Fashioning Liminal Space: The Meaning of *Things* and Women's Experience in the Practice of Domestic Shrine Making in Aotearoa/New Zealand

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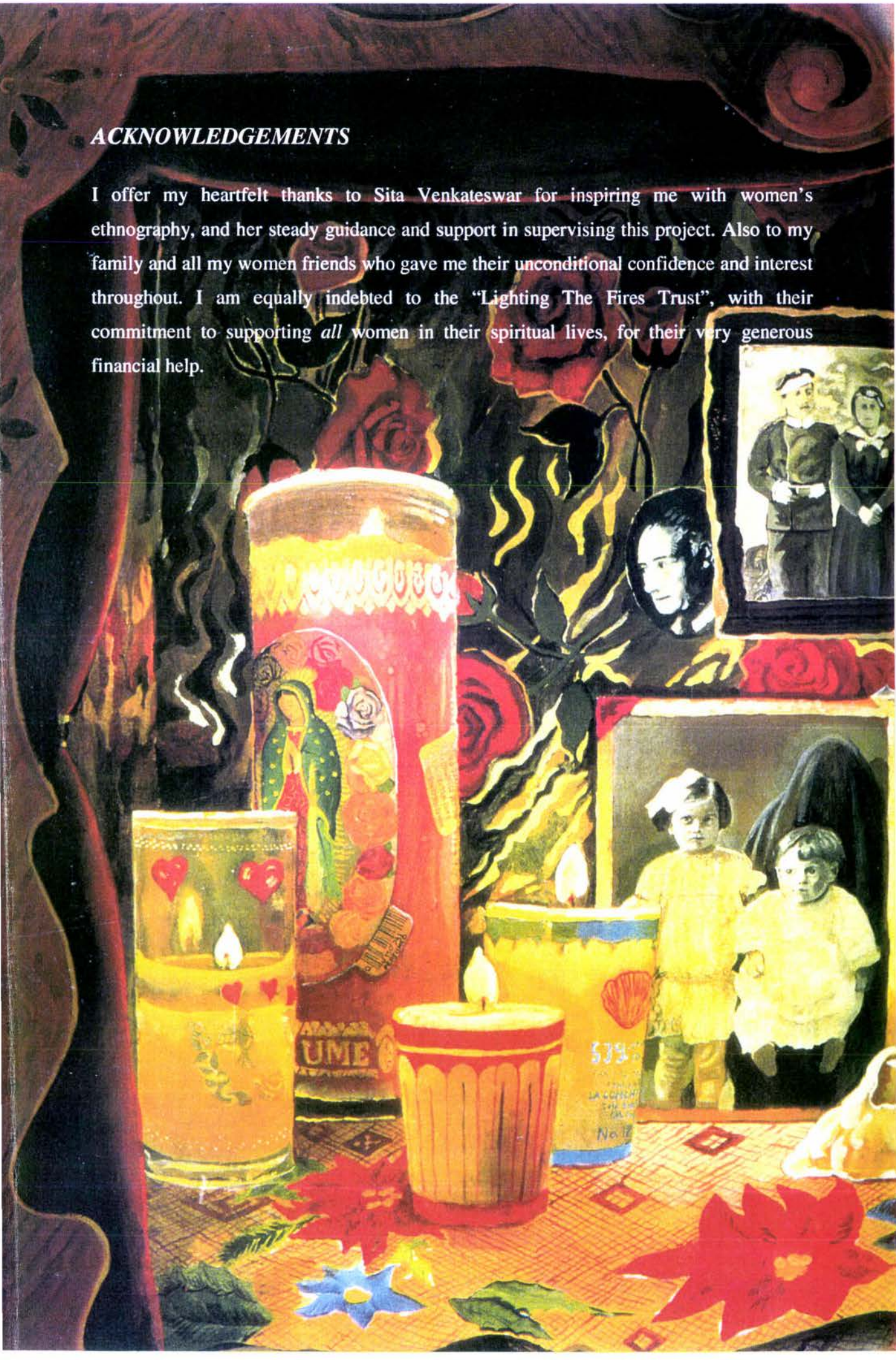
ABSTRACT

This paper aims to bring together two lines of analysis that converge upon the specific spaces that are women's domestic shrines. One line examines the material culture of the spaces and objects on the shrines of ten different women and seeks to reveal the "agency" of these *things* in themselves. The other line is a phenomenological one and responds to the shrine as a site in which issues of practice, embodiment and intentionality in the daily life of the subjects is explored. The material culture of the shrine is investigated as part of the intersubjective experience of its creator and scrutinized as a fruitful place in which to develop an ethnographic understanding of the truth of life-as-lived. This study strives to give voice to ordinary New Zealand women and their precious things within their own homes.

Key Words: **Domestic Shrines/Altars, Feminist Ethnography, Material Culture, Objects, Spaces, Phenomenology, Practice, Intersubjectivity, Embodiment, Agency, Women's Experience, Liminality.**



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Prologue:

The Old School --

I began my studies as an undergraduate anthropology student some decades ago because I was interested in people. Later I trained and worked in psychiatric hospitals and continued to be fascinated by the mysteries of human behaviour. During those years of study I learned with enthusiasm of something called *culture* and of things called *societies* with their own *systems* of kinship and belief. I was mesmerized by the structures that underlie our thoughts and meanings and the metaphors we act out in our institutions and rituals. I learned about the classification of psychological disorder - the patterns of signs and symptoms that informed the way we related to those we labelled as our patients. Grand works of thought and theory that sought to name, predict and categorize the broad sweep of humanity.

However, many years later I found myself no longer circling within the influence of those ideas. Their pull became weaker and more remote as I turned inward toward full-time motherhood. My orbit was reduced to the confines of my house, the company of my young children and other, "at-home", mothers like myself. The larger systems, and the meanings they had once radiated, fell away as the structure and function of my life became governed by nothing beyond the pragmatic imperatives of daily survival within the walls of my home. None of the psychological classifications I had once bestowed on others seemed to fit with the symptoms of motherhood as I was experiencing it. I started to find that new meanings and motivations were making themselves felt in my world and they seemed to spring more from the solid reality of my domestic environment than from the world beyond. For the home was the site, now, in which all my needs and aspirations were lodged, in which all my major social and emotional relationships were being played out. It was amongst the objects of my house that my life now turned and each day I found myself engaged in creating my own meanings within that universe.

Time passed, and it seemed that while I was away the discipline of anthropology was undergoing a corresponding shift in awareness (Ortner 1984). When I returned to my studies I found that there was now a whole vocabulary for what I had been observing and a discourse around the notions that had been taking shape in my own mind during those intervening years. In a way, this thesis is an attempt to now make my own personal meanings out of those years. By using the tools that my renewed study of anthropology has made available to me I have collected, arranged and carefully attended to some of the things of that time.

The Material Culture of Mothering -

The first of these was the development of a new involvement with and respect for the physical environment, and its objects, in which my practice of daily life, and that of other mothers, was played-out. The vocabulary associated with the body of work comprising the anthropology of *material culture* has now given me a way of talking about that cast of unacknowledged actors that was also at work within our homes during that time. The rumbling washing machine, the jumble of greasy dishes that flanked the kitchen sink, the satisfying geometric stacks of cloth nappies, the stains and spills that mottled fabric and floor, the perfect smallness of a baby dress, the texture of food or of the sky as we scanned it for signs that ruled the rituals of laundry. These were the compelling objects that stopped or started our movements through the day. They occupied our thoughts and memories and energy. Perhaps nobody saw these movements or witnessed those pre-occupations, but they constituted the stuff of our lives all the same. They had a compelling power of their own. We exploited, managed and denied the objects of our homes as best we could.

I feel that this quality of objects was well captured in Richardson's forward to the book **Material Anthropology: Contemporary Approaches to Material Culture** (Reynolds & Stott 1987) where he describes this rising interest in material culture as....

...a movement from the distant to the immediate. From the abstract to the concrete and, more than anything else, a movement from the cool elegance of the cerebrum to the hot passion of the hand. However defined, the outstanding attribute of material culture, that which separates it from language, kinship and myth, is that it is material shaped and grasped by the hand.

The hot wet hands of mothers. The clammy pink hands of children. Every object, every surface, that constituted the very fabric of the house was touched by the hands of the mother as she went through the routines of her day. This was no passive or static touch of the hands – the things we touched were our lives and we could never be indifferent to them. And so it was that the shrines that some of us began to fashion in the corners of our homes were constituted of these objects – small things, worn and familiar things, pleasing things, found things that we could hold in our hands and move from place to place. Things we could touch and smell, things we could gaze upon and arrange and re-arrange as we moved and managed the other objects and people within the space of our houses.

Of course, an interest in the links between people and the objects they produce and consume is as old as anthropology itself. Along with its sister disciplines of archeology and museum studies anthropology has been deeply concerned with those material objects which are inevitably and enduringly associated with the existence of human beings in all times and places. However, in the more recent history of the profession the study of *artifacts* has gone out of favour as postcolonial anthropologists have witnessed the potential for objects to be taken out of the context in which they had their existence and their meaning - and so to be misrepresented, exploited or abused by those who study them. It is only since the 1980s (Stott 1987) that material objects have been considered, afresh, to be an appropriate place in which to seek the understandings of our humanness that is the quest of the anthropologist.

The emergence of psychoanalytical approaches allowed us to see the meanings we found in objects to be the projections from the inner world of the observer. It became possible to see identity formation and social relations expressed in the physical things of our culture. The theory of "object relations" investigated the complexity of our relationship with objects and the study of semiotics took us deeply into the layers of meaning that human cultures are capable of giving to things. Investigating the complex interplay between objects and subjects we could see the role of icon, index and symbol where objects could act to signify *other* things as well as whole social systems or ideologies.

The study of material culture has also been concerned with the *changing* identity and use of things over space and time. Appadurai's (1986) edited work, including the ideas of Kopytoff (1986), moved toward an "anthropology of things" and stimulated the development of work on more processual models which observed things through their movements within cultures and between people and groups. Concerned with the "cultural biography of things" these ideas served to liberate objects from the constraints of time and locality and became interested in the lifecycles of material objects as their value was manifested during production, consumption and display. By privileging human agency and systems of exchange it shifted the point of emphasis from specific objects to the generalized systems of which things are but tiny parts. By identifying the value embodied in things as they move through a society, or between societies, they can be seen as having a complex political life and far reaching powers as commodities.

This angle of approach has then led to the idea of "biographical object" (Hoskins 1998) that has put *things* at one end of the continuum between gifts and commodities and sees them as endowed with the personal characteristics of their owners. With cross fertilization from disciplines like design, aesthetics, human geography and ecology this perspective is growing into new approaches that focus on the idiosyncratic and personalized life of specific objects and attends to *domestic* things and spaces. For in the past the material culture of homes was seen essentially as a symbolic representation of normative cultural ideals or as a base from which patterns of social structures such as kinship and economic

relationship were manifested. However, Daniel Miller (2001) and others have now gone "behind closed doors" to "directly observe the processes by which a home and its inhabitants transform each other" (190). This way of looking at things reveals familiar objects and environments in all their "ordinariness" and asks how we use them, and are shaped by them, in daily life. Leaving behind the quest for transcendent themes the study of material culture is now taking us down to the *particular*. As part of this new era of anthropology **The Journal of Material Culture** came into being in 1999 and was conceived in order to "...systematically explore the linkage between the construction of social identities and the production and use of material culture" (publisher's web site: URL http://www.sagepub.com/journal.aspx?pid=112) and so it seeks to draw together many of the threads from past and present ways of seeing *things* into one place.

However, there can still remain the risk of looking at *things* primarily in ways that tend to be "preoccupied with motivations, symbols and meanings' (Jones 1993:183) where, as the post colonial discourse has made us acutely conscious, the preoccupations of the observer may serve their *own* ideologies and misrepresent things as well as people. In response to this, the call is now out for ways of viewing things that take into account *their effect upon us* and how meaning-making takes place within our engagement with objects as we respond to their physical presence in our world. Many anthropologists are now vitally interested in the way we have an embodied experience of things and Seremetakis (1994) appeals for a move away from a "...depiction of objects as passive refractors of pre-existing ideational social codes and norms (which) tend(s) to accommodate only those social narratives that are residual, official and institutional" (134) and describes a view that privileges direct sensory experience of the objects of our lives. She calls it *anthropology of the senses* and it seeks to acknowledge the "idiosyncratic investment" we have in our things because "broad ranging reductive classifications of material culture can suppress the dimension of ... their intrinsic perceptual qualities" (134). In this way we are beginning to look at familiar things afresh, and pay a new attention to their physical presence in our lives as subjects in themselves, rather than objects at our disposal. In a similar vein Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) specifically reject the

propensity to define things as "nothing but the projections of the inner travails of the psyche" (25) and state that

...one of the most important, but unfortunately neglected, aspects of the meaning of things is precisely the ability of an object to convey meaning through its own inherent qualities. Yet most accounts of how things signify tend to ignore the active contribution of the thing itself to the meaning process (45).

My own study then, sits within this more recent stream of ideas. It reveals the power of things to act upon us. This other power of things which lies, not in the more static meanings they give us or the meanings we give them, but in the more fluid and changeable power they have to empty us and themselves of meaning and then reconstitute it in unique and novel ways. To break-down meaning, to dissimilate and dissemble. It works to reclaim some of that very richness and depth of personal and cultural reality that is formed *within* this space of fluid and dynamic intersubjectivity. For we cannot deny the materiality of the objects of our world, for their physical impact upon our sensibilities has a power of its own. As Schiffer (1999) in his overview of the material life of human beings states....

...what is singular about Homo sapiens is the constant intimacy of people with countless kinds of things – our immersion in the material medium. What makes humans unique, then, is that we take part in diverse interactions with innumerable kinds of artefacts in the course of our daily activities ... in no other species do the variety of artefacts and the diversity and complexity of interactions begin to approach those found in even the most materially impoverished human society. Incessant interaction with endlessly varied artefacts is, I maintain, the empirical reality of human life and what makes it so singular (2).

Under the influence of the great thinkers and world-changing ideologies of human history our theorizing about *things* has at times forgotten to take into account the actual material

objects with which we have been surrounded and *their influence upon us* at all times during that history. This study remembers the physical presence and power of those material objects in the home places where we most consistently and intimately engage with them. It seeks a careful and responsive experience of some of these things and finds them capable of not just evoking meanings, but resisting and transforming them as well.

The Phenomenology of the Home World –

The second central insight of those years emerged for me as it became increasingly evident that my daily round of home-bound activities constituted an equally, if not more, powerful site at which the choices, behaviours and products that create a culture were being formed and manifested. The existence of *a priori* ideals assumed by the grand positivist scientific theories seemed to say nothing of the hidden lives of myself, and other such mothers, as we rose and fell under the daily struggles of negotiating and sustaining our lives within the world of our homes. Those theories were blind to our lives – they saw nothing of the whole systems of belief and thought, all consuming fears and anxieties, driving aspirations for ourselves and our families, and profound and mundane bodily experiences that were the totality of our lives. It was that collection of diverse writings called *phenomenological anthropology* that finally seemed able to say something of these experiences as I had felt them.

I had become increasingly aware that those meanings, which we gave to the elements of our lives, were primarily personal and subjective. Finding myself in daily intimacy with the home-worlds of other women, encircled by the sounds and smells and things amongst which they found and forged their deepest meanings, I learned to ask about those meanings rather than assuming. When I listened I heard that the food they fed their families, the books they read their children, the education they sought, the clothes they dressed them in and the medicines they bought all carried often deep complex and highly personal meanings. Each woman was different - what caused agonies of anxiety for one

mother went unnoticed by another. What gave one mother hope and pride was a sign of dread for another and such meanings were as often as not at odds with the meanings propagated by the larger social system of which the women were a part.

The idea of *practice* appeared capable of articulating this state of affairs and provided a model that took the focus away from "...society or culture as....an objective reality in some form or an other, with its own dynamic divorced in large part from human agency..." (Ortner 1984: 1) and toward the individual as an independent actor who had the, seemingly inverted, bottom-up ability to effect change in the larger society itself. For it was true that all the mothers I knew, daily, cooked up and fed their own beliefs and dreams to their children. With an intentionality firmly grounded in their daily tasks and their own bodies it appeared to me that the *personal* most surely was the *political* around the dinner tables of our homes.

Arthur Kleinman (1988) and his colleagues have for many years worked to explore the meanings that people give to the ordinary experiences of life, particularly illness and suffering. He suggests that in order to get at the real deeply felt experiences of an individuals suffering we must understand that "...something is at stake for all of us in the daily round of transactions and happenings" (277). As ethnographers I believe it is vital to ask what is at stake in this life. What is it that this person hopes and strives for, what are their fears and desires? Kleinman identifies these as the *moral* dimensions of a person's life and that we cannot hope to understand another without considering these dimensions. Michael Jackson (1996) too has pursued these ideas to establish a well-developed concept of what phenomenologists call the life-world -

That domain of everyday life, immediate social existence and practical activity, with all its habituality, its crisis, its vernacular and idiomatic character, its biological particularities, its decisive events and indecisive strategies, which theoretical knowledge addresses but does not determine, from which conceptual understanding arises but on which it does not primarily depend (8).

Phenomenological approaches recognize then that so much of our meaning and experience of life arises within and amongst and between the things of our lives-as-lived. This notion of *intersubjectivity* has now also become central to my way of understanding this world. Similarly, the fact that we are living these lives as *embodied* beings who meet our worlds through our bodies and live out every thought and deed inside bodies has become vital to my understanding of those years of motherhood. We traversed our years in the home balancing an array of relationships, which included much more than just the other people we shared our houses with. There was also our own and our children's changing bodies and their diverse and compelling products and requirements which ultimately consumed the greater part of each day. The textures, the smells and sounds, the weather, the natural objects of the garden, animals and, of course, the numerous physical things that constituted the material culture of our homes. These, then, are the existential aspects of our lives, and this approach privileges this immediate experience over the ideological knowing upon which that experience does not necessarily depend. This study recognizes the interplay of home and body and daily life of ordinary women as a powerful site of practice. Its reveals that the women it describes experience a deep and far reaching agency in their lives when they reconcile, negotiate and transform what is at stake in their own worlds in their own homes amongst their own things.

