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Who do I say that I am?:
Identity as a construct and its implications for Christian anthropology.

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

of

THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

by

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I declare that the work herein contained has not previously been submitted in whole or in part for the award of any degree; that it is my own work, and that any substantial contributions to and quotations in the dissertation have been cited and referenced.

Signed:

Signed by candidate

Janet Elizabeth Trisk
June 2002

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Abstract

The question of identity is one of the pressing issues for many disciplines, and is a key question in feminist theory. Theorists occupy diverse positions across a spectrum. At one end there are those who believe there is something "essential" which defines us (both as individuals and in groups). At the spectrum's other end are those who take the view that identity is constructed - whether unconsciously through the practices identified by psychoanalysts, or consciously and unconsciously through linguistic practices, social interactions, through performances of the body. This study seeks to explore some of these understandings of identity, using a specifically post-structuralist feminist lens which, *inter alia* directly challenges the dualisms upon which western philosophy is founded. Having outlined some approaches to the question of identity, the study concludes by examining some of the consequences and possibilities for Christian anthropology in its understanding of what it means to be human and how the human person can be said to constitute the *Imago Dei*.

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During the writing of this project my father died. I dedicate it to him.

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Introduction:
Getting to know the subject

Who is the human subject? How can we speak of identity? What shapes identity? Do we have choices in regard to who and what we are? Can one maintain that there is some continuity between who I am today and who I was yesterday? Is there some essential core to the self that exists beneath the surface of many, often apparently contradictory selves? Am I, through the exercise of right reason, able to understand my identity?

Is there an "I" that maintains some unity, be it an ontological "I" or regulative idea? Or is the subject, to use Julia Kristeva's notion, a subject on trial, always in a process of conflict and contradiction? Or do we speak of the subject in Judith Butler's sense, as performative, constituted through reiterated acts? (Chopp 1997:219).

The question of identity, or who and what is the subject, is one of the most complex issues, not only in theology, but also in psychology, anthropology, political studies, sociology, feminist theory and linguistics, to name just a few concerned disciplines. The issue forms the basis of volumes of contemporary writing, for example Rosa Braidotti in feminist theory (Braidotti 1992), Paul John Eakin in modern literature (Eakin 1999), Judith Butler in queer theory (Butler 1989), Phyllis Bird in Biblical studies (Bird 1997), Kenneth Gergen in the field of sociology (Gergen 1991), Julia Kristeva in psychoanalysis (Kristeva 1991), and Paul Ricoeur in philosophy (Ricoeur 1992).

One of the central questions concerning identity, as we shall see, is the nature of the sex/gender difference. Our sexual differences seem most fundamental. Is this to imply that there is an essential masculinity or femininity? Conversely, is there an essential or core *humanity* which is simply overlaid by sexual difference? What sort of 'humanity' would this core be? Is gender, as some have suggested (for example Butler 1989 and 1993), entirely a construct, or does it have an essential basis - in sexual difference or otherwise? Is there any difference between "sex" and "gender"? Given that our societal and religious structures are undoubtedly patriarchal, what influence does this have on women's identity? Indeed, as some (for example Jantzen 1998:32) have asked: Can women be subjects?

The question of the role of sex/gender in regard to identity opens up related questions: What is the place of our embodiedness in the understanding of our identity? Has identity to do with physical attributes such as sex, size, shape, skin colour. Is identity affected or even defined by physical disability? Or has identity nothing to do with these "surface" attributes and rather with the capacity to reason? If physical attributes contribute to identity, what part do they play? Are these physical attributes themselves social or cultural constructs? For example, Madan Sarup contends that 'race' (which he always writes in inverted commas to indicate that the term is problematic) is not a biological or scientifically verifiable fact. Most people, he suggests, when they use the term 'race' are referring either to a physical characteristic such as skin colour, or they use the term metaphorically (Sarup 1996:171).

For theology, the issue of identity raises vital questions in regard to many traditionally "settled" doctrinal issues - for example the doctrine of the *Imago Dei* and related understandings of Christian anthropology such as who images God, and how? Is there some "core" element to our identity which renders us in the image of God? What does it mean when theologians talk of sin obscuring the image of God in a person? If we are socially and culturally constructed, to what extent can we be said to sin, if sin involves wrong choices? Christian doctrine proclaims Jesus Christ the perfect 'man'. How is this to be interpreted if identity is constructed (rather than essential)? What were the factors that shaped his identity? Did he grow into his divinity? How does this understanding square with the Christian doctrine that he is the incarnation of God?

Methodology

This study seeks to investigate some contemporary approaches to the question of identity and what these contemporary understandings might imply for Christian anthropology. My approach is eclectic. Because I work within a post-structuralist epistemological framework (which is described below), I suggest that there is no *one* correct approach. I employ the observations of, for example, linguists, psychoanalysts, deconstructionists, theologians,

Marxists, philosophers and sociologists, suggesting that each approach has something to offer in attempting to understand the questions of identity.

I shall pay particular (though not exclusive) attention to the writing of feminist philosophers and theorists. It should be noted that I am not arguing that there is a distinct feminist methodology in the sense of there being a specific technique of data collection and analysis used by feminists. Nor am I oblivious to the problems in describing oneself as "feminist".¹ Furthermore, as I shall note below, feminist theory spans a broad epistemological framework. My reasons for preferring writing by feminist theorists are five-fold.

- a) I am female and committed to the political project of some feminists.
- b) The question of identity, "who and what is the subject?", has more often than not been reduced (without acknowledgement) to the question: "What is man?". Feminist writings critique this and offer new perspectives on the question (for example Lloyd 1984).
- c) As Thomas Kuhn points out, what distinguishes one researcher from another is not one or other method of gathering information, or one or another method of experimentation, but the commitment to one or another model of reality; in other words, what paradigm is operative (Kuhn 1962). What feminisms have pointed out, is that lack of attention to or awareness of the operating paradigm has invariably led to an uncritical assumption of patriarchal definitions of reality.
- d) The feminist project of including women as not only "objects" of theoretical speculation, but producers of knowledge has opened up trenchant critiques of traditional understandings of the human subject and epistemologies (for example Jardine 1985, Hekman 1990 and Stanley & Wise 1993).
- e) In this project my choice to listen to and include the voices of women should not be seen as a way of achieving a "balanced view", a correction of the male bias in scholarship. Adopting the margins as a standpoint is, as bell hooks points out, a choice "to stand in political resistance with the oppressed" (hooks 1990:145). It is a way of disrupting

¹ The description "feminist" is contested. For example, the French writers Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray are frequently (in English writing) designated "feminist". Yet they would repudiate this designation. Their argument is that "feminists" in the Anglo-American writings are those women who seek equality with men, forcing them to function like men. Cixous and Irigaray therefore distance themselves from this appellation. Likewise, many Black writers view "feminism" as a white enterprise and prefer the term "womanist". For convenience I shall use the term "feminist".

established ways of looking at subjectivity. The margins then become not just a place of deprivation, but a place of "radical possibility" (hooks 1990:149).

This leads directly into the question of epistemology - a vexed issue in feminist theory.² However, just as there is no single feminist theory, but many feminisms so too there is no single feminist epistemology. Feminist epistemologies range from the empiricist, to the liberal humanist to the postmodern. Following Anderson, who helpfully, identifies three epistemological frameworks within which she suggests feminists work - feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint epistemology and feminist post-structuralism (Anderson 1998:43-45) - I shall prefer her model of feminist post-structuralism. The three frameworks represent the response of feminist theorists to the crisis of rationality, about which more will be said in chapters one, two and three. At this stage we may merely note that:

- a) Feminist empiricism accepts the tenets of philosophical realism and proclaims the possibility of arriving at "Truth" and thus this approach seeks objective knowledge, along the lines of the Enlightenment understanding of the subject, studying the object and making truth claims about it. However, it seeks also to identify and eliminate the androcentric and sexist bias of traditional philosophical writings - for example by pointing out the gendered bias in theoretical writing and, by incorporating the views of women, thus arriving at a position closer to the truth.
- b) Feminist standpoint epistemology contends that the empiricist position is inadequate for arriving at truth because of its failure to take into account the socio/political and cultural situatedness of knowledge. This position does not just aim at a less sexist form of knowledge, but proposes a surer method of obtaining objective truth because of the way it takes account of the context in which the knowledge is generated. In other words this position, like empiricism, proposes, given the right circumstances, the possibility of establishing Truth.

² I use, as a working definition of epistemology, Stanley and Wise's definition: "a framework or theory for specifying the constitution and generation of knowledge...(which) specifies not only what knowledge is and how to recognise it, but who are knowers and by what means one becomes one, and also the means by which competing knowledge claims are adjudicated..." (Stanley & Wise 1993:188).

- c) Feminist post-structuralism rejects the possibility of arriving at *a* truth, advocating a profound scepticism regarding universal claims. Post-structuralism seeks to show how language creates reality. Truth does not depend on the representation of an independent object by means of language. Instead truth is what is acceptable within the linguistic structure. So post-structuralism rejects the separation of knowing subject and the object of study, as proposed by empiricist and standpoint theories. Indeed, this approach challenges all dualisms, including the oppositions of subject/ object and male/ female. Post-structuralism draws on especially the psychoanalytic work of Freud and Lacan and the deconstructionist work of Derrida. *Feminist* post-structuralists seek to expose and challenge the dominant phallogocentrism of language. Feminist post-structuralists redefine what is properly called knowledge, for example seeking to show how emotions are part of how we know. Theorists working within this framework see it more as a critical and constructive strategy rather than a way of establishing objective, universal and neutral truth.

These three frameworks should not be seen as literal representations of all feminist theory. They represent a working model. Often therefore, feminists set in one model exhibit traces of the other models in their writing. For example, Pamela Anderson (1998) in outlining a feminist philosophy of religion, prefers the third (post-structuralist) model, but also draws on standpoint epistemology.

The adopting of feminist post-structuralism is not without difficulty. Just as many post-structuralists are at best ambivalent and at worst hostile towards feminism, so too many feminists (as we shall note below) are hostile towards post-structuralism and its ally, postmodernism. My reason for preferring a post-structuralist framework should become clearer as the discussion unfolds. However, at this stage, I shall give some preliminary reasons for doing so.

Feminist empiricism, as noted above, assumes that objective knowledge is attainable. As Sandra Harding points out, this is a Cartesian way of theorizing because it assumes the possibility of separating the knower from the known, the subject from the object, and the

possibility of a "view from nowhere" which offers an ultimate truth (Harding 1992:340). The supposed separability of knower and known, which forms the basis of this epistemological framework, will be challenged in the succeeding chapters.

Feminist standpoint epistemology has the advantage of situating knowledge in a particular socio/cultural setting. Contending that there is a pervasive sex bias in modern epistemology, it takes, as its starting point, women's experience as the basis for theorizing. However, it suffers from the same criticism as feminist empiricism, namely it assumes an objective understanding of truth may be reached by, for example, balancing the male bias with female readings and noting the particular contexts in which these readings are produced. In reinforcing a new universalism - "the women's experience" - it replaces one orthodoxy with another. Another problem with this standpoint theory is that, taken to its logical conclusion, the various standpoints keep proliferating. For example, if one assumes the standpoint of women as privileged knowers, then one has also to accept that, for example, black women or lesbian women, or working class women have preferable perspectives than white, heterosexual, middle-class and educated women. Standpoint theory also has the tendency to reduce each person's identity to one aspect of the whole. So for example, as Diana Fuss points out, a male lecturer is reduced to his "maleness", a lesbian lecturer to her "lesbianness" and so on, resulting in a hierarchy of identities within each subject (Fuss 1989:116). Ultimately, each person's unique standpoint is the point of reference, or, equally problematically, the group which is oppressed by *all* possible systems of oppression is the most privileged standpoint.³

The relationship of feminism to post-structuralism and its close relative, postmodernism, is the most complicated of all. Contemporary feminism occupies an ambiguous position with regard to the modernist/ postmodernist debate that characterizes the late twentieth and early twenty-first century theories.⁴ Feminism, like postmodernism, is a radical movement that

³ For a trenchant critique of the standpoint epistemology see Bubeck 2000:185ff.

⁴ I am aware of the problems of defining what exactly is meant by postmodernism. For present purposes, in considering the question of identity, I prefer Pamela Anderson's suggestion that postmodernism is characterised by three "deaths", namely the death of the rational subject, the death of a single historical narrative and the death of a metaphysics of presence (Anderson 1998:53). It is with this understanding of postmodernism which I suggest feminism has an ambivalent relationship.

challenges modernist fundamental assumptions such as male/female dichotomies and the dualities and hierarchies that have dominated Western thought. It similarly challenges the prevailing social/symbolic order as a male reality. On the other hand feminism has its roots in modernism and the liberal-humanist movement. It has as one of its aims the establishing of a political platform, which presupposes an ability to make certain kinds of truth claims. So some writers complain that postmodernism precludes political action (Hawthorne 1989:555). Others, for example Nancy Hartsock (1983), argue that feminists must reject all phallogocentric epistemologies, including postmodernism. Against this position Weedon (1997) argues that a revised postmodernism which addresses the needs of feminism is useful. Similarly Fraser and Nicholson (1988) argue that an integration of postmodernism and political feminism is useful in challenging modernist essentialisms in some feminist theories. Jane Flax takes a stronger position and argues consistently that feminist theory is a variant of postmodernism, and that feminism contributes gender sensitivity to postmodernism (Flax 1992(a):445-446). Similarly Susan Hekman argues that postmodernism "...far from being detrimental to the political needs of feminism, actually fosters them" (Hekman 1990:189).

Feminist post-structuralism, firstly, rejects the possibility of metanarratives, including a metanarrative which explains the conditions of women's oppression. Secondly, it seeks to deconstruct the dualisms (such as male/female, subject/object and nature/culture) which undergird the whole of western philosophy. What feminist post-structuralism does not do (and this is one of its strengths) is privilege the female over the male, or irrationality over rationality: That would be to perpetuate Enlightenment models of epistemology, albeit reversing the order of privilege. Thirdly, it attempts to explore the way language is self-referential and the basis for meaning. In other words, this approach posits that words do not refer to some outside and objective reality, but that they afford meaning according to their use and context. We shall examine this in more detail in chapter two. The feminist post-structuralist seeks to show how words, assumed to describe reality, in fact reflect male and patriarchal positions of dominance. Fourthly, feminist post-structuralism seeks to subvert "rationality" (as it is traditionally understood) as patriarchal and male. It seeks to

demonstrate how the feminine constitutes the unconscious (and unacknowledged) underlying "other" of male rationality.

Susan Hekman points out that there is a fundamental difference in the understanding of "epistemology" in the three approaches listed. The Enlightenment definition (which applies to empiricism and feminist standpoint epistemology) understands epistemology to be "the study of knowledge acquisition that was accomplished through the opposition of a knowing subject and a known object" (Hekman 1990:9).

Empiricist and standpoint epistemologies are grounded in the understanding that an objective view of reality can be reached, and that particular people (whether they be academically trained, experts, scientists or women) have a greater degree of access to this reality. But, as we have noted, feminist post-structuralism rejects (amongst other dualisms) the subject/object opposition and instead understands epistemology to be more of a discursive space which encourages a proliferation of voices and perspectives. As Jane Flax expresses it:

I would like to move the terms of the discussion away from the relations between knowledge and truth to those between knowledge, desire, fantasy, and power of various kinds. Epistemology should be reconceived as genealogy and the study of the social and unconscious relations of the production of knowledge. Philosophers would abandon wishes to adjudicate truth claims and instead would engage in linguistic, historical, political and psychological inquiries into forms of knowledge construction... Such inquiries would include investigations into the philosopher's own desire and place within particular social locations and discourses (Flax 1992(a):457/8).

Feminist post-structuralism recognizes that the production of knowledge is a political process, which in turn raises the question of the relationship between knowledge and power. "Crucial to feminist research, however, is attention to politics of knowledge - what counts as knowledge, who gets to produce it and under what conditions" (Armstrong and Du Plessis 1998:104).

Two issues emerge. The first concerns the place of women in this project. Feminist theory, suggests Grosz (1993:206-208), may be divided into two broad categories. The first seeks to introduce women as viable objects of knowledge. Broadly, its contention is that

epistemology is flawed by the exclusion of women and it seeks to supplement existing fields of knowledge by including the voices of women, noting women's experience and challenging existing knowledge as patriarchal. The problem with this approach is that:

By conceptualizing woman as the problem, we repeat rather than deconstruct or analyze the social relations that construct or represent us as a problem in the first place. If the problem is defined in this way, the woman remains in her traditional position: the "guilty one", the deviant, the other (Flax 1990:138).

The second category, rather than simply introducing women as objects of knowledge, takes (patriarchal) knowledge as the starting point and seeks to expose, not only the male bias, but the deeper implications of that phallogentric knowledge.

...feminist philosophers have argued convincingly that reason is not something from which women have simply been excluded. Rather, rationality itself has been defined against the feminine and traditional female roles (Gatens 1992:121/2).

What makes this theory different from competing male theories is that these feminists attempt to develop different forms and methods of knowing, for example by including emotion as part of knowing (see for example Jaggar 1983).

The second issue is related to the first and concerns the issues of who speaks for whom. Womanist and Asian women in particular have criticized white, Western, middle class, educated women for speaking on their behalf.⁵ Lesbian women have criticized hetero-sexual women for ignoring a lesbian perspective.⁶ In Africa it is indeed a luxury to undertake academic study whilst the majority of women struggle daily to survive. I cannot speak "for" other women, but I hope to expose patriarchal ways of considering the question of identity and by listening to women's voices (including the silent/silenced voices) suggest alternatives. This debate will be further explored in chapter two.

Terminology

⁵ See for example Audre Lorde 1984, bell hooks 1984, 1990 and Gayatri Spivak 1993.

⁶ See for example Judith Butler 1990 and 1993.

A number of key terms - body, self, identity, subject and person - are by no means consistently used in the literature. For example (anticipating some of the discussion which will follow in chapters two and three) the question of what is meant by "the subject" differs widely. The classical Cartesian understanding is that the subject is not the same as the self. The subject is that which thinks. So Descartes concludes:

I thereby concluded that I was a substance, of which the whole essence or nature consists in thinking, and which, in order to exist, needs no place and depends on no material thing; so that this "I", that is to say the mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body (Descartes 1968:54).

Some of the contemporary writers (for example Elizabeth Grosz) repudiate this Cartesian dualism, suggesting that the concept of the subject requires a return to the body (Grosz 1994). Other writers, such as Crowley and Himmelweit insist on a combination of agency and the influences of social and cultural construction, defining subjectivity as:

That combination of conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions that make up our sense of ourselves, our relation to the world and our ability to act in that world...the notion of people as intentional subjects - actors in the world - and at the same time as subject to forces beyond their conscious control (Crowley & Himmelweit 1992:7).

Sidonie Smith, by way of contrast, seeks to distinguish self as "an understanding of the human being as metaphysical, essential and universal" and subject as implying "the culturally constructed nature of any notion of selfhood" (Smith 1993:189).

I shall argue that identity is not simply something imposed from the outside, nor is it merely a set of conscious choices we make for ourselves, but it includes both the way others see and name us as well as the identity (or identities) we claim for ourselves.

Outline of the study

In order to set this study in context, in chapter one I shall briefly outline some of the concerns of feminist theories of identity over the past one hundred years, as they respond to the Cartesian and Enlightenment understandings of the subject, within the broader context in which the concerns and the projects of feminist writers and activists were articulated.

As bell hooks notes: "Language is also a place of struggle" (hooks 1990:146). Chapter two will investigate the place of language in the construction of identity. I shall draw substantially on the understanding of Lacan and his interpreters. Lacan, as much as his ideas have been used by feminist writers, has also been critiqued by them and I shall give some consideration to these critiques, going on to consider the problems faced by women in "speaking" their identity, if language is, as Lacan suggests, patriarchal and male.

In chapter three I shall look at the place of the body in shaping identity. The body is not seen in opposition to language or the rational, but, as Kristeva argues, language is embodied (Kristeva 1984). Notwithstanding the Cartesian insistence that we are defined by our ability to rationalize, as even a brief consideration of western cultural stereotypes will reveal, views of the body are very significant in constructing identity. For example, in the west, fat people are viewed as undisciplined, even dirty. Old people and physically disabled are often seen as stupid. In this chapter I shall consider the ideas set forth by Aristotle and especially by Descartes which have led to the dualisms that characterize western philosophy. I shall also give consideration to some alternative understandings which have been suggested by feminist writers when they propose the embodied nature of identity.

In chapter four I will focus on the relationship of self to the "other" as examined by some psychoanalytic theorists and philosophers, concluding that selfhood is unthinkable without alterity, however that alterity is conceived and whether it is embraced or repressed.

Whilst much has been written in regard to the question of identity, very little consideration has been given to the impact of these writings on Christian theology. Therefore I shall consider, in chapter five, what implications of these investigations there are for Christian anthropology, and in particular the understanding that human beings are created in the image of God.

