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"From the Cave to the Abyss"

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Carlsbad Cave, "The Big Room",
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Abstract

"From the Cave to the Abyss": Research into the origins and ramifications of dualities and hierarchies, and a search for alternatives. The history of Western culture has been the rejection of the symbolic cave, sacred source of life and death, and the dismemberment of the world into hostile opposites. The Sub-thesis suggests that the postmodern abyss of uncertainty and self-doubt can operate nihilistically or so as to affirm divergent philosophies of interconnectedness with all life and respect for difference and mystery.

A study taking the form of three installations which comprise the Studio Practice component (50%), together with a Sub-thesis (50%), and the Report which documents the nature of the course of study undertaken.
Acknowledgements

My thanks to the Canberra School of Art for this opportunity to further my research and studio skills.

Especially stimulating has been the practice of this School in having visiting artists and lecturers in residency and forum programmes. The graduate programme of seminars has provided a thought-provoking insight into others' work practices, and a revelation of the congruence in ideas and the force, passion, and intelligence of writers/makers striding into relatively unknown territory.

It has been a joy pursuing a line of inquiry, and burrowing into the world of books. I warmly thank the people who have made this possible. I would have been unable to do this work to my satisfaction without the companionship and sheer hard slog of my partner Tony Steel who has child-minded and helped in innumerable ways. A number of fellow students and academics have been there with assistance whenever called on. Thank you Paloma Ramos, Anne Brennan, and Steven Holland. Nigel Lendon, Deputy Director and Convenor of the Graduate School, has expedited changes in my programme related to child-bearing and other family commitments. Many thanks to Heather Dietrich for advice as to source material. In the initial stages David McNeill, Jill Bennett, and Rosanne Kennedy were helpful with suggestions as to readings and discussions about structure. In the draft and final stages Gordon Bull was an encouraging supervisor. Mary Roberts gave generous time and effort towards final corrections. Professor Bob Hodge from the University of Western Sydney read the work with great interest and offered incisive and helpful commentary. A communal effort indeed!

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Theory: David McNeill, Jill Bennett, Gordon Bull.
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inside  outside

EMPTY  Pippa Pear's jar is empty
FULL   Emma Apple's jar is full

Books on opposites for children.
Seven years after practising art following a tertiary art education, I found myself absorbed with the need to de-skill myself, to make work from a different source. I would trick myself out of habitual ways of making and my own aesthetic judgements by working blindfold or by drawing and painting with left and right hands simultaneously. The sorts of strategies I use as a teacher to free up students in a drawing class. Strategies those students always enjoy but ultimately dismiss as playing, not really making work.

Playing - like so many artists have done before - to try to regain the spontaneity and pleasure in making that young children clearly have. Playing - to touch another core in yourself - one less pre-ordained, wilder, less civilised.

By less civilised I mean less schooled, less conditioned, less aesthetic and perhaps, by association, more imbued of those qualities society disdains and disclaims - intuitive, feminine, spiritual. Here I have entered the delicate and troublesome entanglement of those separations and oppositions that typify our society. Intellect versus emotion, knowledge versus intuition, male versus female, corporeal versus spiritual. Work versus play, conscious versus unconscious, professional versus naive, and so on.

Children's books reveal how early we learn to see the world thus. Apart from the alphabet and numbers, one of the major teachings is pairs: chair and table, cup and saucer, shoes and socks, hat and gloves, mouse and cheese, cat and dog, rain and shine, good and bad, dark and light, girl and boy, mummy and daddy. The trios (such as birth, life, death), the quadruplets (e.g., directions, seasons) are strangely absent.

We only need to watch a few hours of television to see how the adult world acts out the dual oppositions everywhere; from the goodies and baddies who inhabit soaps and Hollywood films, to politics where South versus North, left versus right, greens versus industry predominate. The consequences are simplifications to the point of caricature, and the systematisation of conflict as the primary way of resolving problems.

The art world replicates those splits in its own concerns: high art versus kitsch, art versus craft, modern versus postmodern, painting versus sculpture have become the subject matter of tiresome and seemingly inescapable debates.

As I stand in front of my canvas and make marks with left and right arms working simultaneously I feel firmly grounded, centred, complete. I am calling on the oppositions by prioritising play, intuition, the subconscious, the body. The aim is not to glorify these qualities but rather to restore balance, to experience holistic unity.

In writing this thesis I have scoured the expanding mass of literature analysing dualities to help me understand our enmeshment in separations, to seek a way of honouring difference and of how to work from a different source without entrenching or exalting that difference.

My art practice and this thesis are personal searches and also part of a social force, fuelled by the urgent and critical state of our world, towards alternative ways of viewing our existence.
Leading her into a great black tunnel.

This picture comes from The Wizard of Jenolan, a book written by my mother Nuri Mass and illustrated by my grandmother Celeste Mass, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1946.
A Note

Let me tell you briefly about this dissertation. Since it is also about myself, the start is my own beginning.

My mother was an impassioned advocate for other life forms on the planet. She had little time for humans, their politics, their violence, their destruction of nature. She wrote books on Australian flora, on insects, rocks, natural phenomena, on caves, the snow country, and the mountains. She had little time for men.

My family were brought up in a woman's world. We did not eat meat or fish, and meals were simple, of homegrown vegetables. We made music and art and read books. My grandmother had been a Christian Science healer and we eschewed medicine and drugs. Our home was dark and Victorian, full of histories and hidden emotions and psychic events.

On holidays we visited caves: Jenolan, Abercrombie, Yarangobilly, Wombeyan, Oberon, Wellington, Buchan. And we went down mines in Lightning Ridge. We were drawn to the underground worlds, to the dark and the hidden. The part of me that rebelled made my bedroom the only room in the house with open windows and drawn-apart drapes.

I never really enjoyed being in caves. They pressed on me with all that weighty darkness. They were too close and there was no sky.

Like the depths of the sea, caves are the dark peripheries of our world, sunless, rarely inhabited by humans, full of strange structures and unknown forms. In our ignorance they seem ancient, timeless, insensible, and fearsome. They become physical and metaphorical manifestations of qualities we decry and repress in our own personal and cultural identities.

Denial of the 'other' within ourselves and within society enables a single-mindedness that is destructive and oppressive to diversity and difference. It is in the search for the 'shadow' and a new way of seeing the world that embraces self with other, light with shadow, that I overcome my own dis-ease to go cave visiting, once again. This time in images and words; at one remove; creating a broader context.

My journey has a deliberate order and form, despite its apparent breathless rushing from site to site. It stepping-stones from the dark of the ancient cave, to the dismemberment and the destruction of the symbolic cave dwellers. Out of the deep and abiding sense of loss (described variously as personal and social "anomie", "alienation", "schizophrenia"), that results from that destruction, comes the need for a new way of living, for balance; for a juggling of the opposites until they interweave and intertwine, each within the other, dependent on the other, separate and necessary.
This is not a formal journey, keeping to strict timetables and rationally organised events. It weaves hither and thither, with threads of meaning filtering through. In trying to tell a different story it feels necessary to use a different tone of voice.

Telling the story has been significant for me, and full of revelations. Each leap of awareness I experienced has been made already in the writings of others. The grace, power, and intelligence of those books has helped me on, to the next step. All our lives vibrate ceaselessly around the large questions of our times, and our thoughts and 'discoveries' tend to be synchronous, communal, and mutually regenerative.
Fig. 4

Louisa Chase, "Pink Cave", oil on canvas, 1983.
Western society is pervaded by harsh separations and hierarchical classifications. In Plato's writings, particularly "The Simile of the Cave" 1, and Irigaray's re-reading of Plato 2, we see that this derives from particular political and historical developments; that it is not 'natural'. The journey out of the cave was one of deliberate blindness and amnesia.

About 375 B.C. 3 Plato wrote The Republic as a statement of aims for the Academy he founded and taught in: a school to turn statesmen into philosophers rather than into experts in rhetoric, as taught in rival academies of the time. Plato believed that statesmen must first understand the operation of society and only after should they utilise the strategies of exposition and persuasion.

The section in The Republic called "The Simile of the Cave" images the ignorance of the human condition as though men (sic) are prisoners in an underground cave, shackled so that they can only look straight ahead and are only able to see shadows and hear echoes of the activities and talk happening around them. They connect shadows with echoes and assume they are observing "reality", "the whole truth". Plato then pictures one of them let loose and allowed "to see properly the objects of which he used to see the shadows", and then taken out the long cave entrance into the sunlight and shown the light and the upper world outside, and then gradually shown the sun itself, the source of all life and good 4. This journey, in stages of confusion, dazzlement, disbelief, and gradual realisation, is seen as the process of enlightenment; travelling upwards towards the light as analogous to the "upward progress of the mind into the intelligible region". The sun is the analogy for the divine, for the "form of the good", "source of light" and "controlling source of truth and intelligence". Plato uses this image to argue that statesmen need to rise into this realm of "the highest form of knowledge", the philosophical contemplation of the divine, and then descend again into the world of men to share that knowledge as part of their duty of care and responsibility to society 5.

Even taking into account ambiguities in the translation of some terminology from Plato's day to today (e.g., "illusion" may have meant a "state of mind" rather than "conjecture" 6), Plato's analogy reveals a confidence in categorising the world in terms of binary opposites. The world of "men" and "statesmen" is founded on the invisibility of the other half of this binary, the women. The dark shadowland of the cave is illusion, the light is reality, linking two dualities: dark/light, illusion/reality. There are clear distinctions between ignorance and reason, the human and the divine, the mass of humanity and the educated ruler. The philosopher's struggle upwards towards rationality and reality is a hierarchical image of progress upwards from the weighty base of the triangle to a singular heavenly peak.

Moral and educative goals aside, Plato's story is penetrated by and itself perpetuates the dualism and logocentrism that pervade Western philosophy and culture.
In 1974 Luce Irigaray published *Speculum of the Other Woman* containing subversive readings of Plato's "Simile of the Cave" as well as of Freud's essay "Femininity" and his other writings on women, and containing a series of essays called "Speculum". In the section on Freud, Irigaray foregrounds the masculine ideology implicit in psychoanalytic theory and Western discourse in general: woman is defined as a disadvantaged man, a male construct with no status of her own. In the central section "Speculum", there are ten essays concerned with aspects of the history of Western philosophy in relation to women, used to explore woman's essential difference from man. In the final section, "Plato's Hystera", Irigaray 'speculates' on Plato's simile of the cave in an attempt to reveal how the production of meaning and discourse operates so as to exclude women. As Elizabeth Grosz points out, Irigaray's writing is hard to refer to. In its poetry and ambiguity, fragmentary and elliptical nature, it is impossible to fairly represent through logical argument. This section therefore heavily depends on quotes and otherwise apologises for over-simplifications for my own purposes.

For Irigaray, Plato's cave is an example of a philosophy that postulates ideas through falsification and endless replication of its own position, through reductive, formalised images which refuse their origins (e.g., such origins as cave as womb, passage as vagina, journey out as birth). It is a philosophy which denies differences which would crack it and create fissures in its apparent seamlessness; differences such as the non-neutrality of the feminine, the experience of the senses, anything outside the chained up "phallic line" which imprisons men also: "Heads forward, eyes front, genitals aligned, fixed in a straight direction and always straining forward, in a straight line. A phallic direction, a phallic line, a phallic time, backs turned on origin." The enforcement of such uni-directional gaze is to ensure that men partake in the set-up scene of representation. The exclusion of women, their muteness, leaves men alone to decide "on what is true and false", but these are men only in effigy, in words, in gaze, in formalised gender. The ideal of truth thus formed is "to sanction, organize, regulate, and arbitrate, the relationships between men, particularly by means of theorization. And this is so in the *polis* as well as in the cave". The feminine, the maternal is "without voice, without presence" and any hint of their material elements, of the womb, is turned into scenery to make the show more realistic. The womb, unformed, "amorphous" origin of all morphology, is transmuted by/for analogy into a circus and a projection screen, a theater of/for fantasies.

Multiplicity is reduced to hierarchy and duality:...dichotomies, categorical differences, clear-cut distinctions, absolute discontinuities, all the confrontations of irreconcilable representations. Between the "world outside" and the "world inside", between the "world above" and the "world below". Between the light of the sky and the fire of the earth. Between the gaze of the man who has left the cave and that of the prisoner. Between truth and shadow, between truth and fantasy, between "truth" and whatever "veils" the truth. Between reality and dream. Between .... Between.... Between the intelligible and the sensible. Between good and evil. The One and the many. Between anything you like. All oppositions that assume the *leap* from a worse to a better. An ascent, a displacement (?) upward, a progression along a line. Vertical. Phallic even? But what has been forgotten in all these oppositions, and with good reason, is how to pass though the passage, how to negotiate it - the forgotten transition. The corridor, the narrow pass, the neck.
To Irigaray the journey out of the cave into the sun and its analogous journey from illusion into truth and wisdom is about the imposition of male power and authority, fixedness and ideas, through representation, through language, through the gaze. The ‘sexuality’ of the binaries, their coming-together in copulation, their separation through birth, is denied, as one half of the binary is denied autonomy and becomes the negative of the other. Earth’s burning, incendiary chambers are stripped of their function as cause, of their native and future wealth, for fear they may produce change; now they are mere dark holes in which lucid reason risks drowning. Old mines, fallen into neglect, where no precious metal gleams anymore. Hysteras from which the philosopher’s stone has already been taken away.

The logos eclipses nature, the value and authority of eternal Ideas deny origins, intrauterine oneness, couplings. "The power of the father must supplant that of the mother if order is to be maintained." The father ... no longer has any foundation, he is beyond all beginnings. Between these two abysses - nothing/being - language makes its way, morphology takes shape, once the mother has been emptied out. Enumerating all the "beings" formed in her, and their properties, in order to relate them to the father. In conformity with his desire and his law.

The Father ... is eternal, because he has always refused to be born. His being, as a result, continues throughout time identical to himself. Such is his Good, his Truth, his Beauty. His logos. In(de)finately defined and finite. Immutable, unchangeable.

The omnipotent perfection of the divine, of God, depends structurally on a hierarchy of decreasing perfection: e.g., philosophers, men and, way below, women and beasts; and the beasts themselves are categorised into higher and lower, so that the beasts of the ocean, the lowest literally, are the most degraded of all.

Looking for the chinks in the armour of this self-projecting, self-protecting system, Irigaray wonders how one can return "into the cave, the den, the earth? Rediscover the darkness of all that has been left behind? Remember the forgotten mother?" By taking Plato’s "Simile of the Cave" and rewriting it in a way that overburdens it with its own blind spots, its assumptions, its denials, Irigaray makes explicit what lies dormant in this discourse: the dubiousness of its singular oneness and its clarity. By pursuing the free play of terms and plural meanings she reveals the repressed and unspoken and exposes inherent ambiguities, paradoxes and contradictions.

Between the times of Plato’s writing and Irigaray’s rewriting of the cave analogy there have been the developments of knowledges and political structures that have further authorised and institutionalised some of the repressions and reductiveness anticipated in Plato’s writings. Recently there has been a flourishing awareness amongst numerous groups in society, mostly representing those who have been repressed and degraded within such systems, of the dreadful losses brought about, and that change can only come through a thorough understanding of the foundations and histories of these knowledge and power structures.

The dominant philosophies of dualism and logocentrism did not originate in classical Greece. Alienating separations between humanity and nature, male and female can be traced back to ancient Mesopotamia, to the invasions of warlike Indo-European tribes, to the birth of Christianity, and so on. The sources certainly pre-date Descartes and the rise of science and the Enlightenment, though clearly that period involved a dramatic
intensification of the mechanistic domination of nature. Certain binary separations arise at certain points in history when they become important reinforcers of particular power relations. So that sacred/profane, male/female, and master/slave dichotomies may be speculatively traced back to prehistory and the militarism of male hunting bands; civilised/primitive came to the fore with the period of colonial conquest from the fourteenth century onwards; and subject/object dualism was foregrounded with the rise of science. Ancient dualities are preserved by culture and accumulate to form a "store" of "conceptual weapons, which can be mined, refined and redeployed for new uses." 22.

To begin with Greek culture, and specifically Plato, is to begin where the dominance of a male universality and of reason over body and emotion are lengthily and clearly articulated, in the setting of a culture which is well-documented and massively historicised, and which has become iconically the cradle of our Western civilisation. Plato's work, constantly in circulation throughout Western history, was influential on the work of Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas and, through them, formed the intellectual foundations of Christian doctrine, and of the dominant Western intellectual and philosophical traditions of rationalism until the Enlightenment. Within a poststructuralist perspective Plato's writings are "canonical texts", i.e., ones which have been "historically selected and reselected ... to enforce received wisdom and to legitimate the status quo." 23

My own reason for this starting point is simple: I wanted to start with the image of the cave. As Irigaray says: "The myth of the cave ... as an example [of "phallosensical homologue"] is a good place to start". 24

In ancient myths/religions and symbolically in our culture, the cave is the source of life and/or the entrance to the underworld and to death. The cave is ancient, mysterious, dark, and by association with all these qualities, female. To Plato it was a site of ignorance, illusion, irrationality, darkness. His analogy of the cave implicitly denies the whole sphere of the feminine. 25

The Platonic cave of illusions and ignorance existed in history at the same time as the widespread worship throughout ancient Greece of Gaia, Goddess of the Earth and dispenser of oracles, who dwelt in mystical caverns, in underground caves, in subterranean chambers. Gaia emerged from chaos, birthed the sky-god Uranus who was both son and lover and showered her with fertile rain. She bore grass, flowers, trees and brought forth birds and beasts. The great shrine and oracle of Gaia was at Delphi, perceived centre of the cosmos. 26 However it is also around this time that Apollo stole or was given (according to different legends) Gaia's shrine at Delphi, and many other Gaian shrines were assaulted and won by Zeus. Throughout the Western world other Goddesses were being deposed by male deities or assimilated in altered and suppressed forms into increasingly patriarchal religions and surrounding cultures. 27

Plato refers directly to the Gaian religion in the Timaeus and in The Republic, as "one of those convenient stories", as "some magnificent myth that would in itself carry conviction to our whole community". Plato utilises it in his dialogues to persuade Rulers, Soldiers, and the rest of the community that they were fashioned together in "their mother", the "Earth", and that "they must think of the land in which they live as their mother and protect her if she is attacked, while their fellow-citizens they must regard as brothers born of the same mother earth" 28. Then "god" fashions them separately in a hierarchical classification (one capable of being crossed through merit and capability) of Rulers, Soldiers, Auxiliaries 29, farmers and other workers.
To Plato the Gaian religion was a "myth" which was useful as a national glue and call to brotherhood and loyalty in times of crisis. There are resonances here in contemporary times with governments calling for loyalty to the "motherland", to women and children, in times of war. References to people as all children of "mother nature" are useful when class, race, gender, cultural distinctions would be politically divisive.  

The development of philosophic thought, shifts in epistemology, and paradigm changes do not occur in isolation. Whether it is argued that they precede and stimulate socio-political change, parallel and maintain particular socio-political arrangements, or belatedly reflect socio-political developments, or all three at once, such shifts in philosophic knowledges and world views definitely relate to the social and political environments of their era. It is not coincidence that the conquest of Gaian shrines was taking place as Plato wrote his dialogues. Particular power structures become part of systems of knowledge and philosophies, then their deep entrenchment in culture helps them persist through political and economic change.

Contemporary feminist writers (such as Hartsock, Ruether, Spelman, Irigaray, Plumwood) have provided critical reevaluations of Plato's philosophy, focusing around the linkages made in his works between masculine identity and reason, and between reason and the domination of women, slaves, and nature. Platonic rationalism is implicated "in a process of elevating an abstract and oppositionally defined reason at the expense of devaluing and denying its dualised contrasts". To Plato the abstract timeless realm of reason is also the realm of goodness and the source of value; all else is inferior, mutable. The world of the senses, of particularities, of materiality is of a lower order, and is in the realm of the irrational, the fortuitous, the disorderly, the feminine, the animal, the world of biological life.

Human identity is likewise split in two:

...the soul is in the very likeness of the divine, and immortal, and intellectual, and uniform, and indissoluble, and unchangeable; and the body is in the very likeness of the human, and mortal, and unintellectual, and multiform, and dissoluble, and changeable.

Since the body is seen as a hindrance to the achievement of the highest ideals of the soul, death becomes desirable as escape from such entrapment. (Plato's "eternally present Idea" is to Irigaray "Target, or vanishing point, and death"). Disregard and disdain for earthly things and attainment of a philosophic contemplation of the divine Forms is second best.

Here is the definitive account of the otherworldly identity, basis of the millennial 'existential homelessness' in which the earth is not a home to be cherished but a trial, a place of temporary passage and little significance compared with the world beyond.

"The Simile of the Cave" describes the philosopher's journey out of the earth, the material world, the womb, and the cycle of birth and death as a liberation and transcendence into the divine realm of the blinding light of Reason.

No system of thought seamlessly fits the needs of a society but diverse elements if it may support diverse political ends and often it is these elements which become popularised. The Platonic glorification of death suited a male-dominated and war-ready Greek society which idealised the warrior-hero. Yet in other ways Plato belonged to the new intellectual class and the precedence given to reason and the role of the philosopher in his
writings would have been a factor in increasing the influence of this class over that of the military. Yet Platonic philosophy still inculcated the hostile dualities that derived from the institutionalisation of militarism within older civilisations than the Greek.

In the following Section we see how the toppling of mother goddess religions by male warrior kings or gods had paralleled the development of societies capable of undertaking large-scale endeavours, able to protect themselves from the vagaries of nature, and capable of resisting invasion and conquest. As the need for resisting invasion came to outweigh the others, so the relationship between militarism and duality and hierarchy solidified.

Violence, destruction and war were the concomitants of the institutionalisation of 'power-over'.

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**Footnotes to Section One:**


8. As used by Plato, this "womb" has been structured by a male obstetrician, "played with, made metaphor and mockery of by men": L. Irigaray, *Op. Cit.*, p. 263.


10. Ibid, p. 245.

17. Ibid, pp. 277-278.
20. See footnote 5 in Section Two of this thesis for notes on the connection between women and the ocean.
27. A point of interest is that the original shrines at Delphi (itself the name for "womb") were made of beeswax and feathers, then of fern-stalks twisted together, then of laurel-boughs, then, after the earth goddesses were subordinated under male gods, the shrines became bronze, and dressed stone (both initially were to be engulfed by the elements; by the earth, by fire). (See R. Graves, *The Greek Myths: Volume One*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1977, pp. 178,181.) The relationship between transient organic materials and goddess religions concerned with earth cycles, and male religions and more permanent building materials was paralleled by the timing of the oracle, originally related to seasonal cycles and only operating in one season of the year, but
under Apollo, the oracle operated continuously, its energies were fixed. (See Micheli, Op. Cit., p. 81.) Human control over nature and fixedness became the characteristics of patriarchal religions.


29. "Auxiliaries" refers to the military, the police, and those with executive duties.

30. E.g., books and exhibitions like The Family of Man: "conceived as a mirror of the universal elements and emotions in the everydayness of life - as a mirror of the essential oneness of mankind [sic] throughout the world". (Edward Steichen, Introduction) One subtitle to an image of a mother with children is: "She is a tree of life to them..." (p. 33). E. Steichen, The Family of Man, The Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., 1955. See R. Barthes, Mythologies, Paladin, St Albans, 1976, pp. 100-102 for an essay on this exhibition. Barthes shows how the postulation in the exhibition of a lyrical human essence and a common God suppress the "weight of History" and differences "which we shall here quite simply call 'injustices'."

