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This Body Which is Not One: The Body, Femininity and Disability¹

MINAE INAHARA

Abstract In the social system in which we live, the imaginary body is an able body. The able-bodied has established its representations that are the projection of able-bodied subjectivities. In this article, I shall develop a psychoanalytic account of physical disability in order to open up possibilities for physical disability beyond its position as castrated able-bodiedness. Psychoanalysis, to me, is not simply about 'sexuality' but can also be used to analyse 'physical disability', indeed all aspects of one's subjectivity. I shall propose the appropriation of psychoanalysis to explain the construction of subjectivity, whether it is able-bodied or disabled, in a way that parallels the male/female dichotomy. Within an able-bodied symbolic, in which the able-bodied takes itself as normal, it is impossible to illustrate the multiplicity of the disabled. Following Irigaray's claim that the ambiguity of female sexuality does not conform to male notions of sexuality, I argue that the complexity of the disabled body does not fit into the able-bodied norm of subjectivity. In this article, I shall be drawing on Irigaray's theory of embodied subjectivity to argue against the masculine-able-bodied-based theory of subjectivity found in Freud and Lacan.

Keywords body, disability, femininity, Freud, Irigaray, Lacan

In the social system in which we live, the able body is privileged over the disabled body. In this article, I shall contest the binary categorical system which defines disability in opposition to an able-bodied norm, and suggest that the disabled body is a multiplicity or excess which undermines this able-bodied norm. The able-bodied tradition has been influential in establishing the schema for normative reflection and in categorizing the terrain, the normal or the abnormal, the able-bodied or the disabled. In this article, I shall question the terms within

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which such able-bodied dualism is constructed and suggest an Irigarayan position that can reject such dualism.²

Rephrasing Luce Irigaray's main claim (1985b: 23) that: 'Female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters', I maintain that disability has always been conceptualized on the basis of able-bodied parameters. The purpose of this article is to reconsider feminist theories of the body and to apply them to the disabled body. I shall contest the normative categorization of disabled bodies as essentially the 'Other', maintaining that attention to bodily differences deconstructs the able-bodied/disabled opposition and explores what is positioned beyond these normative categorizations. Synthesizing Irigaray's conceptualization and the experience of physical disability, this article seeks to reject a fixed, single, narrow, masculine and able-bodied conceptualization of the body, and instead to generate a fluid, diverse one, which reflects the variety and complexity of the lived experiences of both women and those categorized as disabled.

Luce Irigaray and Sexual Difference

Sexual Difference and Psychoanalysis

Sexual difference is probably the issue in our time which could be our 'salvation' if we thought it through. (Irigaray, 2004 [1993]: 7)

As considered by Irigaray, 'sexual difference' cannot be understood as just bodily difference. Rather, sexual difference is a normative category. In Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, based upon male oneness – the priority of the penis – sexual difference is concealed. Women are simply those who lack the penis, or fail to inherit the phallus. Irigaray (1985b) challenges Freud's and Lacan's studies of psycho-sexual development and suggests an alternative account of female sexuality which is distinct from masculine conceptualizations of sexual difference. According to Irigaray (1985b: 25): 'Woman's desire would not be expected to speak the same language as man's; woman's desire has doubtless been submerged by the logic that has dominated the West since the time of the Greeks.'

Irigaray claims that our culture (Western culture) is established on the assumption that women are passive and negative. For Irigaray, recognition of sexual difference does not exist in the social system. Acknowledgement of real sexual differences would entail that both men and women can equally and differently acquire their subjectivity. While men have been subjects in the long tradition of Western philosophy and culture, women have been the 'Other' of these subjects.³

While Freud (1991 [1973]) and Lacan (1997 [1977]) considered that the male genitals are identified as 'one', as the phallus, and paid no attention to other sexual organs, Irigaray argues that the female genitals are 'not one'. For her, there

is no single term for the female genitals in terms of a binary opposition. What is the opposite of penis? The female body, in particular the female genitals, are naturally fluid because they unsettle the fixity of the binary oppositions that construct patriarchal thoughts.

