Transcendence Matters: Rethinking Transcendence, Materialism and the Divine in Philosophical Context

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Patrice Haynes

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Dedicated to my Mother, Anthia Haynes

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Abstract

Where there has been a shift by certain strands of modern/ postmodern thinkers towards rethinking 'transcendence' and the 'the divine' in strictly material and immanent terms, this thesis hopes to show that such a shift leads to problematic formulations of material immanence. Given such concerns a move is made towards developing an ontology that will properly sustain otherness (transcendence) within material immanence. Significantly, it will be suggested that this ontology is best supported given a theistic framework, where a more traditional understanding of divine transcendence is acknowledged.

The turn towards thinking transcendence and/ or the divine as entirely inherent within the world, rather than discontinuous with it in any way, is prompted by the worry that the affirmation of traditional, theistic understandings of divine transcendence invariably encourages the discrediting of the material world and inaugurates every kind of unwelcome hierarchical dualisms, for example, God/ World, Transcendence/ Immanence, Spirit/ Matter, etc. This thesis examines the philosophies of Giles Deleuze, Luce Irigaray, Jacques Derrida and Theodor Adorno to see how they might enable us to re-conceptualise 'transcendence' and/ or 'the divine' in this-worldly, immanent terms. Specifically, I look at Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, Irigaray's notion of the 'sensible transcendental', Derrida's '*différance*', and Adorno's 'negative dialectics' in order to assess whether these deliver an account of material immanence broadly characterised by the otherness and becoming of embodied life. Through a careful analysis of their arguments I hope to demonstrate that these thinkers are unable to successfully account for otherness within material immanence in the ways that they claim.

In light of the difficulties ascertained in these 'immanentist' philosophies, I argue for what I call a 'strong' ontological realism with respect to upholding otherness within material immanence. Such a realist ontology, I maintain, is most successfully accounted for given the reality of divine transcendence conceived in a monotheistic sense. I thus urge for a reconsideration of a more traditional conception of divine

transcendence as one that actually secures otherness or difference within the material world rather than negates this.

Introduction

It is precisely through its flight from the finite and through its rigidity that subjectivity turns the beautiful into mere things – the grove into timber, the images into things that have eyes and do not see, ears and do not hear.

Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*

God is more intimately and profoundly interior to things than anything else.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*

It could be claimed that for one strand of modern/ postmodern thinkers, it is not so much the case that 'God is dead' but that the transcendent God of traditional theism is dead. From the mid-seventeenth century onwards, a number of thinkers have argued, and continue to argue, that to insist upon the radical Otherness of God is to institute a morally suspect way of thinking about the world in terms of hierarchical dualisms. The argument runs that a transcendent God is typically figured and esteemed as spirit (or mind), absolute, infinite, independent, eternal, omnipotent, etc, *in contrast and in opposition to* the immanent world, which, as a result, is negatively figured as material, relative, finite, dependent, temporal, passive, etc. As the above quotation from Hegel suggests, the concern is that whenever a transcendent God is avowed this invites the debasement of the material world, and encourages a 'flight' from this-worldly immanence towards that which is beyond, or wholly other than, the world.[1]

Many modern/ postmodern thinkers reject the monotheistic idea of divine transcendence. However, this does not necessarily entail doing away with notions of the divine and transcendence altogether. The French feminist thinker, Luce Irigaray asks '[w]hy do we assume that God must always remain an inaccessible transcendence rather than a realization – here and now – in and through the body?'.[2] Against this assumption, a number of contemporary philosophers, including Irigaray

[1] The terms 'transcendence' and 'immanence' have a long history and are somewhat overdetermined. Broadly, 'transcendence' refers to that which is beyond or surpasses, for example, what can be known, experienced, or represented; 'immanence' refers to that which is bounded or contained by a particular context. We shall see that these two terms take on various meanings with the different philosophies that we look at.

[2] Irigaray, Luce, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: Althone Press, 1993), 148.

herself, have sought to rethink the divine and/ or transcendence in immanent or materialist terms.

The principal objective of this thesis is to assess critically the attempt by certain modern/ postmodern philosophers to overcome the oppositional and hierarchical dualisms of God and the world, transcendence and immanence, spirit and matter, etc. Broadly speaking, these philosophies aim to rethink transcendence and/ or the divine within the bounds of material immanence, such that transcendence may be redefined as the otherness and becoming of bodies in their irreducible differences. However, I hope to show that these attempts to re-conceptualise 'material immanence', 'transcendence' and 'the divine' *without* reference to divine transcendence - understood in the traditional theistic sense as ontologically distinct from, or other than, the world - unwittingly engender impoverished accounts of material immanence.

It is my contention that the 'immanentist' philosophies discussed in this study are unable to satisfactorily depict otherness, i.e. transcendence, within the material world without losing the irreducible otherness of bodies in their concrete specificity or particularity. It strikes me that, for a number of thinkers, there is an expectation that to dispense with the theistic concept of the divine will, almost automatically, ensure the affirmation of bodily subjects and the material world in general. It is a key claim of this study that such an expectation is premature and without proper grounds. Indeed, given, as I argue, the somewhat surprising failure of the 'immanentist' philosophies examined here, in the final chapter of this thesis I begin to advance the claim that *unless* we acknowledge divine transcendence in its traditional theistic sense, then we will end up with formulations of material immanence that fail to adequately account for the sensuous otherness of bodies in their concrete specificity. [3]

[3] In the last few years there has been a distinct renewal of interest regarding the notion of transcendence generally, and divine transcendence specifically, that challenge its negative presentation by certain modern/ postmodern thinkers. See, for example, Schwartz, Regina, ed. *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond* (London and New York, Routledge, 2004), Faulconer, James, E., ed., *Transcendence in Philosophy and Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), Placher, William, C., *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking About God Went Wrong* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) and Westphal, Merold, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence: On God and the Soul* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

As this is primarily a critical project, one that could serve as a prolegomenon towards a philosophical reconsideration of divine transcendence as that which affirms material immanence rather than indicts it, I concentrate for the most part of this study on critically appraising certain works by the 'continental' philosophers Giles Deleuze, Luce Irigaray, Jacques Derrida and Theodor Adorno. I chose these writers for two primary reasons. First, is that they propound, with the arguable exception of Derrida, what can be regarded as 'materialist' philosophies. In the context of this thesis, the terms 'materialist' and 'materialism' are deployed in an admittedly loose sense, referring to positions that emphasise bodiliness, corporeality, embodiment, objectivity, sensibility, material processes, forces or 'stuff'. Importantly, while these thinkers operate with a somewhat imprecise understanding of 'the material', none of them seek to advance a 'reductive' materialism, where it is claimed that *only* matter is real, and that all phenomena typically associated with ideality or mind are ultimately illusory. I look at these materialist thinkers to see how they might enable us to refigure the concepts of transcendence and the divine in material or bodily terms. The materialist reformulation of transcendence provides an alternative to the recently revived, more 'phenomenological' approaches to thinking transcendence and the divine, initiated by Emmanuel Levinas and further developed by thinkers such as Jean-Luc Marion. These phenomenological construals of transcendence remain committed to the notion of a radical otherness that 'breaks in' on worldly immanence from Elsewhere. However, it is my fear that such phenomenologies continue to risk the demotion of material immanence vis-à-vis the 'wholly other'.[4] A central purpose of this thesis, then, is to explore ways in which immanent re-conceptions of 'transcendence' and 'the divine' could operate precisely to avow the material world.

The second reason why I engage with these thinkers is that we can read their projects as post-Kantian reconstructions of immanence. According to Christian Kerslake '[t]he purpose of the Kantian critique is surely to ask *how* immanence is to be achieved, to ask how it is possible'.[5] For Kant, it is the transcendental subject that is constitutive of the immanent, sensible world. However, it can be maintained that

[4] See Blond, Phillip, 'The Primacy of Theology and the Question of Perception', *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, ed., D. Martin, P. Heelas and P. Morris (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 285-313. for a 'materialist phenomenology' based upon the work of Merleau-Ponty.
[5] Kerslake, Christian, 'The Vertigo of Philosophy: Deleuze and the Problem of Immanence', *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 113 (May/ June, 2002), 10.

while Kant liberates immanence from the dictates of a transcendent God, he goes on to submit it to the rigid regime of the transcendental subject. Kant is criticised by a number of philosophers, including the ones we shall examine in this study, for formulating immanence as a closed totality: a realm where all experience is predetermined by the fixed, formal categories of the transcendental subject. Seeking to rethink material immanence as a space of difference and becoming - a 'bounded openness'[6] rather than a closed totality - Deleuze, Irigaray, Derrida and Adorno can each be read as offering a reassessment of the nature of 'the transcendental', i.e. the conditions of immanence. As we will see, these philosophers will found immanence upon what can be termed 'quasi-transcendentals'. These are not static, formal schemas that determine in advance, and from a purely logical (immaterial) standpoint, the nature of sensible immanence. Rather, quasi-transcendentals refer to conditions that are mutable, material and altering (although we should note that Derrida is not as intent as the other theorists to configure the transcendental in explicitly 'materialist' or substantive terms). However, in concluding this thesis I shall contend that the quasi-transcendentalist logic deployed by each of the thinkers we discuss, actually end up positing a surprisingly abstract vision of material immanence, one that is unable to properly account for, and sustain, the concrete specificities of bodies.

The thesis is divided into three sections. Section one considers the 'turn to immanence' through an engagement with the work of Deleuze. Specifically, I look at Deleuze's reading of Spinoza. The early modern metaphysician provides Deleuze with the 'tools' for constructing an ontology of univocal immanence. The section splits into two chapters. Chapter one presents Deleuze's critique of the concept of transcendence. This critique largely reflects the views of the other thinkers in this study. I then go on to detail his ontology of immanence. I alert us to tension spots in his arguments that lead the system elaborated to perpetuate the very dualisms it aims to overcome. In chapter two we will look at the ethical theory that Deleuze develops from his metaphysics, particularly as this indicates a way of thinking the divine and transcendence in terms of the 'becoming-other' of bodies. For Deleuze, the 'univocity of being' and a Spinozistic 'logic of expressionism' allow us to formulate a plane of immanence replete with intensive forces and the becoming of bodies in their

[6] This term is coined by Serene Jones. Jones, Serene, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis, Fortress University Press, 2000), 43.

singularity. However, I hope to show that Deleuze's Spinozism, despite seeming to promise the contrary, effectively discredits particular or specific forms of bodiliness for the sake of an impersonal, auto-affecting absolute.

Towards the end of chapter two I briefly outline Irigaray's critique of Spinoza (and by extension Deleuze), whom she charges with failing to consider the question of sexual difference when thinking the divine immanence. This critique takes us forward into section two. Here we depart from the univocal immanence of Deleuze's Spinozism in order to explore 'intervals of transcendence' that fracture and disrupt immanence with a radical otherness: sexual difference for Irigaray and *différance* for Derrida. Chapter three provides an analysis of Irigaray's notion of the 'sensible transcendental' as this ties her philosophy of sexual difference to a radicalised account of the divine. In chapter four I raise concerns regarding Irigaray's depiction of the two of sexual difference in terms of their *absolute* otherness. We will see that this is problematic for a number of reasons, not least because it fails to account for the relationship between the two of sexual difference that is crucial for her ethics and theology. In seeking to address the difficulties of Irigaray's work I explore a Derridaen approach to thinking the sensible transcendental. This is because his notion of *différance* promises to open up immanence to *multiple* intervals of difference, rather than restricting difference to a single site (Irigaray). However, I argue that Derrida's philosophy of *différance* inaugurates the nihilistic immanence of the text, wherein bodies are condemned as signs of presence, forever to be deconstructed for the sake of the 'wholly other' that can never arrive in immanence.

In the third and final section I begin the shift towards recovering a more traditional theistic conception of divine transcendence, via a discussion of Adorno's negative dialectics. In chapter five, I delineate Adorno's philosophy of non-identity (negative dialectics), particularly as this seeks to uphold what he calls the 'primacy of the object'. We will see that Adorno is keen to develop an 'ethics of thinking' as it were, such that the object in its sensuous particularity is not reduced to the thinking subject. I suggest that Adorno presents a compelling account of transcendence within material immanence that overcomes many of the difficulties identified with the other works discussed. With Adorno the object or body in its sensuous particularity becomes the locus of transcendence within immanence. However, in chapter six, I argue that

Adorno is not able to secure the primacy of the object (and so the non-identity between subject and object) without asserting what I call a 'strong' ontological realism. Such an ontology insists that objects exist in the world in determinate ways that are independent of the human mind and its concepts. Having stated the importance of a 'strong' realist ontology, my key claim will be that such an ontology is most cogently articulated within a theological context, one that acknowledges the transcendence of the divine.

It is thus against the grain of the various philosophies discussed in this thesis, that I shall conclude that rather than rejecting the notion of divine transcendence in order to ensure material immanence as an open space of otherness and becoming, it is actually by moving towards a recovery of a theistic sense of divine transcendence that we begin to secure such a view of material immanence.

Section One

A TURN TO IMMANENCE

Chapter One

Deleuze and Spinoza: The Divine as Univocal Immanence

'The tick is God'.[1]

With his fierce commitment to 'materialism' and his pejorative identification of theology with any discourse that institutes transcendence, the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze seems an unlikely source for those keen to affirm ideas regarding 'transcendence' and 'the divine' in contemporary thought. However, we could say that Deleuze quarrels not so much with the idea of God per se but with God construed as transcendent, as other to this-worldly immanence.[2] With commentators such as Philip Goodchild and Jim Urpeth, I do not read Deleuze's philosophy of pure immanence as necessarily a-theological.[3] It is true that with Deleuze the divine cannot name the transcendent God of monotheism, but it can name what he understands by 'life', 'the powerful, non-organic Life which grips the world'.[4] Indeed, Goodchild suggests as much when he writes that 'he [Deleuze] makes divinity into a power of affirmation and creativity immanent to life itself'.[5]

My view is that in his attempt to elaborate a vitalist materialism, Deleuze actually indicates a way to think beyond the traditional dualism of immanence and transcendence, enabling us to radically modify our conceptions of 'the divine', 'transcendence' and 'the material world'. Indeed, given a Deleuzian immanentism,

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[1] Deleuze, Gilles, ' Scholasticism and Spinoza', Seminar session of 14 January 1974, trans. Timothy S. Murphy, http://www.webdeleuze.com/html/TXT/ENG/140174.html, 3.

[2] We should note that Deleuze uses the terms 'transcendent' and 'transcendence' interchangeably. However, strictly speaking Deleuze opposes the idea of 'the transcendent', namely, that which exists beyond, or is wholly other than, the sensible world per se. The notion of transcendence - understood as that which exceeds or surpasses a certain limit - is, as I hope to show, present in Deleuze's work. Nevertheless, in keeping with Deleuze's writings, I will continue to follow his use of the word 'transcendence' in his criticisms of those doctrines that posit a realm beyond the sensible world (the transcendent!).

[3] See Goodchild, Philip, 'Deleuze and the Philosophy of Religion', http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/cotp/DeleuzeandPhilosophy.doc., 19. See also Goodchild, Philip, *Capitalism and Religion: The Price of Piety* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) for a philosophy of religion much influenced by the work of Deleuze. Also, Urpeth, Jim 'Religious Materialism: Bataille, Deleuze/ Guattari and the Sacredness of Late Capital', *Difference in Philosophy of Religion* ed. Philip Goodchild (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2003). There is also the recent Bryden, Mary, ed., *Deleuze and Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

[4] Deleuze cited by Goodchild, *Capitalism and Religion*, 162.

[5] Goodchild, 'Deleuze and the Philosophy of Religion', 19.

the idea of transcendence no longer denotes that which is external to the sensible world – the Transcendent Other – but rather the becoming-other, the self-differentiation of a dynamic, indeed, divinised material immanence. Deleuze can thus be regarded as offering an immanent account of transcendence, that is, an immanent or materialist transcendence.

In this chapter, I specifically analyse the influence of Spinoza upon Deleuze's philosophy of immanence for three main reasons. According to Yovel, Spinoza is the founder of modern philosophies of immanence, whose systematic presentation of immanence triggered 'an intellectual revolution no less momentous and consequential than Kant's'.[6] Deleuze would laud Spinoza as 'the Christ of philosophers', a thinker who drew up 'the "best" plane of immanence'.[7] Poised at the dawn of modernity, Spinoza's system sets the scene for modern conceptions of radical immanence, as these would challenge dualistic metaphysics premised on the split between mind and world, ideal and real, etc, which has largely dominated Western philosophy since Plato.[8]

Secondly, in contrast to the Nietzschean celebration of the 'death of God', Spinoza's immanentist enterprise explicitly aims to refigure the divine in terms of immanence. Interestingly, Hegel's philosophy can be viewed as doing a comparable thing. However, Deleuze is vehemently against Hegelian dialectics, tersely maintaining that 'the labour of the negative is a load of crap'.[9] For Deleuze, Spinoza's system secures difference by way of life and affirmation rather than by negation and contradiction as in Hegel. The latter approach, Deleuze holds, leads to the subordination of difference to identity.

Finally, in the following chapter, I intend to compare Deleuze's reading of Spinoza with that of Luce Irigaray's. Significantly, we will see that Irigaray charges Spinoza's

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[6] Yovel, Yirmiyahu, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Adventures of Immanence* (Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 1989), 170.
[7] Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London and New York: Verso 1994), 60.
[8] Of course, immanentist philosophies go back as far as the pre-Socratics, and characterise much Epicurean and Stoic thinking. With Spinoza, the idea of immanence is importantly re-invigorated in light of the new science and the problems emerging from the dualistic philosophy of Descartes.
[9] Deleuze, 'Scholasticism and Spinoza', 6.

philosophy of immanence with failing to acknowledge sexual difference. This is important because I will be arguing that despite its intentions the Spinozist system, struggles to uphold the ontological status of particular things and risks, if not unwittingly succumbs to, what Hegel calls an 'acosmism'. Here, the only individual that exists is God; all finite existents and distinctions are thereby rendered ontologically suspect, if not illusory.[10] Furthermore, I shall contend that it is simply not possible to extract from Spinoza, as Deleuze believes, a revolutionary materialism that provides an account of spontaneous material becomings. I hope to show, then, that feminist theologians and philosophers of religion need to think twice before embracing a Spinozistic formulation of divine immanence as an alternative to notions of divine transcendence, in the (mistaken) belief that it supports the flourishing of bodies and differences.[11]

I have two main objectives for this chapter. The first is to outline Deleuze's critique of transcendence. The second is to examine his construction of an ontology of immanence on the basis of Spinoza's system presented in the *Ethics*, which follows what Deleuze calls a 'logic of expressionism'. In seeing how Deleuze develops Spinoza's concept of God as a unique, immanent substance we will note the genesis of key Deleuzian terms, such as 'univocity' and 'singularities'. The analysis of Deleuze's ontology that I offer is a critical one. I wish to highlight areas of stress in the metaphysical system that lead, I maintain, to its unfortunate breakdown. Unlike Deleuze, I do not think that Spinoza's model of immanence permits the expression of irreducible differences nor eschews the dualisms it seeks to overcome. This has important implications for the ethics of becoming that Deleuze derives from the ontological account explored here, and which we will discuss in the following chapter.

In this chapter, then, I concentrate upon the ontological account of immanence canvassed by Deleuze. In the next chapter we will be able to use the ethical theory that Deleuze develops in light of his Spinozistic ontology of immanence to see how

[10] See Parkinson, G. H. R., 'Hegel, Pantheism and Spinoza', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 38 (1977), 449-459, for a critical discussion on Hegel's charge of Spinoza's 'acosmism'.
[11] Grace Jantzen, for example, argues for a pantheist symbolic that could have its basis in Spinozism. Jantzen, Grace, M., *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 272ff.

the idea of transcendence may be rethought in terms of the becoming of bodies on a plane of immanence. I hope to show, nonetheless, that for all the promise of Deleuze's ethics of corporeal becoming, with respect to re-thinking bodies, transcendence and the divine in mutually affirming ways, it is not a promise that can be honoured on the basis of a Spinozist philosophy of immanence.

'To Be Done With the Judgement of God':[12] Why Univocal Immanence?

Echoing a perspective held since Nietzsche's excoriation of the concept of a transcendent God - and any shadows of the dead God, such as Being, Truth, Reason, the Subject, Morality, etc – Deleuze would indict all notions of transcendence as 'the judgement of God', principles of organisation or representation that are imposed upon the world (as if) from without, and which order material life in pre-determined and fixed ways. As he writes:

> 'Any organisation that comes from above and refers to a transcendence, be it a hidden one, can be called a theological plan: a design in the mind of a god...a plan of organization or development...a plan of transcendence that directs forms as well as subjects, and that stays hidden...a dimension supplementary to the dimensions of the given.'[13]

For Deleuze, to think according to the theological dictates of transcendence is to adopt the life-denying mode of Nietzschean *ressentiment*; to subordinate immanence to a plane of transcendence that restricts the (potentially limitless) forms the world can take to a single invariant order or structure.

The figure of God has tended to monopolise the idea of transcendence in Western thinking, such that philosophy throughout its history has been complexly tied to theology. However, it is Plato's philosophy of Forms that initiates thought's preoccupation with transcendence. Platonic Forms stand not just beyond human experience but also beyond the very material world itself, they are transcendent. The God of orthodox theism maintains in distinctive ways, and with some key differences, the Platonic commitment to transcendence.

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[12] Artaud cited by Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), 166.
[13] Deleuze, Gilles, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 128.

With modernity it seems as if philosophy begins to disentangle itself from theology, concentrating less upon the transcendent God and more upon the powers of the rational human subject and the knowledge it can deliver of this world, i.e. immanence. Kant's critical philosophy in particular goes to great lengths to show that human reason can only deliver knowledge of possible human experience, thus prohibiting knowledge of that which transcends such experience. In his Transcendental Dialectic section of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant famously discredits knowledge of transcendence, including knowledge of the transcendent God, as metaphysical illusion. However, Deleuze, like Schelling, Hegel and Nietzsche before him, argue that Kant's philosophy continues the ancient reverence for transcendence, now recast as the rational subject rather than God or the Platonic Forms. It is Deleuze's view that from Kant to Husserl and the legacy of phenomenology, most philosophies remain caught up with theology, which is to say, caught up with transcendence, even when they profess the contrary.

Clearly Deleuze is critical of transcendence. However, he does not challenge the concept of transcendence on the basis that it leads to certain logical and epistemological problems. Since Plato, a great deal of theology/ philosophy has involved interminable debate regarding the problem of how transcendence relates to immanence. With any commitment to transcendence there comes the thorny problems of metaphysical dualisms: ideal/ real; God/ world; mind/ body; noumenal/ phenomenal, etc. When the notion of transcendence is upheld it is generally assumed that there exists two distinct ontological realms, with one transcending (that is to say, ontologically different to) the other. But then transcendence must interact with immanence otherwise it would hold no import. Furthermore, how might transcendence be known if it is beyond human thinking? Thus, we find with Platonists attempts to show how the Forms relate to the world and how human beings can cognitively participate in the Forms; or, with Christian thinkers, discussions on how God relates to creation and how human beings can relate to God; or since Descartes, arguments on how mind relates to matter.

Deleuze is not primarily concerned with these sorts of difficulties. Rather, in keeping with his pragmatic rather than theoretical approach to philosophy, he is interested in

how the concept of 'transcendence' *functions*. What sort of forces animate this concept? Where can this concept lead thinking? As Todd May observes, the concept of transcendence is not always regarded as referring to some sort of alienating power. Instead, the opposite is often the case, such that '[t]he transcending power brings the transcended [immanent] world into full flower, liberating it from the prison of its incapacity, its impotence. Transcendence does not corrupt; it completes'.[14] Deleuze is aware of this consummating role of transcendence vis-à-vis the immanent world. However, (on pragmatic/ ethical, not theoretical, grounds) he will object to such a deployment of the concept of transcendence because it incurs a number of consequences that, to his judgement, negatively impact upon the way we think the world, and thus on the forms of life we can adopt.

As well as assuming two different ontological realms (dualism), the concept of transcendence traditionally introduces an ontological hierarchy. That which transcends (God, the human mind, etc) is attributed with a prime value compared to that which is transcended (the world, the body, etc), thus inevitably rendering immanence as inferior and lacking. Transcendence then serves as the ideal for immanence, its telos. So that it may realise itself, immanence must strive to attain an identity with transcendence, which is esteemed as the Absolute, the One, the Whole, the Real. It is because transcendence acts as a principle of identity par excellence that Deleuze will take issue with it. He argues that transcendence, as the ideal of identity, discredits difference and becoming, delimiting ways of thinking (and so potential ways of life) to one inviolable course.

Deleuze also recognises the central role transcendence plays in ethics: namely, that which stipulates from on high the universal laws of the good life. Again, the problem with this understanding of ethics, for Deleuze, is that it decides in advance, and for all time, the course our lives *should* take, rather than enabling lives to unfold in multiple ways. The points at which Deleuze challenges the concept of transcendence alerts us to the values he wishes to secure for his own philosophy, principally, those of *difference* and *becoming* construed in affirmative, non-hierarchical and non-

[14] May, Todd, *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 29-30.

teleological ways. It is for the sake of these values that Deleuze wholeheartedly supports the turn to immanence in philosophy.

The Material

In addition to observing how the concept of transcendence institutes a hierarchical, ontological dualism, Deleuze also explores how the concept informs the way we think the material. According to Deleuze, whenever immanence is rendered immanent *to* a plane of transcendence, e.g. God or the Transcendental Subject, the underlying presupposition is a conception of matter as inert, thoroughly passive stuff, lacking any life or potency of its own. This vision of matter befits what, since Aristotle, are called hylomorphic theories of material determination, the genesis of form (or morphogenesis). Generally, these theories maintain that particular, sensible things are created by ideal, universal forms that act upon essentially inchoate, amorphous matter, giving it determinate forms and distinctions (identities) that it would not otherwise have. Matter is thus forced to reflect ideals deemed external to it.

Shackled to immutable transcendent/ theological categories and plans, material immanence is condemned, Deleuze argues, to the perpetual reproduction of the same: to being and identity. Kant firmly held that 'the possibility of a living matter is quite inconceivable...since lifelessness, *inertia*, constitutes the essential characteristic of matter'.[15] On this view, the idea of 'living matter' is a contradiction in terms. For Kant, a hylozoist conception of matter, where matter is capable of its own self-morphing and self-organisation, smacks all too much of a heretical pantheism and destroys the proper demarcations of identities.

Deleuze, on the other hand, wishes to move beyond the reduced, impoverished concept of matter presupposed by hylomorphism. He maintains that this relies upon a plane of transcendence that orders material immanence along strict lines of identity, thus preventing the expression of novel or different bodily forms. By dispelling theological notions of transcendence and endorsing a 'pure ontology' of immanence, Deleuze contends that matter can be rethought as creatively generative of a

[15] Kant cited in Albert, Eliot, 'Deleuze's Impersonal, Hylozoic Cosmology', *Deleuze and Religion*, 193.

multiplicity of forms and individuations (biological, cultural, geological, etc) on account of its own immanent, intensive conditions, rather than passively shaped by external (transcendent), immutable forms. For Deleuze, an immanentist ontology enables what Urpeth describes as an 'autopoietic materiality',[16] in other words, a self-sufficient, self-transfiguring material order where difference and material becoming is ensured, rather than fixed identities. Urpeth also points out that this radical re-conception of matter does not necessarily entail atheism but can invite the idea of what he calls a 'religious materialism', where the divine is identified with the sacred forces of living matter.[17]

Pure Immanence: Life

Although transcendence is often appealed to in order to explain how immanence may be brought into full fruition, rather than left unformed and featureless, Deleuze concludes that transcendence actually functions to limit immanent life. Transcendence suspends life, where life, Deleuze hopes to show, is all infinite speed, flux, flow and intensities, the becoming of pure immanence without a fixed transcendent referent that universally prescribes in advance the forms life (matter *and* thought) can take. Hence Deleuze writes:

> 'pure immanence is A LIFE, and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, for the immanent which is in nothing is itself a life. A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is sheer power, utter beatitude'.[18]

For Deleuze, immanence is severely misconstrued whenever it is viewed as immanent *to* something transcendent. He claims that all planes of transcendence are illusions, misconstructions of the pure immanence that is life. As he writes: '[a]lthough it is always possible to invoke a transcendent that falls outside the plane of immanence, or that attributes immanence to itself, all transcendence is constituted solely in the flow of immanent consciousness that belongs to this plane. Transcendence is always a

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[16] Urpeth, 'Religious Materialism', 173.
[17] Ibid, 171ff. In the following chapter we will explore Deleuze's Spinozistic plane of immanence in terms of Urpeth's idea of a 'religious materialism'.
[18] Deleuze, Gilles, 'Immanence: A Life', *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 27, translation modified.

product of immanence'.[19] We shall see that, for Deleuze, there are only ever multiple planes of immanence that interleave 'THE plane of immanence'.[20]

Thinking immanence in terms of something transcendent is, Deleuze laments, the dreadful and costly error of theology.[21] The error is costly because it stifles the potential richness and fecundity of life. This contention is not, Deleuze insists, merely academic but crucially pertains to questions regarding power, especially as this operates by organising life – 'human' and 'non-human' – in ways that curtail difference and becoming, creativity and movement. The illusion of transcendence, i.e. external foundations of immanence, is an effect of a form of thinking that aggrandises a particular concept or schema as fundamental and universal; a form of thinking lured by the stultifying 'security' of identity and sameness, as this excludes or hierarchically orders differences.

For Deleuze, it is the philosophy of Spinoza that offers the best plane of immanence. Indeed, it may be that Spinoza is 'the only philosopher never to have compromised with transcendence',[22] and it is for this reason that Deleuze will consider him the Christ of philosophers, one able to establish a 'pure ontology'. In thinking through the notion of absolute immanence Deleuze is led first of all to the concept of univocity and a univocal ontology. A univocal ontology is one where 'being has only one sense and is said in one and the same sense of everything of which it is said'.[23] For Deleuze, a univocal ontology is the first move in formulating a philosophy of absolute immanence, serving to preclude any surreptitious re-installation of transcendence and hierarchical organisation.

Univocity

Although Deleuze claims that 'univocity is the keystone of Spinoza's entire philosophy',[24] it is the medieval theologian Duns Scotus and his development of the

[19] Ibid, 31.
[20] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 59.
[21] It is important that we appreciate that, for Deleuze, 'theology' is not a term limited to issues regarding God, but encompasses any discourse that perpetuates the Transcendent.
[22] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 48.
[23] Deleuze, 'Scholasticism and Spinoza', 2.
[24] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 63.

concept of univocity that first alerts Deleuze to this notion. Insisting upon the separation of philosophy and theology, the innovation of Scotus lies in appealing to a theory of univocity in order to develop a thesis of 'formal distinction'.

Briefly, the Scotist formal distinction attempts to articulate a midpoint between purely intellectual or conceptual distinction and real distinction (*viz.*, actual qualitative differences). For Scotus, the term 'Being' is the ultimate formal distinction, it can be predicated indifferently and univocally (in the one sense) to both God and creatures. According to Scotus, Being is strictly an abstract, neutral, empty descriptor; the most highly generalised attribute of a thing. Outside the abstract realm of formal being, Scotus invokes ontological equivocity (indeed, nominalism), a realm of pure differences or '*haecceities*' that he will affirm as real distinctions *contra* Being as formal distinction. In this way God's qualitative difference from creatures, such as God's infinitude, can be maintained over and above bare univocal Being.

But what exactly are we to understand by the concept of Being? Is it simply a conceptual category or is it something substantive? Moreover, if pure individuating differences constitute the real, qualitative essence of things, is the idea of univocal Being ultimately fictitious? For Scotus, Being is sort of quasi-ontological, it is a 'virtual' universal property, predicable of both God and creature, and carries a certain substantive weight in the sense that it is real but not actual. This rather confusing account of Being can be seen as Scotus' strained efforts to secure the univocity of Being such that we can gain some rational understanding of God's properties, while nevertheless not wishing to limit God to our categories of understanding or unwittingly sliding into pantheism.

Deleuze proclaims Scotus as 'the greatest thinker of the Middle Ages'.[25] Certainly, he is much enthused by a number of Scotian concepts, including univocity and formal distinction as well *haecceities*, and he is confident that he can deploy these concepts to articulate a philosophy of immanence. However, Deleuze contends that it is Spinoza who properly realises the univocity of Being – although Spinoza himself never even mentions the word in any of his texts. Deleuze reads Spinoza as making

[25] Deleuze, 'Scholasticism and Spinoza', 3.

Being a *subject* of affirmation (namely, God), rather than an abstract, bare property (Scotus). Deleuze argues that Spinoza treats being univocally. There is nothing outside Being and Being is said in one and the same sense of which it is said. Now Deleuze can start to gain momentum with constructing a philosophy of immanence.

However, we know that Deleuze wants to promote a metaphysics that will support his key values of difference and becoming, indeed, this is why he turns to the concept of immanence. Yet, prima facie, a univocal ontology seems to be completely at odds with a desire for difference and becoming. Surely a univocal ontology levels all things into the same, the one Being? Deleuze recognises the difficulties. He writes that when we say 'Being is univocal' this means that 'the tick is God; there is no difference of category, there is no difference of substance, there is no difference of form. *It becomes a mad thought*'.[26]

But Deleuze believes that with Spinoza we can have a univocal ontology, and so a pure ontology of immanence, that affirms a multiplicity of pure or positive differences. This is because Spinoza, on Deleuze's reading, ties the thesis of univocity to a logic of expressionism. As he puts it '[w]ith Spinoza, univocal being ceases to be neutralised and becomes expressive'.[27] For initial purposes, expressionism, with respect to univocal being, means that the very nature or 'logic' of being is precisely to express itself in difference. Being is univocal but Being *is* differentiation; Being is 'differences of expression, with no expression lying outside or grounding any other'.[28]

A philosophy of immanence, thus, requires two key moves for Deleuze. The first is to affirm the univocity of Being - this forecloses illicit transcendence. The second is to affirm the expressiveness of univocal Being - this ensures pure difference and becoming. Deleuze is drawn to a logic of expressionism because he thinks that it can bypass the classic metaphysical problem of relating the One to the Many that has troubled philosophy since Plato. Given expressionism and univocal being (absolute immanence), there is no need to tie the different expressions of Being to the One

[26] Ibid, 3, my italics.
[27] Deleuze, Gilles, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Althone Press, 1994), 40.
[28] Colebrook, Clare, *Gilles Deleuze* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 78.

Being, because (paradoxically) the One simply *is* its many different expressions. Deleuze's philosophy of immanence looks very promising for those of us keen to propose an ontology that will give space to difference. As Deleuze rightly acknowledges, when identity is acclaimed over difference the political and ethical ramifications of this is the exclusion of different forms of lives, a halt on thinking and living otherwise.

Transcendence is theological: the judgement of 'God' dictating a single course of life. Clare Colebrook writes that 'if immanence is philosophy for Deleuze it is also an ethics: not allowing experience to be enslaved by any single image [God, Truth, Subject, etc] that would elevate itself above others'.[29] We could say that Deleuze's commitment to an ontology of pure immanence stems from a longing for a radical egalitarianism that is also radically pluralist. This would entail that Being is 'equally present in all beings' such that no particular being is 'defined by their rank in a hierarchy'.[30] The anticipated implication of this for rethinking the divine in terms of immanence rather than transcendence is incisively put by May: '[w]hatever our relation to the Spinozist God might be, it will not be articulated in terms of *following* or *subordinating* or *resembling*'.[31]

I will now turn to Deleuze's reading of Spinoza. After briefly introducing Spinoza's project, I concentrate on showing how Deleuze elaborates an ontology of univocal immanence according to the logic of expressionism that he finds in the Spinozist system. Although Deleuze believes that Spinoza's monist metaphysics rids ontology of all illusions of transcendence while, nevertheless, ensuring the reality of multiplicity or pure differences, I shall argue to the contrary. I hope to show that the Spinozist system swings between the extremes of: (i) a monism where all differences collapse into God as the (indifferent) One, and (ii) a hierarchical dualism where God as active, independent substance is privileged over passive, dependent finite modes. I believe, then, that the spectre of divine transcendence continues to haunt Spinoza's metaphysics, leaving a host of undesirable consequences in its wake.

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[29] Ibid, 79.
[30] Deleuze, Gilles, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 173.
[31] May, *Gilles Deleuze*, 35.

An Ontology of Divine Expression

The influence of Descartes on Spinoza's own work is indisputable. However, Spinoza is much troubled by the concept of 'substance' as this functions in Descartes philosophy, a concept inherited from the Aristotelian tradition that characterises much medieval philosophy.

The language of substance is complex. For the purposes of this section I shall note two conceptions of substance that Descartes utilises, and which will inform Spinoza's own. The first is as the bearer of 'properties', 'qualities', 'attributes' or 'modes'. Here, the term substance is conceived in the sense of a 'subject' of which various properties may be predicated. It is in this sense that Descartes will argue that there are two substances: 'mind' and 'matter'. The second way that Descartes understands substance is as that which depends upon no other thing for its existence, pure self-subsisting substance. Here, Descartes maintains that there is only one substance: God. In addition to these two central ideas regarding substance, Descartes also recognises that the term can be used in a broad sense to refer to individual things.[32]

Unhappy with the ambiguities muddying the important notion of substance in Descartes work, as well as the difficulties in trying to account for how two separate substances can interact, Spinoza would devote around half of part one of the *Ethics* to arguing against the claim that there can be more than one substance, in order to conclude at 1P14 that *'[b]esides God no substance can exist or be conceived'*.[33] This proposition serves as the linchpin of Spinoza's metaphysics and its radical implications meant that his philosophy received a divided reception, denounced on the one hand as heretical and praised on the other for offering a renewed immanentist vision of Being.

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[32] Aristotle distinguished between primary and secondary substances. A concrete individual such as Socrates the man would count as a primary substance. All concrete individuals are, thus, (primary) substances. Secondary substances are the natural kinds or species to which particular individuals belong, for example, the kind 'man'. They refer to the substantial *form* constitutive of an individual thing.

[33] My italics. Standard referencing for Spinoza is used. Part 1-5, then A: axiom; C: corollary; D: definition; DE: definition of the emotions; L: lemma; P: proposition, S: scholium. Spinoza, Baruch, *Ethics*, trans. G. H. R. Parkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Pantheism?

'I do not know why matter should be unworthy of the divine nature'.[34]

By insisting that there is only one substance Spinoza propounds a monism (contra Cartesian dualism). By claiming that the one substance is God his monism invites the assumption that it is pantheistic.[35] At this point we need to clarify in what sense Spinoza's metaphysics is monistic, and then whether he can be rightly regarded as a pantheist. There are at least two forms of monism. The first is where there is one kind of reality. The second holds that there is just one substantive *individual.* The latter is Spinoza's position.

Following Woolhouse, I would say that Spinoza's divine substance qua divine substance is not instantiated as one actual substantive thing, but is rather a unique or singular reality that makes it possible for there to be any instantiated or actual things.[36] Woolhouse points out that Spinoza's single divine substance is typically viewed as the one instantiation of a nature, and that this is what his monism amounts to. The problem with this, for Woolhouse, is that it tends to lead to the mistaken idea that Spinoza's God/ substance can be straightforwardly identified with the corporeal world that is actually instantiated.[37] The identification of God with the corporeal world is often assumed to be a form of pantheism. Spinoza himself is clear that he does not wish to identify the corporeal world with the divine substance, which he figures in terms of 'God or Nature'.[38] If pantheism is believed to describe the position that God and the corporeal world are synonymous, then Spinoza cannot be regarded as a pantheist in this sense.

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[34] 1P15S

[35] Conversely, Spinoza's metaphysics has also been regarded as a thinly veiled atheism, the reduction of theology to physics.

[36] Woolhouse, R. S., *Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz: The Concept of Substance in Seventeenth-Century Metaphysics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 34ff.

[37] Ibid, 45.

[38] See his letter of 1675 to Oldenburg cited in Mason, Richard, *The God of Spinoza: A Philosophical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 31. See 4 Pref. for Spinoza's linking of God with Nature. We also need to note that here the 'or' is not functioning disjunctively but actually bringing the terms God and Nature into equivalence with each other.

Now, the term 'pantheism' is often bandied about as if it is clear what it means. Generally, pantheism is associated with the doctrine that 'God is everything', but this might entail a number of things. In his recent work on pantheism,[39] Michael Levine contends that the equation of God with the world is not (in the main) a pantheist tenet. He further argues that pantheism is not the view that God is literally each thing there is, such that this piece of paper, an ocean, a toaster, etc, is God. Nor is pantheism the claim that the divine is the 'totality of all things'. According to Levine, pantheism is best construed as the thesis that there exists an all-encompassing unity and that this unity is divine. This notion of pantheism begins to convey in some way the Spinozist God, particularly in light of his statement that '[w]hatever exists exists in God, and nothing can exist or be conceived without God'.[40]

With respect to Spinoza's monism and his alleged pantheism, the pertinent question now is 'what exactly is the corporeal world if it is *not* to be identified with the one divine substance'? The short answer to this is that it is not substance itself, i.e. God or Nature. Nor would it be right to say that the corporeal world is 'made out of' substance, as if substance is some sort of constitutive stuff or raw material. Rather, for Spinoza, any actual corporeal thing, including the corporeal world as a whole, is a *mode* of the one substance.

It would be helpful here to run through the main terms in Spinoza's lexicon: substance, attributes and modes. Substance, as Spinoza defines it, is 'that which is in itself and is conceived through itself'.[41] The concept of substance does not require any further concept through which it is to be comprehended. Substance is absolutely independent; it needs no other thing by which to exist and is, thus, self-caused. An attribute is what the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of a substance.[42] An attribute, thus, 'expresses' the essence of substance. For Spinoza, attributes are 'infinite in kind' but not 'absolutely infinite' (more on which later). Although we know only of two attributes, thought and extension, Spinoza maintains that there is an

[39] Levine, M. P., *Pantheism: A Non-Theistic Concept of Divinity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).
[40] 1P15
[41] 1D3
[42] 1D4

infinity of attributes.[43] Modes are modifications or affections of substance and so cannot be conceived independently of an attribute of substance. As Spinoza puts it, a mode is 'that which is in something else, through which it is also conceived'.[44] Importantly, Spinoza distinguishes between infinite and finite modes.[45] The infinite modes are eternal and are differentiated between *immediate* and *mediate* infinite modes. The former directly 'follow from' the divine nature. The immediate infinite mode of the attribute of extension is 'motion and rest', and is 'absolute understanding' for the attribute of thought. Following from the immediate infinite modes are the mediate infinite modes. For the attribute extension this is the 'face (or aspect, or body) of the whole physical universe' (*facius totius universi*). Spinoza never clarified what the mediate infinite mode of thought is. Finally, finite modes are what Spinoza means by particular things.

For Spinoza, it is quite wrong to think that the corporeal world or universe is *equivalent* to divine substance. Nevertheless, his monism means that the physical universe is not something other than, or apart from, the one substance. Rather, it determinately manifests the one substance as a *mode* of the attribute of extension. Because the one divine substance is indivisible, according to Spinoza, there can be no real divisions ontologically; the corporeal universe is only 'modally divisible' in a loose 'imaginative' sense.[46] For Spinoza, in much the same way as a line is not properly conceived as a series of points, the *facius totius universi* (i.e. the whole of actual corporeal nature) is not 'made up' of particular individuals, is not an aggregate. Rather, our intellect properly conceives it as infinite and indivisible, something like the infinite continuum of finite particular bodies.

Some scholars, such as Genevieve Lloyd, suggest that the term 'panentheism' rather than pantheism best describes Spinoza's conception of the relation between God and the corporeal world.[47] Broadly, panentheism is the doctrine that God exceeds the material world, and so is not identical to it, but the material world is 'in' God, rather

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[43] This is because he argues that God as the most perfect reality must have the maximum amount of attributes, for the more attributes a thing has the more perfect it is. For a number of commentators, this has been viewed as a dubious argument.
[44] 1D5
[45] 1P21-23
[46] 1P15S
[47] Lloyd, Genevieve, *Spinoza and the 'Ethics'* (London: Routledge, 1996), 38-41.

than something external to God. Levine would say that this idea of the world being 'in' God is captured by a pantheist stress on the 'all-inclusive unity' of the divine, which does not entail viewing the world and God as the same. I prefer to read Spinoza's monism in terms of an 'immanentism'. For Spinoza, reality is simply the one immanent substance: God. By emphasising Spinoza's immanentism we can appreciate how for him 'Being "is" one, and everything that is, in so far as it is, has a common, unitary ground [i.e. God]'.[48]

Importantly, as Richard Mason points out, we would be going seriously awry if we supposed that, for Spinoza, substance, infinite modes and finite modes 'are separate items on a list'.[49] Such an approach would undermine the unity and simplicity (i.e. indivisibility) of the one substance that is God. It is not the case that substance and its modes are ontologically two different things. Rather, they are two different ways in which the one reality can be understood. Hence, Spinoza's philosophy abounds with dualistic formulations such as *Natura Naturans* and *Natura Naturata* or active nature and passive nature; essence and existence; and infinite and finite, etc. These attest not to an ontological dualism but to different ways of conceiving the one immanent reality.

For Deleuze, Spinozistic monism is precisely Being (God) as univocal. That univocal Being can be understood in two different ways is, Deleuze claims, by virtue of a logic of expression. According to Deleuze, it is this logic that allows for a multiplicity of particular things while maintaining the univocity of Being. In showing how the one substance expresses itself in multiple differences, Deleuze describes the logic of expression in triadic terms and structures. The fundamental triad in Spinoza's system is that of substance, attributes and modes. Here, the attributes play a crucial role in the logic of univocal expression as the middle term. As Deleuze puts it: 'God expresses himself in his attributes and attributes express themselves in dependent modes: this is how the order of Nature manifests God'.[50]

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[48] Piercey, Robert 'The Spinoza-Intoxicated Man: Deleuze on Expression', *Man and World* (vol. 29), 275.
[49] Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, 34.
[50] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 59.

Let us now turn to the first 'stage' of expression, whereby God expresses himself in the attributes such that each attribute expresses an essence of divine substance.[51] The triad substance, attribute and essence thus characterise the first expressive movement. The task Deleuze faces here is accounting for difference or distinction at the level of the infinite while ensuring the oneness of Being. I shall be arguing that even if we concede the thesis of 'formal distinction' that Deleuze employs to secure the non-illusory differences between the attributes, God emerges as an indeterminate, indeed, unknowable reality that stands 'behind' the attributes as a transcendent One.

Expressing the Infinite: Attributes

Deleuze has a tough job ahead of him. With Spinoza, he is at pains to credit the claim that attributes are 'conceived to be really distinct',[52] i.e. that attributes are conceived through their own concept alone and so 'without the aid of an other thing'. However, both Deleuze and Spinoza deny that the really distinct attributes constitute plural substances, despite defining substance as that which is 'conceived through itself'. Given that Deleuze/ Spinoza are seeking to advance a monism where there is only one substance (God), it is imperative that they rule out the possibility of a plurality of substances. To put things a little differently, Deleuze/ Spinoza need to show that all really distinct attributes must somehow constitute or express the essence of one substance only, thus affirming the monistic formula: 'one single substance for all attributes'.[53]

By analysing the first few definitions and propositions of the *Ethics*, Deleuze infers that numerical distinction cannot apply to substance. Given this, substance by definition is not *one type* of thing as such but is something utterly 'unique'. Spinoza argues that 'every substance is necessarily infinite' where 'infinite' means that which is wholly unlimited by any other thing. Causal relations are regarded as limiting, therefore, a substance cannot have an external causal. Deleuze contends that, for Spinoza, whatever is countable is limited and so has an external cause. Because

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[51] 'An essence is expressed by each attribute, but this as an essence of substance itself'. Ibid, 27. We should note that, for Deleuze, the two sorts of univocal expressions of substance are not in a temporal sequence.
[52] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 34. 1P10S.
[53] Ibid, 37.

substance is infinite, i.e. not limited, numerical distinction cannot apply to substance.[54]

To square the assertion that a substance cannot be limited by anything outside of it, and so there can only ever be one substance, *and* the assertion that all the attributes are really distinct, Deleuze, following Spinoza, contends that there must one substance for the really distinct attributes.[55] For Deleuze, the next crucial step that must be taken is to define the divine substance as 'a being *absolutely infinite*, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence'.[56] Deleuze finds this striking because here the one substance is not some abstract transcendent genus nor is it the nominal totality of all the attributes. Rather, substance is conceived as 'absolutely infinite', or what Deleuze would call 'the positive Infinity', which means that substance is the one absolute reality, but a dynamic, expressive reality, one that expresses itself in each of the really distinct attributes, which are positive and perfect forms of being. When substance is acknowledged as *absolutely* infinite then, Deleuze claims, the real distinctions of the different attributes can be understood as 'purely qualitative, quidditative or formal'[57] distinctions of the one absolute (divine substance), rather than numerical or ontological distinctions that would entail an actual plurality of substances. Substance is indivisible yet is qualitatively distinguishable in infinite ways by its infinite attributes.

When Spinoza argues in the second part of the *Ethics* that there is only ever one and the same substance, understood now under this attribute (e.g. thought), and now under that attribute (e.g. extension),[58] the roots of this position lie in conceiving substance as that which is 'absolutely infinite': qualitatively or formally, not quantitatively (numerically), distinct. Importantly, according to Deleuze, while substance expresses itself in the different qualitative expressions of the attributes, these expressions are

[54] Whenever we regard substance as 'one' we must appreciate that, for Spinoza, this is in a metaphorical sense.
[55] Deleuze previously points out that, for Spinoza, the attributes do not have necessary existence and must attribute their essence to something else (*viz.*, substance) this is why they cannot be identified as substances themselves.
[56] 1D6
[57] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 38.
[58] 2PS7

strictly univocal; they express one and the same substance. Adopting the Scotian notion of 'formal distinction' – a distinction midway between a purely conceptual distinction and a real (ontological) distinction – Deleuze bolsters his argument that the Spinozist attributes are really distinct qualities of being that nevertheless express one being and so are not actual separate things, i.e. substances.[59] Deleuze will also stress that the attributes are not *things* produced by substance, which would suggest that substance lies beyond (or transcends) the various attributes, but are the qualitative expressions of substance itself: substance is immanent in its expressions. Attributes are the 'dynamic and active forms'[60] of the one substance as it expresses itself.

This picture of one absolutely infinite substance certainly seems to allow Deleuze and Spinoza to uphold both one substance and an infinity of really distinct attributes, such that at the level of the infinite attributes there are infinite formal or qualitative expressions of substance, but not actual substantial divisions. However, the idea of substance as inherently expressive of an infinite array of qualitative differences is not so easy to maintain when we inspect a little more closely the nature of the attributes in terms of their relationships with each other and with substance. In what follows I hope to show that the really distinct attributes in Spinoza's system do not, as formal expressions of substance, overcome the dichotomy of the one and the many as Deleuze believes, but instead leads towards either a simple monism or a pluralism with respect to the idea of substance.

Attributes and Substance

Let us recall that Spinoza understands an attribute to be that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence. Each attribute is conceived through itself, requiring no concept or cause beyond itself to be conceived. Deleuze will emphasise that, for Spinoza, each attribute is infinite precisely because each attribute expresses an infinite essence of substance. As infinite, an attribute is something that is unlimited. However, an attribute is not absolutely infinite like substance is, but is said to be 'infinite in kind'. This means that, for example, while the attribute extension is fully and completely expressive of all that there is of substantial essence,

[59] '*Real and yet not numerical, such is the status of formal distinction*'. Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 64.
[60] Ibid, 45.

this expression is nevertheless one particular kind of expression. As such, the attribute extension is really distinct from all the other attributes that express substance; this is why it is conceived solely through itself and does not involve all the other attributes in its specific expression of substance. By itself, then, extension is wholly expressive of substance and does not need to appeal to thought or any other attribute in its expression. We could say that substance itself is absolutely infinite because its essence is irreducible to any one kind of expression or determination. There are, I hold, three interesting and problematic implications that arise from the notion of attributes as infinite in kind, which I will discuss in turn.

First of all, it must be the case that in the Spinozist system each different attribute expresses *all* of the essence of the one and the same divine substance, for if an attribute could only express a part of the divine essence then there would be an *excess* of substance irreducible to any one particular attribute. Substance in itself (God) would then be something that transcends each determinate attribute and the system could no longer be regarded as immanentist. However, if each attribute expresses *all* of the divine essence then how is it that all the attributes do not effectively collapse into each other, such that there is nothing really distinctive about each of them because they are identical?

Gillian Howie clearly illustrates this point when she argues: 'if a is a substance which is identical to all its attributes, and if F is an attribute, then if F expresses the essence of substance, it must also express all the other attributes [G, H, I, etc]'.[61] This consequence would be most unwelcome because it would mean that an attribute is not conceived through its own particular kind alone but invariably calls up all the other attributes with it. The very notion of really distinct attributes would cease to be meaningful and we would actually have a monism where substance only had one expression rather than an infinity: the much lauded logic of expression would not be the key to difference but to sameness.

To guard against the reduction of the infinite attributes to one expression of substance, Deleuze would have to make a great deal of the claim that while each attribute

[61] Howie, Gillian, *Deleuze and Spinoza: Aura of Expressionism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 22.

expresses one thing – divine substance – an attribute nevertheless constitutes a particular qualitative form of substance such that no one form is qualitatively identical to an other. One way Deleuze will seek to bring home this contention will be to consider the attributes in terms of divine names.[62] Each name expresses a particular or distinct (qualitative) sense while having the same reference as all the other names: the divine substance.

However, as soon as we start to accentuate the real distinction of the attributes – whether we think of the attributes as qualitative forms of the one substance or divine names with particular senses but the same reference – we find that we are forced to accept that either an attribute is a *limited* expression of substance, and so does not determinately express substance in itself, or that there are as many substances as there are attributes. The former result reintroduces divine transcendence and the latter is a pluralist understanding of substance, whereby there are many different substances. Of course, Deleuze will be loathed to accept either of these two outcomes as they fail to support being as univocal immanence.

I want to flesh out a little the claim that an attribute is limited, given that one of its defining properties is that it is infinite and so unlimited. As I see it, if the idea of an attribute as 'infinite in kind' is to have any import, then even though each attribute expresses all the essence of substance without remainder (and so is unlimited in this sense), this expression must be a limited one to the extent that it excludes all other substantial expressions in the other attributes. Because substance is considered to be absolutely infinite no expression can be excluded from it, which is to say that substance is precisely the infinite range of expressions of *all* the really distinct attributes. The term substance is shorthand, as it were, for all the attributes, denoting no more and no less than *all* of these.

However, this must mean that substance itself is always something more than (i.e. transcends) any *one* of the attributes, which are 'infinite in kind' rather than absolutely infinite. Deleuze recognises this but (unconvincingly) tries to maintain at once that while 'what is expressed [substance] has no existence outside the attribute, it

[62] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 61.

is nonetheless related to substance as to the object designated by all the attributes'.[63] If the essence of substance is identified with all the attributes, and we then say that an attribute expresses all of substance, we either (i) lose the real distinctness of the attributes; or (ii) reduce substance to a single attribute; or (iii) admit the limited expressiveness of a really distinct attribute. Deleuze would not want to concede the first two points because they would rob the system of difference. He does, however, acknowledge that, for Spinoza, 'one attribute is *denied* of another'[64] and is thus limited in a way that substance itself is not. Yet Deleuze insists this does not mean that the attribute only partially expresses substance. To show this he simply reiterates with Spinoza that an attribute does completely express the essence of substance and that the attribute is limited only insofar as it determinately expresses substance according to its particular kind of expression. The phrase 'insofar as' suggests that if we look at things from the viewpoint of substance itself, rather than a single attribute, then we should see that no attribute is in actual fact limited by substance or the other attributes.

But this way of arguing does not get us very far at all. If from the standpoint of substance the attribute is not limited, then once again the attribute is not really distinct, and so is not a particular determinate expression of substance. Conversely, if a single attribute can only determinately express substance in its own specific way by denying the other attributes then two things result. Firstly, Deleuze would have to accept that the logic of expression entails negation (namely, the negation of the other attributes), without which no expression could be determinate or really distinct. This is quite intolerable for Deleuze because determination by way of negation is the nature of Hegel's dialectical system. Indeed, Deleuze is sure that Spinoza's expressive system is secured by pure affirmation where every ontological item is something positive and affirming. As he writes: '[a]ttributes are affirmations'.[65] However, on my reading of Spinoza, insofar as any attribute is really distinct it demands the negation of all the other attributes: affirmation is thereby bound up with negation. Secondly, if we recognise that a single attribute excludes (negates) all the

[63] Ibid, 62.
[64] Ibid, 59.
[65] Ibid, 60.

other attributes and then continue to claim that this single attribute expresses all the essence of substance we effectively reduce substance to the one attribute.

Alternatively, if we admit that an attribute is a limited expression of substance we must admit that substance always transcends any determinate expression of it. Indeed, if we understand substance as all the attributes, then substance in itself becomes wholly *inexpressible* for as soon as it perceived according to a determinate expression it is limited in some way. I therefore agree with Connor Cunningham when he writes that Spinoza 'forces the attributes to collapse and likewise the divine essence'.[66] I believe this is also true of Deleuze. I maintain, then, that the status of attributes as infinite but only insofar as each expresses substance in its own particular form introduces limitation and negation into Spinoza's system, and this threatens to deny real distinctions or to re-institute divine transcendence.

The second problem regarding the concept of the attribute as 'infinite in kind' has been touched upon in the preceding discussion and concerns the nature of substance (God). We earlier said that the essence of substance is all the attributes. Indeed, Deleuze contends that all the infinite attributes are constitutive of the essence of substance, which is thereby absolutely infinite. However, it is not clear whether substance has just one self-same essence or as many different essences as attributes. In the former case we would be hard pressed to see how an attribute remains that which is conceived through itself as a really distinct expression of substantial essence, and in the latter case plurality and equivocity would be located at the heart of substance. At various points Deleuze will say that an attribute expresses *the* essence of substance and also that an attribute expresses *an* essence of substance.[67] As if addressing this discrepancy he writes '[e]ssences are really distinct from the viewpoint of the attributes, but essence is single from the viewpoint of the object with which it is convertible'.[68] Once again the point is made that it is not a matter of actually different things (essences) but two different ways of looking at the one reality (in this case, from the perspective of the one substance or from the perspective of one of the many attributes).

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[66] Cunningham, Conor, *Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 62.
[67] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 13, 45, 50, 57, 13, 37, 50, 65.
[68] Ibid, 42.

It strikes me, however, that when Deleuze claims that all the different attributes constitute the essence of substance, this essence is actually *comprised* of all the different essences that each really distinct attribute attributes to substance. It is as if the total set of all the attributes, and the distinct essences they express, is somehow converted to a single essence when it is understood in terms of substance as absolutely infinite. But once this conversion is made substance itself is always something more than any one of its attributes, which is limited to expressing just one essence of substance. Things become even more bewildering if we take into consideration Woolhouse's comment that it is not quite correct to regard Spinoza's substance (God) as a nature or an essence, because it is more the case that substance is 'what *supports* natures or essences, or where they are located'.[69] This very much suggests that the divine substance is that which allows for different essential expressions and so is something (what exactly?) other than these expressions. In other words, substance is something transcendent and noumenal because as the condition of all expressions it itself can never be expressed.

The final worry I have with the Spinozist attribute is that the attribute of thought seems to be prioritised over the others. As we know Spinoza states that an attribute is what the intellect grasps as constituting the essence of substance. This has led some commentators to adopt a 'subjectivist' (or idealist) view of the attributes. Here it is held that the attributes are viewed by the intellect *as if* they were really distinct, although independently of the intellect there are no real differences between them. Deleuze would not want to accept this stance because it is reductive of difference, treating them as mere fictions of the mind. The 'objectivist' interpretation of Spinoza's attributes insists that while it is the intellect that distinguishes the differences between the attributes (human intellect distinguishes just two attributes: thought and extension), the intellect is discerning really distinct things in fact. What I wish to highlight here is that Deleuze's appraisal of the attributes as all perfectly equal in status[70] is rather undermined given that the attribute of thought is fundamental in upholding the real distinctions of all the other attributes, such as extension. Spinozist immanence may not be so anti-hierarchical after all. Moreover, it seems that we

[69] Woolhouse, *Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz*, 49.
[70] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 69.

cannot say that an attribute is conceived through itself alone when every attribute must be conceived through the attribute of thought. My concern is that the attribute of thought effectively collapses all the other attributes into it such that there is only one attribute: thought. This really would jeopardise Deleuze's hope to read Spinoza as offering a radical materialism.

By articulating the really distinct attributes in terms of 'formal distinction' Deleuze attempts to disclose a logic of expression at the level of the infinite where the One and the Many are implicated in each other, and where transcendence is kept at bay. But I have argued that when we try to credit the claim that an attribute is 'infinite in kind' we find that we either lose differences or recover divine transcendence and equivocity (of essences or substances). Clearly, Deleuze would not want to accept any of these outcomes.

Before I go on to explore how Deleuze accounts for the re-expression of substance in the finite modes (the second stage of expression), I want to further query just what is this substance, this reality, the essence of which can be expressed first one way and then another. When Spinoza states that there is one substance, now considered under one attribute, then considered under another, the notion of substance itself seems to be without any real content, becoming entirely exhausted by its attributes.

