

AT PLAY IN HER CLEARING: CENTERING THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE
OF PHYSICAL DISABILITY WITHIN
IRIGARAYAN PHILOSOPHY

by

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ABSTRACT

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From a theoretical perspective, the disabled woman can be seen as 'doubly othered' within patriarchal culture. Because the disabled woman faces this dual otherness, she is barred from both masculine language and able-bodied culture. By looking at the memoirs of three women who became disabled in adulthood: Nancy Mairs', *Waist-High in the World: A Life Among the Nondisabled*, Simi Linton's *My Body Politic*, and finally Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick's critical article "Bodies Together: Touch, Ethics and Disability," I will ask the question: How can the disabled woman gain a new sense of embodiment and move beyond the able/disabled binary? To answer this question I will engage in a close reading of all three of memoirs, providing examples that showcase the woman's new becoming, which can be understood in light of Luce Irigaray's theories of 'writing the body' and ethics. To this end, in writing their memoirs, these women successfully come into language through their bodies; thus, achieving their goal of constructing a fully realized notion of embodiment for the disabled woman.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

From a theoretical perspective, a population that is physically, linguistically, or psychologically alienated from the dominant culture is said to be 'othered;' marked by society as a non-being. In patriarchy, this dominance and control is exerted by man, who, according to psychoanalysis, as possessor of the phallus is also the master of linguistic discourse. As a consequence, because woman lacks the privileged organ, there is no place for her within language. It is this silence that prevents her from occupying a subject position, thus making her otherness a stark reality. The sense of isolation that woman experiences in relation to man is compounded if the woman is facing another difference, a difference which continues to bar her from entrance into her individual feminine language. Frustratingly, woman surrounded by difference finds herself doubly othered; she is constituted as an intruder who occupies multiple, marginalized identity categories, and is unable to speak for herself. If, indeed, this pervasive otherness erases woman's language and ultimately her being, woman must find a space or a clearing in which she can gain linguistic emancipation. Linguistic play is integral to theoretical space, as it gives way to woman's linguistic difference. Furthermore, play disrupts or undermines the standard denotation of a word, so as to alter its meaning or effect to suit one's experiences or desires in the hope of creating an alternative and empowered language (Childers and Hentzi 229-230). For woman, this variation in language is tied directly to her body; Luce Irigaray along with H  l  ne Cixous argue that woman's language is her body.¹ Thus, simply by positioning the

¹ The theory of *  criture f  minine* or feminine writing was articulated in Cixous' 1975 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa." Additionally, 1975's *The Newly Born Woman* by Cixous and Cl  ment discusses "a woman's coming to writing" through her body (69).

woman's body within language, she is able to create a feminine language that is unique to her own body. By looking at the personal narratives of women who become disabled as adults, there is a need for a linguistic shift to occur in order to reflect their altered corporeality. Furthermore, their fluid identities require the carving out of a space that allows for theoretical play as they adjust to their new bodies.

Through a rereading of their memoirs *Waist-High in the World: A Life Among the Non-Disabled* (Nancy Mairs), *My Body Politic* (Simi Linton), and the article "Bodies Together: Touch, Ethics, and Disability" (Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick), I will demonstrate that by putting their bodies into language, the authors are forging new subject positions that erode the culturally constructed able/disabled binary and thus give way to a new sense of embodiment for these women. Furthermore, this reconsideration of embodiment can be understood in light of Luce Irigaray's theories of 'writing the body' and ethics of difference.

In order to best examine these memoirs in light of Irigarayan theory, one must become familiar with each woman's personal story. The first memoir under consideration in this project is Nancy Mairs' *Waist-High in the World: A Life among the Nondisabled*. The narrative chronicles Mairs' diagnosis and personal journey as she negotiates her life as a woman with Multiple Sclerosis. In the early part of 1972, the author begins to develop symptoms of MS, such as lower limb weakness, dizziness and exhaustion. A college professor and successful writer, Mairs was asked to attend a workshop where she was unable to climb the stairs to the meeting room. This is the first sign of the disease that would irrevocably alter her body and life as a whole. Ultimately, she did not receive a definitive diagnosis until she moved from Boston to Arizona for a new teaching assignment over a year later. In addition to her new medical concerns, Mairs also had to cope with her husband George's cancer, as well as her two young children (24-27). The diagnosis itself is complicated by the fact that the doctor refuses to give Mairs an honest and complete diagnosis.

Another challenge the author faces is how to tell her family about the disease. While her children are resentful and angry at having the mother they grew up with taken away from them, her husband begins to flee the marriage; ultimately having an extramarital affair. However, the affair signals a new beginning for husband and wife as both must contend with their own bodily differences (41). By valuing their differences, Mairs and her husband achieve a new level of intimacy, one that centers on the power of touch, rather than traditional intercourse. Indeed, this is empowering for Mairs, as she is able to reclaim her sexuality. Furthermore, her first-hand experience with the disabled female body makes her an unexpected advocate for disabled young women. In the chapter entitled "Young and Disabled," the author discusses the change in perception that occurs when a woman becomes disabled. She recounts the struggles and doubts that she experienced during the onset of her disability. By doing this she sets out to address the "social myths" of the disabled woman (126). As a means of demonstrating a new sort of awareness of the disabled woman, the author highlights an article in *Glamour* magazine that discusses sexuality and the disabled woman. In addition, we learn that Mairs often gets contacted by young women who find themselves disabled in young adulthood. When she receives such calls and reads articles like the one found in *Glamour*, she begins to feel comfortable in her identity as a woman who has become disabled. Ultimately, she realizes that by writing her body through articles and other books, she has the ability to empower other women to search for their own sense of embodiment (145).

The reader continues to witness this becoming as Mairs takes trips to the Western United States, Africa, and Europe; it is at this point that the able/disabled binary begins to be dissolved. There were problems from the start of the trip, most notably the frustration Mairs and her family felt at having to help her maneuver on the inaccessible terrain. The anger and exasperation aimed at Mairs and her disability does not prevent her from enjoying and even reveling in the trip. Indeed, this acceptance has something to do with her love of the American West.

Along with Mairs' memoir, I will be analyzing Simi Linton's experience as chronicled in her narrative *My Body Politic*. Linton begins this retelling by looking back upon her able-bodied experience. Before the accident that leaves her paralyzed, Linton is a new high school graduate, a young wife, and a committed anti-war activist. Her seemingly ideal life is forever changed when in 1971, at the age of twenty-three, Linton, her husband, and two of their friends are involved in a car accident on their way to an anti-war protest in Washington, D. C. The accident claims the life of Linton's husband John, and her best friend Carol, thus, Linton is left to cope with her new body and life without the support of those closest to her. After months in the hospital the author is transferred to a rehabilitation center for several months. During her extended stay at the rehabilitation center, she witnesses not only a drastic change in her body, but also in her subject position. A free-spirited and fiercely independent woman, Linton finds it difficult to submit to the phallogocentric discourse of the medical institution, which now seeks to control all aspects of her being (4-7). Her life had changed drastically, as she went from *representing* the Other as a hippie embracing drugs and decadence, to actually *being* the Other, coping with sudden disability and intrusive doctors. Although the nurses took care of her everyday physical needs, she seeks to reengage with her sexuality and bodily pleasures. Because clinical information about sex and disability was limited in the 1970s, Linton and her fellow patients meet on the roof of the center to discuss matters of sex, disability, and their new bodies. Although these discussions occur amongst women and men, this is Linton's first opportunity to engage with matters of the sexualized body, which allows her feminine language to emerge.

During the months she spends convalescing, the author is forced to process the grief of losing her young husband and best friend. However, she must also mourn the death of her former body, a body which had provided Linton with a very strong purpose and Self that is evident in her commitment to political protest and activism (1-2).

Ultimately, when she is ready to reengage with the world outside of the rehabilitation center, she faces issues of institutional oppression and power that work to deny her agency and

independence. In part because she has been oppressed for so long by the hospital, Linton begins to see a therapist. Her positive experience in therapy and her desire to work with disabled women is what inspires her to major in psychology at Berkeley. At Berkeley and Columbia University, where she later transfers, she encounters many other people with disabilities; this causes her to begin to look at the disabled female body in a different way (62-63).

This interest in the sexuality and politics that surround the disabled woman's body begins when the author meets Glenn through a friend in graduate school. Glenn is a quadriplegic who is also extremely politically-minded; together he and Linton decide to create a program that educates people about issues related to sex and disability. While this program focuses on both men and women, the author gears her portion of the presentation toward the disabled woman. Once again recalling her negative experiences in the hospital and the institution's unwillingness to provide information on sexuality, Linton embarks on this project, later named the National Coalition on Sexuality and Disability, as a way to help disabled people, especially disabled women, relearn their bodies (79-80).

Eventually Linton meets her able-bodied husband David this is significant as Linton has occupied both the disabled and nondisabled subject positions, as she met her future husband David as an able-bodied woman. Fortunately, for Linton, David is still willing to love her as the same woman despite her otherness. A final aspect that the reader must take into consideration when reading Linton's memoir is her continuing engagement in political activism, as she focuses activism throughout the narrative, emphasizing the disabled perspective as it relates to sexuality, education, and medical care (223-245). By focusing on such issues, the author, like Mairs is modeling successful embodiment by choosing to integrate it in her personal and political life.

The final memoir I will be exploring in this project is an intriguing text, as it functions as both a memoir and piece of deconstructive criticism. To summarize briefly, Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick's article "Bodies Together: Touch, Ethics and Disability," discusses the authors'

practice of shared writing. Since Janet Price has MS and Margrit Shildrick is able-bodied, employing this model of composition, allows the women to seek and emphasize an experience that erases the able/disabled binary. Throughout the article the women reflect on what the different points-of-view bring to academic writing.

The second part of the piece discusses how disability affects their personal friendship. In terms of the ethics of care, the authors both emphasize that touch is an extremely important element in any kind of personal encounter. When Price's disease was in an acute stage, the way in which they relate to the disabled body changes. For Shildrick's part, her friend's illness reinforced the permeability of disabled embodiment (72). On the other hand, for Price, the difficult part of her illness allowed her to deconstruct the nature of touch as she had to renegotiate issues surrounding personal care and assistance. Through this learning process, Price acknowledges that to engage in an ethics of touch that does not focus on individual agency allows for a "becoming-in-the-world-with-others" and the erosion of the able/disabled binary (72).

As an overview of these texts illustrates, disabled women need to develop a strategy for articulating their own experiences of embodiment, as the field of disability studies and dominant culture fail to create a space for the 'flawed' body. To this end, it is my contention that in writing these memoirs, the women ultimately succeed in claiming their changed bodies which can now exist on their own terms, free from the language of negative qualification. According to Lennard J. Davis, a leading scholar in the field, the lived experience of disability and the disabled population have resided outside of conventional discourses such as race, class, and gender. From Davis' perspective, constructing a discourse of disability has been difficult; as many able-bodied scholars tend to focus on the flawed nature of the disabled body. Thus, he contends that critics look at past theorists and critical movements and begin to establish a new way of looking at the disabled body (Davis; 2006; xv-xiv).

One example of this melding of theoretical movements is posited by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, in her book *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, in which she suggests positioning disability within a feminist framework and advocates the embodiment of physical difference (21-23). By undertaking the study of the disabled woman's body in early American society, the author examines the disabled woman's body in a variety of cultural contexts including the freak show, in which many of these women became objects of morbid curiosity for the able-bodied patron. Similarly, Garland-Thomson argues that casting the disabled woman as the Other is a common theme in American literature. However, for the author, this sense of otherness occurs mainly through culture and the way in which the woman's body is both literally and figuratively written into American culture. From this perspective, the disabled woman does not have the opportunity to 'write herself,' rather; she is a mere representation of herself. Interestingly, for the purposes of my argument, the author suggests that "with the notable exception of autobiographical texts . . . representation tends to objectify disabled characters by denying them any opportunity for subjectivity or agency" (11). Thus, I would argue that although Garland-Thomson's text calls for an investigation of the disabled body within culture, the disabled woman can achieve a more complete sense of embodiment by looking within herself and actively writing her own body. However, in focusing on the woman's embodiment one must be cautious in not discounting the influence of non-disabled culture upon her body.

Another feminist scholar, Susan Wendell, in her book *The Rejected Body* places the disabled body within the larger context of feminist ethics. In attempting to theorize the disabled woman, she speaks to many of Irigaray's main concerns including language, corporeality, and ethics. However, despite the apparent similarities, and Wendell's acknowledgment that the disabled woman is 'doubly othered,' she does not emphasize feminine language specifically. Instead of positioning the disabled woman's language as central to her argument, Wendell's focus revolves around her desire to define disability in terms of society and its institutions,

“questions of definition arise in countless practical situations, influence social policies and determine outcomes that profoundly affect the lives of people with disabilities” (11). Wendell’s statement cannot be overemphasized, as the process of disabled embodiment is greatly influenced by social institutions as they act upon the disabled body. The dominance of medicine, especially as a dominant discourse, presents the disabled woman with a variety of challenges related to her embodied becoming. While it is not my goal to undermine the medical discourse because of its great value to those with disability, I contend that the institution itself alienates the disabled woman from her body and withholds information crucial to the woman’s health.

