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Feminist Ritual: Healing, Transformation and Empowerment

by

Eileen R. Ormond

Thesis

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Master of Arts

Wilfrid Laurier University
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ABSTRACT

A number of contemporary Western feminists are re-defining their spiritual beliefs and creating ritual practices to reinforce feminine values in their lives. Advocates of feminist spirituality believe that the personal and spiritual dimensions of women's lives are interrelated. The experience of transcendence and unity is often preceded by personal healing and empowerment for many women.

The creation of alternative women's rituals, a dynamic force in contemporary feminism, is well illustrated in the ritual work of Diane Mariechild. One purpose of this work is to interpret Mariechild's rituals from a feminist and a psychological perspective and to suggest that feminist ritual may function as a catalyst for healing, transformation and empowerment.

I will include a review of the sources and underlying values of feminist spirituality, as well as a description of three of Mariechild's rites, in which I was a participant observer, and an interview with her.

The ritual research that has transpired primarily in anthropology and ritual theatre offers valuable insights for feminists who are pioneering in the creation of original ritual processes. Drawing on this research, which examines several contemporary approaches to transformative ritual processes, I will focus on the psychological aspects of liminality and its relevance for feminist ritual. I will discuss an individual's experience of liminality as a process of exploring unconscious material by suspending analytical functions and surrendering to emotional impulses. A ritualized descent into the unconscious can result in a new conscious orientation and increased feelings of unity and well-being.

I will conclude with an examination of some of the strengths and weaknesses of Mariechild's ritual work and feminist spirituality in general.

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Drane, I wish to thank-you for receiving me into your life with deep honesty and generosity. May your work continue to guide women to their own sources of power and creativity

I wish to thank my mother and father without whose support and love this work would not have been possible.

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I dedicate this work to my daughter, Sasha, with confidence that she will actualize the wisdom of the feminine that is her birthright.

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INTRODUCTION

Many contemporary Western women are successfully redefining the spiritual dimensions of their experience. Unfulfilled and frustrated by what they see to be predominantly masculine values in the religions around them, these women are seeking new rituals and beliefs that reinforce and affirm their experience of feminine spirituality. William Mahony (1985:19) explains that throughout history individuals have sought spiritual disciplines that express their longing for "a transformative or complete understanding of themselves and of their place in the world." He describes spirituality as a person's process of "becoming," or progressing on his or her way towards an ideal or some form of perfection. The ideal has been expressed in a number of different forms. It may be "fulfillment of being, or return to nonbeing; it may be personal or impersonal; it may be enjoyment of this life or the release of a good death" (19).

An examination of the sources of contemporary feminist spirituality reveals a new age eclecticism, which is gaining popularity in the West at this time. Women, who have radically departed from major religious traditions, are choosing spiritual practices from a variety of divergent sources: Native North American, Eastern contemplative and Wiccan spiritual traditions. They have rejected aspects of spirituality that denigrate the feminine and have selected rituals and beliefs that cultivate personal empowerment. They sense that the personal and transpersonal cannot be separated, that the way to spiritual truth lies within themselves.

According to anthropologists Judith Hoch-Smith and Anita Spring (1978:2) the dominant metaphors for women in Western society have been those connected to

sexuality and reproduction. They note that images of women reduce them to their sexual function and that far too often roles in public rituals are assigned to men. The anthropologists attribute women's exclusion from images of the divine as well as from leadership functions to the myth of feminine evil. In this view feminine sexuality is an evil threat to males; women are weaker, more lustful and less intelligent than men.

One primary myth of Western history is the story of Adam and Eve. The negative aspects of women are portrayed in Eve, a temptress who is responsible for the downfall of humanity. This portrait is part of the mythological and psychological legacy that the majority of contemporary, Western women have inherited. Its pervasiveness has contributed to women's sense of powerlessness and self-negation. In *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on a Spiritual Quest*, Carol Christ characterizes women's experience of powerlessness:

It begins in an experience of nothingness. Women experience nothingness in their own lives in self-hatred, in self-negation and in being a victim; in relationships with men; and in the values that have shaped their lives.... The experience of nothingness often preceeds an awakening, similar to a conversion experience, in which the powers of being are revealed.... Through the awakening to new powers, women overcome self-negation and self-hatred and refuse to be victims (1980:13).

My concern in this thesis is with some of the values and concerns that individuals express within the feminist spirituality movement. To a large degree contemporary feminism is concerned with catalyzing a radical change in the political and cultural norms of Western society. A number of feminists, who have in the past focused primarily on social activism to effect change, are expressing the view that permanent social action must first be rooted in personal growth and transformation. At a recent feminist spirituality conference, one feminist said that, although she had been involved for many

years in social activism, her rage toward men and society had continued to devour and paralyse her soul until she began working on her own healing through feminist spirituality. My emphasis on individual processes is motivated by this same belief that, although social activism may serve as a significant catalyst for cultural change, individual healing will ensure permanent social transformation. For this reason, I am examining the individual needs of some contemporary women instead of the social and historical conditions within which feminism arose.

Feminists are generally less religious than the average population (King 1987:201), however those with spiritual concerns are united in their efforts to create rituals and beliefs that have the power to heal, transform and empower their lives. Feminist psychologists believe that women gain self-confidence by learning to acknowledge and place a higher value on their feminine sources and thereby fortify the feminine ego. This involves healing the wounded and frail ego and developing a greater sense of personal responsibility through affirmations, and self-exploration. Some feminists are creating symbolic healing ritual practices that include meditation, guided visualizations, chanting and dancing while often focusing on goddess images.

Psychiatrist Donald Sandner (1979:3) identifies a symbolic model of healing at the heart of Navaho religion that in some respects resembles the predominant approach to healing in feminist spirituality. Sandner contrasts a scientific medical model with a symbolic model of healing. The medical model is rationally directed toward healing specific symptoms or bodily organs and rarely the body as a whole. He explains that practitioners of scientific medicine focus on objective facts and empirical research, not primarily belief, or subjective states (17). An alternative approach is symbolic healing, which works toward restoring an individual's harmony or balance with the natural and

supernatural world (3). This form of healing relies on the use of symbols instead of any detailed scientific knowledge and a patient's "identification with supernatural or intrapsychic power through the mediation of the symbol" (17). All phases of the healing process are based on that symbolic identification. Sandner defines a symbol as, "any thing which may function as a vehicle for a conception" (12). It may be a word, a concept, an act, a ritual, a dream or a work of art, as long as it carries meaning for an individual.

Sandner (11) explains that the need to give meaning to human suffering is at the root of every system of healing. It is difficult for many people to accept that suffering is meaningless. However we are capable of accepting a tremendous amount of suffering, if it is framed in a meaningful structure. As well as recognizing that it assigns meaning to suffering, the proponents of symbolic healing maintain that it has power to transform the psyche "by converting energy into a different form, a form that can heal" (14)

Feminist Paula Cooley (1976:26) defines women's conversion experience as a transformation that involves a recentering of personal identity resulting in empowerment. For Cooley, conversion is defined as a shift from bondage to some sort of liberation involving an awakening from selflessness to an empowered awareness of self. Within feminist circles empowerment is increased relationship with personal and transcendent, or psychological and spiritual dimensions. Feminists understand the term "transcendence" to signify a wholly accessible experience of internal immanence and unity with all things./1/

Carl Jung (1956:356-357) believes that transformation is an introspective life process involving the sacrifice of conscious or known values and descent into unconscious sources of the psyche. Archetypes that reside in the unconscious are "numinous, structural elements of the psyche that possess a certain autonomy..." (232).

During a descent into the unconscious an individual meets with archetypal symbols, which act as "transformers, their function being to convert libido from a 'lower' into a 'higher' form (232). Jung believes that when energy or libido contained in an unconscious archetype is released into the psyche and integrated into consciousness, a transformation is brought about (232). The conscious personality is informed by new values from unconscious sources.

The experience of empowerment is central to many religious traditions. Jung understood an individual's experience of the sacred as a confrontation with archetypes, which possess the power to evoke great fear, awe and longing (Miller 1985:437). In his discussion of power and religious experience Alan Miller (468) explains that it involves a whole personality including deep instinctual structures that sometimes elude normal awareness. He defines power as a "real presence" that has the ability to do "work," that is, to effect transitions from one state or situation to another. Rudolph Otto (1917:21) describes religious power as a numinous category of value and state of mind. He defines an experience of the numinous as *sui generis*; that is, completely irreducible to any other. Its nature can only be described in terms of an emotional affect that grips or stirs the human soul. An individual can only symbolize the forces of the numinous, because no one thing can capture its essence (27). An individual who enters into relationship, or becomes infused, with the numinous often experiences personal empowerment. This experience can include an increased sense of participation in a greater reality either within or beyond an individual and is often accompanied by increased feelings of well-being and confidence.

FEMINIST RITES

The creation of feminist rites has provided women with the opportunity to experience healing, transformation and personal and spiritual empowerment. A number of ritual practices have emerged in feminist spirituality that include collective and personal rituals, meditation, healing, chanting, dance, and solstice celebrations. In this thesis I will interpret, from a feminist and psychological perspective, the theories and ritual work of Diane Mariechild. I will examine her ideas using the theories of Judith Plaskow, Carol Christ, Paula Cooley and S. B. Perera to elucidate themes of healing, transformation and empowerment in one of Mariechild's ritual workshops. Mariechild is a feminist, mother, psychotherapist and ritual leader. She and Shuli Goodman founded Full Circle Workshops, Inc., in Amherst, Massachusetts. The two women have travelled extensively throughout the United States, Canada and Western Europe working with women and developing feminist rituals.

Mariechild developed her workshop techniques in the early seventies; this work centers on the notion of women's empowerment through retrieving feminine values buried within the psyche. She once described the purpose of her earliest book, *Mother Wit*: "It came out of a time when women's intuition was denied and women were struggling to rebuild a positive view of the feminine. One of the first steps in overcoming oppression is often that of the 'oppressed' defining themselves differently and in a positive way (1987:1).

Although Mariechild's overall emphasis is still on affirmation of the feminine, her understanding of the masculine and feminine has evolved considerably. In *Mother Wit* she writes:

We need to reclaim our female side, but not in the old unconscious way. We must learn new ways of integrating and balancing both female and male energies. These are not opposing poles but complementary manifestations of the same life force. We need to learn to express both energies in appropriate ways (1981:xi).

However, Mariechild has only relatively recently addressed the idea of integration. In *The Inner Dance* she devotes considerable attention to the integration of complementary opposites within the psyche, particularly to the lover and warrior archetypes. The lover possesses characteristics of feminine archetypes; the warrior possesses qualities of masculine archetypes. Mariechild writes, "Moving from an either/or position to a both/and position is a process that is necessary if we are to become fully actualized human beings (1987:137)." She believes that we find richness and depth in our lives when we can celebrate our internal diversities. She explains,

We all have the ability to be powerful and compassionate, peaceful and wrathful, decisive and considerate.... Whenever we find ourselves caught in a struggle of either this or that, we can be sure the answer is.... most likely another quality that combines both this and that and is more expansive than either (137).

One of the primary ways in which we polarize our energies is between male and female qualities (138). In our recent interview, Diane made it clear that she wants to refrain from the use of the terms "masculine" and "feminine" in order to avoid gender stereotyping. She prefers to explore integration in terms of lover and warrior archetypes, both of which can be positive forces in a male or female psyche. Mariechild (138) explains that in both Eastern and Western, as well as Native American, traditions masculine and feminine principles have been represented by major religious symbols. With a few notable exceptions the female principle has commonly been associated with emotion, intuition, a willingness to soften and open, receptivity and a fluidity that

connects all of life. In contrast the male principle has been commonly associated with activity, analytical processes, discriminating awareness, differentiation and expressions in the outside world (138). Each individual embodies both of these principles to varying degrees. Mariechild has chosen to symbolize feminine qualities in the lover and masculine in the warrior:

In exploring female and male energies the lines of demarcation are not as clear as they might first appear to be. The rigid separation of these qualities has indeed set the precedent for gender stereotyping. Rigid definitions of what is female and male have limited the actualization of the full range of human qualities within all of us.... Many of the myths about female and male stereotypes have begun to disappear. In this era we are more likely to conceptualize the healthy man or woman as androgynous (138-139).