Chapter One: Feminists view the subject

...the problem of contemporary feminism is the question of identity (Bucholtz 1999:4).

Essentialist and Constructionist approaches to identity

As we have already noted, the question of identity (and with it the question of difference) is a key issue in almost every area of life - from questions of what constitutes national identity, to the contestation of sexual identity, to the crisis of identity articulated in the question: "Who am I?" Discussions around identity are underpinned by a tension between essentialist and non-essentialist/constructionist perspectives. Is there a clear, authentic set of characteristics that may be used to establish identity, whether the identity is sexual, national, racial or ethnic? Or is identity a fluid, changing, contextually bound concept? This question has important implications. For example, as we noted in the previous chapter, some feminists argue that the identity of the subject of knowledge shapes the knowledge itself. So whether one operates within a feminist empiricist framework, or within a standpoint theory, the identity of the subject (for example as female or black or lesbian) determines both the way one knows what one knows and the weight given to the views propounded by the "knower".

The term "essentialist" is generally employed when the categories of race, class, sex and so on are seen to be innate. Against this view of there being some "essential" nature of, for example, race or sex, is the constructionist view, which posits that these categories are social and cultural constructs. It should be noted that the terms "essentialist" and "constructionist" when applied to identity are not unproblematic. Too often they have been set in opposition to one another, whereas a number of writers point out that more appropriately the two positions should be seen as two ends of a continuum (see for example Szesnat 1997:210). Diana Fuss, likewise points out that even constructionists often rely upon "essential" terms such as "woman" or "history" or "culture" for their arguments (Fuss 1989:5). However, as the terms are in common use I shall therefore use them in considering the literature.

The debate between essentialism and constructionism is not merely an "academic" issue as the question of identity politics has illustrated. In common usage, identity politics refers to the tendency to base one's political allegiance on personal identity - Black, gay, female, Jewish etc. These various identities have been used to build a cohesive political community and heighten personal awareness and political action. Identity, in these political movements is frequently based on an assumed shared essence. Furthermore, it has often been assumed that if such essential identity is missing there is no basis for political cohesion, so that support for "essentialism" or "constructionism" becomes a politically charged issue.⁷

The essentialist/constructionist categorization is complicated further when read along with the epistemological frameworks described in the previous chapter. As we shall observe, theorists taking an essentialist view work within both the empiricist and standpoint frameworks. Likewise, some standpoint theorists as well as post-structuralists take a constructionist perspective.

Few contemporary theorists would identify themselves as "essentialist", which has come to attract a derogatory meaning. Nevertheless the assumptions in both popular discourse and some academic theory reveal that essentialism is the starting point for many people. For example, the category "Black" is often assumed to be an enduring trans-historical and trans-cultural description. Yet as the recent history of South Africa reveals, "Black" is by no means a settled category, at times meaning anyone who is not white, at others excluding people of Asian descent and people of mixed race descent. So too "woman" is often deemed to be a self-evident category, transcending social and cultural definition. I shall be arguing that this is certainly not the case. Indeed even the description "person" may be seen to be culturally and contextually shaped. Slaves, women and children, for example, were not "persons" in many Near and Middle Eastern cultures in Biblical times. Conversely, in South Africa for legal purposes a company may be said to be a person.

⁷ For an illustration of this issue and a discussion of the identity politics as it relates to lesbian and gay theory see Fuss 1989:97-112.

It should likewise not be assumed that proponents of social constructionist theories are in agreement with one another. Some theorists argue that social and cultural conditions shape identity. Others may follow the psychoanalysts and argue that language shapes identity. Common to the approaches though, is the notion that the subject, far from being "essential" or given, is constructed, or achieved. Before examining some of these constructionist approaches it is useful to trace the responses of feminist writers to the dominant Enlightenment definition of the individual which has prevailed for at least four centuries in Western philosophy.

Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* has provided the basis for the western understanding of the nature of the subject, who has unproblematically been assumed to be a rational, autonomous and self-conscious actor, whose thoughts are not historically or culturally coerced. This subject, who is defined by thinking, is contrasted with all that is considered not to think - the body and the material world - which become the "other" of the rational subject and therefore to be brought under the mastery and control of the rational subject. The subject and the object of his contemplation are clearly distinguishable. Shaped by the Enlightenment understanding, a subject in classical liberalism is seen as an autonomous individual, whose freedom is, or should be, inviolable. The authentic "man of reason" is free, unified and self-made, standing apart from historical and cultural influences. Rationality is far more important in defining him than the "incidentals" of race, gender, class or religion. Society is composed of a collection of these self-made individuals who are abstracted from relationship but who, sharing a rational desire for the common good, enter into the social contract. These Cartesian/Enlightenment ideas are not restricted to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Jantzen, by way of example, cites three twentieth century philosophers of religion (Swinburne, Ward and Brummer) who unproblematically (despite both Feuerbach and Freud!) assume a correspondence between divine and human consciousness and posit God as a kind of cosmic mind (Jantzen 1998:28/9).

With the rise of feminism in the twentieth century a recognition has developed that this autonomous, rational individual is male.⁸ As Hekman (1990:34) has it "The "Man of Reason" is gendered, not generic".

This recognition has led to some feminists pointing out that not only are individuals divided along gender lines, but all of life, including the spaces and places inhabited by the Enlightenment individual are divided too.⁹ Individuals inhabit sharply defined arenas of the public and private spheres, each of which is distinct from the other. The public sphere is the place in which properly exercised rationality suggests a common interest and goal. The private (irrational) sphere is the world of home, child-rearing and bodiliness. The separation of the public and private spheres delineates the "proper" places for men and women respectively. It is "proper" for men to occupy the public sphere, be involved in the rational activities of commerce, church and government. Women, by way of contrast, are more embodied and less rational and are associated with the private sphere.¹⁰

The classical humanist understanding of identity went more or less unchallenged until the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since then, however, challenges have come from a number of quarters, some of which we shall explore in the next three chapters. However, as we shall be paying particular attention to the post-structuralist position, before doing so it may be useful to consider, in overview, some of the other feminist attitudes to identity.

Feminist Empiricists Challenge Humanism

As we have already noted there is no one "type" of feminism.¹¹ Nor is there agreement within feminism as to the reasons for women's oppression or the ways of improving the conditions of women. Indeed, it may be said that there is no consensus on who is a woman?

⁸ See especially Genevieve Lloyd 1984 and Sandra Harding 1984.

⁹ See for example Iris Marion Young 1990.

¹⁰ The gendered nature of space is fascinatingly considered by Radcliffe in her discussion of the changing role of women in Argentina in the 1970's. As the military entered the private space of home and arrested civilians, so women left home and took to the streets (the public space) to protest against the regime. This led, so Radcliffe argues, to new forms and discourses of female identities (Radcliffe 1993).

¹¹ See footnote 1 in the Introduction.

However, as De Beauvoir (whose book The Second Sex published in 1949, can in some senses be seen as marking the launch of the current wave of feminism) notes, to ask the question is already to suggest an answer.

A man would never set out to write a book on the peculiar situation of the human male. A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man (De Beauvoir quoted in Crowley and Himmelweit 1992:43).¹²

Empiricists as we have noted, assume the possibility of arriving at an objective rational truth. Feminists working in this frame of reference (for example Lloyd 1984), point out the gendered nature of rationality. For example, feminists point out that the generic "man" in fact refers to men and not all people. Similarly, they point out that theorists use only men's lives to describe subjectivity. The ability to reason defines what is good and fully human, and women, because they are associated with sensuality and irrationality, are seen as neither rational, nor good and therefore not included in what it means to be fully human. Women, as Rae Langton points out, are thus omitted in two ways. They are omitted inasmuch as they are not included as objects of philosophical discourse and they are omitted as knowing subjects (Langton 2000:130). Feminist empiricists, in challenging these exclusions, argue that women just as much as men are rational beings able to arrive at the truth. Sexual difference (as well as the differences of class, race and culture) is irrelevant for the purposes of establishing a valid knowledge of the world. Indeed, the feminist perspective is necessary because it has been previously excluded, thus leading to a biased perspective. Including the female perspective (which is assumed to be identifiable) corrects the imbalance. Identity therefore rests in our common, essential humanity which is discovered through rational process.

However, even within its own framework, this understanding is problematic. The premise upon which liberal feminism rests - namely that there can be an equality of men and women - obliges women to "become men", because the supposed neutral public figure is in fact

¹² For example, in his doctoral thesis: Black Theology - Challenge to Mission, JNJ Kritzingner specifically states: "the personal position and stance of a researcher is an important aspect of any research methodology" (19) and goes on to describe himself as white. No mention of his sex is apparently necessary. It is assumed. Likewise, Michel Foucault in his History of Sexuality in considering homosexuality never mentions lesbianism, effectively coding homosexuality as male.

male. The liberal project takes no account of the (different) embodied experiences of men and women (for example pregnancy). Nor does it take account of the effects of societal arrangements which work against oppressed groups (including women). Iris Marion Young points out that whilst women in the public work place have increased significantly in the past thirty years, the vast majority of women still carry the burden of unpaid housework, thereby effectively undertaking two jobs for the salary of one (Young 1997(b):4).

In response to the recognition that the "genderless individual" is not genderless at all, but male, certain feminist theorists (for example Daly 1978 and Jaggar 1983) insist that one cannot simply insert women's perspectives into masculine rationality. The very concept of rationality is distorted leading to a distorted notion of identity. Instead, it is argued, the biological differences between men and women should be recognized as complementary ways of being leading to complementary ways of understanding identity. This argument has led to what Hekman describes as "strange alliances" (Hekman 1990:40), with anti-feminist conservatives (such as McMillan 1982) and radical feminists (for example Daly 1978) both arguing that woman's nature is different from man's, but that both "natures" are necessary to complete the picture. Theorists working in this framework (like the egalitarian empiricists) assume the essential "fixed truths" of, for example, ethnicity, religion or nationality. Importantly, they frequently rest on the assumption that there exists a common women's experience. In other words, a universal understanding of "woman" is created.

The bodies of women, in this empiricist understanding of identity, are regarded as both limitations on women's access to the same rights and privileges as men as well as the source of a unique set of experiences providing a unique insight, lacking by men. In the negative view, the female body with its capacity for maternity, and its "unstable" cycles of menstruation, pregnancy, lactation, is seen as an obstacle to be overcome. Equality with men can only be achieved in the public sphere (away from the private, domestic, female experience). However, these very experiences lead to a different kind of knowledge, complementary to and necessary to supplement masculine experience. A distinction between biological, bodily differentiation and sexually neutral mind is drawn. We will have occasion in chapter three to consider this issue further.

Feminist Standpoint Challenges to Humanism

Criticisms of the empiricist position have led to the development of the standpoint epistemology discussed in the previous chapter. We have already noted that standpoint epistemology has difficulties of its own. However, it has been a preferred epistemology for feminists considering the question of women's subjectivity.

Standpoint epistemology has been lent weight by Marxism, whose analysis of power relations across class divisions, has served as a basis for the proposition that "woman" constitutes a social class. Women are "alienated" from their authentic selves by the stereotypes constructed by those in power, namely men. Like all oppressed classes, they have epistemological privilege because as Marx pointed out, the most marginalized in society have least to lose whereas the powerful will invest in the status quo to maintain their position of power. Women therefore must be given epistemological privilege in defining true subjectivity. Feminists working within the standpoint frame of reference point out that "humanity" as it has been described, is male humanity and that the inclusion of "feminine perspectives", as proposed by feminist empiricism, will not change the fundamental definition. These theorists therefore argue that women (like the oppressed classes in the Marxist analysis) must construct other norms for themselves in order to define their subjectivity.¹³

In turn, this standpoint theory has been refined and redefined from a number of different perspectives. Women of colour point out that far from there being *a* women's experience, experiences are manifold and are historically, culturally and contextually shaped. In other words, in describing gender, one cannot ignore the issues of, for example, class, religion and race. Gender is only one of a number of intersecting axes which give rise to a person's identity. Black women writers further point out that the "women's experience" that is usually articulated is the experience of white, educated, middle class women. So bell hooks argues that:

¹³ See for example Hartsock 1983 and Harding 1991.

It is essential for continued feminist struggle that black women recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter-hegemony (hooks 1984:15).

Like women of colour, lesbian feminists point out that positing of *a* women's experience relies on assumptions (in this case heterosexist assumptions) which exclude lesbian women's experience and perpetuates their marginalisation.¹⁴

Against the standpoint position it has been argued that in fact there is no single standpoint and that there is no way of adjudicating between competing claims for the "truth" of women's experience. Jantzen suggests however that rather than setting up rival systems of truth, the standpoint position can be more fruitfully employed in disrupting the masculine symbolic (Jantzen 1998:124). She recognizes however that the "price-tag for this theoretical and strategic menu ... is that any one standpoint can give at best a partial perspective" (Jantzen 1998:126). Jantzen also warns that a situation on the margins does not automatically give one access to the truth. She thus qualifies the standpoint theory by urging that it is not simply one's position as oppressed, but also in one's commitment to struggle for justice, that truths emerge (Jantzen 1998:213/4). Jantzen's position would appear to be an example of the combining of different epistemological models to which we referred in the introductory chapter.

As we have already noted in the introductory chapter, we shall explore a third feminist epistemology of post-structuralism in which all grand narratives are rejected (including the grand narrative of feminism itself). In this epistemological framework identity, rather than being fixed and expressed by rational thought, or by being defined by those on the margins, is instead seen as the result of linguistic, social, cultural, historical and unconscious psychological factors. Identity is furthermore, fluid and changing:

Persons are not ready-made souls inserted into bodies by God, nor minds which could be mature and whole independent of the physical history of the individual.... Rather human personhood is *achieved* and achieved at considerable cost (Jantzen 1998:9).

¹⁴ See for example Vera Chounard & Ali Grant 1997.

We shall have occasion in chapter two, to consider in more depth the influence of the psychoanalysts, Freud and Lacan, who suggest that the subject is disrupted by the unconscious processes which result from repression of unacceptable desires. Their ideas have been taken up in postmodern and post-structuralist approaches to the question of identity which accentuate the multiplicity, even fragmentation and/or death of the subject. The premise of post-structuralism is that the individual takes up a number of subject positions within different discourses. Language, rather than describing an external reality, in fact makes meaning. The subject comes into being through participation in various discourses which may well be themselves contradictory. Postmodernism emphasizes the multiplicity of voices involved in the on-going construction of the subject: "Identity is not homogeneous but destabilized, revealed as the site of a contestation of multiple, conflicting discourses (Cady 1997: 22) with the result that the continual "multiple conflicting discourses" give rise to a highly fragmented identity, better seen as "pastiche" than "narrative" (Cady 1997: 23).

Before embarking on this investigation of the post-structuralist positions a note on the so-called "death of the subject", and feminists' response to it, is useful.

The Death of the Subject

The movement in philosophy from the valorization of the humanist autonomous individual to the complex, destabilized subject may in some ways be seen to reach its ultimate conclusion in what has been termed the "death of the subject". The death of the rational, fully conscious, Cartesian subject has been most clearly articulated by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Derrida's attack on the subject arises out of his view (informed by the work of Lacan) that the subject is the result of linguistic practices, which are constantly in flux, so that there is never a self-referential, autonomous subject. Foucault, in his consideration of the history of sexuality, argued that the subject is always culturally and historically constituted through a series of perceived similarities and differences, none of which are however stable. These challenges to the autonomous Enlightenment subject

offered by linguistics and the theorists who insist on recognizing the particular place of the body and sexuality in shaping identity, will form the focus of the next two chapters.

Feminist responses to the death of the subject are varied. Braidotti, for example, argues that so far as women are concerned, they have never been recognized as subjects and that a non-existent subjectivity cannot therefore be deconstructed (Braidotti 1987:237). Similarly, Waugh suggests that the regret over the subject's death is clearly an idea of the dominant cultures. For others, precisely because they are "Other", the death of the subject is no loss at all. Such "others" may never have experienced full subjectivity anyway and may already have sensed the extent to which their subjectivity is constructed through institutions of power (Waugh 1989:2). Diana Fuss agrees:

It does seem plausible that, like the female subject, the Afro-American subject (who may also be female) *begins* fragmented and dispersed... (Fuss 1989:95).

Other writers attempt to fuse elements of the Cartesian subject with the constituted subject.¹⁵ Against this Hekman argues that the result is an "unworkable epistemological eclecticism" (Hekman 1990:81). The subject who has retains agency but who is also constituted is, in the end, the Cartesian individual.

The writers who most clearly abandon the humanist subject of Descartes are the French feminists - Luce Iriagary, Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva. We shall consider their ideas in more detail in the following chapters.

It will be the argument of this thesis that the Cartesian autonomous self-conscious individual is not only no longer possible, but neither is he desirable from a feminist perspective. One of the ways he has been deconstructed is through an understanding of the place of language in the constitution of subjectivity, and it is to the place of language that we now therefore turn.

¹⁵ For example Tessa de Lauretis 1984 and Linda Alcoff 1988.

Chapter Two:

The speaking subject

We have already made passing reference to the place of language in the construction of identity. In this chapter we will explore this suggestion further, considering firstly the relationship between language, experience and reality. The feminist writers who have given most attention to the relationship of language and identity are Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. Because of the influence of Freud and Lacan on Kristeva and Irigaray, in particular, we shall give consideration to the theories of these two psychoanalysts in regard to language and its role in shaping identity. We shall note the debates in regard to whether sex gives rise to a particular language, that is, whether there is "masculine" and "feminine" language; or whether, on the contrary, language itself shapes gender. We will also consider the limitations faced by women in the construction of their identity.

Language is often upheld as the determining factor differentiating humanity from the rest of life. People are able to express their experience and ideas through language. However, we shall ask in this chapter: Does the subject have freedom to use and shape language? Or, are we determined and constructed by the language we use? Again, the various epistemological frameworks we have considered come into play:

Those who hold to an empiricist view of a rational independent self have ignored the fact that each human person has a history which essentially includes not the invention of a language but the entry into a language that precedes the individual. Failure to enter into it is failure to become a human subject. Thus human subjects, born of women and emerging into human community, are constituted by the symbolic order rather than the other way around (Jantzen 1998: 40).

As we shall see, from a post-structuralist perspective:

The image of the autonomous agent of knowledge, privately observing and sharing his or her thoughts with others, is also placed in jeopardy. Under current critical appraisal, the distinction between object and subject, mind and world, deteriorates; the assumption that words are external signs of internal meanings turns pale; the object of the individual's words is deconstructed; and the individual slowly disappears into the greater dance of communal life (Gergen 1991:110).

These questions are compounded when we consider that if the meanings of language are determined by the dominant groups in society - men, white people, heterosexual people, educated people and so on - what place do women, blacks, homosexuals, the poor, have as speaking subjects?

Language, experience and reality

What is the relationship of language to experience? The poles of the answer usually given suggest either that language describes and reflects reality (empirical realism), or that language creates an ever-changing perception of reality (post-structuralism). Traditionally philosophers have assumed that language may be used to describe human experience and that given the right conditions one is able to offer truthful descriptions of that experience. However, few contemporary philosophers and linguists would want to argue that language is simply a reflection of reality and that there exists a one-to-one correspondence between words and "real objects". One might argue that there has been a steady decline in the view that language is able to mirror "reality".

In order to explore this question we need to begin by asking: "what is language?" This may seem an almost facile question. Yet the debates in regard to language, particularly in the last one hundred years or so, can serve to make us aware that there is no simple, or single, answer to the question. The "commonsense" view of language is that it consists of the words we speak, write and think. However, as we shall see, it has been argued by structuralists that the term "language" has a much wider meaning and that it does not mean simply words, or vocabulary, or grammar but:

a meaning-constituting system: that is, any system - strictly verbal or other - through which meaning is constructed and cultural practices organized and by which, accordingly, people represent and understand their world... (Scott 1997:759).

The initial shift in philosophical understanding of the relationship between experience and language may be traced to Nietzsche whose work seeks to expose the concepts of "truth" and "meaning" as unstable. He suggested that, contrary to the philosophical ideas of the west since the time of Plato, there is no single reality beyond our interpretations. It is language

and grammar that produce multiple realities or perspectives. We cannot escape language, but it has no inherent meaning. Its meaning is socially determined.

Heidegger, influenced by Nietzsche, in his "Letter on Humanism" calls language the "house of Being". Language is not an instrument for communicating information. It is the unfolding of meaning itself. In other words, we do not speak language - it speaks us.

The linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (who exemplifies the structuralist view) argued that language is a structure or system where any element is meaningless except in relation to the other elements of the language. He also argued that the relationship between signifier (word or sound pattern) and signified (concept) is arbitrary. In other words there is no necessary connection between a sound pattern (the signifier) and the concept (the signified). Difference between signifiers is what gives rise to meaning.

Claude Levi-Strauss used Saussure's work in his own study of ancient cultures. Levi-Strauss showed how different symbols have different meanings in various cultures, thus endorsing Saussure's view that there are no universal signifieds. He also explored the way women are given significance in various cultures as men's objects of exchange (Sellers 1991:3-4).

