

## Decreation, or Saying Yes

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Following the spiritual itinerary that Simone Weil maps is not an easy journey. It involves instance after instance of crossing, of moving into and across a threshold. The threshold spaces that lie between interior and exterior, human and divine, tragic and celebratory, absent and present, mark passages in a human subject's advancement toward mystical experience by way of spiritual exercises. Spiritual exercises—technical practices of self-modification and self-transformation that this subject performs on herself—collectively constitute the performance of her religious subjectivity. They aim to transform this subject's "I" into a blank, an empty spot, a hole. "I" makes a hole in language by introducing self-difference within its space. It does so from its position as language's internal other. In opening language to otherness, "I" performs an ecstatic movement, revealing that, as Michel de Certeau claims, "from the start, the 'I' has the formal structure of ecstasy."<sup>1</sup> That is, "I" is mystical from the start; "I" is a mystical tactic that spaces language from within, a hole through which "an elsewhere is engraved upon language."<sup>2</sup> "I" is that elsewhere. It operates as a tactic that, by definition, insinuates itself (and its alterity) in an other's place by carving out a space for itself and, in doing so, making a hole in this place. It opens language and a human

<sup>1</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, vol. 1: *The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 174.

<sup>2</sup> de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 176.

subject—or, rather, by uttering it, they subject themselves to its passionate, destabilizing, and dis-placing performance. "I" is a hole through which language and this subject are exposed to the void, to what lies beyond them. It designates, then, the discursive hole through which otherness (divine or human) passes and through which this subject remains open and exposed. In doing so, it also marks a space of indiscretion between *mystics* and politics vis-à-vis language.

### Decreation

This spiritual itinerant reaches this void in decreation, the culminating spiritual exercise in Weil's itinerary. Decreation (*dé-création*) is an ascetic practice of *apophysis* that concerns a soul's uncreated part, its innermost ground that is, on Meister Eckhart's account, identical with the divine ground. What Eckhart calls a retreat (of the soul into this innermost ground)<sup>3</sup> Weil sees as a passage: a mystical passage from the created to the uncreated.<sup>4</sup> This is implicit in decreation's etymology, which consists, as Miklos Vetö points out, of the privative *de*, indicating "the passion for reduction and annihilation erected as a moral imperative" and the nominal *creation*, indicating the term's "strictly metaphysical content."<sup>5</sup> It makes its first appearance in Weil's *cahiers* as a verb, in reference to the cross:

<sup>3</sup> Eckhart develops this idea throughout his sermons. For example, he describes the soul's innermost ground using the metaphor of a little town in Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (New York and Mahweh: Paulist Press, 1981), 181. For other discussions of the innermost ground, see *The Essential Sermons*, 198, and Eckhart, *Teacher and Preacher*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York and Mahweh: Paulist Press), 257 and 288.

<sup>4</sup> Simone Weil, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. André-A. Devaux and Florence de Lussy, tome 6, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1998–), 349-350. Subsequent citations from Weil's *cahiers* are given parenthetically and include tome, volume, and page number in her *Oeuvres complètes*. All translations of Weil's work are my own.

<sup>5</sup> Miklos Vetö, *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil*, trans. Joan Dargan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 11.

“Cross. Only extreme affliction [*malheur*] fully brings redemptive suffering. It is therefore necessary that it be so that the creature can be decreated” (6.2.363). From its initial use, decreation appears as bound to the cross, but while the cross remains negative (in the sense of negative theology), decreation achieves a second apophatic level: the negation of negation and subsequent passage from the negative to the mystical. Weil makes clear that decreation is not a simple negation in distinguishing it from destruction: destruction entails “passing from the created into nothingness” while decreation involves “passing from the created into the uncreated” (6.2.349-350). Hence “destruction is a bad imitation (an ersatz)” of decreation (6.2.350).

This is not to assert that decreation lacks a deeply negative dimension, because negativity is certainly there, thanks in large part to the analogous spiritual exercise of the cross. The affliction of the cross spiritually strips a human subject; it lacerates her; it brings her to the threshold of her mortality and leaves her there, exposed, feeling totally abandoned; it brings her, in other words, to the threshold of a void. Decreation concerns her passage across this threshold and into this void, this abyss of nothingness. To achieve this requires that she detach herself from worldly (created) things, that she empty herself and her desire, and that she fix her will on the void: “to will to the void, to will the void” (6.3.190). She must will the void; she must desire the void; she must choose the void; she must face the void and accept it out of loving self-sacrifice, for to love means “to endure the void and, as a consequence, to accept death” (6.2.207). Moreover, she must not only face the void but create it within herself by hollowing out an interior space through an act of self-negation. In doing so, she follows God who, in the act of creation, must renounce being everything: “God renounces—in a sense—being all” (6.2.270). Creation, then, involves renunciation—self-renunciation—from the beginning since for something other than God to exist, God must contract Godself,

pulling back from and thus renouncing claim to part of the totality of existence.

Creating a void within herself, a human subject follows God in terms of a supernatural self-contraction that does not come easily. It requires a self-violence, a self-tearing, an “extreme uprooting [*déracinement*]” (6.2.356) that makes space for this void, toward which she must direct her desire. This uprooting is so extreme that, in carving out this void, she obliterates her ability to say “I.” Such obliteration comes in part because, according to Weil, “I” is uttered by sin: “the sin in me says ‘I’” (6.2.124). If sin is associated with a subject’s “I,” then her “I” is what she must renounce. She must offer her “I” in a self-renunciative imitation of God—because her “I” is all she, as a human subject, has to offer God; she, as a human subject, possesses “nothing in the world...except the power to say I” (6.2.461). Hence it is this, her “I,” that “it is necessary to give to God” (6.2.261). The ultimate act of human agency, then, is the renouncement of human agency. She creates a void within herself, she annihilates her “I,” and to the extent that she does so, her “I” entirely vanishes and leaves the place to God (6.2.467).

