Before Being: Uncovering the Process of Presencing Through the Mother's Sublimation

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Introduction

Martin Heidegger makes the claim that "the relations of man with beings, is at bottom nothing other than the differentiation of Being and beings, which belongs to man's natural disposition." This insinuates that the state of being in relation to other beings is what ultimately produces the capacity to "be metaphysically determined and defined by metaphysics."[1] That is, that we are beings in relation to other beings allows us to appear as we appear. Luce Irigaray expands upon this claim, suggesting that the ability to differentiate oneself among other beings is an essential condition from which being appears. This condition, however, becomes problematic for being insofar as it takes its presence to be predicated on the absence of the other; that is, that being can only appear in contrast to that which does not appear causes being to take issue with what it is in relation to, with what awards being its metaphysical determination, as being's presence can only maintain itself upon the absence of what it is in relation to. Irigaray illustrates the problem of difference for being when she states: "The unconcealment of one would require the concealment of the other… When one comes to presence, the other leaves so as to welcome the first in a peaceful dwelling."[2] If we take Heidegger's thought that man's relations with beings is nothing other than the differentiation of Being – what is necessary for being's appearance – and being – what presently appears – and attribute his thought to Irigaray's idea that the unconcealment of one necessitates the concealment of the other, then the presence of being shows itself to be established out of the absence and withdrawal of what first allowed it to appear. How, then, does the absence of what allows being to come into presence work upon

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[1] Martin Heidegger. *Nietzsche*. Edited by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 184.
[2] Luce Irigaray. *The Forgetting of Air: in Martin Heidegger*. Translated by Mary Beth Mader (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 152.

being insofar as it maintains its unconcealment, its presence? That is, *how did being get here*? How did being arrive into presence?

The appearance of beings is made possible by conditions that are absent-present. In other words, the conditions for the possibility of appearance do not themselves appear. Heidegger attributes another necessary condition for being's presence, asserting that Being, insofar as it is taken to facilitate the possibility of beings, "is the most forgotten, so boundlessly forgotten that the very forgottenness is sucked into its own vortex," and yet, "what is most forgotten is at the same time most in remembering, which alone allows us to enter and inhabit the past, present, and future."[3] The conditions necessary for the presence of beings are beyond beings' grasp and are simultaneously constantly operating upon each being to permit its entrance into presence. When a being recalls itself – which is to say, when a being reminds itself of how it is or has been determined – it remembers the relations and conditions that produced itself in the present or past. Only once the determination of a being is impermanently suspended can this being recall the presence of that which must remain absent to allow it to be or to appear as it does, that is, only once a being relieves itself of its attachment to how it appears can it remember the conditions that facilitated its appearance, for the presence of that which was absent reveals itself in the wake of being's concealment.

The presencing of a being can then be thought of as a relational movement between the conditions for the possibility of a being and this being itself. Presencing is predicated upon structures of power that arise out of being's relation to what is other and the anxiety to maintain the unconcealment of one in the concealment of the other. I locate the epitomization of this

[3] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 193.

process in the infant's relationship to the maternal body, finding that the exploitation and sublimation – or the concealment – of that which gives being over to itself, of that which bears life, is an essential process in the development of the subject. The attachment to identity and to one's desire to facilitate one's own presencing so as to mitigate any threat to one's presence can only be maintained in the concealment of the other.

To express the movement of the relationship between being and that which facilitates its appearance, I will ground this abstract and partially concealed relationality in more tangible phenomena. Through Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*, I will present the interplay between civilization – which can be taken as a type of being – and the conditions through which it first makes its appearance. In the analysis of Freud's account of the emergence of civilization, I will disclose the conditions that facilitate the appearance of being. In utilizing Julia Kristeva's account of the development of culture, I will bring attention to the conditional absence of that which constitutes being as it comes to exist. The absence of these conditions, which continually works to produce being, unveils the asymmetrical dynamic between that which facilitates being's appearance and being itself; this asymmetry gets continuously manipulated through the determination of being, insofar as being exists in opposition to what awards it presencing. I detect the full force of this relational dynamic in the infant's relationship to the maternal body, finding that the foundation from which being first confronts itself resides in being's first relationship to that which gave it existence. I will then draw from Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic theory of development to detail the subject's process of becoming, placing emphasis on the sublimation and exploitation of the mother, who represents that which awards being its existence, in order to disclose the attitude through which being engages with this

fundamental relationship. This sublimation will expose itself as an essential aspect of the emergence of the subject, as the presence of that which facilitates being's appearance inherently unsettles the integrity of the subject's solidity. Finally, through Luce Irigaray's account of air and Heidegger's conception of Being, I will unveil the problematic condition of being as derivative of being's own attitude towards difference, and propose a new attitude that acknowledges the difference as essential, as a source of life and meaning.

I. On Freud's Account of the Origins of Civilization and Subjectivity

In order to unveil the interplay between beings and what facilitates their appearance and existence, it is imperative to ground these concepts in a concrete presencing of being; to identify the relationships and encounters that act as the conditions from which being appears. Freud epitomizes such a presencing in *The Future of an Illusion*. In this book, Freud muses about the development of civilization, which he quickly attaches to the cultivation of religious ideals, finding that the drive towards unifying a group of people in a particular geological location was brought forth by a reaction against nature: an entity which humanity has no control over, posing an imminent threat. Nature's threat to man produced a need to protect oneself against its "crushingly superior force," which is to say, to defend oneself against nature's power to take life and, further, to mitigate man's helplessness; this, for Freud, is the primary task of civilization.[4] Man resolved to humanize nature in an attempt to tame it. In order to make nature into something man could relate to while also preserving its authoritative presence, man bestowed nature with

[4] Sigmund Freud. *The Future of an Illusion*. Edited by James Strachey (New York: Norton & Company, 1989), 30.

the characteristics of a father. By suturing paternal qualities onto nature, man was able to articulate his ambivalence towards nature which he also experiences towards the domineering, delegating presence of the father: man loves both nature and his father, for they provide him with protection and sustain his existence; but he simultaneously hates nature and his father, for they equally pose a fatal and punitive threat. As man imparts paternal qualities onto nature, Freud further suggests that man turns nature and the father into gods, for they now possess the given authority of altering and producing one's destiny and a sense of omniscience. This deliberate humanization of nature, on the one hand, and its deification on the other, retains the integrity of man's helplessness as well as his yearning for the gods, for the all-knowing and mighty force, without altogether exiling nature from the mortal domain.[5]

Although Freud accounts for the emergence of civilization, he loses sight of the process of presencing – the primary conditions and relationships that assisted in how civilization came to exist. Nature, before it is humanized, acts as the catalyst for man's drive to create civilization, but an account of nature prior to its being endowed with paternal meaning has yet to be disclosed. That is, in order to conceive of the impetus that brought civilization into presence, into being, one must inquire: how was man conceiving of nature in its original state of threat and force? Before Freud introduces the humanization/paternalization of nature, he refers to nature as a "she" and fails to account for this shift in language. He describes nature as having "her own particularly effective method of restricting us. She destroys us… It was precisely because of these dangers with which nature threatens us that we came together and created civilization."[6] The shift in conceptualizing nature came about through a recognition of the potential of

[5] Ibid., 24.
[6] Ibid., 20; emphasis added.

relatedness; that is, of how one's relationship to another has the capacity to reconfigure the structures of power one enters, and thus one's sense of self, when relating to another being. Freud offers an interpretation of humanity's capacity and desire to formulate relationships for the purpose of identifying and establishing one's identity:

> I believe… that when man personifies the forces of nature he is… following an infantile model. He has learnt from the persons in his earliest environment that *the way to influence them is to establish a relation with them*; and so, later on, with the same end in view, he treats everything else that he comes across in the same way as he treated those persons… *it is in fact natural to man to personify everything that he wants to understand in order later to control it*.[7]

Freud makes two points that are particularly evocative: that personification emerges out of an infantile necessity to relate so as to exercise influence over the being they establish a relation with; and that man continually employs this method of survival throughout his life. As man moves to personify nature so as to establish a level of relatedness, not only does he diminish the other-wordly power nature once possessed, but he also rules over nature and sublimates it for the purposes and prolongation of civilization. Nature becomes a presence that is permitted to be only insofar as it is conceptualized within civilization's collective consciousness; nature is no longer an entity beyond humanity but rather an entity that is utilized for humanity's continuity. By relating to nature in this way, man takes ownership of the power nature once had over him; his relationship to nature had to be radically reconceived for man to appear as he wished to appear – as a being no longer vulnerable to the other.