31. Merlin Stone points out that the suppression of goddess religions took thousands of years and continued into the first centuries after Christ. But that the myths reveal the cumulative decline during that period in the powers of the goddesses and an assimilation of male deities into the older religions until those male deities replaced or destroyed the goddesses. See M. Stone, When God Was A Woman, A Harvest/ HBJ Book, San Diego, 1976, p. 68.


34. Plato, Phaedo (1948, p. 225) as quoted in Plumwood, p. 89.


Section Two

Babylonian Myth of Dismemberment: The Tempest

After the separation of heaven and earth the only entities in existence were Apsu and Tiamat. Apsu personified the fresh subterranean waters and Tiamat the salt waters. Apsu and Tiamat were a male-female pair and "their waters mingled together." They engendered a line of gods including Anu, Anu's son, Enki, and other deities. The play and dancing of these younger gods so disturbed the sleep of Apsu that he became determined to destroy his "noisome" offspring, despite Tiamat's protests. Enki, after apparently being asked to kill Tiamat and being unable to, managed to slay Apsu. Tiamat, to avenge her consort, created an army of eleven monsters (three in the form of types of horned snakes, a long-haired 'hero' figure, a great storm beast, a lion-demon, a lion-humanoid, a scorpion man, fierce storms, fish-man, bull-man) and took as her champion and consort the god Kingu. Anu was chosen to subdue Tiamat but when he confronted her he cringed in fear and refused to complete his mission. Finally Marduk, son of Enki, was willing to battle Tiamat, though only upon the promise of the supreme position among all other deities if he succeeded. He was elected war leader of the gods, and carried a spear named for his mandate: "Security and Obedience".

Following a great battle Marduk defeated Tiamat and her consort and all her monsters. From his storm chariot he hurled a raging storm into her mouth, shot her, then dismembered her corpse to order the cosmos. He split her skull with his mace while standing on her "lower parts". He broke her in two "like a dried fish", using one half to roof the heavens and the other to surface the earth. Her breasts formed mountains, the Tigris and Euphrates flowed from her pierced eyes, her spittle formed clouds. The chaos she-monster, slain and dismembered, became the body of the world. Kingu's blood was used to form humanity so that they could be the servants of the gods.

The pantheon of gods then swore allegiance to Marduk as permanent monarch, promising him "Benefits and Obedience":

O Marduk, thou art indeed our avenger
We have granted thee kingship over the universe entire.
When in Assembly thou sittest, thy word shall be supreme.

Marduk's word, his command, was absolute:
He spoke, and at his word
the constellation was destroyed.
He spoke again,
and the constellation was
[re]constructed.
The Gods, his fathers,
seeing (the power of) his word,
rejoiced, paid homage: 'Marduk is king'.

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5. [Footnote]
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This Babylonian myth (known as a 'creation' myth; perhaps more properly termed a 'destruction' myth), the Enuma elish, probably dates from the early second millenium B.C., although none of the extant texts dates from earlier than the first millenium.

In the following discussion of this myth and Mesopotamian societies I am aware that here too is a 'story' being created that is open to challenge and full of its own presuppositions: e.g., that women were better-off before state societies, and that female/nature vs male/culture are universal dichotomies within Western history. The brushstrokes are dangerously broad, blurring detail and diverse stories, in the attempt to re-examine traditional key points in Western history for clues as to the formation and development of the present hegemonic structures of duality and hierarchy.

The Enuma elish myth may have reflected an actual struggle for supremacy between the rising Babylonian civilization of the north and the sea-connected southern cities of old Sumer. It was also a reflection of the conquest of goddess cultures and the development of authoritarian patriarchy.

Starhawk points out that there was a clear shift within the religions of Mesopotamia: archeological evidence suggests the predominance of great goddess worship in prehistory (pre-writing) periods. These goddess religions were all primarily concerned with the continuity of life, whether the Goddesses were called Nammu, Ninhursaga, Ninmah, Nintur, Aruru, Belit-ili, Mama, or Inanna. Successive myths (which, in the form we see them, date from the time of transition, when writing had begun, but still retaining many traces from past stories) show a gradual decline in goddess powers.

Three successive myths focused on by Starhawk reflect the destruction of goddess religions. First, the Sacred Marriage myth, from the late fourth and third millenium B.C., celebrated the cycles of life and renewing fertility, venerated women's erotic power and male sexual power as both life-sustaining and linked magically to fecundity in nature, and mourned the death of the young male consort as a communal outpouring of grief before the next renewal. The major themes were sex and food, life and death.

Second, the Gilgamesh epic related to a historical king Gilgamesh who ruled in Sumer in approximately 2600 B.C. but the stories date from 2100 B.C. on. In these stories war was the central theme. Gilgamesh was a war leader and arrogant king who, with his comrade Enkidu, undertook heroic ventures. This is a myth about male comradeship, loyalty, self sacrifice, courage, obedience and male power over women (although Gilgamesh finally failed to find immortality and had to die because a snake stole the magic from him; the snake being traditionally the symbol of the Goddess).

Third, the Enuma elish myth, condensed at the start of this section, was more recent again, and, in part, can be read as a story about the destruction of the Goddess of creation and the organisation of "power-over" through obedience to authority. It can be viewed as a symbolic image of the institutionalisation of patriarchy and war.

To choose these particular forms of these myths from their manifold variations in different geographical areas and different periods and from amongst the multitudes of myths in Mesopotamia throughout the millenia is clearly to make a point. From the historical distance of the contemporary world it is tempting to search this "cradle" of Western civilisation for clues as to broader changes in social systems. And whilst these myths were certainly not the only myths in Mesopotamia, they do seem to be particularly long-lasting and venerated ones.
The very diversity of myths reflected the regular upheavals which affected the inhabitants. Invasions from surrounding tribal and nomadic peoples into the fertile valleys, the influx of refugees from wars elsewhere, internal conflicts, the uneven flows of the Tigris and Euphrates; all these elements created a melting-pot environment. The cultures grew through interplay, clash, fusion. Out of this ‘meshing’ came developments like the wheel, the first use of metal in quantity, the world's first known writing, arithmetic and geometry, the idea of money, an abundance of art and monumental architecture, the formation of established cities, an institutionalised military, and institutionalised slavery. In its agricultural wealth, trading power, and war successes, Mesopotamian societies markedly influenced the politics and cultures of neighbouring peoples: Egyptians, Hurrians, Hittites, Hebrews, Persians.

The Enuma elish myth appears in written form in the period when Indo-European-led Kassites conquered (about 1600 B.C.) and controlled Babylon (for the next four and a quarter centuries) at a time when Babylon had been weakened by an destructive and plundering invasion from the Hittites from Asia Minor. Babylon had been previously and briefly the centre of a Mesopotamian empire under the king Hammurabi (1750 B.C. - 1708 B.C.), and thereafter remained a great cultural centre for over a thousand years despite constant invasions, occasional destruction and gradual political decline. The gods in the myth, Anu and Enki, may have been associated with the arrival of specific groups at Erech and Eridu in Sumer and the references to them making previous unsuccessful attempts to dispose of Tiamat suggest unsuccessful attempts to diminish the supremacy and popularity of goddess worship.

Marduk became the patronal god of the city of Babylon, gradually absorbing other deities. The rise of the cult of Marduk is closely connected with the political rise of Babylon from city-state to the capital of an empire under Kassite rule. Marduk became more and more important until it was possible for the author of the Enuma elish to maintain that Marduk was king of all the gods and that many of the gods were in fact no more than aspects of his persona. Hence the hymn of the Fifty Names of Marduk incorporated into the epic.  

In the centuries of Kassite rule and following, the history of Mesopotamia becomes one primarily of wars, invasions, plunders, and atrocities on an unprecedented scale under Assyrian empires. Kingship became first and foremost a military occupation: defence of city and lands and extension of territory, domination and influence. Secondary duties were to build and repair the city's temples, to maintain and expand irrigation canals and navigable canals, and to promote and preserve law and justice for free citizens through codes of law (which emphasised the protection of private property). 

Starhawk argues the centrality of reorganising a society for military purposes in the development of power-over women and nature by men, now alienated from themselves by an emphasis on their male identity to the exclusion of all else. Using the context of Mesopotamia, Starhawk argues that the development of patriarchal and militarised structures of power go hand-in-hand. Not because women had not previously been successful warriors and not because males were innately better at war or inherently more brutal "but because societies that adopted patriarchy, the social system based on the principle of hierarchical rule, proved most effective at maximising power." Tribal wars typically involved few deaths, no leaders and few strategies: they were 'hit-and-run'. A society with a large military class, waging war with masses of soldiers, required a high level of organisation, obedience and discipline, and a widespread willingness to lose life for the sake of the group.

According to this argument, as warfare became chronic in Mesopotamian societies, myths, epics, religions, and customs were restructured to perpetuate a new ideology of control.
Slavery was institutionalised, rape justified as an expected reward of war, marriage laws gave men total control over all aspects of the lives of women and children, inheritance through the father made female sexuality and power inherently dangerous and destructive. To institute control over sexuality, patriarchy had to destroy the old order that affirmed the cyclical round of life and death, the erotic, the primal pleasure of touch.

Starhawk postulates that the goddess myths and religions were yoked to these new ideals, perhaps in order to legitimise them. So that long after women had been removed from power and certainly from a voice in the military, the female goddesses were metamorphised from patrons of various aspects of agriculture and the arts and crafts to goddesses of love and war (thus linking sex and violence in the myths as well as in the lives of the people). The priorities of the societies shifted from ensuring the fertility of the land to the neglect and impoverishment of the land for the sake of war, and the related processes of centralisation of power, urbanisation, changed ownership of the land and the development of extensive irrigation.

Nancy Huston argues that there is a deep connection between women’s ability to bear children and men’s preoccupation with war. Both are seen as representations of gendered strength, both as ‘natural’ activities for the two sexes. Huston shows through myths and other writings that heroism is connected to sexual abstinence; that sexuality is viewed as destroying a man’s strength and warmaking capacity. She postulates that men removed women from warmaking (except for occasional virgin heroines like Joan of Arc) in order to out-match the suffering of women in labour, to out-mythologise the life/death encounter of childbirth. Thus “tales of war are received as exalting and tragic, whereas tales of childbirth are thought to be empty gossip”

According to writers Starhawk and Merlin Stone, Mesopotamia is a case study of the history of transition to patriarchy, to the organisation of society around the principles of domination and the rule of men over women, and over other men. As far as we know, life in the early townships appeared to be fairly egalitarian, with no permanent rulers, no slavery, no sacrifice, no class differentiation, and no gender domination. With the development of cities, it is clear that the change in scale and nature of social operations had significant ramifications. Monumental temples replaced the earlier small shrines as places of worship and there is evidence now of animal and human sacrifices. Other large-scale projects such as irrigation and storage systems protected people from the vagaries of nature but also distanced them more from the cycles of nature. Their very construction depended on greater stratification where wealth and land had accumulated in the hands of a few and the mass of citizens worked for those few. Defense of the cities, of the wealth, involved the development of military organisations and the accrual of power in the hands of military leaders. Out of these processes, taking place over centuries, grew societies dependent on conquest and on institutionalised slavery. These power- and war-based societies diminished the traditional powers of women and transformed them into symbolic possessions and rewards, or into sources of danger and evil, to be overcome.

Power had become hierarchical, centralised and increasingly secular; society had become more stratified; the world and the cosmos had become symbolically ordered and classified (“dismembered”); male and female were no longer seen as equal halves ‘mingling their waters together’, but as master and slave.

War and patriarchy have remained institutionalized since the times of Sumer in Western civilization, and so has the self that reflects the structure of war. Inside our minds, we live in a dismembered world, on a battlefield peopled by Conqueror
Outside, the living earth has become one vast potential battlefield. 22

At the risk of creating havoc for the reader I want to jump through time to a different period of history, The Enlightenment, and to a different type of text or story, Shakespeare's play, The Tempest 23. Always keeping in mind the polyphonic nature of any text, the reading given here of this play contains some interesting parallels with the Enuma elish.

Greece and Mesopotamia are frequently termed "cradles" or "wombs" of Western civilisation and have traditionally dominated discussions of ancient history. Another focal point in traditional Western histories is the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, known as "The Enlightenment". The Enlightenment is deemed a pivotal time of intellectual ferment, technological explosion, and political change. The very references and titles to eras, such as "cradle" and "Enlightenment" are ideological; they muffle refusals and dissonances and the oppressions that overcome differences.

Around the turn of the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries Shakespeare was writing some of his greatest plays. His last was The Tempest.

In The Tempest the proper social order has been upset and the king Prospero dethroned and exiled on the sea. But Prospero comes to an island where he learns the secrets of nature and of control over it from Caliban, the son of the "foul witch" Sycorax who controlled the moon and the seas. Caliban, like nature itself, is fickle, unfaithful, stupid, and dirty and needs to be imprisoned and tamed and taught. Prospero is a god, with power over natural spirits and the powers of the natural world. He can create "calm seas, auspicious gales" or roaring waters and mounting seas. He can call forth the Roman goddesses of the earth, and the nymphs and control them also. Through Prospero's total authority and wise stewardship, the violences and disorders of nature and man are tamed, and order is returned to its proper hierarchical structure, with Prospero as sovereign.

Civilisation, in this play, is dependent on imperial power (the native Caliban is wholly subdued) and male authority (daughters and nature spirits and nature are wholly controlled and manipulated or at least until correct order is reestablished). 26 The Tempest is located within a society where social beliefs are increasingly utilising images of mastery and domination of a wild and unbridled nature to sanction a growing exploitation of nature.

The Enlightenment meant, according to Immanuel Kant in 1784, the mature use of intelligence through scientific observation and without another's guidance; the quality of "daring to know". 27 The century begun by Shakespeare's The Tempest saw the organic, the spiritual, and the mystical emphatically vanquished by the scientific and the mechanical, in the name of conquering oppressive orthodoxies, in the name of human liberation and progress.

The idealisation of mind or reason over body and emotion and sensation, and the opposition of mind and reason to nature had been clear in Plato's writings. The mindlessness and
alien distance of nature from everything human were already implicit in Plato, but then made wholly explicit by Enlightenment philosophers. Highly influential was French philosopher, mathematician, scientist, René Descartes (1596-1650) whose intellectual method, known as Cartesian thought, aimed to create a universally acceptable process of studying the world that would step by step build up a logical universe, as clearly articulated as an abstract mathematical model.

For Descartes nature was not organic, alive, full of secrets, and certainly not a Mother Nature, but was wholly lifeless, mindless, barren matter.

Know that by Nature, I do not understand some goddess or some other sort of imaginary power. I employ this word to signify matter itself. 28

Plato had seen the natural world itself as an inferior sphere of little interest. By Descartes' time, with the imperatives of colonialism and capitalism, and the rise of technology, there was a confidence in the human ability to truly conquer nature. The view of nature as null, devoid of any agency, creativity or action, as being mere stuff, invited and justified appropriating nature wholly for human needs.

Descartes' philosophy created hierarchical hyperseparations between disembodied mind and mindless body, between thinking humans with souls and thoughtless, soul-less, sensation-less "brutes" and other nature. The vast distance between thinking and analytical subject and senseless object was enabling to power, control and mastery. 29

The witch trials and murders throughout Europe from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries reflected a rising desperation to prove mastery over nature, mystery, and those creatures of nature, women and the poor. In an apparent irony, as technology made control easier, lack of control became less tolerable. (This issue will be discussed further in Section Five.) There was an increasing fear of leaving any power within different, alien, 'chaotic' spheres.

As tensions mounted between a female nature with mysterious powers - secret origin of all life, mother and nurturer to all life - and a patriarchal society of machine efficiency and scientific rationality and expanding capacities for power and domination, at least 100,000 people were tried as witches and horrifically tortured and executed. 30 They were mainly poor people, and it is estimated that at least 83% were women. The stated crime of witchcraft was having control over nature to the detriment of man, believing in nature spirits everywhere, being anti-hierarchical and animistic, expressing unbridled sexual passion and intercourse with the devil. 31

The witch trials, and the dominant social beliefs that underpinned them and that supported a world of rationality and technological exploration, enforced a conflation of women with the ‘others’ of animals and nature. Women, nature, all the ‘others’, were viewed as wholly divorced from rational man and his machines and the complexities of his social structures. Both women and nature were viewed as wild, bestial, uncontrolled and in need of violent constraint, penetration and moulding. Both women and nature were also viewed as virgins on pedestals to be worshipped and as innocent, pastoral idylls offering renewal and escape. Simple and mindless, both virgins and pastoral nature stood as little chance of survival as witches and fickle and cruel nature. After all, the goal is eventually to storm the pedestal and deflower the virgin.

The Enuma elish and The Tempest pit male against female, male against nature, supreme authority against disorder and chaos. The outcome in both is the conquest by the male
master and the destruction or subjugation of nature, women, and other men to this authority.

It is revealing to re-name these stories and the periods they reflect, exposing their hidden undersides. To name the Enuma elish a "destruction" rather than "creation" myth, and The Enlightenment "The Terror", is to reveal the violent subjugation of the 'other' that accompanies the accrual of unassailable power.

Val Plumwood argues that the dominant model underlying the Platonic dualities is that of master/slave. The body and its senses need to be controlled, and to be disciplined to obey the "rule of the soul". The "master" is indubitably male, the "logos", the "slaves" are female, animal, all the lower orders. As tools to the master's ends, they need to be moulded and sometimes even violently controlled to service those ends: a maximum distance is created between master and slave. 

The essence of 'power-over' underlies the maximally divided dualities that split and alienate, and the sureties and reductiveness of logocentrism. The master's word is final and becomes in fact 'natural'.

Footnotes to Section Two


4. Connections between women, water, and chaos are ancient and persistent. The Greeks believed bodies of water were divided into known seas (the Mediterranean and the Black Seas) and that the flat world disk was circled by a huge fresh ever-flowing river called Oceanus. This was the boundary that marked off the known world, the "cosmos", from the disordered universe, "chaos". If a person were to venture far out on it he would pass through gathering darkness and obscuring fog and come at last to a dreadful and chaotic blending of sea and sky, a place where whirlpools and yawning abysses waited to draw the traveller down into a dark world from which there was no return. (R. Carson, The Sea Around Us. Penguin, Middlesex, 1951, p. 201)

Elysium, the dwelling place of happy spirits however was believed to reside on the far side of this river. But the sea itself was a source of fear - of monsters, storms, shipwrecks.

The Israelites also had a strong distaste and fear of the sea, perhaps derived from the Babylonian myth: "Tiamat" is the equivalent in Hebrew of the word for "the deeps". Israelites refused to eat fish from the sea and categorised the future home of the blessed as a place with "no more sea".

6. Quoted Ibid, p. 64


8. In the earliest Sumerian cities the king was elected by a bicameral assembly of the free citizens and held office only for the duration of an emergency, usually a war, and was dependent on the assembly's consent in all matters of major importance. But after about 2800 B.C. kingship became more permanent and eventually it became hereditary. (Time-Life eds and N. Kramer, Cradle of Civilization, Great Ages of Man, A History of the World's Cultures Series, Time-Life, N.V., 1968, p. 80.)

9. Starhawk, Op. Cit., chapter two. Also see M. Stone, When God Was A Woman, chapter four, for a detailed look at the various political changes and invasions and how these connected to the gradual decline of goddess religions.

10. See Time-Life, Cradle of Civilization, pp. 106-108 for accounts of the Babylonian New Year celebrations during which the altered Sacred Marriage rites were enacted and the Enuma elish was recounted.


14. For further on the punitive laws developed to destroy female power and sexuality and matrilineal descent, see Stone, When God Was A Woman, pp. 58-61, 180-197.

By the time of Aristotle the utilisation of war as a means of acquiring power and control had become 'natural': "...the art of war is a natural art of acquisition...which we ought to practise against wild beasts, and against men who, though intended by nature to be governed, will not submit; for war of such a kind is naturally just." (Aristotle, quoted in Sheldrake, The Rebirth of Nature, Rider, London, 1990, p. 25.)


19. Paul Virilio argues that the development of the city is based not on economic needs but on war and defense needs: "Commerce comes after the arrival of war in a place, the state of siege, the organization of a glacis around an inhabited area...." (See P. Virilio/S. Lotringer, Pure War, Semiotext(e), New York, 1983, p. 5.)
20. In the *Enuma elish*, reflecting part of that transition, Tiamat is imaged variously as immensely powerful, terrifying, dangerous and evil - definitely a worthy enemy - but demonic and poisonous and necessary to destroy.

21. By the time Marduk became an accepted god, men could sell their wives and children into slavery to clear debts.

22. Starhawk, *Op. Cit.*, p. 64. Deleuze and Guattari argue that war machines are not inherently tools of stratification and authoritarian structures but can indeed be subversive and exterior to such apparatuses. It is when particular States, especially based on capitalism, appropriate and refashion the war machine that its aims become the abstract one of war itself, and the whole population and economy of the State become subordinated to these aims. (See G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine*, Semiotext(e), Uni. of Minnesota Press, 1986.)


30. Estimates of numbers killed vary from 100,000 to 9,000,000 over the two and a half centuries following the 1484 papal bull by Innocent VIII declaring witchcraft a heresy. In 1486 the witchhunter's manual had been published (the *Malleus Maleficarum* by Dominican Inquisitors Kramer and Sprenger) outlining in frightening detail the manifold crimes of witchcraft and the punishments. Witchhunts played a significant role in a time of social and political upheaval. Industrialism and the enclosure movement were crumbling the foundations of feudalism and ringing the death knell for the securities of village life and common rights to land, making way for the exploitation of both nature and waged labourers. Witchhunts were a form of widespread and unpredictable persecution of the poor, and especially of poor women, producing fear of crossing authority, and at the same time manufacturing a scapegoat which distracted attention from the social crises. Witchhunts effectively purged folk customs and festivals and furthered the destruction of human community and the sense of oneness with the cycles of nature that contradicted the new social goals. As women were tortured and killed for practising traditional herbalism and midwifery, and simultaneously denied access to new educational institutions, the organised male medical profession grew in power. To destroy the authority of community healers was often the same as destroying the authority of local wisdom and community religion. Dividing healing and comfort from spirituality was part of the distaste for women, ecstatic sexuality, cycles of nature, festivity, life itself. Asceticism, heterosexuality, work, money, and cultural progress prevailed. Behind these changes (the growth of private property, the
professionalisation of knowledge, the exploitation of the ‘other’, and the disempowerment of women) were the widening divisions of culture/nature, mind/matter, science/spirituality. [For further discussion of these issues, see Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics*, Unwin Hyman, 1990 ed., Appendix A, *The Burning Times*, pp. 183-219.]


Odysseus and the Sirens, on Attic red-figure Stamnos from Vulci, c. 450. 35.2 cm.
Section Three

The Master Identity, Odysseus, and

The Enlightenment

It is not material conditions - nature as stingy mother - which have kept us everywhere in chains, as Marxist fundamentalism would have us believe, but our own cultural bondage to the logic of the master. The power structure of master/slave can be seen to underlie the hierarchical dualisms that pervade Western culture and to re-form all relationships and identities within that essential power structure. The master colonises by denying his dependency on and relationship to the other and by denying and cancelling the other's independent existence. Everything else is "underneath, subservient", to be owned, used, explained, exploited, and controlled.

