In the past two decades, feminist ethicists have undertaken the project of reconceptualizing space and time in ways that are more compatible with the experiences of women. In this essay, I will examine how four feminists have taken up this project. Beginning with notions of space, I will examine Drucilla Cornell's idea of the imaginary domain and bell hooks' and Gloria Anzaldua's ideas of marginal and border spaces. Then, I will move to notions of time by examining Trinh T. Minh-ha's idea of storytelling time. In looking at all four of these feminists' work, I will argue that their new notions should not be understood as the reconceptualization of space and time but the *reclaiming* and *revaluing* of space and time for women (the idea of women's space and women's time). Such a move (from reconceptualization to revaluing) enables these feminists to directly connect their work with feminist ethics and its projects of moral development and agency.

I. RECLAIMING SPACE

a. The Imaginary Domain

The first reclaiming of space that I would like to discuss involves Drucilla Cornell (supplemented by Luce Irigaray and her discussions of the feminine imaginary in *This Sex Which Is Not One*) and her promotion of the imaginary domain. This notion is most explicitly articulated in *At the Heart of Freedom*, where Cornell writes that the imaginary domain is the "psychic and moral space for the exploration of new possibilities and for the chance to rework the fabric of the web of meanings out of which the self is spun" (183). According to her, this imaginary space is directly connected to an individual's need for sexual freedom—the need to create oneself as a sexed being and the need to find a space from which to express that sexuality.

Cornell envisions this space as imaginary because the freedom for individuals to represent their own desires and explore their selves as sexuate beings (sexuate beings represent the sexed body of our human being when engaged with a framework by which we orient ourselves, 7) is not allowed within dominant liberal (and legal) discourse. This is true for all women who find that the only way in which they can "properly" express their sexuality is by reducing it to their capacities as reproducers (7). In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray, whose

feminine imaginary serves (to some extent) as a model for the imaginary domain, offers an even harsher critique of women's ability to express themselves as sexuate beings. According to her, "female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters" (23) with a woman's sexual organ's value being seen only in terms of "the 'lodging' it offers the male organ" (23). This inability to express her own sexuality (or have it recognized by others) leads Irigaray to conclude that "there is no possible place for the 'feminine,' except the traditional place of the repressed, the censured" (68). It is this recognition of the repression of women's ability to express themselves that leads Cornell to argue for the imaginary domain.

As an imaginary domain, this space exists prior to any and all (potentially limiting) definitions of what woman or women's sexuality is. It is a space of freedom where others definitions do not have power, serving as an "as if in which we imagine who we might be if we made ourselves our own end and claimed ourselves as our own persons" (8). Because she sees it as a space of imagination, Cornell demands that the imaginary domain have the "widest possible space for expression" (25), where all possibilities are kept open (179). Does this emphasis on the "widest possible space" result in a system where anything goes? In one sense, the answer to this question is yes. Cornell writes that "since sex, gender, and sexuality are not just given to us, we need the space to let our imaginations run wild if each of us is to have the chance to find the sexual orientation that can bring us happiness" (8). In another sense, the answer to this question is no. In addition to being predicated on the right of all individuals to have their own space of imagination (which would protect individuals from having other ideas of sexuality imposed upon them), Cornell's notion of the imaginary domain is directly connected with the need for dignity and self-responsibility. In "Feminist Futures," she argues that dignity and self-responsibility require that we grant others the respect that we demand for ourselves and that we recognize the potential impact (harm) of our actions on others (5-6).

Cornell's imaginary domain is helpful because it points to an important demand by women for their own space in which they are able to represent themselves in ways that are important to them. As both Cornell and Irigaray make clear, the ability for self-representation has

frequently not been granted to women. However, Cornell's project does raise a few troubling questions: How does the guarantee of this radically, open, space of imagination get legislated? What kind of laws, norms, regulations enforce this freedom? It would seem to me that a discussion of this is quite necessary in order to safeguard this space because it is not a matter of simply suggesting that we all deserve a space and then granting it to us. How does this psychic space get created? Is the imagination purely independent of our social/physical realities? How does Cornell account for the practical and immediate ways in which this space is infringed upon by others, by systems of domination/ hegemony? Can this pure space exist?

b. Marginal and Border Spaces

The second reclaiming of space that I would like to discuss involves bell hooks and her notion of the margin in "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness" and Gloria Anzaldua and her notion of the borderlands in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. In trying to reclaim the margins as a space of radical openness, hooks emphasizes the transgressive and transformative potential of these spaces located at the "oppressive borders set by race, sex, and class domination" (145). For hooks, the act of reclaiming these marginal spaces as sites of resistance is crucial if colonized people are to survive and resist dominant culture's attempts to consume them. "If we only view the margin as sign marking the despair," hooks writes, "a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the very ground to our being. It is there in that space of collective despair that one's creativity, one's imagination is at risk, there that one's mind is fully colonized, there that the freedom one longs for is lost" (150-151).

