In 1947, American surrealist artist Dorothea Tanning (1910–2012) finished a canvas that she titled Maternity (1946–47) (plate 1). The large-scale oil painting depicts a white-clad woman, standing on a silky white rug in a vast and empty desert with a young child in her arms. A small white dog with a baby’s face crouches on the rug by the woman’s feet. Behind her is a half-open door, which she has presumably just stepped through. In front of her is another doorframe, surreally placed in the middle of the desert, through the opening of which we can see a creature composed of sails, masts, and ropes; the wind makes the fabric swell to resemble a woman’s pregnant stomach and full breasts. The towering clouds in the sky, which mirror the colours of the fabric of the woman’s clothes, the dog’s fur, the rug, and the creature’s sails, look as if they are about to transform into a violent thunderstorm.

A sense of distress and menace dominates Maternity, which might suggest something about how Tanning viewed the prospect of motherhood at this point in her life. Renée Riese Hubert interprets the painting as an ‘indictment of maternity, which leads to isolation, misery, and absence of fulfilment’. For Hubert, the painting dramatises the tension between artistic creation and the confining affliction that motherhood might have represented for women at this particular time in history. Alyce Mahon echoes Hubert’s analysis of the painting, deeming the figure in the second doorframe ‘monstrous’ and underscoring its headless state. On such a reading, we might see the new mother in the painting as existing in a state of transition, having just gone through the door in the foreground which opens onto maternity – she is ‘between lives’, to borrow a phrase used by Tanning herself. What awaits her, behind the next doorway, is a position in which she becomes all body – breasts and womb – with no head or intellectual capacities, vulnerable to external forces rather than possessing any agency of her own.

Maternity seems to represent a strong statement by the then newly married thirty-six-year-old artist regarding the difficulties of reconciling creativity and personal freedom with social expectations circumscribing motherhood in the early post-war era. Indeed, Tanning never had any children of her own and asserted in an interview that "It would have ruined my life. It’s all right if you’re rich […] but we were poor." Yet the artist would revisit the concept of maternity later in her career – this time in much less negatively charged terms. Beginning in the mid-1950s, Tanning started producing a new series of oil paintings, watercolours, and drawings that bear titles alluding to motherhood. Although culminating in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Tanning’s concern with maternity persisted throughout the rest of her career.
In contrast to Tanning’s first Maternity canvas, the maternity-focused works produced in the 1960s and 1970s, when the artist was based in the south of France, connote intimacy, touch, and contiguity rather than isolation. In addition to paintings and drawings overtly referencing maternity in their titles, during this period Tanning also gave form to a group of soft sculptures, which similarly evince a preoccupation with closeness and touch. These paintings, drawings, and soft sculptures, whether they depict mothers and children or not, invoke ‘maternity’ on a metaphorical level, indicating a form of intimacy that challenges the limits of the individual subject. During the period that Tanning created these works, poststructuralist feminist philosophers such as Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray were specifically concerned with the stakes of maternity and representation in ways that resonate closely with Tanning’s engagements with these themes. This essay proposes that Irigaray’s theoretical engagement with maternity and subjectivity offers a particularly rich set
of analytical tools with which to understand Tanning’s work. Through establishing
the affinities between Tanning and Irigaray, we can begin to grasp the scope of
intellectual currents that flowed between poststructuralist feminism and surrealist
women’s work of this period. As I have begun to articulate elsewhere, the aesthetic and
political concerns of these two bodies of work intersect in ways that have yet to be fully
explored.7

This essay’s argument resonates in part with Griselda Pollock’s insightful analysis
that the 1970s constituted a ‘feminist avant-garde moment […] resuming the broken
thread of earlier avant-garde moments’ in which visual art and film developed a
distinctively theoretical inflection that ‘sought to create knowledge about the feminine
that existing discourses and practices could not or did not provide’.8 However, my
tracing of a kinship between emergent feminist theories and Tanning’s art of the late
1960s and early 1970s should not be interpreted as a suggestion that Tanning had read
these theories firsthand – or that she was even necessarily aware of them. Rather, I
posit that the overarching intellectual milieu in France in the late 1960s and early
1970s generated related ideas around representations of gender, sexuality, language,
and the unconscious, which began to circulate in different places, and emerge in
multiple media, at once.

While there is no record of Tanning consciously drawing on the feminist theories
that will be explored in this essay, her active immersion in the discourses of surrealism
is amply documented. Tanning first came into contact with the movement in New
York in 1936, when she visited the MOMA exhibition Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism; as
she explains in a 1974 interview, ‘For me, it was THE revelation’.9 A few years later,
surrealism would flourish in New York, since many surrealists – André Breton, Max
Ernst, and Yves Tanguy, amongst others – had been forced to flee France during
the Second World War and now continued their creative and political activities on
American soil. Tanning became ensconced in this New York-based group of émigré
surrealists in 1942, contributing to the journal VVV as well as exhibiting paintings
together with other surrealist artists. She began a romantic relationship with Ernst,
whom she married in 1946. In her memoir Between Lives (2001), Tanning writes:
‘Surrealists in New York! […] For me it brought a kind of relief to see my aberrant
pictures find not only tolerance but enthusiasm among these seminal exotics whom
I had admired for so many reasons’.10 Even though Tanning’s artistic practice, as well
as the surrealist movement, had undergone several transmutations by the early 1970s,
she nevertheless felt a strong kinship with surrealism, calling her soft-sculptural
installation Hôtel du Pavot, Chambre 202 (1970–73) (see plate 5) ‘the surrealist piece par
excellence’.11 In an interview from 1990, moreover, she asserted that she still ‘[held] to
the essential tenets and ideas of Surrealism’.12