Although all of the theorists I have discussed attempt to open up a new theoretical space in which the disabled woman can become embodied, I argue throughout this piece that disabled embodiment must begin with the woman herself. From an Irigarayan perspective, she must acknowledge her new body in order to come into her own unique language. The embracing of a new body, in this case the newly disabled body, is a highly personal undertaking, demanding engagement with one’s own lived experiences. To this end, in analyzing the personal narrative of the four aforementioned women, I will be using Irigaray’s theories of language and ethics as a kind of phenomenological lens, in which the disabled woman’s embodiment and subject position can emerge through her language and body. Hence, the recovering of a subject position for the disabled woman is a process that demands self-awareness on linguistic, corporeal, and ethical levels. Indeed, throughout this thesis, I hope to show that the experience of reembodiment for the disabled woman can be examined in greater depth by taking into consideration Irigaray’s theories that are grounded in difference.

Ultimately, complete engagement with a theorist demands that one examine the objectives of his or her critical philosophy. In the case of Luce Irigaray, we must first examine her critique of language. According to her reading, woman is the mirror image of man, and is therefore always appropriated to the masculine discourse. For woman, the consequences are dire; as there are no representations of the feminine in culture, she is unable to find linguistic

freedom outside the male subject. Male dominance in language occurs as a result of the phallus; the phallus is the 'master signifier' of the Symbolic Order which is ruled by The Law of the Father. Because entering the Symbolic Order of language requires a rejection of the mother and the language the child shares with her in the imaginary stage, woman is robbed of a language of her own and she is forced to engage in mimicry of masculine language. According to Freud, man has the phallus and woman wants to possess the phallus, because of her alleged castration. Conversely, Irigaray calls for woman to abandon the search for male signification and create a language based on a woman's embodied difference. Such a language founded upon difference is also vital to the disabled woman, as she must find new ways to express her changing perspective and new sense of embodiment. By articulating her new body in language, woman can begin to reclaim her linguistic power *and* sexual pleasure. Perhaps more importantly, she is also able to claim her otherness. While the term other does carry with it negative connotations, it is a necessary first step toward an ethics of difference, which ultimately prevents woman from being inscribed as the other of the Same, in this case the other of man. Although seemingly unrelated to the disabled woman, in my argument, I intend to show how these memoirs can cast the disabled woman as the Other of the Other. As a philosophical concept, the Other of the Other is a non-collapsible form of subjectivity that allows for woman's existence separate from the dominance of the subject who is usually male. Crucial to my argument is the fact that the Other of the Other also clears the way for a new relationship to language, wherein the female body can be situated in discourse. Hence, in writing their memoirs the authors are writing their specific bodies and are escaping the otherness inherent in their femininity *and* physical disablement. Viewed in this way, the subjects of the memoirs also embark on a parallel, albeit a more complex path, to ethical freedom in linguistic and sexual difference.

Along with sexual difference, ethics is also always at the center of Irigaray's work. These two concepts are melded together, as Irigaray posits an ethics of sexual difference. She argues that an ethical, loving relationship is one focused on living together in equivalence rather than

equality. Equivalence, in terms of sexual difference, seeks to position the man and woman as being-with or along side one another, partners who work for a reciprocal relationship, rather than one of equality, which is based upon Sameness. Certainly, the phallic order that functions hierarchically inhibits such equivalent relations. One of the keys to the success of this philosophy is the allowance of time for each partner to adjust to this new way of being. Time and space are essential to this theory as both partners have a responsibility one to the other. From an Irigarayan point of view, an ethical problem occurs when woman must find a way to articulate meaning while man is on the quest for language. In order to transcend this cultural statute, which situates the two sexes on a hierarchical plane, man and woman must put into practice an ethics of sexual difference. Within sexual difference both parties must acknowledge that the other has an integral role to play in discursive changes that are sexually specific. This example is ideal for explication as it speaks directly to my goal of positioning the disabled body beyond the able/disabled binary.

Although the stark opposition between the able-bodied and the disabled populations is often invisible to those outside of the disabled community, the existence of cultural binaries is certainly not a foreign concept. A binary relationship is one in which the relationship between terms is hierarchical in nature, favoring one term over the other. Indeed, one of the most recognizable in patriarchal culture is the male/female binary. By literally barring woman from man, woman becomes the underprivileged term in the binary; her position in this construct leaves her oppressed and subject to the master's language. It is this sense of mastery over another group that is the goal of the binary construction. In defining and highlighting the consequences of the binary relationship, it is evident that the disabled woman is the subject of two binaries, the aforementioned male/female binary and the able/disabled binary. In the able/disabled opposition, the disabled individual is subject to language and the cultural attitudes of the dominant able-bodied culture (Charlton in Davis 219).

In sum, by engaging with the journeys of these three disabled women, I hope to show that the once able-bodied woman who becomes disabled later in life can attain a new kind of embodiment, as these memoirs illustrate the authors' ability to successfully 'write their bodies,' practice an ethics of difference, and ultimately continue to work to dissolve the able/disabled binary.

CHAPTER II

FROM RELUCTANT RETELLING TO EAGER EMBODIMENT: NANCY MAIRS' *WAIST-HIGH IN THE WORLD* AS AN ADVENTURE IN NEW LANGUAGE

Even before Mairs begins to chronicle her journey as a woman with Multiple Sclerosis, the reader is already alerted to the author's new perception of her body. In titling her memoir *Waist-High in the World: A Life Among the Nondisabled*, Mairs is signaling to the reader that it is the non-disabled who are in the position of the other. The fact that the able-bodied population is now the group that is marked by the 'Master's' language signifies that she considers them to be an oppressed population. Thus, by engaging in this linguistic and theoretical play, Mairs proves Irigaray's larger point: a woman's body does in fact constitute the concept of a woman's language. The richness of her seemingly simple title continues to be felt; when we consider that by placing the non-disabled on the underside of the binary opposition, Mairs can "already, in this way . . . begin to reconstruct the world" (14).

Mairs first acknowledges her trepidation in writing her story; she is particularly concerned about the hyperawareness that comes with writing about her disability. Writing brings out all of her repressed fear, yet she feels that she has a responsibility to tell her story. Although she comes to the narrative as a disabled woman, she also believes that many of her experiences speak directly to individuals on a larger scale. Mairs views her memoir as her chance to speak to "common elements of the human condition . . . through the lens of my own experiences . . . I can bring to life their particular significance in terms of disability" (11-12).

Indeed, for Mairs, her focus on the "common elements of the human condition," is a signal to the reader that she is not very far removed from the world of the nondisabled. While one could argue that the overall aim of the memoir as a genre is to highlight these common elements,

Mairs' writing of her own story resonates on a much deeper level. Given that the author has experienced life in both the able-bodied and disabled worlds, she has been privy to two different bodies and two different perspectives. Ultimately, possessing a body that has been positioned on both sides of the binary, Mairs demonstrates how a body can erode the able/disabled divide by creating her own embodiment reflecting her corporeality and lived experience. However, I would argue that through writing her life, Mairs is demonstrating how a newly disabled woman can access and value the language that emerges from corporeal difference. This is evident as she reads articles about women who are young and disabled, and when she receives phone calls from frightened young women. One woman, Jennifer, contacts her and desperately questions, "'I'm pretty sure it's [MS] what I have, what do you think'" (5)? In posing this question, it is clear to the reader that the caller is soliciting Mairs opinion for reassurance. This conversation jogs Mairs' memory, as she remembers the period after her initial diagnosis. She recalls the many times that she, like Jennifer sought the advice of another. For the author, discussing her disease with her supportive, able-bodied case worker gave her the space she needed in order to accept and inhabit her disabled body. For Mairs, like Jennifer, simply speaking and engaging with another woman clears the way for her to come into her changed body:

Like Jennifer, I often need no more than someone to whom I can speak frankly about MS without being dismissed as a whiner. . . someone like my friend Joan. . . Who wouldn't? In a society that prates about, but seldom practices, communication, the craving to be listened to, heard, understood . . . is hard to assuage. [A] cripple . . . must never lament her state, must preferably never even mention it. (7)

In analyzing this assertion, I would argue that Mairs is in a sense giving back and sharing her experience of disabled embodiment. Indeed, there is a strong sense of responsibility and allegiance to Jennifer and other disabled women, as she feels she must continue to facilitate the disabled woman's emerging embodiment. Furthermore, the fact that a non-disabled woman

played a key role in Mairs' coming into language speaks to my larger argument of beginning to erode the divide between the disabled and able-bodied populations. Moreover, these encounters should be read with the theories of Irigaray in mind. Speaking directly to Irigaray and Cixous' theory of writing the body, through the writing of her own body Mairs is able to demonstrate to other disabled women that one can find their way out of the dominant power structure. In the hope of overturning male discourse Luce Irigaray takes up the task of not only creating, but displaying a language outside of phallic signification in her 1973 text *This Sex Which is Not One*. Irigaray begins this quest for feminine language by rewriting a portion of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, in which the space of the looking-glass is one that is very much contested, a space between two worlds. Unlike the naïve girl in Carroll's original story, Irigaray's Alice represents much more than a childhood fantasy. From an Irigarayan perspective, all women are in the looking glass because they are reflections of men, being linguistically dominated by the 'Master Signifier,' the male phallus. Thus, through her retelling of the tale, Irigaray is on a mission to rescue her Alice from a phallogocentric discourse that appears to have no alternative. Indeed, for woman there is no linguistic possibility outside of the masculine subject, because a model of feminine language has yet to be created. The goal of creating language outside of masculine signification is the goal of this vignette and the text as a whole. The appearance of the surveyor character is crucial to this re-imagining; it is he who occupies the area, keeping Alice in a linguistic limbo. By taking over her house, read as the dwelling place of all language, apologizing for his sexual misdeeds, the surveyor forces Alice to reflect on her own place in language; this in turn allows Irigaray as the theorist to ask questions central to a problem of phallic language. Perhaps the inquiry important to our understanding of Irigaray's theoretical aim is "How can they [woman and man] be differentiated in a single attribution?" (17) In other words, she aims to theorize man and woman separately, thereby celebrating their linguistic difference. Part of recognizing linguistic difference from an Irigarayan perspective is developing an understanding of the relationship that exists between language and the individual woman's body. Irigaray maintains that woman creates her own language based on her corporeality, thus, I contend that

by becoming embodied, the disabled woman creates a new language for herself based on her new experience of physical disability.

Mairs exhibits a willingness to guide other women through the contested and under theorized space of disability. I would argue that Mairs functions as a kind of Alice figure, who once free from the looking-glass can serve as a mentor to other women. Furthermore, I would argue that this allegorical story retold by Irigaray illustrates the shared aspect of feminine language and how women can write their bodies together. As the reader returns to the looking-glass vignette in 1977's *This Sex Which is Not One*, the surveyor, the figure who represents the oppressive, wholly negative bar between the male/female binary, once again returns to harass her. This time, however, Alice like Mairs has a partner in this adventure. Alice tells her young charge what she can expect from the house of mirrors, now that Alice herself knows that the house is also the house of dominant language. In addition to language, Alice also takes the time to link together the issues pertaining to language and the body (20). Indeed, with the emergence of the surveyor, Alice or Mairs in this case, is able to showcase her own new linguistic freedom, while letting Ann or other disabled women learn through observation of coming into language through the female body. By joining together with another woman our Alice has effectively overturned or 'mocked' the mirror, thus, nullifying masculine signification. The women are able to exist within a shared language and fluid identity. Once again she emphasizes the connection between language and writing the body. "What I'm supposed to do about Jennifer, of course, is to write a book: one in which she can recognize and accept and even celebrate her circumstances, but also one that reveals to those who care about her what needs and feelings those circumstances may engender in her" (6). Indeed, this point has significant theoretical repercussions. First, Jennifer comes to realize that it is only through articulation of experience one can write the female body. Second and perhaps more importantly, by aiming to provide information to those who care about Jennifer and disabled women as a whole, Mairs is beginning

a dialogue that will lead to an Irigarayan ethics of difference and the erosion of the binary that has separated the able-bodied and disabled communities.

As Mairs' interactions with other disabled women prove, writing the body, while it is at its core an individual experience for each woman, can be facilitated by other women, who write their bodies and inspire through their embodiment. In the end, the once able-bodied woman who becomes disabled must answer Lewis Carroll's question, which is at the heart of Irigaray's theories of language and ethics: "Then it really *has* happened, after all! And now, who am I" (Irigaray;1977; 9)? In looking for answers from someone more experienced, she is in search for a woman to stand beside her while she is held captive by the looking-glass that cast her as nothing more than the mirror image of man. Although embodiment for the disabled woman must emerge from her individual body, Mairs seeks to expedite and model the first steps of writing the body, thus, she is also able to carve out a space for it in discourse.