The work of Plato and the early rationalists set the stage by equating reason with the master identity against nature, women, slaves, animals, 'barbarians', and the human self. Cartesian and Lockeian thought furthered the process by annexing all nature, all others, as uninhabited by mind, as dispossessed, and part of the property of the Eurocentric and egoistic master. The other becomes a mere tool or means for the master's ends; an item of consumption or resource for knowledge. Incorporation or elimination become the only alternatives offered the other, for a "slave world" cannot offer resistance when it has been denied a voice or a language of its own.

The master himself is not unscathed in the process of domination. He has to sacrifice, renounce within himself those parts of himself that are related to the other, that are animal, natural, barbarous, feminine. In the same way a society bound around power-over is in danger of losing sight of its own nature.

Following the example of the Frankfurt School theorists, Adorno and Horkheimer, The Odyssey is introduced here as a powerful evocation of both the operation of the master identity and the losses it incurs.

The Odyssey, known as legend, epic or myth depending on what historical evidence can be linked to it, originated from oral legends dating from the Trojan War, about 1250 B.C. It probably was orally collated by Homer about the 8th century B.C. as a sequel to The Iliad, depicting the adventures after the Trojan War of some of the heroes from that epic, and it was written down around the 6th century B.C.

Adorno and Horkheimer analyse the Odyssey narrative (calling it "a novel"); they refer to it as "the basic text of European civilization" in its "eloquent testimony" to the mutual implications of enlightenment and myth, which seem to be struggling with each other but are really both moving into a sphere of power and dominion over nature and over mystery. This struggle takes place in a historical era when fixed property and war created the master-versus-everything-else split.
The Odyssey is the story of the most famous warrior hero of antiquity, Odysseus, his wanderings after the Trojan War and eventual homecoming after a twenty-year absence to his kingdom Ithaca (off the north-west coast of Greece) and to his faithful wife Penelope. Odysseus had sailed with the Greeks to overcome Troy and, in every dangerous and difficult situation during the siege, he had proved his courage, intellectual cunning (trickery and deceit), eloquence and diplomacy. These qualities were constantly re-tested during the subsequent years of his wanderings around the islands of the Mediterranean and his encounters with the Cyclops Polyphemos, the witch Circe, the Sirens, the sea-monster Scylla, and so on: the "old demons" (notably mostly female) who inhabited "the distant bounds and islands of the civilized Mediterranean, forced back into the forms of rock and cavern whence they once emerged in the dread remoteness of antiquity".

Odysseus journeys through the dangers of prehistory and nature to self-realisation through self-consciousness, individuation through self-sacrifice and renunciation, and power over nature through estrangement from nature:

...the denial of nature in man for the sake of domination over non-human nature and over other men.

Book XI of The Odyssey tells of the encounter with the Sirens. Odysseus' ship must pass the island home of the Sirens about whom Circe has warned him. These half-women, half-birds sing and make music exquisitely and lure men to their deaths by offers of pleasure too tempting to resist. They know "everything that has happened on this so fruitful earth". In one version of the story the Sirens are fated to die if one ship can pass them unscathed; in that case their power would be gone for ever. Odysseus, curious for all experience, all knowledge, is determined to hear the Sirens' songs. He does this by plugging his men's ears with wax and ordering them to row with all their strength despite any of his pleas. Odysseus has himself tightly bound to the mast, able to hear the songs but not to act. The ship escapes shipwreck, Odysseus experiences the music, the Sirens fail, plummet into the ocean and perish.

This is an encounter with enchantment, but it is one where the enchantresses are destroyed, the power of mystery is distanced and succumbs to the power of objective knowledge, the rowers (the labourers) are forcibly denied enjoyment and sensual distraction or temptation, the master is able to observe and listen and contemplate, but from a distance, denying himself involvement or mobility.

The rulers experience existence, with which they need no longer concern themselves, only as a substratum, and hence wholly ossify into the condition of the commanding self.

The servant is enslaved body and soul, and the master self-represses sensuous experience by invoking the dominant intellect. Such a strict separation of thought and experience impairs both.

There are losses incurred when pure reason is invoked as a means of control; losses for the controller as well as for the controlled. Maria Lugones describes these losses so vividly that here I quote her extensively:

The urge to control multiplicity is expressed in modern political theory and ethics in an understanding of reason as reducing multiplicity to unity through abstraction, categorization, from a particular vantage point ....
The subject who can occupy such a vantage point, the ideal observer, must himself be pure, unified, and simple so as to occupy the vantage point and perceive unity amid multiplicity. He must not himself be pulled in all or several perceptual directions; he must not perceive richly....

If the modern subject is to go beyond conceptualizing the reduction to actually exercising control over people and things, then these fictions must be given some degree of reality....

The modern subject must be masked as standing separate from his own multiplicity.... So his needs must be taken care of by others hidden in spaces relegated outside of public view, where he parades himself as pure. And it is important to his own sense of things and of himself that he pay little attention to the satisfaction of the requirements of his sensuality, affectivity, embodiment....

The lover of purity is shot through and through with this paradoxical incoherence. When confronted with the sheer overabundance of the multiple, he ignores it by placing it outside value when it is his own substance and provides his sustenance. So, he is committed both to an overevaluation and to a devaluation of himself, a torturing of himself, a disciplining or training of himself that puts him at the mercy of his own control. The incoherence is dispelled through separation, his own from himself. As he covets, possesses, destroys, pleases himself, he disowns his own urges and deeds. So he is always rescued from his own incoherence by self-deception, weakness of the will, aggressive ignorance. After he ignores the fundamental and unfounded presupposition of unity, all further ignoring becomes easier. He shuns impurity, ambiguity, multiplicity as they threaten his own fiction. 17

This fragmentation of self, desirable to the controller, is founded on power-over and the separation of the controlled into discrete units. Women, the poor, the colored, the queer, "the ones with cultures" are deemed unfit for the public as they are "tainted by need, emotion, the body". They become "sides of fictitious dichotomies", satisfying the modern subject's needs but simultaneously presenting a threat, and so are rendered invisible and worthless. In the logic of the "lover of purity" they exhibit a peculiar "lack of agency, autonomy, self-regulating ability". They are marked as other than himself, as lacking the relevant unity. But the lack is not discovered, it couldn't be, since the unity is itself assumed. The lack is symbolically produced by marking the producers as gendered, racialized, and 'cultured'. The marking signifies that they are enmeshed in multiplicity and thus are different from the lover of purity. But he must deny the importance of the markings that separate them.

Those outside the dominant group exist only as "incomplete, unfit beings", and what they are, and what is absolutely necessary for them, is declared worthless and altered to fit within the logic of unification by being "split over and over in accordance with the relevant dichotomies of the logic of unity". 18
The 'Enlightenment' held up the promise of humanity's departure from a condition of servitude; the attainment of human autonomy and assured social progress through the use of reason. The struggle in each sphere was between reason and the chains of the past. In religion, tolerance would replace superstition and orthodoxy, in politics the law would protect all against despotism, in natural science empiricism would reveal the truth, in philosophy logical thinking would replace dogmatism and metaphysics. Underlying this utopian vision lay the assumptions of a universal, linear progress and a universal singular solution, and an inherent reliance on hierarchical power structures (patriarchal, Eurocentric, human-centred), an unshakeable belief in technological progress (the reduction to computation and utility), a dependence on separations (such as between myth and science, nature and human, object and subject), and the voiding of the other through taboos against the exterior, the unknown (as we have seen, forcibly implemented through the Inquisition).

Man imagines himself free from fear when there is no longer anything unknown .... Enlightenment is mythic fear turned radical. The pure immanence of positivism, its ultimate product, is no more than a so to speak universal taboo. Nothing at all may remain outside, because the mere idea of outsideness is the very source of fear.  

Intricacies, complexities, interconnections, incomprehensions, the amorphous, the spiritual - all are denied by the subjugating rationality, reductiveness, and objectification which underlie The Enlightenment.  

According to Adorno and Horkheimer, in our contemporary world of technology and representation, all individual experience and relations are mediated through the power structures of society; and self-reflection, imagination, individual value and social freedom cannot coexist with mastery over nature, over the self; so the goals of The Enlightenment are inherently self-contradictory. The only kind of thinking that is sufficiently hard to shatter myths is ultimately self-destructive. 

Footnotes to Section Three


2. I later point out, in Section Five, that insisting on a primary source duality is a misconceived project. However, Plumwood's master/slave analysis is a useful one here for introducing the Adorno and Horkheimer arguments and for showing how such a power relationship inevitably damages both sides.


7. Ibid, p. 46.


9. Ibid, p. 46. Adorno and Horkheimer note that "the epic adventures allow each location a proper name and permit space to be surveyed in a rational manner. Though trembling and shipwrecked, the hero anticipates the work of the compass". (p. 46)

10. Ibid, pp. 46-49.

11. Ibid, p. 54.

12. Homer, quoted in Adorno and Horkheimer, p. 33.

13. There are parallels here with the enchained, forward-looking men in Plato's "Simile of the Cave" and the forcible dragging towards enlightenment of the chosen man. Enchainment and bondage figure largely in both stories.


15. Ibid, p. 35.

16. Ibid, p. 36.


20. Rupert Sheldrake refers to this process as the "Faustian bargain". He points out that Faust stories were published from 1587 on and that their image of the man searching for limitless knowledge and power in return for his soul became more and more acceptable until Goethe's Faust in 1808 ensures Faust's reward rather than eventual punishment. See R. Sheldrake, The Rebirth of Nature: The Greening of Science & God. Rider, London, 1990, pp. 28-29.


Paul Connerton points out the problematic generalisations and simplifications made by Adorno & Horkheimer: e.g., they make no distinction in principle between control over nature and control over social relationships; they delimit the origins of domination to the relationship between man
and nature; all social life is subsumed under the categories "myth" and "enlightenment" and the transition from one to the other is seen as dialectical, inevitable, and inescapable; and the notion of Self is defined only as in a negative reference to the outside "nature" in terms of opposition through control, subjugation, exploitation. (See P. Connerton, The Tragedy of Enlightenment: An Essay on the Frankfurt School. Cambridge Uni. Press, Cambridge, London, N.Y., 980, c.4, pp. 60-79.) Bearing these criticisms in mind, I have used Adorno and Horkheimer in this section, finding them particularly impassioned predecessors of contemporary feminist and ecological cultural critiques which explicate some of Adorno & Horkheimer's 'leaps' in more detail - e.g., the close analyses of Enlightenment philosophers like Bacon by feminist theorists (See, e.g., G. Lloyd, The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy, Uni. of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984.)
A Reminder

The story so far has flowed back and forth across geography and time, from Ancient Greece to even more ancient Mesopotamia, forward again to Greece, and then that swift jump towards modernity in the references to The Enlightenment.

We have seen how philosophy authorised the belief in a central and hierarchical power and in a radically excluded other; how this authorisation justified domination and destruction of the other. We have touched on how such a philosophy, as lived, is self-destructive to the master and the slave, to culture and nature alike.

From here we go on another oscillation. First exploring the systems of duality and logocentrism, seen most clearly through the eyes of those who wish to deconstruct those systems. Then veering back to decipher in more detail just how these systems are destructive both in the world and to the biosphere. From there we will travel forward into the realm of lived and envisaged alternatives to that destruction and to those systems.

So, this first part of the new stage in the journey will define the terms and systems whose histories we have already glimpsed.
Deconstructing A World of Separations

Is it light or dark? Night or day? Warm or cold? Is that person woman or man? Rich or poor? Young or old? Undoubtedly duality is useful to us in imaging our world. In our mythologies powerful symbolic dualities play out deep human issues. And according to our understanding, our very identity is formed at the moment when we recognise our separatedness; the distance between self and others. So what are the mechanisms that transform this essential concept into a destructive one?

Duality or dualism is a perception of the twofold nature of concepts: e.g., mind and matter, male and female - the two sides of the same coin but independent from each other. But duality, as it has been reductively defined by our dominant systems of logic, is binary oppositions which are not equally valued. One term subsumes and defines its opposite in a power relationship which denies its utter dependence on the other.

The dominant and subordinated terms are simply positive and negative versions of each other, the dominant term defining its other by negation.

With binary pairs such as good/bad, presence/absence, mind/matter, being/non-being, identity/difference, culture/nature, signifier/signified, speech/writing and man/woman, the "first term is given the privilege of defining itself and of relegating to the other all that is not it". For example, 'male' and 'female' are not autonomous different elements from each other. Rather there is 'male' and 'not-male', and 'female' becomes part of the manifold exclusions from the more powerful category 'male'.

By expelling its other, the privileged term establishes its own boundaries and borders and creates its own identity. However these identities are far from simple and concrete. Oppositional pairs become linked historically with each other and pollute each other through the operation of insidious interchange. For example, with 'male' and 'female', the 'female' category can imply impurity, irrationality, disorder, chaos, change, chance, error, evil. There is a complex network of binary constructs that operate cumulatively to maintain each other, yet do not neatly parallel each other. With the male/not-male distinction go the value-separated attributes of form-formlessness, action-passivity, stability-instability, expansion-confinement, public-private, theoretical and abstract-material and practical, rational-irrational, culture-nature, and so on.

These relations are deeply socialised and pervade our modern myths and symbols. When college students were tested in the 1950s for their associations with 'right' and 'left' they came out with:

left: bad, dark, profane, female, unclean, night, west, curved, limp, homosexual, weak, mysterious, low, ugly, black, incorrect, death.
right: good, light, sacred, male, erect, heterosexual, strong, commonplace, high, beautiful, white, correct.
This listing correlates quite comfortably with history's first table of opposites by Aristotle (Metaphysics, Book 1,5,6):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limited</th>
<th>Unlimited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Odd</td>
<td>Even</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>Left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest</td>
<td>Motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Curved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light</td>
<td>Dark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Square</td>
<td>Oblong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As soon as conceptual tools were created based on division (variations, comparisons, differences) they were applied, judgmentally, to ethical viewpoints and were "turned into a means of creating metaphysical and moral differentiation in Being". From being practical concepts they became abstract ones.

From terms whose function had been to sort out, to classify, to make measurement possible ... they were translated into a metaphysical dimension, and pretty soon they got totally dissociated from their context .... Everything that was "good" belonged to the series of the One (as Being). Everything that was "many" (different) belonged to the series of the "bad", assimilated to nonbeing, to unrest, to everything that questions what is good.

The process of forming such dualities derives from a particular form of reasoning; i.e., classical logic, which defines the other as an absence, as alien, excluded, homogenised and undifferentiated, and maximally distant from the master identity. Other available logical systems do not make encounters of contradictions so forbidden. For example, relevant logic defines otherness as difference or division or distinction; an other which is "not just specified negatively but is independently characterised and with an independent role on its own behalf". Rather than maximising non-shared characteristics and creating radical exclusion, difference can be established where only a single characteristic is different: there is more particularity and less incorporation.

Just as classical logic works reductively to create a power relationship between binary opposites, so logocentrism operates to create an unbreachable authority around its main symbols, by claiming for them a neutrality and a direct representational link to reality. For example,

Logocentrism presumes that being, language, knowledge are self evident, neutral and transparent terms. Being can be known and experienced in its immediacy; language transfers meaning neutrally without interfering in the underlying thoughts it 'expresses'; knowledge undistortedly reflects reality in truthful representations.

This is a philosophy that conceives of itself as pure, 'above' politics, the limitations of language, the materiality of the world. Such a claim to neutrality, uninvolved in the world 'outside', and pure, disinterested enquiry, diverts attention from the manifold stakes and interests and operates so as to elevate the philosophy's self-image.

It is a system which seeks, beyond signs and representation, the real and the true, the presence of being, of knowing and reality, to the mind - an access to concepts and things in their pure, unmediated form.
Conflicts of interest are masked by the belief in inherent differences and the utilisation of that belief in the categorisation of the different other.

... the concept of difference between the sexes ontologically constitutes women into different/others. Men are not different, whites are not different, nor are the masters. But the blacks, as well as the slaves, are. 11

Logocentrism is heavily reliant on exclusion and binary polarisations of difference. It derives culturally more from a Hellenic tradition of thought than from a Hebraic. Jewish religious writings practise multiple commentary and treat the manifold commentaries as sacred texts in their own right, rather than as mortal, secondary and suspect writings on the central and sacred text which emanates from a higher, ineffable power. In the Hebraic tradition writing is not cast into the derivative, supplementary role that it plays in the Hellenic tradition. 12

Within the Hellenic tradition the dominant philosophy embraces all conflicts within its own system of reasoning; it masters alternatives and absorbs them within its own domain. All is safe, all is explicable, nothing comes as a shock, all is known in advance. The absence here is ethical involvement where the issue of human concern for others and encounters with others is central. The absence is of any belief in different roads to truth, through say mysticism or poetry. Such means threaten the plain prose of reason by claiming access to a realm of intuitive truth. 13

The logocentric model is one of an endlessly circular return to a singular and unified and, above all, sovereign conceptual order.

As Irigaray's work on Plato shows, a rereading of such authoritative purified texts, within the context of an awareness of the processes of language and history, destabilises the centrality and assurity of the text and reveals its internal problems: e.g., where it depends on metaphors and linguistic devices that fall outside its own logic and explicit goals. This is one of the essential strategies of "deconstruction" 14. With deconstruction the authoritative texts of our philosophies and knowledges appear not dissimilar from politically-based ideologies, or those fantastic narrations, mythologies. 15

Jacques Derrida, a force within the Western world since the 1960s as a proponent of "deconstruction", has developed strategies for querying and revealing the flaws of dominant philosophies and structures of knowledge. Derrida argues for holding a double position; both within the professional competence of the philosophy department of a university and, then, from within that stance, the revealing of the internal flaws, the political stakes inherent in particular forms of reasoning, knowledge, truth, through an examination of the written texts.

His object ... is thus a textual unconscious, a repressed materiality at work in all texts. 16

Derrida is not interested in simplistic reversals, i.e., the inverting of cardinal oppositions (such as form/content, culture/nature, thought/perception, essence/accident, theory/practice, mind/body, male/female, speech/writing) so as to leave the inferiorised term established on top. This "leaves the opposition still very much in place without beginning to shift the conceptual ground wherein its foundations are securely laid". 17

Reversal is one strategy but preserves binary structures and, whilst revealing, is not sufficient for effecting change. Working from the margins, from both within logocentrism and from without is more subversive than imagining distancing oneself, leaving the dominant structures intact (because, Derrida argues, one never can really work outside
the dominant language). By utilising the commitments of structures and taking them to their logical ends, there occurs an opening up of the texts to the exterior; to the terms, concepts, knowledges it has excluded or foreclosed. 18 This destabilises the text's explicit ideals.

So, according to Derrida, to ignore the accumulated power and political investments in binary structures and logocentrism and simply to assert differences is naive and no real challenge to the system. Deconstruction performs a twofold feat: both the reversal of the binary structure, which shows up the underlying hierarchy and absence of logical necessity of that dominant structure, and then the exploration of how the repressed term is "within the core of the dominant term, as its logical condition" 19, which makes explicit the dependence of the dominant term on the denigrated term. The project reveals the false logic and the political and historical underpinnings.

Derridean trademark terms are used to point to the other possibilities excluded by binary, logocentric structures. Oppositional forms deny continuums or multiple options; there is always an excess, a remainder which is unrepresented. Derrida refers to such leftovers as "trace" (both presence and absence), "supplement" (plenitude and lack), "différance" (sameness and difference), "pharmakon" (poison and cure), "hymen" (rupture and totality), and, more problematically, "Woman". 20

Derrida's project has been a focal inspiration for much feminist theory. Logocentrism is patriarchal; it is based on an oppositional structure which divides men and women and gives power to men and phallocentric discourse. Power over women functions explicitly and implicitly through the dominant cultural discourses. For those feminists dissatisfied with gaining equivalence with men within structures that identify women as 'non-men', the Derridean notion of différence offers a recognition of a position outside binary structures, a place of possibility for an autonomous female identity. 21

Derrida not only applies his speculative, but also respectful 22, rereadings to the central philosophical texts in Western culture (such as Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Mill, Hegel, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Freud, Saussure) but increasingly he has moved towards examining the ways in which philosophy as it is taught in the French school and university system is shaped by institutional pressures: how it has developed in complex relation to the State. 23 One example is his examination of the paradoxes in the nature of reason ('pure' and 'applied') in an epoch of nuclear-strategic debate where the effects of such paradoxes are "most starkly and urgently visible". 24

Nuclear issues involve an exorbitant complexity, and the profession of reason, the experts, are increasingly obsolete. 'Rational' solutions are impossible where there is such a "multiplicity of dissociated, heterogeneous competencies" 25, where rhetoric and fantasies of apocalypse have so clearly overridden applied expertise and rational prevision. The whole concept of nuclear deterrence and the diplomacy bound around it are manifestly illogical.

Nuclear rhetoric is based on the concept of the infinite progress of humanity governed according to an Idea of Reason arising from The Enlightenment. Derrida argues that only critical reason can reveal the inherent contradictions and aporias in the discourse of nuclear power politics. Derrida further argues that "deconstruction" is the strategy which offers the possibility of real change, in contrast to say post-structuralist enterprises which do not leap onto new ground. To Derrida post-structuralism reduces dominant structures to an uninhabited wasteland, lifeless and neutralised. It does not explore the excess of meaning over form; "the fact that certain elements (of 'force' or 'signification') must always escape its otherwise lucid vigil". 26 And, to Derrida, the
excess enters the domain of ethics. It is too easy to pursue structural critique to the point of anti-humanism, where human identity, morality, relationships become conceptually obsolete. This process surrenders to the deeper exclusions of binary and logocentric structures while at the same time appearing to lucidly dismember them.  

Whilst Derrida resists defining "deconstruction", since to him it is "first and foremost a suspicion directed against just that kind of thinking - 'what is...?' 'what is the essence of...?'", he repeatedly reminds us that deconstruction is not simply a method, is not simply critical. "It is not negative - it was linked from the beginning with affirmation, with the 'yes', an affirmation which is not a 'position' in the Hegelian sense."  

I am 'in favour' of The Enlightenment; I think we shouldn't simply leave it behind us, so I want to keep this tradition alive. But at the same time I know that there are certain historical forms of Enlightenment, certain things in this tradition that we need to criticise or to deconstruct. So it is sometimes in the name of, let us say, a new Enlightenment that I deconstruct a given Enlightenment. And this requires some very complex strategies; requires that we should let many voices speak .... "  

Deconstruction is or should be an affirmation linked to promises, to involvement, to responsibility. 

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Footnotes to Section Four

1. Nancy Jay uses the term "dichotomy" to refer to such value distinctions. (See N. Jay, "Gender and Dichotomy", in S. Gunew (ed), Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct, Routledge, N.Y., 1990, pp. 89-106.) Val Plumwood prefers the term "duality" to "dichotomy", seeing it as both broader and more specific. She defines "duality" as not only a hierarchy between existing differences, but the creation of the belief of an inherent division between radically different orders not capable of change. This belief is created via the strategies of "backgrounding" or denial of the dependency on the other, maximum separation from the other and exclusion of the other by denying shared qualities or any continuity and by erecting barriers, the assumption of the naturalisation or biological basis of such separations, by defining the other purely in relation to the self- i.e., incorporating the other, by objectifying the other, by stereotyping the dominated other by denying any diversity in their makeup. (See Plumwood, Feminism and the Mastery of Nature, Routledge, New York, 1993, pp. 47-55.)