The 1970s were an interesting period in the history of surrealism for several
reasons. Although the surrealist writer Jean Schuster had announced the official end
of the movement in 1969, three years after the death of its founder and leader, André
Breton,13 the work of women artists associated with surrealism tells an altogether
different story. Many of these, including Tanning, Leonora Carrington, and Leonor
Fini, were indeed at the height of their artistic careers in the 1970s. Thus, despite
the Paris-based surrealist group disbanding in the late 1960s, surrealist activities
were still flourishing across the globe. Moreover, the 1970s witnessed the first
critical encounters between surrealism and feminism, which played out, often
antagonistically, in a number of French publications. The pioneering work in this field,
Xavière Gauthier’s Surréalisme et sexualité (1971), was fiercely critical of (male) surrealist
representations of women and female sexuality. Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir’s
analysis in *The Second Sex* (1949), Gauthier – who would later become associated with the feminism of Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray – demonstrated that surrealism, despite its promising revolutionary impulse, had failed to challenge patriarchal myths pertaining to gender. The surrealist writer Annie Le Brun, on the other hand, in her polemic *Lâchez tout* (1977), castigated contemporary feminism for what she saw as its moralising indoctrination and sexual puritanism – tendencies that for Le Brun were incommensurable with the core principles of surrealism. Le Brun's piece might be read as a defence of surrealism against the criticisms that had been levelled by Gauthier, whose book had become a bestseller in France. In 1977, the journal *Obliques* published a double special issue, entitled *La Femme surréaliste*, which attempted to bridge these seemingly locked positions by publishing excerpts from both *Surréalisme et sexualité* and *Lâchez tout*, together with other pieces of scholarship on the figure of the woman in surrealism. The bulk of the double issue, however, was devoted to showcasing art and writing by and about women associated with surrealism, which had been marginalised in previous historiographies. As the editor, Roger Borderie, notes in the issue's foreword (notably titled ‘Avertissement’ ('Warning')): 'Right now, it seems appropriate, if not urgent, to avoid discussions, polemics and quarrels, and to SHOW what women have drawn or painted, to urge audiences to READ texts that they have written, to bring together their collages and creations'.

This endeavour to bring together an oeuvre of works by surrealist women is indicative of a larger feminist revision in the discipline of art history in the 1970s – both in Europe and in the United States. Such revisionist work has been crucial in challenging what Linda Nochlin in 1971 aptly called the ‘white Western male viewpoint’ that had ‘unconsciously been accepted as the viewpoint of the art historian’. This reframing gave birth to the concept of ‘women’s art’, which was employed critically and curatorially to make visible and promote the work of female artists who might otherwise have remained unknown or marginalised. Not all women artists were pleased with this categorisation, however. Tanning herself made a series of disparaging statements about the label ‘woman artist’ from the late 1970s onwards (upon returning to the United States after more than twenty years in France), which signal that she saw the concept of ‘women’s art’ as set up in hierarchical opposition to ‘universal art’. Clearly, Tanning feared that such a label would make viewers and critics approach her works in a biased way. When asked about the category of ‘woman artist’ in a 1990 interview with Carlo McCormick, she stated: 'I have nothing to say. I’ve written statements by the dozens, I’ve written savage letters to all kinds of earnest people who wish to include me in this category, and I just can’t talk about it anymore. I’m not against women, far from it. I’m against these confused people, doing that'. Furthermore, in her memoirs *Birthday* (1986) and *Between Lives*, Tanning writes that 'Meanwhile, the letters keep coming. A sea wave, The Movement washes over me, an unwary beachcomber; it pulls, drags, coerces, demands my solidarity, my admission of sisterhood. Looming large in my corner is the phenomenon of Women Painters. This category of endeavor, painting, has somehow captured the hearts of numerous champions of the cause'. These disavowals, I contend, should not be taken to mean that Tanning’s art is incommensurable with feminism. Indeed, even though she invokes ‘The [Women’s] Movement’ above, it is clear that Tanning’s discontent is not with feminist politics or theory per se, but with what she fears to be the imposition of an all-too-narrow interpretive frame upon her work. Given the myriad ways in which different strands of feminist thought intersect with other intellectual and aesthetic concerns in the second half of the twentieth century, it would be ill-advised to interpret Tanning’s pejorative remarks about ‘The Movement’ as a rejection of feminist politics altogether.
The Maternal-Feminine in Poststructuralist Feminism

The imaginary and the symbolic of intra-uterine life and of the first bodily encounter with the mother... where are we to find them? In what darkness, what madness, have they been abandoned? (Luce Irigaray, 1981)

Luce Irigaray’s elaboration of maternity emerged in the context of a significant engagement by women philosophers and theorists with psychoanalysis and poststructuralism – especially the thought of Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida. Building on this dual framework, Irigaray, Cixous, Kristeva, Gauthier, Chantal Chawaf, Annie Leclerc, and others argued that language in the symbolic order was ‘monogendered’ – masculine – and that this phallocentric ordering of the world worked to suppress what they referred to as ‘the feminine’ (le féminin), ‘feminine difference’, or ‘the maternal-feminine’. The designation ‘feminine’ in these collocations should be interpreted neither as socialised gender nor biological sex, but rather as a space of otherness in relation to the patriarchal symbolic order.

Within Lacan’s theoretical framework the feminine is a linguistic position of irrepresentability; it is connected to the maternal body as a space before the subject’s entry into the symbolic, before the mirror phase in which the child separates its sense of self from that of the other. For Irigaray and Cixous, however, this conception of the maternal-feminine as irrepresentable in the symbolic reveals the phallocentric logic of culture and language, which results in the structural silencing of actual women’s voices and the exclusion of their pleasure. Irigaray’s and Cixous’ feminist projects hinge on finding ways to give symbolic representation to the maternal-feminine; such a symbolisation will effect radical change in the (currently) masculine symbolic order, transforming a monogendered system into one characterised by what Irigaray calls a ‘double syntax’. This new, double sexual economy will, in Irigaray scholar Margaret Whitford’s words, ‘unfreez[e] the discourse which has petrified’ and give rise to a creative and non-hierarchical dialogue between ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, understood as discursive and symbolic positions. Once established, this dialogue will, in turn, alter the subordinate status of women’s social roles.

Poststructuralist feminism, or feminism of difference as it is also often called, has sometimes been dismissed as biologically essentialist by other feminist critics, especially those working in the Anglo-American academic tradition. Many of these critics claim that the centrality of the body in feminism of difference implies an unmediated relationship between anatomy and sexual and gendered identity. Likewise, the theoretical concept of the maternal-feminine has sometimes been interpreted as an uncritical celebration of motherhood. I maintain that such charges are largely grounded in misinterpretation, specifically underestimation of these theories’ poststructuralist and discursive underpinnings. Moreover, these critiques altogether miss the active attempts, by Cixous, Irigaray, and others, to break patriarchal and stereotypical associations between femininity and reproduction. Irigaray, for example, states that ‘it is a matter of urgency not to submit to a desubjectivized social role, that of the mother, governed by an order subordinated to a division of labour – man produces/woman reproduces – which confines us to a mere function [...] We do not have to renounce being women in order to be mothers’.

