

Divine Matter: Transforming subjectivity through art practices and Irigaray's  
sensible transcendental

Alison L. Thomson BA, BArch, DipEd  
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## **Abstract**

The French philosopher Luce Irigaray proposes the sensible transcendental as a model of subjectivity that enunciates an alternate reality based on sexual difference. This concept unsettles conventional understandings of the sensible and the transcendental, suggesting a different relationship between the material and the divine. Irigaray coined the sensible transcendental through her studies and work as a psychoanalyst, her critiques of philosophy and Western theology, and her own experience of Eastern spiritual practices. This studio based research project, explores the sensible transcendental and conceives a series of artworks in relation to this exploration. In keeping with Irigaray's philosophy, the concept is deployed with a focus on Jacques Lacan's notion of subjectivity, Jacques Derrida's challenge to the metaphysics of presence and Martin Heidegger's writings on art. A three part understanding of the sensible transcendental, developed through art practices such as making, reading and writing, along with my own experience of spiritual practices, frames the following exegesis. This three part understanding configures the sensible transcendental as a speaking of Being, feminine transcendence, and elemental intervals. This investigation of the sensible transcendental, in terms of art practice, provided a critical and propositional framework for rethinking my own sense of separation from the feminine and the natural environment and the alignment of these two terms in Western culture. The artworks created as part of this research speak to these concerns and offer new symbolic reference points for a different (female) subjectivity.

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## Declaration of Thesis

This documentation contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and, to the best of my knowledge, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the documentation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alison Thomson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Candidate Name: Alison L. Thomson  
Month / Year: May 2013

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## Introduction

The following exegesis explores five pieces of artwork in relation to French philosopher Luce Irigaray's concept of the sensible transcendental. This concept unsettles conventional understandings of these terms, suggesting a different relationship between the material and the divine. In keeping with Irigaray's philosophy, this relationship is explored with a focus on Jacques Lacan's notion of subjectivity and Jacques Derrida's challenge to the metaphysics of presence, which I have utilised in the formulation of the artworks presented. The discussion of these artworks is framed by Martin Heidegger's writings on art and its possibilities for speaking Being.

The initial impetus for the artworks came from my own sense of alienation from the feminine and the natural world. The sensible transcendental, as a concept, offers a critical and propositional framework for rethinking and redressing this sense of separation. This exploration of the sensible transcendental, through art practice, has enabled me to frame and articulate not only my sense of alienation but also experiences I have had in relation to meditation practices. It is through these practices, and making the artwork that I have experienced what I understand the sensible transcendental to be. As such the artworks discussed aim to find new symbolic reference points for a different (female) subjectivity. As Tamsin Lorraine (1999) writes:

Just as the masculine subject's subjectivity has symbolic reference points to support him, so could symbolic reference points be created for another way of being. Irigaray's notions of the sensible transcendental and the feminine divine are designed to fulfil this symbolic function. (p. 91)

Irigaray coined the term sensible transcendental through her studies and work as a psychoanalyst, her philosophical writing, and her own experience of Eastern spiritual practices.<sup>1</sup> In 1974, Irigaray published her thesis as *Speculum of the Other Woman*, in which she critiques women's exclusion from philosophy and psychoanalytic theory, specifically questioning Lacan's belief that women can not gain access to subjectivity. *Speculum of the*

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<sup>1</sup> Irigaray has a doctorate in Philosophy and another in Linguistics, and trained at the Ecole Freudienne de Paris (Freudian School of Paris founded by Lacan).

*Other Woman* gained Irigaray recognition, but also curtailed her academic career. She lost her teaching position at the University of Vincennes and was excluded from the Lacanian community. After her dismissal, Irigaray continued to work as a psychoanalyst and researcher. In her clinical practice she witnessed the effects of gender based oppression which contributed to the development of her ideas on subjectivity. She later became increasingly interested in the relationship between the status of the feminine and environmental issues. Her writing ranges from critiques of psychoanalysis, philosophy and theology, to ethics and prose. The sensible transcendental is one component of this vast body of work.

The following discussion is limited to the sensible transcendental and structured around the critical and transformational components of the concept. The sensible transcendental forms part of Irigaray's overall aim to articulate sexual difference through critiques of patriarchal discourse. Irigaray mounts this critique by engaging in a dialogue with psychoanalysis, Western philosophy and Western theology and experimenting with new cultural forms. By sexual difference, Irigaray means that there must be two poles of identity, both masculine and feminine, rather than one form of subjectivity based on the masculine. Irigaray developed the sensible transcendental as an alternative 'horizon of becoming' for both men and women. Through the sensible transcendental she hopes to provide a model of subjectivity that offers women a 'feminine divine' and allows men a different relation to the body and the natural environment. The artworks presented here were developed with this goal in mind.

The artworks under discussion were generated through a range of art and design practices, including making, reading and writing, and draw on the imagery of Abstract Expressionism, modernist architectural aesthetics and the work of contemporary installation artists such as Wolfgang Laib. As a former architect, my artwork is influenced by the aesthetics of modernist architecture and while the following discussion is limited to art, my studio practices and understanding of visual language bare the influence of my training in architectural design. In addition to art and design practices, I have completed the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises and undertaken retreats in Buddhist meditation as part of this research. The Ignatian exercises comprise a series of techniques suggested by Ignatius of Loyola who established the Society of Jesus in the early sixteenth century, now known as the Jesuits. The form of Buddhist meditation I practise derives from the Theravada tradition and includes the techniques of Anapana and Vipassana. My experience of the Ignatian Exercises and Buddhist



meditation informed the research along with an understanding of Irigaray's philosophy. The sensible transcendental, in particular, helped to frame and articulate these experiences.

The research I have undertaken is based on a key assumption - that women and the natural environment occupy a similar position in Western culture. This assumption highlights the unacknowledged support of the feminine and the material for patriarchy which in turn denies women their own subjectivity. There are therefore three questions at stake: how to imagine a female subjectivity?; how to cultivate new ways of being which acknowledge a debt to the natural environment?; and, how to use art practices to generate a new symbolic and imaginary that can support these changes? The research undertaken through this masters project is a response to this last question. The artworks discussed propose that a different (female) subjectivity, circumscribed by Irigaray's sensible transcendental, can potentially be 'unconcealed' through a meeting of existing representations and configurations of the sensible and the transcendental. To this end, the artworks take images and motifs of transcendence from the masculine imaginary and attempt to bring them back into relation with conventional symbols of the sensible and the feminine. Through this strategy the artworks aim to: speak Being through a meeting of the sensible and the transcendental; to find symbolic reference points for a feminine transcendence; and, capture 'elemental' intervals between the feminine and masculine. The exegesis outlines how these aims were developed and executed in the artworks presented.

Chapter One initially provides an outline of the concept of the sensible transcendental, situating it within Irigaray's methodology, and exploring the source and meanings of the concept. This discussion is undertaken in order to develop a detailed understanding of the sensible transcendental and its possibilities for generating new symbolic reference points. The following section of the chapter explains how the sensible transcendental might be applied within visual arts practice in partnership with Heidegger's conception of art. Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics as a silencing of Being is taken up and his concepts of 'earth', 'world(s)' and 'clearing' are employed to explore the artworks. The chapter concludes by suggesting a three part understanding of the sensible transcendental as it applies to art practice. Chapter Two comprises a discussion of the artworks presented and this is structured around the tripartite understanding of the sensible transcendental developed in the previous chapter. Part One explores *becoming* (2008) by focusing on the sensible transcendental as a 'speaking of Being', and the shared components of the artworks. Part Two

explores three artworks *confession* (2009), *penance* (2009) and *clearing* (2012) in relation to the sensible transcendental as ‘feminine transcendence’, as well as my own experience of Christian and Buddhist meditation techniques as it relates to my art practice. Part Three concludes with a description of the artwork *black dam 1* (2012) and focuses on the third aspect of the sensible transcendental – ‘elemental interval’.

In conclusion, I emphasise the potentiality of both the sensible transcendental and art practices. As a ‘new’ female subjectivity, the sensible transcendental is not the opposite of male subjectivity, but an interval between the feminine and the masculine, between becoming and Being, between matter and form. This interval can be activated by an intentional drawing together of the sensible and the transcendental through material transformations. In the context of an artwork that which is covered over, silenced, and limited by Western metaphysics can be unconcealed by bringing matter and the divine into relation.

## Chapter One

### The Sensible Transcendental

Irigaray offers the sensible transcendental as a model of subjectivity that enunciates an alternate reality based on sexual difference. In critiquing Western metaphysics and the failure of Anglo European social institutions to acknowledge this difference, she writes:

It is surely a question of the dissociation of body and soul, of sexuality and spirituality, of the lack of a passage for the spirit, for the god, between the inside and the outside, the outside and the inside, and of their distribution between the sexes in the sexual act. Everything is constructed in such a way that these realities remain separate, even opposed to one another (Irigaray, 1993a, p. 15).

Irigaray therefore aims to effect a symbolic redistribution, by bringing these oppositions back into relation through the sensible transcendental. Irigaray's method has been described as a combination of Derridean deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis.<sup>2</sup> In order to better understand the sensible transcendental, those elements of Derrida's and Lacan's theories which intersect with Irigaray's concept will be summarised below. Although the theories of Derrida and Lacan are well known, they are briefly outlined here in order to set up a context for making sense of the artworks explored in this exegesis. This is followed by a discussion of the sensible transcendental in terms of its function and derivation and finally, how it may be applied in visual arts practice.

