Together
Lived-Bodies and Real Experience

In our fabricated world, we can proclaim our demands. But I doubt that the walls of the subway or the noise of machines are changed as a result. We shout, but who listens to us? A variety of worlds separates us: the world of techne, the world of calculation, the world of science, the world of culture. We almost never face each other. We think that we encounter each other but, most of the time, we are infinitely distant (Irigaray, 2001, p. 85).

The following phenomenological sketches involve bodies in their most experientially intense state, the state of nudity. Their main focus is the bodily experience of space and the experience of togetherness. These sketches of experience are informed to a large extent by Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s two books, *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and the Invisible*, in which he describes the living-body of a subject, who exists in “communion” with the world, as a dynamic process of four bodily regions (the perceptive/sensory, the emotional, the motor, and the cognitive) which constantly fold over one another, like layers of flesh, and mutually constitute the living-body. Furthermore, my reading of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology is
influenced by Samuel Mallin’s teaching and writing on that philosopher, and my phenomenological descriptions draw on Professor Mallin’s phenomenological method of Body Hermeneutics. As a way of connecting these descriptions with the larger scope of my Ph.D. dissertation that deals with artists’ nude self-representation and its origin within the feminine, I expand my commentary by drawing on Luce Irigaray’s philosophy, in particular her book *To Be Two*. Several questions have emerged while gathering descriptions of the lived-experience of space and togetherness, as well as upon further reflection on the language itself that underlies our ability to make sense of our bodily experiences of the self, of the other, of togetherness, of the lived-world, and to endow these experiences with meaning, in its fullest sense. It is my goal that these questions will lead to more discussion concentrating on the importance of lived experience, real bodies and real space and will prompt further questions concerning the realms of the virtual body and virtual space. What does it mean to be together? What role does the lived-body play in our conception of togetherness? How is the experience of space implicated in our sense of togetherness? Can we really be together in virtual space? Does your virtual-body in virtual-space impose the same limits on me as the presence of your lived-body in real-space? And finally, what are the ethical implications in our present understanding, our sense, of togetherness?

**To Gather: My Body in Lived-Space (June 2002)**

In a midst of a secluded sand dune, I stand in my bare skin exposed to the summer sun. As I stand and close my eyes I notice the delicate wisps of wind brushing, touching, moving against the back of my legs and arms, my buttocks, my back, and through my hair. My hair flips forward, covers my face, and falls down to my shoulders. A short moment of stillness is broken as my senses shift my attention to the feeling of warmth that settles over the entire surface of my skin, especially my shoulders and the top of head, until the wind flows in again and brushes against my body while cooling me off. In this in-gathering of the space through my body, I become the witness to the play of the wind and of the sun’s rays when I give myself over this natural space and become its plaything. In this giving, my perceptual modality, my senses direct me and open me to the gifts of this natural space. I open my eyes and the brightness of the sun reflecting off the sand fills my eyes. In trying to lessen this complete flood of light into my eyes, which is starting to cause me some pain, I slightly squint and place a hand just above my eyes to protect them from the light and notice that the entire space, the sand-dunes and the few trees and tall grass scattered around it, is bathed in the reddish hue of my body. I decide to walk over to the tree which has a shady area below it. I take my first step but I stop because I feel the burning sand against my foot. I take the next step carefully and do not place my entire foot on the burning sand, only the ball of my foot. My foot begins to sink into the depth of the sand. I decide that I have to move quickly as not to sink into the sand
and not to be burned by it. With each step my motor body orients itself to the given situation and I rather awkwardly run across, while my eyes are quickly scanning well ahead for any unwanted branches, broken bottles, or rocks that can injure my feet. I am finally under the tree and in the comfortable coolness of its shadow, which also protects my eyes from the excessive flooding of the light, I settle down comfortably orienting myself within the area of the shadow. I can hear the wind now as it moves past the leaves, and thus also see it, and I feel it again as it touches my skin, as I begin to settle into this space, open up to it and actively gather it inside me through my body/my senses.

Feeling already comfortably settled into this space I take out my small Super-8 film camera and begin to film my nude body. I hold the camera above my head and spin while trying to capture both my entire body and the surrounding whirling space. At this point, my motor body is amplified and the perceptual modality recedes into the horizon of my experience. I begin to pan the camera in quick swing-like motions from my head to my toes, while at the same time moving my body in counterpoint to the swings of my arms and progressively becoming fully immersed in this movement. When filming myself, my attention constantly oscillates between actively presenting myself in front of the camera and simultaneously capturing myself with that camera, relying on my senses to guide my imagination which stands in for the look of the seer that would naturally guide the movements of the seen and vice versa, in a kind of mirroring of actions. After a while my arms and my entire body become tired, I sit down on the cool sand and begin to pan the camera across my body, almost brushing against the surface of my skin with the camera lens while trying to approximate the correct distance for the image to stay in focus. I gather with my senses and the camera both my body and the space that envelops it.

This gathering is suddenly halted when my senses direct me to the progressively louder sound of human voices. In an instant, the flow of the external space is closed off and I recoil into myself in fear of being confronted in my vulnerable state by a stranger. My body tenses up and I duck. I feel a flush of cold sweat and can hear the beating of my heart. I wait in my coiled position, watch two people running in the distance and eventually leave the field of my vision. I slowly uncoil and resume my in-gathering of the space, the world, I inhabit.

