1

PM-1 3½"x4" PHOTOGRAPHIC MICROCOPY TARGET
NBS 1010a ANSI/ISO #2 EQUIVALENT

PRECISIONSM RESOLUTION TARGETS

National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Votre file - Votre référence

Our file - Notre référence

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

Canada

SPEAKING AN EMBODIED SUBJECT:
A Phenomenological Ontology of the Flesh

by

DIANE ENNS, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

August 2, 1994

copyright

1994, Diane Enns

National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

THE AUTHOR HAS GRANTED AN
IRREVOCABLE NON-EXCLUSIVE
LICENCE ALLOWING THE NATIONAL
LIBRARY OF CANADA TO
REPRODUCE, LOAN, DISTRIBUTE OR
SELL COPIES OF HIS/HER THESIS BY
ANY MEANS AND IN ANY FORM OR
FORMAT, MAKING THIS THESIS
AVAILABLE TO INTERESTED
PERSONS.

L'AUTEUR A ACCORDE UNE LICENCE
IRREVOCABLE ET NON EXCLUSIVE
PERMETTANT A LA BIBLIOTHEQUE
NATIONALE DU CANADA DE
REPRODUIRE, PRETER, DISTRIBUER
OU VENDRE DES COPIES DE SA
THESE DE QUELQUE MANIERE ET
SOUS QUELQUE FORME QUE CE SOIT
POUR METTRE DES EXEMPLAIRES DE
CETTE THESE A LA DISPOSITION DES
PERSONNE INTERESSEES.

THE AUTHOR RETAINS OWNERSHIP
OF THE COPYRIGHT IN HIS/HER
THESIS. NEITHER THE THESIS NOR
SUBSTANTIAL EXTRACTS FROM IT
MAY BE PRINTED OR OTHERWISE
REPRODUCED WITHOUT HIS/HER
PERMISSION.

L'AUTEUR CONSERVE LA PROPRIETE
DU DROIT D'AUTEUR QUI PROTEGE
SA THESE. NI LA THESE NI DES
EXTRAITS SUBSTANTIELS DE CELLE-
CI NE DOIVENT ETRE IMPRIMES OU
AUTREMENT REPRODUITS SANS SON
AUTORISATION.

ISBN 0-315-98498-8

Canada

Name Diane E. ...

Dissertation Abstracts International is arranged by broad, general subject categories. Please select the one subject which most nearly describes the content of your dissertation. Enter the corresponding four-digit code in the spaces provided.

03166004

SUBJECT TERM

C344

SUBJECT CODE

U·M·I

Subject Categories

THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS

Architecture 0729
Art History 0377
Cinema 0900
Dance 0378
Fine Arts 0357
Information Science 0723
Journalism 0391
Library Science 0399
Mass Communications 0708
Music 0413
Speech Communication 0459
Theater 0465

EDUCATION

General 0515
Administration 0514
Adult and Continuing 0516
Agricultural 0517
Art 0273
Bilingual and Multicultural 0282
Business 0688
Community College 0275
Curriculum and Instruction 0727
Early Childhood 0518
Elementary 0524
Finance 0277
Guidance and Counseling 0519
Health 0680
Higher 0745
History of 0520
Home Economics 0278
Industrial 0521
Language and Literature 0279
Mathematics 0280
Music 0522
Philosophy of 0998
Physical 0523

Psychology 0525

Reading 0535
Religious 0527
Sciences 0714
Secondary 0533
Social Sciences 0534
Sociology of 0340
Special 0529
Teacher Training 0530
Technology 0710
Tests and Measurements 0288
Vocational 0747

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS

Language 0679
General 0289
Ancient 0290
Linguistics 0291
Modern 0401
Literature 0294
Classical 0295
Comparative 0297
Medieval 0298
Modern 0316
African 0591
American 0305
Asian 0352
Canadian (English) 0355
Canadian (French) 0593
English 0311
Germanic 0312
Latin American 0315
Middle Eastern 0313
Romance 0314
Slavic and East European

PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION AND THEOLOGY

Philosophy 0422
Religion 0318
General 0321
Biblical Studies 0319
Clergy 0320
History of 0322
Philosophy of 0469
Theology

SOCIAL SCIENCES

American Studies 0323
Anthropology 0324
Archaeology 0326
Cultural 0327
Physical 0310
Business Administration 0272
General 0770
Accounting 0454
Banking 0338
Management 0385
Marketing 0501
Canadian Studies 0503
Economics 0505
General 0508
Agricultural 0509
Commerce-Business 0510
Finance 0511
History 0358
Labor 0366
Theory 0351
Folklore 0578
Geography
Gerontology
History
General

Ancient 0579
Medieval 0581
Modern 0582
Black 0328
African 0331
Asia, Australia and Oceania 0332
Canadian 0334
European 0335
Latin American 0336
Middle Eastern 0333
United States 0337
History of Science 0585
Law 0398
Political Science 0615
General 0616
International Law and Relations 0617
Public Administration 0814
Recreation 0452
Social Work 0626
Sociology 0627
General 0938
Criminology and Penology 0631
Demography 0628
Ethnic and Racial Studies 0629
Individual and Family Studies 0630
Industrial and Labor Relations 0700
Public and Social Welfare 0344
Social Structure and Development 0709
Theory and Methods 0999
Transportation 0453
Urban and Regional Planning
Women's Studies

THE SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING

BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

Agriculture 0473
General 0285
Agronomy 0475
Animal Culture and Nutrition 0476
Animal Pathology 0359
Food Science and Technology 0478
Forestry and Wildlife 0479
Plant Culture 0480
Plant Pathology 0817
Plant Physiology 0777
Range Management 0746
Wood Technology
Biology 0306
General 0287
Anatomy 0308
Biostatistics 0309
Botany 0379
Cell 0329
Ecology 0353
Entomology 0369
Genetics 0793
Limnology 0410
Microbiology 0307
Molecular 0317
Neuroscience 0416
Oceanography 0433
Physiology 0821
Radiation 0778
Veterinary Science 0472
Zoology
Biophysics 0786
General 0760
Medical

Geodesy 0370
Geology 0372
Geophysics 0373
Hydrology 0388
Mineralogy 0411
Paleobotany 0345
Paleoecology 0426
Paleontology 0418
Paleozoology 0985
Palmatology 0427
Physical Geography 0368
Physical Oceanography 0415

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Environmental Sciences 0768
Health Sciences 0566
General 0300
Audiology 0992
Chemotherapy 0567
Dentistry 0350
Education 0769
Hospital Management 0758
Human Development 0982
Immunology 0564
Medicine and Surgery 0347
Mental Health 0569
Nursing 0570
Nutrition 0380
Obstetrics and Gynecology 0354
Occupational Health and Therapy 0381
Ophthalmology 0571
Pathology 0419
Pharmacology 0572
Pharmacy 0382
Physical Therapy 0573
Public Health 0574
Radiology 0575
Recreation

Speech Pathology 0460
Toxicology 0383
Home Economics 0386

PHYSICAL SCIENCES

Pure Sciences
Chemistry 0485
General 0749
Agricultural 0486
Analytical 0487
Biochemistry 0488
Inorganic 0738
Nuclear 0490
Organic 0491
Pharmaceutical 0494
Physical 0495
Polymer 0754
Radiation 0405
Mathematics 0605
Physics 0986
General 0606
Acoustics 0608
Astronomy and Astrophysics 0748
Atomic 0607
Electronics and Electricity 0798
Elementary Particles and High Energy 0759
Fluid and Plasma 0609
Molecular 0610
Nuclear 0752
Optics 0756
Radiation 0611
Solid State 0463
Statistics
Applied Sciences
Applied Mechanics 0346
Computer Science 0984

Engineering 0537
General 0538
Aerospace 0539
Agricultural 0540
Automotive 0541
Biomedical 0542
Chemical 0543
Civil 0544
Electronics and Electrical 0348
Heat and Thermodynamics 0545
Hydraulic 0546
Industrial 0547
Marine 0794
Materials Science 0548
Mechanical 0743
Metallurgy 0551
Mining 0552
Nuclear 0549
Packaging 0765
Petroleum 0554
Sanitary and Municipal System Science 0790
Geotechnology 0428
Operations Research 0796
Plastics Technology 0795
Textile Technology 0994

PSYCHOLOGY

General 0621
Behavioral 0384
Clinical 0622
Developmental 0620
Experimental 0623
Industrial 0624
Personality 0625
Physiological 0989
Psychobiology 0349
Psychometrics 0632
Social 0451

The undersigned recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
and Research acceptance of the thesis

"SPEAKING AN EMBODIED SUBJECT:
A Phenomenological Ontology of the Flesh"

submitted by Diane Enns, B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Thesis Supervisor

Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University

Abstract

My point of departure in this thesis is the assumption that contemporary feminist theories of an embodied subjectivity are inadequate for negotiating the relationship between bodies, subjects and language. I argue that what is required is a sustained theory of the body as flesh, interacting with others and actively perceiving the surrounding world. The French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, provides such an analysis with his ontology of the flesh: a phenomenological approach to the body and language that overcomes the oppressive binary oppositions of traditional Western thought. For an illustration of Merleau-Ponty's ontology, I turn to a fictional account of a black woman's struggle to re-claim ownership of her self through the re-membering of her past as a slave. *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison, expresses an uninhibited love for the body in a language that renders inseparable the matter of the body with consciousness, the world, and others.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, John Harp, for his encouragement and support throughout this project, and his trust in my ability to get through those moments of discouragement. For her gifts of perception, compassion, and humour, I thank Caryll Steffens who calmly put things into perspective for me time after time. To Geraldine Finn I extend my heart-felt gratitude for many hours of stimulating conversation. Her commitment to intellectual exchange despite the often frustrating and constraining limitations of academia, will always inspire me. Above all, she has shown me that a teacher can also be a friend.

I thank my friends, particularly Fauzia, Wendy, and Kirsten, for always being there when I needed them most. In my last months of writing and revising in the face of unexpected setbacks, they were my mainstay. I will always be grateful for their words of advice, encouragement, and sympathy.

Finally I thank my parents who have enabled my writing in more ways than one, and my sister for her timely phone calls.

While he may never be interested in reading it, I dedicate my thesis to Daniel, who "experienced" my writing almost as intimately as I did.

Table of Contents

	Page
Acceptance Sheet	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
 INTRODUCTION	 1
 CHAPTER I: Feminist Attempts to Speak the Body	
Introduction	12
Enunciating an Embodied Subject	15
Essentialism with Distinction	18
Anxiety Over Two Lips	24
Enunciating the Non-Subject: "as if" I have a body	28
The Body Deferred	35
 CHAPTER II: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology of the Flesh	
Introduction	40
The Flesh as Phenomenal World	41
The Flesh as Body	42
The Flesh as Self	47
The Flesh of the Other	52
 CHAPTER III: Speaking From the Space-Between	
Introduction	58
Inside or Outside	59
The Body as Expression	66
The Space Between Inside and Outside	70
"Playing in the Dark": Black Women's Speech	74
 CHAPTER IV: "We Flesh": The Body Beloved	
Introduction	80
Fleshless Language: authorship and authority	83
The Perceiving Body Particular	87
Flesh as Speech as Gesture	89
Manipulative, Masked and Unmasking	93
Recognizing the Other(in the)self	98
Re-claiming the Self	103
Baptized by Sound	107
Concluding Thoughts	108
 CONCLUSION	 110
 REFERENCES	 116

We have relearned to feel our body; we have found underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge which we have of it in virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body. In the same way we shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in the world through our body, and in so far as we perceive the world with our body. But by thus remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall also rediscover ourselves, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 1962:206).

Introduction

In a delightfully witty commentary on the recent onslaught of academic "body-talk," Terry Eagleton wryly remarks: "There will soon be more bodies in contemporary criticism than on the fields of Waterloo" (1993:7). From mangled, ruined or dead bodies, to Foucauldian inscribed bodies, constructed and deconstructed bodies or psycho-sexually produced bodies, the relentless burgeoning of literature theorizing the body shows no signs of abating. Indeed, Eagleton asserts, the fashionable new somatics is making it more difficult "to distinguish the literary theory section of the local bookshop from the soft porn shelves, sort out the latest Jackie Collins from the later Roland Barthes" (1993:7).

Contemporary feminist writers in North America are frequent participants in this discourse; a dramatic departure from the theoretical maneuvering performed by feminists of the 1970s to avoid the taint of flesh. Reasons for this abrupt shift are as varied and complex as the history of Western ambivalence towards the body. But most significant I think, is the advent of post-structuralist critiques of the autonomous, rational, masculine subject, and the concurrent feminist struggle to articulate women as subjects in their own right. The oft-quoted complaint by women and other oppressed and marginalized people is entirely justifiable: why is it

that just when we are beginning to claim ourselves, and be recognized as subjects, the category no longer has any validity?

For contemporary sociological theory, caught up as it is in the present social and academic climate of escalating concern over the effects of racialized and sexed identities, this question is paramount. As Mariana Valverde astutely remarks: "Theorizing subjectivity is, in my view, the main challenge to critical social theory in the 1990s" (1991:181). But the challenge, she continues, begins with an awareness of the short-comings of previous attempts: namely, a materialist Marxist version of humanism that posits the subject before discourse, or an Althusserian version that advocates the reverse: a subject of ideology who does not exist before being inscribed by discourse (1991:182).

This challenge is the focus of *Changing the Subject* (1984), an acclaimed social sciences text that traces the roots of current theories of subjectivity, their shortcomings, and alternative conceptualizations. The authors suggest that the dilemma for theorizing subjectivity is "to advocate the reality and effectivity of the subject produced by and in ideological processess ... yet at the same time to dissolve the individual subject of humanism and bourgeois individualism" (1984:95). In other words, we must ask: "[i]s the subject constitutive or constituted?" (1984:95).

The authors' own alternative to the limited theories of

Marx and Althusser, is to emphasize the historical specificity of discourses and the positioning of the subject within them. They seek to demonstrate that "the subject itself is the effect of a production, caught in the mutually constitutive web of social practices, discourses and subjectivity; its reality is the tissue of social relations" (1984:117).

Such an attempt is an effort to alleviate what Valverde calls "the 1970s dilemma of structure vs. agency" in social theory (1991:181). But neither Valverde nor the authors of *Changing the Subject* systematically address the place of bodies in their discussion of discourse and the subject. This is imperative, I believe, if we intend to theorize a particular subject in its particular "web" of social relations. In this thesis I wish to contribute to the understanding of the subject as positioned in and by social relations and discourses by focusing on the body.

Feminist excursions into theories of subjectivity have demonstrated how the persistent binary oppositions that permeate Western culture and intellectual thought, of which the mind/body opposition is central, produce and effect sexed and racialized identities. The hierarchical ordering of subject/object, self/other, nature/culture, and masculine/feminine dualisms, serves the interests of one over the other. As Hélène Cixous notes, "[t]hought has always worked by opposition ... [b]y dual, *hierarchized* oppositions" that subordinate the feminine to the masculine order, "the

condition for the functioning of the machine" (1980:92). On the side of passivity, nature, darkness and emotion, woman becomes "buried," according to Cixous, under the uniting force of phallogentrism and logocentrism, or "phallogocentricity" as Derrida puts it¹ (1980:92-3).

In the interests of the "one" dominating the "other," theoretical discourses from Plato to Freud have created "a false appearance of unity by reducing the flux and heterogeneity of experience into [these] binary and supposedly natural or essentialist oppositions" (Flax, 1990b:36). Hence the experience of living in a woman's body is dismissed as subordinate to man's at the same time that man dismisses the heterogeneity of his own embodied existence. The second moment depends on the first; it is enacted through it.

If woman is defined by her otherness to man, then it is sexual difference that remains at the crux of the problem. As Jane Flax suggests, "[t]o be other, to be different than the defining One is bad. It is better to be defined and determined as the lesser other of the One than to be outside Being altogether" (1990b:37). This explains the reticence with which feminists of earlier decades spoke of women's experiences of our bodies.

My point of departure in this thesis is the assumption

¹ Toril Moi defines these terms: "phallogocentricity" conjoins "phallogentrism," a system that privileges the phallus as symbol of power, and "logocentrism," the privileging of the logos or word as metaphysical presence (1985:179).

that previous methods of theorizing subjectivity have been inadequate to account for the struggle of the oppressed and exploited to claim a subject position because they fail to question traditional assumptions concerning the body, consciousness, and their relationship to the world. This is critical if we as women, historically associated with a denigrated body, are to claim a speaking voice by which our embodied experiences can be heard. In the recent feminist writings that attempt to negotiate the conflicts between subjectivity and the body, it is clear that what is at stake is this speaking voice.

If women and other subordinated groups are silenced by the discourses of science, philosophy, psychoanalysis and medicine, to name a few, our project must be to examine the spaces that do allow our speaking. Women have always been present in the social, cultural, and discursive texts of our respective times, but often as absences "so stressed, so ornate, so planned, they call attention to themselves" (Morrison, 1989:11). The vital task before us is to examine the structures that position us as an absence, or silent other, and explore strategies that disrupt this operation.

This is hardly a new project. North American and French feminist philosophers have been engaged with it for some time, exposing, in one form or another, the oppressive dynamics of hierarchical binary oppositions that allow few to speak and relegate many to silence. They have tirelessly sought to undo

these mechanisms, and in the undoing, dis-cover a space from which silenced voices can be heard.

I wish to contribute to this project by pointing out the inadequacy of some feminist approaches to negotiating the relationship between the body, language, and subjectivity. In other words, I am critical of what I perceive to be a feminist anxiety with the *be-ing* of an embodied and discursive subject. I think we must look at the issue on two levels at once: first, we need to understand how language functions to obscure its own contingency and particularity; and second, we need to analyse the crucial part a Western conceptualisation of the body has to play in this function.

In this thesis I elaborate an alternative approach to speaking an embodied subject, based on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a French philosopher of this century whose phenomenological work on the body is probably the most extensive and comprehensive of our time. I then apply Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh to Toni Morrison's highly-acclaimed novel *Beloved*, which exposes the violence of a symbolic system that depends on a dominated body as other, as woman and as black, to obscure its own contingent structure. By beginning with the body, with the task of re-learning "to feel our body," to "reawaken our experience of the world," and in so doing, "re-discover ourselves," (Merleau-Ponty, 1962:206) we can drive at the closed doors of language from the other side, where the contingent nature of

experience seeps in and exposes the dualisms of mind/body, subject/object and self/other to be falsely dichotomous.

