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FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND
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Contemporary North American Goddess

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AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

**THE GODDESS INCARNATE
A DISCOURSE ON THE BODY WITHIN ONE COMMUNITY OF
CONTEMPORARY NORTH AMERICAN GODDESS WORSHIPPERS**

Lucie Marie-Mai DuFresne

Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Ph.D. degree in Religious Studies

Department of Classics and Religious Studies
Faculty of Arts
University of Ottawa

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Thank you and Blessed Be.

DEDICATION

To all the women with whom I have danced under the moonlight.

Under the full moonlight, we dance
Spirits dance, we dance
Joining hands, we dance
Joining souls, rejoice (1)

ABSTRACT

For the past 30 years, a feminist spirituality movement has been developing in North America. Variouslly called Goddess Worship, Goddess spirituality, or Women's spirituality, it derives in part from Neo-paganism and Contemporary Witchcraft, on the one side, and feminist liberation theology on the other. Continuing the questioning begun by Simone de Beauvoir on female self and other, on gender and its construction, and on the merits of a morality of indeterminacy, this ethnography of a community of like minded women who participate together in devotional circles to the Goddess in and around Ottawa, Ontario, Canada focuses on the ritual, textual and iconological means by which these women come to an embodied relationship with the divine apprehended as female. By deconstructing the actions, the words, and the images of the human body, as the locus of contact with the divine, and the divine body as the central cosmological metaphor of this spirituality produced and used by these women, the ritual and ethical discourses on identity, power and agency built around them are made evident. Compared and contrasted, they then are studied as charters for the construction of the self and community.

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PRELUDE:

In Ottawa, Canada, at the October 1989 full moon, I attended my first women's circle. This is a description of what I remember of that first encounter with the Goddess. Though I no longer remember the actual words spoken or the original intent of this first circle, I later learned that much of it followed a standard format with formulaic phrases and standard responses (1). The 1990 text of the Candle Mandala ritual (Appendix One, text 1) was written by me as part of my training with this group and was identified by my teacher and the group's ritual leader (Michelle Hrynyk) as a good example of a standard ritual. By comparing this description to that ritual text, some idea of the normal staging of a WCC (2) Women's Full Moon Circle ritual can be envisaged.

I had visited the Occult Shop on Bank Street a few weeks earlier and had picked up a modest flyer of Ottawa Pagan/Wiccan (3) events that the store had on hand. In it was described a Women's Full Moon Circle which could be attended by first meeting with someone from the circle. A phone number was given but no names were available. I was intrigued and decided that I might want to attend and find out more about it. I called the number several times but was not able to reach anyone. Finally, in mid October, I reached the manager of the Occult Shop (Dobhran Cowie) who invited me to come down and meet the leader of the group (Michelle Hrynyk) before the start of the next circle.

On the night of the full moon, I arrived at the store around 6:30PM to meet another young woman who was there for the first time as well as Michelle Hrynyk and Mary Slade (4), two women who were part of the circle. We went to the back part of the store where there was a couch and we proceeded to what was essentially an interview to determine if we (the two new women) would be allowed to participate in that evening's circle. We were asked what we knew of witches and why we thought we were one. I was startled and put off by the questions, no mention of witches had been made in the flyer. I had assumed that the "Women's Circle" was open to casual participation, I had also assumed that the circle was in the format of a women's consciousness raising group. This sounded a lot more like some kind of secret ritual group and I was not certain about staying. But my curiosity got the better of me. I answered that I had been accused of being a witch (which was true) and that I didn't understand why since I was not involved in magic or spell casting (which was also true). I elaborated that I was curious about the circle and that if it offered an opportunity to learn more about 'witches', well I was open to the possibility. I must have answered well enough as I was allowed to stay. As was the other young woman.

She and I were invited to stay upstairs until the circle was ready. That's when we learned that the circle would be held in the basement of the store. As the

other women arrived, about eight in all, they descended the stairs to the basement with hardly a glance in our direction.

At about 8 PM, we were instructed to descend the stairs, take off our shoes, and join the other women for the circle. We were told to follow along and that our questions would be answered at the end.

At the bottom of the stairs there was a small alcove to the right (5). That's where the other women waited before entering the room proper through a curtain of black material. The other women had changed out of their street clothes, taking off their shoes and socks, and had dressed in long loose robes with braided belts around their waists. Their hair was unbound and they were wearing jewellery: long necklaces of amber, semi-precious stones, silver cuff bracelets, rings and various 'art nouveau' style pendants of pretty women. They looked a bit like monks with jewellery (see Appendix Seven - Dress and Adornment). They seemed serious and self-possessed. All seemed to be in their late 20's to early 40's. Two were Francophones, the others were Anglophones. All were white.

While still in this alcove, one of the women informed the others that it was now time to 'ground' (6). She then proceeded to instruct the other women to relax,

breathe deeply and imagine a series of images that she described. Once this was done, the women lined up ready to enter the main room.

The room was in darkness and seemed empty except for a small rectangular table which was set up in the North East corner (7). It was draped with a black cloth and candles were lit on it. Other objects were not at first visible in the gloom. An odour of incense was discernable. I later noticed that the walls were of dark wood panelling and the floor was covered in a dark grey indoor/ outdoor carpeting.

Two women stood at the entrance of the room, one on each side of the entrance. As each of the other women entered, she was greeted and one woman dabbed some scented oil on her forehead. The other woman kissed her on the cheek and then directed her to enter and stand around the periphery of an imaginary circle that occupied the centre of the room. Each woman was greeted in turn and took her place around the circle.

When the last woman had entered, the two greeting women came to complete the circle, staying in the NE quadrant. We all held hands, facing the centre of the room. A chant (8) was started and continued as one of the officiating women, the High Priestess, (HPS) took a knife off the table. She held it in both

hands in a horizontal position diagonally away from her body towards the left with the blade pointing down towards the walls. She walked in a clockwise (9) direction around the outside of the circle of women starting at the table and ending at the table. As she replaced the knife on the table she said: "The circle is cast, so mote it be". All of the women answered: "So mote it be" (10). She then took her place in the circle, standing where the other officiating woman had been standing. This other woman was her helper, the handmaiden (HM).

The HM then took a long handled, hand made broom (11), which had been standing propped up along the left edge of the table, and swept the outside of the circle, again circumambulating in a clockwise direction. She swept from the edge of the circle out to the walls, as if ridding the space of 'dirt'. The other women continued chanting with hands linked while this was done.

Once arrived back at the table, and after placing the broom horizontally on the floor in front of the table, the HM then took the dish in which incense was burning off the table and again, walking around the outside of the circle, went to the east quadrant and handed the incense to the woman who was standing there. The HM then took the other woman's place in the circle and held hands with the women on either side of her. The woman in the East position then started to declaim a set of phrases which would be repeated by each of the next

three women (four in all) only changing some words to match the directions and the objects they were carrying. As she declaimed these words, she also circumambulated the room, on the outside of the circle of women, stopping at each cardinal point and lifting the incense dish up to the ceiling then lowering it and continuing to the next cardinal point. When she reached her original place, the HM took the incense dish from her and, completing a last circumambulation back to the table, the HM replaced the incense dish and picked up a small red candle. She then continued around the circle until she reached the woman standing in the South. Again the HM took the woman's place and the "South woman" walked to all four cardinal points and back to her spot, repeating the same actions and phrases (with appropriate modifications) as the "East woman". The same actions were repeated for the shell filled with water (West) and the dish filled with salt (North) (12).

Once all four elements (air, fire, water, earth) had been used to 'purify' the space we were in, the HPS then addressed the women asking them to face the East. Each woman pivoted on her own axis in a clockwise direction to thus face East. Each stood with feet slightly apart. Each brought her fingertips to her lips then opened up her arms horizontally at shoulder height, hands open and facing front (13), head forward and eyes open. Each kept this position while the HPS spoke and then at the end of the text, each folded her arms over her chest,

right hand over left, took a slight step back with the left foot and inclined her torso forward in a shallow bow. Each then let her hands fall to her side as she now pivoted to face South. The same actions were repeated for South, West and North (14) in that order.

During this time, the HPS had taken the knife from the table and holding it in both hands in front of her chest, she had circumambulated the outside of the circle of women to the East where she stood with feet slightly apart. Bringing both hands up to her lips, she kissed the knife blade and then extended her left hand down with fingers pointing to the floor and her right hand up holding the knife as an extension of her right hand's two first fingers (15). With the knife thus extended, she drew the outline of a complex figure in the air against the side wall, slightly above her head. This figure appeared to be a five pointed star. When finished, she brought her left hand up to clasp her right, lowered both to chest level, took a small step back with her left foot and flexed her torso forward in a shallow bow. She then proceeded to the South, still holding the knife in both hands at chest level. She repeated the same sequence of movements at the South, West, and North positions. The words she spoke as she was making these movements, I later came to know as "Quarter Calls" when the Guardians of the Watchtowers of the various directions were called to participate in the circle.

Once finished, she proceeded to the North East margin of the circle of women, (who were holding hands again), and, holding the knife in both hands above her head, she said: "The circle is cast, so mote it be." The women answered: "So mote it be." At this point, the HPS told us what the 'intent' of the ritual was to be. The HPS then pivoted on her axis clockwise to face the table where she proceeded to deposit the knife.

She then stood facing the table, legs apart, arms extended at shoulder level or slightly higher with hands open and facing front and she said to the other women: "Let us address the Goddess" (16). The women then pivoted clockwise to stand facing the table. They also had feet slightly apart and arms raised to shoulder height with hands open and facing front. The HPS then proceeded to declaim a text inviting the Goddess to be present at the circle. She ended by saying: "Be welcome and Blessed be". The other women responded: "Blessed Be". While this was happening, the HM did whatever seemed necessary for the HPS to be able to move and speak without hesitation. The HM would move the small white candle that was used to read by, she carried the book in which the text of the ritual was written and held it where the HPS wanted it to be so that she could read from it easily. All during the ritual, the HM assisted the HPS as altar boys assist the officiating priest of a Catholic ritual.

After the HPS had called the Goddess, she then proceeded to pick up the cup of liquid which was on the table and raise it above her head. She then declaimed a text which invited the Goddess to transform the liquid into a fitting drink for the women assembled. She finished with the formula: "So mote it be". She then turned clockwise to the HM and offered her the cup saying: "Blessed be". She also kissed the woman receiving the cup. The HM then took the cup, sipped from it and then handed it to the woman to her left with the same blessing and kiss (the women having formed a circle again). The cup thus proceeded around the circle clockwise with each woman receiving the cup and the blessing, sipping from it, and handing it over to the next woman with the same blessing and kiss (17). When the cup returned to the HPS, she took it back to the altar, raised it in both hands facing the altar, poured some of the liquid into a bowl on the altar saying: "To the Gods" (18). The other women responded: "To the Gods". Then the HPS raised the cup to her lips, drained it, raised it a last time and said: "Blessed Be". She then placed the cup back on the table and turned to face the other women.

At this point the women were invited to sit on the floor, to close their eyes, breath deeply, and get comfortable. A 'visualization', a sort of scripted group meditation was then read by the HPS who also was sitting on the floor. This text lasted approximately 20 minutes and ended with a series of images that

reproduced, but in reverse order, the sequence of images of the beginning of the text. As well, the women were invited to feel the weight and solidness of their bodies, to feel the floor beneath them, to pay attention to the room they were in and finally, to open their eyes and to stretch. The women were then invited to comment on their experience of the visualization. Each woman in turn spoke without interruption, offering a description or a comment on the process. Sometimes, she would add to or contrast the descriptions and comments already given. What I noticed was the lack of disagreement, correction, 'one up man ship' or any other verbal power play. This was more like making a scrap quilt, every scrap added without censure, trusting to the cumulative effect. I also noticed that the women responded slowly, quietly and respecting the moments of silence that ensued. This was not conversation but a kind of witnessing (19).

When the comments had proceeded around the circle a couple of times, the HPS invited the women to "feast". Food was brought in from the alcove beside the stairs. A dark cloth was put on the floor, then the food was laid out on it. The cup was retrieved from the table and more liquid (white wine) was put into it. This seemed to signal a social time when rules of behaviour were relaxed. No formal sequence of events seemed apparent and only the continuously circulating cup echoed the preceding ritual. Women shared information about

their lives over the past month (since the last circle), commented on each other's information, joked, broke off into private conversations, laughed, etc. It was like a pick-nick. Once most of the food (20) was eaten and the conversation had run down, the HPS invited the women to 'clear the food away' so that the ritual could resume. The left-over food was re-packed, dirty dishes stacked and every thing returned to the alcove. The women then stood again in a circle and this time the HPS and the women turned, walked or pivoted in a counterclockwise direction until the end of the ritual.

The first sequence of actions was to thank the Goddess for her presence (21). This was done facing the table with the HPS directly in front of it and the other women behind her still in circle relative to each other but also facing the table. The same sequence of standing, arms up and out, crossing them over the chest while flexing the torso in a shallow bow was repeated. Then came the proceeding to each direction (North, West, South, East) by the HPS and the shifting of position of the other women to face the direction in question. Again the HPS declaimed a text with took up the same images as the greetings but was now a thanking for each element's presence and participation to the circle (22). Finally, as the women held hands again facing the centre of the circle, the HPS took the red candle off the table, held it with both hands in front of her at waist level, and proceeded to walk the outside boundary of the circle in a

counterclockwise direction. Once she arrived at the NE position of the circle, she unlinked the hands of the two women there, stood in between them facing the centre of the circle, held the candle in front of her with her left hand, extinguished the flame with the moistened fingers of her right hand and said: "What was started in truth has ended in beauty. This rite is ended, so mote it be." At this point she stamped her right foot, the other women said "So mote it be", she replaced the candle onto the table, rejoined the circle for a group hug and a final song:

The circle is open but unbroken
May the love of the Goddess
Be ever in your hearts
Merry meet, and merry part
And merry meet again (23)

This was repeated three times holding hands, swinging arms, and letting go of hands at end of the last phrase. The lights were then turned back on and the women proceeded to socialize while they cleaned up the space, put objects used during the ritual away after cleaning them, dressed in street cloths and generally got ready to leave. Plans were also made for the next ritual in a month's time and the other new woman and I were invited to come back if we wanted to.

When leaving the store, I decided to walk home (up Bank Street to Laurier

Avenue, over the Laurier bridge east to Sandy Hill, an hour's walk) rather than take the bus or accept a car ride. I wanted to think about what had happened. I was not allowed to do so right away, since the other new woman also wanted to walk home and she lived several blocks north on Bank Street. I agreed to walk with her as it was late and this would be safer. She was very 'high' and 'hyper', talking very fast about how wonderful the ritual had been and how she was going to definitely come back (she never did). I was very quiet and a little overwhelmed by her exuberance and I was relieved when she finally reached home. Once I was on my own, I slowed down and proceeded at a more leisurely pace. I had a lot to think about. In a surprising way, I was also very 'high' but definitely less 'hyper'. I felt like my whole body was humming, as it had after a whole evening of choir practice of Gregorian chant. I felt very present and yet the boundaries of my body seemed expanded. I could hear the traffic and city sounds around me but they were muted. I was much more aware of my thoughts and the remembered phrases of the ritual. I felt apprehension. I feared that this was "too good to be true" yet I hoped it was real. In a strange way, this experience was very similar to the kind of ecstasy I had experienced in chapel with the cloistered nuns when I had boarded in a convent (24) during Grade Seven: the same kind of quiet, private joy and absolute sense of grace. I really wondered if this was fantasy or reality. When I reached the Laurier Street bridge over the Rideau Canal, I stopped and looked

up at the full moon shining over the water. The last time I remembered this scene, I was a teenager and contemplating how to leave my parents' house. This was such a different experience from then. I found myself near tears as I spoke to the Moon as I had once spoken so often to Mary. She was so beautiful and I felt bathed in Her light. Nothing wrong could ever come from being in Her sight. I stayed standing there for a long time looking up at the Moon, then I continued on my way home.

When I got home, close to midnight, my partner and our housemates were waiting up for me. They were curious and wanted me to tell them all about my experience. I couldn't. I had no words to describe anything. And I found their curiosity somewhat obscene. I wanted to be left alone and quiet until I could figure out what was happening to me. I knew I had changed, that something extraordinary had occurred and that it was permanent. I had found god again. Not the God of my childhood, but god nevertheless. The divine was present again in my life.

I could barely manage to tell my partner that I was 'fine' and not to worry, that I would tell him all about it as soon as I could, that I just wanted to go to bed now. The others, I basically ignored.

It took me three days before I could talk and interact with others again. I felt a little like Paul of Tarsus, 'lightning struck'. I was worried that maybe my partner was right in being worried that I had somehow 'entered a cult'. In spite of my fears, I knew I would be back. I had found home (25).

I still struggle to understand what happened that night and to find the words to communicate it to others. To understand what happens to women who search out the Goddess and find her, I have attended many circles, interacted with several women's spirituality groups, and participated in large and small conferences on the theme of contemporary women's spirituality. I have trained with women who knew more than me, I have sought and received initiation and I have, at times, agreed to lead ritual for others. My original curiosity has become the impetus for twelve years of fieldwork as a participant-observer. I still have questions on the process and the consequences of contemporary Goddess Worship. Certainly, this religious movement is still evolving and spreading in North America. The questions and concerns it addresses, women's questions and concerns relative to their relationship to divinity and its ministry, are still to be resolved or even addressed within the hegemonic religious fabric of North American culture. This religious quest towards female religious agency, both human and divine, is still generating insights and motivating social action. It is also, and more immediately, changing the way these women live, in and

through their bodies. This thesis is a 'compte-rendu' of my present understandings of how and why these women seek the Goddess and what consequences for them there is that this Goddess incarnates through them, through the Sisterhood of the Goddess.

INTRODUCTION: THEORETICAL QUESTIONS

I - WHO IS THE OTHER WHEN WOMEN STUDY WOMEN (1)?

When I look in a mirror, who do I see
When I look into your eyes, who looks back at me
When I see you before me, do you see me
Are you my other, can we both be
My self, my other, my me.

Questions of Other and Self, Identity and Difference have occupied the centre of feminist debates for almost 50 years. In *THE SECOND SEX* (1953), Simone de Beauvoir postulated that the oppression of Woman was predicated on her absolute Otherness relative to Man (2). This concept of the Other, which de Beauvoir understood as a fundamental category of thought, permitted man to define Woman as the Other, the unessential, inferior to Man, while he defined himself as the One, the Subject, the being capable of transcendence - of free, independent, and creative activity - to thus being fully human. This, a woman by her very nature could never be. Furthermore, woman, by accepting her Otherness, her Objectification relative to the male subject which defined her, colluded in her own oppression and in her further distancing as the eternal outsider to the conceptual systems of meaning and power. Only by rejecting her Otherness with all of its cultural entailments and significations, would she have access to equality. Thus, she too would achieve transcendence.

But transcendence of self has not been the only postulated goal for women.

Another argument, based on embracing the feminine as Other has also been made. If patriarchy's greatest triumph has been to estrange women from their individual bodies (their biology, sexuality, aesthetics) (Irigaray 1974; Goldenberg 1987) while locking them into a group biological determinism (the sexual, birthing devalued Other) then embracing the body as the ground of being, the source of all knowledge and experience about the self and the world (Bono & Kemp 1991; Budapest 1979; Goldenberg 1987; Irigaray 1974; Kristeva 1980; Rich 1976) could provide women with a source of female power inaccessible to men, thus providing women with special ways of conceiving of and knowing the world (Griffin 1978; Tomm 1995). By celebrating this embodiment of self as female, the Other would open up for women new possibilities of being. This time through the achievement of immanence (3).

But achieving transcendence or immanence ... both of these formulations suffer from the same flaws, they universalize gendered experience and they locate it within a male defined paradigm of absolute dyads. This is safe. The Other can remain other, embodied in woman - the not man.

But what if, to quote from Mary Daly's *WICHEDARY* (1987), this otherness were to be "outside the parameters of patriarchal predictability"? Could this otherness exist? What would it look like? How could it be lived?

Once asked, these questions demand answers and as soon as Western feminist researchers stopped assuming that gendered experience was universally the same for all women, everywhere, everywhen, they began to notice the range and specificities of women's experiences, roles, and positions in other societies and in their own (4). Finally, theory became grounded in women's experience, and knowledge became something to be tested and validated through consensual intersubjectivity derived from shared experience. Women could then become others to each other and in seeing and acknowledging their differences, they could know each other as irreducible selves and yet mutually recognizable. They could come into Be-ing (Daly 1978) in the presence of each other. As Élisabeth Lacelle (1994:256) has said: "l'acte de connaissance est une co-naissance dans la relation avec l'autre", the act of knowing is a joint-birthing within the relation with the other. This is not so very far from the women's spirituality axiom that states that we are all women giving birth to ourselves.

Spirit of the wind, carry me.
 Spirit of the wind, carry me home.
 Spirit of the wind, carry me home to myself.

Spirit of the earth, help me with my birth.
 Spirit of the land, hold me in your hand.

Spirit of the storm, help me be reborn
 Spirit of the rain, wash away my pain ...

But what has happened here to self and other? Is there still a unitary locus of meaning? A benchmark? Is Woman (in the singular) still useful as a concept if

each woman is an irreducible Self exercising personal agency? And who is the Other to be studied if knowledge derives from intersubjective understandings in a self-reflexive mode of disclosure and witnessing? What remains of the Other if self-disclosure and auto-biography become norms of textual exposition and honesty (5)? Who studies whom and to what purpose? To find answers, it is useful to let go of general abstractions and to turn instead to a specific locus of experience and knowing (Ostriker 1993).

A group of Ottawa women provided such a locus by being willing to share their own investigations of self and other. These are women who are participants in ongoing women's full moon and new moon circles, a form of women's religious consciousness raising and devotional exercise predicated on the apprehension by women of divinity as female. Singly and collectively, they have striven to come to know themselves as women outside of the narrow patriarchal niches afforded them in their daily lives.

It would be untrue to state that these women are an example of anything else but themselves and they themselves would reject any attempt to make them typical or exemplary. They are what they are and it is enough.

In the modalities developed by them, of their coming to knowledge of self and

other, processes are unveiled which take the body and especially the female body, as a component, if not the actor, of the apprehension of the divine. The body is always involved in rituals. It is the particular association of the female body, in all its carnal processes and the notion of the goddess as embodied in human women which is of interest here. The following pages will document how and to what extent these women transform their intent into a lived reality. Studying contemporary women's spirituality leads one to examine how these women define and construct what it is to be a woman individually and collectively as they shatter and transform the traditional models of identity and rules of behaviour offered them by their society.

This question, or quest for a new definition of womanhood, leads one, especially one who is even slightly familiar with feminist perspectives, to the notion of essentialism. The New Webster Dictionary (1971:299) defines ESSENCE as being in part a 'constituent substance ... that distinguishes something from all others' and NATURE as 'the inherent quality of anything ... which constitutes what it is'. Feminist theorists have defined ESSENTIALISM as the belief that human males and females have unique and different innate natures deriving from their essences. These differences are believed to be neither socially nor experientially constructed but to be universal, natural and derived from biology (Humm 1995; Kramarae & Treichler 1991). Feminists in general are not very

supportive of essentialism, as many of them consider it a patriarchal argument used to keep women in a subservient role (Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974; Brown & Jordanova 1981). They tend to emphasize with Simone de Beauvoir the socially constructed aspects of womanhood. While acknowledging the real tensions between “essentialists, who believe there are universal and specific feminine and masculine qualities rooted in biology, and social constructionists, who argue that gender roles and distinctions are artificial, that they are socially constructed and imposed”, Wendy Griffin, in her seminal article “The Embodied Goddess: Feminist Witchcraft and Female Divinity” (1995) proposes a distinct perspective: She states that the women she is studying are choosing to redefine the relationship between the spiritual and the material by firmly rooting the material in the body and considering “femininity and masculinity as innate characteristics rather than as social constructs” with the Goddess as manifest in women’s bodies. These women are seeking “to shape a new cultural ethos” and they do so by attempting “to link what they believe is the divine within them to the divine around them in the natural world”, i.e. the Goddess.

By defining gender identity by reference to an essential dyad, an inherent contradiction is maintained. The material feminist discourse is simply changing the old male / not male dyad into nature / culture, innate / learned, essential / constructed. Nothing is resolved here, so how is this contradiction to be

solved? The women of Griffin's study perceive themselves as having both a constructed social identity and an essential core. They seek to deconstruct and eventually reconstruct their social identity through discovering and exploring their essential core which they define in part as a goddess.

Is Griffin describing an isolated case? Or is the identity contradiction to be solved or accommodated by other goddess-oriented women and women's groups? This thesis is a description and analysis of how the community of worship of Goddess women in Ottawa have explored this contradiction and attempted to resolve it.

CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXT

The body and its specific behaviour is where the power system stops being abstract and becomes material. The body is where it succeeds and fails, where it is acceded to or struggled against. The struggle for control, top-down vs. bottom-up, is waged on the material terrain of the body and its immediate context (Fiske 1992:162).

I - HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY MOVEMENT

Beginning in the late 1960's and, in part as a result of the second wave of the women's liberation movement, many North American and Western European women have begun to reconsider their religious commitments and their personal relations to the divine. As they have done so, they have come to realise that they feel alienated from, discounted by, and even dis-empowered by what they perceive as an absence of the female from most arenas of discourse within extant Judeo-Christian religions (Budapest 1979; Christ & Plaskow (eds) 1979/1992; Daly 1970; Morgan (ed) 1970; Radford Ruether 1971). Furthermore, some feel that this absence has been a conscious choice made at the level of the all male church hierarchies to reinforce their theological and moral power. Those few instances where the female could be found in biblical and New Testament texts (Mollenkott 1985; Tribble 1978) have seemed to these women to serve only to belittle, blame and shame women into obedience to male authority, be it secular or religious (Collectif Les Têtes de Pioches 1980; Daly 1970, 1973; L'autre Parole, etc.). Some feminist scholars

of religion have gone so far as to state that this male negative bias towards women is an inherent misogyny and gynophobia within Western society that is attributable to the dichotomous formulation that equates male with spirit, action and good, and female with body, passivity and bad (de Beauvoir 1953; Christ 1979; Daly 1970, 1973; Goldenberg 1978; Radford Ruether 1971). Furthermore, this dichotomous paradigm of moral worth is re-enforced by the depiction of the Judeo-Christian creator god as male (YHWH, God, Dieu) (1) and of the first human sinner as female (Eve). Some feminist writers have gone so far as to postulate that violence to women (and to the earth seen as female, "Mother Earth") has been justified and sanctified, in the eyes of male authorities, by this dichotomous moral paradigm (Caldecott & Leland (eds) 1983; Daly 1978; Goldenberg 1979; Radford-Ruether 1975; Starhawk 1979a; Stone 1979) (2).

North American women have proposed and implemented many strategies to counter their perceived lack of agency within the established churches. Some have left organized religion completely, seeing no way to remedy the situation (3). Some have tried to change the role and place of women within organized churches by working from the inside and calling for a renewed and revised Christianity or Judaism (L'autre Parole; Dumais 1979a, b; Plaskow & Christ 1989). Some have advocated a return to pre-Christian Paganism (or to a more

or less consciously reconstructed Paganism) (Budapest, Stone, Stein, Starhawk, Valiente and others) as a way of 'reclaiming' female agency and power occluded or eliminated by Christianity. Some have preferred to search for and discover female religious agency, called by them "the Goddess", wherever She may be found.

Expanding on the feminist aphorism "the personal is political", some feminist women have begun to explore how religious beliefs relate to social and political structures of gender inequality:

"What people believe (faith - religion) is political because it influences their actions and because it is the vehicle by which a religion perpetuates a social system. Politics and religion are inter-dependent. Every new social structure strives to come up with some kind of mythology of divine origin for its values and aims (...) For example, a self-created male god who has no mother is ... to deny motherhood (and) is to deny wimmin (4). Patriarchal religion is built on this denial. (...) Who absorbs whose culture is a crucial issue on the cultural battlefield. (...) Wimmin's spirituality is rooted in Paganism, where wimmin's values are dominant. The Goddess-worship, the core of Paganism, was once universal. Paganism is pleasure-oriented, joy and feasting prone, celebrating life with dancing and lovemaking. Working in harmony with Mother Nature, we discover and recover the All Creatrix, the female power without whom nothing is born nor glad. Male energy pretends to power by disclaiming the female force. Today, given the patriarchal society within which we live... the real enemy is the internalized and externalized policing tool that keeps us in fear and psychic clutter. (...) A new kind of trust is the most important contribution wimmin's spirituality has to give

to the wimmin's movement. We learned we can trust our bodies when we learned we had the right to control them. We are learning we can trust our souls through learning that our right to have them is rooted in our recognition of the Goddess, of the female principle within the universe and ourselves." (Budapest 1979:10-11).

Some women have thus sought evidence of a lost female cultural and religious power and agency. Both academics and amateurs have wanted to find in past human history some evidence for the possibility of matriarchy, lost goddesses, and the "Divine Feminine" (Mollenkott 1985). Rediscovering, or recovering, 'the Goddess' has been made possible by a growing availability of information on the subject. Early 19th century speculative works (Bachofen, Engels, Freud, Marx) on the possibility of a past human evolutionary stage of female power, the 'matriarchy' were republished in the 1960's. These theoretical works were interpreted (re-visioned) by many Western feminists as 'proof' of a lost woman-centred culture, a feminist utopia, peaceful, playful, creative, knowing neither war nor gender inequality (d'Eaubonne 1976; Stone 1979).

Works written by post Jungian archetypal psychologists (5), who in accordance with Jung's writing gave a large place to female aspects of the self (the anima) if not to women, also became widely available starting in the mid 1970's. Some even explicitly sought to conjoin historical goddess worship with modern female psychology. One must mention here, among others, M. Esther Harding's

WOMAN'S MYSTERIES - ANCIENT AND MODERN (1971), Marion Woodman's THE OWL WAS A BAKER'S DAUGHTER (1980), Jean Shinoda Bolen's GODDESSES IN EVERY WOMAN (1985), and Kathie Carlson's IN HER IMAGE (1989). Neumann's Jungian analysis of the female archetype in human psychology, THE GREAT MOTHER (1955/1963), was lavishly illustrated with Neolithic and Chalcolithic anthropomorphic figurines with more or less obvious female physical characteristics.

As well, Marija Gimbutas began to publish her archeological research on what she came to call "THE GODDESSES AND GODS OF EARLY EUROPE" (1974/1982). This wealth of figural archeological material was interpreted by some women as 'goddess figurines' (Merlin Stone, Barbara Walker, etc.). In this they were following in previous interpretations made by mainly male archeologists and psychologists of religion (Bachofen 1967; Crawford 1957/1991; Neumann 1955/1963).

As more women entered the fields of Religious Studies, Classics, Divinity and Women's Studies, they started to research historical documentary evidence on past religious systems and on formative texts in the Judeo-Christian traditions, sometimes re-translating them with a 'feminist' sensibility. In doing so, evidence was found and made available to the general public (especially a

female public) of the actual existence of divine females in the histories of the World's populations, especially in Near Eastern and Mediterranean early cultures (Heyob 1975; Mollenkott 1985; Plaskow & Romero (eds) 1974; Pomeroy 1976; Warner 1976).

The works of the poet Robert Graves, especially *THE WHITE GODDESS* (1948), and the great popularity of Joseph Campbell's mythopoeic retelling of myths popularized the notion that a Great Goddess had indeed existed which had subsequently been replaced by male divinities, especially the Judeo-Christian god.

II - HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF OTTAWA WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY GROUPS:

A result of this proliferation of information and speculation on past female human and divine agency, was to produce a wealth of fragmentary and often decontextualized, but enormously fruitful and evocative documentary and visual information on past 'goddesses' easily and abundantly available through various feminist or women's presses. In the period of time that I have been in contact with the women of my study (1989 - 2002), Ottawa has had two women's book stores, two occult supply stores, numerous New Age and alternative spirituality stores, all carrying important amounts of 'women's books' or 'women's spirituality' books. Most mainstream bookstores (Ottawa is known as a major

book reading city) carry 'women's studies', 'women's spirituality' and 'occult/new age' sections. Whatever was published elsewhere in book or magazine form in English was readily available in Ottawa.

As well, Canada, through its National Film Board (NFB) Studio D which promoted women film makers, and produced the GODDESS REMEMBERED TRILOGY of films (Read 1993). The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) through its Man Alive series produced and televised a major documentary on the emerging Neo-witchcraft / Pagan / Goddess movements called A CIRCLE OF WITCHES (1988). CBC's national radio produced and broadcasted a major two part Ideas program on the RETURN OF THE GODDESS (Ideas 1986). York University's Centre for Feminist Research publishes Canadian Women Journal/ Les cahiers de la femme which has had two issues (1983, 1997) devoted to contemporary Canadian women's religious experience. The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW) is located in Ottawa and has published an annotated bibliographical essay on women's / feminist liberation theology (Finson 1995). And Finally, the Canadian Centre for Research on Women and Religion (U. Of Ottawa), under the direction of Dr. Élisabeth Lacelle, published two studies: one on women and religion in French Canada (1979) and one on the interplay of women, religion and the body (1983).

A major writer and theorist on feminist psychology, Naomi Goldenberg, became a professor at the University of Ottawa in the mid 1970's and introduced the works of Starhawk, Carol Christ, Morgan McFarland and others to her students in Women's Studies and Religious Studies courses. Christ and Starhawk have been guest lecturers in Ottawa several times in the past years and Starhawk has recently led public rituals and a protest march against globalisation (November 2001). A course on Magic, Witchcraft and the Occult (SRS1510/1110) has been taught, in both English and French, at the University of Ottawa since the mid 1970's, and Carleton University and the University of Ottawa have a joint chair in Women's Studies. Courses at the B.A. and M.A. levels on 'Women and Religion' and 'Women and Goddesses' have been taught on a regular basis at the University of Ottawa for at least 10 years.

Using these resources, among others, many Ottawa women, be it alone or with others, academically or informally, within established church structures or outside of them, have started to explore the possibility:

- that the divine could be female
- that women could apprehend this divine directly (not mediated by church structure or dogma, nor by male ritual professionals), and
- that they as women could apprehend this divine.

This follows the North American trend noted by Adler (1979/1986), Christ (1997), Eller (1993/1995), Griffin (ed) (2000) and Walker (2000).

My general hypothesis is that, for the women of the circles I attended, this apprehension of the divine is an embodied apprehension such that the human body is the locus of contact with the divine and that its physiological reactions and emotional states as produced during ritual are evidence of this contact. The process developed by these women takes as its premise that the female body, and the direct embodied experience of being female are adequate tools for contact with the divine. How this is being achieved by these women in Ottawa is the focus of my research.

To document this developing component of Goddess worship, some general trends have to be recognized. The emphasis on 'spirituality' rather than 'religion' has been well documented (Christ 1997; Griffin (ed) 2002; Eller 1993/1995). In this context, I define spirituality as the process by which individuals negotiate or mediate between their own individual lived experience and the socio-cultural sphere called religion (Guédon 2001). The movement towards spirituality is concomitant with the process by which women leave or at least criticise religious institutions and access their own individual potential for seeking and finding personal meaning.

This quest, at least for some women, does not entail being confined to a religious or spiritual path away from the material world, or seeking retreat from engagement with this world, but rather, in an often noted fashion (Gray 1988) this new spirituality seeks to encompass all of a woman's life: body, mind and soul being valorized equally (Griffin 2000b:78). Personal experience is understood as valuable and germane to spiritual growth, in part in accordance with a generalized contemporary valuing of knowledge and knowledge based industries. The body, and its 'carnal knowing' is understood as a valid 'ground of being'. Instead of denying the body and its appetites, women are asked to embrace its substance and its processes, becoming 'women of substance' to themselves and to others. This search for an 'embodied' spirituality is central to contemporary North American women's quest for the Goddess.

Three main strategies have been employed by North American women to develop the religious possibility of a female divine apprehended by and for women. First, there has been the "reclaiming of Herstory", which has been interpreted as the making visible of a prior existence of female power (both human and divine) which has been obscured or erased by a subsequent and still present patriarchy and its "History" (word play à la Mary Daly, 1978). This has led to a sifting through of the archeological, literary, historical and theological information available for Middle Eastern and Circum-Mediterranean cultures of

Antiquity. This has resulted in the production of dictionaries and encyclopaedias of 'goddess lore' such as Ann Forfreedom and June Ann's *BOOK OF THE GODDESS* (1980/9980ADA), Janet and Stewart Farrar's *THE WITCHES' GODDESS* (1987b) and Barbara Walker's *THE WOMAN'S DICTIONARY OF SYMBOLS AND SACRED OBJECTS* (1988) and *THE WOMEN'S ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MYTHS AND SECRETS* (1983).

Secondly, there has been the anthropological and historical search for and reconstruction of human cultures which have had or still have evidence of female based power, be it political/social or divine (Schneider & Gough (eds) 1961/1973). This has led in part to a resurgence of interest in the religions of Africa, India and the Orient as well as a not always sophisticated or comprehending exploration of Native North American cultures and religious cosmologies (Andrews 1981, 1984; Cameron 1981/2002).

Finally, and independently of the availability of any evidence for a prior time of female power, there has been the invention by women of a new religiosity and (re-)vision of community based solely on women defined contemporary needs and wants. A telling example of this trend, quickly translated from French to English, and often quoted by spiritual feminists has been this passage from Monique Wittig's *LES GUERRIÈRES* (1971:89):

There was a time when you were not a slave, remember this. You walked alone, full of laughter, you bathed bare-bellied. You say you have lost all recollection of it, remember... You say there are no words to describe this time, you say it does not exist. But remember... Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent." (Quoted in McFarland, 1975:1).

And invent they did especially in the area of images of female power, both human and divine.

Indeed the option of recovering/rediscovering the Goddess was not simply a matter of developing concepts. Part of the seduction of this endeavour was that 'goddesses' presented in the most accessible sources in Archeology, Anthropology, Art, Art History and Religious Studies were seen to be embodied in images and artefacts that could be quickly borrowed and copied. Most were understood as being devoid of any recoverable context of manufacture and use, therefore free to be re-interpreted according to personal understanding, wishes and needs. Every image, every 'goddess' became "The Goddess", and "The Goddess" was revealed in every 'goddess'. This came to be known as "She who is many and the many who are She" (6).

The result of these quests made by academics and amateurs was to produce a wealth of fragmentary and often decontextualized, but enormously fruitful and evocative documentary and visual information on past 'goddesses', easily and abundantly available through various feminist or women's presses. Though

many sources of information and models were available and used, a certain number of authors found their way into most personal libraries and formed a core of reference books through which a common language and theoretical foundation could be built and shared by all. This was fostered by the fact that all the women involved read. They read books and magazines, and in turn they often also write (Rabinovitch 1992; Reid 2001a).

A quick survey of book sales (7) and personal libraries demonstrates that, for Ottawa women, the archeologist most influential is Marija Gimbutas. The writers of compilations of goddess lore who are most influential are Merlin Stone, Diane Stein, Barbara Walker and Janet and Stewart Farrar. The theorists / theologians most influential are Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford-Ruether, Carol Christ and Starhawk (Miriam Simos). The ritual practitioners most influential are Z. Budapest, Marion Weinstein, Diane Stein and Scott Cunningham (8). The films most influential have been the National Film Board (NFB) trilogy THE GODDESS REMEMBERED. And the artists most influential in Ottawa have been local: Lauren Foster McCleod, Gordon Derry and the women of the Psyllium Art Collective (especially Dawn Dale and c.j. fleury).

By the mid 1980's, an identifiable women-defined gynocentric spirituality had developed in North America in various forms such as, among others, Dianic

Witchcraft, Goddess Worship, and, simply Goddess Spirituality. It remains highly varied and individualistic, never becoming a unitary faith but rather a convergence of beliefs and ritual practices with shared core values and iconography (Adler, 1979/1986; Eller 1993/1995; Griffin 2000b). One participates in but does not belong to this spirituality. As well, one self-identifies as a goddess person, rather than having membership or identity conferred by an external or centralized authority (Adler 1979/1986; Ardinger 2000; Budapest 1979; Christ 1997; Starhawk 1979; Stein 1987/2001). In many ways, this spirituality is self taught, self directed and self developed.

This gynocentric spirituality has developed into a theology which states:

- that the divine can be female
- that this female divine is "the Goddess"
- that the Goddess is always immanent, and sometimes transcendent
- that She is both the spark of all creation and is revealed by Her creation
- that as part of creation, women therefore reveal the Goddess
- that each woman is a manifestation of an aspect of the Goddess
- that all women, as parts of creation, are parts of the Goddess and therefore constitute a sisterhood as daughters of the Great Mother: "I am She / She is me", "we all come from the Goddess, and to Her we shall return, like a drop of rain, flowing to the ocean"

- that "Goddess Spirituality" is living one's life consciously knowing the above, understanding its consequences, and behaving accordingly.

Thus, this is an enacted theology based on a woman's understanding of her own relationship to the "Goddess" in all Her forms and aspects.

This theology has been described as gynocentric, experiential, embodied, celebratory, creative, individualistic, monotheistic but polysymbolic and highly personal. How personal this can be may be surmised from the observation that many women in Ottawa, while being active participants in Goddess Spirituality also continue to practice within other faith communities, some of origin, some of adoption. Thus, women at any one women's circle might include Catholic and Buddhist nuns, Jewish and Christian women, atheists and humanists, Neopagans, Wiccans and Witches. For these women, and this will be discussed in greater detail later, worshipping the Goddess with other women allows them a deeper and more meaningful contact with the divine even if they remain participants in other religious practices less amenable to women.

Over time, the women in Ottawa involved with this theology have developed various strategies to foster "goddess consciousness" and to enact a relationship with the female divine. These strategies include meditations on goddess images and myths, enacting meaningful rituals based on women's experiences, 'circling'

with like-minded women, creating and maintaining private and public altars and shrines to aspects of the Goddess and developing meaningful devotions to the female divine, taking courses on the history of the female divine (such as the Unitarian Universalist Women's Spirituality courses: 'Rise Up and Call Her Name' and 'Cakes for the Queen of Heaven'), and attending Witchcamps and Wild Womyn's weekends, etc.

According to these women, one way of becoming conscious of the divine within oneself is to make concrete what the Goddess looks like to oneself. Goddess making workshops, (a kind of feminist religious consciousness raising) are popular. The images produced during these workshops are considered as valid and valuable as any historical image and thus they enter the lexicon of goddess images that women have at their disposal.

Political activities are not the focus of this research, neither are social services and community solidarity. Yet it must be noted that these are important components of these circles' lives. They constitute a form of embodiment that should not be neglected. But all of these can and do occur outside of any reference to the body.

CHAPTER TWO: GROUNDING THEORY ON EXPERIENCE

I - FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES AND THE PARTICIPANT OBSERVER.

The core of this research is located in Ritual Studies informed by Feminist Religious Studies. My purpose is to identify and describe the processes by which some contemporary North American women involved with the Goddess express and conceive this involvement. Specifically, the object of my research is what these women, in a formal ritual setting, say and express about the body, their own and that of the Goddess. Three components of the ritual context constitute the locus of my study: ritual actions, ritual texts and ritual images. These correspond to the main ways by which these women give themselves a voice with which to address the Goddess. I approach this corpus from an ethnographic standpoint such that my research results in a "straight forward analytical and descriptive account of fieldwork, thus constituting an ethnography" (Marcus 1986:265). In keeping with the ethnographic viewpoint, I am including part of the historical and theological context within which this community functions. I am not including psychological profiles of individuals, nor am I looking at their life histories. Furthermore, this is not a community study. I am restricting the object of my research to the construction of the embodied Goddess as revealed by the rituals in which this group of women approach the Goddess, and the ritual components produced and / or used by these women. This specific group of women is located in the Ottawa area in

Ontario (capital region of Canada) including the Outaouais region of Québec which borders it; my research covers the time period from 1998 to 2002 though my participation goes back to 1989. This research documents a process which started before my arrival in Ottawa and which continues beyond this research. The length of my participation (1989-2002) provides for the opportunity to perceive shifts and changes in practices and beliefs as well as in the composition of the various groups studied. All of these opportunities have been used to come to understand the organic nature of this faith community.

My data originate from three main sources, each approached with its own methodology.

1. Rituals and Events:

Participant Observation allowed me access to rituals and community events (see list in Appendix Ten) such as women's weekend retreats. My participation in women's spirituality conferences in Southern Ontario was useful since these conferences were not only a source of ideas and data but also included access to rituals, art exhibits, and merchant booths. This provided me with access to data on sources within the larger North American and Canadian Goddess Worship communities for components of local rituals processes. It also provided added information on the production of rituals and the generation and

dissemination of concepts, words, images and actions which have come to constitute the lexicon used by these local women. I complemented participant observation with the collection of books, magazines, and newsletters read by these women and with participation in ongoing discussion e-lists on Neo-pagan and Goddess spiritualities.

2. Ritual Texts:

During the whole of the time that I have known these women, I have collected and collated ritual texts, songs and chants produced and used by them in their circles. Thus I have an extensive archival record of those rituals I attended and some others for which text was written and subsequently given to me. As manager of both the Occult Shop and the Hungry Eye, and thus the person responsible for hosting the circles (NOT leading them), I was entrusted with the "Book of Shadows" maintained by each group associated with these stores. Each 'Bosh', as it is affectionately called, is the record of circles, their themes, their texts, and the identity of the woman leading each ritual that a group maintains for its own benefit. It is its memory and main training tool for new women interested in learning how to prepare and lead a ritual. Since the demise of both stores, I have remained the caretaker of these Books of Shadows and continue to have unrestricted access to them.

3. Goddess Imagery:

Finally, I have collected objects and images produced for and by women involved in Goddess spirituality. These include, in part, jewellery, statuary, talismans, clothing, ritual tools, altar components, greeting cards, posters, and tarot cards, all of which relate directly to Goddess imagery or feminist recreations of traditional western occult and esoteric paraphernalia. I have also assembled a large collection of catalogues of these items produced for sale (see Appendices Eight and Nine). During my eight years (1990 - 1998) of working in and eventually managing occult stores, I had extensive dealings with suppliers, producers, artisans and customers. I learnt what was available and what was not and at what price. But most importantly, I learnt what the women customers were looking for, what they bought, what they could not find and finally, what they would not buy and why.

Because there was always major disparities between what these women were looking for and what was available to me as a shop keeper, I endeavoured to find local sources for the requested items. This led me to 'discover' local artists who were already producing Goddess imagery and items. Foremost among the artisans / craftspeople who produced items well received by these women were Lisa Marcus (pottery), Gordon Derry (antler and bone carving, see Appendix Four - Pagan Altar), Veronica Salvati (sculptor) and Lauren Foster-Mcleod

(illustrator and jewellery maker, see Appendix Five for samples of her work) (see Chapter Seven for discussion of images).

I also became acquainted with local feminist artists, many of whom also participated in women's circles or at least interacted closely with the women's spirituality community of the Ottawa region. Many of these women consequently exhibited in the three Divina et Femina conference art exhibits at the University of Ottawa (1998, 1999, 2000). Foremost among them are the women of the Psyllium Art Collective, of which I had the most contact with Dawn Dale and c.j. fleury.

Finally, my involvement with the three Divina et Femina conferences allowed me to observe to what extent women academics, ritualists, and artists collaborate and inform each other within the sphere of Goddess spirituality. Most women participants were, at the same time, all three: academics, ritualists, and artists. How this convergence and cross fertilisation of ideas and images occurs within Goddess spirituality was made evident to me during the scholarly presentations, the workshops, the performances, the rituals and the art exhibit which made up each conference (see Appendix Seven - 2. Diveena Shapouri banner and ritual costume).

4. Academic Context of Study:

Academic research on Neo-pagan and Goddess centred religious movements in North America is growing. Nevertheless, it is still at the level of basic descriptive ethnography and the first local longitudinal study (Salomonsen 2002). My fieldwork was guided by previous surveys of North American women's Goddess Worship (Adler 1979/1986; Eller 1993/1995, 2000; Griffin 2002; Walker 2000) and current overviews of the development of this movement (Christ 1997; Griffin (ed) 2000). I also took into account the many academic studies of the Ottawa - Montreal Neo-pagan / Wiccan and Goddess communities (Gaboury 1989, 1990; Rabinovitch 1992; Reid 2001a; Slade 1989; Tyrell 1992). Furthermore, I have paid attention to the extant literature on Canadian women's struggle for a greater role and recognition within the Christian and Jewish churches (Dumais 1979a, b; Finson 1995; Lacelle (ed) 1979, 1983; L'autre Parole).

Other than Gaboury's initial fieldwork (1989, 1990) which was located mainly in the Francophone lesbian part of the Montreal community of 'sorcières' and Slade's Honor B.A. research (1989) with one of Ottawa's women's circles, this thesis is the first attempt to describe with any depth or scope the complexities of the ritual construction of self and divinity within a Canadian community of women Goddess Worshipers. Furthermore, this is the largest group of women

to be studied in Canada. Numbering in the 3 - 400, these women who circle together in several different groups in Ottawa are extremely varied in their characteristics. What differentiates them most from other women's groups is that they are each an amalgamation of very different individuals: often bilingual (English / French), including heterosexuals and lesbians, women implicated in the larger Pagan community or willfully segregated from it, some exclusively Goddess oriented while others are holding to other religious affiliations as well; in other words, they exhibit extreme variety and tolerance of difference. (See next section on demographics). No one theology or thealogy (1) is paramount in Ottawa. This is true of both the Wiccan / Neo-Pagan community and the women's Goddess Worship community. And this diversity has been apparent (and a cause of occasional difficulties, see Reid 2001a) all along the fieldwork time span.

Finally, this thesis focusses on some little studied aspects of Goddess Worship: the production and use of symbols and the elaboration of ritual processes. Some recent studies (Christ 1997; Griffin (ed) 2000; Walker 2000) have begun to describe women's experience of the female divine in their own words and to look at the ritual process itself (Folz & Griffin 1996; Griffin & Foltz 1990), yet only one has compared a corpus of rituals and texts produced by a community to discover its common symbolic lexicon and the cosmology exemplified by it

(Griffin 1995) (2).

