

Introduction

Katherine Binhammer, Jennifer Henderson, Lianne Moyes

The Space and Time of Sexual Difference

"Sexual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age" (5). Irigaray begins *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* with this epochal claim, thus, the book announces itself as an attempt to think through this difference, a difference that she believes could cause a revolution in thought. For Irigaray, sexual difference is *fecund*, pregnant with meaning, full of provocative possibilities to think the questions of our age differently (the end of philosophy, technical imperialism, consumer society). Sexual difference, she writes, "could be our 'salvation' if we thought it through" (5). What kind of 'salvation' could be produced by introducing the differential of female from male? How could the project of thinking through sexual difference generate the transformative work of our age? For Irigaray, by rendering the fecundity of signification manifest in discourse, sexual difference will produce nothing less than a "revolution in thought" (6). This revolution will involve the introduction and the rethinking of our traditional understanding of space and time: "In order to make it possible to think through, and live, this difference, we must reconsider the whole problematic of *space* and *time*....The transition to a new age requires a change in our perception and conception of *space-time*" (7). I want to situate the work of project within this thinking through of sexual difference for if we expose the implicit economy of the term, that is to say, if we trace the project of project, we uncover a new relation of space and time. If we think through sexual difference as project, we can begin to envision the rethinking of space and time.

What do you think when you think of 'project'? A plan, design or scheme? Perhaps, a manifesto? Or do you think of objects being thrown, projected into an exterior space? Maybe you imagine the projects, the prisons masking as homes for the black underclass of North American society? You may not be thinking along these lines at all, but musing about projection, whether as a psychological category ("I am not that,

you are projecting, reading something that is not there") or as a forecast or prediction of the future. All of these – and many more – are the thoughts and resonances of project. In thinking these thoughts on project, whatever the thoughts may be, what escapes naming and listing is the project of thinking the thoughts themselves. As Sartre programatically formulated, "All consciousness is consciousness of something" (lxii). All thought is a thinking about, on, or for. The prepositions signal a movement, a linking or a space between and this relation or differential is the place where I would like to locate 'project.' Consciousness, being always directed towards something, someone or someplace, is projected outward. The O.E.D., in addition to the many and varied definitions of 'project,' provides the following sense: "to put before oneself in thought; to conceive, imagine."

If all the meanings and significations of project are placed together and thought at once, a doubled circuit of meaning arises. The circuit begins in space and time, or, rather, the doubled significations of project can be mapped onto the dual conditions of subjectivity (space and time). It is within the doubled resonances of project – as moment and place, a point at which space and time intersect – that I wish to think sexual difference.

Project exists as space and time in its grammatical positioning as both verb and noun. Project signifies a concrete plan as well as the act of planning. Nouns inhabit space – a plan is a document, an object with extension and density. The verbs of project, on the other hand, are aligned with time – to project is to reach into the future, a sending out of a forecast contingent on time.

The circuitousness of project, its space-time, follows a path that is both interior and exterior. In its thrownness, its extension and direction outward, project is conceived as exteriority. But insofar as consciousness is constituted as a mental occupation, project is radically interior. As Irigaray notes, the dynamic of interiority / exteriority corresponds to the pairing of time and space. Within the tradition of Western philosophy, she writes, "time becomes the *interiority* of the subject itself, and space, its *exteriority* (this problematic is developed by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*)" (7).

Historically, the doubled senses of project have their correlation to sexual difference, where, as Irigaray writes, "the feminine is experienced as space, but often with connotations of the abyss and night (God being space and light?), while the masculine is experienced as time" (7). The

masculine is thought in terms of interiority, given subjectivity, whereas the feminine has been conceived of as exteriority, as object viewed by an interiorized subject. The masculine is the active verb in relation to a feminized passive noun. Given that the circuit of project leads us into, around and through both space and time, it projects a way of thinking and conceiving of space-time that is non-oppositional, that is a non-contradictory difference within.

Sexual difference as project or the project of sexual difference works on a redeployment of time and space. Instead of conceptualizing time and space as external opposites or complementarities, as a difference with a space between, project is, at the same time and in the same place, both spatialized and temporalized. In fact, project's space is always already its time. When sexual difference is thought of as a project, it is both an aim or ambition of feminism (i.e., to think and enact a different sexual relation) as well as always already being a project, a working towards and on. That is to say, sexual difference both projects a *future* relation and inhabits a *space* where such a relation is already conceived as possibility. Sexual difference is both a verb and a noun: an act that attempts to interject an/other difference and a noun that announces its presence, the existence of man and woman. The project of sexual difference – the goal of thinking the relation of man to woman, woman to man, otherwise or elsewhere – becomes sexual difference as project. – K.B.

