

# *Being Homeless: Female Subjectivity and Difference*

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hanging on to dust cobwebs not  
cleaning up the house letting  
everything sit and pile up like the  
garbage in the sink with the  
garburetor that doesn't work it's  
all piling up and the man I'm trying  
to impress is looking past me but the  
man is me and the I he's looking past  
is the me that's stuck in my joints and  
the stiffness of my wrist as I try to write

(I see little tiny green flies on  
the counter and think to  
myself that the house is  
infested)

coming home from vacations lots of times I  
wonder what's going to be on the front of  
my garage this week we threw a kid out

kicked him out of my office he's in for  
assault with a weapon robbery with a  
weapon and I'm thinking  
I'll be coming home and  
this guy will be on my front lawn

I went to a meeting at the board office  
from there you can see our school someone  
had done vandalism on the wall *Mrs. K.*  
*is an f-ing witch* we were talking it was  
really heavy and then I look over and—

how do other people perceive you how  
does it look from the outside at first it was  
eggs what a mess we have cedar siding on  
our house we were out there scrubbing for a  
long time we're pissed off but besides that  
what do the neighbors think ? we kept it  
quiet kept it to ourselves it's  
a source of shame really



it's one thing when it happens on school  
property it's another when it happens at your  
home that's a different ball game it changes  
it becomes personal then  
there is no place to go  
no place to be safe

houses always stand as  
a metaphor for ourselves  
a house being  
mucked about with  
abused

it's a safety net and  
a prison too  
you retreat into it to  
keep yourself safe you can't  
go out there

you don't have any rules to  
live by you thought you were  
safe but you're not

Where is 'home' for women, and what is a 'safe' space? How do women experience space? What is female subjectivity? And in what ways is this metonymical? How is language implicated? And how might such thinking be productive for curriculum, for pedagogical practice? The following text is intended—not to offer definitive conclusions—but to problematize such questions both textually and conceptually, to open a productive space for re-bodying habit-formed ways of being&knowing<sup>1</sup> in the Western world. I take as a basic premise the idea that subjectivity is currently, as Mansfield (2000) notes, a crucial theoretical consideration. He writes, "What am I referring to when I say the word 'I'? This little word, which is somehow the easiest to use in our daily lives, has become the focus of the most intense—and at times the most obscure—debate and analysis in *fin-de-siècle* cultural studies" (p. 1). I investigate, here, the potential of a metonymical female subjectivity as a site for being&knowing differently and integrate too related themes of house, home, and safety as they arose for a research group of nine women who met over the course of a year to explore their experiences of fear and pain in teaching (see Walsh, 2003a). Found poetry<sup>2</sup> and artwork from this study are interwoven aspects of the text, and, in concert with original poetry, expressive writing, and traditional academic expository writing, represent textually the difference proposed by female subjectivity.<sup>3</sup> In exploring the latter, I draw on the theoretical contributions of feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray whose work provides a model for reconceptualizing being&knowing in the Western world—an ethical project for our times (Irigaray, 1993a, pp. 116-117; 2002, p. 127; Pheng Cheah & Grosz, 1998, p. 4). For Irigaray, an understanding of difference on all levels begins with the investigation of sexual difference, the creation of a position from which women can "assume the 'I' of discourse in their own right and not as a derivative male 'I'" (Whitford, 1991, p. 42). I explore too the potential of female subjectivity for creating a being&knowing based on home-and-safety-as-openness, an openness involving risk and trust, connectedness, and an openness available to grounded and embodied human beings—rather than a being&knowing based on home-and-safety as being locked, in, closed in, and 'protected.'

Conceptually, the investigation of female subjectivity is linked to work in curriculum studies that foregrounds questions of identity and experience and that interrupts habit-formed and socially sanctioned ways of being&knowing.<sup>4</sup> Current issues in curriculum studies include those that interrogate the everyday—that which seems transparent and that which is insidious and tightly held—that which is unquestioned. Pinar (1998), in his introduction to the edited volume, *Curriculum: Toward New*

*Identities*, notes that problematizing the 'self' is, and will remain, an important impetus for work in curriculum studies in a post-reconceptualist era. He acknowledges contributions from a wide range of areas such as cultural studies, feminist theory, poststructuralist theory, queer theory, psychoanalysis, and autobiography (pp. xiv-xv). Sumara and Luce-Kapler (2003) point out that questions such as "What is curriculum?" and "How should curriculum be taught?" have been replaced by those that foreground epistemological and ontological assumptions. Questions such as "What counts as knowing?" and "Who counts as knowing subjects?" have become central to the field (p. 4). Ellsworth (1997) highlights the ways that educational discourses and practices summon us to take up particular subject positions as teachers and learners—and how such subject positions are underlined by beliefs about the possibility of communication and dialogue—and the expectation that we can, through teaching and learning, come to places of 'clear understanding.' The latter, she notes, is a view that ignores the messiness, uncertainty, unknowability, and uncontrollability of being&knowing—a productive space for transformation and difference. Questions of being&knowing, then, are crucial to curriculum studies, and integral to this paper.

