

TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF EROS

Transfiguring Passion at
the Limits of Discipline

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I was sent forth from the power,
 And I have come to those who reflect upon me, . . .
 You who are waiting for me, take me to yourselves.
 And do not banish me from your sight.
 And do not make your voice hate me, nor your hearing.
 Do not be ignorant of me anywhere or any time. Be on your guard!
 Do not be ignorant of me.
 For I am the first and the last.
 I am the honored one and the scorned one.
 I am the whore and the holy one. . . .
 I am she whose wedding is great
 And I have not taken a husband . . .
 I am the silence that is incomprehensible
 And the idea whose remembrance is frequent.
 I am the voice whose sound is manifold
 And the word whose appearance is multiple. . . .
 I am strength and I am fear . . . I am the one who has been hated
 everywhere
 And who has been loved everywhere . . .
 I am the one whom you have hidden from
 And you appear to me.
 But whenever you hide yourselves,
 I myself will appear . . .
 I am a mute who does not speak,
 And great is my multitude of words.⁴⁰

I, for one, retreat into the thundering silence of her words. Before I say
 too much, too soon.

♡ Ethical Desires: Toward a Theology of Relational Transcendence

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"Eroticism is first and foremost a thirst for otherness. And the supernatural is the supreme otherness," writes Octavio Paz in *Double Flame*. The supreme otherness of God—theologians call it "divine transcendence." Eroticism thus suggests a link between human otherness and divine transcendence. In its most common versions, however, divine transcendence seems not to enhance the awareness of interhuman otherness, but rather to so relativize difference as to effectively absorb otherness into itself. Indeed, "transcendence" is assumed to be what God has and humans do not. Thus the otherness of God and the otherness of creatures, the love for God and interhuman relations are distanced from one another.

The work of Emmanuel Levinas reacts against this dichotomy. The "gleam of transcendence in the face of the Other," Levinas's crucial formulation, seeks to turn discourses of transcendence away from dreams of an otherworldly realm, toward the concrete reality of other persons. Bringing transcendence to bear on the ethical encounter between human beings, Levinas's work has influenced philosophies and theologies of liberation as well as poststructuralist thought. However, Levinas sets apart the sexual encounter and ultimately opposes ethics to eroticism. This is a common dichotomy that threatens Levinas's critical reformulation of transcendence. Luce Irigaray's reading of Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* not only exposes the problem but also opens his proposal toward the possibility of an "ethics of sexual difference." Her interrogation of the role that Levinas assigns to the feminine in the production of transcendence will

help us uncover the implicit gendering of Levinas's transcendence as well as the spatio-temporality that it assumes. And yet her transcendence also closes itself around predetermined types of encounters.

After a brief synopsis of Irigaray's assessment of classic philosophical notions of transcendence, this essay will trace the move from Levinas's face-to-face to Irigaray's body-to-body encounter and its effect on the spatio-temporal imaginary of transcendence. We will explore the interpenetration of transcendence in the flesh and between persons as well as its broader cosmic dimensions, where transcendence appears as erotic cosmological incarnation. This breadth requires, paradoxically, greater singularity. The work of Chicana scholars Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga will allow us to move beyond Irigaray's images of the body, to see the body in the singularity of its multiple differences and limitations.

DISEMBODIED TRANSCENDENCES

Luce Irigaray argues that "the philosophers" rightly recognized their need for transcendence as a basis for the becoming of subjectivity, as an external limit to their subjectivity, but also as a telos for their intentionality.¹ These philosophers, Irigaray reminds us, "were men and they were debating between men. Their solution was, of course, a masculine one."² As we know, they conceived the journey toward transcendence as entailing the overcoming of their own bodies—indeed of materiality as such—which they viewed as constraints to freedom. They projected these constraints onto women, positing a God as the "opposite pole of their instincts and natural inclinations." God would be their external limit and the objective toward which their intentions could be guided.³ They proposed: "The subject develops between . . . two extremes: nature and God, nature and spirit, mother-nature and father-Logos, irreducible birth and absolute creation."⁴ An imaginary rift is thus opened between nature and God, which in turn divides spirit from nature and birth from creation.

God was their other, perhaps their only transcendent Other, for the masculinist culture ignored the transcendent character of the body, of bodies, of the cosmos. Thus, Irigaray calls us to turn back to the relation between the sexes for a sexual or carnal ethics—an ethics of the passions.⁵ "Transcendence is no longer ecstasy, going out of the self toward the

inaccessible, extra-sensible, extra-earthly entirely-other."⁶ But Irigaray is not expounding pure immanence. Rather than choosing one side of the immanence/transcendence cosmological divide opened by the philosophers' transcendence, Irigaray interrogates its assumptions. She seeks a model for the relations between nature and God, nature and spirit, flesh and transcendence, that allows spirit to touch the most intimate spaces of life. A notion of transcendence in the flesh grounds Irigaray's vision of a relation between the sexes that is both "terrestrial and heavenly."⁷

