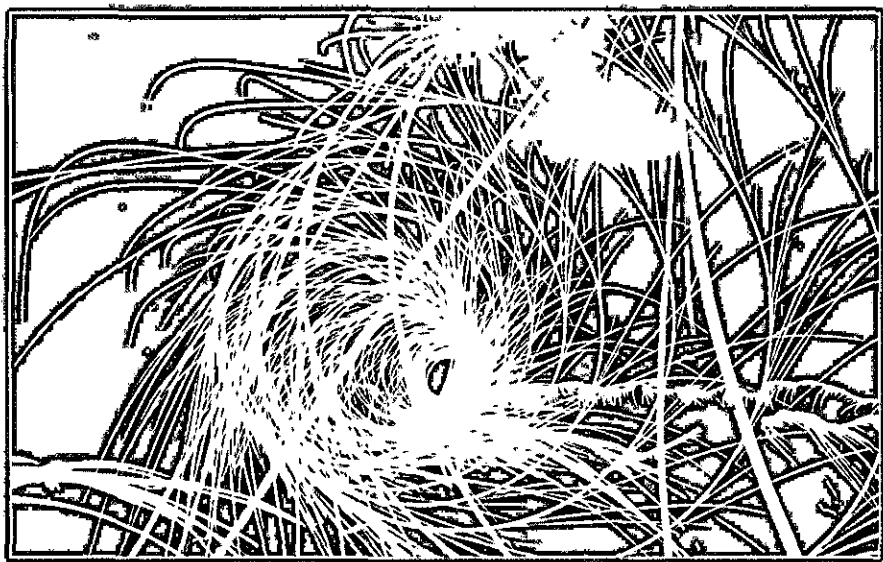


DREAMING THE DARK



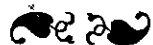
Magic, Sex and Politics

NEW EDITION

STARHAWK

WITH A NEW PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR

Chapter Six



Building Community: Processes for Groups

We are all longing to go home to some place we have never been — a place, half-remembered, and half-envisioned we can only catch glimpses of from time to time. Community. Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with passion without having the words catch in our throats. Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter, voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power. Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of healing. A circle of friends. Someplace where we can be free.

Glimpses. A circle of friends sits on the lawn of a white farmhouse in the Midwest. There is a red barn, and a weeping willow, and a fire in a cauldron at night. We sing and raise power and speak with passion to each other. "This is the richest soil in the world," someone says, and suddenly I feel sure that we could still do it; in spite of everything, we could still make a way to live that would be worthy of the richness of this land. America destroys so much — the cultures that were here before white America arrived, the buffalo, the forests, the wilderness — and yet the land is rich enough and vast enough to let us build anew. Here, beside this

cornfield, in America's heart, I can see that the community I envision is not so different from that which has existed before. A circle of tepees on the plains, the gathering of neighbors to raise a barn — these are not so different from the promise the land whispered to my immigrant grandparents fleeing servitude in the Russian army, the promise inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, the words we hear ringing again and again in all the documents we learned about in school that were said to be America's foundation. Liberty. Justice. Equality. Freedom. In a dimension just the other side of our eyelids exists an America that keeps those promises, and sometimes when we blink too slowly we think we are there. Home.

In that America everything speaks with passion: the fields, the mountains, the trees, the birds, the children. Everything shines from inside out and everything has a dark, secret core where power lies. All things give away to each other, as the Indians say the animals and plants give away in death so that their deaths feed life. The America of the give-away has hands overflowing with abundance to fill every empty belly, a generous heart that doesn't ask for returns, and a wild spirit that will try anything once. That America takes in strays, and her people know how to stick together. They know how to laugh and they know how to love.

When we open our eyes with the imprint of that America still stuck to the lids and look around us, the America we see appears unbearable. In this America we say to the child, "This won't hurt," and then apply the electric current. In this America we hold fast to every last crumb and lock things up tight until we ourselves are locked up in pain from our clenched fists and our clenched jaws. We are lonely, in this America — we are terrified as we see America putting its machinery into gear for a war that will kill us all. Mostly, we feel powerless. We feel there is nothing we can do.

Community. It is not enough to confront our self-haters, to change our inner psychic structures, to spin new myths and new stories. As long as we feel powerless in the political and social arenas, we cannot be free. We cannot make the decisions that most affect us. And if we identify the immanent Goddess with

reality, then our spiritual practice must confront reality. The territory of the quest moves beyond the individual self, out of the wilderness into the streets, to the nuclear power plants, the weapons labs, and the jails. It moves to places where the drama, the clash, is played out, where the battle of our times is being fought.

Action is ritual, myth, vision, quest. For most of us are not living in the wilderness, able to discover in the heart of wilderness the shapes of fear that form our inner limitations and break through them to power. The shapes in our minds that limit our power-from-within are mirrors of the prison, the gun, the guard. To reclaim our power, we must move into the territory of the real threats with which our culture controls us. Like Inanna, Persephone, Osiris, Dumuzi — like all the Goddesses and Gods who descend and return — we too can enter the kingdom of that which we fear most, although for us it may take the form of a weapons lab or a county jail. We can dissolve the shadow of the inner bomb when we openly confront the makers of the real bomb. Within that kingdom, when we join in community, in solidarity, we too can find sources of strength and renewal — the true magic that dissolves fear.

And so we move toward each other, if only because the battle is too large for any one of us to fight alone. In community, we call forth power in a dimension that moves beyond the interests of the personal self, for power-from-within cannot exist in a vacuum. Power-from-within is more than a feeling, more than a flash of individual enlightenment or insight; it involves our sense of connection with others, our knowledge of the impact we have on others. Power-from-within is the power of the give-away, that comes from our willingness to spend ourselves, to be there for others at the price of risk and effort.

In this America we are taught to put self-interest first, to compete, to better ourselves as individuals. And so we are controlled by promises and threats — controlled at a level so deep that we are rarely conscious of it. At times a vision, an experience, may open our eyes.

Going to jail for a political action is an experience that can teach us more about consciousness than a hundred growth seminars. For in jail we experience the controls of our culture directly. We see their naked operation, unclothed by the usual niceties. Power-over is a vise, a clamp that holds us with our own hopes and fears. For there are always privileges to be won if we behave, and there is always someplace worse they can put us, something they can do to us or take away from us, if we refuse to be controlled. So we are caught. In jail we cannot escape knowledge of this control: the system itself has devised a thousand minor rituals, a thousand petty rules to drive the lesson home again and again.

So the purpose of cuffing our hands behind our backs is not to prevent us from attacking the police; it is to acquaint us with the extent of our helplessness. The purpose of the airless, windowless holding tanks, with their open toilets that can only be flushed from outside by the guards is to make us aware, when we are taken to a more decent place, that we can always be returned to a place that is worse. The purpose of stripping us to search us, of having us bend over, spread our cheeks, and cough is not really to discover if we have contraband stuck up our assholes, it is to teach us that humiliation is the favorite weapon the system has devised against the self.

We come out of jail angry, on fire with rage that does not retreat, because as we look around us, day by day, we see the same vise in operation. Everywhere we are surrounded with the pretty pictures of rewards to be won. They are plastered across the billboards and the magazines, they cavort on television. Yet it is not really the image of the car, the dress, the hot tub, the gold chain that we respond to, although these offer pleasure — it is the sense of status, the acknowledgment of our worth, they represent.

And on the other hand, the prison, the mental hospital, stand as the representations of the worse place — where they can take us if we resist control. Yet it is not that most of us live in constant fear of being carted off to jail, but rather that the jail is a symbol of the thousand petty rituals of punishment we face in our jobs, our homes, on the streets. There are endless ways — from the

boss's reprimand to the headwaiter's sneer to the look on the grocery clerk's face when we pull out our food stamps, for the culture to confirm our lack of worth.

Immanence means that each of us has inherent worth — yet we cannot feel self-worth because we believe it as a theological doctrine. We feel it when we connect with another person, when we can comfort someone in distress, ease someone's pain, do work that means something to us. We feel our own worth when we help shape the choices that affect us.

To call forth power-from-within, to free ourselves, we must be willing to move beyond self-interest, to cease grabbing for the carrot and flinching from the stick. We must be willing to give away.

In community, we have power to heal each other and to help each other, power that goes beyond the individual self.

Here is a story: a woman is raped. This is not unusual: women are raped every day. This woman, however, is part of a strong and supportive women's community. She believes she knows who the man is; but she cannot marshal enough evidence to prosecute a case. Perhaps she has a few doubts, herself, about sending someone to prison, where he may very well be raped, and will certainly not be reformed. Whether or not we agree with her doubts, she feels them.

She turns to her community. A group of women goes with her to the place where the rapist works. They wait until he leaves the building, and they surround him.

The women have no force at their disposal. They cannot call on the guns and prisons of the state. They simply confront the man with his act and his responsibility. They appear to him as a living community to say, "What you have done is intolerable to us."

The man is ashamed, embarrassed, defensive. He is forced to look his victim in the face, to see her in a new context. Does he change? We cannot know. But in that community, he causes no further problems.

Here is another story: a young man has been in and out of mental hospitals most of his life. He is diagnosed as schizophrenic. His sister is part of a supportive community of political people

belonging to many collectives and cooperative households. After discussion with her friends, she invites him to come and live near her. He moves into another cooperative household. At first he barely leaves his room. Gradually, with encouragement, he ventures out. Friends find him a job in a community business. He is not treated as a sick person — he is treated as a whole person. After a year, he finds another job on his own. He falls in love. He moves in with his lover. He no longer is a sick person.