The negative aspects of either the lover or warrior archetypes arise when they are not balanced with one another. Compassion of the lover without action of the warrior can result in stagnation. The warrior's action that is not informed by compassion can become cruelty (139).

I will return to these ideas; in Chapter 2 I will provide a thorough description of the evolution of Mariechild's psychological understanding, and in Chapter 4 her emphasis on integration will become clear.

Diane Mariechild is making a significant contribution to the creation of contemporary women's rituals. Her ritual work focuses primarily upon the experience of the ritual participants rather than her performance. She uses a workshop format in which participants are led through rites which involve the creation of sacred ritual space, entering into that space with greeting and chant and experiencing the feminine through a series of meditative, internal visualizations. In her rites, she inspires participants through intimate, personal disclosure of her own feminine sources.

Feminists are exploring and attempting to unite and fulfill the psychological and spiritual needs of a significant number of Western, contemporary women. Feminist spirituality is also helping to revitalize ritual processes that have lost their place in Western religious traditions. Feminist ritual is becoming an alternate means of expressing and embodying feminist values of healing, transformation, and empowerment. Barbara Myerhoff (1979:32) writes, "Enacted beliefs have a capacity for arousing belief that mere statements do not. 'Doing is believing,' hence ritual and ceremony generate conviction when reason and thought may fail."

The process of generating ritual has been studied in the fields of anthropology, liturgics, ritual studies and ritual theatre. Feminists who are experimenting with ritual generating processes have this body of research to draw upon to increase their understanding of the complexities in the ritual field. In this thesis, I will draw on these theories as well as my own experience to suggest that liminality is an essential component of transformative rituals and that the transformative power of liminality lies in an individual's ability to surrender to unconscious impulses and other psychic dimensions.

In the first chapter I will review the sources and underlying values of feminist spirituality. Topics include individualism, eclecticism, and feminist psychology, the cultural revolution of the 1960's and the new age movement of the 1970's.

The second chapter is a description and feminist psychological interpretation of Diane Mariechild's rite, entitled Womb Meditation. I also discuss the relationship of aspects of Mariechild's work to feminist spirituality in general.

In the third chapter I will consider the transformative potential of ritual theatre and discuss its relevance to feminist ritual processes.

In the last chapter I examine the strengths and weaknesses of Diane Mariechild's

ritual work and feminist spirituality in general.

CHAPTER 1

SOURCES OF FEMINIST SPIRITUALITY: A REVIEW

Feminist spirituality is an offspring of the women's rights movement of the sixties and the new age movement of the seventies. The revolutionary impulse of the sixties that cultivated in widespread suspicion of external authority fostered the growth of new age advocates in the seventies. The new age ethos includes a search for personal fulfillment by the achievement of self-knowledge, hand in hand with a vision of global peace. David Spangler (1984:ix) describes the new age vision as a "resacralization" of the world, from which a new planetary structure of brother-sisterhood will emerge. The new age developments are to some degree a response to the shattering of the moral, social and spiritual foundations of North American culture during the sixties. Twenty years later a number of movements remain that vary in quality and durability. Although the women's movement is not without its weaknesses, it has nevertheless developed a powerful momentum, the impact of which is felt by most contemporary men and women. Some feminists are creating a reservoir of beliefs, values and spiritual practices that women are drawing from in order to reinforce their experience of the feminine. A close relationship between new age and feminist spirituality is evident in their common emphasis on psychological realities and its resulting individualism, eclecticism and belief that planetary survival is dependant upon the healing and transformative force of the feminine.

David Spangler (19) traces the transformational impulse of the new age movement to its Judeo-Christian roots, in which the anticipation of a utopian world is predominant. However, instead of seeking an external savior figure as in Christianity, new age

individuals emphasize personal salvation as a means of achieving world peace. Additional contemporary factors contributing to increased concern for transformation of the individual and society is the fear of a nuclear holocaust, the pace of technological advances and the disintegration of traditional values (20). While these are recent contributing factors to the rise of individualism in Western culture the impulse is rooted in the past.

Robert Bellah and a team of researchers (1985:viii) point out that in the 1830's Alexis de Tocqueville warned that growing individualism in American society could contribute to increasing isolation and a resulting lack of freedom. Bellah's team interviewed over two-hundred middle-class Americans about their private and public lives in a study that indicated that although the subjects reflected a wide diversity of values, they were all motivated by individualism (20). Most people placed emphasis on the ability to chose what would give them freedom and success without harming others (21-26). Bellah and his associates agreed that the three most common themes of middle-class American individualism were freedom, success and justice. Freedom to these people meant "being left alone by others, not having other people's values, ideas or styles of life forced upon one (23)." Economic success was considered the means to achieving individual choice (22). They thought of justice as equal opportunity for all persons to achieve their own happiness (25). Mirroring de Tocqueville's analysis, the researchers fear that this vision of freedom from the demands of others obstructs people's understanding of relationship, attachment and co-operation (25). It is a middle-class opinion that every person, regardless of social circumstances has an equal opportunity to achieve economic success. Yet, as feminists are quick to point out, women do not have the same degree of choice as men do in the area of economic achievement. In the final

chapter, I will return to the question of individualistic emphasis in the area of feminist spirituality.

Many middle-class North Americans make sense of their existence with a variety of psychological frameworks. Psychology is best understood as the scientific study of subjective states from the point of view of two contemporary approaches, humanistic and transpersonal psychology. These two movements represent a return to the original understanding of psychology as the science of the soul that endeavours to understand the spiritual dimensions of human existence (Heisig 1985:58) by examining an individual's religious experience (Homans 1985:66). Some psychologists of religion view religious experience as a subjective manifestation of conscious and unconscious processes. The transcendent is understood as an aspect of psychic processes, not as an autonomous, external agent. The earliest psychologists of religion, William James, Stanley Hall, E.D. Starbuck and others understood religion as a concern with a "higher power or force that existed beyond the reach of consciousness and of conscious will or choice and to which consciousness had to adapt itself" (Homans 1985:66). In Bellah's study the researchers found that the people who defined themselves with psychological constructs; who would, for example, tend to observe and analyse their behavior and the behavior of others with terms like "conscious" and "unconscious motivation," roles, well-being, vulnerability, trust and integration, and probably value dreams and the imagination, placed value on the ability to choose who they were, based on their needs and wants alone. They held personal empowerment as their ideal, as well as an ability to relate with others without undue compromise (1985:23). The religion of the new age has become extremely psychological; according to Bellah's findings, it places emphasis on the cultivation of the conscious will.

Lucy Bregman (1982:148) suggests that "psychological religiousness" has become an appropriate vehicle for the expression of sacrality and ultimacy within our contemporary social context which values individualism and the private sphere. Accordingly, individuals who are psychologically religious value their inner experiences of the transcendent above any institutionalized form. They seek an "authentic" experience of the ultimate nature of reality, mystical truths that can never be expressed adequately in words (148). Personal autonomy, self-acceptance and responsibility are emphasized. Impersonal forces can be referred to in a number of different ways: the unconscious, energy, trance, spirit guides, dreams, creativity and visions. New age spirituality has been generated by inner experience advocates, who are becoming increasingly eclectic, choosing beliefs that they deem to be psychologically congruent with who they are.

Jungian, or transpersonal psychology which has grown out of it, and Maslovian, commonly known as humanistic psychology, are two approaches among many that have influenced new age thinking. Their common focus on spiritual dimensions give them relevance for this study. Although there are some fairly sustained critiques of Jungian psychology, Jung's contributions to feminist and new age thinking are his recognition of the need for a balance between the masculine and feminine aspects of the psyche, and his identification of the spiritual dimensions of existence.^{2/} Jung, considered by some the first transpersonal psychologist, identifies the spiritual dimensions of the psyche as the collective unconscious:

In addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature...there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited (1959a:43).

The collective unconscious consists of pre-existing forms, the archetypes. Jung (44)

defines archetypes as patterns of instinctual behavior that are universally symbolized in mythological motifs. For individuals, they most commonly emerge in dreams and active imagination. These symbols of the soul function to guide the person toward "individuation" or wholeness (1959b:31). Individuation is a lifelong process of integrating unconscious material into consciousness. Jung (14) believes that in the collective unconscious of each man and woman there is a counterpart of the opposite gender. For the male there is the anima; for the female there is the animus. Symbolized throughout history as male and female deities, the anima and animus are "transcendental intuitions" (1959a:59). The male's ego is predominantly masculine, but ideally has the capacity to receive feminine values from the unconscious. The healthy female ego is primarily informed by feminine values with the capacity to receive masculine values from the unconscious. A conscious and active relationship with the inner partner is considered the pathway to individuation (20). As John Sanford puts it (10), "Woman has carried for man the living image of his own feminine soul or counterpart, and man has carried for woman the living image of her own spirit."

Jung (1959b:14) describes the animus as "paternal Logos" and the anima as "maternal Eros." His concept of wholeness can be best understood as a union of opposites. He describes the relationship of the anima and animus to the conscious ego in this way:

Whoever identifies with an intellectual standpoint will occasionally find his feeling confronting him like an enemy in the guise of the anima, conversely an intellectual animus will make violent attacks on the feeling standpoint. Therefore, anyone who wants to achieve the difficult feat of realizing something not only intellectually, but also according to its feeling value, must come to grips with the anima/animus problem (30).

Jung (31) believes that this balance is a pre-requisite for wholeness. Unity and totality through self-knowledge represent the highest psychic reality in Jungian cosmology.

Abraham Maslow's humanistic psychology is one source of a popular new age value placed on mystical experiences of individuals in the human potential movement. Maslow, considered the first humanistic psychologist, believes that the essence of religion lies in an individual's mystical experience and that transcendent revelation is a "natural, human peak experience" (1964:20). He identifies peak experience as direct cognition of "humanness in its essence"(95). This cognition of being (B-cognition) perceives external objects and individuals as detached from human concerns (61). More object-centered than ego-centered, peak experiences can be "relatively ego-transcending, self-forgetful, egoless, unselfish" (62). Although Maslow says there are non-peakers, he maintains (24) that every individual is capable of perceiving being-values. He espouses a spirituality that is highly individualistic:

From the point of view of the peak-experiencer, each person has his own private religion, which he develops out of his own private revelations in which are revealed to him his own private myths and symbols, rituals and ceremonies, which may be of the profoundest meaning to him personally and yet completely idiosyncratic... each "peaker" discovers, develops, and retains his own religion (28).

Humanistic psychology generally advocates that self-actualization, the result of perceiving being-values, is the highest ideal. This view, along with those of transpersonal psychology have laid the foundations of new age thinking. In my final chapter, I will look at Mariechild's work set against this backdrop.

By the early seventies, in the new age spirit of the times, feminist psychologists began looking for new directions which they hoped would foster women's psychological

evolution. Although trained within traditional schools of psychotherapy, feminist psychotherapists shifted their focus specifically to address, retrieve and heal feminine values within men and women. They believed that any social change had to be rooted in internal, psychological changes in the individual (Eichenbaum and Orbach:1982). Women's therapy centres opened that were concerned exclusively with women's experience, their needs and struggles. Claiming that mainstream psychological ideology was patriarchal and did not adequately address the needs of the feminine psyche, feminist therapists Luise Eichenbaum and Susan Orbach, founded The Women's Therapy Centre Institute in England, in 1976 (10). By 1982 the Centre had grown to include a staff of fourteen social workers and administrators, and had established a sister organization in New York City (9). Another feminist therapist, Mariam Greenspan (1983:8), endeavoured to expose the predominance of masculine values in mainstream therapies and to develop an alternative feminine therapy to help women clarify and overcome their feelings of powerlessness. Greenspan writes:

I have heard the same stories repeated over and over again: stories of women who are chronically depressed; of women who lack self-esteem--or a sense of self-esteem at all.... Every woman-housewife or career woman, working class or middle-class knows what it is to be depressed (161).

