

## **Altered Subjectivities, between Borders** *Speaking Silences with Irigaray and Kristeva*

“And where are *you* from?” Recounting his experience as an American citizen, Arturo Madrid reflects upon this question, *the* question, the marker that marked (and marks) him as an other, an outside to the circle of dominant American culture. A response: “I am ... very clearly *the other*. . . . I’ve always known I was *the other*, even before I knew the vocabulary or understood the significance of being *the other*.”<sup>1</sup> Growing up in a small mountain town in northern New Mexico, Madrid tells us that his life, and the life of his fellow *hispanos*, is located at an ambiguous place simultaneously outside and inside the dominant American culture. They experienced an “implicit denial,” which, Madrid writes, signals “our absence from the larger cultural, economic, political and social spaces ... [reminding] us constantly that we were *the other*.”<sup>2</sup> Being the other means, in part, living a visibly invisible existence inside a culture, yet, at the margins of the social circle – at the borders, across the tracks, from the ghetto, ad infinitum.

Turning to the writing of Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, I would like to explore the experiences of being other, *the other*, situated at the peripheries of the social cultural circle. What occurs when the margins fold in upon the center, an event that provokes the question, “What is she/he doing here?” Following Irigaray and Kristeva, I will argue that the event of the collapse of definitional boundaries, the moment of the in-vention of the other, signals the possibility of an ethics of alterity, provisionally understood as a nontotalizing relation to/with others. The crucial question is the significance and consequences of otherness for our everyday life, but also for our practices of struggling against multiple forms of oppression and discrimination. We must wrestle with the complex phenomenon of being other (and of being othered) in

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<sup>1</sup> Arturo Madrid. “Missing People and Others: Joining Together to Expand the Circle.” *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Eds. Margaret L. Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins. New York: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998. pp. 21.

order to begin, as Arturo Madrid beckons, to expand the circle, to shift the center. Irigaray and Kristeva, I will argue, impel and hearken us not to forget or deny our relations with others, and that, moreover, it is precisely in and through our relations with others that the possibility of seeing and being otherwise, of stepping outside the hegemonic circle of the same, first emerges.

**I** When the other is there and able to speak himself or herself, he or she listens to the thoughts one formulates for him or her, and assents to them or contests them or withdraws from them into the silence from which he or she came. One only speaks for others when they are silent or silenced. And to speak for others is to silence oneself.  
—Alphonso Lingis  
Silence *is* like starvation.  
—Cherríe Moraga

Effective transformation and elimination of the structures and systems that produce and reinforce patterns of hierarchical oppressive behavior cannot occur, for Cherríe Moraga, merely through the inclusion of previously excluded peoples, will not come about merely by the making visible of those heretofore invisible. Inclusionary politics, or the politics of recognition, while important, remains inevitably limited to acceptance of a status quo, insofar as one does not engage, more radically and fundamentally, in an interrogation of the networks and systems, the “structuring structures,” that weave together the social fabric of our life experiences. To question the center does not mean, merely, the expansion of an original circle, but instead seeks to rupture and displace these systems of relations constitutive of or complicitous in social hierarchies of inequality. In “La Güera,” Moraga suggests that a politics of recognition – the gaining of awareness of those excluded, disempowered, and marginalized – must be complemented by a “dialogue,” that is, by the speaking of the silenced in their own voice, voice(s) irreducible to the hegemonic grammars of dominant (and dominating) culture.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the possibility of multiple speaking subjects, of multiple

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Cherríe Moraga. “La Güera.” *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Eds. Margaret L. Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins. New York: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998.

tongues, of multiple languages. The rule (reign) of any One will only frustrate and occlude the real possibility of dialogues between different, yet equal, subjects.

Luce Irigaray is helpful in exposing and analyzing the logic of such social hierarchies that privilege one voice, one history, one vision, i.e., the Same, at the expense of others, *the other*, i.e., alterity. While her work largely unfolds in and through, and against, both a Western philosophical tradition and the psychoanalytic school of Jacques Lacan, which does not inform Moraga's writing, certain structural homologies may be instructively highlighted. Of crucial significance is (A) the discursive relationship of the Same and the other, identity and difference, center and margin, and (B) the possibility of an "other heading," of an other speaking – *the other's* speaking.