Hooks envisions these marginal spaces as necessarily existing within the culture of domination because it is there, at the fringes/margins, that individuals find a space of refusal—a space "where one can say no to the colonizer, no to the downpressor [sic]" (150). Because these spaces exist within dominant culture, they are risky, unsafe places where one is always aware of the threat of having their voices silenced, co-opted or undermined (148). But, these spaces are not completely dangerous. Hooks argues that they are also locations where communities of resistance reside, forging "radical creative space [that] affirms and sustains [one's] subjectivity…" (153).

Anzaldua's reclaiming of space also involves those places that exist at the limits (or fringes) of dominant culture, but she identifies this space not as the margin but as the border/ borderlands. Describing the border as the dividing line between safe and unsafe, us and them (3), Anzaldua understands it to be a space in constant transition where the "squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead" reside (3). The border exists as an in-between space and is the location of a cultural collision, resulting in "mental and emotional states of perplexity…insecurity and indecisiveness… [and] psychic restlessness" (78) among its inhabitants. But, this space, like hooks' margin, is not a space of pure alienation and uncertainty. Instead, it is a space where a new mestiza consciousness is being formed—a cosmic race whose members "continually walk out of one culture and into another, because [they are] in all cultures at the same time" (77). In this border space of clashing and multiple cultures, this new mestiza consciousness is able to break down traditional notions of how one "belongs" to a country, a culture, or a community. Anzaldua writes:

> As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every women's sister or potential lover…I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the work and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet (80-81).

Hook's promotion of the margins and Anzaldua's exploration of the borders offer important contributions to the study of how women reclaim space. Their respective reworkings of spaces that have been traditionally understood as oppressive enables hooks and Anzaldua to find new ways in which to highlight how oppressed peoples resist dominant culture. Additionally, their discussions of how to work within somewhat uncertain spaces (spaces that are risky and potentially transformative at the same time) offers a good model for feminists and their attempts to inhabit their own uncertain spaces. Both of these essays do raise a couple of questions for me, however. Do individuals, such as hooks and Anzaldua, exist purely at the margins? Or, do they also exist (at certain times) at the center? Is it possible to exist at both locations at different times? How would this complicate their/our understanding of these spaces?

II. RECLAIMING TIME

a. Storytelling time

The reclaiming of time that I would like to discuss involves Trinh T. Minh-ha and her discussion of storytelling time in "Grandma's Story." Trinh describes storytelling as cyclical, not linear. Linear time is "time as planning, as teleology…as prospective development—the time of departure, of transport and arrival" (Kristeva 353) with a clear beginning, middle, and end (with the end representing death). In contrast, storytelling time is a living thing and an organic process where of lives exist as stories and "never stop interacting while being complete in themselves" (Trinh 143). One telling of a story can last up to three months (148) but the story is never finished. Instead, it is transmitted from generation to generation, repeated differently by each new storyteller.

These stories are the traditions that must be passed on, but these stories are never fully owned by any one storytelling. "My story," Trinh writes, "is mine, but it is also, no doubt, older than me" (123). They do not own these stories, but storytellers are compelled to tell them, maintaining the cycle of remembering, understanding, and creating (119). Such a process locates storytellers in a chain of responsibility in which they recognize and honor their connection to past, present, and future generations. Trinh writes: "In this chain and continuum, I am but one link. The story is me, neither me nor mine. It does not really belong to me…I owe [it] to you, her and her, who owe it to her, her and her" (122).

What makes the time of storytelling women's time is the fact that storytelling, although not exclusively, is primarily done by women. Trinh claims that "the world's earliest archives or libraries were the memories of women" and that "in Africa it is said that every griotte who dies is a whole library that burns down" (121). Reclaiming this way of understanding time and communicating tradition is important because it is the reclaiming of women's value and of the "rich oral legacy" that they have contributed to the building of historical consciousness (148). According to Trinh, this time needs to be reclaimed (and reclaimed by women) because the understanding of cyclical time, of the story as living, has been overshadowed and suppressed by

the dominant understanding of (male) time as linear progression. Linear time, which has frequently compartmentalized time into discrete categories of past, present, future or beginning, middle, end, has replaced the living story and its emphasis on imagination with history and its emphasis on facts (Trinh 120). Because it works to reclaim women's value through a reclaiming of their role as storytellers, Trinh's understanding of storytelling time is important. However, it is necessary to complicate this notion of storytelling time by recognizing that the stories that are passed on are sometimes stories that might be better, as Toni Morrison suggests in *Beloved,* to not pass on.

Trinh argues that the passing on of stories from generation to generation is not only practiced in oral or written form; stories are passed on through our bodies, particularly the bodies of women, where the body accumulates, in its every gesture, the memories of the past, present, and future (123). This transmission of the story through the body suggests that we are compelled to tell our stories, to remember our past (and pass it on) regardless of whether we want to or not. Because we are compelled to tell, the act (and time) of storytelling is not always one involving a celebration of our heritage or, as Trinh describes it, a passing on of Joy (119). Sometimes, it involves the passing on of tragedy (I would argue that this recognition is not incompatible with Trinh's own understanding of storytelling). These ideas are effectively illustrated in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the character of Sethe. Sethe escapes from slavery only to find that slavery's tragic heritage is a story that she is compelled to pass on both through her body and in her process of "re-membering" that past.