Greenspan observed that many of her female clients exhibited the characteristic internalized anger of the oppressed. (185). She interpreted their depression as misdirected anger and rage. As noted in the introduction, feminist spirituality is primarily concerned with women's empowerment through the recognition of personal and ultimate values. Three of the major concerns of feminist spirituality are healing, transformation and empowerment. Women drawn to feminist spirituality seek to heal the wounds of the repressed feminine and achieve personal empowerment through the renewed connection

with the feminine. This feminist emphasis is evident in the ritual work of Diane Mariechild. She focuses primarily on images of the goddess, the feminine archetypes that heal a woman's psyche. As a Jungian, she maintains that a healthy psyche depends on a balance of masculine and feminine values, but emphasizes the feminine because she feels it has been repressed for so long.

Feminist theologians Carol Christ, Paula Cooley and Judith Plaskow discuss women's spiritual needs, utilizing a combination of psychological and theological concepts. They believe that women's fundamental spiritual challenges involve the recognition of self-negating patterns of behavior, and require an awakening to a more positive sense of the self. The psychological task of identifying and changing self-negating behaviors is paired with the theological concept of spiritual awakening.

In some very different ways all the feminists discussed in this paper believe that recognition of feminine values will moderate the effects of the highly individualistic, masculine, ego-oriented society in which we live.

The work of Jungian analyst Sylvia Brinton Perera illustrates the way in which feminist psychology and spirituality are connected. She also provides a thorough understanding of women's psychological terrain. She writes that, "The return to the Goddess, for renewal in the feminine source-ground and spirit, is a vitally important aspect of modern woman's quest for wholeness"(1981:7). Perera (7) characterizes the majority of her female clients as successful "daughters of the Father," who have sacrificed the values of the feminine and lost their connections with the instincts and energy patterns therein. She attributes this loss to the predominance of masculine values in the ego-development of both men and women in this society. She (7) explains that the feminine psyche is dominated by an "animus-ego" that heroically strives to fulfill the ideals of the

patriarchy. In order to maintain a balanced ego the repressed aspects of the feminine must be rediscovered. She describes a woman's well-balanced ego as one that can stand its own ground and is empathetically related to others. Perera cites the mythological journey of the Sumerian goddess Inanna as a model for women's recognition of their feminine sources. The qualities of Perera's "animus-ego" resemble those of the warrior archetype that is not moderated by the values of the lover archetype.

Carol Christ (1980:15-18) explains that, although every human being who is faced with the transpersonal must undergo ego-dissolution, women's experience of nothingness is more far reaching. Many women are raised to believe that they are inferior to the men in their lives. This feeling of inferiority begins at birth and continues throughout their lives. Christ (15) writes, "Internalizing the voices of her oppressors, the currents of her feelings of inferiority and self-hatred run deep." In contrast, men are generally raised to think that they will achieve success and personal power in the external world. Their egos are empowered with the values of individualism to a greater degree than women's. Christ (17) believes that the male mystic's path has been made arduous because his major challenge is to renounce an inflated sense of personal power. She argues that because women have never had the power that male mystics strive to renounce, many must strive instead for personal definition and empowerment. The experience of nothingness is much more tangible to many women than men.

From a Christian viewpoint the feminist emphasis on personal empowerment could be criticized as a sinful, narcissistic preoccupation with the self. However, feminist theologian, Valerie Saiving makes a strong distinction between the "sin" of men and the "sin" of women (1979:25). She defines women's sin as an inability to take responsibility for self-actualization, and understands grace as a transcendence of self-negation. Saiving

(37) argues that because of basic character differences, masculine sin is characterized by excessive pride or will to power, whereas feminine sin is more likely to be diffuseness, distractibility, lack of an organizing structure, and dependency on others for one's self-definition--"in short, underdevelopment or negation of the self." Upon consideration of the cultural and biological determinants of feminine psychological behavior, Saiving (30-32) concludes that women are more inextricably bound to nature than are men. She explains that, as a natural outgrowth of their reproductive biology, women have developed attitudes of receptivity and acceptance (32). Saiving (31) writes, "The girl's history as a female is punctuated and authenticated by a series of definite, natural, and irreversible bodily occurrences: first menstruation, defloration, childbirth, menopause." Whereas the physiological events of a woman's development give her unmistakable proof of her femininity, a man's history provides less dramatic assurances of his masculinity. Saiving (32) argues that "masculinity is an endless process of becoming, while in femininity the emphasis is on being."

Judith Plaskow (1980:27) discusses further psychological implications of Saiving's thesis. A woman's ego is guided by unconscious processes, "abiding them, allowing them to ripen until they are complete and comprehension is born." The temptation for women is passively to follow the stream of images and emotions from the unconscious without actively directing or concretizing them. Whereas women's receptivity to the unconscious is their greatest strength, she must also balance this receptivity by giving the unconscious contents conscious form. In other words, if a woman's ego development lacks the structuring qualities of the warrior, she is unable to translate fully her intuitive knowledge into a form that can be expressed, cultivated and refined. Plaskow points to one of the dangers of focusing exclusively on qualities of the lover archetype. But she

also recognizes women's needs to affirm their feminine values. She believes that when a transformed self experiences grace through the surrender of old identities, an individual's attitude toward self, community and cosmos is altered (172). She describes this experience as a union of one's own power with the power of the transcendent, emphasizing that "The experience of grace is not the experience of the sole activity of God but the experience of the emergence of the "I" as co-creator" (172). A woman's intact sense of self is also a necessary prerequisite to establish a relationship to the transcendent.

Paula Cooley (1985:26) also discusses the theological concept of conversion. In agreement with Valerie Saiving's definition of women's sin, Cooley (27) applies the concept of conversion to the personal empowerment of women within the feminist movement. She (26) explains that the transformation involves "a re-centering of personal identity that marks for the convert a shift from being in some sort of bondage to being in a state of liberation." Conversion is a transformation of social, as well as personal, identity (27). According to Cooley feminist conversion always involves personal empowerment within a supportive community (27). She (28) attributes much of women's feelings of self-negation and depression to their primary affiliations with male-dominated institutions. She believes that an integral ingredient in the conversion process is a change in this affiliation to a community that supports feminine values. Feminist conversion is a recognition of "fully related selfhood" within a community which values relationships of interdependence instead of hierarchy and domination along gender lines (30). Cooley writes (31), "Women who have regarded consciousness-raising as in some sense religious transformation have most often described this transformation as a movement from helplessness and fragmentation to integrity."

Feminist psychology and spirituality are making two important contributions to new age developments. They are in basic agreement that the extreme individualistic tendencies of Western culture are due to a highly masculine, ego-centered value system. They believe that a renewal of feminine values within the individual and society will help to regulate the existing imbalance. One of the strengths of the feminine is the ability to perceive the interrelationship of all things. This ability expresses itself in the feminist impulse towards personal empowerment within a supportive community. This community emphasis, as well as the recovery of other feminine values, can contribute positively to North American society. The greatest danger of feminism lies in its tendency to become polarized, emphasizing the feminine to the exclusion of equally important masculine values. It is hoped that the maturation of the feminist movement will moderate this tendency.

In summary, new age and feminist spirituality share the common foundation of Western individualism. Both movements place emphasis on a renewal of the feminine values of intuition, emotion, receptivity, relationship and intuition. They believe that these values can moderate the emphasis presently placed on hierarchical social structures, aggression and linear thinking in the individual and society. Another similarity lies in their eclectic approach, borrowing from whatever tradition best suits their purposes. Sylvia Brinton Perera's work draws on Jungian psychology and feminist spirituality. Judith Plaskow, Carol Christ and Paula Cooley discuss theological and psychological concepts within a feminist framework. New age philosophy and spirituality draw on a variety of religious and psychological traditions. In the next chapter, I will look at these themes in the ritual work of Diane Mariechild.

CHAPTER 2

A RITUAL WORKSHOP

For many years I have participated in a feminist search for women's psychological and spiritual empowerment. My search has been motivated by a perceived incongruence between my personal spiritual experience and the ideas sanctioned by Western religious traditions. I have journeyed through various Christian denominations, a ritual theatre company, Taoist and Buddhist practices, to a ritual studies lab and a feminist ritual group. My recent work on feminist theology, ritual and psychology has provided a missing link in my spiritual understanding and practice.

My religiosity has always had an experiential, as well as an academic, component. I approach Diane Maricchild's ritual work in the dual role of participant and observer.

This chapter is centered around the Womb Meditation rite conducted by Diane Maricchild and her assistant Shuli Goodman. I will pay special attention to the healing, transformation and empowerment themes in the rite. I will also discuss sacred space, meditation and psychological spirituality in as much as they receive emphases in feminist spirituality.

Prior to meeting her at a spirituality retreat, I had been inspired by Maricchild's feminist understanding of women's spiritual and psychological needs in her first book *Mother Wit*. Her latest work *The Inner Dance* focusing almost exclusively on integration of the lover and warrior archetypes and the development of somatic awareness signified a further evolution of her feminist thinking. Here, my purpose is to interpret Maricchild's

and Goodman's Womb Meditation, in which I was a participant observer, in Eganville, Ontario, in July 1987.

Diane Mariechild was born in Neptune, New Jersey, and raised in Manasquan, New Jersey, of practicing Lutheran and Roman Catholic parents. After a period of indecision her parents joined the Lutheran church when she was still a child. She believes that their quest influenced her, for she also began a spiritual search in her childhood which has continued to the present. In our interview she explains:

I visited many churches, searching for the answers to my questions.... I was deeply concerned with the contradictions between the words of the clergy and their actions. I couldn't understand why they did not embody their beliefs more fully.

Mariechild's spirituality expresses itself in highly imaginative dreams and visualizations sometimes with visionary dimensions. She candidly describes a number of visions that came to her while in her women's circle, a women's spirituality group. One vision in particular led her to understand the importance of exploring her anger, to recognize the role of renunciation in her life and the need to balance her masculine and feminine sides. She relates the vision in our interview:

We imagined ourselves going to a marsh land to participate in a very important ritual and we began to dance around in a circle, and what happened was, as we danced, we became geese and flew off. Where I flew in my fantasy was the dark side of the moon. I heard a lot of angry voices yelling and screaming, and I was told that I had to look at my anger. And I had flashes of men in my life, my father, my ex- husband, the minister of my church when I was growing up, relatives, friends of mine and just generic man. Then I was told that I needed to give up what was most precious to me. And my children appeared. They were young at the time, under ten I guess, and I threw them off the moon. I just threw them out into space, and it was very dark. And what appeared to me was this winged goddess who caught them. Then it flashed to this marriage between the winged goddess

and a person that looked like a typical god, or more of a Santa Claus, with a long white beard and long robe. The significance for me was to realize myself and to really balance the energy of the male and female within myself--what Jung calls the Holy Marriage. That Holy Marriage, that inner marriage is necessary to be balanced, to actualize myself.

Mariechild has clinical training in marriage and family therapy, and is a practicing therapist, as well as a ritual and workshop leader. When asked to describe her function in the ritual workshops she replied, "I think my function is of a spiritual friend and as a guide. My motivation for doing it? I love it. I love people. I want to share what's important for me, what's helping free me. And as I share, I notice that it helps free other people."

Shuli Goodman has a background in experimental theatre and ritual performance. She also has clinical training in marriage and family therapy. Diane and Shuli have been working together for three years, in Shuli's words, "co-creating" women's rituals. Wary of the new age belief that the individual is entirely responsible for creating his or her own reality, Shuli explains,

To really accept in your body and your heart and your soul that we're not in control is terrifying, so we say, 'Oh we create our own reality.' Then we can side-step the real surrender to life.

Shuli Goodman utilizes her deep, resonant singing voice effectively accompanying Mariechild's visualizations with songs and chants throughout the rite.

One of Diane and Shuli's greatest strengths is their commitment to meditation practice, which they consider to be the foundation of their spirituality and ritual work with others. They believe that without a continuous spiritual discipline, ritual work is lacking in depth. In pooling their resources Diane and Shuli appear to be actualizing an important feminist value of collaboration in a non-hierarchical relationship.