In chapter one, I examine recent efforts by feminists to re-think the matter of the body and its relation to subjectivity. The discussion centers around the debate over essentialism: while some feminists seek to refuse any and all definitions of woman, including those that advocate a female subject position, others propose an alternative view of essentialism that permits us to speak from our bodies as women. I argue that the concern with essentialism, no matter which side one takes, betrays an anxiety about the body that is generally not being recognized.

The result is a tension in the negotiation of bodies, material reality, and discourse, that is demonstrated in the confusion around the terms Woman, the feminine, and women. In the words of Alice Jardine:

The problem is that within this ever-increasing inflation of quotation marks around the word 'woman,' women as thinking, writing subjects are placed in the position of constantly wondering whether it is a question of women or woman, their written *bodies* or their written bodies (1985:36-37).

This rather enigmatic question is evident in feminist attempts to articulate an embodied subjectivity that escapes the binary oppositions of Western thought. But the promise they extend, to theorize a non-essentialist, non-immutable body, is not delivered. I argue that what is missing in the discussion is a sustained theory of the body as *flesh*; one that will

overcome the dialectic of mind and body, and subject and object.

In chapter two I provide such a sustained theory of the body, in an outline of Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh. I describe how he defines the flesh as an "element of Being" intimately related to the phenomenal world, consciousness and others. Merleau-Ponty's approach is useful for this discussion because his theory of the body as actively perceiving the world it is surrounded by, bears several important implications for language and subjectivity that radically alter the position of the body in discourse.

In the third chapter I turn my attention to language, as a structure that permits the operation of distinctive categories that are hierarchically positioned in discourses. I begin with the example of Jacques Lacan's theory of the subject's development through language, since many of the assumptions regarding language in feminist thought betray a reliance on Lacan's ideas. The notion of language as a universal structure that constitutes the subject, I argue is at the root of the problems feminists encounter when theorizing subjectivity and speech.

To point a way out of these difficulties, I briefly describe Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh as it relates to speech, since his notion of speech as gesture contributes significantly to an understanding of language as contingent. This contribution becomes evident when I refer to Geraldine

Finn's theory of "the space-between" language and being, an idea that demonstrates how the distinct categories or dualisms of discourse are continually overlapping and reversing. I conclude chapter three with a cursory look at parallel ideas in black women's writing and criticism, to point out the racialized nature of white feminist discussions of language.

Finally, in chapter four I describe how Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh applies to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, providing an alternative to the previously discussed feminist articulations of women's spoken and speaking bodies. Wielding words in a manner that mends the rift between the traditional philosophical dualisms of mind and body, self and other, and subject and object, Morrison reveals the violence of the historical discursive positioning of black woman as the other upon which the contingency and particularity of (fleshy) being is projected. She carries this out by expressing an uninhibited love for the body that refuses the oppositional categories that feminize the flesh and objectify otherness.

Morrison's novels, as part of an increasingly visible tradition of black North American women's fiction, provide valuable insight into the contemporary concern with discursive subjectivity and otherness. In a conversation with Gloria Naylor in 1985, Morrison claims her project is to bring to life the "dead girl," the black girl who has been forgotten, in what Carole Boyce Davies calls an "ongoing literary reconstruction of black female identity" (1991:45). Morrison

does this by "excavation" and "re-creation": "rescuing her from the grave of time and inattention... bringing her back into living life" (Morrison, quoted in Naylor, 1985:593).

The bringing to life of the dead black girl, and what this entails for Morrison's main protagonist and the community she is first ostracized from and finally reunited with, has important implications for feminist theories of an embodied subjectivity. By demonstrating the interconnected relationships between the body, the world and others, in a language that breaks the closure of dominating discursive regimes, Morrison opens the door to the contingency and particularity of flesh.

It is most telling that while writing this thesis I was repeatedly stumped by the question: Am I writing about the body or about language? It seems that a clearly distinct and hierarchical ordering of these was necessary, for to speak (of) both at once constituted an impossible paradox. Perhaps this indicates that the ubiquitous "body" of contemporary criticism has become, as Naomi Goldenberg suggests, "a mystified abstraction," obscuring the fact that "our sense of physicality is in large part determined by our day-to-day relationships with one another" (1990:215). She concludes: "Words, I think, should be discarded as soon as they begin to conceal what they ought to illuminate" (1990:215). I hope to convince the reader, as I have myself, that it is possible, and creative, and revolutionary, to speak words that do not

conceal the body.

.

.

Chapter I

Feminist Attempts to Speak the Body

In her introduction to a recent issue of *Hypatia* on feminism and the body, Elizabeth Grosz succinctly explains the recent transition in feminist writings on the body, from silent neglect to a re-exploration of its relation to subjectivity. Earlier feminists have chosen not to speak of the body, Grosz comments, for obvious reasons:

If women's social, cultural, theoretical, ethical and aesthetical possibilities are limited through a series of rationalizations regarding the frailties, limitations and inadequacies of women's bodies, then it is hardly surprising that feminists, in arguing against these limitations, have correspondingly rejected any or most attempts to identify women too closely with their bodies (1991:1).

In addition, Grosz goes on to say, considering the tendency to embrace the transcendence of consciousness over matter in such theoretical paradigms as existentialism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and liberal theory, women have been understandably wary of being associated with nature and biology (1991:1).

But with the increasing interest in dismantling the dualisms inherited by traditional Western philosophy, primarily mind/body, self/other, and subject/object, Grosz believes feminists are now eager to re-think the matter of the body and its relationship to subjectivity. This development has led some feminists "to question the terms in which the

body has been previously theorized, as well as to question feminist rejections of notions of women's lived bodily specificities" (1991:2).

The proliferation of feminist academic writing on the body attests to this line of questioning. Grosz claims the articles following her introduction collectively point to a retheorizing of the body that directs it away from an association with "immanence, nature, otherness, and exteriority," and an opposition to "mind, self or subjectivity" (1991:2). This "new" body "is no longer construed merely as natural, fixed, ahistorical or given; rather it is analyzed and given ontological status as effect or result rather than a cause or givenness [sic]" (1991:2).

In this chapter I want to problematize these claims by pointing out several stubbornly-held assumptions that keep a feminist discussion of the body imprisoned in the binary oppositions that isolate consciousness from a passive, acted-upon body. I will argue that many of these new articulations of an embodied subject continue to bump up against the same old wall: the Body, and by association, the Referent, the Real, the Signified and Nature. This Body, through an endless process of separations, is always one more layer beneath the culturally-inscribed or constructed body, an inaccessible Ground or Beginning that keeps threatening to weigh us down, rendering our efforts to speak as subjects unattainable. In effect, despite its promise to disassemble binary oppositions,

much of the feminist work on the body inadvertently assumes the very categories it wishes to undermine.

The assumption of a body divorced from consciousness, a blank page awaiting the inscriptions of a discursive pen, separated from gender and in need of "de-naturalization," hovers over the feminist discussion of embodied being. I will discuss several theoretical positions in which I believe feminists most obviously assume the kind of body they wish to deconstruct. Significantly, all of these, at one point or another, converge on the issue of essentialism. While there is no consensus as to what is or is not essentialist, it maintains its status as the major obstacle to theorizing subjectivity. As Diana Fuss puts it: "Perhaps more than any other notion in the vocabulary of recent feminist poststructuralist theory, 'essentialism' has come to represent both our greatest fear and our greatest temptation ... essentialism is the issue which simply refuses to die" (1989:62).

The persistent saliency of this issue is rooted in the problematic of speaking from the experiences of our bodies as women, in a public sphere characterized by discourses and institutions that collaborate in silencing us. Luce Irigaray calls this sphere the "economy of the logos": a masculine "onto-theo-logic" discursive regime that reduces, represses, and exploits the feminine by maintaining "sexual indifference" (1985:74-78). By reducing "all others" to "sameness," the

masculine subject of the public sphere, or "polis," remains the only One, while woman is relegated to the position of object or other, an absence in the disparate texts of social and cultural life.²

In the effort to carve out a space within the polis from which to exercise a voice, feminists are resorting to various distinctions between Woman, as representation, and women who live and act in bodies; between figurative or metaphorical bodies, and biological, sexed bodies. These attempts to speak with/in a body that cannot be reduced to "sexual indifference" or to an essentially defined meaning of woman, are further complicated by the uneasy shift between a demand for a theory of the female subject, and an adamant denunciation of such a demand as itself contributing to an essentialist discourse. What happens to the space the body is given or not given in this exchange, is what I am concerned with here.

Enunciating an Embodied Subject

Feminist theories of the subject have always been vulnerable to changing ideas about what is considered essentialist. In the late 1980s, for example, criticism

² For an elaboration of Irigaray's phrase, "economy of the logos" see *This Sex Which Is Not One*, (1985) in particular chapter 4, "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine." The term "polis" is used by Geraldine Finn in her essay, "The Politics of Contingency: the Contingency of Politics" (1989). I think both of these terms appropriately denote the public, collective space, both material and discursive, occupied by the rational male subject, from which women are systematically exiled.

increased against a trend in feminism to revalue women's traditional attributes and skills, particularly when this revaluation implicated women's biology. Linda Alcoff's 1988 essay on what she calls an "identity crisis" in feminist theory, provides a good illustration of this kind of critique.

Alcoff argues that "cultural" feminism does not challenge "the defining of woman but only that definition given by men" (1988:407). Pointing to the work of Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich, Alcoff asserts that a "returned focus on femaleness" unambiguously advocates a "female essence" that is dangerously linked to biology (1988:410). Both Daly and Rich are dismissed by Alcoff as merely valorizing the positive attributes women are traditionally thought to possess, that in effect, have only developed under oppression (1988:410). The difficulty with this view, Alcoff states, is its suggestion that "it is our specifically female anatomy that is the primary constituent of our identity and the source of our female essence" (1988:410).

It is not my intent to argue this point here but to show how Alcoff's proposal for an alternative "theory of the gendered subject that does not slide into essentialism" (1988:422) carefully avoids any discussion of how this subject relates to a body. She endorses Teresa de Lauretis' notion of experience as "a complex of habits resulting from the semiotic interaction of 'outer world' and 'inner world,' the continuous engagement of a self or subject in social reality" (de

Lauretis, 1984:182) as a way of lending agency to the subject, without falling into the essentialism of biologicistic reductions. What emerges is a multiple and shifting subject that is placed within particular discursive configurations (1988:425). From these ideas, Alcoff formulates her own theory of the subject as positional, and as a political point of departure:

If we combine the concept of identity politics with a conception of the subject as positionality, we can conceive of the subject as nonessentialized and emergent from a historical experience and yet retain our political ability to take gender as an important point of departure. Thus we can say at one and the same time that gender is not natural, biological, universal, ahistorical, or essential and yet still claim that gender is relevant because we are taking gender as a position from which to act politically (1988:433).

Alcoff has succeeded in speaking of a subject that allows for the particularity of different positions in culture and discourse by leaving virtually untouched the matter of bodies and the essentialist problems she feels they bring with them. While she manages to locate the subject in a given socio-cultural context, she nevertheless replicates a Cartesian model of consciousness in her use of de Lauretis' references to "inner" and "outer" worlds (1988:424). There is no recognition that taking account of the body in this process might, for Alcoff, throw an essentialist wrench into the argument. For although she claims that we need to take into account the "fleshy" material identity of subjects, (1988:433) Alcoff asserts that "the problem of the subject and, within

this, the problem of conceptualizing 'woman,' is a metaphysical problem," not an empirical one (1988:429). Hence, she carefully avoids acknowledging the relationship between women's experiences as bodies and their socio-cultural position as subjects.

Essentialism with Distinction(s)

Since Alcoff's 1988 essay, a shift in thinking about essentialism has occurred, motivated by increased concern about privileged feminists' speaking for others. The debate on the political necessity of a female subject hinges on this concern. For how do we articulate a female subject when on the one hand, women are perceived to need a bond of shared identity to achieve political ends, while on the other, we need to be aware of the particular positions from which we speak and the incommensurable differences between our own and other women's positions?

This urgent question has encouraged feminists to recognize the importance of the reality of bodies that position us, and take up positions, in particular socio-cultural, economic, and discursive (con)texts. In the rejection of the fixed, natural and universalized body that historically limited women's roles, there is an obvious need to rethink the body. Accompanying this rethinking, is a hesitant attempt to re-evaluate former notions of essentialism.

Rosi Braidotti exemplifies this line of questioning when she states:

I believe that the redefinition of the female feminist subject starts with the revaluation of the bodily roots of subjectivity, rejecting the traditional vision of the knowing subject as universal, neutral, and consequently gender-free. This 'positional' or situated way of seeing the subject states that the most important location or situation is the rooting of the subject into the spatial frame of the body (1993:6,7).

While her emphasis on the position of the subject echoes Alcoff, Braidotti's wish to re-evaluate the body takes the notion of positionality further, in a manner that Alcoff might consider an essentialist reduction to biology.

Braidotti argues that "a feminist woman theoretician who is interested in thinking about sexual difference and the feminine today cannot afford not to be essentialist," claiming that the feminine needs to be re-connected to the "bodily sexed reality of the female, refusing the separation of the empirical from the symbolic, or of the material from the discursive, or of sex from gender" (1989:93). This revaluation of essentialism is the condition of possibility for political activism. It allows for a politics of location that rejects global statements about women and in their place enables us "to be as aware as possible of where one is speaking from" (1993:8). With this in mind, Braidotti calls for a recognition of "a bond of commonality among women," meaning "a consensus that all women partake of the condition of 'the second sex'" which "seals a pact among women ... the

foundation stone that allows for the feminist position or standpoint to be articulated" (1993:8). Indeed, she goes so far as to define woman as "an umbrella term" that brings together a variety of different levels of subjectivity and different relationships to and notions of time" (1993:7).

It is difficult to see just how a definition of woman as "an umbrella term" leads us to a politics of location, where the particularities of women's lives are not glossed over. It appears that Braidotti's revaluation of essentialism has not overcome the central problematic for feminists worried about this paradox. To get around it, Braidotti advocates "an epistemological and a political distinction between 'woman' and 'feminist'" (1993:8); that is, between real women, speaking from a multitude of different locations, and feminist women, who must unite for political reasons. Yet a third term is introduced, "Woman," the historical representation of the feminine,³ a "culturally dominant model for female identity" (1993:8) that must be recognized as distinct from the reality of women's lives in order for feminists to elaborate a political subjectivity. Braidotti concludes that "[t]he myth of Woman is now a vacant lot where different women can play with their subjectivity" (1993:9).

What happens to the body in the kind of separations that

³ see Teresa de Lauretis, *Sexual Difference: A theory of socio-symbolic practice*, (1990) for a description of her differentiation between "Woman" as cultural imago, and women, as real agents of change.

allow women to play with what kind of Woman they want to be, and at the same time (or maybe only sometimes) decide to be feminists for political reasons? It turns out that Braidotti's notion of the body is as fraught with distinctions as her elaboration of Woman. When she gets down to the task of describing just what a "bodily sexed reality" is, we read that:

The 'body' in question is the threshold of subjectivity: as such it is neither the sum of its organs - a fixed biological essence - nor the result of social conditioning ... The 'body' is rather to be thought of as the point of intersection, as the interface between the biological and the social... (1989:97).

In other words, this body that Braidotti puts in quotation marks, marking it apart from what we know to be real, is not a collection of organs, tissue, and skin - that remains another layer beneath this 'body.' Just what kind of body is this, and how many kinds are there? In arguing that "there is a fundamental qualitative distinction to be made between anatomy and sexuality as such," (1989:97) Braidotti distances herself from the flesh-and-blood body that she argues so eloquently for incorporating into a theory of subjectivity.

Braidotti's own acknowledgement that rethinking the body "in terms that are neither biological nor sociological" (1989:99) only reinforces this distancing. She argues that stressing the "metaphysical" dimension of this question shifts the debate from "the false dichotomy of the biological vs. the political" and returns the question of the body to its

rightful metaphysical place (1989:99). To demonstrate this, she privileges Irigaray's strategy, claiming that it consists of refusing "to dissociate questions of the feminine from the presence of real-life women," a "tactical" mime of phallogentrism's equation of the feminine with women and the masculine with men (1989:99). Obviously, since she feels Irigaray's notion of bodies supports her own view of the body's rightful metaphysical place, Braidotti must not believe Irigaray is speaking of real-life women in real-life bodies. This assertion is baffling considering Braidotti's conclusion in another essay that her notion of a multiple feminist subject links the "body and mind in a new flux of self" (1993:11).

Finally, it is evident from my initial citation of Braidotti, that the "body" in her conceptualization is one which constitutes a "spatial frame" wherein the subject is inserted, or a plot of earth wherein the subject can be rooted. The assumption that such a body is an empty vessel, waiting to be filled with conscious activity, is only a fine line away from the body of patriarchal modernity that initiated feminists' fear of essentialism in the first place.

Braidotti provides one example among many ever more sophisticated attempts by feminists to separate real bodies from other metaphorical, symbolic, discursive, or theoretical bodies, in an attempt to give women a political voice. The body is stuck in the middle of these attempts, either

uncritically assumed in its undesirable "natural" state and ignored, or re-dressed and propped up to pose in its new position as the indicator of particularity and locale for the female subject.

Elspeth Probyn similarly promotes distinctions between the "natural" body and the discursive body in her notion of the "doubledness of the body" (1991:111). Probyn suggests we need to displace the body "as a place from which to speak the truth," since our bodies cannot provide us with an unproblematic, "stable platform" (1991:111). While this may seem to leave us in "a discursive wasteland," Probyn argues that by recognizing the "doubledness" of the body, both positioned as concept and "within strategies of enunciation," we can shift the "discursive mood" to one of "speaking our bodies in a subjunctive tone" (1991:111). This means to "put the body forward as an image within discourse" (1991:112).

I use Probyn's words as much as possible here since they clearly betray the same discomfort with real bodies that Braidotti reveals. In a dizzying discussion of the important difference between "my body in speech" and "my body in reality," (1991:112) Probyn attempts to formulate a way for women to speak without speaking for the other. But her "doubled" use of the body serves to perpetuate the interior\exterior dialectic. It is never entirely clear what she means by the doubledness of the body. At one point she defines it as the body's "status as epistemological object and

the thing with which we live" (1991:119). But nowhere has she discussed this thing in and of itself. Indeed, she argues that a return "to the realism of the body" is dangerous (1991:114). She concludes:

As a theoretical abstraction, the concept of the embodied self can be used to refigure 'the real' and thus work to provide women with a place from which to speak and something to say. This is, then, to argue for a mode of thinking that uses images of the self in the body and gives flight to theorizing the body through technologies of the self (Probyn, 1991:121).