Irigaray's rejection of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis implies a denial of any fixed position between the sexes: 'man's desire and woman's are strangers to each other' (Irigaray, 1985b: 27). Thus, femininity is based upon sexual difference and can only be resolved through sexual difference. Her definition of female sexuality (1985b: 28) is based on the female body that is considered not as one sexual organ, but as a plurality of them. Irigaray (1985b: 31) argues that a female body should not be reduced to one sexual organ since this reiterates the masculine logic of 'the primacy of the phallus'. Irigaray insists on the need to create other definitions of the feminine, which resists 'the one' constructed by patriarchy. Irigaray is thus critical of the social system of distinguishing man from woman, since it is not just a distinction but a privileging of man over woman, a subsuming of woman into man, whereby woman is defined in the terms of man.

Irigaray and Freudian Phallogentrism

Irigaray criticizes Freudian phallogentrism that conceives binary oppositions such as penis/lack, oneness/otherness, and masculine/feminine. She maintains that Freud theorizes female sexuality simply in terms of male sexuality. The feminine is considered as a negative category. She argues that Freud neglects to see the specificities of the female body and describes woman's desire only in terms of lack of or desire for the penis. Irigaray questions:

How can we accept the idea that woman's entire sexual development is governed by her lack of, and thus by her longing for, jealousy of, and demand for, the male organ? Does this mean that woman's sexual evolution can never be characterized with reference to the female sex itself? (Irigaray, 1985b: 119)

It is the purpose of Irigaray to deconstruct this binary opposition by moving the feminine part of the binary opposition from a lack into an excess and multiplicity. If the female body is disseminated as the vital metaphor for sexuality, instead of the fixed shape of the single male sexual organ, sexuality could be complex, plural and multiple rather than fixed and single. Irigaray's notion of female sexuality can be positioned in all places, in the air, in the touch, in the look, in the inscription, in the imagination, and in the whole of the body.

Irigaray's Speculum vs Lacan's Flat Mirror?

In 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I', Lacan (1997 [1977]: 1–7) rereads Freud's concept of the bodily ego and develops it into a theory of an imaginary

body. Lacan explains that the first step in subject formation is the acquiring of an imaginary body. This takes place in the mirror stage at approximately six months. An infant who has less mobility and few motor controls, placed in front of a mirror, starts identifying with the whole image that is reflected back in the mirror.⁴ The infant identifies with the image of the self as a coherent *whole*, even though this sits in some tension with the multiplicity of inner sensations that they are also experiencing. As theorized by Lacan, one's awareness of one's own body starts in the mirror stage, and is developed by the next stage of subject formation, which is the entry into the symbolic order.

In her critique of Lacan's mirror stage, Irigaray (1985b: 129) questions why Lacan gives attention to a *flat mirror*, which reflects women's bodies only as absence. Irigaray (1985b: 129) states that '[as] for the priority of symmetry, it correlates with that of the *flat mirror* – which may be used for its constitution as subject of discourse'. With a flat mirror, everything we see is defined as either a male body or a not-male body. The woman only appears as not-male, as lack, or simply as the 'Other'. The entry to the symbolic order (phallogocentric culture) is dependent upon the woman remaining as a blind spot so that the man constructs his subjectivity on the basis of her absence. This shifts woman's identity to 'no place', which is outside of the symbolic. According to Lacan, all we can say is that woman is subsumed to not-man. This leads us to Irigaray's main claim, as Whitford (1991: 159) points out: 'the feminine is always defined as man's other, the "other of the same"'. Irigaray argues that all identities come from a patriarchal norm with the emphasis on visibility, rationality, fixity, wholeness and 'sameness'.

For Irigaray, woman is a reflection for man. Woman reflects man's own image back to him and is the projection of man's notion of oneness within the symbolic. Woman operates similarly to the formation of language for man, representing him since she is not him. Thus, 'woman' is not simply 'the other', but rather specifically the man's 'other' – his mirror, which is why woman exists outside of the phallic symbolic, unintelligible in phallic discourse. In this system of sexual sameness, there are only men: either a holder of the penis or a castrated man. To undo this effect, Irigaray invokes the image of a speculum, a curved and fluid mirror reflecting back on itself, instead of the flat mirror that, as Lacan theorizes, is utilized to reflect back the gaze of the person looking at it. Thus, the Lacanian flat mirror allows a clear demarcation of what is not man. Irigaray argues that woman lacks a mirror for becoming a woman and that woman needs a bowl-shaped mirror, that is, a speculum, which reflects her specificity, her fluidity and complexity and disturbs the fixed male parameter. While the phallogocentric (Lacanian) perspective sees only one dimension (male subject/female object), the speculum opens the perspective of multiple dimensions for many subjects.