Jacques Derrida challenged Saussure's understanding that there is a connection, albeit an arbitrary one, between signifiers and signified. Derrida contends that signifiers do not necessarily point to a signified, as a mirror reflects reality. Signifiers and signifieds are endlessly breaking up and forming new combinations. Furthermore, signifiers and signifieds keep transforming into one another. In other words meaning is not immediately present in a sign and is instead scattered along a whole chain of signs, never fully present in any one. Meaning is thus not apparent from a sign, and is rather a kind of "flickering presence and absence together" (Sarup 1988:36).

Derrida further argues that the whole history of western metaphysics has been based on polarities in which one of the two elements is always privileged. The primary binary is that of writing versus speech in which speech has been regarded as prior because it is "present"

and immediate. In other words in the act of speaking I seem to coincide with myself in a way that is not possible with writing. Derrida argues that behind this view is an understanding of 'man' as able to express his meanings, in full possession of himself, and able to control language. Voice becomes a metaphor of truth and authenticity. However, when deconstructed, this view is seen to reflect a privileging of only one half of the binary and an ignoring of absence of the other half. It is thus a fiction.

For Derrida, meaning is construction through *différance*. As a French neologism the word connotes both difference and deferral. Meaning is temporarily set by differentiation. However, every meaning thus established, implies within it all other possible meanings which have been suppressed. The writer or speaker can never pin down a meaning. Particularly in the case of writing, it is always open to a reader to read the text in such a way as to deconstruct the text and expose other meanings. The establishing of meaning is never a neutral act, always involving choices which reflect interest and power. So that in seeking to understand the representation of language, it becomes necessary to know the context in which the language is used. As Bucholtz suggests language is "a practice rather than a category, an actively constructed performance rather than a pre-existing role" (Bucholtz 1999:7).

We may make an example of the word "woman". The word has no independent, fixed or natural meaning. The meaning of the word can only be determined in its context - for example as distinct from "man", or as the object of sexual desire, or as the adult version of girl, and so on. The importance of this understanding of language is that language may be seen as vital site of political struggle. We should note however, that the speaking subject never controls language. We enter an already existing (though fluid and changing) system of signs. To "find one's voice" means entering into a language that already has existence.

The post-structuralist understanding has important implications for women. "Woman" for example, can be seen not to describe a verifiable "reality" but instead is a contextually determined sign - one which has no single meaning. We shall later explore some other possibilities for women. However, the post-structuralist position can also challenge some

cherished feminist assumptions. For example, the argument that one can simply redress the balance of patriarchy by introducing the voices of women to correct the balance is challenged in two ways. Firstly it is challenged by Derrida's recognition that all language is phallogocentric. For women in the west, as Irigaray and others have noted, language has been determined and used by men for their own benefit, effectively reducing women to silence (Irigaray 1985(b):164).

Secondly it is challenged by Derrida's denial that any "voice" may be an articulation of truth and authenticity. A "women's voice" is as liable to be interpreted and deconstructed as any other. Furthermore, we cannot describe our reality and our experiences without language, but once we learn a language, we are caught within its confines and can only see things in the ways "allowed" by that language. Thus "...any experience we have is shaped, molded, indeed even generated by the linguistic world in which we dwell" (Jennings 1985:56).

Some theorists, particularly those who are nervous about espousing post-structuralism on the grounds that it is "too relative" or that it is inconsistent with the political aims of feminism, have attempted to modify the radical post-structuralist position. Deborah Cameron, for example argues that whilst there is no "pre-existent and innocent subjectivity" upon which our identity is constructed, language should not be accorded privileged status in the process of construction. She names as other constructive factors socio-familial relations, the division of labour and genetic make-up (Cameron 1985:170).

Like Cameron, Douglas McGaughey looks for a "middle way" between the fiction of the one-to-one correspondence of language and reality and the radical relativism of post-structuralism. He suggests that language is both a closed system of referents, and a reflection of reality; yet it is also neither of these. It is in the space between these two possibilities that language transforms (McGaughey 1997:261). We are in a "linguistic horizon" but that linguistic horizon is not grounded in a literal factual world of reference; rather, experience and understanding are shaped by the imagination. In other words, for McGaughey the figurative takes precedence over the literal (McGaughey 1997:262). His view has important implications for women seeking to challenge the phallogocentric systems of language

(which we will explore in more detail below). McGaughey's ideas on the place of imagination and creativity offer a way of escaping the debilitating constraints of literalism. We shall explore the place of imagination later on in this chapter.

One of the most creative attempts to deal with the impasse is offered by Julia Kristeva. Kristeva distinguishes between the semiotic and the symbolic. The symbolic is the system of signifiers (to use Saussure's distinction) which is always in flux and it is by entering this flux that the subject is constituted. The semiotic, on the other hand, is the collection of sounds, rhythms, cadences and tones which are a result of bodily "drives". The semiotic does not represent anything, but is the bodily basis for language. The symbolic and semiotic are in dialectical tension with each other, resulting in an interdependence between body and soul, signification and experience. We shall have occasion to consider this challenge to body/soul dualism in more detail in chapter three. Kristeva's symbolic/semiotic tension is also, however, a challenge to the "closed system" of post-structuralism. Unlike Jacques Derrida who posits that language points to the absent, Kristeva says that through the semiotic, language in fact makes the body present (Kristeva 1984).

Also to be problematized is the notion of experience. Experience is assumed to be the way we access the truth. This has been especially the stance taken by many feminist theorists who have relied on the concept of women's experience as both a source of new knowledge as well as the perspective from which traditional epistemologies can be challenged.¹⁶ Other writers (for example Jantzen 1998) point to the twin difficulties of this approach with its implicit essentializing of women, and the privileging of certain categories of women - white, academic, Western, heterosexual. Post-structuralist theory suggests that experience has no inherent meaning.

...people do not speak their experience; rather, without forms of speaking they could not claim to have an experience (Gergen 1991:110).

In other words, in this understanding experience is given meaning through different (and often contradictory) discourses. Serene Jones, in her article *Women's Experience Between a*

¹⁶ See for example Nancy Hartsock 1983, bell hooks 1984 and 1990.

Rock and a Hard Place, outlines the debate between those writers who adopt the "rock" of universal experience and the "hard place" of the writers who, whilst not abandoning the idea of women's experience, emphasize the historical and cultural location of experience. Preferring the "hard place" she however bemoans the loss of "sturdy visions and faith-filled truths" (Jones 1997:53). Weedon, in addressing the issue, suggests that "politically disabling relativism" is not the only alternative to general or universal theories (Weedon 1997:178). To accept that any view is necessarily partial and historically specific does not imply complete relativity. "As postmodernists, we can use categories such as 'gender', 'race' and 'class' in social and cultural analysis but on the assumption that their meaning is plural, historically and socially specific" (Weedon 1997:178).

Jantzen argues that women's experience should not simply be dismissed because it cannot provide a basis for truth claims. Experience, she contends is always itself constructed within a particular historical and cultural framework. This recognition allows for a "strategic alliance" between those resisting the dominant paradigm. In other words experience becomes, not a basis for privileged ways of knowing, but the basis for a challenge to and an imaginative reconstruction of the dominant paradigm (Jantzen 1998:126).

The very notion of "women's experience" leads us back to the problem of sex/gender difference. If women's experience is different from men's we need to ask how and why this is so. Is the difference attributable to some essential difference between men and women or is the difference socially and culturally constituted? Or, indeed, is it something of both? It is too easily assumed that "sex" refers to biological difference and "gender" to socially constructed difference. However, more recently some writers, for example, Moira Gatens in her *Feminism and Philosophy* contends that *both* "sex and gender are theoretical constructs" (Gatens 1991:114). Judith Butler argues that the distinction between male and female bodies is just as arbitrary as the distinction between supposedly masculine and feminine characteristics (Butler 1989 and 1993). We will have occasion to examine this more closely in chapter three. For now it is important that both "sex" and "gender" should be problematized and not regarded as self-evident, transcendent and independent categories. As

Iris Marion Young, who suggests that gender should be seen as multiple rather than binary, reminds: "Gender is a relational concept, not the naming of an essence" (Young 1997(a):18).

Psychoanalytic theory and language

One of the ways in which feminist theory contests the patriarchal captivity of language is in the context of the psychoanalytic theory of meaning (Weedon 1997:9). Until the groundbreaking work of Sigmund Freud, human subjectivity and rational consciousness were unquestioningly identified. Freud, and following him, Jacques Lacan, in their different ways, exposed the place of the unconscious in shaping subjectivity. Freud suggested that the unconscious is unknowable but decentres "man's" identity. Repressed sexual drives form the basis of the unconscious and from time to time disrupt the stability of the ego-consciousness.¹⁷

Lacan draws substantially upon the work of Freud but also radically alters Freud's thesis that sexuality stems from biological drives, instead suggesting that sexuality is socially, specifically linguistically, constituted. Lacan, following Freud, suggests that the self is much less apparent, rational, stable and identifiable than western philosophy (especially as posited by Rene Descartes) had previously suggested. However, the unconscious has its own language and may be accessed through psychoanalysis. As we shall see, this has great significance for feminist writers.

Lacan argues that the self is constituted by images and representations and has no essential quality. Indeed, for Lacan self and society are inseparable. As we shall see, it is language which constitutes the subject. Without traversing in detail Lacan's description of the formation of the ego through the so-called mirror-stage, the recognition of the self through the (m)other, and the entry into the symbolic world of language, we may note several relevant theses of Lacan. Like Freud, Lacan founds his description of the development of the self on the first years of human development. Unlike Freud, primary identification for

¹⁷ We shall examine further details of Freud's theory in chapter four. In this chapter, because of his influence on the understanding of language, we shall pay attention to Freud's successor, Lacan.

Lacan does not arise from the unconscious biological drives, because for Lacan, there is no unconscious prior to language. The unconscious is constructed by language.

1. Initially a new-born infant does not distinguish between itself and its world. All is of a piece. The child sees itself in the "mirror" of its mother's face, and the image is internalized. The child feels complete and whole.
2. However the sense of wholeness conflicts with the infant's experiences of alternating states of love and hate, depending on its state of well-being. So for example when the infant is hungry and frustrated it experiences itself as 'bad' and in danger of psychic disintegration. To overcome this, the infant splits off the bad feelings and projects them onto the (m)other.
3. So the infant begins to distinguish between the "me" and "not-me". A sense of identity begins to emerge. In the mirror stage, the ego ideal is shaped by the child recognizing and idealizing the (m)other; but because the ideal *is* other, the ideal causes both pleasure and frustration. The child's identity is taken from the (m)other, that is something outside itself, an "image" of itself, yet one with whom it feels to be part. The child deals with the frustration by internalizing the other, causing a split within the self between what is actually felt, and what is idealized. By accepting itself as a self, the child separates from the mother.
4. Separation from the (m)other generates both anxiety and aggression, which must be repressed. The means of repression is the entry into language. Language gives the child mastery over its unbearable emotions and loss of the beloved object.
5. As the child enters into language it makes sounds which signify the mother's coming and going, and "Thus the symbol manifests itself first of all as the murder of the thing and this death constitutes in the subject the elimination of his desire" (Lacan 1977:104). Desire, in other words, is repressed into the unconscious.
6. The entry into language constitutes the process of individuation. However, the acquisition of language is achieved at great cost because it involves internalizing otherness with the concomitant splitting of the ego and its lack. Language, according to Lacan, works through lack and so to take on language means becoming subject to desire.

7. Biological and emotional needs are thus translated into demands expressed in language, but the demand can never be satisfied since the demand is both for the thing expressed but also the total love and acceptance by the (m)other.
8. Desire can thus never be fulfilled because, not only is it hidden behind the expressed desire and therefore not confronted, but also the (m)other is unable to meet the absolute demands of the unconscious need.
9. Lacan re-interprets Freud's Oedipal phase, by translating a biological description into a linguistic one. Freud's "father" Lacan describes as authority/law which places similar demands upon a child who has to leave the mother and enter into "The Law of the Father" thus becoming a subject in society. The individual cannot enter into society without subjecting itself to the symbolic order of language.
10. For Lacan the symbol of authority, the "universal signifier" is the phallus (as distinct from the penis). Language and rationality are thus identified with the masculine. The unconscious (other) is then identified with the feminine.
11. The symbolic order is determined before the subject enters it and so the subject's position is predetermined. This understanding clearly both contradicts the liberal view of the autonomous self and is consistent with the contentions of structuralism.
12. Lacan insisted that although repressed, the unconscious has its own language. The work of the psychoanalyst is to still the speech of the conscious mind and to facilitate the language of desire, the language of the unconscious.

Lacan's understanding of the place of language has assisted feminist theory in two important ways:

- a) in challenging the self-conscious individual of Cartesian thought, and in suggesting instead that far from the idea that "I think therefore I am", rather "I am where I do not think";
- b) in his demonstration that gender identity is part of the symbolic order. This has assisted feminists in challenging biological accounts of gender which are used to justify sexist practices.

Lacan's theory however, offers a number of problems for feminist theory.

1. Lacan accepts uncritically Freud's definition of female sexuality as a lack of normative male sexuality.
2. Furthermore, Lacan ignores the differences between individual women and indeed the differences *within* each woman.
3. Whilst Lacan says that the universal signifier (the phallus) is not equivalent to the penis, it is clear that for Lacan masculine anatomy determines the male/female distinction. Men, as possessors of a penis, can aspire to power. Women, in the symbolic realm, have no position except in their relation to men (Weedon 1997:53).
4. According to Lacan there can be no women subjects, because subjectivity requires language and language is masculine. Women, when they speak, imitate males.

...according to Lacan to speak is to enter into this masculine realm, the play of signifiers, which is the world of literature and philosophy and theology, the world of civilization....it follows in Lacan's system that women literally have no language: in order to speak women must use men's language... (Jantzen 1998: 42).

Jantzen, challenges this view noting that even within Lacan's own framework, his selection of the phallus as the universal signifier, is not consistent with his understanding (following Saussure) that the meaning of every term is understood only in relation to that which is different. The phallus is therefore not the universal signifier. It is, she contends, the dominant signifier - dominant at the expense of women. And, if the signifier is not universal, but dominant, it can be resisted (Jantzen 1998: 51/2).

A further caution is in order here. There is no inherent reason why sexual relations should be privileged above other forms of social relations in considering how identity is constructed. This can easily result because of the importance and quantity of the work undertaken by psychoanalysts who have addressed concerns not yet developed in other discourses. In particular, we do well to remember that psychoanalytic theory is itself socially and historically produced, and therefore inherently patriarchal.

Can women speak? Can women become subjects?

For a number of feminist writers, the silencing of women is one of the most significant features of patriarchy. The silencing of women Deborah Cameron argues (1985:151ff), takes place in several different ways:

1. By exclusion from certain forms of public discourse, for example in the academy or law courts;
2. By custom; for example by not making speeches at weddings;
3. By negative value judgements about their speech, for example that they "nag" or "gossip";
4. By the construction, by men, of "what is feminine" and how women should therefore speak (or not), for example by proscribing women from swearing.

I suggest however, that Cameron does not go far enough. It is not simply the case that women do not speak. Indeed they are often accused of speaking too much. Rather, it is the case that women do not have a language to speak. As Lacan has argued, because language is phallogocentric, representing the male order, women therefore cannot speak by virtue of the fact that they are not subjects, but objects. So, as Spivak concludes, the subaltern *cannot* speak (Spivak 1993:104). The subaltern is prevented from speaking because (in Spivak's example) the intellectual does not see the subaltern as an equal, a subject. The subaltern in turn does not know how to speak because layers of oppression have denied her subjectivity. The duty of the intellectual suggests Spivak, is to speak for the subaltern, recognizing that even as such speaking occurs, the voice of the subaltern is silenced.

John Caputo asks a similar question: "Is there a way that man can write as, for, about or like a woman, or does his writing oppress or silence her?" He concludes that there is no definitive answer, but that the aporia is an "undecidable". His expression of the question is so well articulated that it is worth quoting in full.

Can a man write about women? Would that not make woman his "subject"? Can a man write like a woman? Would that not be more masculine mastery, one more masculine usurpation or co-optation of what is properly feminine, one more move men make against women? Were a man to adopt a feminine pseudonym and were he to write in a feminine voice, and

even to do so quite well, would that amount, not to the invention of a new voice, but rather to stealing women's voice, and so once again to more injustice? But if a man could not write of or in the name of women, or like a woman, or if there were no room for men in feminism, or among women, or for a womanly side of man, if all that would be reducible to more injustice, then has not woman become something powerfully proprietary and appropriative, a way of silencing new voices, with all the exclusionary, excommunicative violence that appropriation implies? These questions are not puzzles waiting to be solved, or resolved, definitively one way or the other, by some clever and skillful theoretician, but more or less permanent aporias that block our way, that divert and detour us, that cost us time even as they give us the time of sexual difference. These aporias are not temporary roadblocks to be cleared away but undecidables that hover over and constitute the space within which the question of woman takes place, the space of "woman" - and of men, of wo/men, of the relationships of men and women (Caputo 1997(b):142/3).

Others take a more positive view (in the sense that remedies can be found) of women's silence. For example Jantzen argues that the problem is not that women do not have language, but that men, including Lacan, refuse to listen (Jantzen 1998:51). Susan Brison notes a similar problem facing survivors of trauma:

In order to construct self-narratives, then, we need not only the words with which to tell our stories but also an audience able and willing to hear us and understand our words as we intend them (Brison 1997:21)

and she goes on to note that without an audience to tell, the subject faces disintegration. As with Jantzen's observation that men refuse to listen to women speaking, Brison notes that more often than not people do not want to listen to the survivors of trauma (1997:21). bell hooks, in similar vein, notes that those who inhabit the margins are even silenced with their own stories:

No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk (hooks 1990:151).

These observations highlight the necessary place of others in the construction of our self-narrative/selves. This interdependency of self and other/s will be further explored in chapter four.

How then are women and others who are silenced to become speaking subjects? The answers depend on one's position in regard to feminist epistemologies. For example, Simone de Beauvoir's writing is illustrative of the position which regards women as disadvantaged because of their socialization as women and therefore forced to use male language in order to negotiate their way in patriarchal power structures. But use it they must, if they wish to be heard. As we have noted, Spivak suggests that others need to speak for the subaltern/women, recognizing that their speaking is not accurate, but the best in the circumstances.

The writings of Irigaray and Cixous on the other hand, are representative of a different model when they suggest that women are not simply oppressed, but that the feminine is repressed in language, philosophy and culture (Gatens 1991:113). Repression, as we have noted from the overview of Lacan, involves denial and relegation to the unconscious of that which is to be repressed. If indeed this is what happens in patriarchal society, "feminine writing" will result in the exposition to consciousness that which has been repressed, namely the female subject. We shall consider this further in the next section.

Women become subjects, or "Resistance is the secret of joy"

As she goes to her death (a sentence imposed on her for killing the woman who genitally mutilated her) the central protagonist of Alice Walker's Possessing the Secret of Joy is acclaimed by other women who have similarly suffered. Their encouragement to her, displayed by means of a banner held up to her as she walks to her execution site, is that "resistance is the secret of joy" (Walker 1993:264). These other women are "silenced" inasmuch as they may not speak, but they find an alternative language (the banner) to articulate their solidarity and resistance.

Citing M Shawn Copeland, Rankka notes the use of verbal defiance and ritual in combination to oppose persecution under slavery. Language as a form of resistance has especially been explored by feminist, and especially womanist theologians and writers. For example, verbal defiance - "sass" or back-chat - is used to defy the oppressor as well as give

the oppressed a sense of her own esteem (Rankka 1998:140/1). (In chapter three we will have occasion to note the place of the body and ritual in the re-creation of identity by those who have survived trauma, torture and persecution.)

Resistance is not limited to back-chat however. Contrary to the views of Spivak that the subaltern cannot speak, Susan Hekman cautions that language should not be seen as a closed system (Hekman 1990:189). Therefore silences, gaps and ambiguities provide the basis for resistance, opening subversive possibilities in the dominant discourses. Silence itself can become a speech-act open to many interpretations, suggest Morgan and Combes (2001:361). Whereas silence is usually defined against speech, it can also, when it frees itself from the (male) definitions of lack or absence, be a subversive will not to say, or to unsay.

Writing and speech as a form of resistance is absolutely crucial for feminist psychoanalysts too, because in their view it is not only women who are oppressed, but the feminine which is repressed, in language, philosophy and culture. These writers espouse the method of deconstruction which seems especially suited to the project of feminism because it recognizes that women have to work from within the old masculine language, but also that even within that language, there are different possibilities. "To resist is not simply a negation but a creative process" (Halperin 1995:60).