Most likely Deleuze would immediately rejoinder here that the point precisely is that the one substance *is* its many different, yet univocal, expressions: substance *is* the absolute infinity of all the attributes. But what exactly is expressing itself? Deleuze will pick up on Spinoza's identification of God with power. As Spinoza writes: '[t]he power of God is his essence'.[71] We can then say that God's 'essence is the absolutely infinite power to exist and generate effects'.[72] Deleuze would want to make it clear that the divine power is an expressive reality that does not exist *apart* from its effects, its expressions, but is always immanent within these. The attributes are thus qualitative forms or determinations of divine absolute power, and we shall soon see that, for Deleuze, the modes are quantitative degrees of divine power. By identifying the divine substance with power, Deleuze is able to maintain the univocity of being as

[71] 1P34.
[72] Piercey, 'The Spinoza-Intoxicated Man', 275.

one dynamic expressiveness that, as such, cannot be other than a multiplicity of qualitative, and quantitative, expressions.

What is interesting about this is that Deleuze's realism or materialism cannot be one pertaining to relatively stable, mind-independent objects in the world, but instead pertains to reality as a dynamic expressive power or force (life). A number of postmodern thinkers might regard this as a radical ontology that challenges essentialism and fixed accounts of being. However, I think that by casting being (God, substance, life) in terms of power we are left with an ultimately indeterminate reality that elides the reality, and forsakes the integrity, of actual concrete bodies. This will become clearer, I believe, when we look at the ethical naturalism.

For now I want to note that if we wish to secure the univocity of being, while maintaining that being is expressed in a multiplicity of different ways, it strikes me that being would have to be something essentially indeterminate, like power. This however invites the suspicion that the expressions of being are at base expressions of nothing in particular, attractively disguised in Deleuze's work as pure positive being.[73] Furthermore, while Deleuze will be at pains to stress that the one substantial power *is* its multiple expressions, he will need to distinguish between being itself, divine substance, as *one* pure (indeterminate) power *and* the different determinate expressions of this power if he is not to lose the univocity of being altogether.

Expressing the Finite: Modes

We have seen that Deleuze gives a Spinozist twist to the Scotist thesis of 'formal distinction', in order to maintain the real distinction of the attributes without conceding numerical or ontological distinction. Deleuze contends that God (substance) first expresses himself in the attributes, which are qualitative forms of

[73] Cunningham persuasively argues that there is a logic of nihilism that runs throughout western philosophy. The basis of this logic is to construe nothing *as* something. He maintains that in Spinoza this logic generates the dualism God or Nature, where one of the two terms can only be made meaningful in the absence of the other. But this has the effect of reducing both terms to nothing, such that Spinoza's monism is one that engenders something out of nothing. I believe such a nihilist logic is at work in Deleuze's Spinozist logic of expression, which can only express or determine what is essentially a radical indeterminacy and Hegel would call this nothing. See Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nothing*, 59-71 and also xiii-xiv.

being. He then argues that 'the attributes are in their turn expressed: they express themselves in modes which designate them, the modes expressing a modification'.[74] Both Deleuze and Spinoza are keen to ensure the reality of finite, particular things in their account of being, despite the indivisibility of the one divine substance.

Reconstructing Spinoza's arguments somewhat, Deleuze proposes that the distinct essences of Spinozist finite modes are degrees or parts of divine power. He appeals to what we can call the 'quantification of quality' argument, in order to claim that each attribute, as a qualitative form of being, produces finite modes as a certain quantity of its qualified power. Importantly, Deleuze points out that while each attribute (a quality) can be regarded as an 'infinite quantity' that is divisible in certain conditions, it is always the case that an attribute 'has *modally* distinct parts: modal, rather than real or substantial parts'.[75] Finite modes, as quantified degrees or parts of qualities (attributes), are not ontologically different entities but are modal distinctions of the one divine substance whose essence is power. This notion of modal distinction is crucial if the unity of the one reality, God, is to be safeguarded.

Deleuze also distinguishes between two forms of modal quantity: intensive and extensive. Each modal essence is an intensive degree (quantity) of quality and 'make up' an infinite series of degrees such that the attribute (quality) can be regarded quantitatively as this series. However, in light of the indivisibility of attributes Deleuze will contend that an attribute understood as an intensive series is not a totality, it is not literally made up of really distinct parts, but is rather a continuum of intensities. According to Deleuze, each intensive degree (of quality) is an 'intrinsic' determination of the attribute and these are inseparable from each other, belonging as they do to an infinite series.

However, Deleuze simultaneously holds that as an essence of a finite mode each intensive degree is something individual and singular. He then utilises an illustration from Duns Scotus, where it is observed that the whiteness of the colour white can be viewed as 'constituted' by varying degrees of intensity. These intensities are the intrinsic determinations or modes of whiteness; no specific degree of intensity of

[74] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 105.
[75] Ibid, 191, my italics.

whiteness is literally separable from the colour white but is always an inherent 'part' of it. In this way, Deleuze argues, we can think of individual modal essences as distinct intensive degrees (of quality) that nonetheless are continuous with one another as an infinite series. We should note here that Deleuze's concept of 'singularities' is drawn from this notion of modal essence as an intensive degree of divine power, which is itself a particular reading of Spinozist modes in terms of the Scotian notion of 'haecceties'.[76]

For Deleuze, an extensive quantity refers to the mode as it passes into existence, where its (eternal) essence as an intrinsic determination of the attribute becomes actualised in duration (the realm of time)[77] as an 'extrinsic' determination of that attribute. As 'part' of a continuous series, infinite degrees cannot be distinguished from each other as such, but only as they become individuated in duration. When a mode comes into existence it is said to be extrinsically determined as an individual. As we shall see when we discuss Spinozist/ Deleuzian bodies in the next chapter, a modal individual is that which is composed of, or constituted by, various existing modes in determining relations with each other. In Deleuze's words: '[a] given mode "comes to exist", comes into existence, when an infinity of extensive parts enter into a *given* relation: it continues to exist as long as this relation holds'.[78] These extensive parts are, in short, transitory finite modes that are governed by causal laws, and, thus, are in determining relations with each other; a certain set of modal relations somehow comes to correspond with a particular modal essence thus actualising that essence in duration.

The distinction between intensive and extensive quantity, intrinsic and extrinsic determination, is important because it informs Deleuze's own theory of the virtual and the actual (which is also inspired by Bergson's ontology). For Deleuze, the virtual is real but not actual, which is not to say that the virtual is a (not yet real) possibility to

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[76] Although Deleuze presents his points as if they come from a close reading of Spinoza some commentators have observed that he has significantly reworked Spinoza's own philosophy

[77] Parkinson explains that, for Spinoza, eternity is existence that is logically necessary and as such needs to be understood as that which is time*less* rather than 'everlasting'. Parkinson, *Ethics*, 312. As Spinoza states, 'there is no 'when', 'before' or 'after' in eternity', the mode of God's existence (1P33S2). Duration is 'the indefinite continuation of existing' and time is a particular measure of duration. Duration is the proper mode of existence for finite modes as these endure and eventually pass away.

[78] Ibid, 208.

be actualised in space and time because the virtual 'possess a full reality by itself'.[79] Nevertheless, the virtual is not actual for it does not exist as a spatio-temporal, material thing. To help elucidate this, we could say that for Deleuze the reality of the virtual is *essential* and intensive, that is, the eternal reality of an essence, whereas the reality of the actual is *existential* and extensive, a temporal, determinate reality. This helps to shed a little light on Deleuze's rather opaque assertion that '[a] modal essence can exist [virtually] without the mode itself [actually] existing [as extensive parts]'.[80]

According to Deleuze 'each mode expresses or explicates God's essence, insofar as that essence explicates itself through the mode's essence'.[81] Finite modes are not creatures that are distinct or separate from their creator, but are immanent expressions of the one divine power itself. Employing the medieval and renaissance terms of 'explication, involvement and complication', Deleuze elaborates the logic of expressionism thus:

> 'To explicate is to evolve, to involve is to implicate...Expressionism is on the one hand an explication, an unfolding of what expresses itself, the One manifesting itself in the many (substance manifesting itself in its attributes, and these attributes manifesting themselves in their modes). Its multiple expression, on the other hand, involves Unity. The One remains involved in what expresses it...immanent in whatever manifests it'.[82]

Explication is a certain unfolding out of the one divine reality into multiple expressions (qualitative and quantitative). But these expressions implicate or involve no less (and no more) than the one God himself. This is the logic of univocal expression, the logic of pure immanence. The concept of 'complication' ties explication and implication together. As Deleuze writes: '[a]ll things are present to God, who complicates them. God is present to all things which explicate and implicate him'.[83]

Although Deleuze wants to show that with Spinoza being is univocal, such that the being (substance) expressed in the infinite/ unlimited attributes is the same being

[79] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 211.
[80] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 201.
[81] Ibid, 183.
[82] Ibid, 16.
[83] Ibid, 175.

(substance) expressed in the finite/ limited modes, he has to acknowledge that, to put it somewhat clumsily, the reality of the finite modes is rather different to that of substance and its really distinct attributes. To recap, Spinoza defines a mode as a modification of substance, which means that a mode is in something else through which it is conceived. This 'something else' is precisely substance under one or more of the attributes. So, for example, Patrice is a finite mode, a modification of substance (God) as expressed by the attributes thought and extension. Substance and finite modes inversely mirror each other: substance is in-itself, self-caused and conceived through itself; finite modes are in-another, caused by another and conceived by another. Moreover, there is the key point that, for Spinoza, only God (substance) has necessary existence, only God's essence necessarily entails existence.[84] The essence of finite modes (as any other 'thing' that is not substance itself) does not imply existence. When we consider these distinctions between substance and modes it is clear that the reality of the modes is wholly dependent upon substance: modes depend on substance but substance does not depend on its modes. Substance is the only independent reality, existing necessarily by virtue of its very essence. As dependent entities, finite modes seem to be somewhat secondarized in relation to the divine substance, which enjoys an ontological priority denied of the finite modes. Certainly Deleuze would not want to concede the charge that the being of substance is of a superior kind to the being of the modes, because this would debunk the thesis of univocal being in an instant. If divine substance is more perfect than the modes, then the ontology is no longer non-hierarchical - a central characteristic of a philosophy of pure immanence - and God's being would transcend that of the modes.

Deleuze responds to these difficulties by drawing attention to two highly significant claims in part one of the *Ethics*, significant because they help show how the Spinozist system can at once deliver particular things (modes) while remaining monistic. The first claim is at 1P16 where Spinoza states: '[t]here must follow from the necessity of the divine nature, infinite things in infinite ways', by which he means that infinitely many things (namely, infinite and finite modes) follow from God's nature (as expressed under an attribute). Now, at this point it is vital we appreciate that, for

[84] 1P11. See also scholium and alternative proofs for this proposition, as well as 1P20.

Spinoza, to say that there must follow infinitely many things from the necessity of God's nature is to say that such things must follow from God as a logically necessary consequence of the divine nature. The 'must' is one of logical necessity: given the divine nature there *must* necessarily be particular things; to claim otherwise would be as logically contradictory as to claim, for example, that 'all men are mortal, Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates is immortal'.

Furthermore, Spinoza equates logical necessity with causality such that God is the cause of all the things that logically follow from his nature. Because Spinoza holds that the relationship between cause and effect is a logical one he presupposes what can be termed a 'causal rationalism'. Jonathon Bennett explains that this is where 'there is a *single* relation of *necessary* connection, which links causes with effects in real [i.e. actual/ material] causal chains and premises with conclusions in valid arguments'.[85] Whatever follows with logical necessity from the divine nature is also necessarily caused to be by the divine nature: logical necessity is causal necessity. Hence Spinoza concludes: [i]n Nature there exists nothing contingent, but all things have been determined by the necessity of the divine nature to exist and operate in a certain way'.[86]

We need to further note that Spinoza's causal rationalism implies what Bennett calls an 'explanatory rationalism'.[87] For Spinoza, there are no brute facts; we can never be content to say that some things just are so. Instead, there must be a reason/cause for whatever is. Spinoza's rationalism thus has its basis in the principle of sufficient reason. In a version of the ontological argument, Spinoza maintains that as the concept of God (substance) includes 'cause of itself' (*causa sui*), then it follows with logical necessity that God exists. Leaving aside the plausibility of such ontological arguments for God's existence, the salient point here is that God is the principle of

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[85] Bennett, Jonathan, 'Spinoza's Metaphysics', *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 61, my italics. For a concise overview of Spinoza's causal rationalism see Parkinson, 'Introduction', 26-30. In 1P11 first Alternative Proof Spinoza famously equates cause with reason: '*causa seu ratio*' (cause or reason) where the seu (or) denotes equivalence, not disjunction. See also 1Ax3: 'From a given determinate cause there necessarily follows an effect'.

[86] 1P29.

[87] Bennett, Jonathan, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 29.

sufficient reason for his own existence as well as the existence of all the particular things that logically follows from his nature.

To emphasise that infinitely many things necessarily follow from Gods' nature is to stress that logically there simply cannot be the one God without the many different things that follow from his nature. As Yovel puts it, God's particularization in the finite modes 'is not an *additional* act of the absolute but one which is constitutive of it';[88] the finite and the infinite are 'mutually dependent'. Here, Spinoza's distinction between God as *Natura naturans*, or active nature, and God as *Natura naturata*, or passive nature[89] becomes pertinent. As we noted in our discussion on Spinoza's so-called pantheism, these terms do not refer to an ontological dualism but rather two alternative ways of considering the one reality that is God or Nature.

In his *Ethics* Spinoza famously makes much use of the phrase 'insofar as' (*quatenus*). This is precisely so that he can capture the sense of a single, unique reality that can be regarded in two distinct ways, emphasising either the oneness of reality (substance), or the multiplicity that actually manifests the one reality (modes).[90] Insofar as we understand God as *Natura naturans*, then, we understand that which is independent and self-caused, and whose essence implies existence. Conversely, insofar as we understand God as *Natura naturata*, we understand 'everything which follows from the necessity of the nature of God, that is, all the modes of the attributes of God'.[91] *Natura naturata* is the reality of substance construed in modal rather than substantial terms, and so in terms of things (modes) that are dependent on another (substance) both existentially and conceptually. Deleuze would argue that while it is true that finite modes are things whose essence and existence depend upon another, and that this is not the case for the divine substance, this does not mean that finite modes, i.e. particular things, are subordinate entities that have a lesser reality to that of substance. Rather, it is simply a matter of *viewing* nature modally rather than substantially.

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[88] Yovel, *The Adventures of Immanence*, 200, n. 22, my italics.
[89] 1P29S.
[90] Roger Scruton argues that '[a]t the heart of Spinoza's thought, lies the little word '*quatenus*', which seems to take away everything the philosopher proves precisely by its over-willing help in proving it. By means of this word Spinoza repeatedly describes differences that are absolute and impassable...as differences of degree, so suggesting a transition where no transition is possible'. Scruton, Roger, *Spinoza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 90.
[91] 1P29S.

The next step Deleuze takes, in order to firm up his contention that Spinozist finite modes are not 'degraded' forms of being *vis-à-vis* God (substance), is to highlight Spinoza's insistence that 'God is the immanent but not the transitive cause of all things'.[92] Given immanent causality, we can regard God as the cause of the infinitely many things that follow necessarily from his nature, but all that follows from God remains *in* the divine reality itself, rather than separate from it. Deleuze defines an immanent cause as one where the effect is retained in the causal agent, 'in it, of course, as in something else, but still being and remaining in it'.[93] A transitive cause per contra is one that 'leaves itself in order to produce, and what it produces (its effect) is outside of itself'.[94] Where God is understood in terms of transitive causality, he is immediately figured as a transcendent creator, a superior being distinct from his creation. In the Christian tradition, for example, God is presented as a transcendent creator who creates the world out of nothing and as something wholly different to the divine being.

As well as transitive causality, Deleuze also considers the emanative causation characteristic of the Neo-Platonic tradition, where particular things 'emanate' from the One, which remains within itself as it produces it effects. For Deleuze, the notion of Neo-Platonic emanation draws closer to the univocal expression of being than does Christian creation, because that which emanates from the One is of the same being as the One. Nevertheless, the emanations of the One lie outside it such that the One remains transcendent, 'something' beyond all beings. Hence, Deleuze writes that 'the themes of creation or emanation cannot do without a minimal transcendence, which bars "expressionism" from proceeding all the way to the immanence it implies'.[95] Univocal expression in Spinoza's system thus demands immanent causation, such that God as cause remains in his effects (modes) while, nevertheless, remaining something distinct from these effects as their (immanent) causal agent (substance); in this way an ontology of pure immanence is fully realised.

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[92] 1P18.
[93] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 172.
[94] Smith, 'The Doctrine of Univocity', *Deleuze and Religion*, 173.
[95] Ibid, 180.

As an immanent cause Spinoza's God is a creative power that is an 'eternal potency-in-act'. As Harold Hallett explains, with Spinoza '"creation" is action *par excellence*: it is the eternal action of an absolutely infinite agent, the potency of which expresses itself in an infinite and eternal actuality. It is not to be conceived as the production *ex nihilo* of an indefinite assemblage and series of temporal beings'.[96] God is an absolute power that immediately expresses itself in act, in all that follows from the divine nature. There is not some pre-existing power that then subsequently creates particular things. Rather, for Deleuze and Spinoza, God is an expressive power that precisely is such in the particular things that are (of) it. Deleuze maintains that once we affirm God (substance) as immanent in his effects (modes), as the indwelling, expressive power present in all things, we have no basis to contend that Spinozist finite modes, or particular things, are of a lesser grade of being than is divine substance. Indeed, particular things are an actual part or degree of divine power insofar as that power expresses itself modally.

Deleuze detects three figures of univocity at work in Spinoza's philosophy, driving its logic of univocal expression. First there is the univocity of the attributes, which Deleuze accounts for by means of a thesis of formal distinction. Second, is the univocity of cause, which we have just seen is the insistence on immanent causality. And the third is the univocity of modality where 'all that is is necessary, either through itself or through its cause [reason]'.[97] All these figures ensure, Deleuze claims, that whatever particular, finite thing there is in the Spinozist universe it is something that ineluctably and univocally leads to the one substance with its infinite attributes. Deleuze believes that Spinoza's system demonstrates the expressive logic of being as divine substance, a logic that involves two movements: qualitative expression at the level of the attributes and quantitative expression at the level of the modes.

I have already cast doubt as to the efficacy of Deleuze's thesis of formal distinction with respect to the attributes and raised the suspicion that divine substance is a transcendent indeterminacy that drains qualitative expression of any real content.

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[96] Hallett, Harold, F., *Creation, Emanation and Salvation: a Spinozistic Study* (The Hague: Martinus Nijohoff, 1962), 38.
[97] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 93.

Now I want to argue that for all its seeming neatness, Deleuze's account of Spinozist finite modes runs aground when we investigate more closely exactly how the finite modes 'follow from' the divine nature, given that this is eternal and infinite and yet is meant to produce finite things of limited duration, while nevertheless remaining unchanged. I thus want to explore how *Natura naturans* can produce *Natura naturata* as this secures the status of finite modes as actual things in Spinoza's ontology. To do this unavoidably requires entering into the difficult terrain that is Spinoza's baroque modal theory.

Unsurprisingly, there is much dispute in Spinozist scholarship surrounding the issue of deriving the finite from the infinite, the durational from the eternal, i.e., *Natura naturata* from *Natura naturans*. What is clear is that Spinoza, and with him Deleuze, certainly intends there to be real particular things in his metaphysics. However, it is very much debatable as to whether the apparatus of his monistic system allows him to do so. I do not intend to settle here this tricky problematic in Spinoza's work. Rather, I aim to show that the arguments deployed to uphold the reality of the finite modes, by both Spinoza and Deleuze, are more than a little tenuous. Indeed, it is my view that with Spinoza the (durational) existence of the finite modes, if not illusory as Hegel complains, is at best epiphenomenal in relation to the eternal divine substance. Moreover, if we do concede the reality of the finite modes we are also forced to concede, it seems to me, a highly logicized ontology where material causality is collapsed into strictly necessary logical relations (the conflation of reason with causes).

Passage From the Infinite to the Finite

In 1P21 Spinoza states that 'all things which follow from the absolute nature of some attribute of God must have existed always and as infinite'. Here he introduces the notion of what Spinozists term 'immediate infinite modes', which we came across earlier. An immediate infinite mode is considered to be a law of nature and is 'motion and rest' for the attribute of extension, and 'infinite intellect' for the attribute of thought.

Following from the immediate infinite mode of each attribute is the mediate infinite mode. This is 'an infinite series of finite modes'. For the attribute of extension the mediate infinite mode is the infinite continuum of all finite bodies. Similarly, for the attribute of thought the mediate infinite mode is the infinite continuum of all finite minds/ ideas. As Spinoza informs us, we can regard the infinite series or continuum of bodies as the 'face of nature' or a single individual, whose parts (*viz.*, finite bodies) can vary in infinite ways without any change to the individual conceived as a whole. Although Spinoza does not specifically name the mediate infinite mode of the attribute of thought (i.e. the infinite series or continuum of ideas/ minds) there is no reason why this series cannot also be thought of as the face of nature expressed under the attribute of thought.[98]

From the mediate infinite mode (of an attribute) individual we finally get to finite modes: particular bodies under the attribute of extension and particular ideas/ minds under the attribute of thought. Finite modes are transitory entities and are said to be in determining causal relations with each other (more on which shortly).

According to Yovel, 'the infinite mode, plays a decisive role in his [Spinoza's] metaphysics since it mediates between God as substance and particular things'.[99] Somewhere during the movement from the infinite to the finite a shift must take place such that substance, which is by definition eternal and infinite, can be temporal and finite. In observing this shift we need to pay attention to the notions of 'infinite and eternal' and 'necessity' as they apply to substance and modes for it seems that their meaning must take on a different sense in each case.

When substance and its attributes are described as infinite and eternal this means that they are omnipresent and timeless. Yovel points out that the infinity of the immediate infinite modes refers to 'their omnipresence in some range of relevant phenomena'.[100] So, for example, just as the attribute extension is present in all extended bodies, so too are the laws of motion and rest (the immediate infinite modification of the attribute

[98] This is what Giancotti argues. Giancotti, Emilia, 'On the Problem of the Infinite Modes', *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 106.
[99] Yovel, Yirmiyahu, 'The Infinite Mode and Natural Laws in Spinoza', *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 79.
[100] Ibid, 85.

extension), which differentiate and determine all extended bodies. However, Yovel argues that if we take the immediate infinite modes to be laws of nature, e.g. motion and rest for actual extended bodies, then their being is not so much eternal but rather 'of endless duration'.[101] Unless the meaning of 'eternal' is so transformed, then we are quite at a loss as to how it is that the eternal divine substance can lead to the durational and transitory existence of finite modes. But this is problematical because 1P21 states that only infinite and eternal things follow from an attribute of substance. Yovel suggests that the eternity and infinity of the immediate infinite modes are properties that are *transmitted* to it from the infinite and eternal attribute, however this transmission involves a certain depreciation or degradation such that timelessness becomes 'endless duration'. This degradation simply seems to take place with no explanation, but without it all forms of being would be timeless and clearly this is not the case for existing (durational), particular finite things.

A similar degradation appears to take place with respect to the kind of necessity that characterises substance and the infinite modes. As we know, for Spinoza, God is described as necessary because his essence implies existence. However, this is not the case for modes (whether infinite or finite), which depend upon substance for both their essence and existence. Modes, then, are contingent in the technical Spinozist sense that their essence does not strictly entail their existence. But at 1P29 Spinoza claims that nothing contingent exists for all that is, is determined by the necessity of the divine nature. To smooth out these discrepancies Yovel proposes that the necessity of the modes is transmitted to them in a 'downward' chain of logical derivation from the attributes of substance. A degradation does seem to occur during this transmission because there is a shift from the absolute necessity of substance to the conditional necessity of the infinite and finite modes. Now Deleuze will emphasise that while there is an order of being, such that substance is ontologically prior to its modes, this order is at once an order of logic: modes thus have logical necessity in the Spinozist system. Deleuze also stresses Spinoza's account of the immanent causality of substance. This is so he can contend that no degradation of being actually occurs in the passage from substance to modes, if God is present (as cause/ reason) in the infinite and finite modes he effects. However, all is not done and

[101] Ibid, 85.

dusted. In addition to the problem of degradation, the *Ethics* exhibits textual ambiguities regarding the causal origins of the finite modes, putting their ontological status in question.

When Spinoza states that (i) all things (including finite modes) follow from the necessity of God's nature (1P16); (ii) nothing contingent exists in nature (1P29); and (iii) things could not have been produced by God in any other way or in any other order (1P33), he seems to be quite straightforwardly claiming that there is a vertical line of (logical) causation running from substance through the attributes, through the infinite modes and then resulting in the finite modes.

However, at 1P28 Spinoza also tells us that finite modes causally determine each other, that is, a finite mode is caused by an antecedent finite mode which itself has been caused by another finite mode and so on *ad infinitum*. Here, there is a horizontal causality at work in the determination of the finite modes that seems at odds with the vertical causation, where finite modes logically follow from the nature of God. As Spinoza plainly puts it 'that which is finite and has a determinate existence could not have been produced from the absolute nature of some attribute of God; for whatever follows from the absolute nature of some attribute of God is infinite and eternal'.[102] Hence, we can only think of finite modes as following from the nature of God insofar as the divine substance is regarded as modified by some finite mode, which in turn has been modified by another finite mode and so on ad infinitum.

What are we to make of this picture of horizontal modal causality? We can think of the mutually causally determining finite modes as 'constituting' an infinite series (i.e. a mediate infinite mode under some attribute of substance), and then we can say with Mason that '[t]he existence of an endless network of existing things can be conceived as *effects* – infinite modes – or as *cause* – substance'.[103] Here, we somewhat bypass the problem of attempting to derive the finite from the infinite (indeed, Mason might argue that we are to stop regarding this as a problem at all). Instead, we highlight two different ways of apprehending the one nature: (i) as *Natura naturata* – the infinite series of interrelating particular things; and (ii) as *Natura naturans* – the one divine

[102] 1P28D
[103] Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, 64, my italics.

substance as eternal potency-in-act (and, therefore, not in tension with *Natura naturata*). Forsyth writes that with respect to finite reality in Spinoza's system 'everything is connected both existentially and causally with everything else, and that all action and reaction are ultimately dependent on the underlying nature of the eternal reality [God]'.[104] But Forsyth, like Deleuze, explains this dependency by appealing to God as the immanent cause of all things. However, the causal relation between particular things is a *transitive* causality, where finite mode A causes change b in finite mode B, and where B is something other than A. This really messes things up because, as Taylor rightly objects, once finite individuals appear in the system so too does transitive causality (by 1P28), 'and the immanentism which was to be the central conception of the Spinozistic system is ruined'.[105] Taylor maintains that we either have to admit particular individuals and transitive causality while losing the immanentist monism, or uphold the immanentism and thereby render particular individuals illusory.

Yovel argues that there is no need to see vertical causality (modes logically following from substance) and horizontal causality (the infinite series of mutually interacting finite modes) as irreconcilably at odds with each other. He ventures that '[h]orizontal causality *realizes* the vertical one by translating its inner logical character into external mechanistic terms'.[106] By treating immediate infinite modes as laws of nature, Yovel can then claim that these 'eternal' laws govern the determining causal relations between temporal finite modes. On this view, the universal laws of nature function as a causal bridge between the infinite and eternal (God) and the finite and durational (finite modes).

Highlighting Spinoza's non-creationist account of the world, Yovel writes that the Spinozist God provides 'finite things with ontological support and with their nature and laws; this does not so much engender them (in time) as it *constitutes* them (timelessly)'.[107] If I read Yovel correctly, to understand how it is that God constitutes finite things timelessly (rather than creates them as things that come after his own

[104] Forsyth, T. M., 'Spinoza's Doctrine of God', *Studies in Spinoza: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, ed. S. Paul Kashap (Berkley: University of California Press, 1972), 9.
[105] Taylor, A. E., 'Some Incoherencies in Spinozism (I)', Ibid, 196.
[106] Yovel, 'The Infinite Mode and Natural Laws in Spinoza', 93, my italics.
[107] Ibid, 92.

existence), demands we view things from the perspective of eternity (*sub specie aeternitatis*) and so in terms of the eternal essence of things, rather than in terms of the existence of those essences as they are actualised or instantiated in time/ duration. For Spinoza, eternity is existence that is logically necessary. The essence of each finite mode follows from God's essence with a timeless logical necessity, just as in the timeless relations of sequences in mathematical proofs. This is vertical causation.

Horizontal causation can be understood as the material expression of eternal logical relations by way of the universal laws of nature. Arguably, these laws do not simply govern the causal (material) relations between finite modes but actually 'cause' these modifications to take place.[108] The infinite series of causally interrelating finite modes is of endless duration, although the particular things within it come into and pass out of existence.

In his paper 'Spinoza's Necessitarianism',[109] Garrett argues that the infinite series or causal chain of existing finite modes is the one and only series that can be generated by the laws of nature that follow from an attribute of substance. By insisting on a strict necessitarianism pertaining to the causal chain of existing finite modes, such that this and only this actual series is possible, we can claim that the laws of nature translates the 'inner logical character' of substance into the realm of duration and time. This certainly agrees with Spinoza's assertion that things could not have been produced by God in any other way nor in any other order than what is actually actualised. I think that Deleuze's own reading of Spinoza implicitly picks up on how a strict necessitarianism allows the latter to maintain the univocal immanence of being. For example, he writes: '[t]his last level [of finite modes] would remain inexplicable did not infinite modes, within each attribute, contain in them laws or principles of laws according to which corresponding finite modes are themselves determined and ordered'.[110]

I have two main problems with Yovel's contention that the notions of vertical causality and horizontal causality in Spinoza's monistic system do not so much effect

[108] The view that Spinozist laws of nature can be understood as causing the infinite series of finite modifications is not without its critics. See, for example, Mason *The God of Spinoza*, 64.
[109] Garrett, Don, 'Spinoza's Necessitarianism', *God or Nature*, ed. Yovel, 191 –218.
[110] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 105-106.

a damaging break between the infinite and the finite, but rather illustrate the way in which the timeless logical nature of substance is translated in the realm of durational material causation and determination. The first is that such a translation just presumes the distinction between the eternal and the temporal, and simply leaves hanging the question of how the former follows from the latter. It strikes me that in Spinoza there is an insurmountable gap between the eternal and the durational/ temporal, a gap that thoroughly undermines the ontological status of the finite modes – at least as they exist durationally.

As Hegel recognises, in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, for Spinoza the divine substance is an eternal absolute that is immediately and fully realised. Thus, Spinoza's absolute cannot be thought of as constituted or realised over time by the action of finite modes (as Hegel's dialectically constituted *Geist* is). This makes the domain of temporal, particular things a contingent if not completely superfluous or even illusory reality. The finite modes as actualised and determined in time make no difference to the eternally full and wholly positive reality of God. Moreover, Hegel maintains that the eternal reality of the one indivisible divine substance is the 'abyss of annihilation'[111] where all particular distinctions dissolve into the simple, non-differentiated oneness of the divine substance.

Indeed, Hegel's central point is that precisely because of its non-dialectical structure the finite modes in Spinoza's system are nothing in and for themselves, they unilaterally depend upon substance, which remains a self-affirming reality quite independently of its modes. For Hegel, all determination implies negation, yet Spinoza's immediately positive, purely affirmative divine substance cannot as such contain negation, no movement of determination through another (what God is not).[112] Hegel thus holds that any determination of particular things in Spinoza's system is rendered a fall away from the positivity of reality, a negation of that perfect reality.

Deleuze celebrates Spinoza's non-dialectical account of being, praising the way it refuses all negativity and instead asserts being as affirmation. But, if we take Hegel's

[111] Hegel, G. W. F., *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 3, (London: Kegan Paul, 1974), 288.
[112] In the next chapter we will see that Irigaray criticises Spinoza's God along similar lines.

criticisms seriously, it seems that with Spinoza the eternal being of substance, qua *Natura naturans*, is to be affirmed more emphatically than the being of durational finite existence (*Natura naturata*), although this is not his intention. Because Spinoza (i) cannot properly account for the transition from the eternal to the temporal; and (ii) depicts the divine substance as wholly positive being, the reality of existing particular things in his metaphysics is insecure, indeed, inexplicable in light of the unchanging bountifulness that is divine substance. Although Deleuze wishes to present Spinoza's divine substance as a dynamic, expressive reality he too, I believe, is unable to overcome the difficulties regarding the relationship between the eternal and the durational and *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*.

The second concern I have with how Yovel squares both vertical and horizontal causality in Spinoza's system is that the logical derivation of the finite modes from the necessity of God's nature is at once their material causation, because for Spinoza reasons are equivalent to causes. This means that the material relations and determinations that constitute *Natura naturata* are 'translations', as it were, of logical ones. The Spinozist universe is, thus, wholly intelligible in the sense that all things follow logically as well as materially from the nature of the divine substance as first cause and as an immanent causality. Consequently, with Spinoza '[t]here can be no miracles, nor any escape from universal law'[113] because this would entail a change in God's nature and God is by definition immutable.

Perhaps Spinoza is right. Perhaps reality is a single system strictly determined by laws of nature that materially express the eternal essence of God. While I believe that Spinoza's immanentist monistic ontology is beset by a number of inconsistencies - ranging from the account of the attributes as infinite in kind to the problem of explaining how an infinite and eternal truth immanently produces finite and transitory existents - the point that concerns me here is that Spinoza's nature is a profoundly 'logicized' one. Indeed, it seems that with Spinoza 'real material processes become epiphenomena of logical processes'.[114]

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[113] Clark, Stephen, R. L., *Biology and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 302.

[114] Milbank, John, 'Materialism and Transcendence', *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, eds. Creston Davis, John Millbank and Slavoj Žižek (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 395.

Whether we wish to turn this reductionism on its head and say that Spinoza naturalises logical necessity, the problem for Deleuze is that he believes that Spinoza's metaphysics can yield a radical materialism characterised by material forces that can enable unprecedented material relations between bodies. Deleuze aims to show that a Spinozistic materialism is one that allows for the emergence of novel material forms (this will become clearer to us when we look at the ethical naturalism that he develops from the *Ethics* in the next chapter). But Spinoza's nature is thoroughly determined and organised by rational principles, by the divine logos. It is not, therefore, a realm of spontaneous material becoming and corporeal novelty. Nietzsche, while finding much to admire in Spinoza, complains that his conception of nature, bound as it is by causal laws that are equivalent to logical derivation, stifles it of creative potency and thus denies material differences and becoming. Deleuze's Spinozism appears to offer a new way of thinking about bodies outside the 'logic of the identity'. However, Spinoza's immanentist monism must safeguard the self-identity of the divine substance, and this demands a rationalised nature where bodies conform to identity, the logic of the One, the Whole, rather than break with it.

Because Spinoza's metaphysics is so committed to a rationalist framework, one commentator will write: '[i]f the universe were best described in terms of Spinoza's categories, then 'immaterialism' would be the correct label, since the emphasis is upon those features (logical necessity, unity, creativity...) that have traditionally characterised the "spiritual" counterpart of matter'.[115] It could be objected here that Spinoza is actually challenging the traditional dualism between spirit and matter by identifying the one with the other. This is true, but nevertheless Spinoza's divinised nature is no Nietzschean creative flux, instead it is a fundamentally logical system relentlessly determined by universal and necessary laws. We should thus be wary of Deleuze's attempt to develop a materialist ontology of becoming on the back of Spinoza's rationalist system, which, on the reading here, can provide no support for such a project.

Conclusion

[115] McMullin, Ernan, 'Introduction', *The Concept of Matter in Modern Philosophy*, ed. Ernan McMullin (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1978), 31.

The concept of transcendence (or, more accurately, the transcendent) is anathema for Deleuze. It is the vehicle of theological and metaphysical dualisms such as God/ world, mind/ body, ideal/ real, etc, and it entails the hierarchical ordering of being. For Deleuze, transcendent or theological schemas have dire implications for ethics and politics, promoting ideals of subordination, obedience, unity and conformity in line with the demands of a transcendent eminence and its dictates. Deleuze also criticises the notion of transcendence for supporting hylomorphic schemas that treat the material as inert, featureless stuff to be structured by fixed transcendent forms.

It is in order to overcome these consequences of transcendent or theological schemas that Deleuze will turn to immanence as the key to a philosophy of life and affirmation. We saw that in constructing a philosophy of pure immanence Deleuze's first step is to insist upon the univocity of being, where being is said in one and the same sense of all that it is said. This prevents the hierarchization of being and so guards against any surreptitious reinstallation of transcendence. Deleuze then connects this Scotian notion of univocity with that of expression, which he considers to be the logic at work in Spinoza's immanentism. In this way, Deleuze argues, being as divine univocal immanence is fully expressive of pure difference.

Deleuze believes that the three figures of univocity that he finds in Spinoza's system – *viz.*, the attributes, immanent causality, and necessity – are able to sustain an ontology of immanence characterised by the dynamic expressiveness of the one divine substance. However, it has been my aim in this chapter to show that these figures are unable to prevent Spinoza's metaphysics from veering between: (i) a monism that, far from expressing an infinity of differences, actually absorbs all distinctions into a self-same identity; or (ii) a hierarchical dualism where substance is privileged over its modes, the ontological status of which remain altogether questionable. Indeed, because I hold that Spinoza is unsuccessful in his attempt to maintain *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata* as one immanent reality, I would say that the world of particular things is immanent not to itself but to another, namely, God. I, therefore, contend that despite the avowed immanentism of both Spinoza and Deleuze, the Spinozist system unwittingly institutes divine transcendence - a consequence of its

dividing into the dualism of active and passive nature that it thereafter struggles to reconcile as a single reality.

To be fair, I should state that in his own philosophy, Deleuze distances himself from being an out and out Spinozist. In *Difference and Repetition*, published in the same year as *Expressionism in Philosophy*, Deleuze writes: 'Spinoza's substance appears independent of the modes, while the modes are dependent on substance, as though on something other than themselves. Substance must be said *of* the modes and only *of* the modes'.[116] Here, Deleuze acknowledges that Spinoza's immanentism breaks up into a hierarchized dualism, where the divine substance is prioritised over its modes, standing over them as a transcendent, more eminent reality. Hence, one way in which Deleuze will articulate his own philosophical project is as the attempt to make 'substance turn on finite modes';[117] only this would realise a fully immanentist ontology where substance does not lurk about as something in excess of finite modes. It is not my aim here to decide the success or not of Deleuze's own philosophy of immanence, which importantly draws on Bergson and Nietzsche as well as Spinoza. Rather, I hope to have shown in our analysis of Spinoza's system that the *devices* used to construct a philosophy of immanence are not as efficacious as Deleuze would have us believe.[118] Where Deleuze is unable to formulate Spinoza's system in terms of a logic of expression by which the one *is* the many (no more and no less), he is likely to face similar difficulties in his own work.[119]

In the following chapter we will look at the ethical naturalism that Deleuze develops from his account of Spinoza's divine substance. I have already cast doubt as to whether Deleuze can in fact establish a materialist ethics of becoming that breaks with a logic of identity, given that, as I have argued, the Spinozist God is the principle of sufficient reason that ensures the rational intelligibility of all nature, leaving 'no space

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[116] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 40.
[117] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 11.
[118] Namely: formal distinction, the quantification of quality argument, immanent causality and logical/ causal necessity.
[119] While it may be going too far to claim that where Spinoza fails so too does Deleuze, there can be no disputing the enormous significance of the former on the latter's own work. As Piercey writes: 'Deleuze's ontology of difference cannot be adequately understood outside the context of *Expressionism in Philosophy*'. Piercey, 'The Spinoza-Intoxicated Man', 269. For the argument that Deleuze's immanentist project 'is most certainly *not* to liberate the multiple but to submit thinking to a renewed concept of the One' see Badiou, Alain, *Deleuze: The Clamour of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

for metaphysical mischief'[120] that would threaten God's self-identity.[121] I will depict Deleuze's ethics of becoming as founded on a rehabilitated conception of bodies, one that attempts to inaugurate a post-human, post-organism era. For Deleuze, our ethical task entails the affirmation of expressive being - an affirmation that Deleuze believes can open up 'an infinite range of ontological explorations'.[122] I will be claiming, however, that this radical picture cannot result from the logic of Spinoza's system. Instead what we are actually left with is the suppression of bodily differences and the affirmation of a rationalised totality: an impersonal divine that one critic would regard as 'rigid' and 'merciless'.[123]

[120] Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism*, 69.
[121] For an excellent discussion regarding Deleuze's attempt to give a materialist reading of Spinoza that is, however, contrary to the principles and implications characterising Spinoza's system see Howie's *Deleuze and Spinoza*. My analysis of these two thinkers is greatly informed by this work.
[122] Urpeth, 'Religious Materialism' 182.
[123] Josiah Royce cited in Westphal, Merold, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence: On God and the Soul* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 52.

Chapter Two

An Ethics of Univocal Immanence

'The rock, the lily, the beast, the human equally sing the glory of God in a kind of crowned anarchy'.[1]

In the previous chapter we looked at Deleuze's critique of the concept of transcendence and his turn to the immanent philosophy of Spinoza. I argued that Deleuze's Spinozism is unable to coherently sustain the expressive immanentism it purports, straining to uphold the meaningfulness of finite things and to avoid re-instating divine transcendence. However, Deleuze is largely satisfied with Spinoza's formulation of an immanentist ontology and from this he develops a practical theory which we will explore in this chapter.

Spinoza's ethical project aims to direct the human subject along a path towards blessedness, towards the 'intellectual love of God', deemed to be the only true good that can afford us 'a continuous and supreme joy to all eternity'.[2] As we shall see, there is, for Spinoza, a crucial connection between striving towards a rational understanding of God or Nature and gaining ethical maturity. With Spinoza, then, ethics and epistemology are inextricably linked. However, Spinozists such as Deleuze are keen to point out that a Spinozistic ethics is no cold and dispassionate enterprise of pure reason. This is because, for Spinoza, how we understand the world directly bears upon, and indeed reflects, our very state of being, that is, our power of acting, both physically and mentally. Indeed, Spinoza contends that with rational understanding comes power and 'active' joy.

Importantly, in contrast to Descartes, Spinoza's monism means that for him human minds and bodies are not ontologically distinct from each other, but are modifications of the one substance conceived under the attributes of thought and extension respectively. By virtue of what can be called the 'thesis of parallelism', Spinozistic minds and bodies can never be in conflict with each other, nor can one causally affect

[1] Deleuze cited in Smith, Daniel W., 'The Doctrine of Univocity', 174.
[2] Spinoza cited in Howie, *Deleuze and Spinoza*, 159.

the other, because, as we know, the attributes are 'infinite in kind' and so cannot be limited by, and thus in causal relations with, any other attribute. Rather, mind and body work together in perfect consort. As Spinoza puts it, 'whether we conceive Nature under the attribute of extension, or under the attribute of thought, or under any other attribute whatsoever, *we shall find one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes*; that is, we shall find the same things follow reciprocally'.[3] That mind and body exist in parallel relations with each other means that 'the order of the actions and passions of our body is simultaneous in nature with the order of the actions and passions of the mind'.[4] It is because Spinoza's metaphysics offers an alternative to Cartesian ontological dualism between mind and body, that Deleuze and a number of recent feminist thinkers[5] will find his work so inspirational for rethinking the body, ethics and epistemology, particularly as Spinoza interrelates these with each other.

In this chapter, we will look at Deleuze's materialist interpretation of Spinoza's ethics. This will first involve detailing the concept of bodies that underlies a Spinozistic ethics and then showing how Deleuze develops an 'ethics of joy' that aims for the thriving of bodies. Thereafter, I shall read Deleuze's Spinozistic ethics in terms of a 'religious materialism'. This will enable us to view the ethical project as the attempt to affirm one's self as nothing less than a unique expression of the immanent power that is God. It is at this stage that we shall see how the notion of 'transcendence' can be construed within a philosophy of pure immanence. Specifically, I will suggest that with Deleuze transcendence is reconceived in terms of the becoming-other of bodies.

As I have already indicated, I will challenge the materialist ethics of becoming that Deleuze's thinks he can obtain from Spinoza's philosophy. Contrary to Deleuze, I shall argue that the journey towards blessedness actually demands the transcendence of any specific or particular embodiment in the affirmation of an anonymous, self-same divine immanence. I then turn to the feminist philosopher Irigaray who, in her

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[3] 2P7S my italics.
[4] 3P2S
[5] See, for example, Gatens, Moira and Lloyd, Genevieve, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza Past and Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

essay 'The Envelope',[6] criticises Spinoza for disavowing sexual difference in his metaphysics. Irigaray's call for an 'ethics of sexual difference' informs her emendation of Spinoza's philosophy, whereby she rethinks the divine economy such that it is no longer one of auto-affection but rather hetero-affection. This engagement with Irigaray's critique of Spinoza (and, by implication, Deleuze) sets the ground for the next chapter.

An Ethics of Joy

According to Deleuze, Spinoza's contention that 'we do not know what the body can do'[7] is a provocation that 'offers philosophers a new model: the body'.[8] As we noted above, Spinoza's monism demands a very different understanding of bodies, and the relationship between the mind and the body, to that which is offered by the Cartesian paradigm. Making a Nietzschean distinction between 'ethics' and 'morality',[9] Deleuze approvingly highlights Spinoza's denunciation of 'consciousness', 'values' and 'sad passions', all of which are associated with morality: its transcendent values, its transcendent God of judgement, and its insistence upon the domination of the passions by consciousness. A Spinozist ethics, on the other hand, is not based on the domination of the eminent mind over the wayward body, or on the decrees of a transcendent God. Instead, as Moira Gatens puts it, reading the *Ethics* through Deleuze, with Spinoza we have 'a philosophy of power that offers a fluid and immanent ethics of joyful and life-enhancing encounters, rather than a transcendent morality which dictates dry duties and encourages a suspicion of the body, pleasure and laughter'.[10] For Deleuze, Spinoza's ethics entails the affirmation of life and bodies, where the latter have the potential to do 'many things at which the mind is astonished'.[11] We will also see that Deleuze/ Spinoza's ethics of the body and its thriving is crucially tied to a theory of affectivity, that is, a body's power to affect and be affected.

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[6] Irigaray, Luce, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: Athlone University Press, 1993).
[7] 3P2S
[8] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 17.
[9] Ibid, 17.
[10] Gatens, Moira, 'Power, Ethics and Sexual Imaginaries', *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality*, ed. Moira Gatens (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 133.
[11] 3P2S

Spinoza's ethics can be regarded as an ethical naturalism because it calls for gaining an understanding of things in general and human beings in particular, as all things are 'part of Nature'[12]. The most fundamental concept of Spinoza's ethical naturalism is that of *conatus* (striving or endeavouring): '[e]ach thing, in so far as it is in itself, endeavours to persevere in its being'.[13] In view of this Spinoza states at 4P22C that '[t]he endeavour to preserve oneself is the first and unique basis of virtue'. This ethical naturalism based upon the principle of *conatus* is then connected to Spinoza's rationalism. For Spinoza, to persist in being demands attaining rational insight into the nature of things so as to achieve, as Garrett puts it, 'a mode of life that largely transcends merely transitory desires and which has as its natural consequences autonomous control over the passions and participation in an eternal blessedness'.[14] Because Spinoza argues that human beings, as finite modes, do not innately possess the idea of God, from which they can then *a priori* deduce the nature of all things as they logically follow from God's essence, the basis of all knowledge has to begin with experience. This means that we need to explore and experiment with the sorts of relationships and interactions that bodies have with each other, in order to grasp which ones are beneficial or detrimental to our own bodily thriving, where this thriving is conducive to our rational understanding of things, and so to further increasing our bodily powers.

Deleuze is much taken with this rooting of ethics in *conatus*, particularly as this involves the empirical analysis and experimentation of bodies and their powers of action. He will adopt what he calls an 'ethological' approach to Spinoza's ethical naturalism.[15] Viewed in terms of ethology, Spinoza's ethical naturalism is to be understood as 'a matter of dynamism, power and the composition of powers'.[16] We now need to look at the way in which Deleuze interprets Spinoza's radical re-conception of the body, given his monistic and immanentist metaphysics. This will enable us to better understand: (i) what it means for a body, not only to persist in being, but also to thrive; and (ii) the nature of bodily becoming, as Deleuze will seek

[12] 4P4
[13] 3P6
[14] Garrett, Don, 'Spinoza's Ethical Theory', *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, 268.
[15] Ethology is a termed borrowed from biologists and naturalists. It is the study of animal behaviour, including human behaviour and social organisation, from a biological perspective.
[16] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 23.

to conceive this in terms of fluid relations between self and other through which the expressive immanent power of the divine is affirmed.

Spinozistic Bodies

Between 2P13S and 2P14, Spinoza sketches out a physical theory of bodies. The most basic element in Spinoza's account of extended things is the 'simple body' (*corpus simplicissmum*). This is an irreducible finite mode of substance as extended. Spinoza's substance monism means that simple bodies cannot be distinguished from each other according to substantial differences. Instead, Spinoza claims that simple bodies are differentiated from each other by 'motion and rest, speeds and slowness'.[17] For Spinoza then, extension – matter – is not an inert mass, as for Descartes, but is viewed as 'essentially dynamic, and hence as generative of the various forms that it takes'.[18] According to Spinoza, all simple bodies are in causal relations with each other and they conjoin with each other to form composite bodies or, what he terms, 'individuals'. These composite bodies are themselves in causal relations with each other and also combine with each other. In this way ever more complex individuals are created, rising all the way up to infinity. The infinite series of interrelating composite bodies is the 'whole of Nature', which can be conceived as 'one individual, whose parts – that is, all bodies – vary in infinite ways without any change to the whole individual'.[19] That the infinite series of bodies, the whole of nature, stays unchanged is explained by Spinoza with the assertion that the overall ratio of motion and rest remains constant in extended nature. However, the configuration of composite bodies in terms of motion and rest can vary infinitely, hence alterations in nature.

In view of all the above, Spinoza explains that the human body is a composite body. It is itself the coming together of other composite bodies that vary in degrees of complexity. For Spinoza, a body can be individuated by its physical structure or form. This is understood as the specific ratio of motion and rest maintaining the internal relations of bodies that make up a particular individual. The individual

[17] 2P13L1
[18] Parkinson, 'Hegel, Pantheism, and Spinoza', 458.
[19] 2L7S. The infinite series of finite bodies 'constitutes' the face of the whole universe: the mediate infinite mode of extension.

persists in existence as long as its characteristic internal ratio of motion and rest remains the same. When this ratio is destroyed so too is the individual.

Given this physical theory of bodies, we can see that the Spinozistic body is not a discrete, independent existent. Indeed, Spinoza insists that all bodies, including human bodies, are 'part of Nature'; all bodies are part of an infinite modal network of interacting finite modes. Finite bodies are, therefore, inherently relational. Hence, Spinoza writes: '[t]he human body needs for its conservation very many other bodies, by which it is as it were continually generated'.[20] Keen to reject the presupposition that bodies are inherently passive or lifeless, typical of hylomorphism, Deleuze finds Spinoza's physics of bodies highly promising.

Drawing upon his reading of Spinoza's finite modes, whereby each modal essence is identified with a degree of divine power, Deleuze defines the Spinozist body in two ways. The first is kinetic and breaks down into three points: (i) the modal essence as a degree of power; (ii) the characteristic relation (of motion and rest) in which the mode expresses itself; and (iii) the extensive parts subsumed in this relation.[21] Deleuze holds that a finite mode, in this case a mode of the attribute of extension, 'comes to exist' when a set of extensive parts 'temporarily actualise the eternal relation of motion and rest in which the modal essence is expressed'.[22] We can think of these extensive parts as interrelating composite bodies that are divisible all the way down to simple bodies. Somewhat unsatisfactorily, Deleuze's claims that an eternal, finite modal essence is actualised when, by some unclear means, a set of extensive parts 'matches up' or 'coheres with' the mode's essence, determining it extrinsically in the realm of duration or time. Now, Spinoza describes the essence of a finite, *durationally* existing thing as *conatus*: the endeavour to persist in being.[23] With this in mind, Deleuze contends that when we consider the body kinetically, the principle of *conatus* entails the body's endeavour to maintain its internal relations of motion and rest.

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[20] 2Post. 4
[21] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 217.
[22] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 78.
[23] 3P7.

The second way we can define the body is in terms of its dynamics.[24] Deleuze will also break this down into three points: (i) the modal essence as a degree of power (*puissance*); (ii) the body's affective powers, i.e. its capacity to be affected and to affect (*pouvoir*); and (iii) the type of affect this is: active or passive. To emphasise the dynamics of a body is to highlight its intensive capacities, its powers of actions, as a singularity, an intrinsic modal determination of divine power. In the context of a dynamic view of the body, the principle of *conatus* is the body's effort to be affected in a great number of ways. For Deleuze, these two ways of defining the body – kinetic and dynamic – are simultaneous with each other.

Spinoza's ontology of a single divine substance fundamentally transforms the way we think about bodies. According to Deleuze, Spinoza lays out 'a *common plane of immanence* on which all bodies, all minds, and all individuals are situated'.[25] Where being is univocal, and where all things exist on a plane of immanence, there can be no 'difference in kind', no hierarchy of beings. Instead, there are differences of degrees, where each thing is an irreducible degree of divine power and so is a positive expression of difference, rather than a difference determined through negation. Given a Spinozistic plane of immanence, then, how would we see things? Deleuze contends that we would not see things in terms of genera, species, categories or natural kinds, all of which assume a fixed transcendent plan of organisation. Instead, we would see pure life: an animated realm of immanent expressiveness, namely, the divine substance expressing itself in its modes. Here, Deleuze argues, the individuation of bodies is in terms of kinetic or dynamic definitions, rather than the essentialising terms of a transcendent plan.

The kinetic definition means that a living body is not a substantial form or organism, but is 'a complex relation between differential velocities, between decelaration and acceleration of particles. A composition of speeds and slowness on a plane of immanence'.[26] Engagingly, Deleuze illustrates the kinetic form of bodies by likening it to the form of music. He points out that music is composed of the complex relations between the speeds and slowness of sound particles. For Deleuze, this gives

[24] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 123.
[25] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 122. The 'parallelism' means that, for Spinoza, the mind is the 'idea of the body' (2P13).
[26] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 123.

us a clue as to how we might live, how bodies might express themselves given an immanent plane of becoming: 'it is by speeds and slowness that one slips in among things, that one connects with something else. One never commences; one never has a *tabula rasa*; one slips in, enters in the middle; one takes up or lays down rhythms'.[27] A kinetic conception of the body enables us to view bodies as fluid, provisional, permeable compositions of a great number of parts.

While Deleuze is keen to give an account of the body as something open to innumerable variations or material becomings, he also wants to secure for it some notion of identity - especially as Spinoza insists that each thing strives to persist in its being. Similarly to Spinoza, Deleuze suggests that the identity of a body is its unique internal relations of movement and rest. The total proportion of movement and rest specific to an individual body must remain constant for that body to persist in being. Deleuze also implies that the body's internal system of motion and rest can hold up to a certain maximum or minimum point before it breaks up and the body is destroyed. Each particular body, then, has its characteristic internal relations of motion and rest, and this is expressed by the composition of its external parts according to certain relations of speeds and slowness.

This kinetic appraisal of the body informs Deleuze's own conception of the plane of immanence as a realm of 'molecular' processes. In his later work *A Thousand Plateaus* (written with Guattari), Deleuze will describe the plane of immanence as: 'traversed by nonformal elements of relative speed that enter this or that individuated assemblage...A plane of consistency peopled by anonymous matter, by infinite bits of impalpable matter entering into varying connections'.[28] Such visions of immanence have their roots in the kinetic approach to individuation that Deleuze finds in his analysis of Spinozistic bodies. Deleuze borrows the term the 'molecular' from biochemistry. He deploys it to refer not to a thing's size but rather to a type of organisation or formation, one that is fluid and shifting. The molecular contrasts with what he calls the 'molar'. Molar forms are molecular composites or assemblages that have repeatedly combined together in a certain way, stabilizing into determinate identities with distinct, fixed boundaries. As Tasmin Lorraine explains, a human

[27] Ibid, 123.
[28] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 282, my italics.

individual, for example, 'is a set of molecular processes stabilized into an organism with a sense of corporeal boundedness, an ability to speak language and manipulate symbols, and a sense of personal continuity'.[29] The human being is, for Deleuze, a body organised in a specific way, a 'body-as-organism', a set of molecular composites that have settled into a more or less stable molar form. By emphasising the molecular as that which is more primordial, as it were, to the molar, Deleuze can develop an ontology of flux and flow, that is, an ontology of becoming, where molar forms can always be otherwise.

Deleuze states that the dynamic definition of the body means that '[y]ou will define an animal, or a human being, not by its forms, its organs, and its functions, and not as a subject either; *you will define it by the affects of which it is capable*'.[30] The Spinozistic plane of immanence calls for the individuation of bodies according to their powers. As Deleuze puts it: '[Spinoza] grasped populations of intensities, he grasped capacities'.[31] To conceive the body as an intensive degree of power - to which corresponds a capacity to affect and be affected by other bodies - immediately paves the way for a non-essentialist account of identity. When bodies are located on a plane of immanence, questions such as 'what is this body?' or 'what does this body mean?' are misplaced for they presume identity, and thus a transcendent plan, rather than difference and the affirmation of immanence. Instead, Deleuze's Spinozistic immanentism means that questions pertaining to the body will be along the lines of 'what can this body do?' or 'how does this body work?'. Deleuze demonstrates the way in which the dynamic definition of bodies challenges our current classificatory categories by pointing out that, with respect to the sorts of affects it is capable of, a draft horse has more in common with an ox than with a racehorse. In differentiating the draft horse from the racehorse he notes that 'if you put a racehorse into the assemblage of a draft horse, it's quite likely that it will be worn out in three days'.[32]

Now, recall that Spinoza quite rightly observes 'that we do not know what a body can do'. For Spinoza, the body can always surprise us. By its own laws (rather than

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[29] Lorraine, Tasmin, *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 167.
[30] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 124.
[31] Deleuze, 'Scholasticism and Spinoza', 5.
[32] Ibid, 5.

under the causal control of the mind) the body can express its power, its relations with other bodies, in countless different ways. It is not possible to decide in advance what a body is capable of, what becomings it can undertake. We cannot, for example, tell from its kinetic structure all the different relations a body can enter into with other bodies, nor the way in which it will affect those bodies and, in turn, be affected by them. In light of this, Deleuze will consider the plane of immanence to be a plane of experimentation, for it is only by experimenting, by exploring and mapping the outcome of various corporeal relations in terms of their effects on a body's powers of acting, that we can gain insight into the specific affective capacities of a body.

Deleuze tells us that Spinoza's ethics has 'nothing to do with a morality' because it rejects transcendent values that universally and eternally prescribe what is 'good' and what is 'evil'. Indeed, for Spinoza, given that God or Nature is pure affirmative being and as such is wholly perfect, it is incorrect to think that nature really contains sin or imperfections. Hence, Spinoza maintains that our notions of 'good' and 'bad' (or 'evil') 'indicate nothing positive in things considered in themselves'[33] but are judged as such *relative* to a particular perspective. This means that while a thing might be good for me, the same thing would be bad for another individual. Importantly, although Spinoza's propounds a relational account of 'good' and 'bad', his ethics is not a relativism based solely upon the whims and fancies of the individual. Spinoza insists that an individual cannot arbitrarily render a thing as good. Rather, a thing can only be properly considered good if it is genuinely useful to me, or if it agrees with my nature, where both of these qualities enable me to persist in being.[34]

Tying these points together, Deleuze claims that Spinoza offers us an 'ethics of life'. Such an ethics does away with the transcendent judgement of a particular form of life as 'good' or 'evil'. Instead, it entails the immanent evaluation of an individual's affective relations with others. These relations are considered good to the extent that they enable the individual to increase it power of acting, or bad to the extent that they inhibit the individual's power of acting. We already know that Spinoza ties virtue to an individual's effort to persist in being. He will also connect this effort of self-

[33] 4Pref.

[34] 'By good I shall understand that which we know with certainty to be useful to us'. 4Def.1. 'In so far as some thing agrees with our nature, to that extent it is necessarily good'. 4P31.

preservation with the effort to seek out and join with those things that are useful to an individual's nature.[35] In this way, an individual becomes increasingly virtuous the more they endeavour to seek out life-enhancing relations with others.

We know that for Deleuze, Spinoza's ethics demands an ethology. Where a biological study of the body would analyse it in terms of belonging to a particular species and genus, and would attempt to determine its essential functions and form, this is far from the case with ethology. As Deleuze envisages it, ethology acknowledges from the onset that bodies on a plane of immanence do not have a fixed and definitive truth. In view of this, a Deleuzian ethology approaches the study of bodies by observing their characteristic relations of speeds and slowness, as well as their capacities for affecting and being affected by other bodies. An ethological assessment of bodies will be able to indicate 'that which aids, and that which harms, a particular being's characteristic relations with its surroundings, along with a description of its desires and aversions'.[36] Ethology thus becomes integral to an ethics where the good, or virtuous, life entails a thing's striving to increase its life-enhancing encounters with others, which is indeed synonymous with a thing's striving to persist in being.