I had been anticipating our meeting all  
week sometimes finding myself staring  
at the ceiling wide awake at night eyes wide  
open remembering the cold steel blue eyes the  
anger and the hate levelled at me I thought to  
myself well should I be changing my phone  
number or buying a new car or an old car an  
old beater to come to school the gaze and the  
aggression and the words echoing through out  
the office yellow the constable walks in I smile  
weakly he's gone we've just told him he's out  
he's a loose cannon he could be anywhere in  
the school right now exhaustion I felt drained  
like a weary boxer leaving the ring knowing I  
hadn't won no one had won questions could I  
have done something different? could we have  
done something different?

the blue the cold and the  
aggression I kept on seeing  
images of being eaten like bait  
like fish like a worm

you didn't know what it was going to be like for you afterwards with every other student that comes in with problems so I wrote:

*Come into my office. Let's sit and talk.*

this is how I would feel after that sort of welcoming but how welcoming is welcoming and how protective is protective?



and a little opening on the side just a teeny one  
sort of a welcoming flag I'm here! but  
how do you feel?  
hiding in a tank it looks  
kind of friendly  
but how comfortable is  
comfortable after that?

this is how you went down the corridors  
afterwards telescope  
looking around corners

Female subjectivity is a different way of being&knowing. For Irigaray, it is simultaneously literal (associated with women only) and also metonymical (a figurative way of suggesting a different way of being&knowing).<sup>5</sup> A metonymical female subjectivity implies contiguity,

association—and is not a something that can be defined, enclosed, nor substituted—at least within the parameters of male discourse, within the parameters of what we generally accept in Western intellectual traditions epistemologically, ontologically, and linguistically—a way of being&knowing that we have difficulty moving beyond. Rather, it is a touchingness, something as yet unsymbolized, perhaps unsymbolizable, something present and also absent in its very nebulousness and lack of containment. The feminine is often characterized as the not-masculine, the ‘opposite,’ that which is as yet unimagined, dispersed, multi-faceted, nebulous, uncertain, and not-in-control—an undefined difference. The masculine is that which is linear, self-contained, and stable in form, that which is teleologically oriented, that which makes claims as to truth and mastery—and that which is most often publicly valorized (see for example, Whitford, 1991, p. 50; see also Note 3 re: the way that the masculine and the feminine operate in this text). Such framings of the feminine and the masculine have roots in Western philosophy and are connected to Aristotle’s Pythagorean table of opposites (Whitford, pp. 59-60). Irigaray takes up such a feminine strategically; she speaks from this place as a first step in giving voice to female subjectivity. She sees *mimesis*—or mimicry of the position to which the feminine has been assigned in the male symbolic—as a place to begin. From here, she looks toward creating a truly different female subjectivity, one that could provide a separate position from that of male subjectivity—and, between the two, a space for creative intercourse, a liminality that invites us *beyond* the juxtaposition of the two—a productive and uncertain space that can inspire change, structural transformation through responsiveness, a kind of *listening-to* (see Whitford, p. 58). The relationship between becomes central.

Female subjectivity, then, represents difference. Irigaray makes use of differently sexed physical bodies as ground for inscribing *two*—a literal as well as a strategic intervention (see, for example, Whitford, 1991, pp. 57, 70-71, 170-174; 1994b, p. 18; Gallop, 1988, pp. 92-99; Fuss, 1989, pp. 61-66, re: the non-referential aspects of Irigaray’s discussions of the body). The ‘two lips’ of the female body speak difference, a way of being&knowing that is in constant contact with itself, always touching, inseparable, a continuity that resists a clearly distinguishable inside/outside, a space beyond opposites, a different way of being-in-relation-to (see Irigaray, 1985a; 1985c; Whitford, 1991, pp. 169-191).

Could this be the dawning of a new world? Immanence and transcendence are being recast, notably by that *threshold* which has never been examined in itself: the female sex. It is a threshold unto *mucosity*. Beyond the classic opposites of love and hate, liquid and ice lies this perpetually *half-open* threshold, consisting of *lips* that are strangers to dichotomy. Pressed against one another, but

without any possibility of suture, at least of a real kind, they do not absorb the world either into themselves or through themselves, provided they are not abused and reduced to a mere consummating or consuming structure. Instead their shape welcomes without assimilating or reducing or devouring. A sort of door unto voluptuousness, then? Not that, either: their useful function is to designate *a place*, the very place of uselessness. (Irigaray, 1994, p. 175)

she turns her key in the lock and it explodes  
pins and springs losing themselves  
in the grass and dirt at her feet

all through the long night  
alone lock unfixed house unlocked she feels  
vulnerable uneasy open  
to the world  
she muses at length

why does she want to be  
locked in?

reaching into the  
bag I draw a  
rune rough between  
my fingers blank  
it says leap\*  
into the void  
empty handed

(trembling at the edge  
passport driver's  
license falling through  
fingers)

\*between resist and let go hold and surrender before  
and beyond staying home changing home



Conceptions of *self*, *identity*, and *subjectivity* are linked to constructs of home, house, and safety—and all inform reconceptualizations of being&knowing (see Note 4 re: differentiating the terms *self*, *identity*, and *subjectivity*). Home is found by many to be not only a physical place—in the West often linked to *house*—but also beyond, to spaces of familiarity, loci of organization (see Morley, 2000, pp. 16-30). Douglas (1991) notes that “while home is located, it is not necessarily fixed in space—rather, home starts by bringing space under control” (as cited in Morley, 2000, p. 16). It is a complex system. Historically, home has evolved from a space in Medieval times that was “less clearly bounded (more like we might now think of a café or pub) and . . . [more] open to the comings and goings of a multitude of diverse persons, involved in highly diverse activities” to a current conception of home as the abode of a nuclear family with a physical space demarcated by rooms with specialized functions that can effectively separate its inhabitants from each other and from the ‘outside’ world (Morley, 2000, pp. 21-22). Since the early seventeenth century, home, in the West then, has increasingly come to connote an inside/outside and private/public distinction—a particular ordering and control of space. Connections to the evolution of ‘self’ and ‘individual’ are evident—i.e. the movement from a premodern conception of the self as connected, intertwined with the physical world and other people to a modernist conception of the self as bounded unto itself, increasingly isolated (see Note 4).