Revealing Women's Unseen Spaces –

Lastly, although much time had passed since those years, I could not help but remain attached to the feminist ideals that had been awakened when I was first a student of anthropology. In the 1970s anthropology was only just beginning to see how the lives and meanings of women had been systematically subordinated and denied in its literature, as elsewhere. In the intervening years much has been done to right the balance. However, much still remains to be done to free the neglected corners of women's lives from the hegemonic male gaze.

It was nearly twenty years ago that Marilyn Waring (1988) compellingly demonstrated how the man-made economic systems that describe and control our so called "productive" lives in this country, totally failed to see or value the kinds of activities that women carried out within their homes. It revealed how the demanding and complex daily round that constituted the lives of so many women "counted for nothing in the ideologies that govern us" (65). She went so far as to say that "what men value has brought us to the brink of death: what women find worthy may bring us back to life" (254) and that "we women are visible and valuable to each other, and we must now in our billions, proclaim that visibility and that worth" (264). This study, in its own small way, continues the work of making visible and honouring what women value.

More recently Kay Turner (1999), in North America, has traced the role of the domestic shrine[1] in the evolution of Christianity from its origins and describes the oppositions between the gender polarities of *oikos* (household/private/female) and the *polis* (state/public/male) with the corresponding shift from the *partnership model* to *dominator model* and the patriarchal relationship of woman as devalued "other", in relation to the male as ideal "self" (16). She traces the history of women's domestic shrines as sites of resistance to the restrictions of women's involvement in public worship and records how they also served to nourish the women's need for an "interconnectedness" (19) between specific people and emotions, which similarly was not satisfied by the institutionalized emotionality of the formal altar. With the comingling of different religious and magical traditions, personal needs and devotions, healing and specific family and individual people

[1] *Shrine* is not the word that most of the women in my study used to describe their special space. Accordingly I always attempted to employ, with each woman, the use of whatever term she herself had chosen. However, the names they used were diverse, so *shrine* is the one I have utilized throughout this paper for consistency, as it is a general term that can act to cover all the other descriptions. I selected it in preference to the word *altar* as that word is derived directly from the Latin *altare*, which means *high*, and is therefore more evocative of the public high-altar of institutionalized and male dominated religious practices. Its opposite is the *low* sacred spaces of the earth, such as the hearth – spaces more intimately associated with the lives and symbolism of women. The shrine, on the other hand, was traditionally a more portable reliquary that was often like a small cupboard and was ultimately more likely to be found housing precious religious objects in the home. As such it has, to me, a more direct link with the spaces I was seeing in my research.

the woman's shrine was capable of subverting the male practices of public worship. This meant that women's domestic shrines were marginalized by the patriarchic religions of the day but that in response the "home altar has for centuries encoded a visual language through which objects 'speak' to the distinctive concerns of women's "hidden culture" (21).

Most of the women I studied had fashioned eclectic shrines dedicated more to fulfilling their own personal needs than any traditional or formalized religious purpose. Each exhibited a mixture of religious and secular or personal objects and comfortably, sometimes defiantly, mixed the symbolism and iconography of different religions in the single space. As such, the shrines documented in this study are part of what I believe we can now see as an unbroken tradition of women crafting and maintaining their own forms of spiritual expression outside of the male institutions of their wider societies – mimicking, contesting and dissimulating in the privacy of their own homes.

Throughout time these unseen activities of women can be traced in the objects they used in their homes. In the study of simple household objects left in the archeological and written records from Renaissance times, Ajmar (1999) has demonstrated the enduring core of "female interaction with the domestic objects in the context of the construction of the domestic female persona and a family memory" (81) and records that the woman has always been "in charge of the moral and material identity and memory of the household" (83). For it is still in these places that we can look for what women value and some of the ways they make meaning in their daily lives. Too long ignored and trivialized, the personal spaces of women's homes can still show us much. Rooted firmly in the feminist tradition this study strives to reveal, claim and honour some of these spaces.

Research Design:

Between Friends – *Maria: "I don't mind telling **you** this..."*

Informed by the three theoretical threads outlined in the prologue I have fashioned my research accordingly and present to you a paper that is inspired and shaped by some of what I, as a woman relating to other women, hold to be the things and experiences of value in our daily lives. Like familiar faces I have picked out in a crowd – the material I have gathered and selected is what I feel is important and alive for myself and the shrine maker as we experienced their special places together.

This research, therefore, is a descriptive ethnographic study that begins and ends with my personal relationships with the women and their things. I began it all by selecting a range of personal friends and inviting them to participate in this research project (see appendix: Form 1). It was my hope and expectation that the women I approached would feel comfortable enough with me to share some of the deeper meaning of their shrines. Most of them I had already discussed related subjects with. Some I had told about my research and they were eager to be involved. This relationship was important – it made my role one of *participant observer* even if I was not living their daily routines and rituals right there in their houses with them. For, as long as we had shared supportive and empathetic relationships shaped around our common experience as mothers, homemakers and women, we were, in fact, participant observers in each other's lives. The ten women who agreed to participate were Hadia, Sherap, Karis, Fiona, Maria, Lovely, April, Laura, Ruth and Jean.

I already occupied a place in the web of shared intimacies with all of the women in this study – we had shared food and family and challenges over some years before I asked to photograph their shrines. Even Ruth, who I met for the first time when I went to interview her, became involved through a connection to my own sister, and so became a link person between two already well-established webs of women. The success of our meeting was a result of the remarkably enquiring and open-minded honesty she offered to me but, I believe, the foundation for that was an assumption of shared values that provided enough

of a cushion of safety and familiarity for Ruth to take the risk of inviting me into her bedroom.

My core ethnographic data was gathered during interviews conducted with each woman in her own home at a time when we would not be interrupted by family or other demands. Sitting before her special space I asked her to tell me about how it came into being, how she engaged with it and the life of the objects upon it. With her permission I recorded these words and then photographed the shrine spaces. I did not select women for this study that I did not have a sense of solidarity, mutual respect and comradeship with. Most of these interviews were conducted sitting on the floor at the end of the bed in their private bedroom, and I had a strong feeling that we both needed to have a sense of comfort and safety with each other in order for such a meeting to take place at all.

It was in these bedrooms that I was able to see the unique value of this ethnographic method of participant observation when it came to the important issue of relating to the "other" in the research activity. Participant observation must always understand the simple yet powerful fact that the researcher "belongs to the same class of phenomena" as those they are studying. Scientists may seek to understand their subjects from many different vantage points but ultimately "there is no way of understanding people independent of a more or less shared human experience" (Hastrup 1995: 53) and if a researcher denies or ignores this they are at risk of producing versions of others that are potentially false, misleading or destructive to those they study. This knowledge reminds us that we are *not different* from the "other" – we cannot expect to adopt the role of disengaged clinical observer evesdropping on unrelated entities who will continue to conduct their lives as if we were not sitting there writing down everything they said.

The postmodern feminist critique has, of course, strongly responded to this problem of representing the "other" in research and has revealed the oppressive, alienating and exploitative falsity of a scientific objectivism that claims to produce a transcendent overview of the "other" while at the same time making them the object of their all too

judgmental gaze. Consequently, the social constructivist argument views *all* "inside-outside" boundaries in knowledge as being about power differentials and struggle (567) to the point where it seems impossible to engage with the "other" at all, for fear of the dire consequences. Since the emergence of these critiques researchers have grappled with the challenge of how to move forward and produce intelligible ways of doing and presenting research and still making a meaningful contribution to our understanding of the human condition without doing violence to the "other". Some have sought more experimental ways of conducting and presenting research that strive to deconstruct these lines of dispute and Donna Haraway (1988), in her seminal article on the problems of situated knowledge and objectivity in science, began postulating a way between these opposing stances in her proposition of a feminist objectivity (583). This stance recognizes that "objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibilities" (528). For to promise such a vision is to succumb to the illusion she calls the "godtrick" (528), which denies the reality that all knowledge arises from a limited location and a situated awareness and can, therefore, *only* be partial.

Knowing this, as a participant observer, it is mandatory then to cultivate an overt and reflexive recognition of one's place as a human sharing experiences with other humans. This allows us, as researchers, to not only acknowledge our prejudices and influences but to *utilize* them to enrich our understanding of the other. Phenomenological approaches remind us that it is within this very stream of life that experience is constituted and this then became a valid place in which to position myself in anticipation of entering into that very flow of existence (Kleinman & Kleinman 1991).

In this way I have consciously pursued a knowledge situated within my relationship with "friends". From amongst people of the same gender, mostly of similar age, with similar roles as mothers and homemakers I produce this knowledge. Located within their bedrooms, amongst their precious objects, it was my role as "friend" that opened the door into their intimate spaces. The utilization of friendship in ethnographic enquiry has been

an especially interesting one for anthropologists and over the years we have seen a shift from the ideal of the ethnographer as an impartial objective observer to an individual subjectively experiencing their engagement with other human beings. Ridler (1996) illustrates how friendship with people in a fieldwork situation is one legitimate way of entering this stream and gathering valid anthropological knowledge about the life-world of our subjects. In this way we can see the value of empathic knowledge and the role of the mimetic style which grounds our observations in a history of common tasks and goals and benefits from our actual participation in those activities that constitute the subject's lived experience.

Correspondingly, it has been my specific intention *not* to direct my attention toward a random array of anonymous subjects with whom I have no personal connection. As described in the prologue, my motivations for this research arose out of my own personal experience of the material culture of the home and the practice of mothering. From the very beginning it was my *insider* status that allowed me to see these special places in the first place – for I noticed in the corners of my friend's homes collections of special things that I knew were more than just attractive arrangements of ornaments. Without my empathetic involvement there would have been no witness to what would otherwise have remained unseen.

Women ethnographers have been writing about their subjective experiences as participant observers for some time now. They have pioneered ways of revealing these previously hidden places and experiences with an existential depth and richness that emerges from their fully felt engagement with the daily lives of their subjects. In so doing they were also able to remain personally in touch with the problems of faithfully representing the "other" they were in relationship with. Karen McCarthy Brown (1991) in her study of a Voodoo Priestess, practicing in her own North American city, used her field journal to reveal how her position of detached observer was superseded by her role as friend

...it was an acknowledgement that ethnographic research, what ever else it is, is a form of human relationship. When the lines long drawn in anthropology between participant observer and informant break down, then the only truth is the one in between: and anthropology becomes something closer to a social art form, open to both aesthetic and moral judgment. This situation is riskier, but it does bring intellectual labour and life into closer relation (12).

My own research is fueled by, grounded in and unfolded around my own subjective experiences of the research subjects and the research process as well as my scholarly interests as a student of anthropology. It is my hope that it will be made the richer and more evocative for that, while at the same time revealing me as having full ownership of the misconceptions and limitations that are inevitably also a part of this research.

A Visitor in the Bedroom: *Jean – "it is a secret thing – I don't want it sniffed at."*

However, no matter how much shared experience my informants and I had during this research the fact remains that we are, at the very same time, *not the same person*, and never can be. We do not inhabit the same world or the same body and our lives converge for only limited periods from time to time. In other words, I was still a visitor in their homes. More specifically I was still a student of anthropology who had invited myself into their private places with an agenda of my own that was actually irrelevant and meaningless in *their* lives. It was my specific intention to gather material from their intimate worlds that was to be put to the service of ideas and outcomes that had an imperative which was not their own.

These are realities that the social scientist will always be working with and I believe must be approached with care. We cannot, and must not pretend that we - the different outsider "self" - do *not* exist even if it is possible to make ourselves invisible as we construct our reports from the field. Nor should we delude ourselves that *our* experiences in the field are

identical to those of our informants. So, if representing the "other" is problematic for the researcher, so too is working with the "self". How can we ethically insinuate ourselves into the lives of others for our own purposes? How can we pretend that we have no "self" that is compellingly involved in the very process? Such questions can paralyse us into inactivity! Again, Haraway (1988) has proposed a frank ownership of one's positionality - for to be an outsider in someone's intimate life is not always a bad thing. As outsiders we can see what they may be inured to in their position as permanent insider. We may revitalize the informant's own awareness by reminding them of, or reflecting back to them, things they could not see about their own practices. As Ruth put it after our meeting - "it was so lovely to talk with you – a real gift to review my spiritual practice" (email 14.7.03). In so doing we may also validate and celebrate aspects of their lives in a wider context in a way that can, hopefully, be inspiring and empowering for them and others.

The positionality of the research "self" can then expose us to much that is of value. In her studies of childhood deaths in the barrios of Brazil, Scheper-Hughes (1992) makes no excuse for taking this position.

...the anthropologist is an instrument of cross cultural transformation that is necessarily flawed and biased. We cannot rid ourselves of the cultural self we bring with us into the field any more than we can disown the ears, eyes and skin through which we take in our intuitive perceptions about the new and strange world we have entered ...nonetheless ...we struggle to do the best we can with the limited resources we have at hand – our ability to listen and observe carefully, empathetically and compassionately (28).

Acutely aware of herself as a member of an alien and dominant culture amongst oppressed people, she has complemented her identity as invasive researcher with that of her identity as feeling human being and has, as a result, written a very real and powerful account of those she studied and lived with.

To this end I have maintained my own field journal throughout the research year. Its extracts sustain my reflexive and overt presence within the discourse as it unfolds. Because it must not be forgotten that I, as an outsider, am still the one bringing you this information. It is filtered, at all times, through my experience. In this journal itself I have written my thoughts and impressions as a fairly loose flow about my feelings associated with each visit, my reactions to the shrine and the objects themselves and how I felt the interview went from a personal and professional angle. It includes other readings and family activities I was doing around the subject and how my ideas about the shrines were influenced by these. Amongst these I have written snippets of ideas, dialogue and observations that I made while each interview was in progress, to act as a supplement and back up to the audiotape and photographs. I have also written lists of words that express my immediate subjective experience of the shrines. These have all been recorded on the day of the interview itself while other ideas, quotes and observations related to the research have been entered randomly as they came to me through out the year, and so are interspersed amongst the ethnographic findings.

Other ways I have attempted to work *against* the de-personalising dangers of *scientific objectivism* include empowering the women to use their own words as much as possible and also, as stated, approaching the women in this study with care – asking only those I felt would feel comfortable about my "intrusion" and honest enough to set limits with me where they chose. Accordingly, three women I approached did not wish to be involved. One was comfortable enough with our relationship to tell me that she felt such a study of her shrine would be too invasive and that it would somehow take power away from a space and ideas that were essentially about a private relationship between her and her religion. But she did give me permission to document her refusal here. I record these assertions on the part of potential research subjects here as a reminder of my precarious position as an intruder on their private lives and that I approached this in good faith and

was more than willing to accept each woman's response on her own terms. I also asked the women if they wished to use a pseudonym and four of the ten chose to do so[2].

Further, to reinforce the overt positioning of myself as someone *not* attempting to be disengaged, but a "self" with a deep investment in the whole project, I have arranged the different *things* in this thesis (pictures, poems, profiles, journal entries, interpretive analysis of shrines) in the same eclectic way that the women arranged their shrines – each thing has its own voice and *my* voice, be it scholarly or deeply personal, is juxtaposed amongst the others. My personal profile, my poems about the shrines and a shrine photograph of my own at the end of the work appear along with my academically informed discourse. These are parts of the mosaic for us all here – equal but different, because where the outsider and where the insider separate, where the scholar and the friend come apart, it is not possible to say – they are both me and to my friends I am a seamless whole. In the same way that they are the same as me in so many ways and yet so totally different from me in so many other ways. Here, my scholarly relationship with the participants (being not the same) is enacted within the matrix of our personal relationship (being the same). Like Devisch (1996:94) I have approached this "....endeavour very much as an aesthetic and moral experience grounded in particular observation or rather observational participation, and reciprocal sympathy, friendship. To overcome these prejudiced interactions of a colonial and missionary type..." For I believe that it is here in this place of tension and paradox that we find the richness and depth that can reveal so much about who we are. The shrines gave me this model of presentation as they demonstrate the same dynamism and have shown me again how fruitful a place that can be.

[2] It is interesting to note that these names were less dissembling disguises than references to their spiritual lives or personal rites of passage symbolized by initiation names or "new" identities they had discovered within themselves as they developed through their lives.

Narratives of the Shrine *- Fiona: "This is the story of my life."*

As stated, the ethnographic data in this study was gathered in one-to-one interviews with the women in front of their shrine spaces at quiet times. I began the interview by asking each woman to "tell me about your special space...." This open-ended question was devised to prompt and permit the women to talk about their shrine in their own words and style. I attempted to listen actively during these stories and recorded them on audiotape. I saved specific questions I had planned to ask (about the history and use of the shrine itself and the provenance of specific objects on it) until *after* they had said all they felt the need to say in response to the initial question. Postmodern critiques of the collection of research material had, of course, alerted me to the dangers of setting agendas and prompting or directing the flow of words and ideas from informants by the nature and style of my own questions and responses, so I strove for an approach that would be more in accord with the phenomenological focus on the here-and-now, informed by the question

What are phenomena – expecting, playing, imagining, suffering, perceiving, valuing, feeling sick, hesitating – ***experienced as? How is the subject experiencing these elements of her life*** *(my emphasis) prior to (their) formulations and formalizations in the physical and social sciences, prior to any second-order determination?" (Kestenbaum 1982: 15).*

For this then is the phenomenological problem: how to capture experience prior to its conceptualization or narrative transformation and its approaches attempt to gather ethnographic impressions as much as possible *before* they are organised into formalized thought and reflection. But as I sat before each shrine and asked about its objects the women began to tell the stories of these things and as the narratives emerged it became clear that these spaces and objects were rich with strong feelings and important aspects of their own identity, social and spiritual lives which they *had yet not put into words*. The shrine spaces were alive with their intent, emotions, needs and interconnectedness but these relationships and feelings were expressed, in their daily practice, below the level of words - they were "acted out" by the placement of objects, the utilization of space and the

sensory experiencing of the body. Little or none of this was taking place at the level of words until the moment that I asked them to speak about their spaces.