This evacuation of her “I” makes way for a mystical passage. Weil’s ethics of decreation involves a human subject’s *self-annihilation*—carving out “an interior void” (6.2.264) within herself—and *self-donation*—giving her “I,” the only thing she has to give, to God.<sup>6</sup> Thanks to these exercises of self-sacrifice, her “I” becomes no longer the individual, finite “I” of this subject but the “I” of God. The ethical dimension of decreation yields a mystical outcome in which, “in a sense, God is ‘I’” (6.2.125).<sup>7</sup> Here Weil’s apophatic anthropology echoes Eckhart’s concerning the identity of the soul’s ground and the divine ground. One hears this echo when Weil writes that “the

<sup>6</sup> Vetö develops a similar point based on what he appropriately calls abnegation. See Vetö, *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil*, 32.

<sup>7</sup> The metaphysical outcome is also powerfully mystical since, according to Weil, total relinquishment of creation makes a decreated subject a co-creator: “we participate in the creation of the world by decreating ourselves” (6.2.432).

self of God is *encore* I. Under all possible relations, it is always this which says I" (6.2.483). One also hears echoes of Pseudo-Dionysius, since what is at stake is a spoken "I," an ability to say "I," that a human subject unsays in sacrificing her ability to say "I." Thus in decreation, the linguistic *apophasis* that Pseudo-Dionysius articulates in his negative theology corresponds to the ethical, and finally ontological, *apophasis* that Eckhart expresses in his negative anthropology. In decreation, Weil brings together apophatic theology and apophatic anthropology in an ontological, ethical, and mystical practice, making decreation *the* apophatic exercise that, paired with the cross, stands at the culmination of Weil's spiritual itinerary. The cross corresponds to the tragic while decreation corresponds to the mystical.<sup>8</sup>

In decreation, Weil creatively crosses theology and anthropology in a spiritual exercise of mystical passage: across a threshold, from created to uncreated. She positions decreation at the culmination of her spiritual itinerary so that a spiritual itinerant, advancing along this practical progression, concludes her journey with decreation. It marks the pinnacle of her expedition through the negative and toward the mystical by way of a linguistic and an ethical *apophasis* in which she unsays and undoes her own subjectivity. This is the move from the created to the uncreated—a move across the ontological or metaphysical threshold of the human into that which lies beyond. It is the move that this human subject has prepared for, that she is prepared for, but it is not a move that she can make on her own. She can create a void within herself; she can make room for God; she can sacrifice her "I"; but she cannot advance on her own across the threshold she desires to cross. She can only move up to the threshold, peering toward it and toward the

<sup>8</sup> In a sense, the cross prepares a spiritual itinerant for decreation in that, through the agony of affliction, it denudes and exposes her, readying her for the ontological crossing toward which she moves and for which she desires. Even so, they are more like two sides of the same coin than like two successive steps since, taken together, they act as the fulcrum around which her religious itinerary moves, with the cross representing the negative aspect and decreation representing the mystical aspect (the negation of negation) of Weil's program.

mystical void that lies beyond it. Completely uprooted, having given all that she has to give, having subjugated herself to the point of self-annihilation, she can only wait there for God to arrive and to carry her across. Her ethical subjection opens onto a spiritual and metaphysical subjection built into decreation. Hence the passion that she experiences in terms of affliction leads to a different passion: a radical passivity, metaphysical as well as ethical, characterized by "inactive action [*action non agissante*]" (6.2.351), that leaves this human subject waiting for God to complete her decreation—since only God can. To do this, God must cross the threshold of creation twice: to retrieve this subject and to bring her back with God, thereby completing her passage into the uncreated. Decreation therefore requires the passage of God to effect the passage of this human subject. This highlights the double sense of passion that opens onto a double crossing driven by desire.

### Desire

In addition, this decreative passage designates a space of passionate subjectivity named as *homo sacer*, inside an outside, "I," hole, threshold, spacing, exposure. This means that a passionate subject remains open and exposed, standing in what Giorgio Agamben calls "an original relation to desire."<sup>9</sup> Desire emphasizes that a human subject is a singularity plus an empty space, a finitude that nevertheless remains open. Weil underscores this in noting that "attention is bound to desire" (6.3.229) since in her spiritual and political itineraries, attention marks the end of the line, the point at which a human subject has done all that she can do on her own. To accomplish anything further requires an other, for whom she must wait.<sup>10</sup> Thus Weil

<sup>9</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>10</sup> In the case of decreation, for example, this other is God, who alone can complete this subject's decreation and carry her across the ontological threshold.

insists that attention is bound “not to will, but to desire” (6.3.229). Her will can take her only so far: up to the threshold of her limits. It can expose her to these limits, but it is desire that keeps her exposed. Desire takes place on the threshold of the void as that which remains.<sup>11</sup> It is the interior void that spaces a human subject and keeps her open.

Desire, then, is paradoxical. It is at once an empty space and a remainder—a remainder that is an empty space. Can an empty space be a remainder? Would an empty space not signal precisely the absence of a remainder? A remainder, it would seem, would be some-thing, yet an empty space seems to be no-thing. Desire is indeed a paradox—that is the point—that highlights a human subject’s necessary finitude (bringing her face to face with it, close enough that she can feel it) and, at the same time, her basic openness to what lies beyond her finite bounds. It is, in short, impossible, and Weil writes just that: “desire is impossible” (6.3.107). But it is an impossibility that is also necessary for a human subject since, on Weil’s account, “impossibility is the concrete form of necessity.”<sup>12</sup> Slavoj Žižek’s assertion that “the human being IS in its very essence a ‘passage,’ the finite openness into an abyss” echoes and supports this.<sup>13</sup> A human subject is a space of passage, an openness created by the gap of desire that makes this subject into a threshold. Moreover, she remains open thanks to the open-ended quality of desire—a quality that reveals its inherent link to tragedy. As Žižek remarks, “not only is desire inherently ‘tragic’ (condemned to its ultimate failure), tragedy itself...is ultimately always the tragedy of desire.”<sup>14</sup> Hence he reiterates that desire, as such, must tragically fail to close the gap: as Antigone demonstrates, desire aims at the impossible, and in doing so,

<sup>11</sup> Desire is a remainder, which nevertheless retains a trace of activity even in passivity and thus maintains her self-exposure in the face of what lies, unknowably, beyond her limits.

<sup>12</sup> Simone Weil, *L’enracinement: Prélude à une déclaration des devoirs envers l’être humain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 94.

<sup>13</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 36.