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In many genres of 'high' culture (epic, elegy) the future is looked on as a catastrophe while the past is venerated and idealized. The last issue of *Tessera* (no. 14, "Memory Work/des mémoires des femmes") foregrounded the work of resisting nostalgic idealizations of the past. Sharron Margaret Turner's "the tree at my back" continues this memory work here, cutting through a lament for lost love with erotic and violent overtones. Other writers in this issue reject the convention of catastrophic ending by figuring an inconclusive, anarchic present which leaves the future open. In Janice Andreae's "Epitaph," a refusal to memorialize the past, to package it for future memory, preserves a relation with the transitory, open-ended present. Instead of creating a solid representational monument to a friend lost to AIDS, Andreae projects (literally, in the installation) an image composed of metonymic points of contact with the lost friend: a cultural intertext, a compelling image discovered in the physical environment, a verbal fragment re-oriented

by this new context. Working with these accidental collisions, Andreae inscribes the 'other' in an infinite chain, permitting the friend a future existence which is altogether different from public monument on the one hand, and interiorized idealization on the other.

Incompletion is a property of all projects in writing: the written word is addressed to another; it awaits realization by a reader. This is especially the case with texts that call attention to their own materiality, establishing relations that disrupt reading-as-consumption and require productive reading practices. In virtual 'pre-texts' like those of Lynn Crosbie, or Carla Harryman and Lyn Hejinian in this issue, the reader is invited to make sense of formal juxtapositions. In the palimpsestic images of Cheryl Sourkes, layered fragments disrupt the apparent discreteness of signs. One sign is made the trace of another: erupting from underneath, "effacing the presence of [the] thing and yet keeping it legible" (Spivak xli) in a writing of the visual image. The Sheila-Na-Gig, imperfectly erased figure of pre-Christian goddess worship, resurfaces in "Travels Through the Heartland: A Close Reading." The realm of the possible, for Sourkes, is located in the insistence of such traces. Etymology is the verbal equivalent of the palimpsestic image: in Sourkes' texts, a drifting through language is guided by lost connections. Pre-existing signs also resurface in the form of sound resemblances and patterns of breathing. In "Virtual Woman: Visits from Words" superimposed over the spines of feminist texts is the outline of a woman (spine of the body). A metonymic relation is established by this layering: it is by virtue of the texts that this virtual woman exists. Positioned between quotation marks, she is the s/cited woman of feminist texts, a collective subject whose becoming is never completed, finalized, fixed in the words of a single text because she is situated in the dialogic space between texts.

Annette Grisé reads a project of re-visioning in Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*, a text which interrupts the authoritative word of inherited history by resuscitating history's excluded 'others.' As archival research and imaginative creation, reading and writing, become gradually confused in Marlatt's text, we move from "truths of (f)act" into "truths of telling" (Godard 119). As the act of narration itself becomes the preoccupation of the narrative, we move into the present tense of 'telling.' The narrativization of the present moment is what interests France Théoret. The political project of/in her "Regard cosmopolite" straddles the present tense of articulation (which sets up a triangular zone of contact

between reader, addressed as feminist, discourse of 'truth,' and voice that summons to action) and the future tense of a programme for global feminism. Théoret takes up the question of ethical responsibility to the other, as thousands of women are being raped, tortured and murdered in the former Yugoslavia. Responsibility, from where we are, involves becoming informed and informing others of the gaps in official 'tellings' of the war. Imperative verb forms prevail in this text: Know the facts. Take up a position. Refuse to be silenced about crimes against women. Intervene to make the facts known. Insist on their recognition – by international law, by politicians, by the media. The problem, however, is that the very idea of fact as a neutral piece of reality legitimates the official line that which *sidelines* the attacks on women. The factual is a mobile category subject to the interests of those in a position to offer official representations. The vigilance to which we are called by Théoret must, therefore, involve an activity of critical interpretation that rejects the so-called neutrality of facts and attacks the presuppositions of journalistic discourses. Perhaps this much is suggested when Théoret advises us, at the beginning of her text, to bring a specific knowledge to bear on the reading of this war – a knowledge of the history of feminism as a discontinuous one of progressions and backlashes which should make us all the more prepared to believe in atrocities which others refuse to believe.

The effect of knowledge of these attacks on women, Théoret writes, is an irreversible epistemological unsettling. But Western feminists have not committed themselves to this unsettling: we are not doing the work of pushing the unbelievable into the order of the believable. The repeated command to act, in Théoret's text, is thus an expression of outrage. But on the subjunctive side of her text – the side of the strategized, the imagined, the wished for – there is the project in "cosmopolitan" feminism that would deconstruct nationalisms. This is a project that will be taken up in a future issue of *Tessera*. – J.H.