This fact became immediately apparent to me as the women began to formulate their description of their shrine to me. As they tentatively began to search for the words they wanted to use to describe their objects and experiences it was a struggle for them to "put into words" the kinds of experiences they were living out in these spaces. I had invited each woman to verbalise her tableau – and so she hesitantly began to fashion what became her narrative. Each one claimed she hardly knew herself what each thing "meant" or why it was where it was. At the end of our time together each woman said in some way or another that she had discovered new things about her special space and or about herself and her life. That my questions had made her "think" - in other words she had created and told me stories about her space and things that she had not (yet?) told herself. It was apparent, as Michael Jackson (2002) revealed "...stories are neither the pure creations of autonomous individuals nor the unalloyed expression of subjective views, but rather the result of ongoing dialogue and redaction within fields of intersubjectivity...." (22).

To me, therefore, the importance of the stories lies not in their existence in themselves, but in the fact that they were being formed, reformed, discarded and owned anew at the shrine. They emerged from that marginal place between the private and the public. Not entirely internalised, not totally hidden, these arrangements of objects and stories represented the first step of externalizing the inner story – putting it into objects and words that then exist in time and space. Not yet fully public, the storytelling can begin to do its work for the woman. It was the story *telling*, not the narratives themselves, that was so important at each shrine.

For this reason I have refrained from reproducing lengthy verbatim records of our many hours of interviews. For it is my aim not to capture these exact words *after* they were experienced – but to somehow reveal more of each woman's direct experience of the shrine in the way that they encountered it – that is, *before* the stories they told me. Sherap

expressed it all when she chose not to write a short profile of herself as I requested of each woman. She said to do so was to make things "too concrete" and then explained this in the following manner –

The 'nothing concrete' is about the thought that if I write something down about myself it might define and confine – it's a bit like cooking a roast – I can eat it when I cook it - but can't stand having the same thing two days in a row. I use art as a healing tool and as a snapshot of an expression in the same way – it's cathartic but I don't necessarily want to look at it all the time. (email 12.11.03)

Sherap refused to tell me a story about herself! Jean was equally resistive to being drawn into defining herself in any way and took a long time to settle on the enigmatic words "a spirit in a body" - which were as far as she would go in creating for me a story about who she was and how she saw herself after her 76 years of life. For the narratives I recorded serve to reveal the existence of each shrine as a powerful site of meaning-making in the lives of these women, where stories and things coalesced around each woman in her chosen place. This was their experience of it *before* words – the qualitative reality of the shrine space for its maker and user – and this was what I wished to try and document.

Poems and Shrines - *Ruth: "It is speaking with the spiritual world"*

However, having chosen not to "concretize" too much of the women's specific stories I still wanted to capture some of this sense of creative flux that existed at these sites so I sought other ways of "pointing toward" their more fundamental meaning as experienced directly by each woman. The first of these methods was to ask each woman to write a short, "quick" list of five (or more) words that she would use to describe her shrine and five words about what she does and what bodily feelings she has when she engages with her shrine (see appendix: Form 6). I asked the women to use lists of verbs and adjectives and do this in a quiet moment after the interview while we were still together at the shrine

so the words could arise from the immediate experience of intimacy with the space – some did this happily, others required more time and solitude and did it for "homework" that they returned to me later. By asking them to write down in a stream-of-consciousness style a few words about their feeling and engagement with their space, unencumbered by the need to make them grammatically or intellectually coherent, I hoped to capture some more of their raw experience of that place.

Like the free association methods employed to elicit feelings and ideas from below the control of the super conscious I have looked to contemporary Depth or Archetypal Psychology and the work of James Hillman (1989) and Robert Sardello (1992) to uncover ways of working with these issues. Both men trace themselves in a direct lineage from William James have written about the implications of the use of particular types of words in our communications. They work from the assumption that *nouns* are made dead because the vitality in them seems to have been smothered by the overlay of all the implications they carry with them. They have shown how this can be mitigated by the use of verbs and adjectives, which can vivify *possible* realities rather than embalming them in definitive meanings. Sardello (1992) states that

...what physics has done for the world through its focus on gravity, language has done to the world through boxing in things with the force of nouns. The soul of things is kept at distance as long as naming them with nouns comes between us and their self representation (122). The isolation of things from qualitative action reduces language itself to a commodity to be sold in the schools as a separating of the world into discrete disciplines, bought by students to prepare themselves to speak the world into inertness (125).

In the hope that releasing their feelings from some of that "gravity" may allow for the expression of some more of this "soul", I asked each woman to write in a way that amounted to lists of verbs and adjectives with single words released from their contextual or structural role. In these lists of words, flowing spontaneously and without grammatical

structure or logical format, I have invited attempts from each woman to move *away* from nouns and *towards* verbs and adjectives. All the women wrote them with serious thought, but without difficulty, and produced words that, I believe, impact strongly upon the reader at a level of feeling and emotion. Every word written in response by each of the women is reproduced in the body of this work.

A related, but more challenging, task I then asked each woman to do was write a poem about her special place. Phenomenology has, of course, experimented with the use of poetic images to "carry us far beyond that, which can be contained and encompassed by conceptual thought" (Jackson 1996: 41) and seeks ways of retrieving the poetics of everyday life. As Sardello has said "the repression of the animation of the world is a cultural repression because the practice of naming things as nouns has completely invaded language and now determines what counts as significant – except for the poets" (123). These were stirring ideas that were enough to give me the courage to make this unexpected request of each participants. I believe the truth of Sardello's observation was confirmed by the responses in this study – the anxiety generated by the request, for some women, was palpable and sprang from the very "deadening" and distancing they had felt from the vitality of words when this kind of writing was forced upon them in schools. With words robbed of the very life I was hoping they could capture with the spontaneous association of feelings and words that is a poem, they felt incapable of "animating" and "naming what was significant" in this form of expression. Laura wrote to me after an email reminding her of the poem I had asked for - "sorry, there is no poem forthcoming from this girl .... it makes my breathing change and my shoulders rise just thinking about it" (email 20.10.03). Similarly, Lovely confided (sorry to disappoint me) that she was simply unable to do such a thing as write a poem. Jean and Sherap also chose not to. Fortunately, each of these women had no difficulty expressing themselves to me in other ways. The other women, however, took it on with relish and the majority wrote poems that reveal a depth of sentiment and practice that went even deeper than what was expressed to me in the narratives told in those spaces.

However, in all these attempts of mine to come closer to the actual lived experience of the shrine space for each woman I have strived, as I have described, to remain aware of the pit falls of this endeavour. I have, therefore, tried to work from a phenomenological approach that "aims for verisimilitude, placing primary experience and secondary elaboration on the same footing. Both are seen as integral to how people manage the exigencies of life." (Jackson 1996:42). These poems and free-association word lists sit then, I believe, somewhere between the woman's primary experience and her putting of it into words to make it sensible to herself and to me. For it is in these spaces that "shared conversations" (Haraway 1988) arise and it is in the shared conversations of these narratives around the shrine that "boundaries materialize." Haraway identifies boundaries as created by "mapping practices" where things do not have a pre-existence and only come into focus when the edges around objects are staked out and marked by those who would name them (595). This, of course, makes such objects difficult to pin down – for "boundaries shift from within: ... what they contain remains generative, productive of meanings and bodies" (595) and therefore defining them is, according to Haraway, a very risky practice. Accordingly, I have chosen to do my best to reveal and record these women's shrines simply as boundary projects – what is generated within them for each woman is something I am prepared only to point toward because, as with poems, it is never possible to give a "... final or unique determination of what can count as objective knowledge at a particular historical juncture" (595).

In the same vein, I had experiences of these women and their spaces *before* I wrote these words. To honour this I have recorded my own poems about my collective experience of the shrine spaces. I have incorporated them in this work in the interests of transparency and honesty – if I asked the women to write poems then I should be prepared to do the same. My impressions may add nothing to the record of what the women themselves experienced at their shrines but they do add another experiential layer to the whole intersubjective exercise that is this research. For in the end *you* can only have a third-hand experience of these women's spaces and since I am the medium for bringing you that experience the more you know about my reactions the better. So, utilizing the fabric of my

own responses to explore other layers of meanings I have crafted *my* writing, *my* poems and story telling, *their* writing and poems and story telling - so they all sit honestly *together* in a way that I hope will work against the construction of static meanings. This is because....

The world is never something finished, something which thought can bring to a close: the world is always in the making, and our thoughts, like our actions, have meaning only in relation to the practical and social life in which we are engaged (Jackson 1996:4).

A Shrine of One's Own *– Karis: "About 10 years ago. Cloth and candle - I chose special things from collected objects. I just had a yearning to make a shrine."*

Helen Cixous (1996) has called for a less masculine, defining and rationalizing approach to these matters. She says - the "mode of passivity is our way – really an active way – of getting to know things by letting ourselves be known by them. You don't seek to master. To demonstrate, explain, grasp. But rather to transmit: to make things loved by making them known" (43). This was exactly my desire – I sought to know the women in this study and their special things so that I could "love" them too and they have become *my* "special things". I present them to you as "things loved" so they may become known to you in the form of a shrine that carefully attends to the shrines of others. This too, I believe, is in the tradition of women ethnographers who have paved the way in new and empowering ways of knowing.

Abu-Lughod has been one of those women reporting from their own position as women in the field as she writes about what she was privy to in *her* experience of the everyday domestic world of women in a Bedouin community (1993). From this she has developed a commitment to an ethnography of the *particular* where she resists her initial impulse to pull back and construct the bird's eye view and strives, instead, to closely attend to the routine activities she participated in within the women's realm. Clifford Geertz, writing much earlier about his fieldwork in Morocco (1973), described the same approach with his idea of the "thick" description, which is like a "note in a bottle" (9). In the same manner, a rich development of the particular of everyday life - the full, decorated, precious and personal – these women's shrines I studied were like that message in a bottle. Palpably "thick" with meaning these shrine spaces and their objects were capable of giving us a capsule of more than enough vital information to lead us to their creators.

Similarly, the way I have written about my research findings has been to present them in the capsule of this thesis. It exists as a collection of fascinating, rich and lovely things of

each of the women and I do not believe that it is necessary to fabricate some demographic framework to anchor and locate these research results. I did not, therefore, seek information about the ages, social background, occupations, marital status or even the personal attributes or motivations of these women. As already mentioned, I simply asked them to supply a Personal Profile - "write a few words to identify yourself so that information in this study will have an identity related to it" (see appendix: Form 5). As described, the women responded in a variety of ways, or not at all, which says as much about who they are as the words themselves. Some needed a couple of friendly reminders and others had written long descriptions *before* I ever got to visit and interview them. I arrange these profiles, along with all the other *things* of value, within the space of these pages without trying to draw any more out of the juxtaposition of those precious things than I already have.

I have quoted most of these statements and referred to some of their specific experiences and thoughts but this work has never been a place where I wanted to "capture and display" these women in any way. My own readings of ethnography have shown me that that is impossible - in this short and limited study I cannot do that, not should I. For these women are, as their shrines reveal, far more complex and changing and paradoxical than that! To try and portray them as "wholes" would be a pretense and a disservice. I could no more do them justice than I could pin down the fluid and shifting layers of each person that were present in their shrine space. I offer up, therefore, in this work only tiny parts of these women – scraps of the collage captured on paper, on film, in words, through my perceptions and expectations, in poems and in the beautiful, powerful and precious *things*. That, I hope, will be more than enough for the reader to experience for themselves the power of intersubjective meaning-making, as the *things* of this thesis work their alchemy upon the reader. As Michael Jackson has said of the phenomenological approach "...our aim is to do justice to the complexity of the lived experience to avoid those selective rediscriptions, reductions and generalizations which claim to capture the essence of the lived in underlying rules or overarching schemata yet, in effect, downplay and deaden it" (1996:8).

For this reason I have bound, open and closed, this thesis with the full-page reproduction of a painting of a shrine by the Mexican artist Elena Climent. This shrine's atmospheric beauty seems to me to be a necessary and fitting "frame" to contain, vivify and particularize the "specialness" of the pages within it. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) have called for a new way of relating to objects that "...releases the symbolic power of things ...by the act of perception. The primary skill one needs to unlock the magic of things is that of seeing them objectively and subjectively at the same time, thus joining the nature of the perceiving subject with the nature of the object" (247). I can do no greater honour to the women in this study and their chosen form of expression than present this collection of their precious and lovely and important things as a shrine of my own and optimistically offer it, as each woman did with her own arrangements of *things*.

Field Journal: 18.4.03

My first shrine visit! April showed me the dressing table that covers one wall of her and Vern's bedroom. It was such a delight to be introduced to all the lovely objects in turn! I have felt that we were sharing and exploring something deep and highly personal and spiritually charged. It was so much part of April herself that I was looking at on that dressing table. She felt it too, I think, and needed to acknowledge it at the end of our interview. We both knew that we had shared something quite emotional and I was acutely conscious of the privilege of that as we sat together on the floor – even though we have sat together and shared many things over the years.

Again I had the fleeting fear that maybe I had pushed my way into something she may regret having allowed me to witness. I hope not! All I can do is trust that our friendship will seal the space....

Chapter 1: The Practice of Women's Shrine Making

Liminal Space - Border Zones within the Home

The unseen realm. Divine beloved. Holy place. Anchor for the Eternal. Connection with the universe. Speaking with the spiritual world. Higher consciousness. Numinous. The footsteps of God. More powerful than me.

The above words record ten different ways of describing *another* place or state of being with which these women were attempting to commune while at their shrines. I could not see these *other* places myself when I first began looking at the shrines. All I saw was groupings of objects - objects that were rich in significance and feeling, but still objects that hid this quality of *otherness* from me. It was only as the women began to tell the stories and write the poems of their shrines that these other states were revealed before my eyes. Sherap first alerted me to them when she spoke of "being in another dimension" and "losing all track of time" when at her altar. It was then that I began to perceive the *whole* of the shrine, and saw that it was so much more than the separate objects themselves, no matter how beautiful, evocative or symbolically potent they were.

The objects of each shrine had also created a space. A space that was an entranceway - a point of communication with those other states that the women had begun to tell me of. Each woman had used the familiar and personal objects of her home and natural surroundings to fashion transition places or border zones between the mundane material world of the everyday and what she envisioned lay beyond it. Their words all speak of things *other* than the ordinary round of daily activities and objects that we are party to in the material world. They speak of realms, states of consciousness or transcendent beings that all these women viewed as something they wished to connect with or invoke in some way. But they needed a way into these other worlds – so they made altars and shrines and special places.

However, once I had understood this way of approaching the shrine space as a portal, I became confused to discover that the various women were utilizing this connecting space in quite *different* ways. There were out-right contradictions in the ways they engaged with their evoked connections to this otherness and I saw that the spaces were not simply direct *conduits* to the transcendent. It became apparent that the shrines, as marginal spaces in *themselves,* had strong properties of their own which were having an impact on the objects and the women who used them.

Listening to what the women said about what happened to the objects that constituted their shrines it became clear that the properties these spaces exhibited were those of liminality. As I visited more home altars this function of liminality emerged as the primary action of each shrine space. Liminal spaces can be identified as those that mark and hold the place *between* realms. They occupy the place of transition and transformation as they sit on the edges and serve as the place of passage from one reality to another.

Christopher Steiner (2001:209) has called these *border zones* and highlights their characteristics as being

...deterritoralized space, pregnant with possibilities, situated between two cultural systems, where values and meanings are negotiated, transformed and rearranged. In the rapid transnational flow of culture, a flow that animates the world of material objects, the border zone offers a period of suspended animation – a liminal space between two worlds were category alternations and conceptual shifts are poised to occur.

He was speaking about such zones in relation to the international movement of objects between countries as commodities. But I have reproduced his description here as the psychologically liminal spaces of the women's shrines seemed to exist and operate in the very same way. Steiner has observed a place of suspended animation, a place that is not territory – a place where objects are made empty of some of their ownership and identity as

they pass between the places where they are owned and identified. I came to see that the creation of such border zones was the very work of shrine making for these women.

Victor Turner was an anthropologist who observed liminality intently in his seminal work **The Ritual Process** (1969) where he defined its characteristics in similar ways. In observing people as they moved in and out of liminal space he saw them as "necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space." (95) He described the way in which rituals produce a state of liminality where participants are literally "stripped" – of clothing, rank, sex, age, status and identity. Cut off from their "normative system of bounded, structures, and particularist groups" (110) all participants, no matter their social role, are made humble, anonymous and equal in what he called a ritual state of "communitas". Dialectically opposed to the normative state of structure, communitas is seen as the temporary state of a rite of passage which people undergo before emerging with a re-envisioned and re-vitalized sense of their place in the life of the culture (128).

Liminality and marginality are conditions in which are frequently generated myth, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art ... each of these productions has a multivocal character, having many meanings, and each is capable of moving people at many psychological levels simultaneously (129).

Again he has recorded the power of the liminal space to deconstruct and re-construct into something new. A place where things are changed because it is a place that is rich with new possibilities, exactly because the old is unseated and pulled apart. For both people and things can be stripped of their "identity" and have their "multivocal" quality released, enabling them to speak to each other with previously hidden voices, and so both be re-vivified and transformed.

Liminality de-stabilises and strips bare but, at the same time, it allows the possibility of re-configurement, so that objects may re-emerge from the transition completely transformed. We can see this in operation when we look at how the shrine site works in relation to memories - for all of the shrines I visited were places where objects were collected and held to remind the woman of people and things of the past. Nora (2001) described what they saw when they examined various types of memorials to past people and events -

Mixed, hybrid, mutant, bound intimately with life and death, with time and eternity; enveloped in a Mobius Strip of the sacred and the profane, the immutable and the mobile. For if we accept that the most fundamental purpose of the lieu de memoire is to stop time...it is also clear that (they) only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis (34).

Memories, like everything put into the liminal shrine space, became like a Mobius Strip where they had the paradoxical capacity of being able to unite opposites and take apart and recombine at the same time.