3. There are innumerable different lists made by different writers, often dependent on their focus. For example, Plumwood, focusing on the humanity, rationality, culture three-fold domination lists as the key dualisms for Western thought: culture/nature, reason/nature, male/female, mind/body (nature), master/slave, reason/matter (physicality), rationality/animality (nature), reason/emotion (nature), mind/spirit/nature, freedom/necessity
(nature), universal/particular, human/nature (non-human), civilised/primitive (nature), production/reproduction (nature), public/private, subject/object, self/other. (Plumwood, Op. Cit., p. 43.)


5. S. L. Star, "The Politics of Right and Left: Sex Differences in Hemispheric Brain Asymmetry", in Gunew, Op. Cit., pp. 237-248 @ p. 238. Obviously this goes beyond being a curious phenomenon: it has political and social ramifications. For example, in relation to left and right brain studies in medicine, it is not surprising that there has been such a neglect in research of disorders of the right hemisphere of the brain, i.e., the part that controls the left part of the body, and the part traditionally seen as not dealing with logical thought, most speech, mathematical ability and executive decisions, but more with spatial ability, emotions, and intuitions. (See O. Sacks, The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat, Picador, London, 1986.) Other ramifications of dualities will be more fully discussed in Section Five of the thesis.

For an anthropological study of the value-laden duality of right and left hands, see Durkheim's pupil Robert Hertz and his essay "The Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand: A Study in Religious Polarity", republished in R. Hertz, Death and The Right Hand, Cohen & West, The University Press, Aberdeen, 1960. Hertz points out that in a number of societies right hand connotes goodness, sacredness, rectitude and virtue, whereas the left hand connotes profanity, impurity, feebleness and maleficence. Hertz treats this as an expression of what he sees as the greater duality, sacred vs profane.


Many contemporary writers pursue the multiple-voice concept from the Hebraic tradition, using multiple insets and graphic devices which refuse clear demarcations between 'primary' and 'secondary' texts: e.g., Derrida, Kristeva, Wittig, Griffin.


14. "Deconstruction" is one of Derrida's names for the process of problematising logocentric discourses.

15. Barthes shows how contemporary myths and ideologies cross over and become each other, and how both transform History and Politics into Nature in a social world that splits nature from history, reality from men, description from explanation, object from knowledge. (See R. Barthes, Mythologies, Paladin, St Albans, 1976, p. 159.)
20. See Ibid, pp. 30-36. Feminist theorists, whilst acknowledging their debt to Derrida's strategies, express discomfort with the utilisation of the word for female as a metaphor of subversion. It seems once more to be a male project using the mystery and 'otherness' of 'woman' as a way for men to visualise the excess.
22. "Deconstruction is not simply forgetting the past" ... there is "respect for tradition, for memory"; "the archive should be as readable as possible, as legible as we can make it". (Derrida, in an interview with C. Norris, in A. Papadakis, C. Cooke, A. Benjamin (eds), *Deconstruction: Omnibus Volume*, Academy Editions, London, 1989, p. 73.)
24. Ibid, p. 163. Derrida does this within the context of suspicion of mixing discourses and losing sight of the specificity and heterogeneity of discourses; so he maintains his central focus on philosophy and its interactions with these other discourses. (Derrida, in Derrida and Norris interview, in Papadakis et al, *Op. Cit.*, p. 75)
27. Micaela di Leonardo discusses the continuing anti-feminism within poststructural anthropology and how there are always "uninterrogated convictions" that come in "the back door", in her Introduction to *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, 1991, pp. 1-48 @ pp. 22-25.
When ultimate value is attributed to an external Other, the result seems to be closure to intersubjectivity on earth. Conquest was predicated on the idea that there would be winners and losers, and the conquerors were determined to be the winners. What it actually means to 'win' when so much has been and is still being lost is a matter European Australians are now trying to assess. As long as one seeks to dominate, recognizing only one ultimate principle, one is out of balance and destroying.¹

The Goddess Gaia, who was losing her powers so dramatically in Plato's day, has today become the symbol for an ecologically aware philosophy, with reverence for the immanence of nature and the interdependence of all life, and a planetary consciousness that views the world as a living organism. Those theorists attempting to develop a 'Gaian' philosophy and a new panoply of ethics for a contemporary world in ecological crisis are one source of critique of duality and logocentrism.

Analyses and critiques of the production of separations and hierarchical power structures in our society are coming from multiple directions; each of these directions reflecting a real shift in social needs and power structures. The ecology movement reflects diminishing resources and failing capitalist economies, feminism reflects the new role of women as consumers and workers, postmodernism and poststructuralism feed on the blatant contradictions within institutional and technological progress, cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary studies reflect new areas of knowledge and the breakdown of old professional categories.

Ecofeminism is chosen here as a source for analysis of how the structures of duality and logocentrism have linked women and nature, to control both, with widespread ramifications on our sense of self, our everyday lives, and the future of the world.²

Feminist writers have revealed the widespread oppression and repression of women and femininity operating via duality-based logic and associated hierarchical structures. In philosophy, in economics, in language, in politics, in psychoanalysis and psychology, in
manifestations of violence, in popular culture and advertising - running as a thread through all our social materiality and ideological constructs - is the male/female split and the negation of the female as impoverished male. Women's difference is used as evidence of inferiority or to stereotype and objectify, violate and oppress women. Women's difference is denied, rendering women invisible and powerless as autonomous subjects.

Complex gender constructs are built around the female and male sexes: "femininity" and "masculinity". They are bundles of stereotypes that shift historically so as to maintain the underlying power relationship within changing economies and technologies. Masculine stereotypes become the positive and the normative, feminine stereotypes become the abnormal. Some of these excluded characteristics are: formlessness (softness, fluidity), passivity (horizontal, atonality, torpidity), instability (recklessness, frivolity, irresponsibility, hysteria), confinement (seclusion, timidity, neatness, inexperience), practicality (nontheoretical, nonabstract), piety (as the teachers not as the inventors or controllers of religions), materiality (detail, triviality, shallowness), compliancy, close relationship to nature (effortlessness, sheer being, physicality), and deception (artifice, pretense, manipulation).

The gender construct of woman as deformed, diminished, impoverished man, as lacking, is maintained by cultural mechanisms such as language, means of perception, and representation. Analyses of knowledges and texts have revealed how the operation of the male gaze reduces women to 'sights', how the operation of psychoanalysis images woman as vacuum, as purely mirror image to man, how the operation of advertising and pornography objectify and oppress women, and how representation operates so as to communicate patriarchy's self-image.

The categorisation of the world into hierarchical dualities reduces heterogeneity and multiplicity to the apparent duality which is really a unity; a monologue, as one half is subsumed within the other. The endless diversity that exists across the spectrum is reduced to the extreme limits of one end of the spectrum only, and consequently our perceptions and available options for behaviour are confined.

... everything is related; and ... the strictly one-track-minded approach - the extraction of a single 'skein' ... damages the entire fabric, including the 'skein'. Yet to put it in simplified terms, this one-track-minded route is the one that has been followed by Western thought: the route of segregation, of the renunciation of the manifoldness of phenomena, in favor of dualism and monism, in favor of closed systems and pictures of the world; of the renunciation of subjectivity in favor of a sealed 'objectivity'.

Regarding men and women, the difference in terms of genetic and sexual behaviour varies considerably across the spectrum, yet in the gender construct is reduced to a relationship of maximum distance, where both sexes do not have positive reality and multiplicity is not encouraged.

Many feminists argue that the male/female duality is the primary separation in society, predating and underlying all others, and thus has to be acknowledged in any analyses of other dualities. This has become a vociferous area for debate, for example, in the deep ecology versus the ecofeminist movements, with certain ecofeminist advocates arguing that to ignore the underlying gender construct is to avoid the root of the nature/culture split. The feminists are in turn attacked by black women for ignoring the racial split as the primary source, and so on.
Such arguments fall into the morass of competing for hierarchical primacy, and ignore the complexities of constantly shifting historical categorisations and power relations which require continual ongoing vigilance.

Dualities supporting the dominance of reason contain multiple exclusions, not reducible to those of gender.

Nevertheless gender plays a key role, since gender ideals especially involve ideals of reason (Lloyd 1984), and male ideals which lay claim to universality for men often invoke the male identity of the master.

The ecofeminist movement, in all its diversity, relates the domination of women to the domination of nature, tracing the male/female and culture/nature splits as tools of intertwined systems of oppression. Ecofeminists argue that there has to be an explicit confrontation with these paradigm dualities before any change can take place, and that feminism has to take on board ecological politics if it is to escape the oppositional thinking that, e.g., made early feminism put its faith in instrumentalism and technology.

Ecofeminism is currently struggling with identifying its goals, but recurring themes are the upholding of a consciousness of interconnections between forms of oppression (not only of women and nature, but of race and class), the need to rethink concepts of human identity (outside of androcentric, hierarchical, atomistic, abstract), the need to develop new ways of 'looking' and of 'knowing', a predominant awareness of the importance of differences (e.g., the particularity of context), the importance of developing a new and ever-changing vision of ethics, the parallel place of social activism.

Two writers whose works form important foundations for ecofeminism are Carolyn Merchant and Susan Griffin. They take the male/female, culture/nature separations and trace them historically, revealing how philosophy and scientific theories were used by political forces in reduced and distorted fashion to justify the maintenance of their power.

Carolyn Merchant in The Death of Nature examines the way in which nature has always been personified as female but by the sixteenth century had taken the form of two distinct manifestations: nature as nurturing mother, and wild and uncontrollable nature. The first manifestation had to vanish, or rather to be vanquished, to allow for the mechanistic scientific revolution; the second image, nature as disorder, encouraged the modern emphasis on power over nature.

One of the scientific philosophers examined by Merchant who made the male science vs female nature a battleground was Francis Bacon (1561-1626). Bacon advocated a total programme for controlling nature to benefit humans. In Bacon's language nature was feminised and sexualised to sanction interrogating, invading and subduing it. One of Bacon's major influences were witch trials (e.g., in Lancashire in 1612) where 'secrets' were revealed via torture and mysteries brought under control.
For you have but to follow and as it were hound nature in her wanderings, and you will be able when you like to lead and drive her afterward to the same place again.

Neither ought a man to make scruple of entering and penetrating into these holes and corners, when the inquisition of truth is his whole object...

I am come in very truth leading to you nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave.

The secrets "in nature's bosom" needed to be forcefully wrested by methods such as mining and forging, "searching into the bowels of nature" and "shaping nature as on an anvil", for the "truth of nature lies hid in certain deep mines and caves". For Bacon, the rape and torture of nature were necessary means for realising the goal of human dominion over the universe, a dominion granted humanity by divine bequest.

In analysing Bacon and his followers, Merchant points out how blatantly sexual politics formed the foundations of the new scientific method, which nevertheless came to epitomise objectivity and political and cultural neutrality.

Our world today is being formed by genetic engineering and biotechnology, perhaps the most radical of the scientific revolutions. Despite increasing systemic understandings of nature and society (e.g., concepts of intercollectivity and interdependence within nature through ecology and chaos theories, and the potentialities within computer technology to create vast and broadly accessible networks with a parallel new language of 'flows' and 'internets'), there is the reality of an inconceivable scale of manipulation of the basic genetic material of life racing ahead virtually unimpeded.

From 1950-1975 DNA was thought to be inviolate and then genetic engineers changed this. They...

...split DNA open, cut out individual genes, transplanted them into bacteria or other cells, reproduced them a billion times. They created hybrids in the test tube unlike anything that three and a half billion years of evolution had accomplished. Within less than a decade, it became clear that genetic engineering and related technologies represented the biggest single advance in the life sciences this century. It held the key to a deeper understanding of human diseases... It offered glittering prizes to industry. It promised to free agriculture from constraining requirements for fertilizers and pesticides. There seemed no limits to what the genetic engineers would dare. The genie was out of the bottle.

Most biotechnology texts, like the one quoted above, express an almost hysterical excitement about this final human breaching of nature's boundaries, with only occasional anxious asides that this "excessively mechanistic appreciation of the nature of life may further drive mankind towards materialism and a sterile, stereotyped view of the universe, devoid of subtlety or value".

The attempts by doctors and scientists to mix genetic material from human and non-human sources in human embryos, to map human genes and patent them in corporate names, to grow life outside of the woman's womb, to control life within the womb through IVF programmes, to rectify genetic problems through intrauterine surgery and transplants are amidst the mind-blowing panoply of experimentation now occurring. Whilst genes, embryos, and bodies are treated as isolatable units, as 'mere matter', there is a dangerous alienation from lives, relationships, and social systems.
As Merchant pointed out, a mechanistic view of the universe goes together with the concept of the human self as a "rational master of the passions housed in a machinelike body" rather than as an "integral part of a close-knit harmony of organic parts united to cosmos and society". There is a radical alienation from a sense of balance or integration within the self and the universe. Many of the goals of genetic engineering and biotechnology seem to emanate from deep-seated fears of women and nature, parts of the alienated social self, and a desperation to utilise science to re-assert control over both.

The desperate quality of this urge to control is described by Susan Griffin as a "rage" that comes from the deeply suppressed fear of the knowledge that we too are nature.

For Simone de Beauvoir this rage against women and nature emanates from the denial of mortality and immanence and the attempt to use the vehicle of culture to create a false security, a sense of transcendence. But the self cannot exist without interdependence on the denied other, and that need creates self-hatred and chaotic confusion, only stilled by destruction and control.

In her book Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her, Susan Griffin catalogues the historic fear of and alienation from the body (and its associated excluded halves of the system of dualities), and especially the other's body, the woman's body. In the chapter "Her Body", Griffin includes quotes from witch trials, which elicited from women via torture of their bodies proofs of their dangerous natures and justifications for control. She also quotes from contemporary plastic surgeons who remedy and refashion imperfect 'natural' bodies of women into their idealised image of woman. Griffin itemises the underlying distaste and abhorrence:

Her body is a vessel of death. Her beauty is a lure. Her charm a trap. She is irresistible. Her voice is deceit. Her word a plot. Her gesture a snare. She plans her seduction. She cannot help herself. Her mind is a theater of seduction. She is incapable of other thought.... She will stop at nothing.... Behind her suppliant flesh is a maw, a devouring hole, an abyss. Death. Destruction. Darkness without light. Nothingness....

Susan Griffin explores the relations between women and nature in philosophy and knowledge by utilising two voices; that of the patriarchal culture speaking about the nature of matter, the nature of nature, and the nature of women, and the imagined voice of women:

By "knowing the force and action of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens and all other bodies that surround us", it is declared, "men can be the masters and possessors of nature".

And so then it is predicted that life will be prolonged, youth restored, age retarded, and incurable disease cured, and pain mitigated, and one body transformed to another, new species created, new instruments of destruction, such as poisons, invented, the time of germination accelerated, composts for the earth fabricated, new foods fabricated, new threads made, paper, glass, artificial minerals and cements, and that there will be means to convey sounds great distances over lines, stronger and more violent engines of war, and that men will fly in the air, and go under water in great ships.

And it is stated that woman's nature is more natural than man's, that she is genuine with the "cunning suppleness of a beast of prey", the tiger's claw under the glove, the naïveté of her egoism, her uneducability and inner wildness ....
And we learn to be afraid
("Woman! The very name's a crime", it is written.)
of our nature. 35

Susan Griffin is particularly provocative in her combined rational/poetic language: her analysis of duality becomes an ancient chorus of grief:


In the last section of her book Griffin speaks wholly through the voice of women, re-visioning the "cave of their history"; the differences, the resistances, the alien views, the inseparability from nature.

... We say our lives are part of nature. We say in every particle every act lives. The body of the tree reveals the past. That the waves from the stone falling into the water were frozen in the winter ice. That stars pull at the bodies of crabs, and oysters know the phases of the moon. 37

The human/nature dualism, the male/female dualism, the whole structure of dualities, underlies the West's treatment of nature which has culminated in the current environmental crisis; a crisis only relatively recently recognised.

Rachel Carson lamented:
The 'control of nature' is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man .... It is our alarming misfortune that so primitive a science has armed itself with the most modern and terrible weapons, and that in turning them against the insects it has turned them against the earth. 38

The Western construction of human identity as 'outside' nature underlies the human/nature split. Dualism capitalises on an existing pattern of difference and reworks it in ways which ground hierarchy, and provide bases for various forms of centredness (i.e., "the rendering of the world in terms of the views and interests of the upperside, the centre"). Within Western culture, dualism operates so as to support class-centred hegemony, male-centredness, Eurocentredness and ethnocentredness, and human-centredness. 39

Within a dualism that treats humans as the only proper objects of moral consideration and the 'rest' as part of a sphere of expediency, the natural world becomes the background to human life:

...the taken-for-granted material substratum of human existence, always present, always functioning, always forgiving; its needs do not have to be considered, except as they occasionally impinge upon or threaten the satisfaction of our own. 40

Nature is backgrounded in history, in economics (nature has no value before human labour is applied), it is homogenised in a way that denies its diversity, it is radically excluded from the spheres of mind and humanity. The polarity between human and nature alienates humanity from anything that links to nature and the animal, e.g., the body, sexuality, reproduction, emotionality, the senses, dependence on the natural world; and excludes
from nature all seen as essentially human, e.g., mind, morals, culture. The alienated human transcends and controls a denied, excluded and devalued nature. 41

The earth, imaged as female, becomes a storehouse to be ransacked and depleted for man's needs, a source of recreation and pleasure, a giant holding tank for man's refuse. The results are frightening and from all predictions already critical to all life on earth:

Ozone depletion, carbon dioxide buildup, chlorofluorocarbon emissions, and acid rain upset the respiration and clog the pores and lungs of the ancient Earth Mother, rechristened "Gaia" by atmospheric chemist James Lovelock. Toxic wastes, pesticides, and herbicides seep into ground water, marshes, bays, and oceans, polluting Gaia's circulatory system. Tropical rainforests and northern old-growth forests disappear at alarming rates as lumberers shear Gaia of her tresses. Entire species of plants and animals become extinct each day. A new partnership between humans and the earth is urgently needed. 42

Western philosophy since Descartes has been fundamentally concerned with power, and the essence of modern technology lies in "enframing"; i.e., the revealing of nature so as to render it a standing reserve, as a calculable order of forces. 43

The attitudes which underlie the exploitation of nature can be traced through the history of philosophy, from Plato's hostility to nature (this world where there is no "perfect or noble growth, but caverns only, and sand, and an endless slough of mud" inhabited by stupid and ignorant animals "'), to Descartes' image of nature as mindless mechanism, as mere matter, to be controlled by objective and pure knowledge ("There exists nothing in the whole of nature which cannot be explained in terms of purely corporeal causes totally devoid of mind or thought" 44), to the various mechanistic positions taken by modern science and technology. 46

Alternative views have been combatted and ridiculed. For example, Robert Boyle, seventeenth century mechanical philosopher and Governor of the New England Company, explicitly declared his intention of ridding the minds of New England Indians of their ridiculous notions about the workings of nature and the "fond and superstitious practices those errors ingag'd them to". Boyle attacked the "vulgar" views which saw nature "as a kind of goddess, whose power may be little less than boundless", and he argued that "the veneration wherewith men are imbued for what they call nature, has been a discouraging impediment to the empire of man over the inferior creatures of God". 47

The exploration of alternative views makes manifest the cultural specificity of Western philosophies and also the lack of homogeneity within Western culture. The very existence of alternative philosophies and visions is evidence that, despite the power and dominance of duality and logocentrism, their omniscience and omnipresence are fictions.
Footnotes to Section Five


2. It is problematic to isolate arguments from a theoretical arena like ecofeminism without fully explicating the diversity of theories contained within that arena. An element of anti-historical, anti-political simplification sets in. It is anyway a tightrope act to utilise theorists’ words as tools for a cause whilst trying to avoid misrepresentation of the broader context. How to plunder thoughtfully! I depend here on the safeguard of the mass of primary and secondary sources on the theories mentioned and the contemporary controversies surrounding these areas of debate, in that there is no lack of reference material for readers to pursue.

3. Woman is seen as the "lesser man" (Tennyson), as "misbegotten male" (Aristotle), as castrated male (Freud). [Quoted in N. Jay, "Gender & Dichotomy", in S. Gunew (ed.), *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*, Routledge, N.Y., 1990, pp. 89-106 @ p. 97.]

Nancy Jay argues that this system, whilst dominant, is not monolithic; that it is philosophies concerned with the maintenance of a conservative social order rather than those concerned with revolutionary change which are bound to fixed dualities and hierarchical structures of knowledge. Jay gives examples from the biblical prophets: Ezekiel, concerned with restoring a former order and always insisting on rigid and sexist oppositions, and Isaiah, picturing a new kingdom and emphasising unity and equal sharing rather than separations. [See Jay, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 102-103.]

4. Where subjectivity is male, it is not surprising that normative behaviour is also seen as male. When psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers are given a questionnaire listing typical masculine and feminine attributes and are asked to attribute them to healthy adult men or women and in terms of ideal health for adult persons, the results show high levels of agreement between the respondents as to attributes characterising healthy adult men, attributes characterising healthy adult women, and attributes characterising healthy adults, and these parallel the sex-role stereotypes, with the healthy adult *person* seen as having *male* attributes, *not* female. Feminine attributes are seen as unhealthy and abnormal. [I. Broverman, D. Broverman, F. Clarkson, P. Rosenkrantz, S. Vogel, *Sex-Role Stereotypes and Clinical Judgments of Mental Health*, in J.M. Bardwick (ed), *Readings on the Psychology of Women: A Study of Bio-Cultural Conflicts*, Harper & Row, N.Y., 1972, pp. 320-324.]


6. Language is the most pervasive carrier of the values of the dominant order. Dale Spender shows how language denigrates feminine attributes and denies the feminine a separate existence from other-than-male. When women are linguistically invisible, the world becomes one of male imagery and a male one until proven otherwise. For example, women become outsiders and subsumed within a male world if they enter "mankind"; they achieve humanity by labelling themselves as "man" and thus lose their identity as "woman". [See D. Spender, *Man Made Language*, Pandora, London, 1980, pp. 157-158.]


Irigaray shows how woman as castrated male, as "hole", has no sexual identity, no conception of female desire: she is there as the passive receptacle for male desire, she becomes the "prop for the enactment of man's fantasies", she is a commodity, an eroticized object, "never anything but the locus of a more or less competitive exchange between two men, including the competition for the possession of mother earth". [L. Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One", in Gunew (ed), Feminist Knowledge, Routledge, N.Y., 1990, pp. 204-211 @ p. 205.] Irigaray suggests that woman's sexuality, woman's imaginary, and woman's language will arise out of the gaps left by the dual oppositions; in amorphous, incomprehensible, polymorphous, multiplicity, nearness, and so on - all those qualities that are excessive, outside the dominant order, neither one thing nor the other. [Ibid, p. 210.]

9. Imagery has the power of communicating, in highly condensed, instantaneous, and not necessarily rational form, complex and often manifestly untrue cultural messages.


13. An example is writer Ynestra King who first claims that there is no hierarchy in nature and no natural hierarchy of persons, but then claims that "the domination of woman was the original domination in human society, from which all other hierarchies - of rank, class, and political power - flow". And thus she creates another hierarchy! [Ynestra King, "The Ecology of feminism and the feminism of ecology", in J. Plant (ed). Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism, Green Print, London, 1989, pp. 18-28 @ p. 24.]

