

**GENDERED SIGNS OF THE SACRED:
CONTESTED IMAGES OF THE MOTHER IN
PSYCHOANALYSIS, FEMINISM, AND HINDU MYTH**

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for my mother

ABSTRACT

This thesis engages a multi-disciplinary theoretical approach to identifying, analysing, and interpreting discourse relating to the feminine and the maternal found at the intersection of psychoanalysis, feminism, and religion. The study explores embodiment, gender, and the sacred as expressed in symbolic representations of the mother and the institution of motherhood in patriarchy. I have therefore drawn on Freudian and post-Freudian theories, gender analysis, feminist critical analysis, and classical Hindu goddess myth to discern ways in which sacred images of the mother serve to reinforce the oppression of women on the one hand and can be transformed to provide empowering symbols for women's lived reality on the other. Theory of sacred space is also employed, particularly with regard to the human production of the sacred through the contested politics of sacred space.

After the introduction in Chapter One, Chapter Two looks at the western history of the body and dualistic thought, showing how the body is both sexualised and gendered. Feminist critique of the binary oppositions produced by this history, and how they shape androcentric perspectives of gender difference, are examined. In Chapter Three I turn to analysis of Freud's conceptions of gender, femininity, and the figure of the preoedipal mother in his theories of psychosexual development and religion. A similar analysis of post-Freudian theorists Lacan and Winnicott follows in Chapter Four, focusing on how the preoedipal dyad of mother and infant emerges as an ambiguous sacred space that simultaneously idealises the mother and represses maternal subjectivity and power. Chapters Five and Six explore psychoanalytic feminist theorists who seek to revalorise the feminine, reclaim maternal agency and subjectivity, and transform the sacred space of the mother. Further analysis reveals that the hermeneutics of the feminine and the

maternal in both psychoanalytic and feminist theories are suffused with religiously nuanced and even mystical discourse.

Pursuing possibilities for interpretation and transformation of maternal sacred space, Chapters Seven and Eight turn more specifically to the study of religion. First, feminist spirituality and "thealogy" are briefly addressed, followed by closer analysis of Goddess theology articulated in Hindu religious tradition. Feminine principles underpinning the myths of the Vedas and then, most significantly, the goddess figures in post-Vedic Hindu myth, are defined and analysed. This line of analysis further aims to support the hypothesis that polarised conceptions of the feminine in general, and maternal subjectivity and power in particular, may be more explicitly expressed in religious myth than in psychoanalytic theory. This is shown to be especially evident in Hindu myth, where symbolisations of the divine feminine and the maternal are strongly represented. Detailed analysis of the attributes of the Hindu goddesses confirms their powerful ambivalence, which both reflects the problems faced by women in patriarchal societies and provides a resource of empowering symbols with which women can identify. Furthermore, in bringing attention to transformative symbolisations of maternity, the vital importance for all human beings to recognise that the (m)other is within us all - both women and men - is affirmed.

GENDERED SIGNS OF THE SACRED:

Contested Images of the Mother in Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Hindu Myth.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	GENDERED BODY, CONTESTED BODY	21
2.1	The Mind/Body Split and Other Binary Oppositions	21
2.2	The History of the Body, Sex, and Gender.....	29
3.	FREUD, GENDER, AND THE SACRED MOTHER.....	56
3.1	Freud, Psychoanalysis, and Femininity	56
3.2	Freud, Culture, and Religion.....	78
4.	POST-FREUDIAN INTERVENTIONS.....	96
4.1	Lacanian Theory.....	96
4.2	Object Relations Theory	116
5.	FEMINISM, THE BODY, AND THE MOTHER.....	130
5.1	Introducing Feminist Theory.....	133
5.2	Feminism, The Body, and Motherhood.....	137
5.3	Psychoanalytic Feminism, the Body, and the preoedipal Mother.....	148

6.	MATERNAL SACRED SPACE	164
6.1	Writing Maternal Sacred Space	164
6.2	Transforming Maternal Sacred Space	191
7.	THE DIVINE FEMININE	213
7.1	Psychoanalysis, Feminist Spirituality, and Goddess Religion.....	218
7.2	In Search of the Goddess.....	226
7.3	Hindu Resources	233
7.4	<i>Śakti, Prakṛti, Māyā</i>	237
7.5	Vedas.....	240
8.	GODDESS, THE MOTHER.....	256
8.1	Post-Vedic Goddesses.....	256
8.2	Interpretations of Divine Ambivalence	301
9.	CONCLUSIONS.....	313
	REFERENCES	333

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In setting out on the journey of academic study and research for this thesis, I have found myself confronted by both the restraints and demands of academic writing according to the discipline of the humanities and social sciences. The aspiration to fulfil those academic requirements is, I think, a path well worth pursuing, although it does evoke a sense of entering a predominantly androcentric world. However, there has also been a sense of encountering a feminist ethos of intervention in, perhaps even subversion of, this world.

Such a viewpoint, of course, immediately situates the theoretical approach of this thesis at the very centre of vigorous debate surrounding issues of gender, both in society and academic study: What does gender mean? Does gender difference really exist, and if so, how is it constructed and maintained? Can gender be identified, analysed, and explained, without resorting to essentialist, biological definitions? Are there "feminine" ways of doing things, and "masculine" ways of doing things, and if so, are they irreconcilably opposed to one another? - and so on. These issues themselves, although emerging from a personal process, essentially refer to the debate underpinning the project itself. Perhaps, after all, the personal and the academic are not as separate as I have imagined.

In any event, the aims of this thesis are informed by a profound and personal interest in the construction of the self and its expression, and by a fundamental idea that this "self" is not a unitary, static entity which is simply referred to as an individual human being. The self, I would argue, is a dynamic, flexible, and multi-faceted being - an integrated (or sometimes chaotic) mass of diverse "personae," perhaps. Since I do

not exclude myself from this definition, my own mix of personae has been unavoidably present in the process of situating the research problem in a theoretical framework and in generating a rationale for this project.

Although an "aspirant academic" identity may be most relevant for this journey, and most definitely presents the greatest challenge, the presence of others cannot be ignored - for example, western, white, middle-class, English, South African resident, mother, daughter, wife, sister, female, feminist... and so on. Equally significant as the "aspirant academic," in terms of the central theme of the thesis - interpretations of the "mother" - and inherently personal in terms of my "beingness," is the fact that I am a mother and so have had first-hand experience of that role, as well as a first-hand relationship with all the implications and contradictions that reside in the patriarchal construction of the institution of "motherhood." This, of course, is my own unique and subjective experience and therefore will not be conventionally perceived as a valid source for academic research, but it surely provides, if nothing else, a rich source of inspiration.

All these factors, and countless more, have inevitably influenced my worldview and, in turn, the directions I have taken on the academic path. Other past experiences, too, have just as inexorably shaped the ideas I have set out to explore. Most relevant, in this context, have been experiences of and participation in what has generally been referred to as the "human potential movement" and the influx of "eastern" religions to the "west" in the 1970s, which gave birth to a lasting interest in the question of what it means to be human, as well as in psychology and Indian religious traditions, most particularly Hinduism. More recently, a growing feminist

consciousness has also motivated me to investigate the significance of gender-sensitive analysis as a theoretical foundation for academic research in those fields.

Lively feminist debate currently progresses around issues of difference amongst women both within and among diverse cultures and societies. Although intensely conflictual sentiments have emerged - for instance, should "first world," elitist, white, middle-class women speak for "third world," black, working-class women? - a common thread can be detected affirming that all voices should be heard. In any event, I will not attempt to speak *for* anyone, but neither will this work reflect the notion that an academic researcher, feminist or otherwise, should not study or speak *about* any communities, worldviews, or religions other than her or his own. Rather, the approach of this thesis aims to adhere to the guidelines of *epoche* essential to comparative and phenomenological study of religion, a discipline that demands not only the bracketing of the researcher's personal worldview, but also, most importantly, sensitivity towards and empathy for "other" worlds. However, I remain acutely aware of the potential pitfalls and problems involved, since it is surely impossible entirely to avoid speaking *from* who I am and what I have experienced. This is not, I imagine, a singular experience for students in the academic study of religion, since the claim of neutrality in social scientific research is itself open to question. Furthermore, I am aware that employing feminist analysis within the study of religion also signifies taking a position, both personal and political.

To sum up, both personal experience and academic interest are invested in a project that aims to interweave psychoanalytic theory, feminist theory, and representations of the Goddess in Hindu myth in ways that might make a useful contribution to the academic study of religion. There are three threads that can be

identified and clarified in order to explain how these fundamental components of the thesis topic are connected: The first concerns religion itself, in that my approach to this study is underpinned by David Chidester's proposal that religion represents, *inter alia*, ways of experimenting in being human, involving the negotiation of meaning and power in human relations that are most often expressed through myth, symbol, and ritual (1991: xiii). Religion, then, can represent the expression of humanity's highest aspirations for unity and spirituality on the one hand, and on the other, the expression of difference and power through conflict, violence, and domination. In the study of such a human project, I would argue that attention to the construction of the self, as both an intrapsychic and intersubjective process, is essential. Further, I would suggest that this process of negotiation of meaning and power in human relations inevitably includes gendered power relations in which issues of difference play a significant part. Therefore, the significance of gender, as well as the method of feminist analysis, cannot be ignored in approaching the intersection of psychoanalytic theory and the academic study of religion, devoted as they are to the analysis of what it means to be human.

Second, most feminist theories, however diverse they might be, include reference to the construction of the self in their analyses of the significance and meaning of sex and gender differentiation. This is particularly evident in psychoanalytic feminism, and postmodernist theory, which engages in deconstruction of humanist assumptions of a unified self, has also presented a new path for feminist analysis. Such impulses are vital for pushing beyond the margins of a western patriarchal worldview and the androcentric bias of Enlightenment thought on which social scientific theories have generally been constructed. Nowhere, perhaps, has

patriarchy had a stronger hold than in the human project of religion itself and androcentric thought is similarly entrenched in the history of academic theories of religion (see Gross, 1977; King, 1995).

Third, the focal point of this thesis is to discover and analyse images or conceptions of the mother, arguably the locus of countless assumptions and theories about "woman," "femininity," sexuality, gender difference, and even women's place in religion and their expression of spirituality. I intend to explore the idea of "mother" as a symbol of both embodiment and the sacred, thus providing a common thread to interweave maternal images articulated in the fields of psychology (specifically psychoanalytic theory, both Freudian and post-Freudian); feminist theory (particularly feminist critique of psychoanalysis and consequent reinterpretations of the mother); and religion (specifically Hindu myth concerning the Goddess as mother).

More fundamentally, this study aims to explore embodiment, gender, and the sacred, as expressed through symbolic representations of the mother and motherhood, in psychoanalysis and religion. The link that I propose exists between psychology and religion is that any study of the construction of the self, which unavoidably involves embodiment, is not limited to the field of psychology and certainly extends to the human project of religion and production of the sacred. Equally, the idea of the sacred is not limited to the field of religion and is arguably implicit in conceptions of the self (including those of the mother and motherhood) that underpin psychoanalytic theory. Furthermore, I would suggest that issues of gender difference are fundamental to both psychoanalysis and religion in terms of how the "self" and the "sacred" are determined and defined, particularly in relation to the body.

Through such an exploration of embodiment and the sacred, I intend to argue that the "maternal body" can be interpreted as "sacred space" in the context of both psychoanalytic and religious conceptions of the self, whether human or divine. This approach requires the introduction of two further points that will provide a wider theoretical framework for generating a hermeneutics of the mother.

First, spatial analysis will be employed to interpret the body, in this case, the maternal body. As mentioned earlier, embodiment is an essential and unavoidable component of individual human identity and it is in this sense that human beings are spatially structured. For example, L. Shannon Jung points out that all human beings, whether male or female, are spatial in terms of physical extensionality. In fact, we experience our spatiality in both an internal and external sense: "we have a *sense* of ourselves as being physical and we actually *are* physical" (Jung, 1988: 56).

In a wider but more abstract sense, spatial analysis will also be used to examine "motherhood" as socially and politically institutionalised space that is delimited by the maternal body - an institution that arguably has often been constructed, idealised, and secularised in ways that have denied the reality of women's subjectivity and experience of being fully human. Furthermore, this maternal space has emerged in psychoanalytic feminist thought in ways that echo religiously nuanced discourse, such as contemporary feminist critique of the "motherhood myth" found in psychoanalysis (Suleiman, 1985: 360). For example, Madelon Sprengnether analyses the desire of all human beings to return to "that state of fullness of Being" that is falsely identified with "maternal plenitude" - a longing, she argues, that is afforded mystical significance (1990: 245-46).

In this context of spatial analysis of the maternal body and the institution of motherhood, the tension between sexual difference and gender difference makes itself strongly felt, the former assumed to be based on essential, bodily differences manifested in biological sexuality and the latter emerging from socially-constructed ideas. But can these two, in reality, be so tidily separated? Or are we entering yet another contentious arena of social relations and binary oppositions, generated by patriarchy, that in truth points to a clouded mix of sexual and gendered distinctions?

Second, it is in the context of socially and politically constructed space that the term "sacred" is appropriated, itself a contested concept in the academic study of religion. To support a definition of maternal embodiment or the institution of motherhood as *sacred* space, I refer to the distinction between substantial and situational definitions of the sacred in the study of religion, and Chidester's explication of the poetics and politics of sacred space (Chidester, 1994; Chidester and Linenthal, 1995). In terms of intrinsically religious or spiritual conceptions of the feminine, such as images of the Goddess as "divine mother" in Hinduism and other religious traditions, a substantial definition of the sacred could be advanced. This refers to a subjectively experienced manifestation of spiritual power and of the sacred, which scholars of religion have attempted to define objectively in various ways, such as Otto's essentialist definition of the "holy" and "experience of the numinous." Linking substantial definition and spatial analysis of the sacred, Chidester refers to the "poetics of sacred space" (1994: 211-12).

However, this study will also stress the relevance of the humanly constructed interpretations of the sacred, which Durkheim identified as a focal integrating and stabilising force in human society. Such a perspective points to a situational definition

of the sacred as humanly produced through "cultural labour" and "ritualization" (Chidester, 1994: 211). Again, in terms of spatial analysis, the "politics of sacred space" is defined as the sacralisation of a place through contested power relations, a process involving the following components: the colonisation of space and its location; inclusion and exclusion (for example, who would defile the sacred space and therefore should be excluded from it?); possession and dispossession (who owns it?); and exile (where experience of dislocation and remoteness from a place makes it seem sacred) (Chidester, 1994: 228-29). Included in an inventory of "places" that might be sacralised, and indeed contested, is the human body (see Chidester and Linenthal, 1995: 6-9).

In the course of this thesis, it will become evident that most of these situational aspects of the politics of sacred space can be applied to certain conceptions of the human, maternal body and to the patriarchal institutionalisation of maternal space ("motherhood"). Clearly, the maternal body represents a site of contested and gendered power relations. For example, the maternal body is colonised (by the infant, by patriarchal social and economic systems, and often by men); its ownership is certainly contested (the abortion debate being a case in point); and in terms of psychoanalytic interpretations of birth, separation, and the human longing for return to "maternal plenitude," inclusion, exclusion, and exile are equally evident. In fact, further analysis of the idea of "maternal plenitude" may well reveal closely interwoven strands of both the poetics and politics of sacred space. Furthermore, although images of the Goddess and "divine mother" in Hindu myth imply substantial, divinely revealed symbols of the sacred, it might also be argued that they are macrocosmic symbols of

the maternal body whose meanings are humanly contested, reinterpreted, and reconstructed through the politics of sacred space.

However, a question still remains: What potential theoretical value can be found in a mix of psychoanalysis, an intrinsically western theory born of the European Enlightenment's fundamental attachment to reason and rationality above all else, and Hindu goddess myth that is embedded in ancient Indian metaphysics? Clearly, this juxtaposition has emerged from personal interests discussed earlier, but it is also rooted in academic concerns and questions concerning the relation between psychology and religion, as well as representations of gender that suffuse that relationship. A psychology of religion that interprets all religious and spiritual experience as a psychological process of projection and transference (interpreted by Freud as a "feminine" trait of dependence on the father) is hardly, to my mind, an adequate explication of those concerns. Therefore, I intend to pursue the relevant issues that might arise from what Maurice Friedman calls "the *meeting* of religion and psychology," which he has suggested as a fruitful alternative framework to that of psychology of religion, on the one hand, or religious psychology, on the other (1992: 60-1).

For decades now, many "westerners" have become disenchanted with the formalised religious structures they were born into and many have turned to some form of psychological therapeutic technique or Indian religious teaching to find a *spiritual* path. Even more so have women questioned, and often rejected, the androcentric bias of western, monotheistic religions and looked in similar directions in their search for a spiritual home. Moreover, feminist scholars in the academic study of religion - whether in the field of comparative religion, psychology of religion, or

theology - have also looked to psychoanalysis and Indian religious traditions for more "user-friendly" theoretical resources for women's spirituality (see, for instance, Naomi Goldenberg; Rita Gross). As Ursula King points out in her recent text *Religion and Gender*, "Some of the liveliest debates at present concern God-language, feminist ethics, feminist spirituality, religious attitudes to the body and sexuality, the relationship between feminism, religion, and psychoanalysis" (1995: 29).

The theoretical direction of this work, therefore, begins at the intersection of psychoanalysis, feminism, and religion. It aims to pursue a gender-sensitive, and sometimes specifically feminist, analysis of images of the mother and maternal embodiment represented in Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory and Hindu mythic images of the Goddess. This analytical approach seeks to assess the significance of gender difference and gendered power relations in the construction of these often religiously nuanced images. For example, Freud's psychology of the development of the individual human psyche mystifies "femininity" and attempts to repress the significance of the mother and female sexuality. Similarly, his theories concerning the origins and development of human culture and patriarchal religion repress the significance and place of mother-goddesses, who, he surmised, might have preceded the father-gods. Moreover, the possible existence of matriarchy, "mother-right," and goddess-worship before patriarchal social organisation also proved an enigma for Freud. But his association of the mother with union, and then loss and longing (and even death), brings a mystical quality to his maternal images.

On the other hand, I will argue, post-Freudian object relations theory (particularly that of D.W. Winnicott), although relatively more sensitive to the significance of the mother, over-emphasises (and arguably sacralises) her role and

burdens her with accountability for the healthy or dysfunctional development of the human psyche. Nevertheless, the maternal role is essential to Winnicott's thought about the origins of human creativity and religion. I intend to examine a range of contradictions such as those noted above that are found in psychoanalytic theory, and critically analysed in feminist theory, followed by an exploration of how they are replicated, and perhaps even resolved, in images of the Goddess in Hindu myth.

This pursuit of a hermeneutics of the mother fundamentally aims to contribute a theoretical resource for affirming the essential place of gendered analysis in the study of religion, as well as for research into and revalorisation of the feminine. However, although this work essentially rests on theory, it is not simply a study of one aspect of the "feminine principle" as expressed in psychoanalysis and religion. I hope that it will also contribute towards a resource of empowering symbols for women's lived reality, particularly in the context of exploring where spirit, mind, and body meet (or diverge) in human experience, both social and metaphysical.

Finally, I have been inspired by the written works of a multitude of scholars from all the disciplines included in this thesis. I acknowledge all of them for their shared knowledge - and my reliance on it - and deeply appreciate the support it has provided in completing this study. However, four writers have particularly influenced the direction of my thinking and are fundamental to this research, since it was their work that first ignited a passionate interest within me and presented a challenge - even an invitation - to start the process. I single out these authors - Naomi Goldenberg, Adrienne Rich, Jessica Benjamin, and Madelon Sprengnether - only because of their special role in inspiring me to dream up the topic and embark on the journey.

First, Naomi Goldenberg has so clearly illustrated the damage done to women by the separation of mind (or soul) and body in traditional western religious thought, for example, in her critique of Jungian theory, "Archetypal Theory and Separation of the Mind and Body: Reason Enough to Turn to Freud" (1989). Rejecting Jung's transcendent archetypes that reinforce this split, Goldenberg points to Freud and post-Freudian object relations theory for theoretical resources to help women reclaim the body and begin to "think through the body." She invites a reworking of Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalytic literature that might "rewrite" ideas of sexuality and the body in western religious and philosophical thought in a way that does not denigrate women. In a wider context, much of Goldenberg's work points to psychoanalysis, feminism, and recent "theology" of the Goddess as interwoven resources for creating a spirituality that relates to *life*, not death, and that does not oppress women or destroy the earth (see 1993).

Second, Adrienne Rich's book *Of Woman Born* (1986) dramatically disrupts western images of women through critical analysis of idealised notions of the mother and the "sacred calling" of motherhood that contradict and negatively impact women's lived reality. Her historical analysis of patriarchy, and critique of scholarly works on the history of matriarchy and the power of the "primordial mother," offer rich resources for the study of psychoanalytic and religious images of the mother. In her conclusion, Rich extends an unequivocal challenge to all women who recognise the need for an essential change in human society: "I am really asking whether women cannot begin, at last, to think through the body... this is where we have to begin" (284-85).

Third, Jessica Benjamin's *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (1990) offers a feminist reconceptualisation of psychoanalytic theory that critiques Freud's emphasis on the father-son relationship. Instead, drawing on object relations theory, she focuses on a spatial analysis of the mother-infant dyad in a way that emphasises the significance of intersubjective relations and the human need for recognition, and creates a possibility for the mutual recognition between two subjects. Here, Benjamin challenges us to re-evaluate the exercise of power apparent in gender relations that epitomise the subject's (usually male) domination of the other (usually female), a psychoanalytic relational construct that can be transposed to religion and human relationship with the divine (whether "father" or "mother"). For example, Judith Van Herik's text *Freud on Femininity and Faith* is based on the argument that "Freud's theories of gender (mental femininity and masculinity) and of religion are internally related" (1982: 1). Benjamin's work, I think, presents an opportunity to rethink gender relations and the origins of social relationships in general, as well as human relations with the divine, within a context of maternal space that could be interpreted as "sacred."

Finally, in *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis* (1990), Madelon Sprengnether's innovative feminist reading of Freud extricates hidden extracts where Freud himself was unable to maintain fully his erasure of the preoedipal mother and his reliance on the son's achievement of oedipal masculinity for the creation of culture. Sprengnether, rather, elicits a story of the preoedipal mother that concludes by showing that the body of the mother becomes a "metaphor for the fundamental estrangement of being" (1990: 243). The last lines of her book offer

opportunities for both women and men to pursue self-knowledge and understanding of the effects of gender difference in their lives:

We are, each of us, male and female, fallen out of that state of fullness of Being which we sometimes imagine as paradise, which we seek falsely to identify with intrauterine existence. And yet each of us enters the world through the body of a woman - a carnal enigma that has virtually baffled our systems of understanding. Rather than fleeing, condemning, or idealising the body of the (m)other, we need to recognise her in ourselves... If the sense of estrangement and familiarity which we choose to name subjectivity resides in our very flesh, then what we need is a whole new metaphysics beginning here.

(Sprengnether, 1990: 245-6)

These words offer an invitation to begin this project, for they demonstrate a link between psychoanalysis and religion, a link that provides inspiration for a feminist analysis of the mother as embodied sacred space. In calling for a new metaphysics to facilitate a new (and post-patriarchal) reading of the mother and the body that supports female subjectivity, I would argue that we are called back to the human project of religion.

All societies create their own cultural and religious myths and then reproduce and reinterpret those myths over the ages in order to progress in the aspiration to be fully human. It is here that the reciprocal interaction between human beings' lived reality and myth is played out. It is generally accepted that the majority of the world's

religions are patriarchal and therefore the symbolic language of religious myth is most often read and re-read from an androcentric viewpoint that supports a hierarchical and patriarchal system in reality. Freud himself, as I will later examine in depth, created his own entirely patriarchal mythology, based on permutations of the ancient Oedipus myth, to explain the origins of human culture and religion. He used his androcentric view of the microcosm - the development of the individual human psyche - as a template for his interpretations of the macrocosm - the development of "western civilisation."

Following my analysis of images of the mother that are embedded in psychoanalytic literature and its aim to uncover the symbolic and religious discourse that can be found there, I intend to approach different "embodiments" of Devī (the Goddess) in Hindu religious tradition and myth. In doing so, the androcentric views of the mother and embodiment that can be found in patriarchal readings of these myths will inevitably come to light. But more importantly, I will look to fresh possibilities for working towards a "new metaphysics" through "post-patriarchal" readings of the mother in Hindu myth which might provide a resource for women, and men, to stop "fleeing, condemning, or idealising the body of the (m)other" so that we might begin "to recognise her in ourselves" (Sprengnether, 1990: 246).

For this final stage of the journey, which will carry us into the realm of the goddesses in Hindu myth, I am indebted to many scholars of Hindu religion, most especially C. Mackenzie Brown, Thomas Coburn, Rita Gross, David Kinsley, and Tracy Pintchman. Their work on Hindu goddess figures has not only contributed significantly to the vast project of recovering female symbols and the divine feminine

in religion, but has also supported the call for gender analysis to be taken seriously in the academic study of religion.

Finally, to return to a point raised earlier concerning the relevance of this thesis for women's lived experience, Lina Gupta's words in her essay "Kālī, the Savior" (1991) offer appropriate support: "How can contemporary women identify themselves with a mythical character? I think there is an interaction between a contemporary woman's psyche and the mythic behaviour patterns of the goddess, patterns that inform and are played out in a woman's life" (1991: 36). Furthermore, in the academic context of the social sciences, there is boundless potential for different women from the countless classifications of humankind that have been dreamed up in our modern world (such as culture, religion, ethnicity, colour, class, sexual orientation, and so on) to explore and share insights and theoretical resources to inspire and empower each other (Gross, 1989). It is in this spirit that I pursue this study, which aims to engage with feminist readings of psychoanalytic discourse and Hindu goddess myth towards rewriting sacred images of the mother.

The structure and concerns of the remaining eight chapters comprising this thesis are as follows: In Chapter Two, "Gendered Body, Contested Body," the mind/body split and other binary oppositions generated by the history of the body and gender are examined, with particular attention to feminist critique of such oppositional categories. Turning to the widespread academic interest in the history of the body, sex, and gender, I intend to show how the body has been sexualised, that is, interpreted as biological, and how it has been gendered, or socially constructed. The history of dualistic thought, particularly in relation to sexuality and gender, is traced from ancient creation myths, Greek philosophy, and early Christianity. Moving on to

the context of medical and social developments during the Victorian era, it is shown how the female body and female sexuality itself became polarised into further oppositional typologies: On the one hand, women were portrayed as controlled, married, and moral, while on the other, they were typified as uncontrolled, sexual, immoral, and dangerous. The approach of spatial analysis is introduced to argue that the body is spatial and constitutes a contested locus of power, a concept that is of pivotal importance for analysis of the maternal body. In this context, religious constructions of and attitudes towards the body are addressed.

Chapter Three, "Psychoanalysis, Gender, and the Sacred Mother," comprises two sections, the first of which examines Freud's psychoanalytic theory with regard to individual psychosexual development and gender differentiation. Freud's explanations for the development of gender difference, his mystification of femininity, and his idealisation of the mother-infant dyad (especially between mother and son) are discussed. The place and role of the mother and motherhood in Freudian theory is thus analysed in terms of a maternal sacred space of fulfilment, where Freud's privileging of the Oedipus and castration complexes and ideal masculinity paradoxically discounts and represses the subjectivity and power of the preoedipal mother. In the second section, similar issues concerning gender and maternal images are then raised in the context of Freud's myth concerning the origins of culture and his theory of religion. I examine how, for Freud, the feminine is associated with nature and women are hostile to culture, while religion is defined as a collective neurosis and an illusory, childlike dependence on the exalted father-figure of God.

Chapter Four, "Post-Freudian Interventions," then turns to analysis of post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory, first focusing on Jacques Lacan's reworking of

Freud's theory and second, on object relations theory, most specifically the work of D.W. Winnicott. Although Lacan remains loyal to Freud's privileging of the Oedipus and castration complexes, he pursues a logocentric explication of psychosexual development, rather than the biological foundation favoured by Freud. Therefore, Lacan's theory of the development of subjectivity and the splitting of the subject, sexuality, and gender identity is discussed in some detail, with the aim of analysing the implications for femininity in Lacan's insistence on the primacy of the phallus, language, and the realm of the Symbolic. Lacan's ideas about the mother and the Imaginary realm, as well as his somewhat mystic conceptualisation of "woman" as "Other" and female *jouissance*, are analysed in terms of the possibilities of a reconstructed female and maternal "sacred space" beyond the Symbolic.

Winnicott's object relations theory, however, emphasises the importance of the preoedipal relationship between mother and infant, thus revalorising the significance of the maternal role. Like Freud, however, Winnicott idealises the mother-infant dyad and I therefore argue that his concept of the "good enough" mother again polarises women in a way that suppresses the active subjectivity of the mother. Particular attention is given to Winnicott's theory of transitional space between mother and child and between inner, subjective reality and external, objective reality. The significance of this space as the locus of creative and artistic activity and religious feeling is analysed in terms of the idea of sacred space. Chapters Two and Three specifically aim to show that Freud, Lacan, and Winnicott all, in different ways, idealise the preoedipal dyad of mother and infant in a way that implies a sacred space of plenitude and fulfilment on the one hand, but an absence of maternal subjectivity and power on the other.

Closely following the conclusions of the former chapters, the fifth chapter, "Feminism, the Body, and Motherhood," addresses psychoanalytic feminist critique of Freud, Lacan, and object relations theory. General feminist theoretical frameworks are briefly introduced, followed by feminist approaches to interpreting the body and motherhood, such as the work of Naomi Goldenberg and Adrienne Rich. The core of the chapter focuses on psychoanalytic feminist advocacy of the recovery of the body and interpretations of female sexuality and the concept and role of the preoedipal mother. Once again, the polarisation and painful paradoxes embodied in the "sacred space of the mother" are extrapolated and analysed in terms of their ramifications for women's lived experience, with particular emphasis on the theories of Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow.

In Chapter Six, "Maternal Sacred Space," French psychoanalytic feminist writers (mainly Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva) are then analysed in some detail, suggesting that their discursive approaches provide innovative reconstructions of maternal sacred space in the context of psychoanalytic theory. Finally, I argue that psychoanalytic feminists are deeply involved in the politics of sacred space, and suggest the possibilities for transformation of maternal sacred space, with particular reference to the work of Jessica Benjamin and Madelon Sprengnether.

In the spirit of seeking out transformations of maternal sacred space, we turn more specifically to religious contexts in Chapter Seven. First, some important points concerning psychoanalytic interpretations of religion, including feminist critique and reinterpretation, are recalled. The interweaving thread binding psychoanalysis, feminism, and feminist spirituality - particularly goddess religion - is identified and discussed, drawing largely on Naomi Goldenberg's work, as well as other writers in

the area of feminist spirituality. The focus of the chapter then turns to Hindu resources, proceeding in the spirit of Rita Gross's advocacy of cross-cultural studies of goddess figures in diverse religious traditions. This avenue is explored with the objective of creating a resource of empowering feminine symbols for both feminist theory of religion and women's lived reality. Conceptualisations of the divine feminine in Hindu religious tradition therefore constitute the core of this chapter, emphasising the emergence of the Great Goddess in Hindu devotional tradition (*bhakti*) and of the feminine principles *śakti*, *prakṛti*, and *māyā*, as well as the ancient history of Vedic mythic images of the feminine and goddesses.

Continuing this avenue of analysis of the divine feminine in Hindu religious tradition, Chapter Eight is devoted to goddess figures in the classical Sanskrit post-Vedic Epics and Purāṇas, with particular reference to the following selection of goddess figures: Sarasvatī; Sītā; Śrī-Lakṣmi; Rādhā; Pārvati; Durgā; and Kālī. I aim to identify and examine the multifaceted images and ideas of the Goddess in relation to divine embodiment of maternal sacred space, arguing that the polarisation and paradoxes unveiled in psychoanalytic images of women and the mother are made more explicit in diverse and dynamic ways in Hindu myth. Hindu mythic images of goddesses and specifically feminine principles are compared with ideals of womanhood, motherhood, and gender relations in Hindu society. The significance of the goddess figures are also examined in the context of the theology of the great Goddess, Devī, with the purpose of identifying and analysing the incidence of ambivalence and paradox evoked in the myths concerning the nature and attributes of both the Goddess and the goddesses. I argue that ultimately this ambivalence and polarisation of the divine feminine in Hindu religious tradition is rooted in the idea of

the Goddess, or goddesses, as "Divine Mother" and therefore I conclude by analysing the significance of these maternal ambiguities in the context of maternal sacred space.

Finally, Chapter Nine comprises the conclusions of this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO: GENDERED BODY, CONTESTED BODY

All human life on the planet is born of woman. The one unifying, incontrovertible experience shared by all women and men is that months-long period we spend unfolding inside a woman's body... We carry the imprint of this experience for life, even into our dying. (Rich, 1986: 11)

2.1 THE MIND/BODY SPLIT AND OTHER BINARY OPPOSITIONS

The above epigraph from Adrienne Rich's book *Of Woman Born* offers a point of departure for examining the universal human condition of embodiment and its ramifications for gender relations. Although these words imply a unifying concept of female embodiment as "mother," Rich later says, "The body has been made so problematic for women that it has often seemed easier to shrug it off and travel as a disembodied spirit" (1986:40). The reproductive power of women's bodies has, in fact, been controlled, manipulated, and used against women throughout centuries of patriarchal domination. Many feminist theorists such as Naomi Goldenberg (see, for example, 1989) have pointed out that in the western world, at least, the denigration of women has been a result of the mind/body split inherent in its philosophical and religious traditions. Western theology and Enlightenment humanist thought have consistently characterised the mind and transcendent spirit as superior to physicality and the body. Since rationality and disembodied transcendence have been equally consistently associated with men, women have long been disempowered and

oppressed by an androcentric perspective that links them with the body, sexuality, and nature.

Ultimately, perhaps, the western dualistic notion of male being superior to female, and the mind to the body, originates in the Judaeo-Christian monotheistic conception of a male God, a God who is not only thought of as father, but also as disembodied. Feminist theory has substantially illuminated how the idea of a male transcendent deity in monotheistic religion has served to legitimate male authority in society and the denigration of embodied femininity, or female sexuality. But such a deity also "deifies masculinity" and implies a disembodied masculinity (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994: 2). As Eilberg-Schwartz points out, this can be just as problematic for men's conceptions of self, since it renders masculinity, or male embodied sexuality, unstable: "I see divine masculinity and human masculinity as two separable and sometimes conflicting symbols" (1994: 6).¹ Although the topic of this study mainly focuses on the problems for women inherent in androcentric dualistic notions that subordinate female embodiment, it is important to bear in mind that the other side of the dichotomy, male disembodiment, is also problematic in the context of gender relations and male subjectivity. And so we soon find ourselves back to the beginning - the universal human condition of embodiment: All of us, women and men, are embodied, but this essentially unavoidable reality appears to be experienced as problematic in human life.

¹ Howard Eilberg-Schwartz's *God's Phallus* (1994) gives an innovative and groundbreaking analysis of the problem of "deified masculinity" for men's conceptions of self and focuses on exploring "how tensions arising from the idea of the sexual body of the father God are expressed in the myth and ritual of one religious tradition, namely, that of ancient Judaism" (p. 2). His work is situated at the intersection of religion, culture, and gender and is informed by feminist and gender criticism, psychoanalysis, and anthropology.

The problem of dualistic thinking does not end with the separation of mind and body and feminist debate has also critically addressed other closely linked binary oppositions, such as culture versus nature. In this instance, it is culture that is characterised as superior to nature, and again, it is men who are said to play the predominant role in the control of nature and the creation of culture. Furthermore, the symbolic association of women with nature is by no means limited to western culture and religion - religious myths of Asian and African traditions, for instance, abound with female archetypal figures symbolising the earth, female sexuality, fertility, maternity, and so on. Hindu Vedic and post-Vedic myth that characterises the earth's fertility as female and divinises maternal reproductivity and nurturance will, in fact, be the focus of Chapters Seven and Eight. More fundamentally, classical Hindu philosophical discourse upholds the dualistic notion of opposing ontological principles: *puruṣa*, representing pure consciousness and spirit, generally understood as male; and *prakṛti*, denoting material creation and understood as female or even as the fundamental feminine principle that is the cause of all creation (Pintchman, 1994: 81-7).

If it can be argued that creation arises from a fundamental feminine principle, or that nature is "female," does this similarly imply that in the social order there exists an essential, universal category called "woman"? Most feminist theorists agree that there is no such thing as the "universal woman" and attention to the significance of difference among women is of increasing concern to current feminist criticism, a concern that will be revisited in the third chapter. Nonetheless, in the field of anthropology, some feminist scholars have reinterpreted gender symbolisation in society, culture, and religion to argue that women's subordination *is* universal, even if

specific symbols, practices, and ideologies vary across cultures.² In the groundbreaking collection of anthropological essays, *Woman, Culture, and Society* (1974) edited by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, Rosaldo's introduction looks at what she understands as "a universal asymmetry in cultural evaluations of the sexes." It is an asymmetry, she argues, that privileges and values men in socio-economic and cultural spheres, while rendering women relatively uninteresting, voiceless, and subordinate to men (Rosaldo, 1974: 17-19). Sherry Ortner, too, categorically asserts that women are universally devalued and that "in every known culture, women are considered in some degree inferior to men" (1974: 69).

Feminist anthropologist, Henrietta Moore, suggests that societies universally distinguish between human society and nature and attempt to control nature for their own benefit (1988: 14-16). Women, it is argued, are symbolically associated with nature because their reproductive capacity seems to situate them closer to it. As Ortner puts it, "It all begins with the body and the natural procreative functions specific to women alone" (1974: 73). Cultural notions of women tend to underscore their biological characteristics, such as sexuality, fertility, maternity, and menstrual blood. In short, women are mostly defined by their sexual functions (Rosaldo, 1974: 31). In this regard, women are further constrained by sexual ideologies that arise from the concept of pollution found in many societies, which is associated with natural bodily processes. Behavioural taboos and restrictions are frequently implicated in the essentially female functions of menstruation and childbirth (Moore, 1988: 14-

² For a useful collection of essays that addresses the diversity of symbols, practices, and ideologies impacting on cultural constructions of gender and the nature of women across cultures, see Shirley Ardener's *Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society* (1992).

16). In some societies, therefore, women's sexuality is feared as a source of pollution that has to be guarded against and controlled - Hindu society, for example, being no exception, as will be discussed later (see Marglin, 1985). In short, female sexuality is dangerous sexuality and, along with nature, it should be controlled and constrained.

In contrast, men are symbolically associated with culture and socio-political activity in the public domain, giving them access to power over nature and thus over women. Rosaldo maintains that in all societies men have some degree of authority over women - although the levels vary across different societies - maintained as a culturally legitimated right that is recognised as morally important (1974: 21). But this male authority, Rosaldo most importantly stresses, does not exhaust power and its acknowledgement does not deny that women also have some access to power and are able to participate, by different means, in shaping the social order. However, women's exercise of power is usually not culturally legitimated as *authority* and, moreover, in the academic arena of the social sciences, the androcentric view that women's exercise of power is "manipulative, disruptive, illegitimate, or unimportant" is largely assumed and accepted (Rosaldo, 1974: 21).

Yet another androcentric binary opposition emerges here in the context of authority and cultural legitimation, that of the public versus the private domains, where women are frequently construed as confined to the domestic activities of reproduction and raising children (Ortner, 1974: 76-80). Rosaldo argues that this opposition underlies the cultural stereotypes and asymmetries that associate women with domestic life and men with public life (1974: 23-4). Socially constructed gender roles, which serve to polarise the sexes, are evidently legitimated by appealing to the naturalness of female bodily functions, many of them associated with maternity. Irene

Diamond and Lee Quinby further elaborate on the assumption that such gendered distinctions and male power over the female are "natural." They enumerate several binary oppositions that denote the superiority of one term over the other, such as male over female, culture over nature, mind over body, and spirit over matter, all of them reinforcing male domination: "Patriarchal arguments revolving around sexual difference conceal the cultural construction of both power and bodies by couching it in the name of 'natural'" (Diamond and Quinby, 1988: xv). The vital point is that the notion "female is to male as nature is to culture" is in itself a cultural construct rather than a fact of nature: "Woman is not 'in reality' any closer to (or further from) nature than man - both have consciousness, both are mortal" (Ortner, 1974: 87).

Gayle Rubin's watershed essay, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" (1975: 157-210), argues from a different perspective, suggesting that sexuality itself is socially constructed and has little to do with anatomical bodily differences: Sex forms part of a society's political and economic systems and is transformed into gender and the sexual division of labour, in other words, the dichotomised and unequal domestic and public domains. Rubin refers to a sex/gender system that "transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity" (1975: 158-9). Following the structuralist theory of Lévi-Strauss, she situates the origins of male domination and control of women in kinship systems that are based on the exchange of women among men, regulated by the incest taboo. For Rubin, the economy is maintained by the sexual elements of kinship systems that demand heterosexuality, exogamy, and exchange of women for the purpose of attaining wealth and forging political alliances. The rules and regulations of sexuality, in terms of gender identities, heterosexuality, and the domestication of women, remain in the

modern western family structure and heterosexual norms, an issue that will be addressed in depth in Chapter Three.

To sum up, most of the binary oppositions we have discussed have been integrated into androcentric and disembodied conceptions where one side of the pair possesses the power and becomes the dominant subject (usually male) against which the "other" (usually female) is defined as subordinated object. Such a hierarchical split implies the subject's domination of the object and does not allow for *different* and equal subjects or "selves." The self, in such a negotiation of power, is defined against the "other," this other being kept at bay, subjugated, and suppressed. Male domination, control, and manipulation of female reproductive potential, in other words, of the female body, is a case in point. But the question remains concerning where and how dualistic thinking originated and how binary oppositions came to signify gendered and unequal polarities. Undoubtedly, perceptions of the body and sexuality are deeply implicated in the history of dualism, which has polarised the sexes and written the scripts for gender roles. In fact, the body itself has a history. Before entering the world of psychoanalytic discourse, a journey to be undertaken in Chapter Two, it would be instructive to consider the western history of the body, sexuality, and gender inherited by Freud, a history that would inevitably have shaped his theory of human psychosexual development. It also represents a history that elucidates how developing ideas of sexual difference determined socially constructed gender differences which have been translated as male domination of the female.

2.2 THE HISTORY OF THE BODY, SEX, AND GENDER

In recent years the body has become a pivotal point of interest in many academic disciplines, such as anthropology, social history, sociology, the history of religion, and philosophy (see, *inter alia*, Cooley, 1994; Csordas, 1994; Gallagher and Laqueur, 1987; Laqueur, 1992; Poovey, 1988; Synnott, 1993).³ Recent anthropological research and interest in the body, for example, has challenged the idea of a disembodied, rational "I" or "a mindful self independent of the body and nature at large" (Lock, 1993: 138). As Thomas J. Csordas points out, "The new body that has begun to be identified can no longer be considered as a brute fact of nature" (1994: 1). The exponential growth of interest in the body as an analytical framework is also highlighted in feminist studies of the history of women, gender, and sexuality in all these disciplines (Gallagher and Laqueur, 1987: vii). Ideas about the body and the social construction of gender, with the attendant development of dualistic notions, has a long history in western thought. It is a history in which religious myth, theology, and philosophy have played major roles.

If sex is biological and anatomical and gender is a sociocultural construction that interprets the "opposite" sexes in terms of social norms and regulated roles, do the two ever meet? Or, do the terms "sex" and "gender" constitute yet another exclusive and polarised dichotomy? I would argue that the body is the space where sex and gender meet. It has already been inferred that socialised gender roles are legitimated on the grounds of the naturalness of sexual difference and bodily functions. Just as gender is undergirded by sexuality, so, too, is embodiment and

³ For a review of anthropological theory of the body and an extensive bibliography of relevant works, see Margaret Lock (1993). For a review of the wide-ranging interest in the body in the study of religion, see Lawrence E. Sullivan (1990).

sexuality enmeshed in social and cultural process. It will become increasingly clear that changing attitudes towards the body emerged over centuries of history and that the body, and its "natural" functions, have been socially and culturally interpreted. As Anthony Synnott succinctly says: "The body... is not so much a biological given as a social creation of immense complexity, and almost limitless variability, richness, and power" (1993: 3-4). The body, as a social phenomenon in the western context, has varied over the centuries of Graeco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian history and, of course, it varies across cultures.

Plato said the body is the tomb of the soul, while St. Paul thought it was the temple of the Holy Spirit; later, Descartes declared the body a machine and, much later, Sartre claimed the body *is* the self (Synnott, 1993: 4; 7). For the purposes of this study, the most important aspect of the body, and perceptions of it, is its relation to the idea of the sexes as "opposite" and to the socially determined differences of gender. As Synnott points out, "Perhaps the main somatic variable for most people for most of their lives is gender" (1993: 4). It would seem that women and men are more alike than they are different, and, after all, it is only one minute chromosome that makes the difference (Synnott, 1993: 38). In fact, pre-Enlightenment history of science and medicine supports this similarity, particularly with regard to sexual anatomy.

Before the eighteenth century, "it had been commonplace that women had the same genitals as men except that, as Nemesius, bishop of Emesa in the fourth century put it: 'theirs are inside the body and not outside it'" (Laqueur, 1992: 4). This idea of structural sameness pertaining to male and female reproductive organs, including the notion that female as well as male sexual pleasure was essential to reproduction, was

assumed for thousands of years. It was formalised more explicitly by Galen in second century CE medicine: "In this world the vagina is imagined as an interior penis, the labia as foreskin, the uterus as scrotum, and the ovaries as testicles" (Laqueur, 1992: 4). Sexual difference was vertically hierarchical, founded on the generation of heat by sexual intercourse, pleasure, and orgasm, which was deemed essential for reproduction. Not unexpectedly, women's heat, although indispensable to the process, was said to be less than men's. Because of their interior nature, female sexual organs were defined as "the cooler, less perfect version of the male" (Laqueur, 1987: 5). The internal organs of women, according to the Galenic account, were imperfect and inferior versions of the male form, making women "the same but lower on the scale of being and perfection" (Laqueur, 1987: 4). But, as Laqueur points out, this was all for a good cause, according to Galen, since nature, in *her* wisdom, provided a cool, protected haven for conception and gestation (1987: 5). Clearly, this paradoxical combination of hierarchy and homology already supported a cultural association of the female with nature and the notion of women's inferiority. Furthermore, despite the lack of emphasis on anatomical difference, women and men were nevertheless perceived as different. But the question remains: How were they different?

Before the emergence of the idea of two "opposite" and complementary reproductive anatomies in the Enlightenment era, when gender differences could be legitimated by their alleged naturalness, sex was primarily understood in a sociological way. Differences between women and men were mainly interpreted in terms of opposite social characteristics and battles for power, in other words, what we generally call *gender* (Laqueur, 1992: 11; Synnott, 1994: 38). Gender was the cardinal cultural category, not biological sex (Laqueur, 1992: 8). We therefore have

to look to the historical progress of myth, philosophy, and religion to find the origins of "dual symbolic classifications," among which one of the foremost examples remains the polarisation of women and men as opposite but unequal (Synnott, 1993: 38).

Judaeo-Christian and Greek Myth

In the Judaeo-Christian context, the origins of oppositional categories, such as the idea of "opposite sexes," lie in ancient myths, most particularly the biblical creation myth of Adam and Eve. Adam was created first and then Eve from Adam's rib in order to serve as his helpmate. The first woman, therefore, was created from the body of the first man and only indirectly by God. It could thus be argued, then, that from the very outset, woman is inextricably linked with the flesh. As the story unfolds, it appears that Eve did not help Adam that much, as it was she who sinned first and has been blamed ever since for humankind's expulsion from paradise. The "gender ideology of Eden" has legitimised Christian patriarchalism and male dominance of women, and in both Judaism and Christianity, patriarchy has been reinforced by the masculinity of God and the prominent patriarchs of biblical history and myth, culminating in the male messiah, Jesus Christ (Synnott, 1993: 39).

Hesiod's ancient Greek creation myth similarly stars a female figure who precipitates the downfall of "mankind." The narrative tells of Pandora, the first woman, who is of extraordinary beauty and was sent by an angry Zeus for the specific purpose of punishing men: It was Pandora, the first embodiment of womanhood, who "opened the cask in which all the troubles, pains and evils of the world had been stored" (Synnott, 1993: 40). Both Eve and Pandora were created *by* male gods and *for* male humans, ensuring that both of these "first females" symbolise the onset of evil

and pain in the world. The "myth-makers," too, as Synnott reminds us, were also male, and it was their cosmogonies which laid the ideological foundations for the subsequent Greek philosophers and Christian theologians (1993: 40).

Greek Philosophers

The beginnings of an idea that male and female were different and, moreover, associated with "good" and "bad," respectively, is already present in these myths. But the history of western philosophy, founded on the supremacy of "Reason" and the rational mind, surely aspired to knowledge of an objective truth that knows no sex or gender. However, the Greek philosophers' development of dualistic vision implies that reason is unequivocally male and, as Genevieve Lloyd points out, "Our trust in a Reason that knows no sex has... been largely self-deceiving" (1984: x). From the very beginnings of philosophical thought there emerged the idea that "Reason" was male and "Nature" was female: "femaleness was symbolically associated with what Reason supposedly left behind - the dark powers of the earth goddesses, immersion in unknown forces associated with mysterious female powers. The early Greeks saw women's capacity to conceive as connecting them with the fertility of Nature" (Lloyd, 1984: 2).

The Pythagorean table of opposites, formulated in the sixth century BCE, comprised ten contrasting pairs, all of which supported the principle that clearly determined and precise forms are good, while indeterminate and unbounded forms are bad (Lloyd, 1984: 3). Pythagoras's ten binary oppositions are as follows: limit/unlimited; odd/even; one/many; right/left; male/female; rest/motion; straight/curved; light/darkness; good/bad; square/oblong. The first of each pair is

considered superior to the second, including male as superior to female, all based on the Pythagorean opposition of form over formlessness (Lloyd, 1984: 3). As Synnott points out, the meanings overlap, and male is associated with good, right, light, and so on, insinuating that "gender is not just a matter of biology, but is entangled with notions of cosmology, number, unity, direction, mobility, state, colour, morality and shape. Gender connects to everything, and everything is gendered" (1993: 40-41).

The connection between maleness and determinate form, and femaleness and unformed matter, was perpetuated in later Greek thought. Plato, in the fifth to fourth centuries BCE, reinforced these gendered associations in his fundamentally oppositional notion of form and matter, where "forms" referred to an abstract idea of eternal and immutable patterns that provide the foundations for all classes of fluid and changing natural phenomena in the material world. Within this framework, Plato developed an epistemology that attached the rational, knowing mind to form, as male, and the non-rational and disorderly to matter, as female (Lloyd, 1984: 4-5). Nevertheless, Plato's diverse works showed complex and differing perceptions of gender and the relationship between male and female. His *Republic* expresses a remarkable egalitarianism in the social organisation of the sexes, particularly in relation to his advocacy of common education and military systems for men and women. Furthermore, Plato's cosmogonic myth in the *Symposium* defines the sexes as complementing one another, stressing love and equality between women and men (Synnott, 1993: 41-42).

However, Plato's creation myth in the *Timaeus* is blatantly misogynist, locating women in an intermediate space between men and animals: Woman is defined as an evil man who has died and been reborn as a woman; if she, in turn, is evil, she

will be reincarnated as a "brute" (Synnott, 1993: 42). Plato acclaims a concept of cosmic Reason that is reflected less clearly in women than it is in men, for female souls "originate from the fallen souls of men who were lacking in Reason; hence they are closer to the turbulence of non-rational accretions to the soul" (Lloyd, 1984: 5). Underpinning Plato's theory of knowledge, and its implicit gendered oppositions, Lloyd further points out, is "his version of mind/matter, or soul/body dualism. Matter, with its overtones of femaleness, is seen as something to be transcended in the search for rational knowledge" (1984: 5). Platonic forms, which Naomi Goldenberg compares to Jung's allegedly transcendent archetypes in her critical analysis of the mind/body split, transcend material reality and are known only by the soul (Goldenberg, 1993: 72). And by further implication, in terms of the *Timaeus* myth, they are known only to the rational soul of the good man. Plato's early dualism of the superiority of the soul over the body had defined the soul as the immortal carrier of divinity that eventually, through incarnations, would be released from the body into god-like immortality. But in his later thought on knowledge, Plato emphasised a transformation of the soul as bearer of immortality into the "rational soul," whereby the cultivation of rational thought became the gateway to freedom from the body (Lloyd, 1984: 6). In any event, Plato's dualism rested on the polarisation of the soul and the body, where the soul was the bearer of reason and freedom from the prison of the body.

Aristotle, in the 4th century BCE, retained the distinction between form and matter, but retrieved Platonic forms from the transcendent realm. Consequently, the rational soul became the form of the body, as opposed to its prisoner: "rational knowledge was no longer construed as the soul's escape from the body" (Lloyd,

1984: 8). Aristotle, therefore, mended the division between body and soul by defining the soul as the "life principle" of the living body (Bynum, 1995: 13). But insofar as Aristotle reintegrated body and soul, so, too, did he polarise male and female more explicitly. Aristotle's vision of gender was definitively androcentric and all women's characteristics were said to deviate from the norm of male perfection. His binary oppositions proclaimed that men are strong and courageous and women weak and cautious; men involve themselves in acquiring possessions outside the house and in outdoor activities, while women preserve them inside the house and are more sedentary; and while both men and women are involved in the procreation of children, it is women who nurture them and men who educate them. The association of male and female with the unequal oppositional notions of culture and nature and the public and domestic domains is quite clear here, and in terms of patriarchal and androcentric attitude, is extended in Aristotle's approach to reproductive biology: Women are characterised as "impotent males" and the soul is said to be emitted in the semen, thus making men, not women, the creators of life (Synnott, 1993: 43).

Christian Theologians and Reformers

Dualism, it would appear, flourished in the history of early Christianity, as well as Judaism, in the first century CE, founded as they were on dichotomies such as heaven and hell, good and evil, light and darkness, truth and falsity, and life and death (Synnott, 1993: 43). Synnott indicates that Greek philosophy and early Christianity seemed to reinforce one another in terms of dualistic thinking. However, Christianity did not perpetuate the binary opposition of male and female as opposites, in that the example of Jesus Christ's life, as well as his teachings, expressed and advocated an

egalitarian society, especially in terms of class and gender. In spite of this, however, Christian theology, church hierarchy, and social organisation, developed patriarchal structures and misogynistic teachings, all founded on the central symbol of God the Father (Synnott, 1993: 44-5). If Paul substantiated the equality of all human beings in the Mystical Body of Christ, he also called for female silence and wifely submission to husbands.

Philo, a first-century CE Alexandrian Jew, was similarly influenced by the dualism of the early Greeks and used their philosophical models in his interpretations of the Jewish scriptures. He followed Plato's example in identifying "sense-perception as the source of the disorders of the soul, giving rise to a tide of passions which threatens to engulf sovereign Reason" (Lloyd, 1984: 22). As Howard R. Bloch points out in his essay, "Medieval Misogyny" (1989), Philo equates the relation of the mind to the senses with that of man to woman. Drawing an analogy with the Genesis creation story, Adam, or man, represents consciousness and the mind, while Eve, or woman, who was created from Adam's rib as his helper, is bound by the flesh and represents the senses: As such, woman is subordinated to man, for, extending the analogy, Philo says in *On the Creation*, "sense and the passions are helpers of the soul and come after the soul" (see Bloch, 1989: 14).

Early theologians Tertullian (c.160-230) and Chrysostom (c.347-407) were expressly misogynist, the former calling God's punishment for Eve's sin down on the heads of all women with these words:

You are the devil's gateway: *you* are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: *you* are the first deserter of the divine law: *you* are she who

persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You* destroyed so easily God's image man. On account of *your* desert - that is, death - even the Son of God had to die. (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4.14; Bloch, 1989: 11-12)

Chrysostom similarly described women as a dangerous yet desirable temptation to men, who therefore embodied an "inescapable punishment" and a "necessary evil" (Synnott, 1993: 45). The misogyny of the early centuries of Christian theology rested on the dualism of Greek thought and the splitting of "man" in the Genesis myth, a misogyny that deeply implicated the oppositions of body and mind, woman and man: One way of reading misogyny, says Bloch, signifies that "if man enjoys existence (substance), being, unity, form, and soul, woman is associated with accident, becoming (temporality), difference, body, and matter," all these elements implying the secondariness and otherness of women, rooted in their carnal associations (1989: 11).

It was St. Augustine (354-430) who grappled with the earlier synthesis of the Genesis myth and Greek philosophy concerning body and soul, women and men. The distinction between corporeal sexuality and rational intelligence is crucial here for Augustine's constructions of gender. To an extent, he challenged the earlier misogyny that portrayed "woman's inferior origins and subordination with her lesser rationality" (Lloyd, 1984: 28). He strove to ensure that women were not conceived as lesser in terms of spirituality and reason. But for Augustine, woman's bodily sex remained a symbol of natural subordination to man: As articulated in her Genesis role as subordinate helpmate to Adam, in the corporeal sense, woman was made for man and must obey him. But in terms of rational intelligence, according to Augustine, women

and men are equally subject to God alone (Lloyd, 1984: 29-30). Women, as well as men, insofar as they both possess reason and are made in God's image, have equal access to renewal in Christ. For example, in *Confessions XIII*, Augustine stated that woman had

a nature equal in mental capacity of rational intelligence, but made subject, by virtue of the sex of her body, to the male sex in the same way that the appetite for action is made subject, in order to conceive by the rational mind the skill of acting rightly. (cited in Lloyd, 1984: 31)

To Augustine, the rational mind was constantly in danger of losing control and becoming excessively involved in temporal matters, such as human love and sexuality: It was this that led to the "fall" and woman remains a symbol of that fall from grace. Furthermore, bodily lust, for Augustine, disturbingly symbolised that loss of control: "Woman, as the object of male lust, is associated with this distressing subjection of mind to body" (Lloyd, 1984: 33). Woman may be the spiritual equal of man, but as carnal carrier of the spirit, she also carries the burden of "the symbolic force of her subordination to man, which Augustine saw as natural" (Lloyd, 1984: 33). Furthermore, Augustine was surely not alone in being so distressed by the idea of women's sexuality. As Peter Brown comments in discussion of the lives of women ascetics in the fourth century, and male attitudes towards them, "to late

antique males, the female body was the most alien body of all. It was as antithetic to them as the desert was to the settled land" (1988: 271).⁴

Finally, thirteenth-century theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), whose theological influence extends to this day, was faced with the problem of reintegrating the conception of woman as misbegotten on the one hand, and as created by God on the other (Synnott, 1993: 46). His major theological treatise, the *Summa Theologica*, represents the most famous attempted synthesis of Greek and Christian thought (Lloyd, 1984: 34). Following closely to Aristotle's philosophy, Aquinas explored the dimension of substantial form as the intelligible principle, or intellectual soul, of the living human body. His descriptions of dimensions of the soul did not include male-female symbolism, but "his account of human nature yields yet another rendering of the Genesis story of male-female relations" (Lloyd, 1984: 35). In short, Aquinas distinguished between woman's individual nature and universal human nature: The former, again following Aristotle, is misbegotten and imperfect, since the male seed carries the perfect form of masculinity, while the latter - universal human nature - includes women and is good. For Aquinas, the body and sexuality constituted an obstacle to spiritual progress, since sexual pleasure could not be without sin (Synnott, 1993: 46). Furthermore, he was committed to the association of women with the naturalness of human reproduction and, like Augustine, to the naturalness of her subordination, because it is in man that reason predominates (Lloyd, 1984: 36).

