antigone's has; after all, Antigone had the benefit of burying her brother without the slightest appearance of grave-robbing. Within, at least, the narrow definition of the divine law that persists after its scission from human law, no ethically pure intervention is possible in the death of Antigone, at least on the part of another; a new Antigone cannot emerge to oppose the state on the grounds of Antigone's death.

In an ethically suspect move, Creon insists that his punishment of Antigone is not an execution, though it entails her starvation. Political executions are reserved for political rivals, and death is a category that applies only to those who truly live. Antigone, Creon asserts, is not a real political subject, one who can enter into the public sphere and contravene its code. She is not a full subject in the polis and therefore can neither be condemned to death nor mourned. Creon's declaration implies that Antigone is neither worthy of execution (a move that recognizes the executed as a political rival) nor of mourning (which recognizes that a particular subject has passed out of the community). Her condemnation does not entail guilt for those who condemn her, he declares, suggesting that instead of asserting his particular law against a credible opponent he has merely restored order in an ethically neutral way—returning the divine law to its underground home. Antigone is not recognized as worthy of execution or of the particular guilt that goes along with acting against a true political rival. In enforcing this peculiar punishment on Antigone, instead of a traditional execution, Creon underlines that Antigone's subjectivity itself is being denied, and not merely her life. While the execution of a political opponent implicitly recognizes his credibility as a political subject and his duties as a citizen, Antigone's "marriage to death" rather seeks to remove her from the public sphere of recognizable, mournable political agents.

Antigone's punishment is strongly and explicitly feminized. Her burial chamber is analogized to a bridal chamber by the chorus; Creon declares as she sets out toward her tomb that she is going to be wed to a dead man. Women's proper role, for Hegel, consists in ceding public agency upon contracting a marriage, and Antigone's confinement and silencing is cast as a sort of extreme femininity, analogous to the living death of a matron

confined to her marital home. Creon fears that, if bested by Antigone, he is “no better than a woman”; his punishment of Antigone is as much about recuperating a hard line between male and female activity as about removing Antigone per se. His punishment of Antigone suggests that rather than dying through the state’s intervention, Antigone has merely been removed to her proper sphere, a removal that does not entail mourning or, indeed, any particular political notice. This simultaneously reiterates that women’s proper role in the polis is a passive, silent and confined one, and propagandistically denies that Antigone, or any woman, has been able to challenge the law of the state.

Antigone’s lamentations can be interpreted as a paradoxical attempt to provide for herself a proper burial, even at the expense of owning and declaring her heroic exploits. Women’s lamentations, after all, were a crucial part of the Greek burial rite, one which was both necessary to the care of the corpse and to the reputation of the family (as an elaborate display of mourning was the sign of wealth.) Indeed, these lamentations themselves were at one time recognized as subversive to the organization of the state, as the most ostentatious displays were considered to assert the influence of the individual family over that of the state¹⁰¹. We can read Antigone’s lamentation, then, as a public attempt to reinsert herself into the fabric of the community and to provide for herself some of the rites of burial that Creon has denied her. Of course, in order to provide her own lamentations, Antigone must abandon the position of the courageous and principled actor who goes to her death in the understanding that she has sacrificed her life for something of great ethical worth. Instead, Antigone recasts herself as a pitiful victim, a girl who has not even had the chance to live, let alone win undying fame. Until this moment, Antigone has been in the ultimately unsustainable position of straddling

¹⁰¹ Loraux, 2002, 56; Burkett, 1985, 194

feminine and masculine subject positions, but the impossibility of her position erupts here as she confronts the impossibility of caring for herself as subject. While in mourning herself thus Antigone must cede the position of a hero or a political actor, her lamentations also resist Creon's representation of her punishment as an ethically neutral return to a properly gendered social order. By lamenting that she will never be married or have children, Antigone forces the chorus to recognize that she is not simply going to the marriage chamber as she approaches the grave, but that an ethically significant, mournable tragedy is taking place. A burial is taking place, she insists, not a marriage, and mourning is obligatory—an ethical imperative that, again, she takes steps to fulfill.

Antigone's suicide both reasserts her activity and seeks to make appropriate her punishment. She refuses both the obscene limbo of her buried-alive state and the passive, non-subject position that it defines for her. She is not simply an object to be set aside, a plant that will quietly wither in the absence of light or air. As Mills points out, in killing herself Antigone in fact recuperates what is for Hegel the highest form of freedom (albeit in a move that Hegel refuses to acknowledge!) (Mills, 1976, 77) Choosing one's own death, for Hegel, entails recognizing that one is more than an object to be destroyed through physical action, but rather a subject whose being is not a mere natural or physical determination. To starve or suffocate in her tomb would be to allow chance, and the determinations of her animal being, to ordain her destruction; in choosing her own death Antigone masters nature, fully assuming a human subject position. Furthermore, by choosing to die at once rather than starving or suffocating, Antigone erases the taint of her improper burial and makes herself into a proper subject of mourning. I do not mean for this account to glorify her choice; Antigone is forced to choose between two awful

options: a passivity that accepts her object position and her incipient, terrible death by starvation or thirst, and an action—suicide—that accepts her destruction, but insists that it takes place on the basis of a subject, that she is an individual with a will and a choice. For men in the polis, mastery of death is accomplished through lifelong political activity and, after death, the intervention of the family; only for Antigone, condemned to an extreme punishment and without family, does suicide present itself as sole the means of asserting her subjectivity.

Perhaps Creon is correct in arguing that he is merely returning a funereal divine law to its underground home. Just as the divine law has retreated to the funeral realm, Antigone has no choice but to kill herself in order to maintain any shred of agency. The particularly funereal orientation of the divine law means that subjectivizing care is not offered to an unruly subject such as Antigone while she is alive, or to others who might become such a subject; the divine law recognizes no practices that sustain or create subjects who can oppose the human law. As such, the result of an irruption of the divine law in opposition of the state produces only temporary, ill-fated subjects, who will inevitably fade back into darkness along with their ethical imperative. This slide back into darkness is, no doubt, often abetted by the violent opposition of the state. However, it should be noted that such an argument is cogent only in the aftermath of a historical truncation of the divine law, one effected by the appropriation of most caring labor to the explicit service of the state. In the final section of this piece, I will consider the possibility for an expanded conception of the divine law and its political effects.

