

Unlocking Hierarchy: Luce Irigaray, Contiguity, Entrustment and Non-Hierarchical Organizing

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Abstract

In this paper I want to address a central conundrum in non-hierarchical organizing: How do we both recognize difference—that we are not all the same—without subjecting difference to its standard placement in our symbolic structures—difference as a necessary support to, but always lesser than, the same? In order to organize non-hierarchically, must we all be the same? If not, how can we be different--and not lesser--as we organize non-hierarchically? How can hierarchical relations not be reconstituted among and between the different as they organize together?

To answer these questions I want to look at three bodies of work which deal the most comprehensively with the assumptions underlying hierarchy and how we might organize non-hierarchically: the work of Helen Brown and her focus on the teaching, learning and sharing of all the skills of organizing in the construction of a flexible non-hierarchical social order, based on the achievement of equality through sameness; the work of the French philosopher, linguist and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray and her focus on the reconfiguration of the symbolic structures of Western thought through addressing ‘the question of the age which must be thought’-- sexual difference-- and by extension difference and its relationship to sameness; and finally, the work of the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, who draw on Irigaray in their theorizing of *affidamento* or entrustment, a non-hierarchical relationship between the woman who knows and the woman who wants. It is a relationship which, by authorizing a place from which the female subject may speak, is the basis for the reconfiguration of the symbolic structure from hierarchy to contiguity, or for sexual difference next to sexual difference, difference next to difference, creating the conditions of possibility for contiguous organizing.

How, then, are non-hierarchical organizing practices to be achieved? Helen Brown’s work on the teaching, learning and sharing of all the skills of organizing in order to produce the flexible social order which underpins non-hierarchical organizing, as carefully done as it is, founders in two ways. First, the teaching, learning and sharing of all the skills of organizing is indeed a first step towards non-hierarchical relations, but it is not enough because it fails to confront its central dilemma—it depends on the rhetoric of sameness to confer equality, so difference among and between women must be repressed, rather than understood as a source of creativity. Secondly, it founders on the relationship between the one who teaches and the one who learns, between the woman who knows and the woman who wants. How is this relationship between those who want to learn and those who already know different organizing skills to be structured, other than hierarchically? How, in particular, are we to organize non-hierarchically among and between the different, without eventually succumbing to some form of hierarchical organizing?

In her work on sexual difference, the French philosopher Luce Irigaray directly confronts this question of difference as necessarily always lesser than the Same if the construction of the Same is to retain its coherence. In her analysis of our symbolic structures--our languages, the stories, myths, religions and philosophies we tell ourselves to make sense

of our world--she maintains that we can rethink these symbolic structures to make a place for sexual difference—and by extension, difference—as contiguous in relationship to each other rather than as hierarchical in relationship to the Same. This Same or the One is theoretically neutral, but is in effect masculine. It is the face of the man who sees himself reflected in the mirror of theory, and, mistaking himself as the sole representative of the human, erases his own sexual difference, and women, leaving no place for sexual difference, and difference, as other than a necessary, but erased, construct. In our present symbolic structures, Irigaray argues, women hold the place of difference. They are only objects; they lack a place from which to speak and name their actions as subjects. Thus, as long as women are without a place in the symbolic structures from which to speak as subjects, as long as sexual difference and difference have no place other than as lesser, hierarchy will inevitably reassert itself.

The work of the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective and their theorizing of *affidamento* or entrustment can provide us with some understanding of how we might go about rethinking the theoretical and practical exemplification of contiguous organizing practices. Entrustment provides us with a way of rethinking the relationship of the woman who knows to the woman who wants as other than hierarchical. It is a relationship based on reciprocity and on honouring the authority of the woman who knows, authority meaning the place from which to speak in the symbolic structure as the female subject, the female subject next to, but not lesser than, the male subject. It means that a place is created where one had not existed before, for sexual difference, and by extension, for difference, to exist in a relationship of contiguity: for sexual difference next to sexual difference, difference next to difference. To the MWBC, honouring the authority of the woman who knows in a reciprocal relationship with the woman who wants, means that in the act of organizing together, we at the same time reconfigure our symbolic structures, where the difference between the woman who wants and the woman who knows can exist in contiguous rather than in hierarchical relations.

As Kate Young has stressed, the most effective organizing is the least hierarchical, and thus the most attentive to how difference can be reconfigured as contiguous. And in so doing, we reconfigure symbolic structures as contiguous: difference next to difference, sexual difference next to sexual difference, where the woman as subject finally speaks, and where hierarchy is no longer inevitable as we organize together.

Introduction:

The processes of organizing are the primary mechanisms through which relations of domination and subordination circulate in our society, determining who gets what: who is paid well, who isn't, who is important, who isn't, who gets to decide where society is going and who doesn't. Despite this impact, the link between the kind of society we create through the processes of organizing we use remains resolutely outside our purview, beyond both scrutiny and alleviation by democratic means. In much of organizational analysis we take for granted that hierarchical organizing, or the relations of domination and subordination embedded in this form of organizing which produces inequality among the participants, is necessary for efficiency and effectiveness; we dismiss the inequalities which result as either irrelevant or unimportant. There is a deeply held presumption that somebody has to be the boss, whether it's the oxymoron of a team leader, or the fiction of a leader and subordinates, the language cleverly erasing the subordinates' domination. We equate order and structure with hierarchy, accept inequality as a necessary outcome, overlook the relations of domination and subordination which circulate in how we organize, and are blind to how hierarchical forms of organizing produce an inequitable society.

