ABSTRACT

This paper begins with a brief analysis of Immanuel Kant’s account of perception in the Critique of Pure Reason, and analyses Luce Irigaray’s critique of Kant in Speculum of the Other Woman, in order that we may better understand the position Irigaray adopts with regards to the notion of embodied ‘perception’ – a key theme in her recent text To Be Two. Part II examines Irigaray’s argument in An Ethics of Sexual Difference, with particular reference to themes of ‘dwelling’, ‘embodiment’ and ‘space-time’. By denying the body representation within discourse, Irigaray argues that the Kantian transcendental subject conceals sexuate difference and buries the ‘feminine’. Hence perception is not conceived as an ethical relationship between two embodied subjects, but as one of knowledge between a transcendental subject and an ‘object’. This enterprise is intended to lend clarity to Irigaray’s vision of embodied subjectivity and alterity in her later works.

Key Words: Perception, transcendental, space-time, dwelling, sexuate difference.

The ‘Copernican Revolution’: Kant’s ‘Transcendental Aesthetic’

I. The Subject of Knowledge

In “The Transcendental Aesthetic” chapter of The Critique of Pure Reason, Kant distinguishes ‘empirical’ intuitions – those which are given to us by means of the senses – from ‘pure’ intuitions: “I call representations pure, in the transcendental meaning of the word, wherein nothing is met with that belongs to sensation” (Kant 1993: 48). These ‘pure’ intuitions are a priori in that they provide a frame in which the senses or sensory experience is placed. The empiricists— and Descartes— were wrong, Kant argued, as they failed to see that intellectual structure is contained within experience, or that this intellectual structure has an a priori component. These ‘pure’ intuitions, uncontaminated by the senses, are space and time. Both space and time are necessary representations that are the foundation of our intuitions. “Time is the formal condition a priori of all appearances whatsoever. Space, as the pure form of external intuition, is limited as a condition a priori to external appearances alone” (ibid.: 56).

Without time, experience of any kind would not be possible. If time is an internal condition of objective experience, then space is its external counterpart. Together, they give form to the manifold of sense data (the field of un-synthesised presentations). Time
and space provide the frame through which perception proceeds. They are the ‘pure’ modes of \textit{a priori} knowledge, discoverable by isolating sensibility and “separating from it all that is annexed to it by the concepts of the understanding, so that nothing be left but empirical intuition” (ibid.: 49). Time and space are the two pure forms of sensible intuition: “principles of knowledge \textit{a priori}” (ibid.).

At the end of the chapter, Kant remarks that “all our intuition is nothing but the representation of appearances;” and that “the things we intuit are not in themselves the same as our representations of them in intuition” (ibid.: 61). He thus concludes that:

\begin{quote}
[A]ppearances, cannot exist in themselves, but only in us. What may be the nature of objects considered as things in themselves and without reference to the receptivity of our sensibility is quite unknown...We know nothing more than our own mode of perceiving them. (ibid.)
\end{quote}

In other words, what I intuít about the object is not necessarily how the object is in ‘reality’—it is a \textit{representation} only. What I receive through sensuous intuition are mere appearances. Remove the subject, and time and space are lost. For neither are “in themselves \textit{things}”, and cannot be said to ‘exist’ outside of the mind (ibid.: 356). Kant spends a large part of the \textit{Critique} working towards his famous conclusion that “the objects of experience then are not things in themselves, but are given only in experience, and have no existence apart from and independently of experience” (ibid.). Such is Kant’s doctrine of ‘transcendental idealism’. The ‘thing in itself’— how the object exists outside of our sensory experience—is quite unknown to us. The appearances of the object that we intuít in space and time, both of which are “determinations of the sensibility”, means that they “are not things in themselves, but are mere representations, which, if not given in us—in perception, are non-existent” (ibid.: 357).