If dualism spawned the splitting of body and soul, the polarisation of women and men, and an underlying misogyny through the eras of antiquity and the Middle

⁴ See Peter Brown's *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (1988) for his groundbreaking research on radical sexual renunciation during the first five centuries. The work includes analysis of the nature of sexuality and the relations between men and women in that religious context.

Ages, then the denigration and hatred of women reached new heights, or depths, throughout Europe during the witch persecutions of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. As documented by Brian Levack in *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, many thousands of people, by far the majority of them women, were prosecuted for the crime of witchcraft during those centuries, and thousands of those were executed (1987: 1-3). This constituted such a widespread and successful purge of alleged witches, frequently referred to by historians as the "witch-craze," that some European villages were left entirely devoid of women (Gadon, 1989: 113). The term "witchcraft" originated from the Old English word *wicce* (masculine) or *wicca* (feminine), derived from an Indo-European root meaning "to bend or shape." According to feminist writer Elinor Gadon, the term implied a "craft of the wise" where the witch could be understood as a "shaper" of human destiny, skilled in the healing arts (1989: 235). However, as described by Levack, the craft came to be attributed with distinctly negative images signifying harmful, black, or malevolent magical practices that were performed through the supernatural power of the occult. Witches, it was believed, appropriated this magical power to enact evil, a power which the Christian church insisted belonged to pagan gods or demons.

Accusations of witchcraft as *maleficium*, or the performance of harmful and evil deeds, initially arose from people within a community against suspected witches living amongst them; to a certain extent, therefore, they arguably served a purpose in the context of maintaining social stability: "Witchcraft accusations allowed members of early modern European communities to resolve conflicts between themselves and their neighbours and to explain misfortunes that had occurred in their daily lives" (Levack, 1987: 116). However, the meaning of witchcraft expanded to include a

second type of ritual activity, that of "diabolism," implying the existence of a pact between a witch and the devil, the Christian personification of evil.

By the fifteenth century, after Pope Innocent VII declared witchcraft a heresy to be tried under the auspices of the Inquisition, witches were not only criminals but also heretics who rejected the Christian faith in favour of worshipping Satan (Gadon, 1989: 212; Levack, 1987: 7-10). Appointed by Pope Innocent, two Dominican inquisitors, Jakob Sprenger and Heinrich Institoris, published a profoundly misogynistic treatise in 1486 called the *Malleus Maleficarum*, or the "Hammer of Witches," a text that was imbued with insinuations of women's moral weakness, intellectual inferiority, and uncontrolled, dangerous sexuality. For example, in addressing the question of why most witches are women, the *Maleficarum* states that women are feebler in mind and body than men and therefore susceptible to the spell of witchcraft; a woman is more carnal than a man, evident in her many carnal abominations; a woman is quicker to waver in her faith, is a liar by nature, a secret enemy, and "more bitter than death"; and finally, "since all witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable... Wherefore for the sake of fulfilling their lusts they consort even with devils" (see Synnott, 1993: 47). Typified as sexually promiscuous by clerics and thus vulnerable to accusation of witchcraft from the educated classes, peasant women were also vulnerable to accusations of evil doings in their ordinary roles as cooks, midwives, and healers within their own communities. In any event, women as a class were marginalised during this period of European history, since they were rendered physically, economically, and politically weaker than men. As Gadon succinctly sums up, the witch-hunt "was open season on all aberrant people, some men but mostly women of the peasant working class, the lower strata of

society - midwives, herbalists, the old wise women, widows, and spinsters, women unprotected by a man" (189: 212).

Scholars have continued to debate the cause of this avidly misogynistic witch-craze that disrupted European communities for over two hundred years. Even more, the issue of the actual reality or unreality of witchcraft beliefs and practices themselves continues to be argued. Were they purely a creation of the prosecutors, an organised "demonology" constructed by the medieval church, which then gained a momentum of its own as a result of social tensions, as argued, for example, by historian Hugh Trevor-Roper (1969: 93)? Or, as Carlo Ginzburg's research suggests, do the beliefs and experiences of the accused warrant investigation as potential realities, which might not always denote negative and harmful practices? Trevor-Roper further argues that persecutors of witches "built up their systematic mythology of Satan's Kingdom and Satan's accomplices out of the mental rubbish of peasant credulity and feminine hysteria" (1969: 116), thereby dismissing not only the significance of meanings ascribed to witchcraft practices by the people themselves, but also the rationality and intelligence of the peasant classes - particularly women - of the time. The underlying causes of the witch-hunts most probably emerged from the interweaving creations of both persecutors and persecuted. Most significantly, however, it is clear that the witch-hunts perpetuated and embellished a misogynistic discourse concerning women, which was already rooted in the dualism of early Greek thought and Christianity, and which served to polarise mind and body, spirit and matter, men and women.

It could be argued that the Protestant Reformers moved to moderate this misogynistic fervour, but they were also arguably responsible for precipitating a

polarisation of the category "woman" that reached its apex in the Victorian era, as will be discussed later. The danger of female sexuality was embodied in a certain type of woman, the prostitute, and under the influence of Reformers such as Calvin, bordellos were suppressed and street prostitution forbidden in many parts of Europe (Culianu, 1995: 7-8). The married woman, however, embodied a safer and more moral sexuality under male control, and although Martin Luther rejected the idea of woman as imperfect man - in terms of God's creation of humankind in His image - his politics of gender still left a lot to be desired: According to Luther, a woman should always be confined to the home and it is, indeed, God's command that she be subservient and obedient to her husband's rule (Synnott, 1993: 48).

Recent historians of Protestantism tend to dispute the past assumptions made by some historians that the Protestant Reformation encouraged the liberation of women and upheld the values of marriage as central to social order, morality, and Christian life. On the contrary, today it is agreed that the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers were distinctly negative in their views on women, sexuality, and marriage. Culianu points out that "recent research tends to emphasise rather sharply the *negative* character of Protestant marriage, which is not a sacrament, but an almost evil institution necessary only because of the weakness of the flesh, or, in Luther's own terms, 'ein Spital der Siechen,' a 'hospital for the sick'" (1995: 8). It was not exactly an inviting metaphor, but it was one that Luther aimed to make a reality: In this spirit, and not without a certain irony, he abolished both brothels and convents, condemning women of all kinds - both "whore" and "virgin" - to compulsory marriage: "Luther saw in every woman an instrument of the devil whom the marital bonds were meant to chastise" (Culianu, 1995: 8). It would seem that women could not be easily purged of

Eve's sin in these puritanical times. Luther thereby initiated the control and moral development of women through marriage, a vision that was reinforced in nineteenth-century Victorian times.

Victorian Sexuality

Nineteenth-century western history of the body and its construction has been of particular interest to scholars, a history that would have constituted one of the guiding paradigms for Freud's work. The work of Michel Foucault has been predominant in identifying the body and sexuality as a locus of power, a trend he traces back to late seventeenth-century Europe, culminating in Victorian politics of the body and unspoken sexuality. As Foucault points out in *The History of Sexuality* (Vol. 1, 1978), it was among the bourgeoisie of the Victorian era that sexuality became repressed and confined to the domestic domain:

Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents' bedroom. (1978: 3)

For Foucault, however, this repression was not really repression, and this silence was not really silence: To the contrary, the Victorians indulged in an increasing scrutiny of sex and initiated an explosion of sexual discourse, sexual confession (not only in the church, but also in the new confessional, Freud's psychoanalysis), and unorthodox sexualities that emerged in modern times. But knowledge and control of sexuality was a means to power, and it was through the very power of prohibition that sexuality became a central issue in western society:

We must therefore abandon the hypothesis that modern industrial societies ushered in an age of increased sexual repression... It is said that no society has been more prudish; never have agencies of power taken such care to feign ignorance of the thing they prohibited, as if they were determined to have nothing to do with it. But it is the opposite that has become apparent... never have there existed more centres of power; never more attention manifested and verbalised; never more circular contacts and linkages; never more sites where the intensity of pleasures and persistency of power catch hold, only to spread elsewhere. (Foucault, 1978: 49)

Foucault presents the body as a locus of power relations, constituting a focus for the appropriation of power in society through the exercise of power over the body. From the seventeenth century, this power changed from the sovereign's right to decide life and death over his subjects to "the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (1978:140). Individual bodies and the population came

to be surveyed, supervised, and disciplined into "docile bodies" through controls such as the optimisation of the usefulness of the body as a machine and the regulation of the population through demographic research and knowledge. Institutions such as the military and education, not to mention prisons and psychiatric hospitals, legalised and legitimated such domination and control of society at large. This kind of deployment of power is directly connected to the body, a definitively political power based on the control of the body and of populations that Foucault calls "bio-power" (1978: 139-45).⁵ Sex, as defined by Foucault, is a political issue that suffuses bio-power, since it is intrinsic to the energies and capacities of the individual body and can be manipulated to control populations:

Sex was a means of access both to life of the body and the life of the species. It was employed as a standard for the disciplines and as a basis for regulations. This is why in the nineteenth century sexuality was sought out in the smallest details of individual existences; it was tracked down in behaviour, pursued in dreams; it was suspected of underlying the least follies, it was traced back into the earliest years of childhood. (Foucault, 1978: 146)

Some feminist theorists have criticised Foucault for "gender blindness" in terms of his analyses of power and knowledge in relation to the body, which, in its social context, is not just sexualised, but also gendered (McNay, 1992: 32-8). In

⁵ See, also, Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* (1977) concerning the prisoner's body as subject to disciplining power, in other words, as "docile body."

addressing the politics of bio-power, it can be argued, Foucault does not adequately address the fact that women's bodies, specifically, have been appropriated and controlled in patriarchal societies by male power and possession of knowledge (Diamond and Quinby, 1988: xv). However, feminist scholars have equally extensively drawn on the profound insights of Foucault's work as a support for feminist critical analysis of gendered and hierarchical power relations (see, for example, Diamond and Quinby, 1988; Flax, 1990; McNay, 1992).

However, Victorian discourse of the body was undoubtedly gendered. Other studies of nineteenth-century European conceptions of the body have unveiled stereotypes that consistently defined women by their bodily nature and sexuality, evoking an idea of female sexuality as pathological. Sander Gilman (1986) identifies the focus of medical discourse and the emerging public health model of the time to have been on the "sexualised woman," in other words, the prostitute, as a source of pollution and disease. "Normal" bourgeois women and wives, on the other hand, represented a female sexuality that was successfully subordinated to male control. The roots of these androcentric images of women that conceptualised excessively sexualised female bodies as "other" were arguably to be found within male observers themselves, arising from a deep, inner fear that women's potential sexual corruption of the male was the "source of political impotence" (Gilman, 1986: 256). Thus, it is implied that male political power and the need to control bodies - or more specifically, female sexuality - became intertwined and indistinguishable. Although thought of as the most sexually repressive society in history, as Foucault pointed out, the Victorians in fact generated an unprecedented discourse of sexuality that situated bodies and physicality "at the very centre of social, political, and cultural signification" (Gallagher

and Laqueur, 1987: vii). It was this central discourse that defined gender difference and men's control and domination of women.

This contradictory representation of sexual and bodily repression on the one hand, and sexual and bodily signification of socio-political and gender relations on the other, was clearly manifest in the nineteenth-century model of sexual difference. Laqueur describes how this replaced the hierarchical model of sexual difference, discussed above, that had lasted from ancient times to the eighteenth century. The older medical model had "interpreted the female body as merely an inferior and inverted version of the male body, all of the women's reproductive organs simply underdeveloped homologues of male organs" (Gallagher and Laqueur, 1987: viii). It also, we recall, emphasised the significance of the generation of heat and sexual pleasure, indicating that male and female orgasm were both required for the process of human reproduction, although the power of women's heat was less than men's.

However, the revised model of sexual difference that emerged in the eighteenth century interpreted female reproductive biology as entirely opposite to the male's, "stressing the opposition of male and female bodies, the woman's automatic reproductive cycle, and her lack of sexual feeling" (Gallagher and Laqueur, 1987: viii). Women became increasingly biologised and sexually determined by their reproductive capacity, and yet at the same time were interpreted as disembodied and devoid of sexual feelings. A new binary opposition is revealed here, a complementary opposition of male desire and female non-desire, that formed the basis of European nineteenth-century medical and political discourse and male-dominated gender relations.

Feminist social historians have investigated the effects of this "politics of reproductive biology" on the lives and experiences of nineteenth-century women (see Laqueur, 1987: 1-41). For instance, in *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, Mary Poovey further explores "the conceptualisation of difference as a binary organisation of sex," and argues that Victorian interpretations of biological sexuality, and the resulting construction of gender relations, were social, not natural, phenomena (1988: 2-6). She discusses the process of "ideological work" in the arena of gender that both constructed Victorian ideology of gender relations and contested the assumptions that underpinned the apparent stability and coherence of this ideology.

The binary opposition of sexual difference may have reinforced the patriarchal, male public domain that excluded women from the vote and the world of work, but it also evoked an idealisation of motherhood and the middle-class, "sexless" Victorian woman's moral power. This, we must remember, was in contrast to the alternative politically engendered image of uncontrolled, "pathological" female sexuality in the sexualised, "other" woman, who symbolised carnal desire, immoral corruption of men, pollution, and disease. Therefore, I would argue that it was equally important for Victorian women to uphold the binary opposition of sexual difference, for example, as illustrated in representations of the mother. As a result, not only was gender polarisation perpetuated, but a long history of the female "virgin-whore" dichotomy was renewed. The category "woman" was polarised into women who represented marriage, motherhood, and morality on the one hand, and on the other, those who embodied the dangers of uncontrolled sexuality and immorality.

The socially constructed image of feminine morality was rooted in claims to a natural "maternal instinct" that defined the "feminine" and "female nature," and inspired women's nurturance of children and moral influence on men. In *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct* (1981), Elisabeth Badinter also challenges the belief in the immutability of maternal love as instinct. Her study of parental behaviour and motherhood over the last four centuries in France and other parts of Europe shows wide variation in the *choices* women made and the quality of love offered to children, much of it shocking in its revelations of neglect and abuse. Only the philosophy of Rousseau and the psychoanalytic theory of Freud, she argues, turned the tide back to "mother love," through forcing the burden of guilt onto women for not fulfilling their "instinct." Even in Victorian times, this belief in "maternal instinct," was more an idea than a reality.

Anthropologist Henrietta Moore argues that the concept of "woman" as "mother," a concept conflated with natural, reproductive processes and maternal instinct, has always been a cultural construction that is expressed in different ways across different times and societies (1988: 25). In Victorian society, women and children among poor, working-class families were still exploited as workers and wage-earners. By contrast, mothers in middle and upper-class families were indeed confined to the domestic sphere, but their energies were mainly given to running the household, rather than "mothering" as such, and the children were for the most part cared for by nannies. As Moore points out, the ideal of childhood as a special, separate world under the nurturing care of the mother and as part of the close family unit assumed to be the norm in western culture today, is a recent sociocultural phenomenon (Moore, 1988: 25-27).

History reinforces the claim that motherhood is always a socially and politically determined concept and, recalling Foucault's bio-power, I would argue that the nineteenth-century creation of motherhood became one of the prime social institutions used to control bodies and populations. Adding a psychological dimension to the argument, Badinter says, "Maternal love is a feeling... And, like any feeling, it is uncertain, fragile, and imperfect. Contrary to many assumptions it is not a deeply rooted given in women's natures" (1981: xxiii). This is echoed in Adrienne Rich's critique of contemporary patriarchal notions of maternal instinct, arguing that motherhood is, in women's reality, earned and learned: "Motherhood is earned, first through an intense physical and psychic rite of passage - pregnancy and childbirth - then through learning to nurture, which does not come by instinct" (1986: 12).

Poovey further analyses examples of assertive women and liberal feminists of the Victorian age who worked for the reform of some of the gendered and class-engendered inequalities of their society, but nevertheless appropriated and maintained the liberal, bourgeois, and patriarchal discourse of sexual difference and the domestic ideal. Gerda Lerner, too, points out that early liberal feminists, who struggled for equality as citizens, still emphasised woman's role as mother: "Even the first major feminist theoretician, Mary Wollstonecraft, appealed to women as a group mainly in terms of their motherhood" (1993: 136). Here, I would argue, the "politics of sacred space" were already at work, initiating a process of gendered power relations that idealised and secularised both corporeal and socially institutionalised "maternal space."

In any event, the history of the body in western thought reveals that it has been interpreted and transposed into social relations, not only as a physically defined

location or "space," but also as a socially determined "idea." Whether perceived as biological reality or social idea, the body nevertheless remains spatial, an unequivocally *physical* and energetically contested site on which social relations, gender relations, and, inevitably, power relations, continue to be enacted. As Foucault pointed out, the body is subject *to* power and control. Nowhere, for instance, is the body, as living flesh, so palpably vulnerable to becoming a locus of social and political domination than in its capacity for pain, such as that inflicted by methods of torture (Scarry, 1985).⁶ In a similar way, I would suggest, the maternal body is a significant example of such a site of pain and, therefore, of domination, in that the physical pain experienced by many women in childbirth has rendered the female body vulnerable to male appropriation and excessive socio-medical control.

The body, as the flesh, may be a small, localised space, but the "expansive nature of human *sentience*" has the capacity to create "expansive territory," or diverse worlds (Scarry, 1985: 22-3). As such, the body is subject, creator of myriad human experiences and ideas. However, the body, as the flesh, is also subject *to* the sociocultural ideas of a particular time and place and is, therefore, culturally created as object. The body is both sexualised and gendered, a simultaneously physical and social space in which sex and gender meet and remain inextricably linked. Ideas of sex and gender interact on this contested field of the body, evolving as part of the history of dualistic thought and gender relations that have served to maintain male access to power and knowledge, the subordination of women, and the denigration of female sexuality.

⁶ Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1985) presents extensive research on and incisive critical analysis of the relationship between the body, pain, and the nature of human creation.

The body, as both physical and social space where sex and gender meet, is no less present in the framework of religion and religious ideas about sexuality and gender. In fact, as we have seen, religious myth and theology have been major players in the development of ideas about the body, sex, and gender. Paula Cooley's *Religious Imagination and the Body* addresses this very issue, specifically in relation to religious symbol systems, asking how "the 'bodied' imagining subject and the body as cultural artefact" are interrelated (1994: 7). Cooley critically analyses this ambiguous conception of the body and embodiment, developing a theory of an integrated "socionatural process" in which the dichotomy of sex and gender can be collapsed. She implicates the dualistic notion of sex (biological) and gender (sociocultural), and the attendant division between essentialism and cultural determinism, as no less culpable than any other binary opposition - for example, body and mind, or nature and culture - in reinforcing male domination. Sex and gender both reside in the body; the body is not only biological anatomy (sexual "imagining subject"), but it is also cultural construction (gendered "cultural artefact"). The body, therefore, is potentially both *creator* and *creation* of human ideas, imagination, and action or, in Cooley's specific context of religion, of religious imagination and the work of ritual. Furthermore, for as long as the idea of "woman" is culturally identified with "body," Cooley argues, then any discussion of the relationship between the body and imagination rests on critical analysis of gender difference (1994: 38). Again, I would argue that the maternal body signifies a very specific example of embodied space that is sexualised and gendered, a space in which the "socionatural" tension between creator and creation, subject and object, is all too painfully evident in women's lives.

In conclusion, it is clear that philosophy, religion, medical science, and socio-political ideals have all played their part in imagining the sexualised and gendered body. The body arguably emerges as a changing and contested space in which the continuous interaction between sex and gender takes place, a process that is deeply implicated in the construction of the self and human experience of subjectivity. It has also emerged from the history of the body that ideas about sex and gender, and the identification of "woman" with "body," have frequently detracted from women's experience of subjectivity and have engendered male domination and the objectification of the female as "other." What is missing so far in this brief review of the body and its role in the construction of the self, is a psychological view of what it means to be human. I now turn to this question in relation to the significance of sex and gender in the development of the human psyche according to Freud's psychoanalytic theory. In this context, I intend to analyse how femininity has been interpreted, how the maternal body and motherhood could be defined as "sacred space," and what the implications are for women's experience of subjectivity and self.

CHAPTER THREE: FREUD, GENDER, AND THE SACRED MOTHER

3.1 FREUD, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND FEMININITY

Freud and Feminism

If we turn to Freud's illustrious career that spanned the turn of this century, it is clear that he inherited a dynamic socio-political, medical, and even religious discourse relating to both sexual and gender difference. A bourgeois, socio-medical construction of the body in western culture, as examined in the previous chapter, must inevitably have furnished a paradigm for Freud's work and underpinned the social milieu in which he himself, as well as his patients and their problems, were embedded. Such a social context, to some extent, explains Freud's undeniably sexist language and apparently misogynist ideology found in his analysis of sexual differentiation and the development of gender identity.

Victorian attitudes towards women, fraught with ambivalence as they were, must also have played a part in shaping Freud's outlook on the female psyche and female sexuality (Rodgers, 1995: 158). Social mores concerning women of his time, even among feminists, we recall, had already effected a polarisation of women and the female body: The bourgeois realm of female sexuality bound by marriage on the one hand, where women were characterised by their subordination to male control, "asexuality," morality, and good works; and on the other, the realm of the alleged excessively sexualised female body, where women were perceived as "other," embodying promiscuous immorality and the corruption of male power. For the

Victorians, the moral obligations of the good wife and mother were paramount, ensuring that no other creative activity was necessary for a mother until her children were grown. In short, it took the advent of Freud's psychoanalysis applied to the issue of maternity "to transform a moral obligation into a psychological 'law,' equating the creative impulse with the procreative one" (Suleiman, 1985: 359).

Within the parameters of this ideology of female sexuality, Freud's work seemed to evoke a mystification of women's psychology implied in his renowned reference to "the sexual life of adult women as a 'dark continent' for psychology" (1926b: 212) and his investigations into the "riddle of femininity": "Throughout history," Freud recalls, "people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity" (1933: 113). Furthermore, his deductions about "femininity" are frequently defined by negative (even pathological) psychological tendencies, such as narcissism, masochism, and lack of intellectual and moral capacity. But, to his credit, Freud stresses that bisexuality is present in all human beings, and is at pains to identify both "femininity" and "masculinity" as psychical attributes residing in both women and men. In his essay "Femininity," he extends this point to critique the notion that masculinity is to femininity as activity is to passivity - active and passive qualities, too, are evident in both sexes (1933: 114). However, in contradiction of this idea, Freud also charts the attainment of femininity as an explicitly gender-specific *process*, that of the biological female child becoming a woman (Brennan, 1992: 7).

In any event, Freud unquestionably confronted and struggled with issues of sex and gender and the effects of patriarchal culture on women's psychology. Moreover, he explored the realm of the unconscious to ascertain the part it played in reinforcing the roles that had become entrenched for men and women. Many of

Freud's introductory and concluding remarks in his papers, particularly those addressing development of masculinity and femininity, are disarming in their tentative, and even apologetic, tone. His lecture on "Femininity," for example, begins: "All the while I am preparing to talk to you I am struggling with an internal difficulty. I feel uncertain, so to speak, of the extent of my licence" (1933: 112). Previous mistakes and omissions, and the need for further case studies and research in particular areas, are frequently acknowledged. This tentativeness was not necessarily upheld in his expressed findings concerning psychological development and gender identity, but we need to probe behind the language that often appears misogynist at first glance.

In response to these trajectories of Freudian thought, some feminists have rejected psychoanalytic theory in their own theorising of gender and sexual difference in patriarchal society. However, there has been an increasing body of feminist scholarship that has turned to and drawn on the profound insights of psychoanalysis, thus indicating the readiness to explore beyond the obstacle of Freud's androcentric worldview and problematic language. This renewed feminist interest has rested primarily on an acknowledgement of the existence of the unconscious and Freud's insistence on its prime significance, along with sexuality, in the psychological construction of the self, gender identity, and society. Diligent re-readings and critical analysis of Freud and post-Freudians have consequently provided one of the essential foundations for feminist deconstruction and transformation of patriarchal ideology.¹

In her ground-breaking work, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Juliet Mitchell was the first to counter feminist rejection of Freud with the argument that

¹ For example, Jessica Benjamin; Teresa Brennan; Nancy Chodorow; Dorothy Dinnerstein; Patricia Elliot; Jane Flax; Jane Gallop; Naomi Goldenberg; Diane Jonte-Pace; Adrienne Rich; Madelon Sprengnether; Judith Van Herik.

"psychoanalysis is not a recommendation *for* a patriarchal society, but an analysis *of* one" ((1974: xv). For Mitchell, an understanding of how the unconscious operates in society, in association with sexuality and gender differences, is essential for further comprehension of how patriarchal ideology itself functions. In a similar vein, Elizabeth Grosz's feminist introduction to Lacanian psychoanalysis notes that Lacan insisted that Freud needed no revision, since "Freudian psychoanalysis provides a series of techniques by which other social and intellectual norms can be examined as symptomatic of social relations" (1990: 10). Indeed, Freud worked within an entrenched patriarchal social structure and his life's task was dedicated to explaining and attempting to heal the psychological wounds inflicted on both women and men by that social order. Therefore, Mitchell argues, it is appropriate for feminists to probe psychoanalytic theory for clues about how ideas of gender difference have been constituted to produce and reproduce "the operations of a patriarchal system that must by definition oppress women" (Mitchell, 1974: xvii). Unlike other psychologies that address problems of consciousness, psychoanalysis, Mitchell reminds us, deals unequivocally with the unconscious (1974: 8). In paying attention to this fundamental tenet of Freud's theory, we might access an explanation for women's position in patriarchy and the psychic consequences of their subordination to men under the "Law of the Father."

Nonetheless, Freud's simultaneous emphasis on individual psychological development through the phases of *sexual* development, with corresponding reference to relevant parts of the body, suggests that biological determinism permeates his psychoanalytic theory. As early as 1905, in his *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905: 125-254), Freud identifies and stresses the existence and important determining power of

"infantile sexuality" in the development of human identity. This aspect, too, has aroused suspicion amongst feminists apprehensive of a biological essentialism that points to a construct of "universal woman" and therefore suppresses the reality of differences amongst women and expressions of female sexuality.

But Naomi Goldenberg, for instance, suggests that Freud's theory, in spite of its sexism and reliance on biological determinism, offers an opportunity for opposing the oppressive, androcentric philosophies of the mind-body split. Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis, Goldenberg argues, "has inspired an extensive body of thought based on the idea that human beings are essentially physical creatures whose mental and emotional experience is derived wholly from bodily life" (1990: 83). She therefore points to an avenue (particularly in the work of object relations theorist, D.W. Winnicott) for disrupting the androcentric privileging of the mind or soul over the body that has served to oppress women in patriarchal culture. Christine Downing further points out that for Freud the body is really "a metaphor for the soul" (Downing, 1992: 75). She stresses, though, that Freud's association of parts of the body with interpretation of psychological experiences is both metaphorical *and* literal. Experiences such as "penis-envy" and the fear of castration are responses to the literal genital organ, the penis, *and* to what it symbolises (as metaphor, the "phallus," symbolising the "Law of the Father"). The body as metaphor, in the context of psychoanalysis, is inextricably linked to the unconscious, "forever imagining its desires and forever elaborating its past" (Goldenberg, 1993: 177).

However, before exploring the significance of feminist analysis of Freudian and post-Freudian theories any further, which will be left for Chapters Five and Six, I intend in this chapter, to examine two main areas of concern: First, Freud's theory of

psychosexual development, most specifically in relation to the development of female identity (in Freud's terms, "femininity"), and its implications for women and conceptions of the mother; and second, his writings relating to the origins of culture and religion, showing how they relate to gender difference, the feminine, and maternal images. Then, in Chapter Four, similar issues will be taken up in relation to post-Freudian psychoanalytic thought, with particular emphasis first on Lacan's theoretical interpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis and second, on Winnicott's object relations theory.

Psychosexual Development and the Son

Despite the undeniable fact that we are all born of woman, the figure of the mother is notably repressed and silent in Freud's psychoanalytic representation of psychosexual development (see Sprengnether, 1990). Although present, particularly as the "preoedipal mother" in the early stages of the child's infancy, the mother is consistently situated as passive object, not active subject.² Freud idealises the mother as entirely devoted to her infant, most particularly the son, and characterises her as "the passive recipient of her son's libidinal urges" (Sprengnether, 1990: 2). He carries this idea to an extreme by arguing that the only true fulfilment of a woman's desire is the birth of a son, who represents the penis she never possessed and therefore symbolises the repair of her state of castration (1933: 127-34). What the mother has lost in terms of subjectivity and activity, rooted in her socially-defined role as a woman in patriarchal society, is symbolised in the phallus which she lacks, but which

² Several feminist scholars have approached this aspect of Freud's work that denies or represses the subjectivity of the mother and have worked to recover maternal subjectivity: See, for example, Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater" (1986c); Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (1986); Madelon Sprengnether, *The Spectral Mother* (1990); Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Writing and Motherhood" (1985).

her son possesses. Therefore, Freud goes on, she enjoys vicarious experience of life through her son's achievements:

A mother can transfer to her son the ambition which she has been obliged to suppress in herself, and she can expect from him the satisfaction of all that has been left over in her of her masculinity complex. (1933: 133)

For both the male and female child, however, "normal" psychological development and gender identity (within the patriarchal and socially-constructed norm of heterosexuality) can only be achieved by transcending attachment to the mother. According to Freud, though, this is effected in different ways, and at different stages, by girls and boys.

Of primary importance to Freud is the son's successful negotiation of the Oedipus and castration complexes towards escaping his Oedipal desire for his mother, so that he can disentangle himself from the disempowering threat of femininity. It is the Oedipus and castration complexes that are central to male psychosexual development and little significance is attached to the mother-infant relationship of the preoedipal period in this process. Object-cathexis for the mother in the Oedipal period has to be renounced, partly achieved by the little boy noticing the little girl's lack of a penis, which "is regarded as a result of castration, and so now the child is faced with the task of coming to terms with castration in relation to himself" (Freud, 1923: 144). But more decisively, it is the liberating father who intervenes with his prohibition of incest, under the guise of threatening castration. This threat, imagined or real,

demolishes the Oedipus complex and thus leads his son on the path towards independence and individuation, masculinity, and the development of the superego.

According to Freud, the son identifies with his father and, like Oedipus, first loves and desires his mother, "which originally related to the mother's breast and is the prototype of an object-choice on the anaclitic model" (1923a: 31). The little boy thus becomes hostile to the father and wishes to replace him in relation to his mother; but, inevitably, he also bears the guilt of wishing to do away with his own father. However, the prohibition of incest and the imagined threat of castration from the all-powerful father serves to disrupt the mother-son bond. The terror that accompanies it encourages the son to repress those urges and avoid castration by joining the masculine world, where his energy can be directed to the development of the superego and, finally, independent phallic masculinity and the positive resolution of the Oedipus complex.

Later, in this ideal progression of masculinity, the boy's repressed sexual desire for his mother will presumably be transferred to normative heterosexual urges and relationships, for prolonged identification with the mother, according to Freud, can only lead to some form of pathogenic, negative resolution of the Oedipus complex, such as homosexuality (Kahn, 1985: 88). Just as Freud represses the power of the mother, so, too, does he repress the effects of identification with the mother on a man's life, an identification that in Freudian thought is deemed disturbing to the son's smooth path to manhood. As Coppelia Kahn points out, "manhood as patriarchal culture creates it depends on denying, in myriad ways, the powerful ambivalence that the mother inspires" (Kahn, 1985: 88). And so, in Freud's interpretation of events, the mother's obvious lack of a penis and the son's perception of her as castrated and

subordinate is emphasised as pivotal to male development, allowing him to deny his connection with her and to collude with masculine contempt for femininity and its implied passivity, as embodied in his own "castrated" mother.³

Psychosexual Development and the Daughter

Now, however, the question remains concerning how the infant daughter fares in her development as a human being, according to a theoretical framework that seems to pay scant attention to the mother-daughter relationship. Here we need to investigate Freud's theory of femininity where it specifically defines the process by which female psychosexual development progresses. It is in this context that the binary oppositions discussed earlier impinge on Freud's work, since the female is largely defined by lack, measured against the dominant phallogentric norm.

Although women have been typified as sexually passive, Freud indicates that it is nevertheless women who are shaped by and subject to the body. Therefore, they are situated in a context of sexuality and nature that serves to deny them a significant role in the public domain and the creation of culture. Lack of the phallus appears to determine the course of the girl's psychical development, culminating in the attainment of the heterosexual norm within the domesticity of marriage and, ultimately, motherhood.

Femininity, then, is formulated further by an expanding store of "lacks" (as opposed to the positive attributes of masculinity) - lack of superego development; lack of ego-boundaries and moral development; lack of a sense of duty; lack of reason

³ Freud details the process of negotiating the Oedipus and castration complexes in the case of boys in several of his essays and lectures. See, for example: *The Ego and the Id* (1923a: 31-5); "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" (1924: 173-9); "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinctions Between the Sexes," (1925: 249-51).

and intellectual capacity - and so on. Rather, qualities such as masochism, narcissism, love (as opposed to moral sense of duty), and feeling (as opposed to reason and rationality) are attributed to femininity - and explicitly to women (Freud, 1925: 257-8; 1933: 132). Although Freud identifies femininity as the natural and desired goal of the girl's healthy psychosexual development into a woman, several of the characteristics enmeshed in it are undeniably construed as negative and problematic for women. Moreover, where "femininity" is found in men, it is defined as pathological, as a residual of preoedipal identification with the mother that has to be surmounted and repressed. Are we to conclude, therefore, that Freud perceived the "normal" psychological state of women as pathological? As Rachel Bowlby points out in *Still Crazy After All These Years* (1992: 144), Freud implies that the "properly feminine" woman's "baby-wish simply takes the place of the penis-wish." The "baby-wish" substitutes for the entirely unfeminine (according to Freud) wish for a penis, which, underneath it all, continues to exist. Therefore, Bowlby concludes, since even "the properly feminine woman is... still hankering after a penis" there is no place for femininity at all, since femininity itself is repudiation of femininity (1992: 144).

Recalling Mitchell's (1974) feminist analysis of psychoanalysis, it could nevertheless be argued that Freud was arguably striving to explain what he observed about femininity and masculinity, in women and men, within the society he inhabited. His aim was to address "the woundedness of all who live under 'The Law of the Father'" (Downing, 1992: 59-60). Perhaps even more pertinent, is his portrait of femininity as psychologically disabling for both sexes, though clearly more

dramatically for women.⁴ Freud begins to disclose femininity - a psychological phenomenon - and its bodily metaphor, the maternal womb, as something familiar and yet unknown - repressed to the unconscious or, more pointedly, the unconscious itself - "the place of origin and of death" (Downing, 1992: 105).⁵

Once again, this points us to the body, the site of all feeling, experience, and emotion, and yet, at the same time, the locus of carnal mortality, of death. Since the maternal body, physiologically, is the site of birth, no wonder it is "woman" (more accurately, "mother") who is indicted as the site, also, of death. Here, already, we can perceive a polarised image of the mother. Are human beings, particularly men, forgetful that all bodies are the site of birth and death? As Downing further points out, in *Analysis Terminable and Interminable* (1937), Freud insinuates that it is the *dread* of "femininity" that men must strive to overcome, not femininity itself (Downing, 1992: 99-100). This moment of both remembering and forgetting has arisen naturally at this point of my analysis but, prematurely, for further critical attention: It opens the question of polarity and paradox that will become central at a later stage in Chapters Three and Four.

To return to this moment and Freud's attention to gender identity, we find that his propositions concerning femininity underwent gradual change as other aspects of his psychoanalytic theory intervened. However, Freud consistently maintained a theme of defining the female by her lacks, in comparison with a male benchmark of

⁴ See Teresa Brennan's *The Interpretation of the Flesh* (1992) for a rigorous analysis of Freud's theory of femininity in relation to the *energetic* dimension of psychic life: "For Freud, emotions and affects are tied to drives, and drives to psychological energy. Femininity was a riddle because Freud could not explain why certain drives and affects were turned against the subject in a disabling way. Indeed, femininity, for Freud, means a specific psychological state that is always disabling" (p. x).

⁵ Here Downing is drawing on Freud's insights in "The Theme of the Three Caskets" (1913a: 291-302); "The 'Uncanny'" (1919: 219-52).

normative sexuality and social identity. Up until his theoretical work *The Ego and the Id* (1923a), Freud presented the psychosexual development of girls as "precisely analogous" to the effects of the Oedipus complex experienced by boys, except, to put it bluntly, girls identified with their mothers, desired their fathers, and consequently hoped to get rid of their mothers (Brennan, 1992: 9). It was considered natural that a girl's first sexual desire should, like a boy's, be heterosexual and therefore directed towards the father. The "Oedipal attitude" in a little girl would establish her "feminine character" as surely as the Oedipus complex "would consolidate the masculinity in a boy's character" (Freud, 1923a: 32).

In 1923, however, Freud's identification of analogy between boys and girls in their psychosexual development was marked by uncertainty, expressed in his androcentric observations of "infant genital organisation":

For both sexes, only one genital, namely the male one, comes into account. What is present, therefore, is not a primacy of the genitals, but a primacy of the *phallus*. Unfortunately we can describe this state of things only as it affects the male child; the corresponding processes in the little girl are not known to us. (1923b: 142)

But a new and transformative realisation about the development of female sexuality was soon to follow Freud's rejection of an analogous "Electra complex" in girls, a step which he frequently reiterates (see 1931: 228-9).

After 1923, with the advancement of his theory to a definition of the structure of the id, ego, and superego, which revealed the essential role of the threat of

castration for proper social and moral development in terms of the superego, Freud completely revised his thinking about femininity. Briefly put, he recognised that the first love and sexual object of both boys *and* girls is the mother, and therefore the daughter confronts the tortuous process of turning away from her mother and transferring an Oedipal desire towards her father, in order to complete her psychosexual development.⁶ Suddenly, direct and incisive attention is turned to the significance of the preoedipal relationship of the mother and infant daughter. But primacy for the mother (as subject) was not to be, since this attachment to the mother has to be renounced and rejected for true femininity to be attained within the confines of "normal" heterosexuality. How, asks Freud, do girls manage to abandon their original love-object, the mother, and turn to their fathers?

Freud's answer with regard to this circuitous path to womanhood gave rise to his infamous (to feminists) characterisation of the little girl, in the anal phase of psychosexual development, as entirely masculine, as a "little man" (1933: 118). Here Freud refers to the original bisexuality of both girls and boys - at this stage, both equally possess active and passive traits and girls play as boisterously and aggressively as boys. In the phallic phase, however, the little girls's alleged phallic sexuality, centred in the clitoris, her subsequent realisation that this organ is inferior to the penis she lacks, and finally, her experience of "penis envy," leads her to blame her mother for sending her into the world "ill-equipped." "Penis-envy" is an immediate reaction, says Freud: "She makes her judgement and her decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it" (1925: 252).

⁶ Freud focused explicitly on restructuring his theory of femininity in three particular essays: "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" (1925: 241-58); "Female Sexuality," (1931: 221-43); "Femininity," (1933 [1932]): 112-35).

The daughter's original love for her mother, according to Freud, had all along been for the fantasy of the "phallic mother," before she realised her mother, too, lacked the phallus. Her consequent hostility towards her mother, then, leads the way to a transference of love to her father and, Freud adds, her sexual drives to the vagina. Accompanying this transformation is the little girl's replacement of her wish for a penis with one for a child, first experienced as a desire to receive a baby from her father (1925: 256). It is then that the girl enters the path to "normal" femininity, where passivity and narcissism take precedence, apparent in her need *to be loved by*, rather than actively to love her father (and later, other men) and her inherent passive receptiveness to that love.

Freud specifically identifies two main tasks for the little girl in this process - changing her love object from mother to father and entering the Oedipal period, and transferring her leading genital zone from clitoris to vagina. These changes are deemed essential for women to achieve the goal of "normal" psychical and heterosexual development, that is, the attainment of femininity, or becoming a woman (1931: 227-35; 1933: 117-18). Again, as in the case of boys when they give up their Oedipal desires, the mother and the preoedipal period have to be rejected in the girl's development of appropriate gender identity. Whereas the castration complex serves to destroy the Oedipus complex in boys, in the case of the girl, the realisation that she is castrated inaugurates her Oedipus complex, that is, turning to her father as love-object and turning against her mother (1925: 257).

Then, finally, to return to an earlier point, Freud surmises that the task is only complete when a woman marries and gives birth to a son in recompense for her "castration" and the baby she could not receive from her father - in short, when she

becomes "mother." Thus, the circle is completed: We are presented with the picture of the little girl who behaves like a boy, who becomes a woman, who becomes a mother, who ultimately becomes Freud's ideal of the feminine, the passive recipient of her infant's libidinal desires. The increase of passivity - and the inherent sacrifice of active, phallic "masculinity" - it is noted, marks the stages along the way to womanhood. Turning away from her mother, Freud asserts, is "more than a mere change of object," but it also shows a "marked diminution of the active impulses and an augmentation of the passive sexual impulses" (1931: 239).

The Maternal Body as Sacred Space

I would argue that Freud's theory of female psychological development, that is, the achievement of "normal femininity," expresses a spatially-organised process rooted in the body. Although sexuality and the body arguably provide a metaphor for psychological transitions, Freud constantly alludes to essential, physiologically-based operations. For example, he consistently speaks of the girl's realisation of castration, not as a symbol, but as a *reality*: "A girl may refuse to accept the fact of being castrated..." (1925: 252); or, "She acknowledges the fact of her castration, the consequent superiority of the male and her own inferiority, but she also rebels against these unpleasant facts" (1931: 229). Furthermore, one of the two essential tasks for the little girl to become a woman is, in Freud's account, the transition from the clitoris to the vagina as leading erotogenic zone, an unequivocally somatic procedure. This, in terms of metaphor, symbolises the transition from phallic "masculine" activity to receptive "feminine" passivity.

The confrontation of these "facts" and the negotiation of the path to womanhood plainly cannot be easy, Freud readily admits. Since his developmental theory stresses that both boys and girls have to reject their mothers, Diana Meyers perceptively notices Freud's apparently arbitrary choice to dwell on difficulties encountered by girls and on explaining girls' defection from their mothers, rather than questioning why boys should remain attached to "mother substitutes" (1994: 66). Logically, it is arguable that his assumption that boys maintain their erotic allegiance to women after repudiating their desire for the mother requires as much, if not more, explanation than that of girls' rejection of the mother in favour of the father and men. But this would clearly present a threat to the centrality of Freud's Oedipal thesis and the superiority of masculinity: As Meyers remarks, "Freud's account of gender would have been altogether different if he had been baffled by boys' pliant sexual fidelity to women, despite their tyrannical mothers, rather than by girls' seemingly well-motivated sexual rebellion against them" (1994: 66).

In emphasising the difficulties for the girl's path to womanhood, Freud further points to the lack of success in many women to reach the goal of "normal femininity," and the consequences of such failure. For example, if the girl refuses to accept the "fact" of her castration, she "may subsequently be compelled to behave like a man" (1925: 252). Or other dangers, such as sexual inhibitions and neuroses, may also lie in wait for the girl who finds it difficult to sacrifice her "infantile masturbation" - the symbol of masculine, phallic activity (1933: 126). Remnants of active or aggressive attributes are relegated to the periphery of normal womanhood and considered pathological.

The fulfilment of femininity is therefore socially and morally idealised in an androcentric view of the mother and motherhood, most particularly in the mother-son relationship: "A mother is only brought unlimited satisfaction by her relation to a son; this is altogether the most perfect, the most free from ambivalence of all human relationships" (1933: 133). Here, I would suggest that Freud's idealisation of the mother could be extended to signify sacralization, since he implies that motherhood is the embodiment of *eros* and the ultimate goal and fulfilment of female development - only then, it would seem, does the girl truly become a woman. Luce Irigaray, for instance, was quick to recognise the importance of critically analysing maternal function as the infrastructure of western patriarchal civilisation, where motherhood is typified as an objectified institution sanctioned by the divine (see Whitford, 1991: 27). In this sense, the achievement of female subjectivity as a woman, independent of the "maternal-feminine," is rendered impossible.

By the same token, however, femininity, as embodied in the mother, is objectified and negatively characterised as passive and narcissistic. In the case of the boy, the mother is the object of his Oedipal desires, but because of her apparent (to him) passive, "castrated" state, she must eventually be left behind. Male fear of castration and disabling femininity leads to denigration and rejection of the mother, who is replaced by other women, and eventually, a wife. Even then, Freud's vision of the wife is negatively portrayed in his implication that her true expression of love, desired by the husband, is most often saved for a son. Then in the case of the girl, abandonment of her love for her mother is said to be unavoidable in assuring her successful attainment of womanhood. And so, I would suggest, a polarisation of the sacred image of the mother - the ultimate ideal of the feminine - is produced: On the

one hand, maternal love and motherhood is exalted as the exemplar of *eros* and the fulfilment of womanhood; while on the other, the mother, and womanhood itself, is defined by numerous inadequacies, to be denigrated and shunned as a danger to the real, "masculine" business of life.

Maternal Subjectivity and Power

Yet Freud's maternal feminine is more complex, even, than this; it is, as I perceive it, as if the contradictions multiply. For residing in this maternal space, as well, is a power that is not allowed full expression in Freud's story of femininity. In his essay, "Female Sexuality" (1931) he notes, with some surprise, the power, strength, and duration of the preoedipal mother-daughter bond: "the pre-Oedipus phase in women gains an importance which we have not attributed to it hitherto" (1931: 225-6). But Freud's realisation does not diminish his insistence that it is a bond that must be broken.

In asking what could possibly generate the little girl's hostility and ultimate abandonment of her love for her mother, Freud refers to several possibilities. In addition to the mother's failure to provide her daughter with an adequate sex organ, he lists her other shortcomings: her failure, also, to provide enough milk; her being the source of the daughter's pain experienced in losing the breast after premature, and presumably, mother-initiated weaning; being the agent of the daughter's fear of poisoning; forcing the daughter to share her mother's love with siblings; and, perhaps most significantly, initially stimulating or "seducing" the daughter (in the course of routine hygiene and nursery care of the infant), only later to prohibit sexual activity, that is, childhood masturbation (1931: 234; 1933: 122-3).

Although Freud focuses on interpreting these maternal actions as fantasies and emotional reactions of the child, he fails to conceal insinuations of active seduction, power, and aggression in the mother as the daughter's hostility unfolds. Sprengnether (1990) highlights these points as intimations of the "spectre" of maternal subjectivity and active agency that Freud seeks to avoid - features that are surely the same in the mother's treatment of both daughters and sons during the preoedipal period. Consequently, she asks, why is it that boys, in Freud's account of their Oedipus complex, do not likewise react with the same kind of hostility as girls towards their mothers?

In his zeal to explain the inevitability of the daughter's disillusionment with her mother and the destruction of her infantile love, Freud stumbles into issues that threaten his idealisation of the Oedipal bond between mother and son. The questions of maternal seduction and aggression which he labours to banish from his construction of masculine development have a way of resurfacing in his arguments concerning feminine development, at the same time that his discussion of ambivalence raises doubts about the mutual gratification he ascribes to the mother-son relationship. (Sprengnether, 1990: 162)

But if this maternal subjectivity were fully acknowledged, the primacy of male development and the phallus, through the Oedipus complex, would be threatened. Freud adheres to the precedence of the Oedipus complex and it is the active, "masculine" striving of the male subject to make his way in the world that is valorised.

In effect, Freud upholds motherhood as the ultimate fulfilment for women on the one hand, while on the other, he implies that this ultimate goal is not of much worth in the overarching plan of human development, society, and creation of culture. In the end, she must be denounced and rejected by boys and men in order to avoid the perils of castration and femininity, as well as by girls and women. As I will show in later analysis of Freud's thinking about religion, men's desire to return to the "oceanic feeling" or "maternal plenitude" of the preoedipal relationship signifies "femininity" and weakness. Moreover, we might well be led to assume that a woman who participates in the world without becoming a mother has deviated from the normative path of female identity and fallen prey to the "masculinity complex" or disabling neuroses. She therefore moves beyond the parameters of normal femininity and shows signs of psychical and social deviance. If Freud's theory of female psychosexual development explains the oppression of women under patriarchy, it also succeeds in presenting a polarised vision of women and the mother that is fraught with contradictions, tensions, and pitfalls.

Freud's research into individual psychosexual development was mostly drawn from two sources - reflection on his own childhood and psychical development and his analyses of his patients' neuroses. Therefore, his theory naturally focuses to a large extent on the explanation of psychological pathology. Freud's clinical case studies also give little attention to the influence of the mother in the development of neurosis or psychological pathology in either girls or boys, interpretations that lead to further contradictions. His idealisation of the preoedipal mother and insistence on female passivity, forces him, again, to avoid confronting these possibilities of maternal agency, power, and aggression. For Freud, femininity is narcissistic and masochistic,

and a woman's desire and aggression is turned in on herself as a consequence of her recognising her "naturally" castrated state:

The suppression of women's aggressiveness which is prescribed for them constitutionally and imposed on them socially favours the development of powerful masochistic impulses, which succeed, as we know, in binding erotically the destructive trends which have been diverted inwards. Thus masochism, as people say, is truly feminine.

(1933: 116)

If the mother is assumed to be passive and turned in on herself, as suggested by Freud, then presumably she also plays little part in a child's normative socialisation or in what is judged to be his or her healthy or "normal" psychological development.

In terms of Freud's ideas about parental seduction, the possibility of maternal desire and aggression towards the child, once again, is raised.⁷ It is successful negotiation of the Oedipus and castration complexes that is crucial to development of a healthy superego, avoidance of neurosis, and attaining full autonomy and independence, not only from the engulfing mother and the dangers of femininity, but also, ultimately, from "feminine" idealisation of the father. For, indeed, once the girl has abandoned her attachment to her mother and transposed her love to her father, she has little motivation to demolish the Oedipus complex. No longer threatened by

⁷ See Sprengnether (1990: 39-85), for an analysis of several of Freud's most famous clinical case reports, such as "Dora," "Little Hans," the "Rat Man," and the "Wolf Man." She argues that although they clearly implicate the influence of maternal desire and seduction in the development of their neuroses, Freud clings to masculine, oedipal interpretations that focus on the paternal role. See also Coppelia Kahn's "The Hand that Rocks the Cradle" (1985).

castration, the girl's superego is less fully developed than a boy's - the reason, in Freud's view, for women's inadequacies. He indicates quite expressly "that they show less sense of social justice than men, that they are less ready to submit to the exigencies of life, that they are more often influenced in their judgements by feelings of affection or hostility" (1925: 257-8), and so on - not to mention the female tendency towards jealousy as a consequence of earlier penis-envy. But the centrality of the Oedipus complex and masculinist ideals in Freud's theory of femininity fails to access the strength of the mother-daughter relationship, and reasons why the daughter should blame her mother for her lack are never adequately theorised. The mother is represented in terms of a narcissistic engulfment of self that both sons and daughters can only escape through the father's world, whether for good or bad. Although Freud acknowledges that in the modern world the father is consistently absent in the child's day-to-day life, somehow any significance attributed to the mother's influence on children's socialisation and moral development is repressed.

Many psychoanalytic feminists have critiqued these implications and have searched for different ways to interpret Freud's theory of femininity to access the subjectivity of maternal desire and to support, as Irigaray stresses, the subjectivity of women *as women*. Sprengnether's rereading of Freud in *The Spectral Mother*, for instance, extensively analyses the contradictions in his writing, revealing that even Freud himself could not entirely erase the subjectivity and significance of the preoedipal mother and maternal desire in human development. Post-Freudians, too, have generated new directions in psychoanalytic theory, with object relations theory most notably assigning precedence to the preoedipal period over the later Oedipal stage of development. However, before exploring these innovations in depth, I intend

first to turn to Freud's work in the area of culture and religion, particularly in relation to the arguably parallel images of the feminine and of the mother found there.

3.2 FREUD, CULTURE, AND RELIGION

This section will be devoted to discussion of Freud's theories concerning the origins of "civilisation" and culture and the role of religion in human society. It is possible to identify close parallels to Freud's psychoanalytic theory of the individual in his thinking about western culture, indicating a macrocosmic process of communal human development that is analogous to the microcosmic development of the self. Issues of femininity and patriarchal power and, more specifically, the suppression of the figure of the preoedipal mother (or of matriarchies and the mother-goddesses) are replicated in Freud's writings on culture and religion. Judith Van Herik explicitly bases her study of the issues of femininity and religion in Freud's work on the argument that his "theories of gender (mental femininity and masculinity) and of religion are internally related" (1982:1). But Freud's thinking about the development of human society and culture, just as his psychoanalytic theory of the individual, was rooted in the spirit of his times. James Jones, for example, points out that, as "an heir of the Enlightenment, Freud assumed that atheism was normative and religion but a vestige of the childhood of humankind" (1990: 1).

Totem and Taboo and the Originary Myth

Totem and Taboo (1913b) represents Freud's initial leap into the field of evolutionary anthropology and social theory, based on his studies of the work of, *inter alia*, J.G. Frazer, Andrew Lang, Durkheim, and Darwin. It is this work, says

Tomoko Masuzawa, in her book about the history of the scholarly quest for the origins of religion, *In Search of Dreamtime* (1993), that for all "the unbelievable drama it contains ... [*Totem and Taboo*] remains a singular and incomparably pivotal text linking psychoanalysis to the subject of religion" (1993: 80). Exploring the nature of totemism and reverence for the clan totem, regarded as the "tribal ancestor," Freud focuses on the correlation of totemism and its custom of exogamy, disclosing their shared roots in the horror of incest, deferred obedience to the father, and guilt. The emergence of totemism, and all later religions, rests on attempts to solve these problems that emerged from the "great event with which civilisation began and which, since it occurred, has not allowed mankind a moment's rest" (Freud, 1913b: 145).

In this "great event," recounted in the parricidal myth constructed by Freud, the "primal horde" of brothers killed and devoured the violent and jealous father in order to gain access to the women in his possession - their sisters and mothers. This deed represents a mythological acting out of the psychoanalytic Oedipus complex in a communal setting. Freud hypothesises that the sacrificial meal, designated as the central ritual of totemism involving the sacramental killing and communal eating of the totemic animal (forbidden at any other time), signifies the collective remembrance of this original deed. Ambivalent emotions of love and hate, reverence and murderousness, towards the totemic animal as symbol of the one powerful father, or even of a father-god, are thus articulated. After the ritual, Freud relates, the animal is mourned through festive rejoicing symbolising a collective memory of the sons' guilt for their murderous deed on the one hand, and triumph over the father on the other.

The meanings signified in this ritual aspect of totemism, argues Freud, marked the initial emergence of social organisation, of moral restrictions and kinship rules

(most significantly, the prohibition of incest and murder), and of religion. Freud presupposes a collective mind that has continued to struggle with the repressed desires that were fulfilled in the "original deed" and are implicit in the Oedipus complex - murder and incest - so central to Freud's psychoanalytic theory of individual psychosexual development. According to Masuzawa (1993: 80-3), Freud aligns individual neurosis and childhood fantasy with his vision of a primitive, barbaric pre-history of humankind. In fact, Freud's notion that fantasies arise from both a personal and historic past are made explicit in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*:

It seems to me quite possible that all the things that are told us today in analysis as phantasy... were once real occurrences in the primeval times of the human family, and that children in their phantasies are simply filling in the gaps in individual truth with prehistoric truth. (1916-17: 371)

Totemic religion, Freud suggests, marks the first covenant with the father, where the filial sense of guilt is resolved through appeasement of the father by deferred obedience - the prohibition of incest - and the transformation of guilt and remorse into religion and moral ordinance. The guilt associated with unconscious Oedipal wishes forms the basis of religion, in James Jones' words, "a biological hermeneutic of the sacred" (1990: 2).

Matriarchy and Mother-Goddesses

Freud's construction of an originary mythology in *Totem and Taboo* and his interpretations of "totemism" as the beginning of civilisation and religion, point to as adequate an explanation of the origins of patriarchy as any. But we find here, just as in his psychoanalytic theory of the individual, confusion and doubt about the place and role of femininity and, in this context, of matriarchy and mother-goddesses: "I cannot suggest at what point in this process of development a place is to be found for the great mother-goddesses, who may perhaps in general have preceded the father gods" (1913b: 149). Like the figure of the preoedipal mother in psychoanalytic theory, the mother-goddesses who precede the Oedipal story are subordinated to the development of morality and *patriarchal* social organisation: "With the introduction of father-deities a fatherless society gradually changed into one organised on a patriarchal basis" (1913b: 149).

In tracing the emergence of religion to later agricultural development, Freud employs the metaphor of the male incestuous libido harnessed to cultivate "Mother Earth." He notes that ancient myths frequently depict the favours bestowed by mother-goddesses on youths who defy the father by committing incest with the mother. Freud admits: "But the sense of guilt... found expression in myths which granted only short lives to these youthful favourites of the mother-goddesses and decreed their punishment by emasculation" (1913b: 152). This portrait of divine maternal power and aggression, perhaps, marks the initiation of Freud's notion that women and the feminine are hostile to civilisation and culture.

Contradictory themes of love and aggression and life and death residing in the mother-goddesses emerge here, arguably denoting a subversion of Freud's Oedipal

emphasis. Although he seems confused about how to integrate the mother-goddess into his theory of the emergence of patriarchal civilisation, Freud surprisingly affords her central place in another essay, "The Theme of the Three Caskets" (1913a). Though focusing on the goddesses of Greek myth, he includes reference to images of the great mother-goddesses of Eastern religious tradition with regard to their paradoxical attributes: "The great Mother-goddesses of the oriental peoples, however, all seem to have been both creators and destroyers - both goddesses of life and fertility and goddesses of death" (1913a: 299). Still more surprisingly, in continuing his interpretation of the meaning of the three caskets in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Freud draws out an analogous theme of life, love, and death in the role of the mother in a man's life: "they are the three forms taken by the figure of the mother in the course of a man's life - the mother herself, the beloved one who is chosen after her pattern, and lastly the Mother Earth who receives him once more" (1913a: 301).⁸ As noted by Diane Jonte-Pace, this text transforms the mother into death itself and her "embrace is simultaneously nurturant, erotic, and deadly," thus pointing to the ambiguous human longing for and fear of death that is inextricably intertwined with a longing for and misogynist fear of the mother (1996: 76-77). But in spite of his acknowledgement and confusion concerning the mother-goddesses in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud concludes that the origins of culture, religion, morals, society, and art all converge in the Oedipus complex and the dynamic relationship between fathers and sons. In terms of religion, therefore, there is only space for "God the Father."

⁸ Sprengnether (1990: 121-4) pays particular attention to the significance of this surprising turn in Freud's approach to the mother-goddess and the human mother, as does Jonte-Pace (1996). How this contributes to subversion of Freud's Oedipal master thesis will be revisited in depth in Chapter Six.

Freud's Gendered Theory of Religion

Two of Freud's later and somewhat pessimistic works, *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) and *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930), build on his originary theory and offer further clues to his thinking on the creation of culture. *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) stresses the notion of man's control over nature (here, I join Freud in using the term "man" as it becomes quite clear that he is referring to *male* creation of patriarchy), proposing that every civilisation is built on coercion and renunciation of instinct and wish. Continuing his evolutionary approach, where prohibitions and moral restrictions are required to triumph over instinctual desires, Freud rests his argument on man's task to defend humanity against the exigencies of nature: "She [nature] destroys us - coldly, cruelly, relentlessly, as it seems to us, through the very things that occasioned our satisfaction" (1927: 15).