A. The question of alterity, as the question of the place (or non-place) of *the other*, figures in Irigaray as central to the attempt to establish a space for feminine specificity, to articulate or express a feminine language irreducible to the economy of masculine signification. For Irigaray, language has always followed from a phallic logic that privileges "principles of identity, sameness, visibility."<sup>4</sup> For instance, the oedipal model of traditional Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic narratives "structures both sexes according to the libidinal economy modeled on the law of the same."<sup>5</sup> Women are thereby reduced to an absence in an economy articulated in terms of phallic presence and identity. Ambiguity and definitional incompleteness, typified in the formlessness of a sexual organ without the cherished features of form and identity – the vagina – consign women to irremediable inferiority. Insofar as women are "defined only by the presence or absence of the male term,"<sup>6</sup> the order of (masculine) language severs the

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<sup>4</sup> Carolyn Burke. "Irigaray Through the Looking Glass." *Engaging with Irigaray*. Eds. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. pp. 38.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Grosz. "The Hetero and the Homo: The Sexual Ethics of Luce Irigaray." *Engaging with Irigaray*. Eds. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. pp. 337.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

connections between mother and child, driving the child out of the imaginary register. The traversal of the oedipal dilemma in which the child moves from the imaginary to the symbolic represents a move into the confines of a phallographic order of the Same that denies and represses difference, namely, the possibility of women's real (i.e., positive) sexual difference from men.

In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray explains that identity, or the Same, characterizes the phallic economy of male sexuality. Within these parameters, woman is defined as lack, as the abyss and absence of identifiable meaning, "*the horror of nothing to see*. A defect in this systematics of representation and desire."<sup>7</sup> Cherríe Moraga explains in a similar manner that the othered term (for Irigaray, the feminine) assumes a subordinate position, described in terms signifying the (alleged) nebulous and threatening nature of this othered "other": "The 'unknown' is often depicted in racist literature as 'the darkness' within a person. Similarly, sexist writers will refer to fear in the form of the vagina, calling it 'the orifice of death'."<sup>8</sup> In a culture that produces and reinforces these myths of the evil other(s), woman is refused a place in the system, improper, the "sex" which, in one sense, is not a sex at all, for her lot, in virtue of her definable lack (the vagina), precludes the possibility of proper meaning, that is, the possibility of occupying the same discursive position and value as the valorized terms.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, woman must remain invisible in an economy of sight, absent in an economy of presence, different (differed/deferred) in an economy of the same. Woman, in other words, is excluded from the masculine economy on the basis of her defined lack, her indeterminacy, that is, her alterity, which only produces and reinforces her subordination.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Luce Irigaray. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993. pp. 26.

<sup>8</sup> Cherríe Moraga. *opt cit.*, pp. 31.

<sup>9</sup> Luce Irigaray. *op. cit.*, pp. 26.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26.

How can this situation be altered? For Irigaray, the disruption/subversion of the machinery of naming animating the masculine logos must occur not through the (re)introduction of another alternative discourse. Irigaray does not advocate the return of the repressed feminine as a new theory of and for women, a theory in expressed opposition to the masculine discourse. As she argues in “The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine,” “the issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or the *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal.”<sup>11</sup> Negatively expressed, Irigaray’s strategy seeks to resist the appropriative tendency of the masculine symbolic, to confound the economy of the same that precludes the possibility of speaking otherwise, of “speaking (as) woman.”

B. The problematization of this masculine economy of the same in terms of the alterity of the repressed feminine occurs more positively by seeking a difference that signals the possibility for speaking as a subject, different from yet equal to men. The possibility of speaking, and of dialogue, cannot occur between self-identical subjects. Rather, the movement of communication is a swaying from one to the other, and from the other to one, which does not seek merely to resolve (negate) differences but to relinquish one’s own grasp on oneself, that is, to be open to the other, an opening/hearing that lets and listens to the speaking of others without the attempt to coerce, dominate, or suppress. Irigaray’s emphasis on difference, then, signals toward an ethical movement of dialogue in which women (and all othered others) may speak in their own terms, through their own voices. Through languages not coercively imposed by a dominant group/culture.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 78.