Gives flight? Probyn's choice of wording here is revealing. In her theoretical disjunction between a body that flies off into the horizon of heady discourse in order to create a space for speaking women, and the embodied self that transforms the real, she has only succeeded in leaving any (every) body behind.

Anxiety Over Two Lips

The debate concerning essentialist definitions of woman and its implications for the body has largely been sparked by reactions to the work of Irigaray. The diverse range of perspectives, from hostile dismissals to ambivalent acceptance, is astounding. Unfortunately, many of these feminists ignore the majority of Irigaray's complex and stimulating ideas, and restrict their engagement to her provocative use of the "two lips" of women's sexual organs. One of her most frequently cited passages is found in "This Sex Which Is Not One," (1985) an essay in her book of the same

title, wherein she points out how woman's "autoeroticism" is different from man's:

As for woman, she touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation.... Woman 'touches herself' all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two - but not divisible into one(s) - that caress each other (1985:24).

This passage continues to trouble feminists. For example, in a recent essay Margaret Whitford concludes that Irigaray's reference to the two lips is important because of the possibility of multiple readings. Whitford demonstrates this open-endedness by citing the opinions of several critics, but it quickly becomes obvious that one unacceptable reading is a "literalist" one. Kaja Silverman, for example, is accused by Whitford of "[falling] back" on a "literalist" interpretation when she claims that Irigaray is advancing a notion of a language coexisting with the female body "as closely as the two lips of the vulva coexist" (Silverman, quoted in Whitford, 1991:99). Jan Montefiore, on the other hand, is supported by Whitford, for her comment that Irigaray cannot be speaking of literal biology because the two lips are "continually interchanging" (quoted in Whitford, 1991:99). In a similar vein, Whitford cites Jane Gallop and Elizabeth Grosz, claiming that they both see the two lips as a writing device, with an "inter-discursive" rather than referential function (1991:99).

Whitford also mentions other feminists (Fuss, 1989; Berg,

1988) who compare Irigaray's metaphor to Lacan's privileged signifier - the phallus: "In this view, the lips are an alternative privileged signifier, not an organ, part of the body or object; they exist *only in the symbolic realm* and disturb the monopoly of the phallus" (1991:100). She concludes that whatever Irigaray might have originally intended, she is no longer in control of the image of the two lips:

It is the autonomous itinerary of multiple symbolic interpretation which I want to stress here, the now seemingly independent life of an image which started off originally as an image of a (mostly unmentionable) part of woman's body, but is now thoroughly impregnated with layers of symbolic meaning (1991:101).

Vicki Kirby gives an excellent example of this anxious insistence on a metaphorical interpretation of Irigaray, in her account of an exchange in which she participated after hearing a conference paper on Irigaray's work. When the speaker referred to the "two lips" as a figurative strategy, "a metaphor through which the significance of woman's embodiment could be reinterpreted as morphology," (1991:7) Kirby asked exactly what "does the nomination 'biological or anatomical body' refer to" and what danger has the exclusion of the biological body avoided? In reply, the speaker "pinched herself and commented, 'Well, I certainly don't mean *this body*'" (1991:7). Kirby uses this anecdote to illustrate how the attempt by some feminists to dismiss the body as not mattering at all, points to the fact that it matters too much

(1991:8).

Whether Irigaray's allusion to the two lips is read as metaphor, symbolic interpretation, or misguided literalism, it is obvious that many feminists are still reticent to speak of the real bodies in which we live and with which we experience our world. In the wariness of such terms as "biology," "literal body," or "referent," it is clear that what is feared is a real flesh-and-blood body. Furthermore, these terms are used in a fixed universal manner, ignoring the simple fact that no body is the same. These feminists are still using biology to distinguish the real and most natural aspect of embodied being from what is recognized as written over by cultural and social discourses. What happened to the knowledge that the biological body, and not just a figurative body, is inscribed by discourse? Why the desire to use the term "biology" as though it is a purely scientific concept outside of culture?

In other words, I am arguing that the feminist debate on essentialism is caught in an essentialist notion of the body as fixed and immutable. As Kirby aptly states:

The assumption here seems to be that if the ground isn't solid then it isn't a ground - if it moves and changes, then it must be just the representation of a ground. The unacknowledged foundation for this anti-essentialist assertion is, ironically, an essentialist notion of a ground that is absolute and immutable (1992:14).

We can substitute "body" for "ground" here. The attempt to create new representations of the body betrays an underlying

belief that our own flesh defines us in universalizable terms founded on the exclusion of all others; that it is the nature of being and having bodies that excludes the particularity and contingency of locations. Paradoxically, the reticence to speak of this flesh bespeaks a body too particular to include.

Enunciating the Non-subject: "as if" I have a body

It is interesting to note that the assumption of the body as immutable ground can also be discerned in the feminist post-structuralist critique of the effort to articulate a female subject. Already in 1985, Toril Moi, for example, expresses suspicion of any attempt to define woman as subject in her harsh criticism of Irigaray's work. In *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), she points out that Irigaray demonstrates a simplistic, ahistorical interpretation of patriarchal power in her failure to address the material changes ("from Plato to Freud") in women's experience of patriarchal discursive strategies. By refusing to acknowledge the "historical and economic specificity of patriarchal power, along with its ideological and material contradictions," Moi believes Irigaray stumbles into the same "metaphysical definition of woman she declaredly wants to avoid," an idealist, essentialist attempt to name woman (1985:148). This is the inevitable result, Moi concludes, of analysing woman as though she is "a simple, unchanging unity, always confronting the same kind of monolithic patriarchal oppression," a force that

represses women's true nature (1985:147). Moi suggests that

If... all efforts towards a definition of 'woman' are destined to be essentialist, it looks as if feminist theory might thrive better if it abandoned the minefield of femininity and femaleness for a while and approached the questions of oppression and emancipation from a different direction (1985:148).

Here is a new take on the essentialist matter. Now even the merest references to a female subject, or even women, is considered essentialist. Now "femaleness" is a "minefield" to be avoided for the potential danger involved in taking a wrong step. At the same time, while the moving of the body into the figurative has been completed, the lingering problem of how women in real life situations can politically transform oppressive structures remains a thorny question. Several strategies have been adopted to accommodate the recognition that for political effectiveness, women need to identify ourselves as women.

I believe Judith Butler's extensive work on post-structuralist formulations of the gendered subject represents the best example of the kind of feminist somatophobia I am criticizing. On the one hand she appears to recognize the need to speak of the body in ways that undermine its status as a fixed, natural ground, while on the other hand she assumes that very fixity.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990) Butler outlines her project to disrupt a normative concept of gender by setting feminist theory free "from the necessity of having to construct a

single or abiding ground which is invariably contested by those identity positions or anti-identity positions that it invariably excludes" (1990:5). She is committed to criticizing the perceived need for a female subject, since it is the "notion of 'women' as subject" that Butler argues gives rise to these exclusionary practices (1990:5). In other words, it is the construction of the subject itself that demands "unspoken normative" requirements to which not all can conform (1990:5). Hence feminists' desire to extend representation to the excluded is paradoxically undermined by the insistence on granting them subject status. As Butler asks, "[w]hat relations of domination and exclusion are inadvertently sustained when representation becomes the sole focus of politics" (1990:6)?

Butler's opponents are those who claim that "politics requires a stable subject" to be effective (1992:4). On the contrary, she insists, we need to deconstruct the notion of the subject, not to negate it, but "to ask after the process of its construction and the political meaning and consequentiality of taking the subject as a requirement or presupposition of theory" (1992:4). To demonstrate such a consequence, Butler asks how she is personally positioned as a theorizing subject: "how is it that a position becomes a position[?]" For is it "one that I devise, publish, and defend, that belongs to me as a kind of academic property? Or is there a grammar of the subject that merely encourages us to

position me as the proprietor of those theories?" (1992:9). In other words, while Butler explicitly states that she does not "shirk" from using the pronoun "I," she is adamant that this "I" is not the originator of these positions, but is constituted by them:

Indeed, this 'I' would not be a thinking, speaking 'I' if it were not for the very positions that I oppose, for those positions, the ones that claim that the subject must be given in advance, that discourse is an instrument or reflection of that subject, are already part of what constitutes me. No subject is its own point of departure... (1992:9).

Butler also states that she does not shirk from using the term women, admitting we have to "speak as and for women" for political reasons. For "[s]urely, that is the way in which representational politics operates, and in this country, [the United States] lobbying efforts are virtually impossible without recourse to identity politics" (1992:15). Rather than shying away from it, Butler argues we can release the term woman "into a future of multiple significations ... emancipate it from the maternal or racialist ontologies to which it has been restricted, and ... give it play as a site where unanticipated meanings might come to bear" (1992:16).

In order to facilitate this accommodation of both the deconstruction of the category and the recognition of its usefulness, Butler's strategy is critical of the common feminist assumption of a radical distinction between sex and gender. Originally this distinction was stressed in order to free gender from the immutable natural-ness of sex, a pre-

discursive and pre-cultural given (1992:6,7). But the problem with this distinction, according to Butler, is the assumption of sex as a natural category.

If such a position is contested, Butler argues, then "perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all" (1990:7). In Butler's view, sex cannot be the surface on which gender, as a form of cultural inscription, imposes meaning. Rather, sex itself is a gendered category, discursively constructed as a pre-discursive ground: "[t]his production of sex as the prediscursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by *gender*" (1992:7).

Butler claims to denaturalize sex by proposing "a set of parodic practices based in a performative theory of gender acts" that allow a subversive "resignification and proliferation beyond the binary frame" of the body, sex, gender, and sexuality (1990:x). Parody is understood by Butler to mean an imitation "that mocks the notion of an original" (1990:138). Gender parody then, reveals only that there is no original gender identity on which gender "fashions" itself. What we think is an original is really a copy, a failed "ideal that no one can embody" (1990:139).

But parody is only subversive for Butler when it is

repeatedly disruptive, and "troubling" to the notion of an inner/outer distinction in which the truth of gender is located in the body. For examples she turns to the practices of drag, cross-dressing and butch/femme lesbian identities, claiming that these performances reveal the complicated relationship between the "original" and the "imitation." Drag, for instance, "plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed," thereby exposing the imitative and contingent structure of gender itself (1990:137). The pleasure of the act, therefore, is in "the radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender" (1990:138). Butler concludes from this theory of gender as "a stylized repetition of acts" that gender is neither real nor true:

If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity (1990:136).

Susan Bordo argues in her 1992 review of *Gender Trouble*, that Butler's playful destabilization of gender through the practice of drag sounds good in theory, but when it is put into its historical and social context, that is, given some body, problems are immediately apparent. Bordo points to the fact that many drag performers espouse "highly dualist gender ontologies," among them, a well-known drag star who publicly stated that "he felt drag queens could help teach women how to be 'real women'" (1992:171). With this in mind, Bordo asks

"[h]ow culturally subversive can these forms be if so readily interpreted as 'proof' of the foundational nature of gender, the essential reality of the 'binary frame'" (1992:172)?

Bordo's criticism demonstrates what I think is at the heart of the problem with Butler's work: the body is completely subsumed by what Bordo calls "discursive foundationalism" in a world "in which language swallows everything up, voraciously, a theoretical pasta machine through which the categories of competing frameworks are pressed and reprocessed as 'tropes'" (1992:170). Hence despite Butler's lip-service to reconceiving the body "no longer as a passive medium or instrument awaiting the enlivening capacity of a distinctly immaterial will" (1990:8), it is just such a body that she assumes and leaves behind in favor of an exclusively discursive notion of gender as performance.

This is obvious in Butler's need to view sex, by which I think she means the body, as culturally constructed, by incorporating its meaning into gender. The effect is to collapse sex and gender into one, and then remove them both from the body into free-floating signifiers. Where do we find a reconceived notion of the body? Where do we find any body at all? For if, as Butler states, "[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (1990:25) then it is cultural and

political discursive regimes that perform gender, and not the human body. Equally disturbing is her insistence that these parodic expressions of a non-original gender are *not real*, as though we do not experience gender in an authentic manner; as though gender is merely a pleasurable game.

Butler's new work, *Bodies That Matter* (1993), further explores the "discursive limits of 'sex'" first outlined in *Gender Trouble*. The title itself suggests that only some bodies matter, or that matter is not a property of all bodies. In a defense of her earlier notion of gender as performativity, Butler persists in distancing herself from the flesh. Her use of often unqualified terms such as "literalization," "materialization," and "naturalization" further emphasize Butler's privileging of discourse and consciousness over the body. In her introduction, for example, she states:

Thus 'sex' is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, 'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time (1993:1).

Hence, it is the power of discourse that produces the categories of male and female sexed bodies, who are not material in themselves, but *materialized* by this power.

The Body Deferred

It is clear from this discussion that the contentious debate on essentialism reveals a relentless rejection of the

"literal," "real," "biological," "pre-discursive," or "referent." Indeed, the obsessive search for a way to separate the flesh from speech, consciousness, and subjectivity, can be thought of as seeking to position women's bodies *somewhere else*. As Kirby suggests:

Although rethinking essentialism marks an avowed return to the body, the reunion is always be-ing deferred. It is certainly not an easy homecoming. Perhaps commerce with the body is considered risky business because the border between the mind/body split, the border across which interpretations of the body might be negotiated, just cannot be secured (1992:6).

The problem facing feminist attempts to envision a re-embodied subject arises out of the assumption of the very terms they are struggling to destabilize: the notion of a fixed universal body that must be rejected as an inaccessible, pre-discursive reality. This creates an insurmountable obstacle for a political arena that appears to require subjects that live in real bodies. Consequently in the attempt to overcome this, some feminists settle for a contradictory compromise: sometimes we must act "as if"⁴ we are subjects in order to exercise a political voice, but most of the time, we cannot be subjects since the category itself presumes a unity of embodied existence that marginalizes other bodies.

⁴ Proponents of an "as if" approach to women's identity argue that we must act as if we are women for political purposes while acknowledging that women cannot exist. I have referred to several advocates of this notion, particularly Butler and Braidotti. See also Denise Riley (1988) and Mariana Valverde (1991).

Such a compromise is an attempt to speak as women in a symbolic system that silences our speech: we must accept the terms given to us - that women, as bodies, as particular, contingent, sexual beings, cannot be heard in a phallogentric discursive regime and be content with temporary preterensions of subjectivity. Or, as in the case of post-structuralist perspectives such as Butler's, we must abandon our bodies with the acknowledgment that we only perform being women, and be content to play with the different positions this performance allows us. Meanwhile, this erasure of the referent continues to allow men to speak for us, since the women are not there at all.

Feminist ambivalence towards the body is the result of this inability to pin down women's place in the polis; to articulate a subject position that will allow us to speak and be heard from our own place. In other words, the awkwardness in feminist thinking about the body is because that body, our denigrated sexed flesh, has been relegated to spaces outside the polis, by a phallogentric and logocentric discursive regime. To attempt to move it to the inside only confirms it as the very justification for an inside/outside mechanism. The inside, the place of the male subject, rational truth, and consciousness, exists only because of the body's exteriority.

Therefore, not only do we need to re-theorize the body, so it is no longer universal, immutable and the opposite of the self and the mind, (for feminists have tried this, ad

nauseum) we need to find a place for it within language and discourse in such a way that radically alters how we think of both. We cannot continue to talk about a female embodied subject that includes the traditional notion of the body as a fixed biological entity divorced from consciousness and the world. We need to articulate a concept of the body that is immersed in its own particularity, but that is not "before" culture, or the ground of culture, or the page on which the discursive pen writes.

While there are several feminist intellectuals currently engaged in such a critical project, most notably Grosz and Kirby,⁵ what I think is missing in even the most eloquent and persuasive invitations to rethink the body, is a sustained conceptualization of the body as flesh, as inseparable from consciousness and actively interacting with the surrounding world. By this I do mean real bodies: my body and your body, female and male bodies, young and old bodies, black, yellow and white bodies, able and differently-abled bodies. For this reason, I believe the feminist preoccupation with the body and

⁵ Tania Modleski and Moira Gatens should also be noted here. Modleski convincingly argues against an "as if" position in her first chapter of *Feminism Without Women* (1991), appropriately entitled "Post-mortem on Post-feminism," where she asks "could we... say of anti-essentialist feminists that only those possessing vastly wider options than the majority of women living in the world today can play at 'being it' while theorizing themselves into the belief that they are not it" (1991:22)?

Gatens points to the split between representation and reality, and the "impotence of our political vocabulary" for articulating bodily difference (1991:85).

its relation to women's desire to claim a speaking subject position, will significantly benefit from Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh.

Chapter II

Merleau-Ponty's Ontology of the Flesh

The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term 'element,' in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an 'element' of Being (Merleau-Ponty, 1968:139).

Merleau-Ponty claims that there is no word in traditional philosophy to designate what he has called "flesh": "...this Visibility, this generality of the Sensible in itself, this anonymity innate to Myself..." (1968:139). In the pervasive notion of the subject and *his* privileged consciousness of a world of objects, bequeathed to us by Descartes, flesh means only the tissue and organs that constitute the body. As our dictionaries commonly affirm, it is a passive acted-on, rather than active body, divorced from intelligent perception.⁶

In a radical revision of the term, Merleau-Ponty describes flesh in its "intertwining" with the world and consciousness, and so undermines the accepted meanings of all of these: the body, the mind and the world. It is this intertwining, the fact that we cannot disentangle our thoughts from our body's sentient activity and the world of objects that we live among, that I am concerned with in this chapter.

⁶ *Collins Concise Dictionary of the English Language* for example, defines "flesh" as "...the human body and its physical or sensual nature as opposed to the soul or spirit" (1982:424).

I will show that Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh is useful for a feminist discussion of the body, because it conceptualises a "body-subject" actively perceiving the phenomenal world and interacting with the consciousnesses of other beings, in a manner that escapes traditional dualisms.

The Flesh as Phenomenal World

The notion of flesh as an "element" of being throws into question the relationship between the human body and the world of objects, since the world is also flesh in this sense, "made of the same stuff as the body" (1964a:163). Our bodies live among objects that are visible, just as we are visible, and work together in a tightly woven ecological system. Things are not then the product of our own mind-work, but already present to us, among us, and we among things. In effect, things transcend us. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

I am thinking of the Cartesian cogito, wanting to finish this work, feeling the coolness of the paper under my hand, and perceiving the trees of the boulevard through the window. My life is constantly thrown headlong into transcendent things, and passes wholly outside me (1962:369).

