AHRB CENTRE FOR CULTURAL ANALYSIS, THEORY AND HISTORY
A TRANSDISCIPLINARY INITIATIVE
& CENTRE FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY GENDER STUDIES

INTERNATIONAL, INTERCULTURAL, INTERGENERATIONAL

DIALOGUES

ABOUT THE WORKS OF AND WITH

LUCE IRIGARAY

LEEDS CITY ART GALLERY
THE HEADROW, LEEDS
22 - 24 JUNE 2001
Leeds, 22 June 2001

A WORD OF WELCOME

On behalf of the new AHRB Centre for Cultural Analysis, Theory and History, I would like to welcome you to our first international conference. Founded in January 2001 by a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Board and supported generously by the University of Leeds, CentreCATH has an initially funded five-year programme of annual Congresses, conferences, seminars, exhibitions, lecture series, visiting scholars and other events. Drawing together a unique alliance of scholars, artists, and theorists working in Fine Art, Art History, Cultural Studies, Jewish Studies, Architecture and Material Culture, Feminist Studies in the Visual Arts, CentreCATH aims to become a forum for a transdisciplinary initiative dedicated to critical thinking in and on cultural practices, their theorisation and historical analysis.

This year we are privileged to have the distinguished philosopher, psychoanalyst and cultural theorist, Luce Irigaray as our Visiting Fellow. She is Director of Research in Philosophy at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris. Luce Irigaray has been indefatigable in the conception, development and organisation of this conference that has boldly offered a platform to a generation of younger scholars who have or still are completing doctoral dissertations on the full range of Luce Irigaray's thought. The idea of a dialogical conference, an event that would cross cultures, languages, generations is itself a perfect reflection of the underlying ethos of Luce Irigaray's philosophy. In form and structure as well as in content, her work seeks for modes of sociality and intellectualty that expand the institutions of scholarship and the domain of intellectual exchange. We have here an opportunity for those deeply interested in Luce Irigaray's major intervention in the philosophy of sexual difference, language, politics, ethics, and theology to meet each other, to converse and share work and ideas. Furthermore, we have the opportunity to listen to these presentations and exchanges in the presence of Luce Irigaray who will both be a participant and interlocutor. Instead of the traditional conference, this event becomes more a prolonged seminar, an occasion for genuine discussion and encounter.

Luce Irigaray has been most generous in offering to present two papers, each reflecting upon different themes within the conference. That there are four such distinct sections bears witness to the breadth as well as the depth of her thinking and her interests. The challenge and the opportunity are there for us to draw the lines of filiation between several domains, art, architecture and film; politics, ethics and philosophy; language and translation; theology and the philosophy of religion. These domains are typically separate within the conventional disciplinary divisions of the traditional university. Thus, in our concern to construct transdisciplinary initiatives that reveal the necessity for forms of transgression, re-assemblage, internal critique, challenge and creativity, the work of Luce Irigaray which touches upon and contributes to so many pathways of contemporary critical thought seemed exemplary.

But there was a deeper motivation for the invitation to Luce Irigaray and for the idea of a major, international conference dedicated to her work. We have a tradition at Leeds of engaging with major contemporary intellectuals and their life-long project to effect, through a depth and sustained originality of thought, a major, and ultimately political shift within western and other phallocentric societies.

Luce Irigaray has written in the introduction to a recent set of essays, *Why Difference:*
“Women’s liberation requires an exacting cultural effort, and not just strategies for social emancipation. Deconstructing patriarchal traditions is certainly indispensable but hardly enough. It is necessary to define new values directly or indirectly suitable to feminine subjectivity and to feminine identity. This is not an easy task. We need to go back a few steps in order to analyse the grip on the feminine subject by one of the many traditions created by the sole subject, de facto masculine, and interpret the reasons for women’s absence in the definition of dominant cultural values. Why didn’t women actively participate in elaborating these values? Why did they let their own values be covered up by masculine creations? And how can we ally this going back in order to interpret and critique History, with the invention of new meanings, new codes that are not just the attempt to reverse values, but allow for both the co-existence and fruitful encounter of two different identities? How can we get out of those false dilemmas: difference equals hierarchy, deconstruction excludes the definition of values that escape the same critiques as the one deconstructed...?”

