

Luce Irigaray

THIS SEX WHICH IS NOT ONE

Translated by CATHERINE PORTER

with CAROLYN BURKE

CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS

Ithaca, New York

Contents

Originally published in French under the title *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*, ©
1977 by Editions de Minuit.

Copyright © 1985 by Cornell University

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in a review, this book, or
parts thereof, must not be reproduced in any form without permission in
writing from the publisher. For information, address Cornell University
Press, 124 Roberts Place, Ithaca, New York 14850.

First published 1985 by Cornell University Press.

International Standard Book Number 0-8014-1546-2 (cloth)

International Standard Book Number 0-8014-9331-5 (paper)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 84-23013

Printed in the United States of America

*Librarians: Library of Congress cataloging information
appears on the last page of the book.*

*The paper in this book is acid-free and meets the guidelines for
permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines
for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources.*

1. The Looking Glass, from the Other Side	9
2. This Sex Which Is Not One	23
3. Psychoanalytic Theory: Another Look	34
4. The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine	68
5. Così Fan Tutti	86
6. The "Mechanics" of Fluids	106
7. Questions	119
8. Women on the Market	170
9. Commodities among Themselves	192
10. "Frenchwomen," Stop Trying	198
11. When Our Lips Speak Together	205
Publisher's Note and Notes on Selected Terms	219

6

The "Mechanics" of Fluids

It is already getting around—at what rate? in what contexts? in spite of what resistances?—that women diffuse themselves according to modalities scarcely compatible with the framework of the ruling symbolics. Which doesn't happen without causing some turbulence, we might even say some whirlwinds, that ought to be reconfinned within solid walls of principle, to keep them from spreading to infinity. Otherwise they might even go so far as to disturb that third agency designated as the real—a transgression and confusion of boundaries that it is important to restore to their proper order.

*

So we shall have to turn back to "science" in order to ask it some questions.¹ Ask, for example, about its *historical lag in elaborating a "theory" of fluids*, and about the ensuing aporia even in mathematical formalization. A postponed reckoning that was eventually to be imputed to the real.²

Now if we examine the properties of fluids, we note that this "real" may well include, and in large measure, a *physical reality* that continues to resist adequate symbolization and/or that sig-

This text was originally published as "La 'mécanique' des fluides," in *l'Arc*, no. 58 (1974).

¹The reader is advised to consult some texts on solid and fluid mechanics.

²Cf. the signification of the "real" in the writings of Jacques Lacan (*Écrits, Séminaires*).

nifies the powerlessness of logic to incorporate in its writing all the characteristic features of nature. And it has often been found necessary to minimize certain of these features of nature, to envisage them, and it, only in light of an ideal status, so as to keep it/them from jamming the works of the theoretical machine.

But what division is being perpetuated here between a language that is always subject to the postulates of ideality and an empirics that has forfeited all symbolization? And how can we fail to recognize that with respect to this caesura, to the schism that underwrites the purity of logic, language remains necessarily meta-"something"? Not simply in its articulation, in its utterance, here and now, by a subject, but because, owing to his own structure and unbeknownst to him, that "subject" is already repeating normative "judgments" on a nature that is resistant to such a transcription.

And how are we to prevent the very unconscious (of the "subject" from being prorogated as such, indeed diminished in its interpretation, by a systematics that re-marks a historical "inattention" to fluids? In other words: what structuration of (the) language does not maintain a *complicity of long standing between rationality and a mechanics of solids alone?*

Certainly the emphasis has increasingly shifted from the definition of terms to the analysis of relations among terms (Frege's theory³ is one example among many). This has even led to the

³We need to ask several things about this theory: how it gets from zero to one; what role is played by the negation of negation, by the negation of contradiction, by the double reduction carried out by the successor; what is the origin of the decree that the object does not exist; what is the source of the principle of equivalence which holds that what is non-identical with itself is defined as a contradictory concept; why the question of the relation of a zero class to an empty set is evaded; and, of course, by virtue of what economy of signification is *Einheit* privileged; what does a purely objective representation leave as a residue to the subject of that representation.

recognition of a semantics of incomplete beings: functional symbols.

But, beyond the fact that the indeterminacy thus allowed in the proposition is subject to a general implication of the formal type—the variable is such only within the limits of the identity of (the) form(s) of syntax—a preponderant role is left to the symbol of universality—to the universal quantifier—whose modalities of recourse to the geometric still have to be examined.