Returning to Freud's use of "she" when referring to nature, we can now begin to get a sense of this erasure, or rather, of man's impossible relationship to a feminized, maternal nature.

Given his interpretation of man's need to personify that which he wants to understand or control, Freud's initial characterization of nature – in *her* heightened state of threat and force – points to man's inability to relate to a feminine nature, implying a disparity between man's capacity to relate to the mother versus the father. Freud implicitly accounts for his shift in language regarding nature when he outlines the infant's transition from viewing the mother as protective, to viewing the father as the primary protector:

> ...the mother, who satisfies the child's hunger, becomes its first love-object and certainly also its first protection against all the unidentified dangers which threaten it in the external world… In this function [of protection] the mother is soon replaced by the stronger father, who retains that position for the rest of childhood. But the child's attitude to its father is coloured by a peculiar ambivalence. *The father himself constitutes a danger for the child, perhaps because of its earlier relation to its mother.* Thus it fears him no less than it longs for him and admires him.[8]

If we take Freud's account of the mother to be akin to nature before its paternalization, then the father can be regarded as retaining the initial ambivalence that was first encountered in the mother, only insofar as it *replaces*, *represents*, a danger that was primarily attached to the mother, to unadulterated nature. Freud's initial use of the "she" pronoun implicitly indicates nature is an ambiguous vessel that exudes this primary danger, and the drive to humanize/paternalize nature allows this danger to become representable, conceivable, sensible, and thus alterable. This shift towards paternalization is also epitomized in psychoanalytic theory of development: the child only comes to confront and recognize the danger and anxiety it first felt towards the mother once these feelings become associated with the father. The father is

endowed with this instigating danger and fear through his association to the mother as a life-sustaining presence. What, then, does the mother represent that creates an originary impression of danger, and why is it non-present insofar as it retains its association with the mother/feminine? We see this danger present itself through man's primary encounter with nature, and through the first infantile attachment, suggesting that unadulterated danger – prior to its paternalization – acts as the catalyst for both the emergence of civilization and of subjectivity. The mother's possession and evocation of this primary danger cannot be related to by the child, suggesting that the mother obscures the danger insofar as it cannot be made representable through her. Once the mother is replaced by the father as the infant's first love-object, as its protection, the child can then begin to grasp the ambivalent relationship it possesses towards its primary protector, and thus reconcile its anxiety-provoking relationship to what sustains its existence. The child yearns for this principal connection to the mother via its love and admiration for the father, while simultaneously fearing an originary danger which now finds its personification in the father.

The shift from man's anxious relationship to feminine nature to civilization's collective personification of paternal nature is necessary for the presencing of civilization, and of nature insofar as civilization conceptualizes it, in that it allows man to confront this primal danger while diminishing the threat nature once posed to his existence. In order for civilization to develop, it was essential that man transform the ambiguous force of nature into a recognizable power that man could relate to and consequently control; this understanding, however, does not account for man's inability to relate to or personify a feminine or maternal nature. Why is it that this fatal danger – as it is initially confronted as an unadulterated nature, and as the mother as the primary

love-object – cannot be grasped, confronted, related to, when embodied as a non-male form? And what does this inability to relate *directly* to these unidentified forces reveal about becoming itself, as exemplified in the emergence of civilization and the development of subjectivity?

II. On Kristeva's Account of Meaning Through the Acquisition of Language

To get a fuller sense of how the shift from man's confrontation of an all-powerful, threatening nature to civilization's collective paternalization and taming of nature yields to a representation that man can influence, Kristeva offers a conception of the formation of culture. Through this formation, she reveals how meaning is acquired and solidified in collective understanding through language. Freud's shift in grasping nature's threat is made mutable, controllable, through personification – as represented through his change of pronouns – which suggests that nature's meaning and its signification is dependent upon the language that is being used to refer to it. *The language itself unveils meaning*, or rather, makes meaning accessible, traceable, and most importantly, representable and controllable. In her essay, "The Impudence of Uttering: The Mother Tongue," Kristeva identifies language as the basis of culture, of making meaning that endures through the signification of representations. How meaning is affixed to language, however, is not direct; rather, meaning as it is represented through language, is obtained by inverting and withdrawing from the source of its meaning. Kristeva describes naming as "an utterance that remembers its 'abandonment' to the overestimated object and that can fail in the 'abandonment' to the abstract idea," signifying that the meaning attached to a name demonstrates its essential severance from its source; that is, the meaning conveyed through

a name does not directly emulate its source because it merely represents the source.[7] Language provides a representation that man can confront in such a way that does not confound him, as attaching a name to a once ambiguous source depletes any danger of the unknown which would disturb man's constructed identity. Representations, insofar as they are the basis for language, not only abandon the source of meaning, but they also efface the drive from which language was first obtained:

> [Since…] the acquisition of language profits from the *denial* of the drive…, language is… constituted as an *object of a perverse type*. Even so, it is not enough to say that language protects itself from sexual desire and from the movement of the drive by rendering it psychic and inverting it… In fact, the psychic inscription continues to act, to be active and, therefore, energetic by doubly inverting itself: both towards its energetic source and towards its own opposite meaning. And all this occurs in order to preserve desire as a secret around which the psychic, i.e. imaginary and symbolic, identity of Myself will congeal.[8]

The psychic inscription of language necessarily inverts the source of its meaning as the name that represents the source both derives its meaning from what it is – the source – and what it is not – what is apart from the source. The inversion of meaning conceals the desire/drive through which meaning was established because the distinction of what is and what is not pertinent to the source of meaning that is represented through language is ultimately a distinction determined by a subject. To constitute language as "an object of a perverse type" is to acknowledge its inability to recognize the internal drive that brought one to establish not only a name but the dualism – of what is and what is not the source – that was determined to acquire this name. If one were to

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[7] Julia Kristeva. "The Impudence of Uttering: The Mother Tongue," Translated by Patricia Viera and Michael Marder. *Psychoanalytic Review 97*, no. 4 (2010) 684.
[8] Ibid., 682-83.

trace the drive to acquire language, the integrity of one's sense of self would be unsettled, as the name that identity clings to so as to make sense of one's self and the world turns out to be an inverted meaning, a representation that fails to preserve the original source of meaning. Ultimately, language is obtained through an essential sublimation of the drive towards meaning and a withdrawal from the original source of meaning; the source of meaning itself becomes fractured in the partial preservation of its representation – which is directly cor/responding to its opposite meaning – but the source and drive itself are never made wholly accessible or conceivable. Meaning can only be held through linguistic variables which are subject to develop and change through relational dynamics, further removing man from accessing the original source of meaning. In the creation of a representation, the ambiguity of the source is preserved insofar as the name fails to encapsulate it; yet the name is taken to be a direct representation of the source of meaning – as a result of the forgotten drive – which isolates man from the ambiguity of the source and obscures his access to reality.

Returning to the emergence of civilization, the shift from an unadulterated nature to a paternal nature appears to not only profit man in the sense that he can relate to and control nature, but also in introducing a mediating conception of nature in order to access the characteristics which first thrust civilization into being. That is, the personification of nature serves to exhibit the ambiguous, confusing, anxiety-provoking aspects of nature that were first encountered, but not consciously regarded, prior to nature's paternalization. Meaning was made accessible, confrontable, controllable, only once it was sublimated from its source (unadulterated nature) and grafted onto something familiar, relatable (the father). As Freud points out, we see this movement take place within infantile development: the mother's protection and danger is only made approachable and recognizable once these attributes are transferred onto the father,

suggesting that this transmutation of meaning is crucial for the development of the subject. Similarly, civilization's emergence is, in fact, not solely attributable to a group of people's desire to protect themselves against the overwhelming, threatening force of nature. Rather, civilization's coming-to-be largely owes to its capacity to access, control, and influence the original source of danger insofar as the primary danger, threat, and *meaning* of nature is made accessible by sublimating the original embodiment of this threat in a familiar representation. Through this movement, an essential aspect of the presencing of being comes to light: in order for a being to be meaningful, to have a sense of itself, the source of its meaning must be sublimated, effaced, and transmuted, for being itself cannot directly emulate or recognize the source of its meaning. Presencing, as seen in the development of civilization, is dependent upon the withdrawal from the source of being and meaning itself, for being cannot relate to or confront the original source of its meaning, as it would be incomprehensible; meaning *must* be mediated; distance from the source must be established; and what first provoked the presencing of being and meaning must be forgotten, effaced, sublimated, for being to burst forth.

