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Her Buddha Body: Liberation of the Yogini through Jouissance

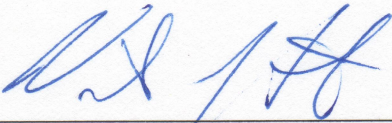
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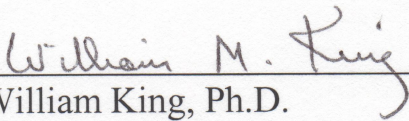
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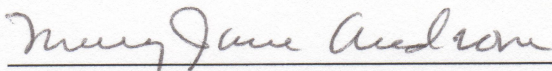
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Her Buddha Body: Liberation of the *Yogini* through *Jouissance*

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Rita Gross, a Western feminist and Buddhist scholar, in *Buddhism After Patriarchy* has called for a post-patriarchal Buddhism. She expounds mutual transformation between Buddhism and feminism by entering into dialogue. However, Gross does not include other Western feminists in her analysis and with this consideration I think it would be worthwhile to incorporate Western feminist thinkers and their philosophies, such as Luce Irigaray, as a reflection of traditional Buddhism. In this respect, I will attempt to facilitate a conversation with Gross to aid in creating a new Buddhism, a transformative feminist Buddhism. With an historical analysis of the treatment of the female body through the three vehicles of Buddhism, my main focus will be presenting the theoretical and philosophical foundations of Tantric Buddhism which will support the physical, sexual, and spiritual experience of the female practitioner, and the potential of her body in the spiritual path to becoming a buddha. Practices specific to Tantrism, when assessed through the lens of the French feminine *jouissance*, will provide contemporary scholars and practitioners a new perspective regarding the doctrinal representation of the sexual and spiritual identity and potentialities of the female practitioner. The structure of Irigaray's *jouissance* will offer an alternative and critical perspective in an attempt to discover woman's place in Tantric theory and praxis.

The prevailing social norms of India in 5th century B.C.E during the time of Buddhism's development was the hierarchical caste system, where both low social and sexual identity were recognized as a sign of past negative karma. In Early Buddhism, the physical body was understood as an impure thing. There was a concentration on the suffering caused by the body, its unattractiveness, and the threatening possibility of attachment. Mindful contemplation of the physical body in early Buddhism at times

involved meditation of the decomposition of a corpse; imagining one's body like a corpse, swollen, smelling, and rotting, allows knowledge of the impermanence of the body and the hope to remain unattached. No matter male or female, the body was considered unstable, constantly decaying and a dependent product of a variety of conditions. However, according to Bernard Faure, "[if] the body is generally deficient in every respect, the female body is even worse."¹

Kathryn Blackstone, in *Women in the Footsteps of the Buddha*, comments that the "vast majority of Pali texts were written by celibate men and reflect their perceptions of women's bodies as enticing obstacles to their quest for liberation."² Some of the descriptive "songs" of the *Therigatha*³ present the perspectives of the early women followers of the Buddha on the subject of the body. The early female practitioner perceives her own self as dangerously sexual; in meditation, she attempts to suppress her desirable nature. While the female (thus sexual) body was viewed as digressive and intrusive to the monk's practice, the male monk or practitioner is never discussed in canonical texts or commentaries as sexually treacherous for the female renunciate. The female body in this instance is itself a symbol of *samsara*.⁴

Although the female body was seen as an impediment even the Buddha was born in the female form in previous lives. "Rūpyāvātī Gives Away Her Breasts" is one of the

¹ Faure, Bernard. *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 55.

² Blackstone, Kathryn. *Women in the Footsteps of the Buddha: Struggle for Liberation in the Therigatha*. Curzon Press, 1998, p. 60.

³ "The Therigatha is a collection of seventy-three poems in the canon of the earliest Buddhist literature. *Theri* means 'women elders' ...and *gatha* means 'verse,' 'stanza,' or 'song.' Hence, the Therigatha are the poems of the wise women of early Buddhism...[it] was passed on orally for six centuries before being committed to writing in Sri Lanka in the first century b.c.e. in the literary language of Pali." (Murcott, Susan. *First Buddhist Women*, p. 15).