Another example of this mining for language through the body occurs when the author writes a piece for *Glamour* magazine in which she interviews disabled young women. Once again, by chronicling these experiences, Mairs is illustrating the power and freedom found in writing the body, as the interview subjects discuss their corporeality as it relates to sex and relationships. However, I would argue that it is significant that Mairs does not claim any of these experiences to be universal; she is only laying the groundwork for the disabled woman to come into language on her own terms. Such an example is seen when one of the interview subjects speaks of her hope for the future of disabled embodiment; "as these women 'speak' disability will emerge as one element of their complicated personalities and not as a confining category" (128). Furthermore, this vignette also speaks to my argument that finding one's own language contributes to the permeability of the able/disabled binary. By writing such an article for a magazine that circulates internationally among both the able-bodied and disabled populations, the author is suggesting that the disabled woman's corporeally-based language can exist in the wider world. From an Irigarayan perspective, this episode highlights the wide-ranging interest

women have in sharing an element of their language. More importantly, however, such an article perpetuates an ethics based on difference and different bodies. While I firmly believe along with Mairs, that transcendence of the able/disabled binary is possible, there is a sense of permanence to disability that such transcendence will never be able to eliminate:

As every woman who wrote to *Glamour* has long since found out, breaking free of a category doesn't abolish the realities of disability itself, which may include weakness, fatigue, deformity, physical pain, bouts of illness, and reliance on technical assistance like crutches, wheelchairs, or hearing aids. . . Their lives might not be "perfect" by conventional social standards, but they [are] determined to live *productively* and *passionately* anyway. (128-29, my emphasis)

Despite the immutability of the women's disabilities, I contend that because they are able to write their bodies, as seen by this interview, the women are empowered to transcend the able/disabled binary. By acknowledging their disability to the public, the women participate in an Irigarayan ethics of difference within the wider world, as they have had the opportunity to 'speak' to the magazine's readers on their own terms and in their own words.

As I have attempted to elucidate thus far, central to Irigaray's theory of language is the argument that woman is always already subject to the power of dominant culture. Moreover, language is only one part of a wide-ranging masculine discourse; in addition there are a number of institutions created to police the out of control body, and this includes medical discourse. Critic Michel Foucault articulates the creation of this theoretical space, stating:

Gradually, an administrative and political space was articulated upon a therapeutic space; it tended to individualize bodies, diseases, symptoms lives and deaths; it

constituted a real table of juxtaposed and carefully distinct singularities. Out of discipline, a medically useful space was born². (144).

While medical discourse seeks to control the 'different' body it only succeeds in further alienating it; this is especially true of the disabled body that is cast as invisible within able-bodied culture. To a certain degree, this is true of all minority groups, however, I would agree with Lennard J. Davis' assertion that the disabled population remains the largest unseen population; "the simple reason [for this invisibility] is the general pervasiveness of discrimination and prejudice against people with disabilities leading to their marginalization as well as the marginalization of the study of disability" (xv). Mairs experiences this sense of invisibility when the first doctor Mairs visits in Boston refuses to make a concrete diagnosis. When the author asks him directly for a medical opinion, he says that he cannot give her a diagnosis (Mairs 27). While this can be seen as cautious, and perhaps even reassuring, the doctor is only perpetuating the stifling medical discourse, wherein she has no agency over her care. The fact that Mairs occupies what many view as a 'flawed' body does not exclude her from phallogocentrism's law of the Same which works to bar all women from language.

While it can be argued that the medical system is an institution that seeks to control all bodies regardless of their gender or physicality, I see the disabled woman as a more vulnerable figure because of her status as doubly othered. This sentiment is echoed by Susan Wendell, through her critiques of the medical system and the role it plays in the definition of disability. According to Wendell, the invisibility of the disabled woman within medicine occurs in part because of the doctor's invalidation of symptoms (123). Indeed, one is able to see the doctor's power being exercised when he fails to diagnose Mairs. Furthermore, Wendell maintains that when a doctor dismisses a woman's ailment, he or she is asking the woman to make a difficult

² In 1977's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault discusses various cultural institutions such as the educational and medical systems as the locus of societal power. Additionally, his theory of the "docile body," casts the body as an object that institutions can force into compliance. Thus, I am arguing that woman's disabled body can be interpreted as a "docile body."

philosophical decision. As a means of illustrating this point, Wendell recounts the story of Gloria Murphy, a woman who was experiencing symptoms similar to those of Mairs'. Although she was seeking treatment by the illustrious Mayo Clinic, Murphy's symptoms were still shunned; "she was told. . . that she had "housewife's syndrome and need only to get busy and get away from her children to feel better" (124). Indeed, I would agree with Wendell that the antiquated diagnosis and prescription of the 'rest cure,' undermines the validity of Murphy's lived, corporeal experience. She "is forced to choose between asserting her. . . own subjectively based ability to know her. . . own body" (124). As Wendell's recounting and Mairs' experience proves, when entering the discursive space of medicine, it is assumed that the disabled woman has no agency over her embodiment. However, as Mairs' eventual 'self-diagnosis' demonstrates, if a woman is able to write her body, she is able to know her body and recognize when something is dangerous or simply amiss within her body.

Ultimately, however, being silenced by medical discourse does not deter Mairs from finding out what is ailing her, it only makes her search for an answer in a more insistent manner. The doctor's overall manner, examination, and Mairs reaction to it, suggest her invisible nature within the medical system; she is left to find the medical information herself.

Unlike the previous example where Mairs' commitment to writing her body helps another disabled woman, here the author participates in writing her body by taking control of her own medical concern, by consulting an article on MS and demanding a diagnosis. Ultimately overturning medical discursive practices, Mairs tells the reader, "As it was, several months had passed before, having recognized my symptoms in an article in *Parade* magazine, of all places I asked him, "Do I have multiple sclerosis"" (27)? Indeed, given that we have already established the author's invisibility, I would argue that armed with the knowledge of her changed body she now has access and ability to write and speak through her own body. Since the *she* is the one who has the power and control over her own body, Mairs is able to enter the doctor's office and question her diagnosis. To be sure, such a bold action undermines conventional medical

discourse, by articulating issues that affect her own body and taking responsibility for her own health, and letting its meaning and its journey reveal itself to her. In addition, I believe that another positive consequence found in writing the body is a sense of pride has when one is able to 'listen' to and know her own body. This feeling is evident when she comments, "I can't say I'm glad to have the chronic-progressive [disease] . . . but at least it spared me the emotional debilitation of being thought, or thinking myself, at least mildly deranged" (28). To this end, I would also contend that in being successfully embodied, meaning that she has learned her new language through her body, she participates in an ethics of difference, and recognizes the importance of striving to transcend the able/disabled binary. By identifying her symptoms, she is making strides that aid in the erasure of the aforementioned able/disabled binary--that separates the two societies from each other---as many in able-bodied culture assume that the disabled woman is hyper-aware of the negative aspects of her corporeality, such as assistive devices or physical deformity.

The issues of difference and the possible erasure of the binary emerge again when Mairs recalls her childhood and how young girls were expected to behave and react to situations. As is typical in a patriarchal culture, the girls and young women were expected to conform to what most thought of as 'normal' in the mid-fifties. Mairs laments:

Mostly I was, as I was trained to be, disappointed in myself . . . a girl learned to compare herself unfavorably to an ideal flashed at her on glossy magazine covers . . . I could not imagine a body that didn't require at least some structural modification. I still can't, and neither can any woman I know. (44).

Like Mairs, I would argue that there is not a woman in a patriarchal culture that does not feel this way. However, because she has experienced life on both sides of the binary, I believe that while this does not necessarily make her better than an able-bodied woman, it does afford her a kind of embodied wisdom that allows her to write her body into its own discourse that exists above and

beyond a hierarchical plane. In part because of this embodied wisdom, Mairs takes on an almost Irigarayan tone, demonstrating like Alice that she has chosen to no longer stand in front of the metaphorical mirror; “We have almost as many mirrors as a fun house, to give our small quarters an illusion of space, but I avoid looking at them straight on” (46). Furthermore, we see a glimpse of the Alice character when Mairs realizes she must hide from able-bodied culture, if she wants honest engagement with this new embodiment; “it’s [her body] in need of militaristic response, its own or someone else’s, to whip it back into shape . . . in any case, it is not the sort of thing your average citizen would like to wake up next to tomorrow morning” (48). As this quote alludes to, Mairs and her fictional confidante both come to understand the inherent risk that comes along with new embodiment and both feel for a time that they must guard their tenuous reembodied selves from the wider world. In other words, the author is truly an Alice figure, courageously giving over her whole being to the concept of writing the body and leading the disabled woman toward her feminine language of embodiment.

Just as the able-bodied woman is being implored to avoid male discourse and speak from within herself, I contend that Mairs also asks the disabled woman to speak her own feminine language that accounts for disabled embodiment. Ultimately, by turning away from the mirror, I contend that Mairs is also calling for reclamation of language that is rooted in the disabled woman’s body; “if we keep speaking sameness, if we speak to each other as men have been doing for centuries, as we have been taught to speak, we’ll miss each other, fail ourselves. (Irigaray; 1977; 205). By heeding Irigaray’s call to embrace a feminine language and overturn the mirror, the disabled woman can begin to reclaim and subsequently alter the subject position that has been taken away from her. Ultimately, for Mairs, the gift of feminine language allows her to transcend the able/disabled binary.

While I have been arguing that finding or writing a woman’s language gives her the gift of embodiment, this embodiment can in turn also lead to a sense of freedom for the disabled woman, in the sense that her difference is ultimately valued and celebrated. This value in

difference is best articulated in Irigaray's theory of an ethics of sexual difference. However, it is also important to recognize that this focus on embodiment does not in fact reduce the woman to a purely corporeal being. On the contrary, I contend that because the Irigarayan path to embodiment occurs outside of the phallic discourse, woman is given the opportunity to come into language via her body without having to contend with the coercive nature of the 'Master Signifier'. Indeed, because Nancy Mairs writes her body both through this memoir and her actions, she experiences an ethics of sexual difference by striving for a relationship where she and her partner exist side by side with each other in what Irigaray terms equivalence, rather than in equality wherein both partners are positioned hierarchically.

It seems appropriate that sexual difference stems from feminine language, since Irigaray posits the theory that woman's language cannot exist outside of her body. As such, Irigaray employs the metaphor of the vaginal lips as a metaphor for woman's language. Although their genital lips represent a complex and divergent language, because of the prevalence of the phallus, woman always runs the risk of having her feminine language interrupted (Irigaray; 1977; 26). The fear of interruption comes about because the woman's body is always defined in a phallic culture, hence, her sexuality is never her own, but rather understood in terms of the phallic norm. Therefore, this engagement with body via language is especially vital for the woman who becomes disabled, as she must learn to embrace her new sexuality, and most importantly her sexual pleasure in relation to her partner. By reengaging with her altered sexuality, the disabled woman is able to get beyond male signification, perceived asexuality and the assumption of possessing a 'broken' body.' This, however, does not mean that an ethics of sexual difference is always practiced. In its most successful form, however, an ethics of sexual difference opens up a space for both man and woman to act in equivalence to each other instead of against each other. According to Irigaray, humanity is barred from achieving an ethics of sexual difference because of its failure to acknowledge the most elemental forms of being. Thus, man and woman are always on a journey to forge the most ethical relationship possible.

However, Mairs recalls an affair George had with a younger, able-bodied woman; “He was the one who slipped away . . . into those of another, healthier woman, and she attributes this infidelity in large measure my MS” (36). I would contend that *his* sense of his wife’s body had changed, therefore, George was the one who was forced to adjust his relationship to his wife’s new body and language. In making this point it is not my intention to make a moral judgment about the ethics of infidelity, it is very likely that just like Mairs, George himself also had to process and come to understand his wife’s new sense of embodiment. Indeed, we can see this coming to an understanding when Mairs states; “he learned that remaining with me is his choice. Even now he confesses, “I can’t imagine leaving”” (36). Indeed, this openness to his wife’s altered body exists because of a shared appreciation for physical and sexual difference, as George himself is ill with cancer. Ultimately, I would argue that from an Irigarayan perspective, it is both body and language that cause the couple to become united in difference.

Furthermore, within the Irigarayan model of embodiment Mairs can overcome barriers related to sexuality. Given the fact that she is able to write her body, speak through it, and have it positioned within a discourse, I contend that she also has the capacity for sexual pleasure and agency. This is clearly seen when the author discusses the couple’s new concept of sexuality. According to Irigaray, the woman has multiple sex organs and can derive pleasure from almost anywhere on her body. Moreover, the woman does not need the male phallus to illicit sexual pleasure, since her genital lips and organs are always touching, she rather than masculine language that controls feminine sexuality (Irigaray; 1977; 28). This female-centered model of pleasure, not only serves to overturn a sexuality that is dominated by the phallus, for the disabled woman, it affords her the ability to experience sexual pleasure in locations on her body. The emergence of alternative erogenous zones are crucial for those who have lost sensation in their lower bodies. Indeed, I would argue that this is the cornerstone of disabled embodiment, as it allows woman to reengage with her body and physicality regardless of her position in the able/disabled binary. This knowledge makes it possible for us to analyze Mairs’ reflections upon

her new sexuality and corporeality. Many years spent in a wheelchair has prevented the author from engaging in traditional heterosexual intercourse, however, this has not prevented her and her husband from being intimate. Rather than occurring in single encounters, the couple experiences their sexuality on an almost everyday basis, as the author requires assistance with personal care:

he [Mairs' husband] is also at peace with my body in a way that I am not. He always has been, and now that I can do little for myself, he rubs in lotion and sprays on scent. . . his ministrations, combining skill with sensuality, reassure me that this is the body he has loved since he first set eyes . . . on it thirty-five years ago . . . I am sure . . . that my body has remained crazy about his body throughout its vicissitudes³. (49)

As Mairs and her husband illustrate, those who ground their passions and sexuality in difference become closer to each other. Seen in this way, Irigaray's position on sexual pleasure opens up a space for Mairs and other disabled women like her, as she is able to create an alternative sexuality based on touching and other loving encounters that allow the disabled woman to know what it is to have a fully actualized and sexed body outside of the dominant phallic and able-bodied culture. In addition to being able to fully inhabit a new, uniquely feminine language, the reclaiming of sexuality for the disabled woman also gives her the freedom to continue to grow into both her new body and language. Once again, we must remember that the ultimate goal of embodiment for the disabled woman is the transcendence of the able/disabled binary, which I believe is accomplished in part when the couple strives to redefine sexuality. In creating alternative sexual practices, they reject the standard conception of disabled sexuality, one that assumes asexuality or frigidity.