### Derridean Deconstruction

Western metaphysics is built on a system of differences in which one of the two poles is always privileged over the other. (Grosz, 1989, p. 27) This system of differences is the foundation of Logocentrism - a singular, unified conceptual order centred around a logic of presence, or the immediacy of things. Derrida's approach aims to challenge Logocentrism by exposing oppositions and identifying what has been covered over by the *logos* within

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<sup>2</sup> See Hanneke Canters & Grace M. Jantzen (2005) in *Forever Fluid: A reading of Luce Irigaray's Elemental Passions*.

particular texts. As part of his approach Derrida employs a number of textual devices. He introduces terms that disrupt any return to the original binary, referring to these as 'undecidables'. The most familiar is *différance* which incorporates both senses of differing spatially and deferring temporally. The undecidable character of *différance* produces an excess or an unincorporated remainder which resists the hierarchy of a conventional binary opposition. Derrida also uses other undecidable terms such as arche-writing, dissemination, supplement, parergon, hymen, trace and iterability to activate the different contexts within which they are deployed. They are 'hinge terms' intended to maintain two words in a state of *différance*.<sup>3</sup>

Like Derrida, Irigaray focuses on language as a mechanism for change and experiments with textual devices. While Derrida aims to deconstruct difference, Irigaray is interested in creating sexual differentiation. Irigaray adopts Derrida's methods within a feminist framework and uses techniques such as mimesis and mimicry to critique texts. As a consequence, some commentators understand Irigaray's concepts in terms of Derrida's deconstructive approach. Victor Taylor and Charles Winquist (2001), for example, define Irigaray's sensible transcendental as a Derridean hinge term:

Fundamentally, the *sensible transcendental* functions as a Derridean hinge term (*la Brisure*) in exposing the arbitrary nature of binary linguistic structures. By subverting the hierarchical relation of transcendent/immanent and their gender-specific referents, a hinge term unhinges the logic (A/not A) securing the fixed identity of the first term as a referent for the negated identity of the second. As a hinge term, the *sensible transcendental* disrupts traditional, meta-theological concepts of the divine by locating the transcendent within its immanent and specifically feminine essence. (p. 361)

The sensible transcendental is intended to disrupt Western metaphysics by bringing the sensible back into relation with the transcendent. Irigaray argues that the privileging of dominant terms inherent in Western metaphysics underlies the way the feminine is symbolised in the western cultural imaginary. The 'sensible' is associated with the feminine, the body and nature while the transcendent aligns with the masculine and the intelligible. A key goal of Irigaray's project has therefore been to provide new conceptual models that will give women images of their transcendence as embodied beings. It is in these terms that the sensible transcendental forms part of my project, as an avenue to a new feminine imaginary.

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<sup>3</sup> See Elizabeth Grosz (1989, pp. 26-38) for a detailed outline of Derrida's approach.

Elizabeth Grosz (1989) notes, Irigaray's "writing, her 'styles', involve new forms of discourse, new ways of speaking, a poetry which is necessarily innovative and evocative of new conceptions of women and femininity"(p. 101). To this end, Irigaray proposes a *parler femme* based on female morphology. She suggests thought-images inspired by female anatomy and sexuality, eroticism and fluids. Irigaray's understanding of 'morphology' is based on the Greek word 'morphe' meaning shape or form. As the philosopher Rachel Jones (2011) points out:

The concept of morphology...provides Irigaray with a language of sensible forms with which to counter both Plato's transcendent Forms or Ideas and the image of maternal matter as simply form-less. Instead, this matter gives the Forms a new form by allowing them to be translated into sensible configurations. (p. 60)

These sensible configurations allow Irigaray to reconfigure formlessness as a *different* form. In addition to exploring new morphologies, Irigaray sometimes employs erotic language. This situates the sensible transcendental within a play of sensuality and seduction. As Carolyn Tilghman (2009, p. 45) suggests, Irigaray's writing eroticizes spirituality, employing a poetry of lovers. Tilghman (2009, p. 45) observes that Irigaray's writing evokes images of multiplicity, fruitfulness, sensation, and the body, deliberately engaging the abstract language of Western philosophy within sensual and seductive imagery. The following passage shows how she conjures this alternative symbolic:

The flesh of the rose petal—sensation of the mucous regenerated. Somewhere between blood, sap, and the not yet of efflorescence. Joyous mourning for the winter past. New baptism of springtime. Return to the possible of intimacy, its fecundity, and fecundation...But time enters in. Too closely connected with counting and with what has already been. (Irigaray, 1993a, p. 200)

As well as exploring an alternative symbolic, Irigaray has sought to reconceptualise the space within binary oppositions from which difference emerges. For Irigaray, the sensible transcendental configures a passage in-between. This 'interval' doubles within and divides across sexual difference so that, even as a mutual space of desire forms between lovers, separation also occurs. Irigaray's notion of the interval, while similar to Derrida's concept of *différance*, in that it differs spatially and defers temporally, is always used in relation to sexual difference. According to Irigaray, (1993a) "if there is no double desire, the positive

and negative poles divide themselves between the two sexes instead of establishing a chiasmus or a double loop in which each can go toward the other and come back to itself” (p. 9). Irigaray offers a number of motifs as part of her attempt to configure the interval between the sexes and initiate a change to the conventional hierarchical relations based on the sensible transcendental. One of these is the manifestation of ‘angels’ in lived experience. According to Irigaray, (1993a) angels might provide a, “birth into a transcendence, that of the other, still in the world of the senses (‘sensible’), still physical and carnal, and already spiritual. It is the place of incidence and junction of body and spirit, which has been covered over again and again” (p. 82). The angel brings into relation the sensible and the transcendental in the interval between the world of the senses and the divine.

A second motif Irigaray employs in order to mediate the interval between the sexes is the ‘elemental’. In the group of texts *Elemental Passions*, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* and *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, Irigaray addresses the relationship between men and women within the context of the elements and the senses. She engages the writings of Nietzsche, Derrida and Heidegger on their elision of femininity. Irigaray’s elemental forms part her overall attempt to rethink the division between matter (conventionally associated with the feminine) and form (typically aligned with the masculine). Irigaray (1993a) writes, “the transition to a new age...assumes and entails an evolution or a transformation of forms, of the relations of *matter* and *form* and of the interval *between*” (p. 7). In her later work, such as *The Way of Love*, Irigaray rethinks Being in terms of the sensible transcendental. She proposes that Being and becoming divine operates in the realm of our relation with others – in the realm of inter-subjectivity. Irigaray’s re-thinking of Being as a question of alterity allows her to represent it as both elemental *and* transcendent. The elemental will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two in relation to my artwork. Irigaray’s rethinking of alterity relates to her understanding of subjectivity and this is the focus of the following discussion on Lacanian psychoanalysis.

## **Lacanian Psychoanalysis**

In addition to being an undecidable term that challenges Western metaphysics, Irigaray’s sensible transcendental is concerned with rethinking subjectivity. At the most general level the sensible transcendental refers to, as Whitford (1991b) writes, “all the conditions of

women's collective access to subjectivity" (p. 47). Irigaray's understanding of subjectivity stems in part from her training in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Drawing on this approach, Irigaray attempts to uncover what has been repressed within discourses, and interprets this excess or unincorporated remainder in a psychoanalytic sense. As such, Whitford (1991b, p. 33) describes Irigaray's project as a 'psychoanalysis' of Western metaphysics. Whitford (1991b) argues that Western metaphysics "is an endlessly repetitive gesture of blocking women's subjectivity in order to protect an endlessly threatened economy which is a fragile barrier against an unthinkable death and dissolution" (p. 116). While Irigaray utilises Lacan's theories she also questions his negation of female subjectivity.

Lacan's structure of the subject comprises the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic and these three 'registers' formed during childhood are interlinked in the adult subject. The Real is that which remains outside the signifying effects of the Symbolic order; the Imaginary - the spheres of consciousness and self-awareness or register for who and what one 'imagines' oneself and other persons to be; and the Symbolic - the realm of language.<sup>4</sup> Lacan describes the child's early experience as a state undifferentiated from the mother and surrounding space. During this Imaginary period, the child experiences what Lacan calls the 'mirror phase' by forming an imaginary idea of self cohesion contrary to a concurrent lack of physical mastery. This difference is experienced as a sense of alienation, and the ego is formed by embracing a perfect image of the self and repressing the imperfect or abject in the unconscious. What is repressed in the unconscious can become split off and projected onto the other in the adult subject. The child subsequently enters the Symbolic with the realisation that others, typically the father, are competing for the mother's attention. Lacan represents the symbolic other by the general, term 'Phallus'. Lacan argues that the child cannot enter the Symbolic without separating from the mother and accepting 'the name of the father' or the 'Law of the Phallus'. Within this schema there is no female subject position - the feminine is cast in terms of lack or absence. Any regression to the undifferentiated bond with the mother is henceforth experienced as anxiety. The female child in Lacan's system, and this is Irigaray's key problem with his theory, cannot enter language without distancing herself from her self-same mother. The female child is therefore doubly alienated from her-self.<sup>5</sup> The role of the Imaginary and the Symbolic in subject formation are important for Irigaray's overall

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<sup>4</sup> See Adrian Johnson (2103) for a detailed outline of Lacan's registers.

<sup>5</sup> I would argue that in extremely patriarchal structures, the formation of subjectivity in the female child is actively blocked in order to constitute her as support and mirror for the male subject.

project because of the way they structure relations between the sexes and their relations to the socio-linguistic symbolic order.

Irigaray views Lacan's theories as phallogentric - a form of Logocentrism in which the phallus takes on the function of the *logos*, submitting women to images defined for, and by men. Irigaray is therefore concerned to articulate sexual difference by rethinking the imaginary through the symbolic. Irigaray believes that during the imaginary phase, the child experiences itself as either male or female. As Whitford (1991b) notes, Irigaray conceptualises the imaginary in terms of sex: "the imaginary either bears the morphological marks of the male body, whose cultural products are characterised by unity, teleology, linearity, self identity,...or it bears the morphological marks of the female body, characterised by plurality, non-linearity, fluid identity" (p. 54). The imaginary or pre-discursive stage is therefore key to Irigaray's aim to rethink female subjectivity. While Lacan sees the imaginary as the site of an ideal body/ego, Michele Le Doeuff, a feminist philosopher and contemporary of Irigaray, understands it as the use of imagery in texts – as a kind of 'thinking in images'. (as cited in Grosz, 1989, p. xix) For the purposes of my argument, the Imaginary will be understood in terms of both definitions; as the site of an ideal body/ego and a thinking in images. I interpret Irigaray's project as a process of installing new imagery into the collective and individual imaginary. In the following section I explore Irigaray's project further in relation to her development of the sensible transcendental.