Nature, personified as female, not only lacks moral restraint and would allow us to destroy ourselves through unrestricted desire, but is also associated with aggression, cruelty, and the "painful riddle of death" (1927: 15). Do we again detect the theme of the power and subjectivity of the feminine residing in maternal aggression and desire as portrayed in the agricultural mother-goddess myths? It appears to be so. Clearly, the psychoanalytic model of the maternal body as the site of both life and death is reiterated in the images of the mother-goddess. Furthermore, these oppositions of nurture and aggression, love and hate, life and death underpin the association of the feminine with the body, nature, and materiality.

However, just as the helpless child turns to the father in Freud's psychoanalytic account, adults, in their human helplessness, turn to the gods. The indulgent mother, first love-object and embodiment of protective care, is soon replaced by the stronger

father who is both feared and admired. The origins of religion reside in this appeal to authority and power, where the individual "lends those powers the features belonging to the figure of the father" (1927: 24). We create gods, says Freud, out of the illusions derived from human wishes. Religion, we must conclude, represents wish fulfilment and illusion, symbolised in the prototype of the infant at the mother's breast. It is therefore dysfunctional, "because in offering substitute satisfactions it inhibits the development of realistic means of engaging life's difficulties" (DiCenso, 1994: 47). For Freud, only masculine intellect, reason, and science can conquer the illusory beliefs of religion and further the process of civilisation. Recalling the parallel path of individual human progress, he concludes: "The path from the infant at the breast to the civilised man is a long one," one, we can only assume, that would be facilitated by psychoanalysis, rather than religion (1927: 51).

Nonetheless, Freud acknowledges, sadly, that men and science have not succeeded in the pursuit of the ideal. In *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930), which is fundamentally a critique of western society and its failure to fulfil humanity's desire for happiness, Freud traces the correlation between the process of civilisation and the libidinal development of the individual, highlighting the unavoidable tension between the pleasure principle and avoidance of pain. On the level of culture, pleasure is associated with the "oceanic" feeling of limitlessness and connection with the universe, often linked with religious feeling. Despite the pain of renunciation and the restrictions of control, the individual can only hope to join the human community by joining "the attack against nature and subjecting *her* to the human will" (1930: 77; my emphasis). It is the attainment of civilisation, Freud declares, that at least distinguishes us from animals and protects us against nature.

In the same text Freud makes his association between the disorder and danger of nature and the feminine even more explicit, extending it to the conclusion that women are hostile to culture:

Furthermore, women soon come into opposition to civilisation and display their retarding and restraining influence - those very women who, in the beginning, laid the foundations of civilisation by the claims of their love. Women represent the interests of the family and of sexual life. The work of civilisation has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable... the woman finds herself forced into the background by the claims of civilisation and she adopts a hostile attitude towards it.

(1930: 103)

Individual development relies on guilt that "springs from the Oedipus complex," fear of punishment from the father, and the emergence of the superego and the exigencies of the conscience. So it is with the group, where civilisation is founded on the guilt from the originary "killing of the father by the brothers banded together" (1930: 131). Freud argues, therefore, that the price we pay for advancement in civilisation is the loss of happiness elicited by an unending sense of guilt - arguably, a collective superego which, in its full development, is the province of the masculine. Religion, Freud concludes, promises redemption from this guilt. This, surely, represents a return to instinctual desire and the illusion of wish-fulfilment symbolised

in the mother-infant bond and later passive dependence on the father - the province of the feminine to be passed through and left behind.

In *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) Freud draws out the theme of *Totem and Taboo* more fully to explain the development of patriarchal religion. It is in this work that he grapples at length with matriarchy and "mother-right," which appears at once a fascinating and thorny problem to Freud in his critique of religion.⁹ His difficulties with situating matriarchy and accounting for the power of mother-right, and the shift to father-right, are nevertheless avoided by the insistence on renunciation of instinctual desires and wish fulfilment. Once again, we are pushed onward to the province of the masculine and the triumph of the paternal principle over nature.

Polarisation and Paradox

Briefly, to sum up, Freud's theorising on the evolution of culture arguably corresponds with aspects of his psychoanalytic theory of individual development and gender, where nature, or mother, has to be subdued and wish fulfilment renounced. I would argue that he idealises and, indeed, sacralises femininity (as he does the mother), by defining nature as feminine (or mother) and associating it with human religious feeling. But an earlier contradiction is replicated here in his works on culture and religion, for Freud simultaneously expresses doubts about the existence of "oceanic feelings" and unequivocally dismisses mysticism as an experiential reality. In *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930: 72-7) Freud explains the alleged experience of

⁹ See Sprengnether (1990: 107-14) for a critical analysis of the thread of Freud's argument in *Moses and Monotheism*. Despite Freud's unshakeable privileging of the cultural transcendence of patriarchy, or of the Oedipal phase over the preoedipal, she rightly, I think, suspects that "The fact that Freud engages with the issues of matriarchy to the extent he does betrays his attraction to these ideas" (p. 113).

oceanic feelings by arguing that they are associated with early childhood desire for "limitless narcissism" that can be traced back to infantile helplessness. Later, these feelings simply provide "religious consolation" for loss and suffering. Of interest here, in relation to Freud's clearly reductive definition of religious experience as regressive and neurotic, is transpersonal psychologist Ken Wilber's critique of what he calls the "pre/trans fallacy" (Wilber, 1982a; 1982b). Wilber's research points to theoretical confusion embedded in western psychology, anthropology, and sociology between the prepersonal (or prerational) neonatal state of subject and object unity and the transpersonal (or transrational) state of unity, that is, the ultimate mystical experience of non-duality. Wilber argues that either the reduction of the transpersonal to the prepersonal, or the elevation of the prepersonal to the transpersonal, "appears to be a major psychological and philosophical fallacy" (1982b: 5). He therefore draws on western philosophy (mainly Hegel) and eastern spiritual philosophy (mainly Aurobindo) to identify and explain influences of this fallacy found in the social sciences, giving particular attention to Freud's theory of religion.

The infant, says Wilber, is in a state of unconscious, prepersonal "cosmic consciousness" or primary wholeness that has to progress to a conscious, personal, and egoic state, experienced as separation from the other, and then, finally, to the ultimate, conscious, and transpersonal union of self and other that is spiritually whole and blissful. Therefore, the nature of religious experience and spiritual enlightenment is not equivalent to the recovery of an initial, unconscious *transpersonal* state; rather, the neonatal experience of fusion is *prepersonal*, a state where the infant cannot distinguish its body from that of its environment, most particularly, the body of its mother (Wilber, 1982b: 24). According to Wilber, this is a level that has to be left

behind for attainment of the personal level of rationality - in Freudian terms, only accessible through negotiation of the Oedipus complex - and then, ultimately, to the conscious, transpersonal state of union with the divine, or "cosmic consciousness."

The human desire to return to a state of neonatal fusion that many psychologists, especially Freud, have correctly identified as regression, has nothing at all to do with human aspiration for transpersonal spiritual wholeness; instead, it has everything to do with "the pull of regression and narcissistic self-absorption, a regressive pull that must be successfully overcome in order for higher development to occur" (Wilber, 1982a: 76). Freud, argues Wilber, was therefore right in his view that desire to return to the preoedipal stage of union is a form of neurosis. However, his theory still involves a type of pre/trans fallacy, Wilber insists, in its reduction of the transpersonal to the prepersonal and its definition of the alleged "oceanic feelings" of religious experience as equivalent to the prepersonal, as nothing more than neurotic desire to return to the "limitless narcissism" of the neonatal state (Wilber, 1982b: 13). Freud's mistake, in terms of Wilber's critique, was his perception of human rationality as the highest level available to the human being, thus denying human potential for attaining a *transpersonal* state beyond the personal and the rational. Freud, according to Wilber, only tells half the story of human development.

Wilber has a point in successfully identifying the weaknesses in Freud's dismissive theory of religion and he also broadens the limited Freudian vision for human development of the self. However, his critical theory tends to replicate Freud's gendering of religion by implying an equally dismissive perception of a lower level of human evolution and personal development located in the feminine, maternal space of the preoedipal dyad: "what the infant is basically one with, or fused with, is just the

material environment and the biological mother... no levels higher than those enter this primitive fusion state" (Wilber, 1982b: 24). For Freud, this state is the illusion of religious experience; for Wilber, it is not associated with religion or spirituality at all. From either point of view, the preoedipal dyad between mother and infant marks a stage to be rejected and left behind, from which nothing of value can be created or learned.

In Freud's theory of religion, insinuations of human spirituality are diminished by defining religion as collective and universal obsessional neurosis that is analogous to the child's fear and reverence for the father (1927: 41). Furthermore, the contradiction of maternal power and aggression is also replicated on a macrocosmic scale, since nature is characterised as destructive and hostile to "man," and women as hostile to the development of society and culture. If we recall that Freud defined women's aggression as self-destructive and masochistic, perhaps it would not be going too far to suggest that Freud's description of nature as feminine and destructive implies the natural world's force and power turned in on itself. Wilber, too, develops a macrocosmic conception of the divine feminine in his text *Up From Eden* (1983), one that invokes contradictory images of the feminine and insinuations of maternal power and aggression that are couched in an overarching evolutionary theory of human consciousness. He theorizes that the collective consciousness of humankind is progressing on an evolutionary journey from the slumbering subconscious to the awakened superconscious. In the current age, he argues, "the ego is perched midway between total slumber in the subconscious and total enlightenment in the superconscious, and for this reason alone is the most distressful period of all," stranded as we are between the bliss of total ignorance and the bliss of awakened

spiritual consciousness (1983: 11). This universal sequence, "The Great Chain of Being," in Wilber's terminology, moves through a hierarchical scale of matter to body, body to mind, mind to soul, and soul to spirit. On the microcosmic level of the individual human being, this sequence is reproduced in the ego's spiritual journey in search of the divine "other," progressing from ignorance and unconsciousness towards the ultimate enlightened superconscious state of wholeness, where there is no "other" (1983: 1-11).

Wilber's "Great Chain of Being" undoubtedly has ramifications for symbolic interpretations of the feminine, and even more definitively, for the maternal, articulated in an evolutionary analysis of the history of the Goddess in religion. Here, Wilber makes a distinction between the "Great Mother" of the archaic world and the emergence of the "Great Goddess" in later religious traditions; he argues that these are two completely different figures representing two different levels of consciousness on the evolutionary scale of the "Great Chain of Being." The Great Mother is typified as "a simple biological nourisher and fertility token, magically blown up to cosmic proportions," while the Great Goddess symbolizes a "subtle Oneness of actual Transcendence, representative of true Divinity" (1983: 134). The Great Mother represents biological birth, embodiment, nurturing, protection, and even aggression and destruction (death), and she is associated with exoteric symbols and rituals; the Great Goddess, however, represents mysticism, spirituality, and transcendence and is associated with esoteric symbols and rituals. In the larger context of Wilber's evolutionary perspective of humanity, the "Great Mother," as a macrocosmic maternal symbol, represents a "primitive" (preoedipal?) stage of human spiritual evolution that has to be left behind for a different, more spiritual and transcendent symbol of the

divine feminine, the "Great Goddess." Once again, as in Freudian theory, polarisation of the symbolic feminine and the mother is perpetuated. However, although the maternal body (the Great Mother) is deemed inferior to the spiritual and transcendent (the Great Goddess), Wilber, at least, affords a place to one form of the divine feminine - if a disembodied form - on the spiritual level of human consciousness. For Freud, though, the "masculine ideal" - or rationality, intellect, and scientific "truth" - remains the highest goal of human aspiration.

Nonetheless, Freud sets out to resolve the contradictions implicit in the polarisation of the feminine through use of a unitary androcentric framework within which the development of patriarchal civilisation can be explained. Revisiting Van Herik's link between Freud's theories of gender and religion in *Freud, Femininity and Faith* (1982), it is pointed out that his vision of ideal human development and *masculine* development coincide: "renunciation of wishes are seen as the source of higher... mental and cultural achievements... Conversely, Freud sees fulfilment of wishes as mitigating against such achievements" (1982: 5). The achievement of masculinity and healthy human psychosexual development are both defined as the essential *renunciation* of attachments - renunciation, first, of attachment to the mother, and ultimately, transcending reliance on and idealisation of the father. Femininity, on the other hand, is associated with instinctual desire and *wish fulfilment*, symbolised in the idealised preoedipal dyad of mother and child.

It is religion that Freud indicts as the ultimate example of wish fulfilment and dependence on the father's protection which, in short, coincides with Freud's account of femininity as the passive quality of dependence on the father. Religion is based on the individual's "personal relation to God" which in turn depends on "his relation to

his father," ultimately arguing that "at bottom God is nothing other than an exalted father" (1913b: 147). Resolution of desire for the mother and of the Oedipus complex and renunciation of dependence on the father, or God - in other words, the repudiation of femininity - is therefore essential for the progress of culture on the larger scale, as well as for individual actualisation.

In Freud's view, I would argue, successful social and moral development and individuation depends on a process of moving beyond feminine passivity and beyond fear and idealisation of the father - in a sense, to the point of *becoming* the father. Van Herik explains it as "a hierarchical typology of psychical positions toward the divine father, which correspond to the mental father, those of femininity, ordinary masculinity, and ideal masculinity" (1982: 193) - the ultimate "ideal masculinity," to my understanding, meaning when the individual takes the place of the father. If so, I would further argue that such an ideal of a consummate development of the superego (the internalised "father"), whose moral and social constituents fulfil an independent and active (phallic) masculinity, is denied to women - or, at least, to women who fulfil the expectations of "normal," passive, heterosexual womanhood. Likewise, according to Freud, for human civilisation and culture to progress beyond collective neurosis, it has to abandon religion and a "feminine" dependence on God.

In a context of interweaving his psychology of religion and theory of gender, Van Herik brings to our notice that Freud nonetheless makes a distinction between Mosaic monotheism (or Judaism) and Christianity. A hierarchical structure is defined as follows: Christianity echoes mental femininity and wish fulfilment, in other words, the naive belief in a father-god - it is, in Freud's view, a regression from Judaism; then, at a higher level, Mosaic monotheism represents a renunciatory religion, a *masculine*

renunciation of wish that progresses to a covenant with the father-god, akin to the development of the superego and "normal masculinity"; but, "renunciation for internal reasons are the source of intellectual, cultural, and ethical advances, but they are still dominated by paternally directed emotion" and so, finally, the only hope for future civilisation (beyond illusion and suffering) lies in a post-religious, rational, and scientific paradigm (Van Herik: 1982: 196). This autonomous scientific and cultural ideal is analogous to the "masculine ideal" where the Oedipus complex is dissolved and the superego has become entirely independent of paternal influence and control.

Even if it could be argued that the Freudian father, in any event, is purely symbolic, a metaphor for the independent and fully developed individual (male or female), the whole developmental process depends on androcentric interpretation and masculine symbols. In Van Herik's words, "at the highest level of the hierarchy, Freud places, not the father or God, but the masculine ideal" (1982: 197). In these terms, it has to be asked once more, where and how can women's psychology and subjectivity be produced and rendered visible, at the levels of both individual psychosexual development and the creation of society and culture, not to mention the human project of religion?

To draw some conclusions from the above analyses of Freud's theories of individual psychosexual development, as well as of the development of culture and religion, I return specifically to the mother as the fundamental theme of this thesis. Within that context, it may be argued, Freud interprets the mother in spatial terms as the embodied fulfilment of instinct and object of desire, located in the wider space of motherhood and the preoedipal relationship between mother and infant. Although the mother is implicitly produced as a sacred space embodying plenitude and wish

fulfilment, desire to remain in this space has to be renounced (in different ways by both girls and boys) by rejecting the mother, or femininity, in favour of dealing with the complex emotions and desires of the Oedipus complex and relations with the father. Therefore, I conclude that this sacred space of the mother is contested and polarised: on the one hand, she represents fulfilment, safety, and the embodiment of love; on the other, she becomes denigrated for being passive and engulfing, even dangerous - a symbol of castration and an impediment to the achievement of individuality: For a boy in his negotiation of the Oedipus and castration complexes, the repudiation of femininity, and the achievement of independent, active masculinity alongside the father; for a girl, in her turning away from her mother towards her father as she makes her way on the path to "normal" womanhood. Yet another polarisation, most problematic for Freud, is that of the mother as object and subject: passive object of her infant's (especially the son's) libidinal desires, but also - and here lies the problem that, according to Sprengnether, Freud struggles to suppress - as active subject or agent of aggression, power, and seduction. Again, the idealised, even sacred space of motherhood is threatened by a "dangerous" mother.

Likewise, on the level of culture, the mother is identified with nature and religious feeling (symbolically embodied in earlier matriarchies and the mother-goddesses of ancient myths), arguably providing a macrocosmic analogy for the maternal body and sacred space associated with fulfilment of instinctual desire. Nature, as feminine and goddess, is nurturing and fulfilling - "Mother Earth." "She," too, has to be rejected in favour of an Oedipal paradigm of struggle against nature and instinct that gives rise to masculinist constructions of social organisation and moral

restrictions underpinned by rationality and scientific reason. Religious feeling, according to Freud, signifies femininity and passive dependence on a father-god.

But nature and the mother-goddess, too, are actively dangerous: Nature is tempestuous, powerful, and overtly hostile to human control and civilisation; and the mother-goddesses of ancient mythologies, both "western" and "eastern," embody not only the fertile earth, life, nurturing, and wish fulfilment, but also violence and death. For Freud, in the end, both the mother and the mother-goddess are hostile to culture and represent the locus of death - the "earth" to which we all return. Finally, however, I would argue that in Freud's theories of psychoanalysis and cultural development, the power and subjectivity of the preoedipal mother (in terms of socialisation and psychological development of the individual) and of matriarchy and the mother-goddesses (in terms of the creation of society and culture) are diminished and suppressed.

CHAPTER FOUR: POST-FREUDIAN INTERVENTIONS

In this chapter, the theme of psychoanalytic characterisations of the mother and motherhood, in the context of both individual psychological development and the creation of culture and religion, will be further pursued. Two major developments in post-Freudian psychoanalysis will be the focus for arguing that the figure of the mother remains a sacred but polarised space: first, Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory and second, D.W. Winnicott's object relations theory.

4.1 LACANIAN THEORY

Post-Freudian psychoanalysis cannot be fully explored without considering the work of Jacques Lacan, whose theory adheres to Freud's positioning of the Oedipus complex as central to human development and culture. Although my discussion will be a relatively brief and simplified account of Lacan's highly complex and abstruse analysis of the human psyche and society, I intend to highlight the significance of its interpretations of gender and femininity which are relevant to the context of this thesis. Lacanian theory has, in fact, been appropriated as an essential point of departure for the work of French feminist writers such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, whose ideas have profoundly significant insights for identifying and interpreting sacred images of the mother.

Although loyal to Freud's emphasis on the Oedipus and castration complexes in his psychoanalytic theory, Lacan diverges from the biological foundation of Freudian psychosexual development. His work is contextualized in a phallogocentric and logocentric paradigm that traces human psychological development through the

Oedipus and castration complexes as a symbolic process driven by the intervention of language and metaphor - the "paternal law." It is the symbolic "Father," as metaphor for the primordial word, his "*non*" to incest, that symbolises the origin of language, desire, and culture.

Subjectivity

Subjectivity, sexuality, and language are fundamental and interrelating constituents of Lacanian theory, where language plays the pivotal role. Lacan's subject not only implies the existence of a "speaking subject," but it is also constituted through and in language. Furthermore, within that realm of language, or the Symbolic register, the subject takes up a sexualised position that inaugurates a socially determined gender identity (Grosz, 1990: 148-9). Although rooted in language rather than anatomy, the link forged by Freud between sexuality and the unconscious is consistently stressed in Lacan's theory. His theory of the subject is unequivocally founded on "Freud's most fundamental discovery - that the unconscious never ceases to challenge our apparent identity as subjects" (Mitchell and Rose, 1985: 30).

For Lacan, therefore, the subject is not a stable and sustained entity, since it is both the subject *of* speech and subject *to* speech. The "I" with which we speak language continually changes meaning and shifts places, "since its meaning is purely a function of the moment of utterance" and "it only ever refers to whoever happens to be using it at the time" (Mitchell and Rose, 1985: 31). But yet another problem concerning the definition of the subject in language confronts us: Language only operates by designating an object in its absence, so that a sense of loss is inherent in speaking the pronoun "I" to symbolise the subject. According to Lacan, a child only

begins to symbolise when it first becomes aware of the potential absence of an object, more specifically, the presence and absence of (m)other as a separate being. Consequently, the infant's emerging sense of itself as subject is predicated on its first experiences of division between self and others - a "splitting" that is eternally repeated: "The subject is therefore constituted in language as this division or splitting" (Mitchell and Rose, 1985: 31). But before moving on to further exploration of the production of the human subject, it is necessary to look at Lacan's topography of human reality. The concepts involved are fundamental to his account of psychological development during which the child takes up a sexualised position in the family and society into which he or she is born.

The Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real

Lacan's map of the human psyche and culture is essential to his psychoanalytic theory and comprises three "registers" - The Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real - which "describe modes of psychological organisation and orientation that shape the presentation of reality and are reflected in and reinforced by culture" (DiCenso, 1994: 49). These registers are therefore copresent and interdependent within the individual psyche, but they also constitute a developmental paradigm in which movement from the predominance of the Imaginary to the Symbolic mode - through the mirror stage - is effected (DiCenso, 1994: 50). It is in terms of these registers that the subject is defined and his or her various relationships with the external world are signified. The Imaginary points to a prelinguistic and presymbolic state of being based on "phantasy, misrecognition, and confusion of self and other" (Elliot, 1991: 79, n.15). Developmentally, the Imaginary is associated with the preoedipal period and

the mother-infant dyad, which proceeds to experience of separation through the infant's fantasy of its "specular ego" evoked in the mirror stage. The Imaginary extends to impinge on adult experience of others and the external world, as a consequence of infantile experience of the "ideal ego" - a narcissistic omnipotence mistaken for a coherent subject (Sarup, 1992: 101-3). In Freud's terms, Lacan's Imaginary is associated with the ego, whose function, according to Lacanian theory, is misrecognition. The "ego" is confined to the Imaginary order and is quite different from the agency of Lacan's conception of the subject, which is constructed through language in the Symbolic order.

It is the Symbolic register that remains central to Lacan's theory in that it allows the construction of human identity and participation in society. As the realm of language, symbolic systems, and creation of culture, through which the human subject is constituted, the Symbolic represents an area of intersubjectivity and social relations where that subject can articulate desires and feelings (Sarup, 1992: 84; 103). In Freudian terms, Lacan's Symbolic is associated with the social and moral exigencies of the superego.

The Imaginary and Symbolic, similar to Freud's ego and superego, interact in individual human life and society, but the Real lies outside both those registers, extending beyond language, symbolisation, and subjectivity. The Real does not refer to reality, in the sense of our "normal" experience of reality in society but, to the contrary, "is associated with the sudden, the disconcerting and the unpredictable" (Sarup, 1992: 104). It is also akin to the drives of the Freudian id, associated with the natural order and death, with primordial times, and with the mother - before, even, the emergence of imaginary relations and the birth of the subject. As Rosalind Minsky

describes it, the Real "includes the pre-Imaginary moment of excess and impossible plenitude to which both the Imaginary and Desire refer" (1996: 147). It implies a territory belonging to the unknown and impossible that exceeds and encompasses the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders and the subject's experience of fantasy and reality. The Real thus implies the space where experiences that are impossible to symbolise and integrate into reality occur - those belonging to the drives and the unconscious - experiences of trauma, of the ineffable, the numinous, and the mystical (DiCenso, 1994: 49).

The Development of the Subject, Sexuality, and Gender Identity

In terms of Lacan's developmental thought, the child develops sequentially through the Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic orders. Although the human subject is constructed through language in the Symbolic order, subjectivity begins to emerge, in a rudimentary form, before the speaking of language. This is initiated within the preoedipal period, associated with the Imaginary and relationship with the mother. But first, the infant is born into the register of the Real, "an anatomical, 'natural' order... a pure plenitude or fullness" (Grosz, 1990: 34). The infant is in a state of bodily fragmentation and uncoordination in which it is completely unaware of any corporeal boundaries between itself and its environment. A state of fusion and unity with its mother constitutes the infant's early experience of life and is associated with Lacan's conception of need. Closely linked with the universal instincts for survival, need for objects that ensure the well-being of the individual remain throughout life. But at this early stage, need is associated with the infant's unity with the mother and

the unmitigated provision of care and sustenance for its survival and satisfaction (Grosz, 1990: 59-60).

Then, a new consciousness of self begins to dawn with the onset of the "mirror stage" initiated by the child's pivotal moment of recognition of absence (Grosz, 1990: 34). Between six and eighteen months the child proceeds through the "mirror phase," where "one becomes oneself because one is no longer the same as one's mother" (Sarup, 1992: 62). Lacan proposes that "the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores it, in the universal, its function as subject"; he further emphasises that this phase "situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction" (Lacan, 1977a: 2). The mirror stage, therefore, designates the infant's initial formation of the ego as an "imaginary gestalt," a mistaken experience of wholeness that, in reality, is non-existent (DiCenso, 1994: 50).

The infant's construction of ego is consequently founded on a series of false connections which, according to Lacan, demonstrate the central function of the ego as "misrecognition" (*meconnaissance*). Old enough to recognise others, usually the mother and father, as separate entities from itself, the infant is nonetheless still vulnerable and lacking control over and coordination of bodily parts and movement. When the joyful moments of recognition of its own image in the mirror occur, along with apparent mastery over its reflected body and movement, the infant begins to perceive a coherent form over which it has control. This generates an experience of self as a unified subject; but, being able to see others in the immediate environment, the infant also comprehends itself as a discrete being, separate and different from the other: "This is the action upon which all subjectivity is based, the moment in which

the human individual is born" (Sarup, 1992: 64). Contradicting this experience of subjectivity, however, Lacan insists that the perceived self is a false image, an external reflection of an uncoordinated and unintegrated being that is frozen in an artificial mirror-image of apparent stability and wholeness:

The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation - and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic - and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. (Lacan, 1977a: 4)

The birth of the subject is therefore founded on a recognition of the body as a discrete entity which is spatially oriented, but which, in reality, signifies a misrecognition, a mistaken image that heralds life-long effects. Moreover, the initial experience of "I" signifies separation (from (m)other) and "the ego, a product of misrecognition, is thus founded on a split in being that can never be healed" (Sprengnether, 1990: 184).

The progression from the Real to the Imaginary and Symbolic also coincides with need transforming into demand, where needs are articulated by the child and addressed to another for fulfilment. Although the infant's mirror-image represents a mistaken experience of a visual *gestalt*, it simultaneously "provides the ground for the *ego ideal*, the image of the ego, derived from others, which the ego strives to achieve or live up to" (Grosz, 1990: 48). This experience of split, it seems, stays with the

individual even after the oedipal moment when the father's word offers entry into the Symbolic. On this primordial experience of loss, separation, and lack rests Lacan's notion of desire, as that, says Sarup, "which goes beyond demand and conveys the subject's wish for totality" and which "can never be fulfilled" (Sarup, 1992: 36). Desire, thus construed as ubiquitous and insatiable, consistently underpins Lacan's account of sexuality, and its differentiation, as produced in the Symbolic order.

To move onwards in Lacan's narrative of the subject's development, the Oedipus and castration complexes (and the role of desire in that context) become crucial for entry into the Symbolic. The preoedipal mother-infant relationship is of little significance in Lacan's account of both the individual and society. Even while still in the domain of the Imaginary, it is *separation* from the (m)other, through the infant's negotiation of the mirror stage, that is of prime significance in the individual's experience. For Lacan, following the structuralist anthropology of Lévi-Strauss, culture is always and inevitably patriarchal.¹ Presenting a different interpretation of the Oedipus and castration complexes from Freud, Lacan argues that subjectivity and sexuality are socially produced, and are "not the effects of nature or development" (Sarup, 1992: 122). He adheres, nevertheless, to Freud's centrality of the Oedipus and castration complexes, inasmuch as the figure of the father serves to separate the child from the mother. But for Lacan, the Oedipus complex is a linguistically constructed

¹ See Marcelle Marini's *Jacques Lacan: The French Context* (1992: 45-6) for an account of how Lacan relies on the structuralist theory of anthropologist, Lévi-Strauss. Lacan's Symbolic is analogous to the ordering function of culture that allows humankind to transcend nature. The cultural order is inscribed in language through the paternal law and the "name of the father," beginning with the prohibition of incest and the ordering of social relations. This refers to the structuring of kinship and the family, based on defining the difference between the sexes and generations, which is accomplished through marriage and the exchange of women. The role of the cultural order, in Lévi-Strauss's structuralist theory, therefore, is equivalent to the essential role of the Oedipus complex in Lacan's psychoanalysis.

"paternal metaphor," which represents the symbolic father's prohibition of incest. The process is not, therefore, dependent on the presence of the real father; or, as Teresa Brennan puts it, "Lacan's main point is simply that language will do the father's job: it establishes distance from, and the distinctness of, the other" (1992: 228). In other words, transition into the Symbolic is encoded in language as the "Law of the Father" to which the child submits, recognising that "the father embodies the power of the phallus and the threat of castration" (Sarup, 1992: 122).

Not only does the Law of the Father serve a symbolic function, but so, too, does the phallus. The phallus, according to Lacanian psychoanalysis, is *not* the penis. The symbolic phallus intervenes to separate child from mother and serves to subjugate both boys and girls. The phallus is the primary signifier of desire, since both males and females desire it and are, according to Lacan, equally without it: For girls it signifies an awareness of lack which precipitates "penis-envy"; and for boys, who desire to represent it and accede to its power, it signifies the impossibility of his desire to supplant the father's powerful position and forge relations with the mother. As Sarup sums up: "All sexuality is created in this lack, leaving male and female as partial beings full of desire... the phallus represents the human predicament that desire is always unattainable, it is that which has been lost and never can be found" (1992: 123).

Gender differentiation, Feminine Sexuality, and the "Other"

Awareness of this lack and different relations to the phallus serve to organise the sexes around the linguistic terms "masculine" and "feminine," where each takes up a position as either male or female. However, even though Lacan insists that both man

and woman are castrated by the effects of language and lack of the father's phallus, it is questionable whether the term "phallus" as "universal signifier" signifies the same reality for women as it does for men. In terms of the reality of the embodied subject, as Brennan points out, it is the "visual anatomical difference" between the mother and father that is initially recognised (Brennan, 1992: 72). It is therefore the male penis, as *visual* signifier of difference that separates the child from its mother and signifies lack of the original omnipotence experienced by the infant in its preoedipal fusion with the mother. It must consequently be easier for the boy to recognise his obvious anatomical difference from his mother, simply because of his possession of a penis. By the same token, the girl, therefore, "lacks this means of representing 'lack'" and so, according to Lacan's psychoanalytic interpretation, is more vulnerable "to psychosis at worst, and narcissism at best" (Brennan, 1992: 73). Therefore, I would suggest that in spite of Lacan's rendition of the symbolic phallus as the linguistic signifier of difference and lack, his interpretation in fact follows the logic of Freud's biological determinism, in which the girl, who lacks the penis, also lacks development of the superego, because of the "fact" of her castration and her resultant "penis envy."

Furthermore, with regard to women's lived reality in the wider context of society and culture, Jane Flax makes the incisive observation that "culture *is* masculine, not as the effect of language but as the consequence of actual power relations to which men have far more access than women" (1990: 103). It is, according to Lacan, the *father's* phallus - no matter how metaphoric the terms "father" and "phallus" might be - that is the mark of difference separating the infant from an incestuous relationship with the mother, and which thus allows her or him to enter the symbolic system of language and social relations. But it is a system that

belongs to and can only be accessed through the framework of a patriarchal society, because, again, it is the *father's* phallus that separates the child from the mother and thus signifies difference, separation, and desire.

In any event, it is this desire for the (m)other, predicated in the Symbolic order - or, more accurately, desire to be the object of the (m)other's desire, which underpins all desires - that becomes Lacan's Other (capitalised). The subjectivity of both males and females is based on this unrequitable desire initiated by the intervention of language through the metaphor of the "paternal law" and the phallus. In short, both sexes are constructed through language, which is masculine, and neither sex can fulfil the other's desire. As Lacan insists, the Other always intervenes between the subject and the other and, therefore, there is no sexual relation or complementary relation between male and female (Sarup, 1992: 129).

The Other is our fantasy of an all-fulfilling repository of knowledge and wholeness, which, in reality, is founded on loss and lack, signifying desires that cannot be fulfilled. These desires are inevitably repressed in the unconscious, indicating that the subject's encounter with the Other is originally and primarily situated within the subject himself or herself, whose very being is based on a split between the conscious and unconscious. In Lacan's terms, the discourse of the Other is situated in the unconscious, the locus of lack and desire - in fact, the Other *is* the unconscious. Although the Symbolic affords the subject entry into language and intersubjective relations, it is the subject's intra-subjective encounters with the Other that underpin those relations. However, I would argue that Freud's construction of the unconscious and levels of repression are essential to understanding how Lacan diverged from

Freud's fundamentally neurological model to a linguistic structure of the unconscious in which the Other is constructed.

Freud's model of the human psyche fundamentally consists in a neurological topography - that is, the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious - wherein the boundaries between these levels of the psyche are guarded by a form of "censorship" that captures and holds repressed material in the unconscious (Brennan, 1992: 20). Perceptions pass through complex sensory impingements, neuronal pathways, and memory systems, which are then translated into psychical terms and registered unconsciously; only then, if any perception passes through the barriers imposed by the "censor," is it able to slip, with relative ease, into the conscious (Grosz, 1990: 83-86). In parallel with this spatial rendition of the psyche, a second topography - that of the superego, ego, and id - is proposed by Freud, in which the id, on the one hand, is constituted by repressed drives that are motivated by the pleasure principle; the superego, on the other hand, provides the locus for repression, conscience, and restraint; and in between the two, the ego's role is to balance and execute the demands of both (Brennan, 1992: 20). The ego and superego, together, represent the reality principle, performing the role of censor and maintaining the barriers between the unconscious and the conscious.

The activity of repression, therefore, is central to Freud's explication of the unconscious: "the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious" (in Brennan, 1992: 121). The unconscious, according to Freud, comprises repressed material and the bulk of that material, according to both Freud and Lacan, is to do with sexuality. But the material that makes up the unconscious is not an homogeneous blend of uniform ideas, for

Freud refers to three different levels of repression, the first being the "primal repressed," or primitive, infantile ideas that are captured in the unconscious and there become static "fixations" (Brennan, 1992: 121). However, in the very beginning of human psychical development, in the preoedipal stage of mother-infant fusion, there is no barrier of repression or distinction between the unconscious and the conscious. From Freud's perspective, only with the resolution of the Oedipus complex and the development of the ego does the superego intervene and repress the primal, forbidden desire for the mother to the unconscious. Primal repression, then, is mainly concerned with sexuality and consists in a primary infantile nucleus of key memory traces and wishes connected with the original desire for the mother (Grosz, 1990: 82-83). Later repressions, born out of a more developed system of the ego - that is, the second stage, which Freud referred to as "repression proper" - are those perceptual traces and experiences that are attracted by the primal, and sexual, infantile impressions.

The third stage, which Freud referred to as "the return of the repressed" looks to the usually disguised expression and transfer of repressed ideas from the unconscious into consciousness (Brennan, 1992: 122). Impulses barred from the preconscious, and thus to the conscious, constantly strive to rise to consciousness, driven by the unflagging energy of the pleasure principle which pushes against the injunctions of the reality principle. Here, Freud emphasises the importance of dream analysis, for "in sleep, the supervising activities of the censor can be relaxed to the extent that the subject is asleep and the wish is thereby denied access to conscious motility" (Grosz, 1990: 86). The visual images of dreams, according to Freudian analysis, are produced by the mechanisms of condensation and displacement, which are pivotal to the return of the repressed in dream life. In short, condensation

compresses many wishes and ideas into one, composite visual image, by combining common features and eliminating differences. Displacement acts by tempering the intensity of an unconscious desire by delegating it to an indifferent term. Together, these mechanisms effect a compromise of modified pleasurable experience, symbolically enacted in the visual images of dreams that provide expedient substitutes for the actual repressed wishes (Grosz, 1990: 87-89). The return of the repressed manifests not only in the visual images of dreams, but also through subversive and disrupted linguistic expressions, such as slips of the tongue - expressions of the repressed that can be encouraged to emerge through the technique of free association in psychoanalysis. It is this Freudian technique that can lead the analysand back to the repressed idea or desire (Brennan, 1992: 123).

Guided by Freud's model of the psyche and the unconscious, and the levels of repression through which wishes have to strive for conscious expression, it is possible to extrapolate how Lacan's linguistic structuralism explicates levels of the unconscious in which the Other is constituted. For Lacan, "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other," specifically, "the capital Other (*le grand Autre*)" (see Lacan, 1977b: 129-31). Agreeing with Freud that the unconscious is mainly sexual, Lacan insists that "the subject is determined in the development of the effects of speech, consequently the unconscious is structured like language" (Lacan, 1977b: 149). In Lacan's linguistic model of the unconscious, condensation and displacement are translated into metaphor and metonymy (Grosz, 1990: 92). The unconscious is not part of a neurological construction that attracts repressed material that may, eventually, be expressed in visual images and linguistic associations - the unconscious itself, in Lacan's view, is structured like language. Lacan's linguistic structuralism, we

recall, asserts that signifiers attribute meanings to objects in the absence of those objects (that is, the other), and those meanings constantly shift and change according to who speaks them, and when they are spoken (Minsky, 1996: 155).

The unconscious, then, is made up of signifiers that have been repressed beneath the barrier to consciousness - in other words, the equivalent of Freud's "repression proper" - and have consequently been prevented from gaining access to conscious expression. But the true home of the Other lies in the desire which constitutes the "primal repressed" - that is, the original desire for the lost mother's body, the (m)Other. As Jane Gallop points out, primary repression is what is left out of the Symbolic register of articulated language, in which the subject is constituted through the intervention of the paternal metaphor, the symbolic phallus. Primary repression is therefore alien, confined to the preoedipal Imaginary, and never present to consciousness (Gallop, 1985: 151). There is no past state of plenitude to which one can return, since the object is unknown and unknowable. The subject's constant search for that original object, the Other, is what Lacan means by the term "desire," in other words, "an offshoot, a child of primary repression" (Gallop, 1985: 151). This desire, the discourse of the Other which *is* the unconscious, is eternally unsatisfied and unsatisfiable, because its object cannot be defined or known. The language of the unconscious is consequently driven by other repressed desires that are associated with the primal repressed and strive for expression through signification, that is, through the subversive and veiled linguistic form of puns, slips of the tongue, silences, gaps, and incoherences (equivalent to Freud's "return of the repressed"), when the subject tries to speak what he or she feels (Minsky, 1996: 156). But this language has its roots in the primal repressed, the domain of the Other, and so it is through the Other

(the unconscious) that language speaks the subject: As Lacan explained it, the subject is the effect of discourse, not its cause (Grosz, 1990: 97). Any sense of coherent self that an individual may achieve through speech is, for Lacan, only the "Imaginary ego," for there is no sign that can refer to the subject's whole being (Minsky, 1996: 156). The speaker's disruptive linguistic forms represent the fragmented nature of the subject, emerging in a vain attempt to articulate desire; this speech essentially represents "an endless appeal to the Other for meaning" and "a search for linguistic substitutes for the lost mother's body" (Minsky, 1996: 147).

At this point, it is also important to recall that Lacan's privileged signifier of division and difference, the phallus, further signifies separation from the mother, eliciting loss of and mourning for the mother and "maternal plenitude" - a lack that is experienced by both male and female (see Sprengnether, 1990: 195-99). The Other, or the unconscious, is at the same time (m)Other. Lacan thus construes feminine sexuality as Other and outside of language, in the silence of the preoedipal Imaginary, maternal space, and the unconscious. Through the father's intervention and the pain of separation from maternal plenitude, both boys and girls, in spite of anatomical differences, constitute themselves within the "masculine" realm of language and culture. In Lacan's theory, therefore, once in the territory of the Symbolic, where the phallus belongs to the *father* and becomes the privileged signifier of difference, gender is culturally constituted by either symbolic access (masculine) or lack of access (feminine) to the phallus. Again, in Lacan's conception of reality, there is no sexual relation, since the feminine is empty of speech and constituted on lack. Masculinity and femininity are simply signifiers of their relation to the phallus, either of which can be taken up by women or men.

Lacan's theory, then, arguably remains analogous to Freud's biological basis of gender differentiation, which is constituted by the "fact" of female castration and the possession or lack of the penis. Both theorists explain construction of the patriarchal order, gender differentiation (where the feminine is defined by the masculine and constitutes lack and emptiness), and male domination; neither, however, push further to explain why, in the first place, the penis/phallus is the chosen (seemingly quite arbitrarily chosen) object of desire that is essential to human subjectivity and culture. Although Lacan characterises the human subject (male and female) as split and full of desire, both Freud and Lacan equally subordinate the feminine and deny the subjectivity of women and the mother. The feminine becomes mother, who becomes (m)Other, who becomes all women, who become the embodiment of loss and desire to be repressed in the unconscious and relegated to the silence of the presymbolic order (Flax, 1990: 107).

Feminine sexuality, therefore, is marked by lack and excluded from the phallic economy of language and representation. Lacan states that there is no such thing as "*The* woman" or feminine essence within that patriarchal and phallogocentric culture (see Sprengnether, 1990: 197-9; Flax, 1990: 103-7). When women speak, says Lacan, they enter the phallic function:

The woman can only be written with *The* crossed through. There is no such thing as *The* woman, where the definite article stands for the universal. There is no such thing as *The* woman since of her essence... she is not all. (in Mitchell and Rose, eds., 1982: 144)

Here, Lacan proceeds to theorise femininity further than Freud, exalting the emptiness of "woman" as an emptiness that extends beyond representation and the law of the father, and as the site of otherness and the ever unfulfilled desire to be loved. Outside of the Symbolic order, "woman" does not (cannot?) speak or conceptualise her experience, but simply experiences her *jouissance*. *Jouissance*, which within the parameters of the body popularly refers to the pleasure of sexual orgasm, is magnified beyond mere *plaisir* to imply the transported consciousness of the mystic, inexpressible through language. It implies a pleasure pushed to the boundaries of "exquisite pain" and momentary loss of consciousness - a highly erotocised death drive (Sarup, 1992: 130). According to Lacan, the *jouissance* of woman "is a *jouissance* of the body which is, if the expression be allowed, *beyond the phallus*" (in Mitchell and Rose eds., 1982: 145) Then, it can be argued, "woman" transcends and has the power to disrupt the patriarchal order. Lacan argues that women do not know or speak of this *jouissance*, but simply experience it, thus transposing this "feminine" experience to the sphere of the mystic and religious experience: "And why not interpret one face of the Other, the God face, as supported by feminine *jouissance*" (in Mitchell and Rose, eds., 1982: 147). Thus, like Freud, Lacan aligns religion with the feminine, but attempts to shift this site of "lack" and "emptiness" from one that is denigrated to one that is exalted as transcendent. However, according to Lacan, women's experience of *jouissance* - as transcendent and mystical in nature - remains silent.

To sum up, Lacan's psychoanalytic theory explains patriarchal society and situates men and women as equally "split" from maternal plenitude and equally full of desire that cannot be satisfied. "Masculine" and "feminine" are arbitrary cultural

constructions differentiated by different relations to the symbolic phallus which, according to Lacan, neither men nor women possess. The feminine, according to Lacan, represents "Other" and does not exist within the phallic economy, implying that in the reality of patriarchal culture, sexual difference does not exist. The essential feminine, or "woman," however, takes on a spiritual dimension of religious experience suffused with a mystical *jouissance* external to the Symbolic. Although Lacan appears to initiate the disruption of patriarchy through the feminine and to raise "woman" to a "higher" plane, some feminist theorists, quite understandably, argue that he does not in any sense refer to *women* and their lived, corporeal reality. Female and maternal space remains empty and women remain silent. I would argue that, at best, Lacan might be referring to the idealised version of the mother in his vision - (m)Other - representing the equally idealised and spiritualised notion of a maternal plenitude that we all eternally long for. Once more, I would argue, the body - and in turn, women (as opposed to "woman") - takes the position of subjugated object. This recalls the (m)Other, relegated to presymbolic silence, associated with loss and represented as object of the subject's impossible desires, which reside in the unconscious.

Again, it is possible to identify a polarisation of the mother, in this case, as a metaphor for all women: On the one hand, she is valorised as transcendent, a sacred space of longed for maternal plenitude and mystical infinitude; but on the other, the preoedipal Imaginary and the maternal body are disparaged and powerless, excluded from speech and the socio-political realm of the Symbolic. Bluntly put, can the one who never speaks ever be subject and express her own desire? Ironically, speech still belongs to the masculine even as (spoken by Lacan) it disrupts the Symbolic order and attempts to exalt "woman."

Lacan has certainly inspired a flood of feminist critique, as well as the innovative French feminist school of writing known as *l'écriture féminine*. At the very least, his theory has far from silenced women writers! A feminist approach to Lacan involves a distrust of the privileged status of the phallus and the "paternal law" - as Marini puts it, "The maternal theme in Lacan's works is as sparse as the paternal theme is abundant. It might be because, for him, the mother as origin is inconceivable... I would say that, in Lacan's work, the mother is impossible, in all senses of the term" (1992: 78-9). Sensing, too, the polarisation of "woman," Marini further indicts Lacan's inconsistency: "Lacan has always oscillated between the saucy and contemptuous version of woman on the one hand and the courtly or mystic version on the other," and, more pointedly, "Derision and exaltation are two well-known defenses against anxiety" (1992: 80).

But the central question that emerges is whether his sacralization of "woman" as transcendent has relevance for real women's lived experience and feminist resistance to male domination. Psychoanalysis characterises religion as neurosis - a fantasy that projects a human need for an idealised father onto God. But, by the same token, I would argue that Lacan's spiritualised notion of "woman," and psychoanalytic theory's idealisation of the mother, create yet another type of "religious" notion, or objectified sacred space, that denies women's subjectivity. This question will be revisited in later discussion around feminist deconstruction of androcentric images of the mother and motherhood, particularly with reference to French feminist writers who have addressed Lacanian theory in depth in their experiments with new ways of speaking through *l'écriture féminine*.

4.2 OBJECT RELATIONS THEORY

In contrast to Freud and Lacan, object relations theory gives primary significance to the preoedipal mother and her influence is strongly felt. Object relations theory posits an initial non-differentiation of the mother-infant dyad which charts the progress of the infant's evolving awareness of herself or himself as a separate being. Like Freud, however, object relations theorists idealise the mother-infant relationship, advocating the subordination of women's subjectivity and maternal desire to the desires of her infant (Sprengnether, 1990: 183-8). Nevertheless, a different voice for the mother is heard and the theory opens up an avenue for exploring the significance of intersubjective relations in human development and the construction of the self. Since object relations theory potentially offers a different perspective on the construction of gender identity, particularly in terms of the social expectations of motherhood, it has been critically examined and applied by many psychoanalytic feminists and feminist theorists in general.²

Winnicott: Body, Mind, and Psyche-Soma

In the field of object relations theory, the work of the British psychoanalyst and theorist, D.W. Winnicott, offers a fruitful avenue for pursuing our analysis of sacred images of the mother. Although he does not give much attention to the formation and significance of gender, his focus on the preoedipal relationship of mother and child, as Jane Flax puts it, "enables us to recognize and begin to undo the repression and distortion of preoedipal experience that so pervade the theories of

² For example: Jessica Benjamin (1986; 1990a; 1990b); Nancy Chodorow (1978; 1989; 1990); Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976); Jane Flax (1990); Naomi Goldenberg (1989; 1993); Madelon Sprengnether (1990).

Freud and Lacan" (1990: 109). More fundamentally, Winnicott's work offers innovative perspectives on the mind/body split, the development of the human individual, and intersubjective relations. Furthermore, it identifies and defines an "intermediate space" (which I intend to argue implies a sacred space) between mother and infant where all creativity, cultural activity, and religious ideas are said to be born.

Winnicott's approach to psychoanalysis and the construction of the self is founded on the body in a way that directly addresses the problem of the mind-body split (Flax, 1990; Goldenberg, 1989). He clearly defines the psyche or "soul" as "the imaginative elaboration of somatic parts, feelings and functions" (cited in Goldenberg, 1989: 251). For Winnicott, mind refers to something completely distinct from psyche; psyche is related to body functioning, while mind is related to the functioning of the brain at a later stage of the child's development (1968: 7). Psyche and soma, as Flax emphasises, form a fluid, interactive unit, where change in one affects the other. Furthermore, she argues, this focus provides a medium through which we can "render problematic men's as well as women's bodies," since both female and male bodies are "a psycho-somatic unit with changing and changeable qualities" (Flax, 1990: 150).

Underpinning Winnicott's theory and practice, in fact, is the assertion that human feeling, emotion, artistic endeavour, and spirituality all arise from bodily experience, whether women's or men's. The significance of the early preoedipal stage of the infant's somatic fusion with the mother, therefore, is vital to this process (Winnicott: 1965; 1968; 1971). According to Winnicott, a perfect environment is necessary during infancy for optimum development of the psyche-soma. Mind, then, develops in response to an increasingly imperfect environment which, to a greater or lesser extent, is the reality of human growth and development. How does this happen?

The Preoedipal Mother-Child Relationship

Object relations theory strongly emphasises maternal presence in early human development, through the concept of "mother-infant fusion" (Sprengnether, 1990: 183), a concept that was to generate Winnicott's famous comment that "there is no such thing as an infant." This means, in his words, "that whenever one finds an infant one finds maternal care, and without maternal care there would be no infant" (1965: 39; n.1). The preoedipal mother and infant are one somatic unit, where the infant's inner and outer reality are one and the same, couched in the experience of "omnipotence" - what the infant desires (symbolised in the object of mother's breast) it creates, in other words, the infant's experience is that it "creates" what is already there, the object of its own desire. Essential to this early stage and for the infant's later, gradual experience of separateness from the mother and of other objects as "not-me," is Winnicott's idea of the "good-enough" mother.

In the beginning, the "good-enough" mother subordinates her entire being to the well-being of her infant. Winnicott speaks of the mirror-role of the mother in his theory of development, drawing on Lacan's mirror stage where the mirror facilitates the child's recognition of his or her own image as a separate but integrated self (1971: 111-18). But for Winnicott the precursor of Lacan's mirror is the mother's face, belonging to the earliest preoedipal stage of non-differentiation. The image that the infant sees of itself is reflected in the mother's gaze, and so he suggests that when the infant looks at its mother's face "what the baby sees is himself or herself. In other words the mother is looking at the baby and *what she looks like is related to what she sees there*" (1971: 112).

Implied in the above statement is all that Winnicott means by the "good-enough" mother - not only the way she looks at her baby, but the way she holds and handles it and the way she presents objects to the infant as though it created them. The importance of holding, as perhaps the only way that a mother can show the infant her love, is stressed (1965: 49). Done well enough, says Winnicott, the baby's "legitimate experience of omnipotence is not violated" (1971: 10). It is during this "holding phase," too, that "the dawn of intelligence and the beginning of a mind as something distinct from the psyche" emerges (1965: 45). Only gradually and gently will the good-enough mother begin to adapt less than perfectly to her baby's needs. Her responses will remain in tune with the infant's developing capacity to tolerate frustration and the shock of loss of its omnipotence as it begins to experience separateness and a world that is "not-me." As Winnicott puts it, development proceeds "according to the infant's growing ability to deal with her [the mother's] failure" (1971: 10).

Inherent in this theory which, like Freud, idealises the mother-infant relationship, is the daunting prospect of the "not good-enough" mother. Exclusive emphasis is placed on the mother's role in the child's development, indicating that any mishaps in this process inevitably rest on maternal dysfunction, particularly in terms of the earliest stages (Sprengher, 1990: 187). Winnicott, in fact, identifies two possible scenarios for the infant's phase of dependency in the "holding environment": One, "infant development facilitated by good-enough maternal care"; or, two, "infant development distorted by maternal care that is not good enough" (1965: 55). The developing strength (or weakness) of the infant ego, he continues, depends entirely on good (or bad) maternal care. It would seem that not only is the baby omnipotent (in

its own experience), but so is the mother, in terms of her apparently inexorable determining influence on and accountability for her baby's development.

Referring back to the early mirror-role of the mother, Winnicott reminds us that "this which is *naturally* done well by mothers" [my emphasis] should not be taken for granted, for, he goes on, what of the mother whose face reflects her own mood or "worse still, the rigidity of her own defences?" (1971: 112). I would ask, what of the mother who takes cognisance of her own being and desire, as an autonomous subject? Here, the dangerous spectre of the "not good-enough" mother looms large, and such a proposition arguably represents a call for denial of the mother's subjectivity.

Winnicott, then, brings back the voice of the preoedipal mother, but most significantly as the object of her infant's desires. So perfectly should the mother subordinate her being to that of her baby's, that they are as one, forming a somatic fusion of maternal plenitude, surely an embodied sacred space. Thus Winnicott, I would further argue, supports a vision of institutionalised motherhood that implies a state of perfection and omnipotence - so that the baby's "legitimate experience of omnipotence is not violated" - in other words, again, an inviolable, sacred space.

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Transitional Space as Sacred Space

If we move on to the development of the infant's realisation of separateness and his or her relations with external reality, we might also see that the "sacred space" of maternal embodiment moves or, at least, expands to the space between two bodies - the potential space between mother and child. We all, as human beings, experience the tension between inner reality (the subjective) and external, shared reality (the objective) - in fact, we are never free from the strain of relating the two, says

Winnicott. In this context, we see how his theory interweaves childhood object relations and creative play with the adult creative world of art, culture, and religion (1971: 1-25).

Winnicott charts the progress of the infant from its unitary, inner experience of subjectivity and omnipotence that creates a world where inner and outer reality are fused, to its emerging ability to accept external reality and develop object relationships. Inherent in this process, according to Winnicott, is the baby's use of "transitional objects," or first "not-me" possessions, and an intermediate area or state of experiencing between the infant's inner reality and its acceptance of external, shared reality (1971: 1-3). Transitional objects, such as a special teddy-bear, doll, or blanket often remain special in a child's life and allow room for the child to accept both similarity and difference. They symbolise the infant's journey from subjective experience to reality-testing and acceptance of objective reality, or in Freud's terms, the growing ability to move from the pleasure principle to the reality principle (1971: 4-10).

This intermediate area of experiencing, then, is the area of transitional phenomena, the area of play, where both child and adult are free to be creative. This, Winnicott implies, is the creative space where an individual may find his or her true self and constitutes the source of artistic and scientific creativity, dreaming, and religious feeling. In terms of the developing child, Winnicott refers to experience of this transitional space as illusion: "that which is allowed to the infant, and which in adult life is inherent in art and religion" (1971: 3). He continues, however, by cautioning that it is the substance of this illusion, in adults, that can also become the "hallmark of madness" - that is, when the individual cannot distinguish between inner

and external reality and imposes his or her subjective but creative experience on others, claiming that it represents objective reality (1971: 3).

Although Winnicott's idea that religious experience arises from "illusion" points to positive and negative meanings, it nonetheless differs from Freud's conception of religion as illusion. In the Freudian paradigm, the project of religion is regarded as a process of transference, that is, the individual's projection of his or her childhood desires and fears onto an illusory "blank screen" that takes the place of the father - in other words, God (Jones, 1990). But in the context of object relations theory, according to James Jones, "Winnicott implies that the sacred is encountered through a transitional state of awareness transcending subjectivity and objectivity" (1990: 133). Despite the timelessness and formlessness of this sacred space which offers a source for creative, cultural, and religious moments of experience, Jones points out that it occurs within relational parameters, "as opposed to the atomistic individualism of earlier psychoanalytic theory" (1990: 134). Then, I would argue, if Winnicott's transitional "sacred space" is relational, but also transcends subjectivity and objectivity, perhaps it might transcend Freud's gender construct of the masculine as subject and the feminine as object. This point will be recalled and analysed in greater depth in Chapters Five and Six, when we look at feminist revisions of object relations theory, intersubjectivity, and the potential for a gendered relational model between two subjects.

To return to Winnicott's psychoanalytic view of the developing individual, the behaviour of the good-enough mother is pivotal in the child's successful use of transitional objects and its experiencing of the transitional space between inner and outer reality. As mentioned above, it is the mother who is required to assess exactly

how to adapt to her infant's needs at every stage of its development. The intermediate area where play takes place is described as the potential space between mother and baby that nevertheless still joins them and therefore, in a sense, is an extension of bodily space. It is neither the inner reality of the infant who was an integral part of the fused space of the mother-infant dyad, nor the external world of the "not-me" and the mother. It is through play in the space between these two that mind, as distinct from psyche, develops, providing the foundation for the inner self, creativity, and the capacity for intersubjective human relationships.

Three phases can be identified in Winnicott's theory of play (1971: 38-64). The first kind of play to follow the early experience of psychosomatic fusion is a process of learning to perceive objects objectively, where an object is "repudiated, re-accepted, and perceived objectively." Winnicott describes this experience as one of precariousness, positioned in the interplay of inner, psychic reality and learning to control external objects. At this point, the appropriate actions and love of the good-enough mother are deemed essential, implying a fragile process expressing "the precariousness of magic itself, magic that arises in intimacy, in a relationship that is found to be reliable" (1971: 47). Second, the ability of the child to play "alone in the presence of someone" is formed - trusting that the "someone" (usually the mother) will be available when needed. Finally, out of this relationship of trust emerges the stage of intersubjective relations, where the mother can move beyond playing in a purely adaptive way to a space where she and her baby begin to play together as two separate beings in a relationship. It is in this potential space between child and mother, in the "doing" of play, that creativity is born - for Winnicott, it is where the origin of

all cultural experience is situated. Furthermore, and most important, it is only in the process of human creativity that the individual can discover the self:

We experience life in the area of transitional phenomena, in the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation, in the area that is intermediate between the inner reality of the individual and the shared reality of world that is external to individuals. (1971: 64)

Turning to the wider world of human society as a whole, Winnicott's enthusiasm for human history and the development of human relations is maintained. He argues that culture is essentially "inherited tradition" that represents a "common pool of humanity" into which human beings contribute and from which they draw for resources to support their own creativity and cultural experience. Referring back to the early stages of play, he draws a corresponding interplay of inner and outer reality for the adult world, which is situated in the potential space between the individual and the environment: "The interplay between originality and the acceptance of tradition as the basis for inventiveness seems to me to be just one more example, and a very exciting one, of the interplay between separateness and union" (1971: 99). The extent of an individual's creativity and his or her use of this potential space depends on the experiences in the early stages of infancy, on whether or not maternal love and reliability were present in support of the child's development of trust in the external world.

Winnicott's vision, I would argue, clearly speaks of a sacred space, the sacred space of creative, artistic, and religious experience. In fact, he says as much. But it is a

sacred space that is founded on the bedrock of the good enough mother and the environment she constructs:

The potential space between baby and mother, between child and family, between individual and society or the world... can be looked upon as sacred to the individual in that it is here that the individual experiences creative living. (1971: 103)

Therefore, it appears that an overarching significance is superimposed on the maternal body and motherhood (the institutionalised maternal environment) as the decisive factors in determining the individual's future experience of self and its expression: Whether it will be psychologically dysfunctional; or an ongoing experience of mediocre greyness and uncreative day-to-day living; or a life that includes the vitality and fulfilment of inventiveness, creativity, and spirituality. As Susan Suleiman accurately points out, in the psychoanalytic paradigm, artistic creation and cultural experience belong to the child, not the mother: "Just as motherhood is ultimately the child's drama, so is artistic creation. In both cases the mother is the essential but silent Other, the mirror in whom the child searches for his own reflection, the body he seeks to appropriate" (1985: 357).