LEVINAS'S EROS

Irigaray's most sustained discussion of transcendence unfolds in the context of her response to Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, and so we shall turn to his depiction of interhuman transcendence in order to encounter Irigaray's difference.⁸ In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas takes us back to the singular encounter of the self with the other (whom I will never be) to reinscribe responsibility at the core of subjectivity. It is on the basis of such an understanding that he poses the question of transcendence—one that does not bypass the human Other, but is opened by "him." Levinas thinks of transcendence as the "welcoming of the other by the same, of the other by me."⁹ Transcendence is found in the *face* of the Other. For Levinas transcendence "designates a relation with a reality infinitely distant from my own reality, yet without this distance destroying this relation and without this relation destroying this distance."¹⁰ Transcendence is defined as separation. The relation established between the self and the Other is based neither on knowledge nor on a dynamics of revelation. It is a relationship of desire—of what he calls metaphysical desire. "Transcendence is *desire*."¹¹ Metaphysical desire is strictly opposed to the needs of the body, which, like hunger, are satisfied by the incorporation of the desired object into the self. Metaphysical desire "desires beyond everything that can simply complete it"; it does not aim at appropriation or consumption, nor even consummation.¹² This interpretation of the relation of transcendence in terms of desire represents a promising move towards a relational transcendence, where the irreducibility of difference is not in conflict with desire, and where desire does not seek the elimination of difference.

But before we get too excited by this metaphysical desire, we should note that Levinas carefully distinguishes it from eros—revealing his desire to be less *sexy* than *sexist*. Levinas does ponder the ethical import of the sexual relation between man and woman, at least for a moment, but ultimately eros fails his test of transcendence. Eros, he argues, like physical needs, seeks satisfaction, it returns to itself. For Levinas, ethics does not return; the desire of transcendence is always an outward movement, without cycles.¹³ However, cycles, as Irigaray constantly reminds us, are intrinsic to the temporality of nature, to the life of the body. A purely linear transcendence is famously prone to leave the flesh behind. Admittedly, the abstract, progressive impulse is not the transcendence that Levinas seeks in the face-to-face encounter; nonetheless a common patriarchal anxiety about the workings of bodies seems to haunt his encounter with the erotic. He concludes: “The metaphysical event of transcendence—the welcome of the other, hospitality—Desire and language—is not accomplished as love.”¹⁴ The ethical relation is “primordially enacted in conversation,” a discourse that, Levinas makes clear, is not love.¹⁵ Love is thus relegated to the nether side of transcendence.

Indeed, Levinas’s account of the sexual encounter is doomed from the start, for the feminine has already been given a role: The beloved is frailty, tenderness, vulnerability, irresponsible animality, infancy, equivocation.¹⁶ Transcendence is not accomplished as love, except when love engenders the son. It is paternity that saves love, furnishing a transcendence that becomes incarnate among men—made possible by, but foreclosed to, women. The feminine here is only womb, an immanence from which transcendence has been plucked. In Levinas the promise of a philosophy of transcendence in the finite is thwarted by replicating the immanence/transcendence divide within the created realm—across sexual difference. The assumed chasm between God and creation of traditional conceptions of transcendence is displaced, but not its undergirding logic: the imagined chasm between a transcending man and an immanent woman. In consequence, a rift opens also between justice and passion, between responsibility and love.¹⁷

Commenting on the Song of Songs, Levinas writes, “Perhaps justice is founded on the *mastery* of passion.”¹⁸ Not only does Levinas reinstate the dichotomy between justice and passion—oddly, to be sure, while reading

the Song of Songs. His description of the logic of this mastery also bears eerie resemblance to a well-known structure of subjection—domination over an Other on which the dominating one nonetheless depends. “The justice through which the world subsists is founded on the most *equivocal* order, but on the *domination* exerted at every moment over this order, or this disorder. This order, equivocal *par excellence*, is precisely the order of the erotic, the realm of the sexual.”¹⁹ Domination is thus invoked as the power that leads from equivocation—the order of the erotic, or the “epiphany of the feminine,” as Levinas says in a different context—to justice.²⁰ Levinas continues, “Justice would be possible only if it triumphs over this equivocalness.”²¹ Mastery and domination over the erotic—what kind of justice could this found? Let me say in passing that it seems hardly irrelevant that one could use that same sentence to describe patriarchal or imperial logics. Patriarchy (or colonialism) is founded on women (or the colonized), more specifically on the domination exerted at every moment over them. Indeed, Levinas’s advocacy of mastery over the erotic seems to be yet another instance of those discourses, to which Irigaray alludes, that imagine transcendence as an ascending journey from nature to God, from body to spirit, from an irreducible birth to an absolute creation—from eros to justice.

The dichotomy thus established between justice and the order of the erotic ultimately makes the status of the face uncertain. Is it still possible, as Levinas attempts, to prevent the call of the Other from becoming detached from his or her body? Would word and face-as-flesh not fall on different sides of the chasm thus opened? For Levinas, it is in the face of the Other that transcendence gleams. The face presents itself—it is seen and it is heard, it expresses itself visibly and/or audibly—but always across an infinite distance. It is precisely the need to protect the separateness of transcendence that leads Levinas to imagine the relation in terms of discourse.²² Conversation “maintains the distance between me and the Other, the radical separation asserted in transcendence,” Levinas explains. Light and sound travel through the divide between the self and the Other in ethical relation. In Levinas’s depiction of the relation, light and sound reach out across the distance and touch the eyes and the ear drums of the subject—an approach of waves to skin, but never of skin to skin.