Conceptions of house and home have long been associated with the human body, and in particular, the female body. The latter, with its interior space, invites a womb-house connection.

The house as a metaphor for the womb, rare in antiquity, became popular only with Christianity, which saw the incarnation of the Son of Man in God’s entry into Mary’s virginal womb . . . . The house with hollow spaces is thus commonly used as a metaphor for the female body, which can be penetrated and envelops the growing embryo, as well as for the nongendered body, which is conceived of as inhabited by a self. What explains his duplication in the metaphorical field is the fact that, in cultural history, woman was—and is—repeatedly analogized with the body. (Benthien, 2002, p. 26)

Young (2000) notes that, “home is an extension of the person’s body, the space that he or she takes up, and performs the basic activities of life—eating, sleeping, bathing, making love” (p. 73). Benthien (2002), in her cultural examination of skin and subjectivity, traces the house-body connection and draws on the work of Blumenburg (1960) in noting that the house-body connection is an ‘absolute metaphor’ in the sense that such metaphors are “orientational guides in the world . . . provid[ing] structure” for thought and foundational beliefs; such connections are so transparent as to be thought of as “universal and self-referential” (p. 25).

The body as house, as dwelling place for the human being underlines separation, a dualistic conception of body and being, as well as a separation of human being from the outside world. Such a house, though it invokes a sense of shelter, safety, and protection, also invokes a sense of being trapped, of being locked in, of being imprisoned (p. 20).

*it's a safety net and a prison too you retreat into it to keep yourself safe you can't go out there you don't have any rules to live by you thought you were safe but you're not*



spheres ominous spheres  
she just happens  
to be in the path of angry  
spheres they all come crowding  
down on her but if  
underneath in this little place little  
hiding hole she  
can be safe

your line where your perceived personal  
space is and basically you have the feeling that  
when you leave work your home is your  
castle you leave work behind and

when you go home it doesn't affect you  
you don't have your phone number  
listed as a teacher things like that because  
you don't want to be phoned at home by  
kids the breaks in it the breaks and the orange  
represents your fear and the red is the beating of  
your heart and the blue is where you knew  
your personal space of safety was but you don't  
know quite where it is now and where it is  
going to form again or how much  
you have after that



Young (2000) considers feminist critiques of 'home' and contends that a common thread in each is the idea that "home is associated with safety and the making of identity" (p. 71) in the sense of being bounded and secure, cohesive, stable and whole, as well as a place to further entrench separations between the political and the personal or private and to safeguard oneself from difference, a difference that could threaten one's identity. A number of feminist writers, she contends, therefore reject a naïve and unpoliticized view of *home*—and its seductiveness as illusion of "wholeness and certainty" (p. 70). De Lauretis (1990) asserts that, in order for transformation and movement to occur, for a recognition of female subjectivity as difference to usurp that which is taken for granted, dislocation is necessary. She writes:

The shift entails, in my opinion, a dis-placement and a self-displacement: leaving or giving up a place that is safe, that is "home"—physically, emotionally, linguistically, epistemologically—for another place that is unknown and risky, that is not only emotionally but conceptually other; a place of

discourse from which speaking and thinking are at best tentative, uncertain, unguaranteed. But leaving is not a choice: one could not live there in the first place. Thus, both aspects of the displacement, the personal and the conceptual, are painful: they are either, and often both, the cause and/or the result of pain, risk, and a real stake with a high price. . . . A constant crossing of the border. . . . A remapping of boundaries between bodies and discourses, identities and communities. . . . (p. 138)

every increment of consciousness  
every step forward is a *travesía* a  
crossing I am again an alien in a  
new territory and again and  
again but if I escape conscious  
awareness escape "knowing" I  
won't be moving knowledge  
makes me more aware makes me  
more conscious I am  
no longer the same  
person I was before  
(from Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 70)

the person who trembles  
while crossing a border casts doubt  
on their own definition not only  
on their passport not only on  
their driver's license but also  
on every aspect and  
form of their definition  
(from Cixous, 1993, p. 131)

(once a shift in  
subjectivity occurs the rest of  
the world shifts as well and it is  
impossible to go back)  
(from St. Pierre, 1997, p. 6)

The concept of house, dwelling, home is one that appears and reappears in Irigaray's writing. For her, the 'house' is the male symbolic, a safe haven for him. Women, however, are "in exile, unhoused in male sexuality, male discourse, and male society" (Whitford, 1991, p. 150).<sup>6</sup> The house of our phallogocentric culture is one created out of fear, the denial

of the mother as the some-place of birth. Woman is his origin, his home—and his unrequited desire to return to her results in the creation of language, a symbol system in which he immerses himself: “unmitigated mourning for intrauterine nest, elemental homesickness that man will seek to assuage through his work as builder of worlds, and notably of the dwelling which seems to form the essence of his maleness: language” (Irigaray, 1993a, p. 127). Irigaray notes too the constitutive nature of language, how language holds the subject in a net “that secures him without realizing it. . . which he believes he controls but which controls him. The subject is ignorant or uncomprehending of language’s ability to generate, to procreate symbols” (1993b, p. 133). In order to use language, to enter the symbolic, both men and women must deny the mother and take up a position already written within the symbolic. In denying the mother, woman erases herself as well.