To sum up, I would argue that Winnicott diverges from the centrality of the Oedipus complex in Freud's theorising about individual development and the origins of culture. He himself refers to Freud's all too brief attention to the significance of the early infant stage and maternal care (1965: 39). For Winnicott, the preoedipal stage of personal development takes precedence in locating the origins of culture, creativity,

and religious experience. He depicts, first, an embodied sacred space situated in the somatic fusion of mother and infant, implying that in this stage, a "perfect" environment needs to be provided (by the good enough mother) in order for later object relations and creativity to be successfully negotiated. Second, he speaks of a potential space, in physical terms, between mother and child (but still joining the two), and in psychological terms, an intermediate space between inner, subjective reality and external, objective reality. This, I have argued, is also a sacred space delimited by two bodies where, according to Winnicott's theory, creativity, artistic endeavour, and religious feeling find their origin through the medium of the baby's use of transitional objects and play. This creativity, then, begins to find its way into society, I would suggest, through the child's first experiences of intersubjective relations, where the mother and child, as separate beings, can play together.

Gender and the Polarisation of Women

Undoubtedly, the preoedipal mother is central to these stages of early life, according to Winnicott's psychoanalytic theory. Not only is the primary role of women their function as mothers, but we find here, too, a polarisation of women: Those who provide a safe and nurturing space for a child's healthy psychological and cultural development through good enough maternal care and those who do not and therefore endanger that development. Like Freud, Winnicott's thinking on gender roles was surely shaped by the social milieu of his class, place, and time. In the early stages of the infant's life, at least, the father's function was portrayed as "dealing with the environment for the mother" - a task that was "not known to the infant" (1965: 43).

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In a radio broadcast on "The Mother's Contribution to Society" in 1957 (C. Winnicott et al, eds., 1986: 123-7), Winnicott acclaims the role of women and disarmingly claims that "every happy person, is in infinite debt to a woman." Echoing Freud's identification of the growing child's repudiation of the mother and femininity and society's consequent denigration and fear of "woman," Winnicott points to fear of dependence and domination as the real fear:

If our society delays making full acknowledgement of this dependence [of the infant on the mother], which is a historical fact in the initial stage of development of every individual, there must remain a block both to progress and to regression, a block that is based on fear. If there is no true recognition of the mother's part, then there must remain a vague fear of dependence. (See C. Winnicott et al, eds., 1986: 125)

But Winnicott's identification of the cause of and a solution for the denigration of women still rests on the "omnipotent" mother, who remains the object of praise or blame for good or ill in human development. This point in itself provides a strong motivation for feminist analysis of psychoanalysis, especially object relations theory, in pursuit of identifying and seeking to transform the root cause of the domination of women. As Nancy Chodorow succinctly points out: "I have yet to find a convincing explanation for the virulence of masculine anger, fear, and resentment of women, or of aggression toward them, that bypasses... the psychoanalytic account... that men resent and fear women because they experience them as powerful mothers" (1989: 6).

The extent to which Winnicott's "sacralization" of the mother and motherhood (which all but denies maternal subjectivity) relates to the lived reality of women who are mothers, as well as to the issue of maternal subjectivity, power, and desire, is therefore brought into question.

It is questions such as these that will be dealt with in depth later on in discussion of feminist critique and use of object relations theory in Chapter Five. Of particular interest, too, will be the spatial elements of Winnicott's theory in relation to mother and child, and their implications for revising maternal subjectivity, intersubjective relations, and the construction of gender identity. Feminist theory in relation to this area - most significantly, the work of Jessica Benjamin - will therefore also be addressed in Chapter Six, in the context of theory of sacred space.

In conclusion, in both this chapter and the former one, I have attempted to link psychoanalysis with issues of women's psychology, gender differentiation, "femininity," and religion through identifying images of the mother and motherhood that signify an embodied sacred space. In doing so, I have attempted to show how the theoretical works of Freud, Lacan, and Winnicott offer a psychologically-based explanation for women's subordinate position in patriarchal society and how, perhaps, they even contribute to that subordination. Images of the mother have been identified as significant, either by their near absence or by their exaggerated presence, in the psychoanalytic theories of Freud, Lacan, and Winnicott. According to Sprengnether, we find the subjectivity and power of the mother repressed to only a "spectral" presence in Freud's theory. Moreover, in terms of Lacan and Winnicott, we find that the preoedipal mother is "not quite present enough" in Lacanian theory and "almost too present in object relations theory... Both options (maternal presence and maternal

absence)" says Sprengnether, "lead to conceptual difficulties for feminists" (1990: 222).

Freud, Lacan, and Winnicott, I would argue, all idealise the preoedipal dyad of mother and infant in a way that implies a sacred space of plenitude and fulfilment on the one hand and an absence of subjectivity, activity, and power on the other. Polarisation of the mother, of female sexuality, of "femininity," and of women in general, has proved to be a consistent theme in the speculations of all three theorists on the construction of sexual and gender identity. Mothers and women are exalted and denigrated, mystified and repressed; they are represented as good and bad; functional and dysfunctional; loving and aggressive; they are defined by lack, as empty and silent, on the one hand; and on the other, as symbols of mystical and sacred fulfilment. Quite explicitly, Freud, Lacan, and Winnicott - in variously negative and positive ways - associate the mother, femininity, and women with creativity, culture, and religion. In the next chapter these points of paradox will be problematised and analysed from a feminist standpoint, with a view to identifying a feminist hermeneutic of the mother as sacred space.

CHAPTER FIVE: FEMINISM, THE BODY, AND THE MOTHER

Western philosophical thought has long privileged the mind and soul over the body and associated the body with woman and her reproductive powers, thus contributing towards women's subordination in patriarchal societies. We have discussed how Freud's psychoanalytic theory pioneered innovative interpretations of the construction of the psyche or the self, believed to be determined by the interaction of the unconscious and sexuality. In attempting to construct a theory of gender and to explain the psychology of women, Freud arguably offered a plausible explanation for the development and maintenance of patriarchal social norms and culture.

Both Freud and psychoanalysts who followed him, such as Lacan and Winnicott, have identified the feminine with idealisation of the maternal in the context of preoedipal mother-infant relations. An undifferentiated fusion is suggested which the child must reject in order to enter the wider world of social relations. The mother, on the other hand, represents a precultural space of narcissistic fulfilment, confined to the space of the Imaginary and preoedipal relations. Whereas Freud and Lacan characterise the preoedipal phase as external and even hostile to culture, Winnicott unequivocally points to the significance of the mother in the individual's development of cultural creativity. None, however, fully acknowledge or investigate maternal subjectivity, agency, and desire.

I have argued that psychoanalytic theory has reproduced the mother as an embodied sacred space in a way that reinforces the idea of motherhood as an institutionalised sacred space. Further, I suggest that it has generated a religiously nuanced discourse of the feminine, most apparent in psychoanalytic notions that

idealise and spiritualise the mother (or, in the case of Lacan, the (m)Other). The mother, as signified by patriarchal culture, is given an exalted and sacred status, only to be denigrated and rejected for not measuring up to the "God-like" dimensions of the masculine ideal. The child, therefore, is required to turn to the masculine world of the father, to the external, sociosymbolic domain of "reality" and rationality. Mother, more accurately, is of the natural world - the "goddess" - and, as such, is polarised as both nurturing and dangerous, the site of both life and death.

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The image of the ideal mother, who passively subordinates her desire to those of her infant in a way that could well be defined as a sacrificial process, arguably implies an element of the sacred. This maternal ideal points to an underlying theme that typifies, in psychological terms, much older constructions of gender in the patriarchal context of western, monotheistic religions. The sacred space of maternal embodiment is all too clearly reflected, for instance, in the "virgin mother" of Christianity, cleansed of all taint of female sexuality and desire. She remains subordinate to the all-powerful Father and passive object of her infant son's desire. I would argue that sacred images of the mother in the context of western patriarchal society, whether produced by psychoanalytic or religious discourse, serve to alienate the feminine from the body and women from their experience.

yes

In his psychoanalytic outline of the construction of the self, Freud defined religion as a neurotic idealisation of the father that expresses feminine, narcissistic dependence on a father-God. Moreover, Freud found difficulty in situating the role of the mother and mother-goddesses in the history of the development of culture and tended to typify women (divine or human) as hostile to culture. Lacan, however, associated feminine sexuality with mysticism and religious experience but marginalised

"woman" and "(m)Other" from the symbolic order. The mother, we recall, is silenced by her exclusion from language and confined to the Imaginary, associated with unrequitable desire that is relegated to the domain of the Other, or the unconscious. Winnicott's theory, on the other hand, more positively invoked a "sacred" space between mother and child - albeit dependent on the "good enough" mother - which embodied the origins of culture and religious feeling.

In this chapter I intend to identify critical analyses of these maternal images that exist in the work of various feminist theorists, in order to explore how they have reinterpreted and reconstructed the maternal body, the mother (as symbol of "femininity") and motherhood. We can, perhaps, already recognise a politics of sacred space emerging from different psychoanalytic interpretations of femininity and the mother. Inviolable and idealised notions of maternal sacred space, and its greater or lesser power in the narrative of human life and sexual differentiation, have been revealed in the work of the psychoanalysts discussed in the previous chapter. In this chapter, feminist revisioning of maternal images and the polarisation and paradoxes inherent in them, will be shown to confront and contest the androcentric visions articulated in western patriarchal society and psychoanalytic theories. Moreover, contested images of the mother will be discovered, too, within the wide-ranging and multi-faceted domain of feminist theory itself, arguably, therefore, producing an alternative politics of maternal sacred space.

Several issues will be addressed in this chapter, starting with a brief introduction to the history of feminist theory, followed by an examination of feminist approaches to the body, gender, biological essentialism, and women's experience of motherhood. The core of the chapter will be discussion of psychoanalytic feminist

analyses of the maternal body and motherhood that draw on Freudian and, more specifically, object relations theory, with particular emphasis on the theories of Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow.

5.1 INTRODUCING FEMINIST THEORY

Feminism, both as an activist politics and as theory, became a powerfully felt source of resistance in the 1960s and 70s in western Europe and America. The women's movement of the time constituted a revitalisation of nineteenth-century liberal feminism's fight for women's rights and equality with men, which was inspired by the eighteenth-century bourgeois revolutions in France and America and the humanistic and political ideals of the Enlightenment period. Later, it was Simone de Beauvoir, in her watershed work *The Second Sex* (1952), who produced an innovative, epic analysis of women's suppressed subjectivity and recognised that "woman" was construed as "other" and defined by lack against "man" as the norm in patriarchal society. Her incisive polemic on the patriarchal construction of gender relations and motherhood underpinned the revival of contemporary feminist resistance politics and theory in 1960s and 70s' Europe and America.

Twentieth-century liberal, white, middle-class feminists, like their predecessors, once again took up the call for women's rights and equality with men, particularly in the public domain of the world of work. However, liberal feminist texts such as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1965), spawned the image of the "superwoman" who did two jobs: The woman who had "made it" in the world of men and yet remained the embodiment of the eternal feminine in the family home.

The development of radical feminism, however, generated by the radicalisation of 1960s left-wing politics and in contrast to liberal feminism, more directly challenged patriarchal society and its inherent male domination. Disillusioned with exclusively male-dominated, left-wing resistance politics, radical feminists stressed the solidarity of women and constructed a sexual politics - some more extreme than others in their reconstructions of reproductive roles - that challenged the sexual oppression of women and colonisation of the female body. Pinpointing the patriarchal family as the root of the problem, radical feminist ideals ranged from proposals for shared parenting (for example, Nancy Chodorow, 1978 and Dorothy Dinnerstein, 1976), to female separatism (for example, Germaine Greer, 1971 and Kate Millet, 1977), to a feminist genetic engineering that would all but exclude men's participation in the process of human reproduction (for example, Shulamith Firestone, 1971). The ideal of sisterhood depicted a commonality of women's experience which was encapsulated in the epithet pioneered by Robin Morgan (1970), "the personal is political," but it was, nevertheless, a sisterhood that generalised women's experience and tended to overlook differences such as class, race, and sexual orientation.

More recent and contemporary radical feminist writers, such as Mary Daly (1973), Susan Griffin (1984), and Adrienne Rich (1986), remain suspicious of theory and emphasise the importance of subjective experience for an effective feminist politics. Insisting that theory is an intrinsically masculine discourse that controls the production and dissemination of knowledge, they have nevertheless attempted to construct alternative theories that are frequently based on deconstructive strategies and transformation of language itself (Weedon, 1987: 9).

Socialist feminists, from the late nineteenth century onwards, have affiliated themselves to varying degrees with Marxian political theory and historical materialism. Their theory links gender relations, and the attendant divisions of power, to capitalist relations of production, a link that manifests itself in the sexual division of labour intrinsic to patriarchal, capitalist society. Socialist feminism most particularly denies any element of "natural" femaleness, and perceives gender as entirely socially produced and historically changing (Weedon, 1987: 4). Contemporary socialist feminism has evolved into a complex body of sophisticated theories, including the appropriation of psychoanalysis to support a feminist challenge to patriarchy, the sociocultural construction of gender, and the politics of reproduction (for example, Michèle Barrett, 1992 and Juliet Mitchell, 1974).

But most recent developments in feminist theory have turned to a variety of alternative sources, such as psychoanalytic theory of language and meaning, poststructuralism and postmodernism, and postcolonial theory to deconstruct the overarching parameters of Enlightenment humanist thought whose unchallenged, universalised "truths" have arguably kept patriarchy in place. Poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories of language, subjectivity, and power have been appropriated by many feminists, moreover, not only to facilitate their project of deconstructing patriarchal discourse, but also for reconstructing a new discourse of gender. Chris Weedon points out, for example, that the construction of a "feminist poststructuralism" could provide the way for linking theory and politics by addressing

"the questions of how social power is exercised and how social relations of gender, class and race might be transformed" (1987: 20).¹

The benefits of a feminist poststructuralism that is held in balance with a feminist political specificity is further argued by Kate Nash (1994), who seems to offer the possibility for a more holistic approach. She explores the tension between feminist deconstruction, which "continually invites us to uncover difference" and feminism as a social and political movement that must, at times, lead women "to posit a unity for the sake of improving the day-to-day conditions of women's lives" (1994: 76). She insists that this tension is a useful and fruitful one for feminism: On the one hand, the deconstructive method serves to disrupt all assumed realities and identities - including gender categories - by claiming they are discursively produced; and on the other, the historical and continuing reality of women's oppression can be addressed by a measure of unified socio-political feminist resistance.

In any event, a new generation of feminism has emerged as a critique, not only of patriarchy and androcentric theory, but even more pointedly, of what could be construed as the assumptions of "mainstream" feminism and its lack of attention to the differences of class, race, and sexual orientation among women. As in many areas of human life, however, feminist schools of thought that have developed over the past few decades cannot be neatly classified into discrete, closed packages. A proliferation of new "feminisms" has emerged, such as African feminism, Black feminism,

¹ Chris Weedon's *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (1987) offers useful and thorough explanations of different feminist schools of thought. The book also aims "to make poststructuralist theory accessible to readers to whom it is unfamiliar, to argue its political usefulness to feminism and to consider its implications for feminist critical practice," successfully bringing clarity to a complex and frequently obfuscated arena of theory. See also Rosemarie Tong's *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (1989) for clear and comprehensive accounts of several feminist theoretical schools, including the main critiques of each one.

womanism, postcolonial feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, and so on. Neither do they represent diverse approaches to one, unifying objective. As Henrietta Moore recently observed in an essay appropriately named "Divided We Stand": "there is no single, homogeneous body of feminist theory" (1994: 79). Instead, feminist theorists appear to interweave a pattern of problems and debates in which they look to each other both for support and critical analysis. Most pertinently, recent feminist discourse attempts to reconnect the split between theory and praxis, seeking to connect theoretical writing with political activism. Feminists, Moore continues, have had to acknowledge differences between various groups of women - as well as between practising feminists - in their experienced realities. Voices of difference have demanded to be heard, not only to challenge the patriarchal discourse of liberal-humanist thought, but also in a concerted effort to extricate feminist theory from the pitfall of being perceived as "not only arcane, but elitist, racist and/or patriarchal" (Moore, 1994: 79). But despite the heterogeneous nature of feminist schools of thought, I would argue that contentious components of debate in all of them, in some form or another, are the body, women's sexuality and reproductive capacity, and the figure of the mother.

5.2 FEMINISM, THE BODY, AND MOTHERHOOD

The human body has become the site of one of the most stringent debates in this heterogeneous body of feminist theory, one which raises the issue of what does or does not count as biological essentialism. In the feminist context, essentialism implies an immutable feminine essence and a generic concept of "woman" that is formulated on the basis of female anatomy, sexuality, and morphology. It is a representation of

"woman" that is deemed external and in opposition to social and cultural determinism. Some feminists seek to recover and attribute value to such a feminine essence as a separatist site of resistance within a patriarchal and phallogocentric culture. Others, however, warn of the dangers of essentialist theory for women, arguing that this alleged "essence" has been historically and socially constructed within a patriarchal framework, only to be manipulated to oppress women.

Yet others may go so far as to define essentialism in feminist theory as definitively anti-feminist, to be rooted out at all costs. In short, the categories of sexuality, gender, and sexual difference - and not least, the notion of a communal "we" among women or a universal category called "woman" - have been placed under exhaustive scrutiny, their very existence disputed. Judith Butler, for example, in *Gender Trouble* (1988), asks "the speculative question of whether feminist politics could do without a 'subject' in the category of women... The feminist 'we' is always and only a phantasmatic construction, one that has its purposes, but which denies the internal complexity and indeterminacy of the term" (1988: 142). Her work issues a challenge to "gender" as a reality, which, it is suggested, arises from the patriarchal social construct of "compulsory heterosexuality." She examines the political practices involved in the creation and regulation of identity, and the possibilities for deregulating it, requiring "a critical genealogy of the naturalization of sex and of bodies in general" (1988: 147).

On balance, it appears that essentialism might well reinforce generalisation of women's experience of oppression and limit the avenues available for resistance against it. Avoidance of the social construction of gender and the effects of history and socio-political ideologies on that construct does not adequately take into account

differences among women - race, class, and sexual orientation - and the consequent diversity of women's experiences of oppression. Nonetheless, it does not necessarily mean that privileging a feminine essence has no place in combating equally essentialist but misogynist ideas found in androcentric theories of gender. Arguably, a conceptual construct can be contextualized differently, transformed, and turned against itself. In any event, analysis and critique of misogynist uses of essentialist notions of women and the "feminine" constitute fundamental tasks in feminist critical theory.

In a similar vein, if we recall our discussion of the mind/body split in Chapter Two, it was inferred that pejorative ideas about the body as inferior to the mind have played a central role in the history of women's subjugation. The association of women with the body and nature as a consequence of their biological sex and reproductive capacity has long been placed in opposition to the association of men with the intellect and socially-produced culture. Because of their biological sexuality, then, women remained in the private, domestic sphere to rear children, characterised as naturally inferior to men in terms of significant socio-political agency. Thereafter, a universal correspondence of gender relations with biological sex differences was assumed, where "female is to male as nature is to culture" (see Ortner, 1974).

But feminists who engaged in developing an anthropology of women were quick to deconstruct this conflation of sex and gender, pointing to socially-constructed gender relations and women's subordination, which were historically embedded in kinship systems where women constituted a commodity of exchange. Such a sex-gender system, it has been argued, became even more immutably fixed in the conventional family structure of modern western society, based on an assumed "naturalness" of heterosexual marriage in which women mother in the domestic realm

and men go out into the public world of socio-political action.² As a result, feminists have inevitably been cautious of any hint of universalisation of a feminine essence based on women's sexuality and biological nature. However, the deconstruction of the male/female, mind/body, culture/nature, and private/public dichotomies generated by the conflation of sex and gender has, ironically, in turn produced yet another exclusionary binary opposition - gender (sociocultural) and sex (biological) - that inhibits analysis of the realities and consequences of human embodiment. As I have argued in the second chapter, with particular reference to feminist writers who have drawn on Foucault's *History of Sexuality, Vol. I* (1984), the body, sex, and sexual differentiation, too - especially women's bodies and female sexuality - have been historically and socially constructed through specific discourses (Moore, 1994: 91-2). By the same token, all experience, whether physical or psychological, social or emotional - and for both women and men - is mediated through the body. In that case, then, as Flax concludes, "embodiment is simultaneously natural and cultural" (Flax, 1990).

Since I have primarily set out to explore how the maternal body represents sacred space, extending the link between the body and culture to include the intersection of the body and religion is clearly warranted. If the body mediates all experience and provides a medium for collapsing the duality of nature and culture, then religion - in the widest sense of religion being the arena of the sacred in society - must also be implicated. However, the body and religion undoubtedly play out a reciprocal relationship, where the fact of human embodiment "determines the

² See Sherry B. Ortner (1974); Micelle Zimbalist Rosaldo (1974); Gayle Rubin (1975); Henrietta Moore (1986); for feminist analysis of sex and gender systems in the field of anthropological and structuralist theory.

parameters of religious experience and discourse and, conversely, how religious thought and practice construct understandings of the human body" (Law, 1995: ix).

Recalling Paula Cooley's work on the relationship between the body and religious imagination, the ambiguous conceptions of the body as both "imagining subject" and "cultural artifact" have been analysed (Cooley, 1994). Addressing the opposition between essentialism and cultural determinism that we have recognised as internal to the field of feminist theory, Cooley advocates that feminists need to acknowledge the inseparability of nature and culture (1994: 19-30). Her own theory of "socio-natural process" indicates that these binary oppositions of nature and culture, sex and gender, flesh and spirit, can be successfully collapsed. For Cooley, it is religious myth and symbol systems that hold nature and culture, the body and imagination, in tension (1994: 38-9). The maternal body, I would suggest, represents a primary site which is suffused with such sociocultural myths and religious symbol systems, whether implicitly "sacred" or explicitly "religious."

The myths of motherhood, I would therefore argue, are socially, culturally, and religiously constructed and are acted out and experienced through the embodied mother. In recent years, feminist writers have not been silent about these experiences, both in terms of personal consequences and what they symbolise for society's understanding of gender systems and motherhood. But it was Adrienne Rich, in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986), who pioneered a feminist approach to female experience of the body, particularly the maternal body. She opens by declaring the fact that "all human life on the planet is born of woman" and that "most of us first know both love and disappointment, power and tenderness, in the person of a woman." The mother, most often, is the locus for our first

experiences, not only of stability and security, but also of rejections and refusals. But at the time when Rich was first writing, she notes that there had been little material written to help us understand and use the experience of the early mother-child relationship, despite the fact that "we carry the imprint of this experience for life, even into our dying" (1986: 11).

Rich's text begins with a personal memoir that recalls her own experiences as mother - some joyful - but more poignantly evoking her frequent suffering of pain, resentment, and anger engendered by having to conform to the "sacred calling" of institutionalised motherhood as demanded by the patriarchal society in which she lived. At the outset, one of the most persistent and, I would argue, sacred myths of motherhood - that of maternal instinct - is dismantled, almost in passing: "Motherhood is earned, first through an intense physical and psychic rite of passage - pregnancy and childbirth - then through *learning* to nurture, which does not come by instinct" (1986: 12; my emphasis). Recalling earlier discussion of the history of the body, it has already been suggested that maternal instinct does not necessarily come naturally, simply through possession of female anatomy (Badinter, 1981). However, it is this very myth of maternal instinct that seems to underpin more deeply held notions of femininity and expected maternal behaviour in contemporary western society. Women's desire to have and nurture children has become "scientifically" substantiated on the basis of it being instinct, or a "biological imperative," effectively obfuscating the reality that women are socialised into wanting children (Nicolson, 1993: 208).

Rich boldly outlines the institutionalised sacred space produced by idealised myths of motherhood, a space that remains under male control and thus fails to

support women's experience of subjectivity. She shows how psychoanalytic theory, for instance, articulates the mother-child relationship as the drama of the child, as though the mother were purely incidental. It is only mothers who are beginning to speak for themselves who can articulate how this exclusive focus on the child affects the mother's sense of self (Suleiman, 1985: 356). The maternal body and motherhood, for Rich, is clearly an embodied sacred space that is contested with regard to ownership and control. Furthermore, I would argue that her theory points to a mother's state of *exile* from, as well as imprisonment in, her own body (whether it is truly her own being the case in point): "In the most fundamental and bewildering of contradictions, it [institutionalised motherhood] has alienated women from our bodies by incarcerating us in them" (1986: 13). This, unexpectedly, identifies yet another paradox inherent in women's reality.

In the western world over the last two centuries, motherhood and the maternal body indeed became contested terrain in a burgeoning politics of the female body and reproduction (Arnup, Lévesque and Pierson, 1990: xiii). Discourses of motherhood were both politically and religiously generated, addressing such problems as fertility and birth control in the name of public health and welfare and population control. A newly emerging ideology of motherhood shifted women's control over their own bodies and reproduction to the realm of professional medical experts. The process of "medicalisation" of childbirth, for example, dislodged the process of gestation and childbirth away from the active agency of the woman herself and the supportive role of midwives and relocated it under the supervision of male-dominated gynaecology and obstetrics. The alienation of women from their bodies, therefore, was well under

way in Victorian times, engendering a contradictory ideology of motherhood that has been perpetuated through the twentieth century:

For all the Victorian era's talk of 'the maternal instinct', the nineteenth century firmly established the belief in women's need to be educated for motherhood. In the evolving ideology of motherhood, the rearing of babies and children was held to be the 'natural' task of mothers in the home at the same time as they were regarded as requiring training to carry out this assignment. The proliferating literature on child care contributed to the developing 'professionalization' or 'vocalization' of motherhood during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (Arnup, Lévesque and Pierson, 1990: xix)

As a result, "natural" mothers were at one and the same time "ignorant" mothers who required the corrective intervention of male expertise. Such medical and scientific claims to knowledge of women has come to permeate modern understanding of women and motherhood, to the extent that mothers have become inclined to internalise the expectations and stresses of motherhood as their own "inadequacies" (Nicolson, 1993: 204).

Motherhood, then, became an institutional space in which mothers themselves - who should surely be the central actors - were in fact marginalised. Their contradictory and peripheral position, as Arnup, Lévesque and Pierson point out, was particularly felt by women who were already socially marginalised by class, race or ethnicity (1990: xiii). Within the western patriarchal family itself, the cultural myth of

the "ideal mother" has been perpetuated by the equally assumed expectation that a married woman will have children (Leira and Krips, 1993: 90). Recalling Freud's originary myth and Lévi-Strauss's structural theory of kinship systems, I would suggest that a married woman who does not want to have children poses a threat to the foundations of patriarchy itself. The cultural myth of an inextricable bond between marriage and motherhood, for women, according to Leira and Krips, is deeply ingrained in the "collective unconscious" of western patriarchal culture.

Motherhood, therefore, signifies a married woman's value in western, patriarchal society and culture and even, as Coppelia Kahn suggests, exonerates woman from "Eve's crime": "The mother's assumed capacity for unconditional love, uncontaminated by self-interest and anger, makes her sacred; her pain in childbirth, her self-sacrifice in childraising purify her sexuality" (Kahn, 1985: 78). Simultaneously, however, a mother lacks authority or power, for in the very same culture the female is subordinate to the male, a gendered pattern that is reinforced in the system of marriage and further validated by the expected role of the woman to bear and nurture children. And so yet another "double bind" ensues, where marriage and motherhood afford a woman "cultural dignity and respect while simultaneously providing the validation of her subordination" (Leira and Krips, 1991).

The contradictions residing in the space of mother and motherhood appear to be manifold. This in itself has been enough to ensure that feminist theory has not ignored the dangers of "maternal essentialism" and the question raised by Ann Snitow, for example, of "how special do we want mothering to be?" (1992: 42). Crucial to women's recovery of ownership of their own bodies and expanding reproductive choices is, as Snitow advocates, for feminist theory to address the imagining of "a full

and deeply meaningful life without motherhood, without children" as well as the already extensive attention to recovering mothers' previously silenced voices (1992: 33).

To return to an earlier point regarding differences among women, the ideological norms and expectations of the institution in which mothering occurs inevitably varies historically and cross-culturally. As mentioned above, factors such as race and class often serve to alienate women who are mothers even further from their own bodies and experience of subjectivity and from access to power. But, on the other hand, Rich points to the potential of a woman's *individual* experience of the fact of embodiment and sexuality - including childbirth and mothering - as a resource for building an autonomous human identity and sense of agency that does not depend on patriarchal institutions of heterosexuality and motherhood. Referring to her own experience once again, Rich emphasises that it is the institution of motherhood - the socially constructed and institutionalised "sacred calling" - and *not* the fact of motherhood itself that had alienated her from her body and spirit (1986: 39).

Nonetheless, maternal ideology in western society undoubtedly remains embedded in the institutional norm of the patriarchal family and heterosexuality and their assumed naturalness. This implies a robust myth of motherhood which has persisted even though the realities of modern life show that "mothering" frequently does not occur in the "normal" patriarchal family structure of father-mother-children. As Paula Nicolson points out, the "traditional nuclear family unit" is as much a myth as the myth of maternal instinct and ideal motherhood (1993: 206-7). But maternal ideology has not escaped feminist challenge: "The influence of feminism has meant

that women no longer have to see motherhood, heterosexuality and marriage as the only possible lifestyle" (Nicolson, 1993: 222).³

Adrienne Rich's later work, as an instructive example, extends feminist interpretations of female sexuality and the body from maternal embodied experience to lesbian experience in the context of western patriarchal society's heterosexual imperative (1993). Her exposition of "lesbian existence" not only challenges the assumption that women are innately heterosexual, but also aims to be potentially liberating for all women. As a lesbian feminist, Rich advocates pushing "beyond the limits of white and middle-class Western Women's Studies to examine women's lives, work, and groupings within every racial, ethnic, and political structure" (1993: 173). In any event, her writing can be applied to rescuing feminist theory from an essentialism that generalises women's experience, so that both theory and practice of feminist resistance might recover the body - "*to think through the body*" - and, at the same time, accommodate difference. Although differences among women such as class, race, ethnicity, occupation, sexual orientation, and so on should never be ignored, Rich argues that most women experience the body as a fundamental problem. The body, therefore, arguably persists as a pivotal point for any feminist theorising concerning women's lived experience under patriarchy (1986: 283).

³ Although I have specifically chosen to focus on images of the mother in this thesis, it has not in any way been my intention to imply that "motherhood" defines women. My aim is more to loosen the confinement of women's identity to disempowering and oppressive "sacred" images of the mother and motherhood. For a focus on analysis of the position of women who are not mothers, see Mardy S. Ireland's *Reconceiving Women: Separating Motherhood from Female Identity* (1993). This pioneering research and analysis of "'childless' women's place in theory beyond the parameters of deviance," particularly in the context of psychoanalytic theory, is extremely valuable for extending feminist attention to difference among women.

5.3 PSYCHOANALYTIC FEMINISM, THE BODY, AND THE PREOEDIPAL MOTHER

Psychoanalytic feminism aims to review and reinterpret Freudian and post-Freudian theory in the conviction that the roots of women's oppression are deeply embedded in the psyche (Tong, 1989: 5). Feminist visions of the body and sexuality, the mother, and motherhood are core issues for the psychoanalytic feminist project of developing a critical theory of gender. In her work on the contribution of psychoanalytic feminist writers to moral philosophy, *Subjection and Subjectivity* (1994), Diana Meyers, for example, points to the rich resources of what she calls "dissident speech" embedded in psychoanalytic feminism (72). Meyers uses "dissident speech" in place of the term "heretical ethics" or "herethics" used by psychoanalytic feminist, Julia Kristeva, in reference to aesthetic practices, such as writing, through which "nonconscious materials" are figuratively articulated. Psychoanalysis, says Meyers, is included as one of those aesthetic practices, or examples of dissident speech, that provide a locus for moral reflection (1994: 58-59). In the case of psychoanalytic feminism, the pursuit of critical reflection on gendered power relations and androcentric constructions of gender is supported by the "narratives of childhood development framed as mythic dramas" offered by psychoanalysis, which, in turn, provides "a particularly compelling framework for dissident speech" (1994: 72). Meyers thus ascribes the "scope of myth" to psychoanalytic feminist narratives, suggesting that "the exoticism of these counterfigurations intrudes on and upsets ingrained thought patterns" (1994: 91). This, I would argue, is evident in psychoanalytic feminist writers' vast body of "dissident speech" devoted to analysis of the maternal body as a politically and religiously contested sacred site. Furthermore,

the ways in which psychoanalysis has supported the institutionalisation of motherhood and sacralised the practice of mothering are also contested within the psychoanalytic-feminist framework. The theory generated by psychoanalytic feminist writers, therefore, has pivotal significance for the concerns of this thesis.

Recovering the Body

Naomi Goldenberg's work in the field of psychology of religion (1977; 1979; 1989; 1993) particularly addresses the problem of the body in relation to women's experience. Finding that human embodiment is not adequately addressed and is even denied in western religion, Goldenberg turns to Freudian and post-Freudian object relations theory for explanation of the central part played by the body in the construction of the psyche and human identity. Psychoanalysis, she argues, has a special ability to connect us with our bodies, since in analysis "language becomes embodied when it resonates with desires, hopes, and fears for past and present" (1993: 3). She critiques western, patriarchal religious and Enlightenment humanistic thought (including Jung's theory of transcendent, disembodied archetypes) which continues to disparage the body as inferior and associated with the feminine, but glorifies the mind and soul as superior, transcendent, and consistently associated with the masculine (1989: 244-55).

Goldenberg, therefore, does not focus on a biological femininity that constitutes an essential "woman" but, instead, looks to psychoanalytic theory as a resource for transforming "anti-body" religious and philosophical thought which is simultaneously misogynist. Neither is it suggested that women, too, should abandon the body in favour of transcending it, since Goldenberg more radically seeks to

explain why only women are associated with the body and "why we [both women and men] flee our bodies in the first place" (1989: 248). Acceptance of corporeality and mortality, she argues, could be the crux of a new philosophy and theology that will not oppress women and destroy the earth. The theme drawn out by Goldenberg's work is one where women's sexuality and the maternal, reproductive body are associated as much with death as with birth. Furthermore, the neurotic evasion and repression of the human fact of embodiment and mortality has become accepted as normal in western society and culture and is reproduced in society's repression of women's subjectivity. Critique and transformation of this theme pervades much of psychoanalytic feminist analysis of patriarchal society and androcentric philosophy, in an effort to recover female, and specifically maternal, subjectivity and desire.

Recovering the Preoedipal Mother

Other feminist writers such as Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976) and Nancy Chodorow (1978) argue that analysis of woman's role as mother is essential to any understanding of the historical and social construction of gender (Elliot, 1991: 99). Engaging with Freud's psychoanalysis, and more specifically following the path taken by object relations theory, their work remains of major significance in the field of psychoanalytic feminist analysis which shifts the focus from the paternal to the maternal. For both Dinnerstein and Chodorow, probing the meaning of preoedipal relations between mother and child in western patriarchal society is the primary concern. Dinnerstein's work focuses on the maternal body and critique of "sexual arrangements" between men and women that are assumed to be natural, in a quest to explain why it is women who are associated with the body and why they are blamed

for humanity's fear of mortality. Chodorow's psychoanalytic framework is underpinned by analysis of the institution of motherhood, rather than the body, with particular focus on the relational aspects of the mother-daughter bond to explain why it is always women who mother. Both writers critically analyse the spurious stability and naturalness of parenting arrangements under patriarchy that form the very basis of psychoanalytic theory of human sexuality and gender, and both advocate the disruption and change of those arrangements.

The theoretical innovations forged by Dinnerstein and Chodorow have been subject to criticism from more recent feminist writers in terms, once more, of their lack of attention to difference among women. Writing in the middle-class, American wave of radical and socialist feminism in the late 1970s, heterosexuality and conventional, middle-class family structure are often assumed, and their critique and proposed alternatives, too, remain within those boundaries. Although the structure of the middle-class patriarchal family are definitively challenged, the accepted status of the nuclear family as the norm and the effects of an overarching heterosexual imperative are overlooked (Elliot, 1991: 107; 144). However, in her most recent work, *Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities* (1994), Chodorow turns her attention to these very problems residing in the differences of culture, race, ethnicity, class, and sexual choice. But in any event, the insights found in both Dinnerstein's and Chodorow's earlier work about the position of and attitudes towards the mother, are invaluable for investigating how the maternal body and motherhood have been defined as sacred space and what the consequences of this sanctification have been for women.

In *The Mermaid and the Minatour: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (1976) Dinnerstein explores "sexual arrangements" which represent society's division of gender roles and men and women's collusion in maintaining the symbiotic relations and psychological interdependence such a division entails. Her project is to challenge the assumption that male-female arrangements are "natural" and to trace the connection between those arrangements and "human malaise," which she defines as the "normal psychopathology" pervading modern human culture. It is a pathology, she argues, that is far from benign, since it has taken on a malignant evolution which has been "shaping our species' stance toward itself and nature, a pathology whose chance of killing us off quite soon, if we cannot manage to outgrow it first, are very good indeed" (1976: 4). Dinnerstein, before Goldenberg, had detected the link between misogyny and humanity's race towards self-destruction and devastation of the natural world.

With regard to locating women's maternal role in these gendered arrangements, Dinnerstein addresses both the idealisation and denigration of the mother, probing the perceptions of her association with fullness and loss; love and hate; authority and submission; in short, "the pain of life and the fear of death" (1976: 34). The ambiguities of these perceptions have nevertheless generated an exaltation of motherhood where the early mother-child bond is felt to be fundamental, universal, immutable, and truly sacred. Dinnerstein further argues that the idealised human mother is a representation of "Mother Nature," a metaphor for our essentially ambivalent relations with the natural world. The mother, like nature, is the source not only of our "ultimate joy," but also of our "ultimate distress."

Dinnerstein powerfully portrays the preoedipal stage as fraught with contradictory emotions such as love and hate, envy and gratitude, where the infant learns the "mystical joys and the humiliating constraints of carnality." Since this "carnal ambivalence" of early childhood is consistently experienced under female auspices, bonded to the maternal body which cannot ever perfectly fulfil infant desires, the all-powerful, all-loving mother is tainted with imperfection and becomes despised - the "dirty goddess," in Dinnerstein's terms (1976: 124-59). Consequently, women in general are tainted by the ambiguities of the flesh, as we later learn of the body's transience and our own unavoidable mortality. In Dinnerstein's hands, I would argue, Winnicott's good-enough mother takes on an aura of wish-fulfilling fantasy, for her vision of the mother is closer to Lacan's (m)Other, the site of eternally unfulfilled desire.

Male rejection of the body affirms the human impulse towards immortality and "the human yearning toward a truth beyond the flesh" (1976: 210). It is the early, indelible connection of the embodied mother with the shortcomings of the flesh that reinforce men's dominance in the making of history and culture, in opposition to corporeality and nature. Both women and men, according to Dinnerstein, seem to collude in the view that woman's connections with the body disqualify her from any communal project of culture beyond the flesh, established as the domain of men.

Dinnerstein does not intend to deny that women are oppressed by men in patriarchal society as a result of this dynamic, but she does examine aspects of the balance of power between women and men that encourage women's collusion in assumed gender roles. She strongly argues that radically different sexual arrangements are required, envisioning a real form of shared early parenting where it is not only the

mother who represents and embodies the ambivalences of the flesh for the infant and young child. Only then might we overcome our later disappointments with corporeal existence in a more humane way that ceases to blame women and to deny the body and nature. And only then, moreover, might our neurotic adherence to a path of global self-destruction be averted and healed. ✓

Dinnerstein's project identifies the maternal body and the sacredness of the preoedipal mother as the source of what Freud, much earlier, called human civilisation's discontents. But she analyses these perceptions of the feminine and the mother, which are assumed to be essential and natural, as social constructions that keep gender relations and masculinist power in place. These social constructions are, nevertheless, engendered by very real and deep psychological processes which are embedded in the experience of the mother-infant relationship that shapes self-identity. I would argue that Dinnerstein's approach moves towards *de-sacralising* the mother and motherhood, by suggesting that human reproduction is not an exclusively female process that has to be shrouded in some kind of sacred mystery; and neither does the preoedipal period have to be a sacrosanct realm of the feminine, presided over by the all-powerful mother. Such a scenario disrupts the foundation of the psychoanalytic process that at once sanctifies and rejects the mother and the feminine in order to direct the individual on the path to the world of the father and the sociosymbolic order. Ironically, then, it is only when the maternal body and motherhood lose their sacred and inviolate power that women will experience being fully acknowledged, integrated, and whole human beings. Dinnerstein concludes:

? the power of the breast

When woman's lone dominion over the early flesh is abolished, she will no longer be peculiarly available as a dirty goddess, as scapegoat-idol, a quasi-human being toward whom we have no obligation to make the painful effort to see her steadily and see her whole. (1976: 155)

Chodorow's point of departure is that women mother and "women come to mother because they have been mothered by women" (1978: 211). Even if the biological mother does not parent, it is even then consistently a woman who takes on the task. Women's mothering, argues Chodorow, "is one of the few universal and enduring elements of the sexual division of labour" that cuts across differences of age, class, and race (1978: 5). In *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) Chodorow specifically explores how the structure of parenting reproduces itself in the context of the social organisation of gender and family structure that has been produced and reproduced in the history of western, capitalist societies.

Arguing that physiological female capacities and a mythical "maternal instinct" can no longer be exploited to explain why women continue to mother, Chodorow further realises that social and psychological theories of socialisation, learning, and behaviour cannot adequately explain the reproduction of the social organisation of gender differentiation in western society (1978: 13-38). She therefore explores the perpetuation of a certain structure of social relations at the deeper level of the psyche and personality development. The more fundamental origins and reproduction of deeply embedded psychological capacities associated with women (who mother) and men (who do not) need to be uncovered. Socialisation of gender roles in society, says Chodorow "are transmitted in and through those personalities produced by the

trying to collapse healthy division of labour

structure of the institution - the family - in which children become gendered members of society" (1978: 39). Central to her line of argument is that women's mothering capacities are built into the feminine psychic structure through deep psychological internalisation induced by a certain social structure. Her explication of why women mother implies an eternal cycle driven by the reciprocal relationship between social and psychic systems.

Chodorow follows Freudian psychoanalytic principles, most specifically the oedipal process, to explain why, eventually, both boys and girls turn away from the bond with their mothers to become autonomous adult women and men (1978: 82). But it is object relations theory that essentially informs Chodorow's theoretical work, in its emphasis on the differential object-relational experiences of boys and girls and the subsequent ways these different experiences are internalised. In her later writing Chodorow reaffirms this approach as central to her theory, explaining that gender relations and men's dominance over women are based on the fact that "through relation to their mother, women develop a self-in-relation, men a self that denies relatedness" (1989: 15). Long before the Oedipus complex, it is early relations between mother and son, and mother and daughter, rooted as they are in historically established social and family structures of patriarchy, that psychologically produce the appropriate "feminine" and "masculine" personalities. The mother urges her son towards separation and the development of a less relational and emotionally-based personality structure that prepares him for the external, male-dominated world. But her relationship with her daughter, to a greater extent, remains merged, perpetuating a relational and emotional bond that softens the boundaries between the mother and the child as "other."

For the girl, according to Chodorow, there is no easy and straightforward oedipal resolution in turning to her father, for even so, she "never gives up her mother as an internal or external love object, even if she does become heterosexual" (1978: 127). Chodorow emphasises the psychodynamic influences of the conventional patriarchal family situation and argues that most girls do become heterosexual. Nevertheless, Chodorow insists that girls do not abandon their mothers as love objects and neither do they perceive themselves as castrated (Kahn, 1985: 75). In her most recent work, Chodorow in fact reveals that Freud himself states that the Oedipus complex is not so absolute in a girl as in a boy and, therefore, "the puzzling question of why she [the daughter] ever gives up her attachment to her mother emerges" (1994: 9). Chodorow further states, quite unequivocally, that

Girls cannot and do not "reject" their mother and women in favor of their father and men, but remain in a bisexual triangle throughout childhood and into puberty. They usually make a sexual resolution in favor of men and their father, but retain an internal emotional triangle. (1978: 140.)

The internalisation of this relational bond engenders more permeable ego boundaries in the girl and a consequently more relational and nurturing "feminine" personality. In a sense, the mother reproduces herself in her daughter - for good or bad - contextualized in and reinforced by a social structure that induces an unending cycle of mothering.

Chodorow points to the development of a maternal omnipotence, on the one hand, as a danger to her own and her child's autonomous self-identity; and on the other, to an uncritical assumption of women's unique self-sacrificing qualities. She also identifies an exclusively female space linking mother and daughter that produces and reproduces mothering. Like Dinnerstein, she advocates shared and equal parenting from the outset as one way of disrupting a socially contextualized and gendered psychological process that supports the conventional sexual division of labour and the oppression of women:

at the
father
exists

My expectation is that equal parenting would leave people of both genders with the positive capacities each has, but without the destructive extremes these currently tend toward. Anyone who has good primary relationships has the foundation for nurturance and love, and women would retain these even as men would gain them...

Successful
activity →
generativity

People's sex choices might become more flexible, less desperate.

(1978: 218)

The thrust of Chodorow's theorising is aimed to disrupt a construction of stereotypical feminine and masculine psychic structures that produce men who denigrate femininity and deny female subjectivity in order to maintain their own dominance of the socio-political sphere of life. Therefore Chodorow examines the profound psychological causes of "male fear and objectification of women, the casting of woman as other, and the refusal to accord subjectivity to mothers" (1989: 14). Her analysis most definitively points to the deeper psychological effects of the sacrosanct

social institution of motherhood and the sacred, but fundamentally ambivalent and flawed image of the omnipotent and self-sacrificing mother. Male preoedipal experience of love for the mother, it would appear, is threatening to their gender and generates polarised responses that "in one breath idealize that love and in the next call it deceitful and seductive" (Kahn, 1985: 85). It is an image of maternal love that is internally conflictual, simultaneously inspiring fear of engulfment, dependence, and passivity on the one hand, and on the other, an unending experience of loss and yearning for return to the imagined source of comfort and security in that undifferentiated bond.

Both Dinnerstein and Chodorow ask why the origins of the profoundly complex and polarised psychological consequences of such deeply felt emotions are unfailingly located in a feminine and, more specifically, maternal space. One solution, they both conclude, is a radical change in the gendered construction of parenting roles which would transform the psychological process generated by the preoedipal relations between parent and child. It has been argued that their approach perhaps does not take adequate note of "same sex bonding" between daughters and peers and other adult female role models. Alternative feminine identification, if strong enough, might allow a daughter "to separate from her mother without having to rely on a heterosexual erotic connection with the father to achieve this" (Ferguson, 1989: 42). More critically, Diana Meyers argues that coparenting as a solution for the women's subordination can as easily lead to children acquiring the weaknesses of both parents, rather than the strengths of male and female influences as Chodorow predicts. Furthermore, she wonders if there is any reason "to predict that coparented children will be any better off in virtue of having acquired the strengths, without the

weaknesses, of each parent," since the parents' "sharply dichotomized strengths," as described by Chodorow, may just as likely lead to confused coparented children (Meyers, 1992: 153-4).⁴ Similarly, Jane Flax stresses the determining power of the internal psychic experience of splitting inherent in all human beings, suggesting that both Dinnerstein and Chodorow might be "too naive and optimistic about the benefits and consequences of coparenting" (1990: 168).

However, I would argue that the theoretical work of feminists such as Rich, Goldenberg, Dinnerstein, and Chodorow not only subvert psychoanalytic theory's psychology of the maternal, but they also disrupt older, more deeply entrenched representations of the feminine and the body embedded in western philosophical thought. Proposals for changing maternal practice and social constructions of motherhood that have become fixed within the structure of patriarchal gender relations constitute a significant and integral part of this feminist subversion. Clearly, these writers have at the very least shown that ideas of the maternal body and motherhood as natural, sacred, and immutable (in the sense of a substantial definition of the sacred), find their origins in western patriarchal philosophy, theology, and psychology. I would therefore argue that these notions of the maternal are fantasies shaping a humanly-constructed and contested sacred space. In other words, these fantasies have provoked a politics of sacred space that has conceptualised, reified, and

⁴ Meyers' essay "Subversion of Women's Agency in Psychoanalytic Feminism" (1992) more fundamentally critiques psychoanalytic feminism as a whole. She argues that this theoretical approach cannot hope to reinstate women's agency, since by its very nature it has to adhere to Freud's already gendered psychological forces (that is, boys' and girls' fundamentally differentiated experiences of the castration complex) that are claimed to drive feminine and masculine development (pp. 152-3). In Meyers' view, psychoanalytic feminism can only act as a barometer - albeit an invaluable instrument - of women's agency and the tenacious role of gender in perpetuating women's subordination (p. 158). In short, the Freudian assumption that determining psychic forces are gendered needs to be challenged by a far-reaching reformulation of psychoanalytic feminism's account of those psychic forces.

colonised maternal space; that has been supported by both men and women's collusion with ideas of the naturalness and substantial sacredness of an essential maternal "instinct" and the self-sacrificing mother; and that has been contested by a feminist consciousness and critique which aims to recover the subjectivity and agency of mothers in their experienced reality.

To sum up, the above feminist analyses of images of the mother arguably illuminate two cardinal constituents of a politics of sacred space, namely, contested ownership and exile. First, the question of who really *owns* the maternal body and motherhood is brought to light: This humanly-produced sacred space *is* represented as female, but does it belong to women? Arguing that this is far from the reality of women's experience of motherhood, theorists such as Rich, Goldenberg, and Dinnerstein contest possession of the maternal body by initiating a recovery of the body itself, along with its inexorable vulnerability and mortality, as a corporeal space both women *and* men need to revalorise and acknowledge as important. As Kahn points out, they challenge the conception of woman's body as "the 'carnal scapegoat' for our fears of the flesh and mortality, or the idol in which we try to recreate our lost union with mother-as-flesh" (1985: 77). Furthermore, Dinnerstein's and Chodorow's advocacy of equal female and male responsibility and participation in parenting arrangements envisions a radical expansion of the boundaries of maternal space beyond an exclusively female realm and beyond disparaging conceptions of the feminine and the mother.

Second, and finally, the sacred space of the mother itself is unveiled in all its contradictions and ambiguities, revealing that it is not only constructed by western, androcentric ideas and practices, and contested by feminist ones, but that it is also

internally polarised. For the son or daughter, maternal space seems to evoke an experience of both love and fear when situated within it and of denial, loss, and mourning when separated from it - in other words, a sense of dislocation and exile. Motherhood, too, is not a simple or unitary experience, for the woman as mother is still herself but also takes on all the roles and responsibilities involved in being "mother" (Nicolson, 1993: 207). Under patriarchy, the "sacred calling" of motherhood frequently signifies a terrain of intensely contradictory physiological, psychological, and emotional experiences that may elicit profound feelings of dislocation and alienation from her familiar self, producing a denial or forgetting of her multiple subjectivity. In relating feminist theory and praxis to women's lived reality, Jane Flax incisively and accurately comments:

If women might say what they want of the maternal, it could be that we do not want to confront its limits and ambiguities... Maternity is not an essence, nor does it exhaust categories of woman or the feminine. Contemporary Western cultures glorify, denigrate and isolate this status... Yet, motherhood is not an exclusionary state... it does not transport anyone into a unique form of being. We go on hating, thinking, etc., as mothers and otherwise. (1993: 153)

*implies child
is a agency
of change
political or social*

Again, the question that comes to mind is, how special (or sacred?) do we want mothering to be in the whole picture of life, given that it embodies such painful paradoxes and seems often to limit women's own consciousness of their power to be determining agents in their own lives? Yet, on the other hand, could there be a place

for feminist renewal and repossession of this maternal sacred space as an autonomous and separate feminine territory which would serve as a metaphor for recovering women's experience of agency and power? In the next chapter, therefore, the theories of French feminist writers Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva will be examined, since they follow a post-Lacanian, postmodernist approach to psychoanalytic theory that seeks to recover the voice of the feminine and alternative images of maternal subjectivity. The possibilities for transforming the embodied sacred space of the mother will then be explored, focusing on Jessica Benjamin's and Madelon Sprengnether's reinterpretations of psychoanalytic theory of gender.

CHAPTER SIX: MATERNAL SACRED SPACE

6.1 WRITING MATERNAL SACRED SPACE

French feminist writers and psychoanalysts Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva arguably move towards an interpretation of maternal sacred space that is underpinned by a postmodernist understanding of the "emptiness" of the category of "woman" in western philosophy and psychoanalysis (Berry, 1992: 251). Their work includes deconstructive analyses of Freud's biologically based theories of sexuality and femininity, adhering to Lacan's emphasis on the centrality of the sexualised subject and the primacy of language in psychosocial life. However, Irigaray and Kristeva also seek to disrupt Lacanian discourse in order to redeem the significance of the maternal metaphor in a reality that is produced by paternal language and androcentric symbolic representation. Finding that in Lacan's patriarchal Symbolic, too, feminine and maternal subjectivity is denied and relegated to the Imaginary and the position of "other," Irigaray and Kristeva - albeit in different ways - experiment with alternative modes of expressing the feminine and the maternal body. These two writers therefore give clarity of purpose to the practice of dissident speech discussed earlier, in their refigurations of women's "nonconscious materials" and their creation of new models for a feminist ethics (see Meyers, 1994: 58-59). The work of both these authors of *l'écriture féminine*, I would argue, aims to redress the underlying repression of maternal subjectivity and creativity inherent in psychoanalytic theory that Suleiman, for example, identifies as an assumption that "*Mothers don't write, they are written*" (1985: 356).

Luce Irigaray

To begin with Luce Irigaray, it can be argued that her work rests on the stance that women and men, femininity and masculinity, are different, an assumption that has been open to attack from some feminist theorists for its alleged biological essentialism. However, Irigaray seeks to forge a new theory of sexual difference that will reappropriate female and maternal sexuality and recover an avenue for feminine expression and women's equal, but different, participation in society and culture. She therefore bases her approach on the assertion that an entirely new ethics, based on the acknowledgement of sexual difference, is required:

Women's exploitation is based on sexual difference; its solution will come only through sexual difference... It is quite simply a matter of social justice to balance out this power of the one sex over the other by giving, or giving back, cultural values to female sexuality... Equality between men and women cannot be achieved without a *theory of gender as sexed* and a rewriting of the rights and obligations of each sex, *qua different*, in social rights and obligations. (1993a: 12)

Nonetheless, Irigaray's vision of a new ethics of sexuality is not an exclusive one, but aspires to liberate social, cultural, and religious life from the power of one gender over the other. Love, she insists, can only exist between two parties in a relationship of equal standing. For Irigaray, then, this "requires that the rights of both male and female be written into the legal code... to convert individual morality into collective

ethics" (1993b: 4). She visualises, even further, that transformation of civil law will extend to a new respect for natural law.

Like Goldenberg, Dinnerstein, and Rich, among others, Irigaray associates patriarchy's denigration of the feminine with its race towards destruction of human life and the earth's fertility. Again, like other feminist writers, she locates the origins of this fight against nature in the patriarchal order's privileging of "hypothetical worlds" beyond this world, such as the "after-life," rather than valuing the world we have. But, since we are able to identify and interpret these limitations of the patriarchal order, Irigaray believes that patriarchy "cannot mark the end of History" and our task of securing social justice and saving our natural resources must be possible (1993: 27).

More specifically in relation to the psychoanalytic paradigm, Irigaray's reading of Freud further emphasises his lack of attention to the reality of sexual difference, as explicated in section one, "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry," of Irigaray's major work *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985a). Freud's theory of gender effectively represses the sexual significance of the preoedipal mother-child relationship and essentially denies the existence of sexual difference before the oedipal stage. Until she recognises her state of "castration," the little girl's sexuality is presumed to be phallic, or masculine - in other words, she has no sex of her own, she is a "little man" - and her later attainment of femininity, according to Freud, rests on "penis envy" and becoming the passive object of male desire. Likewise, Lacan's banishment of the preoedipal mother to the Imaginary, which he devalues, and his depiction of woman as "empty" and even non-existent in his privileged symbolic order, are challenged.

In short, Irigaray indicts psychoanalytic discourse's assumption that "woman lives her own desire only as the expectation that she may at last come to possess the equivalent of the male organ," a discourse that normalises phallogocentric patriarchy and denies women's own sexuality and desire (Irigaray, 1985b: 24). Woman, she points out, is characterised as a "hole" (*trou*) with no potential for appropriate symbolic expression in an order where the phallus is the ultimate signifier. Woman, moreover, functions in a masculine libidinal economy as a blank mirror that reflects the masculine and assures men of their primacy and validity. In other words, boys' fear of castration is mirrored in the "reality" of the girl's lack, but the notion of her later "penis envy" then serves to reassure males that they possess something of worth. Thus, they are comforted in their male anguish (Nye, 1988: 150-1).

For Irigaray, then, woman must be more than simply defined by lack in contrast to male possession of the phallus; she must be more than simply the object of man's desire, always dependent on him for her pleasure; woman's desire and *jouissance* should be represented for itself in a symbolic order of language. Consequently, she sets out to restore an authentic subjectivity and sexuality for women through radical disruption of the phallogocentric discourse that suffuses Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and western philosophy. As Andrea Nye puts it, Irigaray "initiated a new kind of confrontation between the woman reader/thinker and her 'masters'" in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Nye, 1988: 149). First submitted as her doctoral thesis, it was this text, in fact, that earned Irigaray's expulsion from Lacan's (the "master" himself) *École Freudienne* (Sarup, 1992: 135). It is in this text, too, that Irigaray advocates working towards an exclusively feminine linguistic

practice, an expressive voice that has long been denied women, by turning rational, phallogocentric discourse on its head and recovering a voice:

Turn everything upside down, inside out, back to front. *Rack it with radical convulsions*, carry back, reimport, those crises that her "body" suffers in her impotence to say what bothers her... *Overthrow syntax* by suspending its eternally teleological order, by snipping the wires, cutting the current... by the intervention at times of short-circuits that will disperse, diffract, deflect endlessly, making energy explode sometimes, with no possibility of returning to one single origin.
(1985a: 142)

In *Speculum*, Irigaray develops her critique of the repression of the Imaginary and the maternal body, not just in psychoanalytic theory but also in the western philosophical tradition as a whole. She extends her confrontation by adopting an exclusively feminine, poetic, and overtly erotic style of writing, more extensively developed in the essays in *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985b), through which she defines a specifically feminine alterity that stresses the primacy of women's desire. She compiles, as it were, an "erotic inventory"¹ showing that women's sex organs and sources of pleasure are undeniably plural: "*But woman has sex organs more or less everywhere*. She finds pleasure almost anywhere... 'She' is indefinitely other in herself" (1985b: 28). Advocating a separate female symbolic order which explicitly links

¹ I am indebted to Kaja Silverman's *The Acoustic Mirror* (1988: 143) for this term "erotic inventory." Silverman's incisive critical analysis probes the intersection between feminism, film, and psychoanalysis, with particular attention to the "maternal voice" in cinema. Chapter Five focuses on Irigaray's work in relation to femininity and experimental feminist cinema.

language and female desire, Irigaray unhesitatingly pursues the path of speaking and writing the body.