As intuitions are already subtended by space and time—which are not things ‘in themselves’—then it follows that we can only have knowledge of ‘appearances’ of the object, but not of the object itself. While this may seem to assimilate Kant’s views to that of the ‘veil of perception’ of Descartes and the empiricists, I shall briefly expand on an important difference, one which also avoids the problems caused by the traditional opposition of ‘truth’ and ‘appearance’. Whilst we can have no \textit{knowledge} of appearances, not all of our knowledge is drawn from them. \textit{Phenomena} are “appearances, so far as they are thought as objects according to the unity of the categories” (ibid.: 211). Phenomena are appearances that are conditioned by both space and time, and the \textit{categories}. For Kant noted that experience already contains \textit{concepts}, without which our intuitions would be meaningless. Certain concepts, furthermore, are presupposed \textit{in} experience. Kant calls these fundamental concepts ‘categories’. These are \textit{a priori} concepts of the understanding that prescribe the basic ‘forms’ of judgement. An example of the category ‘substance’, for instance, is “that which is able to exist independently, and which supports the properties which depend upon it” (Scruton 1982: 27). To use Roger Scruton’s example of the concept ‘chair’, I must already have in me some general understanding of \textit{substance}; that is to say, the notion of substance must exist in me \textit{a priori} if I am to interpret ‘chair-ness’ in the required manner. The same would apply to
the other categories, such as causality. Kant went on to explain that sensuous intuition is without intellectual structure and hence cannot contain these concepts. The ‘subjective deduction’ is Kant’s move towards positing the cognitive faculties as primary. Although all judgements require a synthesis of the faculties of sensibility and understanding, the latter boasts some dominance over the former, because although intuition is crucial—and cognition is intuitive—objective conceptualisation would not be possible first of all without the ‘pure’ intuitions of space and time, and second without the a priori concepts of the understanding. This is not to say, however, that the empirical world is “arbitrary” in any way (Battersby 1998: 62). Our understanding of the world relies on a synthesis of the ‘manifold’ of yet-to-be-synthesised presentations, the imagination and the faculty of the understanding. This process is, furthermore, crucial in the construction of the ‘self’: “it is only via this act of imaginative synthesis that it becomes possible to say ‘I’ and to distinguish self from not-self. The ego could not know itself as self unless it simultaneously constructed a world—the phenomenal world—that is other than self” (ibid.).

The ‘otherness’ of the empirical world as an apparently necessary element in the construction of the Kantian subject is a matter of concern for Irigaray. In *Speculum*, she provides a characteristically psychoanalytical critique of the Kantian schema, which portrays nature/the empirical world as comparable to the body of the mother. The function of ‘nature’, she contends, is largely instrumental: “Anything conceded to nature is immediately and imperiously taken back and will be found useful only insofar as it ensures more rigorous dominion over her” (Irigaray 1985: 204). Kant’s transcendental schema, then, will be used in order to “negate an intrinsic quality of the sensible world, and this irremediably… Diversity of feeling is set aside in order to build up the concept of the object, and the immediacy of the relationship to the mother is sacrificed” (ibid). Underlying Irigaray’s critique is the idea of the masculine ‘imaginary’: the term in Lacanian psychoanalysis that refers to the unified ideal image that the subject ‘projects’ of himself and which is complicit in the development of the ego. The ‘sacrifice’ of the body of the mother (the empirical world) in favour of the transcendental ‘object’ (which I shall return to)—and a radical form of epistemology—forecloses the empirical world and compromises the place of the body (which becomes split between ‘subject’ and ‘object’). Kant’s transcendental subject is a manifestation of the ‘specular economy of the same’: a reflection of the masculine imaginary. A mirror, Irigaray asserts, “speculates every perception and conception of the world, with the exception of itself, whose reflection would only be a factor of time” (ibid.: 205). Irigaray continues: “It is crucial that we never know the transcendental object as such lest we recognise it and reject the almost matrical effectiveness it has in veiling our perception of all phenomena and structuring their (re)appearance” (ibid.: 204).

