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A PHENOMENOLOGY OF 'THE OTHER WORLD': ON IRIGARAY'S 'TO PAINT THE INVISIBLE'

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> Raise the question: the invisible life, the invisible community, the invisible other, the invisible culture.
>
> Elaborate a phenomenology of "the other world," as the limit of a phenomenology of the imaginary and the 'hidden' — (*The Visible and the Invisible*)[i].

As we know, Maurice Merleau-Ponty was struggling with a dynamic shift in his thinking at the premature end of his life. Described as a move from a phenomenology dependent upon consciousness to an ontology of the intertwining of beings as flesh, this shift had not yet been resolved in a finished text, nor did Merleau-Ponty seem to feel he had answered his own questions if the notes at the end of *The Visible and the Invisible* are to provide us with clues. In a critical commentary on Merleau-Ponty's extraordinary late essay, "Eye and Mind"[ii], Luce Irigaray reveals the gaps between what he perhaps wanted to think, and what he had at that point achieved, requiring as she does that we read his essay in a new way and, I would suggest, opening up Merleau-Ponty's project to be thought anew—beginning where he often did, with the artist's task[iii].

Art is central to phenomenology, artists being understood as exemplary phenomenologists, as having the capacity to reveal essences, to bring to appearance what is phenomenally experienced; in particular, for Merleau-Ponty, the artist, like the philosopher, has the task of revealing the world, and in this act, "bringing truth into being"[iv]. Merleau-Ponty is for this reason somewhat critical of abstract art which he sees as moving too far from essences, of not providing the outlines of existence and of things (EM 182; 71-72). Gilles Deleuze, who explores how the painter can expose the movement of invisible forces that act on the body, concludes that abstract art relies on signifying forms and is hence caught up solely in optical and representational space[v]. Irigaray shares Deleuze's concern that the artist, if understood as phenomenologist, risks imposing forms on that which he sees; she is, moreover, troubled by the way the body becomes a technical instrument in Merleau-Ponty's account, a thing among other things rather than a living being in relation to other living beings[vi].

In what follows I pursue Irigaray's move to reread "Eye and Mind" with a difference—to hear in these familiar phrases an underlying logic that works against itself. I then briefly explore Deleuze's analysis of the task of the painter before turning finally to the works of Joan Mitchell, an abstract expressionist artist, whose works allow us to rethink the phenomenological, and reveal the task of the painter in a new light. I argue that her works show up Irigaray's claims: that the real cannot be captured on the specular plane; that the task of the painter is to recognize this limit and to paint it as such, as the invisible, without appropriating it through forms or integrating it into an insular imaginary; and that an understanding of space moves us beyond situation, even beyond reversibility to a communal sharing, that while not visible in itself, informs and expands

our vision. Paradoxically, I want to argue that Irigaray might bring us closer to where Merleau-Ponty actually wanted to be.

1. *Re-reading "Eye and Mind"*

Despite his valid critique of operationalism, according to Irigaray, Merleau-Ponty himself falls back on a kind of instrumentalism. And if we listen carefully to the phrases we know so well, there is evidence for her claim in his text. In his interrogation of vision, Merleau-Ponty initially asserts that the operations of science are ultimately blind: "Thinking 'operationally' is a sort of "absolute artificialism", "where human creations are derived from a natural information process, itself conceived on the model of human machines" (EM 160; 12). What results from such thinking is that "man really becomes the manipulandum he takes himself to be". Man is thrust into a kind of systematicity that is indifferent to space as lived because "scientific thinking" is one "which looks on from above, and thinks of the object-in-general" (EM 160; 12).

Yet from Irigaray's perspective, Merleau-Ponty's artist is yet another technician. Granted a privileged position, he has a relation to this fabric of brute being that requires of him no more than that he employ no "other technique than what his eyes and hands discover in seeing and painting" (EM 161; 15). His relation is not to the object in general but to the object in particular, situated as it is in relation to the things around it. And for this relation the artist relies on nothing other than his own instruments, his eyes and his hands, for "every technique is a technique of the body" (EM 168; 33); our "fleshly eyes…are computers of the world" (EM 165; 25). He experiences an overlap of the visible and mobile worlds; all that is visible is within reach of his eyes. Yet, painting is

not an operation of thought—the painter paints because he has a sensible body that is caught up in the things, caught up in a sensible world. While his body is not an automaton imbued with a mind or spirit (EM 163; 21), it is, however, fundamentally narcissistic. Whereas the thinking body assimilates, constitutes and transforms the object into thought, the perceiving body inheres in that which it sees; its sensing belongs to the sensed. The body is a thing "caught in the fabric of the world"; but as a seeing and moving thing, it moves into and around things taking them up. They are "incrusted into its flesh" (EM 163; 19).