One strategy poststructuralist feminist theorists have proposed to circumvent phallocentrism in language is écriture féminine (feminine writing), a term coined by Cixous in her pivotal 1975 essay ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, and which she describes as ‘woman […] put[ting] herself into the text’. This term is crucially dependent on the metaphorical concept of maternity. Cixous refers to écriture féminine as writing in ‘white ink’. The image
of the mother’s milk here signals a non-phallic relation between women or between
mother and daughter; it is that which ‘touches you, the equivoice that affects you, fills
your breast with an urge to come to language and launches your force; the rhythm that
laughs you; the intimate recipient who makes all metaphors possible and desirable’.27
Kristeva elaborates the related concept of ‘the semiotic’, associated with drives, rhythms,
and the pre-Oedipal maternal body, which exists in a dialectical relation to the symbolic,
and which may erupt in, for example, avant-garde poetic language.28 Irigaray, too, stresses
the need for a new language of symbolisation: we must ‘find, find anew, invent the
words, the sentences that speak the most archaic and most contemporary relationship
with the body of the mother, with our bodies, the sentences that translate the bond
between her body, ours, and that of our daughters’.29 Cixous’ and Kristeva’s politics
operate mainly through practices of writing; yet their theories can be productively
applied to visual art as well (as, for example, Pollock has convincingly demonstrated).30
Irigaray’s emphasis on symbolic representation, moreover, clearly demonstrates her
theories’ compatibility with art-historical analysis. Irigaray repeatedly states that in order
effect change in the symbolic, we must find ways to symbolise the maternal-feminine,
to allow for a symbolic representation of maternal genealogies. Giving adequate symbolic
form to the mother-daughter relationship becomes, for Irigaray, a counter-narrative
to Freud’s Oedipal theory, which famously construes femininity as an acceptance on
the part of the girl of her (and her mother’s) inferior status as ‘castrated’. Finding a way
of representing a different, ‘feminine’ sexual economy – visually, verbally, or by other
means – will, for Irigaray, rectify the Oedipal narrative in which women are defined
either as imperfect ‘little men’ or as castrated ‘holes’ symbolising death and dissolution –
a sexual economy which depends on the phallus as its organising principle.

Irigaray’s famous image of the ‘two lips’ can be seen as her own attempt to counter
the phallocentric logic of representation in Western culture. ‘Woman “touches
herself” all the time’, she writes in This Sex Which is Not One (1977), ‘and moreover no one
can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact.
Thus, within herself, she is already two – but not divisible into one(s) – that caress
each other’.31 Feminist critics have offered a wealth of different interpretations of the
ambiguous image of the two lips.32 My own position, which is indebted to Whitford’s
analysis, is that although this image evokes the morphology of the female body,
Irigaray’s strategy is discursive rather than biologistic. As Irigaray herself clearly states
in Parler n’est jamais neutre (1985), ‘To seek to discover—rediscover a possible imaginary
for women through the movement of the two lips re-touching […] does not mean a
regressive recourse to anatomy or to a concept of “nature”, nor a recall to genital order
— women have more than one pair of two lips!’33 As Elizabeth Grosz adds, through
the image of the two lips, ‘Irigaray is not outlining the truth of female sexuality or the
make-up of the world. She is creating a discourse to contest or combat other, prevailing
discourses’.34 On a metaphoric reading, the two lips provide a ‘feminine’ alternative
to the phallus, indicating that another sexual economy than a phallic one is possible.
Tanning’s return again and again to the subject of maternity, touch, and intimacy in her
paintings, drawings, and soft sculptures of the 1960s and 1970s similarly suggests an
attempt to perform an alternative to a phallic economy, which construes the ‘universal’
subject as masculine and autonomous. Like Irigaray’s concept of the two lips, Tanning’s
notion of maternity should thus be interpreted metaphorically; while some of her
visual works employ the iconography of motherhood (e.g., the intimate embrace of a
mother and baby, round and possibly pregnant bellies), they also probe questions about
subjectivity, language, pleasure, and alternative modes of being in the world.
Maternités, Ouvre-Toi, and Hôtel du Pavot, Chambre 202

Although Tanning painted a canvas entitled Maternity II in 1953, which depicts a dishevelled mother and a group of children adopting dog-like postures on a bed, it is in her work of the mid-1960s that her evocations of maternity begin to revolve around intimacy and touch in ways that anticipate Irigaray’s theoretical discussions of these concepts. The oil paintings Maternity III (1966) and Maternity IV (1967) both foreground the sensual and affective quality of a naked embrace between a mother and child. Their individual features and bodily contours have given way to an intimacy that seems to constitute and simultaneously erase the limits of both bodies. Similarly, the watercolour Mother and Child (1967) (plate 2) depicts a naked woman in the process of nursing a baby. Viewed from behind, the maternal figure is represented by only a black outline, her body the same colour as the background. The viewer’s gaze is drawn to the child, whose dark pink body is set off against the cream-coloured mother and background. However, the focus of the painting is not the baby itself, but rather the tangle of outlines around it. Just as the baby’s pink colour bleeds outside its own outline, so the mother’s embrace merges with the child. It is impossible to discern

where one figure ends and the other begins. The subject of the painting indeed seems to be the intimate sensation of touching skin.

The nursing woman of Mother and Child returns in a watercolour frieze, Maternités (plate 3), which Tanning painted in 1968. This work depicts headless maternal figures contorted into seven different positions, all with one or several babies attached to them. Maternités was later included in Tanning’s artist’s book Ouvre-Toi, which was created as a companion piece to her soft-sculpture exhibition at the Alexandre Iolas Gallery in Milan in February–March of 1971. The book is a curious artefact which is difficult to decipher fully. The unifying theme, however, seems to be orgiastic desire – delirious pleasure that erases the limits of the autonomous self. The first half of the volume appears as a cross between a sketchbook, a book of surrealist poetry, and an exercise in literary free association (several pages feature horizontal lists of names of literary characters and authors, as well as titles of Tanning’s own works, linked together with dotted lines), while simultaneously offering what seems to be a narrative, albeit a non-teleological one. The second half consists of fourteen fold-out pages (one of which features Maternités), which show figures entwined in a paroxysmal, erotic embrace or act of nursing; some portray human couples, others indicate more than two participants, and yet a few others depict a human-animal amalgam. What unifies the scenes in these fold-out images is the blurring of the boundary between the self and other – each of these images depicts an intimacy that disturbs the singular identity of the individual subject.