III. The Acquisition of Meaning Through Gendering

If we synthesize the two movements discussed so far – the acquisition of control through relationality, and the capacity to represent what is being related to – as conducive to the presencing of being, whether it be of the subject or civilization, then it becomes clear that transmutation is essential for being's development; that is, the source of meaning that being relates itself to requires transmutation so that it can be brought down to the level of man to be controlled and influenced. Prior to this transmutation, the source of meaning – unadulterated

nature in the case of civilization, the mother in the case of the subject – is rendered insensible. This quality of that which facilitates the development of the subject, of civilization, is inherently an other to being; being cannot make sense of what it encounters, and resolves this confusion and anxiety by attributing it to an entity of equal-standing so as to capture it and dispose of its obscurity. In the resolution of that-which-is-other to man, the source of meaning becomes paternalized, masculinized, so as to absolve the ambiguity that is paradigmatically associated with the father's opposite – the mother. Unadulterated nature can then be thought of as possessing qualities of the mother in its enigmatic and anxiety-provoking state.

The desire to entrap the source of meaning is in direct response to the individual's desire to take hold of their identity, to be the sole author of their existence. By making the bearer of meaning sensible, which is to say, placed within a structure of symbolic order, being diminishes what is unsensible, unrepresentable and accentuates that which facilitates its development while simultaneously preserving what is essential for the continuation of being's identity and existence. In "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini," Kristeva underscores mastery as a fundamental characteristic that the bearer of meaning – specifically the mother – possesses. She writes:

> …if we suppose that a *mother* is the subject of gestation, in other words the *master* of a process that science, despite its effective devices, acknowledges it cannot now and perhaps never will be able to take away from her; if we suppose her to be *master* of a process that is prior to the social-symbolic-linguistic contract of the group, then we acknowledge the risk of losing identity at the same time as we ward it off.[9]

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[9] Julia Kristeva. "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini." In *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, translated by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 238.
[12] Ibid., 238.

By associating the mysterious mastery of the mother with the risk of losing one's sense of self, Kristeva uncovers the true disturbance that the source of meaning, being's catalyst, implants into being: the fact that the mother is the only being that can bring life into the world, that can facilitate being at all, marks her as the only being that is in contact with the *before-being* – that which completely eludes us and threatens the integrity and continuation of our existence. The very dependence that is embodied in the mother's life-bearing function brings attention to that which rules over being yet can never be accessed; an unfathomable force that permits existence itself. Our identity, taken to be a product of our own construction, proves to be a result of a process that relates the self to a representation of the source of meaning – something that we cannot make sense of or conquer. The unadulterated, unrepresentable presence of the source of meaning poses a legitimate threat to our symbolically constructed individuality as it evokes what is beyond representability.

Kristeva goes on to describe the maternal body as "the place of a splitting" wherein "the woman-subject, although under the sway of the paternal function (as symbolizing, speaking subject and like all others)," acts as the "threshold where 'nature' confronts 'culture'."[12] The mother comes to inhabit a place between worlds; she exists in nature insofar as she exudes its same ambiguity and mastery of bearing-life, yet she is also a socialized being, which is to say, she is a being that must be symbolized so that she may be collectively understood. The woman-subject's existence is reduced to the level of function; she is recognized for her life-bearing capacities that cannot be replicated, that are essential to the survival of humanity, but all other facets of this function and of her very being, are disregarded, effaced, sublimated, for the purposes of preserving a singular, "equalizing" culture that renders man the master of his

own existence. In other words, the move to dilute the presence of the woman-subject, of the mother, so as to establish "social coherence," is "nothing more than a phallic attempt to reach the Mother who is presumed to exist at the very place where (social and biological) identity recedes."[10] The very symbolization of that which bears meaning and life indicates a *desire for* mastery over, and connection to, what belies being itself. The movement towards this mastery is already corrupted, already a failure, as this *beyond* cannot be accessed through the establishment and concretization of an identity, for this enigmatic place dissolves all sense of individuality. The mother instigates the desire for mastery, yet the individual takes up the execution of this desire by dominating the mother; in a sense, this desire is really a desire for the ownership over what gives one's being over to them, which is essentially a destruction of what facilitates the conditions for the possibility of being. To further accentuate the attitude beings have towards their source of being and meaning, I now want to turn to a closer examination of the essential characteristics that the mother possesses which ultimately result in/unveil the desire for her sublimation.

IV. Anxiety as Indicative of Non-Presence

Through Freud's deliberate forgetfulness of a before-paternal-nature – intimated as a feminized, maternal nature – the individual's relationship to the original source of meaning becomes clear: the capacity to relate to what diffuses meaning, and consequently being itself, is predicated on the sublimation of the original source of meaning and its ensuing transmutation of meaning onto an object/entity that exists within a pre-established relationship that the subject can rationalize. The individual's inability to confront the primary source of meaning, where one

[10] Ibid., 241-42.

confronts unmediated feelings and reactions, points to an inherent human failure to approach the self prior to organizing the significance of one's actions and reactions within a self-authored structure of understanding. The discomfort and confusion that arises from the encounter between the self and the source of meaning reveals the way in which individuals feel deeply uncomfortable and disturbed at the sight of that which affects them in a manner that was not conjured up by oneself, for we want to control and manage our experience in and of the world. When we fail to place our experiences into an arrangement of understanding, of signification – which is to say, into paternal functionality – we experience the pressure of an ungrounding, destabilizing anxiety: the type of anxiety that propels groups of people to formulate a system of organizing experience that offers protection against this troubling and threatening force. Heidegger articulates this anxiety, claiming that:

> Anxiety is indeed anxiety in the face of . . ., but not in the face of this or that thing. Anxiety in the face of . . . is always anxiety for . . ., but not for this or that. The indeterminateness of that in the face of which and for which we become anxious is no mere lack of determination but rather *the essential impossibility of determining it*. In a familiar phrase this indeterminateness comes to the fore…
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> *Anxiety reveals the nothing.*[11]

It is precisely this inability to locate the source of anxiety, this uncharted meaning, that pushes individuals to erect determinations in the face of indeterminacy. Heidegger adds to his account of anxiety by positing fear as its direct contrast; unlike anxiety, fear overtakes us when we find ourselves "in the face of this or that particular being that threatens us in this or that

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[11] Martin Heidegger. "What is Metaphysics?" In *Basic Writings*. Edited by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Perennial, 1993), 100-101.
[15] Ibid., 100.

particular respect."[15] Fearfulness pertains to something that can be recognized and articulated, whereas anxiety incapacitates us to the extent that what is overpowering us cannot be familiarly deduced; anxiety is elusive, ungraspable, yet takes us captive. Fear and anxiety both take hold of the individual, but it is only in a state of fear that the individual can identify *what* is overtaking them. In order to regain power over what provokes anxiety, the unnameable, ungraspable source must first be sublimated to fear of something; through this sublimation, the integrity of the feeling that is induced is upheld while simultaneously bringing that which produces anxiety into the realm of intelligibility and visibility; this transmutation, however, results in an illusory representation of that which resists representation entirely. This movement is exemplified in the development of the subject, as the infant begins to identify the father as primary protector which endows him with the characteristics of the mother's unsettling presence; the child's fear of the father appears only because of the father's earlier relation to the (anxiety-provoking) mother.