Another woman has what is called a psychotic break. She checks into a mental hospital at a respected university. In the hospital they tell her she needs to get angry, to express herself. After the third day on which her assigned psychiatrist has rushed through the ward without responding to her questions, she kicks a chair in frustration. They lock her in a small room. She and her lover decide the hospital is making her sicker. She checks out.

She cannot stay alone because what is called her illness expresses itself as terror. She belongs to a feminist consciousness-raising group. The six other women in the group take turns being with her. None of them is a therapist and none knows what to do with someone who is in a state of terror — except to be there. It takes six of them, because one woman alone would have been drained and overwhelmed. After a few days the terror begins to subside. The woman is able to fight the inner demons, to regain a sense of control. She is never hospitalized again.

In community, we discover what we are truly worth as we help each other through the losses and the crises, as we work together to heal the damages inflicted by this culture. Within community, we can identify the vise of self-interest and resist its control. We can be free.

Community counters estrangement — it reconnects us with others, and with the natural community that surrounds and sustains us. Historically, the institutions of domination have established themselves by destroying community — from the enclosure movement and the witchburnings in Europe, to the colonization of Africa, Asia, South America, and Polynesia. This

pattern continues with the destruction of Native American communities, traditions, and ways of life in the Black Hills and in the Southwest. If we see our work as re-inspiring the world, then we must be intimately concerned with preserving and creating community. We must challenge the principle of domination by resisting the destruction of communities that remain, and by creating communities based on the principle of power-from-within, power that is inherent in every being.

There is a belief sometimes mouthed by members of so-called new-age spiritual groups that when you resist something, you give it energy, you create it. This is a simplistic misconception that comes from a misunderstanding of how energy works. It confuses resistance with denial. When we deny something, we create it — or at least, we create conditions in which it can grow and flourish, precisely because there is no resistance. In Nazi Germany, it was not the resistance to fascism that allowed the spread of Anti-Semitism and led to the death camps, it was the widespread denial, the refusal to admit that such things could happen. It is not resistance to the possibility of nuclear holocaust that will bring it about, it is denial.

Resistance causes conflict. In America as it is today we are taught to fear conflict. Women, especially, learn to be peacemakers, to back down when confronted, and to avoid challenging others. It isn't nice to say no.

We confuse conflict with violence, yet the two are not synonymous. Violence is not anger; not shouting; not a feeling, a mood, or any specific action. I define *violence* as the imposition of power-over. The manager who imposes a speed-up on the line may be inflicting violence, even though she/he is soft-spoken and smiling. The Diné woman who points her rifle at the government official who is trying to force her off her land is resisting violence.

Whenever we try to cause change, we can expect conflict. If there is no resistance to a change, nothing is truly changing. Instead of fearing conflict, we can learn to welcome the freeing of energy it represents. When we pit our energy against an oppressive system, it must meet our power with its own. Its energies, its resources, are diverted from their destructive work.

There is a certain element of daring involved in resistance — at times it feels like pulling the tail of a monster at a feast to disturb it. The forces we must face may seem, at times, overwhelming, yet a colony of ants can disrupt a picnic of giants.

To do so, however, we must attend the giants' picnic instead of our own. Or so it seems. Resistance demands our time and our energy. Yet, if we do not resist blindly by mirroring what we are fighting, resistance itself can become a creative task. The very threats we face spur us to bond together in new forms, to see what controls us and to invent the means to free ourselves.

Magic is the art of turning negatives into positives, of spinning straw into gold. In the act of resistance we can spin the gold of our vision, can join together in ways that embody new stories, new forms, new structures, based on immanence.

Community is built from groups. The result of any creative work that requires more than our individual energies ultimately depends on how well we can work with others in groups. That realization is disconcerting, for groups can be maddeningly frustrating as easily as they can be supportive and empowering. There are, however, processes we can use in groups that help them to develop and work so that they increase and augment each individual's energy.

To empower individuals, groups must be small enough so that within them we can each have time to speak, to be heard, to know each other personally. The time we give to a person and the depth of attention we pay to her/his words and feelings are measures of the worth we accord her/him. We enact the theology of immanence, the belief that we are each inherently valuable, by creating groups in which each person is given time and attention — given respect.

If we think of a group or a circle as a living entity, we can imagine that, like a person, it has a Talking Self, a Younger Self, and a Deep Self. It also has a structure that is determined by the responsibilities of each person and the relationships among individuals in the group.

The Deep Self of a group is the underlying spirit, the sense of connection and common purpose, the bond. That bond is created

and strengthened by sharing energy — working together, sharing food, touching each other, making rituals, singing, chanting, nurturing, laughing.

The concept of a group-mind (and even that of a group bond) is a delicate subject to put forth in an age of cults. But the bond we are talking about is never one that requires people to stop thinking independently, to lose their individuality. On the contrary, a small group that functions by means of the principle of immanence — one that accords each person respect for her/his views, ideas, and feelings — strengthens the individual's sense of self.

The Talking Self of a group is the thinking self, the group's ideas, policies, philosophies, and conversations. Younger Self is the feeling self, one which is often ignored in meetings. It is also the group's sense of humor, of play. A sound group must incorporate and work with all these levels.

Talking is what most groups do with most of their time. Unfortunately, nothing can be accomplished without talking about it beforehand, during the event, and afterward. Hence, groups have meetings.

Some meetings are better than others, but no meeting is as much fun as a walk on the beach, a dinner with friends, or a cozy evening with one's lover. Meetings are work, and people almost always prefer to be doing something else. People will, however, attend meetings if they feel that the work is worth doing, and that their contributions are important.

In most hierarchical groups, at any given time in a meeting, a very few people will be doing all the talking. The others will be silent — sometimes impressed, more often bored, doodling, writing letters to absent friends, or thinking about what to eat for dinner. The few talkers end up making the decisions and formulating the plans; the others abdicate or feel subtly discounted. When groups work in this fashion, they reinforce the thought-forms of estrangement. Members get the idea that some people are valuable and others are not. And very often in groups — even radical and progressive groups — the people who do most of the talking and receive most of the group's time and attention are

those considered more valuable by society as a whole. It is not that the men, or the middle-class people, or the white people, or the highly educated people consciously conspire to keep others silent — it is that they have been subtly conditioned since childhood to believe that their opinions, and those of people like themselves, are valuable. Women, working class people, people of color, and people without formal education, are conditioned to think of their opinions and feelings as valueless. They are taught to listen to an inner voice that murmurs, "You shouldn't say that. You only think that because something is wrong with you. Everybody else knows more about things than you do."

Feminists who became conscious of the difficulty many women have in speaking up have developed a process that helps overcome the problem. We go around the circle, and each person is given time to speak without interruption. No one has to fight to hold the floor, or to assure that she will have a chance to talk. And even those who think their opinions have little value sometimes are surprised to discover how much they have to say when the meeting's structure allots them time in which to speak.

The Native Americans do *rounds* in the sweat lodge, passing a rattle from one person to another. Whoever holds the rattle may speak, chant, call the elements, pray, or sing, as she/he feels inspired. The group-thinking and group-feeling processes that encourage shared power and circular structure are based on rounds.

When we do rounds, the quality of our listening is as important as the quality of our talking. If we maintain that everybody's concerns and views have inherent value, we are obligated to listen to what each person is saying.

At the same time, when we speak we must become aware of whether or not other people are actually listening. Instead of repeating ourselves over and over because we sense that we are not being heard, we can learn to comment on the level of attention, to ask if people are bored, to shut up if necessary. Inflicting boredom on others is a form of violence.'

ACTIVE LISTENING EXERCISE

This exercise can help us become aware of how well we are (or are not) listening to others. It also helps us learn what we feel when we *are* being listened to, so that we can notice when we start losing our audience.

Divide into pairs, and choose a group timekeeper. Pick a topic related to the group's purpose. (See Appendix B, "Tools for Groups," for a list of suggestions.)

Each speaker talks on the topic for two minutes without interruption. (Times can be extended if you wish, but it is useful to practice with the two-minute limit in order to discover how much can be said in a short time.)

The other partner listens both for content and for feeling. At the end of the period, she/he briefly restates what she/he heard, without adding judgements (even approving judgements). In this culture, we are all trained to seek approval. One purpose of this exercise is to discover how good we feel when we are heard — whether or not we are praised. For power-from-within is the ability to base our actions on our own values and sense of rightness — whether or not others approve.

Switch roles. Then tell each other what you liked or didn't like about your partner's response, and how you felt doing the exercise. Share responses in the group as a whole.

This exercise is useful in a group in which people feel disconnected from each other, because most of us connect more easily with one person than with a group. It can be done several times, changing topics and partners to create new lines of connection. It is also useful when groups are in conflict and no one is listening to anyone else, or when a group is in a situation that evokes strong and frightening feelings.

The quality of a group's Talking Self can be judged by the quality of the language members use. Language that works in groups is the same language that works magic; it is simple, strong, concrete, direct, evocative of images and sensations. We cannot come into our power unless we can speak with passion. The clearer we are in our language, the clearer we are about our feelings.

Cliches and buzzwords mask our feelings, even from ourselves, by providing prepackaging for our experiences. When we hear ourselves using jargon, we are avoiding original thinking and avoiding being open about our feelings. When we say, for example, "That really pushed my buttons," we are using a stock phrase so that we don't have to say, "You hurt me. I feel angry. I'm scared." Whenever members of a group decide to "give each other strokes," I question whether they honestly like each other.

CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING ROUNDS

The group picks a subject, such as success, our mothers, or sex. We go around the circle. Each person is given time to speak. Time may be allotted for questions, clarifications, or responses. We speak from personal experience. When the circle has been completed, we have an open discussion about the common threads and the differences among us. From that discussion, we may develop an analysis.

This is the basic process from which much feminist analysis developed. We empower ourselves by seeking the truth in our experience, by making our own truths, not those of the Great Man, the basis for our theories.

A similar process is called *Quaker Dialogue*. Each member of the circle speaks about a common problem, and how she or he resolved it. We do not comment on each other's statements or discuss them — but we learn from each other's solutions.

BRAINSTORMING

This is a process for group thinking and/or problem-solving. When an issue or problem arises, we express it in the group. Members are encouraged to think up creative solutions, ranging from the wild and improbable to the practical. The ideas are written down (preferably on a large sheet of paper so everyone can see them). They are not discussed or criticized. The purpose of brainstorming is not to refine one solution, but to see how broad a range of ideas we can formulate. Criticism and a focus on practicalities, at this stage, only dampen our creativity.

A brainstorm may or may not take place in a round, but even in a free-form discussion, group members should be sure that

everyone in the group is encouraged to speak, and that a few members do not dominate the process.

After the brainstorm is over, we can pick up a few of the proposed solutions, refine them, and decide on a course of action.

FEELING-SHARING ROUNDS

It is the fourth day of peanut butter and processed cheese in the gymnasium used for the women's jail at the Diablo blockade. Spirits are high, but most of us have not been arraigned yet, and we are expecting to spend the rest of the weekend here, where you cannot close a door and escape, even for a moment, from everybody's high spirits. We begin to hear grumbling around the edges — a sound of brewing discontent. About fifteen of us gather in a circle in the yard. One after another we speak, without being interrupted, without being questioned, or answered, or given advice.

"Everyone's always talking about this wonderful unity we have — and I feel lonely. Terribly alone. My affinity group doesn't get together and there's all this superficial contact — everybody hugging and all that, but nobody I can really talk to."

"I came here out of despair. I really couldn't afford to take the time but I just couldn't stand reading the headlines every day and feeling like there was nothing I could do. So here I am — and it felt so good to be out here, to be doing something, anything — even if it was just being a body, sitting in front of that damn plant. But then, when you see the forces they've got, the power — there's so many of them and they've got all the weapons and the courts and the laws. All they have to do is sweep us up like so much litter. And I don't know, I don't feel full of love and peace and all of that garbage — I'm angry! I'm really fucking angry. I want to hit someone or kill somebody. But I don't want to."

"I had to leave my kids to come down here — and that's okay, that's why I'm here, because of my kids. But Jessica's only three and I'm worried about her, and I just want to go home! I want my own bed. I want my own toothbrush! I want to be able to close the door and have some quiet and I can't stand people walking on my mattress."

And as each woman says what she feels, the rest of us murmur in agreement, "MMMMMMN. Yes, I feel that too. And that. And that. And some part of me — even that." Until it begins to seem that we are all aspects of each other, or of some larger self, each of us expressing one facet of the whole. And the whole is rich; it is infinitely richer than silence, it is deeper than a cheer, a bright song, a group hug. We begin to feel that we know each other, that we are connected, no longer alone.

In feeling-sharing rounds, we go around the circle, and each person speaks about whatever feelings she/he previously thought were unacceptable. Each person may ask for response, or she/he may prefer not to. People are also encouraged to express any fears they might have about having exposed their feelings.

The Younger Self of a group is the feeling Self. A group bond is an emotional bond, and, of course, we connect by sharing affection, joy, pleasure, laughter, and trust. But our negative feelings — anger, guilt, shame, sadness, loneliness, and despair — are potentially even more powerful sources of connection. These are the feelings we tend to hug secretly to our chests, as the self-hater whispers in our ears, "You are the only person sick enough or nasty enough to feel like that." To Younger Self, the conflict, when we feel emotions that are not nice, can become one of life or death: Do I, feeling like this, deserve to be connected to the human community? Do I deserve to exist? To be loved? Younger Self is trained by the culture to believe that everything it feels is wrong. We are raised to compete with others from the moment we can speak, and yet taught that good people aren't competitive. We are raised in a climate of violence, in which force is the national answer to every question, yet taught that anger and aggression are nasty. We are trained to feel that we are worthless unless others give us approval.

Yet Younger Self does feel angry, competitive, jealous, bitchy, dependent, weak, scared, and lonely. Often Younger Self believes it is the only one who feels these things, that everyone else is altruistic, kind, even-tempered, generous, brave, honest, and thrifty. Younger Self may fear that its feelings are so negative and so nasty that devastation would occur if they were released.

The more we remain silent about our negative feelings, the more separate and alienated we feel, and the more the unexpressed feelings become sources of group conflict. But when we feel that our anger, our pain, can be accepted and shared, we feel that our right to be the people we are is accepted at the deepest level.

Younger Self sniffs the air of a group very cautiously before it decides it is safe to show its true face. Unfortunately, most of the ways we habitually respond to feelings convince Younger Self that they are not acceptable. Nobody likes to see someone else in pain, yet when we try to cheer people up, to make them feel better, to solve their problems — or when we argue about the content of the feeling — we are telling Younger Self: No, it is not all right to feel what you're feeling.

Groups get into trouble when members begin to take over each other's problems, to give advice. Giving people new information can be empowering; giving advice makes people dependent, implies that they are not smart enough to assess the information for themselves. If we tell Joan to fold up her mattress during the day so that it will not get stepped on, we have told her nothing she couldn't figure out for herself. And we have deflected the conversation from the full range of her emotional experience, negated her feelings, instead of accepting them.

There are many techniques for working with feelings in groups. We can begin each meeting of the circle with a *weather report* — giving each member a short time to talk about her or his emotional weather. We can stop periodically in the midst of discussions to breathe, to relax, to ask each person to state in one or two words what she or he is feeling. We can pay careful attention to the style of our communications, avoiding blaming, placating, computing, or distracting.² We can state our criticisms as *I messages* such as, "I feel hurt when you do that," instead of voicing attacks such as, "You're a creep!"

Frankly, all of the techniques above may be helpful, but none of them guarantees a circle's emotional bonding. In fact, they may work against it. In any group in which a great deal of value is placed on correctness — be it social, religious, political, or psy-

chological — Younger Self tends to dive under the bedclothes. True feelings are not necessarily correct and when we express them honestly, they may not come out in forms that merit the growth-movement's seal of approval. Younger Self prefers an atmosphere of irreverence, teasing, gossip, and, occasionally, open conflict to a hushed respect for propriety of any sort.

The truth is, you can't fool Younger Self. Talking Self may respond to the content of another's messages — Younger Self will respond to the emotion behind them. It doesn't matter how carefully you phrase your statements as I-messages — if you are feeling contempt for someone, that person's Younger Self will feel it. It doesn't matter how often you say, "I hear you." Younger Self knows whether or not you are really listening.

To convince Younger Self that its feelings are accepted, we need to listen honestly, and to feel our own responses honestly. For emotions never exist in a vacuum. A circle has a group heart, just as it has a group mind. Anyone who is feeling pain, rage, or fear is in touch with an important aspect of the group reality, that each person must, on some level, be sensing. If we cannot allow ourselves to draw forth our own painful feelings, if we try to shove them away or deny them, then we cannot accept them in another person.

SELF-CRITICISM WITH RESPONSE

This process is variously called Criticism/Self-Criticism or (by the Movement for a New Society) Evaluation/Self-Evaluation. It was developed by the Chinese Communists and has been widely adapted. I prefer to do it in the following manner:

The group decides on one or a number of questions. (See Appendix B, "Tools for Groups," for suggestions.) An example is: How much time do I take up in the group, as compared with others? The groups does a round, with each person evaluating herself or himself on the question. After each person speaks, the group responds, telling her/him how accurate they feel the evaluation was, and perhaps augmenting it. The purpose is to discover what, if anything, the person needs to change, and how the group can be helpful.

I once kept a quote from Gertrude Stein pinned up on my wall. It said something like, "No artist needs criticism, only honest appreciation. If he needs criticism, he is no artist."

In context, what she meant was that an artist must learn to be her/his own critic, not dependent on the judgement of others. A self-criticism session asks us to evaluate what our standards are and whether or not we meet them, instead of listening to other people tell us how we fail to meet their standards. In some groups, criticism/self-criticism is done by focusing a session on a general evaluation of one individual. I prefer the process described above because I believe that neither strengths nor weaknesses within a group are solely individual — they are qualities of the group as a system. So if Jane takes up far too much of each meeting talking, the problem is not that Jane talks too much — it is equally that Laura never says anything, that Tom goes to sleep instead of telling Jane that he is bored, or that the group needs stronger facilitation. Also, encouraging people to criticize themselves reinforces their sense of self-worth — their attitude that they are indeed capable of knowing what to do and whether or not they are doing it.

GROUP BONDING EXERCISE

(This works best in units of from four to eight people.) Sit comfortably in a circle. Ground, and center, and breathe together. If you like, do the Tree of Life. (See the description on page 30.)