5. Inherent dissonance and questions:

Because the women's groups I came to know and with whom I worked are linked with the Neo-Pagan / Wiccan community of Ottawa, I have had to include in my research the evolution of these contacts. I observed a growing dissonance in the discourse on the divine, on human and gender roles as originally presented by founding Neo-pagan theological writings, and as actually lived by members, both male and female, of these Neo-pagan / Wiccan communities. Within the Neo-pagan / Wiccan communities of Ottawa, this dissonance was expressed in questions that included but are not limited to:

- What are the implications for gender relations when women generate religious practices, symbols and texts that empower them independently from men?
- To what extent have the theo/thealogy(ies) and practices of these women come to differ from that originally devised for Wicca / Witchcraft by Gerald Gardner (3) in the late 1940's?
- What does "power" mean when women speak of themselves as "powerful" and of what they do as "empowering"?
- In redefining themselves as "powerful women", are these women also redefining men? How and with what implications?

These questions found their way into my own research, though not into this thesis. I have limited myself to these two related questions:

- If these women see themselves as embodiments of the Goddess, to what extent does what women believe about inherent divinity (the Goddess) and about the possibilities for experiencing unmediated divinity (being their own priestesses) inform their sense of themselves?
- How do these women express the potential relationship between their own bodies and that of the Goddess? How do they ritualize it? How do they speak of it? How do they represent it?

In order to explore these questions I will focus my attention on the texts, rituals and images produced and used by the Ottawa women's circles.

II - FEMINIST STUDIES:

The feminist orientation of this research implies that it should employ the methodological choices appropriate to the research context in question; and that it should also respect the political and ethical parameters of the subject matter: contemporary North American women's quest for a genuine apprehension and relationship with a divine in the female mode. Special attention must be given to the ethos of 'voicing' and 'embodiment' which define much of the contemporary attitude toward what is being researched here. As finding one's own voice and becoming present to oneself are also axiomatic to

this spirituality, any research methodology which were to evacuate the subject or objectify it, would seriously jeopardise the validity of any conclusions reached.

Within the context of this study, a feminist approach is most appropriate because this is research grounded in women's experiences of themselves and their practices and it addresses issues that are defined by these women as problematic in their lives. In the context of a religious movement which was founded and originally formulated in print by British male nudists with a strong agenda of sexual permissiveness (Valiente 1989:182), it is important for these women to rewrite the partial, distorted and sometimes perverse formulations of gender specific roles and characteristics, be they divine, human, and/or priestly that are still being promulgated by some as religiously correct.

This research takes for granted that women can be "knowers" in that they are the owners of their own experiences, that they are capable of making sense of these experiences and of testing the validity of their knowledge in a consensual intersubjectivity derived from the sharing of these experiences. Within a Western, historical analysis of religion that used to consider only male founders, male writers and male gods as normative, it is necessary to make audible women's religious voices: they have been and continue to be religious

innovators, theo/theologians, writers of religious texts, ritual leaders and mystics. Even more important is the realization that it is women's experiences that inform most directly these women's religious behaviour(s) and discourse(s) and not any male-generated 'normative' text. It must also be noted that there is great plurality and creativity within these religious discourses and that any consensus is generally local, contextual and open to revision by anyone. Any exposition, therefore, must also abandon univocality for a polyphony of voices of which the researcher's is only one (Foltz & Griffin 1996).

For this research to be honest, the researcher must place / locate herself in the same critical plane as the object of her research. This involves her (me) making transparent her originating context (class, race, culture, religious affiliations, scholastic needs), her assumptions and beliefs, and her relationship(s) with her informants (participant / observer, student / teacher / priestess within the community, etc.). In the words of Sandra Harding, "the beliefs and behaviours of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for or against the claims advanced in the results of the research" (1987a:9).

Furthermore, since this research comes from and is meant to inform the community of women involved about their perceived difficulties with gender relations, it is a form of "studying up": identifying and making sense of the

sources of religious power and constraints that mould and structure gender relations within this group.

Inevitably, being both spokesperson / advocate / participant and researcher / observer has fostered within me a certain multiplicity of viewpoints which I must mediate (and reconcile?) in my presentation (Clifford 1986:103).

III - ETHNOGRAPHIC PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION:

Implicit in the participant observation research method is the belief that the researcher has access to both emic and etic viewpoints: emic from the viewpoint of someone living in that culture (the subjective), and etic from the viewpoint of the distanced observer using the filters of the discipline (the scientific objective). The emic is doubled in that it includes the native viewpoint with "the ethnographer's deep sense ... that indigenous usage is always correct in its own setting" (Rosaldo 1986:83) and the researcher's own self-awareness of the process of learning and being changed by the native ways of being (Foltz & Griffin 1996). These are meant to be contrasted and elucidated by scientific objectivity. But anthropologists have taught us that scientific objectivity is itself a form of contextualized subjectivity with a particular agenda informed by issues of race, culture, gender, and politics. "Our knowledge (has been) shown to be less objective, more negotiated by human interests, and the subject of a

greater responsibility in the interactions and ethical honesty of fieldwork..." (Fisher 1986:208). At least now, "we know some of the questions worth asking and have made asking them part of the discipline's agenda" (Rabinow 1986:251).

In reality, the researcher has nothing but his or her own subjective experience and his or her own understanding of the subjective experience of the observed. The task then becomes one of mediating intersubjective understandings in a self-reflexive mode of disclosure and witnessing, of "belief / skepticism" (Clifford 1986:111).

Autobiographical recounting has become recognized in Anthropology as one "appropriate form for merging other cultural experience with the ethnographer's own" (Marcus 1986:168). In my case, I am an insider taking on the outsider's task. I am an older woman, white and heterosexual, childless but happily partnered, a Franco-Ontarian, raised a catholic and a long time participant in Women's Groups who is also a Wiccan initiate. My task is not so much to reveal the Other but to make us (the women and I) visible to ourselves in a way that also permits us to become visible to others. This task must necessarily be, at least in part, autobiographical as my own intuitions and experiences have been the starting point of my questioning.

One of the difficulties which remains is the tension between academic conventions of textual production and the need to “allow multiple sets of voices to speak for themselves, with my own author’s voice muted and marginalized as commentary” (Fischer 1986:201). How to simultaneously remain true to an academic ideal, my author’s intuitions and the lived experiences of the women with whom I am doing research is undoubtedly my most difficult task.

IV - ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT OF RESEARCH:

The community under study is the Ottawa area Neo-Witchcraft community and more specifically, the Women’s Circles within it.

1. THE NEO-WITCHCRAFT COMMUNITY: This community is composed of male and female, Anglophone and Francophone, self-identified Witches / Wiccans / Pagans / Neo-pagans / Goddess Worshippers (4) of the Greater Ottawa and Outaouais (5) regions with whom I have been interacting at occult / metaphysical bookstores, public rituals, pagan gatherings, community events, ‘craft’ workshops and classes, and public and private devotional ‘circles’. Ottawa has a long history as a centre of occult and esoteric groups and practices. It became a major centre of spiritualist activity in the 19th century and continues to have two active spiritualist ‘churches’. It was home to the Canadian Parapsychological Foundation until its demise in the late 1980's. Its publications

are now housed in the Ottawa Room of the Laurier Street branch of the Ottawa Public Library. Ottawa's first occult bookstore, The Wiccan Rede opened in 1985. It later moved to Bank Street and was renamed The Occult Shop. Until it closed in 1994, it remained the local 'pied à terre' for the Wiccan Church of Canada (WCC) and its weekly Sunday night open circles.

The Wiccan Church of Canada, founded by Tamarra and Richard James in the early 1980's, has its High Temple in Toronto and has had satellite Temples in Hamilton and Ottawa. The Temple in Ottawa was closed by the James shortly after they closed the Occult Shop. Those people in Ottawa who still follow WCC style Wiccan practices are now called The Witches Gathering and they have as High Priestess, Michelle Hrynyk who was initiated by the WCC Temple in Toronto. The WCC does not presently consider her or the Witches Gathering part of the WCC and they would not accept this identification either.

While the WCC was active in Ottawa, from 1985 to 1994, it held weekly public rituals, private and public classes in Wiccan theology and magical technology, and provided a kind of storefront chaplaincy to people of the Ottawa area. Its founders have developed a type of Wiccan theology based on Gardner and Valiente both influenced by Richard James' Masonic background and Tamarra's strong identification with her understanding of the Greco-roman mystery

tradition. They also borrow heavily on Dion Fortune's Society of the Inner Light and other late 19th and early 20th century magical groups in having an "Outer Court" of non-initiates and 'dedicants' and an "Inner Court" of 'neophytes' and initiates. The WCC has a three degree system with the 1st degree permitting the leading of group rituals. One can speculate on the benefits of the close association of the WCC founders and the establishment of a publicly visible presence for Wicca commercially and in the press in Eastern Canada. Nevertheless, their attempts to define 'normative' Neo-paganism for all Canadians through seeking 'legal' status as a church and imposing their type of practice on prison chaplaincy at the federal level has met with very strong resistance. National advocacy groups like the Pagan Federation / Fédération Païenne Canada (PFPC) were founded as a response to the WCC's attempt at theological hegemony. The WCC is no longer a strong influence in Ottawa and a more detailed description of the power struggles once common can be found in Reid (2000, 2001a) and Tyrrel (1992).

Also in Ottawa are two Alexandrian closed covens and several dozen small private covens. Silverwheel, self-described as a Welsh Tradition Wiccan group, has been in continuous existence since the mid 1960's and is currently led by one of the original female members. It is the longest existing coven in Eastern Ontario and Western Quebec. The Ottawa Pagan Network (OPN), a loose

affiliation of Neo-pagans describing themselves as 'NOT Wiccan or WCC', have sponsored a library and archive, an internet research site (www.mystagog/opal.html) and a monthly Sunday brunch in a local restaurant. This group has recently suffered the loss of some of its most prominent leaders to military re-assignment and has yet to re-organise itself. It does still constitute the larger part of the membership of the local pagan internet special interest group, the 'National Capital Freenet Pagan Sig' with its 30+ active members. Another local discussion group is OttawaWitch@yahoo.com. Ottawa is also the home of the Pagan Federation / Fédération Païenne Canada (PFPC), a special interest advocacy group which interacts with federal and provincial agencies on matters of interest to Canadian Neo-pagans. It also sponsors an internet e-group (NationalPFPC@yahoogroups.com) and maintains a bi-lingual web site (www.pfpc.ca) featuring extensive FAQs on aspects of Canadian Neo-paganism. For a fuller description of the Ottawa communities, see Reid (2001a) and Tyrell (1992).

2. WOMEN'S CIRCLES: My primary group of study are those women of the Ottawa / Outaouais region who participate in 'Women's Groups' with their Goddess-centred, women-only devotional circles. These women include Wiccan / Neo-pagan women who do not consider themselves religious segregationists along gender lines, i.e.: they do not conceive of their religion and of its

practices as necessarily excluding men. They also include those women who circle only with other women, many of whom consider themselves to be Dianic Witches (6). Both groups of women interact at non-religious events (Pagan gatherings, festivals, non-theological workshops and lectures, clothing swaps, song groups) and use many of the same facilities such as bookstores and services such as midwives. There is no apparent friction between these two groups of women. The friction, when it occurs, is between the Wiccan / Neopagan women and men, and is generated in part by the inability of either the men or the women to come to a mutual understanding relative to the women's participation in forms of devotion that exclude men.

3. TIME SPAN: In hindsight, my fieldwork started when I first encountered 'Witches' and they let me join in their Full Moon circle in October of 1989. That first night, I chose to identify myself as an anthropologist not knowing that two of the women members were also completing academic studies and using the circle as a fieldwork opportunity (Mary Slade and Michelle Hrynyk). I have always publically admitted to academic curiosity and I have benefited from this community's experience in being both a training ground for insider advocates and outsider researchers (see DuFresne, Tyrell, Rabinovitch, Reid, Slade).

V - RITUAL STUDIES:

The ritualists working in Neo-paganism and Goddess Worship circles in Ottawa are likely to have read the academic classics including the Ritual Studies scholarly literature which I am using for this research.

Such authors as Victor Turner, Mary Douglas, Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung were explicitly presented in the Wiccan Church of Canada training material and displayed on the Occult Shop and Hungry Eye book shelves. They were also implicitly present in much of the how-to books produced for this community. Liminal and liminality, initiation and transformation, marginal and central are all concepts and even words commonly used by individuals, both male and female, to discuss the ritual process and their own growing sophistication in manipulating it. This community, with its strong ties to the local universities and colleges (7), prides itself on its literacy and its main non ritual public gathering places had been book stores until the closing of the Hungry Eye. Now these are a Sunday Brunch and a Wednesday night Pub Moot as well as summer gatherings such as Kaleidoscope.

Many early and current formulators of Wiccan theology have been trained in Jungian psychology (Vivienne Crowley, Janet Farrar, Starhawk) and concepts such as 'anima' / 'animus', 'archetype', 'collective unconscious' and 'gender

polarity' have become commonplace and have been blended with concepts from Theosophy such as 'thought form projections', 'auras', and 'astral plane'. Dion Fortune's (Mary Violet Firth) books, especially *SEA PRIESTESS* (1938/1978) and *MOON MAGIC* (1956) have been best sellers in Ottawa and her portrayal of the strong female magus, the 'priestess', has been strongly influential locally. In fact, much of the Western esoteric tradition has been influential as sources of explanatory schemes for experience, goals and methods used by both male and female members of this community.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that for these women, both Western esoteric and traditional British Wiccan symbolic systems and ritual procedures have been left behind or deeply modified. I will focus on these changes.

As for myself, I have approached rituals as explicit moments when mythopoeic themes and symbols are manipulated, by individuals or groups, within a structured setting where the divine and the human are understood as conjoined (inherently embodied), such that new human concepts, beliefs and behaviours can be experienced, experimented with, and developed so as to then make them manifest (lived concretely) in the 'real world' outside of ritual.

I brought to this research my own work experience as an ethnographer, and my

interest in the theoretical perspective developed within anthropology. My analysis of the ethnographic data was also informed by parameters first developed for Ritual Studies. Victor Turner provided the main concepts for my analysis of ritual setting and ritual processes. Mary Douglas has been useful in approaching the concept of power, especially the power inherent in marginality and its conscious adoption and manipulation.

VI - TEXTUAL ANALYSIS:

The same situation prevails in the generation of sacred texts. The community under study reads and works with the same literary and theoretical material as used by the researcher. The number of books, articles, and magazines now generated by and for this community is staggering. There are at least six major publishing houses (8) now specializing, in part or in whole, in Pagan / Wiccan writings. Within this context, I will restrict myself to the texts in use during the rituals.

The religious community in question generates its own texts and rituals as well as using texts which have been printed in books and magazines printed in England, America and Canada. Except for those groups which have a vested interest in dogmatic 'purity' and 'orthodoxy', no attempt is made by any individuals or groups to formulate a corpus of standard texts which would be

reused. In fact, the norm for this community is ephemeral texts and rituals, thus fostering constant creativity within the ritual format. As Griffin (1995) has noted for the groups she studied: "And as no two rituals are ever exactly alike, they (women) continue to engage in this process of creation each and every time they do rituals."

Nevertheless, there is consensus on the minimum constituent parts to a ritual and on the necessity of some formulaic phrases and actions and some core symbols. Furthermore, at least one of the Women's Groups has kept a group "Book of Shadows", a compendium of past ritual texts that are available to any woman in the group as a set of models for texts that she might choose to generate. The task then becomes to identify core ritual texts and ceremonies which serve to define the nature of the divine, appropriate human gender relations or the roles of Priest and Priestess (9) and to analyse these texts in relationship to their treatment of 'body' and 'goddess'.

To the researcher's task, I added my own long term interest in the feminist movement, which provided another set of referents. This research is very much a feminist deconstructive task accomplished through a thematic analysis. This analysis is focussed on expressions of the body: the body of the Goddess and the body of the woman. Style and Voice (who speaks to whom and how) will be

analysed for relevant features. Furthermore, the type of text produced (song, invocation, blessing, meditation, other) will also be analysed to uncover power relations and dynamics as well as the inherent cosmology they reveal. The 'body' with all its senses and functions, will be analysed according to its centrality as THE metaphor through which the contact with the divine occurs for these women.

Following Ostriker's example (1993:66-7), I will examine these women's writings from the triune strategies of the hermeneutics of suspicion, desire and indeterminacy. According to Ostriker, the hermeneutic of suspicion derived from the deeply felt suspicion women felt when confronted by canonical readings of biblical texts which evidenced a deep seated male bias which sought to entrench misogyny in divine revelation. Next developed a hermeneutic of desire, as women sought out woman affirming images and texts within the canonical corpus. This feminist re-visioning, as it generated its own critiques and reformulations of stance and method has given rise finally to a hermeneutic of indeterminacy (Ostriker 1993), within which it is the layering of multivocal, disparate and even contradictory discourses which when accepted as positioned and partial, give rise to a richer, and one could add, post-modern, re-constructed, and now firmly indeterminate reading of truths and views.

Finally, I go back to Simone de Beauvoir and her notion of a morality of ambiguity (1964) to analyse the extent to which these women find a solution to the paradoxes of gender, essence and nature. By comparing de Beauvoir's formulation to the degree of indeterminacy these women achieve in their relations to self, to the female other both human and divine, and finally, to the non female other, one perceives to what degree they actually succeed in their goal of an individualized and multiple realisation of a gendered self.

VII - ICONOLOGY (L'objet témoin)

I will approach the analysis of images of the Goddess from an iconological perspective. The lexicon of forms used to identify aspects of the Goddess will be inventoried and classified according to type. As well, their symbolic referent(s) will be identified and their specific theological referent(s) will be made explicit. Finally, their ritual functions will be defined and their meanings will then be linked to ritual actions and words.

Objects, as artifacts, 'made things', bear witness to their making and their use. They derive much of their meaning from the context of their use, reuse or discard. Ritual objects, as objects used in ritual or symbolic of ritual processes, bear added meaning as keys to understanding, to mystery, to action and to transformation. This idea of a "key" is paramount. These objects are meant not

only to be used but also to do, simply by existing and bearing witness to an intent. The intent for the women of this study, is to make manifest the Goddess and the power embodied in her creation, that is to say, the power within the world and more specifically, in human women. When asked, these women readily admit that the objects DON'T actually do anything, but the human reaction of recognition of a possibility is what actually can do. The object or representation is the KEY to that reaction, and a key that one has made for oneself is the most powerful of all. The self-made key that unlocks the power within:

Cold, dark and lonely
 Locked deep within my own fears
 No key to free me
 Waiting for the sun

Reposes-toi, mon âme
 Tu as tout ce qu'il te faut...

Let it begin with each step we take,
 And let it begin with each change we make,
 And let it begin with each chain we break,
 And let it begin every time we awake.

Women are, in this case, the major agents of religious innovation. They are the founders, the text writers and the philosophers. They are the askers of questions and the elaborators of answers. It is the women themselves who raise the issues of sex and gender as they confront the sexist and patriarchal oppression hidden within early Wiccan discourses on the Goddess and her

Priestesses. Addressing issues of sex and gender is an explicit concern for these women: they worry about the responsibilities inherent in socializing their children, both male and female, in Neo-paganism and the possibilities of having equal and equitable relationships with male partners, both in life and in ritual. These are central issues especially since for Wiccans and Neo-pagans, women are still considered the primary socializers, even more so than in the surrounding cultural norm because of the new idea of a woman centred culture with, as primary deity, a Mother Goddess (Berger 2000).

What are the implications of this idea of a women centred religion? Can it survive within the context of western patriarchal hegemony? Can a religion predicated on the ritual and actual equality of both divine and human males and females actually 'work'? These are the questions that these women are asking and their answers must be heard and pondered.

CHAPTER THREE: WOMEN'S GROUPS IN OTTAWA

My research is focussed mainly on the rituals, texts and images created and employed by women in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, who attend open public women's spirituality circles understood by them as Goddess Worship Circles. I also include those events outside of Ottawa at which these women interact in a ritual context with each other and with others. Therefore my sample of events includes seasonal festivals in the Eastern Townships of Quebec (TerreEau), in the Perth area west of Ottawa (Kaleidoscope, Ottawa Women's Weekend / Gynaecium), and north of Toronto (WiccanFest, HarvestFest). It also includes private, closed rituals which I attended which were Coven circles or women's Rite of Passage rituals. As well, I have included women's spirituality conferences and workshops that occurred in Ontario and to which I participated (see Appendix Ten). These gathered together anywhere from a dozen to over 800 women at a time. In total, over the time span of my participation in this community (1989 - 2002) I attended over 200 rituals and interacted with several thousand women. Though the women and the events that I encountered in the early 1980's in British Columbia (north of Hazelton, in Vancouver and Victoria, and on Bowen and Saltspring Islands) are part of my experience and contribute to my understanding of contemporary Canadian women's Goddess Worship, I did not know then what it was I was seeing and cannot now describe, except in the most impressionistic way, what I saw and

experienced. Of that time, I will only formally use the research I did on “Why Women Belly Dance” which resulted in my BA Honours paper (1984). I realise now that the women I had interviewed then were interacting with the Goddess, as they kept telling me they were, and that it was I who did not understand what they were saying. I did not myself interact with this same Goddess until 1989, after I had moved to Ottawa. The unanswered questions I had at the end of that research project have finally been answered by this one. Thus, they too form part of my data.

Women involved in Goddess spirituality in Ottawa interact through several types of ritual and non ritual events. They constitute ‘circles’ when they gather for rituals, and they form a community through the many layered web of interactions they engage in outside of rituals. Without ever being an easily defined ‘group’, they nevertheless are a recognisable (to themselves and to others) assemblage of like minded women with similar interests and concerns. They attend classes and workshops on magical and non-magical subjects at several new age or occult stores. They take extension and adult education courses together. They teach each other textile skills from sewing to carding and spinning wool with a drop spindle. They have seasonal clothing swaps. They shop in many of the same stores and have similar tastes. They share expertise in formal and informal settings, teaching each other tarot, herb gardening, wild

food harvesting, basket weaving, and incense making. They provide each other with paid expertise: midwifery, secretarial work, internet and web based work, house cleaning, accounting, and child care. They spend time together at their own weekend retreats: Wild Womyn Weekend and Ottawa Women's Weekend (now called Gynaecium). They attend the annual Witches' Ball on Halloween. Many participate in mixed gender, community wide events like open Sabbat Circles and large, regional summer pagan festivals: Kaleidoscope, WiccanFest, HarvestFest, TerreEau. Most of these activities are primarily 'Pagan / Wiccan' rather than 'Goddess' oriented but the majority of the women in this community participate in the larger 'Pagan / Wiccan' community as well. The pagan population in the Greater Ottawa region is between two and three thousand strong. Kaleidoscope has had to move from private land to a commercial campground as it is now attracting over four hundred participants for its event in August. It is interesting to note that both Kaleidoscope and WiccanFest always offer 'women's rituals' which are women only events during their gatherings (there are also 'men's rituals' and gender mixed rituals that everyone can attend). Fifty or more women attend these women only circles. This provides the opportunity for women from Montreal to Toronto to circle together at least once a year and to do so for explicitly female reasons (intent of ritual). Who leads the ritual is chosen in rotation each year by the organisers of the larger events. Kaleidoscope, WiccanFest and TerreEau are all organized

by women even though they cater to the larger, gender mixed Pagan / Wiccan communities between Toronto and Montreal.

I - OTTAWA WOMEN'S CIRCLES

The Ottawa Women's Circles are identified more by the location they use (or used) for their rituals than on their memberships (extremely fluid), their thealogy or ritual style (both dependant on the specific ritual leader and not the group). The same women freely participate in as many groups for which they have time or inclination. Other than Around the Goddess which is known by its name, the other circles were always referred to by their locations, which custom I have adopted:

1. FULL MOON CIRCLE: Occult Shop, Bank Street, 1988 - 1994 (WCC sponsored until 1990, then independently run by the women involved.)

Attendance for this circle, at this location, was from 20 to 35 women at any time with a maximum of maybe fifty women who attended on a regular basis. This circle began as Michelle Hrynyk's women's mysteries coven as part of her training as a WCC priestess. This lasted less than two years. When the original group of 8 women (all WCC except one) disbanded because of frictions within the WCC, some other women (also WCC but neophytes, not degreed priestesses) took it over. It grew to become a large, well attended, public circle.

It also continued to be a thorn in the WCC's side as it was independent and did not provide recruits to the WCC. The women of this circle started out using the standard WCC ritual format and texts and eventually evolved a much more eclectic way of working, but it remained a group which prized itself on well prepared, formal rituals. Improvisation was not prevalent.

2. FULL MOON CIRCLE, Hungry Eye, Dalhousie Street, 1994 - 1998.

The attendance of women at any one circle remained around thirty, with approximately fifty women participating on an ongoing basis. When the Occult Shop store closed and their women's circle had to find a new place to meet, most of the members moved their head quarters to the Hungry Eye store and continued the tradition of a fully open, public circle with a rotating ritual leadership among 8-10 core members. The women in this circle became much more experimental in their ritual work. Innovation and creativity was much prized, as long as the ritual format and process remained understandable and recognizable. This group neither ascribed to a specific tradition nor did it seek to constitute itself into an entity. It remained whoever attended. Because of who made up the core group of volunteers, it tended to be more eclectic and experimental than the other groups. It actively encouraged women to try their hand at leading ritual.

3. WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY GROUP: Unitarian Universalist (UU) Church, Cleary Ave, mid-1990's - ongoing.

This group is ideally composed of all the women of the congregation but actually has a core of twelve to fifteen women, of whom most but not all, have also participated in the Full Moon Circle at the Bank Street and Dalhousie Street locations. These women also organize a "Fairy Magic" circle for their children, as well as offering "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven" and "Rise Up and Call Her Name" workshops. Ritual format follows a generic Cunningham style Wiccan format with a strong emphasis both on exploring aspects of named historical Goddesses and rediscovering European seasonal traditions (foods, customs, folk beliefs). These women have the strongest emphasis of all on children and family.

4. LUNACY DARK MOON CIRCLE, private homes, 1998 - ongoing.

Following the demise of the Hungry Eye in 1998, the women of the Women's Circle dispersed and were absorbed into private covens and other public circles such as the UU and Around the Goddess. A few stayed together and started meeting in each other's homes. As a result of one woman's comment that it was lunacy to try to keep the circle going, the group named itself "Lunacy" and now meets monthly at the dark of the moon.

This circle is comprised of six core members with occasional guests. The group is currently changing and growing as more members are being attracted by its bi-lingual and university student make-up. Some circles are improvised in French when only Francophone members show up. This circle is the closest to being a training coven of all the groups listed as it has a senior member actively coaching the others to gain their own priestessing skills and experience. It is the most improvisational and least formal of all the groups in spite of its senior member being WCC trained.

5. OTTAWA WOMEN'S WEEKEND / GYNEACEUM: yearly event (late June), held on private land in MacDonald's Corner near Perth. This three day weekend retreat with rituals and workshops generally has ten to thirty women attending the daytime events and another ten to fifteen coming for the Saturday evening pot-luck supper. This small gathering was held for seven or eight years in the late 1990's, but is currently on hiatus. There is now a strong interest amongst some of the Ottawa women to restart it.

6. AROUND THE GODDESS: Circles are held in private homes, in indoor public venues (Glebe Community Centre, Old Town Hall, school gymnasiums) during the winter and in Vincent Massey Park during the summer, early 1980's - ongoing.

The core members of this group have all received some Reclaiming / Witch Camp training. This means they have ties to Starhawk and to the San Francisco Reclaiming Tradition with which she is closely identified. This circle is the most politicized of all the women's groups studied. It is also the largest and oldest of the groups having been in continuous existence since the early 1980's. It has twenty to thirty core members with approximately two hundred longstanding participants. There is some occasional participation in this group by all the women of the above mentioned groups. The members of Around the Goddess also use the facilities at the Parcival School when holding large public, mixed gender rituals (ex: an anti-globalisation ritual with Starhawk in 2001). This circle has a variety of community ties including the Ottawa Women's Bookstore (now closed), Mothertongue Books, Arbour (ecological store), OPIRG (Ottawa Public Information Research Group), various women's shelters, rehab centres, Planned Parenthood, Day Care advocacy groups, and Lesbian and Female Bisexual communities. Many of Ottawa's mid-wives are also participants. Since their winter public venue is the Glebe Community Centre, a large number of their occasional participants also live in the Glebe. The women of this circle frequent the Wheat Berry / Singing Pebbles Books / Three Trees / Green Door complex of shops on Main Street in front of the University of St. Paul. When Sarah Clothes (a Glebe shop that primarily sold romantic, gently flowing Indian cotton voile clothing) was open, many of the women shopped there for their

clothes. They also constituted a large proportion of the Occult Shop's Saturday clientele where they were often more or less affectionately referred to as the Glebe matrons in their Sarah Clothes and Birkenstock sandals. In many ways, they have defined the 'look' of Goddess women in Ottawa. These are the women most likely to espouse gender isolationist views and to support cultural feminism and its utopia of a matriarchal society. Nevertheless, because of their close ties with ecological and political activism, they are beginning to hold gender mixed open circles for some of the major Sabbats at which the men involved in these same socio-political causes can attend. The above mentioned ritual with Starhawk had over 200 participants with a 65/35, women to men ratio.

7. PRIVATE OR CLOSED COVENS: private homes, mid to late 1970's-ongoing. There are a number of - the lowest estimate being ten - 'closed' covens or groups in the Ottawa area that are primarily women only. These are very small (two to six members) and meet in private homes for their rituals. Membership (the term is appropriate here) is by invitation and sometimes revolves around a specific individual or is constituted of close friends or adherents to a specific 'tradition' of Wicca or Neo-paganism (Alexandrian, Gardnarian, Celtic, Druidic, Odyssean / WCC, other).

One such closed group was the WYRD SISTERS comprised of six to eight women. This coven met at the full moon, during the mid to late 1990's, at the home of one of the members who lived near the Green Belt in Bells Corners. They had found a natural grove in the green space and had converted it to a ritual space with central fireplace and circular cleared area around it. They continued to meet for over 5 years and only disbanded when the original leader (Aida) left Ottawa. All but one of the remaining women began attending rituals and being active in other groups.

This group was the most 'shamanic' of the various groups I encountered. They sought and often achieved deep mystical experiences during their rituals. Music, drumming, dance and even the use of entheogens were for them common ritual processes. They were the most deeply committed to communion with the consciousnesses of the world around them (their way of saying 'divinity') which they achieved through a blending of Neo-paganism and Amerindian spiritual practices with re-created greco-roman mysticism and a rather romantic but highly effective metaphorical adaptation of the renaissance 'witch' as a woman of power. Thus their adoption of Shakespeare's Wyrld Sisters of Macbeth as their model and moniker.

The total number of women involved in the Ottawa Goddess community over

the span of the past twelve years is between two to three hundred with well over sixty-five percent still involved. This is a fluid group with some entering and leaving of participants. One cannot speak of 'members' as only the core groups (organising committees) can be said to have any specific identity or stability. These groups are defined more by the location they use for rituals and the make up of the participants of any one ritual than anything else. Some women attend the rituals of only one group, others attend as many as they can manage at any one time. Some again have drifted in and out of the groups over time. Women know each other by sight, may know each other's first names, rarely know more about each other except for what may be disclosed within circle or socially outside of circle. In some ways, this is like AA and other 'anonymous' groups: a great deal of intimacy, caring and friendship can develop without the disclosures of identity that usually denote familiarity (family name, marital status, husband's job, etc.).

Women both embrace this anonymity for its freeing of inhibitions and are embarrassed by it when they realize how few names they can put with the many women they know. This is liminal communitas, these women know that in circle they shed their public persona and reveal themselves as intimately as they dare. They know that to circle is to 'bathe in the cauldron' and that they cannot prevent transformation. In essence, the community they recognize as

their own is as marginal, liminal and ever-changing as they themselves seek to be by circling together.

Air moves us,
 Fire transforms us,
 Water shapes us,
 Earth heals us.
 And the balance of the wheel goes round and round
 And the balance of the wheel goes round.

II - DEMOGRAPHICS:

1. Demographics of Women's Circles:

The majority of women who attended and participated in the circles I sampled are white, have a middle class upbringing (but were not necessarily currently of this same economic standing because of widowhood, divorce, or single parenthood), are mostly thirty to sixty years old, (the oldest I have met was in her 80's, the youngest in her mother's arms), educated, literate and come from Christian or Humanist backgrounds. Catholics are visible and numerous. There are women of other religious backgrounds (some Buddhist and Jewish women, no Muslims that I know of), and other ethnic groups (oriental, black, Hispanic, Métis) but they are very few and do not seem to be from strong cultural backgrounds. By this I mean that other than obvious physical characteristics (skin colour, hair texture, linguistic accent), their 'difference' seems invisible since culturally they are very similar to their Anglo, white, protestant counterparts. Most women assume that their circles are integrated and highly

varied, and certainly the ideal the women hold is for them to be so. The reality is somewhat different, in part maybe because Ottawa is only recently becoming ethnically mixed (I grew up in Ottawa and I saw my first black person when American Vietnam war dissidents started coming to Canada). Certainly, visibly different women would be welcomed in greater numbers if they cared to participate. In all of these characteristics, Ottawa women are no different than their American counterparts (Adler, Christ, Eller, Griffin, Walker). The only outstanding differences are that Goddess spirituality started in Canada maybe 5 years later than in the USA (early 1980's) and that there is audible linguistic diversity at and during circles (1).

Goddess worship circles are celebrated in English as the women are predominantly Anglophone, many speaking no other language. A fair number (≈ 20) are Franco-Ontarians or Québécoises. They rarely circle in their own language unless they make a concerted effort to do so amongst themselves. French literature on Neo-paganism and Wicca is very rare and has only recently become available. Scott Cunningham's two most popular books have just been translated into French in Quebec (1998, 1999) but neither Starhawk nor any other Wiccan / Pagan author, and no French language material is yet being produced for other than private use by Canadian Francophones (DuFresne 1999a). As of yet there is no tension between the linguistic groups within the

Ottawa women's circles. From rumours I have heard, the same may not be true of circles in Montreal where the population is mainly Francophone but circles are held and led by Anglophones who make up the majority of the Pagan / Wiccan community.

In Ottawa, it is not unusual for many languages to be heard during any one ritual as each woman may speak in her native tongue (Spanish, Italian, German, Hungarian, other) without it causing a disturbance to the ritual process. This may be because:

- the ritual format is well known and responses such as "Blessed Be" need not be said in English for them to be recognised;
- disclosing is more important than hearing, i.e., it is more important to state to one's self and to others what one's own truth is than to hear and understand what someone else is saying. Nevertheless, 'witnessing' as the un-judgmental acknowledgement of someone else's statements about self is an extremely important and 'powerful' element of the ritual process;
- individualism as expressed through the format of one's verbal responses is more important and 'true' than a strict adherence to any standard liturgy or text;
- diversity is highly cherished and creativity and spontaneity are both essential elements of a 'good' ritual;

- speaking from the heart / finding one's own voice / speaking in one's own mother tongue are all axiomatic values and speaking in one's literal 'mother's tongue' fulfills an important symbolic, political and religious function, i.e.: the making audible of a matrifocal self-identification and 'appartenance' at both the human (my mother's child) and divine (daughter of the Goddess) level.

These women are less rich than 'New Agers', as many have chosen alternate lifestyles (sexual orientation, the arts, political activism, voluntary simplicity) while others have found themselves raising children alone. Some are on welfare or some other kind of fixed income such as disability pensions while others are still attending University. Displaying wealth is frowned upon as it is seen as a kind of patriarchal 'power over' and creative self-reliance as exemplified by skill in textile arts or other female domestic skills is highly prized. Congruent with this valuing of 'voluntary simplicity' and 'debrouillardise' are impromptu group events which support individual and group adherence to them. These include but are not limited to seasonal clothing swaps and exchanges of skills, for example: house cleaning for sewing, or fresh garden produce for a tarot card reading.

In the past five years the number of young women in their late teens and early twenties attending these circles has risen. This may be because of the popularity

of television shows and movies with 'witchy' characters and content like Buffy, Charmed, Practical Magic, and The Craft and the greatly expanded availability of Pagan / Wiccan books, Goddess oriented literature, 'Goth' culture and the general visibility and growing acceptance of these (Becker 1990; Stapells 1999). Another reason for the rise in young attendees is that some of these young women are daughters of older women already involved in Goddess or Wiccan practice.

An interesting difference in the acceptance of 'under-aged' participants in circles between Neo-pagan and Goddess worship groups is that Neo-pagans severely limit access to their circles, even public circles, to young people who are not family members of adult participants because they fear negative repercussions for themselves of possible disapproval by society at large. Goddess women seem quite unafraid of negative repercussions and have, as far as I know, always accepted the participation of younger women and girls, even if not accompanied by an older female family member. In fact, much of the ritual elaboration now being devised in Ottawa specifically addresses the lack of rites of passage for most females in North America. These women see themselves as wanting and needing to integrate their daughters and the daughters of their friends in their ritual experience and process. What comes of this will be interesting to learn.

Within these women's ritual groups, sexual orientation, marital status, and number of children are not criteria used to assess a woman's 'suitability'. There does seem to be a slight pro-lesbian bias but heterosexual women no longer are targeted for the kinds of political correctness gibes that were common in the early 1980's. Feminist women, even womyn, no longer seem to consider men 'the enemy' nor do they display or demand the kinds of cultural norms of behaviour, dress and sexual orientation that used to be derided as "Feminazis" by the larger Neo-pagan gender mixed community: the aesthetics of 'butch' dress and behaviour, that is, a strict avoidance of anything 'feminine' and the adoption of a style of dress characterised by closely cropped hair, unshaven body, absence of make-up or hair dye, loose and mannish dress and sandals or low heeled, round toed boots. As more and younger women get involved, a larger range of dress and behaviour is becoming visible and accepted.

In the past eight years, there are more couples with young children appearing in the Ottawa Pagan community as Wiccan / Neo-pagans in their twenties and thirties pair up and start families. Most of these married Pagan / Wiccan women attend Goddess circles as well as gender mixed circles without perceiving this as anything else but "added value" to their ascription to Neo-paganism. They do not perceive themselves as making a political statement regarding women's religious agency, the way older women (40 and older) still do.

2. Demographics of Conferences:

Conferences, workshops and meetings both in town and out of town are important events as they offer primary opportunity for research, meeting people, conversations, learning new ritual formats and assessing the strength and breath of the Goddess movement. Women from Ottawa will readily travel to Toronto or Montreal to attend a lecture or a workshop from someone like Starhawk.

The conferences I attended can be broken down into three types: academic, ecumenical, and goddess. The academic and ecumenical conferences included a mix of art exhibits, rituals, workshops, academic paper presentations, film screenings, merchant/craftspeople displays, lectures, performances and key note addresses. The goddess conferences were more like weekend long, multi stage rituals during the day and public conferences during the evening when public lectures were scheduled. The day time events were intensive experiential workshops presented within a ritual circle framework. These events are intensely hands-on and do not lend themselves to casual observation. They are training opportunities for those who wish to hone their ritual skills.

a) ACADEMIC CONFERENCES:

(York U. 1996, Divina et Femina I, II, III, 1998 -2000, University sponsored)

The participants of academic conferences have the largest range of ages and backgrounds. These conferences are similar to other academic conferences in that they are predominantly attended by persons who are interested in researching the phenomenon rather than those who are active participants. Both men and women participate at all levels, nevertheless, women are present in much greater numbers.

b) ECUMENICAL CONFERENCES:

(London, Ont. 1995; St Paul U., Ottawa 2002 - Church sponsored)

The ecumenical conferences have attendees who are generally older, white, richer, Anglophone, small c conservative, obviously heterosexual, and mostly practising Christian, with some nuns, Buddhists, and Goddess worshippers. These conferences are focussed on exploring the possibility of a 'female' / feminist voice in worship, still trying to find the FEMININE FACE OF GOD (Anderson & Hopkins 1991), still seeking ways to reform the Christian churches from the inside, sharing the surprise and delight at the discovery and experience of God as Mother / Father, God / dess, and female ritual agency. These are the events with the largest attendance, ex: London, Ontario had 850+ women from all over Canada.

c) GODDESS CONFERENCES:

(Starhawk, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), Toronto 1995 and Starhawk / Donna Reed, Ottawa 1993 - Women sponsored)

The goddess conference attendees are more diverse economically, culturally, ethnically and in their political backgrounds, have a wider span of ages (from early teens to late sixties), are more culturally and socially 'alternative', reveal a more obvious range of sexual orientation, and display far less tolerance for normative anything, especially religion. They are also the ones most likely to self-identify as Witches, Wild Wimmin, Wiccans or Pagans and to be most consciously invested in challenging and changing gender identities and roles.

CHAPTER FOUR: FEELING THE BODY

The earth is my church
The body is my altar (1)

If we bless our bodies, they will bless us (Steinem 1987:248).

I - THE PHYSICAL SETTINGS OF THE RITUALS (see Appendix Three - Floor Plans)

The actual physical locations used for women's rituals in Ottawa have included settings as varied as store fronts, public parks, university class rooms, and even hospital rooms. The physical location does not theoretically make much of a difference since one is supposed to be able to 'cast' a circle anywhere at any time. For these women, being 'in circle' is a state of mind and not a function of place or time. As one version of the Casting of the Circle states: "This is a place out of place and a time out of time". Nevertheless, practical considerations of safety, privacy, space, comfort, aesthetics and symbolism will all contribute to a setting's success or failure as ritual space. What follows is a description and commentary on the various semi-permanent settings used by the women in Ottawa to hold their group rituals.

1. THE OCCULT SHOP: Open from 1985 To 1994, the Occult Shop (originally the Wiccan Rede) was located on Bank Street, just north of the Glebe, a quiet and upscale, older residential area in the centre of Ottawa. Here the ritual

space was the central basement room of the store. This room was a rectangular space entered after descending a set of stairs located mid-point along the right side wall of the upper floor. The room had two doorways placed in alternate corners of the two short walls. The walls were originally panelled in dark wood, later they were covered, ceiling to floor, with black matte fabric. The cement floor was covered with dark grey indoor/outdoor carpeting. There were no heating units or ventilation ducts in the room, and there was only indifferent cleaning being done by the store staff or WCC members.

As a result the space was uncomfortable - hot in the summer, cold in the winter, and due to the lack of ventilation, the scent of old incense and body odours lingered and the floor was hard and unpleasant to sit on for any length of time. Yet there was a womb-like quality to its total darkness. Also, with frequent and longstanding use there developed a sense of familiarity. And as the space was rarely seen in full lighting and hardly used outside of ritual, there was also an aura of mystery to it (what you can't see...).

The women who organized and participated in the Full Moon Circles held there never felt that they 'owned' the room. It was and remained at all times the WCC 'Temple' and the women only rituals were perceived by members of the WCC (both male and female) as aberrant and the non-WCC women as

interlopers. Relationships between the WCC and the women's circle remained extremely strained during the whole of the 6 to 7 years that the women's circle met at this location.

2. HUNGRY EYE OCCULT BOOKS AND SUPPLIES: The ritual space used was located in the central large square room of the store. The store was a converted living unit on the street level of an older apartment building on Dalhousie Street north of the Byward Market area. This is a mixed commercial and residential area, one of the oldest in the city. This central room was entered through a long passage way that began at the front door of the shop and ran parallel to the adjacent stairway up to the other living units located on floors above. These apartments were accessed from a separate external doorway.

The store's central room also had a door in the back wall leading to a back room. The front room had store shelving on all its pale green painted walls but the centre of the room was cleared. The cement floor was covered with linoleum tiles and a wool rug was unrolled for any event involving sitting. Warm crocheted afghans and pillows were used in the winter. Both long walls had electric baseboard heating units. There was a large window at ceiling height in the back wall and the front door to the street was windowed from top to bottom. It was covered with a bamboo screen during rituals such that the room

could not be observed from the outside. Accordingly, the space had adequate ventilation and heating most of the time but poor sound-proofing.

Both stores suffered from being commercial sites and in the view of some, both men and women, could not be appropriate settings for ritual use. On the plus side, the sites did allow for large (thirty or more people) indoor rituals in any kind of weather.

Both sites were perceived as politically coded (WCC / not WCC) which served to make them political battlegrounds at times. This affected the Pagan / Wiccan gender mixed clientele more than the women only Goddess circles which tended to be more independent of any attempt at factionalism or potential political / religious monopoly.

Both sites offered a more politically relaxed setting than the Around The Goddess circles for those women who did not espouse gender isolationism or radical feminist politics. This may have been because the commercial sponsors of both establishments were themselves heterosexual and advocated pro gender dual religiosity. This did not prevent the circles themselves from being negatively perceived by those who did not attend them (both men and those women who were more fiercely gender isolationists).

3. AROUND THE GODDESS: (Please note that my participant-observer comments are based on those rituals held at Vincent Massey Park that I attended. I was never a frequent participant in these rituals as they often coincided with the rituals held in the stores for which I had to be present since, as employee or owner, I was responsible for the security of the stores themselves).

The Around the Goddess circles are held outdoors in the summer months in a natural grove in a large public park (Vincent Massey park along the Rideau River). This grove has a central stone fire pit and a stone fireplace and grill on one of its edges. The area is lightly gravelled and is bordered in squared cedar log benches which define a circle far enough away from the central fire pit for forty or more people to stand in a single width circle around it. The grove is surrounded by mature trees and bushes with at least two paths leaving in approximately 180 degree orientation to each other. A low stone wall flanks one side of the circle where the ground drops away, the other side rises to a small hill. The grove is not visible from the parking lot or the other parts of the park. It is rented out by the city to groups for picnics, weddings, and circles. The city has had no issues with women only or mixed gender rituals, but men only rituals have been dispersed by police who were called (by whom?) because the men were noisy, wearing robes, brandishing staves and athames and carrying

alcohol. This is something of a joke within the Pagan community at large since women also are sometimes robed, use staves and athames and carry alcohol.

A city issued permit has to be obtained and there has been some friction between the WCC (and the Witches Gathering, Michelle Hrynyk's current group, comprised of former WCC members in Ottawa) and Around the Goddess. Around The Goddess has priority and long standing use rights for this space which the WCC resented. Rental is first come, first served and Around The Goddess always seemed to be better organized than the WCC.

As far as comfort is concerned: mosquitoes, rain, wind, cold, heat stroke, spectators, and nature in all its variants is about the worst of it. This rarely posed a real problem as long as ritualists stayed open to improvisation and participants remembered they were outside and had brought along the necessary bug repellent, rain coats, sunscreen, water, etc. This is a highly coveted ritual space and Ottawa's Pagans and Goddess women have felt privileged to have access to it.

It must also be noted that the police and other Ottawa authorities have been quite 'laissez-faire' about public Pagan rituals. As long as no by-laws are

contravened (alcohol consumption is permitted in the private grove, re wedding receptions, etc.) and the public peace is not broken, the city sees no impediment.

4. PRIVATE HOME: The major perceived drawback to holding rituals in private homes is that the space available is usually only suitable for small groups (10 max). Nevertheless, this setting does afford the maximum amount of privacy and comfort. This setting is perceived as potentially intimidating by some women because of the possibility of tensions arising from large social and/or monetary differences between circle participants. Thus obvious social and economic disparity is perceived as a potential source of 'power' disparity between circle participants. Some women insist in meeting ONLY in public and thus 'neutral' venues.

Other sources of perceived difficulties with the use of private homes are external to the group's dynamics. Sometimes family members can, wilfully or inadvertently, introduce conflict where none existed before if a woman's involvement in Goddess circles is not approved of or understood by her family members. Another difficulty is that homes do not tend to be centrally located so some participants may find that transportation becomes an issue especially if a ritual runs late or is on a weekend. (Both stores were centrally located and

on multiple bus routes while the Vincent Massey Park site is also on main bus routes and contiguous to one of the public bike trails.)

Nevertheless, for small circles of friends, the living room or the kitchen is often the ritual space of choice and the domestic setting has strong symbolic import for most of these women. For many, the task becomes one of blending the best of the private domestic setting with the size, availability, neutrality, and accessibility of the public 'open' setting. For the women of the Hungry Eye, this was achieved in part through the use of hand made pillows and afghans and the brewing of a 'crockpot' full of tea with which to greet women as they arrived.

5. MACDONALD'S CORNER / GINA'S FARM: This site is a great setting due to its size and semi wild terrain. It is an old farm that has been left to naturalize, and which has had ritual areas established on it by long use by private coveners (Silverwheel, and others) and public festivals (Kaleidoscope, Women's Weekend).

This location has a number of outdoor sites available for ritual use in the form of natural groves. These come complete with central fire pits and permanent and semi-permanent stone altars. Add to this the well cleared pathways, the clean outhouses, the abundant running (cold) water and weatherproof

accommodations (Gina's very large enclosed porch and a newly re-roofed old log barn both serve as enclosed space for workshops and rituals in inclement weather) and it seems that, in the eyes of the local Pagan and Goddess communities, this site manages to blend the positive characteristics of both park and private home.

Admittedly the mosquitoes can be fierce, the summer heat can be oppressive in the afternoon, and shade can be lacking if the ritual is poorly timed. Nevertheless, many hold this site to be their best loved public setting.

6. WYRD SISTERS GROVE: This location is a natural grove in the Green Belt 'somewhere' in Bells Corners (a suburb of Ottawa). It takes a good half hour to get there walking from the edge of the green space, through a meadow and overgrown brush with occasional lilac trees left over from old farm steads, past a lightening blasted tree (Hecate's Broom) to a stand of fir/maple/elm which has a stone fire pit constructed within it. This space has been a favourite bush party spot, and broken glass bottles did have to be cleaned up quite often, but circle was interrupted only once by teenage boys who wanted to know if the women were 'witches'. The women were dressed in black (it was Samhain) and setting up an altar and they refused to explain themselves. When the women finally replied that yes, they were witches and then didn't explain further, the

boys left rather soon after, either through boredom or nerves, or a blend of both.

