Introduction

Making Metaphysics Matter

The Signifying Body argues for a relationship between ontology and ethics. Rather than reinforcing the traditional view of ontology and ethics as distinct from one another, I argue that Being is revealed in and through an ethical relation with a wholly different Other. The role of language and its relation to ontology and ethics is central to this study. Martin Heidegger argues that it is possible to approach ontology and ontological questions only if we escape the representational prison house of metaphysical language. The Signifying Body attempts to provide a model for a new language—a language beyond metaphysics, a language of physical signification. Through a close reading of the work of Martin Heidegger, Luce Irigaray, and Frantz Fanon, I argue that representational language impedes ethics but signification enacts it. I propose a language that is ethical, not one about ethics but one of ethics, or more precisely a language that is ethics. This language is gestural, corporeal, proximate. It is performative, not constative. It cannot be captured or defined. It is in process. It is given. In the gift of ethical language is authentic Being-in-the world realized through a relation with the Other. Or to put it in Heideggerian terms, we could say that language discloses Being in the lighting of the ethical encounter with the Other. Being is revealed in difference, in my difference from the Other.

The work of Heidegger, Irigaray, and Fanon is central to this study because each of their respective critiques of metaphysics, phallogocentrism, and colonialism contains a fundamental critique of language,
particular representational language. Furthermore, Heidegger’s critique of metaphysical language is essential to the theories of ethics proposed by Irigaray and Fanon. Heidegger anticipated the end of philosophy, by which he meant the end of metaphysical abstraction and false objectivity, and called for a new language and a new way of thinking. Heidegger made clear that asking the question of Being within the language of metaphysics was impossible, for the question is always already circumscribed by the discourse it seeks to escape. “Philosophy, even when it becomes ‘critical’ through Descartes and Kant, always follows the course of metaphysical representation. It thinks from beings back to beings with a glance in passing toward Being.” Irigaray argues that ethics, too, is impossible without a new language, for there is no female subject of discourse and hence no possibility for an encounter between two: “the language system, or system of languages, doubled or accompanied by epistemological formalism and formal logic, takes from women and excludes them from the threshold of living in the word... If this threshold (this ground that is no ground) is ever to be lived for women’s benefit, they need language, some language.” Both Heidegger and Irigaray argue that language, particularly the language of philosophy, has been colonized by scientific discourse and mathematical logic. For Irigaray this results in the fiction of a universal/neuter subject that robs women of political, civil, and ethical identities. For Heidegger, the rise of science and technology, which trains us to think in certain ways, precludes our capacity to think otherwise. The distance and objectivity of scientific language prevents us from seeing things as they are, and technological innovation places emphasis on doing and making at the expense of thinking. Thus, “Philosophy turns into the empirical science of man, of all of what can become for man the experiential object of his technology, the technology by which he establishes himself in the world by working on it in the manifold modes of making and shaping.” These factors inhibit our capacity to see Being. Heidegger argued for a different language, one that would disclose (or un conceal the ‘lighting’ of) Being to us and thus initiate a new relationship between language and the world. Language is not “mere speech”; rather, it is the “house of Being which comes to pass from Being and is pervaded by Being.” It is not I that express language but rather language that expresses me.

Language is also a predominant concern for Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks*, particularly the relationship between language and representation. In this text, Fanon undertakes an interrogation of representation—visual representation, and demonstrates how race and racism are discursive regimes predicated on a scopic economy. Colonial regimes make particular
use of the visibly discursive nature of race. “Colonial discourse produces the
colonized as a social reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely
knowable and visible. It resembles a form of narrative whereby the produc-
tivity and circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a reformed and rec-
nognizable totality. It employs a system of representation, a regime of truth,
that is structurally similar to realism.”5 The black man is robbed of a Being-
for-itself because he is imprisoned by a white gaze that cannot recognize him
as an ethical Other, but rather reads him according to a string of empty
racial signifiers. These empty, because phantastic, signifiers constitute a vi-
sual grammar of the body, the syntax of which results in the “fact” of black-
ness. “Sealed into that crushing objecthood,” the black man’s body is fixed
by pre-existing representations of blackness: “I subjected myself to an ob-
jective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics;
and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency,
fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships.”6 His experience of his own body is
fractured by the language of a “racial epidermal schema,” resulting in his
“corporeal malediction.”7

In demonstrating that race is constituted in a visual field, Fanon ex-
poses the potential for its subversion. He demonstrates the possibility of
resignification at a visual level: how the racialized gaze, which refuses rec-
iprocal recognition, can be returned, interrupted, reversed, and resigni-
fied. If the body is a field of signification that is interpreted visually,
Fanon leads us to a new language, a resignification of the body through a
subversion of the look. If, as Heidegger shows, metaphysics relies on a
representative economy, it has also relied on a scopic economy which reg-
ulates meaning through the visual. The dominant gaze has ordered and
subsequently produced a grammar of the body justifying the racism and
sexism of colonialism and patriarchy.

The Signifying Body, as a whole, recognizes the role played by lan-
guage in any investigation of Being and ethics and, at the same time, attends
to the emphasis placed by Heidegger and Irigaray on the proximate, and by
Irigaray and Fanon on the corporeal. The bodies in the texts of Jordan, Co-
etzee, Morrison, and DeLillo, through a language of physical signification,
exhibit what Heidegger considers to be “authentic Being-in-the-world” and
allow us to glimpse Being in and through the relation of these beings to one
another. That is, they show us examples of the authentic existence that is
the condition by which Heidegger argues we can perceive Being, and I
argue we can achieve an ethical relation with the Other. Moreover, the sig-
nifying language that leads to an ethical exchange within the confines of the
literary text enables the reader, herself, to undergo the experience of au-
thentic Being-in-the-world. For it is through the act of reading that we
experience the possibility of “authentic Being ethically.”
Irigaray’s ethics of sexual difference requires a futural becoming of male and female subjects, but such a becoming is also tied to an escape from metaphysical conceptions of the subject, which privilege the masculine. It is the elision of the question of sexual difference from the question of Being that has resulted in women being cast as the support or ground of Being. Irigaray’s demand for a sexuate ontology relies upon a language that will accommodate the feminine and thereby enable a culture of difference.

We must go back to a moment of prediscursive experience, recommence everything, all the categories by which we understand things, the world, subject-object divisions, recommence everything and pause at the ‘mystery, as familiar as it is unexplained, of a light which, illuminating the rest, remains at its source in obscurity.’ . . . This operation is absolutely necessary in order to bring the maternal-feminine into language: at the level of theme, motif, subject, articulation, syntax, and so on. Which requires passage through the night, a light that remains in obscurity.

