

BODIES THAT MATTER

If I understand deconstruction, deconstruction is not an exposure of error, certainly not other people's error. The critique in deconstruction, the most serious critique in deconstruction, is the critique of something that is extremely useful, something without which we cannot do anything.

—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "In a Word,"
interview with Ellen Rooney

...the necessity of "reopening" the figures of philosophical discourse... One way is to interrogate the conditions under which systematicity itself is possible: what the coherence of the discursive utterance conceals of the conditions under which it is produced, whatever it may say about these conditions in discourse. For example the "matter" from which the speaking subject draws nourishment in order to produce itself, to reproduce itself; the *scenography* that makes representation feasible, representation as defined in philosophy, that is, the architectonics of its theatre, its framing in space-time, its geometric organization, its props, its actors, their respective positions, their dialogues, indeed their tragic relations, without overlooking the *mirror*, most often hidden, that allows the logos, the subject, to reduplicate itself, to reflect itself by itself. All these are interventions on the scene; they ensure its coherence so long as they remain uninterpreted. Thus they have to be reenacted, in each figure of discourse away from its mooring in the value of "presence." For each philosopher, beginning with those whose names define some age in the history of philosophy, we have to point out how the break with material contiguity is made (il faut repérer comment s'opère la coupure d'avec la contiguïté matérielle), how the system is put together, how the specular economy works.

—Luce Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse"

Within some quarters of feminist theory in recent years, there have been calls to retrieve the body from what is often characterized as the linguistic idealism of poststructuralism. In another quarter, philosopher Gianni Vattimo has argued that poststructuralism, understood as textual play, marks the dissolution of *matter* as a contemporary category. And it is

this lost matter, he argues, which must now be reformulated in order for poststructuralism to give way to a project of greater ethical and political value.¹ The terms of these debates are difficult and unstable ones, for it is difficult to know in either case who or what is designated by the term "poststructuralism," and perhaps even more difficult to know what to retrieve under the sign of "the body." And yet these two signifiers have for some feminists and critical theorists seemed fundamentally antagonistic. One hears warnings like the following: If everything is discourse, what happens to the body? If everything is a text, what about violence and bodily injury? Does anything *matter* in or for poststructuralism?

It has seemed to many, I think, that in order for feminism to proceed as a critical practice, it must ground itself in the sexed specificity of the female body. Even as the category of sex is always reinscribed as gender, that sex must still be presumed as the irreducible point of departure for the various cultural constructions it has come to bear. And this presumption of the material irreducibility of sex has seemed to ground and to authorize feminist epistemologies and ethics, as well as gendered analyses of various kinds. In an effort to displace the terms of this debate, I want to ask how and why "materiality" has become a sign of irreducibility, that is, how is it that the materiality of sex is understood as that which only bears cultural constructions and, therefore, cannot be a construction? What is the status of this exclusion? Is materiality a site or surface that is excluded from the process of construction, as that through which and on which construction works? Is this perhaps an enabling or constitutive exclusion, one without which construction cannot operate? What occupies this site of unconstructed materiality? And what kinds of constructions are foreclosed through the figuring of this site as outside or beneath construction itself?

In what follows, what is at stake is less a theory of cultural construction than a consideration of the scenography and topography of construction. This scenography is orchestrated by and as a matrix of power that remains disarticulated if we presume constructedness and materiality as necessarily oppositional notions.

In the place of materiality, one might inquire into other foundationalist premises that operate as political "irreducibles." Instead of rehearsing the theoretical difficulties that emerge by presuming the notion of the subject as a foundational premise or by trying to maintain a stable distinction between sex and gender, I would like to raise the question of whether

recourse to matter and to the materiality of sex is necessary in order to establish that irreducible specificity that is said to ground feminist practice. And here the question is not whether or not there ought to be reference to matter, just as the question never has been whether or not there ought to be speaking about women. This speaking will occur, and for feminist reasons, it must; the category of women does not become useless through deconstruction, but becomes one whose uses are no longer reified as "referents," and which stand a chance of being opened up, indeed, of coming to signify in ways that none of us can predict in advance. Surely, it must be possible both to use the term, to use it tactically even as one is, as it were, used and positioned by it, and also to subject the term to a critique which interrogates the exclusionary operations and differential power-relations that construct and delimit feminist invocations of "women." This is, to paraphrase the citation from Spivak above, the critique of something useful, the critique of something we cannot do without. Indeed, I would argue that it is a critique without which feminism loses its democratizing potential through refusing to engage—take stock of, and become transformed by—the exclusions which put it into play.

Something similar is at work with the concept of materiality, which may well be "something without which we cannot do anything." What does it mean to have recourse to materiality, since it is clear from the start that matter has a history (indeed, more than one) and that the history of matter is in part determined by the negotiation of sexual difference. We may seek to return to matter as prior to discourse to ground our claims about sexual difference only to discover that matter is fully sedimented with discourses on sex and sexuality that prefigure and constrain the uses to which that term can be put. Moreover, we may seek recourse to matter in order to ground or to verify a set of injuries or violations only to find that *matter itself is founded through a set of violations*, ones which are unwittingly repeated in the contemporary invocation.

Indeed, if it can be shown that in its constitutive history this "irreducible" materiality is constructed through a problematic gendered matrix, then the discursive practice by which matter is rendered irreducible simultaneously ontologizes and fixes that gendered matrix in its place. And if the constituted effect of that matrix is taken to be the indisputable ground of bodily life, then it seems that a genealogy of that matrix is foreclosed from critical inquiry. Against the claim that poststructuralism reduces all

materiality to linguistic stuff, an argument is needed to show that to deconstruct matter is not to negate or do away with the usefulness of the term. And against those who would claim that the body's irreducible materiality is a necessary precondition for feminist practice, I suggest that that prized materiality may well be constituted through an exclusion and degradation of the feminine that is profoundly problematic for feminism.

Here it is of course necessary to state quite plainly that the options for theory are not exhausted by *presuming* materiality, on the one hand, and *negating* materiality, on the other. It is my purpose to do precisely neither of these. To call a presupposition into question is not the same as doing away with it; rather, it is to free it from its metaphysical lodgings in order to understand what political interests were secured in and by that metaphysical placing, and thereby to permit the term to occupy and to serve very different political aims. To problematize the matter of bodies may entail an initial loss of epistemological certainty, but a loss of certainty is not the same as political nihilism. On the contrary, such a loss may well indicate a significant and promising shift in political thinking. This unsettling of "matter" can be understood as initiating new possibilities, new ways for bodies to matter.

The body posited as prior to the sign, is always *posited* or *signified* as *prior*. This signification produces as an *effect* of its own procedure the very body that it nevertheless and simultaneously claims to discover as that which *precedes* its own action. If the body signified as prior to signification is an effect of signification, then the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue *performative*, inasmuch as this signifying act delimits and contours the body that it then claims to find prior to any and all signification.²

This is not to say that the materiality of bodies is simply and only a linguistic effect which is reducible to a set of signifiers. Such a distinction overlooks the materiality of the signifier itself. Such an account also fails to understand materiality as that which is bound up with signification from the start; to think through the indissolubility of materiality and signification is no easy matter. To posit by way of language a materiality outside of language is still to posit that materiality, and the materiality so posited will retain that positing as its constitutive condition. Derrida negotiates the question of matter's radical alterity with the following remark: "I am

not even sure that there can be a 'concept' of an absolute exterior.³ To have the concept of matter is to lose the exteriority that the concept is supposed to secure. Can language simply refer to materiality, or is language also the very condition under which materiality may be said to appear?