Before escaping from Sweet Home, the plantation where she was enslaved, Sethe is sexually assaulted and then whipped by her masters. This whipping leaves a permanent reminder (a fragment of a story) on her back in the form of a scar shaped like a chokecherry tree. This literal story written on Sethe's body communicates the tragedy of slavery to all who come into contact with it. Touching her back for the first time, Paul D, a fellow Sweet Home slave, is able to "read" Sethe's story: "He rubbed his cheek on her back and learned that way her sorrow, the roots of it; its wide trunk and intricate branches" (15).

Sethe is not compelled to tell her story only through the tree on her back. She is confronted by her story (but not only her story, but the story of "Sixty Million and more") through her "re-memory" of it, a process that is triggered by bodily memories of her past. For Sethe, these memories come at the most unexpected times, forcing her to acknowledge the story of her past. For example, walking through a field one day, Sethe is reminded of the time at Sweet Home when she was whipped:

> She might be hurrying across a field, running practically, to get to the pump quickly and rinse the chamomile sap from her legs. Nothing else would be in her mind. The picture of the men coming to nurse her was as lifeless as the nerves in her back where the skin buckled like a washboard. Nor was there the faintest scent of ink or the cherry gum and oak bark from which it was made. Nothing. Just the breeze cooling her face as she rushed toward water. And then sopping the chamomile away with pump water and rags, her mind fixed on getting across the field just to save a half mile, and not noticing how high the weeds had grown until the itching was all the way to her knees. Then something. The splash of water, the sight of her shoes and stockings awry on the path where she had flung them; or Here Boy lapping in the puddle, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. Fire and brimstone all right, but hidden in lacy groves (6).

Trinh's notion of storytelling time and Morrison's complication of it, offer a powerful reclaiming of a different kind of time, one that exists independently of the dominant notion of linear time and allows for the telling of stories in a way that is not trapped in (or controlled by) the linear structure of beginning, middle, and end. But, if this project is to be effective, several questions must be explored: Do these different notions of time exist completely independently of each other? Is it possible for both linear and storytelling time to exist simultaneously? What are the dangers of linking linear time explicitly with men and cyclical/storytelling time explicitly with women? Does such a move lead to essentialism?

In concluding this essay, I would like to briefly reflect on the value of these new notions of space and time for feminist ethics. Cornell's imaginary domain, hooks' and Andalzua's marginal borderspaces and Trinh's storytelling time are valuable for ethics because each theorist is not merely offering a redefinition of space or time but a *reclaiming* and *revaluing* of them. In different ways, each theorist articulates how some women's existences have been either

threatened or erased. For Cornell, many women (and in particular she discussions lesbians) have not been allowed to explore or express themselves as sexuate beings and they have not been allowed the psychic and moral space to create their own understandings of who they are. For hooks, women of color (indeed, people of color in general) have been forced into marginal spaces where they are constantly threatened with nihilism and non-existence. For Anzaldua, mestiza women have been exiled in border spaces where they live in a state of homelessness, uncertainty, and psychic restlessness. Finally, for Trinh, women have had their participation within the passing on of traditions and the building of communities overshadowed and erased by the devaluing and replacing of storytelling with History.

Within their redefinitions of space and time, these different theorists work to reclaim places (and processes?) for women that will allow them to resist the threats to their existence by dominant culture and to revalue (and transform) their roles within society. Fundamentally, these new places and processes are locations for moral development and agency. Cornell makes this claim clear in her work, arguing that the imaginary domain is a moral space where individuals practice freedom and are guaranteed the right, "as sexed creatures who care deeply about matters of the heart, …to evaluate and represent who they are" (x). Hooks also understands the space at the margins as a moral space. She sees it as a place where individuals are able, through the help of communities of resistance, to refuse to be oppressed or colonized by dominant culture. This marginal space is also a place where the moral development of the self occurs, where individuals can create and sustain their own subjectivities and develop a counter-hegemonic language of resistance that enables them to articulate their own experiences of the world. Anzaldua understands the borderland space as a place where a new mestiza consciousness is formed through individuals that recognize their responsibility, because they exist at the crossroads of cultures, to develop a new mythos that "change[s] the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave" (80). And, Trinh understands storytelling time to be explicitly concerned with the recognition of storytellers as moral agents who are responsible *for*

the passing on of stories/traditions of their community (the building of that community) and responsible *to* the past members of that community (placing self in context larger than oneself).

Feminist ethics and its explorations of moral development, responsibility, and agency take place in specific locations of space and specific understandings of time. Discussions of time and space, such as those offered by Cornell, hooks/Anzaldua, and Trinh, enable feminists to critically examine how space and time has hindered women's ethical development and how space and time can be revalued and reclaimed on behalf of feminist ethics.