Irigaray theorizes that a female language—and a female subject position—might reveal itself obliquely in the way that the unconscious reveals itself through psychotherapy. Her work as a linguist and as a trained analyst led her to explore the relationship between linguistic performance and psychic/mental states such as senile dementia, schizophrenia, hysteria, and obsession—each of which has its own ‘grammar’ through which the state ‘speaks itself’ without conscious knowledge of the speaker (see Whitford, 1991, pp. 38-42). Her studies of senile dementia, further, demonstrated that the linguistic losses women and men encountered are different—and her investigations of at least three languages, English, French, and Italian, research centering on the words of women and men in daily situations, in the context of therapy, and in ‘test situations’ further revealed sexed aspects of discourse (Irigaray, 1993d, 1996, pp. 69-78, 79-92; Schwab, 1998, pp. 84-88). For example, she notes that, in French, “the masculine is always dominant in syntax. . . which erases the feminine” and that “this has an impact on the way subjectivity is experienced and the way it is expressed in and by discourse” (1993d, pp. 30-31). Also, what is neutral or impersonal is expressed in the masculine (p. 31; 1994, p. 166; 1996, pp. 69-78). The masculine masquerades as the universal in language as in other aspects of the symbolic, and effectively erases the feminine. She is cancelled out—and so, therefore, is another way of being&knowing for both of them.

It’s not that we have a territory of our own; but their fatherland, family, home, discourse, imprison us in enclosed spaces where we cannot keep on moving, living as ourselves. Their properties are our exile. Their enclosures, the death of our love. Their words, the gag upon our lips. (Irigaray, 1985a, p. 212)

She is ensconced within his house, without a subjectivity that can be expressed symbolically. “Homelessness within the very home itself,”

Grosz notes, “the containment of women within a dwelling place that they did not build, nor was even built *for* them, . . . the space of duty, of endless and infinitely repeatable chores that have no social value or recognition, the space of the affirmation and replenishment of others at the expense and the erasure of the self (1995, p. 122). Containment. Imprisonment. An ambiguous and contradictory space to be. Unsafe safety.

The blood and flesh of the phantasized mother/woman, which sustains the language/house of men must find its own symbolic expression in language, thus becoming the other pole of cultural discourse, and allowing two-way predication, (the ‘double syntax’), unfreezing the discourse which has petrified, and at the same time giving to women the cultural and symbolic possibilities previously allowed only to men in patriarchy. (Whitford, 1991, p. 48)

she wakes from a fitful sleep walks  
around the house it is 2 am or thereabouts  
a June evening cool calm quiet she goes  
downstairs to the living room as she always does  
when she wakes in the night it is her  
place to think to stare out at the night sky the street  
the streetlights the houses across the way but tonight  
on entering the living room she is  
disoriented that feeling you get when something is  
wrong something is amiss the front window is it  
broken? no. but white marks are all  
across it her heart pounds suddenly  
very awake she races to the front window looks out  
her flower garden destroyed pansies  
pulled out by the roots shades of purple all  
over the sidewalk a sidewalk full of dirt and  
green and purple and those marks on the window  
words? they’re backwards to her what do  
they say? she can’t remember now  
or can she?



and you're crying white  
lines the word BITCH  
your image now to the  
people who live around

you're walking down the hallway  
thinking okay does everybody in this  
school except me know who this is? is it  
you? is it you? is it you? or I saw you do  
this or that—maybe it is you how can  
you teach when you can't trust people?  
and it got to the point where whenever  
we were away from the house we'd  
come back and we'd think is something  
going to be wrong? is something going  
to have happened to our house?

the remnants of what  
people had left death  
weird and bizarre they  
were right there but more importantly  
they'd come inside left their marks and

where were they? what  
was going to happen after that?



when you walked down the stairs it was  
peaceful quiet pink in my mind pink  
represents safety I had to physically cut this  
paper because I think of the barrier between  
what was and suddenly within a split second  
something happens changes your whole  
perception the perception that you have from  
inside and the perception that it gives from  
outside but what clouds this whole issue is the  
confusion the questions that it brings  
confusion pain darkness

the inside is no longer pristine  
comfortable cozy a haven suddenly  
there is a not a great deal of differentiation  
between in and out

*suddenly there is a not a great deal of differentiation between in and out*

Our depth is the thickness of our body, our all touching  
itself. Where top and bottom, inside and outside, in front  
and behind, above and below are not separated, remote,  
out of touch. Our all intermingled. Without breaks or  
gaps. (Irigaray, 1985a, p. 213)



Irigaray's descriptions of the female body "where top and bottom, inside and outside, in front and behind, above and below are not separated" (1985a, p. 213) and as a "half-open threshold," with "lips that are strangers to dichotomy, pressed against each other but without any possibility of suture" (1994, p. 175) problematizes an outside/inside dualism. Female physiology provides a figurative space for reconceptualizing another way of being&knowing where such distinctions cannot be clearly delineated. The female sexed body is a paradox—a space for those invited, and a passageway for birth, for love—but also an always-open space that can be invaded, can be unsafe, is open to intruders (see Whitford, 1991, pp. 159-160).