In this short sketch, I tried to emphasize the amplification of the perceptual modality in my experience of being alone, and in the nude, in the space of a sand dune. Because my body did not have the armour or protection of clothing, it opened me, on the one hand, to a more intensified whole-body experience of the space and its elements, and on the other hand, made me more vulnerable to the possible dangers of being hurt, for example of stepping on a piece of broken glass. Furthermore, I tried to employ a more capacious meaning of the word “sense” in my description, following Merleau-Ponty’s use and definition of this word in Phenomenology of Perception where he pointed out the interconnectedness of senses, meaning and direction as all belonging to
the word “sense” or sens in French. I emphasized in this sketch that my senses direct me through the lived-space, the world I inhabit, connect my body with the space and help me in-gather the space within my body, while simultaneously laying the necessary ground for me to make sense, the cognitive sense of my relation to this space based on linguistic signification. Moreover, by emphasizing the intensification of my perceptual, motor and to some extent emotive modality within the real space of the sand dunes, with the cognitive modality still being within the horizon of my experience, I tried to demonstrate that the real lived space is not a concept but a lived and relational experience of the human subject always already involved in the lived-world by the sheer virtue of our implantation in the real world. In the concluding section of the chapter on the phenomenology of space Merleau-Ponty noted that “To experience a [spatial] structure is not to receive it into oneself passively: it is to live it, to take it up, assume it and discover its immanent significance” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 258). Therefore to experience real space is to actively participate in receiving it or in-gathering it through the fourfold of the lived-body, which is always already woven into the dense fabric of the lived-world, and thus being fully engrossed in it and to live it.¹

Together, You and I, United: The Good or What One Clings To – Love (January 22, 2008)

Together, you and I are gathered in this small but safe space, where the intrusions from the outside will not disrupt our mutual in-gathering of each other’s presence. When you are in this space with me, your presence summons my attention. Your presence calls out to me while overcasting everything that my senses would usually direct me to in this space if I was alone. The space becomes fluid as my emotions intensify through the sheer awkwardness of our nudity. I sense your vulnerability and through this sensing my own intensifies, while at the same time trying to comfort you. At first we barely look at each other, because we know that the look of the other can make you feel whole or can completely crush you.

We are both standing at the opposite ends of the room, each illuminated by a light above each one of our heads. We discover ourselves in the shadows below. You discover a game, a shadow game, and we each play with our own shadow like a baby exploring its still rather foreign body; Oh, here is my leg! Aha, here is my bum! Oh, look what I can do with my hands, I can make them grow or reduce in size by bringing them further and closer to light. Then, after having familiarized ourselves with our own shadow bodies, we proceed to see what else is out there. I discover you, and to my surprise learn that you have invented other ways of moving and finding your body. I want to try that too, to mimic you. And

¹. The film footage that was shot during my time in the sand dunes appears in the middle section of The Garden of Earthly Delights (2008).
now I see that you are mimicking my movements. This game of mimicking each other is finally wearing off and we proceed to make contact with each other’s shadows. Sadly we realize that as soon as one of us moves too far to the other and leaves the light spot to make closer contact, to unite with the other’s shadow, the shadow-self dissolves, it disappears. We soon realize that this simple and seemingly childish game of shadow-self is really a metaphor for human relations and most importantly of the experience of love, where the firm boundaries of the self and the other are no longer there in this emotional union – the ultimate experience of the good.

We both belong to this lived-space and yet another one is created within it, the intimate space between you and me, which is thick with the emotional intensity that exists between us. I in-gather your presence into myself and in this gathering I open to-wards-you. Together, we open towards one another while the two of us in-gather each other. I experience myself through you. Our mutual exchange is only possible by virtue of your and my real bodily presence, and especially in our most vulnerable states. Our sensitivity to each other’s bodily gestures, bodily orientation, and facial expressions that communicate our emotive states, is the basis of our communion – the union that underlies all community building and is rooted in the experience of the lived-body in the lived-world. But the pleasure of our mutuality is always underpinned by risk, the risk of the possible un-pleasure, if you so choose. You can crush me by not reciprocating my accepting look or through a gesture that is disapproving. You can completely close yourself off from me and not look at me at all or simply walk away; this of course would double my feeling of nudity and vulnerability. In fact, it would rip me open and in this wounded state I would completely recoil into myself.

I realize that although we co-exist in this space together, the two of us remain two. Your presence at once defines me and puts limits on me. I can never be fully united with you or have complete access to you. I am bound by my own limits, self, subjectivity, body, just as you are by yours. While aiming at the whole (Oh, the OOOOceanic fullness) but being left with a gaping hole (absence, void, emptiness), a wound that was left behind, I forever long for that union, that source of the good.

I attempted to draw attention to Merleau-Ponty’s notion that “being is synonymous with being situated” and, furthermore, by including the presence of the other in this sketch, also being oriented towards other beings (1962, p. 252). In the above description, my perceptual modality immediately directs me towards the other. This subsequently amplifies the emotive modality while placing the perceptual, the cognitive and the motor modalities at the horizon of my experience. However, these three modalities are attuned to the emotive modality and coloured by it. Furthermore, the perceptual modality, along with the other two, has the ability to transform the current state of the emotional modality by a change in the other’s bodily or facial gestures. In fact, it is important to note that all four modalities are always necessarily present but
in varying degrees. Perhaps due to the sheer intensity of emotional experience that was engendered in the presence of the other, I gave into the labile nature of language while permitting linguistic slips and acoustic assonances to direct my descriptions. But it is through these momentary absences of my rational ordering of thought that an earlier and more encompassing meaning of the word together has slipped in. So, what has fled or has been driven away from our full and lived sense of togetherness?

The word together is connected to two other words through its etymology: “to gather” and “good”. The etymological root of the word “together,” and the two other words, dates back to before the twelfth century. “Together” in the Middle English was *together* (from Old English *togaedere*, from *to* “to” + *gaedere* “together”). It is akin to Middle High German *gater* (“together”) and to the Old English *gaderian* (“to gather”). The verb “to gather” was in Middle English *gaderen*, from Old English *gaderian*, and akin to Middle High German *gadern* (“to unite”). This Middle High German word *gadern*, which means “to unite,” is the etymological root of the word “good,” from Old English *gōd*, and it is akin to Old High German *guot* (“good”) and in Sanskrit *ghadha* (“what one clings to”).