It is a pleasure and an honour to host this event and we would like to express our gratitude to Luce Irigaray for accepting this invitation and devoting so much time and energy to its arrangement and to the event itself.

CentreCATH welcomes all participants to this intergenerational, intercultural and international event and hopes that the process of our meeting and exchange is a productive experience. If there is anything that we can do to assist, please do not hesitate to ask any member of CATH. Please let us know how you found the conference by filling in a response form that is in your conference pack. For your information: our first CongressCATH will take place 21-24 June 2002 titled Translating Class, Altering Hospitality with Gayatri Spivak as the keynote speaker.

Griselda Pollock,
Director, CentreCATH
This conference does not resemble any other. The speakers will not be for the most part already well known scholars, teachers, or writers. They are rather people who have dedicated a few years of their life to the work of Luce Irigaray and/or have just finished their Phds on her thought. Thus, partly, young people. They are also translators who have approached, with competence and sensibility, a very important problem of our time: How to pass on a thought, a style, from one language to another, avoiding an impoverishment of the original text.

This conference offers an opportunity to younger people to talk about their work, to talk together and to exchange ideas with scholars and teachers on a higher level. It also offers a possibility to compare the quality of research. It is an occasion to speak about the work of Luce Irigaray, talking with her and having discussions together, people of different generations, different languages and different cultures.

Luce Irigaray, 13 June 2001
Abstracts of the papers
Roundtable 1 - Arts-Architecture-Cinema

**Feminine Use of Artistic Media**

A consideration of Luce Irigaray’s understanding of “morphology” could help us re-negotiate the functions of media in practices of art. I argue that some critics have misread the term morphology as referring to anatomy, whereas it is a means of understanding the relationships between forms - for example, between subjectivity, body, and language. Thus, although each subject will have her or his own morphology, each gender will also have a morphologic appropriate to it. I read Irigaray’s use of the terms “the lips” and “the mucous” as an engagement with a morphologic of mediation appropriate to women. The emphasis in developing this as a theoretical structure for the analysis of art practices is not to employ any media as metaphors for mucus, but to consider them as sites of mediation which could possibly reveal a morphologic appropriate to women. I will identify uses of media which can be read as informed by a morphologic of the mucous, and moments where instead they collapse back into mimeticizing a phallic morphologic.

**Hilary Robinson**
**Love in Architecture**

This paper questions how the work of Luce Irigaray can be directed towards the problems of feminism in architecture. Problems I suggest represent a crisis in contemporary architectural debates. I investigate what Irigaray's project of being two; what a recognition of a feminine subjectivity; or a radical sexual difference allowing two subjectivities would mean for both men and women's expectations. What it would mean to live with aspirations towards a culture of two sexed subjects. Directing the investigation more specifically to architecture, I ask how architectural practice can both respond to and initiate modes of living that recognise sexual difference; or in the terms of the title of this work, *With Place Love Begins*; how architecture can respond or initiate a different sort of love that remains unthought within the current cultural traditions I thus ask, in this paper, does this project present a productive means of maintaining a practice of feminism in architecture? And if so how? Thinking "love" shared by two subjects is difficult, particularly for architecture but where problems surrounding feminism in architecture risk designating the question of feminism obsolete; Irigaray's claim that her work could fund a feminism that attends productively to (sexual) difference(s); opening a place for "...an energy merely deprived of the space-time it needs to unfold, inscribe, to play"11 Irigaray, Luce (1987) "Belief Itself" in Sexes and Genealogies. Columbia University Press. p. 25; provides my motive to question contemporary feminist critiques in architecture.