14. Certain dualities predominate at certain times or in particular institutions for political reasons and the means of oppression and repression shift with changing social circumstances. For example, Naomi Wolf’s book The Beauty Myth documents the shift from the association between domesticity and confinement with femininity to the association between femininity and sexualised and cosmeticised beauty; both associations operating so as to oppress and repress women, but in different ways, and to fit widely differing economic conditions. The industries promoting the Beauty Myth are the relatively recent and rapidly expanding diet, cosmetic, surgery, and pornography industries. The Beauty Myth operates to question the very essence of the woman; her natural state, her body, and it provokes competition and separation between women, and self-hatred in women. N. Wolf sees this shift motivated by feminism and the backlash to it. [N. Wolf, The Beauty Myth, Chatto & Windus, London, 1990.]


16. "Ecofeminism" is a term coined in 1974 by Françoise d’Eaubonne to bring attention to women's potential for bringing about an ecological revolution.


26. One element of contemporary science exploring this notion is appropriately called "chaos theory": it looks at the "irregular side of nature, the discontinuous and erratic side - these have been puzzles to science, or worse, monstrosities." 


28. Ibid, p. 149.

29. The huge involvement of corporate giants such as Shell, Exxon, and ICI in this revolution raises questions about who the experiments will benefit, human or corporate needs. For example, a corporation producing fertilisers may produce new crops that are pest resistant but which cannot grow effectively without the addition of particular fertilisers.


31. Griffin argues that at each point in history when scientific revolutions challenge the superior position of humans in the universe and economic hardships challenge the security that control over nature is supposed to maintain, the deep-seated fear of human 'naturalness' becomes a rage against some human group that symbolises nature, e.g., witches, slaves, Jews. 


Note: The woman as deceitful instinctual siren of death, beautiful, sexually insatiable, immoral, bestial, and dangerous is a ubiquitous theme in contemporary Hollywood movies.
Rachel Carson was an inspiration for contemporary ecology movements in her influential 1963 book Silent Spring about the destruction of wildlife in America caused by pesticides, fungicides and herbicides, especially DDT.

Between 1500 and 1700, "living animate nature died; while dead inanimate money was endowed with life. Increasingly capital and the market would assume the organic attributes of growth, strength, activity, pregnancy, weakness, decay, and collapse". This transformation was founded on the utilisation of nature, women, blacks, wage labourers as given 'natural' resources.


Boyle declared nature to be a huge machine: "I consider the frame of the world as a great ... pregnant automaton, that, like a woman with twins in her womb, or a ship furnished with pump, ordnance, etc. is such an engine, as comprises or consists of several lesser engines." [Quoted in Easlea, Op. Cit., p. 23.]
To live in the late twentieth century, for all of us, is to know the fear of ultimate destruction. For many of us it is to walk warily along a knife-edge on one side of which lies the arrogance which leads to destruction, and on the other side the nihilism which equally leads to destruction. ¹

Once the illogical nature of our dominant dualistic ideologies is revealed by deconstruction, and the processes of power are historically researched and analysed, where next? Do we fiddle while Rome burns?

The creation of alternative points of view is a fraught endeavour, stretching the imagination to fever pitch and journeying into the unknown. Our entire written history comes from within patriarchy and within duality and logocentrism. Looking to prehistory for inspiration is necessarily to project needs and desires in a massive transference. Just as difficult is to search living cultures for different perspectives. In a world of enormous power differentials can you ‘borrow’ culture from a ‘developing country’ or Native peoples? Is it even possible to develop a parallel separate philosophy when you are conditioned into the dominant culture and think and speak its language? For the mass of us who live daily amidst the hostile opposites and the separations, are there mechanisms for resistance and change that transcend the scale of the personal?

The following three sections present the ideas and processes of writers and activists (such as Suzuki and Knudston, D. B. Rose, Wittig, Starhawk) to explore such questions within a continuing focus on women and nature.

Footnotes to A Preface

Mayoreak Ashoona, "Caribou in the Distance", lithograph, 1980.
Navajo Indians in the deserts of south-west America speak lovingly of Changing Woman who fashioned the first Navajo people from a mixture of cornmeal and shreds of her own epidermis. She reflects the Navajo belief in the self-renewing maternal earth whose mountains and mesas are the contours of this feminine earth's body. "Fertile soil is her living flesh. Vegetation is her dress. The spinning of the seasons is a visible manifestation of her dynamic beauty, ecological balance, and vitality."

In the rainforests of Malaysia dwell the remnants of the Chewong people, whose laws include a strict mandate against teasing or laughing at animals. Even acts which thoughtlessly rather than maliciously offend the spirits of wild, captive or slain animals are severely punished by Taloden asal, a huge female primordial serpent with stupendous powers over natural disasters. One Chewong legend tells of a man and his fiancee, both young and childless, who catch a live squirrel and lovingly keep it as a childlike pet. This grievous offense of neglecting the solemn duty of recognizing the animal's own different identity, of not respecting its proper role in the cosmos, evokes fury from Taloden asal. A terrible storm sweeps the couple's hut from the face of the earth and the serpent gobbles the two up, completely extinguishing their human souls.

The Chewong do not divide human beings from nonhuman species. Each animal is believed to have its own consciousness, its own perception of the world: there is a tiger way of viewing the world. A fruit bat way. A hornbill way. A tapir way. An elephant way. Even if these animals were to threaten humans, their ways would be respected and compassionately understood.

The Inuit people of the North American Arctic measure time in terms of the movements of the caribou herds, the recurrent changes in the environment, and the phases of the moon. The year is measured in sixteen stages - e.g., there is "the moon in which the caribou have a medium coat", "the moon in which the caribou mate", "the moon in which the big lakes begin to cover over", and so on. Such a measuring of time is part of the Inuit's close connection to the "subtle and imprecise ecological rhythms in the visible patterns of life experience, and memory upon the surface of the land."

The Aboriginal Yarralin community in Australia's Northern Territory believe in the female-ness of the earth, the mother of everything, and the entwining of all species "within a transcendent web of meaning that renders eternally sacred the processes, places, and personages of the natural world". According to the Yarralin, salt water covered the earth in the beginning, then the tide pulled back to reveal a featureless, damp, sandy and malleable earth. This earth was and always is female.
In her moist and pliable state she gave birth to all the original creative beings...
All the different kinds of living beings, and all knowledge, are ultimately born of earth. 6

The creative beings "imprinted their passage on the body of the mother... Walking, running, slithering across the earth" 7 during a timeless epoch of transformation, called the Dreaming, when adventures and stories of great mythic figures created and populated the earth's diversity, cycles, all its species, its places, its processes.

To the Yarralin, all is interwoven, all is sacred. Yarralin Dreaming stories are not so much about 'good' and 'bad' as about balance and order. 8 There are responsibilities for sustaining the balance of this system. "A system cannot be life-enhancing if it is out of kilter, and each part shares in the responsibility of sustaining itself and balancing others." 9

There is a moral obligation to understand and care. "Communication is reciprocal" and there is a duty "to learn to understand, to pay attention, and to respond". No species is superior, and each has its own law. "In opposing and balancing each other, parts must be equivalent because the purpose is not to 'win' or to dominate, but to block, thereby producing further balance". 10

Evasion of responsibilities calls down chaos. 11 This is not a harmonious system and there are innumerable tensions and hostilities, but the purpose in handling them is "not to dominate but to sustain equilibrium [what Stanner calls "abidingness"] and a great deal of social life is directed toward this end". 12

Such communities as the Yarralin throughout the world are under the same threat from Western development as are the environments they have learned to survive in through intimate awareness and adaptation.

The very thinking of indigenous peoples runs counter to the course of rampant, unsustainable development, so we, as indigenous peoples, have been removed from the picture. And removed we have been - mercilessly and efficiently, around the globe... 13

To quote the beliefs of peoples disempowered by our society is to enter a minefield. Knowledges are not separate from politics, and knowing takes many forms. Distortion and misuse are inevitable when knowledge is recontextualised, especially without an honouring of the knowers or an understanding of their political and cultural forms, or without a recognition of the motivations of the borrowers and their cultural and political structures. 14

The quoting of Native peoples' beliefs, especially from many diverse cultures, as in the beginning of this section, can imply that Native peoples all share some essence which is close to nature and different from 'civilised' peoples' needs and beliefs. Such an implication is part of the colonial, imperial master identity that exoticises, idealises, generalises, and ultimately degrades, exploits, and destroys the cultural other.

Nevertheless, increasingly, Western ecological movements have entered this dangerous area in a search for alternate philosophies that have, by and large, worked ecologically, sustained natural balances, allowed for human survival in the harshest of conditions, without destroying those sensitive environments. Studying these cultures' beliefs and actions has allowed ecological movements to develop a system of ethics which is detailed, manifestly workable (at least for small-scale human groupings), and which differs dramatically from Western attitudes to nature.
There are clear benefits to the West (and undoubtedly to the biosphere as well) through what could be seen as this further exploitation of disappearing peoples' philosophies. But there is also the need on the part of Native peoples to represent themselves anew, outside a history that ignores the West's dependency on them. The construction of the coloniser's knowledge can no longer be accounted for within its own terms - for the dependencies, stereotypes, generalisations, and essentialism underlying its ideologies have been exposed. Part of this rewriting of history is the reevaluation of the Western generalisations about Native views of nature as 'naive', 'simple', part of an inferior stage of human cultural progress and irrelevant to our societies, and poetic, endearing, romantic and ethereal.  

The recognition by ecologists of the sophisticated, practical, and detailed knowledge of nature contained within Native people's religions and stories is part of a growing awareness that there are different ways of knowing and different knowns.

Native knowledge about nature is firmly rooted in reality, in keen personal observation, interaction, and thought, sharpened by the daily rigors of uncertain survival. Its validity rests largely upon the authority of hard-won personal experience - upon concrete encounters with game animals and arduous treks across the actual physical contours of local landscapes, enriched by night dreams, contemplations, and waking visions. The junction between knowledge and experience is tight, continuous, and dynamic, giving rise to "truths" that are likely to be correspondingly intelligent, fluid, and vibrantly "alive".

An example of the outlining of an alternative ethics based on borrowings from Native cultures is an article by Annie Booth and Harvey Jacob, "Ties that Bind: Native American Beliefs as a Foundation for Environmental Consciousness". Booth and Jacobs point out the actuality and workability of a society that makes no distinctions between the spiritual and commonplace, that does not view species in a hierarchical arrangement under man but sees them as all equal offspring of a Great Mother, where sacredness is not abstract but is bound up with landforms, animals, and all the processes of humans and nature, where the Earth is seen as living and conscious, to be treated with respect and loving care, where everything has a place, where the world is one of awe and inconsistency, wonder and inconvenience, bountiful diversity, where there is no solitude as all is life affirming, living, pulsating.

Deborah Bird Rose urges the Western world to re-view its own attitudes to spirituality and nature by learning from Aboriginal people. To Aborigines, White people fail to recognise their own Dreamings; they follow dead laws, fail to recognise living ones, and in their power and denial promote death. For the Yarralin people, there is no transcendent God, only this world, us, these manifestations of life. "Mysticism in this tradition is an intensely heightened awareness of intersubjectivity. Self is not incorporated into Other, but is totally engaged with others." 

There is no ultimate Other to take charge of us. Nor is there a new time, 'new age', 'new humanity', or 'new Earth'. There is us - and every other living thing in the cosmos including the Earth - as we are and as we can be. We have only to listen, to learn, to remember our own strong stories, and to act.

Knudston and Suzuki in Wisdom of the Elders, the book to which this section is so indebted, identify Native ecological perspectives in contrast to conventional Western scientific ones to emphasise the losses incurred by and the urgent need for change within Western attitudes to nature. Their list is here crudely condensed as holy versus profane, imbued with life rather than viewed as neutral property, reverence versus dominion, embodied spirit versus disembodied otherworldly Supreme Being, human responsibility for harmony
versus human power-over, daily and routine human duties versus abstract ethics, nature's bounty as gifts rather than as resources to be exploited, instant punishments for violations of nature rather than long term predictions, the universe as a dynamic web rather than a vast array of physical objects, a holistic rather than specialised view, time as circular rather than linear, the acceptance of mystery rather than its reduction to decipherability, humans as intertwined with the universe rather than disengaged, a gentle and accommodating attitude to nature versus aggressive and manipulative, empathy and kinship with all forms of life versus superiority over, human/nature relations as a dialogue rather than a monologue. 20

Of course such listings can also become constructed fictions, aimed at persuading a Western audience to believe in a lost paradise and to idealise human cultural difference. And further, as Val Plumwood argues, the identification and celebration of different philosophies does not ensure their translatability into the Western context.

A culture such as that of the west in which dualism has such deep roots and which has lost such links to particular land areas as defining both communal and individual identity, clearly cannot simply borrow such traditions. Yet perhaps through them it can come to see some fuller and better possibilities for reworking its own world-view and traditions. 21

For example, the sacredness, holiness, and spirituality of Native ecological attitudes is mostly alien to our world of science and technology, but has been posited by some Western critics as the elementary issue in a revival of science itself and also in the development of an ecological consciousness. Adorno and Horkheimer predicted the losses and destructiveness inherent in the disenchantment of the world. 22 Gregory Bateson warned that a science dissociated from the spiritual, like an intellect dissociated from emotion, or a mind separated from body, was "monstrous" and alienating. 23 Some scientists themselves warn us that a reductive science based on a universal theory becomes an instrument of domination:

A disenchanted world is ... a world liable to control and manipulation .... And man, a stranger to the world sets himself up as its master. 24

Morris Berman, in The Reenchantment of the World argues that the dominance of the scientific world view has progressively despiritualised nature and that the "great drama" of the twentieth century will be the struggle to render science more holistic. 25 Suzi Gablik in The Reenchantment of Art states that "Overcoming the crisis of disenchantment has become the greatest need of our culture at this time" and that this will involve "stepping beyond the modern traditions of mechanism, positivism, empiricism, rationalism, materialism, secularism and scientism - the whole objectifying consciousness of the Enlightenment in a way that allows for a return of soul." 26

Within ecology movements there has been the realisation that environmental crises will be solved, not by technology, and not by postmodern critique, but by learning, positing, and exploring other ways of knowing. For example, to accept and respect (rather than attempting to neutralise, dissect, or render invisible) the indecipherable, the unknown, the mysterious, the uncertain, the spiritual; to perceive the world animistically rather than anthropomorphically (i.e., as imbued with, and animated by, universal and autonomous spirits rather than as made up of lesser reflections of human characteristics), is not necessarily to turn tables and make this the new 'truth', but to realise that here is a world view, a political and historical human perception, that could enlarge our perspective, and offer other solutions within a time of crisis.

Perhaps the most important role of reminders from other cultures is to focus our attention on alternatives available within our own culture, both outside the dominant
paradigms and implicitly contained within the exclusions and dependencies supporting those paradigms.

Spirituality is only one of the revolutions in understanding facing Western culture. Knowledge itself is present in our culture in diverse forms, each with its own inherent world view, with different potential ramifications for the material world. For example, Gregory Bateson identified two types of knowledge: the dominant "digital" (verbal, rational, abstract, binary, and numerically in discrete units) and the "analogue" (iconic, lineal, quantitative, systemic, and recognising an infinitely variable spectrum). Bateson utilised these different approaches and the model of interrelationships and circuitry within the development of cybernetics to develop, within our own traditions, perceptions, and knowledges, an "anti-atomistic, anti-reductionist, and strongly contextual" framework or world view. 27

Looking to other cultures can provide practical models of what may seem in our own culture to be utopian and hypothetical. For example, D. B. Rose argues that the type of acentred, nonhierarchical system imagined by Deleuze and Guattari in their article "Rhizome" (1981) is already in existence in the Yarralin people's world view and social system. 28

With an awareness of the diversity of ways of knowing, and the linking of borrowings from other cultures to excluded or peripheralised knowledges within our own culture, new systems of thought can be forged, and choices can be made to work towards the survival of the diversity of knowns; of peoples, of cultures, of ecosystems, of the biosphere.

Footnotes to Section Six

8. Ibid, p. 103.
The destruction of Native peoples in the United States followed the same path as in Australia and in every colonial situation involving nomadic hunter/gatherer societies whose needs for land and attitudes to the environment were diametrically opposed to those of technological, industrial, urbanised societies.

The Master Narrative of the United States proclaims that there were no Indians here, just wilderness. Then that the Indians were savages in need of the United States. Then that the Indians all died, unfortunately. Then, that the Indians still alive are (a) basically happy with the situation and (b) not the "real" Indians. Then, most importantly, that that is the complete story. [Jimmie Durham, quoted in Charlotte Townsend-Gault, "Kinds of Knowing", in D. Namiroff, R. Houle, C. Townsend-Gault, Land Spirit Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada, National Gallery of Canada, Ottowa, 1992, pp.74-101 @ p. 87.]

Townsend-Gault points out that it is also a misrepresentation to generalise "colonising powers", "Europeans", "the West". She outlines how American Indians had to interact with Basque whalers, West Country English fishermen, Dutch traders, and French missionaries with different natures and purposes. But she does acknowledge that, with all their differences, these European intruders shared authoritarian, hierarchical, individualistic, and acquisitive social ideologies. [Townsend-Gault, Op. Cit., pp. 82-83.]

14. The recognition of the political nature of all knowledge leads to a recognition that there is no unmediated, transparent knowledge of the world, no unitary model outside of particular contexts, and all forms of knowledge are fallible conventions. There are many different forms of knowledge:

...what emerges is the understanding that there is more than one kind of knowing: that there exists knowledge that can be shared, knowledge that may be intimated, and knowledge that should be withheld, to control translatability, in respect for the final untranslatability of the essence of cultural difference. [C. Townsend-Gault, Op. Cit., @ p. 86.]


Knudston and Suzuki argue that the only way to avoid mining, manipulating, and plundering Native knowledge and spiritual awareness as intellectual "natural resources" is to simultaneously support Native peoples' struggles for dignity, human rights, and land claims. [Knudston & Suzuki, Op. Cit., pp. 18-19.]

M. di Leonardo points to the multiple layers through which anthropologists perceive particular cultural realities. E.g., the power-laden encounter between researcher and researched, the
network of professional colleagues and particular Western dialogues, connections between anthropological research and political structures and ideologies, and the aims of the researcher to bring about change or to support the status quo. [See M. di Leonardo, Introduction, Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era. Uni. of California Press, Berkeley, L.A., Oxford, 1991, pp. 1-48 @ pp. 31-33.]


Knudston & Suzuki use a case study to show how Native attitudes are misrepresented, romanticised, and Westernised, i.e., the famous speech by Duwamish leader Chief Seattle in 1854 in Washington, which, after multiple translations and embroiderings for various purposes has little relationship now to its original words. See pp. XV-XVII.


Knudston & Suzuki provide examples of what is, to our eyes, extremely sophisticated knowledge amongst Native peoples of soils, plants, insects, and other aspects of local environments. For example, in relation to medical uses alone, traditional Bolivian healers use some 600 different medicinal herbs, and 75% of the 121 prescription drugs used around the world are derived from plants apparently used in indigenous practices. (Ibid, p. 12.)


An Aside

Feminism in all its manifestations has taken on the tasks of rewriting culture, deconstructing philosophy, re-visioning aesthetics, rethinking ethics and values. The project is vast. The very mediums through which knowledges and values are couched - language itself, subjectivity, and identity - are brought into question as wholly colonised by patriarchy. Their function for women or alternative viewpoints is thrust into a situation of flux, ambiguity, uncertainty. Does the death of the author and the cooptation of language by patriarchy mean no new stories can be told?

Can women formulate a different identity, and an autonomous voice for women and, as many hope, simultaneously for the biosphere? Can this occur within existing institutions and systems of knowledge and language, or only develop from outside; in separatism, by returning to a distant past, or by looking forward to a far-off future?

In the following chapters the writings of Monique Wittig and Starhawk are explored. They are linked through this larger project and divided by national and experiential differences. Undoubtedly Starhawk and Wittig would find themselves at loggerheads. The French Wittig, obsessively watchful and determinedly and academically radical, would despise Starhawk's theoretical looseness. The American Starhawk would be uncomfortable with the declamatory style and exclusionary qualities of Wittig's writings. These sections of the thesis have been remarkably difficult to write, simultaneously trying to be mindful of and yet not get bogged down by the rifts within feminism.

Why are both these writers necessary to me, and why do I try to bring them together? Their writings, through tone and content, 'embody' qualities that have been dismembered and dis-remembered in our culture: passion, transgression, process, eroticism, concreteness, community. Their paths diverge and then touch again at numerous points, but both dip into our cultural 'underworld' for visions of wholeness and of being fully alive. For this thesis specifically they each provide echoes with other discussions. The aspects of the 'grotesque' in Wittig's style reverberate with later intimations of the grotesque as radical strategy. And Starhawk's search for a system of ethics based on immanence prefaces my need to dream an existence beyond a world split asunder. Where Wittig goads and inspires us into new realms of the imagination, Starhawk guides and instructs. To me they make good companions.
Nancy Spero,  
"Goddess and Centaur and Running Woman",  
handprinting and collage on paper,  
19" x 24", 1985.
Section Seven

Escape and Revolution

The women say that they have been given as equivalents the earth the sea tears that which is humid that which is black that which does not burn that which is negative those who surrender without a struggle. They say this is a concept which is the product of mechanistic reasoning. It deploys a series of terms which are systematically related to opposite terms. Its theses are so crass that the thought of them makes the women start laughing violently. They say they might just as well be compared with the sky the heavenly bodies in their general movement and disposition the galaxies the planets the stars the suns that which burns those who struggle bravely those who do not surrender. They joke on this subject, they say it is to fall between Scylla and Charybdis, to avoid one religious ideology only to adopt another, they say that both one and the other have this in common, that they are no longer valid.

For Monique Wittig visions of difference are problematic. Wittig shifts back and forth uneasily between evoking the different, and shying clear of such imaginings since they are formed through available imagery and through a language of oppositions.

Yet Monique Wittig’s books are revolutionary in multi-faceted ways. They envisage the actual physical overthrow of the patriarchal order and women’s separate worlds, they retell old stories through the voices of the others, they attempt to invade the dominant order of language itself through an excess of words, by loudly speaking the unspeakable, through a play with form and tone, through disallowing a separation between content and style. They upend a dichotomous world by celebrating the suppressed and dominated terms, by revealing the complexities behind social simplifications and generalisations, by actively self-questioning and refusing to create new dogma.

Wittig is furious in her poetry and lesbian separatism. She is deeply suspicious of any glorification of women that feeds on traditional categorisations of men and women. Wittig’s alternate visions focus on fighting, running away, escaping from what she sees as the well-defended power structure of combined patriarchy and heterosexuality which debases and denies the existence of others. For her, as a writer, textual self-consciousness and radical language is the path to envisaging change. The travelling inwards, viscerally, into the body of the text is the journey to crossing the Acheron towards social death and true life.

Wittig’s book Les Guerilleres, published in France in 1969, reflects the radical climate in France at that time, as well as the feminist books being published then which were rewriting official histories and deconstructing patriarchal institutions and philosophies. Les Guerilleres depicts the overthrow of the old order by a tribe of warrior women and proclaims the destruction of patriarchal institutions and language and the birth of a new feminist order.
The warrior women use humour, violence, community to expose and oppose their own oppression. They retell known stories with a central twist, so as to celebrate the power and separateness of women.