### **Irigaray's use of the terms 'Sensible' and 'Transcendental'**

Irigaray's use of the term Sensible relates to her readings of Plato's *Republic* and *Timaeus*. In *The Republic* Socrates' dialogue develops a position on justice and its relation to 'eudaimonia' (happiness). The dialogue explores two key questions 'what is justice?' and 'what is the relation of justice to happiness?' In order to address these questions, Socrates and his interlocutors construct an ideal society - the Kallipolis. In Book Six of *The Republic*, with the aim of establishing what is Good in the context of justice, Socrates uses the analogy of a divided line to explain the Form of the Good. He divides a line into four sections. The lowest two parts represent the sensible visible realm and the top two - the intelligible non-visible



realm. In the lower section Socrates places images or shadows, in the second section visible objects, in the third section truths arrived at via hypotheses (such as mathematics), and in the highest section the Forms themselves. Corresponding to each of these is a capacity of the human soul: imagination, belief, thought, and understanding. In Book Seven, Socrates develops this discussion by focusing on the philosopher, the Forms and the analogy of the cave. The cave is used to represent the philosopher's education from ignorance to knowledge of the Forms or Ideas. The world of the cave represents the visible world, that is, the world of the senses or appearance, while the world outside the cave stands for the intelligible world - the true reality of the Forms or Ideas. The Sun represents the ultimate Form, the Form of the Good, which holds all the other Forms in position, the origin of all that is. (as cited in Jones, 2011, p.45)

In her essay *Plato's Hystera*, Irigaray (1985a) undertakes a critique of Plato's hylomorphism.<sup>6</sup> Through a close reading of the text, Irigaray shows how Plato's hylomorphism, his separation of the intelligible from the sensible, and his forgetting of the physical scene of the narrative represents a disavowal of maternal matter and a displacement of the role of the feminine in birth.<sup>7</sup> In psychoanalytic terms Irigaray maintains that the apparatus of the 'natural' world is used as a 'scene of representation' without acknowledgement, because something is needed to contain what has been split off through the separation of the intelligible from the sensible. (Whitford, 1991b, p. 116)

In *Timaeus*, Plato elaborates his system further through a creation story. Again using a dialogue he outlines a three level account of creation: Being - the intelligible model (the Forms); Becoming - the visible world of change which is its copy; and the 'receptacle' - in which the forms imprint their qualities so as to generate objects. Jones (2011, p.75) notes that in *Timaeus*, the creation of a universe based on a single ideal model is this time clearly gendered - not only is the creator-god both 'maker and father' but the model from which he works is also metaphorically presented as the 'father' of the visible world. Jones (2011), writes, "*Timaeus* thus lends further justification to Irigaray's mapping of the Forms (and the Form of the good in particular), onto the Father. In *Timaeus*, the universe is made in the image of male divinity and male ideal" (p. 75). While the Forms are aligned with the

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<sup>6</sup> In the hylomorphic model entities are the result of the imposition of form on unformed or disorganised matter; in contrast to the active capacity of form, matter is seen as inert, passive and receptive.

<sup>7</sup> Irigaray regards Plato's cave as a metaphor for the womb.

masculine, the 'receptacle' is explicitly compared by *Timaeus* to the mother. It is also referred to as 'space' (*chora*) towards the end of Plato's text. This concept will be discussed further in Part Three of Chapter Two in relation to my art work.

In summary, Irigaray's use of the term sensible engages with the alignment of the feminine with the world of becoming and nature. For Irigaray, nature and matter are the other of the sensible – that is, the 'other of the other'. While Irigaray argues that nature occupies a negative position in Western culture, her critique is not strictly consistent with what has become known more recently as eco-feminism. Her understanding is, as always, augmented from a psychoanalytic perspective. As Whitford (1991b) argues, "what is being disrespected [in nature] is those parts of himself that the male imaginary has split off and projected – into the world, onto women" (p. 95).

Irigaray's use of the term 'transcendental' has three key components. Firstly, it is a reference to the (male) transcendental subject of Western metaphysics. Irigaray defines the transcendental as the arenas of the (philosophical) subject split off from its ground configuring the body of woman as its base. (Whitford, 1991b, p. 154) Irigaray's employment of the term therefore problematises the transcendental subject of Western metaphysics by bringing him back into contact with the sensible.

Secondly, her employment of the term transcendental allows Irigaray to conceive a different God or notion of the 'divine'. In her essay "Divine Women", Irigaray argues that men have access to divinity through the alliance of the trinity - father, son, spirit. She argues that this theological tradition poses difficulties for women in terms of "God in the feminine gender". As she maintains, "there is no woman God, no female trinity". (Irigaray, 1993b, p. 62) Women are consequently lacking a 'horizon', a reference to the infinite that offers a path to becoming. Irigaray (1993b) writes:

Divinity is what we need to become free, autonomous, sovereign...God forces us to do nothing except become. The only task, the only obligation laid upon us is: to become divine men and women, to become perfectly, to refuse to allow parts of ourselves to shrivel and die that have the potential for growth and fulfilment. (pp. 62-9)

Irigaray therefore offers the sensible transcendental as a new 'divine' or a God.<sup>8</sup> Whitford (1991b, p. 144) describes Irigaray's concept of the divine as corporeal, sexuate - either male or female, subject to becoming, multiple, and incarnated in us here and now. Lorraine (1999) extends Whitford's understanding, arguing that the sensible transcendental is Irigaray's term for a "feminine divine which touches on but also exceeds whatever sensible reality the subject may be experiencing" (p.69).

Lastly, Irigaray's utilisation of the term transcendental offers her a framework for speaking about other experiences of transcendence - that is, those experiences where the individual experiences a dissolution of the self and a sense of unity with her surroundings either through mystical or meditative practices. Lorraine (1999) notes that in her writing on medieval mysticism, Irigaray makes a distinction between the unity of the self-sufficient subject and the wholeness of the mystical experience: "it is rather the wholeness of an experience with no lack because there is no ideal form to which the experience is referred" (p.73). Lorraine (1999) understands Irigaray's transcendental as an encounter with the inconceivable but also immanent, gendered and inter-subjective:

In living toward the horizon of the sensible transcendental, one dissolves one's perceptions and self-same-identity. For Irigaray however, such dissolution is contained through attentive response to that which is always contiguous to conscious awareness; by attending to the gap between corporeal and conceptual logics, especially in relation to an embodied other, one can find the point of contact that can lead to rejuvenating transformations of both. (p.17)

In summary, Irigaray's use of the term transcendental encompasses a critique of the (male) subject of Western metaphysics, a reconfiguring of God in terms of a 'female divine' and a rethinking of transcendence in terms of wholeness, immanence and inter- subjectivity. In the following discussion I will outline how the sensible transcendental can be applied within visual arts practice.

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<sup>8</sup> See *Divine Women: Luce irigaray, women, gender and religion* by Morny Joy (2006) for an extended discussion on Irigaray's rethinking of the divine in the context of religious studies.

## The Sensible Transcendental in Visual Arts Practice

The sensible transcendental operates in a manner similar to Derrida's undecidables, or hinge terms as suggested by Taylor and Winquist. Firstly, it draws together the sensible - configured in Western metaphysics as feminine, and the transcendental - aligned with the masculine in Western metaphysics. Secondly, it proffers an interval between these terms that Irigaray has sought to conceptualise through notions such as the 'elemental' and the mediation of angels. As discussed above, the concept sits within Irigaray's broader aim of incorporating sensuality back into abstract philosophical language, Western theology and articulating sexual difference through an inter-subjective idea of Being. Key to this rethinking is Irigaray's critique of Western metaphysics through a Lacanian psychoanalytic lense in order to uncover what has been repressed within these discourses. Irigaray initially presented the sensible transcendental in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. In this text she engages in a mimetic dialogue with a range Western philosophers on the question of ethics and elaborates her vision of sexual difference. She juxtaposes readings of philosophical texts, including Plato's *Symposium*, Aristotle's *Physics*, Descartes's "On Wonder" in *The Passions of the Soul*, Spinoza's *Ethics*, Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*, and Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, with discussions on experiences of love: between fetus and mother, between lovers, and between women and their bodies. She asserts that women have never known a love of self and argues that women must insist on the integrity of their own embodiment and transcendence.

Whitford (1991b) summarises the sensible transcendental with a definition collated from *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. She defines the concept as incorporating a "vital intermediary milieu, a perpetual journey [*marche*], a perpetual transvaluation, a permanent becoming, the immanent efflorescence of the divine." (Whitford, 1991b, p. 47). These various designations can be understood in the following manner; 'vital intermediary milieu' refers to the divide between matter and the transcendent, between female and male and the possibilities of 'angels' and the 'elemental' in reconceptualising this in-between space. 'Perpetual journey' folds time back into the transcendent while 'perpetual transvaluation' supports transformation of one form to another both physically and intellectually. A 'permanent becoming' denotes becoming in terms of subjectivity but also in relation to Being. And, the 'immanent efflorescence of the divine' is intended to conjure images of divine immanence, growth and

flowering. Together these shifts in understanding open up ways of reconfiguring female subjectivity. This is the field in which I situate my art practice.

Although Irigaray does not provide a theory of art and her writing on visual art is limited, her philosophy, as Hilary Robinson (2006, p. 7) notes, opens up the potential for investigating how her ideas might manifest themselves in the context of art practice.<sup>9</sup> In order to elaborate how the sensible transcendental, in particular, can be explored in visual arts practice, I turn to Heidegger's theory of art because of the connection his writings offer between art and subjectivity in relation to Being. Heidegger's concepts are both reconfigured according to Irigaray's critique of his ontology and used in partnership with Irigaray's sensible transcendental to explore the artwork under discussion. As Jones (2011) argues, Irigaray's call for a new poetics lends itself to Heidegger's approach:

Approaching Irigaray through [a] Heideggerian lense helps show why the project of 'speaking woman' (parler femme) should not be positioned as an attempt to represent a pre-existing essence of woman. Instead, speaking woman is more appropriately paralleled with the Heideggerian notion of speaking Being, of letting Being speak in such a way that a being is brought forth as the specific being that it is. (p.179)

Heidegger (1998) developed his concept of Being through a close reading of Plato's *Republic* – specifically the myth of the cave discussed above. Heidegger interprets Plato's account as a concealment of Being rather than a forgetting of the feminine and nature as Irigaray does. Being for Heidegger is not an object, but a becoming or 'being in the world' and 'truth' is not correctness as it was for Plato, but the 'unconcealed' (or *aletheia*). In his essay *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger tries to discern art's essence and he does this by elaborating his concepts of Being and truth through an analysis of specific artworks.<sup>10</sup> Heidegger argues that art is not only a way of expressing truth in a culture, but a means of producing truth and providing a basis from which 'that which is', or Being, can be uncovered. He seeks to identify the conditions by which specific entities are disclosed or 'unconcealed'. Heidegger (2008) writes, "in the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing...Only this clearing grants and guarantees to us humans a passage to those beings

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<sup>9</sup> In *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray*, Robinson undertakes an extensive study of Irigaray's overall philosophy in relation to a diverse range of artists and art practices.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger refers to the following three works of art in his essay in order to develop his argument; *Old Shoes* (1886-87), by Vincent van Gogh, a fifth century BCE Doric temple of Hera II in Paestrum (Lucania) Italy, and the poetry of Friedrich Holderlin.

that we ourselves are not and access to the being that we ourselves are.” (p. 178). He argues that concealment (hiddenness) is the necessary precondition for unconcealment (*aletheia*), that is, for the production of truth. For Heidegger truth is a product of the process of art, as unconcealment, taking place within the artwork.

