

# *Parler femme, parler hégélien: Applying Irigaray's Mimesis Technique to Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*

*Silvia Locatelli*

*Universidade de Lisboa*

**ABSTRACT:** This text is an attempt to implement a feminist reading of Hegelian philosophy. In particular, the activity of *mimesis* proposed by Luce Irigaray, one of the greatest exponents of feminism of sexual difference, is applied to the Hegelian philosophy of nature. To implement this practice, several steps are necessary. Firstly, to develop an ontological explanation of nature capable of demonstrating the constitutively 'excessive' character of nature in relation to the concept, which maintains a fidelity to Hegelian thought and retains the speculative character of the relationship between Idea and nature. Secondly, to analyse Irigaray's concept of *mimesis*, consisting in that 'conscious masquerade' through which it is possible to unhinge the 'phallogocentric' order from within, thus opening the space for a symbolic order for woman as a subject Other. Finally, to interrogate the symbolic link posed by Hegel – as well as by western culture in general – between woman and nature, in order to apply the exercise of *mimesis* to the Hegelian philosophy of nature. Indeed, if nature is symbolically linked to woman then, given the ontological explanation of nature presented here, the possibility of a symbolic reading of Hegel arises which gives space for an essence different to that of the concept to appear.

**KEYWORDS:** Philosophy of Nature; Hegel; Classical German Philosophy; Feminism; Luce Irigaray.

## *1. Introduction: A Feminist Reading of Hegel*

The aim of this article is to use Hegel's philosophy of nature to exercise the feminist concept of *mimesis*, as developed by the feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray. A legitimate question might be: why look for feminist inputs in Hegel – a male philosopher, renowned even for some unfortunate quotes about women? This approach does not stem from a desire to find themes articulated by feminist women philosophers in a male author, but rather from a desire to encourage feminist readings of texts from the philosophical tradition. Feminism – in all its forms, but especially with Irigaray – represents a break with the philosophical past, one that draws its strength from a critical confrontation and reinterpretation of it. This article, therefore, attempts to be an exercise in feminist thought that aims to re-appropriate the Hegelian text and 'turn it upside down' through a critical reading, not to passively 'learn' lessons from Hegel but to take from his texts what can be useful for our present philosophical aims.

Working with Hegel's texts to elaborate Irigaray's feminism of sexual difference is not straightforward, and it is therefore useful to precisely outline the steps of our analysis. Firstly, a particular ontological explanation of Hegel's philosophy of nature is outlined in order to



demonstrate the so-called ‘essential inessence’ of nature. Secondly, some of Irigaray’s key concepts are presented in order to describe the activity of *mimesis* and its subversive character within the phallogentric symbolic order. Finally, the exercise of *mimesis* is applied to the Hegelian philosophy of nature, showing how through its reinterpretation it can represent the feminine excess that unhinges what Irigaray defines as ‘phallogentric logic’.

## 2. Hegel’s Philosophy on Nature: An Unsolved Contradiction

The sphere of nature constitutes a crucial point in the systematic development of Hegelian philosophy, since nature represents the passage in which the Idea, developed in the *Science of Logic*, initially denies and externalizes itself. In this way, nature appears essentially other than the Idea, but at the same time it is in some sense related to it, since it is itself determined precisely in the movement of alienation from the Idea. This alienation leads, in the Philosophy of Spirit, to a progressive return of the Idea to itself, having recognised its proper essence in otherness. In this sense, the passage into nature represents one of the most problematic and, at the same time, crucial points of Hegel’s philosophical system, in that it allows the development and the mediated return of the spirit to itself:

But what is posited by this first resolve of the pure idea to determine itself as external idea is only the mediation out of which the concept, as free concrete existence that from externality has come to itself, raises itself up, completes this self-liberation *in the science of spirit*, and in the science of logic finds the highest concept of itself, the pure concept conceptually comprehending itself.<sup>1</sup>

Due to its particular position in the system, the sphere of nature has a problematic essence, afflicted by a lacerating and ‘unsolved contradiction’.<sup>2</sup> The contradiction can be seen in its dual and inconsistent character. On the one hand, the logical categories are the result of the necessary development of thought which, thinking itself, reaches its own knowledge: in the realm of nature, one must find the Idea, because the *Idea* has become externality. This means that the process of alienation still has the Idea as its subject – the Idea is denied, but nature as its product cannot be radically other from it. Hegel states this point very clearly at the end of

<sup>1</sup> HEGEL, G.W.F. *Science of Logic*. Trans. G. Di Giovanni. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 753. On this topic, see: WANDSCHNEIDER, D. Die Stellung der Natur in Gesamtentwurf der hegelischen Philosophie. In: Petry, M. J. (Ed.). *Hegel und die Naturwissenschaften*. Stuttgart: frommann-holzbock, 1987, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> HEGEL, G.W.F. *Philosophy of Nature*. Trans. M.J. Petry. London: Allen & Unwin, 1970, p. 209.

the *Science of Logic*:

The transition is to be grasped, therefore, in the sense that the idea *freely discharges* itself, absolutely certain of itself and internally at rest. (...). Inasmuch as this externality is only in the abstract determinateness of being and is apprehended by consciousness, it is as mere objectivity and external life; within the idea, however, it remains in and for itself the totality of the concept, and science in the relation of divine cognition to nature.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, in the sphere of nature, the Idea – the final and absolute result of the development of thought – becomes literally alien to itself, through a movement in which it ‘freely discharges (*entläßt*)’ and exteriorizes itself in natural reality.<sup>4</sup> To re-use the formulation used earlier, the Idea really becomes *external*. Nature, therefore, is precisely extraneous and opposed to the Idea itself. Exteriority seems to represent the very essence of nature. In this sense, the natural realm, characterized by extrinsic and immediate relations, appears as opposed to the realm of the Idea, where the relations between the elements are intrinsic, mediated, and necessary. Due to its exteriority and the extrinsic character of the relations which take place in it, nature appears to be characterised by contingency and multiplicity. The natural realm therefore represents the moment in which we see the necessary logical development of the Idea unhinged:

Nature has yielded itself as the Idea in the form of *otherness*. Since the Idea is therefore the negative of itself, or *external to itself*, nature is not merely external relative to this Idea (and to the subjective existence of the same, spirit), but is embodied as nature is the determination of *externality*.<sup>5</sup>

Due to this twofold aspect, nature appears to be characterised by a contradiction: because of its externalization in nature ‘the determinations of the concept have the appearance of an indifferent subsistence and isolation with regard to one another’; at the same time, however, Hegel emphasizes that this does not imply that the Idea is totally alien to nature, but rather that

<sup>3</sup> HEGEL. *Science of Logic*, p. 753.

<sup>4</sup> ‘The absolute *freedom* of the idea, however, is that (...) in the absolute truth of itself, it *resolves to release out of itself* into freedom the moment of its particularity or of the initial determining and otherness, [i. e.] the immediate Idea as its reflexion, or itself as Nature’ (HEGEL, G.W.F. *Encyclopedia Logic*. Trans. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, H.S. Harris. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1991, p. 307). Hegel clearly points out that this transition from the logical to the extralogical is not a transition in the sense of the logical necessity of thought, as in the *Science of Logic*. See PINKARD, T. *Hegel’s Naturalism: Mind, Nature and the Final Ends of Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 36; PIPPIN, R. *Hegel’s Realm of Shadows. Logic as Metaphysics in the Science of Logic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018, p. 321; WANDSCHNEIDER, Stellung, p. 42-3.

<sup>5</sup> HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 205.

it is present in it as something ‘internal’.<sup>6</sup>

The dual and contradictory character present in nature has given rise to a very heated debate concerning the epistemology of the natural realm – what are the appropriate tools and methods to know nature *philosophically*? – as well as its ontology – what is the essence of nature?

The epistemological debate has, among the less extreme interpretations,<sup>7</sup> resulted in two irreconcilable positions: the natural categories are either regarded to be *a priori* (Stone<sup>8</sup>) – or *a posteriori* (Burbidge.<sup>9</sup>) These epistemological positions have ontological consequences. On the one hand, strong a priorism implies a very clear ontology of the natural realm: nature is intrinsically rational, since in it one finds – albeit at an imperfect and inferior level compared to Spirit – a conceptual component, which represents its true essence. This is the position held by Stone as well as Houlgate.<sup>10</sup> A posteriorism, on the contrary, considers nature as a-conceptual (in the sense of *begrifflos*): the essential character of nature consists precisely in its excess, in its continuous defeat of the necessary and rational development of thought. This is a position supported, for example, by Furlotte.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, in both interpretations the positions seem to be opposed and crystallized. The reason for this double blockage in the current debate in fact lies in the inability to overcome a Kantian dualism, incorrectly applied to Hegel, which the Stuttgart philosopher himself tried to revolutionize and modify. In fact, if one rightly thinks of Hegel as the philosopher of speculative thought, it is easy to understand how, together with other couples (subject-object, concept-intuition, mediation-immediateness), even the *a priori* and *a posteriori* binomial, as well as the presence and absence of the concept in the natural realm, must be overcome by speculative union – unity-in-difference. In other words, Hegel wants to overcome those rigid dualisms created by the crystallized fixations and oppositions of the understanding (*Verstand*), in the name

<sup>6</sup> HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 208.

<sup>7</sup> For others, see: PETRY, M.J. Hegelianism and the Natural Sciences: Some Current Developments and Interpretations. **Hegel-Studien**, vol. 36, 2001 (and his *Introduction* to Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature); BUCHDAHL, G. Conceptual Analysis and Scientific Theory in Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature (With Special Reference to Hegel’s Optics). In: R.S. Cohen; M.W. Wartofsky (Eds.). **Hegel and the Sciences**. Boston: Reidel Publishing, 1984. MAKER, W. Idealism and Autonomy. **The Owl of Minerva**, vol. 34, n. 1, 2003; DUDLEY, W. Systematic Philosophy and Idealism. **The Owl of Minerva**, vol. 34, n. 1, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> STONE, A. **Petrified Intelligence: Nature in Hegel’s Philosophy**. Albany: SUNY Press, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> BURBIDGE, J. **Real Process: How Logic and Chemistry Combine in Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature**. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.