Although Irigaray accuses Heidegger of reproducing the grounding of Being in his “forgetting of air,” that is, of failing to acknowledge the material feminine element that serves as Being’s outside, I argue here that Heideggerian ontology enables us to think matter beyond representation and thus achieve a nongrounded metaphysics. Reconceiving the relation between matter and representation is central to a formulation of ethical difference, for it is only by imagining matter not tied to representation that we can foresee an ontology without ground, from which multiple expressions of difference in Being can arise. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that through this recasting of the material, Heideggerian metaphysics not only can make way for an ethics of sexual difference, such as theorized by Irigaray, but also can, importantly, make way for an ethics of racial difference, which is a key concern for Fanon.

In Black Skin White Masks, Fanon argues that the black man is deprived of an ontology. Racial difference, like sexual difference, has not been given ontological weight because traditional metaphysics, in its failure to distinguish ontic from ontological difference, has not only understood Being on a masculine model, parading as an unmarked universal, it has also thought Being in terms of another false universal: whiteness. The black man, according to Fanon, is deprived of Being itself because his existence is always already inscribed in and through his relation to the white man.
Every ontology is made unattainable in a colonized and civi-
lized society. It would seem that this has not been given suffi-
cient attention by those who have discussed the question. In
the Weltanschauung of a colonized people there is an impu-
rity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation. . . .
Ontology—once it is finally permitted as leaving existence by
the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of
the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he
must be black in relation to the white man. Some will take it
on themselves to remind us that this proposition has a con-
verse. I say this is false. The black man has no ontological re-
sistance in the eyes of the white man . . . his metaphysics . . .
were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civiliza-
tion that he did not know and that imposed itself on him.12

Because sex and race have been considered ontic differences, that is
characteristics or attributes of beings, and not ontological ones, elements
of Being itself, true racial and sexual difference do not exist. As a conse-
quense an ethical relation with the wholly Other is precluded. According
to Fanon, the black man exists only insofar as the white man can have
something to define himself against. In Irigarayan terms, we would say
that the black man is the other of the white man’s Same, not the Other of
his Other. Irigaray argues that sexual difference operates in a similar way.
It can be seen to enable metaphysical logic because Being grounds itself in
an origin that is feminized (the maternal origin), but the feminine itself
has no place in such a metaphysics. The female subject, like the black sub-
ject, “has no ontological resistance”; it does not exist. The Signifying
Body examines the role of grounding in order to make the case that rep-
resentation and the representational language of metaphysics preclude
ethics. The notion of grounding is essential to Irigaray’s critique of meta-
physics, and she follows Heidegger in observing the dependency in meta-
physical thinking of assuming a prior ground to ontology, even in the act
of asking the question of that grounding. I take seriously Irigaray’s ex-
hortation to imagine a metaphysics without ground, from which an ethi-
cal relation with the Other can follow, and I consider Heidegger’s
interrogation of metaphysical language to be the first step. Rather than
reinforcing the traditional view of ontology and ethics as distinct from
one another, I propose we consider Being as the ethical relation with the
wholly different Other.

By reading Irigaray and Fanon in relation to Heidegger’s critique of
metaphysics, I hope to shed light on and ask new questions of each. For
Heidegger, the nature of our ontological existence can only be revealed or
disclosed to us through authentic Being-in-the-world. We must get
beyond the so-called objective distance inherent in metaphysical conceptions of Being and practice ways of Being-in-the-world that originate through relation and proximity. Irigaray maintains that an ethical relation with the Other also depends on proximity, an opening, a nearness that will prevent a reduction of difference to the same. Heidegger’s critique of representational language can allow us to reexamine the ethical relation of difference, but it is also fruitful to bring ethics to bear on Heidegger’s ontological inquiry. Indeed, it is Fanon, as we shall see, who allows the possibility for ontology to be glimpsed in and through the process of reciprocal recognition with the Other. However philosophically catachrestic it may be to posit such a question, I would like to ask whether ethics can lead us to ontology. Might it be in the relation with the Other that Being is revealed? Or to put it another way, I am suggesting that the Being that is, to use Heidegger’s phrase, “unconcealed” through this new language is ethics: Being is the ethical relation with the wholly different Other.

As he makes clear in his “Letter on Humanism,” Heidegger eschewed ethics because he considered ethical questions to be tainted by the scientific logic of metaphysics, the same logic that his inquiry into ontology seeks to get beyond or before. However, there is clearly a relation between Irigaray’s ethics and Heidegger’s “fundamental” ontology. Certainly, the emphasis on nearness and *mitsein* in Heidegger’s work can be understood as harbingers of Irigaray’s ethical project. But the connection is more apparent if we consider Heidegger’s use of the root of the word ethics (ethos)—abode or dwelling place, in his discussion of Heraclitus.

If the name “ethics,” in keeping with the basic meaning of the word *ethos*, should now say that “ethics” ponders the abode of man, then that thinking which thinks the truth of Being as the primordial element of man, as one who eksists, is in itself the original ethics. However, this thinking is not ethics in the first instance, because it is ontology. For ontology always thinks solely the being (*on*) in its Being.

Irigarayan ethics should be seen as consistent with this view. Irigaray is as invested as Heidegger in revisiting the foundational suppositions of metaphysics and the exclusions upon which such foundations rest: “From my point of view, it is not necessary to separate truth from ethicality, to separate, in other words, ethicality from the question of the other’s to be. Since the other is—is already, perhaps will be, has been, has in himself a seed of the to be in so far as he exists—I must respect him as the other which he is.”
Thus both Heidegger and Irigaray can be seen to think ontology and ethics together. It is not the concept of ethics or ontology that impedes such a relationship, but rather the terminology, the language, we have heretofore used to express that relationship. This is why Heidegger and Irigaray take language as a primary point of departure in their analyses of ontology and ethics and why I would suggest that any attempt to practically engage with their philosophies requires a new model of language. To say, then, that ontology is ethics or Being is ethics is to use these terms in a nonmetaphysical sense. If Heidegger’s inquiry into the meaning of Being is to lead us away from Being as presence and the copula—Being is, then the project implies a new understanding, a new conception, of Being. Thus when I say Being is ethics I risk the copula because Being is no longer Being, as it has heretofore been understood, and ethics is no longer ethics. Both terms, exceeding their metaphysical underpinnings, cause us also to reexamine the copula—the to be itself. But, of course, writing this phrase, “Being is ethics,” cannot in itself effect such a transformation. Each element of the phrase is still attached to its sign and its representation. The task before us then is to loose the signifier from the signified, to escape the fixity of representation by an ever-changing signification. It is such a possibility that Heidegger augurs when he calls for the “end of philosophy” or the closure of metaphysics. Interestingly, ethical difference is also made possible by the development of such a language.