Heidegger asserts that art has the ability to set up an active struggle between ‘world’ and ‘earth’. World represents meaning which is disclosed, not merely the sum of all that is ready-to-hand for one being, but rather the network of relations in which *Dasein*, or human being(s), exist.<sup>11</sup> The word earth is used to signify the background against which events emerge; it is outside (unintelligible to) the immediate ready-to-hand. In setting up a world, Heidegger (2008) maintains, “the work moves the earth itself into the open region of a world and keeps it there” (p.172). Heidegger argues that world and earth are necessary components for an artwork to function, each serving specific purposes. The artwork is an object of world, and generates a world of its own; it creates a clearing or opens up other worlds past and present, other cultures and fields of knowledge. In doing so it evokes earth, whilst not representing it, rather highlighting the material qualities used to create it, such as the vibrancy of paint, the density of language, the texture of wood, and the ground or implicit background, which is necessary for each representation. Heidegger holds that in a work of art, the material does not disappear (into the form), as it does in a ‘tool’ but becomes present. For Heidegger, the ‘strife’ between world and earth which art sets up can illuminate the contours of the clearing. In the artworks discussed I draw on Heidegger’s terminology of earth, world(s), and clearing to develop a visual vocabulary for speaking Being, at the same time as engaging with Irigaray’s critique of Heidegger.

Irigaray’s critical engagement with Heidegger is most evident in *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* (part of the ‘elemental’ series) where she argues that Heidegger’s use of the clearing as a metaphor for Being negates the materiality of space: “the clearing of air is a clearing for appearing and disappearing, for presence and absence.” (Irigaray, 1999, p. 9) Heidegger acknowledges earth, but neglects air and conceives being as solitary – that is, outside of sexual difference. In the following chapter I will explore how Heidegger’s notion of clearing can be reworked in terms of an ‘opening’ and his concepts of world(s) and earth

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<sup>11</sup> Heidegger uses the term *Dasein* to define human being - a German word meaning "(human) existence" or, more literally, ‘being-there’.

can be developed in the context of an artwork to take into account the debt owed to the feminine.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Irigaray's sensible transcendental, as it relates to my art practice, can be conceptualised in three ways: as a speaking of Being; a feminine transcendence; and, an elemental interval. These three notions are summarised below.

The sensible transcendental is firstly a bringing together of the sensible (configured as feminine in Western metaphysics) and transcendental (aligned with the masculine in Western metaphysics) as a way of speaking Being. This meeting of the sensible and the transcendental is envisaged through the writings of Irigaray as a dialogue with Plato, Lacan and Heidegger. As Heidegger argues, Being has been silenced in Western metaphysics, since Plato, through its separation from the realm of becoming. This separation has real effects on the embodied subjectivity of both men and women, and on the way subjectivity is configured within disciplines such as psychoanalysis. I therefore aim to make a link between Plato's Forms and Lacan's concept of the 'ideal ego' through the forms I use in my artworks. In these artworks I attempt to unconceal a different (female) subjectivity by bringing imagery from the masculine imaginary, such as Plato's geometrical solids, and the monochromes and colour field paintings of Abstract Expressionism back into relation with prevailing symbols of the feminine, such as formlessness, fluids and receptacles. This act is intended to fold becoming and transformation back into Being. The imagery and symbols utilised in the artworks are discussed in detail in Part One of the following chapter.

Secondly, the sensible transcendental proffers a feminine transcendence. It is a reimagining of the divine and transcendent practices in terms of sensuality and immanence, and an invitation to conjure angels as mediators of the space between the sexes. There is a sensuality evident in the artworks I discuss in terms of the physical process, such as forms melting, dissolving, dripping and dispersing over time, which evokes immanence through its bodily operations and references to the corporeal. In addition to sensuality and immanence, Irigaray's sensible transcendental encompasses exploration of other 'worlds' and zones of

experience. Using Heidegger's understanding of an artwork I explore these dimensions of experience, maintaining that the artworks invoke a sensible transcendental by generating 'worlds' of their own, opening up other worlds past and present, other cultures and fields of knowledge. To this end, I use the artworks to explore modes of transcendence and subjectivity within Neo Platonic, Christian and Buddhist worlds, incorporating my experiences of these models to produce a feminine divine and reconfigure a different female imaginary in the artworks discussed.

Thirdly, the sensible transcendental is the interval between the sensible and the transcendental, between matter and form, both temporal and elemental. As such, the artworks discussed aim to give a presence to this interval through temporal elemental events. In Heidegger's words, an artwork can work to move the earth itself into the open of a world and keep it there. Each installation is imagined as an activated clearing, or opening, bringing earth and world into intimate contact. This activation is enacted through a transition from ideal geometrical form to elemental fluid form and aims to reconfigure Heidegger's clearing metaphor as an opening to Being rather than a forgetting of materiality. This reconfiguring of Heidegger's concept speaks to Irigaray's call to rethink the relations of matter and form, and of the interval between as a sensible transcendental. (Irigaray, 1993a, p. 7).

These three fields of concern have provided the framework for the generation of my art works. In the following chapter I will use this tripartite understanding of the sensible transcendental to discuss the artworks presented.



## Chapter Two

In this chapter I explore five pieces of artwork produced as a part of my Masters research. The chapter is structured according to the three part understanding of the sensible transcendental outlined in Chapter One. Initially, Part One of this chapter explores *becoming* 2008 (Figures 1a-d) by focusing on the sensible transcendental as a speaking of Being. Through the exploration of *becoming* I elaborate a number of key influences pertinent to all the artworks discussed. These features include the evolution of the specific imagery and forms I use in the artworks, and their connection to the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter One, as well as the influence of other art practices and artists. Part Two discusses three artworks, *confession* 2009 (Figures 2a-c), *penance* 2009 (Figures 3a-c) and *clearing* 2012 (Figures 4a-b), in relation to the sensible transcendental as feminine transcendence and my own experience of Christian and Buddhist techniques, in terms of how these meditation techniques relate to my art practice. Lastly, Part Three describes the artwork *black dam I* 2012 (Figures 5a-c), the most recent piece produced in this series, with a focus on the third aspect of the sensible transcendental – ‘elemental’ interval.

### Part One

#### Speaking Being: *becoming*

*becoming*, (2008), comprises a timber platform, frozen ink forms and water. The platform was constructed in two parts from 3mm plywood, sealed with marine varnish and finished with bees wax. The timber platform includes a rectangular depression at one end and a topographical circular well at the other, which is filled with clear water. Over the course of the installation frozen ink forms are hung above the rectangular depression. As the forms melt the depression fills and the ink moves along a channel towards the circular well. Once the ink crosses the juncture between the two parts of the platform, it comes into contact with the water and continues along the channel into the centre of the well. The ink gradually disperses through the clear water, colouring it in the process.

*becoming* was the first installation in this series to be constructed. The work leading up to this piece comprised a series of geometrical forms with hinged faces that could be unfolded and

flattened into two-dimensional shapes. This was accompanied by a series of abstract ink paintings that were then cut and folded to form geometrical solids. Through this experimentation I was attempting to find a way to rethink form and formlessness. The two approaches were combined in *becoming* by freezing geometrical solids and allowing them to drip into a platform. The initial version of this installation included paper embossed with a mathematical net of the solids – such that the melting ink flowed into the embossed areas. The paper was omitted from subsequent presentations of this installation and others in the series in order to simplify their reading. In this artwork and others in the series, imagery from the masculine imaginary and symbols of the feminine are used in order to provide a framework for a meeting of the sensible and transcendental described in Chapter One. I will next elaborate the development of this imagery and associated symbols through a discussion of Platonic forms and art historical precedence that relate to my art practice.

### **Imagery from the Masculine Imaginary: Forms, colour fields and monochromes**

*becoming*, like all the artworks discussed in this exegesis, includes three components; a geometrical solid made in a material that dissolves or melts, a platform, and fluids. The fluids are sometimes present at the outset and sometimes formed over the duration of the installation from the dissolution of the solids. The artworks attempt to reconfigure the binary of form and formlessness as a process of unforming and re-forming. The Australian feminist philosopher Genevieve Lloyd (1984) argues that in the Pythagorean Table of Opposites ‘male’/masculine/maleness is associated with form while ‘female’/feminine/ femaleness is aligned with formlessness:<sup>12</sup>

In the Pythagorean table of opposites...femaleness was explicitly linked with the unbounded – the vague, the indeterminate – as against the bounded – the precise and clearly determined. The Pythagoreans saw the world as a mixture of principles associated with determinate form, seen as good, and others associated with formlessness – the unlimited, irregular or disorderly – which was seen as bad or inferior... [the] ‘male’ and ‘female’, like the other contrasted terms, did not function as straight forwardly descriptive classifications. ‘Male’, like the other terms on its side of the table, was construed as superior to its opposite; and the basis for this superiority was the association with the primary Pythagorean contrast between form and formlessness. (Lloyd, 1984, p. 3 as cited in Whitford, 1991b, p. 60)

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<sup>12</sup> The Pythagorean table (described by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* (986a) in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC) pairs the following terms: Limit-unlimited; odd- even; one-many; right-left; male- female; rest-motion; straight-curved; light-dark; good-bad; square-oblong.