However, if we were to concern ourselves with how these inequalities are produced within our society, could non-hierarchical organizing be a primary mechanism for combatting inequality? Or is it only a partial answer? As we contemplate, for example, the flattened organization, participatory decision making, team building as mechanisms for the involvement and inclusion of everyone, are these another version of 'no child left behind' a focus on aspects of organizing that fails to get at the heart of how relations of domination and subordination are created and recreated in all our acts of organizing, in how we think about them and name them, in the words which are available to us? Is non-hierarchical organizing, like most of our attempts to bring about equitable relations, more complicated than what we had hoped? And what are we pursuing, exactly? Equality through sameness? Or a new way of conceptualizing the relationship between sameness, difference, and equality, one that does not need difference to be lesser than the same for equitable relations among and between the different to be achieved?

In this paper I want to address this central conundrum in non-hierarchical organizing: How do we both recognize difference—that we are not all the same—without subjecting difference to its standard placement in our symbolic structures—difference as a necessary support to, but always lesser than, the same? In order to organize non-hierarchically, must we all be the same? If not, how can we be different--and not lesser--as we organize? How can hierarchical relations not be reconstituted among and between the different as they organize together?

To answer these questions I want to look at three bodies of work which deal the most comprehensively with the assumptions underlying hierarchy¹ and how we might organize non-hierarchically: the work of Helen Brown (1992) and her focus on the teaching, learning and sharing of all the skills of organizing in the construction of a non-hierarchical social order, based on the achievement of equality through sameness; the work of the French philosopher, linguist and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray (1985, 1993a, 1993b, 1994) and her focus on the reconfiguration of the symbolic structures of Western thought through addressing ‘the question of the age which must be thought’²-- sexual difference-- and by extension difference and its relationship to sameness in organizing; and finally, the work of the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective (1990), who draw on Irigaray for their theorizing of affidamento or entrustment, a non-hierarchical relationship between the woman who knows and the woman who wants. It is a relationship which, by authorizing a place from which the female subject may speak, is the basis for the reconfiguration of the symbolic structure from hierarchy to contiguity, and the organizing structure to which it gives voice, or for sexual difference next to sexual difference, difference next to difference, which create the conditions for contiguous organizing.

To answer these questions I want to look at three bodies of work which deal the most comprehensively with the assumptions underlying hierarchy and how we might organize non-hierarchically: the work of Helen Brown and her focus on the teaching, learning and sharing of all the skills of organizing in the construction of a flexible non-hierarchical social order, based on the achievement of equality through sameness; the work of the French philosopher, linguist and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray and her focus on the reconfiguration of the symbolic structures of Western thought through addressing ‘the question of the age which must be thought’-- sexual difference-- and by extension difference and its relationship to sameness; and finally, the work of the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, who draw on Irigaray in their theorizing of affidamento or entrustment, a non-hierarchical relationship between the woman who knows and the woman who wants. It is a relationship which, by authorizing a place from which the female subject may speak, is the basis for the reconfiguration of the symbolic structure from hierarchy to contiguity, or for sexual difference next to sexual difference, difference next to difference, creating the conditions of possibility for contiguous organizing.

¹ I use the definition of hierarchy from the Canadian Oxford Dictionary [1998]: “a system in which grades or classes of status and authority are ranked one above the other”, where hierarchal is the adjective based on medieval Latin from the Greek hieros [sacred] + arkhes [ruler]. The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary [1971] also indicates the relationship of hierarchy to rule over through numerous references to male angels, no female mentioned, and to church hierarchies, no females mentioned.

² This is a paraphrase of the opening paragraph to her essay on sexual difference, “Sexual Difference” (In Whitford, Ed., 1991, p. 165-178).

Part 1: Helen Brown

The most theoretical and practical account of non-hierarchical organizing I have read is Helen Brown's book-length study, *Women Organising* (1992)³. She maintains that most organizational theory accepts hierarchical organizing as the only way to organize together to get work done, which she stresses overlooks the vast amount of work done in the world that does not require subordination, that is instead cooperative and collaborative. How we organize, she argues, cannot be separated from the kind of society we create, and therefore how to work together cooperatively and collaboratively warrants much greater analysis by organizational theorists, who in the main have presumed that cooperation is natural and therefore unworthy of analysis. Brown disagrees, and maintains that how non-hierarchical organizing happens is not spontaneous. We are not naturally cooperative, as the anarchists would argue. Instead, this process is the outcome of a commitment to egalitarianism among and between participants. It is a process, she maintains, worthy of her analysis, which will emphasize "skilled behaviour rather than innate human qualities, and organizing activity rather than the condition of being organized" (p. 7).

Her account of how to organize non-hierarchically is a compellingly comprehensive analysis of a process committed to egalitarianism. Brown begins by carefully analysing the "core problems of organizing: working out what is going on and why, what to do about it, and the translation of those understandings into action" (p. 30), and concludes that if the processes of non-hierarchical organizing are to be realized, "that is, a form of organization which promotes minimum differentiation between participants, particularly in relation to status position" (p. 9), differences must be minimized. She points out that this process requires that we must "find a way of managing a priori differences between individuals" (p. 17), and that the "process of minimising skill and task differentials" (p. 19) is crucial, involving everyone. Ultimately this process entails the teaching to, learning from and then sharing all the skills of organizing (p. 16), beginning with learning how to define what is really happening, figuring out what to do and how to do it, how to build responsibility into the process of getting things done, how to articulate and reconcile dissent in the building of consensus, how to build shared scenarios, how to lead and how to think politically and strategically, all key skills for successful organizing. Brown maintains that all of these are skills which can be taught to, learned from, and shared with one another. No one organizing skill is privileged above the other: none are specialized, privileged, linked to a particular person or a position, and all can be shared, including the skill of leading and political strategizing.