Therefore, what escapes our present and very abstracted sense of the word “together” is the good itself, by virtue of the eclipse of technological thinking over our lived bodily experience. As I previously noted, it is this lived bodily experience that imparts the fullness of meaning to language; experience as an active participation in the lived-world and not as passive reception of the world. “Word and speech,” Merleau-Ponty insists, “must somehow cease to be a way of designating things and thoughts, and become the presence of that thought in the phenomenal world, and, moreover not its clothing but its token or its body” (1962, p. 182). They must become word-flesh. Furthermore, by virtue of expanding the meaning of words “together” and “sense” (senses, direction, meaning), which is given to us through our experience of the lived-body in its active participation in the lived-space (lived-world), their mutual dependence becomes more visible in the following way: senses direct us to each other and the world, while gathering or uniting us in our mutual comm-union, and the meaning is found in that union, which is the good itself.

**The Gift of Imagination at Its Most Bare: Her Caress (February 4, 2008)**

This is our second session together, together as two, and I think that we discovered yet another art project. It is amazing how the experience of nudity gives rise to creation, creativity: last week a shadow project, today an illuminated screen
of togetherness. Why does nudity give? And what is it about this experience that prompts this giving, this opening towards creativity, creation, imagination? Is it that in the experience of nudity we are most bare, vulnerable, and open?

Today we took turns photographing one another. The experience of being shot with a camera feels very different from the experience of being seen in the bare presence of the other. Without the intermediary of the camera, our eyes turn into hands that touch without actually touching the surface of the skin. They are in constant motion. Their quick taps across our bodies, from head to toe, can feel like delicate and comforting caresses or like painful jolts. Those caressing motions of our eyes produce in-motions in me; the inward spiraling that gives rise to the most intense emotions.

… Caress (care-ss), caressing (cares-sing); is it not wonderful how fecund is our language, as long as we permit it to live and flow in our bodies, and to sing it out with pleasure of our mouths to the other. In this singing/calling I touch you, and in this touching/caressing is expressed my care for you which hopefully stirs your emotions. These emotions and perceptive sensations that are the gifts of our bodies recall her caress, the caress of our first other, our mother. Her caressing, her tender care for us and its expression in her voice were song for us, between us. These rhythmic and tonal soundings of her voice, our song and our language, our private language only between us, became regulated by law, silenced, and transformed into language as a means of practical communication that granted us entry into the Symbolic. And yet within this practical communication there remain echoes of her, and of our song. In caress, two S’s touching-together transform “care” into “touch,” leaving these two bodily modalities (affective and perceptive) in close proximity, in embrace as a path for us to re-member our song…

When the camera lens is separating us it prevents our eyes from touching, from caressing that puts us in touch with one another. With the camera between us, I can imagine that you are not looking at those parts of me that I feel most vulnerable about. The lens that acts like a thick veil prevents you from touching me, from touching me inside, because it also prevents me from seeing right into your eyes and seeing your expression; the expression of approval or disapproval. I rely on my imagination to comfort myself in thinking that you did not look at those vulnerable parts of me which I did not want you to see, and if you did look at them you approved.

Do I touch you? Can you feel the tender and hesitant tapping of my touch when I glance at you, when your eyes are hidden behind the camera?

Click, click, Click, click, Click, click … the shutter of the camera clicks away one image after another … Click, click … in the silence of our space this repetitive clicking sweeps me into its sound and rhythm … Click, click … which is very soothing and strangely familiar … Click, click … I begin to move to the rhythm that you set for me with the camera … Click, click, Click, click … you move in response to my movements … Click, click … we slowly become in-tune
with each other Click, click … and immersed in our rhythmic responses to one another … Click, click … no, I don't have to see your eyes, be touched by their gaze … Click, click … your body touches me through its in-tune responses to my body in-motion … Click, click, Click, click.

I looked at the photographs you took of me, and although I did not want you to take pictures of those vulnerable parts of me, you did, and I liked them. I liked them and I like the fact that you did take them and captured them for me to see. If you had not captured them, I would have wondered why not, and probably would have thought that you did not like them. This process is very generative (creatively, imaginatively and emotionally). When you approve and, in fact, praise these images of me, of me at my most bare and vulnerable, you make me realize that I am all-good, all-good from head to toe. This feeling helps me open towards you more and more, and look forward to our next generative-generous session – a session in generosity and giving, the gift of our presence.

As a way of extending the contours of caress in the above sketch, it might be worth our while to consider Luce Irigaray's notion of the caress in her book *To Be Two*, in particular in how it revives the intersubjective relation between the self and the other (me and you). But first, I would like to make a small digression and focus on the differences that she identifies between how women and men conceive relationship. In the opening paragraphs of the second chapter of her book, she notes:

My experience as a woman demonstrates, as does my analysis of the language of women and men, that women almost always privilege the relationship between subjects, the relationship with the other gender, the relationship between two […] With men, one finds both a material and spiritual relationship between subject and object in place of the intersubjective relationship – however incomplete – desired by women […] Finally, instead of the feminine universe's relationship between two, man prefers a relationship between the one and the many, between the I-masculine subject and others: people, society, understood as *them* and not as *you* (Irigaray, 2001, p. 17).