Feminist ritualists are redefining and reviving women's authentic spiritual values. Wallace explains that "revivalism," the aim of any "revitalization movement," is to "return to a former era of happiness, to restore a golden age..." (1985:319). Feminist ritualists reflect back to a golden and perhaps mythical age when the goddess was worshipped and matriarchal principles of love, unity and peace, the laws of nature and instinct were valued (Mariechild 1981:xi). They advocate that the mythology of some matriarchal traditions resonates with women's internal sources and draw in particular on the most tangible evidence of goddess worship found in the Wiccan tradition. Voicing the opinion of many feminist ritualists, Mariechild believes that the ancient matriarchal principle is reasserting itself in our culture. She writes that within a matriarchal system:

...the inner life of feelings and emotions is highly valued. Life is seen as cyclical, a continually rearranging balance. The earth is sacred, giving birth and sustenance to all that is. Nature is the teacher, revealing the mysteries of life. Nature is not a power to be harnessed or overcome (xi).

Mariechild (125) describes Wicca, craft of the wise, as one of humankind's oldest religions. The Great Mother, the Creatress of Life, is revered with the male force as her son/lover.

The spirituality retreat that I attended was organized by Christine Devai, a feminist entrepreneur and spiritual practitioner who is the founder of the Artemesia Institute, a school of herbalism, that sponsors spirituality workshops in North and South America and the Caribbean. The staff at the retreat was a pot pourri of eleven feminist and spiritually oriented workshop leaders ranging in experience and expertise. They offered a variety of spiritual approaches: yoga, naturopathy, transpersonal psychology, Native North American teachings, a Western version of Buddhism, dance, chant and song, botany and feminist ritual. There were approximately forty participants. However the number

fluctuated slightly throughout the week as people came and went. Participants were encouraged to attend the entire week's activities, although this was not obligatory. The non-refundable fee of \$475.00 U.S. for students and \$525.00 U.S. for non-students was steep enough to encourage full participation.

Ron Grimes' discussion of "parashamanism" best characterizes the majority of the retreat leaders and participants. Grimes (1990) describes post-modern parashamans as religiously disenfranchised groups and individuals in search of ritual, healing, reflection and mystery. Typically lacking charismatic leaders and new religions with prescribed rites, they are more tentative:

Those interested in their work usually pay to attend workshops; seeking initiation into an on-going membership is rarely a possibility. Often such groups de-emphasize belief, cultivating an open or eclectic atmosphere. The result is not a new denomination but a workshop circuit... (1990).

Parashamans attempt to unify diversified cultural forms such as religion, art, medicine and therapy, borrowing, and they invent rites to support a predominantly individualistic spirituality (2).

The ritual work of Diane Mariechild and Shuli Goodman provides an illustration of the parashamanistic approach. Mariechild and Goodman were present for two days of the retreat, although the majority of the other leaders were present for the whole week. They arrived on the fourth day and worked with participants collectively and individually on the first afternoon and evening, leaving the next morning open for private consultation before their departure. This was their last stop in a year and a half long tour offering workshops to women in North America and Western Europe. The Womb Meditation was one workshop in a repertoire with many others that they had led on tour.

The rite took place on the front lawn of the retreat centre, a secluded old farm house in the country, on a sunny afternoon, around a very large, old tree. Approximately thirty-five participants were involved in this rite. Ritual objects included a large Plains hoop drum that Shuli played to accompany her chanting, a mixture of sage and tobacco in an abalone shell, matches and a large feather to fan the burning mixture, a large quartz crystal that Diane kept in front of her on a brightly coloured cloth under the tree or carried in her left hand. There was a clear division between the ritual participants who sat in a large circle and the leaders, Diane and Shuli, who sat at the base of the tree. Diane explained that the circle in the Wiccan and Native traditions was considered sacred space and the symbol of wholeness.

Participants assembled in a large circle, seated on the ground around Diane and Shuli, who were sitting at the base of the tree. The tree was not in the middle of the circle; it was part of the circumference. In order to alleviate self-consciousness and discourage analytical thinking, we were instructed not to use video cameras, tape recorders and notebooks. Mariechild gave a short introductory talk on the value of meditation as a tool for grounding and connecting with "the inner abyss," the nothingness from which all transformations are born, and on contemplation of the goddess, who could lead us to the stillness and emptiness of our being. Diane explained that she and Shuli would begin the ritual by welcoming participants into the sacred circle, that we would be purified with burning sage and bow to Diane to acknowledge a mutual light within as we entered. We were also instructed to walk around the circle in a clockwise direction in order to generate energy and keep the circle sacred. We all formed a line from which each person was greeted into the circle individually. On the threshold Shuli beat a provocative, even rhythm on the drum and sang in a deep, stirring voice:

Welcome to the circle
 in peace and harmony.
 Welcome to the circle
 in peace and harmony.
 Heal, we're whole, we're holy
 Heal, we're whole, we're holy.
 Welcome to the circle
 in peace and harmony.

She continued this chant until everyone had entered. At the same time Mariechild stood beside her holding an abalone shell of burning sage that she waved towards each person who stood in front of her. Those participants who were familiar with the Native tradition of smudging with sage drew the smoke toward their hearts up over their heads and behind them. Diane then bowed and they bowed in return, entered the circle and stood waiting for the rest of the participants to enter. Other participants who were unfamiliar with the smudging practice experienced some difficulty at the threshold. Their gestures were tentative and awkward. Upon entering, most women appeared to be either self-conscious or embarrassed to walk around the circle to their places. The leaders returned to the base of the tree. Diane explained briefly the Wiccan and Native American traditions of invoking the four directions, the earth and sky and the placement of the altar in the north (at the tree) following a Native tradition. She then held the burning sage high above her head, faced the north and in a very impassioned, dramatic delivery began invoking the four directions, turning next to the east, south and west. Diane also included an invocation to the sky and the earth. Her words flowed out of her as if she had tapped into a rhythmic source that carried her along in its flow. Everyone was very still, solemn, and expectant, taking in the new sense of highly charged space.

Diane gave basic awareness and breath meditation instruction, that included directing attention to the breath, correct posture and non-judgemental attending to thoughts by not pushing them away or holding onto them. She then led the participants

through a meditation on earth and sky, which involved experiencing the body as firmly planted and deeply connected to the earth and inhaling and exhaling earth and sky energy.^{3/} This meditation lasted approximately ten minutes, after which we continued to sit in silent meditation for another fifteen minutes.

While holding a large quartz crystal in her hands, Diane began a supplication to the goddess, who represented the source of healing, nurturing, love and compassion in us and in all things. She emphasized the planet's great need for the healing wisdom of the goddess in these potentially apocalyptic times and envisioned the goddess as the source of world peace. Diane's delivery was again rhythmic and intense. The participants were then instructed to find a partner in silence and sit down back-to-back. Some chatting erupted among the women, and the leaders quickly advised that we maintain silence with an inward focus. Diane drew our attention to the energy flowing up our spines and between partners sitting together and suggested that we use this for support and strength through the next meditation. The Womb Meditation was introduced as an inner journey aimed at re-establishing a connection with our reproductive organs, the source of women's greatest power. She explained that for many of us this source had been either neglected due to negative cultural attitudes or injured through sexual abuse. While leading us into meditation, Diane asked us close our eyes and focus all of our attention on the reproductive organs, using the breath to relax into the sensations and/or numbness in these areas. She brought our attention to the physiological details: the soft, yielding breasts, the deep cave of the womb, the smooth vaginal entrance, the wonderous fallopian tubes, the tunnels of monthly, renewed life, the ovaries that enclosed the seeds of creation. She advised that women who had undergone hysterectomies, or other surgical interventions in the reproductive areas could still experience the energy in these places.

Shuli then continued to guide us through this journey in a penetrating, chant-like song. She urged us to surrender to the pain and the joy of being a woman, without fear--to acknowledge the abuse and neglect if we had been victim to it.

At this point, many of the women were beginning to cry; there were deep sobs throughout the group. We were instructed to send energy of loving kindness to these areas of pain, directing it with our breath to bring our bodies back to life. Shuli urged us to release the pain and rage and grief to the earth, which could absorb, heal and transform it into empowering energy.

I became aware of some very deep pain and anger. On Shuli's cue, I began sending the energy of loving kindness through my body and releasing pain and anger into the earth, while great surges of emotion shook me. For a while I was enveloped in some of the deepest pain I have ever experienced. Shuli very gently urged us to turn towards the centre of the circle and share our experiences, if we felt the need to. Many women were still sobbing. Some were hugging and comforting the women with whom they had been sitting back to back. For a while we were a circle of intense pain, grief and compassion. I began to experience a tangible increase in warmth and energy in the areas to which I had directed my meditation. These sensations continued throughout the rest of the week. Gradually, participants began sharing aspects of their meditation experience. A few sobbed as they recounted incidents of rape and sexual abuse. Others described vivid images of horror and beauty, death and birth, that they had encountered. One account from a participant is recorded here:

The healing power of the earth opened up under my body like a vault. I felt the release of fluid (pus, water, blood) from my womb as it was pulled or fell out of me and was drawn into the earth. All of the bad feelings about my body, especially those organs, bled away, the memories of sexual abuse, rape, feelings of inadequacy, shame etc.,

healed and were taken into the earth. The earth closed over this mess, and I felt strong, warm feelings from my contact with my partner's back.

Diane invited the women who felt they needed more healing to come into the centre of the circle and lie down. The rest of us were asked to send them loving, healing energy. About ten women moved into the centre of the circle, clearly showing signs of distress. The others surrounded them, with arms outstretched and palms open, sending healing energy. Some of the women in the centre began to weep. Others followed. Shuli began a low, wailing song that others joined. This reached a powerful crescendo before it died down. Then Diane asked all of us to hold hands and expand the circle as wide as possible. We sang "Woman am I. Spirit am I. I am the infinite within my soul. I have no beginning and I have no end. All this I am." We sang another affirming chant that involved very simple, expansive celebratory movements. By this time almost everyone was smiling or laughing and rather worn out. Diane invited us to share some other songs. Several songs later the circle was broken and the crowd dispersed. The rite had lasted approximately two and a half to three hours.

The themes that I have chosen to focus on in the interpretation of Womb Meditation are also characteristic of feminist spirituality in general. Not all groups or workshops pursue all of these themes, but many include most of them. They are as follows:

- (a) Sacred space
- (b) Meditation
- (c) Psychological spirituality
- (d) Healing the feminine
- (e) Transformation and empowerment

CREATION OF SACRED SPACE

Eliade (1957:20) explains that for the religious individuals space is not homogeneous; some parts of space come to hold more significance than others. A sacred space is a strong, significant place within which the absolute can manifest (21). In contrast to profane space, which is homogeneous, infinite and without definition, sacred space defines an absolute fixed point, an orienting center (23). Eliade suggests that

...nothing can begin, nothing can be done without a previous orientation-- and any orientation implies acquiring a fixed point. It is for this reason that religious man (or woman) has always sought to fix his abode at the 'center of the world' (22).

Advocates of feminist spirituality maintain that sacred space can be created in virtually any place that the practitioner chooses. As a rule, they do not rely on institutionalized sacred space, nor on representatives of the faith with higher status to create a special place to acknowledge the sacred. Feminist ritualizer Hallie Iglehart (1983:37-38) suggests that personal meditation space ought to include an altar that contains something from each of the four elements: earth, air, fire and water. Additional objects that possess personal and sacred significance could include: pictures, crystals, photographs, chimes, bells or anything else that reinforces the individual's connection to the sacred. The establishment of sacred space can be as easy as lighting a candle, chanting, burning incense or sage and invoking the four directions.

In Mariechild's Womb Meditation a number of factors contributed to the creation of sacred space. These included: placement of the sacred objects (the crystal, drum and sage) on a cloth in the direction of the north; establishment of the circle; smudging (purification) before entering the circle; and invocation of the four directions, the earth and sky.