The fact that Maternités is included in Ouvre-Toi, with its focus on orgiastic desire, as well as its recurring theme of bodily amalgamation, recasts Tanning’s image of maternity as a disturbance of the subject’s limits by radically intimate touch – erotic, sensual, nursing, nesting, or gestating, suggesting the pleasure of a pre-Oedipal space, before any separation is imposed between mother and child. In Irigaray’s terms, we might read these works as illustrating a ‘feminine’ economy of touch, in which the subject does not have to be defined as ‘one’ (“[t]he one of form, of the individual, of the (male) sexual organ, of the proper name, of the proper meaning”) and in opposition to an abjected, maternal otherness. What is on display here is instead a logic of ‘not one’, evoking Irigaray’s metaphoric image of the two continually touching but non-separable lips, ‘neither one nor two’, which makes it impossible to distinguish ‘what is touching from what is touched’. Within such a feminine sexual economy, both subjectivity and jouissance are configured according to a non-phallic model. As Irigaray writes: ‘Ownership and property are doubtless quite foreign to the feminine. At least sexually. But not nearness. Nearness so pronounced that it makes all discrimination of identity, and thus all forms of property, impossible’. Such an economy of touch is also at stake in Tanning’s soft sculptures, some of which appear in sketch form in Ouvre-Toi. These works too, this essay proposes, engage ideas of gendered and sexual representation, critiquing the mastery of the phallus in the symbolic order, the Freudian narrative that the female sex is castrated, as well as the Lacanian notion that ‘woman’ and feminine jouissance are unrepresentable in symbolic language. Both Freud’s
and Lacan’s theories of (gendered) subject formation depend greatly on the visual—that which can be seen. In this economy, woman’s genitals, in Irigaray’s words, represent ‘the horror of nothing to see’.42 Tanning’s haptic works, made from stuffed tweed, flannel, plush, and fake fur, boldly challenge the primacy of the visual in psychoanalytic theory by urging the viewer to touch them; as Catriona McAra points out, some of these works seem to dare the viewer to reach out and feel them.43

Tanning has famously declared that she was inspired to start creating her body of soft sculptures during an avant-garde music performance:

One moist Paris evening in 1969, in a mood of melancholy reflection, I sat in a concert at the Maison de la Radio, listening to a composer (Karlheintz [sic] Stockhausen) conduct his piece ‘Hymnen’, a music that jolted me out of my negative thoughts and incredibly but clearly showed me what I had to do. Spinning among the unearthly sounds of ‘Hymnen’ were the earthy, even organic shapes that I would make, had to make, out of cloth and wool […].44

The result was a small ‘family of sculptures’45 that, according to Tanning herself, represented (among other things) ‘the triumph of softness over hardness – for how can a hard sculpture have the tactile voluptuousness of a soft one’.46 Like Maternités, many of these sculptures overtly reference touch and closeness: Étreinte (1969) (plate 4), Cousins (1970), and Ouivre-Toi (1970; now destroyed), for instance, each feature two or more headless and deformed bodies covered in fake fur or pink flannel and sewn together in an embrace that cannot be undone. Moreover, the mutually enveloping gesture enacted in Étreinte and Cousins between what seems to be a human form and an animal-like, furry creature signals at once a posthumanist questioning of the very category of the human and an unsettling of the limits of sexual intimacy beyond ‘humanity’. Other pieces, such as Nue couchée (1969–70) and Emma (1970) (see plate 10), portray a reclining female body, contorted or displayed in parts—the latter sculpture consists of a swollen belly surrounded by a frilly skirt. Yet another category—represented by Xmas (1969) and De quel amour (1969)—presents the viewer with erect solitary figures, whose bodies seem to be in the process of devouring themselves; like fleshy Möbius strips, these figures simultaneously portray interior and exterior surfaces. Perhaps the most striking piece in Tanning’s soft-sculptural oeuvre is the installation Hôtel du Pavot, Chambre 202 (1970–73) (plate 5)—a large-scale work composed of three walls that make up a windowless and claustrophobic room. Inside this room, tweed-clad pieces of furniture in different shades of brown transform into deformed, contorted, and headless female bodies, still unmistakably alive.47

Katharine Conley has aptly referred to Tanning’s soft-sculpture period as her ‘tactile turn’, and, clearly, tactility—as both affective experience and theme—is key in these works.48 As Tanning herself elaborates on the material of woven cloth: ‘Something ancient and sensuous rises in me to greet and touch and manipulate this first of man’s refinements […] It’s supple, sly, always moving, often smiling, in fact something of an enchanter’.49 These works invoke surrealism’s exploration of tactility, characteristic in works from the 1930s onwards. Adam Jolles observes that [a]ny cursory survey of the work produced by the French avant-garde in the early 1930s brings to light the sudden privileging of the tactile, from the movable sculpture of Jean Arp and Alberto Giacometti, to the painted objects of Yves Tanguy, to the monochromatic sand reliefs Picasso made in Juan-le-Pins, to Man Ray’s more transparently sensual photographic excurses […] of Meret Oppenheim’s naked body coated in printing ink […]45
This proliferation in the early 1930s of surrealist works concerned with the sense of touch was the start of a sustained surrealist haptic aesthetic, embodied by pieces such as Oppenheim’s *Objet (Le Déjeuner en fourrure)* (1936) (a cup, saucer, and spoon covered in fur), Mimi Parent’s *Masculin-Féminin* (1959) (featuring a man’s tie made from female hair), as well as Marcel Duchamp and Enrico Donati’s cover of the exhibition catalogue for *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, which featured a foam-rubber breast and a note beguiling the viewer to ‘Please touch’ (‘Prière de toucher’). As Janine Mileaf notes, Duchamp and Donati’s cover ‘signalled the settling in of the phenomenon of a multidirectional, contingent, and destabilizing relation to art that had taken hold since the introduction of the ready-made after 1913’. This unsettling of the gaze in favour of the sense of touch (as well as of smell and hearing) was also a key aspect of both the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* in 1938 and the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* (*EROS*) in 1959. Tanning’s soft-sculptural oeuvre is thus both an embodiment and an extension of surrealism’s aesthetic of touch. *Hôtel du Pavot*, moreover, as Mahon notes, is also indebted to ‘surrealist exhibitions and their immersive aesthetic’, in particular the *EROS* exhibition (in which Tanning participated).
I propose that Tanning’s tactile works marry such a surrealist haptic aesthetic with a feminist statement about tactility and intimacy. The intertwined couples, literally stitched together, signal that skin equals not only the limits of one’s own body but also its opening onto the body of the other. Whether one reads these embraces as an intersubjective encounter between two (or more) beings or as a conceptualisation of the unknown and unknowable aspects of each individual spilling out, the notion of the autonomous subject is in both cases radically undermined. The blurring of the boundary between inside and outside in Xmas and De quel amour performs a similar function. Like the intertwined figures of Maternités and the other friezes in Ouvre-Toi, Tanning’s soft sculptures illustrate a feminine, tactile economy that privileges multiplicity rather than what Irigaray referred to as ‘[t]he one of form’. As such, the feminist impact of these sculptures is analogous to Irigaray’s attempts to symbolise the maternal-feminine through the image of the two continually touching lips and that of the mucous (membrane). This latter image (which has been less critically examined than her well-known concept of the two lips), is, in Whitford’s words, ‘the most intractable of Irigaray’s symbolic terms; it is a bit too close to the “abject” for comfort, on the dangerous boundary between inside and outside. […] The mucous represents the most “unthought” and “unthinkable” of Western culture: it is related to the threshold, but it is never theorized’. The images of the two lips and of the mucous thus both operate as challenges to the phallocentrically structured symbolic order; they become figurations both of a non-phallic eroticism and an alternative language of symbolisation. I suggest that Tanning’s contorted soft sculptures, all of