Go around the circle clockwise. Each person says her or his name, and the group repeats it.

The name can be spoken or sung. The group may speak it once or three times, and may sing it back to the person.

Now everyone closes their eyes. Again, go around the circle. Each person says her/his name, and the group repeats it. As we repeat each name, we visualize that person.

Again, go around the circle. Each person says her/his name. This time, with our eyes still closed, we let ourselves picture that person's energy. We may sense a quality or an image, and as it comes to us we say it out loud:

"Rose."

"Warm."

"Turquoise and red."

"A colorful tropical bird."

We take time for each person until images have stopped coming and silence falls. (We are practicing our sensitivity to the ebb and flow of group energy.)

After we have gone around the circle, we focus on the center — breathing together, and visualizing all the images, and qualities, and energies of each of us flowing into the center. Gradually, an image or scene will begin to be created by the group energy. We describe it to each other, as aspects surface in our minds, until we are all clearly in the same place.

"I see a jungle."

"I see bright-colored birds flying."

"I see a mountain — a volcano."

"Yes, the jungle lies on its slopes."

"And I see a cave."

"In the side of the mountain."

"And we can follow it down to the fire."

We can continue with the group vision as long as we like. It may become an elaborate mutual journey. We may find a group symbol or an image of power. We may discover a task.

When we are done, we breathe together again, and return ourselves to ordinary space and time, grounding whatever energy we have raised. Then we can talk about the vision and discuss its meanings.

In Reclaiming, we find that when we teach groups this technique, many people come away from the first exploration feeling annoyed or angry, feeling that the images are shallow and stereotyped. When we ask people what they were seeing that they did not say, often we get answers such as:

"I was seeing bones and blood — but everyone else was seeing flowers, so I didn't want to spoil their trance. But now I feel alienated."

"You're kidding — I was seeing bones and blood. But since nobody else was, I didn't want to say."

As we continue around the circle, we discover that nobody was really *in* the pretty scene the group created. Rather, all were seeing much darker and usually more powerful images, but they were

withholding them from the group. The discovery of how much we all withhold is disconcerting, and the trance exercise becomes a model of group process in ordinary situations.

If we repeat the exercise, with each person committed to expressing even negative images, we will discover a much deeper level of group power and bonding.

CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING

The process of decision making that embodies the principle of power-from-within is called consensus. Consensus was used by the Quakers (whose doctrine of the "inner light" reflects a Christian conception of immanence), but the process has been used informally among tribal groups for centuries, especially in Native American cultures.

Jerry Mander, in an article on the forced relocation of the Hopi and Navaho peoples in the Big Mountain area of Arizona, quotes Oliver La Farge, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Hopi Agent, on Hopi consensus:

It is alien to the Hopis to settle matters out of hand by majority vote. Such a vote leaves a dissatisfied minority, which makes them very uneasy. Their natural way of doing it is to discuss it among themselves at great length, and group by group, until public opinion as a whole has settled overwhelmingly in one direction.³

Consensus is not the same as voting. Nor does it merely mean unanimity. Groups sometimes think they are using consensus but revert to voting when they cannot reach unanimity. They are not truly using consensus, however, because the process is based on a principle that makes it entirely different from voting.

When we vote, we are still in the framework of duality. "Here are two alternatives," we are saying, "choose one over the other. The choice most people make is the one we will act upon — whether the others like it or not." The majority wields power-over the minority.

The principle of immanence, however, gives no one authority to wield power-over others. With consensus, we tell a new story.

We say that everybody's voice is worth hearing, that all concerns are valid. If one proposal makes a few people — even one person — deeply unhappy, there is a valid reason for that unhappiness, and if we ignore it, we are likely to make a mistake. Instead of spending the group's energy trying to force or manipulate people into agreeing to something they don't want, we can drop either or both alternatives and look for a new solution, a more creative option that can satisfy all concerns. We can afford to do this because the universe is not truly divided into either/or choices. It is rich with infinite possibilities.

The consensus process works best with a facilitator who calls on people and keeps the meeting focused. (See Chapter Seven, "Circles and Webs: Group Structures," for more notes on facilitation.) One person puts forth a proposal. In a small group not pressured by time, the group may do a round on the proposal. More often, the facilitator asks if anyone wishes to speak about it, either to speak for it or to voice questions or concerns.

The concept of *concerns* is important. Negative reactions are not expressed as hard-and-fast positions. Instead of saying, "I am categorically against it," we say "I am concerned about it," and we give the reason. Voicing concerns leaves room for the proposal to be modified to meet those concerns.

For example, someone might say, "Kathy wants to join the group; I propose that we accept her."

Someone else might reply, "I like Kathy, but I'm concerned that the group is growing too big."

There are many ways that the proposal could be modified: we could decide to admit Kathy, and no one else after her; we could ask Kathy to wait until someone else dropped out of the group; or we could decide to help Kathy form a group of her own.

If a person feels that her/his concerns cannot be met and the rest of the group is enthusiastic about the proposal, that person can "stand aside." For example, a member might propose that the group study and discuss a certain book. Perhaps one member has no enthusiasm for the project, or is already overwhelmed with things to read from work or school. She/he could decide not to participate, and let the rest of the group go ahead.

If one person has strong objections to a proposal, especially ethical objections, she/he can *block* the proposal. *Blocks* are used rarely and carefully. I can think of only a few instances (out of hundreds of meetings I have seen in which the consensus process was used) when anyone has blocked a proposal. Yet the ability to block a proposal gives each individual ultimate power to influence the decisions that affect her/him. If one person feels strongly enough about an issue to block it, she/he is probably aware of important factors the rest of the group should consider more carefully.

People may raise objections to a proposal, as well as concerns. When feelings run strongly against a proposal, it may be dropped instead of modified.

Consensus takes time. It works most efficiently in small groups; when a group is too large, it becomes impossible to hear everybody. Time spent reaching consensus is well spent, however, because proposals that are wholeheartedly agreed to by a group are carried out wholeheartedly. Voting may seem quicker (although not always — groups can spend long periods attempting to cajole one faction to change its position) but often an unhappy minority undermines a project pushed by the majority, or simply fails to carry it out.

No group, however, can decide by consensus whether to be shot or hung. The consensus process is not effective for choosing the lesser of two evils, for deciding between bad alternatives. It does not work in a dualistic framework.

For example, in the women's jail during the third or fourth day of the Diablo blockade, when about three hundred of us were crowded into a cold gymnasium sleeping on pads crammed wall-to-wall on the concrete floor, we were given a choice by the guards: forty more women were arriving; we could have them in our room, making the crowding worse, or they could be isolated from us in a separate, and even colder room.

Instead of breaking down into affinity groups, we began to debate the question all together — always a mistake. Consensus works badly in large groups at the best of times. We were given fifteen minutes to make the decision. The pressure of time is another factor that makes consensus more difficult.

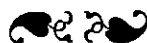
Feelings ran deep. Many women felt strongly that they could not stand to be crowded further. Others felt equally strongly that the new women should not be isolated. The tension caused by days of poor food and physical discomfort began to show.

Even so, the consensus process worked as consensus works: we came up with two creative solutions. The first was that the new women should go into the other room, but that free passage should be allowed between the rooms. This was vetoed by the guards. The second solution was that women from our group should go into the other room, and the new women should come into our room. This, also, the guards would not allow. So the fifteen minutes passed, and we came to no consensus. The guards made their own decision, and we women felt we had failed each other.

Yet in reality we did not fail, we were manipulated. Even though we could see at the time that we were being set up to be divided, we didn't see how to stop the process. Looking back, however, we could have recognized, when our solutions were turned down, that we were not actually being given the chance to make a decision that would suit us. We could, at that point, have refused to cooperate any longer with the illusion that was being perpetrated. Our withdrawal would have made the reality of the situation clearer — that the guards, not us, were responsible for the conditions we were forced to endure.

When consensus does work, however, everyone feels both a personal sense of triumph and a sense of closeness to the group. The process requires maturity, and flexibility, along with willingness to give way for the good of the group, to listen rather than hold forth, to invent rather than insist. Oddly, as people practice consensus, they become more mature, more flexible, more willing to listen and to give away. Consensus calls forth the best that is in us, and so empowers us to work together in community.

Chapter Seven



Circles and Webs: Group Structures

In the circle, we all face each other. No one is exalted; no one's face is hidden. No one is above — no one is below. We are all equal in the circle, the womb, the breast, the eye, the cunt, the sun, the moon — the forms of immanence.

All groups have structures — open and hidden. Just as individuals have bones and flesh, and also a subtle energy-body in a treelike pattern formed by currents of power, so too a group has an outer form and an inner form.

We can change consciousness, we can transform our inner landscape, tell new stories, dream visions in new thought-forms. But to change culture we need to bond in new ways, to change the structures of our organizations and communities. "Function follows form," we could say (reversing the Bauhaus dictum). For as we have seen, structure determines how energy will flow.

The structures of estrangement are hierarchies. Their form is the ladder. In schools, in corporations, in government bureaucracies, in social agencies and professions, we are expected to climb from rung to rung. The function of a ladder is to be climbed. The rungs keep those above separate from those below. Upon each rung, we wield power over those below, and must

bow to the authority of those above. The higher rungs are populated by fewer and fewer people, so a small number always exercises power over a much larger mass.