Anxiety animates the *non-presence* of that which produces this anxious feeling to the extent that the individual, insofar as they attain awareness of this anxiety, is completely overpowered by this state that was induced by something other than themself, something that cannot be uttered. Control over the self is suspended, at least for a moment prior to anxiety's ensuing sublimation to fear, ultimately putting the solidity and integrity of the self into question. The individual's inability to comprehend and locate what is inducing their state of anxiety brings attention to the aspects of one's existence that have yet to be rationalized and organized into a system of deciphering meaning; in other words, the anxious state brings awareness to that which has yet to be given signification, to be placed within the paternal function. Heidegger adds to his phenomenology of anxiety when he states that, "We 'hover' in anxiety," meaning that anxiety

leaves us suspended "because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole," thus putting all sense of determination, of signification, into question; it is in this state where "we ourselves – we humans who are in being – in the midst of beings slip away from ourselves… where there is nothing to hold onto," that "pure Da-sein is all that is still there."[12] Da-sein, which Heidegger takes literally to designate *being-there*, is accessed through anxiety, through a suspension of self, suggesting that determination-of-self and pure Da-sein – that which constitutes being – are at odds with one another; being's own being is problematized in its reflection. In the total abeyance of signification that arrives out of anxiety, where there is nothing for the self to relate to or be distinguished from (their anxiety), is the place that facilitates the conditions for the possibility of being.

V. On the Transmutation of Ambivalence as the Precondition for Subjectivity

Let me illustrate these ideas by turning to Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic theory of development. This theory exhibits the first time the individual comes into contact with a rupturing anxiety of the sort just discussed, and how the individual's attitude towards this encounter acts as the foundation and model for all later relationships. Through Klein, Heidegger's notion of anxiety will take on a new form, disclosing it as an absent presence that asserts its influence through iterations of relatedness, which finds its initial appearance in the mother and nature. In designating the mother as the site where the subject first confronts this untraceable anxiety, the way in which meaning is acquired and the way in which being comes to understand itself will show themselves to be a fundamentally gendered phenomena; what cannot be signified, what appears to be pure, affective nothingness, is paradigmatically maternal,

[12] Ibid., 101.

feminine, to the extent that the entire process of signification – a paternal function – exists within a binary of what can and cannot be comprehended. The development of the subject, along with the development of civilization, is dependent upon the encounter with that which cannot be, or has yet to be, symbolized through a process of sublimation, suggesting that the individual's becoming necessarily finds its beginning in relation to the maternal, to meaning's and being's source, to what exists before its transmutation into symbolic function. The source of meaning's initial form will unveil itself as possessing qualities of the feminine – the first other – suggesting that becoming, signification itself, ensues out of that which resists signification.

What is most characteristic of the individual's relationship to the source of meaning, to the mother, is ambivalence. Echoing Freud, Klein asserts that the infant finds the mother – specifically her breast – as the first love object. Her interpretation of the relationship between mother and infant sheds light on the ambivalence that Freud initially emphasizes in the child's relationship to the father. Klein depicts the child's first love towards the mother and her breast as "already disturbed at its roots by destructive impulses" where "love and hate are struggling together in the baby's mind; and this struggle to a certain extent persists throughout life and is liable to become a source of danger in human relationships."[13] Not only does Klein make clear that ambivalence is a fundamental component of the mother-infant relationship, but she also intimates that this primary relationship has the potential to affect future relationships if it remains unresolved, or in her words, without reparation. The infant's feelings of love towards the mother are self-explanatory given that she provides the necessary conditions for the survival of her child, but the element of hatred towards the mother proves to be more ambiguous. The fact that the

[13] Melanie Klein. "Love, Guilt and Reparation." In *The Writings of Melanie Klein (1921-1945)* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 308.

mother awarded the child life causes the child to attach her to the belief that she can take life away, as previously exhibited in Freud's description of the father as protector. Klein describes the resulting attitude that arises from the infant once it becomes cognizant of this double-meaning that is housed within the mother:

> *...the child is driven towards weakening his attachment to the all-important person, his mother.* She originally kept his life going, supplied all his needs, protected him and gave him security; she is therefore felt as the source of all goodness and of life; *in unconscious phantasy she becomes an inseparable part of oneself*; her death would therefore imply one's own death. Where these feelings and phantasies are very strong, the attachment to loved people may become an overwhelming burden.[14]

Once the child senses his dependence on the mother, finding that she is the sole provider of his needs and cannot consistently satisfy his needs in a timely manner, the child works to establish himself as independent; he acts upon his "self-preservative instinct" to sever the tie between himself and his mother. The issue of interdependence only arises once the distinction between self and mother becomes clear, for in the womb, the infant is not aware of itself: it remains a part of the mother. Dismantling this attachment not only untangles the conflict between hatred and love but also serves to establish the child's independence and cohesion of self.

The problem that Klein exposes is that the child's desire to terminate his dependence upon his mother so as to control his own life – taking its most extreme form in the imaginary destruction of his mother – simultaneously implies the destruction of his very being. Given this

[14] Ibid., 321-22; emphasis added.

symbiotic destruction, the child either exerts control over the mother by reducing her to an object that serves his own ends, or he is overtaken by the anxiety that her presence imparts and becomes anxiously dependent on her for fear of losing his own existence. Klein also presents the option of reparation that occurs later in life, taking the form of identification with others and helping them: becoming the mother oneself. The child then works to resolve his fear and anxiety of his mother's life-taking and life-giving capacity by recreating her in later relationships; that is, he preserves the integrity of the power-dynamic that he was first initiated into through the mother by detecting/imparting and acting through this elementary relationship via each relationship he later undertakes. The maternal body can then be recognized as the first site of power insofar as the infant and the mother acquire meaning – in the sense of comprehending their subjecthood – through this primary relatedness which calls attention to the solidity of one's sense of self and one's capacity to maintain it independently.

Illustrating one transfiguration of the mother-infant relationship, Klein utilizes the example of man's relationship to nature, paralleling Freud's description of unadulterated nature prior to its paternalization. She describes man's relation to nature as something that "has much in common with the relation to one's mother" in the sense that both existents provide man with the early necessities of life while simultaneously being unsatisfactory in their respective continual surrendering of offerings.[15] The fact that the mother and nature simultaneously frustrate and propel man's desire – which is to receive the care and conditions of his becoming promptly and effortlessly – causes him to engage with these life-giving existents in an oppressive way. Klein states that, "*Nature represents to him* [the subject] *a grudging and exacting mother*, whose gifts

[15] Ibid., 336.

must be forcibly extolled from her, whereby violent phantasies are repeated and acted out."[20] In prying out these "gifts" through force, man thus sublimates nature and his mother in order to *take ownership* of the conditions of his being so as to sustain his existence under his control. Further, man's violent phantasies of force and sublimation result in a newfound "possession" of his becoming, but also remove man from his original life-givers insofar as he rejects the mother's and nature's continual, independent existence by subjecting and reducing their being to his desires. But why does man wish to violently extract these "gifts" that offer the adequate circumstances for his very being? Why does he wish to take control of his becoming by overpowering, overwriting, the force that first propelled him into existence?

First, it is important to emphasize that being born, in and of itself, is traumatic. There is no consent in being born, nor is there "satisfactory" knowledge of how one was born into a body, mind, and consciousness that possess all the particularities that collectively form the uniqueness of the individual. Yes, there are biological answers and developmental theories as to how we are born and how our individuality unfolds, but there also remains the intuition of an enigmatic presence that plays a crucial role in the presencing of being itself; a presence that is out of reach, indeterminate, beyond and prior to being. What is more ungrounding is the fact that what is beyond being has withdrawn from being so that being may exist which further accentuates the inherent traumatic effects of being inaugurated into existence. The capacity to become present rests upon the absence of the other; that is, being rests upon the non-presence of that which is beyond being which produces feelings of guilt and shame for having appeared instead of that which did not appear. This, too, is the climactic scene of the mother-infant relationship, the scene where the infant gets propelled into subjectivity, into individuality: the mother ejects the infant

from her body, she cuts the umbilical tie between herself and newborn, causing an essential separation and withdrawal between mother and infant, so that the infant can be initiated into being. The infant is awarded freedom, in the sense that he can begin to cultivate his own selfhood, but the freedom is only partial insofar as the catalyst that brought him into being is beyond his existence and out of his control. This same movement towards taking ownership over the conditions of one's being is epitomized in the relationship between nature and civilization; the development of culture was humanity's attempt to satiate his desire for mastery over his own existence that was threatened by nature. Further accentuating the frustration that contemplating one's own becoming instigates, Kristeva offers a description of this phenomenon as "a space of fundamental unrepresentability toward which all glances converge."[16] In her portrayal of "the mother" as the site from which being ensues, Kristeva underscores that not only is the phenomenon of becoming unrepresentable, which is to say inaccessible through language or unsignifiable, but it is also what all beings look towards; that is, this event which awards us being, entices us as we want to know it despite (or because of) its inherent unfathomability. Our inability to fully comprehend becoming, and further, our inability to *reunite* with the site that facilitated our being, produces an attitude of ambivalence as our desire to be independent finds itself at odds with our desire to return to, to know, that which brought us into being.