which undermine the autonomy of the individual subject in their foregrounding of inextricable surfaces, likewise present a ‘feminine’ alternative to rationalist symbolic language, which signals the possibility of an eroticism that is no longer structured by the phallus.

The installation *Hôtel du Pavot, Chambre 202* represents the apex of Tanning’s questioning of notions of autonomy, stability, pleasure, and language. The installation was created between 1970 and 1973, and was first exhibited (with the reversed title, *Chambre 202, Hôtel du Pavot*) at Tanning’s retrospective at the Centre National d’Art Contemporain in Paris in 1974. Now in the permanent collection of the Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges-Pompidou, the work presents us with a three-wall view of a dingy hotel room with stained wallpaper in which a naked lightbulb illuminates a scene of grotesque transformation. The left wall hosts a tweed-clad chimney breast (entitled *Time and Place*) (1970–73) (plate 6), which, as Victoria Carruthers notes, ‘is contoured to suggest a pendulous human breast. Next to it there appears to be a navel’, and ‘the opening of the hearth appears to be expelling something fashioned

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55 A table is placed against the wall directly opposite the viewer, on which a female figure is lying flat on her back, her long wisps of hair having sunk through the table top and emerged on the other side. This piece, Table tragique (1970–73), is created out of a similar, brown tweedy material as the chimney breast; so is the armchair, Révélation ou la fin du mois (1970–73) (plate 7), which is placed a little right of the centre of the room, and which has caught another female figure in a boundary-defying embrace. The piece appears simultaneously to signify annihilation and tenderness since ‘[o]ne of the chair’s arms’, as Carruthers points out, has ‘morphed into an actual hand, and holds the figure in an embrace’. As with Étreinte and Cousins, as well as the close embrace in Maternités, the viewer is confronted with an intimacy that simultaneously threatens the autonomy of the subject and suggests the possibility of a radically different, less solitary and independent, version of subjectivity.

The walls of the room are also alive, with bodies that are more lifelike than the twisted and malformed figures that are coming out of or merging into the furniture; a round stomach and two bare thighs have burst through the wallpaper on the right-hand
Maternities: Dorothea Tanning’s Aesthetics of Touch

wall (plate 9), whereas the fleshy back and buttocks of a female body protrude from the wall facing the viewer. This latter one is caught in the embrace of another creature, whose furry leg and arm have also come through the wallpaper. The two female forms rupturing through the walls are set off against the humanoid furniture by virtue of their flannelly ‘skin’, which underscores their nakedness in contrast to the ‘clothed’ nature of the tweedy body parts and furniture.58 There is a clear resemblance between these wall sculptures and the positions assumed by some of the figures in *Maternités*; some of the latter are curved forward, foregrounding their nodular spines in the very same way as the body mounted on the middle wall in the installation. The round belly emerging through the wall to the right, meanwhile, recalls the position of two other figures in the frieze, one of which also seems to be struggling to free herself from something resembling paper.

Through a surrealist lens, the scene becomes a powerful staging of the dissolution of the boundary between dream and wakefulness, the unconscious and the ego, and imagination and reality, which André Breton famously describes as the aim of the surrealist project: ‘Everything leads us to believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions. Now, search as one may one will never find any other motivating force in the activities of the Surrealists than the hope of finding and fixing this point’.

The room presents the viewer with a tear in the fabric of reality, which renders the everyday surreal, or marvellous, and recalls Tanning’s much earlier painting *Children’s Games* (1942), created at the height of her association with the surrealist movement, which portrays two young girls ripping wallpaper off a wall to reveal what look like living female body parts underneath. Both Mahon and Carruthers, furthermore, point out that the atmosphere in the run-down hotel room is Gothic and uncanny, an observation that is confirmed by Tanning herself, who stated in an interview with Carruthers that ‘[a] hotel bedroom is both intimate and unfamiliar […] And this can conjure a feeling of menace and unknown forces at play. But these unknown forces are a projection of our own imagination: our own private nightmares’.59 Additionally, both Mahon and Carruthers underscore the intertextual reference of the piece’s title to a popular song from around 1920 ‘lament[ing] the fate of Kitty Kane, a one-time Chicago gangster’s wife, who poisoned herself in room 202 of a local hotel’.60 My reading of *Hôtel du Pavot*, however, goes beyond its hotel-room setting and suggests that this piece engages in an exploration of a feminine economy of symbolisation. Adopting such an interpretation, the fleshy activity in the room becomes a disruption not merely of reality, but of the structures of language and representation. The ‘outside’ of discourse – what has been repressed in order to stabilize meaning – has returned here as a haunting presence. This non-graspable outside, which we might term the ‘maternal-feminine’, is not just making itself known to us, but is actively pushing at and unsettling the boundaries of symbolic representation. Moreover, if the female body, as Irigaray argues, is the foundation of Western culture, which is sacrificed and repressed in order for the masculine subject to find a place of enunciation,61 the sexed, female, and maternal bodies in Tanning’s work resist being cast as such an undifferentiated, formless chaos – or perhaps canvas – against which both identity and language are articulated. The bodies coming out of the walls of *Hôtel du Pavot* not only have form, they also clearly have agency. They claim the room and the furniture with their presence.

