

Transporcelain: The Case of Irit Abba

Eran Ehrlich

Introduction

The first issue of the *Tripod* journal for craft studies is devoted to "transformation". This paper will attempt to show how the concept of transformation takes on a unique meaning in the context of craft, and how craft, unlike the conservative semantic baggage attributed to it, is a foothold for a possible change in the fields of art and design.

Dealing with the concept of transformation requires us to relate to the difference between the Latin origin *trans-formatio* and the parallel concept in Hebrew. The uniqueness of the concept of transformation is not preserved in Hebrew, and examining it allows us to identify the underlying conception. The understanding embodied in the word itself has great significance for the conceptual horizon it opens up, and by referring to it we can expand the implications of the original structural dimension of transformation.

The word transformation represents a mode of reference that captures the state of things (whether tangible or abstract) as always anchored in some structural framework. The conceptual definition is evidence of the existence of a relationship between what we call the essence of the thing and its *forma* – its form. The concept of transformation indicates that everything has a formal structure and in order to change the essence of a thing, its structure must be changed. In other words, we can say that the concept of transformation acknowledges the unbreakable bond between the formal framework and the thing's essence (Kant, 1951). I argue that this acknowledgement has two important implications. The first is that this is not an understanding of this bond as one-way, meaning that it is not just about the effect of the essence on the form, but rather it is a two-way connection, that is, the way the shape changes the essence. Another implication is that it is a synchronous act, i.e., there is neither early nor late part; there is no abstract, pure essence that exists in itself and that is cast into form since each form always has substance – both are bound together.

Some may oppose this conclusion and claim that essence is superior to form; form is but the vessel into which the essence is poured (Augustine, 2004, pp. 267-266).¹ This approach ignores the broad and profound sense of form, whether it is linguistic

¹ Referring to Christian theology the context of the relation between content and mode identifies the thing's dual nature as a condition to be overcome, for example when the body is the key battlefield, and whose main consequence is the preclusion of the body and of desire.

and/or physical, and its influence on essence. A perception according to which essence precedes form ignores the way concepts and objects actually realized within a particular structure, and it extracts the fundamental, transcendental meaning from concrete expressions. This paper's starting point is that when we ignore the specific formal presence and extract only the fundamental meaning, we shun the possibility of containing and understanding the influence of the emotional, sensory, and material dimensions on a thing's meaning.

At some levels we are aware that essence and form² are interdependent (bi-directional and synchronic) and we tend to ignore this on other levels. An example is materials theory. We now know that the boundary between essence and structure loses its meaning since the material architecture changes the material's properties. In other words, it is the structural organization that defines the material's substance and its properties. An identical chemical compound of the same elements will produce completely different material properties depending on their organization in space. The mode of organization-architecture is in this case also essence-properties of the material. Is the overlap between substance and mode valid only on the chemical level? In this paper, I will argue that the two-way and synchronous relationship is expressed even in social and cultural issues. As everyone who engages in artistic-design creation knows, approaching creation from the perspective of the relation between mode and essence is a fundamental principle. The art object expresses in its very being the unbreakable and bi-directional bond between mode and essence. In this paper I will claim that the complexity of this relationship has repercussions that cannot be left only in the domain of the singular (physical/linguistic) object. That is to say, I argue that as the relationship between essence and form is specific in the case of the object, it is similarly the case regarding the structure of art (and design), that is, the bi-directionality and synchronicity to which I have referred are relevant even when we attempt to examine the relation between the particular object and the sphere of reference to it. In other words, the inclusion of certain objects in the field does not amount merely to a change in the object's status, but rather it constitutes a change (transformation) of the meaning (content) of that sphere as well as its structure.