In fact, the artist, unlike the philosopher, from whom we await thoughtful pronouncements and opinions, has no other task than to bring to appearance the world in the way he corporeally encounters it; privileged for his ability to allow his vision to render apparent the relations between his body and the world, the artist is the ideal phenomenologist. In French, as Derrida reminds us, the words for "to show" *monstrer* and *montrer*, make apparent the monstrousness of this human ability to signify, to describe, and to interpret the world, thereby bringing it into being[vii]. Accordingly, for Merleau-Ponty, the painter's task is to demonstrate the world as visible (EM166; 26). Going further than what we normally perceive, the painter makes that which 'profane vision' would consider to be invisible, visible'. Klee's two holly leaves, though at first 'indecipherable', 'remain to the end monstrous' [*monstreuses*] on account of their exactness (EM 184; 76). The volumnosity of the world is rendered visible not through the muscular sense of touch but purely through vision, a "voracious vision" which reaches "beyond the 'visual givens'," opening "upon a texture of Being…" (EM 166; 27).

And this is Irigaray's concern. If the "eye lives in this texture as a man lives in his house" (EM 166; 27), then this eye will only ever encounter its own being, its own perception, its own territory (PI 400). Indeed, she understands Merleau-Ponty's modified claim to be ultimately parallel to Heidegger's own, that "language is the house of being"; for both there is only one world and simply moving beyond language to flesh does not alone solve this problem. For Merleau-Ponty always begins with the sensual experience of his own body: It is through his senses that he experiences what he describes in his nature lectures as an "*Einfühlung* with the world, with the things, with the animals, with other bodies"[viii]; his body is the "measurement of the world"; he is "open to the world" because he is "*within"* his body (N 217; 270). Thus it is because the painter's body, and hence vision, are intertwined with the things in space, that he is able to reveal things as they are – in front of him. Following Heidegger, the artist captures this phenomenological coming-into-being that is not of his own making: The line does not merely "circumscribe the apple or the meadow, but the apple and the meadow 'form themselves' from themselves, and come into the visible as if they had come from a prespatial world behind the scenes" (EM183; 73). But from Irigaray's perspective, this is not sufficient for accounting for other visions, other worlds, for what is there—for the real that is not of his world. The prespatial is such only in relation to his singular and unique spatial scene. Although for Merleau-Ponty "everything I see is in principle within my reach…marked upon the map of the 'I can'"(EM 162; 17), as Dorothea Olkowski points out, "Merleau-Ponty's insistence upon clear perception and assured action in oriented space as well as his certainty that being is synonymous with being situated" raises the question of "what temporal and spatial presuppositions" accompany this

situated being, and whose account of space and time are privileged here?[ix] . According to this version, the task of the painter would be to reveal how he encounters the world, bringing it into appearance according to his vision, a gift which is earned only through exercise, through learning how to see, and learning only from itself.

For Merleau-Ponty, it might be that vision encounters "as at a crossroads, all the aspects of Being", but for Irigaray, to appoint to vision the capacity to capture all aspects of being is to reduce and immobilize in "an image or in an idea", indeed, to the artist's imaginary, the veritable movement of life (PI 399). It is also, importantly, not to preserve the invisible as invisible, silence as silence, the interval as the interval (PI 403-4). And it is to understand this intertwining as happening with his body, but not within it. Difference and otherness are not preserved within his vision—they might shift and change it, but only in the ways his vision appropriates them, allowing them to flesh it out, to symbiotically nurture it as a placenta might do—but not quite as a placenta since the placenta mediates the relation between mother and foetus (PI 392). As Merleau-Ponty describes it, there is no limit between nature and man, thus it is "mute Being" itself which renders its meaning to sight (EM 188; 86-87). If all life must pass through his vision, then it is already fixed in his image, preventing future mixings and intertwinings.

In short, for Irigaray the task of the painter is not to be more able to capture the world than does cybernetics because he begins with embodied being[x]. Nor is it really one of challenging mind/body dualism as the early Merleau-Ponty strives to do. For in beginning with the chiasm of mind and body as he does, he begins with the being who then encounters the world, albeit becoming a subject in this process. Irigaray's logic is otherwise. It is rather because we are inherently relational that we are embodied (PI 396).