In placing these philosophers side by side I hope to enact the kind of “revealing” or recognition that each considers fundamental to ontological becoming and the ethical relation. It is ethics itself that might be glimpsed in the expression of the relation between Irigaray, Heidegger, and Fanon. Although Black Skin White Masks is shaped by different circumstances and seems to be engaged with different questions, I would argue that Fanon is preoccupied with many of the issues central to the philosophies of Heidegger and Irigaray, particularly their attention to language, ontology, and ethics. I hope that in reading his work with theirs we might see the significance of his analysis of racial difference to ontological and ethical becoming. Indeed, Fanon’s work on race and the failure of ethics in the colonial situation is important to any discussion of ethical difference. As many critics have remarked, Irigaray’s ethical model is compromised by her limited conception of difference, specifically her failure to attend to racial difference. One of Irigaray’s most recent works, Between East and West, is an attempt to rectify this omission. Irigaray sees an analogy between a masculinist culture of the same and white Western hegemony. However, she warns that multiculturalism, rather than allowing for difference, seeks to subsume differences into a broader, albeit fragmented, universal. Penelope Deutscher argues
that Irigaray’s analysis falls short because she fails to model her theory of cultural difference on or after her model of sexual difference. Irigaray’s conception of sexual difference does not refer to real differences between men and women, but rather depends upon an ideal future difference, the conditions for which are not yet in place. We currently live in a masculinist culture that does not recognize the feminine. By contrast, the theory of racial and cultural difference articulated in Between East and West depends upon conceptions of race and culture already in place. Irigaray’s “defense of a multicultural integration that does not assimilate difference assumes as a viable referent (rather than an open reference to that which is to come) the differences between cultures.”\textsuperscript{18} Thus Irigaray’s theory of cultural difference risks devolving into the rigid binaries she critiques in relation to sexual difference, or at best a proliferation of “differences” which become facets of the same. Deutscher argues that the task in thinking racial and cultural difference is to “ask how cultural difference can not be represented today.”\textsuperscript{19} I understand the issue, instead, to be to imagine a way to articulate cultural and racial differences that are not representable. As we will see in the pages that follow, Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics enables us to consider how an ethics of sexual and racial difference might be possible if we rethink representation and its limits.

Representation and Ontology

In his interrogation of metaphysics, Heidegger recast a question that had plagued metaphysicians for centuries. Whereas Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Nietzsche, and others had each inquired into the nature of the world—How does the subject know the world? What principles does it act in accordance with?—Heidegger reminded us that the more fundamental question had not been asked. How does this subject, this being, come to be? We cannot inquire into the nature of the world and the subject’s relation to it until we inquire into the nature of the subject itself. How does the subject come to be, so as to be able to act in and be acted upon by this world? Indeed, if we can think of presence at all in order to pose it as a question we must surely first inquire into the presencing of that presence: how it is that this presence or being comes to be presenced? The mistake made by metaphysicians in the past, according to Heidegger, had been to assume an already posited ground or Being even in the act of asking about the nature of that being.

One of our first tasks will be to prove that if we posit an “I” or subject as that which is proximally given, we shall com-
pletely miss the phenomenal content of Dasein. **Ontologically**, every idea of a 'subject'—unless refined by a previous ontological determination of its basic character—still posits the *subjectum* along with it, no matter how vigorous one's ontical protestations against the 'soul substance' or the 'reification of consciousness.' The Thinghood itself which such reification implies must have its ontological origin demonstrated if we are to be in a position to ask what we are to understand *positively* when we think of the unreified Being of the subject, the soul, the consciousness, the spirit, the person.20

For Heidegger it was necessary to ask how it is that this given, Being, is given without resorting to ontotheological logic, that thinks itself in terms that are given of this world and not outside of it, hence invalidating the claim to a higher being outside this world or ground. Put simply then, for Heidegger, Being exceeds our capacity to represent it. The error, according to Heidegger, that metaphysicians have made since Descartes is assuming that Being itself was capable of being represented by a knowing being subject whose very Being makes representation or self-knowledge possible. In taking itself as its own ground the subject becomes both the subject and object of its own investigation.

In Heidegger’s view, the role played by representation in the metaphysical tradition cannot be underestimated. Because the Cartesian model requires a self-knowing subject—"I think therefore I am"—Being is dependent on a prior system of representation. Representational thinking allows only what can be adequately presented or thought to a self-present subject to be thought. Thus a being present to itself is the condition of subjectivity for the Cartesian subject.

In the *ego cogito sum*, the *cogitare* is understood in this essential and new sense. The *subjectum*, the fundamental certainty, is the being-represented-together-with—made secure at any time—of representing man together with the entity represented, whether something human or non-human, i.e., together with the objective. The fundamental certainty is the *me cogitare=me esse* that is at any time indubitably representable and represented. This is the fundamental equation of all reckoning belonging to the representing that is itself making itself secure. In this fundamental certainty man is sure that, as the representer of all representing, and therewith as the realm of all representedness, and hence of all certainty and truth, he is made safe and secure, i.e., *is.*21
Heidegger argues that metaphysicians from Plato to Nietzsche, because they are caught within this representational frame, are trapped in a metaphysics of presence. Both Being and time have been thought in relation to the present, and as a result our capacity to think the nature of Being and time beyond our own temporal experience is limited. On this model, it is impossible for the subject to think outside itself while its understanding of itself is already contained by/within certain paradigms, categories, or representations. Representation and metaphysics, which is dependent upon a representational economy, thus require a ground that is itself never thought.

Heidegger argues that Being cannot be understood through a prior grounding; rather, Being is something that is revealed. Building on the phenomenological method developed by Husserl, Heidegger's project is to uncover what is hidden or concealed, “to let that which shows itself be seen from itself.” But Heidegger critiques Husserlian phenomenology for attempting to impose meaning on what is revealed. By contrast, Heidegger is interested in a revealing that is unimpeded by the subject’s interpretation. Being expresses itself through relations with other beings, what Heidegger calls a Being-with or mitsein, it requires proximity and openness, and it cannot be thought in advance. This idea of relation can be understood in terms of the ethical model of sexual difference proposed by Irigaray. Irigaray builds and develops Heidegger’s notion of the proximate: the idea that being should be uncovered or revealed, rather than known or presented. But as I will argue in the pages that follow, the model proposed by Irigaray is possible only if we rethink the relation between representation and matter. In doing so we can imagine the possibilities for theorizing other kinds of difference, such as racial difference, as ethical relationships.