⁴ Samsara is the cyclic pattern of life and death; controlled by karma, one is propelled through this life and death cycle (divided into six realms) depending on one's own karma. On the Buddhist path, one's hope is to become released from samsara by reaching nirvana. In this instance, woman is viewed as a threat to this path because she is samsara itself; woman is the snare, the hunter; the male renunciate is the prey.

few *Jataka* tales that gives the Buddha a woman's body in a former life as a *bodhisattva*.⁵ Upon crossing the path of a starving woman and child, Rūpyāvātī proceeds to cut the flesh from her breasts to feed a suffering mother and child. Her breasts are miraculously restored because of her great act, however, instead of keeping her female form, she requests to be transformed into a male body so that she may attain buddhahood: "O Brahmin, by means of this truth of mine, / Let my sex become male immediately, / For manhood is an abode of virtue in this world."⁶ The *bodhisattva*'s compassion is expressed through the mutilation of the breasts and the female form is eventually changed to the male physical form. While early Buddhist literature seems to express the impossibility of the female practitioner to attain enlightenment in her own body⁷, Mahāyāna Buddhism presents an ambivalence towards the female body.

One of the most imperative messages of the tradition, the radical egalitarianism of Buddha-nature and emptiness, considerably conflicts with the transformation of the female into male, which signifies the importance of the *physical identity* of the Buddha; attaining buddhahood in the female body necessitates a sex change.⁸ The Lotus Sutra, according to Lucinda Joy Peach, contains a wide variety of conflicting gender images, for example, the images produced by stories such as "Devadatta". This chapter proclaims that all beings, no matter how evil (including Devadatta, the Buddha's cousin) can become Buddhas. In addition to Devadatta himself, the chapter of the Lotus Sutra also illustrates a young woman's capacity to attain enlightenment, however with conditions.

⁵ *Jataka Tales* are stories of Siddhartha Gautama's past lives as a *bodhisattva*. The *bodhisattva* is the path of Mahayana Buddhism: as a *bodhisattva*, the practitioner cares only for teaching the Dharma, allowing others to reach enlightenment before attaining her own.

⁶ "Rupyavati Gives Away Her Breasts," p. 168.

⁷ It must be recognized here that early Buddhism was critical of the Brahmanical tradition which generally denied women access to any sort of education, let alone an education in philosophy or spirituality.

⁸ *All* persons possess Buddha-nature.

The eight-year-old daughter of the dragon king Sagara, described by Mañjuśrī, is “well acquainted with the karma arising from the roots of action of all creatures...has obtained dharani, has been able to receive and keep all the most profound and mystic treasures revealed by buddhas, and has deeply entered into meditations and penetrated into all laws.” Presenting herself to the Buddha and his attendants, the young wise girl is transformed into male form, with the thirty-two signs of excellence.⁹ It would seem that the transformation does not bar women from attaining enlightenment, or becoming a buddha, but limits her physical body and its spiritual symbolism. Appearing to confiscate the female physical form, women are not given a body of their own with which to experience enlightenment.

Gross overcomes this ambivalence with the teaching of emptiness; by employing emptiness, she reconciles the ambivalence towards the female body by suggesting that sexual identity is not a “fixed or rigid trait” but fluid and unattached. The male-female dichotomy is transcended through emptiness because any term which retains meaning in relation to its opposite, indicates nothing in itself. The teaching, as emphasized in the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, states that nothing is permanent; nothing has an innate nature or inherent existence; rather, everything is dependent on other co-arising phenomena. The *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* explains emptiness by breaking down dualistic thought-forms, including the sexual dichotomy. Sāriputra, seen by the Theravādan tradition as one of the historical Buddha’s greatest disciples, approaches the goddess who resides in the house of the famous layman, Vimalakīrti, inquiring as to why she does not change her female

⁹ From the *Lukkhana Sutta: The Marks of a Great Man*; “The Lord said: There are, monks, thirty-two marks peculiar to a Great Man, and for that Great Man who possess them, only two careers are open. If he lives the household life, he will become a ruler...but if he goes forth from the household life into homelessness, he will become an Arahant, a fully-enlightened Buddha, who has drawn back the veil from the world.” The thirty-two marks include a sheathed penis.

sex. She responds: “I have been here twelve years and have looked for the innate characteristics of the female sex and haven’t been able to find them...All things are also without any determinate innate characteristics so how can you ask...” With her supernatural power, the goddess changed Sāriputra into the female form: “Sāriputra, if you can change into a female form, then all women (in their mental states) can also change. Just as you are not really a woman...all women also only appear to be female but are not really women.”¹⁰

