

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

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| List of Illustrations..... | 5 |
| Synopsis..... | 6 |
| Statement of Candidate..... | 8 |
| Acknowledgements | 9 |
| Introduction | 11 |
| Carnal Transcendence as Difference | 11 |
| Chapter One: Carnal Transcendence and Sexual Difference | 20 |
| Irigaray's Tri-part Philosophy..... | 20 |
| Becoming Divine | 25 |
| Phases One and Two: Divine Men/ Divine Women | 30 |
| Phase Three: Divine Intersubjectivity | 41 |
| Sexual Difference | 44 |
| Chapter Two: An Amorous Exchange..... | 60 |
| Becoming Mermaid, Becoming Woman..... | 60 |
| Domestic Philosophy | 69 |
| "Irigaray Anxiety" | 74 |
| Reading and Writing as Sexual Difference | 80 |
| Reading as Carnal Transcendence..... | 84 |
| Writing as Carnal Transcendence..... | 89 |
| Bodies in the Text..... | 93 |
| Chapter Three: Angels Playing With Placentas | 106 |
| The Fort/Da of Angels..... | 108 |
| Carnal = Placental..... | 124 |
| Woman Lover | 137 |
| Chapter Four: Fluid Subjects | 154 |
| Intimate Drifting..... | 157 |
| "Like Water in Water" | 166 |
| Oceanic Feeling | 171 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Water and Air | 178 |
| Mucus and the Soul..... | 185 |
| Chapter Five: Poetics | 193 |
| Reading Everyday Prayers | 194 |
| Almost Touching | 212 |
| Chapter Six: Oneiric Spaces | 228 |
| Bachelard's Oneirism | 230 |
| Between the Trees | 238 |
| The Navel of the Dream | 241 |
| The Birds | 243 |
| Dreaming..... | 247 |
| Conclusion..... | 270 |
| Notes..... | 274 |
| Works Cited and Select Bibliography | 303 |

List of Illustrations

| | |
|---|-----|
| Image 1: <i>The deed is done</i> | 128 |
| Image 2: <i>Smile, “you have a healthy baby!”</i> | 129 |
| Image 3: <i>Meaningless small talk</i> | 130 |
| Image 4: <i>Alone in the recovery room</i> | 131 |
| Image 5: <i>Alison Lapper pregnant</i> | 254 |
| Image 6: <i>Pregnant woman</i> | 255 |
| Image 7: <i>Angel</i> | 256 |
| Image 8: <i>Pink hands</i> | 256 |
| Image 9: <i>Big mother</i> [1] | 259 |
| Image 10: <i>Big mother</i> [2] | 260 |
| Image 11: <i>Big mother</i> [3]..... | 261 |
| Image 12: <i>Joy</i> | 263 |

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)

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Introduction

Carnal Transcendence as Difference

Carnal transcendence is a paradoxical phrase. Carnality suggests a focus on the body and its pleasures, the material world, flesh, excess, temporality and corporeality. It evokes the abjection of bodily fluids and eliminations, and the immediate physicality of sex and desire. Transcendence, on the other hand, suggests an immortality of thought and intellect, eternity, a relationship with the idea of a God or gods, an entrance into divinity, an opening into a space beyond the here and now and an elsewhere without limits or boundaries. This thesis argues that the slipperiness of meaning in the phrase carnal transcendence, its resistance to straightforward analysis, its incorporation of other theoretical arguments and philosophical concepts, and its irresolution as a theory can be productive and creative.

Carnal transcendence, in the way it is discussed in this thesis, is a problematic that emerges from an engagement with the writings of Luce Irigaray. It articulates a philosophy in which flesh is not degraded, nor the spiritual rejected, and where there is no separation between immanence and transcendence. It is a means to imagine the possibility that the carnal has the weight and value of transcendence, and that the divine is as livable and as readily evoked as the carnal. This thesis argues that carnal transcendence offers a means of thinking through sexual difference in relation to Irigaray's philosophy. Locating carnality, transcendence and difference together offers a radical reconstruction of the subject and speculates on a different culture of sexuality. Instead of a transcendence in which embodied subjectivity is

annihilated, a carnal model of divinity maintains and emphasises the erotics of bodily being within intersubjective exchanges. Difference in this context is not limited to heterosexual relations, but manifests—as this thesis will demonstrate—in carnal exchanges between couples as diverse as readers and writers, and mothers and daughters.

The relationship between the sensible, material or physical and the spiritual or divine has long been a concern for Luce Irigaray. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, she asks: “Why do we assume that God must always remain an inaccessible transcendence rather than a realisation—here and now—through the body?” (1993a, p 148). In “Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: On the Divinity of Love”, she is more forthright: “why and how long ago did God withdraw from carnal love?” (1991a, p 16). In *Between East and West*, Irigaray writes that the body, including the carnal act, can be deified (2002b, p 62). She expands on this argument in *Key Writings*, seeking “innocence” in carnal relations, and espousing the spiritualisation of carnal love as a means for perfecting the accomplishment of humanity (2004b, p 169).

The notion of carnal transcendence is one of the most difficult and provoking of Irigaray’s concepts. In her introduction to *Becomings*, Elizabeth Grosz writes of the simultaneous anxieties provoked and possibilities aroused by newness. On the one hand, any innovation or new theoretical concept is heralded as progressive, innovative and creative but, on the other hand, its very newness threatens disruption, uncontainable change, chance, indeterminacy and unforeseeability (1999, p 16). Grosz writes that newness involves “unpredictable transformation—mutation, metamorphosis—

upheavals in directions and arenas with implications or consequences that cannot be known in advance” (1999, p 17).

Luce Irigaray frequently describes her work as new. In an interview with Elizabeth Hirsch and Gary A. Olson, Irigaray says that she is “opening a new field of thought” and that “to accede to these new ways of thought, it's necessary to find a new mode of thinking, a new mode of speaking” (1996, p 4). This corresponds with “the production of a new age of thought, art, poetry, and language: the creation of a new *poetics*”—which she describes in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993a, p 5, emphasis in original). Sexual difference offers “a new model of possible relations between man and woman, without the submission of either one to the other” (1996, p 3). Her model for transcendence is similarly ground-breaking. In *Key Writings*, Irigaray argues for the imperative of reconceptualising divinity as “a new task incumbent on us” (2004b, p 148).

These claims—and phrases such as “the accomplishment of our humanity” (2004b, p 169) and “the wholeness of what we are capable of being” (1993c, p 61)—cause trepidation for many of her readers and critics. Judith Butler acknowledges that “the largeness and speculative character of Irigaray’s claims have always put me a bit on edge” and “confesses” that she “can think of no feminist who has read and reread the history of philosophy with the kind of detailed and critical attention that she has” (1994, p 149). Penelope Deutscher writes of the pleasure in getting immersed in Irigaray’s concepts, but finds divine fulfillment “jarring”: “Butler is right that Irigaray’s tone and style leave the reader on edge, left with a kind of ‘Irigaray anxiety’”

(Deutscher, 1996, pp 6-7). Michelle Le Doeuff similarly criticises Irigaray's "grandiosity"—a term that Butler also uses to describe Irigaray's writing—suggesting that "it would take an angel to do it" (quoted in Deutscher 1996, p 6). But Irigaray's response to this point is deceptively simple: "No, it would take a woman" (2004, personal communication). In this single comment, Irigaray reinforces the enormity of her project, and foregrounds the complexity of her understanding of sexual difference in relation to transcendence.

In "The Only Diabolical Thing about Women", Penelope Deutscher provides a useful synthesis of the various, seemingly contradictory, meanings Irigaray attaches to the term "divine":

Sometimes it is used by Irigaray to refer to the "wonder" that might be between the sexes in a culture of sexual difference ... Transcendence would exist between men and women, rather than between human and divine. Sometimes it simply refers to an "opening onto a beyond" or a "limit". Sometimes it is beauty. Sometimes it refers to a certain, ideal form of love ... Sometimes "God" is that which women would become for themselves. Women's fulfilment would be "divine" (1994, p 7).

Rather than use Irigaray's ambiguous and frequently interchangeable phrases divine love, sensible transcendental, sexual difference and being two—which give rise to the multiple meanings for divinity captured by Deutscher above—this thesis consistently refers to carnal transcendence as difference. Despite its awkwardness, the use of this phrase is a considered one. It is not a phrase which Irigaray herself uses; hence it provokes

tension in relation to her work. The relationship between carnality, transcendence and difference, this thesis will argue, is one that Irigaray resists confronting in her work. The question of why God has withdrawn from carnal love remains unanswered.

Irigaray's resistance to carnality is evident in the way that she frequently qualifies her use of the word itself. She uses a multitude of terms that gesture towards carnality, including love, sexual or sexuate identity, the caress, fecundity, and being two. Her writings on the two lips, mucus and angels are overtly carnal, in that they perform an erotic philosophy modelled on a fluid conception of subjectivity. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray quotes Maurice Merleau-Ponty as using the "seductive" yet "puzzling" phrase "almost carnal" and criticises him for elaborating the carnal only in a solipsistic relation to the maternal that emphasises his own subjectivity and desire (1993a, p 150). "There is no trace of any carnal idea of the other woman", she writes, suggesting that Merleau-Ponty fails to recognise the carnality or difference of the woman as other, outside of her role as a mother (1993a, p 150). Despite this, she perpetrates the error herself, describing her imagery of the angel as "almost carnal" (2004c, p 31). Her resistance is again evident in *Key Writings*, when she refers to "a transcendence which now remains alive, sensible and *even* carnal" (2004b, p 148, *emphasis added*).

Another aspect of this resistance lies in Irigaray's construction of sexual difference. Sexual difference—and note the language of transcendence Irigaray uses in its explication—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). At the same time, with its emphatic exclusion of performative models of sex and gender, Irigaray’s writing undermines the value of sexual difference for imagining a differently sexed culture without the impositions of proper, real and “natural” gender identities.

Thinking through carnal transcendence as difference—the focus of this thesis—provides an opportunity to challenge the contradictory exclusions of sexual difference within Irigaray’s own work, which at once celebrates the plurality of women’s sexuality and closes down multiplicity for sexual difference. This thesis also acknowledges the carnality of Irigaray’s writing, something that is frequently elided in critical readings of her work, and explores the philosophical space of the “new poetics” that Irigaray is attempting to engender. This necessitates responding to Irigaray’s invitation—made explicitly at the beginning of *The Way of Love*—to give attention to the carnal in philosophical dialogue. This thesis not only explicates a theoretical model for carnal transcendence as difference; it also attempts to put into practice a *poetics* of carnal transcendence. A philosophy of carnal transcendence as difference is exploratory, experimental and speculative, requiring a poetic logic, not an analytical one. It privileges a mode of writing that is subjective and risky, responding in kind to the playfulness of Irigaray’s style.

The argument that is developed in this thesis is representative of the ambivalence and difficulty generated by Irigaray’s resistance to carnality—in the same gesture as it is celebrated in her writing—her romanticising of the heterosexual couple, and the lack of subjective ambivalence and ambiguity in

her image of the mother. In identifying these anxieties in relation to her work, the key question that recurs in this thesis is whether carnal transcendence as difference remains an exercise in rhetoric, or if it can be experienced as transformative and creative. In other words, does Irigaray's work fulfill its promise of opening onto something new?

Chapter One traces the problematic of carnal transcendence as it is elaborated in the three phases of Irigaray's work—her critique of phallogocentrism, the establishment of feminine subjectivity, and the creation of a culture of intersubjectivity. A review of the literature demonstrates that much of the critical work in response to Irigaray's philosophy of transcendence focusses on the second phase, and neglects the relationship between transcendence and carnality that emerges in her third theoretical phase. The second half of the chapter addresses the relationship between carnal transcendence and sexual difference, and evaluates the possibilities of carnal transcendence as difference for imagining a differently sexed culture.

In the second chapter, I introduce the subjective voice to explore Irigaray's poetics, tracing the carnality of the reading and writing process encountered in the complexity and playfulness of her texts. This chapter examines how difference manifests in Irigaray's philosophy of carnal transcendence as an "amorous exchange" (1991a, p 44). A text that claims carnality invites the reader into an affective and intimate exchange with an author, and the multiple texts, writers and readers around her. Where do I locate myself—as

a reading, writing, mothering, loving, and swimming subject—in the intimate geography of Irigaray’s work?

The third chapter explores the mother/daughter relation of carnal difference and transcendence. It follows an association Irigaray makes between Freud’s game of fort/da, angels and the placenta which elaborates a carnal and divine subjectivity by reconceiving the relationship between mother and child. The weight and resonance of Irigaray’s philosophy of carnal transcendence as difference is tested through my experiences of motherhood and an embodied connection to a child who occupies an elsewhere space *in utero* and in illness.

In chapter four, I consider expressions of carnal transcendence in the philosophies of others, including Romain Rolland’s oceanic feeling, Catherine Clément’s syncope, Georges Bataille’s theory of religion, and Alphonso Lingis’s rapture of the deep. Overall, these philosophies suggest that the experience of transcendence annihilates the self. In contrast, carnal transcendence as difference demonstrates a deepening of subjectivity. Irigaray’s writing on mucus provides a model for such subjectivity: loving, impermanent, expansive, and without distinct interiors or exteriors in relation to the other.

Chapter Five returns to the problematic of carnal transcendence as difference and raises doubts about its effectiveness as a “new poetics”. I interrogate the return to touch that Irigaray advocates in the transition to a carnal transcendence through a critical reading of her poetry in *Everyday Prayers*. Irigaray’s poetry has multiple aims: to practice meditative or prayerful

writing; to present to the other a feminine mode of articulation; to allow touch to be perceived in a written text; to celebrate life and enable a movement towards more loving relationship; and to restore to nature “her” own becoming. Reading this poetry raises complex questions: what happens when a “touchful” text fails to touch the reader? Does a moment of non-touching, or an oscillation between touching and not-touching, render the textual encounter infertile? Where is the carnal subject located within such a text? What are the consequences of not recognising difference in a poetics of touch?

In an attempt to address the limitations of carnal transcendence as difference, the final chapter explores the latent, intuitive and unthought by articulating what Gaston Bachelard refers to as the oneirism of a work which, if left without acknowledgement, results in the annihilation of the subject (1987, p 80). This brings to the fore the poetics Irigaray’s writing enables—speculation, nonsense, fragments, drift, associations and contradictions. The exploration of dreamspace enables the articulation of a becoming which otherwise lies outside of theoretical contemplation, and unravels a series of associations made throughout this thesis between birds, angels, mothers and writers. Such a connection occupies a space between and beyond texts—new, evasive, and transgressive—from where it is possible to push the boundaries of Irigaray’s philosophy.

Chapter One

Carnal Transcendence and Sexual Difference

In *The Way of Love*, Luce Irigaray suggests that we (Westerners), trained in rigid and coded meanings and senses, forget the requirement of the carnal in our communications. We let pass the opportunity to be “surprised, touched, wonderstruck, called beyond ... what we [are] already” (2002f, p viii). Here Irigaray brings together carnality (being *touched*) and transcendence (being *called beyond*). This chapter examines the key terms and concepts that constitute Irigaray’s philosophy of carnal transcendence as difference: the divine, becoming, sexual difference and being two. The discussion corresponds with the three stages of Irigaray’s project, as she outlines them in *Je—Luce Irigaray*, a 1996 interview with Elizabeth Hirsh and Gary A. Olson: first, a critique of the singular masculine subject; second, an elaboration of a feminine subjectivity; and, finally, the definition of an intersubjective relation between two or more subjects. Read through a carnal understanding of transcendence, Irigaray’s emphasis on sexual difference becomes an interim strategy in the construction of a new philosophical model for love between two (or more) subjects.

Irigaray’s Tri-part Philosophy

The first phase of Irigaray’s work, articulated for the most part in *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which Is Not One*, demonstrates that a masculine framework has conceived Western notions of subjectivity, and determined the category “woman” from a singular perspective. In *This Sex*

Which Is Not One, for example, she writes: “Female sexuality has always been conceptualised on the basis of masculine parameters ... Woman, in this sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man’s fantasies” (1985b, pp 23–25). *Speculum of the Other Woman* holds up a mirror to this masculine account of female subjectivity and sexuality in writings from Freud to Plato. This is a purposeful historical inversion that plays with the linear logic constructing feminine subjectivity. It begins with the words of Sigmund Freud from his paper entitled *Femininity*: “Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity ... Nor will *you* have escaped worrying about this problem—those of you who are men; to those of you who are women, this will not apply—you are yourselves the problem” (quoted in Irigaray 1985a, p 13, emphasis in original). Irigaray responds with the observation that the enigma of woman is “the *target*, the *object*, the *stake* of a masculine discourse, of a debate among men” (1985a, p 13, emphasis in original).

In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray challenges this construction by articulating woman’s polymorphous perversity through the auto-erotic touching of her vaginal lips. She writes: “Woman ‘touches herself’ all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two pairs of lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two—but not divisible into one(s)—that caress each other” (1985b, p 24). Women’s sexuality is multiple or plural: “a woman has sex organs more or less everywhere. She finds pleasure almost anywhere ... The geography of her pleasure is far more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is commonly imagined” (1985b, p 28). For

Irigaray, a woman represents difference or alterity within her own body. This alterity manifests itself in her language:

This is doubtless why she is said to be whimsical, incomprehensible, agitated, capricious ... not to mention her language, in which “she” sets off in all directions leaving “him” unable to discern the coherence of any meaning ... For in what she says too, at least when she dares, woman is constantly touching herself. She steps ever so slightly aside from herself with a murmur, an exclamation, a whisper, a sentence left unfinished ... When she returns, it is to set off again from elsewhere (1985b, pp 28-29).

This model potentially disrupts masculine systems of communication and exchange that rely, Irigaray argues, on mediation—between, for example, man and God, man and his body, man and woman, or man and language. In this second phase of Irigaray’s work, which overlaps significantly with the first, she addresses the limitations of a singular masculine social, political and symbolic order and attempts to establish a feminine subjectivity in and of itself. This involves a “different economy” (1985b, p 29). In *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Irigaray writes:

I am coming back from far, far away ... I have washed off your masks and make up, scrubbed away your multicoloured projections and designs, stripped off your veils and wraps that hid the shame of your nudity. I have even had to scrape my woman’s flesh clean of the insignia and marks you had etched upon it. That was my most painful hour. For you had so deeply implanted these things into me that almost nothing was left to recall me to the innocence of my life. Almost nothing to let me rediscover my own

becoming beyond your sufferings. All that was left—barely—was a breath, a hint of air and blood that said: I want to live (1991b, p 4).

Irigaray demonstrates the nature of masculine constructions of femininity and articulates a feminine subjectivity by echoing the words and styles of various male philosophers, such as Freud in the beginning of *Speculum of the Other Woman* and Friedrich Nietzsche in the above passage from *Marine Lover*.¹ This is a process of mimesis, a method of playing with a text, working from inside it to disrupt its critical assumptions and repeating negative views, such as women as themselves the problem, to highlight their absurdity. In an articulation of the second phase of her work, in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray argues that women philosophers must adopt a feminine position in their writing:

To play with mimesis is ... for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself ... to “ideas”, in particular ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make “visible”, by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language (1985b, p 76).

Irigaray’s mimesis is taken to an audacious extreme in “Une mère de glace”, a chapter of *Speculum of the Other Woman* composed entirely of quotations from the Greek philosopher Plotinus. A discussion of matter, which Plotinus determines is bodiless, it ends with the statement that “impregnating power ... belongs only to the unchangeably masculine” (1985a, p 179). Toril Moi writes that “Irigaray is gambling on the idea that having read so far, the

reader will be so immersed in her arguments, so used to her tone, her way of quoting male thinkers ironically, that no more commentary is necessary.”

She sums up: “The gamble pays off, I think” (1999, p 176). Judith Butler is more temperate in her response, asking:

Does the voice of the philosophical father echo in her, or has she occupied the voice, insinuated herself into the voice of the father? If she is “in” that voice for either reason, is she also at the same time “outside” it? How do we understand the being “between” the two possibilities as something other than ... that [which] leaves the phallogocentric binary opposition intact? How does the philosophical father resound in the mime that appears to replicate his strategy so faithfully? (1994, p 150).

Butler’s critical conclusion is that Irigaray’s mimesis is a disruptive movement to demonstrate that the philosophical space that is claimed as “masculine” can be occupied by a woman. In a thought-provoking question, Butler asks “whether this kind of penetrative textual strategy does not suggest a different textualisation of eroticism than the rigorously antipenetrative eros of surfaces that appears in Irigaray’s ‘When Our Lips Speak Together’” (1985b, p 158). I address this question, and Irigaray’s arguments for “feminine language” and its implications for carnal transcendence as difference in the next chapter.

Irigaray’s third philosophical phase concerns the definition of an intersubjective relationship of love which she refers to as “a new model of possible relations between man and woman, without the submission of either one to the other” (1996, p 3). In *Democracy Begins between Two*, she

writes: “We have to rethink the model of subjectivity which has served for centuries ... so that we can abandon a model of a single and singular subject altogether. This does not mean that the one of the subject can become many ... but that the subject is at least two, man and woman” (2000a, p 4). The “at least” two of the subject echoes the multiplicity of feminine subjectivity—“already two, and not divisible into one”—that is articulated in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985b, p 24). Most recently in *Sharing the World*, Irigaray writes: “Desire and love demand a culture of the imagination, notable of the transcendental imagination” (2008e, p 55). Without this, relational life is “a source of disappointment, unhappiness, deterioration of the self, and not the opening of the horizon, the discovery of felicity, the blossoming of oneself” (2008e, pp 55-56).

Carnal transcendence can be understood as encompassing these three stages in Irigaray’s thinking. First, Irigaray’s writing on the transcendental acknowledges that the traditional referent for the divine is masculine; second, it articulates a feminine conception of divinity which focuses on a corporeal construction of the divine subject; and third, it posits an intersubjective relation between men and women as a carnal model for becoming divine.

Becoming Divine

In *Key Writings*, Irigaray argues for the imperative of reconceptualising divinity as “a new task incumbent on us” (2004b, p 148). This is an echo of her claims for sexual difference, the issue that could be our “salvation” and

whose resolution would herald the creation of a new poetics (1993a, p 5). She continues with the suggestion that there are two tasks required for becoming divine: “to assure incarnation between word(s) and body [and] to practise love towards the other(s)” (2004b, p 145). In this way, the philosophy of becoming divine is both a process of language—“the flesh made word” as Margaret Whitford describes it in a reversal of the New Testament text—and a model for love that emphasises the carnal aspects of spirituality and sexual difference (1991, p 47).² With these oppositions—word/flesh, self/other, carnal and spiritual love—Irigaray is stating divinity as a problematic, imagining the possibility of a carnal transcendental. Irigaray’s work invites questions about the nature and interconnections of spirituality, sexuality, subjectivity, corporeality, and difference. Such an experimental and speculative philosophy requires a poetic mode of thinking, moving beyond logic and rhetoric to explore the intimacies and intricacies of language, affect, and the reading and writing exchange, aspects of the carnal transcendental which will be explored in subsequent chapters.

As a poetics, carnal transcendence offers the possibility for rereading traditional models of divinity within a new interpretative space. Irigaray finds the poetic vocabulary to discuss becoming divine through the passion or carnality of bodies in response to the elements, which provide a fleshy medium for thinking through the relationships between bodies, life, language and the environment. In *Divine Women*, she writes:

The passions are a matter of fire and ice, of light and darkness, of finding and losing one’s footing, and of breathing in the deepest and most secret aspects of life. Our passions ... transform us into

phenomena that can be watery or heavenly, solar or volcanic, blazing with light or lost in shadow, throbbing or dozing (1993c, p 58).

Elizabeth Grosz argues that elements provide “a corporeal model of sexual difference” and a terminology “to describe the powerful relations that constitute love, exchange and social organisation” (1986, p 10). This corresponds with Irigaray’s interpretation of becoming divine as a loving exchange between body and language. In this context, Grosz refers to the elements as a “textual strategy” (1986, p 10), while Whitford uses the phrase “discursive strategy” (1991, p 61). Both terms correspond with Irigaray’s attempts to rewrite philosophy at a corporeal or carnal level that is specific to a feminine becoming. Utilising a language of the elements, in “The Age of Breath” Irigaray counsels a focus on air: “The divine appropriate to women, the feminine divine is first of all related to the breath. To cultivate the divine in herself, the woman, in my opinion, has to attend to her own breathing, her own breath, even more than to love” (2004b, p 165). This seems contradictory, given her insistence on loving the other(s) as a crucial aspect of divinity, but without an emphasis on her self, a woman’s divinity and her relationship with the elements is subsumed in the other.

Cecilia Sjöholm suggests that the elements replace flesh in Irigaray’s philosophy, since flesh has become too fixed in the feminine, in matter, and in excess to constitute the divine (2000, p 98). In “Divine Women”, Irigaray makes a call to revive women’s flesh, which has been deformed, masked, disguised by make up, its beauty hidden, because “of the fact that women

lack a female god who can open up the perspective in which their flesh can be transfigured” (1993c, p 64). In contrast to Sjöholm’s speculations, it is precisely the fixing or congealing of flesh in the feminine that makes it a matter for divinity. Irigaray writes:

Deprived of a God, [women] are forced to comply with models that do not match them, that exile, double, mask them, cut them off from one another, stripping away their ability to move forward into love, art, thought, toward their ideal and divine fulfillment (1993c, p 64).

The only diabolical thing about women, Irigaray emphasises, is not their flesh, their excess or their passions: it is their lack of a god in their own image.

In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray questions the view that God is an “inaccessible transcendence” rather than an embodied realisation (1993a, p 148). Addressing the question she asks of Levinas—why God withdrew from carnal love—she suggests that a belief in a god or gods as a transcendent other opposed to “the accomplishment of our flesh” is the projection of our fears of living a more ideal becoming (2003, p 8). Carnal transcendence as difference offers an alternative possibility: that divinity is “an inscription in the flesh” that is written during loving exchanges (1993a, p 147).

With this reconception of God as “the infinite that resides within us and among us”, carnal transcendence offers a horizon or an incentive for what Irigaray refers to as “a more perfect becoming” as men and women (1993c, p

63). Irigaray defines becoming expansively as “fulfilling the wholeness of what we are capable of being” (1993c, p 61). Becoming divine, or “becoming perfectly”, means refusing “to allow parts of ourselves to shrivel and die that have the potential for growth and fulfillment” (1993c, pp 68-69). This is not a fixed ideal for Irigaray; rather, the goal is to continue the never-ending process of “becoming infinitely”—becoming “is never over and done with” (1994b, p 63). Becoming is not, as Carolyn Burke explains, “an evolution toward some higher state but an ongoing flow, a (self) generation of being” (1994b, p 252). In becoming, Irigaray suggests, the subject seeks a limit that cannot be grasped, a “shadowy perception of achievement” (1993c, p 67), or a horizon that offers an illusion of progression. In the introduction to *Becomings*, Grosz asks whether becoming is a strategy of subjectivity or whether the opposite might be the case: “Is *becoming* that which operates through and as a subject rather than that which a subject is” (1999a, p 9)?³ This question is central to Irigaray’s carnal transcendental, which argues that a fluid and connective model of subjectivity is a consequence of becoming divine.

The third phase of Irigaray’s work proposes an intersubjective relation of being two, where subjectivity emerges as an effect of becoming in relation to the other, rather than being established or privileged in the singular. Following this, the carnal transcendental operates in two dimensions: becoming as ourselves (incarnation) and becoming in relation to the other (transcendence). According to Irigaray, transcendence represents relations with others by respecting difference, and incarnation demonstrates one’s own becoming in relation to sexuate identity. She terms these two

dimensions of the transcendental the “horizontal” and the “vertical” (2004b, p 190). Becoming divine operates in a vertical dimension appropriate to femininity or masculinity—becoming *as woman* or *as man*—and in a horizontal dimension in relation to the other. The model of transcendence that Irigaray outlines in the first two phases of her work corresponds with vertical transcendence; the third phase of her work, an intersubjective ethics of sexual difference, corresponds with the horizontal axis of transcendence that Irigaray identifies between a woman and a man.

Phases One and Two: Divine Men/ Divine Women

Through the first phase of her work, Irigaray demonstrates that a singular, masculine model of subjectivity constructs a specific and limited notion of divinity and carnality as entirely distinct and separate—or opposed—categories. In “Divine Women” Irigaray argues that men have access to divinity through the father, son, and spirit, but that Western theological tradition encounters difficulties with a divinity (or divinities) for women. A masculine God offers men a point of origin separate from the mother. Irigaray suggests that God, who creates and is created through a masculine subject, helps man to define his mortality (his “finiteness”) with reference to an infinite. She writes: “Having a God and becoming one’s gender go hand in hand” (1993c, p 67). In fact, God is *necessary* “to posit a gender” (1993c, p 61). Men are able to become *as men* through their reference to a masculine god, but women have no corresponding horizon to represent their becoming. Irigaray states it deceptively simply: “There is no *woman* God, no female

trinity: mother, daughter, spirit” (1993c, p 62, emphasis in original). Gail Schwab makes the point that this notion of God as the “horizon” for Irigaray relates to her thinking of transcendence in relation to both horizontal and vertical axes. Schwab writes: “God, or the divine, that which has traditionally been conceived as the vertical dimension and infinite, here becomes a horizon—thus horizontal and finite” (forthcoming, no page number). In her response to Irigaray, Penelope Ingram argues that women represent the “negation” of men’s divine ideal: “Woman is the base, the earth, the matter from which the form of man emerges in his quest for the infinite” (2008, p 73). In Judeo-Christian tradition, women’s access to the divine is through the virgin mother, who is “alone of all her sex” (1993c, p 62). Without access to divinity, women’s paths to becoming are caught in a masculine logic and exchange. Their becoming *as women*—their constitution as subjects—is only partial. This has meant that masculine models of subjectivity are imposed on women: “Man is supposedly woman’s more perfect other, her model, her essence. The most human and most divine goal woman can conceive is to become *man*” (1993c, p 64). Deprived of a God “made flesh as a woman”, women are cut off from themselves and one another, unable to “move forward into love, art, thought, toward their ideal and divine fulfillment” (1993c, p 71, p 64).

In *Je, Tu, Nous*, Irigaray again writes of the dereliction that is the result of the lack of divine representation for women: “It has left us without a means of designating ourselves, of expressing ourselves, between ourselves. It has also separated mothers from daughters, depriving them of mutually respectful mediums of exchange” (1993b, p 111). This is echoed in *Thinking*

the Difference: “One of the lost crossroads in our becoming women lies in the blurring and erasure of our relationships to our mothers and in our obligation to submit to laws of the world of men-amongst-themselves” (1994b, p 99). In *Elemental Passions*, Irigaray writes that the transcendence of the mother in her own right—the horizontal dimension of transcendence—has seldom been recognised, except in relation to the father or the son. Evoking Christian belief, which constitutes Irigaray’s religious background, she argues that the “spirit of divinity” circulates between father and son, and confines the woman in her maternal status, a claim that will be examined in more detail in Chapter Three (1992, p 2).⁴ She has no divine identity of her own “which could be perfected in love” (1992, p 2). The articulation of a model to enable women to establish a divinity of their own corresponds with the second phase of Irigaray’s work.

In her analysis of the divine, Serene Jones interprets Irigaray’s project as aiming to “get rid of the notion that God is an objective other” (1993, p 111).⁵ In her reading of Irigaray, there is no transcendence or difference operating between humanity and divinity, since God and woman are the same. This interpretation raises a curious contradiction:

Given Irigaray’s interest in preserving the incommensurable otherness of woman, it would seem that a similar respect for difference would appear in her doctrine of God. However, it does not. God, for Irigaray, is the idealised, projected other of women’s emerging subjectivity. Granted, it is the multiple and indeterminate female subject, not the unitary male, who projects; but as far as the “other” (God) of theology is concerned, there is finally no room for true alterity (1993, p 138).

Irigaray's philosophy of carnal transcendence is more complex than Jones suggests here; Jones's insistence on the singular term God, without acknowledging the multiple meanings Irigaray covers by using the term "divine", limits her understanding. For Irigaray, "God" offers a path or a horizon to a more perfect becoming for men *and* women, as demonstrated by reading her writings on divinity and sexual difference as complementary aspects of the same argument. Penelope Ingram states that Irigaray's God is "quite clearly a 'projection' or an embodiment ... of both sexes." In contrast to the argument of Jones, Ingram concludes that God, for Irigaray, is the "incarnation of difference" (2000, p 67). Transcendence operates in the relations between the sexes, as well as for women in their own right. God, as a masculine ideal, is not simply replaced with a feminine ideal, whose role is the construction of subjectivity for women. The interpretation Jones makes corresponds with the first and second stages of Irigaray's work—the identification that a singular, masculine logic and subject determines our ways of thinking, being and becoming, and the establishment of an alternative, feminine logic and subjectivity—without recognising Irigaray's third phase of carnal transcendence as difference.

With a similar starting point—the second phase of Irigaray's work—Alison Martin takes up Irigaray's claim that women function as commodities without a shared community or identity as women, and locates the divine, as a masculine construction, within this relationship. In relation to the divine, Martin suggests that women "are subject to a form of the absolute which is masculine" (2000, p 53). In contrast to the notion of the divine as an ideal

becoming, Martin argues that “the question of the divine pertains directly to the constitution of subjectivity” (2000, p 3). The divine enables women to achieve subjectivity *as women*, rather than as the other to a male subjectivity, just as a man is defined and oriented through a male god.

This argument is evidenced through Irigaray’s articulation of the consequences of a loss of divinity for women:

As long as woman lacks a divine made in her image she cannot establish her subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own. She lacks an ideal that would be her goal or path in becoming ... If she is to become women, if she is to accomplish her female subjectivity, woman needs a god who is a figure for the perfection of *her* subjectivity (1993c, pp 63-64, emphasis in original).

The point to note here is that divine subjectivity is characterised as an ideal that offers a model for becoming. Before women are subjects *as women*, they become as divine women. Irigaray makes this point earlier in “Divine Women”: “Divinity is what we need to become free, autonomous, sovereign. No human subjectivity, no human society has ever been established without the help of the divine” (1993c, p 62). Martin sees subjectivity, rather than becoming, as the central issue, an argument which focuses on the second phase of Irigaray’s project, but disregards the crucial possibilities of the third phase—the establishment of an intersubjective relation on being two. Martin writes: “[Women] can will their own becoming, and feel this as the creation and perfection of their own subjectivity ... Having an infinite would enable women ... to change” (1995, p 139).

However, in the passage from “Divine Women” that Martin echoes here, Irigaray asks whether we are in fact capable of imagining this female divine: “can we dimly see it as the perfection of our subjectivity?” (1993c, p 62). My departure from Martin rests on this issue: it is an infinite becoming, rather than the achievement of subjectivity, that is crucial to Irigaray’s call for a divinity for women. In the third phase of Irigaray’s work, the notion of divinity evolves towards a becoming that heralds a new culture of intersubjective relations. This is what I have termed carnal transcendence as difference. Martin’s formulation of the divine as a “question” is an important one, but subjectivity is not the only answer. A question allows for the divine to be imagined as an opening, a possibility and a problematic—a question that is ultimately, perhaps, unanswerable. As Martin suggests, the divine is “an opening to many other questions” (2000, p 1). One question that resonates powerfully is: if carnal transcendence as difference imagines the divine as an inscription on the flesh, what is being written?

Julia Kristeva begins *New Maladies of the Soul* with a single, provocative question that encapsulates the problematic of thinking about transcendence in a carnal era: “These days, who has a soul?” Thinking through this question, Kristeva suggests, seems “frivolous and ill-advised” (1995, p 7). Nevertheless, like Irigaray’s writing on carnal transcendence, the question worries and excites. In her search for a soul for our times, Kristeva proposes a rereading of sacred texts, and the possibility of an “eternal return to divinity, a return that may be glorious or profane” (1995, p 115). For Kristeva, sacred texts such as the Bible, to which she refers explicitly, are most intriguing in relation to the borderline subjectivities they create. The

human subject is in continual “crisis, trial or process” with *his* relationship to the divine. Interpreting such fractured and multiple identities requires that we recognise a new space, “a space for our own fantasies and interpretive delirium” (1995, p 126). Rereading the Bible in a new space, Kristeva finds “the pagan aspect coiled up beside the maternal body” (1995, p 117). The pagan aspect of the Old Testament is explicit—forgotten gods and goddesses lurking within the text: Baal, Asherah, Succoth Benoth, Nergal, Ashima, Nibhaz and Tartak, Andrammelech and Anammelech (2 Kings 17). What of the maternal bodies, or those yearning for maternity, lying alongside the pagan? There are Ruth and Esther, who have their own stories; Sarah, mother to Abraham’s late-life child; Leah of the weak eyes; Rachel, twin-wife and barren; the handmaidens Bilhah and Zilpah who bear children by proxy; Dinah, violated, defiled and loved, in whose name a city is circumcised. These Biblical women—denied a God who has (or even loves) the flesh of a woman—are defined in sexual and familial parameters by the absence or presence of a hymen, husband or son.

Hearkening to Kristeva’s call to reread the Bible, and seeking representations of carnal and divine women, I find in Judges the echo of an earlier story in Genesis. A nameless “concubine” leaves her husband and returns to her father’s house in Bethlehem. Her husband follows her, makes merry with his father-in-law and takes the reluctant woman back to the remote hill country. They stop over in Gilbeah and befriend an old man, who invites them to stay at his house. The story continues:

Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him. And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them and said unto them, Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly; seeing that this man has come into mine house, do not this folly. Behold, here is my daughter a maiden, and his concubine; them I will bring out now, and humble ye them, and do with them what seemeth good unto you: but unto this man do not so vile a thing (Judges 19, 22-24).

The King James text continues that the concubine was abused all night until the morning, until she is found by “her lord” on the doorstep. He returns home with her upon a donkey, takes a knife and dismembers her into twelve parts that he sends to the corners of Israel. The context of the story is the absence of a King in Israel, which causes men to do as they wish. But can it really be said that a woman’s degradation, and her lack of subjectivity, is the result of the absence of a man? The question of what is being written in relation to carnal transcendence, then, might be better phrased as: whose voice is being heard? For the second phase of Irigaray’s project to be successful, the voice of the feminine needs to be found.

Looking to a different association between women, the carnal and the divine, I consider Jacques Lacan’s visit to Bernini’s statue of St Theresa/Teresa in Rome.⁶ Tom Hayes describes what Lacan sees when he looks at Theresa:

The capacious folds of thick cloth, like myriad vaginal orifices, denote Theresa’s vulnerability, her accessibility. As she falls

backwards in the throes of an orgasmic convulsion her legs open and she is lifted up and cradled by a cloud. Her eyes, half-closed beneath heavy lids, roll back so the iris is only a faint shadow on the upper edge of the cornea. Her nostrils flare, her mouth gapes, her left arm hangs listlessly at her side while her right hand opens as if to welcome the next thrust of the arrow (1999, pp 338-339).

When Lacan ogles her, he understands immediately that “she’s coming, there’s no doubt about that” (1998, p 147). Lacan continues with the statement that Theresa has no understanding of her own pleasure: “It is clear that the essential testimony of the mystics is that they are experiencing it but know nothing about it” (1998, p 147). Here lies an echo of Freud’s words, mimicked by Irigaray at the beginning of *Speculum*, that the riddle of the nature of femininity need not apply to women who are themselves the problem. Irigaray’s response to Lacan is one of incredulity:

In Rome? So far away? To look? At a statue? Of a saint?
Sculpted by a man? What pleasure are we talking about? Whose pleasure? For where the pleasure of the Theresa in question is concerned, her own writings are perhaps more telling (1985b, p 91).

In her autobiography, from which Bernini drew inspiration for his sculpture, Theresa of Avila wrote of an encounter with an angel:

In his hands I saw a great golden spear, and at the iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated my entrails. When he pulled it out, I felt that he took them with it, and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused by this intense pain is

so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease, nor is one's soul then content with anything but God. This is not a physical, but a spiritual pain—though the body has some share in it—even a considerable share (cited in Hayes 1999, p 332).

In the essay “La Mystérique”—a word which conflates mysticism, hysteria, mystery and femaleness—Irigaray describes a location in which divinity, carnality and femininity are shared.⁷ Responding to the voices of the mystics—including that of St Theresa—she writes:

(Re)assured of the complicity of this all-powerful partner, they/she play(s) at courtship, kneeling in self-abasement at one moment, adorning themselves with gold and diamonds in the next, touching, smelling, listening, seeing, [embracing] each other, devouring, penetrating, entering, consuming, melting each other. She is as trusting as a dove, arrogant as a queen, proud in her nakedness, bursting with the joy of such exchanges (1985a, pp 201-202).

In *I Love to You*, Irigaray finds an echo to Theresa's pleasure in Mary's voice at the moment of the conception of Jesus. This is a reimagining of the scene she has set in “Divine Women”, where she writes of Mary:

Is she the wife? By what mediation? The spirit? Who is represented as an angel, a young man, or a bird? The virgin's relations with the Father always remain in the shadow. Just as the Father himself? ... But the Father is not single. He is three. The virgin is alone of all her sex ... without a divine bridegroom (1993c, p 62).

In *I Love to You*, Irigaray hears God (the spirit, the young man) saying: “Mary, you who, from adolescence, are divine, because you were born of a woman faithful to herself—Anne, the one said to have conceived without sin—you are thus capable of intersubjectivity, the expression of love between humans, do you want to be my lover and for us to have a child together?” (1996, p 140). It is only with Mary’s *yes*—with her pleasure—that God’s love and his son may be “carnally redeemed or saved” (1996, p 140).

In *Je, Tu, Nous*, Irigaray writes of encountering a painting of Mary and her mother Anne, an image she first mistakes for Mary and Jesus before noticing “that this Jesus was a girl!” Her response is one of jubilation: “I felt once again at ease and joyous, in touch with my body, my emotions, and my history as a woman” (1993b, p 25). In *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, Tina Beattie offers an alternative image of a divine for women—the Saint Anne Trinitarian, a sixteenth century woodcut which represents a trinity with Anne, Mary and Christ. Beattie offers a “gynocentric reading” of the work: “The Latin caption beneath reads ‘O Lord, open my lips and I shall praise your name’ so that it invites a playful engagement with Irigaray on the two sets of lips” (2002, p 156). Surrounding the woodcut are scrolls describing the conception of Jesus, allowing Beattie to imagine Mary the lover. In words that echo Lacan, the mandorla illuminating Mary demonstrates “the dark hole of woman’s sex ... illuminated from within” (2002, p 157). Beattie ecstatically writes: “I would go so far as to say that this image is capable of expressing a total theological picture for women along the lines suggested by Irigaray, given of course that the total picture remains ‘always in gestation’, always capable of incarnating the divine among us in new and surprising

ways if we only remain open to the other” (2002, p 158). A total theological picture for women? Only for a mother who gives birth to the son.

Phase Three: Divine Intersubjectivity

In the third phase of her work, Irigaray looks beyond the individual to explore a relation of being two. In *I Love to You*, it is evident that subjectivity for women is inseparable from this project, when she writes: “Being a man or a woman already means not being the whole of the subject or of the community or of the spirit” (1996, p 106). Divinity for men and women operates in the intersubjective relation that Irigaray imagines as a new ethics of sexual difference. In this context, an ethical relation refers to the recognition of the irreducibility and alterity of the other.⁸

Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton define transcendence as operating in the “relation of knowledge between a subject and object.” In this in-between state, the individual enters “a state of continuity between beings whose isolation and separation from the other has disappeared.” In such an exchange, intersubjectivity or being two takes precedence over “subjective experience and consciousness” (2004, p xix). Irigaray’s transcendental operates at this level, but takes it further to figure this relation at a material or carnal level, emphasising the primacy of lived experience. In other words, the transcendental, as an embodied or carnal relation with the other, becomes immanent.⁹

Whitford's "provisional" definition of the carnal (sensible) transcendental emphasises the intersubjective relation by operating as "a field in which there are *two* poles of enunciation, so that the 'I' may be 'male' or 'female', and so may the 'you', so that the speaker may change positions, exchange with the other sex" (1991, p 47, emphasis in original). In "When Our Lips Speak Together", for example, Irigaray writes: "I/you touch you/me, that's quite enough for us to feel alive ... We—you/I—are neither open nor closed ... Between our lips, yours and mine, several voices, several ways of speaking resound endlessly, back and forth" (1985a, p 209). In her examination of the divine couple, Penelope Ingram explores Irigaray's claim that men and women, in a relationship of two that respects their differences, enable transcendence for one another. As Irigaray puts it in *Key Writings*: "Man and woman are co-redeemers of the world: of their bodies, of the cosmic universe, of society and of history" (2004b, p 151). Ingram argues that the divine occupies the position of mediator between men and women, embodying both male and female aspects and enabling exchanges to take place between them (2000, p 57). Her conclusion is that the divine, "both spirit and flesh, inhabits the space, the horizon of becoming, between the sexes" (2000, p 67). Irigaray makes this clear in *Key Writings*, when women's divine subjectivity—in relation to the other—gives birth to a generation of spiritual humanity. Through a concentration on her breath—the "vehicle of the soul"—a woman can achieve transcendence in the flesh. She can then "welcome the other in her soul, not just her body" (2004b, p 167). This union would be the opening of a new age and ethical relation. That such an age has not yet arrived—or has been forgotten—is one consequence of the absence of a divine for women, in which sexuality and

carnality are separate from transcendence. For Irigaray, a loving and carnal relationship, with its union of multiple bodies and souls, represents “the presence of immortality in the living mortal” (1993a, p 25). Without this union of two different subjects, consummation never takes place. Irigaray writes: “Their wedding is always being put off to a beyond, a future life, or else devalued, felt and thought to be less worthy in comparison to the marriage between the mind and the God” (1993a, p 15).¹⁰

Reading the Bible at least one more time, I find in *The Song of Solomon* (*The Song of Songs*) a different model of divine coupling:

Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from mount Gilead.

Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bears twins, and none is barren among them.

Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely: thy temples are like a piece of pomegranate within thy locks.

Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.

Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies (Song of Solomon 4, 1-5).

Irigaray suggests that this poem represents “the creation of the first couple in the Old Testament” (2004b, p 163). In it, we find a complex relationship of loving and being loved in two voices: as Irigaray puts it, two lovers and two beloveds, by which she indicates the recognition of the woman as a subject in

love. The poem explores “the sensual delight of the lovers who wed each other with all their senses, with their whole body, inviting to their encounters the most succulent fruits of the earth” (1991a, p 110). Pamela Anderson writes: “the crucial refrain in this narrative for temporal recognition of the female subject in love is the command of the bridegroom: ‘Do not rouse her, do not disturb my love, until she is ready’” (1998, no page number).

In the *Song of Songs*, the carnal and the divine are not separated. Irigaray finds here “the innocence of carnal love” (2004b, p 179). In *Democracy Begins Between Two*, Irigaray writes: “I remembered the lovers of the *Song of Songs* and wondered what had to be done for man and woman to encounter each other as companions in love, in civil coexistence” (2000a, p 27). In Irigaray’s reading of the poem, this loving coexistence is disrupted by a painful separation between the lovers—between the erotics of “she who wants to be initiated in her mother’s chamber, he who awakes her beneath the tree, the apple tree where her mother is said to have conceived her” and the politics of “that which takes them into the banqueting hall, the chamber armies of the king” (1991a, p 110). In this division between the lovers, Irigaray finds a loss of divinity—“her breath, her soul”—for this woman, and for all women (2004b, p 147). But there remains the glimpse or trace of the woman as the subject of a carnal transcendence in a relation of sexual difference.¹¹

Sexual Difference

Irigaray begins *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* with the statement: “Sexual

difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age... Sexual difference is probably the issue in our time which could be our 'salvation' if we thought it through" (1993a, p 5). Thinking through sexual difference, she continues, would signal the beginning of a newly fertile and creative era, "the production of a new age of thought, art, poetry, and language: the creation of a new *poetics*" (1993a, p 5, emphasis in original). In *I Love to You*, she suggests that a refusal to think through sexual difference would prove a "deadly business" (1996, p 37). Sexual difference, Irigaray argues, manifests as an irreducible difference between men and women. She writes:

I will never be in a man's place, never will a man be in mine.
Whatever identifications are possible, one will never exactly
occupy the place of the other—they are irreducible one to the other
... The other who is forever unknowable to me is the one who
differs from me sexually (1993a, p 13).

In much of her work, Irigaray attempts to establish sexual difference as a positive to counter masculine constructions of the feminine. In *Je, Tu, Nous* for example, she argues that within patriarchal culture there is only one gender, whereas sexual difference offers at least two (1993b, p 20). In *I Love to You*, Irigaray describes sexual difference as universal, natural, immediate and vital. Without sexual difference, she argues, there will be no continuation of humanity. It is worth noting here that Irigaray conceives of sexual difference in two distinct ways. First, sexual difference refers to the construction, and sublimation, of the feminine in relation to the masculine. Second, Irigaray identifies sexual difference as an ethics or a poetics that is

not yet realised, “the opening-up of a period of History yet to come” (1996, p 57). These two distinct conceptions of sexual difference meet in *Je, Tu, Nous* when Irigaray writes: “Women’s exploitation is based upon sexual difference; its solution will come only through sexual difference” (1993b, p 12). In this way, Irigaray’s position on irreducible difference can be read as a strategic one: before we can consider *beyond* the genders, we must rethink *between* them. Tamsin Lorraine concurs on this point, stating that rather than “an exhortation to specify the crucial features of a femininity that leaves intact the binary opposition of male and female” Irigaray’s emphasis on sexual difference is a push towards “a notion of difference and embodied specificity that would ultimately undermine the very notion of sexual difference with which she starts” (1999, pp 40-41).

Notwithstanding, Irigaray’s statements on the primacy of sexual difference are forthright.¹² In *I Love to You*, she writes:

The whole of human kind is composed of women and men and of nothing else. The problem of race is, in fact, a secondary problem ... Sexual difference probably represents the most universal question we can address. Our era is faced with the task of dealing with this issue, because across the whole world, there are, there are only, men and women (1996, p 47).

The emphatic phrases “there are only” and “nothing else” negate the value of sexual difference as a model for plurality, an interpretation that gains credence when sexual difference is read in relation to Irigaray’s construction of feminine subjectivity as multiple. The potential of sexual difference is further undermined when, in response to alternative constructions of the

subjectivity of gender and of sex, Irigaray refers to those who “would like to wipe out [sexual] difference by resorting to monosexuality, to the unisex and to what is called identification: even if I am bodily a man or woman, I can identify with, and so be, the other sex.” Her response to this is that this “opiate of the masses ... annihilates the other” and is a reduction to “identity, equality and sameness, especially between man and woman” (1996, pp 61-62). Despite the bullishness of such sentiments, and with an acknowledgement of the resistances Irigaray’s work offers to the readings I want to make, is it possible to accept Irigaray’s call for a differently sexed culture—a new poetics of sexual difference—without the imposition of a proper, a real or a natural gender or sexual identity?¹³ Might it be possible to speculate differently about the deadly business of sexual difference, utilising ingredients that lie within Irigaray’s work?