Traditionally, sacred space contains a symbol the *axis mundi* that facilitates communication with heaven. These symbols can take the form of a pillar, a ladder, a mountain, tree or vine, among others (37). The communication between the cosmic planes of heaven and earth transports an individual from one mode of being to another (63). The presence of the tree in the Womb Meditation rite held special significance for me personally, although the leaders did not assign any significance to it, whatsoever. It seemed to me to be the perfect *axis mundi*, especially considering the fact that the first guided meditation focused on the earth and sky. What better symbol of this connection could we have had in our sacred circle? I thought it incongruous that special attention was given to the other sacred objects by placing them in the north on the altar while ignoring the tree.

In traditional societies the creation of sacred space is symbolized by an opening or threshold which facilitates passage from one region to another (37). In the Womb Meditation, the sacred circle was established by creating a threshold through which each person passed from the profane world into the sacred, and from one mode of being into another. The smudging of the participants before entering the circle helped to establish this transition. The request to walk around, and not through, the circle in order to generate energy also intensified the sense of sacred space. One entered the circle into sacred territory, in which the powers of the cosmos were more accessible. I felt that sacred space was contravened at the end of the rite when the circle was broken without any formal dismissal of the four directions, earth and sky, or formal opening of the circle /4/. This point illustrates the diversity of spiritual practices that are emerging.

MEDITATION

Meditation has become a popular practice in new age and feminist spirituality movements and is a point of focus in Mariechild's ritual work. One definition of meditation is as follows: "Meditation involves concentration, the narrowing of the focus of consciousness to a single theme, symbol, catechism, or doctrine..." (Underwood 1987:325). One popular form of meditation in the West is the Buddhist *vipassana* practice, or "insight meditation". The practice rests on the traditional Theravada world view that all existence is basically impermanent, painful and lacking any abiding self (Gregory 1986:7). While practitioners in the West may not share all of these beliefs, they nevertheless follow variations of the practice to intensify their awareness of all visible, tangible realities, including the sensations, emotions and thought processes of the mind/body (King 1987:333).

Diane Mariechild has practiced Buddhist, *vipassana* meditation for fifteen years, nine of which she studied with Dhanyi Ywahoo, lineage holder of the Cherokee Nation and founder of the Sunray Meditation Society. Ywahoo's practice bears so strong a resemblance to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition that she has now been recognized as a *Dharma* teacher by His Holiness, Dudjohn Rinpoche. The Sunray Meditation Society is now also a *Dharma* center. In an interview, Ywahoo describes the Cherokee/Tibetan relationship:

...we are a lake that is fed by two streams. One stream is the wisdom of the Native American people, the Cherokee, and the other stream is the wisdom from Tibet and the *Vajrayana* tradition that comes through ancient ones called *Nyingmapa's* (1987:7).

In order to understand some of the basic mechanisms and aims of *vipassana* practice, I turn to Tibetan Lineage holder, Chogyam Trungpa's adaptation of the traditional practices for the West. Traditionally, the two meditation practices of *samahdi*

and *vipassana* are tied together. *Samadhi*, a practice that cultivates a calm concentration, is often considered preparatory practice for *vipassana* (King 1980:90). Osel Tendzin (1982:27), successor of the recently deceased Chogyam Trungpa, explains that *samadhi* is meditative absorption that stills confusion through the techniques of mindfulness and awareness. This practice basically involves sitting cross-legged with a straight spine and hands rested on the thighs, palms down, with open eyes and gaze directed slightly downward (33). Awareness is directed solely to the breath. The aim is to become one with, instead of remaining an observer of the breath (34). At the same time, the thoughts that arise are observed and simply labelled "thinking" and released with the exhalation (35). This technique brings with it a sense of simplicity and freedom from the clutter that our normal thought processes can create (37). Tendzin explains,

This process is very important because it brings a sense of leaving this territory, this 'I.' The practice of meditation awakens the intuitive sense of egolessness. Breath goes out, dissolves into space, and comes back. By practicing in this way we are eroding the basis of ego (34).

The individual is no longer as compelled to create fantasies of who he or she is. "Seeing things directly and not having to invent a sense of identity is delightful" (37). Once trust in this basic practice and perception of simplicity is established, flashes of insight occur. This is the clear vision of *vipassana*. Tenzin explains (38) that, "Mindfulness naturally expands into *vipashyana* insight and we begin to notice the atmosphere around our practice. This is called awareness. We begin to look out, expand, and insight occurs spontaneously." Basically this is the discovery of egolessness, in which the world is perceived simply as the meaning that we give to it (38). The insight is the direct knowledge of things as they are.

The concept of renunciation underlies *vipassana* meditation. Generally, renunciation is understood as giving up pleasure and worldly activities. Tenzin (29) explains that on a deeper level, renunciation is the ability to avoid succumbing to the desires of the ego for pleasure and personal gain that are fuelled by hope and fear. The techniques of *samadhi vipassana* cultivate calm concentration and an attitude of non-attachment toward the impulses of the mind and body, regardless of the content. All impulses are simply seen as subjective creations of the individual and not as objective reality.

Mariechild considers meditation to be the foundation of her spiritual practice. A regular meditative discipline is the means by which the individual perceives the interrelationship of all things (1988:3). She believes that "true freedom can be experienced when we acknowledge our connections with all of life and align ourselves with the dynamic movement of the universe" (1987:1). When we have difficulty listening to our inner voice and thereby perceiving our interrelationship with all of life we experience fear, despair, alienation and loneliness.

Still deeply committed to *vipassana* meditation, Mariechild regularly attends retreats at the Insight Meditation Society, in Massachusetts and has practiced with a number of different Buddhist teachers. She has taken Powa initiation and refuge and bodhisattva vows with Ayan Rinpoche. She has also been initiated into the Chod practice with Ayan Rinpoche and Tsultrim Allione (Letter July 28:1988). Judging from her discussion of meditation in our interview, Diane's commitment to *vipassana* is stronger than ever. She explained that in the past, her meditation primarily involved exploring insights that would emerge which often gave her important information. At a recent Buddhist retreat, Diane decided instead to renounce the images and insights and examine

the ways in which she indulged in fantasy as an escape. What emerged out of this practice was a profound, existential loneliness, which she found valuable for her personal growth.

Trungpa's and Mariechild's methods both involve sitting cross-legged on a cushion, with the spine erect and the hands resting on the thighs. The mind is simply observing the thoughts, breath, and all of the bodily impulses with an attitude of non-attachment. Trungpa recommends observing and labelling the thoughts and letting them dissolve with the out-breath. Mariechild instructs participants neither to push away the emerging thoughts and images nor cling to them. Both techniques aim to diminish the discursive activity of the ego. However Mariechild's purpose for using the vipassana practice with participants differs significantly from the Buddhist goal of complete egolessness, for which the practice originated. Mariechild does not aim to lead participants into egoless states, but simply to relativize the relationship of the ego to alternate psychic realities or the higher Self. Her approach is compatible with a feminist value that women are empowered by experiencing ego fortification as well as transcendent realities. From a feminist perspective renunciation does not necessarily mean denigration of the body, annihilation of the ego and a search for other-worldliness, as in traditional religions. Feminist spirituality endeavours to sacralize women's bodily processes and fortify the ego, should it be frail, before reaching beyond into the deeper layers of the psyche. For this reason both the basic awareness and breath meditation and guided visualizations are appropriate in women's ritual practices.

Mariechild's simplified adaptation of *vipassana* a basic awareness and breath meditation is useful in a number of ways for women's ritual practices. Primarily it leads women into a deeper relationship with personal material, while at the same time cultivates

non-attachment and provides the opportunity to release dysfunctional emotional material. Judging from her personal commitment to regular meditation practice, Mariechild appeared to be encouraging others to do the same. It is particularly important in feminist spirituality, with its emphasis on personal empowerment and ego fortification, to develop practices that point an individual beyond personal dimensions as well. Practices that cultivate renunciation can guard against the dangers of ego- inflation and self-deception.

In our interview, Diane told me that her personal understanding of renunciation had become clear to her in the vision that I have already related. She realized that, "To become fully who I am, I need to be non-attached, which is not non-caring or connecting, but it was non-clinging." She encourages individuals to develop flexible egos in order to expand awareness to all levels of existence:

I am not denying or degrading the material plane, only suggesting that it is one among many planes and that we travel from the earth plane to other levels and then back again. Spirituality isn't an escape from the world, but an expansion of the world. The spiritual dimension enriches and sustains us--it does not limit or deny us (1981:151).

Diane clearly distinguished between the personal self and the transcendent Self. Basing her discussion of the Self on a Jungian framework, she explained that the ego's flexibility lies in the fact that it is not the central guiding factor. There is something much larger that encompasses the ego and reaches into wider dimensions of the transcendent Self. She writes that "sacrifice has been mistakenly thought of as a surrender of the self, rather than a surrender to the Self and its many dimensions" (1981:151). A flexible ego is one that is receptive to a wide variety of dimensions of the Self. It can see beyond the simple fulfillment of needs to the deeper messages of the Self and integrate those messages into the conscious personality:

The ego is the part of us that has the desire and the need. It's not that we shouldn't have desire or need, yet we need to know that it's not fulfilling endless needs that's going to make us happy...to be liberated involves the Self (1988:5).

In *Mother Wit* Mariechild (1971:10) refers to this as the "higher self," or "voice of the soul." In order to have access to the messages of the "higher self," she encourages individuals to set aside personal thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, as well as any unconscious fears. This process should only be attempted with gentleness, while cultivating an attitude of acceptance toward personal material regardless of the contents:

Having worked so hard to acknowledge the existence of your feelings, it's important to realize that you are putting them aside only temporarily in order for you to work psychically. You are not repressing them (9).

In this statement it is clear that Mariechild values spiritual practices that both affirm the ego and others that reach beyond the personal self. In her work with healing and affirmation she understands renunciation as emptying process which releases pain and blocked energy prior to transformation (1971:18). For example, the visualizations in the Womb Meditation were designed deliberately to invoke and release personal feelings and memories.

Mariechild also utilizes another meditative technique that differs considerably from her basic awareness and breath meditations. In her own practice as well she has found that healing and fortification of the personal self is as valuable as the renunciative practices (1981:23). Guided, meditative visualizations are predominant in her written and ritual work. Basically this practice involves sitting cross-legged with an erect spine or lying down in a comfortable position with eyes closed. The meditator is guided, ideally by the voice of another person, through a series of images and metaphors, many of which are designed to explore and develop a clearer understanding of personal emotions

and impulses. She encourages the meditator to tape their own voice, or someone else's, in order to work alone with the visualizations effectively. At both of Mariechild's workshops that I attended the basic awareness and breath meditation was very brief compared to the guided visualizations. In the Womb Meditation, the former lasted approximately fifteen minutes, compared to two hours or more of guided visualizations. Emphasis in the visualizations is on the cultivation of imaginative images in response to cues that are given by another person. Instead of simply observing the mind's activities in silence and letting them go as in the basic awareness techniques, Mariechild encourages participants to cultivate and work with images. She writes, "To the extent that we are able to release, to forgive and to love, we awaken" (1987:92). Acceptance of the contents of the mind is the means by which we can forgive and then release the energies locked up in negative thought patterns. Diane has designed six separate exercises in *The Inner Dance* to guide the individual through a process of self-forgiveness, forgiveness of others, healing the inner child, releasing judgement and releasing pain and shame (91-110).