Irigaray's writing celebrates the autoerotic and plural characteristics of female sexuality, where the lips of the mouth and the vulva become interchangeable. Irrevocably bonding speech and sexuality, "Irigaray moves easily between the image of the two-lipped vulva to that of the woman's lips opening and closing in speech" (Sprengnether, 1990: 210). Women's experience of *jouissance* needs no mediator, for "she 'touches herself' all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact" (1985b: 24). Likewise, in speaking, "at least when she dares, woman is constantly touching herself" (1985b: 29). Irigaray renders a violent image of interruption of such pleasure by the separation of the two lips by the "violating penis" that obliterates woman's own desire and pleasure, thereby providing a graphic metaphor for the symbolic order's interruption and denial of female speech. But her poetics of the female body awakens consciousness of a sexual desire and *jouissance* - within women and between women - that can be rescued from the phallic Symbolic and expressed in a language of the feminine:

Between our lips, yours and mine, several voices, several ways of speaking resound endlessly, back and forth. One is never separable from the other... Kiss me. Two lips kissing two lips: Openness is ours again. Our "world." And the passage from the inside out, from the outside in, the passage between us, is limitless. Without end. No knot or loop, no mouth ever stops our exchanges... When you kiss me, the

world grows so large that the horizon itself disappears. Are we unsatisfied? Yes, if that means we are never finished. If our pleasure consists in moving, being moved, endlessly. Always in motion: openness is never spent nor sated. (1985b: 290-10)

Essential to Irigaray's recovery of female subjectivity and feminine language is her critique of Freud and Lacan's marginalisation of the mother-daughter relationship in favour of giving father and son centre stage. Not only does woman become object of male desire, but she also, according to Freud, only attains her true femininity in her reproductive function, especially as mother of an infant son - a son who, by all accounts, will eventually reject her in obedience to the paternal law. The unsymbolised relationship between mother and daughter, therefore, constitutes an underlying threat to the patriarchal Symbolic. In the context of Freud's femininity, mother and daughter represent, in Irigaray's words, "the dark continent of the dark continent" (cited in Whitford, 1989: 108).

In short, Irigaray not so much works towards revalorising the Imaginary and the maternal body in terms of maternal *function*, as much as she strives to dislodge the paternal and phallogocentric law of the Symbolic through restoring a genealogy of women, of mothers and daughters. In other words, Irigaray's project aims chiefly to construct a female Symbolic, where the mother-daughter relationship can be represented as a prototype for relations between women, where women are not reduced to reproductive function. It is only through the symbolisation of this "vertical relationship," problematic though it may be, that the mother can also be a woman and therefore provide a model for the daughter to separate from her and individuate as a

woman (see Whitford, 1989: 108-21). In this context, I would argue, Irigaray's strives to establish a female sacred space in which "mother," as metaphor for all women, can assume central position as subject. For Irigaray, the maternal is a multivalent symbol:

we are all mothers just by being women. We bring many things into the world apart from children, we give birth to many things apart from children: love, desire, language, art, social things, political things, religious things... We must take back this maternal creative dimension that is our birthright. (1980: 18)

where is the
Kali, Tripura
Sardar

The disruption of patriarchal language and the Symbolic represents the cornerstone of Irigaray's deconstructive work, and her vision of a symbolic representation of the mother-daughter relationship and a language of the feminine defines her reconstructive project. The lack of symbolisation of the mother-daughter relation, she insists, permeates not only psychoanalysis but also western metaphysics, myth, and religion. To redress such an ubiquitous absence and to achieve a different social order, "women need a religion, a language, and a currency of exchange" of their own (Irigaray: 1984b: 79). Contributing towards this need, Irigaray asserts that western culture is founded not on a myth of patricide, as Freud stated in *Totem and Taboo*, but on an original matricide, "an even more ancient murder, that of the woman-mother" (1980: 11). This statement echoes Jungian analyst, Erich Neumann, who stated unequivocally that "patriarchal culture is founded on matricide and that its basic sacrifice is the slain mother" (see Engelsman, 1994: 35). Joan Chamberlain Engelsman further indicates that the repression of the feminine in general, and

maternal deities in particular, that pervades patriarchal religion is based on the banishment or murder of the mother, "while the competition between father and son takes center stage" (1994: 34-5).

In her paper "Body Against Body: In Relation to the Mother" (1980), Irigaray reinterprets the myth of Clymenestra to show that patriarchy was indeed founded on the sacrifice of the mother and her daughters and human descent into madness, a madness that psychoanalysis has attached exclusively to women's desire (1980: 10-13). Therefore, she asks, "when Freud talks about the father being torn apart by the sons in the primeval horde, isn't he, out of full-scale denial and misunderstanding, forgetting the woman who has been torn between son and father, among sons?" (1980: 13).

Irigaray construes the privileging of the patricidal Oedipus myth over the murder of the mother as a metaphor for perpetuating the privileging of the phallus and the Symbolic over the maternal body and the Imaginary. The maintenance of patriarchy is effected by the organising power of phallus, located "at the very place where the umbilical cord, that primal link to the mother, once gave birth to man and woman" (1980: 14). She thereby reveals that psychoanalytic theory's emphasis on fear of the father's threat of castration conceals a much earlier, traumatic severance, that of separation from the mother through the cutting of the umbilical cord. In psychoanalysis, all connection to the original womb is repressed for fear of maternal power, for fear of the "devouring monster" we have made out of the mother, for fear of "fusion, death, lethal sleep, if the father did not intervene to sever this uncomfortably close link to the original matrix" (1980: 14). Therefore, it is the father's phallus that intervenes "to master maternal power" and it is paternal law that

constitutes the Symbolic and regulates human expression and creativity. Consequently, the maternal body is refused symbolic representation and the mother and daughter (all women) must remain silent while the paternal (family) name "slips over the body like clothes, like identity tags - outside the body" (1980: 14).

Irigaray's alternative mythic metaphor for the power of the masculine over the maternal body and the feminine in society and culture shows how the Symbolic represents a masculine sacred space from which the feminine is exiled. This exile is further replicated in western, patriarchal religions since, in her view, these religions offer no way back to the mother and the body, only a way *up* "to heaven, toward the father and his kingdom" (1980: 15). Again, the mother, as both body and earth, is not good enough, but must be subjugated and controlled to hasten human transcendence to some world *beyond* the one we have.

Therefore, to return to Irigaray's reconstructive project, the recovery of a genealogy of women that symbolises the feminine inevitably involves an interweaving of society, culture, and religion underpinned by human relationship with the divine. In western societies, God helps man define his existence and gender by helping him to "orient his finiteness by reference to infinity" (1984a: 61). But love of God is not moral in itself, says Irigaray, for it merely shows the way; we need a God in order to *become*, for inspiration to move forward towards humanly desired goals. Irigaray insists that "Divinity is what we need to become free, autonomous, sovereign. No human subjectivity, no human society has ever been established without the help of the divine" (1984a: 62).

However, women are exiled from the sacred space of man's construction of a uniquely male god. Underpinning all other needs is women's need for a god of their

own, one that serves to revalorise women's subjectivity, language, and experience of the body, one that values mother and daughter, fertility, and the cycles of nature. For instance, Lacan's conception of a special relationship between woman's *jouissance* and God permeates Irigaray's thinking, but Lacan is judged to fall short in his masculinist positioning of woman "beyond the phallus." This kind of divinity, even if *beyond* the phallus, is still defined *by* the phallus, and therefore offers woman no symbolic representation of her own. Although women have often been mystics and guardians of religious tradition, their position has not offered them their own sacred space, their own way to individuation and transcendence. What is it, she asks, that holds women back from becoming "*divine women*"? Her answer suggests that "as long as woman lacks a divine made in her image she cannot establish her subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own" (1984d: 63). Irigaray, too, links women's *jouissance* and bodily experience to religious and mystic experience, but to own this sacred space, "we [women] must thereby enter further into womanhood, and not become more alien to ourselves than we were, more in exile than we were" (1984a: 60).

To sum up, rather than contesting and attempting to transform the phallogocentric "sacred space" of the symbolic order, I would argue that Irigaray more definitively attempts to construct a separate discursive sacred space for women. This project is mobilised through several different strategies, such as writing - or speaking - the female body; symbolising the mother-daughter relationship; and recovering the mother, not for her reproductive function that is confined to the Imaginary, but as a metaphor for all women's creativity. Psychoanalytic theory's discourse of women as "(m)other" and external to phallogocentric culture is, in a sense, paradoxically confirmed in her assertion of sexual difference, but that otherness is

difference

endowed with a female subjectivity located in an autonomous symbolic order. As a result, the "other" as object becomes the "other" as subject. This kind of discourse, I would argue, affords subjectivity to both sexes, where both can be "other" to one another - in other words, offering a foundation for a new ethics and social justice founded on sexual difference.

In this discursive context, Irigaray's work has frequently been interpreted and criticised by some feminists, on the one hand, as biological essentialism; on the other hand, her expression of an analogous religious or mystical feminine experience, which in substantial terms evokes a sense of the sacred, has been further condemned for escaping into mysticism, thereby lacking political power and accessibility for women in the "real world." (see Elliot, 1991: 174-89). In conclusion, however, I would argue that Irigaray's discourse of the maternal body and femininity reflects a politics of sacred space where women, as individuals, might redress their exile from the masculine domain and claim sole ownership and control over their own expression and creativity.

transcend
politics vs
politics of
aggression
of
absence

Julia Kristeva

Julia Kristeva, like Irigaray, launches an attack on phallogocentric discourse with her own complex analyses of sexual difference and maternity, as well as proposals for a new, feminist "heretical ethics." Kristeva's explanation of western culture's constitution of the subject rests on notions of loss, separation, and projection (Jonte-Pace, 1993: 113). We are all, whether male or female, involved as "subjects in process" - a "signifying process" in which meaning is suffused with drives and desires that are universally repressed in the unconscious (Elliot, 1991: 199).

To begin with her thought in relation to sexual difference and the constitution of the subject, Kristeva maintains that sexual difference is symbolic rather than natural, based on an imagined process of separation from the Imaginary, or "castration," through which women and men position themselves in the Symbolic. Following Lacan's psychoanalytic interpretation of gender differentiation in western patriarchal culture, Kristeva asserts that the sociosymbolic system articulates sexual difference by projecting separation and lack onto women, as representatives of the (m)other, and phallic power onto men, projections that have nothing to do with anatomical differences between male and female.

Kristeva situates this signifying process in her distinction between the "semiotic," a prelinguistic space of undifferentiated fusion between mother and child (analogous to Lacan's preoedipal Imaginary before the mirror stage) and the symbolic order of language (Moi, 1986: 12). The semiotic, as representative of this signifying process, comprises the energy of the presymbolic, preoedipal drives forming what Kristeva refers to as the *chora*, that is, a locus of energy - rhythms, pressures, and pulsions that "connect and orient the body to the mother" (Kristeva, cited in Sprengnether, 1990: 213). In line with Lacan's stages of development, the semiotic *chora* has to give way to the subject's entry into the Symbolic, but it always remains as a repressed presence, an unarticulated pressure on symbolic language (Moi, 1986: 13). For Kristeva, although maternal influence is always present, the mother enters into language as "abject" - in other words, as symbol of the impure and sinful which must be denigrated and repressed, in order for social identity and society to be maintained (Nye, 1988: 144). But it is in this very abjection of the mother that the

"dangerous power" of the mother is felt, where the Symbolic order and the unity of the subject teeter on the brink of presymbolic chaos and nothingness.

Kristeva's choice of this Platonic term *chora* to describe the eternal "other" in opposition to Symbolic representation, as Philippa Berry points out, implies the eternally present as "that emptiness which precedes but is the necessary precondition of all forms of representation" (Berry, 1992: 256-8). As such, the semiotic *chora* is arguably reminiscent of Asian religious notions of the primordial chaos and empty space from which all things are created. In the microcosmic framework of the individual subject, the *chora* is associated with the infant's chaotic experience of its body and drives, marking the absence (or death?) of a unified subject, as well as its birth: "The place of the subject's creation, the semiotic *chora* is also the place of its negation, where its unity gives way before the process of charges and stases producing that unity" (Kristeva; cited in Berry, 1992: 257). Kristeva therefore conveys an impression of a mobile, dynamic, and continuous interaction between the semiotic and Symbolic, rather than a definition of discrete stages or closed, stable territories. To the contrary, the semiotic clearly possesses the power to destabilise the order of the Symbolic.

For Kristeva, the semiotic represents a heterogeneous, chaotic, and largely unconscious dimension of language which subsists within the sociosymbolic order but which, nevertheless, can be accessed to subvert that order. In "A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident" (1986b), Kristeva introduces various types of modern-day dissidents who take up a position of resistance within the sociosymbolic order, including "the writer who experiments with the limits of identity, producing texts where the law does not exist outside language. A playful language therefore gives rise

to a law that is overturned, violated and pluralized" (Kristeva, 1986b: 295). Her characterisation refers to what is often known as *l'écriture féminine*, but, unlike Irigaray's vision of a separate, female discursive space, Kristeva insists that this writing is accessible to both women and men. Furthermore, Kristeva's speaking subject, whether male or female, can only articulate this lawless stance of semiotic language and *jouissance* as a strategy of resistance by first taking up his or her position in the Symbolic (Sprengnether, 1990: 214). As a result, Toril Moi points out, both Kristeva's semiotic theory and the "speaking subject" are then irrevocably caught up in a paradox, their position being "at once subversive of and dependent on the law" (Moi, 1986: 13).

According to Kristeva's semiotic theory, as it pertains to women, the language of the maternal body and *jouissance* remains unspoken and powerless until the young girl enters the Symbolic. Kristeva, then, seems to affirm Freud and Lacan's developmental order through which a woman has to take her place in a phallogocentric culture by means of separation from the mother, or "castration," if she is to have a voice in the public domain of socio-political relations. In this sense, then, she focuses on the painful, sacrificial process undertaken by the daughter in surrendering her identification with the mother's body and participation in her *jouissance*, so that she can identify with her father and thus raise herself to his "symbolic heights" (Moi, 1986: 139). As Sprengnether observes, "In Kristeva's depiction of this dilemma it appears that a woman must do violence to her very femaleness in order to grow up" (1990: 216). Although both women and men can choose to disrupt the symbolic order through "*l'écriture féminine*," the separation seems to be a far more uncertain and sacrificial process for women than it does for

men, given the daughter's identification with her mother and her subsequently more precarious hold on the Symbolic.

Since all human subjects seem destined to separate from the maternal body and the Imaginary realm - that is, through the symbolic process of "castration" - in order to enter the sociosymbolic order of western culture, how is it that it is women who are singled out to be consistently marginalised and associated with the Imaginary? To answer this question, Kristeva engages in an incisive critique of western, monotheistic religion and the fantasy or myth of the omnipotent, archaic mother that it has produced. In "About Chinese Women" (1986a), she argues that Judaeo-Christian monotheistic ideology continues to underpin western patrilinear capitalist society, even when it is disguised as humanism. She indicts Judaeo-Christian religion, which has created and perpetuated the myth of the archaic mother, only to then categorise all women as her representative. As such, Kristeva recalls, Judaism's biblical women were marginalised from the symbolic order, associated with the body, pleasure, procreation, and the propagation of the race. Although it was women who ensured the maintenance of the community, a community that was even regarded as "the *bride* of God," they had "no direct relation with the law of the community and its political and religious unity: God generally speaks only to men" (1986a: 140). Judaism, then, evolved by way of control and marginalisation of women, as well as through "the victory of patriarchal monotheism over earlier, maternal and fertility-oriented religion" (Moi, 1986: 139).

Kristeva explains how the patrilinear symbolic order has continued to function in this way through

a *system of kinship* that involves transmission of the name of the father and a rigorous prohibition of incest, and a *system of speech* that involves an increasingly logical, simple, positive and 'scientific' form of communication that is stripped of all stylistic, rhythmic and 'poetic' ambiguities. Such an order brings this *inhibition constitutive of the speaking animal* to a height never before attained, one logically assumed by the role of the father. (Kristeva, 1986a: 151)

The role of the mother, on the other hand, has been confined to the unconscious, to the drives, and to "the first training of those drives in the oral/anal phase, marked by rhythms, intonations and gestures which as yet have no significance" (1986a: 151).

Woman, therefore, is categorised as:

a specialist in the unconscious, a witch, a bacchanalian, taking her *jouissance*... which breaks the chain, the taboo, the mastery. A *marginal discourse*, with regard to the science, religion and philosophy of the *polis*... *Jouissance*, pregnancy, marginal discourse: this is the way in which the 'truth', hidden and cloaked by the truth of the symbolic order and its time, functions through women. (1986a: 154)

Woman, therefore, is always in exile from one domain or the other, constituting a site of polarisation and paradox where she is always faced with the dilemma, the painful choice of whether to be "the mother's daughter" or "the father's daughter." Kristeva, I would argue, points to a maternal space that is reinforced and

sacralised by religion and myth, only to be relegated to the margins of patriarchal society - a space that is feared for its energy and disruptive power, and therefore repressed to the unconscious. Associated with this maternal space, as daughters of mothers and as reproducers of humanity, women have to sacrifice it and identify themselves with the very things considered masculine, such as mastery, the superego, and socio-economic exchange, in order to secure a place in the socio-political realm. The alternative is to refuse that role, to align oneself with the mother and the unconscious drives, to "sulk in the face of history" and "sullenly hold back, neither speaking nor writing, in a permanent state of expectation, occasionally punctuated by some kind of outburst: a cry, a refusal, 'hysterical symptoms'" (1986a: 155-6). The question remains as to whether another alternative exists whereby women can circumvent this painful double bind of exile - either from the mother or from the father.

Kristeva refuses both the extremes, at first considering the even more extreme act of suicide - the path taken by Virginia Woolf, Maria Tsvetaeva, and Sylvia Plath - as another alternative act. However, in her pivotal essay, "Women's Time" (1986d), she develops her path of refusal, and begins to articulate a viable third alternative, in an incisive critique of modern, twentieth-century feminism. Taking the "first" choice of joining the masculine, sociosymbolic contract of western society, the first wave of liberal, egalitarian feminists demanded their equal rights with men and a place in politics and history. Although she acknowledges the achievements of this first generation of feminists, Kristeva argues that women who have attained positions of political power have frequently found themselves reinforcing the very *status quo* they had previously found oppressive.

The second wave of feminists, after 1968, took the "second" choice and sought "to give a language to the intra-subjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past" (1986d: 195). For Kristeva, these are the feminists (like Irigaray) who have refused to be the father's daughter and have rejected a position in the symbolic order, aiming to create a separate, female discourse aligned to the "archaic (mythical) memory" of the mother (1986d: 195). But she cautions that founding a separate female society requires the scapegoating of the other sex, risking degeneration into inverse sexism and violence. Kristeva again stresses that challenging the myth of the omnipotent, archaic mother is a prerequisite to any third option:

If the archetype of the belief in a good and pure substance, that of utopias, is the belief in the omnipotence of an archaic, full, total englobing mother with no frustration, no separation, with no break-producing symbolism (with no castration, in other words), then it becomes evident that we will never be able to defuse the violences mobilized through the counter-investment necessary to carrying out this phantasm, unless one challenges precisely this myth of the archaic mother. (1986d: 205)

Kristeva's third alternative for feminism, then - which she proposes not so much as an alternative, but as a third "signifying space" that can exist in parallel with the other two - aspires to reconcile maternal space and historical, linear time. This demands a return to analysis and deconstruction of the universalised "Woman," so

that a space is opened for "aesthetic practices," for women's writing, and for a feminist ethics where individual difference is allowed free play. Kristeva hopes that

having started with the idea of difference, feminism will be able to break free of its belief in Woman... so as to channel this demand for difference into each and every element of the female whole, and, finally, to bring out the singularity of each woman... her multiplicities, her plural languages, beyond the horizon, beyond sight, beyond faith itself. (1986d: 208)

Ironically, because of her adherence to Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of sexual difference, her critique of feminism, and her attention to subjectivity and individual psychic complexity, Kristeva has been accused of aligning herself with phallogentrism and even of anti-feminism.² On the other hand, however, it can be argued that Kristeva has not necessarily abandoned feminism but, out of her deconstructionist suspicion of all politics and religions that proclaim an overarching "truth," is nevertheless wary of feminists, too, becoming just such a "religious" community (Elliot, 1991: 192-7). Kristeva's prime concern, therefore, in formulating a feminist ethics, is to explore a means for accomplishing such a goal without recourse to religion and mysticism. Her solution looks to "real female innovation" which "will only come about when maternity, female creation and the link between them is better understood" (1986b: 298), and calls for feminists to analyse the maternal body and

² For critique of Kristeva's theory, see, for example, Ann Rosalind Jones (1984); Andrea Nye (1988); Kaja Silverman (1988).

women's real experiences of motherhood. This, not unexpectedly, has generated critique from the other end of the feminist spectrum - the charge of biological essentialism - but an essentialism that seems to fit more comfortably into the feminist ethos. In short, as Suleiman stresses, "It is time to let mothers have their word" (1985: 360).

Kristeva, indeed, has her word as writer and mother, a "word" that, given her suspicion of religion, is ironically imbued with religiously nuanced accounts of pain and sacrifice women experience in a phallogentric symbolic order that silences the feminine and the Imaginary. Sacrifice and death, and their association with birth and motherhood, are likewise addressed in her consideration of a maternal discourse that ultimately challenges western, phallogentric images of the mother. Kristeva's critique of religious constructions of the archaic mother on the one hand, and her analysis of women's maternal experience on the other, are most vividly elucidated in her essay "Stabat Mater" (1986c). Befitting her dual purpose, she periodically divides the page, presenting two definitively opposing texts. One text presents a rational, logical, and literary analysis of the historical development of the cult of the Virgin Mary in Christianity, while the other, in a lyrical, free-flowing style that is both meditative and personal, inscribes Kristeva's own experience of pregnancy, giving birth, and motherhood.

In terms of the former, Kristeva argues that western monotheistic religion upheld the foundation of our (both men and women's) fantasy of the idealised archaic mother, our fantasy of a lost territory, of separation from an idealised relationship with her, in other words, an idealisation of primary narcissism. We live in a culture, says Kristeva, "where the *consecrated* (religious or secular) representation of

femininity is absorbed by motherhood" (1986c: 161). In other words, I would argue, western society has confined femininity to a sacred space of the mother. As a consequence, Kristeva argues, insofar as feminists have rejected motherhood as a space of *exile* from the public domain and symbolic order, they have, to that extent, associated motherhood with that misconceived sacred space. Feminism, as a result, is rejecting a fantasy without pausing to look at women's real experiences of maternity that are veiled by that fantasy.

Kristeva traces the history of the cult of the Virgin, the fantasies it perpetuates about women and the "phallic" mother, and the realities of women's experience of motherhood it represses. The denial of the flesh inherent in Mary's virginity and "Immaculate Conception" culminates in the triumph over death in the "Assumption," thus illuminating the intertwining of sexuality and death: "Since they are mutually implicated with each other, one cannot avoid the one without fleeing the other" (1986c: 165). This may well elevate Mary to a position of power as mother of God, but it distances her from ordinary women's experience of the body and maternity. This fantasy likewise "helps to exclude such women, mired in the exigencies of the flesh, from access to the divine Word, the sublimated Symbolic order upheld by paternal authority" (Sprengnether, 1990: 217).

Nevertheless, despite its repressions, the cult of Mary has at least provided a discourse of motherhood - albeit, one that is suffused with fantasy, but also with love, power, passion, humility, and sacrifice. Now that the influence of religion in the west has all but crumbled, Kristeva surmises, what maternal discourse do we have to replace it? In terms of looking for an alternative in psychoanalysis, she concludes, "Freud offers only a massive *nothing*" (1986c: 179). For a new maternal discourse,

therefore, we also need a new understanding of the maternal body, we need to listen to what mothers themselves are saying about their experiences of the flesh. Suleiman, for example, argues that Kristeva offers an alternative to the "either/or dilemma" faced by women (to choose *either* motherhood *or* writing) by suggesting that motherhood and "feminine creation" go hand in hand (Suleiman, 1985: 367). Pregnancy, insists Kristeva, constitutes a threshold between nature and culture, and the birth of a child the bridge between singularity and ethics; motherhood offers women the opportunity of reaching out to the other, of relationship, of love (1986c: 182). It is here that she sees the potential for a feminine ethics that would heal women's exile and heal the sacrifice made by all human beings.³ For Kristeva, this would be an ethics that includes the flesh, language, and *jouissance*: "For an heretical ethics separated from morality, an *herethics*, is perhaps no more than that which in life makes bonds, thoughts, and therefore the thought of death, bearable: herethics is undeath, love..." (1986c: 185).

In the other, autobiographical text, I would argue that Kristeva provides a dynamic example of such a feminine discourse, a poetics of the maternal body that inextricably binds language and flesh, motherhood and feminine creativity together:

³ Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982) and "Remapping the Moral Domain" (1990) demonstrates a corollary of Kristeva's conception of a feminist ethics. Gilligan challenges Freud's notion of women's lack of a moral development, and more specifically critiques Kohlberg's scale of general human stages of moral development, which she argues, is really based on the *male* sense of justice. She proposes that women and men have different understandings of morality which are equally developed, equally valid, and equally necessary for the individual and society. Gilligan describes the "female" moral point of view as an ethics of care, as opposed to the "male" moral point of view as an ethics of justice. Diana Meyers notes that critics of Gilligan's ethics of care have suggested that it advances "a morality of altruistic subservience" and relies too much on an assumption of women's self-sacrifice and, therefore, could perpetuate women's oppression (1994: 182-83, n.12). But she argues that at more advanced stages of Gilligan's model, individuals stress care and responsibility for the self, as well as for others, and seek integrity and reciprocity in relationships. For a further analysis of "ethics of care" in relation to maternal agency, see Christine Everingham's *Motherhood and Modernity: An Investigation into the Rational Dimension of Mothering* (1994).

FLASH - instant of time or of dream without time; inordinately swollen atoms of a bond, a vision, a shiver, a yet formless, unnameable embryo. Epiphanies. Photos of what is not yet visible and that language necessarily skims over from afar, allusively. Words that are always too distant, too abstract for this underground swarming of seconds, folding in unimaginable spaces. Writing them down is an ordeal of discourse, like love. What is loving, for a woman, the same as writing. Laugh. Impossible. Flash on the unnameable, weavings of abstractions to be torn. Let a body venture at last out of its shelter, take a chance with meaning under a veil of words. WORD FLESH. From one to the other, eternally, broken up visions, metaphors of the invisible. (1986c: 162)

Continuing in this style of poetic prose, Kristeva boldly and surely writes the maternal body, communicating the realities and emotions of her own experience of pregnancy and giving birth - whether to a child or to writing. For Kristeva, pregnancy is a metaphor for the initial split of the being within the unity of the flesh, to be followed by a more radical split between subjects, which is still experienced as both union and separation between mother and child:

this other abyss that opens up between the body and what had been inside: there is the abyss between the mother and the child. What connection is there between myself, or even more unassumingly between my body and this internal graft and fold, which, once the

umbilical cord has been severed, is an inaccessible other? My body and... him. No connection. Nothing to do with it... The child, whether *he* or *she* is irremediably an other. To say that there are no sexual relationships constitutes a skimpy assertion when confronting the flash that bedazzles me when I confront the abyss between what was mine and is henceforth but irreparably alien. (1986c: 178-9)

But even as there is this split between creator and creation - the mother "cut in half, alien to its other" - there is also pleasure, love, and connection. Echoing, perhaps, Winnicott's concept of transitional space, it is in this abyss, this emptiness of the in-between space between subject and other, that Kristeva's vision of an "heretical ethics" - an ethics of love or care - can take place (see Berry, 1992: 254). In Kristeva's words: "motherhood destines us to a demented *jouissance* that is answered, by chance, by the nursling's laughter in the sunny waters of the ocean" (1986c: 179).

And so, does Kristeva, at last, speak the unspoken, fill the void in psychoanalytic theory, speak of all that the "virgin mother" of Christianity does not speak? Kristeva does, indeed, speak out on the reality of the maternal body, of female sexuality, of the splitting of the flesh: Her discourse speaks of the ambivalent experience of separation and loss in giving birth, a process of the flesh over which the maternal body has no control, blurring pleasure and pain. Is this, then, women's *jouissance*? Maternity, according to Kristeva's approach, is an experiential state exclusive to women that can be defined as *jouissance*; but this *jouissance* is not silent, as Lacan insists, for it can also be spoken by women from their own diverse experiences. For Kristeva, maternity represents creation and splitting, producing two

beings in relation to one another, marking both separation and relationship, a polarised vision of maternal sacred space - in its *reality*, not its fantasy. Her similarly divided text of the maternal body therefore raises further questions: Is this an autonomous women's discourse that Kristeva, at other times, relegates to the impossible, signifying a sacred space of the maternal body that stretches beyond rational language and monotheistic religious ideals of mother? And does it represent a metaphor for women's embodied experience in their psychosexual evolution, whether mothers or not, therefore empowering women's language and subverting the patriarchal symbolic system? And, finally, is it a discourse that can accommodate multiple female subjectivity and difference among women?

In response, I would argue that Kristeva, like Adrienne Rich, opens the door to the reality of women's experience of the body, which might suggest a profound level of commonality among women, as well as accommodating the uniqueness of each woman's individual experience. I would further suggest that it is a discourse that does not evade the issue of social construction of gender and differences among women. On the contrary, it brings to consciousness the sacrificial process of the body enacted in the girl's process of "growing up," providing a maternal metaphor for the loss and separation inherent in becoming a woman. As Suleiman points out, "The mother's body, being a place of fragmentation, cleavage, elemental pulsations that exist *before* language and meaning, is necessarily a place of exile, a place of dis-order and extreme singularity in relation to the collective order of culture" (1985: 368). Like Irigaray, Kristeva calls for a discourse of sacred experience, exclusive to women and the feminine, as a resource for resisting the repression of the semiotic and the fantasy of the omnipotent "phallic mother" produced in paternal, oedipal discourse.

Irigaray and, in the end, Kristeva, too, forge an embodied sacred space of the mother through a discursive practice that opposes the masculine sacred space of the symbolic order and serves to recover women's subjectivity. I would suggest that an underlying sentiment of displacement and exile of the feminine and the maternal permeates the often poetic discourse written by Irigaray and Kristeva. As Nye puts it, the uncertainty of "woman's foothold" in Lacanian theory is the springboard for both writers' feminist critiques, through which they have attempted "to rehabilitate Lacan's banished maternal" (1988: 142). Kristeva, however, departs from Irigaray, in that her maternal discourse adheres to the inevitable separation and induction of the subject, whether male or female, into the paternal law and the symbolic realm of subjectivity and speech. Kristeva's feminine discursive practice, although undeniably subversive in intent, aims to infiltrate and take a position within the masculine symbolic order, while Irigaray's, on the other hand, remains in exile from it and rather seeks a new and exclusively feminine "home." Nonetheless, both set out to write the female body, not only as a strategy of subverting phallogocentric culture, but also to initiate a feminine linguistic practice of equal power.

Δ323

To sum up, the feminist theories discussed so far have, in various ways, contested patriarchal culture's conflation of the body and nature with the feminine and women, and its characterisation of them as intrinsically inferior to "masculine" rationality and culture. They have similarly disputed psychoanalytic theory's simultaneous idealisation, and then denigration and fear of the preoedipal mother, both of which serve to deny her subjectivity and power. They have revealed, I would argue, a sacred space embodied in the figure of the mother that is marked by polarity and paradox, a site of birth and death, love and aggression, fulfilment and loss,

narcissism and sacrifice. The myths of the mother and motherhood, in producing this polarised sacred space, have also exposed it as socially, culturally, and religiously constructed, to be acted out through women's real, embodied experience. Mother, or (m)Other, has become internalised at a deep and unconscious level of the psyche, arguably a metaphor for the ambivalence of women's position under patriarchy, which has at once confined them to and alienated them from their embodied experience.

6.2 TRANSFORMING MATERNAL SACRED SPACE

From our analysis so far, it can be argued that psychoanalytic feminist theory is immersed in a politics of sacred space that contests the construction, ownership, and exploitation of the feminine or maternal domain. All the issues that contribute to a politics of sacred space - namely, those of colonisation; inclusion and exclusion; possession and dispossession; and exile (see Chidester, 1994) - are arguably present in psychoanalytic and feminist analyses of the maternal body and motherhood. Feminist theorists have shown that femininity and maternal subjectivity are repressed and repudiated in the context of psychoanalytic theory, excluded and exiled from the masculine sacred space of the Symbolic. But psychoanalytic theory also represents the process of psychosexual development as one where both girls and boys are exiled from *maternal* sacred space, subject to the oedipal demand that they reject the mother and femininity to gain access to subjectivity and society. Androcentric expectations and patriarchal control of women and the social institution of motherhood have simultaneously confined women to the body, while alienating them from authentic experience of the body and their own subjectivity and creativity.

I intend, therefore, to conclude this chapter by drawing primarily on the work of Jessica Benjamin (1986; 1990a; 1990b) and Madelon Sprengnether (1990) to rework a spatial hermeneutic of the mother that encompasses corporeal, psychic, and metaphysical significations of maternal "sacred space." Underpinning this project, I would argue, are two questions that remain concerning the deconstruction of psychoanalytic theory's sacred space of the mother, as well as the reconstruction of a viable alternative for feminist theory and practice: First, how can the construction of gender relations be transformed - even at a profound psychic level - in a way that does not subordinate women and deny maternal subjectivity in women's lived reality? And second, how can the mythology of the (m)Other and motherhood be transformed on a symbolic level, thereby inaugurating a new metaphysics that does not deny the body and diminish the feminine, and does not, as a consequence, reinforce women's subordination?

Recognition and Intersubjectivity

Jessica Benjamin's book *The Bonds of Love* (1990) refers to those "bonds of love" between parent and child that are twisted by the idealisation, denigration, and repression of the mother which, by extension, precipitates the problem of domination and submission between the sexes. Child-rearing patterns and patriarchal social discourses engender analogous patterns of masculine domination and feminine submission where "woman functions as man's primary other, his opposite - playing nature to his reason, immanence to his transcendence, primordial oneness to his individual separateness, and object to his subject" (1990: 7). Benjamin argues that this kind of polarisation is reinforced by psychoanalytic theory's reliance on an intrapsychic

model of human development that progresses through internally experienced psychosexual phases. Tension within the individual is stressed, as is the centrality of the Oedipus complex and the phallus as a symbol of separation and individuation. Differentiation is assumed to signify the individual's disentanglement from preoedipal fusion with the mother and his or her avoidance of regression into a state of original and limitless narcissism.

This intrapsychic model, Benjamin argues, misses the true meaning of differentiation as a balancing of the paradoxical tension between recognition of the other and assertion of the self. Instead, psychoanalysis sets up separation and oneness, differentiation and sameness, as binary oppositions (favouring separation) that suppress the delicate balance between mutual recognition between individuals on the one hand and individuality on the other. A theory of development that rests on dualism and internalised psychic processes, she argues, sets the stage for polarised gender relations and adult relationships of male domination and female submission.

Benjamin therefore focuses incisively on the human need for mutual recognition between two subjects, drawing on a theory of intersubjectivity which does not reject Freud's insights but addresses dimensions of the self and human relationships that Freudian theory has overlooked (1986: 78-101; 1990: 85-132). Where the "other" is the subject's projection and thus confined to the level of object, a relation of domination and subjugation is in process. It is a process, says Benjamin, that originates in traditional psychoanalytic interpretations of the preoedipal dyad, where the mother's separate identity and desire have never been adequately theorised; she remains (m)Other and object of her infant's desire. Winnicott's object relations theory, however, offers a transformative theoretical direction, since it explicitly

problematizes the child's evolving recognition of external reality and other minds that are not his or her own projection.

According to Benjamin's line of argument, the crux of woman's alienation, submission, and dependency lies in Freud's account of woman's lack of a desire of her own, her lack of agency in the public domain, and her fate of perpetual envy of the penis, the male embodiment of the symbol of desire. Man expresses desire and woman is the object of it, confined to a construction of femininity that assumes acceptance and sexual passivity. Furthermore, the contradictory image of maternal power and engulfment, which men fear would force them into unending dependence on the mother, is also implicated in the centrality of the phallus as symbol of separation and sexual differentiation from the mother. Most significantly, the phallus marks the father's power to defend the son against maternal power, serving to intervene and lead the way to individuation and the masculine ideal.

But the child's evolving awareness of differentiation from the mother, of gender identity, and of being a subject of desire, Benjamin suggests, are all interwoven. She therefore pre-empts Freud's positioning of the awakening of gender identity in the oedipal phase and relocates it in preoedipal time and space, in order to develop a representation of female desire and of women as sexual subjects. To this end, Benjamin invokes Margaret Mahler's separation-individuation theory and its focus on what Mahler calls the rapprochement phase during the second half of the second year of life (Benjamin, 1990: 18; 33-36). It is then that the child suffers a blow to her narcissistic omnipotence experienced through fusion with the mother, at one and the same time as awareness of her own separate existence and independence is awakened. It is important, however, in accordance with Benjamin's intersubjective

model, to counter the assumption "that we grow *out of* relationships rather than becoming more active and sovereign *within* them" (1990: 18). Benjamin therefore modifies Mahler's adherence to the Freudian picture of an original mother-infant fusion from which the infant has to separate, arguing that within that relationship, "the infant is never totally undifferentiated (symbiotic) from the mother, but is primed from the very beginning to be interested in and to distinguish itself from the world of others" (1990: 18). Nevertheless, self-assertion is tempered by the paradoxical experience of separation anxiety and it is at this time, Benjamin insists, that the child needs recognition as a subject of desire, as an agent who can make things happen in relationships and in the world; and it is then, as both boy and girl struggle to be recognised in their desire, that the realisation of gender difference begins to emerge out of the child's recognition of differences between his or her mother and father.

In negotiating the tension of rapprochement, the boy denies his dependence on his mother and is able to identify with the "exciting father" as the active subject and representative of the outside world. Moreover, in line with the conventions of gender roles in patriarchal society, the son is actively encouraged by both parents in his bid for independence and separation. This process affords the boy experience of himself as subject of his own desire, which becomes affirmed by his homoerotic relationship of "ideal love" with his father. Longing, too, for just such an ideal love, the daughter needs to be able to identify with a mother who is similarly articulated as a sexual subject and agent. But in the Freudian split that privileges "masculine" freedom over "feminine" nurturance, it is the phallus that symbolises liberation from maternal nurturance and the father who stands for excitement and independence over and

against the mother's holding and soothing space. The "missing father," Benjamin concludes, becomes the key to woman's "missing desire" (1990: 107).

However, Benjamin rejects the possibility of a symbolic female counterpart to the phallus, in other words, women's genital organs as an alternative symbolic representation of women's desire as advocated by Irigaray. The symbolic level of the psyche, she argues, is already fully occupied by the phallus, the emblem of desire that divides subject and object, endlessly objectifying the female body. Therefore, a far more fundamental alternative to the intrapsychic register is required, namely, an intersubjective mode of structuring the psyche. Benjamin advances intersubjective psychological theory as a dynamic means towards practice that will allow the daughter successful negotiation of rapprochement, women access to their own desire, and, as Irigaray also advocated, relations between man and woman as two equal but different subjects.

Drawing on Winnicott's theory of transitional objects and transitional space between two individuals, Benjamin shows how the intersubjective model articulates desire through spatial, rather than symbolic representation. It is a psychic space that is situated within the body and extends to include the space between two bodies. Juxtaposing an inner and outer space, Benjamin's spatial analysis reiterates Winnicott's concept of being alone in the presence of the other, first experienced in the transitional space between mother and child, and continued in that between self and other and between the individual's internal and external realities. Again recalling Winnicott, this is the space that holds us, in which human beings, male or female, play, create, imagine, fantasise, and nourish the spirit.

Crucial to Benjamin's recovery of women's desire, at this point, is her affirmation of an inner embodied space that is intimately connected to female experience: "What is experientially female is the association of desire with a space, a place within the self, from which this force [inner desire] can emerge" to connect with the space between self and other (1986: 97). It is, according to Winnicott, an internal space to do with "being" forming a basis for "self-discovery... the capacity to develop an inside, to be a container," an internal transitional space where we can feel our desires, where we know our desires to be authentically our own (cited in Benjamin, 1990: 128). Such an experience of inner space and self-discovery is accessible through the holding environment that is associated with the preoedipal bodily holding by the mother and extended to the transitional space between mother and child where we are able to trust and experience being alone in the presence of the other. Although this holding or containing capacity implies passivity couched in a sense of essential femininity, this is not what is meant. Rather, an inner being of autonomous, dynamic creativity is construed, a locus of "authorship" where mere drives are transformed into authentic, personalised, and conscious desires (1990:128).

For a moment, it is admitted, this extrapolation of inner, holding space as part of female experience appears to reinforce sexual polarity and essentialise femininity. But it is just a theoretical moment within a wider vision, for it is here that Benjamin pushes her theory into the realities of original development of gender identity, parent-child relationships, and adult social and sexual relations, and then even further to a proposal for transforming gender polarity:

I am arguing here for simultaneity and equality, not exclusion or privileging of either male or female experiences and capacities... I suggest that, ideally, an individual's relationship with desire should be formed through access to a range of experiences and identifications that are not restricted by rigid gender formulas. Thus girls should get what boys get from their father; and girls and boys should get it from their mothers as well - recognition of agency, curiosity, movement toward the outside. (1990: 130)

This kind of integrative approach to mutual recognition between two subjects has the capacity to value equally "both traditional figures of infancy - the holding mother and the exciting father - as constituent elements of desire" (1990: 131). Inasmuch as the exciting father serves to activate the child's desire into outward expression, so, too, does the mother's holding space awaken the child's awareness of desire as truly inner, as a sense of being that is truly his or her own, out of which authentic and equal relationship can take place. In reference to this framework of mutual recognition, Meyers adds the important aspect of "self-recognition," as "self-directed care that consolidates independent subjectivity," which, I think, is implied in Benjamin's reference to the child's developing sense of independent, inner desire. However, Meyers emphasises that even if both parents are participating in raising the child, if they practice domineering parenting they inevitably suppress any growth of the child's capacity for self-recognition "and when they do, they deprive individuals of others' recognition, as well" (Meyers, 1994: 128). A young child does not yet have the skills that come with moral self-recognition to recognise and resist practices of

domination, and if development of moral self-recognition is actively suppressed, then the child's potential for participating in relations of mutual recognition is severely limited, if not destroyed (Meyers, 1994: 181-82, n.6). Self-recognition, therefore, in Meyers' view, is an essential part of the intersubjective model of mutual recognition between two subjects.

Continuing in this context of developing subjectivity, Christine Everingham's *Motherhood and Modernity* (1994) has further explored the mother's position and how maternal nurturing practices can support her claim to agency in the sociocultural domain. In Everingham's view, the mutual recognition between mother and child as two subjects requires a theory to address not only the child's attainment of subjectivity, but also the ways in which the mother interprets and comes to know the needs of her child as an agentic activity. Knowing the needs of her child, Everingham reminds us, is not the result of some kind of maternal "instinct," but a subjective, interpretative, and rational activity. Sara Ruddick (1983), too, theorises what she calls "maternal thinking," defining a particular type of rational decision-making that remains connected to the body and involves the mother as critical agent in her caring activities. Furthermore, a theory of maternal agency would also address the reality of an autonomous and active maternal sexuality, such as the undeniable sexual pleasure of breastfeeding. Ferguson, for instance, argues that "mother love" is an aspect of active female sexuality, in its own right, "a form of sex/affective energy that is neither a substitute for heterosexual intercourse nor a mere acting out of a desire for male power (a 'penis substitute!)" (1989: 35). All these theoretical directions, like Benjamin's, draw out the agency of mothers and rework the realisation of this autonomy as a *relational* process that engages both the child's subjectivity and the

mother's own claim to subjectivity within the transitional space of child-rearing (1994: 6-7).

In such an intersubjective space in which the mother is not objectified and divisive gender polarities are collapsed, the boy, in particular, if he does not, after all, have to reject femininity and his continuity with the mother's holding space, stands to gain something vital to the self: He will attain access to his inner life and a sense of authentic being and desire. If not, then "losing the continuity between himself and mother will subvert his confidence in his 'inside.' The loss of that in-between space cuts him off from the space within... The boy who has lost access to inner space becomes enthralled with conquering outer space." The problem with this oedipal model, as Benjamin readily points out, is that it is women who become the principal external objects to be subjugated. When the boy loses contact with his own desire and cannot recognise woman as an equal and independent subject, she comes to represent "the idealized, acutely desirable object outside, the image of woman as the dangerous, regressive siren... The counterpart of this image is the wholly idealized masterful subject who can withstand or conquer her" (1990: 164).

In conclusion, Benjamin therefore offers new possibilities for conquering, instead, relationships of domination and submission. She brings mutual recognition between women and men as equal and different subjects, who will be equally valued agents of their own desire, into the realms of possibility. Moreover, I would argue that her vision redefines both inner sacred space and transitional sacred space - where, we recall, creativity, culture, and religion are born - that have been consistently linked with the maternal body and preoedipal or Imaginary domain. For, according to Benjamin's interpretation, it is these internal and external spaces that can be used to

overcome archaic fears of maternal engulfment and assumptions of female passivity and dependence that, in the intrapsychic oedipal mode, demand rejection of the feminine. Benjamin's spatial representation of intersubjectivity, on the contrary, does not confine inner and transitional space to women but expands it beyond the contest for ownership between male and female. Alternatively, it calls for every individual to cultivate his or her own inner space of autonomous desire, so that inner space becomes continuous with transitional space between two people, a space in which mutual recognition of the other's subjectivity can take place.

Benjamin's explication of intersubjectivity, I would argue, successfully responds to the question asked earlier of how the construction of gender relations can be transformed - even at a profound psychic level - in a way that does not subordinate women and deny maternal subjectivity in women's lived reality. Her solution offers a theory that extends beyond Chodorow's and Dinnerstein's theoretical contributions, since it addresses what remains to be changed, even in the event of shared parenting, if relations of male domination and female submission are to be eradicated. Furthermore, I would argue that Benjamin transposes both Irigaray's and Kristeva's discursive theories of sexual difference and feminine expression into experiential reality, by showing how both the female Imaginary (inner and intersubjective space) and the male Symbolic (external, expressive activity) can be equally valued. But even more importantly, Benjamin affirms that any individual, female or male, has the potential to integrate into his or her inner self the gender polarities "which have previously been considered mutually exclusive and the property of only one sex" (1990: 130). In other words, I would argue that a previously contested sacred space might be shared equally between women and men, so that one does not dominate and

control the other. In this way, gender divisions, which Benjamin believes to be the fundamental source of our discontent in patriarchal culture - a discontent only too readily pondered by Freud - might be healed and made whole:

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Perhaps the most fateful paradox is the one posed by our simultaneous need for recognition and independence: that the other subject is outside our control and yet we need him. To embrace this paradox is the first step towards unraveling the bonds of love. This means not to undo our ties to others but rather to disentangle them; to make of them not shackles but circuits of recognition. (Benjamin, 1990: 221)

The Dream of Maternal Plenitude

Madelon Sprengnether's *The Spectral Mother* (1990) also sets out to analyse the contested space of the maternal body, with a view to constructing a new feminist psychoanalytic theory that will dislodge one of the ideological foundations of patriarchy's oppression of women. Like Benjamin, she aims to disentangle the mother from the "sacred space" of a unified preoedipal dyad, as construed in psychoanalytic theory, where the (m)other is object, not subject. Returning to the original psychoanalytic master, Sprengnether aims to ascertain whether Freud's theory is capable of generating an account of psychological development that does not reproduce the denigration of the mother as a threat to masculine development and "civilisation" (1990: 227). Much of her own text is therefore devoted to a comprehensive rereading of Freud's texts in which she unravels his repression of the preoedipal mother and his apparently consistent emphasis on the Oedipus and

castration complexes in human psychosexual development and the evolution of western, patriarchal culture. Sprengnether's innovative and searching analysis, however, unexpectedly reveals that such textual consistency cannot be easily presumed. Several instances of contradiction and instability in Freud's writing, where he does not altogether succeed in silencing the preoedipal mother, are in fact identified. As Sprengnether puts it, the preoedipal mother is sensed as a floating entity pervading Freud's patriarchal discourse - a spectral figure "creating a presence out of absence... she haunts the house of Oedipus" (1990: 5).

Sprengnether, like Benjamin, argues that the oppression of women and the notion of femininity as hostile to western culture lies in the inability to theorise adequately the influence and power of the preoedipal mother in human development. This has further manifested in the paradox of a picture of femininity as subversive to the masculine ideal on the one hand and the romantic idealisation, or even sacralization, of maternal plenitude on the other, thus excluding any consideration of a multi-faceted maternal subjectivity. Any glimpses of a "darker vision" of maternal seduction, eroticism, or aggression, says Sprengnether, are counteracted by Freud's romantic vision of the self-sacrificing mother who is fully satisfied by maternal love for her son (1990: 81). Freud most explicitly invokes the Oedipus and castration complexes to propel both boys and girls eventually to reject the mother and femininity so that they may follow the father's path to the masculine world of culture - a realm where femininity and women are marginalised. Nonetheless, the idealised picture of the preoedipal mother and our early bond with her remains in the unconscious, bequeathing the threat of engulfment and dependence from which we have to escape

and, at the same time, a lingering promise of narcissistic fulfilment to which we long to return.

After discovering many of the inadequacies in Freud's efforts to theorise the "dark continent" of women's psychology, Sprengnether returns to some of his later works that shed a different but little apprehended light on his castration theory. Freud, she argues, begins to develop a redefinition of castration as separation from the mother in *The Ego and the Id* (1923) and *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926a). Whereas Kristeva's reading of castration as separation depends mainly on the Lacanian level of symbolic representation, where the phallus stands for separation from the Imaginary register and the subject's entry into the Symbolic, Sprengnether focuses on the site of the maternal body. She detects that Freud subtly shifts his idea of paternal threat of castration in the oedipal process as the origin of anxiety and relocates it in the initial experience of separation from the mother at birth: "objectively speaking, birth is separation from the mother. It can be compared to a castration of the mother (by equating the child with a penis)" (Freud, 1926a: 129). It is this early traumatic severance from the mother, recalling Irigaray's argument, that is repressed and concealed by Freudian privileging of the father's threat of castration. Separation from the mother's body at birth, according to Freud, "is not experienced subjectively [by the infant] as a separation from the mother, since the foetus, being a completely narcissistic creature, is totally unaware of her existence as an object" (1926a: 129-30). Following Irigaray, however, Sprengnether argues that the infant's later experiences of separation and loss, such as weaning from the breast and periodic absences of the mother, surely "glance back at this first great dislocation and derive meaning therefrom" (1990: 229).

The ego, Freud further maintains, is constructed on the basis of a process of mourning, by internalising objects it has loved and lost, a painful process that "makes it possible to suppose that the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-choices" (Freud, 1923a: 29). In short, we become what we have lost and then mourned and our original loss is the body of the mother. Sprengnether therefore highlights Freud's statement that "the ego... owes its existence to an originary loss, its very structure predicated on an absence" (1990: 228), most notably, in the experience of carnal division at the moment of birth. Following a logical connection between these readings in relation to loss and the ego, Sprengnether thus surmises:

Rather than representing a condition of blissful nondifferentiation (as indicated by the object relations view of the preoedipal period as well as the Lacanian concept of the Imaginary) the body of the mother would seem to signal the process of mourning. Because the very existence of the ego is coincident with the awareness of loss, there is no time at which mother has not been Other. (1990: 230)

It can be argued, therefore, that if Freud had given more cognisance to his own musings on separation as essential to ego formation and the maternal body as site of estrangement and desire for what has been lost, "he might have offered a model of preoedipal relations which would include the possibility of maternal discourse," instead of clinging to "a discourse of childhood, fixated on issues of male subjectivity" (Sprengnether, 1990: 232). But, Sprengnether realises, Freudian and post-Freudian

psychoanalytic theory chose to idealise preoedipal relations as a site of unity and plenitude and to forget "the body of the (m)other as a locus of difference and estrangement" (1990: 233). Such privileging of mother-infant symbiosis succeeded in denying the subjectivity of the mother and returned pride of place to masculine subjectivity and dominance in the creation of culture.

Despite traditional psychoanalytic theory's choices, Sprengnether joins other feminist theorists in attesting that preoedipal mother-infant fusion is, in fact, a fiction, no matter how caring and nurturing a mother might be to her new-born infant. Following feminist writers such as Rich and Kristeva, whose personal accounts of maternity serve to contradict such a conception of blissful union, others have further emphasised the fiction of maternal instinct (Badinter, 1981; Everingham, 1994; Nicolson, 1993). Moreover, we recall, Everingham and Ruddick (1983) have affirmed the significance of maternal subjectivity by interpreting maternal nurturance as an agentic activity - an activity, in Benjamin's terms of reference, that takes place in a relationship between two subjects.

In any event, Sprengnether provides a touch of light relief from the weight of a misconception that has arguably had tragic consequences for women, by wryly noting that: "The concept of *mother*-infant symbiosis is an obvious absurdity... A mother who felt in every way like an infant would be worse than useless as a caretaker... Symbiosis ceases to be a meaningful concept when it applies to only one-half of a partnership" (1990: 233). Recalling Benjamin's intersubjective theory, even the other half of the partnership, the infant, is not in a state of symbiotic fusion with the mother, but rather strives from the very beginning to distinguish itself from the world of others" (1990: 18). Sprengnether then delivers the final blow to the "truth" of

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preoedipal unity insisting that even birth is not the original experience of separation. Recalling Kristeva's "Stabat Mater," the *mother* experiences division and otherness ¹³²³ even earlier, where her state of being in pregnancy is articulated as a continuous division and splitting, designating the maternal body as a container of the self and otherness.

Sprengnether's close analysis and reworking of Freud's castration theory, further enhanced by Kristeva's rendition of the maternal body as site of division, initiates a new paradigm for the construction of the ego and the process of enculturation. In an innovative feminist rendition of psychoanalytic theory the drama of mother-infant separation takes precedence over the drama of the Oedipus complex, and the role of the preoedipal mother over that of the father. Freudian emphasis on the need for the father's threat of castration to separate child and mother is deemed to be entirely superfluous, "if division has already taken place... embedded in the process by which each individual consciousness emerges into being" (Sprengnether, 1990: 236). If the mother is an autonomous subject, right from the start, as the child's consciousness of separateness continues to emerge, then the building blocks for the construction of the self and creation of culture are already available in the preoedipal space. And so, too, is the phallus of Lacanian discourse superfluous as signifier of separation and difference in the realm of the Symbolic, if the preoedipal or Imaginary register provides resources for a maternal discourse through which women can articulate their own place in the sociocultural domain.

Sprengnether extends her line of argument to the realm of metaphysics, which, paradoxically, points to the mother's body as the space where life and death coexist. Her analysis of this maternal site of life and death, I would argue, implies an embodied

sacred space that interweaves psychologically and religiously nuanced interpretations of human experience. This avenue of inquiry is further pursued in Jonte-Pace's recent study of Freud's representations of death, mothers, and the afterlife (1996: 61-88). Following Sprengnether, Jonte-Pace also uncovers contradictions in Freud's texts that imply an association of the mother with human fears and anxieties about death and separation, and human fantasies about God, immortality, and the afterlife (1996: 62). Further support for a preoedipal "counter-theisis" is clearly identified, in which, again, the preoedipal mother haunts Freud's house of Oedipus and subverts his master theory. Taking up the point made earlier, in Chapter Three, with regard to Freud's attitude towards religion and his confusion concerning the "mother-goddess" expressed in "The Theme of the Three Caskets" (1913a), maternal embrace is depicted as "simultaneously nurturant, erotic, and deadly" (Jonte-Pace, 1996: 77). Furthermore, in "The Uncanny" (Freud, 1919), the fear of being buried alive while appearing to be dead - according to Freud, "the most uncanny thing of all" - is then connected to the pleasurable fantasy of return to the bliss of intra-uterine existence, akin to the beginnings of life itself (Jonte-Pace, 1996: 79). Ironically, the comfort of return to the original sanctuary of the womb, and the sense of alienation associated with fear of death, are both located in the body of the mother.

Sprengnether's analysis further articulates an experience of otherness that seems to be "inherent in the human condition, a separateness that reaches back into the womb, to the beginning of life itself" (1990: 242). In short, oblivion, or what Sprengnether calls "exile from consciousness," ends with conception itself. The subsequent existence of plenitude, or oneness with the maternal body, simply begins the journey out of exile into life - into beingness, corporeality, and, ironically, into

consciousness of the inevitability of death. The maternal body, therefore, does not ensure a safe haven from the human condition of mortality, but is, in reality, the "locus for its inception," therefore signifying an originary and universal separation. This separation, says Sprengnether, suggests that:

the process of enculturation begins with the onset of life itself. To perceive the body of the (m)other as a carnal metaphor for the fundamental estrangement of Being also collapses the hierarchical relationship between the Oedipal and preoedipal periods, or in Lacan's terms between the Imaginary and the Symbolic stages. From a psychoanalytic point of view there ceases to be any justification for the phallogocentrism of culture. (1990: 243)

Consequently, the mother's body is situated at the centre of a politics of sacred space, which is, in turn, at the very heart of fear of femininity and oppression of women:

At the heart of phallogocentrism lies the terror as well as the certainty of its own undoing. And this undoing is associated with the body of a woman, who must be controlled, who must be prevented from achieving a condition of power from which she can exercise this threat. Like all systems of oppression, moreover, patriarchy mythologizes the object of its dread, inventing ever new rationalizations in terms of "feminine psychology" for sustaining the status quo. (1990: 244.)

Having constructed a myth of maternal sacred space, patriarchy then either denigrates or idealises (even worships) the mother as representative of the human unconscious and, in Freudian terms, the death instinct. Psychoanalysis, as Efrat Tseelon further points out, "has also taught us that desire is by definition unattainable - it is always a yearning for a paradise lost. Thus paradoxicality is part of the human condition. But the woman has become cultural signifier for it" (1995: 3). Since death and woman together represent the eternal Other, the desirable but forbidden Other, then we can entertain the vain hope that if women are controlled, so too, will we at last fulfil our desires and avoid the human condition of corporeality and mortality. But all human beings, women and men, experience this "estrangement of being" and inherit the inevitability of death just as we enter life itself - life, desire, and death that universally originate in the body of a woman, but belong to us all. Therefore, along with Goldenberg, Sprengnether calls for a philosophy and psychology that does not address the mysteries of life and death by separating the flesh from the spirit: "Rather than fleeing, condemning, or idealizing the body of the (m)other, we need to recognize her in ourselves" (1990: 246). Sprengnether, I suggest has given profound consideration to our second question of assessing how the mythology of the (m)other and motherhood can be transformed on a symbolic level, thus opening the way to a new metaphysics that does not deny the body and diminish the feminine, and does not, as a consequence, reinforce the oppression of women.

To sum up, the feminist theories addressed in Chapters Five and Six have all served to contest the embodied sacred space of the mother that has been misconstrued in western philosophy and psychoanalytic theory and abused in the external, social arena of gender relations. The mythology of maternal sacred space constructed by

psychoanalytic theory and associated with female sexuality, and therefore with all women, arguably represents an ideological foundation for women's subordination under patriarchy, whether it be in social, cultural, or religious contexts. The contradictions revealed are manifold: The mother is romanticised, idealised, and sacralised, denying her a multifaceted subjectivity that has the capacity for power and activity, as well as love and comfort. But in contrast, the mother is denigrated for passivity and narcissism, and feared as a symbol of wish fulfilment and dependence that stifles the progress of autonomous masculinity and culture.