Irigaray proposes that the recognition of woman as a subject will transform the symbolic order so that man will take up fully new positions and both man and woman will be unchained from the phallogocentric order.

Irigaray's Philosophy of Sexual Difference: A Summary?

Irigaray (1985a, 1985b) has two intentions. The first is to reveal phallogocentrism as establishing and maintaining the entire system of sexual differentiation. The second is to seek to create a feminine system to offer a positive sexual identity for women. Irigaray pays particular attention to 'phallogocentrism' to remonstrate not only against the overestimation of the phallus or the penis, but also against the consistent neglect of women's independence in the socio-cultural standards and ideals that are formulated by men. Phallogocentrism establishes identity in relation to the phallus, and excludes all differences that do not match the phallic standard. With this logic of the phallus, the one remains the standard that governs the politics of difference. The one is the ideal or the phallic, that is, man. Irigaray wants to produce a new symbolic system that rejects symbolic hierarchies. If women simply long to become like men, it means accepting a masculine discourse that naturally rejects women. Instead, women have to obtain their own expression, an expression that is not the masculine. Irigaray also states:

[Women] merely 'equal' to men would be 'like them', therefore not women. Once more, the difference between the sexes would be in that way cancelled out, ignored, papered over. So it is essential for women among themselves to invent new modes of organization, new forms of struggle, new challenges. . . . (Irigaray, 1985b: 166)

The feminine, as Irigaray theorizes it, does not imply an essential femininity. She does not suggest a fixed, essential nature for women. She is not accepting the psychoanalytic polarization of male/female. Instead, she seeks to reposition difference and femininity. For her, the feminine represents a multiple and fluid difference, that is, it is beyond the binary oppositions.

An Irigarayan Conceptualization of Physical Disability

What is Physical Disability?

In posing the question 'What is disability?' many disability activists and academics seek to grasp the state of disabled people's oppression and subordination (Barnes, 1991; Finkelstein, 1980; Oliver, 1990, 1996). In 1976, the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) defined impairment as 'lacking part or all of a limb or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body (including psychological mechanisms)', and disability as 'the disadvantage or restriction of

activity caused by a contemporary social organization which takes little or no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities'. Following the UPIAS movement, Mike Oliver (1990) coined the phrase 'social model of disability' and suggested that disability is socially constructed. It results from arrangements of social life which exclude people with certain kinds of body from full participation. The social model of disability came from the socio-political battles of disabled people to establish legislation to obtain rights for disabled people: 'disability [has] nothing to do with the body. It is a consequence of social oppression' (Oliver, 1996: 35).

One criticism of this social model is the dichotomy established between disability and impairment. The social model seemed to deny medical and individual aspects of disability; its theoretical structure involves a denial of the significance of the body. Some academics in critical disability studies have been entering the blurred ground of the disability vs impairment discussions (Corker, 1999; Corker and French, 1999; Price and Shildrick, 2001; Shakespeare, 2006; Shildrick, 2000, 2002; Wendell, 1996).⁵ While acknowledging the significance of the social model of disability in order to bring about social changes, they maintain that some problems confronted by disabled people are not able to be resolved by social management.

My approach in this article fits into neither side of this debate. We cannot debate whether the body or social arrangements are primarily the cause of disability when the category of 'the disabled' itself needs to be called into question. The concept of disability does not exist separately from that of ability. Physical disability is enveloped within the able-bodied, and is reduced to a position of weakness, of lack. It is defined as what the able-bodied is not. And, as in Lacanian accounts of the phallus, this able-bodied ideal is itself uninhabitable. I maintain, therefore, that all people are represented by only one body, the able body, and that physical disability cannot be defined except as the supposed opposite of the mythical able-bodied. As with the category of the feminine, this definition has no anchorage in the lived experiences, and bodily forms, of those so labelled.

The able-bodied system misleads those labelled disabled, to adopt a subordinate position. To have faith in a concept of disability is to allow disabled people to be caught up in an able-bodied system which favours the able-bodied subject. To break out of such labelling we need a fluid account of identity, which parallels the moves Irigaray made regarding femininity. A model of fluidity is desired over a model that combines different bodies into one essential self, a self constructed via an able-bodied imaginary. I suggest, following Irigaray's criticism of liberal and existential feminism (Irigaray, 1985a, 1985b), that the quest for

equality which informs current social models of disability, assumes that the able-bodied is the standard for normality, a standard that all people have to achieve. Can those labelled disabled find their own standard of normality, which would locate the notion within their own bodies and experiences?