Irigaray and the Critique of Metaphysics

In her early influential works Speculum of the Other Woman and This Sex Which is Not One Luce Irigaray began her interrogation of Western metaphysics, calling male philosophers from Plato to Heidegger to account for the systematic elision of women from theories of the subject. Woman’s subjectivity, she argues, has yet to be theorized. Nietzsche and Lacan brought woman back into discourse, but she continued to occupy the place of no place. She was the pawn in their phallic exchange. With the publication of her Ethics of Sexual Difference in 1984, Irigaray furthered her critique of metaphysics, arguing that Western metaphysics has precluded the ethical relation. Irigaray makes clear that her attempt to pose the question of sexual difference is as important as Heidegger’s
efforts to ask the question of Being. Both questions have been excluded from metaphysical philosophy. Heidegger’s influence on Irigaray’s thought is evident and she engages directly with his work, particularly “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” (1966) and On the Way to Language (1959), respectively in two of her texts, The Forgetting of Air (1983) and The Way of Love (2002). In these later works, Heidegger refines and revises elements of his position in Being and Time. The dangers of technology and the failure and promise of language are ideas that receive increasing prominence in the later texts, though this examination begins as early as “Letter on Humanism” (1947).

In “The End of Philosophy” Heidegger returns to the work of the pre-Socratic philosophers, specifically a poem by Parmenides, in order to further develop the significance of the clearing or “opening” (lichtung) and its relation to Being and revealing. Heidegger's analysis rests on a discussion of presence and absence. He argues that the “opening” has been forgotten by philosophy even though it is the precondition for both presence and absence and hence Being itself. For “the quiet heart of the opening is the place of stillness from which alone the possibility of the belonging together of Being and thinking, that is presence and apprehending, can arise at all.”24 Heidegger suggests that we see only what is present in the opening and the presenting of that presence, but not the opening or presence itself. Rather than seeing this as a failure of perception, it is the essence of the opening to conceal itself. “If this were so, then the opening would not be the mere opening of presence, but the opening of presence concealing itself, the opening of a self-concealing sheltering.”25 Heidegger ends this short essay with the questions, “But where does the opening come from and how is it given? What speaks in the ‘There is / It gives’?”26 He suggests that this question is the task of thinking to which we should direct ourselves at the end of philosophy.

Irigaray picks up this challenge. She, too, wants to ask the question of the clearing, so as to draw our attention to another forgetting, a forgetting of which Heidegger himself is guilty, the forgetting of matter. She reminds us to reflect on the substance of the clearing and thus of Being: Of what does it consist? What is this “unthinkable that exceeds all declaration, all saying. Or posing, phenomenon, or form. While remaining the condition of possibility, the resource, the groundless ground”?27 Irigaray identifies this substance as air, and considers Heidegger’s failure to identify the material presence of air, or rather his choice to identify its presence as absence, to be indicative of his failure to attend to sexual difference. What is the material that gives birth, sustains, and nourishes? The mater matrix from which all life “is given.”
To man, free air is first of all the advent of an absence that is too great: issuing from that surrounding into which he enters. He enters into the outside. He loses that living body of a home where he stayed before: there where she used to give herself to him, where no difference yet between his/her outside and his/her inside, between her and him, feeding him from the inside, without demonstration. Letting her strength pass into him while he does nothing with it yet but become this Gestell: a living body.28

Where Heidegger argues that metaphysical inquiries into the nature of the subject have been forestalled by already positing a ground of Being in the act of asking the question of being, Irigaray develops this notion further, suggesting that this forgetting of the ground is really an originary forgetting, the forgetting of the maternal body, of which Heidegger, in his forgetting of air, is also guilty. For “[a]s long as Heidegger does not leave the ‘earth,’ he does not leave metaphysics.”29 Irigaray’s critique of metaphysics is central to her theory of ethics. Because the subject sets itself up and against an other from which it practices attachment and objectivity in order to represent it, the representational nature of traditional metaphysics precludes an ethical relation with the Other, particularly the female Other. The subject of Western metaphysics, in its representation of itself as self-knowing, effectively gives birth to itself. This capacity for self-knowledge is given through a representational economy, which requires a distance between the subject and object of knowledge. One of the first examples of this is Plato’s chora, the highly feminized receptacle into which forms enter to take their shape, to become formed, to become beings. However, as Irigaray and Derrida both have argued, a representational economy cannot represent the medium of representation. Thus, because the chora is the vehicle for representation, it is itself unrepresentable; it cannot be defined.

According to Irigaray, the forgotten condition of representation, that which enables this objectivity to take place, is the maternal body. Like the chora, she is the foundation for representation and subjectivity, yet is herself precluded from representation and full subjectivity.

So woman has not yet taken (a) place. . . . Woman is still the place, the whole of the place in which she cannot take possession of herself as such . . . She is never here and now because it is she who sets up that eternal elsewhere from which the “subject” continues to draw his reserves, his re-sources, though without being able to recognize them/her.30
This forgetting of woman is not an accidental exclusion. Rather, according to Irigaray, the representational nature of the metaphysical tradition requires this exclusion. Representation cannot proceed without distance and separation. The proximate, sensible corporeality of the maternal, if acknowledged by the subject, would make all attempts at self-representation impossible. Woman functions as the ground, that which enables representation and with it the self-knowing subject. Man's transcendence has been made possible through this forgetting of the ground and with it woman. The maternal origin of the subject is thus covered over in the constitution of the subject. For Irigaray, then, the forgotten ground of metaphysics is always already feminine. In traditional metaphysics it is woman who constitutes the ground and philosophical man springs from her grounding toward a limit from which she is barred: a male divine.31

Irigaray is not alone in recognizing both the centrality of sexual difference to and its omission from theories of subject constitution. Derrida has addressed the issue of sexual difference in several essays. Like Irigaray, Derrida has turned to texts of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Levinas, accusing them of covering over sexual difference. What Derrida highlights in these texts, and what feminist responses to him make clear, is that what is at issue here is whether sexual difference is constitutive of or precedes ontological difference. According to Heidegger ontological difference precedes sexual difference.

Heidegger argues that part of thinking Being before beings, that is Being before it is dispersed into particular beings, involves thinking Being that is unmarked. Sexual, racial, and cultural differences come after Being; they are ontic not ontological; they are characteristics of specific beings, not Being itself. “Being and the structure of Being lie beyond every entity and every possible character which an entity may possess. Being is the transcendens pure and simple.”32 In opposition to this, Irigaray argues that the failure to recognize Being as sexed limits and precludes women's ontological becoming. Even Heidegger's attempt to think the ground of existence or Being before cultural and sexual markers are instituted falls into the same logic of which he accuses Descartes. The transcendent nature of Being occurs at the expense of woman. Indeed its universality, its sexually unmarked nature is made possible through a rejection of the feminine.