If matter ceases to be matter once it becomes a concept, and if a concept of matter's exteriority to language is always something less than absolute, what is the status of this "outside"? Is it produced by philosophical discourse in order to effect the appearance of its own exhaustive and coherent systematicity? What is cast out from philosophical propriety in order to sustain and secure the borders of philosophy? And how might this repudiation return?

MATTERS OF FEMININITY

The classical association of femininity with materiality can be traced to a set of etymologies which link matter with *mater* and *matrix* (or the womb) and, hence, with a problematic of reproduction. The classical configuration of matter as a site of *generation* or *origination* becomes especially significant when the account of what an object is and means requires recourse to its originating principle. When not explicitly associated with reproduction, matter is generalized as a principle of origination and causality. In Greek, *hyle* is the wood or timber out of which various cultural constructions are made, but also a principle of origin, development, and teleology which is at once causal and explanatory. This link between matter, origin, and significance suggests the indissolubility of classical Greek notions of materiality and signification. That which matters about an object is its matter.⁴

In both the Latin and the Greek, matter (*materia* and *hyle*) is neither a simple, brute positivity or referent nor a blank surface or slate awaiting an external signification, but is always in some sense temporalized. This is true for Marx as well, when "matter" is understood as a principle of *transformation*, presuming and inducing a future.⁵ The matrix is an originating and formative principle which inaugurates and informs a development of some organism or object. Hence, for Aristotle, "matter is potentiality [*dynamis*], form actuality."⁶ In reproduction, women are said to contribute the matter; men, the form.⁷ The Greek *hyle* is wood that already has been cut from trees, instrumentalized and instrumentalizable, artifactual, on the

way to being put to use. *Materia* in Latin denotes the stuff out of which things are made, not only the timber for houses and ships but whatever serves as nourishment for infants: nutrients that act as extensions of the mother's body. Insofar as matter appears in these cases to be invested with a certain capacity to originate and to compose that for which it also supplies the principle of intelligibility, then matter is clearly defined by a certain power of creation and rationality that is for the most part divested from the more modern empirical deployments of the term. To speak within these classical contexts of *bodies that matter* is not an idle pun, for to be material means to materialize, where the principle of that materialization is precisely what "matters" about that body, its very intelligibility. In this sense, to know the significance of something is to know how and why it matters, where "to matter" means at once "to materialize" and "to mean."

Obviously, no feminist would encourage a simple return to Aristotle's natural teleologies in order to rethink the "materiality" of bodies. I want to consider, however, Aristotle's distinction between body and soul to effect a brief comparison between Aristotle and Foucault in order to suggest a possible contemporary redeployment of Aristotelian terminology. At the end of this brief comparison, I will offer a limited criticism of Foucault, which will then lead to a longer discussion of Irigaray's deconstruction of materiality in Plato's *Timaeus*. It is in the context of this second analysis that I hope to make clear how a gendered matrix is at work in the constitution of materiality (although it is obviously present in Aristotle as well), and why feminists ought to be interested, not in taking materiality as an irreducible, but in conducting a critical genealogy of its formulation.

ARISTOTLE/FOUCAULT

For Aristotle the soul designates the actualization of matter, where matter is understood as fully potential and unactualized. As a result, he maintains in *de Anima* that the soul is "the first grade of actuality of a naturally organized body." He continues, "That is why we can wholly dismiss as unnecessary the question whether the soul and the body are one: it is as meaningless to ask whether the wax and the shape given to it by the stamp are one, or generally the matter [*hyle*] of a thing and that of which it is the matter [*hyle*]."8 In the Greek, there is no reference to "stamps," but the phrase, "the shape given by the stamp" is contained in the single term,

"*schema*." *Schema* means form, shape, figure, appearance, dress, gesture, figure of a syllogism, and grammatical form. If matter never appears without its *schema*, that means that it only appears under a certain grammatical form and that the principle of its recognizability, its characteristic gesture or usual dress, is indissoluble from what constitutes its matter.

In Aristotle, we find no clear phenomenal distinction between materiality and intelligibility, and yet for other reasons Aristotle does not supply us with the kind of "body" that feminism seeks to retrieve. To install the principle of intelligibility in the very development of a body is precisely the strategy of a natural teleology that accounts for female development through the rationale of biology. On this basis, it has been argued that women ought to perform certain social functions and not others, indeed, that women ought to be fully restricted to the reproductive domain.

We might historicize the Aristotelian notion of the *schema* in terms of culturally variable principles of formativity and intelligibility. To understand the *schema* of bodies as a historically contingent nexus of power/discourse is to arrive at something similar to what Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish* as the "materialization" of the prisoner's body. This process of materialization is at stake as well in the final chapter of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* when Foucault calls for a "history of bodies" that would inquire into "the manner in which what is most material and vital in them has been invested."⁹

At times it appears that for Foucault the body has a materiality that is ontologically distinct from the power relations that take that body as a site of investments. And yet, in *Discipline and Punish*, we have a different configuration of the relation between materiality and investment. There the soul is taken as an instrument of power through which the body is cultivated and formed. In a sense, it acts as a power-laden schema that produces and actualizes the body itself.

We can understand Foucault's references to the "soul" as an implicit reworking of the Aristotelian formulation. Foucault argues in *Discipline and Punish* that the "soul" becomes a normative and normalizing ideal according to which the body is trained, shaped, cultivated, and invested; it is an historically specific imaginary ideal (*idéal spéculatif*) under which the body is effectively materialized. Considering the science of prison reform, Foucault writes, "The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection [*assujettissement*] much more

profound than himself. A 'soul' inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body."¹⁰

This "subjection," or *assujettissement*, is not only a subordination but a securing and maintaining, a putting into place of a subject, a subjectivation. The "soul brings [the prisoner] to existence"; and not fully unlike Aristotle, the soul described by Foucault as an instrument of power, forms and frames the body, stamps it, and in stamping it, brings it into being. Here "being" belongs in quotation marks, for ontological weight is not presumed, but always conferred. For Foucault, this conferral can take place only within and by an operation of power. This operation produces the subjects that it subjects; that is, it subjects them in and through the compulsory power relations effective as their formative principle. But power is that which forms, maintains, sustains, and regulates bodies at once, so that, strictly speaking, power is not a subject who acts on bodies as its distinct objects. The grammar which compels us to speak that way enforces a metaphysics of external relations, whereby power acts on bodies but is not understood to form them. This is a view of power as an external relation that Foucault himself calls into question.