*what are the implications of maintaining the illusion of outside/inside—a variation on the public/private binary—where the inside the private is mythologized as a safe space to be? where the house the home stands as ultimate symbol of the private a space of safety? but is it?*

*Day (2001, p. 17) reminds us that although rapes most frequently occur inside the home and are perpetrated by men who are known to the victim a commonly held belief is that such violence happens outside in the night and is initiated by strangers in such a story the safety of the home the inside what is private is kept intact she is held in place (under protection)*

*but who is the protector? (and what is the flip side of having to be protected? she-who-can-not-look-after-herself?)*

in her dream she is in a dentist's office her teeth are bothering her and she wants a dentist to fix them the dentist takes her into the main office he has his arm around her like a lover she buries her head in his shoulder you can only see part of the side of her face she doesn't want to look at the women in the office she hides he protects her the women are all dressed alike in the same pastel-colored outfits their hair is all cut the same she can tell they don't like her one in particular glares at her hatefully she knows that this woman was the last to be in the place that she is in now it's obvious she hides in his shoulder and knows that this protection will not can not last for now she is hiding she sees that one of the women is pregnant

To establish and maintain relations with oneself and with the other, space is essential. Often women are confined to the inner spaces of their womb or their sex insofar as they serve procreation and male desire. It's important for them to have their own outer space, enabling them to go from the inside to the outside of themselves, to experience themselves as autonomous and free subjects. . . .

Learn not always to follow the same path, which doesn't mean to dissipate your energies, but rather to know how to circulate from outside to inside, from inside to outside. (Irigaray, 1993c, pp. 48-49)

*suddenly there is not a great deal of differentiation between inside and outside the inside is no longer pristine comfortable cozy a haven they'd come inside left their marks a house being mucked about with abused*

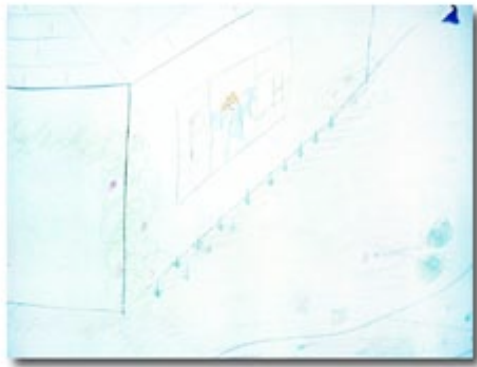
Irigaray notes repeatedly that concepts of space and time must be conceptualized differently, renamed as well, for the acknowledgement of *two* to take place (see for example, Irigaray, 1994, Whitford, 1991, pp. 152, 155; 1994a). *She* cannot be incorporated into a masculine sense of space and time—for her experience is different. Her maternal body is the ground for his being, his subjectivity; “the mother-woman is used as a kind of envelope by man in order to help him set limits to things” (Irigaray, 1994, p. 169; see also, Whitford, 1991, p. 155). An exploitation laced with fear, the need to hold her where she is in space (as mother-woman, not as woman) so as not to disrupt his subjectivity—in a place, a space not her own, not of her own creation.

The mother woman remains the *place separated from its 'own' place*, a place deprived of a place of its own. She is or ceaselessly becomes the place of the other who cannot separate himself from it. Without her knowledge or volition, then, she threatens by what she lacks: a ‘proper’ place. She would have to envelop herself, and do so at least twice: both as a woman and as a mother. This would entail a complete change in our conception of time and space. (Irigaray, 1994, p. 169)

Young (1989) describes feminine experience of the body in space and notes that she is often enclosed, encloses herself in a double gesture—one of protection, enclosing a confined and safe space around her while also being positioned in space as object—at once subject and object. A subject&object whose intention, whose interaction with space and the world around her is limited, fragile, uncertain, confined—and contradictory.

a woman trying to escape running  
from a man trying to hide in a  
museum hiding around corners another  
woman around another corner being attacked  
trying to escape leave the country trying to  
get away but all attempts are hopeless cuts  
open wounds that won't stop bleeding gaping  
cuts that won't heal the slicing of the skin

a group of men with a huge  
painting worth millions  
they have stolen from my house  
I grab it run down a back alley  
hide and run



the house a comfy home cottage with  
the flowers growing up flowers  
being chopped off they're headless  
now they're all on the sidewalk  
the window pane as a barricade  
between you being able to go out and  
do something about this it's a safety net  
but it's a prison too  
you retreat into it to keep yourself safe but  
you can't go out there you can't go  
out and get this person

you don't have any rules  
to live by you thought you were  
safe but you're not

just protecting your own  
personal space that whole idea of the  
boundaries and stuff we don't talk with  
the students about we don't even think

about you just think oh well you just  
go out and do this job but it isn't like that  
teaching is a very vulnerable thing  
public it's a public act

A contradictory relationship to space, the space of her own body, her self. Both Young (1989) and Irigaray link their discussions of space to concepts of immanence and transcendence. How woman has been linked to immanence, connected to nature, relegated to the lower aspect of the nature/spirit split because of her cycles, the changeability of her body, and her capacity to give birth. The masculine, by contrast, is associated with transcendence, the spiritual, traditionally that which has been split from its ground (see, for example, Whitford, 1991, p. 149-151, 154). Young (1989) rethinks transcendence as the body moving out into space with intention, "pure fluid action, the continuous calling forth of capacities which are applied *to the world*" (italics added, p. 59)—something not possible in feminine bodily existence. Her movements are inhibited, small, scribed within a limited space, and often fragmented and disjointed in that only part of the body is involved in a gesture rather than the body as an integrated whole. She lives a paradoxical relationship with&in her body and also with&in space. She is at once an experiencing subject who must act in the world, move her body out into space, be transcendent to some degree—and also the object of a movement. Young writes:

Women have the tendency to take up the motion of an object coming *toward* them as coming *at* them. . . . Women tend to have a latent and sometimes conscious fear of getting hurt, which we bring to a motion. That is, [in] feminine bodily existence. . . the woman takes herself as the object of the motion rather than its originator. (1989, p. 61)