The initiation into being frustrates us not only to the extent that we cannot pull our eyes away from this phenomenon regardless of its resistance to symbolization and signification, but also to the extent that being itself comes at the expense of being withdrawn from that which we were once united with – the mother, nature, before-being. The fact that being only exists because

[16] Kristeva, "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini," 249.

it has been withdrawn from . . . – which is seen most concretely in the literal expulsion of the infant from the mother's womb – produces a particular attitude of resentment and alienation towards the entity that thrusts the individual into existence. This feeling of confusion, anger, shame, guilt, and most potently, *anxiety* is first, and most clearly, located in the event of birth. Once the mother has withdrawn from the infant, the child ceases to be satisfied with her attempted care and identification, causing the child to become aware of his needs and ultimately his emergence as a separated self. The development of self directly responds to this initial traumatism of having been forced out of the mother's womb, which once united mother and infant, as the child begins to compensate for the loss of their mother's all-encompassing care by fortifying their self-sufficiency. This reaction to the mother causes the child to feel displaced from their origin, from what brought them into being, and consequently finds consolation for the traumatism of the mother's withdrawal and her enigmatic danger by redirecting this attitude of ambivalence towards the protective father – a being who did not withdraw from the infant, as they were not physically attached to one another, but who equally contributes to their continued survival. This shift in perspective is not made conscious to the child, but is rather a necessary sublimation that occurs for the purpose of being able to adequately identify and respond to the feeling of ambivalence, as its manifestation in the mother-infant relationship poses too much of a risk to the existence of the child. The "structure" of representation "is a fetishism of the body" where all "threatening, torturing, and gratifying" aspects of the source of meaning "undergoes a figuration wherein it is reduced to a simple, technical device, destined to give the effect of representable, desirable, fetishistic forms."[17] That is, through representation, not only is the

[17] Ibid., 245.

integrity of the source of meaning sublimated, but its very sublimation produces a representation that has a face that includes aspects of the ideal and desirable while retaining the ambiguity and ambivalence that ruptures. Once the mother's presence is sublimated, the qualities of her existence that facilitate care and life-sustaining practices are recognized and exploited, but all other abject features – anxiety, fear, shame, and guilt – are emptied from her embodiment and delegated to the representation of the father.

It is apparent that both the mother and nature possess certain qualities that facilitate the emergence of life and being itself, which ultimately generates the possibility of their respective sublimation for the purpose of self-understanding and meaning-making. Having disclosed the mirroring of mother and nature, I would now like to speculate about how these two figures promote the cultivation of being itself beyond their literal life-giving capacities. My objective is to show that this phenomenon of sublimation is not exclusive to the mother or nature; these are rather iterations of a more fundamental ontological process that depends upon the role of difference to continually produce the presencing of beings, namely the way beings come to acquire meaning and a sense of self.

VI. The Necessity of Withdrawal

Emphasizing the necessity of withdrawal regarding the cultivation of being, Heidegger typifies this movement as it pertains to what man has the capacity to think about, which he later attributes to being itself:

> What must be thought about turns away from man. It withdraws from him… Whatever withdraws, refuses arrival. But – withdrawing is not nothing.

> Withdrawal is an event. In fact, *what withdraws may even concern and claim man more essentially than anything present that strikes and touches him*… The event of withdrawal could be what is most present throughout the present, and so infinitely exceed the actuality of everything actual.[18]

The stress that Heidegger places upon the imperative of that-which-withdraws in relation to how it yields to the development of thought and thus the appearance of being, points towards both the influence that withdrawal has on the individual – in this case, their capacity to think – and to the way in which what has withdrawn, i.e. what is absent, makes itself present through the existence of the individual. This *absent presence* is the immaterial, metaphysical influence of that which constitutes an individual's existence and appearance in the particular ways that they do, in a particular locale and time, without necessitating conscious awareness on the part of the individual; that is, absent presence is that which has a hold over the individual, that which contributes essentially to their presencing, despite its enigmatic, undetectable form. To become cognizant of absent presence necessitates an acute attention to the beings and processes that assist in the development of the subject; it is more so a movement than a being, or rather a collection of negative space that creates the mark of the individual. The mother-infant relationship, and the qualities the mother ought to possess in order to care for her child, offer an image and dynamic that helps to illustrate this absent presence as it works to form the individual's becoming.

Luce Irigaray gives shape to this absent presence by utilizing the metaphor of air. Already intimating air's similarities to the maternal body, Irigaray describes air as primarily "the being of

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[18] Martin Heidegger. "What Calls for Thinking?" In *Basic Writings*. Edited by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Perennial, 1993), 374; emphasis added.

the open expanse whose measure would be that of the yet-to-come of (the) mourning: of she who will never come back."[19] Like the mother-infant relationship, this entry into "the open expanse" is an instant where the withdrawal of the mother follows; the "she who will never come back" is the mother in the sense that the unity between mother and infant that was once inscribed in the maternal body is out of reach and incapable of being returned to. This lost unity is the emergent subject's greatest grievance according to Irigaray and one's becoming is significantly affected by this traumatism. She details man's inability to "set himself up apart from" her, his mother, the beginning prior to his beginning, as follows:[20]

> Man would receive from the maternal *phuein* [nature] the abandonment that orients him toward constituting his foundation. In place of that which would have abandoned him, toward which *he repeats this move of abandonment*, the matrix of every act, man gives himself nothingness. The tie that bound him, as engendered, to this maternal her [*c'elle maternelle*] breaks… *Man provides a foundation for himself on the basis of reducing to nothingness that from which the foundation proceeds*.[26]

Because man has not sufficiently reconciled the withdrawal of his mother, he then receives all other beings and actions as a repetition of this movement of abandonment. The initial reconciliation of this abandonment appears as a nothingness, which is to say that man, in an attempt to assuage the loss that led to his being, erects a foundation, a self-authored beginning, which can be nothing more than nothingness as it effaces the truth of his becoming; that is, in the erasure of the essential withdrawal, man constructs his own illusory beginning from which he comes to understand himself. All potentialities that stem from "the open expanse" of "the

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[19] Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air*, 43.
[20] Ibid., 63.

yet-to-come" are lost on him, as he attempts to identify himself as the foundation; by inscribing himself with the authority to delegate his becoming, man perpetuates the constitutive separation and abandonment leaving him more isolated than before as he effaces the difference between himself and what awards him the conditions for his being.