Irigaray’s insistence on sexual difference in such limiting terms has been justifiably problematic for many of her readers, particularly in relation to arguments for the cultural and historical performativity of gender and sexuality. In “Transforming Sacrifice”, Anne Caldwell writes:

Irigaray's proposals will never appeal to those who wish to move beyond gender. She does, however, supply strategies and starting points for those who do wish to retain some conception of a feminine identity, a desire that often persists in the everyday lives of women ... Irigaray's work addresses women who do not wish to overcome gender, but to enjoy their identity as women without being oppressed because of it (2002, p 30).

Penelope Ingram argues that it is clear that Irigaray is writing exclusively of

“the heterosexual couple” (2000, p 56). Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell similarly believe that Irigaray privileges heterosexuality, reducing difference to the model of the heterosexual couple (Cheah and Grosz, 1998b, p 19). Abigail Bray reads Irigaray’s construction of sexual difference as prescriptive and normative, arguing that Irigaray reduces humanity to two sexes who are “stereotypical heterosexuals” (2001, p 315). To close down alternative readings, Bray writes: “While her influence has waned somewhat, one still runs the risk of appearing dull, of not appreciating the rhetorical complexity of her dense metaphysical allusions, if one asks basic questions of her work” (2001, p 317).

Mary Beth Mader concurs with the view that the sexual act in Irigaray’s writing is most commonly heterosexual, but responds more thoughtfully with a close reading of *Sexes and Genealogies*. She notes that there is some ambiguity in Irigaray’s work which, at times, demonstrates “nuanced, complex and illuminating thought on the topic of sexuality” (2003, p 371). Mader breaks down what it means to “have a sex” within Irigaray’s model of sexual difference into three parts: gender differences in modes of making love, birthing and feeding. To illustrate this summary, Mader offers two brief examples. In an interview with Hirsh and Olson, Irigaray describes sexual difference in the mother/child relation:

He’s a little boy. He has come out of a woman who is different from him. He himself will never be able to engender, to give birth. He is therefore in a space of unfathomable mystery ... For the little girl it’s entirely different. She’s a little woman born of another woman. She is able to engender like her mother; thus, she has a

sort of jubilation in being herself and in playing with herself
(Hirsh and Olson, 1996, no page number).

And in *Sexes and Genealogies*: “The woman ... does not have to distance herself from her mother as [the man] does: through a *yes* and especially a *no*, a *near* or *far*, an *inside* as opposed to an *outside*, in order to discover her sex” (Irigaray, 1993c, p 18, emphasis in original). Mader’s response to the dualism of inside, pertaining to the feminine, or outside, pertaining to the masculine is incredulity: “It is astonishing to have to point out that routinely men and women enter each other in making love; one would have to exclude from lovemaking the human kiss, among other common favourites, in order to think otherwise” (2003, p 371). Mader’s point—well made—is reinforced in Irigaray’s most recent work *Sharing the World*, where Irigaray writes: “As a result of woman including man in pregnancy and, already, in love itself ... it is obvious men and women do not live in the same way being-within and being-with” (2008e, pp 68-69).

Irigaray’s association here is the distinction between horizontal and vertical transcendence. In *Key Writings*, Irigaray discusses the importance of this horizontal transcendence by emphasising the sexual difference of a union between a man and a woman and the irreducibility of one to the other (2004b, p 14). The risk of Irigaray’s vertical and horizontal model for transcendence mirrors that of the inside/outside model: that it reinforces the binary oppositions of human/divine, self/other, and male/female. It is precisely the breaking down of these barriers that is the strength of Irigaray’s model of divinity as it is imagined in the first two phases of her work. In the

third phase, the risks of dualism are ameliorated through a complicated reading of vertical and horizontal transcendence. Both Deutscher and Schwab note that Irigaray has a tendency to use the terms horizontal and vertical interchangeably, in what Schwab argues is “the elaboration of [a] new or different spatiality” (Deutscher, 1994, pp 103-104; Schwab, forthcoming, no page number).

Putting aside the complex questions of that arise here for further discussion in Chapter Three, in my reading of Irigaray’s argument in *Sexes and Genealogies*, the sexual difference that is emphasised is not that between a man and a woman so much as that between a woman and her mother. Irigaray continues (and Mader offers her own translation of Irigaray’s text here in order to include sentences omitted from the published English translation): “[The woman] finds herself faced with a wholly other problem. She must be able to identify with her mother as a woman in order to accede to her sexuality. She must be or become a woman like her mother and, at the same time, be capable of differentiating herself from her mother” (Irigaray in Mader 2003, p 369). Indeed, elsewhere in her work, Irigaray challenges the identification of the feminine with the internal. In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, to offer just one example, she writes: “We are not lacks, voids awaiting sustenance, plenitude, fulfillment from the other. By our lips we are women: this does not mean that we are focused on consuming, consummation, fulfillment” (1985b, pp 209-210).

In “The Use and Abuse of ‘Violence’ in Feminist Theory”, Ann V. Murphy argues that Irigaray enacts “violence against differently gendered or sexed

subjects in the precedence she affords sexual difference” (2007, p 77). Murphy characterises Irigaray’s position on discourses of gender identification, performativity, androgyny and the neuter as spiteful, pernicious, alarmist, weird and worrisome. Although framed in hyperbole—to which Judith Butler might respond that “sometimes a hyperbolic rejoinder is necessary when a given injury has remained unspoken for too long” (1993, p 37)—Murphy raises an important question: has Irigaray shifted her philosophy of sexual difference from subversive mimesis to prescriptive politicking? Murphy acknowledges Irigaray’s explicit statement that she is “not advocating a return to a more repressive, moralising conception of sexuality. On the contrary, what we need is to work out an art of the sexual, a sexed culture”, but she wonders whether this mood infects Irigaray’s work nevertheless (Irigaray 1993c, p 3; Murphy 2007, p 82).¹⁴

It is my contention, however, that Irigaray’s work is speculative rather than prescriptive: she is attempting to imagine how a new poetics (or a sexed culture) might operate. When asked by Hirsh and Olson to respond to the perception that her work is homophobic, Irigaray suggests that this is a misunderstanding of her work:

It’s essential not to confuse my critique of the Western hom(m)osexual imaginary, that is, of a world of the masculine subject, that can think itself only between masculine subjects—hom(m)osexual with the “m” in parentheses—it’s essential not to confuse this critique, this ideological and cultural *hom(m)osexualité* with the practice of homosexuality. It’s not the same thing. Mine is an oeuvre that concerns the relation of sexual difference (1996, no page number, emphasis in original).

The underlying error of many heterosexist readings of Irigaray is to follow her lead and assume that the unknowability of “the one who differs from me sexually” is limited to a single heterosexual sex act (1993a, p 13). Wendy Doniger addresses this assumption in *Carnal Knowledge*, when she examines Daniel Mendelsohn’s suggestion that gay sex enables total knowledge of the other’s experience. Doniger responds:

This assumes that because your partner is *doing* the same physical act that you have done and will do, s/he is *feeling* what you have felt and will feel ... Mendelsohn’s assertion that “sex between men dissolves otherness into sameness” makes no allowance for the sexual individuality that applies equally well to same-sex and cross-sex experience: the chance to know the unique qualities revealed both in sexual sameness and in sexual difference, the different way in which each of us is penetrated or penetrates (2000, p 6, emphasis in original).

In “Sexual Difference as a Model” Gail M. Schwab argues against accusations of heterosexism in Irigaray’s philosophy. In her reading, sexual difference constructs the subject in the negative; to acknowledge a sexed identity is to recognise that one is “not all” (1998, p 82). In other words, sexual difference affirms alterity and understands subjectivity as at least two. For Schwab, sexual difference “is not about predetermined, stereotypical ... identities for heterosexual couples”; it offers, rather, a model for ethical relations in general, “between men and men, between women and women and between women and men ... [a] true intersubjectivity” (1998, p 82). Cheah and Grosz make a similar point when they argue that sexual difference is not a

prescriptive statement on individual sexual preference or lifestyle, but instead an argument about the condition of human life (1998a, p 12).

The interpretation of Irigaray's work as unambiguously critical of the theory of performative gender identities is paradoxical, given her early work on disrupting the "natural" sexual identity of women as passive and obliging props for male sexuality (1985b, p 25). The multiple model of female sexuality that Irigaray offers through the "two lips" offers a counter to Alison Stone's reading of Irigaray's sexual difference as dualist and heterosexist. Curiously, she criticises Irigaray for "overlooking ... the natural multiplicity of forces and capacities [within each of our bodies] such that we are never simply sexually specific" (2006, p 1). Her solution is to synthesise Irigaray's sexual difference with Butler's model of performativity and corporeal multiplicity, which I would suggest is a misdirected argument, given that Irigaray has vehemently argued for the multiplicity of feminine sexuality.

There are complex arguments to be made in relation to sexual difference by reading Irigaray and Butler together; indeed, many are signposted by Butler herself in *Bodies That Matter*. Butler challenges the assumed practice within feminism of grounding critical theory in the irreducible "sexed specificity of the female body" (1994, p 142). She advocates finding ways to use the term "woman" "tactically even as one is ... used and positioned by it" and critically "to engage—take stock of, and become transformed by—the exclusions that put it into play" (1993, p 29). The same cautions apply to sexual difference. For Irigaray, it is grounded in the irreducible and sexually specific difference of the female body. Calling this into question, as Butler argues in the context

of the materiality of bodies, “is not the same as doing away with it” (1994, p 144).

Thinking through sexual difference in relation to carnal transcendence, I suggest, provides an opportunity to counter both the contradictory exclusions of sexual difference within Irigaray’s own work, and readings of it that reduce its possibilities to a limiting specificity.

In *Transformations*, Drucilla Cornell explains her use of the phrase sexual difference:

I use the phrase “sexual difference” because gender, even if it operates as a system, divides us into male and female and, thus, is too limited a conception of our lives as sexuate beings ... I use the phrase because it returns us to the issue of “sex” not as biological body parts, but as sexuality, as sexuality is central to conceptions of how radical social change can truly take place” (1993, p 5).

Cornell’s definition here corresponds to a more enabling interpretation of sexual difference, which has implications for addressing the limitations, or perceived limitations, of Irigaray’s definition. Debra Bergoffen neatly articulates Irigaray’s position on sexual difference as “the question of the couple” (2007, p 152). But who is the couple in Irigaray’s writing? Consider this passage from the end of *This Sex Which Is Not One*:

We are luminous. Neither one nor two ... In their calculations, we make two. Really, two? Doesn’t that make you laugh? An odd sort of two. And yet not one ... I love you: our lips cannot separate to let just *one* word pass. A single word that would say “you”, or

“me”. Or “equals”; she who loves, she who is loved ... I love you who are neither mother (forgive me, mother, I prefer a woman) nor sister. Neither daughter nor son ... What need have I for husband or wife, for family, persona, role, function? ... I love you, your body, here and now” (1985b, pp 207-209, emphasis in original).

In this extract, “I” and “you” are not fixed or distinct bodies, genders, or identities. Sarah Cooper asserts that such ambiguity demonstrates a desire that can be defined as “queer” (2000, p 119). She writes that in “When Our Lips Speak Together” there is no identifiable object of desire, which “troubles any move we might make to read the performance of sexuality in Irigaray’s text in terms of a stable sexual identity” (2000, p 138). For Cooper, Irigaray “queers any exclusive association between the feminine and heterosexuality, and also queers any attempt on the part of readers to define this female sexuality as either auto-erotic heterosexuality or homosexuality, or lesbian sexuality alone” (2000, pp 138-139). In my reading, the couples that Irigaray evokes at different times in the text include a multiple self, lovers (gender unspecified), or a placental relation between mother and unborn child.¹⁵ Unlike the statements on sexual difference quoted earlier in this chapter—texts that are not acknowledged by Cooper in her queer reading—the above passage from “When Our Lips Speak Together” is marked by undecidability.

Bergoffen writes that “to take up Irigaray’s question of the sexual difference is to take up the challenge of following the forked roads of her thought” (2007, p 172). In light of Irigaray’s contradictions, sexual difference need not be conceived as an exclusively heterosexual relation nor a singularly

gendered identity; rather, it is a philosophy that is posited on the “more than one”, the notion of the “in between”, and a movement beyond the structures that currently operate. Irigaray’s model of difference offers a conception of subjectivity as at least two. The frameworks within which Irigaray imagines being two—carnal acts of love, bodily thresholds, textual blurrings of identity—emphasise the potential plurality and multiplicity of this model. Reading Irigaray’s *Elemental Passions*, Cecilia Sjöholm argues that sexual difference becomes “a form of plurality which announces itself as overflow and threat of boundaries” (2000, p 93). In *Elemental Passions*, a book which offers (to quote Irigaray) “some fragments from a woman’s voyage as she goes in search of her identity in love”, Irigaray writes:

Your skin and mine, yes. But mine goes on touching itself indefinitely, from the inside. Secreting a flow which brings the sides together. From which side does that liquid come? One or the other? Both? So which is one and which is the other in that production? Neither? Yet it exists. Where does it come from? From both. It flows between. Not held or held back by a source. The source already rises from the two caressing (1992, p 15).

This builds on Irigaray’s conception of women’s two sets of lips, and extends it to the figure of the couple. In the above passage from *Elemental Passions*, the “both” and the “two caressing” refer to the two sides of the passage of the vagina, extending from the lips. But in an alternative reading, focussing on the “yes” of your skin and mine, the flow between the two suggests a loving union where the “solidity of the erection”—to use the phrase Irigaray continues the paragraph with—and the paternal possibilities of sperm are no more valuable than the hospitality offered by the woman and the mingling of

a flow between two (1992, p 16). This echoes the transition in *This Sex Which is Not One*, from the violation of a woman's lips to a coming together in body and language. In the beginning, a woman's autoeroticism "is disrupted by a violent break-in: the brutal separation of the two lips by a violating penis." By the end, these lips are speaking together—the morphology of woman has rubbed off on the man—"Between us, 'hardness' isn't necessary. We know the contours of our bodies well enough to love fluidity" (1985b, p 215). This demonstrates a model of being two, with its origins in carnality, that recognises the difference between two subjects—nominally male and female, but modelled on the plurality of female sexuality. Such an approach emphasises what Rosi Braidotti refers to as the "trace" of the journey of sexual difference, rather than its arrival point, wherein lies the challenge of feminism to express "the in-between spaces, the transit-areas, the transitions and shifts which make up the nomadic itinerary" (2004, p 162).¹⁶

Focussing on the trace of sexual difference, and its multiple carnal inscriptions, I would like to propose carnal transcendence as difference as a means of moving beyond prescriptive genders and sexualities. Difference is formulated in erotic terms by referring to the irreducibility of bodies, the distinction between them, and the inability of one to entirely consume or incorporate the other in a carnal encounter or exchange. It emerges in embodied exchanges as various as reading and writing; a caress; pregnancy, labour, birth, and breastfeeding; and sexual and sensual pleasure.

Read in the context of carnal transcendence, Irigaray's writings on sexual difference become a series of statements on the specific subjectivity of desire,

in which the individual momentarily loses bodily integrity and selfhood.

Irigaray describes this erotic exchange in “Questions to Emmanuel Levinas”:

[Love is the] shared outpouring ... the loss of boundaries which takes place for both lovers when they cross the boundary of the skin into the mucous membranes of the body, leaving the circle which encloses my solitude to meet in a shared space, a shared breath, abandoning the relatively dry and precise outlines of each body’s solid exterior to enter a fluid universe where the perception of being two persons (de la dualité) becomes indistinct (1991a, p 180).

Carnal transcendence as difference provides a terminology for the “new poetics” that Irigaray suggests emerges from thinking through sexual difference (1993a, p 5). A poetics moves beyond logic and rhetoric to explore the intimacies and intricacies of language, affect, and the reading and writing exchange in an exploratory and experimental philosophy that invites speculation about subjectivity, corporeality, and difference.

In a poetics of carnal transcendence as difference, subjectivity is constituted through corporeal exchanges, and hovers on the threshold of bodily and intellectual being, where the binary oppositions of absence/presence, self/other, mind/body, active/passive tremble. Thinking through carnal transcendence as difference enables an engagement with the politics of sexual difference, and challenges the limitations of Irigaray’s constructions of the other and of carnality.

Carnal difference, the respect and desire for the irreducible and inappropriable difference of the other, finds its origin in transcendence: an

in-between space of thresholds and boundaries where subjectivities and intersubjectivities are called into question. Irigaray examines these connections in *Sharing the World*, where she writes: “The path towards the other is first a path towards the infinite, an infinite in which both I and the other risk losing ourselves” (2008e, p 1). This is the space explored in this thesis, which challenges the “nominal” masculinity and femininity of the subjects of carnal transcendence as difference by focussing on its other couples: reader and writer, and mother and daughter.

Chapter Two

An Amorous Exchange

Carnal transcendence imagines the possibility that there is no opposition between divinity and the flesh. It is an exploratory and experimental philosophy that invites its readers to speculate in new ways about subjectivity, corporeality, divinity and difference. This chapter explores the “new poetics” that Luce Irigaray suggests emerges from thinking through sexual difference (1993a, p 5). In the previous chapter, I asked whether it is possible to accept Irigaray’s call for a differently sexed culture—one that locates carnality and transcendence together—without imposing the limitations of gender or sexual identity. Thinking through these complexities, I offered carnal difference as an alternative model, opening the door to a poetics of carnal transcendence. A poetics of carnal transcendence consciously moves beyond logical and rhetorical arguments pertaining to divinity and bodily-being to explore the intimacies and intricacies of language and the affects of the reading and writing exchange in relation to physical pleasure. This chapter will examine this movement both within Irigaray’s own writing style, and in a subjective voice of associations with and ruminations on Irigaray’s texts that test the engagement of a philosophy and poetics of carnal transcendence as difference.

Becoming Mermaid, Becoming Woman

The summer I am twelve years old is extremely hot, over 35°C on many

days. There are two girls, younger than I, living around the corner—and they have a swimming pool. To prompt an invitation, I reveal my ability to become a mermaid. I imagine a painless and spectacular shift: my legs fusing together to create an incandescent tail; my fingers growing more webbed (they have always been part-sea); my hair floating seaweed-like around me; but, most of all, the cool, clear embrace of the water. Later, I have to explain that chlorine impedes my powers. That same summer, I keep a diary. On the front cover: a painting of a mermaid, upright, looking directly at me, naked, her pubic hair transforming into scales. She is the most carnal woman I have ever seen. On the back cover: a young girl, naked, her legs apart, and her arms around a younger boy, staring into the sea—“it’s like giving birth” is the caption.

I am becoming carnal. My nipples emerge in small pink triangles; my hips are bruised from interactions with furniture and walls; my vulva tingles. I am aware of my body. In the bath I try to touch every part of myself—the backs of my knees, my tongue, my shoulder blades, between my toes. I yearn for the fluidity of the mermaid—that floating signifier—the freedom of water, the limitless, liminal possibilities of being beyond borders, boundaries and fixed definitions. I am seeking ways to negotiate what Tamsin Lorraine calls the “slippery aspects of embodied existence” (1999, p 40). I wear a Ken Done patterned bikini of brightly coloured triangles and string. A family friend tells me not to wear it near her thirteen-year-old son. On New Year’s Eve, we are floating together in the shadows of the pool while the adults prepare fireworks and food. He slips his chlorine-scented

arms around me and presses his wet lips against mine.

In “Belief Itself”, Irigaray prepares her audience for a work that is associational and dreamy “like a children’s story” (1993c, p 25). Children’s stories offer multiple and chaotic points of entry—the words of authors, the repetitions and omissions of retellings, the interpretations of illustrators, the voices of adults reading aloud, the questioning imaginations of children, and the imprints of memory. In these intertexts, Irigaray finds traces and remains of “dark” questions to which we seek answers—among them, perhaps, those that haunted me as I imagined a mermaid-like body that summer: “what is happening to me?” and “who am I becoming?” The mermaids in children’s stories—partial incarnations, monstrously composite women, stages in becoming, to echo Irigaray’s words in “Divine Women”—represent desires, for bodies, spaces and identities and allow a shifting corporeality (1993c, p 58). It is through stories, Irigaray suggests, that we can find “something of our identity, of the difficulties we have in situating ourselves in relation to ourselves and our fellows, something of the dramas and spells that captivate us, capture us, bind us, and separate us” (1993c, p 57). Stories demonstrate the meeting place of the poetic and the carnal, and offer a starting point for an amorous exchange.

What roles did the stories of mermaids play in my becoming woman?

Reading Irigaray, I begin to find answers to this question. Did I hold the association of the mermaid and becoming woman in the back of my mind, in a “poste restante”—a post office box or dead letter office—“where messages

for unknown persons with no fixed address are held, undeliverable by the normal, already coded, telecommanded, circuits” (1993c, p 25). This metaphor for what is held in process or unsent occurs to Irigaray while writing “Belief Itself”. Her example is a woman who bleeds during the Eucharist: “This is my body, this is my blood.” This woman has already given her “message” to another psychoanalyst without success. Irigaray locates this woman in between mother and daughter, in that her age casts her as both, and interprets her bleeding in the same space—the in-between:

This woman tells me: I bleed. This is truly a strange I. It takes place ... in a radical haemorrhage of herself. She is far away when she bleeds. She needs to be far away when that (ça) takes place, too far to come back to him. To her, within herself, kept at a distance from the celebration and the communion that occurs between the men, among the men and the women (1993c, p 27).

The “message”, Irigaray believes, “tells us where the obstacle lies. What it is that lies across the threshold, blocking access, barring the very location” (1993c, p 25); what is outside of “reason” and without obvious or immediate meaning. In her role as psychoanalyst, Luce Irigaray finds herself decoding, thinking through, and interpreting the stories she is told. She challenges these associations in her own writing. The stoppage she writes of here is woman’s relationship with the divine, a becoming or a horizon from which women have been held back, far away, kept at a distance. In Irigaray’s interpretation, the woman bleeds in response to the loss of the divine. Her body responds, as if wounded, in its own celebration of the body and the blood.

Returning to the *poste restante* of the mermaid, Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" and Disney's animated *Little Mermaid* were texts in which I was absorbed at the age of twelve, dipping into them again and again. Reading "The Little Mermaid" and *Melusine*—a French medieval folktale that tells of a mermaid-like woman who falls in love with a mortal man—Irigaray discovers the reasons she has written about the elements in *Elemental Passions*, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* and *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, as though she has held these answers in a *poste restante* until they were revealed to her through a story. Irigaray believes that the relationship between the elements has not been adequately considered, and remains a part of the chaos of children's stories. She attempts to address philosophical silences around the elements, demonstrating that Nietzsche forgets his amniotic origins in his quest to climb ever higher as the over-man, and that Heidegger concentrates on earth as the substance of Being and is oblivious of the possibilities of air for becoming.¹⁷ Rereading "The Little Mermaid", Irigaray finds that the elements determine "our attractions, our affects, our passions, our limits, our aspirations" (1993c, p 57). This series of associations, occurring after the writing of her elemental texts, demonstrates the multiplicity of voices and figures in the spaces between reading and writing. For Irigaray, the "*poste restante*" of "The Little Mermaid" is the role of the elements in our transitions and transformations. In my reading, "The Little Mermaid" represents a desire for carnality and transcendence.

The term "amorous exchange" is first used by Irigaray in "The Bodily

Encounter with the Mother” to describe a corporeal way of communicating that can reverse patriarchal culture’s annihilation of the mother/daughter relation (1991a, p 44).¹⁸ An amorous exchange is an invitation to, and a dialogue with, a desiring other in multiple texts and voices. It is also the performance of being (at least) two in language and philosophy, and the creation of new bodies and ways of loving. It is a model, in other words, for a poetics of carnal transcendence. By evoking the mermaid and my own becoming in response to Irigaray’s writing, I am accepting Irigaray’s invitation in the preface to *The Way of Love* to enter into the dialogue of the text. Irigaray again makes this call in *Conversations*, when she writes that a dialogue “ought to correspond to a love story” (2008a, p xi). A “loving” text seems to invite from the reader a creative and aesthetic response to the writing, in which the reading subject enters into a loving exchange with the theory’s authorial subject. As Sharon Bryan and William Olsen describe reading in their introduction to an anthology of poets on the reading life: “Reading is at the very least the first part of the creative process, and itself a creative act—mysterious and fluctuating, alternately baffled and rapt, questioned and questioning: like writing” (2003, p vii). Irigaray describes *The Way of Love* as written in at least four voices (these include the voices of Luce Irigaray, the translators Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček, and Martin Heidegger), and invites the reader to the encounter:

I ask the reader of the text to accept the invitation to listen-to in the present, to enter into dialogue with a thought, with a way of speaking, and to give up appropriating only a content of discourse in order to integrate it among knowledge already gained (2002f, p x).

As Irigaray writes it, this reader is a peripheral creature in the production of the text—listening and waiting, yet at the same time entering a dialogue with a thought. Whose thought?

For Laura Brown, a pregnant 1950s housewife in Michael Cunningham's novel *The Hours*, reading is a ghostly encounter: "She might, at this moment, be nothing but a floating intelligence ... that perceives, as a ghost might. Yes, she thinks, this is probably how a ghost feels. It is a little like reading" (1998, p 215). Her reading, ghost-like, floating intelligence is a counterpoint to her physical body in the late stages of pregnancy. Entering the interweaving of exchanges in *The Way of Love*, I am simultaneously ghost-like intelligence and embodied physicality, absent and present, reader and writer, sender and receiver, inside and outside the text; I am entering the passage in-between, the place from where it is possible to stretch the boundaries of any text. In this thesis, I want to resist my positioning as a floating intelligence and effect change in Irigaray's texts. I want to read the philosophies that occupy the spaces between the words. As Irigaray imagines it, the "*between* is related to the question of entering; it intersects with entering from both the inside and the outside, making dichotomies—the simplicity of dichotomies and divisions—obsolete: to enter/to leave, inside/outside, interior/exterior" (2002e, p 137, emphasis in original). In my mermaid example, which occupies a space between reading and writing, the mermaid is intermediate space: neither inside nor outside, halfway between mortal and immortal, water and air, human and animal, human and divine. To borrow Donna

Haraway's phrase from "A Cyborg Manifesto", the mermaid is a "boundary creature", literally a monster, "a word that shares more than its root with the verb to demonstrate. Monsters signify ... possible worlds—and they are surely signs of worlds for which 'we' are responsible" (1991, p 22). The mermaid, as I imagine her, opens up the possibility of moving into the *beyond*—the space of becoming woman and of carnal transcendence as difference.

Referring to the second phase of her work, the reference to a divine subjectivity for women, Irigaray describes becoming divine as "entering further into womanhood" (1993c, p 60). This definition is demonstrated in Natalie Angier's *Woman: An Intimate Geography*. Angier introduces her study, part science, part poetry, as "a book about rapture, a rapture grounded firmly in the flesh, the beauties of the body" (1999, p ix). This reads like Irigaray's carnal transcendental, particularly when she refers to it as "the material texture of beauty" (1993c, p 32). Angier concludes her celebration of the female body with a call to her daughter which locates the sea as the space of becoming woman:

She knows she is a girl but she doesn't yet care about it, or realize what it means. Maybe it should mean nothing. Maybe that's what I want for her ... Or maybe she will trade up her mother's tatty bark canoe for a mighty ship of gold and joy, with a mutinous crew of mad-haired Valkyries, cloven maidens, and chafing nymphs. My daughter will sing herself hoarse as she rows firmly forward through squall and calm waters, now in tune with her mates, now roaring against them. She hasn't yet found the fabled free shore, but no matter. She is always at home in the sea (1999, p 367).

Reading and writing as an amorous exchange consists of a series of intertexts, experienced as if they are interruptions by the ghostly floating intelligence who is neither reader nor writer, but some monstrous creation of the two. Reading Angier, I am reminded of other texts that evoke the questions of Irigaray's work and open the *poste restante* of the mermaid. With their monstrous images of mermaids or mermaid-like bodies, Jane Campion's *The Piano* and Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* are two examples. Parallel ideas, associations and images float through these texts: their silent, close-lipped women—Ada in *The Piano* speaking with her “mind-voice” and the little mermaid sacrificing her siren song to become human; the imagery of the elements; the centrality of music; a yearning for something beyond those relationships that are known, something divine or elsewhere; the importance of touch (the little mermaid seeking a kiss from the prince, and the hole in Ada's stocking touched by Baines); the horror of dismemberment (Ada's finger and the mermaid's tail); and the image of the angel (Ada's daughter Flora wearing white wings, the little mermaid rising towards the daughters of the air). The similarities between these texts, and the powerful undertow of the association between transcendence and water, evoke the poetics of Gaston Bachelard's *Water and Dreams*, in which he writes from a “water mind-set”, a poetic imaginary he describes as “elsewhere” which offers “a type of intimacy” (1983, p 8). For Bachelard, the element of water invites the reverie of the reader, allowing the reverberation of associations and desires—an idea that I shall revisit in Chapter Four.

Throughout this thesis, I refer to other texts that echo my reading of Irigaray's philosophy of carnal transcendence—among them the water-saturated death (or near-death) scenes of Stephen Daldry's film adaptation of *The Hours* and Luc Besson's *The Big Blue* that offer possibilities for imagining, or experiencing, becoming divine. Overall, these stories create a sense of wonder and frustration, the passion of a first encounter that prompts an opening into new ways of perceiving, but risks the transformation of the self. This is similar to the fascination that the story of "The Little Mermaid" held for me at the age of twelve, and that Irigaray's work frequently holds for me now.

Domestic Philosophy

Meditating on the fluid experience of reading Irigaray and her intertexts, I arrive at another association. My copy of This Sex Which is Not One fell behind the bookshelf in an old, damp house I lived in several years ago. The house had multiple infestations: moths in the pantry, ants in the kitchen, cockroaches in the back room, mole crickets on the porch, aphids in the basil and possums in the roof cavity. Something of the wildness of the creatures that had crept into the corners emerged in all of us. My study had slugs, leaving silvery mucous trails across the carpet each night. By the time I rescued the book, a couple had made their slippery home between pages 108 and 109, and their fluid—slightly corrosive, I discovered—had eaten through "her 'fluid' character", "certain properties of real fluids" and most of "the reality of bodies in the process" (1985b, pp 108-109). Writing

emerges from our porous, leaky bodies. It is as though we overflow onto the page; in the black text, we see the leakage of our fluid selves. But what message can I gain from my slimy visitors? What writing has their seepage left for me?

In “Animal Compassion” Irigaray asks whether animals are sometimes messengers or friends. Even a hornet is granted hospitality in her home, when she asks: “What message was that hornet bearing? Anyway, it was not hostile to me. Perhaps I had needed the distraction?” (2004a, p 199). With my animal messengers, I find pleasure in the gaps in the text the slugs create. This process of reading and writing is more corrosive—its pleasures more unexpected—than I have so far presumed. There is joy in flights of fancy and the unravelling of a theory. For example: Michèle Le Doeuff picks up a quote from Irigaray (spoken, according to Le Doeuff, in an interview) when she says “If a woman engages with theory she will lose her capacity for pleasure” (Le Doeuff, 2003, p xiv). Le Doeuff is vitriolic that this “mere throw-away remark” and “quasi-parental threat” can extinguish the joy her female students find in philosophy (2003, p xiv).¹⁹ On the surface I agree with her—it is a horrifying prospect to lose one’s *jouissance*, or its potential—but I think Irigaray’s point is a different one. She is saying there is not enough of women’s pleasure in theory. It is as though a woman loses her corporeality, her specificity, her very womanliness, when she enters a body of knowledge. She is saying that carnality and theory should go hand in hand, that theory should be reimagined as an aspect of pleasure and of carnality.²⁰

In *The Sex of Knowing*, Le Doeuff breaks readers of Irigaray into two groups: those who find value in her work and those who recognise its absurdity and inaccuracy (2003, p 65).²¹ These two positions illustrate two educational outcomes: “Those who feel strong and hope to find employment, a place in the professional world, and a satisfactory level of material independence prefer Simone de Beauvoir” (2003, p 65). Le Doeuff adds that those who get something out of Irigaray’s work find it preparatory for a life of domesticity (2003, p 65).

Imagining a life of domesticity with Irigaray, I am reminded of the description from Marilynne Robinson’s novel *Housekeeping*. In her novel, which follows two girls whose mother commits suicide and who find themselves in the care of their chaotic Aunt Sylvie, Robinson describes skeletonised leaves gathering in the corners of the rooms, lifting and alighting every time a door or window is opened. With an archaic turn of phrase, she writes: “by littles and perhaps unawares” the house was readied for “wasps and bats and barn swallows” (1980, p 85). She continues:

Sylvie talked a great deal about housekeeping. She soaked all the tea towels for a number of weeks in a tub of water and bleach. She emptied several cupboards and left them open to air, and once she washed half the kitchen ceiling and a door. Sylvie believed in stern solvents, and most of all in air. It was for the sake of air that she opened doors and windows, though it was probably through forgetfulness that she left them open. It was for the sake of air that on one early splendid day she wrestled my grandmother’s plum-coloured davenport into the front yard, where it remained until it weathered pink (1980, p 85).

Sylvie inhabiting a house is described by her niece as being “like a mermaid in a ship’s cabin. She preferred it sunk in the very element it was meant to exclude. We had crickets in the pantry, squirrels in the eaves, sparrows in the attic” (1980, p 99). I would add to this picture of mermaid-like Irigarayan domesticity the bird droppings and spider webs from “divine messengers” filling the corners and bringing the outside inside. Iris Marion Young describes such a home-life, growing up in the 1950s with a mother who did not clean:

Our two-bedroom apartment was always dirty, cluttered, things all over the floors and piled on surfaces, clothes strewn around the bedroom, dust in the corners, in the rugs, on the bookcases; the kitchen stove wore cooked-on food ... My mother spent her days at home reading books, taking a correspondence course in Russian, filling papers with codes and calculations. She seemed to me an inscrutable intellectual ... I was mortified then by her weirdness, sitting in her chair reading and writing, instead of cooking, cleaning and ironing, mending like a real mom. (2005a, pp 125-126).

For Young, the lack of a “real mom” became a reality when, after the sudden death of her father, she and her siblings were removed from their mother, who was charged with neglect and subsequently jailed:

The primary evidence of neglect was drinking and a messy house. We ate well enough, had clean enough clothes, and a mother’s steady love, given the way she gave it: playing ping-pong, telling bible stories, playing twenty questions. We were a family in need of support, but we children were not neglected (2005a, p 127).

Ultimately, the family was reunited —after the death of their foster father: “Headed now only by a woman, our foster family instantly became a bad environment for us; they shipped us back to my mother without warning” (2005, p 128). Encountering the film version of Robinson’s *Housekeeping*, Young feels as if she has come home. She adds that after her mother died in 1978, “I read her refusal to do housework as passive resistance” (2005a, p 126). Meaghan Morris imagines Irigaray’s work as a type of passive resistance, and pictures her lingering in doorways as a “recalcitrant outsider at the festival of feminine specificity” (1988, p 64). A generation of readers later, and Irigaray is still outside the festival, if not yet outside the kitchen, hovering on the margins of Le Doeuff’s dogmatic certainty about the real work of philosophy.

How is it possible, then, to read Irigaray’s philosophy thoughtfully and critically? Reading “Luce Irigaray” is her preference that emphasises the gender of her name: “Above all don’t say Irigaray; I have a horror of that” she says in an interview (Hirsh and Olson, 1996, no page number). Reading Luce Irigaray, then, are we reading a person or a body of work? Is it possible to separate the two? Where do we locate ourselves, as readers and writers, in this intimate geography? How do we accept the invitation to “listen-to in the present”, to forego interpretations based on the past and repetition (2002f, p x)? Whitford suggests that Irigaray “is proposing her work ... as an object of exchange between women ... Instructions for use of Luce Irigaray would include the message: Do not consume or devour. For symbolic exchange

only” (1991, p 52). I was thinking of Whitford’s instructions—something like the instructions Alice in Wonderland reads on the bottle of “drink me”—while reading the “inconsumable” Luce Irigaray. Why? Will she catch in my throat? Choke me? Poison me, even? Perhaps reading Luce Irigaray is a type of cannibalism: an “interweaving of exchanges” on flesh, touch, bodies and elements (2002f, p x). In *Future Anteriors*, Elizabeth D. Harvey and Theresa Krier argue that Irigaray invites such a reading through the intimacy of mimesis; in *Marine Lover*, it is as though Irigaray is “inside Nietzsche” (Harvey and Krier, 2004, p 7). This incorporation—the ingesting of another—“implicates pregnancy and childbirth, but also operates in a metaphoric register to designate the complex mental operations that bring psyches ... to the fullness of their becoming” (2004, p 8). The reading Whitford proposes, however, suggests the symbolic exchange of introjection, the unconscious internalisation of ideas which constitutes the subject, rather than the loss of subjectivity through incorporation.

“Irigaray Anxiety”

This reading encounter is one that frequently provokes attacks of “Irigaray anxiety” to use Penelope Deutscher’s delightful phrase (1996, p 7). Carolyn Burke refers to the “bafflement, exclusion or antagonism” Irigaray’s writing provokes (1994b, p 249). Anecdotally, Deutscher comments on the dismissals she encounters: “A certain datedness is sometimes attributed to Irigaray, as expressed by a colleague who spoke of how she had once gone through an Irigaray phase, and by another who asked what I got out of

Irigaray *these days*” (1996, p 7, emphasis in original). Whitford suggests that Irigaray has frequently been “dismissed without much understanding” (1991, p 3).²²

The notorious form that this dismissal has taken is the debate surrounding the charge of essentialism and the countering anti-essentialism arguments. I believe that Irigaray’s essentialism or anti-essentialism is no longer a pressing question. As I argued in Chapter One, sexual difference—the aspect of Irigaray’s work most commonly derided as essentialist—can be undermined and reinvigorated by utilising ingredients within Irigaray’s own writing. Rather than a concept that limits sexual and gender identities to biological, natural and dominant prescriptions, difference can be seen to encompass multiplicity, indeterminacy and variability.

In “This Essentialism Which is not One: Coming to Grips With Irigaray”, Naomi Schor neatly defines essentialism as the belief that “woman can be specified by one of a number of inborn attributes that define across cultures and throughout history her unchanging being” and points out that definitions are themselves essentialist (1994b, pp 59-60). She enables the movement beyond the question of essentialism by effectively “de-essentialising essentialism”, that is, demonstrating the multiplicity of viewpoints that have been labelled essentialist.

Schor disentangles the debate by distinguishing critiques that were operating to counter the charge of essentialism, and reveals “that they serve diverse,

even conflicting interests and draw on distinct, often incompatible conceptual frameworks” (1994b, p 60). Her intention here is “to dehysericise the debate” and show that limited and circular arguments run counter to the ambitions of Irigaray’s work (1994b, p 69). Like Whitford, her aim is to open up the possibilities for thinking through and beyond Irigaray. In her writing, Whitford attempts to counter dismissals, to give Irigaray “a fair hearing” (1991, p 3). She does this by exploring Irigaray within two broad contexts—psychoanalysis and philosophy. The first part of her argument is that Irigaray’s method is to “psychoanalyze the philosophers” and through this, Irigaray acts as “a kind of cultural prophet” performing a “sort of ‘psychoanalysis’ of western culture” (1991, p 33). From there, Whitford works to determine Irigaray’s work as a “philosophy in the feminine”, where Irigaray “is redefining the terrain of philosophy by investigating what philosophy until now has been unable to allow in” (1991, p 7). Whitford wants Irigaray to be read as a feminist philosopher. That is, she situates Irigaray within the discourse of philosophy to emphasise her valuable interventions for feminist thinking in a straightforward and accessible style: “We cannot seriously start subjecting Irigaray’s ideas to analysis and critique until we have some detailed understanding of what those ideas are ... My intention [is] to make Irigaray’s work available as a resource for feminists” (1991, p 3). Whitford writes of being fascinated by Irigaray “despite herself”: “She is more than a little inaccessible ... She represented an otherness about which I could not say in advance: this is important and valuable, or else: this is not going to be of any use” (1991, pp 3-4).

This “otherness” is exacerbated when her work is translated from its precise, gendered and pun-filled French (or Italian for *Democracy Begins Between Two* and *To Be Two*). Françoise Meltzer suggests that terms that elude translation—jouissance, for example—“standing in bald French on the English page” are a reminder of this difference and signal an uncomfortable sense of wrongness (1993, p 21). Irigaray has frequently spoken of the problems of translation, “above all difficulties of syntax, logical difficulties”, mistakes which occur because she is “opening a new field of thought” and translators who “fail to listen and lack the imagination that corresponds to what I mean” (Hirsh and Olson, 1996, no page number). She gives the example of the English title *Speculum of the Other Woman* that underlines the vexed issue of the “other”, suggesting that she should have included a colon after “woman” or translated it as *Speculum on the Other Woman* or *On the Other: Woman* (1996, p 4).

In “Translation Modified” Carolyn Burke argues that it has now become possible for English readers to “catch up” with Irigaray’s work, “both in the sense of being able to grasp its range and learning to respond to its strangeness”, for two reasons. First, there are now wide-ranging and challenging interpretations of her work, which have opened up possibility “to move back and forth” between translations, works of the philosophers with whom Irigaray engages, critical analyses and practical engagements with Irigaray’s work. Second, translations have emerged of her most recent works, making it “clear that readers ... should read it not only as thought

about sexual difference but an attempt to bring that difference *into* language” (1994b, pp 250-251, emphasis in original). These developments have helped readers to move beyond arguments of essentialism. This is the encounter that the reader enters into—a speculative and ambitious project to restructure language and social relations. In the preface to *The Way of Love*, Irigaray demonstrates the exchange that operates between the English and French versions of her work: “Reading this translation, I myself made some slight modifications to the French version of the book. It is not always the first writing of an original text which is the best” (2002f, p xx). In the preface to *Between East and West*, she thanks her translator Stephen Pluháček for a text “that does not represent a simple passage from one language to another, with the loss of meaning and of style that often results” (2002b, p xii). Instead, the translation “bears witness to an exchange between thinkers, the place where speech is generated, comes to light and is put to the test” (2002b, p xii). These comments, and her recent forays into writing in English (in *Key Writings*, *Sharing the World*, *Conversations* and *Teaching*), demonstrate a growth in her responses to the difficulties of translation.

The difficulty and frustration of reading Irigaray—the uncomfortable recognition of her otherness or strangeness and the “difference” evident in her writing—lies for the most part in the complexity of her “styles” of writing and her practice of mimesis, which is precisely what makes her work a pleasure to read *as a story*. Sentences are frequently left incomplete as if half-heard; grammar and syntax do not follow the rigid guidelines one has come to expect; ideas are fragmentary, elliptical, playful; her styles are

various, multiple, and changeable, seemingly mid-sentence; her prose is called “poetry”; her allusions *en passant*. To demonstrate this within her own writing, in *This Sex Which is Not One* she writes:

Hers are contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand ... One would have to listen with another ear, as if hearing an “other meaning” always in the process of weaving itself, of embracing itself with words, but also of getting rid of words in order not to become fixed, congealed in them (1985b, p 29).

Hers are contradictory words: “she does not hesitate to mystify, to mislead” (Weed, 1994, p 81). As Elizabeth Grosz says, “the moment one feels relatively confident about what she means in one context, one loses grasp of other related passages which seemed comprehensible when they were read” (1989, p 101). Irigaray invites contradictory readings: “no two readings, even by the same reader, are identical” (Grosz, 1989, 102).²³ This is a deliberate and strategic technique, which offers an active rethinking of woman’s relationship to text. Elizabeth Weed refers to Irigaray’s lack of referencing as a technique of “radical citationality” (1994, p 83). This point is demonstrated in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, which omits the codes of punctuation and referencing because, as Irigaray writes, “in relation to the working of theory, the/a woman ... does not have to conform to the codes theory has set up for itself” (1985a, p 365). In “Mère Marine”, Theresa Krier is frustrated at the lack of narrative in Irigaray’s work, commenting:

She does not much engage sequence—of thought, of image, of unconscious assumption—within the philosophers she addresses, and so at first (and for a long time) a reader may have the sense that one could just open a book of hers anywhere and begin at random (2004, p 33).

Irigaray's work is frustratingly impossible to *finish*, in the sense that there is no final page where reading, thinking and feeling are complete, and the reader exhales at the sight of "the end" and the cessation of a thought. In "An Ethics of Reading", Michelle Boulous Walker notes that for Irigaray, reading "remains in constant movement or becoming—never fixed, never finished, never complete ... always evolving" (2006, p 229).²⁴

Reading and Writing as Sexual Difference

In *Philosophy in the Feminine*, Whitford works through two possible reading and writing positions in response to Irigaray—the masculine and feminine. To write as a man, she suggests, "is to assert mastery, to be in control of meaning, to claim truth, objectivity, knowledge" (1991, p 50). To write as a woman is "to refuse mastery, to allow meaning to be elusive or shifting, not to be in control, or in possession of truth or knowledge" (1991, p 50). Similarly, using the term "anecdotal theory", Jane Gallop distinguishes between traditional critical theory and a playful or erotic approach, characterising the former as masterful, abstract and powerful. Anecdotal theory, on the other hand, is performed as a "struggle for mastery" and an

attempt to think through “situations which tend to disable thought” (2002, p 15).

Such uncomplicated assumptions about gendered reading and writing positions provoke immediate resistance but, for these writers, the overall purpose of the categorisations of “male” and “female” seems to be to undermine these values and challenge their limitations. Whitford writes that she mostly adopts the “male” position in her work, but accepts the principle of the “female” reading. This is a complex manoeuvre that finds the female reading (and its engagement with male philosophers) hovering ghost-like—like Laura Brown reading Virginia Woolf—and silent behind the male. For Whitford, accepting a female reading is analogous to stating that her work is “provisional and more important for what it allows others to see or think” (1991, p 25). The work she refers to, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, opened up Irigaray’s work for feminist thinking, as her introductory remarks anticipated, and is read as a definitive text in Irigarayan scholarship. In the first sentence of *Key Writings*, Irigaray writes that the collection is not intended to replace Whitford’s *Reader*, her work of translation published in the same year, but is intended to continue the work and accent other, more recent, aspects. Given this scholarly weight, Whitford’s readers might be left wondering what is “female” about a text that effaces itself as provisional.

Whitford’s “male” reading corresponds with Grosz’s “straight” reading, which she defines as one which does not produce a “poetic” or Irigarayan reading of

Irigaray (Grosz, 1989, p 240).²⁵ This is the position Grosz assumes in *Sexual Subversions*, explaining her choice as a pragmatic one, the result of limitations of space and the difficulties of such a response. Instead, she provides “a more systematic organisation and structure than Luce Irigaray’s own writings”, an approach that she acknowledges is an “imposition” (1989, p 102). Indeed, summarising their interview with Irigaray, Hirsh and Olson comment that she resists “the kind of ‘logical formalization’ that, in her view, forecloses dialogue and precludes the representation of sexual difference”, and aims to keep “the text ... always open onto a new sense, and onto a future sense” as well as “onto a potential You, a potential interlocutor” (1996, no page number).

The problems that arise as a result of Grosz’s straight reading are similar to those that emerge as a consequence of Whitford’s “male” reading: Irigaray’s “poetry” is simultaneously celebrated and rendered invisible, and a poetic response to her work is, by implication, less meaningful or valid for critical engagement than a straight reading. Imposing a “straight male” reading or writing on Irigaray’s work, although of value for making her work accessible to readers, is analogous to reducing sexual difference to the limiting specificity of a singular heterosexual carnal act, a position I argued against in the previous chapter.

Whitford proposes a third reading strategy—“a double reading, hovering between the two possibilities” (1994b, p 25). Here, the male and female readings would operate together in “a kind of creative and fertile

partnership” which would correspond to an amorous exchange and a model of “being two” (1994b, p 25). In this “symbolic exchange” Irigaray’s role would be “as a *sort of* intermediary” between the reader and the text for a new relationship between the sexes in an ethics of sexual difference (1994b, p 25, emphasis in original). It is unfortunate that such a possibility remains only symbolic, since it is precisely this engagement that is lost in Whitford and Grosz’s insistence on a critical reading strategy that elides the carnal and poetic aspects of Irigaray’s writing.

Tamsin Lorraine allows for the possibility of a more personal engagement with Irigaray’s writing—which she refers to as a “visceral philosophy”—but her own work, as she acknowledges, is more associated with the “straight” or “masculine” perspective of Grosz and Whitford. In her preface to *Irigaray and Deleuze*, Lorraine writes that her simplifying of these two complex philosophers is “inevitably reductionist and ... thus bound to close down some of the more radical implications of their thought” (1999, p x). She notes that Irigaray “has openly expressed her objection to such readings, saying that rendering her work through straightforward commentary can do no more than distort her thought” (1999, p x).

In “The Three Genres”, Irigaray comments on the resistances to her work:

What is it all about? What is she saying? What is its, already given, meaning? The answers to these questions are not forthcoming, especially out of context, which sometimes leads to the objection that the thought is esoteric. But any text is esoteric, not because it conceals a secret, but because it constitutes the

secret, the not-yet-revealed, or the never-exhaustively-revealable (1991a, p 149).

Her answer to these difficulties is to “read, perceive, feel” the text. A better question, she suggests, is: *who are you?* Her answer, already given, is: “*and who are you?* Can we meet? Talk? Love? Create something together?” (1991a, p 149, emphasis in original). It is the shameless contradiction and confrontation of her writing, simultaneously unsettling and exciting the reader, which arouses pleasure. A text of pleasure or bliss—*jouissance*—is, according to Roland Barthes, “the text that discomforts ... unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relationship with language” (1975, p 14). This is Irigaray’s project: to write in a new voice which is capable of evoking a corporeality of “being two” that does not yet exist. She is offering what may be termed an “erotics of reading” (to borrow a phrase from Richard Howard’s description of the work of Barthes) that speaks directly to a woman’s body and its pleasures, and locates that carnality in a philosophy of the transcendental (Howard, 1975, viii). Evaluating the effectiveness of this approach is a task of this thesis, and Irigaray’s poetics will be closely read in Chapter Five to reveal its strengths and limitations.

Reading as Carnal Transcendence

How is it possible for reading to move beyond the limited subject positions of sexual difference and enjoy the amorous exchange of carnal transcendence?

In Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours*, Laura Brown delays the

responsibilities of the day to read Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*:

One more page, she decides; just one more ... She is taken by a wave of feeling, a sea-swell, that rises from under her breast and buoys her, floats her gently, as if she were a sea creature thrown back from the sand where it had beached itself—as if she had been returned from a realm of crushing gravity to her true medium, the suck and swell of saltwater, that weightless brilliance (1998, p 40).