While Antigone's situation is in many ways extraordinary, it should be noted that her predicament is in many ways similar to that of many female figures in Greek tragedy

and elsewhere (recall Beauvoir's women of Vaucelles.) Nicole Loraux has observed that obscenely disrupted burials are a common fate for women in Greek tragedy (2002, 58-59). In addition to violating the norms of proper burial, these women are often denied threnody (the musical expression of sorrow appropriate to burial) or forced to provide their own; threnody is both a necessary part of a proper burial and of memorialization, as threnody is a form of immortality (Loraux 2002, 56-57). When we understand threnody as a practice of memorialization as opposed to burial per se, its fraught relation to the state is more easily understood; frequent attempts to regulate and discourage women's mournful wailing were made by the Greek state, since threnody served, as an unruly expression of familial allegiance and power (always in tension, as Hegel argues, with allegiance to the state) which escaped the state's desire to distinguish glorious and inglorious, recognized and unrecognized deaths.

Furthermore, as Loraux argues, the sight of the deaths of women, and particularly of maidens, are taboo on the Athenian stage; while such deaths are common, they always take place off-stage and are reported by second character. Indeed, the very fact that Antigone's death becomes visible after the fact, when she is disinterred by Haemon, is exceptional. The death of a maiden, then, while common, is also invisible, and even when she dies by her own hand, it is not hers to speak or to demonstrate. The tragedian, like Creon, consistently denies the audience the ability to witness the maiden's death, reiterating this death as a private matter, not a public matter of spectacle like the death and burial of a citizen. Not only unseen but unspeakable, this death falls in a strangely inchoate place, a "dark continent" to borrow Freud's phrase; for, as Loraux points out, "within the imaginary world of tragedy... when young girls die, or... when wives die,

there are no words available to denote the glory of a woman that do not belong to the language of male renown.” (1987, 48) Lacking a proper language for female glory, even when women’s deaths are memorialized, as in Greek tragedy, this is an “ambiguous glory”, “twisted” in the sense that it can be glorious only insofar as it is inherently unfeminine (Loraux, 1987, 28-29). This is reiterated, of course, in the difference between the male mode of death in tragedy—by the sword—and the female mode, by strangulation, an act that, as Irigaray points out, cuts off the breath and voice (Loraux, 1987, 8; Irigaray, SOOW 219). There is no language and no rite in Greek tragedy to memorialize a woman when the possibility of women’s glory was dismissed a priori; “the glory of a woman was to have no glory.”(Loraux, 1987, 2).

Creon is correct, I hold, in asserting that Antigone’s death is not an execution. In fact, his intent in devising her punishment is that Antigone should suffer a fate worse than death and, indeed, a fate that can not be simply understood as a death. Instead, the punishment which he devises for Antigone is one that cannot be represented simply as a death, and certainly not as the execution of a political rival. Antigone’s living entombment is deliberately and fundamentally ambiguous; from outside of the tomb, within the political realm and for Antigone’s family (such as she has left), it will never be certain whether Antigone is in fact dead. While her punishment necessitates her death, there is no moment at which the people of Thebes can be certain that she is dead; instead, she appears only to be permanently removed from the polis. While she has clearly been denied a proper and honored burial, her obscene entombment is ambiguous enough that no clear or ethically pure imperative develops from the perspective of the divine law. As a result, Antigone is necessarily denied recognition both as a political agent and as a

citizen. Her live burial is designed instead to assert that her role in the polis, as a woman, is a kind of living death, one that erases any possibility of subjectivity. This lack of subjectivity is underlined by the denial of the sort of proper burial that cements and recuperates subjectivity on the face of death. Antigone's punishment, then, is much more than a simple execution, which takes the life of an unruly citizen. Creon's denial of her subjectivity is not limited and conditioned, as in the case of the executed criminal; instead, it is an absolute denial, that asserts that Antigone is not and has never been the sort of full participant in the polis who is worthy of recognition under the law (whether as a docile or unruly subject). While Antigone makes attempts—through her laments and her suicide—to reinscribe herself into the community of the dead, this activity falters in that it is incompatible with her heroic subject position and, of course, with her survival. Antigone's exclusion from the community of mournable subjects is more radical than an execution—it declares performatively that she is not and never has been a subject or a member of the community.

DISINTERRING THE DIVINE LAW: ON SUSTAINING REVOLUTIONARY FEMINIST SUBJECTIVITY

I. Solidarity, Feminist Activism and the Divine Law

II. Recovering Maternal Genealogy

A. Women and the Care of Death

B. Irigaray and the Significance of Blood

C. The Return to Blood

An account of Antigone's faltering, and of the entrenched, sexed economy of subjectivizing work in which she toils, necessarily leads to a cautionary account of the possibility of feminist political agency. The prominence of death in this project no doubt casts a slightly morbid pall over my conclusions. While my reading of Antigone produces an ambivalent and complex account of the potential for feminist political intervention, I take it that this reading yields promising and hopeful directions for feminist politics. Thinking through the significance of the care of death from a feminist perspective can contribute to recent feminist and queer investigations into the political uses of mourning¹⁰² and contribute to both political and personal attempts to sustain and enact feminist political subjectivity. Both the failures and the hopeful aspects of Antigone can, as read through Hegel, Irigaray and through my own project, indicate potential directions for feminist activism.

¹⁰² See Butler, 2004, as well as Vasey, Wagner and Stuart.