Luce Irigaray exemplifies one example of such "creative process" (Irigaray 1985(a); 1985(b)). She uses the model of women's bodies to disrupt phallogocentric writing. For example, she recognizes that phallogocentrism commodifies women's bodies, turning them into objects of male desire, and a currency of exchange. Irigaray argues however, that women's sexuality however is "not one". Based on the "two lips" of the labia, women experience plurality. By speaking of women's sexual pleasure, Irigaray not only mentions the unmentionable - women's sexual autonomy - thus disrupting "acceptable" speech, but she also challenges the singularity of phallogocentrism. Irigaray suggests that a women's language will not be easy to develop, but she imagines it might include a refusal to keep rigid divisions between subject and object and a nonhierarchical articulation of differences rather than a privileging of hierarchical oneness (Irigaray 1985(b)).

For Helene Cixous, writing the female body involves returning to patriarchal consciousness that which it has repressed, namely the female body and its sexuality. This is not to replace one theory with another. The point of feminine writing (*l'écriture féminine*) is to displace old oppositions, especially the male/female dualism. Feminine writing is plural, anti-essentialist and anti-theoretical (Hekman 1990:45). Susan Sellers cites an example of Cixous' plural, anti-essentialist writing. In her French and English text *Vivre l'Orange/To Live the Orange* (Cixous 1989) Cixous describes her sudden realization of the magnificence of an orange she notices as she is writing. She is then interrupted by a telephone call which reminds her that the Parisian women are marching in support of the women of Iran. In turn this leads her to remember the Nazi concentration camps in which six million people lost their lives. Cixous' dilemma is then to inscribe all these parts into her writing, rather than choosing the most important, and omitting (or repressing) the rest (Sellers 1991:146-147). As with writing, so too with the subject. The dilemma is how to incorporate multiple aspects of one's identity, without preferring one and repressing the rest. We shall give further attention to this in chapter five.

Toni Morrison's novel Beloved (1987) has as one of its central themes the idea of the return of the repressed. This theme operates at many levels. One illustration will however suffice. The central protagonist is Sethe, a slave woman. Her owner, a white man, in order to punish her for trying to escape (establish herself as a person) whips her, causing severe injury to her back. The white man literally inscribes her body. She is the non-being on whom he writes. Sethe makes a second and successful attempt to escape and is encountered by an outcast white woman who "reads" her wounds inscribed as an image of a tree - a "chokecherry tree". In an attempt to heal the wounds she gathers cobwebs and lays them over Sethe's back. An alternate "reading" of Sethe's injuries is offered by Sethe's mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, who sees "a pattern of roses of blood" on the sheet where Sethe has been lying. However, unlike Amy Denver, the white girl, Baby Suggs keeps the reading to herself. She concentrates rather on healing the wounds, by rubbing in ointment. Long after the physical wounds have healed, a third reading is provided by Paul D, another runaway slave, who

becomes Sethe's lover. He sees the scars as "like the decorative work of an iron-smith too passionate for display".

The white man writes in the flesh of the black woman. Others, who themselves are oppressed, offer readings of the inscription. Sethe herself cannot read what is written in her flesh (on her back) - she can find a reading only through others. She has to learn how to read herself through others. However, until her encounter with Paul D, she has chosen to try and forget the events surrounding her whipping. Indeed when Paul D kisses her back she cannot feel it, because the "skin on her back had been dead for years". It is only with the arrival of Paul D, and because of him, Sethe's murdered daughter Beloved, that that which was repressed is given voice. Finally, the object of the white man's writing finds her own black, female subjectivity, by bringing back to consciousness all that has been repressed. The process cannot happen however, without other (sympathetic) people "reading" her. Once again we note the place of others in the construction of our identity.

Following Lacan, the French feminists including Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, amongst others, note that desire is that which is repressed. Desire is revealed only through displacements and ruptures of consciousness. Exposing the repressed desires is one way of "resisting". This is precisely what they as post-structuralist feminists seek to do. By exposing the repressed and bringing it into conscious discourse they seek to disrupt the phallogocentric discourse which has assumed a unified, rational self. Thus "...one of the most important struggles is to engage in the subversion of phallogocentric discourses and to foster a language that is able to express the specificity of the feminine" (Gatens 1991:113).

The way Irigaray proceeds with this disruption is by displacing masculinist structures, and most especially the male divine, with a new imaginary. This creative process involves creating a new imaginary which enables women to become subjects as women. Because the language of religion is the "master-discourse *par excellence*" (Jantzen 1998:17) the place to begin the disruptive activity of resisting and the creating of a new imaginary is in the language of religion. In order to do grow into their own subjectivity, women need a horizon, an "ideal of wholeness to which we aspire" (Jantzen 1998:12). This horizon involves

"projecting the divine according to our gender" (Jantzen 1998:15) which in turn involves a new set of values which are divine.

Having a God and becoming one's gender go hand in hand (Irigaray 1993:67).

We will examine this further in chapter five.

We have come a long way from the naïve assumption that there is a one-to-one correspondence between reality and language, and that subjects freely use language to express their rational thoughts. It seems that in some ways "language speaks us". For women, the fact that language as we know it is masculine presents a number of problems and challenges in speaking their own voices and in "writing the feminine". However, as post-structuralist theorists contend, language itself is not a stable and unified system, and it falls therefore to be disrupted and deconstructed as women resist phallogocentrism, seeking to enter into their own subjectivity.

As we have already noted, speaking is not the only form of language. The language of resistance, similarly, may take place in a variety of ways. Particularly for women, the challenge is to incorporate the body into writing. As we consider further what this might entail, we need to note that "the body" is a term which also falls to be problematised. We shall consider some of these issues further in chapter three.

Chapter Three:

The body is the subject

...the redefinition of the female feminist subject starts with the revaluation of the bodily roots of subjectivity, rejecting the traditional vision of the knowing subject as universal, neutral and consequently gender free... The first and foremost of locations in reality is one's own embodiment (Braidotti 1992:182).

One of the risks of constructionism and its emphasis on the place of language in the construction of identity is that one can be led to ignore the materiality of the body, or even perpetuate the body/mind Cartesian dualism so criticised by post-structuralism. In this chapter we will pay particular attention to the embodied nature of the subject. We will trace the effects of the body/mind dualism in Western philosophy. In considering some of the challenges to that dualism we shall note some of the effects that traumatic experiences have on the subject's identity. We will also investigate some possibilities beyond dualism and reductionism.

The perceived place of the body in different conceptions of subjectivity falls along a continuum between two poles. At one end, in what we have called the essentialist understanding of the subject, identity is supposed to endure irrespective of historical or material conditions. This essential identity is usually associated with the soul, or the "true self". In this understanding, the body is given significance only in the consideration of "essentials" such as sexual difference, where biological differences decree that certain activities are "natural" to men or women.

On the other hand, a constructionist view of the subject believes that the self has no essential nature and is constructed and formed by, *inter alia* language and the repressed desires and drives of the unconscious which, to a greater or lesser extent, are irrecoverable. Within this constructionist understanding there exist a wide variety of approaches to the place given the body. Freud, for example, takes an approach which relies on biological differences in which men are the norm and women are the "other". Other writers, as we shall see, suggest that sex itself is a social construct and the body only has significance insofar as meaning or identity is attributed to it.

...the body, far from being some fundamentally stable, acultural constant to which we must *contrast* all culturally relative and institutional forms, is constantly "in the grip" as Foucault puts it, of cultural practices. Not that this is a matter of cultural *repression* of the instinctual or natural body. Rather, there is no "natural" body.....Our bodies, no less than anything else that is human, are constituted by culture (Bordo 1996:392).

I shall be suggesting that there is no such thing as "the body" as a discrete and objective phenomenon and that to attempt to investigate it as such is impossible. The body represents a series of overlapping identities and is simultaneously the way we represent those identities or self-images. The body, as Braidotti suggests, is "...a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic and the sociological" (Braidotti 1992:184).

Body language

In most philosophical considerations of language, attention is paid to its mental aspects - the meaning of words, their relationship to concepts, and so on, but very little attention is paid to the embodiment of language. One thus runs the risk, as we have already noted, of implying a privileged place for language in the construction of subjectivity. However,

...language, whether spoken or written, is also in the first place physical: were it not for the body producing sounds, rhythms and silences, there would be no speech; similarly written language consists of physical marks on pages...Without a physical basis in the bodies of speakers and writers there could be no language (Jantzen 1998:194).

As Sampson points out, we cannot escape the fact that all our discourse is embodied - from the distance we stand from one another when we speak, to the tone of voice (Sampson 1998:24).

Recognising this "embodied" nature of language is one of the most important contributions of Julia Kristeva who maintains that language is composed of two elements - the symbolic and the semiotic. The semiotic describes the organization of drives which fire our need to communicate. The semiotic is comprised of rhythm, tone, sounds and so on. These are not meaningful in themselves, but together with the symbolic constitute language signification (Kristeva 1984). Kristeva's work descends (though with considerable modification) from the

work of Freud, whose influence we have already mentioned in the previous chapter. Freud's view of persons is that we are profoundly materialistic inasmuch as the core of our being consists of unconscious wishful impulses which are not accessible to our rational consciousness, but which drive us towards seeking satisfaction. It is precisely these drives that propel us towards communication.

Our positing of the semiotic is obviously inseparable from a theory of the subject that takes into account the Freudian positing of the unconscious (Kristeva in Oliver 1997:39).

Cartesian Dualism

The separation of mind from body is a peculiar phenomenon of Western philosophy. Yet it is an almost unquestioned assumption. Most philosophers trained in the Western tradition will be brought up short by Jane Flax's question "...why would anyone assume such a distinction [between mind and body] is meaningful or central to philosophic discourse?" (Flax 1992(a):197).

Her question notwithstanding, ever since Aristotle twenty-four centuries ago ascribed to Pythagoras a table of opposites, dualism has shaped and dominated Western philosophical thinking. That which was described by Aristotle, was consolidated by Descartes. Cartesian dualism assumes two mutually exhaustive categories, one of which (the left-hand column) is assumed to be inherently superior to the other. A table of such opposites may read thus:

Mind	Body
Culture	Nature
One	Many
Reason	Passion
Stable	Changing
Light	Dark
Good	Bad
Male	Female
White	Black
Spirit	Flesh

Descartes claimed that the mind is an immaterial substance, separable not only from the body it inhabits, but also from the whole world of material bodies. Furthermore, according to Descartes' infamous *Cogito ergo sum* it is the rational mind which gives identity. The

body is merely the substance which the mind inhabits. Cartesian dualism has been rejected by many twentieth century philosophers. However, the effects of that dualism continue to be felt even in postmodern western philosophy.

One of the consequences of the separation of the rational mind from all of the material world is the identification of God with the rational mind and the separation of God and the material world. God is the rational mind extrapolated; the rational mind is finite, whilst the divine is infinite. However both are disembodied. Despite the many challenges to Cartesian philosophy, this idea of God persists in western Christian theology. Consequently what is "like God" (that is, disembodied, rational) is clearly better and more desirable than, for example, the body and the emotions and the material world. This has led, in Christian religious understanding, to an exaltation of the rational, and, significantly, to an association of the body with that which is sinful, "fallen", and, again significantly, female. These are issues to which we shall return in the final chapter.

The devaluation of the body affects every area of life. Western Christianity (despite the assurances of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15!) assumes the survival of an immortal soul as against the death of the mortal (and therefore less valued) body. Careers involving "intellectual" activity are more valued than jobs requiring physical labour. Susan Bordo notes the literally life-threatening effects of body/mind dualism in the lives of anorectics, who attempt to gain total control by the mind over the body by refusing to eat (Bordo 1996:395). Anorectics typically describe their bodies as alien, disgusting, the enemy and a prison. She notes also that "ninety percent of all anorectics are women" (Bordo 1996:402), linking the body/mind dualism to that of the male/female:

What is the meaning of these gender associations in the anorectic? I propose that there are two levels of meaning. One has to do with fear and disdain for traditional female roles and social limitations. The other has to do, more profoundly, with a deep fear of the "Female", with all its nightmarish archetypal associations of voracious hungers and sexual insatiability (Bordo 1996:403).

Elizabeth Grosz notes that a dualist understanding has given rise to three attitudes towards the body, which again persist despite challenges to Cartesian philosophy. First, the body is

treated as a site for scientific/biological investigation. Second, the body is viewed as a tool or machine, at the disposal of the conscious mind. Third, it is considered a medium for self-expression as well as the medium through which the world is mediated to the mind (Grosz 1994:9,10). To these three may be added a fourth, namely the view of the body (especially the female body) as a commodity. In all these understandings the body is inferior to and separated from the mind. The body is experienced, at best, as alien, the "not-self", and at worst as the enemy, or that which confines and limits the self. The body is the locus of all that threatens to overwhelm us and take control of our rational selves.

What is of further concern for feminists is that all four of these dualist understandings have been adopted in the cause of patriarchal oppression, which has, as has been well documented,¹⁸ justified itself by associating women with the body, fluidity, instability (in other words the column on the right). Women are thus rendered unfit for public/political life, which requires rationality and stability, assumed to be the possession of men.

Challenges to Cartesian dualisms have taken many forms. Paul John Eakin offers a fascinating survey of neurological and autobiographical descriptions of the connection between body image and identity (Eakin 1999). He cites for example the case of "Madame I", a young woman who lost body sensation as a result of neurological dysfunction.

Madame I's pathetic touching of her limbs stages a startling inversion of Descartes thought experiment: "I feel my body" she seems to say, "therefore I am". Her troubled condition reminds us that it is possession of a body image that anchors and sustains our sense of identity (Eakin 1999:10,11).

Another of Eakin's examples concerns the autobiography of Lucy Grealy, who, as a result of bone cancer at a young age, undergoes an operation in which a large part of her jaw is removed, leaving her terribly disfigured. Much of her story concerns the responses of others to her disfigurement and her own life-long desire for surgery to correct the disfigurement because her identity is as others see her. She finally has the corrective surgery and the chance of resolving her identity problems by recognizing her new self. However (and this is

¹⁸ See for example Ruether 1983:72 and ff.

something we will explore in chapter four) she cannot do this alone. "Identity ... is always negotiated interpersonally" (Eakin 1999:40).

As a powerful example of the challenge to body/mind dualism we shall examine the effects on identity of trauma.

Trauma,¹⁹ Memory and Identity

Just how inseparable is the body from identity is strikingly illustrated when one comes to consider the effect of torture on identity. Those who survive trauma frequently remark that they are not the same as they were before the traumatic event. Some people even speak of a traumatic event as a death of the self (Brisson 1997:12; Cavanaugh 1998:41). Elaine Scarry suggests that intense pain destroys a person's self as well as a person's language:

...as the context of one's world disintegrates, so the context of one's language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and subject (Scarry 1985:35).

Trauma evidently has an effect on identity. This is significant for three reasons. Firstly, it challenges essentialist notions of identity. We are changed by trauma. We are "not the same"; and, where the trauma is inflicted by other human beings, there follows a destruction of the belief that one can be oneself in relation to others (Brisson 1997:14). We shall say more of this later. Secondly, as Scarry notes, torture leads to the disintegration of language. This would suggest that language is not "external" to identity, but instead the very constituent of identity. Thirdly, the fact that trauma is supposed to be inflicted on the body only, yet identity is altered, is a challenge to the supposed severability of mind and body. Indeed, just as much as the traumatic event is not confined to the body, nor is the memory of it confined to the mind:

memory lives primarily in the body. ...Similarly, where people have been abused as children or have long been forced into subservience, their bodies betray their memories. They instinctively turn their faces from blows, stand bowed, or try to remain unnoticed (Hamilton 1995:6)

¹⁹ I shall use "trauma" not in the strictly medical sense, but in the sense of a wounding of the body/spirit by the intentional act of another.

and

The main change in the modality as well as in the content of the most salient traumatic memories is that they are more tied to the body than memories are typically considered to be (Brison 1997: 17).

This embodied quality of memory challenges the standard philosophical question of whether it is continuous body or continuous memory that determines personal identity.

Brison suggests that there is fairly clear consensus among psychologists as to the continuity of physical and mental anguish:

...a person feels utterly helpless in the face of a force that is perceived to be life-threatening. The immediate psychological responses to such trauma include terror, loss of control, and intense fear of annihilation (Brison 1997:13).

Long term effects of trauma include inability to sleep or concentrate, depression, lack of interest in that which formerly gave meaning to life, and a foreshortened sense of future, even to the extent of not being able to imagine beyond the present moment. These effects are neither "in the body" nor "mental" alone, but affect the body/mind.

The dualisms are further challenged in the work of Cooley who considers the connection between traumatic pain and the destruction of identity of both the victim *and* the perpetrator of torture (Cooley 1994:57ff). She bases her work on that of Elaine Scarry who examines Amnesty International documents detailing circumstances of torture to extract confessions (Scarry 1985). It is Scarry's contention that both victim and torturer "lose" their identity. The victim, in the process of torture, experiences the separation of body and voice. In the exclusive sensation of pain, the victim is alienated from her or his own body, which is the victim's enemy. The excessive nature of the pain "...destroys the capacity to imagine self, world, and the possibility of transcendent realities; in short, extreme sensation annihilates even the possibility of subjectivity for the sufferer" (Cooley 1994:62).

But the victim also "loses" her voice. It is at the point of "confession" the victim's voice is destroyed. The confession is another's language and in speaking it the victim loses her own identity. Patriarchy performs a similar process on women:

Patriarchy silences women by excluding their embodiment from the terms of its language... So sexual and divine love between embodied subjects are rendered impossible within the social and temporal framework of patriarchy (Anderson 1998:177).

We shall later examine some possibilities of healing for those who have "lost" their voices or been silenced.

The Sexed Body in Question

Although "the body" is a key term in feminist thought, the term is by no means simple and agreed. One of the ways that the concept has been investigated in feminist thought is through the male/female distinction. Elizabeth Grosz has outlined the various ways in which feminist thought has responded to this distinction (Grosz 1994:15-19):

1. Egalitarian feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir make the distinction between biological sex and the way sex is lived in culture. Women's bodies are regarded by De Beauvoir as a hindrance to be overcome in order to give expression to the (sexually neutral) mind. It should however be noted that De Beauvoir, following the existentialist philosophers, does not give *a priori* significance to the body. The body has to be interpreted, but she also contends that the handicap of women in society has its basis in the material body (See Gatens 1991:52).
2. Social constructionists such as Juliet Mitchell have a more positive attitude to the body, regarding it as not so much to be "overcome", but rather as a biological phenomenon whose role and representation is socially and politically constructed. In this understanding the body is viewed as a-historical and pre-cultural. These writers distinguish between sex (by which is meant anatomy/biology) and gender (by which is meant a social/cultural construct) (Barrett 1992:202). This opposition between sex and gender has itself recently been undermined and criticized from a number of perspectives.

- 2.1 Alternative views of the body have been emerging. For example, it is becoming recognized that diet, environment and typical activities may vary considerably producing historically specific bodies with specific desires, capacities and form.
- 2.2 We have, certainly in the western world, seen the gradual disappearance of gender differences in such behaviours as dress, body appearance, hair-style and even voice pitch. What constitutes sexual difference is itself questionable:

...whether the debate be about facial hair, short hair, or bald heads being only male, about sexual defilement being naturally female due to women's anatomy, or about sex-changes for those whose bodies do not match their desires (Anderson 1998:7).

- 2.3 Most people assume there to be two sexes, mutually exclusive and unchangeable. However there are many exceptions to this assumption - for example hermaphrodites (people born with ambiguous chromosomal and reproductive organs), and transsexuals (people who have had their bodies surgically and hormonally altered).
- 2.4 The distinction between femininity and masculinity is not self-evident. The terms are constructed in relation to each other:

Concepts of masculinity and femininity are not opposites but **mutual** constructs....in a process that is never complete..... Masculinity & femininity are not character traits defined in childhood/adolescence but on-going social processes (Johnson 1997:22).

- 2.5 The distinction between sex and gender still does not address the problem of the association of maleness with reason and rationality and femaleness with corporeality. As Moira Gatens points out "...in the last decade or so Anglo-American feminists have turned a very critical eye to the sex/gender distinction and its obvious complicity in the mind/body dualism" (Gatens 1991:115).
- 2.6 In a similar vein, Braidotti, citing Butler, argues that theories of gender assume a subject ("woman") who has certain qualities and attributes. Those qualities and attributes are prescribed by the dominant (male) discourse. The definition of gender thus at best hides differences, but also upholds a heterosexist patriarchal norm (Braidotti 1991:63).
- 2.7 Furthermore, as Braidotti and Gatens, amongst others, point out, the sex/gender distinction is peculiar to the English speaking world (Braidotti 1991:50 and Gatens

1991:114). The debate is thus a culturally specific one. In French there is only one adjective - *feminin*.

The crux of the issue of difference as it is understood here is that difference does not have to do with biological 'facts' so much as with the manner in which culture marks bodies and creates specific conditions in which they live and recreate themselves (Gatens 1992:133).

Indeed, as Anderson points out, definitions of sex in western philosophy and theology have always involved more than simply anatomical specifics (Anderson 1998:7).