IN THE BEGINNING: TOUCH

The dichotomy between ethics and the erotic in Levinas's thought is certainly related to his problematic depictions of the feminine, but is not limited to that issue. The spatio-temporality of transcendence in Levinas's imaginary—its heights, exteriority, and straightforwardness—presupposes the exclusion of eroticism. It cannot quite accommodate encounters between bodies, where one is inside the other, where one embraces the other.

A model of transcendence in the flesh calls for other ways to conceive of the bonds between human beings. Like Levinas, Irigaray locates transcendence in the encounter with the Other. However, for her what protects the otherness of the Other is not separation, as it is for Levinas. "*Approaching* involves an irreducible *distancing*; which lies, insurmountable, in the drawing near to one another." The distance that Irigaray imagines here, in contrast to Levinas's separation, defies common intuition; it is insurmountable in touch. It is a figuration of irreducible difference, an "elusive mystery of which the preservation is necessary," for transcendence, that is, "in order that desire *unfold* toward a blossoming."²³ This elusive mystery welcomes touch; it envelops bodies, within and without.

"Lovers' faces live not only in the face but in the whole body," Irigaray reminds Levinas.²⁴ The encounter between lovers does not fit the model of two planes facing each other—two facades, as it were—that the Levinasian account evokes, where the Other's transcendence is always exterior. The erotic encounter demands an imaginary that can accommodate bodily transcendence—as bodies in touch and within each other. Irigaray finds a metaphor for this spatiality in our own beginnings in the womb, in that intimacy of a shared membrane, contact between self and Other, before the word. That place, where we were welcomed before our offerings of any welcome, is the site of identification between mother and child as well as of differentiation between the two. In the beginning was touch, Irigaray reminds us.

The place of initial welcome, however, is no longer there; it does not call us back to it, to perform a regressive move like the ones that Levinas (like most masculinist thought) fears.²⁵ The imaginary return to the

womb awakens us to the memories of its primordial caress inscribed in the flesh. And it is precisely in fidelity to that memory that subjectivity can become welcome and open to a "birth that has never taken place"—for both man and woman. "Sensual pleasure can reopen and reverse" the control-and consumption-oriented approaches to the world and to the Other. It moves toward an infinite empathy that abides "by the outlines of the other."²⁶ Neither grasping nor assimilating, the caress retraces the borders of the Other. Neither height nor one-dimensional separation describes the space between lovers. That space is traced by the contours of bodies.

Drawing near and unfolding—this movement follows a complex spatio-temporality where Eros "touches upon" transcendence. This space is multidimensional; the flow through it involves cycles and returns as much as forward movement—the morphology of the body challenges the privilege of the phallic imaginary. The caress of the Other summons me to recall the intimacy of a primordial communion that gives birth to difference. "Caressing me, he bids me neither to disappear nor to forget, but to rememorate the place where, for me, the most secret life holds itself in reserve. . . . Plunging me back into the maternal womb and beyond that conception, awakening me to another birth," again and again.²⁷ The erotic encounter thus opens the possibility of a new birth, where transcendence takes place.

Transcendence is not achieved through a linear straightforward development. Like cosmic life, transcendence takes place through cycles of repetition that bring forth new births, through remembrances that instantiate new possibilities. Transcendence repeats, and brings about the new. Transcendence does take flesh. Transcendence is neither deferral nor consummation, but a new outcome of the encounter mediated by eros: new conception, rebirth, regeneration. Indeed Irigaray challenges the way that Levinas's deferrals always maintain the separation "with the other in the experience of love."²⁸ For Levinas admits no time for returns and no space for communion. In his ethics, there is only desire, not love. The lovers never enter the place where "the perception of being two persons becomes indistinct," they never access the "energy produced together" to be born again. Levinas, Irigaray observes, turns toward "a future where no day is named for the encounter with the other in an

embodied love.”²⁹ As the actual encounter is deferred, love evades the responsibility of transcendence. Ethics is excluded from the realm of actual sexual relations. Perhaps, as Gayatri Spivak claims, “the hardest lesson is the impossible intimacy of the ethical.”³⁰

TRANSCENDENCE AS SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

Irigaray’s account of the sexual encounter inscribes sexual difference as a difference between the feminine and the masculine. All other transformative encounters, distant or intimate, seem to be excluded. The place of new birth appears to be open only to sexual couples. Is the energy for transcendence absent from other encounters? “Who or what the other is, I never know,” Irigaray admits. “But,” she adds, “this unknowable other is that which differs sexually from me. This feeling of wonder, surprise, and astonishment in the face of the unknowable ought to be returned to its proper place: the realm of sexual difference.”³¹ Can there be, however, a “proper place” for wonder and astonishment? Can we set rules for surprise?