The Able Body as a Phallic Body

Following Irigaray's claim that the ambiguity of female sexuality does not fit into male notions of sexuality, I argue that the complexity of differently abled bodies does not fit into the able-bodied norm or its disabled 'Other'. She seeks to open psychoanalysis and phallogocentric culture to a question that has never been asked, the question of sexual difference and the possibility of recognizing different subjects. I wish to open it to the question of differently able-bodied subjects. My proposal is that the phallic body which is the anchor of signification in the Freudian and Lacanian system can also be viewed as the able body. Even when physical disability is described as a biomedical lack of the whole and able body, its categorization depends upon a symbolic system in which the able body is taking on the privileged position which Lacan allocates to the phallus. What I mean to provide in this section is an opportunity for a dialogue between Irigaray's theory and a series of discourses originating from within the political and cultural boundaries of the 'disabled' world, through and on our own bodies. Here, I shall look at the able-bodied norm, which informs not only what Lacan has theorized as the imaginary relation to the self that establishes identity, but also the symbolic order in which this identity, and especially corporeal identity, is articulated and fixed. I recognize and subsequently articulate of my own physical difference in terms of having or not having an able body and a certain set of physical abilities.

If bodily lack, which characterizes physical disability and its difference in the eyes of the able-bodied, is interpreted as abnormal, it is because *to be seen* is the mode of normalization of norm. Such a notion of norm can only be apparent and established in the mirroring and reflexive moment of self-image, from which it takes its establishment or justification. Bodily lack is predicated on the norm of the whole and able body, a norm which, in turn, allows it not only to be seen, but also to be possessed. The able-bodied is fulfilled by its wholeness since wholeness is valued on the market and is glorified socio-culturally because it can be seen and possessed. Not only is my castration inferred from the abnormality of my body, the disdain of physical differences supports the normative structure of the able body, insofar as the able-bodied is defined by the threat of castration. Thus, the disabled body is positioned as the absence or lack of such a phallic able body.

Like Irigaray, I am critical of theoretical normativity, in particular, the notion of the normative and fixed subject and how the fixed subject has been represented

in the phallogocentric and able-bodied tradition. I am interested in what has been expelled from the theories of the fixed subject and able-bodied culture. Each socio-cultural norm requires the creation of a category of those who fail to comply with it, its 'Other'. Such exclusion is essential to the whole manoeuvre and maintenance of the socio-cultural system. Also like Irigaray, I believe that the theoretical application of 'physical disability' or 'the disabled' body has no fixed resting place, a place where it is 'rightfully' studied, and that it lends itself not only to a reconsideration of many different theories of the body, but also to an exploration of the connections between them.

Margrit Shildrick's Concept of Monstrosity

The fluid conceptualization of the body in Irigaray's work has problematized the fixed notion of the subject. I am also committed to a notion of fluidity, on which embodied subjectivity is formed and reformed. I shall focus on a disruption of the fixed and disembodied subjectivity of those labelled disabled. I argue that any operation, in feminism and disability studies, of establishing and stabilizing a positive subject, to contest the existing preconceptions, only reinforces a difference which has produced vulnerability and discrimination. Rather than making the boundary clearly defined as to what is feminine or what is disabled, I want to see the possibilities of the new space that is established by deconstructing the dichotomy. In *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*, Margrit Shildrick (2002) argues that feminist theories of the body and critical disability studies can accept, rather than reject, the fluid body and vulnerabilities of the embodied subject. She uses the model of monstrosity as an image of vulnerable bodies – all bodies, but in particular those categorized as female, disabled, aged bodies. Shildrick states:

While it is not difficult to recognize the mechanisms at work in the response to disabled bodies, I want to stress that similar moves operate in relation to all forms of monstrosity. It is, above all, the corporeal ambiguity and fluidity, the troublesome lack of fixed definition, that marks the monstrous as a site of disruption. (2002: 80)

Thus, Shildrick argues that bodies viewed as disabled are monstrous and that our reactions to them are ambivalent. Seeking to demarcate the disabled body, she claims that we reach the point where we come to realize the *impossibility* of having a fixed and perfect body. By reading Shildrick, we can reconfigure physical disability not as a category of certain kinds of body, but *as a moment of recognition in the process of being embodied*, a recognition of vulnerability, of fluidity and change. If one is positioned in a fluid system of embodied subjectivity, the notion of a fixed subject can be questioned.