According to this description by Irigaray, it would thus appear that women tend to be more partial to close and private relationships, whereas men prefer the distant and therefore public ones. Women, thus, prefer intimate relations between two subjects (the self and the other, me and you), the intersubjective relationships. Furthermore, this intimacy between the two (me and you) implies proximity and closeness. Proximity and closeness are codependent, for spatial proximity is both sensibly and emotively experienced by the two subjects by manifesting itself in emotional closeness, or at least in amplification of the emotional dimension that would not be present if they were separated by distance, which does not impose the same limits on the two as spatial proximity. However, despite this proximity and closeness, the
two subjects remain two (me and you) in intersubjective relations. The two in intersubjective relation are neither fused, confused or smothered by my “I,” nor do the two become me and them; them the abstracted idea of the plural other, the others of the group, a crowd, of society that I can only experience at distance as some-bodies (objects) that impose no limits on me, the subject. Furthermore, this smothering and con-fusion that distance produces, which Irigaray identifies as being characteristic of relations common to men, leaves no space for considering the other sex, the second sex. The second sex or gender difference, according to Irigaray, is the ground of the irreducible alterity, which preserves the mystery of the other and therefore the gap that keeps the between as a relation between two; the two subjects who are co-dependent and co-creative. Instead the second sex, and therefore the possibility of alterity and of you in “me and you,” is generalized into a universal (uni “one” + versal “world”) “them.” This is really nothing more than the multiples of me (the one) at a distance, because I never get to know “them” as “you” in intimacy, in closeness, in private that would reveal to me our irreducible difference and that you can never be possessed by me. Therefore the between that gender difference presents must be preserved for me and you to live together as two subjects and to be in the intersubjective relationship.

Irigaray maintains that the intersubjective relationships belong to the feminine universe, which has been exiled from our lives into the oblivion of generalizing universals through the dominance of Western man who privileges violence, alienation and “domination of nature, of animals, of other humans” (p. 72). However, although it is difficult for us today to think what the distinct characteristics of the feminine identity would consist of, and which Irigaray insists still remain to be considered, she nevertheless gives us some clues. The characteristics of the feminine to be that she identifies for us include: contemplation and attunement that would lead to cultivation of the self and self-mastery without violence, “without sacrifice, amputation, or self-annulment,” and which would prompt human becoming as an “unfolding” rather than as violence of forcing becoming of Western man; and attentiveness, which would place emphasis on emotional closeness rather than the alienating distance, and reciprocity by way of relation between two instead of the possession by the one and annulment of reciprocal relation (intersubjective relation) (pp. 72-73). Most importantly, the intersubjective relationship has its origin within the body and its history, which Irigaray insists belong to the feminine universe, and therefore have been exiled from our consciousness in Western culture. However, she remains hopeful in noting that: “Perhaps it is up to women to think [the intersubjective relation]. They, who generate in themselves the other gender, can perhaps better conceive the two of subjectivity, of gender, and not only the one” (p. 34).
In her writing on the intersubjective relations, Irigaray brings to light the history of every human subject, the history that has been repressed and dismissed by patriarchal culture and technological thinking and progress. This is a bodily and affective history of our first and bodily relationship with our mothers. “The first other which I encounter,” she writes “is the body of the mother, and this encounter differs depending upon whether I am a girl or a boy. This difference in the first relation with the other’s body can enter into the constitution of woman’s or man’s identity” (p. 30). Maternal body and our first relation with mother and her body are already marked by gender. “Moreover, my body is inhabited by a consciousness which begins with its first relationship with the parental other, with the mother in particular. Such a relation is not neutral: it is sexuate” (p. 31). Already this first relationship, according to Irigaray, nurtures me as a sexuate and intentional being, “I am: a sexuate body, a body potentially animated by a consciousness which is my own” (ibid.). “This property: being sexuate, implies a negative, a not being the other, a not being the whole, and a particular way of being: tied to the body and in relationship with the other, including therein the return to the self” (p. 34). In this first relation we were two, two bodies and two intentionalities. In this way Irigaray also tries to bridge the body with consciousness. “In fact, intention exists both on the part of the mother towards the girl or body, and on the part of the child towards the mother. Thus, the affectionate gaze of the mother towards the body of her son and of her daughter, as well as their attention towards the mother” (p. 31).

Irigaray criticizes Western philosophy for annulling this first relationship, which writes out the mother along with the body out of history and as a result out of our culture. Our first relationship, the relationship with the mother, sets up the corporeally grounded consciousness. This corporeal consciousness is the foundation to which we constantly must return as a way of grounding the truly intersubjective relationship, i.e. the relationship between me and you (between two).

This two does not allow the submission of one to the other, if it is not to suffer the loss of the two. It does not even correspond to a juxtaposition of one + one subjects. It has to do with a relationship between […] This relationship between the two genders cannot be reduced to passivity for the female and activity for the male […] This division annuls one’s own identity: the two genders, the two people in relationship with each other no longer remain (p. 35).

By way of the body it is therefore possible for Irigaray to identify two types of transcendence: the horizontal transcendence and the vertical transcendence. The horizontal transcendence refers to the gender and the vertical to the genealogy (the origin and historical development that is the source of
being transcendent to the other in body, intentions, and words). They are both the origins and the guardians of difference. Irigaray enlists spatial metaphors to further help her emphasize the importance of relatedness/relation/relating in her ethical project of *To Be Two*, which depends on maintaining of a “between” and “to” of the two in the intersubjective relationship. Instead of relying on the tradition of Western philosophy by identifying transcendence with the spirit or with “pure transcendence inaccessible to sensible experience,” the transcendence that Irigaray proposes has its root in our body and sensible experience of the “irreducible alterity,” and not in the elsewhere of pure thought (p. 18). She writes:

In my present body I am already intention towards the other, intention between myself and the other, beginning in genealogy […] My body is never simple factuality or “facticity,” unless it is a denial, an annulment of these intersubjective relationships which, from infancy, have marked it […] The body itself is intentionality: vertical in genealogy, horizontal in the relation between the genders. Denying this intentionality means submitting myself to a consciousness abstracted from my incarnation (pp. 32-33).

Both dimensions therefore comprise our incarnate consciousness and, furthermore, they are codependent in maintaining the space of difference. Moreover, our consciousness of their existence is imperative in our relationships with others, in the intersubjective relationships that preserve the space of alterity and of the in-between of *To Be Two*.

The other is and remains transcendent to me through a body, through intentions and words foreign to me: “you who are not and will never be me or mine” are transcendent to me in body and in words, in so far as you are an incarnation that cannot be appropriated by me […] The will to possess you corresponds to a solitary and solipsistic dream which forgets that your consciousness and mine do not obey the same necessities.