<sup>14</sup> Žižek, *On Belief*, 92. Here he also describes desire as infinite metonymy.

spaces a human subject as a passage, a finite opening onto an infinite void.

Behind Žižek’s assertions regarding desire are Jacques Lacan’s own considerations of desire as this empty space that must remain insatiable and unfilled: desire is “necessarily lacking, unsatisfied, impossible, misconstrued.”<sup>15</sup> It is constituted by a gap, a lack, that must remain open since it is sustained “through its lack of satisfaction, and even its impossibility.”<sup>16</sup> This gap, moreover, is constitutive of a human subject, as Lacan asserts (following Spinoza) that “*desire is the essence of man.*”<sup>17</sup> In psychoanalytic terms, desire functions as the inauguration of a subject: “*desidero is the Freudian cogito.*”<sup>18</sup> I desire, therefore I am. In this formulation, Lacan maintains that desire inaugurates and shapes subjectivity, and since desire is constituted by a lack, the subjectivity that it shapes must also remain lacking. Hence a human subject is, on Lacan’s account, fashioned by the gap of desire. To be human is to desire, which means to lack.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1978), 154.

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge (Encore), 1972-1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1998), 6. This sustained lack or openness is, according to Bruce Fink, because “there is no specifiable object that is capable of satisfying it, in other words, extinguishing it.” See Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 90.

<sup>17</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 275.

<sup>18</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 154. Lacan also links the function of desire to the function of the signifier for a subject, which relates to my discussion above regarding “I” as the discursive space of a subject—the space in which a human subject announces herself in the symbolic. The symbolic is one of three psychic registers that Lacan uses throughout his work; the other two are the imaginary and the real. Furthermore, his claim regarding the signifier fits with his subsequent claim that “there is no such thing as a prediscursive reality. Every reality is founded and defined by a discourse.” See Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 32; see also 55.

This is due in large part to Lacan's insistence that "man's desire is the desire of the Other."<sup>19</sup> His ambiguous phrase can mean, among other things, that desire is desire of the Other's desire (to be an object of desire for the Other), that a human subject desires as Other (from the position of the Other), that desire is desire for the Other, or that desire is desire for something else (something that this subject does not have). It also recalls the Freudian figure of *das Ding* as "something entirely different," "the first outside," "the absolute Other of the subject."<sup>20</sup> As the object of desire, *das Ding* leads a human subject "to aim at the gap."<sup>21</sup> This is where Weil's spiritual itinerant aims her desire as she waits attentively on the threshold for God. Desire is what propels her along her itinerary aimed at the void. It assumes a primacy for Weil such that she defines love in terms of desire: love, she writes, is "pure desire, without a spirit of conquest. Such is that which man has for God" (6.3.146). Such a lack of conquest points to love as the constitutive openness of desire, as in the love for God that a spiritual itinerant feels as she waits on the mortal threshold for God's arrival. To love is "to desire contact with a reality," which for Weil means to desire contact with God.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, it is "in desiring God that one becomes capable of attention" (6.3.216), indicating that her spiritual itinerary ends in desire as attention. Furthermore, desire plays a fundamental role not only in Weil's spiritual and political practices but in the subject who performs them since it precedes even obligation in the constitution of a subject: desire is her "first dimension" while obligation is "second" (6.2.353). Desire comes before obligation

<sup>19</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 235.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, ed. Dennis Porter (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1992), 52.

<sup>21</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Weil, *L'enracinement*, 319. Here Weil also writes that "to desire truth is to desire direct contact with a piece of reality." Thus she connects truth, reality, and love via desire. This resonates with Lacan's discussion of the real and of truth (he states that "'the true aims at the real'"). See Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 91.

as the finitude that opens onto infinity. It is more originary than even obligation, for as long as a human subject lives, she desires.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, as long as this subject lives, she desires "that which is beyond" (6.3.229). She desires what lies across the threshold, which guarantees that her desire will remain unfulfilled, especially insofar as "desire is a real operation only in the supernatural domain" (6.3.340). For a human subject, desire is an experience of impossibility, of confronting the impossible. It is, like biopolitics, an experience in which a human subject comes into contact with her own limits and, in doing so, with what lies impossibly beyond them. It reminds her that she is lacking as it advances her toward the void that she desires—a void that is a "supreme plenitude" (6.2.193). She approaches this, propelled by her desire for the void that is a "desire for the absolute good—it is always the same thing" (6.3.264). As she draws closer to and even possibly across "a certain threshold...the supernatural part of the soul reigns over the natural part...not by will but by desire."<sup>24</sup> Hence desire remains; it precedes, succeeds, and thus exceeds her being and everything that goes with it. Insofar as she is a subject, she is subjected to and by her own desire.

### Excess

But desire exceeds even this; it can be neither circumscribed nor contained. It crosses the line, flowing out of any place meant to confine or control it. It is not whole but hole, in a double sense: it remains constitutively lacking, and it cannot be captured.<sup>25</sup> It is at once not enough and too much. This lack-

<sup>23</sup> On this point, see 6.3.192. Here Weil comes very close to—or perhaps gives her version of—Lacan's claim regarding *desidero*.

<sup>24</sup> Simone Weil, *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes* (Paris: Fayard, 1985), 31.

<sup>25</sup> Thus Lacan writes, "there is a hole there and that hole is called the Other." See Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 114.

excess leads Lacan to dis-place it as “the ex-centric place,”<sup>26</sup> which is also the non-place of a human subject. Hence this subject’s center is outside of herself, meaning that she is fundamentally decentered and displaced as radically other and outside. Her subjective ground is not included on the inside; it is included, like Agamben’s *homo sacer*, only through its exclusion, as inside-out. This lends her a quality not of intimacy but of extimacy—as well as of supplementarity.<sup>27</sup>

Lacan articulates extimacy in the terms of sexual difference, according to which a human subject can position herself on the side of man or the side of woman. Here “man” and “woman” indicate discursive positions in terms of which “every speaking being situates itself on one side or the other.”<sup>28</sup> In this schema, man “has” the phallus, the signifier of desire (and thus of lack), and thus is thoroughly determined by and enclosed in its discourse.<sup>29</sup> Woman does not “have” the phallus, which

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 11, my translation. This phrase comes in the second sentence of his seminar on “The Purloined Letter,” thereby demonstrating that this term is not new in Seminar XX. Jacques-Alain Miller traces its conceptual genealogy in his “The Experience of the Real in Psychoanalysis,” trans. Jorge Jauregui, in *lacanian ink* 16 (2000): 6-27, esp. 16-17.