Thus the “all”—of x , but also of the system—has already prescribed the “not-all” of each particular relation established, and that “all” is such only by a definition of extension that cannot get along without projection onto a given space-map, whose between(s) will be given their value(s) on the basis of punctual frames of reference.

The “place” thus turns out to have been in some way planned and punctuated for the purpose of calculating each “all,” but also the “all” of the system. Unless it is allowed to extend to infinity, which rules out in advance any determination of value for either the variables or their relations.

But where does that place—of discourse—find its “greater-than-all” in order to be able to form(alize) itself in this way? To systematize itself? And won’t that greater than “all” come back from its denegation—from its forclusion?—in modes that are still theo-logical? Whose relation to the feminine “not-all” remains to be articulated: *God or feminine pleasure*.

While she waits for these divine rediscoveries, a woman serves (only) as a *projective map* for the purpose of guaranteeing the totality of the system—the excess factor of its “greater than all”; she serves as a *geometric prop* for evaluating the “all” of the extension of each of its “concepts” including those that are still undetermined, serves as fixed and congealed *intervals* between their definitions in “language,” and as the possibility of *establishing individual relationships* among these concepts.

All this is feasible by virtue of her “fluid” character, which has deprived her of all possibility of identity with herself within such a logic. A woman—paradoxically?—would thus serve in the proposition as the *copulative link*. But this copula turns out to have been appropriated in advance for a project of exhaustive formalization, already subjected to the constitution of the discourse of the “subject” in set(s). And the possibility that there may be several systems modulating the order of truths (of the subject) in no way contradicts the postulate of a syntactic equivalence among these various systems. All of which have excluded from their mode of symbolization *certain properties of real fluids*.

What is left uninterpreted in the economy of fluids—the resistances brought to bear upon solids, for example—is in the end given over to God. Overlooking the properties of *real fluids*—internal frictions, pressures, movements, and so on, that is, *their specific dynamics*—leads to giving the real back to God, as only the idealizable characteristics of fluids are included in their mathematicization.

Or again: considerations of pure mathematics have precluded the analysis of fluids except in terms of laminated planes, solenoid movements (of a current privileging the relation to an axis), spring-points, well-points, whirlwind-points, which have only an approximate relation to reality. Leaving some *remainder*. Up to *infinity*: the center of these “movements” corresponding to zero supposes in them an infinite speed, which is *physically unacceptable*. Certainly these “theoretical” fluids have enabled the technical—also mathematical—form of analysis to progress, while losing a certain relationship to *the reality of bodies in the process*.

What consequences does this have for “science” and psychoanalytic practice?

And if anyone objects that the question, put this way, relies too heavily on metaphors, it is easy to reply that the question in

fact impugns the privilege granted to metaphor (a quasi solid) over metonymy (which is much more closely allied to fluids). Or—suspending the status of truth accorded to these essentially metalinguistic “categories” and “dichotomous oppositions”—to reply that in any event all language is (also) metaphorical,⁴ and that, by denying this, language fails to recognize the “subject” of the unconscious and precludes inquiry into the subjection, still in force, of that subject to a symbolization that grants *precedence to solids*.

Thus if every psychic economy is organized around the phallus (or Phallus), we may ask what this primacy owes to a teleology of reabsorption of fluid in a solidified form. The lapses of the penis do not contradict this: the penis would only be the empirical representative of a model of ideal functioning; all desire would tend toward being or having this ideal. Which is not to say that the phallus has a simple status as transcendental “object,” but that it dominates, as a keystone, a system of the economy of desire marked by idealism.

And, to be sure, the “subject” cannot rid itself of it in a single thrust. Certain naive statements about (religious?) conversion—also a matter of language—to materialism are the proof and symptom of this.

From there to standardizing the psychic mechanism according to laws that subject sexuality to the absolute power of form . . .

For isn't that what we are still talking about? And how, so long as this prerogative lasts, can any articulation of sexual difference be possible? *Since what is in excess with respect to form—*

⁴But there again, we would have to reconsider the status of the metaphorical. We would have to question the laws of equivalence that are operative there. And follow what becomes of “likeness” in that particular operation of “analogy” (complex of matter-form) applicable to the physical realm, and required for the analysis of the properties of real fluids. Neither vague nor rigorous in a geometrical way, it entails an adjustment of meaning which is far from being accomplished.

for example, the feminine sex—is necessarily rejected as beneath or beyond the system currently in force.

“Woman does not exist”? In the eyes of discursivity. There remain these/her remains: God and woman, “for example.” Whence that entity that has been struck dumb, but that is eloquent in its silence: the *real*.