Rather than grasping you – with my hand, with my gaze, with my intellect – I must stop before the inappropriable, leaving the transcendence between us to be. “You who are not and will never be me or mine” are and remain you, since I cannot grasp you, understand you, possess you. You escape every ensnarement, every submission to me, if I respect you not so much because you are transcendent to your body, but because you are transcendent to me (pp. 18-19).

“To” also acts as noesis (precognitive knowledge, bodily knowledge). “Far from wanting to possess you,” Irigaray writes, “in linking myself to you, I preserve a ‘to’, a safeguard of the in-direction between us […] This ‘to’ safeguards a place of transcendence between us, a place of respect which is both obligated and desired, a place of possible alliance […] I stop in front
of you as in front of an other irreducible to me: in body and in intellect, in
dteriority and in interiority” (p. 19). Moreover, this space of between me and
you, the space of To Be Two, is a space that generates the in-stasy. “You are
the one who helps me remain in myself, to stay in myself, to contain or keep
me in myself, to remain present and not paralyzed by the past or in flight
towards the future. Your irreducible alterity gives me the present, presence:
the possibility of being in myself, of attempting to cultivate the in-stasy and
not only the ex-stasy” (p. 37).

Just as the body does not figure prominently in our culture today, so have
its root and echoes been blocked out from our culture by silencing the mother
(the feminine) and our corporeal history. Irigaray’s project strives to write them
both into our culture and thinking. According to Irigaray, for a revolution in
thinking about ethics to take place in Western culture and philosophy,

philosophy would have to recognize that two subjects exist and that
reason must measure itself against the reality and the to be of those two
subjects, in their horizontal and vertical dimensions.

Philosophy would, therefore, be refounded upon the existence of two
different subjects and not upon the one, the singular, the same […]

Such a revolution in thought would permit the constitution of an interiority
different from that determined by and destined to a transcendence
of the beyond or constituted within a genealogical order […] This new
interiority could exist only in the sphere of a sexuate relationship: since
I am not you, I can open a space of interiority in me.

The limit which derives from belonging to a gender is not only a limit to
my presence: in the world, in my encounter with the other, with others;
it is also a limit which delineates a horizon of interiority. Because I am
not you, I can return within myself, collect myself, think.

[…]

This interiority of mine safeguards my mystery as your interiority leaves
you a mystery for me (pp. 36, 39).

According to Irigaray, women are the path to such a revolution in thinking.
Because of their biological incarnation, which echoes the first relation with the
parental other that is already sexuate, and the fact that they hold the possibility
of giving life to the other within their bodies, women can help us rethink our
current ethics and reconsider intersubjective relationship within the contours
of the vertical and the horizontal transcendence (p. 34).
Irigaray’s notion of caress, which she situates within the feminine universe of the subject-subject relation (the intersubjective relation), is one such attempt at rethinking the theory of ethics and perception, by means of the sensible experience between me and you, in their reciprocity.

The caress is an awakening to you, to me, to us. The caress is a reawakening to the life of my body: to its skin, senses, muscles, nerves, and organs, most of the time inhibited, subjugated, dormant or enslaved to everyday activity, to the universe of needs. ... The caress is an awakening to intersubjectivity, to a touching between us which is neither passive nor active; it is an awakening of gestures, of perceptions which are at the same time acts, intentions, emotions. This does not mean that they are ambiguous, but rather, that they are attentive to the person who touches and the one who is touched, to the two subjects who touch each other (p. 25).

The experience of caress that Irigaray describes is not so much a subject-object chiasm that Merleau-Ponty proposes in *The Visible and the Invisible*, when describing his hands in mutual embrace, but the self and the other in a subject-subject chiasm (me-you chiasm). It emphasizes the space of the in-between, the space of the chiasm (crisscrossing), maintaining a path of attunement to the sensible experience of the self and the other in reciprocity. Just like Merleau-Ponty, Irigaray wants to dispense with the dichotomy between the subject and object. However, for Irigaray gender difference is of an extreme importance when considering the life of the subject, for it is its foundation. She criticizes Merleau-Ponty for omitting it in his phenomenology and therefore for considering “sexuality as ‘ambiguity’ and ‘indeterminacy’ [...] As a result sexuality does not favor the emergence of intersubjectivity but, instead, maintains a duplicity in subjectivity itself in such a way that all of its actions, its sentiments, its sensations are ambiguous, murky, and incapable of being turned towards an other as such” (Irigaray, 2001, p. 21). For Irigaray we experience and live objectivity with our body by already belonging to a gender since our birth: “in so far as I belong to a gender, my body already represents an objectivity for me. Therefore, I am not a simple subjectivity which seeks an object in the other. Belonging to a gender allows me to realize, in me, for me – and equally towards the other – a dialectic between subjectivity and objectivity which escapes the dichotomy between subject and object” (*ibid*.).

The passage from Merleau-Ponty on the sexuate body that Irigaray considers is from his earlier work *The Phenomenology of Perception*, where the subject and the object figure still quite apart, in a dichotomy, but which his idea of the “communion” of the senses and of the body with the world attempts to overcome. His introduction of the idea of chiasm in his later work *The Visible and the Invisible*, where he deals with the experience of touch, which undoubtedly has been the model for Irigaray’s conception of the caress, I would argue,
breaks out of the subject-object dichotomy. It introduces the process of dialectic between the subject (touching hand) and the object (touched hand) in their continual crisscrossing, the chiasm. However, Irigaray's criticism of Merleau-Ponty's omission of gender difference in his phenomenology is quite justified, especially when considering sexual body in his earlier work, as the ground of the sensible experience and therefore the life of the subject. This is precisely Irigaray's major contribution in rethinking Western philosophy and ethics.

The caress is a path towards the revolution in thinking that returns us to the intimate, the space between me and you, which Irigaray insists on as a ground of new ethics. Therefore, it has to be a movement away from the social needs and usefulness, as well as collective existence as citizens, which are all foreign to the language of the intimate space of the two that is grounded in sensible experience.