She, nature, thus remains in oblivion. In a double oblivion of she who has always already given him life and has become his living body, and oblivion of she who gives life back to him by helping him with the destiny of his Being. But this oblivion of her, and of a female them, is covered over by the oblivion of his
own destiny as Being. By the oblivion of the sexed character of Being?33

Being, like beings, is funded by a ground or support that enables its theorization in the first place. Representation requires a ground from which to represent. Insofar as this representation requires distance and objectivity, and a concomitant rejection of the proximate and sensible, Irigaray views it as masculinist. Thus Irigaray argues that Heidegger does not escape the metaphysics of presence and the built-in limitations of the representational; he is simply incapable of seeing the trace of them in his own philosophy. Being, too, can be seen as representational, as covering over the ground or vehicle of its representation, even when that ground is rendered as groundless—as opening or absence.

In a similar vein, Fanon argues that the ontological becoming of the racial Other is impeded by the theorization of Being as unmarked. Accordingly, as for women of all races, the black man lacks the possibility of transcendence. He serves as the ground for the white man and is robbed of the horizon that Being provides the subject. “Without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood. . . . The Negro suffers in his body quite differently from the white man. Between the white man and me the connexion was irrevocably one of transcendence.”34 For Irigaray and Fanon, traditional metaphysics cannot think sexual difference or racial difference because woman and the racial Other have no place. To get beyond or before metaphysics then involves making visible those Others who serve as ground and in doing so removing them from their supporting role and enabling their own transcendence. The transcendence of the white man’s Others is a vital component of an ethics of sexual and racial difference. Recognizing the dangers of grounding inherent in transcendence, even in Heidegger’s supposedly groundless transcendent Being, Irigaray suggests another kind of transcendence, a sensible transcendence.

The sensible transcendental brings us closer to working out a relationship between ontology and ethics. As we have seen, Heidegger argues that inquiries into Being have been impeded by the representational language of metaphysics, which assumes an already posited ground. A non-representational language, one that does not depend for its articulation on a grounding, is needed for Being to be revealed. Irigaray, for her part, argues that the sensible transcendental is the means by which an ethical encounter with the Other can be achieved. On this model, my subjectivity no longer depends on taking the other as the object to my subject, the other to my Same. Rather, the sensible transcendental depends on a relation of two Others. Irigaray argues that when sexual difference is operable, a new
way of understanding thought and presence will be possible. Such a one
will not rely on representation of the logos, a distance from the proximate
or the sensible, figured heretofore as a female origin, but rather, this new
mode of transcendence will be enacted through an adoption of the sensi-
ble. “To do this requires time, both space and time. Perhaps we are pass-
ing through an era when time must redeploy space? A new morning of and
for the world? A remaking of immanence and transcendence, notably
through the threshold which has never been examined as such: the female
sex.”35 The sensible transcendental can be understood as an attempt by
Irigaray to answer Heidegger’s question on the nature of Being; if the con-
dition for transcendence is no longer the rejection of the material (of a
ground that is never thought), we can imagine Being that is not predicated
on a prior grounding. Furthermore, as the sensible transcendental is a pre-
condition for the ethical encounter with the Other, we could argue that
Being is revealed when and where ethics takes place. But how can such a
nongrounded relation with the Other take place? It would appear that we
can only achieve the sensible transcendental if we can get beyond a represen-
tational economy. To do so, we will need to explore further the func-
tion of matter and its relation to representation.

According to Irigaray, it is through the recovery of her imaginary
morphology, her own body, that woman is able to establish her difference
and thus establish her subjecthood, for not until the repressed is brought
to light and the unconscious brought to life can woman occupy a place of
her own in society, rather than being the place. Woman is not represented
in the Symbolic Order because it is predicated on the morphology of the
masculine. Woman has no forms which she can inhabit. For Irigaray,
then, achieving an ethics of sexual difference is tied to an exploration of
a woman’s morphology. Women must experience her body in all its ma-
teriality in order to counter her exclusion from a masculine Symbolic.

For Fanon, the black man must also embrace his materiality, his
‘blackness.’ In a colonial setting, the black man experiences his body only
through the eyes of the colonizer. He is forever “overdetermined from with-
out,” the slave of his own appearance.36 Seeing himself as the white man
sees him prevents the black man from developing an intact corporeal
schema and instead results in what Fanon calls a “racial epidermal
schema.”37 The only idea he has of his body is that given to him by the
white man. The colonial economy is predicated on a “manichean delir-
ium,” a binary model of black/white that precludes an ethical relation to
the Other. Like Irigaray’s woman, Fanon’s black man has to get beyond
the body constructed for him in order to develop his own representations of
self. The body that is given to him and its attendant meanings deprive him
of his ontological becoming, for “it is not I who make meaning for myself,
but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me.”

For Fanon, just as for Irigaray, ontology cannot proceed without ethics. And no ethical relation with the Other is possible when the Other’s body provides the ground for the becoming of the white male subject.

If the representational nature of traditional metaphysics ensures the erasure of sexual and racial others, because they are forced to occupy the ground for another’s transcendence, thus precluding the ethical relation, then articulating an ontology that does not depend on representation is the first step to achieving ethical difference. Whereas Irigaray considers Heidegger to repeat the metaphysical dependency he observes of grounding his so-called neuter subject in the maternal body, I would argue that Heidegger’s critique of representation actually removes the risk of grounding, by creating the possibility for matter to exist beyond representation. As I will argue, such a model is crucial to achieving the kind of nongrounded metaphysics Irigaray’s sensible transcendental heralds.

Derrida’s reading of Heidegger reveals a glimpse of the potential significations available to the material body when viewed outside of representation. In “Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference,” Derrida attempts to displace the primacy of ontological over sexual difference in Heidegger’s text. However, unlike Irigaray, Derrida in a deconstructive move attempts to reveal that, far from being sexually unmarked, sexual difference always already informs Dasein. What is helpful about Derrida’s reading of Heidegger for our purposes is that Derrida locates the possibility of a sexual difference that is not grounded in opposition. Derrida reinterprets the claim of Dasein’s neutrality, arguing that in Heidegger’s text neuter Dasein is not being unmarked by sex but is sexed nonoppositionally. Although Heidegger makes clear that Dasein is neither of the male nor female sex, according to Derrida, he opens the door to the possibility of Dasein’s being sexed otherwise. Derrida suggests that Heidegger’s belaboring of the neutrality/ asexuality of Dasein is an attempt to conceive of a new form of sexuality. It is the twoness of sex, sex defined in a binary relation of man/woman that Heidegger is rejecting, not sex itself. “Such precision suggests that the a-sexual neutrality does not desexualize, on the contrary; its ontological negativity is not unfolded with respect to sexuality itself (which it would instead liberate), but on its differential marks, or more strictly on sexual duality.” An asexual Dasein should not be seen to be lacking something, but rather possessing a sexuality beyond the binary model.