<sup>10</sup> HOULGATE, S. Logic and Nature in Hegel’s Philosophy: A Response to John W. Burbidge. **The Owl of Minerva**, vol. 34, n. 1, 2002, pp.107-125.

<sup>11</sup> FURLOTTE, W. **The Problem of Nature in Hegel’s Final System**. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018.

of an active, dynamic, and fluid thought process – made possible by reason (*Vernunft*) – in which two concepts, while remaining opposite and different from each other, at the same time recognise the reciprocity of their relationship, i.e., the indispensability of the relationship with the other term.

In the epistemological debate, this solution was put forward by Rand, who proposed an interpretation capable of keeping the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* character of natural categories together. Rand's Hegel understands philosophical thought as *Nachdenken* (that which comes chronologically after) and the consequent epistemological position sees a work both *a priori* and *a posteriori* in the structuring of the categories of the philosophy of nature. Specifically, the empirical sciences are free to study nature, without having to make reference to any logical category, while philosophy arrives later (*a posteriori* in the chronological sense) with regard to the empirical sciences, to order them in a systematic way according to the principle (*a priori*) of organic unity.<sup>12</sup>

The ontological position here articulated, underlining nature's irreducible otherness and alien character – its 'inessential essence' – presents an ontology of nature suited to Rand's epistemological project. Indeed, only the sciences can deal with nature directly as they are able to deal with its contingency, which makes it alien to a merely logical formalization and organization. However, this does not mean that nature is characterized by a total absence of the concept: rather, one can speak of nature – and, consequently, its excess beyond conceptual structures – because in it the concept is still, even if imperfectly, present.

The relative co-presence of presence and absence of the concept is made possible by holding an ontological middle position in relation to the two interpretations sketched above, which tries to speculatively maintain both aspects of continuity and discontinuity in the relation between Idea and nature.<sup>13</sup>

Nature will be interpreted, then, as in Furlotte, as a 'Non-whole': in it, the concept does not reach its self-determination or freedom and, for this reason, nature is still an irreducible

---

<sup>12</sup> Rand, S. Hegel on the *a priori*. **Forms of Nature in Classical German Philosophy** (workshop), 2019, p. 20. This position is also shared by. PINKARD. **Hegel**, p. 21; PETRY. **Hegelianism and the Natural Sciences**, p. 199-237; STONE, A. **Nature, Ethics and Gender in German Romanticism and Idealism**. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018, p. 121-140.

<sup>13</sup> As a matter of fact, my position is not so different, on closer inspection, from Furlotte's. Furlotte, taking nature's impotence as the focal point of his thesis, is more interested in showing its discontinuity with the Idea than in recognizing the possible – and limited – links with it: but there are passages in Furlotte's text that sustain the dual relationship of continuity and discontinuity between nature and spirit. See FURLLOTTE. **The Problem of Nature**, p. 243. See also: PADUI, R. Hegel's Ontological Pluralism. **The Review of Metaphysics**, vol. 67, n. 1, 2013, p. 125-48.

*Other.* At the same time, however, this does not imply an absence of the concept in nature; rather, the Idea is present and develops itself in the natural realm according to a system of degrees, but it does not manage to actualize itself completely. For an ontology of nature, then, one must understand the natural realm in its dual relationship with the Idea. Nature is, constitutively, that place where the concept tries, constantly failing, to resolve itself; this does not mean, however, that the concept, even if in an imperfect and insufficient way, is not present.

In this sense, Hegel's philosophy of nature functions according to a hierarchical system: in passing through its three sections – Mechanics, Physics and Organic Physics – nature increasingly reaches conceptual determinacy. The relation between these three parts can be read according to a progressive development of the concept, whose increasing presence in the natural world makes qualitative relationships possible. This means that, progressively, the relations between the natural parts become intrinsic, and nature is gradually seen as an organic whole.

The first moment of the Philosophy of Nature – Mechanics – involves the most elementary natural situation. Here the concept is present in a minimal way and for this reason the elements are found among themselves in external relations. This means that there is no link between them which is recognized as being fundamental for their determination. Passing through physics, chemistry and, finally, the organism, the organic and systematic character then takes shape in nature itself. In fact, in the animal organism, Hegel claims, the Idea has finally found itself, in that the form of a totality reemerges. In such a totality every single part is determined by its relations with the other parts and with the whole. For Hegel, the animal organism is 'the existent ideality of determinate being'.<sup>14</sup>

Things, however, do not develop so easily in the realm of nature. In fact, nature will remain until the end as a field of unresolvedness of the concept. If it were to find its resolution, one would simply no longer be in the Philosophy of Nature, but in the Philosophy of Spirit – and not even in its early stages, where in fact the link with nature, not yet totally shaped by the concept through habit, creates problems, such as racial differences.<sup>15</sup> Nature, therefore, maintains that character of exteriority and immediacy as its fundamental constitution. Passing from

---

<sup>14</sup> HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 104. Ilting describes this very clearly: 'Hegels Philosophie des Organischen gehört in das Zentrum seiner spekulativen Philosophie. (...) Das Lebendige, und hier vor allem wieder der tierische Organismus, ist nach Hegel's Deutung mithin die Weise, wie das, was er "die Idee" nennt, als unmittelbares Dasein existiert' (ILTING, K.H. *Hegel Philosophie des Organischen*. In: by Petry, M.J. (ed.). **Hegel und die Naturwissenschaften**. Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzbook, 1987, p. 350). See also: ILLETTERATI, L. The Concept of Organism in Hegel's Philosophy of Nature. **Verifiche**, vol. 42, n. 1-4, 2015, p. 155-166.

<sup>15</sup> 'The universal planetary life of the natural mind particularizes itself into the concrete differences of the earth

the simplest to the most complex stages, this exteriority always finds a greater solution; within the natural realm, however, it can never be resolved, precisely because it is a constitutive trait of nature itself.<sup>16</sup> This seems to be firmly sustained by Hegel himself, who in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Nature* of 1821-22 states:

There is a suspicion of a necessity in this multiplicity [of nature's forms]. *But we must not take nature too seriously.* The spirit is nature's highest point, and yet its properties are extremely arbitrary forms. We must also concede this to nature on its side; we must realize that, since nature is in the determination of exteriority, *contingency is dominant here, it has its game.*<sup>17</sup>

It is now time to analyze the transition from chemistry to the animal organism in order to demonstrate the progressive development of the concept in the natural kingdom. An analysis of the forms that characterize the animal organism (genus-species relation, violence between animals, sexual intercourse, disease and death of the animal organism) will then show that not even in the animal organism – the highest point of the philosophy of nature – is the concept capable of fully permeating the materiality of the natural.

### 3. *From Chemistry to Animal Organism*

The transition from physics to organic physics takes place at the end of the analysis of the processes of combination and dissolution in chemistry, demonstrated by Hegel as linked by a single process. At the end of chemistry, one begins to glimpse the concept of life, as it is shown how the processes of combination and dissolution are intrinsically linked. However, in chemistry, the concept of life does not appear complete as in it '(t)he beginning and end of the process are not identical, and it is this which constitutes the finitude of the chemical process, and separates and distinguishes it from life'.<sup>18</sup>

---

and breaks up into the *particular natural minds* which, on the whole, express the nature of the geographical regions of the world and constitute the diversities of *race*' (HEGEL, G.W.F. **Philosophy of Mind**. Trans. W. Wallace, A.V. Miller Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007, p. 40).

<sup>16</sup> '(T)he existence of material reality bears witness to the fact that the Notion is not fully actualized. Things "materially exist" not when they meet certain notional requirements, but when they fail to meet them. Material reality is, as such, a sign of imperfection' (ŽIŽEK, S. Hegel and Shitting. In: Žižek S., Crockett C and Davis C. (Eds.). **Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics and Dialectic**. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 227. See also JOHNSTON, A. The Weakness of Nature: Hegel, Freud, Lacan and Negativity Materialized.' In: Žižek S., Crockett C and Davis C. (Eds.). **Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics and Dialectic**. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> HEGEL, G.W.F. **Gesammelte Werke 24, 1**. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968, p. 464 (author's translation).

<sup>18</sup> HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 219.

In chemistry, therefore, the process does not appear as a circular movement; dissolution causes an extrinsic relationship between elements, and the unity within difference is not yet guaranteed. However, an impulse is found to explain chemical phenomena through the determination of a purpose, in which it is the self-determination of the concept that determines the realization of a certain process, and not extrinsic conditions. In this way, chemistry itself leads to the negation of the elements of exteriority and finitude, making the transition to organic physics possible.<sup>19</sup>

In organic physics, Hegel links the concept of organism and life with that of subjectivity. Understanding the link between these three concepts is essential to proceed in this analysis.

First, the concept of the organism develops as an overcoming of the residue of exteriority and immediacy that characterizes the chemical process. In the organism, in fact, one can grasp a total, infinite and circular process, ‘in which individuality determines itself as the particularity or finitude, and equally negates this and returns into itself, re-establishing itself at the end of the process as its beginning’.<sup>20</sup> In the organism, therefore, one finds a unitary whole, in which the relations between its members are intrinsic, that is, in which the members assume determinacy through the reciprocal relationship among themselves and towards the whole. In this way there is ‘an elevation into the first ideality of nature, but an ideality which is fulfilled (*erfüllt*)’:<sup>21</sup> this means that nature, after having passed through the particularities and finitudes of its realm, in reaching the moment of the organism returns to the original structure of the Idea from which it had alienated itself. The result of the process is therefore a circular return to the Absolute Idea, which, now, after the whole natural process, is concretized by the negative dialectical relationship with the natural realm. This cyclical return to the Absolute Idea, fulfilled with the concrete development of nature, is for Hegel ‘life.’ In this sense, a passage of Hegel’s *Lectures on Philosophy of Nature* of 1821-22 is enlightening:

The idea has come into existence in life. The soul is the concept; the development of this concept makes the other side to it (*Die Idee ist im Leben zur*

---

<sup>19</sup> ‘This concrete unity with self, which brings itself forth from the particularization of the different corporealities into a whole, and by its activity negates the one-sided form of its self-relatedness and leads the moments of the concept back into unity while dividing and particularizing itself into them, is the organism. The organism is therefore the infinite self-stimulating and self-sustaining process’ (HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 220). Ferrini analyzes in detail the transition from chemical process to organism, arguing that this transition is a logical one that hinges on conceptual inner necessity, not a natural one in which chemical processes give rise to living organisms at specific points in time. See FERRINI, C. *The Transition to Organics: Hegel's Idea of Life*. In: Houlgate S., Baur, M. (Eds.) **A Companion to Hegel**. Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 9.