While Plato does not refer specifically to the Pythagorean table, he was clearly influenced by its binary logic. Recall that in *Timaeus*, for instance, Plato describes Being as a static world of pure Forms, which he associates with the intelligible, the good, the father and god, and Becoming as the world of illusion, change and the sensible. The Forms are configured by Plato as aspatial and atemporal and transcendent to the sensible world. They are the ‘model’ upon which the sensible world is based. Further in *Timaeus* Plato adapts a concept from the Pythagoreans that related each natural element to an ideal geometrical solid:

earth - cube  
water - icosahedron  
fire - tetrahedron  
air - octahedron

I have employed the association of these ideal geometrical solids to the elemental in several of the artworks. *becoming*, for example employs each of Plato’s geometrical solids and in *black dam 1* an icosahedron is used. Plato’s geometrical solids are employed as a device in these artworks to represent the notion of the ‘good’ or the ‘ideal’ which underscores his dimension of Being. It is important to note, that Plato’s geometrical solids are somewhat different to his Forms or Ideas. The geometrical forms described in *Timaeus* are conceived as both ideal Forms and material particles. *Timaeus* (Plato, 1925) explains in detail how each side of the geometrical solids, made up of scalene and isosceles triangles, is configured in various ways to form matter. While the forms utilised in *confession*, *penance* and *clearing* are conical, they function in the artworks in a similar way. Conical mathematics was the particular focus of the fifth century Neo-Platonist philosopher and mathematician Hypatia. The conical forms are used in reference to Hypatia and Neo-Platonic notions of form.

In my artworks the geometrical solids posited by Plato and conical forms favoured by Hypatia dissolve and drip into the platforms. This process of dissolving and dripping creates temporary ‘paintings’ on the surface of the platforms reminiscent of Abstract Expressionist colour fields and monochromes, particularly those of Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko. While it is generally understood that the intention of the Abstract Expressionists was to ‘empty’ meaning from art, what interests me is the way their artworks also reference transcendence and subjective experience.

The art historian Micheal Auping (1987) argues that in their large colour field paintings, for instance, Jackson Pollock, Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman “wished to generate profound psychological and philosophical meaning through amorphous expanses of space. All four developed their mature works out of an imagery based on personal; and hermetic signs and ideograms” (p.164). Auping points out that by the late 1940s, a process of purging these signs resulted in purer fields of colour. While this shift was interpreted by Greenberg as part of a broad stylistic evolution of modernist abstraction, it was seen by others in more metaphysical terms. According to Auping, Robert Rosenblum was the first writer to explore the relationship between Edmund Burke’s notion of the sublime and the effects of the new space being achieved in Abstract Expressionist painting. Auping (1987) writes, “in Rosenblum’s terms, the sublime space that connects Abstract Expressionist painting to Northern Romantic landscapes of the nineteenth century is one of ‘supernatural mysteries’ and ‘religious sources’” (p.164). This is consistent for instance with Barnett Newman’s understanding of painting as a way of *practising* the sublime rather than finding symbols for it. In the essay he wrote to accompany a group exhibition he organised in 1947, *The Ideographic Picture*, Newman explains that the artworks represented ideas ‘directly’ – not through the detour of mimesis: “they combined act and idea...to form shapes that *carried* thoughts, rather than merely stood for them. An ideographic shape was a living thing, an ‘idea-complex’ that actually made contact with the mysteries of life, death and tragedy.” (Gibson, 1987, p. 74) Newman’s reworking of Burke’s sublime, as a representation of both nature and the transcendent, speaks to the re-connection I am attempting to make between the material and the divine.

Feminist critiques of abstract expressionism have similarly emphasised the subjective content of these artworks. Griselda Pollock (1992), for example, writes:

The purity of the visual signifier, seemingly emptied of all reference to a social or natural world, is still loaded with significance through its function as affirmation of its artistic subject. Abstract Expressionism is a celebration of the ‘expressivity’ of a self which is not to be constrained by expressing anything in particular except the engagement of the artistic self with the processes and procedures of painting. This ‘painting’ is privileged in modernist discourse as the most ambitious and significant art form because of its combination of gesture and trace, which secure by metonymy the presence of the artist. These inscribe a subjectivity whose value is, by visual inference and cultural naming, masculinity. (p. 142 as cited in Robinson, 2006, p. 110)

As Pollock's comment indicates, the imagery of Abstract Expressionism can arguably be located within the masculine imaginary - it invokes representations of masculine transcendence and subjectivity. The colour field paintings and monochromes of Abstract Expressionism capture a feeling of transcendence but one that corresponds with Plato's realm of Being rather than Irigaray's sensible transcendental. In my view, the meanings emptied from these artworks, particularly that of Newman and Rothko, aligns with what is configured in Western metaphysics as the sensible and the feminine. Some contemporary artists have responded to the representations of transcendence and themes of Abstract Expressionism in ways that activate them differently. The contemporary installation artist Wolfgang Laib, for instance, borrows the imagery and techniques of Abstract Expressionism and *re-presents* them in what could be understood as a sensible transcendental art practice.

Laib studied medicine in the early 1970s in Tübingen and after completing his dissertation left the profession to follow his interests in art and Eastern philosophies. His artwork employs a range of formats such as: pollen or rice accumulations on the floor; small houses filled with rice or coated in wax; beeswax rooms large enough for the viewer; 'milkstones' and ritual fires. His 'milkstones' consist of a rectangular piece of polished white marble in which the top surface is sanded to create a slight depression. He fills this depression with milk, creating the illusion of a rectilinear form. Laib is also known for his use of large quantities of yellow pollen which he collects from around his home in southern Germany. He exhibits the pollen in a variety of ways, most notably sifted on a stone or concrete floor to create large yellow colour fields. He also uses conical forms both in the arrangement of the pollen and rice and as solids cast in metal.

Laib's interest in healing and Eastern spiritual techniques is clearly evident in his work. In terms of art practice, he aligns himself with Joseph Beuys and shares with Beuys a religious and therapeutic conception of art. Laib views his artwork as effecting a therapeutic and spiritual change in both the viewer and the space in which the artwork is installed.<sup>13</sup> (Page, 1986, p.15) Thomas McEvelley (1991, p.178) positions Laib's art practice as 'neo - pre Modern', defining this movement as an attempt to establish channels of cultural connection with pre Modern societies. McEvelley argues that while many artists associated with the

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<sup>13</sup> A discussion of Beuys' approach falls outside the scope of this exegesis.

‘abstract sublime’, such as Piet Mondrian and Yves Klein based their works on occult or spiritual traditions, Theosophy and Rosicrucianism respectively, others such as Laib chose the neo-pre Modern approach, preferring to draw on various non-Western spiritual traditions.

I would suggest that by referencing the imagery of the ‘abstract sublime’ and drawing on Eastern spiritual practices, Laib’s artwork displays qualities of the sensible transcendental outlined in Chapter One. Laib brings the sensible, in the form of materials which are often associated with reproduction and nourishment together with the mystical transcendental imagery of abstract expressionism. In the ‘milkstones’, for instance he reworks white monochromes, by introducing fluid materials, typically associated with the feminine. Similarly, in the pollen works, Laib reconfigures monochromatic and colour field imagery by using a material connected with reproduction. He also draws on methodologies and techniques used in Abstract Expressionism, such as using the floor as a support and using his body in a performative way in the making of the artworks in a manner similar to Jackson Pollock. Laib’s interests and approach to art practice have been a significant inspiration in the development of my artworks. This is evident through my use of fluid materials, references to colour fields in the form of ‘liquid grounds’, and employing the floor as a support.

### **Symbols of the Feminine: Formlessness, fluids and receptacles**

Logocentrism, as discussed in Chapter One, associates formlessness with the feminine. This assumption configures the feminine not only as lacking form but also being without defined limits, irregular or disorderly. Irigaray resists a characterisation of formlessness as lacking form, suggesting rather that it resists adequate symbolisation. In proposing a different morphology, one that references female anatomy, sexuality and fluids, Irigaray rejects the subordination of the feminine that interprets it in terms of lack. In *Marine Lover*, for instance, Irigaray analyses Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to develop woman’s subjectivity in terms of fluidity: “in me everything is already flowing, and you flow along too if you only stop minding such unaccustomed motion, and its song...So remember the liquid ground. And taste the saliva in your mouth also...These fluids softly mark the time.” (Irigaray, 1991a, p. 37)

Irigaray's allusion to fluids, as Jones (2011, p.179) has suggested, should not be seen as a straight forward representation of the feminine, but a speaking of Being in the Heideggerian sense. It is in this manner that the artworks presented here bring earth – as fluid matter, into contact with world. In each of the artworks presented, fluids appear or change through the dissolution of the geometrical solids. The melting or dissolving solids are intended to invoke a sensual, slow dissolution from one state to another allowing for an interval of unforming and re-forming. As well as incorporating fluids that change state, the artworks presented in some instances contain liquid grounds formed through the dissolution of one fluid flowing into or merging with another. The artwork, as such, sets up conditions by which new forms, are disclosed or uncovered. This uncovering by the artworks grants a passage to other beings, in the Heideggerian sense suggested in Chapter One, enabling a viewer an experience of transcendence, that also accesses their own being as immanent. The process of dissolution enacted in these artworks demonstrates that the forms are not perfect enduring geometrical abstractions, as in Plato's schema, but composed of matter that is provisional, changing state from solid to fluid. Matter is no longer hidden within a form, to use Heidegger's argument, but unconcealed.

In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray 'goes back through the male imaginary', to discern how woman has been defined by and for men. She finds that the dominant image of the mother is that of a 'receptacle' – a closed volume. Recall that in *Timaeus*, the receptacle is related to the mother. As Whitford (1991a p.28) notes, man's fear is of an 'open container' a fear initiated by his need for mastery, of things he cannot enclose. The platforms incorporated into the artworks presented provide a counterpart to the geometrical solids in that they act as open containers for the creation of new worlds: *becoming* has a long rectangular platform resembling a frame; *confession* – a single rectangular platform containing a topographical mapping of an ear; *penance* - a bronze cube pierced with cuts, suggesting a vagina; *clearing* - a tripartite white square baring an imprint of human lungs, and; *black dam 1* - a topographical model of the 'Black Dam' at Dunmoochin.<sup>14</sup> The platforms function as a stage for a different scene of representation in that the container is evident rather than hidden as a backdrop to a narrative. The platforms are intended to invoke what has been displaced by Logocentrism - the feminine, the body, and nature, as well as mimic the characterisation of the feminine as a

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<sup>14</sup> I am currently undertaking an art residency at Dunmoochin. Dunmoochin is a property formerly owned by the Australian artist Clifton Pugh. The Dunmoochin Foundation established by Pugh provides residencies for artists on the property.

space, hole, or receptacle. Topographical contours are used in some of the artworks, such as *black dam 1*, to suggest a connection with the landscape.