This site was felt by the women of Wyrd Sisters to be the most powerful spot of all and the most wild and evocative, the least uncomfortable of the nature settings (fewer mosquitoes, etc.) and perhaps the most magical. This may be because the women of this group had worked together for a long time and 'meshed' or else they were all affected by the setting (night-time, full moon, very little noise from the city, the hike required to reach the site, most forested / most theatrical of all the settings used for ritual).

Perhaps its power lay in the real sense of liminality created here: the long walk in and then out, often in silence, having to bring everything in including ritual tools, water to douse the fire, and dry wood if it had been raining. This site retained a real sense of 'a place out of place, a time out of time', and an aura of connecting with the romanticised image of "herstorical" Goddess worship and female power (it was also the most 'witchy' and 'spooky'). The setting during ritual was truly timeless in both its calendar and clock sense. Neither historical era nor time of night could be easily ascertained, nor could the seasons at times be clearly felt. As the full moon shown over the tree tops and the forest creatures grew comfortable with the women's presence, time and place took on

eternal qualities.

7. CLASS ROOM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA: The setting for this circle is a room in one of the buildings on the university campus. Participants generally either sit on the floor, around a low round table which is used as a base for a central altar, or sit in comfy chairs around this same table. The rest of the room's desks and chairs are stacked and set out of the way. This site works well for six to eight people.

This room overlooks a public transitway, so the noise from the buses can be distracting, as can the presence of campus security guards doing their rounds. The fire alarms and water sprinklers have to be taken into consideration if incense is used. Further, privacy is uncertain as the door locks only from the outside and not from the inside. While the setting is in many ways artificial and incongruous it still works, even for someone who is participating in a circle for the first time.

8. PATIENT'S ROOM, MONTFORT HOSPITAL: Another seemingly unusual site for a circle was a small cramped room in an obstetrics ward where one of the community's women was undergoing a medical abortion (dead fetus). The women of the Occult Shop Full Moon Circle who knew her best and chose to

accompany her during this ordeal (8 - 12 women over two days) gathered around her sitting where they could on the chair, cot, and the patient's bed or standing in the space available. No altar or other ritual setup was used. No candles were lit. Some flowers were brought, a few crystals were laid on the bed within easy reach of the patient, and a talisman pouch had been prepared before hand and was given to her to keep. The ritual setting was built and maintained through voice, physical proximity, emotional intensity, and clear focus. Though this setting could be thought to be the least conducive to ritual, it was felt by the women involved to be where one was most needed.

Some women wanted and were able to stay for the whole of the time it took for the abortion to occur. The woman's paraplegia slowed the process down so that it took the better part of two days. Most women came and went as they could and needed. Many stayed the better part of one day. No formal structure was given to this ritual: it consisted mainly of supportive presence, massage, hand holding, singing, conversation, sharing, and what passes for prayer for these women: a wished for intent expressed as a firm assertion or a respectful invocation of an external power's intercession. Though one woman was the main ritual leader for the whole process, many women took leadership roles at certain moments and for certain purposes during the day that I was there.

The lack of privacy, the constant passage of nurses and doctors and the general medical hubbub did not prevent intent to manifest which was to calm, soothe, and comfort through presence, song and chants. Even the medical staff found the ritual beneficial for them! One nurse commented on the ease and lack of complications of this medical intervention and on how 'lucky' the woman was to 'have such good friends'.

The ritual process was not immediately perceived by the medical staff, though some were clearly bemused and even uneasy. The Montfort is the local Francophone, and thus at least nominally Catholic, hospital in the region. Those nurses who had European midwifery training understood immediately what was happening. Nevertheless, the doctors and the other nurses eventually came to appreciate what they were 'witnessing', to quote one of them.

II - RITUAL PROTOCOL:

1. WHAT IS CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE AND GIVEN APPROVAL:

Within a mythos of 'sisterhood', 'perfect love and perfect trust', and 'all acts of pleasure and love are my sacraments', certain qualities of ritual space are more valued than others. These include comfort, safety, privacy, enough time, appropriateness, respect, laughter / surprise, inclusiveness /hands-on/ participation, familiarity / recognition, fun / creativity / playfulness, pleasure,

beauty, meaningfulness, emotion, and song. These components or characteristics are not ordered here in any way. Each woman would rate them differently but as a whole, they identify what these women consider important, necessary and good for a proper ritual.

a) COMFORT: In Ottawa women's circles, the comfort level of participants is given quite a lot of attention especially if the ritual is long or participants include the young, the old, or the differently able. This attention allows for the bringing of pillows, comfy chairs, blankets, or a glass of water into circle and the ensuring of a comfortable room temperature and a certain minimum level of cleanliness. Participants are encouraged to wear loose clothes (not necessarily robes), and care is taken to identify and avoid or eliminate things that could offend, endanger (i.e.: trigger allergies or asthma) or cause discomfort and thereby impede everyone's full participation into trance or other aspects of the ritual.

b) SAFETY: A sense of safety is an essential prerequisite to these rituals. Care is again given to anything that might cause physical harm but also there is a general awareness of the possible psychological and physical limitations of the participants. This sensitivity to others' sense of safety may be a function of a good or experienced ritualist. Certainly, some ritual leaders seem to take no

notice of anything but their own intent. After a while, these last gain a reputation for 'uncomfortable' or 'embarrassing' rituals ... and see participation numbers drop.

Mechanical aspects of the ritual process are also perceived as potentially dangerous. Thus open flames (of candles or bonfire) can be a problem but the only time I saw someone 'go up in flames', the woman in question was inattentive and behaving irresponsibly. She had also been over indulging in cannabis and some considered her 'too high' to participate in ritual. (Drugs are not automatically proscribed but disruptive or irresponsible behaviour is.) Others quickly snuffed out the flames on her skirt and the women around her kept a vigilant eye on her for the rest of the ritual.

There is a greater likelihood that something on the altar will get damaged such as a glass candle holder breaking than that someone will get physically hurt. Nevertheless accidents do occur - the smoke from a fire can get too thick, candles tip over, the incense becomes overpowering, cinnamon oil placed directly on the skin can cause a skin reaction or alcohol flames flare dangerously high when poured into a hot cauldron ... Participants come to know and value which ritual leaders pay sufficient attention to safety of all kinds and most participants take responsibility for their own safety. This might be because

so many are also mothers of young children and are used to 'looking out' for potential hazards. In fact, an irresponsible woman is sometimes called 'a baby'.

c) **PRIVACY:** For most of the Ottawa women, privacy concerns are not as important as comfort but are still more of a limiting factor than safety. This includes issues around confidentiality and "outing". Participants of women's circles are expected and often explicitly instructed to use discretion and to respect each other's privacy needs. For example, one can talk about a circle to someone who was there but not usually to anyone else. Writing this thesis is a borderline case, I justify my disclosures in part because the women I circled with knew I was at university and that I was doing 'fieldwork' and because I am conscious of having to be especially careful in my disclosures. Furthermore, the final text of the thesis has also been read and commented by three women with which I have circled (Céline Leduc, Lorayne Katz and Shelley Rabinovitch) and I have taken their comments to heart. Over the years, many of the women I circled with have discussed with me aspects of my research and much of our discussions informs my descriptions and comments.

The other issue concerning privacy and to some degree, safety, is the general expectation that someone should feel free to disclose anything in circle and not feel herself either shamed or somehow diminished by that disclosure. Hence the

importance of darkness and silence within the ritual context and the adoption by many Goddess circles of the Quaker tradition of “speaking out of silence”, ie: letting individuals speak or not as they choose, as well as letting speech occur organically out of need rather than structurally out of ritual format or automatically out of some choreographed sequencing of participation. Silence itself is considered a speech act and is respected and accepted as such. The same is true of a woman’s choice of language in which to speak: French, English, Spanish, Italian, etc.

A final component of the need for privacy may derive from an aspect of women’s past histories that Rabinovitch’s (1992) research identified: many Canadian Neo-pagans / Wiccans self identify as having experienced in their past episodes of abuse of one kind or another and the Wiccan injunction to “Harm None” is to them a core need and belief. Recent (2002) Canadian government estimates that 1 in 4 men and 7 in 10 women will experience some form of sexual abuse by the time they are adults also support Rabinovitch’s findings and are congruent with the information self-disclosed by the women in Ottawa. To feel safe and to trust who is in circle and who is leading circle are primary needs and sources of some debate for these women. Questions of coercion or the possibility of coercion, or questions around discretion and privacy are often debated. Ritual leaders are judged, sometimes harshly, on their ability to foster

a sense of security and privacy for the women participating in circle.

d) ENOUGH TIME: Good time management skills are seen to create good ritual as lack of time, starting too late, and rushing during ritual are all considered serious breaches of protocol especially when the 'fault' lies with the ritualist. But equally serious is a participant's habitual lateness: she may find the door locked or the ritual started without her. There is a general sense that rituals which are too long and which 'drag' are bad but worst are those that are rushed or which don't have time allocated for socialising and sharing.

Another serious breach these women identify is when a ritual ends and women are rushed out of the place without sufficient time to regain normal consciousness and emotional equilibrium. This lack of time is experienced by them as both a lack of safety and comfort as well as a lack of respect for their emotional and psychic needs.

Most rituals end with at the very least a 'group hug'. Food and drink (tea or coffee) is available as the women clean up the space used. This informal, and again domestic, group activity is felt as a 'grounding' exercise returning the ritual participant to a mundane and profane consciousness and body awareness.

e) APPROPRIATENESS: Everything that occurs during a circle, not just the ritual aspects, is judged according to how appropriate it is felt to be and how well it speaks to the needs of the group's participants. This can include everything from the content being age appropriate (when children are in circle) to intention and / or community or gender politics. What happens in circle needs to be seen as being in synch with group dynamics, community events, seasonal motifs, the history of the group, etc. Some rituals have been spectacular failures when the ritualist did not pay enough attention to the participants' needs or local politics. The one that I remember best is a ritual containing a heavy handed, rather didactic 'meditation' on community building written and declaimed by a woman who was generally perceived as the worst offender against community co-operation.

Sometimes, lack of appropriateness can be as simple as a ritualist's inexperience being out of synch with the perceived importance of the ritual occasion. Depending on the occasion, this may be judged a major or minor fault. If major, the ritual may be perceived as being ineffective and needing to be redone by someone with more experience. In this case, most women elect to redo a ritual privately in their own homes at their personal altars. Rarely is a public ritual redone in a public venue. When I asked why, the reasons given included not wanting to hurt the inexperienced ritualist's feelings, not wanting

to make a scene or make matters worse, not wanting to identify someone as 'a better ritualist' or 'more responsible for the community' than another, and finally, the reason which seems to me to underpin all the others, 'its my responsibility to see to it that my experience of the ritual or the fulfilment of my intent be according to my standards and my needs'. Which is another way of stating the radical notion of individual freedom and absolute responsibility within which these women strive to operate.

f) RESPECT: Within circle, participants are enjoined to have respect for both themselves and others. The stated intent here is to create enough space for individuality of response, as well as room for dissent. Any speech or behaviour perceived to be 'preachy', judgmental, self deprecating or demeaning is, as a rule, gently pointed out and discouraged for its disrespectful and potentially damaging nature. Words are considered actions and their effects are considered tangible and real.

Another perceived lack of respect is 'invasion of space'. This can be anything from wearing overpowering scent, interrupting someone else, disregarding social cues about personal body space, making too much of someone's emotional response, not accepting the legitimacy of someone's preferences or disclosures. Anything that denies the existence, freedom, validity or legitimacy

of someone else is considered a lack of respect and can, in extreme cases, warrant an individual being unwelcomed.

Since it is not considered proper to actually prevent someone from participating, any group need to moderate certain behaviours can be difficult to implement. The usual mechanism used is what the Ottawa Pagan community calls 'voting with one's feet': the people affected don't participate for a while until the offending person either stops attending or moderates their behaviour. In extreme cases, admittedly very few and far between, someone, usually the store manager or one of the core members of a women's circle will find the task expected of her to speak with the offending person and let it be understood by her that she is not welcome to participate in future circles. (2)

The feminist sensibilities which favour radical inclusion, the Pagan / Wiccan ethos which states that the individual is the only authority in matters of morality, and the structural lack of any mechanism of social control within the community as a whole and women's circles in particular, make compliance to group norms of behaviour something impossible to impose and difficult to learn. Tolerance, avoidance, gentle chiding, and friendly mentoring are the most usual group and individual behaviours apparent in situations of perceived inappropriate behaviour and lack of respect.

g) LAUGHTER / SURPRISE: The majority of women in this community recognize and celebrate the value of these qualities in ritual. Many speak of the transformative nature of humour and the power of the unexpected. That which is familiar is not always best especially if transformation is part of the stated intent of the ritual and the implicit expectation of the participants. The unfamiliar opens the practitioner up to change by challenging expectations, exploding boundaries and opening vistas for change. Some rituals have degenerated into painfully funny burlesques of themselves, through accident, inexperience, exhaustion, the weather, circumstances, whatever. These rituals are always, and this is truly an absolute, are always considered 'the best' and a great cathartic release. Though the formal existence of clowning is not generally recognized or sought by the women of the Ottawa community, it is always greatly enjoyed when it spontaneously occurs. 'Chaotica' is considered a fitting female avatar of the perfidious nature of reality ... and for these women, worthy of celebration when She manifests in circle!

h) INCLUSIVENESS / HANDS ON / PARTICIPATION: For these women, it is imperative that there be 'room' for everyone to participate to the ritual in as many aspects as possible. Not willing to replicate the 'church' dynamics of 'just sitting there and listening', they seek out rituals and ritualists that will engage them on many levels. A ritual that involves just listening, unless it is specifically

accepted as trance work, may not be appreciated and may instead be viewed as 'showing off', theatrical, or 'churchy'. A ritual that is seen as too scripted is described as feeling forced or faked. Participants are vocal in their desire to be just that: 'participants' even if it means improvising something which might be perceived as less well crafted but more evocative. The women ascribe to the notion of 'inclusiveness', thus describing a ritual as inclusive when it is based on the premise that all may participate in its shaping as well as its experiencing.

Some of the best received rituals have been those at which 'crafts' were made, for example, when pysanka eggs were drawn for Imbolc, 'corn dollies' (decorative wheat braids) made for Lammas, and edible tree decorations made for the winter wildlife at Yule (3).

i) FAMILIARITY/RECOGNITION: By contrast, a ritual format which is considered too far from the norm leaves the participants without a "road map" they can follow. Those in attendance may politely "go along for the ride" but then later complain of a lack of inclusiveness. However, a few well chosen words such as "Blessed Be" can act to frame much improvisation and offer enough familiarity to foster comfort and permit a deeper level of participation.

Furthermore, some ritualists become known for their 'style' and if it is

acknowledged favourably by the other women, it will become familiar no matter how idiosyncratic it may be.

j) FUN / CREATIVITY / PLAYFULNESS: The women really seem to enjoy any type of ritual that involves the actual doing or making of something. Ritual is often then considered more immediate and personally meaningful. Activities can be as varied as colouring Eostre / Easter eggs, clay modelling, or a simple word game. This creative play (Gaboury 1990) often leads to self discovery and more spontaneous sharing and disclosure while producing tangible evidence of the stated intent of the ritual such as talismans, altar additions and mementos. In accessing their own creativity, these women sometimes sense that they too are being "The Great Creatrix".

k) PLEASURE: One of the surprises expressed by most of these women is that ritual can be fun and can be a physically pleasurable activity. It is common for participants to report that their headaches dissipate, that they feel more energized and happier after ritual. Some even report a lessening of the levels of perceived chronic pain such as arthritis. Many women emphasize the joy of discovering the sensual pleasure in the mindful and ritualized sharing of food. In particular, chocolate is the most favourite and for some a ubiquitous part of their communal meal-sharing.

When a frequent participant cannot eat chocolate for some reason, such as allergy, the other women will find an acceptable substitute. One woman who could not tolerate cocoa but could eat and enjoyed white chocolate, always found some as part of the communal meal. The women organizing the ritual would see to it that she was included in the group's 'sacramental chocolate'.

Account was also taken of group preferences. This was most apparent for the Moon Circles with their more stable population of participants. Vanilla and rose were favourite scents and citrus was often found irritating. This was factored in when planning a ritual. The women in Ottawa do not consider discomfort and physical abnegation necessary elements of religious experience ... quite the contrary: "all acts of love and pleasure are my sacraments", says the Goddess and the Charge of the Goddess (Farrar & Farrar 1984:42-3) explicitly states, and these women agree to:

Listen to the words of the Great Mother (...) ye shall dance, sing, feast, make music and love all in my praise. For mine is the ecstasy of the spirit, and mine also is joy on earth, for my law is love unto all beings. (...)

Let my worship be within the heart that rejoices; behold, all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals. And therefore let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honour and humility, mirth and reverence within thee.

If pleasure is a sacrament then this speaks to the sacredness of the body and to its moral good (4). For most of these women, no more liberating a

theo(a)logy could be devised then to liberate them and their bodies from the moral strictures and disapproval they felt themselves under before encountering the Goddess.

l) BEAUTY: These women see beauty as both a component of the setting and a comment on the effect of the ritual. A strong sense and appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of a setting, a text, an altar setup, behaviour, dress, speech or song is apparent in this community of women. There are no explicit norms of beauty but nevertheless something must contain more than efficiency and efficacy for it to be 'beautiful'. This could be quality, workmanship, uniqueness, or any other 'extra' component that provides evidence of a special care and concern given by the ritualist. But beauty is also the 'fit' or 'effectiveness' of a ritual, the fact that it 'worked' and was meaningful. In this, 'beauty' resembles 'truth' or 'realness': an intrinsic worth evidenced but essentially undefinable and individualistic.

Borrowed and adapted from the Navaho Beauty Way is this blessing which women in Ottawa use quite often woven into rituals, used as a stand alone 'smudging' (5) prayer or as a silent meditation:

There is beauty indeed
 There is beauty indeed
 Before me, there is beauty
 Behind me, there is beauty

Above me, there is beauty
Below me, there is beauty
To my left, there is beauty
To my right, there is beauty
All around me, there is beauty
Within me, there is beauty
I walk in beauty
I walk in beauty ...

m) MEANINGFULNESS: A ritual that a participant feels has no personal meaning for her is perceived by her as a waste of her time. Since meaning is a personal thing, this can be a rather amorphous criterion. No consensus is guaranteed: I have heard women who attended the same circle say both: "Well that was a waste of time" and "That was incredible ... the energy was really there tonight." Meaningfulness is therefore more a characteristic of an individual's reaction to a specific ritual than an inherent quality of the ritual itself. Nevertheless, some women have enough mastery of metamorphic language and / or trance induction techniques to craft a ritual which permits the greatest number of participants to find personal relevance in the words and images provided. These women acquire a reputation which leads to well attended rituals, but I found no other benefit for them other than the respect accorded them for their skills. For example, their status or degree of authority were not enhanced or lowered because of their ritual skills. Amber is a case in point: a shy, quiet and petite woman, she had a beautiful voice and a delicate and romantic style in both ritual text writing and ritual space decorating. News of her leading a ritual

travelled quickly through the Full Moon Circle network and her rituals were always very well attended. Outside of circle, Amber was almost invisible. She had no apparent ambition and sought no special recognition or power, nor was she sought out for her opinion or asked to take on leadership responsibilities. For these women, skills in one area do not necessarily translate into privilege or status in another area.

n) EMOTION: Women feel that emotions must come into play or else they will sense a lack of meaningfulness in a specific ritual. Elicited emotion is a marker of effective participation and no specific emotion or range of intensity is forbidden. Catharsis is welcome, only 'faking' is prohibited. The same is true of exhibitionism and voyeurism: it has to be real, it has to be personal, it has to be spontaneous. Neither 'drama queens' nor 'pity parties' are appreciated. Nevertheless, if someone finds herself in crisis, she can expect those around her to support her, even for the ritual to change in response to her, but she 'better not abuse' the situation or those around her or she will find herself not knowing when or where the next ritual is to occur. Some themes or ritual scenarios may become taboo if they act as triggers: "When so and so is there, we don't do such and such". It's a way for the women to protect themselves from a type of abuse which they perceive as possible.

A ritual leader that leaves women in crisis after a ritual won't be asked to lead group ritual again. Mind you, allowance is made for inexperience and a senior ritual leader will step in and modify the 'atmosphere' to re-establish 'safety'. Sometimes it's the core members that take on this responsibility for a specific group. Ideally, no one goes home in crisis or unmoved.

o) SONG: Participation in ritual through song and dance (any movement actually) is appreciated by these women, in part because it introduces variety into the ritual format. It also affords additional ways of engaging the body with the ritual process. Women are fascinated by what they discover they can do: breath work leading to trance, skill at leading others through an experience, singing, and creating a closer sense of belonging when harmonics and harmonies 'work'. Unfortunately, the strongest and most skilful singers no longer participate. Some have moved away or are now circling with a private group of friends. Nevertheless, if someone could teach the songs or lead the women in song again, there would be a large number of women learning them and singing them anew.

At one point in the mid 1990's, an informal song group formed under the leadership of Pashta Marymoon. It met in a private home, once every month, to learn the chants and songs that had been circulating in the Goddess

spirituality communities of North America. This song group lasted for over three years and the Ottawa Women's Song Book is one result of it. As well, Around the Goddess has a song group that sometimes sings at women's events around Ottawa.

Women will compare the individual merits of various venues and ritual leaders to assess which circles are most suitable for their needs. Fault is not found with the circle so much as with a lack of fit between expressed need and what is provided. The Ottawa women (like the majority of Pagans in Ottawa) vote with their feet and some events are poorly attended and some venues rarely used. The filthiness of the Occult Shop basement was tolerated only because no other space was then available BUT it was often mentioned when commenting on the cleanliness and comfort of the Hungry Eye space.

It should be noted though that the women using the Hungry Eye were encouraged to have a lot to say and do in making the space used for ritual fit what they wanted and needed. Some women would arrive early to wash the linoleum floor, vacuum the rug, tidy up the bathroom and make sure the dishes were washed and tea made and generally spruce up the space and make it welcoming (sort of like getting the church hall ready before service).

For these women, much of what makes a house a home constitutes the comfort of ritual space. Thus there is a domestic quality to ritual preparations and the ritual sponsor needs to be a good host(ess).

2. WHAT WAS OPENLY CRITICIZED:

Much of what the women found unacceptable has already been mentioned. Nevertheless, some specific behaviours and circumstances need to be emphasized. Physical discomfort of any kind that is not a necessary or unavoidable component of a ritual will be minimized or avoided. Even an initiation is not expected to be an ordeal or dangerous and there is a sense that physical discomfort will actually impede the successful experience of ritual.

Emotional discomfort, on the other hand, can be and is valued as a marker of 'realness' and catharsis is often sought in ritual. Nevertheless, a ritual leader that is perceived as manipulating the production of strong emotional responses during ritual in a 'gratuitous' or coercive manner will be labelled 'power hungry' or 'cruel' and she will not be welcomed as ritual leader again.

Anything that gives no room for individual choice (either pro or con) is considered a form of abuse of power. Thus any imposition on others, be it from the ritual leader or a participant in circle, is a potential source of discomfort

because of the implicit (and sometimes explicit) injunction against rejection of someone's point of view, so any attempt at coercion is considered impolite at best and reprehensible at worst. Since women are free to participate or not, and generate themselves that to which they participate, there is an internal regulating mechanism to minimize discomfort: one simply walks away.

3. QUESTIONS OF AESTHETICS AND PLEASURE:

The position value explicitly attributed to physical comfort is linked to the ritual value attributed to pleasure. The ritual setting, be it private or public, must be more than clean, comfortable and safe. It must also be aesthetically pleasing. Flowers and plants are important, and there is a strong preference for 'natural' things rather than synthetics, ex: instead of using silk flowers in winter, real flowers will be found or else plant materials appropriate to the season will be used.

These women joke about being 'magpies' with their 'pretty pretties'. Most of them have a somewhat romantic sense of aesthetics with a strong preference for Art Nouveau and pre-Raphaelite images and articles. 'Finds' of second hand or reproduction candle holders, vases, serving dishes, chalices, and jewellery will be recycled by them as 'goddess appropriate'.

Most of these women have a strong preference for artisan /craft / hand-made things (candles, textiles, altar tools, etc) and things which are old (family heirloom or 'antique'). They want to connect to an object's history and to the people involved in producing and using the object. Objects which provide this connection are spoken of as being 'yummy', 'real', and 'beautiful'.

There is also a strong sense of whimsy in their choices: a child's plastic sparkle fairy wand is just as appropriate as a hand carved willow branch or an expensive gem incrustated silver wand. Ritual isn't supposed to be 'grim' and 'proper' even if it is serious business.

The comfort extends to food. Alcohol, if the group accepts it, is a pleasure as well as an appropriate ritual drink. But alcohol is not required, it may even be absent from public open rituals because of AA and other concerns, but in small groups or private groups, it is often an important part of feasting and socializing. Alcohol use is always moderate: 1 bottle of wine for 6-9 people over 3 hours, 1 - 2 bottles of cider or beer per person for the evening, and designated drivers are important.

Ritual is considered hungry making: having no food available is considered a

breach of etiquette and a problem since food 'grounds' in the here and now. It is considered especially necessary if the ritual has been very trance like and can thus be considered a part of 'safety' like the designated driver.

Feasting is for these women an important part of ritual and socializing. It is almost always 'pot luck' or else the ritual leader will have distributed a list of preferred items for the next ritual in hopes that everyone will bring something. If something is necessary to ritual, these women believe that it is better if the leader brings it herself since there is no way to predict if anyone else will bring it. An inside joke states that predicting or controlling Pagan behaviour is too much like herding cats...

It is in the definition and handling of pleasure that the body first appears as a necessary and recognized component of ritual. This body has to be fed, it also has to be dressed, and this, appropriately. Even though no coercion could conceivably be applied, norms do develop. Dress for ritual is casual and comfortable. If someone has come directly from work, it is not unusual for constricting clothing to be exchanged for something more comfortable, ex: nylons are taken off, shoes come off, sweaters and afghans are made available since blood pressure and body temperature go down when in trance, etc.

In the circles, the perception of self as body develops in a complex context oriented by "customs" derived from text and from fashions as well as by personal habits and history.

Wiccan "canons" recognize gender and age as appropriate labels for bodies and ... for practitioners. As far as these women are concerned, the close distinction between maiden, mother and crone applies to all women including the Goddess or goddesses.

Beyond this, the body is most explicitly associated with enjoyment of life rather than guilt, and pleasure rather than punishment. This is one of the places for differentiating Wiccan and Goddess oriented rituals from Christian religious traditions and attitudes. An implicit distinction is made between the carnal, the sensual and the sexual and it remains positive.

CHAPTER FIVE: SPEAKING THE BODY

I - TEXTUAL ANALYSIS:

A mythos is more than a rational system of values. Symbols speak to both the conscious and unconscious mind, uniting rational awareness with our deepest nonrational knowledge, rituals enhance the power of symbols because they involve the body, the source of our deepest feeling. Rituals and symbols play an important role in human life because, as Zsuzsanna Budapest writes, "that which is not celebrated, that which is not ritualized, goes unnoticed, and in the long run ... will be devalued" (Christ 1997:161).

Goddess spirituality values spontaneity and improvisation; yet the text, understood as words, their meanings and their ordering, remains paramount for Goddess worshippers. In spite of the ephemeral nature of the words on paper (most ritual texts end up in the garbage as soon as the ritual is over), the words heard and spoken remain, concretized in new thoughts, new dreams, new behaviours and new narratives. As narratives, they return, over and over again, oral history re-enacted, ritualized, sacralized. A phrase heard in one ritual reappears in another:

From my heart to your heart, I welcome you to this circle...(1)

An image evoked in circle takes form on an altar or in an art work:

I believe...
 I hear the faint pulse...
 Breathe deeply...
 She never denies me sustenance... (2)

Words take root, they inscribe themselves on the psyche, they give form to sensations, they make tangible the Goddess to the women who experience her (Griffin 2000b). What words then give her a body? What kind of body do these words reveal?

1. CONTENT

Earth my body
Water my blood
Air my breath
Fire my spirit (3)

The most frequent and - it seems - most agreed upon motif associated with the Goddess in that of Mother Earth. The body of the Goddess is first of all the earth, as planet, as nature, as world. Rare is the ritual in which the Goddess as earth or nature is not mentioned or invoked. And this world is structured in the classical way, following Wiccan tradition: 4 quarters, 4 seasons, 4 elements. Even the metaphysical world of the Goddess is made up of the four platonic elements. At times explicitly animated by spirit, it is still most often earth, water, air and fire. Though they are often mentioned in sequence, I have noticed that they do not occur in equal proportions. For the women in Ottawa, fire and air are least likely to be central images in ritual. Though always present in the Elemental Purifications and Quarter Calls, fire and air do not often figure as themes of meditations or aspects of the Goddess (4). The same is true in

chants, for in ritual texts, birds may fly and fire burn, but most often it is the river that flows, the rain that falls, the sea that washes, the wet that engulfs and cleanses.

Water wash away my tears
Water wash away my pain
Strong as the ocean
Gentle as rain

The river is flowing
Rolling and growing
The river is flowing
Down to the sea

The ocean is the beginning of the world
All life comes from the sea

I am the Ocean and the Ocean is me
I am the Goddess and I am the Sea
Everything opens when I open me
Everything opens when I open me

Listen, sisters, listen
Listen to the waters
Calling us like rivers
Running to the sea

In ritual, water and its avatars are the element of choice:

We all come from the Goddess
And to her we shall return
Like a drop of rain
Flowing to the ocean.

Even the element earth, next most often present in imagery and song, is permeated by water, it is dark, moist and fertile.

As both the Goddess herself and as an aspect of her creation, as both Creatrix and creation, the earth is not only humus but also leaf, shell, feather, sand. As Mother Earth, the earth aspect of the Goddess is also living Nature. On altars and in text, all nature is re-presented, made tangible and apprehensible by the senses in all its variations, not just a leaf but leaves, not just a shell but shells and starfishes and coral ... The earth as biosphere and as Gaia, numinous abundant femaleness: "At the centre of the earth there is a mother" (Celebrating... 1990:86) and she is our Mother Earth.

The Earth used to have, as it were, a goddess to call her own, because the Earth and all creation were of the same substance as the Goddess. East was her epiphany: the divine was immanent as creation (Baring & Cashford 1991:xi).

What then of her body? Her body is the earth, the world and everything in and on it.

The Earth is my body.
My body is the Goddess.
My body is good. (Aida 1993)

The Earth is my church,
The Body is my altar. (Ottawa aphorism)

At first glance the Goddess' body seems more present by its absence of specificity: as 'Goddess', she has no personal body, no individual appearance, no specific characteristics, invisible and yet ever present. And yet she DOES has a body. Hers is a female body: she gives birth, she nourishes, she holds and supports. Her great belly gives life to all creation. Her womb is fertile, her

breasts bring nourishment to her children, her arms are strong and they hold and protect. The rest of the body, that is the parts of her that would anthropomorphize her - shoulders, feet, legs, or back, for instance, simply do not enter into the picture. Furthermore, throughout the texts, she has no face...

My idea of the Goddess varies. Sometimes I think of Her as a large benevolent-looking woman. I never really put a face on Her. Though She's not faceless. I never thought about what Her face would look like. My idea is that she is the deepest part of myself (quoted in Walker 2000:219).

It should also be noted here that her genitals are almost never explicitly mentioned. This absence may be attributable to many factors, including a certain cultural queasiness vis a vis non medical or erotic display or discourse regarding human genitalia ... I have noticed that circles composed of mainly lesbian women and women who consider themselves 'wild wymon' will use more explicit language and images, including slang terms, to speak of the Goddess and the erotic 'power' she embodies. As well, the women who met at the Hungry Eye came to achieve a degree of trust and intimacy which allowed them sometimes to also become explicit in their language when speaking of love, lust, and desire. But this was rare ...

This absence of a human-like body, even at the metaphorical level is also the absence of a person. The Goddess is not present as a singular body. She is not present as a person. She is as an experience, the experience that each woman

brings as a woman living in a woman's body. And that's why water is so important. Both women and the Goddess are considered 'juicy' or as Starhawk said at a conference I attended "You know it's real when it gets wet", and again in a women's ritual at Kaleidoscope when one of the women, who happened to be breast feeding her daughter exclaimed "Well, the Goddess is here!" as her breasts contracted and milk flowed down her belly in time with the end of the Goddess Invocation. Juices flow in ritual, and juices flow from women's bodies. Be it tears, menstrual blood, amniotic fluids, breast milk, sweat or sexual secretions, it is rarely clear if the juices flowing are human or divine. Most women would not distinguish between them saying that one is the other, that one (human) is an aspect of the other (divine). That one (divine) reveals herself through the other (human). That in ritual they co-exist in the same body, human and divine conjoined.

One of the few ways in which the Goddess becomes a person is through the use of kin terms, such as mother or sister. She is rarely a daughter. In speaking of the relationship of women with the Goddess, one is also speaking of new ways of relating to self and to other. Ways engendered in kin terms, embodied in real relationships, a web of life woven of experience:

The Earth is our mother, We must take care of her.
 Her sacred ground we walk upon, with every step we take.
 The Earth is our mother, We must take care of her.

The sky is our father, we will take care of him ...
 The sea is our sister, we will take care of her ...
 The forest is our brother, we must take care of him ...

The body of the Goddess is however equivalent to that which is female in her human daughter. The human female body is conjoined to that of the Goddess both as female and as nature.

Earth my body
 Water my blood
 Air my breath
 Fire my spirit

2 . STYLE

But what does the style of the ritual texts tell us about the Goddess and her body? As present as the Goddess is in the ethos and mythos of Goddess spirituality, she is rarely addressed directly in the rituals of the Ottawa circles, she may be evoked by every image, object, sound, taste and smell but she will rarely be invoked in the literal sense of the word. No one would presume to command her to appear or to do one's bidding. Nor is she prayed to or implored in the Christian sense of placing oneself at the mercy of the Godhead. Rather she is invited to be present, to witness, to bless, to help, to join with, to participate, to teach, to show, to reveal, to be. She is one of us:

Mother, Daughter, Sister, Lover
 Hear us, hear us,
 It is you we seek within us
 Goddess, heal us. (Variant: Goddess, heed us.)

Her presence is evoked through emotions, sensations, memories and feelings.
 The body's sensual responses are the gauge of Her presence, not the mind's
 analysis or recognition.

All ritual text is poetry even if only halting blank verse:

Breathe deep
 And let the warm summer air fill your lungs
 Breathe deep
 And let the rays of the setting sun warm your skin
 Breathe deep
 And let the cares of the ending day
 Slip away on the gentle breeze

Breathe deep
 And let the firm ground support your body
 Breathe deep
 And let the moistness of the evening refresh your skin
 Breathe deep
 And let the doubts and worries of what is past
 Drift away like thinning smoke

Breathe deep
 And take within yourself the joy of summer
 Breathe deep
 And take within yourself the love of sisters
 Breathe deep
 And take within yourself the strength of the mother
 Now that we and she are one

This is her season of fullness
 Bountiful womb of primal energies
 Pregnant with life and dreams
 She gifts us with first harvest

Wellspring of all fertility and creativity
 She provides for all our needs
 Feeding all our hungers

Our minds, our souls, our bodies, ourselves
 She provides and satiates
 She nourishes and nurtures
 She is all that reaches fruition
 She is all that sustains life

Breathe in
 And let yourself sense
 Her power rising within you
 Like the fullness of the summer sun
 Shining long into evening

Breathe in
 And allow yourself to fill with her energy
 Bringing to fruition you own dreams
 Sustaining your own life
 Join her in the dance of creation
 (Summer solstice grounding, Around the Goddess, c.1995)

II - RITUAL CREATIVITY

Reticence to command the divine extends to a related reticence to preach or sermonize others. One cannot, must not tell others what to think, to feel, to do. This would be denying them agency and responsibility, denying them voice. And that, for the women in Ottawa, is a major difference between Wicca in its local WCC form and what they create for themselves when they circle in women-only groups. Many of the original women of the Full Moon Circle at the Occult Shop were members of the WCC and were being trained in "Outer Court" priesthood. This involved a strong sense of ministry and community leadership. The High Priestess led her ritual as she led her community (read congregation) through moral example and force of will. She was the fount of wisdom and the ultimate

moral arbiter. This is the model of priestessing that the Ottawa women rejected as soon as the WCC relinquished control of the women's circle. These same WCC trained women were the first to democratize levels of participation and even access to the ritual itself. They opened the doors to any woman who wished to participate, irrespective of her level of involvement or training in Wicca. The ritual text became more flexible, less formulaic. Improvisation became prevalent, even the structure and format of ritual was modified. Women were no longer instructed to stand, turn, address or otherwise move. More voices were heard, silence was not so absolute. The text was no longer declaimed. The 'Book of Shadows' disappeared as anything else but a scrap book of past rituals which any woman could peruse for ideas. It was hardly secret and it made apparent to anyone who looked in it, just how varied ritual was becoming (see sample of ritual texts in Appendix One).

The role of 'High Priestess' was put aside and was replaced with the 'ritual leader' or 'facilitator'. No longer could only full initiates lead rituals as now initiation itself became a rite of passage to full autonomy rather than a license to 'lead' others. Some rituals had no leader as each woman in turn improvised the text to the ritual actions she took. Some rituals were lead by two or more women in tandem. Sometimes a whole coven would prepare and lead a group ritual at one of the festivals. This was the case for the Women's Circle ritual

that Wyrld Sisters led in 1993 at Kaleidoscope at which Aida's meditation, THE EARTH IS MY BODY, was first declaimed. It marked a decisive moment in the history of Ottawa rituals, both for the co-operative nature of its 'doing' and for the explicit imagery used. Never before in a ritual text written in Ottawa, had such a close link been made between the Earth, the Goddess, the Body and the Woman speaking.

The Earth is my body.
My body is the Goddess.
My body is good. (Aida 1993)

This growing ritual creativity, which considers no text canonical or essential, has extended to the making of major modifications to some basic components of the Wiccan ritual such as the Wine Blessing and the Five Fold Kiss.

1. WINE BLESSING:

In Ottawa, one finds in practice various forms of Wiccan rituals derived from the model first made public in print in England by Gerald B. Gardner in the early 1950's. Though Gardnerians have never been very numerous in Canada, their Tradition still constitutes the basis of most 'British Traditional Craft' now practised in England and English speaking North America and Australia (Adler 1979/1987; Kelly 1991; Rabinovitch 1992, 1993). Central to Gardnerian revivalist witchcraft is a strict heterosexual gender polarity which exists as the central symbol around which all else revolves:

As above, so below. A religion which worships the God and the Goddess as the ultimate creative polarity must envisage - and work with - that same creative polarity of male and female at the human level, otherwise the concepts "God" and "Goddess" are meaningless (Farrar & Farrar 1992a:109).

The blending of male and female polarity is enacted by members of British Traditional Craft in a symbolic 'hieros gamos': the Wine Blessing. In the standard Blessing, a double edged black-handled knife, the athame, is held by one officiant and lowered into a chalice filled with liquid held by another officiant. In Ottawa, for a while during the mid 1990's, who these officiants were, what gender they had to be, and what words they could say, by whom and why became the objects of constant contest and debate even leading to accusations of false beliefs and false practices, of homophobia and misogyny. This debate raged most intensely within the WCC, between its women and its men over the right of the women to hold women only rituals at which gender polarity would not be celebrated or enacted.

To understand the essential nature of the Wine Blessing ritual within Wiccan theology, one has to know that one of Gardner's aims in creating the new religion of 'the Wicca' was to "found a religion that would be based on sex as a sacramental experience" (Kelly 1991:28). The 'Great Rite', an actual or symbolic heterosexual coupling (5), was intended by him to form the major ritual enactment of Initiation and Sabbat celebrations. The original text of the

symbolic Great Rite as written by Gardner prior to 1949 is as follows (Spelling and diacritics are as in the original. Celebrants are unclothed.):

Magus kneels, fills Cup, offers to Witch [she is seated on the altar, holding her athame, and the Priest kneels before her, holding up the Cup].

Witch, holding Athame between palms, places point in cup.

Magus: "As the Athame is the Male, so the Cup is the female; so conjoined, they bring blessedness."

Witch lays aside Athame, takes the Cup in both hands, drinks and gives drink.

Magus holds paten to Witch, who blesses with Athame, then eats and gives to eat (Kelly 1991:66-7).

In the Odysian Tradition (6), founded by Richard and Tamarra James and which forms the basis of the Wiccan Church of Canada's (WCC) public ritual liturgy, participants at public rituals always work clothed and there is no attempt to alternate male and female participants around the circle. Nor is any attempt made to have an equal number of men and women present. Nevertheless, there is a sense that the absence of one gender makes the ritual somehow absurd.

The standard Odysian Wine Blessing is as follows:

The man stands facing the kneeling woman. He holds the athame, point down, both hands around the hilt. She holds a chalice under the knife, both hands under the bowl. The knife is lowered into the chalice during "For there is no greater ..." and raised at the end of

the text. (Note: HP = High Priest, HPS = High Priestess, B = Both.)

HP The Male holds the power and is the reservoir of the power
 HPS The Female taps the power in him and channels it
 B Neither one can work without the other
 One without the other is incomplete
 HP The Horned God is a God of life and death
 HPS And the Goddess is of birth and renewal,
 B To learn you must suffer,
 To live you must be born,
 And to be born you must die.
 The beginning, the continuation and the end, over and over.
 HP The Sun brings forth light,
 HPS And the Moon holds it in darkness
 B As above, so below
 HP And as the Athame is to the Male
 HPS So the chalice is to the Female (7)
 B And conjoined they be one in truth
 For there is no greater power in all the world
 Than that of a man and woman, joined in the bonds of love.

She stands and hands the chalice to him with a kiss and she says "Blessed be". He raises the chalice to the centre of the circle than drinks from it. He turns to the person on his left and offers the chalice with a "Blessed be". The next person imitates his actions and so again around the circle until the chalice returns to the woman. She turns to face the altar, raises the chalice and says "To the Gods". All answer "To the Gods". She spills some of the wine into a libation bowl on the altar and then drinks what is left in the chalice. She replaces the empty chalice on the altar.

The similarities between these two texts can be understood when one remembers that they are both based on the Gardnerian model of human and divine gender polarities and on the heterosexual act as the ultimate human manipulation of divine creative energy, thus the Great Rite. Furthermore, the roles assigned to each gender are stereotypically white, British, and middle

class:

MALE

energy giving
fertilising
linear
rationalistic
consciousness
logical / numeric
analytical
sun
etc.

(Farrar & Farrar 1987a:66-7)

FEMALE

form giving
fruitful
cyclical
intuitive
unconsciousness
emotional / visual
synthesizing
moon
etc.

With their gender polarized, unidirectional energy flow and its stereotypical middle class gender role assignments, these texts reinforce the existing social power relations between men and women. Men are sources of power which women incubate. No space here for all male or all female circles. No space here either for any man or woman who might want to conceive of power as something other than sexual energy, heterosexual or not.

In Ottawa, women have rejected the gender polarized model of the Wine Blessing as the standard for women only circles. They use it, or rather participate in it, only when it is part of a gender mixed circle or the text naturally fits into a Sabbat or rite of passage ritual such as Beltane (the marriage of God and Goddess) or Handfasting (the marriage of man and woman). For their own gender specific circles (8), they have invented something new, devoid of gender ascriptions. These texts are gender irrelevant

as they explicitly break away from power images embodied in gender and sexuality. Furthermore, they do not require the use of an athame lowered into a chalice as the symbol of transformation. Of the two texts that follow, one is taken from Starhawk and used in Ottawa, the other was written by a member of the WCC sponsored Women's Full Moon Circle when the women from that group were attempting to gain independence from the hegemonic control of the local Odyssean (WCC) priesthood. These women are also those who were most directly affected by the taunts and insults directed at the "lesbian, man hating witches indulging in their naked circle-jerks" (9), this directed to them by the male members of their own Wiccan community (see Landstreet 1990, 1991; Maphis 1992; James 1992; and Reid 2001a for a fuller discussion of these events).

The Starhawk text can be spoken by a single person or by a group in unison:

The Priestess and Priest (or other members) hold up a plate of food and a goblet, and say a blessing that is simple and often spontaneous:

All life is your own.
All fruits of the earth
Are fruits of your womb,
Your union, your dance.
Goddess (and God),
We thank you for blessings and abundance.
Join with us. Feast with us. Enjoy with us!
Blessed Be. (Starhawk 1979/1989:169-70)

The form(s) of divinity addressed can be specified or not and can be of a single gender or both. The text is more a recognition of inherent blessedness than an act of making blessed something that is not. It is also a 'thanksgiving' of the divine. Some words, such as "Your union, your dance" can be interpreted as implying sexual congress, and they probably do. Nevertheless, the relationship of one aspect of divinity to another is that of complementarity and co-operation (union / dance). One is not valued or honoured more than the other. Furthermore, even if sexual congress may be implied by the imagery, a strict heterosexual model is not offered. Some lesbian women have read this as a description of their own sexual practices.

The Candle Mandala text is an invocation to a specific aspect of the divine (this time female) to take part in the actions of the group:

All the women present place their right hands over the chalice and their left hands under it. The woman officiating actually holds the chalice with her left hand around its stem.

Radiant Lady, Beacon of our quest
We, your daughters, ask you to bless this wine
That we may share it in your name
As a token of our love for you
And of our respect and caring for each other.

What is prized here is the connection between participants and the divine and between participants and each other. In this case, gender is important only to

the extent that it identifies the participants (mundane and divine) as being of the same gender, of being sisters of the same mother. Gender here unites rather than separates, it equalizes rather than orders. Power is something accessed and shared through shared identity. The Wine Blessing becomes an expression of agape rather than eros.

The accompanying texts are charters. They all spell out what the proper way of interacting with the divine and with fellow community members should be. As such they limit and define the possible and the appropriate. Yet some are more limiting than others while others are open-ended in their possible interpretations. The more power (10) is vested within the actor, the more power is seen as something to be shared and participated into equally, the more the individual is empowered. The less the divine is specified, the less the roles for the actors are normalized and codified, the less the actor is limited and constrained. Maphis argued persuasively that the polarity model of divine and human relations was flawed because of its unidirectional energy / power flow and because of its too narrow definition of this possible divine. Many women in Ottawa agree with him when he states:

Through the assignment of arbitrary cultural norms and roles to the divine realms without recognizing the equal divinity of every alternative to those roles (even the most hateful alternatives) we give the Gods our versions of our prejudices and condemn ourselves to pettiness (1992:21).

In the Ottawa women's circles, gendered polarity has steadily decreased. The changes to the Wine Blessing ritual are proof of this evolution. So is the modification made to the Fivefold Kiss, now morphed into the Self Blessing.

2. Self Blessing:

Behold the mystery aright
 The five true points of fellowship,
 Here where the Lance and Grail unite,
 And feet, and knees, and breast, and lip.
 Doreen Valiente, quoted in Becker (1990)

According to Stewart Farrar, the Fivefold Kiss or Fivefold Salute is :

The witches' ritual salute, with kisses ... on each foot, ... on each knee, ... above the public hair, ... on each breast, and ... on the lips. ... It is only used within the Circle, but the words that go with it (...) are the origin of the universal witches' salutation of greeting or parting: 'Blessed be' (1971/1973:182).

The High Priestess speaks again (...) "In other religions the postulant kneels, while the priest towers above him; but in the art magical we are taught to be humble, so we kneel to welcome them, and we say: Blessed be thy feet, that have brought thee in these ways. (...)

Blessed be thy knees that shall kneel at the sacred altar. (...)

Blessed be thy phallus, without which we should not be. (...)

Blessed be thy breast, formed in strength. (...)

Blessed be thy lips, that shall utter the sacred names.
 (1971/1973:15).

The Fivefold Kiss is not used by women in Ottawa during Women's Circles. Instead, they may use a Self Blessing which, in spite of its name, may not always be self administered. During this ritual, a woman, clothed or unclothed

depending on the circumstances and the intent of the ritual, would anoint various parts of her body while pronouncing a blessing appropriate to the intent of the ritual. She might include only one part of her body or several. Many women now use the seven chakras, while others will add feet, knees, hands and arms as well. For example, a woman might place a drop of rose oil on her forehead as she said: "Bless my mind, that it may always think clearly upon your mysteries", where 'your' refers to the Goddess. A good example of a self administered blessing is the Blessing The Embodied Self text in Appendix One. It is one of the very few texts extant in which the whole body with its many parts is acknowledged. Notice the absence of sexual polarity.

As early as Z. Budapest's first FEMINIST BOOK OF LIGHT AND SHADOWS (1979:5), women have been performing a blessing of the body, their own or that of another. As a Self Blessing (11),

(it can be) used whenever needed to renew your feeling of connection with the Goddess. In performing it, you honour yourself as a reflection of Her power and acknowledge yourself as a vessel for Her divine presence (MoonDance 2001:8).

It is a ritual of acknowledging the inherent goodness of one's body. It might be used during a circle for the healing of an individual when each part of the body is blessed by a different woman. It could be part of a young girl's rite of passage where her mother and other women bless her maturing body as a way

of celebrating her coming of age. It could be part of a woman's initiation into priestesshood when her body would then be blessed more formally as the vessel through which the Goddess manifests during ritual. Whatever the context, compared to the Fivefold Kiss, it also serves as an affirmation of inherent goodness and self valorization.

I bless myself
 and these things that make the circle of my life.
 I bless myself
 and my past.
 For in blessing my past
 and these things that I bring from ages past
 I become who I am now.
 Good or bad, cheerful or painful, my past is a blessing,
 for it has formed me
 shaped me
 held me
 thrust me into the present.

I bless myself
 and these things to my left and right.
 I bless myself and who I am today.
 For in blessing both my intellect and my emotions
 and these things I gather into the life I live now
 I recognize who I am now.
 Left and right
 rational and spiritual
 words and images
 austerity and comfort -
 I bring divisions together.
 My present blesses me
 for it is how I am in the world.
 It pulls me out of the past
 and thrusts me into the future.