Recognizing this teaching and the stories within the Lotus Sutra, one must conclude that *philosophically*, women are neither disabled nor restricted from attaining enlightenment. It is only their bodies which are repeatedly denied and seemingly rejected as a vehicle for enlightenment and buddhahood. *Institutionally*, gender equality was never truly implemented within the *sangha* throughout its history. Gender hierarchy in the Buddhist institution was fortified by Buddha’s initial reluctance to admit women into the *sangha* and his establishment of the Eight Special Rules. Gross argues that early Buddhist liberation was not driven by or the result of the need for justice and righteousness but of “mindfulness, awareness, detachment, and tranquility.”¹¹ Because of the emphasis on renunciation from society, social categories and standards, including those which subjugated women to the margins, mattered little to spiritual achievement. Nevertheless, why is there a need to carry the unnecessary hierarchal limitations from society into the *sangha*? If the refutation of society was the purpose of the *sangha*, why institutionalize one of the most structurally important systems of India at the time? Women had no authority to offer insight as teachers and leaders in or out of the *sangha*.

¹⁰ Paul, Diana. “Buddhist Attitudes toward Women’s Bodies,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol. 1 (1981), p. 68-9.

¹¹ Gross, Rita. *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, p. 214.

However, unlike Gross, I believe the *sangha* did offer a type of justice or righteousness in that women were able to develop spiritually, in awareness and mindfulness, and educationally, in philosophy and praxis; yet their positions, intellectually and spiritually, were always inferior to that of any monk. The Buddha was only willing to move half way; even though there was a gesture of justice for women, the Buddha continued to allow the injustice of a hierarchal framework.

Presented in all the canonical stories here—“Devadatta,” “Rūpyāvātī Gives Away her Breasts,” *Vimilakīrti Sūtra*—each female protagonist is either automatically, or upon request, transformed into a male physical body, complying with the 32 marks. Why is the female physical form negated when finally attaining buddhahood? The transformation of these women, well tuned to the teachings of the Dharma, was justified by the belief that female birth was the result of negative karma in past lives. This belief was socially transposed from earlier Indian social codes; to rectify such misfortune, the male physical form was provided. It is important to note Rita Gross’ historical analysis of early Indian Buddhist patriarchy and its effects on the written tradition. “[Male] dominance was already there as the norm for gender relations and...Buddhism did not attempt to reconstruct or reform society because it saw withdrawal, rather than reconstruction as the only feasible relationship with the larger society.”¹² In the stories of transformation it is not that women were technically prohibited from embarking on the path to Buddhahood; rather, gender hierarchy was ingrained in the institution, an institution which aided the path to liberation. Mahāyāna Buddhism was hardly different from the Theravādan tradition in regards to the application of gender hierarchy within the

¹² Gross, Rita. *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, p. 214.

institution. Even with the teaching of emptiness, and its significance to the Mahāyāna, gender hierarchy was never fully overcome in the *sangha*.

The physical body in *Vajrayāna* or Tantric Buddhism develops a significantly different and, at first glance, a positive perspective. The body is fully realized to be the foundation to facilitate liberation and enlightenment. This leads to the development of meditation techniques in which the bodily sensations and passions are used to aid in the process of enlightenment. Tantric Buddhist texts, *tantras*, developed over several centuries, beginning to appear in India by the second century C.E. and remaining popular until the twelfth. Jacob Dalton argues that the development of the *Yoga-tantras* was a gradual internalization of Buddhist ritual; this transformation was physically experienced, moving from the external shrine to the body's interior or sexual anatomy.¹³ Spanning the second half of the eighth century and the early ninth, ritual worship was moved inward in the *Mahāyoga tantras* and its subdivision, the *Yogini tantras*¹⁴ by drawing particular attention to male and female sexual anatomy; either in iconographical mandalas or in ritual context, sexual union between man and woman became prominent as well the ritual consumption of impure bodily substances.