Brown emphasizes that the process of sharing skills revolves around the recognition of everyone with something to give; it also means struggling to create opportunities for

³ For more information on non-hierarchical organizing, see Ianello, 1992; Young, 1993; Mahmoudi, H. & Maxey, C. 1994; Henneman, 1995; Oerton, 1996; Oseen, 1997a, 1997b; Oseen, 1999; Lennie, 1999; McDonald, P. & Coleman, M., 1999; Cheney, G. 1999; Miller, M. 2001; Guijt, I. & Shah, M., 2001; McGuire, G. & Reger, J., 2003; Bryan, 2004.

those who are less skilled to learn from those more skilled in the creation of sameness, where everyone has approximately the same skills of organizing. Equally she emphasizes the necessity of minimizing individual difference (for example, in time, or experience, or knowledge), because of their link to the hierarchical construction of organizing activities when someone with more time, more experience, more knowledge, simply ‘goes ahead and does it’. The process of non-hierarchical organizing, she points out, is a constant struggle to minimize these differences. Egalitarian relationships among and between participants do not simply spontaneously emerge; they require thoughtful consciousness and commitment to egalitarianism, an egalitarianism which depends on everyone becoming the same through the acquisition of the same skills, including the pre-eminent skills of leading and political strategizing.

However, as interesting as Helen Brown’s analysis is—her careful work on the teaching, learning and sharing of all the skills of organizing in order to produce the flexible social order which underpins non-hierarchical organizing—it founders in two ways. First, the process of teaching, learning and sharing of all the skills of organizing is indeed a first step towards non-hierarchical relations, but the process taken on its own is not enough because it fails to confront its central theoretical dilemma. Brown’s analysis depends on the rhetoric of sameness to confer equality, so difference among and between women must be repressed, rather than understood as a source of creativity. Brown fails to confront how we are to recognize difference, and the creativity which arises from difference, when the sole means to achieve equality is through sameness, that in order to be equal to each other, we must be the same as each other. Skills, time, commitment, history, knowledge, are all amenable to being reshaped as the same. In this conceptualization, difference must remain the repressed other to the same, the lesser of the same, underpinning the theoretical assumption that sameness is the only possible route to equality.

Secondly, and arising from that assumption that equality can only be achieved through sameness, her analysis founders on the relationship between the one who teaches and the one who learns, between the woman who knows and the woman who wants. This relationship is a paradox, a lacuna in her theory which she cannot confront. How is this relationship between those who want to learn and those who already know different organizing skills to be structured, other than hierarchically? How are we to conceptualize sameness and its relationship to difference, when the process of teaching to and learning from each other is itself the representation of a hierarchical relationship?

Because Brown’s approach focuses on learning how to be the same as each other, with the same capabilities as necessary to produce equality, this assumption of sameness is reflected in this theoretical lacuna in the process. Brown leaves unclear exactly how those skills are to be taught, learned, and shared among and between people who are different without recreating hierarchical relations. The dilemma of difference appears once again to confound the strategies set up to eliminate hierarchical relations among people. Must we be the same in order to be equal? In our focus on skill-sharing and on the relationship between the one who teaches and the one who learns, the woman who knows and the woman who wants, who by definition are different, how is difference

resolved other than bowing to hierarchy by recreating sameness over difference, her dilemma which remains unsolved? How, then, are we to organize non-hierarchically among and between the different, without eventually succumbing to some form of hierarchical organizing?

Part II: Luce Irigaray, the reign of the Same and the realm of the different

In her work on sexual difference, the French philosopher Luce Irigaray directly confronts this question of difference as necessarily always lesser than the Same if the construction of the Same is to retain its coherence. In her analysis of our symbolic structures, our languages, the stories, myths, religions and philosophies we tell ourselves to make sense of our world, she maintains that we can rethink these symbolic structures to make a place for sexual difference—and by extension, difference—as contiguous in relationship to each other rather than as hierarchical in relationship to the Same. This Same or the One is theoretically neutral, but is in effect masculine. It is the face of the man who sees himself reflected in the mirror of theory, and, mistaking himself as the sole representative of the human, erases his own sexual difference, and women, leaving no place for sexual difference, and difference, as other than a necessary, but erased, construct. In our present symbolic structures, Irigaray argues, women hold the place of difference. They are only objects; they lack a place from which to speak and name their actions as subjects. Thus, as long as women are without a place in the symbolic structures from which to speak as women and to name their actions as subjects, as long as sexual difference and difference have no place other than as lesser, hierarchy will inevitably reassert itself.

In this second part of the paper I want to examine how difference can be rethought as contiguous rather than erased or as lesser, using the work of Luce Irigaray on sexual difference and the reign of the masculine neutral within our symbolic structures. Like Irigaray, I agree that the question of the age which must be thought is sexual difference, a question unasked in the resolutely ultramodernist discourse of today, in which sameness and equality are inextricably linked⁴. It is this question of sexual difference which must be answered if we are to move from under the reign of the masculine neutral, the final extension of the ultramodern, which Irigaray maintains underscores and makes possible the rhetoric of sameness as equality and its pernicious effects on women. In Irigaray's analysis, hierarchical organizing and the reign of the masculine neutral in our organizations are inseparable: if their forces are to be resisted, and the marginalization and exclusion of women ended, the question of sexual difference must be answered.