It is the ‘transcendental object’ in Kant’s vision that both ‘veils’ phenomena (as the non-self of the self), but also permits our understanding of phenomena: it “allows the conceptual window to be put in place in which nothing is seen per se but whose frame enables the rest to be intuited” (ibid.: 204). The transcendental object is the intelligible correlate to receptivity, or sensible experience. Kant asserts that we can attribute “the
whole connection and extent of our possible perceptions” to the transcendental object; it is “given and exists in itself prior to all experience. But the appearances, corresponding to it, are not given as things in themselves, but in experience alone” (Kant 1993: 357).

In the first *Critique*, there are times at which the transcendental object undergoes a metamorphosis into the transcendental “subject” (Caygill 1995: 401). If the transcendental object is a function of the requirement that appearances must have an object which is non-empirical (Kant 1993: 128), then it also offers “the unity in the thought of a manifold in general” (ibid: 210), regardless of how it is intuited. This ‘unity’ is made the property of the transcendental ‘subject’: the ‘I think’ which is the “vehicle of all concepts in general” (ibid.: 259). There is an apparent ‘slippage’ from object to subject, and vice-versa. Indeed, Kant operates with three notions of the self, which I shall expand upon briefly.

Firstly, there is the formal ‘I think’, representing the transcendental unity of apperception; the correlate of all judgements applying to objects. Second, there is the ‘I’ of the “internal sense” (ibid.: 259), corresponding in some form to Descartes’ *I*: the human soul that is “immortal by its very nature” (Cottingham 1993: 158). Finally, and as I shall discuss below, the third notion is that of the empirical self. But unlike Descartes’ *res cogitans*, the transcendental self—or that which corresponds to the first ‘self’—cannot be known, it is not transparent. What it does however is to “provide a ground for the fleeting impressions of the phenomenal world”, and as such plays a unificatory role, as I noted above (Battersby 1998: 63). The transcendental subject simultaneously constructs itself as well as the phenomenal world (and in this respect is relational). As its correlate, the transcendental object is the thing-in-itself that we must assume to lay beneath our perceptions of objects via the senses. Quite literally, the transcendental object is the not-self: equally as unknowable, but necessary all the same. A moot point is the fact that other people—as well as our own bodies—are akin to something like the transcendental object: the ‘otherness’ that makes the self possible. The self is constructed against otherness (Battersby 1998: 99). The point, however, is that this ‘object’ is impossible to truly know (it remains an ‘idea’ only); hence all perception (of the body and of the other) is ‘veiled’.

Before I move on to look at further consequences of the ‘Copernican turn’—namely to the supposed ‘split’ between the transcendental subject and the empirical world—I should like to look briefly at what Irigaray says in *Speculum* about Kant’s vision of space and time. She remarks:

However grounded in the senses the intuition may be, it is nonetheless framed a priori by space and time. Space and time... are to be viewed as forms of the outer sense or of the internal sense that organise and thereby subsume a diversity that is ridiculous in its confusion of feeling, whether it comes from an outside world peopled with objects... or from an inner world under the control of changes that can henceforth be analysed in function of time. (Irigaray 1985: 205)
Irigaray’s contention is that the maternal-feminine acts as an *a priori* condition of the space-time of the masculine subject, a sort of *a priori-a priori* (indeed, to exist at all we first had to have been born). This is a theme that she continues in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, which I shall come to discuss. When she begs the question “but which time?” (ibid.), however, what she alludes to is the conceptualisation of the transcendental subject in terms of the reflection of the *masculine* subject, as I mentioned above, and his “space-time” (Whitford 1991: 155). Kant’s system is an unconscious reflection of the topography of his own subjectivity, designed to veil our perception of the empirical world, the body, and most importantly for Irigaray, sexuate difference.

In the next section I shall briefly expound some further problems with Kant’s theory of perception, specifically in relation to the transcendental/empirical dichotomy.