The structures of immanence are circular: clans, tribes, covens, collectives, support groups, affinity groups, consciousness-raising groups. In a circle, each person's face can be seen, each person's voice can be heard and valued. All points on a circle are equidistant from its center: that is its definition, and its function — to distribute energy equally.

Creating and working in circular structures, however, is an enormous challenge. We are familiar with ladders; we understand them even when we dislike them; they make us comfortable because we know what to expect. Circles are unfamiliar territory, new ground. The experiences we have within them can be healing or heartbreaking; wonderful or extremely frustrating, intimate or alienating, more intense than any other relationships except family ties.

Changing the structure of a group can be a powerful way of changing the relationships among people within it. Every group has both an open and a hidden structure. To a large extent, especially in nonhierarchical groups, structure can be thought of as patterns of communication that determine how information flows. Information is power — it enables us to do what we otherwise could not do. In a hierarchical group, only a small number of people have access to information and they make decisions. In a nonhierarchical structure, everybody makes decisions and so all must have access to information. Most nonhierarchical groups do not pay enough attention to the ways in which information spreads among group members. Systems to spread information — newsletters, flyers, telephone trees, meetings, and (most of all) conversation — are the life blood of any group. Groups thrive when people within a community have many informal meetings, go to the same parties, run into each other on the street, meet for coffee, and generally enjoy each other's society, because a network of friendships creates a grapevine that is the only truly efficient way to spread information. People often ignore leaflets, but everybody listens to gossip.

The formal roles people take on in a group are its bones, the underpinnings of its outer structure. To assure that power is shared within a group, formal roles should rotate among members. People can practice a role, such as facilitator, in a relatively safe setting — a meeting of a small group in an unstressful situation. Virtuoso facilitators can reserve their talents for moments of great need — for example, legal meetings in jail that take place shortly before arraignments. Good facilitators should also rotate, however, so that they, too, learn a variety of skills. A good, though of course flexible, rule-of-thumb is: never perform the same job twice in succession.

Groups function best when their formal structures are clearly defined and understood. Following is a description of six of the formal roles often performed in a variety of nonhierarchical groups, ranging from collectives to covens. (I personally dislike most of the names for these roles, but haven't invented any better ones.)

THE FACILITATOR

The facilitator observes the *content* of talk in a meeting. She/he keeps the meeting focused and moving. Commonly, when people are discussing one proposal, they will drift off the subject and begin talking about something else. The facilitator reminds them of what the subject is, and if necessary sets aside a future time to discuss the related issues that surface. From time to time, the facilitator may give a brief "state-of-the-meeting" report, saying, "This is what we are talking about. . . . These are the positions and concerns. . . . This is what we have already decided that is relevant." Making reports and restating proposals is especially necessary in long, tense, exhausting meetings during which people have a tendency to forget what they are doing.

The facilitator calls on people. When several people raise their hands to speak, she/he can give them numbers and let them speak in turn. When people are assured that they will be called on, their anxiety levels are lessened, and they can more easily listen to others.

The facilitator should maintain neutrality on the issue being discussed. If she/he has a strong position, or wishes to speak to the issue, another facilitator can be chosen.

VIBESWATCHER

A vibeswatcher (used in the Abalone Alliance) watches the process of a meeting. In particular, she/he remains aware of levels of tension and anxiety. She/he may interrupt the meeting periodically to suggest that people breathe, that feelings be acknowledged, that personal attacks be stopped. In large or tense meetings, a vibeswatcher can be appointed. In smaller meetings, every person present can take on some of this responsibility.

PRIESTESS/PRIEST

In a ritual, the priestess or priest watches the energy of the group. She/he keeps it moving, starts and stops phases of the ritual as the energy changes, *channels* the energy by opening her/his own body to let it flow through. The priestess/priest develops a dual consciousness, an ability to be ecstatic in the moment and, at the same time, to keep a practical eye on what everybody else is doing, whether the cauldron is burning too high, and whether the children are getting trampled underfoot. Especially in large rituals in which many people are unfamiliar with magic, the Priestess/Priest must assure that the energy starts grounded, stays grounded (in the sense of maintaining connection with the earth) and is returned to the earth at the end. It is helpful to have more than one person acting as priestess/priest within a ritual.

PEACEKEEPERS

Peacekeepers (used in the Abalone Alliance) function not only during meetings, but whenever the group is active. They help keep order and deal with crises. At demonstrations, marches, and blockades, they may function as monitors who are trained to defuse potential violence from outside the group or from within it.

Peacekeepers do not have arcane or professional skills. They may have practice in calming and centering themselves, in active listening, in establishing communication with hard-to-reach people. They may encircle a violent person and walk her/him out of the area, or sing to drown the voice of a verbally abusive person. Their value is not so much in their techniques, but in their willingness and readiness to assume responsibility. Ideally, every person in a group becomes a peacekeeper.

MEDIATOR

A mediator is a neutral, objective person who helps others resolve a conflict. A mediator is not a judge, she/he does not choose between two people or two factions, but rather helps each to listen and to resolve their differences. Mediation is a definite skill, and, usually, good mediators have had some training or much practice. Most communities, however, include many people who make good mediators. When conflicts arise within a group, members should not be ashamed to call for help from the larger community.

COORDINATOR

A coordinator can serve as a group center, a switchboard through which information is passed. She/he keeps track of what is being done, who is doing it, and what needs to be done. The coordinator's role is especially important in large projects involving many details and many helpers. It also tends to be exhausting and not as rewarding as many other tasks, but it provides a marvelous opportunity to make mistakes and learn how to take criticism. Coordinators should be more widely appreciated, and should exchange roles often.

The most interesting aspect of a group, however, is its hidden structure. All groups function according to both overt and covert rules. The unspoken rules often concern expression of feelings. In many families, for example, an unspoken rule says: you can't say anything negative about Mommy and Daddy. In many groups, a similar unspoken rule holds sway: don't say anything negative about anybody.

In the Reclaiming Collective, however, we run our meetings by this covert rule: if people laugh at you, insult you, and swear at you, they are showing affection; when people speak quietly and carefully according to the approved growth-movement formulas, watch out! Children run in and out, we eat and drink continuously, and the meetings resemble something between amateur comedy tryouts and a pitched battle in a nursery school. The meetings inevitably run for four or five hours, but we get through our agendas. I consider these meetings to be great group process.

The overt rule, which we are continually struggling to live down to, is: all feelings are real, and inherently valid; express them freely.

Another aspect of a group's hidden structure can be made visible by having members ask themselves the following questions:

How much do I feel connected to the group? How alienated do I feel? If the group were a circle — where would I be in it? At the center? On the periphery? Outside? How would I act differently if I felt central and connected?

A group that is having conflicts might ask each member to draw the group as a circle, and to mark her/his position, so that everyone can look at the drawing and talk about the various perceptions of the structure.

One easy way to give up power is by assuming we don't have it. There are strong cultural forces at work making us feel alienated and isolated, so it should be no surprise that group situations can be very painful for many people, who feel excluded or peripheral, never quite in with the in crowd. Someone who feels isolated feels powerless; and it is always easy to feel that others — the group — are doing something to that individual, imposing something that she/he doesn't have the right or authority to challenge. After all, throughout our lives various groups *have* been imposing conditions on us that (they claim) we do not have the right to challenge. We tend to assume, even in structures that are openly committed to egalitarian, antiauthoritarian principles, that we don't have the right to make decisions unless we are given specific permission. That is what our experience in authoritarian structures has taught us.

As an example, in the early days of the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant blockade, another woman and I felt a need for a general gathering in the evening, to sing, share announcements, and feel a sense of the camp as a whole. The blockade was clearly an open, anarchic structure; nevertheless, our first instinct was to seek out a trainer, someone who seemed to have a position of leadership to ask, "Who has the authority to call a meeting?" "You do," was the response. So we did — by simply walking around camp and calling out, "We're having a gathering."

We could easily, however, have assumed a position of powerlessness, and spent the evening grumbling about how insensitive the leaders were because they didn't see that we needed a meeting of the whole camp.

Let's imagine, for a moment, that the Abalone Alliance had a hierarchical structure, that when we asked, "Who has the authority to call a meeting?" we were told that we could submit a proposal in triplicate to the Board of Directors, and that the Chairman would decide.

We could still have walked around camp, called out, "We're having a meeting," and had one. The consequences might have been different — but the power was ours if we had recognized and been willing to take it. That's important to remember when we deal with the hierarchical structures we encounter constantly in daily life. Very often, we abandon our power even when the structure does not take it away from us. Or we ask permission to take it — putting ourselves in the position of dependent children, instead of assuming our right and authority to make decisions.

The formal roles in a group can be used consciously to help change its underlying structure. For example, during one meeting in the women's jail at Diablo Canyon, I was about to facilitate when another woman objected. "The same people always run the meetings — and I think there are some power issues going on."

We asked if she had ever facilitated a meeting, and when she said no we appointed her facilitator for that one. Instead of being an outsider complaining, she was given a formal role that placed her at center. Often now, in the collective groups I belong to, we begin meetings with a weather report, asking each person how central or distant they are feeling. Whoever feels most peripheral may be appointed facilitator. Whoever tends to monopolize the talk is asked to take notes. Whoever feels grumpiest and most irritated is asked to be vibeswatcher.

In any group, members have associations outside the group itself. These contacts may range from quick exchanges of news to deep friendships. The more two people communicate outside the group, the more information they may exchange, and the more they may influence each other. An outside coalition can increase

the influence of its members within the group. A coalition, like an individual, can take the position of outsider, encapsulating its members and alienating them.