Irigaray's focus on embodied subjectivity and the fluid body is one of the significant points that Shildrick (2002) expands upon. It is neither possible nor desirable that certain kinds of bodily difference should cease to be treated as a concern for medicine; the search for 'cures' is, in principle, respectable. However, we will most likely never reach an era in which all bodies are the same. In contrast, as medical technologies develop, many complex questions have been and will continue to be raised. When utilizing such resources it is not necessary to assume a single able-bodied norm as a good to which we all aspire. Shildrick's analysis of the disabled body at the centre of these contests over meaning and representation ensures that we (embodied subjects) remain vital to this discussion – it places our multiple needs and lived experiences at the forefront, rather than leaving us in the darkness of the medical, ethical and social debates. Shildrick views disabled bodies as bodies of subjects negotiating the medical process in an age in which we have no fixed normative goal.⁶

There are some possibilities of marrying the theoretical understandings of the body in Irigaray and Shildrick. For both of them, the body is both the subject and the object of the images, symbols and values that play the main role in validating who one is. Thus, theorizing bodies, femininities, disabilities and embodied subjectivities provides some space for expressing difference and opens up new possibilities for all embodied subjects. Shildrick provides an analysis of the 'disabled' body as it is *lived and experienced*, arguing that the body is not a docile or inert object merely inscribed by social forces. Like Irigaray, Shildrick seeks to conceive beyond the problematic dualism of mind/body, normal/abnormal, ability/disability, fixed/fluid and culture/nature.

Towards an Irigarayan Deconstruction of the Disabled Body

The able-bodied/disabled binary disregards all aspects of physical differences, pains and pleasures. I ask a similar question to that which Irigaray poses: what is the opposite of the able body? Like the female genitals, 'disabled' bodies are changeable, fluid, since they disturb the fixed construction of the able-bodied 'one'. Disabled bodies are 'not one'. For example, both my partner and I have cerebral palsy, but our symptoms are very different from each other. He can do what I cannot do, and vice versa. While I have a coordination problem, he walks with a limp. When we went to a local pub for a drink, he ordered drinks, and carried them to the table where I was sitting. At that point in time, I heard someone whispering about us behind my back: 'Look! Poor him, she should help him with carrying the drinks over!' I felt guilty about it. However, the woman behind me did not understand my disability at all. I cannot carry a glass without spilling the contents. I wonder whether, if physical ability for all individuals was

not limited to a simple conception of able-bodiedness, we would no longer have a single definition of what constitutes physical difference. Limping and a walking stick were the signification of what is not able-bodied for the woman. But my partner is able-bodied in this respect. This assumption about limping as incapable-of-carrying-drinks and not limping as able-to-carry-drinks has to be questioned here.

The woman thought that my partner has no ability-to-carry-drink in relation to her able-bodiedness. In a way akin to Freud's view of the clitoris, she understood my partner's ability as a castrated ability, that is, disability. Like Irigaray, who claims that the complexity of female sexuality does not fit into masculine notions of sexuality, I argue that the complexity of disabled ability does not fit into able-bodied notions of ability. I realized our own abilities within our disabilities. In this context, physical disability is not the 'Other' to the able-bodied. Instead there is a diversity of abilities and disabilities in all our negotiations of the world. This diversity challenges the logic of sameness in able-bodied understanding of ability and the fixed body it assumes.