*Existenz gekommen. Die Seele ist der Begriff; die Entwicklung dieses Begriffs macht die andere Seite dazu aus).*<sup>22</sup>

The reference to the ideal essence of nature brings us back to paragraph 248 of the *Philosophy of Nature*, in which Hegel, dealing with the unresolved contradiction of nature, places on the one hand the irrational contingencies present in it, and on the other the rational structure of the concept that develops in it. The reference to ideal nature, the cyclical return to the starting point – the Absolute Idea reached at the end of the *Science of Logic* – therefore indicates how in the life of the organism the rational structure has been found again. The organism indeed acts as a whole whose parts are linked together by intrinsic relations, reproducing the same mediated and absolute structure of the Idea.

It thus becomes clear why Hegel links the concept of the organism to that of subjectivity. In paragraph 215 of the *Encyclopedia Logic* Hegel links the characterization of the Idea as process to that of the Idea as subjectivity: the Idea is process because in it the unity of finite and infinite is not a static, abstract unity, in which the understanding is at work and the infinite appears only ‘neutralized with the finite;’ rather, it is a speculative, dialectical, ‘negative unity’ realised by the work of reason in which ‘infinity overgrasps the finite’.<sup>23</sup> This allows subjectivity to be the place where extrinsic and immediate relations have been overcome (*aufgehoben*) and where the whole works as a totality, in which each part finds its own sense in the relations between the other parts.<sup>24</sup>

The Hegelian equation between subjectivity, organism, and life is thus clear: all these figures refer to the idea of a unitary whole in which each part is constituted and determined through its relational character with the other parts and with the whole. In this sense, the whole is not reducible to a simple sum of its parts, but appears as something constructively more

---

<sup>22</sup> HEGEL. *Werke*, p. 418. The concept of life in Hegel owes much to Kantian influence, particularly the *Critique of Judgment*. In fact, Hegel takes up the Kantian distinction between the two domains of the faculties of knowledge: on the one hand, legislation through concepts of nature, which occurs through the understanding; on the other, legislation through the concept of freedom, which occurs through reason (see KANT, I. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. J.C. Meredith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 7-14). The concept of life, for Hegel, cannot be explained through the extrinsic relations of mechanistic knowledge moved by the understanding: rather, organisms can only be explained through the concepts of reason. The difference with Kant lies in the fact that for Hegel the organismic form of life is not a subjective maxim of judgment, but an objective and real structure. See CHIEREGHIN, F. Finalità e idea della vita. La ricezione hegeliana della teleologia di Kant. **Verifiche: Rivista Trimestrale di Scienze Umane**, vol. 19, n. 1, 1990, p. 137.

<sup>23</sup> HEGEL. *Encyclopedia*, p. 290.

<sup>24</sup> Erle, placing a parallelism between Hegel and Jonas, underlines how subjectivity refers to the concept of life, as a mediating activity capable of creating relationships. See: ERLE, G. L’inizio della libertà del soggetto e l’organismo: riflessioni a partire dalle filosofie della natura di Hans Jonas e di Hegel. In: G. Battistoni (Ed.), **Fondamenti per un agire responsabile**. Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2020.

radical: it is constant activity and intrinsic relationality of the parts among themselves, which, in the absence of the unity of the whole, would lose their determination and coherence.

For Hegel, only in the animal organism is subjective vitality present. The animal organism is the last form of the ‘Organic Physics,’ which is divided into three parts. The first form is the geological organism, in which life is an immediate idea, out of itself and therefore not life proper.<sup>25</sup> In the second form, the vegetal organism, subjective vitality begins to develop, but there isn’t yet a fully developed subject, because the parts do not reach their own determination thanks to the relationship with the whole, but are themselves still independent individuals.<sup>26</sup> The difference between the vegetal organism and the animal organism consists in denying the immediate individuality of the parts, demonstrating that they are not individuals independent from the Whole, but mediated moments in the determination of the totality of the organism:

This moment of negative determination is the basis for the transition to the true organism, in which the outer formation accords with the Concept in such a way, that the parts have an essential existence as members, and subjectivity exists as the one which pervades the whole.<sup>27</sup>

Organizing itself as a whole, the animal organism, unlike the vegetable one, is a complete *subject*, since it does not aim at something external to it for a realization of its own being: rather ‘in its process outwards, the organism preserves inwardly the unity of the self.’<sup>28</sup> Referring to the latter expression, Illetterati connects the systematic organization of the animal organism to its independence from external factors for its autonomy and realization.<sup>29</sup> While

---

<sup>25</sup> ‘The primary organism, in so far as it is initially determined as immediate or implicit, is not a living existence, for as subject and process, life is essentially a self-mediating activity’ (HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 15).

<sup>26</sup> ‘(I)t is necessary to explain the way plants had been conceived: incomplete organisms, characterized by a peculiar immediacy. Such immediacy implies that on one hand, plants cannot be authentic unities within difference. On the other hand, as plants have their determinacy outside themselves, they revolve around something else (the sun, or more generally, light). What makes plants a partial and immediate realisation of the concept of organism is their specific characteristic that, in Hegel’s words, they have another self outside themselves, an outside unity towards which they tend and on which they depend. This self outside themselves is primarily light, towards which plants turn, and that on them has the strongest power. In fact, plants do not move of their own accord, but are conditioned in their movements’ (ILLETTERATI. *The Concept*, p. 156).

<sup>27</sup> HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 101.

<sup>28</sup> HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 102.

<sup>29</sup> The parallelism occurs between the first two processes of vitality in plants and animals. The first process, that of formation or figure, has to do with the relationship of the individual with herself: during this process, in the plant we always find a ‘relationship to an external, and extrinsic’ (HEGEL, **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 67); in the animal, on the other hand, the figure is a process in which ‘each member is interchangeably both end and means, and maintains itself by virtue of the others members, and in opposition to them’ (HEGEL, **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 131-2). In the same way, in the second process, that of assimilation, plants still have an extrinsic link with the exteriority – light – on which they depend to determine themselves; in the animal, instead, the exteriority is consumed.

plants need external factors – in particular light – for their own determination, the animal, even when it relates to external elements – for instance in the process of consumption, – reunites with itself and preserves itself.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. *The Animal Organism*

The animal organism, in turn, is divided into three sections: the figure, in which the subject is ‘a whole which is related only to itself’;<sup>31</sup> the process of assimilation, consisting in ‘a state of tension with an inorganic nature to which it is opposed’<sup>32</sup> and therefore in relation to its other; and the process of the genus, as the ‘Idea relating to an other which is itself a living individual, and thereby relating itself to itself in the other’.<sup>33</sup> The genus process, in turn, is divided into the following subsections: genus and species; the sex-relation; the disease of the individual; the death of the individual.

In the genus process we find, on the one hand, the universality of genus itself; on the other hand, the immediate individuality of the living individual. The universal must pose itself as the subjective universal, negating the internal universality, on the one side, and negating the immediate individuality, on the other. In the natural realm, however, the result of this process is not a positive one, which achieves the realization of the universal in the individual. On the contrary, ‘in this generic process, it is only the being which merely lives that perishes, for as such it does not transcend naturality’.<sup>34</sup>

In the natural realm, therefore, a speculative development of the universal is impossible: the universal genus and the natural individual face each other negatively, and the only possible solution of this opposition is the suppression of the natural individual, since it is not an adequate

---

<sup>30</sup> To see this compare how Hegel describes the process of relating to the external world – assimilation – in the case of the plant and animal organism. In the vegetal organism ‘[t]he result of the return-into-self in which assimilation terminates, is not sentience, or the inner subjective universality of the self opposed to externality. It is rather, that light draws the plant out of itself by constituting its external self, so that the plant strives towards it (HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 83). In the animal, on the other hand, assimilation means consumption of the external elements, ‘enveloping of the externality within the unity of the subject’ (HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 151), ‘the *universal* power of its external and opposed nature’ (HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 152), ‘process of simple reproduction from itself, into the uniting itself with itself’ (HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 153).

<sup>31</sup> HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 109.

<sup>32</sup> HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 136.

<sup>33</sup> HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 108.

<sup>34</sup> HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 171.

reality for the concrete expression of the universal.<sup>35</sup> This indicates the constitutive finitude of natural beings: in them, the completion of an infinite return to itself by the concept – the concrete realization of the universal in natural individuals – is not possible. Rather, the abstract universal (genus) remains opposed to individuals: since a speculative reconciliation between the two terms cannot be achieved, natural individuals are destined to die and succumb to the universal of the genus. In the last section of the *Philosophy of Nature*, it is clear that even here the concept is not able to proceed in a linear way to achieve its freedom. Even in the last stage of the animal organism, the highest point in the development of the philosophy of nature, the contingency of nature cannot be resolved and ‘the animal cannot escape a feeling of insecurity, anxiety and misery.’<sup>36</sup>

It is therefore impossible for the animal organism to overcome the state of deficiency: the concept, in natural life, is not completely present, it has not reached its self-determination. Natural life constitutively *is* this constant lack, which, on the one hand, marks the limits of natural existence and, on the other, represents the fundamental characteristic of natural living beings. Consequently, natural beings are, by definition, lacking, deficient, finite beings: their fundamental constitution represents not only their essence, but also their condemnation to finitude.

This situation of constitutive deficiency leads living organisms to try to overcome their finitude through sexual relations. This process, however, is condemned to constant failure, and the constitutive finitude of animal organisms causes them to fall into processes of violent death, illness, or natural death.<sup>37</sup> The analysis of the processes contained in this process of the genus will help us to understand the incomplete and unresolvable character of lack in the animal organism.