The problem with prioritizing the chiasms between mind and body, touching and being touched, seeing and being seen, even vision and touch, is that they are not accompanied by a space-time interval, a gap between the passivity of the perception and the activity of acting upon this perception (PI 397). And this space-time interval, she argues, is necessary if we are not simply to appropriate an other into ourselves, into our own material bodies and perspectives without first asking who this other is, and what the limit is to my perception. Her concern is that "the intertwining remains between himself and himself, between himself and a world which is already situated within him". He doesn't have an "intertwining in the present between himself and the other" (PI 398). As Dorothea Olkowski has argued, "the other is not just a perception of what is outside, but also an affection, an invitation to act"[xi].

If the artist is not required to think about what he sees, recognizing the limits of his vision, if there is no interval to create the "spacing of a distance with respect to the immediacy of perception" (PI 397), then the artist appropriates what is other to him according to the reversal of his gaze, ultimately achieving a narcissistic self-reflection. The artist focuses on the situation, the relation of the things in terms of how they encroach upon each other and upon his own thing-like body without considering the things in themselves, without allowing them to be. For the painter there is no limit between the imaginary, his imaginary, and the real (PI 399). The invisible of the other in this phenomenological account, is appropriated without limit and without recognition in the artist's vision.

Thus the body, in its phenomenological revealing of the world, becomes a technical mechanism like the mirror, which is, for Merleau-Ponty a "pre-human way of

seeing things" that also belongs to the painter. The mirror "anticipates the labour of vision. Like all other technical objects, such as signs and tools, [it] arises upon the open circuit [that goes] from the seeing to the visible body", outlining and amplifiying "the metaphysical structure of our flesh" (EM168; 32-33). For Merleau-Ponty the mirror shows up the reversibility of vision; it reveals how his body can "assume segments derived from the body of another", and how his "substance passes into them". Although in the chiasm there is ultimately no fusion— the two sides remain distinct—there is, however, no limit between the one and an other, no limit that would allow for an interval where a relation could take place; after all, reversibility, as Renaud Barbaras points out, is not yet a relation[xii]. The problem, moreover, is that in concluding that "man is mirror for man", he forgets that the mirror as technique is a pure reversibility that produces vision as a closed circuit. This "mechanical trick'" of the mirror reveals for Merleau-Ponty the "metamorphosis of seeing and seen which defines both our flesh and the painter's vocation" (EM168-9; 34). For Irigaray, it creates a closed circuit that shuts out other ways of relating—above all, to that which is invisible—to that which cannot be subsumed to vision.

The painter does make visible a kind of relation, that is, the situation, the logic of the relationship of things to each other within space. Yet, he does not participate in a relation that would open his own perception to the invisible, to another's perception in the present. For this would require recognizing the invisible as invisible and not as the other side of the visible. If, for Merleau-Ponty, "my body sees only because it is a part of the visible in which it opens forth" (VI 153; 201), then, admonishes Irigaray, he cannot see an other in her alterity because it is not part of the same visible world for him (ESD

168; 157). If women are not simply to continue to provide an envelope-limit for men, but are to have their own place, their own limit, then some kind of interval of a free space-time is needed, some kind of new relation between form and matter (PI 391).

If the artist is not required to think about what he sees, if there is no interval between the passivity and activity of perception, then the artist appropriates what is other to him according to a mirroring of his gaze that remains impervious to the other, a perception that does not allow itself to be informed by that of the otherness of a particular other in the present; ultimately he achieves only a narcissistic self-reflection. The artist focuses on the situation, the relation of the things in terms of how they encroach upon each other and upon his own thing-like body without considering the things in themselves, without allowing them to be. For the painter there is no limit between the imaginary, his imaginary, and the real. Irigaray's concern, then, is that the invisible of the other in this phenomenological account is appropriated without limit and without recognition in the artist's vision (PI 391).