These mysterious and powerful properties of liminality may better be understood if we remember that traditionally, liminal places have been those that guard and permit the transition from our ordinary world or daily life to other worlds. Water, Air (and the fire, light or space that are part of it) and Earth all still exist in the lives of most humans as **liminal** spaces. Borders between life and death, the real and the unreal, the material and the spiritual, the eternal and the ephemeral, human and god. It is into the border mediums of water, fire and earth that we place our dead, surrounded by the objects of significance to them and us.

Mysterious and awesome places – places that we may be able to move in and out of temporarily but which we cannot dwell in. They will only harbour us for short sojourns and then we must return to "dry land" and "put our feet back on the ground" in the "hard light

of day". And yet we are dependent on them for our very survival. Out of the mystery of the harsh worlds of water, fire and earth come all that sustains us in this world.

Strange and alien places, but also familiar elements used by all peoples throughout time for their active properties. For what is it that all these elements do to those objects and people we consign to them? They de-constitute them, dissolve them, decompose and combust them. Material things cannot remain the same in these media. But in a paradoxical way because they are consumed and swallowed up by the medium, so they are held by it for all time. It encompasses, contains and houses them within its eternal presence. Yet, even as it holds them it is also capable of transforming them – for the person or things are carried through the border zone into what lies beyond. From water, air or earth they may be reborn as beings of another realm. Angels in Heaven, stars in the sky, monsters, animals or sprites of the deep, trees, hell-beings or nature beings of the earth.

Even these simple domestic shrines had this ability to connect and re-connect, to transform and reorientate in that liminal space between two worlds for as Kay Turner (1999), in her major study of women's domestic altar making, has observed each shrine is a

... threshold or gateway ... (that) evokes cathexis: the discharge of desire. A woman's altar, her self created threshold, exists between the physical and the spiritual and exists, moreover, between her sense of belief and her sense of need. Every approach to her altar activates a woman's desire for fulfillment, her desire to cross the gap between Self and Other for her own purpose (30).

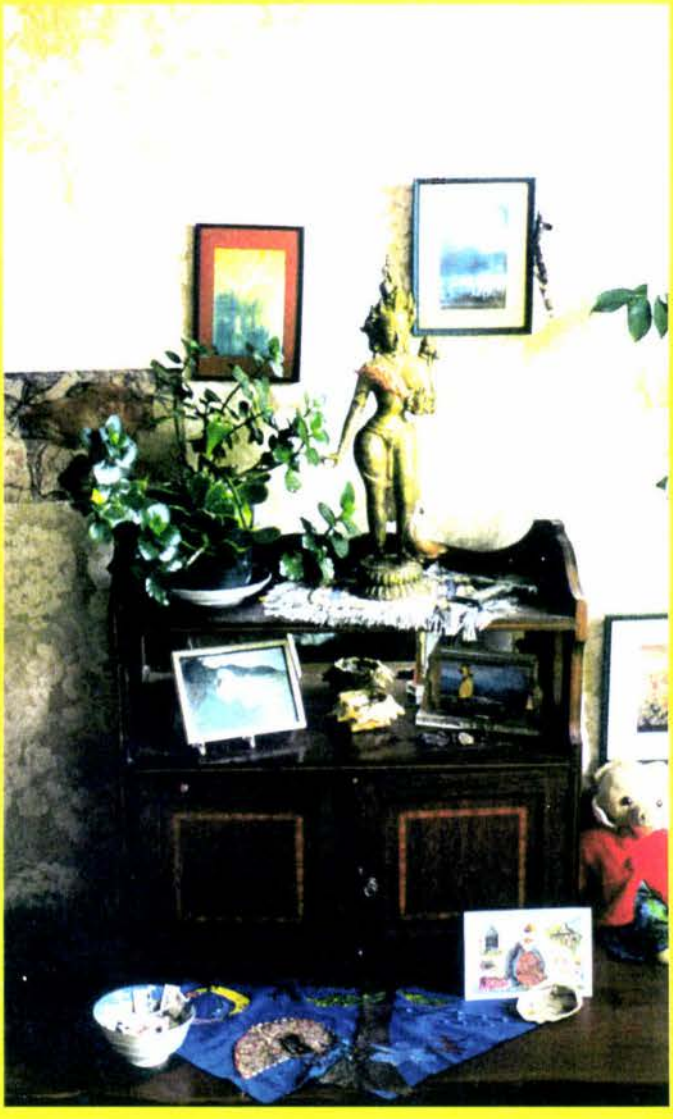
Field Journal: 13. 6. 03

This shrine (Karis) is so full of life and interest and beauty and spiritual/psychological richness. The glossy black-wood African bowl is about the "totality". The "top and the bottom – the union of heaven and earth." It sits under the photo of Jung. He would have really liked it. How is it that the whole universe can be here on this bookshelf beside the computer? Sherap said she was ringing her

cymbals out to the universe and that she lost all sense of time at her altar – something strange is happening to the things put into these private women's spaces. But the women are all so different and hold such differing beliefs. Maria was like a high priestess of the arts of the goddess doing magic with her bones and blood. April is a benign keeper of the hearth with her sister's old hankie basket and the pale blue and gold of the china bowl that connects her with her brother. They are aspiring to different ideals and doing such different things at their altars. Yet the impulse is the same, the space has the same feeling/quality to me when I come before it. Even if it is not my religion or my aesthetic I still feel such a sense of reverence at these places. Is it something about the place itself or is it just my respect and gratitude to these women who have opened these private spaces to me?

1.7.03. "Throwing stuff in the water has always had a strange appeal.....archaeologist Lindsay Allason-Jones said that she would recommend a water feature as fund raiser for any museum. It seems to be a common behaviour across time and cultures..... And there is a deep association between water and treasure, casting away the valuable into the liquid..... Archeologists reckon it's down to boundaries: water is liminal, a border between land and sky, other worldly. This was a place to commune with the gods and the dead." (New Scientist 2003). It's like a well. Like the cenotes we saw in the Yucatan that they found full of bones and treasures and domestic wares. The women cast things into their shrines. Is it the liminal I am responding to when I connect with these disparate spaces?

Karis
This black wood bowl from Africa "connects heaven and earth" and sits in pride of place along with a photo of Jung and a Christian icon of the Virgin Mary.



Hadia
The dancing goddess tends a space rich in liminality in this very personal bedroom shrine.

Hadia

invited to stand
in the stream of blessing
of lightness and inspiration
I come daily, in whatever form –
heart open or cast down by life
to revivify and purify my being
to honour my inner dance
with the divine beloved
I am child and crone and all between
I am mortal, yet I remember
to tend the inner flame

step up
and stay a while
the goddess
whispers,
breathe my ripeness
into your being
dance awhile
in divine silence,
breathe the beloved
who tends
the flame
of your inmost
shrine.

Sherap

With her Lama in the centre, two smalls bowls of water, central pot plant and cymbals that "ring out to the universe" Sherap would often find herself losing all track of time while at her altar.

Liminal Markers – Fashioning a Space to Contain Things

The driftwood is a part of nature that has traveled the seas. Peace Lilly is a beautiful living thing. The angels guard the edges. Fresh water keeps it clean. The candlelight brings it into sacred space. I come here on a full moon. The black stone grounds me.

Once I had observed this liminality in operation in these spaces I asked how was it exactly that these women had created such places and it was then that I became aware of the presence of certain types of objects represented repeatedly on these shrines. I have called these objects *liminal markers*.

Women put many things in and out of their shrine spaces but there were some structural things that appeared on every shrine and seemed to be stable elements that provided some kind of framework within which other types of objects moved more readily. These key things were objects that were symbolic of the three elements (water, air and earth) as described in the previous section and appeared to lend to the space some of the properties of those liminal elements themselves. They created and signalled the liminal. Once they had fashioned these types of objects into such spaces the women then became engaged in putting other things in and out of the space as if it were a container. Inside these boundaries objects seemed to be fundamentally altered by being positioned within the presence of these markers of the liminal.

These liminal markers could be small quantities of the material of the elements themselves, such as Sherap's two vases of water, that she was so disciplined about changing everyday, or the soil in a pot plant. It could be the range of candles that appeared on every shrine or the many natural objects or images of animals or beings or symbols associated with the elements of earth, air or water. The water element was represented in many ways, but empty liquid vessels were prominent among these on the women's shrines (cups, bowls, vases, jugs and water in small bowls.) Water smoothed driftwood and pebbles and bones.

Shells and starfish, fish, dolphins, whales, mermaids, coral and sand are also popular water symbols.

The earth element was marked on every woman's shrine by one or more of the following: pot plants, dried leaves, artificial flowers, floral motifs on objects and cloth. Rocks, stones, pebbles, crystals and gemstones. Drift wood or bones from the plants and animals of the earth. The air element was always represented on each shrine I observed and they were decorated with things that captured the qualities of sky, space, fire, smoke, ash, light, sound or heavenly beings. This was done with one or more of the following: candles, mirrors, matches, cymbals, incense, and sacred ash. Feathers were common as were angels but butterflies, moon or sun also featured. Rainbows, stars and birds are also popular signs of this element.

Most women used a range of markers representing the various elements but the concept of a shrine could be as simple as one liminal marker by itself. Liz was a woman who does not appear elsewhere in this study as she did not have a "shrine" to photograph – all she had was a beautiful large brass oriental style jug she called an urn. She kept it on her windowsill and used it to pour all her worries and problems into when she had "a head full of rubbish" at the end of each stressful day. She would then "visualize tipping it all out" into a limitless "cosmos that can take anything". This one object in itself could act to hold the liminal space and instrument all the properties necessary for a shrine space – as a vessel it represented the element of water and invoked the limitless emptiness of the air/space element as it was inverted and drained into the surrounding cosmos. It is interesting to note that Liz had just moved into this new house and was still in a state of disorganization – I am certain that when I return to her established home her liminal marker will no longer be alone on its shelf, as it will gather significant things within the space it has marked out as its liminal powers are used to work with other issues of her life.

Accordingly, the essential quality of all the altars studied was that they consisted of this *space* in which women could *put* things. The putting in and taking out of things, including

their own bodies, appeared to be the primary purpose of the shrines observed. Like the cauldron of the crone or the inverted omega symbol representing the pregnant emptiness of the universe (Walker 1985) the shrine needed to offer an empty space for the woman in order for it to function effectively and it was the liminal markers that set up and demarcated the boundaries of this space.

Though not always conscious of why they consistently selected such liminal markers to construct their shrines they did describe having a sense of "specialness" about these specific things. They handled them with care and thought and often love or reverence. Touching the smooth pebbles, colourful crystals and gems stones, rich wood or shiny leaves they admired their beauty and explained how they "knew" they were special and that this knowledge frequently resided deep in their body. Charged with powerful and complex meanings the women felt they then became worthy and suitable markers to create the liminality of "temenos" or sacred space (as it was termed by Karis in her poem).

Field Journal: 17.7.03

Now that I am looking for liminal elements I am seeing them everywhere! Feathers, shells, crystals, candles are everywhere! Actually all the paraphernalia you would find if you walked into Crystal Dreams (New Age shop in town) – everything in there from the dancing dolphins to the Native American dream catchers, lucky frogs and the glittering "fairy dust" are liminal markers! Commercialized liminality! Debased and exploited, but still it's always full of people wanting to buy that something that they can use to link them with the "other". No wonder Ruth is amused by all that stuff and laughs at the idea of feathers or shells on her altar. Yet the stones are there, the candles, the bowl in the centre like a witch's cauldron with its encompassing cloth. I don't think it would be possible to have a liminal space without at least one of these things....

22. 9. 03:

(After returning home from overseas). Airports are so liminal! Just in the way that Victor Turner said – everyone is stripped of their power and status and identity. In the departure lounge we are all reduced to anonymous boarding numbers as we are regimented into our rows of seats by the master of ceremonies in their uniforms. You can't tell what our professions are, our wealth, our motivations for travel. And the liminal markers here? (apart from the ubiquitous pot plants!) I guess it is all the sky/space/air elements – huge light windows reveal the great vehicles that will lift us all bodily up into the clouds. And these airports are certainly places to be undone and remade! Such coming and going of humanity – the farewells and meetings, the heightened emotions, the intense connections and the letting go as well as the confronting with your hopes and aspirations as you head off into what ever new place you find yourself in. No wonder airports have such a strange and surreal feeling!

Fiona

Beside the shrine shelf a large basket adorned with the liminal markers of a moon picture and wreaths of plant material provides a space for holding a myriad of precious things.

Maria

On the windowsill beside her shrine, stones, feathers and shells make a liminal holding-zone that protects the innate specialness of things when they are not actually in use on the shrine.

Spaces for Cloth – A Liminal Material

Cotton table runners. Silk and gauze scarves. Embroidered doilies. Lace place mats. Tapa cloth. Woven mat. Fringed tablecloth. Brocade shawl. Screen-printed and satin cushion covers. Velvet throw. Diamante cloth. Beaded hand purse. Patterned handkerchief.

A striking feature of all the spaces I observed was that they were constructed with the use of cloth. Moreover, it appeared that the liminality of the space increased as the use of cloth increased. For April, Ruth, Jean and Laura it was a hand embroidered or lace doily or runner that in many cases was a piece of handwork from a female relative. For Hadia, Sherap, Lovely and Karis it was some small cloth chosen for its beauty, association with other significant women, their homeland or simply for its perceived beauty. Each cloth was chosen to demarcate and hold the base of the shrine space, specifically to shield and separate it from the ordinary spaces below it. Most wanted to draw a line between the mundane objects contained in the spaces below - Laura laughed when recognizing that her cloth was quite definitely to protect her space from the non-liminal things of her husband's underwear drawer! April had a small cloth on only one corner of her dresser, but acknowledged that the chest itself was a special gift to her and housed a lot of special personal things so her shrine did not seem to need that base of protection from the things mundane world.

For Maria the whole shrine was constructed of cloth and it was an object of reverential attention in itself. On her minimalist winter-honouring seasonal shrine she drew my attention to the rich redness of the glossy velvety material that dominated the arrangement - symbolic of the "mother" aspect of the goddess she invoked. The rest of the space was composed of the twinkling cloth that was the black of the "crone" aspect that also represented the darkness and death of going down into winter. Maria spoke with relish about the empty space formed under the table and shielded by the altar cloth – here she

secreted "special" treasures like books to secure and honour them until she could find the time to partake of their secrets.

Sherap honoured and framed her whole shrine with the white kartak or scarf of Tibetan Buddhism, given as a gift and returned as a blessing, while rich cloth held her prayer books and beads. The same type of kartak framed the sides of Jean's altar table along with a cloth depicting an image of one incarnation of her guru along with holy script. Two cloth-covered cushion-covers marked the base of the shrine and protected the images of his sacred feet from the floor. Hadia's shrine table was centered by her unfinished embroidery cloth that she had begun with close women friends at a women's gathering, while diaphanous scarves (that do not appear in the photo) draped the surrounding wall decorations and delineated the boundaries of her altar wall. For Karis a simple hand woven cloth covering a table was all she required to define what she termed the "female space" in her therapy room. A tapa on an accompanying table recalled her homeland (not shown in the photograph).

The varied and beautiful pieces of fabric themselves were acting as liminal markers employed to stake-out, protect and define the actual shrine space. Cloth's flowing, encompassing and covering characteristics could mimic water, air and earth and its special qualities made it a versatile and potent element on every shrine. Like all the things on the shrines the pieces of cloth also had other meanings - holding memory, holding family, protecting and separating, concealing, honouring, decorating, displaying and demonstrating connection to other women or places - but prime among these was their role as liminal marker.

Cloth of course has a long history of use in ritual activities and rites of passage. Its liminal qualities are easily experienced when we think of the power of the veil. It has the properties of being able to separate yet contain, dispose yet hold. Enshrouded in its mystery things can undergo metamorphosis and be unveiled as transformed. It has the paradoxical power of being able to hide as well as display, protect as well as reveal at the same time (think of the

art of gift wrapping or the bride in her special attire). The shroud or winding cloth, the swaddling cloth, the marriage veil, and the consummation sheet are just some of the more obvious uses of the liminal cloth in human ritual.

My observations also illustrated the use of cloth as a woman's medium and it was the women themselves who evoked their fabric's connection to other specific women or women in general. As Weiner and Schneider (1989) have recorded in their major work on cloth and human experience - "the predominance of women in cloth production and distribution in many parts of the world is linked to the widespread symbolic systems in which cloth evokes female power"[3] (21) for "you are basically talking about the nature of life and social life and keeping people together. And that's why women are primarily the agents of cloth." (Weiner 2001:285). The women in this study were no exception and even when not conscious of their usage of cloth they had employed its many qualities, not least its property as a portrayer of liminality, to fashion, adorn and empower their personal shrines. Many used its imagery in their poems and profiles – like Laura, who called herself by only 13 descriptive words, one of them being "Quilter." Or Ruth, who called herself a "lover of fabrics" and a "weaver of the threads of light and shadow".