**Andrea Wheeler**

**Light, Colour and Sound in Cinema**

The archive for this presentation will consist of short cinematic sequences from Jane Campion's *The Portrait of a Lady*. Dislocations within the constitutive elements (light, colour, sound etc) of these sequences do not culminate in the projection of a whole or complete illusion but produce what can be considered as an incoherence within the film's text. These cinematic moments permeate and resist the metaphorical and thematic depiction of femininity at the level of the narrative to reveal the trace of a different relation to representation. This paper is inspired by a close attention to Luce Irigaray's 'Flesh Colors', 'Gesture in Psychoanalysis' and 'The Invisible of the Flesh: A Reading of Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, "The Intertwining-The Chiasm". Irigaray's writings allow us to reconsider the forgotten elements of cinema and so to trace the signifying potentialities of the interrelations of colours, movements and gestures as a resonance of proscribed female genealogies which press upon and disturb the surface tension of phallic representation. The specificity of a daughter's relation to a mother as another subject is saturated by their female genealogies and the sensuous mutuality of prenatal beginnings. Although the interrelations of mother and daughter may, perhaps, not be directly represented at the level of the narrative as part of the film's phallocentric structures, they can be discerned as influential and operative through the affective memories that are made present through the materiality of cinema. Its elements and its manufacture are disturbed as the affective memory recalled by one of the illusion's constitutive elements is dissociated from the confirmation of another. A strange colour, a misplaced sound misheard, or unrecognised light disrupts the film's web of signification, breaking the threads which echo the pressure of touch, and leach through permeable membranes, in a movement of dysrhythmia, as the feint of a volume of repetition which contorts and refracts the image of Narcissus. A fluid movement between Echo's body, in the form of resonance, which replies in phonemes and timbre to the words of another, in a gesture of distortion formed from a slough of words.

**Liz Watkins**

**Feminine Enunciation in Cinema**

The notion of 'parler femme' is central to much of Irigaray's work on the potentialities of feminine specificity and subjectivity. I am interested in the ways in which it is possible to forge connections between Irigaray's notion and ideas about enunciation in the cinema. My presentation will focus on Irigaray's argument that the feminine requires a distinctive space of mediation and enunciation to show how the medium of cinema is particularly well suited to attempts to construct feminist textual praxis that refer to the unspeakable status of the feminine. By arguing that there are key cinematic moments in which a space for the reconfiguration of cultural perspectives on the
feminine becomes available, this presentation shows that the unspeakable moment of cinematic textuality is richly endowed with textual political possibilities.

My work draws on a range of cinematic texts, including Orlando (Potter, UK, 1993), The Piano (Campion, NZ, 1993), Antonia’s Line (Gorris, Netherlands, 1995), The Silences of the Palace (Tlatli, Tunisia, 1994) and How To Make An American Quilt (Moorhouse, US, 1995). Central to parler femme is the contention that women can profit by and through exchange amongst themselves. Through language, fantasy and processes of enunciation, it is possible to argue that these films construct distinctively feminine positions of subjectivity.

Caroline Bainbridge

Saturday 23 June 2001

Morning Timetable

09.30 Roundtable 2 - Reading-Interpreting-Imparting

Chairs: Luce Irigaray and Joanne Collie (University of Warwick)

Speakers:
Judith Still (University of Nottingham), Poetic Nuptials
Stephen Pluhacek (Michigan Technological University), The Other as Other: Hearing, Listening, Understanding

11.00 Tea/Coffee

11.30 Continuation of Roundtable 2

Speakers:
Heidi Bostic (Michigan Technological University), Reading and Rethinking the Subject
Kaisa Kukkola (University of Turku), On Faithfulness in Translating

Discussion

13.00 Lunch
Poetic Nuptials

This paper seeks to examine the rich and polysemic expression poetic nuptials in the context of reading and translating the work of Luce Irigaray. While some of Irigaray’s work is written in a seemingly easily approachable and accessible style, other texts are densely poetic and invite different kinds of reading relationship. I deliberately use the plural kinds because these poetic texts do not demand just one (kind of) reading. They can be read pleasurably even without ‘full’ understanding; equally, sections, even words or expressions (such as that of poetic nuptials) can be lingered over at length so that layer upon layer of connotation becomes apparent. Poetic nuptials, I would suggest, can take place between text and reader; they can take place within the text, between elements of text; they can be a mode of intertextual relationship – the way which the text stages its relationship with other texts. Poetic nuptials are an alternative to ways of reading such as critique which demand a particular distance between what become subject and object. Poetic nuptials would take place as if between (at least) two subjects.