³ For more on sexuality and disability and alternative embodiment see Robert McRuer's 2006 text *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*.

Until the publication of *Waist-High in the World*, Mairs was primarily known as an essayist, with an interest in the American West. As a resident of the region, she is interested in its vastness and beauty and the freedom of movement she experiences there. Feeling inspired, Mairs proceeds to write about her reflections of being a disabled woman in the wide-open West (181-182). However, when she attempts to have it published, she is denied because “That’s not at all what [they] have in mind” (182). I would argue that what they did “have in mind,” invoked the kind of male signification that Irigaray writes against, in which woman exists for masculine control. Perhaps more importantly, the publishers do not take her feminine representation seriously, as the American West is seen as a *masculine* space, rife with stories about frontiersmen who conquer the space. According to Mairs publishers expected:

pieces built around backwoodspersons and long reflective walks by the verges of isolated lakes . . . a story essentially like other women’s stories with the trifling but possibly intriguing difference that I happen to experience whatever befalls me at the height of those other women’s belt buckles. (182)

Although discouraged, Mairs is able to write about some of her experiences in the memoir; this opportunity to write is not a privilege or a gift given to her by phallic culture, it is instead a necessity of her new feminine language, and she feels a responsibility to write despite the phallogentric consequences. Mairs acknowledges her desire for a “conventional” vacation destination; “the tale of westward migration has always been premised on possibility . . . I moved into an adulthood that I, like other dreamers of the conventional West, could never have conceived: the strangest of lands” (Mairs 189).

As a final point I would argue that Mairs is content with her experience because it has been the “strangest of lands.” Although her original physicality was taken from her, she received life-changing gifts as a result. While Irigaray implores all women to speak and write their bodies, I would argue that many able-bodied women never achieve this, as patriarchy limits their

opportunities for growth and self-awareness. The formerly able-bodied woman who becomes disabled later in life has the rare and wonderful opportunity to dual perspective on the same life. For as Mairs reminds us:

It [disability] does not leave one precisely the same woman one would have been without it . . . It does not merely alter a few, or even a great many details in a life story that otherwise conforms to basic narrative conventions: the adventure, the romance, the quest. Instead, it transforms the tale utterly. (182)

For Mairs, developing Multiple Sclerosis has indeed changed her personal narrative and her Being-in-the-World. She can no longer live her life by the same rules, as the conventions that are at work for the non-disabled population no can longer represent her linguistically or corporally, as she now identifies as a disabled woman.

Although much has been made about Irigaray's alleged use of essentialist language when discussing woman, she is to my mind the only theorist whose work is complex enough to contend with all the complexities of embodiment as it relates to the disabled woman. Moreover, she sees difference as not only positive, but absolutely necessary if woman ever hopes to escape a phallic economy. This commitment to difference is essential if one is to undertake an analysis of disability, given that difference is one of the only similarities inherent in any experience of disability. With her devotion to linguistic freedom, fluidity, and multiplicity, it can be argued that Irigaray's call for feminine language does not go unheard and is absolutely essential to the disabled woman's embodied becoming.

Ultimately, like Irigaray, Mairs is a writer who is extremely attentive to the use of her feminine language, that in writing the body she participates in feminine writing or what Hélène Cixous calls in her 1975 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," *écriture féminine* almost by proxy. Cixous believes that woman also has a responsibility to write through her body as a way of claiming language; "she must write her self, because this is the invention of the new *insurgent* . . .

by writing herself woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her” (2043). It is, in fact, by writing herself that Nancy Mairs is able to emerge from the bottom of the able/disabled binary. Indeed, by writing her memoir and thus writing from her own subjective perspective, Mairs was able to create her feminine language. From the onset of her disease, Mairs uses language and writing in order to better make sense of her lived experience as a disabled woman; “since writing has always formed the core of my identity, the means whereby I shape my life, I wonder in particular whether I’d have become a writer if I hadn’t developed this disease. In all likelihood, I would” (Mairs 9). Indeed, by making this statement, Mairs is confirming that regardless of her physicality, that she comes into being through language. Moreover, such an assertion speaks directly to Irigaray’s theory of writing the body and coming into being through language, the essential foundation for an embodied self, a self that regardless of its physicality is “[a] body without fixed boundaries . . . [an] unceasing mobility” (Irigaray; 1977; 215).

CHAPTER III

CREATING A SPACE FOR CELEBRATION: SIMI LINTON'S *MY BODY POLITIC* AS A STUDY OF PLEASURE, AGENCY, AND ACTIVISM

By continuing our investigation of the personal experiences as written by formerly able-bodied women who are now disabled, we can see that the lived experience of disability is not a fruitless exercise in homogeneity. I would argue in fact, that the idea of Sameness among the larger disabled community has no place in the analysis of the disabled woman's experience; rather, our focus should continue to emphasize the emergence of disabled embodiment in terms of differences present in language, corporeality, and ethics. Moreover, this embodiment helps the woman establish both new difference and purpose within her changed life. However, in returning to my original argument, there is a possibility of a fully realized disabled embodiment within the Irigarayan tenets of feminine language, the sexed body, and ethics of difference. These three elements are crucial for both embodiment and full transcendence of the able/disabled binary. One personal account, in which we can recognize and interpret all of the aforementioned theoretical concepts is Simi Linton's 2006 memoir *My Body Politic*, the text deftly illustrates the positivity and change that is born out of the embodiment of the disabled woman, specifically, in this case, Linton herself.

Prior to the accident, at the very beginning of her story, Linton possesses a kind of 'enlightened naiveté' as she engages in political protest, but does not know the personal consequences. Her early discussion about political activism and exercising one's beliefs and power appears to be almost hypothetical in nature; I would argue that although Linton takes part in these anti-war demonstrations she is not fully aware of the personal, physical, and mental costs of war. Hearing the stories of veterans and others whom the war has impacted serves as an unwelcome, but necessary grounding of her alternative embodiment. In retrospect, Linton

appears to recognize the lack of insight she possessed in her youth; “we knew of men who had been killed . . . and of those who were wounded and wouldn’t ever walk again . . . but we were safe from that. We could only speak out against the injustice” (1). Yet as her journey illustrates to the reader, she cannot truly ‘speak’ about the injustice and reality of disabled existence until she must embark on the search for ways to speak about her new embodiment when she becomes disabled. In order to truly speak of her individual lived experience as a disabled woman, she must write her body. In other words, she must develop a new way of conceiving of her body using language, since the language of able-bodied culture no longer applies to her current physicality. To this point she asserts, “the new shape and formation of my body were set . . . the meaning this new body would have for me took years to know” (3). To be certain, this lag that Linton experiences between body and true corporeal knowledge is present because although she has seen the changed bodies of the returning soldiers, she has not learned how to articulate her lived experiences through her changed body.

After a number of months in the hospital, Linton comes to observe changes both in her body and subject position. A free-spirited and fiercely independent woman, Linton found it difficult to submit to the phallogocentric discourse of the medical institution, which now sought to control all aspects of her being (4-7). Just as we observed in the Mairs narrative, the discourse of medicine is a part of a dominant discourse. Linton’s narrative presents an in-depth view of the pervasive and unrelenting power of phallogocentric language within the medical institution. While Mairs was diagnosed with a disabling condition, because she was not hospitalized during the onset of her disease, the medical community did not have direct and constant jurisdiction over her language and thus her body. Conversely, Linton is literally fixed within medical discourse because of her extended hospitalization, thus, her body is controlled and repositioned within phallogocentric culture. From a Foucauldian perspective, the individual body is seen as part of a larger ‘machine’ that constitutes the whole of the dominant discourse; if there is a (body) or a part of this grand machine that no longer functions, it must be also be made docile. Linton’s body

becomes a pawn to be manipulated within dominant, able-bodied culture. According to Foucault, “the individual body becomes an element that may be placed, moved, articulated on others . . . this is a functional reduction of the body. But it is also an insertion of this body-segment in a whole ensemble over which it is articulated . . . The body is constituted as a part of a multi-segmentary machine” (Foucault; 1977; 164). In other words, bodies like Linton’s are not linguistically dominant because they are doubly othered, because institutional power prevents her from having access to the language that is housed within her own body. Rather, these bodies must exist in order to maintain the hierarchy of institutional power.

Ultimately, in order to free the disabled woman generally, and Linton specifically, from the inevitability of the dominant “Master Signifier”; the author must find a way to put her altered body into language, by writing her memoir she finds a place for this changed body. This new conceptualization of the Self is possible if we come to understand it in light of Irigaray’s theory of writing the body, which centers on coming into language by drawing on the ever-changing, multifaceted female body and an ethics of difference. As I have illustrated above, the lack of ownership and agency over her language and body is what prevents the disabled woman from realizing and ultimately relinquishing her veiled subject position. Indeed, Linton as the disabled woman, like Mairs, must strive for this self-actualization in spite of her current discursive position that leaves her doubly othered, oppressed because of her status as a woman with a disability. Since there is no possibility for language outside of the phallogentric power structure, we must first analyze how Linton goes about writing her body, a philosophical exercise that Irigaray advocates. In my earlier discussion of the language of medicine, I argued that this discourse is a part of a larger discursive power structure; therefore, it is crucial that we understand that the integration of these *two* distinct agents of masculine power make Linton’s goal of writing the body and transcendence of the binary all the more difficult.

For Linton, the process of claiming open theoretical space outside of the institutional control of her language and body begins when she is released from the hospital and transferred

to a rehabilitation center. Although the facility exercises extremely dominant and coercive practices, the space must also be acknowledged as the harbinger for the evolution of Linton's disabled femininity. During the months she spends convalescing, the author is forced to process the grief of losing her young husband and best friend. Despite this psychological obstacle, Linton is determined not to lose herself linguistically or corporally. This battle for Self is one she has to continue to fight because of the pervasiveness of male power. Although she is forced into male signification it is always a fact of woman's existence, such alienation is exacerbated for Linton as the institution takes control of her body, because her body is being oppressed and silenced by the non-disabled population. Such a lack of control is seen when Linton tries to inquire about female sexuality and her newly disabled body.

'You know,' he (the doctor) said 'most of the research and most of our experience is with men. *It's not as complicated for you women, you can do everything just like before. And don't worry, your period will come back soon.*' I hadn't had my period since the accident, and no one had said why or that it would return (12, emphasis mine).

By pushing aside questions of her sexuality and reproductive possibilities, the doctor is functioning as one representative of a larger discursive system that seeks to undermine a woman's sexual function and desire. Furthermore, by speaking for her biological processes, the medical system is preventing her from coming into language through her body. Indeed, this denial of body and language is all the more damaging and inappropriate because the experience of menstruation is one that is gynocentric rather than phallographic. To this end, Linton is challenged to participate in writing her body while living in the Master's house, both figuratively and literally during the months spent in hospitals.

The same kind of discursive power is at work when the author asks the doctor about the possibilities for sex and conception, she is once again interpreted as a non-being through

phallogocentric language—“We don’t have much information yet on women, but you go out and give it a try and come back and tell us all about it” (Linton 13). Obviously, from an emotional standpoint, this is infantilizing and humiliating for the author as she attempts to redefine her own sense of the feminine. Moreover, the male doctor’s aloofness toward Linton’s question reinforces the primacy of the phallus as the locus of all power and pleasure. Given the privileged nature of the penis, one can in turn see that woman is merely a token of exchange for the man. I would argue however, that although one may perceive that there is less of a risk in sexually exploiting the disabled woman because of her seemingly inferior body, the disabled woman faces more dire consequences when robbed of her sexual agency. Indeed, I would contend that because her body is so new to her sense of being, it is more likely that she will become alienated from it. According to Irigaray, man will always attempt to separate the woman from her natural body because “the properties of a woman’s body have to be suppressed and subordinated to the exigencies of its transformation into an object of circulation among men” (Irigaray; 1977; 187). Thus, when the doctor reassures her that her “period will come back soon,” he is silencing her initial impulse to speak by objectifying her within the traditional power structure. Additionally, medicine is part of the dominant power structure that does not privilege female knowledge, thus, Linton is barred from writing and speaking through the body. As a result the knowledge and experiences unique to her own newly disabled body are trying desperately to be articulated so soon after her accident.