The reader will note that in this section I accept the Hegelian formulation that the care of death is a necessary precondition of subjectivity; as we have seen, this claim is founded on an account of subjectivity that is based in Hegel's account of the social world as necessarily competitive and warlike, and hence figured by constant threat. This account also privileges the mastery of nature as characteristic of political subjectivity. The subjectivity that is sustained and enabled through the divine law, one might argue, is already inherently masculinist, and sustaining it has at best limited and provisional use for feminist work. One might, in fact, argue that by acceding to Hegel's logic of subjectivization and mortality, I have already granted too much to the phallic logic of Hegel's system, and particularly to his warlike and troubling focus on death as the heart of subjectivity, thus dooming my work to the level of superficial revision that cannot accomplish the necessary radical retheorizing. I reject this on three bases.

Firstly, while the morbid fixation on death at the centre of Hegel's account of subjectivity is apt to critique, it nonetheless reflects the truth of becoming a political subject in our context. Indeed, no technology of subjectivization exists at the moment which can wholly sidestep the masculinist logic of subjectivity in our context. This reflects both the hegemonic aspect of western masculinist discourse and the truth of political action in our communities, where violence, danger and death are potential consequences of resistance, and where the politics of mourning are a potent strategy. Addressing death and mourning are, in this context, a necessary strategy; the key issue for feminist actors, I will argue, will be to exceed a Hegelian fixation on death in order to see the exigency of sustaining political subjectivity as a wider and deeper obligation than one simply requiring the care of the dead.

Secondly, I hold that the “divine law” as the care for vulnerable kin, including dead kin, does indeed reflect a truth that is not solely limited to the gendered strictures of Hegel’s system. Irigaray considers the divine law to be founded on a principle of blood that preceded and underlies Hegel’s system; care theorists universalize such care as the most fundamental human need; even theorists deeply resistant to universals and origins, such as Butler, take human vulnerability, and indeed the threat of death and the phenomenon of mourning, to be a characteristic (albeit one too varied to constitute a universal) which is ripe to be operationalized politically; vulnerability and mourning are the grounds, she argues, for political solidarities and disruptive performances that threaten the very boundaries of the social that abject “bodies” such as Polynices (2004). While the necessity of caring for kin such as the dead Polynices is clearly conditioned by the law of the state in my particular example (and indeed, it is a deeply warlike state), it is also a point of agreement that appropriating or refiguring the conventions of care and mourning around such vulnerable or abject bodies can destabilize and challenge dominant ideologies, economies and social boundaries.

Finally, I recognize that *asujetissement* will be a condition for much, though not all, political action. Firstly, it is important to note that a radical refusal of subjectivity results in an abjection which is profoundly dangerous, unstable, and vulnerable. While specific forms of resistance are possible for the abjected (I am thinking of the crematory terrorism of ACT UP, for example, and the loss of physical control Ladelle MacWhorter describes in a young man subject to “total domination” in a mental hospital (1999, p. 146)), these radical denials of subjectivity are hardly starting points for a politics of survival, let alone of life. Subjectivizing structures like care, including the care of the

dead (however mediated by Hegel's warlike logic of death), figure as crucial underpinning for many forms of resistance. While it may be possible in some cases to inhabit normative structures (for example gender) in such ironic and destabilizing ways that these structures both fail to precisely create a gendered subject and lose some of their claim to structure our social life in general, these strategies are only a portion of the potential field of political action and, indeed, are very difficult to sustain. I have in mind both Butler's and MacWhorter's resistance to and ultimate assent to the logic of "sexual identities" and "sex-desire" (Butler, 1997; McWhorter, 1999) In each case, the author at first refuses the reified and limited subject position proffered. When this proves impossible—the subject position of "lesbian" is inescapable—each finds that this obligatory subject position offers possibilities for resistance and renegotiation rather than merely foreclosing them. Similarly, women engaged in what Nancy Naples calls "activist mothering" reclaim a maternal position and caring practice traditionally laden with oppressive norms to transformative ends. It is my hope (and one that I draw from care theory in general) that the subject positions of mortality and vulnerability, caregiving and receiving care, however overdetermined by oppressive social norms and militarism, are also key sites of resistance and renegotiation.

As one attempt to pursue the promise of such unexpected and disruptive use of the care of the dead, I will consider below Irigaray's attempt to rediscover what she considers to be the lost or buried potential of "divine law" to exceed and disrupt the masculinity logic of political subjectivity.

Solidarity, Feminist Activism and the Divine Law

Antigone cannot accept the role of the hero and political agent, at least in part, because she lacks the familial structure that allows men such as Polynices to be counted as significant figures even after their death. This is not only because all of Antigone's family members are dead or disowned, but also because the care of the dead is strongly gendered as work that women do in order to preserve the public agency of their men. According to Hegel, it is only the funeral rites performed by women such as Antigone that ensures that men's rational and necessary subjectivity does not collapse into meaningless accidents at the moment of death. Antigone must suspect that, with no one to bury her properly or enshrine her memory as a household deity, her hard-won subject position as a public agent will evaporate. In fact, with her last male relative buried and the ethical work that had so motivated her done, it seems that Antigone's resolve is already fading.

If we understand Antigone's despondency as symptomatic of her concern over what will be an inadequate and obscene burial, this can help us make sense of Antigone's coldness toward the two characters who care for her most deeply: Ismene, her loving sister, and Haemon, her loyal fiancé. On the one hand, when Antigone claims that she has no family left to mourn her, she seems to dismiss unjustly two who have shown extraordinary concern for her, her sister and her fiancé (who is also her cousin). On the other hand, this claim seems to accurately represent the fact that, for all their loving concern, neither Ismene nor Haemon can provide for Antigone that crucial good that she has provided to Polynices: a proper burial. Furthermore, in Antigone's rejection of Haemon and Ismene, we can read a statement of the inadequacy of two strategies for

resistance: Ismene's call for self-destructive solidarity between women and Haemon's purely masculine attempt to remedy Creon's wrong against the divine law with recourse to reason, human law and force.