To Irigaray, sexual difference is not a question for which the answer can be found in an appeal to biology⁵; To Irigaray both the question of and the answer to sexual difference

⁴ As Goux explains, it is the denial of sexual difference which characterizes the fullest extent of the modern, or the ultramodern. In that sense, Irigaray is a postmodernist: her focus on sexual difference serves to disrupt the modern.

⁵Jean-Joseph Goux elaborates on this point, that "To assert the difference between the sexes is not at the same time as positing an essential femininity (or masculinity)... It is sexuation that is 'essential', not the content of dogmas fixing once and for all, in an exhaustive and closed definition, what for eternity belongs to the masculine and what belongs to the feminine. Although this infinite, open difference is necessarily

resides in the symbolic, those structures of language, myth and religion which govern our lives, which both create us in our identities and provide us with a place to speak within the structures of thought and language. Irigaray argues that it is the symbolic structures which must be transformed if change in the relations between the sexes is to be both created and sustained. It is not enough to change the relations of production or by extension our organizing relations: we need to think of our situation not only in economic but also in symbolic terms (Irigaray, 1994, p. 40). Irigaray's point, and the point on which I will build my argument, is that whether the philosophers she examines in *The Speculum of the Other Woman*, (Irigaray, 1985) or the psychoanalysts in *The Poverty of Psychoanalysis* (Irigaray, 1991), each hides behind the guise of the masculine neutral: the he who stands in for all, but in so doing erases the she. The question of sexual difference remains unasked, outside the order of the symbolic; women remain exiles in discourse, without a place in the symbolic structure, without a home in the language, absent in our organizations other than as imitation or honorary men or lesser than men.

If we are to move beyond the reign of the masculine neutral, we must address ourselves to the question of sexual difference, and how it might be symbolized within a symbolic structure which imprisoned within an economy of the Same, cannot recognize the sexually specific, only the Same and its mirror image, the Other. Within this state, women exist only as a projection of what men desire and need them to be, woman the mirror image of all that man has disavowed, the Other of the Same, but not existing in their own right, in their own place. Without a home in the language, deprived of a place from which to speak, they are, like Antigone, deprived of light and air. Without a place in the symbolic structures of myth, religion, discourse, women remain only a projection on the wall, the shadows flickering in the cave of Plato which may be the disavowed womb, the erased female body which provides the space for immanence which the philosophers must transcend.

Encased in the body, but the disavowed male body, not her own body, that man may be spirit and transcendence, woman body and immanence, the unsymbolized body and mind of woman are the unacknowledged building blocks of the house of language. As building blocks but not inhabitants, women are speechless. Without an identity independent of men, women remain in an infinitely malleable, always lesser position. They remain the holding place for the disavowed and unwanted. Without a divine from which to create an ideal and thus a place in the qualitative, women are trapped; they remain objects of exchange between men. In our present symbolic structure women cannot be subjects. Deprived of a separate identity in language, women cannot use language as a mediating form to establish relations of partnership with men, or with other women. In this schema, women have only the places men have created for them: the suffering mother, the dutiful daughter, the temptress, but no place for themselves in relation to other women. And without a place for themselves in relationship to other women, they are condemned within the symbolic structures to exist only in relationship to men. Without a separate identity from man other than as man's mirror image, there cannot be the symbolization of mother-daughter relations as more than the maternal, a

supported by a dimorphism provided for us by nature (and that cannot be denied or thwarted without danger), it is also a constructed difference, which must be constantly constructed, reconstructed, cultivated" (1994, p. 180).

relationship which could recognize the desiring woman, the utopian horizon depicted by Irigaray which the reign of the masculine neutral cannot see.

Irigaray proposes that we rethink the different through reestablishing the repressed maternal genealogy, rethinking the myths of the economy of exchange which render man as subject and woman only as object, man as the same and woman as other of the same or the different to the same, man as inhabitant of the house of language, woman as its building blocks. In the reestablishment of the repressed female genealogies which offer difference as contiguity rather than as opposition, in the rethinking of the different using these repressed female genealogies as desiring woman to desiring woman which both supersedes and encompasses the maternal, Irigaray offers woman a place from which to speak within the symbolic that is not circumscribed through an inescapable and always lesser relation to man. To Irigaray, this is a process which emphasizes that "woman must be able to express herself in words, images and symbols in this intersubjective relationship with her mother, then with other women, if she is to enter into a non-destructive relationship with men. . . .It requires not believing that the daughter must run away from her mother to obey her father or love her husband" (1993, p. 20). Thus, for women to establish their own sexual identity, they need "a genealogical relationship with [their] own gender and respect for both genders. This respect is impossible without valid erotic models to replace neutralization of the sexes, or release, or desublimation, which are the models we see today" (Ibid).

Just as the transformation of the symbolic requires the symbolization of women's relationship to their mothers and to other women, a symbolization absent in our reign of the masculine neutral, so too does the economy of exchange. As she puts it, absence characterizes "the entire male economy" [which] demonstrates a forgetting of life, a lack of recognition of debt to the mother, of maternal ancestry, of the women who do the work of producing and maintaining life" (1993, p. 7). Men forget what they owe women, they see themselves in terms of their fathers and of competition between fathers and sons, and between brothers. But this absence of women is to be understood in symbolic terms: women are not to be reduced to their biological function as mothers: "human female identity is either unknown or no longer known. Society and culture operate according to male models--genealogical and sexual" (Ibid). The male economy in which women exist as objects to be exchanged must be transformed to make a place for women as subjects, and this requires that the maternal debt in its symbolic sense be recognized, and a place made for women where one does not now exist.