<sup>27</sup> Extimacy, which corresponds to *das Ding* as absolute other, operates according to a logic of supplementarity very close to the one articulated by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), esp. 141-164 and 280-281. Lacan explicitly acknowledges this (though without reference to Derrida) when he announces to his audience, “You will notice that I said ‘supplementary.’ If I had said ‘complementary’ what a mess we’d be in! We would fall back into the whole.” See Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 73.

<sup>28</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 79. Since, for Lacan, all reality is discursive, these subject positions are situated in discourse. See Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 33.

<sup>29</sup> By phallus Lacan does not mean the actual penis, the corporeal male sexual organ, but the role that it plays symbolically. The phallus is a signifier, even *the* signifier, designating “meaning effects as a whole” and providing the ratio for desire. See Jacques Lacan, “The Signification of the Phallus,” 275, in Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2002), 271-280. In Lacan’s algebra,  $\Phi$  designates the phallus—or, more precisely, the phallic function, which is, according to Fink, “the function that institutes lack.” See Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 103. The phallus and the

means that she is not wholly determined by the discourse of this master signifier—or, in short, she is not-whole. Woman (*La femme*) therefore stands discursively as the only signifier that does not signify anything, which means for Lacan that “we can’t talk about Woman (*La femme*).”<sup>30</sup> She is not-wholly discursive, so that she cannot be spoken or written—except, Lacan notes, as crossed out: “Woman [*La femme*] can be written only with a bar through it [through the *La*].”<sup>31</sup> She can be written only as ~~Woman~~ (*La femme*). In other words, she cannot be inscribed; she can be only exscribed, with the bar through Woman tracing the slash through which exscription lacerates, opens, and spaces an embodied human subject.<sup>32</sup>

Since she is not-wholly discursive—a kind of discursive *homo sacer*—she is not wholly contained in discourse. Rather, Lacan notes, “there is always something in her that escapes discourse.”<sup>33</sup> Something of her slips out through the slit, the slash, that crosses her out since, being not-whole (not enough), she is also too much. This underscores her supplementary function vis-à-vis discourse: she cannot be written, and the very possibility of writing depends upon her inability to be written.

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phallic function get to the heart of Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory in all of its complexities. For a detailed and helpful discussion of them, see Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 101-125.

<sup>30</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 73.

<sup>31</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 72, translation modified. As Fink explains, Lacan writes that the definite article *La* (which represents the universal) in *La femme* must be barred. Since this does not translate well into English, Fink expresses the universal in his translation by writing Woman with a capital W: Woman as such, in essence, must be barred, for She does not exist.

<sup>32</sup> Exscription is Jean-Luc Nancy’s term, which he opposes to inscription: inscription is a writing or scripting into something while exscription is a writing or scripting out of something. Exscription signifies a staging, a fragmentation, a denunciation, a denuding; it corresponds to exposure, opening, nakedness, outside. Nancy’s definitional elusiveness performs the conceptual elusiveness of this term that slips through the cracks. For a more thorough account, see Jean-Luc Nancy, “Exscription,” trans. Katherine Lydon, in Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 319-340.

<sup>33</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 33.

Writing's possibility depends upon the impossibility of writing Woman. Thus, in her supplementary role, she sustains discourse by not being written, which is why she does not (and cannot) stop not being written. Woman functions doubly in terms of discourse: she cannot be written, and she cannot stop not being written. Lacan labels the former function as necessity and the latter function as impossibility, thereby recalling Weil's co-implication of necessity and impossibility insofar as Woman's discursive position is both necessary and impossible.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, Lacan locates in this space of impossibility four points—the Other, the sign, *jouissance*, and love<sup>35</sup>—each of which is marked by the impossible. Like Woman, each cannot be wholly inscribed in or contained by discourse. Though each designates a lack, something excessive remains in each, as in ~~Woman~~, about whom Lacan writes that “she is *not* not at all there. She is there in full (*à plein*). But there is something more (*en plus*).”<sup>36</sup> Here Lacan indicates that these four points, like ~~Woman~~, are exscribed not only discursively but ontologically: each point *is* not not at all there, yet each point *is* there in full and *is* even something more. This kind of ontological exscription Lacan calls ex-sistence, indicating a being whose is radically other, outside of the normal ontological order: displaced, decentered, ex-centric. The four points of the Other, the sign, *jouissance*, and love can, along these lines, all be said to ex-sist.

Ex-sistence, this lack of being that also exceeds being, relates to what Lacan calls, “to employ a Platonic approach...that nothing on the basis of which something entirely original was made.”<sup>37</sup> This allusion to Plato points toward *khora*, the third

<sup>34</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 94; see also 59 and 144. These formulations relate to Lacan's four discourses as well as to the logical formulas (both marked by Lacan's innovative use of negated logical quantifiers) on the side of woman in his diagram of sexual difference, which are part of his extremely complex algebra. See Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 16 and 78.

<sup>35</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 39.

<sup>36</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 74.

<sup>37</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 40.

element in Platonic cosmology that is neither this nor that but other: the other, the nothing, that gives from nowhere.<sup>38</sup> Neither form nor matter, *khora* stands apart from and goes beyond such binary relationships in giving place without taking place. Hence *khora* ex-sists, as what Jacques Derrida calls an “abyssal chasm,” a “*mise en abyme*,” an excess of which “nothing...may be and be said ontologically.”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, since Plato characterizes *khora* as a mother or a wet nurse, *khora* is a feminine figure that raises questions of sexual difference. *Khora* thus shares a kinship with ~~Woman~~ in terms of ex-sistence and of resistance to universal thematization: as Derrida writes, “there is *khora* but *the khora* does not exist.”<sup>40</sup> He echoes almost exactly Lacan's claims regarding Woman, who likewise does not exist, for as Lacan famously asserts, “*there is no such thing as Woman*, Woman with a capital *W* indicating the universal.”<sup>41</sup> Like *khora*, Woman ex-sists ontologically and discursively, as ~~Woman~~.