3. These criticisms have led to a third response, adopted by writers such as Luce Irigaray, Gayatri Spivak, Moira Gatens and Helene Cixous who refuse to make the sex/gender distinction. However, following the ideas of Foucault, these writers advocate a concept of "sexual difference", simultaneously denying essentialism and rejecting romantic feminist ideas of complementarity. Whilst arguing for a recognition of difference between masculine and feminine, they note that the body is neither biologically given, nor outside of culture and history. It is represented and used in specific ways as a result of specific historical power relations. The body is sexually specific, but not in any essentialist way. Rather, sexual difference is one difference along with a number of others (such as race and class), and such differences attract and require cultural markings. For these writers:

Far from being an inert, passive, noncultural and ahistorical term, the body may be seen as the...site of contestation, in a series of economic, political, sexual and intellectual struggles (Grosz 1994:19).

Braidotti similarly observes that the body is neither purely a biological or sociological category, but is an overlapping of physical, symbolic and sociological (Braidotti 1992:184). Kristeva goes even further and insists that the body is in process. The body and even sexuality are products of discourse (Kristeva 1987:46). Similarly Stanley and Wise note that the body is seen better as "embodiment" which is a cultural process, a "becoming", whose meaning is not fixed (Stanley & Wise 1993:196). For Judith Butler the body is the stage on

which gender is performed so that aspects of identity are not uncovered, but projected (Butler 1993).

Embodied resistance and the re-making of identity

Physical trauma, as we noted, affects the identity of the body/mind. It is thus to be anticipated that healing will likewise involve the body/mind. In this section we shall examine some of the possibilities for healing and the shaping of identity of those whose identity has been traumatized, silenced and ignored.

Cooley suggests that it is essential to the process of healing, when working with victims of torture, that the victim be given her or his own voice back. The victim speaks and so is able to re-create identity. The voicing of pain is a moment of creativity (Cooley 1994:59). Brison makes the same point when she suggests that in order to re-make the self after a traumatic experience, we are dependent on others to hear the narrative (Brison 1997:21/2). However, precisely because real listening involves an engagement of the imagination and an entering into the other's story, survivors of trauma often find it difficult to find someone to whom they can speak. We may note here that the "other", in this instance the listener, is crucial to the process of re-creation of identity.

The importance of ritual listening to one's own body as a means of healing is illustrated in the ritual called for by Baby Suggs, the slave, wise woman and lay preacher in Toni Morrison's Beloved. She tells her audience that the only grace they have is their imagination. Then she invites them to imagine both the pains and joys of their flesh - the times of beating and humiliation as well as the times of loving touch. Her sermon is a litany moving from one part of the body to the next, calling on the listeners to contrast their previous sufferings with their present freedom. She invites them to love the different parts of their bodies - eyes, skin, hands, face, arms, neck, liver, lungs, womb and most of all, heart - concluding each invitation: "Love your eyes", "Love your hands" (Morrison 1987:88). The work of healing is literally a "re-memembering".

In ways similar to the "resistance" we have already considered in chapter two, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan suggests that victims of violence, trauma and torture re-claim themselves and their identity by refusing to accept the same sign system as their violators and torturers. She uses a feminist reading of an old Sanskrit story of the public stripping and gang-rape of Dopdi. After the night's brutality, Dopdi refuses to allow herself to be washed and clothed for that would be to wipe away the signs of her violation. Rajan suggests that Dopdi's refusal is not to be read as a heroic transcendence of suffering but as " ...a deliberate refusal of a shared sign system (the meanings assigned to nakedness, and rape: shame, fear, loss)" (Rajan 2000:155).

It is in just such a refusal of a shared sign system that early Christians interpreted the crucifixion as a sign of love rather than shame. However, as Rajan herself notes, it is questionable whether one may suggest that the violation of women's bodies is only a coded debasement, rather than a strike against women's identity (Rajan 2000:156). She recommends the twin responses of both recognition of the violation as well as refusing its shame.

A refusal of the shared sign system is central also to the work of Judith Butler, who argues that existing concepts of gender are dependent on an unquestioned assumption of two "opposite" heterosexual sexes (Butler 1993:123). This opposition also means, however, that there are possibilities for subversion and disruption whenever dissident sexual acts undermine old dualisms. She uses the drag queen, the 'butch' lesbian, the 'macho' gay as examples of this subversion as they problematize gender categories (Butler 1989:136).

The Embodied Self

The resistance of feminists to the parallel dualisms of mind/body and male/female opens the way for the development of new ways of understanding subjectivity, especially female subjectivity. The body

Far from being an inert, passive, noncultural and ahistorical term...may be seen as the crucial term, the site of contestation, in a series of economic, political, sexual and intellectual struggles (Grosz 1994:19).

What then are some of the implications of the body as this "site of contestation" in considering questions of identity? Firstly, as Grosz notes, there is no body as such, only multiple and concrete bodies, each with its own particularity. Subjectivity, likewise, must therefore be seen as particular, rather than generalizable (Grosz 1994:19). Similarly, just as there is no one "ideal body" so subjectivity cannot be forced to conform with one universal ideal. This has important consequences for considering how it is that humanity is the *Imago Dei*. We shall give further attention to this in chapter five.

Secondly, in attempting to understand subjectivity, it is necessary to re-think the privileging of the mind as the defining characteristic of identity. We asked (in the introductory chapter) what happens when woman is knower. This question must now be intersected with another, namely: What happens when the body is incorporated into our ways of knowing?

Grosz notes that the body both is and is not private or public, natural or cultural, genetically or environmentally produced, self or other (Grosz 1994:23). It is to this last aporia that we now turn in considering the relationship of self and other.

Chapter 4: Other Subjects

One of the consequences of Cartesian rationalism is the positing of subjects who are self-made individuals in opposition to an object that is to be known or controlled. This theory of the self-standing autonomy of the subject against the knowable object has been challenged from a number of quarters. We shall explore in this chapter how subjectivity is affected when otherness is taken as constitutive of the subject.

The recognition of the place of the other has come especially, as we might expect, from post-structuralist and feminist writers. For example, Grace Jantzen provides an important reminder that too often the autonomous "self" of philosophical writing is a male self. She suggests that very different conclusions would be reached if the self were a woman faced with her child. The relationship between self and other would then be so much more complex and inter-twined. The "other", in this case the child, is both self and not-self, and to different degrees in the process from conception, through birth and infancy into childhood (Jantzen 1998:243). Interdependence is the very basis of being:

We have all begun as part of somebody else; we have all been utterly dependent, nurtured well or badly into being who we are both physically and spiritually. And we are still deeply dependent on the web of relationships with other natures and with the earth that supports us. None of us fell from the sky fully adult and self-identical; none of us, even the most privileged, is a sovereign self. Nor would this be an ideal to be desired.... (Jantzen 1998:243).

The abstract, universal subject of the Enlightenment has achieved his supposed autonomous subjectivity at the expense of repressing and forgetting the "other" who is a condition of his existence. As may be expected, the repressed other for masculinity is the feminine. Thus Alice Jardine suggests that women are not even seen as the other subject, but simply the space which is "not subject":

The space "outside of" the conscious subject has always been connoted by the feminine in the history of Western thought - and any movement into alterity is a movement into that female space; any attempt to give a place to that alterity within discourse a putting into discourse of "woman"....the abstract spaces of alterity in contemporary thought [are]

gendered female (Freud-Lacan's "unconscious", Derrida's "écriture", Deleuze's "machines", Foucault's "madness") (Jardine 1985:115).

Post-structuralist theory, as we have seen, seeks to uncover the binary structures that regulate meaning through oppositional thinking. One of such oppositions is the self/other distinction. Hence, I shall not be suggesting that the other is not the opposite of the self. Rather, the "other" is an aspect of the self that is not acknowledged. As Madan Sarup notes: "Identity is always related to what one is not - the other" (Sarup 1996:47); or as John Caputo has it:

..identity is not the self identity of a thing,... but implies a difference within identity. That is the identity of a culture is a way of being different from itself; a culture is different from itself.. the person is different from itself. Once you take into account this inner and outer difference, then you pay attention to the other and you understand that fighting for your own identity is not exclusive of another identity [but] is open to another identity. (Caputo 1997(a):13)

Our task in this chapter will be to re-think the consequences of deconstructing the self/other binary. A note of caution needs to be sounded immediately, because as soon as one begins to talk of "self" and "other", one runs the risk of falling into the Cartesian dualisms we have noted in the previous chapter. One also runs the risk of suggesting that identity is singular and stable. Identity, as we have noted, is multiple and proliferating and the self is a self (or selves)-in-process. We need also to remind ourselves that differentiation takes place not only within the self and between ourselves and others, but between others too. In other words just as "I" am not singular in my identity, the other is not always a generalisable other. There are often many "others" - for example "woman" as the other to man is not a generalisable other.

Thus it has been said that Woman is a "name"...that makes woman appear to be the same kind of unitary subject as was the male subject of philosophical and political discourse and that works to suppress all other differences (race, class, sexual choice). It uses the frame of gender to create a false identity (Benjamin 1995:11).

However, whether one takes a linguistic, psychoanalytic or philosophical approach to the question of identity, one inevitably comes to the realization that identity is somehow related to another - whether the other be mother, history, language, institution, person, text or God.

Identity is relational. Identity is relational even when relationship is denied or ignored. For example, Judith Butler challenges the male/female binary as describing reality and she investigates who is the unnamed "other" to the male/female designation of humanity. She asks who is being excluded when bodies are unquestioningly divided into male and female. Thus she is able to destabilize the norm of two-gendered heterosexuality (Butler 1989). Her destabilization of the assumed two-gendered reality is a good illustration of the post-structuralist position which suggests that the "other" that results from the exclusions is not simply a word or a different but equal concept, but is a foundation on which the ideal is constructed. The "other" is an unnamed, unrecognized basis for defining the self. What happens when the "other" is recognized, named and brought to consciousness is a destabilization of a supposed fixed truth. This concept clearly has important implications for understanding identity and how the "other" relates to the self. We shall undertake a brief survey of some of the key thinkers and theories which have contributed to the deconstruction of the autonomous subject before offering some suggestions for a more complex, non-dualist, understanding of the construction of identity in relation to other subjects.

Freud

According to the "father" of the psychoanalytic school, Sigmund Freud, there are four key ideas in understanding identity, each of which involves the formation of identity in relation to another:

1. Identity is gendered and is not inborn, but acquired through a set of psycho-sexual processes. Freud contended that infants are sexual from birth, but are neither masculine nor feminine, and are capable of developing either masculine or feminine qualities, or neither. The development of those qualities comes about through repression of those qualities incompatible with the sexual identity in question. The Oedipus and castration complexes are resolved in different ways for boys and girls. For boys their gendered identity is formed through desire for the mother and fear of castration by the father, which in turn leads to repression of desire and identification with the father's position.

Girls recognize that they are already, like their mothers, castrated. This leads them to reject the mother in disgust and to transferring their desire to the father.

2. There is no unitary self. There are at least two selves - the conscious and the unconscious. The unconscious is formed through the repression of unacceptable desires.
3. Our identity is not dependent only on how we see ourselves but (at least partly) dependent on how others see us.
4. Narcissism is the original human state. The narcissistic self is involved in two processes of introjection and projection. The child introjects objects of desire. In this way the child retains inside what he has to give up in the outer world (Freud 1960:19). The child also projects out of itself that which it experiences as dangerous or threatening, creating an alien "uncanny" double.

Furthermore, Freud noted that the archaic, narcissistic self, not yet demarcated by the outside world, projects out of itself what it experiences as dangerous or unpleasant in itself, making of it an alien double, uncanny and demoniacal (Kristeva 1991:183).

In Freud's early writing he describes the "relationship" with others as purely selfish. He suggests that connections with others are driven by the desire to satisfy one's own needs rather than any concern for the other (Freud 1959). This early view is somewhat modified by his later writing when he suggests that the self is partially determined by the *quality* of relationships with others (Freud 1960).

Despite the predominant understanding of the subject as self-identical, there are a number of writers who follow Freud's understanding of the self as "other to itself". Eakin cites some autobiographers who use the technique of describing themselves as "you" or "s/he" to deconstruct the notion that who one was can be said, in any simple sense, to be the same person as who one is now (Eakin 1999:93). Even more pertinent though, are those autobiographers who recognize the process of "splitting in two, acting and observing at the same time" (Eakin 1999:95).

Lacan

Although Lacan follows Freud in denying that any genuine relationship between the self and the other is possible, he also makes some important departures from Freud. We have already noted Lacan's theory of the place of the (m)other and the Other (i.e. the symbolic order) in the infant's entry into subjectivity. Lacan observed that in the mirror stage the child sees itself in the mirror of its mother. The (m)other, in Lacan's theory, is a merely reflective object, not a loving other. But the infant desires the other in order to meet its needs. However, as the child recognizes the split between itself and (m)other so the child's subjectivity is constituted by a rupture between the self and the not-self which is simultaneously marked by an internalized splitting - a repressed desire for the other. For Lacan therefore, the loss of the "self" gives rise to desire for the other. In other words he inverts Freud's understanding of the introjection of the other.

In Lacan's theory there are only others, never a self; even the self is an other to itself (Flax 1990:18).

Little wonder therefore that for Lacan, the other is hostile and threatening:

The whole progress of the subject is then oriented around the *Ding* as *Fremde*, strange and even hostile on occasion...(Lacan 1992:52).

We shall later note that the understanding of the other as hostile and threatening has been challenged, in particular by feminist writers who dispute Lacan's theory that selfhood is achieved through separation from the other and his interpretation of desire as desire for control. However, Lacan's understanding has had a profound influence, for example in the writing of Franz Fanon who racialises the split between I and not-I. The white ego is constituted in opposition to the black materiality of other bodies (Fanon 1972:114). Fanon's insight is important in embodying Lacan's theory in a particular historical context. "Fanon's re-writing of Lacan implies that the self-other dynamic cannot be abstracted, as it is contingent on bodily differences which are themselves inflicted by histories of bodily others" (Ahmed 2000:90).

Fanon himself has been influential in many of the post-colonial descriptions of orientalism - for example Spivak (1992 and 1993) and Yegenoglu (1998).

Kristeva: Objects and Foreigners

The idea of the threatening other also underlies Julia Kristeva's theory of the object. Kristeva formulates her theory of the object in response to the question of how the obedient, law-abiding, acceptable body emerges and at what cost. The object in Kristeva's theory is rejected by the body and yet it does not part from the body; it is that which is expelled by the body, or falls from it, but which is still the body (Kristeva 1982). It thus threatens order - for example the order of what is clearly inside or outside. In order to achieve identity, the self must object that which threatens its secure boundaries, so, Kristeva suggests (following Lacan), that for the subject to become a self it must separate from continuity with the mother's body. The expulsion has a number of consequences:

1. It creates a "border" between the inside and outside; but this border is not stable.
2. The expelled "self" (mother) becomes an object of menace and loathing because it threatens the boundaries between self and separated other. The expelled self is a menace because it threatens to re-enter the body.
3. The mother's body is both horrifying and fascinating. There is horror in the (male) child at his dependence on the mother's body but also an erotic fascination with it. Kelly Oliver notes that in a 1980 interview, Kristeva suggested that the process of splitting the mother into fascinating and terrifying applies only to males. Females do not split the mother "but merely try (unsuccessfully) to separate from her" (Oliver 1997:226).
4. Expulsion of difference always leaves a trace. In other words, the self and the other are not opposites. The supposed opposites are in fact interdependent, or as Kristeva expresses it "the foreigner is within" (Kristeva 1991:95).

The understanding of the object is helpful in understanding the loathing and rejection of certain "others". Depending on the context, these "others" are homosexuals, Blacks, the mentally challenged, women, and so on. The body, suggests Kristeva, experiences a feeling of nausea when faced with touching that which it finds disgusting and which threatens the

body's integrity. That which threatens the boundaries of the stable, closed system of the self, is deemed is unclean and improper. Excrement, vomit, menstrual blood, saliva are both self and abjected. So too certain "others" who threaten the secure boundaries of the self are abjected and deemed unclean or improper. The abject provokes fear and loathing because s/he challenges the security of the borders between self and other. Abjection precedes the emergence of the subject in opposition to an object. However, Kristeva suggests that the abject is not a true "other":

The abject, as distinct from the object, does not stand opposed to the subject, at a distance, definable. The abject is other than the subject, but is only just the other side of the border. So the abject is not opposed to and facing the subject, but next to it, too close for comfort (Young 1990:144).

Iris Marion Young, drawing on Kristeva, goes on to cite homophobia as a paradigm of the abject "too close for comfort":

The construction of the idea of race, its connection with physical attributes and lineage, still makes it possible for a white person to know that she is not Black or Asian. But as homosexuality has become increasingly deobjectified, no specific characteristics, no physical, genetic mental or moral 'character', marks off homosexuals from heterosexuals except their choice of sexual partners. Homophobia is one of the deepest fears of difference precisely because the border between gay and straight is constructed as the most permeable...so the only way to preserve my identity is to turn away with irrational disgust (Young 1990:146).

Young adds a significant insight when she considers the process of abjection *amongst* members of oppressed groups (Young 1990). She suggests that those abjected by the dominant groups do not abject the dominant other. For example blacks do not abject whites, but often instead abject members of their own group. So for example lighter-skinned Blacks will abject darker-skinned blacks, or women will abject other women. In addition, members of abjected groups may despise members of other oppressed groups - Latinos may abject Blacks, women may abject homosexuals. Young also goes on to suggest a way out of such culturally defined racism, homophobia, sexism etc is to "push all subjects to an understanding of themselves as plural, shifting heterogeneous" (Young 1990:148). We shall return to this important insight in the next chapter.

Derrida and Foucault

While Lacan traces the presence of the other in the subject, and, arguing that the subject is an effect of language, shows how there is a split between the conscious and unconscious discourses of the subject, Jacques Derrida takes his insights further in deconstructing the entire binary structure of western metaphysics. Derrida, noting the binary basis of western thought, advocates a two-step process.

As we have already noted, in each binary, one term is privileged over the other. Derrida firstly reverses the hierarchy, privileging the secondary term in the binary. However this is not sufficient in itself. For example, simply to privilege, for example, woman over man, does not question the dualistic structure itself. A second step is necessary to break apart the structure of dominance. In this second step he locates the subordinate term (for example "the other") in the heart of the dominant term ("the self"), so that the dependence of the dominant upon the subordinate term becomes apparent. Meya Yegenoglu highlights the importance for women of Derrida's deconstructive process (Yegenoglu 1998:7-9). She points out that Derrida's process is not merely a reversal of the philosophical norms of the west, but a shaking of the very structures upon which western philosophy has been constructed. "The "other" is not what the subject distinguishes itself from, but the necessary possibility that makes the subject possible, again and again, each time anew" (Yegenoglu 1998:9).

Michel Foucault bases his explorations in the work of the linguists Levi-Strauss and Saussure. Foucault argues that the way a group's identity (and by implication an individual's identity too) is forged, is through the recognition of the group's differences from other groups. Extending Levi-Strauss' argument that there is no universal symbol, Foucault shows how certain differentiating principles get encoded in language through the principle of "same is good". The norm is then constructed to benefit those in power.

French feminist writers have drawn extensively on Foucault's thinking. For example Luce Irigaray examines the way in which our concept of difference depends on a single male viewpoint: man is the same, and anything which does not fit the same, including, woman is

In ways similar to the "resistance" we have already considered in chapter two, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan suggests that victims of violence, trauma and torture re-claim themselves and their identity by refusing to accept the same sign system as their violators and torturers. She uses a feminist reading of an old Sanskrit story of the public stripping and gang-rape of Dopdi. After the night's brutality, Dopdi refuses to allow herself to be washed and clothed for that would be to wipe away the signs of her violation. Rajan suggests that Dopdi's refusal is not to be read as a heroic transcendence of suffering but as " ...a deliberate refusal of a shared sign system (the meanings assigned to nakedness, and rape: shame, fear, loss)" (Rajan 2000:155).

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The space "outside of" the conscious subject has always been connoted by the feminine in the history of Western thought - and any movement into alterity is a movement into that female space; any attempt to give a place to that alterity within discourse a putting into discourse of "woman"...the abstract spaces of alterity in contemporary thought [are]

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..identity is not the self identity of a thing,... but implies a difference within identity. That is the identity of a culture is a way of being different from itself; a culture is different from itself.. the person is different from itself. Once you take into account this inner and outer difference, then you pay attention to the other and you understand that fighting for your own identity is not exclusive of another identity [but] is open to another identity. (Caputo 1997(a):13)

Our task in this chapter will be to re-think the consequences of deconstructing the self/other binary. A note of caution needs to be sounded immediately, because as soon as one begins to talk of "self" and "other", one runs the risk of falling into the Cartesian dualisms we have noted in the previous chapter. One also runs the risk of suggesting that identity is singular and stable. Identity, as we have noted, is multiple and proliferating and the self is a self (or selves)-in-process. We need also to remind ourselves that differentiation takes place not only within the self and between ourselves and others, but between others too. In other words just as "I" am not singular in my identity, the other is not always a generalisable other. There are often many "others" - for example "woman" as the other to man is not a generalisable other.