They speak together of the threat they have constituted towards authority, they tell how they were burned on pyres to prevent them from assembling in future. They were able to command tempests, to sink fleets, to destroy armies. They have been mistresses of poisons, of the winds, of the will. They were able to exercise their power at will and to transform all kinds of persons into mere animals geese pigs birds turtles. They have ruled over life and death. Their conjoint power has menaced hierarchies systems of government authorities. Their knowledge has computed successfully with the official knowledge to which they had no access, it has challenged it, found it wanting, threatened it, made it appear inefficacious. No police were powerful enough to track them down, no paid informer so opportunist, no torture so brutal, no army so overwhelming as to attack them one by one and destroy them. Then they chant the famous song that begins, Despite all the evils they wished to crush me with / I remain as steady as the three-legged cauldron.

Again and again Wittig reminds us that no form of the "dead culture" can be relied on as an aid. Language itself, for a writer, is the central tool, and "an outworn language" means that everything needs to be re-seen, re-experienced, re-told, but also left uncertain and undefined.

They say everything must begin over again. They say that a great wind is sweeping the earth. They say that the sun is about to rise.

Wittig remains unswerving in centralising women, speaking to them and of them. The pronouns "they" and "me" in Les Guerilleres are normatively female and the book reads as a feminist manifesto. Wittig states:

In Les Guerilleres, I try to universalize the point of view of elles. The goal of this approach is not to feminize the world but to make the categories of sex obsolete in language. I, therefore, set up elles in the text as the absolute subject of the world.

Language itself "poisons" the women's "glottis tongue palate lips", it is made up of signs appropriated by men. Women have to search for their own symbology in the intervals and the gaps within the male discourse and in women's separateness:

... in the zero, the O, the perfect circle that you invent to imprison them and to overthrow them.

The physical overthrow of patriarchy is seen as only the beginning of women developing their own culture, actions, difference.

They say that the event is memorable even though long in preparation and mentioned in diverse fashion by historians writers versifiers. They say that war is an affair for women. They say, is this not gratifying? They say that they have spat at the men's heels, that they have cut the legs off their boots. They say, moreover, that although laughter is the prerogative of man, they want to learn how to laugh. They say yes, henceforward They are ready. They say that the breasts the curved eyelashes the flat or broadened hips, they say that the bulging or hollow bellies, they say that the vulvas are henceforth in movement. They say that they are inventing a new dynamic. They say they are throwing off their sheets. They say they are getting down from their beds. They say they are leaving the museums the show-cases the pedestals where they have been installed. They say they are quite astonished that they can move.
In *Les Guerilleres* are issues that Wittig carries on further in later books, specifically the necessity to protect the integrity of the experience of the lived body in a world trying to do violence to the female, to the body, and specifically to the female body.

They say that any symbol that exalts the fragmented body is transient, must disappear. Thus it was formerly. They, the women, the integrity of the body their first principle, advance marching together into another world.  

Language and body and politics cannot be separated.

Language casts sheaves of reality upon the social body, stamping it and violently shaping it.  

Fragmentation (in written form marked by punctuation, e.g., commas which are used to separate items in a list) is replaced by an unbroken flow of words, implicitly bespeaking fluidity oneness interconnectedness. Detail and diversity are celebrated in this flow of words but traditional categorisations of differences are denied as colours senses perfumes emotions shapes vulvas horseshoes stenches laughter vomit dancing death joy become intertwined in one rich celebration. Lists of women's names in capitals stride/march through the book reminding us of the endless diversity particularity communality, and the inseparability within women's history of ugliness and beauty, power and victimisation.

AIMEE POMA BARBA BENEDICTA SUSANNA CASSANDRA OSMONDA GENE HERMINIA KIKA AURELIA EVANGELINE SIMONA MAXIMILIANA

As well as names there are lists of smells, colours, foods, discourses, everything imaginable.

Amomum aniseed betel cinnamon cubeb mint liquorice musk ginger clove nutmeg pepper saffron sage vanilla...  

There are piles of orange oranges ochre pineapples mandarins walnuts green and pink mangos blue nectarines green and pink peaches orange-yellow apricots.

They engage in discourses which pile up paradoxes absurdities logomachies fallacies sophistries.

The stories, the lists, the fragments build up, stratum by stratum, a conglomerate of women's imagery, history and issues.

Construction is never separate from destruction. Wittig believes that oppression breeds hatred and her books advocate violence, fierce action, strength, struggle as essential parts of overthrowing the pervasiveness of the old order. Alternatives to violence, and rest-places from it, are laughter, complete separatism, personal peace and integration.

In 1973 Wittig's next book was published, *The Lesbian Body*. *The Lesbian Body* attempts to write the female body as wholly separate from and outside the world of men. It passionately celebrates the body as the starting point of life and civilisation.

The body of the text and the female body merge. Parts and specificities of the body are obsessively listed so as to recite one's own body, recite the body of the other, and recite the words of which the book is made up.

The fascination for writing the never previously written and the fascination for the unattained body proceed from the same desire. 17

Old models and stereotypes of the body are literally (or rather 'literarily') destroyed as the text focuses on flaying, dismemberment, and delving deeper and deeper into the recesses of viscera pores veins networks. All is wrenched and pulled apart. Invasion, dismemberment, engulfment prefigure any merging or oneness:

I begin with the tips of your fingers, I chew the phalanges I crunch the metacarpals the carpals, I slaver at your wrists, I disarticulate the ulnae with great delicacy, I exert pressure on the trochea, I tear away the biceps from the humerus, I devour it, I eat m/y fill of you m/y so delectable one, m/y jaws snap, I swallow you, I gulp you down. .... The food you are weighs on m/e within m/y stomach, I am suddenly revolted, I vomit you up, a great liquid half-digested stinking steaming mass falls on your belly. You become very pale at this point you throw yourself back with a great cry, tears spurt strongly from your eyes spattering m/e, you say it is unbearable to see m/e vomit you up, I am overcome by greater pity than ever, I begin to eat you again as fast as I can m/y so adored one I lick the last scraps on your belly, I get rid of the traces of blood, I absorb you m/y very precious one, I retain you within m/e. 18

The processes of fragmentation and deconstruction - the ingestion, the rejection, the reingestion, the coming together may symbolise the journey within feminism where deconstruction and struggle prefigure construction and community. For Wittig it specifically refers to the act of feminist writing which must violently and forcefully deal with the inner alienation and deep rendering splits that are part and parcel of using a tool, language, which inherently denies and excludes female existence.

The excluded, the expelled, the abject are celebrated in loving detail by Wittig. Stench, fetidness, putridness, engulfment, decay: these are socially repellent and also associated with the feminine. Passion, emotion, the senses, the tones: these are socially repressed and associated with the feminine. 19 To Wittig all these qualities are part of the richness of life.


For the reader there is a confusion of historical moment and signification. For example, is the violence and the dismemberment part of the old order that tortured and scientifically and socially fragmented women's bodies? Is it an expression of our alienation from the body and from the other? A sense of the unattainability of final merging? Or is the atmosphere of violence the cumulative result of reading the unreadable, of being forced to enter the world of the other? Is it simultaneously all of these meanings?

Wittig recognises ambiguity as an essential part of women's identity within a patriarchal world where language separates gender (in French), "elle" from "il", creating and reflecting a split subjectivity, where woman is subject to man's knowing. To constantly remind us of this fact Wittig splits the personal pronouns "j/e" and "m/y":

j/e is the symbol of the lived, rending experience which is m/y writing, of this
cutting in two which throughout literature is the exercise of a language which does not constitute m/e as subject. 21

Time is also ambiguous and concertinaed. The islands of women in the book allude to the Amazons; they are exclusive women’s domains, but in the future and present as well as the past. The actors are similarly multifarious: the unnamed and named love is Ishtar/Astarte, Persephone, cruel and fickle, radiant and ravishing, vile, monstrous, the self, all women, known, unknown, myth, prayer, reality. 22

While women’s subjectivity and culture remain illusionary and visionary, there can be no separation between fictional, symbolic, and actual.

... may you lose the sense of morning and evening of the stupid duality with all that flows therefrom, may you conceive yourself as I at last see you over the greatest possible space, may your understanding embrace the complexity of the play of the stars and of the feminine agglomerations, may you yourself in this place strive in a frenzied confrontation whether in the shape of the angel or the shape of the demon, may the music of the spheres envelop your struggle, may you not lose your way in pursuing the stillborn, may the black star crown you finally, giving you to sit at m/y side at the apogee of the figuration of lesbian love m/y most unknown. 23

In Across the Acheron (published 1985) Wittig more specifically preaches a lesbian separatist vision: "... you, Wittig, as an emissary of the lesbian scourge ... treat yourself to a session of bogey-man thrashing ...." 24. Wittig transforms Dante's epic visionary poems, "Hell", "Purgatory", "Paradise", to detail the hellish social reality of women under patriarchy: as victims, slaves, blinded, two-dimensional, internally split by their desire to escape the world yet be part of it, in competition and angry with other women within this structure.

Don't you know that the vanquished in their impotence at crushing their real enemy ... destroy each other mutually if there is no way to act otherwise ... 25

Men's brutality and sexuality are the means of women's oppression. 26 To Wittig women's lives are on the line and domestic violence is about occupation of domestic spaces, slavery, and brutality. 27 Children are "appendages" that tear women apart and then leave them disorientated and directionless. 28

Lesbianism is upheld as a triumphant alternative.

Lesbianism provides for the moment the only social form in which we can live freely ... because the designated subject (lesbian) is not a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude ... 29

From the edge of phallocentric reality, lesbians see the world differently, "obliquely". Paradoxically, being lesbian, "standing at the outposts of the human (of humankind)" 30 allows a more truly 'human' view. Like everyone, lesbians have to deal with the complexities of particularities and the struggles between acculturated selves and bodies. History, politics, culture, nature interweave the body, the mind, the identity. However meanings are coded on bodies and selves in sexually determinate ways and the differences in power, perspective, and desire between the two sexes or the two genders 31 means that there are irreducible and ineradicable differences between male and female that make relations between these sexes within our present society hard contestations and non-progressive. 32
Men and women are not just 'different', they are part of a system of oppression and an ideology of domination. They are two opposing classes, they "are political concepts of opposition".  

Thus a lesbian has to be something else, a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature, for there is no nature in society.

The destruction of the categories of sex is the way for individual women to develop a new identity/subjectivity without which true revolution can never occur.

In Across the Acheron hope lies in lesbian community, and Wittig's "paradise" is a women's world of activity, food, generosity, music, warmth, nature, birds, angels on motor bikes.

...Some of the angels have their sleeves rolled up. Their faces are crimson from the reflection of the live embers and flames on their black and golden skins. Fragrant dill, cumin, oregano, thyme and rosemary are burnt in great dry bundles, and whatever seed there is, once grilled, is thrown into the sieves with coriander and sesame. When seen from a distance, all the activity seems to consist of movement, coming and going, progression along the steep slope, running, advance and withdrawal, manoeuvres and trampling ....

Across the Acheron is an uncompromisingly angry book, a reminder to all utopian theorisers of the continuing social reality for the mass of women. It reads as a warning to academic feminism about alienating itself from the lived experiences of women.

Wittig claims that what is required is "active passion" which ...

... is generally spoken of as compassion. But for the kind I speak of the word is inappropriate. For it seethes, ferments, explodes, exalts, inflames, agitates, transports, carries away just like that while ensures that one is reciprocally embraced. The same violence is there, and the tension. Just like the other, the passion that leads to this place leaves you helpless, knots the plexus, weakens the hamstrings, produces nausea, twists and empties the bowels, clouds the vision and confuses the ear. But also, just like the other, this passion gives arms for striking, legs for running, mouths for speaking and faculties for reasoning.

Footnotes to Section Seven:

5. Wittig dislikes terms like "manifesto", seeing them as ways of disregarding the textual reality, the literary level of the text, thus turning it into a symbol and diminishing its potential for intrusion into literature and politics. See Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, 1992, pp. 62-63.


10. Wittig, *The Straight Mind & Other Essays*, p. 44.


It is argued that "lists destroy all taxonomic schemes" and lead us "from the text to the existential textures of existence". "The list is the text as errant, erratic, and endless." (See A. S. Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Excess*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1989, pp. 86-7.)


19. Many contemporary writers deal with the sense exclusions in our world. (For example, Diane Ackerman's celebration of the senses in *A Natural History of the Senses*, Chapmans, London, 1960.) There is also considerable literature on the connection between abjection and the female. (For example, Andrea Dworkin's powerful analysis of misogyny in *Intercourse*, The Free Press, New York, 1967.)


21. Wittig states:

The bar in the \( j/e \) of *The Lesbian Body* is a sign of excess. A sign that helps to imagine an excess of \( I' \), an \( I' \) exalted. \( I' \) has become so powerful in *The Lesbian Body* that it can attack the order of heterosexuality in texts and assault the so-called love, the heroes of love, and lesbianize them, lesbianize the symbols, lesbianize the gods and the
goddesses, lesbianize the men and the women. This 'I' can be destroyed in the attempt and resuscitated. Nothing resists this 'I' (or this tu, which is its same, its love), which spreads itself in the whole world of the book, like a lava flow that nothing can stop. [The Straight Mind & Other Essays, p. 87]

In the essay, "The Mark of Gender" [The Straight Mind & Other Essays, pp.76-89], Wittig describes in detail the operation of gender through the use of personal pronouns and outlines her personal battle against the categories of sex and gender in language. The issue of subjectivity is faced continually by women authors. In The Orchard [Picador, Sydney, 1994], Drusilla Modjeska points out that the patriarchal literary tradition maintains the inferiority of writing in the first person. She argues that the assumption that the masculine is universal allows the relation between male writer and first person to seem trite and all too direct. But for a woman writer the use of 'I' is complex and must negotiate the transposition of woman as viewed object into seeing subject. [See The Orchard, pp. 140 ff.]

26. One image is of the futility of the temptation to cut off men's dicks since this would only result in glorifying them. See Across the Acheron, p. 97.
27. Wittig, Across the Acheron, pp. 109-111.
31. In this understanding there is no clear distinction between 'sex' and 'gender', both being acculturated. To Wittig the categories 'sex' and 'women' and 'men' are political and economic, not eternal. They are products of an oppressive heterosexual society which "turns half of the population into sexual beings, for sex is a category which women cannot be outside of." [Straight Mind, p. 7] Women are visible as sexual beings but invisible as social beings. [Straight Mind, p.8] Wittig concludes that all such 'naturalised' categories need to be refused: "... by its very existence, lesbian society destroys the artificial (social) fact constituting women as a natural group." [Straight Mind, p. 9] "Gender", to Wittig, is "the linguistic index of the political opposition between the sexes". There is only one gender, the feminine, because the masculine is the general. [Straight Mind, p. 60]
33. Wittig, Straight Mind, p. 29.

36. See specifically comments against the judgement of women trapped within their social roles [Across the Acheron, p. 33], and against the clever use of figures of speech (an issue also close to the heart of Starhawk; see the next Section for her criticism of jargon). [Across the Acheron, pp. 56-57.] Even words, for all their power, can muffle real change. In one image words fall like ash, like autumn leaves, the air is laden with them, they create joy, they meander, float away. It is only in their absence that there is silence, empty sky, the abyss, and perhaps the transition into another world. [See Across the Acheron, pp. 108-109.]

37. Wittig, Across the Acheron, p. 92.
Starhawk, like Wittig, advocates "compassion" as a key to envisaging different stories: Only a politics and a spirituality of compassion can possibly transform and heal the world, because without compassion we miss seeing the real interconnectedness of issues and cannot forge a vision or a strategy that can move us out of the stories of estrangement. And perhaps we should further test our movements by asking, "Are they rooted in compassion? Where is their heart?"  

Starhawk, in her life and writings, is deeply concerned with the destructive potentials of our society. She is proactively involved in the political world, in environmental and nuclear issues. In her multiple roles as witch, writer, teacher, counsellor and activist, Starhawk delves into sources deep within our own culture to develop alternate visions. Ancient religions and myths from Western history provide her with images that lay foundations for envisaging and enacting different social and political systems based on community, personal empowerment, and spiritual interconnectedness with nature. 

Starhawk is confident of the existence of 'essences' which pre-date or elude social conditioning and which are common to us all (e.g., of self, being, energy, Goddess, "the mysteries"): The mysteries are what is wild in us, what cannot be quantified or contained. But the mysteries are also what is most common to us all: blood, breath, heartbeat, the sprouting of seed, the waxing and waning of the moon, the turning of the earth around the sun, birth, growth, death, and renewal.  

This belief in 'essences', anathema to Wittig's belief in the ubiquity of social formations, enables confident borrowing from different eras and cultures and, whatever the dangers inherent in this belief, provides a basis for the development of a different system of ethics.  

Starhawk does not argue for an simplistic affirmation of the feminine side of the system of dualities. By using different strategies, ranging from reactivating particular historical myths to actively living new community and political structures, Starhawk speaks of human relations outside of what she terms the "false choices" of dualities. In what she sees as a context outside of divided gender, she utilises rituals and processes and qualities traditionally lumped into the realm of the feminine (e.g., witchcraft, magic, heart knowledge, nurturance, connectedness) to change perspectives, structures of living, and ways of dealing with the world, without simply reversing patriarchy into an affirmation of the feminine. 

Starhawk, like Wittig, believes that change begins with a shift in individual consciousness but then can only become manifest through community with others. ...we didn't get into this mess alone, and we can't get out of it alone. We need sustained support, both to mount resistance and to enact our vision of renewal, support that itself embodies the deep value we recognise in each other.
Action is essential to create connectedness, but is insufficient in itself for, without an overarching consciousness of connectedness, resultant action will not bring about deep change.

When we see spirit as immanent, we recognize that everything is interconnected. All the beings in the world are in constant communication on many levels and dimensions. There is no such thing as a single cause or effect, but instead a complex intertwined feedback system of changes that shape other changes. The destruction of the Amazon rain forest changes our weather. The murder of a health-care worker in Nicaragua by the Contras affects our health. And so our health, physical and emotional, cannot be considered out of context. To change ourselves, we must change the world; to change the world we must be willing to change ourselves. 

Starhawk argues for the inseparability of personal enlightenment, community structure, and real political change.

As a shaper, as one who practices magic, my work is to find that power [that emerges from within], to call it forth, to coax it out of hiding, tend it, and free it of constrictions. In a society based on power-over, that work inevitably must result in conflict with the forces of domination, for we cannot bear our own true fruit when we are under another's control.

In her actions and writings Starhawk is concerned with empowerment; not the "power-over" that is part of patriarchy and about domination, violence and exclusion, but "power-from-within": enablement, immanence, connectedness, creating, healing, sustenance.

Starhawk uses the word "Goddess" to refer to this power-from-within; the power "of the low, the dark, the earth; the power that arises from our blood, and our lives, and our passionate desire for each other's living flesh."

The Goddess can be seen as the symbol, the normative image of immanence. She represents the divine embodied in nature, in human beings, in the flesh.

For Starhawk the process of change is the practice of "magic": i.e., the continual re-making of choices that value connectedness, directed energy, and identification with other forms of being. Magic is also the evocation of power-from-within, the art of changing consciousness at will, and the art of liberation.

To practice magic is to bear responsibility for having a vision, for we work magic by envisioning what we want to create, clearing the obstacles in our way, and then directing energy through that vision. Magic works through the concrete; our ideals, our visions, are meaningless until they are in some way enacted. So, if our work is to evoke power-from-within, we must clearly envision the conditions that would allow that power to come forth, we must identify what blocks it, and create the conditions that foster empowerment. Given a world based on power-over, we must remake the world.

Starhawk points out that the derision and embarrassment created by words like "Goddess", "magic", and undoubtedly by her own name, are inherently present whenever we are confronted by the presence of deep paradigm difference. A patriarchal culture of estrangement, distanced from and mechanistically exploitative of nature, other human beings, and parts of ourselves, understands manipulation and domination, isolation and fragmentation, but feels contaminated by the feminine, the spiritual, and connectedness to nature. Such other stories are erased, ignored, trivialised, derided.

...whenever we choose the names that make things sound comfortable, acceptable, respectable, academically sound, scientific, we are almost always placing the thing
we name back into the context of estrangement - removing its power and our own, alienating ourselves yet again. The names for the thought-forms of immanence, the names that carry power, often sound simple, childish, or threatening; sometimes they sound funny. They are uncomfortable words - take Magic, for example. Or Witch ... a word that scares people ... that shocks or elicits nervous, stupid laughter .... Yet I prefer the word Witch to prettier words .... It should rub us the wrong way. If it arouses fear or negative assumptions, then those thought-forms can be openly challenged and transformed, instead of molding us unseen from within our minds. 14

Basic to change are shifts in form, structure, and language. Existent structures are never accidental; they are ... the concrete manifestations of a culture's deepest power relationships. A Gothic cathedral, with its stone walls, lofty spires reaching skyward, and long, narrow spaces in which a huge congregation focuses all their attention on the priest at the altar, embodies a concept of God, and of power, quite different from a Sweat Lodge built on bent branches and skins on bare earth, in which a small group sits in a circle together. 15

Starhawk's books are not just about "sawing the legs off the ladders" but about "building the structures that can replace them". 16 These manuals for action outline ways in which contemporary people can effectively create groups of different sizes for working towards personal and/or political ends, bond the groups through the use of ritual 17, and structure those groups so as to ensure that all members are heard and empowered (e.g., through circles, rounds of speaking, consensus decision-making, and the rotation of formal roles such as facilitator, peacemaker, coordinator 18).

Central to change are new stories and a different language. "To work magic, we begin by making new metaphors." 19 Starhawk describes our culture as a set of stories which teach estrangement from nature and each other. The Story of "Apocalypse" or "Revolution" creates an image of time that is one-way and ends in a grand climax. It prevents planning for long-term change. The "Good vs Bad" Story splits the world apart into idealised light vs feared and devalued dark. The duality is hierarchical and about power-over. The "Great Man Receives the Truth and Gives it to a Chosen Few" Story denies different truths and individual experience. The "Making It" Story is about gaining value by achieving social success. It breeds individualism, competitiveness, and blames failure on the individual not the political system. 20

Alternative stories are hard to envisage when "the stories of estrangement have shaped our minds". 21 Starhawk turns to myths within our own culture's past to search for what contemporary society has lost, especially for images of "sameness and difference" that are not dualistic gender categorisations but are about life cycles, eroticism, and symbolic qualities of human nature rather than about power-over. 22

These myths can only be brought into the present concretely and actively. The language of power-from-within is poetry, metaphor, symbol, ritual, myth, the language of magic, of "thinking in things", where the concrete becomes resonant with mysteries that go beyond its seeming solid form. Its language is action, which speaks in the body and to all the senses in ways that can never be completely conveyed in words. 23

Both Wittig and Starhawk, poetically and fervently, envisage interweavings of bodies/language/nature made redolent by a tingling, sensual awareness to the details and actuality of things rather than abstracts. 24 For Starhawk new perspectives, new ways of
The language of liberation is concrete, a language of poetry, not jargon; of metaphors that clearly are metaphors; a language that refers back to the material world, that is sensual... She advocates a vocabulary "not of the elite but of the common" dealing with concepts that can be "tested by experience". Jargon, cliches and "buzzwords" mask feelings, "even from ourselves" and provide "prepackaging for our experiences".