I bless myself
 and the things that point to what is to come.
 I bless myself

and my uncertainties, my potentialities, my future.
 For in blessing what is new in my life
 I move toward what I can be:
 unknown but shown
 unpredictable but mapped
 potential to be fulfilled.
 My future is waiting for me.
 I bless and give thanks for every day of my life.
 Barbara Ardinger (2001:126-7)

For the women of the Ottawa circles, the Self-Blessing is a tool of empowerment by which they come to re-claim the inherent goodness of their bodies, by naming its parts as a whole, by finding positive affirmations for all of its parts, by explicitly naming and touching those parts of themselves they perceive as most owned and used by others. Be it in the production of life, of pleasure, or of commercial goods and services, women's bodies seem to these women to be objects of need and desire for others, be they child, partner, employer or client. What the Self-Blessing does, according to these women, is give them, through ritually meaningful words and actions, access to and ownership of their own bodies. As Diane Stein (1991a:9-10) says:

With women's self-empowerment central to ritual and to Women's Spirituality, the Self-Blessing is a simple, beautiful and powerful way to do just that. One woman leads this but all participate. There are other versions of the Self-Blessing, but mine uses the chakras, touching each energy center with fragrant oil (or use water, wine, menstrual blood or nothing) and saying:

(Touching the Crown): Bless me Mother for I am your child and I am a part of you.

(Touching the Brow): Bless me that I may see my way and see you.

(Touching the Throat): Bless me that I may speak clearly and speak of you.

(Touching the Heart): Bless me that my heart be open and whole with love.

(Touching the Solar Plexus): Bless me with energy and health for all my life.

(Touching the Belly Chakra): Bless my sexuality with balance and joy.

(Touching the Root Chakra): Bless my vagina, the gateway of life and death.

(Touching the soles of the feet): Bless my feet that they may walk in your paths and know my way.

(Touching the palms of the hands): Bless my hands that they may do your work and my own.

(Touching the Crown again): Bless me Mother for I am your child and I am a part of you.

III - SELF AND OTHER:

In speaking of the relationship of women with the Goddess, one is also speaking of new ways of relating to self and other. Among all the modes of knowing Self and Other re-occurring in Ottawa women's discussions and in the ritual texts they write and use, several themes emerge as leitmotifs:

- 1) I / You / We
- 2) Sisterhood
- 3) Comfort and Surprise in the Other
- 4) Self-Creation within Community, and
- 5) Birthing Oneself.

These five themes or modes of knowing self and other, inform behaviour and speech during ritual and have implications for life outside the ritual context since they engender new ways of being and relating. They also have consequences for the notion of embodiment.

1. I / You / We

When a particular woman in circle speaks out-loud to share an experience or an insight, she will speak in the first person. She will say "I". An "I" statement is rarely challenged and never discounted or dismissed. It is recognized as 'true' and valid through having been spoken by the one who has had the experience or insight. This does not mean that the statement is necessarily accepted, but simply that it stands as valid and whole. Almost never are universal statements made such as "women always" or "all women". These types of statements are understood as impossible to validate from experience and they are seen as hierarchical and censoring of specificity. "You" statements are also almost totally absent as it is recognized that only the Self can know itself and that the Other can also speak for itself. "We" statements then become acknowledgements of mutual recognition and/or consensual statements of ritual purpose. Notice for example the use of the pronoun "we" in many ritual chants as in this one:

We all come from the Goddess
And to her we shall return

"I" and "We" thus become markers of selfhood and community. No norm is established for selfhood and diversity is recognized as what makes a community whole.

The locus of identity remains on the concrete individual; the "I" is spoken by a body. The "We" does not turn, even metaphorically into a body (as it does, in contrast, in the Ecclesia of the Catholic Church, or Mother Sion, the Jerusalem of the classical period.) It remains each woman individually who is welcomed in her own separate femaleness.

2. SISTERHOOD

It has been said that women in patriarchal society are motherless daughters but that the Mother Goddess makes sisters of us all. This formulation is not without problems as it predicates a familial relationship as the means of domesticating the other. If you are my sister then we have mutual obligations and we must discharge them in a climate of trust and solidarity. But sibling rivalries and betrayals are common in the best of families. Nothing is gained by obscuring the reality of interpersonal relationships with the fantasy of a benign and loving family. The shock of unmet expectations reveals the utter otherness of she who is not me, while the miracle of a stranger's caring and altruism discloses commonalities of needs and wants that would otherwise remain unexpressed. The Sisterhood of the Goddess brings as many sibling tensions and joys as any family and the women of Ottawa rarely constrain themselves with expectations of "perfect love and perfect trust". Love and trust, in their imperfect realities, are lived in concrete settings, that is in domesticity.

3. COMFORT AND SURPRISE IN THE OTHER

One of the strongest and most unexpected realisations that these women have all made is both how utterly different they are from each other and at the same time, how completely genuine each is as a woman. It is as if the category Woman had been exploded, losing its cultural and historical limitations and had finally become a locus of specificity. At one and the same time, to witness in silence the other's story and to recognize in it the same lived realness as your own story is to apprehend both the alien and the familiar, the unknowable and the known in the same subject / object who in turn is perceiving you as subject / object (12). The flux from comfort to surprise constantly reassures and disturbs. The Self and the Other remain dynamically interchangeable as each woman knows herself in turn subject and object of discourse. And since there is no external unitary criterion of value, the experience of encounter is lived in the flesh: a crazy quilt or spice cake interesting in its variety and imperfection rather than a flawless, seamless gem, not blending but mixing.

4. SELF-CREATION WITHIN COMMUNITY

Integral to the ritual process of women's circles is the metaphor of on-going participatory creation.

Let it begin with each step we take,
 And let it begin with each change we make,
 And let it begin with each chain we break,
 And let it begin every time we awake. (Reclaiming Collective Chant)

The Goddess manifests through our actions (I say 'our' and not 'women's', because these women would not subscribe to the hubris that only women's action make creation manifest). As part of creation is found self-creation. As part of the Goddess becoming manifest is found my becoming manifest to myself and to others. This becomes a major goal of most rituals, to communally foster the possibility of becoming other than we now are, to becoming more truly, more genuinely ourselves, each according to our own vision. But it does not stop there. The act of creation also involves the creation of a new other, of a new relation with this other, with all that is not me now.

What these women recognize themselves as not being they accept as what might be you. They reject the need for an external referent, for a definitive statement of what they must be or the adherence to a codified canon and liturgy with its stable definition of an ideal self. Instead, they prefer an ongoing participation in a number of circles and the resulting increase in the possibility of self exploration and creation.

5. BIRTHING ONESELF

The metaphor of creation readily turns into the metaphor of birth. Women are involved physically, bodily with creation because it is through their bodies that

others are created.

From women you are born into this world
From women you are born into this circle

We are women reclaiming our powers
We are women rebirthing ourselves (Mountainwater 1991:98)

"Je suis celle qui enfante l'autre". I am she who gives birth to the other, says Annie Leclercq (1974). So too would most of the women of this circle. What they are birthing is their own personal other, that which they now are not yet, that which they have not been, that which they have never been. Not content with being reborn (as if it were sufficient to be born again in the same way as before) they choose to birth a new self of their own making within a world which they have defined for their own use, a radical birth, self generated and self nurtured. Not content to be limited to the biological determinism of their sex, they have metamorphized conception, gestation and birth into a process of self definition, as a new alchemy of the self.

I am willing to be different and strong
I am willing to be different and beautiful
I am willing to be different and free
I am willing to be different from patriarchy
For this difference
Is the same
Sameness
With the Non-Linear
World of Magic
The Goddess
Her forces
My dreams
The moon

My feelings
My creativity
My passion
My deep love
Of all creation ...

And the only con-forming
I need to do
Is Forming Creation
For I am form
And I am forming
To universal law
And therefore
Must survive ...

And even though
I may at times
Feel alone
And misunderstood
I will remember
That I have sisters out there
Who are learning to be free
Like me
And that I am not alone
But all One
And one with the all ...

And that once free women
Were respected
And loved
And will be again
And will be again
And will be
I will be
I will it to be
And so doth it be
Forever
And ever
So be it
Blessed be ... (Mountainwater 1991:118)

The Other is the yet to be explored, the yet to be known, the yet to be-come. No unitary model of Self or Other, no static irreconcilable oppositions, no denial of individual and personal agency. Only a dynamic relational inter-subjectivity. These women would challenge us saying that the Other is what we are not yet and that the Goddess too is infinite possibilities:

I am the infinite within my soul
I remember no beginning
I can find no end
All this I am

At the same time, in all the five themes explored above, the body becomes metaphorical - as expression of the femaleness of the goddess, as domestic relationships, as basis for specificity, as locus of participation. Even in the act of birthing, the body is not flesh but instrument of definition, connection and creation. In the ritual texts produced, the resulting notion of embodiment is paradoxically both timeless and idealized.

CHAPTER SIX - EVOKING THE BODY

Remember: intention, purification and ritual use are what defines an altar space (Monaghan 2001a:31).

I - ALTARS AND SHRINES

1. ALTAR CONSTRUCTION

The concrete aspects of the embodiment of the Goddess take several forms, the most important among them are the altar and its components and the ritual acting out or manifestation of the divine female.

2. DEFINING ALTAR:

"An altar is nothing more than an arrangement of objects placed together creatively to evoke a special state of mind in the beholder" (Monaghan 2001a:31)

Altars and their construction are an integral part of women's spirituality for the women of the Ottawa women's circles. As these women use the terms, an ALTAR is a place where magical 'work' is done, it is a magical workplace where the will of the 'priestess' is made manifest. It can be private or public, permanent or temporary. It can be 'virtual' or 'actual', as these women believe that magical work can be done as much in the mind of the operant as concretely in the here and now (1).

Constructing an altar 'keyed' to the intent of the ritual is the first ritual step undertaken by women when preparing a 'circle'. Much of the symbolism of the

ritual is already encoded in the choice of type of altar and components used to construct it. Though some women spend less time on planning an altar layout than others, the women who attend ritual seem to always greatly appreciate the extra coherence of a well constructed altar that matches the intent of the ritual and the words and actions enacted within it. Essentially, the altar is the ritual in microcosm.

Though a 'circle' can be done without a physical altar, the sequence of ritual steps and speech acts that constitute a ritual necessarily construct a 'virtual' or 'astral' altar which is perceivable (at least metaphorically) by the participants. In its simplest form, an altar is the central focus of a 'circle' in such a way that the empty space bounded by a group of women standing (or sitting) side by side such as to form the geometric shape of a circle becomes the focal point of all actions and thus where 'work' is done. When an individual is 'doing a circle' privately, the simplest form of this circle becomes the individual's intent and the altar is the individual's own body understood as being composed of the four Platonic elements plus spirit. This is expressed explicitly in several chants used during ritual:

Air, I am
 Fire, I am
 Water, earth and spirit, I am

Earth, my body
 Water, my blood

Air, my breath and
Fire, my spirit

As a microcosm, an altar reproduces the world within which the ritualist's intent must actualise, as such it obeys the laws of the western magical universe. It is a pantacle:

Ce mot dérive du grec *pan* (tout) et provient de l'idée d'objet qui contient *tout*, qui renferme le *Tout*, synthèse du Macrocosme. (Marquès-Rivière 1972:10)

Les Pantacles alors artificiellement créés par les lois complexes de correspondances, devinrent de grands talismans stellaires, véritables microcosmes, ...qui reproduisent, par un ensemble de constructions précises, l'état des influences astrales à un moment donné. ... Le pantacle devient enfin ce que nous avons appelé déjà une "équation métaphysique"; il résume une pensée religieuse, des conceptions philosophiques évoluées (Marquès-Rivière 1972:364).

It reproduces the conditions, the elements, the forces in play and the outcome intended. It necessarily reproduces the world in which the will of the magician (and these women believe they are doing magic) **MUST** materialise since it is constructed in such a way that the outcome is already existent in its component parts. As one of the chants used to raise power says:

Powers of the earth
Powers taking form
Rising to rebirth
Rising to be born

Here, **MAGIC** is defined as an exercise of will which manifests in the concrete world. This exercise of will is done in an 'altered' state of consciousness, what Laurie Cabot in her book *Power of the Witch* (Cabot & Cowan 1990) , calls the

alpha state: a self induced trance within which symbols can be manipulated, actions can be visualized, and outcomes can be experienced in such a way as to negate or reverse the limitations of the concrete world. As Justine Glass says:

The purpose of ritual in witchcraft is not to call up spirits ... (but) is a means of invoking power which is directed to bring about the result in mind (1965:84). (The) secret power to produce effects in the material world (...), (the) heart of the secret (is) a technique for resolving inner conflict, for expanding consciousness, so that life could be lived fully and happily (1965:82). (And) the great attainment (is the) understanding of human consciousness and the forces which work through (it) (1965:83-4).

The intended outcome becomes manifest as a result of the internal construction of experience. This is not so far from the athlete's mental rehearsal of a future competition and his or her success within it. The same mental capacity to rehearse performance and envisage outcome is used in both cases. The trance experience prefigures the material experience. The future is created, rehearsed and then actualized as a 'fait-accomplis' (Cabot & Cowan 1990; Gaboury 1995; Starhawk 1979; Weinstein 1980).

3. DEFINING SHRINE:

If an altar is a place where work is done, a SHRINE is a place of devotion where the divine can be apprehended, spoken to, entreated, and invited to reside. It tends to be a private and highly personal space and can be so discrete as to be invisible or opaque to decoding by an outsider.

Some (most / many?) women will use the word 'altar' to refer to both an altar and a shrine. When asked to differentiate between them, they will usually say that a 'working altar' is set up only for the time of the spell or circle and always contains tools, while the 'Goddess altar' or 'personal altar' is for honouring the Goddess and usually has a representation of her and some flowers and a candle on it. As such it is a 'gift' to the Goddess or a 'focus' of prayer or presence. Sometimes it fulfills a vow (votive shrine), sometimes it is a wish that the Goddess will 'bless' the woman or her environment. It is where specific aspects or identities of the female divine are most intimately and individualistically encountered. Some shrines are so personal as to be un-decodable by others. Since shrines are meant to be personal and highly individualistic, that they do not conform to any standard layout or list of components is not perceived as a problem by these women. No rules of production can apply. Nevertheless, there are a few rules of use: the most important is a 'well kept' shrine. 'Dirt', as in an unkept shrine which is dusty, covered in incense dust, with candle wax pooled over everything and flowers long dead is understood as a grave lack of respect, to the deity and to the woman herself. "How can she not take seriously what she is doing?", "Doesn't she know that she is sabotaging her intent?" "How can she insult the Goddess that way?" are all examples of comments I have heard these women utter. But the most serious reproach, and this is understandable within an ethos of self-empowerment, is "you don't even respect your own

intent" ... In many ways, this echoes the traditional western notion of domestic piety evidenced through a woman's housekeeping skills and the Christian maxim of "cleanliness is close to godliness".

Altars are not interior decoration but static rituals; altars are related to alteration. I build altars to sanctify space and to focus intention, which is reinforced every time I gaze at them (Monaghan 2001b:4)

Though both the words altar and shrine are known and used within this community of women, they are not systematically kept separate: both words can describe a location in a woman's domicile where she comes in contact with the Goddess, and as such the words are interchangeable. Nevertheless, the working space of a group ritual, that space which is temporarily constructed specifically for an identifiable ritual is always called an altar. So at least at the level of public / private, these two terms maintain a degree of mutual exclusivity.

What they have in common in any case is that both are points of HUMAN focus and intent. The divine is not understood by these women as needing either to manifest or to be present. Humans are the tool users. Humans need to apprehend the divine. Altars and shrines are human strategies of inviting contact with the divine.

4. CONSTRUCTING AN ALTAR:

Thus the first step for anyone on the Wild Girl path is to get in touch with inner creativity by designing a sacred space for meditation, ritual, and self-expression. In this, we act like the goddess, for her first action was to create the world. There are many stories, from many countries, that reveal the same sacred wisdom: that the primary creative act of the feminine is to make a beautiful world out of nothing but space and time. Luonnoter is just one of a dozen creator goddesses who start with nothing and end with a world of miraculous beauty and plentiful life (Monaghan 2001a:30).

How to construct an altar is one of the most commonly asked questions that women address to each other and 'how to' books and magazines on women's spirituality are the most often bought and borrowed. Barbara Walker's books on myth and symbol (1983, 1988) have been some of the most sought after in the stores. The same is true of the Farrars' *THE WITCH'S GODDESS* (1987b). There is never too much information available. Most women are VERY interested in seeing and understanding other women's altars. How to construct an altar is a major subject of discussion and I have never heard a woman refuse to explain her choices or a woman dismiss out of hand another woman's creation or explanation. Even if women don't copy a model or stick to a close recreation of an historical sample, they will nevertheless seek out as many possible examples and explanations as they can find. Often, as part of the socializing that occurs before or after a ritual, women will bring 'show and tell' (a new piece of jewellery, new book, a photo of an altar, etc) to be shared, discussed and dissected by everyone. A lot of attention is paid to understanding

the choices made.

Every 'how to' book on Goddess spirituality has at least part of a chapter on altar / shrine making and maintenance. Articles are written on specific altars. Special issues of major magazines have been devoted to this subject (Of A Like Mind 17:1,10,001; Sage Woman Issue #44, 1998). Whole books are now being devoted to domestic shrines (Campanelli & Campanelli 1993; Turner 1999) and the women in Ottawa buy them, and share them amongst themselves. There have even been a few workshops done on altar making at the Hungry Eye and at Women's Weekend organized by the women themselves at which they share information and experiment with 'creating' new ways of setting up an altar and constructing a shrine.

These women are respectful of each other's creations. The closest thing to a negative comment I heard (other than a comment on dirt) is something like "hum, that's not how I would do it..." This would illicit clarification which would lead to discussion. It would not be construed as rejection, only difference of opinion.

For these women, the altar / shrine is the most important ritual expression of individuality that can be displayed. They delight in showing off their altars and

shrines: much that is meaningful to an individual becomes apparent through her altar construction. Some women are renowned for their altars because of a special skill or care they evidence: maybe it's aesthetics, historical accuracy, individuality, quirkiness, simplicity / elaboration, richness, or something specific like always having fresh flowers. It doesn't matter, what does is the special care and skill that she has given to this task. To me who lived with cloistered nuns for a year as a young woman of twelve, the nuns' care in tending the garden of flowers around the Mary statue and their pleasure in keeping the chapel clean, inviting, and beautiful, and the equally evident care that Goddess women give their altars and shrines have the same 'flavour' of devotion and piety, the same heart felt need to make a 'fitting home' for divine presence and human action.

Sometimes a ritual text is developed FROM an altar set-up. Sometimes the altar derives from the text. No sense of valid / invalid, or canonical / heretic is ever ascribed to an altar set-up. The closest I heard to a theological criticism came from an Alexandrian / Gardnerian 2nd who commented that "In her tradition....". Though her comments were heard, they were not heeded and, later in private, she was considered 'overbearing' and 'dogmatic' by some of the women who had overheard her.

Constructing an altar is both one of the simplest and one of the most important tasks that a woman can set herself. It is her first official step as a new priestess and marks the moment when she comes to know herself a 'goddess woman' (Ardinger 2000; Starhawk 1979a). As a joint task, constructing an altar can serve to build a community as when women during a weekend construct a stone shelf on which all subsequent rituals will be celebrated.

5. LOCATION OF SHRINES AND ALTARS:

A shrine can be located anywhere that is meaningful to the person 'constructing' it. Any logical location in a house or apartment, such as a ledge, corner cupboard, window sill, or bedroom bureau top is appropriate if a woman chooses it to be. As well, any natural place apprehended as especially 'numinous' in Rudolf Otto's (1949/2001) sense of the term: if the Goddess is immanent in all that exists then she is to be found anywhere and anywhere is an appropriate place to celebrate her presence.

The locating of an altar is more problematic because physical constraints imposed by the setting of the ritual, especially a group ritual, must be considered. The shape of the room, the location of the sun and the morphology of the land if outside, the number of participants, the ritual actions appropriate (dance, procession, sitting or lying down for meditation), all these must be

factored in before locating an altar.

a) Orientation:

Some traditions of Wicca and of Ceremonial Magic place great emphasis on the proper orientation of the altar to a specific cardinal point such as the North or the East. To distinguish itself from others, the WCC taught its members to orient their altars to the North East. Now, possibly co-incidentally, this orientation also was the best logistical position for the altar in the basement room of the Occult Shop and this was the location of the altar for women's rituals during the period of time when the Full Moon circles were under the direct direction of women who were 'dedicated' or 'neophyted' within the WCC system. When the Full Moon circles became independent from the WCC, the location of the altar became the sole decision of the woman or women who was/were leading ritual that night.

Sometimes the morphology of the space available imposes its own constraints: the location of doors, windows and furniture, if inside or if outside, the availability of usable flat space, a rock, a ledge or a fallen tree, can call for improvisation. The location of a natural grove, imposing tree or some other natural feature can be chosen. The orientation of moon rise or sun rise, the location of a mountain, of the sea or a river can all provide interesting

possibilities.

Sometimes the orientation of the altar is nothing more than a decision of the ritual leader: maybe she prefers to face an altar on the periphery of the circle or she prefers to have everyone face a central altar. This presupposes a choice re the role of the ritual leader and the active / passive participation of other women. An altar in the centre fosters a greater participation from all present.

Sometimes the size of the circle and the number of women participating can impose constraints: Starhawk's 1995 ritual in Toronto was attended by over 200 women in a large gymnasium. Four tables were placed one against each wall and were designated elemental altars (one each for North/Earth, East/Air, South/Fire, West/Water). Each woman attending was asked to add something personal to each table. The centre of the room, where everyone could stand /sit / lie down / dance was designated Centre / Spirit. This worked very well as the peripheral altars surrounded the group with "good energy" and served to enclose and protect in a 'womb-like" manner the 'rebirthing to oneself' that was the intent of the 'work' of the ritual. It also left enough room for the standing / moving trance that Starhawk led while drumming.

For women constructing Goddess altars and shrines, nothing is neutral,

everything is meaningful. Even when some choice was gratuitous in the making, it will be given meaning in the explanation: "well, you could say that it means such and such... what does it mean to you?..." Also, it becomes apparent from the responses of the listeners that it is ok to say that one does not know why a choice was made beyond "it felt right". "It feeling right" is a major criterion of choice and indicator of validity underscoring the primacy of the body's response over theoretical choices or doctrinal precepts.

6. OWNERSHIP:

Personal altars and shrines belong to the women who construct them. Only in some very rare occasions will one woman construct a shrine or altar for someone else to use and maintain. Even rarer is the modification of a personal altar or shrine by someone not the original constructor. It happens only in teaching / training situations and only in more 'canonical' traditions of British Traditional Craft or Wicca. Outside of this training context, to alter someone's altar is construed as tampering / imposition / power over / ritual assault if not psychic rape. IT'S NOT DONE. It is considered a denial of a woman's right to agency and privacy. The altar here acts as an extension of the woman's own body and the same social rules of respect, deference and 'space' have to be followed.

A major example of the consequences of 'messaging' with someone's shrine was provided by an incident several years ago when the men of the Ottawa community, during their Men's Weekend, modified a Goddess Shrine constructed by the women on Gina's land, during their Women's Weekend shortly before. The women had planned on building a stone cairn in the shape of a reclining woman. Instead, two mounds were produced spontaneously as two groups of women brought back stones and deposited them on the ground. These mounds were quickly recognized as breasts and the women decided not to modify them. Instead, they brought flowers, shells, feathers, and other natural objects, to decorate the stone mounds. When the men saw the stone mounds, they added a large erect cairn in the middle of the two rounded mounds and declared it their 'God' altar. When the women came back to Gina's farm, they had heard the men boasting of 'their' God having bested the women's Goddess. The women were upset and they insisted on rebuilding their shrine away from the men's cairn as a way of putting things right... Some women could not even go and see what had been done: "it's too painful, I want to remember it the way it was"; "horrible"; "how could they"; "typical, what do you expect? They're men!"; "just can't leave a woman's body alone, now, could they? Just had to fiddle..." More than lack of respect or politeness is evident here, all the past grievances between the men who considered the women too independent and the women who felt the men were interfering where they had

no business got played out over some stones piled up in more or less recognisable shapes...

7. COMPONENTS

Each altar is constructed of items chosen for their symbolic import. This is a magical universe and it is the metaphoric links between a woman's intent and the symbols she uses that are important and not any canonical validity. Nevertheless, some choices are dependent on the type of altar one wants to produce: elemental, standard magical, standard Wiccan, WCC, or Goddess oriented. Each is a microcosmic representation. (See Appendix Four - Altars).

a) Elemental: The elemental altar is the simplest of altars. It contains one each of four elements perceived as the building blocks of the universe: air, fire, water, earth, each placed in the appropriate quadrant of the circle. Women are free to choose what is meaningful to them as representations of these elements: feather, candle, shell, flower. The simplest and most mundane of articles can be used. They need not be purified or consecrated as the divine is immanent in nature.

This altar can be as simple or as elaborate as a mandala. Furthermore, the centre of the circle can be emphasized as spirit with something like a large

crystal or a deck of tarot cards placed in the centre to represent the choices yet to be made. If food or drink are to be shared, they can be placed in the centre of the circle surrounded by the elements thus becoming charged with their 'energy'.

b) Standard magical: The standard magical altar is based on the tools and the operations to be accomplished: a thurible (air) to burn incense and other flammable offerings; at least one candle/lamp (fire); a surface on which to work (paten / earth); a container for liquids (cup / chalice / water); a knife / athame to cut or inscribe and a wand to stir; a bell to summon, water and salt to purify, and a book containing texts and recipes.

On this altar, everything must be consecrated and the tools can only be used for this purpose or else risk contamination. Tools are often made especially for the purpose or purchased. Expense is part of the value of the object (the best, the most unique, etc). This is a rule driven domain in which any infraction negates any potential power. It is also a domain within which most Goddess women would prefer not to operate.

c) Standard Wiccan: The altar is constructed from a rectangular horizontal surface on which are placed the four elements, the divinity representations, the

'tools of the art', seasonal offerings, the cup and plate for the ritual meal, and the Book of Shadows. The God and Goddess are always represented together. Gender polarity is VERY important and is represented at many levels. Every item is coded according to gender and an equal number of male and female components are included. Some gendered components are: correspondences, tools, elements, divinity statues, and ritual actions such as the Great Rite and the Blessing of the Cake and Wine.

An elemental altar can be made Wiccan by adding both male and female divinity representations, earth can be bread, water can be wine (hum... only female elements are consumed... well, magicians were usually men...). Consecration is accomplished by 'conjoining' male to female: usually by inserting the athame (knife) into the chalice. Some women object strongly to the imagery and have replaced the knife by the wand or they use a cauldron with a wooden spoon. Why did Gardner choose the blade? Some women perceive it as a not too subtle reference to men's control of women by force / violence and refuse to use a bladed instrument for any ritual action taken in the name of the Goddess. Others perceive the knife as a female domestic tool, the kitchen knife, refusing to imagine it use as a weapon. They thus 'reclaim' it as a female tool of creating life (kitchen / food / garden) from its 'perversion' as a patriarchal tool of death (killing / war).

The items used on a Wiccan altar are purified and consecrated to this purpose only. Tools are perceived as such, tools, and define the worker; like an artisan with his tools of the trade, these are the "tools of the art".

d) Wiccan Church of Canada (WCC): This is a blend of both Wiccan and magical altars. A three part division along the horizontal axis, divine (top) / natural (middle) / human (bottom) is divided vertically into Male (right) and Female (left). For each position on the altar, there are tools and elements which are appropriate. This altar is always oriented North East. An added feature is the "Source Candle", usually black, placed between the God and Goddess candles: "From the Darkness of Chaos sprang the Goddess and from the Goddess came the God ..." will be said as first the Source and then the Goddess and God candles are lit.

e) Goddess: The Goddess altar is the most variable and idiosyncratic of all. It can be organized like any of the previous, including the presence of the male divine (son or lover of the Goddess) with only the obvious presence of the female divine being necessary. This representation of the female divine is often achieved by the use of three candles, one each of red, black and white representing the three aspects of the Goddess: Maiden (white), Mother (red), Crone (black). Sometimes the colours are pink, red, and purple or silver, gold,

and black. In either case, the intent is the same: to represent the three phases of the Goddess' life.

Not all Goddess altars contain obvious representations of the female divine. I have seen some as subtle as three flowers in a vase or three rocks in a basket and as elaborate as a table top mandala of dozens of figurines and statues of female divines from around the world. The choice is the woman's.

8. PURPOSE OF ALTAR:

In creating my multiple altars, I try to alter the world, to break down the barrier between sacred and mundane, between men and women, that the fenced altar of my childhood represented. As I create and maintain these sacred hearths, I finally become the altar girl I was never permitted to be as a child (Monaghan 2001b:4)

It is interesting to note the subtle shift from 'alter' to 'altar' in Monaghan's text. She is aware of the homonymous convergence and uses it to emphasize the creative, life affirming alteration of the hearth in contrast to its opposite, the "fenced altar of my childhood". Many of the Ottawa women would agree with her, adding that this also underlines the difference they perceive between priestess and priest.

While most of the women in Ottawa would agree that Goddess spirituality altars do what all altars do:

- define the locus of action,
- determine the forces at play (microcosm),
- focus the ritualist's intent as well as the group's,
- occupy the visual field thus providing a sense of privacy and a counter to possible boredom,
- foster a sense of connection to the immaterial,
- engage the senses and the aesthetics of participants,
- define ritual space and time (here and now), and
- constitute a first step for ritual,

they would emphasize that altars are tools that priestesses use. By actually 'working' at an altar, these women become more than devotees or worshippers, they become ritualists, actors in their own spirituality. Not content to remain passive recipients of a male clergy's ministrations, these women express strong need and desire to act in their own names, and for themselves first (and community later). They are not, or for some no longer, interested in becoming 'priests': this is not a need to minister to OTHERS, to provide a bridge for OTHERS between the divine and the human, but to be the agent of ONE'S OWN contact with the divine. These women insist on making a strong distinction between what they perceive to be the role of a priest and that of a priestess.

A priestess acts in her own name, alone or with others. When she acts with others, she acts with other women who also act in their own names. This is a community of priestesses, not a congregation under the direction of a leader. And each priestess has her own altar, that of her own body, which she seeks to conjoin with that of the Goddess through the celebration of the earth in its

full creation.

In building my spiritual dioramas today, I participate in an activity that echoes ancient times and ancient women's rituals (Monaghan 2001b:4).

The earth is my church
The body is my altar

And in preparing one's body for ritual, by bathing, robing, putting on 'sacred' jewellery, assembling tools and constructing an appropriate altar, all these preparations may actually end up being the whole of the ritual if the intent is finally accomplished by the construction of the altar. By having to choose her intent, her tools, her ingredients, her correspondences, and assembling them into a representation of the cosmology of a world within which her intent MUST necessarily manifest, by preparing her body both physically and psychically sometimes the 'work' does itself: the ritual ends up being the construction of the altar and anything else becomes superfluous.

But the altar is first and foremost the body of the woman herself: the body as both the location where things happen and the tools employed with hands that contain (cup), hands that support (pentacle), a hand that slashes (athame), or a finger that points (wand). The body too is a microcosm, this time not only of the world but of the Goddess who is also the world. Body of the Goddess, body of the priestess, body as altar, all conjoin through the body of the ritual.

The earth is my church

The body is my altar.

Even, or especially when the ritual space becomes virtual, the body remains present:

...my home is the altar on which I work on my life.
(Shea 2001:13)

As seen previously, ritual space is a state of mind rather than an actual place. Some authors explicitly say so (Ardinger 2000; Cunningham 1990; Starhawk 1979; Weinstein 1980) and the improvised nature of some Ottawa women's rituals certainly attest to this fact. Take for example the hospital ritual described above. Another example is an impromptu ritual done after one of the academic sessions of the Divina et Femina III (2000) conference. After speaking of her work as a Yoruban priestess, Tiziana Rinaldi Castro spoke of a particularly difficult counselling case she had had to deal with. Expressing dismay at her perceived difficulty in generating change in the situation, she asked us (the audience) to pray with her. I was asked to lead a spontaneous ritual within which we could gather up beneficial energy and make it available for the positive and appropriate outcome of this matter. The people there (several dozen, many of whom were either from the Neo-pagan / Wiccan community or the Goddess Worship community of Ottawa) spontaneously rose from their seats, assembled in a circle holding hands and improvised an appropriate ritual. No altar was constructed or tools used other than the body, mind and spirit of the people there. The four elements (air, fire, water, earth) were called upon

to sustain the actions taken, but it was the human actions of knowledge (air), daring (fire), will (water) and silence (earth) which were marshalled into action.

Many present at this ritual would concur with Barbara Ardinger when she says:

It seems to me that our true sacred space is the body of the Goddess and perhaps our true altar is Her heart or mind. One Christmas Eve - the night the barbarian German tribes called *Madranicht* or Mothers Night - I was doing a 7 A.M. (sic) ritual before a cluttered altar with a friend when suddenly I heard myself say, "The earth is our altar." I think that sums it up. The earth herself is our altar and we're part of the Goddess's ritual. As long as we state our intention and with words or without them invoke Her presence, the physical arrangements don't much matter (2000:108).

CHAPTER SEVEN: SEEING THE GODDESS

... yes, we have seen the Goddess, and she is us! That's really something to think about - that the Goddess represents everything our imaginations are capable of (quoted in Walker 2000:215).

I - IMAGERY OF THE FEMALE DIVINE IN NORTH AMERICA

One way of becoming conscious of the divine within oneself, according to the women of the Ottawa women's circles, is to make concrete what the Goddess looks like to oneself. A first strategy used to develop this lexicon of 'Goddess' images has been the search for, the discovery of, and the reuse of any and all extant images of supra human females.

Another strategy is to make the images oneself and "Goddess Making Workshops" have been organized to fulfil this need. The images produced during these workshops are considered as valid and valuable as any historical images and thus they enter the lexicon of Goddess images that women have at their disposal.

Bought, received, or made, the images or representatives of the Goddess that are used in the Ottawa region fit within a continent-wide trend. Indeed, concurrent with the development of a gynocentric spirituality in North America has been the development of female sacred or Goddess imagery, visual images and artifacts. Images and other representations are found in the same books

and journals feeding the development of North American Goddess Spirituality. Chief among these are images from the ancient past and from exotic or classical cultures where Goddesses are explicitly represented.

The images most favoured have been so called 'goddess figurines' of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic Near East and Europe illustrated in the books of Elinor Gadon, Marija Gimbutas, Merlin Stone and Barbara Walker.

Concurrent with the development of this gynocentric spirituality (centered on both the human and divine female) has been an art movement called by some "matriarchal" or "matristic" art, with strong feminist political beliefs and a reliance on female body imagery (Gadon 1989; Göttner-Abendroth 1982/1991; Orenstein 1978, 1990). Female artists involved in this art movement have proclaimed their intention to be grounded in female experience and perspective. They state their intention to make art 'by women for women'. Accordingly, they make art that collapses the distance between maker and viewer; art that is meaningful for women, in which women recognize themselves with their concerns, interests, experiences, desires and aspirations. For these women, art is supposed to give both voice and sight to women, ie: to express from a woman's point of view, and to see from a woman's perspective. As a practice, this art must embody the female form, ie: make the female an actor and doer,

an actor displaying to herself and to her own, rather than an object (female model) displayed for the benefit of the owner (male artist and patron).

In this context 'reclaiming' and 'rediscovering' prehistoric representations of anthropomorphic females thus takes on special pertinence. As 'goddesses', these representations have become tools of empowerment as demonstrated by such female artists as Judy Chicago (1979/1996) and Monica Sjöö (Sjöö & Mor 1987), who have in their own art production made explicit reference to prehistoric 'goddess figurines' considering them images of female power and agency. The fact that these figures of reference are both ancient and concrete give them additional potency.

Other historical and cultural sources are used, mostly, if not always, from outside Christianity. Little is done with Mary or Christian female saints. Judaic female figures are 'reclaimed' with Lilith and the Shekinah being most popular. African, Asian, Amerindian and other 'exotic' cultures as well as images from classical Greek and Roman times are welcome. Some women artists identify through performance art with these images, enacting their presence within ritual contexts in either ephemeral or recorded performances. More generally, women in North America who take up belly dancing as a hobby often recast its history into that of a 'dance of the Goddess' (Wilson & Wilson 1974;

Buonaventura 1983; Crosby 2002) and choreograph it now as a ritual activity 'by women for women' (DuFresne 1984). (1)

As a result of these ritual and artistic endeavours, a lexicon of female imagery has developed which is defined by the women who produce and use it as "goddess imagery". This lexicon is used to produce, in a more or less commercial manner, a large range of items that these women consider meaningful and useful in a spiritual / devotional way. These range from frame drums to jewellery, from candles to altar statuary and from clothing to magical tools.

Though these objects are purchased and used by both men and women who are not involved in Goddess spirituality but may be attracted to them for other reasons (erotic, aesthetic, fashion, adolescent rebellion, etc), only their production and use by women self identified as involved in Goddess spirituality will be considered.

Not only objects are produced: poetry, songs, ritual texts, and aphorisms all employ linguistic metaphors congruent with the images found and produced. The same themes centred on the experience of inhabiting a female body, coupled with a re-evaluation of the cultural and psychological stereotypes of

female emotion and experience take form in the words and actions these women produce (see Appendix One - Ritual Texts). A strong convergence of themes and images becomes evident as actions, words and images produced in the context of Goddess Worship are studied as a whole.

Whether ritual re-enactment, ritual writing or process of artistic production, the reference to and use of this goddess imagery is closely associated to a female defined and female derived political agenda of 'empowerment'. Started by the women's liberation movement with its goals of social, economic and political equity, it has now been extended by these women to the sphere of religious and mythopoeic meaning and agency.

At the same time, the growing visibility of 'goddess' imagery in North American popular culture is a result of the permeation of women's spiritual concerns, elaborations and celebrations within public consciousness, to the extent that these women are being recognized as a 'target market group'. (2)

For instance, this use of women-centred images has now been extended to objects not normally considered 'art', such as: logos, trademarks, clothing, fabric decoration, jewellery, illustrations in and on books and magazines, greeting cards and writing paper, decals, bumper stickers, temporary and

permanent skin tattoos, pottery, quilts, flower gardens, furniture, candles, soaps and colouring books. Not all these objects are commercially mass produced. In fact, most are made in small numbers and in an artisan / crafts person type way.

Another area where images are produced and used is in the making of devotional objects for women's contemporary spirituality (including but not limited to Goddess Spirituality, Wicca, Neo-paganism, Feminist Witchcraft, Feminist Spirituality, and Goddess Worship): statuary, wall plaques, devotional images, candles, altar tools such as pottery chalices, candle sticks, bowls, ceremonial wands and knives, incense burners, lamps, drum skins, rattles, divination cloths, pouches and book bags. Banners, kites and wall hangings for private or public ritual spaces have also been produced. Again production may be commercial, artisanal, or personal.

II - IMAGERY OF THE FEMALE DIVINE IN OTTAWA (see Appendices Eight & Nine)

The women in Ottawa have access to a full array of sources. Images are provided by some women by word of mouth, gifts and book exchanges and by other women in articles and books that they have written about themselves and others. Product catalogues, store web sites, actual store inventories,

artist's portfolios, art exhibits (Divina et Femina), studio tours, private collections are all venues for discoveries of new and old images and ideas. One must also note omnibus publications of 'goddess figurines', women's contemporary art and exhibits, and archeological 'evidence' for matriarchal or matristic pasts. How-to books, pamphlets and courses on ritual and devotion within Goddess spirituality are readily available. Finally, several 'Goddess Making Workshops' have been held in Ottawa over the last 10 years.

Yet a collection of examples of objects recently made locally and items available for sale since the late 1970's show that most images fall within a few categories or use the same recurrent themes. For instance, many are inspired by ancient goddesses.

At the local level, and as a result of these endeavours, a lexicon of female imagery has developed which is defined by the women who produce and use it as 'goddess imagery'. This lexicon is used to produce, in a more or less commercial manner, a large range of items that these women consider meaningful and useful in a spiritual / ritual / devotional way.

For these women, all of the above images are also aspects of the same search for a female defined and female derived political agenda of 'empowerment' -

the women's liberation movement.

Among the most representative or meaningful images that these women produce and / or acquire, some are selected as evoking the most 'power' or potentiality. They are the favourite motifs, recurring most often in figurines, jewellery, and objects worn on the body, and pictures and statues on the altar.

Among these motifs, the following are the most frequently encountered:

- 'drawing down the moon' based on the Nile Neolithic figurine (Appendix 9.1)
- spiral / labyrinth, especially combined with above figurine but also reminiscent of various historical sites like New Grange (Appendix 9.2)
- Willendorf (little fat lady) (Appendix 9.3)
- snake, by itself or combined with female human figure where it takes on the aspect of kundalini fire, ie: women's erotic power (Appendix 9.4)
- birthing, in more or less explicit poses (Appendix 9.5)
- crescent moon, especially triple crescent motif or Lady of Laussel (Appendix 9.6) and moon phases (waxing / full / waning).

Again, especially important to the Ottawa women are the images of women found in European and Middle Eastern archeological sites of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. These images of women, many identified rather

gratuitously as goddesses or priestesses, and some proven to be fakes (Lapatin 2001), have become archetypal and iconic for them. By that I mean that they are now being imbued with religious, psychological, and mythic meaning such that they serve for some as models of both past and future charters of values and behaviour in human gendered relationships and in human / divine relationships.

III - GODDESS MAKING WORKSHOPS (See Appendices Five & Six)

Goddess making workshops are a local development with few similar activities anywhere else.

1. GENESIS OF IDEA OF WORKSHOPS:

Women in Ottawa are very lucky in having as a resource Lauren Foster McLeod. As a professional illustrator, and one of the facilitators of the Women's Spirituality Group and children's Fairy Magic Group at the Unitarian Universalist Church on Cleary Avenue in Ottawa; as editor of Blessed Bee (a pagan children's magazine); as a continuing illustrator for SageWoman magazine and yearly calendar; as illustrator for the Divina et Femina exhibit catalogues and as an artist participating in local women's art shows, she has helped to make visible the images and symbols that women have been developing for themselves. I first met Lauren at the Women's Full Moon circle at the Occult

Shop. She was then just starting to establish herself as an illustrator. She has since produced illustrations of Goddess jewellery for a store catalogue; made banners and promotional flyers for many local women's spirituality events; produced statuary, jewellery and greeting cards on goddess themes for local stores; illustrated the SageWoman calendar using local women as her models; become a regular illustrator in the alternative spirituality press; and most importantly, she has been the initiator and continuing facilitator of Goddess Making Workshops. Few women in Ottawa do not know her and / or own some of her work. Many of us have taken workshops with her. Many more have circled with her over the years. She is a long time participant in all of the public and some of the private women's circles in Ottawa. Though she has never sought initiations or active status as a priestess, she is very active in facilitating women's and children's events within the Ottawa pagan community.

She first came up with the idea of a 'Goddess Making Workshop' as an adjunct to the 'Cakes for the Queen of Heaven' module for the UU Women's Spirituality Group in Ottawa. 'Cakes' is an ten part study module on past and present instances of goddess worship in world religions written and designed by Shirley Ann Ranck to teach other UU women a more woman affirming way of understanding the divine. It has been in use for at least 10 years in Canada and since 1986 the United States. Laurie thought it advantageous to gather up as

many illustrations of 'goddesses' as she could find and to present them to other women as models of the female divine which they then could either copy or use as inspiration for the 'creating' of their own representations of the female divine. Over the years, this workshop has been given as part of the UU module in Ottawa, as part of one year's Women's Weekend, and at several Women's Circles as part of ritual and as a separate workshop. It was also given as one of Divina et Femina I's workshops. For the women who take part, it is both very popular and a very powerful experience.

In her own art practice, Laurie has sought both historical accuracy (when illustrating articles or books) and personal inspiration (when producing statuary and 'art' for sale). She has scoured illustrated sources in archeology, art, mythology, history, commercial catalogues, feminist books, until she had over 200 images of the female divine from past and present religious traditions. All of these she has used and made available to others. She has been the single most influential source of goddess imagery (both historical and modern) and effective facilitator (through leading the workshops and encouraging women to produce their own images) to the personal discovery of goddess imagery for Ottawa women (and now others through her illustrations in SageWoman).

2. DESCRIPTION OF TYPICAL WORKSHOP

Each goddess making workshop starts with the event being publicised by word of mouth and by flyers posted on the UU Church bulletin board and in various stores such as the Occult Shop, the Hungry Eye, Singing Pebbles Books, etc. On the day of the event, women arrive knowing they will be working with clay. They are thus wearing comfortable old clothes and they are prepared to make a modest donation of money to cover costs (\$2-\$5). The materials provided by Laurie include plasticine, modelling clay and potter's clay, recycled Styrofoam food trays, plastic wrap, wax paper, various clay modelling tools, several hundred photocopied illustrations of archeological and art figures of human females ('goddesses'), and some examples of previously made figurines.

She takes some time talking about pre/non- Christian depictions of the female divine. Books and illustrations are looked at, discussed and eventually, specific images are chosen by women as models of what they themselves might like to produce. Laurie then spends some time explaining the technology of clay modelling (Laurie is quite good at this) and every woman is given as much encouragement and help as she may need to start experimenting with the clay. During the workshop, experimentation and mutual encouragement and interplay is quite apparent: the women will compare and comment on each others work, often with surprise and delight, always with enthusiasm. Many

women will express dismay at not knowing how to express themselves through modelling, but with encouragement from everyone there, everyone produces something. Some women, during the workshop, will even attempt several different ideas, as no limit is put on what they do and how much material they use. Since women are encouraged to leave with extra clay and even copies of the illustrations to use at home, no time constraint is perceived by them during the workshop.

A typical workshop lasts a little over two hours and several women have attended more than one over the years. Women say that it is their enthusiasm and enjoyment of the workshop which have brought them to insist on it being repeated so many times (to Laurie's surprise and mild dismay - its preparation is time consuming).

3. DESCRIPTION OF TYPICAL GODDESSES MADE

At first, most women try to reproduce their favourite goddess figurine which they have seen in a catalogue, in a book, a store or on line. Then, they start experimenting with something more personal. Eventually, and only partially because of inexperience with clay modelling, the women start making 'fat little goddesses' à la Willendorf. This usually produces much bantering and joking: "oh, she looks just like you!", or "wow, she's pretty", and again, "um, yummy".

Some women will elaborate on a theme: spirals, wombs, mounds, vulvas, enclosing arms (with or without baby), or 'drawing down the moon' (Nilotic vulture headed female figure with upraised arms) (3). Some women will produce extremely abstract forms which they identify more through the sensual experience of producing them than through any apparent produced shape. Some women will decorate the figures they produce with shells, semi precious gems, feathers, beads, paint or other found objects such that the figure resembles more a 'fetish' than a statue of a divine personage. There is something intensely talismanic about this. The women themselves consider these figurines 'containers': they're not always certain of what, but they do know they want them and what they contain.

In part as a result of her involvement as the facilitator of these workshops, Laurie has produced some very meaningful images for the Ottawa women. One of the most pertinent is that of a local woman juggling dozens of small goddess figures up in the air in front of her. This image was used as the back cover of the *Divina et Femina II* art exhibit catalogue. Laurie also produced the conference's logo and exhibited some of her private work in the exhibition. She is not the only woman artist contributing to the emerging iconography of the Goddess in Ottawa, but she has been the most well known of the women participating in the various public circles.

4. DESCRIPTION OF REACTIONS OF WOMEN TO WHAT THEY MADE

The women were initially sceptical that they would be able to produce something aesthetic. Many of them came more for the information they assumed would be available, than for the actual production of a figurine. They all wanted the opportunity to learn and explore imagery associated with the female divine and had little expectation that they would end up with something they would cherish. This is now more true of early workshops. Women who have participated to later ones have known that they would end up with something meaningful and they have been there because of this expectation. Word of mouth has had a lot to do with this.

While first manipulating the clay, the women would joke about being kids again, and both reticence at the messiness and sensual pleasure in the clay's plasticity were evident, sometimes in the same woman. And the women were aware of their own sensory reactions to the process of manipulating wet clay.

As recognizable images started to be produced, the women got more quiet and absorbed in their task: they sometimes would just stop and think or get up and look around at other women's work or even look outside or take a short walk away. This was especially true for the workshops that occurred on Gina's farmland. It seemed at times that the internal process these women were

experiencing was too intense and that a 'break' was necessary.

Some women seemed frustrated at not being able to give form to what they saw internally, some others were surprised and delighted at what they were producing. Some women showed strong emotional responses (tears, joy, awe, sorrow, longing, wonder, bewilderment, introspection) as the workshop proceeded.

After, when women shared their thoughts and feelings about the workshop, they said things like: "I wish I had done this sooner", "why did I not know about these goddesses?", "this is fun!", "wow, I never thought I could do something like this", "they're all so beautiful, and so different", "now I have a goddess of my own", "she looks like you!", "oh look, at what ... has made. Wow, that's so different!", "that's yummy", "...and not a Barbie in the lot!".

Some women expressed a sense of wonder at the beauty of the female form and of its almost unlimited variety of forms. They found astonishing that extreme simplification or abstraction could still be unmistakably female. They were also surprised that much more than the few stereotypical forms were produced (not all breasts and vulvas or madonnas with babes). It was interesting to notice that the women were less drawn to images that were

considered 'too' specific to a time and place, such as a named goddess of a recognizable cultural milieu (4). It may be that the women did not feel adequately informed to establish a relationship with her. For these women, it is important to 'know' the historical and cultural goddesses and to understand their original cult practices. This may be a result of the "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven" classes that many of them have attended... the question has never been asked of them.

There was always at least one woman who was profoundly shaken by the experience and who found herself confronted with ingrained prejudices against her own body or women's bodies in general. Some found themselves for the first time 'in charge' of what was female beauty and who got to decide. Issues of sexual abuse or dysfunctional relationships with the body were broached during and after the workshop, especially when the workshop was part of a ritual or occurred during Women's Weekend, maybe because of their more relaxed, intimate settings and the lack of time constraints. Certainly, the experience of making these 'goddesses' has had a profound impact on the way these women perceive 'beauty' and 'femaleness'.