My partner, by mimicking an able-bodied movement, is in a sense incorporating the able-bodied norm in his own way. Thus, his ability-to-carry-drink destabilizes the claim that physical disability is the 'Other' to the able-bodied. Rather, physical disability and the able-bodied seem to be intertwined and interdependent. For what emerges between my partner and the woman is not difference as such, but an initial inference to the 'Other'. How do we deal with the 'Other' correctly when the 'Other' is never completely the 'Other' to the self, when one's own distinctness is dependent upon seeing the 'Other' as 'Other', and yet the boundary between the 'Other' and self is blurred? My partner mimics an ambiguous relation to the ability attributed by the socio-culture, an ability that he at once attributes to the culture but seeks to undermine.⁷

The able-bodied subject can only exist because the disabled object acts as a 'standard' so that the woman can sustain herself by repudiating some bodies. The woman in the local pub needs to speculate on my partner's (dis)ability in order to establish her able-bodied self. In viewing our disabled bodies, the woman becomes threatened by her own vulnerability. She becomes vulnerable to loss of an able-bodied wholeness. As Shildrick (2002) considers, viewing the monstrous body or the disabled body is regarded as an encounter with the vulnerable self. Shildrick reveals the complex feelings of fear and vulnerability which disrupt the self when confronted with the monstrous or disabled 'Other'. Thus, the able-bodied norm only comes to pass as a consequence of the repression of different bodies, of not seeing differences or acknowledging that the so-called disabled body may have abilities of its own. The problem with the able-bodied subject is that, as a concept, it requires the transcendence of the fluid body. The apparent

split between an able-bodied subject and a disabled object is produced by the supposedly able-bodied subject's segregation of him/herself from the body and bodily transformations. Questioning the notion of an able-bodied subject opens up a space for conceptualizing differences. I have suggested that the 'disabled' body, like the female body, is not fixed by the 'able-bodied' view of it. It maintains a constituent of 'excess' as it is not incorporated or sufficiently articulated in able-bodied thought. The symbolic holds no self-representation for disabled people because physical disability has been appropriated into an able-bodied (compare phallic) symbolic. This symbolic system is controlled by an ideal of able-bodiedness.

Challenges to the Able-bodied Flat Mirror

The space of the disabled is a fluid space of difference and ambiguity. This opens the way for the awareness that there are different abilities which are generally ignored. Since the 'one' has always been defined as able-bodied and masculine, I wish to explore the possibilities for a different subjectivity. Why allow myself to be assessed by any norm which excludes myself?

Able-bodied culture has constructed a notion of physically disabled people as the 'Other' and those excluded have had no hand in their own construction. Irigaray questions Lacan's attention to a flat mirror that regards female sexual organs only as lack: I also ask why this flat mirror reflects disabled bodies simply as lack, as not whole, as not complete. I cannot see myself in this mirror, which operates as a reflection only for the supposedly able-bodied. I suggest that both the phallic body and the able body are illusionary and unattainable. We have an obsession with 'body-perfecting tools' such as gyms and cosmetic products in an attempt to obtain the perfect body, an attempt which by its nature is doomed to failure. The able-bodied symbolic is maintained by individuals viewed as disabled. Thus, the able-bodied person can form his/her identity on the basis of the disabled lack, which reinforces the able-bodied illusions of fixity and wholeness. If those categorized as disabled could determine their own identity, not located in an opposition to the able-bodied ideal, the illusion of an able-bodied identity would become clear. However, exploring this opaque identity is not easy at all, in the same system of articulation. In her poem, Keith (1995 [1994]: 57)⁸ expresses the impossibility of describing her strength in terms of the able-bodied imaginary and symbolic:

Tomorrow, I am going to rewrite the English language.
I will discard all those striving ambulist metaphors
Of power and success
And construct new ways to describe my strength.
My new, different strength.

Then I won't have to feel dependent
 Because I can't Stand on My Own Two Feet.
 And I'll refuse to feel a failure
 Because I didn't stay One Step Ahead.
 I won't feel inadequate
 When I don't Stand Up For Myself
 Or illogical because I cannot
 Just Take It One Step At A Time.

I will make them understand that it is a very male way
 To describe the world.
 All this Walking Tall
 And Making Great Strides.

Yes, tomorrow I am going to rewrite the English language
 Creating the world in my own image.
 Mine will be a gentler, more womanly way
 To describe my progress.
 I will wheel, cover and encircle.

Somehow I will learn to say it all.

Here, Keith exposes the difficulties of expressing her bodily specificity within an able-bodied system and suggests a new way of articulating and imagining her own body. Rather than reinforcing a distancing from the disabled body of her own, Keith regards her body as opening up the possibility for blurring boundaries, thereby envisaging new creative prospects within that relationship and also, in far broader terms, beyond.