Thus it has been said that Woman is a "name"...that makes woman appear to be the same kind of unitary subject as was the male subject of philosophical and political discourse and that works to suppress all other differences (race, class, sexual choice). It uses the frame of gender to create a false identity (Benjamin 1995:11).

However, whether one takes a linguistic, psychoanalytic or philosophical approach to the question of identity, one inevitably comes to the realization that identity is somehow related to another - whether the other be mother, history, language, institution, person, text or God.

Identity is relational. Identity is relational even when relationship is denied or ignored. For example, Judith Butler challenges the male/female binary as describing reality and she investigates who is the unnamed "other" to the male/female designation of humanity. She asks who is being excluded when bodies are unquestioningly divided into male and female. Thus she is able to destabilize the norm of two-gendered heterosexuality (Butler 1989). Her destabilization of the assumed two-gendered reality is a good illustration of the post-structuralist position which suggests that the "other" that results from the exclusions is not simply a word or a different but equal concept, but is a foundation on which the ideal is constructed. The "other" is an unnamed, unrecognized basis for defining the self. What happens when the "other" is recognized, named and brought to consciousness is a destabilization of a supposed fixed truth. This concept clearly has important implications for understanding identity and how the "other" relates to the self. We shall undertake a brief survey of some of the key thinkers and theories which have contributed to the deconstruction of the autonomous subject before offering some suggestions for a more complex, non-dualist, understanding of the construction of identity in relation to other subjects.

Freud

According to the "father" of the psychoanalytic school, Sigmund Freud, there are four key ideas in understanding identity, each of which involves the formation of identity in relation to another:

1. Identity is gendered and is not inborn, but acquired through a set of psycho-sexual processes. Freud contended that infants are sexual from birth, but are neither masculine nor feminine, and are capable of developing either masculine or feminine qualities, or neither. The development of those qualities comes about through repression of those qualities incompatible with the sexual identity in question. The Oedipus and castration complexes are resolved in different ways for boys and girls. For boys their gendered identity is formed through desire for the mother and fear of castration by the father, which in turn leads to repression of desire and identification with the father's position.

Girls recognize that they are already, like their mothers, castrated. This leads them to reject the mother in disgust and to transferring their desire to the father.

2. There is no unitary self. There are at least two selves - the conscious and the unconscious. The unconscious is formed through the repression of unacceptable desires.
3. Our identity is not dependent only on how we see ourselves but (at least partly) dependent on how others see us.
4. Narcissism is the original human state. The narcissistic self is involved in two processes of introjection and projection. The child introjects objects of desire. In this way the child retains inside what he has to give up in the outer world (Freud 1960:19). The child also projects out of itself that which it experiences as dangerous or threatening, creating an alien "uncanny" double.

Furthermore, Freud noted that the archaic, narcissistic self, not yet demarcated by the outside world, projects out of itself what it experiences as dangerous or unpleasant in itself, making of it an alien double, uncanny and demoniacal (Kristeva 1991:183).

In Freud's early writing he describes the "relationship" with others as purely selfish. He suggests that connections with others are driven by the desire to satisfy one's own needs rather than any concern for the other (Freud 1959). This early view is somewhat modified by his later writing when he suggests that the self is partially determined by the *quality* of relationships with others (Freud 1960).

Despite the predominant understanding of the subject as self-identical, there are a number of writers who follow Freud's understanding of the self as "other to itself". Eakin cites some autobiographers who use the technique of describing themselves as "you" or "s/he" to deconstruct the notion that who one was can be said, in any simple sense, to be the same person as who one is now (Eakin 1999:93). Even more pertinent though, are those autobiographers who recognize the process of "splitting in two, acting and observing at the same time" (Eakin 1999:95).

Lacan

Although Lacan follows Freud in denying that any genuine relationship between the self and the other is possible, he also makes some important departures from Freud. We have already noted Lacan's theory of the place of the (m)other and the Other (i.e. the symbolic order) in the infant's entry into subjectivity. Lacan observed that in the mirror stage the child sees itself in the mirror of its mother. The (m)other, in Lacan's theory, is a merely reflective object, not a loving other. But the infant desires the other in order to meet its needs. However, as the child recognizes the split between itself and (m)other so the child's subjectivity is constituted by a rupture between the self and the not-self which is simultaneously marked by an internalized splitting - a repressed desire for the other. For Lacan therefore, the loss of the "self" gives rise to desire for the other. In other words he inverts Freud's understanding of the introjection of the other.

In Lacan's theory there are only others, never a self, even the self is an other to itself (Flax 1990:18).

Little wonder therefore that for Lacan, the other is hostile and threatening:

The whole progress of the subject is then oriented around the *Ding* as *Fremde*, strange and even hostile on occasion...(Lacan 1992:52).

We shall later note that the understanding of the other as hostile and threatening has been challenged, in particular by feminist writers who dispute Lacan's theory that selfhood is achieved through separation from the other and his interpretation of desire as desire for control. However, Lacan's understanding has had a profound influence, for example in the writing of Franz Fanon who racialises the split between I and not-I. The white ego is constituted in opposition to the black materiality of other bodies (Fanon 1972:114). Fanon's insight is important in embodying Lacan's theory in a particular historical context. "Fanon's re-writing of Lacan implies that the self-other dynamic cannot be abstracted, as it is contingent on bodily differences which are themselves inflicted by histories of bodily others" (Ahmed 2000:90).

Fanon himself has been influential in many of the post-colonial descriptions of orientalism - for example Spivak (1992 and 1993) and Yegenoglu (1998).

Kristeva: Objects and Foreigners

The idea of the threatening other also underlies Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject. Kristeva formulates her theory of the abject in response to the question of how the obedient, law-abiding, acceptable body emerges and at what cost. The abject in Kristeva's theory is rejected by the body and yet it does not part from the body; it is that which is expelled by the body, or falls from it, but which is still the body (Kristeva 1982). It thus threatens order - for example the order of what is clearly inside or outside. In order to achieve identity, the self must abject that which threatens its secure boundaries, so, Kristeva suggests (following Lacan), that for the subject to become a self it must separate from continuity with the mother's body. The expulsion has a number of consequences:

1. It creates a "border" between the inside and outside; but this border is not stable.
2. The expelled "self" (mother) becomes an object of menace and loathing because it threatens the boundaries between self and separated other. The expelled self is a menace because it threatens to re-enter the body.
3. The mother's body is both horrifying and fascinating. There is horror in the (male) child at his dependence on the mother's body but also an erotic fascination with it. Kelly Oliver notes that in a 1980 interview, Kristeva suggested that the process of splitting the mother into fascinating and terrifying applies only to males. Females do not split the mother "but merely try (unsuccessfully) to separate from her" (Oliver 1997:226).
4. Expulsion of difference always leaves a trace. In other words, the self and the other are not opposites. The supposed opposites are in fact interdependent, or as Kristeva expresses it "the foreigner is within" (Kristeva 1991:95).

The understanding of the abject is helpful in understanding the loathing and rejection of certain "others". Depending on the context, these "others" are homosexuals, Blacks, the mentally challenged, women, and so on. The body, suggests Kristeva, experiences a feeling of nausea when faced with touching that which it finds disgusting and which threatens the

body's integrity. That which threatens the boundaries of the stable, closed system of the self, is deemed is unclean and improper. Excrement, vomit, menstrual blood, saliva are both self and abjected. So too certain "others" who threaten the secure boundaries of the self are abjected and deemed unclean or improper. The abject provokes fear and loathing because s/he challenges the security of the borders between self and other. Abjection precedes the emergence of the subject in opposition to an object. However, Kristeva suggests that the abject is not a true "other":

The abject, as distinct from the object, does not stand opposed to the subject, at a distance, definable. The abject is other than the subject, but is only just the other side of the border. So the abject is not opposed to and facing the subject, but next to it, too close for comfort (Young 1990:144).

Iris Marion Young, drawing on Kristeva, goes on to cite homophobia as a paradigm of the abject "too close for comfort":

The construction of the idea of race, its connection with physical attributes and lineage, still makes it possible for a white person to know that she is not Black or Asian. But as homosexuality has become increasingly deobjectified, no specific characteristics, no physical, genetic mental or moral 'character', marks off homosexuals from heterosexuals except their choice of sexual partners. Homophobia is one of the deepest fears of difference precisely because the border between gay and straight is constructed as the most permeable...so the only way to preserve my identity is to turn away with irrational disgust (Young 1990:146).

Young adds a significant insight when she considers the process of abjection *amongst* members of oppressed groups (Young 1990). She suggests that those abjected by the dominant groups do not abject the dominant other. For example blacks do not abject whites, but often instead abject members of their own group. So for example lighter-skinned Blacks will abject darker-skinned blacks, or women will abject other women. In addition, members of abjected groups may despise members of other oppressed groups - Latinos may abject Blacks, women may abject homosexuals. Young also goes on to suggest a way out of such culturally defined racism, homophobia, sexism etc is to "push all subjects to an understanding of themselves as plural, shifting heterogeneous" (Young 1990:148). We shall return to this important insight in the next chapter.

Derrida and Foucault

While Lacan traces the presence of the other in the subject, and, arguing that the subject is an effect of language, shows how there is a split between the conscious and unconscious discourses of the subject, Jacques Derrida takes his insights further in deconstructing the entire binary structure of western metaphysics. Derrida, noting the binary basis of western thought, advocates a two-step process.

As we have already noted, in each binary, one term is privileged over the other. Derrida firstly reverses the hierarchy, privileging the secondary term in the binary. However this is not sufficient in itself. For example, simply to privilege, for example, woman over man, does not question the dualistic structure itself. A second step is necessary to break apart the structure of dominance. In this second step he locates the subordinate term (for example "the other") in the heart of the dominant term ("the self"), so that the dependence of the dominant upon the subordinate term becomes apparent. Meya Yegenoglu highlights the importance for women of Derrida's deconstructive process (Yegenoglu 1998:7-9). She points out that Derrida's process is not merely a reversal of the philosophical norms of the west, but a shaking of the very structures upon which western philosophy has been constructed. "The 'other' is not what the subject distinguishes itself from, but the necessary possibility that makes the subject possible, again and again, each time anew" (Yegenoglu 1998:9).

Michel Foucault bases his explorations in the work of the linguists Levi-Strauss and Saussure. Foucault argues that the way a group's identity (and by implication an individual's identity too) is forged, is through the recognition of the group's differences from other groups. Extending Levi-Strauss' argument that there is no universal symbol, Foucault shows how certain differentiating principles get encoded in language through the principle of "same is good". The norm is then constructed to benefit those in power.

French feminist writers have drawn extensively on Foucault's thinking. For example Luce Irigaray examines the way in which our concept of difference depends on a single male viewpoint: man is the same, and anything which does not fit the same, including, woman is

deemed "other". However, since man has not perfected his definition of "Himself as Same" the feminine has not been completely negated, and has the potential to disrupt the economy of the same (Irigaray 1985(a)).

The Self as a conscious "Body for Others"

A very different approach is taken by Ann Ferguson (1996) who explores a materialist understanding of the self and other in the construction of identity. She draws on, and expands, Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance. Selfhood is, for Ferguson "an embodied process of thinking, feeling, desiring, perceiving, judging and willing" (Ferguson 1996:112). More importantly, in this context however, is her insistence that these processes always occur in actual or thought-constructed social relations with both one's own body and with others. The resulting psychical body image is a construction which transcends fragmented bodily experiences.

Ferguson describes three "levels" of self process. The first is that which Deleuze and Guattari call the "body without organs" - a body image that is neither sexed nor gendered. At this level the infant's concern is only for health and survival, and others are merely instruments to be manipulated to ensure these needs. The second level involves attachment to and making the self acceptable to members of one's own social group. It is, she argues, in our self-interest to reject the images of ourselves that are other, for example, "of the opposite sex" (though acts of rebellion, such as girls behaving as tomboys, are possible). In other words social identity not only describes a person, but prescribes normative actions, or performances (Ferguson 1996:114). Furthermore, society ascribes meanings and values to certain body conditions (for example gender, race or ethnicity) and part of the self-process involves choosing whether to accept, distance from, or reject the body condition. The third level of self process involves the evaluation and critique of the first two levels, leading to resistance and change. Ferguson notes that for any strategy of change to be effective it must be both an individual choice and a collective task. For example, she suggests that redefining beauty cannot simply be undertaken by an individual. There needs to be a collective agreement on such redefinition (Ferguson 1996:116).

In other words, for Ferguson, the self is constituted in a complex dialogue between social forces and individual agency or choice. Identities (for example of race, class, gender or sexual orientation) are not simply added one to the next, but comprise a complex of structural, symbolic and personal interpretations or performances (Ferguson 1996:120). What distinguishes her theory from the psychoanalytic approaches is that she expressly grounds her theory in embodied performances, for example of race or gender. For Ferguson, these conditions (as they are for Judith Butler) are not fixed but an on-going and unstable process.

The Ethical Claim of the Other

The dynamic of self and other has been explored not only by psychoanalysts but by philosophers too. So, for example, for both Levinas and Ricoeur (in different ways) one's identity is called into being by the face of the other.

Levinas' view of the other is the one who summons us to responsibility. For Levinas the other is other because the other is different, a form of truth quite alien to me. The other is an epiphany, a face which appears and which summonses the self to responsibility, to ethical response. The other is not an object to be known, but that which, if I give myself to know in my capacity as subject, will constitute me as an ethical being. Levinas, reflecting a similar understanding to Lacan of the hostile relationship between self and other, suggests that when I face the Other, I am faced with the dilemma - kill or be killed. Either I have to lose myself, my Sameness, by recognizing the other, or to hold onto my Sameness and destroy the other. The encounter with the other, the face-to-face meeting with the other therefore entails an ethical choice. Either I can attempt to eliminate the other or I can take responsibility for the other, which implies the extinction of me. This hostile confrontation has been criticized by a number of writers. Jantzen asks pertinently: "Why the impulse to kill? Why not, say, an impulse to smile, or feed, or kiss, or converse? Why the assumed hostility?" (Jantzen 1998:239). Jantzen recognizes the context of Levinas' writing (under the shadow of Auschwitz) and commends his attempt to replace ontology with ethics (his priority is to

consider relating to the other, rather than to know the other). Nevertheless, she suggests his understanding is typical of a western masculine concern with death rather than concern for "natality" and flourishing.

Ricoeur also criticizes Levinas' understanding on the grounds that his philosophy does not rest on real relationship, but on a one-sided, masterful other who takes the initiative and instructs the self to act justly (Ricoeur 1992:189). Ricoeur instead proposes a more deeply relational understanding of the connection between self and other. "...otherness is not added onto selfhood from outside...but...it belongs instead to the tenor of meaning and to the ontological constitution of selfhood" (Ricoeur 1992:317).

Ricoeur distinguishes between *idem* identity (the self identity which links the infant to the adult and by which one recognizes oneself as "the same" over time) and *ipse* identity (which is formed by the dialectic between self and other.) For Ricoeur the "other" includes not only other things and persons but also institutions as well as the otherness of one's own body, the "flesh" (Ricoeur 1992:319).

McGaughey, reviewing both Levinas and Ricoeur, notes that the self is neither an autonomous ego, observing the world and others, nor is it a self passively shaped by others, but it is the *aporia*²⁰ of self and other (McGaughey 1997:438). So too, whilst the stable, rational Cartesian ego as masterful author of the Self has disappeared, I am not *only* constituted by the "readings" others make of me. Paradoxically, the uniqueness of the self, he argues, is not the "hidden" self, inaccessible to others and even the self, but the uniqueness of the self is established by relatedness (McGaughey 1997:439/40).

Relating self and other: desire and possibility

For feminism, in the beginning is alterity, the non-one, a multiplicity (Braidotti 1992:189).

²⁰ "Aporia" - literally "no way through". McGaughey uses this concept to challenge the dualisms of western philosophy. In this instance, one requires the concepts of both self and other, and yet each needs the other in order to be comprehended.

Just as the body/mind dualism has been shown to be an artificial separation, so too is it artificial to separate Same and Other. So Madan Sarup (1996) notes the irony of binary oppositions in which difference is reduced to a centre/dominant versus subordinate/margin dichotomy. This binary operates in the same way as splitting and projection - that is the centre splits off and projects onto the margin all its anxieties and contradictions. Ironically however, in the end the margin is the centre or the foreigner is within.

Fixed oppositions conceal the extent to which things presented as oppositional are, in fact, interdependent - that is they derive their meaning from a particularly established contrast rather than from some inherent or pure antithesis (Scott 1997: 761).

One of the projects of feminism is to demonstrate that the self and the other are inextricably linked and it is in being with the other that I most profoundly experience myself. (See for example Benjamin 1988:78-99). The loss of rigid boundaries, far from being threatening, is in fact creative. It is indeed the capacity for mutual, reciprocal connections that allows for the constitution of subjectivity (Flax 1992(b)). In contrast to Lacan's threatening "other" who will subsume me unless I conquer and expel him, for many feminist writers the other is the one who brings me into who I am, so that "I" am both self and other.

Braidotti (like McGaughey) argues that identity is not constituted by self *or* other, but by the dynamic interaction in the space between self and other. This pregnant space is the source of identity. Braidotti follows the work of Deleuze and Guattari, who suggest that desire far from being the "lack" defined by Lacanian psychoanalysis, is in fact that which produces and connects. Whereas Lacan sees desire as an absence that strives to be filled through the attainment of an impossible other, a number of feminist writers (for example Braidotti 1992 and Grosz 1994) see desire as a movement towards expansion and self proliferation (Grosz 1994:165). Desire is not opposed to the real, but is its actualization. Female desire is the in-between space connecting inside and outside - the flow between self and other. Desire, for Braidotti is firstly, not just libidinal desire, but the ontological "desire to be" (Braidotti 1992:183). Secondly, desire is not the dialectical oppositions but the capacity for interconnectedness and the opening of space for another to be *other* (Braidotti 1992:187). In other words the space between self and other is fluid and changing, the place in which both self and other come to be.

The importance of the "space between" is not only emphasized by feminist writers. McGaughey (1997) also explores this "space between" particularly the space between body and spirit. He suggests that the self is not only a set of "actualities" but also all the possibilities which may be revealed. These possibilities emerge out of "the unique and unrepeatable experience of the self as *nous* in dynamic interaction with a life-world of things and Others" (McGaughey 1997:421). McGaughey criticizes the prevailing views of the self which rely on "actuality", whether actuality is defined as external appearance or the inside, invisible aspects. Some views of actuality rely particularly on the appearance, power and social status of a person. Others rely on the view that the "real" self is the hidden, inside, permanent and enduring part to which one returns from the outside world. Both these views are however, inadequate because they ignore the possibilities which are introduced by the spirit. For McGaughey the spirit (*nous*) is both the individual and world spirit. The content of spirit is the "flow of images" by which the world is made present to the imagination as well as the universals one uses to make sense of the images (McGaughey 1997:420).

Feminist writers are, however, not unanimous in their support of seeing the space between as creative. Diana Fuss argues that in these views difference is seen as "a product of the friction between easily identifiable and unitary components of identity (sexual, racial, economic, national ...) competing for dominance within the subject" (Fuss 1989:103).

It is not in this sense that I use the term "the space between". Nor, as I understand them, do Braidotti and McGaughey use it in the way of Fuss' definition. The space between is not, as Fuss would have it, like an electronic field in which identity particles bounce off one another (Fuss 1989:103), forcing changes to identity. Rather, the term indicates the fluidity and unboundedness of self and other. When it is recognized that the other is within, boundaries between self and other are no longer clearly defined and space is opened up for more complex possibilities to emerge.

These reflections on the space between Self and Other seem to offer the most fruitful possibilities for a post-structuralist understanding of identity. This view of a dynamic

interchange constantly giving rise to the subject which is created and re-created anew, takes into account the insights of the psychoanalysts who insist on the place of the "foreigner within". It also takes account of Derrida's deconstruction of the self/other dualism as described above. The subject is not privileged at the expense of the other, nor can the subject be conceived without recognizing the presence of the other. It is in the fluid interaction of self and other/s that the subject emerges. The analogy of sub-atomic physics is helpful. "Solid" matter is far from that. Physicists have suggested that matter is primarily constituted by the spaces between atoms, or within the atom, between electrons. Nor is the "space between" bounded by two fixed objects. So too, I suggest, with human subjectivity. The space between is the space of possibility and the place of always-emerging subjectivity. There is no defined boundary between subjects, or between inside and outside. Identity always carries within it the "ghost" of non-identity or difference.

One of the important effects of this understanding of the self who emerges, disappears and whose possibility lies in the self, others and the spaces between, is the potential for disrupting dominant hierarchies of power, which rely on stable, defined subject positions. Just as subjects themselves are not stable and bounded, so too the "spaces between" fluctuate and are given different meanings. Space is neither empty nor neutral. Two illustrations may serve to clarify this. The first is in the form of "advice" offered to women by Kathleen Kirby:

...perhaps you, like me, have difficulty maintaining your personal space in public areas. Men coming toward you on the sidewalk won't get out of your way. I have found a simple solution: as the man approaches, direct your eyes to his knees and allow a look of casual preoccupation to come over your features. If he refuses to yield right-of-way, direct your vision to his groin with an air of distracted annoyance. I guarantee he will, sheepishly, veer to his side of the walk. Perhaps the basis for this tactic's success is that it transforms ...the phallus into the penis (Kirby 1996:122).