And yet that woman-thing speaks. But not “like,” not “the same,” not “identical with itself” nor to any x, etc. Not a “subject,” unless transformed by phallogratisms. It speaks “fluid,” even in the paralytic undersides of that economy. Symptoms of an “it can't flow any more, it can't touch itself . . .” Of which one may understand that she imputes it to the father, and to his morphology.

Yet one must know how to listen otherwise than in good form(s) to hear what it says. That it is continuous, compressible, dilatable, viscous, conductible, diffusible, . . . That it is unending, potent and impotent owing to its resistance to the countable; that it enjoys and suffers from a greater sensitivity to pressures; that it changes—in volume or in force, for example—according to the degree of heat; that it is, in its physical reality, determined by friction between two infinitely neighboring entities—dynamics of the near and not of the proper, movements coming from the quasi contact between two unities hardly definable as such (in a coefficient of viscosity measured in poises, from Poiseuille, *sic*), and not energy of a finite system; that it allows itself to be easily traversed by flow by virtue of its conductivity to currents coming from other fluids or exerting pressure through the walls of a solid; that it mixes with bodies of a like state, sometimes dilutes itself in them in an almost homogeneous manner, which makes the distinction between the one and the other problematical; and furthermore that it is already diffuse “in itself,” which disconcerts any attempt at static identification . . .

Woman thus cannot hear herself. And, if everything she says is in some way language, that does not make the lingual aspect of

her speech what it signifies, all the same. That her speech may draw the possibility conditions of its meaning from its confinement to language is quite another matter.

We must add that *sound* is propagated in her at an astonishing rate, in proportion moreover to its more or less perfectly insensible character. Which results in one of two things: either the impact of signification never comes (from) there, or else it comes (from) there only in an inverted form. *Che vuoi*, then?

Without counting the zone of silence that lies outside the volume defined by the place from which discourse is projected. And meaning would have to be diffused at a speed identical to that of sound in order for all forms of envelopes—spaces of deafness to one or the other—to become null and void in the transmission of “messages.” But the small variations in the rapidity of sound then run the risk of deforming and blurring language at every instant. And, if we ply language to laws of similarities, cutting it into pieces whose equality or difference we shall be able to evaluate, compare, reproduce . . . , the sound will already have lost certain of its properties.

Fluid—like that other, inside/outside of philosophical discourse—is, by nature, unstable. Unless it is subordinated to geometrism, or (?) idealized.

Woman never speaks the same way. What she emits is flowing, fluctuating. *Blurring*. And she is not listened to, unless proper meaning (meaning of the proper) is lost. Whence the resistances to that voice that overflows the “subject.” Which the “subject” then congeals, freezes, in its categories until it paralyzes the voice in its flow.

“And there you have it, Gentlemen, that is why your daughters are dumb.” Even if they chatter, proliferate pythically in works that only signify their aphasia, or the mimetic underside of your desire. And interpreting them where they exhibit only their muteness means subjecting them to a language that exiles

them at an ever increasing distance from what perhaps they would have said to you, were already whispering to you. If only your ears were not so formless, so clogged with meaning(s), that they are closed to what does not in some way echo the already heard.

Outside of this volume already circumscribed by the signification articulated in (the father’s) discourse nothing is: *awoman. Zone of silence.*

And the object a? How can it be defined with respect to the properties, also, of fluids? Since this “object” refers back most generally to a state that is theirs? Milk, luminous flow, acoustic waves, . . . not to mention the gasses inhaled, emitted, variously perfumed, of urine, saliva, blood, even plasma, and so on.

But these are not the “object *a*”s enumerated in the theory. The experts will so state. Response: will feces—variously disguised—have the privilege of serving as the paradigm for the object *a*? Must we then understand this modeling function—more or less hidden from view—of the object of desire as resulting from the passage, a successful one, from the fluid to the solid state? *The object of desire itself*, and for psychoanalysts, *would be the transformation of fluid to solid?* Which seals—this is well worth repeating—*the triumph of rationality*. Solid mechanics and rationality have maintained a relationship of very long standing, one against which fluids have never stopped arguing.

Along the same lines we might ask (ourselves) why sperm is never treated as an object *a*? Isn’t the subjection of sperm to the imperatives of reproduction alone symptomatic of a preeminence historically allocated to the solid (product)? And if, in the dynamics of desire, the problem of castration intervenes—fantasy/reality of an amputation, of a “crumbling” of that solid that the penis represents—a reckoning with *sperm-fluid* as an obstacle to the generalization of an economy restricted to solids remains in suspension.