## **Part Two**

### **Feminine Transcendence: *confession / penance & clearing***

#### ***confession / penance***

*confession* (2009) consists of a white timber platform, constructed from 3mm and 12mm plywood cut to resemble a topographical model of an ear. Over the course of the installation, a frozen conical form, made from water and blue pigment, is placed on the ear shaped depression. As the form melts the white depression fills with liquid which splits into various shades of blue. *penance* (2009) comprises a bronze cube, made using the lost wax method, and a frozen conical form made from wine. Over the course of this installation, the frozen form is hung over the cube aligned with a group of cuts in its surface. As the conical solid melts the form of the cube is reinstated.

### **Neo-Platonic and Christian Worlds**

As mentioned in the introduction, Irigaray developed the sensible transcendental in part through her readings of Western theology. Many of the beliefs and practices employed in Christianity stem from Neo-Platonism founded by Plotinus.<sup>15</sup> Jones (2011, p. 99) observes that following Plato's *Timaeus*, Plotinus conceives matter as that which cannot change or be changed by the ideal Forms. He insists that matter only reflects the appearance of the Forms that are visible against it due to matter's formlessness. Irigaray (1985a, p. 169) argues that in Plotinus' metaphysics, matter, such as water, is not a mirror - which gives a faithful image (as it was for Plato), but reflects unreal semblances of the real. Jones (2011, p. 99) points out that such faithlessness causes Plotinus to see matter as 'evil' because it is completely lacking in the Form of the Good, a position that is taken up in the Christian denigration of matter and

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<sup>15</sup> Neo-Platonism revives a Platonic theory of forms, renaming Plato's Form of the Good as 'the One'. Plotinus reformulates Plato's concept of matter and proposes new practices to experience transcendence.



the flesh.<sup>16</sup> This denigration is accompanied by an internalised model of subjectivity. As Julia Kristeva (1987, p.108) argues, Plato's Form of the Good is internalised in Neo-Platonist practices and precepts; Plotinus replaces Plato's sun – the Form of the Good with an 'inner' eye.<sup>17</sup> According to Kristeva (1987, p. 109) Platonic dialogism is adapted, with Plotinus, into a monologue that leads the ideal inside a Self and establishes itself as an *internality*. This internality sets the scene for the early Christian idea of an inner temple and practices aimed at purification or perfection such as confession and penance.

In his analysis of early Christianity, Michel Foucault (1988) argues that in the fourth and fifth centuries it was necessary to renounce the sensible world in order to achieve purity of soul and access to the truth. This shift corresponded with an increasing publicisation or externalisation of 'inner experience'. Foucault traces the move to public self-examination and identifies two forms of self-disclosure used in the period; *exemologesis*, the status of penitence or penance and later *exagoreusis* – the verbalisation of all thoughts or confession.<sup>18</sup> Confession became the mark of truth and anything that could not be expressed became a sin. Foucault (1988, p. 48) argues that from the eighteenth century this verbalisation is appropriated by the human sciences, (such as psychoanalysis and psychology). In these contexts the verbalisation of thought is not in the renunciation of the self but to constitute a new self.

Both confession and penance rely on the conventional division in Western metaphysics between the intelligible, associated with the masculine, and the sensible, associated with the feminine. In this understanding, access to the divine is gained through the intellect and by

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<sup>16</sup> The French philosopher and Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin devoted considerable attention to the status of matter in Christian theology and saw his overall project as an attempt to 'Christify matter'.

<sup>17</sup> In order to see the 'beauty of the good soul' Plotinus advised the following precept:

Withdraw within yourself and look. If you do not yet therein discover beauty, do as the sculptor, who cuts off, polishes, purifies until he has adorned his statue with all the marks of beauty. Remove from your own soul therefore all that is superfluous, straighten out all that is crooked, cleanse what is obscure and make it resplendent, and do not cease sculpting your own statue until the divine resplendence of virtue shines forth...Have you become this? Do you see this? Do you purely dwell within yourself, without any obstacle to unity, does *nothing foreign anymore*, by its submixture, *alter the simplicity of your interior essence*?...you shall then have become the light itself,...Then must you observe carefully, for yours will be the only eye that is able to perceive supreme Beauty...For the eye will first have to be rendered analogous and similar to the object it is to contemplate. Never would the eye have seen the sun unless first it had assumed its form. (as cited in Kristeva, 1987, p.108)

<sup>18</sup> The first form of self-disclosure – penance, is the renunciation of the self through ascetic macerations or martyrdom. In the second form of self-disclosure – confession, the only way to discern the 'purity' of thought is through the complete obedience to the master via a permanent verbalisation of thought.

repressing the body; the flesh is punished to achieve the purity of the mind. Confession enacts the ‘law of the father,’ in Lacanian terms, by mobilising patriarchal discourse. Anything that does not enact the law of sameness is repressed – such as the abject, separated off from the self and relocated in the unconscious. Similarly through penance, the flesh / body is made responsible for the mind’s deviation from the law of the same and punished accordingly.

As practices, confession and penance rely on a spatial model of subjectivity. Foucault’s writing on Early Christianity shows that these techniques depend on an internalised sense of self – the most notable example in Christianity being the metaphor of the body as a temple for the soul. In my view this internality is problematic for women. As Irigaray has noted, the feminine is characterised in Western culture as receptacle or space. As a female practitioner of techniques that draw on the traditions of Christian meditation, I am a space within a space, twice removed from my embodied self. While Christianity offers a ‘horizon of becoming’, this becoming is largely conceived outside of an awareness of sexual difference, therefore denying female subjectivity.<sup>19</sup>

During the time I was making *confession* and *penance*, I was undertaking the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises.<sup>20</sup> The exercises involve imagining oneself in settings from the Christian narrative and recording ones observations, sensations and feelings in a textual and / or visual format. An emphasis in this practice is placed on imagination and the possibilities of this approach, I believe, correspond with Irigaray’s understanding of the imaginary as a site for creating new forms. Confession as a practice forms part of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises and while penance is no longer used, its legacy is still apparent in the way the body is neglected in deference to dialogue and to the mind as a means of achieving understandings. The Western theological tradition, of which the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises are an example, encompasses many techniques and rituals. I selected to focus on the practices of confession and penance in the making of the artworks because these techniques capture the division between the sensible and transcendental.

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<sup>19</sup> Some feminist theologians such as Anne-Claire Mulder have begun to investigate Irigaray’s philosophy in their work. Whilst this research promises to elaborate some interesting connections, it falls outside the scope of my current project.

<sup>20</sup> The exercises extend over 30 weeks (or 30 days in a retreat setting) and include a weekly meeting with a director, who acts as a guide through the experience, to discuss the outcomes of each exercise.

The historical and philosophical associations of confession and penance informed the associations the artworks bring into play. The frozen forms used in both *confession* and *penance* are conical - a reference to Hypatia's interest in conical geometry, and the depression incorporated into the surface of the platform in *confession* resembles a human ear - one of the key senses used in the Christian practice of confession. *penance* utilises Plato's geometrical solid for earth – the cube, and this cube, cast in bronze, is scored using oyster shells.<sup>21</sup> In this way, a correspondence is made in *penance* between earth and flesh, as it is perceived within Neo-Platonism and later in Western theology. As works of art, *confession* and *penance* represent an attempt to bring the sensual and the sensible, and an immanent sense of the divine into relation with these techniques. They do this by referencing the body and invoking the sensual through a slow dissolution of ideal forms. *confession* and *penance* aim to mend the tear between the sensible and the transcendental, to repair and make whole the flesh. This is suggested by allowing the conical forms representing a masculine model of transcendence to melt and fill the depressions in the surface of each platform.

### *clearing*

*clearing* (2012) comprises three timber platforms and conical forms made from sugar, cochineal and white titanium. Each platform is constructed from plywood and the exterior surface finished with lime wash and semi-gloss polyurethane. The depressions in each platform are filled with water and over the duration of the exhibition the sugar based forms, placed in the water, dissolve. The pigments in the sugar disperse and colour the water different shades of red.

## **Buddhist Worlds**

In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray (1993a), asks, "why do we assume that God must always remain an inaccessible transcendence rather than a realisation - here and now - through the body" (p. 148)? Irigaray's concept of the sensible transcendental is a proposition

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<sup>21</sup> The cuts in *penance* refer to Hypatia's death. Hypatia was murdered by a Christian mob by being dragged through the streets of Alexandria into a church and flayed with oyster shells. She was executed in this way because she was unwilling to renounce her Neo-Platonic views.

– to experience the divine through and in the body and the body’s connection through the senses to the elements. Whereas Irigaray focuses on Hindu practices in *Between East and West*, I have drawn on my own experience of the Eastern meditation practices of Anapana and Vipassana, which come from the Theravada tradition. Hindu practices and the Theravada tradition share similar meditation techniques particularly in relation to breathing exercises. Through these practices it is possible to experience transcendence through the body.

The techniques of Anapana and Vipassana capture elements of Irigaray’s sensible transcendental through Anapana’s observation of respiration and Vipassana’s observation of bodily sensations. Sensations vary from ‘gross’ or strong sensations such as pain, cold, heat, pressure to ‘subtle’ vibrations in and on the body. The observation of sensation is systematic - moving from the top of the head down to the toes and back again. By observing these sensations one begins to understand a relationship between mind and body. With practice, awareness of sensation becomes more acute until very small areas of the body enter conscious awareness. When this awareness is combined with Anapana one also becomes more aware of air – that we are coextensive with and dependent on air. The experienced meditator can move awareness through the entire body in one breath. The object of the technique is to develop equanimity towards every sensation whether it is painful or pleasurable. It is through this equanimity that an understanding of *annica* or impermanence is reached. A long term goal of Theravada meditation is the dissolution of the body/ego.