This is a basic assumption in phenomenology, which Merleau-Ponty defines as a "philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their 'facticity'" (1962:vii). In other words, a phenomenological perspective begins with a world that is already there, that precedes knowledge; reflection comes

after, arising out of the individual's own experience of the world. Indeed, nothing can be known except through my own interaction with the environment around me, from my own particular point of view, since "[t]he world is there before any possible analysis of mine..." (1962:x).

This is a world significantly different from the one Descartes envisioned. The Cartesian knower's relation to the object world is one of detachment: where nothing can be understood to exist unless I experience myself as existing in the moment of apprehending something. Instead, phenomenology attempts to find an alternative to "both the empiricists' denigration of the body as a passive receptor of sense data and the idealists' disregard of the body in favor of consciousness (which the idealists claim is the truly active performer in the constitution of phenomena)" (Bigwood, 1993:49-50). Merleau-Ponty accomplishes this by understanding the body, not as an object in the world to be scrutinised by the scientific mind, but as "our point of view on the world," the locus of our experience with material phenomena (1964a:5). His project then is to realize that:

The perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence. This thesis does not destroy either rationality or the absolute. It only tries to bring them down to earth (1964a:13).

The Flesh as Body

Merleau-Ponty's theory of bodily perception carries out

this project, and it is here that we realize the full extent of the relationship of the body to the world. To perceive, he writes, "is to render oneself present to something through the body" (1964a:42). Perception is an activity of the body that we can become cognitively aware of; it is a reaching of the body towards objects and an enclosing of them back into itself, in such a way that disturbs the individuated, hierarchized relationship between body and phenomena.

If I look at the sky, for example, I do not contain it within my gaze as an object out there, separate from myself, but give myself up to the experience of blue-ness as I feel myself merging with the expanse of sky: "I am the sky itself as it is drawn together and unified, and as it begins to exist for itself; my consciousness is saturated with this limitless blue" (1962:214). Hence, the sky is not something I "possess in thought", but is a sentient experience my body engages in prior to thought. As Carol Bigwood puts it: "My seeing the sky ... becomes my thinking I see the sky" (1993:51). In other words, "[it] is not our intellectual judging that makes sentience possible but this silent, noncognitive, intimate bonding of our body with the world-earth-home" (Bigwood, 1993:51).

Another example Merleau-Ponty gives concerns our bodies' unique perceptual ability to see things as unified entities in relation to other things. Suppose I am walking along a shore where a ship has run aground but cannot immediately discern

its shape as such since a part of the ship merges into the landscape of a forest. Merleau-Ponty argues that the outline of the ship finally becomes clear, not because of a repertoire of images of ships in our minds that we recall in this instance, but because our body actively perceives meanings that are already there. Parts of the visual field - the forest, wood from the ship, the shoreline - not immediately recognized in their real relationship, become organized for me after acknowledging something "imminent" in the tension between them. But the meaning is inherent to the landscape, I do not cognitively create it: "[t]he unity of the object is based on the foreshadowing of an imminent order which is about to spring upon us a reply to questions merely latent in the landscape" (1962:17).

Both of these examples demonstrate a non-cognitive, or non-linguistic communion of the body with its environs and illustrate how meaning that is already there can be apprehended or taken up in such an exchange. This clearly sets up an alternative to the Western scientific model of perception, of the subject-knower probing the object-world for information needed to create knowledge. That the body interacts with these objects as flesh to flesh overturns the assumed hierarchical order between the subject and the world.

But while Merleau-Ponty's theory of bodily perception reveals both body and world to be flesh, it also displays a seemingly impossible contradiction. Earlier I stated that the

body lives among objects as one of them, and yet is not really an object because it is that which sees and identifies objects. In this already-present world, our bodies live and move in an inseparable relation to the phenomena we experience, not one of the objects around us, yet not distinct from them. While Merleau-Ponty argues that the body is not in space like other things, but "inhabits" it, and that the body is not just an instrument or means, but "our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions" (1964a:5); he also claims that "my body is a thing among things; it is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing" (1964a:163). How are we to negotiate the impossible position the body occupies here?

Merleau-Ponty describes this paradox of the body's status as both subject and object, as an "imposition of meaning":

Bodily experience forces us to acknowledge an imposition of meaning which is not the work of a universal constituting consciousness, a meaning which clings to certain contents. My body is that meaningful core which behaves like a general function, and which nevertheless exists, and is susceptible to disease. In it we learn to know that union of essence and existence which we shall find again in perception generally... (1962:147)

By pointing to the ability of the body to see itself seeing or touch itself touching, he seeks to demonstrate this union of essence and existence; elsewhere described as "the spatiality of the thing and its being as a thing" (1962:148). For if my left hand touches my right hand in the act of reaching for an object, my right hand is both an object of flesh, bones and

muscles to be touched, and that which, in the movement of reaching towards something, designates another object. Consequently, "[i]n so far as it sees or touches the world, my body can therefore be neither seen nor touched. What prevents its ever being an object, ever being 'completely constituted' is that it is that by which there are objects" (1962:92).

The enigma of the body then, is that it simultaneously sees and is seen; a being-for-itself and a being-in-itself. Merleau-Ponty explains this by describing the system of exchanges that occur when looking at a painting. For example, the animals in a painting do not exist as the walls of the cave they are painted on; they are not *there*, fixed as things, yet they are not somewhere else: "It is more accurate to say that I see according to it, [the painting] or with it, than that I see it" (1964a:164). The color, light and depth that are in the painting "are there only because they awaken an echo in our body and because the body welcomes them" (1964a:164).

All things, therefore, have "an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence" (1964a:164). Here the boundaries blur between the body as flesh and the world as flesh, like the painter who "is obliged to admit that objects before him pass into him" or conversely, "the mind goes out through the eyes to wander among objects" (1964a:166). Thus the body acts as a kind of middle ground where this exchange between things takes place: "There is a

human body when, between the seeing and the seen, between touching and the touched, between one eye and the other, between hand and hand, a blending of some sort takes place - when the spark is lit between the sensing and sensible..." (1964a:163).

The Flesh as Self

It should be apparent by now that Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh has serious implications for theorizing subjectivity, or consciousness and rational thought. I intentionally began with the phenomenal world and end with consciousness and the self's relation to the other, to revert the Cartesian order of the transcendent mind over matter. But I do not simply mean to reverse the hierarchy, for as Merleau-Ponty states:

We have to reject the age-old assumptions that put the body in the world and the seer in the body, or, conversely, the world and the body in the seer as in a box.... Where in the body are we to put the seer, since evidently there is in the body only 'shadows stuffed with organs,' that is, more of the visible? (1968:138).

Therefore, imposing any hierarchical order on the world, the body, and the mind is impossible in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. We need to be continually aware of how they are inextricably intertwined, and how difficult it is to speak of one without speaking of them all.

But thus far, it has not been made clear what it is that constitutes self-ness, or the "seer" in Merleau-Ponty's theory

of the flesh, when it is evident that he does not want to dismiss rationality or conscious thought altogether. As I stated at the beginning, his project is to bring rationality down to earth, not negate it. So how do we conceive of this one who sees, or one who touches in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology? How is the mind intertwined with the body if the body perceives meaning pre-cognitively?

Fundamental to a Cartesian conceptualisation of the subject is its privileging of conscious reflexion: Descartes posits a self or cogito that grasps itself by the "psychic fact" that I am certain I exist the whole time I am thinking about it (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a:21). Such a cogito transcends the body and the world of things. But Merleau-Ponty argues that Descartes' movement "from things to thought about things," entails either a reduction of experience to psychological events, where the "I" is only a hypothetical cause, or an acknowledgement of a system of thoughts anterior to these events which are timeless (1962:372). Divorced from all context, the Cartesian subject is an eternal, universal, absolute entity; contained within itself, it is an inside without an outside.

There are no allowances for particularity in such a model. The contingent aspects of our individual environments, socio-economic statuses, relationships, emotional crises, genders, skin-colours, and political agendas, are smoothly glossed over. Merleau-Ponty seeks to overcome the

inside/outside dichotomy by revealing the inescapable contingency of our knowing and being. For him the cogito is a consciousness "which knows itself only in and through the world and over time, a consciousness which neither creates nor discovers itself... but recovers itself from the world" (Romanyshyn, 1982:148).

Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception has radical consequences for a Cartesian conception of the mind. For if the body's interactions with its surrounding environs can be described as pre-cognitive, or pre-reflective, then the mind is not, as Descartes would have it, the privileged filter of all experience. Rather, the body, "directed outside itself, inextricably entangled in existence," (Bigwood, 1993:50) is engaged in a continual sentient activity that is clearly distinct from thought. Whereas the mind grasps an object "either as possible or as necessary... in perception it is 'real'" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a:15).

This implies that there are two distinct ways of experiencing the world - one with the body and the other with the mind, in an exclusive relationship to each other. Such a distinction, Merleau-Ponty states, is the premise on which the idealists disavow the legitimacy of bodily perception, for perceptual experience can be shown to be confusing and contradictory (1964a:18). But while Merleau-Ponty admits that perceptions are indeed contradictory, and that if there were a non-contradictory thought, "it would exclude the world of

perception as a simple appearance," the question remains "whether there is such a thing as a logically coherent thought or thought in the pure state" (1964a:18). In reply, he argues that the idealists' accusation is ill-founded when "*the acknowledged contradiction appears as the very condition of consciousness*" (1964a:19).

We must see the cogito:

not as a constituting subject which is transparent to itself, and which constitutes the totality of every possible object of thought and experience, but as a particular thought, as a thought engaged with certain objects, as a thought in act; and it is in this sense that I am certain of myself (1964a:22).

The self as a "thought in act" is the important link in understanding how Merleau-Ponty critiques the traditional distinctions between mind and body. For thought is no longer merely the inside activity of the mind, but extended to the activity of the flesh in moving out towards the world surrounding it. Our consciousnesses are now open to the world and accessible to others, as we acknowledge our participation in a given reality in the phenomenal world. It is this recognition of consciousness as being inside as well as outside - not sealed within itself, but stretching out to the world and others - that propels us out of the Cartesian model of the individuated, autonomous subject.

As I write this I am realizing how arduous a task it is to grasp Merleau-Ponty's conceptualization of the subject. It quickly strays from any attempt to pin it down, particularly

since the very language we are used to employing to speak of the categories of consciousness and flesh, and subject and object, assumes and reproduces their distinctions. Indeed, by the time Merleau-Ponty writes The Visible and the Invisible (1968) he completely writes himself out of this divisive order of things, and suggests that the project he began with has grown to requiring a complete transformation of philosophy as we know it.'

It is important to understand that consciousness in Merleau-Ponty's work is not conceived of as the workings of the mind on its own, visible only to itself, but as working through or with the objects it perceives as (an aspect of) the body. We are our bodies, rooted in the world we all share and take up for ourselves. In other words, my consciousness is "a relation to the world" (1964a:117).

In one of the few explicit references to his conceptualization of the mind, Merleau-Ponty writes in a working note for The Visible and the Invisible, that the mind is "the other side of the body" meaning that it "overflows into it ... encroaches upon it, is hidden in it -- and at the same time needs it, terminates in it, is anchored in it. There is a body of the mind, and a mind of the body and a chiasm [intertwining] between them" (1968:259). I believe

' See G.B. Madison's essay, "Did Merleau-Ponty Have a Theory of Perception?" wherein he argues that in *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty "recognized the need to 'recommence everything'" performing "a thoroughgoing philosophical house-cleaning" (1992:95).

this is the best articulation of his view of the mind and body as inextricably linked in a kind of circular rather than diametric relationship.

The Flesh of the Other

One of the most significant contributions Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh can make for feminist analyses of the body-subject, can be found in its implications for the relationship between the self and others. For if we can articulate a development of the self that does not necessitate either the rejection or domination of the other, we can undermine the discursive mechanisms of oppression that hierarchize the relationships between body and mind, and self and other.

Merleau-Ponty's work on infant development significantly departs from some common assumptions of the psychological model, by emphasizing the simultaneity of the infant's psychic and social developments. In an essay entitled "The Child's Relations with Others" he states that the infant's developing awareness of its own body and of the other's body as another self, are two "operations" that "form a real system": becoming conscious of "incarnation" (1964a:120). The infant moves from a first "pre-communicative" phase of life after birth where it remains in a state of undifferentiation, particularly with its mother, to a second phase where a slow process of distinction between individuals occurs (but is never completed)

(1964a:119). In this second phase, while the awareness of the infant's own body occurs earlier than the perception of the other's body, these developments are internally related:

The perception of one's own body creates an imbalance as it develops: through its echo in the image of the other, it awakens an appeal to the forthcoming development of the perception of others. It echoes in another phase, in which the perception of others appears predominant, and so on throughout the development (1964a:121).

This factor overturns the classical psychological position that posits the contents of the individual psyche as something incommunicable: "I alone am able to grasp my psyche - for example, my sensations of green or of red. You will never know them as I know them" (1964a:114). Merleau-Ponty claims this incommunicable psyche constitutes the root of the problem for psychology: if the psyche is inaccessible to others, how can I come to realize that there is a psyche enclosed in another's body?

But if we think of consciousness as being open to others and the world from the beginning, that is, having an interior and an exterior, then we can recognize another's psyche across their body. As Merleau-Ponty states:

Unless I learn within myself to recognize the junction of the *for itself* and the *in itself*, none of those mechanisms called other bodies will ever be able to come to life; unless I have an exterior others have no interior. The plurality of consciousness is impossible if I have an absolute consciousness of myself (1962:373).

A Cartesian conception of the self as an individuated, autonomous consciousness closes in on itself and prevents the

acknowledgement of another subject. Others must be objects that in their otherness define the subject. But in Merleau-Ponty's perspective of consciousness, I cannot be an object for the other person because of the knowledge I have of myself.

But if another's body is not an object for me, nor mine an object for him, if both are manifestations of behaviour, the positing of the other does not reduce me to the status of an object in his field, nor does my perception of the other reduce him to the status of an object in mine (1962:352).

To understand why we are not objects for each other, we need to return again to the world that we all participate in, coming full circle to where I began with the notion of flesh as the phenomenal world.

If "[m]y consciousness is turned primarily toward the world, turned toward things," first and foremost a relation to the world, then other consciousnesses also turn towards this world (1964a:116). The key to understanding one's relation to others is in recognizing that the given world is the common ground of our bodies' perception. "If I am a consciousness turned toward things, I can meet in things the actions of another and find in them a meaning, because they are themes of possible activity for my own body" (1964a:117). It is because we are all in the same world, that "[f]rom the depths of my subjectivity I see another subjectivity invested with equal rights appear..." (1964a:17-18). The behaviour of the other subjectivity takes place in my perceptual field.

To illustrate this Merleau-Ponty describes

"transitivism," a phenomenon whereby one attributes to others what actually belongs to oneself. He gives as an example when a patient will pity another patient for having had a crisis which the first patient actually suffered, or when hypochondriacs look for signs of illness in other faces (1964a:148). We all think of examples of such projections, from mimicking the facial expression of one who is telling us an absorbing or frightening story, to experiencing anxiety when someone close to us is undergoing a stressful ordeal. Merleau-Ponty explains: "All that we are, all that happens to us can furnish us with explanatory categories and in every case plays the role of exploratory tools for knowing the other" (1964a:148). Our own experience makes us sensitive to what happens to the other, "and makes us seek in the other the equivalent of, or something that corresponds to, what has happened to us" (1964a:148).

Again, this is a manifestation of the flesh or body-subject removing the boundaries between inside and outside. Just as the object is part of the subject, the other is in the self. We find in ourselves the behaviours, expressions, and sentiments that we see in the other, and conversely have the ability to sympathize with the other's behaviours, expressions, and sentiments, because they are experienced by us as well. These exchanges always take place in a shared world. In essence, my perspective of the world "has no definite limits, because it slips spontaneously into the other

person's..." (1962:353).

Merleau-Ponty demonstrates this in a passage that I will include here in its entirety because it expresses what I have often felt in looking at another person. For sometimes, I am aware of the other as another life with startling clarity:

...suddenly there breaks forth the evidence that yonder also, minute by minute, life is being lived: somewhere behind those eyes, behind those gestures...another private world shows through, through the fabric of my own, and for a moment I live in it; I am no more than the respondent for the interpellation that is made to me....how could I conceive, precisely as *his*, *his* colors, *his* pain, *his* world, except as in accordance with the colors I see, the pains I have had, the world wherein I live?...

But at the very moment that I think I share the life of another, I am rejoining it only in its ends, its exterior poles. It is in the world that we communicate, through what, in our life, is articulate. It is from this lawn before me that I think I catch sight of the impact of the green on the vision of another, it is through the music that I enter into his musical emotion, it is the thing itself that opens unto me the access to the private world of another. But the thing itself, we have seen, is always for me the thing that I see (1968:11).

The flesh as an element of Being, the meeting point of interactions between the world of objects and other bodies, is a useful concept for feminists attempting to theorize an embodied speaking subject. Merleau-Ponty's unique conceptualization of the body fills the gap in the feminist approaches that I outlined in chapter one, providing a sustained notion of the body as flesh, inseparable from consciousness, yet thoroughly immersed in the material world. For if we conceive of the body as participating in our

conscious perceptual activity, then it cannot be viewed as an immutable ground of being, but takes up a place among the specificities of one's own context in time and location; of genitals, skin colour, socio-economic status, sexual practice, and age, among others.

But is it enough to simply insert a more contingent body into the discourse of embodied subjectivity that I begin with in chapter one? Does Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh alter the discursive dynamics that discourage women's efforts to speak our bodies and initiate instead the attempt to disengage ourselves from this flesh? In the following chapter I will pursue these questions by shifting the discussion to language and how Merleau-Ponty's approach to it offers the possibility of escaping the inside/outside dialectic set up by current theories of language and subjectivity.

Chapter III

Speaking From the Space-Between

If what one is fascinated by is the image of one body, one voice, one reason, any deviation takes the form of gibberish. If woman speaks from her body, with her voice, who can hear? Who can decipher the language of an hysteric, the wails of a hyena, the jabbering of a savage - apart from other hysterics, hyenas and savages? Our political vocabulary is so limited that it is not possible, within its parameters, to raise the kinds of questions that would allow the articulation of bodily difference: it will not tolerate an embodied speech (Gatens, 1991:85).