However, the terms that describe pleasure evoke the return of a repressed that disconcerts the structure of the signifying chain. *But pleasure—black-out of meaning—would be abandoned to woman. Or awoman.*

Awoman, yes, since the failure to recognize a specific economy of fluids—their resistance to solids, their “proper” dynamics—is perpetuated by psychoanalytic science. And since this may lead to the resurgence of the *cause of awoman*, a historical positioning where the fall-out of all speculation is projected. It remains to be seen just how far the compressibility of this *residue* will go.

It is true that *a good number of her/its properties have been taken over by desire, or the libido*—this time attributed by priority to the masculine. These latter are defined as *flow*.

But the fact of having taken back *in the same* the solid instrument and certain characteristics of fluids—leaving to the other only the still neglected residue of their real movements, the yet unexplained principles of a more subtle energy—poses crucial economic problems. In the absence of the relations of dynamogenic exchange or of reciprocal resistances between the one and the other, impossible choices impose themselves: either one or the other. *Either desire, or sex*. Which, thanks to the anchorage of the name-of-the-father, will produce a “friable” organ and a “well-formed” desire.

This compromise leaves each one half-solid. The perfect consistency of the sex organ does not belong to it but, by reconfiguring that organ with the meaning instituted by language, it recovers a semi-solidity of desire. This operation could be designated as the *passage to a mechanics of near-solids*.

The psychic machinery would be safe. It would purr along smoothly. Of course, a few problems of entropy persist, some concern over resources of energy. But we have to trust science. And technology. All the more so since they offer possibilities

for cathexes that turn the “libido” away from more embarrassing questions. If only that of the “subject’s” boredom in repeating the same story over and over again.

Which is called, in part, the *death instinct*. But if we question—also, and why not?—this so peculiarly astonishing discovery of psychoanalysis, we are again led to notice *a double movement: an adaptation of certain characteristics of fluids to rationality, and a negligence of the obstacle that their own dynamics constitutes*.

You don’t believe it? Because you need/want to believe in “objects” that are already solidly determined. That is, again, in yourself(-selves), accepting the silent work of death as a condition of remaining indefectibly “subject.”

But consider this *principle of constancy* which is so dear to you: what “does it mean”? The avoidance of excessive inflow/outflow-excitement? Coming from the other? The search, at any price, for homeostasis? For self-regulation? The reduction, then, in the machine, of the effects of movements from/toward its outside? Which implies reversible transformations *in a closed circuit*, while discounting the variable of time, except in the mode of *repetition of a state of equilibrium*.

On the “outside,” however, the machine has in some way borrowed energy (the origin of its motive force remains, partially, unexplained, eluded). And, in some way, it has borrowed its operating model. Thus certain properties of the “vital” have been deadened into the “constancy” required to give it form. But this operation cannot and must not be represented—it would be marked by a *zero* as sign or signifier, in the unconscious itself—or else it risks subverting the entire discursive economy. This latter is only saved by affirming that even what is living tends to destroy itself, and that it has to be preserved from this self-aggression by binding its energy in semi-solid mechanisms.

Since historically the properties of fluids have been abandoned to the feminine, *how is the instinctual dualism articulated with the difference between the sexes?* How has it been possible even to “imagine” that this economy had the same explanatory value for both sexes? Except by falling back on the requirement that “the two” be interlocked in “the same.”

And we shall indeed have to come (back) to the mode of specula(riza)tion that subtends the structure of the subject. To “the jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence,” to that “symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form,” a “form [that] would have to be called the *ideal-I*,” a “form [that] situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone. . . . The fact is that the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as *Gestalt*, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted, but in which it appears to him above all in a contrasting size (*un relief de stature*) that fixes it and in a symmetry that inverts it, in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him. Thus, this *Gestalt*— whose pregnancy should be regarded as bound up with the species, though its motor style remains scarcely recognizable—by these two aspects of its appearance, symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination.”⁵

A considerable homage is owed for this recognition by a master of specular profit and “alienation.” But too flat an ad-

⁵Jacques Lacan, “Le stade du miroir,” in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1977), p. 2. No emphasis added. Further quotations from this article are indicated parenthetically within the text.

miration runs the risk of canceling the effectiveness of this step forward.