Even while Derrida takes sexual difference as his own point of departure in his texts on Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas, and Hegel, many feminists remain wary of the purport of these elaborate theorizations. In the case of “Geschlecht,” suspicion centers around the case Derrida
makes for the neutrality of Dasein, seeing this as not an opening to but
yet another foreclosing of the feminine. Kelly Oliver equates sexual neu-
trality with sexual undecidability and worries that this results in an era-
sure of sexual difference altogether. Such a view exemplifies a circular
logic endemic to theorizations of sexual difference. Why must sexuality
that is defined nonoppositionally result in undecidability? Primarily be-
cause, despite our best intentions, it is very difficult to conceptualize sex-
ual difference outside its given parameters, its given representations.
This is not to say that we can not successfully imagine a nonbinarized
or nonhierarchized relation between the sexes. It is, I would argue,
quite easy to escape, at least in our theorizations, the tyranny of the one.
It is far less easy, however, to escape the logic of the two. For Oliver
nonoppositional sexuality becomes undecidable and therefore lacks any
differentiation at all. But Derrida is clear on this point: Dasein's neutral-
ity is sexually marked. It is not undecidable, meaning lacking sexual-
ity, it is simply sexed otherwise beyond our current conceptions of
sexual difference.

If *Dasein* as such belongs to neither of the two sexes, that
doesn't mean that its being is deprived of sex. On the contrary,
here one must think of a pre-differential, rather a pre-dual,
sexuality—which doesn't necessarily mean unitary homoge-
neous, or undifferentiated . . . From that sexuality, more orig-
inary than the dyad, one may try to think to the bottom a
“positivity” and a “power” that Heidegger is careful not to
call sexual . . . Here indeed it is a matter of the positive and
powerful source of every possible “sexuality.”

According to Derrida, there is a sexuality more originary than the dyad,
a sexuality that exists beyond any representation we have of it.

Oliver, following Irigaray, argues that undecidability resulting in an
erasure of sexual difference “amounts once again to erasing the feminine.
The history of Western patriarchy indicates that the erasure of sexual dif-
fERENCE could be used once again to give precedence to the masculine over
the feminine. In the name of undecidability, every sex becomes mascu-
line.” This is something Derrida himself has warned against in his read-
ing of Levinas: “Once sexual difference is subordinated, it is always the
case that the wholly other, who is not yet marked is already found to be
marked by masculinity.” However, Oliver and others are right in a
sense. “Geschlecht” does fail to address the feminine, but this failure is in-
tegral to Derrida’s explication of sexual difference, or at least its possibil-
ity, in Heidegger’s text.
In foregrounding an ethics of sexual difference that is not grounded in the two sexes, I would argue that Derrida, through Heidegger, makes obsolete the notion of the feminine—at least its representation—and forces us to question how effective it is to tie a recuperation or resymbolization of this feminine to the outcome of sexual difference. Indeed, the erasure of the feminine that critics see in Derrida’s celebration of Dasein can enable new possibilities for articulating sexual difference. Because the ‘feminine’ has become the hallowed signifier in theorizations of sexual difference we have failed, even in imagining difference which cannot be collapsed to the one, to get beyond the otherness of the feminine. Because the feminine is tied to its function in the preestablished order of representation even when it is defined as a subversion of that order, to privilege it is potentially reductive and indeed antithetical to a project of sexual difference. Indeed it is this privileging of the feminine difference, over and above sexual difference, as the primary difference that has inhibited sufficient analyses of other forms of sexual difference and racial difference. Instead of questioning Derrida’s motivation or reading his critique as an attempt to reimpose a phallogocentric model we should examine how Derrida’s text might open up new possibilities for thinking about sexual difference in a way that is more productive in imagining an ethics of sexual difference than the model proposed by Irigaray herself.

Irigaray’s goal in arguing for a recognition of sexual difference is to bring the feminine into culture. She argues that subjectivity has been accorded to and appropriated by the masculine; there are no representations of the feminine in culture. Irigaray desires the symbolization of two sexes, not one and its mirror image. Although this duality is not binarized or hierarchized, I consider that this conception of sexual difference as two limits the possibility for achieving difference beyond the two and may indeed signal our failure thus far to conceive difference in nonbinarized terms. Indeed, it forces us to ask the question of the difference of sexual difference. Irigaray is very insistent that the feminine cannot be defined or known because we cannot even imagine the terms to do so while we live in a culture which does not value sexual difference as an ethical relation. However, the theorization of such an ethics is firmly lodged in our present conceptions of a relation, albeit a future one, between male and female subjects. Although I am committed to establishing a case for the importance of sexual difference and a possible means of achieving it, I do not think that Irigaray’s celebration of the feminine can get us beyond the metaphysics of the subject, grounded in representation, that we already possess. Irigaray’s model cannot sufficiently conceive of male and female sexuality differently enough to accommodate a true revolution of sexual difference.

Similarly, I would argue that we cannot possibly theorize a model of racial difference if the paradigm is always thought in terms of black and
white. These concepts are too firmly lodged in their representations (often for necessary political reasons) for racial difference to be understood as an ethical relation. An ethics of sexual and racial difference has been impeded by a representational economy that relies on already articulated notions and definitions of difference, which implicitly privilege difference along a binary axis of man/woman, white/black. Indeed, bodies that cannot be categorized according to our current conception of sexual and racial difference, whether we define identity biologically, culturally, or philosophically, have always existed. Many bodies are neither black nor white. Even bodies that identify as ‘black’ or ‘white’ are neither black nor white. Other bodies are biologically neither ‘male’ nor ‘female’ or are both. Certain bodies identify chromosomally as male and physically as female or vice versa. And what of the xxy body? How does that body participate in an ethical exchange between man and woman if s/he identifies as both or neither, or changes that identification regularly? Too often these bodies are considered aberrations and are made invisible through surgical correction. An ethics of sexual and racial difference which continues to view difference as an alterity, however absolute, between two merely reaffirms the invisibility of the intersex and interracial subject. Furthermore, such a view reproduces the elision of the feminine and racial Other enacted in the history of metaphysics. At times Irigaray seems to imagine the possibility ultimately for more than two sexes, but such a proliferation would come after the original initial difference of the two. As she makes clear in her more recent titles, Democracy Begins Between Two and To Be Two, the ethical relationship that Irigaray envisions is for the male/female couple. At base is a foundational division of two which in itself makes other differences derivative and secondary. This, I would argue, is ultimately as limiting as it is initially liberating, foreclosing a spectrum of difference.

Part of this problem stems from the impossibility of imagining a model of difference, when the condition for such an imagining is its unknowability, as Drucilla Cornell makes clear in her critique of Lacan’s conception of the Real. Even though the Real is designated as unrepresentable, it is always already subject to representations that are read back onto it from the Symbolic.