The questions Moira Gatens poses in this passage arise out of a concern with women's ability to affect change in the political realm, when that arena, the "modern body politic" is based on the image of a masculine body - the one body. She suggests that we should recognize the futility of asking "to be fully admitted into this fantasy of unity" and turn instead to an ethical vocabulary concerned with "the specificity of one's embodiment" (1991:85). I think she is right in pointing to the necessity of demanding a language that recognizes more than one body (politic), for this enables "dialogue, debate and engagement with the other's law, and the other's ethics" (1991:85).

But Gatens does not inform us of exactly how the language of ethics would grant us the power of speech. This is a timely question for white feminists who are learning to recognize how our notions of claiming a speaking voice, of who gets to speak, to whom and for whom, contribute to the

silencing of others. We also need to ask why our political vocabulary is understood to be disembodied, and whether there are points of reference outside this discursive order to which we can appeal. How do we articulate bodily difference and embodied speech? These are questions that reveal the troubled nature of feminist negotiations of language and flesh, of embodied be-ing and embodied speaking.

In chapter one I traced the limitations of feminist attempts to speak an embodied subject to an ambivalence towards the reality of flesh and its relationship to discourse. In this third chapter, I will question the understanding of language that continues to stonewall these attempts and point to alternative routes that disrupt the closures of current theories of language.

Inside Or Outside?

There is no such thing as *The woman* where the definite article stands for the universal. There is no such thing as *The woman* since of her essence... she is not all (Lacan, 1975:144).

Feminists have written extensively about the exclusion of the feminine in discourse, particularly as it is formulated in the work of Jacques Lacan. With its attention to the simultaneous formation of language, subjectivity and sexuality, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory provides a salient example of how women are silenced within discourse, rendered absent and other by the very process through which the subject acquires speech.

Language for Lacan is a self-contained system, a universal structure that pre-dates the subject. It is into this system that the child, as a developing subject, enters when needs must be put into signifying form. But the subject does not create its own language; it is an order that exists extrinsic to the subject. As Grosz states, according to Lacan "language does not represent the subject's pre-existing intentions or ideas; the subject no longer constitutes language or functions as its master, but conversely, is constituted as a subject by language" (1990b:97).

This occurs as a result of Lacan's privileging of the "signifier." Based on the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure, Lacan understands the "sign" to be the smallest unit of analysis at the base of all representational systems, composed of two parts, the signifier and the signified. The signifier is "the material (phonic, graphic) component" and the signified is "the conceptual (meaningful) component" (Grosz, 1990b:93). Lacan argues that these two parts are not individually related, but slip between one another ambiguously. In other words, conceptual meanings are not necessarily matched with material forms.

By privileging the signifier, Lacan reveals how the subject is formed by language and not the reverse. He remarks, for example, that if one is examining a stone covered with hieroglyphics, one cannot assume the signifier is addressed to oneself in spite of knowing that there is another

subject who wrote them, because they cannot be deciphered. But the hieroglyphics can be defined as signifiers because they are related to each of the other signifiers. Thus it is the relation of the signifiers to each other that constitute the subject: "...by that very fact, this subject - which was previously nothing if not a subject coming into being - solidifies into a signifier" (Lacan, 1977:198-9). Hence, language speaks the subject: the subject is an effect of language (Grosz, 1990b:97).

This hierarchical distinction between the signifier and the signified is central to Lacan's discussion of the "phallus," and to the position of woman in his text. In a shift from Freud's emphasis on the role of the penis in psycho-sexual development, Lacan defines the phallus as the universal signifier, or signifier of signifiers, and insists that its meaning is distinct from the penis. The phallus cannot represent the penis or its status would be reduced from signifier to signified. Passages such as the following, however, throw this open to question:

One might say that this signifier [the phallus] is chosen as what stands out as most easily seized upon in the real of sexual copulation, and also as the most symbolic in the literal (typographical) sense of the term, since it is the equivalent in that relation of the (logical) copula. One might also say that by virtue of its turgidity, it is the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation (Lacan, 1966:82).

In this passage the relationship between masculine sexuality and language is clear: the "logical" copula is equivalent to

the operation of the penis/phallus in sexual copulation.

The conjunction of the phallus and the logos can be further identified in Lacan's ideas about the development of the subject. While Freud's account of the resolution of the oedipus complex emphasizes the psychosexual development of the child which depends on the presence or absence of the penis, Lacan's account shifts to the concurrent production of the gendered subject and the mastery of language. The infant's desire to be everything the mother desires, according to Lacan, is a desire that can never be satisfied. In order to come to terms with the loss of control over the mother, the child, Lacan claims, "uses his or her first words to establish, in fantasy, control over the loss of the object which gave satisfaction" (Henriques et.al., 1984:215).

It is this desire therefore, that necessitates the child's movement into the symbolic.⁸ Since the dyadic relationship with the mother is only imaginary, Lacan states that a third term must intervene to propel the child out of this state of fantasy into the real world of language and culture. This is the function of "the Law of the Father," a

⁸ In the glossary of *The Newly Born Woman* (Cixous and Clément, 1986), the Symbolic in a Lacanian sense is defined as the order of language, or "discursive and symbolic action," a realm into which the subject enters upon its acquisition of language. The Imaginary is defined as "both a chronological stage in individual maturation that is dominated by the perceptual and the later survival of sense-making patterns marked by these preverbal, pre-Oedipal forms of understanding" (1986:164). The Imaginary is characterized by "the illusion of the possibility of oneness" in its inseparable relationship with the body of the mother (1986:165).

metaphor for the paternal function in breaking apart the dyadic union of mother and child.

Hence, for Lacan, to speak means that "one must enter into and become constituted by the realm of the symbolic - the play of signifiers and the signified and the 'universal signifier' (the phallus)" (Flax, 1990:99). With its privileging of a universal symbolic order, Lacanian psychoanalysis reiterates the historical philosophical distinctions between the body and language, asserting a speaking subject that can only come into being after the repression of the fleshy unity with the mother. Woman's inability to access the phallus and therefore the symbolic renders her speechless:

There is woman only as excluded by the nature of things which is the nature of words, and it has to be said that if there is one thing they themselves are complaining about enough at the moment, it is well and truly that - only they don't know what they are saying, which is all the difference between them and me (Lacan, 1975:144).

Irigaray, however, is critical of Lacan's appeal to a universal structure of language, and argues that women exist "elsewhere" than in a phallic economy of the logos. She contends that the question Lacan needs to ask is "whether, in his logic, they [women] can articulate anything at all, whether they can be heard..." (1985:90), since an acknowledgement of this would challenge the notion that there is only one (phallogocentric) logic. When Lacan complains that women will not divulge the secret of their desire, their

"jouissance," like the silent but "coming" statue of St. Theresa by Bernini,⁹ Irigaray maintains that he simply cannot hear it: women's *jouissance* remains beyond the phallus, a disruptive excess (1985:90-91). Raising the question as to whether women can articulate anything at all or be heard in a phallogocentric logic, "would mean granting that there may be some other logic, and one that upsets his [Lacan's] own. That is, a logic that challenges mastery" (1985:90).

Thus, female sexualization is the effect "of the existence of a language that is transcendent with respect to bodies": the logical requirement of a language that rules as master "and that she threatens - as a sort of 'prediscursive reality'? - to disrupt its order" (Irigaray, 1985:89). This disruption occurs when women speak from their exiled place. To resist being reduced to an effect of language, Irigaray suggests, women should be concerned with "the way in which, within discourse, the feminine finds itself defined as lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject" and "should signify that with respect to this logic a *disruptive excess* is possible on the feminine side" (1985:78).

"*Parler-femme*," sometimes translated as "woman-speak," is

⁹Lacan claims that women's supplemental desire, or *jouissance*, cannot be known or spoken about: "[t]here is a *jouissance* proper to her and of which she herself may know nothing, except that she experiences it... we've been begging them [women] on our knees to try to tell us about it, well, not a word" (1975:145-146)! He goes on to say that one only has to go look at Bernini's statue of St. Theresa, "to understand immediately that she's coming.... And what is her *jouissance*, her coming from" (1975:147)? Women's desire cannot be represented.

what Irigaray calls women's speech, "style," or "writing," from this place of excess. Characterized by fluidity, it is a "tactile" form that "resists and explodes every firmly established form, figure, idea or concept" because it cannot be the object of a position (1985:79). Redefining language in order to leave room for this feminine speech, requires the work of uncovering the "dichotomizing" operation of discourse Irigaray urges women to listen to philosophy's "procedures of repression, to the structuration of language that shores up its representations," and calls for the necessary examination "of the operation of the '*grammar*' of each figure of discourse, its syntactic laws or requirements, its imaginary configurations, its metaphoric networks, and also, of course, what it does not articulate at the level of utterance: its *silences*" (1985:75).

This questioning of the very mechanisms of language, how it operates to exclude the contingency and particularities of the flesh, and then obscures this very operation, is the work that feminists need to engage in, in order to dis-cover a space from which to speak. I believe that Merleau-Ponty's division between "the spoken word" and "speaking the word," and the relationship this has to the body's experience of the world, can contribute to the recognition of such a space.

The Body as Expression

Merleau-Ponty criticizes both the empiricist and intellectualist traditions for conceiving of a language as bearing no meaning in itself. For the empiricist, "the word is not summoned up through the medium of any concept" (1962:176). It is called up by association in the mind and therefore is not the bearer of its own meaning, has no "inner power" and is reduced to a "psychic phenomenon" (1962:176). For the intellectualist the word has no "effectiveness of its own, this time because it is only the external sign of an internal recognition, which could take place without it, and to which it makes no contribution" (1962:176-7). In other words both the treatment of the word as a mark left by a stimulus and as a category which structures experience deprive the word of any meaning (Schmidt, 1985:113). In neither view do we have a speaking subject: "In the first there is nobody to speak; in the second, there is certainly a subject, but a thinking one, not a speaking one" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962:177).

Merleau-Ponty takes speaking as his point of departure and not some abstract notion of language as a structured system. In order to allow for a speaking subject, he suggests that speech should be viewed as a gesture, and so weaves language into his ontological theory of the flesh: speaking is part of the body's active communication and engagement with the surrounding world. He compares speech to the physical movement of pointing out an object for someone else. It is

the act of pointing which directs and creates meaning for the person I am with:

My friend Paul and I point out to each other certain details of the landscape ... when I make a movement towards some point in the landscape that I can see, I do not imagine that I am producing in Paul, in virtue of some pre-established harmony, inner visions merely analogous to mine: I believe, on the contrary, that my gestures invade Paul's world and guide his gaze (1962:405).

Similarly, language bears intentional meaning: as "phonetic gesticulation[s]," words flow out from our bodies to point out meaning for another (1962:181). Just as we do not discover meaning by examining Paul's finger, but by following it to the object that he is pointing towards, so words bring us to meaning in the world (Schmidt, 1985:112-13).

Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the word as a gesture links thought to expression and thus undermines the traditional presumption that thought occurs before speech (or that it should, as is demonstrated by the adage: "think before you speak") reducing words to mere representations of our thoughts. He argues instead that "[a] thought limited to existing for itself, independently of the constraints of speech and communication, would no sooner appear than it would sink into the unconscious, which means that it would not exist even for itself" (1962:177). Hence thoughts and speech are taken up together. Familiar things appear "indeterminate" when we cannot remember what they are called, and our own thoughts remain unknown to us until we formulate them by speaking or writing them. Indeed, it is in naming an object

that I understand its meaning:

When I fix my eyes on an object in the half-light, and say: 'It is a brush', there is not in my mind the concept of a brush, under which I subsume the object, and which moreover is linked by frequent association with the word 'brush', but the word bears the meaning, and, by imposing it on the object, I am conscious of reaching that object (1962:177).

With this example, Merleau-Ponty proposes what is for us an unfamiliar unity between a word and its referent: the word "inhabits things and is the vehicle of meanings. Thus speech, in the speaker, does not translate ready-made thought, but accomplishes it" (1962:178). He suggests that while the objectified study of language makes words appear arbitrarily assigned to things, it is when we take into account the gestural sense or emotional content of the word, that "words, vowels and phonemes" can be seen as "so many ways of 'singing' the world" (1962:187). The function of words is not to represent things "by reason of an objective resemblance, but because they extract, and literally express, their emotional essence" (1962:187).

Merleau-Ponty makes a distinction between two different kinds of speech, *parole secondaire* and *parole originaire*, the first of which obscures this "singing" characteristic of language. In secondary speech, or "the spoken word," an act of expression arises unthinkingly out of established linguistic and cultural structures, like "a worn coin placed silently in our hand" (quoted in Godway, 1993a:31). Whereas in primary speech words are like sense-organs, in secondary

speech words lose the gestural element through which the world presents itself to us, and the sense-organ parallel disappears (Godway, 1993b:391). This language, divorced from experience, or the body's participation in the world, in fact does not say anything in the sense of *sens*, of meaning as embodied perception and direction (Stenstad, 1993:57). Rather, it reflects "the sedimentation" of the originating experience of perception and "suffers from a growing lack of expressiveness" (Godway, 1993b:391). Indeed, as Merleau-Ponty asserts: "[...to be] satisfied... with the established language... is in fact a way of staying silent" (quoted in Godway, 1993b:392).

Original speech, however, or "the word in the speaking," (Merleau-Ponty, 1962:197) is authentic expression, found in children's first words, an artist's creative expression, or lovers' declarations, all of which "transform a certain kind of silence into speech" (1962:184). Merleau-Ponty believes it is this silence that we need to return to:

Our view of man will remain superficial so long as we fail to go back to that origin, so long as we fail to find, beneath the chatter of words, the primordial silence, and as long as we do not describe the action which breaks this silence. The spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning, a world (1962:184).

This kind of speech is flesh, and like the body's act of perception, it participates in the experience of the world in such a way as to render active and passive indistinguishable. But to say language is "like" perception is misleading:

"Merleau-Ponty's account of language is so intertwined with experience that he speaks of learning a new word as acquiring another sense organ. *Parole originaire* is the way into new experience. It breaks the silence, which in a sense reveals that there was silence" (Godway, 1993a:32).

The distinction between these two kinds of speech can be useful for a feminist discussion of an/other space from which women can speak. The notion of an originating speech, by which we *speaking* words rather than use them, and create meaning rather than evoke the constraining power of phallogentric language, corroborates Irigaray's "*parler-femme*," that is, "a way of speaking, a voice for women which is not derived from a male culture and grammar" (Godway, 1993a:22). With this voice, we can, as Godway suggests Irigaray attempts to do, "bring woman into existence" (1993a:32) and thus pose a challenge to Lacan's dismissal of woman as the "not-all."

The Space Between Inside and Outside

Geraldine Finn's description of "the space-between" is useful here for exploring ways to accomplish this project. Merleau-Ponty's notion of the chiasm, or intertwining, of flesh with the body speaking the word and with the experience or perception of the world of things and others, creates a space in-between in the interstices of these elements of being. It is from this *between* that the stable categories of language and thought are shown to be inadequate for

representing the realities of life. As Finn remarks, resistance and change would not occur if "language were commensurate with life, or representation with reality. But this is not the case. The contingent and changing concrete world always exceeds the ideal categories of thought within which we attempt to express and contain it" (1994:106).

Beginning with the understanding that language cannot express the particularities of our lives, but that these particularities always remain in excess of the categories we are assigned, reveals:

the space between experience and expression, reality and representation, existence and essence: the concrete, fertile, pre-thematic, and anarchic space where we actually live: the space of sensibility and affect, of undecidability and chance, of being-otherwise-than-being a man, a woman, a Christian, a Jew, a mother, daughter, father, son, etc.... This space between is the necessary and indispensable space of judgment and critique, creativity and value, resistance and change (1992b:113-114).

This is not a space outside discourse, but one that shows the inside and outside to be continually overlapping or intersecting; not collapsing into one, but passing between. As Finn claims, "[w]e are always both more and less than the categories which name and divide us," just as our lives say more than they mean and our categories mean more than they say (1992b:113-114). In other words, the discursive exercise of naming continually falls short in its categorization of people or objects, and leaves remainders. These residues constitute the space between language and being, or between the

categories we are named with and the reality we live in.

It is the discourse of phallogentrism that obscures this continual turning inside-out of categories and their excesses, since its function is often one of "suturing" this space-between with the threads of "articulated, hierarchical, predicative meanings" in the interests of the political powers-that-be (Finn, 1992b:113). Since this space is constituted by the particularities of everyday life, making room for the concrete experience of one's skin colour, sexual practice or gender, in other words, making allowances for ambiguity, it cannot be allowed to flourish in a polis erected on the side of the One, the disembodied rational masculine subject.

This suturing creates the illusion that language is uncontestable but is all we have. Therefore, feminists interested in the problem of speaking as subjects attempt to escape the impossible paradox of speaking in a language that excludes us, all the while acknowledging this exclusion as a result of its sutured closure. According to Finn, contemporary feminism often tends to assume the categories, the binary oppositions of self and other, man and woman, and identity and difference, stripped of their ambiguity and incommensurability with the contingent realities they organize. It is as though "we are afraid to 'come out' from the categories which, uncomfortable and contradictory as the lives they afford us may be, at least supply us with a place

in the polis" (Finn, 1994:110).

This ambivalence I have demonstrated in my first chapter. Separating real flesh-and-blood bodies from metaphorical, figurative, or symbolic bodies attests to the inability to recognize a space within language wherein we can express the contingency and experience of flesh. Judith Butler's "suturing" of the distinction between sex and gender, and detachment of both from the flesh, points to the acceptance of a universal structure of language that disavows bodily experience and expression. Similarly, a concern with essentialism in which "biology," the "real," and "nature" become scape-goats, reveals an assumption that language is all-encompassing and inescapable, and that the designation of a word pins its meaning down to an immutable and fixed category.

If we could think of language as a symbolic system that allows Merleau-Ponty's notion of *parole originaire*, (the body speaking words arising out of the space-between language and being) we could recognize speech as an exchange of perceptual communication between our-selves and other-selves, and not as part of an enclosed system we need to penetrate in order to make ourselves present.

"Playing in the Dark": Black Women's Speech¹⁰

We are wedded in language, have our being in words.
Language is also a place of struggle (hooks,
1990:146).

The relation between language (in the sense of parole originaire or speech from the space-between) and the flesh (in Merleau-Ponty's sense of the intertwining of the body, consciousness, the world and other-selves) is obscured in much of the work done by white feminists, a factor which in turn helps to obscure the part our own whiteness plays in this obscuring. While we are busily engaging ourselves with how to slip our bodies into phallogentric discourse, we have overlooked the significant fact that our anxieties - concerning essentialism, biological reductionism, and the possibility of a female subject - are predominantly white women's anxieties assumed to be universally experienced.