The status of the sexual pair in Irigaray’s work is the subject of much scholarly debate, for Irigaray frequently appears to be subverting the sexual hierarchy while leaving its heterosexist assumptions in place. Levinas’s depiction of the sexual encounter conforms to the patriarchal gendering: He imagines a male (active) lover in relation to a female (passive, settled) beloved. In contrast, Irigaray introduces other characters to the sexual encounter scene: the female lover and the male beloved. This seems to open the possibility for resisting heterosexist assumptions. Troublingly, however, Irigaray does claim that “pleasure between the same sex does not result in that immediate ecstasy between the other and myself.”³² Why would she want to impose such limits upon the possibilities of sexual experiences?

A Levinasian move might be at play here. Like Levinas, Irigaray wants to guard ethics from a logic of substitution. The Other and the self are not interchangeable. Levinas argues not only “that the same goes unto the other differently than the other unto the same,” but that it is impossible “to place oneself outside of the correlation between the same and other.”³³ I cannot take the place of the Other or include her within the reach of the self; the Other presents “himself.” I approach the Other only

as myself, with all the limits that implies. Levinas attempts to assure that directionality through the asymmetry of relation—the Other is the poor whom I cannot approach with empty hands. The relation is irreversible. The Other is the destitute one to whom I must respond. While it subverts the predominant social hierarchy by asserting the priority of the destitute person, it raises other ethical concerns: In his framework the Other is always in the position of victim.³⁴ This logic entails an unsurpassable hierarchical relation, even when its values are reversed. Indeed, Irigaray contends that in Levinas’s work there is no “recognition of,” or “interaction between, two different subjectivities.”³⁵

Like Levinas, Irigaray wants to guard against substitution. She does so by asserting not the asymmetry of the relation to the Other, but the irreversibility of sexual difference. She locates the relational boundary not between the propertied and the poor or between the citizen and the stranger, but between man and woman. She says, “I will never be in a man’s place, never will a man be in mine. Whatever identifications are possible, one will never exactly occupy the place of the other—they are irreducible one to the other.”³⁶ Although this move avoids the implicit hierarchy of Levinas’s asymmetry, it still leads her to similar problems: The boundaries of otherness are structurally set. For “the confused and changing multiplicity of the other . . . begins to resolve itself into a system of intelligible relationships,” to quote Irigaray’s own comments regarding Plato’s *Hysteria*.

WOMAN, MAN, AND THE THIRD

Irigaray’s strategy tends to reify and indeed transcendentalize sexual difference, as Amy Hollywood has persuasively argued. Irigaray puts “sexual difference in the place once occupied by God.” It is, she argues, “the universal and objective difference through which subjectivity can be discovered.”³⁷ However, Irigaray’s male-female dualism may be destabilized when the sexual pair is grounded in the other relations in which Irigaray herself seems to envision it. Focusing on Irigaray’s allusions to “the third” may help us move toward a broader and more theologically promising notion of relational transcendence. The sexual pair is not one! The man-and-woman is always in relation to “the third”—a concrete

reality beyond the sexual pair. This third is not, to be sure, an extramundane or extra-temporal reality that would submit both man and woman to its immaterial law. After all, we know that at the end of the day the dominant man slips into the position of such a god, proclaiming the supposed precepts of eternal and immaterial essences.

If the third that Irigaray alludes to liberates man and woman from the potential tyranny of the dyadic structure, it is not by escaping materiality, but by signaling the multiple relationalities inherent in men and women. The third relates both man and woman to their potential as well as to their own limits: "to the divine, to death, to the social, to the cosmic."³⁸ Or better: to the cosmic *as* material, social, and divine. To conceive these cosmic relations entails imagining space differently. An ethics of the passions requires a reconception of *place*, as Irigaray announces in the introduction to *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*.³⁹ Traditionally, woman has been the place for man. She has been his envelope. Without her own place, woman is only his thing. His world turns her into a seductive and threatening thing, into a container whose engulfment has been the source of innumerable male fantasies. If there is no third, Irigaray alerts us, she or he would become *all-powerful*.⁴⁰ And this provokes violent reactions: He attempts to contain her in his places that, unlike the womb, are neither alive nor open. Man has constructed a world where she has no place of her own, she has no third. At the same time, as a man's thing, without her own place in the world, woman has no access to transcendence. She becomes reduced to the immanent ground of his transcendence. If she is *his* place, how could she *offer* welcome to the Other? For her to receive the Other, for man and woman to welcome each other, each must have his and her own space.

A COSMIC PLACE

Each woman and each man must have her and his own place if they are to enter a common space for the erotic encounter—to enter and to emerge from it. If the relation between the sexes is to bring forth new births, if it will open the flesh to transcendence, it must, quite literally, take place. Incarnation, Christianity has taught us, needs its stable, its ass, its ox, and its star. Indeed, the "*work of the flesh is never unconnected*" from the world and the universe. The "*work of the flesh*" needs the

energies of bodies and cosmos, but it also produces energies that contribute to its transformation, to the cosmos's continuous creation. Furthermore, as irreducibly relational, the work of the flesh is never without limits. Transcendence is always becoming within the limits and promises of embodied existence—never dislodged from it.