Judith Still

The Other as Other: Hearing, Listening, Understanding

The opportunity to translate carries with it certain responsibilities. These responsibilities are first and foremost ethical. They entail a respect for the other - a respect that in turn calls for humility: the recognition that I am not the whole, that I have much to learn from the other, that the words of the other are not reducible to my own. Such recognition and respect are all the more important, and perhaps all the more difficult, when it is a question of translating someone of the other gender. Without such respect and humility translation risks becoming an appropriation through which the other, the word of the other, are reduced to me, to my own. Perhaps this risk is unavoidable. But I would like to suggest as a provisional guardrail the following axiom: To hear is not yet to listen, and to listen is not yet to understand. While there are affinities between hearing, listening, and understanding, there are also important differences which must be recognised and honoured if translation is to bear witness to an exchange between thinkers and to make room for the unexpected to emerge.

Stephen Pluhacek

Reading and Rethinking the Subject

Luce Irigaray’s recent work, particularly I love You, To Be Two and Between East and West, call for an other way of reading, of approaching the text a subject-reader or as subject-translator. As the reading/translating subject meeting these works, one must adopt a different mode being, attentive to breath. The Rhythm of these works, of the writing subject invoked through these works, resembles in some way the rhythm of poetry, the openness with which one is called upon to encounter another culture. The reader is called to an other way of thinking, and other way of reading different from the exclusively cerebral way of reading in which we have been trained. The style of texts is a teaching on relational identity. Luce Irigaray’s texts call upon us not to reduce them to something previously known. They illustrate that reading is always inevitably a sort of translating.

These three books ask the questions that are crucial today: How to be two? How to approach the other as other? How to cultivate relational identity, building a bridge between singularity and community? These books, and particularly Between East and West, show that it is a matter of practices. The answers to these difficult but important questions lie not just in an intellectual exercise but in a way of being in the world, a way of being toward the other. My experiences reading, translating and teaching her work have highlighted for me both the difficulties of translating and the importance of helping to bring this work to a wider readership. Offering a new way of thinking the subject, Luce Irigaray’s work is both a challenge and an invitation.

Heidi Bostic
On Faithfulness in Translating

I would like to ask few questions on faithfulness in translating. These questions are compact versions of those that I have widely analysed in my MA thesis about translation of Luce Irigaray’s work in Finnish, which in my mother tongue.

The translation problems in philosophical texts, as well as in French feminist texts are discussed in Translation Studies. Also Luce Irigaray’s work is mentioned but only in few details and mainly in English. It is, as French, an Indo-European language. I evoke common problems of English and Finnish translations but also I would like to pay attention to specific problems, more tightly linked with Finnish language. My examples are from Luce Irigaray’s ‘Un mystère qui illumine’ (Être deux, 1997 Grasset).

There in no gender in English or in Finnish language, at least in the same way as there is in French. How to translate the idea of juxtaposition of lectrices - lecteurs, certaines - certains, toutes - tous? What is the idea? Is it to say that there are women and men readers? Is it that there are two categories which don’t include one another? There one should ask oneself a kind of question of fidelity: is my purpose to present the French way of expressing (dividing) things and people or should I try to speak directly to Finnish public?

Another question of faithfulness can, and should, be asked while thinking of reading public: few key-notions in Irigaray’s text have several radically different ways to be expressed in Finnish. Examples: le discours which can be translated in two ways ‘keskustelu’ and ‘diskurssi’ (first ‘discussion’, second ‘discourse’ today a concept of postmodern analysis in literature, feminist studies, etc.) and one doesn’t evoke another. The same goes with identique, la subjectivité, la contemplation, etc. To which public should the translation speak and be comprehensible? How to do to keep the both, all, possibilities open? To which public should one be faithful?