Irigaray thus urges us to challenge the primacy accorded to the phallus, and by extension, to identity, vision, presence, and determinacy, that undergirds and animates a phal-logo-ocular-centric economy of male sexuality. According to Grosz, “Irigaray celebrates a concept of femininity that is capable of representing women in more adequate terms than has been possible within patriarchy. She evokes another mode of sexuality, identification, and pleasure than those made available to women in oedipal structures.”<sup>12</sup> Both a critical interrogation of masculine language/logic and a challenge to the self-sufficiency and identity of the symbolic, Irigaray opens up and transgresses the limits of phallic logos as she seeks to express feminine specificity, feminine alterity, in a language not fully beholden and submissive to the logic of the symbolic. “Irigaray is trying to imagine a realm ... in which woman is no longer defined in relation to man as his negative, other, or as lack,” Burke writes.<sup>13</sup> Continuing, “This new ideological place ... could be described as preoedipal or postpatriarchal, or, as the place of a desire. It is a site where women’s relations to each other might acquire appropriate expression.”<sup>14</sup>

The emphasis on and accentuation of difference enables a positive transformation in our relations with others. The ethical is here conceived on the basis of a nontotalizing relation to the other, a relation, both linguistic and social, that refuses recuperation into a system of signification and regulation. Jean-Joseph Goux is instructive on this point, arguing that the neutralization of difference “can only ensure the perpetuation of subjection – not subordination to individuals but dispossession by masculine culture – by a structure, an order, a system.”<sup>15</sup> Irigaray’s “differentialism,” in other words, asserts an irreducible difference between the sexes, a difference that must be preserved and

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<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Grosz. op. cit., pp. 338.

<sup>13</sup> Carolyn Burke. op. cit., pp. 45.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Joseph Goux. “Luce Irigaray Versus the Utopia of the Neutral Sex.” *Engaging with Irigaray*. Eds. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. pp. 182.

thought out rather than effaced. Here (sexual) alterity does not serve to buttress the impossibility of communication between sexually different subjects, men and women, but rather signals the possibility of exchange, of a more open exchange of desires, masculine and feminine, that does not adequate and dominate difference. The repression or preclusion of women's own possibility for speaking – of maintaining their differences from men, from the system of the masculine that structures all differences around a masculine model/ideal – annihilates a fundamental difference crucial for ethical exchange. Moraga is instructive here, arguing that the “dialogue has simply not gone deep enough.”<sup>16</sup> A dialogue between others cannot occur (ethically) without the recognition of differences. Similarly, in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray writes: “If there is no double desire, the positive and negative poles divide themselves between two sexes instead of establishing a chiasmus or a double loop in which each can go toward the other and come back to itself.”<sup>17</sup> Here, the chiasmatic interchange maintains differences between others while simultaneously enabling equal – yet always different – exchanges, “keeping a space of freedom and attraction between them, **a possibility of separation and alliance.**”<sup>18</sup>

Irigaray does not essentialize these differences between others and, moreover, does not advocate a separatism which would preclude the ethical moment realizable in dialogue. Rather, the recognition of difference, for Irigaray, is seen as the condition of possibility of nontotalizing, nonexclusionary relations with others. Here, a recognition of difference means confronting the real ways in which our experiences deviate from each other, but also of the necessity of finding grounds of commonality – which means working past the fears we may have for others. This is well expressed by Moraga who writes that “one voice is not enough, nor two, although this is where dialogue begins. It

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<sup>16</sup> Cherrie Moraga. op. cit., pp. 33.

<sup>17</sup> Luce Irigaray. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993. pp. 9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13. [My emphasis]

is essential that radical feminists confront their fear of and resistance to each other, because without this, there *will* be no bread on the table. Simply, we will not survive.”<sup>19</sup>

**I** call me  
roach and presumptuous  
nightmare on your white pillow  
your itch to destroy  
the indestructible  
part of yourself  
—Audre Lorde

1,950 mile-long open wound/ dividing a *pueblo*, a culture,  
running down the length of my body,  
staking fence rods in my flesh,  
splits me splits me  
*me raja me raja*  
This is my home/ this thin edge of/ barbwire.  
—Gloria Anzaldúa