**II. The Transcendental and the Empirical**

It has been the charge of feminist philosophers that Kant’s ‘Copernican revolution’ also helped to widen the symbolic ‘gap’ between the empirical (natural) world, and the transcendental ‘world’ that has pervaded Western tradition since the time of the Greeks.⁷ It is at this point that we must take note of Irigaray’s use of Heidegger. As Joanna Hodge remarks, “In *Speculum* she takes up and develops the contrast between the empirical and the transcendental and Heidegger’s own distinction between the ontic and the ontological. It is this intersection of themes that makes way for her insistence on a sensible transcendental” (Burke et al. 1994: 203). Section II of this paper shall deal with the connection between perception, space-time and the ‘sensible transcendental’. In this section, I shall deal more broadly with the themes of ‘transcendental’ and ‘empirical’ in Kant and Irigaray.

Kant makes it clear in the Preface to the first *Critique* what he means by the term ‘transcendental’: “I apply the term transcendental to all knowledge which is not so much occupied with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of object... A system of such concepts would be called *Transcendental Philosophy*” (Kant 1993: 43). Hence the ‘transcendental’ is not so much the opposite of the empirical as the ‘condition’ of it (inasmuch as it acts as a prerequisite of experience). The *a priori* intuitions of time and space etcetera, *ground* our experience of the empirical world, without which our ‘experience’ would amount to nothing more than a jumble of incomprehensible sense data. This ‘discovery’ of an *a priori*—on Claire Colebrook’s interpretation of Irigaray—closes the gap between the transcendental subject and the (maternal) origin (or empirical/sensible world): “By not acknowledging the gap, break, loss or distance from the sensible, the subject is always able to include and comprehend the origin as its own: “between empirical and transcendental a suspense will still remain inviolate, will escape prospection, then, now, and in the future” (Colebrook 1999: 144).⁸ Colebrook goes on to note that it is this very *closure* of the gap between the transcendental and the sensible that constitutes ‘metaphysics’ itself, at least in Irigaray’s view. Metaphysics “is the thought of a symmetry between the ideal and its material other. The idea of representation is also the constitution of the masculine subject. Kantian closure is,
then, a form of subjectivism in which sensible being is reconciled, included within, or comprehended by, the ‘supersensible’ (meaning, the concept, ideality)” (Colebrook 1999: 145). Sexuate difference is precluded in this act of ‘closure’; hence the empirical world appears as a reflection of the transcendental subject, it acts as his mirror. This ‘concealment’ of (or refusal to recognise) the ‘origin’ must be viewed in psychoanalytical terms. As Margaret Whitford remarks, “in the male imaginary, the ek-stasy (ek-stase, hors-de-soi) of existence, corresponds to the projection of erection, male narcissism extrapolated to the transcendental” (Whitford 1991: 151). This desire to be in control of the empirical world, to order and categorise it, Irigaray links with castration anxiety. As Whitford continues, “whatever the subject cannot dominate, or overlook and perceive from his transcendental elevation, threatens the subject with castration” (ibid). The subject is perpetually projecting himself outside himself, towards the transcendental object = X (in Kantian terms), or the ‘no-thing’ (Heidegger). That which escapes his grasp and control is a perpetual threat.

If the motives driving Kantian idealism are encoded or revealed by philosophical discourse, then “when Irigaray ‘interprets’ philosophy, what she finds is the shape of the male body and the rhythms of male sexuality” (ibid.: 150). Hence the imagery in Speculum is vividly sexual: the masculine subject seeks “elevation”, “penetration”, “erection” (Irigaray 1985: 133). The ‘feminine’ is symbolised as inert matter, the ground on which the transcendental subject builds his edifice. Further to this, the subject will also establish a dwelling place, one that—in Heideggerian terms—becomes the impenetrable “house of language” (Whitford 1991: 156).9