In the first passage, in the process of genus and species, the genus is particularized in

---

<sup>35</sup> ‘However, because of nature’s own status as the *entfremdet* (self-alienated) Idea, nature cannot exactly match the rational determinations of the Concept: nature has an essential lack of power, an *Ohnmacht* (impotence). This term indicates that because nature is the immediate realisation of the Idea, the Idea in exteriority (time and space), it is therefore somehow external to itself. But this finitude of nature is, ultimately, the exteriority of the particular vis-à-vis the universal. The kind is not the individual – think of a zoological species – hence the concept lies always outside its object’ (HUNEMAN, P. *The Hermeneutic Turn in Philosophy of Nature in the Nineteenth Century*. In Stone, A. (Ed.). *The Edinburgh Critical History Of Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*. Edinburgh. Edinburgh University Press, 2011, p. 75).

<sup>36</sup> HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 179.

<sup>37</sup> ‘But organic beings never perfectly succeed in subordinating their parts and their efficient-causal relations to the whole. This, Hegel submits, is why organisms are subjects to illness, accident, violence, and ultimately are destined to die when the unstable dominance of their whole over their parts breaks down’ (STONE. *Nature*, p. 156).

different species. These are organized, on the one hand, according to the order and degrees of the concept; on the other, according to the various, accidental ‘circumstances and conditions of elemental nature’.<sup>38</sup> The different species and classes of animals are therefore basically organized as moments of the concept: however, the natural world, with its particular and finite existences, is not able to express the concept in its complete determination.

From this follow three fundamental consequences. First, the concept divides each species according to certain properties: however, the particular natural existences present exceptions and errors with respect to the general properties of their own species. Hegel takes the example of acephalous humans: even if humans count the presence of the brain among their properties as a species, there are exceptions that can exist without it. Secondly, as the concept cannot determine the existence of individual natural beings completely, one finds that, for the division of the species, aspects external to the concept itself become fundamental, connected to the natural habitat, to the availability of nourishment and to the climate, for instance.

Thirdly, saying that the concept is not fully expressed in the natural realm means that the species in which it is divided are not perceived as moments of the same concept, in unity and mutual relation. Rather, the contingent and extrinsic component of nature pushes the species to oppose each other, creating oppositions and violent clashes. For this reason, each species has developed its own weapons – teeth, claws – with which it distinguishes itself from other species and stands in opposition to them. Thus, we encounter the first type of death of the natural individual: being unable to be the place for a self-determination of the concept, the various species individualize and determine themselves in negative and violent distinction from others, who are seen as enemies and lowered to inorganic nature. As a consequence of this, ‘violent death constitutes the natural fate of individuals.’<sup>39</sup>

The second process that Hegel analyses is the sex-relation between two individuals of the same genus. For Hegel, sexual intercourse is born from a feeling of need and lack of the individual animal, who feels torn apart by an intrinsic unresolved contradiction. This feeling of incompleteness and contradiction stems from the fact that the animal individual is, on the one hand, included under a genus, then a type, a concept, through which it acquires determination. On the other hand, however, the single individual is precisely an individual: in its individuality, it is unable to fully coincide with the genus, as it always represents a particular – and imperfect

---

<sup>38</sup> HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 177.

<sup>39</sup> HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 177.

– determination of it.

It is important here to stress the distinction between true infinity and bad infinity: when the concept can be returned to itself, we have the circular movement of true infinity; when this movement is not achieved, we can only find the bad or ‘spurious infinite’,<sup>40</sup> an infinite progression of finite elements. In nature, as seen in the process of reproduction, one can find only the bad infinity, while the true infinity is not possible to achieve. To understand the significance of these terms, one must refer to the passage of the *Science of Logic* in which Hegel affirms that ‘the claim that the *finite is an idealization* defines *idealism*’.<sup>41</sup> What Hegel advocates in this passage is not a subjective idealism according to Kantian epistemology or, even worse, according to the idea that the world, in general, is a construction of the subject. With the term Idealism, Hegel wants to emphasize the speculative character whereby the finite finds its truth in the true infinity, that is in the dynamic relationship between finite and infinite.

For Hegel, the bad infinity (*das Schlecht-Unendliche*) is characterized by the determination of the understanding that opposes and contrasts it with finite things. The true, authentic infinity (*die wahrhafte Unendlichkeit*) results from the speculative union of finite and infinite. In fact, if one simply opposes finite and infinite, the result is a ‘contradiction [of the understanding]’ that causes ‘two worlds, one infinite and one finite, and in their connection the infinite is only the *limit* of the finite and thus only a determinate, *itself finite infinite*’.<sup>42</sup> For Hegel, the true infinite is instead the ‘*unity* of the finite and the infinite’:<sup>43</sup> this infinite is capable of permeating every aspect of finiteness to make it its own, to recognise itself in the finite and return to itself mediated by the relation with that which appeared constitutionally different.

In the *Philosophy of Nature* we still find the understanding’s opposition of the finite and the infinite that results in the bad infinite: the individual feels a tension, it feels it cannot completely permeate its species, but only partially adheres to it. It ‘*feels* this deficiency’, as ‘the genus is present in the individual as a strain opposed to the inadequacy of its single *actuality*’.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> ‘The product is the negative identity of differentiated singularities, and as a resultant genus, an asexual life. In its natural aspect, however, it is merely the implicitness of this product which constitutes this genus. This differs from singular beings whose differentiation has subsided into it, and is itself an immediate singular, although it has the determination of developing itself into the same natural individuality, and into a corresponding sexual differentiation and transience. This process of propagation issues forth into the progress of the *spurious infinite*. The genus preserves itself only through the perishing of the individuals, which fulfil their determination in the process of generation, and insofar as they have no higher determination than this, pass on to death’ (HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 175-6).

<sup>41</sup> HEGEL. **Science of Logic**, p. 124.

<sup>42</sup> HEGEL. **Science of Logic**, p. 111.

<sup>43</sup> HEGEL. **Science of Logic**, p. 114.

<sup>44</sup> HEGEL. **Philosophy of Nature**, p. 172-3.

This sense of incompleteness is represented by its belonging to a certain sex: the possession of male genitalia excludes the possession of female genitalia – and *vice versa*. This sexual characterization prevents the individual from embracing the totality of its kind. The solution that the individual seeks is to relate to the other – to the other sex – in the hope of producing a third person capable of overcoming these shortcomings and limits. But, according to Hegel, the process of reproduction is destined to be a continual failure: in fact, the production of a third party leads only to the life of a new individual, who is also sexed and therefore incapable of attaining completeness in relation to its kind. A process of bad infinity is thus initiated in which an infinite progression of finite elements is generated. Sexual intercourse represents for Hegel the last attempt of nature to solve its lack. An attempt destined to fail, inevitably.

The third process that Hegel describes is disease,<sup>45</sup> which represents the other inevitable consequence of being part of the contingent world of nature. On the one hand, as an organism the animal follows the systematic and rational order of the Idea: each part of it, unlike the vegetable organism, cannot exist separate from the whole, but owes its essence to its relationship with the other parts and with the totality. On the other hand, however, the animal organism finds itself living in a world intrinsically characterized by finitude and contingencies: it follows that it will never be able to respond to the logical-conceptual perfection of the Idea. The finitude of the animal organism is concretized in the relationship with the inorganic elements that surround it. At the end of the assimilation process, which precedes the process of the genus, and which is outlined as the relation between the animal organism and the inorganic elements that surround it, the animal organism returns in unity mediated with itself, as it has made the inorganic element, initially external and opposite to the organism, a part of itself and its nourishment.

As Hegel points out, however, the relationship with the external inorganic nature does not always end this way. Sometimes, the external element is not able to be processed by the animal organism, and for this reason it remains opposed and external to it. In order to fight it, one of the parts of the organism is excited and insists on contrasting the external element, moving away from the organicity of the whole. As a result, the animal organism loses its unitary character: it falls ill and deteriorates over time, because a single part of it, in response to con-

---

<sup>45</sup> Von Engelhardt distinguishes between three types of disease in Hegel: see VON ENGELHARDT, D. *Hegels Organismusverständnis und Krankheitsbegriff*. In: Petry M.J. (Ed.). *Hegel und die Naturwissenschaften*. Stuttgart: frommann-holzbook, 1987, p. 427.

tingent, accidental stimuli from the surrounding environment, becomes divorced from the organism's totality, and operates in a singular way disconnected from the whole. It may be, Hegel says, that the disease can be cured and overcome and for the part to be returned to the systematic order of the whole. But this does not change the inevitable destiny of the animal individual, which is destined to fall ill again and deteriorate over time, according to the 'original disease of the animal, and the inborn germ of death'.<sup>46</sup>

One arrives therefore at the final moment of the *Philosophy of Nature*: the death of the individual, a finished being ultimately incapable of being permeated by concrete universality. The death of the natural individual is therefore the result of the inability, on the part of natural creatures, to be a place where the mediated universality of the concept can be returned to itself. Since this opposition cannot be overcome by the speculative thinking of reason – since the finitude of nature cannot accommodate the universality of the concept in a concrete way – the abstract universal must overwhelm the individual, causing its natural death. For Hegel, there can be no other possible end in the natural world, since its multiform, contingent and irrational character (in the sense of *begrifflos*) is constitutive of nature itself.

This means that not even in the animal organism, the highest point of nature for Hegel, can one find a full and perfect realization of life, organism, and subject. The animal organism, certainly, works in reference to these concepts. However, it is part of the natural realm, in which contingencies and excesses with respect to the order of the concept are always and constructively present: for this reason, natural life cannot accommodate the total realization of the concept of life.

### 5. Luce Irigaray

Before analyzing how this particular reading of Hegel's philosophy of nature can be the object of Irigaray's feminist work of *mimesis*, a preliminary – and certainly not exhaustive – analysis of Irigaray's thought is necessary.

Luce Irigaray can be considered 'the main philosopher of sexual difference'.<sup>47</sup> It is im-

---

<sup>46</sup> HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 209.