Kirby's aim in the chapter in which this advice appears is to "redefine the spaces of gender". Gender hierarchy relies on fixed interpretations of biological difference - Lacan's "law of the Father" in which men are subjects and there is no *space* for femaleness, the sex which lacks the phallus. By reconstituting the space, a female subject appears.

The second illustration is part of a story told by Audre Lorde who, as a young girl, travelled once on a subway train with her mother. The young Audre was squeezed by her mother into a small section of seating, alongside a white woman wearing a fur coat and leather gloves. The woman, when she observes Audre in her "new blue snowpants" touching her coat, pulls the coat closer to herself and finally leaves the seat and stands in the aisle of the subway train (Lorde 1984:147/8). Sara Ahmed, commenting on the story, notes the irony in the white woman withdrawing from physical proximity to the young black girl. Even as she withdraws, she is touched by Audre "in such a way that the subject is moved from its place" (Ahmed 2000:92). In the very act of withdrawing and "defining" her boundaries, the woman's boundaries are breached.

For feminism the beginning is alterity, as we noted at the beginning of this section. "Otherness", like subjectivity, as we have seen, is not a clear, distinct and stable concept. The foreigner is within, as Kristeva would have it; or, as Derrida would suggest, the supplement marks what the centre lacks. In addition, it is the very instability of the boundaries between self and other that creative possibilities emerge. The challenges and opportunities offered by this understanding, especially as it pertains to Christian anthropology will form a focus of the last chapter.

Chapter Five: **The subject of Christianity**

In this final chapter I wish to examine some of the implications for Christian anthropology of that which has been considered in the foregoing chapters. One way of approaching this task would be to set out the dominant Christian tradition in its view of the human person, and move on to compare and contrast that tradition with the views we have thus far considered.

Although we shall note some of the traditional understandings of Christian anthropology, the problem with only proceeding in this way is that it ignores what has been a recurrent theme of the past chapters, namely, that the ideas leading to and comprising what we have identified as a post-structuralist feminism constitute a whole new way of looking at human identity. As we noted at the close of the Introduction, the question is: "What insights are introduced when woman is knower?". While the knower has traditionally been male, white, middle-class and he has defined his rationality as the essence of who he is, in the light of the critiques of that subject, a somewhat different approach is called for.

We have noted that some feminists (especially Cixous and Irigaray) have urged the writing of a new (feminine) language. In this chapter I shall also attempt a "new" language in the consideration of Christian approaches to identity. For example we shall explore what happens when "God" and "humanity" are not set against each other as opposites. I shall also attempt to listen to some of the silences which have been imposed by some of the traditional phallogocentric language of Christian theology.

Cixous's *Vivre l'Orange/To Live the Orange* (Cixous 1989), which we considered in chapter two, provides a helpful model of the approach I have chosen to adopt. We noted that in this text Cixous writes in both French and English. She also attempts to include a pastiche of the elements which inform her at the time of writing - the magnificent orange, the telephone call, the march of Parisian women in support of the women of Iran and the lost lives of Nazi

concentration camp inmates. Cixous' text seems to offer a useful model because it recognizes that there is no one linear "story" just as there is no one approach to the question of identity and the ways in which it is constructed. Cixous' multi-layered approach will inform the approach I shall adopt in this chapter. (I have also been influenced in the method I have chosen by Julia Kristeva's *Stabat Mater* (1997) which is described in more detail below.) I shall make use in the text of three different colours, which will suggest different possible ways of reading. The text printed in black outlines some traditional approaches to the question of Christian anthropology. The complete text can be read sequentially in the conventional way, ignoring the colour changes. Alternatively, the blue and red sections (in which alternatives to the prevailing dominant voice in Christian theology are explored) can be read discreetly, or as a kind of a dialogue between them, or in dialogue with the black text.

Human Being in Christ

And God said: "Let us make humankind in our image"... So God created humankind (Gen.1:26,27).

He is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15).

One of the points of departure for Christian anthropology is that humanity images God. Precisely how this divine image is reflected is however a matter for debate, especially in the light of the challenges to Enlightenment "man". Answers to the question have usually fallen into two broad categories. The first gives priority to the stories in Genesis 2 and 3 of the creation and "fall" and uses Adam as the archetype of what it means to be human. The second approach gives priority to humanity as redeemed in Christ, and views Jesus as the archetype.²¹

Adam as Archetype:

The classic exposition of the first category (Adam as archetype) was articulated in western Christianity by Augustine. Working with the Genesis 2 and 3 account of creation (and

²¹ For a full exposition of these two approaches see De Gruchy 1997.

responding to Pelagius) Augustine taught that Adam was the pinnacle of creation, created for relationship with God, blessed with righteousness and perfection, but who fell from this state, thus bringing sin into the heart of human existence. Through the "fall" the *Imago Dei* was lost and henceforth all humans were marked from birth with original sin. This anthropology came to dominate both modern Catholic and Reformed theology - to the extent that other ideas have by and large been lost. However the teachings of some of the pre-Augustinian theologians may be usefully distinguished from Augustine's views. For example, Irenaeus taught that although the triune God created humanity in the divine image, human beings are not the true image of God. The true image is the Son. Furthermore the image is not something "in" humanity, but the direction in which we are to grow. For Irenaeus, Adam and Eve were not created perfect, but created so that they could grow into what God called them to be, namely perfect relationship with God (Irenaeus, *Epideixis*).

For Clement of Alexandria, who distinguished between the divine image and likeness, all human beings are created in the *image* of God and are called to grow into the *likeness* of God by cultivating rational control over passions of the body (Clement, *Stromata* 2,23 and 3,16).

Expressing an early form of the dualism we have already explored, Gregory of Nyssa understands the term "image of God" in Genesis 1:27 to refer to the purely spiritual being, a reflection of the divine Logos, lacking mortal body and gender. However God anticipated that this intellectual being would choose disobedience and thus gender duality was added by God in anticipation of the fall. Only through virginity could a person begin to restore the self to its original nature and grow into the likeness of God (Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 387-427).

It should be noted that, almost without exception, the anthropologies proposed by the various Christian theologians include a hierarchy of gender.

For man...is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man (1Cor.11:7).

In Augustine's early writing against the Manicheans he followed Origen in seeing human beings as created first as a male and female unity. The "image of God" was constituted by the interior intellect. Later he changed his ideas and wrote that male and female differentiation was created from the beginning and that gender hierarchy - the female subordinate to the first created male - was part of the original design (Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 9.5). Despite his view that both men and women have intellects, when seen as a couple, the woman represents the inferior, subordinate part of humanity:

..the woman together with her own husband is the image of God, so that the whole substance may be one image, but when she is referred to separately in her quality as helpmeet, which regards the woman alone, then she is not the image of God, but as regards the male alone, he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman too is joined with him in one (Augustine, *De Trinitate* 7.7.10).

The idea of the "natural inferiority" of women was taken a step further by the scholastic theologian Thomas Aquinas. Combining the ideas of Aristotle and Augustine, Aquinas taught that the soul is immortal and can live independently of the body, but that the soul is also the "form" of the body and is therefore incomplete in itself. The asexual soul images God, but the male body is the perfect form whilst the female is defective in her body and intellect. She is an incomplete and defective being and her role is simply as helpmeet to man in procreation. Aquinas taught that Eve was more guilty than Adam because not only did she sin by disobeying God, but she also sinned against Adam by seducing him. However Adam shares responsibility because he failed to exercise his superior reason.

Here we see the parallels between the male/female dualism and the dualism between spirit and flesh which has also permeated Christian anthropology.

...'woman' is defined as a deficient man in discourses from Aristotle through Freud. The superior member of the pair maintains his innocence. Unlike the inferior, *he* is secure in his independence and natural superiority; he is within but not of the dyad. Like Aristotle's master or husband, his is the active matter, determining and generative within, but never affected *by* his coupling. There is no disorder within him and hence none within Being as such, but there may be disorderly objects requiring his mastery (Flax 1992(a):453).

As the early church exhibited a growing antagonism to the "flesh" and a growing preference for ascetic practices, so too were women associated with the fallen flesh and men with the likeness of the divine - the spirit.

Genesis 3 has played a critical role in the history of Christian theological reflection on the nature of sin, sex and gender relations. As the locus classicus for the doctrine of original sin, it introduced gender into the formulation of the doctrine through the terms of its narrative construction. Thus the question of sin in western thought has been intimately linked with questions of sex and gender, while traditional views of gender, and particularly of female gender, have been marked by associations with the origins of sin and death (Bird 1997:174).

Bird goes on to point out how Jewish and Gnostic writings draw attention to this text and use it as a basis for claiming that woman brought sin into the world. Hence she quotes Sirach 25:24 "From a woman sin had its beginning and because of her we all die".

Reading humanity from Christ

There is another starting point for considering the question of how humanity images God. A rather different understanding of the *Imago Dei* is achieved if one takes as one's point of reference, not Adam, but Christ. This understanding is based on the theology of Paul, especially in the letter to the Romans, where the meaning of humanity is read not from creation and fall but from an already redeemed humanity "in Christ". As De Gruchy points out, the implication of this starting point is that the *Imago Dei* then describes relationship with God (redeemed in Christ) rather than some characteristic or another which distinguishes humanity from the rest of creation (De Gruchy 1997:248). This "reading from Christ" is not the dominant reading in western Christian theology, but it has important possibilities:

1. With Christ, the true *Imago Dei* as suggested in Col.1:15, as the point of reference (instead of the Hebrew testament's understanding of God in Genesis 1 and 2), it follows that the image is of a *trine* God - a doctrine of God which does not support "monarchical monotheism" (Moltmann 1981) but communitarian relationships instead.
2. This starting point for anthropology also takes seriously the place of the incarnation of Jesus. With all the difficulties in establishing who was the historical Jesus, it is nevertheless important to note that Jesus' life, the kind of person he was, gives an

indication of the true *Imago Dei*. Jesus as the "broad shape" of a life, is a symbol for compassion, care and love - especially in countering selfishness, greed and individualism. As I shall also be arguing, the "broad shape" of the Christ-life includes embodied relationship with the other, as illustrated by his divine/human being.

3. Perhaps the most significant implication of this "reading from Christ" is suggested by Leonardo Boff (though he in no way explores the issue along the lines I do so here). In his exposition on liberation and eschatology, Boff suggests that the highest human purpose is to "allow God to become real by means of ourselves" (Boff 1989:160). Jesus, the incarnation of God, is the model for this "making God real". What is interesting about this understanding is that it collapses (as Jesus does in his divine/human being) the dichotomy between God and humanity.

For women, in particular, this "reading from Christ" with its invitation to allow God to become real opens new possibilities as has been recognized by Irigaray with her suggestion that we open a "sensible transcendental"²² (Irigaray 1993:129). We shall examine this further under the heading of "The Divine Horizon" below. Hand in hand with allowing God to become real, is the recognition that I am, because of relationship:

A feminist aim of becoming divine as I have set it out is an aim of increasing sensitivity to the face of the Other (Jantzen 1998:265).

It may be objected that "reading from Christ" raises more problems than it offers possibilities. As many feminist theologians have pointed out, using Jesus as a model for humanity has serious difficulties for women, both because of his literal maleness as well as the interpretations placed upon him.²³ However as both Rita Brock and Luce Irigaray have suggested, the Christ is more than simply the man, Jesus of Nazareth. For Brock, the Christ is not limited to the son but is "the full incarnation of God/dess in life-giving relationships" (Brock 1988:xiii). Similarly, Irigaray suggests that the divine incarnation in Jesus is partial, a view consistent with the imagined self-understanding of Jesus in John 16: "If I am not

²² Irigaray uses this description of a sensible transcendental to counter the transcendent/immanent dualism of Christian theology. The transcendence of her sensible transcendental is a transcendence which is "wholly immanent, not in opposition to the flesh but as the projected horizon for our (embodied) becoming" (Jantzen 1998:271).

²³ See for example Daly 1978, Hampson 1996.

gone the Paraclete cannot come" (Irigaray 1997:208). "The Christ" is not a designation limited to Jesus of Nazareth, but is extended to all who live out the full incarnation of God. "Readings from Christ" therefore could include the understanding of the on-going incarnation in the body of Christ. This will be explored in more detail below.

In the beginning is relationship

In chapter four we gave consideration to the place of the other in the shaping of identity. More particularly we concluded that identity emerges out of relationship²⁴ between self and other (with other people, communities, the cosmos, institutions, the divine, language) and even that identity emerges out of the dynamic and unresolvable space between self and other. The aporia between the self and the other

...discloses experience as not the mere interface of the internal and external, the known self and the known context, but, more profoundly it discloses experience as an unknown and unknowing paradox, in which *our very identity as unique individuals becomes defined not by our inwardness but by our interaction with the world* (McGaughey 1997:42 italics added).

This fundamental understanding challenges the individualistic descriptions of the nature of the human person which have dominated western theological thought, in particular from the Enlightenment onwards. Descartes' "thinking subject" is a clear example of this idea:

At its extreme, all that consciousness can be sure about is its own self-certain existence. The existence of other minds can only be inferred from the apparent existence of other bodies... Consciousness becomes, in effect, an island unto itself. Its relations to others, to the world and to its own body are the consequences of mediated judgements, inferences, and are no longer understood as direct and unmediated (Grosz 1994:7).

For Christian anthropology, which has relied so heavily on the rational self constituting the *Imago Dei*, the implications of this challenge to the Cartesian-influenced understanding are wide-ranging:

²⁴ Carter Heyward prefers the term "mutual relation" to "mutual relationships", arguing that the latter can too easily be turned into a one-to-one personal relationship (Heyward 1999:62). I do not exclude personal relationships, but intend to include a great deal more. I include the intentional and unconscious connectedness of all life, including humans, animals, God, language, institutions and the earth.

1. At the most basic of levels, my identity cannot escape being shaped by others, whether it is in reaction against the other whom I dislike or identification with the other (including other persons, institutions, etc, but also my own repressed/unconscious other) which I admire. I am never an individual alone in relationship to "my God", working out my salvation, but I am part of a complex web of continually shifting relationships. Who I am with God changes moment by moment.
2. Identity as an individual never exists; In other words, relationship is not that which two isolated selves forge, but the subjects themselves are a product of relationality.
3. The goal of autonomy, defined as the freedom to do whatever I choose, is not only impossible to achieve, but is seen to be undesirable.
4. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to investigate this thoroughly, there are fresh possibilities for understanding both Christology and the doctrine of God.²⁵

In what follows, we shall examine some of these implications in further detail. Under the influence of Greek philosophy, Christian theology

...understood true being to be eternal and unchanging, it understood both the divine and the world (insofar as it was truly real) as eternal. All that did not have this quality of being was deficient: difference equals defect. As applied to humanity, this meant that the true being of humanity must be some common and unchanging nature. Personal variations and relations (which Greeks plainly recognized as actual) were external, accidental, ultimately less real (Heim 2001:175).

Christian anthropology has also assumed that humanity is somehow different from the rest of creation and set in hierarchical relationship to the rest of the cosmos. This assumption, combined with patriarchal/hierarchical thinking has, as has been well documented, led to an exploitation of the natural environment, women and colonised peoples.²⁶ A further intensification of this division between humanity and the rest of creation is brought about by Descartes' separation of the soul from nature. The mind or thinking substance, for Descartes, should escape the body (and by extension, all other matter which is part of nature) in order

²⁵ See for example Heyward's suggestion that God is "the movement that connects us all" (Heyward 1999:61). The doctrines of the "social" Trinity expounded by for example, Moltmann 1981, Cunningham 1998 and Heim 2001 do not go as far as Heyward, but recognise mutual relationship as the basis for Trinity.

²⁶ See for example Halkes 1996, Nelson 1995 and Ruether 1996.

to reach "pure" rationality which is the true essence of "man". The effect of this separation is that not only is the soul outside nature and the body, but it is also separate from other minds.

Given the challenges we have considered to the body/mind separation, it would seem that a more appropriate understanding of the human person would have to take into account our relationship with not only our own bodies, but with the rest of the cosmos too. For example, at what point does an oxygen molecule, which I inhale, stop being "not me" and become me? Similarly, when does the carbon dioxide I exhale become "not me"? At a most fundamental level the otherness of the environment is part of me. Furthermore, even at this most basic level of breathing, I change moment by moment. What was "not me" becomes me and *vice versa*. The ideal of eternal unchangability is impossible.

Likewise, the challenge to independence, far from being a threat, manifests what liberation theologians have identified as a key to Christ-likeness, namely the identification with the poor. The identification with Jesus and modelling of the self on this image counters the popular approbation of individualism and the construction of the self in accordance with consumerist images. Expressed slightly differently, the Christian chooses that one invent (or re-invent) oneself as another (in this case, the poor). Anderson argues that in order to expose the bias of predominant values in favour of white, male, heterosexual men, and in the pursuit of justice we need to learn to re-invent ourselves as other "where otherness includes differences of sex, race, class and ethnicity" (Anderson 1998:181). It should be noted that the project of "re-inventing the self as other" is first described by Sandra Harding (1991:270) from within a feminist standpoint epistemological position. However, there is no reason that the strategy should not be adopted by those taking a post-structuralist perspective. Indeed, it is in doing so that the criticism of post-structuralism as totally relativistic and a-ethical can be met. Re-inventing the self as other can be applied both to identification with those on the margins - as liberation theologies advocate - and to the "otherness" within. From a feminist perspective this would include naming and identifying with repressed desires, with feelings, with bodily experiences, indeed with anything which does not conform to disembodied rationality.

Similarly, the traditional western valuing of freedom (read as synonymous with autonomy) falls to be re-interpreted. Peter Hodgson is one theologian who has attempted a re-reading of the notion of freedom of the individual. For Hodgson, human beings image God in their freedom. However freedom is defined not in the usual individualistic terms or even as the capacity to act, but in terms of relationship - to God, to the earth and its living creatures and in community with other humans (Hodgson 1994:179/180); or as Kirby puts it: "I exist both because I see others and because they see me, literally or metaphorically" (1996:125). In other words, as feminists, Blacks, colonised peoples, lesbians and gays, disabled people and many others have pointed out, my existence is denied if others do not see me.²⁷ The invitation for the Christian therefore is to "see" marginalised others as Jesus did (for example by speaking to the Samaritan woman as described in John 4, or by touching lepers, or by giving recognition to Zechariah by eating a meal in his home) and thereby participate in "creating" their identity. Carter Heyward, evoking the divine creative activity of Genesis 1, describes this "sceing" as "calling forth". She suggests that Jesus' ministry and ours' is to "see one another as we are meant to be and to call one another forth" (Heyward 1999:8).

Hodgson, also evoking the divine creative speech of Genesis, suggests that the way freedom is best exemplified is in the capacity to speak (1994:180). In this context then, I "see" another when I allow the other to speak her own words. This, as we have noted, is problematic for the "subaltern". We shall further consider this need to speak/ be heard below.

What all these variations on a similar theme remind us is that relationship is intrinsic to who we are. This is not a new insight in Christian theology, but it is one which has been frequently overlooked, especially in considering what it means to image God, where some inherent quality is sought rather than mutual relationship between self and others.

²⁷ See Mohanty 1993:193 and Kilby & Lury 2000:253.

Women in the image of God

Although we may begin to see that there are new possibilities for, amongst others, women, to be recognized as human beings in Christ, given the constraints upon them and the close interweaving of western Christian theology with Cartesian ideas of the subject, we must now ask: Can women image God? If so, which God is it that women image? Theological anthropology, as a distinct topic is a relatively new one, but Christian theologians have always considered humanity as part of the doctrines of creation, redemption and eschatology. There are three basic and inter-related statements Christian theology generally makes about humanity:

1. Humanity is created in the image of God (the *Imago Dei*);
2. Humanity is a creation of God;
3. Humanity is sinful and in need of redemption which only God can effect.

We shall attend to the question of whether and how women can indeed be said to constitute the *Imago Dei* by considering each of the foregoing statements under the headings of:

1. The Divine Horizon
2. Humanity as God's Creation
3. Sin.

The Divine Horizon

Christian anthropology has traditionally relied on two fundamental dichotomies - a subject/object dichotomy in which the nature of "humanity" (usually male humanity) is the object of study, and the dichotomy between God and humanity. If a post-structuralist feminism must reject dichotomies, what then becomes the task of Christian anthropology? The challenge to the God/human dichotomy will be considered in the following section. One way of challenging the subject/object dichotomy and suggesting a new anthropology is to open spaces to hear the voices which have not been allowed to describe who they are "in Christ". It is hardly necessary to state that this has not been the traditional role ascribed to Christian theology, which has been characterised by a select group (of mostly male clerics)

pronouncing "objective" truths concerning human reality. We shall have to consider what happens when the silences/spaces/"other" voices are listened to.