III. The Transcendental Unity of Apperception and the Body

Before moving on to part II, I should briefly like to say something about the place of the body in the Kantian schema, as it relates to the transcendental unity of apperception. If, as I noted above, the unacknowledged ‘gap’ between the transcendental and the empirical results in the concealment of the relationship with the maternal origin, then the body as materiality—as sexuate—also lacks symbolic representation within discourse. Indeed, this is something of a two-way problem. Kant’s account of perception leaves no room for the body, only an awkward ‘slippage’ between the psychological ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ of the empirical self. As Christine Battersby remarks, “Kant needs a body in order to be a self; but the body he needs is neither self nor not-self... Introspection has no spatial co-ordinates: nothing ‘inner’ is spatializable; everything ‘outer’ is in space and is also other than me” (Battersby 1998: 70). Hence there appears to be a paradox (a priori?) at the heart of Kant’s account.10 My body appears as essentially other than me, as I experience it as I experience other objects in the empirical world. The body is in space, yet its ‘internal’ aspect is denied representation, as it is not ‘spatializable’. It is this duplicitous attitude towards the body and embodiment (and perception) that Irigaray regards as both symptomatic of the morphology of the masculine ‘imaginary’ and as contributing to the ‘concealment’—or denial of—sexuate difference.
To expand on this point, it is useful to recap on Kant’s notion of ‘apperception’. In the Critique, he remarks that “It is by means of the transcendental unity of apperception that all the manifold given in an intuition is united into a concept of an object” (Kant 1993: 103). In brief, Kant distinguishes ‘apperception’ from empirical consciousness (experience), the former being the requirement for (or prerequisite of) all acts of judgement that the self-sameness of the ‘I think’ be discoverable across all syntheses of the manifold of experience (Burnham 2004: 1). This ‘unity’ that persists through time—the transcendental ‘subject’—relies on ‘inert matter’ to ground it. Not only does this pose a problem in relation to the body, but for Irigaray, this ‘inert matter’ is the maternal-feminine, the ‘body’ of the mother: “This sameness is the maternal-feminine which has been assimilated before any perception of difference. The red blood, the lymph, for every body, every discourse, every creation, every making of a world” (Irigaray 2004: 84). The maternal-feminine acts as a kind of a priori—a priori. The ramifications of this are as follows: firstly, the ‘feminine’ is always negated by the transcendence of the masculine subject and will remain trapped in bodily ‘immanence’ (as Simone de Beauvoir might put it), hence Irigaray’s assertion that “any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by ‘the masculine’” (Irigaray 1985: 133). Secondly, this accounts for the masculine subject’s inability to perceive his sexuate other as other. In not allowing a place for the body in his schema, and glossing over the gap between the transcendental and empirical, Kant created a “chasm” or “abyss” in which he feared to fall (Battersby 1998: 71). Sexuate difference remained something that eluded his gaze and for which his transcendental philosophy could not account.

The ‘Bodiless Body’: Space-Time, Perception and Embodiment in An Ethics of Sexual Difference

