Com|plicated Woman

Multiplicity and Relationality across Gender and Culture

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> "At the entrance to our house [when I was growing up] there was a rosetta quilt. Each piece was a rose sewn from 2 folded circles—it took a lot of folds. Each rose was made of scraps of fabric, many colors, polyester, anything and everything, woven together by delicate threads. My grandmother and I would do things like that together. I have one now in my house—4 x 5 feet square. It makes me think of her, doing all these things—cooking, cleaning, helping people, being active in her church. . . . She influenced me to be a fluid person who can move in different spaces and be comfortable."
>
> —Sara[1]

> "What always matters is folding, unfolding, refolding."
>
> —Gilles Deleuze[2]

My friend Sara's life looks a lot like the beloved rosetta quilt that hangs on the wall of her house today. Sara's grandmother taught her to quilt—to take brilliant, multicolored scraps of cloth, to cut them in circles, and then to fold them together into bunches and pleats until they took on the shape of a rose, and then with "delicate threads" to weave them all together in an ever-widening pattern that would dazzle and delight.

Sara's life, too, is a weaving and folding together of many parts. Born in Puerto Rico in 1962, she grew up bilingual, and it was her spirit of adventure in her twenties that prompted her and her husband of one year, Nelson, to move to the continental United States to pursue his Master of Divinity degree. Returning

together to Puerto Rico for Nelson's first pastorate, Sara began an M.A. in comparative literature, devouring postmodern French philosophy while encouraging Nelson in his ministry. After seven years of being told by doctors that she was infertile ("the seven lean years, like the seven lean cows in the Bible!"), she became pregnant. Her first child, Noelia, was born, and life began to change radically as she fell in love with her baby, and then had a second little girl, Paula. The family moved back to the States where Nelson began his doctorate. Two more children, Celeste and Laura, were born in short order.

Today, she describes her activities in terms of "devotion": in the order in which she herself describes her many commitments, she creates a warm and aesthetically beautiful home fragrant with wonderful meals for her four daughters and her spouse (now a seminary professor); she is very active in her church in both liturgical and programmatic ways; she makes meals and volunteers for the local interfaith homeless network; she is a board member of a shelter for battered women and their children; and she works full-time as the administrator for the graduate degree programs of the seminary (where she also frequently volunteers in a variety of tasks that call upon her artistic, creative, and organizational talents). In addition, she does translating for the national Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and still somehow finds time to read everything from the Harry Potter books to Jacques Derrida. Her friends marvel at her capacity for multitasking and wonder if, like Hermione in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*,[3] Sara has mastered the magical art of being in two places at the same time!

When I ask her how she herself understands all her multiple commitments and identifications, she demurs, saying, "One does these things—I don't think about how. It just flows—it just happens." But then, on reflecting, she credits her grandmother with a gift for moving seamlessly from one activity and set of relationships to another:

> I grew up in a family, somewhat traditional in the Latino context, where my mom and I lived with her parents and an uncle and two aunts. We lived in a small town with one of everything except markets—one barber, one seamstress. The Catholic church was at the center of town, on the Plaza, and I went to Catholic school there. . . . Before I started school, even, I would go with my grandmother on her rounds. She was a traditional country woman who went to the market each day to buy the food to cook for that day. And she was a big influence on me concerning relationships. She would negotiate, but also *visit*. Sometimes we would stop in at a merchant's even if she had no business there that day, just to ask about a family member or how someone was doing. She went to the funeral home around three times a week, just to see who had died and to pay her respects! She would walk around town just to see people. This influenced my own desire to move in different spaces. The next generation, my parents and aunts and uncles, settled into jobs. They were settled in one place. But my grandmother *navigated*.

Valuing Multiplicity

The purpose of this essay is to argue that *multiplicity* is a more generous and apt description of women's lives, and indeed a better metaphor for women's hearts and minds, than the logic of "integration" that pervades much of modern psychology.[4] Women, I would argue, are "com|plicated"—literally, we are a folding together (*com-plicatio*) not only of multiple roles and relationships, but also of multiple internal states of emotion and identity. Sara's rosetta quilt offers a rich image for conceptualizing women's psychology and women's pastoral needs in the context of our postmodern, multicultural world today. "Selfhood," particularly ideas of what constitutes a healthy self, has been regarded in terms of "congruence," "cohesiveness," "integrity," or, more popularly, "having it all together." Yet at least as far back as Freud's writings, psychology (especially psychoanalytic psychology) has pointed to a more complex, messier understanding of how human persons—and particularly human *psyches* (minds/souls)—are constituted. Our very selves might be understood as quilts, in which our thoughts, feelings, memories, deeds, and desires are woven throughout our lives into an ever more complicated and colorful pattern of consciousness and identity.