Nature, for Irigaray, is also an entity akin to air, as it epitomizes this abandonment which reminds man of his constitutive foundation: the crucial withdrawal that engenders his existence. In the face of this debilitating presence which forces man to recall that there was something prior to his being, he "gives himself nothingness," which is to say he actively *overwrites* the foundation of his being, ultimately repeating this movement of abandonment, by soothing himself with a re-telling of his coming-to-be – rooted in representations and a system of signification – which is essentially a nothingness. Man turns away from the ground of his becoming by conjuring up a new narrative, a new source of meaning, which necessitates the sublimation of the original source of his being – his mother, nature, air. In re-creating what is already there but is unassimilable due to anxiety, man not only overwrites the foundation of his being as a nothingness – for his self-authored origin is solely a sublimation of the true source of his being – but he also makes it so that "the secret of his productive activity" will never appear to him as he effaces the difference from which the process of his becoming occurs.[21]

VII. Exploitation and Sublimation as an Erasure of Difference

The child's disregard for the mother's subjectivity is indicative of the child's over-determination of self; that is, in the formulation of independence through the acquisition of

[21] Ibid., 146.

identity and subjectivity, the mother is inherently reduced to an object, acting as the basis for the child's survival. In her essay, "Container Technologies," Zoë Sofia offers the image and function of the container as a metaphorical representation of the condition of the mother in relation to the child. She more generally details humanity's relationship to container technologies insofar as they are indicative of an underlying cultural "misogynistic metaphysics" that fails to "acknowledge indebtedness to the spatial/maternal environment and the labors of those who sustain this facilitating space."[22] That is, our failure to recognize the containers, or environments, or labours, that produce the preconditions for our becoming is a direct result of our failure to acknowledge and accept the source of our being as a whole, for this realization threatens our perceived agency and freedom regarding our becoming. Sofia accentuates the exploitative dynamic between infant and mother by attributing container-like qualities to the maternal body. She writes:

> ...the baby is seen as part of its environment – the maternal provision. It leaves its primary container technology (the womb) to enter an extra-uterine matrix, a space where, all going smoothly, its needs are unobtrusively supplied by what it experiences as an 'environment mother.' *It ruthlessly exploits this seemingly personless entity* whom it only gradually comes to know in a relationship of mutual love and concern.[29]

By delegating the mother as a personless environment/space, Sofia emulates psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott's claim that a mother ought to be "sufficiently separate" from her child so that her presence is felt, "but not noticed."[23] As the mother oscillates in the child's world, providing

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[22] Zoë Sofia. "Container Technologies." *Hypatia* 15, no. 2 (2000): 181–201, 188; emphasis added.
[29] Ibid., 184; emphasis added.
[23] Ibid., 184.

him with adequate care and resources, her presence as an individual subject becomes lost to the child; her existence serves to cultivate the life of the other, and her particularities are made obsolete in her life-giving labour; she is reduced to a "personless nutritive vessel."[24] Further, she is later reprimanded and scorned by the child for the abandonment, the withdrawal, that was necessary in his very becoming. Her laborious functions are made noticeable, and later resented, for her "gifts" do not arrive on the scene satisfactorily, but her existence beyond these functions is forgotten entirely. The mother's life is only stamped with value insofar as she produces a being that is already inscribed with substantive value; her meaning comes from what she produces, not what she is. The mother's desirable state is to inhabit the form of an absent presence, where she minimizes her very subjecthood for the purpose of sustaining the existence of her child. The acknowledgment of her subjecthood is further diminished during the child's assertion of their independence and sense of self, as the mother is reduced to her ability to provide care so that the child can regain control over these "resources" and erect himself as independent. By lessening the existence of the mother to what she can provide, the fullness of her presence, insofar as it threatens the integrity of one's power over their existence and provokes anxiety, is reduced to her functionality, acting as the first stage in her subsequent symbolic sublimation.

Expanding upon Winnicott's claim that "an infant is not," Sofia asserts:

> ...aside from its facilitating maternal context, the infant is not. This is not simply physically true – humans are born very immature – it is also a statement about ontology: without the (m)other's activity in creating a 'facilitating environment' for the nurture, emergence, and exploration of the self, the person cannot come into being.[25]

[24] Ibid., 188.
[25] 183-84.

Without the mother, there is no *I*. This may seem like a reductive or oversimplified statement, but when one considers the stakes that Klein attributes to the infant when he comes to this realization, it produces a life-threatening anxiety. The child's phantasmic destruction of the mother implies his same destruction, so he must dissolve this symbiotic relationship by reducing the mother, through power and assertion of self, to her caring functionality so as to gain full control over his existence. Overtaken by an anxiety of that which he has no control over, – what exists before and beyond himself – the child recognizes his vulnerability and moves to fortify his sense of self, his narrative of the world, by extracting only what is necessary from the mother and disregarding the rest of her being. When thinking of nature as a type of facilitating container, man's debilitating anxiety can also be considered as the catalyst for humanity's desire to violently and rigorously extract resources from the earth, as the absence of nature would lead to man's dissolution, so he desires to extrapolate earth's resources and hold them himself before he is denied them. Not only does this realization of being dependent upon the mother and nature pose an existential threat in the sense of survival, but it also makes one cognizant of one's interdependence as a subject. The essential understanding of one's coming-to-be does not (solely) arise from the recognition that one is dependent upon their mother for one's

existence, but that one is dependent upon others, one's environment, regardless of the subject's capacity to take ownership and advantage of the resources which allow for the constitution of one's existence.

Sofia characterizes her understanding of becoming as lodged in an "intersubjectivist model of subject formation" wherein "the self is understood as an entity given shape through various dynamic relationships of containment that both construct and occur in spaces that are

interpersonal, imaginative, real, active, the products of conscious efforts as well as unconscious or automatic labors."[26] That is, the "emergent subject" consists of "spatially and temporally contingent manifestations that are part of a whole environment, field, or network."[27] We see this interconnected dynamic of emergence in the mother-infant relationship and in Freud's conception of the development of civilization as they exemplify the facilitating beings (mother, unadulterated nature) as the being that not only allows for the birth of being in a literal sense but that also provide the conditions that constitute the extraction of one's sense of individuality. The resentful and exploitative attitude the individual inhabits once they become cognizant of the withdrawal of these facilitating beings is indicative of an underlying, cultural framework that positions the individual in an attitude of anxious ambivalence; that is, in an attempt to resolve the initial traumatism of being abandoned, man exerts power over that which gives him existence so as to mitigate any further potential loss, and to regain control over the conditions necessary for his becoming. We are born into a world where the mother and nature are reduced to mere objects that exist solely for their laborious functions because this necessary traumatism of withdrawal has yet to be resolved in such a way that refrains from diminishing the full existence of that which facilitates being, namely, difference.

VIII. The Mother as Void According to Kristeva and Irigaray

Kristeva articulates the failure to acknowledge the mother as resulting from our cultural "tendency towards equalization" which ultimately leads to "a regressive extinction of symbolic capabilities," without completely extinguishing the presence of difference. Since the existence of

[26] Ibid., 184-85.
[27] Ibid., 94.

one gets subsumed under the influence of the other, difference is only partially and faultily maintained insofar as one overpowers the existence of the other. She goes on to state that this tendency is an "ultimate danger for identity, but also supreme power of symbolic instance thus returning to matters of its concern."[28] By equating the mother's life-giving capacities to man's own construction of his foundation, symbolic function is made accessible and attainable – as the acquisition of signification depends upon the sublimation of the source of meaning – but the basis of identity is at risk of being entirely forgotten and effaced. Kristeva unveils the world as filled with symbols that have lost correspondence to their original source; the fortification of identity is nothing more than a mosaic of illusory claims that fail to acknowledge the relationship to the source from which they appeared. The tendency towards equalization, which results from a desire to strip the mother of her authority over her life-giving-capacities, is enacted through forgetfulness, insofar as the acknowledgment of the mother's mastery over life is perpetually ignored and overpowered through her exploitation and sublimation.

To the extent that the mother is the true embodiment of this confrontation between nature and culture, Kristeva suggests that the mother's sublimation is essential to the development of the subject, claiming that "[If] there were no one on this threshold, if the mother were not, that is, if she were not phallic, then *every speaker would be led to conceive of its Being in relation to some void,* a nothingness asymmetrically opposed to this Being, a permanent threat against, first, its mastery, and ultimately, its stability."[29] That is, the mother *must be* sublimated to a representation as she embodies the enigmatic non-presence of before-being. In order for man to become master over the process of his becoming, of life itself, he conflates the embodiment of

[28] Kristeva, "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini," 240.
[29] Ibid., 238; emphasis added.

the mother with the incomprehensible beyond-being. The void-like qualities that the mother's and nature's presence impart emerge out of man's inability to know or take ownership over the processes which allow him to exist at all. He resolves this through the act of sublimation in an attempt to take ownership of these processes and "balance" the asymmetrical relationship that he finds to be too destabilizing in the acquisition of his sense of self.