To consider the body in terms of its powers is to consider it in terms of its affectivity. In the next sub-section we shall look at Spinoza's theory of affects, a theory that links Spinoza's ethics with his epistemology and brings the notions of *conatus*, power and activity into the foreground. We shall then go on to see how Deleuze utilises Spinoza's theory of affects as the groundwork for an 'ethics of joy';[37] an ethics of the body that does not, however, reduce the mind to a mere 'slave of the passions'; an ethics of becoming that advances us towards knowledge of God, and so towards the affirmation of the divine expressive power as the immanent force in and excess of all things. We will then refigure this ethics within the context of a religious materialism.

The Theory of Affects

[35] 4P20
[36] Gatens, and Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings*, 100.
[37] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 28.

With respect to the finite modes, i.e. particular things, Deleuze, following Spinoza, distinguishes between affections (*affectio*) and affects (*affectus*). Affections refer to modifications or changes made through a body's encounter with another body. It is important to always keep in mind the thesis of parallelism, whereby any modification of a body is necessarily a modification of an idea/ mind. Spinoza's substance monism entails that the order and connection of ideas/ minds is the same as the order and connection of bodies, such that the infinite series of modifications of bodies, and the infinite series of modifications of ideas/ minds, are exactly isomorphic with each other.

Commentators such as Parkinson take Spinoza's term 'affects' to refer to emotions. Deleuze prefers to regard Spinoza's affects as feelings; *felt* changes or variations in the body's existential health, as it were, the increases or decreases in the body's powers of acting during the course of its existence. Amelie Rorty usefully suggests that, for Spinoza, the affects are 'the ideational indicants of bodily thriving or declining'.[38] Deleuze, following Spinoza, identifies two sorts of affects: (i) *actions*, where a body is determined to act in accordance with its own nature, producing active affects in doing so; and (ii) *passions*, where the body is determined by external bodies, experiencing passive affects as a result. For Spinoza, there are no wholly independent bodies existing by their own powers alone because all bodies are part of nature, that is, part of the infinite chain of finite bodies causally interacting with and affecting each other. (The same is true of ideas/ minds). Passions, then, reflect a body's existential state as part of nature, where a body is necessarily exposed to other bodies that act upon it from without.

Unsurprisingly then, passions are the most common types of affects. Deleuze explains that for Spinoza the mind registers passive affections (bodily modifications) as 'inadequate ideas' or 'imaginings'. The mind registers passive affects (a felt increase or decrease in the body's powers of acting) as an idea or mental correlate of changes in the body's powers of acting. Insofar as we are passive - i.e. determined to act by an external body (or mind/ idea) and experiencing passions as a result - our

[38] Amelie Rorty cited in Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*, 128. Spinoza himself defines the affects as 'the affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, helped or hindered, and at the same time the idea of these affections'. 3D3.

knowledge of the world remains at the level of inadequate ideas or imagination. Here, we understand the world confusedly, grasping things in terms of their effects alone, lacking knowledge of their causes as these follow from the necessity of God's nature.

Although passions result from the body undergoing changes caused by external bodies, Spinoza/ Deleuze point out that passions can be joyful or sad. Joyful passions result when my body encounters another body that increases my powers of acting. A body that increases my powers of action is held on that basis to be compatible with my own. When two bodies are mutually compatible they relate together in ways that increase the powers of both bodies, thus creating a composite, or assemblage, advantageous to the thriving of both. Conversely, sad passions result when my body encounters another body that decreases my powers of acting, or even destroys me, dissolving the coherence of my composite parts. Two bodies are mutually incompatible when they relate together in ways that decrease the powers of acting for both bodies, even to the point of death for both bodies.[39] Deleuze will read Spinoza's *Ethics* as offering us 'an ethics of joy' with three main practical tasks. The first is to maximise our joyful passions as these increase our powers of action. The second is to form adequate ideas about bodies. And the third is to become conscious of oneself, God and things, as this is to cultivate a state of blessedness.[40]

Towards Joyful Becomings

The practice of maximising our joyful encounters, according to Deleuze, requires the study of bodies, an analysis of which bodies are agreeable or disagreeable with our own, such that we can work towards selecting encounters with those bodies that increase our power of action and joyful passions. The study of the dynamics of bodies as they enter into relations of power with one another through which they may

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[39] We should note that there are non-reciprocal relations between bodies. Here a stronger body is able to augment its powers by capturing a less powerful which only suffers or dies from its involvement with the other. As Gatens observes, this non-reciprocal form of relation describes 'the historical relation between men and women in a complex social and political assemblages'. Gatens, Moira, 'Feminism as "Password": Re-Thinking the "Possible" with Spinoza and Deleuze', *Hypatia*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Spring 2000), 65. My concern is that Spinoza principle of conatus fully licenses the injustice of this relationship, at least for men, who persist and thrive in being. Rather worryingly, Gatens and Lloyd both concede with Spinoza that 'it is a condition of human life that its endeavour to persevere in existence necessarily involves the use and, sometimes, destruction of other bodies'. *Collective Imaginings*, 101.

[40] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 28.

be strengthened, weakened or even destroyed is precisely the task of ethology. As Gatens and Lloyd clarify: '[b]y understanding human endeavour across time as a process of experimentation, ethology offers a 'map' or a 'code' that indicates which encounters and combinations reliably lead to human thriving, which do not and why they do or do not'.[41]

Spinoza holds that human beings are not born with an immediate knowledge about the causes/ reasons of things as they follow from the necessity of God's nature. Human knowledge about the world does not begin immediately with the idea of God from which we can then deduce the nature of all other things (modes).[42] He insists that all knowledge begins with sense experience, that is, with ideas regarding the modifications of the body; what he calls 'inadequate ideas'. When we only have inadequate ideas about the world we leave our joyful encounters with compatible others entirely to chance, rather than actively endeavouring to select these in the effort to maximise our joyful passions. If we always start from inadequate ideas about the world, it seems as if the endeavour to actively seek out compatible bodies, which is synonymous with the endeavour to maximise our joyful passions, is thwarted from the onset by our ignorance regarding the nature of bodies. This concern is further compounded in light of Spinoza's contention that notions such as teleology, free will and final causes are nothing but figments of our imagination.[43] If we do not possess free will, and we are unable to engage in purposeful action, how might we ever actively go about selecting joyful encounters with others?

Spinoza suggests that because the very essence of an existing individual is its striving to persist in being (*conatus*), it will have an instinctive tendency to seek out those things that agree with its nature. Spinoza also maintains that human beings have a conscious awareness of their *conatus*, and he will regard *conatus* in terms of 'appetite' whenever he is considering the simultaneous endeavour of both a particular mind and body to persist in being. Spinoza calls the conscious awareness of appetite 'desire', and from this he will argue that we need to realise that a thing is good *because* we desire it and seek it out, instead of mistakenly believing that we desire and move

[41] Gatens and Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings*, 103-104.
[42] 1 Appendix. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 55.
[43] 1 Appendix. Also, 4 Preface.

towards it because it is inherently good.[44] In this way Spinoza attempts to explain how we naturally gravitate towards joyful encounters in our natural endeavour to persist in being, without appealing to purposive or teleological accounts of behaviour.

However, while the very laws of our nature are such that we have an innate attraction to compatible bodies, insofar as we are not the *active* cause of our actions we remain, Spinoza contends, in a state of passivity. Spinoza describes this state as being in 'bondage to the passions' where we 'are driven about in many ways by external causes ...like waves on the sea, driven by contrary winds, we toss about, not knowing our outcome and fate'.[45] To be in bondage to the passions is to be assailed by external forces whereby our bodies are acted on and determined by other bodies, and our minds are gripped by inadequate ideas that only yield confused, indeed, mutilated knowledge about the world 'like consequences without premises'.[46] Even though Spinoza recognises that an external body can act upon my body in a way that increases my body's power of acting, and which I will feel as a joyful passion, it is, nevertheless, always the case that a joyful passion is still a passion, and so signals my passive state. As a passive existent I am not persisting in an active, thriving and healthy way. Indeed, insofar as I am passive I am lacking power, separated from all that my body and mind can do; instead of thriving on my own self-determination, I am suffering the determinations of others.[47]

Given that we are always part of nature and therefore always exposed to external causes, i.e. other bodies determining us, it seems as if the move from a state of passivity towards activity is an impossible feat. However, Deleuze explains that Spinozistic passive joys can be accumulated and then practically transformed into active ones by means of forming 'common notions' or adequate ideas. For Spinoza, the common notions are the primary basis of all reasoning. They enable us to gain knowledge of the world in accordance with reason and take us up to Spinoza's second stage of knowledge (reason), where the first stage of knowledge is the world viewed by way of the imagination or inadequate ideas.

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[44] 3P9S. Also 'a 'final cause' is simply human appetite'. 4 Preface.
[45] Spinoza cited by Gullan-Whur, Margaret, 'Spinoza and the Equality of Women', *The Ovid: A Swedish Journal of Philosophy*, vol. LXVIII, part 2, 2002, 107
[46] 2P28D.
[47] For Deleuze, we always realise our power (essence) but in ways that diminish or increase our powers of acting. See *Expressionism*, 231, 243 and 246.

Briefly, we can form common notions about bodies by deliberating on the 'agreements, differences and oppositions'[48] between two or more bodies until a clear and distinct idea, i.e. an adequate idea, is reached as to the common properties shared by those bodies. To cognise common notions with respect to bodies, for example, is to cognise eternal and necessary truths regarding the general structure/ properties of all bodies. Common notions, therefore, enable us to grasp things 'under the aspect of eternity' (*sub specie aeternitatis*), which is to have a rational understanding of things as they follow from the eternal necessity of God's nature. Importantly, common notions relate the particular to the general or universal, they pick out 'those things [properties] that are common to all',[49] thus affording us with knowledge about the general properties of things, but not the essence of a particular thing.

Now, according to Spinoza, whenever our mind forms a common notion, which is necessarily an adequate idea, it necessarily acts by its own internal power.[50] Accompanying this action is an active affect, that is, an affect internally generated by the individual's power, rather than by an external cause. Spinoza calls this active affect 'joy'. As Deleuze points out, 'these joys are not passions but rather *active joys*'.[51] Such joys are indicative of our free activity and thriving, in contradistinction to our bondage to the passions where we suffer from lack of power.

When Deleuze calls us to maximise our joyful passions, through joyful encounters with compatible others, this marks the *first* stage of a Spinozist 'ethics of joy' and is not an end in itself. Joyful passions, while they increase our power of acting, still keep us in a passive state of being. We know that for Spinoza virtue is striving to persist in being. However, when we observe the ways in which his ethics, epistemology and theory of affects interconnect, it is clear that for him virtue is the effort to persist in being where this is inseparable from the effort to persist as an active, thriving, healthy, joyous individual, i.e. as a rational individual. Indeed, Spinoza states that 'to act absolutely in accordance with virtue is simply to act, live

[48] 2P29S
[49] 2P38
[50] 2P1
[51] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 56, my italics.

and persevere one's being (these three mean the same) in accordance with the guidance of reason'.[52]

With this in mind, Deleuze will hold that for an ethics of joy the virtuous life entails the endeavour to maximise our joyful passions so that we can convert these into active joys through reason. The common notions serve as a bridge that allow for the passage from inadequate ideas to adequate ideas, from passivity to activity, from suffering and bondage to thriving and freedom. We can detail this movement thus. Whenever an individual encounters a body (or bodies) similar to its own, its power of action increases, both physically and mentally. A 'lively' mind has a proclivity to reflect on the commonalities between its body and the one that has caused the joyful encounter. When the individual is able to form an idea about what its body and the other body have in common it conceives an adequate idea about bodies *per se*. The apprehension of an adequate idea is caused by the individual's own power of understanding and the individual is deemed to be persisting actively. With rational understanding come active joys that 'join the first passions and then take their place'.[53]

In this way we can see how the accretion of joyful passions serve as the important, initial step in an ethical programme that offers a practical guide to becoming active and thriving such that one is filled with a certain kind of joy: the active joys that are evidential of a virtuous life. Deleuze maintains that as we gain further rational insight into the world we are increasingly able to become the active cause of our encounters with others. The more adequate ideas we have about the world, the better we are able organise our environment so that it succours our thriving and so our persisting in being. This, indeed, is the very purpose of ethology: the study of bodies in order to determine the sorts of compositions and relations that are most beneficial for an individual to thrive.

I wish to further discuss the idea that reason allows us to organise our environment. However, before doing so it is worth pausing for a moment to note that many Spinozists, including Deleuze, are at pains to stress that Spinoza's ethics is not a programme for rampant individualism or egoism, concerned only with ensuring the

[52] 4P24.
[53] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 56.

thriving and preservation of the individual by rational means. Against this, Deleuze would argue that Spinoza radicalises the very notion of an individual. The Spinozistic individual is not a substantial one (only God is an individual in this sense), but instead is part of modal network, an infinite series, through which its very existence is sustained, or destroyed, in affective relations with others. The point here is that, for Spinoza, no being, including human beings, can preserve itself as one among many independent existents, but only through its interactions with others: finite being is always being-in-relation. A Spinozistic ethics of *conatus* is not intended to be a license for pure egoism but is rather an ethics of empowerment through material or embodied relations with others. As Deleuze states, a Spinozistic ethics entails that our relation with others is 'no longer a matter of utilisations or captures, but of sociabilities and communities'.[54]

Let us return to Deleuze's claim that rational knowledge allows us to become active in organising our encounters, such that we join with compatible bodies and avoid incompatible ones, thereby creating for ourselves an environment in which we can thrive. Deleuze's Spinozism gives the impression, then, that to be active and thriving is to increasingly become the active cause of our joyful encounters, rather than leaving these encounters to chance. According to Deleuze, it is by increasing our rational understanding of the world that we are able to become active in this pragmatic way. The problem with this, I would argue, is that that Deleuze trades heavily on our everyday understanding of notions such as 'activity' and 'organisation', which tend to presume the free will of the individual and goal-orientated (teleological) action. Spinoza explicitly denies free will and purposefulness in his account of action. Of course, Deleuze is aware of this. Like Spinoza, he will attempt to explain a thing's action in terms of the principle of *conatus*. Thus, he will claim that an individual's self-preserving nature instinctively drives it towards joyful encounters, and so towards forming composites or unions with compatible bodies. Within such unions, the individual is better able to gain a

[54] Deleluze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 126. For example, Gatens and Lloyd adhere to this view. I, however, believe that Spinoza's ethics is deeply individualist. I agree with Westphal's observation that with Spinoza 'it is *my interest*, not the apprehension of some common good, much less the recognition of another's legitimate claim on me, that is the sole basis of my relations to others'. *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence*, 64, my italics.

rational view of the world. Now, for Spinoza, to regard the world in accordance with reason is all that it means for an individual to be active and thriving.

At this point we need to alert ourselves to the way in which the notion of 'activity' takes on a very different meaning in the context of Spinoza's rationalised ontology. We know that for Spinoza all things follow from the necessity of God's nature; that there is no contingency in Nature; and that God, who is absolutely perfect, could not have produced things in any other way or in any other order. Moreover, Spinoza conceives of God as *causa sui*, and also upholds a causal rationalism, such that there must be an explanation for every thing/ event there is, which is also the cause of each thing/ event. In Spinoza's system, the explanation/ cause of all things/ events ineluctably leads back to God as *causa sui*. The implication of all this is a thoroughly determinist system. In Roger Scruton's words, 'the causal order of Nature [for Spinoza] is as rigid and unbreakable as the logical order of ideas'.[55] All things are 'part of Nature' and thus they are a fully determined part of a causal chain characterised by logical necessity.

Given the strict determinism or necessitarianism that results from Spinoza's monistic and immanentist system, it is not surprising that he dismisses the idea of free will as illusory. But what can the notion of 'free activity' mean within the parameters of such a relentless determinism? Seeking to reconcile freedom with necessity, Spinoza revives a contention that can be traced back to the Stoics, namely, that freedom is to be realised through knowledge rather than volition. Thus, he asserts: 'we [finite individuals] act solely in so far as we understand'.[56] For Spinoza, we become the 'adequate' or active cause of our actions to the extent that we understand our determinedness as part of a necessary causal chain. Baldly put, a Spinozist 'ethics of joy' is one that requires us to form adequate ideas of the causes of things so that we can acquire true insights into the rational whole, of which all things, ourselves included, are a necessarily determined part. For Spinoza, the more we gain insight into the necessary causal/ rational order of Nature, the more we are able to move away from a state of passivity and bondage towards a state of activity and thriving.

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[55] Scruton, Roger, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 58.
[56] 4P24D.

Knowledge of necessities enables us to become active and thriving both in a theoretical and practical sense. We thrive 'theoretically' insofar as we convert (by way of the common notions) the inadequate ideas that confuse our minds and limit its power of understanding, into adequate ideas that give us a 'clear and distinct' view of the world and, thus, promotes the mind's power of understanding.[57] We thrive 'practically' insofar as we form adequate ideas of our passions, those affects we feel when our body suffers or undergoes determination by external causes (other bodies), and which always signal the body's passivity, its delimited power (this includes the joyful passions).[58] Spinoza asserts: 'an emotion [a passion] is more in our power, and the mind suffers less from it, the more it is known to us'.[59] The rational analysis of a passion requires us to form an adequate idea of its cause. We can then grasp that it is a specific determination, a modification, in the necessary causal order of Nature where nothing good or bad happens as such, because all that happens in Nature, which is perfectly ordered, is all that should happen. In this way we can remove from the mind any feelings, such as love or hatred, we have formed in relation to an external object that we have imagined to be good or bad, purely on the (subjective) basis of its effect on our body.[60] By rationally comprehending a passion we transform it into an adequate idea. We, thus, transform something our body first suffers as an affection by an external cause (and which leads us to attach certain feelings, e.g. love or hate, towards the external object affecting us), into something we properly conceptualise and grasp as part of the necessary universal order, the understanding of which brings us active joy.

Freedom

[57] This conversion is a dubious process. How can a passive mind of limited power suddenly find itself able to form a common notion/ adequate idea?
[58] Even Deleuze must admit that the joyful passions mark limited power. 'But then we must break out of the mere concatenation of passions, even joyful ones. For these still do not give us possession of our power of action... [The forming of common notions by which we act is not achieved] through the accumulation of joyful passions, but by a genuine 'leap''. Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 283.
[59] 5P3C. Also, 5P3.
[60] 5P2.

In Spinoza's system there is no undetermined, i.e. uncaused, thing. Freedom consists in being self-determined.[61] Only God is fully self-determined (*causa sui).* However, we human beings (and other finite modes) can become self-determining, that is, our own active cause, insofar as we form adequate ideas and, therefore, gain insight into the necessary determination of things as they logically follow from, and are caused by, the necessity of God's nature. As Lloyd puts it '[b]y understanding the causes of what we undergo, we are supposed to appropriate to ourselves the status of determining cause'.[62] We effectively become one with, or participate in, the divine power insofar as we think in accordance with reason, and so comprehend the necessities of Nature. It is in this way that we are afforded freedom and active joy.

As finite modes dependent upon substance for our essence and existence we, human beings, can never be wholly self-determining. However, for Spinoza, we have the option to be: (i) passively determined, where we suffer affects caused by other bodies and remain confused and controlled by the passions; or (ii) actively determined, where we act in accordance with universal reason and so think the very movements of divine power as all things proceed from this with logical necessity, feeling this power as active joy. In his vision of a Spinozist 'ethics of joy', Deleuze gives a somewhat misleading picture of what the active, thriving, virtuous life is. He seems to suggest that we are thriving to the extent that we become the active cause of our encounters with others, endeavouring to create for ourselves unions and sociabilities that are congenial to our nature. But when we unpack what activity can actually mean within the context of Spinoza's metaphysical system, we realise that it is not so much the case of finite individuals endeavouring to organise joyful encounters with others, in creative, experimental ways (ethology). Instead, we become active, the cause of our own activity, to the extent that we comprehend the necessities of nature: a fully rationalised, fully perfect immanent unity. We are active, thriving and joyous insofar as we acquiesce, by way of rational thinking, to the necessary natural order, the divine order.

[61] 'That thing is called free which exists solely by the necessity of its own nature, and is determined to action by itself alone'. 1D7.
[62] Lloyd, *Ethics*, 85.

The discrepancy between Deleuze's presentation of Spinoza's 'ethics of joy' and what a Spinozistic immanentism can actually deliver begins to manifest itself when we start to investigate what notions such as joy, activity and freedom really mean in the context of a system where all bodies/ events are necessarily determined. In a later section I hope to pick up on further discrepancies regarding Deleuze's materialist reading of Spinoza and what the logic of the Spinozistic system actually supports, which is, I hope to show, a rationalised immanence unable to satisfactorily account for bodily differences. For now we need to further explore Deleuze's Spinozistic 'ethics of joy' before going on to see how this could inform a religious materialism.

Blessedness: The Intellectual Love of God

The final stage of the Spinozist ethical project entails understanding the world through the third kind of knowledge: intuitive knowledge. This knowledge shares with reason, knowledge in the form of the common notions and adequate ideas, the properties of being necessarily true and depicting the world under the aspect of eternity. It differs from reason both in method and content. To understand the world through intuition is to grasp its truths in one 'intuitive leap' rather than discursively through a series of inferential steps as in reason.[63] This is not some pre-rational, mystical revelation of things but rather an immediate affirmation, 'a direct vision'[64], of the eternal truths of God. While this might give us the impression that intuitive knowledge entails the intellectual contemplation of a mysterious, other-worldly realm, removed from the sensible world, Deleuze wishes to emphasise that it is intuitive knowledge that offers us consciousness of ourselves, God and things. Indeed, what is affirmed by intuition is knowledge of concrete and particular things, as these all depend upon God in respect of their essence and existence. Where reason yields adequate ideas that give rational insight into the *general* properties and laws of things, intuition, on the other hand, yields ideas pertaining to the essence of *singular* things as these ideas are timelessly 'contained in' God. Deleuze writes that intuitive knowledge 'will reveal to us the correlation of the essence of God and the singular

[63] 2P40S2.
[64] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 301.

essences of real beings'.[65] And, Spinoza himself contends that '[t]he more we understand singular things, the more we understand God'.[66]

For Spinoza, the essence of each particular thing is eternally expressed as an idea 'in' or 'constituting' the mind of God, that is to say, the 'infinite intellect' of God (the immediate infinite mode following from the attribute of extension). Intuitive knowledge, Spinoza informs us, 'proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of some of the attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things'.[67] The extent to which our mind is able to understand things by intuitive knowledge is the extent to which our mind directly participates in the very mind of God.

The mind of God is absolute and perfect; it eternally has the utmost power of understanding and therefore does not undergo shifts in its power of understanding, such that it moves from a lesser to a greater understanding of things, or vice versa. Thus, the mind of God does not experience affects, where an affect is understood in the technical sense of the idea of the feeling that signals an increase or decrease in our power of acting. Because the mind of God does not experience affects of joy or sadness it has no emotions, God feels neither love nor hate towards those things he has an eternal idea of. Nevertheless, for Spinoza, the infinite intellect has 'a kind of eternal analogue of joy, an eternal "rejoicing"'.[68] Spinoza will think of this 'eternal rejoicing' of the mind of God as its state of 'blessedness', the experience of a unique kind of joy, a supreme affect that is apposite for that which is eternally perfect. A unique type of emotion accompanies this state of blessedness: namely, an eminent form of love. This love is not engendered by feelings in response to an object that causes an affect in God, but rather is an active, intellectual love. According to Spinoza, this is the intellectual love of God, which is no less than 'the love by which God loves himself'.[69] Insofar as we understand the world by intuitive knowledge, and so under the aspect of eternity, we can partake in the intellectual love of God and experience the eminent feeling that is 'blessedness'. As Deleuze puts it

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[65] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 57-58.
[66] 5P24.
[67] 2P40S.
[68] Garrett, 'Spinoza's Ethical Theory', 283.
[69] 5P36.

> '[i]n the third kind of knowledge we form ideas and active feelings that are in us as they are immediately and eternally in God. *We think as God thinks, we experience the very feelings of God*'.[70]

Before I go on to recast Deleuze's Spinozistic ethics in terms of a religious materialism, I would like to suggest that already we can begin to regard the ethical programme as one that directs us, as finite things, towards 'becoming-divine', precisely by way of our progressive rational recognition of the infinite power that is God. Indeed, becoming-divine on this account entails the intellectual reunion of the finite with the infinite. In gaining knowledge as to the necessities of Nature, the individual moves closer to the liberating understanding that power is not manifest in the world through contingent, external causes, randomly affecting us in all sort of ways, but is nothing other that the sustaining power of God, expressively immanent as/ in all things. Although our 'becoming-divine' is a process we undertake, a transition from passivity and inadequate ideas towards activity and intuitive knowledge, Deleuze will stress that '[t]he "transition" is only an appearance; in reality we are simply finding ourselves as we are immediately and eternally in God'.[71] The process of becoming-divine is thus a process of recognising we are eternally divine

A Religious Materialism: Corporeal Becoming

In this section I want to rework Deleuze/ Spinoza's ethics of bodies in terms of what Urpeth calls a 'religious materialism'. I do this specifically to highlight how the notion of 'transcendence' can be reconceived within the context of Deleuze/ Spinoza's philosophy of pure immanence. The expectation is that Deleuze's non-reductive materialist immanence is one that where transcendence can denote the becoming of bodies rather than a flight from bodiliness into a realm of pure spirit. In his short essay entitled 'Religious Materialism', Urpeth observes certain features in some recent continental philosophies that could enable us to rethink the divine, following the 'death of God' heralded by Nietzsche and the critique of classical metaphysics initiated by Kant, both of which are implicated in each other. Wishing to reject both 'anti-materialist religions' and 'anti-religious materialisms', as these have tended to characterise the response to post-Kantian reflection on the divine in

[70] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 308, my italics.
[71] Ibid. 308.

continental philosophy, Urpeth proposes what he calls a 'religious materialism'. He suggests that the rudiments of this position can be detected in the philosophies of Deleuze/ Guattari and Bataille, although it is not a term that these thinkers deploy.

According to Urpeth, a religious materialism offers the possibility of a 'non-anthropomorphic religion based on a recovery of the transcendences inherent in material life itself'.[72] The fundamental characteristics of a religious materialism are an emphasis on immanence and the affirmation of the material. Importantly, a religious materialism aims to overcome the hierarchical dualism or, indeed, the opposition between material immanence and spiritual transcendence that typifies much Western philosophy and religion. While insisting upon a strict material immanence - such that the material world is immanent to itself alone, rather than bound to a transcendent referent - a religious materialism will, however, regard matter as that which possesses a creative vitality of its own. In this way matter can be understood as generative of otherness or differences – i.e. transcendences – that, nevertheless, remain immanent to material life itself. A religious materialism, then, avows the idea of an 'immanent transcendence', that is, a materialist formulation of transcendence. For Urpeth, to affirm the creative potency of matter is to affirm its 'intrinsic religiosity'.[73] Given a religious materialism, then, the divine is to be identified with the creative forces and processes of a dynamic, fully expressive material immanence, rather than with a transcendent immutable spirit. Clearly, Deleuze's Spinozism fits in very neatly with this picture. We should also stress that, for Urpeth, a religious materialism has important ethical and political implications, specifically the dissolution of fixed bodily forms or identities (Deleuze's molar forms/ identities) and identities that inhibit material becoming and so the full expressiveness of material life. A religious materialism, then, has no special reverence for the human and indeed calls for the erosion of boundaries between animal/ human/ machine.

Transcendence: Becoming-Other

For Deleuze, the Spinozistic plane of immanence liberates ontology from the life-suppressing dictates of a theological or transcendent plan. As he writes:

[72] Urpeth, 'Religious Materialism', 171.
[73] Ibid. 173.

> 'There is no longer a form, but only relations of velocity between infinitesimal particles of an unformed material. There is no longer a subject, but only individuating affective states of an anonymous force. Here the plan [of immanence] is concerned only with motions and rests, with dynamic affective charges'.[74]

When situated on a plane of immanence bodies are no longer to be defined by what they *are* but by what they can *do*, their powers to affect and be affected, to enter into relations with others, to express being. Furthermore, '[a] body can be anything; it can be animal, a body of sounds, a mind or idea; it can be linguistic corpus, a social body, collectivity'.[75] Deleuze/ Spinoza's plane of immanence is a plane of becoming, where 'all becomings are molecular',[76] the flow of particles entering into novel forms and configurations with one another, defying the boundaries between self and other, defying our common place distinctions between the natural and the artificial, human and non-human, etc. The plane of immanence is the plane of life; of singular intensive forces (*haecceties*, or bodies as a degree of power, capable of various affects); of divine expressive being and becoming-other at infinite speed. Deleuze famously invokes Artaud's concept of the Body Without Organs (BwO) to articulate the plane of immanence, which is the experimental body par excellence. According to Deleuze, the BwO 'is nonstratified, unformed, intense matter, the matrix of intensity',[77] it is the 'full egg before the extension of the organism and the organization of the organs, before the formation of the strata'.[78] Incidentally, he muses 'is not Spinoza's *Ethics* the great book of the BwO?'.[79]

The problem, for Deleuze, is that the plane of immanence – 'God or Nature' or 'Life' or 'BwO' or 'the Virtual' – tends to stabilise into fixed 'molar' forms, 'bodies as organisms',[80] 'strata', 'territories', etc, that block alternative lines of becoming. He

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[74] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 128.
[75] Ibid, 127.
[76] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 303.
[77] Ibid, 169.
[78] Ibid, 170.
[79] Ibid, 170. See Judith Poxon's work on the BwO as the anti-theological body that is she claims also a kind of 'liberation theology'. Poxon, Judith, 'Embodied Anti-Theology', *Deleuze and Religion*, 42-50.
[80] 'The organism...is a stratum on the BwO, in other words, a phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation that, in order to extract useful labor from the BwO, imposes upon its forms functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences'. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 176.

writes: 'life [pure immanence] as movement alienates itself in the material form that it creates, by actualising itself, by differentiation itself, it loses "contact with the rest of itself". Every species is thus an arrest of movement'.[81] Interestingly, Deleuze/ Spinoza's plane of immanence is effectively 'transcended by its own creations'.[82] That is to say, any determinate, particular thing - e.g. a subject, an object, an idea, a body, an organism, a society, etc - exists *as if* a step removed from pure immanence. For Deleuze, any determination of the plane of immanence inevitably creates the illusion of transcendence and is the reduction of fecund immanent becoming to particular and fixed positions or viewpoints of it. The illusion of transcendence cannot be avoided in the actualisation of pure immanence as life. However, it is often the case that that which appears to transcend the plane of immanence is then erroneously posited or treated as the transcendent ideal of determinate forms of life. The point for Deleuze is that we are to affirm the plane of immanence as an '*immanent* transcendental'.

Indeed, another of the many ways in which Deleuze will figure the plane of immanence is in terms of a 'transcendental field': '[w]hat is a transcendental field?'. It can be distinguished from experience in that it doesn't refer to an object or belong to a subject (empirical representation)'.[83] The transcendental field of immanence is the impersonal, inorganic realm of life and force. It precedes any determinate subject or object because it is the condition of any subject or object. However, Deleuze's transcendental field is an immanent condition of things, it does not stand outside or beyond determinate things, but is more like an 'indwelling power' infinitely expressed by all things and yet irreducible to any one expression. Hence, Deleuze writes that the plane of immanence, a transcendental field, is 'an outside more distant than any external world because it is an inside deeper than any internal world'.[84] It must be underscored that Deleuze's notion of an immanent transcendental field, as the condition of all possible experience, is not a fixed schema that determines in advance

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[81] Deleuze cited by Hallward, Peter, 'Giles Deleuze and the Redemption From Interest, *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 81 (Jan/ Feb, 1997), 10. Deleuze is specifically referring to Bergson's ontology here but this view is also true of a Spinozistic plane of immanence.
[82] Hallward, 'Gilles Deleuze', 10.
[83] Deleuze, *Immanence: A Life*, 25. See this short article for the various twists and turns Deleuze makes regarding the notions of transcendence, transcendents, transcendentals and immanence.
[84] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 59.

the form of the empirical world. Instead, it is a 'virtual' field of impersonal forces and elements that can be actualised in unpredictable and novel ways.

Interestingly, Deleuze develops a theory/ praxis that he calls 'transcendental empiricism' based upon conceiving the immanent transcendental field as 'an empirical transcendental'. Deleuze's transcendental empiricism proposes an alternative philosophical vision to that of Kant's transcendental idealism, where the empirical world is the representation of the transcendental subject. Very briefly, a transcendental empiricism contends that what is given (the empirical) is not an effect of some ideal, *a priori* condition - e.g. the transcendental subject, God, Platonic Forms, etc - separate from the sensible world yet pre-determining it in fixed ways. Rather, the given, each particular experience, is to be viewed as an empirical actuality with its own distinctive genealogy, uniquely and singularly constituted within the plane of immanence. As Bruce Baugh explains 'the actuality of the empirical, instead of instantiating a rule or a concept given by the understanding, is *empirically constituted* through a chance concatenation of forces...which together produce something new and unforseeable'.[85] For Deleuze, a Spinozistic plane of immanence provides the basis for challenging metaphysical systems that effect the reduction of sensible immanence to a single, fixed representation of it by a transcendent or ideal 'transcendental' schema that forecloses the emergence of different expressions of empirical life.[86]

For Deleuze, our ethical, political and religious task is to: (i) expose the illusory fixity of molar constructs, particularly as these are taken to be normative identities; and (ii) radicalise 'the plane of organisation', that is, the world of determinate forms of life, by opening up 'lines of flight' out from fixed identities towards the creation of experimental or expressive bodies, bodies that are ever-engaged in becoming-other. To enter upon 'lines of flight' in terms of a religious materialism requires me, a

[85] Bruce Baugh cited in Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze*, 127.

[86] In the next chapter we will elucidate further the concepts of 'the transcendental', 'the sensible/ empirical', 'ideal/ real', etc, when we discuss Irigaray's notion of the 'sensible transcendental'. This notion has affinities with Deleuze's idea of a 'transcendental empiricism' and both these formulas are attempts to overcome Kant's transcendental idealism, which, it is argued, renders the phenomenal world in abstract and immutable ways. For an interesting discussion on Deleuze's 'transcendental empiricism' and Irigaray' s 'sensible transcendental' see Colebrook, Claire, 'Is Sexual Difference a Problem?', *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*, eds. Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 110-127.

human being (a body as organism), to become increasingly attune to the divine immanence of material creativity. I am to go to the limits of my habituated perceptions and conceptions 'in order to touch upon the imperceptible reality'[87] that usually escapes my conscious awareness, and yet is an all-embracing immanence that I have become 'alienated' from in the maintenance of a particular bodiliness, a personal identity, that impedes the full expressiveness of material life, of God. Thus, I am to embark upon 'becoming-divine'. This entails what Deleuze calls 'becoming-imperceptible', the dissolution or 'deterritorialization' of my corporeal identity as 'human' in the affective affirmation of the immanent divine power, its molecular processes and intensities. Insofar as I affirm this divine power, I defy the distinction between the finite and the infinite, such that becoming-imperceptible/ divine is at once a 'becoming-everything'. In sum, the process of becoming-divine requires one, in Deleuze's words:

> 'To reduce oneself to an abstract line, a trait, in order to find one's zone of indiscernibility with other traits, and in this way enter the haecceity and impersonality of the creator. One is then like grass: one has made the world, everybody/ everything, into a becoming...one has suppressed in oneself everything that prevents us from slipping between things and growing in the midst of things'.[88]

If we read Deleuze's Spinozistic plane of immanence in terms of a religious materialism the notion of transcendence is, I maintain, immanently and materially figured in two ways. The first is the self-differentiating of creative matter itself, its divine power to generate differences, or transcendences, that nevertheless remain within the immanence of material life. The second is the illusion of transcendence. This is the illusion of a plane of organisation, i.e. determinate forms of life, existing as if independent of the plane of immanence. A religious materialism demands the critique and disintegration of such illusions as these delimit (even negate) the becoming of material life. This entails a line of flight out from illusory fixed identities, (material 'transcendences' or determinations that have disavowed their genesis within immanence), and a 'return' to the plane of immanence: life, becoming, affirmation, God, blessedness. This critical-redemptive process involves what we

[87] Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze*, 137.
[88] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 309.

could call a movement of 'transdescendence',[89] a de-transcending, as it were. In becoming-divine we do not depart from material immanence but rather journey further into its sacred depths.

Becoming-Woman/ Becoming-Other/ Becoming-Divine

In closing this discussion on how a religious materialism could be formulated from a Spinozistic plane of immanence, I would like to indicate its implications for feminists, in particular feminist philosophers of religion. A religious materialism could enable feminists to rethink ideas regarding 'the divine', 'the body' and 'transcendence' in ways that affirm bodiliness and becoming - qualities that have, in traditional Western theology/ religion, been (a) devalued in favour of spirit and being, and (b) associated with femaleness to the detriment of actual women.

Given a religious materialism, women's bodies would no longer stand under the moral judgement of a transcendent God. Instead, they would be located on a plane of immanence whereupon it is no longer a question of what a body is but what a body can do. Once we rethink bodies on a plane of immanence, the project of feminism,[90] although never a homogeneous venture, changes in considerable ways. For example, the problem of 'women's subjectivity' would no longer be regarded as the repression of a specifically female mode of embodiment, which must somehow be given its own socio-symbolic articulation. Instead, feminists would turn to the problem of becoming *per se* and how the concept of 'woman' is related to this.

A religious materialist plane of immanence is no longer under the dictates of a transcendent or theological plan, which means that it is a realm of becoming without substantive identity. A number of postmodern feminists are drawn to the creative potentials of thinking becoming without identity, where identity is equated with a politics that turns on the repression/ exclusion of difference. Colebrook notes that a Deleuzian way of theorising becoming would mean that we should think less in terms of 'the becoming *of* some subject' and more as 'a becoming towards others, a

[89] I obtain the term 'transdecendence form Regina Schwartz who contrasts it with 'transascendence' as the effort to depart immanence for the beyond. Schwartz, Regina, 'Introduction', *Transcendence*.
[90] Broadly understood as an ethical/ political task committed to the emancipation of women from discourses and practices that prioritise men over women.

becoming towards difference'.[91] When Deleuze advances the concept of 'becoming-woman' he does not mean the assumption of a particular identity: 'woman' pre-figured as a transcendent normative ideal. Rather, he gestures towards a path out of 'man' as the 'molar entity par excellence',[92] and sees 'becoming-woman' as the first step towards a multiple range of becomings: becoming-animal, becoming-imperceptible, becoming-revolutionary, etc. For Deleuze, 'becoming-woman' is 'not imitating or assuming the female form, but emitting particles that enter the relation of movement and rest, or the zone of proximity, of a microfemininity, in other words, that produce in us a molecular woman'.[93] Deleuze argues that even actual women 'as a molar entity' must 'become-woman' as this refers not to a specific bodiliness (empirical females) but to a certain affective bodily state or intensiveness, one that is open to transformative relations and connections with others, and so is open to becoming.

A religious materialism therefore aims for the disintegration of fixed molar identities, such as 'man' or 'woman', and calls us to transcend these constraining forms of being in favour of becoming-other, of setting off on our own creative lines of flight pursuing joyful relations with others in an affirmation of life and difference. This movement of becoming-other is not a flight from the body but is rather a 'transformation of our embodied experience',[94] heightening our sensitivity to the heterogeneous forces of material life, letting our bodies surprise us with what they can do by their own power. In becoming-other we are becoming no less than divine, for we are entering into (rather than resisting) the very rhythm, the flow and flux, speed and intensities of the plane of immanence: a divine realm of self-expressive, self-transfiguring material life. A feminist religious materialist would not concentrate upon, say, the task of signalling the embodied reality of women as fully *imago dei*, or with reconstructing a female divine in order to support the affirmation of women's subjectivity. Instead, she or he would be concerned with the call to becoming-other. According to Urpeth, '[s]uch becomings are sacred in that they indicate the suspension of the ontological and evaluative teleological categories of the theologico-humanist thought and the

[91] Colebrook, Clare, 'Introduction', *Deleuze and Feminism*, 12.
[92] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 322.
[93] Ibid, 304.
[94] Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze*, 137.

encounter with an anonymous, impersonal fecundity of undetermined synthesis'.[95] A religious materialism places the emphasis on the joy of becoming, which is not to reactively cling to a specific form of being (molar identities) but to affirm the creative power of life itself precisely by seeking to radicalise our sense of embodiment through joyful encounters with others.[96]

Critical Interventions

Certainly, Deleuze seems to offer a striking vision of ontology and ethics based upon a Spinozistic plane of immanence, where bodies are no longer organised by a fixed transcendent plan but instead are conceived as processes or becomings, provisional composites ever-open to new forms of expression. This picture of a Spinozistic plane of immanence is appealing for those of us wishing to rethink concepts regarding 'the divine', 'transcendence' and 'matter' in ways that are affirmative of bodies, rather than leading to their downgrading or negation. It is my view, however, that when we follow through the logic of the Spinozisitc system we do not, unfortunately, arrive at the joyful becoming of bodies in their irreducible differences. Instead, contrary to Deleuze's contention, we arrive at a logicized immanence unable to accommodate the specificities of particular bodies and minds. We can follow the system's logic in two dialectically related ways: first, as the loss of particular individuals to God as the self-same rationalised Absolute; and second, as the aggrandizement of the individual to God. In doing so we will see why Hegel would argue that for Spinoza, and the same will be true of Deleuze, 'true Being lies in what is opposed to the corporeal'.[97]

Becoming-Spiritual Automaton

Let us recall Deleuze's remark that '[i]n the third stage of knowledge we form ideas and active feelings that are in us as they are immediately and eternally in God. *We think as God thinks, we experience the feelings of God*'.[98] The goal of Deleuze/ Spinoza's ethical programme is, insofar as we are able, to move out from a state of

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[95] Urpeth, 'Religious Materialism', 182.
[96] However, as Lorraine notes, Deleuze is rather unclear as to just what is involved in the destratification of our personal, embodied identities. Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze*, 180.
[97] Hegel, *History of Philosophy*, 287.
[98] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 308, my italics.

passivity, i.e. bondage to the passions, towards a state of freedom and activity, culminating in the intellectual love of God. Such love is to *feel*, with increasing intensity, God's expressive power within us, God's power affecting us, moving us to think and to feel as at one with God.

According to Lloyd, Spinoza's *Ethics* urges us to 'move from a self-centred view of our place in nature',[99] where we experience things and events from our own particular perspective, that is, according to how things/ events affect us bodily/ mentally (either with joyful or sad passions), towards a true understanding of nature from the perspective of God, that is, under the aspect of eternity. When we grasp things from the viewpoint of eternity we grasp things as they follow with logical necessity from God's nature; we affirm that whatever is, is what should necessarily be. We, thus, no longer view the world from our relative, interested and personal position in the realm of time and history, but from the absolute, disinterested and impersonal 'position' of eternity. Ethical maturity requires us to become what Deleuze/ Spinoza call 'spiritual automaton'. As such our thinking wholly coincides with the impersonal, timeless 'movement' of the mind of God, a movement that I effectively impede to the extent that I view the world from my own particular position as a temporal, finite individual. Hence, Deleuze states '[w]e have a power of knowing, understanding or thinking only to the extent that we participate in the absolute power of thinking [namely, God's]'.[100] For Deleuze/ Spinoza, our power of thinking is at its optimum insofar as it is automatic and fully determined, that is, insofar as it is properly realised as at one with God's absolute power of understanding. Indeed, God is the spiritual automaton par excellence. Only insofar as we are determined to think by the power of God's understanding do we become truly active thinkers. In Deleuze's words '[i]n thinking we obey only the laws of thought, laws that determine both the form and content of true ideas'.[101] As 'spiritual automaton' ('our') thinking 'reproduces reality in producing ideas in their due order'.[102] The due order of nature, viewed from God's

[99] Lloyd, *Ethics*, 48.
[100] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 142.
[101] Ibid, 140.
[102] Ibid, 152. SPP, 85. It is somewhat misleading to regard this as 'our' thinking for it is a deeply impersonal thinking, a thinking that belongs to no particular one.

perspective, is the timeless order of logical necessity 'where an effect follows from it cause with all the necessity of a mathematical theorem'.[103]

It is my contention that Deleuze/ Spinoza's becoming 'spiritual automaton' entails transcending, as far as I can, my passive, specific embodied existence - where I inadequately experience things from my particular perspective, where I relate things in the world to me, as I take myself to be a particular, embodied individual. I endeavour towards my self-transcendence in order to become free and fully active, as this is to lose my specific relation to the world and instead reproduce in my thinking the objective rational order of nature. In so doing, I come to recognise that, from the viewpoint of eternity, God's perspective, I am eternally at one with all there is.[104]

In his works, Deleuze will typically describe the plane of immanence as one that is impersonal, anonymous, a-subjective, pre-individual, inorganic, etc. He will also hail pure immanence as pure life, a transcendental field of becoming, 'a natural play of haecceities, degrees, intensities, events and accidents',[105] a dynamic material realm of multiple differentiations, and so forth. The ethics of joy that Deleuze develops from Spinoza appears to direct individuals towards realising for themselves a creative freedom of joyful encounters centred upon the weird and wonderful becoming of bodies. But what the Spinozistic plane of immanence actually demands is this. We are to transcend, as far as we can, our self-centred particularity, our specific bodily interestedness, in order to become spiritual-automatons, whereby, to the extent that we grasp the eternal necessities of the natural order, our thinking takes on for itself no less than the creative force of God's own power of understanding. However, on Spinoza's, and so Deleuze's account, God's creative freedom is the freedom of logical necessity: a pure, disinterested and impersonal creativity.

I thus find myself in agreement with Peter Hallward's insight, an insight often missed by Deleuze's enthralled commentators, that with Deleuze/ Spinoza '[t]o be 'free'...can only mean, to be free *of* worldly [particular] interest as such. Freedom is

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[103] Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy*, 57.
[104] In losing myself as a temporal individual, I recover myself as an eternal (modal) part of the whole.
[105] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 280.

here an expressive state, rather than situated action'.[106] The drama of becoming, evoked in Deleuze's texts, actually masks a far less dramatic acquiescence to the natural order of things as they flow ineluctably from the necessity of God's nature. Although Deleuze will condemn the imposition of transcendent/ theological plans on the plane of immanence, I would argue that his Spinozistic plane of immanence is not the anarchic realm of material becoming that he presents. Instead, it is a thoroughly rationalised plane, a *mathesis universalis*, where all particular bodies/ minds are logically and timelessly positioned. Here, freedom does not amount to situated action, or to joyful encounters, but to the affirmation of our necessary determinedness.[107] The concrete consequence of this is a political quietism where we must accept the existing state of affairs not only as how things are but as how things should be.[108]

The secondarization of our temporal, particular embodied existence is made surprisingly explicit by Deleuze when he writes that:

> 'the good or strong individual is the one who exists so fully or so intensely that he has gained eternity in his lifetime, so that death always extensive, always external, is of little significance to him'.[109]

For Deleuze, the ethical subject, is not to restore a moral order of good or bad, but is to confirm 'here and now, the immanent order of essences and their states'.[110] This immanent order of essences is eternal and perfect; it is neither good nor bad. It is helpful to recall here Deleuze's theory of finite modal distinction - the quantification of quality argument outlined in the previous chapter. According to Deleuze, the essence of a finite mode is an intensive degree of power and eternally persists as part of an infinite series of intensities or singularities. These singularities only become distinguishable from one another when they are extrinsically determined in the realm of duration by a set of extensive parts. Given the above quote, the realm of extensive relations, of the joyful compositions and sad decompositions of particular bodies existing in time is seemingly of little consequence to Deleuze, and is somewhat

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[106] Hallward, 'Giles Deleuze', 17.
[107] See Gatens and Lloyd *Collective Imagining* for a contrary argument.
[108] For a critical discussion on 'the politics of expressionism' see Howie, *Deleuze and Spinoza*, 181-186.
[109] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 41.
[110] Ibid, 41.

relegated to 'one gigantically *redundant* exercise'.[111] If I read him correctly, Deleuze more or less seems to be saying, that there is little use in concerning ourselves with the joy and pains of temporal, extensive existence, when we are eternally affirmed in our essence as a mode, an expression, of the divine substance. But let us note, under the aspect of eternity Deleuzian modal essences are 'overwhelming similar',[112] for they are simply indistinct 'points' on a series.

Becoming-Everything

Thus far I have claimed that Deleuze/ Spinoza's ethical programme encourages the finite individual to transcend their passive bodily particularity in the effort to become 'spiritual automaton'. Insofar as the individual is able to achieve this, he or she accords in their thinking with the purely impersonal thinking of God's, and so does not think the world from their own standpoint as a particular embodied individual, but from God's absolute, eternal standpoint. I maintain, then, that for Deleuze/ Spinoza ethical maturity involves the overcoming of bodily particularity in order to think the eternal vision of God whereupon we are dissolved in an automatic affirmation of the One univocal being. However, it is also my view that just as the particular individual is lost with the affirmation of the impersonal absolute, the individual is simultaneously elevated to the level of the absolute. As spiritual automaton the individual becomes coincident with God, indeed, becomes God, insofar as God expresses himself in all that is.[113]

According to Deleuze:

> '[The concept of immanence] claims to penetrate into the deepest things, the 'arcana'. ... It at once gives back to Nature its own specific depth and renders man capable of penetrating into this depth. *It makes man commensurate with*

[111] Hallward, 'Deleuze and the Redemption of Interest', 13.
[112] Howie, *Deleuze and Spinoza*, 198.
[113] It must be admitted that Spinoza is at pains to avoid the suggestion that any finite individual can become God, for a finite thing will always be *dependent* upon God and so never able to attain for itself God's power. However, it can also be argued that there is only one real individual for Spinoza and this is God, such that God is God even insofar as God is expressed in one of his modes. As Connor notes with respect to Spinoza metaphysics: '[t]he individual must be able to be God so that there is no individual; and God must be that individual to ensure that there is no (transcendent) God'. Connor, *Genealogy of Nihilism*, 67. We shall see that Deleuze rather embraces this muddle.

> *God* and puts him in possession of a new logic: makes him a spiritual automaton'.[114]

For Deleuze, the union between the finite and the infinite in Spinoza's system does not entail the submergence of the particular into the 'abyss of annihilation, as Hegel fears. Rather, it is the affirmation of immanent expressive being whereby the divine is affirmed precisely in *my* unique and active expressiveness of divine power. To the degree that we attain blessedness, or ethical maturity, is the degree that we realise that '[t]o be is to *express oneself, to express something else, or to be expressed*'.[115] Importantly, for the spiritual automaton 'thought' and 'being' are perfectly identical. Thus, when Goodchild writes that Deleuze 'imbues the entirety of thought with a religious pathos, a spirit of affirmation, a praise of creativity',[116] we should not take this to mean that our creative power is limited to the realm of thought alone. Deleuze/ Spinoza's monist ontology means that where there is a power of thinking/ understanding there is equally a power of bodily acting: thought and being are univocal expressions of the one being. The state of spiritual automaton is not simply a state for the mind but for the body also, such that both mind and body can be affirmed as expressive, creative power.

Goodchild further claims that 'the aim of Deleuze's work is not to subject reality to thought, but to produce reality through thinking. The reality produced is a mode of existence, an episode, a life, a mode of expression, an ethos or a style'.[117] Certainly, with Deleuze we are called to 'enter the haecceity and impersonality of the creator'.[118] In doing so we are to 'make a world' which is no less than 'becoming-everybody/ everything (*tout le monde*)'.[119] We are to traverse the plane of immanence at infinite speeds of creative becoming, expressing in multiple ways our irreducible singularity. This celebration of our unfettered self-creativity as singularities on a plane of immanence is, I think, one that should be called to a sharp halt. The body that is free to become whatsoever body it desires to express is not at all like the lived bodies of our actual experience. While I find nothing objectionable in Spinoza and Deleuze's

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[114] Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 322, my italics.
[115] Ibid, 253.
[116] Goodchild, 'Deleuze and the Philosophy of Religion', 19.
[117] Goodchild, *Capitalism and Religion*, 164.
[118] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 309
[119] Ibid, 308.

insistence that 'we do not know what a body can do', its strikes me that the lines of flight that Deleuze proposes that we embark upon risks becoming little short of flights of fancy that do little to transform the concrete lives of human individuals. As a creative, expressive force of becoming, setting out on unprecedented lines of flight, I have no history, nor any significant ties with other bodies, nor any bodily constraints. In short, I am a highly abstract, autonomous individual of the distinctly Cartesian mould. Against the desire of becoming-everything, becoming-divine creator I can do no better than quote Susan Bordo:

> 'To deny the unity and stability of identity is one thing. ...[t]he dream of limitless multiple embodiments...is another. What sort of body is it that is free to change its shape and location at will, that can become anyone and travel everywhere?'[120]

It finally remains to be said that given a Spinozistic plane of immanence the individual as spiritual automaton is not free to create any old world or body it pleases. As I sought to argue above, the creative freedom for the Spinozist spiritual automaton is identified with the freedom of logical compulsion.

I hope to have highlighted key ways in which Deleuze's Spinozism rests upon a system that is unable to maintain the integrity of particular embodied individuals, and, far from offering a plane of immanence as an open field of creative bodily becomings, actually forwards a closed totality wherein all things are fully determined by the necessity God's nature. We have seen that, on the one hand, Spinoza and Deleuze's ethical subject is to transcend, to the extent they can, their finite bodily particularity in order to become a 'spiritual automaton' and thereby become reunited with the infinite God. On the other hand, the individual is effectively raised to the status of the divine, to the creator, able to produce for him or herself an entire world. Although these appear to be two opposing movements they are, I hold, symptomatic of the monist immanentist system where only God is the true individual. The peculiar upshot of this is that just as soon as the finite individual is posited, it is at once denied, for the finite individual is, only insofar as it is affirmed as *God* expressing himself in a finite

[120] Bordo, Susan, 'Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism', *Feminism/ Postmodernism*, ed. Linda Nicholson (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 145.

mode. It is not surprising that Hegel would famously complain that with Spinoza there is 'too much God'.

We could say that the Spinozistic immanent God is the epitome of pure auto-affection, basking in the blessedness of his own pure reason. At this point, I would like to develop the argument that Spinoza/ Deleuze's rationalised immanence is unable to satisfactorily account for particular bodily differences by drawing upon the insights of Irigaray. Deleuze reads the *Ethics* as offering the 'best' plane of immanence, where being is univocal and precisely, thereby, fully expressive of multiple differences or singularities. Irigaray's reading of this text, however, will find a standard representation of God as the image of male ideals of subjectivity, an image disguised as an impersonal, indifferent absolute. I shall suggest that Irigaray's performs an emendation of Spinoza's conception of God such that God is no longer figured as pure auto-affection but rather as hetero-affection. We will see that, for Irigaray, such a reworking of the concept of the divine requires the affirmation of sexual difference.

Irigaray Reads Spinoza

In her essay on Spinoza, entitled 'The Envelope', Irigaray cites Heidegger in order to lament that 'being has yet to be referred to in terms of body or flesh'.[121] This is interesting in reference to Spinoza, given, as Deleuze is keen to stress, that Spinoza's formulation of God, in terms of a single immanent substance, necessitates that thought and extension are attributes that are both fully expressive of being. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, it is Irigaray's view that flesh or matter is never just neutral 'stuff' but is always implicated in sexual difference. She claims that whenever matter is figured in neutral or generalised terms the role of the 'maternal-feminine'[122] is thereby disavowed. This, she argues, leaves us with a flawed concept of matter that has significant social and cultural ramifications for actual sexed subjects. The problems that Irigaray finds with Spinoza's model of God all stem, she will claim, from his myopia regarding the relevance of sexual difference in thinking nature as

[121] Irigaray, Luce, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 86.
[122] In the next chapter we will explore Irigaray analysis of the connection between the concept of matter and the typical association of this with the maternal (the mother's body) and the feminine.

divine immanence. I will highlight three main objections that Irigaray levels at Spinoza's depiction of God. These are: (i) the issue of God's place; (ii) the problematic relationship between thought and extension; and (iii) the activity/ passivity dualism.

According to Irigaray 'Being is determined by the place that envelops it'.[123] In her reading of Spinoza, she utilises the image of 'envelope' in order to rethink the relationship between sexed bodies in light of the concept of the divine. One of Irigaray's most important, and contentious, claims is that the question of sexual difference, particular with respect to thinking 'women's subjectivity' outside an economy explicitly or implicitly driven by the values of patriarchy, is crucially linked to the question of the divine.[124] Hence, Irigaray will examine the Spinozist God in order to ascertain its implications for the conception of sexual difference.

As I understand her, Irigaray is keen to explore the question of 'who gives God his place?' in Spinoza's philosophy. She suggests that, for Spinoza, it is God who provides his own place: he is self-caused, is in himself and conceived by himself. Irigaray, however, challenges the definition of God as *causa sui* by asking: 'but does the cause that is already given result from an essence that is not give as such?'.[125] For Irigaray, without the acknowledging of sexual difference, the maternal-feminine is the cause that is never admitted. She cannot, in Spinoza's system, produce any determinable effects, as these would allow us to deduce her necessary existence. Thus, the maternal-feminine remains indeterminate, until her part in the conception of nature, i.e. her causality, is finally recognised. Until such time woman has no place of her own and there is little difficulty in regarding Spinoza's substance in terms of God the Father as cause (*Natura naturans*), with all his particular effects as his sons (*Natura naturata*).

In addition to disputing the definition of God as *causa sui*, Irigaray also argues that the assertion that the divine substance is conceived solely through itself evinces a complex relation of interdependence between man and God such that 'man defines

[123] Ibid, 88.
[124] See her famous essay 'Divine Women', *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).
[125] Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 89.

God who in turn defines man'.[126] Playing with the double meaning of conception, that of idea and child, Irigaray contends that man and God ensure each other's dream of auto-conception, such that the concepts 'man' and 'God' are secured by each other at the same time as the one limits the absoluteness of the other. Of course, if man/ God is his own principle of sufficient reason, then the maternal-feminine can have no function in actions of conception, she is merely passive, inert nature: a receptacle or envelope. It is by employing the image of the envelope that Irigaray illuminates her claim that it is woman's body (her vagina/ her womb) that serves as a container for man/ God. As envelope, woman affords man/ God his essence, his necessary existence and so his place. For Irigaray, it is not that man flatly denies the existence of the maternal-feminine, but that her existence may be *for herself.* As she puts it 'the maternal-feminine exists necessarily as the cause of the self-cause of man. But not for herself'.[127] However, Irigaray aims to transform the passive image of woman's body as man's envelope into the potential for woman to envelop herself, to be her own self-cause as this ensures her essence and existence, her place.

Turning to the issue of the relationship between thought and extension. We know that, for Spinoza, these are conceived as attributes of the one substance and that each attribute is conceived through itself alone. Interestingly, this leads to a curious separation of mind and body (one even more severe than Descartes) in that the two remain absolutely unaffected by each other for they are not in any causal relation. The thesis of parallelism asserts that there is an order and connection between ideas and things as a means of tying mind and body together. However, for Irigaray, mind/ body parallelism is just another variation of the traditional split between body and thought. She argues, in line with many feminist thinkers, that the effect of this split is played out in the social and cultural roles assigned to men and women. Bodily tasks become the obligation of women, while men are given a total monopoly on conceptual (symbolic) production. While mind and body remain envisaged as separate, Irigaray maintains that there can only be 'rootless and insane thinking' and 'moronic bodies'.[128] That there may be proper reference to bodies or flesh or matter

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[126] Ibid, 89.
[127] Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 84-85.
[128] Ibid, 87. Although, to my knowledge, Irigaray never makes any direct reference to Deleuze in her work, she is far from enamoured with the notion of the BwO, which could be held as typifying a moronic body. She asks 'isn't the organless body [women's] historical condition?'. Furthermore, in

would require, for Irigaray, an affirmation of sexual difference that conceded finiteness and limit to thought and extension, in the recognition that there are *two* bodies and *two* minds, such that male and female subjects would each have their own thoughts and bodies.

It is in her analysis of the ethical distinction between activity and passivity employed by Spinoza, that I find Irigaray most instructive. As in itself and conceived through itself Spinoza's God is eternal active potency. He is pure omnipotence, unaffected, unlimited and undetermined by anything but himself and so is paradigmatic of unmitigated auto-affection. But Irigaray uncovers God's weak spot. She points out that Spinoza's God does not have the power to bear passivity, that is, God lacks the power to bear the affections of an other. Similarly, man lacks the power to recognise woman as anything other than his Other, the guarantor of his self-same identity.[129] For Spinoza, to be a finite embodied individual is necessarily to be in determining, affective relations with others. However, in the *Ethics* he writes: 'lack of power consists in this alone, that a man suffers himself to be led by things which are outside him'.[130] Yet, if all determination, except self-determination, is passive, this must mean that for Spinoza the state of finite embodiment is the state of passivity.[131] This could only lead to indigent accounts of self-other relations, for we could only ever *suffer* our bonds of attachment with others. Even the joyful passions, engendered by joyful encounters, are deficient with respect to the active joys of reason that are produced internally by the subject's rational thinking. In developing an ethics, and theology, of sexual difference, Irigaray proposes that the possibility of difference lies in the *power* of passivity, namely, the subject's and/ or God's capacity for hetero-affection.