Kristeva approaches the question of the possibility of ethical action, of how to address difference in nontotalizing ways, by inscribing alterity within the same, a gesture that seeks to open up the barriers of identity that shut difference out by realizing the proximity and dependency of self on other. Returning to Madrid’s personal narrative, we may express this as the recognition of the blind spots and missing people, cultures, and histories passed over or erased in the construction of a hegemonic American identity. Identity extends powers of legitimation and authorization at the expense of those defined, oppositionally and subordinately, as other. For Madrid, this amounts to a reductive and oppressive classification imposed upon minorities by a dominant group. “All of us are put into the same box,” he writes, “Whatever our history, whatever our record, whatever our validations, whatever our accomplishments, by and large we are perceived unidimensionally and are dealt with accordingly.”<sup>20</sup> Here the ethical encounter is negated by a thinking anathema to the differences of the other, to the possibility of the speaking of others. Kristeva is very helpful here, for her ethics of alterity, as Kelly Oliver argues, seeks to “acknowledge difference without attempting to totalize it, annihilate it, or reconcile it.”<sup>21</sup> “It is more a question of cohabitation ... not of absorption,” of opening up and welcoming the other rather than maintaining a

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<sup>19</sup> Cherrie Moraga. op. cit., pp. 33.

<sup>20</sup> Arturo Madrid. op. cit., pp. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Kelly Oliver. “Introduction: Julia Kristeva’s Outlaw Ethics.” *Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Julia Kristeva’s Writing*. Ed. Kelly Oliver. New York: Routledge, 1993. pp. 13.

mutual exclusivity and oppositionality between difference/the other, on the one hand, and identity/the same, on the other.<sup>22</sup>

For Kristeva, then, the inscription of the other within ourselves serves as the basis for an ethics of difference. She bases her reformulation of our relations to and with others on a psychoanalytic model that emphasizes the unconscious structures according to which individual and social action unfold. As Oliver stresses, “psychoanalysis sets up an ethics which respects this irreconcilable strangeness. Psychoanalysis accepts, even invites, difference, nonmeaning, otherness. It can provide a new way of identifying the other, the stranger, not in order to reify and exclude it, but in order to welcome it.”<sup>23</sup> Yet, the possibility of an ethics of alterity cannot be realized without an accompanying reconsideration of existing models of subjectivity and identity hostile to the welcoming of the other. Kristeva’s notion of the subject-in-process is helpful in making the transition from the classical subject of metaphysics that defines itself in opposition to and through an exclusion of the other.

Kristeva’s strategy necessitates a discursive break with the model of classical subjectivity, of the unitary ego or *res cogitans* of Western metaphysics, in order to create the possibility for a subject without stable boundaries, without a determinant and totalizing identity. Her “speaking-subject” or “subject-in-process” expresses the process of continual creation and becoming by which the subject comes into being as “between identity or unity” as well as “the challenge to this identity ... the moment of crisis, of emptiness, and then the reconstruction of a new, plural identity.”<sup>24</sup> By reformulating subjectivity as an always already unfinished signifying process, Kristeva’s subject-in-process divides the subject from itself, places the subject in an ambiguous dialectic between the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic, tentatively

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Ross Guberman. *Julia Kristeva Interviews*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. pp. 190.

defined as Kristeva's term for the material and heterogeneous process existent within but irreducible to the symbolic, resists full (re)presentation within the terms of the dominant discourse.

The semiotic does not exist independently of the symbolic, and to this extent, one may instructively juxtapose Kristeva's semiotic process with the types of ambiguity and definitional incompleteness associated, by Madrid, with border existences. As such, the border (the semiotic) remains outside the terms of the dominant society/culture (the symbolic) yet is only meaningful in terms of the dominant. In other words, the border and center (the semiotic and symbolic) are mutually interdependent, yet exist, also, in an uneasy relationship, manifest, for example, in the culturally reconfigurative potentials of border shifting, or in Kristeva's terms, in the power of the semiotic to disruptively erupt into the symbolic order – transgressing unicity through the becoming-/making-improper of the monolithic monologic of the ruling regime. More simply, the semiotic (the border/margin) harbors a transgressive potential precisely to the extent that this is where the rules of the system (the symbolic) break down. The border is a place of continual negotiation, and the semiotic may be usefully construed in this context as the process of destructuring and opening up, the moment of sedition, in which the Same dissolves into others.