One of the most prominent features of the Womb Meditation rite was meditation. In the rite, Mariechild described meditation as a tool for grounding and connecting with the inner abyss and all things. The participant's memories of pain, rage and shame were acknowledged and released through meditation and visualization. At the end of the meditation, many of the women reported having experienced a release of negative energy. In Mariechild's Womb Meditation the basic awareness and breath meditation prepared the participants for the visualization that followed. While increasing the women's internal awareness, the meditation also set the stage for the purging of painful emotions and memories, emptying the psyche in order to facilitate transformation. Releasing pain can

be as difficult a practice as recognizing it. The innovative use of this renunciative practices is one of the strengths of Mariechild's emotional energy.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY

Feminist and other new age forms of spirituality focus primarily on fulfillment of being. Spiritual beliefs and practices are framed in a synthesis of personal and transcendental concepts that interprets spiritual reality as a manifestation of conscious and unconscious processes within an individual. The transcendent is understood as an experience that is accessible through the self, not entirely separate from the self. Diane Mariechild's spirituality reflects such a synthesis. She believes that a spiritual practice can access a divine creativity that exists within and help us to find love, power, authenticity and deep, honest response to life (23). Spiritual power can manifest in the individual through the phenomena of auras, chakras, psychic communication, astral projection, and healing (1981:vi-ix). Meditation is also the primary means by which to perceive one's past incarnations. In her chapter on reincarnation, Mariechild offers five meditative visualizations designed to facilitate recall of past life experiences and lives that are occurring in other dimensions simultaneously (89-95).

As I mentioned earlier, Mariechild's understanding of integration has evolved considerably in the last ten years. In *Mother Wit* she argues that Judeo-Christian religious beliefs define and legitimize male domination and supremacy (154). She suggests that the elimination of Lilith from the Judeo-Christian myth and the substitution of Eve signifies a depotentialization of the goddess and justifies male supremacy and domination (150). Mariechild (150) writes, "When a culture perpetuates a creation myth that excludes the

female creative force, it is a culture that categorically rejects women." Earlier creation myths envisioned the creative force as female. The Judeo-Christian tradition has repressed this feminine creative force and denied women images of strength, independence and courage. She points to the Judeo-Christian tradition as the major source of the misogynist beliefs that underlie the majority of our institutions, which have fed on fear and guilt, denial, repression and punishment. She explains that many of the predominant values underlying our institutions alienate women from their true selves. Mariechild's opinion was widespread among early feminists. However recent feminist research challenges this unidimensional view that the relationship of women and religion is simply one of subjugation (Young 1987:3). Katherine Young (7) suggests that an overview of the world religions does not necessarily support the correlation of male dominance with supreme male deities, as Mariechild has suggested. There is always a degree of truth behind a stereotype. Women have been subjugated by the Judeo-Christian religion. Mariechild develops this point further to suggest that exploitation of positive feminine attributes have caused women to internalize negative self-images. For example, women have been so conditioned to be receptive to other people's needs that they have often remained unaware of their own. Women's creative energies are considered legitimate only insofar as they are channeled into nurturing others with little or no thought of self (150). The ability to submit, "to let go and open oneself to the unknown has been reduced to a submission to the will of men" (150). Because of the distortion of these and other feminine qualities, women have negated their feminine sources. In our interview, Diane explains that in the early seventies even more than today, women's healing involved internalizing positive messages about being feminine:

There was a basic lack of recognition of the feminine. It was important to redeem the qualities of the feminine,

particularly the powers of intuition, valuing relationship, sensitivity and emotion instead of feeling guilty or denying them. Women had to stop blaming themselves for who they were and celebrate feminine qualities.

Mariechild's work with affirmations, visualizations, meditations and explorations of the feminine archetypes and energies grew out of these convictions.

In her early work Mariechild's search for the sources of women's oppression led her to an examination of the values of our society at large; she pointed her finger at men for creating and perpetuating these values. As her work evolved, she became increasingly aware of the psychological dangers of polarization. In *The Inner Dance* Mariechild explains:

We feel we have to choose one attitude or action over the other. We have forgotten that all polarities are an aspect of a single whole. To develop any one quality without balancing it with its opposite can be harmful (1987:137).

In the initial stages of the healing process, many feminists transfer hostility and blame they feel towards themselves onto men and society. They often develop aggressive stances against all values that are masculine, maintaining the stance of a victim instead of taking responsibility for creating a better reality. This tendency is evident in Mariechild's early work. Then, she says, she stopped blaming altogether and began to cultivate the positive qualities of the lover and warrior archetypes. In our interview she explains that to deny the father principle is just prejudice turned around. She believes that the worst mistake a woman can make is to use her awareness as a weapon against men; that we all have our own evolution to work on and we must take responsibility for that. If women bond around their sense of victimization, seeing man as the enemy, then hatred is perpetuated and healing cannot take place.

HEALING THE FEMININE

In their critique of individuals and society, feminists rely heavily on the concepts of the masculine and feminine. They are united in their conviction that many women have been silenced and suppressed in the public and private domains of their lives. Sometimes feminist thinking defines the feminine as receptive, emotional, intuitive and relational, and assigns an altogether positive value to these attributes. In contrast, the masculine is defined as aggressive, rational and hierarchical, all of which are considered negative qualities.

Feminists choose to focus exclusively on the healing of women through the recognition of the feminine. Feminism has been fuelled by the pain and rage of women who have been conditioned to de-value their feminine strengths. Many of these women have witnessed or been victim to sexual and emotional abuse--one of the most blatant form of women's oppression. Feminist therapists have helped women awaken to these social and personal realities. Feminist therapist Mariam Greenspan (1983:182) observes that depression and a victim mentality are the most common symptoms of the female clients with whom she works. Women are three times as frequently depressed as men, with suicide rates twice as high as men's (185).

In their report on women and mental health in Canada, The Women and Mental Health Committee recommended that further data-collection and research is required in order to define and identify women's problems and issues in the area of mental health. Statistics based on the psychiatric diagnoses of people admitted to psychiatric hospitals reveal one consistent pattern. Women predominate in diagnostic categories characterized by depression and anxiety (1987:17).

Mariam Greenspan (182) reports that her depressed clients typically describe feelings of worthlessness, excessive dependency on the approval of others and a lack of personal identity (187). Women lacking self-esteem tend to interpret their feelings of hurt, fear, sadness and anger towards the men in their lives who are abusive as proof of their inherent worthlessness. They conclude that they feel bad because they are bad. Greenspan explains that these women reinforce their own sense of worthlessness repeatedly and unconsciously comply with the norms that have been set for them by society:

The worthlessness itself was somehow felt to be an essential part of her feminine self. Emotional invulnerability, emotional violence, and aggression were all aspects of masculinity as culturally defined. Hence the Victim in Linda unwittingly complied with the way men treated her. In doing so, Linda was unconsciously attempting to be 'in synch' with the internalized social definition of herself as a woman (189).

It is easy to see how a victim mentality becomes a way of life for many women, who blame themselves instead of seeing abuse as a larger cultural problem. A victim who is caught in self-condemnation believes that she does not possess the personal resources to alter her circumstances and break the vicious, negative patterns of her life. She cannot begin to recognize or express the rage that she feels toward the sources of external abuse, nor take responsibility for her own contribution to the situation. Instead she remains depressed, passive and alienated from her sources of power and healing. Greenspan believes (194) that the first step in learning to affirm the feminine involves facing repressed anger. Depression is often a symptom of the inability to express anger. In order to experience personal power, it is necessary to give up attachment to unconscious anger. Women have a great ambivalence toward anger and power:

Women are not only afraid of anger, but of power....

Everything in a woman's social experience teaches her that power is masculine and depression is feminine.... For many women, power is associated with abuse--because the two have been connected in women's experience of male power. Many women quite rightly resist becoming 'masculine' in this sense. Yet there are few nonmasculine models of power for women to envision; for the genuine power in women is, like everything else female in male society, devalued (195).

Mariechild's feminist concerns are expressed in her ritual work in the themes of honouring the seasons and cycles of the earth, and the female creative principle, by recognizing that everything is born of woman, that all matter is mother, and that in order to survive, the earth requires nurturing and caretaking (1988:5). She describes healing as a deep inner journey--a search for the essence of self, which increases self-knowledge, reunites the body, mind and spirit (1981:58). She explains that, "Working with the breath, with movement, with visualization and guided introspection will help us to clear away limitations--the pain, anger and fear that inhibit our self-actualization" (1987:3). In *The Inner Dance* Diane offers a variety of meditative exercises to facilitate this process. Her emphasis in the exercises, as well as in her ritual work is on self-acceptance and gentleness. She writes that the inner work, "means being patient and loving towards yourself, knowing that you have all of the time you need to make the changes you need to make" (7). While guiding individuals through gentle, meditative explorations of sensations (74-76), feelings (77-79), thoughts (80-81) and images (82-84), she emphasizes that the beginnings of personal liberation involves the development of compassionate self-awareness:

My teacher, Dhyani Ywahoo says that 'forgiveness is the healing balm.' The only way we can be fully present, the only way we can remember our true nature, is through forgiveness.... To the extent that we are able to release, to forgive and to love, we awaken (91-92).

Mariechild believes that we carry an inner child within our hearts, who is the embodiment of love, curiosity and joy (97). By the time we reach adulthood this inner child is hurt and afraid, and we cannot grow into maturity and wholeness until this inner child is healed. Often the emotional and sexual abuse that we experienced as children is hidden, yet the pain infuses our lives to the point that we are unable trust or develop intimate relationships.

Kay Turner (1982:229) believes that feminist ritualists are like traditional shamans, who have healed their own sickness before they can heal others. Diane related to me that her personal motivation for conducting ritual workshops lay in her own discovery of ritual practices that have liberated her. An emphasis on healing is evident throughout her work.

The theme of healing was significant in the Womb Meditation rite. Shuli's welcoming chant invited participants to heal themselves through their own internal resources with the words: "Heal, we're whole, we're holy." Diane's supplication emphasized the healing powers and compassionate wisdom of the goddess that offered freedom from the pain of separation through the knowledge of the relationship with all things. The visualizations facilitated women's increased awareness of bodily sensations and particularly their reproductive functions. Other healing symbols in the visualization included the nurturing goddess, the light energy of loving kindness, the all-receiving mother earth and the negative emotion that needed release. All of these internal symbols as well as the rite itself provided a vehicle for healing. The rite also functioned as a device for giving alternative meanings to parts of the body and experiences that had become sources of suffering for many of the women.

Many feminist psychologists and ritualists utilize images of the goddess as a tool

for the recognition of the feminine values of the psyche. The process is symbolic healing in which the individual identifies with "supernatural or intrapsychic power through the meditation of a symbol" (Sander 1979:17). Psychologists tend to focus on distinctive characteristics of the goddesses as models for understanding the woman's psyche. For example, therapist Jean Shinoda Bolen (1984:vii-viii) explains and develops the positive and the negative psychological characteristics of a number of goddesses: Artemis, Athena and Hestia the virgin goddesses; Hera, Demeter and Persephone the vulnerable goddesses; and Aphrodite, the alchemical goddess of love, beauty and transformation. Each goddess represents a particular feminine characteristic in the psyche. Bolen's Jungian therapy involves exploring these particular qualities and learning to identify the archetype that is being activated in the psyche. Mariechild's tendency to invoke the positive energy goddess images, those that represent the nurturing, compassionate and healing mother archetypes, is prevalent among feminist ritualists. Another archetype frequently invoked for women's empowerment is the independent, confident warrior constellation.

Jungian analysts Emma Jung and S.B.Perera believe that for many women their relationship to the animus, or male values of the psyche is not healthy. Jungians define the animus problem as a condition in which the woman's ego is dominated by the negative side of the animus. The woman with a negative animus is subject to an aggressive, perfectionistic, internal critic, lacking compassion. Emma Jung witnessed the growth of women during the early stages of women's liberation. She understood feminism as a positive step for women toward the conscious integration of masculine values, as well as an opportunity to affirm feminine values. While praising the development of masculine values in the women's psyche, she also observed that these

successful women in the world were more susceptible to the animus problem:

These are active, energetic, brave, and forceful women. But also there are those in whom the integration has failed, in whom the masculine behavior has overrun and suppressed the feminine principle. These are the over-energetic, ruthless, brutal, men-women...who are not only active but aggressive (1957:4).

The challenge for the "liberated" woman, who had achieved a degree of equality with men, was to consciously integrate masculine values without being completely overwhelmed by them (5). In contrast with contemporary feminist theory, Emma Jung believed that the animus problem developed because women were unwilling to sufficiently obey the commands of the animus, that is, to become more objective or intellectual:

...If woman does not adequately meet the demand for consciousness or intellectual activity, the animus becomes autonomous and negative, and works destructively on the individual herself and in her relations to other people (6).