5. USES OF GODDESS FIGURES BY WOMEN WHO MADE THEM

Some figurines were discarded almost as soon as they were made. I don't know why, but maybe as I was, some were just experimenting and didn't expect a finished product. But then, I work with my hands more often than most and have learned to trust that eventually the internal image will emerge and take tangible form. Some women wrapped up their figurines very carefully, almost as new born infants, to bring home with them. They held them gingerly, with looks on their faces reminiscent of that on a new mother who finally holds her child. Some were aware of this and tried to minimize the intensity of the emotion by joking: "this is silly, its just a lump of clay..." Others maintained: "No, it's a goddess... your goddess... she's important."

Some women, many years later, still had their figurine(s) as a permanent part of their home altar/shrine and would bring them to circle when it was their turn to lead ritual. Women remembered when a specific figurine had been produced "oh, I remember that one" and could ask: "is that the one you made at....?"

Some women expressed disappointment at not producing something as lovely as what they visualized but expressed a wish to try again at home or in another medium. Certainly, a few women found that they could produce something that others cherished and this has led to a more public production of art work by

them. An example is Willow Marie Power taking the experience of making plaster casts of faces, which was a part of one goddess making workshop, and now making body casts of women of all ages, especially pregnant, as commissioned work good enough to be exhibited at *Divina et Femina III* (5).

If one considers the number of workshops given and the number of women who have taken them, it is rather remarkable that no one has said she was disappointed in the workshop itself. The experience of making 'a goddess' remains a subject of conversation, something alluded to, and reminisced about.

The relationship between the images and the beliefs is circular: the production of the images is a ritual process that fosters the experience of the presence of the goddess as herself, as a result of group action, and principally, as an aspect of the woman herself who is producing the image. Thus, what a woman produces when she attempts to represent the goddess contributes to the discovery of this goddess and becomes part of the group lexicon of available manifestations of this goddess presence within individual and group consciousness.

Within the Neo-pagan context, the images available to the women as representations of the Goddess do evolve. Choices also have evolved during the

past 10 years and the direction of those changes is interesting. It tells of a progression towards a more abstract representation, or at another level, towards less anthropomorphic images. Even prehistoric images are subjected to such a change: After a period of increasing interest, rediscovery, and reuse of any and all images of the past which could be interpreted as 'female' (from early 1970 to late 1980), a reduction of the number of individual pre-historic images has occurred. While no image has disappeared completely, some few have become standardized and now hold a position of instant recognizability and interpretability. Where the figures are anthropomorphic they are mostly attentive to the female attributes, if not, they emphasize roundness, curves and circles.

The importance of natural objects such as shells, feathers, stones, branches and flowers, etc. (6) as representations and manifestations of the Goddess cannot be overestimated. These objects are so frequently used on altars and shrines as to have become emblematic of the Goddess. One aspect of these "natural" objects is interesting: they are not symbols in the strict sense of the term, they do not "stand" for the divine, they embody or re-present It or Her.

For the women in Ottawa, the most successful (numerous, recognisable) images seem to be those that have most lost their specific historical contextual

referent such that they now can contain the maximum of metaphoric links. They thus become 'better to think with', to paraphrase Claude Levi-Strauss. The more empty of factual reference they seem, the better their potential for embodying aspects of the Goddess and her human daughter.

Each woman, and all women, irrespective of artistic talent or status, theo/alological training or inclination, can and must find or produce for herself and for others, manifestations of the goddess and therefore of the Goddess' presence. Finding, producing, or reproducing images of the Goddess is a primary and primal ritual act.

In spite of the individual effort and personal recognition involved in composing what the Goddess 'looks like', the women of this community dealing with the goddess/goddesses are assuming a common if not universal ground for the expressions of the divine in female form. They provide for each other a confirmation of the validity of one's personal vision, and in so doing, little by little, they are moving towards a common, if unspoken, set of criteria allowing one to re-cognize the Goddess in concrete forms. If they are at ease with - and value - the most ancient images it is partly because the Goddess, and Divine Femaleness, is to be found at the ground of Being. These women do explicitly posit that all representations of the divine as female are referring back to a

primal femaleness - the essence of be-ing female.

CHAPTER EIGHT - ESSENTIALISM, FEMINISM, WOMEN AND WITCHES

... those who practice feminist witchcraft and / or participate in "goddess rituals" use consciously constructed mythopoeic images in religious ritual to create a framework of meaning which seeks to define a new ethos. The ethos is intended to 'revision' power, authority, sexuality, and social relations (Griffin 1995:1).

I - WHAT IS WOMANHOOD:

For the women participating in the Goddess circles of the Neo-pagan community in Ottawa, involvement with the Goddess and the Female Divine leads directly to and proceeds from an essential question: what is the nature or definition of womanhood. This question feeds discussions, orients political decisions and structures their religious / spiritual life. Several options are provided them by feminist literature, a literature to which they have access but which they do not necessarily discuss.

1. WOMANHOOD AS DESTINY:

Most, but not all feminists reject Essentialism because they see it as reinforcing the patriarchal Determinist argument that states that anatomy / biology is destiny and that women's inferior social and cultural status and restricted access to power is proper and justifiable because these are contingent on women's biological sex and are thus part of the natural order. In other words, it is women's eternal nature to be disempowered and possessed by men... cultural and historical specificity notwithstanding (Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974;

Brown & Jordanova 1981).

Yet, the Goddess-oriented women in Ottawa do not reject essentialism. Instead, they give it a positive spin by taking femaleness, including its biological processes, as a source of power since it is one essential aspect of the creative process through which reality becomes manifest. For them, this is, if not a fact of one's life, then a belief one is struggling to make true.

2. WOMANHOOD AS CULTURALLY CONSTITUTED:

Other feminists argue that there is nothing 'natural' about being a woman, that "One is not born but rather becomes a woman" (de Beauvoir 1953) and furthermore, that it is imperative that this construction of gender and sexuality be analysed as to how it is chosen, learned, manipulated, controlled and ultimately, how it can be changed. Since what cultures make of sex differences is almost infinitely variable, these cannot be biological (Brown & Jordanova 1981). Therefore, language, gender discourse and performance (Butler 1990) and the individual's own choices in the context of 'mass culture' become the constituents of what is or is not female or male. This emphasis on cultural constructions poses a problem in that 'woman' disappears as a category of agency, since, according to these theorists, to retain it would be to ascribe to essentialism (Mitchell & Rose 1982).

Again, the women of the Ottawa circles have constructed their own interpretation of an attitude with which most of them would partially agree. They do recognize the heavy weight of cultural indoctrination and socialization. But they do not see it as the origin of their gender and sex; rather they describe the experience of culture and society as re-orienting, hiding or subverting the 'natural' reality of Womanhood.

3. WOMANHOOD AS EXPERIENCE:

Other feminists who retain the notion of nature as determinant, see in it a source of female power inaccessible to males. According to them, nature gives to women special ways of conceiving of and knowing the world (Griffin 1978; Tomm 1995). This EMBODIMENT alternative corresponds to the radical notion that bodies are the ground of being, the source of all knowledge and experience about the self and the world (Bono & Kemp 1991; Budapest 1979; Goldenberg 1987; Irigaray 1974; Kristeva 1980; Rich 1976) and sees women's actual or potential maternity as the essential difference between men and women (1). The women in the Ottawa women's spirituality community would add their own female experiences of being socialized as women in North American society to this difference between men and women. They do not take the body as the sole ground of being, or as the sole defining factor in one's relationship as female with the Divine, as human with the female divine, or as woman with the

Goddess.

Some authors (Irigaray 1974; Goldenberg 1987) maintain that patriarchy's greatest triumph has been to estrange women from their individual bodies (biology, sexuality, fertility, aesthetics) while locking them into a group biological determinism (the devalued 'other'). To reverse this estrangement is the goal of much of contemporary women's spirituality (Christ & Plaskow 1992; Eller 1993/1995; Gray 1988) and this goal is visible, conscious and explicit in the Ottawa women's rituals and actions.

4. WOMANHOOD AS POWER:

During the European Middle Ages and Renaissance, the Christian church sought to eradicate non-conforming elements from the population. These elements included those people identified as pagans, heretics and witches. Most people identified as witches, defined as 'doers of evil' (maleficia) were women. Why has yet to be satisfactorily explained but most feminists would point to the gynophobic attitudes of Church preachings on the inherent, essential malice and sexual evil of women as the 'daughters of Eve' which made of all women potential witches (Sprenger & Kremer 1486/2003). Thus WITCH became the ultimate negative connotation of the category WOMAN and this as a direct result of her NATURE. But what if the value of the connotation were to be

reversed? What if one's nature as a woman gave one inherent power: that of women's wisdom, of the wisewomen, of witches (Ehrenreich & English 1976)? What if women's biology mirrored that of divine nature, of the Goddess (Budapest 1976; Christ 1997)? What if women's sexuality were to be a sacrament of this Goddess (Valiente 1989) and a source of positive power (Lord 1978, 1989)? What if women's fertility were to be a metaphor of the creative potential in humanity (Budapest 1976; Radford Ruether 1980)? What if the aesthetics of womanhood were to be named and voiced by women for themselves (gynocentric art)? What if experiencing one's own inherent essence rather than transcending it were to be the means to religious fulfilment (Moltmann-Wendel 1994)? What if women embodied consciously and individually their woman-ness and men their man-ness?

Dianic, or feminist witches have taken these questions to heart by answering emphatically yes to them and building a new rituality and aesthetics on this positive affirmation of embodied, carnal womanhood. From nature and culture as inherently limiting to nature and experience as inherently empowering seems to be the logic of much of contemporary women's spirituality. This is a radical redefinition and revaluing of women, femaleness and essentialism (Griffin 2000b).

The women in Ottawa have made a different choice. For them, a witch is not someone who stands on the source and seat of power, that is female power; it is more precisely someone who can share power, or access her share of power. In their daily lives, they deal squarely with others of different genders, sexual orientations or nature. Their Goddess is not their own monopoly - she reigns over everything and everybody and is as immanent in the other as in the self, female or not.

II - THE POWER TO NAME ONESELF:

You are a witch by saying so three times (attributed to Z. Budapest).

A strong component of the empowerment process is the power of naming oneself, that is to claim one's identity and to claim the possibility of constructing one's identity, in other words, the power to choose one's models. The feminist reclaiming of the witch as woman of power accomplishes both and provides a concrete example of the trend. When, following the second wave of North American feminism in the late 1960's, some North American women chose as a potent symbol of defiance and rebellion to call themselves witches and to adopt the image of the witch as a model of a woman of power, they were, they say, 'reclaiming' (2) women's power which they saw as having been denied them by patriarchal oppression (3).

For the participants in the women circles in Ottawa, Goddess rituals are awakening a discourse on power. This discourse is far ranging: what kind of power, exercised by whom, to do what? Within this discourse on power the term 'witch' appears forcefully.

All women are born witches by their very nature.
(Dianic Witchcraft aphorism, c. 1975).

What is it about women's nature that could possibly make the above aphorism either a curse or a blessing? What essential truth, if any, is clothed in these words? Given Europe's history of fear of and fascination with the image of the witch (Matalene 1978; Purkiss 1996), why would any woman today who speaks of herself as a feminist choose to call herself a witch (Eller 1993/1995; Purkiss 1996) or even to maintain that all women are by their nature witches and that this is a power that must be reclaimed by them (Budapest 1979)? This is only one of the terms of reference by which women involved in Goddess spirituality define themselves.

The 'witch' as a self ascribed referent becomes equivocal, fluid, ambiguous, polysemic, and easily manipulated by anyone as both a symbol of deviance and defiance and a model of female power, both legitimate and illegitimate. To make sense of contemporary women's use of this term, one needs to know how they represent to themselves the historical, cultural and academic uses of the word 'witch' in Europe and America. The semantic domain of the term witch in

contemporary culture is very different depending on the subculture. (4) Contemporary North American female writers and ritualists participate in the dissemination of specific uses of the term witch by women. They also contribute to related discourses on what these women mean by power, women's power, and patriarchal oppression.

Many sources are available to these women to chart out the semantic field of the word witch. Women share amongst themselves legends and fairy tales, folklore, religious discourses on heresy and female nature, and scientific and academic androcentric discourses in history, psychology and sociology. They share a growing feminist discourse in these same disciplines deconstructing the work already done to reveal the witch as an object of patriarchal fear and of the dis-empowerment of women (Matalene 1978; Radford Ruether 1980; W.I.T.C.H. 1970, etc.).

They already have access to political and spiritual feminist discourse which reconstructs the image of the witch as a model of essential female power which needs to be reclaimed and lived anew. Finally, they may participate in the discourse of Wicca / Dianic Witchcraft / Feminist Witchcraft for whom the image of the witch is a charter for a new relationship with a female divine, the Goddess. Seen in this context, a witch is both a label and a category, an

identifiable individual and a role ascribed to by one's own community.

III - LEGENDS, FAIRY TALES AND FOLKLORE:

The ugly, old woman in tattered black clothing, long grey hair, hunched back, constantly mumbling under her breath as she glares at you from under the brow of her pointed black hat is a stereotypical figure of European legends and fairy tales. She is the evil step-mother who refuses to care for her step-children. She is the old woman deep in the woods who lures unsuspecting children to their deaths. She is the village scold who curdles the milk, withers the crops, causes storms, infertility and impotence. She is the fairy godmother that is left off the guest list and so curses the child. She is the enchantress who feeds on men's vitality. She is every woman who doesn't belong, doesn't comply, doesn't follow the rules. She is the arrogant, the cruel, the unforgiving, the unloving, she always loses, always dies (Purkiss 1996).

Being bad, she is everything that the good woman is not (Séguin 1978), the perfect counterpoint for women who are attempting to escape the stereotype of the good girl. This explains why the position of Wiccan women in particular is so ambiguous. On the one hand, many Neo-pagans and Wiccans will strenuously object to the exhibition or use of the Bad Witch figure (à la Wizard of Oz) on the grounds that it misrepresents both 'real' witches and women; on

the other hand, others, sometimes the same women as before, will object with equal vigor to the figure of the Good Witch, whose power is seemingly conservative were it not for the 'marvels' she performs. The feminist Wiccan and Goddess-centred discourses on the notion of the witch held in the Neopagan community of Ottawa reveal that individual women and communities of women make choices in selecting the components of their identities. Furthermore, there are strong currents of opposition in the construction of 'woman's identity'. What this new identity is opposing may also need to be constructed at the same time. These choices, these constructions are not developed in isolation. They progress through participation, direct or indirect, with communities of women whether actual groups meeting regularly or virtual links established by women reading the same authors, attending the same events or purchasing the same items.

For the women of the Ottawa women's circles, the triple process of discovering themselves, discovering the Goddess, and discovering the body has meant an acceptance of the witch identity both as a positive and negative symbol. By naming themselves, they affirm their rebellion and their freedom. They would not accept the label of 'whore' - which is too precisely defined but they recognize themselves in the imprecisely defined, mysterious and ambiguous 'witch'.

IV - THE POWER TO BE ONESELF

These women do not claim a power defined by another person, another institution or even god. They claim a power to be what they are in all its variety and ambiguity. They claim the right not to be precisely defined and they recognize the necessity of preserving ambiguity throughout their rituals, their sacred texts, their iconography. Thus they negotiate a realistic path toward their own individual power by making no dramatic break with the past or with the daily context of their lives. For them, embodiment of the sacred brings the sacred into the normal activities of one's body and of one's self. This is obvious in their treatment of domesticity and family.

... feminism ... depends on the experience of quotidian living for its meaning and direction (Carson & Pajackowska 2000:xi).

Make for yourself a power spot
 Bring you a spoon and a cooking pot
 Bring air
 Bring fire
 Bring water
 Bring earth
 And you a new universe will birth ...
 Shekhinah Mountainwater (1991:87)

Kitchen Witchery: The opening ritual will deal with the conference theme of sacred domesticity in a light-hearted way. As the Goddess asks, we worship in reverence ... and mirth. The ritual will, literally, revolve around the cooking pot, which is the foundation of family and civilization. We will make a joyful noise with our cooking implements, and then festoon the ritual tree with them. Dare we suggest that the tree is the one from which Eve ate the apple,

thereby bringing humanity into consciousness?
Gina Ellis (2000:48)

The positive value placed on domesticity appears everywhere in the background of ritual life. What makes a good home makes a good ritual space. What makes a good hostess makes a good ritualist. What makes a good mother makes a good initiator, or goddess ... Food, comfort, safety, beauty and friendship are necessary components of life, inside or out of circle. Goddesses and women wash, nurture, weave, mend, build, shelter, feed and support life.

The family is valued not as an abstract symbol or general referent, but as the sometimes comfortable, sometimes painful environment of one's life. It is spoken of almost as an extension of one's body and certainly as the condition of one's embodiment. It is also the future: the women of the Ottawa women's circles weave webs of interconnectedness which permit them to constitute for themselves families of choice, mothers finding spiritual daughters who themselves become mothers, sisters finding each other, older women finding grand-daughters, younger women finding older mentors. These bounds survive beyond the limits of the circles and become the foundations of lasting friendships. Community is built within which even the 'witch' finds home.

These women have resolved in part the contradiction inherent in the dyadic definitions of womanhood by adopting the double image of the witch and the

goddess as metaphors for women of power. Intuitively understanding both Mary Douglas' (1966/1980) notion of the inherent unconstrained power and freedom of the margin and Mary Daly's (1987) notion of the freeing power of standing 'outside the parameters of patriarchal predictability', they have constructed for themselves a new model of identity. In investing themselves in the 'messy' and ambiguous figures of the witch and the goddess, they have embraced ambiguity as a positive aspect of existence and they have adopted an existential stance of which Simone de Beauvoir would have approved. This is however still an ideal to attain, because in the process, these women have had to reconfigure the definitions of femaleness, community and divinity, amongst other basic concepts. This reconfiguration is most notable in the central figure of the Goddess.

CHAPTER NINE - PROBLEMS IN LIVING AN EMBODIED THEALOGY

From the rituals, from the iconography and the sacred texts which have become the foundations of an evolving religious tradition, we can glimpse how a group of women are developing a new relationship with their bodies and with the sacred. At the very least, we can recognize certain trends. First of all, those rituals, images, and texts have evolved over time and we can identify in which direction they are proceeding. In other words, we can trace what a particular group of women who identify positively their relationship with what they call the Goddess can construct. What new conceptions of the body, their own and the Goddess' are taking form. In general terms, it is obvious that the body becomes good rather than sinful: the body as giver of life from birth to death. But there are ambiguities in how these women negotiate the changes they are making. There is no perfect fit between what occurs at the ritual level, the textual level and the iconographic level. What is being done does not always match what is being said or represented. There is agreement but there are also ambiguities in the following trends:

- A reduction of variance is occurring in the forms of ritual and images and yet variety is perceived as good.
- There is a growing standardisation in the forms and contents of both ritual and image which can be seen as the establishing of a new 'tradition'.

- Experienced Priestesses are being marginalized by the realities of their special circumstances: as ritual leaders, they lose part of their freedom and individuality, they are no longer anonymous and can no longer enjoy the freeing aspects of disclosure within anonymity.

In order to deepen this exploration, one would have to have access to what these women understand and recognize to be the physical, mental and emotional process(es) that come into play for them as they take part in these rituals. This would require further study and intensive interviewing. At least three aspects of living with a Goddess' body could be explored in more depth: integration, sisterhood, and relations with men.

I - INTEGRATION:

How do these women integrate mind, body and soul? How do they integrate the rational and emotional parts of themselves? How do they integrate with other women, Goddess oriented or not? How do these women view their own humanity? Their pasts, presents, and futures? Their selves as aspects of nature, not as all of nature, but as parts of nature? How far are they willing to integrate both what they are and what they have become? It is rather easy to learn to live with red hair but rather harder to live with disease, scars, or the aftermath of what others have done to you. Goddess spirituality embraces the inherent

but distrusts what is imposed from the outside. This can lead to imperfect integration with oneself and one's own history.

II - SISTERHOOD:

These women DO grow much closer to other women. They develop a shared language and iconography. They forge lasting links made of experiences, disclosures, support and understanding. They explore new modes of thinking, feeling and acting and in so doing craft for themselves a new ethos of community and gendered solidarity. This sisterhood continues outside of the ritual context. Even if a woman does not continue to attend ritual with other women, she continues to be part of the network of care, 'entre-aide', which these women weave for each other. This is not only the symbolic spider web but a real concrete 'safety net'. Real community IS built bringing a great lessening of the distrust and distance that daughters of the 1950's were taught to have for other women.

III - RELATIONS WITH MEN:

This sisterhood comes with a price: an even greater alienation from men. It is not that men are seen as some kind of enemy but that they stay an alien other. No cross-gender understanding, shared experiences or language is being built with them. Male mistrust is being met by female mistrust and even those

women who have strong relationships with men find themselves sometimes incapable of bridging the gulf that seems to be growing between the religious experience of women and that of men. This is even more poignant for Wiccan and Neo-pagan women who expect their men to share in their cosmology and theo(a)logy and who find themselves instead alienated and mistrusted.

Some women involved in Goddess spirituality have found that they cannot accept the growing alienation they feel from their religious communities of origin. They leave circle, friends, contacts and new community behind to return to the more rigid form of their religion of origin. For example, two women in Ottawa who were from liberal Jewish backgrounds have now married into ultra-conservative communities. At least three nominal Christians have married into Charismatic or Fundamentalist groups. These women cannot be faulted: Is it to understand them to say that they are acting out of need? Yet their actions make clear how ambiguous and 'costly' the creation of a new identity and ethos of community can be for some.

On a more intellectual level, the increasing distance between the feminist theological literature to which everyone has access, the British Traditional Wicca from which many texts and rituals originate and what these women are actually doing today is creating another growing dissonance. This dissonance is organic.

It is the product of the process of emancipation from canonic texts and liturgy. What will result is still to be determined.

It may be that these trends are not there by choice. It may be, for instance, that the ritual context, especially in the 'open' public circles where anyone can take part, imposes certain features such as simplification because of the potentially uneven levels of competence and knowledge of participants. Normalisation of symbols may also be understood as the easiest strategy to foster recognition and understanding by the greatest number of participants. The ritual process is in itself a definite form distinct from other spheres of life, with its own necessities. So the transformation of image to icon might also be a ritual imperative: the imposition of iconographic simplification corresponds to the impersonalisation and simplification of the public altar compared to the private shrine: thus private image become public icon can serve as a rallying point. Among these women, images are supposed to be born or found through individual apprehension; but such images become shareable when they participate in a discourse larger than that of its producer, when they transcend their particular context of production and meaning and inform a group's sense of identity and 'appartenance'.

Furthermore, if one values honesty rather than truth, that is to say the realness

of the particular rather than the unassailable of the universal, then one cannot establish a stable lexicon of few images and expect everyone to recognise themselves in them. This may account for the fragmentary nature of groups and alliances, and the ever changing landscape of group memberships. But then, this causes no alarm, after all "everything changes".

Within this context, what happens to the body, that of the Goddess and that of the woman? It is striking that in the iconography we witness a simplification of the body and most of the time, a replacement of the Goddess as an anthropomorphic figure by natural objects and substances that are said to "represent" (a word often used) Her. The same process is at work in the text where the body of the Goddess is replaced by its female features which are most often not even named but alluded to. In effect the Goddess has no body.

This lack of a stable recognizable body may be due less to a search for a universal goddess, than to the means by which the Goddess can transcend Her immanent nature. In this way she escapes the finitude of labels and categories, remaining infinite, multiple and multiplex (DuFresne 1997b). Whatever the reasons or the theological implications, if the Goddess has no body, what are the consequences for the women who identify with her?

As the Goddess so am I:

Earth my body
Water my blood
Air my breath
and Fire my spirit.

But if the Goddess offers one NO body to replace the one one has, how to live with the body one has? One can write positively about the body but does one live positively in one's actual body? Which body may not be so 'good': i.e. which may hurt, may have been abused, injured, raped or otherwise rendered less than ideal by external and internal circumstances. It is much easier to accept an inherent limitation and much less easy to accept limitations imposed from the outside. The Goddess' body has no history, but every human body does. There is no easy fit.

If the Goddess has no body, she cannot age, yet she is explicitly conceived of as Maiden, Mother and Crone, the Ancient of Ages. Are these mutually exclusive identities? Not necessarily. We are all imbricated in multiple layers of kin and social relationships. At the same time, we are daughter, sister, lover, mother, grand-mother, aunty, niece and more. No limit is put on the number of kin ties and relationships we can recognize. Such is also the case with the Goddess: and we benefit if we remember this. Yet a too narrow identification with any aspect of the Goddess to the exclusion of others, only serves to lock us into old social stereotypes. Women don't lose their Maiden aspects just because they age.

Women don't lose their Mother potential just because they are childless. Women don't lose their Crone's wisdom if they fall in love or find themselves mentoring. Nor does the Goddess ... A too rigid investment in the Triple Goddess with no leeway for actual needs and experiences imposes a kind of censorship which perverts the creative potential of the indeterminate Goddess. This is especially felt by older women. No woman I have ever met who is considered a 'crone' by other women, is comfortable or happy in the role. It feels too much like being put out to pasture. "I'm not that old", they say. "I'm just starting to understand what it means to be a maiden. Don't take my sexuality away from me ..."

Moltmann-Wendel is one of the rare authors to have recognized the potential value of recognising the fact of growing old in concrete terms. She acknowledges the threefold face of the Goddess

as a young, middle-aged and old woman (...) interpreted as women's experience, and in addition (...) taking on religious significance for life - of cycles instead of linear patterns which express our life (1994:33).

She then places this face within time. Significantly, however, the text she quotes is not a Neo-pagan text; it is from a sermon a rabbi in New York speaks to her congregation on how she imagines God:

We become older, as God becomes older. How similar we have become to each other! God takes our face in both her hands and

whispers ...'Even when you are old I will be with you and hold you when you are grey-haired. I have given birth to you, I carried you, I will hold you fast. Grow old with me...' (...) Her face, marked by time, now no longer seems to us to be fragile, but wise. For we understand that God knows about things that only time can teach: that it is possible to survive the loss of a love, to feel certain in a world which is constantly changing, to be able to live in dignity even when every bone hurts ... Now we understand why we have been made to grow older, every added day of our life, every new year, makes us more similar to God, she who is eternally older ... (1994:33-34)

If the Goddess has no body then age is ignored; and this matters very much to Ottawa women. The dissonance between the ideal and the real is physical, so much so that Lauren Foster-McLeod chose to use real women for her illustrations of the Goddess; and the women of Ottawa are grateful to her for it. To see themselves portrayed as aspects of the Goddess in all their flaws and beauties resolves some of the dissonance between ideal and real.

If the Goddess has no body but a definite gender, if she is Creatrix and universal and if she stays gendered, she cannot meet the universe without a male consort: Starhawk, Radforth Ruether and Germain Greer have all said that community includes men, life includes men. We could manage a universal Goddess if we made sexuality her main metaphor of life. Most of the women of Ottawa are not ready for this. This would limit the Goddess' multiplicity and her indeterminacy. She would be limited ... she would also be rather more carnal than most women would be prepared to identify with.

The model offered by the Goddess gendered but bodyless could not be sustained for long without a structural opposite. We have a God for men, we are exploring a Goddess for women ... But we don't have a divinity for humanity or a Goddess for men and a God for women. We are still limited ... but this is the subject of another thesis.

Feminist Studies and Ritual Studies can both learn from the women of Ottawa. These women seek a morality constructed from the specificities and messinesses of lived experience, responsive to full embodied engagement in a community continuously re-woven and maintained through physical presence and physical acts. There are no absolutes here. No ideals, no canon, no authority outside of choice and experience. Since any goals, be they political or spiritual, are achieved through the interplay of individual and group action, they too are 'indeterminate', not existing until manifested. Eschewing certainty and truth, they embrace indeterminacy and honesty. They provide us with an example of what Simone de Beauvoir (1964) has called the 'morality of ambiguity'.

This is a population of women who invest in process and experience, in the here and now, who privilege the specific and the concrete and who eschew 'tradition' or 'theory'. No absolutes, no dogma, no set liturgy, no social structures self-maintaining through hegemonic power, no structures of privilege and

disadvantage ... Messy, yes. Predictable, no. Fragile and temporary, maybe. Creative and life affirming, definitely. Responsive to individual needs while fostering community, yes. Will it succeed, it already has. Will it continue, only as long as it continues to lead to self discovery, to empowerment, and to full human (female) agency in the relationship with the (female) divine, with the embodied Goddess.

Praise Her from whom all blessings flow.
For waters deep and fire's glow.
For life and breath and earth our home.
Praise Mother, Maid and Ancient Crone.
Blessed Be.

CONCLUSION:

We learned we can trust our bodies when we learned we had the right to control them. We are learning we can trust our souls through learning that our right to have them is rooted in our recognition of the Goddess, of the female principle within the universe and ourselves (Budapest 1979:11).

For the past 30 years, a feminist spirituality movement has been developing in North America. Variouslly called Goddess Worship, Goddess spirituality, or Women's spirituality, it derives in part from Neo-paganism and Contemporary Witchcraft, on the one hand and feminist liberation theology on the other. Continuing the questioning begun by Simone de Beauvoir on female self and other, on gender and its construction, and on the merits of a morality of indeterminacy, this ethnography of a community of like minded women who participate together in devotional circles to the Goddess in and around Ottawa, Ontario, Canada focuses on the textual, ritual and iconological means by which these women come to an embodied relationship with the divine apprehended as female. By deconstructing the actions, the words, and the images of the human body, as the locus of contact with the divine, and the divine body as the central cosmological metaphor of this spirituality produced and used by these women, the ritual and ethical discourses on identity, power and agency built around them are made evident. Compared and contrasted, they then are studied as charters for the construction of the self and community.

Throughout this thesis, Simone de Beauvoir provided me with an intellectual Ariadne's thread which proved most solid. In Simone de Beauvoir's best known work, *THE SECOND SEX* (1953) first explored the consequences for women of a politics of gender essentialism which she defines as the male theoretical construct based on biological determinism which defines Woman as other, carnal, immanent and thus inferior to Man as human, spiritual / intellectual, transcendent and superior. Woman as a class and femaleness as a quality, are in her argument intellectual constructs which underpin the social construction of gender politics and women's inferiority.

In her book, she identified an intellectual dead end: there is no way to be female and fully human. The only way out of this socially constructed prison is for women to eschew the roles assigned to them, including that of motherhood, to reject the rules of dress, appearance and behaviour which serve to limit them, to reject female as not male and to instead live their lives unfettered, to live their lives as men thus fully human. But this too is a trap as it neither eliminates essentialism nor does it transform it.

In one of her lesser known essays, *POUR UNE MORALE DE L'AMBIGUÏTÉ*, written in 1944 but published in 1964, Simone de Beauvoir brings a resolution to essentialism by tackling the moral dilemma of existentialism. Nowhere in the

essay does she speak of gender or essentialism, nevertheless, her formulation of a morality of indeterminacy does provide an escape from biological and gender determinacy. She argues that only a morality built on total individual responsibility for the choices of one's life can lead to true freedom and realness. By this she means that no external rules are valid since they negate freedom of choice, no external truth is valid as it negates the specificity of context, no external norm is valid as it constrains individual potential. Furthermore, any control of the other is by consequence a denial of freedom of self. Thus, total and true freedom of self can only be achieved through an engagement with other in which the relation with other is negotiated to mutual benefit, from a position of absolute honesty and total responsibility. Thus existentialism is not anarchy nor is it a rejection of the other but rather an embracing of difference, of contingency, of impermanence and of indeterminacy. As she says, freedom and life are in the becoming and not in the being. The state of being is death, the process of becoming is life. Becoming is yet to be determined, it is contingent, it results from multiple choices and is relational. As such it is profoundly and painfully moral and human. And nowhere in this essay does gender intrude as some kind of limit to human.

As I studied the women of the Ottawa women's circles, I held as my main hypothesis that these women had found a way out of the gender trap, that they

had developed a process by which they could resolve Simone de Beauvoir's early formulation on gender inequality and that this process resonated with her postulates of a morality of ambiguity. After all, they embrace ambiguity, they reject external norms seeing them as mere models, they search for their own essences, their own individual truths, they recognise each other as equally valid through their differences.

These elements of resolution first elaborated by Simone de Beauvoir framed all my research. I found them hinted at by contemporary feminists though with less lucidity or rigour, for example Z. Budapest's 1979 polemical statement that :

Male energy pretends to power by disclaiming the female force. Today, given the patriarchal society within which we live... the real enemy is the internalized and externalized policing tool that keeps us in fear and psychic clutter (1979:10-11)

or Mary Daly's (1987) call for amazons acting outside of the norms of patriarchy, finally resulting in Ostriker's (1993:66-7) hermeneutics of indeterminacy within which it is the layering of multivocal, disparate and even contradictory discourses which when accepted as positioned and partial, give rise to a richer, and one could add, post-modern, re-constructed, and now firmly indeterminate reading of truths and views.

In the realm of spirituality, these questions have an urgency of their own

because the body is the battleground. As Fiske (1992:162) says:

The body and its specific behaviour is where the power system stops being abstract and becomes material. The body is where it succeeds or fails, where it is acceded to or struggled against. The struggle for control, top-down vs bottom-up, is waged on the material terrain of the body and its immediate context.

The women of my study are trying to solve de Beauvoir's battle on their own terms using their own tools. There is nothing new here. The body is after all the 'ground of being'. Techniques of the body, be they prayer, trance, abnegation, surfeit, what have you, are the stock in trade of all religious systems. There is no religion without a human body to live it. Images of the body as religious symbols are also widely present in other religious systems: Christian Ecclesia as body of Christ, Maltese temple in the form of the Goddess, to name but two. Nor is there anything new to the idea that religious behaviour takes visible form on or through the body: be it the mystic's radiant face, the transcendence of pain and injury of the Sun dancer, or the stigmata of the saint. Finally, the sensuous and sexual nature of religious actions and metaphors have parallels in Tantra, Shinto, Confucianism, and frankly most if not all systems even if more by their absence than by their obvious presence. So one must ask, what is new here. It is that these women, in the absence of prophet, saint, priest, dogma or tradition, are elaborating through individual effort and spiritual 'bricolage' a new relation with the body which deconstructs and transforms that given to them as women by the religious hegemony within which they live. This

religious hegemony either rejects the body as flawed and the point of emergence of evil into the world, or it overvalues the appearance of the body as a visible moral test of interior worth. The body may no longer be considered sinful, nevertheless it must be perfect: healthy, fit, trim, beautiful, well adorned, well modified cosmetically or surgically, all in an attempt to show oneself not lazy, not gluttonous, not slovenly, not ... that is the ten commandments written on the modern body. We as a culture seem to have re-embraced the medieval notion that the body reveals the soul and that apparent beauty reveals one's worth, whatever the currency.

These women are reformulating the relationship to the body. Not by following a prophet or a code but by having the courage to develop it themselves. As they develop a gendered religious existentialism, they therefore provide an ideal ground to observe Simone de Beauvoir's suggestions in action. I have observed them struggling to find ways to make this a group endeavour. Nevertheless, it is a solitary struggle and it is often very lonely.

These women are not without resources, they read, they study, some at university, they participate in workshops and rituals and they endlessly debate. And as a result, they have built a lexicon of images, symbols, words and phrases, ritual sequences and structures that are constantly evolving yet

recognisable, thus forming a common language and the beginnings of a culture, that is to say, a community now self-replicating through initiation, mentoring, and the raising of children.

These women have access to a rich trove of literature, archeology, art and alternative theologies, but do not read Christian theology. Though contemporary feminist spirituality has its beginnings in the feminist re-visioning of biblical religious formulations, these same endeavours to deconstruct patriarchal formulations have entrenched a hermeneutics of suspicion towards anything Christian or Christian derived. As an example from recent events, in 2002 Rosemary Radford Ruether gave a two day conference at the St Paul University on the links between feminist liberation theology and ecofeminism. The auditorium was full of women. Less than 10 men were in attendance. The women there, if one had the eyes to identify them, were almost equally represented by nuns or by witches. Again, there was this incredible merging of intent and synergy of goal that allowed for fruitful participation and collaboration during the discussions and workshops. But after this event, no links were forged, no curiosity was displayed to get to know more about the other, nothing beyond a grudging but admitted surprise and approval on the part of the witches that nuns and other Christian women could be asking similar questions and elaborating similar solutions. The Christian women had obviously

adopted Neo-pagan ritual forms and phrases (see the Healing the Earth ritual in Appendix One) but the witches had no interest in exploring any of the Christian texts or formulations. There was still a deep undercurrent of suspicion. Though the early authors and texts of feminist liberation theology are well known and read, no recent texts have entered the lexicon, nor is there any dialogue between the two groups as groups. For example, Radford Ruther, like most feminist theo/alogians within Christianity, is invisible to most Neo-pagans. She is quoted and referenced in ecofeminism but her refusal to leave Catholicism renders her suspicious to Neo-pagans.

As described in the thesis, these women have access to many other resources: NFB films, feminist bookstores, occult and metaphysical stores, university courses in Religious Studies and Women's Studies, including Naomi Goldenberg's classes and books as a direct link to Starhawk, Carol Christ, and others, as well as her absolutely fundamental observation that a change in the gender of divinity necessarily brings about a change in the religion itself. There is a whole feminist infra-structure developing in Ottawa, from midwives to child care, from suppliers to service providers, from friends to community. To me, it resembles most a small French-Canadian Catholic parish with its self reliance, sufficiency and self referential nature.

As successful as this endeavour seems to be, in the end, these women did not fully succeed. In the early phases of my analysis, I believed that these women HAD found a resolution to Simone de Beauvoir's early postulates on gender inequality and the social construction of gender. My thesis shows that this claim is partially false. By not moving beyond gender, these women have not resolved the debate on essentialism.

This was the hardest stage in the thesis research for me to write, or even to admit to myself. But I cannot escape the fact that for these women, there is no way yet to leave an explicitly female universe. The category 'human' irrespective of gender is still not explored or liveable.

The models of divinity and humanity that the Ottawa women now have are still limited: neither true embodiment nor gender transcendence are available to them. And the possible solutions to this inherent ambiguity are not yet apparent.

Nevertheless, models do already exist in the feminist spirituality literature. A first model is provided by Starhawk who brought in 1979 one of the very few "creation myths" of the Goddess worship movement. In her account, love is the motivating force of creation which necessarily creates the loved, the other,

which, once differentiated, seeks (re-) union through this (self) same love.

Human male and female then become concrete expressions of a cosmic "dance"

to the music of desire:

CREATION

Alone, awesome, complete within Herself, the Goddess, She whose name cannot be spoken, floated in the abyss of the outer darkness, before the beginning of all things. And as She looked into the curved mirror of black space, She saw by her own light her radiant reflection, and fell in love with it. She drew it forth by the power that was in Her and made love to Herself, and called her "Miria, the Wonderful".

Their ecstasy burst forth in the single song of all that is, was or ever shall be, and with the song came motion, waves that poured outward and became all the spheres and circles of the worlds. The Goddess became filled with love, swollen with love, and She gave birth to a rain of bright spirits that filled the worlds and became all beings.

But in that great movement, Miria was swept away, and as She moved out from the Goddess She became more masculine. First, She became the Blue God, the gentle, laughing God of love. Then She became the Green One, vine-covered, rooted in the earth, the spirit of all growing things. At last She became the Horned God, the Hunter whose face is the ruddy sun and yet dark as Death. But always desire draws Him back toward the Goddess, so that He circles Her eternally, seeking to return in love.

All began in love; all seeks to return to love. Love is the law, the teacher of wisdom, and the great revealer of mysteries (Starhawk 1979:17-18).

But this love is based on both self-love as well as self differentiation and on an implicit subordination of the second principal (here male) which seeks to reunite with its source, that which is complete within itself, except for desire. But what

of actual equality in difference, Simone de Beauvoir's original ideal? How then to destroy gender inequality and its differentials of power? Already in 1977, in *LES BERGÈRES DE L'APOCALYPSE*, Françoise d'Eaubonne had identified the false goal of power exclusively in the hands of women (*Anima*), as being neither less false nor less dominating than power exclusively in the hands of men (*Animus*). Calling for an abolition of both *Anima* and *Animus*, she called for the coming of a new world in which gendered identity and sexual orientation were no more than normal variants in a world in which heterosexuality were but 'one modality among many of Eros' and in which for the first time, the 'totality of humanity can have the chance to be born to itself in the world' :

Il faut accélérer l'avènement du monde nouveau où *Animus* et *Anima* disparaîtront parce que l'homme, fécondateur ou non, et la femme, auto-fécondée ou non, renonceront grâce à l'amour enfin possible à se rechercher comme des CONTRAIRES. Ou à s'entre-détruire, ce qui est la même chose. Il faut, dis-je? Mais comment? Je le veux!

Demain, je vais les affronter toutes. Dans quelques heures. Je dois dormir. Dissolution du Conseil et de toute Instance suprême : ce sera ma première exigence. Démocratie directe enfin réellement appliquée. Autogestion enfin égalitaire : partagée entre les sexes. L'hétérosexualité? Non pas reprise comme valeur de base, bien entendu, mais reconnue, sans privilège ni anathème, parmi tous les autres modes de l'Eros ; non plus exaltée, mais pas davantage scandaleuse ; n'étant plus nécessaire à la reproduction, elle pourra être vécue pour elle-même. Et la totalité humaine bafouée par *Animus* et mutilée par *Anima* connaîtra pour la première fois sa chance d'être au monde (cited in Lacelle 1983:25).

Again love, and love of 'contraires', opposites becomes the means of full

emancipation of all variants of humanity and human love from the tyranny of absolute gender bi-polarity. Here sexuality and gender are not denied or eliminated. Rather they are embraced in the knowledge that the essential solitude of life is fulfilled in the 'going beyond oneself towards the other, engaging oneself in the multiplicity of relationships and in the human dialogue'.

In their concrete existence, the Ottawa women have gone a long way on a similar path. These women, for the most part, like themselves more; have resolved at least in part, estrangements from body / self / and sexuality. They have developed personal means of accessing and interacting with the divine and with each other. But they still do so only in the female mode and through female identity both human and divine. There is here great variety within gender, but no real gender indeterminacy. Gender is still the question, the process, the modality, the battle field. It cannot yet be left behind because the work is only half done.

The images of the Goddess generated in the ritual circles reflect the limits imposed on her. This Goddess is female in all her variety. She is pre-pubescent, fertile, parturiant and post-menopausal. She does bleed, give birth, suckle and abort. She knows orgasm and ecstasy, she is sexual. Yet she never has sex, for she does not have a partner. She is auto-erotic, fulfilled, sufficient to herself. A wonderful model of 'healing' but not of 'health'. This may not prove such a

problem to gender isolationists and cultural lesbians, but it is proving to be a huge problem for those women who seek to live in what Starhawk reminded her audience in Toronto in 1995 is a universe that includes men. Most affected are those Neo-pagan women who choose to circle in mixed gendered groups with theologies based on gender polarity.

Simon de Beauvoir would say that these women have failed in escaping the prison of gender determinacy because they have not yet dared to go far enough. By embracing so exclusively a gendered mode of relating to the divine in their own image, especially the tripartite model of the Goddess as Maiden / Mother / Crone, these women, and I suspect the Goddess movement as a whole, have short circuited, at least for now, the process they had started of achieving liberation from gender constraints. It remains for instance to deconstruct the terms of maiden, mother and crone. A few final examples:

- 1) Any truly alternative formulation of gender and sex poses an unresolvable and unexpected challenge. This has been most evident in the unacceptability of transgendered or ambiguously gendered individuals and their almost absolute unacceptability as participants to women's circles. The cognitive dissonance introduced by their presence is as yet unresolvable.
- 2) No ways of "dealing with men" have yet been explored let alone formulated. Even the divine as male is suspect and though increasingly tolerated and even

accepted in ritual, depending on the trust the ritual leader can generate, rituals, invocations, and images of the divine male are few, elementary and very personal.

3) finally, goddess spirituality is an individual spirituality, a way of relating to oneself. At most, it includes relation with those like me. It does NOT extend to the not me. As such it is still not a theology and though sisterhood may seem like a community and a culture, it is still not a human community and culture. It isolates as much as patriarchy.

This should not come as a surprise, feminist literature has always been deeply flawed in being programmatic, polemical and presented in opposition. It does not yet stand alone without references to what it rejects.

It may be that authentic community can be better achieved through the common recognition of individual solitude:

Quels sont MON destin, MA vocation, MA relation propre à l'autre et au monde, MA signification et MES symboles? Ce sont là des questions auxquelles les femmes seules (chaque femme seule) peuvent répondre avec authenticité, parce qu'il n'y a de réponse que dans la liberté d'une compréhension et d'une foi, d'un engagement personnel, subjectif, émanant de l'intériorité d'une conscience autonome, en première personne. On vit seul, on meurt seul, cela est fondamental, même si cette solitude essentielle ne découvre et n'accomplit sa plénitude de la personne qu'en se dépassant vers l'autre, en s'engageant dans la multiplicité des relations et du dialogue humain (Yvonne Pellé-Douël cited in Lacelle 1983:26).

Feminist theology is still a self-referential endeavour, it is strongly suspicious of anything outside itself unless it is safely from the past or from far away and feminist theology and goddess spirituality is very much focused on the present. It recuperates and heals the past and engenders (yes it is a pun) the present, but it as yet does not envision the future, not does it yet know how. As such it is still sterile.

Having said this, there are intriguing and hopeful signs that this spirituality may develop into a real theo/alogy, a philosophy of relationship: these women as they become more at ease with themselves are looking outside themselves: to their children, their partners (male and female), to the society at large and even to humanity as a species. What exists now may be a stepping stone to something which may foster human liberation, especially if both men and women can find a way to foster this liberation together. What the thesis demonstrates in the end is the essential need for a theology of relationship which can embrace indeterminacy in all its forms even masculine.

It took me a long time to develop the courage to admit to myself and to others, the degree of disappointment and sadness I felt considering the path still to be travelled. It is only recently, in the last few weeks as I have begun to speak of the results of my research to the women of these circles, that I have been

made privy to the same sadness and disappointment as felt by some of the senior women of this community. This gives me great hope that the process is not frozen, or ended but that enough passion and desire still fuel women's endeavours that a morality of indeterminacy may yet be achieved.

END NOTES:

DEDICATION:

1. Karen Beth. Recorded on Libana's cassette 'A Circle is Cast' (1986). Un-attributed texts are songs from the Ottawa Women's Song Book (see Appendix Two) or phrases from Ottawa women rituals (see Appendix One).

PRELUDE:

1. Women's circle rituals are characterized in part by the ephemeral nature of the texts used. They are often written for a specific purpose and then discarded or else they are improvised on the spot. Some groups, such as this one, followed a standardized liturgy but even they modified the standard texts to fit the moment. The Candle Mandala text and the Standard Elemental Purifications (see Appendix One) give good examples of the format used by this group.

2. See Chapter Three on the context of study for a description of the Wiccan Church of Canada (WCC) and its relationship to this Women's Circle and to the Ottawa Occult Shop.

3. Pagan, Neo-pagan, Wiccan and Witch are used interchangeably by this community to mean essentially the same thing. To choose one over another is part of the strategy of negotiating acceptance in a social context where the word 'witchcraft' is still understood as meaning the exercise of effective malice.

Even though the English term 'witch' and the French term 'sorcière' are not strictly speaking exact translations of each other, for the purpose of this thesis they will be used interchangeably. This reflects how these words are actually being used by contemporary Anglophone and Francophone Canadian feminist writers. It also matches the use made of the words by the women of my study group, many of whom are bilingual Francophone Canadians.

4. Mary Slade's Honours B.A. paper (1989) is based in part on participant-observation of this ritual group.

5. See Appendix Three - Floor Plans for layout of the Occult Shop upstairs and Occult Shop basement.

6. A grounding is an exercise in becoming 'present in the moment' and in establishing a sense of openness and quiet within oneself prior to entering into

ritual. Even a person 'circling' alone will take a moment to 'ground' prior to commencing a ritual.

7. See sketch of standard WCC Women's Group altar in Appendix Four.

8. See selection in Appendix Two of songs and chants used by women in Ottawa during the time of my research. Sometimes an atonal chant will be intoned in which each person can improvise harmonies. Eventually the sound becomes harmonious. This signals that the group has 'melded into one consciousness' or, alternatively, that everyone has reached a similar depth of light trance.

9. Clockwise (deosil) and counter clockwise (widdershins) are ritual directions which have to do with winding and unwinding the 'energy' of the circle. See entries for 'circle' (p.45-6), 'deosil' and 'widdershins' (p.74) in *The Encyclopedia of Modern Witchcraft and Neo-Paganism* (Rabinovitch & Lewis (eds) 2002) for more details.

10. This corresponds to the Casting section of the Candle Mandala text.

11. The knife is called an athame, the broom is a besom.

12. This corresponds to the Elemental Purifications in the Candle Mandala text.

13. This resembles the Orante position of early Christian art. See Appendix Seven - Dress and Adornment for an example of a woman standing in this position.

14. This corresponds to the Quarter Calls in the Candle Mandala text.

15. This position is that of the magician card of the tarot based on the hermetic notion of the microcosm (the earth) being influenced by the macrocosm (the heavens) in part through the agency of the magician who links the two through his body and his will.

16. This corresponds to the Invocation in the Candle Mandala text.

17. This corresponds to the Wine Blessing in the Candle Mandala text.

18. This pouring of liquid (and setting aside of food) into a dish reserved for the divinity invoked is called a 'libation'. After the ritual, the contents of the libation bowl will be poured out onto the ground outside. It is always disposed of in this way by this group as it is considered an offering 'to the gods'.

19. 'Witnessing' and 'speaking out of silence', both concepts borrowed from Quaker Liturgy, have been introduced to the Ottawa women's circles by Pashta Marymoon, herself a Quaker and a prominent ritualist (priestess) in Ottawa during the time of my research. She now resides in Victoria, British Columbia where she has become prominent in her local community.

Similar notions were developed from feminist consciousness raising techniques but the Quaker source is most pertinent for this group, because of Pashta's influence.