In *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Irigaray evokes the rapture of the sea in the swelling and the falling rhythm of her writing:

And the sea can shed shimmering scales indefinitely. Her depths peel off into innumerable thin, shining layers. And each one is the equal of the other as it catches a reflection and lets it go. As it preserves and blurs. As it captures the glinting play of light. As it sustains mirages. Multiple and far too numerous for the pleasure of the eye, which is lost in the host of sparkling surfaces. And with no end in sight ... And whoever looks upon her from the overhanging bank finds there a call somewhere further than the farthest far. Toward an other ever more other. Beyond any anchorage yet imaginable (1991b, pp 46-47).

In *Marine Lover*, Irigaray speaks in the voice of a siren, calling in the voice of the other. Fergus Kerr, in *Immortal Longings*, hears her writing as “a kind of chant”, provoking epiphanies (1997, p 111). The siren is a creature of elsewhere, occupying the spaces between circumscribed, solid land and the uncontained, formless sea and air. This is a space of risk that challenges and confuses.²⁶ It is the borderline where Irigaray situates her work, operating between the known and mapped masculine philosophies, and the shape-

shifting sea of a new philosophy of difference. By tradition, the siren's song is finely tuned to a masculine ear. It is something of a mimic, presenting to him precisely the voice he wishes to hear, echoing his ideals back to him. Her mimesis is a trap; he risks being consumed. Similarly, Irigaray "play[s] with mimesis" echoing the voices of male philosophers, but she is "elsewhere" outside of the logic within which the original fantasy is constructed (1985b, p 76). Her voice, while echoing his words, is deliberately discordant to a "masculine" ear (that is, the traditional ear of philosophy). At times, it is a voice that requires effort, labour, which resists, is contrary and recalcitrant, repellent and impenetrable. Aggressive. This is a siren who offers the atonal melodies of a new music whose sense is just beyond the level of ease or pleasure in listening.²⁷

In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, for example, Irigaray asks us to reconsider Plato's cave. In *The Republic*, Plato explains human becoming in relation to the divine or the ideal—"the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world"—through prisoners "like ourselves" who face a screen on which shadows are projected by "puppet masters" (Plato, 1991, pp 210-211). The space they occupy is an echoing "underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light" (1991, p 208). Plato describes it as "the world of sight" (1991, p 211). If a spectator were to turn around and face the light behind him "he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen in the shadows" (1991, p 210). In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray asks us to reconsider Plato's cave: "Read it this time as a metaphor of the inner space, of the den,

of the womb” (Irigaray, 1985a, p 243). In Irigaray’s reading, the entrance to the cave represents the forgotten vagina, taking “the form of a long passage, corridor, neck, conduit, leading upward toward the light or the *sight of day*, and the whole of the cave is oriented in relation to this opening” (1985a, pp 243-244, emphasis in original). Upward? In a sleight of hand (or of words), Irigaray shows that the cave turns everything inside out and upside down: “you will always have lost your bearings as soon as you set foot in the cave; it will turn your head, set you walking on your hands” (1985a, p 244). Irigaray’s mimesis is similarly dislocating; rather than simply echoing the words of philosophers, she knows another pleasure. She brings “new nourishment” to this performance (1985a, p 76).

The voice of the siren is a composite and monstrous voice of a creature caught in the stages of becoming: bird, woman, fish. It is a voice that is disruptive, which beckons and cajoles, promising new ways of living in the world, transforming ethical and sexuate relations, suggesting unknown ideas and places. Irigaray’s project, Grosz writes, “is to announce the birth of a new epoch, a new type of exchange and coexistence” (1993, p 213). If her writing indeed heralds this newness, Irigaray, to borrow Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément’s term, can be heard as the “newly born woman”. She is “a voice crying in the wilderness ... the voice of a body dancing, laughing, shrieking, crying. Whose is it? It is ... the voice of a woman, newborn and yet archaic, a voice of milk and blood, a voice silenced but savage” (Gilbert, 1986, p ix). To live through Luce Irigaray’s call, rather than drowning or stopping our ears, to listen to her song—which is “only in riddles, allusions, hints,

parables ... until the ear tunes to another music” (Burke 1994b, p 251)—and remain afloat, the reader must listen with an “other” ear.

In the opening to her collection of poetry *Prières Quotidiennes (Everyday Prayers)*, Irigaray offers her poetry for such a listening—a listening-to in the present—where we “find other perceptions, other gestures, other words to say, and to speak between us, the relations to nature to ourselves, to the other” (2004c, p 33). She continues: “We have to listen and to keep listening in ourselves in order to situate ourselves differently with respect to the world, to the self, to the other” (2004c, p 33). This is where Barthes locates the pleasure of a text, when he writes: “it produces, in me, the best pleasure if it manages to make itself heard indirectly; if, reading it, I am led to look up often, to listen to something else” (1975, p 24). The reader makes sense of reading, and of their own subjectivity, through absences from the text, the moments when the “I” occupies an elsewhere or, at least, a “not-here”, when the reader is listening “differently”. Reading *Marine Lover* or “The Little Mermaid”, I may be looking into the distances towards an unseen sea. My head may be tilted slightly to the side, as if hearing the distant drumming of a shell. Grosz describes this as “a text’s ‘viscosity’, its materiality, its superabundance regarding an author’s intentions” which allows for “a very wide range of uses and potentially infinite readings” (1993, p 201). To describe a text in such a way emphasises its physicality—it is almost as though the text stands in for the body of the other or of the lover. Dianne Chisholm uses the term “clitorized reader” to describe a woman who feels “as if her ‘clitoris’ has been touched through contact with the print on the page ...

She feels an erotic affectivity” (1995, p 24). Moira Gatens writes that women reading *This Sex Which Is Not One* “become aware of ... their own labial contiguity ... The body’s own text is ‘written upon’ by other bodies, other texts, and it in turn ‘writes upon’ other bodies and other texts” (1996, p 38).²⁸ James Waddell uses the term “erotic perception” to describe his encounters with women and with philosophical texts. He describes erotic perception as “unsettling ... It disturbs the flow of existence and creates a space where tenderness, caring, playfulness and pleasure collide with pain, hostility, immodesty and shame” (1997, p viii). Read in this way, the text offers a manifestation of carnal difference. It invites touch, and the reader risks danger and a loss of self; it promises transformation. As well as carnal objects, texts are transcendent objects because of what and how they allow us to feel, to imagine and to become.

Writing as Carnal Transcendence

Irigaray says, “I am a woman. I write with who I am” (1993c, p 53). This positioning statement, and the invitation in *The Way of Love* to enter into “an interweaving of exchanges” challenge the reader to interact with “Luce Irigaray” as text and as woman (2002f, p x). In an interview, Irigaray says:

I think that the purely narrative, autobiographical “I” or the “I” that expresses only affect, risks being an “I” that collapses back into a role traditionally granted to woman: an “I” of pathos, that the woman also uses in her place, the home. It seems to me important to accede to a different cultural “I” —that is, to construct a new objectivity that corresponds not to an indifferent

“I” but to an “I” that's sexed feminine (Hirsh and Olson, 1996, no page number).

In *Space, Time and Perversion*, Grosz makes an important point about the subject of the author, when she asks: “Can one admit what one’s position is? Is a position definitively present, not only to a subject’s self-representation, but for all others to avow and accept? Does any subject or position have the stability to definitively state what-it-is?” (1995, p 67). In *A Lover’s Discourse*, Roland Barthes suggests it is not possible to write the self: “I cannot *write myself*. What, after all, is this “I” who would write himself? Even as he would enter into the writing, the writing would take the wind out of his sails, would render him null and void—futile” (1979, p 100, emphasis in original). He continues “writing compensates for nothing, sublimates nothing, ... it is precisely there where you are not—this is the beginning of writing” (1979, p 100). The (male) writer should not hope to find himself through writing; but for a woman who is re-writing his philosophy, writing the *self* is an offering, an invitation to an exchange with the readers. In “The Laugh of the Medusa”, Cixous says: “Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing ... Woman must put herself into the text” (1981, p 246). This process of *écriture féminine* has two aims, which correspond with Irigaray’s project: “to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project” (Cixous, 1981, p 246).

This is the intention of Irigaray's *parler-femme*, translated by Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke in *This Sex* as speaking (as) woman: to break up phallogocentric discourse and to project a new writing that would correspond

to an ethics of sexual difference, or a model of “being two”. In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray writes that the book is “a collection of questions” that cannot really be answered, including: how can we speak (as) women? She suggests a possible answer: “By going back through the dominant discourse. By interrogating men’s ‘mastery’. By speaking to women. And among women. Can this speaking (as) woman be written? How?” (1985b, p 119). Possibly. By writing to women. And among women. This is a circular reasoning, but Irigaray sees that “there are more and more texts written by women in which another writing is beginning to assert itself” (1985b, p 134). Her work attempts an “other” writing at the level of the body, in the amorous exchange between reader and writer.

This is clear in “When our Lips Speak Together”, in which Irigaray writes in a “new” voice demonstrating the plurality of a feminine subject as a challenge to the “sameness” of men and women’s voices:

We have so much space to share. Our horizon will never stop expanding; we are always open. Stretching out, never ceasing to unfold ourselves, we have so many voices to invent in order to express all of us everywhere, even in our gaps, that all the time there is will not be enough ... If we don’t invent a language, if we don’t find our body’s language, it will have too few gestures to accompany our story (1985b, pp 213-214).

Parler-femme, speaking (as) woman, brings bodily exchange to the text by emphasising speaking rather than writing (evoking the two sets of lips), and demonstrates the fluid undecidability, or the messy excess, of discourse.²⁹

Parler-femme is one mechanism for jamming the machinery of phallogocentric language (1985b, p 78).³⁰ For Alison Bartlett, Irigaray and domesticity are linked in this slippery phrase which evokes the “excess” of domesticity:

The machine I imagine being jammed is a printing press, a massive machine that generates words, texts, theory. It's a dirty black metal giant. The jam is strawberry: pink and glassy with bits of pieces held in suspension amid the transparent spread, remnants of another organic lifetime ... In the end, the quotidian rules; everyday domesticity overwhelms modernist industrialisation ... The machinery Irigaray refers to ... is the upstanding and unbending patriarchal academy ... Writing as a woman, rather than through the narrative machinery of patriarchy, is a style: a disruption to conventional reading and representational practices that resists the steely authority of linearity and logic arguing instead from subjective and historical specificity. It's the jam of theory, having to locate yourself in your writing (2006a, no page number).

Locating the self as woman in writing is a necessary component of a dialogue that invites an amorous exchange and a rethinking of binaries such as masculine/ feminine and reader/ writer. Whitford supports this when she says that speaking (as) woman refers to something that does not yet exist (1991, p 42). It is not a definitive or prescriptive construction of women's writing; rather, it is an attempt to locate the carnal self in theory, to allow pleasure and theory to come together. This process is something Irigaray has called the *sexuation*, or the sexualisation, of discourse (1993a, p 105). At the conclusion of “The Three Genres”, Irigaray remarks on the “invisibility” of

God and of “our sexual relation, our carnal act”, asking: “What birth takes place, is yet to come, between these two poles of invisibility? How can we discover and interpret its traces in discourse? How can we remodel existing languages so as to give rise to a sexuate culture?” (1991a, p 152). She argues that a sexuate culture, which she also refers to as an ethics of sexual difference and a being two, does not yet exist. These are the two, seemingly disparate, parts that she wants to bring together through the carnal transcendental: god and sex.

Bodies in the Text

In her rewriting of philosophical language, when Irigaray writes “with who she is”, as woman, how is the weight of this body visible in the text? I have referred to the corporeality or carnality of “being two” that I see as Irigaray’s bodily project. Judith Still figures Irigaray’s body in the text as a nuptial relationship, quoting *To Be Two*: “Les noces entre les corps et la parole” (the wedding between bodies and language) (Still, 2002, p 10). In “Crossing Lovers” Cecilia Sjöholm raises a curious point about the bodies in Luce Irigaray’s texts, asking how readers have become so convinced that Irigaray is writing about female bodies. She has noticed that Irigaray’s bodies are free-floating abstractions of “I” and “you”, indistinguishable in their touching, “relieved of arms, legs, breasts, sexual organs” (2000, p 97).

As much as Irigaray’s body, it is your body and my body that these bodies come from. Barthes writes that “the pleasure of the text is that moment

when my body pursues its own ideas—for my body does not have the same ideas I do” (1975, p 17). As readers, you and I are not relieved of arms, legs, breasts or sexual organs. Irigaray writes from her own body, and finds its morphological echo in the bodies of her readers. It is this body between two—the reading, writing, gendered, transcendental body—that I am interested in. The “who I am” Irigaray writes is *becoming*, in constant flow in “the infinite deferral of meaning” that is writing, as Betsy Wing defines writing in her glossary to Cixous and Clément’s *The Newly Born Woman* (1986, 168). Ann Rosalind Jones asks: “Can the body be the source of a new discourse?” Can a state of excitation become a written text? (1996, p 328). A text of “being two” can be a jouissant text, marked by spontaneity, abundance and overflow. Irigaray demonstrates this in “When Our Lips Speak Together”, writing: “It’s our good fortune that your language isn’t formed of a 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?” (1985b, p 209).

Why only one text at a time? In an idle moment, I google “Luce Irigaray”. I am at one remove from what is known as the “ego search”—the googling of the self. The search locates works with which I am already familiar; I skip forward hundreds of thousands of references, known and meaningful in some way: bibliographies, sketchy biographical details, key quotations, conceptual lists, French feminisms. I excavate the nooks and crannies of a postmodern archaeology, searching for—what? And, then, something unexpected, and no doubt unintended: an old email exchange, consisting of

eight pages of close-packed text, existing in awkward black-and-white and dated fonts like ghosts. Names have lost their context—Simone, “michael”, “thanks Noelle”, “Dear Ruth” “Cheers! Paul”, “Must run, Catherine”—and float free outside the limits of titles and affiliations. It is as if I overhear a conversation, a crossed-line, and tentatively make sense of it as “talking about Irigaray”. We are lost in a thicket of parentheses like a thorny warning on the page. Phrases are arrowed over and over, original authors lost—>>>>>—and repetitive re: re: re-s (remember those?) take over half a page. Multiple phrases are encased in “scare quotes” demonstrating ironic knowingness (or scholarly laziness?) so that I can almost hear those disembodied fingers hooking the air. This is discussion coded in “Irigarayan” and “Deleuzian” and “Merleau-Pontian”, those wonderful and arcane languages of mimicry. Overhanging us are economies of arborescence, a phusis and a phuien, and a full academy of name-dropping: Heidegger’s Ereignis, the “legacy” of Saussure, Hegel “needs restating as a problematic”, “Derrida’s glance at Heidegger’s apparent omission of sexuality and sexual difference in his fundamental ontology project” and Deleuze “leveled by genitally over-determined feminists”.

There are moments of cohesion and comprehension—Michael writes that Irigaray offers “a language of thinking”. Others say: Irigaray’s work contains the “residue” of other writers, that they are enjoying the “anchor” of sex, experiencing the claustrophobia of reading Irigaray, loving her recoding of Lacan’s jouissance, these libidinal economies, the “cleavage” of sexual difference, the “smell” of heterosexism, the dissolution of temporality

(sexual difference = to come), the complexity of mucus as simultaneous flow and unity. This is a sticky place. One writer (is it Paul?) comments: "I think we'd have to develop the transcendental element of the sensible a bit more as a means of determining how I can both be pulled out of my narcissistic economy while maintaining a certain degree of sameness". Oh, I could tell him something of this contest—I feel like Alice. And, as if my confusion has conjured her on the page, she appears in the text of a reply: "Which way, which way! cried Alice, knowing it was both at the same time." And a counter-reply (or is it a question?): "Of course, Alice ontologically 'is not' which is why she is such a great 'friend' for Zarathustra." Quick, find Deleuze!

In the midst of this unravelling, I grab hold of any body I can reach. Someone—identities are mucus-like flows here—writes: "I think the meek still inherit the earth in Irigaray—we could not imagine her spitting and she lacks a firedog. Excessive heat ... [is] usually written in the masculine ... There are, for example, few alimentary economies in her writing—bluntly put, one could be forgiven for thinking that Irigaray doesn't possess an anus or any urethral fluids." Imagine her spitting? When she is responding to Lacan, there are flecks of spittle at the corner of her mouth. A particularly vehement point lets fly a gob of spit that lands in the eye of the sardine can. Lacks a firedog? Have the fires been lost in the emphasis on water and air?

Why on earth would Irigaray position her anus in her writing? Doesn't she imply that form of anal-ysis is a male trope? When Butler writes about the

“penetrative textual strategy” of mimesis, don’t you imagine Irigaray’s laughter echoing from the kitchen? Butler answers her own question when she calls “When Our Lips Speak Together” a “rigorously antipenetrative eros of surfaces” (1994, p 158). This is precisely Irigaray’s point—if you will forgive such penetrative language. Hasn’t she already offered us her lips, her labia majora and minora, vaginal flesh, vulva, and clitoris all bound together by the stickiness of mucus? I cannot agree with this unknown writer but nevertheless he plants his seed—I reluctantly find myself scanning Irigaray’s work for evidence that she has an asshole and that she pisses at least as regularly as the rest of us. There is shit and pleasure here aplenty in the exchange between readers and writers.³¹

Reading and writing a response to Irigaray involves participating in more than one text at a time, and breaking down the relationship between reader and text. The reader/writer of Irigaray’s texts may start to feel something like Lewis Carroll’s Alice, tumbling down the rabbit hole. Like the unstable geography of Irigaray’s rewriting of Plato’s cave, everything turns “from high to low, from low to high, from back to front, from anterior to opposite” (1985a, p 244). Irigaray introduces a relationship with Alice in the first chapter of *This Sex Which Is Not One*—“The Looking Glass, from the Other Side”—written in response to Michel Soutter’s film *The Surveyors*, which begins with an extract from *Through the Looking-Glass*. Alice asks: “Who am I? I *will* remember if I can ... L, I *know* it begins with L” (1985b, p 9, emphasis in original). Grosz notes the association between Alice and “A-Luce”, both of whom step beyond their “role as the reflective other for mean”

through the looking-glass from “dichotomous structures of knowledge, the binary polarizations in which only man’s primacy is reflected” to a “land of wonder” (1989, p 131). Christina Nicholson writes that Alice and Irigaray are linked, positioning them together as “investigating patriarchal texts and taking them to their (il)logical conclusions” and operating “on the threshold of divine discourse” (2003, p 374, p 363). By way of example, she offers Alice’s dialogue with Humpty Dumpty in *Through the Looking Glass*:

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory’”, Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course you don’t—till I tell you. I meant ‘there’s a nice knock-down argument for you’!”

“But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean ‘a nice knock-down argument’”, Alice objected.

“When *I* use a word”, Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is”, said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is”, said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

Alice was too much puzzled to say anything; so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. “They’ve a temper, some of them—particularly verbs: they’re the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, *I* can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability! That’s what *I* say!”

“Would you tell me please”, said Alice, “what that means?”

“Now you talk like a reasonable child”, said Humpty Dumpty, looking very much pleased. “I meant by ‘impenetrability’ that we’ve had enough of that subject, and it would be just as well if you’d mention what you mean to do next, as I suppose you don’t mean to stop here all the rest of your life.”

“That’s a great deal to make one word mean”, Alice said in a thoughtful tone (2005, p 219, emphasis in original).

Like Alice, readers of Irigaray risk losing their grip on subjectivity and meaning in the “nice knock-down argument” and “impenetrability” of the text. In *Elemental Passions*, Irigaray writes: “Was it your tongue in my mouth which forced me into speech? Was it that blade between my lips which draws forth floods of words to speak of you?” (1992, p 9). The borders and boundaries of the textual bodies in *Elemental Passions* disintegrate, and the distinction between reader and writer is fuzzy. Consistent with my argument for the multiplicity of sexual difference in Irigaray’s writing, the markers of gender—the evidence of writing as (a) woman—are remarkably ambiguous; “I” and “you” are no longer distinct bodies, genders, identities. To recapitulate her words in “When Our Lips Speak Together”: “We—you/I—are neither open nor closed ... Between our lips, yours and mine, several voices, several ways of speaking resound endlessly, back and forth” (1985b, p 209). The reader enters the carnal experience of being two—simultaneously you and me, unable to distinguish who is touching whom, who is open, who is closed. This is evident in *Elemental Passions*, when Irigaray writes:

If, in affecting you, I affect myself, the body-instrument opposition no longer holds. For the instrument I am in order to affect you is itself affected as a body, just as your body, which I affect, is an

instrument which affects me. In that exchange of affection the producer and the product become one, the organ and the body can no longer be divided, myself and yourself are no longer embodied as distinct and rival universes (1992, p 58).

In her preface to *The Ethics of Eros*, Tina Chanter responds to this intersubjective blurring of reader and text in her writing:

I am aware of the fact ... that Irigaray's name sometimes functions in my text in a way that extends beyond what Irigaray may say ... It may be possible to detect in the role that I hereby attribute to Irigaray an uncertainty about what I am willing to say in my own voice, but perhaps this hesitation should not be read so much as a lack of confidence on my part as the impossibility of precisely distinguishing my voice from the texts I have been reading for years (1995, pp 10-11).

She identifies the overlapping of Irigaray's name and voice in her text, and the struggle of trying to isolate her words amid the cacophony of Irigaray, Derrida, Heidegger and Levinas. For Chanter, there is no precise definition of her own voice; at times she is unable to write her self and lapses into incorporation.

One response to this challenge is to meet it through dialogue—or amorous exchange—with Luce Irigaray, to write with who “I” am and risk annihilation. It is necessary, Whitford suggests, “to put yourself into play, you cannot stand back at a safe distance” (1991, p 24). Huffer does this in *Maternal Pasts, Feminist Futures*. Her first sentences—in a chapter entitled “Mom”—make explicit the ghostly presence of her mother: “When I was in college, my

mother came out as a lesbian. This book, at its core, is about coming to terms with that ... I'm quite certain that my mother's presence is somehow inscribed throughout these pages" (1998, p 1, emphasis in original).

Similarly, Judith Hamera in *I Dance to You* begins with a "confession": "I seem constitutionally unable to write about things I do not love" (2001, p 230). I am reminded of the way in which Richard Howard introduces Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text*, as "a writer's aphrodisiac" (1975, p vii): this is the beginning of an amorous exchange. Writing Irigaray "in the flesh" is an approach that many writers are taking, notably Kathryn Bond Stockton in *God Between Their Lips* and Eluned Summers-Bremner in her essay *Reading Irigaray, Dancing*. These texts offer radical dialogues with Irigaray, and model the possibilities of the amorous exchange and being two.

Summers-Bremner offers an embodied interpretation of Irigaray's sensible transcendental that is "partly a dialogue between my 'selves': the mostly silent dancer and the feminist academic; the classically trained body and the dancer I would like to be or am in the process of becoming. And it is partly a dialogue with Luce Irigaray" (2000, p 91). Summers-Bremner traces her experiences of experimenting with Irigaray's work while she dances. She comments that this lends her reading "physical specificity" which she believes is otherwise lacking in the rhetoric of Irigaray's work, and finds that her reading has also altered her dancing practice (2000, p 91).³² The dancer's body is constructed as a complex and contested space: she is visualised through the fleeting and ephemeral dance performance, which is only achieved by rigorous physical training. Dancing, she constitutes both

presence and absence, since her feminised form is emphasised while her subjectivity is erased. Summers-Bremner writes: “The dancer's body is her instrument, it is commonly said, and if this is so then the dancer ‘herself’ must be in some sense without body—lacking, or at least distanced from the instrumental body, which performs” (2000, p 91).

This is an ideal “brink”—to use Stockton’s phrase—or borderline from which to examine Irigaray’s conception of the complex and contested space of the feminine. Summers-Bremner’s reading of Luce Irigaray’s divine emphasises its disruption of the active, transcendent male and the passive, material female. Both dancing and reading Irigaray offer an in-between space where such binaries can be challenged (2000, p 110). She occupies the fleshy medium of dance, and the conceptual medium of academia. By moving rapidly between them, drawing her reading self back to her body, straining her dancing self toward the carnal transcendental, she transforms in an endless flow of becoming.

In *God Between Their Lips*, Stockton reads Irigaray in dialogue with Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, exploring the fleshy medium of the body through its outbursts of sobbing. She seeks to negotiate the connections between “spirituality and desire, between sex and sorrow, between gendered lack and escape through wound” (1994, p xv). In so doing, she asks why the material—present in the mucus-like overflow of tears—so often requires a spiritual discourse. Taking up Irigaray’s argument that women are constructed in terms of lack—in their bodies and bodily relations—and yet

are denied lack as a form of desire, Stockton explores what she terms “spiritual materialism”, akin to the carnal transcendental. Stockton describes this conceptual strategy as operating on “the brink”. In Irigaray, she argues, “lacking” is offered as a labour which produces pleasure. In psychoanalytic tradition, women’s lack refers to the absence of a penis; Stockton argues that Irigaray “take[s] back the lack on behalf of women by rendering women’s bodies and relations opaque” (1994, p xvii). For Stockton, the brink is the intersubjectivity of sorrow, a zone located at the edges of the body, “where a lover, or someone we desire, stands positioned, receiving sobs from the outside in.” Stockton refers to her writing as “the erotics of a feminine fracture” (1994, p xiii). Brink and fracture are metaphors for women’s relationship with God and with their own bodies.

Excavating such an unstable geography requires new forms of discourse. Stockton therefore examines the challenge of “writing the personal” in order to learn “how to visit loss, and how to understand the conflicts over our visitation of it” (1994, p xxii). Writing the personal, she argues, is risky for both reader and writer, offering at best something not otherwise encountered which forms a subtle and unimagined convergence of meanings. Its danger lies in its sentiment: “It can deliver its ardor all too readily, hand over its sense without enough shadow” (1994, p xxiii). Her personal postlude brings a carnal and poetic aspect to her critical voice:

In the night, “God” between us, “God” between my lips, in my most private chamber, I touch my lover’s arm, and at the surface of her skin, where our burning takes place, I touch many bodies ...

your mother lay by your elbow, your father at your ear; I touched your cheek and saw a secretary there with a man ... So many bodies upon and around you, I can never touch you without them. Folded between us and into our love they are “God” between our lips (1994, p 251).

In this amorous exchange emerges the engagement with Irigaray that is lost in Whitford’s and Grosz’s male and straight readings of her texts. Stockton provides a response to Irigaray’s critique that Westerners have forgotten the carnal in their dialogic exchanges, demonstrating the corporeal and intersubjective possibilities of writing the personal.

Judith Still borrows from Irigaray the evocative phrase “poetic nuptials” to describe the bodily exchange which can take place between authors, readers, translators, and within and between texts. She writes: “Poetic nuptials are an alternative to ways of reading such as critique which demand a particular distance between what become subject and object” (2002, p 7). They allow an intersubjective relation of being two (or more). Within this exchange, Still suggests, the text becomes active, searching for or seeking readers who will respond to its gift (2002, p 8). She describes “poetic nuptials” in the personal through her experiences translating the words of Irigaray’s *Passions élémentaires* into English. She and Joanne Collie sit at the kitchen table, surrounded by the detritus of wine, dips and pitta bread, half-hidden beneath papers and French and English versions of Irigaray’s books. At any given time, they might be rereading the “sacred” text, shouting suggestions at one another, arguing for or against a particular translation, scrambling through

dictionaries, or trailing hummus over work already completed, ready to be dismantled later. They pause to sip red wine, or to mop up a spillage, laughing hysterically, offering unusual word choices, sometimes shouting “yes” and punching the air, then sheepishly taking another sip of wine and scooping up some more dip. Still calls this:

An intellectual collaboration, an exchange of gifts, an emotional experience and a labour of love: rolling words around your tongue, letting them fall from your lips to have them reverberate in another’s labyrinthine inner ear echoes your hopes for further passionate encounters between the text and other readers (2002, pp 20-21).

An amorous exchange. Poetic nuptials. An erotics of reading and writing. A dialogue “between two” and a thesis towards becoming. Throughout this thesis, I want to visit the “points of saturation” or moments of becoming that inform my reading of Irigaray’s carnal transcendence, in order to rise to the challenges that this dialogue generates. Specifically, in the subsequent chapters I ask: what value does a carnal transcendental have if it remains rhetorical rather than experiential? In *The Hours*, Virginia Woolf is beginning to write *Mrs Dalloway*: “At this moment there are infinite possibilities ... She can feel it inside her, an all but indescribable second self, or rather a parallel, purer self. If she were religious, she would call it the soul” (Cunningham, 1998, p 35). Like the writing woman of Hélène Cixous, she finds herself overflowing: “Time and again I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst” (1981, p 246). Let’s swim together.

Chapter Three

Angels Playing With Placentas

In *Sexes and Genealogies*, Luce Irigaray refers to becoming divine as “entering further into womanhood”, and goes on to say that “the becoming of woman is never over and done with. A woman’s subjectivity must accommodate the dimensions of mother and lover as well as the union between the two” (1993c, pp 60-63). For Irigaray, motherhood is the aspect of a woman’s subjectivity that has been most compromised and discredited by the absence of a divinity and a model for difference that emphasises the carnal. In “And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other”, she demonstrates that subjectivity *as women* has been lost in constructions of motherhood which fuse the identities of mother and daughter. In “Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother”, Irigaray suggests that Western culture is founded on “matricide” and describes the mother/daughter relationship as “an extremely explosive core in our societies. To think it, to change it, leads to shaking up the patriarchal order” (1993c, p 86).

The elaboration of a carnal transcendence for women in Irigaray’s recent work seeks to interrogate the opposition of the subject positions of woman and mother. In *Sharing the World*, Irigaray writes: “The mother is, and remains, a ‘You’ rather than a ‘you’. Her transcendence with respect to the child is vertical ... And to this ... has to be added the sexuate belonging of the mother, and ... its relation to that of the child” (2008e, pp 120-121).³³

Recognising what Irigaray terms “horizontal transcendence” conceives the

mother as a carnal subject as well as a transcendent one, and enables this possibility for a daughter also (2004b, p 190). In “The Return” Irigaray suggests that the repression of the mother “has ultimately led to an overshadowing of another decisive natural dimension, that of sex or gender” (2008d, p 226).

This thesis has argued that carnal transcendence offers a model for difference that is not limited to the heterosexual couple. It has also examined the potential of poetics—textual play that offers a rewriting of theory—to engage with the speculation and impossibility of carnal transcendence as difference. This chapter brings together these two strands through an exploration of the mother/daughter relationship as a model of carnal transcendence as difference. Elizabeth Grosz suggests that the mother/daughter relation in Irigaray’s writing offers a challenge to the interpretation that sexual difference is heterosexist: “The attachment of mother and daughter, if it can be seen as a relationship *between two women*, provides a homosexuality that is both auto-erotic and ‘other’-directed” (1994a, p 338, emphasis in original). In this chapter, I bring into play my own experiences as a mother, and unravel a series of associations Irigaray makes between angels, the placental relation, transcendence and carnality. I also challenge Irigaray’s construction of difference in the mother/daughter relationship, arguing that her philosophy privileges the daughter, and neglects the fluid subjectivity of the mother.³⁴

The Fort/Da of Angels

The figure of the angel represents one of the most intriguing and complex aspects of Irigaray's work on the divine. More than anywhere else, her angelic writings demonstrate the problematic, exploratory and speculative nature of carnal transcendence as difference. Angels, for Irigaray, are the winged others to ourselves that she imagines communicating at the thresholds of the body—including skin, membranes, orifices, hymen, and placenta—and in exchanges between bodies, including sex, pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding. In *Everyday Prayers*, Irigaray describes her angels as “almost carnal”—that her hesitation on this point is significant is something I have already noted (2004c, p 31, my emphasis). In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray writes that the figure of the angel is “not unrelated to sex”—again note the hesitation in attributing carnality through a double negative; instead, it is “as if the angel were a representation of a sexuality that has never been incarnated” (1993a, pp 15-16). This offers a tantalising glimpse of the possibilities Irigaray imagines for an ethics of sexual difference. In Chapter One, I articulated my concerns for Irigaray's construction of sexual difference, but concluded that an enabling conception, recognising the interconnections of transcendence, carnality and difference, opens up the possibilities for a new incarnation of sexuality without imposing limitations on bodies and their pleasures. The “angelicization of the human”—as Penelope Ingram describes Irigaray's project—offers a model for becoming that is both corporeal and spiritual, where the angel represents the figure of a “newly conceived human” in whom divinity is made flesh (Ingram 2000, p 64).

derives great satisfaction and is compelled to repeat—throwing small objects into inconvenient places (1961, p 14). The only use that the child makes of his toys, Freud writes, is to play with them in this manner: to throw them away. His loud exclamation “o-o-o-o” as he does so is interpreted by Freud and the boy’s mother to mean “fort” (gone, faraway) (1961, p 14). Freud notes that this translation of the sound was confirmed when Ernst used the phrase “Baby o-o-o”—spoken to his mother after an absence of several hours—to describe the appearance and disappearance of his reflection “in a full-length mirror which did not quite reach to the ground, so that by crouching down he could make his mirror-image ‘gone’” (1961, p 15). In a more elaborate version of the game, Ernst plays with a wooden reel or bobbin to which a string is attached. Freud writes: “It never occurred to him to pull it along the floor behind him, for instance, and play at its being a carriage” (1961, p 15). Instead, he repeatedly practices throwing the reel so that it disappears over the edge of his curtained cot (“o-o-o-o”), then skilfully pulls it out again with a satisfied “da” (there). “This, then”, Freud writes, “was the complete game of disappearance and return” (1961, p 15).

In his interpretation of the game, whose meaning was “obvious” to him, Freud suggests that it is related to the child’s ability to allow his mother to go away without protest (1961, p 15). Simply put, the reel and the thread are a substitute for the mother. The game allows Ernst to compensate for the absence of his mother or to manipulate her presence, to throw her away and return her to himself, to take his revenge against her for leaving him, and to play with pleasure and repression. Freud writes that throwing away the reel

takes on a defiant meaning: “All right, then, go away! I don’t need you. I’m sending you away myself” (1961, p 16). This understanding is confirmed for Freud a year later when the boy is observed throwing his toys in anger and saying, “Go to the fwont [sic]!” Freud explains: “He had heard at that time that his absent father was ‘at the front’, and was far from regretting his absence; on the contrary he made it quite clear that he had no desire to be disturbed in his sole possession of his mother” (1961, p 16). At this point in the text, Freud includes a footnote: “When this child was five and three-quarters, his mother died. Now that she was really ‘gone’ (‘o-o-o’), the little boy showed no signs of grief. It is true that in the interval a second child had been born and had roused him to violent jealousy” (1961, p 16). Freud adds nothing more. This, then, is the complete game, at least so far as Freud is concerned.

Derrida’s reading of the game plays with the fort/da of Freud’s relationship with Ernst—Freud is his grandfather, father to Ernst’s mother, Sophie, whose death is relegated to a footnote. In *The Post Card*, Derrida writes: “There is a mute daughter ... This is Sophie. The daughter of Freud and the mother of Ernst whose death soon will toll in the text. Very softly, in a strange note added afterward” (1987, p 306). The strangeness of this footnote lies in its reverberation for the reader. The weight of the footnote is not acknowledged by Freud; he seems himself to play at throwing away the mother, to take his revenge against her for leaving him. Michelle Boulous Walker suggests the “thrown away” mother might be representative of Freud’s desire to

“eliminate questions of sexual difference altogether” (1998, p 55), a criticism that is repeatedly levelled at male thinkers in Irigaray’s work.

Derrida identifies other manifestations of fort/da in Freud’s telling of the game: the theory of the pleasure principle, the limitations of Freud’s interpretation of the “complete” game, as well as absences and presences that resonate within Derrida’s own life and writing.³⁵ In *The Ear of the Other*, Derrida points out that Freud plays his own version of fort/da with his interpretations of the game:

[Freud] does not stop at any single interpretation of the fort/da ... [He] always ends up finding his interpretations insufficient. One by one, he throws them away and moves on to another. He always has to take one more step: he moves on to another which he also throws away ... He himself is doing fort/da with his own interpretations, and it never stops ... He writes himself this scene, which is descriptive or theoretical but also very profoundly autobiographical and performative to the degree that it concerns him in his relation with his heirs: his grandson, his daughter ... When this becomes apparent, there is no longer a limit on the fort/da (1988, p 70).

The repetitions and returns of this passage demonstrate the way that Derrida is playing with the fort/da of language and the ambiguous possibilities of meaning—as illustrated by Freud and the mother’s interpretation of Ernst’s “o-o-o-o”. In a passing comment in *The Post Card*, Derrida playfully refers to the veil on Ernst’s cot as “the hymen” of the fort/da, but states that he has “neither the time nor the taste” to “open this curtain” (1987, p 308). Derrida

plays his own fort/da with the hymen, returning to it when he focusses on the importance of the bed or cot for Ernst's game:

Everything occurs around the bed, and has never occurred except around a bed surrounded with veils or curtains: what is called a "skirted crib" ... These curtains, these veils, this cloth, this "skirt" that hides the bars, form the inner chamber of the fort/da ... I am calling this once more, and necessarily, the hymen (1987, p 316).

The translator, Alan Bass, reasons that the hymen—so playfully elided in Derrida's text—requires a footnote. He adds: "*Hymen* is irreducibly both virginity and consummation (marriage), related here to the *conjoined* interpretations of the father and daughter ... of what takes place around the bed" (Derrida, 1987, p 316, emphasis in original).³⁶ Do we need a hymen—no, sorry, a footnote—to Derrida's text to tell us that the father and daughter, grandfather and mother, are conjoined, in their agreement of Ernst's "o-o-o-o" at least, if not in other ways? That the fort/da being played by Ernst with and against his mother, also plays Freud and Derrida? Is it really "around" the bed that this game takes place—hasn't Derrida really shown us that it is entirely within (the curtains, veils, cloth, skirt of) the bed that the action takes place, even if he finds its consummation distasteful? Continuing his fort/da, Derrida again steps away from the hymen: "This entire syntax is made possible by the graphics of the margin of the hymen ... I will not exploit it here" (1987, 317).

Irigaray takes up Derrida's challenge to examine the veil (hymen) more closely, and finds that what resonates most powerfully in this play is the

“rather white and transparent screen: air, canvas, veil” which covers the cot and conceals the reel. It is this veil—“more or less white, more or less transparent”—that makes little Ernst’s masturbatory (as Irigaray interprets it) game of “disappearance-reappearance, inside-outside, outside-inside”, hide-and-seek possible (1993c, p 30). It is on this veil that the game of the mother hinges; believing that she is attached to him by a thread, he reels her to and fro, into and out of the sheets. Of the veil and the part it plays in the symbolic absence-presence of the mother, wife and daughter, Freud has “nothing to say ... says nothing, knows nothing, wants to know nothing” (1993c, p 30). It is the veil Ernst plays with, rather than the reel and the thread, and, for Irigaray, it is the veil that symbolises the mother. Irigaray also notes that the game Ernst plays is one of sound—it “happens in the mouth: between the lips, the tongue, the palate, the teeth, the larynx”—and of gesture, the flicking movement of his hand and arm (1993c, pp 95-96). This is a more complex and incomplete game than the one Freud interprets, “with him, foetus, playing at going in and coming out of her with a cord, a placental-veil, a womb-bed” (1993c, p 31).

Through his game, Irigaray suggests, the boy finds a reminder of the first veil he has known:

The mystery of the first crypt, a first and longed for dwelling place, the happy time when he had space in her, and she in him, when he owed his whole life to her, before any call or claim. He lives off her, feeds on her, is wrapped up in her, drinks her, consumes her, consummates her ... During that time in the womb ... haven of skin, membranes, of water ... air, warmth, food, blood, life,

potentially even the risk of death, come to him via a hollow thread (1993c, pp 32-33).

In reconstructing this amniotic world—“with its layers, its circuits, its vessels, its nourishing pathways ... a whole world of invisible relations that adheres to her womb, that takes place in her womb”—Ernst plays with his own absence and presence, his own subjectivity, as well as that of his mother (1993c, p 34).

Irigaray writes:

In this game of hide and seek, the son plays with himself alone: with him in her, her in him, before any meeting face-to-face can occur. The game takes the place of the encounter, takes over from it, overtakes and overcomes it, weaving a whole world, from the depths of the earth to the highest heavens (1993c, p 34).

In this game, Ernst is playing hide-and-seek with any number of absences and presences—the reel and thread, himself, his mother, language, womb, umbilical cord, and placenta.

Taking the game higher still, Irigaray writes:

The most important fort-da ... refers, past the mother's presence, in the mother, beyond-veil, to the presence of God, beyond the sky, beyond the visual horizon. It moves away from the presence of the mother beyond veil, petticoats, pants etc.—though this does not mean that the son does not send himself there in the first veil, the amniotic fluid and the placenta that separate him from the womb—away from the mother's presence, then, toward that of god beyond in heaven (1993c, p 32).

This game, made possible through a series of veils or threads, is a game played with angels. Irigaray writes: “Before the son has perfected his stage set, one can try and steal his veil away from him, take the curtain of his theatre, the means or mediator of his *fort-da*, and ... give it back to the *angels*” (1993c, p 35, emphasis in original). In the whiteness, opaqueness and lightness of the veil over the cot, Irigaray recollects the image of the angel. She imagines the fort/da that angels might play as mediators of the game, the flesh, the relationship between mother and child.

Occupying the realm of the poetic, angels stand between the mortal and the divine, offering communication and communion. The angel arrives as a messenger, to make an announcement, to reveal what is yet to come. The angel represents and traverses the distance between humanity and God, moving freely between the finite and the infinite, emerging from beyond “the ultimate veil” (1993c, p 35). In “Belief Itself” Irigaray imagines the message of the hereafter that is embodied in the angel:

Awesome call or recall that circulates so swiftly and lightly, an annunciation of more weight than any coded message, moving to and fro between the first and last dwellings that are withheld from present visibility and readability, to be deciphered only in the next world. From beyond the angel returns with inaudible or unheard of words in the here and now. Like an inscription written in invisible ink on a fragment of the body, skin, membrane, veil, colorless and unreadable until it interacts with the right substance, the matching body (1993c, pp 35-36).

The unreadable or unheard words of the angel, Irigaray believes, concern sexual difference—in the case of the fort/da game, the relationship between the mother and the son. The angel in this game—mediating between reel and string, back and forth, near and far—is at the service of Ernst. His mother, Irigaray notes, seems to have no angel of her own; “she is thrown away and pulled back by means of the angel, but she herself cannot use that mediation, that messenger ... The angel even stands in the way between God and herself” (1993c, p 37). This mother/son relationship harks back to Mary and Jesus, where the angel—at the service of the Father, at the bodily threshold of the hymen—announces that she is with child. The mother has no angel of her own, and the being-two that the angel heralds is only that of the mother and son. “The *other*, the woman lover, is kept away from the scene”, Irigaray writes (1993c, p 37, emphasis in original). Divinity has not yet found its carnality.

In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray imagines a corporeal angel mediating between man and woman within a relationship of sexual difference. She writes:

A sexual or carnal ethics would require that both angel and body be found together. This is a world that must be constructed or reconstructed. A genesis of love between the sexes has yet to come about in all dimensions ... from the most intimate to the most political (1993a, p 17).

This is a relationship in which carnality and maternity can coexist, with the angel at the service of the carnal transcendental. The mother/child

relationship becomes a model of sexual difference that could be transposed to any relationship of difference, including a heterosexual one between a man and a woman lover.

As I argued in Chapter One, when sexual difference is reconceptualised in terms of carnal transcendence, it demonstrates the irreducibility of two carnal bodies. It is the manifestation of the “yet to come” that Irigaray describes as a culture of sexual difference. In other words, the “sympathetic deciphering of bodies, skins, membranes, mucuses”, which forms the absence and presence that Irigaray is concerned with in “Belief Itself” (1993c, p 36). The angel—described by Irigaray in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* as a “remainder”—is a consequence of the “nonfulfilment of the sexual act” between men and women (1993a, p 15). Irigaray writes that angels circulate “as mediators of that which has not yet happened, of what is still going to happen, of what is on the horizon ... Angels destroy the monstrous, that which hampers the possibility of a new age; they come to herald the arrival of a new birth, a new morning” (1993a, p 15). Not unrelated to sex, but reconceived as carnal beings, angels herald a kind of sexuality not yet incarnated (1993a, p 16). The presence of angels announces that the consummation of a newly sexed culture is yet to come.³⁷

Now seven months pregnant, my divinity is shifting under the weight of my humanity. I am becoming as never before; not since puberty—remember those pink triangular nipples? Those aching hips? The tingling surface of the skin? The desire to shrug off the body?—have I been so distracted by

the sheer physicality and weight of my flesh. I am here every moment. But the metaphors that I have read about myself—container, envelope, split subject—and those I have read about you—parasite, possession, infection—roll away from me. They do not apply here. You/I—we—make our own rules. I feel more akin to Sylvia Plath’s loaf “big with its yeasty rising” and feel you as Esther Ottaway’s “seed-pearl swimmer ... in that shell-shaped abdominal universe” (Plath, 1989, p 116; Ottaway, 2006, p 6).³⁸ I am the carnal subject incarnate, with a greater awareness and intimate knowledge of the properties of mucus and the porousness of the body than ever before. My subjectivity is shifting. I am everybody’s object. My body does not belong simply to me or you (nor to your father) but to the world at large. As if we are becoming animal, to echo Deleuze and Guittari, I/you are multiple; I/you are legion (2004, p 264). We are plural. My lips—purple now—attest to that. I am stretching the edges of the world.

I play with your absent presence (or is it your present absence?) on a daily basis. To mime Irigaray’s words, we are not yet face to face, nor in a relation that mirrors or projects. I know you only through your touch. At times, you flutter against me like a bird caught in the cage of my ribs. Then you spasm and jerk, as though to throw my skin off like a cloak. Words are at once too great and too small to encompass you. There are those that come close, that wrap around and within my mouth like you wrap around and within my organs—tongue, frond, curl, bottom, light, grass, bed, blood—but read as nonsense.

In her interpretation of Irigaray's angelic texts, Elizabeth Grosz positions Irigaray's angel as intermediate. She locates the angel in the "middle ground between the bird and the fish, God and human, man and woman", signifying "the possibility of a bridge between the mortal and the immortal, the terrestrial and the divine, male and female" (1989, p 161). Traditionally conceived as disembodied or neuter, the angel occupies a mobile space between the masculine and the feminine. In Grosz's reading, Irigaray's sexual (carnal) ethics pivots on this point; the corporeal or embodied angel represents a divine union in which man and woman inhabit the same place. In "From Goddess Spirituality to Irigaray's Angel", Penelope Ingram convincingly argues against this interpretation of Irigaray's angel as a "mediator" in an ethics of sexual difference. Instead, she understands that the "intermediary function performed by the angel is a *temporary* one" (2000, p 60, emphasis in original). In this role, the angel is the harbinger of sexual difference, rather than a representation of it. The angel "announces what comes after"—a time that is yet to arrive or yet to return "where an ethics of sexual difference is well established enabling us to mutually decode one another and God" (2000, pp 60-61). In this waiting time, the angel mediates between us and God. Ingram asks:

Though Irigaray makes many associations in "Belief Itself" between the angel and the woman, especially with regard to their porous, membranous, transparent constitution, could it be that the angel, symbolically representative of woman, rather than merely mediating woman's relationship with the divine, experiences woman's relationship with the divine in her stead? (2000, p 62).

In Ingram's reading, the angel is perceived as impeding woman's relationship with the infinite since, in its role as mediator, the angel distances woman from the divine. The angel, Ingram argues, is simply a "stage" in woman's becoming divine: "the angel will always represent woman's incomplete relationship to God and her inability to experience herself in the divine" (2000, p 62). Ingram interprets the angel as "a *consequence* of the fact that sexual difference and coming into being of the sensible transcendental have not occurred" (2000, p 61, emphasis in original), and argues that the angel "merely guards the space between the human and God" until the "divine, placenta-like state [of sexual difference] is inaugurated" (2000, p 63).

The difficulty with Ingram's argument for a "temporary" angel is that it implies temporality, rather than acknowledging the angel as a creature that, in Irigaray's words, "unceasingly" and "endlessly" passes through borders and boundaries (1993a, p 15). As a creature with access to the infinite—that which exceeds limits—the relationship between the angel and time is one which is oblique.³⁹ Ingram writes that, in Irigaray's texts, "generally it is as though the angel mediates our role with God now, occasionally ... it is as if the angel will come in the future and will announce a later coming of God" (2000, p 61). This is precisely because of the intemporal nature of the divine and of the angel: to echo Irigaray's words, the angel represents simultaneous call and recall, what comes after and what has already been, both harbinger and echo. This is consistent with Irigaray's arguments for an ethics of sexual difference—something that has come before and is yet to come.

This understanding of the angel supports my argument for interpreting sexual difference as a carnal irreducibility between two bodies. The role of the angel can be illustrated through the complex temporality of erotic pleasure—a space in which Irigaray imagines angels mediating, like mucus, between two bodies. In *Textures of Light* Cathryn Vasseleu writes:

Erotic pleasure is an imaginary beginning, a birth after and before the present which will have never taken place ... It is a beginning without memory, a beginning which knows no other. In contrast to conscious motivation, erotic pleasure is an acceptance of that which gives of itself, of that which is of no account, of that which has not yet come into being (1998, p 113).

This passage complicates time with its overlapping of before, after and what never takes place. Irigaray uses a similar technique when she writes of the yet to come or the coming again, and the arrival or the return of sexual difference. Irigaray suggests that sexual difference requires a rethinking of space and time (1993a, p 7).⁴⁰ In her expansion of this point, she makes evident the links between sexual difference and transcendence, locating God or gods as “the subject, the master of time ... He effects the passage between time and space” (1993a, p 7). Vasseleu’s contribution is to make the link between temporal indeterminacy and erotic pleasure. Like erotic pleasure, the angel offers a different perception of space and temporality. Irigaray writes that the angel is “yet to be made manifest in the realm of time and space” (1993a, p 15).

Continuing the argument for a temporary angel, Ingram challenges the way in which Irigaray's angel has been interpreted as embodied, particularly as Schwab (and Grosz, to whom she is indebted) understands it in relation to the maternal body. According to Ingram, Schwab "has confused the character of the angel's *temporary* mediation, with that of the placenta, and ultimately that of the divine" (2000, p 63, emphasis in original). If the angel were embodied, then this divine would have already occurred, and Irigaray is explicit that the angel represents a sexuality not yet incarnated. So, Ingram suggests that:

What Irigaray intends by the concept of angelic embodiment is not a corporealization of the angel but an angelicization of the human. Which is to say that woman and man, now able to experience the divine within and transcendence without, can themselves perhaps be understood to be more like angels, though they are definitely sexed as male and female (2000, p 64).