The connections between *Hôtel du Pavot*, language, and representation are implied in Tanning’s *Ouvre-Toi*, which features an ink drawing with sketches of the fleshy
female bodies that protrude from the walls in the installation (plate 8). In the upper left-hand corner of the drawing, the viewer can also glimpse the flowery wallpaper of the initial staging of Hôtel du Pavot in 1974. The writhing female bodies in the drawing are referred to a few pages later in Ouvre-Toi as an ‘orgie fureur des murs’ (a ‘furious orgy of the walls’) as well as, significantly, ‘graffiti’. Tanning thus overtly imagines these bodies as signs that form a kind of writing. Clearly disobeying conventional logic and grammar, this orgiastic ‘body language’ — the ‘other’ to the rationalist discourse of the phallocentric symbolic order — might be interpreted as a visualisation of écriture féminine. Such feminine writing, for Irigaray, operates as ‘a disruptive excess’ which ‘does not privilege sight; instead, it takes each figure back to its source, which is among other things tactile. […] It is always fluid […] Its “style” resists and explodes every firmly established form, figure, idea or concept’.64

If we view the tweed-clad pieces of furniture in Hôtel du Pavot through a poststructuralist prism, they can also be seen to represent the relationship between the symbolic order and its repressed excesses. In the famous words of Ferdinand de Saussure, ‘without language, thought is a vague, unchartered nebula. There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language’.65 From this, it follows that language structures what can be thought; words, concepts, and grammar provide the forms available for thought to pour itself into. As Whitford explains:

Any organization of the world, whether it be linguistic, social, or individual, is an organization which carves out of an undifferentiated continuum a set of categories which enable the world to be grasped. But it is impossible to organize the world in this way without residue. The emergence of distinctions, determinate identities, or social organizations always implies something else, that original state of non-differentiation from which they have emerged, such as a pre-social nature or the unconscious […]66

In Western metaphysics, this ‘residue’, which remains outside of discourse and is ungraspable in itself, has been categorised as feminine. As Derrida noted in his pivotal lecture ‘Structure, Sign, and Play’, even though we cannot step outside discourse or reject symbolic language, we can be aware of ‘the structurality of structure’, that is, recognise that language as a system depends on acts of exclusion and repression.
that have created a certain version – a gendered version, we might add – of ‘reality’. Thinking through ‘the structurality of structure’, which Derrida advocates, helps facilitate the feminist project of giving form to the residue or excess repressed by patriarchal discourse.

With this view in mind, I suggest that Table tragique and Révélation ou la fin du mois can be interpreted as embodiments of the process of signification, through which an amorphous thought ‘moulds itself’ into a linguistic concept (a table or an armchair), or through which a sign becomes distinct only by differentiating itself from something else. The female bodies that are merging with the furniture may be seen to represent such an amorphous otherness, which nevertheless leaves a trace, a ‘feminine’ residue. There is also a representational slippage at play in these pieces, in which concepts have begun to leak and meanings multiply. The fact that the metaphoric notion of a chimney breast, in Time and Place, is captured mid-transformation into what resembles a physical breast underscores the slipperness and play of linguistic meaning; so too do the armchair’s caressing arm and hand.

Whereas the soft sculptures in Tanning’s Hôtel du Pavot have received considerable critical attention, no one has yet offered a detailed commentary on the background against which they are placed or mounted. The original staging, at the Centre National d’Art Contemporain in 1974, used a dark brown wallpaper with a pink and yellow flowered pattern in the shape of medallions. This iteration of the installation featured two walls instead of three, and, additionally, Tanning’s first soft sculpture, Pincushion to Serve as Fetish (1965), was placed on the floor below one of the pink female forms bursting through the wall. Subsequent stagings (all of which have covered three walls instead of the original two) have variously employed a flowery wallpaper and a striped red and blue one. Whereas the dirty nature of the wallpaper is a constant feature in all of these, one curious detail appears after the initial staging: an empty square where a frame has presumably hung, next to one of the female bodies. It is situated immediately below the naked lightbulb, which serves to draw our gaze towards it. The square is set off against the rest of the wall by the pristine condition of the wallpaper – a kind of inverted stain that serves to highlight the grimy and run-down condition of room 202 at the Hôtel du Pavot. But the vanished frame signifies more in the installation than merely contributing to the dingy atmosphere in the room. Despite the fact that it is perhaps the most ordinary, indeed, ‘realist’ aspect of this installation – full as it is of fantastic, metamorphosing bodies and objects – the absence of the frame feels incongruous. It disturbs – more than do the writhing body parts. Writing about photography in Camera Lucida, Roland Barthes famously speaks of a work’s punctum: ‘It is this element’, he writes, ‘which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me’. The empty frame in Tanning’s installation, however, rather than catching and holding our gaze, seems to perform the opposite function; it makes us look away, its emptiness signifying a lack that is troubling.

I believe that there is an overt association between the ‘lack’ on display here and the psychoanalytic idea of castration, which may well be a joke on Tanning’s part, mocking both the frequent Freudian interpretations of her work (which apparently annoyed her) as well as Freud himself. Given that the addition of the empty frame to the installation replaces the initial inclusion of Pincushion to Serve as Fetish, it might indicate a tongue-in-cheek reference to the disappearance of the fetish object, whose dual purpose for Freud was to disavow as well as acknowledge the ‘fact’ of female castration. If this empty square signifies castration, then the multiple female forms protruding from the walls and the furniture certainly challenge and undermine
Freud’s notion that the female sex is a castrated and inferior version of the male sex. But perhaps we might more productively read the empty square through a poststructuralist lens, signifying the ‘lack’ of every subject that enters into the symbolic order. What is lacking for the symbolic subject is the wholeness and plenitude from which he or she has had to separate in order to achieve any form of identity. In Irigaray’s analysis, as we have seen, this pre-symbolic relationship with the mother needs to be thought and theorised; in failing to symbolise the maternal-feminine, Western culture only provides a space for a masculine sexual economy and the male speaking subject. She writes:

A taboo is in the air. If the father did not sever this over-intimate bond with the primal womb, there might be a danger of fusion, of death, of the sleep of death. Putting the matrix of his language [langue] in its place? But the exclusivity of his law forecloses this first body, this first home, this first love. It sacrifices them so as to make them material for the rule of a language [langue] which privileges the masculine genre [le genre masculin] to such an extent as to confuse it with the human race [le genre humain].