20. The food consisted of bread, cheese, nuts, fruit, and other easily transported and shared foods. Nothing was cooked or fancy. The tone of the feast was in keeping with Z. Budapest's description:

The feast is done in happy tones, much praise for the Goddess, and celebration of Her among us, Her wimmin (1979:29).

21. This corresponds to the Farewell to the Lady in the Candle Mandala text.

22. This corresponds to the Farewells to the Quarters in the Candle Mandala text.

23. These chants are now widely known within the Goddess spirituality communities in North America. The identities of the original authors is rarely known and many chants have now developed alternate melodies and verses which are recognized as regional variants when they are sung at summer festivals. An Ottawa Pagan Song Book (1996) was compiled by Lauren Foster-McLeod. It contains 82 chants with variants, all of which have been in use in Ottawa since the mid 1990's. See Appendix Two for a selection of these chants.

24. Notre Dame du Bon Conseil on Bayswater Street in Ottawa, c. 1963-4.

25. "Finding Home" and "Coming Home" have become apocryphal phrases. No original author can now be identified. Nevertheless, they are central themes of the Women's Spirituality and of the Pagan / Neo-pagan movements (Adler 1979/1986, Christ 1997, Eller 1993/1995). They also find their way into ritual texts:

May Artemis protect you,
and Hera provide you,
and the womansoul within you,
guide your way home. (Budapest 1991a:20)

"Finding home" is also the most common response that Canadian individuals, male and female, give to the question of how or what they felt when they discovered Wicca (Rabinovitch 1992, 1993; Reid 2001a; Valiente 1989). See also Nelle Morton's *THE JOURNEY IS HOME* (1985).

INTRODUCTION:

1. An early version of "Who is the other when women study women" was presented at the Women and Wisdom conference at the University of Ottawa in 1997.
2. The capitalised singular noun is taken from de Beauvoir.
3. "The feminist critics, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, argue that Otherness, if defined as the feminine, opens up new possibilities for women because by *celebrating* difference women achieve immanence" (Humm 1989/1995:197, emphasis in original).
4. This specificity and variability became most apparent for North American women when Hispanic women and women of colour started criticising feminist authors for their White, middle class, Anglo-Saxon cultural blindness. See especially the works by bell hooks and Audré Lord.
5. Marcus 1986:168.

CHAPTER ONE:

1. "If God is male, then male is God. The divine patriarch castrates women as long as he is allowed to live on in the human imagination" (Daly 1973. Ch.1.). Some of the evidence of the church's stance on the inadmissibility of women to the priesthood is in the following documents: Pope Paul VI. October 15, 1976 and Pope John Paul II, May 22, 1994.
2. This postulate, that violence to women and violence to earth seen as female is justified and sanctified by the dichotomous moral paradigm is foundational to 'ecofeminism'. Some of its strongest theological formulations are being made by Radford Ruether 1992, 1995. See also Caldecott & Leland (eds) 1983.
3. Fairly early on, feminists seemed to divide up into those who rejected religion absolutely focussing on social, political and economic matters (material

feminists) and those who undertook to change religious paradigms (spiritual feminists) (Eller 1999). Spiritual feminists have been those most active in developing Goddess spirituality.

4. Wimmin, womyn, wemoon, are all ways of renaming the human female as something other than a modified 'man' (wo-man). This usage was first proposed by Mary Daly as part of her radical deconstruction of words and expressions. See her *WICKEDARY* (1987) for more examples.

In this thesis, I will occasionally follow Daly's word deconstruction to emphasise how the women of this community actually pronounce and understand certain words to have extra semiotic weight when used within a feminist discourse.

5. See the series *Studies in Jungian Psychology* by Jungian analysts published by Inner City Books, founded in 1980 "to promote understanding and practical application of the work of C.G. Jung." (Publication notice in front of Woodman (1980)). See especially #4 *The Occult*, #6 *Descent to the Goddess*, #18 *Hags & Heroes*, #21 *The Pregnant Virgin*, #25 *The Spiral Way*, #32 *The Sacred Prostitute*, #34 *The Mother*, all available at the Occult Shop, the Hungry Eye or Motherthongue Books.

6. "An occult writer who realized the true significance of the ancient gods, and their archetypal role in the collective unconscious, is the late Dione Fortune (1891-1946). Frequently reiterated in her works is the sentence: 'All the gods are one god and all the goddesses are one goddess and there is one initiator.' The one initiator is one's own higher self with which the personality becomes more and more integrated as the path of spiritual evolution is followed" (Valiente 1989:29).

Dion Fortune was trained in both Freudian and Jungian analysis and she is now being recognized as a forerunner of contemporary Neo-paganism and Wicca (Clifton 1998).

'She who is many, the many who are she' (Farrar & Farrar 1987b) is an epithet often given to Isis. She has been the model of female divine power within much of the discourse of Western occultism (Le Corsu 1977).

7. During the period covered by my research, my partner, Michael McCord, managed a number of Ottawa bookstores. I worked at the Occult Shop for 4 years, 2 of them as its manager. Michael and I opened and ran the Hungry Eye Occult Books and Supplies store for 4 years until it became a casualty of the ice storm of 1998. We became quite familiar with the availability of books and magazines and the likes and dislikes of our customers.

The women in Ottawa exchange books and magazines on a regular basis. It is quite natural to bring one's latest issues of various magazines (SageWoman, Of a Like Mind, Beltane Papers, etc) to a women's circle to pass around and lend and borrow. Books also are lent and borrowed so one CAN talk of a core library that most, if not all of these women have read.

8. Scott Cunningham is not a Goddess spirituality author but he is the most influential male Wiccan writer read by Ottawa women. He is responsible for the popularization of an 'eclectic', solitary and highly personal practice of Wicca which retains all of its theological and ritual characteristics while eschewing the need for coven membership, apostolic initiation and the adherence to stable, long standing traditions of practice. Since the great majority of Canadian Wiccans / pagans / witches are solitary (Rabinovitch 1992, Reid 2001a), probably because of the lack of the high population density that characterizes both the USA and Britain, Cunningham's formulations have a great appeal. His were the best selling books in both the Occult Shop and the Hungry Eye. Only the Farrar's WITCHES BIBLE COMPLEAT (1984) achieved the same volume of sales. Next was Starhawks' SPIRAL DANCE (1979).

CHAPTER TWO:

1. TheAlogy, from 'thea' goddess, is a term first used in print by Naomi Goldenberg in CHANGING OF THE GODS (1979) to identify a 'theology' of the Goddess.

2. Ostriker (1993, 1986) is the first to look at images of the body in women's post 1960's poetry and the use of religious metaphors within the same corpus of poetry. Ostriker is aware of Goddess spirituality and does discuss it as an influence in women's poetry to her book: FEMINIST REVISION AND THE BIBLE (1993).

3. Gerald B. Gardner, founder of Gardnerian Witchcraft in England in the early 1950's and the first to write under his own name of the 'revival' of Witchcraft / Wicca as a religion. Doreen Valiente was one of his first Priestesses and has now been acknowledged by most Wiccans as the one who rewrote the original Gardnerian ritual texts to include a Goddess equal to the original God and to soften the rather blatant sexual opportunism of the rituals as Gardner had originally formulated them.

4. These terms are used interchangeably by this community to mean the same thing.

5. Ottawa / Outaouais: These are the names of two of the three rivers that meet on the Northern edge of the city of Ottawa. The Ottawa river runs roughly from Northwest to Southeast. The Outaouais runs into it from the North and the Rideau runs into it from the South. In this region, the Ottawa river defines the provincial boundary between Ontario and Quebec.

6. Wiccans who care to do so, recognize various "traditions" within their faith. These traditions have recognized founders and follow standardized liturgical texts and formats in their rituals. Most of these traditions were founded in Britain after the 1950's. Some North American traditions reject canonical texts and identified founders / leaders for a more individualistic and 'Eclectic' way of worship. One North American tradition developed out of the 1970's feminist movement. It advocates Goddess monotheism and gender-based ritual segregation for worship. The tradition is called 'Dianic' from the name of the Roman lunar goddess Diana. In North American (and in Ottawa), Eclectics are the largest group by far.

In Ottawa, most Wiccans are Eclectics, some are British Traditionalists (Gardnerian/Alexandrian), some are Wiccan Church of Canada. There are also many Dianic women's groups which have as participants women of other traditions as well.

Most Ottawa Dianic women's groups use a blend of Z. Budapest, Starhawk and Cunningham teachings and ritual formats while never granting to any one way or author dogmatic purity or orthodoxy.

Dianic or Feminist Witches, are women who practice a form of Neo-paganism based loosely on models of British Wicca (Gardner and Valiente) but modified in the 1970's such that the Goddess is considered either the sole or most important deity, rituals relate more to women's life histories and concerns than to a seasonal ritual calendar, authority is shared, hierarchy is eschewed, dogma is flexible and males, either human or divine, are not a necessary element or concern. Not all Dianics are gender isolationists, nor are all Dianics women. Some men consider themselves Dianic, ie: worshippers of a sole female deity, but most women would have difficulty accepting their claims. Z. Budapest and Morgan MacFarland are the two most important 'founders' of the two main forms of Dianic Witchcraft which has now become as varied as its adherents (Griffin 2002).

7. Institutions of higher learning in the immediate area (including Quebec) are: Carleton University, University of Ottawa, St. Paul University, Cité Collégiale, Algonkian College, UQAH (Université du Québec à Hull).

8. These publishers include but are not limited to: Weiser, Llewellyn, Pheonix, Arkana, HarperCollins, Sterling, Virago, Prentice Hall, Newcastle, etc. This list does not include producers of magazines, videos, music recordings, and other products geared to this market which also serve to disseminate theological information.

9. Priest and Priestess: Priesthood is an ambiguous term for Wiccans. Most Wiccans consider that there is no laity in Wicca, that all initiates are priesthood and have unmediated access to the divine. Nevertheless, coven leaders are usually considered High Priest and High Priestess in those Traditions that recognize these terms, and in those Traditions that have Degrees of Initiation, the Priesthood is usually reserved for initiates of the higher degrees. Some Traditions (Dianics among others) explicitly deny the laity / priesthood dichotomy and will not recognize its validity within other Traditions.

Most of the women I met in the Ottawa women's groups prefer to speak of the 'ritual leader' or 'facilitator', rather than the priest or priestess. Nevertheless, 'priestessing', as that particular way of fostering religious experience and personal empowerment in other women that women in Goddess worship develop is a highly prized ability and goal. "How to priestess" has been the most sought after and elusive goal for most. And those that DO priestess well find themselves at a loss faced with the responsibility and pressure to train others. Effective priestesses also face the prospect of being isolated from other women, not as a result of their own wishes or actions, but as a result of the respect, and awe, other women feel for them. Some complain that they have ended up no longer being 'one of the girls'. See discussion on ritual protocol in Chapter Four for further details.

CHAPTER THREE: WOMEN'S GROUPS IN OTTAWA

1. Some early French translations of seminal works (Ehrenreich & English 1976; Stone 1978) were available in Quebec and seem to have predated the same books as imports into English Canada. More likely, they formed part of women's 'quiet revolution' and emancipation from the Catholic Church's hold on women. These therefore, were read not so much as necessarily spiritual but political texts. See any of Gaboury's bibliographies.

CHAPTER FOUR:

1. Ottawa community aphorism.
2. I have known this to happen only twice in ten years: once because one

woman insisted on monopolising the 'speaking out of silence' such as to silence anyone else there; the other time because the woman, who was known to be bi-polar was obviously in her manic phase. The first woman was dropped from the phone tree, the second was escorted out by a senior ritual leader who sat with her while the ritual continued without them.

3. These 'crafts' have been re-used in Fairy Magic and in women's circles of other years and under different leaderships. See Chapter Seven - III Goddess Making Workshops for another example of this kind of ritual 're-cycling'.

4. In the words of Z. Budapest (1979):

We are committed to living life lovingly towards ourselves and our sisters. We are committed to joy, self-love, and life-affirmation (9)
... Paganism is pleasure-oriented, joy and feasting prone, celebrating life with dancing and lovemaking. Working in harmony with Mother Nature, we discover and recover the All-Creatrix, the female power without whom nothing is born or glad (11).

5. Smudging is a means of using the smoke used by burning botanicals to 'wash' (purify), 'bless' (sacralise with incense) or 'give thanks' (with a burnt offering). The word and the practice have more to do with adopted Amerindian practices than with a reuse of Christian church or Western Occultist use of incense.

CHAPTER FIVE - SPEAKING THE BODY

1. These words were first improvised (by me) at a women's circle at Kaleidoscope, a Pagan summer festival near Perth, in 1993. In 2001, they made it back to the same women's circle at Kaleidoscope, but this time, contributed by an American woman who had learned them at the Michigan Women's Music Festival the year before.

2. Words printed over an interpretation of the 'venus' of Laussel by the painter, Lorayne Katz. Lorayne is a long time participant in Goddess spirituality circles in Ottawa. She exhibited this painting in the Divina et Femina I exhibit at the Museum of Classical Antiquities, University of Ottawa, 1998. Goddess of Laussel, acrylic on canvas, 1998. (See Appendix Eight for photo of painting in exhibition).

3. Un-attributed texts are from the Ottawa Women's Song Book. 1996.

4. Except at Imbolc (Feb 1st), when Brigit / Bride is invoked as the Triple

Goddess of fire of the forge, fire of inspiration, and fire of healing and the hearth.

5. The Great Rite is THE central mystery of British Traditional Wicca (Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca) and the Third Degree initiation ritual (the highest degree and the one leading to the Priesthood in these two Traditions) includes an actual Great Rite between the officiating priesthood and the aspirant.

A local Alexandrian High Priest (coven leader) has often remarked to me how it is inconceivable to him that the Wine Blessing is always performed in WCC public rituals where non-initiates and members of the public might be present. In his Tradition, this is one of the rituals that are performed only if initiated witches are present. The feeling I have when I hear him speak this way is that he is scandalized by this public display of a 'deep and secret mystery'.

He has mentioned that a 'Cup of Fellowship' is what is shared when a circle is performed with non initiates as participants. I don't know if other Traditions make this distinction.

6. The Odyssean tradition was founded by Tamarra and Richard James of Toronto, ON in the late 1970's. It has a Greek pantheon of divinities and sees the religious quest as being exemplified by the trials and travels of Homer's Odysseus. The WCC has an Odyssean Temple with both public circles and 'inner court' covens. Richard and Tamarra James bought Gardner's personal papers when Ripley's (who had acquired them at his death) put them up for sale in the late 1970's. Included in these papers was Gardner's handwritten compendium of ritual texts, 'Ye Booke of Ye Art Magical'. The James still own this collection of Gardner texts and a close study of Odyssean texts reveals the extent of their (WCC) borrowings from Gardner.

7. The capitalization of Athame and not chalice is in the original text. No one seems to have noticed this or tried to correct the text. I don't know if this is meaningful or not.

8. I use 'gender specific' to mean groups that exist to provide a gender restricted environment within which their members can meet, such as women only Full Moon Circles. 'Gender mixed' groups are those that do not restrict participation according to a person's gender. I have never known a person's sexual orientation to be a criterion of inclusion or exclusion in a women's circle though some homophobia was evident in early WCC public rituals.

9. This is a direct quote from one of the WCC men who was arguing with me in

the Occult Shop after a particularly contentious 'neophyte' class had ended. Neophyte is what the WCC considers its potential priesthood material. In other traditions, these people would probably be considered Second Degree.

Since I worked for Richard James in his Ottawa store and was Tamarra James' occasional private student and her Handmaiden when she was in Ottawa, and that I also attended the WCC Women's Circle, I had close ties to both the Odyssean Tradition and the Wiccan Church of Canada. Nevertheless, I never sought membership or initiation from them. This was widely known. This made me both an insider and an outsider to the WCC. People were probably more open to express themselves in front of me since I would both know community politics and understand what was said while not being able to do much about it.

10. 'Power' is conceived of in three modalities in Wicca: power from above, power with, and power from within. The first is the power to coerce, to impose one's will on another. This form of power has negative connotations and is formally denigrated and denounced in certain forms of Wicca. Power with is the form of power most prized by some women's groups. It is the recognition that there is a synergy that forms when individuals act in concert, that the power of the group is stronger, larger than the power of the individual acting alone. Power from within is that form of power that women's groups aspire to. It is literally self-empowerment, the power to be, to act, to actualize because one is totally oneself without estrangement. This is the type of power first formally described by Starhawk in *SPIRAL DANCE* (1979/1989) and which has now become one of the distinguishing features of Wiccan theology (Rabinovitch 1992, 1993).

11. Other versions of Self Blessings can be found in Ardinger (2001:33), Mariechild (1990:32), Moondance (2001:7), Mountainwater 1991:113) and Stein (1991:9-10).

12. See Lacelle 1983 for a further discussion of this dynamic interchangeability of the female / feminist subject / object.

CHAPTER SIX:

1. The notion of 'magic' has been transformed and re-interpreted by these women; they have adopted a shamanic stance. The 'shamanic' nature of the work done by these women is expressed essentially in that mental activities are engaged in in an 'altered state' where in they can gain access to 'powers'/abilities, believed by them to be innate and female, not normally available to them and which activate in them when they 'participate' in the Goddess. The

fact that the Goddess is linked to Nature reinforces this aspect.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

1. Women's Festival themes have included "Dancing on Your Own Ground" where one could 'Reclaim the Whore' and Bellydancing workshops are now almost 'de rigueur' at summer festivals. Women see learning to bellydance as a way of communing with the erotic nature of the Goddess. They do NOT share pagan men's view of it as a male spectator sport to the point where some women will dance in ritual (with only women present) but not around the night time fire with its mixed gender audience.

The early 'how-to' books of the 1970's and 1980's (see Wilson & Wilson 1974, Buenaventura 1983 and others) all proposed a pseudo history for this dance form as a prehistoric rite of goddess worship which had been 'pornographed' by men. The women I interviewed for my BA Honours paper claimed the same mythopoeic past which they were now re-sacralising and re-vivifying. Because they were doing and saying this outside of a ritual context and neither they nor I had yet encountered this very same Goddess, I did not understand them.

I had been apprenticed to a Middle-Eastern cabaret orchestra and dance troupe in which I became a soloist (Michel Safi's Harem Review, Toronto 1970-1977). I later became a dance teacher, choreographer and historian. My data, both ethnographic and historical, demonstrated a long and varied history for the antecedents of this model syncretic dance form. None of these sources included 'a sacred dance of the Goddess performed for birthing mothers in the temple caves of the Great Mother', to quote one of the women I interviewed. Goddess women today would resonate with her interpretation much more than with my historical and ethnographic research.

2. Target market group: see Appendix Eight Advertisements. Goddess imagery and 'finding the Goddess in you' have become noticeable in mass media advertisement. The three examples in the Appendix are of a 'Goddess Night Out' at a NY spa for the American female Olympic athletes; a NASA recruitment poster for female astronauts, and the now infamous Gillette VENUS razor for women that promoted itself with post-modern images of California Aphrodites displaying their sleek legs to the Bananarama version of "I'm a goddess". The Venus razor also has a web site where women can take a quizz, loosely based on Jean Shinoda Bolen's GODDESSES IN EVERY WOMEN (1985) and thus discover the goddess in them.

Sometimes, its in the sales pitch that Goddess theology is found as in this

advertisement for clay rattles in the shape of 'fat little ladies':

Goddess rattles created by Joan Pié. The ancient goddess calls us to re-member, to gather aspects of Self we have forgotten, discounted, judged or shamed. As we hold her in the Present, she calls out to us from the Past, awakening primal, ancestral memory as old as the clay of the Earth Herself, reminding us we are complete and full, just as we are. Each clay goddess is uniquely different. \$35.00 gift items Spring 98.

<http://miraclesbookery.com/giftsp98.html>

3. This Nilotic figurine is especially important for those women who are involved in bellydancing as they interpret it as a forerunner of the modern dancer herself celebrating womanhood and her sexuality under the full moon light. Here the concept of 'drawing down the moon' as invoking the Goddess within oneself and dancing under the moon's influence are conflated.

4. These goddess images 'too specific to a time and place' also did not sell well in the Hungry Eye. I don't know precisely why but assume that for many, a specific historical representation assumed a specific historical connection and liturgy between the celebrant and the divinity... I never asked the question.

Sometimes, a woman would come in and 'pounce' on a specific historical reproduction because she had been searching for it specifically. Thus the classical Athena in white marble, the Aztec goddess of birthing Tlazoteotl, and the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe sat on the shelves for a long time until a specific woman came in, saw Her and, exclaiming in joy, took her up in her arms and left (after paying) in great joy.

5. See Appendix Eight for an illustration of Willow Marie Power's PORTAL. In the exhibition catalogue, she (2000:27) says this about her art work:

I discovered I could write, recite and dance what I know of the changing seasons of women's lives and I wanted to do more.

That so much of our lives is written on our bodies fascinates me. I decided to take the stories of women, literally, in my hands, and craft them into form and image.

There is something of every-woman in this piece: a gate we all through, a common moment honoured and a sense of the sacred.

6. Animals as such are rarely used. Sometimes a cat for BAST, an owl for

ATHENA or a raven for MORIGAN. More often, one finds feathers representing air or antlers representing earth (rarely the Horned God). One almost never finds fur, teeth, claws or bones as one would in an Amerindian medicine bundle. The animal pieces may be a little too literal (bloody / a product of hunting) to be comfortable... the question needs to be asked.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

1. That Ottawa women locate female identity in the conjunction of BOTH the process of being socialized as a woman and being socialized as such IN a woman's body is underscored by their inability to accept male to female transvestites or transsexuals in their gender specific circles. These people, no matter that they were full participating members of the community at large and community wide gender mixed circles, were never more than tolerated in the women's rituals they attended. As a result of one transvestite's participation to a Full Moon ritual without the women there being able to object, attendance at this circle was extremely low for several months until the women felt certain that the 'interloper' would not come back. This person's participation was very contentious and the issue of his / her identity was never resolved. When asked why this person was considered an "male invader", some of the women's responses were: "Can't have it both ways: social privilege of being male and participation in women's mysteries"; "Just gate crashing"; "What does he (sic) have in common with us? Did he grow up female?"

After many years of thinking about it, the best analysis I can give is that this person was trying to have the masquerade / social construction of gender display (the dress, high heels, make-up, mincing manner, the 'drag') validated as stereotypically and univocally 'really female' by those who were most invested in deconstructing this 'drag'. Furthermore, this person was looking for external validation from a group of individuals invested in personal and individual validation of a personal 'truth'. The cognitive dissonance and political distance between the two endeavours made it impossible to accommodate both at once.

2. 'Reclaiming' is an aphorism of modern feminism. It implies a former ownership or possession, a subsequent loss and a final re-owning. It is also the name of a form of feminist Goddess worship developed in the late 1970's in California and of which Starhawk (Miriam Simos) is the best known writer and 'priestess'. Reclaiming as a religious group is a part of the larger contemporary Neo-pagan movement and is considered by Wiccans as being a legitimate tradition in their midst. See Salomonsen (2002) for a recent ethnography of the San Francisco Reclaiming Witches.

3. Only women's use of the term 'witch' is here presented. Some men also call

themselves witches, namely those members of the contemporary Neo-pagan religious movement called Wicca. To ask and answer why men use the term is outside the scope of this thesis.

4. Furthermore, Francophone women may be using the term 'sorcière' in a way which may not quite parallel the Anglophone use of 'witch'. One can still hear a French-Canadian woman being controlled through the warning: Do you want to be considered a witch? This happens most often when she is being a 'tête de pioche' (hard headed / stubborn) or when she steps out of the norms of sexual behaviour. See the discussion on "La Corriveau", a historical Québécoise witch, for a fuller discussion of this cultural difference (Collectif Clio 1982; D'Amour 1983; Séguin 1978).

In the 1970's, at the beginning of Québec feminist stirrings, the 'sorcière' became a rallying cry with one artist collective calling themselves "La nef des sorcières" (the witches precinct or 'holy of holies'). Another women's collective adapted the cultural figure of the 'water diviner', the 'sourcier' and made of it the 'sourcières en quête de nos énergies-femmes' (the searchers of the well spring questing for female energies / those returning to the source of women spirit). A further exploration of these cultural differences would be fertile.

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APPENDIX ONE: RITUAL TEXTS

- 1- Candle Mandala
- 2- Standard WCC Elemental Purifications
- 3- Candle Spell
- 4- The Earth is My Body
- 5- Celebrating the Corn Harvest
- 6- Goddess Full Moon Ritual
- 7- Amber's Divorce from Odyssean Tradition
- 8- Maiden Initiation
- 9- The Power of One
- 10- Dark Moon Circle - The Lord
- 11- Blessing your Embodied Self
- 12- Healing the Earth
- 13- The Charge of the Goddess

1.1. CANDLE MANDALA

March 2, 1990
Lucie DuFresne

CANDLE MANDALA

MATERIALS

silver tray with copper handles	besome
6 black participants' candles	wand
1 handmaiden's candle	women's oil: cinnamon
1 source candle	salt & earth dish
1 long birthday candle	water & shell
censor & olibanum (frankincense)	silver cup
matches & fireproof dish	wine
goddess image	libation dish
1 fire candle	1 form candle
1 force candle	

RECIPIES

WOMEN'S OIL:

one part cinnamon
one part myrrh
one part pure almond oil

TEMPLE PREPARATIONS

Place tray in centre of space with source candle in centre. Light source candle. All other items should be on altar as usual with candles and incense lit. Each participant enters holding her black candle, unlit.

RITUAL

CHANT: We all come from the Goddess
And to her we shall return
Like a drop of rain
Flowing to the ocean

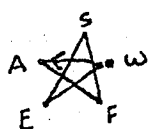
As each participant enters the ritual space carrying her unlit candle, she will be anointed. She will then circle room deosil x3 while chanting and continue chanting while circle is cast (Michelle) and swept (Lucie).

/...2

- 2 -

PURIFICATIONS

Delegated to participant closest to quarter - standard form.

QUARTER CALLS - MichelleAIR

Guardians of the East, Spirits of Air
 Hear our call
 Bring us the hope and joy of the new day's light
 And may our minds be cleared by your sweet breath
 Hail and be welcome!
 Blessed Be.

FIRE

Guardians of the South, Spirits of Fire
 Hear our call
 Bring us the warmth and passion of a summer's day
 And may our souls be kindled by your bright flame
 Hail and be welcomed!
 Blessed Be.

WATER

Guardians of the West, Spirits of Water
 Hear our call
 Bring us the refreshment and renewal of a clear spring's flow
 And may our hearts be soothed by your gentle rain
 Hail and be welcome!
 Blessed Be.

EARTH

Guardians of the North, Spirit of Earth
 Hear our call
 Bring us the strong purpose and sure resolve of your earth's
 processes
 And may our bodies be fed by your great abundance
 Hail and be welcome!
 Blessed Be.

/...3

- 3 -

INVOCATION - Michelle

Lady,
Compassionate, Truthfull, and Strong
You who see all with such clear sight
You from whom nothing can be hidden
Help us tonight to see ourselves as we really are
With strength to accept what we find
With truthfullness in our own self disclosure
With compassion for our own complex natures.
Lady, it is with the greatest of love
That we bid you
Hail and be welcome!

WINE BLESSING - Lucie

Radiant Lady, Beacon of our quest
We, your daughters, ask you to bless this wine
That we may share it in your name
As a token of our love for you
And of our respect and caring for each other
Blessed Be!

Wine is passed around deosil and ends with libation to the Lady.

MEDITATION - Lucie

Each participant now sits around the tray holding the source candle in the centre of the floor.

Each of us has brought back her scribed candle to add to our source candle. During the past few weeks, we have, each of us, together and singly, meditated on the group and our places in it. We have imbued our candles with our wishes and our aspirations, our concerns and our commitments for the coming year. Tonight, we will use these same candles to look within ourselves, each of us within herself, to discover our own myriad, complex selves, and to meld these selves of ours into a self, aware and whole, each of us, for ourselves.

And later tonight, we will meld our candles together to form a new source candle for our group.

/...4

- 4 -

MEDITATION

We are going to go on a journey of sights, sounds, smells, tastes and textures: a magical journey into night; a journey of the senses. We shall dream the dark and the light.

Take your unlit candle, each in turn. Light it from the source candle and place it on the tray.

Make yourself comfortable, for this is a long journey, but a pleasant one. Sit or lie down, however you prefer. Look at your candle. See it glow.

You know in your mind and in your heart that you can pass anywhere in light safely and easily, and that you have the power to enjoy its illuminations. For this is your dream, a magical dream, in which you can do anything you want.

Relax, in the goodness of the light, in the comfort of the dark
Breath deeply and slowly, In and Out,
Feeling your body settle into comfort as you breath,
In and deeper, and
Out and more fully as you keep on breathing
Letting yourself breath and
Feeling your muscles relax, your mind clearing of the outer world,
In and out, fully and deeply,
With a gentle sigh as you breath out, all remaining tensions are being released,
Continue, breathing and relaxing

Your body is becoming more and more peaceful;
Your mind is getting more and more calm and quiet,
Clearing and opening to explore the world of light and sight,
Until you feel more and more centered.

Let your eyes relax and close. Leaving them closed, see with your mind's eye the flame of your candle drawing closer and closer, glowing, brighter and brighter, filling your whole field of vision.

/...5

- 5 -

All around you, patterns of light and shadow, rainbow hues, shift and shimmer, enveloping you. Soon, you will perceive a portal in the centre of that field of light. That opening, that door, that portal leads into your dream world. You may want to enter, to pass into it, extending your hand and letting your own light flow through the portal, gently and effortlessly parting it.

You know you are going to a place between the worlds; a place of peace and joyful renewal of your life forces; a place of passion and vitality, a place of will and desire, a place to gain knowledge. You will visit here for a few moments, knowing that you will be able to come back to this place, to visit whenever you wish, for this is your place, and you can find here and bring back the memories and the energy and knowledge you need. And you continue to advance steadily and with patient desire.

As you pass through, entering that still and warm darkness, you turn to view each direction in turn, sensing limitless possibilities beyond the dusk. Finally, you extend your hand and by the light of your palm a candelabra comes in sight in the centre of the space. As you advance, you notice that each of its eight branches holds an unlit candle, each of a different colour. You smile, you know that you are the one to light the candles, each in turn.

Sensing the need for change, you point your finger and the indigo candle flames and glows steadily. See it and taste the sweetness of change, gladly sought, welcomed and honestly acknowledged.

Hearing the sounds of friendship and the happiness it brings, you will the blue candle to glow. You find in its steady flame, the patience to seek that which you need.

As you gaze, a sense of fulfilment grows within you. The richness of the fertile earth fills you with its smells of fruition, of completion, of work well done. Because you will it, the green candle glow.

/...6

- 6 -

You close your mind's eyes a moment, reflecting on the growing mandala before you. You are attracted by it, you wish to study it, devining in it the fruits of your own intellect. As you open your mind's eyes, the yellow candle flames.

Energy flows through you, warm and stimulating. You know its touch as the lifegiver it is and you know that the orange flame is the next to come to life.

Mounting passion gives you strenght. With it comes courage, courage to seek and find your true heart's desire, and your passion flames red.

As you see, really see with all your being, the mandala of bright flames before you, you sense yourself healing, body/mind/soul merging as the flames merge, indigo into blue into green into yellow into orange into red into indigo again, finally, glowing purple in the synthesis of your self.

As your power builds, the mandala spins, colours merge and blend. Clear white light envelops you. Peace wells up in you as you will the clear white light to unite with your darkneses, to clear your sight. In the clarity of your sight, gaze upon the many shades of yourself and know yourself many hued.

(long pause)

/...7

- 7 -

Finally, the mandala slows in its spinning and resolves itself in an eight branched candalabra. You extend your hand and draw back within yourself the flames of your being: first white/synthesis, then purple/sight, then red/passion, then orange/touch. Each candle in turn shimmers and fades. Yellow/intellect, then green/smell, then blue/hearing, and finally, indigo/taste. With each returning flame, you sense another aspect of yourself acknowledged, accepted, welcomed, and cherished. The mandala is within you. The mandala is you. You sense the inner light that is your self. Again, a still, warm darkness caresses you.

Knowing that inner light glows by your will, and is yours to bring back with you, you turn and seek the portal of return. You approach it. Gently and effortlessly, it parts and you exit, bringing with you the ability to see yourself in all your aspects, shadow and light, rainbow hued, shimmering bright. You feel that flame inside your body, becoming more aware of your body as you return your attention to it, still breathing in and out, feeling the strength, the invigoration, the rest and happiness of your journey, in joining all parts of your body and you know that you will go again. But now, back to this Circle, bringing your light to join each to each and each to the Circle. You slowly open you eyes, seeing in the candles a reflection of your journey. Acknowledge that light and the strenght and clarity which it brings. Come back as you are ready. And now, stretch your arms, your legs, blink your eyes.

(stand holding hands around lit candles)

GROUND POWER

CHANT: She changes everything she touches
 And everything she touches, changes.

/...8

- 8 -

FAREWELL TO THE LADY - Michelle

Lady,
 Compassionate, Truthfull, and Strong
 We thank you
 For helping us see clearly who we really are
 For giving us the truthfullness to recognize our own selves
 And the strength to accept what we find
 With compassion for our own complex natures

Lady, it is with the greatest of love
 That we bid you
 Hail and Farewell!

FAREWELL TO THE QUARTERS - Michelle

EARTH
 Guardians of the North, Spirits of Earth
 We thank you for joining us this night
 For strenthening our purpose and assuring our resolve
 And feeding our bodies from your earth's great abundance
 And it is with the greatest of love
 That we bid you
 Hail and Farewell!



WATER
 Guardians of the West, Spirits of Water
 We thank you for joining us this night
 For refreshing and renewing us at your clear springs
 And soothing our hearts in your gentle rains
 And it is with the greatest of love
 That we bid you
 Hail and Farewell!



FIRE
 Guardians of the South, Spirits of Fire
 We thank you for joining us this night
 For warming us in the passion of a summer's day
 And kindling the bright flames of our souls
 And it is with the greatest of love
 That we bid you
 Hail and Farewell!

/...9

- 9 -



AIR

Guardians of the East, Spirits of Air
We thank you for joining us this night
For bringing the light of hope and joy to our new day
And clearing our minds with your sweet breath
And it is with the greatest of love
That we bid you
Hail and Farewell!

OPEN CIRCLE - Michelle

3x deosil with the fire candle

(Hug and then extinguish candles)

SIMPLE FEAST AND MELTING OF CANDLES INTO NEW SOURCE CANDLE

NOTE: Some of the meditation's introduction is based on the Spider Woman meditation from the Coven's Book of Shadows written by Marie.

1.2. STANDARD WCC ELEMENTAL PURIFICATIONS c. 1989
as used by Women's Full Moon Circle

With the Sweet Air of Life
I do bless and make sacred
A fitting place within this, our circle
For the Guardians of the East
And the rites of Life we shall herein perform.
So mote it be.

With the Bright Flame of Fire
I do bless and make sacred
A fitting place within this, our circle
For the Guardians of the South
And the rites of Light we shall herein perform.
So mote it be.

With the Pure Waters of Love
I do bless and make sacred
A fitting place within this, our circle
For the Guardians of the West
And the rites of Love we shall herein perform.
So mote it be.

With the Firm Salt of Law
I do bless and make sacred
A fitting place within this, our circle
For the Guardians of the North
And the rites of Law we shall herein perform.
So mote it be.

1.3. CANDLE SPELL - Gracie's - 1994

On a cloth on the floor:

One white, vanilla scented candle in the east.

A cup of water, a dish of salt, a bowl of herbs and flowers.

Athame, candle scribe, wish candle(s) of appropriate colour(s), candle holder(s), bell, prepared talisman square, vial of oil.

Ritual is done sitting on floor, facing east.

TEXT:

Powers of the east

Powers of the west

Powers of the north

Powers of the south

Light white vanilla candle.

Athame moves over head from one direction to next. Ring bell after each invocation. Replace Athame on floor.

Come here and lend your protection

Let nothing come among us

That is harmful or evil.

Power of the sun

Power of the moon

Be drawn down

And lend your strength

Light of the sun

Bright of the moon

Power of the Goddess

Power of God

In one unite.

Palms upwards and to the front / side of body. Head forward.

Position of receiving.

Goddess Isis

Be drawn into us

Be in us

Lend your strength here

Isis the woman

Isis the wisdom

Isis the lover

Isis who understands

The love of a woman for a man

The love of a woman for those who are her own

Be drawn into me

Through the air
Through the water
Through earth
Through fire

Athame through air
into water
into salt and dried herbs
Anoint candle with intent

Power of the sea
Of which I am a child
Power of the earth
From whence I came
And shall return

Place salt in water and drink

Place hands in herbs

Power of the moon drawn down
Power of the east and west
Winds of change
Power of north with strength
Power of the south with heat and warmth
Unite here and complete this endeavour

Private anointing of hands and talisman.
Place candle on talisman and light it.
Anoint breast.

Bring to me my desire
Through the water, earth
Air and fire
Bring to me
That which in my heart I desire

Position of receiving

In no way
Let this spell rebound
Reverse or cause harm in any way
Clear and direct is my intent

Isis I beseech
And thank you
Powers combined
To this deed

As it is in my mind
As it is in my heart
Here and now

So mote it be
So mote it be

Extinguish candles, which should be
burned to marked point.

1.4. THE EARTH IS MY BODY - Aïda - Women's Circle - Kaleidoscope
- August 7, 1993

Notes:

- Aïda has Crone's Disease.
- She is a single mother with two teen age children, one girl and one boy.
- She was the ritual leader and moving force within the Wyrð Sisters with whom I circled during 1992-1994.
- This was the first public women's ritual that explicitly conjoined the body of the woman with the body of the Goddess. The 40+ women, from all parts between Toronto and Montreal who participated in this ritual were strongly affected by it. It was the generator of a major shift in imagery and intent in the women's circles in Ottawa which followed it.

Meditation:

In the beginning, there was only formless chaos... Then chaos settled into form, and that form was the huge Saea, the deep-breasted one, the earth. (Greece)

Eurynome assumed the form of a dove and laid the Universal Egg on the waves of the sea. She instructed Ophion (the snake also born from her) to coil seven times around the egg until it hatched and split in two. Out tumbled all things that exist. (Greece)

Woyengi (the Mother) molded humans from the Earth while seated with her feet resting on the Creation Stone. (Nigeria)

A Woman fell from the upper world. The toad brought her mud from the bottom of the sea. She took it and placed it carefully around the edge of the tortoise's shell. It became the beginning of dry land and of the life upon it. (North American Huron)

Thou art the mother womb/ The one who creates all. (Babylon)

The Earth is my body. My body is the Goddess. My body is good.
The Earth is my body. My body is the Goddess. My body is good.

It may start off at the beach: "Put a 2-piece bathing suit on that baby girl". "No, you have to wear a shirt even if your brother doesn't". "Why? Because you're a girl." "Cross your knees." "Be lady-like - stay still." "No, you can't play these games like a boy now that you have your period." "Ssh, talk about these things

quietly."

Shave your legs/arm pits, pluck your eyebrows, tuck your tummy in, stick out your chest.

Shall I colour my hair? perm my hair? My ass is too big. My breasts are too big. My breasts are too small. I'm too fat. My hips are too big. My thighs are flabby. People don't like me like this. I hate my body, myself.

No, No, No

The Earth is my body. My body is the Goddess. My body is good.

The Earth is my body. My body is the Goddess. My body is good.

Hysterectomies, mastectomies, cliterectomies, breast reduction, breast enlargement, liposuction, tummy tucks, hip reduction, feet binding, waist binding, cosmetics facial surgery, c-sections - when will it end?

Food Ads: "Eat it, Eat it, Eat it, it's tasty, it's simple to make, it's good, Eat it.

"You're fat - You're sick - It's your fault - You've been bad.

"Eat it, Eat it, Eat it, it's sweeter, saltier, spicier, exciting - Eat it.

"You're fat - You're ugly - You're sick.

No, Stop. No.

The Earth is my body. My body is the Goddess. My body is good.

The Earth is my body. My body is the Goddess. My body is good.

The Earth is my body. My body is the Goddess. My body is good.

"I feel sick, I'm not well. I'll go see the doctor. He knows. His office is clean, its white. He's white and clean. His machines are clean. He can fix it."

"Take this pill" - I feel sicker

"Take another pill" - I still feel sick

"You'll need this blood test, urine test, electrocardiogram, an ultrasound, a hook-up to this nob, a plug-in to that nob....

"I feel sick - I'm tired, I lost my vitality - I'm working backwards - I'll try the alternative route."

"Well, I've tried to heal you, but you're still not improving. What are you getting

from this illness? What do you get out of being sick? You must want to be this way otherwise you'd be well. It's your karma. It must be a past life thing. Your spirit is tainted. You are paying back for your past sins."

"You see, that's what happens when you abuse your body for so long. Take this herb, take that herb - purge - fast - cleanse - detoxify - purification by fire - we'll fight it if you have to die for it - take this - take that..." You're being bad - Atone. Atone.

(In a small voice): "No, I didn't ask for this. No, I don't want to be sick. No, I'm not bad. I'm so tired - sad and tired. I live my life in the best way I can... sometimes it's wrong for me - sometimes it's right -

The Earth is my body. My body is the Goddess. My body is good.
The Earth is my body. My body is the Goddess. My body is good.

My cat just had kittens. Her skin hangs down on her belly and wobbles from side to side when she walks. She looks tired but she's regaining her strength. She nurses her kittens and sometimes leaves them and goes outside. No one comments on her body - how it changed - if she's regained her previous shape. She is what she is.

Normal health in the scientific tradition is epitomized in the picture of a young, white male. Problems of the old are disregarded. Normal female physical functions - pregnancy, lactation, menopause, menstruation - are seen as dangerous, painful, frightening, weakening and unsustainable without help. Women are given estrogen for their fears of becoming old.

Normal health means fully functioning with or without assistance. There is no excuse for not being normal.

"And as I get weaker, my vitality shrinks. They say I was born this way - like sin. My body and mind are not to be trusted. I must follow their rules otherwise I'll get punished, naturally, like getting sick, or breaking a leg, losing my sweetheart, getting a traffic ticket. I try to learn my lessons, the teachings of pain so that I'll never have to experience bad things again.

"My death. They will paint my cheeks and lips red like life. Fix me up once more so I can be seen in death well dressed, serene. Enclose me now in steel or concrete to keep away the earth changes that would mold me (spare parts in good order have been salvaged). The End.

(voice getting louder):

NO NO NOOO

The Earth is my body. My body is the Goddess. My body is good.

The Earth is my body. My body is the Goddess. My body is good.

I am vital, moving, growing, changing. In the natural flow of my expansion and enrichment I encounter pain, I lose control, I die. In the natural flow of my curiosity and play I discover joy and wisdom. I am born. Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional. I accept both my joys and sorrows as part of my spiral in life. I ally myself with all that I resist and thus become whole. I regain my holiness.

Yes. this aging, this sickness is part of my whole self. Death is part of my whole self. I expand - compassionate, confident, letting loose, flying off into death, birth the void - full.

I let go into transformation - every step of the way into completion. I will die laughing with ecstasy - my eyes wide open.

The Earth is my body. My body is the Goddess. My body is good.

The Earth is my body. My body is the Goddess. My body is good.

1.5. CELEBRATING THE CORN HARVEST - WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY GROUP - AUGUST 1993 - First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa

Note: The First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa has three parts: Humanist, Christian and Pagan.

This is a Sunday Ritual for the full congregation prepared by the Women's Spirituality Group for Lammas - Celebrating the Corn Harvest. (Diane, Laurie, Heidi, Nancy, Kit, Roz). These women also participated in the Hungry Eye Dark Moon Circle and had followed the "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven" course at the UU church.

INVOCATION - LAMMAS

N: Heidi / E: Kit / S: Laurie / W: Nancy

- N What is this celebration?
- S It is the season of Lammas.
- E What is the meaning of this season?
- W It is the harvest time.
- N What do we do in this season?
- S We honor the fruits of the Earth, our ongoing sustenance.
- E After this harvest celebration, what will we do?
- W We will tend and store our harvest, preserving what is necessary to life.
- N How do we recognize ourselves in this season?
- S We knead the dough. We bake the good bread. We call upon the Mother who gives us
our daily food.
- E Who helps us?
- W Our Goddess helps us.
- N What is our Goddess?
- S She is the benevolence of our mother planet, the rich gifts of her soil, the nourishment of our bodies.
- E Who is our Goddess?
- W She is the Virgin of Light, the Crone of Darkness, the Mother of Time.
- N Where is our Goddess?
- S She is in our hearts in all seasons of the turning year.
- E Who is our Goddess?
- ALL Behold, she is ourselves.

(Adapted from "Women's Rituals - A Sourcebook", by Barbara G. Walker)

Excerpt from explanation of the ritual as presented by the women to the

congregation:

... You may be wondering why contemporary women are returning to a style of worship dating back several millennia? What relevance do the pagan rituals - rooted in farming traditions - possibly hold for a woman of today? After all, a modern farm is a blend of heavy machinery, technology, chemicals, government regulations and good old fashioned instinct. Certainly most farmers of today do not experience the intimate rapport with the earth that farmers of yore experienced as they trod their small farms, barefoot and bare handed. We no longer beseech the Divine to make the seasons turn or to look kindly upon our crops and our efforts. Yet the festival times of the modern Pagan worshippers remain closely tied to the events of the growing year: the Winter and Summer Solstice and the Fall and Spring Equinox. Certainly, tradition plays a large part in this, but we find that the rituals harken back to our basic connection with the physical, spiritual element, as we understand them through reading meditation and discussion. This belief system has re-awakened our awareness and reverence for the basic spiritual force.

For many of us, it is our need to see the Divine in the Female and the Female in the Divine. There are other reasons. Perhaps more subtle. The basic rhythms of the cycle of life - Birth, Death and Re-Birth - resonate with the natural cycles of our bodies and lives. Some of us find ways to embrace the many different facets of ourselves, as reflected in the three aspects of the Goddess. The Maiden symbolizes innocence. The Mother symbolizes the creative, nurturing and protective aspect of our lives. These need not be restricted to the biological functions of womanhood. The Crone, a term used with deepest respect in the Pagan community, symbolizes the experience, strength and knowledge gained throughout our lives. As well, we simply enjoy sharing our spiritual journeys with other spiritual women. ...

1.6. GODDESS FULL MOON RITUAL - c. 1993 - SANDY ? - OCCULT SHOP

Note: This text has been typed as written without changing typos or normalizing format. Standard ritual format was used as well as standard ritual responses (So Mote It Be, etc.).

Text may have been written by Michelle Hrynyk but Sandy Duncan is more likely its author (it's in her style and character).

INVOCATION OF THE QUARTERS:

EAST / AIR

From my first breath, I have known you.
Sweet air filling my lungs for the very first time,
flowing life within me.

As a child I remember running with you on windswept shores,
you, playing in my hair, filling me with delight.
Singing ancient life songs to me.

Now how sweetly you carry scent and sound.
How cleverly you bring back memories of freedom past.

Light as a lovers touch,
or strong as a fearsome gale,
Impossible to contain or possess, I still desire you.
Bringing wisps from mother Gaia I welcome you.

You were the first one to learn how to fly.
From my first gasp to my last breath I need you.
I am you.

SOUTH / FIRE

From the moment I came to life, fire you resided in me.
My beating heart follows your flame's rhythms.

I have always cherished your sun's gold light,
And the heat you impart on cold winter's night.

You have taught me to fear and respect your awesome power to engulf.

Oh, how I have been engulfed by you! With every passionate touch.

My lovers teacher you are.
 And you are the one to stir my womanly desire.
 I have made love to you a million times.
 I am devoured by you,
 I am you.

WEST / WATER

In you I rested till my mother's womb could hold me no more.
 Now in you I cleanse, bathe and purify myself.
 From the sky you come
 to heal this poor planet, and cover us with perfect whiteness.

From rocks you run to quench my never ending thirst.
 You are a soothing balm for my sorrows,
 and from time to time you flow freely from me.

You enchant me with your winter transformation.
 Magically, you are guided only by the moon.

I am full of you, bursting of you and forever thirsting for you.
 I am you.

NORTH / EARTH

My love, my mother, earth
 you hold me up, every day of my life.

Endlessly I walk upon your fair and fragrant breast.
 Every day you nourish me and provide shelter for me.

As old as forever, knowing all things, you have taught me well.
 I have learned so much from you, for within you lies all mysteries.
 And you have name me WITCH

The scent of your treasures, rich with the decay of things come to pass,
 of everything being reborn through you,
 the feel of you in my hands.

I love you for providing for me, for teaching me in the old ways.

I know I will return to you
will lie in your embrace forever
I will become a part of you
I am you.

INVOCATION OF THE GODDESS

Mothers, Sisters, Daughters of the Goddess, we are gathered to honor the great mother in all her glory.

She comes to us through everything, in the sound of stones, in the scent of rosemary, in the touch of the sun. Lets invite her to join us in this celebration. In our invitation, we honor some of the many cloaks she wears, the sacred names she carries.

Through the Air she has come to be known as:

Sappho
Lilith
Artemis
Diana
Arianrhod
Aido Wedo
Cheng-O
Athena
Cybil
Aradia
and Shekina

Through fire she has come to be known as:

Oya
Pele
Hestia
Amaterasu
Vesta
and Sun Woman

Through Water she has come to be known as:

Yemaya
Mari
Tiamat
Kwan Yin
Isis

Sarasvati
and Kwannon

And through Earth she is called:

Demeter
Ceres
Copper Woman
Old Woman
Hecate
Ishtar
Rhiannon
Habondia
and Oshun

MEDITATION

Now if you will, I would like you to find a comfortable space, sitting or lying down and you might choose to close your eyes. I would like to take you through a journey, an affirmation meant to explore the seasons of nature, Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall, and the seasons of our lives as women. For the purpose of clarity, I will be speaking to you in the first person. this is in no way to exclude you, but rather to help you imagine yourself as the person in the story, if you choose to do so.