There is no mistaking Antigone's contempt for and dismissal of Ismene, a figure whose apparent complacency and cowardice are balanced by an intense, selfless love of her sister. We can also recognize, however, in Antigone's rejection of Ismene, a refusal to accept that solidarity among women should consist in sharing a bitter fate. Ismene's offer, however loving, consists only in the masochistic multiplication of suffering; no Eve, Antigone rejects the reasoning that every woman should be punished for her crime. The flaw of Ismene's offer can be understood in two ways: firstly, by offering to share Antigone's fate as if she had shared her crime—despite the fact that Antigone has acted ethically, and she has not—Ismene threatens the ethical individuality that Antigone has achieved through her action, pulling Antigone back into an undifferentiated, passive, ethically homogeneous femininity in which ethically considerable action by the individual is impossible. Secondly, and of a piece with Ismene's denial of Antigone's individuality, Ismene has already established herself, in her refusal to bury Polynices, as unwilling to ensure proper burial and mourning for Antigone and unwilling to continue Antigone's project of resistance. As we see in Antigone's moment of despondency, her great regret as she goes to her death is that she has no family to mourn her, a process which I argue would sustain her subjectivity and her place in the community. Ismene is both masochistic and paralyzed in the face of Creon's power: she is willing to die, despite her inaction in burying Polynices, but not to act to bury her sister. As such, she is clearly unable to provide her sister with the one thing that Antigone needs in order to solidify her

individuality, a proper burial. Without excusing Antigone's callousness toward her sister, we can perhaps find in this scene an indication of a more positive expression of solidarity and sisterly love: better to respect the principle of blood, to care for Antigone in death, to remember her and to carry on her struggle, than to suffer and die with her.

Haemon also proves unable to give Antigone a proper burial; instead he tries to save her, in the process forcing his way into her crypt and violating the integrity of her burial chamber. When he finds that Antigone has already hanged herself, he does not pause to care for her corpse—which, under the divine law, presents an urgent ethical obligation, a pressing need—but rather, motivated by anger, vengefulness, and ultimate despair, he tries to kill his father and then takes his own life. Haemon, of course, has an understanding of the divine law second only to Antigone's, and argues articulately to defend its claim against the human law; it seems unfair to dismiss him as ignorant or unwilling in this regard. Despite what seems to be total disregard on the part of Antigone, Haemon tries valiantly—first through the exercise of reason, then force—to save her and the city of Thebes. It seems likely that Thebes would be better off with such a fair-minded and deliberate ruler in the place of stubborn, harsh Creon and his reverse image, the fey and fiery Antigone. It is as difficult to find him ethically wanting for trying to save Antigone as it is to rebuke Ismene for trying to die with her. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that, as befits his masculinity (albeit a less extreme masculinity than Creon's), Haemon does not act to give Antigone a proper burial. In fact, his actions, however well-meaning, serve to further pervert her already improper burial; Haemon violates Antigone's burial chamber and exposes her corpse to the elements. While this final act is an irreproachable example of manly heroism (even down to its overtone of sexual force),

it cannot fulfill Antigone's need for care in death, and in fact works against the fulfillment of this need. Hence we might understand Antigone's rejection of Haemon, however unfeeling¹⁰³, as an acknowledgement that, at least as long as he maintains his masculine role, he cannot provide the burial that she needs.

Elsewhere, I have argued for women's need to return to what Irigaray terms the principle of blood, and offered thoughts on how to do so in the context of the family¹⁰⁴. Here, I will instead offer a few remarks on the potential for fruitful gestures of solidarity at the political level. While Antigone's treatment of Ismene and Haemon is, at best, an ambiguous model from which to draw lessons on the ethics of resistance, reflecting on Antigone's unfulfilled desires and motivations may lead to insight. Tina Chanter explains that Antigone's rejection of Ismene can be seen as a hopeful gesture toward a better future: by quashing Ismene's self-destructive urges, she invites Ismene to discover in her death a better way to live, perhaps by recourse to the divine law¹⁰⁵. I would argue that, in maintaining and reasserting the principle of blood and the divine law, Antigone provides Ismene with a possible means by which to escape the masochistic tendencies that are at play in her own demise, even as she indicates the powerful principle of blood, which can serve as a means to continued, active resistance to the arbitrary law of the state.

If we risk reading further into Antigone's rejection of Haemon and Ismene, we can find in her stance a statement of the importance of care in resistance. The great

¹⁰³ Some readers claim for Antigone a certain sympathy or feeling for Haemon in ascribing to her line 654 ("Dearest Haemon, how your father wrongs you.") There is considerable evidence, however, that this line is traditionally Ismene's. See Wyckoff, 1954.

¹⁰⁴ "Disinterring the Divine Law" in *Irigaray Teaching*.ed. Irigaray and Mary Green. Continuum, 2008.

¹⁰⁵ "Antigone's Exemplarity: Irigaray, Hegel and Excluded Grounds as Constitutive of Feminist Theory" in *Thinking With Irigaray*, ed. Mary C. Rawlinson, Sabrina L. Hom and Serene Khader. SUNY Press, forthcoming.

failure of both Haemon and Ismene is that neither will give Antigone the care that she needs in death; Haemon is too dedicated to masculine activity, and Ismene to feminine passivity, to act to ensure Antigone's proper burial. While both are motivated by their love for Antigone, in each case this love takes the form of self-destruction rather than caring for her and sustaining their relationship, even in death. As such, perhaps Antigone is right to decry Ismene's love as consisting in words, not actions; her love will not lead to the ultimate loving act of burying her dead sister, reconciling her body to the earth, the community and the family. Of course, if care is fundamentally a matter of sustaining subjectivity, then Antigone fails as thoroughly as does Ismene; Antigone's harsh rejection and demanding stance can hardly be said to foster political activity and ethical agency in Ismene. Perhaps the ultimate failure of Haemon and Ismene—shared, no doubt, by Antigone—is a failure to act lovingly toward one another, to offer the care that fosters and sustains subjectivity in the living as much as the dead.