Sexuality pervades the *Vajrāyana* universe and is an integral part of our phenomenal reality. The human body and the expression of sexuality through ritual coitus become channels to salvation. Ritualized sex or the consumption of bodily substances, either imaginary or actual, is seen on the *Vajrāyana* path as a powerful force

¹³ Dalton, Jacob. "The Development of Perfection: The Interiorization of Buddhist Ritual in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32: p. 27, Kluwer Academic Publishers; Netherlands: 2004. Though I agree with Dalton's argument for a historical progression of internalization, he does not confront the assumed conflict for the female practitioner, nor does he seem to address her.

¹⁴ The *Mahayoga-tantras* are a division of the *Yoga-tantra* class.

in the quest for final liberation and buddhahood. The body, having transformed from an impure obstacle to a multi-purpose tool for liberation, is used in forbidden, transgressive behavior in an attempt to realize the ultimate truth, achieve enlightenment, and to accomplish it in a single lifetime.¹⁵

The *abhisheka*, or initiation ceremony of the *Vajrāyana* path, is dependent on the teacher's lineage and the karmic dispositions of the new practitioner. The structure of these initiation ceremonies, with a male practitioner, usually consists of bringing in a female consort. In coitus, the male practitioner would receive instruction from his guru as "the representative of reality, inseparable from the *yidam* and one's buddha-nature."¹⁶ The *yidam* is a personal deity, an association or embodiment of one's own buddha-nature; it is visualized during the initiation ceremony and "it seems to be the ultimate combination of the power of concrete symbolism with the power of abstraction beyond conception."¹⁷ A *yidam*, usually illustrated, can either be composed of one singular character such as *Vajrayogini*, or can be both female and male embracing.

Vajrayogini, as a nontheistic deity, is a major *yidam* for Kagyu Buddhists, a Tibetan sect; though a "nontheistic deity" seems ironic, the term is meant to mean an "anthropomorphic representation of [the] enlightened mind."¹⁸ In practice, one identifies with *Vajrayogini*, herself and with the world as she exists within it. She is nothing more

¹⁵ Flourishing in India and Tibet, Tantric practices involving transgression of desire were not as popular in other Buddhist countries. However, one school of Japanese Tantra, Tachikawa-Ryū, esteemed sexual intercourse between male and female to be the highest form of human activity, "an adornment of Buddhahood." Indulgence or uncontrolled sexual intercourse was never advocated in this Japanese sect. Quite interestingly, *Tachikawa-Ryū* denounced autoeroticism and homosexuality as "sterile and counterproductive" because of the cosmic significance of the female and male partners (Stevens, John. *Lust For Enlightenment: Buddhism and Sex*, p. 80).

¹⁶ Ray, Reginald A. *Secret of the Vajra World: The Tantric Buddhism of Tibet*, p. 206.

¹⁷ Gross, Rita M. "I Will Never Forget to Visualize That Vajrayogini Is My Body and Mind," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring, 1987), p.85.

¹⁸ Rita Gross is a Kagyu practitioner. She discusses her experiences in: "I Will Never Forget to Visualize That Vajrayogini Is My Body and Mind," p. 84, 1987.

tangible than light, realized as empty of dualistic thought forms and objective existence, yet one does and can exhibit the qualities and form of the enlightened mind. For Gross, *Vajrayogini* is “strong and beautiful...fierce and compassionate...she is my body and mind.”¹⁹ The *yidam* manifests in diverse forms; singularly, as the *four-armed Vajrayogini in warrior stance, white Vajrayogini with foot raised, Vidyādhari Vajrayogini* and *Vajrayogini in falling-turtle pose*.²⁰

In her text, Elizabeth English discusses the various manifestations of the deity, illuminated by the cult of *Vajrayogini* in India, but refers only to the male practitioner. Of the *Vajrayogini in the falling-turtle pose*, English states that the deity is a combination of intense eroticism and terror, “overwhelming lust that would in itself be terrifying.”²¹ The *yogin*, in ritual, should visual *Vajrayogini* as his wife and in embrace. He worships her with transgressive *bali*²² offerings in hopes of empowerment; “Being realized, she fulfills his desired [goal]: of this there is no doubt.”²³ Since English does not specifically address the *yogini*, or female practitioner of the *Vajrayogini yidams*, I can only speculate the conflict for the female practitioner. Many of the *yidam* visualizations value the female body and *Vajrayogini*'s pose; nevertheless, they are significantly based on a male practitioner's perspective. If the practitioner is to embrace and “marry” the visualized

¹⁹ Gross, Rita M. “I Will Never Forget to Visualize That Vajrayogini Is My Body and Mind,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring, 1987), p. 87

²⁰ English, Elizabeth. *Vajrayogini: Her Visualizations, Rituals, and Forms*, p. 73-79. In this particular text, English refers only to the male practitioner.