The angel, like the placenta and the two lips, emerges as a "third term" that "maintain[s] the space between, the integrity of the autonomy of each sex, so as to prevent their fusion, their collapsing back into the order of the same" (Ingram 2000, p 59). In this way, the figure of the angel becomes a metaphor for carnal difference, emphasising the irreducibility of bodies, the distinction between them, and the inability of one to consume or incorporate the other entirely.

Carnal = Placental

Imagining you wearing your placenta like a red hood, I return to fairy tales. Children's stories. In all these tales, the mother is an ambivalent figure: she desires a daughter as red as blood. Snow White, red as blood, white as snow and black as ebony, is the product of her mother's death wish. The story tells us that the queen dies soon after she lays eyes on her daughter. In "The Juniper Tree", retold by the Brothers Grimm, the story begins when a woman spills blood under the juniper tree; pricking or cutting her finger, she sees the red blood on the white snow and wishes for a child with that colouring. Her pregnancy follows the seasons, and mimics the swelling, ripeness and poison of the juniper berries. The first month passes, and the snow melts. After two months, everything is green. Three, and the flowers bloom. Four, the plants grow stronger, thicker and more abundant. The smell of the juniper tree intoxicates her in the fifth month. By the sixth, she and the fruit are large and firm. In the seventh month, she eats the juniper berries until they sicken her. At eight months, she thinks of death and asks to be buried under the juniper tree. After the birth of the child, white as snow and red as blood, she is so delighted, the story says, she dies. The figure of the mother of children's tales is a blemish, a blot, a stain. She is too close to death; she never returns from the abyss of birth. In life—as the wicked stepmother—she is a cannibal, seeking to incorporate the daughter's uncorrupted organs. The beautiful queen consumes the liver and lungs she thinks belong to Snow White. The dead bodies of sacrificial mothers accumulate in these stories. In death, she calls the daughter to her

grave. In “Cinderella” she takes the form of a bird. In “All Fur” the mother, on her deathbed, extracts a promise from her husband: only to remarry someone as beautiful and with hair as golden. Years later, this describes her daughter, who resembles the dead queen in every way. The daughter is now the object of her aging father’s lust. The mother thus binds her daughter to her coffin, the marital bed, the maternal body.

In *Je, Tu, Nous* Irigaray locates the angel in the complex mediating role played by the placenta. Even in this example, the role of the angel is not necessarily temporary—after all, in “Belief Itself” we have seen little Ernst’s angel still performing the function of the placenta, regulating the relationship between mother and son, and granting the son his own subjectivity. Irigaray interviews French biologist H  l  ne Rouch, who emphasises the complex, and frequently misunderstood, role played by the placenta:

On the one hand, it's the mediating space between mother and fetus, which means there is never a fusion of maternal and embryonic tissues. On the other hand, it constitutes a system regulating exchanges between the two organisms ... It thus establishes a relationship between mother and fetus (Irigaray, 1993b, p 39).

In contrast to commonly held views, which exist in what Rouch terms “imaginary reality”, the relationship is not one of “fusion (a ... mixture of the bodies or blood of mother and foetus)” nor one of “aggression (the foetus as a foreign body devouring from the inside, a vampire [or parasite] in the maternal body)” (Irigaray, 1993b, p 39).⁴¹ Instead, the placenta is an organ

that is formed by the embryo but behaves independently and relatively autonomously (1993b, pp 38-39).

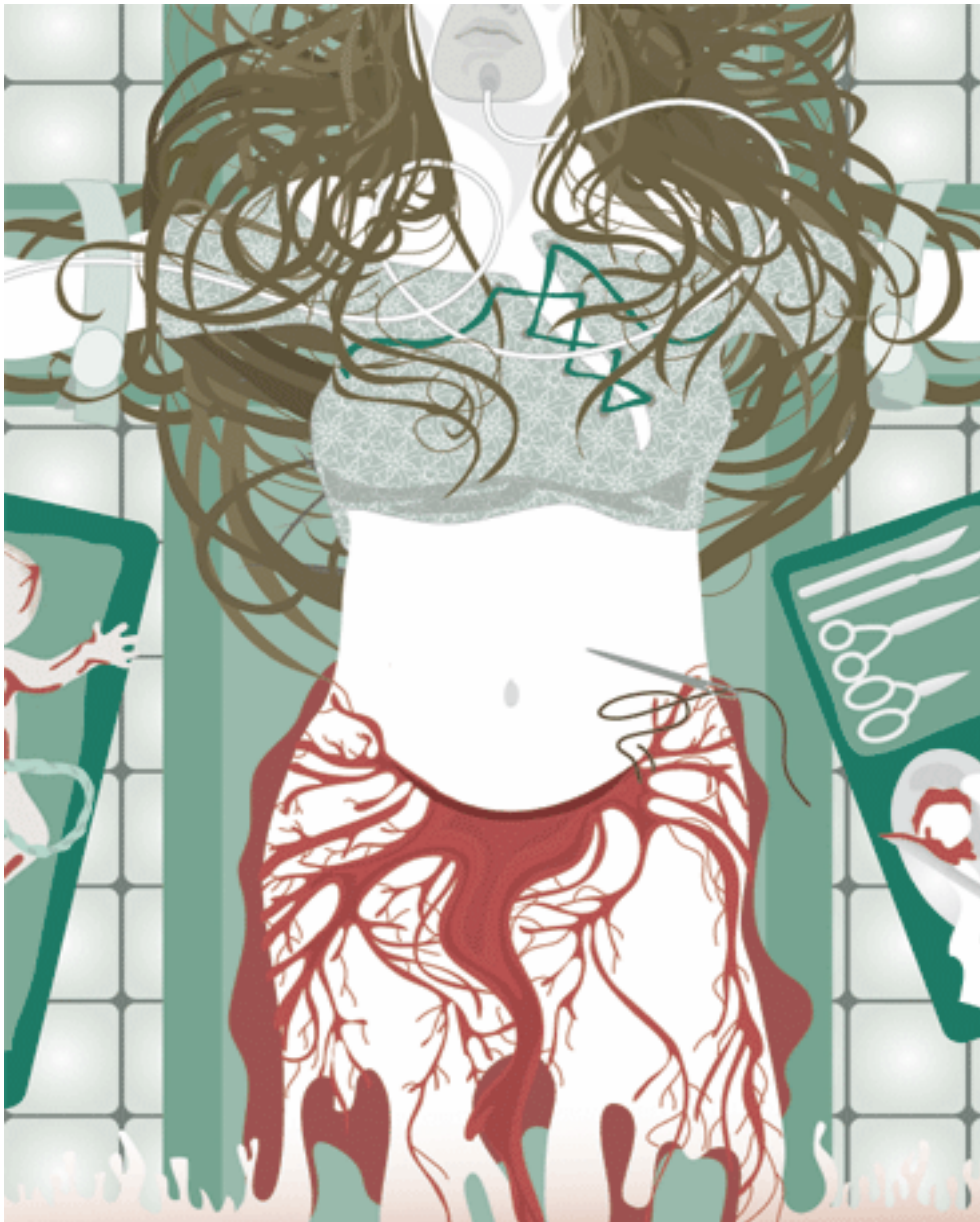
Rouch emphasises that the placental relationship is one of negotiation and exchange between the “mother’s self and the other that is the embryo” (Irigaray, 1993b, p 41).⁴² The placenta acts, Rouch suggests, as a “third term”, where third means not the sum of three parts but plurality, “that which is ‘left over,’ that which lies between the integers, like a remainder in division” (Irigaray, 1994b, p 363). It is a remainder, like the angel—a consequence of nonfulfillment, perhaps, but a positive one in which the difference between the two is maintained.⁴³

To reach you, the doctor cut through the layers of my abdomen and uterus and left a wide sutured wound. During an angry, spiteful induced labour, without a break between contractions, many hours after the midwives had promised you would arrive in time for morning tea, when I had all but forgotten you, your heart rate dropped to 60 beats a minute. Very quickly—and I cannot tell you how long, as time was slippery now—we were in theatre. I was hallucinating at this stage—I told your father he was dressed all in red, and that the blonde fat man from Little Britain made a cameo appearance during the operation. When the doctor made the final incision and pulled you out, he found the placenta had abrupted during labour. Abruption placenta.

The placenta had separated from the uterus. I was haemorrhaging and the blood was clotting behind my uterus; you were in distress. When the pain became severe, I asked for an epidural, not knowing we were becoming detached from one another. When he handed you to me, the doctor kissed me on the forehead and said, “Well done”. It was only later, when I discussed your birth with him and read some literature that I discovered where we had been with the placental abruption: there is a foetal mortality rate of twenty to forty percent worldwide. The maternal mortality rate is higher. It was a long time before I could use the word “birth” to describe this day; I would sidestep around it in increasingly elaborate and fanciful ways, using words such as arrival or coming. It only served to increase my feelings of separation from the event.

Soon afterwards, searching for ways to describe how I was feeling, I discovered online a series of artworks entitled “Cesarean Art”. Dedicated to “all the scarred mothers”, the twenty-eight paintings are a response to an unwanted caesarean section. The artist remains anonymous on the website, but is identified elsewhere as Birgit Amadori. She has had two caesareans, the first in Germany in 1999 after an attempted homebirth with the cord around the baby’s neck.

Image 1: Anonymous, 2005, *The Deed is Done*.



Source: <http://www.cesarean-art.com> (retrieved June 23, 2006).
No details of the artist available.

Image 2: Anonymous, 2005, *Smile, "you have a healthy baby!"*



Source: <http://www.cesarean-art.com> (Retrieved June 23, 2006).
No details of the artist available.

Image 3: Anonymous, 2005, *A picture about the meaningless small talk that was held in the operation room—whether or not the yellow tape around the trees near the hospital mean that they will be cut down or not.*



Source: <http://www.cesarean-art.com> (retrieved June 23, 2006).
No details of the artist available.

Image 4: Anonymous, 2005, *Alone in the recovery room, separated for hours from baby*



Source: <http://www.cesarean-art.com> (retrieved June 23, 2006).
No details of the artist available.

The second caesarean was in the United States in 2005. She was unable to find a doctor who would allow her to attempt a vaginal birth.⁴⁴ In an interview online, conducted in mid-2006, she describes her “cesarean rage”.⁴⁵ The interviewer, known only as “emjb”, refers to herself as “a cesarean ~~victim test subject~~ [sic] survivor” and describes the violation and rage resulting from her own caesarean experience: “Feeling like a wounded bleeding dying animal, like a piece of meat, was part and parcel of my experience, too ... the shock of being downgraded from woman-becoming-mother to a piece of ground chuck on a slab that the doctor can’t be bothered to talk to is something you never really get over” (Emjb, 2006, no page number).

The beauty of the images, reminiscent of both Frida Kahlo and Mucha, starkly contrasts the violent anger, and the isolation from one’s own body and baby that can result from a surgical birth. Much of the online discussion of the images deplores the artwork as disgusting, expresses sorrow for the child or children, and urges the artist to seek psychiatric help.⁴⁶ In a more thoughtful response, one mother, the anonymous author “Bearing” of Bearing blog, demonstrates that such violent imagery is not the exclusive province of caesarean mothers. Not having had a caesarean, she describes the “ghostlike and luminous, impressionistic (and yet hard-edged) quality of the artwork” as reminiscent of mental images from her “textbook-smooth, uneventful” homebirth (Bearing, 2006, no page number). She writes:

Suddenly I am hanging from them, squatting down, as a contraction comes over me. In surprise I shout, "Oh my God, I'm pushing!" My body surges deep inside, and I feel the baby descend. I have barely recovered when it happens again. Here comes the contraction, and I sink down, hanging, and at the bottom of it the baby drops through me just a little farther. And again. I can nearly see in front of me my own pelvis, not like a photograph but instead some internal mind's eye picture of it, a fantastic hinged cage of ivory opening up (an ice cream scoop's halves sliding one inside the other, an arcade's claw game unclosing, a bracelet's clasp retracting into itself). Each flex reveals a glimpse of a round red fruit, releasing it heavily inch by inch (2006, no page number).

She concludes: "if I can have such weird, disjointed, dreamlike mental images of my own peaceful homebirth, I can easily see how someone whose births went awry and were recalled with pain and regret and a sense of violation could create art like this" (2006, no page number).⁴⁷ The paintings resonate with my emotional experience of a caesarean without coercion by a communicative doctor to save my daughter's life. The paintings represent the ambivalence of motherhood, the struggle of intersubjectivity and the violence of playing with the absence and presence of another. The maternal body is the site of this conflict.

In the provocatively titled "The Promiscuous Placenta", Jane-Maree Maher describes the placenta as "the point of communication between pregnant woman and foetal entity, allowing for and recognising their difference" (2001, p 202). She continues:

The placenta as organ belongs neither to the corporeal location of the pregnant woman nor that of the fetus. It offends and refigures bodily integrity and boundaries, it allows for at least two to work together at the site of one, while preventing against a collapse into singularity. The placenta operates as a border, but only a porous and provisional one (2001, p 202).

Maher constructs the pregnant body as a performance of contagion, contamination or infection, in which “the ‘disease’ that is communicated is embodied subjectivity” (2001, p 201). In other words, the pregnant body demonstrates the disruption of the borders and boundaries of a singular subjectivity, and results in seepage, leakage and rupture from which emerge two distinct subjects. The placenta is, in Maher’s words, “the materialization” of this contagion (2001, p 201).⁴⁸ The terms Maher uses are unsettling—contagion, disease, offence to bodily boundaries (2001, p 202)—and, by association, they evoke the uneasy association between life-saving medical intervention and the maternal-foetal body. The notion of a “promiscuous” placenta suggests the location of carnality and maternity together; Maher writes that viewing the pregnant body through the placenta “is a challenge to representational order, for ... it confronts distinctions between ‘mother’ and ‘child’ [and] mother and sexual being” (2001, p 213). The porous and multiple notion of subjectivity that Maher constructs—emphasising the passage of fluid, morphological confusion, and transformation—is a valuable contribution to a narrative of carnal maternity.

In Irigaray’s writing, the angel—a threshold like the placenta—is the path of transformation, the medium of exchange, and the point of connection

necessary for a mode of becoming that transcends corporeal logics of a singular subjectivity. This is the becoming Irigaray evokes through sexual difference, when she refers to an ethics of fecundity that would result in “the production of a new age of thought, art, poetry, and language: the creation of a new *poetics*” (1993a, p 5, emphasis in original).⁴⁹ The angelic allows a consideration of the pregnant body as poetic and carnal. Irigaray’s placental economy is an intersubjective relationship between mother and foetus which provides an opening to reconsider social and cultural relations, particularly as they impact on constructions of women’s bodies and the roles of the mother. For Irigaray, writing of the placenta in relation to carnal transcendence is a response to the gap she perceives between rapid advances on a technical level, but limited evolution on an ethical level. For Maher, viewing the pregnant body “through the placenta” offers “a challenge to ... the practice of binary thinking” (2001, p 213). For Irigaray, a placental economy gives primacy to the lived experience of the feminine, and offers a model of being (at least) two. A relationship of plurality or multiplicity—modelled in the placental economy—operates with this mediation to ensure that we recognise the difference between subject positions, rather than constructing a logic of sameness.

These are the first things I remember about you. You have a full head of fine dark brown hair, with a couple of grey hairs behind your left ear. You have long, fine fingers that everyone has commented on. Your eyes are an indeterminate dark blue brown grey. You have mild jaundice, so your skin is a perfect shade of holiday tan. To comfort yourself, you suck on your

entire hand—either hand will do. Your top lip is a perfect double curve, and you keep your bottom lip sucked in. You smell like oil and the sea. The midwives wrap you as tightly as a mummy. When you cry, it sounds as though you are singing—la la la la. You raise your arm up in a fist like a champion. The first television program we watch together is a German documentary on harmonicas. Your right ear is a bit squashed, and sticks out slightly. You have your first good breastfeed on your second day in the world, while your daddy holds your hand and kisses your forehead as you suckle. I hold you under my arm like a football. Sometimes when you sleep, you wiggle your eyebrows up and down. At night, a fuzzy time, our outlines blur. On the third day, my breasts wake wet and heavy, and you cry your singing cry. Your body leans and presses. I overflow, and my hospital bed becomes a milk bath.

What do I know of maternal desire? The term too often refers to the desire to be a mother. Instead, I think of the fierce intensity of your mouth on my bloodied nipples, more sensitive than ever before and since. I feel again the urge to touch every place on your body, to know you inside and out, inside out, from inside me and without me. I remember the blurry half-light of night-time feeds, when our points of contact—cushion, breast, arm, chair, mouth—meet and merge. My body remembers the hormonal weight of your body against mine. Even now, more than a year since we have breastfed together, I think of you and my breasts remember, give that familiar tingling buzz and let down a solitary drop of milk. It is as though we could start again at any time. In the endless suck and flow of our relationship, in

the stretch-mark reminders of the ripe fruit burst of my body, in the mole behind your left ear—my favourite place in the world, somewhere that you have never been—are where I locate carnality and divinity.

Woman Lover

The mother, Irigaray argues, lacks recognition as a “woman lover” (1993c, p 37). The designation “woman lover” gives weight to the carnality of the mother/child relationship. Iris Marion Young rises to the challenge this represents, asking: “Why does the gender code require such a division between motherhood and sexuality?” (2005b, p 876). In Young’s writing, carnality, transcendence and maternity come together; the pregnant body, in a model similar to Maher’s placental relation, challenges the binaries of maternity and sexuality, transcendence and immanence. All mutually exclusive categories—self/other, subject/object, female/male (when the foetus is a boy), singular/plural, human/animal, public/private, inside/outside—are rendered indistinct when applied to the pregnant body.⁵⁰

Young applies this logic to answer the question of the division between maternity and carnality, referring to the “eroticism” of pregnancy (2005b, p 46). This is experienced by the woman through the memory of her own mother’s body, and in the “self-love” she gains from her changing body (2005b, p 53). Young describes her pleasure “like [that of] a child” that she feels when seeing her naked body in a mirror: “Without stealth or vanity ... I turn to the side and stroke the taut flesh that protrudes under the breasts”

(2005b, p 54). In a passing comment, she makes the suggestion that the mother's sexuality is closely aligned to that of the child, which she describes as "global and multiple" (2005b, p 86). This is a reminder of Irigaray's description of the plurality of women's sexuality in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, where she suggests that a woman has "sex organs more or less everywhere [and] finds pleasure almost anywhere" (1985b, p 28). Young goes further in her description of the sexuality of the mother, demonstrating the carnal difference that manifests itself between a mother and daughter:

Drowsy during the morning feed, I went to bed with my baby ... I lay there as she made love to me, snuggling her legs up to my stomach, her hand stroking my breast, my chest. She lay between me and my lover, and she and I were a couple. From then on I looked forward with happy pleasure to our early-morning intercourse, she sucking at my hard fullness, relieving and warming me, while her father slept (Young, 2005b, pp 88-89).

The sexual language that Young uses here is both seductive and discomfiting. Julia Kristeva performs a similar act in the poetics of divinity and maternity in "Stabat Mater", where she writes of her son using the erotic words slides, fondles, inflates, flutters, slips. She writes: "A wave swells again, when he goes to sleep, under my skin—tummy, thighs, legs ... The wakeful tongue quietly remembers another withdrawal, mine: a blossoming heaviness in the middle of the bed, of a hollow, of the sea" (2002, p 324). Writing on the erotics of breastfeeding, Alison Bartlett uses the terms "sexual ... erotic, sensual, pleasure, passion and desire" to demonstrate the "expanse of experience" of maternal sexuality and the limitations of the language

available to describe such experiences (2005a, p 86). Bartlett asks: “what is at stake in denying that breastfeeding can be a sexual experience?” (2005a, p 108). For Irigaray, at stake is the subjectivity of the mother as a woman.⁵¹ This is a particular risk for mothers of daughters. Adrienne Rich uses the phrase “lesbian continuum” to describe, as she puts it, the “range—through each woman's life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman” (1993, p 203). This encompasses the erotics of the mother/daughter relationship which is established, in Rich’s terms, within an economy of “compulsory heterosexuality” (1993, p 203).⁵²

One morning, when you were ten months old, I pressed my lips to your forehead, and came away burning. Your temperature was 38.4 degrees. Just after I gave you some paracetamol, you had a convulsion. Your legs and arms were stiff and shaking, your back was arched, your eyes rolled back in your head, and froth was coming from your mouth. I called an ambulance. On the phone, I was almost incomprehensible. You went limp, your breathing was erratic, you were blue around the mouth. When the ambulance arrived, you were unresponsive. I had my first trip through the new Lane Cove Tunnel in that ambulance. In hospital that afternoon, you had another convulsion with a temperature of 38.2. You had a lot of tests—blood, urine and mucus, an EEG, and a lumbar puncture. Everything seemed normal. The next morning in hospital, just after Daddy had left for work, you had a different type of seizure. You were unresponsive and turned blue. You were no longer breathing. Very quickly, you were

surrounded by two doctors and four nurses—attempting to trace your heart rate, monitor your oxygen level, attach an oxygen mask, insert a cannula, take your blood sugar level, prepare a glucose drip and revive you. In the midst of the chaos, one of the doctors accidentally stuck a needle into his own hand.

At that moment, the “clown doctors” arrived—laughing, throwing balloons, blowing bubbles, and playing silly horns. I watched a bubble settle on your pale bruise-coloured cheek in the seconds before a nurse screamed at the clowns to “Get out!” and pushed them from the room. Twenty minutes later, you were sitting on my lap eating a bowl of pureed pear. The doctor described what had happened as an “acute shutdown” and said it was the most extreme reaction to fever she had ever seen. Two months later, just after your first birthday, we were back. You had been vomiting and had diarrhoea for a day, and began to deteriorate quickly. I called an ambulance. On arrival in hospital, you were taken straight to resuscitation. Once again, your system had shut down, but this time you didn’t have a fever. Your blood sugar level was recorded as 0.8 (normal is between 4 and 8). You were in hospital for five days on a drip. Once home, Daddy took your blood sugar level every morning. We held our panic close, and tried not to show each other the whites of our eyes.

Four months on, you have had another three hospitalisations, one of them for three days while I was writing this chapter, and the diagnosis is still uncertain. There are more tests required from an endocrinologist and a

neurologist. A year on, as I edit this chapter, and I have lost count of your hospital stays and your seizures. We have a few answers. You are a hypoglycaemic asthmatic epileptic. A recent MRI showed that your left temporal horn is underdeveloped and the cells around it are dead. The analogy that the neurologist used was a birthmark on your brain. Some point of connection to me perhaps? It is as if a part of you is absent, perhaps given back to the angels. What better gift to offer them than one of your horns? Maybe this is where you go in your endless to-ing and fro-ing, reeling and threading. I still have nightmares. You grow beautifully. You are strong and joyful and fierce: these are the words that I use most often to describe you. You are here. And, sometimes, elsewhere. We keep a hospital bag packed.

In “And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other”, Irigaray plays her own fort/da game, reconstructing a relationship between mother and daughter. She plays with the absence and presence of the mother as a woman, the absence of the daughter’s own subjectivity, and the fusion of the identities of mother and daughter. Adopting the voice of the daughter, she writes: “I start to breathe ... I have a home inside me, another outside, and I take myself from the one to the other, from the one into the other. And I no longer need your belly, your arms, your eyes, or your words to return or to leave” (1981, p 61). From the daughter’s perspective, the struggle for subjectivity is a negative one, expressed through an aggressive hostility towards the body of the mother: “You flowed into me, and that hot liquid became poison, paralysing me ... My blood coagulates, remains in and near my heart” (1981,

p 60). In her introduction to the text, Hélène Vivienne Wenzel describes the daughter's "anguished voice" at being "glutted" by her mother (1981, 59).

Poignantly, and somewhat disturbingly, she dedicates her writing to her own mother "whom I would yet seek to touch" (1981, p 59).

In contrast to the fort/da game between mother and son, where the little god Ernst manipulates the mother to and fro, the daughter of "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other" struggles to separate herself from the reel and thread. Her fort/da game is as much with her own body as it is with that of the mother. Irigaray writes: "A girl does not do the same things when her mother goes away. She does not play with a string and reel that symbolise her mother, because her mother is of the same sex as she is and cannot have the object status of a reel" (1993c, p 97). The daughter has no need to replicate Ernst's masturbatory game of in and out, since she is already touching herself with her two lips. Irigaray offers three alternatives for the little girl: to lose herself in distress, to play with a doll, or to dance.⁵³ Through dancing, Irigaray suggests, the girl creates a space that challenges the binary of "here" and "there", and opens herself "to the cosmic maternal world, to the gods" with "a territory of her own in relation to the mother" (1993c, pp 97-98).⁵⁴

Following Irigaray's line of argument, Tamsin Lorraine suggests that the girl's variation to fort/da is spinning or whirling:

She twirls in circles to continue the intensely immediate sensations of vital contact with her environment. Her whole body

is thrown into and involved with this movement ... She swirls in space to feel the living vitality of her own body which is in complete contact with the world around her. And yet, through identification with the mother she is also able to retain some sense of self in this twirling. She makes her world in this twirling, and so makes herself (1999, p 31).

As Irigaray writes the scene in “And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other” however, the daughter is unable to “make” herself. She herself becomes a reel and thread who is thrown back and forth against the backdrop of her mother’s disappearance and return:

I look like you, you look like me. I look at myself in you, you look at yourself in me ... Here, in front of your eyes, I am another living you. But, always distracted, you turn away ... I would like us to play together at being same and different. You/ I exchanging selves endlessly and each staying herself. Living mirrors.

We would play catch, you and I ... And we don’t need an object to throw back and forth at each other for this game to take place. I throw an image of you to you, you throw it back again, catch it again (1981, pp 61-62).

Struggling to differentiate herself, the daughter is reincorporated into the mother, and into the nourishment the mother provides. The mother is assimilated with food and milk, so that the relationship between mother and daughter is cannibalistic: “You’ve prepared something to eat. You bring it to me. You feed me/ yourself. But you feed me/yourself too much, as if you wanted to fill me up completely with your offering. You put yourself in my mouth and I suffocate”

(1981, p 61).⁵⁵ Resisting her mother's offerings in order to avoid incorporation, the daughter makes a claim for an exchange between them:

Put yourself less in me, and let me look at you. I'd like to see you while you nurse me: not lose my/your eyes when I open my mouth for you; have you stay near me while I drink you ... So that the one doesn't disappear in the other, or the other in the one. So that we can taste each other, feel each other, listen to each other, see each other—together (1981, p 61).

Unheard through the strident claims of her daughter, the mother in this exchange has no voice. Irigaray criticises Freud and Derrida for giving Ernst an angel—a medium for coming and going—but leaving his mother immobile. For making her into a “thing” (2008e, p 123). In “And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other”, the mother is frozen, segmented, motionless. Her daughter cries out: “With your milk, Mother, I swallowed ice. And here I am now, my insides frozen. And I walk with even more difficulty than you do” (1981, p 60). The mother has no identity separate from the womb or breast. There is no woman, no other, no lover here, no sensuousness or eroticism in their relationship—there is only mother. And this, of course, is precisely Irigaray's point. In “Gesture in Psychoanalysis” Irigaray writes: “The mother always remains too familiar and too close. In a way the daughter has her mother under her skin, secreted in the deep, damp intimacy of the body, in the mystery of her relationship to gestation, to birth, and to her sexual identity” (1993c, p 98). There is no separation between mother and

daughter; together, they are without the possibility of a relationship of difference.

The “*parler femme*” strategy of Irigaray’s mother/daughter writing is risky. Marianne Hirsch challenges her exploration of the mother/daughter relationship through masculine paradigms such as Freud’s *fort/da*, arguing that what is developed is an “androcentric system, which, even if it is deconstructed and refined, still remains a determining and limiting point of departure” (1981, p 205). It is in this context that Hirsch describes “*And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other*” as “acknowledging the interpenetration that characterises female identity” (1981, p 210). The term “interpenetration” is a critical one, given Irigaray’s emphasis on labial logic to disrupt masculine economies.

Domna Stanton concurs with Hirsch’s assessment, suggesting that the maternal metaphor in Irigaray’s writing is “an offspring delivered by/from the father” (1989, p 169). Reading Irigaray alongside Cixous and Kristeva’s “*l’écriture au maternel*”, Stanton suggests that these works do not successfully “produce revelations as much as revalorizations ... of *topoi*, images and myths embedded in phallogogic” (1989, p 168). Her criticism of Irigaray is weighed in terms of the transcendence of maternal philosophy, which she measures by asking: “Do [these texts] make an elsewhere reverberate? Do they signal movement ... to another place?” (1989, p 168). Her answer to these questions is in the negative; she concludes that “the

maternal metaphor, in my opinion, does not herald the invention of a different poetic or conceptual idiom” (1989, p 168).

In “Toward an Ethic of Nurturance”, Eléonor H. Kuykendall similarly concludes that Irigaray’s work does not realise a “developed feminist ethic of nurturance” (1983, p 272). She writes:

There is a spiritual vision of mothering as it is lived. But there is lacking still a transition between Irigaray’s often-eloquent celebrations of the maternal and the erotic potentiality of women’s bodily experience as the source of a spiritual matriarchy, and a developed proposal for a body politic. That project awaits our undertaking (1983, p 272).

Since Kuykendall made this point, Irigaray has published *Thinking the Difference*, in which she articulates the need for “sexed rights to be written into law” which recognise the mother as a “civil subject” who is sexually different from the father (1994b, p 11). This includes “the right to motherhood as a component (not a priority) of female identity ... which means the mother will have the right to choose whether to be pregnant and the number of pregnancies” (1994b, p 88).⁵⁶ It is my contention, however, that this text does not fulfill Kuykendall’s call for a transition between the celebration of the erotic and spiritual maternal and the maternal body politic (1983, p 272). For a new mother reading these texts, the weight and physical challenges of pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding and mothering are curiously absent. For example, Irigaray’s suggestion of “putting up posters in all public

places with beautiful pictures representing the mother-daughter couple”, although a delightful prospect, seems absurd when pram-friendly footpaths and toileting facilities are in short supply (1994b, p 9).

The inequality of the relationship between mother and daughter—the uneven weight that Irigaray gives to the daughter’s voice—is similarly problematic, and is compounded in Irigaray’s later work. Annie Smart notes this curiosity also, asking: “Does Irigaray speak *of* or *for* mothers?” (2000, p 391, emphasis in original). She refers to Irigaray’s slippage between the terms “maternal genealogy” and “feminine genealogy” and wonders whether this might be symptomatic of “an unsettled attitude towards maternity” in Irigaray’s writing more generally (2000, p 391):

Mothers are both visible and invisible ... A particular maternal body—subject to pregnancy and childbirth—and a maternal experience are not greatly represented ... Nor does Irigaray explore the idea that motherhood might produce its own particular values, subjectivity, and way of thinking (2000, p 391).

Certainly, the voice of “And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other” is resoundingly that of the daughter. There is no hint of the double or plural subjectivity that Irigaray demonstrates in “When Our Lips Speak Together” when she writes:

We are luminous. Neither one nor two. I’ve never known how to count. Up to you. In their calculations, we make two. Really, two? Doesn't that make you laugh? An odd sort of two ... I love you, childhood. I love you who are neither mother (forgive me, mother, I prefer a woman) nor sister. Neither daughter nor son ...

What need have I for husband or wife, for family, persona, role, function? Let's leave all those to men's reproductive laws. I love you, your body, here and now. I/you touch you/me, that's quite enough for us to feel alive (1985b, pp 207-209).

In this passage, Irigaray rejects the language that defines women as daughters, wives, and mothers in familial relations, and embraces the plural subjectivities that form her definition of woman. The multiple differences of these fluid and ambiguous subject positions are lost in "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other" and *Thinking the Difference*.

Smart also criticises Irigaray's construction of the mother/ daughter relationship as divine. She applies the "interrupting, questioning voice" from *Speculum of the Other Woman* to *Thinking the Difference*:

"The divine and the human were not separate"—according to whom? Do we have examples? "Supernatural mother-daughter encounters took place in nature"—where else could meetings take place in pre-historic/mythic time? Must women occupy a "natural" space? (2000, pp 388-389).

The ambiguities of Irigaray's claims for a utopian, mythic time in which maternity, divinity and sexuality were accorded equivalent respect, are problematic. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray refers to "the disappearance of the great mother-daughter couples of mythology", naming the Greek myths of Demeter-Kore, Clytemnestra-Iphigenia, Jocasta-Antigone (1993a, p 9).⁵⁷ Amber Jacobs challenges her on this point, asking:

If, as Irigaray suggests elsewhere in her work, myth must be read as the foundations of the male imaginary that has become law, then how is it that the mythical mother-daughter couples she mentions ... achieve the status of “traces” of a “pre-patriarchal order”? Irigaray appeals to the restoration of these mythical mother-daughter relationships as if they are not productions of the patriarchal imaginary but hark back to an uncontaminated “before” (2007, p 180).

For Irigaray, memories of childhood seem to hark back to an uncontaminated time. In “Animal Compassion” Irigaray again speaks from the daughter’s perspective. She recollects her love of rabbits as a child, and the joy she found in sharing their company:

When I learned through a letter my mother sent to the boarding school where secondary studies kept me captive of the death of my cherished rabbit, little Moïse, whom I had rescued from drowning in a washtub, I decided that my urban sojourn had lasted long enough. It was time for me to return [home] ... How to obtain the impossible parental authorisation? I began a hunger strike ... I thus found myself back in the garden.

I leave the girl in her preferred landscape with her winged and furry friends. Being thus immersed in life was her consolation, her happiness. She demanded nothing more. But what became of her exiled in “adult life”? In “society”? In the “city”? (2004a, p 196).

Irigaray seems to demonstrate a singular and stable subjectivity with a smooth transition from the girl in the garden to the woman in the city. In my experience, motherhood interrupted such stability and singularity of selfhood, not only through the challenges that pregnancy offers to

constructions of subjectivity, but through the physical, emotional and mental upheaval that motherhood generates. Childhood recollections are overshadowed by complex questions from a mother's viewpoint. Remembering such experiences as those Irigaray describes, it is as though I embody a double subjectivity, with the innocence of the garden superimposed on the anguished and complex decision-making that responds to the daughter's hunger strike. For instance, when Kristeva writes of childhood memories in "Stabat Mater", she recalls honey, softness, roundness, warmth as well as "the echo of quarrels: her exasperation, her being fed up, her hatred" (2002, p 325). But the hatred Kristeva feels from her mother is not straightforward, it is "always held back ... a spasm that is held like a delayed orgasm" (2002, p 325).

There is something of the delayed orgasm in Irigaray's writing, when she imagines a relationship of carnal transcendence between mother and daughter. In "Body against Body: In Relation to the Mother", she writes: "Our task is to give life back to that mother ... We must give her the right to pleasure, to sexual experience, to passion, give her back the right to speak, or even to shriek and rage aloud" (1993c, p 18). She continues: "We need above all ... to discover our sexual identity, the specialness of our desires, of our autoeroticism, our narcissism, our heterosexuality, our homosexuality ... We need to discover what makes our experience of sexual pleasure special" (1993c, p 19-20). Without carnal transcendence, there is no woman or lover. As the daughter in "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other", Irigaray

holds a mirror to the mother and shows her that there is nothing to see. In so doing, she also abjects herself.

I edit my words, I censor myself, because I write to you. There are many things I do not want you to know. If, perhaps, one day, you tell me you are pregnant, I will cry. You will think I cry from happiness, with joy. No. I will cry because of your vulnerability and fragility. I will cry because I remember my weakness after you were born; because I argued with the nurses to allow me to have a shower alone; because for months after, I held onto the railings of staircases and was frightened by crowds. I will cry because your father and I railed, and tore; because your ears were wet with my tears as I nursed you; because my pillow heard fists and screams; because your father's face was mud; because my own mother held and rocked me at three in the morning. Was there some connection between the rupturing of our placenta and the damage to our family? How can we find our subjectivities for ourselves, together? At nearly one and a half, when I ask you to point to mummy, you tap your hands against your own chest. You can identify your father, your grandparents, your friends, yourself, but you stumble when asked to separate me from you. Sometimes I do the same.

Michelle Boulous Walker uses the words sensuous, erotic and amorous to describe the “labial logic” of the mother-daughter relationship that Irigaray imagines as a consequence of carnal transcendence (1998, p 4). She suggests

that Irigaray renders the maternal body sexual and desiring.⁵⁸ Walker writes:

An amorous language becomes the basis for Irigaray's later works where an eroticism between female bodies merges into the preliminaries toward a sexual encounter between bodies both female and male ... Irigaray offers us the mother as a question or problem to be explored ... [Irigaray's philosophy] problematizes the mother in ways that force us to reflect critically on the status of the mother in and for feminist philosophical thought (1998, p 175).

In this chapter, in response to Walker's exhortation to think critically on/as the mother, and Irigaray's challenge to "think" and "change" the "explosive" possibilities of the mother/daughter relationship, I have articulated something of the problematic of the mother, and her libidinal relationship with a daughter, for carnal transcendence as difference (Irigaray, 1993c, p 86). The mother figure evoked here is ambivalent and loving, absent and present, scarred and scary, angelic and carnal.⁵⁹ For Irigaray, a starting point for a maternal model of carnal transcendence is that women "find value in being women and not just in being mothers" (1993b, p 11). For me, a maternal subjectivity that accommodates carnality and divinity recognises the great shifts in subjectivity experienced in becoming a mother, and the contradictory feelings of soul-expanding love and rage. This would mean a recognition of the fort/da game the mother plays on a daily basis—the strings that keep her upright, the threads that stop her reeling through the day, the absence of past certainties, the to and fro, back and forth and pushing and pulling rhythm of feeding, patting, pacing, rocking, and curling into oneself

exhausted. The subjectivities that emerge from this—of the mother as woman—are newly formed and mucus-like in consistency, a notion that will be examined in more detail in the next chapter. The mother-daughter relationship, enabled by the framework of carnal transcendence—the recognition of each other as divine women—moves beyond the mediation of the reel and thread, the placenta, the breast, toward a new conception of self. It is my contention that such a differently sexed culture—one that recognises the carnal transcendence in the relationship of difference between mother and daughter—has not yet been articulated in Irigaray’s philosophy. In light of this, Chapter Four looks to other philosophies that bring together sexuality and divinity, including Romain Rolland’s oceanic feeling, Catherine Clément’s syncope, Georges Bataille’s theory of religion, Alain Corbin’s lure of the sea, and Alphonso Lingis’s rapture of the deep.

Chapter Four

Fluid Subjects

In the speculative philosophy of carnal transcendence as difference, subjectivity is constructed through relations with a transcendent other. The subject positions that emerge occupy multiple and contradictory sites of divinity, sexuality and gender identity. The carnal subject emphasises proximity, touch, contact, whereas the transcendent subject is immaterial, beyond reach, untouchable. Carnal transcendence as difference brings these contradictions together in a subject whose divinity can be grasped in the flesh. The paradox of carnal transcendence, and its slippery and multiple constructions of subjectivity, is evident in the relationships of difference examined in the previous chapters—reader and writer, mother and daughter—and the possibilities these enable for imagining a differently sexed culture.

To demonstrate this line of argument through a negative example, Jean-François Lyotard's mutilation of the body in *Libidinal Economy* is the antithesis of the erotic mattering of carnal transcendence as difference. In what reads as an eroticisation of a human vivisection (that is, assuming a living subject), he writes:

Open and spread, expose the labia majora, so also the labia minora with their blue network bathed in mucus, dilate the diaphragm of the anal sphincter, longitudinally cut and flatten out the black conduit of the rectum, then the colon, then the caecum, now a

ribbon with its surface all striated and polluted with shit (1993, p 1).

In this gesture of violence, Lyotard opens up the body's libidinal or carnal surfaces for analysis, and in this visceral relation, Lyotard's reader is rendered as an exquisite corpse, folded into whatever convoluted form Lyotard constructs, and forced to make meaning without the contextual basis of embodied subjectivity.⁶⁰ Lyotard continues his commands:

At the other end, undo the mouth at its corners, pull out the tongue at its most distant roots and split it, spread out the bats' wings of the palate and its damp basements ... the fine bony pieces of the wrist, the ankle, take them apart and put them end to end with all the layers of nerve tissue which surrounds the aqueous humors and the cavernous body of the penis ... And this is not all, far from it: connected onto these lips, a second mouth is necessary, a third, a great number of other mouths, vulvas, nipples (1993, pp 1-2).

Lyotard flattens the body and all its organs of pleasure into a single skin, which he twists into a Möbius strip. This dissection, he claims, is one of "polymorphous perversion" with sexual gratification dispersed across the body (1993, p 242). Lyotard claims that he wants to unravel the politics of carnal relations by disrupting bodily unity, but in so doing he establishes a masculine libidinal economy, with its mangled labia and dislocated nipples speaking, as he phrases it, to the "hard-on" of theoreticians (1993, p 242). Simultaneously, he assumes the neutrality of his Möbius skin or libidinal band, with its juxtaposition of vulvas and penises.⁶¹

In contrast, the value of Irigaray's philosophy of carnality lies in her emphasis on sexual difference and transcendence. For Irigaray, there is no possibility of unravelling carnal relations or libidinal economies without challenging the "neutrality" or sameness of the logics that sustain them, including the relation between sexuality and divinity. This chapter engages with the complexity of this task by examining alternative theoretical approaches to the relation between carnality and divinity, including Romain Rolland's oceanic feeling, Catherine Clément's syncope, Georges Bataille's theory of religion, Alain Corbin's lure of the sea, and Alphonso Lingis's rapture of the deep. Of particular concern is the way in which these writers represent the subjectivity of carnal transcendence. It is my contention that the experience of a sexualised divine described by each writer ultimately denies difference and annihilates the subject. In the same way, Lyotard's mangled flesh evokes a violent carnality in an attempt to transcend individual subjectivity, but in the process eradicates the sexual specificity of subjective bodily experience.

In opposition to Lyotard's carnal subject, I argue that Irigaray's emphasis on a relation between carnality and transcendence offers a model of intersubjectivity that occupies the dual spaces of the sexual—tactile, immediate, dangerous, abundant—and the divine—immortal, limitless, and ideal. Irigaray's writing on mucus in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* provides a possible model for such an exchange between subjectivity and intersubjectivity: loving, expansive, without interior or exterior, maintaining

the difference between two bodies while enabling their union. In Irigaray's writing, mucus provides a metaphor for the intimacy, connection and intellectual playfulness of a poetics of carnal transcendence as difference.

Intimate Drifting

The theories of Rolland, Clément, Bataille, Corbin and Lingis, despite their differences, evoke the poetics of Gaston Bachelard's watery dreaming, inviting the reader into an elemental and affective amorous exchange. In *Water and Dreams*, Bachelard writes from what he calls a "water mind-set", a poetic imaginary he describes as "elsewhere" which offers "a type of intimacy" or carnality (1983, p 8). In a precursor to Irigaray's writing in *Marine Lover*, Bachelard adopts the "voice" of water, an element he describes as "the mistress of liquid language, of smooth flowing language, of continued and continuing language, of language that softens rhythm and gives a uniform substance to drifting rhythms" (1983, p 187). He writes that liquidity is "the very desire of language" (1983, p 187).

In this chapter, the argument for the subjectivity of carnal transcendence as difference drifts between different philosophies and textual examples, privileging the element of water and the matter of mucus, to explore the "wetness" of the transcendent encounters, the leakage between ideas that cannot be reduced simply to the theoretical, and the embodied sensation of continual flux.⁶² Roland Barthes writes of the pleasure of drifting, which occurs when one is "driven about by language's illusions, seductions, and

intimidations, like a cork on the waves” but chooses to “remain motionless, pivoting on the *intractable* bliss that binds me to the text (to the world)” (1975, p 18, emphasis in original).⁶³ The bliss or *jouissance* that binds the reader to the text, and the self to the world, forms the link between these different authors in the flow of associations and images which follows.

Each of the philosophies of divine carnality explored in this chapter shares an association between transcendence and water, with a series of oppositions emerging: proximity and distance, movement and stillness, control and relinquishment, and transcendence and immanence. For Corbin, a sublime experience, such as witnessing a storm at sea, leaks its way into the body and the psyche. The subject is immersed in a strange matter not of itself, yet one it yearns to connect with (1994, p 127). Through Rolland, Freud looks for the origin of religious sentiment in an association with the sea (1951, p 8). Lingis makes the connection that water promises a depth to subjectivity. The subject lingers in a different plane or dimension, dissolving into erotic multiplicity (or polymorphous perversity) (1983, p 13). In water, Bataille finds a lost intimacy, a relation in which the subject is of the world and the world is of the subject (1989, p 51). After dissolving, Clément returns to herself, asking “where was I?” (1994, p 212). Water destabilises a subject; to follow the metaphor through, one loses one’s footing, is lost in turbulence, struggles for breath, and risks drowning. In the space of the liminal, selfhood is threatened. The subject exists on the threshold, occupying the space as a hinge or a fold, an articulation between the other, the world and the self.⁶⁴ In response to the philosophies explored in this chapter, I ask: is it possible to

experience the divine, and not to lose the self? Can carnal transcendence maintain its promise of imagining a world where divinity and sexuality are as readily accessible and highly regarded as each other?

Bachelard's poetics of water, with its rhythm of ebbing and flowing, and rising and falling, is a language of desire. In his evocation of divinity, Bataille uses the term intimacy; Rolland and Corbin write of contact; Lingis layers erotic language, referring to caressing and being caressed, experiencing voluptuousness, nakedness, desire; and Clément refers to "the sexual drive of the universe" (1994, p 203). Bachelard links water to the fluids of the body—saliva, urine, semen, sweat, blood, tears—and mucus in particular (1983, p 105). He cites Jules Michelet, who suggests that, scientifically speaking, sea-water is a type of mucus—the "universal element of life" (Bachelard, 1983, p 105).

Free-diver Tanya Streeter holds her breath for three minutes and 38 seconds, descends 122 metres underwater to the ocean floor, and returns immediately to the surface.⁶⁵ In that single breath, "her heart rate slow[s] to 15 beats a minute, her lungs compress to the size of scrunched-up plastic bags and her blood cease[s] circulation around her extremities" (Brooks, 2003, no page number). In an interview published in The Guardian in 2003, she describes her relationship with the sea: "I have a strong emotional response to the water. I find it overwhelming and I don't think I've ever properly articulated it. I feel very much protected when I'm underwater ... I feel as though the sea is on my side." The author, Libby

Brooks, describes Streeter as “blonde, with a bikini-friendly body” (2003, no page number). In the photograph that accompanies the story, however, she is masked, clad in a wetsuit, and wearing giant flippers, almost the length of her legs; she looks uncannily inhuman. In contrast with the violent image of pressured lungs and bloodless limbs, she says: “I have an incredible sense of inner peace throughout a dive. It’s a very introspective experience because you are forced to look within to understand how your body is responding to the experience, and to adjust accordingly. It’s very quiet...” (Brooks, 2003, no page number).

Australian free diver Sebastien “the Sub” Murat and his trainer Paul Murray describe their experiences in an interview in The Sydney Morning Herald in 2003. In the accompanying photo, they are in the water. Paul stands upright, hands on his hips; Sebastien is curled up, floating suspended in the water; as Paul describes him, he is “almost aquatic”. Sebastien can hold his breath for up to eight minutes, and holds the world record for the longest underwater swim, at 193 metres. He aims to dive unaided to a depth of 200 metres—“the abyss”, the point at which “your body collapses” (Van Tiggelen, 2003, no page number). Paul describes Sebastien’s life-threatening loss of consciousness or “samba” during one record attempt: “A samba’s a flop-around in the water, a loss of motor control from lack of oxygen. It’s no big deal ... I mean, we train on no air.” The relationship between the two men is all-important: “There is no ‘I’ here. It is a ‘we’ thing.” Sebastien explains that, without Paul, there would be no return: “There’s no way I could swim back from that depth. Going down’s

not a problem. The problem is coming back up.” He describes freediving as another world: “Normal life ... doesn’t mean much to us, in this world” (Van Tiggelen, 2003, no page number).

Alain Corbin in *The Lure of the Sea* and Alphonso Lingis in *Excesses: Eros and Culture* seek to articulate an experience, both material and spiritual, that exceeds representation. In a state of flux or surge as a result of their encounters with the sea, they describe the rupturing of the boundaries between the carnal and the transcendental, the corporeal and the conceptual. Corbin experiences an “indescribable emotion” of bliss or rapture that he understands as sensual, a “desire for close contact as a prelude to an imaginary merging” (1994, p 172). He writes of watching a storm at sea as an evocation of the sublime: “Right down into the observer’s body, the emotion arising from the sublime scene causes the experience of the continuum of natural phenomena to coincide with life rhythms. This emotion is like active matter making its way into the psyche” (1994, p 127). The sublime, like carnal transcendence, is a complex and paradoxical notion. For Lyotard, the sublime is simultaneous pleasure and pain. Lyotard defines it as “the event of a passion, of a possibility for which the mind will not have been prepared, which will have unsettled it, and of which it conserves only the feeling—anguish and jubilation—of an obscure debt” (1993, p 141).⁶⁶ The sublime engages the senses, encompassing or immersing the subject within an event that is at the limits of representation and comprehension.

Lingis writes of the rapture or sublimity of the deep, and his thalassa complex—the urge to return to the sea. Scuba diving in the darkness and quietude of the ocean, he is a haptic critic, a notion from film theorist Vivian Sobchack to be explored in the next chapter; his sight becomes a sense of touch. Lingis is transformed: he rejects human movement, turns off his light and drifts. He writes: “[I] dissolved into the warm thick dark ... I was only depth. Depth ... without planes or horizons, where nothing approached, nothing receded, no sites held fixed, no distances gauged” (1983, p 6). His imagery is violent—he describes his body flailing, out of control, almost limbless, like a “thalidomide baby” (1983, p 6). This association interrupts the flow of his transformation: it becomes ugly and aggressive, acting against the amniotic plenitude he otherwise evokes. In the dissolution of the self (the rejection of the mother?) he claims to find bliss. Switching his light on again, Lingis is a voluptuous eye adrift in the deep, caressing and being caressed by all its sights. He writes: “The eye adrift in the impermanence caresses, is caressed by the laps of brine, the magnesium networks of light, the evanescent slidings of the fish” (1983, p 11). In this intimacy, the objects of the gaze lose their categorisation as things or others: “Under the caress the substance and the life become skin ... Under the caress skin extends a wanton and exhibitionistic nakedness. It exposes its exorbitant materiality, unformed, uninformative, inoperative, provocative and teasing” (1983, p 10). The caressed and caressing eye is indistinguishable from its sights, and detachable from the limits of flesh: “skin that had made contact with the anemone, eye still full of marine water making contact with the eye stuck on the ganglion of the octopus” (1983, p 12). The detached eye is eroticized; it

drifts in and caresses the deep, it is moved by “voluptuous desire ... It is seeking the invisible” (1983, p 13).