2. *Deleuze and sensation*

Like Irigaray, Gilles Deleuze is also critical of the phenomenologist's account of the painter's task, to render the world visible and hence meaningful to him. In Francis Bacon Deleuze finds an artist who avoids representation, narration and figuration, an artist who paints the facts. The bodies Bacon depicts are bodies without organs, bodies that exceed the organizational structures of the perceptive system of the other. For Deleuze, the task of the painter is not so much, to reveal the world as he perceives it, but rather to create each time anew, to find ways to move beyond the cacophony of clichés

evoked by the empty canvas. The task of the painter is not so much to paint that which is not visible; it is rather to paint sensation. In bypassing systems of signification and meaning that go through the brain, painting sensations allows for a direct connection to the viewer's nervous system through acting upon the body where sensation is located. Bacon's world is one of pure "artifact" (FB 32). To paint sensation is not to paint feelings, horror, for example, because feelings are sensations that have already been interpreted through the accounts of others; they are at least once removed. Feelings rely upon identity, empathy, and the organization of the other. Bacon, Deleuze elaborates, paints only affects, sensations and instincts. The problem with phenomenological perception is that it "merely invokes the lived body" that emerges from organized organs (FB 39). We know from Merleau-Ponty that the perceiver shuts out stray data, and sees according to the logic laid down by the level whether it be lighting, spatial, or ideological (PP 313; 362)[xiii]. For Deleuze, rather than movement being explored through the body's active and engaged motility, it is accounted for in the elasticity of sensation. Movement is passively experienced, in place — a spasm, "*the action of invisible forces on the body*" (FB 36). This is not the body of the "I can" that connects corporeal capacities to objects and things. It is the body that is acted upon, the body of the scream.

So let us review the painter's task. According to Deleuze, it is to paint sensation and to spurn representation. It is to paint the diagram as the "operative set of asignifying and nonrepresentative lines and zones, line-strokes and color-patches", which operates only at the suggestive level (FB 82-83). Colour-patches and lines are chaotic, even catastrophic as they operate outside the realm of figurative givens. At the same time they offer a "germ of rhythm in relation to the new order of the painting" (FB 83). One would

think, thus, from this description, that Deleuze would embrace abstract art as exemplary of the breaking away from figuration, from the clichés of the canvas—but not so. For in fact, according to Deleuze, abstract painting "reduces the abyss or chaos…to a minimum". It produces abstract and signifying forms by employing a "purely optical space" that is no longer subordinate to tactility (FB 84). Abstract painting is not so much a diagram as a symbolic code that depends upon binary oppositions. Indeed, it would seem that the abstract painter, like Merleau-Ponty's scientist, is ultimately blind.

Abstract expressionism, of which Deleuze is somewhat less critical, moves in the other direction. Where abstract painters subordinate the hand to the eye, abstract expressionists subordinate the eye to the hand. For Jackson Pollock, proffered as the prototypical abstract expressionist, it is ultimately not about a "transformation of the form but [rather about] a decomposition of matter." Instead of imposing visual abstract forms upon the canvas, he releases the rhythms of the body, namely of the hand as it discovers "matter and material". Liberated from the visual, it "makes use of sticks, sponges, rags, syringes" (FB 86). This is not the artist's hand declared by Merleau-Ponty to be "'nothing but the instrument of a distant will'" (EM 188; 86). As action painting, it is the "'frenetic dance' of the painter around the painting, or rather in the painting, which is no longer stretched on an easel but nailed, unstretched to the ground". There is no longer an optical horizon, but merely a tactile ground (FB 86). In short, in neither abstract nor abstract expressionist painting is, for Deleuze, the chiasm of the haptic and the visual achieved—neither is caught up in an external rhythm, a profound power that explains the "logic of the senses" whereby Bacon's bullfights allow us to "hear the noise of the beast's hooves" (FB 37).

For the problem with abstract expressionism is that rather than bypassing the haptic body, it forgoes any reliance on the visible realm. What is lost from view are the "imaginary tactile references which, in classical three-dimensional representation, made it possible to see depths and contours, forms and grounds." Since it was these references that subordinated the hand to the eye, the abstract expressionists made visible an "exclusively manual space" articulated by paintings that are flat, impenetrable to the gaze, and that rely on the gesture of colour without the definition of the line. It is "a space that is imposed upon the eye as an absolutely foreign power in which the eye can find no rest" (FB 87). In Deleuze's view, Pollock and other abstract expressionists employ a "mechanical repetition elevated to intuition" (FB 88). Although they succeed in breaking figuration, they "create a veritable 'mess'" resulting in a painting of the catastrophe; they might achieve sensation but "it remains in an irremediably confused state" (FB 89).

Bacon, however, seeks control through the line which delimits time and space. Like Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze wants to retain some kind of figuration—but in his case, the figure that makes sensation "clear and precise"; for it is important to "emerge from the catastrophe" even if it's achieved only "as an afterthought", "as a spurt of paint" on the completed work (FB 89). The catastrophe thus seems to be matter that lacks form and definition, sensation and precision. I would suggest that the catastrophe here is perhaps, for Deleuze, the maternal-feminine—experienced as preceding sensation or certainly any active perception except on the side of the mother—experienced as a time when he was touched without himself touching (PI 396).