Now, returning to the question of the subject, experience according to the model of Kristeva's speaking subject refuses the understanding of subjectivity in purely static terms. Subjectivity is dislodged from its former residence in the symbolic and reconfigured on a groundless ground and in terms of the precarious dynamism of an existence that, in a sense, straddles two (or more) worlds, refusing static habitation in (the) one. Whence, in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva argues that “[because] the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either ‘exclusively’ semiotic or ‘exclusively’ symbolic, and is instead necessarily

marked by an indebtedness to both.”<sup>25</sup> This discursive model of the subject-in-process enables a (re)conception of human practice that is partially mediated by structural (i.e., symbolic) conditions but which, at the same time, is never fully beholden to these. Subjectivity cannot, in other words, be reduced to an unchanging identity fully subject to the monotonous finality of structural necessities.

Because the subject-in-process is shown to be an effect of lived experience, the heterogeneous materiality exceeding total representation in the sign system (the symbolic), the unity of experience can only be falsely maintained by throwing up strong barriers between self and other. Kristeva describes this process of “throwing up” barriers in the production of selfhood in terms of abjection. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva describes abjection as a casting away or expulsion that inaugurates the identity of the subject.<sup>26</sup> Here the process through which subjectivity is founded is inseparably linked to an excluding and rejecting, an abjecting: “During the course in which ‘I’ become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit.”<sup>27</sup>

Kristeva argues that the abject (like Madrid’s account of peoples inhabiting the borders) dwells in an ambiguous domain between determinable boundaries, between subject and object, as neither subject nor object. But more importantly, Kristeva shows that the process of abjecting, abjection, simultaneously founds and ruptures the integrity of the subject, produces and dissolves unity: I come to be in virtue of what I am not, of what ‘I’ exclude from myself in order to become myself. Whence Kristeva writes, “I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* with the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Julia Kristeva. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. pp. 24.

<sup>26</sup> Julia Kristeva. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

This founding repudiation by which the subject comes to be means the creation of an abject domain, “a terror that disassembles,” that ruptures the border between myself and an other, drawing the subject towards the abyss where meaning collapses. As Madrid tells us, being *the other* is similar to being the abject, as the “darker side to otherness” that “disturbs, disquiets, discomforts. It provokes distrust and suspicion. *The other* makes people feel anxious, nervous, apprehensive, even fearful. *The other* frightens, scares.”<sup>29</sup> Being *the other* in relation to the dominant threatens and terrifies the dominant in the realization of its own abjection. Expressed another way, “it is not really difference that the oppressor fears so much as similarity. He fears he will discover in himself the same aches, the same longings as those of the people he has shitted on.”<sup>30</sup>

Border existence, otherness in proximity, manifests the interdependence and mutual imbrication of self and other, at the same time that it serves as a site of continual renegotiation and struggle. In this sense the abject “lies outside, beyond the set, and .... from its place of banishment, [it] does not cease challenging its master.”<sup>31</sup> Symbolic legitimacy is called into question, threatened, by the experience of the abject as “the impossible within,” and as the contingency of center on margin, self on other. Put differently, refusing (and refused) integration, abjection is the extricated *outside* that enables the unfolding of an *inside*. Abjection forms and collapses the boundary between inside and outside by manifesting the necessity of borders to the maintenance of the identity of the I *and* the permeability of these very borders.

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<sup>29</sup> Arturo Madrid. op. cit., pp. 23.

<sup>30</sup> Cherrie Moraga. op. cit., pp. 31.

<sup>31</sup> Julia Kristeva. *Powers of Horror*. pp. 2.



[The oppressor] must, first, emotionally come to terms with what it feels like to be a victim. If he – or anyone – were to do this, it would be impossible to discount the oppression of others, except by again forgetting how we have been hurt.

—Cherríe Moraga

... it is in looking to the nightmare that the dream is found. There, the survivor emerges to insist on a future, a vision, yes, born out of what is dark and female. The feminist movement must be a movement of such survivors, a movement with a future.