Power operates for Foucault in the *constitution* of the very materiality of the subject, in the principle which simultaneously forms and regulates the "subject" of subjectivation. Foucault refers not only to the materiality of the body of the prisoner but to the materiality of the body of the prison. The materiality of the prison, he writes, is established to the extent that [*dans la mesure où*] it is a vector and instrument of power.¹¹ Hence, the prison is *materialized* to the extent that it is *invested with power*, or, to be grammatically accurate, there is no prison prior to its materialization. Its materialization is coextensive with its investiture with power relations, and materiality is the effect and gauge of this investment. The prison comes to be only within the field of power relations, but more specifically, only to the extent that it is invested or saturated with such relations, that such a saturation is itself formative of its very being. Here the body is not an independent materiality that is invested by power relations external to it, but it is that for which materialization and investiture are coextensive.

"Materiality" designates a certain effect of power or, rather, *is* power in its formative or constituting effects. Insofar as power operates successfully

by constituting an object domain, a field of intelligibility, as a taken-for-granted ontology, its material effects are taken as material data or primary givens. These material positivities appear *outside* discourse and power, as its incontestable referents, its transcendental signifieds. But this appearance is precisely the moment in which the power/discourse regime is most fully dissimulated and most insidiously effective. When this material effect is taken as an epistemological point of departure, a *sine qua non* of some political argumentation, this is a move of empiricist foundationalism that, in accepting this constituted effect as a primary given, successfully buries and masks the genealogy of power relations by which it is constituted.¹²

Insofar as Foucault traces the process of materialization as an investiture of discourse and power, he focuses on that dimension of power that is productive and formative. But we need to ask what constrains the domain of what is materializable, and whether there are *modalities* of materialization—as Aristotle suggests, and Althusser is quick to cite.¹³ To what extent is materialization governed by principles of intelligibility that require and institute a domain of radical *unintelligibility* that resists materialization altogether or that remains radically dematerialized? Does Foucault's effort to work the notions of discourse and materiality through one another fail to account for not only what is *excluded* from the economies of discursive intelligibility that he describes, but what *has to be excluded* for those economies to function as self-sustaining systems?

This is the question implicitly raised by Luce Irigaray's analysis of the form/matter distinction in Plato. This argument is perhaps best known from the essay "Plato's Hystera," in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, but is trenchantly articulated as well in the less well-known essay, "Une Mère de Glace," also in *Speculum*.

Irigaray's task is to reconcile neither the form/matter distinction nor the distinctions between bodies and souls or matter and meaning. Rather, her effort is to show that those binary oppositions are formulated through the exclusion of a field of disruptive possibilities. Her speculative thesis is that those binaries, even in their reconciled mode, are part of a phallogocentric economy that produces the "feminine" as its constitutive outside. Irigaray's intervention in the history of the form/matter distinction underscores "matter" as the site at which the feminine is excluded from philosophical binaries. Inasmuch as certain phantasmatic notions of the feminine are traditionally associated with materiality, these are specular

effects which confirm a phallogocentric project of autogenesis. And when those specular (and spectral) feminine figures are taken to be the feminine, the feminine is, she argues, fully erased by its very representation. The economy that claims to include the feminine as the subordinate term in a binary opposition of masculine/feminine excludes the feminine, produces the feminine as that which must be excluded for that economy to operate. In what follows, I will consider first Irigaray's speculative mode of engaging with philosophical texts and then turn to her rude and provocative reading of Plato's discussion of the receptacle in the *Timaeus*. In the final section of this essay, I will offer my own rude and provocative reading of the same passage.

IRIGARAY/PLATO

The largeness and speculative character of Irigaray's claims have always put me a bit on edge, and I confess in advance that although I can think of no feminist who has read and reread the history of philosophy with the kind of detailed and critical attention that she has,¹⁴ her terms tend to mime the grandiosity of the philosophical errors that she underscores. This miming is, of course, tactical, and her reenactment of philosophical error requires that we learn how to read her for the difference that her reading performs. Does the voice of the philosophical father echo in her, or has she occupied that voice, insinuated herself into the voice of the father? If she is "in" that voice for either reason, is she also at the same time "outside" it? How do we understand the being "between," the two possibilities as something other than a spatialized *entre* that leaves the phallogocentric binary opposition intact?¹⁵ How does the difference from the philosophical father resound in the mime which appears to replicate his strategy so faithfully? This is, clearly, no place between "his" language and "hers," but only a disruptive *movement* which unsettles the topographical claim.¹⁶ This is a taking of his place, not to assume it, but to show that it is *occupiable*, to raise the question of the cost and movement of that assumption.¹⁷ Where and how is the critical departure from that patrilineage performed in the course of the recitation of his terms? If the task is not a loyal or proper "reading" of Plato, then perhaps it is a kind of overreading which mimes and exposes the speculative excess in Plato. To the extent that I replicate that speculative excess here, I apologize, but

only half-heartedly, for sometimes a hyperbolic rejoinder is necessary when a given injury has remained unspoken for too long.

When Irigaray sets out to reread the history of philosophy, she asks how its borders are secured: what must be excluded from the domain of philosophy for philosophy itself to proceed, and how is it that the excluded comes to constitute negatively a philosophical enterprise that takes itself to be self-grounding and self-constituting? Irigaray then isolates the feminine as precisely this constitutive exclusion, whereupon she is compelled to find a way of reading a philosophical text for what it refuses to include. This is no easy matter. For how can one read a text for what does *not* appear within its own terms, but which nevertheless constitutes the illegible conditions of its own legibility? Indeed, how can one read a text for the movement of that disappearing by which the textual "inside" and "outside" are constituted?

Although feminist philosophers have traditionally sought to show how the body is figured as feminine, or how women have been associated with materiality (whether inert—always already dead—or fecund—ever-living and procreative) where men have been associated with the principle of rational mastery,¹⁸ Irigaray wants to argue that in fact the feminine is precisely what is excluded in and by such a binary opposition. In this sense, when and where women are represented within this economy is precisely the site of their erasure. Moreover, when matter is described within philosophical descriptions, she argues, it is at once a substitution for and displacement of the feminine. One cannot interpret the philosophical relation to the feminine through the figures that philosophy provides, but, rather, she argues, through siting the feminine as the unspeakable condition of figuration, as that which, in fact, can *never be* figured within the terms of philosophy proper, but whose exclusion from that propriety is its enabling condition.