Irigaray has argued that the divine law celebrated by Hegel is already “raped”, distorted and truncated by its arbitrary confinement to caring for the dead; prior to this unequal division, the human and divine were a unity (TTD 11). Firstly, the divine law is truncated, as a result of the assimilation of familial work to the interests of the state, to exclude almost all of the work of sustaining subjectivity within the family; the care of children, for instance, is denied any intrinsic ethical worth, and is instead valued secondhand, as the production of citizens to the benefit of the state. All that remains of the divine law is that which cannot be easily reconciled with the ends of the state—the care of family members who, like the dead, will never return to the state. Secondly, the divine law is improperly excluded from the administration of the city. Here, Irigaray implies that

the divine law ought to extend into the realm which Hegel sets aside for human law. Like Haemon, she argues that the principles of divine law can be reconciled with the laws of the city in a way that is not fatal, but rather prevents suffering and sickness (the festering imbalance or ethical impurity represented by disease in Sophocles.) Here we have a vision in which the interests of the state and the family need not be taken as inimical to each other (as they are in Hegel, a situation which necessitates the regular practice of war.) Finally, the division and distortion of divine and human law reflects, in part, the gendered division of laws, which determines that the caring work of sustaining subjectivity is performed by women in the care of their husbands and their husband's families (particularly children and parents). This division elides many possible permutations of caring work, including the care of the dead—for instance, the possibility that Haemon should care for Antigone's corpse in death.

While much of the divine law has already, according to Irigaray, been appropriated by the human law, a re-appropriation of the divine law in its fullness promises an expanded field of ethical potential within the family. Reimagining a broadened divine law might restore much of the subjectizing care in the family to its status as an autonomous practice not appropriated to the ends of the state; expand the definition of such care to include, for instance, forbidden modes such as the care of women by their sisters and by men; and, perhaps, expand the understanding of what sort of group might offer the conditions for care in the mode of the divine law (as it seems that radical kinship structures, such as the queer "families" of HIV-positive gay men and their caretakers, might occasion a similar ethical relationship). This expansion would have a dual effect: firstly, by expanding the compass of the divine law to include more

activities and, perhaps, more “families”, the occasions for the genesis of radical subjectivity like Antigone’s are multiplied. Secondly, broadening the divine law in a way that would oblige Antigone, Haemon and Ismene to care for one another would provide the conditions for a subject position such as Antigone’s to be sustained. Unfortunately for this ill-fated trio, the divine law is only partially rediscovered, in a form that is already condemned to faltering and death by its allegiance to a patriarchal logic of the family—that is, one in which all possible forms of care are destined outside of the natal family, and care is always gendered as work by women for men.

The failures of Ismene, Haemon and Antigone should be interpreted as a result of the truncation and gendering of the divine law, which has been defined as work for women only, excluding Haemon, and limited to the care of the dead (where it seems that the work of sustaining living subjectivity is widespread, though generally assimilated to the needs of the state). The distortion and delimiting of the divine law leaves even such ethically cognizant figures as Haemon and Antigone indifferent to the imperative for Haemon to care for the dead Antigone, or for Antigone to care for her living sister. Hence the story of Antigone ends with the collapse of a family and of a city, brought about, in the one case, by sisters’ mutual rejection, and in the other, by the ultimate accession of Haemon and the townspeople to the violent logic of state rule. Should these figures have cared for each other as Antigone does her dead brother, it is possible to imagine that radical subjectivity like Antigone’s might have a more sustained and less catastrophic encounter with the law of the state.

Recovering Maternal Genealogy

Women and the Care of Death

After the victory of human over divine law, women's work in the service of divine law is alienated labor: its product is enjoyed by a woman's kinsmen and their fellow citizens, but not by women themselves. The work of caring for the dead does not directly benefit women, since they do not have public agency to preserve, and do not participate in the community beyond the family.

The care of death is performed by women at great cost; this cost is clear in a figure such as Antigone, who sacrifices her life to her funereal duties, but is no less present in any number of women who sacrifice their blood relations to their natal families and their children in order to build the memorial to their husbands' names. While women bear the costs of the care of death, they are systematically denied the crucial goods that accompany the receipt of such care. In a public realm that is obsessed with death, murder and war, those who lack care of death suffer and fall behind. Where the entry points to subjectivity and citizenship are points at which death must be risked, passage through these points is, at best, a difficult and agonizing possibility for those who do not have familial guarantees of memorialization. Without sustaining care, women's subject positions in the public realm are a precarious achievement. According to Hegel, it is only the funeral rites performed by women such as Antigone that ensure that men's rational and necessary subjectivity does not collapse into meaningless accidents at the moment of death; Antigone must suspect that, with no one to bury her properly or enshrine her memory as a household deity, her hard-won subject position as a public agent will evaporate. In fact, after Antigone has accomplished her ethical duty and before her heartening return to the earth, her resolve falters, and she laments her imminent death—

not only because she will lose her life but because she will lack mourners (*Antigone*, line 843ff).

Even if Antigone had living family members to ensure her proper burial and mourning, these initial burial rites would be only the beginning of the process of memorialization. As a woman, whose genealogy is nameless and hidden, she will not be instituted as a household god or the progenitor of a lineage. The suppression of female genealogy is of a piece with the denial of female individuation. As Irigaray points out in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, the paradigm of patriarchal reproduction produces a lineage of individuated males, while there is no place for women's individuation, only a generational cycle in which women successively hold the place of maiden, mother and grandmother. Women are only placeholders in this paradigm, providing a site in which to reproduce a name and a subjectivity that is never their own.

Unless the non-individuated maternal site is unfolded, allowing for individual subject positions to arise among generations and lineages of women, there can be no history of female ancestry and therefore no institutionalized means of intergenerational memorialization for women. Hidden and nameless maternal genealogies are denied the material reality of male genealogies, for they do not represent the inheritance of property or social status through the generations. The funeral economy perpetuates the appropriation and covering-over of women's ancestry in its emphasis on the male family line.

By perpetuating the memories of men in the form of their namesake sons, women work to build a necropolis of patriarchal "houses" over the ruins of matriarchal descent. This is not only an appropriation of women's labor and a denial of a basic good to

women, but a strategy to repress a potential site of resistance to human law. The appropriation of the divine law of caring for the dead by the male economy of war is completed, Irigaray observes, when the women of Hegel's community come to mourn the loved sons they have sacrificed to the city's good at war, in memorials that are as much a part of the fabric of the state as of the family.