In *What is Philosophy?,* with Felix Guattari, Deleuze describes the artist's creation of new affects and percepts in terms of imposing zones. Sensations pass from one to the other, among things, beasts and persons in a zone of nondistinction and indetermination: "Life alone creates such zones where living beings whirl around, and only art can reach and penetrate them in its enterprise of co-creation"[xiv]. It is the artist who allows material to pass "into sensation, as in a Rodin sculpture". It is the artist who "must create the syntactical or plastic methods and materials necessary for such a great undertaking, which re-creates everywhere the primitive swamps of life" (1994, 174). It would seem then that it is the artist's line that brings clarity and distinction to a veritable material mess.

Although Merleau-Ponty would seem to understand this in reverse; the "painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it", ultimately, for him, painting is also the move to escape this penetration, this submersion or burial (EM 167; 31). For it is only in creating that we even experience being (VI 197; 251); the "flexuous line" of the painter operates as the "restriction, segregation, or modulation of a pregiven spatiality" (EM 183, 184; 72, 77). It would seem then that for both Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze, without the creative force of the artist employing the line, the connective sensation, matter remains a catastrophe in which we are submerged. And here I hesitate or pause to reflect, since it seems that that is what is missing here—reflection upon what matter is being appropriated and if it makes a difference. As Olkowski points out in her reading of Irigaray, if "femininity is not to be defined as a container and masculinity is not to be identified with the unifying activity that also determines time" then some kind

of interval is needed that allows for a feminine identity, a desire which goes toward the other and returns to itself (1999, 80).

3. *Joan Mitchell: an other time-space*

In turning to the abstract expressionist works of Joan Mitchell, I try here to explore how an artwork opens up an alternative time-space. If we consider Mitchell's works, this painter's hand is not an instrument to be used at the service of other instruments of the body, for example, the eye that moves. Her paintings do not result from the imposition of forms upon matter, but rather can be understood as emerging from her embodied memories, of the interpenetration of her encounters with places, trees, flowers, water, and landscapes that have affected her, and that she does not attempt to render as likenesses, as essences nor simply as sensations. Mitchell claims, "I paint from remembered landscapes that I carry with me—and remembered feelings of them, which of course become transformed. I could certainly never mirror nature. I would like more to paint what it leaves me with"[xv].

In this rethinking of painting in terms of embodied identity, the hand that paints is not only not an instrument as such, but is also not the gesturing hand which passes through language as the storehouse of Memory[xvi]. Rather than capturing what she has encountered through the imposition of language and cultural forms, Mitchell's works seem to be more her response to these encounters. It is almost impossible to impose meaning as such on these works even as, phenomenally, it is tempting to try. Generally, Mitchell titled her paintings after they had been completed, and the names rarely refer to the subject matter of the painting, but rather to an association, a feeling, a relationship,

perhaps a tribute to someone she cared about. They bear titles such as *Salut Tom, Chez Ma Soeur*, *They Never Appeared with the White*. But, always, she resisted the imposition of narration, of signifying forms, upon her works.

Hemlock (1956, 91 x 80in.) was apparently named for a poem by Wallace Stevens about peacocks and hemlocks. Rather than representing or illustrating this poem, she responds to it through her own medium[xvii]. Despite the apparent treeness of the painting that emerges if one imposes a tree form upon the horizontal lines, the greens and browns, the brushstrokes that seemingly move in the wind, Mitchell maintained that *Hemlock* was not a tree, that it was a figure/ground painting (Bernstock 37). Her paintings, she said, "did not need to tell a story ... if a painting is good there should be nothing one can say about it" (Bernstock 41). Phenomenologically one might search out the essence of the work— treeness perhaps—but it is exactly this stability of meaning that the work evades. Although this painting is composed of an extraordinary number of brushstrokes of various hues and textures, multiple greens mixed with golds, blacks, oranges, reds, greys and whites, only when one stands close to the painting do the brush strokes in their astounding individuality begin to appear. From a distance, the effect is one of swirling movement that hovers between shifting forms.