No wonder then that the feminine appears for Irigaray only in *catachresis*, that is, in those figures that function improperly, as an improper transfer of sense, the use of a proper name to describe that which does not properly belong to it, and that return to haunt and coopt the very language from which the feminine is excluded. This explains in part the radical citational practice of Irigaray, the catachrestic usurpation of the "proper" for fully improper purposes.¹⁹ For she mimes philosophy—as well as psychoanalysis—and, in the mime, takes on a language that effectively cannot belong

to her, only to call into question the exclusionary rules of proprietariness that govern the use of that discourse. This contestation of propriety and property is precisely the option open to the feminine when it has been constituted as an excluded impropriety, as the improper, the propertyless. Indeed, as Irigaray argues in *Marine Lover* [*Amante marine*], her work on Nietzsche, “woman neither is nor has an essence,” and this is the case for her precisely because “woman” is what is excluded from the discourse of metaphysics.²⁰ If she takes on a proper name, even the proper name of “woman” in the singular, that can only be a kind of radical mime that seeks to jar the term from its ontological presuppositions. Jane Gallop makes this brilliantly clear in her reading of the two lips as both synecdoche and cat-achresis, a reading which offers an interpretation of Irigaray’s language of biological essentialism as rhetorical strategy. Gallop shows that Irigaray’s figural language constitutes the feminine in language as a persistent linguistic impropriety.²¹

This exclusion of the feminine from the proprietary discourse of metaphysics takes place, Irigaray argues, in and through the formulation of “matter.” Inasmuch as a distinction between form and matter is offered within phallogocentrism, it is articulated through a further materiality. In other words, every explicit distinction takes place in an inscriptional space that the distinction itself cannot accommodate. Matter as a *site* of inscription cannot be explicitly thematized. And this inscriptional site or space is, for Irigaray, a *materiality* that is not the same as the category of “matter” whose articulation it conditions and enables. It is this unthematizable materiality that Irigaray claims becomes the site, the repository, indeed, the receptacle of and for the feminine within a phallogocentric economy. In an important sense, this second inarticulate “matter” designates the constitutive outside of the Platonic economy; it is what must be excluded for that economy to posture as internally coherent.²²

This excessive matter that cannot be contained within the form/matter distinction operates like the supplement in Derrida’s analysis of philosophical oppositions. In Derrida’s consideration of the form/matter distinction in *Positions*, he suggests as well that matter must be redoubled, at once as a pole within a binary opposition, and as that which exceeds that binary coupling, as a figure for its nonsystematizability.

Consider Derrida’s remark in response to the critic who wants to claim that matter denotes the radical outside to language: “It follows that if, and in

the extent to which, *matter* in this general economy designates, as you said, radical alterity (I will specify: in relation to philosophical oppositions), then what I write can be considered ‘materialist.’”²³ For both Derrida and Irigaray, it seems, what is excluded from this binary is also produced by it in the mode of exclusion and has no separable or fully-independent existence as an absolute outside. A constitutive or relative outside is, of course, composed of a set of exclusions that are nevertheless *internal* to that system as its own nonthematizable necessity. It emerges within the system as incoherence, disruption, a threat to its own systematicity.

{ Irigaray insists that this exclusion that mobilizes the form/matter binary is the differentiating relation between masculine and feminine, where the masculine occupies both terms of binary opposition, and the feminine cannot be said to be an intelligible term at all. } We might understand the feminine figured within the binary as the *specular* feminine and the feminine which is erased and excluded from that binary as the *excessive* feminine. And yet, such nominations cannot work, for in the latter mode, the feminine, strictly speaking, cannot be named at all and, indeed, is not a mode.

For Irigaray, the “feminine” which cannot be said to be anything, to participate in ontology at all, is—and here grammar fails us—set under erasure as the impossible necessity that enables any ontology. The feminine, to use a catachresis, is domesticated and rendered unintelligible within a phallogocentrism that claims to be self-constituting. Disavowed, the remnant of the feminine survives as the inscriptional space of that phallogocentrism, the specular surface which receives the marks of a masculine signifying act only to give back a (false) reflection and guarantee of phallogocentric self-sufficiency, without making any contribution of its own. As a topos of the metaphysical tradition, this inscriptional space makes its appearance in Plato’s *Timaeus* as the receptacle (*hypodochē*), which is also described as the *chora*. Although extensive readings of the *chora* have been offered by Derrida and Irigaray, I want to refer here to only one passage which is about the very problem of passage: namely, that passage by which a form can be said to generate its own sensible representation. We know that for Plato any material object comes into being only through participating in a Form which is its necessary precondition. As a result, material objects are copies of Forms and exist only to the extent that they instantiate Forms. And yet, where does this instantiation take place? Is there a place, a site, where this reproduction occurs, a medium through which the

transformation from form to sensible object occurs?

In the cosmogony offered in the *Timaeus*, Plato refers to three natures that must be taken into account: the first, which is the process of generation; the second, that in which the generation takes place; and the third, that of which the thing generated is a resemblance naturally produced. Then, in what appears to be an aside, we may “liken the receiving principle to a mother, and the source or spring to a father, and the intermediate nature to a child”(50d).²⁴ Prior to this passage, Plato refers to this receiving principle as a “nurse” (40b) and then as “the universal nature which receives all bodies,” according to the Hamilton/Cairns translation. But this latter phrase might be better translated as “the dynamic nature (*physis*) that receives (*dechesthai*) all the bodies that there are (*ta panta somata*)” (50b).²⁵ Of this all-receiving function, Plato argues, she “must always be called the same, for inasmuch as she always receives all things, she never departs at all from her own nature (*dynamis*) and never, in any way or at any time, assumes a form (*eilephen*) like that of any of the things which enter into her... the forms that enter into and go out of her are the likenesses of eternal realities modeled after their own patterns (*diaschematizomenon*)...” (50c).²⁶ Here her proper function is to receive, *dechesthai*, to take, accept, welcome, include, and even comprehend. What enters into this *hypodochē* is a set of forms or, better, shapes (*morphe*), and yet this receiving principle, this *physis*, has no proper shape and is not a body. Like Aristotle’s *hylē*, *physis* cannot be defined.²⁷ In effect, the receiving principle potentially includes all bodies, and so applies universally, but its universal applicability must not resemble at all, ever, those eternal realities (*eidōs*) which in the *Timaeus* prefigure universal forms, and which pass into the receptacle. There is here a prohibition on resemblance (*mimēta*), which is to say that this nature cannot be said to be like either the eternal Forms or their material, sensible, or imaginary copies. But in particular, this *physis* is only to be entered, but never to enter. Here the term *eisienai* denotes a going toward or into, an approach and penetration; it also denotes going into a *place*, so that the *chora*, as an enclosure, cannot be that which enters into another enclosure; metaphorically, and perhaps coincidentally, this prohibited form of entry also means “being brought into court”, i.e., subject to public norms, and “coming into mind” or “beginning to think.”