Keith's poem intersects with Irigaray's theory, and disrupts the traditional role of the flat mirror. Her poem does not merely produce an able-bodied/disabled dichotomy in which disability is the passive term. Rather, her poem reveals multiplicity of the embodied self. Thus, in her poem, the body, which is usually categorized as the 'Other', produces a fluid image which disrupts the dichotomy. Keith expresses her body, which Irigaray states is: 'always at least double, goes even further: it is plural . . . more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is commonly imagined – in an imaginary rather too narrowly focused on sameness' (1985b: 28).

Like Irigaray, my reading of Keith's poem offers the image of the speculum as a way to destabilize the flat mirror and to allow people to embrace their own images which undermine the socio-cultural norm and reflect back to them their own identity and their own subjectivity. Irigaray demonstrates that the speculum is an image for illustrating alternative representations of the feminine. Keith offers an insightful critique of the able-bodied symbolic. In this way, Keith is deconstructing the able-bodied mirror that maintains the able-bodied norm. As

Keith reveals her embodied subjectivity in her poem, I suggest that we have to explore femininity and physical disability from our own embodied experiences. Keith, in her poem, speaks from the position of a 'disabled' woman in order to question the power of the negative view on the disabled body. She also demonstrates how the disabled body has been excluded by revealing the normative view to be passive or negative. Thus, I argue that Keith's poetic voice makes a shift in the conception of female disabled subjectivity and the female disabled body. In my view, Keith's poem illustrates Irigaray's view because she assumes that her disability cannot exist in its own right or with a positive form of subjectivity as opposed to being viewed as a negative and passive version of the able-bodied male subjectivity, until she has not only confronted, but also revised the able-bodied biased formulation of physical dis/ability in our culture. I analysed the poem to demonstrate how the English language is a masculine and able-bodied system obscuring and controlling the imaginary of the feminine and the disabled.

Returning to the self-image or the mirror image, I suggest that the role of the speculum can transform. Keith's poetic expression attempts to disrupt her social relations and presents opportunities to question existing social inequalities. Thus Keith opens up new spaces for looking at an able-bodied code of ethics and discourse. I argue for an evolution of the speculum in an Irigarayan sense. The speculum is the image of undermining the able-bodied subject. Those viewed as disabled provide the starting point for a new way of seeing the body. By using the term 'disability' we must be careful not to group all disabled people under one universal signifier named disability, which reduces a range of embodied experiences into a homogeneous being.

Conclusion: Towards Multiple Bodies

What does an Irigarayan notion of multiplicity do to the able-bodied system which our society exalts? The able-bodied paradigm of the body is normative in that the body is based on having a whole body, a single and fixed set of physical abilities, while the disabled body is in some way incomplete. Yet, my body is not simply 'not a whole body'. I do have physical abilities, but they are not measurable in the able-bodied system. The binary opposition between the whole body and nothing becomes undermined when my abilities are recognized. The able-bodied system has been destabilized due to the multiplicity and fluidity within it.

The perfect body, which is the able body, is simply not attainable. No matter what modifications are made, the idea that there is this perfect body is an impossibility. As an ideal, it is just that, ideal – unattainable. I suggest that another system is required; a system that acknowledges a range of bodily differences and that is

based on the multiplicity and fluidity of bodies. It is one which also recognizes the vulnerability of all bodies. The system which I envisage will be constructed on the concept of multiplicity rather than that of simplicity. This system can liberate all people – all bodies. Such a system would not only liberate disabled people but also able-bodied people, in that it would disrupt the assumption that ability is positioned in only one way and thus liberate people to explore their own abilities. A system based on multiplicity would counter imagination with contact; it would decrease the gap between people, it would set up connections and challenge the boundaries that categorize people. This destabilization of boundaries might, in the end, produce the blurring of the able-bodied characteristics of the human body. We do not need a theory of disability that views disability as one side of a binary opposition. The dualistic structure operates by positing an opposing side in order to maintain one side's appropriateness and legitimacy to distinguish it from that which it is not.

Exploring Irigaray's work, I have envisaged the body, femininity and physical disability within a combined imaginary and symbolic that is based on complexity. My intention in this article is to provide a means by which those labelled disabled people may redefine and re-imagine themselves. In this article, I have argued that an Irigarayan intervention into studies of disabled bodies is required to do this.