A common place in which the self and the Other would enter is not part of Levinas's depiction of the ethical encounter. Indeed, posing a space that could contain both self and the Other would for him amount to creating a totality. For Irigaray, however, the cosmos is never a closed totality, but a living ground.⁴¹ The cosmos does not lead back to sameness. It is not "pure immanence," but quite to the contrary, the site of transcendence in flesh. Yet masculinist cultures have denied their "debt toward that which gives and renews life," just as they have foreclosed the body and the womb.⁴² They have reduced the cosmos to a closed totality, as a once and for all product of creation.⁴³ "Believing that [the cosmos] is given once and for all, to be exploited endlessly, carelessly, irretrievably," human beings have ignored its transcendence. In this reduction of creation to the merely immanent we have also abandoned our own responsibility as mediators of creation, as agents of its transcendence. We have forgotten our own role in the becoming of the cosmos as well as God's concern for it.⁴⁴

In addition to the place into which man and woman enter, and places for each one, there must be a space between them. "Desire can eat up place," Irigaray reminds us, in attempts either to regress to the womb or to consume the Other. The subsistence of the couple and the desire that unites them thus depends on the protection of the space between them. This idea of distance, introduced above, is neither static nor abyssal, but a dynamic interval subtended "toward and into infinity" by Godself. "The *irreducible*. Opening up the universe."⁴⁵ May we imagine God as the living and dynamic envelope that links us while protecting the space between us? An envelope that subtends the "space" of difference and opens creatures to a relational infinity that is transformed as a result of the relations across differences?

As mediators of the becoming of the cosmos, human beings meet the transcendence, not only of the sexual Other, but also of the whole creation. Indeed, the demise of the transcendence of the cosmos is most

frequently inextricable from the implicit relegation of ethnic Others to sameness, to immanence. Irigaray does not explore these connections. The role of providing support for man's flight to the heights of ethics—of transcendence—is not exclusively assigned to women. This mechanism is the guiding principle of contemporary geopolitics and capitalist globalization. For instance, the Others of the south are increasingly confined to a closed space, to the role of supplying the material resources, indeed being the material resources, for satiating the desires and setting free the first world—not accidentally conceived as spatially higher. The south is conceived as being the place from which the north departs to pursue its own transcendence. In these encounters with the Others of the third world the cosmos continues to appear as given, once and forever, for incessant exploitation. We have yet to think of our encounters with those Others in light of transcendence of the flesh and of the cosmos. It seems crucial, indeed urgent, to find a model of encountering these Others of the third world—sexually different, but not only—where each is invited to enter a place and have a place, a cosmic dwelling. For the United States, desire has been consuming the cosmos, eating up place.

The relation between sexual difference and cosmological unity/multiplicity opens the space for a theological interpretation of the erotic relation. Rather than extracting the sexual pair from its relations to the cosmos, the social, and the divine, might “the third” link both partners to the multiple complexities of their existence? As a site of incarnation that participates and contributes to the continuous creation of the cosmos, the Irigarayan erotic encounter may be imagined as an instance in the infinite web of relations across difference that constitute a living creation.

THE SOCIAL BODY

In Irigaray's work, however, the implications of the social relations of each of the persons in the sexual relation remain undeveloped at best. Irigaray's analysis stays in the interstices of sexual difference. Indeed, at times she seems to define the space between the self and the Other as a simple frontier—in sharp contrast with her descriptions of that interval between the self and Other as a dynamic and living place subtended toward and into infinity.

Touch between sexually differentiated bodies provides us a key figure for the simultaneity of desire and transcendence, and a much-needed supplement to the Levinasian face-to-face. We have seen that the encounter between bodies opens up a more complex spatio-temporality and a richer model for imagining the transcendence in the flesh. And yet to predefine the basis on which the Other may induce “feelings of wonder, surprise, and astonishment,” is a step toward occluding the excess, the infinity in the flesh of the Other.⁴⁶ Furthermore, an exclusive reliance on the sexual pair as the site of this bodily transcendence is at risk of exiling man-and-woman from their other relations, from the broader (social) world. If it loses touch with its social relations, this model may turn out to propose yet another *otherworldly* transcendence.

Otherness is multiple in its singularity. The Other is always already implicated in infinitely complex relations—sexual relations—which are always also political, ethnic, and economic relations. The transcendence of the Other might thus be imagined as that infinite relationality that appears to us at the present time, in this particular encounter. This relationality extends in time as much as in space. For the differences encountered at any given time—as differences that emerge from relations, from other encounters—also extend beyond this moment. They reach beyond the boundaries of sexual difference. The call of other Others is never merely exterior to the relation between the sexes. Other encounters fold into the sexual relation and sexual relations unfold into the maze of sociopolitical affairs.