Lingis evokes the libido: excess, overflow, sensuality, desire, caresses, voluptuousness. In *Textures of Light*, Cathryn Vasseleu writes: “Erotic pleasure is an acceptance of that which gives of itself, of that which is of no account, of that which has not yet come into being” (1998, p 113). This highlights the erotics that Lingis encounters with creatures of “no account” which have not yet “come into being” themselves. These sea creatures become an extension of the flesh of the subject—“Organs separated in me ... skin that had made contact with the anemone, eye still full of marine water making contact with the eye stuck on the ganglion of the octopus” (1983, p 12). Lingis’s notion of an erotic dismemberment of the body is reminiscent of Lyotard’s libidinal skin. However, Lingis is able to recognise the possibility of an intersubjective definition of erotic pleasure—giving and receiving, relinquishment and control, and the loss and return of the self and the other—that privileges embodied experience. He writes: “Voluptuousness becomes passion when one finds one’s own eyes captured in the look that has sought one out, finds one’s eyes steeped in the frenzy of the lover’s gaze” (1983, p 14). This exchange is not fulfilled in his rapture; passion is unrequited as the creatures of the deep remain unaware of the organs seeking them out.

Corbin’s sublimity and Lingis’s rapture demonstrate an affective relation with nature, in which the relationship between the interiority and exteriority

of the subject and its surroundings is called into question. In her redefinition of the term affectivity, Rosalyn Diprose writes: “Rather than being an aspect of personal existence that occasionally disrupts the integrity of the self for better or for worse, affecting and being affected will be viewed as the basis of the production and transformation of the corporeal self through others” (2002, p 75). The experiences of Corbin and Lingis remain the former: an individual exercise that challenges the integrity of the subject, but without an intercorporeal or intersubjective exchange with an other. For all the erotics of their encounters, Corbin and Lingis experience its wonder alone. Like the free diver, the self that has experienced rapture soon returns to a fixed and stable position; the dismembered body and its organs, once reconfigured, no longer remember the shifting corporeality of the carnal experience.

In Luc Besson’s The Big Blue, Jacques Mayol is a world champion free diver; the sea is on his side. In a phenomenon that we are told “has only been observed in whales and dolphins, until now”, he stops his breath, slows his heartbeat, and dives. His pregnant partner, Johanna Baker, is warned: “Don’t think of Jacques as a human being. He is from another world” (Ledoux and Besson, 1988). Towards the end of the film, immediately after Johanna’s pregnancy is confirmed to her, we enter this other world. Jacques is lying, seemingly asleep, with sunlight through the blinds casting striped shadows over him. We hear the tinkling of bells and a soft moan—the call of the sea. From beside him, we watch as Jacques opens his eyes, and gazes upward. The ceiling shimmers and blurs. At first, it seems to be the watery reflection of the sea outside; then, with a roar, it turns dark blue

and begins to descend towards the bed. Jacques raises his arm, and is immersed. The world tilts sideways, and up becomes down. Families of dolphins swim into view: playfully nosing and rolling to an uplifting tune. Johanna returns home, to share her news, and finds the house dark, and Jacques outstretched on the bed, blank, staring at the ceiling, with blood dripping from his nose. He is still alive: without speaking to her, he rushes to the water and prepares to dive.

I return to the comments made by Sebastien Murat and Paul Murray; Paul says, “Freediving is our life ... Seb may have other pursuits, but I don’t have time for that, basically. If he decides ... he wants to rear children and whatever else, that’s his decision, but we both know what it’s taken to get to this point, and it is not something to be thrown away lightly.” Sebastien responds: “At the moment, I am like a chameleon. I have another normal life with my girlfriend in Cairns. At present my two worlds needn’t interfere too much with each other” (Van Tiggelen, 2003, no page number).

In The Big Blue, Jacques is forced to make a choice. With Johanna watching, he straps on his flippers, and splashes his face: “I have got to go and see.” He seems only peripherally aware of Johanna’s response: “See what? There’s nothing to see, Jacques. It’s dark down there. It’s cold. You’ll be alone.” As she cries, “Jacques, I’m pregnant”, he reaches out his hand, and lowers himself into the water. She lets go: “Go and see, my love” (Ledoux and Besson, 1988). We are in the dark; the music swells; we trace the light and bubbles of his descent. We are far away from the normal

world; we are in another place. And, listening with another ear, we hear the far-off haunting call of the sea. A dolphin swims into view, and beckons; Jacques stretches out, one arm on the diving bar, but the creature stays just beyond reach. He lets go of the connection to the land above—and to the body of the mother—and moves into the darkness.

“Like Water in Water”

In *The Theory of Religion*, Bataille, like Corbin and Lingis, attempts to represent “a mobile thought, without seeking its definitive state” (1989, p 11). Exploring the subjectivity of transcendence, he suggests that unlike human beings, animals exist only in “immediacy or immanence”. Animals are unaware of time beyond the present, and are unable to experience subjectivity or transcendence (intersubjectivity); they are “in the world *like water in water*” (1989, p 19, emphasis in original). For Bataille, religion is humanity’s search for this lost intimacy with the world, for pure immanence and continuity. Bataille’s understanding of intimacy slips toward “something unknowable” that “cannot be expressed discursively”. He writes:

The swelling to bursting point; the malice that breaks out with clenched teeth and weeps; the sinking feeling that doesn’t know where it comes from or what it’s about; the fear that sings its head off in the dark; the white-eyed pallor, the sweet sadness, the rage and the ranting ... are so many evasions.

What is intimate, in the strong sense, is what has the passion of an absence of individuality, the imperceptible sonority of a river, the

empty limpidity of the sky: this is still an empty definition, from which the essential is missing (1989, pp 50-51).

Intimacy or eroticism is a point of connection with the sacred or the divine.⁶⁷ For Bataille, intimacy means a denial of subjectivity. He distinguishes between the profane, the world of things and the economy within which human beings commonly reside, and the sacred, which he describes as the “prodigious effervescence of life” (1989, p 52). In his introduction to Bataille in *The Postmodern God*, Craig James writes that the sacred includes “bodily fluids, laughter, poetry, sacrifice, festivals, religion, sexuality, violence, death, and God” (1998, p 8). In *The Feminine and the Sacred*, Catherine Clément and Julia Kristeva construct a similar definition in a series of letters addressing whether a specifically feminine sacred exists. Their understanding of the sacred finds its character in the morphology of the female body; it is “a leaky being par excellence” (Clément and Kristeva, 2001, p 29). Kristeva proposes the term “perfume” as a metaphor for the sacred porosity of women, but Clément rejects this as “too polite” (2001, p 20). Instead, she offers secretion, humours, odours, since “the sacred is sexual” (2001, p 20). Like Bataille’s association between intimacy and the natural world, Clément finds the sacred in “the enveloping sensation of the absolute when one stands before a mountain landscape, the sea, a sunset, a nocturnal storm in Africa” (2001, p 30).

For Bataille, the sacred is the point at which subjectivity is threatened, where transcendence is a moment of sacrifice: “The only way for the self ... to achieve continuity is by losing itself in the ‘totality of what is’ but this

involves a sudden, sacrificial negation of self ... It ultimately heralds death” (1997, p 6).⁶⁸ To a certain extent, Clément and Kristeva concur with this viewpoint: “Yes, the sacred authorizes the lapse, the disappearance of the Subject, the syncope, vertigo, the trance, the ecstasy, the ‘above-the-roof’ so blue” (2001, p 30). The notion of sacrifice in relation to a feminine sacred, however, is more complex than the annihilation of the subject. Kristeva introduces the example of the maternal body—“the vaginal body, that dwelling place of the species [which] imposes on woman an experience of the ‘interior’, of ‘internal reality’” (Clément and Kristeva, 2001, p 16)—as a figure which complicates Bataille’s model of sacrifice, by locating the communion with the sacred within the embodied world of the profane or the everyday.

In a letter written on December 1, 1996, Kristeva asks:

What if the ancestral division between “those who give life” (women) and “those who give meaning” (men) were in the process of disappearing? What do you think? It would be a radical upheaval, never before seen. Sufficient to herald a new era of the sacred, in fact, which might well be the surprise of this third millennium (Clément and Kristeva, 2001, p 14).

Clément hails Kristeva as a visionary, seeking to awaken the civilisation of the future (2001, p 2). Nevertheless, like Bataille’s yearning for a lost intimacy, there is a nostalgic note to the feminine sacred Kristeva and Clément articulate. Towards the end of their correspondence, Clément writes:

Each in her own way, you and I have both explored the apparent “returns to” in the forms the sacred takes. Return to childhood, to dirt, to the anal stage in initiation rituals; the return to the body, both pure and impure, internal and external, in the precise lyricism of the mystics. The “return” to motherhood ... (Clément and Kristeva, 2001, p 154).

The correspondence is unfinished, and in her final letter Kristeva invites the reader into the exchange: “We seem to have come across all sorts of memories and just as many spaces, in a state of emotion—rather than analysis—in gestation ... I would like readers to join us in the same frankness and questioning spirit that was proper to us, without affectation and without certainty” (2001, p 178). The sacred remains something “experienced in private” on the brink between “body and thought, biology and memory, life and meaning—among men and women” (2001, p 178).

It is in such uncertain places—the elsewheres and the in-betweens—that philosophies of transcendence continue to locate themselves as unrepresentable and inarticulate. It is difficult to grasp subjectivity within such spaces; the subject hovers ghost-like and ephemeral, always collapsing outside of him or herself and into sublimity or jouissance. How might it be possible to encounter transcendence without a lapse in subjectivity? How might it be possible to maintain bodily being—that abject creature of mucus, blood, spit, shit and tears that keeps resisting transcendence and sinking into the dirt? Kristeva’s “perfume” is only evasion; amongst the poetry and beauty of transcendence, must lie its carnality—its sensuality, as well as the stink and mess of humanity. To separate the subject from transcendence—to

speak of losing the self, falling away, lapsing, sacrificing selfhood—is to deny the possibility of transcendence as carnal and everyday. Bataille’s artificial binary between the sacred and the profane is set up to fail: the profane, like a contagion, infects the sacred; the sacred and the profane are indistinguishable like water in water.

In Stephen Daldry’s The Hours, Laura Brown, a pregnant housewife and mother in the 1950s, attempts suicide. She tells her young son, “I have something to do” and leaves him with a neighbour, in tears that are a presentiment that something other than his presence, or the absent-presence of his unborn sibling, is calling her away. She cries as she waves goodbye, and he is left screaming in the middle of the road. As he constructs and destroys a wooden house—in the fort/da game of an older child—Laura takes a hotel room and requests “not to be disturbed”. She lines up four bottles of pills, and continues to read Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway. As she reads, she caresses her belly. “Did it matter, then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely?” (Rudin, Fox, and Daldry, 2002). This is the same Mrs Dalloway, who Virginia Woolf says “had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxicabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone ... to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing” (1996, pp 12-13). In the film, we hear Woolf speak: “It is possible to die. It is possible to die” (Rudin, Fox, and Daldry, 2002). Laura lies on the bed, with her stomach exposed, and gazes at her bottles of pills. She chooses

life. From underneath the bed, a surge of water and seaweed rises up to consume her. She is passive, unresisting; her clothing billows and she is engulfed in plenitude.

Oceanic Feeling

In *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud describes a sensation of rapture communicated to him by Romain Rolland in a letter dated December 5, 1927, written in response to Freud's belief that religion is illusory. Freud summarises the sensation thus:

This consists in a particular feeling, which never leaves [Rolland] personally, which he finds shared by many others, and which he may suppose millions more also experience. It is a feeling which he would like to call a sensation of "eternity", a feeling of something limitless, unbounded, something "oceanic" (1973, p 8).

In his letter, reprinted by William Parsons in *The Enigma of the Oceanic Feeling*, Rolland explains that oceanic feeling is a subjective experience and, although it may be channelled through religion, implies no specific belief. It is however, he believes, the source of religious sentiment. One may, he thinks, "rightly call oneself religious on the grounds of this oceanic feeling alone, even if one rejects every belief and every illusion" (Freud 1973, p 8). Freud explains that oceanic feeling puts him in a difficult position, much like the anxiety that Irigaray's divine generates: "I cannot discover this 'oceanic' feeling in myself" (1973, p 8). Without experiencing it, Freud describes "a feeling of indissoluble connection, of belonging inseparably to the external

world as a whole” (1973, pp 8-9). In his letter, Rolland describes it as “*the feeling of the ‘eternal’* (which can very well not be eternal, but simply without perceptible limits, and like oceanic, as it were)” (Freud, 1973, pp 8-9, emphasis in original). He goes on to explain that this sensation has never failed him: “I have always found in it a source of vital renewal” (Freud, 1973, p 9). Rolland experiences it “like a sheet of water which I feel flushing under the bark”, and adds that, for him, it has nothing to do with yearning, “but the sentiment I experience is imposed on me as a fact. It is *contact*” (quoted in Parsons 1999, pp 16-17, emphasis in original).

In his analysis, Freud suggests a number of possibilities to explain oceanic feeling, which he interprets as the temporary collapse of the ego into the other or into the world.⁶⁹ The sensation of oceanic feeling evokes the becoming of the infant, who learns to separate self and mother: “the ego detaches itself from the external world. Or, to put it more correctly, originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself” (1973, p 13). The ego-feeling of the infant is “inclusive” and “all-embracing” (1973, p 13). In adults, Freud writes that the feeling of the self, or the ego, seems stable; subjectivity is “autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else” (1973, p 13). In the intersubjective experience of erotic love, however, the boundaries of the self are slippery: “At the height of being in love the boundary between the ego and the object threatens to melt away. Against all the evidence of his senses, a man who is in love declares that ‘I’ and ‘You’ are one, and is prepared to behave as if it were a fact” (1973, p 9). Freud suggests that a residue of the infantile subjective

state might persist in adults in this way, possibly to the extent that a person might experience a sensation of “limitlessness and of a bond with the universe” (1973, p 10). Unlike Rolland, Freud does not believe that oceanic feeling is the source of religious sentiment. He writes:

I can imagine that the oceanic feeling became connected with religion later on. The “oneness with the universe” ... sounds like a first attempt at a religious consolation, as if it were another way of disclaiming the danger which the ego recognises as threatening it from the external world (1973, p 14).

Here Freud interprets the oceanic feeling as originating from something outside the subject and, given his resistance to the existence of God, rejects it.⁷⁰

An alternative explanation of oceanic feeling lies in Freud’s articulation of the death drive, or Thanatos. In this interpretation, and in the example of erotic love, oceanic feeling finds its origin in the subject. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud explains the death drive in relation to love as the reverse of erotic immersion in the other (1973, p 122). The desire for oceanic feeling encompasses a desire for quiescence, darkness and nothingness. In *Water and Dreams* Bachelard writes:

A being dedicated to water is a being in flux. He dies every minute; something of his substance is constantly falling away ... Daily death is the death of water. Water always flows, always falls, always ends in horizontal death ... Death associated with water is more dream-like than death associated with earth: the pain of water is infinite (1983, p 6).

The subject seeks to return to the state of intimacy, connection and lack of tension that existed in its infantile state, in its uterine and placental union with the mother. At the same time, the danger or threat of water encroaches.

In *Syncope: the Philosophy of Rapture*, Catherine Clément revisits oceanic feeling, describing it as “a flood; a torrent of waves; a delicious immersion; a feeling of drowning; arriving in a liquid that rolls, shakes, exhausts and draws one up” (1994, p 201). It is, she writes, a “mystical syncope”. As Clément notes, in English the term syncope is open and ambiguous, offering a range of meanings: “a fainting or a swooning and other kinds of loss or absence of consciousness; an irregularity in the heartbeat; a grammatical or other elision” (1994, p xix).⁷¹ Like other philosophies of transcendence, it represents gaps in articulation or the nonsense of meaning. Clément writes: “I am only a philosopher, quick to intertwine the threads of thought around a phenomenon that fundamentally rejects it” (1994, p 7). Where it concerns subjectivity, syncope is “an absence of the self” or a suspension of being “similar to death” (1994, p 1). Clément immerses herself in syncope joyfully, “between laughing and crying, between ecstasy and agony. Joyfully, between the pleasure of orgasm and the happy sadness that follows. Joyfully, playing with our most deeply held beliefs, which, in the space of rapture, no longer exist” (1994, p 21). Syncope is undeniably erotic: delicious, joyful, cresting, followed by a collapse. Clément describes the experience of syncope as “a surprise, a delay of life, a violent anticipation, and a slow return to what one calls the ‘self’” (1994, p 212). When you fall into syncope, Clément writes,

“you never know in what shape you might return: with wolf’s paws, the tail of a serpent, a bark at your lips, a pelt or fur ... One never knows” (1994, p 212). It is here—“the horizon found, and the infinite movement of waves rolling in and pulling away”—that transcendence is located. Clément calls it “the sexual drive of the universe” (1994, p 203).

In an evocation of the association between carnality and maternity discussed in Chapter Three, Clément locates syncope between the angel and the placenta. In syncope, she writes, the subject gives him or herself up (or back?) to the angels (1994, p 1). Like Ernst playing with his reel and thread, in syncope, Clément lends herself to the angels for a short time. It may be that she reconstructs her first dwelling place—Clément writes that it is “impossible to escape birth imagery [of syncope]; there are the first contractions, contradictions, tensing and relaxing the space; the sac breaks and the water is lost, then there is the exit and, finally—following the model of previous syncopes—the cry” (1994, p 211). For Clément, syncope is made up of loss—of consciousness, of bodily fluid, but there remains a residue, the remainder. One example she gives is the placenta: “the remains of what is no longer the child”, no longer the mother; “a lost object, meant to be thrown away ... but potentially suitable for touching or eating, for returning whence they came ... The angel is part of it” (1994, p 211). The curiosity of considering the placenta the first lost object for the child—that which the child will repeatedly throw away and call back during his (her?) life—only

occurred to me after the birth of my daughter: it was my body, not hers, that bled for its absence.

In “The Little Mermaid”, Hans Christian Andersen presents a creature lacking an immortal soul, who seeks passage into the infinite. Her grandmother tells her that creatures of the sea “are like the green rush; once it is cut, it can never grow green again.” Human beings, however, “have a soul which lives forever, lives after the body has turned to dust. It soars up into the bright sky, up to the shining stars. As we rise up to the surface to see the human countries, they rise to the lovely unknown places, places we shall never see.” The mythology of the mermaid is built on longing. It is only through marriage to a man—“if he were to cling to you with all his thoughts and affections, letting the clergyman place his right hand in yours and promising to be true to you here and for ever”—that a mermaid can hope for a soul. In marriage, “his soul would flow into your body ... He would give you a soul and keep his own” (Andersen, 1960, 85-6). The mermaid yearns for these unknown places and the gift of a soul, and offers her voice to the sea witch in return for humanity. The sea witch says to her:

Your tail will split in two and shrivel into what human beings call nice little legs. But it’ll hurt: like having a sharp sword go through you. All who see you will say you are the loveliest little human being they have ever seen! You’ll keep your graceful movements, and no dancer will be as graceful. But every step you take will be like treading on a sharp knife which draws blood (Andersen, 1960, p 89).

The little mermaid accepts the violent price of her nice little legs, but is not loved by the prince in return. She drowns herself (or in some versions, stabs herself) and finds herself flying:

The little mermaid had no feeling of death, but saw the bright sun and, soaring above her, hundreds of lovely transparent creatures ... their voice was music, but so spiritual no human ear could hear it, just as no earthly eye could see them. They glided through the air without wings by their lightness. The little mermaid saw that she had a body like theirs, which rose higher and higher out of the foam. "To whom am I coming?" she said; and her voice sounded like that of the other beings, so spiritual that no earthly music can reproduce it. "To the daughters of the air!" they replied (Andersen, 1960, p 98).

*In the animated film version, Disney alters the story so that the little mermaid seeks the "kiss of true love" from a prince rather than an immortal soul (Ashman, Musker, and Clements, 1989).⁷² The mermaid, Ariel, is marked as a boundary creature by her name, which finds its etymology in "of the air", and evokes Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, so that the mermaid appropriates some of the characteristics of that "airy spirit" who is described as "like a water nymph": a delicacy of form, divinity, synchronicity with the elements, a wish for liberty, and an unearthly singing voice (Shakespeare 1998, p2, p 19).⁷³ It is the voice of the siren that Prince Eric falls in love with in Disney's *The Little Mermaid*. He wakes after a shipwreck to find Ariel, the little mermaid, lying over him and singing,*

surrounded by a halo of light. He mistakes her voice and figure for that of an angel.

Ariel relinquishes her voice to Ursula, the evil sea witch, who lives within a suggestive seascape of an open conch shell. Emerging from the darkness, Ursula's body is shown in pieces and parts—extreme close-ups of her moist red lips, a black mole on her cheek, her bruise-purple skin, fleshy breasts and black velvet-sheathed tentacles.⁷⁴ For Marina Warner, Ursula represents “desiring, rampant lust; an undulating, obese octopus ... what the English poet Ted Hughes might call ‘a uterus on the loose’” (Warner, 1995, p 403). Ursula embodies the femme fatale, described by Mary Ann Doane as characterised by “their languorous poses, their rapacious glances ... exaggerated movements of the hips and arms, with the head thrown back, her hair suddenly spilling down her back, contortions, rolling eyes” (1991, pp 125-126). Ursula teaches Ariel that gender is a masquerade, a performance, telling her: “You have your looks, your pretty face, and never underestimate the importance of body language”, she growls, turning her back to reveal folds of flesh in a low-cut gown and thrusting her hips in exaggerated sexual mimicry (Ashman, Musker, and Clements, 1989).⁷⁵ Ariel moves into the human realm, relinquishing her relationship with the sea.

Water and Air

In *Marine Lover*, a water-saturated analysis of and response to Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Irigaray assumes the position of Nietzsche's

feminine other, and evokes the rapture of the sea. The sea, Irigaray writes, calls “to still-unheard-of truths. A siren song drawing them away from any shore” (1991b, p 46). She asks “is there any greater rapture than the sea? ... Endless rapture awaits whoever trusts the sea” (1991b, p 13). Tamsin Lorraine evocatively describes the marine lover as “lost in becoming”: “She is the sea, the moving flux of waves, the tendrils of seaweed dancing at the bottom of the ocean, the cyclic ebb and flow of the tides on the shore ... She simply responds and pursues her pleasure. She goes where her desire leads her, as it leads her” (1999, p 50). It is this oceanic feeling that Irigaray evokes in *Marine Lover* when she speaks with the unbounded and fluid voice of the feminine other, and offers a becoming to counter that of Nietzsche’s over-man. Irigaray’s marine lover calls to Zarathustra to remember the sea and the feminine other: “Why this persistent wish for legs, or wings? And never gills?” (1991b, p 13).

In an interview, Irigaray claims that she chose to examine Nietzsche in terms of water because “it is the element of which he is most afraid. Water is what disturbs, ices ... both ices and mirrors. It is a pole that I wouldn’t call opposite but different in relation to the sun” (quoted in Grosz 1986, p 8). The notion of subjectivity privileged by Nietzsche is defined in opposition to the mother, whose corporeality is readily evoked through the imagery of the (amniotic) sea. Nietzsche’s texts dwell in airy, open and dry spaces, far from the ocean. In the preface to *Ecce Homo*, he writes:

Those who can breathe the air of my writings know that it is an air of the heights, a *strong* air. One must be made for it. Otherwise

there is no small danger that one may catch cold in it. The ice is near, the solitude tremendous—but how calmly all things lie in the night! How freely one breathes! (1992, p 5, emphasis in original).

As his feminine other, the marine lover calls from beyond, yearns for the divine, and disturbs and disrupts the airy masculine elements of Zarathustra.

The puckish Zarathustra says:

Poets always fancy that nature herself is in love with them; and that she is creeping to their ears to tell them secrets and amorous flatteries ... Alas, there are so many things between heaven and earth of which only the poets have dreamed. And especially *above* the heavens: for all gods are poets' parables, poets' prevarications (1982, p 240, emphasis in original).

His marine lover replies:

Men—perhaps?—know no other way to the divine, even if some sense it nostalgically ... And as they constantly back away from a sudden experience of the divine, they measure up only to themselves, even in regard to their God. Measuring out the path that marks the boundary of their world. From hell to Heaven (Irigaray, 1991b, p 189).

Caught within the sacrifice of a masculine divine, the marine lover mourns the loss of divinity for women:

And from the sea, they will soon have nothing but adornment. Queens carried off from their element. Torn away from their birth. Mixture of life and death, of becoming and eternity ... And love is that which, by separating them from themselves, draws

them to suffer such agonies that they adore, they receive passage into the beyond (Irigaray, 1991b, p 142).

In “Divine Women”, which expands on this passage from *Marine Lover*, the stories of “The Little Mermaid” and *Melusine* provide the starting point for a discussion of becoming divine women. To expand on some of the ideas discussed in Chapter Two—for Irigaray, these transformative stories present to readers “the passage from life in the womb to life in the air”, a life that is situated in ambiguous and ambivalent relations between the sexes. She suggests that such stories of love are “always star-crossed”: “Neither flesh, nor spirit, nor body, nor name are allied, generated, regenerated, allowed to flourish.” She asks why: “Because we are still half-fish, half-birds? Not yet women, born women (or men in fact)? Not yet human and divine?” Reading “The Little Mermaid”, “we are investigating something that attracts us, fascinates us even, like a mystery, a key to our identity” (1993c, p 59).

The little mermaid is without a maternal genealogy—one possible beginning for locating a feminine divine. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray calls for “a genealogy of the divine among women, and in particular between mother and daughter” (1993a, p 168). In *Thinking the Difference* she asks: “How have we come to this—all of us, and especially we women? One of the lost crossroads in our becoming women lies in the blurring and erasure of our relationships to our mothers” (1994b, p 99). She writes of the “destruction of female ancestry, especially its divine aspect” (1994b, p 100). The traditional mother/daughter relationship, she suggests, like the absence in “The Little Mermaid”, is premised on a type of “motherlessness”. The

mother in such a relationship, as Elizabeth Grosz interprets Irigaray's argument, is "not woman"—and therefore not "becoming divine" as woman—within a "constrained maternity" (1989, pp 120). The mother, for Irigaray, is a part of the "mute substratum", the unacknowledged other of Western culture (Grosz, 1989, pp 120-121). Within this relationship, Grosz writes, the daughter is "in exile": "She has no woman with whom to identify" (1989, p 123). In the previous chapter, I argued that Irigaray's writing on the mother/daughter relationship privileges the subjectivity of the daughter; in this way, Irigaray herself contributes to the blurring and erasure of the daughter's relationship to her mother, particularly in "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other". The embodied and carnal mother is constrained, muted and exiled in Irigaray's writing, just as she is in "The Little Mermaid".

The mermaid of Andersen's tale lacks a mother and an intersubjective path to divinity, experienced through carnal love as a model for being two. In *The Way of Love*, Irigaray suggests that the divine "assumes an important place as the becoming of the human itself which, through love, transubstantiates body and spirit" (2002f, p 11). Irigaray imagines the divine – the "wisdom of love" – mediating between philosophy and theology: "The divine there assumes an important place in the becoming of the human itself which, through love, transubstantiates body and spirit" (2002f, p 11). Whitford summarises Irigaray's conception of love as a space that bridges the human and the divine:

Love is the vehicle that permits a passage between, the passage to and fro between the sensible and intelligible, mortal and

immortal, above and below, immanent and transcendent. Instead of an abyss, or an enclosure which defines an inside and outside, there should be a threshold, and the possibility of permanent passage in and out, to and fro, from the highest to the lowest, and back again (1991, p 164).

Thinking through an indissoluble connection with the other, Irigaray explains her recent work as “trying to define a new model of possible relations between man and woman, without the submission of either one to the other ... the construction of an intersubjectivity respecting sexual difference” (1996, p 3). To ensure the difference between the two subjects is respected, Irigaray rewrites “I love you” as “I love to you”. She explains that a “to” is necessary between “I love” and “you” to “maintain a relation of indirection to you. I do not subjugate or consume you” (1996, p 109). As Kelly Oliver puts it in “The Look of Love”, *I love to you* “adds the dimension of movement and the in-between *I* and *you* missing from the formulation that sounds as though my love can assimilate you” (2001, p 65, emphasis in original).

Without an alternative path to divinity, the little mermaid chooses an elemental becoming—as a “daughter of the air”. In *The Forgetting of Air*, Irigaray writes: “Is not air the whole of our habitation as mortals? Is there a dwelling more vast, more spacious, or even more generally peaceful than that of air? ... No other element carries with it—or lets itself be passed through by—light and shadow, voice or silence” (1999, p 8). Air is the place where we can locate our becoming, even as we pass through the stages of oceanic

becoming. Irigaray situates us here: “to live—to breathe: to become—to change/alter” (1999, p 164). She writes: “Once we have left the *waters* of the womb, we have to construct a place for ourselves in the *air* for the rest of our time on earth ... To construct and inhabit our airy space is essential. It is the space of bodily autonomy, of free breath, free speech and song, of performing on the stage of life” (1993c, p 66, emphasis in original). In her later work, Irigaray seems to reject the watery becoming of *Marine Lover*, and her critique of the airy Nietzsche, to focus on the importance of breath in the construction of autonomous subjectivity.

In Sebastian Gutierrez’s film She Creature, the mermaid is a portent of fertility and death. Lily is an ex-prostitute who has been rendered infertile by a botched backyard abortion. She sings and dances for a circus act, dressed as a mermaid in an erotic show. An old man visiting the circus spies Lily undressing after a show: “You are no mermaid”, he tells her (Arkoff, Camp, Winston, and Gutierrez, 2001). He knows: he keeps the Queen of the Mermaids—saying her name only in hushed tones—chained in a glass cell in his house. She is a sea serpent, reptilian, with webbed fingers, a forked tail, pale water-soaked flesh, and an incomprehensible ululating voice, like the sound of a wild sea. Her vision, which we see in glimpses, is through a sheen of blood: she sees only red. She is dark and terrifying, a true man-eater. Once a month, the old man tells us, she becomes human “legs, feet and all”. For one night, she is “virginal, innocent and meek” (Arkoff, Camp, Winston, and Gutierrez, 2001). The rest of the month she is voracious, carnal, alluring. Lily and her partner Angus knock out the old man and

take the mermaid—the perfect circus freak—on a sea voyage. Even chained and guarded in a cabin, the scent of the sea strengthens her. Between bouts of nausea—seasickness? morning sickness?—Lily reads the journal of the old man’s wife, Therese, pregnant as an old woman, and consumed by the mermaid. Lily becomes more wanton and amorous—Angus describes her as “quite forceful”: “Perhaps the ocean is bringing out the animal in you” (Arkoff, Camp, Winston, and Gutierrez, 2001). She experiences disturbing dreams of death and dismemberment, as though the mermaid is a vampire. At the full moon, the mermaid becomes human. The sailors flock around “this little whore”—“Deaf and dumb, I like that in a woman” (Arkoff, Camp, Winston, and Gutierrez, 2001). These men are marked for death. The mermaid transforms again: monstrous, alien, vast. We are in the feeding ground of a lascivious and fertile monster, a watery grave. Lily makes it out alive with her daughter, whose eyes are the colour of the sea.

Mucus and the Soul

In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray suggests that mucus might take the place of a soul for women:

The mucus, in fact, is experienced from within. In the prenatal and loving night known by both sexes. But it is far more important in setting up the intimacy of bodily perception and its threshold for women. Does the mucus perhaps take the place of the soul for women? But of a soul that is never spoken? Alien to everything yet said of the soul as such? (1993a, p 109).

Irigaray continues with a list of reasons why it is imperative to “think through” mucus (a wonderful moist and blurry erotic logic). Mucus, in this sense, refers to the viscous, slimy, slippery mixture of water, mucins, cells and salts that is secreted by mucous membranes. It protects and lubricates all of the cavities of living bodies that open to the outside or to other bodies. Irigaray writes: “Any thinking of or about the female has to think through the mucus ... No thinking about sexual difference that would not be traditionally hierarchical is possible without thinking through the mucus (1993a, p 110). Mucus is the “trace” of sexual difference—indicated in Chapter One—to which Rosi Braidotti refers when she writes of the difficulty of representing the “unrepresentable” female subject:

The difficulty consists in thinking through and expressing the in-between spaces, the transit-areas, the transitions and the shifts which make up the nomadic itinerary. It’s these moments of nomadic transit that are both crucial to the process of theoretical creation and also quite resistant to representation: how does one configure that which goes in-between A and B and does not coincide with either? What counts in the project of sexual difference is the in-between spaces, the itinerary, rather than the final destination. The “feminine” in question is the trace of this journey, not its arrival-point (2004, p 162).

For Irigaray, mucus represents the feminine in sexual difference, since it “always leaves a trace behind”. Irigaray celebrates mucus for “its abundance ... its availability, its joyfulness, its flesh” and cautions against a failure to embrace it (1993a, pp 110-111). Making explicit the link between sexual

difference and transcendence, Irigaray states that the aspect of mucus that remains the least examined is its relation to the divine. She writes:

At issue would be a kind of divinity with whom one might be welcoming, festive, specifically because the God that Nietzsche talked about is dead. In other words, because the mucus has a special touch and properties, it would stand in the way of the transcendence of a God that was alien to the flesh, a God of immutable, stable truth. On the contrary, the mucus would summon the god to return or to come in a new incarnation (1993a, p 110, upper and lower case in original).

Irigaray's recent work seems to run counter to this position, and to contradict a carnal subjectivity of transcendence embodied through fluid or mucus. In "The Age of Breath", Irigaray writes: "The divine appropriate to women, the feminine divine is first of all related to the breath. To cultivate the divine in herself, the woman, in my opinion, has to attend to her own breathing, her own breath, even more than to love" (2004b, p 165). Margaret Whitford provides a point of connection between these seemingly contradictory philosophies: "The mucus is also related to air, because of the mouth's links with breathing, speaking and singing. Air corresponds closely to a possible female imaginary; it is both mobile and immobile, permanent and flowing ... yet it is that of which the philosopher may remain permanently unaware" (1991, p 163).

Whitford associates mucus with the non-theorised or the unthought. She lists the ways in which this is the case: mucus is (a) interior, cannot

be seen in a flat mirror; (b) more accessible to touch than sight; (c) essential to the act of love, to exchange between the sexes; (d) always partly open; (e) unable to be reduced to the maternal-feminine; (f) not part object, not able to be separated from the body; (g) not solid or fluid; (h) not stable, without fixed form, not set in a shape; (i) unable to be swallowed or spat out; (j) associated with the two sets of lips, to silence and speech (1991, p 163). This list becomes ambiguous in its association between mucus and unthought; certainly, it is thought-provoking. For example, I try to wrap my tongue/mind around the inability to swallow or spit mucus—because, in relation to my speaking lips, I thought we were also talking about/with saliva, if nothing more. Evident in Whitford's summary of the qualities of mucus are some of the limitations I have already identified in Irigaray's construction of sexual difference; the reference to mucus in the act of love, singular, which represents exchange between the sexes. This is unnecessary; mucus, of all of Irigaray's concepts, is not reserved for the heterosexual couple. Despite this, Whitford communicates some of the abundance and joy of thinking through mucus. Tamsin Lorraine follows her lead, but by implication breaks down the male/female dualism, when she writes that mucus is "Irigaray's term for the unthought moving toward representation—those strangely uncanny aspects of experience that defy already established self/other and body/mind divisions" (1999, p 37).⁷⁶

Exploring the qualities of mucus, Lorraine writes: "The body is inert without its relation to mucus. Mucus is its point of contact; by virtue of its

ambiguous role vis-à-vis the clear-cut boundaries of intact bodies, it presents a living material that brings one closer to the infinite beyond which exceeds all boundaries” (1999, p 40). By virtue of its living qualities, mucus offers a model for a simultaneous divinity and carnality: its presence in an act of love, its trace, its instability and impermanence, its lack of fixed form, its expansiveness, and its disruption of the interior and exterior boundaries of bodies and their becomings.

Hilary Robinson, in *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray*, also identifies the role of mucus—“the site of mediation”—in breaking down binary oppositions. For Robinson, thinking through the mucus (realising its “morpho-logic”) is crucial for woman-woman relationships (including mother and daughter), woman-man relationships and for woman herself. Following Irigaray’s discussion of the two lips, she suggests that mucus “mediates a woman to herself, and also mediates her, in her difference and specificity, to her lover” (Robinson, 2006, p 104). The morphology of mucus, she argues, “allows for both the relinquishing of control and the presence of the subject demanded by ... intersubjectivity” (2006, p 104). Curiously, Robinson is the only writer I have encountered who recognises the grammatical slippages in Irigaray’s writing on mucus, and the readings of her commentators. Mucus is the noun; mucous is the adjective; hence the definition above which refers to mucus secreted by the mucous membranes. In Irigaray’s writing, the slippages might occur—assuming intent, if the reader is generous—because, as Robinson reads her, “what Irigaray is

doing—practising—in her work ... [is] speaking *in* the morpho-logic of the ‘lips’ and the mucus” (2006, p 108, emphasis in original). To put it another way, Irigaray’s mucous writings invite an encounter with the logic of mucus.

Irigaray writes: “Because the mucus has a special touch and properties, it would stand in the way of the transcendence of a God that was alien to the flesh” (1993a, p 110). Earlier in the text of *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, she says in passing: “The mucus should no doubt be pictured as related to the angel” (1993a, p 17). Lorraine suggests that, like mucus, “angels maintain the body’s contact with the divine by mediating with the mortal body and its infinitely variable contact with the sensuous world” (1999, p 40). Mucus offers a possible model for a simultaneous divinity and carnality, offering an association with mediation, transformation, exchange, uncontained flowing, fluidity, and love: its presence in an act of love, its trace, its instability and impermanence, its lack of fixed form, its expansiveness, and its disruption of the interior and exterior boundaries of bodies and their becomings. In “The Mechanics of Fluids”, Irigaray interrogates an aporia in scientific texts that she associates with the feminine: the elaboration of a theory of fluids.

In *Forever Fluid*, Hanneke Canters and Grace M. Jantzen define fluidity in relation to Irigaray’s work in four ways. First, fluidity “refers to a logic generated by the emergence of (sexually) different subjects” who are “continually becoming forever fluid” (2005, pp 4-5). Second, fluidity defines the female subject who disrupts the binary oppositions of the traditional

construction of subjectivity as the one and the other and “passes out of the boundaries in which she has been positioned” (2005, p 4). And, third, Irigaray’s language is fluid: “poetic, full of (unanswered) questions, playful and elusive”, it escapes the grasp of the reader time and again (2005, p 5). Finally, Canters and Jantzen conceive fluidity beyond the scope of Irigaray’s work to consider subject positions that extend past sexual difference into the “creative performance” of other modes of difference (2005, p 5).⁷⁷

A philosophy of fluidity, above all, pertains to carnality, transcendence and difference. Irigaray writes: “What is left uninterpreted in the economy of fluids—the resistances brought to bear upon solids, for example—is in the end given over to God”; that which remains to be articulated is “God or feminine pleasure” (1985a, pp 108-109). Within a fluid or mucus logic, the Möbius self, to reconceive the violence of Lyotard’s libidinal economy, is a carnal subject within an intersubjective and intercorporeal exchange with another. Transcendence occurs not, as Lyotard would have it, through violence and the annihilation of subjectivity—the exposure of the cavities of the body so that they dry up—but through the excess, overflow and in-between of mucus. The philosophies explored in this chapter suggest that the experience of carnal transcendence annihilates the self—Lingis “dissolves” into his rapture; Bataille’s ultimate intimacy is death; Freud interprets oceanic feeling as “the collapse of the ego”; and Clément and Kristeva imagine the disappearance of the subject in the sacred. This construction is opposed to Irigaray’s carnal transcendental, which offers a different subjectivity (or a subjectivity of difference) through a model of being two.

The experience of the divine, far from signalling the annihilation of the subject, is an intimacy that offers a deepening of subjectivity. The subject of the carnal transcendental, like woman with two sets of lips, is plural. Evoking the two lips in relation to the carnal transcendental brings mucus into play. Mucus is a point of connection or threshold between carnality and divinity; the divine, carnal subject is without distinct interiors or exteriors in relation to the other. Like Lyotard's Möbius strip, this is not a union that sees the one collapsing into the other. Such a conception offers a "libidinal economy" that is both masculine and feminine and a means of articulating the mysteries of absence, transcendence, carnality, without resorting to a violent dissection of the body and its pleasures. The next chapter asks whether the libidinal economy that Irigaray's writing on mucus offers is evident in her poetic work *Everyday Prayers*.

Chapter Five

Poetics

In *The Way of Love*, Luce Irigaray writes: “In order to talk to the other, to listen to the other, to hold a dialogue between us, we have to again find an artistic, musical, touchful way of speaking ... and of listening, able to be perceived in a written text” (2002f, p xx). So far in this thesis, I have argued that Irigaray’s philosophy elaborates a speculative philosophy of carnal transcendence as difference, which is practiced by her readers through the poetics of an amorous textual exchange. To briefly recapitulate this argument, carnal transcendence entertains the possibility that the physical and spiritual share the same weight and potential. The term “touchful” in the context of the above quote from Irigaray describes an experience of a carnal transcendental that manifests as a poetics. Poetics refers to a process of textual play in which a text is criticised through a performative rewriting.⁷⁸ In *Touching Thought*, Ellen Mortensen defines poetics as “a mode of reading or thinking ontologically” (2002, p 4). She suggests that poetics resists the assumption that the subject (writer or reader) can master the object (text or theory), and continues: “Instead, poetic thinking attempts to listen to that which has been forgotten or unheard of in ... frantic theorizing” (2002, p 4). Together, a poetics of carnal transcendence rewrites the terrain of the corporeal and the conceptual in an attempt to transform subjectivities (reader, writer, mother, lover, philosopher).

In this chapter, a critical reading of Irigaray's published collection of poems, *Prières Quotidiennes (Everyday Prayers)*, provides an opportunity to challenge Irigaray's claim that her poetry is a performance of a touchful "feminine" writing, and to speculate on the effectiveness (or otherwise) of performing a poetics of carnal transcendence. Given the limited release of the collection, in the first half of the chapter (*Reading Everyday Prayers*) I reproduce six of the poems, and at the same time perform a close textual analysis, which provides evidence for the arguments made in the second half of the chapter (*Almost Touching*). Elsewhere in her philosophical writing, Irigaray demonstrates a poetic and touchful style through an amorous exchange, which she elaborates in relation to the construction of a feminine subjectivity (for example, in *Marine Lover*) or a model for loving relationships (in *I Love to You* and *The Way of Love*). This chapter asks whether an unsuccessful touchful exchange in *Everyday Prayers* renders the poetics of carnal transcendence immaterial, an exercise in rhetorical pronouncement rather than the transformative and creative process that Irigaray envisages.

Reading Everyday Prayers

The collection of poems in *Everyday Prayers* opens on August 14, 1997, and concludes on July 21, 1998. There are sixty-one poems in total, between ten and thirty lines each, written in free verse. The poems are selected from those written daily as a form of "meditation, prayer [and] contemplation" of divinity, nature and the relation with the other (2004c, p 32).⁷⁹ The French

and English text is presented side by side, as I have done in a replication of six of the poems here, with the translations offered by Irigaray herself (with the assistance of Timothy Matthews) (2004c, p 3). In the textual analysis of the poems that follows, I ask the following questions: how do the poems evoke touch? How do they function as a meditative practice? Does the poet invite any exchange with the reader? Is there a rethinking of subjectivity? How is the becoming of the poet evident? Is becoming similarly experienced by the reader? Is a feminine way of perceiving demonstrated? Is the sparseness or poverty of language that Irigaray claims actually utilised? Are the poems touchful? Do they evoke a carnal transcendental?

My answers to the questions demonstrate the difficulty of the encounter that the reader experiences with these poems. Rather than being touchful, the relationship corresponds more closely with an absence of touch, or a not-touching. To put this simply: the self that is touched and awakened throughout the poems is the self of the poet; the “other” self of the reader is dormant. In the divine union or joining celebrated in the poems, there is no residue or excess; there is no touchful space for the other to occupy. In other words, there is no carnal difference in which the other is recognised as unassimilable to the self. The poetic realisation of carnal transcendence does not take place for the reader—no matter how explicitly it is performed by the “couple” within the poems—and so the poems risk making a carnal transcendence a philosophy that can be announced but not enacted.

My reading of *Everyday Prayers* raises important, and difficult, questions: what happens if a “touchful” text fails to touch the reader? How can one engage with the elaboration of a carnal transcendence if the reader does not experience the synaesthesia the writer promises? Does the absence of touch, or an oscillation between touching and not-touching, render a textual encounter infertile? What value does a carnal transcendental have if it remains rhetorical rather than experiential? And, most importantly in the context of this thesis, is a philosophy of carnal transcendence discredited altogether if its experience is unable to be translated textually?

21 Août

Le bonheur d'elle
 Entre instant et éternité.
 À nous de créer le temps,
 De tisser entre maintenant et toujours.
 Transmutant l'énergie,
 La décuplant en nous,
 Entre nous,
 Ou l'harmonisant,
 L'oeuvrant:
 Art de la chair
 Fait de nos corps et de nos âmes
 Divinement unis.

August 21st

The happiness of her
 Between instant and eternity.
 It is up [to] us to create time,
 To weave between now and always.
 Transmuting the energy,
 Multiplying it in us,
 Between us,
 Or harmonizing it,
 Working it:
 Art of the flesh
 Made of our bodies and our souls
 Divinely joined.

In this poem, the subjects—her and us—are ambiguous. The reflection of the poem is prompted by *her* happiness (or the happiness *of* her, the seemingly awkward translation suggests); but who is she, with this distant and disowned happiness? By using the phrase “le bonheur d'elle” Irigaray

suggests something beyond the possession of happiness. There is no punctuation between the first and second lines so that “between instant and eternity” is relative to the “happiness of” this woman. Who is she? Is she a part of the possible couple—the “us” and the “our”—that the poem speaks of? Is she other than the author of the poem? In *July 18th* Irigaray writes of happiness “in her” (“Le bonheur en elle”) referring to encountering happiness in nature: “The air, / The blue immensity / The warm wind” (“L’air, / L’immensité bleue, / Le vent chaud”). In *September 11th*, Irigaray writes: “Gathering in the deepest self/ the love with her ... To be frightened for her / Out of ignorance of the peril we run” (Rassembler au fond de soi / L’amour avec elle ... Avoir peur pour elle / Par ignorance du péril couru”). Read alongside these other poems, it is the happiness of nature that begins this August poem. An alternative possibility is that Irigaray is referring to the female half of the couple in the third person. If this is the case, the shift from “her” to “us” and “our” suggests that the poem is written from a masculine point of view. This is unlikely given Irigaray’s statement in the introduction to her poems that her aim is to present “a revelation of a feminine way of perceiving and thinking ... Far from being arrogant, scholarly language, here is a vehicle that tries to convey ... colors, sounds, smells, flavors” (2004c, p 30).

Line 3 of the poem seems to suggest that the creation of time is the province of lovers. In love, there is a new relation to temporality. In the introduction, Irigaray writes that “except for allusions to some events in love, temporality is asserted little in these poems.” The use of the present tense refers to “an

eternity born of the instant. Such a temporality is often credited or left to the elements of nature: the sky, the air, the sun, the wind, the flowers” (2004c, p 44). In this poem, the happiness *of nature* lies between moment and infinity. The timeframe belongs to nature, and not to the lovers. The lovers borrow nature’s time—the different temporality of sky, wind, flowers—and weave it into their embraces. Who are these lovers? On *November 14th* the “I” and “you” are “those who love her” (“Ceux qui l’aiment”)—these are nature lovers. In their love of nature, the lovers recognise the other. In this and other poems in the collection, the alterity of nature replaces difference between the lovers, who are fused together in a divine union.

In this poem, the word choices in the English translation cause the reader to stumble. Line 5: transmuting the energy? To transmute means to change from one form or substance to another, as in an alchemist’s (already futile) attempt to convert base metal to gold. These are complex words that disrupt harmony, interrupting the simplicity of the imagery. There is no poverty or sparseness of language on offer here, and no privileging of infinitives, which runs counter to Irigaray’s intentions for this poetry—to demonstrate a touchful mode of writing.

Similarly, to speak of the energy of lovers in this context is a curiosity. Is it intended to suggest force? Or desire? The metamorphosis of this energy is creative, so it seems that Irigaray’s lovers recharge themselves and seek harmony in nature. The poet wants to reflect on the creativity of the couple, playing with their desire for one another, and taking time from the world.

The lovers of the poem are “working it”—what fun they are having!—but the context of the poem suggests that they are crafting or creating. Art of flesh. There is a suggestion communion in the blending of body and soul in this poem. This is an inscription, written by the poet, on the body and the soul of the other. But who is this other? For Irigaray, this union would be the realisation of a carnal transcendental; however, there is no separation or fracture, and therefore no carnal difference, between these lovers, divinely joined. Individual subject positions are erased: there is no “I” or “you”. In “our” divine joining, Irigaray speaks to the masculine other. The touch that is expressed in this poem is between these conjoined bodies and souls. The openness of the genders and of their relation in the poem—are they lovers at all?—might allow the reader to locate him or herself within this union, however, it seems that there is nothing outside the fusion of the lovers and nature.

8 Septembre

Tu m’as ouvert le ciel:
 Comment te perdre?
 Le bonheur est venu de toi.
 Contempler le ciel est béatitude,
 Le vivre comme extase en moi
 Est félicité.
 Parfois les deux s’unissent
 En un instant d’éternité,
 Où le dedans et le dehors
 Allient l’univers, toi et moi
 Dans un amour divin.

September 8th

You have opened the heavens to me:
 How could I lose you?
 Happiness has come from you.
 To gaze at the sky is beatitude,
 To live it as ecstasy in me
 Is bliss.
 Sometimes the two unite
 In a moment of eternity,
 In which the inside and the outside
 Join the universe, you and me
 In a divine love.