The core of this paper was written to point to the complex relation between the content's meaning and the formal status of the work, by referring to two theoretical positions – that of Deleuze and Guattari and that of Luce Irigaray – as the ones through which we may perceive the complex relation between the content aspect and the formal aspect. The complexity of the connection between the (linguistic)

² The discussion form (*forma*) in this paper encompasses the structure's aspects. Each structure has visibility or audibility, therefore each structure has a visual or tonal expression, whether it is color, material, rhythm, sound etc.

structure and the content, which emerges from the positions of Deleuze and Guattari and Luce Irigaray, is not only relevant to the case of language, but it also allows a perspective from which one can also read the artistic practice.

The perspective from which I examine this issue does not focus on the object but on the space around it. In other words, the examination I perform does not only focus on clarifying the formal dimension of the object, but also on the formal dimension of the field.

A

The present paper will undertake this examination with regard to the work of “creator” Irit Abba,³ who has worked in ceramics for many decades, and whose work is highly esteemed in the ceramic context in the local and international fields. However, this evaluation remains mediocrity (limited to the ceramic scene) and lacks an equivalent status in the local art discourse.

Abba’s work is, for me, an encounter with an exciting *oeuvre* that has rare and subtle qualities. This paper is an attempt at a writing that would correspond to the feeling I had in viewing the works, and which would nevertheless be able to convert both the immediate feelings and the subsequent thoughts into a structured process. This move will attempt, through the tools of interpretation, to trace some of the experiences I had and even to express, by this gesture, my appreciation of the work and its creator.

I shall argue that this state of affairs is not coincidental and is not the particular story of Irit Abba, but rather that it stems from the way ceramic activity is perceived in the overall context of artistic activity in Israel. This argument has two corollaries that consider the cultural significance of ceramics through its analogy to language. The first corollary examines the meaning of power in the structure of the language on the synchronous level, using the distinctions and terminology proposed by Deleuze and Guattari in their book *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005). The second corollary examines the meaning of power of the structure along the diachronic axis, that is, the traditional (handed-down) aspect of language through the conceptual context proposed by Irigaray in her essay “When Our Lips Speak Together” (Irigaray, 2003).

This paper will argue that Irit Abba’s work is at a similar place to that which Deleuze and Guattari describe in the case of minor literature. Abba’s place in the space of craft transforms her artistic activity into an act that is de-territorialized and posits the mental aspects of this act in a state of exile, since it is physically located in a

³ I have chosen the term “creator” because it eludes affiliation with any particular field.

different space from them. In other words, the regular setting in which Abba presents her works, such as ceramic galleries, medial exhibitions, design exhibitions, design museums and so on, detach Abba's body of work from the physical-mental-cultural space of the art field, which, so I maintain, is the (supposedly) obvious context of her work. The tools that Deleuze and Guattari employ in their essay on minor literature can help clarify the "inter-linguistic" relationships as expressed in Abba's case. I would like to show below that Abba undermines the craft language and produces, within a tradition of the highest scholastic adherence, a private language that subverts that very tradition and gives it meanings deriving from a completely different source than what tradition allows. This move by Abba is analogous to the move advanced by Irigaray in relation to linguistic traditions. Besides the analysis of the status Abba's work in the space of art and craft in the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari's and Irigaray's thought, I shall propose to regard the insights formed in the process as a means for examining the boundaries and content of the fields of art, craft and, in retrospect, design.

The discussion of Abba's set of works is, as I mentioned, the examination of its unresolved status in the mental space and in the thicket of categorizing definitions that ultimately determine, to a great extent, the scope of the presentation, the definition of the creator as a ceramic artist and the classification of her works.

I found that these questions, which absurdly place Abba's work outside the artistic field – or, at best (?), on its perimeter – are some of those rare opportunities that we have in the seemingly pluralistic field of art to explore the contribution of this marginalization, that stuttering, per Deleuze's term, which allows us to attempt to clarify the *saltum* (leap) by which speaking out of tradition and professional knowledge inverts the (ceramic) eloquence to (artistic) stuttering, placing the work outside the craft field itself (in its traditional sense), but being prevented from introducing it into the field of art.