To my mind, the juxtaposition between the empty square and the erupting female bodies in Tanning’s installation might be seen to symbolise the process of separation that each subject undergoes (and which Lacan referred to as symbolic castration), but in a way that neither silences nor disavows the maternal-feminine, instead allowing it to assume form.

Every subject’s connection to as well as separation from the maternal is represented, for Irigaray, by the navel, ‘this most irreducible mark of identity’. The cutting of the umbilical cord in Irigaray’s theory supersedes the Oedipal complex and Lacan’s symbolic castration, which forbids ‘the bodily encounter with the mother’. In the current symbolic order, where the phallus is the organising principle, ‘the openness of the mother [ouverte de la mère], the opening on to the mother [ouverte à la mère], appear to be threats of contagion, contamination, engulfment in illness, madness and death’. The symbolic order thus ‘superimposes upon the archaic world of the flesh a universe of language [langue] and symbols which cannot take root in it except as in the form of that which makes a hole in the bellies of women and in the site of their identity. [...] A hole in the texture of language corresponds to the forgetting of the scar of the navel’. The navel, in Irigaray’s reading, thus implies the possibility of a different order of symbolisation, leading onto ‘[t]he imaginary and the symbolic of intra-uterine life and of the first bodily encounter with the mother’. To conceptualise the maternal-feminine in such non-phallic terms would not only subvert Freud’s problematic equation of femininity with castration and Lacan’s insistence that the feminine is irrepresentable in symbolic language, it would also pave the way for a non-hierarchical economy in which ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, conscious and unconscious, operate according to what Irigaray calls a ‘double syntax’. A ‘feminine’ symbolic would thus not replace the current ‘masculine’ one, but rather operate with it in alignment, each cross-fertilising the other.

Navels are a recurring motif in Tanning’s art from the 1960s through the 1980s – both in her sculptures and her paintings. Representations of navels dominate soft sculptures such as Emma (plate 10) and Traffic Sign; moreover, as McAra notes, the navel is a central focal point in Tanning’s ‘post-sculptural paintings such as Web of Dreams (1973–93), Portrait de famille (Family Portrait) (1977), and especially Murmurs (1976) […] where the navel of the central figure is shown bare and bathed in moonlight’.
navel is present in *Hôtel du Pavot*, too, most conspicuously adorning the front of the female figure bursting through the wallpaper on the right-hand wall (see plate 9), but also suggested in the round protrusion on the left side of *Time and Place*. Drawing on the feminist insights of Mieke Bal and Griselda Pollock, McAra proposes that the navel of *Emma* might be approached as a metaphorical alternative to the phallus.\(^7^9\)

If we unpack this suggestion, we might say that the navel in Tanning’s art not only displaces the primacy of the phallus in Western culture, but that it also opens out to the symbolisation of the maternal-feminine, which has been repressed in the phallocentrically structured symbolic. Like Irigaray’s evocative images of the two lips and the mucous, Tanning’s navel is an aspect (in addition to her figurations of touch, ’body writing’, and linguistic slippages) of her alternative language of representation, of a feminine ’syntax’ which, in Irigaray’s words, ’involve[s] nearness, proximity, but in such an extreme form that it […] preclude[s] any distinction of identities, any establishment of ownership, thus any form of appropriation’.\(^8^0\)
Irigaray impels us to ‘find, find anew, invent the words, the sentences that speak the most archaic and most contemporary relationship with the body of the mother, with our bodies, the sentences that translate the bond between her body, ours, and that of our daughters’. This language, she insists, would ‘not replace the bodily encounter, as paternal language attempts to do, but [would] go along with it’; its ‘words [would] not bar the corporeal, but [would] speak corporeal’. As this essay has suggested, Tanning’s work similarly prompts a reconsideration of the phallocentric ordering of Western culture; it offers a symbolisation of the maternal-feminine according to a grammar that does not construe it as abject or forbidden. Her drawings and paintings that bear titles alluding to maternity conceptualise this theme as a logic of touch and intimacy that destabilises the contours of the individual subject ‘in such an extreme form’, to rehearse Irigaray’s words, that it ‘preclude[s] any distinction of identities,

any establishment of ownership, thus any form of appropriation’. Such a metaphorical understanding of the term maternity has served here as a useful prism through which to interpret Tanning’s soft sculptures, whose titles do not connote motherhood, but whose expressions nevertheless revolve around an eruption of the maternal-feminine into the symbolic.

Surrealism famously sought to give expression to the unconscious – in Breton’s words, surrealism proposed ‘to express the actual functioning of thought […] in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern’.

However, the impact of Lacan’s linguistically-oriented psychoanalysis from the 1940s onwards complicated the idea of an unmediated articulation of the unconscious, as language itself was shown to be held in check by the phallocentric and rationalist symbolic order. By the time Tanning produced the works discussed here, theorists such as Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva were in the process of extending Lacanian psychoanalysis as they filtered it through contemporary poststructuralist theories, a project that evidenced the continuous repression of the maternal-feminine in symbolic language. Their aesthetic and political project of recuperating this maternal-feminine and giving it symbolic form was indeed predicated on terms inherited from poststructuralism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, as well as second-wave feminism – terms and tools that were not available in the early decades of surrealist activity. Yet, I suggest that the early surrealist pursuit to express the unconscious in art or writing resonates to some extent with poststructuralist feminist aesthetics – both projects attempted to give voice or form to that which was seen to have been repressed by the current cultural order. The tactile turn in surrealism consolidates this connection, as it gestures towards the feminist politics of touch that would become a central aspect of Irigaray’s revision of psychoanalysis. Surrealism’s haptic aesthetic might thus be seen, like Irigaray, to undermine the privileging of vision in both Freudian and Lacanian discourse, which served to construe the female body as castrated and inferior.