Lacking a name or their own in the memorial logic of the polis, women are impoverished in their very ability to speak and the represent themselves. The undying family name, which marks the individual who possesses it as an enduring subject, marks the possessor as one worthy of entering into the community of mutual recognition, as one who can bear and return the gaze of the other, and who will not threaten the integrity of the community by reverting wholly to nature. Women, who are merely bearers, not possessors, of the name, lack the signifier of subjectivity. Where women lack the ability to recognize and be recognized, they are unable to represent themselves—either as human or as divine, alone or as part of a couple.

In *I Love to You*, Irigaray explains that the lack of a proper name and corresponding subject position disadvantages women linguistically, denying women the ability to take up the position as subject of their own utterances. Irigaray's research demonstrates that women rarely appear as the subject of their own speech or that of men. The patriarchal logic of name, memory, and memorial work ensures that the subject "I" is always already gendered as masculine, with the feminine as an auxiliary to this subjectivity. In this symbolic field, it is impossible to speak as a woman, which hinders women's ability to represent themselves as subjects while reinforcing a logic of the same in the realm of discourse. This linguistic impoverishment impedes communication

between men and women, who, Irigaray argues, essentially speak different languages; even more so, it impoverishes the language that might bond women together at the human and spiritual levels. Irigaray observes in her research that mothers are particularly lacking in the language to discourse with their daughters (ILTY 74). The impossibility of speaking as a woman means, in part, that bond between mother and daughter remains unspeakable and unconscious, and is deprived of its cultural and spiritual significance.

Without the ability to represent herself and her mother as two subjects, intimately intertwined and yet of two different generations, the little girl cannot represent the relationship between herself and her mother, and lacks the capacity for “rehearsal, repetition, re-presentation of her relationship to beginnings and to reproduction” (SOOW 77). When the little girl can represent herself and her mother as women, Irigaray imagines a healthy, “ludic” relationship between mother and daughter—one in which the daughter plays out, with her baby doll, the role of her mother, depicting the mother as desiring the girl child. In this ludic relationship, the child’s “play with representations of the self” allows both an identification with the mother and a means to imagine a life for herself that is different from her mother’s. Deprived of maternal ancestry, then, a woman is cut off from those matrilineal relationships that most threaten patriarchy and denied a potentially revolutionary perspective from which to reimagine her own relationship to maternity.

Irigaray challenges us to step outside of the Hegelian logic of death, in which women are denied goods specific to the phallic economy, such as specular subject-recognition and the mastery of death. Within such a framework, it seems that women’s great concern is exclusion from the life of the state and of Spirit. While Irigaray would

agree that the integration of women into the public life of the state, and particularly into civil society, is imperative, she also points to the disruptive principle of *blood* immanent in the care of the dead. Blood could inaugurate a revolution that reconfigures the logic of the family and polis, and reintegrates these into the divine. This insight led me to adjust my larger project—an investigation of the effects of the Hegelian funeral economy on women—in a more positive direction, in order to acknowledge the potential of blood not to allow women to better integrate into the paradigm of Hegelian subjectivity, but to disrupt the funeral logic of the state. The final sections of the chapter explore the principle of blood and offer examples of practices that can help in the personal rediscovery of blood.

Irigaray and the Significance of Blood

For Antigone, the principle of blood is already affected by the oedipal logic of patriarchy, and that Antigone suffers and dies as a result of the phallic appropriation of death. However, to read *Antigone* with such a focus is to miss the powerful feeling that motivated Antigone, even unto her suicide. While the maternal blood that motivates Antigone is necessarily marked by the patriarchal logic of the ancient Greek family, it nonetheless provides a powerful current of resistance against human law and indicates a disruptive reality that cannot be represented within the Hegelian world of appearance. Antigone's self-asphyxiation at once epitomizes Creon's stifling oppression of the feminine and represents a striking act of self-determination; it is worth noting that she takes her own life in a way that does not shed her blood and respects the divine law—that the living should be above ground, the dead buried—that Creon transgresses. Far from

being forgotten, Antigone is still remembered—perhaps by those tapping into a subterranean current of blood—particularly by women concerned with resistance. Antigone is a riveting figure because she reveals both the cruel and thorough nature of the triumph of human law and the possibility for both peoples and individual women to rediscover the power of blood.

Antigone's action in service of the divine law indicates an enduring bond between daughter and mother, a powerful axis that threatens the patriarchal order. As Irigaray points out, in caring for her brother, Antigone is reconnected with her mother and in fact carries out her mother's desire. Of course, insofar as the mother's desire is not simply for a child but for a son, the divine law is already appropriated to the oedipal logic of the patriarchal family. To the extent that Antigone assumes and carries out her mother's desire, her tribute to the feminine principle of blood would seem to slip into that patriarchal logic that refuses to individuate mother and daughter, treating them rather as moments in the execution of a maternal function—a maternal function reduced to the desire for and reproduction of the phallus. Hence, in "The Eternal Irony of the Community", Irigaray does not share Hegel's nostalgia for the alleged harmonious coexistence of the brother and sister, human and divine laws prior to their tragic, final conflict: she points out that the moment for which Hegel longs is already preceded by a "rape", the distortion and appropriation of the divine law (a distortion that begins, as Irigaray argues, with its separation from and opposition to human law). However, Irigaray argues that the divine law carries the vestige of a moment prior to this appropriation, which she describes as red blood.

Irigaray correlates the divine law to “blood”, the fluid, vital, and natural (yet also intrinsically human) principle that is repressed in the development of Spirit. Blood represents the matriarchal principle that connects the mother to the child. In the womb, the blood is a medium of exchange between the mother and fetus; it represents the enduring link between mother and child, and between co-uterine siblings; in the adult woman, menstrual blood marks a fecundity that indicates her special sexed relation to nature and to the creation and sustenance of life. Like death itself, blood is repressed and obscene, a sign of gore and violence, within the logic of the phallic economy; however, it retains an original aspect of vitality and nourishment.