²¹ English, Elizabeth. *Vajrayogini: Her Visualizations, Rituals, and Forms*, p. 77.

²² *Bali* ritual is “a propitiatory food offering to local spirits and deities and...to the principal deities of the mandala” English, Elizabeth. *Vajrayogini: Her Visualizations, Rituals, and Forms*, p. 206.

²³ English, Elizabeth. *Vajrayogini: Her Visualizations, Rituals, and Forms*, p. 78: see Note 143.

yidam, does this exclude women as worshippers, partners? Are women then restricted to the *yidams* of a deity-couple in coitus?²⁴

In these *yidams*, the male and female partners embody the symbolic union of the masculine and feminine principles of Buddhist practice – compassion (male) and wisdom (female). Gross argues that the feminine and masculine concepts of the initiation practice are not in opposition to each other but a non-dual pair, a dyadic unity. One should not regard each as opposing the other but as interdependent or complementary aspects of one whole; “The mere presence of two elements is not always evidence of dualistic, hierarchical thinking. The two could be experienced non-dually...which is the aim and intent of this symbolism in Vajrāyana Buddhism.”²⁵ I agree that a non-hierarchical model is *intended* in tantric initiation ceremonies; however, it seems that the Buddhist tantric consort has remained passively instrumental to the “requirements of the male practitioners she transforms.”²⁶ It is because of this that I am not convinced that Gross’ non-dual pair actualizes in practice.

With the development of the *Yoga-tantras* the female body is given back, at least within ritual; her impure nature is no longer scrutinized. Instead, her body is needed, worshipped even for its spiritual symbolism. However, her body is not returned to her; rather, her physical form is used in ritual as a consort or impure tool for male enlightenment. The female form in Buddhist tantric ritual is a powerful force but she is powerful because of the transgression through her impurity, her difference, her uncontrolled sexuality. Despite the idea that the female body takes on a new signification

²⁴ These questions are strictly in response to English’s text. They will be addressed later in the paper when I discuss Luce Irigaray and her feminist philosophy of *jouissance*.

²⁵ *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, p. 198.

²⁶ White, David Gordon, ed. *Tantra in Practice*. Princeton University Press: 2000, p. 18.

in tantric practice, her identity within this ritual still depends on her impurity. Because the initiation is considered a transgressive act, it presupposes her impurity; the act would not be transgressive without her impurity. The Buddhist tantric initiation practice is a transgressive act for the male practitioner; he needs the presence of the female as he recognizes her as his source of desire. The question which must be considered here is of woman's desire, or what cravings arise within her.

Given the aforementioned symbolism of the female within the tantric practice, I will explore Luce Irigaray while responding to Rita Gross' attempts to bring about a post-patriarchal Buddhism. I want to join her efforts in creating a truly equal Buddhism by introducing a new voice. Irigaray argues that without symbolization of some kind, whether verbal or iconographic, women are "homeless" in a phallogentric symbolic order.²⁷ Imploring the philosophy of Irigaray could assist in re-interpreting the sexual symbolism found in Tantric initiation ceremonies.

Gross' argument is encompassed in the exploration of a Buddhist definition of feminism and creating a feminist reconstruction of an historical Buddhist praxis and theory: "One of the great resources for this venture into Buddhist feminist analysis and reconstruction is, of course, the immense body of feminist thought that has so radically altered scholarship and understanding in the past twenty years."²⁸ In addition, when discussing the possibility of a post-patriarchal Buddhism, Gross calls for the significance of the yogini's role, which will "test the boundaries of [her] tradition and her own limits and horizons."²⁹ Traditionally, the *yogi* or *yogini* was not a member of any monastic

²⁷ Whitford, Margaret. "Irigaray's Body Symbolic," *Hypatia*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Feminism and the Body (Autumn, 1991), p. 98.

²⁸ *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, p. 125.