<sup>47</sup> BRAIDOTTI, R. Sexual Difference Theory. In: A.M. Jaggar, I.M. Young. *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998, p. 299.



portant to stress that this notion captures something different from the sex and gender distinction. The sex distinction means the biological difference between the male and female sexes,<sup>48</sup> while the gender distinction has to do with the difference between masculinity and femininity in the social practices and expectations about which behaviors and activities are appropriate for male and female individuals.<sup>49</sup>

For Irigaray, sexual difference implies something different from these two terms which is more pervasive and radical. In fact, sexual difference cannot be related either to biological sex or to gender, and yet it is a notion intrinsic to both these terms. In the current feminist debate the distinction between sex and gender is the fundamental distinction, whether it is accepted, or questioned, as in Butler's Foucaultian critique of the materiality of sex. For Anglo-American analytical feminism, the distinction is considered to be sufficient,<sup>50</sup> while in French feminist works, a third term, precisely that of sexual difference, is called upon, which is fundamentally distinguished from the other two.

The problematic nature of the relationship between these terms is also a result of the linguistic difference between English and French. Indeed, the terms used in the English language to distinguish gender (masculinity and femininity) do not find a perfect equivalence with the French terms *masculin* and *feminin*, which have a broader significance: the English terms used to describe the distinction between the sexes (male and female) have as French counterparts the terms *male* and *femelle*, which are commonly used to describe the sex of animals and

---

<sup>48</sup> It is not so obvious in the queer and feminist debate that biological sex is something naturally connoted, and therefore absent from mediations and cultural filters. Judith Butler, inspired by Foucault (in particular by *The History of Sexuality* (1979)), understood this point brilliantly, pointing out that we cannot see a dualism between culture, which influences the notion of gender, and nature, which instead has to do with biological sex. Butler demonstrated that the notion of 'materiality' and biological sex are also the product of cultural mediation, indissolubly linked with the field of signification: 'The category of sex, is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault called a "regulative ideal". In this sense, then, sex not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls' (BUTLER, J. **Bodies that Matter**. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 11-12). For a critique of the sex/gender distinction, see also Gatens 1996: 3-21. Gatens tries to show, as Butler and Foucault, that the main mistake of 'gender theory is the unreasoned, unargued assumption that both the body and the psyche are postnatally passive *tabulae rasae*' (GATENS, M. **Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality**. London: Routledge, 1996, p. 4).

<sup>49</sup> 'According to the distinction, sex is biological, and most people are biologically male or female. Gender is social and consists of: 1) the social expectations and assumptions about what behaviors and traits are appropriate for male and female individuals. For example, it is commonly expected that males will relish confrontation while females will try to avoid it. 2) the psychological traits, and the understanding of themselves, that individuals tend to develop under the influence of these social expectations. For instance, males often do come to relish confrontation more than females' (STONE, A. **An Introduction to Feminist Philosophy**. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, p. 30).

<sup>50</sup> See MIKKOLA, M. Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender. In: **Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy**, 2008.

plants.<sup>51</sup> The result is that the terms *masculin* and *feminin* cover a wider, more articulated and complex sphere than gender, which contains an essential reference to the experience of sexual bodies; if gender is linked to the social expectations of masculinity and femininity, the terms masculine and feminine include that set of cultural values that are given to our corporeity.

The best way to define sexual difference is therefore to start from the relationship that this term has with biological sex and gender. While gender theories consider the difference between femininity and masculinity as determined by social practices and expectations, the sexual difference theorist stresses something all-pervasive and structurally deeper than the social order – that is, the symbolic structures that organize our culture and determine the formation of subjects and identities. In general terms, Stone describes the symbolic order in the following terms:

I understand by ‘symbolic structures’ patterns of meaning, symbolism, and association which play an organising role in dominant areas of culture such as religion, philosophy, myth, art, and literature, and which bind these areas into an interlocking ‘symbolic order’.<sup>52</sup>

This clearly underlines something more radical than a social norm or expectation: just think of the situations in which a change in a social norm has failed to lead to a change in a certain cultural conception.<sup>53</sup> For example, applying gender equality in employment at the legislative and social level in a patriarchal and masculinist culture will not do much to change the perception of women as the sex destined to the domestic sphere and family care work. This

---

<sup>51</sup> See JONES, R. **Irigaray: Towards a Sexuate Philosophy**. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011, p. 5; STONE, A. **Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 9-10. Gatens also stresses the lack of a clear distinction between sex and gender in French thought, underlining how this represents a ‘strength of French feminist theory’ (See GATENS, M. **Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Difference and Equality**. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, p. 155).

<sup>52</sup> STONE. **Luce Irigaray**, p. 25. The use of this term must be specified, as it is fundamental for the understanding of Irigaray's thought and for the feminist debate in general. To describe this term in detail, it is necessary to find how it corresponds and differs to the Lacanian symbolic order. We are going to follow Stone's clear explanation that ‘for Lacan, the ‘symbolic order’ meant language. For Irigaray the symbolic order means a culture’s inherited set of ideas and images, which form the horizon of a people’s thought. So her symbolic order goes beyond, but includes, language’ (STONE. **Introduction**, p. 127). Moreover, Stone clearly underlines how the relation between the symbolic and the imaginary is different between Irigaray and Lacan. For Irigaray, the imaginary order is linked to the symbolic, in that it indicates the set of images that are embedded in our symbolic structures, while for Lacan symbolic and imaginary are two opposing orders (STONE. **Luce Irigaray**, p. 35).

<sup>53</sup> However, this does not imply that sexual difference should replace gender, as there are substantial differences between the two: while sexual difference concerns ‘the meanings of bodies themselves,’ gender has to do with ‘what it is appropriate for people to do or think given that these people have male/female bodies’ (STONE. **Introduction**, p. 129). As Stone points out, the difference between the two terms becomes clear when they come into conflict: in the case of menstruation, for example, the social order wants them to be kept out of sight, while the symbolic order gives menstruation many different meanings, such as dirt, but also fertility.

happens because the fundamental distinction between gender and sexual difference lies in the fact that gender indicates those behaviors that are socially expected by people belonging to a particular sex, while sexual difference implies the interpretations that are given to the sexed bodies themselves – and thus the reading of male bodies as more suited to productive work, and female bodies as more appropriate for family care, as biologically destined for gestation.

Here one can understand the connection sexual difference has with anatomical sex. Indeed, sexual difference implies the way in which ‘natural’ biological differences are perceived and organized by symbolic discourse: it aims to show how the discourse of the symbolic order itself defines and organizes the perception of our sexed bodies. A striking example is the Freudian description of the female clitoris as a small penis,<sup>54</sup> or the definition of the female sex as the lack and absence of the male sex. In this sense, the concept of sexual difference grasps something that the concepts of sex and gender omit, ‘namely, that as human beings we always live and experience our bodies as imbued with meaning, never as bare biological being.’ In this way, ‘sexual difference refers to the meanings and symbolic associations which cultures, and the individuals who live in them, give to being male- and female-bodied.’<sup>55</sup> Therefore, sexual difference examines the question of corporeality, showing how the interpretation given by the symbolic order to our sexed bodies organizes a certain conception of being a woman and being a man. The feminine in this sense needs to be understood, as Rachel Jones claims, ‘as encompassing women’s bodily existence as female, as well as the social and cultural significances of that bodily mode of being’.<sup>56</sup>

Here are a few examples to clarify how the symbolic interpretation given to our sexed bodies carries with it the cultural expectation of how woman and man should be. For example, the symbolic idea that women’s bodies are secondary to those of men brings with it the expectation that the wife will be submissive to her husband; furthermore, the symbolic idea that the woman, having her menstrual cycle, is closer to a sense of naturalness than the man, and therefore more inclined to irrational and hysterical reactions; or the symbolic reading that the woman, being the sex destined for gestation and pregnancy, must have a higher parental and family instinct than the man.

---

<sup>54</sup> ‘The leading erogenous zone in female children is located at the clitoris, and is thus homologous to the male genital zone at the glans penis. Everything I have been able to find out about masturbation in little girls has related to the clitoris and not to the parts of the external genitals important for later genital functions. I even doubt that a female child can, under the influence of seduction, get to anything other than clitoral masturbation’ (FREUD, S. **Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality**. New York: Verso, 2016, p. 262-3).

<sup>55</sup> STONE. **Introduction**, p. 112.

<sup>56</sup> JONES. **Irigaray**, p. 5.

Therefore, with the concept of sexual difference, the concept of symbolic order – that is, the symbolic structures that organize our culture and determine the formation of subjects and identities – becomes fundamental. The symbolic order proper to western culture is denounced by Irigaray as a monosexual culture dominated by one dialectic, termed by the Belgian philosopher ‘phallogocentric’,<sup>57</sup> where a hierarchy is developed in which the female is only able to determine herself in relation to the male. In a ‘sexually indifferent’ symbolic order governed by the ‘phallic imperialism’<sup>58</sup> the female is unable to express herself, she has no place of her own. It follows that the woman can determine herself only in contrast to the male: ‘the feminine is always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex (*le sexe masculin*).’<sup>59</sup>

This means that the characteristics of the female have never really been taken into consideration by the western philosophical tradition. Rather, every characterization of the female sex has always been created starting from a parallelism and negative relationship with the male. Think, for example, of how the female reproductive apparatus has always been described, not only in common imaginary, but also in scientific explanations, as a negative mirror of the male one: the female reproductive apparatus is considered a passive double of the male one, which, instead, through erection and ejaculation, is considered active. The problem is that this characterization of the female sex has repercussions for the imaginary linked to the woman: since the female reproductive system is considered as the passive correspondent of the male apparatus, the woman is generally seen as fragile, accommodating, and submissive to the virile and strong character of the man.

From this hierarchical opposition between the male and the female arises a series of antithetic pairs: positive/negative, active/passive, visible/nonvisible, rational/irrational and emotional, mind/body. Through a brilliant analysis of the western philosophical and psychoanalytical tradition, Irigaray shows how the male and its related terms have always determined the rules of a phallogocentric dialectic, to which the female must relate to find a determination. Irigaray, with this denunciation of the western culture’s monosexual character, aims for a rehabilitation of the sexual difference between male and female, and so to a reappraisal of the female as a proper sex that doesn’t need to be characterized as the negative of the male, but that

---

<sup>57</sup> IRIGARAY, L. **Speculum of the Other Woman**. Trans. C.G. Gillian. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 52.