The third question that I would like to ask here about faithfulness is the most difficult one. In Irigaray’s text, there are several allusions to semblant, paraître, perception, concevoir. These words may seem to be easy but the straight link with seeing in this very case is evident which it is not in Finnish. In Finnish things don’t seem to be. That is an interesting point while studying the semantic fields of different notions of perception or senses - in Finnish different senses are used and sight is not inevitably the most important one. What is translator’s fidelity then? How the critiques of western way of perceiving and defining things be understood in Finnish context? Is it translator’s task to make them comprehensible? Isn’t s/he then translating more that there is the text? Aren’t these ideas in the text, implicitly?

Is there such a global notion as fidelity or faithfulness or are there different ways of being attentive to text, different ways to respect it. At least there are lots of questions to ask.

Kaisa Kukkula
Abstracts of the papers
Roundtable 3 - Philosophy-Ethics-Politics

From the Same to the Other

In a multiethnic, multiracial and multicultural society such as ours, one cannot but speak about differences, one cannot but speak about the other. The mixing of races and traditions has already become a part of our everyday life. For this reason we must learn to give importance to differences. They must not be discarded, denied, nor integrated, but must be accepted as a fruitful counter-part to uniformity.

Our Western tradition, however, is based on a logic of what is identical to ourselves, of what is similar in our culture’s symbolic order. The same has always been privileged to otherness. In contrast, difference has always provoked fear; it is for this reason that the question or issue of the other has often been avoided and why the thoughts of Luce Irigaray are denounced and scrutinised.

However, openness to the other is antithetical to modes of thinking endemic in Western culture. He is in fact attracted by the same, was brought up to exercise differences. Immersed in a culture characterised by a single all-powerful figure, conditioned to think constantly distinguishing between ‘subject’ and ‘object’, it seems evident from his relationship with the other, that he has not yet accepted the concept of differences of otherness. Since we are a part of an era of cultural mixing, we are obliged to redefine our relationship towards the other. We are obliged to learn to come into contact with the other while recognising their equivalence but respecting the racial difference between us.

On the other hand, sexual difference is universal. Human being, in effect, is basically made up of man and woman. The duality of the gender exists in all races, cultures and traditions. We can assume, therefore, that respect of sexual differences can lead to the respect of all secondary and multiple differences. Since the desire of the same has dominated and guided our way of thinking, you cannot confront the issue of sexual difference without recognising the problem associated with the same. Man, in effect, in his perpetual desire for sameness, has also altered woman’s identity. In fact, in his continual search, he has made himself a prime model of the human race, and has thus put woman on the same scale. Woman has therefore been connected to the male universe.
Saturday 23 June 2001

It is therefore necessary to define, for woman and man, an identity appropriate to their gender and sexual identity. Moreover, one must consequently recognise one’s partiality and not annul the insurmountable differences which exist between the two sexes. It is only in this way that we can become capable of recognising the other (in this case: the woman) as irreducible to the same. And only such a recognition can make possible the advent of culture of two subjects, different but equivalent: man and woman.

For all this to happen however a thought revolution must take place in compliance with “the thought of sexual difference”, of which Luce Irigaray is the prime representative. A thought which shows an openness towards the idea of “plurality” manifested in the duality of male and female.

Consequently, sexual difference represents the key that can allow for the realisation of the peaceful co-existence between all other differences. Diversity exists everywhere. Thus the founding principle of the community must be “difference”, and the basic model of a similar operation is that of the difference between man and woman. It is possible then to affirm that the only ‘new look’ towards the concept of difference can teach us respect for the other as other, and distance ourselves for always from the violent reduction of the other to the same.

Note: The considerations mentioned above refer in particular to the following works of Luce Irigaray: Speculum. De L’autre femme; Ethique de la difference sexuelle; J’aime à toi. Esquisse d’une félicité dans l’histoire; La democrazia comincia a due.