When a group is alive and thriving, coalitions are constantly forming, shifting, deepening, re-forming. When there is a great deal of crossover among coalitions, they become the stitching that binds the group together as a whole. But if they become frozen into factions, or if one or more members find themselves excluded from coalitions, the coalitions can become sources of schism.

There is no way to make people like each other if they don't. There are, however, ways to increase contact and communication among members. When two people work together, they generally draw closer, provided they are both responsible. Otherwise, they may end up hating each other. In that case, one or the other may leave the group, thus resolving the problem. If people from different factions within a group take on a task together, they are forced to communicate more with each other, and often a new bond is formed. In Reclaiming we have found that teaching in pairs and meeting often to plan classes causes us to grow very close to our co-teachers. That closeness becomes one of the rewards of teaching. Nevertheless, we make an effort to shift teams around, so that we maintain many ties with many members, and the group as a whole is strengthened.

People come to groups, as we have said, from many different backgrounds and with many different needs and experiences. The positions we assume in a group are often part of an ongoing pattern that each of us repeats in life unconsciously, unless we make a deliberate effort to become aware of it and to change. Some of us get used to being at center, important figures in any group. Others gravitate toward the middle, where they can be anonymous. Still others are always on the outside. It takes a lot of work to change the patterns we have learned in competitive groups and in other structures of domination.

Following are descriptions of ten such positions, ten informal roles I have seen people take on in nonhierarchical groups. Of course, no one plays only one role — we all switch, invent new characters for ourselves, grow and develop. Some of us are even

able to function as solid, committed, loving, hard-working, real people.

Power-from-within encompasses the power to change ourselves. In my experience, people change not by being given answers, but by asking themselves pertinent questions. I have provided such questions for each of the roles I describe. The ten are arranged according to the place within a circle that each tends to assume, moving from the periphery to the center.

THE LONE WOLF

You don't commit yourself to the group, but love to criticize and compare the group with other groups, usually unfavorably. Ask yourself, "Why do I want to hang around people I consider inferior? Am I afraid of my equals?" Also ask, "How would my criticisms be different if I said, 'We should' . . . instead of, 'You should' . . .?"

THE ORPHAN

Often you come from a background of loss and deprivation. You may have been a prisoner, mental patient, or another one of the culture's Fallen. You desperately want the closeness the group offers, and are terrified both of the vulnerability that represents, and of the rejection you are sure you will get instead. You believe that if people really knew you, they would be disappointed or disgusted. So you slink around the edges of groups, never opening up or making close friends, and eventually others *do* start to dislike you, fulfilling your worst fears. Ask yourself, "What work can I take on for the group, preferably in company with one or two others? What can I contribute?"

GIMME SHELTER

You are constantly demanding something from the group: advice, reassurance, help. You want the group to make you feel welcome, important, loved, supported. After all, don't they say that's what it's there for? Ask yourself, "What actual work can I do for the group? What tasks can I take on — and can I do them in such a way that my work does not require anyone else to expend time or energy on the tasks?" Also ask, "How would I act differently if I felt I had power?" then act that way.

FILLER

You just take up space. You feel your opinions and ideas aren't very interesting or valuable. Perhaps you have been trained all your life to think that way. Wear brighter colors and encourage yourself to speak up at least once at every meeting, particularly when your ideas and perceptions differ from others'. Take on a task involving more than routine work — perhaps with the orphan. Make a date with someone from the group to do something together outside the group.

THE PRINCESS

You are so very sensitive that the group process is never smooth enough for you. You feel compelled to comment on slight tensions and minor nuances of conflict, often expressing great anxiety. The Princess (who may also be male) is often a therapist or a psychic, and often leaves groups unless she/he is running them. Ask yourself "Who am I competing with, and why?" Refrain from commenting on group process until you can do so by affectionately insulting another group member.

THE CLOWN

The clown or fool is an important figure in many tribal religions. The clown's job is to make fun of people and ceremonies, and to provide comic relief. You probably provide an important service to the group. Nevertheless, ask yourself, "Can I be serious when necessary? Do I know when to practice restraint? Is my clowning, at any given moment, furthering the work of the group? Am I afraid of open conflict?"

THE CUTE KID

You are charming and cute, and want approval from others badly. Your excuse, when you don't want to do something, is to plead helplessness or get sick. You would love to be taken care of, yet you are actually much more competent and strong than you are willing to believe. Ask yourself, "Do I really mean that I *can't*, or that I don't want to? Does the task perhaps need to be done whether I want to do it or not — and done by me? What new level of power or responsibility will I come to if I do it? Does that scare me?" Also ask, "What in my life — in the group — would I do

whether or not others approve?" Ask the group not to praise you for doing those things.

THE SELF-HATER

You are a perfectionist, harder on yourself than on others. Nevertheless, you are continually escalating your standards for the group, and continually outraged at how much others fail to live up to them. You don't understand why other people feel guilty after talking with you, when you are truly only trying to raise their consciousness about the issue of the moment.

Be nicer to yourself. Play. At least once a day, do something irresponsible. Sandwich your criticisms between expressions of appreciation. Ask yourself if you identify with Jesus. If the answer is yes, get friends to sing hymns to you off-key before meetings.

THE ROCK OF GIBRALTAR

You take on thankless tasks and get them done. You remember what everyone else forgets. Everyone comes to you with their problems. Outsiders often see you as "the leader" of the group. Indeed, you feel that the group would fall apart without you.

Ask yourself, "Am I afraid of showing my weaknesses?" Also ask, "What tasks can I delegate?" Give away some of the juicy, creative tasks as well as the routine work. Begin training your replacement immediately, before burnout sets in.

THE STAR

You feel the meeting hasn't really begun until you arrive. You talk a lot, and often interrupt people, because you know that you will say exactly the right thing to save the situation. Really, you are brilliant, and you enjoy impressing people.

Practice silence. Ask yourself, "Do I want to impress people or to empower people? How do I feel about people who are constantly trying to prove to me that I can never equal *them*?" Recognize that others feel the same way about you. Change, and keep your friends.

My tendency in groups is to play the role of Rock or Star. I was trained for those roles from childhood. In my family, I was given a great deal of responsibility. Because my father died when I was

five, I was often my mother's confidante, and learned that even adults took my views and opinions seriously. I grew up feeling special. In school, I was often the smartest kid in the class, the one who always knew the right answer when nobody else did. I was also smart enough to realize that being the constant winner in the classroom competition did not make me well-loved, and in fact, it could easily make me a target of jealousy and hostility. So I developed a kind of phony humility, a manner that said, "Aw, shucks, kids — I'm just one of the gang — those As were sort of an accident. And look how bad I am at softball (heh, heh)."

In groups, I felt comfortable taking on a lot of responsibility, facilitating meetings, taking the role of teacher, priestess, leader. In collectives and nominally leaderless groups, my outward manner was still "Aw, shucks, kids — I'm just one of the gang." Yet, actually, much of my own sense of identity depended upon being the one to step in with a brilliant answer at the crucial moment.

In *The Spiral Dance* I recorded some of the struggles around power and leadership that we went through in my first coven. My present coven, Raving, emerged from a class for women that I taught. We spent three years struggling to break out of the teacher-student framework and make our power relationships truly equal. For a long time I was genuinely confused. I thought I was bending over backward to give people power — I didn't understand why they weren't taking more of it. What I didn't see was the way I held tight to the reins while complaining loudly that the horses wouldn't guide themselves. As long as I saw myself *giving* people power, I unconsciously believed that that power belonged to me.

For example, for a long time we considered our rituals collective because we all performed such tasks as leading various parts, writing invocations, and guiding trances. That was certainly a step toward collectivity and away from the custom of one person leading everything. However, because the actual control of a ritual rests with the person who controls the transitions and the timing — who starts and stops things — it was a lot easier for me to give up leading anything overtly than to give up starting and stopping what everybody else was doing.

I also discovered — painfully — that as each woman in the coven finally came into her own sense of power, she and I would have a fight. I gradually understood that, having taken on a position of authority in the group, I, on some level, represented the principle of authority to each woman, a principle each of us must battle if we are to claim the authority in ourselves. As long as I was willing, even unconsciously, to play authority, each woman was going to have to battle me. Such conflicts may be productive between analyst and client, but in a circle they tended to be extremely draining, especially for me.

Somehow, Raving managed to muddle through. Eventually, we became a collective, called Reclaiming, as well as a coven, and decided to begin teaching classes and helping new groups to form. We also decided that there must be ways to structure the groups based on another model of power, so the new groups wouldn't have to repeat our struggles with authority.

One decision we made was to teach in pairs, so that from the beginning students could see power being shared and flowing easily. One teacher almost inevitably becomes an authority — two create more space in the center, so others can join them more easily. We also systematically turned over parts of each class and each ritual to the students, so that everyone got a chance to be the central focus, to take both power and responsibility. Finally, advanced students began teaching with us.

Another lesson we learned is that the roles people take on in groups are often related to their class backgrounds. Class is not just a matter of income, but of values and expectations, the subtle messages one gets from one's family and peers. My family valued intelligence and education — there was never a doubt in the atmosphere that I was bright, would go to college, and would succeed at something requiring brains. I could have been born, equally bright, into a family in which children were discouraged from speaking to their elders, or where there were too many children for any one to receive much attention. The family values might have centered around hard work instead of education, and the expectations might have been that we just weren't the sort of people who excelled in school, which wasn't an important arena

of life, anyway. I might have grown up thinking I was dumb and should keep my mouth shut in groups of smart people.