Blood provides the fundamental and evident links of familiarity (particularly, that between mother and child, and co-uterine siblings) which cannot be fully assimilated to patriarchy. Antigone’s claim that she would not sacrifice herself, as she has for her brother, to bury a husband or child, indicates a co-uterine bond that exceeds any allegiance she might have to her husband and his children¹⁰⁶. Even after these links have been buried or appropriated to the logic of the patriarchal family and city, they retain their own special ethical significance, one which is independent of human law, and they maintain special and, to the city, largely invisible bonds which are impossible within phallic logics: special and loving relations between mother and daughter, living and dead.

¹⁰⁶While it is difficult, under the rubric of blood, to understand Antigone’s declaration (at Sophocles *In.* 1020) that she would not act thus to bury her husband or, particularly, her child—indeed, this passage is considered problematic in most readings—this statement can perhaps be understood as a defense of the hidden principle of maternal blood over against the colonizing principle of patriarchal descent. Antigone’s matrilineage is distinguished by its irreproducibility, as maternal lines of descent and relation are actively suppressed and cut off. Antigone’s matrilineal relations will be erased by marriage, to be replaced by a family—husband, children, and in-laws—defined by norms of marriage and paternity rather than blood. Within this logic, Antigone’s relation to her own children will reproduce the paternal grandparents’ line, but cannot reinscribe or re-present her relation to her mother as does her relation to Polyneices, her mother’s son. I suggest that this claim of Antigone’s is best understood as a defiance of the logic of patriarchal definitions of family, which instantiates kinship by means of law rather than blood, which is nonetheless founded in this logic; Antigone values her brother above all other because he is the only apparent link to her mother.

The principle of blood is instantiated in the divine relation between Demeter and Kore. When Irigaray speaks of the loss of female ancestry, she often refers also to the fall of the mystery rites that worshiped these goddesses—since the obscuring of female ancestry correlates to the obscuring of female spirituality (TD 100). Demeter represents the fecundity of the Earth, while her daughter represents virginity—a concept that Irigaray has widened and re-read as a principle of women’s self-determination and integrity, both physical and spiritual. Together, they also evince a historical representation of the spiritual significance and sanctity of matriarchal lines of descent, of the desire of the mother for a daughter and of the daughter for the mother *quia* woman; such representations are rarely visible, Irigaray points out, in our time. The loss of figures such as Demeter and Kore is not only a loss of female divinity but of female ancestry, language, and self-representation:

we women, sexed according to our gender, lack a God to share, a word to share and to become. Defined as the often dark, even occult mother-substance of the word of men, we are in need of our *subject*, our *substantive*, our *word*, our *predicates*: our elementary sentence, our basic rhythm, our morphological identity, our generic incarnation, our genealogy (SG 71).

The rebellious principle of blood is perhaps best shown in the special love that bonds Demeter and Kore, for this is a love that resists those economic norms that traffic in women; it transgresses the boundaries between the worlds of the living and of the dead; and it values virginity and fecundity against the gods’ practice of rape and war. The mother and daughter have no interest in the power struggles between the male gods, Zeus and Hades, and concern themselves instead with growth and, particularly, with the human cultivation of nature (hence, Demeter and Kore represent also a bridge between the

natural, the human and the divine.) When Zeus and Hades conspire in the rape of the daughter and the destruction of the mother-daughter pair, Demeter resists this trade between father and husband and acts to preserve the virginity of her daughter. While the sharp and adversarial distinction between Zeus' and Hades' realms (of the living and the dead) is fundamental to the logic of kingdoms, the blood tie between Demeter and Kore is indifferent to such a distinction. Blood is, in the case of Demeter and Kore, the sign of the power of female genealogy; the site of women's representations of themselves as divine; and a means for the spiritualization of virginity, fecundity, and even of death.

As the mark of fecundity and vitalism, blood is a point of resistance to the logic of death and war imposed by the victory of human law. It may seem strange to correlate the divine law, now exclusively concerned with the care of the dead, with the respect and preservation of life. Unlike the warfare and struggle that characterizes public life, however, which is concerned with ending the life of another and mastering one's own death, the work of caring for the dead is fundamentally concerned with sustenance and continuation. The burial of the dead—which, as Hegel puts it, comprises the return of the dead man to the nourishing bosom of the Earth—is a gesture of quasi-maternal care. As we see in the example of Demeter's love for Kore—undiminished when the daughter goes to the underworld—in the logic of blood, death is neither radical nor terminal, and does not disrupt the fabric of care and connection represented by blood. The sister's care of the dead brother represents not only his reintegration into the fabric of a community (a community which, in the case of Polynices, has effected his death through its logic of fraternal competition) but also his reintegration into the loving couple of the sister and brother, mother and son; therefore burial reasserts not only the logic of the polis but the

bonds of love. These acts of sustenance and love, deeply intertwined with the work of giving and sustaining life, are hardly a concession to the phallic logic of death; rather, they effect the return of death to life.

After the triumph of human law, blood has been dispersed, and women's preference for younger, less authoritarian men is ruthlessly crushed through mobilizing these young men for war (SOOW 226). The work of memorializing the dead, so dangerous to the state in the moment of Antigone's confrontation with Creon, is appropriated in the interest of memorializing young men's sacrifice of their lives to the state. What remains, in Irigaray's famous turn of phrase, is woman as "the eternal irony of the community", a disruptive and unexpected surprise. Irigaray's early work in analyzing the history of philosophy is founded on the ironic scene of a female reader observing contradictory currents in men's writing of which they, the writing subjects, are unaware. These ironic currents, hidden to the subject of philosophy, include omissions and contradictions that often point to weaknesses in the philosopher's logic or reveal an alternative to his certainties.