The idea that we are not monolithic—that our minds encompass both conscious and unconscious domains—was at one time revolutionary, particularly to the Enlightenment rationalist for whom the very act of thought was the defining moment of selfhood: *Cogito, ergo sum*—"I am thinking, therefore I exist" (René Descartes). Such complexity, however, has become almost commonplace, and is the prevailing paradigm in most models of human psychology. In Freud's classical division of the mind into the "institutions" of ego, id, and superego,[5] the unconscious was understood to be created by the child's internalization of paternal/parental and societal prohibitions (around the age of five, during the "oedipal crisis"), creating a repression barrier in the mind between the id's instinctual desires and the superego's moral dictates.

We have come to think of this model in terms of vertical "depth," in which our understanding of ourselves is achieved by plumbing downward, digging like an archaeologist or continental explorer for "deeper" truths.[6] While elusive, the contents of the unconscious (at least in part) may be carried up into consciousness on such vehicles as dream symbolism, accidental actions (slips of the tongue and the like), and therapeutic conversation (especially as manifested in the "transference"—the projections onto the therapist of childhood feelings toward original caregivers that are "caught in the act" to be analyzed, yielding new insights[7]).

In contemporary psychoanalytic theory, however, particularly a school of thought called "relational psychoanalysis,"[8] this vertical "depth" model is increasingly being accompanied or replaced by an appreciation of an even greater multiplicity. In this new model, the human mind is understood more horizontally or spatially, across a wider spectrum of states of consciousness and

accompanying emotion (often called "affect states" or "self-states"). In contrast to Freud's conflictual model of repression as the mechanism for removing certain mental contents from awareness, relational theorists regard *dissociation* as a significant, if not the primary, means by which a multiplicity of self-states is generated.[9]

Dissociation in this model (as distinct from the *fragmentation* model) is understood as a normal mental process.[10] Unlike Freud's theory of repression, which could be imagined to resemble a hydraulic system of pressures and counterpressures, dissociation is understood as a more organic process, occurring naturally as consciousness moves across a web of mental states and contents. The mind develops through ever-increasing organic associations among bodily experiences, memories, desires, moods, and fantasies—in one author's detailed description, "a multiply organized, associationally linked network of parallel, coexistent, at times conflictual, systems of meaning attribution and understanding."[11] The unconscious itself becomes multiple in this understanding. To quote relational theorist Jodie Messler Davies,

> Not one unconscious, not the unconscious, but multiple levels of consciousness and unconsciousness, in an ongoing state of interactive articulation as past experience infuses the present and present experience evokes state-dependent memories of formative interactive representations. Not an onion, which must be carefully peeled, or an archeological site to be meticulously unearthed and reconstructed in its original form, but a child's kaleidoscope in which each glance through the pinhole of a moment in time provides a unique view; a complex organization in which a fixed set of colored, shaped, and textured components rearrange themselves in unique crystalline structures determined by way of infinite pathways of interconnectedness.[12]

Dissociation is no longer being regarded primarily as pathological, solely as the outcome of trauma. As Philip Bromberg, another relational thinker, has observed,

> The process of dissociation is basic to human mental functioning and is central to the stability and growth of personality. It is intrinsically an adaptational talent that represents the very nature of what we call 'consciousness.' . . . There is now abundant evidence that the psyche does not start as an integrated whole, but is nonunitary in origin—a mental structure that begins and continues as a multiplicity of self-states that maturationally attain a feeling of coherence which overrides the awareness of discontinuity. This leads to the experience of a cohesive sense of personal identity and the *necessary illusion of being 'one self.'*[13]

Healthy subjectivity, then, is far from monolithic. To explain this more concretely, each of us experiences ourselves at a given point in time as being in one particular state of consciousness ("self-state"). Each self-state comes laden

with its own thoughts, memories, physical sensations, emotions, and fantasies. In this sense, none of us is a wholly unitive "self" or "being." This nonmonolithic understanding of self/selves as more than a singular individual with an isolated consciousness or will accords well with non-Western conceptions of persons. In fact, as anthropologist Clifford Geertz has pointed out, the Western notion of the person as a "bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe" is viewed as quite peculiar in most of the world's cultures,[14] where identity is conceived more in terms of belonging to one's community.[15]