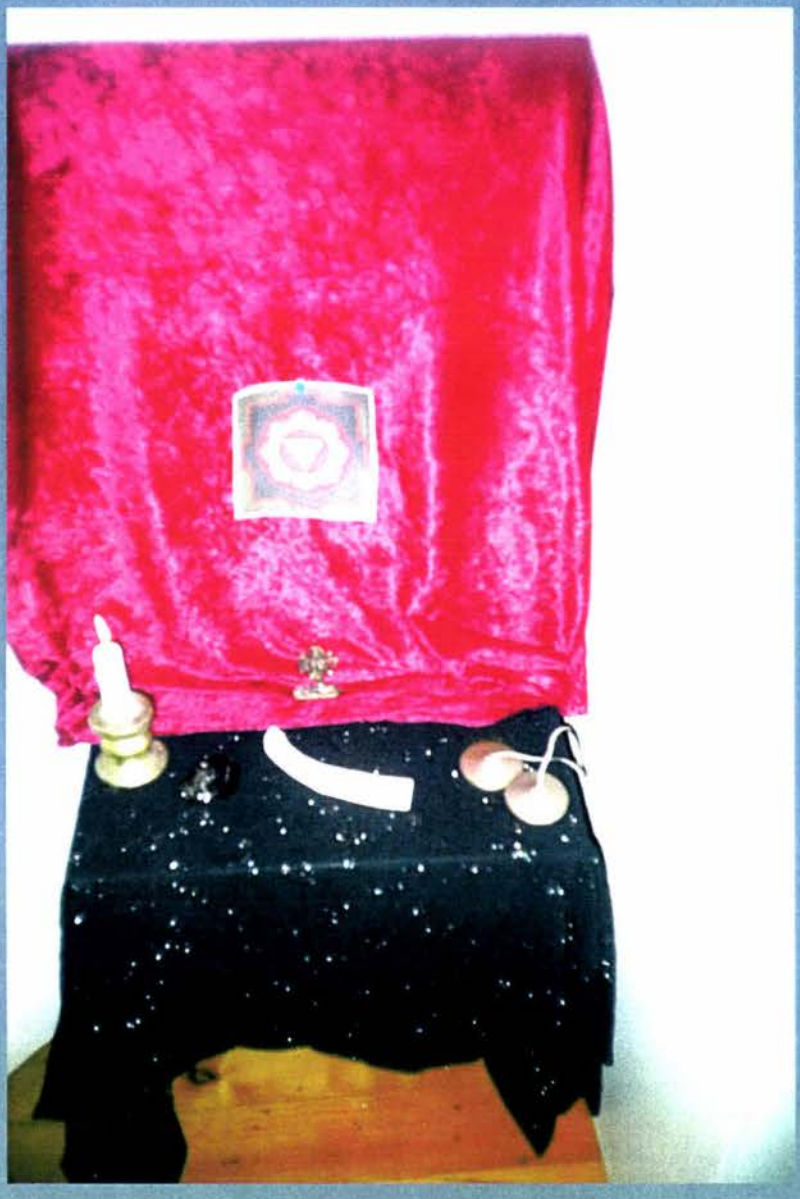
Field Journal: 22.5. 03

This shrine (Maria) has had a strong impact on me at what feels like a really deep level. I found it the most liminal of the shrines – yet it is so simple. It's mainly cloth. The secret space under the table speaks to me – a special place to hideaway books that are waiting to tell their secrets. It reminds me of how I wrap my most special dharma books in a cloth to keep them by my bed. Or the old paintings by Dutch Masters showing women reading cloth draped bibles. Somehow the methodical wrapping and unwrapping seems very soulful. I imagine a robed monk doing it....

[3] Weiner and Schneider's major work on cloth and human experience gives a fascinating overview of this fact and strives to counteract the neglect of fabric as an ethnographic subject as it asserts women's mastery and abiding relationship with the medium.

5.11.03:

Reading Greek myths and legends and just discovered that the youngest of the Fates – the three goddesses of destiny – is called *Clotho*. She is the "maiden" of the Maiden, Mother, Crone triple aspect of the divine feminine and sits spinning out the thread of life. Atropos, the crone, cuts if off with her shears! What could be more liminal than that space where the fabric of life is created and shaped and cut? The feminine body of the goddess is this very site! The goddess is liminal. The Goddess is Cloth!



Maria
A shrine constructed from liminal fabric with the bone, the triangle symbol and the black rock representing her own body. A tiny statue of the goddess Kali presides.

Ruth

I am a 46-year-old New Zealand born woman with strong Scottish and Irish roots – a beloved soul-mate and friend, a cherished mother, an inspired writer (all on good days, of course!), a lover of fabrics and colour and words and textures; all things beautiful. Yet the shadow is always near and I embrace it as best I can – my work lies in weaving the threads of light and shadow to bring lives into focus and consciousness. I name myself as Dark Mother – a midwife at the threshold of death. I am warm and cold, fair and irrational, strong and custard bellied, focused and scattered – I am everything and nothing in the scheme of things. I trust the Spiritual World, even when I don't understand the impulses that come out of it.

Lovely

On the piano top in the family lounge this space is not private but the liminal is still signalled by the two framing plants, the candles and the small lace cloth under one vase.

Summary to Chapter 1

Women are fashioning their own liminal spaces within their homes. Using cloth and precious and personal everyday objects of the house and nature they re-create the properties of the liminal elements of the natural world. These spaces are capable of containing the things they put in and out of them and acting upon them in particular ways.

Chapter 2: The Practice of Shrine Use

Spaces of Cleaving – Letting Go and Holding Fast

Purification of body and soul. I hand it over. Let go of hassles. I just offer up my fears. It's for releasing.

Needs to be held in that sacred place. Need to be with him, put them in his care. I connect with myself – Buddha, universe. My family surrounds me here. Shrines are points of stability.

As described above the shrine space exhibits the properties of liminality and the most important of these properties is its paradoxical ability to both *hold fast* and also *let go* at the same time. A study of the objects put into the shrine space revealed each woman to be using her shrine specifically to *bond* and *unite* herself with things, people and ideas and also to *separate* and *free* herself from the same. The shrine seemed capable of doing both – some shrines acted primarily in one way or the other, while others did both at the same time or both at different times. I have called this paradoxical quality of liminal space *cleaving* because this word implies its own antonym - where *to cleave* two things is to bind them in union and also to split them apart. It is a word that carries its opposite within in itself, for cleavage between two things denotes their separation, but the separation has no meaning unless it embodies the idea of the original state of the two things as bound together at some point.

April's special place seemed to be strongly about *holding* – with pictures of her family proudly and lovingly arrayed it was dominated by a recent photo of her with her husband. The arrangement was described by her as a "picture of myself" and was a loving display of all she held dear in her world. She didn't want to collect pictures of ancestors in this space as she felt they needed to be "let go" and "not held back" by being trapped there, but

it did feature her children as she clearly wished to maintain her connection to them. Ruth's space on the other hand represented the opposite of this and seemed to be much more about *letting go*. Ruth was puzzled about why one would want to keep pictures of one's children or husband in the shrine space when I mentioned that some women did. Her mother, however, *was* represented in a delicate inlaid box, but she explained she currently had a troubled relationship with her and stated how she would often come to her shrine when she had had a "nutty" phone conversation with her. In this way it was a place to bring negative feelings and clear or cleanse them. A place to settle and off-load the "craziness" sometimes aroused by the vicissitudes of life. At the very centre of her shrine was a lovely dish she used to place "shite" (little hand-written notes about niggles or problems or issues she wanted to remove from her life and thoughts). Covered by cloth these concerns could be safely disposed of in this place. The bowl still harboured a few scraps of paper that Ruth read with a laugh, for so effectively had the shrine worked to dispose of them that she had totally forgotten their content.

Generally most of the women seemed to use their shrine spaces for roughly equal activities of holding fast or letting go. When a past colleague died Sherap, in an act typical of most of the shrine makers, placed her picture on her shrine - "in the company of her guru and the great figures of the Buddhist lineage" to "help her in her transition into death." The picture was removed when "the time was right" and Sherap was able to let her friend go. However, at the same time her shrine held a picture of her son who had recently had an accident and needed to be supported and held onto at a time of perceived fragility. Pictures and objects representing deceased friends and relatives were displayed on the periphery of her altar so that it could act to hold onto their presence while simultaneously acting to release them. Similarly, Laura connected to her distant homeland of family and childhood in the U.S.A. Karis connected herself to Carl Jung, her role model and inspiration in her work as a psychotherapist, by means of his photograph positioned in the central space at the top of her shelves. Hadia's shrine had a strong quality of holding "time" as it recreated aspects of her childhood with her teddy bear and playful treasures in a bedroom "just like the one I had as a girl."

In this way the shrine space could also act as a place where each woman encountered herself and had her own self-identity reflected and affirmed. By attaching or separating to different aspects of themselves they were able to create and maintain before their gaze a dynamic picture of who they perceived themselves to be or who they aspired to be. April's poem strongly captures this sense, with the display of treasures being a conscious representation of herself. Maria's, in a less overt way, was also clearly about establishing her own identity and actively working with it as she strove to cleave with archetypes of deep significance in her evolving sense of selfhood. Laura was strong in her statement that her dressing table collection was, indeed, where she "dressed" herself and created the self she met the world with - an arrangement of things that she vigilantly protected from what seemed, at times, like a world indifferent to her personal existence. With its power of cleaving the shrine could be a potent place for encountering, affirming and working with the self and most shrine spaces had one or more objects that appeared to be primarily about cleaving to the self.

Hadia's held markers of the major elements of her life with pictures and objects representing her childhood, her son, her spiritual teacher and her relationship with her partner. Fiona had an entire round basket table top, along aside her shrine hearth, that was essentially a collection and display of cards and presents from a by-gone birthday (a bottle of wine, coffee mugs and other things given to her by special people) - still with their decorative wrappings and ribbons and garlanded by rose petals, wheat sheaves and laurel leaves that had long dried and turned to brown. Held in time since that special day these objects seemed to capture and secure there at the end of Fiona's bed the "self" that had been the recipient of such lovely gifts. The poems of both these women spoke powerfully of how their shrines depicted different aspects of themselves and, like Karis's poem, they portrayed the shrine as about their "life" and a representation of their inner self.

However, on the other end of the continuum, Lovely's space seemed to contain nothing that spoke of her own individual identity – more public and shared with the family it had none of the personally precious or deeply symbolic objects that were so common on other shrines. Jean's shrine was also less adorned with such objects, focusing primarily on honouring and promoting her attachment to her spiritual master it was also used by *others* when she hosted group puja in her house. Interestingly these two, least personal of the shrines, were both in the more communal sitting rooms (rather than bedrooms) and each of these women specifically referred to *another* place they had where they kept a special picture of their deity. These places were in their bedrooms. Too intimate for my inspection, or not classified by them as "a shrine", it was never-the-less apparent to me as they spoke that both women also maintained a deeper layer of things in an even more private space. It could be that such spaces held more of the personally potent objects, more deeply linked with their own encounters with self, like those I observed in the other bedrooms of this study.

Both Fiona and Karis echoed the holding power of the liminal space by referring to it as an anchor. While Fiona reinforced the theme of the shrine space as a power place for holding to things by firmly stating that her personal place was "not for dead people" and that she had another whole space where she placed images and memories of those she was farewelling. Ruth too, used her shrine space to hold on to dear dead friends whose pictures were arranged on its periphery (not shown in the photo) some distance from the bowl at its centre.

Sometimes it was *one* object in itself that seemed capable of acting to both unite and separate at once when used in liminal space. Maria stroked the bleached bone and articulated that it was connecting her to the dark goddess of death; while at the same time separating her from her own changing body as she moved into middle age - the bone placed on the altar was a giving up of her temporal self while at the same time being a mediation object that united her with the Great Mother. In the space of her altar she was able to connect herself with this idea, this feeling – hidden and denied in other parts of her

home and her day as a suburban homemaker and mother. In the dissolving medium of this threshold space between two worlds each of these women was able to loosen the things they did not want in their lives and strengthen their bond with their chosen ideals and people.

Field Journal: 13. 6. 03.

Ruth says she is letting go of shite, Sherap is letting go of her ego and her dead friend! Her son is right there at the centre of her shrine and she is letting go of her fears for him while at the same time clearly holding on to him with all her motherly might! I do the same with pictures of mum. Jean slips pictures of Swami behind photos of loved ones "to put them in his care". There is so much attachment here and yet so much conscious letting go and handing over. Thought I was seeing a pattern here about shrines affirming and manifesting the self, but now I am confused because its not just about building up a kind of image of oneself – its much more complex and messy! I've seen half the shrines now and can't see any pattern - I'll just have to go with it and see what else I discover at the next shrines.

April

Pleasing to her eye – this collection is a lovingly tended reflection of self amidst family.

April

MYSELF

Standing erect in "Dancer's Pose"
She stands, my statuette,
Myself

This is her space, her altar
Her honouring of herself
Myself.

Peace Lilly graces the dresser
Cushions, shining green, living
A reminder for the world,
Myself

Gifts from Loved Ones, placed
carefully on dusted polished surface
reminders of being loved
and those she loves
from present and past
Photos of those most precious to her,
Myself

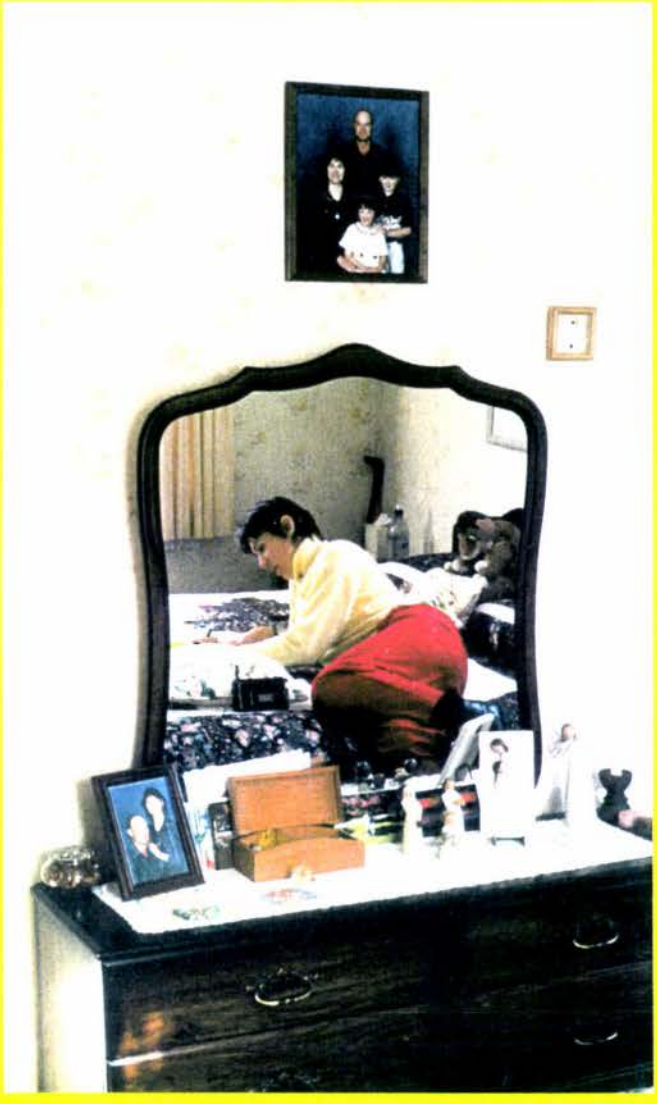
"Hidden Treasure" tucks behind
and Angel
stands in golden splendor
forever with her,
Myself

Adorned mirror, gift from her soulmate,
reflects herself to herself,
Myself

Pleasing to her eye, this arrangement of things important to her,
Myself

Her "centering place"
Her soulful place
Her space
MY SPACE

And a candle to Light the Way.

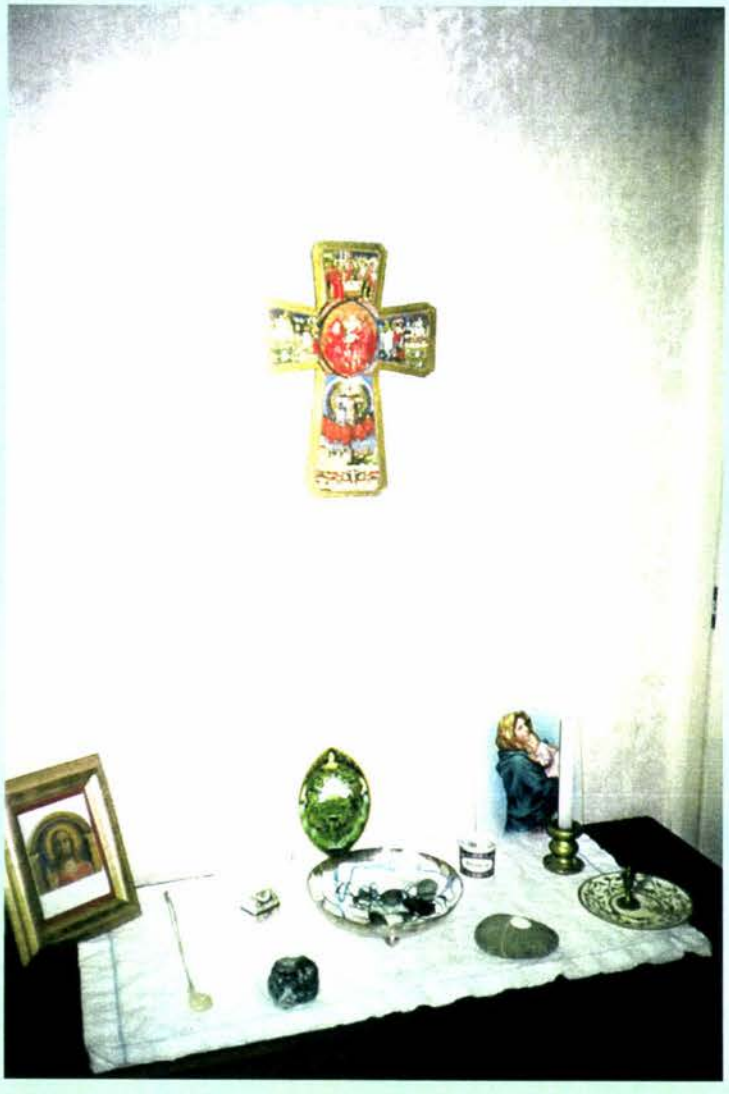


Laura

With a row of angels guarding the hope, light and love of home and hearth this shrine holds strongly to family both near and distant in time and place.

Maria

- **Woman**
- **Ritual Maker**
- **Goddess Worshipper**
- **Yogi**
- **Mother**
- **Wife**
- **41**
- **Polish/Catholic ancestry**



Ruth

With no family pictures and an open receptacle at its centre this shrine can be a powerful place of letting go.

Lovely

I am married with 2 children and am 38 years old. This is my 5th year in NZ and we came to NZ from South Africa. Originally I am from India.