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order to disassemble the body-as-organism, 'isn't it necessary to have had a relation to language and sex – to the organs – that a woman has never had?' Irigaray, Luce, *This Sex Which is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 141. See also Braidotti, Rosi, 'Discontinuous Becomings. Deleuze on the Becoming-Woman of Philosophy', *Journal of the British Society of Phenomenology*, vol. 24, no. 1 (January, 1993) for a feminist appraisal of Deleuze's concept of becoming that while sympathetic to Deleuze's aims is, however, disconcerted at his seeming indifference to sexual difference.

[129] It is Simone de Beauvoir who, influenced by Hegel's famous master/ slave dialectic, first articulates the idea of woman as the Other of man. For de Beauvoir the position of Other is inherently negative, it is the inessential term in the subject-object binary. Beauvoir de, Simone, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (London: Vintage, 1997). Irigaray accepts the idea of woman as other but wishes to invest this otherness with positive value.

[130] 4P37S1.

[131] 'We are passive insofar as we are part of Nature'. 4P2.

For Irigaray, in starting to rethink the divine in terms of sexual difference the following transition must take place:

> 'From auto-affection to hetero-affection, from auto-determination, auto-engendering, to determination, creation, even pro-creation by someone other. From the necessary circularity and conceptual self-sufficiency of God to the difference of that which can be conceived *by*, or even *in*, something other'.[132]

In my view, it is by confounding the distinction between activity and passivity that Irigaray makes a key amendment to Spinoza's philosophy. For Irigaray, the ethical or spiritual task in an era of sexual difference would be for embodied, sexed subjects to cultivate a passive-active receptiveness to each other, as this would realise the divine in terms of what Irigaray calls a 'sensible-transcendental'.[133] In the next chapter, we will see that Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference means that some sort of notion of 'limit' must play a part in figuring the divine as immanence, such that it is no longer simply expressive of one self-same reality. Thus, she proposes, 'if man and woman are both body and thought, they provide each other with finiteness, limit, and the possibility of access to the divine through the development of envelopes'.[134] For Deleuze, a philosophy of affirmation, such as the one he finds in Spinoza, must be thoroughly opposed to the installing of limits as this implies negation. However, Irigaray suggests that if subjects recognise the limit of sexual difference then no one subject, divine or otherwise, could claim to be totality of all things to the detriment of expressing difference.

For Irigaray, that Deleuze's Spinozistic plane of immanence enables man to become commensurate with God is indicative of man's refusal to engage with the specificities of actual embodied living, in the attempt to transgress all limits so that he may become all. Thus, although Deleuze's praises Spinoza for delineating the divine as univocal yet multiply expressive immanence, and certainly does not intend the principle of univocity to promote a philosophy of the One, Irigaray would argue that the One is nevertheless reinstated as the eminent male subject now intensified as limitless substance. Indeed, Irigaray insists that the realisation of multiplicity first demands the recognition of two bodies: male and female.

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[132] Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 89.
[133] A full analysis of this term is undertaken in the following chapter.
[134] Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 86.

To sum up, Irigaray indicts Spinoza's, and by implication Deleuze, for failing to consider the question of sexual difference. This failure, it is argued, results in no less than a matricide that sustains the oneness of God/ man, Father/ Son. For Irigaray, the difference that is woman's specific embodiment cannot be given expression in Spinoza's system, for it is by the suppression of that difference that the system gains its purchase. Her emendation of Spinoza entails the discernment that the absolute power of God is undermined by his lack of power to bear the affects/ determinations of an other. Thus, from an Irigarayan perspective, Spinoza's God can only exist in the impoverished state of autistic, auto-affection. It is by thinking the divine in terms of sexual difference that Irigaray believes she can re-conceive the divine as hetero-affection contra auto-affection and in so doing open up the divine economy to the expression of embodied differences.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to show how Deleuze establishes an ethics founded on a Spinozistic plane of immanence, particularly as he formulates this as an 'ethics of joy' concerned with the thriving of bodies in joyful encounters. We then went on to reconsider Deleuze's Spinozistic plane of immanence in terms of a religious materialism. This allowed us to see how Deleuze's materialist immanentism could nevertheless enable us to rethink the idea of transcendence in immanent, materialist terms, thus overcoming the traditional hierarchical dualism between transcendence/ immanence, spirit/ matter, God/ world, etc.

I suggested that there are two main forms of 'immanent transcendence' in a Deleuzian religious materialism. The first is the becoming-other of bodies on a plane of immanence characterised by creative material processes. And the second is the illusion of transcendence that is created whenever the plane of immanence is actualised into determinate forms of life, as these determinations appear to exist as if relative to, or a step removed from, absolute immanence, rather than immediately at one with it. I also highlighted the implications of a Deleuzian religious materialism for feminists keen to re-conceive notions such as 'the divine' and 'transcendence' in

ways that are affirmative of bodies, differences and becoming rather than leading to their secondarization at best, or denigration at worse.

However, despite the attractive prospects of Deleuze's philosophy of immanence, I argued that a Spinozistic plane of immanence is no open terrain of creative bodily becomings but instead is a closed, fully rationalised totality. There can be no miracles in Spinoza's nature and certainly no anarchic becoming of bodies each one univocally expressing the glory of God.

In chapter one, we examined Deleuze's construction of an ontology of univocal immanence according to a logic of expression that he finds at work in Spinoza's metaphysical system. I contended that this logic does not sustain an account of divine substance as fully and immanently expressive of pure difference, as Deleuze claims. Instead it leads to a system that slips between a monism where no distinctions are discernible in the one fundamentally indeterminate substance, and a hierarchical dualism between substance/ *Natura naturans* and modes/ *Natura naturata*, where the former remains a distinct, independent reality that transcends the latter. We saw that Deleuze's Spinozism is unable to convincingly demonstrate how the finite follows from the infinite, thus throwing into question the ontological status of the finite modes (particular things). Moreover, Deleuze and Spinoza invoke a causal rationalism when they claim that all finite things follow with logical necessity from God's nature. This leads to an immanence wherein all things/ events are absolutely determined.

In this chapter I wanted to expose the discrepancy between Deleuze's ethics of bodily becomings that he believes can be developed given a Spinozistic plane of immanence, and what Spinoza's ontological system and ethical programme actually demands of particular bodies. I argued that for Spinoza/ Deleuze ethical maturity requires the embodied individual to transcend their particularity in order to regard the world as a 'spiritual automaton', and so from the impersonal, absolute perspective of God. Yet, we also saw that with Deleuze's Spinozism the individual transcends their distinct specificity so that he or she can acquire for themselves no less than the creative, expressive power of God. Both these outcomes, I maintained, are inimical to actual living bodies, treating their material limitedness as that which thwarts the impersonal, rational dynamic of divine immanence rather than affirms it as a creative fecundity.

We finally looked at Irigaray's critical reading of Spinoza where she charges Spinoza, and indirectly Deleuze, for failing to take seriously the relevance of sexual difference when thinking matter/ nature and the divine. I highlighted what I consider to be her principal emendation of Spinoza's metaphysics, namely, her proposal that the divine is to be rethought in terms of hetero-affection rather than auto-affection, such that the divine is envisaged as empowered, rather than diminished, by its relation with an other. For Irigaray, the divine/ nature/ matter/ immanence must be acknowledged as containing an inherent ontological limit or interval of difference if it is not to collapse back into an undifferentiated oneness. We have already noted that Irigaray takes this limit to be that of sexual difference.

In this section, then, I have concluded that, contrary to appearances, Deleuze's Spinozist plane of immanence is unable to provide an account of the divine, matter and transcendence in ways that support the flourishing of particular bodies. I hope to have shown that Deleuze's model of immanence, based on the principles of univocity and expressionism, struggles to prevent the re-introduction of divine transcendence and leads to a logicized, abstract immanence that cannot properly account for embodied specificities. In the next section, I seek to appraise Irigaray's formulation of immanence in terms of sexual difference and the idea of the 'sensible transcendental'. I hope to determine whether she successfully advances an immanentism that manages to rethink the divine and transcendence in immanent terms such that these concepts are confirming of bodies, difference and becoming.

Section Two

INTERVALS OF TRANSCENDENCE

Chapter Three

Irigaray, Sexual Difference and the Sensible Transcendental

'Our destiny is to generate the divine in and between us'.[1]

In this chapter we shall explore in further detail Irigaray's immanentist philosophy of sexual difference. I will argue that Irigaray constructs a realist ontology of sexual difference and that this enables her to postulate the divine in terms of what she calls a 'sensible transcendental'.[2] Where Deleuze insists upon a univocal immanence, such that there is difference in degree rather than difference in kind, Irigaray will insist upon an immanence characterised by the ontological difference of female and male sexuateness. Irigaray's conception of immanence, I contend, treats sexual difference as an ontological limit, as it were, within immanence. This limit introduces an interval of difference within immanence and serves as a permanent site of transcendence within the sensible world. I hope to show that, for Irigaray, it is the corporeal or 'material' otherness of the two of sexual difference that endows the immanent world with a spiritual significance. Irigaray's notion of the sensible transcendental thus offers a way of thinking an immanent transcendence in terms of the difference of sexual difference.

The central task of this chapter is to unpack the notion of the sensible transcendental. Because this idea is deeply entwined with Irigaray's understanding of sexual difference I will first aim to establish exactly what she means by sexual difference, particularly with respect to the vexed question concerning her so-called 'essentialism'. Having offered an account of her ontology of sexual difference, I go on to show how Irigaray rethinks the divine as the sensible transcendental. I want to demonstrate that Irigaray does not simply consider the divine in terms of the human projection of ideals, but also as the very reality of the two of sexual difference: women and men in their irreducible ontological difference.

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[1] Irigaray, Luce, cited by Daggers, Jenny 'Luce Irigaray and "Divine Women"', *Feminist Theology*, vol. 14, (1997), 41.

[2] As Margaret Whitford notes, with Irigaray 'we find that the sensible transcendental is also referred to as a god'. Whitford, Margaret, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 47.

However, in the next chapter I will argue that Irigaray is unable to properly formulate the interval of difference between the two of sexual difference. This is due, I believe, to her tendency to describe sexual difference in terms of the *absolute* difference between female and male sensibilities. Indeed, it is my contention that Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference leaves us with a rather abstract account of female and male embodiment.

The Critique of Transcendence: A Feminist Perspective

Before we discuss the meaning of sexual difference for Irigaray, it would be helpful to gain an overview of her dispute with the concept of transcendence. Like a number of feminist thinkers, particularly feminist theologians, Irigaray is critical of the depiction of divine transcendence that prevails in traditional monotheism - the roots of which can be traced to Platonism and the idea of the One beyond being. As transcendent, God is deemed to be wholly other to the material world, a self-sufficient, eternal, immutable and infinite spirit that exists utterly divorced from, and unaffected by, the vicissitudes of material life. Other qualities traditionally attributed to the divine transcendence are steeped in monarchical imagery and include sovereign, king, lord, the almighty, etc. These denote an all-power God that reigns *over* a subordinate immanent world.

Feminists find such conceptions of divine transcendence highly problematic because they invite, if not sanction, the discrediting and domination of earthly immanence and bodily existence. Due to the classic symbolic alignment of the female with earthliness and bodiliness in Western thinking, it is argued that the traditional vision of divine transcendence supports in turn the devaluation and subjugation of the female. Given these interconnections, feminists such as Irigaray maintain that the idea of divine transcendence is no more than a reflection of patriarchal ideals. According to Irigaray, man cannot acknowledge 'how much that image [of the transcendent God] owes and denies to specular projection and inversion...the "father" is that which is reproduced in him in order not to be mirrored in his absence (of self)'.[3]

[3] Irigaray, Luce, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 314.

From her early work *Speculum of the Other Woman* on, Irigaray observes the way in which the monotheistic God functions as a paradoxical mirror for man. She argues that God serves as an ideal ego for the male subject, an image of autonomy, omnipotence, omniscience, rationality, independence, dispassion, eminence, etc, that man will identify himself with and in so doing bolster his identity. Yet as an image of ideal male being, God also destabilizes male identity by configuring man as what God is not, thus installing negativity and lack at the heart of male identity. For Irigaray, man will typically displace the negativity and lack that his identification with God inaugurates onto the female, the maternal-feminine. Man thus constructs woman in an oppositional relation to himself, so that she becomes man's inverse or negative mirror image, thereby enabling him to assert himself in positive terms.

As do many feminist theologians, Irigaray recognises an important correlation between man's relation with God and man's relation with woman, which also has poor consequences for woman's own relation with God. Patriarchal conceptions of the divine associate man with God, and place woman in a negative opposition to both man and God. We then have the hierarchical dualism between 'man/God' and 'woman/ not-God' where the former is positively valued over the latter. As Mary Daly would argue, the concept of God divinises the male and casts the female out from the *imago dei*, where she is subsequently positioned as the embodiment of evil.[4] The theological concept of transcendence, as Deleuze claims, can be seen to institute a way of thinking about the world in terms of hierarchical dualisms: transcendent God/ immanent world, man/ woman, spirit/ matter, intelligible/ sensible, active/ passive, etc.

For Irigaray, the idea of God as the transcendent other to the material world, licenses the 'sacrificial logic' that drives patriarchy's repudiation and exploitation of the material/ the maternal - which are no less than the essential (yet disavowed) conditions of all life. The spiritual task for monotheistic religions (and before these, Platonic philosophy) is for man to coincide with the divine. However, Irigaray alerts us as to how the effort to attain this 'demands the sacrifice of this present life, this present earth and gaze. All animate matter must be reorganized if Being is to be

[4] Daly, Mary, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: Women's Press, 1991).

imposed in its truth. *Only the dead see God.*'[5] In order for man to become God, he must become the 'man of reason'[6] so that he may emulate the divine ideal. He must sacrifice his sensuousness, his bodiliness, and emotions – attributes that are symbolically transferred onto the female, who thus comes to represent denigrated nature. Man's spiritual entelechy demands that he cut himself 'off from his relations with the earth, the mother, and any other (female), by that ascent toward an all-powerful intelligibility'.[7] The irony of this, Irigaray points out, is that man effectively commits himself to a living death on earth, where he must 'exist' in a state of 'hyperbolic doubt' regarding the material-maternal matrix that sustains him.

A significant number of feminists call for the complete rejection of religion and God, maintaining that any recourse to religious themes inevitably entails endorsing the androcentric and patriarchal values that traditionally underpin them. As one feminist puts it, '[h]istory shows that the moral degradation of woman is due more to theological superstitions than to all other influences together'.[8] However, Irigaray insists that a re-description of the divine is imperative for feminist projects that aim to rethink women's difference, or otherness, *positively* rather than *negatively* in relation to the positive that is man-God's self-same identity. Irigaray's sees her principal task as the effort to liberate woman from her historical position in Western thought and culture as the Other of the same (man), where woman is defined in relation to man who serves as the normative standard. Against this, Irigaray wishes to assert woman's difference as 'irreducible to the male subject and sharing equivalent dignity'.[9] In brief, Irigaray aims to construct an ethics of sexual difference between men and women, which will require a radical transformation of philosophy, theology, and politics. In this chapter we will explore the idea of the sensible transcendental in relation to Irigaray's project.

The Question of Sexual Difference

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[5] Irigaray, *Speculum*, 306, my italics.
[6] See, Lloyd, Genevieve, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
[7] Irigaray, *Speculum*, 362.
[8] Elizabeth Cady Stanton cited by Frankenberry, Nancy, 'Feminist Approaches', *Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Critical Readings*, eds. Pamela Sue Anderson and Beverley Clack (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 4.
[9] Irigaray, Luce, 'The Question of the Other', *Another Look, Another Woman: Retranslations of French Feminist*, ed. Lynne Huffer, special edition of *Yale French Studies*, vol. 87 (1995), 8.

To question the meaning of sexual difference for Irigaray is, I maintain, central if we are to grasp the radical potential of her idea of the divine as a 'sensible transcendental'. It is a question that inevitably requires us to enter what is proving to be the irrepressible debate concerning the issue of Irigaray's 'essentialism'.

An essentialist reading of Irigaray contends that she understands the concept 'female' to have as its referent the female body/ psyche, which is taken to possess specific capacities or qualities (typically biological) deemed essential to its identity.[10] The worry regarding essentialist accounts of sexual identity is that any affirmation of sexual difference as given, i.e. a natural or pre-cultural fact, serves to legitimate and augment the determination of psycho-social roles by which women's subordination to men is justified as natural. Essentialism, then, is generally thought to give credence to the claim that (naturally given) sex determines (socio-cultural) gender in an irrefutable way.

Feminists who adopt an anti-essentialist or constructivist approach to sexual difference, maintain that only a rejection of the belief that 'males' and 'females' constitute natural kinds allows for the successful undermining of oppressive gender norms. Such feminists view the idea of the 'sexed body' as referring either to inconsequential empirical facts that are entirely amenable to various forms of socialisation/ enculturation, or as itself 'produced', or 'constructed' by, for example, discursive demarcations.[11]

In her influential commentary on Irigaray, entitled *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, Margaret Whitford highlights the way in which recent feminist debate on the question of essentialism/ anti-essentialism reveal the sharp distinction of these

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[10] For a useful overview of this debate see Naomi Schor, 'This Essentialism Which is Not One: Coming to Grips With Irigaray' in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, eds. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[11] The former position regards the materiality of the body in typically Cartesian terms as a neutral, *tabula rasa* awaiting socio-cultural formation; this leads to the contention that only an arbitrary relation holds between sex and gender, such that female bodies (sex) are quite able to assume masculine traits (gender). The latter position is one proposed by Judith Butler in her book *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993). Butler's thesis is that the materiality of sex is not a brute facticity pre-existing signification but is the very materialization of socio-cultural norms.

terms to be spurious.[12] For Whitford, such a realisation opens up for a reading of Irigaray as a *strategic* essentialist rather than as an ontological essentialist. As such, Irigaray could be interpreted not as advancing a theory of woman's essential being, but rather seeking to reconstruct the *symbolic representation* of 'woman' outside of its formulations by phallogocentric discourse,[13] where 'woman' is negatively positioned in relation to 'man' as both a figure for lack and excess.

Whitford's presentation of Irigaray as a strategic essentialist encouraged a renewed engagement with her work by Anglophone feminists who had previously dismissed it on account of its ostensible ontological essentialism. The critique of ontological essentialism by feminists centres upon: (i) the epistemological problem of accounting for epistemic access to sex as a mind-independent reality; and (ii) the ethical/ political problems of ahistoricism and the effacing of differences implied by classifying individuals as female according to shared, universal properties. In wishing to avoid these difficulties feminists could adopt an Irigarayan strategic essentialism as a way of retaining the category 'woman' held to be a basic requirement for grounding feminist political practice. As Stella Sanford elucidates, Irigaray's understanding of 'sexual difference' 'refers to a speculative, and in some sense futural or critical-utopic, symbolic configuration, which is to be achieved'.[14]

What is striking about this approach is that it allows feminists to see female sexual identity as something to be anticipated as a transformation of the symbolic, rather than as a bodily reality or essence that Western thought has discursively repressed and which feminists need to articulate. For Irigaray, transformation of the symbolic could be materially realised by necessitating the creation of institutions such as a 'bill of sexuate rights'. These rights would, according to Irigaray, secure women's (and men's) socio-cultural autonomy and ensure the positive representation of the sexed specificity of bodies conceived morphologically.[15]

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[12] See Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

[13] From an analysis of Lacan and Derrida post-structualist feminists tend to describe discourse as 'phallogocentric' because of its privileging the principles of logic, which structure our thoughts into binary (either/ or) categories, and its privileging the term in the binary that is traditionally aligned with the masculine.

[14] Sanford, Stella, 'Feminism against "the feminine"', *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 105 (Jan/Feb, 2001), 8.

[15] To view the body in terms of 'morphology' develops insights taken from Freud and Lacan which maintain that our corporeal identity is based upon an 'imaginary anatomy' that bypasses the

However, while a reading of Irigaray as a strategic essentialist is one that her philosophy invites, from *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* onwards it can be argued that she makes a number of contentious pronouncements by which she could be more accurately thought of as upholding an ontological or realist understanding of sexual difference. Indeed, when Irigaray claims, for example, that '[s]exual difference is an immediate natural given' she is quite clearly regarding sex in realist terms, that is, as a fundamental reality independent of our concepts of it.[16] In light of this, Irigaray thus takes sexual difference to be no less than a material reality that precedes symbolic representation.

Thus, the phallogocentrism that dictates our present symbolic order must be indicted for its sexual *indifference*. This disguises the way in which maleness is presented as a generic humanness, thereby excluding something actual, namely, the specificity of the female sex. Given a realist view of sex, Irigaray is able to define her feminist agenda as: 'substituting, for a universal constructed out of only one part of reality, a universal which respects the totality of the real. The universal is therefore no longer *one* nor unique, it is *two*'.[17] It can be suggested, then, that Irigaray's aim of transforming the symbolic order is motivated by a desire to secure an alternative representation of 'woman' *precisely because* woman's sexual distinctiveness is in fact an actual, pre-existing reality that phallogocentric discourse misrepresents and suppresses.

Of course the realist tenor of Irigaray's recent work is a cause of great alarm for those anti-essentialist feminists enamoured by the promise of her strategic essentialism. However, a realist view of sexual difference does at least avoid a potentially damning problem associated with conceiving sex strictly in symbolic terms. As some feminist theorists have observed the risk of this sort of strategic essentialism is that terms such

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distinctions between mind/ body and nature/ culture. This is because no pre-given body is being assumed but rather a psychical representation of bodily libidinal impulses.

[16] Irigaray, Luce, *I Love to You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, trans. Alison Martin (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 47. It is in this book that we find the clearest assertions of sexual difference as a fundamental reality, see in this volume 'Human Nature is Two', 'Sexual Difference as Universal' and 'Donning a Civil Identity'. See also *To Be Two*, trans. Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Monoc (London: Althone Press, 2000), 65, 90.

[17] Irigaray, Luce, *Why Different? A Culture of Two Subjects: Interviews with Luce Irigaray*, eds. Luce Irigaray and Sylvere Lotringer, trans. Camille Collins (New York: Semiotext(e), 2000), 146.

as 'woman' or 'the feminine' take on meanings that render them highly abstract and formal, to the point where they bear no intrinsic relation to actual (concrete) women.[18] This is because terms like 'the feminine' are used to refer to that which structurally falls outside the realm of language (taken as necessarily masculine) constituting a (non-)position or liminal site that can never be spoken of or represented, rather than an ontological reality. 'Woman', 'the feminine' etc, therefore, becomes the 'eternal elsewhere' of discourse. As such these terms can be deployed as tropes or philosophical categories to signal, among other things, a discursive excess that disrupts phallogocentric discourse (Derrida), or a possible mode of being that has been forgotten and, furthermore, could never be fully instantiated by existing (ontic) women (reading 'the feminine' analogously to Heidegger's Being). Yet a purely symbolic interpretation of 'sex' is criticised for having no political expediency due to its failure to refer to real-life women - being at best an opportunity for radicalising philosophical theory and at worst the appropriation of woman's place by male thinkers.

In arguing for an Irigarayan-inspired 'politics of ontological difference', underpinned by an essentialist account of sexual difference, Braidotti importantly stresses that: 'Sexual difference is a *fact*, it is also a *sign* of a long history that conceptualised difference as pejoration or lack'.[19] Irigaray's recent attempts to outline a realist ontology of sexual difference, to be accompanied by transformative disruptions of the male symbolic, can thus be viewed as aiming to assert the material fact of sexual difference.

I contend that the realist essentialism evident in Irigaray's latest works is a bold move that aims to deliver not only 'a powerful political theory'[20] as one feminist claims, but also a compelling re-conceptualisation of the divine as a 'sensible transcendental'. Before discussing how a realist understanding of sexual difference provides the basis for thinking a 'sensible transcendental' I want to outline Irigaray's ontological

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[18] See, for examples, Battersby, Christine, *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 119, 126 and 133; and Sanford, 'Feminism against "the feminine"', 11-12.

[19] Braidotti, Rosi, 'The Politics of Ontological Difference', *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1989), 101.

[20] Stone, Alison, 'The Sex of Nature: A Reinterpretation of Irigaray's Metaphysics and Political Thought' in *Hypatia*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2003), 61.

account of nature.[21] In doing this I wish to demonstrate that sexual difference, for Irigaray, is regarded not only in essentialist terms but also as *the* essential difference of being, it is the difference that makes all other differences possible.

Sex (I): Nature's Essential Difference

According to Irigaray:

> 'The natural, aside from the diversity of its incarnations or ways of appearing, is at least *two*: male and female. This division is not secondary nor unique to human kind. It cuts across all realms of the living which, without it would not exist. Without sexual difference, there would be no life on earth. It is the manifestation of and the condition of the production and reproduction of life'.[22]

Prima facie it seems as if Irigaray is claiming, rather contentiously, that the natural world basically consists of entities that are either male or female. This flies in the face of the overwhelming consensus in biological studies that sexual reproduction is in fact a statistical *anomaly* amongst species of living organisms on this planet.[23] Moreover, the idea that a sex can be attributed to inorganic matter seems to be thoroughly questionable.

Given these empirical points, it is not surprising that commentator Gail Schwab recommends that we consider Irigaray's remarks on the universality of sexual difference in the natural world as partly polemical. Indeed, Schwab states that such remarks are to be ultimately disregarded so that we can concentrate upon sexual difference understood as a cultural universal.[24] We have already cited the difficulties that arise with a purely cultural understanding of sexual difference. Furthermore, Irigaray's insistence that sex is a fact that is 'inscribed *in* nature itself',[25] as opposed

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[21] Here 'nature' is being understood as the organic and inorganic substratum of the universe including the earth and human beings.
[22] Irigaray, *I Love to You*, 37.
[23] This point is made by Myra Hird in her paper 'From the Culture of Matter to the Matter of Culture: Feminist Explorations of Nature and Science', *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 8, no. 1 http://www.socresonline.org.uk/8/1/hird.html, 3.14. See also Simone de Beauvoir important work on biology and the manifestation of sexual difference in nature in *The Second Sex*, 35-69.
[24] Schwab, Gail, 'Sexual Difference as Model: An Ethics for the Global Future' in *Diacritics* vol. 28, no. 1, p. 80.
[25] Irigaray, *I Love to You*, 35, my italics.

to imposed *upon* nature by discursive practices, suggest that we must take seriously her claims that nature is inherently sexed. As she herself explicitly states: 'Plants, animals, gods, the elements of the universe, all are sexed'.[26]

In her illuminating paper on Irigaray's philosophy of nature Alison Stone argues that we should interpret Irigaray's claims about the inherent 'sexuateness'[27] of nature as making a *phenomenological* point, rather than the somewhat risible assertion that all nature is structured to accord with the biological principle of sexual reproduction. Thus, to affirm nature's sexual dimorphism is not to assert that all things are biologically sexed male or female – as human beings (generally) are - but to contend that our experience of natural phenomena, as exhibiting distinctive patterns or rhythms, can be 'metaphysically' translated in terms of sexual difference.[28] Hence, Stone writes: 'Irigaray ascribes sexual difference to most natural processes *only in a highly attenuated sense*'. She glosses: 'the rhythmical bipolarity inherent in all natural processes makes them "sexuate", ... because their bipolarity is *structurally isomorphic* with human sexual differentiation'.[29]

For Irigaray, at its most elementary level, the sexual difference of nature constitutes two unique *rhythms*. These 'rhythmic bipolarities' include night and day, winter and summer, the ebb and flow of tides, the circulation of breath/ air, blood or sap, as well as human sexual dimorphism, which, Irigaray maintains, is the highest expression of nature's primordial sexuateness. Given our experience of nature manifesting itself according to dualistic rhythms, Irigaray argues that we need to 'take account of natural powers (*puissances*) in sexual terms'.[30] As I hope to show, a realist conception of nature as universally sexually dimorphic provides the foundation upon which the edifice of Irigaray's ethics and theology of (human) sexual difference rests. Indeed, as Pheng Cheah and Elizabeth Grosz point out, it is by postulating the universality of sexual difference as constitutive of nature itself that Irigaray enables us

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[26] Irigaray, Luce, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 178. See also: '*Nature has a sex*, always and everywhere' ibid, 108.
[27] 'Sexuateness' is a cognate of 'sexuate' which, along with 'sexed', translates Irigaray's term '*sexué*'.
[28] Stone, 'The Sex of Nature', 62-63. I am grateful to this informative paper for the discussion of Irigaray's philosophy of nature her.
[29] Ibid, 62, my italics.
[30] Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 108.

to conceive of nature as always already 'spiritualised', thus undoing the classical opposition between nature and spirit.[31]

However, the question arises as to whether we can take as axiomatic the claim that nature consists of two originary rhythms – female and male. Stone argues that Irigaray justifies her novel depiction of nature phenomenologically, which enables her to 'treat as "knowledge" the sensible way we encounter and inhabit nature – as scientific theories typically do not'.[32] For Irigaray, then, that nature universally exhibits a rhythmic bipolarity which mirrors human sexual dimorphism is something our sensibility confirms. Yet, while we may indeed experience nature in terms of certain binary rhythms, we might also want to highlight our experiences of nature as a complexity of rhythms, patterns and events; a 'polyphenomenality', as it were, that seems to be somewhat elided by the simplistic binary paradigm Irigaray proposes.[33]

Certainly Irigaray does not intend to give a reductive account of nature. This is why she writes: 'the natural, *aside from the diversity of its incarnations or ways of appearing*, is at least *two*: male and female'.[34] It seems that Irigaray's wants to articulate nature's diversity and differences but strictly as this is expressed *via* the two rhythms of sexual difference. She is adamant that sexual difference is a first principle of nature. Thus, she will state that her philosophy starts 'from reality, from a universal reality: sexual difference... this reality of the *two* has always existed. But it was submitted to the imperatives of a logic of the *one*.'[35]

Irigaray does not challenge the logic of the one by thinking nature in terms of its manifestation of 'concrete singularities' (cf. Deleuze). This is because she regards the valorisation of the many over the one as of a piece with the logic of the one because it fails to challenge the assumption that the universal must be one and male.[36] According to Irigaray, nature's inherent sexual dimorphism constitutes a genuinely

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[31] Cheah, Pheng and Grosz, Elizabeth, 'Of Being-Two: Introduction', *diacritics*, vol. 28, no. 1, 9.
[32] Stone, 'The Sex of Nature', 65.
[33] As Hird notes, for a number of theorist 'if nature is to 'retain any meaning at all it must signify an uninhibited polyphenomenality of display'. 'From the Culture of Matter to the Matter of Culture', 3.4.
[34] Irigaray, *I Love To You*, p. 37, my italics. See also: 'Obviously, the universality of nature is complex', *Sexes and Genealogies*, 113.
[35] Irigaray, Luce, *Why Different?*, 146.
[36] Ibid, 145-146. See also 'The Question of the Other', 11-12.

concrete (material) universal, a universal that is not one but two. The Irigarayan argument then, is that the diversity of nature can only be properly thought, without falling into abstraction, once the fundamental sexuateness of nature is perceived as the essential difference. Here, sexual difference functions as an ineradicable limit in nature itself that provides a space for the expression of all other material differences.

Irigaray therefore identifies the rhythm of the two – as this ultimately manifest itself in human sexual difference – as the *only* concrete universal in nature. For Irigaray, it is the alleged ubiquity of sexual difference in all natural phenomena that gives it pre-eminent status in her ontology. What makes Irigaray's philosophy of nature so intriguing is the view that *all* material differences in nature are effectively indeterminate unless they are *first* marked by sexual difference. Yet is it so obvious that *everything* in the cosmos is definitively marked by sexual difference? And, if sexual difference is not as omnipresent as Irigaray maintains does it not then become somewhat arbitrary to assert it as reality's essential difference, without which the material could only ever be blank, extended substance?

I have already suggested that both science and phenomenology could challenge Irigaray's understanding of all nature as universally and primordially sexed. Indeed, from a scientific perspective, Hird questions the tendency of some feminists to overdetermine the significance of sexual difference when theorising the human body (which is not the same as saying that sexual difference has *no* significance in how we understand human bodies). She argues that a scientifically informed understanding of the materiality of bodies leads to the conclusion that the term 'sexual difference' is 'largely nonsensical in terms of living matter'.[37] It is quite reasonable to suggest that, at the level of microbiology (let alone inorganic matter/ processes) sexual difference, either in its strict reproductive sense, or Irigaray's wider sense of binary rhythms, is not as universal or originary as Irigaray claims. Even phenomenology provides examples of natural phenomena that are not marked by sexual difference. Irigaray herself cites air as a sort of mediating element that cannot be characterised in sexual terms.

[37] Hird, 'From the Culture of Matter to the Matter of Culture', 4.2.

I think that Irigaray's account of nature rests on the moot point that sexual difference is universally manifest in nature. It is on the basis of this claim, however, that Irigaray identifies sexual difference as *the* essential difference of nature, reality's only concrete universal. For Irigaray it is this insight that must guide our ethical and religious practices. As she puts it, the universality of sexual difference 'compels us to a radical refounding of dialectic, of ontology, of theology'.[38] However, if we experience nature as a 'polyphenomenality', then Irigaray's bipartite ontology is surely reductive and limited. If the claim that sexual difference pervades all reality is without more convincing support, then, as far as I can see, Irigaray proffers no other reasons as to why sexual difference is to be prioritised over other material differences exhibited in nature.

We might suggest qualifying Irigaray's claim as to the universality of sexual difference in nature by limiting this to *human* nature. Certainly she is prone to making statements such as: '[s]exual difference is a given of reality. It belongs universally to all humans'.[39] Or: '[t]he whole of human kind is composed of women and men and of nothing else'.[40] But, if we do restrict the universality of sexual difference to humanity, we cannot then argue, as Stone believes Irigaray does, that: (i) human sexual duality is the highest realization of nature's inherent sexual dimorphism; and (ii) it is the ethical and spiritual task of women and men to cultivate sexual difference in particular (as opposed to other differences) as this accentuates the sexual difference of nature.

Let us restrict, then, Irigaray's assertion regarding the universality of sexual difference to human beings alone. Importantly, I do not mean that we think human sexual difference only in culture terms, but as an objective reality constitutive of women and men's corporeal being.

Sex (II): Human Nature's Essential Difference

[38] Irigaray, *Why Different?*, 165.
[39] Irigaray, *Why Different?*, 166.
[40] Irigaray, *I Love To You*, 47.

Earlier we argued against an interpretation of Irigaray as a strategic essentialist by highlighting how, on numerous occasions, she makes it plain that she takes sexual difference to mean a material reality. For Irigaray the very future of ethics, philosophy, indeed civilisation itself, demands the recognition that '[b]etween man and woman, there really is otherness: biological, morphological, relational'.[41]

Irigaray is most keen to emphasise that the very being of men and women is radically distinct: a difference in kind and not of degree (contra Deleuze). Hence she writes: 'Let's say between a man and a woman the negativity is, dare I say it, of an *ontological*, irreducible type'.[42] Although the idea of 'ontological difference' recalls the Heideggerian distinction between Being and beings (as this seeks to distinguish between the question of Being, and beings as spatio-temporal entities) I agree with Sanford who argues that, for Irigaray, the ontological difference between men and women describes a difference between two incommensurable entities.[43]

We have seen that many feminists are deeply sceptical of the assertion that human sexual dimorphism is a natural fact. The fear is that politically transformative action is prevented because the constraints of a 'given' nature lock men and women into immutable psycho-social roles. An option for feminists who wish to articulate 'sex' in realist terms, such that 'men' and 'women' denote 'natural kinds' (i.e. have an objective, material reality), is to clarify the process of classifying individuals into groups. One important way individuals can be classified into a natural kind group is on the basis of them all sharing or exemplifying a fixed essence or property. (This sort of classification is typically informed by Aristotelian essentialism). Alternatively, natural kinds can be thought to consist of individuals grouped together through similarity relationships or by bearing a certain non-irrelevant unity; in either case it need not be held that the grouped individuals have an essential property in common. The latter conception of natural kinds enables feminist to assert that there

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[41] Ibid, 61.

[42] Irigaray, Luce, Hirsch, Elizabeth and Olson, Gary, '"Je-Luce Irigaray": A Meeting with Luce Irigaray' in *Hypatia*, vol. 10, no. 2 (Spring, 1995) 110, my italics. See also: 'The difference between man and woman is a difference in *being*, a difference between two worlds'. Irigaray, *Why Different?*, 84 my italics.

[43] Sanford, 'Feminism against 'the Feminine'', 9-12. However, not everyone will agree that this is Irigaray's position, for example see Deutscher *A Politics of Impossible Difference*, 112.

are objective differences between human male and female bodies without having to affirm the existence of immutable, ahistorical essences.[44]

Rather than investigate the classificatory procedures involved in determining sex as a natural kind, which can illuminate vested political interests as well as uphold the objective materiality of sexed bodies, Irigaray chooses to secure her realist understanding of sex by elaborating a heterodox metaphysics of human bodies based on the materiality of mucous-fluids. I believe she opts for an alternative metaphysics of bodies not only to avoid what she considers to be phallogocentric metaphysical assumptions but to advance a new essentialism - where male and female essences are seen as fluid and dynamic rather than fixed.

Irigarayan Bodies

In an essay entitled 'The "Mechanics" of Fluids' Irigaray criticises phallogocentric science and metaphysics' proclivity towards describing the basic structure of the world in terms of solid, discrete objects. This, she argues, leaves the 'economy of fluids' unthought. According to Irigaray, fluids are a physical reality that traditional (Aristotelian) logic fails to symbolise, for such logic is only capable of distinguishing those things that are quantifiable, disconnected and self-identical: as are solids/ substances. Indeed, Irigaray maintains that traditional logic and mathematics rationalize the fluid in terms of the solid thereby leaving us with only 'an approximate relation to reality'.[45] She also holds, similarly to Deleuze, that solid objects have only a phenomenal status – they give the appearance of 'things in themselves' but are actually temporary coagulations of fluid matter. To become attentive to the 'economy of fluids' is, for Irigaray, not to discover 'things' but rather a process. Physical reality, for Irigaray, is 'continuous, compressible, dilatable, viscous, conductible, diffusible', always exceeding proper or good form(s).[46]

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[44] For an excellent discussion on how the political commitments of feminists guides debate on the question of 'natural and social kinds' see Sally Haslanger 'Feminism in Metaphysics: Negotiating the Natural' in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, eds. Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 107-126.
[45] Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 109.
[46] Ibid, 111.

Taking reality to be ultimately constituted by fluids, or fluidity, Irigaray rethinks the materiality of human bodies in terms of what she calls 'mucous'. For Irigaray, '[n]o thinking about sexual difference that would not be traditionally hierarchical is possible without thinking through the mucous'.[47] The concept of the mucous has a number of applications in Irigaray's work. However, in relation to 'mucous bodies' it is importantly tied to articulating 'thresholds' and 'sensibility'. Irigaray understands the mucous as a materiality that defies fixed, substantial identity. It is neither subject nor object, solid nor fluid, interior nor exterior, but rather constitutes a threshold, interval or passage, a continuous becoming of 'self' and 'other' that necessitates a reinterpretation of space and time, desire and the divine.

Thus, the mucous body is characterised by a porosity such that there is continual communion of fluid materiality (e.g. air, blood, water, etc) between the mucous membranes of bodies. These bodies are never 'proper' in the sense of being self-contained units fixed by solid boundaries but have 'living, moving borders',[48] ever changing through sensible contact with that 'otherness' or 'outside' that exceeds the mucous body and yet is always contiguous with it. Hence, Irigaray writes that the mucous is the, 'most intimate interior of my flesh...[yet also a] threshold of the passage...between inside and outside, between outside and inside... These mucous membranes evade my mastery'.[49]

In accordance with a metaphysics of fluids Irigaray utilizes the notion of the mucous body so she can claim that, while bodies can never be conceived as something fully determinate they do, nevertheless, have a discernible corporeal shape. But this shape is always provisional, determined by various affections from both the outside and inside of the mucous membranes. This makes the body at once intimately mine and yet affectively related to others such that the body is 'neither one nor two'. For Olkowski, the Irigarayan body is 'a kind of sensibility that I would call affectivity'.[50]

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[47] Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: Althone Press, 1993),110. My discussion of the concept of the mucous and the body is mainly informed by comments made in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* and *Elemental Passions*.
[48] Irigaray, *Elemental Passions*, 51.
[49] Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 170, my ellipses.
[50] Olkowski, Dorothea, 'The End of Phenomenology: Bergson's Interval in Irigaray', *Hypatia*, vol. 15, no. 3 (Summer, 2000), 79.

The body can be regarded as a sensibility because it is inherently *perceptual*: it breathes, feels, tastes, sees, hears, touches, and is touched.[51]

Importantly, for Irigaray, all sensible perception is affective. To perceive the other, is to engage in a mutual affective exchange, such that perception is not the act of sensing something that lies *outside* the body (a criticism Irigaray directs, somewhat sweepingly, at the French phenomenological tradition) but is the very transformation of self and other as they continuously come into contact. We will see the importance of this depiction of the body as an affective sensibility when I develop the idea of a 'spiritual phenomenology', as this describes a key spiritual task for men and women given the realisation of the divine as a 'sensible transcendental'.[52]

Although Irigaray insists that her account of the mucous body counterposes the idea of the body traditionally conceived as something solid and definitively individuated, she nevertheless avers that the bodies of men and women are radically different. Noting the way in which Irigaray frequently describes human sexual difference in terms of a difference in rhythms - as this follows from her depiction of the sexuateness of nature - Stone surmises that the sexuate rhythms distinguishing the bodies of men and women can be thought of as the specific ways in which these two different bodies circulate their mucous fluids.[53]

Because of their distinctive corporeal rhythms, Irigaray argues that men and women have completely different ways of perceiving the world; indeed, for Irigaray, the very difference of male and female sensibilities works to reinforce the specific modes of being/ becoming each sex has.[54] Thus, Irigaray writes: 'Men and women are corporeally different. This biological difference leads to others: in constructing subjectivity, in connecting to the world, in relating'.[55]

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[51] Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 198.
[52] Indeed, Irigaray argues that 'because the mucous has a special touch and properties, it would stand in the way of the transcendence of a God that was alien to the flesh, a God of immutable, stable truth', *Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 110.
[53] Stone, 'The Sex of Nature', 67.
[54] I use the term 'sensibility' to describe male and female embodiment.
[55] Irigaray, *Why Different?*, 95 my italics.

There are two significant points arising from the statement just quoted, both of which converge on the issue of essentialism. Firstly, in her later works, Irigaray often claims that women's bodily temporality has a greater affinity with that of the natural world than men's bodies.[56] She also contends that women's corporeal being is more relational or intersubjective than men's.[57] Claims such as these do seem to mark a regressive turn in Irigaray's reformulated ontology of sexual difference, precisely because Western patriarchy has generally figured women (negatively) as guardians of nature[58] and/ or, as always in relation or dyadic. Secondly, Irigaray seems to imply that sexual difference is to be understood as biological, and that this biological difference *causes* the different ways of being for men and women. The problem here is that she leaves herself open to charges of biological essentialism, where the biological make up of sexed bodies altogether determines the psycho-social positionings of each sex.

However, Irigaray is at pains to distance herself from Freud's thesis of 'biology is destiny'. Explaining this Stone draws attention to the fact that Irigaray is working with a concept of biology that is wholly different to that of the phallogocentric science.[59] For Irigaray, biological sexual differences, namely, hormonal/ chromosomal configurations and anatomical/ physiological structures, are themselves *effects* of an even more elementary sexual difference: that of men and women's distinctive corporeal rhythms. As Stone emphasises, sexual difference at this elementary level must not be conflated with the difference between two distinct reproductive capacities as in traditional biological conceptions.

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[56] Ibid, 150.

[57] Here is Irigaray: 'the female world remains closer to what's naturally preordained...whereas the male world is built, in part *against* nature. That doesn't mean that woman's subjectivity is reduced to being pure nature and man's, culture. Rather, the two genders have *different forms of consciousness*: one remaining more faithful to the body and to her sensibility, to the concrete environment, and to the intersubjective relationships, particularly in terms of the two; the other, constructing a universe of non-natural objects, through a specific technique which also translates into forming human groups generally far more removed from natural elements than those organized by women'. Ibid, 97 my italics. Although it seems as if Irigaray hopes to avoid rendering woman pure *unconscious* nature and man pure *conscious* culture, that she retains patriarchal assumptions as to the predispositions of the two sexes strikes me as premature and conservative.

[58] A famous example of this is Hegel's account of women's role in relation to the ethical life (see *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 266-289).

[59] Stone, 'The Sex of Nature', 68–69.

In accounting for the physical reproductive features of bodies, as these serve as objects for scientific study, Irigaray suggests that the primordial mucous fluids of male and female bodies tend to stabilise into certain recognisable shapes and formations. The salient point Irigaray wishes to express is that sexual difference cannot be reduced to simple biology. Indeed, Irigaray regards the former understanding of sexual difference as 'empirical' and the latter 'ontological'. She suggests that: '[p]hilosophy's task is to raise this [sexual] difference to a level of thought, to a somewhat ontological level; it's been left uncultivated, left to empiricism'.[60]

Although distinguishing between 'ontological' and 'empirical' sexual difference seems to offer an attractive route out of the problem of biological essentialism, I nevertheless think that Irigaray's ontology of sexual difference lapses into a conservative essentialism. Certainly, Irigaray wishes to give a more expansive account of sexual difference than the one presented by the biological sciences. However, she retains the idea of a determining material base (this time at the 'ontological' level rather than the 'empirical' or biological) for the behaviours of men and women when she maintains that sexuate rhythms lead to particular ways of being.

Using an example to press this point: Irigaray seems to me to be claiming quite straightforwardly that it is *because* of their specific corporeal rhythms that women are necessarily more attuned to nature than men. This leads to her view that women's socio-cultural praxis is best suited to safeguarding nature – by preventing excessive pollution/ wars/ rapacious consumption of natural resources, etc - so that the social world remains in step with the rhythms of the cosmos. Due to their corporeal temporality men, according to Irigaray, 'care little about living matter and its cultural economy'.[61] The very being of men inclines them towards an instrumental treatment of nature.

It is true that an important leitmotif of Irigaray's work is the criticism that patriarchal society functions by confining women to the care and reproduction of bodies - a role

[60] Irigaray, *Why Different?*, 71.
[61] Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 194. See in this volume the essay 'A Chance for Life', written as a response to the Chernobyl tragedy, for a plainly essentialist depiction of men and women's relations to nature.

conceived as subordinate to the development of culture as this is deemed the task of men. It is also true that by theorising sexual difference under the rubric of sexuate rhythms Irigaray wishes to avoid positing embodied subjects as (i) fixed structures exemplifying idealised and timeless forms or essences, and (ii) mere biological entities from which particular behaviours can be inferred. However, rather than taking this as an opportunity to renew our understanding of sexed corporeal identities, Irigaray, by insisting that sexuate rhythms predisposes the being of men and women to act in ways that simply replicate existing gender roles, effectively shoe-horns her new ontology into traditional (patriarchal) paradigms of sexual difference.[62]

It is my contention that Irigaray is disinclined to explore the potentials for thinking sensible bodies as sites from which an infinite number of irreducible corporeal identities (or subjectivities) because this would threaten the foundational status of sexual difference in her metaphysics of human bodies. If Irigaray were to embrace the idea that *all* corporeal identities could be constructed and reconstructed out of the *same* range of infinite possible identities, then she would have to concede as anachronistic the idea that identity can only be formulated in terms of the female/ male binary – where particular identities are held to follow from a particular sex.

Importantly, for Irigaray, sexual difference is not just one difference amongst many. It is not simply one specific co-ordinate in the infinite differentiation of individuals. As we have already seen in her philosophy of nature, Irigaray rejects any immediate affirmation of the multiple. To celebrate human identity in terms of multiplicity is, for Irigaray, to endorse a nihilism where all thought of universality is dispensed with and individuals are endlessly dispersed as pure singularities unlimited by either self or other.[63] Certainly, Irigaray wishes to present a 'maximal' account of sexual difference, one that can host a manifold of corporeal identities that are not determined or fixed. But, she insists that the multiple must come after the two of sexual

[62] I wish to point out here that I concur with Irigaray when she maintains that to affirm a particular bodiliness is to concede that the modes of being available to that particular body are limited in relevant ways that are not up to us. Not to concede this is, I believe, to treat bodiliness merely as an unwelcome *constraint* to be overcome by self-conscious determination, thereby downgrading the material. My real grievance with her position is the way she all too easily recoups the values of patriarchy when describing how women might cultivate their given sexuate nature to the level of culture.
[63] See Irigaray, *Why Different?*, 145-146 and 77-79.

difference is first avowed. Indeed, Irigaray wants to claim that 'there is no identity *outside* of sexual identity'.[64]

Sexual Difference: A New Logic

It is Irigaray's principal thesis that sexual difference is an originary and absolute difference that is the condition for all other differences. As I see it, Irigaray does not only want to argue for a *logic* of sexual difference contra phallogocentrism. She also seems to suggest that sexual difference is itself *generative* of all other differences. That sexual difference may be understood in terms of a logic seems to be the aim of Irigaray's reworking of Hegel's dialectic. This reworking centres upon an analysis of the role and function of what she calls 'the limit' or 'the negative'.

Baldly put, for Hegel the universal is equated with the one that is absolute Spirit/ Consciousness (*Geist*). This absolute is not an immediate given but attains self-consciousness by way of 'the labour of the negative' - the dialectical interplay between subject and object. Here, the rational subject negates the otherness of the object[65] - which initially appears as the pure immediacy of contingent nature/ heterogeneous matter - until subject and object are wholly reconciled with each other in a single identity. At this point the object is recognised as nothing more (or indeed less) than absolute consciousness. Importantly, as Belmonte puts it, 'Hegel's ontology is...an ontology of subjectivity... The Subject becomes itself and comes to know itself by becoming other than and returning to itself'.[66]

In her reformulation of Hegel's dialectic Irigaray rejects the assertion that the universal or the absolute is a self-identical one. For Irigaray, Hegel's conception of the universal as one means that the negative can only be characterised as otherness or difference in the sense of denoting a limit or contradiction internal to a single

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[64] Schwab, 'Sexual Difference as Model', 81 my italics.
[65] 'In thinking an object, I make it into thought and deprive it of its sensuous aspect; I make it into something which is directly and essentially mine'. Hegel cited in Belmonte, Nina, 'Evolving Negativity: From Hegel to Derrida' in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2002, n. 35, p. 54.
[66] Belmonte, 'Evolving Negativity', 22. Indeed, for Hegel, Absolute Spirit is the Absolute Subject: God.

consciousness. Thus, in Hegel's dialectic, difference is only apparent and is ultimately reduced to the same.[67]

It is Irigaray's contention that dialectics can only provide a space for the thought of real alterity if the negative is recognised as constituting two concrete universals, the male and the female, rather than a conceptual limit in the consciousness of the self-same rational subject. Thus Irigaray writes:

> 'His negative is still the mastery of consciousness (historically male), over nature and human kind. The negative in sexual difference means an acceptance of the limits of my gender and recognition of the irreducibility of the other. It cannot be overcome, but it gives a positive access – neither instinctual nor drive-related - to the other'.[68]

For Irigaray, it is only by recognising and respecting the limit of sexual difference, a limit ontologically inscribed in nature itself, that 'the labour of the negative' need no longer articulate an appropriative logic that reduces all otherness to a single subject, but instead articulates a logic of love: this both maintains an interval between two irreducible subjects - woman and man - and ensures a relation between the two that is constitutive of their very subjectivities.[69] By securing the alterity of sexual difference as the absolute difference of human being, Irigaray argues that we are then able to rethink the relation between the universal and the particular outside the logic of the One such that all human subjects (women and men) can be thought in their irreducible, multiple differences.

For Irigaray, no individual subject constitutes the whole (that is, the whole of humanity, nature, spirit, being, etc) but is necessarily limited in the following two ways: (i) by the sexuate *genre* to which she or he belongs; and (ii) by the other sex. Firstly, the individual is limited by their sexuate *genre*[70] because as a particular self

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[67] This is Irigaray's reading of Hegel. A few recent commentators on Hegel have sought to problematize the common perception of him as the thinker of Identity and Totality par excellence. See Gillian Rose and Jean-Luc Nancy for example.

[68] Irigaray, *I Love to You*, 13. See also ibid, 61

[69] 'Because I love you absolutely, I, myself, am no longer absolute. Recognizing you gives me measure. Because you are, you impose limits upon me. I am whole, perhaps but not the whole. And if I receive myself from you, I receive myself from me. We are no longer one'. Irigaray, Luce, *To Be Two*, 15.

[70] Translators have tended to render Irigaray's use of the word *genre* into gender. However, following Whitford, I have left the term untranslated because 'gender' tends to invoke the sex/ gender distinction

no one individual is able to represent all the other individuals belonging to their *genre*. This means that constitutive of an individual's identity is both their distinct, non-interchangeable particularity and the fact of their belonging to the universal that is their sexuate *genre*.

Secondly, the individual is limited by the other sex in a way that installs an absolute and originary negativity at the heart of his or her subjectivity or corporeal identity. This fundamental negativity guarantees the universal as two, thus limiting individuals to a particular sexuate *genre* and so thwarting the emergence of the individual subject as '*one*, solipsistic, egocentric and potentially imperialistic'.[71] Crucially, for Irigaray, to identify oneself as an individual belonging to a sexuate *genre* must entail recognition of the other sex as that which marks the fundamental limits of one's *genre*.

From this brief discussion on Irigaray's reworking of Hegel's dialectic we should now begin to see how she believes a logic of the two, i.e. a logic of sexual difference, is capable of thinking the individual's singular, concrete uniqueness through the prior affirmation of their identity as sexed. As Iriagray puts it: '[b]ecause I'm able to situate there [in sexual difference] the difference and the negative that I will never surmount...I'm able to respect the differences everywhere...[b]ecause I've placed a limit on my horizon, on my power'.[72]

The Generative Interval of Sexual Difference

Let us now highlight the ways in which Irigaray presents sexual difference as generative of all other differences. For Irigaray, it is axiomatic that 'no world is produced without sexual difference'.[73] Accordingly, she claims that 'the relation between man and woman is paradigmatic; it is the groundless ground of

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which Irigaray does not employ. Irigaray's *genre* covers a range of meanings including: grammatical gender, kind, sort or race (human race), species (animal) and genre (artistic). Whitford suggests that the most significant meaning is that of *kind*: e.g. mankind and womankind. Whitford, M., 'Glossary' in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed, Whitford, Margaret (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1991), 17.

[71] Irigaray, *I Love to You*, 47.

[72] Irigaray with Hirsch and Olson, 'Je-Luce Irigaray', 110.

[73] Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 178.

communication, and the creative and generative locus'[74] for all human life and becoming. Sexual difference, as Irigaray understands it, is no less than the very condition for all human being, it is the condition which itself depends on no other condition - hence its originary and so privileged status in her ontology. Cheah captures this important sense of sexual difference when in an interview he says: 'the generative power of the interval of sexual difference...is the source or necessary condition of possibility of our being'.[75]

Commentators, such as Cheah, who are supportive of the idea of sexual difference as instituting a 'generative interval' capable of engendering all forms of life, hasten to point out that Irigaray is not conceiving sexual difference in solely reproductive terms. Rather, sexual difference, as we saw in our discussion of Irigaray's metaphysics of bodies, is the very ontological structure of reality; it is the concrete (not abstract) principle for human life in all its diversity and multifariousness. In my analysis of Irigaray's reconception of the divine as a 'sensible transcendental' we shall see the pertinence of the notion of a 'generative interval' persisting between women and men.

Contrary to those who prefer to view Irigaray's concept of sexual difference in terms of a 'utopic' possibility – that is, proleptically signalling the (im)possible 'event' of an alterity that the current phallogocentric (*hom(m)osexual*) symbolic order has rendered structurally impossible[76] – I have pressed for an understanding of Irigaray's sexual difference as an ontological fact. I therefore agree with Stone's contention that, in her recent works, Irigaray has been developing a 'realist essentialist' understanding of sexual difference. Realist in the sense that it describes a reality that fundamentally *is*,

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[74] Irigaray, *I Love To You*, 46.

[75] Cheah, Pheng, 'The Future of Sexual Difference: An Interview with Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell', eds. Cheah and Grosz, *Diacritics*, vol. 28, no.1 (Spring, 1998), 28. Braidotti argues along similar lines: '[t]he presence of the sexual other is not negligible... Regardless of the sexual identity and the gender of one's partner, the traces of heterosexuality on us all are undeniable'. Braidotti, Rosi, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 46.

[76] A recent example of such a reading of Irigaray's sexual difference can be found in Deutscher's monograph on Irigaray entitled *A Politics of Impossible Difference*. Here, Deutscher pushes for an understanding of sexual difference as 'the "to come" of which our culture bears the possible/ impossible trace' (190). Indeed, support for such a reading is given when Irigaray herself says: 'I am therefore a political militant for the impossible, which is not to say utopian. Rather, I want *what is yet to be* as the only possibility of a future'. *I Love To You*, 10 my italics.

independent of any socio-symbolic order or conceptual categories; and essentialist in that men and women are ascribed a being/ becoming specific to their sex.

I now want to show how treating sexual difference as an ontological fact enables Irigaray to articulate a radical 'materialist' or corporeal account of the divine in terms of what she calls a 'sensible transcendental'. I will do this by first outlining Irigaray's critique of philosophy's effacement of the 'sensible transcendental' in the construction of the (male) subject. I then go on to demonstrate Irigaray's theological conception of sexual difference as offering humanity a relation towards a different transcendence; a relation that is, she maintains, capable of affirming sensible life rather than negating it.

Philosophy's Effacing Of The Sensible Transcendental

In her book *Speculum of the Other Woman* Irigaray juxtaposes a critique of Freud's psychoanalytic theory with critical readings of texts from the history of philosophy in order to expose the blind spot that has meant that 'any theory of the "subject" has always been appropriated by the masculine'.[77] This blind spot refers to psychoanalytic theory and philosophy's inability to recognise 'woman' as more than the other of the same.

Thus, in her analysis of Freud's account of the subject Irigaray reveals how the identity of the male subject is secured by rendering 'woman' his 'specular' other. As such, 'woman' functions as a negative mirror symbolising lack, 'nothing to see' or else an obscene amorphousness, in relation to which 'man' is able to establish his identity as absolute, a self-same One safely removed from any otherness that might put his sovereign identity into question. Given this male specular economy – where the only ratified subject position is male – 'woman' drops out of the field of vision, her otherness is occluded and with it the possibility of articulating her subjectivity in her own voice.[78]

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[77] This is the title of the essay opening the middle section of Irigaray's *Speculum*, 133-146.

[78] This feeds into Irigaray's influential argument that within the phallogocentric socio-symbolic order women are only capable of speaking/ thinking/ acting insofar as they adopt the male subject position and so not *as* women. For her criticisms of Freud (and implicitly Lacan) see 'The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry', *Speculum*, 13-129.

Irigaray then skilfully demonstrates the way in which Freud's narrative of the male 'specular' subject parallels that of the male rational subject promulgated by Western philosophy. According to Irigaray, philosophy has primarily been an enterprise dedicated to the representation of the subject. She then argues that the subject is only afforded its self-presence through 'a break with material contiguity'.[79] In thinking philosophy's effacement of the 'sensible transcendental', Irigaray examines this 'break with material contiguity' that enables the emergence of the rational subject. For Irigaray, this break characterises the founding gesture of traditional metaphysics which thereby functions by means of a strict separation between the sensible and transcendental, empirical and intelligible, matter and form, real and ideal, etc. By foreclosing the material (figured in psychoanalysis as a 'cut' from the (m)other[80]) the subject is able to regard himself as the ideal ground of his own being. Moreover, all otherness is delimited to his own horizon. This means that all is the same for there is no otherness apart from its relation to the self-same subject.

In *Speculum* Irigaray finds Kant's account of the transcendental subject particularly illustrative of the self-originating, rational subject beloved of Western philosophy. Kant's critical philosophy proceeds by way of transcendental argument. For Kant, this entails logically deducing the *a priori* conditions that make experience or presence possible. One such condition Kant deduces is the transcendental subject: this subject can never be an object of experience but must be presupposed in order to account for the appearance of objects in space and time. As a formal condition for experience, the transcendental subject is not embodied; it is pure unconditioned intelligibility - the 'I think' that actively synthesises the manifold of sensory intuitions into the determinate objects that constitute our world.