Young observes too that way women move their bodies in space, small, protected spaces with timid, uncertain movements, because of "original doubt in our body's capacity," a phenomenon that she claims is linked to "the general lack of confidence that we frequently have about our cognitive or leadership abilities" (1989, p. 67). Irigaray contends that to inscribe her own subjectivity, she must create her own 'axis,' her own way of *moving between* heaven and earth (Irigaray, 1994, p. 174; Whitford, 1991, p. 150, 152, 160; 1994a). She must create her subjectivity—a different position than that of the male subject—through integrating, perhaps rewriting, what has been described as transcendent, immanent, of reconceptualizing space&time, and thereby acknowledging her experience. The confusion of being homeless, of not having a 'safe' space inspires Irigaray's insistence on acknowledging female subjectivity—eschewing fusion, incorporation into the masculine

universal, and thereby opening into difference, the recognition of *two*. She elucidates a *sensible transcendental*, in which two equal subjects respond to one another, where one is not subjected to object-only position, but both move fluidly between subject&object positions in relation to one another, a space where change can happen. Where each can, recursively and continually, create 'home' for the other. Changeable safety.

From one point of view, [the sensible transcendental] can be seen as the symbolic order *in its possibilities of and for transformation*, in other words, language as a field of enunciation, process, response, and becoming, but a field in which there are *two* poles of enunciation, so that the 'I' may be 'male' or 'female,' and so may the 'you,' so that the speaker may change positions, exchange with the other sex. (Whitford, 1991, p. 47)

dawn through plum colored venetian blinds  
light light  
she is not sleeping really  
but rests in awareness  
breathing through her heart  
deep deep full breaths open  
tracing scents of lavender sage

*she rubs her hands together in the night and when she opens them there is glowing ball of light in her hands the phosphorescence spills over into the darkness and she knows that it is energy within&beyond  
(a different relation to space&time one that rewrites safety rewrites home that is grounded in the body open that breathes with risk uncertainty that trusts inhaling exhaling through the chest the heart connecting inside outside attentive present female subjectivity)*

In her process of rewriting transcendence, of creating a productive space *between two*, and of articulating female subjectivity, Irigaray looks to Eastern traditions—specifically to India and the practice of yoga (1996, 2002). She elaborates on the idea of 'air' as one of the vital elements of life—and points to the conscious and autonomous mediation of the breath, its movement through the *chakras* of the body, from the genitals, up through the abdomen, the heart and throat, to the forehead (third eye) and through the top of the head—a movement of energy, air (*spirit*, breath) from the carnal to the more spiritual, accomplished through the body. This movement provides not only a metaphor for linking body and spirit—but also a material practice for doing so. As such, it provides a gesture, an act that helps to break down what has previously been separate. Body and spirit are cultivated at once through conscious attention to the

breath—immanence and transcendence commingled (1996, pp. 23-25; 2002, pp. 60-64)—inside&outside problematized, borders transformed. For Klein (1997) too, concentrated awareness of the physical, such as focus on the act of breathing, is materially and metaphorically a grounded connection to nature, the environment, through a life-sustaining exchange of gases, an extension of the boundaries of the 'self' as separate embodied being. For her, such attention to the breath and its role in opening and connecting is the ground for something other than what she calls the two-dimensionality, the flatness of poststructural subjectivity (1995, pp. 84-85). She calls us to acknowledge the multidimensionality of different subjective *states*—one of which is mindfulness<sup>7</sup>—in which space&time are experienced differently, and where the 'self' as isolated, bounded unto itself—and therefore 'safe'—is called into question.

By training the senses in concentration, we can integrate multiplicity and remedy the fragmentation associated with singularity and the distraction of desiring all that is perceived, encountered, or produced. There is no question, then, of renouncing the sensible, of sacrificing it to the universal, but rather it is cultivated to the point where it becomes spiritual energy. (Irigaray, 1996, p. 24)

Tibetan Buddhist practices, Klein says (1997), teach us to become more deeply aware of our own bodies, to be grounded in awareness of the physical and also to embody a conception of our connectedness with others and with the world around us—a world that is alive and pulsing with energy—and a world with which we co-create, through energetic interactions. From a Tibetan Buddhist perspective, we are not dissociated viewer-minds, protected within a bodyspace, but active participants in energetic flow and transformation—grounded in a focused awareness of our own bodies in the present moment—“going inside so deeply that [we] [open] into a vast space that is neither internal nor external . . . a kind of holographic expansion in all directions (1997, p. 147). Such practices also operate as means of interrupting a teleological orientation to time—an orientation based on the future and that is separate from the body, much in the way that knowledge itself is split from its physical ground in Western being&knowing—and situate one in the present moment. Space&time reconfigured. Safety and home rewritten as that which is open, connected, permeable—rather than that which is closed in, 'protected.'

*voices rise together separately find one another resonate harmonize sometimes  
bray in dissonance singularity cacophony energy spirals bodies hum*



Female subjectivity offers difference, a way of being&knowing not isolated and enclosed, pulled around itself in a controlled safety inspired by fear, a need to control, to maintain oneness—but a different experience of space&time, a different kind of home—more open, grounded in the body, dispersed and connected—one concentrated in movement in&out, between&among, rather than focused inward—a movement emanating from a breathing-with, an embodied presentness—trust, and willingness to risk. Nebulous difference.

Relationship becomes integral. Relationship borne of the acknowledgement of two, of difference. Both&and. The productivity of the uncertain space between—and an acceptance of not-knowingness, uncertainty—in the process, the dynamics of transformation, the restructuration of subjectivities-in-relation.