I have thus far provided an exegesis of Irigaray’s critique of Kant’s account of perception. Broadly speaking, her analysis is underscored by psychoanalysis and the notion that the philosophical subject is at the mercy of his own repressed relationship with the maternal-feminine, and also his fear of castration, hence his desire to order and control. In An Ethics of Sexual Difference, Irigaray expands on several key themes from Speculum, but with a distinctly Heideggerian angle. I shall deal with these themes as they occur within the text. In Ethics, Irigaray links ‘sameness’—or the “love of Same”—the lack of perception of sexuate difference with the denigration of the role of the body since the time of the Greeks (Irigaray 2004: 83). Man has forgotten, she says, the role that the body played in the Homeric epic and the lessons taught through the affirmation and love of the body. The “metaphysical edifice” of philosophy has rendered the body an unrecognisable quantity, valueless in a system that affords it no real ‘place’ (Irigaray 2004: 85). She remarks: “Love of sameness becomes that which permits the erection of space-time or space-times, as well as the constitution of a customarily autarchic dialogue-monologue with God” (ibid.).
Here are two themes that continue to concern Irigaray in her later text *To Be Two*: the relationship between the masculine subject-philosopher and his god/Other, and the parallel issue of the aforementioned subject’s transformation of his ‘love of sameness’ into a “system of symbolic and mercantile exchanges”, in which the body—and by extension, nature—are forgotten (ibid.). This is a system that is concerned with the production of objects—material or linguistic—as opposed to with what renews and gives life. It is a system that threatens the “great cosmic rhythms” with death, as it cherishes not what is cyclical, but what is *produced* (hence this kind of “love”, she says, is “teleological”) (ibid.). “Love of the same”, Irigaray says, “is difficult to establish among women because what women provide is not symbolised as a manufactured object” (ibid.: 89). Woman’s status as bearer and giver of life, as womb-matter, has rendered her a “horizontality, ground for male erection” (ibid.: 92); indeed, a ground for the construction of the ‘metaphysical edifice’ that swallows up the maternal-feminine and buries it “deep in the earth” (ibid.: 90). Woman, then, does not ‘inhabit,’ but resides in a permanent ec-stasy (i.e. is outside herself), a sort of *jouissance* (or *en plus*) that makes her Being indescribable under the terms of masculine logic. What is pertinent here is Irigaray’s appropriation of the Heideggerian notion of the ‘dwelling-place’. With the body devalued, or else forgotten entirely, ‘embodiment’ takes a different guise. As Irigaray notes, “to inhabit is the fundamental trait of man’s being” (ibid.: 119). However, she goes on:

*To perceive* – is this the usual dimension of the feminine? Of women, who, it seems, remain in perception without need of name or concept. To remain within perception means staying out in the open, always attuned to the outside, to the world. (ibid.)

This re-worked idea of perception is something that Irigaray continues in *Two Be Two*, which shall be discussed briefly in the concluding section. Perception in this sense occurs “out in the open”, in the world, and would accede to the other as (an embodied) other, without artificial ‘boundaries’, without closing off the world or “closing off the self” (ibid.). In other words, perception pertains to an encounter with the other—with the world—and not to a manufactured object, be it material, linguistic, or indeed the objects of Kant’s *a priori* construction. ‘Woman’ dwells on the threshold, somewhere between her own usurped space-time and an artificial masculine edifice.

Perception for the philosopher-subject amounts to the construction of a ‘dwelling place’, for which, as I noted above, the building material is the maternal-feminine. Irigaray argues that it is woman’s own space-time that has been used—and subsequently of which she is deprived—in this enterprise. This ‘dwelling’, furthermore, comes complete with boundaries that separate the subject from both the other and the world. This is revealed when language acts as a net, that “secures [the ‘subject’] without his realising it: the net of a language which he believes he controls but which controls him, imprisons him in a bodiless body, in a fleshless other, in laws whose cause, source, and physical, living reason he has lost” (Irigaray 2004: 113). In Heidegger’s words,
“language remains the master of man” (Heidegger 2004: 348). And as Whitford remarks, “the house of language in which man dwells to protect himself from his original dereliction can become a prison for both sexes” (Whitford 1991: 157). Man has imprisoned himself inside, whilst woman will remain outside in the cold. Both sexes are alienated, in some sense, from their ‘natural’ (pre-cultural?) relationship with the body and the world. Man’s attempt to master language, to shape it for his own purposes, “drives his essential being into alienation” (Heidegger 2004: 348).

If “building and dwelling reveal hatred and destructiveness”, and lead to the alienation of man’s “essential being”, then this diagnosis points to an ‘illness’ which began at the start of the modern age (at the beginning of ‘modern’ philosophy), with Descartes and Kant (Whitford 1991: 157). Moreover, it is this pathological relationship with the other and the world that is reflected in the relationship between the subject and his body. In today’s world, sexuality and technology mirror one another in that they are both vigorously mechanistic:

The body is torn between the different speeds of perception that situate it… the body has always functioned according to differences in the speed of perception. But before there was always something global or earthly or elemental to hold it together. (Irigaray 2004: 121)