It is only the symbolic which scars the Real as lack. It is this symbolic which in turn signifies the Woman as the castrated Other. Even if this is an unconscious identification between the Thing and Woman based on a primordial lack that marks “man’s” desire, the very significance given to lack cannot be separated from the symbolic. The Real appears in Lacan, it is
given form as Woman. It is the appearance of the Real, its identification with its representation as lack, that Lacan analyzes. Lacan’s infidelity to his own argument lies here: he takes the appearance of the Real mandated by this drive to representation as the Real.45

The unrepresentability of the Real is, however, crucial in establishing the possibility of ethics; unrepresentability is the condition of incommensurability. However, neither psychoanalytic nor poststructuralist conceptions of the unrepresentable allow for this otherness. The beyond or real for them is irrecoverable and can be known only as unknowable within the system of representation it is trying to get beyond. The unknowability of this beyond does not open the ethical relation; it precludes it. How do we maintain the incommensurable relation with the Other without losing the Other in the abyss of the beyond? Incommensurability is, above all, a relation, but it can be achieved only if a grounding cannot occur. An ethical relation between sexually and racially diverse subjects can take place only if the corporeal and proximate are made visible. However, the risk in introducing the material here is that it could, as historically has been the case for female bodies and other bodies of color, result in a grounding. The Signifying Body attempts to articulate an alternative to a representational economy through a rearticulation of the relation between matter and representation. Specifically, I propose the possibility that material signification exists beyond representation, beyond the always already grounding that that material becomes subject to in the act of representation. If signification can be understood outside of a representational frame, a nongrounded metaphysics is possible. A nongrounded metaphysics enables authentic Being-in-the-world and an ethical relation with the Other. An expression of signification beyond representation is, therefore, integral to the demands of the ethical relation, as articulated by both Irigaray and Heidegger. However, understanding metaphysics’ dependence on representation is the first step in understanding how a recasting of the relationship between representation and matter can enable authentic Being-in-the-world and ethical difference.

As we have seen, Derrida’s reading of Heidegger makes way for a sexuality that is nonoppositional, a nonbinarized alterity between the sexes. This is precisely what Irigaray’s theory of sexual difference calls for. However, I think Dasein’s neutrality signals more than the possibility of a difference between the sexes which is beyond sexual opposition; instead, it points to the possibility of sexuality beyond the sexes: beyond the two. Here sexual difference is multiple; rather than proceeding from the one sex to two to many, Dasein originates in the many. Indeed it is the thinking of

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sex as two that sets up the impasse to difference: “It is the discriminative belonging to one or another sex, that destines or determines to a negativity that must be then explained.” Furthermore Derrida makes clear that the very term which Heidegger uses to discuss sexual difference, “geschlecht,” exceeds sex. It signifies difference at the level of “sex, genre, family, stock, race, lineage, generation.” Derrida contends that in choosing to use the term “geschlecht” instead of “sexuality,” Heidegger attempts to make room semantically for another kind of sexual difference. In liberating sexual difference from sex as defined, we make room not for an erasure of sex in sexual difference but a redefinition. Derrida argues that, in figuring Dasein as neutral, Heidegger can be seen to suggest that sexual difference cannot be thought separately from ontological difference. I would argue that this neutrality also reveals that racial difference cannot be thought separately from ontological difference and that sexual difference cannot be thought separately from racial difference. In fact, I would argue that a true ethics of sexual difference can occur only when sex ceases to be the privileged signifier in the ethical exchange. By thinking sex beyond a paradigm of male/female, however alterior to one another Irigaray imagines them, the thinking of other kinds of difference, for example different configurations of sex and race within one body, is made possible. Heidegger’s theory of *mitsein*, which imagines Being as a relation, as a revealing, between subjects provides a model for a theorizing of Being as both a sexed and raced relation. And suggests that authentic Being-in-the-world can occur only through the experience of an ethical encounter with a wholly different Other.

As I will demonstrate in the pages that follow, Heidegger’s theory of *mitsein* and the potential-in-Being helps us to imagine an ontology that accounts for difference and realizes an ethical relation with the Other. As we saw above, Fanon himself understands the problem of racial difference as an ontological question. Interestingly, Fanon attempts to account for this ontological lack using a psychoanalytic framework. Fanon argues, using Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage, that the alienation produced by the subject’s misrecognition of its image as whole is of a profoundly different order for the black man. Although the black subject has its own idea of itself, that idea is profoundly altered through the failure of identification that takes place when it encounters the white metropole. Furthermore, it is not just the idea of itself that is altered, but the actual physical self appears to undergo a change. “My body is given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recoloured.”

Just as for Irigaray, then, for Fanon, the material body has an important role to play in the developing of an ontology for the racialized subject. If the body is not a given static thing, but is altered through its
interpellation and failure of identification with others, what might such a body be capable of? How can the Other release him/herself from these imprisoning representations and create new significations at a material level? How might such physical significations lead to authentic Being-in-the-world and the ethical relation?

Psychoanalysis is often employed by critics to account for racism and is often used, following Fanon, to account for the particular relation of whites and people of color under colonialism. The connection between psychoanalysis, colonialism, and race is specific—the colonized body is a racialized body. Critics who argue for the importance of psychoanalysis in understanding racism do so from this colonial model. As Juliet Flower MacCannell asks, "How did race enter the colonized psyche in so traumatic a fashion that for the colonized it had the power to displace and efface their humanity?" In this study, I am interested in seeing how we might understand racial difference as ethical difference using psychoanalytic ideas and principles. In other words, rather than using psychoanalysis to account for the persistence of racism and racialized thinking, we can see it instead as a model for articulating new ways of conceiving of race. Taking a cue from Fanon, then, I consider that racial difference needs to be understood as an ontological category, but I also see that his use of psychoanalysis provides productive insights into the development of subjects as raced. However, whereas many critics focus on Fanon's exploration of the psychic alienation experienced by the person of color, I want to use his insights to produce another reading—an understanding of how such alienation for the racial subject can be disrupted, how a new grammar of the body can subvert the scopic economy of racism and lead to an ethics of recognition.

Western metaphysics robs the racialized Other of ontology because s/he is excessively embodied and thrust into the position of ground. Fanon acutely recognizes the role the body plays in the black man's oppression. Although science has demonstrated that there is no biological basis to race, we are still grappling with its remainder, the physical, material body. The Signifying Body suggests that rather than continuing to disavow the facticity of the material, racialized body, we might perhaps use it as our point of departure. Where might an analysis of racial difference get us if we began with the body? What can the body signify? And ultimately, how can the body lead us to authentic Being-in-the-world and enable an ethics of racial and sexual difference?