Abba's case is an opportunity to raise a few questions, only several of which I will try to answer in the limited scope of this text, but it is perhaps appropriate to present them; is there another reason for Bauman's glass ceiling (Bauman, 2002) that precludes the possibility of transition between art and craft? What is the position of the gender question at this point?

To what extent does the fact that the work is read through a medial prism stem from its being perceived as part of a feminine tradition of knowledge? Alternatively, how is it that in the field of (Israeli) craft, women have become the mainstay and have assumed the role of the custodians of knowledge and the preservers of

tradition, and is this related to the rejection of tradition within the local art discourse?⁴

Is it the construction of a new barrier that pushes many women creators outside of what we deem to be high art, in a way that actually relegates them?⁵

In addition, is it not the case that the ceramic tradition that preserves the reference to the object as a voice speaking among human beings⁶ accords with what Irigaray proposes as part of the speech technique between mother and daughter in the creation of a feminine genealogical line analogous to the masculine one, and is this fact not one of the reasons that this alternative genealogy was marginalized?

Deleuze and Guattari open the essay on minor literature with a strong assertion regarding design:⁷ "Only expression gives us the method". This is a statement that demands exclusivity regarding the possibility of reading within the work and it seems to me an essential platform for the discussion of Abba's work. Deleuze and Guattari's assertion requires us to consider the self-expression of action, and when we come to discuss the expressions of Abba's work we must begin with the material question. It is impossible to talk about the totality of Abba's work without addressing the material in its cultural sense. Abba works from within the ceramic tradition and there

⁴ My intention here is to point out that a field of action is painted in a gendered hue that results in the entire field's being perceived, regardless of the gender identity of its creators, as inferior. In other words, the fact that most of the founding fathers of Israeli ceramics were mothers rather than fathers gave the field a lower status than that of the field of art.

⁵ Plato says in this matter that the craftsman is better than the artist because of former is required to deal with concrete reality. Largely, this perception is prevalent in the public-cultural space in all aspects of design, such as product design, industrial design and even architecture. However, for some reason, when dealing with the subject of craft, that dealing with the concrete is seen as of a lower rank especially since it receives almost no academic recognition and it is therefore excluded from the critical discourse of the various design branches and it lacks the methodological tools of these fields. Whereas design is perceived as part of modernity and as a discipline that develops its dealing with "the situation" as the basis for theoretical processes. Craft is seen as an activity that does not rise beyond the performative knowledge, and this knowledge is regarded as barren of theoretical implications.

⁶ By this I mean that in craft traditions, the whole structure of the relationship between manufacturer and consumer is different from those we have come to know after the Industrial Revolution. In this relationship, greater meaning is attributed to the specific needs of the consumer, while considering the manufacturer's abilities and the conditions of creation that together prescribe the formation of vernaculars. Unlike the anonymity of the industrialized product, which is based on average evaluations that are made even more extreme in the age of globalization, when the ability to mobilize production lines and replace production forces completely eliminates the possibility of relating to local conditions.

⁷ "But as long as the form and the deformation or expression are not considered for themselves, there can be no real way out, even at the level of contents. Only expression gives us the method" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003, p. 16). Through this sentence, Deleuze and Guattari point at the linguistic mode (form) not only as a linguistic structure but also as an expression of an essential state of affairs.

is no doubt that she possesses a very high skill in the processes and elaboration of the ceramic material, especially with regard to porcelain (on which it can be said that of all the known ceramic materials, it is characterized by very specific and unforgiving traits that leave their mark on the lexical range of what can and cannot be done with it).