If we follow Irigaray's thinking, the tree gives because it "unceasingly creates space". If we put names aside, the beech tree, or the maple, identifiable by the shapes of their leaves, the colours of their bark, if we really look at the tree, at its becoming which is not a human one, in its otherness it gives rather than requiring something from us. From Heidegger we learn that humans make room for things by including them in their world. Thus, something human-made, a table, for example, draws upon the viewer's

resources, from the forms she must impose in order to create a space for it[xviii]. Difference, however, keeps our vision open and alive because it requires us to move beyond given forms that the language of the same draws upon in shaping the ways we see. Difference requires us to look beyond imposed meanings and their utility. Cultural complicity compromises our ability to see (Irigaray, 2002, 146).

Mitchell, it seems, encountered the world in its strangeness, preserving this otherness even as it penetrated her corporeality, her identity, her works. In fact, for her, nature is that which is other since it can also be "'man-made'"; "a city is as strange as a tree" (Bernstock 31). *Wet Orange* (1972) at 245 by 112 inches is a triptych field painting that Mitchell's commentator, Joan Bernstock, claims captures the vastness of the Midwest landscapes with which Mitchell grew up—cornfields, skies, water. Yet this work lacks the suggestiveness of *Hemlock* and defies all imposition of signification. Her triptychs were apparently meant to unite distinct realms whereby "separate centers of focus in each rectangle [can be] seen and absorbed at one time". Painted then to be seen at a distance, these panels set in motion a rhythm between them even as each functions as a separate entity. In Mitchell's own words, this canvas is like "a living, breathing, pulsating organism with a palpable life of its own" (Bernstock120). *Wet orange* is luminous, the orange at first overwhelming, overshadowing the other colours which begin to come into play; the purples and blues, in particular, contrast, and pulsate against the orange. Again she employs a variety of brushstrokes. The paint is gobbed on, thickly painted, dripping in places. There is a dappled effect, the crisscrossing of colours jostle up against the brilliance of the orange which seems to glow more deeply over time. Indeed, new aspects, new modulations, mixtures, textures and rhythms continue to

emerge. Unlike Pollock, Mitchell painted her canvases against a wall and the paint dripped downwards with the co-participation of gravity's pull. Her method of working, according to Bernstock, was not one of frenetic activity, focussed around the spurt or the line. Rather, she worked slowly focussing on the "relationships emerging on the picture plane". Quoting Mitchell, "'I don't go off and slop and drip…I stop, look, and listen, at railroad tracks. I really want to be accurate.'" This accuracy included "to-and-fro motions" as she moved between the canvas and the back of her studio (Bernstock 35).

Even as *Wet Orange* becomes more familiar, it also becomes stranger. Because of its vastness, even from a distance, eyes must move across this work which cannot be caught in a glance. Although there is no thing as such to grasp on to, there is still a feeling of depth; I would suggest this work provides for space that is not yet place, that has not yet been claimed by the framing of human technë, the forms of logos or Heidegger's bridge, and yet that shows up an intertwining of relations beyond any notion of space according merely to either Euclidean geometry, or to situation. For Irigaray, quoting Klee, the "point about painting is to *spatialize perception* and make *time simultaneous*"[xix]; space is then understood not in terms of the ways things are lined up, one behind the other, but rather in the ways "through which [they] communicate or commune in an often invisible way" (PI 402). Mitchell seems to accomplish this by building bridges among the landscapes encountered in her youth, her present, and even anticipated in her future without appropriating these according to specified forms—rather than reflecting them as captured by her imaginary—which would have been to reduce her encounters to the specular plane including all that is invisible about them—she rather

articulates on canvas only the ways in which she has been interpenetrated by them—the ways they intermix with her and within her.

The work in turn spatially intermixes with the onlooker. Although, for Mitchell, *Wet Orange* is the painting of an embodied identity, the work is also a thing that stands independently, as she herself observes. As such it stops time and creates an open and free space for those who view it[xx]. The work does not lend itself to a subjective appropriation into unified temporal structures of past, present and future; rather, what are brought into play are fleshly relations in the present that cannot be subsumed under any final forms. Since these relations are not dictated by the work – there is no "right place" to stand before *Wet Orange*— it allows for the free movement of viewers in their perceptive interaction with the work. Exactly because it cannot be seen all at once, it defies the supremacy of vision that draws mastery in the privileged moment of the glance, requiring instead movement of the entire body in fleshly perceptual relations. In evoking space through a suspension of time, allowing the viewer to move along the work without synthesizing the experience into a whole, this work provides for an interval between the active and passive aspects of perception, similar to that which allows for relations between two subjects.