In conclusion, I would argue that Benjamin's and Sprengnether's theories interweave to produce a transformation of the sacred space of the mother in a way that recovers female subjectivity and human experience of both body and spirit, as well as integrating the polarities situated in the maternal body. Sprengnether articulates maternal sacred space as a metaphor for the complex psychological and spiritual experience of being human, which western philosophical, religious, psychological, and social systems have striven to control and repress from consciousness. She analyses how this further represents a refusal to acknowledge that the embodied space of the (m)other, as locus of life and death, is an integral part of the paradox of being that all humans are destined to experience. Just as Benjamin asserts that the "father" (or phallus), as metaphor for the external world of social relations and activity, is not exclusively male, so too, does Sprengnether claim that the "mother" (or (m)other), as a metaphor for the locus of an estrangement of being, is not exclusively female. And finally, just as Benjamin situates the paradoxical human need for both recognition and independence in an intersubjective and transitional sacred space that belongs to both male and female subjectivity, so too, does

Sprengnether stress that the existential estrangement of being - arguably an inner sacred space - inherent in the human paradox of life and death, has to be called to consciousness as an integral part of both male and female subjectivity and experience.

The body of the mother and the institution of motherhood has consistently been articulated as a contested sacred space, imbued with religiously nuanced intimations of sacrifice and exile, unity and division. We have seen how the sacralization of maternal space, particularly in psychoanalytic discourse, has served to reinforce the oppression of women in western patriarchal culture, but also how consciously constructed maternal discourse can empower women's subjectivity. Finally, the possibilities for transforming this sacred space in a way that transcends contested ownership between women and men have been glimpsed. Although the emphasis so far has been on analysis of psychoanalytic and feminist images of the maternal body and motherhood that produce diverse and contested notions of sacred space, the influence of religious conceptions and mythological images of the mother have been felt as an underlying "spectral" presence. In Chapters Seven and Eight I intend to explore further how these psychoanalytic and feminist images of the mother as sacred space are implicitly associated with the human project of religion and offer important resources for understanding explicitly religious maternal images. In contrast to the western context of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic feminism, I intend to study the goddess figures of Hindu myth as an alternative resource for transforming the sacred space of the mother.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE DIVINE FEMININE

So far, in summary, it has been argued that conceptions of motherhood and the maternal body in western patriarchal culture represent a humanly-produced politics of sacred space contested on the field of gender relations. An entrenched maternal ideology conceives motherhood as nothing short of a sacred institution to which women are called. Once she has answered the "sacred calling" the mother, as self-sacrificing convert, is expected to fulfil the expectations of this androcentric ideology which repudiates maternal subjectivity and agency in the world. Furthermore, I have argued that psychoanalytic theory has served to support such an ideology, revealing that Freud's "dark continent" of femininity shrouded the figure of the mother in mystery and suffused the maternal body with enigmatic ambivalence. In this patriarchal context, both the embodied mother herself and institutionalised motherhood constitute a polarised and contested sacred space. Being maternal space, this unquestionably represents an exclusively feminine space but, paradoxically, it is a space that is controlled and made sacrosanct by androcentric and masculinist discourse. Therefore women are disempowered and denied ownership of this space, frequently experiencing alienation from their own bodies and an authentic sense of self.

The maternal body, as represented in Freudian theory, can be defined as an embodied space that is arguably sacralised by idealisation of the preoedipal dyad (most notably, mother and son) and romanticisation of an all-encompassing maternal plenitude. Through analysis of Winnicott's object relations theory, I have further suggested that the social institution of motherhood represents a sacred space that

embraces the maternal body, maternal "holding" of the infant, and the transitional space between mother and child. But the humanly-produced sacredness of this space relies on the ideology of the "good enough mother," and consequently, I have then argued, does not necessarily serve to enhance maternal subjectivity and empower women's agency.

It has been discovered, to the contrary, that Freudian and post-Freudian theories cast the feminine as "(m)Other" and the mother as object, subservient to the masculine world of language and culture accessed only through the Oedipus and castration complexes. As Lacan asserts, the phallus plays the active part in the construction of the subject by precipitating separation from the maternal Imaginary and progression into the paternal sociosymbolic order. As pointed out by many psychoanalytic feminist theorists, maternal subjectivity of any kind is denied, let alone the multiple subjectivity that has been affirmed through feminist maternal discourse.

The objectification and subordination of the feminine and of women, we recall, have been founded on binary oppositions where "woman plays man's primary other." The figure of the preoedipal mother becomes (m)Other, or the unconscious, as representative of human desire that is eternally unfulfilled. Most pertinent, perhaps, are the gendered divisions generated by an androcentric worldview that places mind over body; transcendence over immanence; culture over nature; and the active over the passive. These oppositions, feminists have argued, separate and exclude the feminine and women from culture and generate relationships of male dominance and female submission within a patriarchal order.

It is these gendered contradictions that are at work in psychoanalytic representations of the preoedipal mother, encapsulated and imprisoned in an "othered"

and reified sacred space of the body, a sacred space constituted by the self-sacrificing mother. Such a conception of maternity is deemed to be natural, where the mother's desire is passively subordinated to the needs of the infant. Thus, maternal subjectivity is subdued, and the sacred space of the mother and motherhood is claimed by the masculine, at once idealised as the fountain of nurturance for human survival, only to be denigrated, sacrificed, and rejected for the social world of the father. What emerges from this polarised psychoanalytic vision of female development is that the "feminine" in all of us, women and men, has to be sacrificed for the onward journey to autonomy and individuation. In order to be able to sacrifice what is idealised as plenitude and fulfilment has, of course, to be denigrated and denied as narcissistic and oppressive, for it is hardly possible to reject what is loved and desired. And so, from that point onwards, we can begin to untangle the threads of a maternal fabric woven out of paradox and contradiction.

To this end, therefore, psychoanalytic feminists have critically analysed and contested these exclusionary oppositions that deny the feminine and maternal subjectivity, albeit from widely differing theoretical viewpoints. In short, several feminist writers - for example, Benjamin, Goldenberg, Rich, and Sprengnether - have striven to collapse the gendered binary oppositions that perpetuate male dominance. However, their scrutiny of psychoanalytic theory has brought to light just as many internally contradictory oppositions which are said to coexist within the space of the maternal body and motherhood. The contradictions that come to mind are: fulfilment and loss; birth and death; love and aggression; sacrifice and narcissism. But Freud, for instance, as argued by Sprengnether, found these contradictions and the mystery of femininity, impossible to resolve. Therefore, in terms of their persistent, if spectral,

presence in the figure of the preoedipal mother, Freud most often chose to repress them.

If these internal and apparently contradictory attributes are recovered and repossessed by women, it has been suggested, a multi-faceted maternal subjectivity might be reclaimed. I would argue that this feminist project, rooted in a politics of sacred space, consistently brings us back to the maternal body. While some feminists, such as Rich, Irigaray, and Kristeva seek to "write the body" and reconstruct a separate feminine space in which to reinstate maternal subjectivity and an active female sexuality, others show how these paradoxes of human life reside in the very fact of human embodiment itself - female and male. Both nature and culture can only be experienced through embodiment, says Flax, and Paula Cooley argues, moreover, that embodiment is constructed through a "socionatural process" generated by the interweaving energies of the embodied subject's creativity on the one hand and cultural determinism on the other. Goldenberg, too, has wondered why we flee our bodies in the first place and why, as a result, we have somehow construed that this problem of embodiment, reproduction, and mortality belong only to the female sex. The nostalgic longing to return to maternal plenitude and our mourning for its loss, concludes Sprengnether, are human fantasies. She insists, correctly, I think, that the embodied (m)other, as site of polarisation and paradox, is a metaphor for human subjectivity and the "estrangement of being" that "resides in our very flesh" and is experienced by us all, both women and men.

Sprengnether, therefore, calls for a new metaphysics that will provide the potential for further symbolic understanding of human subjectivity and embodiment. Cooley, too, more explicitly extends this inquiry to the arena of religion, addressing

the problem of how cultural and religious symbol systems both create and are created by the embodied and gendered subject. In recalling these issues, then, in the context of the sacred, it could be argued that anything, including the body and embodied space, can ultimately only be sacralised within the paradigm of religious belief and practice. This chapter will therefore expand analysis of maternal sacred space to symbolisation of the feminine and the maternal in religion, most particularly, religious myth. For it is myths, according to Carl Jung, that function as the building blocks of reality, that connect mind to body, matter to spirit, people to their experiences (see Goldenberg, 1979b: 48).

In this regard I therefore intend to return to imaginings of the Goddess as representative of the feminine and the maternal, drawing on two areas of religious studies: First, and briefly, critique of psychoanalytic views of religion and God will be extended to the reconstruction of the feminine as sacred in the context of feminist "theology" and recovery of the Goddess. Second, and most importantly, I will turn to Hindu goddess myths as an alternative and living source for exploring maternal sacred space. I intend to investigate where and in what ways Hindu goddess figures represent divine embodiment of sacred space within which reside the polarised and often paradoxical characteristics discovered so far in maternal space. The argument that polarity and paradox is not denied and repressed in Hindu myth but is, in fact, symbolised and made conscious in the gendered deities of Hindu religious tradition will be pursued. Although the Goddess, in various forms and most particularly as divine mother, is worshipped and experienced by Hindus as substantially sacred, I will also argue that she is implicated in a humanly-produced politics of sacred space that is reflected in human society. Similarly, gendered divisions such as mind and body;

nature and culture; immanence and transcendence; action and passivity will surely be found to play their part in the cosmic dance between the divine and human worlds of Hindu thought. But most importantly, post-patriarchal readings of Hindu representations of the feminine will be engaged to enrich feminist resources for reconciling those gendered divisions and resolving the polarisation of the feminine articulated through oppositions such as loss and fulfilment; birth and death; love and aggression; narcissism and sacrifice.

7.1 PSYCHOANALYSIS, FEMINIST SPIRITUALITY, AND GODDESS RELIGION

Freud, by all accounts a devout atheist, defined religion - in the context of western, monotheistic religious traditions - as an obsessional neurosis or a symbol of the childhood of humankind, through which the oedipal drama is ritually enacted at the level of culture (Jones, 1990: 1-2). As a consequence of guilt and remorse for the original act of parricide that is continually resymbolised and re-experienced in the instinctual life of every boy during the oedipal process, the ultimate patriarch, God, comes to be idealised and worshipped at the collective level by his "children." Freud's view of religion, therefore, is founded on the template of individual psychosexual development and the early instinctual life of the child, thus advancing "a biological hermeneutic of the sacred" (Jones, 1990: 2). Furthermore, as articulated in Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*, dependence on the power of God has served to remove human fear of death, providing the illusory hope of moving beyond the confines of the flesh to immortality and protection against the exigencies of nature.

Religion, then, according to Freud's psychoanalytic paradigm was another form of transference, a replay of childhood's desires and fears projected onto the blank screen of God the father (Jones, 1990: 35). As source of comfort and defence against human weakness in the face of nature's destructive power, Freud could not deny the benefits of religion and God as a surrogate for the strong and protective father. But in the modern age in which he lived and worked, he saw that religion no longer effectively assuaged the discontents of western civilisation: "An heir to the Enlightenment, Freud assumed that atheism was normative and religion was but a vestige of the childhood of humankind" (Jones, 1990: 1). For Freud, religious beliefs were wish-fulfilments and illusions: "They are illusions, fulfilments of the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind. The secret of their strength lies in the strength of those wishes" (1927: 30). The tenacity and perpetuation of these false ideas and wishes, Freud therefore concluded, ultimately signified neurosis (Sorenson, 1990: 211). Our only hope for curing the ills of society and the human heart, Freud believed, lay in the intellect, in rational thought and scientific endeavour.

Recalling Van Herik's analysis, it was argued in Chapter Two that Freud's theory of religion is inextricably interwoven with his theory of gender. Religious devotion, most particularly in Christianity, to a loving, caring God, was typified by Freud as illusory wish fulfilment akin to the characteristics of femininity, defined as attachment to and dependence on the father, as well as "a weak superego, a poorly developed sense of morality, a restricted intellect, opposition to cultural advance, and insufficient respect for reality" (Van Herik, 1982: 192). Judaism, however, fared better in Freud's religious hierarchy, representing masculine resolution of the Oedipus complex in which paternal restrictions and renunciation of wish-fulfilment are

internalised as a strong superego. But for Freud, even the attainment of *normal* masculinity has to be surpassed in order to fulfil his own dream of *ideal* masculinity - arguably an equally tenacious illusion - and absolute renunciation of oedipal attachments. Only this path would herald intellectual primacy and make his hope for a scientific stage psychically possible in a "postpaternal universe" (Van Herik, 1982: 193).

However, turning once more to psychoanalytic object relations theory, a different view of religious phenomena in terms of transference, femininity, and illusion can be detected. Winnicott in particular understood illusion as a positive and essential element of the individual self's transition to reality, "encouraging people to play with and shape reality through illusory experiences" (Sorenson, 1990: 215). He offered a relational model of development of selfhood in interaction with objects, in other words, with other selves and the external world. An original transitional space of play between mother and child was defined by Winnicott, where the child imbues "transitional objects" (such as special toys) with inner, secret meanings as well as external "real" characteristics, using these objects as a medium for growing awareness and experience of separation from the mother. This space, therefore, is intrinsically related to the feminine and the maternal body, founded on trust in the dependable and safe space of the mother where the child learns to play alone in the presence of another. It is the later but similarly interactive and transitional space between internal and external reality, between subjectivity and objectivity, that is maintained in adult life as an "intermediate area of illusory experience" which provides the locus for creative, cultural, and religious experience (Sorenson, 1990: 215-6). It is, in a sense, a "third space" that bridges the gap between self and other, between inner and outer

worlds, giving the individual the potential to transform creatively what exists independently in external reality by infusing some of her or his inner reality into it (Flax, 1990: 119).

Religious experience, then, from an object relations point of view, belongs in this transitional space where human beings can transcend duality and emerge renewed and inspired to creativity. This psychoanalytic explanation of the source of religiosity, I would argue, dovetails with one of the foundations of this thesis, stated from the outset, that religion represents ways of experimenting in being human, involving the negotiation of meaning and power in human relations (Chidester, 1991: xiii). According to James Jones, Winnicott construes that it is in this transitional state of awareness that the sacred is encountered (1990: 133). Anita Sorenson, too, points out that in contrast to Freudian theory's denial of the possibility of God as a "viable object," object relations posits God, psychologically, as an illusory "transitional object" that offers a positive and productive means for healthy individuation: "Rather than every religious illusion dying of disenchantment as a person's mind matures, one's religious beliefs undergo continuous transformation and revision, simultaneous with other developmental progress" (Sorenson, 1990: 216).

Furthermore, and again in contradistinction to Freud's oedipal hermeneutic of religion, the prototype for religious experience, from Winnicott's perspective, resides in preoedipal maternal space and connection with the maternal body. As Diane Jonte-Pace points out, object relations theory implies that "the psychological capacity for religious experience lies in the relational maternal-infant matrix out of which a sense of selfhood and otherness emerges" (cited in Sered, 1994: 73). Jones argues that an object relations approach to religion has the potential to replace the masculine,

oedipal dynamic of distance and separation that gives rise to "anti-body" and "anti-woman" religions, with a preoedipal dynamic of connection rooted in our first relationship with the maternal body. This hermeneutic of connection, he continues, generates a vision of life-giving interactions - between individuals, between humankind and nature, between human beings and the divine - whether expressed in a "psychoanalysis of empathic attunement, the physics of quantum interconnectedness, or a spirituality of embodiment" (1992: 359). It is in just such a fluid and organic cosmology imagined by Jones that the Goddess surely has a place, a place to which I will shortly return.

An unbroken thread, I would argue, can be traced through the territories of psychoanalysis, feminism, and the recovery of religious belief and practice associated with "the Goddess." Naomi Goldenberg's work, perhaps, has done more than any to tease out, analyse, and weave this thread into the study of religion and western culture in ways that counteract patriarchal denigration of the body, women, and the earth. In *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religion* (1979b) Goldenberg anticipates the end of patriarchal religions as we know them, such as Judaism and Christianity, and, following Mary Daly's groundbreaking and revolutionary text *Beyond God the Father* (1973), foresees the death of the "great male gods." She devotes her text, and much of her later work, to creative visions and analysis of possible alternatives.

For Goldenberg, it is, ironically, Freud who has led the way to understanding such a religious revolution in his indictment of western religions and father-gods that keep human believers in childlike dependence and intellectual stasis. Such dependence on divine paternal authority, she argues, only exacerbates women's "already

complicated Oedipal situation" (1979b: 35). Despite the express misogyny of much of Freud's gender theory, not to mention his difficulties with imagining a place in history for mother-goddesses and matriarchy, his ideas about religion, Goldenberg suggests, can be appropriated by feminist theory to encourage women "to outgrow Oedipal dependence on paternal authority whether that authority is embodied in a paternalistic husband or father god" (1979b: 35).

As we recall from her thinking about the mind/body split, Goldenberg, like Jones (1990), turns to Winnicott's object relations paradigm for ways to reunite psyche and soma in the quest for individuation and, more specifically, to find a way back to the body and the feminine. She appears reluctant to integrate explicitly religious discourse and "the sacred" into object relations theory, at least, if that sacredness in any way signifies transcendence of embodied experience and the human world. In this regard, Goldenberg aligns herself with "Freud's irreverence as part of his insistence that psychoanalysis be maintained as a secular inquiry that should treat nothing as sacred, nothing as taboo" (1992: 349). Nonetheless, despite her assertion of the secular nature of psychoanalysis - arguably to the extent of constructing secularism itself as sacred - Goldenberg still holds the thread between psychoanalysis, feminism, and religion intact. In fact, John McDargh's commentary on both Goldenberg's (1993) and Jones' (1990) texts illuminates the religious aspect of the thread, concluding that both writers colour neo-psychoanalytic theory with soteriological intent: Goldenberg in her quest to bring an end to human flight from the flesh, and Jones in his fusion of relatedness with the sacred (1992: 392-5).

In her collection of essays in *Resurrecting the Body: Feminism, Religion, and Psychotherapy* (1993), Goldenberg develops the thread in three main directions. First,

it is argued that psychoanalytic therapy and feminist consciousness-raising groups are made of the "same stuff," in their common cause of healing through the embodied activity of talking, and its essential counterpart in the healing process, listening (1993: 149-55). But it is a particular kind of speech used in both methods which gives voice to the silenced, that is, a way of talking and listening that accesses the past and liberates the repressed from the unconscious. Psychoanalysis and feminism together, I would further argue, offer resources to recover an especially repressed constituent of the unconscious, namely, maternal and female subjectivity. In sum, both psychoanalytic and feminist discourses "lead back to the body through their insistence on the importance and complexity of sexuality" (1993: 185). Goldenberg, and arguably other feminist theorists such as Rich, Irigaray, and Kristeva point to a "spirituality of embodiment" where awakening consciousness of our embodied nature is salvific in itself. I would even argue that this direction of feminist theory, like Freud, implies that psychoanalysis might adequately replace religion in fulfilling the human search for meaning. But, unlike Freud, these writers are not suggesting displacing religious experience for more androcentric, rational, and scientific analysis of the human condition, but rather for a practice that is empathic, relational, creative, and, most importantly, embodied.

Second, and in spite of her critique of the infiltration of the sacred into object relations theory, Goldenberg theorises how religious notions can be located in the intersection of psychoanalysis and feminism, thereby completing the linking thread (1993: 172-89). Not unexpectedly, the ground of her argument is the human body, the place that theology has shunned (1993: 173). In psychoanalysis, somatic history - inseparable from psyche - provides the context for all knowledge and experience, and

it is the flesh that "teems with past memories and wishes for the future. Body is forever imaging its desires and forever elaborating its past" (1993: 179). It is these desires that open a place for manifestations of the sacred in psychoanalysis, as metaphor and personified images - in Goldenberg's words, as "a myriad of gods, goddesses, nymphs, satyrs and spirits who have animated human imagination for millennia" (1992: 353). But these images of the sacred remain immanent representatives of the desires and imaginings of the human psyche-soma, not deities of a transcendent, disembodied realm. Body, therefore, we are reminded, is sacred space. And it is feminist theory, in its recovery of the body and female sexuality and its consequent revaluing of life in the flesh, that can modify the sexism of Freudian discourse and the masculinist bias of psychoanalytic theory.

Third, and finally, Goldenberg's vision of shared interest in the body is further extended to extrapolation of a close link between contemporary psychoanalysis - most specifically, object relations theory - and feminist *thealogy* (as opposed to the androcentric academic discipline of theology) or "the return of the Goddess" (1993: 190-209). It is here that visions of the sacred which do not deny the flesh find a place in religious belief and experience. In Goldenberg's view, object relations theory and Goddess religion share many focal points: past history as a source for meaning (personal history and social prehistory); female images of power and desire (the preoedipal mother and goddess figures); the individual in a context of intersubjectivity and community (psychotherapy and the Goddess movement); and fantasy as a central and valid component of "rational" thought (individual internal fantasy life and collective goddess myth) (1993: 191). Either one, therefore, offers a viable alternative to patriarchal religions in fulfilling the purpose of infusing human life on earth with

meaning and sacredness. "That which is repressed is now returning," says Goldenberg, and "when theology becomes theology, the metaphysical comes home to the physical" (1993: 209); or, as I would suggest, to the sacred space of the mother.

7.2 IN SEARCH OF THE GODDESS

Searching for the roots of a universal prehistoric Goddess forms a prevalent part of theological and ecofeminist writing and of women's studies within the academic study of religion. As Dawne McCance has recently pointed out, religious feminist criticism has taken shape as a "quest" and "the search for lost voices, for myths and symbols excluded from patriarchal tradition, manifests itself as a 'quest for the goddess'" (1990: 167). Archaeological and anthropological research, too, offers a basis for debate around the existence of prehistoric matriarchies, Goddess worship, and the "fall" into patriarchy. Evidence of a female cult in a sixth millennium BCE urban centre of Anatolia, for example, is found in the frequently cited archaeological research of Marija Gimbutas in the area and British archaeologist James Mellaart's excavations of the Catal Huyuk site (Barstow, 1989; Rich, 1986; Ruether, 1993; Stone, 1979). A "new" history of prehistory is thus being produced to support feminist critique of patriarchal, monotheistic religion and as a foundation for feminist spiritual practice.

Ann Barstow's essay "The Prehistoric Goddess" (1989) examines evidence pointing to traces of Goddess worship found to date as far back as 25000 BCE and stretching from Siberia to southern Africa. Symbols of fertility or the "great mother" appear to have been significant images for engendering trust in nature and confidence in the survival of the human race. Although the ancient Goddess is manifested in

diverse images and roles, Barstow claims that she was fundamentally a single Goddess who symbolised the feminine as "the principle of power over life and death" (1989: 7-8). She was the archetypal "Mother-Goddess," widely revered as the supreme deity (Stone, 1982: 13). Furthermore, Barstow suggests that early hunter-gatherer societies, and even very early urban societies, may have developed systems of co-operative male-female power and control, rather than the power of domination inherent in the social structures of either patriarchy or matriarchy.

Lively feminist debate continues around the possible historical reality of worship of a supreme Mother-Goddess, universal matriarchy, or a lost egalitarian ecofeminist paradise.¹ According to Margot Adler, for instance, it is the *idea* of past matriarchy - in other words, the imagining of "women in power" - that is empowering and transformative for contemporary women (1982: 127-8). As Paula Webster also points out, the real value of the "matriarchy debate" lies in the future, not necessarily as a model for future society or even as a symbolic reference to past mythic glories, "but in its rejection of power in the hands of men... It pushes women (and men) to

¹ One such debate, representative of this area of concern in the 1970s and early 80s, appears in *The Politics of Women's Spirituality* (1982), between the editor, Charlene Spretnak, and feminist anthropologist, Sally Binford (see pages 541-61). In brief, Binford argues that there is no evidence to support the existence of prehistoric matriarchy and a supreme Mother Goddess. She challenges what she regards as a tendency towards "myth as history" which, she argues, has generated a "New Feminist Fundamentalism" - a religious phenomenon based on insupportable assumptions: "these include the notion of matriarchy as a stage in cultural evolution, the equating of matrilineality [where men generally still possess the power] with matriarchy, the romanticising of 'natural' birth control, and the assigning of unitary significance to art forms that appear in widely differing contexts" (547). Spretnak's counter-challenge addresses each of these points in detail, her main argument, however, being that on the one hand there is an abundance of evidence collected by archaeologists, classicists, and historians of religion that points to Goddess religions which predated patriarchal religions in many parts of the world; but on the other hand, she asserts, the feminist scholars and writers, who Binford has criticised, readily accept that we do not yet have adequate evidence to know if these societies were matriarchal or not. In a counter-response, Binford identifies a danger for hard-won feminist aims in an alleged regression to biological essentialist and stereotypical understandings of culturally defined sex differences (558). Spretnak, however, counters that the artefacts and myths under discussion have produced images of female *power* that serve to empower women and challenge stereotypical images of "femininity" (560).

imagine a society that is not patriarchal" (1975: 155). Present-day matrilineal societies are still generally oppressive to women, and prehistoric matriarchy, if it existed at all, may not have been universal, but, argues Adler, "there *is* plenty of evidence of societies where women held greater power than they do now" (1982: 134).

The subtly different narrative of an *egalitarian*, peaceful, agrarian, gynocentric world that was violently overthrown by patriarchal pastoralists and the advent of classical civilisation, has also been challenged by some feminist writers (Ruether, 1993: 143-55).² Recalling Freud's problems with situating matriarchy and the mother-goddesses in human history, questions still remain today concerning the significance and alleged centrality of a prehistoric Mother-Goddess. Rosemary Radford Ruether, among others (for example, Rich, 1986: 84-101), rightly urges caution in accepting wholesale a romanticised and idealised picture of matricentric history. Joan B. Townsend (1990) more radically criticises feminist nostalgia for "an ancient, unified religion of *the* Goddess as historic fact" that underpins the contemporary Goddess movement's aspiration to enhance women's status in western society. This quest, argues Townsend, fits more readily into the framework of "revitalisation movement theory with nativistic and millenarian elements" (1990: 179). Her analysis of the archaeological evidence suggests that it has been misinterpreted in order to construct a myth of a golden age that has been passed off as historical fact. Townsend asserts that the evidence in fact refutes the validity of "the existence of a 'universal' or

² Chapter 6, "Paradise Lost and the Fall into Patriarchy," in Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (1993: 143-72) offers a balanced, contemporary, and informative account of this continuing debate. The positions of various feminist writers, creation theologians, archaeologists, paleoanthropologists, and anthropologists are succinctly and clearly set out and analysed.

Mediterranean/European-wide Goddess religion, which is claimed to have existed from the Upper Palaeolithic through the Neolithic and beyond" (1990: 196).

However, in response to this critique, it can be argued that a body of ancient myths of the Goddess across diverse cultures does exist - myths that surely reflect the environments out of which they emerged and the minds of the people who created them (Rich, 1986: 92). In any event, "feminist reconstruction of a past which has been stolen from us" (Christ, 1987: 66) - whether historical fact or not - as well as research into cross-cultural Goddess myth, provide symbols that revalue the body, the feminine, and the earth, thus serving to empower women in religious practice and spiritual life.³ Carol Christ insists that it is what the past has to offer women in the present that is important and echoes Goldenberg's call for return to the body and acceptance of the feminine and mortality:

What is significant here is the meaning of the re-emergence of the symbols of God the Mother and the Goddess today. Whatever God the Mother and the Goddess may have meant in the ancient cultures, today God the Mother and the Goddess symbolise the emerging power of women, the celebration of the powers of the female body, and an acceptance of humankind's rooting in nature and finitude. It seems to me that these three issues - female power, the female body, and finitude - have been consistently denied in Western religion and that

³ See: Carol Christ (1979; 1983; 1987); Christine Downing (1984); Elinor Gadon (1989); Naomi Goldenberg (1993); Merlin Stone (1979).

the symbol of the Goddess forces recognition more clearly than any other symbol. (Christ, 1983: 249)

True or not, just as Adler advocates the transformative power of *imagining* matriarchy, Merlin Stone imagines a time when "at the very dawn of religion, God was a woman" - a symbolic memory, whether fact or fantasy, which, she argues, can only benefit women and men alike in transforming patriarchal society (1979: 120). In terms of religious phenomena, perhaps what we see in process here is the construction of a new mythology and a new sacred history and their integration into contemporary consciousness.

Innovative reconstruction of ritual practice, as well as myth, has also been in process. The feminist concern with spirituality and the retrieval of significant participation and power for women and female symbols in religion in the western world, particularly in America, has led to an active women's spirituality movement from the early 1970s.⁴ After ten years of social scientific study of the American feminist spirituality movement, Cynthia Eller sees it as a flourishing movement, always fluid and dynamic, and unique in its diversity and non-institutionalisation: "It is a spontaneous, grass-roots movement with no overarching organisation, no system of leadership, and no regularised form of membership. It draws on many religious traditions, but answers to none" (Eller, 1993: 3). Some feminists have been willing to

⁴ Charlene Spretnak's *The Politics of Women's Spirituality* (1982) offers a useful and wide-ranging collection of essays on feminist spirituality and Goddess religion, myth, and history by a variety of feminist authors. The issue of women's spirituality as a political force is also addressed in this volume. The essays particularly provide the reader with insight into the early discourse of the feminist spirituality movement in the 1970s. For more recent analysis of the feminist spirituality movement in America, see Cynthia Eller's sensitive and thorough social scientific study, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess* (1993).

remain within their own religious traditions, for example, Christianity and Judaism, in order to work for change from within. Other groups of women have returned to ancient "pagan" rites, calling themselves witches or members of the sisterhood of the Wicca. Their beliefs and rituals symbolise human unity with the rhythms of nature and the body and, for some, the myths of the Goddess in her various forms guide their practice. As Goldenberg points out, "the entire earth is conceptualised as the body of the Goddess and thus is sacred" (1993: 201). Starhawk, for example, a prominent leader and writer in the contemporary American Wicca movement, emphasises that the Goddess is not understood as anthropomorphic in nature but as the primary symbol of what has been lost - spiritual power, the harmony of nature, and the sacredness of the body and sexuality (1979: 7-9). Furthermore, although reverence for nature, women, and the feminine constitutes an almost universal feature of feminist spiritual practice, not all practitioners worship goddesses or the Goddess (Eller, 1993: 3-5). As Eller succinctly sums up, "Feminist spirituality's unique contribution to individual women is empowerment, and empowerment in a particular form: empowerment as a woman" (1993: 208).

However, from a theoretical perspective, there are an infinite number of ancient goddesses who populate diverse mythologies across many different cultures. Feminists and theologians in search of meaningful forms of religious expression and experience have clearly been prepared to change from patriarchal religious traditions to innovative and creative forms of religious paradigms devoted to the Goddess. The question remains, however, as to whether women should seek out appropriate ancient goddess myths from their own cultural territories, or whether a dynamic and fluid cultural interchange is called for. For example, American scholar of religion and

theologian Carol Christ relates her personal journey, which led her to study the history and meanings of Greek goddesses and their myths (1987: 57-66). At first sensing that she might be misled in neglecting the resources of her own culture's Goddess history and myth, she nonetheless found herself drawn to the ancient Greek goddesses as fruitful sources of meaning and fulfilment, in both her spiritual and academic life contexts.

In this spirit of feminist recreation of myth and ritual, the potential for enriching cultural interchange among contemporary religions might also be explored. As pointed out by C. Mackenzie Brown, "interest in feminine dimensions of transcendence as revealed in mythologies, theologies, and cults of goddess figures throughout the world has been keen in recent years, in the field of women's studies and religious studies generally" (1990: ix). In accordance with such an impulse, I intend to turn to Hindu mythic images of the goddess as a transcultural *living* resource for discovering maternal and feminine religious symbols. Rita Gross's essay "Hindu Female Deities as a Resource for the Contemporary Rediscovery of the Goddess" (1989) definitively supports this avenue of inquiry. Asserting that "it is one thing to know that the goddess must return and another to know where to find her," Gross argues that the hidden female imagery in western religions and the "fascinating goddesses of the ancient world... represent a tiny inroad in a largely patriarchal tradition, or, in the case of the ancient goddesses, they are very removed from us" (1989: 218). While outlining the potential pitfalls and dangers of misinterpretation in crossing the "cultural distance" between western and eastern forms of religion, Gross nonetheless postulates that Hindu female deities provide a fruitful resource for rediscovering the significance of the Goddess for women in religion: "if approached

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Uveda

critically and carefully, and if intelligent selection and borrowing are utilised, the Hindu goddesses can be the greatest stimulant to our imagination and to our speculation about the meaning of the goddess" (1989: 218).

With care, therefore, and mindful of the high standards set, I venture to become such a "borrower," in a search for symbolic meanings embedded in the divine embodiment of maternal sacred space in Hindu myth. Bearing in mind that the Hindu religious tradition represents just one such resource, among many others (for example, Buddhist traditions and African religions), I aim to show that the polarisation and paradox revealed in maternal sacred space, while remaining relatively repressed in psychoanalytic theory and western monotheism, are made explicit in the goddess myths of Hinduism.

7.3 HINDU RESOURCES

India's rich diversity of religious traditions that have come to be known under the generic term of Hinduism have a long history of readily including both feminine and masculine aspects of the divine. As we shall see, the interaction and joining of the two are deemed essential for the creation and sustenance of the universe. Female and male principles have taken the form of gendered abstract concepts, mythic figures, and most prominently, gods and goddesses. The ancient Vedic texts of the Aryan invaders of north-west historic India, however, which were written down from around 1500 BCE and formed the foundation for later Hinduism, contained little reference to female or goddess figures of any major significance. Although the history of some of the later Hindu goddess figures, for example, Śrī and Sarasvatī, can be retraced to a background presence in the *Vedas*, it was the great gods such as Indra, Agni, Soma,

and Varuna who were central to Vedic myth and ritual and who dominated a vast pantheon of male deities. Goddesses, although present, appeared to play a relatively minor role in the Vedic vision of the divine compared with those great gods (Kinsley, 1986a: 7; O'Flaherty, 1986: 130).

Nonetheless, the female deities of India do have a pre-Vedic history of their own. Archaeological evidence has unearthed figurines and seals portraying female figures dating from as far back as the second millennium BCE, figures that are thought to have had widespread and popular religious significance for the pre-Aryan Indus Valley civilisation (Kinsley, 1986a: 212-20). These goddesses, if such they were, appeared to be closely connected with animals and the fertility of crops and looked benign in nature. Interpretations of these female figures, based on available evidence, has to be tentative at best and they perhaps bear little relation to the goddesses of later Hinduism who appear in post-Vedic mythology. But in any event, it is reasonable to conclude that goddesses or, at least, the feminine principle, were strongly felt on the subcontinent of India for as far back as we can imagine.

Inasmuch as goddesses constituted a shadowy presence in the Vedic age, however, by the 5th century CE, the great Goddess, known as Devī (and many other names), had become a central figure in post-Vedic Sanskrit myth. To a certain extent, she supplanted Brahmā's position, alongside Viṣṇu and Śiva, as one of the three main deities who were worshipped as ultimate reality or the supreme being in pan-Indian Hinduism (Kearns, 1992: 191-4). The emergence of the Hindu tradition of *bhakti*, or devotion to a personalised deity, was rooted in the great epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, dating from approximately 300BCE to 300CE. But it was in the medieval period from about the 5th to the 16th centuries CE that theism and the

practice of *bhakti* came to full fruition, becoming successfully integrated into the orthodox Brahmanic tradition and woven into the myths and precepts of the major *Purāṇas* (ancient stories) of the period. Although Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism were already emergent and flourishing devotional sects in the India of the early centuries of the second millennium, the 6th century CE saw the blossoming of Śaktism, worship of the Goddess as *śakti* (power) and supreme deity, Devī.⁵ As the *Purāṇas* developed over this era, myths and stories with a cast of thousands of greater and lesser deities and demons were told and endlessly retold. This retelling was also perpetuated in the vernacular literature of the various regions of India, such as the poems, songs, and plays written by the ecstatic poet-saints of medieval times.

The development of Hindu goddess worship during this period generated a theological precept - supported by texts, myth, and ritual - that "the ultimate reality in the universe is a powerful, creative, active, transcendent female being" (Kinsley, 1986a: 133). Most scholarship on Hindu goddesses, in fact, approaches them as "different manifestations of an underlying feminine principle or an overarching great goddess" (Kinsley, 1986a: 4). The earliest classical Sanskrit text devoted to celebration of Devī as ultimate reality - and still the most popular today - is the *Devī-Māhātmya* ("Glorification of the Goddess," 6th century CE), a section of the *Markandeya-Purāṇa*. This theological assumption tends to subsume and unify all other Hindu goddess figures under one transcendent being. Kinsley explains that this is effected in two ways: Either a particular goddess, usually adopted for sectarian purposes, is regarded as the supreme deity or consort of the highest (male) deity and

⁵ See Thomas J. Hopkins (1971), *The Hindu Religious Tradition*, for a history of Hindu theism, *bhakti*, and textual sources (Chapters 6 and 7).

all others are understood as parts of her; or, one transcendent great Goddess is approached as the formless, abstract conception of ultimate reality, according to Hindu understanding, and all goddesses are subsumed under her as her various manifestations (1986a: 132-3).

These two paths, which are available either for worship or for study of the divine feminine in Hinduism, apply just as much in sectarian devotion to any particular significant male deity. However, as Kinsley further points out, each of the major male deities of Hindu tradition is also accorded an individual coherent mythology and theological meaning. Likewise, Kinsley then insists, has each of the many significant goddess figures, although these deities have received far less attention from this perspective in religious studies scholarship and theological analysis. The myths and symbols associated with each individual goddess therefore deserve to be studied for what she can teach us, not only about Hindu society and religion but also concerning human life and relationships in general.

In summary, for the particular purposes of this thesis, I intend to explore how gendered principles and goddess myths in the classical Sanskrit texts of the Hindu tradition articulate the symbolisation of gender and the ambiguities and polarisation of female and maternal sacred space. Consequently, I would argue that all approaches to the study of the divine feminine in Hinduism are relevant for this project. In any event, I aim to extrapolate and analyse particular polarities that exist and are expressed within the context of the divine feminine and divine mother in Hindu myth, whether inherent in the attributes of one goddess figure or between different goddess figures as attributes, so to speak, of the one, great Goddess. There are, however, underlying feminine principles that arguably form a foundation for the history of the divine

feminine and the great Goddess in Indian religious tradition. These will provide a fruitful springboard for uncovering ambiguity and paradox in female sacred space in Hindu tradition.

7.4 ŚAKTI, PRAKṚTI, MĀYĀ

"Śakti means power: for the Hindu, power is the criterion of divinity, and consequently everything that exhibits power is revered and worshipped" (Klostermaier, 1990: 145). Grammatically feminine, śakti is also construed as the female principle in Hinduism, the primal, creative power out of which everything arises - in short, the "cosmic mother," source of all creation. Śakti is the energy that creates, maintains, and destroys the material universe. This abstract conception of female activating energy has become inextricably associated with the great Goddess of Puranic times (*Devī-Māhātmya* 1.63; see Coburn, 1991: 32-84).⁶ In the popular paradigm of glorification of Devī, śakti is exalted as the active dimension of Brahman, the Absolute, or as ultimate reality itself. As such, the Goddess is also associated with the equally female, cosmic principle of materiality and all manifest creation, prakṛti. Furthermore, she is māyā, the illusory aspect of Brahman's creative power and the materiality which that power engenders, thus linked to and linking both śakti and prakṛti (Pintchman, 1994: 3).

From the more philosophical perspective of Hindu tradition, as expressed in Sāṃkhya philosophy, Advaita Vedānta, and the spiritual teachings of yoga, prakṛti and māyā essentially project negative connotations (Kinsley, 1986a: 135). Māyā

⁶ All references to the *Devī-Māhātmya* will be taken from Thomas Coburn's translation of the text in *Encountering the Goddess* (1991: 32-84).

represents the veil of ignorance and delusion, the changeable and impermanent power of creation that hides the unchanging nature of Brahman. Similarly, captured in a dualistic construct, *prakṛti*, or "nature," is the polar opposite of *puruṣa*, or "pure spirit." According to Samkya philosophy, the two represent opposing ontological principles, continually interwoven in a creative tension that renders them inseparable, the one always reflected in the other. *Puruṣa*, as pure witness consciousness, although inactive and devoid of creative energy, is nevertheless essential as a catalyst for the evolution of *prakṛti* and the creation of the universe (Pintchman 1994: 86-7).

In spite of the fact that these two principles are grammatically feminine and masculine respectively, the classical philosophical texts do not necessarily conceptualise *prakṛti* as an explicitly feminine principle. However, as Pintchman argues, *prakṛti* is the source of material creation and thus clearly symbolises - at a cosmic level - a maternal, reproductive function (1994: 87). Furthermore, in the *Purāṇas*, *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* are articulated as the female and male aspects of Brahman, or ultimate reality, who splits into matter and spirit in order to initiate creation. For example, *prakṛti* becomes unequivocally identified with the great goddess, Devī (*Devī-Māhātmya* 1.59; 5.7), while *puruṣa* is similarly identified with the great god, Śiva (*Liṅga-purāṇa* 2.11.4; see Kinsley, 1986a: 58).

It would appear all too easy to presume a replication of the western religious and philosophical history of dualistic thinking and gendered binary oppositions, where male is to female as mind (or spirit) is to body, and culture is to nature. *Prakṛti* represents the web of materiality in which the spiritual seeker becomes enmeshed. Both *prakṛti* and *māyā*, therefore, denote obstacles on the path to *mokṣa* (ultimate spiritual liberation), generating ignorance and unconsciousness. Thus, in this

spiritually unconscious state, human beings mistake the phenomenal nature of this material world for absolute reality. But when divinely embodied as the great Goddess, these abstract principles, and the phenomenal existence they signify, take on a religiously positive connotation as objects of worship and reverence. In the popular Hindu *bhakti* tradition in which Devī is worshipped as the ground of all being, life and creation are affirmed and celebrated (Kinsley, 1986a: 136). As Klostermaier puts it, Hindu goddess religion "takes the reality of this world very seriously and resists all attempts of more idealistic systems, such as Advaita Vedānta, to consider the world as illusion" (1990: 14). Kinsley, more poetically, also asserts:

As *śakti*, *prakṛti*, and *māyā*, the Devī is portrayed as an overwhelming presence that overflows itself, spilling forth into the creation, suffusing the world with vitality, energy, and power... She is the source of creatures - their mother - and as such her awesome, vital power is revered. (1986a: 136)

Śakti, *prakṛti*, and *māyā* are therefore understood as impersonal, transcendent, cosmic principles that are identified with the great Goddess and her personified goddess forms, a point that will be reiterated and clarified in the following analysis of particular goddess figures. All three principles become represented as embodied, not only "on the divine level in different individual goddesses, who are also said to be multifarious expressions of the Great Goddess," but also, as Pintchman indicates, "on the human level in the essential nature of women. The category 'feminine' or 'femaleness' encompasses all of these levels" (Pintchman, 1994: 2-3). As C.

Mackenzie Brown similarly points out, the *Devī-Māhātmya*, a text dedicated to glorification of the Goddess, declares that "every woman... is a portion of the Goddess, and she abides in all beings in form of the mother" (Brown, 1990: 216). Moreover, as abstract symbols of creative energy, nature, and the birth of the material universe, *śakti*, *prakṛti*, and *māyā* arguably reinforce the association of "female" with "nature" and the maternal function of reproduction. Thus, I would argue, in becoming articulated as *embodied* cosmic principles that represent the maternal creative function - both on divine and human levels - *śakti*, *prakṛti*, and *māyā* can be understood as symbols of maternal sacred space.

7.5 VEDAS

The abstract, philosophical, and gendered principles of *śakti*, *prakṛti*, and *māyā* in the Hindu tradition, however, have a more ancient history - one that is suffused with complex meanings and ambiguities. These principles not only formed a philosophical and theological foundation for the powerful and personalised Goddess tradition, as articulated in the Puranic texts, but they also emerged out of a preceding history of Vedic goddess mythology. At this juncture, therefore, I intend to take a regressive *excursus* in order to examine the ways in which the Vedic goddess figures initiated the production of a fundamental and multifaceted feminine principle, which continued to underpin Hindu devotion to the Goddess in the medieval period, and even to this day in contemporary Hinduism.

Despite the fact that goddess figures display only a shadowy presence in the *Vedas* and were overshadowed by the major Vedic gods, the notion of a fertile source of energy that is undeniably feminine forms a consistent motif in the texts. The *Rg-*

Veda, in fact, tells of several goddesses of great power, although the hymns devoted to them are few and they are certainly outnumbered by the male deities of the pantheon (O'Flaherty, 1980: 79). But just as Sprengnether's transformative interpretation of the "spectral mother" retrieves Freud's preoedipal mother from the unconscious to reveal her power, so too does a "maternal" power emerge from the shadows to take a place - even if secondary to the gods - in the *Vedas*.

The myths contained in the ancient Vedic texts repeatedly imply that numerous goddesses and female symbols were associated with cosmogonic functions and cosmological structures signifying creative power and materiality (Pintchman, 1994: 17). Although these associations were not always formally articulated, Pintchman argues that the idea of abstract female principles begins to take form in these texts (1994: 19). This is especially evident in Vedic cosmogonic myths, where goddess figures frequently seem to symbolise an underlying feminine principle that is linked to creative power, natural phenomena, and the material universe.

The *Vedas* themselves, the sacred texts which form the foundation of the orthodox Brahmanical canon, comprise four main classes: *Samhitās* (ca. 1500-800 BCE); *Brāhmaṇas*, ca. 1100-800 BCE; *Āraṇyakas*, ca. 1000-800 BCE; and *Upaniṣads*, ca. 800-300 BCE. The *Samhitās* comprise the *Ṛg*, *Yajur*, *Sāma*, and *Atharva*, of which the oldest, the *Ṛg-Veda Samhitā*, provides the most fruitful mythological material for study of goddesses, being "a collection of mantras, or hymns, celebrating deities, divine presences, and powers" (Kinsley 1986a: 6). Several of the Vedic goddesses, in both cosmogonic and cosmological contexts, definitively symbolise aspects of nature, the elements, and maternal characteristics. To illustrate this point, I intend to discuss the role of a selected few of the many Vedic goddess

figures, specifically those representing water, earth, dawn and night, and - perhaps unexpectedly - speech.

In the *Samhitās*, particularly the *Rg-Veda*, a significant role is played by a group of goddesses collectively referred to as the waters, or *ap*, a feminine Sanskrit term. These goddesses, the waters, often fulfil cosmogonic functions, suggesting a kind of "primordial womb" in which the gods themselves (who will create the cosmos), or the embryo of the manifest universe itself, gestates until ready to be born. As such, the waters clearly provide a metaphor for a cosmically divine level of female reproduction and maternal function:

That which is beyond heaven, beyond this earth, beyond the gods and *asuras* - what first embryo/germ, wherein all the gods beheld each other, did the waters (*ap*) hold?

The waters held that very first embryo/germ where all the gods came together, that one in which all worlds abide, placed on the navel of the Unborn.

(*Rg-Veda* 10.82.5-6; see Pintchman, 1994: 25)

The maternal role of the waters, as goddesses, is further sustained in verses of the *Rg-Veda* where they (*ap*) are revered as the mothers of the great fire god, Agni, even mothers of all the gods and of all that exists, being "the very motherly ones of all that stands and moves" and "mothers of the world" (*Rg-Veda* 6.50.7; 10.30.10; 10.9.5; see Pintchman, 1994: 24). The waters emerge as goddesses who embody all the qualities usually associated with the "good mother" - nourishing, healing,

protective, life-giving and life-affirming, beneficent, purifying, and abundant. But they are, above all, unquestionably divine and immortal. The hymns of the *Vedas* sing their praises and invoke the blessings of these bounteous, motherly goddesses, the waters:

These waters, indeed, are refreshing: help us to look upon strength and great joy.

Like loving mothers, give us here (a portion) of your most auspicious fluid... Oh waters, you refresh and rejuvenate us.

May the waters, goddesses, be for our happiness and protection, and for drinking. May they pour forth happiness and welfare.

I beg the waters, sovereigns ruling over wealth and human beings, for healing balm.

(*Rg-Veda* 10.9.1-6; see Pintchman, 1994: 24).

Following the watery motif, the Vedic goddess Sarasvatī represents a more explicit personalisation of the element of water, since she is identified both as goddess and as a mighty river. Lauded as a bountiful, fecund, inexhaustible, and immortal river, Sarasvatī brings fertility, wealth, and well-being to the earth and humankind. Her waters, moreover, contain purifying holy oils and healing medicine that cleanse her devotees of all pollution and affliction (Kinsley, 1986a: 11; 56). Sarasvatī is indeed mighty and strong, but no less maternal in nature. In the *Rg-Veda* she is appealed to for food and for children:

I sing a lofty song, for she is mightiest, most divine of Streams.

Sarasvatī will I exalt with hymns and lauds, and, Vasistha, Heaven and Earth...

So may Sarasvatī auspicious send good luck; she, rich in spoil, is never niggardly in thought...

May we enjoy Sarasvān's breast, all-beautiful, that swells with streams,

May we gain food and progeny.

(*Selections from Vedic Hymns*, 1968: 35; see Young, 1993: 271)

And in the *Artharva-Veda* (7.10) she is called on to nurse her children:

Your breast, which is ever-flowing, delightful, favourable, well-invoked, granting food gifts, by which you nourish all precious things, Sarasvatī, make it be received. (*Atharva-Veda* 7.10; see Pintchman, 1994: 40).

The *Rg-Veda*, moreover, also describes Sarasvatī as "the inciter of all pleasant songs, all gracious thought, and every pious thought," thus anticipating her later nature as Hindu goddess of speech, thought, intellect, and learning (Kinsley, 1986a: 11; 59).

This important point concerning the interweaving of the female cosmogonic powers of water and speech in the Vedic texts will be revisited later in this chapter.

The element of earth, in goddess form, is also well represented in the *Vedas* and, in fact, takes on a less abstract form than the waters. Pṛthivī (sometimes called Bhumi), as earth goddess, is both the physical earth itself and the mother of the whole

universe. Along with the waters, as part of the material cause of creation, she also takes on a cosmogonic role (Pintchman, 1994: 30-1). As maternal source of all creation, she is depicted in the *R̥g-Veda* as the partner of the universal father, Dyaus, the god of the heavens. Or, in more earthly terms, Pṛthivī, as the earth (or mother), partners Dyaus, as the sky (or father): "Together, Pṛthivī and Dyaus are invoked as the parents of the world and of the gods" (Pintchman, 1994: 31). But her maternal aspect is fundamental to both roles, for as the earth, she is also mother, the abundant source of life for all the earth's creatures. In the *Atharva-Veda*, however, she emerges as an independent goddess figure and the most vivid depiction of these maternal aspects appears in a hymn of praise to Pṛthivī. As a bountiful, life-supporting goddess, she is invoked "to pour out nectar and milk to feed her children and is said to have golden breasts" (Pintchman, 1994: 31).

The earth that supports all, furnishes wealth, the foundation, the golden-breasted resting-place of all living creatures, she that supports Agni Vaisvanara (the fire), and mates with Indra, the bull, shall furnish us with property!

The broad earth, which the sleepless gods ever attentively guard, shall milk for us precious honey, and, moreover, besprinkle us with glory!...

That earth upon which the attendant waters jointly flow by day and night unceasingly, shall pour out milk for us in rich streams, and, moreover, besprinkle us with glory!

(*Hymns of the Atharva-Veda*, 1964: 199-207; see Young, 1993: 272)

As well as her supportive strength, which nourishes and maintains the earth and her creatures, Pṛthivī, like the waters, also possesses procreative powers. Again, the link with water is forged, even to the extent of stating that Pṛthivī was water at the beginning of creation (*Atharva-Veda* 12.1.8; see Pintchman, 1994: 32). Earth, Pintchman suggests, seems to be expressed as the next stage of material formation, arising out of the most abstract level of materiality, the waters.

Aditi, another of the goddesses appearing in the *Vedas*, is similarly described as equivalent to the earth, and in the *Brāhmaṇas*, she becomes virtually identified with Pṛthivī (Kinsley, 1986a: 9-10). Although her individual identity is difficult to define, her maternal nature and presence is very strongly represented in the *Rg-Veda* as "our birthplace" and the "great mother" (Pintchman, 1994: 32). Aditi is known as the mother of the Ādityas, a group of seven or eight gods, and as mother of kings and of the great god Indra. Associated, too, with aspects of the unbounded and limitless physical universe, Aditi is sometimes articulated in a more abstract way, as a goddess of cosmic significance (Pintchman, 1994: 33). In the *Rg-Veda* (10.72) she is portrayed as the mother who gives birth by "crouching with legs spread... the cosmic origin of space itself and of earth, as well as being mother of the gods of the sky" (O'Flaherty, 1980: 79). As Kinsley points out, the root of her name is *da* (to bind), and as *a-diti* she is unbound and free, often petitioned by devotees to release them from suffering and misfortune (1986a: 10).

These plentiful Vedic representations of water and earth as goddesses has endured throughout India's history and remains an important part of contemporary Hindu belief and practice. Hindu reverence for the divine feminine is embodied in a "sacred geography" that articulates the Indian subcontinent itself as goddess and

mother: Bhārat Mātā, "Mother India" (Kinsley, 1986a: 178-81). The goddess Pṛthivī of the *Ṛg-Veda* is simply one of the most ancient literary expressions of a continuing "reverence for the awesome stability of the earth itself and the apparently inexhaustible fecundity possessed by the earth" (Kinsley, 1986a: 178). Likewise, are many rivers considered goddesses in India to this day, the most important example being the Ganges, but all of them revered for their great purifying powers (Kinsley, 1986a: 189). The rivers of India are largely understood as feminine and are worshipped for their bounteous qualities that express life-affirming religious values, such as "wealth, beauty, long life, good health, food, love, and the birth of children" (Feldhaus, 1995: 3). Just as the Vedic representations of the waters as goddesses show that they are inherently divine, so, too, is Gaṅga Mātā ("Mother Gaṅga" [the Ganges]) understood as innately divine in India today. As Diana Eck explains, the Gaṅga is not made sacred by ritual, she is not a sacred repository in which the divine has come to dwell - she *is* celestial by nature, unmediated, and immediate: "Whatever is holy, whatever is merciful, whatever is utterly auspicious is already there" (Eck, 1986: 183).

To return to the Vedic texts, there are two more important goddesses, among others, who play a noteworthy part in the Vedic texts. They are known as Uṣas and Rātrī, and are consistently associated with or identified as the dawn and the night, respectively. In the *Ṛg-Veda*, they are most often referred to as sisters, or even twins:

The two sisters, Night and Dawn, taught by the shining Sun, have the same endless path to go. The two auspicious creators, though of

opposed characters (darkness and light), are of the same mind, and do not clash and do not tarry.

(*Rg-Veda* 1.113.3; see Chan et al, 1969: 17)

Uṣas is a "young maiden, drawn in a hundred chariots (1.48), she brings forth the light and is followed by the sun (Surya), who urges her onward (3.61)" (Kinsley, 1986a: 7). Uṣas appears as a young and beautiful maiden, the awakener who rouses people from sleep to carry out their daily tasks. She is an auspicious goddess, petitioned by her devotees as bringer of light, wealth, and order - both social and cosmic.

Rich dawn, she awakens man from sleep. She sends one after enjoyment, another to perform sacrifice, and another after wealth. She belches out, as it were, all beings whose vision is limited by darkness, by spreading her light.

The daughter of the heavens, young maiden, white-robed, Dawn is seen dispelling darkness. O sovereign of the riches of the whole earth, auspicious Dawn, dispel darkness now from this sacrificial house of the gods.

Chaser of enemies, protector of *ṛta* [order], born for the sake of *ṛta*, full of joy, truthful, waker of the voices of living beings, the auspicious, supporter of sacrifice longed for by gods, shine here, now, in this sacrificial place.

O Dawn, in the days past you dispelled darkness. Now, O lady of riches, you do the same; and you will do the same in the future. You live in your eternal glory, never old, always the same, immortal.

(*Rg-Veda* 1.113.5, 7, 12, 13; see Chan et al, 1969: 17)

Despite her presence as a youthful maiden, Uṣas, the dawn, is also mother; she is mother, in fact, of the gods: "O Dawn, you are the mother of gods. You are the image of Aditi, the mother of gods. Shine as the banner of sacrifice" (*Rg-Veda* 1.113.19; see Chan et al, 1969: 18). She is also called the mother of cows, bringing light by baring her bountiful breasts (Kinsley. 1986a: 7).

Rātrī, sister to the dawn, plays an equally benign role, bringing rest in the night-time, although she may also be feared for her association with darkness. She is therefore petitioned for security and protection against the dangers brought by the darkness of night (*Rg-Veda* 10.127):

The Goddess as she comes hath set Dawn her Sister in her place:

And then the darkness vanishes.

So favour us this night, O thou whose pathways we have visited

As birds their nest upon the tree.

The villagers have sought their homes, and all that walks and all that flies,

Even the falcons fain for prey.

Keep off the she-wolf and the wolf; O Night, keep the thief away:

Easy be thou for us to pass.

(*Selections from Vedic Hymns*, 1968: 1; see Young, 1993: 271)

However, Rātrī is not only the protector against the night, but also the night itself. Therefore, she sometimes appears to embody those malevolent forces that lurk in the shadows of the night. But together with her sister, Uṣas, Rātrī also embodies maternal virtues, for the *Rg-Veda* calls the two goddesses "powerful mothers (1.142.7) and strengtheners of vital power (5.5.6). They are also called weavers of time and mothers of eternal law" (Kinsley, 1986a). Uṣas, especially, we recall, brings the light of day that ensures the continuance of religious ritual practice and sacrifice. Marking the "eternal law" of divisions between night and day, Uṣas and Rātrī, I would argue, might be seen as divine mothers of sacred time, rather than sacred space. They empower the lives of both humankind and the deities with activity and rest, bringing light and watching over the darkness of night for all time.

All these Vedic goddesses, among many others, represent female forces of creativity and reproduction, most often explicitly articulated as maternal. In their cosmogonic participation in material creation and their identification with natural phenomena, these goddesses, as Pintchman argues, appear to be precursors to the philosophical, abstract feminine principle, *prakṛti* (1994: 19). Furthermore, their power as activating forces of both the gods and humankind similarly anticipate the concept of *śakti*. But if we turn to another Vedic goddess, Vāc, who later becomes identified with Sarasvatī, a feminine principle of a different nature emerges. Here, associations of the goddesses with the natural elements give way to the power of speech and intellect.

The intermingling of the cosmogonic functions of speech and water is frequently found in the *Samhitās*. The Vedic goddess, Vāc, meaning speech, appears throughout these texts, revealing herself in the faculty of human speech as well as

acting as a creative force (Pintchman, 1994: 37). This goddess's power is particularly felt in supporting cosmic and ritual order, as bestower of the mystic, visionary experiences of the *ṛsis* (seers), and manifests as the truth they utter while re-enacting their visions in ritual sacrifices (Kinsley, 1986a: 11-12). It is her all-pervasive energy, it is said, that creates and mobilises the *ṛsis* and the Brahmins (priests):

With sacrifice they followed the track of Vāc; they found her entered
into the *ṛsis*. Bringing her near, they distributed her in many places.
Seven singers chant her together.