Florinda Trani

The Ethics of Dialogical Transference

Many feminist theorists have argued that Luce Irigaray's project of sexual difference is discriminating against other differences, such as racial or ethnic differences, differences in class, sexual preferences, health etc. In my dissertation In the Flesh. Identity, Embodiment and Difference in the Works of Luce Irigaray I argue to the contrary. In my view Luce Irigaray's project of sexual difference offers a very rich and inspiring resource for thinking through and living not only sexual difference, but all sorts of differences. I especially consider her emphasis on embodiment to be very important for developing an ethics of differences, understood as thinking and living a good life together while respecting all the differences between us and within us. In my paper I will first explain the importance of Luce Irigaray's focus on embodiment for thinking through and living differences. Then I will explore the role of the imaginary in erasing and in articulating embodiment and differences. I will suggest that Luce Irigaray's focus on the imaginary can be understood as a special form of transference. Finally I will propose that an ethics of differences can be based on this special form of transference, which I call the dialogical transference.

Tonja van den Ende

Gender Perspective for Democratial Education

Given our sexist cultures based on masculine values, it is imperative to empower women by developing alternative and creative methods of education on democratic values, to move forwards in the construction of democratic societies where gender equality becomes a reality for all. In the case of youth, the promotion of values such as the respect and tolerance of sexual differences and mutual understanding between the sexes, will allow them to discover and develop their own unique sexual identity, while filling gaps in the possibilities of dialogue between the sexes.

The author will discuss a new educational experience on gendering education for mexican youngsters centered around themes such as sexual difference, identity construction and communication among girls and boys within small consciousness-raising groups having an adult coordinator.

Finally, the efficacy and effectiveness of this model of education will be analyzed in regards to its possibilities of application in different contexts and cultures around the world.

Maria Jose Garcia Oramas
## Timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09.30</td>
<td>Roundtable 4 - <strong>Feminine in Theology and Philosophy of Religions</strong></td>
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<td>Chairs: Luce Irigaray and Denise Couture (University of Montréal)</td>
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<td>Speakers:</td>
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<td>Laine Harrington (Graduate Theological Union), <strong>Access or Barrier to</strong></td>
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<td>Goddess Talk?</td>
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<td>Anne Claire Mulder (University of Amsterdam), <strong>Incarnation: The Flesh</strong></td>
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<td>Becomes Word</td>
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<td>11.00</td>
<td>Tea/Coffee</td>
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<td>11.30</td>
<td>Continuation of Roundtable 4</td>
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<td>Speaker:</td>
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<td>Morny Joy (University of Calgary), <strong>Divine Love</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Discussion</td>
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<td>13.00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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## Abstracts of the papers

**Roundtable 4 – Feminine in Theology and Philosophy of Religions**

**Access or Barrier to Goddess Talk?**

Luce Irigaray’s words from Elemental Passions do not accord themselves only to experience with “male” discourse (that is, phallogocentric, centred on the phallus as centre the word). Luce Irigaray’s words also accord themselves to women’s discourse – the words of those who attempting to include the feminine in male-dominated theological discourse – the words of those who, attempting to include the feminine in male-dominated theological discourse (that revolves around a masculine *logos*), turn to celebrate the “godess”. But, we must be careful here, for in attempting to include woman in God/word-centered theological language, many end up using the same properties that male discourse have constructed about (and attributed to) women. In other words, what happens when women’s words fall “woman”? Contemporary language about “goddess(es)” then, begins to rely on and perpetuate definitions of women that merely mimic (or oppose) male discourses about God.

Goddess language that moves from the *majuscule* “God” to a *minuscule* “goddess”, and from singular to plural, is not enough. The inclusion of women in theology requires the development of a different of a different language, an “other” discourse – beyond words. Using the metaphor of a woman at the gate, I suggest the scandalous nature of “goddess talk”, addressing the first gate, then the woman, and finally what the quieting of such talk might bring.

Laine Harrington
Incarnation: The Flesh Becomes Word

In this paper I will present some key ideas of my dissertation called Divine Flesh Embodied Word. ‘Incarnation’ as a hermeneutical key to a feminist theologian's reading of Luce Irigaray's work. I will focus this presentation on what I see as the central thesis of the dissertation, notably that images and thoughts, or the activities of imagining and thinking, are rooted in the movements of the sexuated flesh. These movements of the flesh become Word - works of art, bodies-of-thought, gestures of exchange, discursive practices - in an elaborate process of transfigurations. I have arrived at this thesis along two lines: first by a careful analysis of Luce Irigaray's use of the word 'chair' and secondly by interpreting Luce Irigaray's concept of 'morphology'. This idea implies that in images and thoughts, including images of and discourses on the divine and God, traces of the libidinal, sensible movements of the flesh can be found. It moreover implies that these images and discourses cannot be presented as neutral, but must be thought through as gendered from the start. This has important implications for feminist theological discourses on God and the divine as I will argue in this paper.