If, for Mitchell, painting is not about descriptions, illustrations, or mechanical repetition, then surely Deleuze would approve. Yet, equally so, for Mitchell, painting is not about sensation. It is about feeling. Bernstock quotes her: It is about "empathy…that's all my painting is about. My empathy with nature, dogs, gardens, and all that is just the way I am. It has to do with something you feel" (Bernstock 68). Rather than painting pure sensations, she paints her mediated relations with the landscapes

around her: "If only I could feel a sunflower", and, "I can feel the sunflower almost physically" (Bernstock 86). Although orange and yellow are the predominant colours of *Sunflower III* (1969), there is a cascade of colours that tumult down the left hand side of the canvas tending towards, but never finally coming to rest in definable forms,…besides yellow there are also greens, blues, reds, purples, oranges, browns. The white on the right hand side of the canvas on second glance is white painted over oranges, pink, green, gobs of white painted over dark blue. The colors flow into one another, a dancing and glittering harmony. Her paintings of sunflowers are not still lifes as such. Rather, they resonate with the vibrant colours, the energy, the movement, the vitality of sunflowers. One could almost call them sensations, yet they are sensations that have been mediated through feelings, and in this mediation open up the world of an other as one that informs my vision through interpenetration rather than mastery. Her works expand my vision into other worlds.

4*: Another Vision*

In her analysis of "Eye and Mind", Irigaray observes that it is not because "it is a body", not because we can be a thing among other things, despite the ability of this thing-like body to reflect upon its relation to other things, and to its situation amongst them, that we are so intertwined with them. It is rather because this body is a "being-in-relation-with" that it is so intertwined (PI 403). Rather than our technical ability to demonstrate or reveal the world thereby bringing it into being, it is our ability to modulate our relations with others, to recognize the invisible in the other as the invisible, which makes us human (PI 397).

For Irigaray, the space we inhabit is not only one of situation, but it is also the space in which we communicate and commune. This means that our perception is always a "crossing of looks" (PI 403); that is, it is a sharing of how I see with how you see; how you see, affects how I see, but it is not the same seeing. This sharing of vision between two, she writes, is one where the invisible is preserved. If we both really perceive a landscape, if we do not impose the forms of culture, utility or language upon it, then we do not see exactly the same one. Yet the circulation of flesh "between the world and me, between the other and myself" allows us to share this invisible that is present in my vision without exposing it to the imposition of useful forms (PI 399). It is true that when Merleau-Ponty looks at the green of a landscape with someone else they share the same green. For Merleau-Ponty, "[t]here is here no problem of the *alter ego* because it is not *I* who sees, not *he* who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general…" (VI 142; 187)[xxi]. It is this vision in general with which Irigaray takes umbrage, for although accounting for the sharing of vision, doing so under the banner of generality provides for no limit to his vision. For Heidegger, others are given to us in the objects for which they have made room—provoking a cultural complicity[xxii]. While for Deleuze, the threat of cultural complicity requires giving up on the other altogether, Irigaray would rather acknowledge a dynamic limit to vision that is in itself productive: vision is not general, but is rather communal. Looking with someone else means that the way I look might be shifted, that the sharing of seeing can actually change the way that I see, precisely because we do not each see exactly the same.

If the painter really wants to paint what is there, in Irigaray's account, he or she will already be relying upon other metabolisms besides vision, including the invisible.

Indeed, art can provide for the mediation of "bodily matter", its transmutation and sublimation into something beyond the immediacy of the drives or biological reproduction (1993, 165). To paint the invisible is then to recognize that there is that which cannot be reduced to or appropriated on to the specular plane, that might animate the visible, but as such is not merely the other side of the visible, its internal doubling. The task of the painter, then, is to recognize this limit and to paint it as such, as the invisible, without appropriating it through forms, or integrating it into an imaginary, but rather to let it be as that which it is. I do not actually think that, in the end, Merleau-Ponty would have wanted to describe the task of the painter significantly otherwise, which means that perhaps Irigaray's understanding of painting would have offered to Merleau-Ponty a sharing of vision that he would ultimately have welcomed.

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[i] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 229; *le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 283. Hereafter VI; as with all texts, the first page number refers to the English edition, the second to the French.

[ii] Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind", in *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964); *L'oeil et l'esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964). Hereafter EM.

[iii] Luce Irigaray, "To paint the invisible", trans. Helen Fielding. *Continental Philosophy Review* (2004) 37: 389–405. Originally published in Italian as "Dipingere l'invisible," *Segni e Comprensione* 44 (December 2001): 10–16. Hereafter PI.