Here there is also the stipulation not “to assume a form like those that enter her.” Can this receptacle, then, be likened to any body, to that of the

mother, or to the nurse? According to Plato’s own stipulation, we cannot define this “nature,” and to know it by analogy is to know it only by “bastard thinking.” In this sense the human who would know this nature is dispossessed of/by the paternal principle, a son out of wedlock, a deviation from patrilineality and the analogical relation by which patronymic lineage proceeds. Hence, to offer a metaphor or analogy presupposes a likeness between that nature and a human form. It is this last point that Derrida, accepting Plato’s dictum, takes as salient to the understanding of the *chora*, arguing that it can never be collapsed into any of the figures that it itself occasions. As a result, Derrida argues, it would be wrong to take the association of the *chora* with femininity as a decisive collapse.²⁸

In a sense, Irigaray agrees with this contention: the figures of the nurse, the mother, the womb cannot be fully identified with the receptacle, for those are specular figures which displace the feminine at the moment they purport to represent the feminine. The receptacle cannot be exhaustively thematized or figured in Plato’s text, precisely because it is that which conditions and escapes every figuration and thematization. *[This receptacle/nurse is not a metaphor based on likeness to a human form, but a disfiguration that emerges at the boundaries of the human both as its very condition and as the insistent threat of its deformation; it cannot take a form, a morphe, and in that sense, cannot be a body.]*

Insofar as Derrida argues that the receptacle cannot be identified with the figure of the feminine, Irigaray would seem to be in agreement. But she takes the analysis a step further, arguing that the feminine exceeds its figuration, just as the receptacle does, and that this unthematizability constitutes the feminine as the impossible yet necessary foundation of what can be thematized and figured. Significantly, Julia Kristeva *accepts* this collapse of the *chora* and the maternal/nurse figure, arguing in *Revolution in Poetic Language* that “Plato leads us” to this “process... [of] rhythmic space.”²⁹ In contrast with Irigaray’s refusal of this conflation of the *chora* and the feminine/maternal, Kristeva affirms this association and further asserts her notion of the semiotic as that which “precedes”(26) the symbolic law: “The mother’s body is therefore what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*”(27).

Whereas Kristeva insists upon this identification of the *chora* with the maternal body, Irigaray asks how the discourse which performs that

conflation invariably produces an “outside” where the feminine which is *not* captured by the figure of the *chora* persists. Here we need to ask, How is this assignation of a feminine “outside” possible within language? And is it not the case that there is within any discourse and thus within Irigaray’s as well, a set of constitutive exclusions that are inevitably produced by the circumscription of the feminine as that which monopolizes the sphere of exclusion?

In this sense, the receptacle is not simply a figure *for* the excluded, but, taken as a figure, stands for the excluded and thus performs or enacts yet another set of exclusions of all that remains unfigurable under the sign of the feminine—that in the feminine which resists the figure of the nurse-receptacle. In other words, taken as a figure, the nurse-receptacle freezes the feminine as that which is necessary for the reproduction of the human, but which itself is not human, and which is in no way to be construed as the formative principle of the human form that is, as it were, produced through it.³⁰

The problem is not that the feminine is made to stand for matter or for universality; rather, the feminine is cast outside the form/matter and universal/particular binarisms. She will be neither the one nor the other, but the permanent and unchangeable condition of both—what can be construed as a nonthematizable materiality.³¹ She will be entered, and will give forth a further instance of what enters her, but she will never resemble either the formative principle or that which it creates. Irigaray insists that here it is the female power of reproduction that is taken over by the phallogocentric economy and remade into its own exclusive and essential action. When *physis* is articulated as *chora*, as it is in Plato, some of the dynamism and potency included in the meaning of *physis* is suppressed. In the place of a femininity that makes a contribution to reproduction, we have a phallic Form that reproduces only and always further versions of itself, and does this through the feminine, but with no assistance from her. Significantly, this transfer of the reproductive function from the feminine to the masculine entails the topographical suppression of *physis*, the dissimulation of *physis* as *chora*, as place.

The word matter does not occur in Plato to describe this *chora* or *hypodochē*, and yet Aristotle remarks in *The Metaphysics* that this section of the *Timaeus* articulates most closely his own notion of *hylē*. Taking up this suggestion, Plotinus wrote the Sixth Tractate of the *Enneads*, “The

Impassivity of the Unembodied,” an effort to account for Plato’s notion of the *hypodochē* as *hylē* or matter.³² In a twist that the history of philosophy has perhaps rarely undergone, Irigaray accepts and recites Plotinus’s effort to read Plato through Aristotelian “matter” in “Une Mère de Glace.”

In that essay, she writes that for Plato matter is “sterile,” “female in receptivity only, not in pregnancy... castrated of that impregnating power which belongs only to the unchangeably masculine.”³³ Her reading establishes the cosmogony of the Forms in the *Timaeus* as a phallic phantasy of a fully self-constituted patrilineality, and this fantasy of autogenesis or self-constitution is effected through a denial and cooptation of the female capacity for reproduction. Of course, the “she” who is the “receptacle” is neither a universal nor a particular, and because for Plato anything that can be named is either a universal or a particular, the receptacle cannot be named. Taking speculative license, and wandering into what he himself calls “a strange and unwonted inquiry” (48d), Plato nevertheless proceeds to name what cannot be properly named, invoking a catachresis in order to describe the receptacle as a universal receiver of bodies even as it cannot be a universal, for, if it were, it would participate in those eternal realities from which it is excluded.

In the cosmogony prior to the one which introduces the receptacle, Plato suggests that if the appetites, those tokens of the soul’s materiality, are not successfully mastered, a soul, understood as a man’s soul, risks coming back as a woman, and then as a beast. In a sense woman and beast are the very figures for unmasterable passion. And if a soul participates in such passions, it will be effectively and ontologically transformed by them and into the very signs, woman and beast, by which they are figured. In this prior cosmogony, woman represents a descent into materiality.

But this prior cosmogony calls to be rewritten, for if man is at the top of an ontological hierarchy, and woman is a poor or debased copy of man, and beast is a poor or debased copy of both woman and of man, then there is still a *resemblance* between these three beings, even as that resemblance is hierarchically distributed. In the following cosmogony, the one that introduces the receptacle, Plato clearly wants to disallow the possibility of a resemblance between the masculine and the feminine, and he does this through introducing a feminized receptacle that is prohibited from resembling any form. Of course, strictly speaking, the receptacle can have no ontological status, for ontology is constituted by forms, and the receptacle

cannot be one. And we cannot speak about that for which there is no ontological determination, or if we do, we use language improperly, imputing being to that which can have no being. So, the receptacle seems from the start to be an impossible word, a designation that cannot be designated. Paradoxically, Plato proceeds to tell us that this very receptacle must always be called the same.³⁴ Precisely because this receptacle can only occasion a radically improper speech, that is, a speech in which all ontological claims are suspended, the terms by which it is named must be consistently applied, not in order to make the name fit the thing named but precisely because that which is to be named can have no proper name, bounds and threatens the sphere of linguistic propriety, and, therefore, must be controlled by a forcibly imposed set of nominative rules.

How is it that Plato can concede the undesignatable status of this receptacle and prescribe for it a consistent name? Is it that the receptacle, designated as the undesignatable, *cannot* be designated, or is it rather that this “cannot” functions as an “ought not to be”? Should this limit to what is representable be read as a prohibition against a certain kind of representation? And since Plato does offer us a representation of the receptacle, one that he claims ought to remain a singularly authoritative representation (and makes this offer in the very same passage in which he claims its radical unrepresentability), ought we not to conclude that Plato, in authorizing a single representation of the feminine, means to prohibit the very proliferation of nominative possibilities that the undesignatable might produce? Perhaps this is a representation within discourse that functions to prohibit from discourse any further representation, one which represents the feminine as unrepresentable and unintelligible, but which in the rhetoric of the constative claim defeats itself. After all, Plato *posits* that which he claims cannot be *posited*. And he further contradicts himself when he claims that that which cannot be posited ought to be posited in only one way. In a sense, this authoritative naming of the receptacle as the unnameable constitutes a primary or founding inscription that secures this place as an inscriptional space. This naming of what cannot be named is itself a penetration into this receptacle which is at once a violent erasure, one which establishes it as an impossible yet necessary site for all further inscriptions.³⁵ In this sense, the very *telling* of the story about the phallogomorphic genesis of objects *enacts* that phallogomorphosis and becomes an allegory of its own procedure.