One of the prisms through which Abba's work can be treated is through the definition of minor literature and major literature formulated by Deleuze and Guattari. Their use of these two terms defines a specific perspective on using the term minor. For them, when we denote a literature as minor, we do not mean that this literature is written in a language perceived as marginal in the hierarchy of language. They certainly do not intend to rate the literary value of the work. Being minor implies, therefore, as they show in Kafka's case, a mismatch between the perception of the *langue* as major and its minor realization. This is a state of permanent alienation in the language relations (in Kafka's case – the German of Prague). This alienation, which is not a deviation outside the boundaries of the language but a deviation from the standard usage within the language, allows the minor (deviant) author or speaker to express their condition without becoming a brick⁸ in the standard linguistic edifice.⁹ In any case, it is this dimension of minor that can attribute meaning to the particular place, in the sense that the minor language expresses an essential state of affairs by means of the linguistic situation.

When we look at the different actions that Abba performs on porcelain, we should re-focus on the question of the expression that Deleuze and Guattari make insurmountable. We can group them under the title of anti-technique; the encounter with porcelain lends a completely different facet to those (anti-technical) actions, which in daily life¹⁰ would remain undistinguished or that in a different material

⁸ "This is the problem of immigrants, and especially of their children, the problem of minorities, the problem of a minor literature, but also a problem for all of us: how to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the language and making it follow a sober revolutionary path? How to become a nomad and an immigrant and gypsy in relation to one's own language?" (*ibid.*, p. 19).

⁹ In this context, Deleuze and Guattari note the place occupied by blacks in America. I would add that there is a very interesting development in this direction within contemporary French among residents of the poorer neighborhoods, especially the North Africans, who developed an alternative French that combines words from Arabic and reverses the order of letters in a word, i.e. reading it from right to left as in Arabic.

¹⁰ The everyday is a very important category for the productive meanings of artistic activity, and here we can once again refer to Irigaray. The use of anti-technical techniques, i.e., the rejection of the lexicon of permitted/forbidden within some artistic medium, is an important development in the history of art, even if its first manifestations stemmed from the formal internal-artistic discussion, since the Impressionists and even Corot, Courbet and Turner, a discussion which, in its political connotations, was held by the Futurists. The real connection between theoretical speech and alternative practices was expressed by the gradual rise of women artists (men-artists also played a part in this, but the severity of breaking with tradition and its political consequences are much more dramatic in women artists). The reliance on a range of actions that draws its diversity and justification from the world of everyday life, in contrast to the inner-medial traditions of action, is one of the

encounter would be given a completely different expression. If we took, for example, materials whose conceptual burden and modes of use, on the one hand, and whose physical qualities, on the other hand, are close to the techniques used by Abba, that quality that can be defined as minor in Deleuze and Guattari's sense, would not exist;¹¹ instead, they would correspond with their perception as part of everyday life alternatively as relying on the validity of *Want of Matter* and *Arte Povera* in art (in the sense these movements have today). In this respect, the same gap of immanent alienation between the different levels of expression would be absorbed into a coherence that would posit those techniques as major.¹² When we observe Abba's semi-translucent porcelain spheres, we come into contact with the tradition of porcelain use, which was based on the demonstration of the ability to achieve maximum control over the material's thickness, a process that enhanced the beauty and the lightness of the vessel and made the porcelain object part of the precious-object tradition. It is an experience of wholeness that is pushed to the highest level of risk, which in Limoges and other traditions reaches an apex of control. The price of this control is the creation of a perfect object, which, despite the light passing through it, the history of its making cannot be perceived at all. From this point of view, it is perceived in its entirety as *ex nihilo*, like the classical dance that strives to erase the traces of exertion and suffering and leave the impression of perfect movement.

The spheres that Abba creates attain such level of thinness that they reach the boundary of material-light, but they always disclose the pricks, the perforations, the cracks, the bites and the scars of erasure, making the history of the action present and speaking aloud,¹³ thereby evoking the creator and redeeming the vessel from

most important expressions in fracturing the hierarchy of power and knowledge in the field of art and in creating various glass ceilings that repeatedly hinder the integration of marginal publics and not only of individuals who succeed in adapting themselves to the norms (one may think of black music in America in this regard).

¹¹ "A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization" (*ibid.*, p. 16).