There is an intrinsic link between the body and perception in the sense that perception always involves the “active contribution of the perceiving individual” (Stone 2006: 199). Alison Stone notes that, for Irigaray, “Perception reflects the individual’s ‘freedom’. That in the individual which freely shapes their perceptions is their rhythm…Rhythms, for [Irigaray], are free because they unfold spontaneously. But this spontaneous unfolding of human rhythms is only possible, she maintains, against a backdrop of ‘the cosmic rhythms’ in which… sensibility participates” (ibid.). Irigaray says that “Man has built himself a world that is largely uninhabitable” (Irigaray 2004: 121). Perception—true perception (as discussed in To Be Two)—is made impossible in a system that shuts the subject off from the world, and “forgets or shuns the flesh” (ibid.: 120). This is a system that has signified death for the “great cosmic rhythms” and hence perception is somehow out of synch with the body to which it should belong; the body that, in our era, “is cut into parts like a mechanical body” (ibid.). There is nothing organic, “earthly or elemental” to cement it to the world (ibid.). Instead, the body is treated as a mere vessel for the philosopher-subject’s journey into the transcendental: a solitary and lamentable sepulchre.

**Conclusion: Two Be Two?**

The ‘Copernican Revolution’ is that which placed the philosopher-subject at the centre of a new matrix of possibility. Instead of seeing nature as primary, and investigating how our cognitive capacities could interpret it, Kant posited our cognitive capacities as primary and then tried to deduce the a priori limits of nature. This role
reversal—in Irigaray’s opinion—elevated the subject to a place ‘above’ the world of nature and objects, as a kind of overseer. In Speculum, Irigaray chides what she sees as this arrogant claim to ‘sovereignty’. By centring himself outside himself—“man’s ex-stasis within the transcendental subject”—he has cut “himself off from the bedrock, from his empirical relationship with the matrix that he claims to survey” (Irigaray 1985: 134). Furthermore, if the ‘split’ between the transcendental and empirical remains unacknowledged, then so too does sexuate difference. The ‘dwelling-place’ that the subject constructs—his impenetrable ‘house of language’—protects him from the threat of castration as well as housing him “as [he] was once housed in the womb” (Whitford 1991: 158). From this vantage point, he may be able to see everything, yet he can perceive nothing.

Irigaray asks: is survival the best we can hope for? Or is there the prospect of a better future for humanity? This better future is only possible if man relinquishes his hold over the maternal-feminine, and woman’s space-time. Only if he gives up this dependence will it be possible to construct a new ‘space-time’ for sexuate difference. If there is to be flesh, Irigaray urges, “an autonomous breath must infuse the body” (Irigaray 2004: 122). The possibility of a reinvigorated ethical relationship with the sexuate other and the role that perception plays in this relationship, is a central theme in To Be Two. The breath and breathing, is also pivotal to this vision of alterity. Irigaray takes much inspiration from Eastern philosophies and the way that meditation and breathing (and hence the body) are inseparable from the philosophy itself. In Being Two, How Many Eyes Have We? she writes that “the breath, as vital or spiritual matter of a human being, corresponds to this third ground from which we can appear as humans and relate between us” (Irigaray 2000a: 20). This “third ground” —a ‘sensible transcendental’?—is possible only if woman is to find her on space-time, her own place. Indeed, perception is the key to this transformation. Perception provides a way out of this ‘prison’: “Perception should not become a means of appropriating the other, of abstracting the body, but should be cultivated for itself, without being reduced to a passivity or to an activity of the senses”. (Irigaray 2000: 43)

Note 14 - italicize ‘I Love to You’

In the References:

change 200b to 2000b in line under Irigaray
‘BODILESS BODIES’: PERCEPTION AND EMBODIMENT IN KANT AND IRIGARAY

Notes

1 The term ‘aesthetic’ has its roots in the Greek ‘aisthētikos’ meaning ‘perception’, but the term was often used in German to refer to the critique of taste. A footnote in this particular version of *The Critique of Pure Reason* states that the term was taken up by Kant as referring to “the science of laws of sensibility” (Kant 1993: 49). Kant wanted to discover the *a priori* laws behind the empirical sources that evoked judgements of ‘taste’, for example, hence the ‘transcendental aesthetic’.