It is the winter of my life, and I am growing just like a seed in my mother.
A little seed, burried deep in my mother's womb.
A seed burried deep in the earth, planted by the great mother.
A delicate thing, growing inside this protective burrough.
Being taught all mysteries, being nourished and sheltered by my mama.
Like the seed who is lying deep in Gaia's breast.
Me under layers of blood, tissue, skin and clothing.
And the seed, under layers of dirt, leaves and snow.
Preparing, as I am, for life in the other world.

I can hear my mamma singing to me,
as the seed hears the wind whooshing a lullaby overground.
Waiting, waiting to be ready to emerge.
Somehow I will know the right time.
As the seed awaits the first thaw.
I await my own spring.

Pushing, pushing through those layers of muscle, tissue, blood and skin.

Pushing, poking, through the earth, the dead leaves, the last of the frost.
 Here is the spring of my existence.
 Quickly time moves
 to make me flourish. Time moves quickly also for the young plant.
 The wind in me shoots up, making me tall and spry
 Like my sister,
 the young plant grown from seed.

I am young, I am maiden
 Maiden is she. We both flourish in sunlight and coming warmth.
 I cloak myself in fresh dresses
 as the young bud dons her new petals.
 We both sway gaily in the wind. Still so young and fresh
 Vitaly attached to our mamma.
 With so much to learn from her wisdom.

Soon the summer will come, and it will be time to bloom.

How warm I am
 How full of Summer

I am heavy and full and round.
 I am strong and clever and free to choose.

Like my sister in the garden, I am redolent with color and perfume.
 My scent comes from deep inside and delights all.
 I am an invitation to sensuality
 I have learned well from my sister who bewitches all the bees with her nectar.

I too flow of this life blood.
 And the full moon's light blesses me with her magic.
 As she blesses the flower with silver dew.

Woman, in full bloom, I now know my mothers mysteries
 and the fire in me lights all around me.
 My sister too holds the secrets of nature in her heart.

Soon we will both know all,
 and be ready to give back all we are, to the Goddess

My sister and I recognise this time by the chill in the air
 Trees tell us it has come

They sing with the growing winds
and lay their most precious gifts at our feet.

We are worthy of this display,
For we have grown old and wise, and have given all we have to all who will take
from us.

My sister has lost her color, has grown very heavy and tired,
but she is at her most beautiful.

I see myself in her.
I remember the blush of my youth, the height of my fertility
and the greatness of my gifts.
She is returning to the soil,
she is giving back her leaves, fruits and seeds.

And when it is time, she will lay down
and give her magic back to the earth,
to return to the great mother, as will I.

We will lay side by side,
and leave our seeds, who will wait and grow and become

in another womb
in another garden.

THANKING THE GODDESS

Beautiful Mamma, great mother of all
We learn from you in all ways
And are aware of your presence in all things
We see you in rocks and leaves and rain
Our wish is to honor you and thank you for your presence
Blessed be

FAREWELL TO THE WEST

The blood running through my veins
The tears welling up in my eyes
The sacred flow of my womb
All are testaments of your presence
I will cherish your powers to purify and satisfy me

I will bathe in the rain and walk in the snow
You will always live in me
Thank you for your presence

FAREWELL TO THE NORTH

Dark, damp rich is earth
and full of the stuff of life
You are the cradle of my birth and death
You hold the promise of sustenance and rebirth
I cannot express what you mean to me
So great is your role in my life
Thank you for your presence

FAREWELL TO THE EAST

My beautiful teacher
the wind
I thank you for showing me
the meaning of freedom and joy.
I will join my voice to yours
I will forever dance with you.
I will honor you with every breath I take
Thank you for your presence

FAREWELL TO THE SOUTH

Lover, fearsome warrior
You stir within me passion and longing
I will every night await your return
Ever faithful you will rise before me
Fire of my beating heart
Hear my praise
Thank you for your presence

1.7. AMBER'S DIVORCE FROM ODYSSEAN TRADITION - UNBRAIDING OF CINGULUM - c. 1995 -

Note: Ritual text was a co-operative venture of the women involved under Amber and Pashta's overview and using Amber's symbolic lexicon.

DRIED ROSE SMUDGE (Amber)

All that for which my soul did pine
A green isle in a sea, a fountain and a shrine...

No more shall bloom the blasted tree, not the stricken bird soar
A dream too bright to last which died before it was born

Deep and passionate love, the urge to merge into one
Costing the loss of self, the priceless sanity once won

Drawn deeper within the labyrinth, despair and life draining
Loss of trust and innocence, the sorrow of tears raining

No way out or back, forward through the tangled threads
Converging new beginnings with the echo of the dead

Spiritual awakening, and the dark goddess dreaming
On the birthing edge of knowing
And the fragile brink of meaning

BLESSING (Pashta, Sandy, Lucie)

Some of the responses are missing: feet, womb, eyes, nose.

Feet P

Knees L

Blessed be thy knees, dear friend
Which have knelt before the sacred laws of life
May they never falter under the burdens of choice
May they always support you on your spirit walk
And may they stand firm in your resolve

Genitals S

Blessed by thy Yoni, dear sister
Sacred well of pleasure and renewal,
Gateway to the vault of the mystery of creation,

May it bring you carefree love and joy,
 And inspire respect and awe
 As it blossoms and opens
 To give passage to your many creations

Womb

Navel

Blessed be thy navel, dear friend
 Center of all life's connections
 The bond of nurturance
 May that which connects you to Mother Earth
 Connect you to all of creation

Heart

Blessed be thy heart, dear sister
 Source of thy vitality, love and will
 May the red flame burn brightly within you
 To strengthen your resolve and beliefs,
 And may the violet flame burn clearly within you
 As love expands your consciousness
 And enfolds all those who you encounter on your path

Hands & Arms

Blessed by they hands and arms, dear friend
 Outstretched to the stars from which we came
 Enfolding, Caressing, giving, gifting
 With generosity, and kindness
 May you always be an instrument of the work of the Gods

Breasts

Blessed be thy breasts, dear sister
 Milk of the stars
 May their beauty nourish and inspire
 Firm sustenance and comfort
 Strength and solace, vitality and hope
 And affirm the presence of the Mother's Grace

Throat

Blessed by thy throat, dear sister
 Channel to the heart
 May it be open and free, and resonate with song

And may it give expression to your joy and passion
Soothing and invigorating the soul
And granting comfort and dreams to you and those you love

Mouth

Blessed be thy mouth, dear friend
Speaking the names of the Mother
May your voice always be raised in praise and song
Affirming the truth in dignity and joy

Nose

Mind / eyes

Blessed by thy mind, dear friend
Thy private sanctuary, thy secret garden
May it be filled with happy thoughts
Dreams and enchantments
Creating your future as it is fitting
In the eyes of the Mother

1.8. MAIDEN INITIATION - ANN - YULE 1996-97

Note: This is taken from the last of three rituals (Crone/Mother/Maiden) which were celebrated by Ann and her two initiators as part of the process of birthing herself to herself. Of the three women, she was the oldest (mid 50's). The others were in their mid 40's and late 30's. This text was written by her as her declaration to the Goddess at end of the third initiation ritual:

I give my gifts to the cosmos
My soul to the wind
For I am the cosmos
And I am the wind

I am one with all life
I am one within
For I am the cosmos
And I am the wind

I am the life
That sprang from the sea
Hear me now cosmos
For I am free to be me
To work by my own destiny
By and with the powers of Arianrhod.

1.9. THE POWER OF ONE - Willow Marie Power - 1997

This is a text given to the women who attended Willow Marie Power's "Power of One" workshop at the Hungry Eye on January 27, 1997. It is a sample of how she works her own circle when she celebrates as a 'solitaire', that is to say, as one alone. Willow Marie is a poet and former dancer and her rituals are always finally choreographed and highly refined in textual imagery, body movements, and physical setting (time/place/tools).

Willow Marie usually works at the full moon, outdoors on her high rise balcony overlooking a residential park. When working indoors, she usually sets up an altar in her living room, looking out the patio doors to her balcony and the park beyond.

GROUNDING

All Mother-Father
Protect and guide me
Help me hear your voice

3 deep breaths with arms & hands open
visualize a full moon (yourself) shining
on a raging sea (emotions)

ANOINT & CONSECRATE

Sacred is this circled star
A necklaced nova shining far
To bridge both realms
To mesh and bind
Divinity and humankind

standing in front of altar
draw pentagram with oil on throat

CASTING

By the sacred power
Of 3 x 3
By the sacred power
Inside of me
As Priestess of all
And Priestess to none
I will my will
To the will of one

Using wand (willow branch twined with
silver ribbons) draw circle in the air
above oneself

This circle is safe
This circle is sacred
This circle is cast.

holding wand in both hands in front of
chest then placing wand back on altar

QUARTER CALLS - finger tips of right hand touch each body part as named
With my heart, my voice, my sight, my mind

In perfect love and perfect trust
 I can out to the (Northern) Watchtower, Lords of (earth)
 May your presence here
 And the path of this circle
 Lead me closer to (truth)
 Hearken to my calling,
 And Blessed Be

LORD & LADY

What battle wounds
 My power mates
 And holy forces
 Consecrate

INTENT

All Mother-Father Creator

QUARTER CLOSE - finger tips of right hand touch each body part as named

With my heart, my voice, my sight, my mind
 In perfect love & perfect trust
 I call out to the (Northern) Watchtower, Lords of (earth)
 And I give thanks for you presence here
 And the path of this circle
 Stay if you can, leave if you must,
 And Blessed Be

OPEN CIRCLE

My hands in flight
 Caress the air
 To page & script
 The knowing there:
 Unbound power - binding none
 In random fall
 Each chapter's drawn
 A frost of spell
 That falls upon
 The circle of my casting
 To softly stream
 Forever spread
 Its never-ending
 End un-read
 My fingers letter spells of weather magicked.

1.10. DARK MOON CIRCLE - THE LORD - D'ANNA GOULDEN - HUNGRY EYE - MARCH 1998

Notes: This is one of only three rituals celebrated by Ottawa women to the God alone.

At the time of this ritual, D'Anna was married to a Algonkian Native. She is herself strongly drawn to Native/quasi shamanic forms of spirituality and she understands and was trained in ceremonial magic. She began training with the WCC but subsequently opted for a Native Wiccan blend for her personal practice. She now circles almost exclusively with women and was the co-leader of the Hungry Eye Dark Moon Circle.

The Horned God is Herne / Cernunnos / Stag Lord, the Celtic God of the wild places, and for D'Anna, he is also a Native Spirit, a Manitou.

SMUDGING (piñon pine, sage, tobacco)

QUARTER PURIFICATIONS - CHANT

Horned One

British Traditional Wiccan Chant

Lover Son

Leaper in the Corn

Deep in the Mother

Die and be reborn

QUARTER CALLS

Spirit of the East, high flying eagle

Gather with us on this night

So that you may hear our prayers

And carry them on your wings

Towards the awakening sun

Be you ever welcome in peace

Blessed Be

Spirit of the South, screaming hawk

Gather with us on this night

So that you may hear our prayers

And share your raptor's passion

As we celebrate your hunter's skill

Be you ever welcome in peace

Blessed Be

Spirit of the West, silent lynx
 Gather with us on this night
 So that you may hear our prayers
 And bring us your swiftness
 As we celebrate your sure actions
 Be you ever welcome in peace
 Blessed Be

Spirit of the North, Grandmother Bear
 Your granddaughters call to you
 The long winter is over
 The time of turning inward is done
 The form is complete
 Now is the time for force
 Come to us She-bear
 And bring us your strength of presence
 An your ability to weather the roughest times
 Be welcome in peace
 Blessed Be

GOD CALL

Horned One, untamed rogue
 Virgin and seducer
 Provider and protector
 Honourable warrior
 Noble defender
 You who are both hunter and hunted
 Each in turn, come to us
 We, your sisters and daughters,
 Call on you, as we have not done
 In seasons past
 We return for your guidance
 We ask you to come to meet and know us
 We ask you to come for us to meet and know you
 Stag Father,
 We welcome you
 With perfect love and perfect trust
 So Mote It Be

TALKING CIRCLE

So often the Horned Lord is only seen as the Lady's Summer Lover, the

strong silent type that fulfills so many of our fantasies of love, desire and lust. As wonderful and satisfying as this image is, it is also partial, incomplete and ignores aspects of the Lord which are not recognized by our Western society.

Where is the young Lord, innocent and shy, the sweet fruit tempting a jaded palate? Where is the nurturing father whose strong arms support and shelter the fragile child? Where is the grieving mate and parent confronted with the dissolution of a family? Where is the broken man destroyed by false accusations? These too are aspects of the Lord, too often ignored...

(Open talking circle using speaking feather)

WINE BLESSING (*Text missing*)

GOD FAREWELL

Horned One,
We have honoured your many aspects tonight
and have opened our hearts and minds
To new perspectives
We thank you for your presence
And 'ere you depart to your wondrous realms
We bid you
Hail and farewell

QUARTER FAREWELLS

Grandmother Bear
We thank you for your presence this night
And carry with us always your strength of presence
As you return to the realms of earth
We bid you
Hail and Farewell

Silent Lynx
We thank you for your presence this night
And carry with us always your swiftness
As you return to the realms of water
We bid you
Hail and farewell

Screaming Hawk

We thank you for your presence this night
And carry with us always your raptor's passion
As you return to the realms of fire
We bid you
Hail and farewell

High flying Eagle

We thank you for your presence this night
And carry with us always your sacredness
As you return to the realms of air
We bid you
Hail and farewell

1.11.BLESSING YOUR EMBODIED SELF - Lady MoonDance, "Blessing your Embodied Self" in SageWoman 2001 (53):7.

I kneel at my altar and press a drop of amber resin or rose water to my third eye, saying:

*"Bless my eyes,
that they may see clearly,
in this world and in the next."*

I smell the sweet fragrance on my fingertip as I touch my nose:

*"Bless my nose,
to smell your divine essence."*

I move down my body, anointing each part as I continue:

*"Bless my lips,
that they may speak my truth and yours.
Bless my throat,
that it may give strength and clarity to my voice.
Bless my heart,
filled with love for all creation.
Bless my breasts,
formed in strength and beauty.
Bless my stomach,
full and round, she nourishes me.
Bless my womb,
filled with the powerful blood of life.
Bless my yoni,
overpouring with sacred pleasures.
Bless my legs,
with which I stand firm and tall in my beliefs.
Bless my feet,
to carry me forward on my own true path.
Bless my hands,
to do your work and my mine own."*

I clasp my palms together for a moment before once again touching my third eye, and then crossing my hands over my heart, head bowed:

*"Bless me Mother,
for I am your child."*

1.12. HEALING THE EARTH - MARCH 2002 - U. ST. PAUL

Note: This conference was attended by about 300 women from the Ottawa area. The number of Christian, and obviously Catholic women was apparent (about 2/3 of attendees). Many of the Catholic women were nuns, including several of the teachers I had had growing up and attending school in convents in the Ottawa area (1960's). Maybe 5 men attended, priests and deacons. The other women were from the Ottawa Goddess community, including at least 40 Wiccan / Pagan women, all of whom I had circled with at some point. This is the text of the ritual we celebrated as part of the conference events. It was written by women of Around the Goddess. The conference was sponsored by the Centre for Research on Women in Christianity at the University of St Paul, which is a part of the University of Ottawa.

From : "Ani Arnott" <ani@magma.ca>
Date : Sun, 10 Mar 2002 14:13:11 -0500

Dear All: Ritual words as requested. Ani

Healing the Earth: A challenge for feminism and theology
Conference with Rosemary Radford-Ruether
St Paul University, Centre for Research on Women in Christianity
Ottawa, Canada - March 9th, 2002

Ritual (created by Barbara Zerter and Ani Arnott)

MORNING RITUAL:
Opening Chant:

Earth my body, water my blood, air my breath and fire my spirit;
Earth my body, water my blood, air my breath and fire creating love.

Terre mon corps, eau mon sang, air mon souffle, feu mon esprit;
Terre mon corps, eau mon sang, air mon souffle, feu créant l'amour.

Greeting Dance: KOS

Left foot forward two steps, dip, dip (I greet you);
Right foot back two steps, dip, dip (I give you space);
Right foot right two steps, dip, dip (We move as one).

PROCLAMATION OF THE ELEMENTS:

EARTH

Je suis la terre, Son corps.

Sentez-moi dans le sol humide qui reçoit les semences, dans les champs mûrs de grains, dans la forêt, dans les cavernes et sur les plus hauts sommets.

De mes reins vous sortez, dans mon corps vous trouvez votre soutien et votre nourriture, et dans mes bras vous trouvez votre repos à la fin de vos jours.

AIR

I am the air that is Her breath.

I laugh with the tulips in spring, whisper in the summer trees, scatter the seeds of harvest and blow the snows of winter.

I am the breath of Life, hear me in the cry of the new born babe, the shout of triumph, the tender whisper of love.

FIRE

Je suis le feu de Son Esprit

Voyez-moi dans le soleil ardent de midi, la flamme blanche du (sic) forge, la chaleur du foyer

Je suis la flamme de l'inspiration, je brûle les mensonges et illumine la vérité.

Je suis l'étincelle de la vie, la flamme sacrée, le feu de la purification, de la passion et de l'espoir.

WATER

I am the waters of Her living womb.

Taste me in the salty oceans, the cool running streams, the soft gentle rains, the raging storms, in the tears of your sorrow and joy.

I am the sacred well, cleansing, refreshing, quenching your deepest thirst.

I am the water of Life that no living thing can do without.

CENTRE: (from Blessed is She from Hope for Wholeness by Katherine Zappone)

Blessed is She who spoke and the world became.

R. Blessed is She.

Blessed is She who in the beginning, gave birth.

R. Benie soit Elle

Blessed is She who says and performs.

R. Blessed is She.

Blessed is She who declares and fulfills.

R. Benie soit Elle

Blessed is She whose womb covers the earth.

R. Blessed is She.

Blessed is She whose womb protects all creatures.

R. Benie soit Elle

Blessed is She who nourishes those who are in awe of Her.

R. Blessed is She.

Blessed is She who lives forever, and exists eternally.

R. Benie soit Elle

Blessed is She who redeems and saves. Blessed is Her Name.

R. Blessed is She.

CLOSING RITUAL

Chant:

Earth my body, water my blood, air my breath and fire my spirit;

Earth my body, water my blood, air my breath and fire creating love.

Terre mon corps, eau mon sang, air mon souffle, feu mon esprit;

Terre mon corps, eau mon sang, air mon souffle, feu créant l'amour.

Scripture: The Blessings of Creation

Earth: (Ps. 104)

You set the earth on its foundations,

So it will never be shaken.

You cover it with the deep like a garment.

You make springs gush forth from the hills,

Giving drink to every wild animal.
 By the streams the birds have their habitation;
 They sing among the branches.
 From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
 The earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.
 You cause the grass to grow
 For the cattle,
 And plants for the people to use,
 To bring food from the earth,
 And wine to gladden the human heart,
 Oil to make the face shine
 And bread to strengthen the human heart.

Air: (Jean 3, 5-8)

Je te dis qu'il faut naître de l'eau et du Souffle pour entrer dans le royaume de Dieu. Car ce qui naît de la chair est chair et ce qui naît du Souffle est esprit. Le vent souffle où il veut, tu entends sa voix sans savoir d'où il vient ni où il va. Ainsi va toute personne née du Souffle.

Water: (Ezekiel 47)

God said to me: "Mortal have you seen this?" I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on one side and on the other. "This water flows toward the eastern region. when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh. Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live..it will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes. on the banks, on both sides of the river there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail. because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing."

Feu: (Luc 12, 49)

Moi, je suis venu verser le feu sur la Terre. Et je voudrais tant le voir allumé.

(Luc 24, 32)

Le couple des disciples d'Emmaus se dirent l'un à l'autre: "Notre coeur n' a-t-il pas brûlé lorsqu'il nous parlait sur la route et qu'il nous dévoilait les Écritures?"

LAMENT OF THE ELEMENTS:

ALL ELEMENTS:

You

We address you
 Peoples of the earth
 Let no thought
 No fiction of mind or economics
 Come between our voices and your hearts

WATER:

I shape the rock
 I nourish the life of plant and animal
 Without me none can live
 I play upon the atmosphere
 Dance in the clouds
 Shift with the swinging of the moon
 I rise to suckle your child
 Open you to pleasure

Yet your poisons drip into me
 Beyond my power to transform them
 Your gases raise the temperature of earth's moist mantle
 And I dry, I dry

EARTH:

Within my body
 Rock and plant, weight and sustenance
 My gravity holds you to me
 Like a precious child

From my bowel and back
 You strip my flesh
 Force it on other elements who cannot hold it

À l'intérieur de mon corps
 Pierres et plantes, poids et subsistance
 La force de gravité vous tiens,
 précieuses enfants, au sein

Mais vous dépouillez la chair
 De mes entrailles et de mon dos
 Et vous la forcez sur d'autres éléments qui ne peuvent pas la tenir.

AIR:

Music winds through me to your ear

I resonate with all the sounds
Of tears, and cries of joy, of moans

All of the fierce wild is in me
I move you, connect you with your loved ones
Breath to breath

But new particles weigh me down, thicken me
Disrupt my passage through your lungs

FIRE:

I kept you warm
Cooked, dried your food for eons. I inspired you
Now I engulf the deer in flash fires, tear the wretched life from dried out forest

Rarely do your children learn my beauty, or my terror;
I am exiled from the hearth

Je vous ai chauffé
J'ai préparé votre nourriture pendant une éternité. Je vous ai inspiré.

Maintenant j'engouffre les cerfs dans les incendies éclatants
C'est rare que vos enfants apprennent de ma beauté ou de ma terreur
Je suis en exil du foyer

CENTRE / SPIRIT: (all participants)

I am energy gathered, the still point
Will, intention
Word and sound carry me to my goal
Fire feeds my courage
Nourished by the soft rain of her tears
Grounded in the common bread of life

Discussion with neighbour:

What can I do to help bring healing to the earth?
What do I need to sustain me in this ?

Healing Gifts from the Elements:

AIR:

Honour the gifts of your mind:

intuition, learning, knowledge, use them to heal and be healed.

FIRE:

Honour the gifts of your spirit:

energy, passion, compassion, use them to heal and be healed.

Honorez les dons de votre esprit:

l'énergie, l'amour, la compassion, utilisez-les pour guérir et pour être guéri

WATER:

Honour the gifts of your emotions:

love, courage, daring, use them to heal and be healed.

EARTH:

Honour the gifts of your body:

creativity, strength, determination, use them to heal and be healed.

Honorez les dons de votre corps:

la créativité, la force, la détermination, utilisez-les pour guérir et pour être guéri

(Receive stones with gifts to reinforce our intentions)

Closing Blessing:

CENTRE: (all)

May all beings be free from suffering, and the causes of suffering

May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness

EARTH:

May you bring forth blessings of right livelihood

WATER:

May you bless with healing and the medicines of the heart

Que vous bénissiez avec la guérison et la médecine du coeur

FIRE:

May you have the compassion and courage to remain steadfast

AIR:

May you affirm Life

Que vous affirmiez la Vie

1.14. THE CHARGE OF THE GODDESS - Doreen Valiente

Listen to the words of the Great Mother; she who of old was called among men Artemis, Astarte, Athene, Dione, Melusine, Aphrodite, Cerridwen, Dana, Arianhod, Isis, Brede and by many other names:

Whenever you have need of any thing, once in the month, and better it be when the moon is full, then shall you assemble in some secret place and adore the spirit of me, who am Queen of all witches. There shall you assemble, you who are fain to learn all sorcery, yet have not won its deepest secrets; to these will I teach things that are yet unknown. And you shall be free from slavery; and as a sign that you be really free, you shall be naked in your rites; and you shall dance, sing, feast, make music and love, all in my praise. For mine is the ecstasy of the spirit, and mine also is joy on earth; for my law is love unto all beings. Keep pure your highest ideal; strive ever towards it; let naught stop you or turn you aside. For mine is the secret door which opens upon the Land of Youth and mine is the cup of the wine of life, and the Cauldron of Cerridwen, which is the Holy Grail of immortality. I am the gracious Goddess, who gives the gift of joy unto the heart of man. Upon earth, I give the knowledge of the spirit eternal; and beyond death, I give peace and freedom, and reunion with those who have gone before. Nor do I demand sacrifice, for behold, I am the Mother of all living, and my love is poured out upon the earth.

Hear you the words of the Star Goddess; she in the dust of whose feet are the hosts of heaven, and whose body encircles the universe.

I who am the beauty of the green earth, and the white Moon among the stars, and the mystery of the waters, and the desire of the heart of man, call unto your soul. Arise, and come unto me. For I am the soul of nature, who gives life to the universe. From me all things proceed, and onto me all things must return; and before my face, beloved of Gods and of men, let your innermost divine self be enfolded in the rapture of the infinite. Let my worship be within the heart that rejoices; for behold, all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals. And therefore let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honour and humility, mirth and reverence within you, And you who thinks to seek for me, know your seeking and yearning will not avail you unless you know the mystery; that if that which you seek you find not within you, then you will never find it without you. For behold, I have been with you from the beginning; and I am that which is attained at the end of desire.

APPENDIX TWO: SELECTED SONGS AND CHANTS USED BY OTTAWA WOMEN, 1989-2003

1. From the Ottawa Women's Song Book - compiled by Lauren Foster-McLeod c.1996

AIR I AM

(Andras Corbin)

Air I am, Fire I am.
Water, Earth, And Spirit, I am

AIR MOVES US

(Cathleen Shell, Moonsea, Prune - Reclaiming)

Air moves us,
Fire transforms us,
Water shapes us,
Earth heals us,
And the balance of the wheel goes round and round,
And the balance of the wheel goes round.

THE RETURN

The Earth, the Air,
The Fire, the Water,
Return, return, return, return.

EARTH IS MY BODY

(Recorded by Prana on Return of the
Mayflower)

Earth (is) my body. Water my blood.
Air (is) my breath. And Fire my spirit.

WE ALL COME FROM THE GODDESS (Z. Budapest)

We all come from the Goddess
And to her we shall return
Like a drop of rain
Flowing to the Ocean.

WATER WASH AWAY

Water wash away my tears. x2
Water wash away my pain. x2
Strong as the ocean. x2
Gentle as rain. x2

THE BEGINNING OF THE EARTH (Delaney Johnson & Starhawk)

The ocean is the beginning of the Earth. x2 (... of the World)
All life comes from the sea. x2

RIVER IS FLOWING

The river is flowing, flowing and growing.

The river is flowing down to the sea.

Oh, Mother carry me (Mother Earth carry me...)

Child I will always be.

Oh, Mother carry me down to the sea. (Mother Earth carry me...)

LET IT BEGIN

(Reclaiming Collective)

Let it begin with each step we take.

And let it begin with each change we make.

And let it begin with each chain we break.

And let it begin every time we awake.

MOTHER, DAUGHTER, SISTER, LOVER

Mother, daughter, sister, lover

Hear us, hear us.

It is you we seek within us.

Goddess, guide us. (... , heed us) (... , heal us)

WE ARE SISTERS

We are sisters on a journey, shining in the sun.

Shining through the darkest night.

The healing has begun, begun, the healing has begun.

SURE AS THE WIND

(Terry Dash)

Sure as the wind, my sisters

And sure as the rain

Sure as the sun does shine

We will raise our voices again. (...our song again.)

WE ARE A CIRCLE

(Rick Hamouris, recorded on Welcome to Annwfn)

We are a circle within a circle

With no beginning and never ending.

UNDER THE FULL MOONLIGHT

(Karen Beth, recorded on Libana's A Circle is Cast.)

Under the full moonlight, we dance

Spirits dance, we dance

Joining hands, we dance

Joining souls, rejoice.

WOMAN I AM

(Trad. Adapted from Blesséd Am I)

Woman I am.

Spirit I am.

I am the infinite within my soul.

I can feel no beginning, I can feel no end.

All this I am.

ISIS, ASTARTE

(Deena Metzger)

Isis, Astarte, Diana, Hecate, Demeter, Kali, Innana.

SPIRIT OF THE WIND

(Craig/Star Williams)

Spirit of the wind, carry me.

Spirit of the wind, carry me home.

Spirit of the wind, carry me home to myself.

Spirit of the earth, help me with my birth.

Spirit of the land, hold me in your hand.

Spirit of the storm, help me be reborn.

Spirit of the rain, wash away my pain ...

WE ARE SISTERS

We are sisters on a journey, shining in the sun,

Shining through the darkest night,

The healing has begun, begun

(The journey has begun...)

The healing has begun.

WOMAN AM I

Woman am I

Spirit am I

I am the infinite within my soul

I can feel no beginning, I can feel no end.

All this I am.

UNORTHODOXOLOGY

Praise Her from whom all blessings flow.

For waters deep and fire's glow.

For life and breath and earth our home.

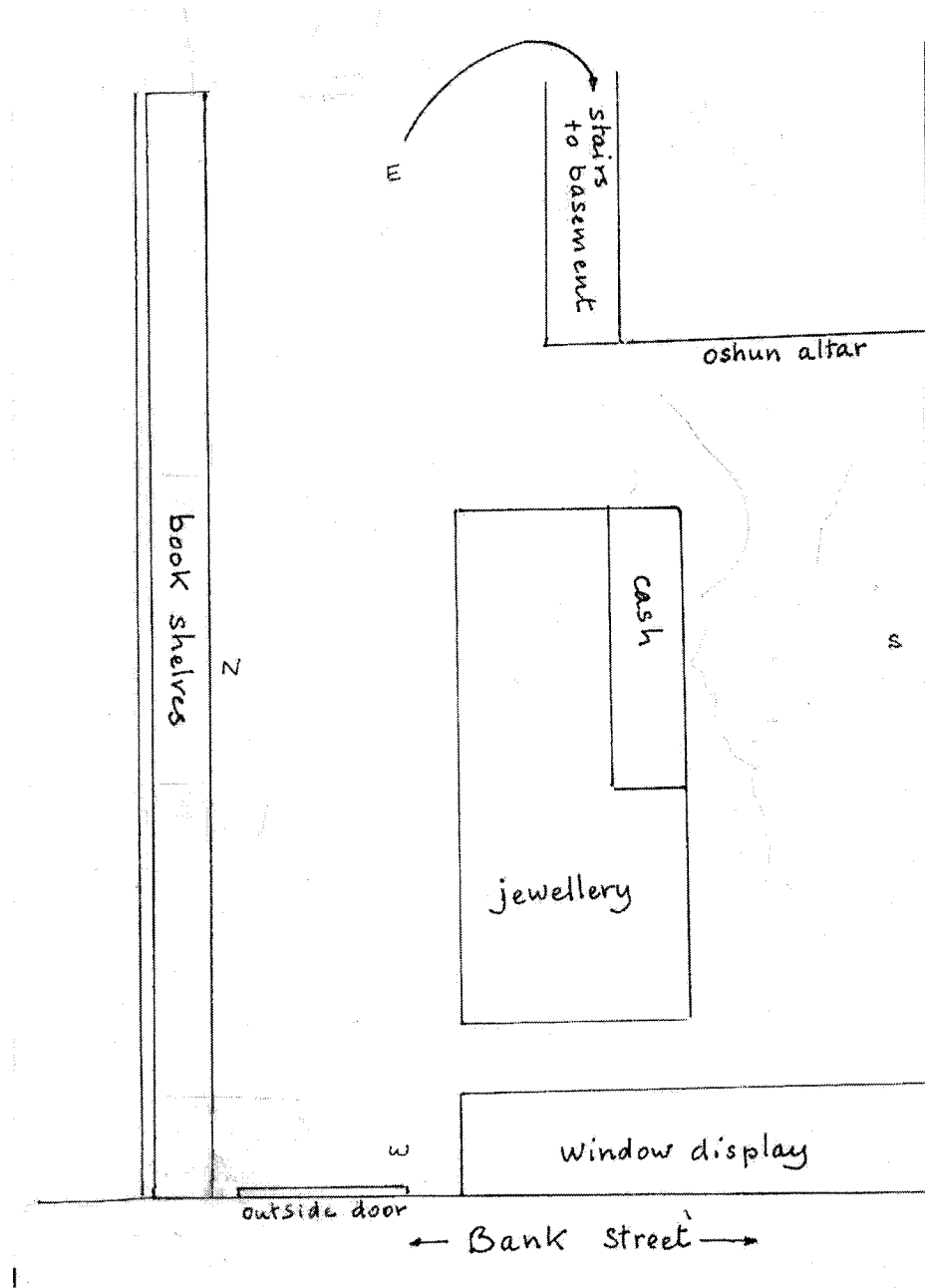
Praise Mother, Maid and ancient Crone.

Blessed Be.

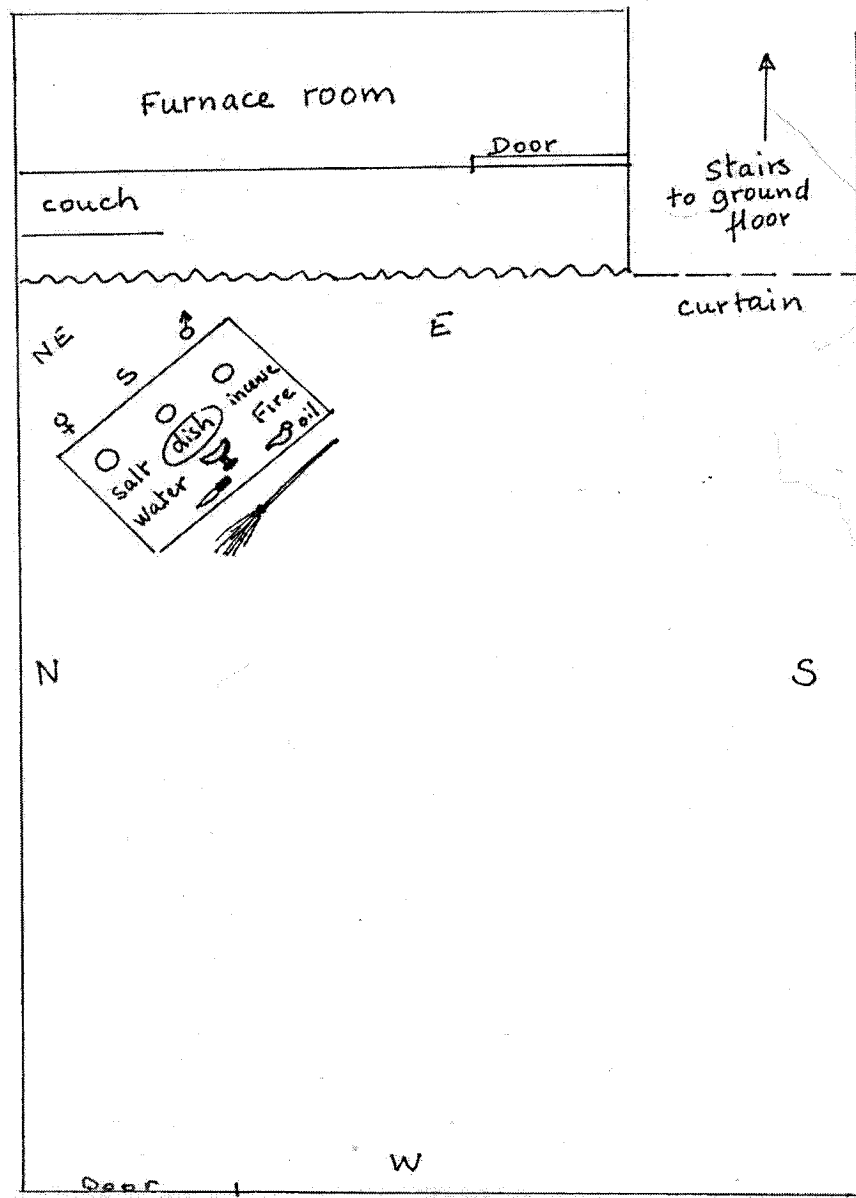
APPENDIX THREE: FLOOR PLANS

- 3.1. Occult Shop Upstairs
- 3.2. Occult Shop Basement
- 3.3. Hungry Eye Main Room

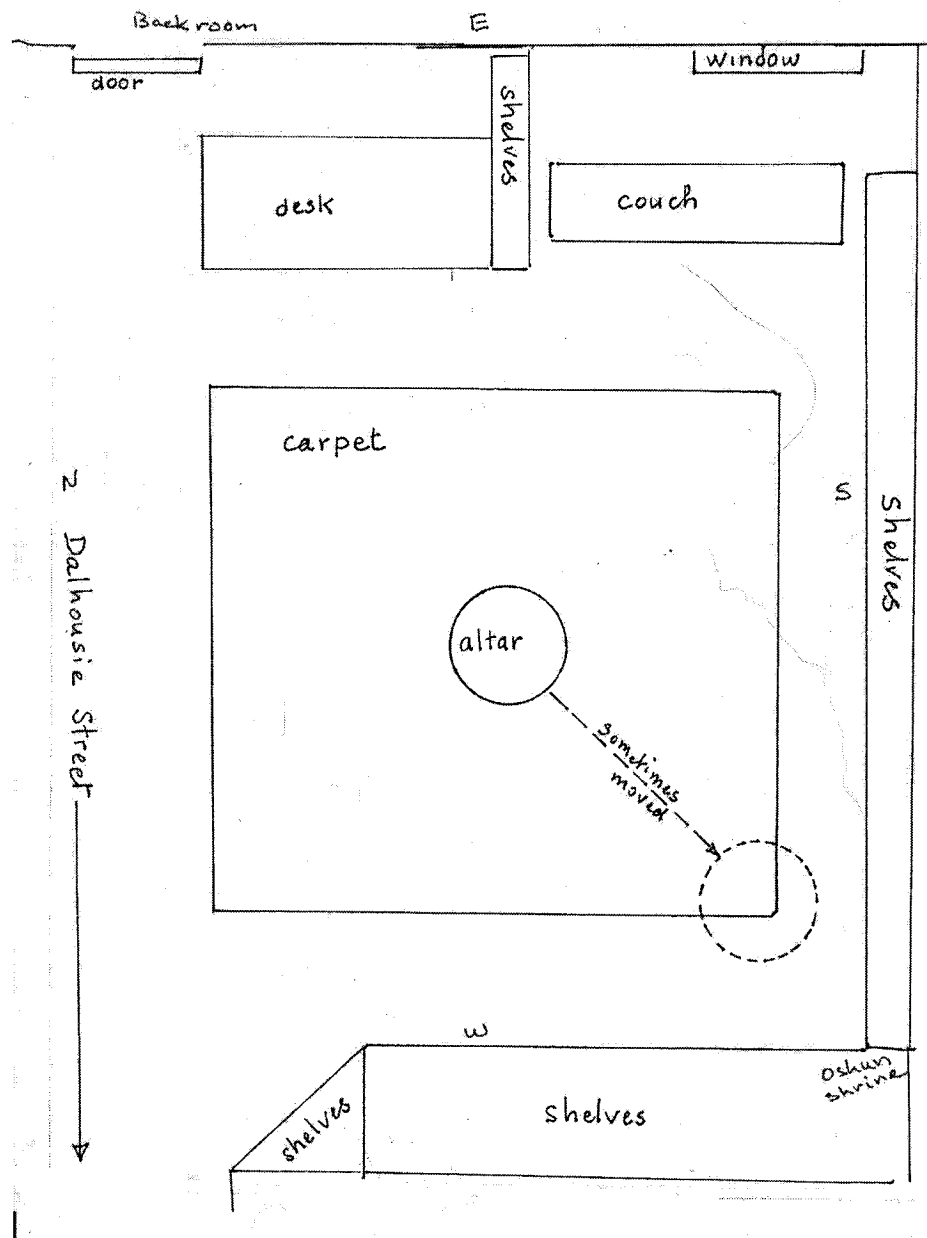
3.1. Occult Shop Upstairs



3.2. Occult Shop Basement



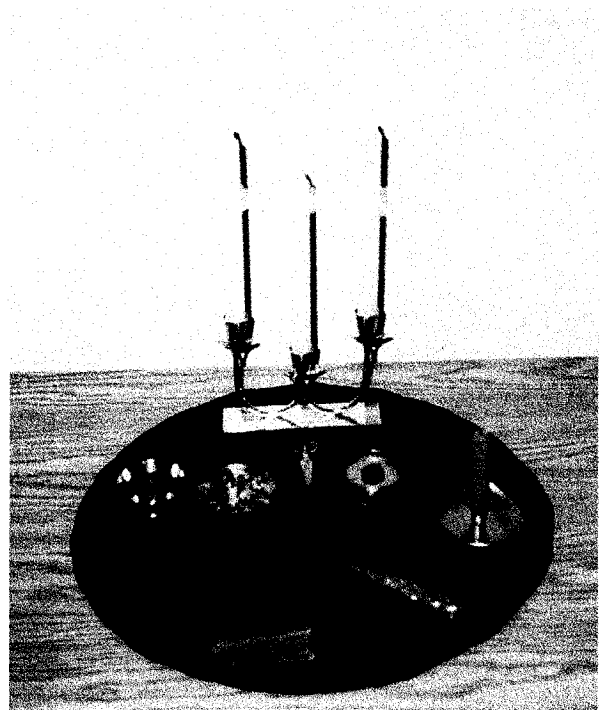
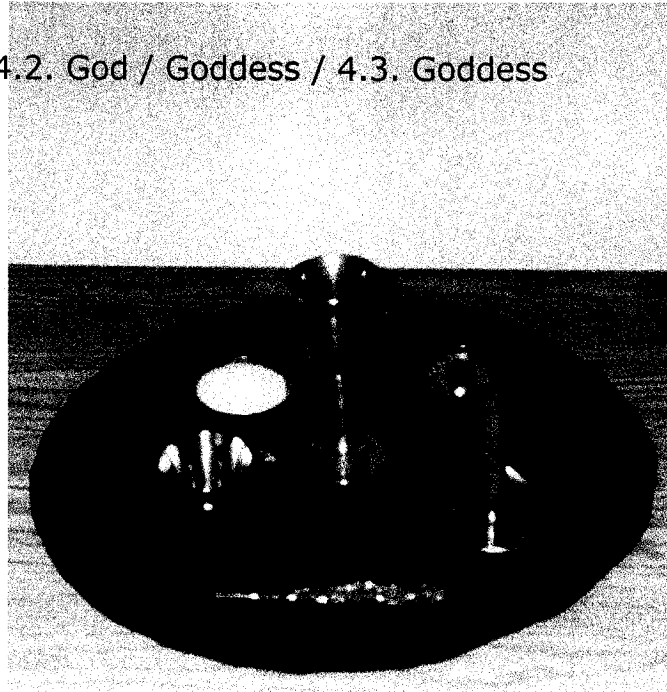
3.3. Hungry Eye Main Room



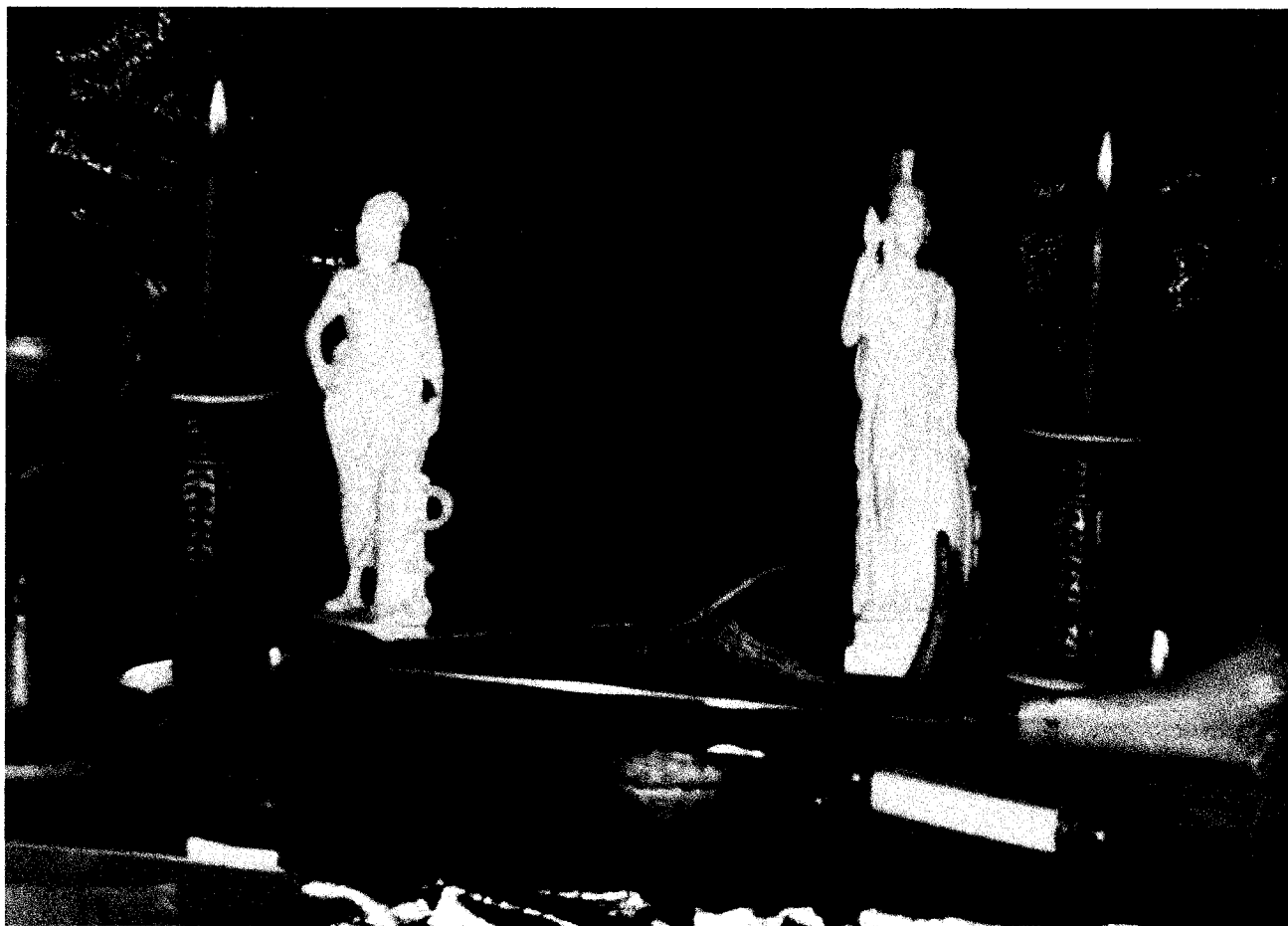
APPENDIX FOUR: ALTARS

- 4.1. Elemental - photo Michael E. McCord, 2002
- 4.2. God / Goddess - photo Michael E. McCord, 2002
- 4.3. Goddess - photo Michael E. McCord, 2002
- 4.4. Standard Wiccan (British Traditional) - "Wicket on Shelley's altar" - photo Shelley TSivia Rabinovitch, c.1996
- 4.5. WCC Women's Group - from James (n.d.)
- 4.6. Store Shrine to Oshun - Hungry Eye - photo Lucie DuFresne, c.1998
- 4.7. Pagan (with male and female divine) - photo Michael E. McCord, 2002
note: antler carvings of male and female divinities are by Gorden Derry, Runestone Vale Studio, Lanark ON, c.1996

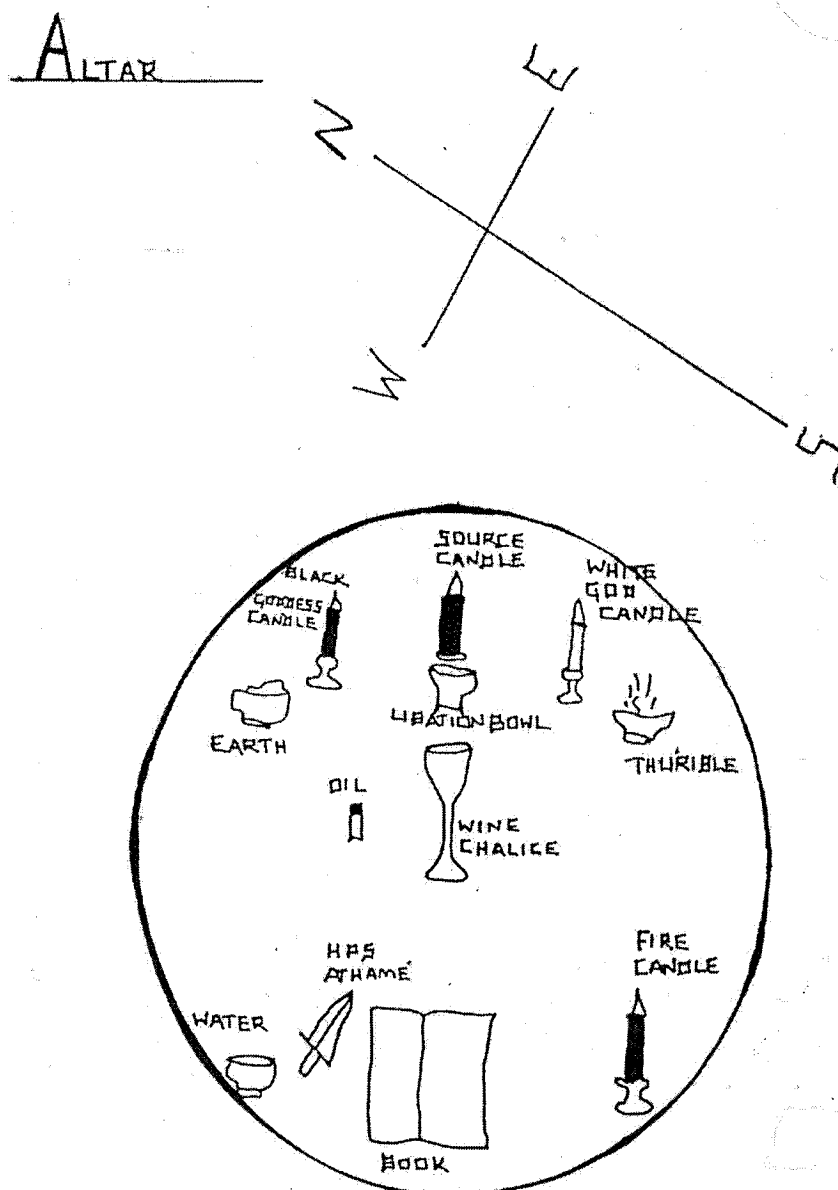
4.1. Elemental / 4.2. God / Goddess / 4.3. Goddess



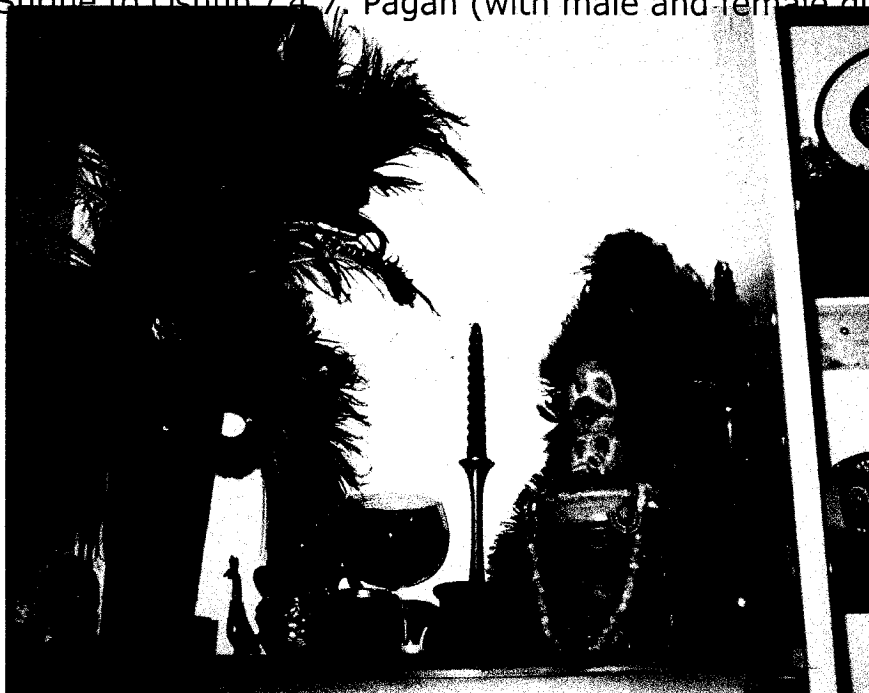
4.4. Standard Wiccan (British Traditional)



4.5. WCC Women's Group



4.6. Store Shrine to Oshun / 4.7. Pagan (with male and female divine)

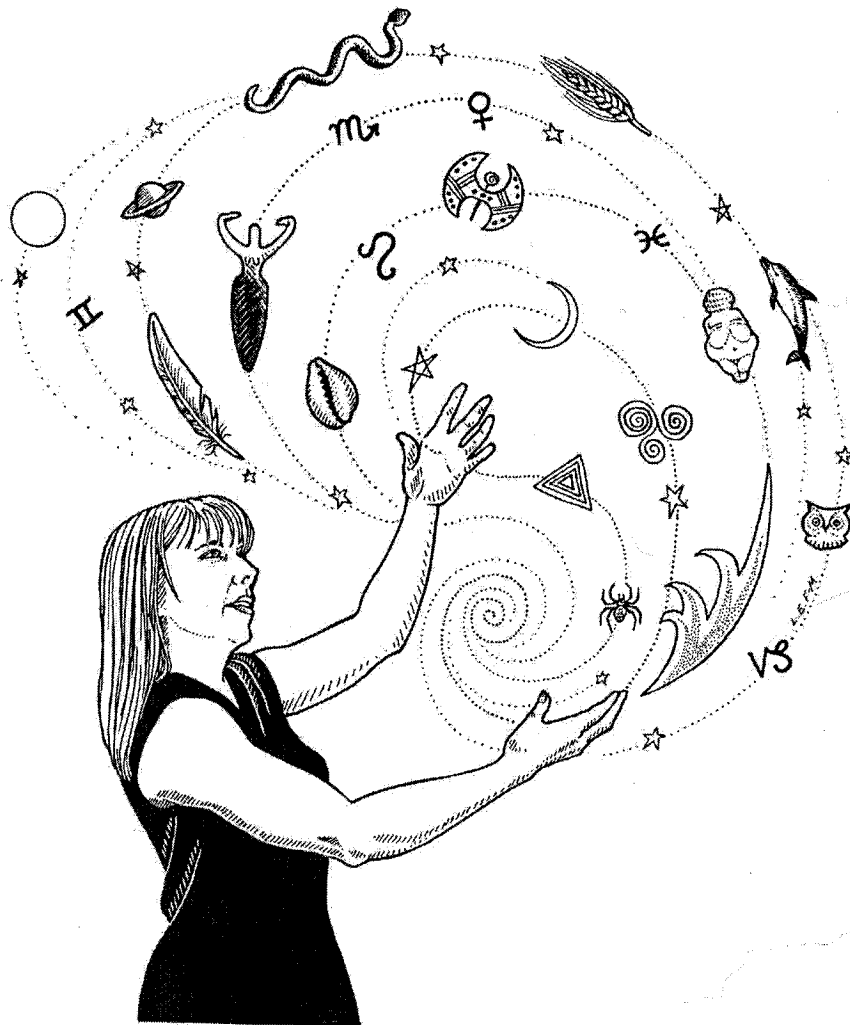


APPENDIX FIVE: LAUREN FOSTER-MCLEOD

- 5.1. Untitled (woman juggling symbols), pen & ink, Sept '98.
Sagewoman Magazine, #44, Winter 1998-9:23.
- 5.2. Hecate at the Crossroads. Sagewoman Calendar 'October', pen & ink.
- 5.3. July - Play (D'Anna and daughter Neva). Sagewoman Calendar, pen & ink
- 5.4. Various sketches of jewellery for catalogue, Hungry Eye, pen & ink.
- 5.5. Goddess of Laussel, note card, pen & ink
- 5.6. Goddess Making Workshop poster (1994), pen & ink.
- 5.7. Samhain Ritual For Children poster (c. 1995), pen & ink.