At least one disruptive irony would seem to persist in the phallic economy of death, one that indicates the possibility of reappropriating the divine law from the Hegelian schema of death and mastery. While it is in the interest of Spirit that the natural accident of a man's death should be recast as chosen and mastered, women's work in caring for the dead is not actually concerned with mastery, but rather with the shadowy work of reconciling the masculine community's need to for mastery with the exigencies of nature. As such, the care of the dead represents an intriguing middle point between natural determination and rational self-determination, one that resists the binary logic of

animal/human, life/death, and reason/nature. In reconciling the needs of the human community with nature, the divine law indicates the possibility that the tensions between nature and culture for Hegel might not necessarily end in conquest and repression but rather in mutual accommodation. Drawing out from the shadows the ethical law of caring for the dead, then, presents a challenge and an alternative to Hegel's logic of mastery.

Hegel's own dismissal of blood—which, Irigaray demonstrates, is necessarily excluded from Absolute Spirit—at the same time acknowledges the necessity of blood to the apparatus that achieves Spirit. Like the divine law itself, blood remains a crucial element in the sustenance of the community, albeit one that is excluded from the community itself. In Hegel, then, blood may be dispersed and degraded, but it must also remain in some subterranean or appropriated form—one which, Irigaray suggests, can be rediscovered and reappropriated.

The Return to Blood

In *Democracy Begins Between Two*, Irigaray decries the fact that “woman is still subjected to the law of nature” (DBBT 42), as she lacks a civil and a spiritual identity. “The cause of this,” she writes, “is the lack of a passage, within the family itself, from natural to civil identity” (DBBT 52), a passage that can only be reconstructed through institutions, like sexed civil rights, that counter the traditional repression of sexual difference. At the same time, it is necessary to discover a passage from natural to *spiritual* identity within the family, and I propose that the divine law presents such a passage. A return to and repossession of the divine law promises not only to right certain civil wrongs against women but to return to the spiritual principle of blood—a principle

fundamentally opposed to the warlike and possessive logic of the state, and one which indicates a spiritual connection to nature, life, and female ancestry.

Granted the power and promise of the divine law and its trace of blood to disrupt the patriarchal state, it is in the best interest of women to return to this principle. To disinter the divine law, buried in the time of Antigone, is to rediscover a point of resistance to the economy of war and death; matriarchal ancestry; and a relation to the divine which is distinctively suited to women. Irigaray has successfully disinterred the female divine in traditions such as yogic breathing and the Catholic figures of the Virgin Mary and her mother, Anne. In what follows, I will offer an account of the rediscovery of female genealogy through the spiritual practices of Chinese traditional religion, an account which, while purely anecdotal, demonstrates the possibility of rediscovering female ancestry—and through it, the female divine—through existing cultural traditions and also offers a set of techniques which can aid in the task of reestablishing and re-valuing female genealogies.

Chinese Traditional religion is an ancient form of ancestor veneration believed to predate the Buddhist and Taoist practices also common in China. It entails the belief that the dead live in a spiritual world in many ways parallel to that of the living. Deceased ancestors, like living family elders, should be cared for by descendants, and require attention and care (often in the form of real or symbolic sacrifices of food, clothing or money). Burial sites must be cared for, and the names of male ancestors remembered. Ancestors are venerated as quasi-deities, demanding sacrifices and offering protection and aid. The care of ancestors represents veneration for the fecundity of the previous generations, and also a special tie to the earth where they lived and died, as the burial site

is a special site to be cared for by a family member. Since the duty of caring for the ancestors falls to the family, a rite of burial becomes a site for the highly ritualized, public display of a family's constitution and limits. Traditionally, the duties of caring for the dead are granted to a dead man's sons and daughters-in-law; unmarried daughters have a lesser role, and married daughters are excluded entirely from the familial rituals. The women who guard and execute these rituals, the elder women of the family, are in fact daughters-in-law, rather than natal members of the family.

In recent years I have observed in several Chinese-American families, including my own, a shift in the representation of kinship in such funeral rituals. These rituals have integrated natal daughters and granddaughters, both married and unmarried, into the fabric of the family for the purposes of burying their male and female ancestors. This change is surely influenced by the increased value placed on female children in China and the West over the past century; smaller families that make it more likely for families to lack sons and grandsons; and the influence of American culture, which tends to accord married daughters a role in the natal family. In the simplest terms, such a change also reflects a desire on the part of elder women, the guardians of these traditions, to represent their kinship to their daughters and granddaughters at the level of divine ritual. In reimagining burial rituals to incorporate female as well as male genealogies, female elders offer their descendants a way to live out the divine law in a way that respects, rather than obscures, the principle of blood. These reimagined rituals offer a rare opportunity to represent blood relations between women, both at the familial and, to some extent, the public level (as funeral rituals produce public events such as announcements and processions). Finally, insofar as the care of the dead and the

remembrance of ancestry is a spiritual task within Chinese Traditional religion, these matrilineal bonds, too, become spiritualized.

Rediscovering and reimagining funeral traditions can provide women with a means to return to female ancestry and female divinity. Reinvented with a concern for women's genealogy, memorial practices such as memorizing ancestors' names and visiting their graves can help to establish alternative, multiple genealogies—genealogies that are not confined to the same exclusive lineage by which each person is assigned one, perhaps two, family names. The rituals of caring for the dead—a vestige of divine law long-ago appropriated to the ends of the patriarchal family and the state—can be rediscovered, as in the funeral rituals described above, as a site to affirm the bonds of blood. By adopting and adapting cultural traditions of care and memorialization for the dead, women can both preserve existing cultural diversity and discover the possibility of culture between women.

While ancestor veneration is a tradition in which the correlation between the rediscovery of female genealogy and female divinity is unusually clear, I do not accord this particular tradition any special primacy in the pursuit of female spirituality. I offer this example because I believe that a dedication to a culture of difference requires us to recognize that all cultures hold their own lessons and possibilities for the rediscovery of the female divine, and because for me, as I suspect is the case for many women, this rediscovery of female divinity was facilitated by my relationships to the women of my family. Finally, I find the way in which the changing roles of women between generations and cultures are integrated, by older women, into ancient traditions to be a promising sign that feminist activism need not produce a war between generations of

women or a struggle to destroy existing culture, but can rather represent a collaborative process between mothers and daughters to rediscover hidden promise in their cultures.

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