Until the woman consciously integrates the masculine factor her feminine side will be overrun or repressed by the autocratic values of the animus. When animus possession pushes the feminine side into the background the woman experiences depression, and loss of interest in life. The solution for Emma Jung involved the harmonious integration of masculine and feminine values into the conscious life of the woman (13). Because women have been conditioned to think that the masculine powers of logos are superior to the feminine powers of intuition and emotion they have most difficulty with self-confidence, courage and will power (23). This is achieved by "giving the feminine its due value," while at the same time integrating positive masculine attributes (24). First and foremost, the woman must discriminate between her own feminine values and those of the animus, "and sharply limit its sphere of power" (38). I question the degree to which

Emma Jung herself was still caught in a dominant/submissive relationship between her masculine and feminine. Perhaps some contemporary women have transcended this submissive relationship to the masculine. Perhaps Emma Jung could not yet see the degree to which feminine values could be repressed in favour of the masculine. Her most important message to contemporary feminists is that the masculine requires conscious recognition and appropriate application in the woman's life.

Perera only briefly discusses the presence of the positive animus in the Sumerian myth, while primarily focusing on the healing journey for women into their feminine sources. She utilizes the descent of Inanna into the underworld as a model for the descent into the unconscious feminine aspects of the psyche. The unconscious contains those energies that have been repressed throughout one's life because of the ego's inability to integrate them into consciousness. Perera (1981:14) explains that during the descent, the conscious ego is often overwhelmed by the passion and numinous images from the unconscious and permanently altered by this contact. The energy that is released from the unconscious serves to revitalize and expand consciousness. Due to the negative values that are generally assigned to feminine qualities, women and men alike have a great deal of repressed feminine energy. For women initial contact with the feminine archetypes can bring with it extremely negative and frightening feelings, such as depression, despair, rage and fear. Perera (28-29) explains that a woman who has been dominated by an animus-ego is easily overwhelmed by renewed contact with these seemingly irrational forces. However, only an act of conscious surrender to the archetypal feminine can redeem its negative side and integrate it into the ego. The journey always requires suffering, a renunciation of the familiar and facing the terror of the unknown.

Although Greenspan, Bolen, Perera and E. Jung utilize somewhat different

psychological frameworks, they share Mariechild's opinion that women have been conditioned to associate many of their feminine qualities with negativity. Sandner (1979:11) explains that healing also involves giving meaning to otherwise meaningless suffering. The act of bringing unconscious material into consciousness can also give women a greater sense of meaning and understanding. Symbols and images can provide a new conscious framework within which to understand intense and confusing emotional material.

TRANSFORMATION AND EMPOWERMENT

The process of healing effects a change from an undesirable state into a more positive state of being. When healing takes place a transformation is the result. Healing can be psychological and/or physical. The entire process requires a renouncing or completion of an old form and the beginning of a new one. Many feminists maintain that the greatest wisdom of the feminine lies in the intuitive knowledge of the inevitability and interrelationship of life and death which lies at the heart of the transformative process. Perera suggests that for many women submission to the will of the feminine requires a sacrifice, as well as giving up the role of "spiritual daughters of the patriarchy" (1981:8). The renunciative aspect of the transformative process is portrayed in Inanna's descent. From a Jungian interpretation Inanna and Ereshkigal her dark sister in the underworld make up the bipolar pattern of the archetypal feminine (43). Archetypes possess both positive and negative, light and dark, characteristics. Ereshkigal, Queen of the Great Below, is the shadow or counterpart of Inanna, Queen of heaven, where the sun always shines (9). Inanna renounces her worldly identity, faces her dark sister and is overcome by the forces of chaos and death which "incubate and bring birth with an implacable pitilessness (24). Ereshkigal's destructive-transformative forces bring Inanna "naked and bowed low" into the underworld (9). At each of the seven gates one more layer of clothing is removed. Ereshkigal kills Inanna and hangs her corpse on a peg to rot (9). After three days Enki, god of waters and wisdom, rescues Inanna with two mourners whom he creates from the dirt under his fingernail (10). Ereshkigal is so moved by their compassion that she frees Inanna from the peg of death into new life.

Reflecting a Jungian approach, Diane Mariechild believes that the feminine holds

the key to the transformative process:

It's the recognition of the life cycle--of dying and being reborn again. Because in this culture we're so cut off from the feminine, there's such a thing around material possessions, even the body, and such a fear of death because we don't recognize the cycles (1988:7).

These life/death cycles are most evident for women in their bodily processes. Mariechild (1987:169) describes women's bodies as vessels, as well as metaphors for transformation. In ancient cultures the process of menstruation, birth and lactation was considered a mystery of transformation. She describes these "women's mysteries" as awesome and beyond rational comprehension. Mariechild (116) explains that the power of internal affirmations can transform fear into courage, feelings of scarcity into gratitude, inner doubt into confidence, anger and alienation into relationship with others and compassion. She aims to transform the fears that limit and separate us into the "love, joy and courage of our being" (113). She understands personal empowerment as development of the will and its alignment with the greater will of the universe (151). The purpose of empowerment is to become aware of what we are choosing and how to go about making appropriate choices for our personal well-being.

In the Womb Meditation rite, Diane led us into a symbolic place within of nothingness, from which all transformations were born. In this state all that was familiar was suspended and offered to the goddess. Diane explained that the goddess resided in the empty, fertile void from which she gave birth to new forms of perception. The birth of the new form was dependent on the surrender to the wisdom of the feminine that could recognize both life and death. Identification with the compassionate goddess helped to renew women's relationship with the neglected and abused reproductive areas. Chants sung by participants at the end of the rite emphasized personal empowerment through a

renewed relationship with the infinite powers of the universe, in these words: "Woman am I. Spirit am I. I am the infinite within my soul. I have no beginning and I have no end. All this I am."

The next chapter will diverge somewhat into a consideration of the ritual process itself and will focus on the liminal nature of transformative rites.

CHAPTER 3

RITUAL THEATRE AND FEMINIST RITUAL

In this chapter, I will define and discuss feminist ritual in light of recent anthropological and theatrical research on the ritual process. The discussion will focus on the psychological process of transformation in two forms of contemporary ritual expression, feminist ritual and ritual theatre, to suggest that feminist ritual may function as a catalyst for personal and social transformation.

Arnold van Gennep's (1960) classic description of the transformational stages in traditional rites of passage or initiation rites will provide the foundation of my discussion. I will examine Diane Mariechild's ritual work in light of Victor Turner's and Richard Schechner's discussions of liminality and transformation, as well as Ron Grimes' fieldwork with Grotowski's Polish Lab.

A discussion of the similarities between ritual theatre and Mariechild's ritual will suggest that the two contemporary ritual expressions are close companions. However the two forms diverge upon examination of the essential impulse behind the ritual creations. The major difference will also illuminate the power within both ritual forms.

Victor Turner (1982:91) believes that the interface between anthropological studies of ritual and theatre "could become a major teaching tool for both sets of partners in a world many of whose components are begining to want to know one another." Contemporary anthropological research has acquired a dual focus on social as well as individual dynamics. Although Turner's anthropological research is primarily concerned with social process, his secondary concern is with an individual's experience of

transformative processes. His attempt toward an "anthropology of experience" discusses the ways in which individuals consciously receive and derive meaning from cultural events. In Bruner (1986:4), Turner writes,

...all human act is impregnated with meaning, and meaning is hard to measure, though it can often be grasped, even if only fleetingly and ambiguously (33).

He explains that meaning is generated by putting culture and language together with what we feel, wish, and think about our present state in life (33).

A focus on the experience of transformative ritual processes is clearly evident in the work of Ron Grimes, ritual scholar and ritual theatre directors Richard Schechner and Jerzy Grotowski. I will examine Maricechild's ritual work in light of Victor Turner's, Richard Schechner's and Ron Grimes' discussions of liminality and Grotowski's ritual theatre work.

RITUAL: DEFINITION AND FUNCTION

Victor Turner (1967:19) defines ritual as "prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers." Research in contemporary ritual theatre would broaden Turner's definition of ritual if by "prescribed," he means to lay down or impose authoritatively. Traditional initiation rites are prescribed by previous generations, whereas Grotowski's and Schechner's contemporary ritual theatre work cultivates spontaneous exploration in a ritual context. The performance aspects in ritual theatre are the prescribed, formal behaviours layed down in a script and repeated, whereas the workshops and exploratory preparations for performances can be relatively loose and unprescribed.

Turner's above definition of ritual best describes what he later calls ceremony. Distinguishing between transformative and reinforcing rites, Turner (95) explains that the term "ritual" more accurately describes forms of religious behaviour associated with social transitions, whereas ceremony describes religious behaviour that confirms prescribed social norms. He challenges earlier social anthropological views that ritual only reflects and sustains social order, arguing that rituals function as vehicles of transformation. Turner (171) writes that, "Ritual is a transformative performance revealing major classifications, categories and contradictions of cultural processes," and not a "prop for social conservatism whose symbols merely condense cherished cultural values." Ritual holds the generative source of culture and structure (171). A ceremony reinforces and preserves the status of a particular group or culture. It affirms or intensifies an individual's commitment to a particular worldview or social structure.

Feminist spirituality has developed both ceremony and ritual. A small ceremony opened a feminist spirituality conference that I recently attended. It functioned to unite women for a day and reinforce a feminist worldview, purpose and identity among participants. We were all instructed to hold hands in a large circle and sing a feminist song that included the themes of women's spiritual and political empowerment, as well as relationship with all things. We were led through a series of dance steps that involved moving one way, then the other and weaving in and out of raised arms. This pre-designed ceremonious rite imposed on participants by leaders of the conference exemplifies Turner's definition of ritual. Feminist ritual, like contemporary ritual theatre, makes broader use of transformative rites. These rites may not necessarily be prescribed, but spontaneously evolve according to participant's impulses. One of Mariechild's rites that I participated in was pre-designed as well as spontaneous, containing one section to

facilitate personal exploration and expression. Although the difficulties experienced by participants with the liminal aspect of the rite are clearly evident, this rite illustrates feminist experimentation with spontaneous ritual processes.

The rite entitled *Crystal Visions: A Way of Personal and Planetary Peace* occurred on the second day of a two day workshop on April 16, 1988, at the University of Ottawa, sponsored by The Women's Centre. Approximately twenty women were in attendance, ranging in age from twenty to sixty. The rite took place in a room with many windows overlooking the buildings on campus. A thick concrete pole was in the middle of the room obstructing people's vision of each other and Diane and Shuli. The altar was set up on a small table with a white cloth, in the direction of the north containing two candles on either side, symbolizing the fire element, a statue of the Buddha and an African goddess. There were two bowls at the front of the altar; one containing rice, to symbolize the earth element and the other containing water, to symbolize the water element. There were two crystals that were later taken from the altar and set down beside Diane and Shuli on the floor. An abalone shell containing sage also sat on the altar, symbolizing the air element. Diane and Shuli sat at the base of the altar, crosslegged on meditation cushions throughout the rite.