NOTE: most images have been slightly reduced to better fit on page.
Proportions have been maintained.

- 5.1. Untitled (woman juggling symbols), pen & ink, Sept '98.
Sagewoman Magazine, #44, Winter 1998-9:23.



untitled- by Lauren Foster-MacLeod

Sept. '98

with thanks to
SAGEWOMAN
Magazine

5.2. Hecate at the Crossroads. Sagewoman Calendar 'October', pen & ink.



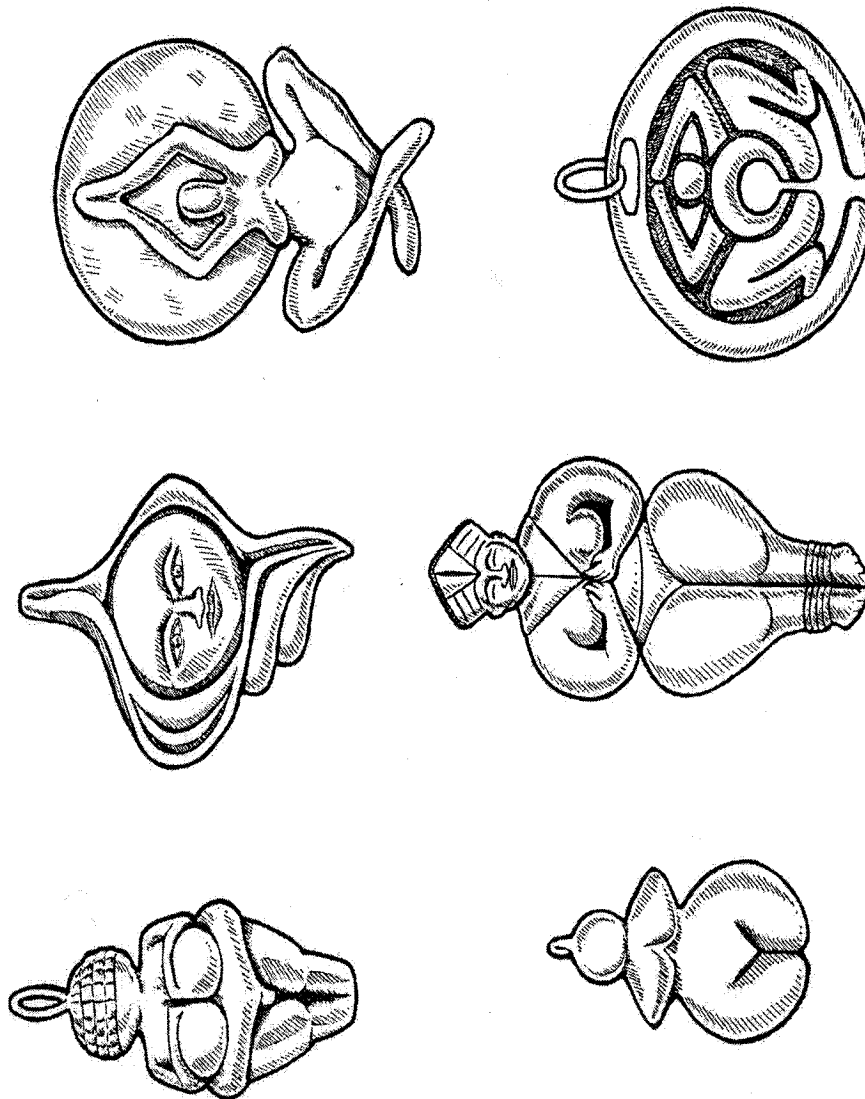
HECATE at the Crossroads
October

- 5.3. July - Play (D'Anna and daughter Neva). Sagewoman Calendar, pen & ink



JULY - PLAY

5.4. Various sketches of jewellery for catalogue, Hungry Eye, pen & ink.



5.5. Goddess of Laussel, note card, pen & ink



5.6. Goddess Making Workshop poster (1994), pen & ink.

FIRST UNITARIAN CONGREGATION
OF OTTAWA

*Women's
Spirituality
Group*

MONDAY, JANUARY 10TH
**GODDESS-MAKING
WORKSHOP**



7:30 P.M. IN FELLOWSHIP HALL

*We will create our own Goddess figures out of clay.
Within a cast circle we will listen to inspiring, relaxing
music as we work.
Clay will be provided, as well as pictures of ancient
Goddesses. If you wish to bring feathers, crystals, beads
or anything else to incorporate into your creation, please
bring it along (as well as any you wish to share).
For more information call Laurie 728-1916*

30 Cleary Avenue * off Richmond Rd., about 1 mile east of Woodroffe.
725-1066

5.7. Samhain Ritual For Children poster (c. 1995), pen & ink.



Come and learn what real witches do on Hallowe'en!

Children are encouraged to wear their Hallowe'en costumes. We will serve apple cider & snacks after the ritual.

Part of the Samhain tradition is giving food to those in need. Please bring a contribution for the Food Bank.

Please pre-register so we will have some idea of how many will be in attendance. Call Lourie at 726-1916.

APPENDIX SIX: GODDESS-MAKING WORKSHOPS

- 6.1. - 6.5. Divina et Femina I Workshop, U. of Ottawa, 1998.
 - 6.1 photo Lucie DuFresne
 - 6.2 - 6.5 photos Lisa Du Fresne
- 6.6. - 6.8. Women's Weekend Workshop, Perth ON, c. 1996.
 - 6.6 - 6.8 photos Lauren Foster McLeod

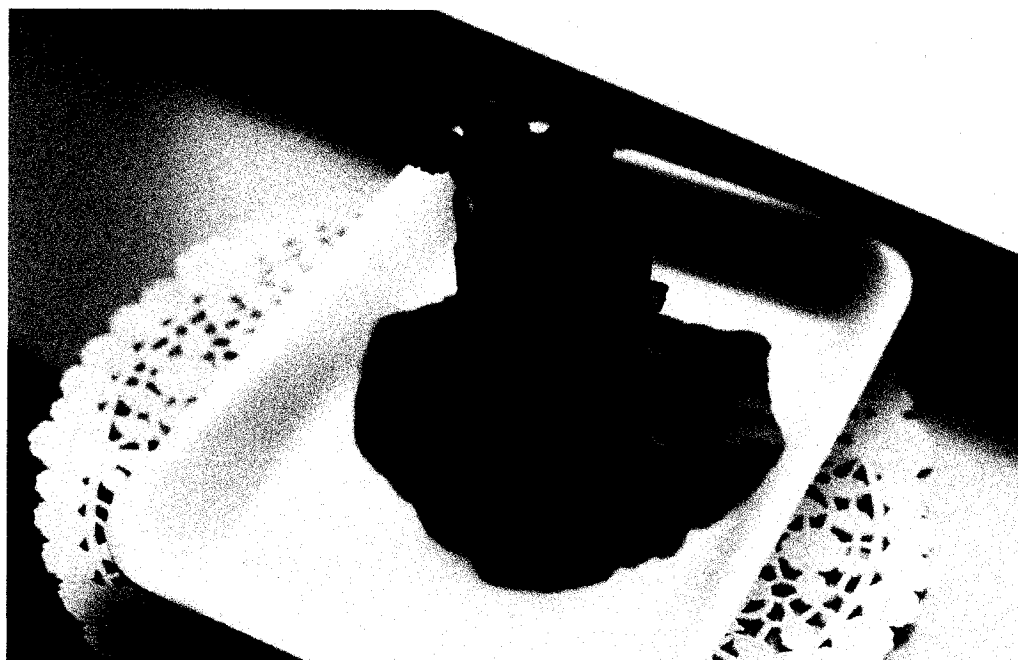
6.1. -

orksho

wa, 18



6.4. - 5. Divina et Femina I Workshop II of Ottawa 1998



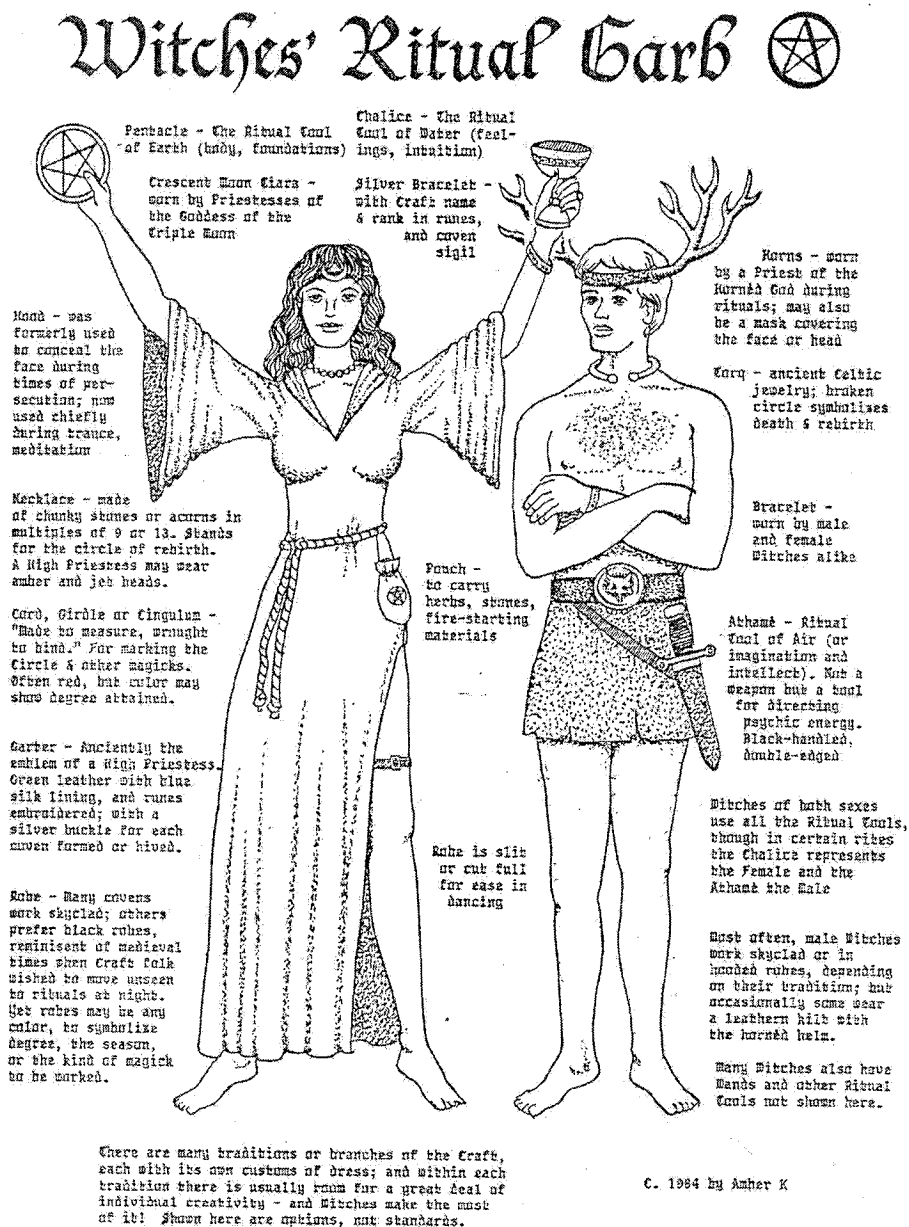
6.6. - 6.8 Women's Weekend Workshop Perth ON c. 1996



APPENDIX SEVEN - Dress and Adornment

- 7.1. Witches' Ritual Garb, c. 1984, Amber K.
Note: image has been slightly reduced to fit on page
- 7.2. Diveena Shapouri in ritual dress in front of her Isis banner - Divina et Femina III, U. of Ottawa 2000, photo Lisa Du Fresne

7.1. Witches' Ritual Garb, c. 1984, Amber K.



7.2. Diveena Shapouri in ritual dress in front of her Isis banner



APPENDIX EIGHT - Miscellaneous Images

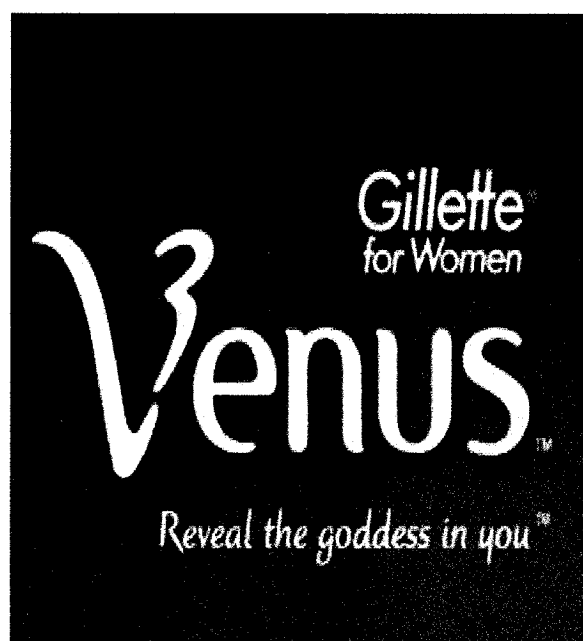
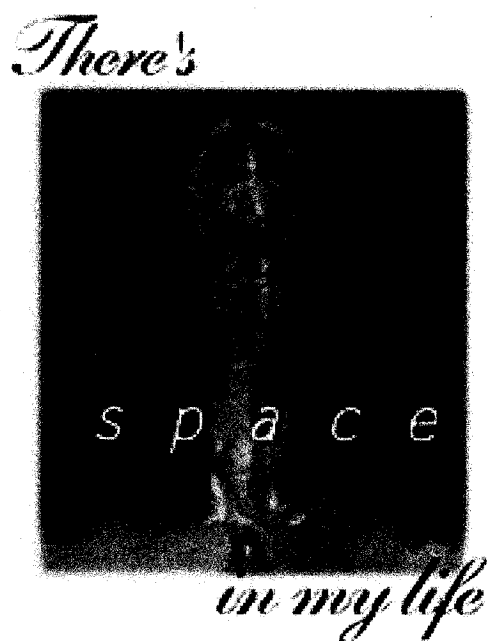
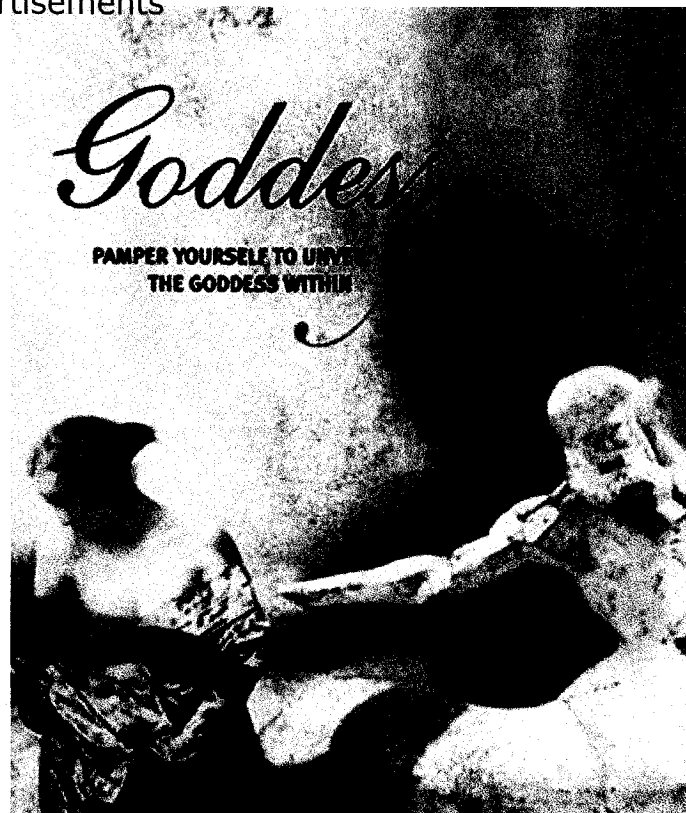
8.1. - 8.3. Advertisements

- 8.1. "Goddess Night - A glamorous benefit at the Regent Wall Street, NY, NY, April 4, 2002, featuring play and pampering venues for women, casino, feasting and dancing for women and men. Reservation \$350. Call 1.800.238.7632"
www.americanathletes.org
- 8.2. "Women's Outreach Initiative" NASA Space Agency
www.nasa.gov/women/spacegoddess.gif
- 8.3. Gillette VENUS razor logo
www.gillettevenus.com/images/logo_venus.jpg

8.4. - 8.5. Art Works

- 8.4. Willow Marie Power: PORTAL
photo Lisa Du Fresne
- 8.5. Lorayne Katz:
photo Lisa Du Fresne

8.1. - 8.3. Advertisements



8.4. - 8.5. Art Works



APPENDIX NINE - Goddess Images

- 9.1. 'Drawing down the moon' based on the Nile Neolithic figurine
1. Gadon (1989, colour plate 4): Early female figure, mid-fourth millenium B.C.E. Terracotta, paint, 11½". Egypt.
 2. Lauren Foster McLeod, brooch, synthetic clay, 3", c.1994
 3. © Central Casting, USA. Pewter pendant, 4", c.1997
 4. "Faces of the Goddess - The Priestess". Product display card. Nirvana 2001.
 5. Orenstein (1990:102) : Ana Mendieta, Nañigo Burial, 1976.
 6. Essential oil diffuser, Aroma Land, 2002, www.aromaland.com/passible_dif/goddess.jpg
 7. "Beadgoddess", necklace of glass beads and metal pendant, 2002, www.thebeadsite.com/goddess.jpg
 8. Painted drawer front, 2002 : <http://woc.suso.org/HandPaintedFurniture/goddess%20top.jpg>
 9. Lauren Foster McLeod, banner for "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven" workshop, Hungry Eye, c.1997, photographer unknown
 10. Lauren Foster McLeod, clay goddess, c.1997. Photo L. F. McLeod
- 9.2. Spiral / Labyrinth, alone or combined with 'drawing down the moon'
1. Gadon (1989:107, fig. 76) : Cretan Coin with Labyrinth, ca. 1200 B.C.E. Drawing. Knossos. Note: image is upside down.
 2. Logo, 2002 : <http://labyrinthwork.com/images/goddess.jpg>
 3. "The Great Mother : symbol of the infinite source of life. Her moulded full body is the promise of Renewal and Transformation. This design is an amalgamation of the universally revered archetype which dates back as far as 30,000 years. She measures 11¾". High-fired stoneware, decorated by hand with spirals and assorted symbols, glass beard necklace and belt plus little treasures cradled in Her arms. Comes with a card of explanation." Product description. WOMAN OF WANDS - A Mail Order Company. P.O. Box 330, Main Street, South Lee, MA 01260. c.1994:4
 4. Spiral Jetty : www.katyberry.com/Goddesses/
 5. "The Aditi Rattle : First Goddess of India. Feminine embodiment of Infinity, the Cosmos and Creativity. Aditi means ' free from all bonds'. Made of high-fired stoneware, these Aditi are also rattles decorate with suede, feathers, glass beads, shells and gold and silver thread. Comes with a card explaining the significance of the rattle in ceremony, 4½" high". Product description. WOMAN

OF WANDS - A Mail Order Company. P.O. Box 330, Main Street, South Lee, MA 01260. c.1994:11.

6. Painted gourd, sand, feather, and shells, Wynn (1988).

9.3. Willendorf (little fat lady)

1. Neumann (1963/1972) : Plate 1 - Paleolithic Figures of The Goddess. A: Venus of Willendorf, Limestone, Austria; B: Venus of Menton, Soapstone, Austria; C: Venus of Lespugue, Ivory, France.
2. Orenstein (1990:126) : Leslie J. Klein, The Stones Bear Witness.
3. Gadon (1989, colour plates 31 & 32) : #31 - Earth Mother of Willendorf. ca. 25,000 B.C.E. Limestone, 4½", Austria. The ample volumes of the sacred female celebrates her capacity for birth and nurture. #32 - Susan Maberry as the Earth Mother on the Day after the Nuclear Holocaust, 1985. Performance. REVELATIONS OF THE FLESH, directed and produced by Cheri Gaulke, Los Angeles. On the day after the bomb, Willendorf stands amidst the rubble, sadly contemplating the destruction of civilization.
4. "Goddess" :
www.geocities.com/Athens/2962/colourbook/goddess.gif
5. "Isabella & Friends", limited edition sculptures - artist: Dari Walker. BBW (Big Beautiful Woman) Magazine. L.F. Publishing. CA. P.O. Box 458, Mt. Morris, IL 61054, Vol 18, No 6, 1998:63.
6. www.lindagoff.com/images/goddess/gif
7. Altar goddess 2 :
<http://hawkdancing.com/Homepage/Catalogue/Arachne/alrarg.html>
8. Earthmother : www.goddess-of-willendorf.com
9. Plusgoddess : <http://plus-goddess.com/bbwsslounge.html>
10. Altar goddess 1 :
<http://hawkdancing.com/Homepage/Catalogue/Arachne/alrarg.html>
11. "Earth Dreamer", earrings and pendants :
<http://ancientmemories.com/spirit/goddess.jpg>

9.4. Snake, by itself or combined with female human figure

1. Neumann (1963/1972), Plate 56: Snake Goddess. Faience, Crete, middle Minoan III period.
2. Gadon (1989:293, fig.147). Carolee Schneemann. EYE BODY, 1963. Photograph of a performance. Schneemann appeared nude with live snakes crawling on her belly and breasts in a 1963

performance called *Eye Body*, recalling the rituals of the Minoan priestess invoking the chthonic power of the serpent.

3. Orenstein (1990: frontispiece): *Hélène de Beauvoir*. Second Encounter with the Great Goddess. 1982.
4. Gadon (1989), colour plate 52: *Meinrad Craighead*. I am Summer Our of Spring's Death. 1985. Colored ink on scratchboard. The spiral represents the ongoing cycle of the seasons, ever-changing, ever-renewing.

9.5. Birthing, in more or less explicit poses

1. Gadon (1989:325, fig.159 & 160): #159: *Judy Chicago*, *The Crowning*, 1981. Prismacolor on rag paper. 24" x 33". The birthing image is stark, powerful - an abstracted female form focused on the emerging new life. "Her hair flows out over her head like the branches of a tree. Her toes are spread and extended like roots connecting her to the earth..." (Wye 1982:17). #160: Anonymous. *Aditi-Uttanapad*, tenth century B.C.E. Bronze. South India. The image is headless; her hands hold lotus branches, symbols of emerging life. The muscles of her abdomen are flexed in the contractions of labor and from her vulva the new life, a lotus bud, is coming forth. The icon abstracts the creative force inherent in the female body, making an analogy to the life-giving properties of nature.
2. Receptivity pendant. Jane Iris design. "A striking representation invoking the power of our creative generative impulses. An appropriate symbol inviting earth energy and vitality into the core of the woman." Product description. *Moonrise Herbs - Online Catalogue*.
<http://www.botanical.com/moonrise/jewelry/jewelry.html>
3. #25. Silver and garnet. *Gabriele Masill Collection Catalogue - Goddesses and Elements*. 1993
4. Wynn (1988)
5. Gadon (1989), colour plate 8 : *Judy Chicago*, *Earthbirth*, 1963. From the *Birth Project*. Quilting over airbrushed fabric, 63" x 135". Painting by *Judy Chicago*, quilting by *Jacqueline Moore*. The Earth Mother gives birth to herself, extruding the primal matter in a great wave spouting from her mouth.

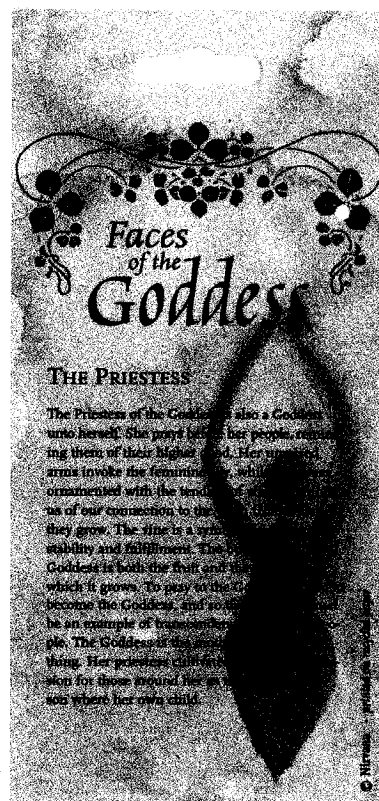
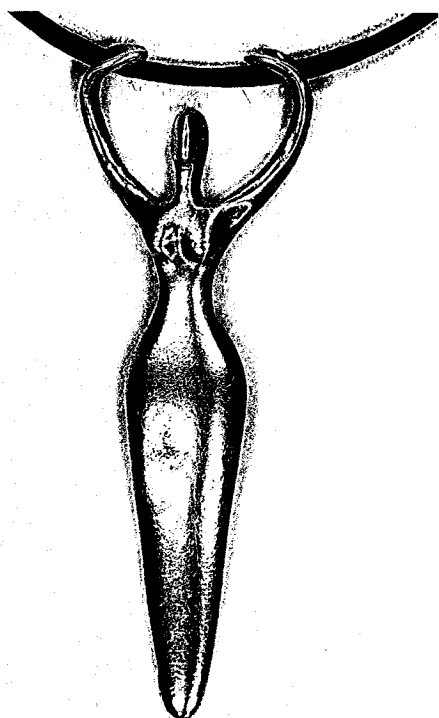
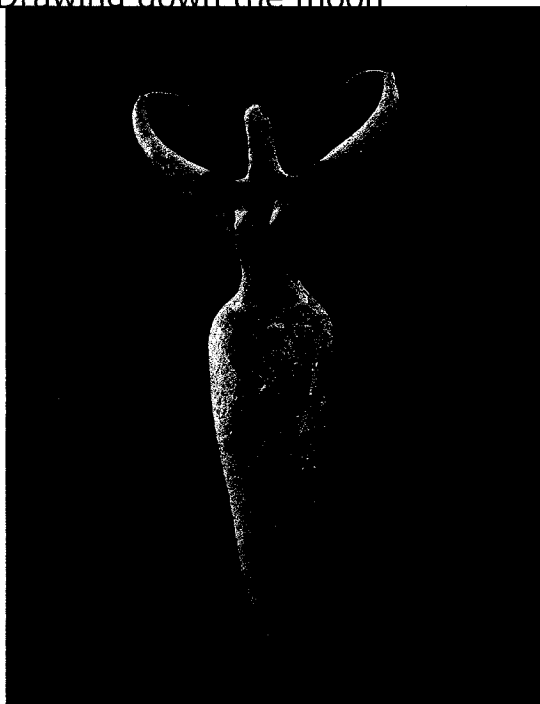
9.6. Crescent moon, especially triple crescent motif or *Lady of Laussel*

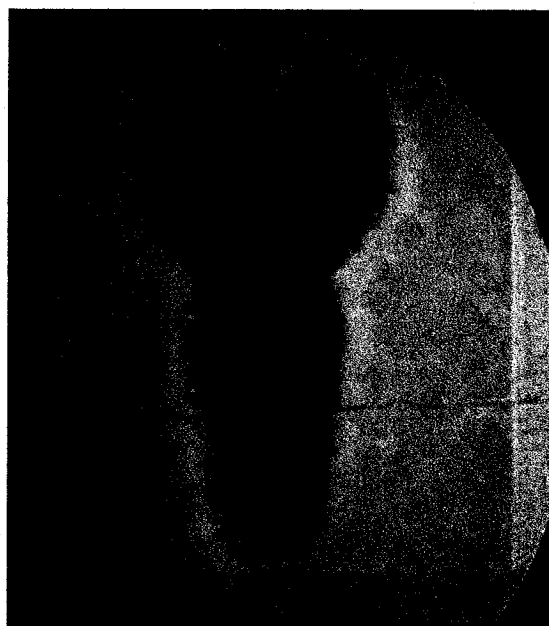
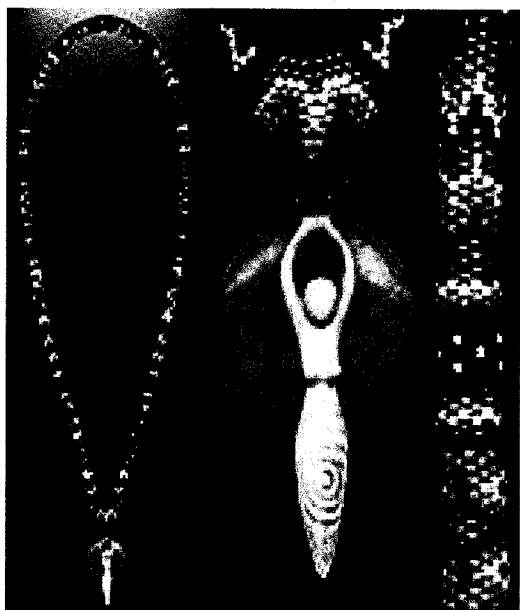
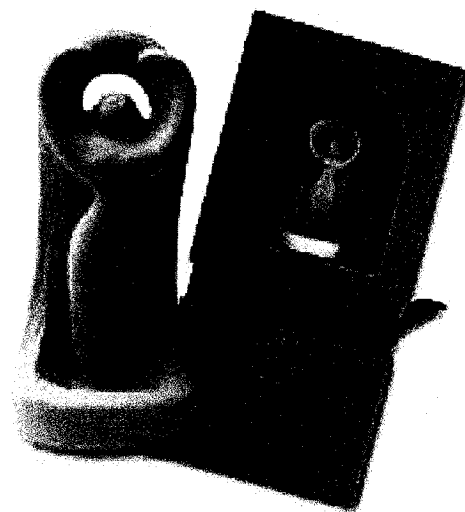
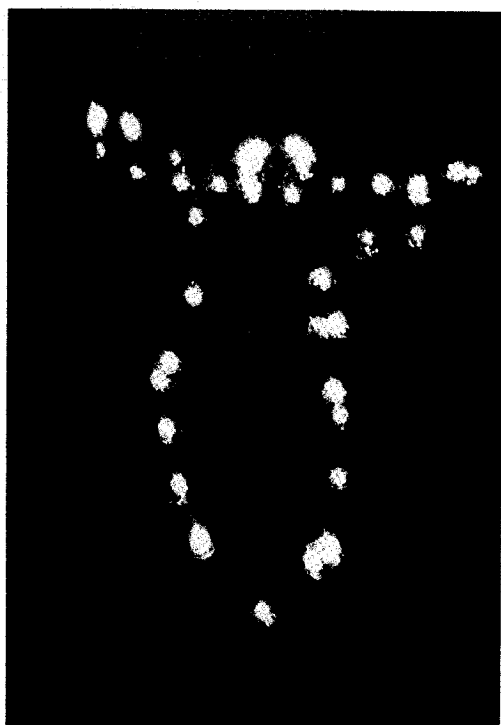
1. Gadon (1989:347, fig.183) : *Christopher Castle*. *MAEVE IN MALTA*. Etching. Printed in burnt umber ink. 19¼" x 14 7/8"
2. "The TRICRESCENT represents the moon and its three phases

which since ancient times have been likened onto WOMAN and her three AGES. As Mother, Maiden, and Crone, she represents a most ancient form of the Holy Trinity: Mother, Daughter and Grand-mother, leading us to recall an earlier Matriarchal culture now lost in all but myth and memory." Product description. © 1987 Sacred Spirit Products. White Light Pentacles / Sacred Spirit Products catalogue (c.1995). P.O. Box 8163, Salem Massachusetts 01971-8163.

3. "Sky & Stars". Pleiades Jewelry - Lizzie Brown & Lydia Walz catalogue. 1994:6.
4. #22, silver. Gabriele Masill Collection Catalogue - Goddesses and Elements. 1993
5. #13, silver & moonstone. Gabriele Masill Collection Catalogue - Goddesses and Elements. 1993
6. Goddess / Labyrinth Archetype Amulet. cast bronze. Sacred Source - Ancient Images and Ancient Wisdom from JBL Devotional Statues. Product catalogue. P.O. Box 163, Crozet VA 22932. c.1994:31

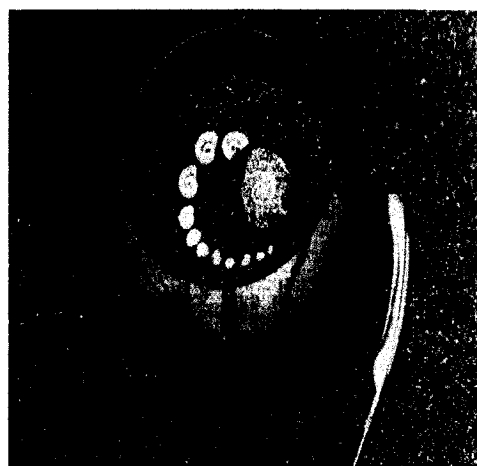
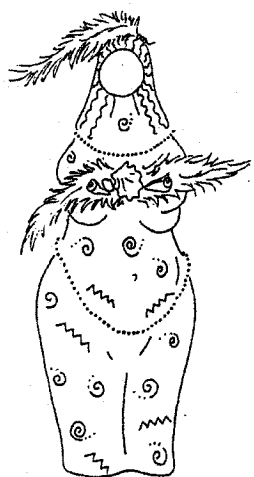
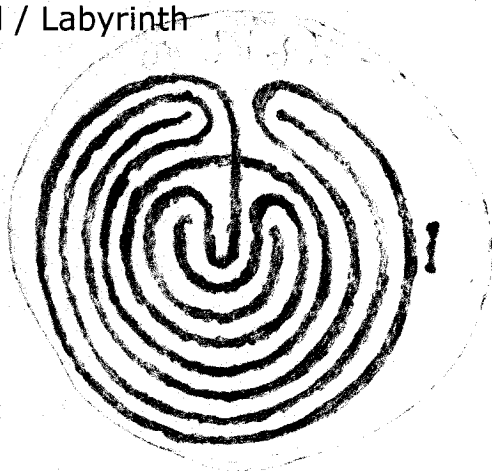
9.1. 'Drawing down the moon'



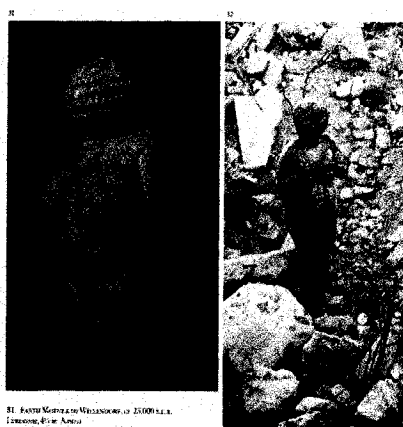




9.2. Spiral / Labyrinth

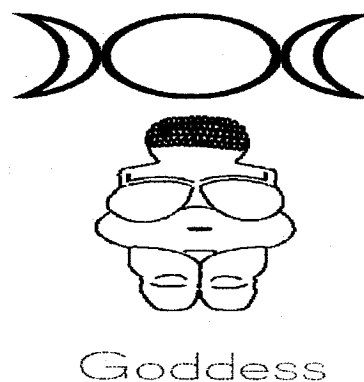


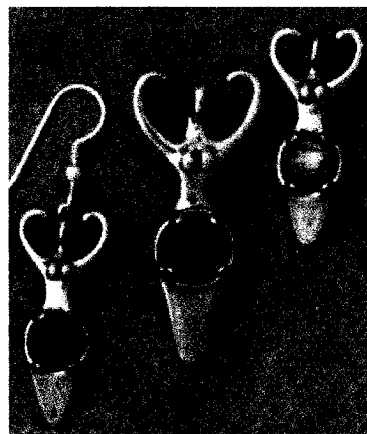
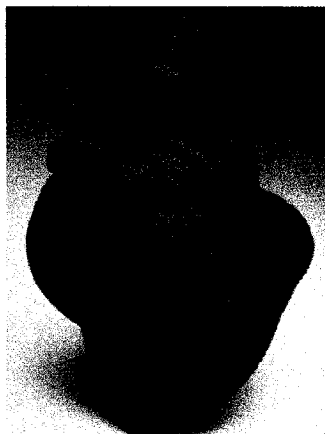
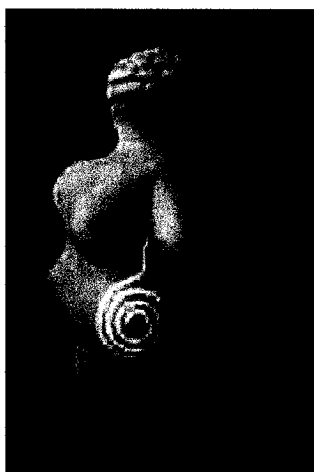
9.3. Willendorf (little fat lady)



11. Fossilized skull of a Neanderthal, ca. 250,000 B.C.
The skull is made of the same fossilized material as the
other fossils found in the same area.

12. A person standing in a rocky, outdoor environment.





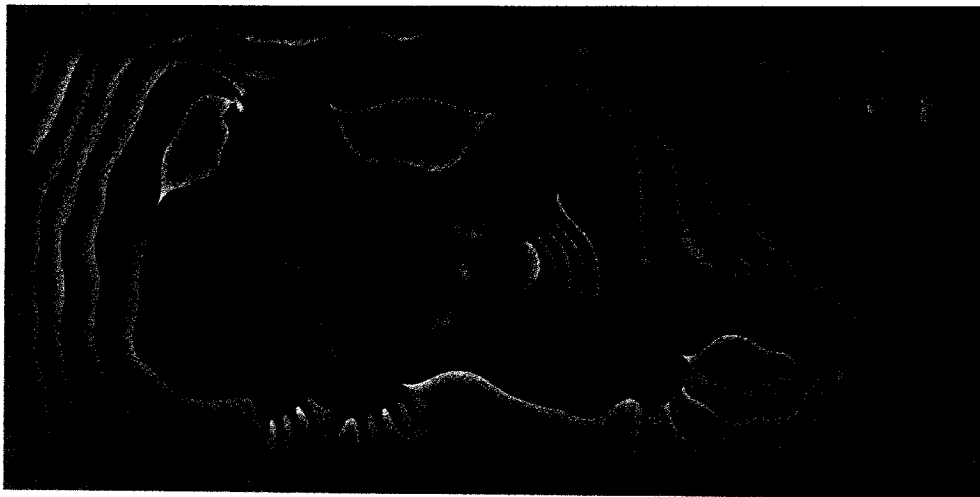
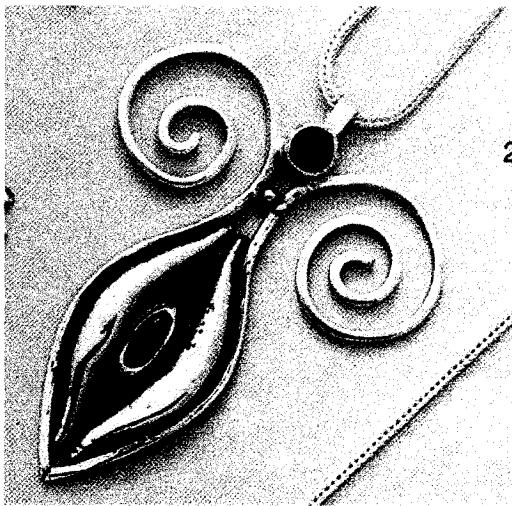
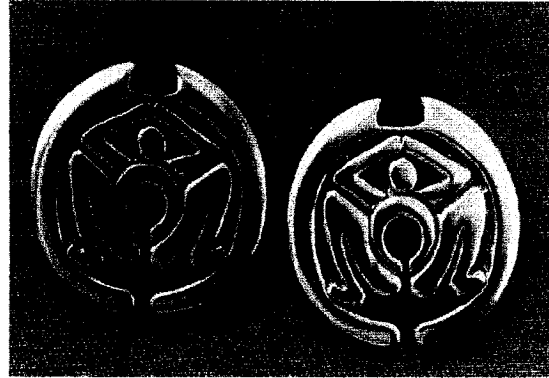
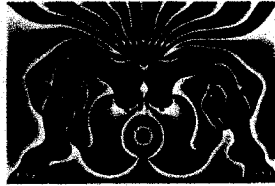
9.4. Snake



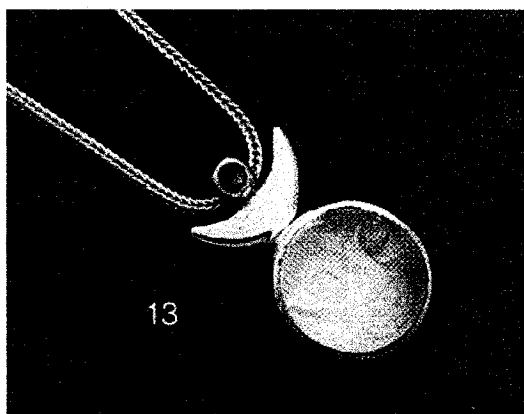
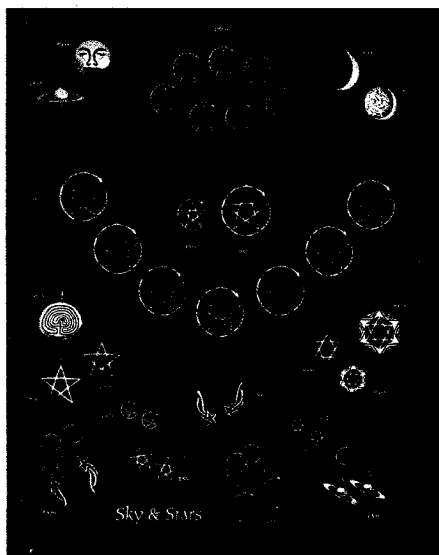
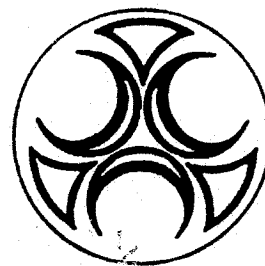
9.5. Birthing

159. Jao Chango. Tin Cutsheet, 1981.
Engraving on tag paper 24 in. x 34 in.
The birthing image is a mark, powerful in
abstract female form. It is a symbol of
the birthing process. Her face flows out over
her head like the branches of a tree. Her eyes
are open and extended like rays connecting
her to the earth.

160. Anurag Kumar. Anurag Kumar, South India.
The image is a headless, her hands hold her
breast as symbols of nurturing life. The
muscles of her abdomen are lined with the
contractions of labor and from her comes the
new life, a fetus, held, awaiting birth. The
line abstracts the creative force inherent in
the female body, making an analogy to the
life-giving properties of nature.



9.6. Crescent Moon



APPENDIX TEN - EVENTS AND VENUES ATTENDED

1. CONFERENCES ATTENDED - Listed Chronologically

CAPE/ACEP

1993 FACE TO FACE: Pastoral Care and Counselling in a Multi-Faith Milieu. Canadian Association for Pastoral Education. Ottawa, Ontario. January 21-24, 1993.

Starhawk & Donna Read

1993 FULL CIRCLE - Screening of Pt 3 - Women and Spirituality Trilogy (NFB of Canada) and a lecture by Starhawk. U. of Ottawa Alumni Theatre. November 18, 1993.

Starhawk (Miriam Simos)

1995 RECLAIMING THE SACRED - A Weekend Womyn's (sic) Workshop with Starhawk. April 22-23, 1995. Toronto.

Finders Keepers

1995 FINDERS KEEPERS: Women Divining the Heart of Feminist Spirituality. London, Ontario. May 26,28, 1995

York University

1996 A CELEBRATION OF FEMALE SPIRITUALITY - Goddesses, Worshippers, Female Spirits, Priestesses. York Centre for Feminist Research. Toronto, Ontario. March 1-3, 1996.

Radford Ruether, Rosemary

2002 HEALING THE EARTH - A Challenge for Feminism and Theology. Ottawa: St. Paul University. Centre for Women and Christian Traditions. March 8-9, 2002.

2. WOMEN'S CIRCLES ATTENDED - Listed Alphabetically

Around The Goddess

Full Moon Circle - Occult Shop

Full Moon Circle - Hungry Eye

Lunacy Dark Moon Circle

Various Private or Closed Circles

Women's Spirituality Group - Unitarian Universalist Church

Wyrd Sisters

3. FESTIVALS ATTENDED - Listed Alphabetically

Kaleidoscope (Minifest), ON

Northwestern Women's Festival, Hazelton, BC

Ottawa Women's Weekend / Gynaeceum, ON

TerreEau, QC

WiccanFest, ON