If we are to create a place for women in the symbolic for the repressed maternal genealogies, if we are to acknowledge the maternal debt ignored in patriarchy, we must rethink difference as a place in language and difference as a strategy in language. We must rethink difference not as oppositional, as the other of the same, but difference in contiguity to difference, subverting the hierarchical grammatical structure based on violence and repression. In our creation of a place for sexual difference as contiguity in the symbolic structure, we must rethink how the feminine became the non-masculine, how she became not-he within the grammatical confines of language, how the culture of language was "reduced to a single pole of sexed identity" (Irigaray, 1993, p. 21). We must rethink how women became objects in language, the building blocks necessary for the stability of language which depends on the dichotomy of male subject/female object for its coherence, but which prevents women from inhabiting the house of language. We

need to give back to women cultural value within language so that she is not always reduced to “terms which define her as an object in relation to the male subject” (Ibid, p. 20), where men as the only allowable subjects⁶ continue to speak for women, in a world where they cannot imagine “women as sexed subjects having equivalent rights” (Ibid, p. 71). If women are to speak and to act, they require a subject position which recognizes sexual difference, a subject position which does not pretend it is a place from which both sexes speak, where the same is a cover for the erasure of the different, not the recognition of its equivalency.

To create this subject position for women we must ask ourselves how language is implicated in the hierarchical construction of relations between the sexes. We must look at how language is constructed, how it establishes “forms of social mediation”, how it functions as a means of enabling one sex to subjugate the other” (Ibid, 1993, p. xv). Language is never neutral—how women are constituted and their relations with other women and with men are determined by the “deep economy” of language, the relations which determine the choices which are available to us as we struggle to make ourselves understood in words which do not allow us a subject position⁷. We must transform the language, the underlying economy of the language and its equivalencies, so that not only men and their relationships, but women and their relationships to each other, not only as mothers but as women, are symbolized, mythologized in the language, recreating the other pole of sexed identity, but a pole which is not set in opposition. Women, and women as the mother-daughter couple, must be represented in culture, where they are now absent, so they may be represented in language, in “words, images and symbols” (Ibid, 1993, p. 20), and if they are to be represented in law, where the rights they enjoy are the rights of men, but not of themselves⁸ so we may create the criteria through which a civil society and its organizations may arise composed of equals who are different.

Part III. Luce Irigaray, the transformation of the symbolic, and the implications for difference in organizing non-hierarchically

In a series of essays and addresses, some to the Italian Communist Party in the late 1980s, Irigaray focused on the question of sexual difference, its lack of representation in the symbolic structure, and the necessity of transforming women’s identity in the collective and in civil society by restructuring the symbolic (cf. Irigaray; 1993a, b;1994). She points out that in France women are considered to be equal, to be the same as men. But as she asks in *Je, Tu, Nous* (1993b), equal to whom? “To men? To a salary?

⁶To Irigaray (1993), in language "men designate themselves or other men as subjects of a sentence....men talk to each other, communicate amongst themselves, but do not address women much except when the message content puts women in a mothering role....women seldom designate themselves or other women as subjects of speech. They much more frequently put men in the position of subjects of the statement".

⁷ As Irigaray puts it, "the neutral, which often takes the place of a sexual difference that has been erased, is expressed in the same form as the masculine. . . .these forms of language and speech that seem to us to be universal, true, intangible, are in fact determined and modifiable historical phenomena. They entail consequences for the content of discourse that are different for each sex" (1994, p. 27).

To a public office? To what standard? Why not themselves?” She goes on to stress that we can’t skip a step in women’s quest to live our lives in ways that suit us; we can’t declare our equality to men before confronting the question of sexual difference: since our “exploitation is based on sexual difference, its solution will come only through sexual difference” (1993b, p. 12). Without this recognition of sexual difference we cannot attain a civil identity for ourselves, an identity which does not now exist. Because sexual difference remains unrepresented, every structure expressed collectively, including of course, how we organize, is expressed in the masculine form, “marked in the deep economy of the language” (Ibid, p. 20)⁹. Women have no representation or identity in the collectivity as themselves, just as they have no place in civil society, where “being a woman is equated with not being a man” (Ibid, p. 71). Without representation or identity or place, without the representation of sexual difference, women and their concerns disappear within the collective and within civil society. Without symbolic representation, women have no way of maintaining the links between the two groups to which they belong, “women and units of the contemporary world” (Ibid, p. 40), the both/and which characterizes participation in collectivities like our organizations and more broadly but not separately, in civil society.

Without representation in the symbolic, women are alienated from their work in organizations: they occupy a place in the sexual division of labour and in organizational culture--both inextricably intertwined--which is always, inevitably, lesser. The consequences, “conveyed by language” (Irigaray, 1993b, p. 119), of the sexual division of labour, are lower pay--work less valued--if the work is done by a woman rather than a man. Analysing the content of the skills of organizing or the managerial aspects of the work is not going to make a difference as long as the central fact of sexual difference and its absence in the symbolic structure is evaded. Irigaray stresses that this sexual division of labour “is not merely a fact of nature, as those who are culturally naive would have us believe so as to perpetuate the current state of affairs. What we have here is a socially constructed division of labour that continues to operate in the guise of apparently pure economism” (Ibid, p. 119). It is a division which is also violent. The irrationality that characterizes how pay is awarded for the work women do which “continues to be implemented suggests that a disguised form of violence is being used in what passes for the social order” (Ibid, p. 121), a violence that reappears in the constantly malleable content of the ‘ideal worker’, where whatever women do is valued less¹⁰; even if they work longer and harder than men, their work loses its link to valued work¹¹.