In the Theravada tradition, ‘truth’ can only be learned experientially, that is, transcendence can only be achieved through the body. Truth in this system does not relate to Plato’s understanding of Being or a Christian understanding of God but to material temporal experience.<sup>22</sup> The effects of Buddhist meditation can be characterised as a shift from spatial to temporal understandings of the self. Theravada Buddhism in particular offers a temporal embodied model of subjectivity. The emphasis on the body in Anapana and Vipassana meditation and the examination of sensation, along with the observation of thoughts and the shift from spatial to temporal understandings of the self, distinguishes the focus of these

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<sup>22</sup> The vehicle for learning the ‘truth’ is the body/senses and these are made up of five aggregates, one part matter and four parts Mind – comprised of consciousness, perception, sensation and reaction. The sense ‘doors’ (sight, taste, hearing, touch smell and mind) connect Mind to matter. According to this system, it is our reactions to sensations with craving and aversion that cause suffering. The developed form of reaction is attachment and there are five forms of attachment; the sensual, the ‘I’ or the ego - the image we have of ourselves, ‘mine’ or attachment to what we possess because it supports the image of ‘I’, views and beliefs, and religious forms and ceremonies.

techniques from the traditions founded on the concerns of Ancient Greek philosophy, Christianity and most other forms of Buddhism. However, while Theravada Buddhism counters the disembodied subject of Western metaphysics it remains problematic in terms of the way the sensual and the 'I' is conceived.

If one accepts Lacan's model of subjectivity then, as a female, I do not have access to subjectivity, and therefore have no ego in the masculine sense. On this basis the goal of dissolving the ego may have different effects for a female than it would for a male practitioner of Anapana and Vipassana meditation. Similarly, given the way the body is conceived within Western culture, a distrust of sensuality in the Theravada tradition may reinforce an alienation from the corporeal. Like Christianity, Buddhist practices do not acknowledge sexual difference, and this lack of awareness denies a specific female subjectivity.

*clearing* was conceived while I was undertaking a series of meditation retreats and reflects my experience of this time. The title *clearing* borrows Heidegger's concept of Being, discussed in Chapter One, and its associations of the body as a site for 'clearing' or transcendence. The depressions incorporated into the surface of the platform resemble the shape of human lungs and were intended to draw a parallel between the space of an actual clearing and the space inside the lungs. This association between a 'clearing' and lungs also responds to Irigaray's critique of Heidegger. As she writes, "to forget being is to forget air" (Irigaray, 1993a, p. 127). The conical forms made from sugar and cochineal dissolve into the clear water which fills the lung like depressions in the surface of the platform. The dissolving forms suggest a transformation of a masculine 'ideal' into a different form characterised by the sensation of colour, nourishment and fluidity. In this artwork the imaginary, represented by the clear water and used to dissolve the forms, draws on Irigaray's claim that the imaginary can be deployed to create (or uncover) new forms.<sup>23</sup> The water and dye gradually become a still mirror reflecting both the spectator and the surroundings. Lighting is used to create reflections and shadows, which appear on the walls of the space. These reflections help create an 'intermediary milieu' inspired by Irigaray's allusion to angels, as the lung shapes when reflected resemble angel's wings. A connection is therefore intended between the angelic and lungs – between an immanent transcendence and the act of breathing.

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<sup>23</sup> It also introduces the Buddhist notion of an 'observing mind' which is absent in Lacan's model of subjectivity.

## Part Three

### Elemental Interval: *black dam 1*

*black dam 1* (2012) comprises a timber platform, a frozen water form, and chalk. The platform is constructed from 12mm plywood sheets and finished with blackboard paint. An excerpt taken from Plato's *Timaeus* is written on the platform in white chalk. The form of the timber platform is a 1:20 topographical model of the 'Black Dam' – a natural feature of Dunmoochin. Over the duration of the installation, a frozen form made from rain water is hung above the platform. As the form melts the depression fills with water and the text dissolves at the points where the ice drips and falls.

The Black Dam at Dunmoochin has been painted, drawn and photographed by a range of Australian artists and photographers over the past forty years. Originally used to make mud bricks, it has become a significance cultural landmark. It was recently earmarked by Nillumbik Shire Council to be covered over, however this was stopped through an organised protest by the local landcare group. The Black Dam is not only valued by artists as a landscape but also functions in the broader community as a kind of barometer of climate change and rainfall levels. (Russo, 2012). The Black Dam is both an object of representation and a 'sacred' place.<sup>24</sup>

Working in response to an actual site, the topographical model in *black dam 1* provides an avenue to rethink 'nature' in terms of Irigaray's sensible transcendental. Irigaray has attempted to do this in her work through a more extended critique of the form/matter divide and by writing about the natural elements. Jones (2001) notes that despite the various philosophical systems since Plato, one of the relative constants of Western thought has been hylomorphism. She cites a number of philosophers, such as Nietzsche, Bergson, Heidegger, and Deleuze, who have challenged this mode of thinking, displacing the form/matter distinction by re-aligning matter with active processes of generation, emergence and becoming.<sup>25</sup> Jones (2001) argues that what is distinctive about Irigaray's contribution to this

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<sup>24</sup> In my view, the black water in the Black Dam caused by the breakdown of sugar gum leaves, has a 'sublime' quality reminiscent of Newman's reworking of Burke's sublime.

<sup>25</sup> The Australian writer and artist Terri Bird (2011) engages these critiques, particularly that of Irigaray and Deleuze, in conjunction with the writings of Grosz and Andrew Benjamin to rethink matter in the context of art practice. Whilst this research elaborates relevant connections, it has a different focus to this exegesis. The aim of my current project is rather to draw matter back into relation with the divine.

project is her thorough analysis of the ways in which the hylomorphic tradition aligns sensible matter with woman while representing the active power to give this matter form as masculine and male. In reference to Irigaray, Jones (2011) writes:

Her analyses show that it is not possible to offer a thoroughgoing critique of the form/matter divide without also critiquing its historical gendering; otherwise this gendering – in which feminine matter provides the resources for active male creativity – will simply reinscribe itself elsewhere. (p. 26)

Such re-inscriptions elsewhere inform Irigaray's critique of Heidegger and Nietzsche and these are evident in her elemental series cited in Chapter One - *The Forgetting of Air, Marine Lover* and *Elemental Passions*. For example, Irigaray claims Heidegger recalls earth but neglects the fluid materiality of air, whereas Nietzsche celebrates feminine seas of becoming while forgetting the amniotic waters of reproduction. In the elemental series, Irigaray attempts to represent the elements outside the limits of hylomorphism. Irigaray does this by reflecting upon the philosophy of the pre-Socratics, particularly that of Empedocles, who understood the cosmos in terms of the four elements and their various interactions and transmutations. He believed that becoming is governed by love and strife – love drawing the elements together and strife driving them apart. Empedocles' writing provides Irigaray with a metaphor for imagining a different kind of interaction between the sexes. A central theme of *Elemental Passions* is that a woman's sexuality should not be limited by a masculinist philosophic logic. As Whitford (1991b) argues:

The elements allow Irigaray to speak of the female body, of its morphology and of the erotic, while avoiding the dominant sexual metaphoricity which is scopic and organised around the male gaze; she can speak of it instead in terms of space and thresholds and fluids, fire and water, air and earth, without objectifying, hypostatizing, or essentialising it. (p. 62)

For Irigaray, the 'elemental', is an interval marking the limit between two sexually differentiated subjects. In her later work, Irigaray rethinks Being in terms of the sensible transcendental. She argues that Being and becoming divine operates in the realm of our relation with others – in the dimension of inter-subjectivity. Irigaray's re-thinking of Being as a question of alterity allows her to represent Being and becoming divine as elemental *and* transcendent:

An interval must be provided, neither the one nor the other where each finds oneself again and finds the other again while avoiding the one simply overturning the other through what is revealed of them. This interval - and this medium - is first of all nature, as it remains left to itself: air, water, earth, and sun, as fire and light. Being par excellence - matter of the transcendental. (Irigaray, 2002b, p.19)

As Rebecca Hill (2012, p. 58) notes, Irigaray's interval is sensible transcendental.<sup>26</sup> *black dam 1*, along with all of the artworks discussed, aims to set up an event or clearing in Heidegger's terms, which endures until the forms have dissolved. An elemental event is invoked in each artwork by activating an interval in form and matter that is configured between the transcendental and the sensible. In *black dam 1*, Plato's form for water – the icosahedron, dissolves into the depression in the platform to create a pool of clear water. In the process, the dissolving geometrical solid erases Plato's metaphysical text to reveal the 'landscape' beneath. Fluid elemental matter arising from his ideal configuration of water actively erases his own discourse. In Heidegger's words, the artwork moves the earth itself into the open of a world and keeps it there. *black dam 1* is imagined as an activated clearing, or opening, bringing earth and world into intimate contact. As discussed in Chapter One, this transformation reconfigures Heidegger's clearing metaphor as an opening to Being rather than a forgetting. This reworking is enacted through the transformation from ideal geometrical form to fluid form, activating an interval by undoing the imposition of form onto elemental matter.

As discussed in Chapter One, *Timaeus* includes a third dimension - the receptacle or *chora* in addition to the intelligible Forms and the sensible material world. Grosz notes (1995, p.112) that *chora* has been given attention in contemporary French philosophy as the unacknowledged foundation of Western understandings of spatiality and place, and of femininity.<sup>27</sup> In Derrida's deconstructive reading, it represents that which has been covered over in order to separate Being from the sensible world; *chora* is the third, irreducible term in Plato's text. Drawing on Irigaray, Grosz (1995) argues that *chora* "serves to produce a founding concept of femininity whose connections with women and female corporeality have been severed, producing a disembodied femininity as the ground for the production of a

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<sup>26</sup> The Australian philosopher Rebecca Hill undertakes an extensive analysis of Irigaray's interval in *The Interval: Relation and Becoming in Irigaray, Aristotle, and Bergson*. While the breadth of Hill's research is outside the scope of my current project, it presents possibilities for future investigations in the context of art practice.

<sup>27</sup> Irigaray's notions of place relate to her critique of Aristotle's metaphysics. Irigaray's critical engagement with Aristotle and his conception of place is most evident in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*.



(conceptual and social) universe” (p.113). From Irigaray’s (1985a) perspective, *Timaeus*’ receptacle highlights the way maternal matter is used to support the metaphorical and material resources required for Platonic metaphysics to function: “she is the reserve of ‘sensuality’ for the elevation of intelligence, she is the matter used for the imprint of the forms” (p.141). The platform in *black dam I* mimics the receptacle – its status as a support is not however hidden, as it is in *Timaeus*, but unconcealed. In this case it provides an opening for speaking Being by quietening Plato’s voice.

In this chapter I have shown how the three part understanding of the sensible transcendental outlined in Chapter One informed the artworks under discussion. In the following Conclusion I will identify opportunities for further investigations of the sensible transcendental in art practice and emphasise the potentiality of both Irigaray’s concept and art practices.