<sup>58</sup> IRIGARAY. **Speculum**, p. 59.

<sup>59</sup> IRIGARAY, L. **This Sex Which Is Not One**. Trans. C. Porter, C. Burke. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 69.

has its own specificity.<sup>60</sup>

### 6. *The Mimesis Technique*

The turning point, for Irigaray, consists in the fact that through the excesses that the feminine represents towards the masculine, women can begin to make themselves heard and to denounce how the univocal and violent voice of the male One has tried to repress them. Here, however, the fundamental problem for Irigaray arises: if the western symbolic order is a symbolic order in which only the masculine has a voice, how can feminine Otherness express herself and make herself heard? In what way can the feminine express her irreducible Otherness in a symbolic system that does not offer her the tools to do so? The problem can be clarified through the use of the terms ‘internal’-‘external’: on the one side, in the western symbolic order there is no place for a pure expression of the feminine; on the other side, the feminine cannot place herself outside the symbolic system in which she is trapped, precisely because an external to this system does not exist.<sup>61</sup> Outside the symbolic means outside language and thought: how can one say, how can one think – how can one be – in the absence of a language that can say it and a thought that can think it? The feminine, therefore, cannot simply abandon the western symbolic system, because it is only and exclusively within this system that an Identity can have a voice. If one wants a subversion of the symbolic, therefore, one must implement it from *within* the symbolic itself, showing how it has been formed through a principle of violence and exclusion with respect to an Otherness

---

<sup>60</sup> The necessity of this critique (and of the consequent cultural, symbolic and linguistic revolution) for the affirmation of sexual difference is emphasized by Whitford: ‘For the work of sexual difference to take place, a revolution in thought and ethics is needed. We must re-interpret the whole relationship between the subject and discourse, the subject and the world, the subject and the cosmic, the microcosmic and the macro-cosmic. And the first thing to say is that, even when aspiring to a universal or neutral state, this subject has always been written in the masculine form, as man, despite the fact that, at least in France, ‘man’ is a sexed and not a neutral noun’ (WHITFORD, M; IRIGARAY, L. **The Irigaray Reader**. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, p. 166).

<sup>61</sup> Indeed, when we try to put ourselves outside the symbolic order and the language, we find ourselves inside them again. For example, we decide we want to get out of the rational logic of western thought: the only alternative we have is to place an irrational event. But the irrationality of this event is just inside the rational discourse itself: in the discourse, in fact, the difference between rational and irrational is of fundamental importance, because in order to find the rational we need a pure opposite of it. In fact, western logic is a binary logic, based on the opposition of terms such as rational and irrational, male and female, logical and illogical. The only possible movement therefore seems to be that of starting from within the discourse itself, to show the possibilities it excludes and widen its margins. In this sense, the work of Derrida, with his deconstruction, and Butler, with her theory of performativity, are similar to that of Irigaray: there is no outside of the symbolic, but we can make it explode from the ‘inside’. The same can be said of the figure of *mimesis*, proposed by Irigaray. For an analysis of the differences and similarities between Derrida and Irigaray in the question of style, see WEED, E. *The Question of Style*. In: Burke, C., Schor, N., Whitford, M. (Eds.). **Engaging with Irigaray**. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

that cannot be said in it.

Irigaray precisely aims to give voice to this feminine Otherness by showing how it overflows the same univocal categories in which phallogocentric thought has tried for millennia to force it: the point is not to go towards an outside of the symbolic – since there is no such outside that is possible to speak of – but rather to show how its own thought structures are not absolute and neutral, but partial, violent, and repressive. To do this, one must start from the symbolic itself, from within: to use the words spoken by the symbolic, to use the thought structures shared by it, so as to show all those possibilities which the discourse excludes and to reveal the act of exclusion on which the discourse itself is based.<sup>62</sup>

To carry out this subversion, Irigaray proposes the *mimesis* technique.<sup>63</sup> Her mimesis consists in assuming the feminine role deliberately, in accepting those same categorizations in which the patriarchal discourse wants to cage the female, in order to show how the woman herself, representing an excess, destroys these rigid characterizations:

There is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one “path,” the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of mimicry. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. (...) To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation through discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself – inasmuch as she is on the side of the “perceptible,” of “matter” – to “ideas,” in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make “visible,” by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It also means “to unveil” the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed in this function.<sup>64</sup>

In this way, Irigaray recovers the female body, concentrating on female pleasure. In fact, in western discourse, the woman has always been linked to the body, while the man to

---

<sup>62</sup> ‘For both Derrida and Irigaray, it seems, what is excluded from this binary is also *produced* by it in the mode of exclusion and has no separable or fully independent existence as an absolute outside. A constitutive or relative outside is, of course, composed of a set of exclusions that are nevertheless *internal* to that system as its own nonthematizable necessity. It emerges within the system as incoherence, disruption, a threat to its own systematicity’ (BUTLER, J. *Bodies That Matter*. In: Burke, C., Schor, N., Whitford (Eds.). **Engaging with Irigaray**. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 152).

<sup>63</sup> ‘The aim of the mimetic strategy, and of all the strategies, has become quite specific in Irigaray’s recent work: first of all discursive change: ‘to bring about a change in discourse [faire muter un discours]’ (SP: 191), to shift the position of the subject of enunciation. Second, to state the conditions for women’s ‘generic identity’; (sometimes she says: for women to become a *pauple*, a people)’ (WHITFORD, M. **Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine**. London: Routledge. 1991, p. 136).

<sup>64</sup> IRIGARAY. **This Sex**, p. 76.

rationality: in this sense, the woman-man binary has always been based on the body-mind binary. Irigaray therefore decides to take this assumption so rooted in the western imagination, and to interrogate it. Consequently, the woman's body will be shown to be other than what was believed: it exceeds the categories with which the symbolic wanted to define it.

For Irigaray, in the hetero-patriarchal culture, masculine sexual pleasure is the paradigm for all sexual pleasure. This can be seen especially in Freud. In contrast to the singularity of male pleasure, the woman has always been assigned with just one form of sexual satisfaction: the clitoral one of the phallic phase, which is always seen as an impoverished penis-equivalent. In her 'change to femininity', the clitoris yields its importance to the vagina – seen as the instrument for men's pleasure. But these two organs are in no way interchangeable, rather they contribute, with others like vaginal lips and breasts, to the richness and the plurality of female pleasure. The woman's body cannot therefore be incorporated in the phallogentric logic of the One. On the contrary, the female body is capable of a plurality of different pleasures, since '*woman has sex organs more or less everywhere*'.<sup>65</sup>

To emphasize how the female body represents an obstacle for the phallogentric logic of the One, Irigaray presents the figure of the *parler femme*,<sup>66</sup> which describes the proper female pleasure of autoerotism: while the man always needs an instrument to touch himself, the woman does not need any mediation, because 'she touches herself all the time (...) so for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact'. The contact between the two lips is a particular kind of contact, in which there is no longer the clear logical division between what is touching from what is touched: 'as for woman, she touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation, and before there is any way to distinguish

---

<sup>65</sup> IRIGARAY. *This Sex*, p. 28.

<sup>66</sup> Kozel and Jones' descriptions of Irigaray's process of mimesis are well defined. Kozel, who underlines the problematic aspects of this practice, presents the *mimesis* technique as follows: 'Mimesis is a powerful tool available for women to subvert the social order as it is presently defined and preserved by patriarchal structures. As the phase that aims to bring about the conditions for the possibility of social and cultural change, mimesis involves women consciously stepping into the sexual stereotypes provided for them by men. It thus becomes a process of eroding the stereotypes from within. Mimesis is a powerful tool available for women to subvert the social order as it is presently defined and preserved by patriarchal structures. As the phase that aims to bring about the conditions for the possibility of social and cultural change, mimesis involves women consciously stepping into the sexual stereotypes provided for them by men. It thus becomes a process of eroding the stereotypes from within' (KOZEL, S. *The Diabolical Strategy of Mimesis: Luce Irigaray's Reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty*. *Hypatia*, vol. 11, n. 3, 1996, p. 116). Jones clearly underlines the revolutionary value of this practice: '(S)he is seeking to *parler femme*, a phrase that can be translated as both 'to speak woman' and 'speaking (*as a*) woman'. By way of a pun (*par les femmes*), the French also suggests that speaking (as a) woman is something that needs to be done 'by women', that is, among and between them. *Parler femme* speaks of a way of articulating the female sex that would allow women to take up the position of speaking subjects themselves' (JONES. *Irigaray*, p. 16).

activity from passivity'.<sup>67</sup> This means that in female sexual pleasure there is no clear distinction between masturbated organ and masturbating instrument, as both lips perform both functions. This implies that a clear distinction, a clear mediation is not possible.

From this a female logic, or non-logic, follows, a female way to speak, or not-speak – the lips stay together and ‘to say a single precise word, they would have to stay apart’<sup>68</sup> – that resists a clear definition and conceptualization: speaking as a woman is not speaking *about* the woman, but consists in an ‘attempt to provide a place for the ‘other’ as feminine’.<sup>69</sup> In this sense, the woman is not a subject in the masculine sense of the term: hers is not a fixed and solid identity, but rather an ever-changing flow.<sup>70</sup>

This does not mean that the woman lacks an identity: rather, she has an identity that subverts and transcends the concept of identity that the phallogocentric discourse wants to impose. She has her identity, paradoxically, in resisting an identity in phallogocentric terms: she is not one, definable and defined, but, just like the two lips, she is a plurality that is at the same time immediate and indivisible – a plurality of indistinguishable voices.

The woman is therefore the contradiction in patriarchal discourse which goes beyond its rigid and hierarchical binarism: she is fluid, she is many, but she is not for this reason a non-identity; she doesn’t obey a masculine logic, but she is not for this reason illogical. Rather, it is precisely in this plurality and dynamism, unspeakable in the phallogocentric discourse, that she finds *her* identity and *her* logic. The woman appears finally as a subject – no longer as an object-mirror – which, in her plurality and richness, radically exceeds the male logic of the One.