(*Rg-Veda* 10.71.3; see Pintchman, 1994: 37)

And Vāc herself declares:

I, myself, say this welcome news to gods and men. He whom I love, I
make him powerful, (I make) him a Brahmin, (I make) him a seer, (I
make) him wise...

I have entered into heaven and earth. I bring forth the father at the
summit of this (creation). My *yonī* (womb/origin/abode) is within the
waters (*ap*), in the ocean. Thence I extend over all worlds, and I touch
heaven with my uppermost part.

I also blow forth like the wind, reaching all the worlds. Beyond
heaven, beyond the earth, so great have I become through my
grandeur.

(*Rg-Veda* 10.125.6-8; see Pintchman, 1994: 38)

These verses acclaim Vāc as an all-pervasive feminine principle of creativity, both immanent and transcendent, extending from earth, to heaven, and beyond. Her reproductive potency, symbolised as her *yoni* (womb; uterus; or vagina) permeates the primordial waters, thus linking her to the role of the waters (*ap*) as cosmic womb (Pintchman, 1994: 39). This cosmogonic role is explicitly maternal, since she is the nourishing, benevolent deity "who has given birth to things by naming them" (Kinsley, 1986a: 12). In other verses of the *Rg-Veda*, Vāc is further invoked as a heavenly and "bounteous cow" whose lowing further joins the creative energy of both water and speech, bringing forth creation and human communication:

The buffalo-cow [Vāc] lowed; she fashioned the floods (*salila*), having become one-footed, two-footed, four-footed, eight-footed, nine-footed, she who in the highest heaven has a thousand syllables.

From her flow forth the (heavenly) oceans (*samudra*), on account of which the four directions exist, and from her flows the *akṣara* (imperishable/syllable), on which the entire universe exists.

(*Rg-Veda* 1.164.41-42; see Pintchman, 1994: 39)

According to Kinsley, Vāc as the "bounteous" cow ensures the appropriate speech at all levels of human society, through providing "first, the lofty, discerning vision of the *ṛsi*; second, the ritual formulas of the priest; and third, the everyday language of people which enables them to establish themselves as a community of friends" (1986a: 12). The creative power of Vāc, and her association with sacred ritual and the maintenance of cosmic order, is felt as an even more significant presence

in the later *Brāhmaṇas*, as is her identification with Sarasvatī, the mighty river goddess (Kinsley, 1986a: 11-12). Her power of divine speech flows forth like the waters, enabling the chanting of mantras, without which the performance of Vedic ritual and sacrifice could not occur.

Frequently named Sarasvatī-Vāc in the *Brāhmaṇas*, Vāc is associated with the cosmogonic role of the waters. But she is also associated with the earth: "In fact, the waters, the earth/Aditi, and Vāc all seem to represent different aspects of the same creative principle" (Pintchman, 1994: 48). Most significant, however, is the articulation of Vāc, manifest as the faculty of speech, in sexual union with Prajapati, the creator of the physical universe. It is this male deity's copulation with speech that initiates creation, but it is said to be a union accomplished through Prajapati's mind (*Satapatha-Brāhmaṇa* 6.1.2.6ff.; see Pintchman, 1994: 48). Thus, an image of creative union between speech (female) and mind (male) emerges, who together create not only the natural and human orders, but also the sacrificial order of religious ritual (Pintchman, 1994: 49-50). This female manifestation of creative speech implies a cosmogonic principle that extends beyond the phenomenal elements of nature, water, and earth to the realm of culture.

Does this union of speech and mind imply a transformation of the ubiquitous oppositional formula underpinning male dominance, where female is to male as nature is to culture? This might be an ontological leap not intended by the Brahmanical writers. Pintchman draws on several verses from the *Brāhmaṇas* which assert that mind pre-exists speech and is its source (for example, *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* 10.5.3.1-4; see Pintchman, 1994: 49). The same text insists that mind, in preceding speech, is superior to it: speech, it is said, only imitates mind. Notwithstanding this claim, it is

also said that mind cannot be made known without speech (*Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* 4.6.7.5; see Pintchman, 1994: 223, n.100). Vāc, therefore, acts as Prajapati's inherent creative power, "as his ability to speak or make manifest the contents of his mind" (Pintchman, 1994: 51). Again, the role of a Vedic goddess figure arguably anticipates the feminine creative principle of *śakti*, without which the gods are inert and powerless.

The presence of the elements of water and earth is sustained in the *Upaniṣads*, but these elements tend to lose their genderedness. The Upaniṣadic texts are abstract and reflective in character and consequently the mythological framework of the *Samhitās* and *Brāhmaṇas* changes in a way that reduces the significance of individual deities. Although the waters and the earth retain their cosmogonic and cosmological meanings, they surrender their female identity. However, the creator god, Prajapati, retains his cosmogonic, male identity as mind, and although Vāc's identity as a goddess is not stressed, she remains as his female partner. Accordingly, as in the *Brāhmaṇas*, Vāc continues to function as "the activating principle that, through interaction with a creator figure, is projected forth and transformed into the manifest world" (Pintchman, 1994: 58).

To sum up, in the Vedic literature as a whole, the goddesses, in their multifarious divine forms, embody a single feminine principle which is "both an activating principle and also the gross, abstract material from which the manifest cosmos is formed" (Pintchman, 1994: 58). Furthermore, their obviously maternal nature remains a consistent thread running through the Vedic myths in which they play a part. As divine embodiments of the cosmogonic mother, in other words, as maternal sacred space, the Vedic goddesses introduce a glimmer of new light on

images of the mother. In giving birth to, as well as being identified with the natural elements of the material world, they adhere to the reproductive role of creativity. As such, the goddesses are situated in the realm of nature - albeit at a cosmic level - which is arguably analogous to the role of the preoedipal mother and her position in the realm of the Imaginary. But these maternal goddesses also include the mother who participates in the birth of culture and the intellect, as the faculty of speech - in a capacity marked as inferior to that of the father - but, nevertheless, taking a tentative step for the feminine into the Symbolic realm. This feminine principle, rooted in the ancient myths of the Vedic goddesses and later articulated in Hindu philosophical discourse as the cosmic principles *prakṛti*, *śakti*, and *māyā*, forms the foundation of the vibrant theology of the Goddess, and her many manifestations, promulgated in post-Vedic mythology. It is these goddesses to which we now turn our attention.

CHAPTER EIGHT: GODDESS, THE MOTHER

8.1 POST-VEDIC GODDESSES

So far, it has been inferred that divinity in Hindu tradition is conceptualised as both male and female, symbolised in the sacred texts of the *Vedas* as gods and goddesses. The more abstract, philosophical turn of the *Upaniṣads* and the concentration on ascetic practice aimed towards the attainment of *mokṣa*, saw the development of an equally abstract conception of Brahman, or ultimate reality, as one divine substance comprising inseparable male and female principles, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. Brahman, however, was conceived as transcending “all qualities, categories, and limitations,” such as the earthly confines of gender (Kinsley, 1986a: 136). However, the later popular and exponential growth of theistic devotional practice, known as *bhakti*, in the early centuries of the first millennium CE, inaugurated the revitalisation of personal deities, supported by the literary mythologies and theologies of post-Vedic gods and goddesses found in the stirring dramas of the epics (the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*) and the ancient narratives of the *Purāṇas*. As the great *bhakti* traditions dedicated to male deities blossomed, namely, Vaiṣṇavism (devoted to the god Vishnu and his avatars) and Śaivism (devoted to the god Śiva), non-Vedic goddesses also became major role-players, usually personified as consorts to male deities.

As we recall, though, the 6th century CE saw the new flowering of another popular stream of *bhakti* tradition, that of goddess-worship. The overwhelmingly Śakta texts, such as the *Devī-Māhātmya* (6th century CE) and the later

Devībhāgavata-Purāṇa (11th to 13th centuries CE), established a theology of the Great Goddess, Devī, as a feminine rendition of the supreme being or ultimate reality (see Pintchman, 1994: 178-84). In Śakta Tantrism, tantric texts, doctrines, and practices likewise elevated the post-Vedic goddesses to supreme status and articulated the feminine principle, *śakti*, as the supreme cosmogonic and cosmological divine power. In this context, "the goddess who is identified as Śakti is usually elevated above the male aspect of the Godhead" (Pintchman, 1994: 110).

However, literary myths and theology cannot be divorced from what they symbolise in society and everyday religious practice, both past and present. The *bhakti* tradition forms the basis of popular Hinduism today throughout India and other parts of the world, comprising a framework of beliefs and practices that, to a great extent, cut across the boundaries of class and gender in Hindu society. The basic premise that myth expresses both a model for and reflection of social structure (including gender roles), as well as providing a basis for religious practice, is crucial for assessing the significance of the goddess figures for women in Hindu religion and society.

In this regard, the legal codes of Hinduism, the *Dharmaśāstras*, particularly those texts attributed to the sage, Manu, at the turn of the first millennium, lay down the expected ideals, norms, and regulations for social relations in Hindu society. Marriage is deemed central to social stability and is clearly essential for women to have a recognised position in society. According to Manu's prescriptions, a woman is required to be an ideal wife, or *pativrata*, that is, devoted to her husband as *pati*, or a "god," always subject to his control and sacrificing her own well-being to ensure that

of her husband and family (Carmody, 1989: 51; McGee, 1991: 78; Young, 1987: 73-5). This applies to any wife, no matter how odious the husband:

Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure (elsewhere), or devoid of good qualities, (yet) a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife...

Until death let her be patient (of hardships), self-controlled, and chaste, and strive (to fulfil) that most excellent duty which (is prescribed) for wives who have one husband only. (*The Laws of Manu*: 5: 195-99; see Young, 1993: 278).

In spite of this legitimization of women's subordination, Manu, as it turns out, betrayed an ambivalence in his attitude towards the role of women. On the one hand, no woman should ever be independent, and she is subordinate to men throughout her life:

By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house.

In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent...

She must always be cheerful, clever in (the management of her) household affairs, careful in cleaning her utensils, and economical in expenditure. (*The Laws of Manu*, 5: 195-99; see Young, 1993: 277-8).

But, on the other hand, a woman should also be protected and respected at all times, and as wife and mother, she should be revered and worshipped, in specific ritual performances, as the embodiment of the goddess in the home.

Women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-law, who desire (their own) welfare.

Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards. (*The Laws of Manu*, 3: 84-5; see Young, 1993: 277).

A woman's most revered status, not unexpectedly, is as mother of a male child, undoubtedly perceived as the "best way for an Indian woman to gain prestige and honor" (Carmody, 1989: 53). Procreation, especially of sons, is regarded as one of the essential duties of marriage, which is the very foundation of social order, or *dharma* (Young, 1987: 82-83). Here, I would suggest, Freud's idealisation of the mother-son relationship is reiterated and, moreover, extended to include the divine realm, where the wife and mother is venerated as a symbolic representation of the beneficent goddess. However, Manu's regulation of women's normal role in Hindu society is underpinned by the fundamental issue of control and the patriarchal and androcentric conviction that women and female sexuality are dangerous if not controlled by a male and the confines of marriage and motherhood. Reflections of this issue of control of the feminine arise in diverse forms in the myths of the goddesses.

It will become clear, as we continue, that the myths found in the classical post-Vedic texts are replete with divine symbols of womanhood and maternity. I therefore

intend to examine a selection of the classical Hindu goddesses individually - namely, Sarasvatī, Sītā, Śrī-Lakṣmi, Rādhā, Pārvati, Devī (as the Goddess), Durgā, and Kālī - showing how they reflect and reinforce these socioreligious norms in some instances, and in others, contradict them. Furthermore, and most important, the ways in which these feminine and maternal symbols in the Hindu goddess tradition embody polarisation and paradox in the divine realm, which I have argued to be inherent in conceptions of the mother and motherhood in the human world, will be analysed. In this regard, the extent to which the politics of maternal sacred space, so far uncovered in the human realm, is mirrored in the divine world, is of vital significance for this study.

Sarasvatī

It seems pertinent to begin with the goddess Sarasvatī, since she is one of the few ancient Vedic goddesses who are still worshipped in India to this day. Associated today less with the Vedic river-goddess, Sarasvatī, the Sarasvatī of Puranic myth remains closer to Vāc, the Vedic goddess of speech. As we recall, Sarasvatī and Vāc were, in any case, closely linked and even identified with one another by the time of the *Brāhmaṇas*, thus forming a strong connection between female symbols of nature and culture. Myths about Sarasvatī are sparse in the Purāṇas, but she is nevertheless a widely popular goddess in contemporary Hinduism. Sarasvatī presides over the realm of culture as a whole, as goddess of learning, knowledge, the sciences, and the arts, especially music (Kinsley, 1986a: 59-60).

It is Sarasvatī's connection with the faculty of speech that underpins her involvement in culture, as articulated in Puranic myths that identify her with the tongues of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Kṛṣṇa. These myths most frequently relate this goddess to the creator-god, Brahmā, sometimes as his offspring, and at other times, as his wife. But it is Sarasvatī, however, who has remained as a popularly worshipped deity in contemporary India, rather than Brahmā, and her blessings are usually invoked for new cultural and educational ventures, such as concerts, film-making, and university ceremonies (Kearns, 1992: 197). Moreover, Sarasvatī is identified with thought and intellect, those faculties that make coherent speech possible. The importance of speech and sound in Hindu religiosity cannot be overestimated, given the pivotal role of the utterance of Sanskrit mantras in ritual worship, most especially in the chanting of the sacred syllable, *om*. This sacred sound, it is believed, holds the entire creative process within it (Kinsley, 1986a: 59).

In a wider cultural context of both worldly and spiritual life, speech and language represent rationality and human intelligence. As such, Sarasvatī differs from many other Hindu goddesses who are more often associated with fertility, reproductivity, and other aspects of the natural world. Artistic images of Sarasvatī, therefore, often show her riding a swan, a symbol of spiritual transcendence, or seated on a lotus that "floats above the muddy imperfections of the physical world, unsullied, pure, beautiful" (Kinsley, 1986a: 62). Watery elements, then, still arguably play a part in Sarasvatī's milieu, but essentially as symbols of absolute purity and transcendent spirituality. As Kinsley further points out, "Sarasvatī inspires people to live in such a way that they may transcend their physical limitations through the ongoing creation of

culture" (1986a: 62). In the everyday world, then, she inspires human beings in their higher aspirations of culture and learning, and in the religious sphere, she likewise exemplifies humanity's highest aspirations of purity and spirituality. Sarasvatī, therefore, in her central role of blessing cultural, academic, scientific, and artistic endeavours, is not generally regarded as a domestic goddess. In terms of Hindu ideals of motherhood, her maternal attributes are purely metaphorical, relating to the birth of artistic creation and the inspiration of wisdom. Sarasvatī's definitive role in the creation of culture, I would argue, pointedly contradicts the association of the feminine with nature and reproductive symbols, such as those found in psychoanalytic ideals of the feminine and the maternal, which are said to reside in the pre-symbolic and pre-cultural realm of the human psyche. Perhaps it is this very contradiction of Hindu patriarchal norms concerning women and the feminine that underlies the lack of attention to Sarasvati in Puranic myth.

Sītā

If Sarasvatī's mythology tends to be meagre, Sītā's is prolific and abundant. This vibrant female figure, Sītā, both human and divine in nature, is widely acknowledged as the most popular epic heroine in Hindu religious tradition. Most popularly known as wife of the god Rāma, Sītā is one of the major protagonists in the great epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, written by the sage, Vālmīki. Although Sītā's divinity and status as a goddess is not clearly defined in the early part of the epic, both Rāma and Sītā become implicitly cast as divine manifestations of the great god, Viṣṇu, and his

consort, Lakṣmi, as the narrative progresses. Certainly, in the context of contemporary Hindu *bhakti* they are approached as deities, but Sītā is rarely worshipped independently of Rāma, whose divine status is firmly established as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Sītā's persona - both human and divine - is almost entirely defined in relationship to her husband.

If myth should provide an ideal model for human relations in society, then the divine couple Rāma and Sītā seem to be the very essence of myth's function. They arguably fulfil Hindu ideals of marriage and royalty to the very letter of the law according to Manu. While Rāma is portrayed as the perfect and powerful king, who dispenses his rule as a model of social integrity and justice, Sītā is revered as the ideal Hindu wife, or *pativrata*, whose every thought revolves around her husband and who remains steadfast and loyal to Rāma through thick and thin (Kinsley, 1986a: 68-70). Sītā's mythic role is illustrated in several incidents throughout the narrative of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, one after the other proving her selfless devotion and sexual fidelity to Rāma against all odds. Her character is tested through exile, abduction, ordeal by fire, and banishment, none of which dispel her loyalty to Rāma. Despite her hardships, Sītā emerges as a woman of spirit, showing great courage and endurance; and, despite her unshakeable wifely devotion to Rāma, it is not beyond her to rebuke him for his insensitivity to her situation and his rigid adherence to kingly duty. Rāma, in point of fact, might aspire to be the ideal king, but he surely falls short of the mark of ideal husband. Sītā's loyalty to Rāma is not always reciprocated in kind.

When Rāma is exiled by his father from the kingdom of Ayodhya to the forest for fourteen years, he hopes to protect Sītā from suffering the dangers of forest life

and insists that she should remain in the safety of the palace and await his return. Immediately, without thought for royal convention, the spirited Sītā confronts Rāma's request with the contempt it deserves. Even the usually passive Sītā "places wifely devotion above wifely submission when she insists, against Rāma's wishes, on following him into exile" (Kearns, 1992: 209; see Kinsley, 1986a: 71-72). To this end, she manipulates the image of an ideal wife's unswerving loyalty to her husband in order to justify what could be construed as a lack of obedience to Rāma. Sītā declares:

"O Offspring of a great king, O Rāma, I am unable to show aught but contempt for what I hear! It is unworthy of a warrior, a prince skilled in the use of sword and lance! O Lord, what thou hast said is shameful and may not be endured!... a wife alone follows the destiny of her consort, O Bull among Men; therefore from now on, my duty is clear, I shall dwell in the forest! For a woman, it is not her father, her son, nor her mother, friends nor her own self but the husband, who in this world and the next is ever her sole means of salvation... I shall willingly dwell in the forest as formerly I inhabited the palace of my father having no anxiety in the Three Worlds and reflecting only on my duties towards my lord. Ever subject to thy will, docile, living like an ascetic, in those honey-scented woodlands I shall be happy in thy proximity, O Rāma, O Illustrious Lord... none shall restrain me, O Mighty Prince, on this I am firmly resolved!... O Rāma, separated from thee I should immediately yield up my life... If, despite my grief, thou

wilt not take me to the forest, I shall seek death by poison, or cast myself in to the fire or drown myself!" (*The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki* 2.24-29; see Young, 1993: 288-9)

For Sītā, her husband is a god, and without him her life would be meaningless. She is, without doubt, *pativrātā*. Her ultimate threat of suicide, though, is hardly the expected behaviour for a "submissive" wife. Inevitably, Rāma relents and they leave for the forest together.

When Sītā is later abducted by the wicked Rāvaṇa, who plots to destroy Rāma, her life, without Rāma, loses meaning. The text describes how her grief, in separation from her beloved, dims the radiance of her great beauty:

Entangled in a mighty web of sorrow, her beauty was veiled like a flame enveloped in smoke... or faith that is languishing or hope that is almost extinguished or perfection unattained... For a woman the greatest decoration is her lord and Sītā, though incomparably beautiful, no longer shines in Rāma's absence. (*The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki* 5.15-16; see Kinsley, 1986a: 72)

But Sītā's chastity and fidelity remain undimmed and none of Rāvaṇa's potent ploys to seduce her - including pretending that Rāma has been killed - succeed. Eventually, Rāma defeats Rāvaṇa and rescues Sītā, only to reject her. Rāma's husbandly duty and male fantasy of ideal womanhood appears not to accommodate the possibility of unshakeable love and fidelity such as Sītā's. Certain that Rāvaṇa's power and lust must

have conquered Sītā's resolve, Rāma self-righteously repudiates Sītā, even to the extent of offering her to one of the enemy demons:

"What man of honour would give rein to his passion so far as to permit himself to take back a woman who has dwelt in the house of another?... I no longer have any attachment for thee; go where thou desirest... Assuredly Rāvaṇa, beholding thy ravishing and celestial beauty, will not have respected thy person during the time thou didst dwell in his abode" (*The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki* 6.17; see Young, 1993: 291).

Sītā, once more, and justifiably, does not wholeheartedly embrace a submissive role and rebukes Rāma for his lack of faith in her affection and love. To prove her purity, she commands a funeral pyre to be built. With a "fearless heart" and "in the presence of all" she enters the flames, addressing Agni, the god of fire: "As I am pure of conduct, though Rāma looks on me as sullied, do thou, O Witness of the Worlds, grant me full protection" (6.120; see Kinsley, 1986a: 74). Emerging unscathed, Rāma acknowledges her purity and they are reunited. Just as the story is set to end on a note of "happily ever after," gossip about Sītā alerts Rāma to the fact that his subjects are not happy about his reacceptance of Sītā, for, after all, she has been with the enemy. Rāma therefore banishes Sītā to the forest, once again giving his kingly responsibility to his subjects' sensibilities priority over his love for Sītā. Sītā, ever the devoted wife, cannot find it in her heart to blame Rāma, believing, still, that this misfortune has befallen them through some fault of her own, even if from a past life. While in exile in her forest hermitage, Sītā gives birth to twin sons, thus

portraying Sītā as one of the few female deities who fulfils biological maternity. After several years, Rāma calls Sītā back for yet another ordeal to prove her innocence and his own righteousness once and for all. Agreeing to do this, Sītā nevertheless loses her will to continue in this world and asks the goddess of the earth to take her back: "If, in thought, I have never dwelt on any but Rāma, may the goddess Madhavi receive me" (7.97; see Kinsley, 1986a: 76). The earth duly embraces Sītā and she sinks back into the earth on the goddess's throne, leaving a grieving Rāma to live out the rest of his life, as king, in loneliness and sorrow. To the end of her earthly life, Sītā's whole reason for being centres around Rāma, and only Rāma, but her final act could nevertheless be seen as one of defiance, rather than one of submission.

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Sītā's mythology clearly indicates that her identity is defined entirely by Rāma's needs and kingly duties. Her marriage, moreover, is marked by constant separation from the object of her love, emphasising a love made all the more profound by her solitude and the intensity of her longing for Rāma. Her steadfastness, in separation, not only provides a model for Hindu women as the ideal wife, but also for the ideal devotee, eternally resolute in love and longing for God. Sītā, therefore, is approached by devotees as an intermediary, as one who has access to Rāma, and provides a medium for his divine blessings (Kinsley, 1986a: 79). Her identity as wife, devotee, and divine consort - whether depicted in the imagery of myth or sacred art and iconography - is altogether defined by her association with Rāma.

Sītā is without doubt widely revered as an exemplar of *pativrata*, the dutiful wife, and the myths of the *Rāmāyaṇa* both provide a model for and reflect the social norms and ideals laid down in the *Laws of Manu*. However, Sītā's identification as a

deity, and evidence for her divine power, may be less in doubt and more profound than on first sight. Cornelia Dimmitt, for example, argues that Sītā plainly displays the qualities of a goddess in two further important ways: first, as a goddess of fertility and second, "as *śakti*, the energy that inspires the hero Rāma to action," providing the creative source of his power as king (Dimmitt, 1986: 210-11).

D310

First, Sītā (literally meaning "furrow") has a history rooted in Vedic myth where she appears as a fertility goddess worshipped by farmers. Vedic myth and ritual stress a king's capacity to draw forth the fertility and richness of the earth for the benefit of living creatures and humankind. The implication is that without the king (male) the earth's (female) creative potential cannot be tapped, a relationship that seems to provide a metaphor for the bond of marriage between male and female. These themes are appropriated by Vālmīki in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, for in the myth, King Janaka unearths his daughter, Sītā, while ploughing the earth (Kinsley, 1986a: 67-8). From the start, then, Sītā shows superhuman origins that accommodate her as a goddess of fertility and she arguably symbolises the riches of the earth brought forth by the king.

According to Dimmitt, several parts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* support the interpretation of Sītā as intimately related to the fertility of the earth, articulating her power as "mistress of the plants and animals" (Dimmitt, 1986: 210). Most obvious, of course, is Sītā's birth and death: She is not born of a human womb, but springs from the earth; neither does she die at the end of the epic, but instead, "reenters the earth on a throne sent up from the netherworld by her mother, Madhavi Dharani, 'Earth, the Upholder'" (Dimmitt, 1986: 214). The events of her life in between also reflect her

close ties to nature and the power of her presence on plants and animals. When she is absent, plants and trees seem to lament and wither; and when present, such as on her return to Ayodhya after exile, "Fruitless trees became fruitful; trees without flowers abounded in blossoms; those that were withered sprouted leaves, and the foliage dripped honey" (6.126; see Dimmitt, 1986: 215). Animals, too, seem to echo Sītā's moods and even come to her aid when she is in danger. Far from pining for the comforts of home when she is in the forest during Rāma's exile, Sītā seems at her happiest when close to nature.

Furthermore, when Sītā is abducted and imprisoned in Lanka by Rāvaṇa, Ayodhya "remains in a state of suspended animation, and the plants and animals refuse to perform their usual functions" (Dimmitt, 1986: 217). Sītā, it appears, possesses those powers of fertility and prosperity that are withheld from the earth for as long as she is held prisoner, powers attributable only to a goddess. But it is Rāma, the king, who has to act to rescue Sītā and restore fertility to the earth. As such, Rāma embodies the symbol of kingly power (male), who restores Sītā, symbol of the riches of the earth (female).

However, with regard to Dimmitt's second point, she argues that Sītā's status as goddess is also expressed as *śakti*, or as Rāma's activating energy. It is not only Rāma who acts to restore fertility to the earth, but it is Sītā who forces the hero, again and again, to his acts of heroism. Repeatedly, by her actions, Sītā moves the story forward, furnishing Rāma's motivating force, or *śakti*. One instance, among others, is when Sītā refuses the monkey-god Hanuman's rescue from Lanka, ensuring, rather, that it is Rāma who must fulfil the heroic role of saving her. After her ordeal by fire,

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and reunited with Rāma, the divine and heroic king, "Sītā is the source and support of the continuing prosperity of the world, as symbolised in the extraordinary qualities of the rule of Rāma, his divine ten-thousand-year reign" (Dimmitt, 1986:223).

Closeness to nature and the power of fertility characterise Sītā's female nature, one that supports the notion of the feminine being allied with nature and the masculine with culture. On the human level, she is unusual among post-Vedic goddesses in being portrayed as a mother, in the literal, biological sense (Kinsley, 1986a: 76). On the divine level, Sītā, as a goddess of fertility, can be perceived as maternal, a veritable "earth mother." In point of fact, she comes from and returns to her own mother, the earth goddess. Sītā's power, then, extends beyond the mere attributes of the devoted and submissive wife, to encompass divine status. As goddess, Sītā is not simply an inferior adjunct to the god, Rāma, but provides a metaphor for one half of the universal whole, the activating energy of the world. At times identified with Viṣṇu, maintainer of the universe, and Lakṣmi, goddess of wealth and prosperity, our epic heroes, Rāma and Sītā, embody many features attributed to those deities.

Śri-Lakṣmi

The image of the goddess Śri-Lakṣmi (alternatively known as Lakṣmi or Śri), bears a resemblance to her incarnation, Sītā, in that she is also the wife and consort to a male deity, in this case, the great god of Hindu devotional tradition, Viṣṇu. Śri-Lakṣmi, too, fulfils many of the ideals of *pativrata*, but she differs from Sītā in that her divinity and status as a powerful goddess is incontrovertible. The goddess Śri-

Lakṣmi arguably embodies the predominant feminine symbol of Hindu social order and the most popular goddess of the Vaisnava tradition, whose devotees worship the god Viṣṇu as supreme being. According to Kinsley, by the late epics (ca. 400 CE), Śri-Lakṣmi was almost exclusively associated with Viṣṇu as his "steadfast wife" (1986a: 24-8).

In contrast, Śri-Lakṣmi's earlier history portrays an image of fickleness and inconstancy that associates her with many deities (*Mahābhārata* 12.220.44-46; see Kinsley, 1986: 26). Before being adopted into the Vaisnava tradition Śri-Lakṣmi seems to have been an independent goddess figure with her own cult, who then, to a great extent, "loses her independent status when she becomes the consort of Vishnu" (Olson, 1989: 128). Śri-Lakṣmi's nature was significantly identified with beauty, prosperity, growth, fertility and the fecundity of the natural realm, the last showing a consistency with Sītā's nature. As Viṣṇu's consort, Śri-Lakṣmi's disposition becomes more restrained and clearly subordinate in relation to her husband, arguably portrayed as the idealised loyal and submissive Hindu wife who assists Viṣṇu in his role of maintaining social order and duty (*dharma*) in the human world: "Although she does not lose her association with fertility and growth, she seems more clearly involved in or revealed in the order of dharma that her husband creates and oversees" (Kinsley, 1986a: 28). In the *Mahābhārata*, Śri-Lakṣmi herself declares: "I dwell in truth, gift, vow, austerity, strength and virtue" (12.218.12; see Kinsley, 1986a: 29).

Thus Śri-Lakṣmi became associated with domestic order, auspiciousness, and contentment, derived from an auspicious interdependence between male and female principles. In contemporary Hinduism, Śri-Lakṣmi is frequently worshipped as

goddess of wealth and prosperity, often invoked by traders and business people for the blessing of their ventures (Kearns, 1992: 197). Her myths, however, tell of Śrī-Lakṣmi's relationship with Viṣṇu originating in the cosmogonic Puranic narratives of the churning of the milk ocean by the gods and demons in their search for the nectar of immortality (Kinsley, 1986a: 26). In many texts and Indian iconography, Śrī-Lakṣmi is associated with reproductive fertility symbols, such as water, out of which arose the creation of the universe; the lotus, symbol of the womb and the complete life cycle; the *bilva* fruit, associated with the power to remove *māyā*, or illusion; and the vessel, representing abundance, openness, and receptivity (Olson, 1989: 133). Śrī-Lakṣmi's connection with the lotus is persistent in both myth and iconography, picturing her seated on a lotus, or holding one, or surrounded by lotuses, all of which uphold the image that both Śrī-Lakṣmi and the lotus are symbols of purity and auspiciousness:

...from the ocean of milk then arose the Goddess Śrī. Seated on a blossoming lotus, bearing a lotus on her hand, she appeared [before all]... the ocean of milk then manifested itself as a person and presented her with a garland of full-blown lotuses... and Sakra praised the goddess who bears a lotus in her hand, saying: "I bow down before Śrī, the mother of all, who resides on the lotus, has eyes of blossoming lotuses, and who reclines on the heart of Viṣṇu..." (*Viṣṇu-Purāṇa* 1.9.100, 103, 115; see Narayanan, 1986: 228).

As a model for Hindu women, Śrī-Lakṣmi is the devoted wife, according to Carl Olson, expressing an "obsequious position in relation to her husband, the proper

position for all Hindu wives" (1989: 137). The most popular image of Śri-Lakṣmi as perfect wife in Indian art depicts Viṣṇu reclining on the coils of a serpent with one foot on Lakṣmi's lap, while she tenderly massages it (Kinsley, 1986a: 28; Marglin, 1986: 298; Olson, 1989: 137). The conjugal union between Viṣṇu and Śri-Lakṣmi, according to Puranic myth, therefore presents an archetypal image of ideal married life. The concept of *pativrata* is divinely idealised in the form of Śri-Lakṣmi, arguably reflecting and legitimating women's subordinate position in the Hindu household. But in spite of this model, the relationship between Śri-Lakṣmi and Viṣṇu also symbolises *prema*, the Hindu concept of pure, spiritual love (Olson, 1989: 138). Images of the couple frequently depict great intimacy between the two, sometimes even merged as one bisexual figure. As Katherine Young points out, in the more profound significations of religious symbolism, this intimacy and merging of god and goddess reveals how male/female polarity, as represented in this divine couple, was raised to a higher unity, through the "religiously powerful concept of *oneness*" (1987: 80).

Extending the parameters of Viṣṇu and Śri-Lakṣmi as a metaphor for the interdependence of male and female principles, the *Kūrma Purāṇa* describes Śri-Lakṣmi "as the power by which Viṣṇu creates, the power by which he deludes his creation, and the material principle that serves as the immediate source of creation" (Pintchman, 1994: 146-7). Identified with the functions of *śakti*, *māyā*, and *prakṛti* in this *Purāṇa*, Lakṣmi herself affirms that she is equal to and undifferentiated from Viṣṇu. Lakṣmi, then, is equated with the great Goddess as ultimate reality.

The conception of Śri-Lakṣmi as the activating energy, or *śakti* of Viṣṇu, is further supported by the cosmogonic myths in the *Pāñcarātra Agamas*. These

interpretations of Śrī-Lakṣmi were later appropriated by the Śrī Vaisnava tradition of South India to provide a ritual framework for the worship of Viṣṇu's divine consort (Kumar, 1990: 239-44). According to the Pāñcarātra tantric tradition, Śrī-Lakṣmi plays a central role as the *śakti*, or dynamic creative power of the supreme being (Kinsley, 1986a: 30). In this cosmogonic context, Viṣṇu is represented as relatively passive, associated only with the realm of *pure* creation, while Śrī-Lakṣmi is associated with both pure and impure creation through her activity of creating the material universe. Śrī-Lakṣmi, then, as *śakti*, functions as the mediator between Viṣṇu and the material, human world (Kumar, 1990: 207-12). She is afforded the special position of being close to both the divine ultimate reality and the material world of individual souls. According to Kinsley, the *Lakṣmi Tantra*, one of the most popular Pāñcarātra texts, even implies that Śrī-Lakṣmi, on the functional level, takes the position of supreme divine principle: "Lakṣmi undertakes the entire stupendous creation of the universe with only a one-billionth fraction of herself (14.3)... She also occupies the central position as the object of devotion, the dispenser of grace, and the final bestower of liberation (50.131-2)... It is she, not Viṣṇu, whose form is described in detail and presented as the supreme object of meditation" (1986a: 30). In the same text, Śrī-Lakṣmi's own words elevate her to a position of supreme divinity in the Pāñcarātra school of thought:

I alone send (the creation) forth and (again) destroy it. I absolve the sins of the good. As the (mother) earth towards all beings, I pardon them (all their sins). I mete everything out. I am the thinking process

and I am contained in everything. (*Lakṣmi Tantra* 50.67; see Kinsley, 1986: 30).

This functional view of Śrī-Lakṣmi points to a duality between Viṣṇu and his consort, implying that the supreme lord wills, while his *śakti* carries out his will, namely, the task of creation. However, on an ontological level, the Pāñcarātra texts do not impose a hierarchical structure on the couple and rather articulate Viṣṇu and Śrī-Lakṣmi as inseparably one, thus implying an essential unity. The Śrī Vaisnava tradition, originally generated by the ecstatic *bhakti* of the early Tamil *āḷvār* saints (6th to 10th centuries CE), later became systematised under the influence of the theological teachings of the great eleventh-century religious and philosophical teacher, Rāmānuja, and a long line of *ācāryas* (teachers) who followed him. The tradition developed with a strong *bhakti* orientation, focusing on devotion to Śrī-Lakṣmi as Viṣṇu's consort and *śakti*. Śrī-Lakṣmi's salvific role as mediator between God and the liberation of human souls is fundamental to those teachings. The *ācārya*, Yamuna, for example, said, "between God and his souls as an equal partner of God standing in inseparable relation to him... the Lord and his divine consort fit together in a holistic scheme as two sides of the same reality" (Kumar, 1990: 214).

Most significantly, in terms of understanding the maternal attributes of Śrī-Lakṣmi, Bhaṭṭar, a disciple of Rāmānuja, speaks of her as universal Divine Mother, pervading the whole universe with Viṣṇu and as the "life-giving Śakti of the Lord" (Kumar, 1990: 124). Bhaṭṭar persistently insists on the compassion of Śrī-Lakṣmi as a maternal trait of the divine feminine in Śrī Vaisnava tradition, describing the goddess as "the Mother full of compassion, her looks overflowing with compassion, she is

excellent in generosity, compassion and affection for those who resort to her" (Kumar, 1990: 126). Narayanan points out that it is the mother in the family who usually mediates between the children and the father, and it is Śrī-Lakṣmi who fulfils this archetypal role in the divine realm (1986: 225). Śrī-Lakṣmi is not only the wife of Viṣṇu, but she is also "mother of the universe" (Narayanan, 1986: 231).

In the figure of the goddess Śrī-Lakṣmi we see the divine embodiment of the idea of the feminine as close to the natural world and the fertility of the earth. Furthermore, Śrī-Lakṣmi represents the domestic ideal of the subordinate wife, portrayed as the devoted and loving wife of the god Viṣṇu. Like many Hindu goddess figures, Śrī-Lakṣmi is not portrayed literally as a mother, but her role as Divine Mother is strongly felt. She is mother of manifest creation, as divine embodiment of the feminine principles of *śakti*, *māyā*, and *prakṛti*, identified with the creative force of the universe and the Goddess as the ground of all being. Moreover, she is compassionate mother to her devotees, enacting a redemptive role as a medium for spiritual aspirants to attain God-realisation. In these creative and salvific roles, which, I would suggest, represent divine embodiment of maternal sacred space, Śrī-Lakṣmi is accorded a power equal to that of Viṣṇu. In her maternal attributes, I would further maintain, Śrī-Lakṣmi symbolises an active subjectivity and power not usually revealed in images of the mother.

Rādhā

Just as Sītā is recognised as an incarnation of Śrī-Lakṣmi, so too is Rādhā, beloved of Kṛṣṇa, the god of love and divine avatar of Viṣṇu. Kṛṣṇa, it is said in the epics and the Puranic myths, was incarnated to redeem the world from the evils of the Kāli age, and is arguably the most popular deity in Hindu *bhakti* tradition. But whereas Sītā echoes and even exaggerates Lakṣmi's exemplary embodiment of *pativrata*, Rādhā presents a singularly different image, one that overturns the conventional norms of Hindu womanhood. According to Olson's interpretation, insofar as Lakṣmi is the "obsequious wife," Rādhā, in sharp contrast, is "lustful lover" (1989). However, Rādhā is also similar to Sītā in that she has no known identity apart from her divine male partner, Kṛṣṇa, although "it is clear that her union with him basically alters the structure of Kṛṣṇa's divine personality" (Miller, 1986: 14). Rādhā's nature, though, is highly ambiguous; in fact, a variety of literary myths present two quite different images: one, as adulterous lover of Kṛṣṇa, and the other, as his legal wife and divine consort, a role that even elevates her to full divine status as "cosmic queen," a manifestation of the great Goddess, Devī.

Rādhā does not appear as a fully developed heroine in Hindu myth until relatively late and there is no explicit reference to her in the earlier Puranic myths devoted to stories of Kṛṣṇa. The most popular text containing myths of Kṛṣṇa's childhood and youth, the *Bhāgavata Purāna* (ca. 10th century CE), tells of the youthful Kṛṣṇa's intimate sexual exploits with the *gopīs* (young female cowherds) in the forests of Vṛndāvaṇa. A favourite *gopī* is mentioned, who we assume to be Rādhā, but she is not yet named. It is only in the *Gītagovinda*, the work of twelfth-

century poet, Jayadeva, that Rādhā's role as Kṛṣṇa's favourite *gopī* and lover explicitly unfolds. This poem evokes a drama of illicit love, written mostly from Rādhā's point of view, where her dominant emotion is one of love in separation, eliciting pain, longing, jealousy, and sorrow. Separation recalls the theme of Sītā's relationship with Rāma, but Rādhā's longing for Kṛṣṇa is far more passionately expressed and even illicit. Rādhā, indeed, has no formal claim on Kṛṣṇa and she is most certainly not married to him. Their relationship is erotic and passionate, shrouded in secrecy and suffused with risk, acted out in the depths of the forest in the darkness of night (Kinsley, 1986a: 85-6). Nevertheless, the "overall mood is not that of joyful union, although the two do unite blissfully at the end of the poem, but of love in separation" (Kinsley, 1986a: 85). Rādhā is the epitome of the lovesick maiden, tormented by the pain of her love:

When spring came, tender-limbed Rādhā wandered
 Like a flowering creeper in the forest wilderness,
 Seeking Krishna in his many haunts.
 The god of love increased her ordeal,
 Tormenting her with fevered thoughts,
 And her friend sang to heighten the mood. (Jayadeva, 1977: 74; see
 Kinsley, 1986a: 85-6).

Unlike Lakṣmi, and even more unlike Sītā, Rādhā is sometimes portrayed as rebellious and unconventional and her lovemaking with Kṛṣṇa exudes an intense passion and eroticism - even violence. For Rādhā, love is "a battle of sexual delight"

and her affair with Kṛṣṇa "turns the world upside down by overturning social conventions and accepted norms of behaviour. In fact, their love laughs at social conventions" (Olson, 1989: 138-9). The *Gītagovinda* sometimes hints that Rādhā belongs to another (*parakīyā*), a theme that is made explicit in later vernacular literature of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism, such as the poems of the fifteenth-century ecstatic saint, Candidas (Kinsley, 1986a: 86). According to some texts, Rādhā is openly dismissive of her husband and carelessly abandons her reputation and her responsibility to her husband, in favour of her adulterous love affair with Kṛṣṇa (Olson, 1989: 138). Clearly, Rādhā does not in any sense exemplify the definition of an ideal wife according to the *Laws of Manu*. Instead, she adheres to the laws of love:

Casting away

All ethics of caste

My heart dotes on Krishna

Day and night.

The custom of the clan

Is a far-away cry

And now I know

That love adheres wholly

To its own laws.

(Candidas, 1967: 135; see Kinsley, 1986a: 88)

Whereas Lakṣmi and Sītā symbolise female sexuality that is subordinated to male control, Rādhā appears as a free spirit whose sexuality is expressed through

uncontrolled passion. Her sexuality, on the other hand, is arguably safely channelled through her lovemaking with Kṛṣṇa. Furthermore, Rādhā's ecstatic sexual union with Kṛṣṇa represents self-surrender and a willingness to sacrifice her reputation and the security of social acceptance (Olson, 1989: 139). Rādhā's plight, and the expression of her emotion and love, is painfully and instantly recognisable as all too human, caught in the intensity of all-consuming erotic love. But in abandoning everything for Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā's role takes on divine significance, reflecting the ideal devotee's total self-surrender to God. The culmination of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's sexual union, then, arguably symbolises an indivisible, divine oneness, the merging of the devotee with God. As Olson puts it, "Rādhā serves more as a model for the soul's odyssey in search of its beloved god" (1989: 141).

Rādhā's divinity, however, is later articulated in an alternative view of her identity as a fully-fledged goddess. Her ambiguous nature emerges in a later definition of Rādhā as *svakiya*, that is, belonging to Kṛṣṇa, as his legal wife (Kinsley, 1986: 92). Rādhā is most significantly cast in this role in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* (15th or 16th century CE), undergoing a textual transfiguration from "the human mistress of Krishna dallying amorously in the earthly paradise of Vṛndāvaṇa to the heavenly queen sporting in the celestial sphere of Krishna's supreme world, Goloka" (Brown, 1986: 62). On the more human level, however, Rādhā's love for Kṛṣṇa seems to lose its freedom and playfulness portrayed in the lovesick young girl of the earlier texts (Olson, 1989). Rādhā is sometimes depicted as possessive, jealous, demanding, and even cruel in her relations with Kṛṣṇa, who, nevertheless, has countless wives and female companions in addition to Rādhā (Kinsley, 1986a: 94).

Most important, though, in terms of Rādhā's image as a source of female power and maternal nature, is her identification with the feminine principles of *prakṛti*, *śakti*, and *māyā*.¹ Here, Rādhā's likeness to Lakṣmi distinctly emerges, portraying her as divine consort who performs cosmogonic functions. Parts of the *Brahmavaivarta* text elevate Rādhā to a position that is even superior to Kṛṣṇa, aligning her with the great Goddess, Devī, as "cosmic queen," the creative power of the universe and the ground of all being. The same text graphically describes a copulative cosmogony between the goddess, Prakṛti (Rādhā) and her partner, Puruṣa (Kṛṣṇa):

The Goddess, Primordial Nature, incited passion in the heart of the Supreme Being.

Krishnā, infatuated with her beauty, embraced her in amorous sport for the lifetime of a Brahmā,

At last discharging his seed into her womb.

From her exhausted limbs flowed perspiration which became the cosmic waters upon which the universe would float.

From her laboured breathing arose the vital breaths that would sustain all living beings.

After a hundred eons, the goddess finally gave birth to a golden egg, which she kicked into the cosmic waters.

From that egg arose, in due course, the entire universe.

(*Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* 2.2.30-2.3.60; see Brown, 1986: 57)

¹ For a definitive textual and theological analysis of Rādhā in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, see C. Mackenzie Brown's *God as Mother: A Feminine Theology in India* (1974).

Thus did Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa become parents of the world.

The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* further characterises Rādhā's divine nature as "attribute" to Kṛṣṇa's "substance," implying that the term "attribute" does not simply signify a subordinate, passive part of Kṛṣṇa, but represents "the essential, activating quality or force that allows the substance to realise its own nature" (Brown, 1986: 67). Kṛṣṇa is depicted as powerless without Rādhā, and thus the goddess becomes identified as Kṛṣṇa's *śakti*, activating his desire to create the universe. In the same *Purāṇa*, when Rādhā becomes similarly associated with *māyā*, she symbolises "the power enabling Krishna to obscure his supreme nature and assume the role of a friend, master, child, or lover, thereby evoking a more intense, intimate response on the part of his worshippers" (Brown, 1986: 69).

The essence of Rādhā's divine nature, as articulated in the unmistakably maternal theology of Rādhā in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, is her soteriological role as mediator of Kṛṣṇa's grace and love for his devotees, echoing Śrī-Lakṣmi's divine role in relation to Viṣṇu. Rādhā is supreme as Divine Mother, ever compassionate and forgiving of her children: "Rādhā, accordingly, is viewed as the Supreme Mother, and in this role she is not only the universal creator, but also the supreme mediator and redeemer for all ignorant and suffering beings" (Brown, 1986: 57). Rādhā, as Mother, is revered as more deserving of worship than is Kṛṣṇa as Father. In contradistinction to most conventional conceptions of the maternal, whether in western or eastern religious and philosophical traditions, the mother is given pre-eminence over the father. The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* states:

Prakṛti is the Mother of the world, and Puruṣa the Father of the world.

The Mother of the three worlds is a hundred times more venerable than the Father...

You [Rādhā] are the Mother of the world, Hari [Krishna] is the Father.

The guru [spiritual teacher] of the Father is the Mother, to be worshipped and honoured as supreme. (4.52.34-5; 4.124.11; see Brown, 1986: 70)

Rādhā's maternal image, interpreted here as *guru*, or supreme spiritual teacher, surely extends beyond the realm of nature, as cause of material creation, to be given precedence over the father in the realm of culture. It is in her reservoir of maternal properties, it seems, that Rādhā's power lies.

Pārvati

Pārvati, like Sītā, Lakṣmi, and Rādhā, is understood mostly in relation to her husband, the great ascetic god Śiva. As Kinsley points out, Pārvati's identity and mythology is virtually dependent on Śiva's. She also displays many of the qualities of the ideal wife and ideal devotee, particularly in her capacity to remain loyally devoted to Śiva against all odds. For Śiva is a paradoxical figure, at once great ascetic yogi and ardent lover - the "erotic ascetic"- as Wendy O'Flaherty calls him in her book of the same title (1981). Śiva is the "outsider" of the Hīndu cosmic pantheon, symbolising the paradoxes inherent in the human condition and holding the oppositions of sexuality and chastity, desire and spiritual aspiration, in creative tension. Śiva, the stories of classical Puranic myths tell us, is either performing *tapas*

(ascetic austerities) for a thousand years, or making love to his wife, Pārvati, for a thousand years. The very reason for Pārvati's birth, the same myths imply, is "to lure Śiva into marriage and thus into the wider circle of worldly life from which he is aloof as a lone ascetic living the wilds of the mountains" (Kinsley, 1986: 35).

Accordingly, as seducer and then wife of this wild and eccentric deity, Pārvati plays according to a different set of rules from those followed by her sister goddesses in the game of cosmic gender relations. Pārvati, meaning "she who dwells in the mountains," is born of Himavat and Menā and is said to have been attracted to Śiva from early childhood. Nothing, it seems, deters her from her quest to win Śiva, even though she hears that his "appearance is terrible and that his habits are uncivilised and inauspicious" (*Śiva Purāṇa*, Rudra-Saṃhitā 3.25.45-51; see Kinsley, 1986a: 43). When all else fails to attract the attention of this resolutely reluctant husband-to-be, the only option left to Pārvati is to match his excessive performance of *tapas*. It is in this context that Pārvati's unique nature emerges. The growth of the *bhakti* tradition in the early centuries of the first millennium in India opened religious life and aspiration for God-realisation to all, cutting across the brahmāṇical restrictions of class and gender. However, the esoteric yogic path to *mokṣa* (spiritual liberation), involving highly disciplined ascetic practices, largely remained the domain of male aspirants. In her intense yogic practices, therefore, Pārvati symbolises a different picture of femininity from the conventional ideal of Hindu womanhood. Furthermore, the intensity and eroticism of her lovemaking with Śiva, once she "gets her man," raises the spectre of uncontrolled female sexuality, which, according to Hindu tradition, seems to be regarded as dangerous. I will return to this interpretation of female sexuality, as symbolised by the Hindu goddess figures, later.

Once married and settled, however, Pārvati sets about fulfilling her longing for the conventions of a home, family, and children. She produces two children, neither by the usual means, thus completing the perfect divine family (Kinsley, 1986a: 42-4). Karttikeya, the first son, is born from Śiva's spilled seed, incubated outside of Pārvati, and Gaṇeśa, the second son, is fashioned by Pārvati herself from the dirt and sweat of her own body. Thus Pārvati appears to be a creative mother in more ways than one. Devotional hymns and iconography depict a harmonious and blissful domestic picture, even if the modern observer might be forgiven for seeing this ancient mythic family as a predecessor of a contemporary domestic myth of the macabre, the notorious Addams family! Favourite toys for the children are Śiva's serpent ornaments and garlands of skulls, while Pārvati herself often has to upbraid her husband for irresponsible gambling and hemp-smoking. But her central goal is to domesticate Śiva and uphold *dharma*, or social order, and the householder ideal (Kinsley, 1986a: 46-9). Pārvati, then, assumes the role of modifier of Śiva's cosmic energy, for his sexuality and asceticism can be dangerous if excessive, generating intense heat that might scorch the universe. In fact, one of Śiva's chief divine functions is the destruction of the universe through his violent cosmic dance, the *tāṇḍava*. But that dance is danced with the darker form of the Goddess, Kālī. When Śiva dances in loving union with Pārvati, it is an erotic but gentle dance, the *lāsya* (O'Flaherty, 1980: 131).

In addition to her humanly-inspired aspirations for home and family, Pārvati is clearly identified as an aspect of the supreme Goddess, Devī, thus forming a harmonious, interdependent relationship with Śiva as supreme God. The *Kālikā Purāṇa*, for instance, explicitly relates that Devī incarnates as Pārvati, in order to marry Śiva (O'Flaherty, 1986: 135). Not only this, in another layer of the myth,

Pārvati agrees to descend further, incarnating as the mortal queen, Taravati, married to an incarnation of Śiva, king Candraśekhara, (O'Flaherty, 1986: 135). Thus we see the interdependence of female and male principles functioning at both human and divine levels. At all times, however, as O'Flaherty stresses, Pārvati knows that she is Devī, and thus mediates between the human and ultimately divine realms.

The interdependence between Pārvati and Śiva is pervasively symbolised in the sexual imagery of the *yoni* (vulva or womb) and the *liṅga* (phallus), the most popular image of the deity in Saivite temples: "The liṅga and the yoni symbolise a creative interaction between the world of the ascetic, in which sexual abstinence is mandatory, and the life of the householder, in which sex is necessary" (Kinsley, 1986a: 52). Pārvati is also represented as Śiva's *śakti*, his creative energy, without which he would be inert and unable to create. She is *prakṛti* (nature), while Śiva is *puruṣa*, or pure spirit (*Liṅga Purāṇa* 2.11.4; see Kinsley, 1986a: 50). In short, as we have seen in other examples of divine hierogamies in post-Vedic myth, Śiva and Pārvati embody one, divine unity, symbolising complementary aspects of the ultimate reality. Pārvati's mythic persona, however, is fundamentally ambiguous, embodying both ideal wife and devotee of Śiva on the one hand, and the Goddess on the other: "Pārvati, too, may be regarded either as an appendage of the great god Śiva or as his controller" (O'Flaherty, 1986: 138). As will become evident later, Pārvati's darker and more powerful manifestation as the Goddess, that is, as Kālī, controls and dominates her male partner, the great god Śiva.

Devī, Durgā, Kālī

The theology of the Goddess, Devī (sometimes referred to as Mahādevī, the Great Goddess), as supreme being and ultimate reality, flourished in the medieval era of Hindu *bhakti* tradition. This conception of the divine feminine was crystallised in the 6th century CE in a section of the *Markandeya Purāṇa* known as the *Devī-Māhātmya*, translated as "The Specific Greatness (or Virtue) of (the) Goddess" (Coburn, 1991: 1). The text is also referred to as the *Durgā-Saptasati*, the "Seven Hundred (Verses) to Durgā," although, as Coburn points out in *Encountering the Goddess*, his translation and exegetical analysis of this text, most editions appear to have less than six hundred verses (1991: 31). The *Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, compiled some five to ten centuries later, vindicates as well as elaborates on the Goddess as transcendent and ultimate, and emphasises her maternal nature (Brown, 1990: ix). In this text, Devī is elevated to cosmic supremacy, the mother, ruler, and supporter of all beings, even creator of the gods, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva.

Devī, as supreme Goddess, is thus identified with the feminine principles *prakṛti*, *māyā*, and *śakti*. Many goddesses, as we have seen, are partly defined as the *śaktis* of their male consorts, providing the activating force for the creation of the universe. But Devī, as *śakti*, is *the* power underlying ultimate reality:

Whatever and wherever anything exists, whether it be real or unreal, O
 you who have everything as your very soul,
 Of all that, you are the power (*śakti*); how then can you be adequately
 praised? (*Devī-Māhātmya* 1.63)

Furthermore, if she appears as *śakti* in relation to a male deity, the god is almost always subservient to her. The philosophical understandings of *prakṛti*, as the web of materiality, and *māyā*, as the veil of illusion, tend to have negative connotations for the spiritual path to *mokṣa*, but they are transformed in relation to Devī (Kinsley, 1986a: 133-7). These principles become infused with positivity and the Goddess's vitality, energy, and power are consequently cherished as cosmic virtues:

(You are) the cause of all the worlds; although possessed of the three qualities (*gunas*), by faults you are not known; (you are) unfathomable even by Hari, Hara, and the other gods.

(You are) the resort of all, (you are) this entire world that is composed of parts, for you are the supreme, original, untransformed Prakṛti...

Hail to the Goddess, hail eternally to the auspicious great Goddess!

Hail to Prakṛti, the auspicious! We who are restrained bow down to her...

The Goddess who is known as the *māyā* of Viṣṇu in all creatures,

Hail to her, hail to her, hail to her: hail, hail! (*Devī-Māhātmya* 4.6; 5.7; 5.12)

Kinsley says of Mahādevī, "As *śakti*, *prakṛti*, and *māyā*, she is not understood so much as binding creatures to finite existence as being the very source and vitality of her creatures. She is the source of creatures - their mother - and as such her awesome, vital power is revered" (1986: 136). Most important, Devī *is* Brahman, she *is* ultimate reality, and in essence, the Goddess exists beyond all qualities, including the masculine

and feminine. The *Devī-Māhātmya*, Brown argues, does not so much contend that ultimate reality is feminine, but underscores the truth that ultimate reality is, indeed, truly ultimate (1990: 3). The Goddess's ultimate transcendence of gender is further affirmed in the *Devī-Gītā*, (the self-revelation of the Goddess), contained in the later *Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which affirms "that her highest form of the divine light, encompasses and transcends all gender" (Brown, 1990: 14).

In the context of her mythology, even within a single text such as the *Devī-Māhātmya*, the Goddess is known by many names. For example, among others, she is Amba or Ambikā ("Mother" or "Mother dear"); she is Lakṣmi, Sarasvatī, and Pārvati; she is the fierce warrior goddess, Durgā and she is also Pārvati's dark form, the terrible Kālī (Coburn, 1991: 19-21). The Goddess's nature, as expressed through her different names and forms, is fundamentally ambivalent. On the one hand, she is worshipped as a distant and transcendent cosmic figure, seated on a heavenly throne from which she oversees creation, preservation, and destruction of the cosmos with the blink of an eye. Yet on the other hand, she is understood as an approachable and accessible mother figure, always ready to comfort and help her devotees when in trouble (Kinsley, 1986a: 137-9). *The Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa* similarly reveals the Goddess as both divine mother of the universe and ultimate reality that transcends all qualities, including gender (Brown, 1990: 14).

The Goddess's paradoxical nature is reiterated in her benign and terrible forms, forms that are most vividly evoked in the three main myths of the *Devī-Māhātmya*. Sometimes the Goddess is portrayed as exceptionally beautiful, associated with erotic desire and pleasure, and at others, as maternal symbol of fertility and nourishment (Kinsley, 1986a: 142-3). In contrast, however, Devī also assumes fierce and terrible

forms as protector of the cosmos and her ferocity is sometimes depicted as uncontrolled and bloodthirsty, even to the extent of posing a threat to the very cosmos she aims to protect: "The context of combat arouses an aspect of the Devī that delights in the blood lust of battle and is reminiscent of the berserk qualities of warriors by which they undertake bloodcurdling deeds" (Kinsley, 1986a: 144). As O'Flaherty contends, Indian goddesses can be divided into two main classes, that is, either as "goddesses of the breast" (auspicious and benign) or as "goddesses of the tooth" (erotic and dangerous) (1980: 90). This point of polarisation and its various interpretations will be revisited later.

In any event, despite the ambivalence of Devī's nature, the myths unequivocally assert the Goddess's salvific function when the world is in danger. Noting an affinity here with the redemptive role of Kṛṣṇa, divine incarnation of Viṣṇu, in the *Bhagavad Gītā* (part of the great epic, the *Mahābhārata*), Coburn points to other verses in the *Mahābhārata* dedicated to Durgā's "salvific activity in the teeth of adversity" (1991: 27). The idea of deities periodically incarnating for the sake of redeeming the world pervades the myths of both Kṛṣṇa and the Goddess. It is a motif that is readily apparent in the *Devī-Māhātmya*, particularly in the twelfth chapter, "immediately after the Goddess's Krishna-like future incarnations have been enumerated" (Coburn, 1991: 27):

The proclamation of my births grants protection from evil spirits,
 Since it deals with my conduct in battles, laying waste the wicked
 demons.

When it is heard, there will be no danger to human beings from their enemies...

Just in this fashion does the blessed Goddess, even though she is eternal,

Provide protection for the world, O king, by coming into being again and again. (*Devī-Māhātmya* 12.22; 23; 33)

In the frame story of the *Devī-Māhātmya*, as part of the *Markandeya Purāṇa*, the sage Markandeya seeks to instruct two of his pupils about the identity of the Goddess:

The seer said:

"She is eternal, having as her form the world. By her is all this pervaded.

