

**Carnal Transcendence as Difference:
The Poetics of Luce Irigaray**

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April 2009

This thesis is presented for the degree of PhD.

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Synopsis

Carnal transcendence imagines a world in which the carnal has the weight and value of transcendence, and the divine is as liveable and readily evoked as the carnal. Carnal transcendence offers a means of thinking through difference in the work of Luce Irigaray, who asks: “why and how long ago did God withdraw from carnal love?” (1991a, p 16). This thesis argues that Irigaray enables her readers to explore the relationship between carnality, transcendence and difference, but resists elaborating it in her work. Carnal transcendence as difference risks remaining an exercise in rhetoric, rather than the transformative and creative philosophy that Irigaray imagines.

Irigaray’s resistance to the carnal is evident in her arguments for sexual difference, which offers our “salvation” if we think it through, and heralds “a new age of thought, art, poetry, and language: the creation of a new poetics” (1993a, p 5). Note the language of transcendence used here. When considered in the light of carnal transcendence, sexual difference imagines a differently sexed culture. This thesis argues that Irigaray’s writing is contradictory on this point: it articulates the plurality of women’s sexuality, but emphatically excludes theories of sex and gender that emphasise multiplicity. This thesis challenges these limitations by exploring the possibilities of the “other” couple in Irigaray’s writing—mother and daughter—for thinking through carnal transcendence as difference.

This thesis not only explicates a theoretical model for carnal transcendence as difference; it also attempts to put into practice a poetics—a playful rewriting of theory. This celebrates the carnality of Irigaray’s writing—evident in her complex imagery of the two lips, mucus, the placenta and angels—and enables an exploration of the philosophical space of the “new poetics” that Irigaray is attempting to engender.

Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled *Carnal Transcendence as Difference: the Poetics of Luce Irigaray* has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Agnes Mary Bosanquet (3038960)

April 2009

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the many people who have contributed to this thesis.

My supervisor Nick Mansfield has been inspiring, thoughtful, reliable, engaging, and compassionate. A list of adjectives cannot begin to represent my gratitude.

Luce Irigaray's May 2004 seminar for doctoral students at the University of Nottingham marked a turning point in the development of my ideas. I thank her for the generosity of her time and feedback, and the other students who participated in what Irigaray described as a "friendly" and "joyful" exchange.

I am grateful to the editors of the journals in which extracts of this thesis have been published, and to the anonymous referees for their valuable feedback: *Transformations: Online Journal of Region, Culture and Society*, (Volume 11, 2005), *Outskirts: Feminisms Along the Edge*, (Volume 14, May 2006), and *Neo: A Journal for Higher Degree Research Candidates in the Social Sciences and Humanities* (2009, forthcoming).

I am also indebted to the conference audiences who offered thoughtful comments on work in progress: at *Body Modification* (April 24-26, 2003, Macquarie University), *Mobile Boundaries, Rigid Worlds* (September 27-28, 2004, Macquarie University), *Everyday Transformations: The Twenty-First Century Quotidian*, (December 9-11, 2004, Murdoch University), *Bodmod Mark II* (April 21-23, 2005, Macquarie University), *Women and the Divine*

(June 17-19, 2005, University of Liverpool) and to the editor and anonymous referees for *Undisciplined: proceedings of the first annual conference of the interdisciplinary postgraduates group at Macquarie University*, in which an early summary of my ideas is published (2005, pp 79-84).

Others I would like to thank include my previous supervisors, Jennifer Rutherford, who challenged me to hone my writing style, and Tom Burvill, who helped me to define my topic; Cultural Studies staff and students, especially Helen Shoobridge, Aaron Darrell, and Jason Davis; colleagues from the Learning and Teaching Centre; friends, in particular those who read and commented on drafts, Emilie Severino, Zacha Rosen and Damon Young, and Susannah Gynther for the gift of Esther Ottaway's *Blood Universe*; and my extended family. All of you were unwavering in your encouragement, persistence and optimism.

Thanks beyond measure to my mother, Mary, to whom this thesis is dedicated, and to my father, David, for his tireless work as an editor and a grandfather.

Above all, thank you to James, for love, laughter, and triumphs; and to Harriet, for keeping us in the present.