The subjects—"you" and "me"—that were missing in the fusion of the last poem have appeared. The poet speaks to the "you" or "tu" who has brought happiness and the heavens. Who is this intimate—a friend, child or lover? If the "you" of the poem refers to the male lover, it is a reminder of the comment Irigaray has made in the introduction: "These poems ... are a way of letting the other hear something of the mystery that I represent for him, of allowing him to avoid confusion or misrecognition, of providing him with signs which permit him to safeguard the two and our dialogue" (2004c, p 47). Unlike the poem previously analysed (*August 21st*), two subjects are evident in this poem, but once again there is no mystery between them. They are united, divinely joined, without an inside or an outside that is separate from the other. Which two unite in this poem? "You" and "me"? Happiness in you and appreciation of the sky? Earthly love and heavenly sky? In line 9, the binaries that collapse in the poem are revealed: the inside and the outside. In divine love, like a Möbius strip, it seems that there is no distinction between two. The happiness comes from the masculine you in this poem, not from her (nature?). Is this the enunciation of a feminine poetics? *I cannot lose you because all happiness/ pleasure/ bliss comes from you? How could I lose you (for I would lose myself)?*

The heavens have opened, and the nuance of this in English (that it may be raining on the lovers) is elided. The double meaning of "le ciel" is translated as "heavens" in line 1, and "sky" in line 4. The poet wishes to show that the beloved has offered a glimpse of something beyond in a moment of carnal transcendence. The layering of orgasmic language in the poem—ecstasy,

bliss, unite—alongside religious language—heavens, beatitude, eternity—is no coincidence. In Catholic tradition, the date of this poem—September 8—celebrates the Birth of the Virgin Mary. To recapitulate a point from Chapter One: Irigaray’s response to a painting of the infant Mary and her mother Anne is revealing: “I felt once again at ease and joyous, in touch with my body, my emotions, and my history as a woman” (1993b, p 25). Some of this emotion is communicated in this poem, perhaps in awareness of the Catholic calendar.⁸⁰

The poet says: you have opened the sky to me. This follows on from the fear of losing the other in the vast blueness of the sky. The poet says: Happiness has come from you. And is coming from you. Later (*April 27th*), the poet writes: “Of course, I dwell nearly in the sky” (“Certes, j’habite presque dans le ciel”). In this poem, the sky (or heaven) is a substitute for the lover—a living substantive which alters the incarnation of the lover. He is more than human: eternal and universal, he occupies the place of the divine for her. The term beatitude in line 4 implies sainthood, blessedness and religious honour. To gaze at the sky would correspond to the less common meaning of beatitude: bliss. Indeed, elsewhere *béatitude* is translated as bliss (*July 18th*). The playful rhyme of *félicité* and *éternité* is lost in the English bliss and eternity.

On *August 13th*, the poet also encounters the blue of the sky and the blue of the earth. The phrase in this poem: “Le bleu du ciel” comes from Georges Bataille’s novel of that name, translated into English as *Blue of Noon*. In *Key*

Writings, Irigaray has mentioned that this novel is “within arm’s reach [on] my bookshelf” (2004b, p 103). In “A Future Horizon for Art?” Irigaray analyses Bataille’s use of language in the novel, exploring his distribution of gendered subjects. Of the four authors she explores—Marguerite Yourcenar, Marguerite Duras, Maurice Blanchot and Georges Bataille—the latter uses the most “she” subjects. This “she” however is “the partner or the object of an action performed by a masculine *I*” (2004b, p 107). Interestingly, the poem in which Irigaray uses the phrase from Bataille contains no subject pronouns at all. What might this suggest for a feminine and touchful poetics? Within the novels of Yourcenar and Duras—who, Irigaray critically notes, have publicly declared that they write as asexuate subjects—“*she* is hidden or is sometimes expressed in the guise of natural elements” (2004b, p 107, emphasis in original). It seems that the “she” of *Everyday Prayers* occupies a similar space: “Nothing breaks / The communion with her” (“Rien ne rompt / La communion avec elle” (*October 31st*); “Fragments of wafer / In which commune through the air / Those who love her” (“Fragments d’hostie / Où communient dans l’air / Ceux qui l’aiment”) (*November 14th*). The “she” of these poems is nature, and it seems “he” offers her happiness and divinity.

To paraphrase the poem, the exchange between the lovers might be as follows: To contemplate or to consider the sky or the heavens (my beloved) is blissful. You have opened the way to heaven for me. By sharing your sky (your divine self) with me, you have bestowed on me the greatest happiness. The open sky is boundless and vast, like life in a moment of joy. Living an

ecstatic life in divine union with you is bliss. If this poem speaks to a masculine lover, is it possible for him to hear this and avoid confusion or misrecognition? The message he hears, perhaps, is: you are my god.

2 Novembre

Avancer en elle
Paisible,
Animée d'une secrète force,
D'une intime jubilation
Irradiant mes os eux-mêmes,
Me soulevant de ma pesanteur.
Mon corps rit vers le céleste,
Sa perfection bleue,
Tandis que je contemple
Le familier ici-bas
Transfiguré de lumière.

November 2nd

To step forward in her
Peaceful,
Moved by a secret strength,
An intimate elation
Irradiating even my bones,
Lifting me from gravity.
My body laughs towards the sky,
Its blue perfection,
While I contemplate
The familiar world here below
Transfigured by the light.

It is November in this poem, and the season has turned since the August beginnings of the collection. The transition of the seasons is an important aspect of Irigaray's poems, with their emphasis on nature, the sky, clouds and flowers. In August, the summer breathes and a scorching sun unites (*August 13th*), and *September 16th* offers the sensual and "tender gift of a summer's end" ("Tendre cadeau de fin d'été"). By *October 12th*, the day is colder and the lovers have "A taste for a soft nest in the evening / A nostalgia for open arms, / For a space to coil up in, / After a summer's wandering in nature" (Le goût du nid tiède le soir. / La nostalgie de bras ouverts, / D'un lieu où se lover / Après l'errance en elle de l'été"). Irigaray envisages the relationship of the lovers moving and changing in response to the seasons. In autumn, the

lovers “take refuge in the nest of the heart, the dwelling of breath and the embrace after summer wanderings in a solar nature ... If meeting in nature has become impossible, at least the lovers attempt to join each other through the wind, clouds, birdsong, from the shelter of the body, or of the home” (2004c, p 38).

In *November 2nd*, the lovers are separate. The poet finds herself moving forward with nature, with *her*—“in” her the translation offers. The poet is immersed in the natural world, even without her lover inside her. Perhaps it is the absence of this divine union that makes the simplicity of this poem recognisable. The intimacy of line 4 comes from within; the poet is not dependent on her lover for happiness. In her introduction, Irigaray writes: “November teaches [the lovers] to accept the night, so as to be born again more alive to the mystery of the other, teaches them to enjoy the gold of the leaves in the absence of the sun, to wait for the return: of life, of the other” (2004c, p 38). The other refers to both nature and the lover; the poet waits for the return of the summer lover.

Yet line 1 speaks of stepping forward, not of waiting. Perhaps the poet finds herself wanting to step outside, to move into the different realm of a new month, to proceed with her peacefully. Her lover is away for now, but she can still smell and feel their union. It offers her a secret strength, an intimate elation—her bones are irradiated. This is, again, a word choice which might disrupt the simple and modest imagery of the poem. Irradiation suggests microwaves, radioactivity, x-rays, sterilisation; these are not loving images.

The French *irradiant* has a negative connotation of the spread of pain through the body. The positive association Irigaray makes in the poem, with the imagery suggesting a projection or a shedding of light from her bones outward, adds complexity and depth to the poem. To say that she is illuminated even to her bones, or that is illuminated from her bones, is intended to suggest light and a lifting of gravity. Line 7 becomes clearer as a result—"My body laughs towards the sky"—as though the radiance within strives to meet the sun. The imagery of this line is evocative and suggests movement: the body arched, the head thrown back. The vast blueness of the sky provokes a wonderful laughter. Irigaray writes that she feels close to Hölderlin, "who saw in the 'blue of the sky' the earth's most marvelous gift" (Irigaray, 2004c, p 32). Something of this closeness is communicated in this image, which comes so shortly after the discomfort of irradiated bones. In this line of the poem, I encounter a point of connection that did not occur in the divine joining of August or September. There is an invitation to respond to this image that is lacking in the fusion of two subjects. In line 9, the touchful moment is lost. The "I" of the poem is separate from the laughing body—while the body laughs, the "I" contemplates.

In the final line, the poet says that the familiar here-and-now is transfigured by the joyous abandon of laughing at the blue perfection of the sky. In Irigaray's use of the term *ici-bas*—here-below—lies an allusion to Théodore Botrel's *The Echo*: "La vie est triste ici-bas!" In Botrel's poem, the echo replies "Bah!"⁸¹ This is the closest Irigaray's poetry comes to sadness.

8 Décembre

Enlacement d'âmes,
 Bras au service du souffle,
 Sortes d'ailes
 Présentes à nos étreintes,
 Maintenant la chair de l'air
 En nous,
 Entre nous.
 Suspens de la vie.
 Nuée divine
 Que nous partageons
 En une béatitude tranquille.

December 8th

An interweaving of souls,
 Arms at the service of breath,
 A sort of wings
 Present in our embraces,
 Holding the flesh of the air
 In us,
 Between us.
 Life in suspense,
 Divine cloud
 That we share
 In a quiet bliss.

In December, the northern hemisphere's winter, the lovers are again entwined in a divine union of body and soul. In her introduction, Irigaray writes: "December enjoys a gathering in the soul, an embracing of spirits, of breaths, of wings ... In the dereliction, the bareness of winter, the other is what holds us back from the brink of the abyss, keeps us from falling, allows us to hope, to live through the trial by shadow and frost" (2004c, pp 38-39). For winter, life is in suspense. Frozen? Waiting? Irigaray credits such a temporality as existing between instant and eternity, a time that belongs to the sky, the sun, wind and flowers (2004c, p 44).

To imagine this poetically, Irigaray has the arms waiting on breath in line 2. It is this breath, a term Irigaray closely associates with the soul in her philosophical writing, which animates the embrace of the lovers. In "The Age of Breath" Irigaray writes that breathing corresponds with interiority and autonomy; the woman who cultivates her own breath (her soul) gives weight

to her own subjectivity and spirituality. In a line of argument that is both apocalyptic and meditative, Irigaray suggests that the sharing of breath is an opening to a new spiritual age, where “the task of humanity will be to become itself divine breath ... This epoch maybe announces the moment in which the whole universe will return to God”(2004b, p 168). When she writes of a divine cloud, it seems that Irigaray wants to speak of a manifestation of this divine breath. The word *nuée* is more complex than the English “cloud”, suggesting a host, a swarm or a multitude. The association is akin to the mingled “bath of breath” of *July 21st*. This makes clearer the subsequent lines of *December 8th*, in which the lovers quietly share the bliss of this breath. It is as though they are breathing in unison, in keeping with the unity of their bodies and souls. For Irigaray, the matter of the soul or the spirit—the vehicle of divinity—is breath. The association between soul and breath echoes a sentiment expressed by Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*: “The word ‘soul’ (âme) is an immortal word. In certain poems, it cannot be effaced, for it is a word born of our breath ... The word ‘soul’ can, in fact, be poetically spoken with such conviction that it constitutes a commitment for the entire poem” (1964, p xvi). For Bachelard, such an utterance in a poem makes a promise to the reader to provide “a flicker of the soul” (1964, p xviii).⁸²

The “flicker of the soul” that lights this poem becomes clear when the reader confirms the date on which this poem was written—December 8 marks in Catholic tradition the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary.⁸³ On this day, the pregnancy of Mary’s mother Anne is celebrated. As Irigaray notes in

I Love to You, Mary, alone of all her sex, was conceived sexually but “without sin” (1996, p 140). Like the poem of September 8, the lines of this poem take on another meaning. The “interweaving of souls” is the divine conception without sin; the phrase “entre nous”/ “between us” has the connotation of sharing a secret with an intimate—a child or a lover.

The arms of the lover, Irigaray writes in her introduction to *Everyday Prayers*, “shelter in an aerial and light way, like the wings of a bird, or an angel ... [as] a celestial messenger who weathers heaviness and whose flesh speaks in a manner more divine than words” (2004c, p 48). This is not a “sort of” wings, in which transformation is lost; rather it is *as if* wings are present in the embrace. As body becomes spirit, flesh becomes air. It is this transformation that Irigaray attempts to realise through her poetry and the philosophy of the carnal transcendental. She attempts to marry form and matter: “Form does not claim to dominate matter; it serves its blossoming, its growth ... The body becomes spirit and the spirit body or, rather, they both become flesh, and each by the other” (2004c, p 30). The spirit is evident in Irigaray’s poems, but the matter is absent. There is no flesh, mucus, or mess evident in the union of these lovers or in Anne’s pregnancy. Unlike the carnality that is evoked in Irigaray’s philosophical writings on the two lips, the placenta and mucus, the divine union of this poetry is airy. There is little evidence of “ease” and “joy”—terms used by Irigaray in her response to the painting of Anne and Mary together—and terms which might as readily describe the entry of a lover.

1er Février

Te voir comme forme
 N'est pas le plus doux.
 Te percevoir comme lumière
 M'émeut davantage.
 Touchée par toi
 Même de loin.
 Tes gestes retiennent mon regard,
 Plus éveillé encore
 Par l'invisible de ton âme.
 Deux yeux sont nécessaires
 Pour contempler ton corps.
 Trois pour aimer ton âme?

February 1st

To see you as a form
 Is not so sweet.
 To perceive you as light
 Moves me more.
 Touched by you
 Even from a distance.
 Your gestures hold my gaze,
 Still further awakened
 By the invisible of your soul.
 Two eyes are necessary
 To contemplate your body.
 Three to love your soul?

The author of the poem (the “I” of the gaze), even with her third eye, seems not to perceive the other “I” that is the reader. She writes to a textual “you” unknown to me. Presumably, “you” refers to the masculine other to whom the poet is representing some of her feminine mystery, the aspects of herself that are irreducible to him—to paraphrase Irigaray’s claims in introducing the poems. When I read the poems, no such irreducibility or mystery exists. I am neither “you” nor “I”—I cannot perceive my otherness in her, and am reduced to a non-touching non-subject. I am neither seen as a form, nor perceived as light. My gestures are imperceptible. As a reader, I have at least two eyes. Might I have a third to contemplate the soul of the poet? Is my soul—if a textual ghost has such a conceit—only visible to the other? Must my self and the other of the poem fuse for such a becoming?

A third eye offers an alternative means of perception: to recognise light, to touch from a distance, to see the invisible.⁸⁴ In “Being Two, How Many Eyes Have We?” Irigaray argues that the Western tradition understands seeing as *recognising* an object, a form, or a concept that “already has a face according to a model, a paradigm, an *eidos*, that I have been taught” (2002a, p 143). Seeing renders the visible an object of my gaze. To see differently—to recognise a subject other than myself—corresponds to perceiving invisibility or transcendence. Irigaray asks: “How many eyes do we have ... being two? Certainly we each keep our two eyes. But we probably have more eyes, one or two: to contemplate invisibility in the visible, in the light of the day, but also to perceive in the night of interiority” (2002a, p 150). A third eye is necessary to perceive the self. Is this why I am invisible: the poet has not gifted her reader a third eye?

15 Avril

Nos anges peut-être
 Eux se parlent
 Franchissant ce qui nous sépare,
 Portant à l'un ou à l'autre
 Le message tu.
 Nos anges déjà?
 Non pas nous.
 Eux seulement nous parlent
 À la vitesse du vent
 Ou de l'éther.
 Chuchotant au seuil de la chair,
 Trop chaude pour leur envol.
 Restant dehors
 À palpiter,

April 15th

Our angels, maybe
 They talk to each other
 Getting over what separates us
 Carry to the one or to the other
 The silent message.
 Our angels already?
 But not yet us.
 Only they speak to us
 With the swiftness of the wind
 Or of the ether.
 Whispering on the threshold of the flesh
 Too warm for their flight.
 Staying outside
 Quivering

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|--|---------------------------------------|
| Battre des ailes. | Beating their wings, |
| Sans s'aventurer encore dans la coeur, | Without venturing yet into the heart, |
| Le sang. | The blood. |
| Effarouchés, | Frightened, |
| Joueurs, | Playful, |
| Légers... | Sprightly... |

In this poem, the lovers find their divine union personified as angels. The angels of *Everyday Prayers*—ordinary, familiar angels—offer communion between lovers, overcoming their separation (their time apart from one another) and their separateness (their difference). At times, these angels belong to the lovers; at others, they are the lovers themselves. On *April 13th*, the lover folds her wings “as a bird or an angel” (“D’oiseau / Ou d’ange”). On *July 9th*, Irigaray refers to “the bread of angels” (“un pain des anges”) that nourishes (or “preserves”) love.

Irigaray compares her angels with those of Rainer Maria Rilke, who describes angels as “terrifying” (2001, no page number). Rilke recoils from encounters with angels: “even if one of them suddenly / pressed me against his heart, I would perish / in the embrace of his stronger existence”, he writes in *The Duino Elegies* (2001, no page number).⁸⁵ Irigaray first mentions Rilke in “Belief Itself” in relation to the figure of the angel, as pure as an animal “in the Rilkean sense”: “The angel is terrible, terrifying, as Rilke says. He reminds us of something that is meant to be eternally forgotten. He conjures up something that has not been written legibly, with a word that moves through it without stopping” (1993c, p 39). She revisits Rilke when preparing *Everyday Prayers* for publication, but she writes that his work seems

distant. Rereading *The Duino Elegies*, Irigaray finds imagery similar to hers, with Rilke's lovers and angels, but comments on the differences she encounters: her poetic angels "are the servants of life, of love: tender, almost carnal", whereas those of Rilke are "frightening". She writes: "Rilke can scarcely imagine an angel flying from one lover to the other, to help them in their solitude or in their approach one to the other. Rilke's angel seems a dreadful messenger of a God-the-father, distant and irrelevant to the pathos of incarnation, contrary to what I attribute to these spiritual creatures" (2004c, p 31). For Irigaray, the relation between human and angel is more equal—perhaps our angels talk to one other. Irigaray's angels exist at the threshold of the flesh of lovers—they are "almost carnal" (2004c, p 31). The angels of *April 15th*, however, are timid creatures—they stay outside, finding the flesh too warm for their flight. The angels do not touch. They are not frightening, but frightened. Of carnality? Of corporeality? Cynthia Willett notes this about Irigaray's angels as well, suggesting that it is "as though they [are] untouched by the struggles of the material world" (2001, p 152). The angels of this poem reflect a tendency in these poems to remain outside the flesh, to avoid blood and heat. The "almost" carnality of the angels corresponds with the almost touchfulness of the poems.

Almost Touching

There is a gap between the reader's experience of the poems, and Irigaray's announcement that her poetry communicates "a touch ... to celebrate, to preserve and to awaken the self and the other to what is habitually forgotten

in living” (2004c, p 31). In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray privileges touch as a mode of perception which is linked to feminine morphology. She argues that woman touches herself all the time with genital lips that caress each other in a continuous exchange of touching and being touched. Sexual pleasures (plural) for women are experienced through touch, aroused by “fondling the breasts, touching the vulva, spreading the lips, stroking the posterior wall of the vagina, brushing against the mouth of the uterus” (1985b, p 28). As this sentence demonstrates, Irigaray explicitly performs this touchful writing in *This Sex Which is Not One*. More recently, in *Sexes and Genealogies*, Irigaray writes that we must return to the origins of touch in the maternal body—“our first sense and the one that constitutes all our living space, all our environment”—in order to understand the potential for women of a transition from the material to the divine (1993c, p 59). In *The Way of Love*, she says: “For there to be an exchange, it is essential that the other touch us, particularly through words” (2002f, p 18). In *Key Writings*, she emphasises the importance of touch for a relation of being two: “We lack a culture which is both subjective and intersubjective. Such a culture would require being faithful to the reciprocity in touching-being touched, itself a matter of perceiving or of speaking” (2004b, p 18).⁸⁶ In *Sharing the World*, she again argues the need for such a language—one that welcomes the call of the other:

Such words are so strange to our culture because relations with the other have seldom been cultivated. Words which touch, stir, move or leave us waiting ... Words which feed us without our assimilating them, making them our own, simply appropriating

them. Words which approach without forcing the threshold (2008e, p 19).

This call for a touchful dialogue assumes a straightforward relationship between language and sex. In *To Speak is Never Neuter* and *I Love to You*, Irigaray argues that sexual difference is evident in the discourses of men and women. In “Being Two Outside Tomorrow?” and “Towards a Sharing of Speech”, she presents linguistic research on sentences constructed using the pronouns *I ... you*, and cue words, including *between* and *perhaps*. She concludes that women and girls seek communication (usually with a masculine subject) in their addresses, and that men and boys rarely seek an intersubjective exchange, preferring reference to objects (2004b, p 65).

Irigaray claims that her poetry responds to these differences:

These poems ... are a way of letting the other hear something of the mystery that I represent for him, of allowing him to avoid confusion or misrecognition, of providing him with signs which permit him to safeguard the two and our dialogue. Poetic language is more appropriate to this work than speculative discourse where, in part, I talk the other's language, use his grammatical and lexical norms (2004c, p 47).

Irigaray compares the “touchful” project of *Everyday Prayers* with that of male poets—she is not explicit at this point, although she mentions Rilke and Hölderlin elsewhere—who privilege ideas of “death, suffering and mourning” with reflections on “an unhappy past” and “unsatisfied desire” (2004c, p 47). In Irigaray's interpretation, masculine poets write about an unattainable or unnamed desire; in other words, they seek a touch that cannot be fulfilled. A

feminine poetry, in comparison, celebrates and supports life, and moves towards more loving and happy relationships. To the detriment of her argument, Irigaray does not reference any other female poets who might contribute towards such a relationship, preferring to elaborate her feminine and touchful writing through the mimetic imagery of angels and sky.⁸⁷

In *Feminism and Poetry*, Jan Montefiore reads Irigaray's philosophy alongside the poems of Emily Dickinson and Adrienne Rich, and concludes:

The poetry of woman-centered sexuality ... is not, as it has been claimed to be, "a new language" because it articulates women's authentic experience: because experience and language do not coincide, and there is nothing gendered about poetic form. A poetry of purely female identity is not, then, a really viable possibility ... Apart from the utopian "When Our Lips Speak Together", the examples of women's poetry which ought to correspond to imaginary femaleness always turn out, when looked at closely, to be engaged with the same masculine language or symbolism which they are supposed to transcend. But this oppositional engagement, this struggle to transform inherited meanings, is where the real strength and specificity of women's poetry lies (2004, p 180).

The claim that there is "nothing gendered about poetic form" runs counter to Irigaray's project, and to much of the work of feminist poetics. Indeed, the fact that Montefiore makes an exception for "When Our Lips Speak Together" suggests that Irigaray's speculative—a term that is more apt than "utopian"—*parler-femme* can be effective. I would suggest, however, that in Irigaray's poetry, with its emphasis on divine union and the fusion of "I",

“you”, and “her” (nature), there is little evidence of difference between the self and other. I would also argue, for this reason, the poems are unable to articulate a distinctively feminine poetic voice.

Montefiore’s passing comment that experience and language do not coincide is similarly confounding. The poetic techniques Irigaray describes in her introduction demonstrate her conviction that her poems are experiential for both the writer and the reader. For example, Irigaray explains that she has kept the formal composition of the poems to a minimum so that the “poverty or the simplicity of words can speak to the other” (2004c, p 32). For the most part, the poems are devoid of poetic effects and wordplay such as rhyme, alliteration, figurative language, or irony. For a reader, these impoverished words, with their lack of ambiguity, instability or abundance, generate an uneasy relationship with the poetry, where meaning is rendered too literally, and ardour is delivered without enough shadow, as Kathryn Bond Stockton puts it in *God Between Their Lips*. Irigaray privileges the use of infinitives, the simplest forms of verbs and the words of communion—come, take, eat. At other times, she says in her introduction, “the verb ... vanishes, leaving place for a gesture, an act, [or] a motion” (2004c, p 44).

These techniques are evident in *July 21st*, when she writes: “In communion / With her / Through the air: / Medium of life, / Bath of breath, / In which mingle / Warmth, smells, sounds” (“En communion / Avec elle / À travers l’air: / Milieu de vie / Bain de souffle, / Où se mêlent / Chaleur, odeurs, sons”). As the final poem of the collection, *July 21st* is notable as the only

poem that utilises stanzas. These correspond with the progression of the lovers: communion with nature in the first stanza (above), communion “with you ... creating the we” (“Avec toi ... Créant le nous”) in the second stanza, and communion between two (“Entre les deux: l’amour”) in the third stanza. The fourth stanza returns to the breath “unifying the flesh / for new embraces” (“Unifiant la chair / Pour de nouvelles étreintes”). The poem ends with the possibility of rebirth through a return to nature: “Unless we return in her / To be born again / Once more” (À moins de retourner à elle / D’en renaître / Encore une fois”).

Irigaray’s poetry speaks mostly in the present tense in an attempt to illustrate an encounter with the “daily real” of a relationship with nature, without reducing it to allusion or allegory. The “bath of breath” in the above extract (*July 21st*) is intended to demonstrate that the air we breathe, a mingling of inhalations and exhalations, is a bodily exchange with the other. She makes this point when she refers to the correspondence between people and nature: “human bodies ... are similar to elements of the universe ... I am not saying that I perceive the breath of the other as I perceive the wind, but the medium is nearly the same” (2004c, p 36). The anthropomorphism of nature is further demonstrated through her use of substantives in the poems to designate natural objects or phenomena as living, writing of the silence of clouds (*April 1st*), the “delight of the air” (“Joie de l’air”) and “the breathing of vegetation” (“La respiration du végétal”) (*June 5th*), and “the happiness of wind in the morning” (“Le bonheur du vent le matin”) (*October 12th*). In her introduction, Irigaray writes that a living substantive, an expression of

existence as opposed to a fixed and unchanging concept, “preserves the duality [and the temporality] of subjects. A substantive can also take the place of the presence of the other, him or her” (2004c, p 44). For instance, on *August 31st*: “To contemplate the sky / Is a blessing sometimes, / Akin to the one lived with you” (“Contempler le ciel / Parfois est grâce, / Proche de celle vécue avec toi”). The poems frequently combine the infinitive and the substantive with the present participle acting as “a hyphen between the two” (2004c, p 44). Here we find happiness flowering and blooming (June 23rd), and the “rising” of the world through the sun (May 31st).

The subject positions of the poems are slippery; as with the exchanges of Irigaray’s critical works, the “I” and “you” of the poems are frequently relieved of masculine and feminine identifiers. On *March 4th*: “More intimate you are/ Than I with myself. / You recall me in me / Inhabiting who I am, / Interposed between my lips” (“Plus intime tu es / Que moi à moi-même / Tu me rappelles en moi / Habitant qui je suis, / Intervenant entre mes lèvres”). And on *June 12th*: “Without you, no I. / Because you are, / A space is created where I am” (“Sans tu, pas de je. / Le fait que tu sois, / Crée l’espace où je suis”). In keeping with the task of inviting the masculine into an intersubjective dialogue with a (feminine) other, the “you” of the poems is invited into a relation of “us” and “our”: “The place where I remember / You, us” (“Le lieu où je me souviens / De toi, de nous”) (*September 11th*). The absence of a clear delineation between the subjects of the poems is a result of the frequent substitution of a substantive for the other. In these poems, nature is accorded the status of the other. In the first poem of the collection

(August 9th), we find the “Soul of the universe / presented to our eyes / Thirsting for communion” (“Âme de l’univers / Offerte à nos yeus / Assoiffés de communion”). Irigaray explains that this is an attempt to avoid “the language of an ‘I’ who skims over experience to describe it, reducing it to a spectacle or a narrative play”; instead, the subjective voice of these poems is “immersed in what is felt” (2004c, p 43).

Irigaray’s poetry attempts to restore to nature “her” own existence and becoming. Irigaray writes that she wants to write words received from nature, to “celebrate nature, leaving it to be” (2004c, p 45). In her poems, “the clouds will cloud, the wind will wind, the summer will summer” (2004c, p 34). She stages a series of intimacies between two lovers and nature, whose relationship corresponds with seasonal shifts. The lovers and nature are frequently indistinguishable. In *April 21st*, the words of the lover are described as tactile “like a rustle of leaves, / A beating of wings, / A throb of the soul” (“Comme un bruissement de feuilles, / Un battement d’ailes, / Une palpitation d’âme). Nature and the encounter with the other both offer a “memory of an intimate touch” (“Mémoire d’un intime toucher”) in *May 31st*.

As a meditative practice, the poems offer a stream of consciousness in response to the seasons and the elements. In *July 18th*, Irigaray writes of “The air, / The blue immensity, / The warm wind, / Impregnated with the incense / Of the firs, of the flowers” (“L’air, / L’immensité bleue, / Le vent chaud, / Imprégné de l’encens / Des sapins, des fleurs”). In this passage, the “I” of the poet is effaced in her communion with nature. In her introduction,

Irigaray writes: “s/he who writes wipes away a subjectivity educated in the Western manner, and takes root in, or renews links with, less logically formal levels of the wording” (2004c, p 30). This erasure of the self is an interesting counterpoint to her earlier claim: “I am a woman. I write with who I am” (1993b, p 53). Read together, these seemingly contradictory claims suggest that the feminine enunciation of these poems involves a radical rethinking of subjectivity. This is an awkward position for the reader, who might find her own subjectivity wiped away. I use “her” quite consciously here, since the masculine reader has a clearly identified position within the text: according to Irigaray, he is listening to the mystery of the other (2004c, p 47). Anticipating an amorous exchange, a reader has difficulty negotiating her position and experiencing a touchful relation to the poems.

Perhaps a touchful text is better imagined as a threshold, in which the reader and writer alternate between touching and not-touching. The “almost” touch of these poems could become a realisation of carnal transcendence; a caress, for instance, touches on the threshold of the flesh in this way.⁸⁸ In “The Wedding Between Body and Language” the caress is an awakening to “the life of my body ... to intersubjectivity ... to a life different from the arduous everyday” (2004b, p 20). In “The Intimate Requires Separate Dwellings” Irigaray offers a model for such a relationship of the caress—which she refers to as developing a “culture of proximity”—when she writes: “poetic dwelling ... [requires] an un-covering, of oneself and of the other, which reopens the place where each takes shelter to prepare the moment of an encounter” (2002f, p 152). Poetic dwelling spaces operate in the “curves” and “loops” of

our exchanges, which provide a space to pause, “for a rest, for a thought, for inward gathering” (2004b, p 7). These moments of not-touching occur when the reader encounters an “elsewhere” or a “not-here”, and the pleasure of the text lies in indistinctness, indirectness and distraction. This corresponds with the pleasure Barthes finds in a text when he looks away or listens to something that spills over the edges of meaning (1975, p 24). This in-between space of a text is not a continuous imprint on the body; rather it brushes against the reader, but is just out of reach if one attempts to grasp too tightly. It is the alterity or otherness—its irreducibility—of the text that invites carnality.

In *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Laura U. Marks begins her haptic or erotic criticism of the relationship between the senses and multimedia technologies with the suggestion that writing is successful if the reader can embody the experience of the writer.⁸⁹ She asks: “How can the experience of a sound, a colour, a gesture, of the feelings ... they provoke, be communicated in words? They have to be translated. Like synaesthesia ... writing translates particular, embodied experiences into words” (2002, p ix). For Marks, one measure of successful writing is if it constitutes an event for the reader; that is to say, a piece of writing does not connect with what the reader already knows, but marks an embodied experience that would otherwise remain “dormant, immanent, somewhere between” (2002, p ix). Reading as an event invites an experience of newness that corresponds with an amorous exchange. The text becomes the site for a possible intercorporeal encounter between multiple readers and writers, who respond to the alterity

of the text and each other. This encounter between bodies and textual space constitutes a poetics of carnal transcendence.

Marks raises the spectre of the non-touchful, the moments when writing does not encompass the physical, but “brushe[s] against or *almost* touches its object” (2002, p ix, emphasis in original). This is a positive occurrence for Marks: “Sometimes it is the *inability* of writing to capture experience that is evocative” (2002, p ix, emphasis in original). She argues that the literal meanings of words, the information that they convey, “is the least of poetry” (2002, p ix). Poetry finds the touchful when the words translated from one language to another, or from one medium to another (such as the expression of colours, sounds, smells and flavours in words), communicate an experience of wonder, carnality, ferocity, and sensuousness. As Marks puts it, the task of a translator “is to make the dry words retain a trace of the wetness of the encounter” (2002, p x).⁹⁰

In *Everyday Prayers*, Irigaray wants to write as though no translation is necessary—as if writing is not always already a synaesthetic exchange. She says in the introduction: “We have to receive words from nature itself, listening to what it really is. These words will be all the more appropriate if they remain living matter, as nature itself” (2004c, p 35). She suggests that simple words are the medium for this process: “Those which work or transform little but which let be ... Words that are the least metaphorical, the closest to the real ... Immersed in what is felt, someone who writes strives to restore what is experienced living” (2004c, pp 43-44). And yet, are natural

words possible? Is it possible to write flowers, air, or water, rather than writing of them? Can a poetic summer *summer*, or nature *nature*? Surely in the phrases Irigaray uses—the blue of the sky (le bleu du ciel) or the scorching sun (un brûlant soleil)—translation has already occurred.⁹¹ This movement is all the more complex in *Everyday Prayers*, with the English and the French sitting alongside one another. For the most part, the English translation mimics the French line by line, word for word. The literal meanings of the words are given—“Transmuant l’énergie” is “Transmuting the energy” (*August 21st*), “Irradiant mes os eux-mêmes” is “Irradiating even my bones” (*November 2nd*), and “Nuée divine” is “Divine cloud” (*December 8th*). This is the least of poetry, to use Marks’ phrase, in which the slippery multiplicity of a word such as nuée (cloud, swarm, flight, multitude) is lost.

Textual exchange is always a process of translation, as Vivian Sobchack articulates in *What My Fingers Knew*. Exploring the encounter of text and touch in relation to film, she wonders at the gaps between theory and experience, and language and affect. How can a theorist respond to the “tactile, kinetic, redolent, resonant, and sometimes even taste-full descriptions of the film experience?” (2000, p 1). She answers this question in the flesh, through the bodily experience of watching the opening scene of *The Piano*, in which unidentifiable tendrils of pinky-red wash across the screen in near-darkness, and become Ada’s “fluid” fingers glimpsed in close-up sunlight. Before this image was comprehensible, she writes that her tingling fingers knew what she was looking at (2000, p 1). Later in the film, when Baines touches Ada’s skin through a hole in her stocking, Sobchack

writes that “suddenly my skin is both mine and not my own: the ‘immediate tactile shock’ opens me to the general erotic mattering of flesh” (2000, p 6).⁹²

Sobchack traces a history of attempts to understand the relationship of “our sensate bodies” to film, exploring the carnality and sensuality of our embodied responses to texts. Through what her fingers knew, Sobchack recalls the “carnality” of the film experience, and the “crude” reactions of bodies to texts. This “subversive” body she calls the “cinesthetic subject”, a name she derives from a correlation of cinema, synaesthesia and coenaesthesia—where the senses are not discrete but form a unity of bodily sense, such as might be present in children before cultural practice installs sense boundaries and hierarchies (2000, p 7). She describes her model of subjectivity thus: “The cinesthetic subject both touches and is touched by the screen, able to commute seeing to touching and back again without a thought and through sensual and cross-modal activity able to experience the movie as both here and there” (2000, p 8).

In Sobchack’s model, the intersubjective relationship of touch is elided; in touching a text, the cinesthetic subject turns back towards itself. Sobchack writes: “I will reflexively and carnally turn toward my own carnal being to touch myself touching, smell myself smelling, taste myself tasting, and, in sum, sense my own sensuality” (2000, p 10). The cinesthetic subject occupies the space of haptic criticism affirmed by Laura Marks, yet Marks emphasises the location of the other: “In a haptic relationship our self rushes up to the surface to interact with another surface” (2002, p xvi). This

articulates the difficulty I grapple with in relation to Irigaray's poetry: without the reader experiencing a haptic or "touchful" relation to the text, the relationship between the lovers of the poems loses its general erotic mattering, or its "wetness". Instead of interacting with another surface (or other bodies), the reader rebounds against the text and returns to the self, without transformation.

In my reading of *Everyday Prayers*, I have grappled with the loss of self that a reader risks in this intercorporeal exchange. In *Touch*, Laura Marks expresses a similar response to texts, when she writes of "being drawn into a rapport with the other where I lose the sense of my own boundaries" (2002, p 1). She understands this sensation as erotic, writing:

The ability to oscillate between near and far is erotic. In sex, what is erotic is the ability to move between control and relinquishment, between being giver and receiver. It's the ability to have your sense of self, your sense of self-control, taken away and restored—and to do the same for another person ... A lover's promise is to take the beloved to that point where he or she has no distance from the body—and then to let the beloved come back, into possession of language and personhood (2002, p xvi).

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard writes that in its reverberation—the measure of a poetic image—we find "the sonority of being. The poet speaks on the threshold of being" (1964, p xii). The threshold of being is becoming, which operates for both the reader and the poet. Selfhood is not annihilated; rather, as Bachelard writes: "the duality of the

subject and object is iridescent, shimmering, unceasingly active in its inversions” (1964, p xv). He continues:

In the resonance we hear the poem, in the reverberations we speak it, it is our own. The reverberations bring about a change of being. It is as though the poet’s being were our being. The multiplicity of resonances then issues from the reverberations’ unity of being. Or, to put it more simply, this is an impression that all poetry-lovers know well: the poem possesses us entirely (1964, p xviii).

Poetry and divinity make a similar promise: subjectivity deepens in response to the reverberation or the caress of the encounter. Properly enacted, a poetics of carnal transcendence would possess the reader in a sensual, transformative, dangerous relationship with the author and the text. This process is evident in “When Our Lips Speak Together”:

You are moving. You never stay still. You never stay. You never “are”. How can I say “you” when you are always other? How can I speak to you? You remain in flux, never congealing or solidifying. What will make that current flow into words? ... These movements cannot be described as the passage from a beginning to an end. These rivers flow into no single, definitive sea. These streams are without fixed banks, this body without fixed boundaries. This unceasing mobility (1985b, pp 214-215).

Irigaray’s touchful poetry falls short in its positioning of the poetic subject and “her” relationship with the other. The celebration of the couple’s divine union in the poems leaves no space of otherness for the reader to occupy. As Willett asks, in relation to Irigaray’s writing generally: “One wonders whether human relationships can ever escape wounds from conflicts past and present.

One wonders, where are the ghosts of those who were lost?” (2001, p 152). In the next, and final, chapter, I attempt to address this absence by taking the poetics of carnal transcendence as difference outside of Irigaray’s writing and into the ghostly realm of the unthought-of and the impossible.

Chapter Six

Oneiric Spaces

As a speculative philosophy that imagines the possibility of a world in which the sexual and the divine share an equivalent value, carnal transcendence as difference is problematic. Its complexity arises not only from its oxymoronic construction, and the contradictions and resistances both within and beyond Luce Irigaray's writing on sexual difference and divinity, but from the fact that it articulates a possibility rather than an actuality. Through poetics, Irigaray proposes carnal transcendence and sexual difference as transformative, productive and creative. Her work invites alternative modes of reading, writing and thinking as a gesture against the logic of linear and phallogocentric constructions of gender identities, sexuality and divinity. In Irigaray's writing, a poetics of carnal transcendence manifests through mimesis, flights of fancy, incongruous associations, wordplay, and ambiguity. The paradox here is that attempting to enact or perform a speculative philosophy—by its nature, rhetorical, fragmentary and abstract—is something of an impossibility.⁹³

A poetics of carnal transcendence as difference theorises from between corporeal and conceptual logics, a between or threshold space that is not fully coded or charted within philosophical theory. A poetics of carnal transcendence as difference attempts to articulate something as yet unthought, a philosophy that Irigaray describes as new—a “new field of thought” requiring “a new mode of thinking, a new mode of speaking” (Hirsh

and Olson, 1996, no page number). This requires the reader to use their imagination, to speculate differently, to “listen with another ear, as if hearing an ‘other meaning’” (Irigaray, 1985b, p 29), to be “surprised, touched and wonderstruck, called beyond” (Irigaray, 2002f, p viii).

The previous chapters have shown that the reality of carnal transcendence as difference does not always match this poetic rhetoric. In Chapter One, I argued that the possibilities of thinking through sexual difference to imagine a differently sexed culture are marred by Irigaray’s dogmatic emphasis that there are “only” men and women and “nothing else” (1996, p 47). In Chapter Two, when Irigaray invites her readers into an amorous exchange with the “four voices” of *The Way of Love*, I showed that the exchange was one-sided. The reader is invited to “listen” to the four voices, which include Luce Irigaray, the translators Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček, and Martin Heidegger; the voice of the reader in the loving “exchange” of the text is muted (2002f, p x). In Chapter Three, I sought a philosophy that constructed the mother as carnal and transcendent in relation to her daughter, and found the daughter-Irigaray attacking the placental relation she had previously celebrated. Chapter Four celebrated mucus as a means to imagine the possibility of carnal transcendence as difference without annihilating the subject or resorting to a violent dissection of the body. But in Chapter Five I lamented the absence of touch and the missing trace of sexual difference in Irigaray’s poetry. Throughout the thesis, I have demonstrated the resistances of Irigaray’s work to the readings I want to make—for sexual difference as the beginning of a newly sexed culture, for

reading and writing as an amorous exchange, for conceiving the body of the mother as carnal, and for experiencing the mother/daughter relation as a model for carnal transcendence as difference. This chapter seeks to rewrite a poetics of carnal transcendence as difference by taking it outside of Irigaray's writing into the space of the unthought and the impossible.

Bachelard's Oneirism

Gaston Bachelard suggests that we can accomplish nothing against our dreams. Bachelard refers to the oneirism or dreamspace of work which, if left without acknowledgement, can result in the annihilation of the subject (1987a, p 80). The work Bachelard refers to by way of example is that of an artisan at a clay or china kiln, who is actively engaged with the elements of "his" craft, blending earth, water and fire (1987a, p 80).⁹⁴ With a subjectivity soft and impressible like the paste when the artisan first encounters it, he becomes firm and true in his purpose through the realisation of his work. His experience, Bachelard writes, "is an interweaving of dreams and dexterity" (1987a, p 80). He continues: "Take away the dreams and you stultify the worker. Leave out the oneiric forces of work and you diminish, you annihilate the artisan. Each labour has its oneirism, each material worked on contributes its inner reveries" (1987a, p 80).

Like the artisan realising his purpose through dreaming, a similar transformation occurs for Irigaray through her writing, when she engages with the elements of her craft, the words of her philosophy. Her writing is an

attempt to make “visible” that which was “supposed” to remain invisible: “a possible operation of the feminine in language” (1985b, p 76). In the voice of the marine lover, she writes that her philosophy attempts to articulate “still-unheard-of truths” (1991b, p 46). She does this by entering the space “between” words and ideas to disrupt dichotomous thought (2002e, p 137). Irigaray is self-referential in her writing, finding the vocabulary to discuss carnal transcendence as difference in the elements of earth, fire, air and water, as discussed in Chapter One. In relation to the representation of the unthought-of or the unthinkable—the space explored in this chapter—Irigaray defines the elements as constituting “the origin of our bodies, of our life, of our environment, the flesh of our passions”, and describes these passions as the “deepest and most secret aspects of life” (1993c, pp 57-58).

Elizabeth Grosz suggests that writing about the elements is part of an attempt to find a language that can represent women “outside or in excess of” patriarchal terms “and to demonstrate the possibility of alternatives” (1986, p 8). Grosz argues for the fluidity of a language of the elements, writing that the elements allow a “precise characterisation of lows and highs, the searing or frigid intensities, the heights of passion and the engulfing, stifling ... interactions and possible exchanges between the sexes” (1986, p 10). The “textual strategy” of the elements provides “a corporeal model of sexual difference” that is not reliant on a fixed understanding of sexual identity (1986, p 10). Rather, the subject is fluid and open to the possibilities (or impossibilities) of transformation into the “components of fish, birds and snakes which constitute our corporeal and psychic existence [and which] may

provide images, ideals, models [to represent] non-oppositional differences between the sexes” (Grosz 1986, p 10).

Whitford similarly argues that Irigaray’s elemental vocabulary offers “a discursive strategy that allows for fluidity” (1991, p 61).

The elements ... represent an unstructured and fluid psychic space, less constrained by the dominant imaginary, more open to other possibilities. It is the poet who takes the risk of exploring these spaces, and who can presumably offer glimpses of previously undreamt-of horizons (1991, pp 61-62).

In Irigaray’s writing, the elements provide a language that exceeds the theoretical and offer a poetics to enable an articulation of impossibility. To put it in Bachelard’s terms, this contributes the inner reveries and oneirism of Irigaray’s philosophy avoiding the stultification or annihilation of the (reading and writing) subject.

The oneirism of theoretical writing—the dreamspace and reverie of academic work—is rarely acknowledged. This is evident in responses to Irigaray’s writing that insist on linear and logical analysis of her arguments. Such writing aims, in Irigaray’s words, “to conform to the codes theory has set up for itself” (1985b, p 365). As discussed in Chapter Two, Margaret Whitford refers to “masculine” writing, which asserts a dominant textual position, seeking to control, possess and maintain truth and knowledge in the singular (1991, p 50). This is akin to Grosz’s “straight” reading, also outlined in Chapter Two, which systematically organises Irigaray’s own writing into a

consistent and logical whole (1989, p 102). Jane Gallop—whom Grosz identifies as one of the few writers to effectively perform an “Irigarayan” analysis of Irigaray (Grosz, 1989, p 240)—describes the “masculine” or “straight” reading as masterful, abstract and powerful, unable to speculate on “situations which tend to disable thought” (Gallop, 2002, p 15).

Given Irigaray’s project of dismantling and disturbing thought, these approaches are limiting. Of particular concern is the way in which these readings negate Irigaray’s representation of sexual difference and carnal transcendence, which are made meaningful through a poetics that invites an affective speculation on possibility and impossibility. This denial of the poetics and oneirism of Irigaray’s texts runs counter to the aims of theorising transcendence in relation to the carnal, which insists on the embodied difference of the subject in the encounter with the divine. Attempting to articulate carnal transcendence in a logical, sequential, and consistent manner would mean the annihilation of its subject.

In Chapter Four’s discussion of the subjectivity of carnal transcendence as difference, each of the theorists addressed writes of attempting to represent the unrepresentable, or to articulate the impossible. Alain Corbin uses the term “indescribable” to articulate his experience of the sublime (1994, p 172). Alphonso Lingis refers to his eye “seeking the invisible” (1983, p 13). Georges Bataille alludes to “mobile thought” that cannot be defined (1989, p 11). His writing worries over this point: intimacy and transcendence are “unknowable” and “cannot be expressed discursively” (1989, p 50). Any

attempt at definition is “empty” with the writer sensing that something is “missing” (1989, p 51). Julia Kristeva, in her correspondence with Catherine Clément, writes of the space of “emotion rather than analysis” where thought is always “in gestation” (Clément and Kristeva, 2001, p 178). Elsewhere in her work, Clément suggests that carnal transcendence—which she explores in relation to syncope—is a phenomenon that “rejects” thought (1994, p 7).

Examining the complexity of the above philosophies of transcendence that struggle to define the object, Chapter Four argued for the morphology of mucus as a metonym for the subjectivity of carnal transcendence as difference. Irigaray describes mucus as something unthought and unspoken—but always leaving a trace—in philosophical thinking, particularly in its relation to sexual difference and the divine (1993a, pp 109-110). This association demonstrates the logic underpinning a poetics of carnal transcendence as difference: impermanent, expansive, abundant, joyful, progressive—material that invites play.⁹⁵

Dream Play

Like Irigaray’s associational and dreamy children’s story in “Belief Itself”—in which can be found “something of our identity, of the difficulties we have in situating ourselves in relation to ourselves and our fellows, something of the dramas and spells that captivate us, capture us, bind us, and separate us” (1993c, p 57)—exploring the oneirism of a work is a matter of seeking out the remainders in a text, of delving into the dark corners and finding mysteries

and passions that might correspond with stages in becoming. The oneirism of a text is an attempt to answer the worrisome, persistent and wakeful questions that a text poses. In the case of a poetics of carnal transcendence as difference, is it possible at all? Are carnal experiences—sex, birth, and death to name a few that reverberate through the everyday—transcendental? Can transcendence, which seductively promises to take you out of your self, turn around to embed you more tightly in the physical world? Might carnality and transcendence be one and the same? Or does Irigaray’s philosophy—and, by association, my own—remain merely speculative?

Rather than the performance of labour, production, or work—which Bachelard’s artisan experiences, albeit dreamily—this chapter explores oneirism playfully, taking an interpretative approach to dream imagery. This is also a response to Freud who refers to the “work” of dream formation and interpretation, and the role of dreams in the “work” of analysis (1978, p 183). In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud relies on his own dreams to build his theory. On the complexities that arise from this, he writes:

If I relate my own dreams I must inevitably reveal to the gaze of strangers more of the intimacies of my psychic life than is agreeable to me, and more than seems fitting in a writer who is not a poet but a scientific investigator. To do so is painful, but unavoidable; I have submitted to the necessity, for otherwise I could not have demonstrated my psychological conclusions. Sometimes, of course, I could not resist the temptation to mitigate my indiscretions by omissions and substitutions; but wherever I have done so the value of the example cited has been very definitely diminished. I can only express the hope that my readers

will understand my difficult position, and will be indulgent (1978, p 5).

Having undertaken a lengthy analysis of the imagery of his own dreams, Freud concludes: “I do not wish to assert that I have entirely revealed the meaning of the dream, or that my interpretation is flawless. I could still spend much time upon it; I could draw further explanations from it, and discuss further problems which it seems to propound. I can even perceive the points from which further mental associations might be traced” (1978, p 86). This unravelling of associational meanings seems limitless; by halting at the point of discovering something new about himself, Freud is able to conclude “that dreams do really possess a meaning ... When the work of interpretation has been completed the dream can be recognized as a wish fulfilment ” (1978, p 86). In a footnote, he makes this point more explicitly: “At bottom dreams are nothing other than a particular form of thinking, made possible by the conditions of the state of sleep. It is the dream work that creates that form, and it alone is the essence of dreaming—the explanation of its peculiar nature” (1978, p 86).⁹⁶ The meaning of dreams, Freud concludes, occurs through interpretation; meaning comes from the analyst (the scientist) after the retelling of the dream. Yet Freud leaves open the door to another way of thinking when he refers to the intimacies he is revealing as seeming more fitting for the writing of a poet (1978, p 5). He concludes with the startling image akin to a ghost in the machine.⁹⁷ Replying to the rhetorical question of the theoretical value of the study of dreams, he says that there is something more here than a benefit to psychology. He asks:

What of the practical value of this study in regard to a knowledge of the psyche and discovery of the hidden peculiarities of individual character? Have not the unconscious impulses revealed by dreams the value of real forces in the psychic life? Is the ethical significance of the suppressed wishes to be lightly disregarded, since, just as they now create dreams, they may some day create other things? I do not feel justified in answering these questions. I have not followed up this aspect of the problem of dreams (1978, pp 380-381).

In her analysis, Michelle Boulous Walker problematises Freud's use of the descriptor dream work: "While the dream is the *work* it carries out, it cannot be understood as the creative product of a logical process. The dreamwork is a production without product, a pre-productive chain that does not accumulate value" (1998, p 93, emphasis in original). In this sense, and for the purposes of this chapter—to explore the unthought of a theoretical work, to uncover the "other things" that the ethically significant dream thoughts create (Freud, 1978, p 381)—dream work is better interpreted as dream play.