Each singular encounter unfurls to an irreducible multiplicity. A singular encounter opens up to history, and a room to a whole country. I indicated above that for Irigaray the work of the flesh is never unrelated to the universe. I want to emphasize that the work of the flesh is never unrelated to other persons. Even inside the maternal womb, before conception and differentiation, the traces of the multiple relations that bring forth mother and child subsist. In *This Sex which Is Not One*, Irigaray turns to female morphology—“*neither one nor two*”; a nearness that does not long to become one—to provide an alternative vision for overcoming the phallic economy of the one: “The *one* form, of the individual, of the (male) sexual organ, of the proper name, of the proper meaning.”⁴⁷ But

she never pursues the potential of this multiplicity for a rearticulation of differences, along racial, ethnic, and cultural axes.⁴⁸

The multiple relations (and their markers) that constitute the person have been of particular interest to feminists of color, whose experiences of racial/ethnic marginalization are as important as sexuality for their theorization of the body. For instance, the work of Chicana scholars Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga may be read as attempting to uncover the transcending potential of the sexual relation and the power of touch to bring about new births.⁴⁹ However, their conceptualization of the sexual is always already also racial/ethnic.

Anzaldúa's use of the term *mestizaje* illustrates the intertwining of race/ethnicity and sexuality in a single body that is not one. Literally, *mestizaje* refers to the product of the sexual encounters between persons of different races, particularly between European and indigenous people. Nonetheless Chicana scholars have used it to refer to the myriad of relations across difference that constitute the self—not only the racial mixture associated with Latina identity, but also other social relations that impinge upon and become inextricable from the self. Thus, in Anzaldúa's work, *mestizaje* refers not only to the relation between the Indian mother and the Spanish father, but also to the relation between the Mexican and the Anglo-American elements of her identity.⁵⁰ Multiplicity is, to be sure, riddled with ambiguities. In its attention to the complexity within the self, *mestizaje* resembles Irigaray's characterization of female sexuality. In their intimate relationship, the different elements of the *mestiza* are "neither one nor two."⁵¹ And yet *mestizaje* extends the boundaries of the body toward the social body. The body is inscribed by the multiple relations from which it emerges—at birth and beyond. "Pero es difícil diferenciando between lo heredado, lo adquirido, lo impuesto"—Anzaldúa ponders, "just what did she inherit from her ancestors? . . . which is the baggage from the Indian mother, which is the baggage from the Spanish father . . . ?"⁵² The socio-political becomes flesh, it is incarnate in and as sexed bodies. Irigaray is not oblivious to this fact, of course. But her privilege of the man/woman difference restricts the realm of the erotic. As we saw, Irigaray reminds Levinas that "Lovers' faces live not only in the face but in the whole body."⁵³ Anzaldúa and Moraga would

add that the lovers' bodies live not only in their *individual* bodies but in the whole socio-political body.

Moraga's explicit thematization of the social production of desire and its inscriptions on bodies leads her to more complex and conflictive descriptions of the erotic than those Irigaray expounds. Moraga may, like Irigaray, imagine a sex that is not one. But writing from the conflicted space of racial and sexual wars, Moraga represents the social constitution of bodies through figures of multiple, but also of partial or wounded forms of embodiment. For instance, a woman's skin appears as the site of memories of the touch of the maternal dwelling, but also of painful and guilt-ridden separation—her light skin is a sign of her distancing from her brown mother and thus a reminder of her complicity with a racist society. Her skin is a "scar sealing up a woman," she writes. From another perspective, however, Moraga is brown. Her skin is darkened by her desire of women—Moraga's sex, she observes, is brown.⁵⁴ "By incorporating pain, difficulty, and failure in the re-imagining of a sexual and social world, [Moraga] represents a non-redemptive vision that obliges the reader or spectator to account for the conflictive social and cultural contexts providing the arena for sexual experience."⁵⁵ She imagines bodies as not yet whole, portrayed as dismembered bodies and amputated parts: as faces still searching for their bodies, for example. These bodies where conflicted relationships take place are still yearning to be reborn as one—or at least as a multiplicity capable of lovingly touching itself. For these bodies, to caress their own multiplicity is a promise not-yet-fulfilled.

Significantly, Irigaray's phrase, the "memory of the flesh," evokes a myriad of carnal reminders that Irigaray never considers: skin color, the texture of hair, the scars on the skin, one's body type—markers of racial difference. For the lover's flesh remembers. It bears the marks of histories of wonder and pain—even beyond the womb. Individual histories, in their relation to others' histories, mark the skin that is touching and being touched. They make possible (or foreclose) erotic desire. An account of transcendence in the flesh would need to acknowledge the transformative power of these wounded bodies, whose memories also open the self toward unforeseeable becomings, toward incarnate transcendence.⁵⁶

Transcendence is a relation with a reality irreducibly different from my own reality. This difference is an elusive mystery in the whole body of the Other—singular in its irreducible multiplicity. The Other is not merely one who summons and judges, but rather one who incites feelings of wonder. Her/his otherness preserves the interval necessary for the unfolding of desire. Erotic pleasure and intimacy are thus returned to the realm of ethics, where transcendence does take place—in the singularity of each encounter, in a particular space. Flesh and cosmos open toward transcendence. Relational transcendence does not entail overcoming the flesh. It is a transfiguration that never bypasses the body in its complex historicity. To develop a notion of relational transcendence thus requires a reconceptualization of the interhuman encounter and of the body—one that foregrounds the links between the individual body and the sociopolitical body, between the single encounter and histories of communal encounters. Such a model may lead us toward a more inclusive theological articulation of the cosmic as material, social, and divine.