Further, this web of ourselves develops not in isolation, but always *in relation*. Contemporary infant observation studies confirm earlier "object relations" theories that the earliest experiences of self appear to be organized around a variety of shifting self-states formed through the internalization of affect-laden experiences of primary caretakers and others in the early environment.[16] The very capacity to move smoothly and seamlessly from one self-state to another, and to regulate one's own bodily affect-states, is facilitated (or not facilitated) by primary caretakers' responsiveness (or lack thereof). The quality of the boundaries between self and other is gradually established through mutual recognition and regulation, or, in less desirable scenarios, impaired by parental nonrecognition and/or intrusion.

We are better understood, then, as a *folding together* of many selves—personalities formed in identification with numerous inner objects or part-objects (not just id, ego, and superego). Each of us is in ourselves a multiplicity of "selves in relation."[17] At any given moment, we may experience ourselves as one indissoluble Subject, a singular "I," but behind, beyond, or alongside every subject-moment are all the other subject-moments that comprise the whole of this web.[18] We are made up of many parts, with varying degrees of accessibility between and among them as our consciousness shifts more or less seamlessly from one to another, without our paying particular attention to the flux. It is precisely this subjective feeling of seamlessness that creates the illusion of being "oneself," but this very illusion of seamless going-on-being from one self-state to another is in itself a developmental achievement.

Imagine yourself for a moment as more multiple than you had ever considered before—a complex quilt of subjectivities, flexible enough to bend to new circumstances, to form new relationships drawing on an inner world of memories, experiences, and identifications. In a postmodern world, with its ever-burgeoning flow of information—verbal, visual, aural—and instantaneous communication around the globe, is it any wonder that contemporary psychologies are exploring and celebrating this possibility of a more fluid and variegated construction of self and identity? Perhaps it is such "identity complexity"[19] that is the healthiest and most responsive form of "selfhood" most able to cope with the continual flux of the world in which we live.[20]

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The challenge to unitive notions of self is, *theoretically*, gender neutral. In relational theory, consciousness is understood, in both men *and* women, to be multivalent, fluid, their realities continually being constructed and reconstructed in the matrix of individual and social relationships. Why, then, include multiplicity in a pastoral care anthology specifically about women?

The first and more pragmatic answer is that women probably more readily identify with multiplicity as having an intuitive resonance with our own experience. Our lives often *feel* complicated. The book *I Don't Know How She Does It!*[21] points to the challenge of multitasking that confronts middle- and upper-middle-class women, especially those of us who embraced the liberal feminist battle cry of the 1960s and '70s that we could "have it all." "Having it all" has been repudiated by some younger women of both the upper and middle classes because of the stress, and the separation from home and children, that "having it all" seemed to demand. However, women's personal declarations of liberation from sexism never could produce genuine liberation, unaccompanied as they were by a parallel liberation of men. The socioeconomic structures of white male political power and monolithic, stoic constructions of masculine identity continue unabated. So "women's liberation" increasingly came to mean economically privileged women's running faster on the hamster wheel of multitasking, and increasing pressure to master multiple roles as equally true and full-time identities—wife, mother, daughter, professional, volunteer. Of course, such multiple roles, touted as new pressure by the publishing classes, were not at all new to working class and poor women, who for centuries had already been doing it all—and having none of it!

The extent, then, to which we can readily identify with multiplicity of identities as women may have as much to do with externally imposed (and sometimes internally embraced) expectations about juggling multiple roles—involving multiple personas (the faces we show to others in various arenas of our lives)—as it does with the creative, dynamic potential of our true inner complexity and diversity. Sara says, "I don't think there is a woman or girl who can say she does just one thing or is just one thing. . . . Women are more open to 'go with the flow.' Maybe because we're forced to do that, because of expectations on us. I try to fight them, but they are so ingrained. I can't resist." Such socially imposed external demands for increasing flexibility in our lives and relationships, it might be argued, may even be inhibiting the flowering of our internal potential, because we have been so well socialized to inhabit the scripts others have written for us, rather than to explore freely the stories of our own unlimited becoming.