The caress is an awakening to a life different from the arduous everyday. It is a call to return to you, to me, to us: as living bodies, as two who are different and co-creators. It is a common act and work, irreducible to those acts and works dedicated either to individual or collective needs.

[...] The caress is the spell directed at you in a way which is irreducible to the common, to the general, to the relative neutralization required by collective life. It is the awakening of you to yourself, and also to me. It is the call to be us, between us.

[...] The caress leads each person back to the I and to the you. I give you to yourself because you are a you for me. You remain you thanks to the you which you are for me, which you are “to” me – to recall the “to” of I Love to You, which has nothing to do with possession. Your body does not resemble an object for me, as subject, and the same is true for my body. For me, an incarnate subject, you are an incarnate subject. We are two woven bodies and words, beings and to-bes, and not merely beings under the spell of a master who vanish in imagined virginity. An invitation to peacefulness instead of to passivity, the caress unfolds as an intersubjective act, as a communication between two, a call to an in-stasy in us and between us, and not to an ecstasy outside of us (Irigaray, 2001, pp. 26-28).

Therefore, the source of revolution in thinking that this new ethics proposed by Irigaray will call for is to be found in and between our bodies, the intimate space of “to.”
I must confess that my way of shooting you is not exactly very intimate or giving towards you. I point the camera at you and while standing still, as to not completely dissolve you into abstract light of long exposure, I shoot you. Perhaps instead of you moving in front of the camera I should, as a way of having my body gesture to you, show you where and how I am looking, and how I am moved in this seeing. In this seeing, my eyes become my body and my body becomes my eyes as you draw them to you.

[…] When you draw me, you draw me out, out of my self, from the inside out. Out? Out where? Where to? To-ward you. You pull me out with the delicate tapping of your eyes, their attentive and engaged gaze that caresses me all over and opens me to you. You pull, draw in my body into you, into your body.

I enter you.

You pull me in and push me out, by expelling me through your body, like breath. In and out, in and out […] you leave traces of me, of this pulling, this drawing-in of me into you, with your pencil. Each stroke of your hand on the surface of the drawing paper is an extension of your seeing, of you seeing me and reacting to this seeing with gestures of your hand. Seeing, breathing […] you take me in, and after not being able to contain me any longer you let me out. I spill, pour, empty out of you, through you, onto the page. Breath after breath, your labour delivers me.

You birth me.

[…] When you draw me, I feel the caress of your eyes and the undivided attention of your eyes that are directed only towards me. In shooting this direct contact of your eyes and their caresses are absorbed, because mediated, by the camera. When you draw me, I feel very strong sensations, emotions. Why? Perhaps because drawing is more direct or intimate for both of us, as opposed to shooting with a motion picture camera.

It might be also interesting to consider how we respond and are directed by the essence of these two words, by language in general, on an unconscious level; shooting and drawing. In the English language one shoots with a camera. Shooting requires a target, an object to be aimed at with a camera, a machine, and to be captured like a victim. This perhaps might have its roots in the origins of the motion pictures, in particular in Étienne-Jules Marey’s experiments in photographic animation in which he used a fusil photographique (a photographic gun of his own invention) to investigate animal locomotion. It is nevertheless peculiar that English speakers chose this rather aggressive and death-oriented word to correspond to their actions with the film camera. In the French language tourner is used instead, and just as in the Polish language
kręcić both translate to turning, turning around, revolving, and spinning, which correspond to key mechanisms of the film camera, its heart and belly; the motor, the shutter, the turning or winding crank and the take-up reel that are constantly turning. This idea of turning that permits the light-image to be inscribed on film with each turn also suggests contact or touching of frames, as they are located one above the other and accumulated on the film roll. In further extrapolation on this action of turning, making a film for the French and the Polish has a strong connotation with copulation; the Sun (light) copulates with the Earthly materials (film: part mineral, part vegetal, part animal) with each turn, and some parts of the gestation take place in the body of the film camera. Whereas for the English speakers making a film corresponds with the action of shooting, capturing, arresting of life, essentially the act of Thanatos, for the French and the Polish through the action of the turning mechanism it is an act of Eros.

Now what of drawing? Drawing through the continuous activity of pulling in and pushing out appears to me to be also more akin to Eros. Furthermore, drawing continues after the lines have been placed on a page; it is a continuous and repetitive activity of drawing-in the other into myself and then onto the page, and again into myself, etc. And the traces of the other remain in my body longer than when shooting with a film camera, which mediates the process of pulling you into me as it pulls a representation of you into itself.

How then can I overcome this mediating and distancing aspect of shooting and become as intimate with you as you do with me when you draw me? Is there a bridge towards intimacy with the other in cinema via the French and the Polish repetitive and cyclical action of turning, turning around, returning? Returning to what … and who?

Respond-Dance and Sea-ing with Camera (March 11, 2008)

We relied only on a camera today to make representations of each other. In some ways it is becoming more comfortable to be in the nude around you. Is it because I know that you will not look at me there, those parts of me that I feel most vulnerable about, those I do not want you to see because I am afraid to be confronted with your rejection of me, me as wholly good from head to toe? I try to keep your gaze focused on my eyes. I carefully study it, paying particular attention to your eyes breaking away from our interlocked look and quickly scanning parts of my body. I keep trying to read your eyes and finally, after

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2. The footage of me shot during these sessions appears throughout my film The Garden of Earthly Delights (2008, 16 mm, colour, silent, 8 minutes).
much assurance from your eyes, I break away from this intent looking. I shift my attention to my body, to be wholly present for you, yet keeping your gaze with the horizon of my experience.

I want to be looked at. And even there, where I have previously not wanted you to look, I desire your look and your acceptance. So far I have only seen acceptance in your eyes and your bodily responses. Your gestures towards me with a camera or with a pencil on paper emanate acceptance, approval, and encouragement. Perhaps encouragement is too strong a word, or perhaps not for it is the encouraging look in your eyes that comforts me and supports my every step to continue and reveal more of myself to you; a look that we all experienced and that perhaps was one of our first most vivid experiences whose echoes still today reverberate within us.