These feminine figures insist on taking sexual difference into account and, in doing so, on reconsidering what Luce Irigaray terms “the whole problematic of *space* and *time*.”<sup>42</sup> She suggests undertaking this revaluation based on *khora*'s space *between* form and matter or power and act (or passivity and activity). This *between* space Irigaray labels an interval, “both

<sup>38</sup> Plato discusses *khora* in his *Timaeus*, trans. Donald J. Zeyl (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 2000), 48e-51b. For a provocative reading of this, see John Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Derrida, “*Khora*,” trans. Ian McLeod, 104, 99, in Derrida, *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 87-127.

<sup>40</sup> Derrida, “*Khora*,” 97.

<sup>41</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 72, my italics, translation modified. Given the translation difficulties that I mention above, it seems necessary to give Lacan's French here: “*il n'y a pas La femme, article défini pour désigner l'universel*.” Literally translated, this would read, “there is no such thing as *The* woman, definite article in order to designate the universal.”

<sup>42</sup> Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 7. Irigaray's notorious reading of *khora* comes in her *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), esp. 243-364.

entrance and space between,”<sup>43</sup> which designates the space of desire that, by definition, resists being suppressed by a single and permanent definition. Instead, Irigaray writes, “desire demands a sense of attraction: a change in the interval,” a displacement in relations of proximity or distance.<sup>44</sup> Desire demands that this space *between*, this interval, be “a changing dynamic”—in other words, a dynamic threshold that can remake not only space and time but transcendence and immanence.<sup>45</sup> The dynamism that Irigaray stresses recalls de Certeau’s distinction of place and space (as well as his distinction of strategy and tactic), in particular the insinuation of temporality into his conception of space. Unlike place, which remains static and synchronic, space includes the temporal components of unfolding and change required for Irigaray’s dynamic interval that *takes place*.<sup>46</sup> In this way, she disrupts what she sees as Lacan’s static binary in transforming femininity from a gap to a threshold.

This threshold is, moreover, “always *half-open*” as “a threshold and reception of exchange” that is at once “an opening onto a beyond” and “a limit that the other may or may not penetrate.”<sup>47</sup> Hence it combines finitude with radical openness, which recalls Žižek’s description of a finite opening onto an infinite abyss. He, like Irigaray, imagines a human subject as a passage, a threshold. However, Irigaray’s description of such a threshold as half-open activates this position *between* via a dynamic *khora* that intermixes action and passion along the lines of self-*assujettissement*.<sup>48</sup> It refuses a reduction of woman as

<sup>43</sup> Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 8.

<sup>45</sup> Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 8; see also 18.

<sup>46</sup> The temporal dimension of unfolding also corresponds to Derrida’s *différance* as spacing and temporizing—both dynamic processes.

<sup>47</sup> Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 18, 17.

<sup>48</sup> This French term can mean subjection, subjugation, subjectivation, even subjectivization. I leave this term untranslated to play on this ambiguity and to keep all of these possible meanings in play. It plays an important role in Foucault’s discussion of ethics and sexuality. See Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 2: *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 25-37 and 53-62.

*khora* to “a body-matter marked by their signifiers” in a passive sense.<sup>49</sup> Likewise, it refuses reducing her to a depository for “the remainders produced by the operation of language,” by which Irigaray means masculine discourse.<sup>50</sup> Instead, Irigaray’s half-open threshold suggests a dynamic *khora* able to change the interval *between*—the interval of her desire—according to tactics similar to those of self-*assujettissement* in which power is not centrally and statically located (as in the phallus or the State) but is dispersed and relational (along the lines that Michel Foucault describes).

Weil’s reading of *khora* resonates with Irigaray’s insofar as Weil sees this feminine space as escaping formal, ontological reduction in remaining “outside of forms” (6.2.351). She, too, views *khora*’s spatial and ontological impossibility productively, allowing *khora* to stand in the half-open threshold that Irigaray describes. As half-open, it marks a space for inactive action or active passivity, a technique of reflexive self-*assujettissement* that calls for a paradoxical agency. When Weil writes in her reflections on *khora* “to conserve in oneself only that which is passive” (6.2.351), she implicitly maintains this form of agency insofar as conserving is an action that a human subject performs. She acts to conserve what is inactive; she is active with respect to what is passive. This exemplifies that form of self-subjecting subjectivity that Weil articulates in her mystical and political tactics as “inactive action on oneself” (6.2.351). Furthermore, Weil reads *khora* in relation to *mystics*, thereby relating this half-open, feminine threshold to tactics such as decreation and attention on the edge of the void. A mystical subject takes the place of *khora* by positioning herself on the feminine side of sexual difference, the side of the not-whole or not-all. This position is not limited to women, however, as men can also occupy this space. There are, Lacan says, “men who are just as

<sup>49</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 96. This comes from Irigaray’s essay “Cosi Fan Tutti,” her critical reading of Lacan’s Seminar XX.

<sup>50</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 90.

good as women” on this score, such as John of the Cross—in other words, “the ones we call mystics.”<sup>51</sup> This is the impact of Weil’s claim that this feminine space remains “outside of forms”: the *jouissance* associated with it remains beyond, as supplementary. This mystical subject “has a supplementary *jouissance*.”<sup>52</sup>

## Jouissance

What is *jouissance*? It is pleasure that is excessive and overwhelming; it is pleasure that crosses the line, that goes too far and is no longer pleasurable. *Jouissance* is transgressive—it has to be since, according to Lacan, “without a transgression there is no access to *jouissance*.”<sup>53</sup> Indeed, access to *jouissance* implies an acceptance of death, meaning that it potentially exceeds not only pleasure but life.<sup>54</sup> These stakes of life and death reiterate that body plays an important part in *jouissance*, for body is that finite limit of being that opens onto the infinite. Hence desire and *jouissance* retain a corporeal trace since that Other here is, according to Lacan, “symbolized by the body.”<sup>55</sup> This Other is a bodily Other who, in Lacan’s terminology, “can thus be only the Other sex.”<sup>56</sup> Hence questions of sexual difference are not divorced from questions of body. This resonates with what Irigaray describes as an ethics of the passions that calls for reimagined relations between form, matter, interval, and limit.<sup>57</sup> Along these lines, body functions as a threshold, a space of exchange and interaction, in which its

<sup>51</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 76.