### 7. *Philosophy of Nature: an exercise in Mimesis*

---

<sup>67</sup> IRIGARAY. *This Sex*, p. 24.

<sup>68</sup> IRIGARAY. *This Sex*, p. 208.

<sup>69</sup> IRIGARAY. *This Sex*, p. 135. Stone is another author that emphasizes the link between the description of female auto-eroticism and the mode of the feminine itself: ‘She appears to be claiming that female anatomy engenders a particularly direct form of autoeroticism, which, in turn, can ground a distinctively female form of diffuse and polyvalent communication. Seemingly, too, Irigaray maintains that western culture has repressed the possibility of these distinctively female forms, validating only male forms of desire and speech’ (STONE. *Irigaray*, p. 22).

<sup>70</sup> ‘The style of fluidity, as Irigaray sometimes calls the way in which women write and speak, entails having no one identity but rather conceives of its form as multiple. This “fluid” status of a “parler-femme” is not synonymous to being dispersed, unintelligible, untouchable, out-of-reach, and merely falling together with the mode of non-identity. Feminine identity in terms of style is described by Irigaray as being in constant flux which means that “she” is, spatially, both here and there, inside and outside, never in opposition to but slightly rubbing against or touching what is other’ (HADIKOESOEMO, N. In favour of an ontology of sexual difference. Luce Irigaray on mimesis and fluidity. *P.O.I. RIVISTA DI INDAGINE FILOSOFICA E DI NUOVE PRATICHE DELLA CONOSCENZA*, vol. 8, n. 1, 2021, p. 120-121).



Let me now briefly resume my ontological speculative conception, using Irigaray's terminology to focus on the 'inessential essence' of Hegel's nature. As seen above, even if there is a conceptual progression, for Hegel nature represents a dimension *Other* to the concept, which cannot be resolved in a speculative dialectical process. Indeed, Hegel seems to describe a natural dimension that finds its essence in being immediate and contingent: this means that nature has its own value not because it is rationalizable, but precisely because it presents a different way of being from the concept.

This does not mean that nature finds its character just in being non-conceptual, non-rational: otherwise, one would fall into that problem for which nature can just be described as negative with respect to the masculine conceptuality. Rather, nature, just like Irigaray's woman, has been shown paradoxically to have its essence in not having an essence in conceptual (phallogocentric) terms. The concept, in an attempt to tame it in a necessary logic, fails. Nature shows that its essence cannot be contained in the essentialist and limited terms of the concept. Nature is irrational only in the sense of *begrifflos*, which does not mean that it finds its essence in being the negative of the concept, but simply that the logic implemented by the concept *cannot work for it*. And this is precisely because nature has its own *illogical logic*, that lies at the heart of the contradiction of having its essence in not having an essence in the conceptual and rational terms of the Idea. If one wants to grasp the essence of nature, then, one must be open to the possibility of an inessential essence, that is, an identity that cannot be articulated in the (conceptual) phallogocentric discourse.<sup>71</sup>

The diverse, disorderly, and contingent character of nature is determined by an immediacy, which is its defining character, as I will try to demonstrate by analysing the gestation process. Nature is characterized by an immediacy that makes it impossible to distinguish and determine; in contrast, the concept builds its own movement through a relationship of mediation, or rather of differentiation, from which a speculative union will then develop, while in nature, everything seems to be united in an immediate totality. In this immediacy, there are many, various and diverse beings who, even if they are different from each other in some way, ultimately recognize themselves in an immediate union with the natural element. In nature,

---

<sup>71</sup> Burke describes this fact brilliantly: 'It is as if she were speaking from another territory – the ocean, or the other side of the looking glass – where the familiar rules of logic have been reversed, deconstructed, and subjected to a sea change' (BURKE, C. Irigaray Through the Looking Glass. In: Burke, C., Schor, N., Whitford (Eds.). **Engaging with Irigaray**. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 39).

therefore, there is a sense of immediate union, in which it is not possible to mark precise differences between the different individualities present in it. This description of nature recalls Irigaray's *parler femme*, in which the woman's lips 'speak together,' being united in an immediate union, in which it is impossible to distinguish 'me' from 'you'.

Given this reading of the ontology of nature, I want to propose an exercise in feminist *mimesis*. To do this, it will first be necessary to demonstrate how Hegel links woman and nature, as both are characterized by immediate relations in which subjects become indistinguishable from one another. In fact, Hegel seems to link the female both to the materiality of her body and to nature, underlining therefore her immediate character, while linking spirit and concept to the man.<sup>72</sup> This is clearly indicated by the following passage, in which Hegel states:

The study of nature is therefore the liberation of what belongs to spirit within nature, for spirit is in nature in so far as it relates itself not to another, but to itself. This is likewise the liberation of nature, which in itself is reason; it is only through spirit however, that reason as such comes forth from nature into existence. *Spirit has the certainty which Adam had when he beheld Eve, 'This is flesh of my flesh, this is bone of my bones.'* *Nature is, so to speak, the bride espoused by spirit.*<sup>73</sup>

This can be exemplified most clearly in the process of gestation, treated by Hegel in his *Anthropology*, precisely in the moment of the 'sentient soul in its immediacy.' Here one can see how the relationship between mother and child is parallel to Irigaray's *parler femme*. I chose this moment because it is a figure in which the immediacy of nature and that of the woman is represented in an explicitly strong way. In addition to the gestation, two other phenomena need to be analyzed to show how Hegel binds not only nature, but also womanhood to that sense of immediate unity, and, therefore, sees woman and nature as intrinsically linked: the phenomenon of neurasthenia and the analysis of the female reproductive system.

In the moment of gestation, mother and child, despite being two different entities, are indistinct from each other: they are two, but they are also one. In their immediate relationship, therefore, lives the contradiction that we are unable to articulate, because they are not two *or*

---

<sup>72</sup> This is clearly emphasised by Stone, who brilliantly shows the link between male-concept-subjectivity and female-nature-matter, with particular reference to Hegel's treatment of sexual difference in the *Philosophy of Nature*: 'But in what sense can some individuals possibly be more 'material' than others? An answer is provided by Hegel's account of reproduction and sexual difference. Having described male and female reproductive anatomies to be organized respectively around difference and its absence, he adds that female and male individuals respectively contribute 'the material element' and the 'subjectivity' to their offspring' (STONE. *Nature*, p. 182).

<sup>73</sup> HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 204.

one, but both two *and* one at the same time. Just like the lips of Irigaray's *parler femme*: they are two, they are multiple, but their relationship is immediate and their difference unspeakable. In both cases there is no conceptual determination, there is no moment of mediation that can differentiate the two entities: it is an immediate union, in which the differences are unspeakable, in which the limit between different and indifferent is indescribable. The child is not yet reflected in itself and is therefore an immediate being. This immediacy makes it a passive being, because its essence is determined by the absolute and immediate identity with the mother, who becomes the genius of the child:

Here are two individuals, yet still in undivided soul-unity: the one is still no *self*, not yet impenetrable, incapable of resistance; the other is its subject, the *single* self of both. – The mother is the *genius* of the child; for by genius we commonly mean the selfish totality of the mind, in so far as it exists *for itself* and constitutes the subjective substantiality of another, which is only externally posited as an individual; the latter has only a formal being-for-self.<sup>74</sup>

Hegel points out that this relationship is not only physical – the baby grows in the mother's womb – but above all psychic: this allows it to continue even after pregnancy, through a constant immediate sharing of feelings and sensations between mother and child. Here Hegel directly links the female being and the vegetable world: in fact, Hegel describes this 'magical relationship' that continues even after birth through the fact that 'female nature can (*like the monocotyledons in the vegetable kingdom*) within itself break in two,' i.e., by reproducing offspring immediately identical to her. In this sense, the child cannot distinguish itself and its feelings from those of its mother: there is a fusion between the child and the mother, an immediate identity. As Stone correctly points out, this relationship also takes place in the opposite direction, that is, in the fact that the child also becomes the genius of the mother.<sup>75</sup> With gestation, therefore, we see evidence of what was said at the beginning, that is, the fact that Hegel sees in the feminine the link with the natural component, characterized by its immediacy.

Another point that leads us to think of how nature's logic of immediacy is, for Hegel, typical of female subjects, can be found in the passage in which he affirms that the magical relationship between mother and child during pregnancy and the first months of the baby's life, is also present in some moments of conscious life, especially with 'female friends with delicate

---

<sup>74</sup> HEGEL. *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 89.

<sup>75</sup> See STONE. *Nature*, p. 198.

nerves'.<sup>76</sup> Even here, one can see how the woman is tied by Hegel to nature, as both are capable of immediate, magical relationships.

This feminine mode of being is also underlined by Hegel in some remarks of the *Philosophy of Nature*. In the paragraphs dedicated to sexual intercourse, Hegel affirms the existence, dictated by the concept, of sexual difference: 'As the different sexes constitute the sex-drive as differentials, there must be a difference in their formation; their mutual determinateness must exist as posited through the concept'.<sup>77</sup> This means that for Hegel, the difference between male and female does not have its origin in the different reproductive apparatuses, but is rather a difference that could be defined as 'metaphysical,' i.e., consisting of two different ways of approaching reality. In this sense, the reproductive apparatuses of male and female are different in that they reflect two different ways of approaching reality: this means that the different genitals are a *result* of the two different modalities, and not vice versa. To affirm the difference between the two sexes Hegel argues that, while in the female there is 'necessarily the undifferentiated element', there is in the male fundamentally 'the sundered element of opposition'.<sup>78</sup> On the one hand, therefore, the man mediates between himself and his offspring: this is reflected in the act of reproduction, as the man splashes out his seed, distancing it from himself. On the contrary, the woman, who receives the seed and is subject to the process of gestation, recognizes herself immediately with her offspring. Indeed, for Hegel 'the male is the active principle; as the female remains in her undeveloped unity, she constitutes the principle of conception'.<sup>79</sup> Hegel continues to stress the link between woman, nature, and matter on the one hand, and man and concept on the other, affirming that 'the female certainly contains the material element, while the male contains the subjectivity'.<sup>80</sup>

The elements needed for the activity of *mimesis* are now ready, namely: (1) an ontology of nature that defines its character Other than the concept and (2) the symbolic link implemented by Hegel between woman and nature. In this way, we can implement step (3) the exercise of *mimesis*, which consists in inhabiting the patriarchal symbolic links in order to change them 'from within', by putting in place that 'conscious masquerade' that allows us to see the excess of the feminine over the masculine. Indeed, following Irigaray's *mimesis*, the identity between nature and woman has been accepted, showing how, if nature exceeds the unity of the Hegelian

---

<sup>76</sup> HEGEL. *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 90.