Irigaray’s response to this exclusion of the feminine from the economy of representation is effectively to say, Fine, I don’t want to be in your economy anyway, and I’ll show you what this unintelligible receptacle can do to your system; I will not be a poor copy in your system, but I will resemble you nevertheless by *miming* the textual passages through which you construct your system and showing that what cannot enter it is already inside it (as its necessary outside), and I will mime and repeat the gestures of your operation until this emergence of the outside within the system calls into question its systematic closure and its pretension to be self-grounding.

This is part of what Naomi Schor means when she claims that Irigaray mimes mimesis itself.³⁶ Through miming, Irigaray transgresses the prohibition against resemblance at the same time that she refuses the notion of resemblance as copy. She cites Plato again and again, but the citations expose precisely what is excluded from them, and seek to show and to reintroduce the excluded into the system itself. In this sense, she performs a repetition and displacement of the phallic economy. *This is citation, not as enslavement or simple reiteration of the original, but as an insubordination that appears to take place within the very terms of the original, and which calls into question the power of origination that Plato appears to claim for himself. Her miming has the effect of repeating the origin only to displace that origin as an origin.*

And insofar as the Platonic account of the origin is itself a *displacement* of a maternal origin, Irigaray merely mimes that very act of displacement, displacing the displacement, showing that origin to be an “effect” of a certain ruse of phallogocentric power. In line with this reading of Irigaray, then, the feminine as maternal does not offer itself as an alternative origin. For if the feminine is said to be anywhere or anything, it is that which is produced through displacement and which returns as the possibility of a reverse-displacement. Indeed, one might reconsider the conventional characterization of Irigaray as an uncritical maternalist, for here it appears that the reinscription of the maternal takes place by writing with and through the language of phallic philosophemes. This textual practice is not grounded in a rival ontology, but inhabits—indeed, penetrates, occupies, and redeploys—the paternal language itself.

One might well ask whether this kind of penetrative textual strategy does not suggest a different textualization of eroticism than the rigorously anti-penetrative eros of surfaces that appears in Irigaray’s “When Our

Lips Speak Together": "You are not *in me*. I do not contain you or retain you in my stomach, my arms, my head. Nor in my memory, my mind, my language. You are there, like my skin."³⁷ The refusal of an eroticism of entry and containment seems linked for Irigaray with an opposition to appropriation and possession as forms of erotic exchange. And yet the kind of reading that Irigaray performs requires not only that she enter the text she reads, but that she work the inadvertent uses of that containment, especially when the feminine is sustained as an internal gap or fissure in the philosophical system itself. In such appropriative readings, Irigaray appears to enact the very spectre of a penetration in reverse—or a penetration elsewhere—that Plato's economy seeks to foreclose ("the 'elsewhere' of feminine pleasure can be found only at the price of *crossing back* (*retraversée*) through the mirror that subtends all speculation"³⁸). At the level of rhetoric this "crossing back" constitutes an eroticism that critically mimes the phallus—an eroticism structured by repetition and displacement, penetration and exposure—that counters the eros of surfaces that Irigaray explicitly affirms.

The opening quotation of Irigaray's essay claims that philosophical systems are built on "a break with material contiguity," and that the concept of matter constitutes and conceals that rupture or cut (*la coupure*). This argument appears to presume some order of contiguity that is prior to the concept, prior to matter, and which matter works to conceal. In Irigaray's most systematic reading of the history of ethical philosophy, *Éthique de la différence sexuelle*, she argues that ethical relations ought to be based on relations of closeness, proximity, and intimacy that reconfigure conventional notions of reciprocity and respect. Traditional conceptions of reciprocity exchange such relations of intimacy for those characterized by violent erasure, substitutability, and appropriation.³⁹ Psychoanalytically, that material closeness is understood as the uncertain separation of boundaries between maternal body and infant, relations that reemerge in language as the metonymic proximity of signs. Insofar as concepts, like matter and form, repudiate and conceal the metonymic signifying chains from which they are composed, they serve the phallogocentric purpose of breaking with that maternal/material contiguity. On the other hand, that contiguity confounds the phallogocentric effort to set up a series of substitutions through metaphorical equivalences or conceptual unities.⁴⁰

This contiguity that exceeds the concept of matter is, according to

Margaret Whitford, not itself a natural relation, but a *symbolic* articulation proper to women. Whitford takes "the two lips" as a figure for metonymy,⁴¹ "a figure for the vertical and horizontal relationships between women...women's sociality."⁴² But Whitford also points out that feminine and masculine economies are never fully separable; as a result, it seems, relations of contiguity subsist *between* those economies and, hence, do not belong exclusively to the sphere of the feminine.

How, then, do we understand Irigaray's textual practice of lining up alongside Plato? To what extent does she repeat his text, not to augment its specular production, but to cross back over and through that specular mirror to a feminine "elsewhere" that must remain problematically within citation marks?

There is for Irigaray, always, a matter that exceeds matter, where the latter is disavowed for the autogenetic form/matter coupling to thrive. Matter occurs in two modalities: first, as a metaphysical concept that serves a phallogocentrism; second, as an ungrounded figure, worrisomely speculative and catachrestic, that marks for her the possible linguistic site of a critical mime.

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself—inasmuch as she is on the side of the "perceptible," of "matter"—to "ideas," in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make "visible," by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover up of a possible operation of the feminine in language.⁴³

So perhaps here is the return of essentialism, in the notion of a "feminine in language"? And yet, she continues by suggesting that *miming* is that very operation of the feminine in language. To mime means to participate in precisely that which is mimed, and if the language mime is the language of phallogocentrism, then this is only a specifically feminine language to the extent that the feminine is radically implicated in the very terms of a phallogocentrism it seeks to rework. The quotation continues, "[to play with mimesis means] 'to unveil' the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed in this function. *They also remain elsewhere*: another case of the persistence of 'matter'..."

They mime phallogocentrism, but they also expose what is covered over by the mimetic self-replication of that discourse. For Irigaray, what is broken with and covered over is the linguistic operation of metonymy, a closeness and proximity which appears to be the linguistic residue of the initial proximity of mother and infant. It is this metonymic excess in every mime, indeed, in every metaphorical substitution, that is understood to disrupt the seamless repetition of the phallogocentric norm.