Also, her birth in many forms. Hear about this from me.

When she becomes manifest for the sake of accomplishing the work of the gods,

Then, even though she is called 'eternal,' she is said to be 'born in the world'..." (*Devī-Māhātmya* 1.47-48)

The sage thereby explains how the Goddess is born, and what she does, through the medium of three myths in which she is identified with her form as the invincible warrior goddess, Durgā. As Kinsley points out, in contemporary Hindu belief and ritual, Durgā is widely worshipped as the favourite form of the Goddess, and from a

theological standpoint, the Devī and Durgā "are essentially the same deity" (Kinsley, 1986a: 138).

In the first of these narratives, Durgā's form is evoked through the praises of the creator, Brahmā, who calls upon her capacity as Mahāmāyā, or divine deceiver of the sleeping Viṣṇu. Brahmā asks her to separate herself from Viṣṇu so that he will awaken to consciousness and be able to overcome the demons Madhu and Kaitabha. Having removed the veil of illusion from Viṣṇu, Durgā uses her divine power, instead, to delude the demons, thus assisting Viṣṇu to kill them. It is Brahmā's exaltation itself that gives birth to the Goddess's embodied power to help Viṣṇu:

May you, praised in this fashion, O Goddess, with your superior powers

Confuse these two unassailable Asuras, Madhu and Kaitabha,

And may the imperishable lord of the world be quickly awakened,

And may his alertness be used to slay these two great Asuras. (*Devī-*

Māhātmya 1.66-67)

Furthermore, in the *Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Viṣṇu's helplessness is accentuated in favour of elevating the heroic deeds of the Goddess above the power of the great gods, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva (Brown, 1990: 104-9).

The second myth is the most famous and popular rendition of Durgā's warlike powers and well portrays her ambivalent image. Here, Durgā conquers the buffalo-demon, Mahiṣa, who, having defeated the gods, can only be destroyed by a woman. Durgā is invoked by the gods as a result of a cosmic crisis that leaves them helpless. It

is the *tejas* (heat) or fiery splendour of the gods, each one giving a bodily part or weapon to the Goddess, that creates Durgā's body and superior power, as she rides into battle on her lion (*Devī-Māhātmya* 2.9-33).

Having seen the triple world trembling, the enemies of the gods,
With all their armies prepared for battle, their weapons upraised, rose
up together.

Mahisura, having fumed in anger, "Ah, what is this?!",

Rushed toward the sound, surrounded by all the Asuras.

Then he saw the Goddess, filling the triple world with her radiance,
Causing the earth to bow down at the tread of her feet, scratching the
sky with her diadem,

Making all the nether regions tremble at the sound of her bowstring,

Standing (there) filling all the directions with her thousand arms.

Then there began a battle between the Goddess and the enemies of the
gods... (*Devī-Māhātmya* 2.34-38)

After successfully slaying the millions of warriors who made up Mahiṣa's army, Durgā finally fights the great demon, Mahiṣa, and beheads him with her mighty sword.

In relation to these tales of Durgā's mighty power, it is significant that the *Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa* repeats the myths of the *Devī-Māhātmya* not only once, but twice, and extensively elaborates the details of the narratives. In the story of Mahiṣa's downfall, a lengthy conversation between Durgā and the demon reveals that Mahiṣa, to his peril, sees Durgā as a mere woman and is deceived by her great beauty and

"femininity" (*Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 5.12.14-30): "Maḥiṣa insists that as a woman the goddess is too delicate to fight, too beautiful for anything but love play, and must come under the protection and guidance of a man in order to fulfil her proper proclivities" (Kinsley, 1986a: 99).

In spite of Maḥiṣa's mistaken vision of Durgā, this goddess clearly violates Manu's requirements for ideal womanhood and wifely virtues, thus situating herself at the periphery of the social order. For Durgā excels in the traditionally male pursuit of war and, unlike "normal" women or the more restrained goddesses, she is not the submissive wife and homemaker. Although it could nevertheless be argued that the Goddess's power is called up and even created by the power of the male deities, Kinsley makes a pertinent point that differentiates Durgā from the divine consorts of those gods: "Durgā does not lend her power or *śakti* to a male consort but rather *takes* power from the male gods in order to perform her own heroic exploits" (Kinsley, 1986a: 97). The third myth finally pushes Durgā's liminal nature even further beyond the boundaries of social and cosmic order, in the form of Kāli, the "Mad Mother" (Brown, 1989: 110-23).

The third myth of the *Devī-Māhātmya* finds the gods in trouble yet again, defeated by the great *asuras* (demons) Śumbha and Niśumbha. And, once more, they call upon the Goddess to save them. When Durgā is taunted by the demons' generals, Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, Kāli emerges from her forehead, a personification of Durgā's wrath, who easily destroys Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa and their armies:

From the knitted brows of her forehead's surface immediately

Came forth Kāli, with her dreadful face, carrying sword and noose.

She carried a strange skull-topped staff, and wore a garland of human heads;

She was shrouded in a tiger skin, and looked utterly gruesome with her emaciated skin,

her widely gaping mouth, terrifying with its lolling tongue,

With sunken, reddened eyes and a mouth that filled the directions with roars.

She fell upon the great Asuras in that army, slaying them immediately.

She then devoured the force of the enemies of the gods.

...The army of those mighty and distinguished demons

She destroyed: she devoured some, and thrashed the others.

Some were sliced by her sword, others pounded with her skull-topped staff. (*Devī-Māhātmya* 7.5-8; 13-14)

As the story unfolds, it tells of a band of seven *śaktis* - Brahmānī, Mahesvari, Kaumari, Vaisnavi, Varahi, Narasimhi, and Aindri - who emerge from seven gods and are collectively known as "the Mothers." These are fierce and bloodthirsty mothers indeed and make short work of the armies sent forth by Śumbha and Niśumbha to attack Durgā. But then the next major demon to enter the fray is Raktabīja, who possesses the extraordinary power to recreate himself in every drop of his blood spilt in battle, rendering him virtually invincible. Kāli, however, is undismayed and sets about drinking Raktabīja's blood and chewing up his countless facsimiles:

With her mouth Kāli seized upon the blood of Raktabīja.
 Cāmuṇḍa [Kāli] took it all into her mouth, from every direction,
 And also into her mouth entered the great demons who were born of
 his blood.
 Cāmuṇḍa chewed them up, and drank his blood.
 With spear, thunderbolt, arrows, swords, and lances the Goddess
 Wounded Raktabīja, whose blood was being drunk by Cāmuṇḍa.
 Mortally wounded by that constellation of weapons, the great demon
 Raktabīja
 Fell to the earth bloodless, O king!
 And then, O king, the gods entered into boundless joy.
 When he was slain, the band of Mothers danced about, intoxicated by
 his blood. (*Devī-Māhātmya* 8.56; 58-62)

Rid of Raktabīja, the Goddess, with the aid of the seven Mothers, successfully defeats Niśumbha, leaving only Śumbha, the very last demon, still alive. He defiantly taunts the Goddess, accusing her of relying on the power of others - that is, the seven Mothers or *śaktis*, to defeat her enemies. The Goddess answers him by asserting her supreme oneness, and all the *śaktis* reenter her body:

The Goddess said:

"I alone exist here in the world; what second other than I, is there?

O wicked one, behold these my manifestations of power entering back into me!"

Thereupon, all the goddesses, led by Brahmānī,
 Went to their resting-place in the body of the Goddess; then there was
 just Ambikā, alone. (*Devī-Māhātmya* 10.3-4)

The Goddess then single-handedly fights Śumbha and finally, after an earth-shattering battle, kills him and restores the world to order: "When that wicked one was dead, the whole universe became soothed, regaining its natural condition once more" (*Devī-Māhātmya* 10.25).

In the elaborations of the *Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, however, one of the most visible paradoxes of the Goddess's nature is underscored, that of her contradictory erotic and horrific features. Ambikā (Durgā) torments the manly Śumbha with her womanly beauty and passion and, hoping to lessen his own humiliation in being defeated by a woman, Śumbha begs Ambikā at least to assume a darker, more ugly form. Ambikā thus calls up Kālikā (Kāli), arguably the polar opposite of her own fair beauty, being "black in complexion, with protuberant, hanging lips, scrawny limbs, sharp teeth and nails, and yellow eyes like those of a cat" (Brown, 1990: 120). Ambikā then stands by and watches Kālikā slay Śumbha. This splitting of Devī into the two figures of Ambikā (Durgā) and Kālikā (Kāli), Brown suggests, serves to absorb and resolve "some of the tension between the erotic and horrific aspects of the Goddess" (1990: 121).

The Puranic portrayals of Kāli do not mark her only appearances as a form of the Goddess, but her overall image, particularly in Indian iconography, is consistently hideous and terrifying (Brown, 1989: 110; Gupta, 1991: 21; Kinsley, 1986b: 144-5). In contrast, there are instances in later texts, such as the *Karpūrādi-Stotra*, a Tantric

text, where Kāli is described as young and beautiful, with a gently smiling face (Gupta, 1991: 21; Kinsley, 1986b: 144). However, red eyes, matted hair, pendulous breasts, emaciated body, blood dripping from her mouth, human heads around her neck and waist, dead infants hanging as earrings from her ears, make up the more commonly articulated litany of appalling awfulness that is Kāli. Haunting the cremation grounds, where ordinary women are forbidden to go, or rushing into battle, she appears mad and destructive, intoxicated by the blood of her foes. Her nature pushes far beyond the confines of conventional society, apparently reinforcing the patriarchal Hindu image of the untamed feminine as a threat to stability and social order.

Kāli is not only associated with Durgā but also with Pārvati, the mostly benevolent consort of Śiva. Kāli (the "black one") appears as the dark and negative side of Pārvati's nature, symbolised in her dark complexion. When Śiva teases her for her blackness, Pārvati practices intense austerities in order to cast off her dark skin, reappearing as Gauri (the "golden one"), with glowing and golden complexion (*Vamana Purāṇa*, chs. 25-29; see Kinsley, 1986b: 146). Kāli also emerges as a personification of Pārvati's fury in order to fight the demon, Daruka, and thus appears in her terrible form. But Śiva, although himself not renowned for social respectability, has to step in to calm his spouse, whose blood-intoxicated frenzy threatens the very cosmic order she was called upon to restore (*Liṅga Purāṇa* 1.106; see Kinsley, 1986b: 146). Whereas Pārvati modifies her husband's excesses and seeks to hold the tensions of human nature in balance, Kāli incites Śiva to his wildest extremes, for instance, in their divine *līlā* (play) of the *tāṇḍava*, the cosmic dance. Śiva, as Lord of the Dance, often dances in competition with Kāli, the two deities "inspiring each other

to greater frenzy, shaking the worlds with the pounding of their feet and threatening the breakdown of the cosmic order" (Brown, 1989: 113). Only when Śiva wins the violent contest between the two dancers, and allows himself to be soothed by his peaceful wife, Pārvati, is Śiva restored to domesticity and the universe to order (O'Flaherty, 1980: 141-3).

However, as spouse of Śiva, Kāli is most commonly portrayed as the dominant partner, sometimes standing or dancing upon his nude and prostrate body. The imagery is explicitly erotic, with Kāli on top of Śiva's erect phallus, a union symbolising the dominant power of the female in the creation of the universe. It is Kāli, in her maternal and reproductive role as Śiva's *śakti*, "who will receive the cosmic seed and bring forth the universe from her womb" (Brown, 1989: 114). As Brown points out, Kāli's relationship with Śiva elicits her maternal role as cosmic mother, thus beginning "to bridge the gap between her horrific and benign modes... Her destructive energies are now perceived as part of her transformative powers involving both growth and decay" (Brown, 1989: 114). Kāli is both creator and destroyer, embodiment of both life and death.

If Kāli seems to reinforce the Hindu patriarchal conception of uncontrolled, and therefore dangerous, female sexuality, in her outrageous contravention of *dharmic* ideals of wifely virtue and motherhood, Tantric interpretations of Kāli arguably reveal her deeper significance for spiritual life (Brown, 1989: 114-16; Gupta, 1991: 22-3). Śiva as *puruṣa* and Śakti (Kāli) as *prakṛti* are one, the supreme Brahman, continually bringing forth and withdrawing the universe. Each aspect of Kāli's body symbolises an aspect of consciousness, and at the level of spiritual transcendence, her terrifying nature is understood as salvific, symbolising her power

to destroy ignorance (*māyā*) and transform the deluded individual ego (Brown, 1989: 121-22). As Kinsley explains it, Kālī represents "blood and death out of place," the uncontrolled chaos that impinges on the fragile order of society, reminding us that life is essentially disorderly. The Hindu ideal of *dharma* fails to allow for unpredictable, even tragic events and the often chaotic nature of real life; but Kālī can redeem us by giving birth to a wider vision of reality. In the context of the spiritual quest for *mokṣa*, Kālī reminds us of a realm that transcends *dharma*, beckoning "humans to seek a wider, more redemptive vision of their destiny" (Kinsley, 1986b: 152).

Despite her profound ambivalence, as redeemer Kālī is "mother," and to her devotees, no matter how chaotic or fierce she may be, she is always approached as divine mother. This was exemplified by the two great Bengali saints, Ramprasad (1718-75) and Rāmakrishna (1836-86), who both worshipped Kālī with a fervent and unconditional devotion (Brown, 1989: 119-21). Ramprasad's devotional songs emphasise the goddess Kālī's exploits, no matter how repellent, as *līlā* (divine play) and her maternal form as *māyā*:

All this is the mad Mother's play,

The three worlds are deluded by her *māyā*.

The woman's true nature is hidden by her *līlā* -

She herself is mad, her husband is mad, her two disciples are mad.

(McLean, 1995: 88).

Sometimes the Goddess is cruel and heartless, sometimes she is merciful and compassionate, but always she is Mother. Magician and trickster, sometimes even

deceiving her "children," Kāli is plainly not always the "good mother" (McLean, 1995: 90). Rāmakrishna's worship, often inspired by Ramprasad's poetry, was intimate and as unconventional as the goddess herself. For Rāmakrishna, Kāli was the "all-merciful and benign mother of all" and although he did not forget her horrific side, like Ramprasad, "he saw through her terrifying demeanour, thereby discovering her maternal affection for all humankind" (Brown, 1989: 121). Both saints offered themselves in total self-surrender to the goddess Kāli, whether "good mother" or "terrible mother." Just as the world is ambiguous and unpredictable, so too, is the play of its mother. But it is just that - play - for in reality (that is, ultimate reality), mother Kāli transcends the paradoxes of life and the mores of society, revealing divine perfection and freedom: "For the devotee, all earthly sorrows and pains then disappear, merging in that ocean of bliss known as Kāli" (Brown, 1989: 122). Is this, perhaps, the maternal plenitude, referred to by Sprengnether, to which all beings long to return? The place where life and death meet, a place that so many religions and cultures, it seems, call "mother."

8.2 INTERPRETATIONS OF DIVINE AMBIVALENCE

In the above analysis of a number of Hindu goddess figures who appear in post-Vedic, classical Sanskritic myths, the emergence of the great Goddess, Devī, who is understood as supreme being and ultimate reality, has been recognised. The Goddess, we recall, has proved to embody ambivalence and paradox, revealed in her own nature as well as among the myriad goddess figures who represent her divine embodiments. With regard to just the few Hindu goddesses who have been analysed in some detail above, it is clear that each goddess also possesses a significant identity

of her own, one that often similarly embodies paradoxical characteristics. If, for a moment, we can use the generic term of the "divine feminine" in Hindu tradition, some of the enigmatic oppositions that are apparent include transcendence and immanence; dominance and submission; eroticism and asceticism; sacrifice and abundance; beauty and ugliness; chaos and order; danger and protection; gentleness and ferocity; benevolence and malevolence; creation and destruction; birth and death.

Life, also, is full of paradox and unpredictability and in this sense, as well as many others, religious myth, and its enactment through ritual, provide symbols for spiritual life and pointers for moral values and social norms. Undoubtedly, myth also reflects and reinforces existing social structures, the most pertinent, in terms of this study, being gender relations and the cultural values attached to femininity. In religious myth, the activities of the deities function as metaphors for similar experiences among humans (Harman, 1989: 5-6). In other words, a religious metaphor - for example, "sacred marriage" among the Hindu deities - creates a point of contact between the divine and human realms, for marriage occurs among humans, too. Such a metaphor, for our purposes, might be expanded to all male-female relations among the deities, conjugal or otherwise. Many modern scholars of Indian religion have offered interpretations of the Goddess's (or the goddesses') ambivalence, particularly in the context of her (or their) relationships with male deities, and what it signifies for relations between women and men, as well as relations between humans and deities.

Taking up the metaphor of "sacred marriage," one of the most fruitful interpretations of the ambivalence of Hindu goddesses was first advanced by Indologist, Lawrence Babb (1970), whose theory rests on an explanatory framework

of marriage and masculine control of female power and sexuality. His theory has generated lively scholarly debate - accepted and employed by some scholars, critiqued and reinterpreted by others - since the early 1970s. Babb has attempted to explain the mystery of the Goddess's contradictions: For example, in times of prosperity the Goddess is Lakṣmi, bestower of abundance and happiness, but in times of adversity she is the great destroyer, Durgā, manifesting in her most extreme form as the terrible Kāli (1970: 140).

In short, Babb rationalises this apparent polarisation of feminine divinity by dividing Hindu mythic goddess figures into two similarly polarised categories: married or not married. In the case of the former, a goddess is controlled by a male deity, representing the restraint of female power and sexuality, and is therefore benign; as such, she exemplifies passive devotion to her husband. In the latter case, a goddess is independent, or tends to dominate any male partner she might be associated with; such a goddess figure represents the dangers of uncontrolled female power and sexuality and is therefore malevolent. Divine partnerships of the first category, Babb notes, reflect powerful ethical qualities, as exemplified in the marriage of Rāma, who personifies benevolent kingship, and Sītā, who embodies "the very model of wifely virtues" (1970: 142). Here, a clear example of the metaphor of "sacred marriage" articulates "a point of juncture between religious symbol and social structure" (Babb, 1970: 142). In contrast, when a goddess is dominant in a divine partnership, she is perceived as the embodiment of an impersonal force, which can be used for the good, but which can also be dangerous to her devotees. She symbolises the contradiction of Hindu social norms and fear of uncontrolled female sexuality, and in this form, the goddess has to be appeased through blood sacrifice. Babb concludes with a statement

about the nature of gendered divinities that has arguably become one of the most frequently cited suppositions in the study of Indian religion and myth: "When the feminine dominates the masculine the pair is sinister; when male dominates female the pair is benign" (1970: 142).

Other scholars of Hindu religious tradition, such as Richard Brubaker (1986; 1989) and Kinsley (1986b), have essentially agreed with this categorical polarisation, but have extended it from a theological perspective. The ambivalence of the goddesses signifies more than a model for or reflection of societal norms, but has profound significance for Hindu religious life and the spiritual ideal of *mokṣa*. As we recall, Kinsley suggests that Kālī, for example, in her disruption of social and cosmic order, symbolises a realm of consciousness beyond the parameters of *dharma* or social order. Kālī, as an example of the Goddess's fiercer form, thus leads her devotees to the threshold of *mokṣa*, to a vision of perfect freedom (Brown, 1989: 122; Kinsley, 1986a: 130). As such, she is Divine Mother and saviour. Once again, we are confronted with paradox, but in this instance in the single figure of an independent, dominant, and powerful goddess. This in itself problematises Babb's taxonomy of two distinctive types of goddess.

In response to this problem, Brubaker extends the polarisation of the divine feminine - whether embodied in a single goddess or between different goddesses - to encompass an analogous tension embedded in the Hindu vision of the sacred (1989: 157-9). The second part of Babb's statement concerning the benevolence of the married pair is correct, according to Brubaker, and corresponds to a domesticated and sanitised conception of the sacred. But the first part of the statement is too limiting, he argues, for the danger and disruption of the independent goddess is not necessarily

Kālī as
feminine
leads to
freedom

malevolent, but can also be understood as an expression of the sacred, in its redemptive and liberating power. Insofar as visions of the divine feminine are polarised, so, too, are visions of the sacred: On the one hand, the sacred is conceptualised by Hindus as ordered, predictable, and safe, symbolically expressed through the practice of self-denial, self-control, and ritual sacrifice, all of which function to reinforce social harmony and to lead the devotee towards heavenly reward. On the other hand, however, the Hindu vision of the sacred is also understood to erupt in real life in unpredictable and dangerous ways, such as drought or disease, and is symbolised by the fierce and disruptive attributes of the goddess. Her healing and blessings are then invoked, so that her dangerous power is transformed to beneficence, through ecstatic ritual, blood sacrifice, and mystic communion with the divine. But why is the uncontrolled and potentially dangerous power of the sacred symbolised as female? Or, alternatively, why is it the dangerous female who is consistently sacralised as powerful and salvific? According to Brubaker, male fear of the power of female sexuality in Hindu society is transposed from the human level to the spiritual level, akin to the human fear of the depth of the sacred, the fear of the unknown that awaits on the other side of the threshold of *mokṣa* (1989: 159).

I would argue, in this context, that the domesticated, safe, and benign conception of the sacred could be further compared to the sacralisation of the "good mother" of psychoanalytic theory. Similarly, the uncontrolled and dangerous power of the sacred is echoed in the psychoanalytic view of the mysterious feminine, the pathology of femininity, and the spectre of maternal subjectivity, aggression, and power. Hindu mythic symbols of this sacred and redemptive power, which can be

terrifying and disturbing, become embodied as the sacred space of the Goddess who devotees call "Mother." The presence of ambivalence and tension represented in the divine feminine of Hindu tradition, the good and terrible mother of the goddess myths, I would argue, is strongly felt: The power of the mother demands attention and is propelled to the light of consciousness by the dynamic power of symbol and ritual; the power of the feminine may still be feared, but it is not repressed into the unconscious, lingering in the dark corners of the psyche.

To return to critical analysis of Babb's dichotomy, it can be argued that his categories are far too narrow and limiting. If nothing else, the goddesses of Hinduism unequivocally express that femaleness is not a limiting condition. As Gross points out, the goddess figures enact a broad range of culturally valued activities: To name but a few, Sarasvatī embodies learning; Sītā, endurance, loyalty, and devotion; Lakṣmi, wealth, well-being, love, and compassion; Rādhā, erotic love and self-surrender; Pārvatī, asceticism, eroticism, and domestic harmony; Durgā, beauty and fierce strength; and Kālī, devastating power and the destruction of finite attachments (Gross, 1989: 226-7).

Kathleen Erndl, in her study of Hindu goddesses in Northwest India, *Victory to the Mother* (1993), echoes these ideas in her critique of Babb's categories. Acknowledging that the Goddess is undeniably ambiguous, she suggests that "gentle" and "fierce" may be better descriptive classifications, terms that can be equally applied to the diverse male deities. The so-called "malevolent" goddess figures, such as Durgā and Kālī, are certainly fierce and warrior-like, but their actions usually function to protect the created universe. They are, in any event, complex figures who embody such contradictions as beauty and ferocious strength, destructiveness and maternal

protectiveness (1993: 155). But with regard to the so-called "benevolent," married goddesses, Erndl asks, "is it appropriate, for example, to lump together such different consort goddesses as Pārvati and Sītā or Lakṣmi and Rādhā?" (1993: 157). Pārvati, for instance, symbolises the tension between ascetic spiritual practice and domestic life; her power and determination in her practice of austerities push far beyond the boundaries of the stereotype of wifely domesticity. Sarasvatī, too, although beneficent in her blessings to humankind, clearly represents qualities that contradict stereotypical images of the feminine as symbol of nature, fertility, and sexuality. Instead, she embodies pure spirituality and is worshipped for her patronage of all aspects of culture. Furthermore, although usually understood as wife of the creator, Brahmā, Sarasvatī is worshipped independently, as a deity who has become more important than her consort. Moreover, can Sītā, the loyal wife and perfect devotee, really be classified alongside Rādhā, who is mostly portrayed as adulterous lover, not even married to Kṛṣṇa? Both Sītā and Rādhā represent explorations of the nature of devotion to God and symbolise aspects of divine-human relationship, but in very different ways (Kinsley, 1986a: 4). Rādhā's love, we recall, is passionate and even jealous - in fact, Rādhā is not always gentle - but she is committed to total self-surrender in her union with Kṛṣṇa. Lakṣmi, more than any, personifies benevolence, well-being, and compassion, but in certain devotional contexts she is also acknowledged as *śakti*, Cosmic Mother, signifying a power that is equal to Viṣṇu's.

To sum up, Erndl, along with other scholars such as Brown, Brubaker, and Kinsley, point to a holistic theology of the Goddess in Hindu *bhakti* tradition that embodies the paradoxes and tensions inherent in the human condition, a theology "that embraces all aspects of reality, not just the most pleasant... Devī is closely

connected with the realities and ambiguities of life. She is *prakṛti* (matter), *śakti* (divine power), *māyā* (creative illusion), and *samsara* (the worldly cycle) - which encompass purity and impurity, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, creation and destruction, life and death" (Erndl, 1993: 155).

The question still remains as to whether the distinction of married or unmarried is the most appropriate yardstick with which to explain the ambivalence of the Goddess and her diverse forms. Frédérique Marglin, for example, also points to the connection between symbolic and social realities, stressing that myth and ritual contain and encode the diverse cultural values of Hindu society (1985: 41). The definition of independent, uncontrolled goddesses as malevolent symbolises the negative cultural valuation of female sexuality as impure and dangerous (Marglin, 1985 42-4). Alternatively, however, sexuality has a positive cultural valuation in Hindu life, which is also encoded in myth and encapsulated in the term "auspicious" (1985: 44-6). Sexual intercourse is regarded as auspicious and applies equally to male and female sexuality, signifying a non-hierarchical power that overrides the social construction of male dominance. Myths of the goddesses articulate a female power and sexuality that is auspicious and good, associated with regeneration and the maintenance of life.

What is dangerous, or inauspicious, in this alternative Hindu view of the world, is celibacy, both male and female. Male celibacy, such as Śiva's great asceticism, generates a blazing heat that is dangerous to the cosmos, symbolising the searing heat that causes real-life disasters, such as drought and famine. Erotic activity and sexual intercourse among the deities therefore symbolises the cooling of destructive heat, the bringing of rain, and regeneration; in this context, then, female

sexuality is considered auspicious for its power to ensure the fertility of the land (1985: 53). Similarly, as portrayed by the goddess Pārvati, female asceticism and celibacy generates the same dangerous heat and potential for destruction as male asceticism. In terms of the essential auspiciousness of regeneration through sexual activity, conjugal relations serve to tame both the male and female. This is portrayed, for instance, in the marriage of Pārvati and Śiva: Pārvati defuses the heat of Śiva's *tapas* and domesticates him just as much as he controls Pārvati. Marglin therefore suggests that in the case of the independent goddesses, it is not their uncontrolled sexuality that holds potential danger for the world, but the power generated by their celibate state. Nonetheless, the fiery energy of the single goddesses is ambivalent in itself, for, as enacted by Durgā in the myths of the *Devī-Māhātmya*, it is frequently turned to good cause, through its salvific power to conquer evil (Marglin, 1985: 55).

In conclusion, I suggest that the key to understanding the ambiguities of the Goddess or goddesses, lies in mythic portraits of and devotees' attitudes towards the Goddess. I would reiterate that interpretations of the multifaceted divine feminine do not rest on the classification of sacred marriage, but on the category of motherhood (Kurtz, 1992: 20-3). The attitude of worship offered to Devī belongs in the sacred space of the mother: "She is the Mother, and all devotees are her children. Perhaps that is why the erotic *madhurya bhava* [lover-beloved mood] is conspicuously absent from Devī *bhakti*; to see oneself as the lover or consort of the Goddess would violate the incest taboo" (Erndl, 1993: 159). It is within this maternal sacred space that diverse and ambivalent mythic images are generated, diverse goddess figures that are connected and unified by the idea that "all the goddesses are mothers" (Kurtz, 1992: 23). The ultimate message of the mythology of the Goddess, in all her forms, is that

she is Divine Mother, both as substance of the universe and the creative energy that produces it.

Although few goddesses in post-Vedic myths are portrayed as biological mothers, they are all endowed with creative, regenerative power, frequently conceptualised in the feminine principles of *prakṛti* and *śakti*. The theology of the Goddess, and all her forms, contains ambiguities and multivalent qualities, but all of them can arguably be interpreted through the paradigm of divine motherhood. Recalling the goddesses addressed in this study, Sītā appears as a human, biological mother, but as goddess, she is symbol of fertility, the *śakti* or energiser of Rāma and upholder of the world. Sītā also embodies the ideal of self-sacrifice, a quality so often associated with the mother, portraying her unshakeable devotion to God. Lakṣmi, functions as symbol of fertility in many of her myths, but her cosmogonic role as universal Mother and *śakti* of Viṣṇu is also powerfully expressed, articulated as equal or even superior to Viṣṇu, in some devotional traditions. Even Rādhā, the adulterous lover of Kṛṣṇa, is eventually elevated to the status of Cosmic Queen, mediator of Kṛṣṇa's blessings to devotees; in later Puranic myth, we recall, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's copulative cosmogony transform them into the parents of the universe. Pārvati is both human and divine mother, creating one of her children from the excretions of her own body, symbolising a creative power that stands alone, without male contribution. But as symbol of the divine feminine, as Śakti, she is inseparable from the masculine, as Śiva, forming a unified symbol of ultimate reality. The goddess Sarasvatī then brings a different tone; although benevolent, her nature extends beyond the parameters of creativity associated with female reproductivity and nature, for she is the pure spiritual mother, the guardian of learning and knowledge, deeply involved in the creation of

Δ268

281

NB Brahma
"mind" birth
failure

culture. Durgā, Kāli, and the "seven mothers" prolifically enact the fiercer features of Devī, the "terrible mother," but also the redeeming mother, the protector of her children. In these forms, the Divine Mother is raised above the masculine in her reproductive role as creator. The Goddess and her manifestations constitute the "cosmic Mother," whose energy and power creates, destroys, and reproduces the universe:

Regeneration is a cyclical process, part of an endless spiral of birth, growth, maturation, decay, and death. From this perspective, death is not an end but the necessary transition to rebirth and regeneration. This is pithily captured in the following Sanskrit saying: "Again birth, again death, again sleep in the mother's womb." For Hindus, death is like a sleep in the mother's womb. (Marglin, 1985: 55)

In her critique of the myth of maternal sacred space, Spengnether examined how the maternal body has been constructed as sacred space, the womb or site where birth and death meet, representing the human experience of mortality and "estrangement of being." In patriarchal society and psychoanalytic theory, the fear of this inevitable human condition, and all its attendant ambiguities, has been unequivocally associated with the feminine and with the body of the (m)other, as a symbol of the unconscious, in an attempt to deny that "We are, each of us, male and female, fallen out of that state of fullness of Being which we sometimes imagine as paradise, which we seek falsely to identify with intrauterine existence" (Spengnether, 1990: 245-6). In the psychoanalytic framework this sacred space is a contested one,

embodying polarisation and paradox, the "good" and the "terrible" mother, who is both exalted and denigrated: but, it is always the mother. Do we see the same politics of sacred space, on the level of the divine, in Hinduism's construction of the "Divine Mother"? Or do the goddesses of Hinduism provide a rich symbolic resource for women to draw on for their social and spiritual empowerment? Moreover, when Sprengnether identifies the need for a "new metaphysics" that incorporates both male and female in coming to grips with our mortality and "fundamental estrangement of being," do the goddesses make a positive or negative contribution? These questions remain to be explored in the conclusions of the following final chapter.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSIONS

We are, each of us, male and female, fallen out of that state of fullness of Being which we sometimes imagine as paradise, which we seek falsely to identify with intrauterine existence. And yet each of us enters the world through the body of a woman - a carnal enigma that has virtually baffled our systems of understanding. Rather than fleeing, condemning, or idealizing the body of the (m)other, we need to recognize her in ourselves.

(Sprengnether, 1990: 246-5)

Offering inspiration for the beginning of this project, the above passage remains equally appropriate for its conclusion. This thesis tells a story from the diverse perspectives of psychoanalysis, feminism, and religion. It is also a story within a story - that of the mother, who embodies the core narrative within a wider one that tells of the composition of the self and what it means to be human. It is also a story that takes into account different domains of being: body, mind, and psyche or spirit. The study as a whole rests on the reality that all versions of the story, and all the domains of human beingness, are gendered: In the wider context of that reality, I have chosen to focus on the unique myth of "mother" and "motherhood." Through the focusing lens of maternal embodiment and motherhood, therefore, I have aimed to uncover how psychoanalysis, feminism, and Hindu religious myth intersect and interact in the production of the sacred.

The process of human construction of the self and subjectivity is of fundamental significance in the study of human development and what it means to be human. Similarly, therefore, it must be of fundamental significance for both psychoanalytic theory and the study of religion. Since human subjectivity is also gendered and embedded in a history of androcentric theory and hermeneutics, gender analysis and feminist analysis, too, have necessarily been called upon to be participants in the narrative.

I have argued all along that the mother, as the pivotal protagonist, has been contested and sacralised. Images of the mother in psychoanalysis, feminism, and Hindu myth point to a politics of sacred space, but sacred space that does not readily recall the familiar elements that are usually identified as such in the academic study of religion. For example, concrete symbols such as land, mountains, rivers, burial grounds, religious buildings, war memorials, and historical monuments, among others, are frequently imbued with sacredness through the dynamic cultural labour and ritualisation that is enacted in the human project of religion (Chidester and Linenthal, 1995: 1-20). However, the body, too, can be sacralised, as can any social institution that is of central significance for the norms and values of a society. I have suggested, therefore, that in several ways the maternal body and the social institution of motherhood have been produced as sacred space.

The body, it has been proposed, is both biologically sexualised and socially gendered - in other words, the body is where sex and gender meet. The body, by its very physicalness and extension into space, is spatial, thus providing a site for sex and gender to interact. Sex, which is not only biological but also, to a certain extent, socially constructed and historically mutable, and gender, which is not only socially

and culturally produced, but also frequently legitimated on the grounds of biological "naturalness," fluidly interact within the parameters of the spatial body. In this context, I have then argued, androcentric ideologies of sex and gender intersect in notions of the maternal body and institutionalised motherhood in a way that suggests a politics of sacred space.

In the process of developing this study, I have arrived at several conclusions. First, I have found that Freud's psychoanalytic theory of human psychosexual development has perpetuated the polarisation of the sexes rooted in the dualistic thought that permeates the history of western philosophy and religion. Following the androcentric perspectives of western patriarchy that tend to associate reason and the transcendent spirit with the male, and the body and mortality with the female, Freud's biological determinism produces a similar perception of gender differentiation. For Freud, "femininity" and women are defined as "other" and characterised by lack, measured against the patriarchal norms of masculinity and men. Although sexuality and the significance of anatomical genitalia (or lack of) can be interpreted as metaphors for psychological development of subjectivity and gender identity, Freud implies that the attainment of normal womanhood - namely, femininity - is undergirded by a thinly veiled continuation of penis-envy. In other words, I would argue, Freud implies that femininity - the foundation of appropriate gender identity for the "normal" woman - is not only "other," it is also pathological. The veil that covers female desire for the penis, in Freud's account, is motherhood.

Second, according to Freud's extrapolation of the mother's role in human psychosexual development, femininity becomes sanctified in the idealised image of the preoedipal dyad of mother and infant - especially mother and son - as the ultimate

fulfilment of womanhood. In Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory, it was discovered, notions of the mother and motherhood come to represent a sacred space that polarises the feminine and exposes the many ambivalent and even paradoxical characteristics associated with the maternal. Just as Victorian notions of the female body, even among early liberal feminists, characterised women (especially mothers) as asexual and moral on the one hand and carnal, sexual, and immoral on the other, Freud polarises maternal sacred space through idealisation on the one hand and repudiation on the other.

Freud constructs the maternal body as sacred space, I have argued, by exalting the preoedipal mother as the perfect, self-sacrificing object of her infant's desire, and the mother and son relationship as the embodiment of *eros*. But the mother is soon denigrated for endangering successful human development, for she represents narcissistic fulfilment of desire that rests on feminine weakness, passivity, and lack of rationality and moral judgement. In Freud's theory, the Oedipus and castration complexes take pride of place, and the mother must be rejected, by son and daughter alike, in order to enter the patriarchal world of social relations.

Likewise, Jacques Lacan perpetuates the centrality of the Oedipus and castration complexes at the level of metaphor and symbol. The preoedipal mother is accorded little significance, since she is associated with the Imaginary, thus serving to exile the maternal from the Symbolic and to define maternal space as one of lack, emptiness, and silence. The mother, for Lacan, becomes (m)Other, representative of the unconscious and the repressed repository of eternally unfulfillable desire. It is the phallus that stands as the signifier of gender, ushering in the paternal law and ensuring that femininity is likewise characterised as "other." The only avenue left for the

attainment of subjectivity in patriarchal society and culture is through exile from maternal space and entry into the masculine realm of the Symbolic.

The maternal body, represented in the figure of the preoedipal mother and notions of motherhood, is therefore represented as a polarised site of both self-sacrificing devotion to the infant and engulfing narcissistic wish-fulfilment. The mother is exalted as a sacred space of maternal plenitude from which the individual is exiled, lest he or she becomes ensnared in narcissism. The maternal body, therefore, comes to represent security and joy on the one hand and the pain of longing for what is lost on the other. Although D. W. Winnicott recovers the essential significance of the preoedipal mother's role in human development, she is once again polarised into the categories of good enough and not good enough, functional and dysfunctional. Again, as object of the *child's* drama, the mother's power is subdued and the multifaceted nature of maternal subjectivity receives little attention.

Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory, therefore, tells a story of the mother that denies her active power and represses her subjectivity. I have therefore argued that psychoanalysis situates the maternal body in a politics of sacred space that is derived from and colonised by androcentric conceptions, controlled by paternal law, and culturally produced by the myth of self-sacrificing motherhood. Women, says Adrienne Rich, are at once confined to and alienated from their bodies by fulfilling the "sacred calling" of motherhood, as laid down by patriarchal norms, thus poignantly illuminating women's experience of exile in this politics of sacred space. As a result, we are left with an ambivalent picture of the mother, who is both idealised and denigrated: She is good enough or not good enough, functional or dysfunctional; she embodies "maternal plenitude" and love on the one hand and lack,

emptiness, and silence on the other; she represents both self-sacrifice and narcissistic wish fulfilment; security and eternally unrequitable desire. Finally, and in any event, it is suggested that we are doomed to be exiled from this maternal sacred space, which, according to the dictates of the psychoanalytic paradigm, itself remains in exile from the patriarchal symbolic order. The experience of exile and longing, which is an important component in the production of sacred space, clearly emerges as a significant issue in psychoanalytic constructions of the mother and motherhood.

Third, it was further discovered that these ambivalent images of the maternal body and motherhood are replicated in the religious discourse and mystical nuances that are submerged in psychoanalytic theory. Freud himself replicates his repression of the power and subjectivity of the preoedipal mother, and his mystification of the "dark continent" of women's psychology, in his theory of religion. His reflections on the origins of civilisation, culture, and religion once again rest on the Oedipus myth and the struggle between father and son, making it problematic for Freud to explain the significance of mother-goddesses who preceded the history of patriarchy. However, he continually reiterates the notion of mother-goddesses and the maternal body as the site of life and death, the place where we give birth to our mortality. Birth and death are thus added to the inventory of polarities encapsulated in the maternal body, and yet, while Freud implies that both goddesses and women, in their closeness to nature and lack of superego, are hostile to culture, it is also possible to detect nuances of longing and reverence for that maternal space to which, according to Freud, we all return.

Lacan, it was found, waxed more mystical in his musings about "woman" and what he termed her *jouissance*, which is defined as an inexpressible, mystic experience

above and beyond the signifying power of the phallus. Exalted and sacralised, woman and her experience remained inexpressible and silent, still confined to the empty and silent space of the Imaginary, despite Lacan's mystical vision of femininity. Winnicott, however, pursued a more dynamic and authentic version of the mother's role, identifying the transitional space between mother and child as the locus of the origins of creativity and knowledge. He defined this space of "play" as analogous to the transitional space between the individual human being's internal, subjective reality and external, shared reality, a fluid space where creativity, art, culture, and religious feeling originate. Winnicott, I therefore argued, defines a sacred space that gives authentic significance to the role of the mother, although any further inquiry into maternal subjectivity remains limited and subordinated to the "drama of the child." Nonetheless, Winnicott's work has been important for feminist strategies for recovering maternal subjectivity.

Fourth, and following the above avenue of inquiry, I have indicated that it is in the polarised constructions of maternal sacred space in psychoanalytic theory that the potential for feminist recovery and transformation of maternal sacred space lies. Feminists vigorously contest androcentric perspectives and sacralised images of the mother and motherhood found in psychoanalysis - images that not only denigrate women, by associating female sexuality and the maternal body with the flesh and mortality, but also repress the power and subjectivity of the mother. Notions of the maternal as natural, sacrosanct, and immutable are unveiled as androcentric fantasies that have been reinforced by the collusion of both men and women. Western philosophy, theology, and psychology have all contributed to the process of conceptualisation, reification, and colonisation of the maternal body and motherhood.

By contesting these psychoanalytic fantasies of the mother, it can be concluded, psychoanalytic feminists have entered into and engaged in the politics of sacred space played out on the maternal field.

Drawing on my exploration of various feminist critiques, I have noted four important techniques of transformation employed by psychoanalytic feminists in the politics of maternal sacred space. The first, I would argue, aims to *de-sacralise* images of the mother and motherhood, responding in different ways to the question of how important women want mothering to be, given that the sacralisation of the mother and motherhood has only served to reinforce the oppression and subordination of women. The demands of motherhood as a kind of sacred vocation, according to Jane Flax, precipitates contradictory experiences and emotions for women. Not only is motherhood polarised by androcentric, psychoanalytic versions, but it is also internally ambivalent, engendering woman's experience of dislocation and alienation from her own familiar experience of self: Motherhood, says Flax, is not, in reality, an "exclusionary state" - any woman who happens to be a mother remains other things, too (1993: 153). But this reality of multi-faceted subjectivity and maternal agency becomes submerged and hidden in psychoanalytic interpretations. Adrienne Rich also intimates that it is not the experience of being a mother itself that is oppressive for women, but it is the requirements expected of them, according to patriarchy's rendition of the "sacred calling of motherhood." What Rich and other feminists, such as Judith Butler, have called the "heterosexual imperative," and the unrealistic ideal of the white, western nuclear family, have proved inadequate in terms of the reality of differences among women and women's lived experience.

In response to the particular renditions of the "sacred calling" found in psychoanalytic theory, feminists such as Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow have quite definitively aimed to de-sacralise the mother and motherhood. Showing how the mother has been symbolised as the "dirty goddess" who deals out "the pain of life and the fear of death," Dinnerstein identifies the mother as the "carnal scapegoat" held responsible for humanity's malaise. But, says Dinnerstein, women have colluded with men in upholding the notion of the naturalness of "maternal instinct" and self-sacrificing devotion. Power over the infant's experience of fulfilment and denial, joy and pain, then rests entirely with the maternal body and the mother's care. Only when motherhood loses its sacred aura and inviolate power over the infant, can women be integrated as whole human beings and can women and men seriously come to grips with the malaise of our age.

Dinnerstein's proposed solution is shared parenting, and so, too, is Chodorow's. Her critical analysis of motherhood explores the deeper psychological effects of the sacred vocation of motherhood and the ambivalent and flawed image of the mother, who is at once self-sacrificing and omnipotent in the infant's life. Repudiation of the mother, out of fear of dependence, and the loss and yearning that results in the dislocation of exile from the mother, is highlighted in Chodorow's work. However, what is brought to light, in addition, is the pervasive lack of theory in psychoanalysis to address the mother-daughter relationship. Chodorow counters Freud's insistence that both boys and girls repudiate the mother and claims that the emotional bond between mother and daughter survives, thus engendering relational capacities in women that perpetuate the reproduction of mothering by women from generation to generation. The problem at hand, in point of fact, is not a sacred calling,

but a passing down from mother to daughter. Shared parenting, according to Chodorow, might circumvent this exclusive lineage and the conventional ideas of appropriate gender roles and division of labour that oppress women.

Chodorow's attention to the mother-daughter relationship, and its virtual absence from psychoanalytic theory, brings to mind the second technique of transformation, which is quite different from de-sacralisation of maternity. In this regard, research into French feminist writing disclosed a discursive technique aimed to reclaim the voice of the mother and the feminine. Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, for example, immerse our consciousness in an exploration of the meaning of femininity, seeking to generate maternal symbols that revalorise the feminine. Irigaray, like Chodorow, takes serious note of the missing mother-daughter relationship - "the dark continent of the dark continent" - that remains unsymbolised in psychoanalysis. She sets out to redress this lack by replacing it with a genealogy of women and by constructing a separate, exclusively female discursive space. Irigaray advocates the rewriting of maternal discourse, pointing the way to an exclusively feminine symbolic order, in opposition to Lacan's paternal law and masculine Symbolic. Using radically disruptive and poetic language, she redeploys maternal metaphors and uses them to provide symbols for the creativity of all women. In this way, Irigaray directs us towards a new vision of ethics and equal gender relations, where the objectification of the feminine as "other," or more pertinently, as "(m)other," becomes not only transformed into "other" as subject, but also becomes situated in an autonomous, female symbolic order.

Kristeva, too, critiques the androcentric conception of maternal sacred space rooted in the mythic, idealised image of the all-powerful archaic mother, who is

particularly evident in the history of western monotheism. Femininity, for Kristeva, is a state of exile from the symbolic order of social relations and power, as represented in Lacan's theory. Like Irigaray, the use of disruptive discourse is of prime importance, but unlike Irigaray, Kristeva's technique of transformation is one of infiltration and subversion from within. For Kristeva, both women and men have to repudiate the maternal realm of the Imaginary and enter the Symbolic realm in order to access any form of resistance or revolutionary influence in patriarchal society. Even though, for Kristeva, both women and men possess the potential to engage in subversive discourse (*l'écriture féminine*) and thus disrupt the Symbolic, it is a far more painful process for women. Women, says Kristeva, are required to sacrifice their very femaleness in order to take up a subversive position in the Symbolic. 8190

Both Irigaray and Kristeva, however, use mystical and religiously nuanced discourse in their techniques of transformation. Irigaray supports the Lacanian notion of linking woman's bodily experience of *jouissance* with mystic and religious experience but, not unexpectedly, takes us further than did Lacan. Women, says Irigaray, have to immerse themselves even further into womanhood in order not to become "more alien to ourselves than we were, more in exile than we were" (1984a: 60). Kristeva, too, takes up a discursive position that almost contradicts her insistence on female entry into the Symbolic. Her text, "Stabat Mater" (1986c), articulated in 8207 what can only be described as the poetic and subjective language of the mystic, relies heavily on real maternal experience, revealing the maternal body itself as the original site of fragmentation of the self. The splitting of the self, says Kristeva, begins in the mother's womb, and in the experience of that splitting lies a resource for maternal symbols that offer a metaphor for the creativity of all women. Kristeva's vision calls

for attention to the realities of maternal experience to seek symbols for healing the split between self and other for a new feminine ethics (in essence, like Irigaray) that facilitates relationship between two subjects. Both Irigaray and Kristeva, I would conclude, engage in the politics of maternal sacred space through "writing the maternal body" - albeit in different ways that, in the end, turn out to be not so different. Their techniques of transformation, no matter how similar or different, essentially confront and deal with problems of inclusion and exclusion, sacrifice and creativity, and the exile of the feminine and the maternal from the patriarchal symbolic order of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory.

The third technique of transformation, in the context of this study, refers mainly to the work of Jessica Benjamin and her reinterpretation of Winnicott's idea of "transitional space." Rather than looking for alternative feminine symbols to aid the transformation of gender relations, Benjamin points to a spatial representation of gender and an intersubjective mode of structuring the psyche. Her theory rests on a search for authentic being and inner desire that emphasises the value of maternal agency. She identifies a female, internal transitional space of experiencing desire that is as important for the child - girl or boy - as is the "exciting father." Benjamin's notion of maternal inner space, which I suggest represents a form of maternal sacred space that could transform women's experience in a positive way, obviates repudiation of the mother. Exile from the mother is not necessary for the development of social relations, for either sons or daughters: Repudiation of the feminine, in fact, only reinforces the oppressive structure of gender relations of dominance and submission, where the female is always "other" to the male norm.

According to Benjamin's transformation of psychoanalytic theory of gender, the recovery of the importance of "maternal holding" and consciousness of internal transitional space is essential for the development of authentic relationships - both between individuals and with one's own inner being. Finally, Benjamin extends her theory of transitional space to encompass the necessary intersubjectivity of women and men as equal subjects. As parents, too, both maternal and paternal participation and contributions would be valued as essential for the inner and outer being of the child. This technique of transformation, I have argued, draws on Winnicott's notions of transitional space, both between mother and child and within the individual, at a profound psychic level that is transferred to experiential reality. Like Irigaray and Kristeva, this mode of transformation aims to heal the fragmentation of the feminine, as well as the fragmentation of relations between the sexes. In contrast to the French feminists, however, Benjamin extends beyond symbol and metaphor to the reality of human relationships.

Finally, the fourth technique of transformation returns to symbol and metaphor to heal the fragmentation of the feminine and the maternal at the level of metaphysics. For Madelon Sprengnether, the psychoanalytic romanticisation and exaltation of the preoedipal mother represses the "shadow" side of the mother and represses maternal subjectivity and agency. Fear of dependence on her wish-fulfilling capacity and engulfing love, the sacred mother has to be rejected. Perceiving her as subject and active agent, even to the extent that her nature may include aggression and power, is repressed into unconsciousness. Focusing on original loss and exile from the mother, and the sense of longing for return to maternal plenitude that lingers in the unconscious, Sprengnether challenges the notion of early undifferentiated fusion

between mother and infant that is articulated in Freudian theory. Such a picture of symbiotic bliss is fiction, nothing more than a fantasy that denies the dynamic subjectivity and agency of the mother.

Sprengnether's reworking of Freud's castration theory draws on submerged subtexts in his writing and locates birth as the site of separation (or castration) that is deemed necessary for healthy ego formation. If Freud had followed this line of thought, argues Sprengnether, his privileging of the Oedipus complex and the phallus as signifier of separation would have been entirely superfluous. Following Kristeva, Sprengnether further points to maternal experience of continuous division and splitting during pregnancy, designating the maternal body as the container of self and otherness. Conception itself is really the locus of origin for separation and the journey into life, which simultaneously entails the advent of consciousness of mortality. It is the maternal body that is situated at the very centre of a politics of sacred space, and it is the maternal body that is the site of origin for the sense of alienation and "estrangement of being" experienced by all human beings. Psychoanalytic notions of mourning and loss, engendering nostalgic longing for return to a safe haven of maternal plenitude, therefore, remain in the realm of fantasy and sacred myth. All human beings, female and male, Sprengnether reminds us, experience this estrangement of being and inherit the paradoxes of life. Life, desire, and the inevitability of death all originate in the body of the mother, but from that point onwards, these realities belong to us all, women and men. In short, recalling Sprengnether's words "rather than fleeing, condemning, or idealizing the body of the (m)other, we need to recognize her in ourselves" (1990: 246).

The fifth conclusion emerging from this study is that the sacralisation and polarisation of the feminine, the maternal body, and motherhood, as well as repression of female agency and power, have been perpetuated in many patriarchal religions, most particularly in western, monotheistic religious traditions. Psychoanalysis, however, with the help of transformative critiques articulated by feminist theorists, has gained momentum in transforming maternal sacred space. Psychoanalytic and feminist theoretical developments, together, have recalled attention to the body and given voice to the silenced feminine and maternal. Naomi Goldenberg, in particular, pursues the notion of a "spirituality of embodiment" or an awakening of consciousness of our embodied nature as an emerging salvific impulse in feminist thought. Therefore, it has been concluded, analysis of sacred images of the maternal body and motherhood represents a thread that weaves its way through the intersection of psychoanalysis, feminism, and religion.

Following this line of argument, Goldenberg looks to psychoanalysis (especially Winnicott) and feminism almost as a "replacement" for religion or spiritual practice, in their recovery of the body - particularly female sexuality - and the opportunities both give for personal recollection of past history and authentic "speaking" at a profound level of being. With regard to religion, our attention is drawn to "thealogy," feminist spirituality, and newly emerging goddess religions as areas for supporting the propagation of feminine myths and symbols as resources for women's spiritual practice. It was noted that debate continues over the questionable scholarship and historical accuracy of some feminist renditions of the history of a "universal Goddess," who is said to have been virtually annihilated by the advent of patriarchy (see McDermott, 1996). But more importantly, it can be argued that

feminist spirituality has generated a new body of myth relating to the divine feminine, which can well serve as a reservoir of empowering symbols for women in their social situations and spiritual lives. Recalling feminist aims to reinstate and transform the power of the feminine and maternal that has been repressed in psychoanalytic theory, I have thus concluded that the human project of religion also offers a way to articulate and revalue that power. The final part of this thesis aimed to take this line of thought further into analysis of a particular religious tradition.

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My intention in Chapters Seven and Eight was to examine the hypothesis that the ambiguities found in conceptions of the feminine and the maternal are expressed more explicitly in religious myths where symbolisations of the feminine play a strongly represented role. Bearing in mind, too, the problem of differences among women that are sometimes overlooked, I followed an opening offered by Rita Gross in relation to the sharing or "borrowing" of religious myths and symbols among different cultures - in this case, Hindu myths of the divine feminine. This line of analysis also specifically represents a response to Luce Irigaray's call for the divine in women's image and to Madelon Sprengnether's call for a "new metaphysics" that does not oppress women and repress maternal subjectivity and power.

In the course of examining psychoanalytic images of the mother, a contested politics of sacred space was uncovered, a space that embodies ambiguity and paradox: the good and terrible mother, who is at once idealised and denigrated in a multitude of ways. Nevertheless, the *mother* clearly embodies the central symbol of androcentric perceptions of femininity. Feminist theorists, especially psychoanalytic feminists, also focus on how patriarchal and psychoanalytic images of the mother and the sacred calling of motherhood have reinforced the oppression of women. On the other hand,

however, the maternal body is revalorised as a symbol of real lived experience, creativity, power, and spirituality that can be reinterpreted and transformed in ways that empower women. Innovative feminist ideas even venture to push beyond the genderedness of the mother, to recollect that the (m)other is accessible to and part of all human-beings, women and men.

Similarly, images of the divine feminine in Hindu myths of the Goddess and her manifestations, the goddesses, reflect male fear of uncontrolled female sexuality and therefore, to some extent, reinforce the control and subordination of women outlined in the Hindu canon (for example, *The Laws of Manu*). Women in the Hindu tradition may be revered as embodiments of the Goddess, but mainly as wives and mothers - as *pativrata* - under the control of and dependent on men. However, I would argue that the vast array of goddess figures found in classical Sanskrit Hindu myth and, moreover, the diverse characteristics portrayed in each of those figures, proffers myriad symbolisations of the feminine and maternal that extend far beyond the limited vision just mentioned. Such diversity, it was found, also engenders many explicit and graphic expressions of divine ambivalence rooted in the natures of the goddesses.

The significance of ambivalent traits found among the Hindu goddesses, both within the nature of one figure or among different goddess figures, was therefore examined. Lawrence Babb's categorisation of consort goddesses and independent or dominant goddesses as benevolent and malevolent, respectively, was concluded to be inadequate. Each goddess figure studied was found to possess diverse and often ambiguous qualities. For example, if Śrī-Lakṣmi might represent the showering of blessings and abundance, arguably appropriate for those devotees still enmeshed in

material life, her representation as Cosmic Mother and *śakti*, the creative energy of the universe, equals the soteriological power of her male partner, Viṣṇu. Even Sītā, the embodiment of *pativrata*, at times symbolises a woman who stands by her own desires and confronts the insensitivities and inadequacies of her husband, the great king, Rāma. It could be argued that the multitude of goddess figures, and their diverse attributes, would, at the very least, provide significant symbols for the diverse requirements of different women.

Most important, I have concluded, are the spiritual and cultural meanings attached to the ambivalence of the divine feminine in Hindu tradition. Although the independent and fiercer representations of the Goddess, such as Durgā and Kālī, can be said to represent the danger of female sexuality and to reflect male fear and denigration of the feminine and women, this by no means tells the whole story. As pointed out in the previous chapter, Marglin's study of the polarities of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness - as opposed to purity and impurity - embedded in Hindu symbolisations of male and female is a case in point. Here, a non-hierarchical cultural interpretation of gender emerges, defining sexuality and erotic activity - both female and male - as auspicious, and celibacy as dangerous and inauspicious. Furthermore, female sexuality, as represented in the powerful goddesses, is interpreted as an especially powerful symbol of protection and salvation in this context of auspiciousness.

In terms of spirituality and the Hindu path to liberation and enlightenment, the "darkness" of goddess figures such as Kālī takes on positive sacred value. The dynamic, powerful, and perhaps even dangerous aspect of femininity and the maternal is clearly not repressed in Hindu myths, where the independent, fierce goddesses play

a central role. Here, I have argued, the repressed agency and power of the maternal is explicitly expressed, for, we found, all the goddesses are mothers. Whether a goddess appears as a "biological" mother or not, whether she is represented as good or terrible, gentle or fierce, self-sacrificing or engulfing, loving or punishing, safe or dangerous, she is "mother" to her devotees, and the embodiment of compassion for her "children." However, the apparently negative attributes of some goddesses, such as Durgā and Kālī, are frequently typified as the "dark" aspect, the "shadow" side of the feminine. The paradoxical elements of darkness and light, however, are replicated in Hindu visions of the sacred. The sacred, too, may be safe, controlled, and ritualised on the one hand, or uncontrolled, dangerous, and risky on the other. Therefore, this "darkness" represented in the fierce goddesses can be situated in the realm of the sacred and can be defined as spiritually empowering, pushing the devotee to the brink of *mokṣa*. This "shadow," too, could be equally empowering for women in society and religion, as symbolic expressions of women's anger and as symbols for female creativity and actualisation (Gupta, 1991: 33; McDermott, 1996: 288-9). Most significant, I would argue, is that the ambivalent characteristics of the Hindu goddesses, particularly those expressed so vividly in fierce and powerful figures such as Kālī, represent transformative symbols of wholeness, thus recovering the repressed power of female sexuality and the multi-faceted nature of maternal subjectivity. As McDermott points out, in her recent study of western feminist appropriations of Kālī, "Kālī is a goddess of transformation" (1996: 291).

Hindu goddesses, I would finally conclude, in all their ambivalence, both reflect the problems faced by women in patriarchal societies and provide a resource of recognisably empowering symbols with which women can identify. The fiercer aspects

of the goddesses, for example, not only push devotees to the edge of *mokṣa*, but might also serve to encourage women to the edge of liberation from the constricting norms of expected gender roles in society. Most important, they embody a transformative vision of maternal sacred space that forcefully expresses the paradoxes inherent in that space. The maternal nature of the goddesses and the divine feminine in Hinduism, as representations of *śakti* or creative power, does not, in any sense, confine women to the role of motherhood, but serves as a metaphor for unfettered creativity and fulfilment. Furthermore, these maternal symbols express the spiritual power of liberation and the sacred, made available to women and men alike. Finally, therefore, the ambivalent maternal attributes of the Hindu goddesses offer an opportunity for us to recognise the (m)other within all human-beings and reclaim her within ourselves.

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