Multiplicity, therefore, has resonance with women's lives at a more complex psychological level—of *inner* creativity and flux. This level of multiplicity is better illuminated by a postmodern feminist analysis that addresses the social construction of gender, and the linguistic mechanisms of reinforcement

of patriarchalism embedded in the very language by which we come to know ourselves and others. Although women have made great strides in some arenas, especially as measured by a liberal feminism that demands political and economic equality for women (such as the first viable campaign of a woman presidential candidate in the United States), the social construction of gender difference(s) and the psychosocial category of "Woman" continue to pose problems for individual women's lives, as feminist psychoanalytic and postmodern theorists have shown.

It is by now a commonplace among liberal feminists, from the psychologist Carol Gilligan[22] to presidential primary candidate Hillary Clinton,[23] to speak about the importance of women's "finding their own voices." As part of a larger liberationist movement, feminist pastoral theology has warmly embraced this ideal of helping to give voice to the voiceless, and to "hear" the marginalized, including women, "into speech."[24] As French feminist philosophers have pointed out, however, language itself is part and parcel of the patriarchal infrastructure of Western societies, following Jacques Lacan's linguistically focused version of Freudian theory.[25] Lacan proposed that as babies we all experience a certain shock and alienation upon realizing that the image of ourselves in the mirror is false—a chimera of seeming wholeness, agency, and integrated motion that exceeded our infantile experience of fragmentation and erratic sense of control. We are plunged into an irremedial state of alienation from ourselves as we identify with the illusion of the unified self seen in the mirror. We trade our embodied selves for a false and inverse identity in the glass, in order to defend against the infantile experience of being a "fragmented body" (*corps-morcelé*), "still trapped in his motor impotence and nursling dependence."[26] This unconscious trade-off comes at a price—our first sense of self is inextricably linked with an experience of alienation and lack.

This "mirror phase" of development coincides with the recognition of the mother as a separate subject in her own right, with her own thoughts and feelings. The differentiation from the mother also occurs increasingly alongside the encounter with the father as an "other" whose "Law of the Father" (or "Law of the Phallus") enforces the oedipal rule of further separations, and suppression of spontaneity in favor of survival in compliance with the norms and demands of civilization. Culture itself is the vehicle of the Law of the Father, and as language is intrinsic to culture, patriarchal social structures are imbued with the very acquisition of language itself. There is consequently no coming to speech, or even *thought*, apart from patriarchy, because there is no thought apart from the "Symbolic" (Lacan's term for the world of language and culture by which all operative reality is constituted). Lacan considered this to be absolutely and universally determined, based on biological gender characteristics. In particular, the penis as Phallus—the symbolic role of principle social organizer—engendered what Lacan believed to be a universal phallo-cracy.

It is in this regard that Luce Irigaray, a French postmodern feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst, raised the question: "Can women speak?"[27] Irigaray, however, leaves room for a possible—albeit as yet unknown—construction of femininity, a "feminine god" for "divine women" that would not be so thoroughly conditioned by patriarchal sociolinguistic structures.[28] Irigaray's work entertains "the divine [as] a movement . . . a movement of love."[29] How can we imagine subjects/subjectivities that are no longer sub-jected (thrown under) by phallocentric language and culture? Such an "imaginary" would require somehow circumventing the patriarchal stamp of language, and of civilization itself. Irigaray's writing style itself is full of circumlocutions, poetic images, and suggestive gaps in logic, as an attempt to inscribe women's resistance to phallocentric language and culture.

As part of this effort at resistance, Irigaray writes frequently of images and themes that appear to derive from female bodily existence—fluidity, flux, folds, lips,[30] even mucous membranes[31] as a counterpoint to the masculinist "logic of the Same"[32] in which truth is equated with linear, rational thought and the straight-ahead movement of progress informed by Enlightenment ideals.

Another postmodern philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, has offered an extensive meditation on the aesthetic theme/image of "the fold."[33] Elsewhere, I have already shown how Deleuze's work provides useful metaphors for the embracing of multiplicity, both in reference to human subjectivity and theology—especially in his revaluing of the image of the *rhizome* as a counterpoint to the frequent psychological and theological "depth" metaphor of "trees" and "roots."[34] This resonates well with conceptions of the unconscious in terms of horizontal or spatial multiplicities of subjectivity and affect, as an alternative to Freud's and Jung's unconscious "depths."[35]