The sacred is found "here, where we are, immanent in the world". The rituals of magic are far from our culture's grand abstractions. They are about becoming grounded, feeling powerful within community, and making commitments to concrete change, however small and discrete. This is the place to begin from.

Societies which have based their ethics on principles of immanence have tended to evolve slowly, adapting to land and climate rather than imposing technology and absolutes upon chaotic nature. Starhawk offers practical means by which such principles can be part of the contemporary world; ways to re-enchant the world, to 'ground' ourselves back into the concrete and mundane, to speak and act with integrity.

"Integrity" is central to Starhawk's ecofeminist "ethics of immanence". It has nothing to do with the absolutes of our society's concepts of justice. There is integrity of self, which is a self that integrates positive and negative, dark and light. There is integrity of action, which is about consistency of commitment and the taking of responsibility for inherent consequences of decisions and actions. There is the constant awareness of context and of how we are an integral and inseparable part of the human and biological community.

Once the stories of our culture are unpacked and new perspectives derived from the known, the absolutes and singular truths are unmasked and numerous truths emerge. Preserving these is part of the change. The fostering of diversity could even be used as a "standard for judgement", perhaps leading to the favouring of a "salt marsh over a subdivision".

Footnotes to Section Eight:


3. In a culture that prioritises individualism and distance from others it is not surprising that experiences that we do all share (e.g., birth, breathing, seasonal cycles) are trivialised as evidence of human communality. They are seen to be so reductive as to be virtually meaningless. Traditionally, when they are utilised it has been by groups in power in the attempt to unify the
populace for the purposes of the group; to make people forget their real political and historical differences. Critics of the dominant structures are usually uncomfortable with seeing significance in such 'new age' elemental experiences. In their denial of the importance of these 'noncultural', 'natural' interconnections, the critics reflect the society's culture-over-nature value system. Starhawk speaks of this in relation to attitudes to spirituality: “The resistance to questions of spirit among radicals is itself born of the white culture's delusion that power-over can be countered, only by power-over, that spirit, mystery, bonding, community, and love are weak forces at best, and at worst, distractions from serious struggle.” [Starhawk, Truth or Dare, P. 18.]

4. V. Plumwood, "Women, Humanity and Nature", Radical Philosophy, London, No. 48, Spring 1988, pp. 16-24 @ p. 23. See this Plumwood article for a coherent argument against such reversals and against the affirmation of the "feminine" in a society which has debased it.

5. Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. XVII

6. Starhawk, Truth or Dare, p. 22

7. Ibid, p. 8

8. When Starhawk uses the word "power" she is referring to the late popular Latin root word "podere", meaning "to be able". [Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 3.]

9. Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 4

10. Ibid, p. 9

See Truth or Dare, p. 21 for an outline of why such an apparently genderised concept of energy is chosen. Starhawk sees it as a strategic intervention into patriarchal ideology.

11. Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, pp. 13-14; Truth or Dare, pp. 6-7

12. Starhawk, Truth or Dare, p. 8

Starhawk is clear that though individual history and psychology is important, "A liberation psychology is more concerned with how structures of power shape and bind us than with the particular events of our individual childhoods." [Truth or Dare, p. 23.]

13. Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, pp. 5-6


Starhawk points out that "Witch" comes from the Anglo-Saxon root"wic", meaning to bend or shape. The shaping of consciousness is viewed as a dangerous act by the established order which fights back by imaging witches as evil or delusionary. [Starhawk, Truth or Dare, p. 7.]

15. Starhawk, Truth or Dare, p. 95

16. Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 134

17. For the use of ritual, see Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark, p. 146 and Chapter 8, and Truth or Dare, pp. 98-112 and throughout the book.
18. See Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, pp. 116-118
19. Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 26
20. Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, pp. 19-23
21. Ibid., p. 72
22. See Chapter 5 "Goddesses & Gods: The Landscape of Culture", in *Dreaming the Dark*, pp. 72-91
23. Starhawk, *Truth or Dare*, p. 15
24. Both Wittig and Starhawk speak longingly of a "nounless" language, one about relationship and movement rather than objectification. [E.g., Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 29.]
25. Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 27
26. Starhawk, *Truth or Dare*, p. 21
27. Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 103

Starhawk rejects the religious concept of a "higher plane" and argues that the intangible, the unseen is revealed through the physical world, and through going deeper into this world rather than getting out of it. [See *Dreaming the Dark*, Chapter 4, fn 1, p. 232.] The "underworld" is reached through magic and through immanence.

29. All magic work is begun with "grounding": i.e., breathing from the belly and visualising a connection with the earth and drawing energy from the earth. Starhawk says: "I see the energy pattern as a treelike form, with roots in the energy-field of the earth, currents running up the body on both sides, at the front, back, and through the center - currents that are themselves hollow and can conduct energy downward as well.... Branches extend down the arms and out through the hands. They also sweep up from the top of the head, down and around the body back to earth, creating the surrounding energy-field or aura, which is a protective yet permeable filter." [Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 52.]
30. Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*, p. 38
Bud ("Virgil") on the brink, in the film *The Abyss*, Director James Cameron, 1989.
Section Nine

Dreaming in the Abyssal Region

The beginning of this thesis referred to a time in history when a society which prioritised the light of reason and the rule of a war-like patriarchy turned the womb and tomb of the cave into an excluded realm of darkness. Subsequent sections of the thesis traced the historical splitting apart of the world into hostile opposites, the inferiorisation of one side of the oppositions, and the development of authoritative ideologies that denied real difference. Suffering resulted: the oppression of those not part of the dominant order, the rampant destruction of nature, the relegation of the feminine to the periphery, and the defensiveness and hostility that derives from the alienated psyche of the master.

Some criticisms of and alternatives to this history have been explored: the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray, examples from other cultures, ecofeminism, and the approaches of Monique Wittig and Starhawk.

In this conclusion, we return to the image of the cave and other dark realms - the grotto, the abyss - which haunt our culture of light and reason. The depth of the fascination and terror aroused by these images signals the voyeuristic curiosity and frightened hostility with which we view the other and the unknown. Within this reading, the "abyss" is the uncanny and strange within ourselves, which demands recognition before fear of the other can transform into respect.

The cave is a complex "metaphoric field". History has compounded the archetypal image with multiple layers of meaning.

Before Christianity (e.g., in Hindu, Etruscan, Cretan and Roman societies), caves were symbolic places of birth and regeneration, sanctuaries for rites related to Mother Earth, and entrances to the underworld. In modern myth caves still retain elements of this archetype: as womb, centre of life and warmth, sensuality, healing, and wisdom, as well as places of darkness and death. However, in Homer's The Odyssey and then Plato's The Simile of the Cave, caves began to represent the attractions of the material bodily sensual world and as such were repeatedly left and rejected by the rational "teeming brain".

Homer and Plato's heroes escaped 'inferior' levels of existence within the caves in search for the life of intellect and philosophy. In so doing they divided themselves forever from union with the natural order. Homer and Plato set the scene for cave imagery in Western iconography. In the mixture of folk traditions with ancient religions and philosophies of superior rationality, the cave becomes manifold and complex: sacred nurturing sanctuary, delightful grotto of love, a dangerous trap or snare for the unwary, a labyrinth for monsters, a place of confinement to be escaped and outgrown.

Despite historical shifts in the imagery, the metaphoric power of the cave as symbol of the (sensual, brutal or sacred) rule of nature, centre of life, transition between life and death, both marvellous and perilous, has persisted. Within caves, opposites collide. In a
culture of radically separated oppositions such collision is fascinating and disturbing.°

There is

a utopian moment in which the (culturally) irreconcilable opposites of attraction and repulsion become one ...[and] social conditioning falls away, leaving the viewer's vision unclouded by manners and mores (if only for an instant). When "beauty and its opposite... merge" ... "socially conditioned responses are shattered".

The more dependent we are on the exclusion of the other for our own self image and the more rigid our system of beliefs, the more shattering is such a moment of insight. In the following example we glimpse the disjunctive eddies emanating from the encounter between British colonials and Indian culture.

E.M. Forster's book Passage to India (1924) uses cave imagery as the focal setting for the clash of cultures. The Malabar Caves become the symbolic image of infinity, timelessness and lack of order; qualities terrifying to the rigid, exclusionary, colonial mind. These caves are highly polished round chambers deep within the hills, reached by rough-hewn passages. Any noise or light within them is repeated infinitely in unreadable echoes and reflections. Without human presence they are empty abysses. There is no clarity, order, no distinction between illusion and reality; just as the whole experience of India to the Westerner is a "great blur", its "emotional centre" as impossible to determine as "the heart of a cloud". For one of the characters, kindly, Christian, very British Mrs Moore, her single experience of one of the caves is enough to shatter her sense of self and to lead to total disillusionment and death. For Mrs Moore the repeating echo in the cave says: "Pathos, piety, courage - they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value".

The noise of the caves is the chaos of India, the multitudes, the sects; a sense of infinity and the smallness of the individual, the valuelessness of the one, the everpresence of an ancient world - pre-God, neither good nor evil but rather good and evil together, empty of singular ideals and virtues, diverse and vast.

One way that Western culture has entertained and at the same time controlled the disturbing 'noise' of the natural cave is in the form of the artificial "grotto". The grotto, like the cave, is a source of fear and fascination:

And after having remained at the entry some time, two contrary emotions arose in me, fear and desire - fear of the threatening dark grotto, desire to see whether there were any marvellous thing within it.

The fascination with both grotto and cave as womb, renewal, collective unconscious, archetype of the maternal, site of mystery, place of terror and death, site of initiation, province of the unknown and the obscure reverberates through Western literature (from Homer to Freud, Jung, and Bachelard), and in avant-garde architecture and art (Gaudí and Schwitters).

From Homer to Joyce the grotto has been the locus of mysterious forces, of unanswered questions, of states of being and becoming. ...a metaphorical portal, an entrance, a place of passage. To enter is the significant act; for to enter is to acknowledge the distance between outside and inside, between reality and illusion, between nature and art. Like the theatre, the grotto is a gateway to wonder and to knowledge.... But like the labyrinth, the story has no end.

From Roman times to at least eighteenth century England and Germany, rulers and the wealthy built artificial grottoes on their estates to remind them of the larger cosmos
Contemporary descriptions of ruined but still extant English "follies" and "grottoes" 
 evoke a secure social class for which these unnecessary structures represented an excess 
 not normally allowable in the maintenance of their security. Eccentric, moody, often 
amateur, follies and grottoes were pretend caves, huts, castles, or other fantastic 
structures, embellished with shells and bark, containing all sorts of oddities, usually 
hidden at the bottom of the estate, covered with brambles and ivy.

A folly is glass and bones and a hank of weeds.

They are cut off from worldly contacts, and lose all humanity, becoming more 
mineral than artifact, resolving into stones again.

Unreason possesses the folly, it stands brittle and always wrong with the landscape. 
The walls may be the stone of the Pyramids, but always at the heart stands disquiet.

In many ways the artificial grotto was a safe containment for this "disquiet", and for an 
integrated cosmos. It was fashioned and owned, encased in dusty shells and stone, and down 
the bottom of the garden.

It is how we meet with the other that determines whether we allow a real recognition of 
difference and the challenge that that may present to our own identity, or whether we 
contain that difference in classificatory systems and glass cases.

Contemporary culture contains many examples of 'toying' with the alien in the same way 
that the artificial grotto does; by maintaining a safe distance; by being a collector and a 
voyeur. Think of the popularity of violent, erotic, and science fiction books and films. 
There is also the current fashion of reviving the grotesqueries that dominated many 
nineteenth century collections: e.g., calendar pictures of babies' heads in bottles, Peter 
Greenaway's films, exhibitions like "Repulsion: Aesthetics of the Grotesque" at the 
Alternative Museum in New York, 1986, and coffee table books like Grotesque: Natural 
Historical and Formaldehyde Photography.

The macabre, the forbidden and the taboo startle us almost into a state of childlike wonder 
and intense curiosity. But the context governs how this experience affects us. The coffee 
table book allows us to possess as objects all the world's exotica and all taboo parts of 
ourselves. We feel protected from death, decay, and imperfection since we are fooled into 
the belief that what we own, we can control. Watching a violent movie where the hero, 
with whom we associate, of course never dies, assures us that we are omnipotent and 
impervious to the outside world. Such 'cottonballed' alienation too often depends on 
violence against the other as the mechanism that maintains the illusion.

Western culture has been erected on the cornerstones of radical separations from the 
feminine, the natural, the instinctual, and many 'others'. Its progress, its civilising 
force, has had inherent ramifications: psychic losses, social oppressions, and systemic 
violence. Colonialism, imperialism, the world wars, the wholesale desecration of animal 
and plant species, the potentiality of self-annihilation - the modern world reeks of death 
and destruction.

J.M. Coetzee, in his book Dusklansds (1983), narrates the travels of an eighteenth 
century Boer explorer in South Africa. This explorer spreads destruction as he claims and
names an alien land. His gaze is the hostile gaze of a power based on fear of the natural world, fear of how the recognition of that world, with its cycles, impermanence, and flux could destroy the bases of his personal power and thus his self. He kills and redefines within his own terms to still that fear.

Destroyer of the wilderness, I move through the land cutting a devouring path from horizon to horizon. There is nothing from which my eye turns, I am all that I see. Such loneliness! Not a stone, not a bush, not a wretched provident ant that is not comprehended in this travelling sphere. What is there that is not me? I am a transparent sac with a black core full of images and a gun.

The tidings of the gun: such-and-such is outside, have no fear. The gun saves us from the fear that all life is within us. It does so by laying at our feet all the evidence we need of a dying and therefore a living world.... I leave behind me a mountain of skin, bones, inedible gristle, and excrement. All this is my life's work, my incessant proclamation of the otherness of the dead and therefore the otherness of life.\textsuperscript{25}

Coetzee's Boer explorer is a pure manifestation of the master, deeply fearful of any realisation of his dependence on the other or the degree to which he is trapped within his own alienation.

Savages do not have guns. This is the effective meaning of savagery, which we may define as enslavement to space, as one speaks obversely of the explorer's mastery of space. The relation of master and savage is a spatial relation. The African highland is flat, the approach of the savage across space continuous. From the fringes of the horizon he approaches, growing to manhood beneath my eyes until he reaches the verge of that precarious zone in which, invulnerable to his weapons, I command his life.

He threatens to have a history in which I shall be a term. Such is the material basis of the malady of the master's soul. So often, waking or dreaming, has his soul lived through the approach of the savage that this has become an ideal form of the life of penetration.

...the transformation of the savage into enigmatic follower, and the obscure movement of the soul (weariness, relief, incuriosity, terror) that comes with this familiar transformation, we feel as a fated pattern and a condition of life.\textsuperscript{26}

Coetzee has described a power that is dependent on the dismemberment of the living world and a schizophrenic isolation from one's own complex self. The result is a dispassionate coldness which is also an immense terror.

Julia Kristeva argues that by recognising the other within ourselves we are spared detesting others (e.g., foreigners) in society. When the individual "ceases to consider himself as unitary and glorious but discovers his incoherences and abysses, in short his "strangenesses"\textsuperscript{27}, then there is no longer a drive to evict, conquer, subordinate, or even assimilate the others in society.

Using Freud, Kristeva points out that death, the feminine, compulsive drives are the deep 'others' of Western psychology: they arouse an "uncanny strangeness" and repressive barriers. An encounter with the repressed within ourselves or with social others creates an incoherence within us: here is something we cannot frame within our consciousness.
Also strange is the experience of the abyss separating me from the other who shocks me .... I lose my boundaries, I no longer have a container, the memory of experiences when I had been abandoned overwhelm me, I lose my composure. I feel "lost", "indistinct", "hazy".  

For Kristeva, knowing our own shadow is "the ultimate condition of our being with others".  

Kristeva uses the term "abyss" to refer to the border of the subject's existence. It is the "underside of a stable subjective identity", the "unpredictable, sporadic accompaniment" of symbolic subjectivity, the "abject" (that which is excluded but which can never be obliterated).  

Even at times of its greatest cohesion, the subject teeters on the brink of a yawning hole which threatens to draw it into it. This abyss marks the place of the genesis and the obliteration of the subject, for it is a space inhabited by the death drive, Hegelian negativity, the indistinct space occupied by mother and child in symbiotic dependence.  

The ambiguity and unclassifiability of the abject and the abyss, neither one thing nor the other in our system of dualities, neither inside nor outside, neither dead nor alive, reminds us of the precariousness of our identity and the everpresence of chaos.  

With modernity, the cave and grotto, so well inhabited by myth and legend, became too tame an image for the other in a world of unprecedented revolutionary changes. Increasingly the metaphoric field for the dark and the alien shifted to the "abyss".  

There is nothing more powerful than this attraction toward an abyss.  

The abyss is an empty space, a void, not cooptable by culture: it is immeasurable and uninhabitable, a bottomless gulf, a pit, a hell, a primal chaos, unfathomable, an immensity of time, space, depth and scope.  

Like the cave, the abyss reverberates throughout Western history. To the Greeks the abyss was "a gloomy place in the Underworld, which lies as far distant from the earth as the earth does from the sky; it would take a falling anvil nine days to reach its bottom".  

In Genesis it is out of such formlessness, out of the primal chaos, that the firmament was born and vegetation and birds and beasts. Here the abyss is the womb of all life.  

Abysses are primal, chaotic; the precondition for caves.  

The abysses of the modern world are both physical and metaphorical. In geology they are the most inaccessible, little researched reaches of the physical world. The "abyssal plains" are flat, deeply sedimented, featureless areas of the ocean floor, the deepest parts of the ocean with the exception of trenches. They are in a "domain of darkness".  

If Western history is about the movement out of the maternal womb-like cave into a masculinist world of rationalist technology and philosophical hierarchies and divisions, then it is also the movement towards an abyss of the unknown (e.g., the exploration of space, genetic manipulations), of possible annihilation (through nuclear or environmental crises), and of disintegration of existing knowledges and certainties.  

Critics of society focus on the interior abyss: of repressions, absences, losses, and forgotten memories.
Stephen Dowden's book on German modernist writers Kafka, Broch, Musil, and Thomas Mann is titled *Sympathy for the Abyss*. Surrounded by the horrors of the two world wars, these writers were looking beyond the rational (which had spawned such wars) to the realm of the inexplicable, beyond order, where ideals and illusions mean nothing and strict divisions between man and nature, us and them, good and evil, physical and spiritual, become irrelevant. In their own way, these writers were delving into what Derrida calls "the abyss beneath the university"; the repressed, the unconscious, the inconsistent and the unspeakable.

In Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* the action takes place in an era of crisis, "a time in which war, nihilism, and moral bewilderment have made a shambles of orderly existence". A humanism based on anthropocentric subjectivity, a harsh separation of man and nature, has "served as an incubator to the political bestiality of the twentieth century". Man as culture against nature has resulted in man's dominion over the earth and aggression towards other men. In this impasse the character Adrian Leverkuhn founds a theory of musical composition that originates "not from personal interiority but in the exteriority of nature as a whole". This acts as a source of renewal, a promise of an encompassing holism and of a new depth of humane expression.

Adrian's sympathy for the abyss takes a literal form in his playful enthusiasm for the creatures of the ocean's nethermost depths and for the celestial vastness of galactic expanses.

For humanism, "deep-sea grotesqueries" and "astrophysical time and space" are not "religiously productive nor otherwise relevant to the essence of man". But for Adrian they represent a chaotic vitality which does not lend itself easily to classification and is a source of renewal. Out of the prioritising of nature and the disintegration of old forms comes a "new, deepened and unrhethorical articulation of elemental humanness".

Descent into the abyss, the source of life, the chaotic unknown, is frequently imaged in popular culture as a source of renewal. In two contemporary and successful box office movies drops and falls into fissures and bottomless chasms initiate rebirth and the prioritising of love between people, and even between humans and aliens!

Steven Spielberg's film *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade* (1989) was the third in the series *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and *Indiana Jones and The Temple of Doom* (1984). *Raiders of the Lost Ark* had been one of the biggest commercial hits in film history, but film critics called it "one of the most un-human, inhuman, and anti-human movies of all time". All three films are full of all kinds of racist caricatures, elevations of "the mundane to the pseudo-profound" and the preference given to discrete thrills over any sense of "drama, logic, detail, or character consistency". Third World relics are stolen and antiquities broken and discarded in the same flippant way that bits of history and myth are stolen and jumbled together in a meaningless mish-mash. (The Holy Grail and Nazism cross paths in comic-book style and the Ark of the Covenant is reduced to "a multiple-head ray gun".)

In the three films a panoply of all our collective fears (from vertigo to snakes) abound in cinematic fast-forward and are commonly played out in the dark spaces of tunnels, underground tombs, caverns, and cave temples. These movie caverns are not "the fairy mound, the cave, the crack, the fissure in the earth, the gate, the doorway, the vaginal passage" of the archetype, for there is no time in the rampant action to experience any mystery, sacredness, or eroticism. Yet, in a way, the power of the archetype survives, for, looking at *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade*, drops over chasms or jumps into
abysses signal significant shifts in the film; they consistently turn the focus onto the relationship between father and son, and enable expressions of love and communication between men of few words and certainly none of affection.

The first drop is when Indiana apparently falls over a cliff in saving his father from a German tank. His previously emotionally inarticulate father cries out: "Oh God I've lost him ... I never told him anything". When indomitable Indiana reappears, his father hugs him to his body tightly. The second drop is when Indiana has to decide between his own fear and his love for his father in stepping into an apparently bottomless chasm (an illusionistic footbridge appears!). This leap of faith is less about religion and God and more about love for his father and respect for his father's knowledge. The third drop is when the ground opens up in an earthquake and Indiana throws himself into it to save the Holy Grail. His father grasps his hand and tells him to let go of the Grail (the father's lifetime obsession) in order to be saved. For the first time the father calls his son "Indiana" instead of "Junior", and Indiana no longer needs to prove himself and leaves the Grail to the abyss and comes to his father. At the end of the film Indiana asks his father "What did you find Dad?" and his father answers, wryly, "Illumination."

Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade is an extremely lightweight piece of popular cinema. Its interest here is the reflection of desire for communication and love between two men, father and son. Despite the appalling materialism and junk philosophy of the film, the ultimate sign of success, in a world where noone seems trustworthy and no belief system remains coherent, is intelligence and courage but also this love between father and son.

A more complex film is The Abyss (1989), directed and written by James Cameron. The action takes place beneath the ocean, on the brink of the Caymen Trough, in the abyssal region of the sea floor. The film begins with a U.S. nuclear submarine, carrying warheads with five times the destructive capacity of Hiroshima, crashing on the edge of this underwater chasm after being disoriented by an unidentified fast-moving light. A rescue mission is mounted by the crew of an underwater oil drilling platform called "Deepcore", plus navy seals, plus the estranged wife of the head of the oil rig - the very 'male' Lindsay who is an expert in submersibles and a "queen bitch".

In this alien watery underworld many strange things happen. Unearthly speeding lights are seen and then a huge snake-type form made of seawater appears. Here are aliens with the technology of controlling seawater (a proof of alien-ness since water is the Jungian archetype of the unconscious and the Freudian symbol of the mother). To the navy boys, if these phenomena are not "one of ours" then they must be "one of theirs" (i.e., the Russians) and must be destroyed.