Play occupies a liminal space that invites a suspension of disbelief and relishes possibility and transformation. In *Visions of the Night*, Kelly Bulkeley proposes dream analysis as a kind of play, suggesting that similar elements constitute both: the creation of unreal or quasi-real spaces; a tendency towards extravagance, exaggeration and variation; a movement away from "serious life" towards nonsense and foolishness; and strong emotional responses (1999, p 62). The game that is played here, like the

fort/da game of Ernst, is a game with words, an attempt to articulate ideas and images that exceed the limitations of theoretical language and thought.

Between the Trees

In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray suggests an approach to the interpretation of dreams modelled on reading between the lines of a text (1985a, p 27). In “Belief Itself” she suggests that dreaming “gently”, holding “onto sleep while letting everything float freely” is “the duty or vocation of the analyst” (1993c, p 25). Almost as an afterthought, she adds: “Especially if she is a woman perhaps” (1993c, p 25). In a challenge to Sigmund Freud and his followers, she suggests that traditional dream interpretation articulates already prescribed meanings, ignoring the spaces that appear blank to their perceptions (1985a, p 27). “The dream interpreters”, she writes, “had no desire but to rediscover the same. Everywhere. And, indeed, it was not hard to find. But was not *interpretation* itself, by that fact, caught up in the dream of identity, equivalence, analogy, of homology, symmetry, comparison, imitation” (1985a, p 27). The dream is preconceived as a rebus, that is, a riddle or puzzle that represents words through pictures or symbols. Analysis favours “a linear, teleologically horizontal or vertical displacement, over a surface as yet unwritten, which it brands by cutting it up according to the rules of repetition or recurrence, obeying processes ... within a given graphic order” (1985a, p 137).

Irigaray's response is to propose that the reader of dreams turns this scene of representation inside out, upside down or back to front. Like Irigaray in Plato's cave, the dream interpreter is attempting to recollect what has been forgotten, and "you will always have lost your bearings as soon as you set foot in the cave; it will turn your head, set you walking on your hands" (1985a, p 244). Like the ending of *Alice in Wonderland*, for Alice the dream seems curious and wonderful. But if, turning it around, you enter the space of Alice's sister—the dream interpreter reading between the lines of the text—the dream has different resonances:

Her sister sat still just as [Alice] left her, leaning her head on her hand, watching the setting sun, and thinking of little Alice and all her wonderful adventures, till she too began dreaming after a fashion, and this was her dream: First, she dreamed of little Alice herself, and once again the tiny hands were clasped upon her knee, and the bright eager eyes were looking up into hers ... The whole place around her became alive the strange creatures of her little sister's dream ... So she sat on, with closed eyes, and half believed herself in Wonderland, though she knew she had but to open them again, and all would change to dull reality ... [all] would change (she knew) ... Lastly, she pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers would, in the after-time, be herself a grown woman (Carroll, 2005, p 272).

Dreams, in Irigaray's analysis, may be read like images created for children with hidden pictures or messages—like the glimpse of the sorrows and joys ahead for Alice and her sister's insistence on the real that she knows. The meanings of dreams "are to be discovered *between* the branches, *made out* from *between* the trees. From the spaces between the figures, or stand-in

figures. Spaces that organise the scene, blanks that sub-tend the scene's structuration and that will not yet be read as such. Or read at all?" (1985a, p 138, emphasis in original). Here Irigaray suggests that it is the blank spaces of a dream that make meaning, much as the oneirism of a work reveals its subject. The writing of dreamspace, as Irigaray describes her own writing in "The Three Genres", "constitutes the secret, the not-yet-revealed, or the never-exhaustively-revealable" (1991b, p 149). Interpreting dreams becomes a method of reading and writing differently or otherwise, of occupying a theoretical space that insists on the blanks in discourse, losses or absences of meaning, and excesses that resist codification and order.

For Irigaray, the project of writing differently is not simply a matter of metaphor; in *Between East and West*, she writes: "Do not think I am amusing myself here by elaborating beautiful metaphors in order to support my own utopia. I am speaking here of real things. But who still has eyes to perceive the real?" (2002b, p 3). This real is imagined in the oneiric realm of the children's story or the *poste restante* of a letter for an unknown person that cannot be delivered through usual means (1993c, p 25). This philosophical elsewhere is evoked through the language of dreaming, drawing on the unconscious, associational and imaginary poetics to articulate carnal transcendence as difference.

The Navel of the Dream

Freud writes in *The Interpretation of Dreams*: “There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable—a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown” (1978, p 143). What a curiosity—the navel as a point of contact with the unknown? As with little Ernst, Freud is blinkered. The navel marks—and these words are ludicrously self-evident—our placental relation with our mother, and the achievement of a subjectivity separate from hers. So, as always, we are playing with the absence and presence of the mother. In the dreams that follow, this is both my (waking and dreaming) self as a mother to an unborn child, my mother hovering behind all these dreams, my friends as mothers, the mothers of my friends, and an abstract, all-encompassing mother image, representing the anxiety, guilt, fear and joy associated with maternity. There are other figures and half-figures with whom I play in dream space: men, children, inanimate objects, and animals. Like Ernst, might I also be playing with angels and gods? Might I be playing with the absence and presence of the divine?

Before any encounter with the divine is possible, it is necessary to enter into the game, to occupy an elsewhere space, to write differently. Such an approach evokes the possibilities of an amorous exchange, a textual dialogue between at least two subjects experienced corporeally. This is crucial in the articulation of a poetics of carnal transcendence. Gallop, in *Anecdotal Theory*, suggests that critical writing in response to dreams is “an attempt to theorise from a different place” and to speculate around ideas that have a tendency to “disable thought” (2002, p 11). She writes: “The place I mean is

not actually the land of dreams ... I want to theorise from a place where dreams cohabit with a host of other narrative forms, riddles, and stories, and play with language” (2002, p 11).⁹⁸

Interestingly, Irigaray has not yet performed this task of reading dreams differently in her work. Elizabeth Hirsh and Gary A. Olson ask Irigaray in an interview about the connection between dream interpretation as “an avatar of an *other* order of writing”, and her argument for the existence of “an ancient social order where women’s participation in civil and religious life is linked somehow to ‘still partially figurative, non-abstract’ systems of writing signs” (1996, no page number, emphasis in original).⁹⁹ Hirsh and Olson ask, in other words, whether a different type of reading of unconscious dream imagery might correspond with a feminine pre-patriarchal mode of communication. Irigaray’s response sidesteps the first part of the question, and concentrates on the second part—in which Hirsh and Olson ask about the link Irigaray makes between alphabetic writing and the civil and religious codification of patriarchal power (1996, no page number). This seems to refer to the essay “Flesh Colours” where Irigaray discusses the way in which psychoanalysis privileges language, specifically speaking and listening, over the other senses (2004b, p 114). She wonders whether, perhaps, dreams emerge as a result of the lack of seeing and being seen that constitute the exchanges between the analyst and the patient (2004b, p 114). In other words, might the imagery of the dream be an excessive result of the limited scope for the visual in psychoanalysis? To counteract this, she suggests that analyst and analysand communicate through painting. Like dreams, “the

objective of painting is to spatialize perception and make time simultaneous” (2004b, p 114). This is also the role of the analyst, Irigaray seems to suggest: to offer perspective. To return to Irigaray’s interview with Hirsh and Olson, what is clear in Irigaray’s response is her belief that what is lost in dream interpretation—specifically that of Freud—is sexual difference and carnal transcendence. The blank space of perception, or the navel of the dream, is the recognition of the specific carnal embodiment of the dreaming subject (and, in psychoanalytic terms, the carnal difference enacted between the analyst and analysand).

The Birds

Hélène Cixous refers to the unthought or blank spaces as the nether realms, dangerous and evasive, entered through “the back door of thought” (2004, p 169). In her dream-like piece of writing “Birds, Women and Writing”, Cixous explores these nether realms, and finds herself in a country of birds that swarm outside threateningly and joyfully like ideas. Looking for the origins of the association she makes between birds, women and writing, Cixous turns to the Bible. These birds are written of in the Old Testament—unclean, forbidden for human consumption, otherworldly, in Cixous’s words “imund” (2004, p 167):

And the Lord spake ... saying, These are the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth ... And these are they which ye shall have in abomination among the fowls; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, and the ossifrage, and the ospray, And the vulture, and the kite after his

kind; Every raven after his kind; And the owl, and the night hawk,
and the cuckow, and the hawk after his kind, And the little owl,
and the cormorant, and the great owl, And the swan, and the
pelican, and the gier eagle, And the stork, the heron after her kind,
and the lapwing, and the bat. All fowls that creep, going upon all
four, shall be an abomination unto you (Leviticus 11:1-20).

Cixous writes: “We can dream around the mystery of the stork’s ‘immundity’.

We can have all kinds of reveries regarding the swan and the swan’s
abomination” (2004, p 167). Cixous’s reverie—via Clarice Lispector’s novel
The Passion according to G. H., in which a woman confronts the
abominable—takes her to this point:

Let those birds be “abominable”: I associate women and writing
with this abomination. I do this, of course, half playfully, half
seriously. It is my way of indicating the reserved, secluded, or
excluded path or place where you meet those beings I think are
worth knowing while we are alive. Those who belong to the birds
and their kind (these may include some men), to writings and
their kind: they are all to be found—and a fair company it is too—
outside (2004, pp 168-169).

If you seek to join this exalted company, if you go outside towards the birds,
Cixous writes, if you enter the “nether realms”, the unthought, the
impossible, “you no longer belong to the world. Out there we shall be in the
company of swans, storks, and griffons” (2004, p 171). This space is
“somewhere in that most evasive of countries without precise address, the
one that is most difficult to find and work with, and where it is even difficult
to live without effort, danger, risk. This risky country is situated somewhere

near the unconscious: to reach it you have to go through the back door of thought” (2004, p 169). In this space, Cixous makes a discovery—the abominable is joyful, it is out of this world. But it is not from this space outside that writing comes, or at least not this space alone:

On the contrary, it comes from deep inside ... It is deep in my body, further down, behind thought. Thought comes in front of it and closes it like a door. This does not mean it does not think, but it thinks differently from our thinking and speech. Somewhere in the depths of my heart, which is deeper than I think. Somewhere in my stomach, my womb, and if you have got no womb—then it is somewhere “else” (2004, p 172).

For me, that “deep inside”, the place “behind thought” that enables me to think “differently” has become the caesarean scar from my daughter’s birth. It is a site of creativity and abomination, signalling “somewhere else” that is other than the “down-below” (what Cixous calls the “nether realms”) which I had imagined would be the source of my creativity and fecundity.¹⁰⁰ Cixous ends on a raging and bitter note: the joy of the abominable—of birds, women, and writing—has been lost. We—the fair company—are in exile (2004, p 171).

In “The Writing of the Birds”, a response to Cixous, Stephen David Ross writes: “In the face, the eyes, the paws, fangs, and claws, the fur and skin, in the touch of the animals is joy” (2004, p 191). There is a similar association when Clément writes about syncope, discussed in Chapter Four, suggesting that the subject who “falls” into syncope might return “with wolf’s paws, the

tail of a serpent, a bark at your lips, a pelt or fur” (1994, p 212).¹⁰¹ This transformation is carnal; Clément calls it “the sexual drive of the universe” (1994, 203). Ross brings together the strands of these associations, when he writes: “The characters cannot be distinguished: men, women, cats: birds, women, writing; *imund*. It is a question of men and women, of sexual difference. Sexual difference is impure” (2004, p 186). The joy of sexual difference, its potential to transform the subject, has been lost.

In “Animal Compassion”, Irigaray picks up on the theme of loss, when she writes of animals: “How can we talk about them? How can we talk to them? The familiars of our world inhabit another world, a world I do not know. Sometimes I can observe something in it, but I do not inhabit it from the inside—it remains foreign to me” (2004a, p 195). In Irigaray’s philosophy, what remains foreign, unassimilable, transcendent, is the other, in particular the other in a relation of sexual (carnal) difference and God or gods. She suggests that birds show the way towards divinity: “Birds lead one’s becoming ... the pathway to restore but also transubstantiate the body, the flesh” (2004a, p 197). The encounter with the birds outside—the joyous, unclean birds of ideas—offers, in Irigaray’s words, a “call to love” that leads us to discover the “scarcely foreseen future of our human becoming ... the accomplishment of our humanity” (2004a, p 201). The accomplishment of our humanity! To paraphrase from Lispector and Cixous, the question that Ross calls *imund*: is that it?

Dreaming

Where are we? This place has a proliferation of associations and signifiers—birds, writing, trees, navels, elements, gods, women and men. What they have in common is an attempt to represent the limits of consciousness, to theorise something elsewhere and beyond the logical and the rational, to think through the unthought. These are the toys for dreamplay. The dreams that follow were experienced during the writing of this thesis. This is dangerous territory. Not only because writing the personal means revealing more intimacies than is agreeable to me (Freud, 1978, p 5)—or indeed to the reader—nor because, as Kathryn Bond Stockton suggests, the writer risks delivering her ardour too readily so that the reader recoils from a touch at once too intimate and too grasping (1994, p xxiii). Not only for those reasons. In *Feminist Poetics*, Threadgold writes:

If we want to “rewrite” in a different sense, not transmission but transformation (and this will not always be appropriate), it seems to me that there has to be a very thorough understanding of the contexts, both material and discursive, in which we write, and a very detailed understanding of the materiality of texts (the resistances they offer to the readings we want to make), as well as a sense of the new discursive spaces, the unthought, the unspoken, that we are trying to make visible and audible in our writing. We also need to be constantly aware of who the “I” is who writes (1997, p 56).

If this is the case, then we are doomed already. Although we can have a sense of the space here, and metaphors to map it, the “I” who writes this text is

unknowable to herself. The dreaming I writes ideas the wakeful self may be unaware of, the unthought-of, the untheorised, the impossible. The dreaming I shifts from childhood to motherhood, from human to animal, from self to other *without thinking*.

I am a baby. My father and I lie on a blanket on the grass—I feel its prickles through the soft cotton. I am naked, feeling the sun on my bottom. My father is wearing only shorts. He curls his leg around me, and I look towards the back of his knee. Then I am older, in the school playground lying under the swings. A young girl in a maroon school uniform is swinging—her legs outstretched, then her feet tucked under; forward, pointed, back, curled. As she swings above me, with her legs moving back towards her body, I lick her. I stretch out my tongue, lizard-like, along the crease at the back of her knees.

The “nonsense” words that I unconsciously associated with my unborn child in Chapter Three—tongue, frond, curl, bottom, light, grass, bed—find a point of connection here. Bachelard writes of the persistence or permanence of childhood that lives in “moments of poetic existence” (1987a, p 96).

Dreaming of childhood, he suggests that we return to the “reveries which opened up the world for us” and which take us back to the beauty of our first images (1987a, p 96). The touch of grass, the warmth of the sun, the wetness of my tongue and the levitation of the swing—all these associations return me to the happy sensuality of childhood. This scene has its origin in memory. I have seen photographs of my father—shirtless, hairy-chested, wearing

sunglasses—in the garden with me as a baby lying naked on a towel. The blanket of the dream was a green paisley quilt always pulled out on sick days and for lying in the sun. My mother is outside the frame of this dream, absent from its imagery, but it seems as though I hear her voice, extolling the benefits of sunning a baby's bottom.

The second part of the dream seems to evoke a darker memory of childhood. I am the young girl on the swing in the maroon school uniform. I also lie beneath myself. I dimly recollect an event in childhood of a friend slipping from a swing and grazing her knee. I asked her whether I could taste her blood, and she let me lick it as it welled from the cuts. Here, the body is turned back to front, and I am doubled, licking the crease of my own knee. The blood is hidden in this dream; that is to say, it is out the front, and I am facing the back of the knee. I seem to watch the events of the dream with an adult intelligence—the scene at the swing is at once erotic and disturbing. Dreaming of childhood, I remember the opening of the world, as Bachelard suggests. I simultaneously recollect the opening of myself—my becoming, my subjectivity.

This dream seems to invite Irigaray's reading between—seeing the imagery of the dream back to front, inside out, upside down—with its reversed knee, the curling back and forth of the legs on the swing, and my father's knee curled cross-legged around me. These bodies are all strangely twisted—the baby looking towards the back of a knee, rather than into the garden, the swinging legs, the father's leg oddly bent, the tongue of the child lying under the swing.

The lying child. I recollect that the friend whose blood I tasted had a non-contagious disease of the blood. I wanted to see if it tasted different from my own.

I dream that it is raining late at night on a hill. I am wearing a tattered white wedding dress with bloodstains on it. I, and a tall man who appears beside me (my husband but not my husband), dig a hole in the ground in the shape of a shallow bowl. We lie together in the hole like two spoons. At the same time, I stand next to a pear tree and watch from the hill. The tall man claws at the dirt with his long fingernails. Someone asks what he is doing; I reply that I don't know. I—the woman in the wedding dress—lie down in the hole, bowl, bed or grave. It's like a conception. The couple, the tall man and I, make love violently in the storm. When I wake up, I scribble words to remember the dream: I love you, love, and eat you while you sleep. Lie spooned against me, I'll grow the curve of your hip.

Thinking through this dream, I concentrate on its fairy tale elements—the almost metonymy of hole, bowl, bed, grave and womb; the evocation of birth, sex, cannibalism and death; the erotic mattering of rhyming mud and blood; the strange doubling of the self (again) and a liberal dose of gothic aesthetic. It seems to me that this dream represents the reverse of the divine union that Irigaray advocates for the couples of her poetry. In *Everyday Prayers*, the couple are “divinely joined” (August 21st), united “in a moment of eternity” of “divine love, joined by “the universe” (September 8th), they share “an interweaving of souls” (December 8th). The fusion of the lovers in this dream

is accompanied by a sense of horror. The two incorporate one another completely. Until death do us part—but in this dream, like Irigaray’s interweaving of souls, even death offers no escape.

Soon after my friend Louise has given birth to her first son, I dream that the three of us are lying together in the lounge room of their house. I feel that I am both myself and the newborn baby. He/I are lying on our stomachs close to a window, with a sheer curtain blowing in the breeze. The sunlight is dusty. His/my mother sits with her legs outstretched; we lie between her legs. She is giving us a massage, stroking us all over our bodies and humming under her breath. She turns us this way and that, pulls and stretches our skins, her hands long and lean and strong. She is massaging the base of my/his spine, and circling her fingers around the hollow of my/his back. She says: “This is where the light begins”.

Light—*luce* in Italian. Luce. In this dream, light has the texture of dust and skin. I think of Cathryn Vasseleu’s *Textures of Light* when I wake. On texture, she writes: “a disposition or characteristic of anything that is woven into a fabric, and comprises a combination of parts and qualities ... Texture is at once cloth, threads, knots, weave, detailed surface, material matrix and frame” (1998, p 12). On light: “In its texture, light is a fabrication, a surface of a depth that also spills over and passes through the interstices of the fabric” (1998, p 12). I want something more from Vasseleu. The names of the chapters evoke an amorous exchange—carnal light, living flesh, touching flesh, the lightness of touch, illuminating passion, erotic light. I want to

experience this light. I feel such a yearning after this dream—to be a child? To be a mother? To be where the light begins? There is something of the carnal angel here—“like an inscription written in invisible ink on a fragment of the body, skin, membrane, veil, colorless and unreadable until it interacts with the right substance, the matching body” (Irigaray, 1993c, pp 35-36). A misreading here—the light substance.

Why the lower back? Why is this the origin of light? The hollow of the back—another dream about a hollow. Last night, it was the hollow of the bed, now the hollow of the back. Why these recurring hollows? What associations does it have? Hollowness? Emptiness? Is this a dream about a desire for a child to fill a hollow, empty, dark place? To say: this is where the light begins. Carnal light. Erotic light. Touching light, touching flesh. Touch me. He/I lies between her legs? My legs, perhaps? He lies between my legs. Lean and strong. Stretching our skins. My two lips? Let this be where the light begins.

Pregnant with my daughter, I dream of a bridge constructed in the form of a mother. She is the pylon of the bridge, silver-grey metal or marble with a slight sheen, large, naked. She is holding a child, approximately nine months old. From one approach, I see her bare bottom and the brief impression of the baby peeking at me over her shoulder. From the other, one breast free, she holds the baby almost upright across her body, its legs dangling onto her left hip. She is carnality incarnate. Huge. She looks towards the oncoming traffic, which passes between her legs. I drive back

and forth across the bridge. In the background, a soaring and swooping piece of orchestral music plays. This music celebrates the placenta, the conductor says as he introduces it, and as I listen, I visualise musical notes in the form of a placenta, communicating between the mother and the child.

It is as though I dream this in response to Irigaray's proposal in *Thinking the Difference* that there should be more beautiful public images of mothers and daughters. Irigaray suggests that this would "begin to redress women's individual and collective loss of identity ... It will help them move from the private sphere to the public, from the family to the society in which they live. The mother-daughter couple is always erased" (1994b, p 10). My initial response was dismissive, but the simplicity of this approach is striking and beguiling. When did I last see a public artwork that celebrated the bond between mother and daughter, or that celebrated the mother as woman?

Two recent artworks, which both make a giantess of the pregnant woman—Alison Lapper pregnant (Quinn, 2005) and Ron Mueck's pregnant woman (2002). Alison Lapper, the subject of the first sculpture, is an English artist with the congenital disorder phocomelia, which caused her to be born without arms and with shortened legs. She spent her childhood in institutions after being rejected by her mother at four months of age. The sculpture by Marc Quinn was located in London's Trafalgar Square between September 2005 and late 2007. Lapper describes the statue as "transcendingly beautiful", and said: "I regard it as a modern tribute to femininity, disability and motherhood ... It is so rare to see disability in

Image 5: Quinn, 2005, *Alison Lapper Pregnant*.



© Marc Quinn

Source: <http://publicheart.wordpress.com/2008/11/01/alison-lapper-pregnant/>

Retrieved February 19, 2009.

Image 6: Mueck, 2002, *Pregnant Woman*.



© Ron Mueck.

Source: <http://www.nga.gov.au/Mueck/index.cfm>

Retrieved February 17, 2009.

Image 7: Lapper, 2000, *Angel*.



© Alison Lapper.

Source: <http://www.alisonlapper.com/gallery/images/ANGEL.jpg>

Retrieved February 19, 2009.

Image 8: Lapper, 2000, *Pink Hands*.



© Alison Lapper.

Source: <http://www.alisonlapper.com/gallery/images/PINKHANDS.jpg>

Retrieved February 19, 2009.

everyday life—let alone naked, pregnant and proud. The sculpture makes the ultimate statement about disability—that it can be as beautiful and valid a form of being as any other” (2005, no page number).¹⁰² In her own artwork, Lapper has addressed these complexities in a series of self-portraits that juxtapose the divine and the maternal.

The other sculpture that resonates from the imagery of the dream is Ron Mueck’s pregnant woman. Hugely pregnant, she is disconcerting in a different way, for her immensity and her realism. The National Gallery of Australia, in describing the artwork on its website again makes the association between divinity and maternity, referring to the themes of fertility, birth, the goddess, the iconography of the Madonna and Child, and life itself (Kennedy, 2004, no page number). The Director of the Gallery at the time of its acquisition, Brian Kennedy, wrote that initially he felt “intimidated” and “cautious” recognising something both “awe inspiring” and “grotesque” in *Pregnant Woman* (2004, no page number). He immediately relates to the sculpture on a personal level: “For men of my vintage, it has been typical to be in attendance at the birth of children. Not so for men of a previous generation ... This is a very emotional work to someone who has lived through challenging pregnancy, never been pregnant or failed to be pregnant” (2004, no page number). His thoughts turn to the divine, describing the pregnant woman as a “secular Madonna”:

She addresses a taboo in our society, where 2000 years from the mysterious birth of Jesus which gave rise to our current system of counting the years, many in our society still find pregnancy a

subject which should be retained as a private one. *Pregnant Woman* is for me a hymn to the beauty of the life-giving which is shared so personally only by mothers. *Pregnant Woman* is surely one of the most fascinating images of maternity (2004, no page number).¹⁰³

Patricia Piccinini's sculptures provoke a similar response. Her works are life-like mutant forms that raise questions about genetics, evolution, reproductive technologies and bio-engineering. In a review published in *The Australian* on Thursday April 2, 2009, Edward Colless wrote a response to her piece *Big Mother*, which depicts a life-size ape with a human baby at its breast. Colless describes it as a "comically blasphemous travesty of the Madonna and child." He continues:

Is this a wet nurse? A surrogate mother who has impregnated across species? An impoverished servant biologically colonised by her human overlords? Or has she been a vessel for a miraculous, messianic birth? ... Whatever this think in her arms is, it wearies her but she nurtures it with grim determination, driven by a maternal instinct that operates her like a puppet. Her skin sags and the expression on her simian face exudes the pathos of a slave with no future other than this one task" (Colless, 2009, no page number).

Reading this description, the lack of agency that Colless allows the mother is striking, and reminiscent of Irigaray's description of the mother in "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other". The adjective Colless chooses to describe the sculpture is revealing: "dangerous" (2009, no page number). The mother's sexuality only serves to strengthen this impression: "Any

Image 9: Piccinini, 2005, *Big Mother*



© Patricia Piccinini

Source: <http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/natureslittlehelpers/>
Retrieved April 2, 2009.

Image 10: Piccinini, 2005, *Big Mother*



© Patricia Piccinini

Source: <http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/natureslittlehelpers/>
Retrieved April 2, 2009.

Image 11: Piccinini, 2005, *Big Mother*



© Patricia Piccinini

Source: <http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/natureslittlehelpers/>
Retrieved April 2, 2009.

empathy you experience with this surrogate finally burns away when you step behind her and see her gargantuan, mutated and obscene rubbery sexual organs and anus.” His fear turns to “unambiguous disgust” and Colless notes that maternity “is dreadful” (2009, no page number). His conclusion is that “mothering is presented as obliteration” but what strikes me is that it is Colless himself who has performed this annihilation of the maternal subject.¹⁰⁴

The dream has another association, closer to home. There is the sculpture by Loui Fraser in the courtyard of the Humanities building at Macquarie University. In *White Slaves and White Australia*, Raelene Frances offers a history of Joy, who is claimed as the first public sculpture of a prostitute in the world (2003, no page number). In 1995, the sculpture was located on the corner of Yurong and Stanley Streets close to Kings Cross, the well-known red light district of Sydney. The victim of vandals and community outrage, she was removed by the South Sydney Council after eighteen months (Frances, 2003, no page number). Frances tells several anecdotes about the sculpture, including a curious one in which a grieving mother takes a hammer to the sculpture. The face of the statue resembled her daughter, who had recently died:

When Loui later spoke to the mother about her actions, she discovered that the woman’s daughter had been a Sydney sex worker for many years. In fact, she’d been introduced to the occupation by her mother, who was herself a brothel-keeper. Joy was too vivid a reminder of the young woman’s life, her early

Image 12: Fraser, 1995, *Joy*.



© Loui Fraser. Photography by Michelle Wilson.
Source: <http://www.artgallery.mq.edu.au/>
Retrieved August 26, 2006.

death a result of ill-health following years of heroin addiction (2003, no page number).

In the second anecdote, a mother takes her seven year old daughter to see Joy, as a celebration “because it departed from the hypocrisy which characterised so many of society’s attitudes to sex” (Frances, 2003, no page number).

For Georges Bataille, whose theory of religion I explored in Chapter Four, a prostitute is the incarnation of divinity. In the short story “Madame Edwarda”, written in 1941 under the pseudonym Pierre Angélique, he encounters divinity in carnality in the arms of prostitute called Edwarda. He describes the “shock” of her embrace in which a frozen “stillness swept down” upon him from on high. He writes: “It was as though I were borne aloft in a flight of headless and unbodied angels shaped from the broad swooping of wings, but it was simpler than that. I became unhappy and felt painfully forsaken, as one is when in the presence of GOD” (1997, p 224, emphasis in original). He continues:

She was seated, she held one leg stuck up in the air, to open her crack yet wider she used fingers to draw the folds of skin apart. And so Madame Edwarda’s “old rag and ruin” loomed at me, hairy and pink, just as full of life as some loathsome squid. “Why”, I stammered in a subdued tone, “why are you doing that?” “You can see for yourself”, she said, “I’m GOD” ... At last, reeling, I sank down on my knees and feverishly pressed my lips to that running, teeming wound. Her bare thigh caressingly nudged my ear, I thought I heard a sound of roaring sea surge, it is the same sound

you hear when you put your ear to a large conch shell (1997, pp 227-228).

Madame Edwarda and Joy are far removed from the imagery Irigaray imagines as celebrating carnal transcendence. As prostitutes, they are woman in a world of men-amongst-themselves, exchanged as goods. In “Civil Rights and Responsibilities for the Two Sexes”, Irigaray condemns as “uncivil” the men who prostitute women, who buy and sell girls amongst themselves, and who produce or distribute images of women’s bodies that disrespect feminine sexual identity. Within her model of civil rights and responsibilities “it would be a civil offence to depict women’s bodies as stakes in pornography or prostitution” (2004b, p 206). Joy an offence? My dreaming self travels back and forth across the bridge, the umbilical cord, and I hear our placenta singing. My daughter, my joy.

I give birth to a baby who is a grain of cooked white rice. Looking closely, the rice has the form of an embryo, with little nubs of limbs and grey smudges for eyes. I know that the baby has arrived too soon, and needs to return to the womb, but I am unsure whether to eat the rice embryo or to place it into my vagina. I consider the fact that rice is the staple food of many, and wonder how they deal with their rice embryos. No one has mentioned sex, but I am pretty sure that eating the baby will take it to the wrong place. In my anxiety, I drop the grain of rice on the floor, and have to crouch down to find it. It has fallen into the folds of the bedclothes and is dusty and misshapen. It has become blurry around the edges, and seems to be rubbing off on my hands. At this point, I feel the baby move, and I begin

to understand that the grain of rice is only a small part of the whole still inside me.

Imagining you as a cooked grain of rice, I attempt to incorporate or consume you—your softness, whiteness, malleability, vulnerability. Carnal difference assumes the irreducibility of two bodies, the inability of one to entirely incorporate the other—but I wonder at you inside me, at your separateness, at your selfhood. How can I conceive of you as different from me? In Irigaray's description of the womb, you are living off me, feeding off me, wrapped in me, drinking me, consuming me (1993c, pp 32-33). I am anxious about my ability to nurture and sustain you in the fertile and moist ground of my womb. The bedclothes are dusty—unwashed? Unused? Or used too well? As rich with meaning as the white sheets or veil of little Ernst that he uses to hide the reel—Derrida calls it a hymen, Irigaray an angel. In this dream, I am playing with the absence/presence of the foetus, experienced only through touch. I am the other to the daughter in "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other": I consume you, I live off you, I reject your consumption of me.

Another night of hospital dreams. An accumulation of glimpses, emotions and sensations. Driving the circular car park around and around. Corridors lacking windows, fluorescent lights, vinyl floors, the ping of disinfectant in my nostrils, countless signs and directions, the walls scraped raw from beds and trolleys. Feeling again the boredom and the panic, dry eyes, chapped lips, dirty pyjamas, vending machines for every meal,

pacing, waiting, the moaning of the building, the disorientation of day and night. Always in the background the machinery, the alarms, the endless rise and fall of numbers. Harriet is in my arms—pink, mottled blue, then grey. I'm running the fluorescent-lit, vinyl-lined, red-arrowed corridors of the hospital. She's limp in my arms, her head banging uselessly against my shoulder. I'm screaming for a doctor to bring her back. A nurse tells me that all the doctors are having a meeting and smoking cigarettes in the car park. I'm losing her. Running. Trying to breathe for both of us. Kissing her blue lips.

Adrienne Rich asks “the unconscious of the young mother—where does it entrust its messages, when dream-sleep is denied her for years?” (quoted in Walker, 1998, p 151). Here is my unconscious—the images I permanently thrust aside in order to live. I use Kristeva’s words unconsciously, as a rejection. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva describes the abject:

A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being (1982, p 3, emphasis in original).

For Kristeva, the abject marks the moment we separate from the mother (1982, p 3). Like the daughter in “And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the

Other”, who rejects the gift of the breast-milk from the mother—“with your milk, Mother, I swallowed ice” (Irigaray, 1981, p 60)—the daughter in *Powers of Horror* refuses the cup of milk proffered by the mother and father as the “sign of their desire” (Kristeva, 1982, p 3). Unlike Irigaray’s daughter, by acknowledging the abject—that which is “thrust aside”—Kristeva’s daughter recognises that she is rejecting herself, her own desire: “I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*” (1982, p 3, emphasis in original). The yearning and desperation of “And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other” ends with the death of the mother: “And what I wanted from you, Mother, was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive” (Irigaray, 1981, p 67). The daughter’s needling and grasping comes down to her resistance to accept the woman who is her mother and herself. The mother relates to a daughter who is angry, screaming of being cloistered and imprisoned, lying in bed all day, refusing to eat (Irigaray, 1981, pp 60-61). The daughter not only refuses the food offerings of the mother—the icy milk, the honey bread (Irigaray, 1981, p 62)—she fails to nourish herself. She is unable to see that she is refusing her own desire, her own carnality, herself as a woman like her mother, herself as a mother nourishing another.

And here, in this association, in reading Irigaray’s mother/daughter relationship which kills the mother, and having nightmares of my own which kill the daughter, I find what rankles most when I read Luce Irigaray: her refusal to acknowledge the abject aspects of the carnal. The impossibility of carnal transcendence as difference in Irigaray’s philosophy is her resistance

to the carnal: the lack of body fluids, baseness, and shit in the joyous celebration of becoming as woman separately from, and alongside, the mother. In the opening of this chapter, I identified the anxieties that I have encountered in thinking through Irigaray's work to imagine a newly sexed culture that takes the mother/daughter relationship as a model for carnal transcendence as difference. To do this, carnal transcendence as difference needs to embrace the abject, to take us to the borders of our condition as living beings; to hospital beds, to morgues, to cemeteries, to operating theatres and birthing rooms. This is a poetics that not only yearns for the ideals of divine union and interweaving souls, but acknowledges the weight of my separation from you, and how sad that makes us feel.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

Carnal transcendence imagines a world in which the sexual has the weight and value of divinity, and the divine is as livable and readily evoked as the sexual. As a model of difference, it elaborates the possibility of a newly sexed culture in which carnal and divine relationships are mucus-like: abundant, available, joyful, expansive, and variable. This thesis has attempted to think through carnal transcendence as difference in relation to Luce Irigaray's philosophy in two major ways. First, it challenges the resistances within Irigaray's writing for conceiving sexual difference as the basis for a newly sexed culture, and for constructing the mother/daughter relationship as a model for carnal transcendence as difference. Second, this thesis celebrates the poetic amorous exchange of Irigaray's writing, something that is frequently elided in critical readings of her work that reduce it to a logical, sustained argument. For both these tasks, the key question is whether carnal transcendence as difference represents a rhetorical ideal, or whether it enables the creation of new poetics.

The answer to this question is not a simple affirmative or negative. Carnal transcendence as difference is an exploration of a theoretical terrain, and as such remains irresolvable. It does not represent a singular or contained philosophy and, as this thesis has argued, carnal transcendence as difference emerges unevenly in Irigaray's writing. The value of the concept lies in the way in which it brings this unevenness to light, enabling the reader to consider the complexities of sexual difference, transcendence and carnality in

relation to one another in Irigaray's work, and to speculate and imagine these complexities differently.

Chapter One established the framework for thinking through carnal transcendence as difference in relation to the three stages of Irigaray's work: the recognition that the traditional referent for the divine is masculine; articulation of a feminine divine subject; and the creation of a divine intersubjective coupling. It raised the possibility that this third phase of Irigaray's work makes it possible to speculate differently about the outcomes of sexual difference—including a differently sexed culture that locates carnality and transcendence together—by focussing couples other than the heterosexual couple. Chapter Two opened up this speculation by exploring the amorous exchange of the reader and writer of feminist philosophy within Irigaray's own writing style, and through poetics in response to her writing. This double approach tested the notion of carnal transcendence as difference, and found that its strength lay in locating pleasure and theory together in a voice that is at once critical *and* personal.

In Chapter Three, the critical personal voice challenged the absent presence of the mother in Irigaray's writing. As a model for carnal transcendence as difference, the mother/daughter relationship showed that a differently sexed culture has not yet been articulated in Irigaray's philosophy. Other libidinal philosophies, explored in Chapter Four, reinforced this lack. Mucus emerged as the aspect of Irigaray's philosophy that most clearly articulates carnal

transcendence as difference, providing a substance to connect transcendence, carnality and difference.

Reading *Everyday Prayers* in Chapter Five raised a challenge to Irigaray's model of difference in relation to transcendence, since, as a close reading of the poems demonstrated, the divine union of the poems did not manifest itself in a touchful exchange for the reader. In other words, the matter of mucus was not present to bind the poet and reader in an amorous exchange. This demonstrated the complexity of attempting to perform carnal transcendence as difference in a textual exchange, and reinforced the risks of poetic writing in response to theory. Heedlessly—where angels fear to tread—Chapter Six attempted to perform a poetics of carnal transcendence as difference by negotiating the dreamspace of unthought and impossibility. This process uncovered the unthought in relation to carnal transcendence as difference—abjection—and identified the impossible—a newly sexed culture that takes the mother/daughter relationship as a model for carnal transcendence as difference.

There is much that remains to be thought in Irigaray's writing and the responses of her critics, particularly in relation to the complex and changeable philosophies that this thesis traverses—sexual difference, transcendence, mucus, amorous textualities, placental economies, two lips, mother/daughter relationships, and poetics. Rosi Braidotti defines thinking as “the means of grasping the fluid mass of the affects which animate the body as a libidinal space” (1991, p 31). This corresponds with the difficult

task of thinking through the slippery philosophy of carnal transcendence as difference. It also emphasises the different spaces of the libidinal occupied by individual bodies, which correspond to different affects and different grasps. This thesis represents one fluid mass in response to the inconceivable question that Luce Irigaray poses: why did God withdraw from carnal love?

Notes

Chapter One: Carnal Transcendence and Sexual Difference

¹ Irigaray's strategy of mimesis encompasses the work of Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, Plato, Freud, Heidegger and others. In common with all of her mimetic texts is the assertion that what is missing in "male" philosophies is an awareness of sexual difference.

² Margaret Whitford writes: "The sensible transcendental, then, is the flesh made word (in an audacious reversal of the New Testament)" (1991, p 47). The New Testament text reads: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth" (John 1, 14).

³ *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory and Futures* is a collection of essays, edited by Elizabeth Grosz, which examines questions of the immanence of futures and the metamorphic possibilities of time and memory. In the first essay of the collection, "Thinking the New: of Futures Yet Unthought", Grosz uses terms such as creativity, progress, innovation, disorder, transformation, and upheaval to describe processes of change or the establishment of newness. She asks: "What kind of difference must it be to differ not only from itself and what is other (difference as divergence, as the breakdown or failure of identity) but also to differ from its own differing: in short to diverge in (at least) two directions at once? How to think the idea of direction or trajectory without being able to anticipate a destination?" (1999b, p 17). The notion of becoming, as opposed to being, emphasises these complexities: progress without ideal, direction without destination, and difference as multiplicity.

⁴ In the introduction to "Spirituality and Religion" chapters of *Key Writings*, Irigaray provides some personal background to explain her perspective on Christian theology: "I was born and educated in a Christian context ... [but] upon becoming an adult, I left my own tradition" (2004a, p 145). Irigaray came to an understanding that a neglect of a religious dimension to her life was harmful to subjectivity and relations with others and the environment, and so returned to the questions of Christian theology. As an adult, she combined the answers she found there with her readings of Eastern (predominantly Indian) theologies which she encountered through the practice of yoga. Irigaray's *Between East and West* addresses the connections and divergences she found in her spiritual quest. Several

commentators have challenged Irigaray's reading of Eastern traditions as limited and naive, notably Morny Joy (see, for example "Divine Love" in 2002) and Simone Roberts in "Irigaray's Eastern Turn" (2004).

⁵ Serene Jones reads Irigaray alongside German theologian Karl Barth. Jones's intention is to learn Irigaray and Barth's "ways of thinking" and enter the strange worlds of their texts, sensing "the undercurrents that draw their positions 'near to one another' and then forcefully pull them apart" (1993, p 111).

⁶ For an interesting reading of St Theresa through George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, see Kathryn Bond Stockton's *God between Their Lips* (1994, Chapter 7).

⁷ Christopher Fynsk suggests that "'La Mystérique" is a play that Irigaray stages, and notes: "If we were to fall into taking this experience as a *model* (as though Irigaray were promoting *one* figuration of sexual desire in its biological and spiritual determination, as though this scene captured the truth of feminine desire), we would miss the play of mimesis here" (1996, p 173, emphasis in original).

⁸ For a feminist reading of Levinas's model of ethics, see Tina Chanter (1995, p 182). Irigaray's argument in relation to the writing of Levinas is that his feminine is not other to himself. In "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas" (in *The Irigaray Reader*) she claims that "he knows nothing of a communion in pleasure between the one and the other, nothing of the erotic" (1991a, pp 180-181).

⁹ On the relation between transcendence and immanence, Iris Marion Young writes: "Transcendence ... expresses a mode of temporality. The living subject is future-oriented; the future is open with possibility, which generates anxiety at the same time as its openness and possibility restructure the meaning of the present and the past ... The temporality of immanence is cyclical, repetitive. As the movement of life it moves in species time unpunctuated by events of individual meaning. The cycles go around, from spring to summer to fall to winter, from birth to death and birth to death" (2005a, p 129). Her context is a challenge to Simone de Beauvoir's claim that housework/ women's work is always only immanent—a negative valuation, Young argues, which "flies in the face of the experience of many women" (2005a, p 130).

¹⁰ Tina Beattie is critical of Irigaray's attempts to sexualise the divine. In *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, she argues that Irigaray's "religious symbolism lacks sacramentality and therefore corporeality because it is abstracted from its rightful place ... where liturgical performance and worship give bodily expression to the

language of faith. Similarly, her appeal to the language of sexuality and fecundity ... bears hardly any relationship to the joy and tragedy, the mess and muddle, ambiguity and complexity of human sexuality, love and procreation" (2002, p 38). Although I challenge Beattie's insistence on the "rightful place" of religion, I have sympathy for her conclusion here. In Chapter Three, I reach a similar sticking point in my reading of Irigaray's mother/daughter relationship.

¹¹ In "Reverence for each Other Being the Sweet Aim", Helen Shoobridge looks at Irigaray's reading of the Song of Songs alongside Emily Dickinson's poetic encounter with the masculine. She writes: "In the Song of Songs, the distance between the speaker and the divine offers a chance for the feminine lover to speak ... The interval of distance hinders an easy appropriation of the other for one's own purposes, and this conforms to Irigaray's idea of a relation between the sexes where each must first see the other and approach him or her with care ... The female speaker's excessive passion and desire are framed by intermittent references to her separation from the lover" (Shoobridge, 2000, pp 91-92).

¹² Butler challenges Irigaray's statements on the primacy of sexual difference when she writes: "If, as Norma Alarcon has insisted, women of colour are 'multiply interpellated', called by many names, constituted in and by that multiple calling, then this implies that the symbolic domain, the domain of socially instituted norms, is composed of racialising norms, and that they exist not merely alongside gender norms, but are articulated through one another. Hence, it is no longer possible to make sexual difference prior to racial difference or for that matter to make them fully sexual axes of social regulation and power" (1993, p 182). Cynthia Willett also argues against the primacy of sexual difference, referring to "Irigaray's blindness to the relevance of class and status in her analysis of gender" (2001, p 128). She notes this particularly in the struggle for power between mother and daughter—I discuss this in Chapter Three—where Willett argues for considering the maternal in relation to class difference. She writes: "The mother's exercise of power extends well beyond the boundaries of the immediate family into the political economy. If that mother enjoys something of a life of leisure and privilege in the class-structured societies of Europe, she may be supported by low-paid servants and immigrant workers ... Have these women 'lost their axis' as Irigaray's theory of identity and cosmic force seems to imply?" (2001, p 143). See also Penelope Ingram's *The Signifying Body*, where she reads Irigaray's sensible transcendental alongside Toni Morrison's novel *Paradise*. She concludes: "Just as Irigaray maintains paradise is not out these

somewhere above us, *Paradise* is a gift that we exchange between ourselves, and in doing so we might approach the ethical possibility of both sexual and racial difference” (2008, p 89).

¹³ The phrase “resistances [texts] offer to the readings we want to make” comes from Terry Threadgold’s description of the materiality of texts and the risks associated with rewriting for a feminist poetics (1997, p 56). I revisit these issues in Chapter Two.

¹⁴ Murphy also criticises Irigaray’s technophobia in *Je, Tu, Nous*: “Indeed, Irigaray even goes so far as to enumerate the ways in which the male presence remains in artificial procreation, in order to argue that women who utilise methods such as these are in fact in bad faith” (2007, p 82). Murphy’s claims of technophobia are valid, but she neglects to consider Irigaray’s criticism of the commodification of women’s bodies through such technologies. For a more considered response to this argument, see Alys Eve Weinbaum’s (1994) “Marx, Irigaray and the Politics of Reproduction”.

¹⁵ Alison Weir is critical of the relationship that Irigaray constructs in “When Our Lips Speak Together”, suggesting that it is “sadly lacking” since it is “restricted to the private realm, to the intimacy of the lovers’ discourse. Irigaray is unable to ... account for the possibility of a relationship with others beyond the bedroom” (1996, p 103). This reading is only possible if the voices in the text are only those of two lovers, which I do not believe is the case.

¹⁶ Rosi Braidotti uses the term “trace” in the context of discussing a construction of subjectivity as “becoming” that has implications for carnal transcendence: “an enfleshed, immanent subject-in-becoming, for whom life is embodied, embedded and eroticised” (2004, 171). Pamela Anderson refers to the “trace” of sexual difference in the following way: “As imagined by Irigaray ‘sexual difference’ cannot be picked out or referred to like a physical object or an essential nature. Instead sexual difference is an ideal ... [which] can be understood as a ‘trace’ in the philosophical sense ... it can signify the face of the Other. As a trace, sexual difference needs to be given space between two sexually specific subjects and not set in opposition to the sameness of a male standard of subjectivity. This trace remains invisible as long as it is suppressed by the sameness of patriarchy” (1998, no page number).

Chapter Two: An Amorous Exchange

¹⁷ Heidegger's term "being-in-the-world" represents ontological questions about the interconnection of self, other, knowledge and space. Irigaray explicitly engages with the work of Heidegger in *The Forgetting of Air*, as Joanne Faulkner articulates in the essay "Amnesia at the Beginning of Time": "*The Forgetting of Air* can be read as instruction to Heidegger in the art of the *acceptance* of gifts, which would require *engaging* with one's benefactor. According to Irigaray, the philosopher refuses to encounter the otherness that endows him ... with his life: that is, the sexed other. Irigaray engages with Heidegger, who is her benefactor, as well as the beneficiary of their relation. Thus, *The Forgetting of Air* is at once thanks, and an expression of grievance, to Heidegger" (Faulkner, 2001, p 127, emphasis in original). Here, Faulkner points to the indebtedness and interconnectedness of the textual relationship between Heidegger and Irigaray. It is the amorous or carnal aspect of this relation between reader and writer that is explored in this chapter. Faulkner begins her essay with an epigraph from her daughter: "Thank you for making me mum—I love my life. Bridget, aged 5" (2001, p 124). This amorous voice of becoming informs the text that follows, emphasising the porous, fluid, maternal aspects that are forgotten in Heidegger's ontology. Irigaray's criticism of Heidegger's Being is that it neglects the feminine other and the question of sexual difference.

¹⁸ I am indebted to the anonymous referee for *Outskirts: Feminisms Along the Edge*, who wrote: "Another thing to think about (as I am currently doing): the nuptial contract, or amorous exchange, does enable men and women thinkers to come together. However, Irigaray has written a lot about the devastating problems (transferentially) of women encountering each other. This is in line, obviously, with her mother-daughter stuff. The best material from her comes from *To Speak is Never Neutral*. I have found that I've had to go back to this early material not to get beyond the 'phallic mother', as so many theorists/philosophers tell us, but to re-ask the things that put in question the relations/responses between women authors and readers" (2006, personal communication). Although I don't directly engage with these ideas here—my apologies!—they have informed my reading of Irigaray, and mark a future direction in my work.

¹⁹ Michelle Boulous Walker calls for a dialogue between Le Doeuff and Irigaray, but writes that this request may be "somewhat naive" since "Le Doeuff's project of a philosophy without borders ironically positions itself against those analyses that tend to re-establish borders by characterising philosophy as a closed

domain of masculine privilege. Le Doeuff seems to read Irigaray in this way” (1998, p 26). For a reading of Le Doeuff and Irigaray together, see Virpi Lehtinen’s “On Philosophical Style” (2007).

²⁰ Tamsin Lorraine proposes that “writing theory is a practice that brings—or should bring—the writer into more intense immediate contact with herself and the affective materiality of her existence, which feeds and motivates her words” (1999, p 13).

²¹ In *The Sex of Knowing*, Le Doeuff writes: “In [Irigaray’s] writing we find the three K’s of Nazism, cooking with Hestia (Küche), children (Kinder) with the right to motherhood, and the church (Kirche) with leaden references to edifying (female) deities. The text thus is not very different from what the worst of men, and conservative women with them, have wanted for women” (2003, p 65).

²² In reading this chapter, my supervisor Nick Mansfield felt something akin to “Irigaray anxiety”. He notes that the chapter avoids retreating into a male reading position, and added “it’s courageous and I think it comes off (it does make me a little nervous though, I don’t know why)” (2008, personal communication).

²³ Eléanor H. Kuykendall writes: “In conversation with non-academic French feminists I found many who had read isolated essays of Irigaray’s, including, in the original of course, “And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other”, and found them extraordinary. But I found no one, up until a year after its publication, who had been able to read *Amante Marine*, with its complex literary illusions; and indeed a French academic advised me to start with the second part, which presents cognitive linear arguments, in order to understand the experimentally written first and third parts. What, then, is the political force of a writing style inaccessible to all but those highly trained academically?” (1983, p 270).

²⁴ Walker suggests that Irigaray learns this lesson on reading from Diotima, whose teaching on love and divinity is reported by Plato, and to whom Irigaray responds in the essay “Sorcerer Love” (Irigaray, 1993a). Walker writes: “Irigaray is able to offer us an open reading, one that refuses to totalize its encounter with the other. Irigaray’s reading remains—up until the very last sentence—a readiness to re-read ... [and] to move on from the fixed terrain of her own thought. In this, Irigaray’s reading is a kind of love or beauty in action ... The sensible and the transcendental are no longer alternatives, but meet here in the midst of Irigaray’s response” (Walker, 2006, pp 231-232).