¹² It should be added here that even the use of materials rooted in the traditions of the sublime could not preserve the precision of expression in the sense in which the relationship between the action and the substrate on which it was applied would turn out to be overly distinct and would become the central issue. Abba has the ability to transform the incongruity into something less than a frontal conflictual expression; the frontal dimension of this type of conflicts largely shifts the discussion to its formal dimensions, as can be seen in some of Picasso's later works, but where the technique is not perceived as essential, despite the breaking away from tradition, it is possible to raise the fundamental discussion that exists behind the work's presence.

¹³ "...he will make it cry with an extremely sober and rigorous cry. He will pull from it the barking of the dog, the cough of the ape, and the bustling of the beetle. He will turn syntax into a cry that will embrace the rigid syntax of this dried-up German. He will push it toward a deterritorialization that will no longer be saved by culture or by myth, that will be an absolute deterritorialization, even if it is slow, sticky, coagulated. To bring language slowly and progressively to the desert. To use syntax in order to cry, to give a syntax to the cry" (*ibid.*, p. 26).

the anonymity of its creation. This is similar to the way in which Deleuze and Guattari describe the essence of minor writing: "writing like a dog digging a hole, a rat digging its burrow. And to do that, finding his own point of underdevelopment, its own patois, his own third world, his own desert" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003, p. 18). Minor writing is not essentially given, but only the necessary circumstances prescribing a certain state of affairs. Here is a call by Deleuze and Guattari to act out of choice that leads the creator to a state of incompatibility between the tools she uses and the context in which they are applied. For Abba, this means not only the relation between the craft field and the artistic field, but also between what the canonical status of the ceramic dictionary allows and what Abba expresses through her actual use of the ceramic language; going back to the quote – in the niche she carves for herself in the ceramic tradition.¹⁴ In this respect, minority is effective not only in relation to art but also in relation to craft. Abba is in a state of dual deterritorialization, because even in relation to the territorial space of art, she acts as carving a niche of her own, as she articulates the artistic expressions through the estrangement she effects on them with the ceramic means rooted in tradition and different points of reference. From a point of view striving to some canonical status, whether ceramic or artistic, Abba may fall between the cracks; it is possible, however, that her voice can only be heard in its uniqueness out of the gap that she herself is its source.¹⁵

A great excitement fills me facing Abba's works together with the realization that we have here a unique voice, precise in its stammering with relation to the lexicon of the artistic language,¹⁶ similarly to what Deleuze and Guattari had shown with respect to the Kafkaesque text in the context of the peripheral status of the German of Prague as used by the Jews.

¹⁴ "What interests him even more is the possibility of making of his own language – assuming that it is unique, that it is a major language... even when major, a language is open to an intensive utilization that makes it take flight along creative lines of escape which, no matter how slowly, no matter how cautiously, can now form an absolute deterritorialization. All this inventiveness, not only lexically, since the lexical matters little, but sober syntactical invention, simply to write like a dog" (*ibid.*).

¹⁵ Here we can use H. Gobard's proposal for a four-language model, especially its vernacular and vehicular components. Local language in this case will be the ceramic language, in the sense of a territorial connection to craft tradition and knowledge bodies, while art is the transporting language in the sense that its horizon is a social, non-localized one of barter and bureaucratic transmission, such as galleries, museums, curators and writing, apropos the creation itself. But it also contains the referential dimension of meaning and culture. An interesting point for discussion, which perhaps it would be better to develop elsewhere, relates to the mythical dimensions of art, and whether this dimension of the desire for spiritual deterritorialization can be found in art.

¹⁶ It is impossible to compare formally the concepts of hegemony regarding what is correct and appropriate in art, in comparison to what is proper and correct in all matters relating to language. Nevertheless, I would like to argue that although artistic language is an immeasurably more open a space than linguistic norms, and although the system of linguistic rules in art is not explicitly codified, there is still a great deal of coding within the artistic language that will install, for example, *a priori*, the craft activity in well-defined, delimited locations whose related types of parameters would differ from those applied to what is defined as real art.