### Notes

1. I purposely use the ampersand to connect words in constructions such as “being&knowing” as one way of demonstrating my commitment to working in a space between and beyond such ideas and words, not in a linear sense of the space *between* two points—more like a multidimensional & space, a both&and beyond. The joining of words with an ampersand signals too a commitment to

finding different ways of being&knowing-in-the-world than the ones limited by our conventional ways of thinking and denoted by the words we use in taken-for-granted ways. I began this practice in my master's study (Walsh, 1990), my thinking inspired by an essay by Mezei (1985) where she interrogates the use of the slash and replaces it with the ampersand.

And woman as object of the sentence, (sentenced to the object),  
as reader moves over, crosses over the slash and becomes writer,  
speaking subject, creator of her own text.

And so I remove the slash: it falls, ambivalent as always,  
perhaps disconsolate, & is replaced by an ampersand, cheerful,  
accommodating.

I have read

&

I have written

&

This quote by Mezei (1985, p. 25) is a useful example of the kind of play with language that women writers have explored in looking for a language and a subjectivity of their own.

2. Found poetry is poetry that is *found* in the environment, in this case, the transcripts of the research meetings and also the texts of other authors. Various researchers have used found poetry as a way of re-presenting what emerges in their research as well as a way of processing, of working with phenomena—writing as inquiry (Butler-Kisber, 1998, 2000-2001. 2002; Graveline, 2000; Luce-Kapler, 1997; Richardson, 1992; Stewart & Butler-Kisber, 1999).

3. Textually, this paper is intended to interrupt forms of academic representation that emphasize certainty and knowability, the latter as two markers of male subjectivity (see Note 4, para 5). The theoretical writing herein operates in a recursive and associational interplay with the artwork, poetry, and expressive writing as an attempt to reconfigure and re-present being&knowing. The latter loosely represents female subjectivity, and the former, male subjectivity. I invite the reader to consider the text itself as incomplete, fragmentary, and suggestive—a sort of liminal, and hopefully productive, space between. I also footnote large chunks of text to invite something other than a linear reading.

4. Through this work, I am working to foreground female subjectivity and also to begin distinguishing the terms *self*, *identity*, and *subjectivity*. I find in my reading and even as I write, that the three are sometimes used interchangeably—or at least in ways that have, at times, not been adequately framed. A 'clear' and unproblematic distinction is probably impossible—and maybe not desirable. I do think, however, that the discussion has interesting implications for curriculum studies. What are the nuances and the historical connotations of words like *self*, *individual*, *person*, *subject*, and *identity*? What do we intend when we use such terms? How might the associations surrounding each term help us to reimagine the being&knowing of learners and teachers—and the relationships among them?



Though there are links among the terms 'self,' 'identity,' and 'subjectivity,' the three are not synonymous. The Western term *self*, in current times, acknowledges the assemblage of feelings and sensory experience that is at once changeable and also somewhat coherent. Mansfield (2000) notes that in addition to the subject's relation to the world in grammatical, politico-legal, and philosophical kinds of ways, the subject is also a human person: "no matter how exhaustive our analyses of our selfhood in terms of language, politics, and philosophy, we remain an intense focus of rich and immediate experience that defies system, logic and order and that goes out into the world in a complex, inconsistent and highly charged way" (p. 4). Further, he writes:

Usually we live in an open-ended yet known, measured yet adventurous journey into experience, one we see as generally consistent and purposeful. It is this unfinished yet consistent subjectivity that we generally understand as our selfhood, or personality. (p.4)

Belsey (2000) notes too that the term 'self' (which she equates roughly with *individual* and *person*) stands for the "whole package"—"we subsist as an uneasy conjunction of organic impulses and cultural values, each at the expense of the other" (pp. 66-67). Klein (1995) traces historical change in the meanings of the terms *self* and *individual*. She notes that *individual*, as late as the fifteenth century, implied a sense of indivisibility and connectedness—one century later, the term had evolved to encompass a sense of "uniqueness and personal choice"—and subsequent separateness (p. 27). Abbs (1986) writes that the movement "from the indivisible and collective to the divisible and distinctive, carri[ed] quietly within itself the historical development of self-consciousness . . . that change in the structure of feeling which during the Renaissance shifted from a sense of unconscious fusion with the world towards a state of conscious individuation" (as cited in Klein, 1995, p. 27). Further, *self* "in the late Middle Ages in Europe . . . was a noun representing something to be denied in favor of God and all he represented"—a term that soon thereafter evolved to encompass a more bounded consciousness (Klein, p. 27).

With this, the center of meaning was no longer situated in the wider external sphere—in God, society, or nature—but came to rest more completely within the narrow boundaries of the individual himself. (Klein, p. 27)

The terms *subjectivity* and *identity* are intertwined, symbiotic. *Identity* involves "membership [in] a group," well-known, acceptable, and seemingly 'natural' categories of being (Belsey, 2002, p. 52). Identity implies that which seems fixed, coherent, and stable, and perhaps most importantly, that which we can not or will not question, that in which we are deeply invested. A sense of ontological essentialism exists around identity. *Subjectivity*, in a poststructuralist turn, reminds us that we agree to different subject positions, that we *subject* ourselves to their terms, that we are subjected, and that we can and do assume different and sometimes contradictory subject positions in accordance with context. We are written differently in different situations—through subject positions that are defined through language and other discursive practices. A poststructuralist subjectivity refers to "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world"—a "subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak" (Weedon, 1997, p. 32). Such a subjectivity is not a

singular internalized locus but rather a site where competing and often conflicting discourses take hold and shift positions, constantly changing, foregrounding themselves and then moving away. It is a process in which the subject herself is complicit. She assumes different subject positions consciously and unconsciously, maintains and resists them.