But is there another reason why I feel more comfortable with you and myself? I wonder if the camera, the mediated look that it elicits, has something to do with it. We look through the camera and not directly at each others’ bodies, as a way to dispel some of that initial emotional unease. Stan Brakhage also preferred to experience those extremely emotionally charged moments through his camera, such as the birth of his first child in Window Water Baby Moving (1959) or the autopsy of cadavers at a Pittsburgh morgue in The Act of Seeing with One’s Own Eyes (1970). Perhaps our cameras have eased us into stripping bare, exposing ourselves physically and emotionally to one another, and in this vulnerable state of bareness opened us to the generative process between us, towards art-making.

Another aspect of our sessions with the camera involves reviewing what we have shot and being attuned to each other’s responses to our bodies and their representations created by one another; my shooting of her body, and her shooting of my body. In this reviewing process, and quite a revealing process, I see your look, your attitude or sympathy towards me and you see mine. If the picture shows me good and beautiful as a whole, with no parts omitted, I feel all good and whole. However, if the picture does not present me as all good, i.e. does not present every part of me, I feel fragmented and sad. My emotions no longer beam outward toward you but instead recoil into the darkest, the most remote parts of my being. I am certain that you experience the same emotions if the images of you that I made do not depict you as wholly good. That is why I want to capture all of you and in the most beautiful way, so that you will feel accepted, approved and wholly good, as a way to comfort you in your openness towards me; in our mutual charity.

Indeed, the camera experience is very different from drawing, in which I am drawn, pulled towards your eyes and enter you, later to be expelled, translated through your body on paper into a representation of me. There is no intermediary between us, but a direct immersion in one another, a union, a communion. But is such an intimacy, such communion, possible when shooting with a camera? If so what would it entail?
When I shoot you, my body responds to you. I respond to every minute movement and gesture that you make and you to me. I move with you. I dance with you to our rhythm: the inner rhythm of your body, the inner rhythm of my body while holding the camera, and the third rhythm of our respond-dance that we co-create together. My rhythm inscribes and resonates within you and yours within me, while constantly attuning ourselves to one another and our together rhythm of this coupling. However, within this coupling and its resulting rhythm you and I do not lose ourselves and merge into one, instead we remain two. As two, we ensure the continuity of our in-between rhythm and carry on our respond-dance.

When I shoot you, you immediately respond to me with your body. Unlike in drawing, where the respond-dance is somewhat delayed, in shooting there is a possibility of immediate response. Therefore shooting can become equally intimate when it is not diffused in the labyrinth of reason, of cognitive relay (censorship) between the person behind the camera and the person in front of the camera. This immediacy of response turns seeing into an even more active and immersive sort of “see-ing.” Together in this see-ing we are incessantly attuning to one another; we swim in the thick sea of our active visual engagement. Your gaze solicits my entire body to become eyes, and conversely for my vision to fuse with my other senses, in particular, hearing and touch, that open and attune me to you, to listen, to touch, to put me in-touch with you, with me. In the immediacy of our experience, this see-ing returns my senses into a synaesthetic communion and helps me remember the history of my being, the history of my first relation with the other, an intersubjective and a bodily relation of “two and one” with my mother. Mother-me, at first two in one, and later seemingly two subjects yet one because interlocked in their dependence and attention to one another. You and I cannot be one, or desire to completely regress or be reduced to one. However, partial regression through remembering into the oceanic is quite desirable and necessary to make porous the wall that protects and keeps me in one piece and to open to you. In this interlocked oneness of our oceanic see-ing two of us remain. And we must remain two for its ebb and tide to continue, for this intersubjective experience to continue its flowing rhythm between you and me. I can be swept and give myself to you in this see-ing but not completely. I have to be able to come back to myself, just as you to yourself, so that we can continue this pulse of seeing – see-ing between you and me.

Painting and Sadness

Because I love you absolutely, I, myself, am no longer absolute. Recognizing you gives me measure. Because you are, you impose limits upon me. I am whole, perhaps, but not the whole. And if I receive myself from you, I receive myself as me. We are no longer one [...] Does existing not mean offering you an opportunity to become yourself? (Irigaray, 2001, p. 15).
Painting her – blue paint spread on the surface of 16-mm clear film leader. Paint smeared around in a tiny rectangular frame.

Painting her – at first an amorphous blob but slowly begins to echo her form, her bodily form.

Painting her – one amorphous blob after another. A series of blue-coloured representations of her body are beginning to look like an animated sequence, reverberating with the animations of my body and her body, together.

Painting her – why I do persistently hear the word “pain” in painting? Why does it echo in me so profoundly and in its resonance comes to the fore for me? And why have I not heard its resonance before today, before our encounter together?

In painting you, perhaps “pain” echoes those parts of you that I left out: parts that are concealed from my field of vision; parts that are and must stay concealed from me to establish the difference that exists between us, and therefore the possibility of you and me; and parts that I cannot physically fit into the tiny 16-mm film frame, which is the size of my index finger nail. In painting you, perhaps “pain” springs forth from the sheer nature of working with this medium, which leaves me no choice but to leave out even those parts of you that you presented to me by way of opening to me. I cut them off and out from the totality of the visual composition, and as a result leave you fragmented, in parts rather than whole, the wholly good. In the process of painting, my action of releasing your bodily form onto the celluloid canvas is constantly interrupted, it is fragmented by having to add paint to the tip of my brush which halts the dynamic flow of my actions and my immersion in the experience of being together.