❖ New Creations: Eros, Beauty, and the Passion for Transformation

GRACE JANTZEN

The Genesis story in the Hebrew Bible, with its account of a beautiful garden forfeited by a descent into sin and violence, is often taken as the paradigmatic narrative of creation for Christianity. It is not the only biblical account of creation. The prophet Isaiah, for example, describes a vision of a new creation, made by God to transform the present world of trouble, destruction and pain. He declares the proclamation of God:

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;
And the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create;
For behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy . . .

There follows a description of a utopian Jerusalem—so different from that conflict-ridden city in Isaiah's time or in ours—in which people live together in peace and harmony. All flourish together. Violence has no place: "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord" (Isaiah 65:17–25).

Similar accounts of a new heaven and a new earth also occur elsewhere in the Bible, notably in the book of Revelation, where the writer describes "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). All God's enemies have been defeated and shut out, and the people of God live with him in unimaginable beauty and splendor. The city has

17. The Gospel of Philip (II.3), in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, ed. James M. Robinson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 139.
18. Robert M. Price, "Mary Magdalene: Gnostic Apostle?" *Grail* 6, no. 2 (1997): 59.
19. Gregory the Great, Homily 33, *Patrologia Latina* 76, col. 1239.
20. Jane Schaberg, "How Mary Magdalene Became a Whore," *Bible Review* 8 (1992): 37.
21. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 43 note 1. See also Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 177–78.
22. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: Herder & Herder, 1983), 60.
23. Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979), 60–68.
24. Virginia Burrus, "The Heretical Woman as Symbol in Alexander, Athanasius, Epiphanius, and Jerome," *Harvard Theological Review* 84 (1991): 232.
25. The description of Mary Magdalene at Jesus' tomb is perhaps the most erotic passage in all of Gregory's oeuvre. From Gregory's "Gospel Homily," 25. B. McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 2:61.
26. The tradition of the Song of Songs is exhibiting ever more queer potential. See Virginia Burrus and Stephen Moore, "Performing Sodomasochism in the Song of Songs," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 13, no. 1 (2002): 25.
27. Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 25.
28. Virginia Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 162.
29. Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 278.
30. Mayra Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).
31. Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 68.
32. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 50.
33. Edith Wyschograd, in John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Edith Wyschograd, eds., *Theological Perspectives on God and Beauty* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 2003).
34. King, *The Gospel of Mary Magdala*, 13.

35. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular-Plural* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 3.
36. King, *The Gospel of Mary Magdala*, 45.
37. Or it may be, as King suggests, a belief that the self is its "spirit-infused soul," and not its matter, which will dissolve in the end along with our material actions. "Like adultery, sin joins together what should not be mixed: in this case, material and spiritual natures" (King, *The Gospel of Mary Magdala*, 50). This would be the predictable Gnostic dualism of matter and spirit.
38. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 91.
39. Indeed, it does not divinize the All as such (as the Magdalene texts do not seem to do, either), but rather articulates a panentheism of All in God. God is, then, an infinite medium by and in which all are redistributed—flung in utter fragmentarity—into each other. I have elsewhere discussed this process panentheism in relation to apophatic mystical traditions in which the interrelationship of all creatures is drawn into the mutual immanence and transcendence of God and the world. See Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003), esp. Part IV.
40. "The Thunder, Perfect Mind," intro. and trans. George W. McRae, in Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 271–76.

ETHICAL DESIRES: TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF RELATIONAL TRANSCENDENCE | MAYRA RIVERA

1. Luce Irigaray, "Each Transcendent to the Other," in *To Be Two* (New York: Routledge, 2001).
2. *Ibid.*, 86.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, 88.
5. Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 12, 17.
6. Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, trans. Alison Martin (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 104.
7. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 17.
8. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* closes with an essay on Levinas, but his thought is throughout the volume, not least in its title. Irigaray refuses to be described as a disciple of Levinas, however. In fact she explains that when she "sought dialogue with Levinas" through her reading of his texts and the publication of "The Fecundity of Caress," "each time, it was a failure";

