Carnal Transcendence as Difference:
The Poetics of Luce Irigaray

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This thesis is presented for the degree of PhD.
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**Synopsis**

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

Irigaray’s resistance to the carnal is evident in her arguments for sexual difference, which offers our “salvation” if we think it through, and heralds “a new age of thought, art, poetry, and language: the creation of a new poetics” (1993a, p 5). Note the language of transcendence used here. When considered in the light of carnal transcendence, sexual difference imagines a differently sexed culture. This thesis argues that Irigaray’s writing is contradictory on this point: it articulates the plurality of women’s sexuality, but emphatically excludes theories of sex and gender that emphasise multiplicity. This thesis challenges these limitations by exploring the possibilities of the “other” couple in Irigaray’s writing—mother and daughter—for thinking through carnal transcendence as difference.
This thesis not only explicates a theoretical model for carnal transcendence as difference; it also attempts to put into practice a poetics—a playful rewriting of theory. This celebrates the carnality of Irigaray’s writing—evident in her complex imagery of the two lips, mucus, the placenta and angels—and enables an exploration of the philosophical space of the “new poetics” that Irigaray is attempting to engender.
Statement of Candidate

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

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

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

Agnes Mary Bosanquet (3038960)

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

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