<sup>52</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 73. For a helpful reading of *jouissance* in Seminar XX, particularly in relation to knowledge, see Bruce Fink, “Knowledge and *Jouissance*,” in *Reading Seminar XX*, ed. Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 21-45.

<sup>53</sup> Lacan, *Seminar VII*, 177.

<sup>54</sup> See Lacan, *Seminar VII*, 189.

<sup>55</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 38.

<sup>56</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 39, translation modified.

<sup>57</sup> Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 12; see also 17.

borders “are wed in an embrace that transcends all limits.”<sup>58</sup> *Jouissance* is experienced bodily: a body, Lacan writes, “is something that enjoys itself (*cela se jouit*).”<sup>59</sup> Desire and *jouissance* are felt corporeally as sensual experiences. Roland Barthes captures this sensuality in his description of *jouissance*: “it granulates, it crackles, it caresses, it grates, it cuts, it comes.”<sup>60</sup> *Jouissance* is a corporeal experience, experienced in this case by a woman’s body.

Feminine *jouissance* is transgressive, for it is, according to Lacan, in “the realm of the infinite” as “a supplementation of this not-whole” that Lacan calls woman.<sup>61</sup> Since this *jouissance* is hers, and because she is not-whole discursively or ontologically, it is impossible to contain either her or her *jouissance* in discourse. Not only is it impossible to talk about Woman, it is also impossible to talk about her supplementary *jouissance*, which, like her, is both lack and excess. Not even a woman who experiences this *jouissance* that is hers can say or know anything about it; her feminine *jouissance*, Lacan maintains, is an experience “about which she herself perhaps knows nothing if not that she experiences it—that much she knows. She knows it, of course, when it comes (*arrive*).”<sup>62</sup> This description reveals its kinship with mystical experience of the kind that Weil’s spiritual itinerant hopes to have: she can experience decreative passage only when God arrives and carries her across the ontological threshold of creation. Mystical testimony thus follows the same format as testimony of feminine

<sup>58</sup> Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 18.

<sup>59</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 23.

<sup>60</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 67.

<sup>61</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 103, 35. It is important to note that though Lacan exscribes Woman by crossing her out, he does so based on the capital W’s signification of universality (represented by *La* in the French *La femme*). The same is not true of woman, with a lowercase w, which for Lacan designates “the signifier that is, nevertheless, common and even indispensable.” See Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 73.

<sup>62</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 74.

*jouissance*, which “consists in saying that they experience it, but know nothing about it.”<sup>63</sup> How could they? It ex-sists; it is exscribed, crossed out, barred from (masculine) discourse and ontology. Indeed, Lacan asserts that it is just this experience of feminine or mystical *jouissance* that puts these human subjects “on the path of ex-sistence.”<sup>64</sup>

It is also what puts them on the mystical path, for these experiences of feminine *jouissance* situate woman in relation to God. Their inability to be put into language and thus into discursive knowledge recalls apophatic or negative theology, which cannot capture anything of an infinitely ineffable and always excessive God. That they take place in terms of ex-sistence resembles the apophatic anthropology that corresponds to this theology. This points toward Lacan’s provocative suggestion that one face of the Other, “the God face,” be interpreted based on feminine *jouissance*.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, Lacan asserts, “it is in the opaque place of *jouissance* of the Other...that the Supreme Being is situated.”<sup>66</sup> There is, then, an important link between feminine *jouissance* and God, for “it is insofar as her *jouissance* is radically Other that woman has more of a relationship to God.”<sup>67</sup> Her supplementary *jouissance* grants her this relationship with God—a relationship that exceeds ontology, discourse, and knowledge. This means that, since access comes in experiencing feminine *jouissance*, a mystic’s position is feminine, on the side of the not-whole, because it is from there that she can have more of a relationship with God. Hence Woman-Other-God forms an impossible trinity that ex-sists in the feminine space of the not-whole—the not-whole that is, at the same time, excessive (not enough yet too much). Supplementary, feminine *jouissance* serves as an access to this impossible trinity, which is why a mystic positions herself on the

<sup>63</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 76.

<sup>64</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 77.

<sup>65</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 77.

<sup>66</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 82.

<sup>67</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 83.

side of the not-whole. Insofar as this subject occupies the existential space of Woman, the space of the Other, she occupies the space of God. This space is an interval, a space *between* that is also a space *beyond*.

It is an interval, a threshold, that is mystical and that is marked by sexual difference. Hence questions of sexual difference cannot be dissociated from questions of mystical experience. This means that Weil’s mystical itinerary aims at a distinctly feminine space of ex-sistence—a space that de Certeau calls an elsewhere. A desire for decreation, which is a desire for passage across an ontological threshold, is a distinctly feminine desire that highlights the play between lack and excess: a mystical itinerant gives up everything for the chance to gain even more, to gain everything and then some. Highlighting the mystical dimension of this feminine position of not-all places emphasis on excess and remainder rather than lack and gap, viewing the hole as a passage rather than an insufficiency. Irigaray also highlights this kind of excessive remainder as she describes (in terms that come very close to those used by Weil, de Certeau, and John of the Cross) a soul’s “nocturnal wandering” that pushes “onward into the night until it finally becomes a transverberating beam of light, a luminous shadow. Onward into a *touch* that opens the ‘soul’ again to contact with divine force.”<sup>68</sup> Echoing the linguistic and anthropological *apophasis* of Dionysius and Eckhart as well as the corporeal and discursive tactics of Lacan, Irigaray describes “an endless, open space...between here and there” that is “neither a *this* nor a *that*, not a *here* any more than a *there*. No being, no places are designated.”<sup>69</sup> She describes *khora*, which gives place without taking place.

<sup>68</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 193. These quotations come from the chapter entitled “*La Mystérique*,” which linguistically fuses four elements: mysticism, hysteria, mystery, and the femininity fundamental to all three.

<sup>69</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 193.