As in the case of Kafka, on which Guattari and Deleuze dwell, which allows, through inarticulateness, to become a quarried expression that succeeds in breaking through the weakness of language the very structures of it, thus fulfilling Kafka's literary needs, so too the contextual "weaknesses"¹⁷ of Abba's works constitute an musical key that generates the correct tone for her work and that gives her qualities that speaking from within artistic language would have made superficial, or they would even be largely flattened into mannerism.

The craft speech and Abba's remarkable ceramic skills place her on the side of artistic conservatism that adheres to creative traditions (academic painting, sculpture and drawing), so that in practice, Abba is positioned as an exception to the contemporary, standard¹⁸ language of art that places the conceptual aspect in a position of primacy and treats with suspicion anyone who is a professional. This position becomes in Abba's case a dimension of power enabling her to transform the professional touch of craft into a mechanism for the churning of qualities that in the legitimate linguistic context of art would become part of a "nonconformist" normativity.

In this context, we can open the subject to a discussion on another, more comprehensive level, where transformation has a general meaning. In other words, we can examine how the values of craft, including the historical tradition of ceramics and its technological aspects, can affect the meaning or the boundary we create for art. Does art stop at the boundaries of painting/photography/video/installation/performance/sculpture/sound or perhaps a set of tableware or a soup bowl can nourish the body and the soul? Can it challenge the division between personal expression and function and can it destroy whole expanses of conceptual purity? What possibilities can be embodied in the space of the kitchen, the dining table or the bookcase in the living room as artistic display/exhibition locales (in terms of viewing/observation)? What are the implications of the blurring of territories between the designated, defined spaces

¹⁷ "Ordinarily, in fact, language compensates for its deterritorialization by a reterritorialization in sense. Ceasing to be the organ of the senses, it becomes an instrument of Sense. And it is sense, as a correct sense, that presides over the designation of sounds (the thing or the state of things that the word designates) and, as figurative sense, over the affectation of images and metaphors... Thus, there is not only a spiritual reterritorialization of sense, but also a physical one. Similarly, language exists only through the distinction and the complementarity of the subject of enunciation, who is in connection with sense, and a subject of the statement, who is in connection, directly or metaphorically, with the designated thing" (*ibid.*, p. 20).

¹⁸ Continuing the previous comment, standardization is a concept the validity of which is very difficult to determine, unlike a standard, for example, and it is also difficult to point to the force that standardization applies to deviation. It is possible to examine the transparent outlines of standardization precisely by examining what is incapable of penetrating its domain, and to deduce from these remainders what kind of membranes are activated during the selection process and whether they have a common trait and conceptual, ideational consistency or mental norms. This can be done just as it can be seen how a very wide range of activity, which constitutes a personal expression within the craft field – especially by women artists – is cast outside of the artistic space.

and of the shattering of hierarchies for our perception of the artistic field with its foci of power, and especially for our perception of art?

B

Abba's attempt to work from within ceramic knowledge, while breaking ceramic norms and constructing a process of language writing that is in a referential relation with itself¹⁹ as a reference point, rather than with the ceramic canon and the patriarchal language of knowledge and tradition determined by the discipline, inevitably leads to a reflection on the similarity of this approach to Luce Irigaray's approach. It is evident that both operate from tradition, whether linguistic or ceramic. Both deal, one verbally and the other by creative techniques, with finding a holding point whose commitment to the canon is as restricted as possible and which is capable of reflecting the unique position of the speaking voice.²⁰

When Luce Irigaray writes, she attempts to write from within the body. In her quest for liberation from the stifling traditions of writing and language, which distort her speech, she finds support in her own body. This is the place of personal experience from the memory of the body and from an intimate association with it. Even if it cannot convert the linguistic expression in the sense of *langue*, it allows to identify the falsification of the language of the experience and thus transforms the plastic expression into a locale where the body speaks itself, even before and despite language.