If we continue to apply the Irigarayan lens to the disabled woman, we soon realize that her linguistic plight is not any different from an able-bodied woman; however, I argue that the disabled woman must be conscious of her lack of access to language if she ever hopes to become anchored in a subject position and emerge from the able/disabled binary. Thus, understanding Irigaray’s thoughts on the female sexual imaginary are a necessary first step in this process. In the essay “This Sex Which is Not One,” the author articulates woman’s lack of place and space, “[w]oman in this sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging prop for the

enactment of man's fantasies . . . pleasure is above all a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own, and it leaves her in a familiar state of dependency upon man" (Irigaray; 1977; 25). If, as Irigaray suggests, woman is just a token used for male pleasure, then the author, in trying to discover her own language through pleasure, is attempting to engage in just the opposite: she is trying to carve speech through her new body and the multiple pleasures therein. In other words, because of her altered physicality and her thwarted attempts to speak about female sexuality, which according to Irigaray cannot exist in a phallogocentric world, the woman is silenced and becomes an object of fetishization as a result.

While Linton's discursive position does not improve overnight, once out of the rehabilitation center, she begins to embrace her new discourse more fully. As a way to achieve reengagement with the outside world, Linton must retreat inward to reflect on how to cope in the able-bodied world. Ultimately, in order to do this she seeks the counsel of a therapist; however, because of her disability, she has difficulty finding someone who can relate to her without feeling that her disabled perspective is being dismissed by the able-bodied therapist. Interestingly, when Linton does speak with a therapist who is disabled, she feels their roles are reversed, with Linton functioning as the therapist. As a newly disabled woman, Linton is still trying to define her subject position in terms of language. From this point of view, she is the Other and is feeling like she is living on the margins between two worlds. Therefore, because of her new identity in language, Linton is unable to reveal all to someone with the identical linguistic barrier. Finally, the author finds another therapist, Sarah, who allows her to emote and speak in her own language, claiming this feminine language for the first time since her accident: "I slowly began to talk about my present life . . . I talk[ed] to Sarah. Two or three times a week. She dug deep, but always shored me up . . ." (37). I would argue that these dialogues succeed because a therapist's office stands apart from the outside world, creating a space for shared intimacy and language. Indeed it is not that sharing experiences with another disabled woman is harmful, however, it is more helpful for Linton to talk with a third-party when she is looking for help in first articulating this new language.

To this end, it is important to realize that Irigaray and Cixous advocate that *all* women write their bodies.

We also witness Linton's becoming more comfortable within feminine language when she decides to attend college and major in psychology. By taking this step, Linton is signaling to herself, and more importantly the able-bodied population, her complete commitment to her disabled embodiment. Furthermore, in seeking to focus her studies on disabled women, she will be able to aid other disabled women in their search for feminine language, aiding other women who find themselves lost within able-bodied culture. This will also benefit Linton and her search for fully realized Self. Indeed, I would argue that the author feels a great sense of responsibility to teach other women how to come into language through their individual bodies; "I had decided to go back to school and told everyone I was going to be a psychologist. Once said, I had to do it" (31). In using this example, however, I am not suggesting that the women compare or parrot each other's languages or experiences, as we see happening in Linton's session with the disabled therapist. Rather, like Mairs illustrates in *Waist-High in the World*, women can benefit greatly by learning the disabled woman's 'writing process' as it relates to her body. By sharing in rather than enforcing the process of woman's linguistic becoming, the woman who seeks to unveil her individual writing now has a sense of ownership and agency over language as well as her body and its pleasures. Furthermore, although the educational system is usually seen as a part of masculine discourse, I would argue that Linton's commitment to her studies about disabled women illustrates her linguistic engagement with new corporeality.

Linton's experience in therapy, and her subsequent interest in psychology, speaks directly to Irigaray's contention that women can often benefit from a shared feminine language. She believes that woman can speak both independently, through her body, as well as with other women because of their shared subject position (Irigaray; 1977; 209). By positing this idea of feminine signification, Irigaray articulates the connection between woman's language and her body. Discovering this new language is liberating for the disabled woman especially, as the

theory is grounded in linguistic and bodily difference; therefore, she can transcend the dominant culture and able-bodied discourse. According to Irigaray's theory, the woman is always the other of herself, meaning that she is defined as the Other of the Same. Although we have previously defined otherness as oppressive, in this sense, otherness can also be seen as positive as it denotes difference. Irigaray highlights both otherness and the connection between language and body when she states:

'She' is indefinitely other in herself. This is doubtless why she is said to be whimsical, incomprehensible, agitated, capricious . . . not to mention her language in which 'she' sets off in all directions leaving 'him' . . . For in what she says . . . at least when she dares, woman is constantly touching herself. She steps ever so slightly aside from herself with a murmur, an exclamation, a whisper a sentence left unfinished . . . When she returns, it is to set off again from elsewhere. From another point of pleasure or pain. (Irigaray; 1977; 29)

While some who perceive Irigaray's theories of language as essentialist may find the relationship between language and the body exploitative, as it is seen as reducing the woman to a body in a dominant discourse, it is in fact the only way for woman to recover from the singular morphology of phallic discourse. Sadly, since the disabled woman cannot gain linguistic freedom through conventional language, she must find her own language within her individual body. However, for the disabled woman and Linton specifically, sexuality is still fraught with self-doubt and questions. Fortunately, for the disabled woman, in accessing her language she is able to finish that incomplete sentence that Irigaray alludes to, for in discovering her language and subsequently her body, she also discovers aspects of pleasure and joy. Through her new language she is able to clearly articulate what she wants from her changed body and embrace new experiences. While this new sense of pleasure often refers to sexual pleasure, an area that Linton delves into later in the narrative, I would argue that these new pleasures can also be nonsexual, as Linton

demonstrates as she uses the new language as a harbinger to an interest in the psychology of disabled women.

However, in order to gain even more confidence in writing the body, I believe that Linton still must strive to speak with other women who have experienced happiness and pleasure with the disabled other. Ultimately, Linton is afforded this opportunity when she transfers from Berkeley to Columbia University in New York, a campus that she finds on the whole to be less forward-thinking and open to difference than her former, liberal alma mater. At the university she meets a classmate whose husband is disabled and currently living in a rehabilitation center. Although the woman, Christa, does not have a disability herself, her intimate, ethical relationship with a disabled Other gives her the authority to speak and empathize with Linton about issues related to disability. The effect on the author is profound, as it gives her an emotional outlet and a safe venue where she can come into her own as a disabled woman:

Christa and I began talking one day in the hall, and I always looked forward to seeing her there . . . Her husband was, at the time, in the rehabilitation institute, following a serious injury and surgery . . . She is about thirty years older than me, and she was, at the time I met her almost the age [her early fifties] I am today. I had never been comfortable with a woman older than me . . . Yet I liked being with Christa. We could talk about sex, pain, and love, and I could curse and be bold with her. I was startled that she seemed interested in me, and it made me feel like a grown-up to be with her. (62-63)

By rehearsing her difference and new sense of Self with another woman who happens to be able-bodied, Linton can go forward to learn about the process of coming into language from other disabled women, while at the same time engaging ethically with the able-bodied woman, which allows her to eventually transcend the able/disabled binary. Indeed, Linton's conversations with

Christa prove that she can develop a sense of shared language and intimacy that is not simply imitated with someone on the other side of binary.

Although the path to embodiment is different for every disabled woman, I contend that all women who come into language on their own terms, like Linton, associate writing their bodies with the acquisition of power. If we understand this to be the case, logic would follow that the newly empowered woman has a desire, if not a responsibility, to assist other women. Linton heeds this call by embarking on a research project on the psychology of disabled women. In her last semester at Columbia, Linton the eager and ambitious student of psychology, wants to study the psychological profiles of disabled women; however, limited research on the topic challenges her to engage with a community of women who are limited by 'Master Signifiers,' and have yet to claim their individual, intimate languages. The creation of new knowledge without a preexisting research model is steeped in risk and reward; however, I believe that for Linton the project serves as an affirmation of the hard work she has done in order to initiate the building blocks of a fully realized subject position. From my perspective, the most intriguing aspect of the author's dialogues with other women is the degree to which their stories run parallel to her own. This experience not only supplies her with fodder for professional pursuits, it also prevents her from stagnating in her own growth and self-discovery. Hearing the other women speak about their early experiences causes the author to remember her past, analyze the masculine language she was immersed in and reflect on the tenuous state of her emerging subject position. By considering the less favorable moments and insights pertinent to the experience of the disabled woman, especially the impact of negative touch, Linton speaks to the high stakes that are inherent in the Irigarayan linguistic and bodily interdependence, wherein woman is able to access her own unique language through her body by reacquainting herself with her corporeal history. Certainly for the women she interviews, the violating presence of the phallic order is an obstacle 'on the way to [their] language.'

As I stated previously, the fact that Linton is on her way to disabled embodiment does not mean that she is completely in her own body. For if woman fails to participate in the discovery or acknowledge the importance of articulating language and speech, she does not have the opportunity to engage with her body or develop a code of ethics based on difference and multiplicity. Because woman knows no other model besides that of the phallic order, Irigaray is wise in anticipating the pitfalls that will impede woman on the path to embodiment and an ethics of difference. In fact, Irigaray is quite open in addressing the dangers of falling back into phallogocentrism. We can see this candor when she discusses “the sentence left unfinished” (Irigaray; 1977; 29). This is without a doubt a reference to an example of the Cixousian practice of *écriture féminine*. However, to speak of a sentence unfinished can also signify a hesitancy and an anxiety in moving forward in language. To this point, the same can be said for Irigaray’s mention of movement “from another point of pleasure or pain” (Irigaray; 1977; 29). In the Irigarayan sense, the vacillation between these sensations usually denotes *jouissance*, as sexual climax, or fluidity, or freedom inherent in feminine language (Childers and Hentzi 162). There are also connotations of fear or danger, as one cannot always differentiate excitement or fear as one prepares for complete ecstasy and the explosive nature of a language founded on difference, in this case a feminine language that exists outside of male signification. This is crucial to the understanding of the psyche of the disabled woman as she must employ her new language in order to make sense of her new experience of disability, feeling both pleasure and pain as she now must negotiate the disabled side of the binary bar. The beginning of the erosion of this binary bar is at work when she and her interview subjects for her project on disabled women set out to write their bodies through the retelling of their stories. Additionally, aside from being able to speak their own individual languages that can be shared among other women, the women as a group use their anxiety-provoking physical difference to upset phallogocentric language:

The women also talked about being touched by many hands—by doctors and nurses and physical therapists-- . . . Here their mothers sometimes stood by and

said nothing to stop the touching. In fact they often encouraged their daughters to be cooperative . . . I understood [their] fear, I had been walking a tightrope since I entered this world. Here I was for all the world to see a disabled person, and there was a certain pleasure I took in demanding that the world accept me on my own terms. (66-67)

Indeed, I would argue that this is a prime example of reclaiming a different body, by allowing the woman to write and speak through her body and its own unique experiences. From an Irigarayan perspective, reclaiming their language is a tactic that these women employ, so they are not objectified by the portion of able-bodied culture that is blind to the permeability of the binary unaware of an ethics of difference. Speaking to this point Irigaray asserts:

[It is necessary] [f]or women to undertake tactical strikes, to keep themselves apart from men long enough to defend their desire, especially through speech to discover the love of other women while sheltered from men's impervious choices that put them in the position of rival commodities to forge themselves a social status that compels recognition. (Irigaray; 1977; 33)

In discussing Linton's memoir, I have been focusing primarily on the disabled woman and the oppression she experiences as a result of her disability; however, it is also crucial to remember that the disabled woman is doubly othered because of her physical difference *and* gender. Therefore, Irigaray's warning to remain separate from men is all the more important for the disabled woman. Additionally, by insisting that the disabled woman's language ought to coexist with the language of the able-bodied woman, I believe a new theoretical space can be opened for all women, while looking forward to an Irigarayan ethics of sexual difference and her conception of the Other. As she emphasizes throughout her memoir, Simi Linton is not one to accept the traditional order of society if it prevents the process of her fully becoming a woman despite her differences. Thus, I contend that Linton realizes Irigaray's vision for difference and

feminine embodiment; however, because of Linton's still emerging identity as a disabled woman, she must continue to contend with issues related to the sexed body and the able-bodied woman. I would argue that issues related to Linton's former able-bodied identity can be addressed if one continues to apply Irigaray's ideas to help the disabled woman theorize her new body and transcend the former.

Coming into one's own language and the subsequent transcendence of the able/disabled binary is rooted in the body, thus, Simi Linton's life is the perfect example of literally writing the body, as so many of her professional and personal pursuits focus on the experiences of the disabled body. Throughout her recovery and even on through today, one of Linton's primary objectives is to reengage with her body and its pleasures. She does not find it necessary abandon the concept of corporeal pleasure; rather, she explores different paths to engagement with the body. Arguably, her desire not to escape the concept of the disabled body is rooted in her once able-bodied self. From the beginning of her retelling, the reader comes to know an extremely free-spirited, liberal and open young woman. In the hospital looking back on her former life, Linton remembers herself as a

self-fashioned hippie in rented rooms on the outskirts of Boston . . . Had it just been weeks before that when I had been splayed out on my living room floor in Cambridge, tripping on LSD, entranced by the oily purple globules rising and falling in my lava lamp? . . . having my picture taken for an underground newspaper *The East Village Other*. (Linton 3,6).