*Khora*, then, marks the space of *jouissance* since in this impossible space that is a void, a gulf, an abyss, a consuming and inexhaustible flood “sweeps over the ‘I’ in an excess of excess.”<sup>70</sup> This excess engulfs and flows through the hole of “I” that an awaiting mystical subject makes via her tactics of self-*assujettissement* for just this purpose, for just this chance of ecstatic experience—the kind that she can experience without being able to know or say anything about it. Such an experience is that of feminine *jouissance*: transgressive, ecstatic, excessive. This experience and this *jouissance* are, Irigaray writes, what “make me (become) God in my *jouissance*.”<sup>71</sup> It is this impossible, mystical experience of feminine *jouissance* that weaves through the Lacanian Woman-Other-God trinity, for “it is insofar as her *jouissance* is radically Other than woman has more of a relationship to God.”<sup>72</sup> It is as woman that a human subject has a relation to the Other—which is to say, God.

Furthermore, Irigaray asserts that this feminine space marks “the only place in the history of the West in which woman speaks and acts so publicly.”<sup>73</sup> Thus it is in—and by way of—the impossible non-place of her *jouissance* that woman can articulate and engage in political tactics of social engagement. Speaking and acting from no-place, neither here nor there, her politics exemplifies tactics (as de Certeau describes them) in their lack of, and disordering of, place. Her political tactics space (i.e. disrupt) circumscribed, closed, stable places according to her dis-position as lack and excess. The space she has in mind is the one that de Certeau describes, namely, a disrupting and mobile space that includes a temporal component insofar as it

<sup>70</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 195. This happens, moreover, when “all is passive waiting, unpremeditated abandon...unbearable sweetness and bitterness, aridity, dizzy horror before the boundless void.” Irigaray captures here something of a spiritual itinerant’s experience of waiting attentively on the threshold for God to complete her decreation. See Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 194.

<sup>71</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 200.

<sup>72</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 83.

<sup>73</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 191.

continues to unfold. Spacing along these lines recalls the movement of *différance* that Derrida describes as spacing and temporizing—and that remains as open-ended as desire. Thus Irigaray calls for a political movement “to put the accent back on space,”<sup>74</sup> a space of this kind. Her call is to reconfigure political space in light of these ecstatic, feminine lines, marshalling the resources of ~~Woman~~, *khora*, and *jouissance* as impossible yet necessary, taking place in a threshold—a threshold that is biopolitical insofar as it, like *jouissance*, requires facing and accepting death. Indeed, this threshold positions itself in that impossible terrain of death as that passage outside of imagination but within experience.<sup>75</sup>

At the same time, this threshold remains mystical, opening toward the Woman-Other-God trinity that ex-sists and that she desires to experience thanks to a threshold crossing. Hence this threshold space is, like *jouissance*, *between* and *beyond*, political and mystical. It is there that knowledge and love intertwine insofar as there, Irigaray writes, “I know it/myself and by knowing, I love it/myself and by loving, I desire it/myself.”<sup>76</sup> Desire remains, for love is always impossible, always the impossible, which Antigone demonstrates as well as any woman.<sup>77</sup> But this does not mean that love (or any other impossibility) does not take place: as Žižek writes, “THE IMPOSSIBLE DOES HAPPEN...‘miracles’ like Love (or political revolution) DO occur.”<sup>78</sup> It is for just this reason that desire endures and that a human subject always desires—that to

<sup>74</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 98.

<sup>75</sup> It would be an experience of what Lacan calls the real: a trauma, a radical split, a break with discourse and knowledge and an excursion passing into the exception that is constitutive of the universal. Žižek describes the Lacanian real according to three modalities: “the abyss of the primordial life-Thing,” “the meaningless letter/formula,” and “the mysterious *je ne sais quoi*, the unfathomable ‘something’ that introduces a self-division into an ordinary object.” See Žižek, *On Belief*, 82. For more detailed accounts of the real, see Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 24-31 and 90-92.

<sup>76</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 200.

<sup>77</sup> See Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 87.

<sup>78</sup> Žižek, *On Belief*, 84.

be a human subject, particularly a feminine human subject, is to desire.<sup>79</sup>

## Yes

Thus it is with her love, her desire, her body, that—open and exposed thanks to self-subjection—a human subject performatively utters *yes*. But she has said *yes* all along. Weil's mystical and political tactics call for an itinerant human subject to perform *yes* in every step. In every practice, she enacts her *yes* as a performance of her desire for an other toward whom she advances and to whom she will give herself passionately. Like her desire, *yes* must be without condition, for Weil asserts that “this *yes* has virtue only if it is absolutely unconditional.”<sup>80</sup> She cannot hold back; she must expose herself completely to an other, whether this other is God (as in decreation) or another human subject (as in political obligation). Her *yes* exposes her and her desire: in saying it, she turns herself inside-out, exposing her most interior space to an other whom she welcomes. In doing so, she crisscrosses public and private, opening herself to alterity and allowing it to penetrate her. She tactically makes herself into a threshold across which she desires an other to pass, maintaining this self-spacing through active passivity.<sup>81</sup> In saying *yes*, then, she says *yes* to active passivity via self-*assujettissement* and self-exposure. She does so, however, without necessarily entering language, for *yes*, according to Weil, takes place in silence as an extra-discursive operator, a performative utterance of the impossible. It is what Derrida calls “language without language,” exceeding and incising language

<sup>79</sup> Indeed, on Irigaray's account, the knowledge from which woman is barred “thereby becomes desire.” Hence her exscripted ex-sistence cannot but yield desire. See Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 195.

<sup>80</sup> Weil, *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes*, 58.

<sup>81</sup> As in the exercises of cross and decreation, she makes room within herself for this other to cross what Weil calls “the very threshold of decreation” (6.2.474).

through its opening.<sup>82</sup> Hence “it is and is not of language”; it stands in the threshold, between and beyond, as an originary affirmation.<sup>83</sup>

*Yes* is an opening, a cut, an arche-originary and absolute performative that is nevertheless never present as such. Like Woman for Lacan, it does not properly exist; it ex-sists, as an incisive exscription through which a subject of any kind passes. This means, as Derrida notes, that “I” does not preexist *yes* but is instituted in it: to say “I” is to say “yes-I,” so that human subjectivity emerges from the incisive opening of *yes*; what emerges is “yes-I.”<sup>84</sup> “I” therefore passes through the linguistic hole cut by *yes*. Anything connected to human subjectivity—agency, discursive position, practice, even ontology—passes through *yes*, this “absolute performative.”<sup>85</sup> In addition, *yes* is not only affirmation but double affirmation, for as Derrida writes, *yes* “is originally, in its very structure, a response.”<sup>86</sup> *Yes* is always *yes*, *yes*; it “doubles itself in advance,”<sup>87</sup> which means that it is always already plural and thus always already displaced.