Deleuze links the process of creation to a chaotic, groundless preorigin from which all beings do not so much emerge upward, as they "unfold." Deleuze describes this bottomless origin or "chaosmos" as a "matrix" (literally, womb)[36]—a maternal image for the divine. Deleuze contests the linear logic of Enlightenment conceptions of space and time, posing a trinitarian dynamic of "folding, unfolding, and refolding"[37] as an alternative vision of creative process that, literally by implication, is less phallocentric and patriarchal. Feminist theologian Catherine Keller draws on Deleuze, as well as the ancient church theologian Nicolas of Cusa, to propose an "origami of creation":

> . . . Deleuze cannot resist [the] formula: "the trinity *complicatio-explicatio-implicatio*." This is a trinity of folds, *plis*, indicating a relationality of intertwining rather than cutting edges. *Complicatio*, "folding together," in Cusa folding of the world in God, signifies "the chaos which contains all; . . . *explicatio*: that which "unfolds" what otherwise remains "folded together"; . . . and that relation, the "relation of relations," may be called by *implication* the *spirit of God*. . . . So the third capacity thus signifies the relationality itself.[38]

She cites Elizabeth Johnson's affirmation of divine Love as "the moving power of life, that which drives everything that is toward everything else that is."[39]

The fluidity of the fold, like the roses on Sara's quilt, offers a compelling image for the multiplicity of women's lives, both outwardly as we live between and among various spheres of activity and relatedness, and inwardly, as we contemplate the nonpathological—and even life-giving—fluidity of movement within our psyches. We are *com-plicated*—an inner folding together and togetherness of folds. We are inwardly constituted by an ongoing "folding, unfolding, and refolding" as various emotions and ideas unfurl to meet the challenge of each new moment.

Sara comments, "I like reading Derrida. And I think a woman must have come up with it—reading his autobiography, I see his mom's influence!" I ask, "Why do you think his ideas are like a woman's ideas?" "Because he has to undo and redo things. That's what I have done. I had expectations—I thought life was one way. Life takes turns. You have to redo and keep going." Reflecting back, she says, "When Noelia was born I just wanted to be with my baby and enjoy. I didn't feel like I was less of me. I had to make choices—conflicting choices—but I felt it was right. I had to rebuild myself. . . . And I just said, 'Let's keep going! No regrets!' Now the first one is in college and it feels awesome! I am rejoicing in that." Of course regrets, or the specter of regrets put away, and the weathering of hard losses also are threads within the texture of Sara's sense of self. But it is precisely this complexity, this ability to weave strands of experience together, that contribute to her resilience and determination:

> My creativity is always hands on. . . . I find time to cook an extra meal for Northwest Interfaith. I find creative ways to manage my time. I teach Sunday School—it's an outlet—you always have to have one more trick under your sleeve. . . . And being involved in other places, and with my own children—it pushed me to think outside the box: You have to use what you have. I could sit down and complain, I didn't have this opportunity, but this is what I have, how can I use it? This is a thread in everything I do. And lo and behold, you can do a lot of stuff! Could I do more with more resources? Yes, but I can *do lots* with what I *have!*

Furthermore, as liberal feminism has insisted for decades, the personal is also political. Multiplicity becomes a feminist model of resistance to the phallocratic logic of the One or the Same. Deleuze's image of the fold has political implications. As cultural historian Gen Doy has written:

> For Deleuze, [the image of the fold] is not confusing or disorientating, but empowering. . . . The methods of thinking and being of 'possessive individualism' are destroyed. . . . Indeed, the trope of 'the fold' seems to be in the right place at the right time in our postmodern era, where liberal humanist hopes of progress and freedom for all are confronted by wars, famines, indeed barbarism of all kinds. . . . [40]

Jane Flax, drawing on Irigaray, articulates how a concept of multiplicity of selves/subjects is not merely a boon for individual women (and men), but also opens space for an ethic that contests the failed promises of Enlightenment oneness with a new promise of social and political liberation:

> I believe a unitary self is unnecessary, impossible, and a dangerous illusion. Only multiple subjects can invent ways to struggle against domination that will not merely recreate it. In the process of therapy, in relations with others, and in political life we encounter many difficulties when subjectivity becomes subject to one normative standard, solidifies into rigid structures, or lacks the capacity to flow readily between different aspects of itself. . . . No singular form can be sufficient as a regulative ideal or as a prescription for human maturity or the essential human capacity. . . . [I]t is possible to imagine subjectivities whose desires for multiplicity can impel them toward emancipatory action. These subjectivities would be fluid rather than solid, contextual rather than universal, and process oriented rather than topographical. Emancipatory theories and practices require 'mechanics of fluids'. . . .[41]