In painting you, just like in drawing, I pull you into me, you enter my body and I release your bodily form through my body with the actions of my hand. And indeed, just like drawing, these painting actions resemble breathing (inhale and exhale, etc.); taking the outside in, transforming it, and letting the inside out. The only difference in painting is that the action of pulling you in and releasing out is disrupted by momentary pauses of having to add paint to my brush. These momentary pauses disrupt the flow of my activity and engagement “to” you, therefore the immediacy of our togetherness (our eye-body, you-me meditation), while fragmenting my experience and the representations of your bodily form as a result. But one may ask if the process of drawing is really that much different from that of painting. I will have to insist that in drawing the immediacy of my projective actions in response to the intensity of my experience of seeing her conveys her form and our experience together in a more direct manner. Perhaps this is where our language leads us, how it thinks us and our actions and gives sense to our being.

Pain … pain … is it my pain? Whose pain is it if not hers? But is it really pain? This is not a real pain, at least not physical pain of any sort, only my imagination of what it must (emotionally) feel like for her to be painted; both the pleasure
and pain of this experience. I imagine that the pleasure of this experience for her is the pleasure of presenting or revealing her bodily parts to me, for me to give them presence in the composition. And the pain in this experience may be connected to the absence of these and other parts of her, which appear to be concealed or rejected by me in the composition. By concealing/rejecting those parts presented to me by her, I (the painter) am the pain-inflictor. I am also, however, capable of feeling the pain of the inflicted other, in other words being capable of empathy as the language of my sketch evidently points towards.

But where do language and such words as empathy and sympathy actually lead me, and what significance do they have for me? Empathy (em “in” + pathos “feeling, emotion, experience”) means “the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner” (“Empathy,” def. 2, <www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empathy>). Sympathy (syn “with, together” + pathos “feelings, emotion, experience”) means “having common feelings, mutuality; an affinity, association, or relationship between persons or things wherein whatever affects one similarly affects the other; mutual or parallel susceptibility or a condition brought about by it; unity or harmony in action or effect; the correlation existing between bodies capable of communicating their vibrational energy to one another through some medium” (“Sympathy,” def. 1, 4, <www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sympathy>). Thus, empathy and sympathy are simultaneous with painting and being painted. These words and their corresponding sense (meaning, feeling) are perhaps more amplified in painting than in drawing, or when shooting with a camera. This is in part because the experience of the painting process itself leads us to it and the English language amplifies this experience; painting, the other is in pain because cut out, left out by me, the painter, and not presented as whole in the composition (“to put together [parts] so as to form a whole”), as wholly good. I feel with the other. This pain is sadness, and it belongs to me; the sadness of not being able to paint her fully, wholly, in the composition, both the parts that stay concealed because of my lack of skill as a painter and the parts that transcend me and will forever stay a mystery to me.

But is there more to this absence, this concealment and the mystery of you that transcends me? I took into me a part of you and projected it by means of my body on the clear-leader, the film canvas. But is concealment simultaneous with emotional pain and anguish that is present in the act of painting you here? This absence, which is part of selection (cutting away in selection, rejection, leaving out) in the process of composition, is different from absence whose presence as concealment we can sense and feel. This absence, the invisible and its mystery, is fecund and nourishing.

… love must keep the mystery of the other intact, to nurture the flow between the two.
Thus the amplification of empathy and sympathy in the experience of painting, as language itself helped in leading us to it, directs us to the essence of the experience of togetherness. This essence being the feeling of mutuality, by means of the reversibility of the self (me) and the other (you) in sympathy and not by physical means of possession. Therefore the building blocks of love are indeed in the intimate space of to-gether.

**Conclusion: Together – To Gather – To Unite – The Good – What One Clings To**

Would not generating the good together represent the end of conflicts and lacerations? Wouldn’t peace between us be born in the birth of the spiritual, which is neither word nor body alone, but the fruit of a love which leaves each of us to ourselves, and opens up a way for each of us to be as two?

To generate the good, to go beyond the clouds, to arrive at the sun, not merely at his light, but at him as a warm, unavoidable presence, both of this world and of another. Remaining here, I have moved into the beyond with you.

For this journey, I have listened, I have opened in myself a space to accommodate you, a clearing of silence. I have welcomed this part of you, this flower of your body, born from your breath and heart, nourished by your sun, which has sprung from you and has inclined towards me. I have wanted to savor and protect this, before wanting more (Irigaray, 2001, p. 60)

How much prompting and provocation will it take to break through the thick shell of social indifference and lack of concern for the vulnerable other and to bring into being a culture that is truly intersubjective? What form should art take in order to engender powerful experience that infuses movement, therefore change through revolt on the personal level, into the alienating and lifeless (because unresponsive and detached from Eros) social order? Luce Irigaray suggests that a subjective and intersubjective culture “would require being faithful to the reciprocity in touching-being touched, itself a matter of perceiving or of speaking” (p. 23). For Irigaray perception and language are paths “towards sharing the mystery of the other” (p. 20), the mystery that safeguards the irreducible alterity between us, of you and I, while preserving the space of a “to” and maintaining the “in-direction between us” (p. 19). Perhaps this is precisely where artists should start, i.e., in the reciprocity of experience between subjects, while keeping the mystery between them intact. We can also add to this Merleau-Ponty’s notion of experience that extends beyond intersubjective relations and into the world, which is to live it not as a passive reception of the world but as an active participation in the world.
He directs us to this notion of experience in his description of the experience of spatial depth in *Phenomenology of Perception*, which may very well apply to any experience. “To experience a structure is not to receive it into oneself passively: it is to live it, to take it up, assume it and discover its immanent significance” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 258).

The importance of body in art, and therefore body art, is that it is the source of the good. For my body (perceives, senses – *sens* [sense, significance, feeling]) directs me through lived-space, the world I inhabit. It connects me with the world (two fleshes), while opening the way to the other through feeling (empathy, love) and granting me the ability to make (cognitive) sense of it all. Thus the experience my body grants me is central in redefining community and the public sphere based on a sense of the good at its core, through the strong binding emotions and love for one another; between two as “I love to you”.

**Works Cited**