¹⁹ We can find support in what Deleuze and Guattari quote from Wagenbach: "all these marks of the poverty of a language show up in Kafka but have been taken over by a creative utilization for the purposes of a new sobriety, a new expressivity, a new flexibility, a new intensity... Language stops being representative in order to now move toward its extremities or its limits" (*ibid.*, p. 23). Or the quote from page 139: "The animal does not speak 'like' a man but pulls from the language tonalities lacking in signification; the words themselves are not 'like' the animals but in their own way climb about, bark and roam around, being properly linguistic dogs, insects, or mice. To make the sequences vibrate, to open the word onto unexpected internal intensities – in short, an asignifying intensive utilization of language" (*ibid.*, p. 22).

²⁰ "If we keep on speaking sameness, if we speak to each other as men have been doing for centuries, as we have been taught to speak, we'll miss each other, fail ourselves. Again... Words will pass through our bodies, above our heads. They'll vanish, and will be lost. Far off, up high. Absent from ourselves: we'll be spoken machines [*machines*], speaking machines" (Irigaray, 1985, p. 205). Irigaray's image of object-machines acquires an interesting dimension in the ceramic context, in which we can think of the work on the potter's wheel as a powerful concretization of the ceramic modes of expression, and of the way they gave rise to a ceramic tradition that requires a great effort to resist, for example, with respect to the concept of centralization and symmetry. One can, however, think of functional aspects in which ceramic creative traditions, having been harnessed for generations to create practical objects or ornamental pieces, are employed by contemporary women (and men) artists for finding paths of personal expression and creation of an entire inventory of non-functional "objects".

Irigaray does not perceive the relationship between language and body in the same Rousseauan²¹ relationship of nature versus culture (in the sense of an attempted return to a primal state). This would require the Platonic assumption regarding the idea to which we should strive and in this sense also the return to the one, the phallic. However, for her the body is assigned to a place that can, consciously, invoke the non-transparency of language, the mental effort required to produce alternative categories that can read the body in a different way out of a different and stated motivation. Irigaray's use of speech from a different place is an attempt to construct as basic a foundation as possible for linguistic change. She proceeds from the realization that it is impossible to act only against the expressions of the end products of the mental infrastructure. Certainly, no action against socio-economic structures, no matter how important, can replace the action/struggle against the foundation of consciousness. Irigaray, however, is not content with merely changing the language itself, and she is determined that this linguistic change should act not merely as a linguistic change – she is also interested in the changes of form and content that will follow the linguistic change. Nevertheless, she acknowledges the conservatism of the cultural structure in terms of its development, and does not attempt to challenge these paths of development.²² She tries to change the substrate from which the cultural structure arises, that is, the level of content, and she also aspires to convert the formal configurations of the phallogocentric language. In this regard, Irigaray is radical in her demand for change and conversion, but this radicalism addresses tradition and confronts it – it should not be seen as a nihilistic position that seeks to abolish all reference. The physical starting point as a basic

²¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau

²² In Irigaray's case, three constructive planes of language should be distinguished, regarding two of which Irigaray clearly offers a critical and alternative view. The first plane is that of content, that is, the expressions and values represented in language and culture, and Irigaray, even if she naturally wishes to change them, identifies a danger of illusion if we are to be content with this plane only. This is because the second plane of language, that is, its structures and the linguistic layers in it that reflects both conventional cultural norms and modes of thinking, is the most important one, if we want to effect significant change, otherwise we may regress to the illusion of declarative change that conceals the same hierarchical and political structures as we know them. The third plane, which, I maintain, Irigaray does not challenge, is the diachronic dimension of knowledge, in other words an acceptance of the ways knowledge accumulates and its having hierarchical and political meaning. Even if Irigaray attempts to attain a different starting point that is not rooted in the phallic One, and chooses to maintain feminine multitude as an alternative, and even if she argues that this has implications for the products of knowledge and the power relations between those products, she keeps returning to the structure, to the system. Even if the latter is open to several concurrent possibilities, it still requires disciplinary adherence to the modes of knowledge accumulation while rejecting other, mystical or intuitive approaches that fail the logocentric test of language, even if this language is alternative. "Will this lead to the blurring of the distinctions between categories? Which one? In the name of what? Or whom? Why? I think what you call categories of discourse and of truth. The establishment of new logical forms or rules for determining signification" (from Irigaray's reply to Alice Jardine; Irigaray, 1985, p. 56). "...no more than I could adhere to the belief that there are universals programming meaning, eternally and globally, for all men and for all women... I very much hope to figure in the cultural memory of the twentieth century and to contribute to the transformation in the forms and content of discourse" (*ibid.*, pp. 57-58).