I will also picture the rupture of this interpretation of the concept of incarnation with traditional theological discourse on the Incarnation. If time allows I will also draw attention to the idea that the flesh is moved by the touch of the other - either the other person or the work of art which touches the subject in her flesh.

Anne-Claire Mulder

Divine Love

The work of Luce Irigaray resonates with references to God, goddesses and the divine and the need for women to find and express integrity and desires in a way that affirms a love that is divine. This paper will be an exploration of this aspect of Irigaray's work, with particular reference to I Love to You and Entre Orient et Occident.

For Irigaray, what is of most importance is that a woman must be able to experience her own existence in ways that attest to her own fullness of identity, or, as Irigaray deems it, to divinity. This mode of ‘becoming divine’ is portrayed differently in various of her works, but it is in “Divine Women,” in particular, that Irigaray first develops the idea of women realising their own divinity. And while Irigaray acknowledges the need for a divine matrix that corroborates one’s existence, her use of the term ‘infinite of becoming’ certainly places this divine entity on a different plane than the familiar static categories of the male symbolic, such as Being/Idea/Unity, which she addressed in Speculum. In “Divine Women,” Irigaray also associates love with the divine when she states, ‘The belief in the love of God is the belief in the feminine principle as divine’ (p.70). Irigaray then acknowledges that it is only if a woman realises her own divinity, especially with its resonance of love, is she is capable of entering into a relationship.

In fact, it is her move endorsing a felicitous meeting of female and male genders that marks a distinct development in her work. Indeed, since An Ethics of Sexual Difference (1993), and especially in I Love to You (1996), Irigaray has been concerned with establishing a right order of relationship, of ethics, between men and women. For Irigaray, this fulfilment of the two respective genders is a charged task – one that could spiritualise humankind. It involves a labour of love that permits an affirmative recognition of sexual difference that enhances life, rather than imposing sacrifice or death on women by precluding their access to self-determination. Irigaray states: ‘Hegel knew nothing of a negative like that’ (Irigaray 1996: 13).

For Irigaray: ‘Love is accomplished by two, without dividing roles between the beloved and the lover, between objectival and animal passivity on the one hand, and generally conscious and valorous activity on the other. Woman and man remain two in love” (1996: 138). Irigaray wishes to retain an opposite (though not opposing) gender as the irreducible token of exteriority (Irigaray 1996: 145), and also to instantiate the moment of recognition as the vindication of heterosexual love. It also respects the irredubility of the other, while allowing what Irigaray describes as ‘a positive access – neither instinctual nor drive-related – to the other’ (Irigaray 1996: 13). It is love thus enacted – with attentiveness, with generosity, with a form of intransitivity – that Irigaray denotes by the phrase ‘I love to you’ (Irigaray 1996: 102). For Irigaray, this carnal love between a man and a woman is thus cultivated and made divine.

In her most recent work, Irigaray has demonstrated a growing interest in what she terms Far-Eastern or Oriental traditions (Irigaray 1996: 137). More specifically, she has developed her theories regarding the role of woman, particularly her position as goddess. As she observes in “Les Temps de la vie”: ‘In India, men and women are gods together and together they create the world, including its cosmic
dimension (Irigaray 1999: 44). This divine union of male and female, represented by the gods and goddesses, celebrates the constant fecundity of life in a mode of becoming. At the same time, Irigaray appreciates that this relationship, specifically with reference to Tantrism also discloses ‘The worship of a Goddess (worship of her body and her sex) by man’ (Irigaray 1996: 137). This is in keeping with Tantric belief, in both Buddhism and Hinduism, that the energy of the universe emanates in women.