Irigaray's view of subjectivity and of identity explains further the symbiosis between the two. For Irigaray, subjectivity is a "position of enunciation," a place from which to speak—and a structure into which identity is poured—a structure that is formless without identity (Whitford, 1991, p. 91). Each, in some sense, defines the other, and neither exists separately from the other. Irigaray aligns identity with the imaginary and subjectivity with the symbolic. Subject positions are offered in the symbolic—"the social and cultural order in which we live our lives as conscious [and] gendered . . . structured by language and the laws and social institutions which language guarantees" (Weedon, 1997, p. 50). Identity is aligned with the imaginary in that it is the first moment of the emerging "I," the moment when the subject (mis)identifies itself as a whole, coherent, and powerful being: "the baby, whose experience of its body until then had been fragmented and incoherent, is enabled, by means of a mirror (or an image of itself mirrored from a parental figure or figures) to see a reflection of itself as a whole body or unity, with which it can identify 'in anticipation' " (Whitford, p. 63). The imaginary derives from the body and is a psychic structure that develops through time (see Whitford, p. 63).

While Irigaray utilizes aspects of psychoanalysis, she also critiques it as an exemplar of the reigning symbolic&imaginary. Sexual difference is crucial to her work. For her, male subjectivity is aligned with a male symbolic—the hegemonic cultural structure that underlies much of Western philosophy—a way of being&knowing that is characterized by *oneness*, one truth, a belief in universals and absolutes that can be understood through rational means and that subtends all, and a system of domination and subservience that is based on the valuation and devaluation of terms in the binary oppositions that organize thought. It is a system of rationality that represses the unconscious—a structure that itself has an intellectual history, and one that can therefore be interrupted and transformed. Western thought, she contends, is itself imaginary in that it misconstrues itself as the whole, the one, and the only way of being&knowing (see Whitford, pp. 53-74). The male symbolic is necessarily intertwined with a male imaginary, and for a female subjectivity to emerge, a female symbolic and its corresponding female imaginary must be differentiated. Currently, however, both men and women, must take up subject positions within the male symbolic, the only existing possibility.

It is important here to note Irigaray's use of the term *imaginary*. Whitford (1991) notes that, "she conflates in a single term the phenomenological definition of the imaginary (the conscious, imagining, and imaging, mind) with the psychoanalytic definition (the unconscious, phantasizing mind), and can move fluidly between one and the other" (p. 54). Also influential in Irigaray's *imaginary* are Bachelard's imaginary and its connection to the elements of earth air fire, and water as well as Castoriadis' imaginary as both "primordial creative source or magma . . . [and] as a social formation" (p. 56) (see Whitford, 1991, pp. 53-74 for further discussion). The distinction of female and male imaginaries is specific to Irigaray—and crucial to her theory.

5. Is Irigaray's female subjectivity aligned only with women? It is problematic to read her in a literal way. See Whitford, 1991, p. 102, re: the slipperiness with which Irigaray herself moves among terms such as 'woman,' 'women' and the 'feminine' and how these might be read differently at different times and for different purposes as perhaps empirical descriptions, ideal descriptions, descriptions of the reigning (male) imaginary, prescriptions, or metaphors. With reference to Freud and his inattention to sexual difference, Irigaray (1985b) writes), "we might wonder whether certain properties attributed to the unconscious may not, in part, be ascribed to the female sex, which is censured by the logic of consciousness. Whether the feminine has an unconscious or whether it is the unconscious. And so forth" (p. 73).

6. The idea of female exile, of homelessness and wandering, and of the importance of language in such being&knowing is one that has been espoused at length by a number of women writers. Anzaldúa (1999) and Cixous (1991, 1993), for example, write about woman as being *no-place*, unsituated. Cixous speaks of her foreignness—born of a Jewish German mother and a French/ Algerian father, living in Algeria, then in France, speaking Spanish, German, Arabic, Hebrew, English, and French—she calls herself triply marginalized—as a woman, as a Jew, and as an Algerian colonial (Suleiman, 1991, p. ix). She speaks of writing as a way to overcome her sense of exile and to locate herself: "the miracle is that out of all this sense of lack, writing came. At a certain moment, for the person who has lost everything, whether that means a being or a country, language becomes the country. One enters the country of words" (Cixous, 1991, p. xx). Anzaldúa also speaks of being no-place, of not belonging and about the interstices of her identity—as a lesbian *Chicana*, living on the borderlands of Texas and Mexico, speaking a patois of languages and living a patois of cultures: Indian, Spanish/Mexican, American (1999, pp. 37-45, 77-86). The cultural and linguistic differences that Anzaldúa and Cixous have lived contribute to their inquiries into borders and boundaries, feelings of exile and foreignness and perhaps, too, to their need to write and to create themselves in language. A language of their own.

7. Mindfulness as subjective state, a different way of being&knowing for those of us in the Western world is coherence amidst chaos, a calm centeredness and stillness of bodymindspirit, a connectedness beyond the self and the limits of the individual body through nonjudgmental observation. Mindfulness is described by Klein (1995) as "the ability to sustain a calm, intense, and steady focus when one chooses to do so" (p. 11), by Tomm (1995) as "increased attention to what is happening at any moment" (p. 15), and by Kabat-Zinn (1994) as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" (p. 4) (see also Bai, 2001; Thich Nhat Hanh, 1995a, 1995b). It is not necessarily the absence of conceptual thought as much as the non-attached acceptance of what is—the practice of watching thought without involving oneself in its drama, or in its associated emotions. It is an anchoring in the body—a heightened and purposeful awareness of physical sensations, often with a focus on the breath. I have written about mindfulness and its connection to being&knowing elsewhere (see Walsh 2003b).

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