Michel Foucault translated the need for multiplicity into just such political terms when he wrote, "We must not imagine a world of discourse divided . . . between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies . . ."[42]

This postmodern view resonates well with Homi Bhabha's postcolonial formulation of hybridity in relations between subjects, where hybridity is defined as the capacity of two partners, or two subjects, to join together without losing the distinctiveness of either.[43] Unlike a dialectical relationship, in which each subject must somehow be transformed or even dissolved into a transcendent solution to the problem of difference, hybridity suggests the possibility of a new, more egalitarian intersubjectivity in which particularities, differences, and even conflicts are retained and respected. This image of multiplicity has to do not only with the gendered nature of relationships, both social and political, but the way the "other" has been constructed in global relations of domination, war, racism, and colonization of indigenous peoples.

Gayatri Spivak asks the parallel question to Irigaray's question about women: "Can the subaltern speak?"[44] Where the *subaltern* (the subjugated other) has been constructed through colonial conquest, is there space for resistance? Postcolonial writers have argued that there is no going back or romanticizing earlier, precolonial times, but resistance to the hegemonic influence of the dominant colonizing cultures becomes possible through creative strategies of reassertion of indigenous cultural values and identities. Hybridity becomes a resource for claiming the threads of multiple cultural inheritances, *post*-colonialization, without the need to surrender to dominance via assimilation. While the term *postcolonial* itself represents a hoped-for future that is not yet achieved,[45] postcolonial

theorists offer a strategy of multiplicity through which new forms of life may flourish both locally and globally.

Folding, Unfolding, Refolding—Making the Quilts of Our Lives

I have attempted in this chapter to argue that multiplicity is a more generous and apt paradigm for understanding women's lives, both social/relational and internal/psychological. This argument depends in part on the assertion that gender is socially constructed. There will always be an objection to this, that the biologies of male and female bodies (however uniquely constellated in individual human beings) cannot be ignored. Hormones are powerful. Men's psyches may be no less characterized by multiplicity and unfolding/refolding than women's. But we are differently constituted by the sheer biological distinction that while both women and men are birthed from the womb of a woman, only women have a womb like hers (whether we become biological mothers or not). Irigaray draws considerably in her theories from women's more diffuse bodily sources of desire and sexual pleasure.[46] Nevertheless, as "gender" participates in language, it is already embedded in culture. There is no pure biology of gender—all notions of gender are *already interpretations* of biological experience. And these interpretations are laden with implications for power and domination.[47]

As Elaine Graham, Judith Butler, and others have pointed out,[48] however, it is precisely because these categories are finally constructs, and not immutable facts of nature, that gaps and inconsistencies within them may provide spaces from which both women and racialized, subaltern, and queered subjects can speak. Subjugated voices can erode and "jam the machinery" of dominance much the way fluids can erode seemingly solid rock.[49] "If the regulative fictions of sex and gender are themselves multiply contested sites of meaning," Butler writes, "then the very multiplicity of their construction holds out the possibility of a disruption of their univocal posturing."[50] There are spaces within multiplicity from which subversion and critique can still unfold. Deleuze's "fold" and Irigaray's powerfully seductive writings about the fluidity of women's experience lived in the body can be invoked as alternative interpretations to dominant discourses, in which gender, race, and sexuality are constructed and assigned lesser political power and social worth through hierarchical, linear polarities and binary oppositions (male-female, straight-gay, and by extension, white-black, Christian-Muslim, and so on).

A distinction must now be drawn between this new "imaginary" of multiplicity, folding, and flux—which indeed may serve as a helpful corrective to patriarchal insistence on an ideal of the (male) One—and an essentialist rendering of gender difference as innate and biologically determined. Words like "matrix" (womb), "flux," "*jouissance*" (an untranslatable term used by Irigaray to refer to female pleasure, including orgasm, but also a superfluity of internal pleasure,

a "reservoir yet-to-come" that may spill over into artistic creativity, writing, or play[51]), and even "fold" (especially when juxtaposed with phallic imagery that is "hard," "straight," and "penetrating") have clear associations with characteristics of the female body. Femininity itself has been associated with the internal in contrast with the masculine as external, although there is a danger here in reinforcing sexist stereotypes.