[iv] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p. xx; *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. xv. Hereafter PP.

[v] See in particular Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The logic of sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 2002). Hereafter FB.

[vi] In her other essay on Merleau-Ponty, Irigaray addresses specifically her concern that he privileges the Visible. See, "The Invisible of the Flesh: A Reading of Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 'The Intertwining—The Chiasm'", in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); originally published in *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: les éditions de minuit, 1984); hereafter ESD. I do not specifically take up this chapter since it has already been addressed by a number of philosophers; the following is not an exhaustive list: Judith Butler, "Sexual Difference as a Question of Ethics: Alterities of the Flesh in Irigaray and Merleau-Ponty", in Dorothea Olkowski and Gail Weiss (eds.), *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2006); Sue Cataldi, "The Philosopher and her Shadow: Irigaray's Reading of Merleau-Ponty, *Philosophy Today* 48.4 (2004): 343-355; Tina Chanter, "Wild Meaning: Luce Irigaray's Reading of Merleau-Ponty", in Fred Evans (ed.), *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh* (Albany: SUNY, 2000); Helen Fielding, "Only Blood would be more Red: Irigaray, Merleau-Ponty and the Ethics of Sexual Difference", *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 32.2 (2001): 147-159; Ann V. Murphy, "Language in the Flesh: Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and Irigaray", in *Feminist Interpretations of Merleau-Ponty*; Dorothea Olkowski, "The End of Phenomenology: Bergson's Interval in Irigaray",

Hypatia 15.3 (2000): 73-91; Cecilia Sjöholm, "Crossing Lovers: Luce Irigaray's Elemental Passions, Hypatia 15.3 (2000): 92-112; Cathryn Vasseleu, *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas, and Merleau-Ponty* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[vii] Jacques Derrida, "Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand", in John Sallis, ed. *Deconstruction and Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p.166.

[viii] Merleau-Ponty, *Nature: Course notes from the Collège de France*, trans. Robert Vallier (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), p. 209; originally published as *La Nature: Notes cours du Collège de France*, ed. Dominque Séglard (Paris Seuil, 1995), p. 217, hereafter N.

[ix] Dorothea Olkowski, *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 80.

[x] What Merleau-Ponty refers to as cybernetics is, according to Varela, Thompson and Rausch, the formative years of what is now known as cognitive science. And although according to Varela et. al., these voices of the emerging field between 1943 and 1953 were quite diverse, it was the "idea of mind as logical calculation" that seems to have won out. Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, Eleanor Rosch. *The embodied mind: cognitive science and human experience* **(**Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1991), p. 39.

[xi] Olkowski, "Chiasm: The Interval of Sexual Difference Between Irigaray and Merleau-Ponty", in *Re-Reading Merleau-Ponty*, Laurence Hass and Dorothea Olkowski, eds. (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity, 2000), p. 344. This article provides a clear articulation of Irigaray's argument that perception must be accompanied by this interval if recognition of the other is to be possible.

[xii] Renaud Barbaras, *Vie et intentionnalité* (Paris: Vrin, 2003).

[xiii] See also Olkowski (1999: 59-88) for a discussion of this phenomenon.

[xiv] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 173.

[xv] Judith E. Bernstock, *Joan Mitchell* (New York : Hudson Hills Press, 1988), p. 31.

[xvi] Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, J. Glenn Gray trans. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968), p. 11; originally published as *Was heißt Denken* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1961), pp. 7-8.

[xvii] Dan Nadaner, "On Relatedness between the Arts: Crossovers between Painting and Poetry", *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 27.1 (Spring, 1993): 34.

[xviii] Luce Irigaray, "Being Two, How Many Eyes Have We?", *Paragraph* 25. 3 (2002): 145.

[xix] Luce Irigaray, "Flesh Colors", trans. Gillian C. Gill, in *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 155.

[xx] Giorgio Agamben describes this, following Heidegger, as the original rhythm of the epoch that art provides through breaking linear time and hence creating a present space. See Agamben, "The Original Structure of the Work of Art", in *The Man without Content,* trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 100-102.

[xxi] See also the note "The Other" (VI 269; 322-323).

[xxii] Irigaray writes: "Taking part in the same culture, two subjects will hardly keep an eye half open to locate, to recognize the objects necessary for their survival, and also for their cultural complicity" (Irigaray, 2002, 146).