It behooves us, then, to look into the status of the “exteriority” of this form that is “constituent [more than constituted]” for the subject, into the way it serves as screen to another outside (a body other than this “total form”), into the death that it entails but in a “relief” that authorizes misapprehension, into the “symmetry” that it consecrates (as constituent) and that will cause the “mirage” of “the maturation of its power” for a subject to be always tributary of an “inversion,” into the motor capacity that it paralyzes, into the process of projection that it puts into place—“a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone”?—and into the phantoms that it leaves as remains. Look into that world of automata, that robot-world which still invokes the name and even the mercy of God in order to get itself going, and invokes the existence of the living so as to imitate that existence more perfectly than is possible in nature.

For although nature of course does not lack energy, it is nonetheless incapable of possessing motive force “in itself,” of enclosing it in a/its total form. Thus fluid is always in a relation of excess or lack vis-à-vis unity. It eludes the “‘Thou art that’” (p. 7). That is, any definite identification.

And so far as the organism is concerned, what happens if the mirror provides nothing to see? No sex, for example? So it is with the girl. And when he says that in the constituent effects of the mirror image, the sex of one’s like(ness) does not matter (“it is a necessary condition for the maturation of the gonad of the female pigeon that it should see another member of its species, of either sex” [p. 3]) and also that “the mirror-image would seem to be the threshold of the visible world” (ibid.) isn’t this a way of stressing that the feminine sex will be excluded from it? And that it is a sexualized, or unsexualized, male body that will

determine the features of that *Gestalt*, matrix irreducible to/from the introduction of the subject in the social order. Whence its functioning according to laws so foreign to the feminine? Whence that “paranoic alienation, which dates from the deflection of the specular *I* into the social *I*” (p. 5), but whose inevitable appearance was already inscribed in the “mirror stage.” The *like* prefiguring itself there as that *other of the same*, the mirage of which will forever persecute the subject with that perpetual tension between a personal ego and a formative agency that, although one’s own, is unappropriable. The distinction being henceforth undecidable between which would be truly the one, which the other, which would be the double of whom, in this endless litigation over identity with oneself.

But these dissensions—intrasubjective and social—must already have left behind them, in a former time, *hysterical repressions*. And their paralytic signifying-effects. Does it follow that the question of the assumption, jubilating or not, of its specular image by a sexualized feminine body would be (in) vain? Desire having already fixed itself there, the neutralization re-marked by the “mirror stage” would be a confirmation of a “more archaic” rigidification (*ibid.*).

*

And if, by chance, you were to have the impression of not having yet understood everything, then perhaps you would do well to leave your ears half-open for what is in such close touch with itself that it confounds your discretion.

7

Questions

Since *Speculum* was written and published, many questions have been asked. And the present book is, in a way, a collection of questions. It does not deal with all of them . . . Nor does it “really” answer them. It pursues their questioning. It continues to interrogate. From various angles, it approaches what has been imposed or proposed in the form of questions. What can be said about a feminine sexuality “other” than the one prescribed in, and by, phallograticism? How can its language be recovered, or invented? How, for women, can the question of their sexual exploitation be articulated with the question of their social exploitation? What position can women take, today, with respect to politics? Should they intervene, or not, within, or against, institutions? How can they free themselves from their expropriation within patriarchal culture? What questions should they address to its discourse? To its theories? To its scientific disciplines? How can they “put” these questions so that they will not be once more “repressed,” “censored”? But also how can they already speak (as) women? By going back through the dominant discourse. By interrogating men’s “mastery.” By speaking to women. And among women. Can this speaking (as) woman be written? How? . . .

Questions—among others—that question themselves and answer each other throughout this collection.

Why not leave some of them in their own words? In their immediate expression? In their oral language? Even at the price

This Sex Which Is Not One

touch each other naked. And that, to find ourselves once again in that state, we have a lot to take off. So many representations, so many appearances separate us from each other. They have wrapped us for so long in their desires, we have adorned ourselves so often to please them, that we have come to forget the feel of our own skin. Removed from our skin, we remain distant. You and I, apart.

You? I? That's still saying too much. Dividing too sharply between us: all.

Publisher's Note and Notes on Selected Terms

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Some modifications of the format of the original edition of this book have been made for the convenience of readers and some in accordance with the conventions of book-making in the English-speaking world.

