PHL 661 Topics in Feminist Theory:
Irigaray’s Philosophy of Sexual Difference

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Course Description

In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Luce Irigaray famously stated that, “sexual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age. According to Heidegger, each age has one issue to think through, and one only. Sexual difference is probably the issue in our time which could be our ‘salvation’ if we thought it through.” In this course, we will try to make sense of and provide a context for this radical and perplexing claim. Starting with early works such as *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which Is Not One*, we will examine Irigaray’s philosophy of sexual difference as primarily a critical project meant to deconstruct and turn on its head a philosophical canon arguably blind to the issue of sexual difference. Turning to later works such as *The Way of Love* and *In the Beginning, She Was*, we will go on to scrutinize her attempt to construct a culture of two, both in terms of the development of a properly feminine subjectivity, and in terms of examining the relation between the sexes. The course provides a solid foundation for students interested in feminist thought in general and French Feminism in particular. The question of sexual difference will be examined in relation to subjectivity and otherness, language, birth and motherhood, love and desire, embodiment, and racial and cultural differences. We will examine Irigaray’s engagement with thinkers such as Beauvoir, Freud, Plato, and Hegel.

Course Requirements

**Participation (20%):** Discussion is an essential element of this class. Students are expected to attend every class, and to actively participate on a weekly basis. Please come to class prepared and willing to engage in conversation about the readings and issues at hand, and to create an intellectually stimulating and productive environment. Read assigned texts at least once, take careful notes, prepare and bring questions, and always bring a hard copy of the text that we are working on to class.

**Oral Presentation (20%):** Each student will give an oral presentation in a week of their choosing. Presentations should be about 30 minutes in length, and ideally you should not simply read a paper. Think of these presentations more like an exercise in teaching the assigned materials rather than as a conference presentation. Students are strongly encouraged to meet with me during office hours, prior to their presentations, to go over what you plan to discuss and the structure of the presentation.

**Prospectus (10%):** Students are asked to turn in a prospectus in preparation for writing their final research paper. Your prospectus is due in class on March 2, and should be 3-4 double spaced pages in length. It should include a brief thesis statement, several research questions, a tentative outline of your argument, and an annotated bibliography listing 3-5 sources that you will be drawing from in your paper.

**Research Paper (50%):** Final papers are due at noon on March 16, should be 12-15 double spaced pages in length, and should draw from assigned readings. Reference to relevant secondary literature is strongly encouraged but not required. **Late papers are not accepted.**
Course Materials

Books have been ordered to the DePaul Bookstore. PDFs have been uploaded to D2L (under “Content”) and should be printed before class. **Please always bring annotated hard copies of readings to class.**

A wide range of recommended readings are also available on D2L. You will find a folder for each week with a set of essays and book chapters related to that day’s topic. You are in no way required or expected to read these, but they are there for you as an additional resource, and they might be particularly helpful as you prepare oral presentations and research papers.

Required Books


Required Readings on D2L


Reading Schedule

Jan 5: Woman as Other

- Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Introduction (D2L)
- Irigaray, “A Personal Note: Equal or Different?” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “The Other: Woman” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “The Question of the Other” (D2L)

Jan 12: A Philosophy of Sexual Difference

- Irigaray, “Any Theory of the ‘Subject’ Has Always Been Appropriated by the ‘Masculine’” (*Speculum*)
- Irigaray, “Sexual Difference” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “This Sex Which is Not One” (*TSNO*)
- Irigaray, “The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine” (*TSNO*)
- Irigaray, “When Our Lips Speak Together” (*TSNO*)

Jan 19: Freudian Blind Spots: Woman as Lack

- Freud, “Femininity” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry” (*Speculum*)

Jan 26: Platonic Reversals: Cave or Womb?

- Plato, *Republic*, 514a-525c (D2L)
- Irigaray, “Plato’s Hystera” (*Speculum*)

Feb 2: Matricide and Maternal Genealogy

- Irigaray, “Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “On the Maternal Order” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “The Wandering of Man” (D2L)

Feb 9: Écriture Feminine

- Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “Women’s Exile” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “The ‘Mechanics’ of Fluids” (*TSNO*)
- Irigaray, “When Our Lips Speak Together” (*TSNO*)
Feb 16:  **Irigaray’s Antigone**

Invited Guest: Dr. Rocio Zambrana, University of Oregon

- Sophocles, *Antigone*
- Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§ 444-483 (D2L)
- Irigaray, “The Eternal Irony of the Community” (*Speculum*)
- Irigaray, “Between Myth and History: The Tragedy of Antigone” (D2L)

Feb 23:  **Between Subjects in Love**

- Plato, *Symposium*, 199c-212d (D2L)
- Irigaray, “A Reading of Plato, *Symposium*, ‘Diotima’s Speech’” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “I Love to You” (D2L)
- Irigaray, “In Almost Absolute Silence” (D2L)

Mar 2:  **Speaking With the Other, Being With the Other**

- Irigaray, “Approaching the Other as Other” (D2L)

Mar 9:  **Challenging the Primacy and Binary of Sexual Difference:**
On Racial/Cultural Difference and Transgender Identity

- Deutscher, “*Between East and West* and the Politics of ‘Cultural Ingénuité’: Irigaray on Cultural Difference” (D2L)
- Bloodsworth-Lugo, “Contingency and Race” (D2L)
- Salamon, “An Ethics of Transsexual Difference” (D2L)
- Poe, “Can Luce Irigaray’s Notion of Sexual Difference Be Applied to Transsexual and Transgender Narratives?” (D2L)