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In this issue, "project" joins "memory" in a double movement of casting forward as well as back – most often, of casting forward *at the same time as* back. Sylvie Bérard finds this movement in women's science-fiction of the 1970s and 1980s. As she suggests in "Amazones de tir," insofar as women's sci-fi both revisits myth and projects women subjects into social space, it complicates the notion of science-fiction as a narrative of

the future. A similar oscillation between past and future is at work in Margaret Webb's "When All She Intended Was Blue Sky," a text that reframes the speaker's recurring memory of kissing a girl in the back seat of her father's car as the past of a different future: "the past acting to become present acting to become future." As the text moves between the theatre, the back seat of the car, the streets of Montréal, and the scene of writing, the lines that were missing from the script – lines that delineate a lesbian embrace – gradually become a part of the speaker's discourse.

Lynn Crosbie, too, is interested in missing lines – specifically those of the character Susie in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*. Crosbie's "Like a Hook into a *Cat's Eye*" both reconstructs and extrapolates from Susie's story. By repeating fragments of the narrator's (Elaine's) descriptions of Susie in conjunction with photographs that provide a possible image of her, the text makes visible Elaine's "detached and pitiless perspective" on Susie. Further, by focusing on Elaine's relationship to Susie, one of the members of her portrait gallery of "malevolent" female figures, Crosbie's text both shows the effects of such distance on Susie's life, and suggests certain continuities between Elaine and the character she describes/self-projects.

In "The Wide Road", Lyn Hejinian and Carla Harryman muse about desire and self-representation, two processes that expose, indeed mobilize, the temporal contradictions of "project." Just as the displacements of desire hook back as well as forward, one's self-image incorporates a view from without, a point of view one projects in order to look back at oneself as well as to look out. "[T]he outstretched so called field of vision" reads the first column, "is bounded only by invisibility – by the skin and bones of our head that we admit but can't see." Desire, suggests the second column, is both a kind of foresight, a "looking ahead toward its object" and a kind of hindsight or regret. This double movement is further complicated by the fact that "what has happened has endless repercussions, currents of effect and possibility." In this sense, desire can be reduced neither to the pursuit of an object nor to nostalgia for a past event. In the terms of Hejinian and Harryman – terms that situate the unfolding of a feminist project in the continuous present – "[w]e are watching him watching her, as if all of us were gerunds to infinity."

For Elspeth Probyn, a woman's look sets the image of a woman in motion. Drawing upon Brossard's notion that an "image relays desire," Probyn develops a critical project of cruising images, particularly errant

images that point to those beyond the purview of the text. In Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, for example, she finds images of lesbian desire (among them "Girls and Girls and Girls and Horses") that Hall, writing in the 1920s, could read only in terms of the categories of sexology. Probyn's notion of "be-longing," a term that for her "captures some of the movement of desire, longing, nostalgia, and sheer 'being' caught up in the processes of wanting to be," is another figure for the contradictory temporality of "project." Setting identity adrift on vectors of desire, it throws forward or "casts ahead" images that women are in the process of becoming.

"She would be the first sentence of my next novel" writes Brossard in anticipation of the woman who will take shape in the propositions of her text. Writing, she suggests, is continuous with reading; the novel she anticipates is one she is writing and reading at the same time. In many of Brossard's texts, and particularly in *Picture Theory*, the hologram is a way of thinking this tension between the still-to-come and the already-in-process. A hologram is an image produced when the light reflected by an object placed in a beam of coherent light interferes with the light of another beam. Such an image can be produced by shining a laser through a photographic film on which such traces of light have been recorded. By approaching the image that emerges behind the screen from various angles, one has the sense of a three-dimensional image in space. A hologram, then, takes projection and textuality beyond the opaque surfaces of the page and the screen.

Brossard's writing is holographic both in the sense that it projects a virtual image of a woman, a woman-in-effect, and in the sense that it is a trace of that woman, a trace capable of generating the image again and again. Further, the holographic image that emerges behind the photographic film is a way of conceptualizing the woman that lies behind the patriarchal screen. The screen is no longer a surface onto which images are projected but a translucent film that facilitates the passage of signs, a medium that (given the appropriate conditions of light) generates the image of a woman. At the same time, the tenuousness of the image, its ghostly quality, insists upon the need to lift the screen and allow women to live their sexualities and subjectivities as legitimate positions in the social. – L.M.

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