This social order is both reflected and recreated in an organizational culture that is only ostensibly sexually neutral. What passes for sexual neutrality is not: the sexual division of labour and its “economic injustice is reinforced by policies maintaining the illusion of egalitarianism” (Ibid, p. 123), linked by “codes of conduct within the workplace. . .laid out in accordance with natural languages valorizing a male subject,

⁹ As Irigaray notes, (1993, p. 20) “Grammatical gender is neither motiveless nor arbitrary....instead of remaining a different gender, the feminine has become, in our languages, the non-masculine”--female doctor, as an example, or “you guys” used for a mixed group, never “you gals”, used for women alone.

¹⁰ See Tiennari et al (2002) for a recent discussion on the ideal worker

¹¹ See Hoeber and Shaw (2004) for an account of work that men would be able to use to advance into leadership positions, but when women did it, it was expected, not paid for, and offered no opportunities for promotion.

either explicitly or implicitly, in the content or style of the prevalent discourse” (Ibid, 124). Organizational culture, like the language it is expressed in, is “reduced to a single pole of sexed identity” (Ibid, p. 21). The rules of work are determined by men, and women must adapt (cf. 1993b, p. 122). They must “subject themselves to the imperatives of a culture that is not their own” (Ibid, p. 85). The absence of representation of sexual difference in the symbolic is played out in the sexual division of labour and in organizational culture, in the language we use to talk about work and the people who do it. Women at work exist within a truncated symbolic structure, the words inadequate to describe the place they inhabit, a colonized country constantly compared to one it is not, but not one which is itself.

The consequences of the denial of sexual difference are bleak, as we try to construct organizations based on the rights and duties of citizens of different sexes within a truly civil society. If we are to follow Irigaray, and her concern with the establishment of the rights and duties of sexually specific citizens in a civil society, avoiding the triumph of the masculine neutral, we need to reconstrue this opposition of the different to the same. Irigaray argues that we need to recreate a difference which is not lesser, subverting the hierarchical structure of the ultramodern, which depends on the neutralization of sexual difference for its ability to recreate hidden forms of hierarchy. We need to provide a way out of the constant reestablishment of a hierarchy and toward the creation of a civil society based on the rights and duties of both sexes. As she notes ascerbically, men have rights, women have duties, and without reciprocity, a civil society, and for my purposes, non-hierarchical organizations, cannot be established.

What Irigaray desires is a reconstitution of the symbolic structure to create a place for women as sexually specific subjects alongside men so that women might attain the civil rights and responsibilities required for a civil society. We must overcome “men’s reluctance to admit that women are adult persons that are not reducible to men” (1994, p. 59); we must abandon “the pretext of the individual [which] does not pass the reality test: women get pregnant, not men” (Ibid, p. 59); we must affirm the value of the female generic rather than allow the assimilation of women to men (cf. Ibid, p. 57), actress erased by actor. In that symbolic restructuring we must appropriate “the rules and standards of speech” (Ibid, p. 47) to suit women, not only men; we must rethink the symbolic laws which govern exchange in language, remembering that Marx stated that the first oppression is women by men. We must rethink the labour issues, “the means and techniques of production” because they have been for “the most part defined by men, and there is no reason why women should submit to them if they were the only models or better than those they would define themselves” (Ibid, p. 62). Finally, we “must obtain the right to work and to earn wages, as civil persons, not as men with a few inconvenient attributes. . . . Women must not beg for or usurp a small place in patriarchal society by passing themselves off as half-formed men in their own right” (Ibid, p. 63). We must not extend the rights of men to women in ways that do not fit; we have to reorganize “civil society according to current needs” (1994, p. 71); we have to talk about relations between and among people with the same infinite subtlety that we now extend to property rights (1994, p. 71).

To recognize sexual difference, to make a place for women as themselves, the rights and obligations of each sex must be rewritten to indicate sexual difference: women must not

submit themselves to laws which were not written for them, where they are continuously redefined not as themselves and for themselves, but primarily in terms of their roles within the [patriarchal] family (1993b, p. 79). Women require equivalent rights and obligations, not the same rights and obligations. And that is the crux of the matter: sameness erases. The paradox of our organization, caught in the ultramodern which requires the erasure of difference, is that they cannot address any of the hierarchical forms of sexual difference in a symbolic structure that refuses to admit to any of this. It can only live with difference while denying its existence.

In our present symbolic structures, then, women hold the place of difference and the different, but that place is erased. Women exist only as objects, as the necessary other: they lack a place from which to speak and name their actions as subjects. Without a place in the symbolic structures from which to speak as subjects, women cannot name their actions. They must, inevitably and inexorably, refer only to the male symbolic structures, where sexual difference and difference have no place other than as lesser, and hierarchy inevitably reasserts itself. Women have no place of their own; as Irigaray memorably put it, they are like Ariadne, abandoned on the island of Naxos, outside the realm of the symbolic, condemned always to speak and to name actions in words not of their own, reconfirming, however unwillingly, the reign of the Same.

It is that abandonment of women which the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective have attempted to rectify through their theorizing of *affidamento*, or entrustment, as a way of rethinking hierarchical relations which do not depend on the erasure of the same.

Part IV: The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective and Entrustment/*Affidamento*

In "Women-Amongst-Themselves: Creating a Woman-to-Woman Sociality (Whitford, ed, 1991)," Irigaray writes, "as for the ethics of sexual difference, what I observe is that men have never elaborated it" (p. 191). It is this ethics of sexual difference, an extension of her argument in "Equal or Different (Whitford, ed., 1991)," that concerns me here first, and then its elaboration in its organizational forms as entrustment or *affidamento* by the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective.