Significantly, Kant's transcendental method relies upon a distinction between the empirical and the transcendental such that, as Irigaray puts it, 'between empirical and transcendental *a suspense will remain inviolate*'.[81] Only by dissociating the

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[79] Irigaray, Luce, 'The Power of Discourse', *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Whitford, Margaret, (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 123.
[80] In particular see Lacan, Jacques, 'The Mirror Stage', *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1977), 1-7.
[81] Irigaray, *Speculum*, 145.

transcendental subject from the sensible world (a passive world of 'dead' matter) it intuits is Kant able to conceive of the subject as free, spontaneous consciousness. The upshot of this is that '[i]t is man's transcendental ego – not matter or God – that constitutes the creative centre of the knowable (phenomenal) world'.[82]

In a move typical of her interrogatory approach to the phallogocentric philosophies she examines in *Speculum*, Irigaray points out the irony of the ostensibly self-same, auto-generating transcendental subject whose acts of (self-)representation can be shown to *depend* on an otherness he dare not recognise as such. This is because it is only by objectifying (and therefore effacing) his material/ maternal conditionedness or origins that the subject is produced in the first place. As Kant writes: 'I must have objects of my thinking and apprehend them; otherwise I am *unconscious* of myself'.[83]

It is because Kant's metaphysics ties subject and object together in a mirroring relation that Irigaray contends that the subject exists in a 'specular imprisonment'[84] cut off from any otherness that he has not already pre-determined. For Irigaray, it is only by refusing the split between the sensible and the transcendental that philosophy can break out of its specular imprisonment and thus allow for the expression of an otherness that has not been *a priori* determined in advance. Indeed, Irigaray wants to reveal the conditions of experience – the transcendental – to be *sensible* rather than the pure ideality presumed by Kant.[85]

Colebrook gives an incisive statement of Irigaray's 'transcendental' project: her 'method is *to open the transcendental to its empirical determination* and, at the same time, to see any determination or identity of the empirical (such as 'man' or 'woman') as produced through a transcendental logic'.[86] To conceive the transcendental as 'empirically determined' is, for Irigaray, precisely to think the 'sensible transcendental'. In doing this we are able to recognise that the otherness constitutive

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[82] Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman*, 62. See pp. 61-80 in this volume for an excellent inquiry into the Kantian subject and its *necessary* relation to (sexed) bodies/ matter.
[83] Kant cited in Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman*, 68.
[84] Irigaray, *Speculum*, 137.
[85] This is very much in line with Deleuze's desire to rethink the transcendental in empirical terms rather than as a fixed ideal schema.
[86] Colebrook, Claire, 'Is Sexual Difference a Problem?', 111my italics. See also Braidotti who writes: 'Irigaray's 'divine' [i.e. 'sensible transcendental'] aims at *materializing the* a priori *conditions* needed to achieve changes in our symbolic as well as material conditions' in *Metamorphoses*, 59 my italics.

of the subject is not the anaemic otherness of Kant's phenomenal object (an object Hegel would deride as simply revealing the 'forms of thought' rather than the concrete 'thing in itself') but rather a sexually embodied other who is to be recognised as a *subject* not represented as an *object*.

Why does Irigaray identify sexual difference as that particular otherness determining of (embodied) subject identity? Colebrook suggests this is because of its *historical* erasure in philosophical discourse. Certainly, Irigaray persistently argues that Western philosophy traditionally operates on the basis of the sexual indifference of the neuter. We could claim that this insight effectively warrants foregrounding sexual difference in particular as that which needs reconceptualisation in order to undo the phallogocentrism of Western thought - where *all* otherness is excluded for the sake of upholding the imperial (male) One.

While I agree that historically sexual (in)difference has dominated philosophical discourse, I maintain that Irigaray's ontological commitments, as she elaborates these in her later works, necessitates thinking sexual difference as *fundamentally*, not just historically, constitutive of the 'sensible transcendental'. We have seen that, for Irigaray, otherness always already exists as the universal reality of sexual difference (the originary difference) such that otherness otherness cannot be represented by a single logic but must be affirmed as the 'sensible transcendental'.

Given the affirmation of the 'sensible transcendental' the determination of the sensible is no longer to be conceived as the subject's objectification of the sensible (as this merely mirrors self as same). Instead it is, as Colebrook puts it, 'the sense of the embodied specificity of my [sexuate] identity which is gained through recognition of the (differently) embodied other'.[87] To reiterate once more, for Irigaray, the condition for the sensible (or experience) is not the logically deduced abstract 'I' that is Kant's transcendental subject but is the sensible reality of sexual difference: the transcendental is sensible.

[87] Colebrook, 'Is Sexual Difference a Problem?', 123.

In addition to wanting to breach the gap between the transcendental and the sensible (or the empirical) with her notion of the 'sensible transcendental' Irigaray also deploys this term to convey 'that which confounds the opposition between immanence and transcendence'.[88] It would be useful here to distinguish between the terms 'transcendental', 'transcendent' and 'transcendence'.

The term 'transcendental' is to be understood in its modern Kantian sense (rather than its scholastic sense) as that which 'establishes and draws consequences from, the possibility and limits of [human] experience'.[89] For Kant, these conditions are ideal, universal and necessary. They are space and time of human sensibility and the fixed, *a priori* categories of the understanding of the rational subject. The term 'transcendent' refers to that which is wholly other than, and exists wholly apart from, the sensible. For Kant, the transcendent is noumenal, which means we can have no knowledge of it. Finally, the term 'transcendence' denotes that which surpasses, exceeds or goes beyond a certain limit. It can refer to that which is irreducible to my experience or my mode of being.

We have just discussed how Irigaray refigures Kant's transcendental in corporeal terms. Importantly though, unlike Kant, she altogether rejects the idea of a transcendent realm divorced from the sensible world. She does, however, utilise the idea of transcendence to articulate an otherness or exteriority inherent in the material world. This is an immanent transcendence, one that 'always touches on and yet exceeds whatever sensible reality the subject may be experiencing'.[90] For Irigaray, transcendence is *proximate*, it is not a beyond indicative of the transcendent but neither can it ever be experienced as pure presence. Furthermore, Irigaray's transcendence is *sensible* for it is the experience of the corporeal otherness of the other sex as she or he is irreducible to the other sex.

In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* particularly, Irigaray, I contend, privileges sexual difference as the site of transcendence within the world such that women and men epitomize for each other a sensible transcendence. Although Irigaray's 'sensible

[88] Irigaray, *An Ethics*, 33.
[89] *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 907.
[90] Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze*, 69.

transcendental' is a term of multiple meanings that are interconnected, I think it helps to note two broad senses in which it is used. The first is in the more technical sense of transcendentalist philosophies and refers to our material/ maternal origins or conditionedness as this inscribes the negative of sexual difference at the heart of embodied subjectivity. The second sense is that of the transcendence incarnate in uniquely sexed bodies: here, the dissymmetrical bodiliness of men and women means that their encounters with one another places them both in relation to transcendence. It is with this evocation of the 'sensible transcendental' as a relation towards a different transcendence that the term gains, for Irigaray, its particularly religious significance.

Let us now turn to how she rethinks the divine as the 'sensible transcendental' as this anticipates an ethics of sexual difference where men and women are granted 'a birth into transcendence, that of the other, still in the world of the senses ("sensible"), still physical and carnal, and already spiritual'.[91]

Towards a Different Transcendence: The Divine as a Sensible Transcendental

For Irigaray, if feminists are to realize a 'sexuate culture', where the specificity of female (corporeal) identity/ subjectivity is no longer subsumed by the male economy of the same, then it is incumbent that we engage in a redefinition of the divine.[92] In an excellent paper on Irigaray's concept of the divine Deutscher observes that while Irigaray aims to transform the term so that it can carry different meanings to those implied by its patriarchal determinations, she does retain at least three of its traditional connotations. These are: (i) alterity, (ii) transcendence and (iii) 'guarantee' of subject identity.[93] However, we will see that Irigaray significantly alters what she believes to be philosophy and theology's (phallogocentric or masculinist) understanding of these three notions of the divine.

Before moving on to delineate the ways in which she modifies the concept of the divine it is useful to grasp from the onset Irigaray's terminology of the 'vertical' and

[91] Irigaray, *An Ethics*, 82.
[92] As she puts it: 'I don't think anyone among you [feminists] could say, 'I'm not going to consider the problem of God'. For we are, notably, in a monotheist cultural economy, subjected to a culture of the male God, the masculine Trinity'. Irigaray cited in Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference*, 92.
[93] Deutscher, Penelope, '"The Only Diabolical Thing About Women"...: Luce Irigaray on Divinity', *Hypatia*, vol. 9, no. 4 (Fall, 1994), 100.

the 'horizontal' with reference to our relation with the divine. Irigaray regards traditional Western monotheism as one that construes the human-divine relationship 'vertically'. By this she means that monotheism posits God as a supersensible entity utterly separate from the physical, sensuous world such that God signifies a transcendent ideal. This concomitantly endorses a 'rhetoric of ascent'[94] according to which man endeavours to transcend the world - which he denounces as caught up in material immanence - in order to know or become at one with the divine.

As we know, Irigaray wants to dispense with all notions of the divine as insurmountably detached from sensible life. She therefore, recasts our relation to the divine in 'horizontal' terms in order to articulate the divine as an immanent transcendence; one that does not require 'a "leap" into another world'[95] but rather men and women's mutual recognition of each other's sexuate distinctness. Interestingly, as we noted in the introduction, Irigaray does not entirely jettison the idea of a vertical relation to the divine. While she certainly rejects the concept of a supernatural God we will see that she conceives men and women's sexuate genre as offering a context for positing ideals (apposite to each sex) that would serve as 'divine horizons' enabling the 'becoming' of men and women.

I shall provide an account of Irigaray's notion of the 'sensible transcendental' as one that denotes transcendence in both its 'horizontal' and 'vertical' dimensions. It is in this way that Irigaray attempts to offer a conception of the divine that violates the split between transcendence and immanence.

The Sensible Transcendental: a 'Horizontal' Divine

Let us first consider the 'sensible transcendental' as it can be conceived 'horizontally' and which, in my opinion, gives us the clearest indication that, for Irigaray, the reality of sexual difference is divine in itself. Indeed, in *Marine Lover* Irigaray imagines her own version of the myth of an earthly paradise. We are to consider man and woman living together in 'the perception of a divine that was not opposed to them, perhaps?

[94] I take this expression from Walter Lowe in his paper 'Second Thoughts About Transcendence', *The Religious*, ed. John D. Caputo (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), 242.
[95] Irigaray, Luce, 'Equal to Whom?', *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 212.

That was not even distinct from them.'[96] The very corporeal difference between men and women presents, for Irigaray, an originary site of transcendence. In their sensuous encounters with each other men and women are (at least potentially) open to an absolute and infinite difference, namely the particular sensibility of the sexuate other.

This difference (read transcendence) maintains desire between the two of sexual difference; a desire that can never result in the appropriation of one to the other but rather guarantees the fecundity of their encounters. However, this originary transcendence is blotted out in what Irigaray regards as the original sin, namely, when man turned 'God into difference extrapolated to infinity'. For Irigaray, this renders God 'the infinitely different, but in the sense of being infinitely more, whose auto-affection depends on the reduction of us to the same... Difference located in a transcendence which is inaccessible to us?'[97]

Against this picture of God as an absolute inaccessible other, who strips this world of its own wealth of difference in order to assure His own aggrandizement, Irigaray wishes to reclaim the divine as the absolute otherness she argues can only be found in the ontological difference between the sexed bodies of men and women.[98] She urges us to be 'attentive to what *already exists*': the irreducible difference between men and women. In doing so we will then see that:

> 'The [sexually different] other is and remains transcendent to me through a body, through intentions and words foreign to me: "you who are not and will never be mine" are transcendent to me in body and in words, in so far as you are an incarnation that cannot be appropriated by me'.[99]

For Irigaray, it is by virtue of sexual difference that men and women are blessed with incarnating an absolute difference that renders the one transcendent to the other.

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[96] Irigaray, Luce, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 173.

[97] Irigaray, *Elemental Passions*, 28. We should note that while Irigaray takes this to be a classic understanding of the Christian God theologians such as Lowe argue that God envisaged as inaccessibly distant or beyond is a *modern* fabrication. Lowe, 'Second Thoughts About Transcendence', 249.

[98] For example see *Why Different?*, 58, 84, 165 and *To Be Two*, 13, 34.

[99] Irigaray, *To Be Two*, 65, 18, 85-93. Notice that Irigaray uses the term 'transcendent' here. She employs it in instances like these for its rhetorical resonance with the idea of an absolute, irreducible otherness. However, this otherness is not one that inhabits a realm removed for the sensuous world. For more on transcendence as sexual difference see *I Love to You*, 104-105.

Crucially, because the incarnate transcendence (that is, the bodily alterity) of each sex is also *transcended* by that of the other no one sex can by itself serve as the sole incarnation of transcendence.[100] Irigaray connects the corporeal reality of sexual difference to the divine in terms of a 'sensible transcendental' that ensures 'nothing more or less than each man and each woman being virtually gods'.[101]

However, while we must acknowledge sexuate bodies as inherently divine Irigaray also maintains that men and women need to bring god to life *between* them.[102] Two key and related points can be drawn from this latter claim. The first is that, for Irigaray, the divinity of sexuate bodies is only conceivable in terms of their necessary *relation* with each other. The divine is not simply the difference of the two sexes (as discrete entities) but rather that men and women constitute an 'original relationality', a 'being-two' (*être deux*) as Irigaray calls it, that requires us to think the divine in terms of the couple of sexual difference. Secondly, sexual difference institutes a space or an interval between man and woman such that one could ever be reduced to the other. We will see that Irigaray acclaims this interval as a creative, indeed divine site, one where mediation can take place between self and other, flesh and spirit, immanence and transcendence, etc, in a way that facilitates the flourishing and becoming of sexuate subjects.

Interestingly, while it is true that (in her later works at least) Irigaray emphasises the two of sexual difference, her concept of the divine as a 'sensible transcendental' evokes what Whitford calls a 'divine trinity'.[103] We can think this trinity as comprising of the two of sexual difference *plus* the interval between them. Irigaray sometimes refers to this interval elusively as the 'third term' - that which safeguards a space of inexhaustible difference between men and women.

How, then, might god be brought to life between the couple of sexual difference? For Irigaray, this requires the fostering of love and passion between man and woman so that the interval between them is a 'generative' one in the sense of enabling their

[100] This is Irigaray's criticism of Christianity's treatment of Christ as the incarnate divine. (However, she actually finds Christ a promissory figure for inaugurating an ethics of sexual difference as this goes beyond the Father-Son paradigm). See *Marine Lover*, 164-190 and *Equal to Whom?*.
[101] Irigaray, *Equal to Whom?*, 202.
[102] Irigaray, *An Ethics*, 129.
[103] Whitford, *Philosophy in the Feminine*, 167.

mutual becoming and 'spiritualisation' as two sacred and embodied subjects. This is opposed to the surreptitious appropriation of the (potentially fecund) interval for the (re)production of the same. As Irigaray laments: '[t]he passions have either been repressed, stifled and subdued, or else reserved for God... But it is never found in the gap between man and woman'.[104] As a different approach to the complex notion of the 'sensible transcendental' let us discuss in further detail how a 'generative interval' may be sustained between man and woman.

The Sensible Transcendental as a Generative Interval

Irigaray contends that for a transition to an age of sexual difference to occur a change in our concepts of 'space and time', 'place' and the 'envelopes of identity' is required. She adds that this in turn demands rethinking the trinitary configuration of matter, form and the *interval between* them, as this would transform the economy of desire that governs relations between man and gods, man and man and man and woman.[105] For Irigaray, the interval is that which contests the antithetical organisation of container/ contained, subject/ object, form/ matter, sensibility/ intelligibility, etc, characteristic of Western thought. In doing so the interval enables us to radically transform our understanding of embodiment and correlatively the relation between the two of sexual difference.

Earlier we looked at Irigaray's reconception of bodies according to a metaphysics of fluids. We saw that she complicates the picture of bodies presented by phallogocentric metaphysics as solid, self-contained entities with 'proper' boundaries, with her own vision of 'mucous bodies' as this aims to articulate the pertinence of the interval for corporeal subjects. Crucially, the interval must afford the bodies of woman and man with a place or position that is non-interchangeable, a place marked precisely by the interval, understood here as a 'limit' or 'threshold' or 'the negative', which is to be respected rather than transgressed or violated.

This is important because one of Irigaray's main criticisms of Western philosophy is its construal of woman's body as 'place' (an unacknowledged envelope or matrix by

[104] Irigaray, *The Irigaray Reader*, 71.
[105] Irigaray, *An Ethics*, 7-8.

which man is sustained during his conceptual flights), while leaving her no place of her own. For Irigaray, then, sexuate bodies are to be conceived as distinct, they have their own place. Yet equally these bodies are not discrete forms, they are not to be regarded in terms of disjunction. The interval means that male and female bodies are fundamentally intercorporeal, they are always two, as Irigaray puts it 'the relationship with the other is *inscribed* in the pre-given of my body'.[106] Thus, we find the thematics of proximity, contiguity and nearness in Irigaray's account of intersubjectivity as these attempt to express the paradoxical status of sexuate corporeal subjects as *both* situated in their own place (thus ensuring their distinct identities) *and* indissociably entwined with each other such that they are 'neither one nor two'.

For Irigaray, if god is to be brought to life as the love between man and woman, then there must be two sexually distinct subjects, the ontological reality of sexual difference must be recognised and avowed. She holds that the interval produces a space necessary for maintaining the distinct identity of the sexes. However, this space or interval of difference between the sexes is not, for Irigaray, to be regarded as an empty abyss or an impassable gulf between two differentiated yet indifferent sexuate subjects. Rather, it is one that allows for mediation between the couple of sexual difference as this guarantees their flourishing and growth.

In this space the two of sexual difference are able to enjoy relations of loving exchange. Their erotic communion is characterised by the 'caress' or 'touch' which does not seek to assimilate or negate the other's bodily alterity for the purpose of (re)producing or augmenting identity as self-same,[107] but is fecund or generative because it permits for a creative encounter between man and woman. And so we read: '[i]n this relation [between the sexually different couple], we are at least three,

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[106] Irigaray, *To Be Two*, 34. On the page of this quote, Irigaray concedes that the other can be one of my own gender but, in line with her privileging of sexual difference as the absolute alterity, she adds that to be a woman is to be ontologically related to man. Braidotti is sympathetic with this position claiming that the traces of sexual otherness 'are encrypted in the flesh, like a primordial memory bank'. *Metamorphoses*, 46. I too think sexual difference is 'inscribed in/ on' our bodies but I do not believe this to be *the* constitutive otherness of embodiment as Irigaray does.

[107] 'The caress can become a reciprocal word-touch between people who love each other and not a capture by the hand or the gaze as it's often described by male philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas', *Why Different?*, 106. See also *To Be Two*, 17-29.

each of us irreducible to any of the others: you, me and our work [*oeuvre*]'.[108] But, this creative work is not the biological reproduction of a child;[109] rather, it is that the inexhaustible excess of difference between the two sexes opens both subjects out to an experience of undetermined otherness, the 'sensible transcendental' as it were, by which they may be continuously transfigured in beauty and love: a creative act of mutual becoming.[110] The interval, as depicted by Irigaray, radicalises space and time so that man and woman are able to touch, embrace and become without dissolution of their identity.

A Spiritual Phenomenology

I believe we can elaborate this idea of a creative becoming between man and woman in terms of a 'spiritual phenomenology', as this involves what Irigaray calls 'a training of the senses' which brings 'the body to rebirth, to give birth to itself, carnally and spiritually, at each moment of every day'.[111]

What might Irigaray mean by a carnal and spiritual rebirth of the body by way of the senses? Let us recall her account of the 'mucous body'. We saw that, for Irigaray, (human) male and female corporeality are two radically different sensibilities characterised by the distinctive rhythm and flow of their mucous-fluids. The absolute otherness of the other sex means that man and woman are always a mystery to one another: they never encounter one another as fully present. The reality of the other of sexual difference forever exceeds the experiences I have of them. Given this, Irigaray claims that the sexuate other cannot be *known*, only *perceived* as this is 'to insist on transcendence here and now'[112] between the two of sexual difference.

In Irigaray's phenomenology, perception is inherently affective; as a distinctly sexuate sensibility whenever I perceive the other I am affected and I also affect the

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[108] Irigaray, Luce, 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas', *The Irigaray Reader*, 180.
[109] Irigaray is critical of the traditional conception of love between men and women as natural drives or instincts. For her, '[t]he labour of love between man and woman cannot have for its natural or state-determined objective the founding of a family'. *I Love To You*, 146.
[110] Irigaray, *Elemental Passions*, 27.
[111] Irigaray, *I Love To You*, 24. Here I am inspired by Lorraine's analysis of Irigaray's proposal for an 'art of perception' . See Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze*, 87-89.
[112] Irigaray, *To Be Two*, 14.

other in turn. The sensuous encounters between man and woman are, for Irigaray, uniquely characterised by the passion of 'wonder', for the radical alterity of the other sex means that any encounter between the two is such an unanticipatable event that the experience affects both subjects with such profundity that their very corporeal being is transformed.[113]

Stone is helpful in elucidating this ontology of corporeal change with respect to the experience of wonder between the sexes. She suggests that when the mucous-fluids constituting the sexuate body touches upon the absolutely novel (*viz.*, the body of the other sex) they spontaneously react to this by altering the circulation/ rhythm of their flow in a passionate yet cognitive response to the other that is also self-transforming.[114]

That the mucous-fluids can be thought of as responding to the other in a way that is both passionate and cognitive requires us to grasp an important distinction Irigaray makes between sensation and perception. The former, according to Irigaray, is to be affected by the other in purely passive and instinctual way such that the other is effectively reduced, and thereby lost, to the level of how they make the subject feel. The latter, however, entails a 'cultivation of the sensible' where sensibility is mediated by thought or the mental. This does not absorb the experience of the other in the simple immediacy of feeling but attempts to recognise or acknowledge difference in a way that respects the autonomy and transcendence of the other.[115]

For Irigaray, it is precisely through a 'cultivation of the sensible' that self and other are able to creatively engender one another through affective exchanges that complicate any neat distinction between auto-affection/ hetero-affection or passivity/ activity. This is because it is through sensuous contact with the other that I am able to attain a sense of my own corporeal specificity, as this is constitutive of my very selfhood. However, my embodied identity is not something that I passively acquire from my affective encounters with the other. It is also something that I creatively

[113] 'This feeling of surprise, astonishment, and wonder in the face of the unknowable ought to be returned to its locus: *that of sexual difference*'. *An Ethics*, 13, my italics.
[114] Stone, *The Sex of Nature*, 67-68. In a footnote Stone also connects the percipient and passionate mucous-fluids of sexuate bodies with Irigaray's notion of the 'sensible transcendental' (n. 7, 80).
[115] See *Two Be Two*, 40-53 and *Why Different?*, 105. Irigaray therefore attempts to overcome the mind/ body dualism of western thinking.

establish (and re-establish) for myself by imaginatively structuring or shaping my affections in particular ways.

Of course, such self-creation is only possible given the other, for both self and other affectively negotiate their fluid corporeal 'boundaries' or 'limits' as this maintains each one in their singular, but not proper or fixed, identities. Due to the radical difference of their bodies, Irigaray claims that man and woman always (or, at least, potentially can) meet one another 'as though for the first time'.[116] The wonder they experience in view of each other is generative of the most powerful and transformative affects that ensure (more than, as I will later argue, encounters with those of the same sex) the reciprocal becoming of both. For Irigaray, it is because of the unique valency of the sensible encounter between man and woman that their relationship needs to be credited with having deep spiritual significance.

Indeed, the hetero-affection (wonder) experienced upon the potent encounter with the other sex is vital for the possibility of the subject's self-transcendence, understood here as a bodily becoming that precludes the sclerosis of the subject as self-same. Such a self-transcendence is, for Irigaray, to be considered divine: it is a birth into the alterity of new and innovative ways of living in and through the body, and as such is another instance of the 'sensible transcendental'. As Braidotti puts it, Irigaray advocates, 'a path of transcendence that goes through the body, not away from it'.[117] Thus, self-transcendence is not a spiritual or mental ascent towards an incorporeal, transcendent God that demands the negation of the body but one that affirms the body in its multiple becomings - the body as a '*morphé* in continual gestation'.[118] Importantly, we should situate this self-transcendence in the context of the mutual becoming divine of man and woman as they together enjoy 'a liberation of being through the affective'.[119]

It is because Irigaray's phenomenology of perception is so pivotal to her notion of the divine as a sensible transcendental that I have regarded it as a 'spiritual phenomenology'. Such a spiritual phenomenology requires what Irigaray calls an 'art

[116] Irigaray, *An Ethics*, 12
[117] Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, 62
[118] Irigaray, *An Ethics*, 193.
[119] Ibid, 212.

of perception'[120] or a 'training of the senses'. This allows for the 'cultivation of the sensible' by which male and female bodies can become 'spiritualised' as it were, in a shared process of ongoing transfiguration that affords both with new ways of being in the world. Importantly, their becoming together is not one that is directed in a teleological manner towards any final consummation of their being that results in a single absolute identity. We can think of Irigaray's spiritual phenomenology as reworking Hegel's phenomenology of spirit which, she contends, seeks the realisation of a self-identical absolute by means of the triumphant overcoming of all otherness and materiality.

Thus far, we have explored Irigaray's notion of the 'sensible transcendental' as this conceives the divine in 'horizontal' terms. Central to this reconception of the divine is the transcendence manifest between the couple of sexual difference, which creates a generative interval between the two. I now turn to the divine regarded 'vertically' as this refers to a god specific to one's *genre*.

The Sensible Transcendental: a 'Vertical' Divine

Throughout this chapter I have argued that Irigaray depicts sexual difference as an ontological reality, rather than a future possibility or a discursive effect. We have just seen that Irigaray identifies sexual difference as an immanent yet transcendent otherness. I hope to have shown that the very reality of sexual difference is, for Irigaray, divine in itself, able to constitute (given an ethics of sexual difference) the 'sensible transcendental' between the couple of sexual difference.

Nevertheless, she asserts that symbolic (i.e. socio-cultural, linguistic/ discursive) support is needed in order to give *cultural* expression to sexual difference as an ontological fact. Although, as seems to be her position, sexual difference exists as an 'objective' truth prior to any of our 'subjective' representations, it is yet to be reflected at the civil level of social, political, religious, linguistic, judicial, etc, institutions and practices. For Irigaray, a *culture* of sexual difference does not yet

[120] Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 144.

exist. She maintains that our socio-political order needs to take its cue from, and indeed 'cultivate' the natural order of sexuate rhythms.[121]

These arguments are given as a measure against our existing mono-sexed society that represses sexual difference leaving civic life 'out of tune with our natural rhythms'[122]. We, according to Irigaray, subsequently live in an 'abstract' social world which, sundered from the sexuate rhythms of nature, is marred by sacrifice, atrophy and death in a way that is detrimental to the lives of both men and women. Only a genuinely sexuate culture, Irigaray believes, can overcome the prevailing nihilisms of our present conditions. She thus seeks a transvaluation of the sickly *ressentiment* of sexual indifference that would engender a world characterised by an ethics of sexual difference. This would provide the context for realising the generative interval between the couple of sexual difference that is the very condition for the growth and thriving of all life.

Central to the agenda of inaugurating a sexuate culture is to rethink the divine with respect to sexual difference. We have suggested that Irigaray regards the reality of sexual difference to be divine in itself, but the *implicit* divinity of sexual difference needs to be *explicitly* affirmed as such, to use Hegelian parlance. Alison Martin puts this well when she writes that: 'the universality of sexual difference for Irigaray is given and yet remains to be cultivated. It is *already and has already been incarnated* but awaits a culture able to recognize that incarnation, hence the need to constitute divine ideals'.[123] If god is to be brought to life, realised as a divine love between men and women, then, Irigaray holds, 'God' can no longer refer to the ostensibly neuter One but rather to the divine of our sexuate *genre*.

This is to conceive 'God' 'vertically' as 'the horizon of fulfilment of a gender [*genre*], not a transcendent entity that exists outside becoming',[124] and requires us (as sexuate subjects) to create and posit divine ideals. These could not signify an abstract being totally removed from sensible life but rather offer provisional points of orientation

[121] 'The social order is [to be] built on the respect for [sexuate] nature and for its cultural elaboration, only this respect can elevate the relation between the genders to a civil level' *Why Different?*, 149.
[122] Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 198.
[123] Martin, Alison, *Luce Irigaray and the Question of the Divine*, (Maney Publishing for Modern Humanities Research Association: London, 2000), 82 my italics.
[124] Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 63

that would create a horizon of possibilities specific to each sexuate *genre*. Such (sexed) divine ideals would encourage nothing less than the 'becoming divine' of men and women.[125]

Each sexuate *genre* must have, then, according to Irigaray, its own particular 'horizon of fulfilment' or 'ideality' that we are to think of as divine. Although the divine as sexed ideality is not *reducible* to the embodied subjects who individually and collectively constitute a sexuate *genre*, neither is it a metaphysical figure altogether discontinuous with the sensible world, thereby representing what could only be an impossible ideal for embodied subjects. Rather, this (sexuate) ideality would open up a passage or interval into a future without a fixed telos, enabling an ongoing process of self-perfecting for sexuate subjects that would always be anchored by a 'memory of the flesh',[126] such that the subject remains faithful to and ever more perfectly realises the sexed corporeal uniqueness that he or she has been 'graced' with.

Once more we see, with this 'vertical' formulation of the divine, Irigaray's refusal to endorse in her theories a schism between the real and the ideal, immanence and transcendence, etc, paradigmatic of phallogocentric philosophies and theologies. The divine ideality of one's sexuate *genre* is, therefore, to be seen as remaining consistent with her overall reconception of the divine in terms of the 'sensible transcendental'.

In her influential essay 'Divine Woman' Irigaray tells us that the arguments of Feuerbach in his *The Essence of Christianity* inspires her own envisioning 'God' as constituting a 'horizon of becoming' for differently sexed subjects.[127] Briefly, Feuerbach's primary thesis in the aforementioned work is that 'theology is anthropology'. He aims to show that 'God' is not an ontological reality, a supreme being that exists somewhere 'out there', but is a projection of human fulfilment or accomplishment. Thus, he advances the view that the concept 'God' must be seen in purely functionary terms as that which enables the construction of human subjectivity and socio-cultural identity. This is because 'God' reflects values and qualities that

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[125] 'God forces us to do nothing except *become*...to become divine men and women, to become perfectly, to refuse to allow parts of ourselves to shrivel up and die that have the potential for growth and fulfilment'. *Sexes and Genealogies*, 68-69.
[126] Irigaray, *An Ethics*, 217.
[127] Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 61, n. 3.

have been so esteemed by man that he considers them predicates of 'the divine' and yearns to actualise these in himself in the pursuit of his own perfection. Accordingly, Feuerbach asserts that 'God' serves as 'the mirror of man', in other words 'God' is to be understood as the idealization of man, an image of human fulfilment. This means there is ultimately no antithesis between the divine and the human subject: consciousness of God is therefore consciousness of self; love of God is therefore love of self, and so forth.[128]

Following Feuerbach, Irigaray claims that '[m]an is able to exist because God helps him to define his gender (*genre*), helps him orient his finiteness by reference to infinity'.[129] While she accepts Feuerbach's functionalist approach to the divine she contends that to date the idea of 'God' has served only as a mirror for the male subject whose self-idealisation creates 'God' in man's image. This man-made 'God' inaugurates a '*genre* of men' that affords them with a horizon of potentiality by which they may orchestrate their self-realisation and so further consolidate their (male) subject identity. However, if 'God' is a mirror that only reflects male ideality, then women are left in a state of 'dereliction', as Irigaray puts it. Under such circumstances women can only negate their sexed specificity by striving to realise themselves in accordance with male ideals; or assume their status as lack, thus serving as a negative mirror: a diabolical reflection of all that is not 'God/ Man'.

To redress the monopolisation of 'God' by the male subject Irigaray insists that: '[i]f she is to become woman, if she is to accomplish her female subjectivity, woman needs a god who is a figure of the perfection of *her* subjectivity... [A] God in the feminine gender...as an other that we have yet make actual'.[130] For a '*genre* of women' to be founded, which would provide a space or horizon for women to become *as* women, demands that women imagine and create a 'God' of their own. This 'God' would be the projection (or objective representation) of the ideals, qualities and values

[128] See Feuerbach, Ludwig, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Prometheus Books, 1989).
[129] Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 61.
[130] Ibid, 64, 72.

that could offer a focus for female becoming and self-transcendence into ever more perfect incarnations of female being.[131]

Lest we think that a 'God in the feminine *genre*' is one that presumes an ideal female essence that women must endeavour to attain, Irigaray continually emphasises that a female divine is fundamentally characterised by *becoming*: as she writes, 'God forces us to do nothing except *become*'.[132] Furthermore, a female divine as the horizon of their sexuate *genre* situates women in a collective (i.e. social) space where they can communicate with one another in a way that mediation is possible between them. Words, ideas, beliefs, aspirations, etc, can therefore be exchanged between women allowing the differences among them to be expressed and negotiated rather than suppressed. Irigaray also stresses that a 'God in the feminine *genre*' would establish a female genealogy. Women's relationships to their mothers and to each other could then be articulated and symbolised rather than discounted so as to uphold the Father-son relation as primary.

A number of feminist philosophers and theologians have criticized Irigaray's ready acceptance of a functionalist or instrumentalist account of the divine, which limits all inquiry into God to anthropology and the socio-political (as per Feuerbach). In doing so she is charged with capitulating to the very logic of the same that she so berates in Western thought. From a certain theological viewpoint, the Irigarayan divine as 'horizon of female (or male) becoming' is seen to be thoroughly reductive and idolatrous, eroding the radical otherness of God to the point that God becomes indistinguishable from women's (or men's) needs and desires. With this failure to think the sexed subject in relation to a divine that is ontologically and irreducibly

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[131] Some commentators have questioned the possibility of *consciously* projecting ideals in the creation of a 'divine' horizon, when the point for Feuerbach is that such projection is *unconscious* and, furthermore, inevitably tied up with existing social (patriarchal) beliefs and values. Anne-Claire Mulder offers a cogent response to this concern when she advises against over-emphasising the projective element of Irigaray's 'female divine' and instead stress the way in which she values 'God' as 'an act of *poiesis*: as an act of creating a world-view, of giving shape to the self, the world and the relation to the other; thus of appropriating the power of naming the world. This act entails a working through, a labouring upon, a transformation of sensible, tactile experiences of the world, of the self in the world and of the relation to the other'. Mulder, 'A God in the Feminine', *Towards a Different Transcendence*, 67. In my view, the real problem Irigaray faces, with regards to actively creating 'divine horizons', is how we could ensure that our proposed ideals do not simply perpetuate the existing state of affairs such that a 'God in the feminine *genre*' would not be as emancipatory as we might hope.

[132] Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 62.

other than self, Irigaray is subsequently held to jeopardise the possibility of ethical relations taking place either between men and women or those of the same sex. Feminist theologian Serene Jones expresses these concerns when she writes: 'how can Irigaray maintain an ethics of difference in human relations if the normative model of the God-human relation is one in which difference is reduced to a function of the subject and thereby dissolved as true difference?'[133]

In offering a response to such difficulties we need to proceed carefully, for the Irigarayan divine is a multifaceted one which must always be thought through the complex notion of the 'sensible transcendental'. I venture that while it is true that her description of the divine is reductive in the sense that she does not posit the divine as existing beyond the reality of sexual difference, she does not, however, straightforwardly reduce the divine to a mere function or instrument of the sexed subject. As I have been contending, for Irigaray the divine is the very reality of sexual difference, a reality that is *given* to human beings and which they must affirm and cultivate. She writes: 'the [sexual] difference is there. It does not have to be created from nothing. We need merely be attentive to what already exists'.[134] For Irigaray, human beings do not *create* this reality of sexual difference, rather, we could say, they incarnate it as a gift.

But why think of sexual difference as divine? Why give it this spiritual weight when we could treat it simply as an empirical fact pertaining to a secular world? I think an answer to this emerges in her ontological assessment of sexual difference as the fundamental reality that makes all being possible. In our earlier discussion of Irigaray's philosophy of nature, which in turn led to an exploration of her account human nature in particular, it was argued that she presents sexual difference as the concrete (sensible) yet unconditioned condition (transcendental) of all life and becoming. The sexuate rhythm of the two is for Irigaray originary, it is the primordial structure of the cosmos such that 'the universe...obeys certain laws [*viz.*, those of the

[133] Jones, Serene, 'This God Which is Not One: Irigaray and Barth on the Divine', *Transfigurations: Theology and the French Feminists*, eds. C.W. Maggi Kim, Susan M. St. Ville, Susan, M. Simonaitis (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 139.
[134] Irigaray, *To Be Two*, 65.

sexuate rhythms] before any sort of work of man or any creation of God'.[135] Sexual difference is thus the condition for any creative act (even God's).

Clearly, Irigaray does not regard sexual difference as one empirical fact among others. For her, women and men are no less than 'mediators of a secret, a force, an order that also touches on the divine'.[136] I believe Irigaray leaves us in little doubt that this 'force' is that of sexual difference, its eminence in her ontology - as that givenness, that 'sensible transcendental' without which nothing could be - confers upon it a divine status.

Irigaray's 'horizontal' configuration of the 'sensible transcendental' binds the ontological reality of sexual difference with the divine in such a way that her use of the term 'the divine' or 'God' cannot, I argue, be viewed simply as the appropriation of a mere rhetoric that feminists can deploy as part of a secular socio-political project for female autonomy and identity. As I see it, the ('horizontal') 'sensible transcendental' must dispute any impression that 'the divine' is something that she tendentiously grafts onto her ontology of sexual difference as that which is merely generated by sexed beings in their quest for subjectivity and cultural identity. Rather, Irigaray's notion of the divine is so intrinsic to her ontology of sexual difference that we could say, perhaps controversially, that she espouses a sort of 'onto-theology'.[137]

We know that for Irigaray the sensible is ineradicably marked by sexual difference. I am also suggesting that she considers this difference to be divine in nature. I accept that while we might concede that Irigaray depicts sexual difference as more than an ordinary empirical fact this does not necessitate thinking this difference as divine. Nevertheless, it is the particular qualities that she attributes to sexual difference that, for me at least, deeply resonate with a certain (philosophical if not theological) notion of the divine as the generative principle of all life, the unconditioned condition. As

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[135] Ibid, 90.
[136] Irigaray, *An Ethics*, 199.
[137] The term 'onto-theology' is famously utilised by Heidegger. See Heidegger, Martin, 'The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics', *The Religious*, ed. John Caputo, 67-75. Briefly, metaphysics is onto-theological for Heidegger because in thinking Being it is led to posit God as the supreme exemplification of Being and thereby as the 'ground-giving unity' of being as *causa sui*. I suggest that Irigaray's theology is an onto-theology because the being of the two of sexual difference is divine.

one commentator puts it 'Irigaray so redefines the notion of divinity that it is sometimes interchangeable with the concept of sexual difference'.[138] If we agree with this then we can say that for Irigaray the sensible is imbued with the divinity of sexual difference.

In her engagement with Hegel's phenomenology, particularly in *I Love to You* (and some of the essays in *Sexes and Genealogies*), Irigaray is keen to emphasise that the sensible is not bereft of spirit, it is not, as Hegel thinks, a simple immediacy, a bare facticity that needs to be instilled with spirit by way of the labour of the concept.[139] For Irigaray, 'spirit' is not pure ideality, it does not refer to the Absolute as pure mind/ consciousness or incorporeal Subject: God. On this she is quite plain: '[o]f course we are spirit... But what is spirit if not the means for matter to emerge and endure in its proper form, its proper forms? What is spirit if it forces the body to comply with an abstract model that is unsuited to it? That spirit is already dead. An illusory ecstasy in the beyond'.[140]

The universal form of sexual difference endows matter, the sensible, with spirit. Spirit is inseparable from the sexed body; indeed, the sexed body *is* spirit. It strikes me that when Irigaray talks about 'spiritualising' the body we can take this to be synonymous with her idea of 'becoming divine'. This is because she means the same thing by these two expressions: namely, the fulfilling of our sexuate natures. Thus, as a sexed female human being, Irigaray writes: '[m]y project is regulated on the basis of my natural identity. The intention is to assure its cultivation so that I may become who I am. Equally, it is to spiritualise my nature in order to create with the other'.[141]

Once again we should not prematurely assume that Irigaray endorses the idea of an ideal female essence that women must strive to realise in a teleological way.[142]

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[138] Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference*, 95.
[139] 'Hegel, like most people, forgets that natural immediacy is not, in a certain sense, absolute nor simple immediacy. In nature itself, nature meets its limit. This limit is indeed found in *generation*, but is also, horizontally, in the *difference* between female and male. Besides, these two dimensions come together'. Irigaray, *I Love to You*, 41.
[140] Irigaray, *I Love to You*, 25.
[141] Ibid, 39.
[142] 'The fact of being a woman, and of having to always realize my own gender [*genre*] more perfectly, provides me with an anchoring in my identity which must not for all that be fixed and unchanged'. Irigaray, *Why Different?*, 160.

Instead we should see that the accent is always on 'becoming' in recognition, nevertheless, that our sexed bodiliness informs in significant ways the 'shape' or 'mode' of our becoming. If human beings are always already spirit, always already divine, by virtue of their sexuateness, then it is not a matter of 'becoming divine' as if we were not so already, but rather *recognising* and *realising* the divinity incarnate within us as sexual difference.

In this discussion of Irigaray's 'vertical' formulation of the sensible transcendental I hope to have reinforced my claim that she regards sexual difference to be divine in itself, and to have shown that she does not simply rehearse the Feuerbachian argument that 'theology is anthropology' such that 'the divine' is understood as little more than a human projection. Her philosophy of nature, which is concomitant with her realist conception of sexual difference, guards against a subjective appropriation of the divine, for sexual difference is that which is given, not created or constituted by thehuman mind or desire, it is a (divine) reality anterior to any subject. The fundamental reality of sexual difference must, according to Irigaray, guide our spiritual, ethical and socio-political practices. Indeed, for Irigaray, these aspects of civic life are necessarily interconnected for they should all serve the purpose of cultivating our essential sexuate natures as this enables our 'becoming divine': the perfecting, expanding and affirming our unique sexuateness, which is achieved always in relation with the sexuate other. In her words: '[b]oth man's and woman's actions have to be directed towards a respect for the natural world, including the natural world of our body, and also direct creation towards the blossoming of human activity, not its enslavement'.[143]

Conclusion

I have wanted to show that for Irigaray there is nothing in reality that is more basic than sexual difference. Even our concept of the divine must conform to this fact. I have argued that Irigaray's notion of the sensible transcendental rethinks divine transcendence as the radical otherness of the other of sexual difference. This is Irigaray's formulation of an immanent or material transcendence. An ethics and

[143] Ibid, 160.

theology of sexual entails 'respect for the other [of sexual difference] whom I will never be, who is transcendent to me and to whom I am transcendent'.[144] We have also seen that for Irigaray the reality of sexual difference needs to be cultivated by way of the socio-symbolic order such that it may flourish and realise itself as the divine reality that it is. Hence, I maintained, Irigaray's call for the creation of divine horizons for women and men.

Although I have been keen to stress the irreducibility of sexual difference for Irigaray, I think that she hints at an otherness in excess of sexual difference that would belie its primary status in her ontology, and would also require us to revise our notion of the divine. This otherness is intimated in the idea of the 'generative interval' said to persist between man and woman. We noted that Irigaray sometimes refers to this interval as a 'third term', thus indicating that it cannot be reduced to either of the poles of sexual difference: male or female. The interval of difference is so excessive that even Irigaray must admit that it cannot be wholly expressed by the terms of sexual difference. The interval fractures the dyad of the couple of sexual difference introducing a 'third term' that opens out towards an unspecified otherness that may well be more archaic than sexual difference itself and which could also point to a divine *beyond* sexual difference.

Following an earlier suggestion, I would argue that the irrepressibility of the interval means that Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference is best understood, not strictly as a 'being-two' (*être deux*), but rather as a trinitarian 'being-three', in the sense of the couple of sexual difference and the interval between and pointing beyond them. For Irigaray, the divine is profoundly implicated in the notion of the interval as a space for difference. On the one hand, she can be interpreted as regarding the interval as divine because it is the site where man and woman engage in a mutual spiritual creation. This is implied by comments such as: 'I discover the divine *between us*, conceived by us but not combined with us, existing between each of us. We give birth to it... God reveals himself as the work [*l'oeuvre*] of man and woman'.[145] On the other hand, she sometimes seems to envisage God beyond the parameters of sexual difference as that which provides a space for sexual difference: '[w]hile God

[144] Irigaray, *I Love To You*, 104.
[145] Irigaray, *To Be Two*, 13 my italics.

can help to arrange space, space-time, he never takes "the place of". He lets difference be achieved, even invites it to happen. He does not fulfil it'.[146] In the next chapter, I shall question this ambiguous status of the interval in Irigaray works and will argue that it creates a number of difficulties for her philosophy of sexual difference.

[146] Irigaray, *An Ethics*, 167. See also in this work Irigaray's depiction of God as 'subtending the interval, pushing the interval toward and into infinity' (48) and '[c]ould it be that God is he who intervenes so that there should be reciprocal limitation of envelopes for both [man and woman]? (93).

Chapter 4

Irigaray With Derrida: The Sensible Transcendental and *Différance*

Thus far we have examined Irigaray's notion of the sensible transcendental. I have sought to show the way in which this idea is inseparable from the ontological difference of the two of sexual difference. For Irigaray, female and male sensibilities constitute a material difference permanently inscribed within immanence, such that immanence cannot collapse into self-sameness or univocity. In concluding the previous chapter, I noted the somewhat perplexing status of 'the interval' or 'third term' in Irigaray's work, as this refers to the creative, fecund space between the two of sexual difference. It seems that this interval may be construed either as: (i) constituted by the two of sexual difference conceived as originary identities (female and male); or (ii) that which is *prior* to sexual difference, such that sexual difference is itself an effect of something else, something that transcends sexual difference.

In this chapter I want to explore these two approaches to the interval with respect to thinking sexual difference and the divine. Irigaray typically regards the interval as the site between the two of sexual difference conceived as originary. I will argue that she tends to emphasise the *absolute* difference between female and male sensibilities to the extent that it is difficult, if not impossible, to account for the relation between the two. This relation is crucial because the two of sexual difference are supposed to sustain an interval of difference between them that ensures a space for the flourishing of embodied subjects in their irreducible differences, as these bodies have been afforded a certain corporeal integrity by their essential sexed identity.[1] However, I hold that if the two of sexual difference are understood in terms of their absolute difference, then the interval of difference between them functions disjunctively rather than generatively. The result of this is that we are left with two subjects who are completely foreign to each other and each caught up in the somewhat abstract immanence of their sexed corporeality.

[1] This sense of bodily integrity disappears with Deleuze because any bodily specificity is actually reductive of pure material immanence (life), which is essentially indeterminate and thus calls for the dissolution of all determinate forms so that its impersonal, inorganic flux is maintained as primary.

To overcome these difficulties in Irigaray, I turn to the work of Jacques Derrida in order to rethink the interval, and the idea of the sensible transcendental, in terms of *différance*. Sexual difference can then be seen as an effect of the 'intervalings' or 'spacings' of *différance*. This is the second approach to thinking the interval. I shall suggest that Derrida's *différance* not only prevents the 'absolutising' of sexual difference but also avoids the problematic prioritising of sexual difference over other differences that we find in Irigaray's philosophy. Furthermore, although Derrida desists from regarding *différance* as divine in itself, it is a notion that, nevertheless, has theological import. This is because *différance* can be shown to provide the conditions for the (im)possibility of the divine as that which is always 'to come' (*à-venir*). *Différance* hints at an otherness or a transcendence that disturbs immanence conceived as the process of signification: the Derridaen text.

However, although Derrida appears to answer the difficulties discerned in Irigaray's work, I will argue that his notion of *différance* fails to think the immanent/ transcendence distinction in a way that avoids their severance from each other. I shall claim that *différance* leaves us with the abstract immanence of the text, an immanence that can only ever destabilize and negate corporeal identities and remains eternally haunted by the transcendent 'wholly other' that is always 'to come'. In concluding this section, I will contend that neither Irigaray nor Derrida are able to construct an immanent transcendence in a way that avoids reintroducing a fundamental break between the two, where such a break is to the detriment of material life in all its differences and becoming.

Questioning 'the Interval'

I think that Irigaray's model of sexual difference equivocates between positing the sexually different other as *irreducibly* other and/ or *absolutely* other. But these two senses of otherness are distinct and should not be conflated. The other who is irreducible to me can still share things in common with me and can be conceptualised by me without being reduced to my concepts. However, the other who is absolutely other has nothing in common with me whatsoever; their alterity is so radical that they must remain utterly unknown to me.

Irigaray often depicts the difference between the sexes in terms of their irreducibility. For example, she states that men and women 'cannot be substituted one for the other... *Whatever identifications are possible*, one will never exactly occupy the place of the other – they are irreducible one to the other'.[2] The point emphasised here is that while men and women may be able to identify with one another in some ways their identities are not interchangeable or reversible: maleness cannot assume femaleness.[3] I believe Irigaray is right to insist that the two of sexual difference are irreducible to one another.

However, there are a number of occasions in her work when she seems to make the more controversial claim that the being of men and women is different not just in *some* respects but in *every* respect, such that the other of sexual difference is not only irreducibly other but is absolutely other. This impression is given in her frequent descriptions of the sexually different other as 'transcendent', as 'mystery', as 'foreign', to the extent that 'men and women belong to different worlds'.[4] If this is the case, then it is hardly surprising that 'the other who is forever unknowable is the one who differs from me sexually',[5] and that 'I cannot know you [the sexually different other] in thought or in flesh. You are transcendent to me, inaccessible in a way'.[6]

I do not know how far Irigaray is simply being polemical with such comments. Perhaps she simply wishes to stress in a particularly forceful way that men and women are different in important ways, and that this cannot be overlooked in the name of some generic humanity. However, it is my view that her philosophy of sexual difference *demands* a conception of the sexually different other as absolutely other. I will outline why the notion of absolute otherness is problematic shortly. For now I want to offer four reasons why I think that Irigaray's ontological and

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[2] Irigaray, *An Ethics*, 13.
[3] Although we might want to say that a man is able to adopt femininity, as this is culturally constructed, Gatens makes a pertinent point when she says that there is a qualitative difference between the kind of femininity 'lived' by men. A feminine male is not the same as a feminine female. Gatens, Moira, *Imaginary Bodies*, 9.
[4] Irigaray, *Why Different?*, 85.
[5] Irigaray, *An Ethics*, 13.
[6] Irigaray, *I Love To You*, 103.

theological project entails that the two of sexual difference are to be conceived in terms of their radical alterity.

The first is to guarantee an interval of ineffaceable difference – namely, sexual difference – that would prevent the determination of all differences according to a single absolute standard (for example, the male as in phallogocentrism). For Irigaray, without the two of sexual difference as the 'paradigmatic interval of difference'[7] we are unable to guard against the appropriative machinations of the economy of the same.

The second reason is that by conceiving the two of sexual difference as absolutely other she is able to maintain the *primacy* of sexual difference. In her contentious claim that race and 'other cultural diversities' are 'secondary' to the problem of sexual difference with respect to identity,[8] Irigaray makes it clear that she considers sex to be *the* difference that makes *all* the difference to our identities. If sexual difference is understood simply as an irreducible otherness constitutive of one's identity then it would be difficult to say why we should uphold this difference as uniquely significant over all other differences.

Thirdly, her ontological understanding of sexual difference as a radical difference between the corporeal-spiritual being of man and woman means that this absolute difference must be reflected at the discursive level. For Irigaray, then, the male and female socio-symbolic orders are to be regarded as entirely distinct from each other. This is why she paradoxically asserts that the thought of *le féminin* (in positive terms) is impossible within the male sexual economy of phallogocentrism.[9]

Finally, the casting of the sexually different other as absolutely other is crucial to her notion of the 'sensible transcendental'. We have seen that she refigures humanity's relation to the divine so that this is no longer understood as a relation to an

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[7] This expression is Butler's, 'The Future of Sexual Difference', 28

[8] Irigaray, *I Love To You*, 47. For a critique of Irigaray's failure to recognise the way in which sex difference is 'marked' by racial difference see Armour, Ellen T., *Deconstruction, Feminist Theology and the Problem of Difference: Subverting the Race/ Gender Divide* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 103 –135.

[9] 'I am a woman. I am a being sexualized as feminine. I am a sexualized female. The motivation of my work lies in the impossibility of articulating such a statement'. *This Sex*, 148-149.

incorporeal God, conceived as radically other and transcendent, but as a relation to the other of sexual difference, whose distinct sensibility is said to constitute a transcendence in the empirical world.

It seems to me that Irigaray's formulations of sexual difference in terms of the model of the two of sexual difference and the corporeal subject as 'neither one nor two' belies the fact that she wishes to maintain two ultimately incompatible things. These are: (i) that the difference of sexual difference is absolute; and (ii) that the subject is understood as 'not-One'. In the former case, the careful safeguarding of the incommensurable difference between the sexes ineluctably slides into absolutising sexual difference. In the latter case, the primacy of sexual difference in thinking subject identity is undermined once we admit, as we must, that there are a multiplicity of differences constitutive of our identities, some of which are equally important as sexual difference. The idea of the subject as 'not-One' means that otherness is always inscribed at the heart of identity, and invites us to conceive the individual in terms of multiplicity and so outside the circuits of self-same identity.

However, the notion of a multiplicity of irreducibly different embodied subjects renders problematic Irigaray's claim that we are to articulate identity through a logic of sexual difference. This is because it would be difficult to precisely demarcate what is proper to female and male embodied subject identity without asserting from the onset two distinct, positive identities: female and male. To establish sexuate identity in this way would be to endorse a non-relational (non-dialectical) account of identity, for it entails the immediate positing of identity, that is to say, an identity undetermined by otherness.

If we work through the ambiguities in Irigaray's writings – a very un-Irigarayan approach – we find that she is forced into one of two positions that she would not wish to endorse. The first is the positing of male and female identity as absolutes. The second is the collapse of the female/ male dichotomy in favour of multiple subjects. These two positions entail a departure from Irigaray's conception of the interval. If the two of sexual difference are absolute others then the interval between them becomes an insuperable void securing the two sexes in their self-contained identities. If, however, we no longer think difference through the male/ female

dichotomy then the interval is no longer *exclusively* marked by sexual difference but by differences in general.

I have already outlined why I believe that Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference needs to work with an understanding of sexual difference as absolute. I now want to examine the implications of such a model of sexual difference. Thereafter, in seeking to address the difficulties detected in Irigaray's work, I turn to Derrida's philosophy of *différance* as this seeks to eschew the positing of absolute identities by conceiving individuals in terms of multiplicity.

The Problem of Absolute Difference

Why should we find rendering the other of sexual difference as absolutely other objectionable? This, I maintain, is due to the Hegelian argument that absolute alterity is the same as absolute identity for both may be characterised as simple self-relation. Reflecting upon the relation of identity and difference in his *Science of Logic* Hegel writes that: '[b]ut difference is only identical with itself in so far as it is not identity but absolute non-identity. But non-identity is absolute *in so far as it contains nothing of its other* but only itself, that is, *in so far as it is absolute identity with itself*.[10] Thus, he claims that '[d]ifference in itself is self-related difference'.[11]

To the extent that Irigaray conceives of sexual difference in terms of their absolute difference she undermines the idea of the couple of sexual difference as an 'original relationality', a '*être deux*', and effectively advances a non-relational account of male and female corporeal identities. Clearly this is not what Irigaray intends. For her, sexed identity is necessarily relational: each sex represents a concrete 'limit' (or 'negative') that serves to mark the boundaries of one's sexuate *genre*, the *genre* that provides the individual with their sexed specificity. This limit must be respected as that which affords the two of sexual difference their particular sexuate identity.

If Irigaray's relational account of sexed identity centres upon the notion of 'the limit', then a key question must be whether this limit enables mediation between self and

[10] Hegel, G.W.F, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Humanity Books, 1969), 413.
[11] Ibid, 417.

differently sexed other such that the latter is a constitutive part of self-identity (inscribed within the self and not outside it), or whether the limit functions as a rigid line of demarcation establishing male and female identities disjunctively. I believe the latter is the case. To show this I want to distinguish between three notions of difference and observe their relation to subject identity in particular. These notions are: absolute difference, positive difference and negative difference. I shall argue that Irigaray vacillates between the first two as part of her critical response to Hegel whom she believes treats difference in terms of what we are calling negative difference.

Let us explain 'negative difference' first. This is difference understood as all that is 'not-self'. Here, otherness has no content of its own, it is not a positive other but is simply a 'not', a negation of the self as the only positivity. We know that for Irigaray this other is merely the 'other of the same'.

'Absolute difference' is pure difference. Hegel points out that pure difference only ever refers to itself and so is not defined in relation to anything else. Absolute difference becomes absolute identity precisely because in securing itself as difference it is rendered self-same, i.e. absolute identity. If we think that positing the other as absolute otherness or difference is a profoundly ethical gesture, one that safeguards the other's otherness, then we are quite misguided. What actually happens is that we disavow our relation to otherness and thereby consolidate our own identity all the more.

In addition, the absolute other becomes unthinkable. This is because the absolute other's terms of reference are excluded from our own. Self and absolute other are made blind to one another because the terms in which they are to be understood are deemed radically disparate. I therefore agree with Hutchings when she writes that: 'relying on a notion of radical alterity actually closes off the possibility either of recognizing difference or of identifying the conditions of possibility for such recognition'.[12] By hailing the other of sexual difference as an absolute other Irigaray not only promulgates a non-relational account of sexed identity but also renders the differently sexed other wholly indeterminate or noumenal. The absolute other is an

[12] Hutchings, Kimberly, *Hegel and Feminist Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 160.

abstract other who far from 'jamming' the logic of the same ensures that it ticks along nicely.

But if the absolute other is ultimately indeterminate how could it be identified, for example, as the other of sexual difference?[13] If it is the case that Irigaray takes sexual difference to be the exclusive mark of radical otherness, then she may be seen to *over*-determine absolute alterity such that what is theoretically unknowable is rendered a thoroughly transparent identity. We could say that here Irigaray is attempting to conceive sexual difference as a 'positive difference', understood as an absolute otherness *determined* as something in particular: sex.

While positive difference allows for the *recognition* of radical otherness as sexed it also presumes a non-relational account of sexed identity, due to the fact that *prior* to one's recognition of the sexuate other one's own sexed identity has already been established. This is why in Irigaray's later works we find ourselves pondering with Deutscher: 'images of a peaceful, comfortable encounter between a man and a woman, each saying of the other, with confidence: here is difference'.[14] Sexed identity on this model is not the effect of the reciprocal (i.e. dialectical) constitution of 'self' and 'other', it is not relational, but is an immediate, *a priori* affirmation of identity and difference. A number of feminists are disappointed with Irigaray's equation of radical otherness with sexual difference, arguing that she effectively colonises radical alterity and prevents this notion from signalling a multitude of ever changing identities.[15]

By making these distinctions between the various understandings of 'difference' that I believe Irigaray works with, I hope to have shown that while she is right to want to dispense with difference construed as mere negation - a 'negative within the determinations of the one'[16] (which is no difference at all) - her concerted efforts to

[13] A striking example of such a move by Irigaray is her oft repeated comment '[w]ho or what the other is, I never know. But the other who is forever unknowable is the one who differs from me sexually'. *An Ethics*, 13.
[14] Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference*, 121.
[15] For example, Butler argues that insofar as Irigaray identifies otherness solely with the feminine 'she fails to follow through the metonymic link between women and [...] other Others, idealizing and appropriating the "elsewhere" as the feminine. But what is the "elsewhere" of Irigaray's "elsewhere"? [W]hat and who is excluded in the course of Irigaray's analysis?' Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 49.
[16] Martin, *Irigaray and the Question of the Divine*, 130.

safeguard difference *as* difference actually end up absolutising difference. Her conception of the other of sexual difference as radically other has the curious effect of making the sexed other both completely unknowable and wholly transparent as 'male' or 'female'.

On Prioritising Sexual Difference

We have seen the way in which the idea of absolute otherness slides into absolute identity. Let us now examine three consequences of Irigaray's prioritisation of sexual difference. The first is the worry that by treating sexual difference as originary, and prioritising it for that reason, Irigaray's ontological schema effectively secondarizes all other differences. Commenting on the nature of the difference between a man and a woman and between two women she says: 'Let's say between a man and a woman the negativity is...of an *ontological*, irreducible type. Between a woman and another woman it's of a much more *empirical* type'.[17] In our discussion of Irigaray's metaphysics of bodies we said that for her women and men are 'ontologically' different due to the fundamental distinctness of their corporeal being, understood as two distinct rhythms that give the mucous-fluid body of each sex its specific temporality. We took 'empirical' differences to mean the 'shapes' or 'forms' that bodies stabilise into and which are the objects of study for the biological sciences. Certainly, for Irigaray, sex, as the only ontological difference, is more primary or original than other differences, such as race, sexuality, age, etc, which depend upon the ontological reality of sexual difference as the condition of their expression. However, I wonder on what basis we can foreground it as more fundamental *ontologically* than other corporeal differences? [18]

A metaphysics that privileges the female and the male as the only ontological reality and holds that all other differences are merely 'empirical' seems to cast doubt on the very reality of those other differences. Indeed, the various ('empirical') shapes that the rhythm and flux of sexed mucous-fluids provisionally settle into seem to be somewhat phenomenal and inessential compared to the ontological reality of sexual difference itself. Although Irigaray's metaphysics of sexed mucous-fluids seeks to

[17] Irigaray, 'Je-Luce Irigaray', 110.
[18] Politically yes, for the purpose of feminism, but ontologically no.

account for the multiple becomings of female and male bodies, these bodies as they are 'individuated' according to their particular empirical differences have no *ontological* significance apart from their sexuateness. Thus, whatever differences there may be between women (or between men) it is only their sexuateness that is of any import to their being. With this hierarchization of difference in terms of 'ontological' and 'empirical' we end up repeating the very logic of the same in our attempts to articulate the differences between women for it is only the shared fact of being sexed female that has any ontological value.