<sup>77</sup> HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 174.

<sup>78</sup> HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 174.

<sup>79</sup> HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 175.

<sup>80</sup> HEGEL. *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 175. This topic is dealt with in great depth in STONE. *Nature*, p. 178-81.

concept, so, consequently, the woman also exceeds masculine logic, and seeks a dimension of her own.

### 8. Conclusion

In this article I have tried to implement a feminist exercise of *mimesis* within the Hegelian philosophy of nature. To do so, it was first necessary to outline an ontological structure of nature that could serve the purposes of the paper, and that could refresh this part of Hegelian thought – too often simplified or neglected – where, in fact some of the most interesting systematic problems take shape. By presenting the position of a speculative ontology of nature, I have contended that in it the concept never manages to evolve completely, thus delineating nature as ‘essentially inessential’. To sustain my position, I have argued that in nature there is always a co-presence of presence and absence of the concept, which develops progressively. However, precisely because of the constitutively exceeding essence of nature, the concept can never develop completely within it. I have demonstrated this by analyzing figures such as sexual intercourse, interspecies violence, illness, and the death of the organism.

After presenting Irigaray’s thought and her exercise of *mimesis*, I applied it to the Hegelian Philosophy of Nature, appealing to (and inhabiting) the symbolic link between nature and woman present (in western culture and) in Hegel. Referring to moments such as gestation, I drew a parallel between the a-conceptual immediacy of nature and Irigaray’s *parler femme*, showing how the former does not represent a place to be conceptualized or considered as a negative of the concept, but rather as an *Other* place, having its own illogical logic and inessential essence (from the phallogocentric point of view). Through the activity of *mimesis*, the symbolic space for an identity of the feminine as feminine has opened up.

In this way, this text represents an attempt at a feminist reading of Hegel which goes beyond a mere criticism or defence of his work in relation to various forms feminism – to rather propose a feminist practice that utilises Hegelian thought. It is no coincidence, in my opinion, that it is precisely the Philosophy of Nature, the area that has been paid little attention and often overlooked by the scholarship, which has turned out to be the right place to implement Luce Irigaray’s feminist *mimesis*. It is the destiny of phallogocentric discourse, which in its creation of hierarchical binaries has placed the woman – together with the concepts related to her, such as that of nature – in a position of inferiority, denying her a symbolic space – of words, of writing, of existence. So, following Irigaray, within these terms which have been denied space, history

and existence, an opening of symbolic possibility must open up. In this way, Hegel's philosophy of nature was used as a site of female and feminist re-appropriation, thus fulfilling my goal: to make the Hegelian text a place to implement a philosophy of sexual difference.

*Silvia Locatelli*

*Universidade de Lisboa*

[locatelli.silvia.96@gmail.com](mailto:locatelli.silvia.96@gmail.com)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BRAIDOTTI, Rosi. Sexual Difference Theory. In: Jaggar, A.M.; Young, I.M. **A Companion to Feminist Philosophy**. Malden, Mass.: Blackwellm, 1998, p. 298-306.
- BUCHDAHL, Gerd. Conceptual Analysis and Scientific Theory in Hegel's Philosophy of Nature (With Special Reference to Hegel's Optics). In: Cohen, R.S.; Wartofsky, M.W. (Eds.). **Hegel and the Sciences**. Boston: Reidel Publishing, 1984.
- BURBIDGE, John. **Real Process: How Logic and Chemistry Combine in Hegel's Philosophy of Nature**. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.
- BURKE, Carolin. Irigaray Through the Looking Glass. In: Burke, C., Schor, N., Whitford (Eds.). **Engaging with Irigaray**. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- BUTLER, Judith. Bodies That Matter. In: Burke, C.; Schor, N.; Whitford, M. (Eds.). **Engaging with Irigaray**. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. **Bodies that Matter**. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- CHIEREGHIN, Franco. Finalità e idea della vita. La recezione hegeliana della teleologia di Kant. **Verifiche: Rivista Trimestrale di Scienze Umane**, vol. 9, n. 1, 1990, p. 127-230.
- DUDLEY, Will. Systematic Philosophy and Idealism. **The Owl of Minerva**, vol. 34, n. 1, 2003, p. 91-105.
- ERLE, Giorgio. L'inizio della libertà del soggetto e l'organismo: riflessioni a partire dalle filosofie della natura di Hans Jonas e di Hegel. In: Battistoni, G. (Ed.). **Fondamenti per un agire responsabile**. Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2020.
- FERRINI, Cinzia. The Transition to Organics: Hegel's Idea of Life. In: Houlgate, S.; Baurm M. (Eds.). **A Companion to Hegel**. Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing, 2011.

- FREUD, Sigmund. **Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality**. New York: Verso, 2016.
- FURLOTTE, Wes. **The Problem of Nature in Hegel's Final System**. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018.
- GATENS, Moira. **Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality**. London: Routledge, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. **Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Difference and Equality**. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- HADIKOESOEMO, N. In favour of an ontology of sexual difference. Luce Irigaray on mimesis and fluidity. **P.O.I. RIVISTA DI INDAGINE FILOSOFICA E DI NUOVE PRATICHE DELLA CONOSCENZA**, vol. 8, n. 1, 2021, p. 106-129.
- HEGEL, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. **Gesammelte Werke 24, 1**. Hamburg: Felix Meiner. 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. **Encyclopedia Logic**. Translated by Geraets, T.F.; Suchting, W.A.; Harris, H.S. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. **Philosophy of Mind**. Translated by W. Wallace, A.V. Miller Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. **Philosophy of Nature**. Translated by M.J. Petry. London: Allen & Unwin, 1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_. **Science of Logic**. Translated by G. Di Giovanni. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- HOULGATE, Stephen Logic and Nature in Hegel's Philosophy: A Response to John W. Burdige. **The Owl of Minerva**, vol. 34, n. 1, 2002, p. 107-125.
- HUNEMAN, Philippe. The Hermeneutic Turn in Philosophy of Nature in the Nineteenth Century. In: Stone, A. (Ed.). **The Edinburgh Critical History Of Nineteenth-Century Philosophy**. Edinburgh. Edinburgh University Press, 2011.
- ILLETTERATI, Luca. The Concept of Organism in Hegel's Philosophy of Nature. **Verifiche**, vol. 42, n. 1-4, 2015, p. 155-166.
- ILTING, Karl Heinz. Hegel Philosophie des Organischen. In: by Petry, M.J. (Ed.). **Hegel und die Naturwissenschaften**. Stuttgart: frommann-holzbook, 1987.
- IRIGARAY, Luce. **Speculum of the Other Woman**. Translated by C.G. Gillian. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. **This Sex Which Is Not One**. Translated by C. Porter, C. Burke. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

- JOHNSTON, Adrian. The Weakness of Nature: Hegel, Freud, Lacan and Negativity Materialized.' In: Žižek, S.; Crockett, C.; Davis, C. (Eds.). **Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics and Dialectic**. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
- JONES, Rachel. **Irigaray: Towards a Sexuate Philosophy**. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011.
- KANT, Immanuel. **Critique of Pure Reason**. Translated by J.C. Meredith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- KOZEL, Susan. The Diabolical Strategy of Mimesis: Luce Irigaray's Reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. **Hypatia**, vol. 11, n. 3, 1996, p. 114-129.
- MAKER, William. Idealism and Autonomy. **The Owl of Minerva**, vol. 34, n. 1, 2003, p. 59-75.
- MIKKOLA, Mari. Feminist perspectives on sex and gender. In **Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy**, 2008. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-gender/>.
- PADUI, Raoni. Hegel's Ontological Pluralism. **The Review of Metaphysics**, vol. 67, n. 1, 2013, p. 125-48.
- PETRY, Michael John. Hegelianism and the Natural Sciences: Some Current Developments and Interpretations. **Hegel-Studien**, vol. 36, 2001, p. 199-237.
- PINKARD, Terry. **Hegel's Naturalism: Mind, Nature and the Final Ends of Life**. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- PIPPIN, Robert. **Hegel's Realm of Shadows. Logic as Metaphysics in the Science of Logic**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.
- RAND, Sebastian. Hegel on the a priori. **Forms of Nature in Classical German Philosophy (workshop)**, 2019.
- STONE, Alison. **An Introduction to Feminist Philosophy**. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. **Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. **Nature, Ethics and Gender in German Romanticism and Idealism**. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018.
- \_\_\_\_\_. **Petrified Intelligence: Nature in Hegel's Philosophy**. Albany: SUNY Press, 2005.
- VON ENGELHARDT, Dietrich. Hegels Organismusversteandnis und Krankheitsbegriff. In: Petry, M.J. (Ed.). **Hegel und die Naturwissenschaften**. Stuttgart: frommann-holzbook, 1987.



- WANDSCHNEIDER, Dieter. Die Stellung der Natur in Gesamtentwurf der hegelschen Philosophie. In: Petry, M. J. (Ed.). **Hegel und die Naturwissenschaften**. Stuttgart: frommann-holzbook, 1987.
- WEED, Elizabeth. The Question of Style. In: Burke, C., Schor, N., Whitford, M. (Eds.). **Engaging with Irigaray**. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- WHITFORD, Margaret. **Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine**. London: Routledge. 1991.
- WHITFORD, Margaret; IRIGARAY, L. **The Irigaray Reader**. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.
- ŽIŽEK, Slavoj. Hegel and Shitting. In: Žižek, S., Crockett, C. and Davis, C. (Eds.). **Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics and Dialectic**. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.