Spaces to Still the Senses – A Beautiful Collection

I need to see them! Beauty. Smiling. Gaze. Silent. Spaciousness. Relaxing. Beautiful. Grace. Precious. Rich. Elegant. Calm. Treasures. Attuned. Interesting. Soulful. Special. Serenity. Peaceful. Simple. Pause. Whole. Centered. Calm. Aware. Empty. Safe. Focused. More present. Pleasing to the eye.

As I visited these domestic shrines each woman revealed to me a specific space in her domestic landscape that she really liked. A space she felt to be very appealing to her, a place that was a repository for things of beauty and specialness. It was immediately apparent that each woman in this study had fashioned spaces that would capture and arrest her senses and produce bodily felt aesthetic experiences. This was achieved in numerous and individual ways but each altar space was consciously positioned to catch and rest the woman's eye, to satisfy her sense of beauty and structure and arrest all her senses with objects of appeal.

Each woman described how her shrine was a collection of things that she found to be beautiful, lovely and attractive. Natural objects, faces of beloved people or beings and works of art and craft. Each woman smiled, her face softening as she described the precious things of her altar. She touched them lovingly or generously allowed me to hold and admire her chosen things. The shrine space was a place for beautiful objects and was also decorated to enhance their beauty - embroidery, flowers, glossy leaves, crystal, glass, pottery, china, porcelain, gilt, bronze, silver, silk, jewelry, precious stones, carved, turned, and polished wood, inlaid stone and metal, decorated ornate frames, paua shell, weaving, tapestry, beads, tassels, brocade, lace, satin, velvet, glitter, gold. Embellishment, texture, detail, design, colour, gloss, richness, delicacy, sheen and depth - each shrine displayed at the very least three of these elements, usually most of them all brought together within the confines of the special space.

Nadia Seremetakis (1994) has written of the importance of these everyday sensory experiences over time and called them "moments of stillness or sensory stasis" (9). Quite suddenly we can find that our ordinary flow of inner monologue and sensations are interrupted by a direct sensory experience of things "embedded in (the) material culture" (vii) that surrounds us. Elicited by the work of the senses these moments of quiescence serve to "halt the customary unfolding of everyday life by generating other languages against the blanketing of commonsensical codes that rationalize the skimmed experience of the everyday as totality" (12). As she describes the old Greek man halting from his daily labours under the midday sun for his ritual cup of coffee she says there are substances, spaces and times that can trigger this stillness. The aroma of the coffee beans, the sun on your back or, for the women in this study, the glow of a candle, the scent of incense, the sight of the form of the beloved - the senses are captured and arrested and the whole bodily experience of the woman is re-experienced in some different way.

Articles invested with sensory memory...are frequently non-synchronous: they are out of the immediate continuum of social constructed material presence and value (12). For these moments reveal hidden substances of the past. It is the very absence of referents, surfaces and textures that lifts them out of the banality of structural silence imposed by a cultural order and allows a previously by-passed content to be released as history (17).

Here the "structural silence" is the one created by the property of liminality operating in the shrine spaces where all the imposed meanings and associations of an object are cleansed. In the more organic encompassing silence allowed by the liminal space the *things* may begin to speak in new and different ways. Each woman has organised her shrine to grab her body's attention, to capture and halt her everyday flow of sensory input and redirect her into a new quality of sensory inflow.

Once the eyes were arrested by the visual appeal of the space the women then employed other means to more fully engage their senses if they desired a more prolonged interaction with their shrine. Most lit a candle to produce some kind of effulgence that radiated an

embracing atmosphere that included them in the space. Maria used incense to "create the atmosphere" and Ruth wrapped herself in a very special shawl while April's "favourite" was to cuddle into bed with the candle on. Warm, embraced, safe and drawn in by the candle glow or incense the more of their senses they could "arrest" the stronger their immediate experience of their shrine. Sherap used the chime of her cymbals to take her more deeply into that "other dimension" that she felt could not be described in words.

The effort women go to in order to engage their senses and create a full bodily experience at their special space can be illustrated by an example from the book by Celine Kearney (1997) in which New Zealand women talk about the spiritual rituals of their lives. In it one of her informants says "I like to bathe at night with candles and incense and oils in the bath; it's a very spiritual experience for me. When I take off my clothes and climb into the hot water and sink into the scent and the steam, there is a feeling of release and surrender". An investigation of the use of the domestic bathroom in this way is beyond the scope of this study but many women have mentioned to me how they liked to create special baths and that they were an element in their spiritual practice. This research demonstrates that these women are using controlled sensory stimuli in the same way to engage all their senses and so better enter into the liminal spaces they create within their ordinary domestic environment and routines. Darkness, candle light, incense and sometimes flower petals and music all help to produce sensory stillness that transform the quintessentially functional and mundane family bathroom into a liminal space.

It is worth noting there the special power water has as a liminal element. It has an especially strong quality of being able to activate all the bodily senses at once and so is a powerful tool in drawing in and arresting the body. Of all the liminal elements water may safely and effectively touch or cover all parts of the body, it may be taken internally and can be stored, handled, made hot or cold or mixed with other materials with ease. It offers a strong textural experience for the sense of touch and kinesthetic awareness and provides equally strong visual or aural stimulation with its own distinctive sounds and response to light and movement.

I believe it is for this reason that liquids of all varieties appear on shrines and altars of all spiritually informed traditions. Vessels of all shapes and sizes act as symbolic representations of the water element or are used to carry the sanctified water that is employed for blessings and purifications. Many religious traditions include the full immersion in a body of water as one of their fundamental rites. In these rituals the liminal quality of water symbolically performs its action of cleaving – separating us from our negative qualities and "stains" in purification while at the same time showering upon us the positive attention and qualities of the blessings of the attending deities. This is the same water these ordinary women daily grappled with in their dishwashing, clothes washing, surface cleaning, body washing, plant and garden care. Their houses and their days were never without the vessels, machines and activities of water and they were also able to utilize the liminal qualities of that same water by representing it on their altars or immersing their whole bodies in it in at special times of the day or night. Water is the main liminal element available and used in the modern home and the one most capable of touching and stimulating all the bodily senses in the daily context.

With the carefully arranged aesthetic appeal of their shrines capable of captivating and stilling the senses these women were able to enter into its liminal boundaries and experience something of its effects. Even if it was Laura's quick reassuring glance in her harried morning routine or Ruth's deep breath after a disturbing phone call it was a place that had the power to arrest the ordinary flow of conscious through its appeal to the senses - be it for a brief moment or for a protracted period of meditation.

The altar is a made thing and a process of making. It is an intentional gathering of symbolic objects, each having their own purpose but each combining with others to elicit a visually compelling whole. Like any work of art an altar is a product of choice and strategy, an attempt to transpose contradictory materials through arrangement, embellishment and so on, in the endeavor to create meaning (Turner 1999: 39).

Field Journal: 22.5.03

(Hadia) Floral wall paper, dust, autumn light, gaudy treasures, precious trinkets, coloured beads, mistress Teddy in her red knitted cardi and the faded yellow of the candlewick bedspread on the maiden's bed. She has rescued you all by making this into a "girl's bedroom." Like two girls curled on the floor she opened the shrine cupboard and showed me her treasure box. I loved it! Fascination. Sensory pleasure. Somehow the light and the smell took me straight back to my own girlhood.

Hadia

Storage spaces were often an integral part of the shrine and provide an inner space full of precious treasures.

Laura

Born May 1963

Woman/girl

Mother/daughter/sister

Wife/lover

Friend

Quilter/cook/homemaker/gardener

Lover of Nature and horses, dogs and birds

Karis

Cards and pictures of images that attract the eye along with gold decorated ornaments and things of natural beauty like shells, feathers and star fish provide an aesthetically pleasing place to hold medicines and other precious objects.

Spaces to Experience Embodiment – How it Feels

I had a yearning to make a shrine. It feeds my heart. It attracts healing energy. It feels special.

It wasn't the right place for it. If it feels right I put it there. It felt wrong, like sacrilege – I was irritated!

If the shrine creation and engagement was primarily about the putting of things in and out of a liminal space, then the woman's body was first among those things. Most of the special places reverted to nothing more than an idiosyncratic juxtaposition of interesting or aesthetically pleasing objects when the woman herself was not engaging with them. Unless the woman put her own *body* consciously in to the configuration of objects its powers remained latent and it remained closed as a portal to the liminal. It was at her shrine that she would stop to experience herself within her body. Here she would check in with herself and monitor her own emotional and health status and perhaps strive for the kinds of transformations that she may call "healing".

One of the major ways to heighten and fulfill the bodily investment in the shrine activity was to fill it with other bodies. For it is with other bodies that our own body engages most powerfully and our response to another body always involves a corresponding reaction from our own. Therefore, it was no surprise that the only other major category of things that I recorded on these altar spaces was, of course, the images of *other* bodies. Representations of other people - artwork, photographs, statues, figurines, iconography and holographic images. Faces, eyes, hands, feet. Lovely's winking holographic Christ/Mary. Karis's photograph of Jung. Jean's two images of her guru in two different bodies. Masters, deities, mentors, husbands, lovers, children, deceased friends. These various bodies represented those whom the women wished to be linked with – those people and ideals they strove for, those people they wished to be bound in relationship

with. Sherap and Jean spoke of "cuddling" and "cradling" the photos of their lama or guru at times of need, while Fiona just loved to look at the beautiful bodies of her children displayed in various stages of their development from infancy. Her shrine was also decorated with hearts of all types, each one touching the same place in her own body. Gazing and touching they connected their own bodies to those of others.

The shrine space needed to speak to and appeal to the body of its maker. It needed to produce a physical reaction within her. She needed to see others in their physical form – to talk to their faces, hold them in her hands and touch them with her tears or her fingertips. There was no shrine space that did not contain images of the human body. In fact Maria's space, which had the fewest actual bodily forms depicted on it, was in fact the altar most powerfully described as being about the human body more than anything else. The Hindu yantra triangle picture was, she said, a representation of the breasts and genitals of a woman. The white bone represented the inner structure of her own form while the tiny central statue was the goddess Kali - the Crone herself, with bloodied human body parts attached to her own dancing body.

The predominance of *female* bodies amongst the images on the shrines was not then unusual given that these were the bodies the women felt they could most strongly identify with. Karis caressed her beautiful stone as she explained that it was "petragenatrix" that was the stone body of Mother of the Earth, of which we are all a part. Strikingly, all the shrines had some image on them of a goddess symbol, except those of the Indian master Sai BaBa (though it has been explained to me that he has an androgynous presence with his big hair and long robe and that many of his devotees relate to him in his female aspect). The Chinese goddess of compassion Kwan Yin, Hindu goddesses or the Catholic Blessed Virgin Mary featured on shrines that were otherwise distinctly non-religious. The same picture of the Virgin Mary, nestling the small child close to her body, appeared on or surrounding four different shrines and images of Kwan Yin featured on another three. Hindu goddesses appeared on three others and in all but one the traditional goddess characters were not being directly linked with the religious affiliations of the woman. Ruth

and Karis explained that they chose female deities to counteract the maleness of their religious traditions or the shrine space itself. Ruth had identified her inspiration as the Christian wisdom deity Sophia and central to her shrine was a beautiful illustration of the divine female as Gaia or Mother Earth. Sherap was adamant that she had a picture of Kwan Yin on her otherwise exclusively Tibetan Buddhist shrine (with its many pictures and statues of male teachers and deities) because there were "too many men" and it was the "goddess form of a woman's body" that she personally felt "related to". There are, of course, female Tibetan Buddhist goddess forms, but Sherap had chosen this picture of the strong and graceful Kwan Yin because she was "beautiful".

Central to this experience of embodiment felt at the shrine was each woman's repeated description of things on the altar space that "just felt right". When probed on why certain objects were on the shrine (or sometimes, more significantly, why certain things were *not* permitted there or had been removed) over and over again they would shrug their shoulders and say it just "felt" as if it didn't belong or wasn't right. On consideration the deepest they could take this response was to identify it as a bodily feeling – one felt in their "guts", their "heart" or their "soul".

Hadia quickly moved her teddy back to its original corner on the table after I had held it and replaced it incorrectly. She jumped up from her place and deftly re-positioned it – a strong physical response to something her body instantly informed her did not feel right. Jean spoke of the brass cat that she could not tolerate on the shrine for long and was not happy until it was consigned to the coffee table. Her whole body tensing and recoiling as she recalled the time she "just cringed" when the holy sandals of her guru were placed on their orange pillow *directly* on the ground by a well-intentioned visitor. It continued to disturb her bodily until she purchased a special cloth to place the pillow on. When asked if there was anything on her shrine space that didn't belong there Karis rushed at it with energy and grabbed a vase she immediately claimed was "just a gift" from some family friends and didn't belong there. It did belong on the windowsill – attractive and enjoyed, it did not feel "special" enough to be on her shrine space. Maria would not let anyone else

touch the objects on her shrine and if they did she had to "re-charge" them with her own bodily energy by holding and rubbing them before they were returned to their place. The presence of homeopathic medicine bottles, verbutti (sacred healing ash) and aromatherapy oils further reinforced the notion of the shrine as a place where women encountered their own bodily feelings and that could therefore also be linked to the transformation of bodily healing.

It would take a longer and more focused study than this to investigate the role of the woman's body as a liminal space in itself and correspondingly as a liminal marker in society in general. However, it was impossible for me to be unaware of the link between the creation of liminality and the feminizing of the places chosen for shrines. Even Lovely's special space on top of the family piano in the family lounge, the least liminal of those studied, was undoubtedly a place that had been created and tended by a woman – with its arrangements of pot plants, china ornaments, candles and children's precious things. Most of the shrines were, of course, housed in the woman's bed room and there presence had to be negotiated in relation to the man that most of them shared that room with. Both Maria and Laura were assertive about how they rapidly expelled any object of their male partner's from the space by their bed where they had their shrine. His car keys left on the dressing table, his suitcases straying onto her side of the bed were not acceptable in that space. Sherap, along with Maria and Laura, were quite conscious of the power of their own bodies in relation to their shrine spaces. Maria described the liminal power of her woman's body itself as she places herself in the shrine space and "activates" it with her presence. Sherap spoke of how she moved her shrine from the narrow space directly beside her bed as she felt she may be in some way offending it when her body, partially clad, climbed across it as she got in and out of bed. Laura was conscious that her space was intimately involved with her daily activities of dressing, preparing her face and hair and that this gave the space more female power and ownership.

Ruth said she let her husband use her altar with her at times, but with her consent and she was certain that it was *her* space and not for her children. Others managed the issue of

their personal female space in differing ways. Karis's consultation room was separate from the main house and not used by her husband and Hadia maintained a separate bedroom from her male partner. Lovely's was used by the whole family at the times they sat before it and prayed or sang together. April's husband supported her in her use of her space in ways like extinguishing the candle if she fell asleep while communing with her altar from her bed. The other women in the study did not share their homes with other adults at the time.

So, a woman's domestic shrine is a place for her body. A place of healing, checking in to how the body is coping under the demands of everyday life. A place to experience the struggle with life that is manifested within her own body and between the bodies represented there and, hopefully, experience the feeling of serenity and inner calm that can be described no other way than as a physical sensation. Placed in the shrine space, her body, and those of others, may be freed from their daily imperatives and the pragmatics of time and space and re-united with its highest aspirations. Hadia, Maria, Ruth and April all used the imagery of the dancing body in relation to their shrine - sensuous, invigorating, empowering, flowing and encompassing - this one image of movement says so much about the experience of embodiment as understood by each person. Made open and softened by the security and tranquility of the shrine space or ripped apart by the raw power of the truth she confronts there, the woman permits and risks deeply felt bodily experiences.

Field Journal 13.7.03:

It has been a long time since I last saw Jean. Have only spoken to her on the phone since mum died. When I finally saw her lovely and artistic shrine it was strangely comforting to recognize the faces on it. The house was full of familiar pictures and some of them were my mother's. She talked a lot about connecting with the eyes of her Guru. How she "looks into his eyes" and just "has a little talk with him". It was good to see those eyes again and the images in the paintings that

were from my past. That night I dreamed my mum came to meet me in the high wood panelled hallway of Jean's old house.

Fiona

A mosaic of photos of her twin children as they have moved through the stages of their lives along with heart decorated objects, this shrine acts as a celebration of the bodies most important in Fiona's life.

Fiona

I am a middle aged pakeha woman of Celtic/French decent sixth generation New Zealander. I enjoy creating shrine like cubbies in my home as an expression of honouring the divine in all things. The divine comes in the form of beauty simplicity and usability and last but not least relationships both personal and omnipresent.

Maria

Woman
is the altar
She
is the centre the
Source
of all that is
Her
body creates
Her
breath destroys
She
births the light
She
dances the darkness.

Every day in
joy or
pain I
Kneel and
listen, I
play.

Jean

Faces and feet and hands of her master lovingly portrayed and displayed in this shrine.

Places to be Transposed – Uplifted and Grounded, Moved and Touched

Uplifted. Peaceful. Focused. Grounded. Struggle. Happy. Sad. Safe. Pray. Sing. Breathe. Contemplate. Cry. Listen. Empty. Conscious. Painful. Spaciousness. Silent. Grateful. Loved. Supported. Focused. Frightened. Centered. Challenge. Comforted. Remember what is important.

These were some of the words used by each woman to describe the ways she engaged with her altar space and how she felt when doing so. It is therefore a place where these women could find themselves confronted by some profound feelings.

Over and over again each woman spoke of going to her shrine experiencing one bodily state and leaving it aware of a different sensation within herself. Frequently she would leave her shrine feeling uplifted or grounded. Often she would come to it in one mood or with one feeling and leave it with another. Sometimes contact with her shrine would open her to painful or discomforting emotions. Hadia speaks of her space as "challenging" her and how she "struggles" to release things at her altar. Sherap can feel fear and doubt welling up at her shrine and explains how she has at times stopped doing her Buddhist religious practice of prostrations before her altar because "bad stuff kept happening to my kids". Others speak of sadness and tears called up by reflection upon their current lives, families or the memories held in the shrine objects. However, descriptions were even fuller of proclamations of "joy", "happiness" and "love" experienced at the shrine.

