Are Footnotes Enough?
The Challenges of Translating the Philosophy of Sexual Difference

Caroline Wilson
Duoda, Women's Research Centre, University of Barcelona

Abstract: *Luce Irigaray challenged the world to think about the concept of equality which had, for several centuries, provided a paradigm from where to measure the freedom (or lack of it) of women, who were not initially included in the Enlightenment project. Irigaray's provocative question ("Equal to whom?") was rooted in the broader women's movement, full of excitement at the time, that wished to transform the world into a place whereby women and men could live in a changed and happier relationship to one another and to the world itself. However, times have changed rapidly over the past decades and the philosophical work pursued by Irigaray and others engaged in a similar project has diverged significantly from the direction taken by feminist thinking and practice in the English-speaking world. In the face of such divergence (and a clear imbalance in impact and influence given the predominance that the English language has taken on globally during the same period; a predominance resulting in many assumptions as to the authority of the philosophy done in English in leading trends of philosophical inquiry) this paper seeks to explore whether faithful translation of this other, less considered or understood, philosophy is even possible. The matter is made more complex given that the philosophical work in question is rooted in the human relationship to language itself, seeking to effect change through transforming the symbolic order. A philosophy based on the transformation of the symbolic order is evidently highly concerned with language itself and the signifiers attributed to it, thus presenting the translator with potential stumbling blocks. Is she, faced with transmitting meaning that will not be easily passed into the other language, going to have to produce constant footnotes, the usual resource for this dilemma? Here we will look at specific terms such as the sexuate, the symbolic order of the mother and (female) authority in order to provide a working example of some of the issues at stake.*

Introduction

Is it possible to translate a philosophical body of thought that is in turn also a living political movement? Not only this, what if, embedded within the said philosophy, is the belief that the usage of language itself can act as a transformative force. That is, that the re-signification of words and/or terms in relationship with/to others also involved in this political project is an integral founding element of the philosophy itself. If that transformative force is perceived to be dynamic and alive, acquiring new meaning through being re-thought in relationship with others, how is it possible to render this significant into another language, where such an endeavour is not taking place?

Additionally: what if that other language, English in this case (representing an already established symbolic order the meanings of whose words are often taken as being *the* meanings), is potentially hostile or indifferent to the new meanings being generated in relation to the words being used with transforming political intent? If we translate such language without making the transformational intent explicit, what dangers do we incur?

This article seeks to explore these issues using the experience of the author who has acted as translator over several decades for the work taking place in certain European countries. This work is sometimes referred to under the umbrella of "continental philosophy" but much of it, through lack of translation and outside interest, is still unknown to those working only in English.

Particular examples of words or terms will be used to explore some of the issues involved. It might be observed that because the general field and historical time within which this philosophical thinking has taken place is one that the English-speaking world *is* familiar with, even probably considering itself a leader in the field (that is, feminist philosophy and theory), there is considerable scope for exploration of the extent to which misunderstanding occurs. Of specific interest is the extent to which this thinking has been misunderstood and misappropriated[1] by those who do know the philosophical terrain in question but who have in fact failed to grasp significant elements of its original intended meaning.

If this is the case, there are vital issues at stake for the matter of translation. Is it possible to translate with any accuracy at all something that the target audience does not understand on many levels, or is such an attempt likely to contribute to the misappropriation indicated above?

[1] The concept of misappropriation is particularly relevant here given that it is so central to Irigaray's initial thesis concerning the usurpation of the female/feminine throughout patriarchal history.

The philosophy of sexual difference

Luce Irigaray is generally considered to have kicked off a new wave of feminist thinking when she began to question the history of philosophy predominant in western civilization.[2] Of particular concern to her was the paradigm of equality and its usage in feminism. Interrogating the principle of equality is a matter of huge philosophical (and political) significance which has perhaps only gained traction in recent years; it is becoming ever more urgent to investigate both the philosophical and real supposed shared understandings around it, given how easily the word is now bandied about without any kind of profound discussion at all as to what it actually means.[3] The relationship between equality and freedom in lived experience, in a study of almost anyone's life, may have much to reveal, not all of it comfortable. For example, two twentieth century women, Doris Lessing and Carmen Martín Gaite, showed in their lives and their writings just how mistaken we may be to think that the said relationship (between equality and freedom) is a simple or necessarily direct one.