The second difficulty that results from prioritising sexual difference is an inevitable valorisation of heterosexuality. That Irigaray's philosophy is heterosexist is a claim ranking alongside her purported essentialism for dividing opinion among her readers. It is important to recognise, before any immediate indictment of her work as heterosexist, that in her descriptions of the carnal relations between the heterosexual couple she is critical of a traditional understanding of this as simply a physical act driven by biological instinct. In expounding an ethics of sexual difference, she offers an alternative conception of the relation between the sexes as one that is spiritually transformative, enabling the mutual becoming of two different subjects. Nevertheless, Irigaray's ontology and theology, particularly as I have detailed the latter in terms of a 'spiritual phenomenology', situates radical otherness (or transcendence) with the differently sexed other in such a way that, as Butler puts it, 'heterosexuality becomes the privileged locus of ethics'[19] and also, I would add, spiritual practice.

Finally, with Irigaray the difference between male and female becomes not just the *paradigmatic* interval of difference but the *only* interval of difference. Thus, it is only through an encounter with an other who is sexually different from me that I will (somehow) experience the greatest wonder and be affected and spiritually transformed by the most profound transcendence. According to Irigaray, only a radical alterity is capable of rousing in me the passion of wonder as this affects my sensible being/ becoming. This means that my encounter with those of the same sex, those who differ from me only 'empirically', tends to confirm me in my sameness for the

[19] Butler, 'The Future of Sexual Difference', 28.

difference between us is not great enough to affect me in a radically transformative way. Although this may not be her explicit intention, it seems to me that for Irigaray only men and women can constitute for each other a 'sensible transcendence'. According to Irigaray: '[p]leasure between the same sex does not result in that immediate ecstasy between the other [of sexual difference] and myself...it does not produce in us that ecstasy which is our [i.e. the two of sexual difference] child, prior to any child'.[20] We can think this child as related to the mutual becoming of both sexes. By limiting transcendence to the other of sexual difference, Irigaray's ethics and theology has the effect of making my experiences of, and relationships with, those of the same sex rather mundane. Yet we might wish to surpass such a reductive vision of transcendence, preferring instead an ethics and theology that conceives individuals as irreducible singularities capable of inspiring our awe and passion such that we seek to create and become with all others in relations of love.

I have argued that a certain trajectory can be followed in Irigaray's philosophy which leads to absolutising the difference between the sexes. This trajectory begins with her ontology, which takes sexual difference to be originary. Male and female identities have, therefore, been established *prior* to their relations with each other. The interval between them, then, will always be a disjunctive one, securing their identities as absolute difference. In seeking to overcome this slide into absolutising the two of sexual difference we could develop the idea of the subject as 'not-One', which Irigaray also advocates in her work. However, her ontology does not allow her to relinquish a model of sexual difference in terms of the male/ female dichotomy, hence, she does not push this idea of the subject as 'not-One' to the point where that dichotomy breaks down and subject identity is articulated in terms of multiplicity rather than the male/ female binary.

The work of Derrida is interesting here because his notion of *différance* suggests that sexed identity is itself an effect of a more general differentiating process, whereby multiple intervals of difference arise between multiple provisional identities. We shall now engage with Derrida's work in order to rethink sexual difference outside the male/ female binary, and also to see whether the infinite intervals of pure difference,

[20] Irigaray, 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas', *The Irigaray Reader*, 180.

no longer circumscribed by sexual difference alone, offers a renewed understanding of the divine.

Différance: Rethinking The Interval

We know that Irigaray's metaphysics treats sexual difference as an 'immediate natural given'. It is the 'sensible transcendental' - the material condition - for all life and becoming, and must be regarded as originary. However, from a Derridaen perspective Irigaray can be criticized for positing sexual difference as an original presence rather than an effect of an even more basic condition. For Derrida, this condition is that of 'pure difference' and is integral to his notion of *différance.*

In aiming to destabilise a 'metaphysics of presence' Derrida's neologism *différance* re-describes the conditions for all determinate beings in space and time in terms of a 'primordial non-self-presence'. If we accept that the condition of all determinate differences is pure, indeterminate difference itself, i.e. *différance*, then it could be argued that to render 'the male' and 'the female' as an original presence is to efface the conditions that made this difference possible, namely *différance.* 'The male' and 'the female' are thereupon naturalised and absolutised as originary in a way that prevents alternative determinations of pure difference. In order to clarify further the steps of this argument an analysis of Derrida's notion of *différance* is required.

In place of Heidegger's Being, Derrida posits *différance* as a quasi-causality, quasi-origin that is even 'older' than the ontological difference.[21] *Différance* is not an ontological reality, it neither 'is', nor 'is not'. It cannot be construed as, either an original presence or absence, positivity or negativity, subject or object but is the very slippage and disruption of such metaphysical distinctions. We can, Derrida writes, think of *différance* as 'the nonfull, nonsimple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus, the name *origin* no longer suits its'.[22] Indeed, *différance* is a 'non-originary origin'. It is the condition for all determinate identities but nevertheless it is

[21] Derrida, Jacques, '*Différance*' , *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 75. Briefly, the ontological difference is the difference between Being (*Sein*) and beings (*seindes*), i.e. the difference between the 'question of the meaning of Being' (the ontological) and beings perceived here and now as presence (the ontic).
[22] Ibid, 64.

not a primordial *arche*. This is because it is never at one with itself at any one time but rather names a process: a ceaseless process of differentiation that cannot be tied to a specific start (or end) point that is not itself an effect of this process.

Différance is never present, we never see *différance*, but it is intimated by the 'trace'. Roughly understood, the trace, like *différance*, is not substantive but is inscribed in all that is present as a mark that signals towards otherness, an otherness that is absent yet perturbs the present precisely by its absence. Drawing upon the structuralism of Saussure, Derrida argues that no sign – which need not be limited to its linguistic sense but can be generalised to mean any determinate identity or formation conceived in space and time (for example, bodies, powers, concepts, etc)[23] – carries meaning by virtue of itself, but is only rendered meaningful through its relation with other signs. All meaning is differential: as signs refer to other signs, which in turn refer to other signs, *ad infinitum*, their meaning is continually differing and deferring without final closure.

Although a sign gives the illusion of fully present meaning it belies the way in which its meaning is constituted through its shifting relations with other signs. These other signs do not themselves appear but are 'present' in their absence, present as traces. All meaning is, therefore, provisional and all presence is marked by absence. The undecidability of meaning, the interplay of signs as absent-presence and present-absence - through which meaning is both possible and impossible for the promise of presence is forever denied by the trace - points to an origin that is not a fixed absolute or foundation, but is the 'non-originary origin' *différance*: a play of differences, of differentiation that is always already in effect. From this we should see that, for Derrida, *différance* is not only the condition of determinate things but characterises their very being as inherently mutable, rather than fixed as essence or substance.

A further way of understanding *différance* is as a process of 'intervalings'. In his seminal paper *Différance* Derrida writes that:

[23] '[W]e will designate as *différance* the movement according to which language, *or* any code, any system of referral in general, is constituted "historically" as a weave of differences'. Ibid, 65.

> '[a]n interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present, that is, in our metaphysical language, every being, and singularly substance or the subject'.[24]

For Derrida, no determinable 'thing' (for example, a being, a body, a sign, etc) is ever self-present. Things are never perfectly self-contained but are always already bound up with otherness: they are 'not-One'. Thus, a thing's identity is never given prior to its relations with others but is constituted and re-constituted precisely through a process of differentiation or 'differencing-from' others, which entails 'the active interval or spacing that is necessary for all distinction'.[25]

The interval in Derrida's work is not pre-set between two pre-determined identities, e.g. female and male. For Derrida, there is not just one fundamental interval of difference but many. *Différance* is generative of infinite intervals and effectively establishes a dynamic realm of 'intervalings', where a thing's identity is never once and for all but is continually differing and being deferred in fluid, ever-changing relations with others.

How does the idea of *différance* as 'intervaling' allow us to rethink: (i) sexual difference outside the male/ female binary; and (ii) a divine alterity irreducible to the couple of sexual difference? I will address the question of sexual difference first before turning to that of the divine which I will discuss in relation to Derrida's 'materialism'.

Différance and Sexual Difference

In her book *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz makes a pertinent distinction between sexual *difference* and sexual *identity*. She argues that:

> '[i]t is clear that there must be a relation between sexual difference and sexual identity; sexual difference, though, cannot be understood, as is commonly the

[24] Ibid, 66.
[25] Belmonte, 'Evolving Negativity', 19.

> case in much feminist literature, in terms of a comparison and contrast between two types of sexual identity *independently* formed and formulated. Instead it must be seen as the very ground on which sexual identities and their external relations are made possible'.[26]

For Grosz, sexual difference is no less than the intervals or spacings of infinite differences that are constitutive of sexual identity and yet are always erased in any determination (or identification) of sexed bodies. It is not the case, as Irigaray seems to suggest, that sexual difference is primordially pre-figured as 'female' and 'male', with an interval persisting between the two that functions to preserve them in their distinct identities. Such a model of sexual difference limits the interval of difference to the two of sexual difference. Here the interval is not so much generative of difference but actually impedes the expression of difference beyond the male and the female.

Against this restrictive conception of the interval, we can use Grosz's insights, which in turn have been informed by Derrida, to think of it as 'nonlocalizable relationality'.[27] As such, it would be impossible to limit the location of the interval to a relation between two fixed bodies, for example, the male and the female. Instead, the interval would describe the very process of differentiation between volatile bodies that are in ever-shifting relations with each other such that their sexual identities are always under revision. Derrida himself claims that to conceive sexual difference according to a 'logic' of *différance* would liberate 'the field of sexuality for a very different sexuality, a more multiple one'.[28]

Given this account of sexual difference, sex is not one (male) nor is it two (male and female). Rather it is many. Or, more radically, it is always 'to come' ('*à-venir*'). Sexual difference is always to come because no consciousness could ever forecast the forms this difference might take, or what this difference might essentially consist of. This is because Derrida's sexual difference is not substantive, but is curiously 'preontological'[29] as the unpredictable differing and deferring of bodies, the condition

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[26] Grosz, Elizabeth, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 208-209, my italics.
[27] Cheah, Pheng, 'Mattering', *diacritics*, vol. 26. no. 1, (Spring, 1996), 132.
[28] Derrida cited in Whitford, *Philosophy in the Feminine*, 83.
[29] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 209.

that makes sexual identity possible while itself remaining intrinsically indeterminate. This sexual difference cannot be reduced to any of its present determinations but rather agitates present sexual identities, indicating an impossible difference that is always to come: 'impossible' because inconceivable from within our present horizons, and 'always' to come because it can never at any moment be manifest as full presence.

A number of feminists are attracted to such a conception of sexual difference for it offers a way of going beyond the male/ female binary (as this is seen to essentialise sexual identity), towards a more expansive understanding of sexual difference as 'polysexuality', 'sexuality without number', 'ontological and not merely ontic', etc.[30] Interestingly though, as Deutscher notes, 'at the most radical point of a thinking of sexual difference, there is again no sexual difference'.[31] This is because it can never be given determinate content, it is not an entity, substance or essence that has a fixed identity such that we can say 'this (x) is sexual difference'. Instead, it is always a future deferral, a promise that can never be fulfilled but for that reason guards against the hypostatisation of sexual identity so this can be left undecidable. Indeed, sexual difference, re-modelled in terms of multiplicity as depicted by Grosz, is effectively indistinguishable from the notion of *différance* itself.

Some feminists are alarmed at this absorption of sexual difference into *différance*, for the notion of sexual difference can then only be tenuously linked (if it can be linked at all) to what we consider to be concrete, actual women and men. As somewhat of a synonym for *différance*, sexual difference becomes a highly abstract term for the possibility of multiple (sexual) identities that seems to take feminists beyond traditional concerns regarding the thought of men and women, their representation and relations. Indeed, given that multiple sexual identities could no longer be identifiable with what we currently think of as women and men, it is difficult to see on what *basis* those identities could be regarded as *specifically* sexual. The highly speculative nature of a multiplicity of possible identities, as effects of *différance*,

[30] For Derridaen inspired accounts of sexual difference see for examples, Caputo, John, D., 'Dreaming of the Innumerable: Derrida, Drucilla Cornell, and the Dance of Gender' in *Derrida and Feminism*, eds. Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson, Emily Zakin (London: Routledge, 1997), 141-160; Cornell, Drucilla and Adam Thurschwell, 'Feminism, Negativity and Intersubjectivity'; and Diprose, Rosalyn, *The Bodies of Women: Ethics, Embodiment, and Sexual Difference* (London: Routledge, 1994), ch. 4.
[31] Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference*, 118.

means that these will be radically other than the concrete identities we are currently familiar with.

There begins, for myself and a number of commentators on Derrida, a growing suspicion that *différance* cannot provide us with the means to think any differences at all; neither the radical others it promises (for none of our existing concepts can presage such otherness), nor the various identities of the present (which must be deconstructed). In response to such reservations a feminist might argue that a Derridaen model of sexual difference involves conceiving this difference according to a dialectic of the possible and impossible. Sexual difference is possible as sexual *identity* - which allows for the determination, and so thought, of the concrete other as sexed. However, sexual *difference* (*différance*) is impossible because it can never be captured by any specific sexual identity without foreclosing other possible configurations of sexual identity.

Yet, rather than enabling us to think the other as a concrete (actual, empirical) specificity, it seems that this ceaseless oscillating between the possible and impossible simply chases one aporia after another. Whatever is possible has already fallen into the sameness of presence and so must be disavowed. This means we are to be indifferent to the actual for the sake of the impossible. The worry is that we are left with little more than random reveries of (im)possible futures that drains thought of any meaningful content.[32] The risk of advocating sexual multiplicity is that it bypasses the thought of actual women (or men) in their material specificity. As Gillian Rose informs us, 'if actuality is not thought, then thinking has no social import'.[33]

Capable only of tarrying with aporias, *différance*, I maintain, is unable to inaugurate any concrete transformations in the present and so ends up conserving the existing state of affairs, which, to the extent that this is predominantly patriarchal, feminists aim not just to challenge but also to change.

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[32] Derrida himself concedes that: '[i]n a certain way thought means *nothing*'. Derrida cited in Cunningham, Conor, *Geneaology of Nihilism*, 155.
[33] Rose, Gillian, *Hegel contra Sociology*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), 214.

A Materialism Without Substance: Rethinking the Sensible Transcendental'

Ever since proclaiming that 'there is nothing outside the text' (*'il n'y a pas de hors-texte'*) Derrida has faced charges that his philosophy of *différance* is some sort of 'linguistic idealism', where language (text) can only refer to itself and so eliminates the thought of anything material or real beyond linguistic discursiveness. Derrida has been keen to dispel such contentions pointing out that *différance* repudiates logocentrism's insistence for an 'either/ or' approach to metaphysical dualisms. This means that language cannot be viewed as purely linguistic (i.e. self-identical), in stark opposition to the real, but is always already implicated in its others. Similarly, when reflecting on the classic nature/ culture dichotomy, Derrida proposes that we think of 'culture as nature different and deferred, differing-deferring; all the others of *physis* – *tekhnē*, *nomos*, *thesis*, society, freedom, history, mind, etc. – as *physis* different and deferred, or as *physis* differing and deferring. *Physis* in *différance*'.[34] In this way Derrida confounds any clear-cut distinction between nature and culture, for the one always contains indelible traces of the other, as they differ and defer always in relation to each other. Thus, given *différance* nature (and its correlates, the sensible, the empirical, matter, immanence, etc) cannot be thought of 'anthropologistically' as blank, passive facticity to be given form by rational human consciousness (Hegel) or labour (Marx), but as always already 'destining' towards culture, mind, form, spirit, transcendence, etc.[35] By problematizing traditional metaphysical dichotomies, *différance* lends itself to elaborating a 'sensible transcendental' that would transform the way in which we think about nature, humanity and the divine.

In his illuminating paper 'Mattering' Cheah begins to sketch what a 'deconstructive materialism' might look like, and what implications it could have for a politics of bodies. Interestingly, at one point he connects the idea of *différance* and bodies with that of a 'sensible transcendental'. He writes:

> 'from the side of individual bodies, spacing or *différance* designates the constitutive susceptibility of finite bodies to a process of othering from their self-identity. This process of othering inscribes or weaves these bodies into a

[34] Derrida, *'Différance'*, 70.
[35] In accounting for 'the interimplication of the natural and the social or cultural' Grosz, with a nod to Derrida's *destinerrance*, writes of 'materiality as destination'. See *Volatile Bodies*, 21.

> larger network, a nontotalizable "structure", a moving base that sustains and relates every determinate object, entity, subject or social formation. This 'structure' is not a transcendent exteriority but a *sensible transcendental* weave (Derrida calls it 'general textuality') where the ideal and the empirical, form and matter, are no longer separate levels that meet at various interfaces but infinitely interlaced'.[36]

Like Irigaray, Derrida attempts to defy Kant's radical distinction between the transcendental (i.e. the conditions of experience) and the empirical or sensible world. The notion of *différance* means that the world of sense experience cannot be conceived as effected by a set of fixed, transcendental conditions that exist outside the sensible realm (a transcendent transcendental).

A central aim of Derrida's philosophy, like Deleuze and Irigaray, is to rupture Kant's transcendental closure of immanence so that the world can manifest itself in a multiplicity of ways. In doing so he refuses the split between the ideal and the real. However, he could not sanction Irigaray's contention that the transcendental is the sensible, understood as the generative interval of sexual difference. Equally Derrida would not want to affirm with Deleuze the fundamental reality of divine substance.

Derrida's *différance* functions as a 'quasi-transcendental' in that it provides the conditions for experience but is not itself a fixed, wholly determinable foundation. This is because *différance* is simply the 'the "active", moving discord of different forces, and of differences of forces'.[37] It is no transcendental ideality subtending the sensible world while failing to appear there but constitutes the very nature of the world precisely as a 'sensible transcendental': a dynamic web of differing and deferring bodies the identities of which are never self-identical but are produced in and through their differential relations with each other. Furthermore, *différance* is not reducible to any particular form the world takes. Thus, it is both (concretely) 'inside' the world and 'outside' it.[38]

We can, thus, rethink the 'sensible transcendental' as *différance*. In turn we could also conceive the bodies comprising this 'sensible transcendental' as micro 'sensible

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[36] Cheah, Pheng, 'Mattering', *diacritics*, vol. 26. no. 1, (1996), 133 my italics.
[37] Derrida, '*Différance*', 70.
[38] Despite Derrida's distance from Deleuze we can see that they both envisage a process of differentiation that is primordial to any determinations.

transcendentals' for they too are always already inscribed with traces of difference. A body is never at one with itself, nor does it have an originary nature. Rather, the body is always in a process of 'othering'; enveloping or accruing various identities (sexual, racial, ethnical, socio-cultural, geographical, etc) in differing relations with others but never being or becoming a substantial 'this' or a 'that', for 'the embodiment of finite beings is a process that has no end'.[39]

I contend that *différance* as a 'sensible transcendental' construes transcendence as the very process of becoming in unanticipatable ways, and always in complex relations with various others. Here, transcendence paradoxically signifies: (i) the immanent/ present body in its differing and deferring corporeal identity; and (ii) a transcendent futurity, as a chora-type space (where the spatial-temporal distinction breaks down) that allows for the emergence of unexpected transformations of the body. *Différance*, then, rejects the polarisation of immanence and transcendence such that all bodies may be characterised as a 'sensible transcendental' by virtue of their ever-transforming identities.

Despairing Messianisms

A 'sensible transcendental' 'generated' by *différance* accords with what Derrida, in *Spectres of Marx*, describes as 'a materialism without substance: a materialism of the khôra for a despairing "messianism"'.[40] The concept of "messianism", with its clear religious resonance, will allow us to see how a Derridaen 'sensible transcendental' could provide a context for a divine alterity that is not reducible to any ontic determination, be this a specific empirical fact (such as, sexual difference), or the empirical world as whole. Before explaining Derrida's use of the term "messianism" with respect to his materialism, I want to briefly suggest why he considers this to be one without substance.

The idea of 'a materialism without substance' can be read as a response to Marx's 'dialectical materialism' – itself a response to Hegel's idealism. For Marx, human

[39] Cheah, 'The Future of Sexual Difference', 33.
[40] Derrida, Jacques, *Spectres of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 168-169.

freedom (overcoming a state of alienation from the world) involves the recognition that consciousness and the real are not contrary to each other, but that the real is essentially the materialisation or 'ontologization' of human consciousness, which is basically free. Oddly, Marx retains an implicit idealism because, for him, the material world is nothing in and of itself, it is simply a bare immediacy or given that acquires its forms and qualities through human activity.

For Derrida, the notion of *différance* means that the world has no substantive basis, it is neither the product of mind (Hegel), or human social practice (Marx), nor is it the flux of purely material forces (Nietzsche). Rather than counterposing idealism with materialism, Derrida views matter and mind in terms of their differing and deferring relations with each other. As Diprose points out '*[d]ifférance*, while not a substance, does nevertheless indicate the *uncertainty* apparent in the production of substances'.[41] Here Diprose is noting the peculiar productive power of *différance*, for the process of signification, of representing the material is actually *constitutive* of the material, of bodies or substances. However, the material is not wholly reducible to the linguistic sign or mental concept; there is always a material excess to discursivity. But this excess should not be conceived as something substantive in itself prior to the 'work' of *différance* and its process of signification/ representation. Thus, for Derrida, the world is not a substantive thing. It has no fundamental essence to be immediately affirmed or teleologically realised, but is always already an effect of a differentiation process, it is a dynamic givenness, a 'sensible transcendental' without origin or telos: it 'is' *différance.*

How does this 'materialism without substance' tie in with the idea of 'messianism', indeed a 'despairing messianism'? Derrida makes a distinction between the 'messianic' and 'messianism'.[42] The former articulates the formal conditions for the possibility of what Derrida calls 'the event' or 'singularity' which can be understood as both the possible and impossible disordering of presence. The messianic encapsulates the idea of the '*tout autre*', i.e. the wholly other; an otherness that we can anticipate as that which is always to come (for the world cannot be reduced to presence) but can never determine or identify as any specific thing. To do so would

[41] Diprose, Rosalyn, *The Bodies of Women*, 97.
[42] Ibid, 167-168, 65 and 28.

be to erroneously name that which, as wholly other, we could have no name for. Derrida maintains that in our (human beings) anticipation of the *tout autre* we must practice a 'hospitality without reserve', for only an unconditional receptivity to otherness can ensure a space for the arriving (*arrivant*) of the other.[43]

By contrast, messianism names in advance the identity of the *tout autre* that we are always awaiting. For Derrida, such names include, God, Woman, Man, Humanity and Democracy. Why, then, should Derrida's materialism institute a 'despairing messianism'? I suggest that this is due in part to the way in which the idea of the messianic and messianism are implicated in each other.[44] While the messianic involves acknowledging the inevitability of unmotivated, unwilled changes that transfigure bodies/ the world in unforeseen way, and to which we should remain open, we nevertheless cannot help but name the *tout autre*, even though we know this entails the paradox of awaiting radical otherness while knowing what it is we wait for. Indeed, the messianic seems compelled to invoke a messianism because radical otherness could never be recognised as such. If the *tout autre* were recognisable then it could be conceived in terms of existing identificatory categories. However, the *tout autre* transcends, disrupts and destabilizes all such categories as a radical otherness that exceeds all presence. Despair, then, meets us at two fronts: (i) that we can never fully determine the conditions that make us what we are, or the nature of the radical otherness through which we may be transformed; and (ii) that we are bound to name the *tout autre* even as this circumscribes alterity within a particular framework or identity, foreclosing alternative ways in which the (im)possible *tout autre* may become manifest.

However, Derrida also claims that at the heart of all despairing messianisms lies 'absolutely undetermined messianic hope'.[45] I take this to mean something like the following. That the condition of all messianisms, whether they admit to this or not, is precisely the messianic as the indeterminate *tout autre* that signals no other in particular but the very possibility of the arriving of the other in general. If we do not

[43] The *tout autre* can never arrive as such but is always arriving, or always 'to come', for it can never arrive in the fullness of presence.
[44] Richard Kearney makes a similar point when he writes that '[t]he messianic needs messianism in the final analysis as much as messianism needs the messianic'. See, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001),77.
[45] Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 65.

concede the messianic – the (im)possible otherness that irritates and disturbs presence without however being reducible to presence – as the (formal) condition that makes all messianisms possible, then we efface that which makes the assertion of any messianism possible. Messianisms would then harden into dogmas, becoming dangerous because of their refusal or inability to acknowledge that the other can always be anticipated otherwise. Deutscher makes much the same point when she writes: '[t]he difference between the messianic and messianism is the difference between an impossible politics [e.g. of sexual difference] that cannot (but must) name what it knows it anticipates, and a disavowing politics that will not admit its impossibility in these terms'.[46]

The messianic and messianism must, therefore, be negotiated according to a double strategy of avowing and disavowing the name of the *tout autre* we await. Such a strategy keeps the messianic hope alive, for it attempts to exercise a 'hospitality without reserve' towards the *tout autre* who we cannot anticipate in any concrete terms, but who we are able, nevertheless, to acknowledge as that which is always to come.[47]

This dialectic between the messianic and messianism invites the idea of what Derrida calls a 'religion without religion'. What might this paradoxical formula mean? We can think of it as an (im)possible religion. It is the hopeful anticipation of, the desire for the *tout autre* (the messianic) as divine, yet without giving a specific face to the divine; without rigidly or blindly adhering to specific religious frameworks, be these Christian or Muslim or Sexual Difference; even without knowing in full confidence that the other who is to come will definitely be a divine other.

A number of theologians have noted the methodological similarities between Derrida's philosophy of *différance* and the *via negative* of negative theologies stretching back to Nicholas de Cusa. Both attempt to obliquely articulate an ineffable

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[46] Deutscher, *A Politics of Impossible Difference*, 106.

[47] 'For pure hospitality or pure gift to occur there must be absolute surprise...an opening without horizon of expectation...to the newcomer whoever that may be. The newcomer may be good or evil, but if you exclude the possibility that the newcomer is coming to destroy your house if you want to control this and exclude this terrible possibility in advance, there is no hospitality.... The other, like the Messiah, must arrive whenever he or she wants'. Derrida cited in Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 75.

otherness through a dialectic of absence/ presence, as this makes possible the impossible signification of that which is radically other to all that is, without reducing the other to presence. However, Derrida is keen to maintain a distinction between the assumptions of *différance* and negative theology. This is because in the very identification of God as the transcendent other that language/ concepts seek to express yet cannot, negative theology, Derrida holds, indirectly retains God as presence. For Derrida, *différance* or the messianic - as the purely formal condition of possibility for all faiths, for all religions, for all divines - cannot be given substantive content. Hence Dermot Moran's comment that: 'Derrida appears to be giving a kind of transcendental account of the conditions of possibility of religion while abstaining from the possibility of affirming any particular future to come'.[48]

Interestingly, while Derrida's philosophy refuses to affirm a particular messianism, what must always be affirmed is *différance* for only this ensures the possibility of the *tout autre* as always to come, as always arriving. Although endorsed as an ethical refusal to occlude any anticipatory horizons for the *tout autre*, conceding the undecidability of the *tout autre* seems to have some rather unsettling implications. For example, Derrida will state that:

> '*[t]he other is God or no matter whom*, more precisely, no matter what singularity, as soon as any other is totally other [*tout autre est tout autre*]. For the most difficult, indeed the impossible, resides there: there where the other loses its name or can change it, *to become no matter what other*'.[49]

The concern here is that by insisting upon the inherent indeterminacy of the *tout autre*, as the very condition that makes the anticipation of the (im)possible other as God, Woman, Sexual Difference, etc, we must accept that the *tout autre* becomes a placeholder for any and every other 'no matter what'. Although affirming the undecidability of the *tout autre* is meant to provide a space for all others (to come), the problem is that no one other can be distinguished from the next, and every other is equivalent to the next. All (im)possible others are effectively reduced to the same.

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[48] Moran, Dermot, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London and New York, Routledge, 2000), 470.
[49] Derrida, Jacques, '*Sauf Le Nom*' trans. John P. Leavey, Jr in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 74 my italics.

Earlier I argued that Irigaray overly determines transcendence as sexual difference. I further claimed that by delimiting the site of transcendence to one particular difference – sex – all other corporeal differences are subsequently downgraded. Derrida, on the other hand, insists upon maintaining the absolute otherness of transcendence such that this remains wholly undecidable. But here transcendence remains radically indifferent to any particular difference, rendering all the differences it makes (im)possible no different from each other. This is because all particular differences become negations of the absolute indeterminacy that is *différance*. In view of this I believe we have reason to agree Peter Dews who writes that 'despite all appearances, *différance* is itself a powerful principle of unity'.[50]

Différance: a New Messianism?

Derrida himself is aware of the potential for *différance* to become reified as an absolute other set in opposition to all being/ presence/ identity. In 'Violence and Metaphysics' he criticizes Levinas for doing just this.[51] The point for Derrida is not to eulogise the other over the same, difference/non-identity over identity, absence over presence, etc, for this is simply a reversal of the terms of traditional metaphysics and so continues to presume self-present identity, thus remaining within the orbit of a 'metaphysics of presence'.

Although Derrida clearly exploits the resources of transcendental philosophy,[52] he goes to great lengths to avoid presenting *différance* as some *a priori* first principle or *arche*. Hence, we find the need to recourse to awkward expressions such as 'non-originary origin', 'primordial non-self-presence', 'quasi-transcendental', etc, in order to articulate the enigmatic status of *différance*.[53] Furthermore, Derrida is careful not

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[50] Dews, Peter, *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 1987), 43.

[51] Derrida, Jacques, 'Violence and Metaphysics', *Writing and Difference*, (London: Routledge, 1978), 79-153.

[52] Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 466. Also '[f]ollowing Husserl, he [Derrida] rigorously maintains a transcendental standpoint with regard to "the object", whereby any assertion regarding an object of knowledge must be suspended and referred back to a questioning of the meaning of objectivity'. Weir, Alison, *Sacrificial Logics: Feminist Theory and the Critique of Identity* (London and New York, Routledge, 1996), 29.

[53] Such recourse is unavoidable for Derrida because we only have the language of metaphysics with which to articulate what is outside metaphysics. 'We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon –

to hypostasise *différance* as a basic *process*, that of differing and deferring, for this risks turning *différance* into some sort of primeval force or activity (cf. Deleuze). While *différance* is constitutive of every intelligible thing in space and time 'it' is not itself any one thing for 'it' is always 'immediately and irreducibly polysemic'.[54] Given that all these qualifications are meant to preclude the thought of *différance* as absolute, how can it then be viewed as one?

It seems to be that in order to uphold *différance* as the condition of possibility for all determinate differences, Derrida, in spite of himself, ends up relying on the very oppositional logics, characteristic of traditional metaphysics, that his (non)concept of *différance* is supposed to disrupt. Because he asserts that all identity involves the suppression of difference, and thus is only ever the illusion of self-present identity, he renders *différance* as *absolute* difference, for it *always* differs in *every* respect from any identity. Indeed, *différance*, as the endless differing of differences, is structurally incapable of being given expression by identity. Subsequently, identity is rendered absolute identity, for any and every identity is opposed to *différance*. Hence, rather than a playful differing and deferring of identity and difference, we have the antagonistic opposition of absolute difference and absolute identity, and it is this opposition that drives the weary dialectic between the possible (identity) and the impossible (difference). Yet, as Hegel's philosophy teaches us, no dialectic can occur between absolute identity and absolute difference because both are non-relational identities and so are indifferent to each other. To avoid this problem, Derrida argues that all determinate identities are *effects* of *différance*, that is, all determinations are *within* or *internal* to *différance*.[55] In this way *différance* becomes *the* absolute; there is only *différance* and the identities it makes both possible and impossible.

Indeed, Derrida himself acknowledges the omnipresence of *différance*. He states that: 'philosophy lives *in* and *on différance*, thereby blinding itself to the *same*, which is not the identical. The same, precisely, is *différance*'.[56] For Derrida, if *différance* is an absolute it is not like those of a 'metaphysics of presence'. *Différance* it is not a

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which is foreign to this [metaphysics] history'. Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', *Writing and Difference*, 280.

[54] Derrida cited by Moran in *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 466.

[55] 'Thus one comes to posit presence ... [as a] determination or an effect within a system which is no longer that of presence but of *différance*'. Derrida, '*Différance*', 69.

[56] Ibid, 69-70.

unified, self-identical absolute. Rather, it is an absolute that is infinitely dislocated by undecidable intervals of difference. *Différance* is an undecidability that makes all differences possible. However, in his desire to safeguard *différance* as the condition of all differences Derrida: (i) prioritises *différance* over any determinate difference; and (ii) treats every particular difference (identity) as the repression of difference. This has the effect of reducing every determinate difference to an inessential moment of *différance* as the absolute. No specified difference has any inherent value or significance, whether the divine, sexual difference, or whatever. All differences are, therefore, the same and, furthermore, they must all be disavowed for the sake of *différance* as the absolute.

And what is *différance*? It is everything and nothing. It is nothing as everything. It is nothing. As radically indeterminate/ undecidable it is a highly speculative, abstract transcendent absolute that permits nothing but its own auto-affection. In Derrida's words: '[a]uto-affection is not a modality of experience characterizing a being which would already be itself (*autos*). It produces the same as relation to oneself within the difference from oneself, the same as the non-identical'.[57] Of course, what Derrida means by the same is non-identity (*différance*), but, as we have seen, all non-identity can only be the same. As a number of critics have noted *différance* can only operate as the indifferent elimination of all determinate particularity and thus is fundamentally nihilistic.[58]

Transcendence Contra Immanent Actuality

Following Cheah, I have suggested that Derrida's *différance* could be deployed to formulate a 'deconstructive materialism' whereby bodies are conceived as existing in networks of determining relations with each other through which their corporeal identities are continually being renewed. We can think this ever-changing realm of undecidable corporeal identities in terms of a Derridean model of the sensible transcendental. A Derridean approach to the notion of a sensible transcendental

[57] Derrida cited in Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, 30.
[58] On the connection between *différance* and nihilism see Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism*, 155-165. (Cunningham also interestingly draws parallels between Spinoza's monistic ontology and that of Derrida's). See also various works by the exponents of 'radical orthodoxy', for example, Catherine Pickstock.

refuses Irigaray's restriction of the interval of difference to the two of sexual difference understood as two pre-established identities. With Derrida immanence is marked by innumerable 'intervalings' between non-fixed identities. Indeed, immanence is *différance*, the realm of differing and deferring identities.

We have already noted Derrida's denial that his philosophy is an idealism where there is no objective real apart from the signifying process that is *différance*. For Derrida 'matter' (or 'the real') is not utterly reducible to the text. Nevertheless, I would argue that Derrida's *différance* sets up the totalised immanence of the text or discursivity. There is nothing outside the text because everything is text: the eternal, diachronic play of signs generating multiple intervals of difference between multiple undecidable identities. And yet the very dynamics of the text, its differing and deferring, blanks and pauses, bespeaks of something (im)possible, that which is *tout autre*, 'wholly other', not-text, absolute transcendence. It is my view that *différance* inaugurates the dualistic opposition between the total immanence of ontic presence and the total transcendence of the 'wholly other'. This has quite devastating implications for thinking the material and bodies.

Because Derrida maintains that no concept of identity is capable of determining difference, he effectively empties all thought of any determinate content, for no body – understood as any determinate thing - can be identified in its concrete (i.e. its material) specificity. All bodies are reduced to signs, becoming no more than indices of pure presence or actuality that must be forever dispraised and undone by the generative violence of *différance* to which they are subordinate. Indeed, I would argue that *différance* renders actual bodiliness or material objectivity noumenal, a reality that haunts the text unable to be known as such.

Derrida claims that '[i]f I have not very often used the word 'matter' it is not as you know, because of some idealist or spiritual kind of reservation. [...] the signifier 'matter' appears to me problematical only at the moment when its reinscription cannot avoid making of it a new 'transcendental signified'.[59] In a similar way to Deleuze, I contend that Derrida would prefer to sacrifice the notion of bodily integrity - which

[59] Derrida cited by Diprose, *The Bodies of Women*, 79.

need not be construed as an immutable form or a new 'transcendental signified'[60] – for the sake of a despairing, indifferent signifying process.

According to Derrida 'absolute evil' is 'absolute life, fully present life, the one that does not know death and does not want to hear about it'.[61] However, while Derrida believes that *différance* holds life and death in an irreconcilable but productive tension, what it actually does is *oppose* absolute presence to absolute *différance* so that life in its concrete, material actuality cannot be thought in any *positive* sense. *Différance* can only instil bodies with their negative moment, which is of greater import to whatever they may actually be. Indeed, the vigilant upholding of *différance* in Derrida's philosophy can be seen as 'the triumph of possibility over actuality' which means that 'whatever *is* is constantly threatened, undermined and rendered superfluous by whatever might be'.[62]

I agree that immanent material presence/ acutality should not be exalted as the full actualisation of all things, such that renewal (contra mere conservation) and futurity is denied to life, but neither should it be denounced wholesale as the evil repression of alterity. I suggest that immanent presence/ actuality – the realm of embodied human subjects – needs to be conceived as open to transcendence and future possibilities without being *necessarily* forsaken by these. Only then can we begin to see how life is capable of transformation and flourishing.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to expose a number of shortcomings in Irigaray's conception of the sensible transcendental, understood in terms of sexual difference. I then turned to the work of Derrida to see whether we could surmount the difficulties in Irigaray's work by rethinking the sensible transcendental in terms of his philosophy of *différance.*

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[60] See my account of bodies in Chapter 6.
[61] Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 175.
[62] Blond, Phillip, 'Review Essay: The Absolute and the Arbitrary', *Modern Theology*, vol. 18. no 2, (April, 2000), 283. For Derrida '*différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom'. '*Différance*', 74.

To recap, Irigaray attempts to overcome the traditional distinction between material immanence and divine transcendence by re-situating the latter within the former. For Irigaray, the ontological difference between the two of sexual difference indelibly marks immanence with an interval of difference - female and male bodily subjects each constitute for the other an eternal, spiritual site of transcendence within the sensible world. In chapter three we saw how the ontological difference between the sexes is constitutive of what Irigaray calls the sensible transcendental. This term has two principal meanings. The first is more technical in the sense that it is a response to Kant's transcendental idealism. Where Kant would figure the transcendental conditions of experience as the fixed, *a priori* categories of the understanding, Irigaray, on the other hand, would postulate female and male corporeality as the material conditions of the sensible world. Contra Kant's *ideal* transcendental (the transcendental subject), Irigaray proposes a *corporeal* or *sensible* transcendental. We should note here a similar effort by Deleuze and his notion of a 'transcendental empiricism'.[63] However, from an Irigarayan perspective Deleuze's univocal plane of immanence would need to be criticised for failing to affirm from the onset the ontological difference of female and male corporeality, which would prevent his notion of singularities from becoming merely expressive of the same.

The second sense in which we are to grasp Irigaray's idea of the sensible transcendental is as the (embodied) otherness or transcendence of the other sexual difference. We have seen that Irigaray endows the otherness of sexual difference with spiritual significance, such that the idea of the divine becomes inseparable from the idea of sexual difference. However, in this chapter I have argued that because Irigaray is so anxious to ensure the priority of sexual difference – the two concrete universals of immanence – her philosophy tends to construe the other of sexual difference as an absolute other rather than an irreducible other. As well as objecting to the prioritisation of sexual difference in Irigaray's work, I argued that if we render female and male subjects in terms of their absolute otherness, then we cannot maintain that the interval of difference between them is generative of the mutual becoming of embodied subjects that are 'not-One' (because ever-marked by others).

[63] For Deleuze the plane of immanence – expressive substance – can be regarded as an empirical transcendental, that is, a field of material becomings that are not determined in advance by a purely formal schema *à la* Kant.

Rather, the interval functions disjunctively, securing each sexed subject in their absolute difference from the other. While I welcome Irigaray's attempt to uphold the concrete specificity of bodies, I think that her philosophy of the two of sexual difference *overly* determines the embodied subject as sexed, to the extent that her account of bodies slips into abstraction. I also contend that the ontological difference of sexual difference has the effect of splitting an Irigarayan immanence into two abstract sensibilities, namely, female and male embodied subjects. These two subjects then become wholly transcendent and unknowable to each other, in much the same way as the God of monotheism is wholly transcendent and unknowable to human beings. In view of this, I do not think that Irigaray manages to avoid divorcing transcendence from immanence as she believes. I wish to conclude, then, that her 'immanentism', does not enable the mutual becoming of bodily subjects in their unique differences, but instead splits into a dualism between two abstract embodiments: the female subject and the male subject as two discrete absolutes, each locked within the immanence of their self-same sexed identity.[64]

We noted that Irigaray sometimes seems to suggest that the interval of difference between female and male being is such that it exceeds sexual difference as a 'third term', and indeed is even more fundamental than sexual difference. This hints at the possibility that sexual difference is itself dependent upon a prior (divine?) condition, and so is not as originary as Irigaray would have it. We then engaged with Derrida's philosophy of *différance* in order to rethink the sensible transcendental outside the two of sexual difference.

With Derrida, we saw that the notion of the sensible transcendental does not denote something substantive, such as the ontological reality of the two of sexual difference or a single divine substance. Instead, it denotes that which is eternally undecidable as a ceaseless process of signification where identities are forever deferred and differing. A Derridaen sensible transcendental is generative of multiple intervals of difference between multiple provisional identities. In this way otherness or transcendence is not confined to just one fixed interval of difference between two originary identities,

[64] For the argument that Irigaray avoids this outcome see Martin, *Luce Irigaray and the Question of the Divine*, 129ff. However, in concluding her study Martin remains troubled by 'the question of whether the two [of sexual difference] can truly have a dialectical relationship without sharing a single term of mediation'. Ibid, 220.

namely, Irigaray's female and male subjects. Furthermore, because a Derridaen sensible transcendental remains inherently undecidable it does not foreclose the (im)possibility of the 'wholly other': an otherness or transcendence that is always to come but can never be finally named as God, Woman, Democracy, etc, without reducing that otherness to the economy of the same.

Like Irigaray and Deleuze, Derrida also reconsiders the conditions of experience – namely, 'the transcendental' – outside Kant's idealist framework. For Derrida, *différance* functions as a quasi-transcendental in the sense that any identifiable thing is an effect of *différance.* However, *différance* is not mind, nor matter, nor God. Rather, it is a 'non-originary origin'. I hope to have shown that Derrida's philosophy of *différance* offers a way of thinking multiple 'intervalings' of difference within immanence, contra Irigaray's restriction of the interval of difference or transcendence to a single difference (sexual difference). However, I argued that Derrida's *différance* entails the loss of actual or concrete bodies to the ceaseless process of signification. *Différance*, I maintain, is unable to affirm actual bodies in their unique, irreducible material differences and can only ever treat bodies as (im)possible corporeal identities under perpetual erasure within the immanence of the text. Although Derrida claims that there is nothing outside the text, I have argued that with Derrida we are forced into a dualism between the immanent text and the transcendent wholly other, whether this be God or material/ corporeal actuality or whatever.

According to Irigaray, '[m]an has been the subject of discourse, whether in theory, morality or politics. And the gender of God, the guardian of every subject and every discourse, is always masculine and paternal, in the West'.[65] According to Derrida, 'God is the name and the element of that which makes possible an absolutely pure and absolutely self-present self-knowledge'.[66] Both Irigaray and Derrida are critical of the divine conceived as a transcendent other serving as a basis for an economy of the same, whether that of the male subject (Irigaray) or presence (Derrida). In this section I first explored Irigaray's reformulation of immanence in terms of the sensible transcendental and then I reconsidered this notion according to Derrida's philosophy

[65] Irigaray, *An Ethics*, 6.
[66] Derrida cited by Hart, Kevin, 'Jacques Derrida: The God Effect', *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* , ed. Phillip Blond, (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 265.

of *différance*. I argued that both these thinkers are unable to construct immanence such that it is internally marked by transcendence,[67] without re-creating the very oppositional dualism between immanence and transcendence that they wished to avoid. I hope to have shown that both these models of immanence, transcendence and the divine leave us with unsatisfactory accounts of embodied subjects and materiality.

Thus far then, contrary to expectations, it does not seem that the repudiation of divine transcendence at once delivers a realm of immanence where bodies are able to be affirmed in their irreducible particularity and their capacity for becoming. In the following section I will present Adorno's philosophy as one that appears to come close to articulating an immanent transcendence that does not lead to reductive or nihilistic accounts of bodies or the material. Nevertheless, it is my contention that for all its strengths Adorno's 'immanentist' metaphysics is wrought with problems that a return to a more traditional, theistic notion of divine transcendence can, I believe, overcome.

[67] For Irigaray, the other of sexual difference constitutes an immanent transcendence and is an otherness endowed with spiritual or divine significance. For Derrida, immanent transcendence is the endless differing and deferring of the text as it refuses to foreclose the (im)possible 'wholly other' which could be the divine, Woman, etc, as in Derrida

Section Three

RECOVERING DIVINE TRANSCENDENCE

Chapter Five

Adorno, Transcendence and the Primacy of the Object

World is crazier and more of it than we think,
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
The drunkenness of things being various.[1]

In the last two sections we have examined the work of Deleuze, Irigaray and Derrida, to see how they allow us to rethink transcendence and the divine as *otherness* and *becoming* within material immanence, rather than as that which is ontologically distinct from the world, and which encourages a flight from material immanence. However, I have argued that, despite their intentions, these three thinkers formulate immanence and transcendence in ways that lead to abstract accounts of the material world. I have found that with Deleuze and Derrida the concrete specificity or particularity of bodies is rendered subordinate to, and even suppressive of, the indifferent differentiation or becoming of immanence - whether Deleuze's expressive divine substance or Derrida's undecidable text. With respect to Irigaray's immanentism, I argued that while she does not want the concrete specificity of bodies to disappear into an anonymous process of becoming-other, she expresses bodily differences by way of two categories – 'female' and 'male' – that, because they are too broad and sweeping, fail to register the specificities of bodies adequately.

In this chapter I turn to the work of Adorno. This is because I believe that his negative dialectics produces a subtle account of the dialectical intertwining of immanence and transcendence, whereby the object in its sensuous particularity can be specified in ways that do not highlight just one principal determination, as with Irigaray. However, while the object is determinable for Adorno it can never be definitively identified as one thing or another. In this way Adorno ensures that the material otherness of the object is not brought into complete identity with human concepts. We will see that in Adorno's work transcendence in immanence results

[1] Macneice, Louis, 'Snow', *The New Oxford Book of English Verse*, 923. I thank Ruth Knox for pointing out this verse to me.

from the non-identity between the (embodied) thinking subject and the material object. This non-identity, as I understand it, is not due to some essentially unknowable quality of the material object but rather denotes: (i) the richness or density of the object's determinateness such that the object, although determinable, can never be completely determined by human concepts; and (ii) the object's potential to undergo, within certain material limits, transformations within time, i.e. history.

Adorno is able to maintain the non-identity between subject and object by insisting upon the primacy of the object, whereby the object in its sensuous particularity is acknowledged as always in excess of, or transcending, the conceptual determinations of the subject. By situating transcendence in the primacy of the object (i.e. in the object's sensuous particularity and becoming), I think that Adorno offers an appealing vision of transcendence in immanence in ways that eschew the sort of abstractions that, I have claimed, result from the models of immanence advanced by Deleuze, Irigaray and Derrida.

Like the other philosophers we have discussed, Adorno proposes an alternative account of the conditions of immanence to Kant's transcendental subject. We will see that Adorno treats history quasi-transcendentally, in the sense that particular historical contexts and institutions are constitutive of the various forms the material world takes. As he writes: '[a]lthough reflecting the transcendental moment, the traditional [i.e. historical] moment is quasi-transcendental: it is not a point like subjectivity but the properly constitutive factor'.[2] Material immanence is thus *historically* grounded for Adorno, rather than based upon categories ('quasi-transcendentals') that are still overly formal and fixed, as in Irigaray's originary two of sexual difference, or collapsed into a radical indeterminacy, as in Deleuze and Derrida. Adorno's conception of immanence enables him to specify the material, i.e. historical, conditions of immanence, while also showing that such conditions are practically alterable in a way that can politically transform the nature of worldly immanence.

Although Adorno's work does not often engage directly with theological questions he nevertheless, in the words of Murdoch, 'retains an undogmatic theological religious

[2] Adorno, Theodor, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 54.

sense'.[3] A secular Jew, Adorno has at best an ambiguous relationship towards theology, often using religious tropes and motifs both critically and affirmatively in his critique of what he argues is our increasingly rationalised world. However, it is possible to witness his 'theological religious sense' in his deep commitment to metaphysics, which he regards as synonymous with the idea of transcendence. Against the world as disenchanted, rationalised immanence, Adorno insists upon transcendence. As we would expect, Adorno does not construe this transcendence as a transcendent spirit removed from the realm of possible experience, but rather as the irreducible, sensuous particularity of objects. I also hope to show that Adorno's materialist reclamation of transcendence is driven by a strong political impulse: to think transcendence as historical possibility, as this can excite human praxis to transfigure the real, such that humanity is no longer bound to 'an ontology of the wrong state of things'[4] passing itself off as unalterable fate. For Adorno, the transfigured world is the promise of peace or utopia: the non-coercive, non-totalising, materialist reconciliation of identity and non-identity.

This chapter breaks down into three main sections. The first highlights Adorno's critique of modernity and the 'disenchantment' of the world by instrumental reason. The second explores his philosophy of non-identity (negative dialectics) and his materialist conception of transcendence. The third looks at his vision of a future that is no longer trapped within an abstract context of immanence, and where concrete differences can be affirmed rather than negated.

While I think that Adorno's negative dialectic provides a conception of immanence that is able to uphold the concrete specificity of bodies, in ways that Deleuze, Irigaray and Derrida are not able to manage, I do not in the end adopt his model of immanence. In the next chapter I will argue that Adorno's thesis of the primacy of the object requires a 'strong' ontological realism if the material objectivity of the object is to retain a moment of independence (non-identity) from all human determination or mediation. I will then make my key claim, namely, that the strong

[3] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 373. In his introduction to his translation of Adorno's work on Kierkegaard, Robert Hullot-Kentor goes as far as saying: 'theology is always moving right under the surface of all Adorno's writings'. See Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. Hullot-Kentor, Robert, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), xxi.
[4] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 11.

ontological realism that I wish to advance is one that is best accounted for precisely by appealing to traditional notions of divine transcendence: God understood as ontologically distinct from the world.

The Spell of Immanence

'Transcendence, captured by the immanence of the human spirit, is at the same time turned into the totality of the spirit and abolished altogether'.[5]

According to Adorno, modern, late capitalist society is under the grip instrumental reason: a form of thinking and practice that is unable to countenance any element or event that does not conform to it. Adorno's main criticisms of modernity and instrumental reason are laid out in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, co-written with Horkheimer. For these two thinkers, the present form of rationality is governed by the 'principle of immanence, the explanation of every event as repetition'.[6] The dire consequences of this is the increasing disenchantment of the world, where '[t]he multiplicity of forms is reduced to position and arrangement, history to fact, things to matter'.[7] Adorno and Horkheimer would agree with Weber's memorable depiction of the modern world as an 'iron cage', a closed, rationalised totality, where difference is reduced to sameness, and becoming to the repetition of the same. The following discussion will outline the key themes in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in order to see how, for them, the modern world is increasingly a disenchanted, rationalised immanence that denies transcendence, understood as otherness and becoming within worldly immanence.

Instrumental Reason and the Disenchantment of the World

In brief, Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* presents a genealogy of (western) reason in terms of the dialectical relations between subject and object, humanity and nature, self and other. Through an examination of these relations, the writers show reason's emergence in history as a tool of domination and mastery. This

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[5] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 402.
[6] Adorno, T. W. and Horkheimer, M.,, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, (London, New York: Verso, 1997), 12.
[7] Ibid, 7.

tool is first fashioned by primeval humanity in its desire for self-preservation in the face of nature, which humanity first encounters as an alienating immediacy, all flux and contingencies. It is not lost on these two writers that the domination of nature coincides with the domination of women – as beings typically associated, in Western thinking, with the natural world.

For Adorno and Horkheimer, those who welcome the project of modernity as the self-conscious 'disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy',[8] fail to see it as a further, more insidious and extensive, exercise of domination. Archaic domination, they maintain, prevails as the logic of self-preservation in modern society.[9] Given this, these authors claim that the 'disenchantment of the world' is in fact its reconstruction in ever-more abstract and repressive ways, returning modernity to mythic fatedness even as it announces the realisation of freedom and truth. Let us see how this is.

When reason is deployed in a purely instrumental way it serves, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, as the vehicle of domination and the increasing disenchantment of the world. Instrumental reason is essentially pragmatic. It is concerned with establishing the means to gain certain ends, typically for the control of nature. Its principal features include: subsumption, abstraction, classification and quantification, features that Adorno will associate with 'identity thinking'. When instrumental reason holds sway at the level of both cognition and practice, the universal category is made the ultimate measure of the particular (i.e. the individual object) subsuming similar yet distinct objects under universal categories or definitions. These categories themselves make up formal, unified systems and schemas, which ensure that all things conform to a rational totality – the *mathesis universalis* – where 'nothing at all may remain outside'[10] for all must be known with absolute clarity. Furthermore, all becoming is repetition. Change cannot be countenanced because this would destabilize the eternal order of things.

[8] Ibid, 3.
[9] 'Enlightenment is mythic fear [of nature] turned radical'. Ibid, 16.
[10] Ibid, 16.

Submitted to the processes of instrumental reason the individual in its sensuous particularity is reduced to a mere 'token' or 'specimen' of a universal class. The relentless industry of instrumental reason drains all nature of the qualitative differences and concrete specificities that give it its liveliness, its affective power, its spirit we might say. Particular objects, including human subjects, are levelled down to abstract equivalences that, while taking on a 'thing-like' appearance, are nothing more than bits of mathematized, subjugated matter: *res extensa.* As Adorno and Horkheimer put it: 'from now on, matter would at least be mastered without any illusion of ruling powers, of hidden qualities'.[11] In this way the world is gradually disenchanted, seeming to reflect no more than the abstract forms of reason alone.

Informed by Marx's theory of value, Adorno and Horkheimer are keen to show how instrumental reason is at one with the logic of capitalist production. They argue that capitalist society subjects people and things to the exchange mechanisms of the market, where the incommensurable are made commensurable. In their words '[b]ourgeois society is ruled by equivalence'.[12] Similarly, a feminist might argue that the phallic economy accords with the homogenizing, disenchanting impulse of instrumental reason. In the phallic economy, a particular male body is prioritised and attributed value as the bearer of the phallus, while the female body is reduced to lack, as 'nothing to see' because her body is minus the phallus. As objects in the phallic economy women's bodies are made universally equivalent to each other, having exchange value only insofar as they provide raw matter (biology, labour, etc) for the reproduction of the male body and its symbolic and/ or socio-economic interests.

However, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the disenchantment and mastery of nature (and bodies) comes at a price: '[w]hat appears to be the triumph of subjective rationality, is paid for by the obedient subjection of reason to what is directly given'.[13] The world rationalised by instrumental reason is one that, far from enabling human autonomy, traps the subject within an unalterable objectivity that it cannot think

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[11] Ibid, 6.

[12] Ibid, 7. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno writes: 'It is through barter [exchange] that non-identical individuals and performance become commensurable and identical. The spread of the principle imposes on the whole world an obligation to become identical, to become total'. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 146.

[13] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 26.

otherwise without risking its (albeit sham, though nevertheless real) sovereignty.[14] The world has become reified. Seeming to embody *of itself* those abstract qualities imposed upon it by subjective reason, it looms over the subject as a new immediacy, a 'second nature' just as alienating as the 'first nature' that originally besieged the subject with its terrifying heterogeneity.

In the modern world, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, the rational subject's spell of immanence is almost unbreakable and, indeed, turns on the subject itself.[15] How, then, might that which transcends the modern capitalist and/ or patriarchal order be conceived? How, then, to break the spell of immanence and to recover a sense of transcendence? For these writers, this recovery is not monotheism's reconciliation of subject and object in a supersensible world,[16] but is rather the re-enchantment of nature (including human nature) as that which has its own qualitative distinctness and autonomy.

Aura of Transcendence

Against the total rationalisation of the world by instrumental reason, where material immanence becomes a closed context organised by the logic of the same, Adorno insists upon a form of cognition that changes the focus from identity to non-identity. In this way he hopes to offer an account of cognition that prevents losing the individual's 'aura of transcendence' - that is, their irreducible, sensuous particularity – to the immanence of human thinking.

In showing how Adorno attempts to maintain transcendence or otherness within immanence, I will first outline his thesis of the primacy of the object. We will see that he considers the idea of transcendence from an epistemological perspective. Although Adorno contends that 'we cannot think without identifying',[17] he argues that

[14] 'Dwelling in the core of the subject are the objective conditions it must deny for the sake of its unconditional rule'. Ibid, 281.
[15] Cognition limited to the immanence it constitutes can only think 'cycle, fate and domination of the world reflected as the truth and deprived of hope'. Ibid, 27.
[16] Adorno and Horkheimer regard this as a false reconciliation of subject and object, one that makes, in the words of Rose, 'our relation to both the world beyond and real existence one of impotent longing'. Rose, *Hegel contra Sociology*, 77.
[17] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 149.

it is a mistake to believe that the object is completely reducible to its identificatory categories. Because, for Adorno, 'objects do not go into to their concepts without leaving a remainder',[18] there can be no concept wholly adequate to its object. In view of this, Adorno claims that epistemology needs to perform an 'axial turn' from the subject to the object, from identity to non-identity. Such an axial turn admits to the concept's entwinement with a material otherness that it is necessarily bound up with, and yet which always transcends it. As Adorno writes, 'the non-identical moments [in cognition] show up as matter, or as inseparably fused with material things'.[19] Once I have delineated Adorno's thesis of the primacy of the object, I will go on to discuss his philosophy of non-identity thinking or negative dialectics in terms of cognition as 'naming'. I hope to show that Adorno's notion of non-identity thinking offers a vision of transcendence that neither invokes an abstract 'wholly other' (Derrida) nor an abstract materiality (Irigaray and Deleuze); but rather a sensuous objectivity that whilst conceptually determinable, nevertheless, defies *full* conceptual determination. In the final sub-section I consider the redemptive power of transcendence in Adorno's work, as that which is capable of inaugurating what he calls the 'transfigured body'.

On the Primacy of the Object

While Adorno concedes to idealism the view that 'necessity compels philosophy to operate with concepts', he also insists that 'this necessity must not be turned into the virtue of their priority'.[20] Philosophy's elevation of the universal concept over the object is, for Adorno, extensionally equivalent to its elevation of the thinking subject over the object. An important task of *Negative Dialectics*, and the later 1969 essay 'Subject and Object', is the demonstration of the perennial reduction of the object by the subject as the common theme, whether intentional or not, running through the idealist philosophies of Kant and Hegel, as well as positivist or nominalist theories. However, Adorno also shows that the subject's reign over the object, its total lack of reverence for the object it tries to dominate, is paid for in equal measure by the subject's own degradation.

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[18] Ibid, 5.
[19] Ibid, 193.
[20] Ibid, 11.

Against philosophy's absolutisation of the subject, Adorno insists upon the primacy of the object. This is not 'to place the object on the orphaned royal throne once occupied by the subject',[21] which would be nothing more than the subject turning the object into an idol, a pure objectivity seemingly rid of all anthropomorphic contamination, and either completely knowable (scientific positivism) or completely unknowable (negative theology). Rather, the thesis of the primacy of the object acknowledges two basic and interrelated points. First, the subject necessarily depends upon the sensuous object, without which the subject literally could not think at all. As Adorno claims, thought always thinks 'something'.[22] Second, although the material 'something' is thinkable, its moment of independence (non-identity) can be recognised by the fact that it can never be fully reduced to the subject.

Adorno does not, however, wish to deny the significance of the subject's relation to the object. He therefore stresses that, whilst the object mediates the subject, the subject in turn mediates the object precisely by thinking it.[23] However, the mediation between subject and object is asymmetrical. As Adorno observes:

> 'An object can be conceived only by a subject but always remains something other than the subject, whereas a subject by its very nature is from the outset an object as well...To be an object also is part of the meaning of subjectivity; but it is not equally part of the meaning of objectivity to be a subject'.[24]

The subject depends on the object *more* than the object depends on the subject. Indeed, for Adorno, this asymmetry testifies to the primacy of the object. Although the object can only be thought by the subject, we can, nevertheless, logically conceive the object's objectivity independently of the subject. However, it is impossible to conceive the subject without the object that it thinks. This asymmetry between

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[21] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 181.