Consider, for example, Grosz's call to view the body "not as a blank, passive page, a neutral ground of meaning, but as an active, productive, 'whiteness' that constitutes the writing surface as resistant to the imposition of any or all patterned arrangements" (1990a:72). In this statement, Grosz ignores the fact that white skin is resistant to inscriptions in a very different way than black skin, both because black bodies experience the marks of cultural discourses

¹⁰*Playing in the dark: whiteness and the literary imagination* is the title of a collection of critical essays by Toni Morrison that focuses on the significance of African-Americans to the American literary imagination.

differently, and resist them differently. Indeed, by acknowledging only whiteness as resistant, Grosz implies that bodies of other colours remain blank, passive pages.

Toril Moi similarly glosses over the differences in the experience of skin colour, and the difference these differences would make in her work, when she defends her lack of attention to black, feminist (and lesbian) criticism in *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985):

.. this book purports to deal with the theoretical aspects of feminist criticism. So far, lesbian and/or black feminist criticism have presented exactly the same *methodological* and *theoretical* problems as the rest of Anglo-American feminist criticism.... in so far as textual theory is concerned there is no discernable difference between these three fields [white, black, and lesbian] (1985:86).

Even more conspicuously oblivious to the implications of being white in theorizing the body's relation to discourse, is Denise Riley's reference to Sojourner Truth's well-known query, "Ain't I a woman?". In her book *Am I That Name?* (1988) Riley begs the reader to consider that "a new Sojourner Truth, from the platform of feminist politics" might now refrain: "Ain't I a fluctuating identity?" (1988:1). Riley is attempting to correct what she feels is a problematic essentialist stance in Sojourner Truth's identification as a black woman: from her own whiteness, she obscures the contingency of her own location, and of the experience of race in the world. As Tania Modleski puts it, Riley is attempting to reach out "across racial lines, historical eras, and

national boundaries to claim commonality of belief with a black female abolitionist on the nature (or anti-nature) of 'woman,' " particularly when Sojourner Truth is affirming herself as a woman "by an appeal to experience" (1991:21)

These three examples point to the assumption that at a certain point in the process of theorizing the position and activity of the body within discourse, the particularities of the body can be left behind in favour of a supposedly all-inclusive theory. Sidonie Smith appropriately characterizes this operation of "colour-blindness" when she asserts that the discourse of embodied woman is comprised of the subjectivities of those "angels in houses": the bourgeois women. As the universal, male subject is formed through the discourses of identities such as race, class and sexuality, "so those angels take shape through the discourses of various kinds of contaminated women, those even more 'colorful' others who are denied the possibility of escaping the drag of the body" (1993:17).

What Grosz, Moi, and Riley overlook is that black women's conceptualizations of an embodied subjectivity do not, and cannot, look the same as that of white women's, for their experiences of black embodied be-ing and speaking are not the same. For example, the concern with speaking an embodied subject without lapsing into essentialism is not present to the same degree in the theory and fiction of the black women writers I have encountered. Rather, what emerges is the

recognition that language is flexible; it can be broken, bent and twisted to their own ends, to speak black female experience. Furthermore, I do not find the same reticence as white feminists have demonstrated in using such terms as the "subject" or the "self." Toni Morrison, for example, declares:

We are the subjects of our own narrative, witnesses to and participants in our own experience.... We are not, in fact, 'other.' We are choices. And to read imaginative literature by and about us is to choose to examine centers of the self and to have the opportunity to compare these centers with the 'raceless' one with which we are, all of us, most familiar (1989:9).

Black women writers are often critical of white feminists' preoccupation with the problematic of inserting a female subject in the text, and focus instead on the necessity of the relationship between subjects, one that escapes the either/or dialectic. Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, for instance, writes that what distinguishes black women's writing is its "interlocutary" character, "not only a consequence of a dialogic relationship with an imaginary or 'generalized Other,' but a dialogue with the aspects of 'otherness' within the self" (1992:145-46). In other words, black women's writing is different for its "privileging (rather than repressing) of 'the other in ourselves'" (1992:147). Henderson argues, with the examples of Sherley Ann Williams' *Dessa Rose* and Toni Morrison's *Sula*, that the objective of black women writers is not "to move from margin to center, but to remain on the borders of discourse, speaking from the

vantage point of the insider/outsider" (1992:160). She concludes:

As gendered and racial subjects, black women speak/write in multiple voices... privileging one parole and then another. One discovers in these writers a kind of internal dialogue reflecting an intrasubjective engagement with the intersubjective aspects of self, a dialectic neither repressing difference nor, for that matter, privileging identity, but rather expressing engagement with the social aspect of self ('the other[s] in ourselves'). It is this subjective plurality (rather than the notion of the cohesive or fractured subject) that, finally, allows the black woman to become an expressive site for a dialectics/dialogics of identity and difference (1992:161).

This view is corroborated by bell hooks who argues: "Should we not be suspicious of postmodern critiques of the 'subject' when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time[?]" (1990:28). hooks believes that critiques of essentialism enable African-Americans to acknowledge new ways to construct an oppositional and liberatory self or identity, but it is important to note that "[t]here is a radical difference between a repudiation of the idea that there is a black 'essence' and recognition of the way black identity has been specifically constituted in the experience of exile and struggle" (1990:29).

In "Choosing the Margin As a Space of Radical Openness," (1990) hooks claims a marginal site of resistance as the "space of [her] theorizing," (1990:146) a space filled with transformative power:

This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Marginality as a site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators (1990:152).

It is from this space, the space of the between language and being, where flesh is not banished from the word, where the contingency of every-body's identity is affirmed, that I think Morrison also speaks. From this space women can be heard as speaking, embodied beings.

Chapter IV

"We Flesh": The Body Beloved

Beloved is the story of Sethe, an ex-slave who attempts to kill her four children when threatened with having to return to a life of slavery. Sethe succeeds in taking the life of only one: a two-year-old "crawling-already" girl who is never named. She returns on Sethe's doorstep, after years of ghostly rages in her house, incarnated as a young woman with flawless skin and baby-like hair who calls herself "Beloved," the word inscribed on the baby's tombstone.

The novel relates Sethe's story in a series of "rememories": of her suffering as a slave at "Sweet Home" where a man referred to as "schoolteacher" takes notes on the slaves' behaviour and appearance; of her miraculous escape during which she gives birth to Denver; of her marriage to Halle at Sweet Home and his failure to appear in time to escape with her; and of her attempt to put her babies "where they would be safe" (1987:163). These rememories are sometimes shared by Paul D, one of the Sweet Home slaves who ends years of running when he finds Sethe at 124 Bluestone Rd.

One of the most moving moments in *Beloved* occurs when Sethe's mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, speaks to a gathering of the community in a field they call "the Clearing." In a parodic mime of Christ preaching to the multitudes, she calls forth the children, then the men and the women, to laugh, cry

and dance, admonishing them to love their flesh, their skin, hands, mouth, and organs, but above all, their hearts: "For this is the prize" (1987:89).¹¹ Contextualized in a masculinist tradition that has institutionalized contempt for the flesh and its desires, Baby's words stand in sharp relief against the cruelty of this contempt as it is exercised on the bodies of black slaves:

'Here... in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out.... And no, they ain't in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed.... You got to love it' (88).

Her words lovingly particularize the body, itemizing the broken and beaten features of black bodies that were once enslaved: the mouth, the neck, the lungs, the womb, the "dark, dark liver - love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart" (88).

The "we flesh," with which Baby Suggs opens her speech contains no copula, no verb to join the subject and object. In other words, there is no place where the "we" begins and the "flesh" starts. It is the communal "we," that laughs and weeps and dances, a "we" inseparable from flesh. The effect is one which allows both words to occupy several grammatical categories at once. At the same time that "flesh" acts as a

¹¹ Hereafter all citations from *Beloved* will be followed by a page number only.

verb, an activity performed by the "we", it is also indistinguishable from the "we" in the sense that we are our own flesh. "We" is both adjective in its description of the flesh as a community, and noun in its designation of the community as the subjects performing the activity of "flesh." Both are subsumed into the subject of the next sentence: "flesh that weeps, laughs." Hence, without the copula, there are no clear categories of subject and object, the "we" and the "flesh" occupy shifting positions that disrupt linguistic conventions.

It is interesting to note that while the copula is considered the important link between subject and object, it is the un-copulated "we flesh" that constructs connections here: re-uniting the community by reversing the process of separation between consciousness and flesh, the individual and others, and the power of naming and self-possession. In the act of loving their bodies, Baby Suggs' people re-claim their selves from their former white owners, and experience for the first time the pleasure of commanding their own organs and limbs in dance, song, and laughter.

The "we flesh" designates the active, loved and loving body as the starting point for one's location and experience in the world. It acts as a formula for the novel, and is reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty's assertion that the body is "our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions" (1964a:5) or "a thought in act" (1964a:22). This

subtle alteration of conventional linguistic usage, the omission of the copula, is thus so closely related to an ontology of the flesh, that it is difficult to speak of them separately. In this final chapter I will attempt to weave together the strands we know as language and flesh as they are inextricably intertwined in *Beloved* and describe the effects this chiasm has on speaking the feminine.

Fleshless Language: authorship and authority

We do not have to read far into *Beloved* to encounter a powerful illustration of the relationship between authority over bodies and authorship of words. The first of Sethe's rememories occurs when defending her powerful love for the baby she killed: "and there it was again. The welcoming cool of unchiseled headstones; the one she selected to lean against on tiptoe, her knees wide open as any grave. Ten minutes, he said. You got ten minutes I'll do it for free" (4-5). Sethe exchanges her body for one word to be inscribed on her baby's tombstone. "Ten minutes" of "rutting among the headstones" and the engraver inscribes "Beloved" into stone (5).

It is important to note that Morrison's choice for Sethe's first rememory is one that is often returned to throughout the novel, as Sethe persists in hoping the deed was enough to vindicate herself in the opinion of her dead daughter's ghost. For those ten minutes, Sethe believes, "were longer than life, more alive, more pulsating than the

baby blood that soaked her fingers like oil" (5). The suffering Sethe experiences in those minutes is brought on by the extreme powerlessness of one who must give up her body, a body just recently claimed as her own, for the ability to name the child of her own flesh and blood. In order to have access to even one word, to claim it for herself, Sethe must give up the rights to her own flesh; to be herself engraved by the inscribing power of the engraver. Marked as nameless flesh, she is rendered a black other to the engraver's text. His word cancels out her flesh.

It is schoolteacher, the replacement for Sweet Home's original proprietor, Mr. Garner, who demonstrates with chilling clarity this relationship between authority over body and authorship of text. He arrives with a notebook, and with the ink Sethe makes, writes down the slaves' responses to his incessant questions. It is the questioning that Sethe remembers destroyed Sixo, one of the Sweet Home men, "[t]ore him up for all time" (37).

Sethe's rememories further reveal that schoolteacher takes notes concerning their physical appearance as well; a documentation of the flesh, a transposal of body into text that sediments the meaning of black flesh as white text. At first Sethe thinks nothing of it: "I couldn't care nothing about the measuring string.... Schoolteacher'd wrap that string all over my head, 'cross my nose, around my behind. Number my teeth. I thought he was a fool" (191).

It is only when she discovers that the questioning has a purpose that the full horror of his note-taking surfaces. This occurs when Sethe overhears schoolteacher lecturing his students: "'No, no. That's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them up'" (193). It is this degradation that Sethe tries to convey to Beloved as being far worse than the death Sethe chose for her:

That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up....

And no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper (251).

The dirtying that steals the self occurs in the act of naming. As Sixo discovers when beaten by schoolteacher for challenging the proprietor's perception of theft, "definitions [belong] to the definers - not the defined" (190). Garner, the more lenient first landowner, exercises his right to define when he boasts to other landowners that his slaves are men, "'[b]ought em thataway, raised em thataway'" (10) causing Paul D to wonder if manhood lay "[i]n the naming done by a whiteman who was supposed to know" (125). And Baby Suggs, to prevent this dirtying, stops her ears when her owner's overseer brings her news of her children: "...she knew their names. She knew, and covered her ears with her fists to keep from hearing them come from his mouth" (144).

It takes some time for Paul D to realize what it seems Halle and Sixo know all along, that whether whites talk loud or soft, "'[w]hat they say is the same'" (195). The difference between good whites and bad whites is a mere subtly, for it is their power to take notes, document, name, and define, that participates in the destruction of the black self. As Paul D eventually wonders, how much difference was there before schoolteacher and after: "Garner called and announced them men - but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave. Was he naming what he saw or creating what he did not?" (220).

When the power of the slave-owner to name and claim the black body is disrupted, a new space is created where the self suddenly takes form in an altered relationship to its own flesh and name. This is dramatically illustrated when Baby Suggs draws her first free breath:

...suddenly she saw her hands and thought with a clarity as simple as it was dazzling, 'These hands belong to me. These *my* hands.' Next she felt a knocking in her chest and discovered something else new: her own hearbeat. Had it been there all along? This pounding thing? (141).

And in the next moment Baby asks Garner why he has always called her "Jenny." Surprised, he asks her what she calls herself and is greatly amused by her reply, "'I don't call myself nothing'" (142). In fact, she tells Garner that if her first owner called her Jenny, she didn't hear it, answering to anything he might have called her (142). It is only when she is allowed to claim her organs and limbs as her own, to obey her own commands, that Baby Suggs re-claims her real name and

refuses the naming by a whiteman. Freedom to feel her own body is simultaneously a freedom to name it.

The Perceiving Body Particular

Baby Suggs' last years of life are spent in her sickbed "pondering color" (4). Worn out by the "bad luck" of whitefolks, Baby craves the colors in quilt fabric or flowers, since, as Sethe believes, "[s]he never had time to see, let alone enjoy it before" (201). Sethe also comes to enjoy the colors of the objects of life around her: the carrots and turnips in the garden, the color of hair and eyes, and bits of ribbon (201). Whiteness has deprived these women of the pleasure of their own flesh interacting with the world around them; in the process of claiming and owning their bodies, they enter into an altered relationship to the phenomenal world. The longing for color symbolizes the intense desire to turn back to the life-world lost to them by the imposition of whiteness.

Hence it is the perceiving body, immersed in its material surroundings, that experiences the world and others in the ex-slave community of *Beloved* and not a disembodied consciousness. This is apparent in the relationship between conscious activity and the body's movement among objects. For example, we read of Sethe's encounter with memories in spite of her attempt to remember "as close to nothing as was safe" (6). But something stirs, "[t]he splash of water, the sight of

her shoes and stockings awry on the path... and there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling out before her eyes" (6). The thought of Sweet Home is simultaneously a sight, precipitated by the sounds and sights she is presently experiencing.

Sethe's warning to Denver that Sweet Home will always be there, "'[e]ven if the whole farm - every tree and grass blade of it dies'" (36) points to a view of the phenomenal world as always already there, a given reality. "'[N]othing ever dies,'" Sethe tells Denver (36). Even if a house burns down, it might be gone "'but the place - the picture of it - stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world'" (36). Ever other people "see" it, when they "'bump up into a rememory that belongs to somebody else... that place is real'" (36). Sethe makes no distinction here between image and reality. The image is just as real as the concrete material reality she experiences, and it does not go away when she ceases to think about it. The world is alive with things and images, all of which are real.

In this exchange between the flesh and the world, the sentience of the body is not distinguishable from that of the mind. Thoughts and feelings run into and through each other, experienced or mediated by the flesh. When Paul D hears from Sethe that she was beaten by schoolteacher's nephews, he rubs his cheek on her back, where the scars are shaped like a chokecherry tree. and by doing so, "learns" her sorrow, "the

**PM-1 3½"x4" PHOTOGRAPHIC MICROCOPY TARGET
NBS 1010a ANSI/ISO #2 EQUIVALENT**

PRECISIONSM RESOLUTION TARGETS

roots of it; its wide trunk and intricate branches.... And he would tolerate no peace until he had touched every ridge and leaf of it with his mouth..." (17-18). There is no distinction here between Sethe's sorrow, the feeling she expresses when remembering her beating, and the scar formation on her skin; in order to share this pain, Paul D must touch Sethe's sorrow/scars with his own lips.

The actively remembering and perceiving body reveals Morrison's privileging of the particular. This is evident in the incarnation of one baby girl out of the "Sixty Million and more" whom Morrison alludes to in her epigraph, as well as in the simple descriptions of daily life, such as Sethe's work space "back behind and to the left of the milk cans" (73). Similarly, Paul D's love for Sethe is described in terms of the particularity of her body. The narrator relates that he loves her more every day: "her hands among vegetables, her mouth when she licked a thread end before guiding it through a needle or bit it in two when the seam was done, the blood in her eye when she defended her girls... or any coloredwoman from a slur" (115). Love does not refer here to abstract personal qualities, but to the concrete daily and familiar movements and mannerisms of the body.

Flesh as Speech as Gesture

The actively perceiving, particular body of the black ex-slave learning to own him/herself permits the kind of speech

that Merleau-Ponty calls a gesture. At the end of the passage relating Baby Suggs' call to her people to love their flesh, we read that "she stood up then and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music" (89). I think this image is central to the novel's evocation of the notion of speech as gesture.. The speaking body is active on two levels here: the dancing body is itself speaking, expressing in movements what the heart, the organ we usually associate with "pure" (ie. irrational) emotion, is saying. In effect, this speaking heart acts to invert the perceived necessity of the traditional rational subject to subdue the passions of the heart.

The description of expression and communication as the body moving in gesture is illustrated in the characters' manner of story-telling. When Denver tells Beloved the story of her birth, we read that in the telling she begins to hear as well as see the story. Through the rapt attention of Beloved, Denver then begins to feel the story: what her mother must have felt, and how it must have looked. The story is then given shape by the presence of Beloved:

So she anticipated the questions by giving blood to the scraps her mother and grandmother had told her - and a heartbeat. The monologue became, in fact, a duet as they lay down together.... Denver spoke, Beloved listened, and the two did the best they could to create what really happened, how it really was, something only Sethe knew because she alone had the mind for it and the time afterward to shape it (78).

Hence, the speaker and the listener participate in the creation of *what really happened*. The story, a fictional account by those who were not actually present, is nevertheless real. Put another way, Denver's story assists in the creation of that reality, because she sees, hears and feels it with her own body.