The last couple of hundred years have seen the concept of equality endowed with huge meaning. Indeed, we might think that much of western so-called civilisation has depended upon the notion. Certainly, feminism in its many manifestations has relied heavily upon it, to the extent that achieving it is still generally held to be the main goal for women in the modern world. It is not a term generally considered to be in need of interrogation. Nevertheless, Irigaray's concern, pertaining to the direction that the women's movement should go in, was in many ways shared by many of the feminist thinkers of the nineteen seventies. However, it

[2] *Speculum de l'autre femme*, 1974.

[3] This leads us also into hugely complex terrain whereby the already troubled relationship between western feminist theories and the (automatic) assumptions made about the freedom, or rather, non-freedom, of those outside of that history goes on to yet another level: if Irigaray, for example, is asking us to consider that the feminist theory predominant in the western world is fundamentally flawed, this also has the capacity to shake up the relationship between the supposed "free" and "non-free" women on a global level. This paper does not have the scope to enter into discussions around this in any greater depth but undoubtedly one of the motivations for translation in the first place is the hope that far deeper and wider reflections and conversations might take place, precisely in reaction to a greater understanding of Irigaray's challenge to think beyond the philosophical framework of equality.

has been left largely to one side in the English-speaking culture.[4] In the general culture, however, it is now possible to hear men (and some women) say that the aims of equality have been achieved in modern western societies; the implication is that feminism is no longer required. This is quite frequently said whilst those in power proceed to reinforce the worst kinds of male white protectionism and bullying tactics so as to rather desperately keep control and power over others. Presumably, the declaration that equality is now a given relates to the fact that it is inscribed in laws across the western world. Technically, then, it can happen if all other conditions are in place.

Unfortunately, the fact that in theory women (in some parts of the world at least) have equal rights, seems to have generated a tendency for it to be used as a strategy for in practice keeping women out and perhaps enacting a subtle power grab as yet undocumented due to a lack of language with which to describe it. Clearly, having control over the language used is an integral part of this power game.[5]

However, if we care to look back to the sixties and seventies and the vast amount of feminist scholarship and activism that took place then, we see that the question of what equality is and why women might want to fight for it was not an indifferent one. At the time, it would seem apparent that the general aim was not merely to be equal to men, but rather to transform the world and social relationships in their entirety, so that women and men might co-exist rather more freely and in a different relationship to one another. Kate Millet, recently deceased, coined this rather well as *sexual politics*, and her intuition and consequent argument that sexual politics was at the centre of many of the issues involved is still very relevant today.

Returning to Irigaray's question however, what happened was that it led to a questioning of the history of philosophy itself. Her thesis, broadly put, was that

[4] There are exceptions to this and a small but strong body of scholarship and discussion now exists in relation to Irigaray's work. However, this does not seem to have permeated mainstream perceptions of what feminism is about in any way. Neither has the work carried out steadfastly in Italy and Spain over the past decades to further deepen the thinking of sexual difference, as yet, been considered as having a potentially more global reach.

[5] This paper was written just before the outpourings in certain parts of the world of women's voices, embodied thus far most strongly in the #MeToo movement. This movement can be seen as an expression of many things but it surely needs deeper work if it is really the case that there can be a genuine change in how women's voices are able to shape the world. Again, the issues raised in this article are vitally important if we are to stay grounded and focussed on achieving genuine transformation both in women's lives but also, perhaps crucially, in the relationships between the sexes, if we are to cease seeing feminism in terms of battle and war with men and to find a way to exist (happily) as co-creators of our world.

western philosophy developed with the misappropriation of the female mind and body, using it as suited but in fact excluding women themselves from the *polis*, where both politics and philosophy are made. The *polis*, and the knowledge produced from it, is thus not only incomplete but fundamentally biased and out of balance, as she sought to show with her theory of usurpation of the work and existence of the female sex.

If we accept her theory, we are, in our known history at least, at the very beginnings (and in many cases, seemingly yet to even arrive there) of finding out what it might mean to make politics and philosophy in a world where both sexes create and define meaning, in a transformed relationship to one another, where that relationship is in itself a fertile place of creation of new meaning.

In the English-speaking world, to speak of these matters is almost impossible. However, in Italy and in Spain, concerted attempts have been made over the last decades to take Irigaray up on her challenge to think through what a *sexuate* world might look like (It is no surprise that my spell-check does not of course recognise the word sexuate).

Irigaray herself was read by a few English-speaking feminists from quite early on, and, it has to be said, was largely, especially at first, misunderstood. A relatively early exception to this, perhaps the first in English, was Margaret Whitford,[6] who gently encouraged a readership in the English language to stop trying to subjugate Irigaray's thought and ideas to their own paradigms, and rather open themselves to its potential for new meaning. Later, others have arrived at far more sophisticated understandings.