—Cherríe Moraga

The notion of the abject as situated between self and other, the ambiguous in-between located at the precipice of an abyss which threatens to engulf and dissemble the subject, structurally resembles Irigaray's consideration of the feminine imaginary in "This Sex Which Is Not One." Irigaray describes the feminine as that which eludes the restricted masculine economy of specula(riza)tion in which linearity, form, identity, continuity, fixity, sight, etc. prevail. However, Irigaray's attempt to develop a feminine imaginary calls for woman to (re)discover or (re)envelop herself by herself. Woman must reinscribe herself in the masculine economy, not as another equal element in the system, that is, as equal to and, hence, non-different from man, but rather as the always already other-to-self, divided – plural. In this sense, the geography of feminine pleasure is described in terms of a pluralistic, differing/deferring sexuality that disrupts a masculine discursive machinery of sameness. The heterogeneity and multiplicity of feminine language "upsets the linearity of a project, undermines the goal-object of a desire, diffuses the polarization toward a single pleasure, disconcerts fidelity to single discourse ..."<sup>32</sup> Woman, in other words, refuses her own incorporation into the system of representation, and in so doing refuses to own herself, to possess and control herself so that in her multiplicity, alterity prevails as the impossibility of propriety of self and other. "Woman derives pleasure from what is so near that she cannot have it, nor have herself. She herself enters into a ceaseless exchange of herself with the other without any possibility of identifying either."<sup>33</sup>

This "speaking (as) woman" signals an other mode of signification that can serve as a useful model for feminist practice, a model in which alterity is not excluded or

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<sup>32</sup> Luce Irigaray. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. pp. 30.

reductively incorporated but the possibility of ethics, as an openness to the coming of the other. Recalling both Moraga and Madrid, the power to name, to identify, and the control thereby achieved over the named and identified objects/persons, must be relinquished for the possibility of the opening up to difference, that is, for the possibility of nonconsumptive and nonadequative relations toward others different than myself.

In a similar manner, by unsettling linguistic (symbolic) self-identity and unity, the alterity/heterogeneity associated with the speaking subject of Kristeva functions positively, Oliver argues, as “the practice of breaking down identity,” which becomes “an ethical imperative.”<sup>34</sup> Avoiding the process of establishing rigid boundaries between self and other, identity and difference, Kristeva “brings the subject into the place of the other by putting the other into the subject.”<sup>35</sup> As a result “the pattern and logic of alterity is already found within the subject,” which means “the subject is never a stable identity, but always a subject-in-process/on trial.”<sup>36</sup> The othering of the classical subject contributes to the task of breaking down identity as the subject is rendered other to itself, that is, as an always already heterogeneous speaking-subject that undermines the completion of the signifying process.

Moreover, for Kristeva, abjection enables the possibility of a critique of the negative logic of exclusion necessary to subjectivation (the coming into being of the subject). The abject recognizes the precariousness of the self as founded upon, and threatened by, the abjected other. The encounter with and open recognition of the abject – and our own abjection – is not merely a destruction of the self and identity for a valorization of fractured/fracturing identities, but the possibility for positive transformation between different others in a manner respectful of difference.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 31.

<sup>34</sup> Kelly Oliver. *op. cit.*, pp. 15.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 13.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

To conclude, both Irigaray and Kristeva offer helpful insights into the logics of sameness that produce subordinated and suppressed others *and* suggest positive routes by which to overcome subjection to dominating regimes that silence difference. Each in her own way suggest that difference, alterity, must be recognized, and that the valorization of unity and identity must give way to enable others to come into the circle, but also, to change the very nature of the circle.

Lastly, how might we begin, in Madrid's terms, to expand the circle? Moraga writes that the "real battle ... for all of us, begins under the skin."<sup>37</sup> "When we do rub up against this person [the other], *there* then is the challenge. *There* then is the opportunity to look at the nightmare within us."<sup>38</sup> Our turn toward difference, *the other*, must occur by coming to terms with *the other* in ourselves. This is what Moraga means when she writes that oppressors can only begin to understand the meaning of the oppressions of others by realizing their own direct and indirect complicity in and accountability for their oppression of others. "Without an emotional, heartfelt grappling with the source of our own oppression, without naming the enemy within ourselves and outside of us, no authentic, nonhierarchical connection among oppressed groups can take place."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Cherrie Moraga. *op. cit.*, pp. 30.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

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