Obviously, her life had changed drastically, as she went from *representing* the Other as a hippie embracing drugs and decadence, to actually *being* the Other, coping with sudden disability and intrusive doctors. Although the nurses took care of her everyday physical needs, she also seeks to reengage with the sense of her own language. Although she wrote her body and her Otherness that came from her former identity as a hippie, she must now find a way to account for

and express her new subject position. In part because clinical information about sex and disability was limited in the 1970s, Linton and her fellow patients meet on the roof of the center to discuss matters of sex, disability, and their new bodies:

After visiting hours . . . when our loneliness was and isolation were at a peak, we huddled together and talked about sex. Most of us had sustained spinal cord injuries to our necks or backs, other had brain injuries. All of us were radically altered in the way we responded to sexual stimulation . . . we shared our stories—our attempts at masturbation, our furtive fondling of our girlfriends or boyfriends . . . [these conversations were] our few private moments at the institution. (11-12)

I would argue that this is a key step in Linton's quest for a new corporeality as she must experiment and find different avenues to her feminine sexuality. From an Irigarayan point of view, Linton and the others in the rooftop group are in the process of reclaiming their sexuality from the dominant discourse; this cannot happen without language that comes to fruition through the woman's body. Thus, one could argue that simply by talking and experimenting with their bodies' changed responses is more helpful than a conventional therapy session, as reengaging with their bodies and language aids them in reintegrating into the wide world. Moreover, it is important to note that embracing alternatives to heterosexual sex is twice as difficult for the disabled woman as she is rendered doubly passive by her status as a woman with a disability. However, by looking at Luce Irigaray's call to women to take responsibility for their pleasure, we are able to see that this call is just as important to the disabled woman. In her essay "French Women Stop Trying," Irigaray questions male power as it relates to female pleasure, calling for women to take responsibility for their own sexual pleasure. This is especially crucial to the embodiment of the disabled woman, as conventional phallogentric sex is, from the disabled woman's point-of-view, imbued with the sense of inability and awkwardness. While somewhat counter-intuitive, I contend that although Linton has a very noticeable physical disability she

actually has an easier time escaping the power of male sexuality. In other words, the able-bodied woman who does not realize that she lives under phallographic rule is at a distinct disadvantage, as she does not see any outward signs of *her* 'disablement'; as a result, the newly and authentically disabled woman who can speak to her desires and needs is better prepared to accept and more willing to experiment with her own sexuality and bodily pleasures because of the difference in her path to language, a language that arises out of the female body. This willingness to engage with different bodies on her own terms is evident when Linton echoes the sentiments of her fellow patients; "What was clear and uniform across the group was that we felt lust in our hearts. . . [and] we stretched out toward sex, toward pleasure" (12). For Linton then, the transcendence of the able/disabled binary is not in simply finding new ways to enjoy her body, rather, it is the fact that she can now write and speak a language through her body that is separate from able-bodied society, whose treatment of the female body is more disabling than actual physical difference.

Despite the fact that Linton herself comes away from these frank discussions with an appreciation for her new body, she laments the fact that many in the hospital "had partners who wanted them to be "the way they were before" (12). While one can certainly argue that becoming disabled puts physical and emotional strain on the relationship, it seems as though Linton, who is developing a new sense of self through feminine language and the discovery of a positive corporeality, desires a partner that accepts her on her own terms. She finds such a partner in Rick, the former husband of her best friend Carol, who along with Linton's husband perished in the accident. While such a pairing may seem to those on the outside to be oddly incestuous, it makes sense to the author as he had been a constant friend during Linton's rehabilitation and periods of shared loss and grief. Overtime the close friendship makes the subtle transition to romance and ultimately leads to Linton's first sexual encounter since the accident (24-25). I see this moment as a significant turning point in the author's life, not because of the sex itself, but rather because the experience illustrates that Linton is feeling more comfortable in her position as a disabled woman, speaking this new language from her changed body. Theoretically speaking, I

argue that this sexual experience in particular is an example of the Irigarayan concept of “Love of Self.” To summarize briefly, “Love of Self,” articulated in 1984’s *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* is founded on three basic tenets. To begin, love of the self allows for play between the active and passive roles, furthermore it questions traditional language, finally, love of the self aims to achieve a love beyond mere pleasure, masturbation or even *jouissance*, rather, it seeks a more profound love that focuses on the transcendence of one’s Being (Irigaray; 1984; 59-60). Thus, I believe that for the disabled woman, love of the self represents true freedom and agency in her language as she can now live within and celebrate her difference. Thus, although Rick is part of the sexual encounter, for Linton the sexual experience represents a way to get to know her own changed body and also use her new-found feminine language that has its roots in her body. Although Linton does not engage in any literal speech during sex, I would argue that her body is fully engaged in loving of the Self. I would contend that she is also rehearsing a new body and a new sense of pleasure which arise from language and the linguistic play women engage in while en route to their language. According to Irigaray, woman’s love of the self is different from man’s and is recognized by “body expanse that tries to *give itself exteriority*, to give itself in an unpunctuated space-time that is also not orgiastic in the limited sense of that word” (Irigaray; 1984; 64). Hence, in applying these conditions to Linton’s sexuality, I argue that she achieves love of the self in the sexual encounter as she is able to transcend and redefine bodily space by finally being able to actively celebrate her corporeal difference. Although those early discussions at the rehabilitation hospital contributed to development of Linton’s new consciousness and the writing of her body, it was the actual sexual experience that delivered her into a new space of difference and pleasure. To this end, Linton asserts, “I learned that the parts fit like they had before, and the pleasure was the sweeter after a long absence and for the tenderness and love we found with each other” (25). Ultimately, this quote signifies that the encounter is not about the mechanics of sex; rather, sexual satisfaction speaks to the larger point of allowing the disabled woman to engage in theoretical play, so that she can explore her new ability to express her own sense of bodily pleasure, now that her body has come into language.

As I have shown throughout this chapter, a large part of Linton's reclaiming of herself as a disabled woman centers around her coping with and experiencing the joy and frustrations of her changed body. Of course, given her interest and desire to learn more about the sexed body of the disabled woman, it is not at all surprising that she participates in activism with a focus on sexuality. Linton embarks on a project, later named the National Coalition on Sexuality and Disability, with her friend, as a way to help disabled people, especially disabled women, relearn their bodies (79-80). From an Irigarayan perspective, she is growing into her own embodiment by speaking through her body about her own experiences and helping other others discover their languages and bodies. Linton and Irigaray both maintain that it is vital that women learn alternative ways to attain pleasure outside of their respective bodies.

For Irigaray, the Love of the Other is in part concerned with accessing different approaches to feminine sexuality and the need to reject phallogentric stereotypes and engage in an ethics of sexual difference; "Today man would like to equal the machine. Consciously or unconsciously, he thinks of himself as a machine . . . [women need] a zone of calm respite toward the race of productivity. In sexual matters as well" (Irigaray 1984; 143). By insisting on a shift in female sexuality, Irigaray is not suggesting that the partner disappear, instead she is in favor of a more equivalent relationship between man and woman. Using the same theoretical model, I would argue that Linton too is advocating sexual difference. However, one can also see Linton's variation on Irigaray's theory, as she calls on women to reject the conventions of able-bodied sex and pleasure: "we were encouraging people to use disability as an opportunity to think in new ways about sex and what's important to them. . . we deemphasized the importance of genital sex, saying it was only one option" (Linton 83-84). Thus, in her own way that pays tribute to Irigarayan philosophy, Linton is embracing an ethics of sexual difference for those who attend the workshops that emphasize difference, as seen in the way sex and embodiment is approached. But perhaps most important to my argument is the fact that the disabled woman is given the opportunity to 'play' in the theoretical space she has created for herself through writing

her body, which in turn gives her a language specific to her body. Indeed, in asking the women to experiment or literally play within their new corporeality, Linton is also at 'play' as she can continue to celebrate her own corporeal difference.

Much like Nancy Mairs, another step for Simi Linton in her path toward full embodiment and transcendence is the development of a code of ethics that she is able to employ when she is involved in a partnership or any other subject different from herself. For Linton, I would argue that because so many of her experiences as a disabled woman center around the goal of writing the body and placing the disabled woman in discourse, an Irigarayan call to ethics is feasible and allows her to complete the work of disabled embodiment that is necessary in order to transcend the limits of the able/disabled binary.

While Linton, as a disabled woman, is considered an other by dominant cultural standards, this is not how she self-identified even after the accident. As a result Linton is startled and perhaps a bit nervous when she runs into "one of my kind" (42), during her first weeks at Berkeley. Yet in referring to the disabled person in this way when she writes her memoir, I contend that Linton is now cognizant of the disconnect that once existed between her language and body.

When she first arrives in the college town, she notices that although there seems to be fewer disabled people living there than in New York, she finds Berkeley's disabled population is much more visible in the community. In part, because of visibility, she is forced to acknowledge disabled otherness in her community, but also in herself (47). In other words, as a new member of the category of other, she must learn how to be with and have an ethical relationship with the Other. We can understand that Linton's fear of adopting this identity of difference is at first extremely real. Perhaps her most profound fear is losing her sense of Being-in-the-World. Indeed, Linton's fear of losing her Self comes from her own memories:

The abstract category “disabled” or in those days more likely “handicapped,” that had grown up with carried over even when I got tagged to be on the team. Except for my uncle Sonny, who had lost a leg in an automobile accident, I hadn’t known any disabled people up close. And anyway, he was just my uncle he didn’t count. (47).

Due to her preconceived notions of disability, I contend that what Linton needs here is an ethical encounter with the Other, or the disabled. According to Irigaray, an ethical and reciprocal relationship is one of the most prized experiences in human existence, as it allows for becoming that leads to language and prospect of equivalence with the Other, the non-disabled (Irigaray; 2002; 76). Thus, if Linton is ever going to claim her disability, she needs to encounter the disabled Other in order to begin writing her body. I believe that this acceptance does finally occur, when she sees a collective of disabled individuals going about their daily lives in Berkeley:

It [Berkeley] even seemed to have some cachet, some exoticism . . . At the health food store I’d often see a burly guy with a red bandana tied around his neck . . . One of his legs, the shorter one, rested on the top rung [of a stool] ; the other, straightened out, touched the floor and kept him balanced. He always greeted me with a big smile, like we’d known each other a long time. (47)

Indeed, while it is evident that Linton has a sense of curiosity and a desire to engage with the other disabled citizens, I would take this point a bit further and contend that this gregarious encounter is a sign that Linton is ready to enter into an ethical relationship with the Other, who is actually herself. Theoretically speaking, entering into being with the other is understood as “the attraction, the desire which pushes one toward the other without the relation being then already conceived as a “with the other” (Irigaray; 2002; 78). Interpreted in this way, I see Linton’s experience “with the other” to be a step toward her transcendence of the able/disabled binary, and speak through her disabled body as she acknowledges her disabled body on her own terms,

using her own body. For once she is willing to see herself as disabled she is letting go some of the tension and dominance inherent in that pairing of terms.

In another extremely significant moment of ethical becoming, the author, positioned as the Irigarayan Other enters into a relationship with a nondisabled male subject. This presents an opportunity for ethical growth for Linton, especially because as the Other of the Other her subject position cannot be collapsed. Put simply, because subject position cannot be collapsed, she is now free to exist outside of the able/disabled binary, even still, it appears that finding love with a nondisabled subject would require an ethics of sexual difference. We must remember that Linton has occupied both the disabled and nondisabled subject positions, this is crucial as she met her future husband David as an able-bodied woman. Fortunately, for Linton, David is still willing to love her as the same woman despite her otherness. Once again, as readers we see that Irigaray's ethics are at the center of the couples' love for each other, Linton claims:

Over time we learned the tricks of my tricky body . . . I was more experienced in some ways . . . I had lived in this land for a while. It was second nature to me. And I also knew the able body. He hadn't known a disabled one, so he learned on me . . . We grew together. We grew more intimate. He followed my lead to an extent, but he never seemed a foreigner (131).

I also see this partnership and its valuing of difference as a consequence of the openness of both partners when Linton's body changed. I would argue that for David especially, the "tricks" of Linton's body are not tricks in the negative sense. Instead, the tricks were clues into Linton's body, as she has been able to write on her own body and speak from the point-of-view of her lived experience. Thus, David was never a foreigner, as these aspects of her embodiment had been negotiated by Linton and in sense given to David as a token of their ethical relationship.