What has seemed far less easy to bring to the consideration of the English-speaking world has been the work that has taken place in both Italy and Spain to develop a *politics* that roots itself in and sets out from the philosophy of sexual difference. I understand this philosophy to originate with Irigaray's notion that sexual difference is *the* thing to be thought through (and thus re-signified) in the second half of the twentieth century. She cited Heidegger as the source of the idea that each age has something to "think through".

In the English-speaking world, however, we now regularly equate anything feminist with equality (usually its failure) and little else. The notion that feminism and the theories it birthed was always intended to transform the world, not make it worse, often seems to have almost been forgotten. Meanwhile, our worlds of education, business and politics have been taken over by what a female politician

[6] Whitford, 1994.

recently denoted as the politics of bullying.[7] Obviously, to survive in that world, women are often complicit in the said politics, unfortunately leading many to equate their behaviour with the belief that this implies that women are no better than men when it comes to power. Whilst on some level this may be the case, it obviates the fact that the history of women and men has been so radically different until very recently that any conclusions we might arrive at concerning the nature of either women or men and how they might operate in systems and societies not saturated in paradigms of power, money and competition are premature.

But feminism really wasn't intended merely as a battle to be able to participate on an equal footing with politics and policies of domination, power and abuse of others. When we now hear comments as to how individual women are "no better than men" when in positions of power that should of course be of no surprise. It is logical that staying within the same system, including women in it (and reluctantly, at that) will not lead to deep change.

Irigaray, in her more recent developments on the theme, is very clear that if we continue in the same vein, philosophically speaking our relationship to the real is not hopeful. She sees the arrival of the sexuate onto the scene as the only hope for a civilisation that is otherwise doomed to re-enact the same enclosed system that allows for no new life. Rather, the continued imposition of the (historically undeniably patriarchal) existing system and the repeated efforts to destroy the apparition of the sexuate, particularly, but not only, in the female, is what is causing this world to slowly die. The following quotation offers a sample of her writing as to the consequences of excluding the female/feminine difference from the symbolic order:

> Thus a God, unique and in the masculine, has occupied the place of the ecstasy opened and safeguarded by her. From then on, the world is closed upon itself, and the way is prepared for the hell at work today (*In the Beginning, She Was*: 4).

The language in the above citation is full of meanings that a scholar of Irigaray would have a fairly instant grasp of. However, this would not necessarily be the case for somebody reading in the English language. Nevertheless, Irigaray has been quite extensively translated into English and significant work has also been done as to the reception of her thinking, opening us up to the possibility of discussion of her ideas.

[7] The Guardian, September 2017.

However, as indicated above, this has not been the case with the work originating in the philosophy of sexual difference taking place in Italy and Spain that has attempted to also become a politics.

Let us now take three words/terms as examples of problems to solve in translation. It should be noted that although the target language in question is English, due to its being the author's native tongue, presumably the issues at stake would arise to an even greater extent in other languages that might be completely disparate in root, form and cultural context, and thus throw up even harder problems.[8]

The three words/terms chosen are interesting in relation to the issues posed here in this paper because each of them manifests different characteristics in terms of origin, development of meaning, and potential for recognition (or not) of shared meaning.

Example 1: Sexuate

The term sexuate is one very clearly coined by Irigaray herself, one that emerges out of her initial work. In this work she establishes the concept of sexual difference as a founding element of her philosophical thinking, such as in *The Ethics of Sexual Difference*. As mentioned above, initial grasp of her work was limited and often erroneous. However, this has been rectified in many ways over the past decades until today, when we can put the term sexuate into a commonly used search engine and find many references and scholarly articles on the topic. Many of these clearly have worked hard to engage with Irigaray's thinking and in doing so, have evolved an understanding of the meaning intended by her. However, on many occasions, there are difficulties in the feminist community itself about the said meaning. Mainly, this relates to an ongoing discussion as to whether a philosophy that roots itself so fundamentally in the (sexuate) body can be viable. There is no scope to go further into this discussion here but it is one that has existed since the beginnings of the concept of sexual difference being translated into the English language and has led to many misunderstandings of her work, leading to the erroneous critique that this was a philosophy based on essentialism, on female biology alone, and as such,

[8] It would be highly desirable if this paper encouraged those translating into other languages and cultures with very few apparent similarities or shared history to develop the issues at stake even further.

unacceptable for any feminist project seeking to impact on the world on a much broader scale.