A too-glib reading of Irigaray could locate her with essentialist feminists who believe that women are inherently or "essentially" different from men, and that the feminist task is not to contest femininity as an immutable "truth," so much as to advocate its being valued equally alongside masculinity. While this may be a temporary strategy for living within patriarchy, Irigaray's appropriation of the postmodern tool of "deconstruction"[52] reveals a more revolutionary agenda, in which the falsity and poverty of patriarchal culture itself is uncovered and repudiated through the play of linguistic analysis.

An additional meta-caution should also be raised—against over-theorizing! The more abstract our discussion of gender becomes, the more it finally flows into an *aporia*—a philosophical dead end. Following Jacques Derrida, there is no construction of gender (or race, or anything, for that matter), dominant or otherwise, that does not already contain the seeds of its own deconstruction.[53] Precisely because gender is socially constructed, as soon as any certainty is claimed about it, the exceptions will sprout up—or unfold!—to undo it. The only way out of this dead end, then, is not finally through further theorizing, but through *practices*. As Graham writes,

> The impasse of postmodernism is resolved not by turning away from the critique of metaphysics and dominant rationality, but by insisting that purposeful, coherent and binding values can be articulated from within the core of human activity and value-directed practice. Such a perspective translated into theology would speak of the contingency and situatedness of human existence and knowledge, and the provisionality of our apprehension of the divine. 'Truth' would be understood as realized within and through human practices and material transformation. . . . Thus, the centrality of practice—as self-reflexively reflecting and constructing gender identity, relations and representations—is confirmed as the focus of critical attention for a theology of gender. It would however add a feminist critique of such claims to truth and value by attending to latent aspects of domination and exclusion in the formulation of such values.[54]

Practical Im|plications—The Quilts of Our Lives

Although my writing is admittedly very theoretical, I am convinced that finally it will not be through new and better theoretical formulations, but it will be through *practices*, of multiplicity that women's creativity and authentic power will come to fruition. What in this postmodern time *practically* keeps us

com|plicated women from just flying apart, or falling to pieces? If a psychological model of *integration* comes too close to homogenization and a suppression of creative inner voices, what, if anything, holds our internal diversity together?

It should not be stated that there is no *wholeness,* or sense of cohesion, in this model of multiplicity. Far from being an image of endless iterations of existence without any sense of connectedness (which *would* be fragmentation), the figure of the fold is illustrated by Deleuze via an image of a labyrinth—a whole that is constituted *by* the multiplicity of its folds: "A labyrinth is said, etymologically, to be multiple because it contains many folds. The multiple is not only what has many parts but also what is folded *in many ways*."[55] Our sense of wholeness, then, as distinct from a monolithic oneness, depends upon our being able to move fluidly and gracefully, *in many ways*, among all the many parts of ourselves, continually drawing from our complexity new strengths for the journey.

In Sara's words, "There is a thread that pulls it all together. And that is very spiritual. I have a sense of gratitude to God that pours out in different ways for different things. In my upbringing, it was important to give to others who are not your family, not just your obligation." Sara's spirituality is a crucial source of strength and has a strongly relational quality:

> I think: This life is our one chance—make it or break it! I believe in a promise of eternity, a reconciliation with God, some unity where wrongs are made right, a reunion of believers, people you will see again. I hold on to that—even if it's not true—because it helps. I expect to see my grandma, my grandpa—even my dog! I have a sense of God's creation [gesture of her arms encircling]—there's got to be something like that. . . . The God I'm praying to—I have to meet some way. There is this force or power I've seen in my life—there has to be a point of looking and recognizing that, in a more tangible (can I say tangible?) way. We expect, we look, we see . . . in prayer . . . good things happen that we didn't expect, and we attribute that to God's good hand and help.

A Threefold Braided Thread

There is still a thread that holds the quilt of our lives together—but I would argue that it is not the thread of "the" executive ego, although that is usually present as an aspect of subjectivity that very usefully carries the mature illusion of being one-self,[56] seaming all our disparate parts and self-states together in a continuous sense of "me" going on being. Rather, I would propose that there is a *threefold braided thread*—the experience of *inhabiting one body in relation to other bodies*, a mature sense of *spirituality*, and a commitment to a coherent set of *embodied ethical practices*—by which the roses of the quilt are bound together.

I would even venture further to suggest that this threefold braid is not a single straight line, but, like the filaments tying each rosetta to the next in Sara's

grandmother's quilt, is itself a *network,* a *weaving.* It is not, finally, *one* thread or braid, but a web of threads that, taken together, constitute a "whole"—a whole whose very coherence and binding power is made up of our embodied relationships (including our multiple cultural inheritances and our internalization of others across the lifespan), our spiritualities, and our moral commitments. Each woman (each person, I would argue) is thus a complex community within her- or himself. By recognizing and valuing this communality of self/selves, we are all the more likely to be able to value the pluralism of the many communities with which we intersect, and even those "others" beyond our immediate safe, familiar context.