²⁹ Gross, Rita. *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, p. 250.

order or lay community. Specific to *Vajrāyana*, they wandered freely on religious pilgrimage, settling in isolated areas for individual spiritual hermitage. *Yogis* and *yoginis* were not necessarily celibate nor did they adhere to any social conventions, especially social hierarchies.

Though I agree with Gross in regards to the feminist *yogini*, and her prospective recognition as guru, I am uncertain of how this might occur. Gross suggests that the feminist *yogini* will have the imagination and unconventional vision to “name reality” or go beyond orthodoxy, unconditioned by patriarchal thought-forms.³⁰ But, how does woman attempt to experience and describe enlightenment when historically her voice and her body have been restricted or completely negated in the traditional or canonical meanings within which Gross still remains? If the purpose of analysis is to continue a dialogue between feminism and Buddhism, let’s truly introduce other feminist thinkers into the conversation. Gross even states that the majority of the Western *Vajradhātu sangha* (Buddhist community) are lay practitioners and over half are women: “What happens when large numbers of lay women practice a spiritual discipline largely designed by and for men?”³¹

Irigaray’s philosophy of *jouissance* juxtaposed with the unconventionality of the *yogini*’s lifestyle could become a way in which to create a symbolic and actualized physical and sexual role for the female Buddhist practitioner. Many of those responsible for translating French feminists—Irigaray, Helene Cixous, and Julia Kristeva—choose to leave *jouissance* in its untranslated state, “not to assimilate it, but to retain its

³⁰ Gross, Rita. *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, p. 249.

³¹ Gross, Rita M. “I Will Never Forget to Visualize That Vajrayogini Is My Body and Mind,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring, 1987), p. 85.

foreignness.”³² One could therefore describe *jouissance* as a negative philosophy, much like the critical negations of Buddhism in the teachings of non-self, impermanence, and dependent origination. In this way, I describe *jouissance*: a negation of phallogocentrism, non-cultural, non-biological. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray describes *jouissance*, as it pertains to woman’s mystical experience:

“This is the place where “she”...speaks about the dazzling glare which comes from the source of light that has been logically repressed, about one tern into another, about contempt for form as such, about mistrust for understanding as an obstacle along the path of *jouissance* and mistrust for the dry desolation of reason.”³³

French feminists celebrate this feminine concept because of its power to disrupt ideology and threaten patriarchy by providing an alternative to male-dominated culture and discourse: “*Jouissance* thus connects woman’s body and language, by rendering audible and visible the underbelly of consciousness as a different language, one that reflects emotional, visionary, and fragmentary aspects of existence.”³⁴ Irigaray’s *La Mystérique* explains woman’s mystic experience as silencing, failed words in an emphasis on the inadequacy of language, for there is no longer a necessity or desire for “some determinable attribute...so the best plan is to abstain from all discourse, to keep quiet, or else utter only a sound so inarticulate that it barely forms a song.”³⁵ She goes on to explain the course of the mystical experience for woman, a path into a type ignorance,

³² Gallop, Jane. “Beyond the *Jouissance* Principle,” *Representations*, No. 7 (Summer, 1984), p. 110.

³³ Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (1985), p. 191.

³⁴ Cooley, Paula M. *Religious Imagination and the Body: A feminist analysis*. Oxford University Press: 1994, p. 23.

³⁵ Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (1985), p. 193.

eliminating project and projection; a path “which is mixed in a *jouissance* so extreme, a love so incomprehensible, an illumination so unbounded that un-knowledge thereby becomes desire.”³⁶

According to Irigaray, woman experiences pleasure almost everywhere; “one can say that the geography of her pleasure is much more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is imagined.”³⁷ With this characterization of the female body and how she experiences the reality of her desires, and how they differ from phallic desire, I believe it would be necessary to reassess the Tantric Buddhist initiation practice. What does woman need to transgress?³⁸ Is woman really transgressing her own desires in the ritualized sex act? The transgressive discipline of the female practitioner could lie in the breaking free from the pair in coitus; her independence, within itself, is transgressive of traditional Buddhism (Buddha’s nirvana was illustrated through the eradication of impurity). For Irigaray, woman’s impurity would rest in her learned knowledge of her own representational and conventional defeat and insignificance. The female practitioner in this case would be embarking on a path in which to flee logic, “obvious ‘truths’ that actually hide what she is seeking.”³⁹ The Buddha makes the distinction between *conventional* and *ultimate* truths; the former relates to the language, customs, and earthly knowledge that we encounter in our existence. Though they are helpful, it is the latter that allows us to awaken to reality as it is truly is. For the female practitioner, it is the conventional truths which she has learned

³⁶ Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (1985), p. 195.