Returning to Irigaray's symbolic metaphor of air as that which provides the conditions for existence, she offers an account of the full extent to which air, an absent presence, is the true master of man's becoming. She describes air as "the substance of the copula that would permit the gathering-together and the arrangement of the whole into the life and Being of man, and permit his habitation in space as a mortal."[30] Despite the fact that air seems to be the origin from which man emerges, Irigaray goes on to claim that

> [Air] would never be able to be constituted as an origin because of its mediating qualities and because it is a permanent necessity for the immediate subsistence of man. Which means that *this matter escapes mastery* and that the debate between man and *physis* with respect to air, is the one that most constantly threatens death: the one that is the most originarily, and always immediately, present in his overcoming of the natural.[31]

The persistence of air's authority over man, to the extent that "on air, he nourishes himself; in air, he is housed… he can move about, can exercise a faculty for action, can manifest himself, can see and speak," challenges the capacity to establish air as man's origin, for it unceasingly works upon the subject to produce them as they appear presently.[39] The fact that air continuously

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[30] Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air*, 12.
[31] Ibid., 12; emphasis added.
[39] Ibid., 12.

facilitates the *presencing* of the individual reveals air to be an origin that moves alongside being, always working to produce the subject. Irigaray suggests that because air operates in this way, it evades all mastery for it cannot be represented as an isolated moment; it is only when the qualities and labours of air, of what appears like a nothingness to man, are transcribed onto the maternal body and function, onto nature, that the action of air can be isolated and thus "mastered" by man. He believes himself to have overcome a natural *process* by distilling it via its identification with certain *entities* (the mother, nature, the other), which entirely bypasses what man wishes to master in the first place; he wishes to be the master of his process of becoming, mitigating all influence and "asymmetrical relationships" which threaten all he has come to know about the world and himself. The representation of what facilitates the conditions for being itself is necessary for the actualization of man's desire for mastery over himself.

IX. The Role of Forgetfulness

As man continually recreates the conditions for his becoming by deliberately sublimating and exploiting that which facilitates his presencing – whether it be through the symbolization of bodies or by controlling the means through which he seizes these "gifts" – he distances himself from what he initially belonged to. He becomes his own illusory source in a twofold manner: because he disregards the process through which he appears by attributing this process to a singular source that he can overcome; and because he consequently *forgets how he comes to presence* along with the many forces, the continuous origins, which award him presencing. In the creation of cognitive structures that represent his becoming, man relies upon a "relation of dominance that drives his essential being into alienation;" however, man's inherent connection to

that which facilitates his presencing remains intact, for he would not be able to exist without it.[32] The connection to that which facilitates being persists through anxiety, constantly pressuring man to frantically cling to his self-authored illusions and will for dominance, which would ultimately result in the complete dissolution of his being. As Heidegger puts it, "...the original anxiety in existence is usually repressed. Anxiety is there. It is only sleeping. Its breath quivers perpetually through Dasein," suggesting that this anxiety – insofar as it perseveres as a symbolic regurgitation of man's origin – is indicative of man's continued relatedness to his "origin" – the process of becoming – to what is ultimately essential for his being.[33] Heidegger further asserts that without this confrontation with the incomprehensibility of his being, man would fail to be initiated into being, asserting that, "since existence in its essence relates itself to beings – those which it is not and that which it is – it emerges as such existence in each case from the nothing already revealed… Without the original revelation of the nothing, no selfhood and no freedom."[34] This feeling of being alienated from that which first thrust the individual into presencing is a crucial event for the development of being; the separation from and inability to comprehend what predicated the presencing of being is what is ultimately essential to the existence of being, suggesting that this alienation must necessarily be given to man from the epitomized other, the mother, to the extent that man can never gain mastery over her life-bearing capacities, or her presence as a whole.

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[32] Martin Heidegger. "Building Dwelling Thinking." In *Basic Writings*. Edited by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Perennial, 1993), 348.
[33] Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" 106.
[34] Ibid., 103.

This original revelation of the nothing, however, is quickly repressed through the sublimation of the bodies and entities which provoke the anxiety of man's alienation. Kristeva makes sense of man's reaction to the anxiety-provoking beyond-being, proposing that,

> *It is as if paternity were necessary in order to relive the archaic impact of the maternal body on man;* …in order somehow to admit the threat that the male feels as much from the possessive maternal body as from his separation from it – a threat that he immediately returns to that body…[35]

In asserting paternity as a necessary response to man's grievance for his separation from and powerlessness in the face of the maternal body, Kristeva implicitly suggests the essential gendered aspect of man's comprehension of his becoming. The attribution of symbolic meaning – a paternal function – to the source of meaning, of being – the maternal body – awards man the ability to "repossess" what he has been separated from, what is beyond himself. The paternal function of signification is the mechanism through which man gains power over that which he cannot know, that which provides him with presencing; this mechanism is only utilized once man internalizes the catalyzing threat and makes it representable. In an attempt to extinguish the threat of the other, of his lost authority and power, man reifies this symbolization by confining all maternal bodies – i.e., all bodies that possess life-bearing capacities – to their laborious functions, essentially making them into objects. Once this anxiety is sufficiently repressed through the paternal function, man is completely estranged from his "origin" as he fails to remember the continuous giving that the other does in order for him to establish himself as what he perceives himself to be; there is no idea of man without woman, and the erasure of her presence constitutes the erasure of how he has come to know himself. "He forgets the framing of

[35] Kristeva, "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini," 263; emphasis added.

his home," which is to say, *he forgets that his being is repeatedly gifted to him* through the presence and work of other indispensable forces, via this very repression of what tangibly connects him to the process of his becoming: the anxiety of his appearance as a being.[36]

The repression of man's anxiety through the oppression of bodies that have been translated into paternal symbolization acts as the foundation from which he develops. Irigaray underscores this repression as the essentially constructive force behind man's becoming, claiming that, "The Being of man will be constituted on the basis of a forgetting: of the gift of this *from which* of which he is."[37][38] Through the forgetfulness of the presence of that which awards man his existence which is accomplished by the paternal function of signification, man not only preserves his ability to feel as though he is the one constructing himself, but he also unconsciously submits to his desire to return to the "*from which* of which he is." This forgetfulness of the void-like origin of his being is propelled by the reality that "He can neither grow nor set himself up apart from the wait to return within her, *to return to that beginning prior to the beginning*, when she gave herself entirely to him without distance or difference."[46] That is, man's desire to reconcile the alienation he feels from his abandonment and separation from the "beginning prior to *his* beginning" is partially satisfied through the very forgetfulness of what gave being to him, as he takes himself to be his own originating source; he deludes himself with the idea that effacing the cause of his abandonment entirely eradicates the existence of the other that withdrew, while, in reality, he is actually nurturing his perpetual estrangement.

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[36] Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air*, 67; this claim is in reference to Heidegger's notion that man is a dwelling being from his essay "Building, Dwelling, Thinking".
[37] Ibid., 30.
[38] Ibid.; emphasis added.

Heidegger, however, contributes the idea that the development of being is necessarily rooted in forgetfulness, not solely for the purposes of returning to what gave being to itself or to diminish the effects of anxiety so as to regain ownership over one's existence, but also because the way in which beings appear is concealed, suggesting that "forgetfulness," or rather ignorance, can't truly occur if what is lost cannot actually be made cognizant. Contending with the rift between thought and being, Heidegger employs Parmenides' text that articulates the presencing of being, and thus thought, through the work of the mythical goddess, Moira. Heidegger garners that how beings come into presencing inevitably obscures the movement itself:

> Parmenides speaks… of the presencing (of what is present), and of duality, and in no sense of 'beings'. He names the [Moira], the apportionment, which allots by bestowing and so unfolds the twofold. The apportionment dispenses [*beschikt*], (provides and presents) through duality. Apportionment is the dispensation of presencing, as the presencing of what is present, which is gathered in itself and therefore unfolds of itself. [Moira, the apportionment] is the destining of 'Being,' in the sense [that she] has dispensed the destiny of Being… into the duality, and thus has bound it to totality and immobility, from which and in which the presencing of what is present comes to pass. *In the destining of duality, however, only presencing attains a shining, and only what is present attains appearance.* Destiny altogether conceals both the duality as such and its unfolding.[39]

According to Parmenides' depiction of presencing, that which dispenses being – in this case, Moira – conceals the twofold (beyond being) so that presencing may unfold itself, though it knows not from where or what it unfolds; that is, through Moira's apportionment, which destines

[39] Martin Heidegger. "Moira (Parmenides VIII, 34-41)." *Early Greek Thinking*. Translated by David Farrell Krell and Frank A Capuzzi (San Francisco: Harper Perennial, 1984), 97; emphasis added.