When we come to the matter of translating *sexué*, then, we find that translators into English have nearly all found their way to the word sexuate. The option might have been to use the already existing word sexed, as in "to sex an animal", to discover the sex of something, but this was clearly deemed to be insufficient to transmit the meanings contained in the French word.[9] Sexué translates quite nicely into other Latin origin languages such as Spanish and Italian but in English the word sexuate was a new invention that did not fit quite so neatly.

As such, given Irigaray's intentions to put something new into motion, this is not necessarily a bad thing. Inventing a word provokes and invites discussion and debate, something that is surely desirable particularly in the context of her project. It is interesting that many of those seeking to render this project intelligible to those reading in English use the terms *sexuate difference* or *sexual difference* indiscriminately, which could create problems of meaning. However, we might consider that this constitutes a lesser problem, if it means that the reader has already crossed the threshold into Irigaray's thought and is hopefully interested in exploring deeper subtleties forthwith.

With this word, sexuate, the translator's task turns out to be relatively simple, because there is now a body of scholarship in the English language whereby decisions have already been made to introduce the term. For a translator, this quite clear consensus makes the decision to use it too, if required, quite unequivocal.

However, if we have the time as a translator we might look into the varying interpretations of this word and see that there are elements left unresolved. We might discover that even Irigaray herself, over a long trajectory as a philosopher emboldened to think freely and newly on all levels, setting out from a new ontological perspective, changed her thinking and ideas at different stages of her career. If the thinking emerging from her philosophy of sexual or sexuate difference is not fixed, and she herself would seem to enjoy this fluidity of meaning and how it is expressed through language, how might a translator manage?

In the case of this particular term, the interesting thing is that even a translator absolutely new and potentially indifferent to Irigaray's philosophical project would, in all likelihood, thanks to our modern technological translating

[9] Although I have found this version used in earlier translations of Irigaray and remember my own indecision when starting out with the translation of the term; it is interesting that it now seems so clearly insufficient.

resources, reach the word sexuate and quickly find enough corroboration and references to it to be fairly sure that this is an appropriate translation.

Would a footnote be, in any case, helpful here? Perhaps it would, given that some readers will not know much, if anything, about the said project. What would the footnote cover? Perhaps a brief commentary on Irigaray's work and some related bibliography, but also a mention of the fact that, even now, many of the terms and concepts of this work are in the air as to how they might be received and interpreted by different cultures and languages.

Example 2: The Symbolic Order of the Mother

If we move on to the second term, we find ourselves with the new coining of a phrase that, unlike the word sexuate, turns up relatively few entries on our search machine, thus presenting a translator with some different issues.

The philosophical concept of a politics of the symbolic evolved out of the term used by Luisa Muraro in her ground-breaking work *The Symbolic Order of the Mother*. Muraro's work and that of the groups she has consistently worked closely with over decades, the Milan Women's Bookstore and the Diotima group at the University of Verona, as well as her later connection with Duoda, at the University of Barcelona, was quite closely connected in origin with that of Irigaray, although they do not tend to make overt reference to each other. The thinking underlying the text *The Symbolic Order of the Mother* is very clearly rooted in the evolution of the philosophy of sexual difference, then.

However, very little of the quite significant body of work produced in Italy, and slightly later, Spain, has been translated into English. Teresa de Lauretis produced a fine translation of an earlier work by Muraro and others as the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective and accompanied it with an excellent introductory essay.[10] This book did not enjoy huge success, though, and attempts by Italian and Spanish women to open up debate with the English-speaking world largely fell by the wayside. *The Symbolic Order of the Mother* was translated into Spanish and German, but not, to date, English; in itself perhaps something to think about.[11]

[10] *Sexual Difference*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990 [*Non credere di avere dei diritti*, Turin: Rosenberg i Sellier (1987)].

[11] In the course of preparing this paper, I was delighted to discover that an English translation is on its way, due to be released in early 2018. Hopefully this will enable new discussions to take place in the English language.

When those in the English language read or hear talk of anything to do with the mother in feminism, the tendency is to equate this with a certain trend in feminism to raise the status of mothers and mothering in the established world. Whilst there is nothing wrong with this of itself, many feminists who have fought to be part of the world on every level, to be makers of the *polis* (and symbolic order) alongside their male counterparts, react in a quite hostile way to any attempt to put the maternal at the centre.