³⁷ Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which is Not One*

³⁸ Returning to the early Buddhist conception of the desires of the male renunciate, I think it would be important to remind the reader that it is always the woman who is portrayed as dangerous and an impediment to enlightenment. The male form is never presented in this manner when considering the spiritual path of the female practitioner.

³⁹ Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (1985), p. 193.

and become accustomed to through her imposed inferior position. It is on the path for enlightenment and buddhahood that she searches for the ultimate truth in which she transgresses the conventional and discovers something beyond, something indescribable as reality itself.

Inherent within Buddhist thought is the principle of transgression. As a discipline, transgression sets out to “undermine sanctified distinctions between pure and impure wherever possible, embracing deeply felt taboos and relishing contact with sources of the greatest impurity.” Transgression is grounded in the metaphysics of non-duality, the realization of emptiness, and as a methodology, it is capable of traversing the path to Buddhahood. “By shattering these instinctive responses, [transgressive] practices radically challenge the unenlightened dualistic tendencies of the mind, attacking the innate dichotomy of subject and object and forcing it to break through the experience of a non-dual reality.”⁴⁰ Gross mentions the nondual metaphysics but little of the transgressive dimensions of the practice; whereas, I find enormous potential in the concept, especially when attempting to create a more feminist existence for the *yogini*. Throughout Buddhist history, the transgressive discipline offers a critical component within the tradition itself; critical dialogue does not put an end to the tradition; on the contrary, transgressive practices strengthen critical commentaries while proposing innovative ways to achieve the ultimate truth.

⁴⁰ English, Elizabeth. *Vajrayogini: Her Visualizations, Rituals, and Forms*. Wisdom Publications, Boston: 2002, p. 41.

Margaret Whitford, in presenting Irigaray's body symbolic, states that the "two lips"⁴¹ signify multiplicity and plurality, no one can really agree on what the "two lips" really signify. Irigaray's "two lips" could offer a new, identifiable image to the *yogini* in her quest for liberation and buddhahood. Irigaray states that a woman 'touches herself' constantly without anyone being able to forbid her to do so, for her sex is composed of two lips which always embrace. She is multiple but indivisible. *Jouissance* and the "two lips" offer the possibility of a critical device that can give greater power to the critical and transgressive devices that Buddhism already employs.

Because of Irigaray's representation of woman's body and the significance of the "two lips," she offers the symbolism of the tantric initiation ceremony a new perspective; woman's multiplicity could suggest her capacity to embody both wisdom and compassion. Even Gross postulates that the practitioner "always strives to develop both wisdom and compassion."⁴² In this way, not only would there be a negation of hierarchy within the practice but would also give the female practitioner a more affirming source of identifiable symbols. This symbolic order will be embodied in the creative imaginary of the *yogini*. Only then will she have the capacity to develop her own transgression in terms of her own experience and pleasure and define this transgression as free of phallogocentric symbols and an embrace of *jouissance* through Buddhist tantric practice.

Jouissance will be the factor in the *yogini's* pursuit to create a new symbolic order, transgressing the canons of Buddhism by valuing her own body and sexuality in Buddhist tantra. *Jouissance* will allow for multiplicity and plurality in experience and subjectivity.

⁴¹ The "two lips" are a part of Irigaray's *feminine* signifying multiplicity, plurality; they refer to woman's sexual anatomy of which is given new metaphorical and symbolic meaning and value; they represent the *parler femme* (speaking woman) and stand in direct contrast to Lacan's phallus.

⁴² Gross, Rita. *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, p. 105.

The images of “two lips” will encourage a revolutionary language of *jouissance* based on bodily pleasure in the pursuit of final enlightenment, where there no longer is the ambivalent body of the *Mahāyāna* or impure physical form of the Theravāda.

Jouissance's critically-negating structure toward patriarchy has the capacity to transform the *yogini*'s path to buddhahood; it will serve as a critique to free the *yogini* as an active compassionate liberator and an embodiment of wisdom and creativity.

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