²⁵ In a footnote, Grosz suggests that Jane Gallop is an exceptional writer who is capable of an “Irigarayan” reading of Irigaray (1989, p 240). See for example Gallop’s *The Daughter’s Seduction* (1982).

²⁶ For Michel Chion, the voice in cinema is itself a reminder of the enveloping and seductive song of the siren: “ever since the film screen has been inhabited by the voice that permeates the boundaries of the screen, the myth of the Sirens has haunted it” (1999, p 115). He argues that the voice in cinema, and the pleasure we take in it, “has to do with boundaries and shores”, with the borders of the screen and the bodies that inhabit it, yet reach beyond (1999, p 114). The haunting of the sirens—those voices in cinema that call us to this in-between—recollect our “oceanic origins” and situate us within the “uterine darkness” of the theatre (Chion 1999, p 114).

²⁷ Thanks to Damon Young for his description of Luce Irigaray’s voice from a male ear. He wrote: “Your own text is not really an example of those aspects of ‘parler-femme’ which equate to syntactical collapse, leaps of (il)logic, ambivalent signification. Your writing is quite precise, rational, and coaxes or soothes the reader. Now it seems to me this is kind of important because what you are in fact describing is something different. The *écriture féminine* of Irigaray and Cixous is sometimes seemingly hostile (to rationality, at least), deliberately opaque, etc. You explicate this style—and the interesting task of reading it—most effectively in the chapter. You do not however reproduce it. Personally, I think that’s interesting because I think it is possible to ‘parler-femme’ without speaking in riddles and code. In fact: I think this is exactly what you’re doing. Which in a sense means you’re rendering Luce’s project somewhat obsolete even in the same gesture by which you rescue it and affirm it. Your reading of Luce, in fact, displaces Luce. In effect, you’ve (in my reading of you) questioned the vehemence or the vigilance of her challenge to ‘phallogocentrism’ by offering a kind of womanly, carnal reading practice which does not have to operate outside the normal ‘codes/grids’ of intelligibility” (2006, personal communication).

²⁸ Anna Gibbs describes the erotics of writing in relation to the work of Michel de Certeau who uses the term “heterology” to describe the “science of the different” (in Gibbs 1995, p 146). In relation to writing, heterology manifests itself “by means of a ‘sexual’ process that posits the arrival of the other, the different, as a detour necessary for its progress ... [It is] an erotics; it is the inaccessibility of its ‘object’ that makes it produce” (de Certeau, cited in Gibbs, 1995, p 147).

²⁹ For this reason, I believe that in the context of Irigaray's work *parler-femme* is a more valuable term than *écriture féminine*. Indeed *écriture féminine* is not a term that Irigaray uses herself; it is used when her work is read in conjunction with Cixous and Kristeva.

³⁰ James Waddell writes that Irigaray's attempts to "jam" patriarchal language are successful, since he has difficulty writing subjectively in response to her work. He suggests that her "elusive style ... makes it difficult to know what she is doing. Is she attacking? Is she celebrating? Is she doing both?" (1997, p 73). In *Erotic Perception*, Waddell stages a series of what he calls "philosophical portraits" which take the form of an encounter with a woman in a park, seen through the lens of various philosophers. When Irigaray watches the scene, she confronts Waddell so that he recognises that he is using the woman as a "prop to love myself" (1997, p 75). He writes: "I use a woman like I use a son ... In placing her between God and son, I nullify her as other and profane her by leaving her in an abyss as I fly to meet God" (1997, p 75).

³¹ Thanks again to the anonymous referee for *Outskirts: Feminisms Along the Edge*, who wrote: "Isn't Irigaray's point, vis-à-vis anality, that it is a distinctly masculine trope, or imaginary point of coherence for masculine forms of thinking? Doesn't Irigaray resist such a trope because of this: the (male) imaginary body is capable of birthing through the anus: a world without women (Grosz; Whitford; Bouldous Walker)? More obviously, aren't Irigaray's (? maybe?) etc., her means of introducing a different logic than anal-logical reasoning, a form of reasoning she argues is so dear to Western, masculine philosophy?" (2006, personal communication). Judith Still makes a similar point about women's "exclusion from the anal", suggesting that Irigaray presents love of sameness as an "ontology of the anal or else a triumph of the absorption of the other into the self of the intestine" (1997, p 155).

³² Irigaray's writing on breath, however, assumes a familiarity with the practices of yoga which allow a tactile response in the moderation of posture and breathing.

Chapter Three: Angels Playing with Placentas

³³ In relation to sexual difference, in *Sharing the World*, Irigaray writes: "As a result of woman including man in pregnancy and, already, in love itself ... it is

obvious men and women do not live in the same way being-within and being-with” (2008e, pp 68-69). The criticisms I made of the limitations of Irigaray’s conception of sexual difference in Chapter Two are evident here.

³⁴ The writing of this chapter was only possible by absenting myself from my daughter. In the essay, “Theory, Desire and Maternity: At Work in Academia”, Alison Bartlett writes of the “predicament” of being on leave from work and writing, of leaving her daughter in order to write, given that the topic of her writing is the complex relationship of maternity and academia. She argues that “maternity undoes the professional, troubles the institutional and confuses the subject. Corporeality, subjectivity and ... intellectuality can be thought of as radically altered by maternity” (2006b, p 21). Bartlett demonstrates that this alteration is both intellectually and creatively productive. Her essay includes a series of whimsical cartoons, entitled “Idol Academic” which play on the everyday embodied reality of Irigaray’s divine, Freud’s fort/da and Haraway’s cyborg for mothers. For me, grappling with similar theoretical and corporeal shifts, what resonates most in Bartlett’s essay is the entanglement of motherhood and theory. Her cartoons are one example of this. Bracketed interruptions to her critical text are another: “(‘But look at this beautiful baby; I fed her on milk and honey and Haraway’)” (2006b, p 26).

³⁵ In Derrida/ Fort-Da, Alan Aycock writes that Derrida “plays on fort-da in his love letters (whose messages go and return), in the pleasure of his love (which threatens to lose and find itself), in the uncertainty of writer and addressee (always incompletely known), and in the fort-da of his own theory of writing (set in eternal motion by the forces of ‘difference’)” (1993, no page number).

³⁶ Worth noting is that, following her reading of Mary’s conception of Jesus, Irigaray redefines virginity in her philosophy: “Virginity must be rediscovered by all women as their own bodily and spiritual possession, which can give them back an individual and collective status ... Becoming a virgin is synonymous with a woman’s conquest of the spiritual” (1993b, pp 116-117). For a discussion of these ideas, see Deutscher’s *A Politics of Impossible Difference* (2002, pp 50-51). For an interesting use of Irigaray’s writing on virginity in relation to women with persistent genital pain, see Christina Labuski’s “Virginal Thresholds” in *Luce Irigaray: Teaching* (2008).

³⁷ As James Waddell neatly sums it up: Irigaray’s angels “announce a coming healing of the split between body and soul, sexuality and spirituality, and the ways

men and women distribute these elements between each other in the sex act. Angels are to be associated with fluidity, mucosity, something that cannot be pinned down, solidified. Without mucosity, without angels, a body is fallen, a corpse. When angel and body are found together, a sexual or carnal ethics is possible” (1997, p 90).

³⁸ The full text of Sylvia Plath’s *Metaphors* reads as follows: “I’m a riddle in nine syllables,/ An elephant, a ponderous house,/ A melon strolling on two tendrils./ O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!/ This loaf’s big with its yeasty rising./ Money’s new-minted in this fat purse./ I’m a means, a stage, a cow in calf./ I’ve eaten a bag of green apples,/ Boarded the train there’s no getting off” (1989, p 116). In her collection of poetry, *Blood Universe*, Tasmanian poet Esther Ottaway traces the journey of her pregnancy, the birth of her daughter Layla and her identity as a mother. The poem I quoted is *Seed-Pearl*: “I am certain of your deep-sea sounding/ though I have never felt its drift before./ In twelve weeks I have traced a new chart,/ sensory nuances of a hidden topography:// sea-sick lurch of nausea, rumbling borborygmus,/ feeble peristalsis of an empty bowel.// I have learned well. I know your dive/ is outside that noisome system,/ outside my raw, exhausted map. I find you,/ seed-pearl swimmer, foreigner,// and in that shell-shaped abdominal universe/ I meet with you, like destined cells colliding” (2006, p 6).

³⁹ For this definition of the infinite, I am indebted to Penelope Deutscher, who writes in *A Politics of Impossible Difference*: “Belonging to their sexuate genre would be a means for women to situate themselves as finite in the context of the infinite. Here infinite does not mean the supernatural, or that which I am not, but that which exceeds my own limits but in which I participate and to whose infinite range of senses I contribute” (2002, p 97). In the introduction to *Becomings*, Elizabeth Grosz describes time as “one of the assumed yet irreducible terms of all discourse, knowledge and social practice ... It tends to function as a silent accompaniment, a shadowy implication underlying, contextualising, and eventually undoing all knowledges and practices ... Time has a quality of intangibility, a fleeting half-life ... It has an evanescence, a fleeting or shimmering, highly precarious ‘identity’ ... Time is more intangible than any other ‘thing’” (1999, p 1).

⁴⁰ Joanna Hodge argues that Irigaray’s work is utopian because it “presents an account of the relation between space and time that cannot take place, or rather has no place and is utopian in the sense of thematizing an impossible spatial-temporality” (2003, p 197). I agree with her notion of the impossibility of Irigaray’s writing, but there are risks associated with describing her work as utopian. For one,

Hodge separates sexual difference and transcendence, suggesting they offer opposed views of space and time—this runs counter to the reading of transcendence as difference proposed in this thesis. Margaret Whitford uses the term utopian in relation to Irigaray’s work, arguing that the imagining of a utopia can be a “closed and immobile future state” or an “open-ended uncertain continuous struggle” (1991, p 23). It is within the second category that she locates Luce Irigaray’s “utopia” of sexual difference. In this sense, Luce Irigaray’s work as “a theorist of change” is not to prescribe a utopic future, but to set in motion a process. She is “trying to ‘imagine the unimaginable’ and it is in this light that we should understand” her ethics of sexual difference (1991, p 22). In “The Situated Self and Utopian Thinking”, Greg Johnson calls for a reaffirmation of the utopian as “situated, critical, and relevant to transformative politics, a view that is structured by embodiment” (2002, p 20). This utopia is one that represents a redefinition of the notion, and offers a structure within which we can understand Irigaray’s call for an ethics of sexual difference that is located as a manifestation of carnal transcendence. The utopian becomes ambiguous, multiple and unbounded. In this sense, it incorporates the dystopian, since it marks the possibility of the beyond, rather than its actualisation. The utopian becomes “the demand that things be otherwise” (2002, p 23). This is not the construction of an ideal, but the process of reflecting on current systems and, as Drucilla Cornell puts it, the “exploration and re-exploration of the possible and yet also the unrepresentable” (cited in Johnson 2002, p 30). In Johnson’s analysis, this is an embodied becoming. The body is grounded in utopian ways of thinking as a “site where unlimited and diverse realities ... are brought into focus and are capable of constructing new alternatives” (2002, p 23). Through the work of Merleau-Ponty, Johnson argues that “the body structures the utopian” (2002, pp 32-33). If Irigaray’s work is to be described as utopian—I prefer the term speculative—this complex definition of utopia is crucial. In any case, Irigaray challenges the interpretation of her vision as utopian, saying: “I am speaking here of real things” (2002b, p 3).

⁴¹ Rouch mentions the commercial use of the placenta in research and cosmetics in France, and suggests that instead the mother is asked how she wants it used. She says: “That would be a mark, symbolically at least, of the gift she has given to the child and the debt, inestimable in our patriarchal commercial system, of the child in return” (Irigaray, 1993b, p 44). In other examples of a continuity of relation and exchange with the placenta, you can find recipes for cooking the

placenta online, and for making “placental impressions”—artistic images created by fanning out the placenta and pressing it on to paper. A friend who recently gave birth took photographs of the placenta, and gave one to me. Another friend and father kept the placenta in his freezer for four years after his daughter’s birth—during which time he was divorced from her mother—and then planted it in the garden.

⁴² Rouch understands it as a “successful transplant”: “The embryo is half-foreign to the maternal organism. Indeed, half of its antigens are paternal in origin. Because of these, the mother should activate her defense mechanisms to reject this other to her self. The placenta ... prevents this ... In a complex manner, it will block or at the very least greatly minimise maternal activity leading to rejection, but only locally, around the uterus, and moreover in such a way that the mother keeps her defensive capabilities against infection” (Irigaray, 1993b, p 40).

⁴³ Cynthia Willett, who describes the placenta as “fingerlike weaves of tissues reading out and between” mother and child, challenges Irigaray’s model of the placental exchange as an unequal one. She argues that the foetus lacks subjectivity, as it is without “intentionality, and perhaps also the ability to imagine or desire what is absent” (2001, p 135). On a literal level, Willett is right, but it seems that in Irigaray’s argument, it is the angel that plays this role for the foetus and child until “he” learns to master absence and presence for himself.

⁴⁴ These details come from <http://whollydevoted.livejournal.com/2008/07/19/>. Retrieved February 16, 2009. More of Birgit Amadori’s work can be found here: <http://www.amadori.org>. Retrieved February 16, 2009. In early 2009, the original “Cesarean Art” <http://cesarean-art.com/> site was no longer accessible. The images can be viewed here: <http://www.google.com/search?um=1andhl=enandq=site%3Awww.cesarean-art.com%20cesarean%20artandie=UTF-8andsa=Nandtab=iw>. In late April 2009, the website was again active, with a excerpt from a poem by Mary Most (“War Story”, 1994): “Now the whole room only cares about him,/ why is he crying too/ what are they doing to my baby let me see/ him let me have him let me hold him/ I can't ask with this mask on my face,/ my empty arms strapped down,/ my legs numb I cannot move./ Why am I here alone, no one left/ to hold my hand and they're putting/ bloody organs back inside me,/ I am open to the wind and so alone/ I don't even have my baby anymore.” Retrieved April 30, 2009.

⁴⁵ See <http://grabapple.net/entry/259>. Retrieved February 11, 2000.

⁴⁶ See, for example, this exchange of emails from an ob/gyn listserv: <http://forums.obgyn.net/ob-gyn-l/OBGYNL.0605/0084.html>. Retrieved February 11, 2000. The artist herself responded to the “haters”: <http://cesarean-art.com/html/disclaimer.htm>. Retrieved June 23, 2006.

⁴⁷ See http://arlinghaus.typepad.com/blog/2006/05/cesarean_art_an.html. Retrieved November 1, 2007.

⁴⁸ This exchange can be read in relation to Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming-animal as a performance of contagion. As I indicate in the main text, in my view the contagion model is a negative metaphor.

⁴⁹ The relation between the angel and the placenta, however, offers an alternative understanding of becoming as an ethical relation. Tina Chanter in *The Ethics of Eros* describes the ethical relation as “the ‘I’ experienc[ing] an infinite obligation to the other” (Chanter 1995, p 183). The placental economy offers an alternative construction of subjectivity as a fluid exchange, and borders and boundaries as porous and provisional, offering a space of hospitality. In *Woman*, Natalie Angier writes of the foetal cells that circulate in the mother’s body long after the birth of a child: “A mother ... is forever a cellular chimera, a blend of the body she was born with and of the bodies she has borne” (1999, p 319).

⁵⁰ In *Maternal Pasts, Feminist Futures*, Lynne Huffer make a similar point with the question: “How do we think the mother beyond the familiar logic of oppositions between complementary halves—paternal and maternal, presence and absence? How do we sketch out a different model, one that moves from a relation of annihilation and replacement to one of mutuality and coexistence?” (1998, pp 3-4).

⁵¹ A detailed discussion of my experience of breastfeeding—so crucial to my subjectivity as a mother and a source of pleasure, relief and solace—is outside the scope of this chapter. Irigaray discusses breastfeeding briefly in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, when she responds to Freud’s comment that breastfeeding is an activity of the mother towards the child: “It is difficult to see how the verb “to breastfeed” can be simply reduced to an activity by the mother ... Any consideration of pleasure in breastfeeding seems here to be excluded, misunderstood, under silent ban” (1985a, p 16). This mention of breastfeeding makes mention of pleasure in a strangely disembodied way. More powerfully, Julia Kristeva breastfeeds her son in poetic prose alongside the theoretical text of “Stabat Mater” (1986, p 160). Hélène Cixous writes of the joyful physical, intellectual and emotional overflow of breastfeeding: “A longing for text! Confusion! What’s come over her? A child! Paper!

Intoxications! I'm brimming over! My breasts are overflowing! Milk. Ink. Nursing time. And me? I'm hungry, too. The milky taste of ink!" (1991, p 31). For discussion of this passage, and of the intimacy and creativity of breastfeeding, see Alison Bartlett's *Breastwork*, which includes a chapter on sexualising breastfeeding, where Bartlett argues for acknowledging the erotics of breastfeeding (2005a, p 85).

⁵² For a discussion of Rich and Irigaray together, see Marianne Hirsch's *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989, pp 136-138).

⁵³ "Performance researcher" Joshua Sofaer has created a fort/da doll that he plays with in his research project *Disinter/est*. He writes: "The Fort/Da Mother Doll is a doll modelled on the infant's mother, employing her actual hair, the ends of which may well have been growing during the years in question. The Fort/Da Mother Doll allows the now-adult-of-the-infant-that-was to infantilise their mother and explicitly replay the separation trauma observed by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, discarding and reclaiming in therapeutic frenzy" (2002, no page number). See http://www.joshuasofaer.com/texts/write_dduoc.html. Retrieved February 21, 2009.

⁵⁴ Cynthia Willett writes: "I have concerns with Irigaray's vision of a more beautiful society and more sublime world ... Girls may enjoy dolls and dance, but they enjoy dolls and dance much more when they are at the centre and not the periphery of the social stage. And girls no less than boys are possessive of their toys and their space. The social stage for acquiring autonomy is more complex than Irigaray allows" (2001, p 143).

⁵⁵ The daughter's refusal of the milk offered by the mother disturbs the subject positions of self and other, as in Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*: "When the eye sees or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk—harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring—I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up in the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. Along with sight-clouding dizziness, *nausea* makes me baulk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. 'I' want none of that element, sign of their desire; 'I' do not want to listen, 'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it. But since food is not an 'other' for me, who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*" (1982, p 3, emphasis in

original).

⁵⁶ Another point worth noting is Irigaray's construction of the father. She writes: "Of course, children are conceived by women and men together, but conceived only. The work of gestating, giving birth, breast-feeding, and mothering is up to women ... Of course, fathers must keep some rights with regard to their children. But experience shows that their rights must not take priority, because many fathers abuse them" (2004a, p 207). To Irigaray's suggestions for sexed civic identity in *Thinking the Difference*, I would add several that challenge her work: political equivalence for those who adopt, lesbians and single women accessing fertility treatments or sperm donation, and for women who choose not to have children; an acknowledgement of and respect for the "maternal" spaces in which men operate—including single fathers, formal and informal sperm donors, and gay fathers; a recognition that the possibility of pregnancy is limited to certain times in a woman's cycle and certain stages of a woman's life, and that the desire, response, need and capacity of women in relation to pregnancy varies; acceptance of models of family that are not limited to a heterosexual, married couple and their biological offspring; and an acknowledgement of adoption, reproductive technologies, donorship, surrogacy etc in discussions and policies surrounding parenthood.

⁵⁷ For Irigaray's reading of the Demeter and Kore myth, in which she suggests Kore experiences a change in self-affection, see "The Return" (2008d, p 227).

⁵⁸ Walker writes: "Irigaray displaces the traditional metaphor of the mother as nourishment with the disruptive figure of an ambiguous labial sexuality that speaks the complex relationality of mother and girl-child ... The singularity of the labia is always *double*, never one. This labial logic confounds oppositional thinking. It displaces oppositions such as inside and outside, self and other, reference and metaphor ... Questions of exclusion (of inside/outside, of speaking/not speaking, of silence/speech) lapse with the labial logic that now focuses on *how* to speak ... her labial logic is not about the symbolic, it is, rather, about difference ... Irigaray's labial logic enables us to do this by situating the play of difference ambiguously somewhere between the mothers' and daughters' lips. And I contend that this makes the world of difference to simply repeating the same" (1998, pp 157-158, emphasis in original)

⁵⁹ The theme of ambivalence is a recurring one in discussions of the maternal figure. In "Stabat Mater", a text which brings together maternity and poetics, Kristeva writes: "Let us call 'maternal' the ambivalent principle that is bound to the

species, on the one hand, and on the other stems from an identity catastrophe that causes the Name to topple over into the un-nameable that one imagines as femininity, non-language or body (1986, pp 161-62). Michelle Boulous Walker has a sustained discussion of motherhood and ambivalence (see 1998, p 150).

Chapter Four: Fluid Subjects

⁶⁰ “Exquisite corpse” is a game in which players create an image or a story collectively without being able to see the contributions of previous players. Supposedly created by the Surrealists in France in the 1920s and 30s, based on a traditional parlour game, the name derives from a phrase produced in an early game: “Le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau.” (“The exquisite corpse will drink the new wine”). Read the recollections of André Breton on the game: http://exquisitecorpse.com/definition/Bretons_Remembrances.html. Retrieved 20 March 20, 2009. For examples, see http://www.exquisitecorpse.com/definition/Morgue_%5Bthe_corpses%5D.html and <http://www.jabcstudio.com/pages/corpse.php>. Retrieved March 20, 2009.

⁶¹ In the introduction to *Gender After Lyotard*, Margret Grebowicz writes that Lyotard presents sexual difference as one of the most important issues in philosophy, but does so “in a style that stands apart from the culture of academic feminist inquiry, giving the reader no explicit definitions of analyses, not even a trajectory of questions, but a confusion of images, (im)possibilities, dead ends, splinterings and desires. After Lyotard, the reader is left scrambling to pose the ‘right’ questions, to make the appropriate linkages” (2007, p 2).

⁶² In part, this chapter emerges from a question Luce Irigaray asked me in a workshop for doctoral candidates in Nottingham in May 2004: are you caught in a watery stage of becoming? I found myself adrift, unable to answer her. Why might such a stage be a trap? Why caught, rather than floating or swimming confidently? Is it a limitation? Is an affinity with the ocean a reluctance to give birth to oneself? Curled and constricted within an amniotic sac of one’s own making? Celebrating a becoming that needs to be overcome? See *Luce Irigaray: Teaching* for Irigaray’s description of the PhD seminars (2008b, pp ix-xi).

⁶³ Andrew Brown makes the interesting observation that the tactic of drift is for Barthes a “way of distancing himself from any phenomenon he is examining while at the same time continuing that phenomenon, prolonging its salient

characteristics, drawing it out ... Instead of occupying the oppositional stance of critique, he adopts a more oblique approach, one which involves what might be called ‘subversive complicity’ with the material he is discussing” (1992, 32). In his writing on drifting, Derrida states: “I have abused this word, it hardly satisfies me. *Drifting* designates too continuous a movement: or rather too undifferentiated, too homogenous a movement that appears to travel away without saccade from a supposed origin, from a shore, a border, a coast with an indivisible outline. Now the shore is divided in its very outline, and there are effects of anchoring, collapses of the coastline, strategies of approach and overflow, strictures of attachment or of mooring, places of reversion, strangulation, or *double bind*” (1987, p 261, emphasis in original).

⁶⁴ This imagery to describe subjectivity—the threshold, hinge, or fold between the other, the world and the self—relies on the writing of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible*. He writes: “We must accustom ourselves to understand that ‘thought’ (cogitatio) is not an invisible contact of self with self, that it lives outside of this intimacy with oneself ... It is the invisible hinge upon which my life and the life of the others turn to rock into one another, the inner framework of intersubjectivity” (1968, p 234).

⁶⁵ On April 5, 2009, the *Sun Herald* [Sydney] reported that a British woman had set a new world record with a 96 metre free dive. Sarah Campbell, 37, completed the dive in 3 minutes, 34 seconds (*Sun Herald*, April 5, 2009, Deep-Sea Record: Woman diver’s feat, p 36). Free-diving is one of the only sports in which a woman holds a world record that exceeds that held by a man.

⁶⁶ For Immanuel Kant, to whom Lyotard is responding, the sublime represents the greatness or vastness of what is unable to be articulated or grasped. In *The Critique of Judgement*, Kant distinguishes between the “remarkable differences” of the beautiful and the sublime, noting that beauty “is connected with the form of the object” and has “boundaries”, while the sublime “is to be found in a formless object”, represented by “boundlessness” (Kant, 1964, p 23). For Lyotard, the sublime exists at the edge of conceptual thought, destabilising our assumptions about reason and knowledge.

⁶⁷ In *Sharing the World*, Irigaray writes: “To turn our eyes toward the heart of the intimate risks undoing its touch—dividing, distinguishing, cutting off and thus isolating, Our eyes are not capable of seeing, nor even contemplating intimacy, at

least not directly. They can only imagine something about intimacy from the light, the gestures, the words that it radiates” (2008e, p 20)

⁶⁸ Bataille ends *The Theory of Religion* with the following postscript, dedicated “to whom life is an experience to be carried as far as possible”: “What joins us is THE SLEEP OF REASON—WHICH PRODUCES MONSTERS” (1987, p 113, emphasis in original). For Bataille, this represents our negation of the sacred, and the limitation of humanity to the world of the profane. The phrase “the sleep of reason...” is from Francisco Goya’s etching of that name, part of the series *Les Caprichos* or *The Fantasies* created between 1793 and 1798. The etching shows a man (perhaps Goya himself) asleep over his writing desk, with nightmarish owls and bats flapping behind his head. Thanks to David Jones for these insights. In one version, Goya added the caption: “Imagination abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters: united with her, she is the mother of all arts and the source of their wonders.” For a brief discussion of this, see www.museum.cornell.edu/HFJ/Handbook/hb128.html and http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/pharos/collection_pages/18th_pages/P1_1986/FRM_PIC_SE-P1_1986.html. Retrieved March 25, 2009.

⁶⁹ In relation to Irigaray’s work, it is interesting to note that Freud associates oceanic feeling with the practice of yoga. An unnamed friend tells him that by “withdrawing from the world, by fixing the attention on bodily functions and peculiar methods of breathing, one can in fact evoke new sensations and coenaesthesias in oneself, which he regards as regressions to primordial states of mind which have long ago been overlaid. He sees in them a physiological basis ... of much of the wisdom of mysticism” (1973, p 9).

⁷⁰ Thomas Parisi in *Civilisation and its Discontents: An Anthropology for the Future?*, writes that Freud does not want to accept “that there is some kind of palpable God ‘out there’ that is responsible for this feeling in us whenever it occurs” (1999, p 84).

⁷¹ In English, the term syncope has its origins in Middle English, from the Latin, from the Greek for cutting up or cutting short. Linguistically, it refers to an elision or contraction of letters or syllables from the middle of a word (ne’er for never, ev’ry for every). Medically, syncope is a brief loss of consciousness caused by a temporary deficiency of oxygen in the brain. It can also be related to the musical term syncope, which refers to the stressing of a beat that is not usually emphasised. The online dictionary, www.dictionary.com, which references a range

of resources for syncope (including Webster's, Random House and medical dictionaries) provided the source for this summary. Retrieved March 25, 2009.

⁷² An association between Walt Disney and Luce Irigaray may seem an unlikely amorous exchange but nevertheless, I hope, a fruitful one. I take Penelope Ingram as a model for this dialogue between Disney and the divine. She articulates Irigaray's divine through the "so-called low-brow Goddess Spiritualist" movement (available at a New Age bookshop near you), arguing that they share a "call to and for a divine for women", and similar founding concepts, including the belief that "only men experience the possibility of an infinite horizon and a representation of themselves as divine ... and the refiguring of God as immanent." She makes these connections, "not ... to 'uncover' the 'low-brow' aspects of the work of Irigaray, nor to suggest that goddess spirituality is 'high-brow' philosophy in disguise", but in the hope that by identifying similarities between the two, "we can better understand the significance for feminist movements of formulating a divine for women, indeed, why it is that feminists from positions as seemingly disparate as French philosophy and goddess spirituality are motivated to do so"(2000, pp 48-49).

⁷³ Susan White briefly explores some of the issues of ethnicity in Disney's *The Little Mermaid* through the allusions to *The Tempest*. She sees the misshapen body of Caliban as "symbolically present through the liminal, 'in-between' mermaid herself who wants to change her monstrous ... body." Ariel's companion Sebastian, the "Caribbean" crab, is also a possible Caliban, prompting a "cannibalistic" scene as Ariel is served crab for dinner (1993, p 193).

⁷⁴ For Roberta Trites, the imagery of Ursula and her cave is "gynophobic" and a "grotesque parody of the female anatomy" (1999, p 149). In a footnote she writes: "Although some viewers might perceive those of Ursula's statements that capitalize on Ariel's inexperience as ironic and an intended tribute to feminism, these comments are voiced in the midst of too much gynophobic imagery to honestly promote feminism" (1991, p 152). Yet the film contains both feminist and anti-feminist discourses operating simultaneously. Vaginal images are not, in themselves (even when associated with danger) gynophobic"—much as phallic symbols are not "castrative". It is possible to read this imagery as prefiguring the human genitalia Ariel seeks. Trites reads this meaning into the red flowers the mermaid cultivates in the original Anderson story, representing "burgeoning sexuality". The flowing blood of the original tale "prepares the girl for menarche,

while the image of the knife-like pain warns the girl about the potentially hymen-breaking phallus" (1999, p 148).

⁷⁵ Ursula's song in Disney's *Little Mermaid*: "The men up there don't like a lot of blather/ They think a girl who gossips is a bore/ Yes, on land it's much preferred/ For ladies not to say a word/ And after all, dear, what is idle chatter for?// They're not all that impressed with conversation/ True gentlemen avoid it when they can/ But they dote and swoon and fawn/ On a lady whose withdrawn/ It's she who holds her tongue who gets her man" (Ashman, Musker and Clements, 1989).

⁷⁶ In a challenge to Whitford's understanding of the mucus, Cathryn Vasseleu writes: "The mucus is an interior which could not be more intimately me, yet which evades my mastery. The body's interiority is ungraspable in so far as it is unopposable to any other thing, and is refractory to concepts of containment and dissipation, penetration and recollection, visibility and form. To describe the indeterminacy of the mucus as unrepresentable would be to miss the point" (1998, pp 67-68).

⁷⁷ This book begins with the words "Let me go where I have not yet arrived" (Canter and Jantzen, 2005, p 1). Grace Jantzen suggests that these words proved prophetic for Hanneke Canter, who died from cancer in September 2002 before the book was completed. Grace Jantzen herself died not long after it was published. In her review essay, Pamela Sue Anderson writes: "I knew Hanneke Canter in life and in her own search for identity as a young woman philosopher. *Forever Fluid* gives tribute to Hanneke's life in an ironically fluid manner, leaving us with a philosophical question: where is 'she' now? I also knew Grace M. Jantzen in life and in her search for a feminist philosophy of natality rather than im/mortality—a search which inspired the young woman philosopher. Yet, the lives of these two authors were both cut short by death—and we are left with *Forever Fluid* as a love story with an ambiguous ending: its persistent message is to resist necrophilia. The struggle for love is apparent in this book: but are we not allowed to struggle with death?" (2007, p 228).

Chapter Five: Poetics

⁷⁸ As well as through a consideration of Irigaray's mimetic writing, this definition was reached through a reading of Terry Threadgold's *Feminist Poetics* which refers to feminist poetics as an intertextual process of rewriting (rather than

analysing) a text, performing a critique, and being seduced by the process. Threadgold defines poetics as “work on and with texts” which asks the questions: “What is a text? How is it internally structured? How do texts mean? What is a writer? What is a reader? What is the relationship between verbal and non-verbal, ordinary and aesthetic texts?” (1997, p 2).

⁷⁹ Read as a daily meditation or missal, Irigaray’s poetry operates like her yoga practice, explored in *To Be Two* and *Between East and West*, to give her philosophy a corporeal specificity. Irigaray refers to Heidegger’s “dialogue with the Japanese” in relation to the influence of Eastern philosophy on her practice of daily meditative writing. Yoga enables Irigaray to concentrate on her breathing, a process she explores in ‘The Age of Breath’ as a spiritual task: “By cultivating breathing, we can gain access to our autonomy, open a way for a new becoming and for sharing with other traditions” (2004a, 146). In *Between East and West*, she outlines what yoga has taught her—“the importance of breathing in order to survive, to cure certain ills, and to attain detachment and autonomy”—and what it has not given her, namely a means to explore “a sexuation of breathing or of energy”. The latter she has needed to explore alone “by practicing, by listening (to myself), by reading, by awakening myself” (2002b, p 10).

⁸⁰ Thanks to David Jones for the insight into the possible significance of the dates of Irigaray’s poems.

⁸¹ The full text of Botrel’s *L’Écho* reads: “Rôdant, triste et solitaire/ Dans la forêt du mystère,/ J’ai crié le coeur très las:/ « La vie est triste ici-bas! »/ L’Écho m’a répondu: « Bah! »/ – « Écho, la vie est méchante! »/ Et, d’une voix bien touchante,/ L’Écho m’a répondu: « Chante! »/ – « Écho, Écho des grands bois,/ Lourde, trop lourde est ma croix! »/ L’Écho m’a répondu: « Crois! »/ – « La haine en moi va germer,/ Dois-je rire ou blasphémer? »/ Et l’Écho m’a dit: « Aimer! »/ Comme l’Écho des grands bois/ M’a conseillé de le faire:/ J’aime, je chante et je crois!/ Et je suis heureux sur terre!” Retrieved March 27, 2007 from <http://www.racines-en-sevignac.fr/echo.htm>

⁸² Like Irigaray in *The Way of Love* inviting the reader to *listen-to* in the present, Gaston Bachelard writes in *The Poetics of Space*: “One must be receptive ... to the image at the moment it appears: if there be a philosophy of poetry, it must appear and re-appear through a significant verse” (1964, p xi). Just as Elizabeth Grosz warns of the creative and threatening promise of newness, Bachelard calls for the reader of poetry to experience the “ecstasy of the newness of the image” (1964, p

xi). In her introduction to the poems, Irigaray argues that *Everyday Prayers* offers such transcendent newness, referring to “initiating possible beginnings ... open[ing] new horizons ... new stage[s] in my thinking” and the “revelation” and “ecstasy” of a feminine perception of nature and the other (2004c, p 29). If the articulation of the touchful in *Everyday Prayers* is of limited success, as I argue in this chapter, how is the reader to navigate the danger and joy, and consequent threat to subjectivity, of a poetics of carnal transcendence? Reading Irigaray through Bachelard is fruitful, given the commonalities of their work. Bachelard has written on the elements in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* (first published in French in 1938), *Water and Dreams* (1942), *Air and Dreams* (1943). In a rare discussion of this association, Margaret Whitford writes: “Although Irigaray never, as far as I know, mentions Bachelard, within the French intellectual context the resonances of the term imaginary are clearly Bachelardian. In addition Irigaray’s use of the four elements seems to echo Bachelard’s ... Bachelard suggests that creative writers have a preference for one element over another, and that there is usually one in which they feel most at home. For example he devotes a whole chapter of ... *Air and Dreams* to Nietzsche’s ‘dynamics of ascension’ ... whereas Irigaray ... looks for what is absent (the repressed mother/woman) and takes Nietzsche’s work as a point of departure for a meditation on the flight from water and from the unacknowledged nurturant element” (1991, p 55).

⁸³ Again, thanks are due to David Jones for recognising the significance of the date. In a rare discussion of Irigaray’s Catholicism, Tina Beattie begins “Carnal Love and Spiritual Imagination” with the question: “Is Luce Irigaray a Catholic? Is Pope John Paul II a feminist?” (1997, p 160). She makes the radical suggestion that the answer to both these questions might be affirmative: “This is not a blind date—at least as far as *Irigaray* is concerned. In 1986, during the Pope’s visit to France, she heard one of his homilies and wrote to him expressing her concern” (1997, p 161). This was an open letter published in a newspaper, and later reprinted in the journal *Paris-Feministe* 24 (1-15 April 1986): 13-15. Beattie thanks Margaret Whitford for providing her with a copy of the letter, in which Irigaray criticises the Pope “for giving a talk on sexual morality that was lacking in any sense of spiritual sustenance and that failed to address the pressing ethical, theological and social conditions of the age. She tells him ‘carnal love is a little more spiritual than you imagine,’ and argues that the sexual relationship cannot be seen only in terms of procreation but must be seen first and foremost as the means of divinization between the sexes”

(Beattie, 1997, p 162). Beattie concludes: “I would suggest that in any theoretical coupling of Irigaray and John Paul II, it would be the Pope who would provide the carnal love and Irigaray who would provide the spiritual imagination” (1997, p 183). Beattie suggests that Irigaray ultimately offers redemption for Catholic church in which the lips of women are acknowledged.

⁸⁴ The term “the third eye” is used to describe the pineal gland, located in the centre of the brain and responsible for the production of melatonin. See www.crystalinks.com/thirdeyepineal.html for a discussion of the mythology surrounding the pineal gland as the third eye. Retrieved March 10, 2006. There is no doubt that Irigaray is aware of this association—Descartes refers to the pineal gland as the “seat of the soul”—see <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pineal-gland/> “Descartes and the Pineal Gland”. Retrieved April 15, 2009. Bataille expands on Descartes by writing of the “pineal eye” (in an essay in the collection *Visions of Excess*). Here Bataille writes: “The pineal eye probably corresponds to the anal (in other words nocturnal) conception that I initially had of the sun and that I then expressed in a phrase such as ‘the intact anus ... to which nothing sufficiently blinding can be compared except the sun (even though the anus is the night).’ I imagined the eye at the eye at the summit of the skull like a horrible erupting volcano, precisely with the shady and comical character associated with the rear end and its excretions ... I did not hesitate to think seriously of the possibility that this extraordinary eye would finally really come to light through the bony roof of the head (1985, p 74). For critical discussion of Bataille’s pineal eye, see Martin Jay, (1993, pp 226-228) and Dennis Hollier (1992, pp 85-129). Irigaray’s writing on the third eye can be recognised as a challenge to Descartes and Bataille. Cathryn Vasseleu touches on these ideas in *Textures of Light* (1998, p 49, p 123). This is deserving of a closer reading, particularly in relating to the critiques I have made of reading as anal trope in Chapter Two.

⁸⁵ Rilke’s First Elegy begins: “Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the Angelic/ Orders? And even if one were to suddenly/ take me to its heart, I would vanish into its/ stronger existence. For beauty is nothing but/ the beginning of terror, that we are still able to bear,/ and we revere it so, because it calmly disdains/ to destroy us. Every Angel is terror.” For the full text, read <http://tkline.pgcc.net/PITBR/German/Rilke.htm>. Retrieved March 20, 2009.

⁸⁶ Irigaray writes: “in the enigmas formed by the popular or the literary imagination, in the monsters produced by culture, we must seek a sense of the

darkest part of our becoming, which is surely the most deeply tactile” (1993c, p 59). She continues: touch is the one sense “that travels with us from the time of our material conception to the height of our celestial grace, lightness, or glory” (1993c, p 59). Cecilia Sjöholm suggests that Irigaray’s writing plays with our perception and the relationship between sight and touch: “How do we make sense of phrases like ‘day and night are mingled in our gazes. Our gestures. Our bodies’? ... Day and night cannot or should not mingle. We confront a misuse of language layering the invisibility of the flesh in disorienting shapes: ‘day and night are mingled in ... Our gestures. Our bodies.’ Day and night may be seen, but not touched; they belong to different modes of perception and different linguistic registers” (2000, p 103). In “Being Two, How Many Eyes Have We?”, Irigaray argues that, in Western tradition, seeing is constructed as looking at and recognising an object, a form, a concept: “I recognise something that already has a face according to a model, a paradigm, an *eidōs*, that I have been taught.” In this way, seeing “corresponds for us with knowing again, knowing a second time, and so entering in complicity with ourselves and with the one who has already defined or constructed the form” (2002a, p 143).

⁸⁷ Two female poets who come immediately to mind—perhaps because I spent so much of my adolescence curled up with them—are Sylvia Plath and Emily Dickinson. Certainly, the worlds conjured by Plath and Dickinson are darker and more terrible than Irigaray’s vision—although it is perhaps to this danger that the reader responds. In relation to the male writers to whom Irigaray refers explicitly—Rilke, Hölderlin—her comments that they privilege ideas of “death, suffering and mourning” with reflections on “an unhappy past” and “unsatisfied desire” (2004b, p 47) is an incisive critique and a recognition of an alternative. However, this criticism remains abstract, and Irigaray’s poetry in *Everyday Prayers* does not present an adequate alternative.

⁸⁸ Levinas suggests that “what is caressed is not touched, properly speaking” (Paterson 2004, p 173). Irigaray would argue that this might be true of a masculine caress. For example: Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s “intersubjective” caress is onanistic—he touches himself with his two hands together. he writes: “When I press my two hands together, it is not a matter of two sensations felt together as one perceives two objects placed side by side, but of an ambiguous set-up in which both hands can alternate the roles of ‘touching’ and ‘being touched’” (1968, p 106).

⁸⁹ Marks describes her work as “haptic or erotic criticism” by which she refers to the eyes functioning as organs of touch as they move across the textured surfaces

of visual media, and the process by which she tries to express this in words. The term haptic criticism arises from the work of Deleuze and Guittari on “smooth space”, and offers a theoretical method whereby the critic moves “along the surface” of the critical object in a type of mimesis (2002, p xiii). Interestingly, Marks also refers to layering or folding of space, but without specifically contrasting the smooth and the folded (2002, p xi). Marks invites the readers her text to be touched or not-touched by her text: “Stop when you have found something to want to play with” (2002, xvii).

⁹⁰ Marks cites Walter Benjamin, who believes that the task of the translator is to inscribe a relationship between the original work, “pure language” and God (Marks, 2002, p ix). Marks takes God out of this equation, preferring Deleuze and Guittari’s phrase “plane of immanence” (2002, p ix). A potential link between carnality and transcendence is lost here.

⁹¹ In *Sharing the World*, Irigaray writes: “Words should not appropriate or possess stars, wind, birds “which remain always unable to express the energy, the life, that the light and the music of the universe pass on to our perceptions” (2008e, 19).

⁹² For a discussion of *The Piano* in relation to Irigaray’s philosophy, see Caroline Bainbridge’s *A Feminine Cinematics* (2008, Chapter 7).

Chapter Six: Oneiric Spaces

⁹³ In a work that addresses the limitations of sexual difference, and extends Irigaray’s work, Penelope Deutscher examines Irigaray’s work on the basis of “impossible difference”—the categories of identity and difference that have been repeatedly excluded in culture, history, politics and philosophy (2002, p 5).

⁹⁴ In the poetic, carnal and melancholy “Clay, Cloth, Corps” Jennifer Rutherford writes of a dream the echoes Bachelard’s writing: “I began to dream of pots./ Seulement les pots?/ Oui. les pots. J’ai commencé à rêver des pots. I began to dream of pots. To see the clay turning on the wheel. To see my hands on the clay, turning on the wheel. To feel my hands on the clay, turning on the wheel. To feel the clay under my hands, dreaming on the wheel./ Et puis?/ Et puis j’ai rêvé des pots. Tous les pots du monde je les rêve./ C’est tout?/ Non. je faisait cette rêve chaque nuit. I saw the clay turning on the wheel, and my hands, the hands of a potter,

fashioning a pot. I saw the clay rising under my hands, its pale flesh encircling mine, The straight walls of the pot rounding under my touch, cette chair, dure et ronde sous mes mains. rising, rising until it stood; fiere, seule et vraie. Ce pot avec une verité qui va de soi-même, en dehors de mes mains, toute seule et vraie” (2006, no page number).

⁹⁵ Carol Bigwood takes up the invitation to play with Irigaray’s mucus. She writes: “I search for thinking pathways that are poetic in their rationality, for ways of speaking that aren’t cut off from my breath, and words that live in the atmosphere of my body” (2007, p 94). Her approach is to deliver performative “body papers” particularly in relation to Irigaray’s work (2007, p 94). Her work on mucus reads: “(Participant while I turn around right and left with head down and arms outspread like a bird) ... *She focuses on the invisible tangible—that self-touching that cannot be seen like that between the lip and the lip, the eyelid and the eye, and the fetus and the mother. She wants to focus on a “touching without grasping”.* (I repeat turning sideways and enacting full bodily ripples) *a touching without grasping.* (Participant) *a touching without grasping. She wants to focus on the “mucus of the carnal”.* (I repeat, slowing down my movements and regaining my breath) the mucus of the carnal. (Participant) *the mucus of the carnal”.* *Mucus is an unthought of philosophy ... Mucus takes us to sexuality and speech ... to the threshold of the female sex that gives access to the mucus, to the act of love where communion takes place through the most intimate mucous membranes*” (2007, p 107, emphasis in original).

⁹⁶ In a return to the game of fort/da, Freud reveals the “first dream” of Ernst, aged twenty months: “The night before its father was to return to the front the child cried out, sobbing violently: ‘Papa, Papa-Baby’. That may mean: Let Papa and Baby still be together; while the weeping takes cognizance of the imminent departure. The child was at the time very well able to express the concept of separation. Fort (away, replaced by a peculiarly accented, long-drawn-out ooooh) had been his first word, and for many months before this first dream he had played at away with all his toys; which went back to his early self- conquest in allowing his mother to go away” (1978, p 183).

⁹⁷ The “ghost in the machine” is British philosopher Gilbert Ryle’s explication of René Descartes’ mind/body dualism in *The Concept of Mind* (1949).

⁹⁸ Laura Marks ends *Touch* with a decade of dreams she has had that represent the shifts in experimental media over that time (2002, p 193).

⁹⁹ The full question of Hirsh and Olson reads as follows: “In *Speculum* you invoke an approach to dream interpretation that would treat the dream not as the “rebus” of an “already given graphic order” but as a kind of pictograph, an avatar of an *other* order of writing. More recently you’ve argued that alphabetic writing is “linked historically to the civil and religious codification of patriarchal power” and you’ve affirmed the existence of an ancient social order where women’s participation in civil and religious life is linked somehow to “still partially figurative, non-abstract” systems of written signs. Is there a connection between the pictographic dream script of the unconscious and the “partially figurative” writing of this pre-patriarchal history?” Irigaray answers: “I’d say that in a book like *This Sex Which Is Not One* I asked myself—and this seems to me to respond to your question—if woman didn’t correspond in one sense to that which we call the ‘unconscious’. If the culture is founded on a certain repression of the graphic order, and if that which returns at night under the guise of the dream presents itself as a sort of pictograph, isn’t there the trace of a much more generalizable pictographic order that had already been historically repressed, specifically in the West? In order to know, it would be necessary to analyse the dreams of cultures in which writing is still today more pictographic, but I haven’t done that. I know that cultures in which writing is more pictographic are generally more favourable to the feminine subject and to a culture of the feminine” (Hirsh and Olson, 1996, no page number).

¹⁰⁰ I made this association between my caesarean scar and creativity while an interview subject in a demonstration of the “clean language” technique by James Lawley. “Clean Language” describes a psychotherapy technique in which the interviewer or therapist avoids introducing their metaphors, assumptions or suggestions into a conversation, instead focussing on those generated by the subject. See www.cleanlanguage.co.uk.

¹⁰¹ Angela Carter’s “The Company of Wolves” evokes syncope in the movement between wolf and man: “His feral muzzle is sharp as a knife ... Off with his disguise, that coat of forest-coloured cloth, the hat with the feather tucked into the ribbon; his matted hair streams down his white shirt and she can see the lice moving in it ... He strips off his shirt. His skin is the colour and texture of vellum. A crisp stripe of hair runs down his belly, his nipples are ripe and dark as poison fruit but he’s so thin you could count the ribs under his skin if only he gave you the time. He strips off his trousers and she can see how hairy his legs are. His genitals, huge. Ah! huge. The last thing the old lady saw in all this world was a young man, eyes

like cinders, naked as stone, approaching her bed. The wolf is carnivore incarnate” (1993, p 217). The imagery of the wolf is given wide coverage: Freud’s wolf-man, Braidotti’s metamorphosis, Deleuze and Guittari’s “becoming-animal”. In “Love of the Wolf”, Cixous writes: “We love the wolf. We love the love of the wolf. We love the fear of the wolf. We’re afraid of the wolf: there is love in our fear. Fear is in love with the wolf” (2005, p 116).

¹⁰² See Alison Lapper’s website: <http://www.alisonlapper.com> for a biography and image gallery. Retrieved February 19, 2009. See also this extract from Lapper’s biography in *The Guardian*:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2005/sep/03/art1>. Retrieved February 19, 2009.

¹⁰³ For a talk from Brian Kennedy on the creation of *Pregnant Woman*, see <http://www.nga.gov.au/Mueck/director.cfm>. Retrieved April 20, 2009. Kennedy says: “One day, while in the café of the National Gallery, [Mueck] noticed a pregnant woman with her eyes closed, lost in her own thoughts, but allowing the viewer to contemplate the subject of her pregnancy ... In the case of *Pregnant woman* [Mueck] worked closely with a model from her sixth month to the final week of her pregnancy. He used photographs and anatomical text books, as before, but in this case also he employed intense scrutiny of the model. *Pregnant woman* is presented to us at full term” (Kennedy, 2004, no page number).

¹⁰⁴ See the full review at <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,25276064-5013577,00.html>. Retrieved April 20, 2009. See Piccinini’s work here: <http://www.patriciapiccinini.net/> Retrieved April 20, 2009. This site publishes academic essays in response to her work, including one by Donna Haraway

¹⁰⁵ These words are borrowed from a poem by Esther Ottaway called “Facing Reality”: “My friend has pinched my unborn daughter’s name./ Unwittingly, of course—I’d never said/ the name aloud. Just softly in my head/ in baby daydreams. Now it’s not the same./ Not that I am cross with her—in fact, I’m glad/ some child got it. Let’s face it, with my health/ and one high-powered tot, I’m kidding myself/ with thoughts of other babies. And their dad/ would be none too pleased either. No, it’s best/ to be pragmatic now, to sell the cradle/ and give away the trappings of the nest./ I’ve always been a realist; keeps things stable./ My first and last. I’ll tell you what is real:/ the weight of that, how sad it makes me feel” (2006, p 30). Julia Kristeva recognises the weight of the separation between mother and child in

“Stabat Mater”, referring to it as the “abyss”: “What connection is there between myself, or even more unassumingly between my body and the internal graft and fold, which, once the umbilical cord has been severed, is an inaccessible other? My body and ... him. No connection. Nothing to do with it ... Trying to think through that abyss: staggering vertigo” (2002, pp 324-325). I would say, for both of us.

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