Earlier we read of Denver's interaction with the same story, this time without Beloved. Again, the story is encountered as though already there, not something she needs to fabricate, but something she participates in:

Easily she stepped into the told story that lay before her eyes on the path she followed away from the window.... And to get to the part of the story she liked best, she had to start way back: hear the birds in the thick woods, the crunch of leaves underfoot; see her mother making her way up into the hills where no houses were likely to be... (29).

The story is there in the sounds and sights of the trees and the birds, and in her body's communion with these other elements of being. In effect, Denver conjures up the details of the story with her senses.

The narrating of Sethe's explanation to Paul D of what happened to her "crawling-already" girl makes explicit the relation between the speaking body and the spoken word. Sethe spins around and around the room with Paul D at the table in the center, while she "spins" her tale. Her answer to Paul D's question moves like a spiral, "[c]ircling, circling... gnawing something else instead of getting to the point" (162). In fact, Sethe knows that the circle around the room and the

subject will remain one, "she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask" (163).

The body as expression is again poignantly illustrated in the rememories of living as slaves when the voices of blacks were silenced, sometimes very literally by mouth bits. When Paul D remembers the work camp he is sent to where he takes up his place in a chain gang of runaway slaves, the narrator relates: "Not one spoke to the other. At least not with words. The eyes had to tell what there was to tell: 'Help me this mornin; 's bad'; 'I'm a make it'; 'New man'; 'Steady now steady'" (107). In the quarry the men spoke with their sledge hammers, beating and singing,

garbling the words so their syllables yielded up other meanings. They sang the women they knew; the children they had been.... They sang of bosses and masters and misses; of mules and dogs and the shamelessness of life.... Of pork in the woods; meal 'n the pan; fish on the line; cane, rain and rocking chairs (108).

It is significant that at times the smoothness of our experience of reading the text is disrupted by the omission of certain words. For example, the "of" in "[t]hey sang of bosses" is not present in "[t]hey sang the women." This frequently happens elsewhere in the text: Denver is grateful to Grandma Baby, for, as the narrator relates, "[s]he told me all my daddy's things" (209); Beloved tells Denver "[t]his is the place I am" (123). The absence here of "about" "of" or "where" subtly but significantly alters the meaning, pointing to the fact that the conventional use of language acts as a

screen. As Merleau-Ponty writes: "language is a power for error, since it cuts the continuous tissue that joins us vitally to the things and to the past and is installed between ourselves and that tissue like a screen" (1968:125). In these examples the screen is removed.

The effect is similar to that of "we flesh": meaning is created in the movement of words across grammatical categories. Grandma Baby did not tell Denver about her Daddy's things, she told her the things themselves, as though presenting her with them rather than communicating about them. Similarly, Beloved is not in the place where her body takes up space, but rather she *is* the place.

Manipulative, Masked and Unmasking

The most valuable point of entry into the question of cultural (or racial) distinction, the one most fraught, is its language - its unpoliced, seditious, confrontational, manipulative, inventive, disruptive, masked and unmasking language (Morrison, 1989:11).

I believe Morrison's re-ordering of linguistic conventions is instrumental in creating a new space, a space-between, which allows the flesh to speak and be spoken by revealing the intertwining of categories we have come to think of as distinct. The removal of significant linking words vitally transposes the sentence, and manages to subvert the simultaneous discursive and physical violence of white dominion over black bodies particularly as it is exercised in the distinction between subject and object.

The place in the novel where this function of "unmasking" is most apparent is in several chapters towards the end where we read the "unspeakable thoughts unspoken" (199) of the three women in the house at 124. "Masked," because as Stamp Paid, the ex-slave responsible for completing Sethe's escape, discovers on several occasions while attempting to knock, the voices surrounding the house are "recognizable but undecipherable" (199); "unmasking" because the representation of the unrepresentable, or the speaking of the unspoken, expresses the unheard desires of the black woman.

At this point in *Beloved*, Sethe and her daughters, Beloved and Denver, have excluded the outside world from their lives. Sethe no longer works at Sawyer's restaurant, choosing instead to spend her time with Beloved, and her energy on convincing Beloved of the powerful love that compelled her to kill her own daughter. 124 is getting louder. Stamp Paid, listening at the door, decides that "the undecipherable language clamoring around the house [is] the mumbling of the black and angry dead" (198), but mixed in with these voices are "the thoughts of the women of 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken" (199). The voices are "roaring" (181) and Stamp cannot tell to whom or about whom they are speaking; the meaning remains "outside his mind's reach" (172):

The speech wasn't nonsensical, exactly, nor was it tongues. But something was wrong with the order of the words and he couldn't describe or cipher it to save his life. All he could make out was the word 'mine' (172).

There is an important distinction made here between speaking in tongues, and speaking words in the wrong order. The voices are not speaking in an unfamiliar or "nonsensical" dialect, but are altering our own language, masking its meaning for Stamp Paid. I interpret this as a re-ordering of the grammar of language; a refusal of the subject/object categories that permit the authorship/authority function of discourse. The significance of Stamp Paid recognizing the word "mine," I think rests in his intimate knowledge of what it means for an ex-slave to possess something fully, to claim what is your own.

The unspoken, unspeakable thoughts are narrated in three monologues, one for each of the women, and a fourth passage where all three voices are mixed together and often indistinguishable. Sethe thinks of the return of her daughter Beloved, turning over in her mind the memories she no longer has to remember because she believes Beloved has come back in the flesh to exonerate her. Denver relates her fear of her mother, of the thing in her "that makes it all right to kill her children," (206) as well as her hope for the return of her "daddy," and her love for Beloved. In the third of these chapters, we read Beloved's thoughts, in halting phrases and sentences without punctuation, of the journey through the middle passage, and of her longing for Sethe to smile at her. The voices join in the last of these brief chapters: a culmination of mutual desire in a sing-song style of

alternating questions and responses.

The confusion of Beloved's "unspoken" thoughts arise from ambiguous references to people "crouching" in a slave-holding ship, to dead bodies being pushed over the deck, and to a woman whose face Beloved desires for herself. In the end, in a passage that appears to be reminiscent of the moment Sethe, Paul D and Denver return from the carnival to find Beloved sitting against a tree stump, this woman's identity is confirmed as Sethe:

I am not dead I sit the sun closes my eyes
when I open them I see the face I lost Sethe's is
the face that left me Sethe sees me see her and I
see the smile her smiling face is the place for me
it is the face I lost she is my face smiling at
me doing it at last a hot thing now we can
join a hot thing (213).

The ambiguous identities, the confusion caused by the deviation from linguistic norms, and the intense expression of desire, particularly in the last two of these chapters, tend to disturb many of *Beloved's* critics. Barbara Schapiro, for example, insists that the craving to be recognized by the other renders necessary a defensive "shell" to protect the self from a dissolution of boundaries between oneself and the other (1991:201). Schapiro uses the "unspeakable thoughts unspoken" passages to argue that "[t]he hunger for recognition... may be so overwhelming that it threatens to swallow up the other and the self, destroying all boundaries in one total annihilation" (1991:201).

David Lawrence similarly interprets the expressions of

desire between the women. He asserts that Beloved "acts as an embodiment of uninhibited desire" with an insatiable appetite for "the life and love that was denied her" (1991:195). The fragmented discursive self-representation that this desire promotes, "articulated without clearly established frames of reference - inside and outside, past and present, cause and effect," Lawrence argues, threatens to destroy Beloved by continually "obfuscat[ing] the boundary between self and other" (1991:196). Indeed, Lawrence goes so far as to suggest that the fusion of identity alluded to in the refrain at the end of the fourth chapter:

You are mine
 You are mine
 You are mine (217)

"can only be destructive, as Sethe and Denver lose themselves in the overpowering 'mine' asserted by Beloved" (1991:196). He concludes from this that Beloved enacts "the slavemaster's monopoly over both word and body," enforcing an "internalized enslavement" (1991:196). Susan Jaret McKinstry also points to the emphasis on "mine" as connoting "a desire to possess the other completely. Such possession is destructive, for the self is absorbed into the other and disappears" (1991:271).

I find this interpretation intriguing for it confirms precisely what I think Morrison exposes with her ambiguous "masked and unmasking" passages: the function of language to obscure its own hegemonic categorizing of subject and object, or self and other. Assuming the psychoanalytic model of the

emerging subject's dependence on the rejection of the objectified other for its wholeness, this interpretation betrays a deep-seated anxiety towards the loss of the individuated subject, and by association, towards chaos, ambiguity, desire, and the flesh.

An alternative reading of these "unspeakable thoughts unspoken" can liberate language for purposes other than binding one to the dualism of dominating/dominated, and reveal the cracks and crevices opening up spaces for the speech of the dominated. For these passages are above all a complicated rendering of women's "interior voices." As Rebecca Ferguson states: "All that is here presented is implicitly not speakable, nor writable, yet it articulates the deepest level of self expression and dialogue between Sethe, Beloved and Denver.... interactive yet intensely private, inexpressible yet 'overheard' by narrator and reader" (1991:116).

To elaborate such an alternative interpretation, we need to understand how an embodied language, the "we flesh," of *Beloved* corresponds to a radically altered dynamic between selves and otherselves, demonstrating the kind of intersubjectivity Merleau-Ponty describes with his ontology of the flesh.

Recognizing the Other(in the)self

It is Paul D's arrival at 124 Bluestone Road that precipitates the process of Sethe's re-membering her past. He

is after all a body from her past; they shared the same traumatic experience of slavery at "Sweet Home." After Paul D drives out the ghost, their individual "stories" are brought together as their bodies are, beginning with Sethe's explanation of the tree of scars on her back. Relieving her "of the weight of her breasts," Paul D allows Sethe to remember the "stolen milk" and "the pleasure of baking bread" causing her to wonder if she can begin remembering things because he will be there to catch her (18).

After they make love, the remembering begins. Their individual memories of the same place and people are related alternately in a narrative that moves from one consciousness to the other through body contact. It begins with Paul D examining Sethe's "tree," evoking the image of the tree he loved best at Sweet Home, and of Sixo, another Sweet Home slave. The narration moves to Sethe's memories of the kitchen at Sweet Home, with a touch from Paul D's elbow, and back again to Paul D with the movement of her ankles. In this way the remembering shifts from one consciousness to the other by the touch of skin, as though circling inwards until they meet in a culmination of memories of Sethe and Halle's wedding day and love in the corn field.

In this final passage of the chapter, the remembering and the sexual intimacy merge into one erotic metaphor. Sethe and Paul D alternately remember how the corn stalks, broken from Sethe and Halle's love-making, were plucked and cooked that

night:

The pulling down of the tight sheath, the ripping sound always convinced her it hurt.

As soon as one strip of husk was down, the rest obeyed and the ear yielded up to him its shy rows, exposed at last. How loose the silk. How quick the jailed-up flavor ran free.

No matter what all your teeth and wet fingers anticipated, there was no accounting for the way that simple joy could shake you.

How loose the silk. How fine and loose and free (27).

This entire chapter attests to the meeting of two subjects positioned in their own stories that are nevertheless inextricably entangled. It poignantly illustrates the intertwining of flesh and consciousness of one self as it meets and communes with another self.

It is Denver's relationship to Beloved that most clearly demonstrates the intersubjective relationship, for Denver has lived most of her life in isolation. Indeed, before the incarnated Beloved arrives, Denver's only companion is the ghost whose infant presence is measured by her raging antics in the house. Denver has no community; her only pleasure is to retreat to an enclosure of boxwood bushes in the woods where her imagination supplies "its own hunger and its own food... badly needed because loneliness wore her out" (28-9). Her world is like this enclosure, an inside with no outside to which she can venture, consisting only of the house, the field and the woods.

The coming of Beloved changes all this for Denver who subsequently devotes all her energy to pleasing and satisfying

Beloved in order to keep her near. The importance of Beloved's "gaze" is paramount for Denver:

To go back to the original hunger was impossible....

It was lovely. Not to be stared at, not seen, but being pulled into view by the interested, uncritical eyes of the other... Denver's skin dissolved under that gaze... She floated near but outside her own body, feeling vague and intense at the same time. Needing nothing. Being what there was (118).

Beloved has satisfied Denver's intense longing to be recognized by another, and when that recognition is threatened, Denver panics. When Beloved momentarily disappears in the cold house, Denver finds that "the loss is ungovernable... she does not know where her body stops, which part of her is an arm, a foot or a knee" (122-23). Her relationship to Beloved has defined her body/self, the limits of which are no longer tangible since "she has no self... [s]he can feel her thickness thinning, dissolving into nothing" (123). Denver experiences this bereavement acutely, having been deserted by two brothers and a grandmother. Beloved is the other who gives her an identity, a reason for being.

What we find in the relationships between Denver and Beloved, and Paul D and Sethe, is not a subject that is given and defined by the object, or other, but a subject that knows itself by recognizing a similar selfness in the other. The "hunger" is to be recognized, not to subsume the other under a controlling gaze. As Paul D remembers Sixo describing his

lover: "'She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind" (273).

Hence, the narrative of desire, of "unspeakable thoughts unspoken" describes the yearning for recognition by others. The identities of the three women do not merge into one, but are shown to overlap, shift, or intertwine with one another. In effect, the other is shown to reside in the self, and the self in the other. This interpretation concurs with Stamp Paid's ruminations about white and black relations: "Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood" (198). In a way, he realizes, they are right, since the more black people tried to convince white people that there was no jungle, "the deeper and more tangled the jungle grew inside" (198). But it was a jungle whitepeople planted in them, and as it grew it spread back to those who created it: "Changed and altered them. Made them bloody, silly, worse than even they wanted to be, so scared were they of the jungle they had made. The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own" (199).

It is clear here that the "other" is not somewhere outside the self. In this black ex-slave community there is

no unambiguous demarcation between the enemy and loved ones, as is so devastatingly exemplified in Sethe's murder of her own child and the community's subsequent ostracism of the occupants of 124. Hence, contrary to the common assumption among critics that Beloved is the other who must be exorcised to prevent Sethe and Denver from a dangerous merging with her, I am arguing that she is the part of Sethe that must be remembered in order for Sethe to reclaim herself.

Re-claiming the Self

Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another (95).

It is no coincidence that the embodied form of Beloved's ghost arrives at Sethe's doorstep only after Paul D initiates Sethe's remembering of their shared past. Sethe's intimacy with Paul D gives her back her body (189) after having lost it in the time between her 28 days of freedom, "of healing, ease and real-talk" and her 18 years of disapproval from the community. Sethe has remembered something; what it is like to commune with another and share life stories. This remembering is what brings the baby ghost to incarnated life; a remembering that literally re-members her crawling-already girl.

When Beloved returns from "the other side" (215) in her embodied form, she exhibits the behaviour of a small child, the age at which she was killed. She is described as having "new skin" (50) with scratches that look like baby hair (51),

feet and hands that are "soft and new" (52), and breath that smells "exactly like new milk" (98). Beloved's quiet adoration of Sethe, her restlessness when the latter is gone, and her delight in games, all attest to her infant-like demeanour.

Consequently, when Sethe begins to give in to Beloved's increasing demands, in her attempt to make her returned daughter understand the boundlessness of her love, Sethe denies her own self. This threatens to destroy Beloved, whose great need for Sethe is to reflect Beloved's own being. The fear of being abandoned by Sethe a second time perpetuates Beloved's destructive dependence on her. It is Sethe, whose face Beloved wants for herself, who must allow Beloved to be. When her tooth falls out, she thinks,

This is it. Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once. Or on one of those mornings before Denver woke and after Sethe left she would fly apart. It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself.... She had two dreams: exploding, and being swallowed (133).

In Beloved's pre-Oedipal kind of relationship to her mother, it is Sethe whom she needs to keep her self together.

If we understand Beloved as the part of Sethe that was forgotten, it follows that this re-membling is vital for Sethe's re-clamation of her self. In order for Sethe to once again experience days "of healing, ease and real-talk" (95) and "see what the sun is doing to the day" (201), in other words, to perceive with her body the world around her, she

must acknowledge Beloved as another self. This entails realizing that she had no right to kill her child.

The presence of Beloved leaves Denver a changed young woman. Her love and desire for Beloved eventually propels her to the "outside" where she acknowledges recognition from others and gains the confidence she needs to claim a self-identity. After 12 years of never venturing past her own house and yard, Denver goes into town to beg for food and work, and the recognition from the community, in particular from the boy who once taunted her, is enough for her to discover her self:

It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve. And it might not have occurred to her if she hadn't met Nelson Lord.... All he did was smile and say, 'Take care of yourself, Denver,' but she heard it as though it were what language was made for (252).

When Paul D meets her for the first time after his own retreat from 124, he describes her as "[t]hinner, steady in the eyes" with a smile, "no longer the sneer he remembered" (266). Her body reflects her new-found relationship to the world, others and herself.

But for Sethe, it is only the second loss of Beloved that initiates what will presumably be a slow recovery to ownership of her own self. In the final section of the novel, we read that 124 is now silent with a "hunger" that has worn out Sethe and Beloved (239). The playful games, Denver notes, have turned into fights, as Beloved accuses Sethe of "leaving her behind" (241) and Sethe seeks to defend her horrible choice in

the wood shed. Beloved's increasing demands slowly beat Sethe into humiliating submission until Denver stops worrying about the possibility of Sethe killing again, and begins to fear Beloved will harm Sethe: "The flesh between her mother's forefinger and thumb was thin as china silk" while Beloved got "bigger, plumper by the day" (239). In this uncanny reversal of the psychoanalytic plot, it is the mother who is in danger of being engulfed by the daughter, as Denver realizes one day: "...if Sethe didn't wake up one morning and pick up a knife, Beloved might" (242).

Sethe must realize that she has been unable to recognize and acknowledge Beloved as another subject. It is not that she needs to see her as an other to be separated from and marked apart. Beloved does not embody otherness, but the part of Sethe's self that must be re-membered, recognized, named, so that Sethe can reclaim herself. Sethe must acknowledge that she has no right to kill her children to keep them safe. As Ella remarks to the other women of the community: "what's fair ain't necessarily right" (256).

It is not until forced to make the decision all over again that Sethe works this out for herself. In her attempt to kill the white man she thinks is schoolteacher, whom it turns out is merely Mr. Bodwin arriving to pick up Denver for work, Sethe completes the recognition of Beloved as another self, acknowledging in a kind of reenactment of history, that killing Beloved is not the right solution. And, as Paul D

reminds her, in the end, Sethe is her own best thing, not Beloved. Her wondering "'Me? Me?'" in response, indicates acceptance (273).