I have based this interrogation of ontology and ethics in terms of a rethinking of the relation between representation and matter. Irigaray's analysis demonstrates that the Western metaphysical model depends on a representative economy where the subject—the white man—defines
itself over and against another who is robbed of subjecthood. This is clearly seen in Fanon’s account of the colonial relation. Fanon’s black subject is beset by representations; he is forced to conform to meanings already existing for him. Irigaray’s ethical model requires not a distance and rejection of the material and the proximate but an adoption and recognition of it. For Irigaray this can occur through the recovery and experimentation of imaginary morphology. Fanon’s careful analysis of the mirror stage and the process of identification holds a myriad of possibilities for exploring the imaginary morphology of the black subject. Even though Fanon uses Lacanian psychoanalysis to explain how the black subject is denied subjectivity and ontology, I will demonstrate how many of Fanon’s insights about racial identification can help realize an ontological becoming for the racial Other.

Textual Matter

The texts I have chosen for this study include Neil Jordan’s *The Crying Game*, J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe*, Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*, and Don DeLillo’s *The Body Artist*. These texts all foreground issues of sexual and racial difference and disrupt received representations of sex and race. But importantly these texts, though they differ in form, media, and genre, provide us with models, expressions, of Being that defy representation. In their new language of physical signification, these beings experience authentic Being-in-the-world in and through their ethical relation with an Other. If, as Irigaray and Fanon warn, ethics cannot be achieved without a recognition of difference at the ontological level and, as Heidegger makes clear, ontology cannot be thought within a representational framework because such a framework requires a grounding, these texts offer examples of ontological becomings that are produced in difference. Furthermore, they illustrate a necessary relation between ontology and ethics.

All of these texts demonstrate how identity formation is always a foreclosing of other potential subjectivities. Identity formation both relies on and secures a representational economy and the metaphysics of presence that that economy employs. *The Crying Game*, *Foe*, *Paradise*, and *The Body Artist* highlight the connection between identity and representation, and at the same time make visible the exclusion that these depend on by revealing a realm beyond representational limits—difference and signification. Each text reveals how any attempt to fix identity in the representational frame of the Symbolic always enacts a violence at a material level, a foreclosure of the potential for Being-in-the-world. These texts challenge the idea that abjected bodies remain part of a representational economy as its constitutive outside; rather, they demonstrate how these
other bodies participate in an alterior form of signification, beyond identity, beyond the Symbolic Order. Furthermore, they reveal how these alternate material possibilities open these bodies to authentic Being-in-the-world, which is expressed in and through an ethical relation with the Other. *The Crying Game,* *Foe,* *Paradise,* and *The Body Artist* force us to ask us what specific conditions give rise to certain representations. How is subjectivity different depending on the political, social, historic environment that brings it into being, or to use Heidegger’s term, into which that being is “thrown?” But, finally, these signifying bodies reveal that ontological becoming and the ethical relation are inseparable and that both depend on a new relation between language and the world. The artistic text is crucial to such an investigation of ontology and ethics because it is only in the work of art, Heidegger argues, that we can find a model for the kind of language we seek at the “end of philosophy.”

Fanon’s study of the Antillean’s identity formation demonstrates clearly that identification and subject formation are not processes that happen independently of culture, economics, or history, but in fact are produced in and through the specific orientation that the subject experiences in relation to these modes of power. Thus one’s experience of subjectivity in a colonial situation is different for the colonizing subject of the metropole and the colonized subject of the colony. But what is common to both is that each subject has to conform to a representation/identification already in place, already determined by that specific nexus of power relations and the subject’s place within it.

Texts like *Foe* make visible the operation of subject formation in a colonial economy. *Foe* demonstrates how other subjectivities—subjectivities in difference beyond a representational paradigm, beyond the strictures demanded by the colonial apparatus—exist and can disrupt internally those very workings. *Foe* shows that once other significations, other ways of Being-in-the-world, are opened, then an ethics of sexual and racial difference can occur. Such a relation takes place, on a Heideggerian model, through a revealing—where the subject who is living the full complement of its potential material significations opens itself to an Other and leads her/him into an ethical relation. It demonstrates how authentic Being-in-the-world is glimpsed through encountering the Other as Other in the ethical relation.

*The Crying Game* also demonstrates how the kind of representations subjects are forced to accord with are shored up by specific cultural and political investments. If racial identity is regulated by the subject’s relation to the colonial apparatus, it is equally the case that sexual identity is regulated by patriarchal and homophobic discourses. However, *The Crying Game* shows how a subject can both exist within the representational confines of the Symbolic and signify beyond them at the same time. Dil uses the process of imaginary identification—where a subject takes up a
Symbolic identity through identification with others—to defy cultural norms, and demonstrates how the coherency of Symbolic representations can be disrupted even while appearing to affirm and consolidate the identifications in place. Thus Dil’s identity as a black heterosexual woman is always underwritten by her body’s other significations: transvestite male and/or homosexual male of indeterminate race.

*Paradise* makes clear Fanon’s and Irigaray’s claim that the racial and sexual Other are robbed of an ontology because they occupy the ground for the Subject’s transcendence. Morrison’s novel demonstrates the role that the material body and a physical and signifying language can play in escaping such a grounding. In *Paradise*, Morrison depicts the ontological becoming of race and sex together through such a language and in doing so demonstrates how the sensible transcendental is integral to both forms of ethical difference.

In *The Crying Game*, *Foe*, and *Paradise* the reader is brought face to face with the incommensurability of the Other. In this way, these texts enact externally the kind of ethical relation that they thematize within the diegetic level of the narratives. My reading of *The Body Artist* explores the ethical possibilities that are opened between reader and text, and argues that the narrative’s disruption of representative categories reveals to the reader her own foreclosed material possibilities and can release her to an ontological becoming through an ethics of reading.

Finally in the conclusion, I return to the question of language and its importance in realizing authentic Being-in-the-world and an ethical relation with the Other. Through an examination of Heidegger’s later works and Irigaray’s response to them, I demonstrate more fully the role of the literary text in ontology and ethics.

*The Signifying Body* demonstrates that language and the literary text are crucial to our experience of living authentically and achieving an ethical relation with the Other. Indeed, by attending closely to Heidegger’s, Irigaray’s, and Fanon’s positions on language, we will see the indispensability of the artistic text to a revealing of ontology and ethics. The language expressed by these signifying bodies, which enables them to experiment with other becomings and the potential-in-Being, results in the unconcealment of Being. However, what is disclosed is more than just a glimpse of Being. What is disclosed is a relation between Being and ethics, or rather Being as ethics. In the body of language, in the corporeal significations, in the ungrounded sayings, each body comes face to face with the Other and through him or her the language of Being. Ultimately, the signifying language that occurs within the confines of the literary text enables the reader, herself, to undergo the “experience of language.” Through it she can experience the possibility of “authentic Being ethically.”