2 According to Descartes, external objects “are the unobservable but inferred causes of our perceptions” (Wilkerson 1976: 182). Kant calls this account of the relationship between the mind and external objects ‘transcendental realism’, as it opposes his own doctrine of ‘transcendental idealism’, by which the mind has “immediate sense experience of external objects” (Ward, 2006: 82).

3 Some commentators (See Allison 1983: 25-28; Wilkerson 1976: 180-190) talk of three ‘interpretations’ of Kant’s idealism: “positive”, “negative” and “formal”. It is beyond the limits of this project to engage in a full discussion of Irigaray’s position with regards to this particular debate, but it is in my view that she supports, broadly speaking, the “positive interpretation”. In Wilkerson’s words, this view prescribes that “Kant is a ‘noumenalist’ in the sense that he distinguishes between two sets of objects, non-spatial and non-temporal noumena and spatio-temporal phenomena; and that he is a ‘phenomenalist’ in the sense that he reduces objects of experience or phenomena to collections of perceptions” (Wilkerson 1976: 184). It is with this ‘two world’ interpretation in mind that I approach Irigaray’s critique.


5 Hence it is not, like Descartes’ *res cogitans*, “solipsistic”, but wholly dependent on an ‘other’ for its self-awareness (see Battersby 1998: 68).

6 Irigaray’s argument may not seem so contentious if we consider that the ‘essence’ of the Copernican Revolution was to “make the phenomenal world dependant upon our own cognitive apparatus, since it is only in this way that we can guarantee a priori knowledge of objects” (Wilkerson 1976: 186).

7 Whitford, for example, maintains that, since Kant, there has been “a rigorous split or exclusion of the sensible, of experience, of the empirical or psychological’ from the transcendental” (1991: 216n). Whether the split is as ‘rigorous’ as this is wholly debateable. Indeed, it is rather more possible that there has been a ‘glossing over’ of the split. Also, the symbolic ‘gap’ is tricky to define in traditional metaphysical terms, this would amount to a realm beyond our ‘natural world’. For Kant, transcendental knowledge relates not to the objects of our experience, but rather that which makes our experience possible. Thus the transcendental is concerned with “the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible a priori” (Kant 1993: 43).

8 Colebrook quotes from Irigaray 1985: 145. Italics Irigaray’s.

9 As far as I can tell, it is Whitford that uses this phrase and not Irigaray herself. It does, however, help to reflect Irigaray’s appropriation of Heidegger’s notion of ‘dwelling’, as well as his contention that “language is the master of man” (Heidegger 2004: 348), which both imprisons him yet protects him from his “original dereliction” (Whitford 1991: 157).

10 The title of Irigaray’s critique in *Speculum* is ‘Paradox A Priori’. The first epigraph alludes to this very problem of “internal sense” versus “outer space” (Irigaray 1985: 203, from Kant’s
Ellen Mortensen, for example, remarks that the morphology of the female body defies “traditional notions of unity, sameness, and solidarity and speak[s] instead to the principle of multiplicity, difference and fluidity” (Burke et al. 1994: 219).

Phenomena, for example, are synthesised/‘manufactured’ by the sensibility and the understanding. From Heidegger’s essay ‘Building, Dwelling, Thinking’ (Heidegger 2004: 347-363).

Alison Stone (2006), for example, argues that Irigaray posits a kind of “ontological realism”, in which “the natural…is at least two: male and female” (Irigaray 1996: 37. Italics Irigaray’s.) Culture as we know it is viewed by Irigaray as a kind of ‘alienation’, perpetuated by the myth of the universal: the one, as opposed to the two (this topic is discussed at length in I Love to You).

Stone quotes from Irigaray 2000b: 42.

References


(2000a). *Being Two, How Many Eyes Have We?* Christel Gottert Verlag.