Making reference to the mother, therefore, in feminist theory or philosophy, can lead to a triggering of this hostility and cause some to reject what Muraro's work might have to offer to a greater audience. *The Symbolic Order of the Mother*, however, is not exactly a treatise seeking to literally put mothers at the fore; it is rather a philosophical text which sets out from the premise already articulated by Irigaray (thus accessible in English), that the work and being of women at almost every level in history has been controlled, usurped and sometimes abused by a male patriarchal symbolic order organised for its own benefit (Quite why the men controlling the development of societies in our known history needed to limit and suppress female existence and women's contribution to the symbolic order is another, interesting, question but there is no scope to address it here).

The Symbolic Order of the Mother is, then, a journey into starting again or returning to making a symbolic order but this time giving female existence and experience a place and a voice. It is part of an endeavour to sexuate philosophy and thus to effect change on the symbolic order so as to bring into being a sexuate world.

To translate this into English without understanding the background of the text or the philosophy being developed behind it can be seen to carry dangers if the language used is not to trigger important misunderstandings, starting with the use of the word mother in the title itself. Unlike the present-day situation with the work of Irigaray, the Internet or other texts will not turn up much that will help the translator to decide how to proceed. The term symbolic order also probably requires explanation.

It is difficult to see how to get beyond these problems without considerable usage of footnotes. This in turn requires the translator to have considerable understanding of the philosophical content and context — quite a demand. It is difficult to see how a translator might produce a faithful translation without making considerable effort to understand where Muraro is coming from. This is not a problem in itself, but it is a lot of work. Here the possibility of recommending related bibliography in English is clearly very limited.

This text could be seen as the ground from which the Italian and Spanish women concerned evolved what they have called the politics of the symbolic. The politics of the symbolic is an attempt to transform the symbolic order through connecting language, embodying or signifying words in relation to new political practices, or if not new, through explicitly naming them to endow them with greater transformative force.

If that relationship between language, meaning and transformation of the real are all so vitally and indissolubly connected but are taking place only in a particular language, then how is translation possible if the meaning attributed to the words is not only not the same but has no correlation in the target language? We see this problem most clearly in relation to Muraro's text because there really is no correlation to it in the English-speaking world. This philosophy was born out of the women's movement and as such has evolved in a context that those involved perceive to be political. It is this they refer to as the politics of the symbolic. In English, a phrase was coined in the earlier days of feminism: the personal is political. Unfortunately, the momentum gained by the women's politics then that could also be described as a politics of the symbolic, that is, one aiming to transform the symbolic order in which human beings exist and express themselves, not just survive in a hostile environment still controlled overall by some men, has largely, to date, in the English-speaking world, been lost.

For a translator, then, making this text comprehensible might require a lot of footnotes and a lot of research… It will be very interesting to see how this has been managed by the translator in the forthcoming text and hopefully, the existence of this translation will enable the growth of a greater community of discourse than that which presently exists.

Example 3: Female/feminine authority

In their philosophical and political work, the Italian women of Diotima and the Milan Women's Bookstore spent a lot of time thinking about the meanings of specific words which they could see were motives for confusion in the existing symbolic order. One of perhaps the most interesting of these was authority, or, more precisely, female or feminine authority. In terms of this paper and its focus, the interesting thing for a translator is that authority is a word and concept that in theory should offer no problems when it comes to translation. The collocation *female authority*, however, is another thing altogether. To sexuate the word authority in

English without explaining what it means to do so is highly problematic and probably dangerous to do without making explicit that it arises out of a deep discussion as to both what it means to sexuate, and the difference between authority and power.

In any case, we might consider that authority as a concept now, certainly if we look at the politics currently operating in the world, is in an almost complete meltdown. What do we mean when we use it in English? Do we distinguish it from power? Do new generations, who are responsible for passing down future meanings, understand it as separate from power?

In Lia Cigarini's book *La politica del desiderio* (The Politics of Desire), 1995, she refers to the crisis of the concept of authority in the twentieth century in the western world. This follows on from the work of Hannah Arendt in "What Is Authority?".[12] Arendt analyses the meaning and history of authority in the western world, from Plato who introduces authority as a political form, to how the Greeks applied persuasion in the managing of domestic affairs, and force and violence in foreign ones, through to the rise of the totalitarianism that led to the second world war. She differentiates authority from both force and coercion, depending rather upon a shared recognition of hierarchy and the passing down of knowledge from one generation to the next. On this view, when this hierarchy is no longer accepted by all parties, conflict arises.