## Conclusion

Irigaray proposes the sensible transcendental as a challenge to Western metaphysics and as a new model of subjectivity. Through the sensible transcendental she hopes to offer women a feminine divine and allow men a different relation to the body and the natural environment. The artworks discussed here were developed with these goals in mind. Through my studio based research, the sensible transcendental was explored and the artworks conceived in relation to this investigation. In keeping with Irigaray's philosophy, the concept was deployed with a focus on Derrida's challenge to the metaphysics of presence, Lacan's notion of subjectivity, and Heidegger's writings on art. A three part understanding of the sensible transcendental, developed through art practices such as making, reading and writing, along with my own experience of spiritual practices was used as a framework for generating and discussing the artworks. This three part understanding configured the sensible transcendental as a speaking of Being, feminine transcendence, and elemental intervals.

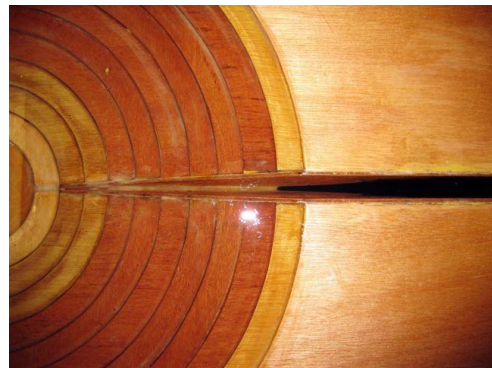
The specific outcomes of this research can be explained in terms of the three part framework used to generate the artworks. The artworks firstly aim to speak Being through a meeting of the sensible and the transcendental. To this end, the artworks take images of transcendence from the masculine imaginary and bring them into relation with conventional symbols of the sensible and the feminine. This strategy mobilises the sensible transcendental as a Derridean hinge term, and incorporates Irigaray's critiques of both Plato's metaphysics and Lacan's model of subjectivity. Secondly, the artworks aim to find symbolic reference points for a feminine transcendence. This understanding was developed through Irigaray's critiques of Western theology and her engagement with Eastern spiritual practices, as well as my own experience of meditation techniques. The sensible transcendental and Heidegger's concept of worlds offered a way to critique and reframe these experiences in the context of art practice. Thirdly, the artworks aim to give a presence to elemental intervals between the feminine and masculine. This third strategy draws on Irigaray's rethinking of the elemental in terms of inter-subjectivity and speaks to her goal of reconfiguring relations between matter and form, and the interval between as a sensible transcendental. In developing my understanding of the elemental, I have also engaged with Irigaray's critique of Heidegger by reconfiguring his clearing metaphor as an opening to Being.

The artworks generated as part of this research suggest how art and design practices can be used to rethink existing models of subjectivity and modes of transcendence and at the same time conjure an alternate symbolic by creating (or uncovering) new forms. These new forms respond to Irigaray's *parler femme* as a 're-imaging' or 're-imagining'. This re-imaging elaborates how the sensible transcendental can be mobilised within an artwork, both my own and that of other artists such as Laib, to speak Being and reconnect the transcendental (male) subject of Western metaphysics to the sensible. That is, an artwork can be employed to cultivate new subjectivities which acknowledge a debt to nature and to the feminine. As such, this research has helped me to address my own sense of the separation from the feminine and the natural environment and understand the alignment of these terms in Western culture.

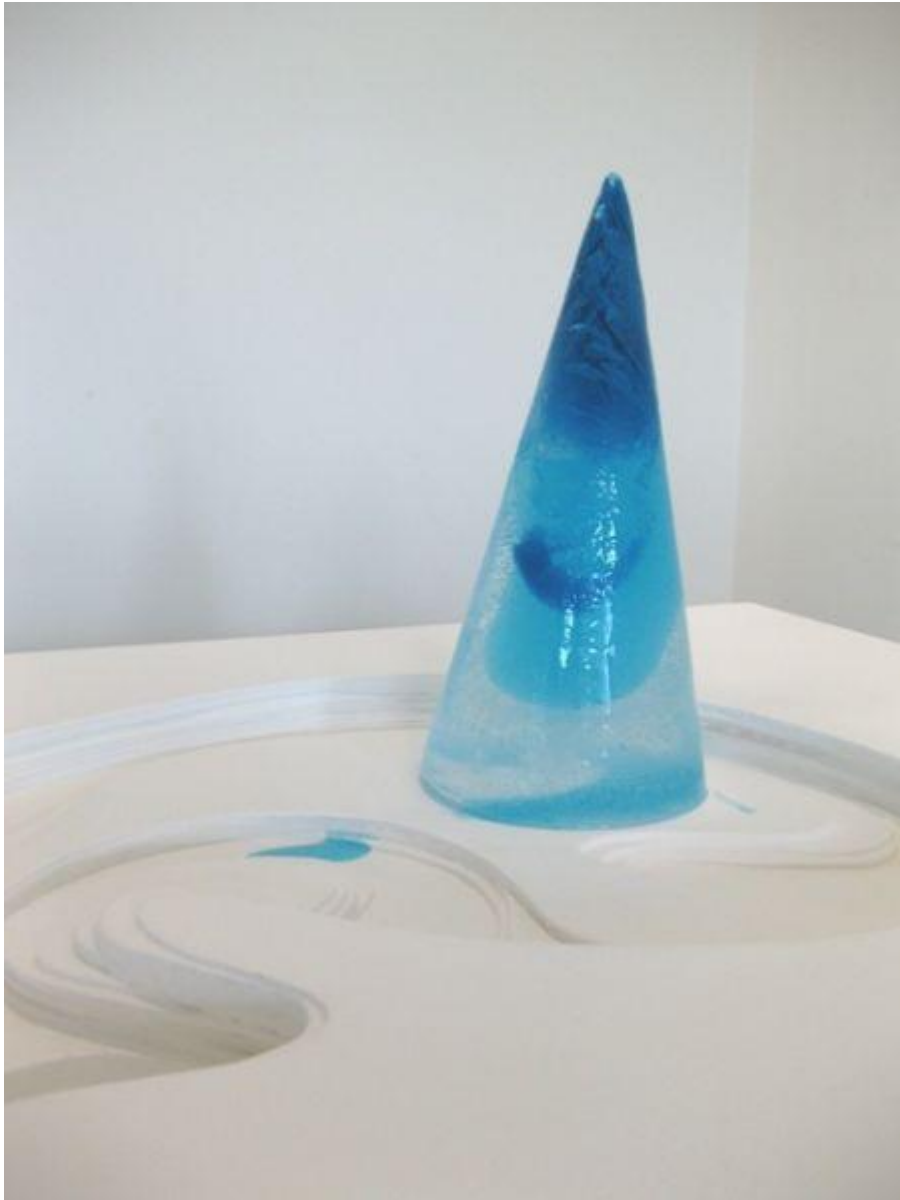
The artworks discussed highlight the critical and propositional potential of art practices for configuring the sensible transcendental. These possibilities will be the basis of future artworks that aim to further understand the sensible and the transcendental, other terms aligned with these oppositions and the interval between. This exploration will include further analysis of the connections and disjunctions between Lacan's Real, Heidegger's earth and Irigaray's 'matter', as well as, Heidegger's notion of Being. This investigation will be pursued through strategies that engage with Irigaray's call to rethink matter, form, interval and limit in relation to place and explore the sensible transcendental in terms of a 'sensible threshold of becoming' as posited by Rebecca Hill. These possible connections have the potential to offer new understandings of nature and place in Australian art and resonate with fields outside the visual arts such as architecture and theology.

In conclusion, I would emphasise that the sensible transcendental is always already a potentiality. This 'new' female subjectivity, both material and divine, is not the opposite of male subjectivity but an elemental interval between the feminine and the masculine, between becoming and Being, between matter and form – an interval that can be given presence through a conscious juxtaposition of the sensible and the transcendental and material transformations. In the context of an artwork, that which is covered over, silenced, and limited by Western metaphysics can be unconcealed by bringing matter and the divine into relation.

## Figures



Figures 1a-d. (clockwise)  
*becoming*, 2008 Installation, timber,  
ink, water, wax, fishing line, 308mm x  
800mm x 2700mm



Figures 2a-c. (clockwise)  
*confession*, 2009 Installation, timber, paint,  
water, 580mm x 880mm x 900mm

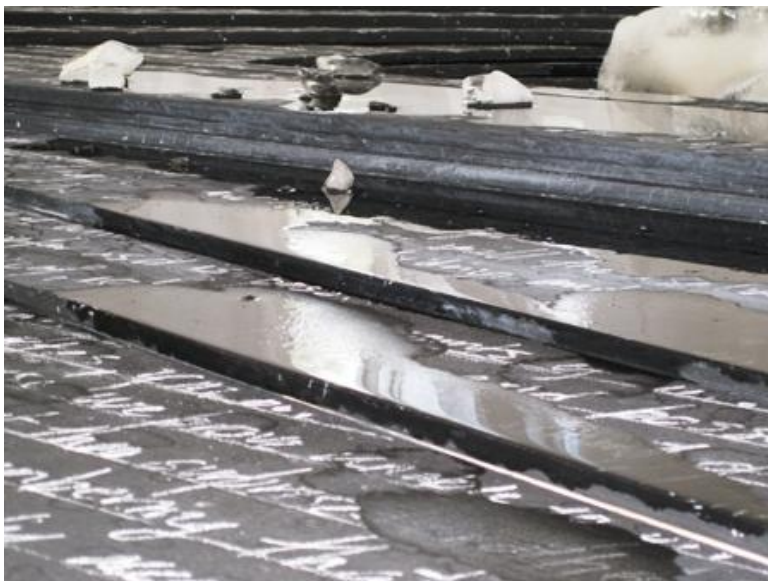


Figures 3a-c. (clockwise)  
*penance*, 2009 Installation, bronze,  
timber, paint, wine, fishing line,  
170mm x 170mm x 1190mm





Figures 4a-b  
*clearing*, 2012 Installation, timber, paint, water, sugar,  
cochineal, titanium oxide, 1810mm x 2000mm x 300mm



Figures 5a-c. (clockwise)  
*black dam 1*, 2012 Installation, timber,  
paint, water, chalk, fishing line, 1800mm  
x 1800mm x 2700mm



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