Opening up a discussion of our class backgrounds is important in groups — not to make middle-class people feel guilty or defensive, but because we do not really know each other unless we know each other's histories. When class differences can be named, the sense of isolation, of being from another planet, that people from poor or working class backgrounds often feel in groups can be lessened. And we can learn from our differences in ethnic background, race, sex, physical limitation, and appearance.

Estrangement perpetuates itself by keeping us divided from each other. We are taught to fear people of different ethnic or class backgrounds, to turn our frustrations and resentment on each other instead of on the system that hurts us all. Talking about our differences, confronting our distrust of others who are different, is the first step in healing the pain we feel at our separation. Only through such healing can we create community that reaches across the lines of race, sex, and class, so that all our separate strengths can be joined together.

When we struggle to step out of roles, to confront our differences, we do so not to be politically correct, but to free ourselves and to enrich our experience. The culture of domination rewards us for being at center, for hanging on to attention, status, and control. The cult at the heart of American culture is that of personality, offering as its highest reward the narcissistic joy of Making It, of being applauded, admired, and looked-up-to from below as one straddles the top rungs of the ladder. But the top rungs are isolated and unstable. One can always fall. And being looked up to is very different from being supported by the real love and real trust of others upon whom we can also depend, because they are equals, because they can call forth their own power-from-within.

At center, we get attention. We wield power — but we are not free to move. When you are uniquely important and responsible for everything, you are also neatly trapped. When you let go, when you realize that others can do what you do equally well, although undoubtedly differently, you can move on, and under-

take new responsibilities, without expecting what you have built to collapse when you leave.

About a year after we began teaching together, Reclaiming went through a period of crisis. Two of our five members had to move away from the area in order to find jobs in their fields. The remaining three of us were struggling to continue the classes and meet the commitments of the collective. Two of us went to the Diablo blockade, when the alert was called, leaving Lauren by herself to handle everything. At such moments, collectives often crumble. But because we had trained our replacements, other women were ready and eager to take over our responsibilities. Instead of dying the group expanded.

A healthy group is never stable. It is always changing, growing, re-forming. There are many theories about the stages of group formation, but in my experience with groups several stages are generally occurring at once. Nevertheless, a broad movement can usually be discerned, and knowing something of its pattern can, at least, reassure us that we are not the only group who ever went through these particular conflicts and survived. I prefer to conceive of the cycle as following the magic circle of the four elements:

CYCLES OF GROUP TRANSFORMATION

AIR

The group begins with a common vision and common perceptions. Often, members are excited when they meet others who think as they do, who share common goals. This is usually a honeymoon period, during which members feel close to each other and admire each other — because they don't really know each other. Energy is generated.

FIRE

The group struggles to discover how to use its energy. In hierarchical groups, members struggle for power-over. In nonhierarchical groups, members struggle for power more subtly, or struggle to define structures and processes that will empower individuals and allow them to share power equally. The group begins to discover its will, and deep feelings are generated.

WATER

The group struggles with the feelings members have for each other. Now that members know each other, they love each other and rage at each other. People in the group both want and resist more intimacy. They fight about their closeness or distance. Someone's feelings are continually being hurt. Sometimes group members become lovers — or, worse, fall in love with each other's lovers. This stage once drove me to formulate Starhawk's Three Laws of Small Groups:

1. In any small group in which people are involved sexually, sooner or later there will be grave conflicts.
2. In any small group in which people are involved, sooner or later they will be involved sexually, even if only in fantasy.
3. Small groups tend to break up.

EARTH

If the group survives its emotional conflicts, it tends to *crystallize*, defining itself and its boundaries more clearly. As its purpose and character emerge, the group can begin to undertake serious work. During this phase some members usually leave the group (if they haven't left before). New members join. The group functions in the wider world. Its successes, failures, and continued growth lead eventually to a new vision — and the cycle begins again.

In each stage, conflicts arise about the very areas which are potential sources of new growth. Conflict can be creative if we look upon it as telling us what tasks we need to accomplish. Some guidelines for each of the stages follow:

AIR

Conflicts arise about goals, perceptions, and differences. Visions and goals need to be expressed. Accept that people will have differing perceptions. Discuss people's differences in background, including class, race, culture, education, and conditioning to sex roles. Also discuss differences in people's present situation, including their special needs, the resources of time and money available to each, and their personal goals. Differing levels of experience should also be acknowledged.

Create a bonding ritual.

FIRE

Conflicts arise about power. Use all the processes described above that encourage the sharing of power. Exchange roles, train replacements, encourage silent people to speak up and talkative people to occasionally shut up. Practice consensus.

Competition is always present in groups. Acknowledge it: it can be used creatively. Create situations, such as rituals, in which people can show off and be admired.

Work directly with group energy through breathing, chanting, dancing, and grounding.

WATER

What are people feeling? Express the negatives. Speak the unspeakable. Name the group's unspoken rules. Be aware of how much time, energy and attention each member asks for, and receives. Give the group, and individuals, praise and appreciation as well as criticism — and encourage members to accept praise. Share food. Have fun.

When couples or coalitions develop, take care that those involved also strengthen ties with other group members — perhaps by working together on projects.

EARTH

Clarify the group's organizational structure and its boundaries: who is in and who is out. Wish those who leave well, but don't try to keep them if they want to go. Take on new people. Get the work done.

AIR

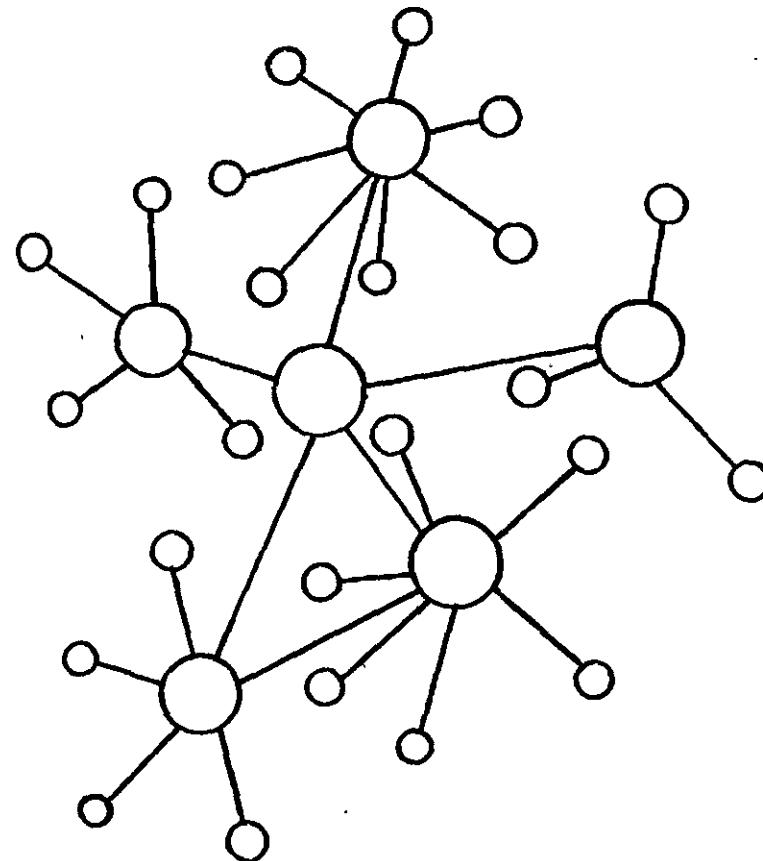
Reflect on the experiences that grow from the work. Arrive at new visions, perceptions, goals, differences. Start a new cycle.

METASTRUCTURES

And so groups grow and combine — but not into faceless masses. They grow as bodies do, into organisms consisting of many cells, many parts, each of which retains its own integrity. We make networks. We weave webs. We could also say that our organizations are like music — they should contain silences and

many small phrases repeated with infinite variations, and they should join in strong rhythms, in moving themes.

Small groups network by using *spokes* (as they are called in the Abalone Alliance) as wheels use spokes to join the rim to the hub. These spokes, however, join wheels to wheels, circles to other circles. I am drawing this as I write and I make patterns that look like snowflakes, crystals, stars, diagrams of molecules, a bed of sea coral, a matrix of bone, something organic, or perhaps a demented child's tinkertoy construction.



Spokes are people chosen to speak for the group, to embody the group will and to connect it with other groups. Like people taking other formal roles, spokes should be changed frequently. Spokes from many groups can meet to discuss issues and, if their groups empower them to do so, to make decisions. When all groups work by consensus, every decision is a synthesis of many people's viewpoints and ideas, not an either/or choice decided by a majority. At the blockade, for example, affinity groups formed clusters and sent spokes to cluster meetings. Each cluster, in turn, sent a spoke to the overall council that made decisions affecting the camp. But the council held no power-over individual groups. Power always rested in the smallest unit. The affinity groups shaped the decisions of the larger groups. The council, after hearing from the clusters, who in turn had heard from each affinity group, could make the decision to begin the blockade. But it could not tell any individual group where to go or what to do.