However, Arendt does not perceive the crises of the twentieth century to signal the end of civilization, writing:

> With the loss of tradition we have lost the thread which safely guided us through the vast realms of the past, but this thread was also the chain fettering each successive generation to a predetermined aspect of the past. It could be that only now will the past open up to us with unexpected freshness and tell us things no one has yet had ears to hear […] But the loss of worldly permanence and reliability — which politically is identical with the loss of authority — does not entail, at least not necessarily, the loss of the human capacity for building, preserving, and caring for a world that can survive us and remain a place fit to live in for those who come after us (1956).

[12] Originally "What Was Authority?" in C. Friedrich, ed., *Authority* [Harvard University Press, 1959].

It might be thought that the concept of authority passed down through a male elite philosophical and political tradition *had* to be in crisis. We could posit that the practice of "building, preserving and caring" in a male-dominated society was of an extremely ambivalent nature, given the warlike tendencies of many patriarchal societies. So, what Arendt tentatively suggests in relation to a possible future where those values and practices are not necessarily lost may be an understatement.

In the work of the Italian women, authority was to be distinguished from power, which depended more on coercion and force than on the transmission of the past. Authority, however, on their view, was a *relational* structure, containing knowledge and ways of doing, passed on over time and recognised as valid because of the value of the relationships endorsing that knowledge.

To translate the term female authority is then far more complicated than we might initially believe. On the one hand, we may feel that this is a word that we already have a handle on in the English-speaking world and therefore one that will generate no problem for a translator. However, the incomplete brief discussion above of the in-depth work to signify the term reveals to us that we lack the knowledge of this history or re-signification in the English language. There is almost no trace of it at all in English to be found on the Internet, for example. It is thus, ironically perhaps, this seemingly shared word that in fact is shown not to be shared at all, revealing just how hard it is as a translator to faithfully render a text true to its origins. Footnotes would, once again, be necessary in this case but also perhaps a suggestion that without going deeper into the work done to re-signify the term, it will still be very difficult to grasp.

Too, it might be observed that to use the adjective female, or even feminine, without making explicit that this usage is grounded in a project to bring sexuate difference into the world, that is, the philosophy of sexual difference, is dangerous, given that in the English-speaking world usage of any such terms tends to be misinterpreted as a hostile takeover bid for power on the part of rabid feminists desiring to overthrow men. In English the trend, rather sadly, has been towards the erasure of the sexuate in language when possible, in the name of equality; for example, we no longer find women referred to as actresses — they are now completely assimilated into the male world as actors — they are called the same as men. The cost of this assimilation and the beliefs that underpin it require urgent interrogation, if we are to listen to those urging us to bring a sexuate world into being.

Conclusions: What are the issues for translation brought up by such examples?

We see that translating this philosophical thinking into English (which considers itself as somewhat hegemonic in the field of feminist theories) becomes quite problematic. The English-speaking world does not tend, apart from a few exceptions, to consider that it might have something to learn from the European (or other) strands of feminist thinking that have challenged us to create a new world based on sexuate difference, rather than reluctantly granting women permission to join in with men as long as they adapt to the male-established terms.

Contemporary discourses in the English-speaking world appear to barely question the political paradigm which holds equality in the existing symbolic order as the maximum objective, and women who were not around in the seventies or eighties have little or no idea of the visions of those decades, manifested through a huge amount of work on so many levels: to transform the world, not assimilate into it on any terms, at any cost. We see many perversions of this and that so-called equality is in fact used against women, confusing them, since they lack a language or vision for anything greater. Does this make the translation of the philosophy of sexual difference into the English language even more urgent?

Irigaray's initial critique of equality, then, if unpacked, holds the key to much of today's confusion and manipulation of the term feminism and yet it is rarely examined. Irigaray was asking us to consider that the concept of equality itself was embedded within a particular historical culture and politics. In the English-speaking world, this concept is almost never put into question as it continues to function as a way of measuring human parity.

Is the translation of the philosophy of sexual difference and politics of the symbolic thus doomed? What would it require for it to become meaningful? *Could* it become meaningful in the English language or has the more idealistic feminism of previous decades now gone too far along other darker roads? Do we owe it to younger women and men, to new generations, to attempt to transmit what this history was? Does the concept of the sexuate have any hope or relevance today in an English-speaking context? If we do accept that history is sexuate and that the future needs to be sexuate, how do we begin, in English, to translate both the philosophy and the practices evolved from it?

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