Ultimately, I would argue that Linton and David's marriage is strong because they both take Irigarayan concepts about the ethics of sexual difference and Love of the Other and make

them work for their marriage. Furthermore, because Irigarayan ethics allow the couple to engage in a reciprocal relationship grounded in difference, Linton is able to continue to grow into her new sense of embodiment. Indeed, I would argue for the full embodiment of the disabled woman to take place, one of the requirements is a healthy relationship where both parties acknowledge and love differences so that the disabled woman is valued for both her differences and her humanity. In my mind, concepts of writing the body and transcendence of the able/disabled binary represents a kind of freedom and rebirth for the disabled woman. For Linton, one gets the sense that she has fully transcended the binary. I believe that for Linton, transcendence is tantamount to dissolving the able/disabled binary, not only in culture, but also in consciousness and indeed this is what Irigaray's concept of transcendence entails. This version of transcendence of a binary simply works to help woman achieve a more complete sense of embodiment (Irigaray; 2002; 65-66), in this case so that the able-bodied population does not dominate the disabled population and vice versa. In terms of the disabled woman, the transcendence of the able/disabled binary is the final step in successfully writing her body; as the disabled woman now has the power of speech, which allows her to be the arbiter of control as it relates to the binary bar. This power is inherent in the woman's individual body, as she can articulate her own altered sense of embodiment. This is relevant to Linton because she has achieved the Irigarayan model of transcendence of the binary that aids the development and evolution of her language, body, and overall perception of herself as a disabled woman. Much of this success is due to her commitment to the concept of Irigarayan play. For both writer and theorist, there is nothing static about the female body and it is free to create or write itself. The concept play is perhaps the perfect theoretical tool when attempting to theorize the disabled woman's body, for at play, the body is no longer out of control, broken, or shameful; its difference is there to be celebrated and embraced.

As a final point, I would argue that although so-called 'difference' feminists like Irigaray have not traditionally been employed in the study of disability, it is important to remember that

issues of difference are the grounding for much theory surrounding disability. Furthermore, we must also remember that theories of difference and on embodiment depend upon willingness to share personal experiences. Speaking to the centrality of difference within the study of disability and humanity as a whole, Barbara Fawcett in her 2000 text *Feminist Perspectives on Disability* offers F. Williams' thoughts on difference:

We cannot assume that commonalities (as women or among different groups) exist, nor can we override their differences with false consciousness. But it is through the process of knowing, acknowledging and understanding the complex relations of power in which we are *all* caught and the differences they create that we can, from time to time, reach the commonalities we share. (Williams; 1996; 72, emphasis mine).

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION:

FINDING COMFORT IN THE CLEARING: THE PROMISE OF EMBODIED ETHICS AND TRANSCENDENCE

Throughout this study I have been proposing that the embodiment of the disabled woman is based in a woman's body; the resulting reembodiment that is based in linguistic, corporeal, and ethical difference. Certainly, the process of writing the body and the subsequent corporeality that stems from it cannot be overlooked, as the disabled woman's embodied becoming requires situations within language that exist outside of the traditional discourse of patriarchal power and within her sexed body. Indeed, since this is the case, I will be focusing solely on the ethics of difference and the transcendence of the able/disabled binary, in order to illustrate that the process of embodiment does not signal an end to the disabled woman's new way of Being. A disabled woman coming into her own language allows for a new beginning of sorts, one that clears the way for both her continually evolving, embodied Self and her own unique lived experience in the wider world. To this end, Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick's critical article that is informed by personal experience, "Bodies Together: Touch, Ethics and Disability," presents a unique opportunity for examination of ethics and transcendence from an embodied point of view, as many of their critical insights speak to Irigaray's notions of ethical relationships and the transcendence of the binary. Ultimately, by reading these three theorists side by side, one will be able to clearly see that analyzing an ethics of difference using Irigarayan philosophy can add new richness and relevancy to our understanding of the newly disabled woman who is, after all, no stranger to difference.

In order to best understand Price and Shildrick's view of ethics and disability, it is best that we first explore their critique of disability and embodiment. From the point-of-view of the authors, traditional post-structuralist theory tends to ignore disability; so too, they argue disability does not attempt to consider the body from an embodied perspective. Indeed, this contentious relationship between the theoretical approach and disability as a field of study only serves to further alienate both parties (Price and Shildrick 62). Thus, in this piece the authors work to illustrate how post-structural or post-modern theories of the body and disabled embodiment are inextricably linked to one another. Moreover, through their practice of writing together, as one disabled woman (Janet Price has Multiple Sclerosis), and one nondisabled woman, the authors are representative of how two bodies can work together in a professional context. Ultimately, by writing together, the disabled woman, Janet Price, is able to participate in an Irigarayan model of ethical becoming based on difference and transcendence wherein she can transcend the able/disabled binary by engaging with new and liberating embodiment. However, in keeping with the argument articulated throughout this study, we must remember that this ethical becoming is not possible without woman's writing her body. Understood in this way, Price and Shildrick are not only actively involved in writing the body; as two women writing in a partnership, they are also engaging in the sharing of feminine language and bodies. Such a practice is also a step toward the sense of community that Mairs and Linton attempt to achieve in their narratives.

By employing Irigaray's theories of difference and transcendence, I am not attempting to write against Price and Shildrick's article, on the contrary it is my aim to illustrate how reading Irigaray alongside these authors serves to reinforce language and ethics as the cornerstones of the disabled woman's relationship to herself and her own Being-in-the-World. In their first call for a sense of disabled embodiment, Price and Shildrick demand that the field of disability studies move away from both the medical and social models of disability, as these models are focused on exercising power over the body, thus making the body of the disabled female subject to dominant medical and able-bodied discourse. According to the authors what is missing is a relationship

that recognizes the Self in the context of the larger world; “neither [the medical model nor the social model] acknowledges the constitutive relationship between the embodied subject and the world, the notion that our subjectivity consists in becoming in a world of others” (63). Although her 1984 work, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* does not speak directly to the ethics of difference or transcendence as they relate to the disabled woman, Irigaray’s models of ethical difference, man and woman, provide a perfect system in which to theorize the transcendence and the ethics of difference, as it applies to the relationship between the disabled woman and her able-bodied counterpart leading to the eventual embodiment and transcendence of the disabled woman.

Price and Shildrick maintain that developing an ethical relationship with the Other is to acknowledge that no identity regardless of cultural position is free from theoretical interpretation or ‘play,’ and change. This is crucial to understand as it underscores the difficulty in bridging the gap between Self and Other. Moreover, although as we have seen over the course of this project that theoretical and linguistic slippage are integral to the embodiment of the disabled woman, giving her a space in which to create herself anew, an ethics of difference is much more complex. Ironically, although Irigarayan ethics are grounded in difference, be it sexual or otherwise, the goal of this ethical becoming is to bring both Self and Other together in such a way that they can value and learn from each other’s differences. Indeed, I would argue that far from trying to erase the theoretical permeability that exists between the disabled and the nondisabled, thereby making the Other an Other of the Same, Price and Shildrick are instead attempting to find different methods outside of *sexual* difference that can constitute the ethical component of disabled embodiment:

Given that its boundaries are insecure, the act of claiming and defining identity is one of shoring up the inevitable and necessary slippages in our embodied subjectivity. This disruption of the notion of a unified, self-present individual brings more clearly into focus the question . . . of our bodies and their mutually constitutive effects on one another . . . the post-conventional perspective

demands recognition that of our sense of self, and how we orientate ourselves to the world, is irrevocably tied up with the bodies of those around us. (63)

This concept of the interdependence of bodies is not a new theoretical construct, as Irigaray advocates this kind of ethical exercise in order to achieve a reciprocal relationship between man and woman. In other words, ethical behavior cannot exist without the deconstruction of the binary bar that separates the Self and the Other. However, this separation of the Self and the Other cannot emerge within a society that is not ready for such a division. To be certain, the assumption that ethical difference will find its own place within a given culture amounts to shirking one's own responsibility to the process of embodiment. To this end, Irigaray states:

One of the places in our time where we can locate people is the "world of women." Nonetheless, if there is to be neither repression of this "people" nor ethical error on its part, an access to . . . difference becomes essential, and society must abandon the murderous hierarchy . . . which bars woman from accomplishing the task reserved for her. . . the task of going from the deepest depths to the highest heavens. (Irigaray; 1984; 118)

For the disabled woman, we must remember that she faces the world as someone who is doubly othered, being both female and disabled; however, as Irigaray reminds us, difference is essential to the ethical becoming of all women. Indeed, although Irigaray does not explicitly mention the importance of writing the body in this statement, I believe that Irigaray's point is well-taken; the possibility for ethics cannot exist without a well-established, embodied language of difference.

Given this chapter's focus on ethics, it is still quite difficult to wholly abandon the whole process of disabled embodiment and especially the creation of an individual language. Perhaps this fixation on language occurs because in order to establish a code of ethics one must be able to speak her own language and know what an ethical relationship would look like for her given her new and perhaps insecure corporeality. While the Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick piece

functions mainly as a critical article one cannot fully appreciate the depth of the article without also focusing on the personal narrative that emerges from the piece. The experience of Price and Shildrick is unique, as the two often engage in academic writing together. Rather than impeding their ability to write together, the authors see this difference as their call to investigate the ethical component of embodiment for the disabled woman. Indeed, I would argue that the process of writing together, from two different subject positions, while not uncommon, does have a profound effect on their view of the disabled woman's embodiment and the possibilities for an ethics grounded in difference. Indeed, I would argue that Price and Shildrick's practice of writing in tandem speaks directly to Irigaray's previous point of breaking up the hierarchy. It is the hierarchy and the power of dominant male and able-bodied culture that bars the disabled woman from ever seeing herself in relation to the usually male, able-bodied subject. More than this however, I argue that both Price and Shildrick write together not out of an academic obligation, but instead to convey a shared sense of truth in the lived experience of disability. Once again, reinforcing the importance and the learning that comes from an individual in multiple subject positions the authors assert:

It is certainly not the case that our experiences are the same, but nor are they isolated and unified 'events.' In place of unified stories with clearly delineated boundaries around the 'I' . . . we want to emphasize the multiple points of interchange . . . instead of the condition of Being with its ready-made certainties, expectations and capacity for calculation, what matters is the risky process of becoming with others. (65)

Speaking to this assertion, I contend that the authors desire to keep their experiences separate, yet also reciprocal in nature, is much like Irigaray's feelings on nostalgia. While nostalgia is traditionally thought of as warm and comforting, Irigaray sees nostalgia as a roadblock on the way to an ethical becoming. Read in this way, we can see that separately Price and Shildrick's experiences or nostalgia, be they the same or different, are essential because they are the harbinger for understanding difference and being with the Other. Moreover, I would also argue

that when the once able-bodied woman is robbed of language her because of the onset of disability, ultimately she needs to be free in order to become embodied and engage in a reciprocal relationship with one who is unlike herself. Thus, if woman has to keep away from nostalgia and other distractions, there is even more of a reason for the disabled woman to embark on the process of embodiment beginning with the creation of a feminine language for as Irigaray claims, "the other—male or female—would need and desire in return: to build an identity, a language, a body of work" (Irigaray; 1984; 142).

By exploring Price and Shildrick's creative process of writing together, we get to see an ethical partnership in its very early stage. Although Price and Shildrick discuss at length how the coming together of the self and the other is illustrated through their cooperative practice, I would argue that while writing together helps to overtly demonstrate their coming together, the authors are also unconsciously engaging in the practice in the Cixousian practice of *écriture féminine* or feminine writing, wherein woman is able to further her embodiment by 'writing herself,' thereby writing using her own feminine language and chronicling personal experiences on her own terms. While I have discussed this practice earlier in the study, I believe it is imperative to acknowledge that by writing together, Price and Shildrick are not only growing closer as friends and writing partners; they also are also becoming more comfortable with Price's different body; by writing through her body Janet Price is able to explore and appreciate her changed body. Additionally, by becoming familiar with Price's bodily differences, Shildrick is better able to be with the other because she has her friend's sense of body and the emergence of ethics. Throughout Cixous' essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," the author pleads with the woman to write using her own feminine language, rebel against the phallic order of culture, and ultimately find her own voice through her uniquely feminine body. In the final pages of Cixous' call to feminine language, I would argue that she looks forward to a kind of freedom in ethical difference and embodied becoming of the Other. This is especially evident when she states, "the new love dares for the other, wants the other, makes dizzying precipitous flights between knowledge and invention"

(2055). Indeed, I would argue that the values of this portion of the text can be seen as Shildrick the nondisabled partner comes to acknowledge her ethical place with the Other. Furthermore, I would argue that Janet Price as the disabled woman attains her own ethics of difference and thus Irigaray's positive label of the Other of the Other.

When seen as just a simple phase, the Other of the Other often causes great confusion. If we understand correctly the binary opposition between Self and Other, it becomes difficult to understand why the term gets used twice in the phrase. However, when one looks closely at the term, there is a sense that Irigaray posits an ethical concept that is truly revolutionary. If we understand the Other as it was previously defined, as one who is alienated from the dominant culture, then the aforementioned Other would constitute an individual who can exist outside the binary. Furthermore, because of its subject position, the Other of the Other possesses an identity that cannot be collapsed or deconstructed. Thus, I would argue that for the disabled woman, a position as the Other of the Other would not only provide her space to define her new being, it would also afford her the possibility of achieving sensible transcendence, a form of transcendence that makes it possible for woman to achieve a kind of spiritual becoming without having to abandon her newfound embodiment. This freedom affords her the space to keep evolving and changing within herself and within the world.