*Yes* opens itself as a confirmation and, in doing so, opens itself to an other. Insofar as it is a form of address, it addresses itself as a response to an other. It also continually promises to confirm itself with every action; *yes* promises to confirm *yes*, which in turn makes promising possible, which makes discourse, address, and responsibility possible. In short, *yes* makes possible and allows for a relation—any relation—to an other through its incisive opening: it at once inaugurates and confirms the possibility of relation (and thus of politics). *Yes* is the unconditional space that opens up relation in which a human

<sup>82</sup> Jacques Derrida, “A Number of Yes (*Nombre de oui*),” trans. Brian Holmes, 101, in *Deconstruction: A Reader*, ed. Martin McQuillan (New York: Routledge, 2000), 97-106.

<sup>83</sup> Derrida, “A Number of Yes,” 101.

<sup>84</sup> Derrida, “A Number of Yes,” 104.

<sup>85</sup> Derrida, “A Number of Yes,” 103.

<sup>86</sup> Derrida, “A Number of Yes,” 104.

<sup>87</sup> Derrida, “A Number of Yes,” 104.

subject says and performs not only *yes, yes* but *yes, welcome*. That is, *yes* enacts a tactic of hospitality in which a human subject promises to welcome any other, no matter whom—hence its lack of conditionality, upon which Weil insists. Derrida formulates this in what might be called his hospitable imperative: “let us say *yes to who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*.”<sup>88</sup>

Hospitality is as excessive as *yes*, passing beyond the borders of possibility. This border crossing into the impossible shows hospitality’s rapport not only with *yes* but with desire. Derrida conceives of “*desire as hospitality*,”<sup>89</sup> pointing to the abyssal quality of both as openings, on the threshold between possibility and impossibility. Desire opens a human subject and keeps her open. Like Weil’s mystical itinerant who waits attentively on the threshold of creation, full of desire for God to arrive and carry her across in a passage of decreation, this subject performs her *yes* as she says to an other, “‘*enter, enter without waiting...hurry up and come in, ‘come inside,’ ‘come within me,’ not only toward me, but within me: occupy me, take place in me.*”<sup>90</sup> This call, addressed to an other, points not only to desire *as* hospitality but to hospitality *as* desire. Here, a hospitable human subject calls an other to cross not only the threshold of her home but the threshold of herself, her subjective and corporeal limits, via the *yes* through which she turns herself inside-out. This self-exposure to alterity performs *yes* and, in doing so, demonstrates the desire inherent in her performance. *Yes*, as a call to transgress limits, recalls *jouissance*—transgression *par excellence*—as an excess that rushes over and submerges her in the impossible and the inexpressible, outside of phallic discourse and ontology. This call to come inside is a call

<sup>88</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 77.

<sup>89</sup> Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 127.

<sup>90</sup> Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 123, my italics.

of active passivity in which a human subject submits to being taken over, to being penetrated by, an other.

Through her active passivity, this subject carves a hole through which alterity can pass and thanks to which she can, in Irigaray’s words, “melt, mingle, and melt again.”<sup>91</sup> *Yes* expresses, impossibly, feminine *jouissance*. *Yes*, like feminine *jouissance*, is always without place; it is not locatable, not circumscribable; it always slips away, refusing to be pinned down—particularly insofar as it can melt, mingle, and melt again. In other words, it shifts; it wanders; it stays on the move; it remains open. *Yes*, like feminine *jouissance*, like Weil’s spiritual or political subject, lacks place, continues moving tactically, insinuates itself in an other’s place—mingling before melting again and moving on. For Weil, *yes* says *yes* to love, but it says *yes* to shattered love, to love as passion, to love insofar as “love is the essential, infinite, absolute desire that no joy can fill until it overflows.”<sup>92</sup> Hence she figures love as desire, an infinite and essential lack that remains unfilled. What is excessive about this love as desire is its lack. Desire not only opens but leaves open a human subject so that she remains exposed, exscribed, ex-sisting. Through desire, she turns herself inside-out and waits attentively for an other whom she desires to arrive. She remains on the threshold for a divine or human other to cross and come into her, all the while repeating her *yes*.

Her desire, as constitutive lack, is excessive. *Yes*, too, is excessive. It remains outside of language and of existence, always already repeating itself as a response. It indicates, for Derrida, “that there is address to the other.”<sup>93</sup> It stands as the excessive condition that opens a space for and makes possible any politics, any relation to an other, which comes through an opening, a hole, of desire. *Yes* is also the condition of human

<sup>91</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 196; see also 200.

<sup>92</sup> Weil, *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes*, 59.

<sup>93</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce,” trans. Tina Kendall and Shari Benstock, 299, in Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 256-309.

subjectivity, which passes through the same hole of desire and reiterates her desire with every *yes*. This is because, Derrida notes, saying *yes* also means saying “*yes-I*” or “*yes-I-say-to-the-other*.”<sup>94</sup> This inaugurates, by way of desire, both a speaking human subject and the other whom she always addresses and responds to, the one whom she welcomes in experiences of ethical hospitality or of mystical exercise—both equally excessive, both equally impossible. Every *yes* is a confirmation and a response, a call as well as an opening. *Yes* keeps her open as she continues to enact *yes* in waiting for an other to arrive. As Derrida remarks, “*yes* keeps restarting itself, an infinite number of times.”<sup>95</sup> Even as this subject says *yes* to passion, *yes* to active passivity, *yes* to ethical or mystical hospitality, *yes* to decreation, *yes* to death, *yes* to God, *yes* to mystical passage, *yes* to crossing the threshold, she continues to say *yes*. Always another *yes*.

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<sup>94</sup> Derrida, “Ulysses Gramophone,” 298.

<sup>95</sup> Derrida, “Ulysses Gramophone,” 309.