Weavers of Connection

As women familiar with navigating the web of connections both within and without, we can become weavers of connection and empathy, not only creating personal ties, but building political coalitions through relational acts of *capacitación* (= creating capacity/empowerment). Sara describes her own role in such a moment of weaving, which engaged her at the inner level of emotions and multiple identifications, while externally evoking her best political, cross-cultural, and linguistic skills:

> It had to do with some awareness of "crossing" identifications or something like that. I kept thinking about that and remembered this experience. Last year I attended a MLK day of service at New Creation Church in North Philly. . . . [One of the groups] at New Creation was Rebuilding Together Philadelphia (RTP), an organization that helps qualifying poor homeowners with house repairs, free of charge. People apply and they receive a visit from an evaluating team to verify the information, assess the repairs that need to be done, and approve that person to receive the services. RTP was going to make some thirty visits to people in the immediate New Creation area on that same day. All their members were primarily men (just two women) and all of them were white. Almost all of them lived in the suburbs. They needed a Spanish-speaking person to visit these homes with them. That's how I ended up joining [one of their] teams. Never before did I feel so fortunate and capable. I gained their trust immediately. Furthermore, people they initially ruled out because of misinterpretation of their circumstances and demeanors, were accepted after a brief discussion and some explanations. The contrary also happened. But what I experienced was that I was accepted by both the disenfranchised Hispanic as well as the white, suburban group. I do not know how. I guessed knowing both languages was a real asset. But also my understanding of the two cultures helped, too. I came home so exhausted and sad about what I saw, but very excited about how I might have helped some people who would have been so misunderstood and, therefore, disqualified.

I continue to believe that the more willing we are to explore all the parts of our multiply constituted selves (including our own inner multiculturality—known and unknown to us), and to become curious about encountering the "others" within us—the parts of ourselves we have disavowed or otherwise split off from conscious awareness—the more open we will dare to be toward the "other" in our world. The model of pastoral care and counseling that I am advocating[57] seeks to help individuals (both women *and* men) come to know, accept, and appreciate all the distinctive parts—the many voices—that live within them. This openness to inner "others" may then allow women and men to bridge relational gaps, not simply by liberal Enlightenment values of "unity" and "solidarity" (a form of oneness), but by unfolding to embrace the other.

Might such unfolding lead to new social constructions, new recognitions, across gender, race, sexuality, and religion, to disrupt and replace existing power dynamics of dominance and submission with a new, political intersubjectivity—even among nations? This relational unfolding and refolding together—this com|plication—is the heart of an ethics for a postmodern world. We cannot have empathy for "others" whom we are too afraid to know, either within ourselves, or in the social realm beyond superficial, anxiety-laden politeness or paranoid projections that inflate "others" into enemies, agents of evil, or justifiable targets of war. The more paranoid we become, the more we are likely to behave as the other's fearsome "other," continuing what has already become an endless cycle of provocation and retaliation.

In our relations, from the most intimate circles of lovers, family, and friends, to our immediate communities, to the wider world, and even to God—as Christian theism itself is unfolded and refolded in new, more multiple conceptions of the divine[58]—we will find new sources of justice and creativity to sustain our efforts for justice and peace. At a time when there is so much simplistic rhetoric of "us and them," "good and evil"—especially with regard to race and racialized stereotypes of "other" religions and cultures—I continue to believe that it is precisely a turn toward multiplicity that might best help us to envision a generosity toward the "other" that might save us from ourselves.

While this embracing of multiplicity is both informed by a postmodern feminist pastoral theology/psychology, and resonates strongly within it, it is finally worth pursuing passionately by both women *and* men. Multiplicity can offer new, more creative ways of conceiving both self/selves and other(s) as we take up the challenges of living in today's pluralistic, postmodern world—a "fluidity that is not loss but rather source-resource of new energy."[59] Our com|plication unfolds an alternative "imaginary" to the hyper-rational, masculinist "progress" model of the Enlightenment in whose thrall we have dreamed too long. Multiplicity of self and others unfurls a new fold, to reveal a dream of a truly postcolonial age in which justice, care, and creative flourishing can flow freely among living beings.