To claim, though, as Irigaray does, that the logic of identity is potentially disruptible by the insurgence of metonymy, and then to identify this metonymy with the repressed and insurgent feminine is to consolidate the place of the feminine in and as the irruptive chora, that which cannot be figured, but which is necessary for any figuration. That is, of course, to figure that chora nevertheless, and in such a way that the feminine is "always" the outside, and the outside is "always" the feminine. This is a move that at once positions the feminine as the unthematizable, the non-figurable, but which, in identifying the feminine with that position, thematizes and figures, and so makes use of the phallogocentric exercise to produce this identity which "is" the non-identical.

There are good reasons, however, to reject the notion that the feminine monopolizes the sphere of the excluded here. Indeed, to enforce such a monopoly redoubles the effect of foreclosure performed by the phallogocentric discourse itself, one which "mimes" its founding violence in a way that works against the explicit claim to have found a linguistic site in metonymy that works as disruption. After all, Plato's scenography of intelligibility depends on the exclusion of women, slaves, children, and animals, where slaves are characterized as those who do not speak his language, and who, in not speaking his language, are considered diminished in their capacity for reason. This xenophobic exclusion operates through the production of racialized Others, and those whose "natures" are considered less rational by virtue of their appointed task in the process of laboring to reproduce the conditions of private life. This domain of the less than rational human bounds the figure of human reason, producing that "man" as one who is without a childhood; is not a primate and so is relieved of the necessity of eating, defecating, living and dying; one who is not a slave, but always a property holder; one whose language remains originary and untranslatable. This is a figure of disembodiment, but one which is nevertheless a figure of a body, a bodying forth of a masculinized

rationality, the figure of a male body which is not a body, a figure in crisis, a figure that enacts a crisis it cannot fully control. This figuration of masculine reason as disembodied body is one whose imaginary morphology is crafted through the exclusion of other possible bodies. This is a materialization of reason which operates through the dematerialization of other bodies, for the feminine, strictly speaking, has no morphe, no morphology, no contour, for it is that which contributes to the contouring of things, but is itself undifferentiated, without boundary. The body that is reason dematerializes the bodies that may not properly stand for reason or its replicas, and yet this is a figure in crisis, for this body of reason is itself the phantasmatic dematerialization of masculinity, one which requires that women and slaves, children and animals be the body, perform the bodily functions, that it will not perform.⁴⁴

Irigaray does not always help matters here, for she fails to follow through the metonymic link between women and these other Others, idealizing and appropriating the "elsewhere" as the feminine. But what is the "elsewhere" of Irigaray's "elsewhere"? If the feminine is not the only or primary kind of being that is excluded from the economy of masculinist reason, what and who is excluded in the course of Irigaray's analysis?

IMPROPER ENTRY: PROTOCOLS OF SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

The above analysis has considered not the materiality of sex, but the sex of materiality. [In other words, it has traced materiality as the site at which a certain drama of sexual difference plays itself out.] The point of such an exposition is not only to warn against an easy return to the *materiality* of the body or the materiality of sex, but to show that to invoke matter is to invoke a sedimented history of sexual hierarchy and sexual erasures which should surely be an *object* of feminist inquiry, but which would be quite problematic as a *ground* of feminist theory. To return to matter requires that we return to matter as a *sign* which in its redoublings and contradictions enacts an inchoate drama of sexual difference.

Let us then return to the passage in the *Timaeus* in which matter redoubles itself as a proper and improper term, differentially sexed, thereby conceding itself as a site of ambivalence, as a body which is no body, in its masculine form, as a matter which is no body, in its feminine.

The receptacle, she, "always receives all things, she never departs at all

from her own nature and, never, in any way or any time, assumes a form like that of any of the things that enter into her" (50b). What appears to be prohibited here is partially contained by the verb *eilephen*—to assume, as in to assume a form—which is at once a continuous action, but also a kind of receptivity. The term means, among other possibilities, to gain or procure, to take, to receive hospitality, but also *to have a wife*, and *of a woman to conceive*.⁴⁵ The term suggests a procurement, but also both a capacity to conceive and to take a wife. These activities or endowments are prohibited in the passage above, thus setting limits on the kinds of "receptivity" that this receiving principle can undertake. The term for what she is never to do (i.e., "depart from her own nature") is *existhatbai dynameos*. This implies that she ought never to arise out of, become separated from, or be displaced from her own nature; as that which is contained in itself, she is that which, quite literally, ought not to be *disordered in displacement*. The *siempre*, the "never," and the "in no way" are insistent repetitions that give this "natural impossibility" the form of an imperative, a prohibition, a legislation and allocation of proper place. What would happen if she began to resemble that which is said only and always to enter into her? Clearly, a set of positions is being secured here through the exclusive allocation of penetration to the form, and penetrability to a feminized materiality, and a full dissociation of this figure of penetrable femininity from the being resulting from reproduction.⁴⁶

Irigaray clearly reads the "assume a form/shape" in this passage as "to conceive," and understands Plato to be prohibiting the feminine from contributing to the process of reproduction in order to credit the masculine with giving birth. But it seems that we might consider another sense of "to assume" in Greek, namely, "to have or take a wife."⁴⁷ For she will never resemble—and so never enter into—another materiality. This means that he—remember the Forms are likened to the father in this triad—will never be entered by her or, in fact, by anything. For he is the impenetrable penetrator, and she, the invariably penetrated. And "he" would not be differentiated from her were it not for this prohibition on resemblance which establishes their positions as mutually exclusive and yet complementary. In fact, if she were to penetrate in return, or penetrate elsewhere, it is unclear whether she could remain a "she" and whether "he" could preserve his own differentially established identity. For the logic of non-contradiction that conditions this distribution of pronouns is one which establishes the "he"

through this exclusive position as penetrator and the "she" through this exclusive position as penetrated. As a consequence, then, without this heterosexual *matrix*, as it were, it appears that the stability of these gendered positions would be called into question.

One might read this prohibition that secures the impenetrability of the masculine as a kind of panic, a panic over becoming "like" her, effeminized, or a panic over what might happen if a masculine penetration of the masculine were authorized, or a feminine penetration of the feminine, or a feminine penetration of the masculine or a reversibility of those positions—not to mention a full-scale confusion over what qualifies as "penetration" anyway. Would the terms "masculine" and "feminine" still signify in stable ways, or would the relaxing of the taboos against stray penetration destabilize these gendered positions in serious ways? If it were possible to have a relation of penetration between two ostensibly feminine gendered positions, would this be the kind of resemblance that must be prohibited in order for Western metaphysics to get going? And would that be considered something like a cooptation and displacement of phallic autonomy that would undermine the phallic assurance over its own exclusive rights?