[22] '"Something"- as a cogitatively indispensable substrate of any concept, *including the concept of Being* – is the utmost abstraction of the subject-matter that is not identical with thinking, an abstraction not to be abolished by any further thought process.' Ibid, 135, my italics. This passage is a rejoinder to Heidegger's and Hegel's ontologies which hypostatise the concept 'Being'. For Adorno, there is no general 'Being' for being is always 'something'.

[23] O'Connor offers a simple definition of mediation as 'the thesis that meaning are not atomic in that the independence of something is inseparable from its relation to something else'. O'Connor, Brian, 'The Concept of Mediation in Hegel and Adorno', *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, vol. 39/40 (1999), 84.

[24] Ibid, 183.

subject and object is differently re-stated by Adorno when he declares that 'the subject, the epitome of mediation, is the How – never the What' in cognition.[25] The subject mediates the object by determining it by way of concepts. However, without the object the subject has nothing to mediate in the first place: 'there would be no mediation without "something"'.[26] Conversely, the object is not simply nothing without subjective mediation, and certainly its objectivity cannot be exhausted by such mediations.[27]

The thesis of the primacy of the object is a materialist insistence that, as Hull simply puts it, 'all thought must be of something and that 'something' is irreducible [to thought]'.[28] Confounding the usual formulations of subject and object in representationalist epistemologies, Adorno argues both that '[t]he duality of subject and object must be critically maintained against thought's claim to be total', *and* '[subject and object] are neither an ultimate duality nor a screen hiding ultimate unity'.[29] For Adorno, 'subject' and 'object' are analytic or theoretical distinctions that, while never fully corresponding to the material world they refer to, disclose the way in which the world has actually been - and still is - mediated according to these concepts.[30] This enables him to argue that the dichotomy of subject and object in idealist philosophies faithfully reflects the real separation and hypostatisation of subjects and objects in capitalist exchange society. Adorno, thus, challenges traditional models of subject-object (both idealist and positivist), by revealing their index in a contradictory, antagonistic social totality that they uncritically reflect.

Adorno seeks to reformulate the relationship between the thinking subject and the object in a way that ensures the subject's necessary connection to the object itself, such that central to the object's very meaning is its subjective mediations (Hegel's point), while nevertheless maintaining the object's non-identity with the subject and

[25] Adorno, 'Subject and Object', 142.
[26] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 171.
[27] However, here we touch upon a central ambiguity in Adorno's understanding of the object, which may be a composite of subjective mediation that has crystallized over time or something in itself that exceeds all such mediations. We will explore this problematic further in the next chapter.
[28] Hull, Carrie, L., 'The Need in Thinking: Materiality in Theodor Adorno and Judith Butler', *Radical Philosophy*, no. 84, (July/ August, 1997), 29.
[29] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 175, 174.
[30] From an Adornian perspective, 'the world' is not some independent thing in itself, but is to be understood as both affording and emerging through the concepts 'subject' and 'object' and the non-identity between them.

so appreciating its primacy (Kant's point). He, thus, rethinks their relation in terms of, what Murdoch calls, 'an unsystematic dialectical tension'.[31] This means that, for Adorno, what can be known is not transcendentally predetermined but can change and evolve over time, becoming more determinate as further and new insights regarding the object can be gleaned. However, the subject can never attain complete knowledge of the object, as in Hegel's notion of absolute knowing, because an interval of difference between the two will always persist. Importantly, this interval is not absolutely fixed, *à la* Kant, but can alter over the course of history, offering new perspectives on the object.

Adorno wants to avoid bracketing off that 'something' which will always exceed thought as a wholly unknowable thing-in-itself, in contrast to Kant and, I believe, Derrida. Such an absolute otherness, Adorno believes, can have no meaningful import for the subject and is effectively reduced to 'a chaotic abstraction'[32] at best, or a mere logical limit for the thinking subject, with no ontological qualities of its own, at worst. According to Adorno the '[p]rimacy of the object can be discussed legitimately only when that primacy...is somehow definable'.[33] As I understand him, part of what must be entailed by the object's being 'somehow definable' is its capacity to determine or guide *of itself* the sorts of predicates and properties we attribute to it. If the object is to be regarded as more than raw matter simply waiting to be constructed any which way by the thinking subject (or language), then it must have a determinate form of its own that it is able to 'communicate' in some way to the thinking subject.

However, Adorno must address the difficulty of how the object may be known in itself when it is always mediated by the subject's concepts of it. As we shall see, an important way Adorno tackles this issue is by emphasising thought's experience of the object's recalcitrance to its conceptual mediation. This dissonance can be read as the object quite literally exerting 'pressure' on the subjective concepts that mediate it. The thinking subject registers this pressure as an implicit feeling of 'guilt'. A guilt stemming from the realisation of the damage the subject has caused the object. In

[31] Murdoch, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 370.
[32] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 139.
[33] Adorno, 'Subject and Object', 143.

Adorno's words '[m]y thought is driven to it [the object] by its [thought's] own insufficiency, by my guilt of what I am thinking'.[34]

I would now like to advance this discussion of Adorno's non-identity thinking, or negative dialectics, by considering remarks he makes regarding thought's aspiring to 'name' the object, rather than simply classifying it in the manner of identity thinking. For Adorno, cognition as naming has its paradigmatic instance in Judaism and mystical theologies, where there is a ban on any final pronouncement of the Divine Name, in order to both preserve divine transcendence and to guard against the worship of idolatrous names. In the next sub-section we will see how Adorno connects naming with the critical practice of 'determinate negation'.

Cognition as Naming

In *Negative Dialectics* Adorno writes that '[i]f the thought really yielded to the object, if its attention were on the object, not on the category, the very object would start talking under the lingering eye'.[35] One of the loftier ambitions of Adorno's philosophy is to let the object speak of itself, to express its truth to the thinking subject. Certainly, the possibility that the object is knowable in itself, rather than as it is determined or constituted by the subject's identificatory categories, requires its ability to 'give' or 'show' itself according to its own intelligibility, that is, its own form or normativeness.[36]

While Adorno would not put it in quite these terms, his work implies that the object - both people and things - lodges a claim to the thinking subject. The object calls upon the subject to recognise it as that which has a truth and a potential that both includes the subject's experience of it, and surpasses that experience. To heed the object's call, by remaining receptive to the 'pressure' it places on our words and concepts, is to wish to *name* the object. Naming is precisely non-identity thinking. This 'seeks to say what something is, while identitarian thinking says what something comes under,

[34] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5.
[35] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 27-28.
[36] The object's capacity to 'give' itself is assumed by phenomenology, where the epistemological ideal is the discernment of the object itself, famously captured in Husserl's slogan: 'to the things themselves'. The goal of phenomenology is very much at the heart of Adorno's own endeavours.

what it exemplifies or represents, and what, accordingly, it is not itself'.[37] Cunningham nicely links together these points about naming and the object's call when he writes that: '[i]n returning to the object we answer a call – this is our calling – doing so with the offer of a hopeful name'.[38]

Interestingly, Bozzetti suggests that, for Adorno, the object's call is 'to be understood as the language of God...[its] capacity for the prophetic word'.[39] By this I take him to be highlighting the sense of the object calling from beyond the immanent context of late modern, instrumentalised social totality. However, for Adorno, this transcendent site whence the object calls is not beyond the world of possible experience. Rather, for Adorno, the object's transcendence is best interpreted both phenomenologically and socio-politically. In the former sense, the object's qualitative complexity will always exceed any finite experience or conceptual identification of it. In the latter sense, the object's historical possibility means that it can always transcend any existing social totality.[40]

According to Adorno, to think the sensuous object according to the ideal of the name requires an interminable, but not directionless, 'qualitative discrimination'[41] of it. Such discrimination does not aim for the full conceptual 'capture' of the object. Instead, it is an ongoing process of 'contextual redetermination', where the action of the concept is not mechanical subsumption but 'formation, de-formation and transformation *for the sake of and in response to the claims of the object*'.[42] Cognition that aims to discriminate the object must be sensitively dynamic. It must

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[37] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 149.
[38] Cunningham, *A Genealogy of Nihilism*, 260.
[39] Bozzetti, Mauro, 'Hegel on Trial: Adorno's Critique of Philosophical Systems', *Adorno: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 300.
[40] It is Benjamin who inspires Adorno's use of the name as a model for cognition. However, although the former sought to redeem the earthly object by securing its name in the creative language of God – where there is no gap between word, name (*viz.*, the things' unique category) and the thing itself – Adorno argues that such a mystical deployment of the name passes too quickly over actual (earthly) things, inaugurating an impotent (and very Kantian) longing for redemption beyond the sensible world. As Düttmann notes, for Adorno, the 'name is therefore not to be regarded as some indivisible unity located in a site beyond the concept', where, I take it, its critical/ redemptive force would become ineffectual. See Düttmann, Garcia, *The Memory of Thought: An Essay on Heidegger and Adorno*, trans. Nicholas Walker (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 9. For an informative examination of the doctrine of the name in Adorno's work, as this filters through its use in Jewish philosophy, see Kaufmann, David, 'Correlations, Constellations and the Truth: Adorno's Ontology of Redemption' in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 26. no. 5, 2000, 62-80.
[41] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 184.
[42] Bernstein, *Adorno*, 333 my italics.

be conscious of the abstractions that result from identificatory judgements. It must then enliven and demystify fetishized identity by becoming receptive to that which exceeds the concept (non-identity) and which thought seeks to express. For Adorno, thinking must work *through* the conceptual determinations in order to disclose what lies beyond these. The mistake of traditional thinking is that it takes identity for its goal, thus failing to see that '[n]on-identity is the secret *telos* of identification'.[43]

Cognition as naming must be *sensitively* dynamic because its 'logics of disintegration' is not simply the arbitrary play of signification in an immanent, self-referential system. For Adorno, thought can attend to the object beyond it by responding to the 'forces' placed upon its conceptualisations by *the object itself*, as the object 'contests' these conceptualisations. In this way the object impels a critique of thinking leading to a re-determination and transformation of concepts. As Adorno states, it 'is the matter [i.e. the object], not the organizing drive of thought, that brings us to dialectics'.[44]

Adorno's non-identity thinking attests, not to the play of Derridaen *différance* and the (im)possible attempt to name the wholly other, but to the other as *a sensuous particularity*, whom my thinking responds to and seeks an *affinity* with. It is my view, furthermore, that to conceive the other in terms of their sensuous particularity better conveys their concrete specificity in a way that avoids the still somewhat abstract formulation of sensuous otherness that I believe haunts Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference.

Certainly, Adorno accepts that all cognition operates with concepts and the relations between them. However, for him, our concepts are not to be used to simply parody otherness, as with Derrida and Lacan. Instead, they can be deployed to gain a certain affinity with the object itself.[45] Influenced by Benjamin, Adorno connects naming with thinking in 'constellations'. He writes:

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[43] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 149.
[44] Ibid, 144. 'If every symbol symbolizes nothing but another symbol, another conceptuality, their core remains empty'. Ibid, 399.
[45] 'Under its critique, identity does not vanish but undergoes a qualitative change. Elements of affinity – of the object itself to the thought of it – come to live in identity'. Ibid, 149.

> 'The determinable flaw of all concepts make it necessary to cite others next to it; from this flows those constellations to which something of the hope of the Name has passed. The language of philosophy approaches the Name by denying it'.[46]

An individual concept can never adequately grasp, without remainder, the array of properties and qualities belonging to a particular object. For Adorno, a cognition that endeavours to name the object must arrange its concepts into various groupings or constellations. Here, the relation between concepts both reveal the insufficiencies of each individual concept (critical), and offers a conceptual depiction that aims to approximate the object itself (mimetic).

Importantly, for Adorno, the constellations that emerge in thinking are not to be viewed as definitively naming the object's basic, immutable essence. Rather, given his contention that 'there is no hidden meaning which could be redeemable from its [the object's] one-time and first-time historical appearance',[47] constellations can only name the object's truth, not as something absolute but as something strictly relative to its particular historical context.[48] In light of this, a cognition that tries to name the object is not the attempt to call it by its true or proper Name or identity.

Cognition as naming is to guard against petrifying both concept and object, by refusing to pronounce a name as if it were the Name. As Düttmann puts it, '[a] name always promises another name, because it is given to be given, given again, and also refused'.[49] Thus, a name is offered to the object, but it must be continuously re-offered rather than imposed upon it once and for all. We now start to see how naming is tied to the determinate negation of reified concepts. In naming and re-naming the object thought can reveal how the object's apparent naturalness is in fact the *result* of its various determinations, or mediations, by socio-cultural practices, rather than its pre-given nature. However, as I will say *ad nauseam*, the negation of the name is not

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[46] Ibid, 53, translated modified.
[47] Adorno, 'The Actuality of Philosophy', *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O'Connor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 33.
[48] As Jobling rightly observes, and which holds for Adorno, there is a distinction between that which is historical and contingent and that which is purely arbitrary. The former allows us to claim that there are indeed truths but that these refer to a specific historical context that did not necessarily have to be; the latter simply leaves us with relativism. Jobling, J'annine, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Theological Context: Restless Reading*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2002), 159.
[49] Düttmann, Alexander Garcia, *The Gift of Language: Memory and Promise in Adorno, Benjamin, Heidegger, and Rosenweig* (London: The Althone Press, 2000), 85.

for the sake of finally hitting upon the true Name, of uncovering the object's primordial being stripped of its socio-historic determinations. This is because Adorno maintains that the object *really* is as it has been historically produced: what is, is the history (literally) sedimented within it. An object's essence, then, is not pre-established and fixed, but is historically constituted and ever evolving. However, Adorno also claims that 'what is, is more than it is',[50] and one way we can read this pregnant remark is that the object is more than the mediations that have crystallized around it over time: it has future possibilities.

The object's name must be negated, then, in order to give the lie to the apparent *necessity* of its present existence as thus and so - which, nevertheless, truthfully attests to its *becoming* thus and so, within a social totality that attributes a certain reality to it as if this were its fate. The subjective mediations and determinations of the object that thicken and solidify over time into a 'second nature' are, Adorno holds, contingent; but, nevertheless, are still objective and real. Determinate negation in this sense constitutes what we may think of as the *critical* function of naming. This does not entail Hegel's negation of the negation, where the contradiction between thought and being is (logically) overcome in their final identification with each other. Instead, for Adorno, determinate negation involves placing identificatory concepts in constellations not to *overcome* the insufficiencies and the contradictions that emerge in their juxtaposition, but rather to bring these into bold relief. This conceptually illuminates the objective negations and abstractions that have *in material actuality* denied the object its distinct sensuous particularity. What is made determinate is not the thing's location within a rational totality (Hegel) but a negated state of affairs, an 'ontology of the wrong state of things'.[51] In these disenchanted times, the critical naming of the object through constellations allows its fragmented, distorted forms to be made manifest to thought. Such naming determinately negates the thing's unified, rationalised appearance within capitalist exchange society.

However, naming is not only critical for Adorno. It also has a speculative or redemptive function, and this too is a form of determinate negation. In revealing the object as reduced and damaged, cognition need not simply affirm this negated state as

[50] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 161.
[51] Ibid, 11.

the object's immutable truth. Instead, precisely by refusing to deny the elisions, contradictions and disjunctions in thinking the object, thought (negatively) hints at repressed differences and unassimilated sensuous particularities that indicate the object's potential to exist otherwise. The acknowledgement of its potential for transformation is a (determinate) negation of the object's present negated form. However, because Adorno figures the object in the open, unspecified terms of its potentiality or possibility, rather than as a positive 'something' to be restored or realised, this negation remains negative. What naming redeems is *possibility* (negative, because it is not (yet)). As Adorno writes:

> 'The means employed in negative dialectics for the penetration of its hardened objects is possibility – the possibility of which their reality has cheated the objects and which is nonetheless visible in each one.'[52]

The thought that thinks against itself, against the negated world it conceptually depicts, is the thought that thinks transcendence: that which is beyond present existence. And yet, this beyond is not the beyond of being or experience. It is, rather, a historical possibility that has been foreclosed from the object by actuality (mis)conceived and/ or experienced as unalterable fate.

Derrida's philosophy of *différance* similarly anticipates transcendence according to the figure of the (im)possible (and so avoids stating transcendence in positive terms). However, I would argue that Derrida's (im)possible is an abstract version of Adorno's historical possibility. For all the unformulatedness or negativity of the latter's possibility, that which 'is not' is not, however, 'pure non-being'.[53] Adorno's possibility, as the object's unrealised potential to exist otherwise than what present society dictates, can arrive in time and space, given the actual transformation of the world. This would require a practical negation of the existing objective contradictions that critical thinking is able to specify and disclose. Derrida's philosophy of *différance*, I have argued, commits him to a 'metaphysics of the text', as it were. Here, a metaphysics of presence is 'eternalised' as an unavoidable effect of signifying practices. Only that which is '*wholly other*' can, therefore, challenge the text as self-

[52] Ibid, 52. Indeed, Held contends that '[t]he central category in negative dialectics for the comprehension of the object is 'possibility''. Held, David, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*, (Hutchinson & Co: London, 1980), 214.
[53] Ibid, 393.

same presence. But, the 'wholly other' cannot arrive without being reduced to sameness/ presence. The 'wholly other', therefore, can only serve as a purely 'formal' ideal, for its arrival is (im)possible as that which is always to be postponed.

Just as Kant's recognition of the 'unthinkability of despair'[54] forces him to postulate a free, intelligible world, contra the despairing ontology of empirical immanence where all is absolutely determined, Derrida too guards against the despairing ontology of the text as presence, by postulating the 'wholly other' as that which teases the text with traces and openings that seem to promise a passage out of presence. However, because Derrida, like Kant, *a priori* 'blocks' off that which we do not currently experience (namely, freedom and difference), by constructing it as *forever* transcendent to experience, and so prohibiting the possibility of its actual arrival in immanent experience, he effectively consolidates despair as life's principal existential mode. From Adorno's perspective, Derrida fails to see that this 'block' is not necessary but contingent: a product of historical processes rather than the inevitable effect of *différance*.[55]

According to Adorno 'nothing could be experienced as *truly alive* if something that transcends life were not promised also',[56] and Derrida would surely agree with this. However, for Adorno, what transcends present life is historical possibility rather than a formal possibility, which is all I believe Derrida's *différance* offers. As Adorno writes: '[w]hat is must be changeable [in actuality] if it is not to be all'.[57] In this way life need not be condemned to absolute despair, but can be lived according to the modalities of both hope and promise, as these have their index in the possibility of what Adorno calls 'the transfigured body'.[58] It is then the historical possibility of the transfigured *body*, not the formal or logical, messianic (im)possibility proffered by Derrida's destabilized *text*, that grants naming its redemptive capacity. For Adorno, cognition as naming both critically highlights the concept's inability to fully identify the object, *at the same time* as it proleptically names the possibility of the transfigured body, without, however, positively identifying its nature.

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[54] Ibid, 385.
[55] 'The anti-historical theology of downright otherness has its historical index'. Ibid, 402.
[56] Ibid, 375 my italics.
[57] Ibid, 398.
[58] 'But what hope clings to...is the transfigured body'. Ibid, 400.

Towards the Transfigured Body

'The details of our world deserve our respectful and loving attention'.[59]

Here, I aim to show that Adorno's idea of the transfigured body attempts to prevent his negative dialectics from descending into an ineffectual, even nihilistic aesthetics that merely expresses what Rowan Williams calls 'the pathos of perpetual negation'.[60] The transfigured body in Adorno's work does not, in my view, refer to a purely formal Ideal with no ontological substantiveness or positivity as such, where it serves only as a logical standpoint that simply enables us to determine the world as 'an ontology of the wrong state of things'. Rather, I maintain that Adorno's hope for the transfigured body is hope for an actual possibility, namely, the possibility of a radically transformed, emancipated society. It is, therefore, a profoundly political hope for what may be possible in history, rather than a hope based on dreams of the impossible.

It is true that Adorno is unswervingly agnostic as to the exact nature of the transfigured body, refusing to give any positive ideas or images as to what a transformed world might be like. According to Adorno, where there are contradictions and antagonisms in actuality, i.e. present existence, there can be no wholly affirmative conception of an ideal future that would not be anything more than a false reconciliation of the ideal and the real in the realm of thought alone. A further difficulty, *vis-à-vis* thinking the future as the transfigured body, is that cognition must inevitably deploy concepts that are themselves conditioned by the prevailing capitalist social order. Visions of an other future would seem to elude depiction by concepts marred by present conditions. The question we must now ask is whether Adorno regards thought as so completely tethered to existing conditions that it is unable to think otherwise without drifting into fantasy or reproducing the immanence it wishes to break out from? Is it the case, as Pickstock believes, that, for Adorno, actuality

[59] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 377.
[60] Williams, Rowan 'Between Politics and Metaphysics: Reflections in the Wake of Gillian Rose', *Modern Theology*, vol. 11, no. 1 (January, 1995), 17. As Jarvis recalls for us, Horkheimer, in a frustrated response to Adorno's supposedly materialist negative dialectics, complained that '[s]o all we can do is say "no" to everything!' Jarvis, Simon ,'The Coastline of Experience: Materialism and Metaphysics in Adorno', *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 85 (1997), 15.

permanently '*holds back* the ideal future [the transfigured body] through contradictions and alienations'[61] such that the only option left for thought is endless negation of the actual?

An important clue to addressing these issues is Adorno's claim that contradiction is not the ultimate essence of being in some sort of Heraclitean sense.[62] Rather:

> 'Contradiction is non-identity *under the aspect of identity*.... What we differentiate will appear divergent, dissonant, negative for *just as long as the structure of our consciousness obliges it to strive for unity*: as long as its demand for totality will be the measure for whatever is not identical with it'[63]

This should not be read as simply highlighting a logical point - namely, the law of non-contradiction - such that non-identity is simply negativity (i.e. lack) vis-à-vis identity as positivity. Rather, Adorno wishes to argue that contradictions are the marks of a form of thinking that *desires* totality, unity and consistency, in accordance with the principles of logic, particularly the law of the excluded middle (a thing must be either p or not-p, there can be no intermediateness). That is, contradictions are indicative of a form of thinking that takes absolute identity as its goal. The salient point here is not that identity thinking *fails* to achieve unity and closure, but that its attempt to do so rides roughshod over actual things, damaging individual objects by subsuming them under abstract categories, making the incommensurable commensurable. Contradictions in thought, then, attest to contradictions in actuality. Dialectics as the 'consistent sense of non-identity'[64] is the form of thinking that quite literally feels the force of the object as it protests against its definitions (social as well as philosophical). As Adorno vividly puts it, the agony of dialectical thinking, its constant experience of contradiction 'is the world's agony raised to a concept'.[65]

For Adorno, dialectics is a thinking necessarily bound to an 'ontology of the wrong state of things'. By overcoming contradictions in the realm of thought alone Hegel's dialectic, Adorno claims, becomes blind to contradictions in actuality and so

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[61] Pickstock, Catherine 'Liturgy, Art and Politics' in *Modern Theology*, no. 10, vol. 2 (April, 2000), 164.
[62] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5.
[63] Ibid, 5, my italics.
[64] Ibid, 5.
[65] Ibid, 6.

maintains the status quo. *Per contra*, Adorno's negative dialectics, by resisting thought's tendency to seek totality and closure (i.e. identity), does not finally overcome negativity or non-identity with the affirmation of a positive absolute. It is precisely by not effacing thought's experience of contradictions that negative dialectics reveals the real social antagonisms that effect these contradictions in our thinking. Coole rightly emphasizes that, for Adorno, determinate negation is not a practice for thought alone but 'hopes to incite its practical negation'.[66] Importantly, practical negation is no indiscriminate destruction of what is, but is the collective negation of oppressive and inequitable structures, practices, laws and institutions that distort people and things and which critical thinking is able to specify.

While it is true that Adorno regards thinking as caught up in the existing state of affairs it is vital that we realise that for him thought needs to be aware of what Rose calls the 'difficulty of actuality'.[67] Certainly Adorno will make dramatic announcements such as 'the world is false to its innermost core',[68] which would lead us to think that for him there is no positivity to being at all. This would mean that thought is *a priori* condemned to repeat the negativity of existence. However, such remarks by Adorno should be read polemically because the more interesting point he wishes to press home is that actuality is a complex of truth and untruth, actuality and possibility; objects literally embody these contradictions. The difficulty of actuality means that truth is to be reached by negating untruth: '[i]n the end hope, wrested from reality be negating it, is the only form in which truth appears'.[69]

But truth, for Adorno, is not some metaphysical thing-in-itself. Negation, both theoretical and practical, does not finally encounter things in their pristine positivity, free of all ideology. Instead, Adorno develops the idea of truth as that which entails a transformed experience, a different way of *thinking* things in the world, which in turn would transform ways of being in the world for both subjects and objects. In this sense the notion of the transfigured body is not so much a positive existent to be wrested from the unrealised potentialities of present existence, but is rather *a different*

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[66] Coole, *Negativity and Politics: Dionysus and Dialectics from Kant to Postructuralism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 175.
[67] Rose, Gillian, *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 5.
[68] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 31 trans. modified.
[69] Adorno, Theodor, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1999), 98.

form of consciousness, one that no longer seeks to totalise itself in all there is but remains open to experience, appreciating the otherness of the object without forgetting its own necessary connection to the object in thinking (mediating) it.

For such a transformed experience to be realised would mean that negative dialectics 'must turn even against itself'.[70] An 'ontology of the wrong state of things' is the world structured as a unified totality, a closed system of immanence where no thing defies the laws of classical logic. Negative dialectics is the consciousness that bears testimony to the real contradictions and discord in a world that has been falsely reconciled and thus only simulates its unity and coherence. 'Utopia [*viz.*, the transfigured body] would be *above identity and above contradiction*; it would be a togetherness of diversity'.[71] The transfigured body, then, would be the world in its properly reconciled state, a world no longer pathologically bound by the drive for self-preservation, which manifests itself as instrumental thinking, and where negative dialectics would have no place because the contradictions that drive it would no longer be.

Importantly, Adorno maintains that given the possibility of the experience of transcendence, hope for the transfigured body can be more than just wishful thinking. Indeed, the question '[i]s it still possible to have a metaphysical experience?'[72] is one that preoccupies Adorno in his later years, and is precisely concerned with whether transcendence can be experienced. We know that Adorno appreciates what he regards as the 'rescuing intention' of Kant's proscription on experiencing transcendence – that is, the experience of what transcends the given, i.e. metaphysics – because it acknowledges the limit of finite conceptual consciousness, and so preserves a moment of non-identity between thought and being.[73] However, Adorno believes that Kant erroneously naturalises the material or structural conditions of modern social experience (principally, the laws of the capitalist market) by casting these as the *a priori*, transcendental conditions for experience per se. Adorno indicts Kant's philosophy for transcendentally grounding the conditions of experience in the

[70] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 406.
[71] Ibid, 150, my italics. See also ' [t]he right state of things would be free of it [dialectics]: neither a system nor a contradiction'. Ibid, 11.
[72] Ibid, 372.
[73] Hegel's philosophy, in its attempt (rightly for Adorno) to dialectically connect immanence and transcendence, would nevertheless end up liquidating transcendence in the realisation of *Geist*.

ahistorical transcendental subject and its invariant set of *a priori* categories, rather than recognising these to be the historically contingent, and not *logically* necessary, conditions that make modern experience what it is. In this way Kant forecloses the possibility that there can be a transformation of experience and so the possibility of the transfigured body: a society no longer constituted in accordance with the principle of exchange and identity thinking.

From the context of immanence – the very mechanisms of which produced the utter dreadfulness of Auschwitz – Adorno seeks the light of transcendence in the possibility of metaphysical experience. Such light would reveal that the world is not totally closed in on itself, that what is, is not all that could ever be. By appealing to transcendence Adorno is not wishing to provide a safe haven for the spirit from the cruel fate of the material world. For Adorno, to retain this split between mind and world, the intelligible and the sensible could not support the hope for the transfigured body and is, thereby, politically quietist. As Adorno puts it '[t]he ideological untruth in the conception of transcendence is the separation of body and soul'.[74] The transcendence that metaphysical experience might disclose is not, for Adorno, an otherworldliness beyond material existence, but is rather the elements of otherness that are always immanent in the material world: an immanent transcendence.

Transcendence is thus to be regarded as permanently wed to material immanence. This has important implications for thinking the material. Indeed, perhaps to convey the unusualness of the materialism he is developing, Adorno interestingly connects it with theology. He writes:

> 'At its most materialistic, materialism comes to agree with theology. Its great desire would be the resurrection of the flesh, a desire utterly foreign to idealism, the realm of absolute spirit'.[75]

By this rather unexpected alignment of the material with theology, where the latter often insists upon the notion of transcendence, I think Adorno is suggesting that paradoxically the resurrection of the flesh, or the re-enchantment of the material, is only possible given its relation to transcendence. As we know, for Adorno,

[74] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 400.
[75] Ibid, 207. Also, Ibid, 401.

transcendence is not a redemptive ideality outside bodily finitude. Rather, it is the standpoint thought attains if it thinks against itself, breaking through the carapace of conceptual identity and so transcending the reified materiality that identity thinking constitutes. The thought that opens onto transcendence in this way can acknowledge both that the material is not fully reduced to its abstract constructions, and that this material excess intimates the potential for objects to exist in a different key; one where its sensuous particularity is no longer alienated from it. It is in this potential that hope for the transfigured body – the promise of theology - is given grounds.

In his reflections upon metaphysical experience Adorno brings the concepts of materialism, metaphysics, transcendence and theology into a constellation. Thus far, we have taken Adorno's idea of metaphysical experience to mean any experience that transcends the immediacy of disenchanted material immanence. For such experience to occur it must be possible that even though subjects are 'embedded in themselves, in their "constitution"...they are nonetheless able to see beyond themselves'.[76] But this beyond is not something that Adorno is content to simply logically deduce, which would once more perpetuate the split between the ideal and the real, instead he wants to ascertain whether the subject can actually *experience* transcendence while embedded in its own immanent constitutions. In a nutshell, the answer for Adorno is both yes and no. He attempts to show that the context of immanence can yield the experience of transcendence, but that this is always a negatively inflected experience because it is of what is not. However, 'what is not' is not simply non-being/ nothingness. Hence, he claims that the 'transcendent is, and it is not'.[77]

I would now like to outline a practice Adorno calls 'micrology' as one that, while not comprehensively developed to this end by him, suggests how the experience of transcendence may be attained. Micrology is a form of anamnesis where cognition recalls those sensuous particularities that an object's history - shaped by the social totality in which it is situated - has suppressed. However, what is recalled points to what has not yet been realised and so is a memory of a potential that thereby becomes a promise of the object's transformation, its redemption as it were. Micrology responds to Adorno's contention that '[n]o recollection of transcendence is possible

[76] Ibid, 376.
[77] Ibid, 375.

anymore, save by way of perdition; eternity appears, not as such, but diffracted though what is most perishable'.[78]

As I have been keen to stress, for Adorno the violence of identity thinking is real. Objects are really damaged and disenchanted as their individuating differences are purged by the classificatory judgements of identity thinking. This suppression of differences is not merely thought's hostility's to non-conceptual otherness but is the actual annexing and degradation of people and things, as well as the human individual's repression of her or his own somatic instincts or drives. In view of this Adorno writes: '[t]hings congeal as fragments of that which was subjugated; to rescue it means to love things'.[79] The enterprise Adorno terms 'micrology' is precisely this work of rescue and the impulse for this work is love. It is the recollection of the material differences and contingencies that identity thinking disavows in its subsumption of the individual object, in all its sensuous particularity, under abstract universals. These damaged remainders are the silent, painful protestations of the object as it resists those societal definitions, themselves often contradictory, demanded by capital and/ or the phallic economy. The thought that redirects its attention away from the category to the actual things themselves, things injured by the machinations of a totalising rationalisation, is the thought that seeks to 'lend a voice to suffering'.[80]

We could say that for Adorno, the love that responds to the suffering object drives thought to transcend the false unity of (ir)rationalised immanence, in order to recall those irreducible material fragments that leave their trace in the gaps, breaks and dissonance that give the lie to thought's (apparent) complete capture of the object, the claim of identity. Micrology experiences that which transcends the disenchanted immanence of late modernity, not in the empyreal heights beyond being, *pace* Levinas; nor in the textual upheavals of *différance*; nor yet in a single, irrepressible phenomenon, for example, sexual difference - prioritised as the bearer of transcendence over other phenomena. Rather, in the poignant words of Horowitz, micrology finds transcendence 'in the tiniest motes of dust that subjective reason has

[78] Ibid, 360.
[79] Ibid, 191.
[80] Ibid, 17.

not yet been able to totalise, the being otherwise that redeems being'.[81] This 'dust' gathers in the spaces or non-identity between the universal (concept) and the particular (the individual object). By discerning the residues of identity thinking, micrology splinters open immanence, allowing glimmers of light from transcendence to spread across the dullness of 'universal equivalence'. This light does not come from a supernatural source; rather it radiates from the redemptive glow contained within the neglected particulars of this world, which become ciphers of the absolute, that is, the object in its sensuous particularity.

Here is Adorno:

> 'The smallest intramundane traits would be of relevance to the absolute, for the micrological view cracks the shells of what, measured by the subsuming cover concept, is *helplessly isolated and explodes identity*, the delusion that it is but a specimen'.[82]

These traits are those effaced material specificities and contingencies that subsumptive identity thinking cannot discriminate. They are 'helplessly isolated' because they stand outside the norms of intelligibility and so are effectively indeterminate. Yet they are not nothing, and as a material excess they bespeak an otherness that 'explodes' conceptual identity.

Micrology, then, can afford us with the experience of transcendence. But this is an aporetic experience because transcendence – the intramundane traits recalled by micrology – remains circumscribed by immanence even as it 'breaks out' of this. This is because the social totality in which the experience of transcendence takes place remains governed by principles (namely, the capitalist principle of exchange) that render those experiences illegitimate.[83] Furthermore, transcendence is itself marked 'by the same distortions and indigence which it seeks to escape',[84] because, in these late capitalist times, the experience of transcendence reveals 'pained fragments,

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[81] Horowitz, Asher, 'By a Hair's Breadth: Critique, Transcendence and the Ethical in Adorno and Levinas', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2002), 236.
[82] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 408 my italics.
[83] This is why Adorno will regard Kant's block on experiential transcendence as correctly descriptive of our present times where any experience of transcendence we might have is immediately revoked by the existing state of affairs.
[84] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 247.

not triumphant totalities'.[85] And yet, as we know, Adorno regards these fragments as having redemptive import for they promise a potential for the object to exist otherwise.

While micrology can be viewed as the experience of the object's transcendence Adorno, as I suggest we read him, is also keen to stress the subjective nature of the experience of transcendence, particularly as this has its basis in the body's affective capacity. Indeed, I would say that for Adorno the experience of transcendence is one that can actually be subjectively *felt* from within material immanence. The contradictions and dissonance that arise in the context of rationalised immanence are physically manifested as suffering. Unsurprisingly then, it is in the bodily sensations of suffering and pain that Adorno finds the somatic expression of negativity, of what should not be. He writes that '[t]he physical [or bodily] moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different'.[86] Insofar as the experience of suffering is one that alludes to something beyond itself, namely, a context where suffering is no more, I believe we can regard it as a *bodily* experience of transcendence.

Conversely, feelings of happiness – which, for Adorno, are inseparable from (though not reducible to) bodily pleasure and fulfilment - offer a transcendent yet bodily experience that positively heralds what should be but is not (yet). What should be is the universal happiness that is currently denied the world - not out of necessity but due to the hegemony of identity thinking. Though subjects can have moments of happiness in a falsified and disenchanted world, these moments, while positive in a sense, are nevertheless tied to negativity. This is because the existing state of affairs sustains domination and suffering, such that moments of happiness are always tainted by the suffering that prevails. However, Adorno does not completely undermine the redemptive force of happiness, as the promise of universal happiness. He claims that '[h]appiness [is] the only part of metaphysical experience that is *more than impotent longing*'.[87] For Adorno, the experience of happiness in this increasingly disenchanted world constitutes a physical actuality that serves as a fragile yet concrete basis for

[85] Kaufmann, David, 'Correlations, Constellations and the Truth: Adorno's Ontology of Redemption', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 26, no. 5 (2000), 76.
[86] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 203.
[87] Ibid, 374, my italics.

hope regarding the possibility of the world's redemption. In contradistinction, it seems to me that the Derridaen '(im)possible' is a notion that can secure hope *only* as an impotent longing for actual transformation, precisely due to its abstractness. For Adorno, then, suffering and happiness are bodily experiences that transcend the given while remaining anchored in material immanence. Such experiences, along with the insights given by the practice of micrology, call into question the normativity of the existing context of immanence and can provide the basis for a 'socially transformative praxis'[88] that could bring about the actual transformation of the world.

According to Adorno 'transcendence feeds on nothing but the experiences we have of immanence'.[89] Although the world is increasingly disenchanted, it is not a thoroughly closed context of immanence for it is possible to experience fragments of otherness, sensuous particulars, as a phenomenal excess that contests the adequacy of conceptual determination. To reiterate, the transfigured body is not a formal ideal 'hovering abstractly, impotently over things in being',[90] unable to arrive in immanence. Instead, for Adorno, hope for the transfigured body is sustained by potentialities already present in immanence. Indeed, the transfigured body is tantalising proximate. As Adorno says '[i]n the right condition, as in the Jewish *theologoumenon*, all things would differ only a little from the way they are; but even the least can be conceived now as it would be then'.[91]

To sum up: the realisation of the transfigured body does not, for Adorno, entail the negation of the world *per se* but the negation of the world as it exists in a negated form. The world is alienated from its own materiality and sensuousness by a spirit, subjectivity or mind, that seeks to make itself total in all things, out of a drive for self-preservation that has become perverse. Spirit's freedom is not to be gained by fleeing nature, a move that actually ends up imprisoning spirit in its own abstractions, but by acknowledging and thinking the rich materiality and bodiliness that affords spirit its substance: life in all its differences and becoming. Spirit must seek its reconciliation with the material objectivity that, while irreducible and other to spirit, can never be totally divorced or expunged from it. Such reconciliation would not attain absolute

[88] Ibid, 203.
[89] Ibid, 398.
[90] Ibid, 299.
[91] Ibid, 299.

identity but the transfiguration of the world where peace is realised as 'the state of distinctness without domination, with the distinct participating in each other'.[92]

Negative dialectics aims towards this reconciliation and so towards its own demise. As Adorno states: '[i]t lies in the definition of negative dialectics that it will not come to rest in itself, as if it were total'.[93] For Adorno, negative dialectics is *not* the ultimate mode of cognition, but is perhaps the only one powerful enough to break the spell of immanence cast by subsumptive, identity thinking. Given the reconciled condition, negative dialectics will be a qualitatively changed dialectics: a thinking no longer driven by contradictions but by a joyful attending to the object in its sensuous particularity, and so a thinking that does not blot out the object's aura of transcendence, i.e. its awesome uniqueness.

On Reconciliation

It is clear that the reconciled state for Adorno is not a static, closed unity, where differences are forced into an 'abstract equality' or hierarchy according to the rule of the same, namely the subject as absolute. In Jay's words, reconciliation for Adorno means 'the restoration of difference and non-identity to their proper place in the non-hierarchical constellation of subjective and objective forces he called peace'.[94] Socially this would manifest itself as a world where 'people could be different without fear'.[95] Indeed, human and non-human nature could exist in ways where no thing can be conceived as reducible to another. Importantly, such reconcilement is inseparable from a transformed consciousness, one that abides 'insistently with the particular',[96] rather than reducing it to a mere 'through-station' en-route to the Absolute, as with Hegel.

Hent De Vries suggests that Adorno's emphasis on the primacy of the singular, in his utopian reconciliation, defies the Platonism of the universal that has predominated Western philosophy, and instead institutes an almost Benjaminian Platonism of the

[92] Adorno, 'Subject and Object', 140.
[93] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 406.
[94] Cited in Coole, *Negativity and Politics*, 262, n. 41.
[95] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 103.
[96] Ibid, 74.

singular.[97] This is right, I think, to the extent that Adorno's vision of a properly reconciled ontology is one where the particular object itself, rather than the general category, is prioritised as the basis of the truth of things. However, we would be wrong if from this we supposed Adorno to be commending some sort of nominalism. For Adorno, no existent is purely self-identical or self-contained. In short, there are no unmediated, purely self-related objects in the world. Each particular thing is what it is due to its relationships with other particular things within a wider material context, principally, the social context. All particulars are, therefore, mediated by the universal.[98] For Adorno, the job of cognition is not simply to subsume the particular under the universal but to unfold 'the difference between the particular and the universal, dictated by the universal'.[99]

Instead of a Platonism of the singular, Bernstein, more helpfully I believe, describes Adorno's (hoped for) reconciled ontology as a 'particularistic pluralism'.[100] A particularistic pluralism calls for a certain cognitive approach towards the object, one that rejects the principle of bivalence in thinking the individual object, whereby the object either is, or is not, as its concept emphatically states. Rather than subsuming the object under abstract categories, cognition would instead track the material content of concepts or categories that mediate the object. It would need to make, what Bernstein calls, *material* inferences between concepts rather than *logical* ones, where the latter are informed by context-independent laws of logic and facilitate the complete determination of the object.[101] Cognition, then, would seek an ongoing naming of the sensuous particular object through a constellation of appropriate concepts. These concepts are themselves materially 'loaded', as it were, for they are always of a piece with the material conditions (objects, events, practices, institutions, etc) from which they emerge during the course of history. By illuminating, rather than suppressing, their material conditionedness concepts arranged in constellations

[97] De Vries, Hent, *Minimal Theologies: Critique of Secular Reason in Adorno and Levinas* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 282.
[98] '[T]he particular itself is unthinkable without the moment of the universal which differentiates the particular'. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 328.
[99] Ibid, 6.
[100] Bernstein, *Adorno*, 349.
[101] Ibid, 263ff.

will be able to highlight the complex material scene within which the particular object becomes actualised, i.e. made determinate.[102] In a changed philosophy:

> 'substance would lie in the diversity of objects that impinge upon it and of the objects it seeks, *a diversity not wrought by any schema*; to those objects, philosophy [and so thought] would *truly give itself* rather than use them as a mirror in which to reread itself, mistaking its own image for concretion. *It would be nothing but full, unreduced experience in the medium of conceptual reflection*'.[103]

Let us now turn to how we might rethink immanent transcendence given Adorno's reconciled ontology.

Unreduced Experience: Reconsidering Immanent Transcendence

Adorno contends that in the reconciled condition subjective experience would not be the 'absolute knowing' that is Hegel's self-conscious *Geist*. Rather, experience would live by 'consuming the standpoint'.[104] Once free from the fixed standpoint, experience would be, according to Adorno, undiminished and unreduced. It would be a spontaneous, intentionless encounter with the object as a sensuous particular by the 'fearlessly passive',[105] yet rationally responsive subject, whose thinking would be *transformed* by this encounter rather than safely returned to its originary standpoint. The sensible world would, thus, be characterised by openness and becoming rather than totality and system.

Given Adorno's materialist dialectical framework, there are three motifs through which the idea of immanent transcendence can be articulated. These are 'excess', 'difference' and 'historical possibility'. I shall consider each in turn.

(i) *Excess*

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[102] 'Cognition of the object in its constellation is cognition of the *process* stored in the object'. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 163 my italics. I also want to point out the object's determination is not a wholly passive process; the object can also be viewed is (limitedly) self-determining.
[103] Ibid, 13.
[104] Ibid, 30.
[105] Adorno, 'Subject and Object', 146.

Because the object continuously accrues complex and varied determinations over time, it is thereby characterised by an ontological complexity or density that affords it a phenomenal excessiveness. Bernstein conveys this excessive quality of the object in Adorno's work as 'what makes something objective, other, an object out there in the world *is its individuated intricacy and power in excess of it simple phenomenal appearing and thus in excess of its empirically grounded designation*...the "object" as opposed to the subject is the nonidentical excess (the deity "in" the object) beyond what is captured in the ordinary concept of a thing'.[106] The object in its sensuous particularity will always exceed conceptual determination. According to Adorno '[i]n places where subjective reason scents subjective contingency, the primacy of the object is shimmering through'.[107] When the principle of bivalence is relinquished, the object's phenomenal excess is made visible as the indeterminacy of concepts. This indeterminacy is the very shimmering of the object's aura of transcendence.

(ii) *Difference*

With Bernstein, we have characterised Adorno's ontology as a particularistic pluralism. As such, there is not just one fundamental ontological difference marking the material world, but rather many differences. Where Irigaray views all existents as *sexed* female or male and so situated within the relevant sexuate genre, Adorno on the other hand views all existents as sensuous particulars. Importantly, sensuous particulars are not free-floating singularities, for as Adorno states, '[t]here is no entity whose determination and self-determination does not require something else, something which the entity itself is not'.[108] Sensuous particulars exist as fluidly situated within a dialectical 'field of force' – call it material objectivity - where they are continuously becoming actualised through determining relations with other sensuous particulars and concepts.

(iii) *Historical Possibility*

[106] Bernstein, *Adorno*, 193, my italics.
[107] Adorno, 'Subject and Object', 146.
[108] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 102.

Although Adorno regards the world as something that is continually becoming actualised through subjective and objective mediations, he never claims that its ultimate essence is one of chaotic Dionysian flux. The becoming of the world entails the capacity for forms to stabilise and have a certain durability. Nevertheless, these forms are not to be viewed as the immutable essence of things, for essence is to be understood as something open-ended and alterable rather than invariant. For Adorno, that which is, is that which can be changed, given certain material limits. The world – and its objects - can be reformed and re-determined: this is its historical possibility and allows for its becoming and self-transcendence.

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By refusing to pre-determine the ontology of the terms of the interval of difference (Irigaray), while not fleeing into the purely self-referential realm of signs (Derrida), Adorno's philosophy enables us to advance a 'thick' ontological description of the immanent world that does not deteriorate into abstract formulations. This ontology, I contend, provides the basis for a compelling re-conception of transcendence, understood as inseparable from the immanence of the sensible world and yet as a real otherness in immanence. Where Levinas will hunt for transcendence in the ethical relation with the Other beyond being, Adorno proposes an *ethics of thinking* which takes its cue from the transcending impulse of thought as it *responds* to the otherness of the sensuous particular.[109] What drives thought's transcending motion, then, is not simply its own inadequacy; whereby the perpetual failure of concepts or signs compels thought to chase the endless deferral of identity. Rather, it is the 'call' of the object as that which is irreducible to thought. Yet the object cannot be totally alien to thought without becoming utterly meaningless. Faced with this paradox, one of the main points of Adorno philosophy is that it is precisely the very nature of thought to be tied to an ineliminable moment of otherness: '[r]epresented in the inmost cell of thought is that which unlike thought'.[110] Thinking must acknowledge the otherness upon which it depends and which it is always already complexly bound up with.

[109] See Horowitz, 'By a Hair's Breadth', 213-248, for a useful discussion concerning the idea of transcendence in Adorno and Levinas' work. See also, De Vries' *Minimal Theologies*, for a comparative study of Adorno and Levinas that explores the implications of each of their philosophies for thinking theology.
[110] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 408.

Because *how* thought relates to such otherness is importantly constitutive of actual things in the world, to divorce epistemology from ethics risks abandoning the world to the violence of a totalising thinking, and so to a totalised ontology that robs the world of difference and discernment.[111]

The otherness of the object *vis-à-vis* thought invokes the metaphysical idea of the absolute or the unconditioned. Indeed, for Adorno, an ethical cognition is to strive for knowledge of the absolute 'without the construction of an absolute knowledge'.[112] As I read him, the absolute is no more than, and indeed no less than, the object in its sensuous particularity. For Adorno, thought is able to think and know the absolute, which is neither a noumenal materiality nor pure ideality, but is concretely manifest in front our very eyes, for example, as that delicate flower, the face of a friend or a stranger, a suffering body, etc. But thought can never know the absolute absolutely. An ethics of cognition would entail jettisoning the aims of totality and identity, as these cast a spell of immanence over the world, turning sensuous, living objects into immutable constructs of knowledge. Instead, cognition would seek a '*distant nearness*'[113] to things as they stand aglow in their aura of transcendence, their mysterious, irreducible sensuous particularity – this is precisely an ethical relation to the object in cognitive mode.

For Adorno, each object is a locus of transcendence. To experience such transcendence entails an 'immersion in detail',[114] that is, an attention to contingencies, as these begin to delineate the object in its awesome singularity. In the reconciled condition the difficulty of actuality – characteristic of 'an ontology of the wrong state of things', where truth is to be wrested from falsehood – gives way to the beauty of actuality. Here, beauty is the very visibility of the sensuous particular experienced in its uniqueness rather than as typifying a class. Such beauty is the light of truth and ethics, '[t]he eyes that lose themselves to the one and only beauty are Sabbath eyes. They save in their object something of the calm of its day of creation'.[115] Sensuous

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[111] For a feminist critique of the separation of ontology and ethics in Levinas see Diprose, Rosalyn *Corporeal Generosity: On Giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).
[112] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 404.
[113] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 90.
[114] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 303.
[115] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 76.

objects in their non-fungible particularity are expressive of transcendence: an otherness that does not disable thought so that discernment becomes impossible, nor leads it beyond the sensible world, but rather keeps calling thought back to the beauty of things themselves. This is the world re-enchanted.

Conclusion

Even as he describes a world so disenchanted by the dominance of instrumental reason, and its economic analogue the exchange principle of capitalism, that he will declare present existence an 'ontology of the wrong state of things', Adorno will also argue that the spell of immanence is never total. He maintains that consciousness could not even despair of the grey 'if our minds did not harbour the concept of different colours, scattered traces of which *are not absent from the negative whole*'.[116] For Adorno, the material otherness that transcends thought is never completely cut off from thought; our concepts can never entirely close in on themselves.

In this chapter I have been keen to show that Adorno's notion of non-identity, or transcendence, pertains to the object in its sensuous particularity. This, I have argued, avoids presenting non-identity in the overly formal terms of the 'wholly other' such that it has no definable content and impotently haunts actuality - a problem I fear weakens Derrida's work. By emphasising the object in its irreducible, sensuous particularity, it is my view that Adorno's negative dialectics offers a highly promising account of material immanence as a space of otherness and becoming that does not, however, (i) abandon particular bodies to a process of indifferent becoming or 'othering' (Deleuze and Derrida); or (ii) articulates embodied specificity in terms of a single definitive and prioritised difference, such as sexuateness (Irigaray).

While Adorno utilises theological concepts, such as 'transcendence', 'redemption', 'hope', 'the Divine name', 'the absolute', 'transfiguration', 'peace', 'reconciliation', etc, we could never claim that his is a theological project, in the classic sense of offering a renewed understanding of the reality of God and the implications of this for

[116] Ibid, 377 my italics.

the world.[117] Yet his work, like the other thinkers examined in this study, is not straightforwardly secular either. Although he more readily appeals to the term 'metaphysics' rather than 'theology' when considering the idea of transcendence, he suggests that he is not simply secularising theology as metaphysics. He writes: '*[v]is-à-vis* theology, metaphysics is not just a historically later stage, as it is according to positivistic doctrine. It is not only theology secularised into a concept. *It preserves theology in its critique*, by uncovering the possibility of what theology may force upon men and thus desecrate'.[118] For Adorno, then, metaphysics maintains the possibility of theology even as it critiques it.

And what is this possibility of theology? I venture that it is not so much ridding theology of its mystical shell and realising it in humanist terms, as Feuerbach and other materialists attempt. Rather, it is a fierce insistence upon the possibility of transcendence against total immanence. Importantly, however, Adorno's concept of transcendence cannot be separated from his non-dogmatic materialism. For Adorno, the concepts of 'transcendence' and 'the material' call each other up; they are dialectically linked. In this way, the concept of 'transcendence' becomes importantly tied to the idea of the transfigured body as a historical possibility. The possibility of theology is the possibility of a world that can be transfigured, a world thus freed from pathological repetition: mythic fate.

It is this link Adorno makes between transcendence and a non-dogmatic materialism that I find interesting. The dominant refrain in Adorno's work is that the thinking subject cannot totally determine the object with its concepts and categories - there is always something 'more' of the object that remains non-identical to mind. Yet there is a critical tension in Adorno's philosophy as he tries to steer between the Scylla of positivism and the Charybdis of idealism when thinking the object. This is because the object, for Adorno, is to be regarded in two seemingly incompatible ways. The first is in a realist sense, insofar as it is something that is ultimately irreducible to and independent of mind and its subjective conceptualisations. The second is in a more

[117] Adorno's insistence upon the indeterminacy of the object has prompted some commentators to think that his negative dialectics is a form of negative theology and its *via negativa*. However, I think this is somewhat misleading because, for Adorno, we are not limited to saying 'the object is not this and not this' *ad infinitum*, but rather that the object is and is not this, for what is (presence) is always more than it is, a thing has future possibilities. What is is true, but it is never the *whole* truth.
[118] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 397 my italics.

idealist sense, insofar as the object is never purely given, for all that is given has always already been mediated by mind.

Bernstein contends that this ambiguity in Adorno should not be dissolved as it precisely prevents his work from sliding towards subjective idealism or a sceptical realism (positivism).[119] However, I think this ambiguity or even contradiction demands further investigation. Specifically, I contend that a definite shift needs to be made towards a realist view of the object to avoid inadvertently reducing it to the subject's measure. That the sensuous object has a meaningfulness and normativity of its own is vital to the notion of transcendence as indicative of a material objectivity irreducible to the constitutive subject.

In the following chapter I shall place the concepts of materialism, realism and transcendence into a constellation, and will argue that the integrity of the object as a sensuous particularity is best secured given a 'strong' realist ontology of the object. More contentiously, I will further argue that such a realism is most effectively explained by returning to a more traditional, monotheistic understanding of Divine transcendence.[120]

[119] Bernstein, 'Negative Dialectic as Fate: Adorno and Hegel', *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno* ed. Thomas Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 49, n. 29.
[120] I use the capital D here so that the Divine has proper noun status, as a reality in itself. I do this to emphasise the more traditional sense of Divine transcendence that I wish to appeal to.

Chapter Six

Transcendence, Materialism and God

'The world, materiality and all, points us in the direction of God'.[1]

In the previous chapter, I hope to have shown that Adorno's philosophy of non-identity enables us to regard the object, in its sensuous particularity, as the site of transcendence within material immanence. I argued that such an understanding of immanent transcendence avoids rendering material immanence in abstract ways, such that it is unable to satisfactorily sustain the concrete specificity of bodies – a problem that I have identified in the work of Deleuze, Irigaray and Derrida.

However, I think that Adorno's important thesis of the primacy of the object - a thesis that emphasises the way in which the object will always transcend the subject - is undermined for the following reason. Adorno's strict adherence to dialectics means that he refuses to clarify whether the object is a thing-in-itself independent of all human determination, or whether the object has no essential truth or being of its own. It is my fear that the latter position effectively removes the object's capacity to constrain and give meaningful content to our concepts. The object effectively loses its non-identity with subjective categories and we must concede that transcendence, understood as the material objectivity of the object, is lost to the immanence of the human mind and its conceptual determinations.

In response to the above concern I undertake three tasks in this chapter. The first is to examine what exactly Adorno means by the object. Is the object a thing in itself or is it constituted by human mediation? Specifically, I wish to establish whether or not Adorno's materialism supports what I call a 'strong' ontological realism. Briefly, such an ontology is one where the object exists in a determinate way that is independent of human determination or mediation. While I think that Adorno's ontological account of the object is ambiguous, I will maintain that, in the end, he

[1] Fern, L., Richard, *Nature, God and Humanity: Envisioning an Ethics of Nature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 152.

advances what can be termed an 'anthropological realism' or a 'social idealism'. Here, the object is not reducible to the determinations of a single human subject, but it is reducible to the determinations of *collective* human activity (theoretical and practical) over the course of history. To the extent that this is the case, I argue that Adorno, somewhat despite himself, ties the object too closely to the human subject (understood in collective terms). This fails to support the claim that I wish to press, namely, that the object has a fundamental integrity and independence of its own that cannot be collapsed into the human subject, whether individually or collectively.

My second task entails fleshing out the idea of a 'strong' ontological realism. I do this because I maintain that the sensuous particularity of the object is most successfully ensured if we insist upon the object's moment of independence (non-identity) from human subjectivity. I want to argue that objects exist in distinct and specific forms that are independent of human conceptions and interpretations of it. Indeed, I hold that the object needs to be acknowledged as somehow having the capacity to constrain and guide the way in which we can understand and interact with the world. My contention is that a 'strong' ontological realism enables us to cite the object in its sensuous particularity as a point of transcendence within immanence: the object, while knowable, is ultimately irreducible to human conceptual determination.

Having stated the importance of a 'strong' realist ontology, my third task is to show that such an ontology is best accounted for given a certain notion of Divine mind. Here, my central claim is that the idea of Divine mind, an immaterial or spiritual transcendence, enables us to assert, more cogently than a strict materialism would allow, the integrity of bodies or objects in their irreducible, sensuous particularity and material becoming. Instead of *rejecting* Divine transcendence in order to think immanence as a realm of material differences and becomings - i.e. a realm of immanent otherness or transcendences - my thesis is that such a conception of immanence is best achieved when we *affirm* the idea of Divine transcendence in more traditional ways. I shall introduce the idea of what can be labelled a 'theological materialism' in order to argue that it is precisely because material immanence is sustained by a Divine transcendence that exceeds it and desires it to be in all its various particularity that the material world is not reducible to human determinations

of it.[2] I thus wish to show how we might *philosophically* reclaim Divine transcendence as that which grants the material its own qualitative determinateness and integrity such that the world is a material plenitude irreducible to human conceptualisations.

The Object and the Question of Realism

In this section I want to examine Adorno's subject-object dialectics specifically to see what he means by the object as a sensuous particular. What, generally speaking, is this object given to subjective mediation? While Adorno would accept that the object is minimally 'something' and that it is in principle determinable, his non-dogmatic materialism, nevertheless, would not want to definitively determine what the object is for this would be to reify it and, thus, lose it to mind. For Adorno '[m]aterialism is not the dogma indicted by clever opponents, but *a dissolution of things understood as dogmatic*; hence its right to a place in critical philosophy'.[3] Adorno believes that thinking the material demands, not the construction of a fundamental ontology (*pace* Heidegger and Bergson) that will always be deaf to the beating of its idealist heart, but critical reflection upon the thought that thinks the material.[4]

For Adorno, the object is not something we can have immediate access to (as in naïve realism) because it never escapes mediation by mind. Here we come to the nub of the issue: the problem of givenness. Earlier I noted that Adorno rather uneasily maintains two seemingly irreconcilable positions regarding the object's given status. On the one hand, he rejects as myth the view that the thinking subject passively receives the object as a ready-made, thing-in-itself. On the other hand, he contends that the subject thinks that which is non-identical or irreducible to it. How can Adorno uphold these contrary claims without courting the sort of unhelpful ambiguity that can only

[2] Although the phrase 'theological materialism' is one I developed independently in my response to the issues raised in this study it has appeared in recent works by philosophical theologians keen to show that not only are reductive accounts of matter implausible, but that without God the very notion of the material loses its meaningfulness. See Davis, Milbank and Žižek ,*Theology and the Political*, 393-462. In this volume I am particularly inspired by Blond's paper 'The Politics of the Eye: Towards a Theological Materialism', pp. 439-462. See also the 'theistic naturalism' developed by Richard Fern in his *Nature, God and Humanity*, pp. 136-164.

[3] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 196, my italics.

[4] Regarding Adorno's critical thinking as the path towards a non-dogmatic materialism see Jarvis, Simon, 'Adorno, Marx, Materialism', *Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, 79-100.

weaken his overall argument? In addressing this problematic I will show that Adorno offers an account of the object as 'sedimented history', which could explain how he can maintain both the independence of the object and its inevitable subjective mediation. However, I shall later argue that this account still risks losing an important sense of the object's independence from the subject.

The Object as Sedimented History

Adorno insists upon the primacy of the object. However, he refuses to hypostatize the object as a brute datum or thing-in-itself completely independent from the subject. As he puts it: '[t]he object is no more a subjectless residuum than what the subject posits'.[5] While Adorno wants to avoid the subjugation of the object by the rational subject, he equally does not want to lose the subject's connection with the object, for no amount of transcendental manoeuvrings can synthesise the two once they have been theoretically conceived as ontologically split. Adorno's commitment to dialectics means he will contend that the primacy of the object is only sustainable within a (non-totalising) subject-object dialectics, whereby the subject constitutes an ineliminable and active moment of the object. Hence, he writes: [t]he general assurance that innervations, insights, cognitions are "merely subjective" ceases to convince as soon as subjectivity is grasped as the object's form'.[6]

To claim that subjectivity is the object's form is to claim that the subject's determination of the object is properly constitutive of the object. For Adorno, it is not that the subject *falsely* projects the forms of human thinking onto the object, erroneously 'anthropomorphising' the object as it were. Rather, the subject affords the object its determinate form and meaningfulness. This is a distinctly idealist understanding of the object, where idealism broadly means: 'the philosophical doctrine that reality is somehow mind-correlative or mind-co-ordinated – that the real objects comprising the "external world" are not independent of cognizing minds, but

[5] Adorno, 'Subject and Object', 146.
[6] Ibid, 144.

only exist as in some way correlative to the mental operations. [...]that reality as we understand it reflects the workings of minds'.[7]

However, we know that Adorno is at pains to distance his philosophy from Kant's subjective idealism (which is also an ontological idealism) where the subject is *entirely* constitutive of the object, unilaterally dictating its forms. For Adorno, the subject mediates that which is always already a qualified 'something', rather than an unstructured sensory manifold (e.g. Kant's sensible intuitions). As Brian O'Connor notes, in his excellent paper 'Adorno and the Problem of Givenness', Adorno is clear that the subjective 'determinations of the object "will adjust to a moment which they themselves are not"'.[8] In mediating the object, the subject *responds* to something other than itself. If this were not the case the subject would not be able to think anything at all (for to think, Adorno tells us, is to think 'something').