First, we look at the ethics of sexual difference and how to create this woman-to-woman sociality, given that women have no place in our present symbolic structures and hence no way of knowing how to act. So what do we draw on, what are we to think about, what are we to be aware of, and what are we to take into consideration as we go about constructing a woman-to-woman sociality that is the embodiment of the ethics of sexual difference, of how to act toward each other, woman to woman and woman to man, which recognizes sexual difference—and difference—in terms of respect and of wonder? Irigaray states we need "rites and myths to teach us to love other women . . . to live with them . . . we need values we can share if we are to coexist and create together" (Whitford, ed, 1991, p. 192). Without symbolization of words and of stories and myths, religions and philosophies that do not have representations of women as women, women lack the means of loving the same—themselves, and other women. They do not, then, have the means of knowing how to act and how to be with other women because there are no

words, or stories, or myths that express the love of the same, of oneself as a woman, and love of other women. She continues, because “there are indeed almost no symbolic forms of love of the same in the feminine,” and because we exist within “a language and a social organization which exile us and exclude us,” we must create or “invent another style of collective relations. . . . a new subjective and socio-cultural order”(Ibid, pp. 192-193).

Here Irigaray is referring to *affidamento*, a “style of relations between women at once new and traditional,” which grapples with the various afflictions that have plagued women’s groups: “the unspoken, the implicit, the flare up of passions, persecution through silent consumption, demands or claims always expressed elsewhere or to others, the seizure of power by some women and the reduction of all women to “like everyone” or “like me” (Ibid, p. 193).

If we as women are to avoid the reconfiguration of hierarchical relations between and among us as women, we must create an interval, a border or a limit, to contiguous relations so that women can work together side-by-side and are neither obliterated nor erased. To Irigaray, we do this by recognizing or creating a place for our mothers as mothers and as women—the desiring mother in other terms—and through “our sexuate relationship with language, ideation, idealization and becoming divine” (Ibid, p. 194). The “divine” provides us with a horizon, a way of thinking beyond the categories that we have thought confine us, and in confining us turn us against each other. It is the liberation of the group that does not demand that the collective define and expel the different, but that the group, by reference to this horizon, can provide a place for the contiguous relations that women seek, where “women—one plus one to the n—can gather or await one another without destructively competing or wiping each other out” (Ibid, p. 194).

To the question of how we are to accomplish the strategy of creating a place for sexual difference where only the masculine neutral or sexual indifference exists (the *man*, *master*, *mankind*, my *fellow* Canadians, who stands in for both women and men), Irigaray stresses “the sexuation of the symbolic order cannot be accomplished all at once, via technology or magic. It will correspond to an intellectual, ethical, aesthetic and political effort on the part of both sexes.” According to Irigaray, we do not wish to be just “mothers, wives, nurses and housekeepers to both children and men, or . . . technical assistants to or collaborators with the present world” (Ibid, p. 196). We wish for neither the past (the different as lesser) nor the present (as erased) but for the future of sexual difference next to sexual difference in a new and contiguous social order.

In the introduction to the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective “Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice (1990), de Lauretis makes the point that we “need to make sense of, exalt, and represent in words and images the relationship of one woman to one another” (p. 1). What we have now we cannot use and do not need: the oppressive gesture of extension that masquerades as magnanimity; “You too can be just like me, but the rights you want are those I constructed to fit my needs and my wants.” What we need is a place in the symbolic structure, a “genealogy of relations between women that is at once discovered, invented, and constructed through feminist practices of reference and

address . . . taking other women's words, thoughts, knowledges, and insights as frame of reference for one's analyses, understanding, and self-definition; and trusting them to provide a symbolic mediation between oneself and others, one's subjectivity and the world (p. 2).

It is not mere equality with men that women desire, not just equality with the colonizers, the timid gestures of mere reform. As de Lauretis points out, to Irigaray that is not enough. Irigaray asks, "That's all we want? Just that?" And replies that for women to fight for equality with men is "to prevent the expression of their own sense of existence, and to foreclose the road to women's real liberation" (p. 6). We desire not to confine ourselves to the lesser of the same, the amorphous, undifferentiated, mysterious, unknowable Other who cannot know what She wants because She cannot know. Instead, we desire to explore what human culture does not know "about the difference in being a woman" (p. 10).

We need a theory and a practice of sexual difference to achieve freedom, not in the sense of equal rights to men, but a freedom that is much more creative. This practice of sexual difference takes shape in the form of entrustment, or the contiguous relations between the woman who wants and the woman who knows. And if this theory of sexual difference is to be realized in the restructuring of the symbolic to make a place for women where one has not existed before, the practice of sexual difference as entrustment must exist. This relationship of entrustment between women serves to create those places of reference through which women are interpellated—hailed, brought into the symbolic structure where they take their place as authorized, validated human beings of the female sex who have responsibilities to the world, and to shape the world in a way that suits women. Entrustment is a practice that provides a way and a place for women to be authorized, that is, admitted to the place of the subject, the one who can know. We have no place in the present symbolic order other than as the holding place for the rejected male body. In that sense, we exist neither corporeally nor conceptually. The oppressive gesture of magnanimity in the form of the masculine neutral deprives us of our own conceptualization of being, of our own subjecthood, of our own "I" from which to speak and to know the world.