Tanning’s work of the late 1960s and early 1970s draws together surrealism’s excavation of the unconscious, its exploration of the possibilities of touch and tactility, and contemporary poststructuralist feminist ideas around language and the maternal-feminine. As stated at the outset of this essay, I do not wish to argue that Tanning was necessarily aware of this latter intellectual tradition; there is no evidence that she ever read the writing of Irigaray, Cixous, Kristeva or any of the other theorists associated with poststructuralist feminism. Rather, the resonance between her aesthetic and the theoretical positions of these feminists suggests that they emerged out of a shared intellectual milieu, of which surrealism as well as a germinating linguistically-oriented critique of phallocentrism were significant parts. My reading of Tanning’s work of the late 1960s and early 1970s through the prism of Irigaray’s poststructuralist feminism crystallises her recurring concern with touch, contiguity, and the symbolic potential of the concept of maternity, and has made it possible to theorise the feminist implications of her engagement with these concepts.

In a 1974 interview with Alain Jouffroy, Tanning stated that her art attempts to capture and represent ‘[u]nknown but knowable states’.

This statement is not only indicative of her allegiance to surrealist philosophy, but a resonant illustration of the crux of the poststructuralist feminist vision of giving symbolic form to that which remains outside of the current structures of language. Tanning’s scenes of intimacy, which evoke the memory of a closeness we have all once known but which symbolic language cannot accommodate, offer an important visual dimension to this project.
Notes
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1 As Alyce Mahon notes, this dog is modelled on Tanning and Max Ernst’s dog Katchina, which also appears in numerous subsequent paintings. See Alyce Mahon, ‘Dorothea Tanning: Behind the Door, Another Invisible Door’, in Alyce Mahon, ed, Dorothea Tanning, London, 2018, 27.


3 Mahon, ‘Behind the Door, Another Invisible Door’, 27.


11 Tanning, Between Lives, 75.

12 Quoted in Mahon, ‘Life is Something Else’, 65.


15 As Alyce Mahon notes, this dog is modelled on Tanning and Max Ernst’s dog Katchina, which also appears in numerous subsequent paintings. See Alyce Mahon, ‘Dorothea Tanning: Behind the Door, Another Invisible Door’, in Alyce Mahon, ed, Dorothea Tanning, London, 2018, 27.

22 Pollock points out that ‘[t]he French term le féminin is not easily translated by the English word feminine or femininity, which have accrued connotations more typically disowned by feminists’. Pollock, ‘Moments and Temporalities of the Avant-Garde “in, of, and from the feminine”’, 801–802.


29 Irigaray, ‘The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, 43.


31 Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, 24.


33 Quoted in Whitford, Luce Irigaray, 173.


35 As Victoria Carruthers notes, the mother in Maternity II ‘looks deranged, her long hair in disarray and flying off to one side as if she is caught in the middle of some wild and bestial moment […] Unlike the sense of isolation around the central group in the first Maternity painting, the family in Maternity II is more like an intimate “pack.”’ Victoria Carruthers, Dorothea Tanning: Transformations, London, 2020, 132, 135.


37 Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, 26.

38 Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, 26.

39 Irigaray, ‘The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, 45.

40 Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, 31.

41 The book Ouvre-Toi includes sketches of the soft sculptures Don Juan’s Breakfast (1972) and Ouvre-Toi (1970), as well as the two wall-mounted figures of Hôtel du Pavot (1970–73).

42 Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, 26.

43 Catriona McAra, ‘Emme’s Navel: Dorothea Tanning’s Narrative Sculpture’, in Patricia Allmer, ed, Intersections: Women Artists/Surrealism/Modernism, Manchester, 2016, 103. McAra refers specifically to those of Tanning’s sculptures that utilise plisse, such as Cousins and Étreinte.

44 Tanning, Between Lives, 281.

46 For an analysis of the intertextual qualities of Ouvre-Toi, see Catriona McAra, ‘“Open Sesame”: Dorothea Tanning’s Critical Writing’, in Anna Watz, ed, Surrealist Women’s Writing, 210–224.

47 This list of Tanning’s cloth sculptures is not exhaustive; see also e.g. Pincushion to Serve as Fetish (1965), Yeh (1969–70), Cultet en temps de pluie (Rainy-Day Cultet), 1970, Traffic Sign (1970), Don Juan’s Breakfast (1972), Tweedy (1973), Primitive Seating (1982), and Myself as Never (1969–2009).

48 Katharine Conley, Surrealist Ghastliness, Lincoln, 2013, 121.


51 Janine Mileaf, Please Touch: Dada and Surrealist Objects after the Readymade, Hanover, New Hampshire, 2010, 2.


53 Mahon, ‘Life is Something Else’, 61. It is worth noting that there are echoes of other artistic traditions in Tanning’s soft sculpture; see McAra, ‘Emme’s Navel’, 104.


55 Carruthers, Dorothea Tanning, 159–160.

56 Robert Lebel draws a parallel between the position of this figure and

Moreover, the contorted poses of many of Tanning’s soft sculptures are echoed in other paintings and drawings from this time, such as for example L’Avent-Garde (1966), Déguites (1975), Tango Líves (1977), Notes for an Apocalypse (1978), Huntless (1980), and Mean Frequency (Aurora) (1981).

57 Carruthers, Dorothea Tanning. 159.

58 Conley reminds us that tweed is a ‘fabric associated with British elites that epitomizes bourgeois propriety’. Conley, Surrealist Ghostliness, 145.


61 Carruthers, Dorothea Tanning. 162.

62 Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother', 36.

63 Dorothea Tanning, Ouvre-Toi, Milano, 1971, 6.

64 Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, 78, 79.

65 Ferdinand de Saussure, quoted in Winfried Nöth, Handbook of Semiotics, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1990, 61.

66 Whitford, Lue Irigaray, 66.


69 See e.g. Between Lives, where Tanning writes: ‘Oddest of all, the sad little procession of analyzers, trudging toward the altar of libido, singing their quavering hymns from the open books of people like Sigmund Sang Froid (Max’s pun).’ Tanning, Between Lives, 336.


71 Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, 39.

72 Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, 39.

73 Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, 39.

74 Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, 40.

75 Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, 41.

76 Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, 39.

77 Irigaray,.This Sex Which Is Not One, 132.

78 McAra, ‘Emma’s Navel’, 94.

79 McAra, ‘Emma’s Navel’, 100.

80 Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, 134.

81 Irigaray, 'The Bodily Encounter with the Mother’, 43.


83 Jouffroy, ‘Interview with Dorothea Tanning’, 57.