When taking all these insights together we find ourselves caught up by competing claims. Firstly, it is not just the case that the object is only knowable by the subject but that the object itself has subjective form. Secondly, the subject must be responsive to the object as something that has its own objective qualitativeness and dynamic. It is with the idea of the object as 'sedimented history' that Adorno can be read as accommodating these apparently incongruous perspectives.

The self-defined materialist Marx once commented that 'nature, taken in the abstract for itself, and fixed in its separation from man, is nothing for man'.[9] In a similar vein Adorno writes: [i]dealism was the first to make clear that the reality in which men live is not unvarying and independent of them. Its shape is human and even absolutely extra-human nature is mediated through consciousness'.[10] Uncontroversially, in my view, Adorno is here maintaining that for the human subject nature is never encountered in its pure givenness for it is always already conceptually mediated by human beings in social relations.

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[7] Nicholas Rescher cited by O'Connor, Brian, 'Adorno and the Problem of Givenness', *Revue Internationale De Philosophie*, vol. 63, no. 227 (*Janvier*, 2004), 85.
[8] Ibid, 86.
[9] Marx cited by Trigg, Roger, *Reality at Risk: A Defence of Realism in Philosophy and the Sciences* (New York and London: Harverster Wheatsheaf, 1989, 2nd ed.), 37.
[10] Adorno cited by O'Connor, 'Adorno and the Problem of Givenness', 85.

However, I do not think that Adorno's is just the phenomenological and epistemological point that the object can never appear or be known as it is in itself. He also seems to want to make the ontological claim that, given human mediation, there simply are no 'natural' objects.[11] On this view, it is not the case that rustling beneath the subjective constructions of the world lies nature in its unmediated purity. As Coole lucidly puts it, for Adorno, objects 'are not alien stuff on which we impose hypothetical formulae, but phenomena imbued with (inter)subjective purposes and therefore amenable to interpretation...any object we experience *is already a subject-object amalgam*, which is why we can have access to it without claiming an impossible noumenal intelligence'.[12] Adorno's debt to idealism is precisely this idea that the object is thinkable because it always already bears the conceptual hallmarks of the human subject rather some alien intelligence.

The object's meaningfulness is not, for Adorno, divorced from the human subject but indeed is constituted by it. However, this meaning-constitution is not mechanically effected by a formal transcendental subject bound by invariant universal and necessary concepts. Instead, meaning accrues to the object over the course of history as human bodily subjects collectively determine (theoretically and practically) the object over time. It is in this way that we can begin to understand the idea of the object as 'sedimented history'. In Adorno's words: 'this [sedimented] history is in the individual thing and outside it'.[13] The object is, thus, constituted as the sedimented history of its contingent and non-teleological becoming.

Although my focus here is on the object, it is important I give some attention to Adorno's notion of the subject. *Contra* Kant, Adorno's subject is empirical rather than transcendental; it is not a logical subjectivity, nor is it a self-same, self-present entity, but is rather a moment inseparable from its own historically constituted objectivity. Subjects are themselves socio-historical constructs, i.e. objects. Bodily subjects are, therefore, also the sedimentation of the discourses that mediate and position them within the social totality – discourses that are continually being reconstituted. Adorno will thus insist that every subject always has 'an objective

[11] Or, conversely, the mediation of the world by embodied, sensate human subjects is itself a natural process with tangible and not merely epiphenomenal effects.
[12] Coole, *Negativity and Politics*, 159.
[13] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 163.

core'.[14] As well as being an object itself, the thinking subject is always 'intentional' (in the Husserlian sense) and is nothing without the object it thinks. However, the subject is not simply an *effect* of objective processes, for it has a real constitutive bearing upon the object - subjectivity makes a qualitative difference to the object. As Adorno states: '[a]fter the elimination of the subjective moment, the object would come diffusely apart...If the object lacked the moment of subjectivity, its own objectivity would become nonsensical'.[15]

Yet how does the object gain its objectivity as it were? How is the object something the subject can adjust to as that which is other than it? Because the object is socially produced and shaped over time by collective human activities and practices - ranging from physical labour, art, conceptualisations, languages, psychical investments, technologies, etc - in a heterogeneous and (at least potentially) dynamic scene of varied and overlapping meaning-production, the object acquires an independent life of its own. This is so, even though the object is all-the-way-down a product of human signification. In its immediacy the object appears to the individual human subject as something quite independent of her or him. In actuality, however, the object's autonomy is only by virtue of the density and richness of its socio-historical determinations. It is the object's social over-determinations that afford it its qualitative difference and irreducibility to any *individual* subject at any one time or place. Knowledge of the object entails 'reading the existent as a text of its becoming',[16] that is, disclosing the human social history sedimented within it.[17]

An Anthropological Realism?

Roger Trigg would regard this 'sedimented history' view of the object as a form of 'anthropological realism'.[18] Here the object has no inherent truth of itself but only as it is humanized nature. Indeed, Adorno writes that 'the materialist procedure does all the more justice, the more it distances itself from every "meaning" of its objects and

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[14] Adorno, *Subject and Object*, 143.
[15] Ibid, 149.
[16] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 52 trans. modified.
[17] Ibid, 163.
[18] Trigg, *Reality at Risk*, 37. Trigg attributes this epithet to the Leszek Kolakowski's reading of Marx.

the less it relates itself to an implicit, quasi-religious meaning'.[19] The object has no intentional truth (Divine or even human). It is a contingently produced human artefact that cannot be falsely naturalised as essentially one thing or another, without denying its potential to exist otherwise, that is, to exist as something determined differently in accordance to a different social context.

My worry is that to conceive the object as meaningful only insofar as it is socially constructed commits us to what Stephen Clark labels a 'social idealism'.[20] By this is meant that the determination of reality is wholly the result of social construction. Here, reality has no qualitative form of its own and is fully bound by the immanence of the human social context. My reluctance to endorse a social idealism is not that I think that a social/ pragmatic structuring of reality will *necessarily* result in the alignment of human needs and interests to a subjugating will to power, which is a view Milbank holds when he claims that to endorse any purely secular ontologies is automatically to endorse an account of being characterised by 'ontological violence'.[21] Rather, I am concerned that we lose an important justification as to *why* such interests ought not to be aligned with subjugating power, once we reject the idea that reality has a moment irreducible to its socio-political formations.

It is, however, debatable as to whether or not we can think of Adorno's ontology as an anthropological realism. This is because he makes a number of comments that would suggest that he does not wish to reduce all reality to human history. For example, he states that: '[s]ociety is not only a human product'.[22] Here, Adorno wants to suggest that human society is *natural*-historical. Ever the dialectician, Adorno implies that the idea of 'human history' fails to make sense without that of 'nature' as its dialectical counterpart.

Using a distinction deployed by Lukàcs, Adorno refers to 'first' and 'second' nature. In brief, the former is sensuous materiality, i.e. organic and inorganic things. The latter refers to the 'thing-like' quality of objects, their immediate givenness as

[19] Adorno, 'The Actuality of Philosophy', *The Adorno Reader*, 32.
[20] Clark, S. R. L., *God's World and the Great Awakening* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 2.
[21] Milbank, John, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 278-325.
[22] Jarvis, *Adorno*, 191.

something independent of humanity. For Lukàcs, second nature is entirely ideological. It is the effect of reification where, in capitalist society, human activity becomes alienated from individual producers in the commodity exchange process and, consequently, the world is experienced as something autonomous, rather than as the work of human creativity.

Unlike Lukàcs, Adorno does not wish to denude second nature as mere ideology. He does not want to reclaim all nature to the work of a fully self-expressive humanity (Lukàcs). As I read him, Adorno considers the idea of reification in both subjective and objective ways. Subjectively, reification has its origins in the work of humanity – conceptual, psychical, artistic, manual, etc – but this work appears as the innate properties of things and its roots in human history are forgotten. Objectively, reification testifies to the material, thing-likeness of nature indicative of its non-identity with human history.

For Adorno, the distinction between first and second nature is not to be lost to: (i) a Marxist materialism where second nature is vanquished in the restoration of all nature to human praxis and history; or (ii) a Romantic wish to return humanity to some pre-social first nature and so to the undifferentiated 'blind web of nature'.[23] Both these are identitarian moves and in that respect are idealist. Because Adorno wants to offer what we could call a negative ontology of nature, he will maintain the distinction between first and second nature without turning either of these into a pre-dialectical first principle. Hence, he writes: 'it would be up to thought to see all nature...as history, and all history as nature'.[24] It is Adorno's contention that while nature cannot be reduced to history it is, nevertheless, always historically mediated.

These reflections on Adorno's dialectical understanding of nature and history show that his sedimented history view of the object cannot all too easily be regarded as the collapse of all reality into human history. For Adorno, humanized nature cannot be properly figured without a moment of non-identity, the material otherness irreducible to humanized nature. Adorno's subtle position with respect to nature and history make it difficult to straightforwardly brand him as an anthropological realist.

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[23] Adorno, *Subject and Object*, 140.
[24] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 359.

When specifically discussing the object, Adorno sometimes refers to its material objectivity as that which is 'non-conceptual'. This further suggests that he does not regard the object as simply a product of human rationality. For Adorno, thought has to gain 'insight into the constitutive character of the non-conceptual in the concept'.[25] Thought must think the material object as 'an objectivity beyond all "making"'.[26] However, I would say that Adorno is somewhat misleading in his depiction of the object in terms of the 'non-conceptual'. As I understand him, by referring to the non-conceptuality of the object, Adorno is not so much wanting to highlight the object as a material thing-in-itself, free of all conceptual determination. Rather, he wants to underscore the idea that the object is 'conceptually independent'[27] of any *individual* subject thinking it, which is quite apart from the idea that objects are something quite literally devoid of concepts.

The Adornian object is not a pure material otherness that human thought must somehow fathom with concepts that are wholly foreign and opposed to the purely material nature of the object. This is because Adorno contends that the meaningfulness of the object is precisely because it is given as something always already discursively marked by the collective mediations of human subjects, which become ever more complex over the course of time. When Adorno writes that the object is mediated 'according to its *own* concept'[28] this is not so much the claim that it is determined by its own supra-human concepts, but rather that the object embodies the (human) socio-historical concepts that have determined it over time and that this historical constitutedness of the object is not reducible to a single subject. Yet interestingly, this means that when reflecting upon the object's determinateness the subject is, in a certain sense, engaged in claiming back its own constitutive work – albeit not the work of that particular subject but the collective work of human socio-historical determinations. I think this is why why Rose will say that, for Adorno, '[t]he object is the subject returning to itself'.[29] However, unlike Hegel's, the

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[25] Ibid, 12.
[26] Ibid, 376. Also '[b]ecause the subject does not make the object, it can only really "look on", and the cognitive maxim is to assist in that process'. Ibid, 188.
[27] O'Connor, 'The Concept of Mediation in Hegel and Adorno', 93.
[28] Adorno, 'Subject and Object', 143, my italics.
[29] Rose, 'How is Critical Theory Possible? Theodor W. Adorno and Concept Formation', *Sociology in Political Studies*, vol. XXIV (1976), 85.

Adornian subject will never attain identity with the object. That there is no final closure between subject and object ensures the world's becoming as social transformation.

Thus, when Adorno refers to the object in its non-conceptuality he is not appealing to some noumenal materiality, a Kantian thing-in-itself. He is clear that the 'non-conceptual' is something that has epistemic import; it is capable of placing constraints on the sorts of predicates attributed to it by the subject. However, for all its connotations, Adorno's idea of the non-conceptual does not refer to a moment of the object that is *altogether* independent of all human mediation. By emphasising that the subject will always encounter the object as something already determinate (by virtue of its socio-historical mediation), Adorno retains a sense of the object's independence from the subject understood individually. Nevertheless, the object's determinateness *is* dependent on the subject understood collectively; the object is thus not beyond *all* subjective making.

Adorno presents an ambiguous account of the object. He implies two seemingly contrary claims: (i) that the object is made determinate by its socio-historical construction; and (ii) that there is always 'something' that is irreducible or non-identical to the human subject. However, it is not at all clear to me whether this 'something' that is irreducible to the subject is independent even of socio-historical determination. If it is so independent then it is, for Adorno, as unknowable as Kant's thing-in-itself because it is not dialectically related to subject. If it is not then I would hold that his ontology is indeed a form of social idealism.

Although Adorno can be interpreted as propounding some sort of realism regarding the object (in the sense that the object has determinateness independent of any one thinking subject), I do not think he advocates what I consider to be a 'strong' form of ontological realism. This is for the following two reasons. Firstly, Adorno is adamant that the object has no *inherent* meaning or truth of its own. Secondly, whenever Adorno does allude to a material otherness that is non-identical to human subjectivity (both individual and collective), for example in his discussion of the concepts of 'nature' and 'history', and his somewhat opaque references to the non-

conceptuality of the object,[30] this otherness is unable to be constitutive in our judgements about the world. This is due to Adorno's contention that the human subject can only think that which has been humanly rendered intelligible, via human determination.

In the following section I will make explicit my understanding of ontological realism, particularly as a 'strong' ontological realism. I hope to show that such a realism is better able to afford the object with an integrity that ought not to be sacrificed to the immanence of socio-historical contingency. Because Adorno does not insist upon what I understand by a 'strong' ontological realism, his position ultimately falls into a social idealism (or an anthropological realism), where the object is collapsed into the vagaries of human history.

Ontological Realism

In its widest sense, ontological realism is a theory about being or what exists, rather than of knowledge (epistemology) and the truth of our knowledge claims.[31] To that extent an anthropological realism is a species of ontological realism. However, I will view it as a 'weak' form of ontological realism because the nature of being essentially depends on humanity.

Conversely, I regard a 'strong' ontological realism as one that postulates that at some fundamental and significant level things exist in the world in ways that are independent of human conceptualisations and praxis. Straight away I must introduce three important qualifications:

1) I discount an ontological realism that holds mind-independent reality to be some heterogeneous, indeterminate material 'stuff'. Not only would this vision force us to conclude that the structured appearance of the world is the

[30] It is my view that when we unpack Adorno's notion of the non-conceptuality of the object, we find that this does not mean that the object has a meaningfulness and determinateness independently of the human socio-historical context. However, Adorno never states his position in such a stark way. This leaves it open as to whether the 'non-conceptual' denotes the material otherness of the object as something that can never be entirely reduced to the subject even in its collective sense.

[31] Of course, ontological realism will always have important ramifications for epistemology: how might we know being?

result of human cognition, but also that any intelligibility perceivable in the world could only ever be illusive, supervening on a reality devoid of any real distinctions.

2) An ontological realism that insists upon certain aspects or features of reality that are not the effects of human determination need not deny the reality of that which is humanly constructed and experienced.

3) Any reality that exists in a determinate way outside of the human mind would, nevertheless, need to be able to causally interact with human bodily subjects. If not, such a reality could at best only be logically deduced as the unknowable thing-in-itself that is the cause of our experience, and at worst rejected out of hand as unfounded metaphysical speculation.

Drawing together these provisos, the 'strong' form of ontological realism that I support is one where reality (at some basic level) has a determinateness beyond all human making, an objectivity of its own that is (even if only partially) comprehensible to human subjects and *includes*, rather than negates, the reality of human experience, production and reproduction.

In the last ten years or so, there has been a discernible renewal of interest in rethinking ontology by a number of theorists seeking an alternative to the postmodern 'textualisation' of the world - where the real is levelled into its representation, and political action is reduced to 'outnarrating' one's adversaries on the basis it seems of no more than local prejudice.[32] Postmodernism has tended to view ontology with great distrust, identifying it as the seat of all foundationalism, universalism, essentialism and absolutism - positions much anathematised by postmodernists. However, recent reappraisals of ontology, for example that of critical realist Roy Bhaskar, seek to advance a complexified picture of being. Rather than propound an 'ontological monovalence' or positivism that simply eternalises the existing state of affairs, a more sophisticated ontological analysis would investigate concealed or

[32] I obtain the term 'outnarration' from Milbank. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason.*

underlying structures and mechanisms that effect (in complicated and not straightforwardly deterministic ways) the world of immediate experience.

Using insights drawn from some recent works on ontology, I shall sketch here what I call a 'tri-modal' ontology. I take seriously Hull's remark that 'some things may be less constituted than others' and that there are 'differing modalities of materiality'.[33] I shall posit three key 'modes' through which the material world may be theorised. I must stress that I do not consider these modes to be discrete realms of being but more like interpenetrating and overlapping strata.

(i) Physical Nature

It will, I believe, get our emancipatory programmes nowhere if we deny the import of nature in its physical, material givenness. Here nature is not understood as some featureless hyle, but as pre-formed and demarcated in certain ways that cannot be simply over-ridden by human agency. In her excellent book *What is Nature?* Kate Soper offers a good working definition of what I mean by physical nature. Namely:

> 'those material structures and processes that are independent of human activity (in the sense that they are not a humanly created product), and whose forces and causal powers are the necessary condition of every human practice, and determine the possible forms it can take'.[34]

Without physical nature, then, there could be no world and certainly no constructed or textualised world. Indeed, I doubt any postmodernist would deny this with a straight face. However, while I agree that physical nature is never encountered in its immediacy this far from entails that it is reducible to its mediations. Although postmodernists such as Judith Butler might argue that physical nature is strictly unknowable in itself, I would prefer to say that it is scientifically analysable and that we can gain knowledge, always partial, provisional and fallible, about how it exists independently of our subjective concepts.[35] Every existent is both constrained and

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[33] Hull, 'The Need in Thinking', 30. I am also inspired by the work of Kate Soper and the critical realist Tony Lawson. See Lawson, Tony, 'Feminism, Realism and Universalism', http://www.econ.cam.ac.uk/faculty/lawson/PDFS/ Feminism_Realism_and Universalism.

[34] Soper, Kate, *What is Nature?* (Oxford and Malden MA: Blackwell, 1995), 132-133.

[35] This would be to accept that while we cannot step outside of our conceptual frameworks we can, nonetheless, appreciate the distinction between (i) our judgements about the world and (ii) whether or

enabled by physical nature, which is vitally constitutive of all things, both animate and inanimate. Nature's physical, chemical and biological processes, properties and structures bear in relevant and specific ways upon how things can be in the world. Such processes include trans-historical constants such as gravity, inertial, thermodynamics and death. But physical nature is not thoroughly mechanistic, monotonous or static; it has an open, spontaneous or variable dimension that allows for the emergence of variant or new forms and kinds of being.

Human beings may be considered as sharing a common nature without this being necessarily fixed and ahistorical. Specific biological characteristics and processes such as genetic, hormonal and physiological make-up, growth, reproduction and ageing, along with certain linguistic and creative capacities, are (in principle) identifiable as pertaining to the 'natural kind' of human being. Biologically implicated needs, instincts and desires also constitute part of humanity's given and universally held nature. Indeed, without some conception of shared, objective human needs and capacities we are left with purely subjective, competing accounts of these. This effectively pulls the rug from under political endeavours to secure a just society where needs can be met and capacities exercised. In their keenness to emphasise differences (not a wholly misguided impulse) many postmodernists lose sight of how very *similar* human beings are. For example, feminists and male chauvinists who overly stress the sexual difference of human bodies (a difference I do not deny or wish to underplay) betray their myopia at the weight of evidence supporting the claim that, in terms of their bodily/intellectual/psychical abilities and tendencies, women and men are to a great extent similar.[36]

To acknowledge a shared human ontology irreducible to social constructions does not mean that human beings are mere products of their biological determinations. Again, Soper is helpful here when she contends that physical nature, including human nature

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not our judgements conform to the world as it exists independently of us. If we disagree with this we are forced into an anti-realism that would have it that the world simply conforms to our judgements.

[36] Again, I must emphasise that I am not suggesting that the evident differences between male and female bodies make no difference to their being, and certainly in the social arena there is a marked difference in the roles of women and men. On the failure to appreciate 'sex similarity' see Connell, R. W., *Gender*, (Cambridge and Malden MA: Blackwell, 2002), 40-46.

'does not, or only very minimally, determine the modes in which we respond to its limits and potentials'.[37]

(ii) Socio-Historical Nature

Of course, the human response to physical nature is never an immediate, purely 'natural' one. It is always socially and historically coded because human subjects never experience nature (human or non-human) in its immediacy. Physical nature is inevitably 'humanized' as it is socially and culturally mediated in specific ways over the course of history. Through these mediations nature is transformed, constructed and reconstructed in distinct and diverse ways. Shared as well as diverging interests largely inform the human demarcation and signification of the world. Socialized nature is richly textured by its multiple determinations and is more fine-grained or particularized than physical nature. While it is malleable it tends to settle into fixed, even inert forms. The error lies in taking what has been socio-historically formed to be an unchangeable state of affairs such that social inequities are deemed 'just the way it is' and the hope for political transformation made futile.

Following Adorno, I want to claim that 'anthropomorphized' nature is a natural process: social reality has ontological valence, a real objectivity, and should not be regarded as merely subjective constructions that are wholly fictive or false. It is a *fact*, for example, that women do most of the housework in contemporary societies, and that the majority of cabinet ministers in the world's governments are men. But these facts are produced by *alterable* material conditions that at present structure the situations available to women and men in ways that serve the social interests of men.

I also want to claim that while physical nature is mediated and transformed by human activity, it is not reducible to its human determinations. Nature, in its material givenness, has powers and properties of its own. This means that the given objects in the world cannot be determined any which way humanity pleases. Human beings cannot by themselves take flight and join the birds in the sky nor can they use sunlight to photosynthesise carbon dioxide and water. While we might agree with Spinoza and

[37] Soper, *What is Nature?*, 142.

Deleuze that 'we do not know what a body can do', it is clear that bodies cannot be made to do whatsoever we wish. Nature has its own capacity to resist the way it is socially classified, interpreted and utilised.

I do not deny, then, that the reality human beings share is a humanly constructed one. Nor do I consider these constructions to have no genuine ontological import, as those who contend that the *real* world is the world stripped of its human mediations. Rather, I want to ensure that we meaningfully uphold the ontological distinction between socio-historical nature and physical nature so that the latter does not end up lurking spectre-like behind our social constructions or completely dissolved into these, but can indeed 'guide' (not rigidly determine) these constructions in emancipatory ways.

(iii) Sensuous Particularities

The most fine-grained ontological mode is the existence of individual things in their sensuous particularity. For illustrative purposes I shall focus here on human beings. According to the ontological schema that I have presented so far, we can say that an individual human being has a given physical/ biological nature that it shares with all other human beings. This pre-discursive, biological nature encompasses key commonalities such as genetic and physiological structures and properties, while also exhibiting a range of differentiations such as differently sexed or abled bodies. An individual human body is further and more specifically determined by its situatedness within a particular socio-historical, geographical context. The social constitution of a human body – always implicated in social interests – can both delimit it and enable its flourishing, according to the roles, relations and material resources made available to it. While, in 2005, the (estimated) six billion human bodies in the world share universal biological properties, as well as more localised determinations relative to socio-historical contexts, each body, nevertheless, has a unique ontological configuration of its own that constitutes its non-fungible sensuous particularity.

I find it difficult and unhelpful to deny that the capacities, powers, liabilities and dispositions of human individuals are socially conditioned.[38] However, this does need not mean that human beings are entirely the product of their social constitution. Each human body has distinctive capacities and qualities of its own that endows it with an agency enabling it to live out its body (even as this is biologically and socially conditioned) in a wide range of ways, and always in mutually affective relations with other bodies. The body's uniquely lived trajectory is not incidental to what that body is but constitutive of it. I also want to stress that I do not conceive an individual's sensuous particularity in terms of a fixed, innate essence. I accept that each human being has a given material/ biological bodiliness that, whilst manipulable (for example, women's hormone levels can be altered with the contraceptive pill), has processes and properties that are relatively stable and constant. But a human's sensuous particularity is shaped and reshaped over the course of history through various practices, experiences and relations with others.

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What importantly distinguishes this incipient tri-modal ontology from Adorno's is that I emphasise and insist that physical nature, the given materiality of the world, has significant determinations of its own, irreducible to human conceptions and constructions. I have also been careful not to discredit the human subject's constitutive involvement in the world and have not sought to deny this ontological pertinence. I do not, however, believe that it enough to just signal the otherness or irreducibility of physical nature external to the human mind. If this material otherness is rendered completely ineffable or amorphous then, no matter how much we might seek to avoid this, a form of idealism (social or subjective) spells our position.

It is my contention that physical nature's moment of otherness from the human mind needs to be thematised as having a structure and organisation of its own that is not, however, thoroughly inaccessible to the human mind. It cannot be that the human mind is an alien intrusion into physical nature, forever caught up in its own immanence. Rather, the distinctions in physical nature must somehow be thinkable

[38] Lawson, 'Feminism, Realism and Universalism', 22. (Lawson does not deny this either)

by us precisely because they have an intelligibility that is not wholly foreign to us. The physical world must 'lend' itself to our conceptualisations of it otherwise it is difficult to see how our concepts could ever get a handle on it. This does not mean that physical nature is directly and entirely given to the human mind, for it is part of the very being of our minds to have a socio-historical context and to conceive the world from the perspective of such contexts.

Unless we acknowledge the ontological pre-determinateness of physical nature as that which affords it its relative independence from human cognition, then the sensuous particularity of things can never have an ontological, material moment that transcends human socio-historical contexts. However, if we agree that physical nature has an intelligible and knowable organisation of its own, independently of the human subject, then we need to explain how this might be so. It is at this important juncture that I believe ontology meets theology. If physical nature has an intelligibility and structure beyond its human determination then this is best explained, I shall argue, by appealing to the idea of Divine mind. I therefore maintain that a 'strong' realist ontology, like the one I have suggested, needs its theological consummation and in this way we are led towards recovering the idea of Divine transcendence - conceived in its more traditional sense - precisely so that material immanence may be exalted.

Towards A Theological Materialism

Here, I want to show that an affirmation of Divine transcendence, understood as Divine mind, enables us to advance a model of immanence as a material field of bodily differences and becomings that does not, however, lose the integrity of bodies to a generalised material process of differentiation or 'othering' (Deleuze and Derrida), nor restricts ontological differences to a single difference such as sex (Irigaray). In contradistinction to the other thinkers discussed in this study, the key claim I wish to make is that unless we admit to a certain conception of Divine transcendence, it is difficult to explain how we could have transcendence or otherness within material immanence, where what is meant by 'immanent transcendence' is the object in its sensuous particularity, a concrete specificity that is irreducible to human mediation or determination. I therefore contend that Divine transcendence, far from depreciating material immanence, actually enables us to regard immanence as a space

where bodies are to be avowed in their sensuous particularity and capacity for becoming.

In what follows I want to highlight how a cogent account of a 'strong' ontological realism with respect to the object actually calls for the acknowledgement of Divine mind, and so a Divine transcendence, rather than a thoroughgoing materialism and with this a rearticulation of the divine in wholly materialist terms. I must point out that for the purpose of this thesis, I intend only to introduce some good *philosophical* reasons as to why materialism, if it is to be properly figured in terms of a 'strong' ontological realism, needs to be formulated with reference to Divine transcendence as that which creates and sustains the material. I do not therefore develop a full 'theological materialism' in the sense of constructing a materialism in accordance with specific theological doctrines, such as the incarnation or creation *ex nihilo* in Christian theology. This would be a major undertaking and would have to be executed elsewhere if it is to be done with any justice. Whilst my own (at this stage still somewhat speculative) position is that a materialism conceived outside of theology is unable to deliver a 'strong' ontological realism, my more modest aim in the limited space I have left is to initiate a 'turn' towards theology by showing how philosophy itself becomes implicated in the theological.

Why Divine Mind?

The 'strong' ontological realism I have defended is committed to the view that reality exists in a determinate way, and that this determination is independent of the human subject and its concepts. Because I want to advocate an ontology that can sustain the integrity of particular bodies – i.e. the body as an individual entity that, while determined by its relations with others, is something more than those relations and so is not utterly reducible to these relations – I reject an ontology that asserts reality as a fundamentally indeterminate materiality, 'a swarming heterogeneity'[39] of blind material forces. Such an ontology would effectively render the distinctness or unity of particular bodies ultimately illusory, in the sense that the true nature of reality is an unstructured material flux. On this picture, particular bodies could only ever be the

[39] Coole, *Negativity and Politics*, 186.

contingent, superfluous effects of an indifferent material process that has primacy over any distinct bodily forms that might arise from it (I hope to have shown that Deleuze's Spinozistic ontology particularly falls foul of this).

Given that an ontology of pure material indeterminacy fails to satisfactorily affirm the particularity of bodies, I insist upon an ontology that maintains that reality is a coherent structure: a cosmos, not a chaotic expanse. I therefore hold that bodies or objects are unities by virtue of possessing a relevant degree of coherence and stability. Postmodernists are often allergic to notions such as unity and oneness, fearing a logic of the same at work, and so the reduction of difference to sameness. This is not altogether unfounded. However, if we deny that there are real unities in the world, such that an intelligence is able to pick out an individual thing as a distinct *kind* of thing, then all the world collapses down to the rubble of heterogeneous particulars spread out in space and time. Now this might be viewed as an emancipatory ontology, one that calls for the unfixing or rendering fluid of all boundaries on the basis that there are no such boundaries in reality. If there are no unities, where, for example, do I, a human being, begin and end? With the mitochondria in 'my' cells? With the multitude of eukaryotic cells that make up organs? With the sunlight that helps produce Vitamin D in 'my' body? While such considerations may well challenge the sovereignty of (apparently) discrete wholes like myself, I fear that the cost of this vision is the obliteration of any individual as anything more than an arbitrary construct that could at any moment cease to cohere in the form that it presently exists.

According to Clark '[i]nsofar as we admit...of a real world that does not depend on us and what we may say of it, we need to understand how that real world is unified itself. If it can't be unified it remains mere chaos...if it comes across as more than that...it is as the world of an infinite intellect'.[40] I think that this contention is correct. However, we need to see why I hold that acknowledging the existence of an infinite intellect has more explanatory force in explaining unities in the world, than the claim that pure matter is capable of its own self-organisation into distinct forms or unities.

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[40] Clark, S.R.L, *God, Religion and Reality*, (London: SPCK, 1998), 77.

Clark further argues that '[i]f there are patterns in the world itself, and not simply in our deluded fantasy, there is something like a Mind in Reality, even before 'we' came to be.'[41] Here, Clark is merely assuming that pattern or unity is dependent on mind or ideality. However, it is quite feasible to maintain that the determinate forms of the material world simply emerge spontaneously and fortuitously out of basic material processes. Very much informed by the 'new' materialism of Deleuze, Manuel DeLanda argues that matter posses its own 'immanent and intensive resources for the generation of form from within'.[42] He writes that:

> '[i]n the eyes of many human beings, life appears to be a unique and special phenomenon...This view betrays an 'organic chauvinism' that leads us to underestimate the vitality of the processes of self-organization in other spheres of reality...*In many respects the circulation is what matters, not the particular forms that it causes to emerge*...Our organic bodies are...nothing but temporary coagulations in these flows...'[43]

Darwin's theory of evolution powerfully claims that all organic life, including intelligent life, evolves from a process of natural selection that is ultimately accidental rather than prescribed by a Divine intelligence. However, some critics have argued that 'before Darwinian evolution can start, a certain minimum level of complexity is required';[44] suggesting that Darwin assumes just what he seeks to explain: the capacity of brute material 'stuff' and blind causality to engender highly complex material unities and organisms. Nevertheless, for a great number of people Darwinian evolution is a highly plausible account as to the existence of particular forms of life.

I do not set out here to debunk Darwin's theory, nor, more generally, the thesis that matter can engender forms and patterns of itself.[45] Rather, I want to point out that if we accept a strictly materialist explanation as to the existence of forms or unities in

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[41] Ibid, 75. Clark, informed by the insights of Plotinus, states that 'pattern exists when the *same* is present many time over'. Ibid, 74. I prefer to talk about similarities in the world, rather than sameness because I want to avoid the suggestion that existing material things exactly repeat a particular pattern. Nevertheless, I must concede that to avoid smuggling in nominalism through the back door the very idea of similarity requires sameness for the judgement of similarity to be made. (For a thing to be similar to another thing is for it to be of *the same kind* of that thing, without being identical). I propose that the sameness of a pattern/ unity contained in infinite intellect is materially expressed as similarity.
[42] DeLanda, Manuel 'Deleuze and the Open-Ended Becoming of the World', Dialogues, 2, my italics
[43] Manuel DeLanda cited by Hird, 'From the Culture of Matter to the Matter of Culture', 3.3.
[44] Davies, Paul cited by Clark, *Biology and Christian Ethics*, 15.
[45] For a critique of Darwinian theory in the explanation of biological forms see Clark, *Biology and Christian Ethics*, particularly, 9-57.

the world, then we considerably weaken the basis from which we can make some crucial claims regarding the 'strong' ontological realism that I wish to promote. Most importantly, I posit a 'strong' ontological realism in the attempt to secure the *integrity* of material/ bodily forms (indeed, the primacy of the object). Now, a view of the material such as DeLanda proposes, would cheerfully reduced me to 'a very large motile colony of respiring bacteria, operating a complex system of nuclei, microtubles, and neurons' and happening at this moment in time to be using a computer to write this sentence.[46] Indeed, never mind the honour of being regarded in the terms of 'bacteria', I am, for DeLanda, more properly to be conceived as a chance assemblage of 'raw materials'. My point here is not so much that this conception of a human organism, such as myself, is false. Instead, my worry is that it is reductive, in a way that devalues the overall unity of a human body (the distinctive relation of the parts to the whole that makes a thing identifiably human), and so a certain holistic integrity of the human body in particular, and bodies/ objects in general.

I hold that a 'strong' ontological realism, one whereby bodily integrity is secured, demands that the world possesses at least the following two (related) characteristics: (1) the persistence of the object in an identifiable form over time; and (2) intelligibility. It is my contention that an appeal to the existence of an infinite intellect, or mind, enables us to account for these two features with more efficacy than a pure materialism. Let me now briefly highlight why I believe this to be the case, taking each feature in turn.

1) Let us grant that a solely material universe is able to generate determinable forms, such as particular organisms. Furthermore, we could say that that these forms exhibit a certain degree of durability or constancy. Because these forms result from the arbitrary coalescing of certain material elements into determinate structures, we must admit that such forms are only ever arbitrarily unified. On this picture, there is ultimately no reason why a thing is formed in the way that it is, why its various parts are able to 'knit' together and co-function in the way that they do, or why only certain forms are able to emerge and not others. Aside, from these difficulties, the main concern is that there is no reason *why* the particular unity of a thing should persist in

[46] Lewis Thomas cited by Hird, 'From the Culture of Matter to the Matter of Culture', note 7.

its current form from one moment to the next, or from one place to the next. However, if we were to suppose that form or unity is ideal and universal, rather than spatio-temporal (i.e. material), we could argue that for an object to persist as *the same kind of thing* over time is because it conforms to an ideal, non-perishable, form. Kant would attribute such ideality to the human mind, such that the human subject is deemed to be the principle of unity for material things. Because I wish to uphold the integrity of the object as that which is something determinate beyond its human conceptualisation, I would want to pursue the arguement that if there are ideal forms concretely manifest in the sensible world, then these belong to an infinite intellect - one supremely alive and thoughtful.

2) Let us now consider whether a strict materialist could maintain that the universe is intelligible, in the sense that it is a coherent and explicable reality? A number of thinkers, from Plato on, have argued that a wholly materialist universe is, in the final analysis, an unintelligible one. To insist upon a strictly materialist account of the world is to accept that the various structures of reality are ultimately contingent, for there can never be a fundamental, i.e. non-contingent, reason as to why things exist as they do, or why events occur as they do. In his book *Truth and the Reality of God*, Ian Markham rightly points out that: [i]f the coherence of reality is arbitrary, then it is possible that either the universe could at any moment cease being orderly or coherent, or its coherence only extends to certain parts'.[47] This means that the very *assumption* that we can make sense of the world, as something that actually has a significant degree of regularity and orderliness, is without proper justification or warrant if it is possible that reality is at base chaotic.[48] Clark, and similarly Markham, claims that we can only explain the intelligibility of the universe if we concede that there exists 'something non-material and infinite, which is the final explanation for whatever is'.[49] To be sure, if we contend that the world is structured in purely arbitrary ways, then we either (i) undercut the possibility of its rational discernment by human subjects, or (ii)

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[47] Markham, Ian, *Truth and the Reality of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 80.

[48] 'It is the assumption of coherence and intelligibility [in any attempt to explain things in the world or the world itself] which requires justification'. Ibid, 77.

[49] Clark, *God, Religion and Reality*, 63. (For an account as to why the unifying principle of the material world cannot itself be material (a problem of infinite regress), see Clark, Ibid, 54ff). 'For the universe to be intelligible, there must be a necessary being (i.e. a logically necessary being who exists in all possible worlds and is self-explanatory)'. Markham, *Truth and the Reality of God*, 91.

are forced to endorse a form of subjective idealism, whereby any order of the world is one that has been imposed upon it by the human mind.

In contrast to this depiction of the world and its outcomes, I hold, alongside thinkers such as Clark and Markham, that if we presuppose a self-explanatory, necessarily existing infinite intellect, then this can explain how the world is afforded its coherence and intelligibility. To posit such an infinite intellect is not necessarily to be committed to an ontology where everything is wholly determined (as with Spinoza/ Deleuze). Rather, it is to be committed to the idea that the existence of any determinate thing is ultimately explained by this intellect. My position, then, is that the concrete specificity of bodies is better maintained given a reality that is coherently and rationally organised by an infinite intellect.

Boldly put, the claim I wish to defend, somewhat controversially in light of much postmodern and materialist critique, is that a unified and intelligible material reality is one that depends not soley upon its own fecundity and self-sufficiency but, ultimately, upon the immaterial reality of an infinite intellect, that of Divine mind.[50] I am aware that to identify the idea of an infinite intellect with Divine mind is to present a rather dry conception of the Divine that is a long way off from the Divine that is so richly depicted in traditional biblical theism. However, while I would maintain that an important task for any comprehensive philosophical theology is to show the connections between an infinite intellect, beauty, creation, truth, love and communion, and so supporting an account of the Divine that more closely resonates with that detailed by the theistic traditions, at this juncture I simply wish to stress that it is by virtue of that which transcends material immanence - namely, Divine mind - that material immanence can be sustained as more than a purposeless site of contingent constructs. I thus want to challenge the belief that any commitment to Divine transcendence at once forces us into some kind of gnosticism, whereby the material is to be regarded as evil and fallen. Instead, I hope to have begun to show that the transcendence of Divine mind is one that actually allows us to elaborate an account of material immanence where the integrity of differences can be upheld rather than lost to anonymous material forces.

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[50] 'The unity of living beings and universes, must rest in something immaterial'. Clark, *God, Religion and Reality*, 61.

Of course, if we accept that Divine transcendence, minimally understood in the first instance as Divine mind, secures material immanence, such that the sensuous particularity of bodies cannot be entirely determined by the categories of the human mind (individually or collectively), then we will need to explain how Divine transcendence maintains both its ontological otherness from the material world while nevertheless granting the material its various forms and unity. In short, we would need to provide an account of the mediation between Divine transcendence and material or worldly immanence, one that does not fall foul of pantheism nor a disjunctive dualism between the transcendent Divine and the immanent world, the spiritual and the material, etc. I do not attempt to address this vexed problem here. Rather the purpose of this section is to prompt, on philosophical grounds, a reconsideration of Divine transcendence as that which prevents material immanence from being reduced to either an antinomic flux or a logically deduced, bare, passive substratum that the human mind gives form to. Indeed, in light of the difficulties that, I have argued, plague the 'immanentist' philosophies discussed in this study, as well as the argument sketched above regarding materialism's need for Divine mind, I think we ought to take seriously Milbank's claim that 'the theological appeal to transcendence alone sustains a non-reductive materiality and is the very reverse of any notion of idealism'.[51] At the very least, we should appreciate that Divine transcendence in its traditional sense need not be viewed as necessarily contrary to the material.

Conclusion

Although appreciative of Adorno's philosophy of non-identity, in this chapter I have argued that his thesis of the primacy of the object is seriously undercut because he is unable to support a 'strong' ontological realism regarding the object. Adorno is at pains to prevent the reduction of the object to the subject, for there is, he maintains, an ineradicable non-identity between the two, such that the object in its sensuous particularlity stands as a locus of transcendence within the sensible world. However, I have sought to show that by attributing the meaningfulness of material objects

[51] Milbank, 'Materialism and Transcendence', 396.

entirely to the determinations of human history, Adorno ends up sanctioning a 'social idealism' or, concomitantly an 'anthropological realism'. Here, the given materiality of the world is effectively little more than a blank canvass upon which human history is scored. I regarded this as a demotion of the material because the sensuous object is denied its own qualitative determinateness. In this way, I claimed, the object's sensuous particularity is lost to the immanence of human history in its radical contingency.

To guard against such an eradication of the object's transcendence by the (individual or collective) human subject, I called for an understanding of the object in terms of a 'strong' ontological realism, whereby the object is acknowledged as having qualitative determinations of its own, thus independently of the human subject. The argument runs that if the object is something meaningful and determinate beyond its human mediation, then it maintains a moment of otherness from the subject that is not simply a chaotic or formless materiality but rather a distinct sensuous particularlity endowed with a basic integrity that lets the object be for its own sake. The next crucial, but contentious, step that I took was to claim that a 'strong' ontological realism is most successfully formulated within a theological context. I argued that the overall unity and coherence of material objects, and the material world more generally, is the product of an infinite intellect rather than a fortuitous coalescing of heterogeneous material 'stuff' into various forms. I held that while the latter view may well be possible, it nevertheless forces us to accept an account of the material whereby actual determinate things are secondary to, even limiting of, a primal material flux that is fundamentally devoid of specific distinctions. With Clark, I contended that if we posit an infinite intellect, which I identified with Divine mind, then we can attribute the unity of material immanence to this rather than to the human mind.[52] On this account, the sensuous particularity of the object is secured by Divine mind, which serves as a principle of unity that thereby ensures the intelligible distinctness of each individual material thing. Once the sensuous particularlity of the object is no longer wholly reducible to the human mind then the object genuinely

[52] I have maintained that if we accept that the unity of material immanence is a product of the human mind then we must also accept a view of the material as ultimately nothing in itself, a view which is reductive and which I wish to avoid.

constitutes a site of material otherness or transcendence within the immanence of human experience.

I hope to have shown that philosophically the appeal to Divine transcendence, understood as Divine mind, actually enables us to propose a non-reductive account of material immanence such that the material world is characterised by the sensuous particularity of things that cannot be brought into absolute identity with the concepts of the human mind. To put this slightly differently, it is Divine transcendence, I argue, that guarantees the primacy of the object and therefore the permeating of material immanence by the transcendence that is the object in its concrete specificity and material situation. Once we begin to comprehend the object within a theological framework we can then view it as a unique, sensuous testament to the Divine transcendence that enables it to be. Such an object is not an unknowable thing-in-itself, but rather all the tangible things we encounter in our worldly midst, things we can determine but never absolutely.[53]

[53] Here we might recall St. Paul's comment that God 'however invisible has been there for the mind to see in the things he has made'. Rom. 1:20.

Conclusion

In the introduction to her excellent anthology *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond*, Regina Schwartz writes:

> 'Ironically, while transcendence signals what is beyond...it has also been linked to unfashionable concepts like presence, being, power, an argument without recourse, an authority beyond reason, the tyranny of the most excellent, the hegemony of the west, and of course, a totalitarian deity'.[54]

Certainly, for the four thinkers discussed in this study – Deleuze, Irigaray, Derrida and Adorno – the concept of divine transcendence, understood in its traditional theistic sense, is regarded with scarely veiled animus. The materialist concerns of these philosophers is such that they will reject the notion of divine transcendence, identifying it as principally responsible for instituting and consolidating the hierarchical dualisms that have dominated Western thinking, particularly that of spirit and matter, where the former is venerated over the latter, which is subsequently depreciated. However, while these thinkers jettison an 'other-worldly', divine transcendence, one of the main objectives of this thesis has been to explore the ways in which they enable us to rethink 'transcendence' and 'the divine' in immanent and materialist terms, rather than discarding these concepts altogether. Indeed, by reconceiving transcendence and divinity as material otherness and becoming within the world, these writers aim to restore a radical plenitude and dynamic to material immanence, which they believe is suppressed when the material is understood with reference to a divine that lies radically beyond it.

Yet, through a critical assessment of these 'immanentist' philosophies, I hope to have shown that the various attempts to deny divine transcendence and, concomitantly, revitalise material immanence as a fecund site of material otherness and becoming, that is, a site of strictly immanent transcendence, unexpectedly fail to secure the integrity of bodies in their concrete specificity, and thus fail to do justice to the very notions of materiality and embodiment that are at stake. Given, as I claim, the

[54] Schwartz, *Transcendence*, vii.

tendency for the materialisms of Deleuze, Irigaray, Derrida,[55] and Adorno to advance, albeit unwittingly, delimited and even abstract accounts of the material world, I argue that a 'strong' ontological realism is needed if the sensuous particularity of things is to be upheld. Importantly, I hold that it is by securing and affirming the object's sensuous particularity - such that this is ultimately irreducible to the human mind - that we are then able to properly figure transcendence in terms of material otherness and becoming, without jeopardising the integrity of bodies. The real bite of my argument comes with the contention that a 'strong' ontological realism must logically appeal to the non-material transcendence of Divine mind if it is to be successfully expounded. By seeking to address philosophical concerns with respect to the material, which have arisen through my analyses of the four philosophers discussed in this study, I have found reasons to give serious consideration to the claim that it is by returning to the idea of Divine transcendence that we actually prevent the downgrading of the material world, for it is Divine mind that can best account for material immanence as a realm of irreducible differences.

Noting the prevailing denouncing of the idea of divine transcendence by many contemporary thinkers, James Faulconer, approvingly citing Michel Henry, writes that 'our understanding of what religions say about transcendence is often rooted more in a circulating set of uncritical assumptions than in the texts of religion'.[56] In philosophy one such uncritical assumption, I hold, is that Divine transcendence must necessarily be opposed to, and negating of, material immanence (an assumption very much fuelled by the Nietzschean critique of religion). In this study I have concentrated in the main upon developing the thesis that the *rejection* of Divine transcendence does not inevitably lead to an enriched materiality, as is the common expectation. However, in the final chapter I respond to this admittedly negative thesis by working towards a more positive one: namely, that the concept of Divine transcendence enables the non-reductive understanding of the material that I call for.[57]

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[55] Once again, I recognise that the materialist epithet is somewhat strained when applied to Derrida, given that his antipathy towards any foundations in philosophy would mean that he would be reluctant to be viewed as some sort of champion for 'the material'. However, Derrida's philosophy of *différance* has a number of materialist implications and indeed Cheah believes it is possible to develop what he calls a 'deconstructive materialism'.

[56] Faulconer, 'Philosophy and Transcendence: Religion and the Possibility of Justice', *Transcendence in Philosophy and Religion*, 73.

[57] I would say that my negative thesis clears the ground for the positive one.

While I emphasized the philosophical reasons as to why I take this to be the case, I also anticipate that closer reference to religious texts as well as to theological doctrines would further corroborate my positive thesis. Of course, this would demand an extended project in itself and thus I do not undertake this here.

In bringing this thesis to a close, then, I want to consider the extent to which the various difficulties that blight the quite different materialist or immanentist philosophies of Deleuze, Irigaray, Derrida and Adorno stem from the influence of Kant's transcendental project on these thinkers, an influence I highlighted in the introduction and at certain points throughout this work. I have maintained that, whether implicitly or explicitly, these four thinkers contest Kant's transcendental idealism because it infers a fixed, ideal schema 'rooted' in the transcendental subject that can only ever constitute the sensible world in a limited, formal and automatic way. Indeed, Kant's transcendental idealism/ empirical realism is such that immanence (the sensible world) is rendered a closed totality, where objects of experience are only possible if they are entirely determined by, and thus conform to, the unchanging, a priori categories of the transcendental subject. On this picture the subject is trapped by its own categories according to which it must forever construct the world. Here the possibility of a more dynamic vision of immanence as a space of becoming and difference, of 'bounded openness' ('bounded' because restricted to the limits of the material or sensible world; 'open' because these limits are not a priori predetermined), is ruled out.

While Deleuze, Irigaray, Derrida and Adorno are critical of Kant's transcendental idealism their own philosophies are, nevertheless, post-Kantian in the sense that they continue the transcendentalist project of investigating the conditions of experience, rather than embracing, say, the positivist move of simply describing empirical givenness. I have regarded these four thinkers as 'quasi-transcendentalists' because whilst they refute Kant's abstract, transcendental subject they rethink the conditions of experience as contingent and transforming - contra a frozen, a priori schema. Moreover, these conditions defy any easy determination as real or ideal, sensible or intelligible, empirical or transcendental, etc, and thus problematize these very distinctions. Commenting on the poststructuralist and postmodern (very much Nietzschean) move towards de-centring the transcendental subject, Coole observes

how this means that 'the forms and categories of knowledge remain contingent and provisional, promiscuously sensuous and intellectual',[58] precisely what Kant sought to guard against in order to secure knowledge of the (phenomenal) world. Yet this is appealing to philosophers such as the ones discussed in this thesis because it liberates immanence from its reduction to the transcendental subject, allowing sensibility to engender new concepts, idealities and ways of being. Once freed from both the transcendental subject and from the ideal forms of the transcendent God of monotheism (or the Platonic Good), it is supposed that material immanence becomes capable of self-transcending, self-transforming, self-othering, and is thus enlivened and enriched.

Yet I wish to conclude this project by venturing that (non-theistic) quasi-transcendental constructions of immanence generate dualistic ontologies that are not able to safeguard the integrity of things in their sensuous particularity. Although further inquiry is needed as to *why* this is the case, I suspect that whenever the conditions of experience are held to be entirely internal to immanence then what must be presupposed for those conditions to operate, as non-abstract 'idealities' enabling the differentiation of immanence, are conceptions of the material that are from the onset at odds with the integrity of things in their sensuous particularity. Let us once again highlight the difficulties that emerge from my analysis of the philosophies of Deleuze, Irigaray, Derrida and Adorno, which, I argue, turn upon a quasi-transcendentalist logic.

Deleuze

Seeking to develop a philosophy of immanence that is radically materialist, we saw in chapters one and two Deleuze turn to the metaphysics of Spinoza. With Spinoza, Deleuze is able to formulate a logic of expressionism that will allow him to avoid not only the rational circumscribing of immanence by the transcendental subject but also the construction of immanence by way of the labour of the negative that is Hegelian dialectics. For Deleuze, Spinoza's plane of immanence provides a way of articulating a 'transcendental field' of becoming, to wit, an impersonal, deterritorialised field of

[58] Coole, *Negativity and Politics*, 40.

forces, intensities and singularities that are (somehow) actualised as determinate, material forms. Here, Spinozistic substance displaces the transcendental subject - a subject limited to an immutable set of categories, unable to transcend these without entering into metaphysical illusions - and offers an infinite transcendental field as the scene of the unlimited becoming of bodies.

However, I argued that Deleuze presents a Spinozistic plane of immanence characterised by novelty and unrestrained creativity that flatly contradicts Spinoza's own account of substance as a highly logicized, rationally determined construct. Although it could be objected that Spinoza naturalises logical necessity, rather than promotes a dualistic understanding of active rational principles and passive materiality, it must still be admitted that Spinozistic substance is such that matter becomes 'totally etherealised and idealized',[59] bearing little relation to actual material lives. Having shown in chapter one that Spinoza and Deleuze are unable to convincingly tie substance (*Natura naturans*) and modes (*Natura naturata*) together as one monistic reality - the result being that finite, particular things are rendered ontologically suspect and quite inessential to the pure positivity of substance - in chapter two I pushed home the point that Spinoza's rationalised immanence demands of the human subject (a finite mode of thought and extension) the transcending of his or her embodied specificity. This is because the ethical programme calls us to become 'spiritual automatons', entering into, by way of contemplation, the impersonal, univocal logic of the one divine substance. I thus maintained that Deleuze's attempt to recast Spinoza's substance as a transcendental field, one far more expansive that Kant's transcendental subject, nevertheless delivers an immanence that is every bit as rigidly determined as Kant's. Even if we grant Deleuze a transcendental field that is more akin to a Nietzschean flux, I argued that this is still unsatisfactory because the integrity of bodies actually represses and becomes an affront to a valorised indifferent material process of becoming *in general.*

Whether properly Spinozistic or more Nietzschean, Deleuze's transcendental field does not produce a realm of pure immanence where bodies in their sensuous particularity can be transfigured and enjoy becoming. Instead, it produces a dualism

[59] Milbank, 'Materialism and Transcendence', 395.

between (i) a primary realm of pure, immediate immanence that is either thoroughly rationalised or anarchic; and (ii) a secondary realm of material determinations or specificities (organisms, the human subject, etc) that transcend the primary realm and, because no longer immediate with pure immanence, the whole or the One, attain a negative or even illusory status.[60]

Irigaray

In chapter three, I sought to show how Irigaray rethinks the conditions of immanence not as a transcendental field of singularities or multiplicities, as in Deleuze's reworking of Spinoza, but as the incarnate idealities of female and male modes of being and becoming. With Irigaray, the determination of immanence is not effected by a logically inferred, ideal and universal subject (Kant's transcendental subject) or the self-differentiation of a univocal substance (Deleuze's Spinozism), but by sexually embodied subjects and their relationship with the otherness (transcendence) of the other of sexual difference. The transcendental is thus, for Irigaray, sensible: the embodied reality of sexual difference. By emphasising the constitutive power of sexual difference, I argued that Irigaray hoped to open up immanence to a generativity and becoming that nevertheless remains grounded in the concrete specificity of female and male bodily subjects.

While I appreciated Irigaray's efforts to maintain and affirm bodies in their concrete specificity, in chapter four, I critcised her for articulating this specificity according to the rather limited, overly simplified categories of sexual difference: 'female' and 'male'. A central difficulty with this is that sexual difference becomes prioritised over other differences. Indeed, we saw that Irigaray views sexual difference as 'ontological' and other differences as simply 'empirical',[61] with the effect that this distinction serves to confer upon sexual difference a fundamentality that is not held by other material differences. I further argued that Irigaray's sensible transcendental based upon sexual difference actually splits immanence into two. This is because originary female and male subjects remain locked within their own self-related immanence. Consequently, the other of sexual difference is rendered an unknowable

[60] See chapter two, pp. 80ff.
[61] On the problem of this distinction see chapter four, pp.160-1. Also, chapter three, p. 120.

(albeit material) transcendence. In chapter four I thus sought to demonstrate that Irigaray's use of sexual difference as a quasi-transcendentalist logic does not deliver an immanence invigorated by the creative corporeal becomings of sexed subjects but instead constructs an abstract account of embodiment that ultimately figures the two of sexual difference as radically other from each other.

Derrida

Whereas the other three thinkers explored in this study are, despite their important differences, firmly committed to the material howsoever understood, Derrida is not so readily thought of as a materialist. Indeed, he has often had to fight the charge that his philosophy of *différance* is really a form of linguistic idealism (and in the end I do not think Derrida actually escapes this charge). However, in chapter four I drew upon the work of Derrida in order to address the difficulties arising from Irigaray's account of a 'sensible transcendental'. In particular, I was interested in Cheah's reading of Derrida in his paper 'Mattering' where he tries to develop a 'deconstructive materialism'. According to Cheah the Derridaen text is not simply the play of linguistic signs but includes the play of embodied identities as the meaning of these identities are endlessly differing and deferring in relation to each other. In light of this, Cheah suggests that the Derridaen text is understood as a 'sensible transcendental'. In common then with the other thinkers in this study, Derrida challenges Kant's transcendental idealism and its strict separation of the transcendental and the empirical, the sensible and the intelligible, etc. But it was argued that for Derrida the quasi-transcendentals offered by both Deleuze (divine substance) and Irigaray (sexual difference) remain too dogmatic and foundational, thus, risking the over-determination of immanence as was Kant's problem. Instead, Derrida's cites *différance* as a 'non-originary origin' generative of an undecidable, ever-transforming immanence.

Although Derrida's *différance* enables us to think a sensible transcendental beyond the limits of Irigaray's two of sexual difference, the unfortunate result of this is, I maintained, that, rather like with Deleuze, the sensuous particularity of bodies is demoted in favour of a generalised process of differentation - in this case the differing and deferring of meaning. Indeed, Derrida's *différance* entails that any determinate

body can only ever be treated as an ontic presence and thus can never be affirmed but only negated. I therefore argued that the quasi-transcendental logic of *différance* produces the dualism between (i) the immanence of the text as presence; and (ii) the transcendence of the (im)possible 'wholly other' that threatens to arrive and transform immanence but can never actually do so.

Adorno

We noted in chapter five that, for Adorno, it is collective human history that functions as a quasi-transcendental. Material immanence is thus constituted by particular historical contexts, which are not determined by some hidden a priori logic but are contingent and alterable. Importantly, Adorno's philosophy of non-identity (or negative dialectics) stresses the object in its sensuous particularity, a particularlity that is determinable while always exceeding any of its determinations at any specific historical juncture. I held that understanding objects, and this includes human subjects,[62] as sensuous particularities with many different determinates, some more fundamental than others, offers a more subtle way of grasping the concrete specificity of things than Irigaray's attempt to do so through the somewhat reductive categories of the two of sexual difference.

Adorno's thesis of the primacy of the object aims to acknowledge and safeguard the sensuous particularity of the object, to avoid its reduction to the closed immanence of subjective conceptions. In chapter six, however, I explored a perplexing ambiguity surrounding Adorno's notion of the object. This was whether or not it ccould be understood in terms of a 'strong' ontological realism such that it is something qualitatively determinate and meaningful independently of the human subject. My concern was that if the object has no significant moment of independence from the human subject then its sensuous particularity is entirely reducible to the subject, and this would return us to a view of the materiality of things as raw 'stuff' to be shaped by the human mind. Although there is some textual evidence to show that Adorno did not wish to reduce the object to a product of human history, particularly with his

[62] Recall that, for Adorno, the subject is also necessarily an object (the converse, however, does not apply).

references to 'nature' as a dialectical counterpart to 'history',[63] I argued that because he rejects the idea that the object has any inherent meaning of its own, and that in any case any determination of the object that is independent of the (collective) human subject is unknowable, Adorno's philosophy is unable to adequately support a 'strong' ontological idealism. I thus fear that with Adorno the object becomes entirely reducible to the quasi-transcendental categories of human socio-historical contexts, and in this way loses a moment of non-identity with those categories as this can testify to the integrity of the object in its sensuous particularity.[64] When not coupled with a 'strong' ontological realism, I argued that Adorno's reformulation of the quasi-transcendental conditions of immanence as human history falls into a 'social idealism' (or 'anthropological realism') and this presupposes a dualism between human history and a given materiality (say, nature) that has no intrinsic meaning of its own.

'Strong' Ontological Realism: A Passage to Theology?

Kant's Copernican revolution means that 'we can know a priori of things only what we ourselves put into them'.[65] Arguably, it is Kant's transcendental idealism that spurs from the modern period on a move towards immanentist philosophies, *despite* his distinguishing between a knowable phenomenal and immanent realm and an unknowable noumenal and transcendent realm of things in themselves. This is because Kant gives credence to the idea that material immanence can be self-constituting, self-sufficient and self-standing by virtue of transcendental conditions that, while not given in experience, must be presupposed for experience and thus are fundamentally of a piece with immanence. Rejecting the idea of a transcendent God as the basis of immanence as well as refusing the limits of Kant's transcendental subject, the four thinkers in this study aim to give an expanded, radicalised account of material immanence that turns on the assumption that immanence can be its own ground.

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[63] See pp. 230-1.

[64] I say 'can testify' because the non-identity of the material object to its human determinations may simply refer to an amorphous materiality that has no intrinsic determination of its own and, thus, is a concept of matter that is inconsistent with wishing to stress the integrity of objects independently of human mediation.

[65] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxviii.

I, however, have wanted to show that if we are committed to the integrity of things in their sensuous particularity, where this integrity calls for a 'strong' ontological realism, then the idea of a self-constituting material immanence stuggles, if not altogether fails, to honour this. I argued that a 'strong' ontological realism requires a theological framework where Divine mind is acknowledged as the transcendence that enables material immanence to sustain the integrity of things in their sensuous particularlity. That metaphysics must find itself led to theology in this way is a question that this thesis leaves very much open to debate. However, to reiterate, it is my hope that this thesis has shown that the refusal of divine transcendence, as well as Kantian idealism, does not easily yield a satisfactory account of the material and that there are firm indications that with the affirmation of divine transcendence there is also the affirmation of the material.

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