The practice of these acts of entrustment between women provides a way to rethink the symbolic structure in other than hierarchical terms, to admit the sexually specific two as difference next to difference, as contiguous rather than in the hierarchical terms of sameness that require difference as lesser. Entrustment provides a point of reference in the symbolic structure by which women can locate themselves. By symbolizing these acts of entrustment, we create the stories, the myths and the philosophies of how to act and how to think about these acts that are missing in the present symbolic structure, which has no means of providing a way to symbolize the relations between women. As we do this, we simultaneously create the dual conceptualization of contiguous, sexually different beings as we create a symbolic structure that is contiguous rather than hierarchical. No longer does the symbolic structure rest on the suppression of the disavowed and rejected other to give it meaning: I am a man because I am not a woman;

if she wants to be equal to me, she must be the same as me; if she wants to be different to me, she must be lesser.

To de Lauretis, the “generalized social practice of entrustment” (p. 9) will produce change in the symbolic structure. How we act among and between ourselves as women creates change in how we are able to think about ourselves. What had eluded us before, our inability to think about ourselves as other than as lesser or as erased, we can now create by thinking about what entrustment means. Not only can we think about sexual difference where before there had been only the universalizing (male) One, and about sexual difference next to sexual difference symbolically, sexually specific male subject next to sexually specific female subject, but also we can think about difference next to difference, contiguously rather than hierarchically. By rethinking difference as contiguous, by creating a space for women’s own difference from each other, for their own diversity, in entrustment, we can valorize or give credence to that diversity, despite our disparities, and despite our differences between the one who wants and the one who knows.

To talk about differences between women and men means to talk about differences between women and between men. It allows us to recognize that we are not all the same, that we exist as women in relations of disparity, that we can figure out how to recognize disparity in our organizing strategies rather than hiding behind the mask of the same, and that we create the flexible social order of Helen Brown in the light of that recognition. Through entrustment, we are no longer subject to the masquerade of the masculine neutral, the male symbolic that demands sameness and erases difference. By recognizing difference in the symbolic structure, it provides us with a way of overcoming the “‘antagonistic comparison’ of one woman to another” (p. 112), because we remain, if we are all the same, a projection of men’s desires and needs; we remain the other, undifferentiated. We need to think through and about our diversity by recognizing the value of the mother, not only in her function as a mother, the role of women in the present (male) symbolic, but also as a desiring woman, and in that sense our own value. We need to recognize that we are different among ourselves, and that we have to relate to each other in our diversity and in our differentness. We need to admit in practice our differences, so that we can think about what we want, not as an undifferentiated mass, but as a female sexually specific subject, in which we relate to each other in our differences and disparities so that we can all use and benefit from our differences, rather than mire ourselves in envy and resentment.

Entrustment provides us with a mediation between the “I” and the world; it is not a separation where we retreat from the world, but a relationship in which we name ourselves as having value, as having a right to speak and to act. Disparity, differentness between and among women, already exists. It must be recognized, not erased, so we can create new ways of acting and being, so we can think what has not yet been thought. If not, we remain in our sameness the prisoners of men, the mysterious other who is other than the same, the unfathomable black hole composed of men’s projections of what they want women to be.

The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective writes that what exists in the present is that women turn to men to get ahead, but that does not change anything because the present symbolic structure continues to validate men and erase women. What we need instead is a "symbolic order . . . which admits of relations of mutual aid between women," the possibility of mutual exchange "between the woman who wants and the woman who knows," the opportunities to attach ourselves to women who are more "aware." The culmination, as they point out, is that "if that relation is established between two women, a new combination enters the system of social relations which modifies its symbolic order" (pp. 122-123). Changing the social relations among and between women revolutionizes the symbolic order in a way that consigns equality to the status of reform: necessary, but not complete.

The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective goes on to point out the revolutionary impact, that to take responsibility for what is—the world, her life—a "woman must take her experience as a measure of the world, her interests as a criterion for judging it, her desires as a motive for changing it," that together we must give ourselves "the authority to decide for oneself what to think, and what to want" (p. 126). We need to look at the other woman who knows, so we can realize the sensibility of being more, and not anxiously assess her with the fear that she is more and we lesser. We need a symbolic relationship between this woman who wants and the woman who knows. We must symbolize the maternal genealogy, which is unsymbolized in all that we tell ourselves that gives voice to our experiences because in our present symbolic structure there is no place for us from which to speak.

Equal or different is not only about abandoning the old way of equal (and erased) or different (and lesser) but also difference in its creative possibilities (difference next to difference). The hierarchical forms of sameness/difference and equality as sameness/difference as lesser are rejected, and the creative possibilities of the two, of contiguity, of sexual difference rather than only the sexual indifference of the one, are embraced in entrustment, the relations between women that exists to restructure both how we organize and how we think.

Irigaray helps us understand contiguous organizing. She helps discuss without sentimentality what entrustment, or the relationship between the woman who wants and the woman who knows, might mean. If contiguous rather than hierarchical forms of organizing are to be theorized adequately, and their practical implications carefully explicated, then Irigaray's philosophical examination of sexual difference next to sexual difference, difference next to difference, the woman who wants next to the woman who knows, is a necessary beginning. Her work can provide a way of thinking not only about relations between men and women but also of difference among and between women that does not demand thinking in hierarchical terms. How else can we organize to get things done in contiguous ways if we do not first consider how we are going to theorize difference in ways that are not inevitably hierarchical? Irigaray does not provide us with a final destination, nor with a "should" or a "must," but she does provide us with the creative impulse that emerges when one woman tells another woman: "Go ahead." My idea of how to organize non-hierarchically is about that creative impulse.

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