In the end, Beloved takes the shape of a pregnant woman, the ultimate symbolic reference to otherness in the self. She is not the other that must be excluded or the ghost that needs to be exorcised, but the re-membered past now driven away by Sethe's ability see her part in it and name her experience. Beloved's embodied presence is no longer necessary. Sethe's decision returns her to Paul D, Denver, and her community.

Baptized by Sound

We are left with the question: what is it that prevents Sethe from killing her daughter a second time, when she has never wavered from her insistence that she did the right thing in killing her baby out of love?

When the women of the community arrive at 124, each with her own memories of ghosts and grief, they do not immediately know how to drive out the ghost that was rumoured to be beating up Sethe. Denver watches them from the porch, then hears their prayer. When the women stop praying, we read that they "took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like" (259).

The "sound" is heard by Sethe and Beloved and they emerge from the house to see "the rapt faces of thirty neighborhood

women" (261) whose voices:

searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash (261).

In a scene reminiscent of Baby Suggs' calling together her people in the Clearing, the "we flesh" is again evoked, this time, I believe, to remind Sethe of what it is she has forgotten: the "sound" of her twenty-eight days of communion with others in freedom, a pre-linguistic order where the categories are not the same, not distinct, not belonging to either the dominating or dominated. There is no other here, no subject/object dichotomy. Rather, the subject is shown to be the object simultaneously and the other is shown to be a part of the self.

Sethe is baptized into this sound that is once again threatened by a whiteman, whom Sethe thinks "is coming for her best thing" (262). This time, she risks losing Beloved by flying at him, but Denver and the women intervene. It is the wave of sound, a language of the flesh without copulas, powerful enough to break the authorship/authority purpose of words, that saves Sethe.

Concluding Thoughts

I have attempted to trace the operation of "we flesh" throughout *Beloved*: in the wresting of ownership and the power

of naming from the definers; in the love of the body perceiving things, people, and memories; in the "masked" and "unmasking" expressions of desire; and in the relationships between selves and other-selves. All of these point to the effects of "we flesh" to expose the falsity of distinct and incommensurable categories within language and thought.

It is clear from this discussion that speaking of the subversive potential of the "we flesh" in the very terms it destabilizes can be an awkward exercise. Writing about the "other(in the)self" does not adequately express the chiasmic relationship between individuals that Morrison so melodiously illustrates with Sethe and Paul D's intimacy. But at the same time, Morrison manages to express with the words of our language, a resistance to the hierarchical ordering of dualisms that positions black woman and black body as other. In the process, she reveals how words made flesh, and flesh made words, can free up a space for our embodied speech.

Conclusion

In a revealing moment of *Beloved* Denver conveys her fear of leaving the yard to her grandmother's spirit, as she pauses before stepping "off the edge of the world" in search of help (243). Baby prompts her with a reminder of what the slave community had to endure in order to claim their selves. To Denver's protest "But you said there was no defense" she replies: "'There ain't.... Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on'" (244).

Baby Suggs' response suggests that the possibility of resisting the closure of a discursive regime built on its power to sexualize and racialize otherness, lies in the recognition that there is no distinct inside/outside dichotomy. Rather these categories are shown to be ambiguous and reversible: Denver has lived her whole life inside the safety of her home; now she must save that "inside" world with help from the "outside." There is no easy distinction between a safe place and a dangerous world, as Sethe demonstrates in the murder of her own child at home. The possibility of oppression is never out there, somewhere else, but as Stamp Paid perceptively indicates, it is within ourselves: a jungle of our own making harbored inside us.

Our struggle then, with regard to racist and sexist power, "is a struggle against ourselves and those we love... a sustained internecine struggle against the enemy within and

not an easy confrontation of opposites - us/them, right/wrong, self/other, good/evil, friend/foe and so forth" (Finn, 1992a:176). Clearly there is no outside or elsewhere to escape the oppression of the inside. Conversely, as in Denver's case, there is no safe inside from which to exclude the outside. As it turns out, the dreaded outside is where she discovers a community to provide her with the recognition she needs.

Therefore, the place from which women can speak and be heard is right where we are. We cannot stop being who we are, nor can we speak in a language other than our own, for "[t]he skin, the genitals, the class, the language, the nationality, the education, the wealth, the good looks and their social and political meanings remain with us wherever we are and whatever we are doing, feeling or thinking. They are who we are..." (Finn, 1992a:177). Hence we articulate our space of resistance within the place where we are, within the language we speak, and with the bodies we are. These are our conditions of possibility.

This is what I have sought to point out in this thesis. I began by giving an overview of the recent feminist engagement with theories of an embodied subjectivity, that take several different and contradictory routes to arrive at the possibility of speaking the body. Some feminists argue that a return to the qualified terms of essentialism is necessary to bring our bodies into discourse. Others argue

that to speak at all we cannot ascribe to a universalizing meaning of Woman, but must continue to reveal the body and gender as discursively constructed categories.

I conclude that this discussion is missing a sustained analysis of the body as flesh and blood, a gap that reveals an underlying anxiety towards the flesh. This anxiety is alleviated by endless separations: between a metaphysical, symbolic or figurative body and the real, biological, or fleshy body; distinctions that leave behind the particularity of our individual locations and therefore merely repeat the disembodiment function of phallogocentric discourse.

In my chapter concerning Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh, I conclude that a theory of the flesh that reveals our bodies to be continually interacting with others and the phenomena around us, can contribute uniquely to a feminist enunciation of embodied subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty describes an active body-subject that does not develop out of a domination model where an object or other must be repudiated, but one that develops out of mutual recognition of other selves and a shared world. As such, he describes the in-between space of these binary oppositions, where the intertwining characteristic of subject and object, mind and body, and self and other, transform how we think about them.

But I subsequently point out that such a view of the body must correspond to a re-negotiated relationship between language and flesh. In other words, we need to think of

language in ways that open the possibility of resisting the dualisms that close language upon itself. If we think of speech as gesture, as the body's communicative expression to other bodies whereby subject and object are revealed to be falsely distinct categories, the contingency of language can be recognized. We will then be able to dis-cover a space for women as speaking subjects, from which we can subvert the notion of language as a universal structure.

Some black feminist writers and critics exemplify such a view of language and thus concur with Finn's provocative notion of the "space-between" reality and representation or language and being. From this space of radical theorizing, we can articulate the reversibility of binary oppositions, and set into bold relief the obscuring (whitening) function of the discourses in which we participate. Once we learn to expose the roots of domination in language systems, we are free to recognize the fleshy, contingent aspects of words and their meanings.

Toni Morrison brings these themes together in *Beloved*. In my final chapter I demonstrate how her use of language reveals the violence perpetuated against the other of discourse, by speaking from the space-between oppositional categories. In the characters' manner of story-telling, gesturing, and remembering, Morrison exposes the intertwining of reality and representation, past and present, self and other, and subject and object. Above all, she illustrates the

kind of bodily-perception Merleau-Ponty theorizes, locating the body of the Black ex-slave in a particular time and place in a history that is always present.

With this articulation of a body-subject immersed in the everyday world of things and a community of other selves, Morrison quite literally transforms traditional language structures, and allows the "unspeakable" to be spoken. The unrepresentable desires of black women, are, in the end, represented for the reader. Once again, we are presented with categories that run into each other: what is unspeakable can and *is* being spoken.

In the final passage of *Beloved* the narrator informs us that "[t]his is not a story to pass on" (275). Yet the incarnation of a forgotten dead girl is a story that Morrison does pass on. Indeed, it is in the telling of a story too horrible to be told, that the forgotten girl is re-membered and laid to rest. The ambiguity of the narrator's insistence anticipates our remembering.

Feminists concerned with articulating an embodied subjectivity, or theorizing women's experience with/in bodies that find themselves on the wrong side of language and discourses, would do well to look for solutions in these ambiguous spaces. This is the most significant contribution that Morrison and Merleau-Ponty can make to speaking an embodied subject: we do not have to believe in the distinct categories given to us to suture and obscure differences

arising from the contingencies of flesh. To reiterate bell hooks' refrain: "Language is also a place of struggle" (1990:146). Words wedded to flesh serve as our condition of possibility.

In the spaces where the terms of flesh and words, being and speaking, and selves and other-selves, intertwine and commingle, women's embodied speech cannot be silenced. These spaces are ambiguous, but only dis-comforting to those who cannot or will not allow their creative and revolutionary potential to overcome the oppressive operation of binary thinking. In the words of Audre Lorde:

I'm saying that we must never close our eyes to the terror, to the chaos which is Black which is creative which is female which is dark which is rejected which is messy which is.... Sinister, smelly, erotic, confused, upsetting... (1984:101).

References

- Alcoff, Linda
1988 "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-structuralism: The identity crisis in feminist theory." *Signs*. 13 (3):405-436.
- Berg, Maggie
1988 "Escaping the cave: Luce Irigaray and her feminist critics." Pp. 62-76 in Gary Wihl and David Williams (eds.), *Literature and Ethics*. Toronto: Toronto University Press
- Bigwood, Carol
1993 *Earth Muse: Feminism, Nature, and Art*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press
- Bordo, Susan
1992 "Postmodern Subjects, Postmodern Bodies." *Feminist Studies* 18 (1):159-175.
- Braidotti, Rosi
1989 "The politics of ontological difference." Pp. 89-105 in Teresa Brennan (ed.), *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge
- 1993 "Embodiment, Sexual Difference, and the Nomadic Subject." *Hypatia* 8 (1):1-13.
- Butler, Judith
1990 *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge
- 1992 "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism.'" Pp.3-21 in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (eds.), *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York: Routledge
- 1993 *Bodies That Matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"*. New York: Routledge
- Cixous, Hélène
1980 "Sorties." Pp. 90-98 in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*. New York: Schocken Books
- Cixous, Hélène, and Catherine Clément
1986 *The Newly Born Woman*. Betsy Wing (trans.) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Davies, Carole Boyce
 1991 "Mother Right/Write Revisited: Beloved and Dessa Rose and the Construction of Motherhood in Black Women's Fiction." Pp. 44-57 in Brenda O.Daly and Maureen T. Reddy (eds.), *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press
- Eagleton, Terry
 1993 "It is not quite true that I have a body, and not quite true that I am one either." *London Review of Books* 15 (10):7-8.
- Ferguson, Rebecca
 1991 "History, Memory and Language in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." Pp. 109-127 in Susan Sellers (ed.), *Feminist Criticism: Theory and Practice*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press
- Finn, Geraldine
 1992a "The Politics of Contingency: The Contingency of Politics - On the Political Implications of Merleau-Ponty's Ontology of the Flesh." Pp. 171-188 in Thomas W. Busch and Shaun Gallagher (eds.), *Merleau-Ponty, Hermeneutics, and Postmodernism*. Albany: State University of New York Press
- 1992b "The Politics of Spirituality: The Spirituality of Politics." Pp. 111-122 in Philippa Berry and Andrew Wernick (eds.), *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion*. London: Routledge
- 1994 "A Feminist Approach to Applied Ethics." Pp. 101-116 in Eleanor Godway and Geraldine Finn (eds.), *Who Is This We? Absence of Community*. Montreal: Black Rose Books (forthcoming)
- Flax, Jane
 1990a "Signifying the Father's Desire: Lacan in a Feminist's Gaze." Pp. 109-119 in Patrick Colm Hogen and Lalita Pandit (eds.), *Criticism and Lacan: Essays and Dialogue on Language Structure and the Unconscious*. Georgia: University of Georgia Press
- 1990b *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Fuss, Diana J.
 1989 "'Essentially Speaking': Luce Irigaray's Language of Essence." *Hypatia* 3 (3):62-80.

- Gallop, Jane
 1985 *Reading Lacan*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press
- 1988 "Lip Service." Pp.92-100 in *Thinking Through the Body*. New York: Columbia University Press
- Gatens, Moira
 1991 "Corporeal representation in/and the body politic." Pp. 79-87 in Rosalyn Disprose and Robyn Ferrell (eds.), *Cartographies: Poststructuralism and the Mapping of Bodies and Spaces*. North Sydney: Allen & Unwin
- Godway, Eleanor
 1993a "Phenomenology and the Frontiers of Experience: Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray." *Historical Reflections* 19 (1):17-33.
- 1993b "Wild being, the prepredicative and expression: How Merleau-Ponty uses phenomenology to develop an ontology." *Man and World* 26:389-401.
- Goldenberg, Naomi
 1990 *Returning Words to Flesh: Feminism, Psychoanalysis and the Resurrection of the Body*. Boston: Beacon Press
- Grosz, Elizabeth
 1990a "Inscriptions and body-maps: representations and the corporeal." Pp. 62-74 in Terry Threadgold and Anne Cranny-Francis (eds.), *Feminine, Masculine and Representation*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin
- 1990b *Jacques Lacan: A feminist introduction*. New York: Routledge
- 1991 "Introduction." *Hypatia* 6 (3):1-3.
- Henriques, Julian, and Wendy Hollway et.al. (eds.)
 1984 *Changing the Subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity*. New York: Methuen & Co. Ltd.
- hooks, bell
 1990 *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics*. Toronto: Between the Lines
- Irigaray, Luce
 1985 *This Sex Which Is not One*. C. Porter with C. Burke (trans.), Ithaca: Cornell University Press

- Jardine, Alice A.
 1985 *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press
- Kirby, Vicki
 1989 "Corporeographies." *Inscriptions* 5:103-119.
- 1991 "Corporeal Habits: Addressing Essentialism Differently." *Hypatia* 6 (3):4-24.
- 1992 "Addressing Essentialism Differently...Some Thoughts on the Corpo-real." *University of Waikato Women's Studies Occasional Paper Series*. New Zealand: University of Waikato, 4:1-23.
- Lacan, Jacques
 1966 "The Meaning of the Phallus." Pp. 74-85 in Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds.), *Feminine Sexuality*. New York: Pantheon Books
- 1975 "God and the Jouissance of The Woman." Pp. 137-148 in Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds.), *Feminine Sexuality*. New York: Pantheon Books
- 1977 *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*. London: Hogarth Press
- de Lauretis, Teresa
 1984 *Alice Doesn't*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- 1990 *Sexual Difference: A theory of socio-symbolic practice*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- Lawrence, David
 1991 "Fleshly Ghosts and Ghostly Flesh: The Word and the Body in Beloved." *Studies in American Fiction* 19 (2):189-201.
- Lorde, Audre
 1984 *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. New York: The Crossing Press
- Madison, G. B.
 1992 "Did Merleau-Ponty Have a Theory of Perception?" Pp. 83-108 in Thomas W. Busch and Shaun Gallagher (eds.), *Merleau-Ponty, Hermeneutics, and Postmodernism*. New York: State University of New York Press

- McKinstry, Susan Jaret
 1991 "A Ghost of An/Other Chance: The Spinster-Mother in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." Pp. 259-274 in Laura L. Doan (ed.), *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters: Unmarried Women in the Twentieth-Century Novel*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice
 1962 *Phenomenology of Perception*. Colin Smith (trans.) London: Routledge & Kegan Paul
- 1964a *The Primacy of Perception*. James M. Edie (trans.) Illinois: Northwestern University Press
- 1964b *Signs*. Richard C. McCleary (trans.) Illinois: Northwestern University Press
- 1968 *The Visible and the Invisible*. Alphonso Lingis (trans.) Illinois: Northwestern University Press
- Modleski, Tanya
 1991 *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age*. New York: Routledge
- Moi, Toril
 1985 *Sexual/Textual Politics*. New York: Routledge
- Morrison, Toni
 1987 *Beloved*. New York: Knopf
- 1989 "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28 (1):1-34.
- 1990 *Playing in the Dark: whiteness and the literary imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- Naylor, Gloria
 1985 "A Conversation." *The Southern Review* 21 (3):567-593.
- O'Neill, John
 1989 *The Communicative Body: Studies in Communicative Philosophy, Politics, and Sociology*. Illinois: Northwestern University Press
- Probyn, Elspeth
 1991 "This Body Which Is Not One: Speaking an Embodied Self." *Hypatia* 6 (3):111-124.

- Rigney, Barbara Hill
 1991 *The Voices of Toni Morrison*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press
- Riley, Denise
 1988 "Am I That Name?": *Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
- Romanyshyn, Robert D.
 1982 "Unconsciousness: Reflection and the Primacy of Perception." Pp. 145-69 in Ronald Bruzina, and Bruce Wilshire (eds.), *Phenomenology: Dialogues and Bridges*. Albany: State University of New York Press
- Rose, Jacqueline and Juliet Mitchell
 1982 *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*. New York: Pantheon Books
- Schapiro, Barbara
 1991 "The Bonds of Love and the Boundaries of Self in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *Contemporary Literature* 32 (2):194-210.
- Schmidt, James
 1985 *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Between phenomenology and structuralism*. New York: St. Martin's Press
- Smith, Sidonie
 1993 *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- Stenstad, Gail
 1993 "Merleau-Ponty's Logos: The Sens-ing of Flesh." *Philosophy Today* 37 (1):52-61.
- Valverde, Mariana
 1991 "As if subjects existed: analysing social discourses." *Canadian Review of Sociclogy and Anthropology* 28 (2):173-187.
- Whitford, Margaret
 1989 "Rereading Irigaray." Pp. 106-126 in Teresa Brennan (ed.), *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge
- 1991 "Irigaray's Body Symbolic." *Hypatia* 6 (3):97-110.

END

2 9 1 0 5 1 9 5

FIN

Hence, the speaker and the listener participate in the creation of *what really happened*. The story, a fictional account by those who were not actually present, is nevertheless real. Put another way, Denver's story assists in the creation of that reality, because she sees, hears and feels it with her own body.

Earlier we read of Denver's interaction with the same story, this time without Beloved. Again, the story is encountered as though already there, not something she needs to fabricate, but something she participates in:

Easily she stepped into the told story that lay before her eyes on the path she followed away from the window.... And to get to the part of the story she liked best, she had to start way back: hear the birds in the thick woods, the crunch of leaves underfoot; see her mother making her way up into the hills where no houses were likely to be... (29).

The story is there in the sounds and sights of the trees and the birds, and in her body's communion with these other elements of being. In effect, Denver conjures up the details of the story with her senses.

The narrating of Sethe's explanation to Paul D of what happened to her "crawling-already" girl makes explicit the relation between the speaking body and the spoken word. Sethe spins around and around the room with Paul D at the table in the center, while she "spins" her tale. Her answer to Paul D's question moves like a spiral, "[c]ircling, circling... gnawing something else instead of getting to the point" (162). In fact, Sethe knows that the circle around the room and the