NOTES ON SELECTED TERMS

"Alice" underground (*"Alice" sous-terre*)

In the original, Irigaray rewrites the name Soutter (the director of the film that is the ostensible subject of "The Looking-Glass, from the Other Side") to point up the subversive or underground nature of her speaker's perspective, that of a female subject who refuses to be circumscribed or named according to the rules of patriarchal logic.

all (*toute[s]*)

In translation, it is not always possible to convey Irigaray's idiosyncratic transformations of French grammatical structures, as in *toute(s)*, a female subject that is simultaneously singular and plural, as such, an example of her "speaking (as) woman" (*parler-femme*).

commodities (*marchandises*)

Because English lacks gender, the term is neutralized in translation,

and Irigaray's emphasis on the commodity as feminine or female matter cannot be fully translated. Thus, ironically, her larger point—that the organization of sexual difference is reflected in language as well as in social practices—is slightly blunted due to the differences between actual languages.

“dragonfly” (“*Libellule*”)

The name of the cap that is passed around in the film discussed in “The Looking-Glass, from the Other Side.”

ek-sistance (*ek-sistance*)

Existence as conscious separation or differentiation from nature: the state of being opposite to that generally ascribed to the feminine.

indifferent (*indifférente[s]*)

- a) Within the masculine order, the woman is indifferent in the sense of non-different or undifferentiated because she has no right to her own sexual difference but must accept masculine definitions and appropriations of it.
- b) As a consequence, she is indifferent in the sense of detached or remote because of the imposture of her position.
- c) From a feminine perspective, however, she might experience difference differently, in relation to her resemblance to another woman rather than to a masculine standard. (V. “When Our Lips Speak Together.”)

masquerade (*la mascarade*)

An alienated or false version of femininity arising from the woman's awareness of the man's desire for her to be his other, the masquerade permits woman to experience desire not in her own right but as the man's desire situates her.

mimicry (*mimétisme*)

An interim strategy for dealing with the realm of discourse (where the speaking subject is posited as masculine), in which the woman deliberately assumes the feminine style and posture assigned to her within this discourse in order to uncover the mechanisms by which it exploits her.

one, oneness (*le un*)

The universal standard and privileged form in our systems of representation, *oneness* expresses the requirements for unitary representations of signification and identity. Within such a system, in which the masculine standard takes itself as a universal, it would be impossible to represent the duality or plurality of the female sex and of a possible language in analogy with it.

other/same (*autre/même*)

A related tendency in Western discourse which privileges masculine “sameness-unto-itself” as the basis of signification and identity and, as a consequence, posits the feminine as other only in relation to masculine sameness, that is, not as a different mode of signification.

proper, proper name, property, appropriate (*propre, nom propre, propriété, approprier*)

This word cluster suggests close connections between the related systems of capitalism and patriarchy—more specifically, between their demands for order, neatness, the proper name, and the proper or literal meaning of a word, on the one hand, and the concepts of property ownership and appropriation, on the other.

questions (*questions*)

A habitual mode in Irigaray's writing, because it introduces a plurality of voices and facilitates the examination of a priori concepts without, however, insisting upon definitive answers or revisions of the systems of thought that are brought into question.

retraversal (*retraversée*)

The process of going back through social, intellectual, and linguistic practices to reexamine and unravel their conceptual bases, in analogy with Alice's voyages of exploration in *Through the Looking-Glass*.

reversal (*renversement*)

A reversal in the hierarchies of power, so that the formerly “inferior” term then occupies the position of the “superior” term but without altering the nature of their relations.

Publisher's Note and Note on Selected Terms

self-affection, self-touching (*auto-affection, se retoucher*)

A mode of signification in analogy with the openness and plurality of female sexuality (which is always auto-erotically in touch with itself) as opposed to the closed or singular mode of phallic discourse.

speaking (as) woman (*parler-femme*)

Not so much a definitive method as an experimental process or a discovery of the possible connections between female sexuality and writing, "speaking (as) woman" would try to disrupt or alter the syntax of discursive logic, based on the requirements of univocity and masculine sameness, in order to express the plurality and mutuality of feminine difference and mime the relations of "self-affection."

standard (*étalon*)

The masculine as the standard of value, in relation to which the feminine acquires significance and worth. The resonance of *étalon*, which also means *stallion*, is, however, lost in translation, as is the sense of *étalonnage* as not only a standardization but also a kind of stud-service that divides the socio-sexual order into what Irigaray calls masculine "producer-subjects" and feminine "commodity-objects."

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Irigaray, Luce.

This sex which is not one.

Translation of: Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un.

1. Women—Psychology. 2. Women and psychoanalysis.
3. Femininity (Philosophy) 4. Sex (Psychology)

I. Title.

HQ1206.I713 1985 155.3'333 84-23013

ISBN 0-8014-1546-2 (alk. paper)

ISBN 0-8014-9331-5 (pbk.: alk. paper)