The chaos begins. The leader of the seals, needing hierarchy and orders from above, starts to go crazy in this realm of uncertainty and darkness. He arms one of the warheads, creating a potential nuclear crisis between the U.S. and U.S.S.R.: the destructive power of humans is present in full force. Meanwhile the destructive power of nature, in the form of a hurricane, smashes the oil rig, causing it to be dragged down underwater over the edge of the chasm. Everything now is on the brink or in the abyss. Total chaos reigns. Equipment smashes in the fall, fires break out, water breaks through, fear is rampant, men are drowning and racing for their lives from compartment to compartment. Outside there is the chasm, darkness, the unknown.

Through all this Lindsay remains unflappable and is working harder and more efficiently than anyone else to save the rig. When she goes outside the rig to do a repair, she has a joyous, 'touchy-feely' meeting with the aliens, first an electric spirit form and then a large jellyfish type ship, half organic, half whirring engines and electric lights. She
strokes it lovingly, fearlessly, and has "just a feeling" that this alien intelligence will not do us any harm. She has "better eyes" than the "hate and fear" of the navy leader.

Then in extraordinary scenes both Lindsay and her husband Bud 'drown'. When Lindsay and Bud are left in a sinking submersible, hanging over the abyss, with only one oxygen suit between them, Lindsay deliberately drowns so that Bud can take her frozen body back to the rig for hopeful revival. She does revive, in a scene that is remarkably like hard labour and birth. She comes back to the living, changed, soft and loving.

Bud then dons a pressure suit to go down into the chasm to unwire the warhead. In his voyage into the deep he breathes fluid oxygen to allow him to survive the pressure changes. So he too 'drowns' in order to live; the film makes blatant that this form of breathing is like a return to the womb. As Bud descends, Lindsay keeps him conscious by talking through a radio link, telling him the previously unsayable: "It's not easy being a cast-iron bitch, takes discipline and years of training". When his cable breaks and he free-falls all two and a half miles straight down, Lindsay's voice floats down to him: "I'm there with you... I'll always be with you". In the deepest depths, Bud (whose real name is "Virgil") tells Lindsay "Love you wife" and she responds "Love you".

In a definitely 'Hollywood' conclusion Bud is saved by the alien angels?, jellyfish?, E.T.?, "delicate and eerie as Victorian fairy paintings". Everyone who's basically good is also saved, as submarines, oil rigs, and warships are all lifted above the surface of the water by a giant cradling, obviously friendly, alien ship. The last words of the film are confirmation of conjugal healing and the softening of a woman/wife: "Hi Brigman" she says to Bud; "Hi Mrs Brigman" he concludes. Music. Lights.

Despite the silliness and the predictability of the anti-feminist elements, and the disappointing inability to dream up an alien intelligence which is not technological and able to control nature at whim, there are also those descents into chasms and journeys out again as settings for human communication and expressions of love. There is a pervasive message that "us" versus "them" thinking is madness, leading only to destruction. Compassion, sacrifice, courage, inter-gender love and inter-species love are the qualities that can transcend such thinking.

Part of the reason why The Abyss is such an unconvincing film is that so many of the characters, apart from the navy blokes, seem welcoming to the aliens and fearless of this completely unknown powerful lifeform. We are not schooled to react this way; we are instilled with fear and horror of the other. Perhaps such films can make small incremental impacts by reiterating a sense of awe, wonder and love for difference. A hard story to tell in an age of cynicism, especially through the gloss and simple-mindedness of Hollywood.

The cynicism and self-doubt of postmodernism has opened up an abyss of uncertainty where before there was an Enlightenment confidence in man's evolution through reason. As utopian dreams fade and the 'truths' and grand narratives are demystified, a chasm opens up which can be nihilistic or reinvigorating. Lamentations of loss can echo through that chasm endlessly or the space and darkness can enable an imaginative exploration of diverse possibilities.

Writers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Georges Bataille and Antonin Artaud are referred to (by Foucault, Kristeva, Derrida, and Deleuze, amongst many others) as "the principal modern challengers to 'the subject' and to knowledges predicated upon it" as critics of the grand 'truths', opponents of systems of duality, proponents of flux and ambiguity.
The heretical insubordination of these thinkers to the rule of the rational drew them towards violence, evil, death, madness, creativity as uncontrollable elements, as excessive, and ultimately incommunicable. 51 Nietzsche speaks of "the thrill of the infinite, the unmeasured". 52

Nietzsche, enemy of traditional hierarchies and dualities, protagonist for an integration of Dionysian "excess", aware of the significance of perspective and the power of naming, nevertheless viewed, with disdain, the inferior in the world (matter) and amongst people (the "common herd"). He spoke so disparagingly of women that his opposition to other dualities constantly stumbled over his misogyny:

You are going to women? Do not forget the whip! 53

Has my definition of love been heard? It is the only one worthy of a philosopher. Love - in its means, war; at bottom, the deadly hatred of the sexes.

Nietzsche wished for transcendence, a "higher type". His solution to the "freedom" of the chaotic abyss of chance which replaced for him the eternal will, the web of reason of logocentrism, was the largeness, strength, and courage of the individual. 55

Bataille, influenced by Sade, quested for self-sufficiency through violent, erotic and poetic means and a repetitive antilegalistic conquering of social and cultural constraints. In the endless attempt to say the unsayable, to make the forbidden material and banal, Sade and Bataille both created closure as well as rupture and transgression. 56

Artaud, extraordinary explorer of physical and psychical extremes, elusive and uncategorisable, multiple and heterogeneous, was concerned with revealing the Gnostic-style drama of inner conflicts. To him, forms, matter, the body, sexuality were vile, false creations, entrapping, governed by evil, to be sacrificed and metamorphosed to enable change. 57

For Artaud, subjectivity was the negation of all existing truths and dualities through dissolution, multiplication, and metamorphosis:

Father, Son, Spirit, antichrist, death, life, nothingness, resurrection, eternity, infinity, immortality, finitude, earth, evolutions, karmas, reincarnations, transmigrations, transubstantiations, matter, flesh, body, redemption, numbers.... 58

There is a "vertigo of being-in-the-world as being suspended between the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal, the carnal and the spiritual, with the abyss between one incarnation and another always in view". 59

When André Breton evicted Bataille and Artaud from the Surrealist movement, he did so because they aroused fear and disgust in him by delving too far into the shadows. Surrealism, though dedicated to the unconscious, expelled elsewhere the threatening forces of darkness. Visions of "sovereignty, perversion and madness" were seen as incompatible with "a vision of collectivity, sublimation and joy". 60

The expulsion of the dark side of these radical thinkers was also the expulsion of their affirmations; for a life which was an eternal enigma, for the unsayable, for oblique expressions in "dreams, whispers, feverish hallucinations, circumlocutions, silences and ellipses", for "chance, transgression, excess, discontinuity, fragmentation, and difference". 61
Clearly these philosophies are about loneliness, tragedy and alienation. They were a product of their times (Artaud and Bataille were writing in the bleak, turbulent period between the world wars) and personal biography (both Nietzsche and Artaud suffered awful physical illness and eventual madness - Artaud spoke about his body as that "menacing, indefatigable presence" 62). These writers yearned for transcendence; of matter, of ordinary people, of emotions, and of the body. As critics of duality and hierarchy they were partial (as any criticism is), revealing their own dualities (of gender, of spirit vs body, etc) and their own ideologies of hierarchical transcendence.

These philosophies are radically different from ecofeminism's critiques and yearnings for connections within a web of life. Such differences create a rich diversity of perspectives and manifold visions. However, in these final pages I focus on my own vision and the search within contemporary culture for manifestations of the desires for love, community and connection (espoused by ecofeminism but conspicuously absent from Nietzsche, Bataille and Artaud)

When writer Elie Wiesel experienced Auschwitz and Buchenwald he was plunged into the void of separation from God, meaninglessness in life, and God's absence from history. As reality destroyed religion, and history destroyed a belief in eternity, estrangement and alienation grew, leaving nothing - nothing but friendship, community and love. For, "in the world of the void, there is no hope beyond life". 63

Out of this horror, a voice cried out for life, community and love. Today, in a different time of crisis, there are many voices with the same message. 64

Recently, on TV, I saw a baby's face, covered with blood and tissue, emerging from a cut-open womb during intrauterine surgery for a cleft lip, after which the baby understandably died. This was, for me, just as gut-wrenching as any of the grotesqueries populating modern culture. Part of my reaction came from having my own children, and having had those children recently inside my womb, knowing the protectiveness and love I felt while pregnant and now as a mother, and feeling that love expand outwards to other babies in wombs, other mothers, in compassion, awe at their beauty, respect for their integrity, and knowledge of our responsibility.

I am deliberately drawing images from women's traditional biological roles as mothers and their supposed greater capacity for nurturance as a consequence. Controversy rages over such assumptions as feminism struggles to liberate women from the biological essentialism that has been used to relegate them to a diminished social role. But this gut-wrenching reaction to the baby's face in the womb is a human reaction. If emotions come from experience, we have all experienced being in the womb (I regret that such a statement will not be true for long). If we let ourselves feel, if we do not retract too quickly from the horror and become cold and dispassionate and violent in self-protection, then we suffer with that baby and with the mother, and we are disturbed by the excitement and arrogance on the operating doctors' faces, excitement at the knowledge that they are breaching yet another natural boundary. Further, if we had a philosophy of responsibility to protect the integrity of all life forms, we would not have to depend on personal experience to know how to respond and act.

...a socialist ecofeminism can offer a respect for nature, a respect that is located in the embodied practices and values of caring - without slipping into celebrating those naturally nurturant women beloved by patriarchy and for that matter by mystical ecofeminism. 65
Being with others and being in and of nature can only develop out of self-understanding and acting outside of duality and divisiveness; - "being manifold as whole, as wide as full".

Affirmations of friendship, community and love are the bases of the new ethics of compassion talked about by Starhawk and science critic Hilary Rose:

Where Bacon's origin story for science spoke of the intimate connection of knowledge and power, the feminist critique of science, from Mary Shelley onward, has spoken of the danger of knowledge without love. It is the admission of love, a recognition that the process of care shapes the product, which opens up the prospect of a feminist reconstruction of rationality itself as a responsible rationality - responsible to people and to nature alike.

It is love, as caring respect for both people and nature, that offers an ethic to reshape knowledge, and with it society.

Irigaray, searching beyond the "extremes or opposites" that she so dislikes, speaks of the importance of "making the earthly elemental desirable again" and of "looking for what is indispensable to life".

The rest is of little importance. And if there is a privilege that opens everything up, is it not the privilege of living?

"What is indispensable to life! "The privilege of living"! What beautiful phrases, and how abstract they seem, how vulnerable to divergent interpretation, how cooptable by mutually incompatible philosophies.

This thesis ends with the example of Ankoku Butō dancing, which tries to embody and 'ground' such abstractions.

When I first experienced Butō, dancing I was confounded by the beauty instilled by the extraordinarily slow pace, the fragmented and exquisitely controlled body movements, and the repetitive minimal movements building up to complex transformations over time. I was plunged into a different, quieter, more visceral space than normally exists in our society. It was illuminating to discover that Butō was not a traditional Japanese dance mode, but had grown out of the bleak postwar landscape of 1950's Japan. It was in fact a postmodern pastiche of ancient modes, influences from the West, reactions against both tradition and the West, and its own philosophy of integration with the other (the body, community, the marginalised, the natural world).

Ankoku Butō, literally "the dance of utter darkness" is concerned with the "submerged depths of violence and sexuality", the forbidden, the suppressed, the grotesque, as well as trying to break through social disenchantment by "returning the focus of dance to the simplicity of a body ... in tune with nature".

Butō attempts a return to an imagined premodern, pre-Western dance mode whose expressive power was to be derived from its links to the uncanny and irrational, to a kind of subterranean reservoir of raw sexual energy tied up in the intimate relation that primitive humanity once had with nature.

Butō borrows randomly from early nineteenth century popular forms, the kitsch of early twentieth century mass-produced art, and imaginatively back to primitive societies, to a "world of darkness that our modern age has lost, where the gap between words and things disappears and where existence unfolds before us."
Sets are dark and full of shadows, typically built like poignant postwar wastelands, and, according to one critic, "filled with spastic cripples holding aloft ... pathetic emblems of vanished civilizations". Grotesque facial and bodily distortions defy verbal explanations and imply multiple and conflicting interpretations in an uneasy truce. By calling forth contradictory interpretations but refusing to yield to any, the grotesque is disruptive to meaning and interpretation. It tries to reach the audience on a physical 'gut' level, but the viewers then strive to normalise this discomfort through rationalisation. The form itself resists the interpretation that it necessitates. Explorations of desires for violence and sexuality, "bursting forth from the abyss of darkness", aim to breach the social domestication of our chaotic instincts.

Modern narrative is replaced by myth where all realms are "equally accessible and mutually interdependent". There is an endlessly repeating, constantly changing, shapeless form of time. Things are not orderly or predictable but as innumerable and conflicting as thoughts and images.

Buto presents a world where words and things have not been categorised and made part of hierarchies but are undifferentiated and are woven together creating correspondences between all things. The Buto vision is of an unstable world in a state of constant flux, "cyclically moving back and forth between the poles of disintegration and recreation".

Surrealistic metamorphoses help destroy the myth of the alienated individual, and replace it with a fragmented self (that is constantly transformed into other animals or persons or mythic beings so that it becomes impossible to tell one person from another). This is the first step toward the ultimate goal of reintegration into the universe.

The dancers study and imitate other animals until they believe they are completely like those animals.

It is not the form of the animal or object that is important in this exercise, but how well one is able to experience what it would be like to be some other kind of being whose strength and beauty comes from their ability to artlessly adapt themselves to natural laws.

The lesson is that the unique subjective voice is "not the result of self-assertion but the natural outcome of "knowing one's place". Ankoku Buto's aims are significant at a time in our history when we are longing for a "re-sacralized world", for an understanding of death and our own mortality, and for mystery. Such absences vibrate dissonantly within our disembodied world of technology, but there is a presence in these absences - a "drag coefficient" - that anchors our culture. A cultural manifestation like Buto is an attempt, partial though it may be, to embody such absences. Buto's strategies aim to reunify the self into "an all-encompassing order of nature" and to find a more authentic autonomous self by breaking through to a communal unconscious.

Nakajima Natsu, founder of a Buto group, claims:

I am striving, not towards art, but towards love.
Footnotes to Section Nine:

1. The "metaphoric field" is a term used in F.M. Weinberg, The Cave: The Evolution of a Metaphoric Field from Homer to Ariosto, Peter Lang, New York, 1986.

2. Ibid, p. 23.

3. In The Odyssey Odysseus passes through a number of caves: Calypso's grotto, Polyphemus' cavern, Scylla's crevice, and the cave of the nymphs. See Weinberg, pp. 19-37.


Greek society was actually in transition from earth worship to sky god worship and the interdependence of light and dark, culture and nature was still understood. For example, though the oracle at Delphi had been conquered by Apollo, god of art, beauty and form, the management of the oracle was still turned over to Dionysus, the principle of energetic and undisciplined growth, for the three winter months. Ibid, p. 279.

5. Ibid, chapters 2-4, pp. 51-178.

See Weinberg, p. 113 for a description of the mixed cultural and religious sources of the cave image, from earth goddess religions of the Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations, to the invading war and sky gods of the Achaians, to influences from Egypt and Asia Minor.

6. For example, as attitudes to women and nature shifted throughout history, so the imagery around the essentially material, womb- and tomb-like cave altered. In Medieval times the cave became a symbol of man's bestial nature, lust and fear; an entrapment for the less-than-pure, the imperfectly faithful. During Romanticism the glorification of nature as a source of spiritual salvation amidst burgeoning industry returned the cave, briefly, into "a refuge and place of purification rather than the dark and dirty hole that Plato's prisoner struggled so hard to escape". [Ibid, p. 295.]


8. The focii on the "sublime" and the "abject" in contemporary culture are explained in terms of fascination with collision of opposites: the sublime evokes both terror and pleasure, the abject is neither self nor other and lies ambiguously outside the accepted order of opposites. [M. Dery, "Lost in the Funhouse", World Art: The Magazine of Contemporary Visual Arts, G & B Arts International, No. 2, 1995, pp. 46-51 @ p. 51.]


10. E.M. Forster, A Passage to India, Penguin, Middlesex, 1924.


Other British characters in the book are enriched by the experience of India and their growing acceptance of ambiguity.


15. Ibid, p. 123. This is the conclusion of the book.

16. Naomi Miller points out that though subterranean building is an integral part of modern cities, the artificial cavern as a man-created cosmos in miniature, as nature cultivated and controlled, and as art imitating and surpassing nature was to largely end in that form in the late eighteenth century. The disappearance of the fashion for garden grottoes she explains in terms of growing disdain for ostentatious symbols of private privilege and a new aesthetic of parklands which supposedly imitated the simplicity of the open countryside. Miller suggests that the grotto may still be found in contemporary culture in the illusions and the cavern of the cinema. [Miller, *Op. Cit.*, p. 118.]

17. English grottoes were based on Roman and Renaissance grottoes.


21. Popular culture is absorbed with images of a post-apocalyptic world: empty of all life, bleak, beyond nature and beyond culture - a void of bestiality and danger. This reflects a well-grounded fear; that our concept of progress will self-destruct and return us to savagery, this time without nature to sustain us. The widespread expression of this fear of a blank future derives from our incapacity to imagine other options to this race to destruction.

Fantasy is one useful way to imagine real difference. Hilary Rose calls feminist science fiction a "literature of desire". [H. Rose, *Love, Power & Knowledge: Towards a Feminist Transformation of the Sciences*, Polity Press, Cambridge, U.K., 1994, p. 215.] However the majority of science fiction is pervaded by "a macho enthusiasm for the technology of domination". It equates "technological advance with progress", is "frequently racist and almost invariably sexist", and imperialist: "Man saw himself as infinitely irresponsible, always able to move on, to find and conquer new worlds, brutally and carelessly vandalizing and laying waste to 'his' environment. There was always another planet, another third-world country, out there". [Rose, p. 212.] To Hilary Rose this "socially frozen, technologically dominated, more or less pornographic mainstream patriarchal science fiction" is basically "technological and sexual voyeurism". [Ibid, p. 215.]


Note: The word "grotesque" has the same origins as the word "grotto": from the Italian for "crypt" and the Greek for "hidden".

23. Many historians of this century see the twentieth century as the most barbaric and murderous one ever. For example, between 1900 and the 1990's, more than 187 million people had been killed or allowed to die, which is more than one in ten of the total world population in 1900. There is also the changed nature of warfare; no declarations, no treaties, more civilian than military deaths, and mass genocides. [E. Hobsbawn, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, Abacus, London, 1995, pp. 12-14.]
Gregory Bateson warned that our division between culture and nature and the reduction of matter and nature to mindlessness, "not entitled to moral or ethical consideration", combined with an advanced technology, will mean that our "likelihood of survival will be that of a snowball in hell".  


25. Ibid, p. 79.


31. Ibid, p. 73.


The Greeks believed that the world was a flat disk circled by a huge fresh ever-flowing river called Oceanus. This was the boundary that marked off the known world, the "cosmos" from the disordered universe, "chaos". If a person were to venture far out on this river he would pass through gathering darkness and obscuring fog and come at last to a dreadful and chaotic blending of sea and sky, a place where whirlpools and yawning abysses waited to draw the traveller down into a dark world from which there was no return. [R. Carson, *The Sea Around Us*, Penguin, Middlesex, 1951, p. 201.]

34. Our stories of evolution follow suit, though in evolutionary dogma it is not God who directs but the irrepressible forces of nature.

35. In the eighteenth century caves were theorised as carved out by deluges of water welling up from an abyss beneath the earth's surface and then receding back into the abyss. Such a theory persisted despite the ease with which it could be disproved. It reflected the link between underground caverns and deep abysses going back to the Greeks. [D. D. Jackson and the Editors of Time-Life, *Op. Cit.*, p. 71.]


40. Ibid, p. 137.


42. Ibid, pp. 153-5.

43. Ibid, p. 175.

44. H. Sheehan, "The Panning of Steven Spielberg: Chapter One of a Critical Cliffhanger", Film Comment, Film Society of Lincoln Center, New York, Vol. 28, No. 3, May-June 1992, pp. 54-60 @ p. 59.


48. For example, a woman in a man's world has to become a "bitch", softness goes together with being happy to be called "Mrs", women are more instinctive, see more, and get on better with alien elements.


Nietzsche, Bataille and Artaud are also seen as precursors of poststructuralist debates on "alterity, the exchange of presence for absence, the demise of constituted subjectivity, the rift between the real and the symbolic, the rediscovery of the body, the potency of a discourse driving into excess and semiotic anarchy". [Ibid. p. 218.]


See Burgard for discussions of how Nietzsche's misogyny affects the usefulness of his writings for feminism and critics of duality.

Nietzsche's writings remain ambiguous and full of contradictions. Another of his well-known sayings about "love" is: "What is done out of love always occurs beyond good and evil". [From


61. Ibid, pp. 18-19. In this quote Weiss is speaking especially about Nietzsche.


64. There are always divergent voices from the dominant. If we think of Plato's "The Simile of the Cave" which began this thesis, it is important to remind ourselves that Greek culture contained many philosophies with quite different attitudes to mind and body and humans and nature from Platonic philosophy, and Plato's work itself showed variations over time and ambiguities of meaning. [For a discussion of Ionian and Pythagorian philosophies see W. McDougall, Body and Mind: A History and A Defense of Animism, Beacon Press, Boston, 1961, pp. 8-27.]

65. H. Rose, Op. Cit., p. 236. Rose points out that the violence of the dominant is dependent on the caring of the submissive, and that private and public, female and male are locked together in these dependencies in patriarchal society. [Rose, p. 45.]

The development of an ethics of care is no easy task, and could easily be the subject of another thesis. For this reason, I have kept allusions to it fairly vague and utopian. I am aware of this glossing over and refer readers who wish to pursue this issue further to J.C. Tronto, "Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care", Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, The Uni. of Chicago Press, Vol. 12, No. 4, Summer 1987, pp. 644-663.

66. This quote is part of Nietzsche's description of "greatness" in Beyond Good and Evil, No. 212, quoted W. Kaufman, Op. Cit., p. 446.]


68. Ibid, p. 238.


This was partly a reaction to the puritanical influence of the West on the traditional flamboyence of Kabuki and No dance theatres.

Donald Richie, quoted Ibid, p. 17.

Gōda, quoted Ibid, p. 33.

Harpham, On the Grotesque, as quoted Ibid, p. 41.

Minimal movement slows time to a standstill, repetitions force viewers to become aware of minute variations and subtleties. Precise articulation of separate parts of the body results in the sense that a rational mind is not in control of a fragmented body. But harmony of action between the dancers implies a communal mind and will. [Ibid, pp. 45-46.]


Ibid, p. 38.

White concealing facial makeup also masks individual identity and creates a communality.


Nakajima Natsu, quoted Ibid, p. 27.
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Fig. 3  This picture comes from a book written by my mother and illustrated by my grandmother: Nuri Mass, The Wizard of Jenolan, illustrations Celeste Mass, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1946, oppos. p. 16.

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Fig. 7  Barbara Kruger, “Your fictions become history”, 1983. (We won’t play nature to your culture: Works by Barbara Kruger, Catalogue, ICA, London and Kunsthalle, Basel, 1983, p. 27.)

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