structure for the recognition and construction of language receives full recognition here, and she offers an alternative physical infrastructure in the transition from the phallic body to the female body. It can be formulated thus: with regard to the diachronic dimension of language/culture, Irigaray attempts to convert traditional content to alternative content, yet she remains loyal to the creative mechanisms of historical knowledge and does not challenge them (but does challenge their contents). However, on the synchronous level, she does not limit herself only to changing the content, but, on the contrary, acknowledges the compatibility of alternative contents for changing the agenda and the reference points, and the construction of an alternative social reference space for conventional evaluation systems.

This axis of knowledge that acknowledges what has been accumulated (more than its accumulated contents) precisely with regard to the mode of its accumulation is interesting, in the context of the discussion of Irit Abba's work.

Abba relies in her work on the long, prehistoric tradition of ceramic knowledge;²³ she grew out of this knowledge, and it constitutes, for her, the foundation of her modes of expression. The use of the wheel and of manual techniques for treating the surfaces of the ceramic material, the paint and the glazing, are all rooted in tradition, but instead of above, Abba opens, instead of beautifying and decorating Abba scratches, pierces, produces textures that overturn the traditions of decoration into a thin layer of epidermis, which, by exploiting the memory of porcelain preserves all the touches and contacts between Abba and the material, as a kind of material dactylography that immortalizes her speech. One can think, for example, of the question of body for examining how close Abba is to Irigaray – how Irigaray proceeds from the physical starting point to establish the possibility to develop not only a different linguistic dictionary, but an alternative grammar that is not based on a conception of unity and exclusivity, and that does not rely on the periodicity of depletion and repletion. Irigaray strives to attain other modes of speech.²⁴ Abba, too, rejects the functional meanings of her action and excludes them from the economy of use. She overturns that inventory of movement and gesture that is involved in the ceramic production to create what is outside the ceramic domain –

²³ This matter of ancient knowledge that forms out of continuous activity and goes through the transition from the prehistoric and the historic expresses an area of knowledge that is outside of linguistic traditions, certainly the written traditions, and is a reservoir of knowledge that formed alongside scientific and academic knowledge, and to a large extent was unaffected by the knowledge patterning in the great traditions of the 17th and 18th centuries. These modes of knowledge acquisition in the fields of craft in general are gradually supplanted by academic knowledge acquisition and teaching, as we know them from other disciplines.

²⁴ "Speak, all the same. It's our good fortune that your language isn't formed of single thread, a single strand or pattern. It comes from everywhere at once. You touch me all over at the same time. In all senses. Why only one song, one speech, one text at a time?" (Irigaray, 1985, p. 209).

i.e., objects without use, a language that is dysfunctional but attentive to its own position.

Bibliography

Kant, I. (1951), *Critique of Judgement*, Translated by J. H. Bernard, New York: Hafner Publishing. (Original publication date 1892)

Saint Augustine (2002), *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, E. B. Pusey (trans.), Project Gutenberg eBook, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3296/3296-h/3296-h.htm>.

Deleuze, J. and Guattari, F. (2003), *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Bauman, Z. (1998), *Globalization: The Human Consequences*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Irigaray, L. (1985), *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Irigaray, L. (1993), *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, London: Routledge.