The first problem to be addressed is how women are to speak in the face of traditional theological discourse? How are women to create themselves as subjects? What are women to do if they wish to write/speak their identity in Christ? Language, as Lacan insists, is masculine. Whilst many feminist writers (as we saw in chapter two) accept Lacan's starting point, there are women who show that Lacan's view is not absolute. Jantzen argues that the Phallus, which Lacan describes as the Universal Signifier, is not universal, but dominant, and if it is dominant but not universal, it can be resisted (Jantzen 1998:43). Ways of resistance have been explored especially by some of the French feminists. There are, suggests Irigaray, spaces and gaps to be inscribed (Irigaray: 1985(a)). For Cixous the way to disrupt the phallographic order is to use feminine writing (*l'écriture féminine*). Kristeva suggests that poetic language can create a "revolution" (Kristeva 1984).

In practical terms, what might these attempts to subvert masculine language and speak as women mean? Cixous' *Vivre l'Orange*, a collection of multiple voices, is one way. Another is explored by Julia Kristeva whose *Stabat Mater* (1997) is one of the most striking examples of feminine writing. She mimics the musical setting of Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* which consists of two solo voices that sometimes sing simultaneously. Kristeva's version consists of two parallel columns, the right-hand column being an essay in "ordinary" (masculine) prose outlining aspects of the doctrine of Mary - a male discourse on motherhood. The left-hand column is Kristeva's own poetic reflection, sometimes in sentences, sometimes just in words and phrases, on her experience of giving birth to her son. It is neither the right nor left-hand column that describes the "truth". >From the two, and more importantly the space between them, the birth of something new emerges.

Such writing offers an opportunity to radically re-think Christian anthropology. Instead of relying entirely on "objective" (or so-called "God's eye view") descriptions of the nature of the human person, the poetic reflection on giving birth suggests different ways of understanding relationship (mother and child/Mary and Jesus) and our imaging of God in

the creating/birthing process. Poetry as much as academic prose constitutes theological reflection.

Likewise, Cixous' collage of voices reminds us that a feminist re-writing may include voices normally considered to be extraneous to theological writing. Feelings, desire, as well as insights from other disciplines may well form the basis of theological reflection.

A practical example of the opening of new voices in the understanding the *Imago Dei* may serve to illustrate these alternatives. We shall consider some possibilities of regarding Jesus Christ as the model for what it means to be human. However, it needs to be noted that even with Christ as the starting point, the dominant traditional "readings" of Christ have been presented by male theologians. As Carter Heyward reminds: "All JESUS-images are culturally and politically derived" (1999:16). So who Christ is, is who western male theologians paint him to be. We will compare some of the more traditional (male) readings of Christ with some alternative feminist readings.

Some of the traditional readings and images of Christ from Biblical, classical and church praxis-based sources include:

- a) biblical theological images which are, more often than not, images of a powerful ruler - Messiah, Christ, Lord, Son of Man, Son of God - which in turn have supported imperialistic, exclusive and dominating behaviour.
- b) the concerns of classical theology which did not reflect so much on Jesus' relationships as on his ontological status - divine, human or both.
- c) the classical atonement theories which are based on the necessary shedding of Christ's blood - a demand from God faithfully met (Heyward 1999:176).
- d) in church praxis, the emphasis on Christ's maleness, to the point where women are said not to be capable of imaging Christ, thus being prevented from being ordained to represent Christ at the eucharistic table.

Very different readings of Christ may be offered if women's voices are heard. For example:

- a) Working from a Biblical perspective, instead of titles of power and ultimate victory over

his opponents, women might instead emphasize Jesus feasting with friends at Bethany, or the sensual washing and anointing of him by the woman in Luke 7, or the touching healing of the woman bent double.

- b) Instead of obedience to the "Father" and blood sacrifice women might revise or reject the classical atonement theories and instead look to Jesus' forgiveness of the woman taken in adultery.
- c) Rita Brock suggests reading Christ as the embodiment of erotic power (Brock 1988). Brock and Irigaray, amongst others, suggest that "the Christ" is who constitutes the Christic community (Brock 1988; Irigaray 1997).

When Jesus is "read" through these different lenses, he offers a model for understanding the *Imago Dei* which is quite different from those who suggest it is in the rational intellect that humanity images the divine. The *Imago Dei* derived from these readings suggests relationship, embodied sensuality, compassion and celebration as elements of the divine image.

Resistance is not easy however. As Irigaray contends, giving women identity is not just a case of expanding our definitions of men, but rather it means changing the very meaning of identity. In other words the social/symbolic formulations will have to change for womanhood to come into existence. Woman still has to be created (Whitford 1991:135-137). Jantzen cautions, though, against an all or nothing approach. Even if the woman-subject has not yet fully been achieved, that is not to say there is no woman-subject attempting to speak. There are signs of the emerging woman-subject.

However, the constraints upon and difficulties encountered with speaking this new identity should not be underestimated. Firstly, language is communal. I cannot speak a private language in order to "freely" construct my own identity. We "are not the cause of what we do but the products of the discourses through which we speak" (Davies 1992:64). I am at least constrained by what the reader/listener interprets me to be saying; and to choose a different discourse risks disapproval and even ostracism.

It would be a mistake however, to represent the process of taking up a subject position as one of simple choice. For one thing, the historical contextualization of discourses means that not all subject positions are equal, some carry much more social reward than others and some are negatively sanctioned. The role of dominant or hegemonic discourses on gender and gender identity is pivotal here. While non-dominant discourses certainly provide subject positions, and modes of subjectivity which might be individually satisfying and which might challenge or resist dominant modes, those individuals who do challenge or resist the dominant discourse on gender and gender identity frequently find that this is at the expense of such things as social power, social approval or even material benefits (Moore 1994:65).

Secondly, we have already noted a different but equally pernicious danger - the danger of speaking for others. Their gender alone does not afford women the basis for speaking a new identity. This would be to create a new universal model. The divisions within liberation theologies (for example the split of womanist, *mujeristas* and queer theologians from feminist theologians) should serve as a reminder that it is not sufficient to universalise the "poor" or "marginalised". Chounard and Grant, from a lesbian perspective, remind that "other than heterosexual" is not one class" (Chounard & Grant 1997:154). Perhaps the invitation here is not to limit the understanding of the *Imago Dei* to a single, universal model but, as subjects themselves are constituted by a multiplicity of identities, to foster a proliferation of possibilities.

One of the most interesting and creative attempts to "open spaces" for new understandings has been undertaken by Grace Jantzen, who, working *inter alia* with, Luce Irigaray's writing, suggests the need to create "a god according to our gender" (Jantzen 1998:254). With Feuerbach, Freud and Marx, Jantzen concurs that the God of western Christianity is a construct. She notes also however that this God is the construction of masculinity. This God of masculine construction consists of the (unconscious) projection of all that is valorised by men, onto God. So God is great mind (the supreme rational being), unchangeable, strong, invulnerable, powerful ruler, and so on (Jantzen 1998:90).

Because this is the dominant and not universal understanding of God, it is a construction open to challenge. Instead of dismissing Feuerbach's notion of projection as mere atheism, she suggests that the conscious, creative projection of new values onto God will open up a new symbolic order, a "divine horizon" towards which women can aspire and which will allow woman-subjectivity (Jantzen 1998:90/91). In other words, who and what constitutes

the *Imago Dei* will first depend on what values we project onto God. For example, an acceptance of our own unconscious desires, or an acceptance of the "foreigner within", will lead to a very different construction of God from the traditional western Christian model. For example this alternative construction posits a God who is not singular, but plural. God will not be wholly other, but the other within. God will not be unchanging, but fluid and in process. God will not be self-evident, but open to discovery and surprise and change. In turn, this understanding of God will allow for a much broader, less exclusive, less well-defined idea of who and what constitutes the *Imago Dei*.

Humanity as God's creation

The starting point for Judeo/Christian anthropology is God's creation of humanity:

Adam is shown to us in Genesis 1 and 2 in the first place as a *creature*. This is our fundamental relationship with God (Hill 1984:5).

This God/human dichotomy has been unproblematically assumed. However, as we have just noted, if the *Imago Dei* derives from an initial projected image of God by those who theologise, the relationship between creator and created is much more complicated. Furthermore, if the subject/object and self/other dualisms collapse in the face of relationship which gives rise to identity, so too does the God/human dualism. This "collapse" is, of course, not one which traditional Christian theology has supported, relying instead on the absoluteness of the gap between humanity and God.²⁸ Grace Jantzen offers a compelling suggestion for the reason for the vigorous dismay with which any hint of pantheism is greeted in traditional (male) theological circles:

I suggest that the threat of such boundary-loss and a fear of being absorbed back into the All (Mother?) accounts for the hasty rejection of pantheism by many traditional philosophers and theologians... The fear of pantheism bespeaks a perceived, if unconscious, threat to masculinist imaginary of the west (Jantzen 1998:267/8).

²⁸ Many examples may be cited. Karl Barth is perhaps the most vigorous defender of this position in the twentieth century.

However, if we are to remain true to the insights we have explored thus far, and recognize that the domination of women, Blacks, homosexual people, non-Christians, disabled people and other marginalized groups is supported by a god in whose name dualisms have been entrenched, then the rationale for this division falls to be questioned. This is not, as Jantzen points out, to deny the transcendence of God. The "divine horizon" is always beyond present actuality (Jantzen 1998:271). But it does not follow that the divine is therefore separate. Instead the divine is "a horizon of becoming, exploring the embodied, earthed, female divine as the perfection of our subjectivity" and our role is to bring this god to life "through us and between us, embodied, transcendent ... the enablement of subject-positions as women" (Jantzen 1998:275).

Adam - the dominant starting point for anthropological reflection - is the creation of God. Adam is unproblematically the creature, fallen from God, and, because of that fall, now mortal. Once again, however, the picture is very different if we start not with Adam, but with Jesus. To ask if Jesus is a creature of God is deeply problematic, as the Arian disputes bear testimony. However, to recognize Jesus as the *Imago Dei* and the self-creating incarnation of God, re-focuses the question to one of relationship within the Trinity. Humanity, from this perspective, is not a *res* created by some external divine power, but the emerging consequence of loving relationship. Humanity has the power (as did Jesus) to be self-creating - not in an autonomous and individualistic way, but in the sense of allowing new identities to emerge from relationship with the other.

Furthermore when we direct attention not to Jesus' ontological being, but the "shape of his life" we are able to counter the ideas of unchangeableness and immortality representing perfection. Instead the shape of Jesus life gives us a basis for envisaging a "divine horizon" - a god to which women can aspire.

A different perspective on the challenge to the Creator/creature dualism is explored by Wioleta Polinska (Polinska 2000) through the medium of art, specifically the depiction of the nude bodies of women. Polinska argues that God as the Prime Creator is imaged by man when he creates woman. The creator-artist is active, but outside the picture (of the female

nude) which he creates for the erotic pleasure of other men. However, just as Irigaray and Cixous urge us to "write the feminine", so too female artists have begun articulating different voices, for example by painting nude *old* women, *fat* women, *lesbian* women kissing, *Black* women, *pregnant* women and *working class* women (Polinska 2000:57-61). Just as the feminine writing disrupts the phallogocentric discourse, so too these paintings disrupt the "...normative inscription of women's bodies and introduce female subjectivity as speaking for its own purposes" (Polinska 2000:61).

This disruption, she argues, has theological significance because Christianity, as an incarnational religion, needs to hear "new" voices. Women artists assist with this inasmuch as they introduce woman's body, not as it is constructed by men, but as it is celebrated by women, into discourse. Women become creators of themselves.

Judith Butler would agree. A rather different way of creating new identities emerges from her work. Butler suggests that gender is a speech-act which she designates "performativity". She distinguishes performance and performativity, suggesting that the former presumes a subject whereas the latter contests the notion of the subject (Butler 1994). Performativity can be used to subvert the dominant way of performing a supposedly coherent singular subject position. One of the most explicit ways of doing so is through drag (Butler 1989:31). Drag reveals that gender itself is imitative (that is, not "essential") and if imitative, then the dominant heterosexual performance is only one of a range of possibilities. Drag also reveals the short-comings of the supposedly "normal" male/female, active/passive binaries. Imagining and performing these diverse and different identities opens new possibilities for the "divine horizon" - the as yet only imagined potential for new ways of conceiving the divine.

Sin

We noted above that one of the traditional theological statements made about humanity is that it is sinful and in need of redemption. We noted too, that this view of humanity goes hand-in-hand with the divine/human dualism that suggests only God is good and that

humanity, tainted by original sin, can rely only on God's grace for salvation. As the liberation theologians have eloquently pointed out, the Christian understanding of sin as a moral concept fails to take adequate account of structural sin which marginalises and keeps certain groups of people in poverty.²⁹ Sin, as these theologians remind us, is a state of being, not an action. However, even these understandings of sin are based on a fundamental dualism - the separation of good God and sinful humanity, and in a patriarchal context, as Carter Heyward points out, the "solution" is an ethic of obedience (Heyward 1999:80).

Heyward proposes instead an understanding of sin that is commensurate with the understandings of identity we have been exploring. She suggests that sin is:

...a denial of our power *in relation*, our denial of the Sacred Source of our being *together* in life, not as an option but, more basically, as the very ground of our being....the false splitness between self and other (Heyward 1999:85).

Conversely, when human beings "god" (her verb for embodying justice-love):

...the Sacred is not fastened to either creature but is sparking between and generated by both, and not only both as individual creatures, but as embodiments of social, political, and natural histories (Heyward 1999:74).

This sounds closely akin to the ideas explored in the previous chapter when it was suggested that the space between self and other is the space of creative, and multiple, possibilities. Could it perhaps be said that we constitute the *Imago Dei* when we embody the potential for these emergent possibilities? Do we sin when we deny ourselves and others this possibility, when we confine ourselves or others to being "non-people" or to static and stratified external appearances? Are we redeemed from this when we allow new voices to emerge and recognize them as our own? However we reflect on how human beings sin, it seems sure that the traditional dualistic definitions will no longer suffice.

²⁹ See for example, Gutierrez 1971:35, Brown 1978:52, Stille 1990:64-66.

The Body of Christ

We have already noted that the body has generally received thoroughly bad reviews in Christian theology - this despite the centrality of the incarnation for Christians. As James Nelson provocatively expresses it:

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' And when the Word came to dwell with us, it became - what? A book? A creed? A theological system? A code of morality? No! To the everlasting embarrassment of all dualistic piety, it became flesh (Nelson 1995:47).

The image of the Christian community as the Body of Christ dates back to the earliest writings in the tradition (1Cor.12 and Rom.12). However, just as the incarnation has all too often been ignored, or subsumed under docetic theologies, so too this powerful image has often been "spiritualised" and denuded of its material connotations. However the image may be fruitfully re-claimed and re-interpreted in reflecting on Christian anthropology. Although the body is all too often, in Christian writing, regarded as the site of sin and something to be overcome by exercise of the mind, an alternative, albeit marginal, tradition also exists. In particular the mystical writers offer rich insights upon which feminists may usefully draw in considering the metaphor of the Body of Christ in outlining a more wholistic anthropology.

An interesting example of such insights is offered in the writing of Marguerite of Oingt, a fourteenth century mystic, who pictured Jesus on the cross as a mother giving birth:

Oh my sweet Lord, with what love you laboured for me and bore me through your whole life. But when the time approached for you to be delivered, your labour pains were so great that your holy sweat was like great drops of blood that came out from your body and fell upon the earth... Ah! Sweet Lord Jesus Christ, who ever saw a mother suffer such birth! For when the hour of your delivery came you were placed on the hard bed of the cross... And truly it is no wonder your veins burst when in one day you gave birth to the whole world (quoted in Jantzen 1995:300).

Not only is Christ imaged as a woman giving birth, but the child of that labour is "the whole world" - human, animate and inanimate alike. Through his birthing process Christ gives birth to the whole world which is the Body of Christ. This understanding is akin to the description of the world as "the body of God" (Jantzen 1994 & McFague 1987). This image,

incidentally, offers a very different perspective to the moulded clay of Adam, or, even more remotely, the spoken word of Genesis 1:26, where God is the creator who remains outside "his" creation.³⁰

Other women mystics kept alive this embodied imagery in the erotic language they use to describe their relationship with Christ. Explicit sexual imagery is used by, for example, both Julian of Norwich and Hadewijch of Antwerp. For Hadewijch the beguine, to be God with God means an embodied experience, in which God is given expression in humanity's concrete identification with the poor. Julian suggests that she sees "no difference between God and our substance, but, as it were all (is) God" (quoted in Jantzen 1995:148). The human body in these descriptions, far from being a site of sin, is the place of the most intimate encounter with God. Indeed, it may be seen (as by Julian) as part of the "all" that is God.

The Trinitarian, social God is embodied in the Body of Christ - that is, all that the Christ has given birth to. This understanding of the Body of Christ illuminates in several important ways, matters we have been considering.

1. It is a corporate image, which takes account of both the differences between individual members as well as their interdependent relationship. The image of a body counters individualistic notions of identity so prevalent in Anglo-American philosophy of the twentieth century. It suggests that identity is constructed and developed in community with others.
2. It implies a degree of choice of identity - one can (generally) choose to be a member of the Body. It also, however, implies a future orientation, open to potential as the Christ-life continues to be lived out in the Christian community and the body continues to grow and change.
3. With the material connotations of the term "the body", it serves as a useful reminder of the non-dualistic nature of identity which includes the body. The body of Christ is made up of bodies and the inter-relationships between them. And, like individual human

³⁰ There are feminist writers who vigorously oppose what they describe as the inherent necrophilia of Christian imagery - death giving rise to life. See for example Brock 1988 and Jantzen 1998.

bodies, the Body of Christ falls to be interpreted and performed. In this sense, one does not become a member simply by undergoing some sort of ritual (for example baptism) but by performativity, in other words by being Christ-like.

4. Although the metaphor has been used to exclude non-members of the body, like all bodies, the Body of Christ cannot exist without its "other", thereby implying relationship with both non-members and the earth. Furthermore, its ideal, if it is founded on Christ-likeness, far from being excluding, always seeks to include, especially marginalised people.

Jim Cotter poetically expresses some of these reflections and at the same time offers a profound conclusion to the revised Christian anthropology which I have been attempting:

Love your body
 You are a body:
 not a no-body,
 nor just anybody,
 but somebody.

And we are a Body
 and we are the Body of Christ... (Cotter 1991:61)

Conclusion:
Subjective Reflections

Who do I say I am?

A "person" is not a neutral description. It is a normative designation, as is recognized when one considers, for example, societies and cultures where women or children or slaves are viewed as non-persons. I have attempted to expose the assumed neutrality in the Cartesian/Enlightenment framework which has dominated western philosophy for centuries. I have also attempted to show whose identity is in fact being represented when this supposed neutrality is posited and, more importantly, whose identity is excluded, abjected or occluded. In introducing this topic, I noted that I would prefer to work within an epistemological framework that is both feminist and post-structuralist. This epistemological framework explicitly challenges the Cartesian binaries which have characterised our ways of knowing in western philosophy which have privileged certain knowers, their ways of knowing and what constitutes knowledge.

I have also attempted to re-think some traditional understandings of Christian anthropology through the post-structuralist feminist lens. Because feminism is an expressly political movement (whichever epistemological framework is chosen) I have also considered the suggestions feminists have made of the possible ways of subverting phallogocentric, patriarchal and dualist ways of defining humanity. Feminine writing, performativity and reconstituting of the figure of the naked woman in art are just three of the mechanisms suggested. Subversion of hierarchies and opening up spaces where new identities can be explored are also specifically part of the Christian agenda. As I have argued, "in Christ" a new humanity is not only suggested but invited as the "body of Christ" is constituted and re-constituted.

Part way through the writing of this thesis I attended a lecture in which the speaker referred to a person being "like an electron" - one both can and cannot define it. An electron is both

"here" and "not here". Likewise, a person's identity is subject to intrinsic uncertainty, defined in part only to the extent that it eludes definition in other respects, both clear and not clear. Try to pin it down and it is difficult to say what identity is. Allow it to shift and emerge and disappear and one gets a "smudge", some ideas, some partial glimpses of possibility.

The self is no more a mere "inside" than it is a mere "outside". Above all, the self is nothing merely actual. The self is inseparable from its Being, and its Being is an open-ended process of projecting of possibilities both material and mental, i.e., inseparable from its communal paradigm, the linguistic mediation of all experience, the dynamic of revealing and concealing of possibilities in actuality and the horizon of time (McGaughey 1997:417).

I may "speak" my identity as female, South African, white, Christian and the silences between these words call out. The silences of those excluded by these words call out too - more softly, generally less audibly. Persons who know me may define me by appearance, power, social status, yet these definitions suggest nothing about my feelings, emotions, desires, hopes and fears. I and others may name relationships which shape me - friend, lover, daughter. Yet none of these suggest the "me" I may yet become, the potential which rests in me and, especially, between me and others. Who I say I am has still to be discovered as new possibilities unfold, new selves emerge and silences are given voice.

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