Being to exist as it exists, she obscures all that is not presencing. That which has taken form "attains a shining," but all that contributes to presencing – *the destining of being*, the twofold, the unfolding of the twofold – is out of reach, beyond being; ultimately inaccessible. When Heidegger claims that destiny conceals duality and its unfolding, he is asserting that as individuals persist throughout time and mark the trail of their destining through determinate past actions and presencing, their unfolding is concealed to the extent that the non-actualized, non-present, possibilities (of action) disappear for the individual, despite the fact that these non-actualized possibilities contribute to the presencing of the individual. Heidegger goes on to attach the failure to be cognizant of the unfolding of the twofold to the forgetfulness of the movement of the presencing:

> Mortals accept whatever is immediately, abruptly, and first of all offered to them… They never really hear the call of the disclosure of the reality. They keep to what is unfolded in the twofold, and only to that aspect which immediately makes a claim upon mortals; that is, *they keep to what is present without considering presencing*.[48]

Through Heidegger's explication of Moira's duty of apportionment, the subject's forgetfulness of that which gives them presencing appears as an inevitable byproduct of presencing itself, for the duality from which presencing occurs is partially concealed, as only what is perceptible is regarded; however, by positing man's ignorance to what does not appear but what simultaneously contributes to what is present as something which is "kept to" and upheld, Heidegger declares this forgetfulness as a deliberate shortcoming of the individual. It is not impossible to be attentive to presencing itself; what is required is a willingness to encounter and

embrace ambiguity, difference, as it is an essential force that contributes to one's becoming. As man clings to the false, distilled representations that appear before him, he neglects *the process from which he appears*; he attributes this process to beings that he can conquer and overpower which allows him to partially make visible the duality necessary for presencing. However, he forgets about the *destining* from which presence unfolds. The process of presencing is taken for granted, and as a result, he disregards *what* gives him the capacity to appear as he appears, and *how* he comes to presence.

As man represses the anxiety that arises from what gives him his being, he ultimately forgets how his being unfolds, and to and from where it unfolds, further separating him from coming into contact with that which facilitates his presencing. His very becoming, and his attachment to what he believes himself to be, displaces him from what he was first united with, what first called him into being. The illusory representations of his "origin" and their consequent sublimation reify and perpetuate this separation insofar as the symbolic is upheld throughout history; that is, because man continues to uphold the integrity and authority of his representation of reality, he inevitably fails to encounter what is presently before him, what is presently facilitating his presencing, for he has cut himself off from what is meaningfully appearing before him. Once the subject's ideas of their becoming have become calcified, the capacity to access what is enacting the conditions for being and meaning to appear becomes obscured and out of reach. It is up to the individual to consider the movement of presencing – all of the beings, environments, relationships and their effects – so as to remember what continues to be forgotten. Despite the fact that time cements the way in which being comes to comprehend its reality and itself, Irigaray suggests that time can inversely deteriorate the framework being has inherited:

> *Time thus amounts to remembering the forgetting* – that nothing ever occurs in the same place, that in each instant man changes his air, that he disappears and reappears all the time, *that his becoming obliterates*, and, moreover, corrupts the air where he takes place, the air thanks to which he entered into presence.[40]

As time persists and the subject gains their own sense of historicity, being finds that there is, in fact, no solid understanding one can come to about the world or the self, for the way in which one encounters oneself in the present changes throughout time. In fact, the overdetermination of identity inhibits the individual's capacity to access and remember the process through which they came to acquire themselves. When Irigaray writes that "his becoming obliterates" once man remembers his process of forgetting, she intimates that his awareness of what came before himself and where he is headed to – beyond being – destabilizes the constructed illusion of his becoming for his remembrance calls attention to the process of presencing, and to all that contributes to the infinite iterations of the way in which he finds himself in the present, completely rupturing the authority over his presencing. Further, remembering the process of forgetting decenters the individual in their claim over reality as what is revealed to have been forgotten is in fact the unending work of external beings to produce being as it comes to appear.

X. On the Emancipatory Effects of Recalling Presencing

I would now like to outline a way of repairing the essential relationship between being and what facilitates being, between presence and that which gifts presence, by proposing Karen Barad's notion of intra-action as a means of tending to that which is forgotten, of paying debt to that which has been overlooked, exploited, and overwritten. Barad's notion of intra-action

[40] Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air*, 163; emphasis added.

accounts for the phenomenon of the presencing of beings insofar as being develops out of pre-existing relations; that is, being unfolds out of "ontologically primitive relations – relations without preexisting relata."[41] The boundaries and particularities of an individual's presencing "attain a shining" because of a metaphysical relationship that precedes presencing altogether; concealment is necessary for the emergence of what is being revealed, or rather, what is appearing. We see this duality in Freud's emergence of civilization, wherein civilization, if taken as a presencing/being, develops out of a relationship between nature and man that predates the "birth" of civilization; similarly, the infant only takes form as a result of the relationship between the maternal body and embryo; and through Parmenides' Moira, who dispenses presencing through the relationship of the duality – what is gathered and what unfolds. Barad articulates this movement without the positioning of representations:

> Phenomena are constitutive of reality. Reality is not composed of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but 'things'-in-phenomena. The world *is* intra-activity in its differential mattering. It is through specific intra-actions that a differential sense of being is enacted in the ongoing ebb and flow of agency. That is, it is through specific intra-actions that phenomena come to matter – in both senses of the word. The world is a dynamic process of intra-activity in the ongoing reconfiguring of locally determinate causal structures with determinate boundaries, properties, meanings, and patterns of marks on bodies… The world is an ongoing open process of mattering through which 'mattering' itself acquires meaning and form in the realization of different agential possibilities.[51]

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[41] Karen Barad. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2003, 815.
[51] Ibid., 817-18.

What exists in reality obtains meaning, or mattering – insofar as the physical and "meaningful" aspects of beings come to appear – as a result of a dynamic, ongoing, intra-activity between phenomena. Barad's conception of how reality comes to appear not only reveals the presencing of reality to have an agential quality to the extent that meaning and mattering are ongoing, mutable processes – which is in direct opposition to the stifling development of identity that depends upon a configuration of symbols with fixed significations – but they also emphasize the inherent giving quality of intra-action itself, for phenomena contribute to each other's reality without overwhelming the respective presencing of whatever appears with desired notions of what ought to appear. By identifying the intra-activity of phenomena – which can be thought of as the necessity of relatedness and mutual dependence – as essentially constitutive of reality, Barad calls attention to what asks to be remembered; that the relationships we engage in give our being to ourselves; that our "mattering," our meaning, our presencing, is contingent upon the possibilities we are gifted through the presencing of others.

Coming to regard the presencing of being and reality in this way means that one must have a desire to preserve the difference that exists between beings, for if difference were destroyed in pursuit of comprehension, then the connection to what gives one over to being will become lost. The difference necessary for presencing, however, has been effaced through it being placed within symbolic order; it has yet to be encountered and upheld without being sublimated or appropriated. Kristeva suggests that the only way to remember forgetting and what has been forgotten through the sublimation of difference is to "reach the threshold of repression by means of the identification with motherhood (be it as heterosexuality or symbolic incest), to reach this

threshold where maternal jouissance, alone impassable, is arrayed."[42] That is, in order to remember what is other and what contributes to the processes of one's presencing, one must identify their own maternal qualities insofar as each and every being facilitates intra-activity: one must recognize their own life-giving capacities, and one's reciprocal responsibility to assist in the becoming of the present. When we come to regard the world in this way, or, when we come to desire the preservation of the mother as a form of reparation, we begin to regard what is other than us, not solely as essential in the process of our own mattering, but as a presence that we can revere in our reception of ourselves. In the maintenance of difference which occurs through the decentering of the individual's egoistic authority over the presencing of reality, what is other is upheld, sustained, and protected for the differentiation of beings and phenomena is essential to how we come to matter, how we come into presence. In comprehending becoming in this way, through the preservation of the differentiation of beings, we restore a unity based on an essential separation.

[42] Kristeva, "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini," 249.

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