- Luce Irigaray, "What Other Are We Talking About?" in *Encounters with Levinas*, ed. Thomas Trezise (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 68.
9. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 43.
 10. *Ibid.*, 41.
 11. Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," 92.
 12. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 34.
 13. The structure of this outward moving ethics is replayed in the unreturnability of the gift as described by Derrida.
 14. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 254.
 15. *Ibid.*, 39.
 16. Levinas's depiction of the feminine has been the subject of much feminist scholarship. See, for instance, Tina Chanter, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas: Re-Reading the Canon* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2001); Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love: Gender and Transcendence in Levinas* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Athlone, 2000); Claire Elise Katz, *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine: The Silent Footsteps of Rebecca*, ed. Merold Westphal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).
 17. An appreciative note on the distinction between erotic love and ethical love frames, for instance, Claire Elise Katz's insightful reading of Levinas's portrayal of the feminine against the backdrop of Jewish thought (Katz, *Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine*).
 18. Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 76. Significantly, the images of creation over a reviled chaos are evoked here. For an assessment of the influence and ethical repercussions of this theological trope, see Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).
 19. Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 76. Significantly, the images of creation over a reviled chaos are evoked here. For an assessment of the influence and ethical repercussions of this theological trope see Keller, *Face of the Deep*.
 20. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 264.
 21. Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 76.
 22. Diane Perpich, "From the Caress to the Word: Transcendence and the Feminine in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Tina Chanter (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 44.
 23. Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, trans. Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček (New York: Continuum, 2002), 131; italics added.
 24. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 193.
 25. Irigaray remarks that the world of the womb "is not to be confused with her. It is destroyed forever at birth and it is impossible ever to return to it. All kinds of veils may claim to take its place, seek to repeat it, but there can be no return to that first dwelling place"; Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 33.
 26. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 186.
 27. *Ibid.*, 187.
 28. Luce Irigaray, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: On the Divinity of Love," in *Re-Reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 110.
 29. *Ibid.*, 110.
 30. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "French Feminism Revisited," in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, ed. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 171.
 31. Luce Irigaray, "Sexual Difference," in *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 124.
 32. Irigaray, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas," 111.
 33. *Ibid.*, 36.
 34. Latin American liberation thinkers have challenged this aspect of Levinas's thought. For instance, Enrique Dussel contends that for Levinas: "The poor provokes, but in the end is always poor, miserable" (Enrique Dussel and Daniel E. Guillot, *Liberación latinoamericana y Emmanuel Levinas* [Buenos Aires, Argentina: Editorial Bonum, 1975], 9).
 35. Irigaray, "What Other Are We Talking About?" 69.
 36. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 13. Similarly, she states, "One of the dangers of love between women is the confusion of their identities, the lack of respect for or of perception of their differences" (63).
 37. Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 232.
 38. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 12.
 39. *Ibid.*
 40. *Ibid.*
 41. Challenging the common confusion of ground with "fixity, the self-present, the changeless . . . the Same," Keller proposes thinking of the metaphor of ground not as something that discourses provide, but which they "variously inhabit and honor." Concepts "will either attend to their own

- 'ground,' the earthly habitat that endlessly and differently gives rise to thought, or they will drift in the conventional groundlessness that has provided the very foundation for classical metaphysics"; Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell, ed., *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 13.
42. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 100.
 43. Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray's Rewriting of the Philosophers* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 219.
 44. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 195.
 45. *Ibid.*, 48; italics added.
 46. In a more recent essay on Levinas's work, Irigaray restates her opinion of the necessary priority of the gender difference in discourses about the other. Cf. Irigaray, "What Other Are We Talking About?"
 47. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), 279.
 48. Irigaray's single focus has been strategically crucial for challenging the ubiquitous erasure of the female subject in Western thought. However, the urgent needs for resisting the global force of imperialism demands attention to other Others also forcefully excluded from Western thought.
 49. These scholars do not work from within the Western philosophical tradition, as Irigaray, Levinas, and Dussel do, but at the intersection of ethnic, literary and cultural studies. Therefore, the term *transcendence* is absent from their discourse. It is in their allusions to transformation and rebirth that I find the potential points of connection with Irigaray's project.
 50. The African ancestry, so central to the Caribbean imaginary, is notably absent from the work of most Chicana scholars. U.S. Hispanic theologians have adopted the term *mulatez* in conjunction to *mestizaje* to highlight its significance.
 51. Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 272. "The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality which keeps her prisoner and to show in the flesh and through images in her work how duality is transcended"; Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 151.
 52. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 104.
 53. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 193.
 54. Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, *The Wounded Heart: Writing on Cherrie Moraga*, ed. Deena J. González and Antonia Castañeda (Austin: University of Texas, 2001), 19.

55. *Ibid.*, 92.
56. Do "we need to think this body as quite so pure, so new-born as Irigaray's woundless utopia of the flesh," Catherine Keller wonders. "I suspect," Keller proposes, "that the deep flesh, even in its resurrection, will carry the redemptive scars" (Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 221).

NEW CREATIONS: EROS, BEAUTY, AND THE PASSION FOR TRANSFORMATION | GRACE JANTZEN

1. Grace M. Jantzen, *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*, vol. 1, *Foundations of Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
2. Hent de Vries, *Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).
3. *Ibid.*, 1.
4. Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
5. *Ibid.*, 3.
6. *Ibid.*, 88.
7. Grace M. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 270.
8. René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987), 9.
9. René Girard, *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 12–13.
10. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 26.
11. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence: Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Row, 1992), 21.
12. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 97.
13. *Ibid.*, 96.
14. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 306.
15. *Ibid.*, 103.
16. *Ibid.*, 306.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 63; Girard, *Things Hidden*, 430.
19. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 140–42.
20. Girard rejects out of hand feminist critics of his theory, suggesting that they simply "want now to join the power games of the males" and thereby lose "their real moral superiority" (Girard, *The Girard Reader*, 226–27). But this