Such structures are often criticized for being inefficient. They are easily ridiculed — especially in the media. Of course anyone who has recently dealt with a government agency, or tried to get a large corporation to redress a computer error might well question whether hierarchical structures are, indeed, as efficient as we like to believe. In fact, anyone who has ever worked in the lower levels of a hierarchy knows the amount of waste, theft, and minor sabotage that occurs daily. Hierarchies appear to be efficient only because they have enormous resources, money and the armed forces of the state to back them up.

A general can tell a soldier where to attack and *what* weapons to use. If the soldier disobeys, he may be shot or thrown into prison. Networks of circles cannot call on the national guard to enforce their commands, even if they want to. Covens, peace groups, antinuclear groups, and women's groups can neither buy nor command obedience. Indeed, if they tried to command it, they would arouse nothing but resentment. Our major (perhaps our only) real resource is people — their good will, their power-from-within. Efficiency can only be judged by the degree to which the will and the power of the people involved are tapped and

strengthened. By that standard, egalitarian structures are highly efficient.

However, networks do not always convey information quickly. A network does not need a leader, but it often needs a *center* — some point where information can be collected and distributed to all the circles.

On some projects, the center might be a person or a small group of people. Inevitably, because we have all been conditioned to seek outside authority, network members will imbue the central people with authority, ask them to make decisions, and often see them as leaders. Central figures in egalitarian groups should be prepared to challenge others' assumptions, and to maintain a sense of humor.

A center does not have to be a person or group, however. It may be a physical place where people can meet; it may be a periodic event, such as the general camp meeting my friend and I called at the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant blockade. It may be a telephone tree, or a bulletin board located in a central place: It may be a radio station, a newspaper, a newsletter, a coffee house, or a neighborhood bar. It may be a festival or a ritual — but there must be some way to spread information quickly among members of a group, because without information, nothing can happen.

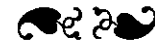
The Goddess manifests where we are. If we dream these networks, these snowflake structures, into a larger vision, we find that their texture differs from place to place. People begin to speak of politics of place, of bioregions.¹ My community is concerned with this neighborhood: with knowing the local dogs and their owners; the child of the couple who run the flower shop; the identical twin butchers; the black man who sits on his stoop and smiles as I walk up and down the street, and who likes to watch the comedy auditions at the Other Cafe. It has to do with history — with the wild boar that once ran on Sutro Hill, with the hippies who flocked here in the sixties, and with their sad remnants, the burnouts, the addicts, who still haunt Haight Street like the ghosts of acid trips past.

Our vision is of this neighborhood, this city, governed not from above but from below. What could we do, as neighbors, as citizens, if we took our power — if we shaped the future of our city out of our love for these particular hills crowned with imported eucalyptus forests, these waters, these bridges, this clear air, these Victorian houses with their long halls and tiny rooms, this legacy of poets and gold dust and earthquakes? What if we also called our community this bay, this ocean? What if it were not something separate from the pelican and the snowy egret and the gray whales passing in their migrations past our cliffs? Perhaps if we knew our neighbors we would not allow them to be forced out of their homes by the ever-rising rents; perhaps they would protect us. Perhaps together we would change the city's face, find ways to draw power from these winds, these tides, find ways to help each other through the losses, the hard times — because hard times come to us all.

When we say *community*, we might think about things in new ways — not with loyalty to "one nation, indivisible" (too big to grasp), but with loyalty to real people in a real place, where we live. Loyalty to a watershed that stretches from the high Sierras down the winding delta into the bay, and to all people who drink that water. In Europe, the old cultures arise again; we are not British, they say, but Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Cornish, Manx; not French, but Breton; not Spanish, but Catalan. The empires come apart at the seams. In the Southwest of the United States, in the Black Hills, the Indian tribes still fight to survive. Perhaps it is time for all of us to reconsider our loyalties, to consider what might further human survival. Our work is not just sawing the legs off the ladders, but building the structures that can replace them.

We spin our circles. Some of them hold and many unravel; yet we begin again, knowing that this work of making community is weaving the mantle of the Goddess. May it be a cloak to shield each one of us from the cold; a net to catch us when we fall.

Chapter Eight



Sex and Politics

August, 1979

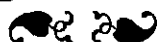
Coven Raving is meeting. As always when we meet, we talk about our lives, about our needs, about our lovers or lack of lovers.

We are gathered under a high Victorian ceiling in a flat in the Mission district. The sashes are drawn as the time comes to work magic. We take off our clothes.

That is relevant, because our magic, our deliberate linking and focusing of minds, our raising and molding of subtle energies, our touching of each other, our intimacy, is not separate from our sexuality. Nor can our sexuality be separated from our magic. We are not lovers with each other, but we are five naked women in the small room, and as we breathe together, inhaling and exhaling in unison, becoming one—one breath, one organism—the air is heavy with odors that are earthy, spicy, fetid. We are exotic flowers; we are slowly-eroding-over-a-lifetime flesh.

We are Witches. We pursue together the Mysteries. And sexuality, not in its narrow but its broadest sense, is the essence of those Mysteries.

Appendix B



Tools for Groups

MEETING PROCEDURES

Breathe together. Connect. Choose facilitator, vibeswatcher, timekeeper, and notetaker. Check-in.

Review agenda and make changes, or call for agenda items, establish priorities, and set times for each.

Go through the agenda.

Take breaks. Stop to periodically check how members are feeling, and to breathe.

Evaluate the meeting.

Set the next meeting date, time, and place.

Close.

RITUAL PROCEDURE

Gather people and explain the ritual. Introductions. Check-in.

Ground and center. Hold hands and breathe together. Tree of Life.

Purify.

Make sacred space. Invoke the four directions.

Invoke the Goddess and God.

Create the image upon which the energy will focus

Raise the cone of power.

Ground the power.

Share food and drink.

Say goodbye to the Goddess and God, and to the four directions.

Open the circle.

QUESTIONS FOR KEEPING TRACK OF GROUP STRUCTURES AND PROCESS

(These are useful in self-criticism sessions.)

1. Why did I come to the group and what do I want from it?
2. What is the group doing well? Poorly? How do I play a part in each?
3. How much time do I take up as compared with others?
4. How much attention do I get as compared with others? Compared with what I want?
5. How much do I listen to others? How present am I?
6. Am I getting the information I need in order to participate in the work of the group? If not, why not?
7. What am I seeing, thinking, or feeling that I'm not saying?

8. How central am I to the group? How much influence do I have? How much do I want? Over which decisions?
9. With whom do I talk most outside the group?
10. How much structure do I want or need in the group?
11. How much closeness do I want or need? How much can I tolerate?
12. How important is the group to me? What priority does it have in my life? How committed to it am I?
13. What are the unspoken rules of the group?
14. Is what I am doing or saying serving the interest of the group or my personal hidden agenda?

SOME TOPICS FOR ROUNDS OR ACTIVE LISTENING

There are an infinite number of possible topics, but these may get you started. Note that broad topics are tackled from a specific, personal angle. We don't do a round on "sexism," we do a round on how being a woman or man has limited us.

1. How has being a woman/being a man limited me? What possibilities has it offered me that I wouldn't otherwise have had?
2. What are the strengths I bring to the group from my specific racial, ethnic, or cultural background? What needs do I have from the group?
3. How has my experience of life been limited or enriched by my class background? What strengths and weaknesses has it given me?
4. How has violence affected my life?
5. In what situations do I now feel powerless? When do I feel empowered?
6. How would my life be different without the threat of nuclear war?
7. What do I do to make money? What do I have to give up to do what I do?
8. What do I do with my anger?
9. What problems do I have with love relationships?
10. How do I expect to die? What feelings does this question evoke?

Appendix C



Chants and Songs

The Fire Song

Words and music by Starhawk

*We can rise with the fire of freedom
Truth is a fire that burns our chains
And we can stop the fire of destruction
Healing is a fire running through our veins*

I wrote this chant especially for a blockade at the Livermore Weapons Laboratories, which took place on February 2, 1982. The second of February is the Celtic holiday sacred to Brigid, Goddess of smithcraft, poetry, and healing.

We can rise with the fire of free-dom

Truth is a fire that burns our chains. And we can

stop the fires of des-truc-tion

Heal-ing is a fire run-nin' through our veins

The Return

Native American

*The earth, the water, the fire, the air,
Return, return, return, return.*

One version of this song is sung by Michael Tierra on a tape of chants called *The Giveaway*.

The musical notation for 'The Return' consists of two staves of music in 8/8 time. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of lyrics: 'The earth, the wa-ter, the fire the air Re-'. The second staff contains the melody for the second line of lyrics: 'turns re-turns re - turns re-turns.' The notes are simple quarter and eighth notes, with a final double bar line at the end of the second staff.

The Flow and the Ebb

Words and music by Shekinah Mountainwater

*We are the flow, we are the ebb,
We are the weavers, we are the web.*

I learned this chant in the women's jail at the Diablo Blockade. As we were ending our ritual on the Equinox in a moment of sweet silence, the guards told us we had to go back into the main room. Someone quietly began chanting this, stood up, took the hand of the woman next to her, and led a snake dance into the room where the other women were. We circled the room and everyone in it, making the perfect end to the ritual. I thank Shekinah Mountainwater for sharing this chant.

The musical notation for 'The Flow and the Ebb' consists of two staves of music in 6/8 time. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of lyrics: 'We are the flow _____ We are the ebb _____'. The second staff contains the melody for the second line of lyrics: 'We are the wea-vers We are the web _____'. The notes are simple quarter and eighth notes, with long horizontal lines indicating sustained notes at the end of each phrase.