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I would like to acknowledge Lois Keith for permission to reprint her poem 'Tomorrow I'm Going to Rewrite the English Language', from *Mustn't Grumble: Writing by Disabled Women*.

Notes

1. Margrit Shildrick (2000 [1999]) used the same phrase 'This Body Which is Not One' in the title of her article. In 'This Body Which is Not One: Dealing with Differences', Shildrick (2000 [1999]: 77–92) examines the practice of body modification as normalizing or fixing the fluid body, and criticized this normative practice. She maintains that the dominant discourse regards the subject as the disembodied or as the 'singular and separate body', where boundaries between self and other are fixed. In this article, Shildrick pays particular attention to some cases of conjoined twins to explain that the body can be seen as 'one' by a procedure of corporeal and discursive modification that, however, fails to eliminate the mark of the 'monstrous other' that disrupts the assumption of the self-same – oneness. I empathize with Shildrick's view on the fluidity of the body in this article. In addition, since this article is about exploration of an Irigarayan conceptualization of physical disability, the phrase 'This Body Which is Not One' is rephrased from the title of Irigaray's famous book/article called 'This Sex Which is Not One'.

2. In 'Love's Labours Lost? Feminism, the Disabled People's Movement and an Ethic of Care' (Hughes et al., 2005: 259–75), the authors utilize Irigaray's work to explore an ethics of care from both a feminist perspective and a disabled perspective. They maintain that an Irigarayan conceptualization in disability studies is required, in particular, its claim for a fluid and embodied analysis of the caring relationship.

3. Here, I consider that Irigaray's claim is related to Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir (1997 [1949]) explains the social constructions of woman as the 'Other' within patriarchal discourse. De Beauvoir asks 'What is a woman?' and she considers and suggests that woman is the 'Other' of man. In the most repeatedly quoted line of *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir (1997 [1949]: 295) states: 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.' She also suggests that male perception of the female body as lacking in relation to the male body is related to this patriarchal construction of woman.

4. For Lacan, viewing oneself in the mirror is the initial moment of identification. He considers that the moment of seeing one's mirror-image (self-image) is the first moment of identification as/with a consistent and lived image. The mirror is a partition; it separates the world one lives through from the world one views. Lacan considers that the mirror forms an illusion of wholeness. What is essential for Lacan is the consequent psychosomatic bond that expands between the subject and its image. After the mirror stage, the subject positions legitimacy in the image rather than the self and produces an inner partition.

5. Critical disability studies examines disability issues using post-structuralist/postmodern theory, gender theory, postcolonial theory, cultural analysis, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, bioethics and sociology of the body, and has developed out of recognizing the inability of the social model and the medical model to explore the complexities of disabled people's embodied experiences.

6. In this connection, Shildrick (2002) also looks at Donna Haraway's theory of the cyborg – a hybrid figure synthesizing biological and technological features. The analysis of the cyborg body seeks to question the conventional notions of subjectivity and identity and opens up new possibilities for seeing our embodied subjectivities in a postmodern age.

7. In 'Publisher's Note and Note on Selected Terms' of *This Sex Which is Not One*, mimicry is defined as:

An interim strategy for dealing with the realm of discourse (where the speaking subject is posited as masculine), in which the woman deliberately assumes the feminine style and posture assigned to her within this discourse in order to uncover the mechanisms by which it exploits her. (Irigaray, 1985b: 220)

Mimicry is a philosophical manoeuvre employing conventional categories of woman in order to question the category itself. Mimicry – the possibility of repeating a stereotypical view unfaithfully – suggests that women are something other than the view illustrated. Irigaray's idea of mimicry bears some similarity and indebtedness to Jacques Derrida's idea (1973, 1997 [1974]) of *différance*. Mimicking the system of psychoanalysis (and other theories), Irigaray maintains that stereotypical views can be subverted when they are exposed and demystified. When successfully operated, mimicry reiterates the stereotypical view without reducing women to that view and parodies it such that the view itself must be renounced. For Irigaray, the aim of mimicry is to question the male definition of femininity to such a degree that a new definition of and, ultimately, an embodied subject position for women can emerge. As maintained by Irigaray, we cannot work entirely outside of language. Thus, Irigaray claims that a new definition for women has to emerge out of a mimicry engaging with the old definitions.

8. This book is also referenced as Keith (1996): *What Happened to You? Writing by Disabled Women* (New York: The New Press).

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