Is this a reverse mime that Irigaray does not consider, but which is nevertheless compatible with her strategy of a critical mime? Can we read this taboo that mobilizes the speculative and phantasmatic beginnings of Western metaphysics in terms of the spectre of sexual exchange that it produces through its own prohibition, as a panic over the lesbian or, perhaps more specifically, over the phallicization of the lesbian? Or would this kind of resemblance so disturb the compulsory gendered matrix that supports the order of things that one could not claim that these sexual exchanges that occur outside or in the interstices of the phallic economy are simply "copies" of the heterosexual origin? For clearly, this legislation of a particular version of heterosexuality attests full well to its non-original status. Otherwise there would be no necessity to install a prohibition at the outset against rival possibilities for the organization of sexuality. In this sense, those improper resemblances or imitations that Plato rules out of the domain of intelligibility do not resemble the masculine, for that would be to privilege the masculine as origin. If a resemblance is possible, it is because the "originality" of the masculine is contestable; in other words, the miming of the masculine, which is never resorbed into it, can

expose the masculine's claim to originality as suspect. Insofar as the masculine is founded here through a prohibition which outlaws the spectre of a lesbian resemblance, that masculinist institution—and the phallogocentric homophobia it encodes—is *not* an origin, but only the *effect* of that very prohibition, fundamentally dependent on that which it must exclude.⁴⁸

Significantly, this prohibition emerges at the site where materiality is being installed as a double instance, as the copy of the Form, and as the non-contributing materiality in which and through which that self-copying mechanism works. In this sense, matter is either part of the specular scenography of phallic inscription or that which cannot be rendered intelligible within its terms. The very formulation of matter takes place in the service of an organization and denial of sexual difference, so that we are confronted with an economy of sexual difference as that which defines, instrumentalizes, and allocates matter in its own service.

The regulation of sexuality at work in the articulation of the Forms suggests that sexual difference operates in the very formulation of matter. But this is a matter that is defined not only against reason, where reason is understood as that which acts on and through a countervailing materiality, and masculine and feminine occupy these oppositional positions. Sexual difference also operates in the formulation, the staging, of what will occupy the site of inscriptional space, that is, as what must remain outside these oppositional positions as their supporting condition. There is no singular outside, for the Forms require a number of exclusions; they are and replicate themselves through what they exclude, through not being the animal, not being the woman, not being the slave, whose propriety is purchased through property, national and racial boundary, masculinism, and compulsory heterosexuality.

To the extent that a set of reverse-mimes emerge from those quarters, they will not be the same as each other; if there is an occupation and reversal of the master's discourse, it will come from many quarters, and those resignifying practices will converge in ways that scramble the self-replicating presumptions of reason's mastery. For if the copies speak, or if what is merely material begins to signify, the scenography of reason is rocked by the crisis on which it was always built. And there will be no way finally to delimit the elsewhere of Irigaray's elsewhere, for every oppositional discourse will produce its outside, an outside that risks becoming installed as its non-signifying inscriptional space.

And whereas this can appear as the necessary and founding violence of any truth-regime, it is important to resist that theoretical gesture of pathos in which exclusions are simply affirmed as sad necessities of signification. The task is to refigure this necessary "outside" as a future horizon, one in which the violence of exclusion is perpetually in the process of being overcome. But of equal importance is the preservation of the outside, the site where discourse meets its limits, where the opacity of what is not included in a given regime of truth acts as a disruptive site of linguistic impropriety and unrepresentability, illuminating the violent and contingent boundaries of that normative regime precisely through the inability of that regime to represent that which might pose a fundamental threat to its continuity. In this sense, radical and inclusive representability is not precisely the goal: to include, to speak as, to bring in every marginal and excluded position within a given discourse is to claim that a singular discourse meets its limits nowhere, that it can and will domesticate all signs of difference. If there is a violence necessary to the language of politics, then the risk of that violation might well be followed by another in which we begin, without ending, without mastering, to own—and yet never fully to own—the exclusions by which we proceed.

FORMLESS FEMININITY

Awkwardly, it seems, Plato's phantasmatic economy virtually deprives the feminine of a *morphe*, a shape, for as the receptacle, the feminine is a permanent and, hence, non-living, shapeless non-thing which cannot be named. And as nurse, mother, womb, the feminine is synecdochally collapsed into a set of figural functions. In this sense, Plato's discourse on materiality (if we can take the discourse on the *hypodochē* to be that), is one which does not permit the notion of the female body as a human form.

How can we legitimate claims of bodily injury if we put into question the materiality of the body? What is here enacted through the Platonic text is a violation that founds the very concept of matter, a violation that mobilizes the concept and which the concept sustains. Moreover, within Plato, there is a disjunction between a materiality which is feminine and formless and, hence, without a body, and bodies which are formed through—but not of—that feminine materiality. To what extent in invoking received notions of materiality, indeed, in insisting that those notions

function as "irreducibles," do we secure and perpetuate a constitutive violation of the feminine? When we consider that the very concept of matter preserves and recirculates a violation, and then invoke that very concept in the service of a compensation for violation, we run the risk of reproducing the very injury for which we seek redress.

The *Timaeus* does not give us bodies, but only a collapse and displacement of those figures of bodily position that secure a given fantasy of heterosexual intercourse and male autogenesis. For the receptacle is not a woman, but it is the figure that women become within the dream-world of this metaphysical cosmogony, one which remains largely inchoate in the constitution of matter. It may be, as Irigaray appears to suggest, that the entire history of matter is bound up with the problematic of receptivity. Is there a way to dissociate these implicit and disfiguring figures from the "matter" that they help to compose? And insofar as we have barely begun to discern the history of sexual difference encoded in the history of matter, it seems radically unclear whether a notion of matter or the materiality of bodies can serve as the uncontested ground of feminist practice. In this sense, the Aristotelian pun still works as a reminder of the doubleness of the matter of matter, which means that there may not be a materiality of sex that is not already burdened by the sex of materiality.

Some open-ended questions remain: How is it that the presumption of a given version of matter in the effort to describe the materiality of bodies prefigures in advance what will and will not appear as an intelligible body? How do tacit normative criteria form the matter of bodies? And can we understand such criteria not simply as epistemological impositions on bodies, but as the specific social regulatory ideals by which bodies are trained, shaped, and formed? If a bodily schema is not simply an imposition on already formed bodies, but part of the formation of bodies, how might we be able to think the production or formative power of prohibition in the process of morphogenesis?

Here the question is not simply what Plato thought bodies might be, and what of the body remained for him radically unthinkable; rather, the question is whether the forms which are said to produce bodily life operate through the production of an excluded domain that comes to bound and to haunt the field of intelligible bodily life. The logic of this operation is to a certain extent psychoanalytic inasmuch as the force of prohibition produces the spectre of a terrifying return. Can we, then, turn to psychoanalysis itself

to ask how the boundaries of the body are crafted through sexual taboo?⁴⁹ To what extent does the Platonic account of the phallogenesis of bodies prefigure the Freudian and Lacanian accounts which presume the phallus as the synecdochal token of sexed positionality?

If the bounding, forming, and deforming of sexed bodies is animated by a set of founding prohibitions, a set of enforced criteria of intelligibility, then we are not merely considering how bodies appear from the vantage point of a theoretical position or epistemic location at a distance from bodies themselves. On the contrary, we are asking how the criteria of intelligible sex operates to constitute a field of bodies, and how precisely we might understand specific criteria to produce the bodies that they regulate. In what precisely does the crafting power of prohibition consist? Does it determine a psychic experience of the body which is radically separable from something that one might want to call the body itself? Or is it the case that the productive power of prohibition in morphogenesis renders the very distinction between *morphe* and *psyche* unsustainable?