Whatever their nature they were clearly strong feelings that were not generally encountered or openly expressed in the ordinary course of the day. Again the carefully fashioned shrine place invited the opening-up and recombining of feelings, experiences and attitudes, which characterize the activity of the liminal. In many different ways each woman spoke about being undone and reconstituted, taken apart and attached to or separated from things. *Change,* therefore, was an integral aspect of each shrine encounter.

Change can be negative and fearful, but each encounter was made with the underlying confidence that ultimately each woman would be moved in some fundamental way nearer to her highest aspirations.

For this, I believe, is the alchemy of liminality. It may evoke anxiety and sadness, but also their opposite. It is capable of separating the women from people and things, experiences and emotions while also connecting them to the people, feelings, ideals and bodily states that they desired. With their heads raised to the heavens and their feet re-grounded on the earth, with courage and individual ingenuity, all of these women had followed their impulse to construct and tend their own liminal power place - in spite of the risks. Time and time again in their busy lives they came back to these places because they had the confidence and trust that these careful arrangements of objects in space could carry them through the painful currents of change and re-create them in positive ways. Fiona and Karis called it their anchor – and yet, if it was their anchor it was also capable of throwing them into the very storm that tossed them.

The way these women seemed to relate to their special spaces was as places where they were both tossed and turned, smoothed and steadied. Places where they were could be moved and calmed. But always they permitted, sometimes invited, things to touch them and, experiencing them more deeply, they would emerging re-orientated and re-directed. In this way they act in very much the same way as the labyrinth. Traditionally the spiritual seeker enters a delineated space in which they are deliberating subjecting themselves to disorientating and unfolding changes in the position of their own bodies. They turn left and right and backtrack within the space until they finally negotiate an intricate and convoluted path to the exit and emerge transformed. A body does not have to go on the literal journey of a pilgrimage in order to be moved and re-aligned. Small and carefully fashioned domestic spaces are obviously quite capable of bringing about similar liminal transformations for those who seek them.

Streep (1997) in the summary to her Do-it- Yourself book called **Altars Made Easy** sums up the ultimate role of the domestic shrine as a means of personal transformation. An instrument for creating and managing change in our outer and inner lives she says, "creating a sacred space is a process. The act of building an altar changes us and our sense of ourselves in time and space..." It is about responding to the changes in our moral lives...

... the things that matter most – existence itself, love and intimacy, health and well-being and happiness – all are subject to the larger cycles of life and death, attainment and loss. Change, of necessity, always involves a step forward and a step back, a letting go and a reaching out. Creating sacred space helps us to come to terms with change in all of its aspects and allows us to focus on the energy of change in positive ways (Streep 1997:199)

Field Journal: 10.5.03

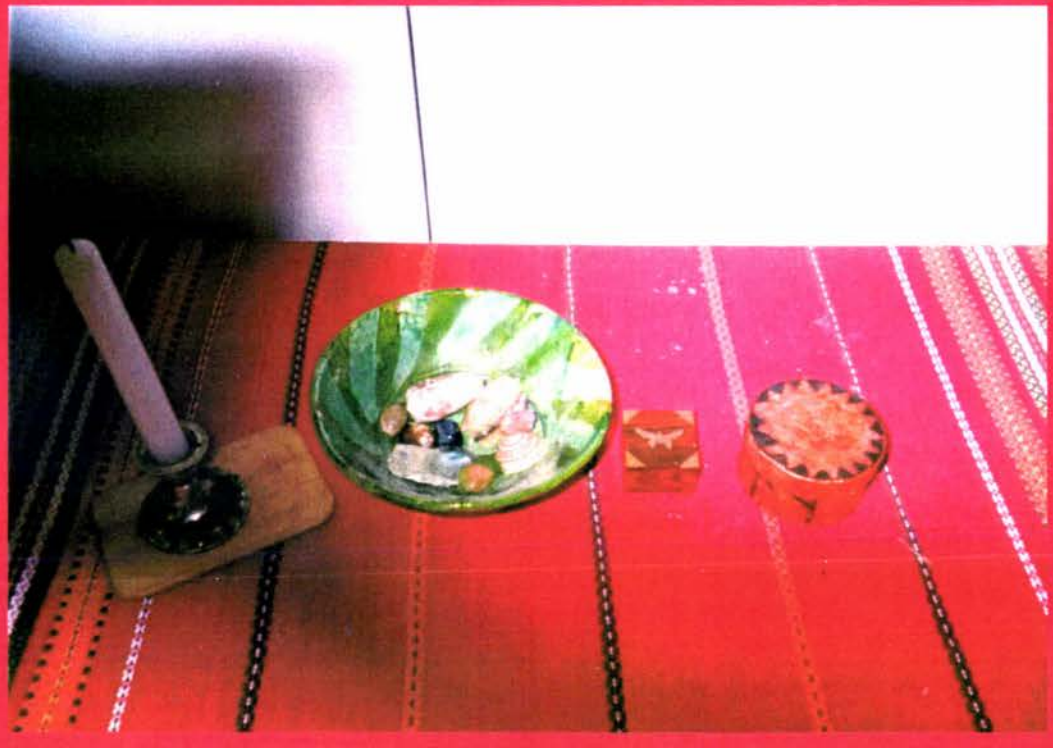
All I want to do is make my own shrines! I see shrines everywhere! Last weekend Hadia and I made hypertufa (light mixture of concrete and sand) shrines for our gardens. Mine is decorated with shells and it is a home for the blue plastic BVM (Blessed Virgin Mary) Hilary brought back from Rome. Hadia's is a tall stone BVM and she has made a long elegant grotto inlaid with old china from her grandmother's teacups! It's so good to have a dear friend to talk and do altars with all day in the sun!

13.8.03:

I've only just realised that Karis is putting her clients into a liminal zone when she invites them to lie by her "open" and almost empty red clothed shrine space – for it is in that space that she invites them to re-make themselves during therapy.

Karis

How often have I entered my room
in painful anguish and bone-weary
like Inanna Queen of Heaven
stripped of all her power and glory?
Then I inhale the faint aroma
of incense
and breathe myself into myself
gazing upon my shrine
Dedicated to HER.
Each component, a symbol in itself
and together framing a larger symbol
of interior space, my TEMENOS.
A sanctuary that is home,
where my soul finds a resting place
for one eternal moment,
the elusive still-point
in the changing, flowing flux
I call MY LIFE.



Karis

On the table beside her main shrine shelves she has fashioned this more open "feminine" space created by cloth and signalled by liminal markers of the earth (crystal and pebbles), air (candle, butterfly, sun) and water (bowl and shells) that remains "empty" so that her clients may transform themselves within it.

Summary to Chapter 2

The private shrine space of each of the women studied was revealed as a powerful site of practice in each woman's life. It is a space where she confirms and negotiates who she is, what her highest ideals are and what is at stake in her life-world. A place where her senses are engaged and stilled, where she experiences her own body and those of others. A place where she lets go of some things and attaches to others, a place where she ultimately hopes to find herself transformed. Kay Turner (1999) wrote -

the altar is the woman's access to her kind of power, power shared with and through others, both human and divine. It is a sacred and artful instrument for assuring the beautiful necessity of life itself (165).

Chapter 3: The Material Culture of Shrine Objects and Spaces

Into the Looking Glass

Stepping into the bedrooms and living rooms of these women I too was drawn into the power of these artful spaces of *beautiful necessity*. My senses were aroused and then stilled as time and time again I was captivated by the colourful, intricate, beautiful, useful, touching, simple and disparate - the compelling presence of these *things* in themselves. They were not *my* things. They were things I had never seen before, yet the impact they had upon me still lingers many months later. Permitted into the transformative space of the shrine I too began to see the objects in different ways. My own understanding of each object was tangibly suspended as I sat in fascination and some excitement to see what new meanings would be shared with me. Treading carefully - unsure of how to act on the floor at the foot of someone's bed. Watching myself, checking that I did not ask leading questions or impose my own meanings on the intimate things laid out before me. I was never disappointed. Each shrine space offered up to me a tableau of objects that was thick with deep and rich meanings that I had never expected and could not have anticipated. I felt the thrill of discovery. In these spaces the ordinary things of the home were more different, more subtly altered and more un-fixed than I could have ever imagined.

The way that anthropologists have looked at the *things* of the material culture of domestic life has changed itself over the years. In my introduction I described some of these changes in the ways in which objects have been studied and some of the alternate perspectives which inform the way we view things. And it was while engaging with the many, varied and precious *things* of these home altars that I became more fully aware of new perspectives – views that were less about any *one* of the specific meanings in themselves and more about objects having their meanings emptied and altered. About paradox, ambiguity and change. These were functions that were only granted by the action of liminal space – a space where objects were stripped of their "old" identity and permitted to reveal previously hidden meanings. In this state of liminality the object's "multivocality" (Turner

1969) could arise and I found myself exposed to some of the limitless possibilities an object could carry.

Objects that comprise a home can be usefully described as "mirrors and windows" (Whincup 1994) as they serve to reflect and reveal identity, memory and social meaning for, and about, their owners. The objects collected and arranged and juxtaposed in the houses of the women in this study most certainly could be seen as doing all of these things. However, women's descriptions about how they used these shrine spaces made it clear that these objects were capable of acting in yet another way. Not like a mirror or a window, but more like a crystal ball! They showed that it is possible to use domestic objects to create other surfaces in our homes – surfaces where the light that goes into them is not just reflected or transmitted, but refracted. So that what emerges is different, in novel and unpredictable ways, from what was put in. In the tradition of Alice in Wonderland or the Wicked Step Mother in Snow White these surfaces are more like wishing wells or magic mirrors for they demark marginal zones in the home, exhibiting properties different from those of other things in the household.

Field Journal 19.5.03

How mysterious and unknown the places seemed to me. It seems impossible to put into words the sense of "differentness" that these spaces radiate while at the same time being so familiar. Maybe it is that very paradox that is so compelling. Elena (Climent – Mexican shrine artist I have been communicating with over email) captured it when she talked about the shrines she used see on the busy streets of Mexico City. She said they were *bigger* on the inside than on the outside – in danger of being annihilated by the indifferent traffic that roared around them yet completely full of the life put into them by the people who so intensely created them out of the complexity of their inner lives...

8. 8.03:

I've been photographing roadside crosses as I travel about doing my shrine interviews. They are so touching and speak of so much and yet sit marooned in the wasteland of highway verges. I seem to be seeking and needing to see these little portals to the "other" everywhere – I find it so soulful that they are there, amongst the rubbish and dying weeds. They've got the same magic for me as these women's shrines - these portals to the liminal I have found in ordinary bedrooms on dressing tables and tabletops like my own. It's like wormholes or time warps that slip you off to some other universe when you know to look at them in the right way.

Ruth

In service
Still, silent
Woven threads
Father, Son
Holy Sophia
Whispering heaven voices
Waiting patiently
For me to cast my gaze
Your way.

Objects in Liminal Zones

For *things* placed in liminal space can manifest characteristics veiled in ordinary space. Christopher Steiner (Myers 2001) has argued the existence of these very states of difference when he claims that objects' relative "power*lessness* to speak for themselves" is revealed when they are in this marginal zone between place and status (211, his italics). However, I believe that the findings of my study demonstrate that it is not *powerlessness,* but quite the opposite, that can invest objects in non-ordinary space and that the example he cites is, in fact, confirmation of my own observations rather than his theory. He used the analogy of the new migrant or the art object that is argued over in international court and described them as having been disenfranchised as they wait in a no-mans land unable to have a say in their own fate. In his case study he describes a lengthy court battle that is waged over a sculpture that is being imported into the United States – where the taxes that must be paid on it are dependent on its status as either an artwork or some ordinary object. In this scenario, he seeks to establish the relative powerlessness and voicelessness of the thing that is having its meaning and identity argued over by others while it waits in the limbo of border space.

However, my study of shrine objects has shown that objects in such space can actually be *empowered,* rather than made impotent, by the effects of the marginal zone. I observed that in liminal space objects *may* be stripped of their old and ordinary meanings, but that they can then *resist* being re-labeled and given new identities by others. This is actually an empowering - where, in the transitional realm, they can refuse to let another party or idea dominate or name them. In so doing, they can reject the labels and yet remain fully present in themselves – disagreement about what they are does not negate their existence. In fact, as in Steiner's example, a new power of its own may be allowed to emerge, a power that is generated in the many months of lawyers' dedicated and frenzied activity, thought and debate about the status of the "art work". For it was nothing more than a lump of wood and metal, sitting in the courtroom, that produced that effect. Yet strangely, its very materiality was actually reinforced and strengthened by the arguments that raged around it. For in that

liminal space its raw physicality was finally speaking for itself – stubbornly persisting in material space even while others struggled to categorize and own it for their own purposes. This is a power derived from the very fact that the object's past has been expunged, its identity de-stabilized and its habitual meanings disintegrated by the liminal properties of the border space.

So the real irreducible agency of things lies not in their intrinsic identity. Not in their innate power to produce in us a given response, to invoke in us a certain feeling or generate *one* meaning or idea. No, here we see that their power lies in their ability to stimulate in us such a *multitude* of ideas and feelings and reactions. A material object, just by flashing into our sensory awareness, is capable of instantaneously triggering within us a cascade of reactions, a gamut of bodily responses and layer upon layer of unfolding meaning. This is its power; this is its mode of agency. Its unquenchable, undeniable propensity to affect us on every level - its power to activate our senses by its very materiality.

Most of the time we are not aware of this relentless power that objects have over us – we have learned to manage it by projecting upon them the specific array of meanings that meet our purposes or make themselves available to our consciousness at any given time. We control them by limiting and directing the meanings that come to us. In this way we have forgotten their power and denied them as nothing more than blank canvases that we project upon. When we do this we denigrate and subordinate matter. We belittle *things* and this enables us to exploit and manipulate them. Liminal spaces reveal their power. There they may *resist* the imposition of larger structures of ideas or regimes of meaning and value assignment.

Furthermore, I suggest *things* are at their most powerful the more liminal the space they occupy – for this is where their meanings are ambiguous and contested, where their boundless possibilities and complexity are being revealed in ways not accessible in the uncontested "ordinary" places they would occupy on either side of that border zone. For in those places their value and identity were fixed and assumed – their very presence was

subordinated to the ideology of their owners and everybody would speak *for* them. It is only in spaces where *our* inner voices are arrested, our senses stilled, where silence is allowed to surround the object, that they may finally be allowed to "speak for themselves" - when we refrain from speaking *for* them.

Field Journal: 3.8.03

Reading Marcel Proust's Remembrance of Things Past, I note that he has written a huge big fat book that is really a homage to *things*, because children experience things (recalled from the past of childhood) in a more sensory, immediate way – a way that this study has shown me that we, as adults, tend to lose touch with. Because the young boy, like us, is desperate to "grow up" and embrace the world of *ideas* in favour of the world of *things*. So, when recounting the intimacies of his childhood he tells of his childish ambition to be a great writer. He aspires to elucidate the great questions of life and waxes lyrical on the abstract truth of the world. However, even as he strives for this exalted aspiration his philosophical musings are constantly arrested and sidetracked by the *things* that he encounters in the world around him. In the house and garden and the streets of his village he repeatedly finds himself stopped short by the *objects* he meets. He struggles to find something of "intellectual value" in them and cannot. He concludes that they will, therefore, be of no use to him as a writer. But eventually he ceases to resist them as they never-the-less provide him with the exquisite pleasures of life that give him some respite from the strain of trying to intuit the larger meanings that seem to elude him! In the end, I think he has written the original work that celebrates the *things* of a life!

Then, quite independently of all these literary preoccupations and in no way connected with them, the gleam of sunlight on a stone, the smell of a path would make me stop still, to enjoy the special pleasure that each of them gave me, and also

because they appeared to be concealing, beyond what my eyes could see, something which they invited me to come and take but which despite all my efforts I never managed to discover ....they seemed to me to be bursting, ready to open, to yield up to me the secret treasure of which they were themselves were no more than the lids.(Even though)...each of them was associated with some material object devoid of intellectual value and suggesting no abstract truth....the mystery that lay hidden in a shape or a perfume,...I was taking it home with me, protected by its invisible covering which I had imprinted on my mind and beneath which I should find it still alive, like the fish which, on days when I had been allowed to go out fishing, I used to carry back in my basket, covered by a layer of grass which kept them cool and fresh (1981:195).

Karis

I am a 47 years old - bicultural heritage Samoan mother and English father. Long-term relationship with the father of my children - Richard aged 20 years, Camille 17, Isaac 14 and Sophie 12.

I have just completed my psychotherapy training with the Psychosynthesis Institute, which teachers/trains counsellors and psychotherapists in the transpersonal framework.

I have a practice, work from home and work mostly with women who are around the mid-life transition (35-42) who desire to heal from the past in order to manifest their potential.

The room I use for my consulting room, I have consciously created as a sacred space and would be very willing to participate in this research project.

Personal Things as Fetish Objects

Permitted their own power in the border zone of liminal space, the objects used by these women on their shrines can be seen to act most like the *fetish* objects that anthropologists once collected from darkest Africa. Peter Pels (1998) has described such objects as those emerging from border zones where they have been excised from their home context and intercepted and purloined by the collectors of another culture. Between their own original space and an alien one, their meanings became inherently destabilized and re-charged. "In this confrontation, the fetish always threatens to overpower its subject, because its lack of everyday usage and exchange values makes its materiality stand out, without much clue as to whether and how it can be controlled" (99). Here Pels has observed the same power that I saw in the shrine objects, rather than the *powerless* state of the transition zone postulated by Steiner. Placed in the liminality of the shrine the pebbles, the statues, vessels and pictures the women used to fashion their special places acted exactly as Pels observes. For when things stand liberated from their imposed meanings and strong in their materiality you can never "arrest the continual, paradoxical movement that most uses of the (fetish) concept entail." As "part of an esthetic of untranscended materiality, fetishism tells us to move in, rather than escape, the sensuous border zone between ourselves and the things around us, between mind and matter" (102).