In the portion of Price and Shildrick's article that chronicles Price's experience with disabled embodiment, the authors agree with critic Ros Diprose who claims that the only true path to an ethical embodiment "demands the recognition of alterity" (Diprose in Price and Shildrick 71). However, it quickly becomes evident that Price, like both Mairs and Linton cannot escape the all-encompassing power of medical discourse. Unlike the doctor-patient examples I examined in the first two texts, Price is faced with a relationship that is founded on the power of her personal caregiver. From Price's perspective, the act of touching is the contentious issue as she feels it violates her societal position as an adult woman (71). Indeed, I would argue that this invasion of the Self not only violates Price's recent shift to a disabled embodiment, it also violates

the Irigarayan notion of an ethics of difference, wherein the two do not exist in equivalence to each other. Far from an ethical sense of equivalence, she describes the anxiety and violation she and others often feel when being assisted:

What can be read as in the uneasiness of carers, both professional and lay, is the thought that 'this could be me.' In consequence far from conveying support and recognition, touching may be an attempt to distance the anomalous other . . . this is not a plea for sympathy or even empathy with the disabled person, but an assertion of importance of acknowledging irreducible difference and recognizing that although bodily boundaries are shifting and permeable, they should not be transgressed at will. (71)

Indeed, I believe this point to be crucial in both the ethical construction and overall embodiment of the disabled woman. One of the goals of Irigaray's theories, as well as my study is to illustrate that woman, despite her otherness can be and even have a right to full embodiment through being with the Other. However, in the same vein, part of being with the Other in an ethical fashion entails knowing when the boundaries of the individual have been compromised. If one fails to take the Other into account, not only does it effect the Other it also effects the Self, as it displays the subject as being insecure in regard to her own ethical becoming.

In looking at this scenario from an Irigarayan perspective, the disabled woman, although she seemingly bemoans the care she is given, is taking another step toward becoming the Other of the Other. Indeed, although Irigaray is known for helping woman to gain embodiment through the sharing of language and the sharing of bodies as is evident throughout this study, I contend that her stance towards ethics begins to move away from this concept of mutuality and bodily permeability in favor of ethics that grant woman ontological agency. This does in fact make sense, given Irigaray's insistence on a language and corporeality based on woman's independence from men. It is not that the ethics of difference should not be a shared endeavor;

on the contrary, Irigaray reminds the woman that as the embodied subject she can now govern the ethics of touch based upon her own model of the ethics of sexual difference, which continues to grow and change with the specific woman. This is clearly evident when Irigaray declares, “. . . unless we are to remain within the confines of this rigorous and luxuriant approach, we must ask the question of the other as touched and touching. And of an other whose body’s ontological status would differ from my own” (Irigaray; 1984; 157). Seen in this way, Irigaray is not preventing the other from engaging in a shared ethics of difference, rather, she is simply issuing a warning that there are individuals like Price’s caregiver that will try to confuse the disabled woman’s sense of ethics, especially given the fragility that new embodiment brings with it.

While the development of an ethics of difference is a high stakes undertaking, it is not my aim to suggest that all touch or all encounters with an Other are irrevocably negative. Executed in the correct way, an experience of touch can be liberating for the disabled woman and can ultimately lead to her becoming an Other of the Other, meaning that she can reside in a subject position that cannot be collapsed. By occupying a subject position that cannot be infiltrated by an oppressive discourse of power, like the institution of medicine, the disabled woman is able to celebrate rather than hide her difference. The reader of the Price and Shildrick’s article is able to experience this transformation of the disabled woman into the Other of the Other. According to Price, her physical as well as her emotional response is different when her close friends including Shildrick aid her in performing her daily routine:

There is a qualitative difference that I . . . experience in assistance from friends as opposed to care workers . . . Security with friends grows from the prior knowledge of what the embodied experiences of the self and the other have in common: hands held, coffees drunk. . . . mutual touches of friendship. . . These friends do not experience my body as it is now for me, but our mutual histories offer an ease through these moments. (71)

Of course, as this quote addresses, Shildrick is able to garner assistance from her friends because of their shared histories and their ability to see beyond Price's disability. However, more than this, I would argue that Price's friends see her status as the unshakeable Other of the Other, and subconsciously respond to that by engaging with her in relationships based on equivalency. As mentioned earlier in this study, Irigarayan equivalence is a love where no hierarchical power exists, rather the partners exist side by side in relation to one another.

However, to my mind what is most important in Price's encounter with her friends is not so much their willingness to aid Price as the Other, it is rather Price's relationship to her own sense of ethics. I would argue that the fact that she can now have friends offer her assistance speaks to her successfully becoming an Other of the Other. In other words, the very fact that she is able to choose whether she wants to receive care from a personal assistant or her friends, is a signal that she is no longer bound by a responsibility to the Self/Other binary (71-72). Up to this point, I have been employing "Bodies Together: Touch, Ethics and Disability" to illustrate the tenets of Irigarayan ethics, that while not attributed directly to her are most certainly at work in the piece. However, on a larger scale I am also using this article to illustrate the need for an alternative to the Other of the Other, as this Irigarayan construction does not allow for any sense of transcendence.

Certainly, one might argue that after her emancipation from linguistic dominance, the disabled woman is entirely free. Yet, I maintain that while linguistic emancipation is absolutely necessary for the disabled woman's own personal embodiment, the creation and maintenance of the Other of the Other is the sign of disabled embodiment that is visible only to the wider world. However, inside herself, the disabled woman still feels lost and insecure because she still continues to occupy the underside of the able/disabled binary. Ultimately, one can observe Irigaray's admission to the subject position of the Other of the Other:

The rift between the other and me is irreducible. To be sure we can build bridges, join our energies, feast and celebrate encounters, but the union is never definitive . . . To correspond with one's own becoming requires an alienation of approaching the other and dividing from him, or her. . . Difference demands . . . the relinquishing of the whole, whether this be in oneself or with the other. (Irigaray; 2002; 157)

By alienating herself from the Other, the disabled woman is able to come to terms with her new embodiment without the pervasive gaze of public spectacle. Throughout this study, I have maintained that the process of disabled embodiment is an individual experience that affects each woman differently. Indeed, the same is true when one must finally integrate and conceptualize all her difference at one time.

Given the fact that significant amount of Irigarayan theory revolve around the question and creation of difference, one is left to wonder why in the case of the Other of the Other, does she seek to pull the Self and the Other apart? The answer is in fact, for the woman to be truly embodied within herself, outside of the conventional subject/object philosophy which in itself breeds binary thinking. In other words, the disabled woman needs to transcend the Self/Other binary as well as the able/disabled binary while still retaining her hard fought embodiment. For many within the disability studies community, transcendence in its traditional form is heralded as a coping mechanism used to alienate the woman from her body. According to Susan Wendell, author of *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*, transcendence is a *choice* "to exercise some habits of mind that distances oneself from the chronic, often meaningless physical suffering" (178). Although she does a commendable job in also presenting the dangers of disembodiment, I would argue that her reading of disabled disembodiment is incomplete, as she fails to realize that disembodiment also leads to alienation from the woman's individual language, body, and code of ethics, all of the components that I argue actually constitute the embodiment of the disabled woman. Conversely, Irigaray's advocates

transcendence without losing touch with essential aspects of embodiment, language, corporeality, and ethics. Although she is not writing explicitly about the disabled woman, Irigaray's description of transcending a seemingly suffering body articulated in *The Way to Love*, speaks directly to my point of ethics and transcendence sustaining the disabled woman in the wider world. With the aid of transcendence, the disabled woman can live in her body with sense of confidence, complete with her own feminine language. Armed with this knowledge and experience she can rise above the able/disabled binary:

The human has to turn not only toward the outside but also toward the inside, on the pain of losing its humanity. And the human's making cannot be only exterior, it is also interior . . . transforming this matter so far as to make it a work of art, to transubstantiate it into a more subtle, spiritual, even divine, matter. To illuminate it so that it enlightens he, or she, who gazes upon it, who contemplates it.
(Irigaray; 2002; 173)

As we can understand from Irigaray's point of view, transcendence is more than just a passive 'getting beyond;' rather I would argue that the woman who transcends dominant culture successfully, continues to evolve and look toward the future of her Being-in-the-World.

Over the course of this work, my theoretical investigation has had two distinct goals: first, I have shown that by employing the influential theories of Luce Irigaray, the woman that becomes disabled as an adult has a new opportunity for embodiment that resides outside of the traditional power structure. Furthermore, I contend that this route to embodiment is a process beginning with acquisition of language through their new body. Through this language that is different for each woman, the disabled woman is able to unveil a new language, as she is now able to 'speak' through her altered body. Lastly, through a different body there arises new potential for a relationship with the Other and a subsequent opportunity to engage in an ethics of

difference. This contention has profound consequences in the everyday life of the disabled woman and her experiences in the wider world.

For the authors, the issue of difference is a concern when thinking about disability activism, for example. Although many of these groups work for positive change and honorable causes, the authors believe, and I would agree that many of these groups achieve a kind of homogeneity within them. In other words, the assumption is often made that the disabled population at large support the same issues or policies (73). Conversely, the authors see this push for practicality as the force that ultimately undermines an ethics of difference. While a consciousness that resides in Sameness does have the possibility to be harmful as Irigaray demonstrates, I see this ideological challenge as a potential opportunity for the reembodyment of women who *become* disabled. If the disabled woman cannot write her body within conventional sociopolitical activism, there are different paths to change. Indeed, by writing their personal stories, Price, Shildrick, and the other women, carve out a clearing for the individual body and the body politic, wherein they can become reembodyed through writing the story of their own altered bodies. Insofar as these women write their bodies, they also succeed in writing ethical difference.

Related to difference, my second aim was to illustrate how, through transcendence, the disabled woman is able to get beyond able/disabled binary. In getting beyond the binary, we have frequently discussed the concept of transcendence. Indeed, this is a difficult process to envision as it is paradoxical in nature. According to Irigarayan philosophy, transcendence can be best understood as embodied transcendence. It is also a way to engage with and improve the Self through reflection and the embracing of difference. As I alluded to earlier in this chapter, the disability studies community has always been somewhat suspect of the idea of transcendence and its benefit to those with disabilities. For my part, I believe that the Irigarayan concept of transcendence along with the concept of writing the body, works to create a theoretical space in

which the woman can reside comfortably in her difference within the wider world without the threat of fear or shame.

Although I introduce the concept of linguistic play in the beginning of this study, as a means of conclusion, I argue that one could also incorporate a kind of transcendental play with the concept of linguistic play. In other words, just as the presence of Irigarayan play in language spurs on the creation of a language of embodiment, I would argue that the emergence of the concept of transcendence clears the way for a greater sense of theoretical space; while also invoking a renewed spirit of adventure and creativity for the disabled woman. Furthermore, since each of the women now occupies her own unique subject position, the women will use their transcendent experience in a different way. Hence, when evaluating the women I have been analyzing in all three of the memoirs, it becomes clear that each transcends the able/disabled binary in their own way. This affords each of them different experiences of transcendence and an ethical strength they can employ in the wider, able-bodied world in order to keep away from the exclusion represented by the binary bar.

As our first disabled subject, Nancy Mairs in her memoir *Waist-High in the World: A Life Among the Nondisabled*, experiences much of her transcendence in the American West; thus, seeing the region as a space for a kind of spiritual transcendence. Symbolically, the open space of the West provides the perfect backdrop for transcendence; however, it appears that Mairs' practical mobility concerns will get in the way of her embodied becoming. Indeed, because this sojourn into the desert requires alternate routes and modification, the trip becomes what looks like an insurmountable challenge (Mairs 189). Yet, I would argue that because she achieves transcendence, she possesses the ability to enjoy everyday experiences, like vacations, without feeling trapped by able-bodied culture.

On the other hand, Simi Linton seems to take a much more cerebral approach to transcendence, rather than in engaging in an activity that would upset the able/disabled binary in

the wider world. Ultimately, because she is not sure about what the impact of transcendence would mean for the disabled community and disability activism, it appears as though she does not let the concern even enter her consciousness. However, I contend that even in her conscientious objection to the concept, Linton is making a veiled statement to both the able and disabled communities that indicates she has already transcended any kind of binary conflict. Finally, in the Price and Shildrick narrative “Bodies Together: Touch, Ethics and Disability,” we do not necessarily get a complete view of Janet Price’s transcendence, because of the critical bent of the article. Even so, I believe that simply by writing with a nondisabled partner, the two, like Linton are silently protesting binary construction.

While all these aforementioned experiences constitute the transcendence of oppressive cultural constructs, I would end by asserting that perhaps the most transcendental experience for all of these women was in fact the composing of their memoirs. For as Luce Irigaray’s contemporary Helene Cixous reminds us, the goal of writing is to mine every ‘clearing’ in search of every woman’s ‘truth’; “When I write, it’s everything that we don’t know we can be that is written out of me, without exclusions, without stipulation, and everything we will be calls us to the unflagging, intoxicating, unappeasable search for love” (2056).

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