This notion of fetishism that first arose out of an alienating and exoticising of objects, as they were removed from their own spaces into foreign ones, can be rehabilitated here as we look into the bedrooms of ordinary women and see such qualities again in their heartfelt arrangements of treasured ornaments and mementos. For these women have had the courage and imagination to not just acknowledge and tolerate the paradoxes and sensory complexity that materiality presents us with on a daily basis, but to work with it in sometimes risky, but always dynamic, ways that offer the potential to enrich their lives.

Field Journal 3.8.03 Like the young Proust's fish - slimy, glistening, black and smelling of cool river water, the boy sensed the power of those profoundly physical

things to move him in any number of mysterious ways. So that, it seemed to him, they were vessels crammed with meaning under their bulging lids. Those fish were shiny, slimy fetish objects nestled in that grass! Kids make fetish objects all the time. The kids' bedrooms are lined with them – stones, bird's eggs, old nails, marbles, fossils and butterfly wings. Am reading a lot about the idea of *fetish*. I really like the notion of ordinary women all over the country worshipping fetish objects in their kitchens and bedrooms. The things I have seen are so real and strong and so ordinary and yet have such meaning for each woman. It seems really subversive – women reclaiming the stone "idols" of their pagan goddess times when the power of the feminine divine ruled the world. You can see a woman's fetish object is really just a thing that women value that men label as fetish because it comes from a "country" alien and exotic to them.

Field Journal 2.6.03

When Milly Molly Mandy (little girl character in daughter's English story book from the 1920s) goes to town to buy cloth so her mother can make her a new little polka dot dress what she purchases by the yard is called "stuff". *Stuff* is Cloth. Yet now (because of its long association with women?) it has taken on new and quite pejorative meanings. Stuff has become everything that we can't or won't understand. It is that nameless conglomeration of undifferentiated things that are generalized into meaningless triviality. At worst it's a swear word. I guess that if the seeming chaos of liminal space is not within your control or your immediate comprehension, then one response to it is to disdainfully label it as "stuff" and hope that it gets "stuffed"!

Fiona

The Shrine

You are created
out of my life
You are developed
out of my life
You are singled
out
out of my life
You are the
expression
out of my life
You are my
epitaph

You are the stimulus
for my life
You are the beauty
for my life
You are the inspiration
for my life
You are the honouring
for my life
You are my creative force
my primal scream

Hadia

I am a 42 year old mother who has an intense personal relationship with the objects of significance in my home. I therefore create sacred space and shrines and endeavour to relate these objects and places in my life to my inner spiritual/emotional environment. They become in turn a manifestation of my emotional/spiritual values and also enrich my experience of day to day living.

I experience life as a continuum containing many facets of both material and non-material. My personality is out-going, but I balance this with an awareness of the inner journey and poetic, creative expression.

Field Journal 12.6.03

Stuff and Sense

Waiting on the dressing table and bookshelf,
disguised as china, greeting cards, doilies, photos, mementos and trinkets,
nestling in the niche of telephone, pot plant, dish and tablecloth.
Things. Precious things. Lovely things. Women's things.
Gold tracery frames the power in your haberdashery of secrets.

Subjects, Objects and Making Offerings

The way that these women worked with these shrine objects can, I believe, be traced in the idea of *offering*. Many times over these women spoke to me of offering things or ideas or of making an offering to their altars or of things on their altars as being "offerings". Streep (1997:138) tells us of the nature of *offerings* by reminding us of its meaning as "sacrifice" which is from the Latin meaning "to make holy". Holy is a word that comes from Old English and literally means "whole" (Allen 1985). In this way we can view the things of the home as being subjected to the projections and imperatives of the people of the household, **until** the woman places them on her specially constructed liminal space and *offers* them the opportunity to exist free of those burdens. The things of the shrine are, in this context, allowed and invited to be *whole,* as they are made *holy* by being offered into the shrine space. Again this word carries the paradoxes so typical of liminality – to offer up things was to let them go *and* to secure them in space and time. Things were offered as a gift or thanks but also as a disposing or cleansing away of the unwanted. April's freshly gathered autumn leaves, Karis's bowl of sea shells or Ruth's shite notes and Sherap's fear – they were all described as offerings that were put into the space with no firm idea of how they would be received over time.

So, everything truly "offered" to the shrine space was done so unconditionally - the personal and social projections carried by the object were always allowed to be disorganized or dissolved in the act of offering and, at the same time, invited to be reconstituted in some other way and at some other time. But the offering was still tentative and humble, for what would become of the offering once cast into the shrine was something the woman knew she had no conscious control over. A particularly interesting example of this was the placing of dead birds or parts of birds on shrines. Sherap said she had placed a dead bird as an "offering" on her altar after it had flown into her window when she was meditating there. On the day I visited Hadia her goddess statue at the centre of her shrine was adorned by the feathers of her pet hen discovered killed by a local dog that morning. Not comfortable to simply dispose of the dead bodies these women chose to

honour the creatures in some way. To acknowledge their being, as valued identities, rather than anonymous objects in their world.

What other place in the household could hold and celebrate the intrinsic life and integrity of a thing than the place already made holy? For the space itself will manifest some answer out of its own physical presence in the woman's life. Outside that space *things* are so often co-opted by people and their emotions, memories and motives – their physicality colonised by the "semiotic sedimentations" (Steiner 2001:229) of individuals or cultures. But in the shrine space, as in no other space in their procession from manufacture to consumption, from biography to display, from ownership to gift, they are offered the possibility of being whole.

By offering up things to the shrine they could then be released from the tyranny of objectivism. When things are seen as having innate power of their own they may better be acknowledged as actors in our world, rather than as exploited by their human masters. This is what I saw in the way these women approached their altars. Uncertain, hopefully, unassumingly they brought all these offerings to their shrine spaces. Open, expectant and prepared to be moved they let the objects work on them. For *offering* is not imposing – it does not discard or cling, it frames only the possibility of such outcomes. As already recorded, the women in this study *offered* things to their liminal spaces in just such a way. They offered to let go, they offered to build attachment - but always they offered with a tentativeness that left the final result up to the space itself. "I just offer it up - I don't know what will happen to it" or "I will know when it is ready", they invited it to "teach me what it is I am meant to learn". For within the intersubjectivity of daily life as these women told of their relationships with their special things I often glimpsed those things as *subjects* – with an agency that these women all responded to with their senses and felt in their very bodies.

Field Journal 22.7.03

April's matches really fascinate me. She uses them to light her candle and yet they actually sit in an honoured central space near the center of her shrine. They are in a delicate little woven flax basket which she says disguises them as the box is not "aesthetically pleasing" but also she wishes to decorate and display the match box to "honour it because it is the source of light." It reminds me of the plastic Halloween skeleton Ella (my daughter) found once when she was little. She didn't know what to do with it as she didn't especially like it and didn't want it amongst the treasures in her room, but she did feel for it as it was cold and skinny and naked and dead and needed to be looked after. I found it later wrapped in cloth and placed on my bedroom shrine space. It seems to me that only a shrine can hold and honour something just for what it is. It may have no use or outward attraction but that doesn't mean it is worthless or mean it should be hidden or discarded. On a shrine it can just be – safe and held.

24.8.03

Keep thinking about those dead birds! Hadia's chicken, and Jamil's (her son) distress. Sherap told me about the little one she put "as an offering" on her shrine after it was killed crashing into her window. Did she tell me it then came back to life as she meditated? Or am I just remembering something that has happened to me?

April

I am 47 years old and have 2 children, Matthew who is 21 and Amii who is 17 years. My husband Vernon and I have been married for 21 years and have lived in Taupo for most of that time. I have a passion for helping young children to learn and grow and this lead me into the field of education with a particular interest in the works of Rudolf Steiner. I tend to be a "non-conventional" thinker and an individualistic thinker, in other words I don't fit into boxes of thought be it educational, philosophical or religious. I like to take what I have learned over the years, mix it with my intuition and soul body and trust in my thoughts and feelings in each situation of interaction with life and other people.

I love and respect the divinity of life and have let go of the need to know how that works. I love simple beauty and ways of the heart. I love music and dance of a gentle nature.

In case this is important in your profile building I would mention that I am from a family of 5 children, being number 4 with a 7 year gap up to my next sibling and 5 down to the other. My parents remained married for more than 50 years until they died a few years ago. My childhood was stable, staying in the same small country town, Waipukurau, until I left home at 17 to go to Teachers College in P.N. I had some O.E. after that during my early 20's before getting married at 24.

Field Journal: 17.9.03

Offerings

Secret display of ordinary treasures
Cluttered order of random meaning –
strewn with Nature's little perfections.
Dressing-up a dark corner –
where Self may meet Divinity.
She crafts a tiny world peopled with the collage of family,
the miniature furniture of memory, love and faith.
Its embroidered edges spiral serenity and struggle,
attachment and release.
The strata of a life accumulated
with artful care into an eternity of the personal -
shadow box of the cosmos.

Deirdre

I am a first generation New Zealand woman. The bones of my ancestors are in Ireland, India and England. I have been making personal shrines in my home for about the last 10 years or so because I needed to find lovely places to put precious things along the paths I trod each day. Somehow they allowed me to work with the feelings and ideas and needs that really mattered to me as a mother, partner, spiritual seeker and homemaker. I see myself as someone trying to make a meaningful place for myself in the world I found myself inhabiting. I desire to engage with satisfying arrangements of words and ideas as much as with the gorgeous little things that collect about me and others as we move through our lives.

Summary to Chapter 3

It is possible for objects to be in a state where they are made empty – where new meanings are fluid and potential and their intrinsic power is more easily seen when we encounter them in their wholeness. In this way they can be experienced as physical entities that never fail to evoke responses of potentially unlimited complexity and depth in the senses of those who engage with them. For they are engaged with as subject not object. We have seen that even the most ordinary of things in the domestic lives of women can reveal this agency.

Conclusion:

The Truth of Life-as-Lived and the Liminal Intersubjectivity of People and Their Things.

Cluttered. Humble. Clumsy. Simple. Quiet. Safe. Dusting and Cleaning. Sitting doing nothing. Gazing. Real.

These are some of the other words the women used to describe their shrines and what they did when they engaged with them. These words speak of the worlds of ordinary women and their daily domestic lives. However, it was within these worlds that these women were able to go into themselves to seek what they called the eternal, god or the truth. They found it waiting for them when they went before their special spaces. Marked out and held by the things they had chosen. The smell of incense, the effulgence of a candle, the warmth of a shawl, the bitter sweetness of a memory, the hotness of tears or the cool balm of peace and tranquillity. Amidst their fears and their happiness, their serenity and their struggle these women found and constituted their own truth amongst the objects of their homes.

As anthropologists seek and develop new directions in ethnographic research they ask themselves what is the nature of the truth that they are seeking. In the past many have energetically sought this truth in Durkheim's *objective social fact*. However, things have changed over time and when the great physicist Niels Bohr was asked about his view of truth and what might be complementary to truth, he replied - "clarity" (Greenspan 2001:137). So, it was not for "clarity" that I searched in the collections of things that constituted women's domestic shrines - as it has been the specific intent of this study to come out of the clouds of idealism, down to the material objects of the every day and into the thick of intersubjective meaning. For it is in *these* places that we may continue our search for that truth.

It is not just in the spaces between *people* that meaning making takes place. *Things* are not powerless and we never meet them so - for meaning is created and re-created within the spaces between people *and* things every day of our lives. The spaces we fashion between our bodies and the objects of our ordinary lives can act as liminal zones in which the meaning and identity of objects and people are daily constituted in the round of domestic life. The most liminal of these spaces between people and things are rich with the shifting possibilities of meaning – paradox, ambiguity and even contradiction provide a matrix from which the novel and unpredictable, the transformative can arise. These spaces are not places of clarity or stability but they are, I believe, exactly the spaces in which we can find evidence of the ethnographic truth of life as lived.

My mother's ashes (earthenware pot wrapped in muslin) on the last shrine she made. India 2001.

DEDICATION

To all the women who had the courage and imagination to build shrines in their homes and the generosity to let me into those private and precious spaces.

To my mother who was making shrines long before I knew enough to ask her what they meant.

Within the pages of this work I have collected together and displayed, in the most pleasing way I am able (given the limitations of my skills, the medium and the technology of paper and ink) the *things* I discovered, was gifted and gathered on my research encounters with the women in this study.

I have selected this 1993 painting by Mexican artist Elena Climent to delineate the edges of the space I have sought to establish for holding these precious things I have arranged here. It is called Altar with Photographs and Candles (held at the Mary-Anne Martin Fine Art Gallery, New York City) and it contains all the liminal markers and other elements I observed in women's shrines.

Framed by this picture I offer up these words and images here so that I may let them go, and so that I may also hold fast to them, because they are of importance to me and the other women. I put them into the fabric of these pages, the empty space of these bindings, so that they may be taken apart and reconstituted by myself and by the reader – so we may both be transformed by the experience. What the products of that transformation will be, I do not know. I can only offer-up hopefully – and let the power of liminality do its work.

Elena Climent's work has been delightful and inspirational to me in researching this thesis and I would like to thank her for the ideas and experiences she so generously and freely shared with me about the making of her shrine pictures (Reproduced with the artist's permission).

Appendix – Research Forms

FORM 1

An Invitation to Participation in a Social Research Project....

Greetings!

As a student of social anthropology I am interested in women's spaces – the houses they turn into homes and the domestic places in which they live their daily lives. This makes me interested in the objects that make up those homes and the value and meaning we give to, and get from those physical objects, in the process of our ordinary daily round. My aim is to use what I learn during this work to write up an MA thesis to complete my degree in Social Anthropology at Massey University. My supervisor is Sita Venkateswar of the Social Anthropology Programme.

As a way of focusing on one significant expression of those objects that make up our homes I have chosen to study those special spaces that could be loosely labeled as "shrines" or "altars". This does not mean I am only interested in formal "religious" constructions or traditional domestic altars – I am equally interested in those special corners women create out of a meaningful collection of precious things. Maybe these are photos or natural objects and a place to put flowers.

Whatever we call these places I believe they are charged with meaning for those who make them and attend to them and "touch base" with them from time to time in their busy worlds. I believe that these "sacred corners" can tell us much about the domestic spaces that women create in their homes and how they relate to and express their inner meanings and motivations in their daily lives.

It is my hope that this research will reveal some of those "hidden" spaces that are so important to many women in this country and in so doing will honour their soulful presence

in our lives and be an inspiration to women of all faiths in the nurturing and expression of their values and beliefs in their own homes and daily lives.

I would be most grateful for your help in this work and warmly invite you to participate in this research project with me. On the back of this page (Form 2) is an outline of the role I am asking you play in this project.

With thanks and best wishes

Deirdre Savage

FORM 2

YOUR ROLE IN THIS RESEARCH:

If you were to agree to be part of this research project your role would be to:

1. Give me, in your own words, some written information that profiles who you are (see Form 5 attached).

2. Read the written questionnaire (Form 6) about your "shrine" or collection of special objects and write your own personal replies in whatever way seems appropriate to you. (If this kind of written response is one you are not comfortable with I would like to discuss other ways we could cover the questions together)

3. Meet with me in your own home and discuss the specific precious objects and use of your special space. At this time we would talk some more about the answers you have already written. I may have some more questions to ask and would like to photograph your special place at this time.

This is all that I would require of you, but I will seek your permission to contact you later in the year (by phone or letter) to ask any other follow-up questions that may arise as I begin to work through the material I have collected.

FORM 3

MY RESPONSIBILITIES TO YOU IN THIS RESEARCH:

I am concerned that this research is ethical and safe for all those involved. I do not wish to exploit or misrepresent any of those who are generous enough to share their personal lives and possessions with me. To this end I undertake that:

Any written or verbal information you give me will be totally confidential and will not be passed on in any way other than its incorporation in the resulting thesis.

The information gathered as part of this research will be stored in a secure place during and after the investigation and that I will retain the research information collected. However if, on completion of the research you wish any of your contribution to be destroyed or returned I undertake to do this.

You are free to withdraw from your involvement in this research at any time, without explanation.

I will not be using full names or information that will indicate addresses or the specific identity of people or places. Your identity will not be divulged to any other person without your express permission. I will be asking you to tell me what name (or pseudonym) you would like to link you to your contribution. Your name and address will not be recorded as part of this study.

The final document that I produce from the information I have collected about you and others will be lodged with Massey University and may be accessible to public through their library. You may have a copy of the final draft of the thesis upon request.

Not to use any of the specific information you give me in any other future published work without your permission.

I will seriously and openly take into consideration any feedback or opinions that you may offer me on ways of improving the conduct of this research.

FORM 4

CONSENT FORM

Please read the following statements and sign them to confirm your agreement to participate in this research. Sign them only when you are confident that you understand and agree to all the requirements and conditions of your involvement.

I have read the outline of this proposed research and understand its purpose and what is required of me to participate (see forms 1 and 2).

I have read and understood the list of responsibilities the researcher has undertaken to uphold toward me and any of the information I may share with her (see form 3).

I understand that I can withdraw from this project at any time without explanation and that I can request the return of any material related to me from the researcher.

I understand that my identity will not, without my express permission, be revealed in this work.

I agree to participate in this research:

Signature: **Print Name:** **Date:**

Researcher: **Print Name:** **Date:**

Thank you.

This consent form has been designed with consideration to the points outlined within the "Responsibilities to Research Participants" highlighted by the Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa/New Zealand in their *Principles of Professional Responsibility and Ethical Conduct* (1992). Thank you for your cooperation.

FORM 5

PERSONAL PROFILE:

Please write a few words to describe yourself so that your information in this study will have an identity related to it.

What name would you like to be identified by in this study?

.....

FORM 6

WRITTEN QUESTIONNAIRE

Without worrying about grammar or spelling or trying to write anything especially "logical" jot down the first words that come to you in response to these requests...

*Write 5 (or more!) descriptive words about your special space:

*Write 5 or so words about your bodily feelings when you engage with your special space:

* Write 5 or so words about what you ***do*** when you engage with your special space:

* Write a "poem" or list of words and ideas, in any form you like, describing your feelings about and/or your relationship with your special space.

Thank you

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