Participants gathered outside the room in a lounge. Taped music was playing goddess chants while people sat in silence, for the most part, listening and waiting. Diane and Shuli entered and Diane explained that we would be entering sacred space. Her instructions for entering were identical to those given before the Womb Meditation. The welcoming song that Shuli sang as people crossed the threshold was the same. The purification with sage was again awkward for many of the women who were not familiar with the practice. An opening meditation of the earth and sky as well as individual

meditation were followed by fifteen minutes of structured exercises to stretch and relax our bodies. We were then instructed to form groups of six and sit in small circles. While sitting in a meditative posture with our eyes closed, Shuli led us through a visualization based on the theme of living in a world of peace. We were to imagine the feelings of waking up in this world; the setting, the sounds, the people with whom we lived, the food that we ate, how we prepared it, our occupation, and many other daily activities. The woman sitting next to me began crying softly almost immediately after the visualization began. As time went on, the room remained silent, except for the occasional snuffle or sob. The amount of silence surprised me, because I was unable to hold back a flood of tears and immense grief at the contrast between the visualization and state of the world today. When we opened our eyes, I saw many solemn faces. Shuli asked us to share our vision of a world of peace in small groups. All that I could do was cry. The visualization had lasted approximately twenty minutes. Diane and Shuli addressed the large group, emphasizing the need for self-examination and our interpersonal relationships to begin to understand obstacles to world peace. Diane explained that for many years she has listened to women complain about the state of the world, who could not remain in the same room with their parents for more than five minutes without arguing. Diane and Shuli then suggested that we were going to create a ritual to explore our personal obstacles to world peace. While placing four candles in the four directions around the concrete pole, Diane explained that the center was protected by the powers of the four directions. We were instructed to sing while moving in a large circle around the room, until we felt the need to enter the centre and release our obstacles to world peace, where they would be transformed. We could do this with a song, words or dance. We all stood tentatively waiting for the chanting and movement to begin. After a long, awkward pause

in which it appeared that Diane and Shuli were waiting for a song to spontaneously emerge from the group, they began singing a complex song familiar to only a few of the women. The energy of the group was faltering. People slowly began to move, attempting to sing the song. It seemed that we had circled around many times before someone finally summoned up the courage to jump into the center. When she did, the movement of the circle stopped abruptly and everyone waited in silence. She softly explained her personal obstacles to world peace and returned to her position. We stood there self-consciously in silence for an awkward moment until Shuli began singing and the circle trudged on. Many women were walking around mechanically. I felt extremely self-conscious with an overwhelming impulse to leave the room. Each time someone entered the center everything came to a stop. Because the energy was so low to start with, each new beginning increased my uneasiness. Several of the women who entered the center were stopped mid-sentence by their tears. Up to this point all of the women had used words instead of a dance or song. Then one participant energetically jumped into the center of the circle and asked Diane and Shuli to drum. She began to dance with very intense, anguished movements extending up and down, throwing her whole body into chaos. She yelled that she released her feelings of personal inadequacy and continued to dance, almost frenzied. The other participants became very animated and energy rose. Each time another person entered the center yells of encouragement, clapping hands and stamping feet were offered. One woman beckoned others to join her in the center and received enthusiastic response. The original woman dropped out after about fifteen minutes and more women entered the center and danced.

When the center had cleared, Diane formed a smaller inner circle, travelling in the opposite direction. Others entered the center and the songs continued. The energy was

flowing very strongly and transitions occurred easily. The energy remained high and faces were animated until Diane and Shuli stopped the circling. Then we were instructed to form a large circle again and sing a final song before leaving for the lunch break. The circle was broken without any formal dismissal of the energy of earth and sky and the four directions.

This rite contained highly and loosely structured phases. Although the transition from high to low structure, was awkward, when participants were instructed to sing a song and release their obstacles to world peace, eventually some spontaneous activity emerged. Liminal qualities were evident in the emphasis on low structure, spontaneous expression, psychic vulnerability in the acknowledgment of weakness and pain, as well as joy and transformative processes. In Chapter 4 I will discuss some of the challenges of cultivating unstructured, liminal ritual processes.

The initiatory process delineated by van Gennep and Turner provides an accurate description of rites involving psychological transformation as well as those designed to mark a change in social status. The difference lies in a social as opposed to a psychological emphasis, not in the process itself. It is highly likely that a neophyte undergoing initiation into a new social status simultaneously experiences a psychological transformation or existential shift.

FEMINIST RITUAL

Feminist ritual can be defined essentially as a container or framework within which contemporary women and men symbolically express their fundamental response to existence before one another in sacred space. Ritual participants explore, share, enact,

affirm and invoke primarily feminine images of immanence and mutually acknowledge the presence of transcendent powers. As I discussed in Chapter 1, sacred space is a specially designed area, often temporarily set apart from normal space, containing potentially transformative energies and transcendent powers. Feminist ritual has grown out of personal desire, within an increasingly secular culture, to seek new spiritual meaning through the creation of ritual structures that facilitate healing, transformation and empowerment, as well as to reinforce feminist values. This movement is one contemporary manifestation of what Virginia Hine (1981:405) describes as the emergence of archetypal ritual processes. In this ritual-starved society, feminists are digging deep into the roots of their experience and creating rituals that best express their spiritual and personal reality. The ritual practices of feminist spirituality have grown out of a belief that feminine values are not adequately expressed in the Judeo-Christian religious traditions.

Schechner (1987:5) believes that in both animals and humans ritual arises around deeply ambivalent interactions. Usually these concern issues of sexuality/mating, hierarchy, and territory. Recent anthropological research has found that ritual symbols can "formulate or 'make sense' of particular, often problematic, cultural, or psychological situations and then reframe, transform, or intensify this 'sense,' leading to a new orientation of the participants to their situation" (Schieffelin 1985:707).

According to Victor Turner, increased choice and responsibility may,

prove too much for the individual to endure on his (or her) own, and he (or she) seeks some transcendental source of support and legitimacy to relieve him (or her) from anxieties about his (or her) immediate and ultimate fate as a self-conscious entity (200).

Feminist ritual may be a catalyst for personal transformation and provide transcendent

legitimacy for alternative career and life-style choices.

Feminist ritual is a part of the larger feminist "revitalization movement" that is sweeping through our culture. Anthony Wallace defines a revitalization movement as a "conscious, deliberate organized effort on the part of some members of a society to create a more satisfying culture" (1985:319). The feminist "revitalization movement" has created a great deal of freedom, as well as uncertainty for many women. Freedom entails integrating new roles and new attitudes which may be irreconcilable with formerly conditioned values. Wallace's model indicates that any cultural transformation involves a period of uncertainty and experimentation.

LIMINALITY IN TRANSFORMATIVE RITUAL

Turner's discussion of transformative ritual processes is based on Arnold van Gennep's identification of a three-stage initiation process that alters an individual's social status, marking a transition from childhood to adulthood. Initiation rites are perhaps the clearest illustration of the transformative uses of ritual. Van Gennep (1960:11) traces initiates through a process of separation, transition and incorporation. The separation stage removes initiates from their familiar surroundings, detaching them from a set of cultural conditions for an interval of time. The transitional stage is characterized as a chaotic threshold between two worlds, in which the old forms are lacking in substance, and the new are not clearly established. The final stage of incorporation re-integrates initiates into a community with a new social identity and status (81). Van Gennep (19-20) describes a rite of passage as a means by which an individual, "...leaves one world behind him [or her] and enters into a new one...to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world."

The term "liminality" was originally conceived by Arnold van Gennep to describe the middle, transitional phase in traditional rites of passage. Liminality can be defined as a ritual condition that catalyzes individual transformation by psychologically transporting ritual participants into unfamiliar realms of conscious, existential understanding. Victor Turner describes initiates in a liminal state as:

...neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed in a rich variety of symbols...(1969:95).

The initiates possess nothing and are reduced to a position of uniformity and dependency in order to be re-formed with additional powers (95).

Turner (1984:202) explains that liminality is central to the ritual process. It is within the liminal phase that communication of the sacred, ludic recombination and relationships of *communitas* are achieved. Communication of the sacred is the "heart of the liminal matter" (203). When the power of the sacred is communicated, "those undergoing the rites will change their nature, be transformed from one kind of human being to another" (203).

According to Turner (1984:204), ludic recombination is "quintessentially liminal." It provides individuals with a glimpse of alternate perspectives or "unique structures of experience," characterized by ambiguous ideas (1986:41). Psychologically, it introduces chaos or uncertainty into familiar cognitive structures, juxtaposing contradictory values that ultimately may expand an initiates' sense of choice or existential freedom. Ludic recombination rearranges prescribed cultural values "...in any and every possible pattern, however deviant, grotesque, unconventional or outrageous" (204). This unique glimpse of alternate realities provides a cognitive gap within which to "juggle with the factors of

existence" (205). The purpose of this stage is to prepare initiates for the transmission of new teachings to accompany the change in social status.

Feminist ritual frames the sacred with the deliberate invocation of sacred space. In that space the sacred is communicated through meditation and silence, chanting, repetitive movements, power objects, and the cultivation of images and energies of goddesses and gods personifying transcendent powers or aspects of the unconscious.

According to Turner, "communitas" is a relationship of communion between individuals who submit to a liminal status in order to connect with the sacred. It unites individuals who have given up their social roles and status in immediate "total confrontation of human identities" (1969:132). The bonds of communitas are anti-structural, undifferentiated and non-rational. Not necessarily confined to relationships between individuals, communitas can also be one individual's experience of a universal relationship between all things:

Even the solitary mystic achieves communitas by reaching the root, the 'Atman' he believes exists identically in all men indeed in all beings, embracing nature as well as culture in communitas (1975:203).

The feminist spirituality movement expresses a desire for communitas through the creation of rites that cultivate a deeper relationship with authentic, hidden values of the self, with other people and with processes of nature.

The liminal phase of ritual functions to unite participants with hidden aspects of themselves, and with transcendent realities. Liminal experience can intensify awareness of personal, unconscious processes or produce a sense of numinosity and transcendent power. Compelling or terrifying forces that appear to operate beyond conscious control may arise within liminal states, providing wisdom and guidance for conscious integration. The symbols arising out of liminal states are products of the activation of unconscious

material which contains ambiguous, contradictory and unexpected impulses.

From a Jungian perspective, liminality activates the psychological mechanism that enables participants to suspend a familiar conscious orientation and journey into the unconscious. The powerful emotional experience that can accompany a transformative process may be accounted for by an individuals' recognition of repressed, unconscious fears or memories. Freud believes that the mechanism of repression represents an attempt to rid the conscious mind of traumatic memories or any other emotions deemed unacceptable by consciousness. Repressed, unconscious emotions can have a tremendous amount of energy when they are released into consciousness. An individual's encounter with pain, rage or grief that has been buried in the unconscious, can produce an experience of chaos, unpredictability or loss of familiar boundaries and control mechanisms. There can be confusion of where the emotions will end, or the depths to which they will penetrate. Janine Roberts (1988:30) explains that ritual can allow an individual to feel safe while experiencing intense emotion. It is the clear ritual structure provided by the ritualist, or leader of the rite which allows participants to enter the chaos of the liminal stage./5/

Victor Turner (1974:107) identifies the acceptance of pain and suffering as a characteristic of liminality, in contrast to the tendency to avoid pain and suffering in the status system. He contrasts the impulse to *communitas* with the impulse to create structure and understands their interplay as a dialectical process within society (97). Both individuals and groups experience "high and low, *communitas* and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality" (97). The pain and suffering in traditional initiation rites is deliberately imposed on participants by initiating elders. In contrast, the intense emotion that may be experienced in contemporary rites can be self-imposed or

cultivated by a ritual leader. In either case, transformative rites are paradoxical in that they produce an experience of anti-structure within a highly structured context. The re-incorporation stage restructures new patterns of consciousness with material gathered from the unconscious.

EXPERIMENTAL AND RITUAL THEATRE

Research has evolved in the fields of anthropology and religious studies to examine transformative ritual processes in experimental and ritual theatre. Ritual theatre grew out of the experimental theatre movement of the 1960's in which emphasis was placed on the performer's process rather than the finished product, and on authentic, spontaneous interaction between performers and audience members. Common themes within both movements include suffering, growth, authenticity, spiritual evolution, transformation, and empowerment. Ron Grimes (1982:166), a ritual scholar, characterizes ritual theatre, or theatre that is ritualized, by an interest in masks, gestures and Asian spirituality; with an emphasis on sounds rather than words, minimal emphasis on playwright, eclecticism, and high interaction between audience and actors.

Ritual and theatre share many of the same characteristics. Both have transformative and liminal potential. A stage or ritually sacred place may create a liminal space, apart from "normal" reality in which the surrender and transformation of habitual perceptions of self and reality may occur. Robert Benedetti, a practitioner of conventional theatre, discusses the transformative potential in the performing process:

We teachers of acting, and we actors, also know how the actor, in the deepest way, must center himself; as he touches his center he...is liberated to flow outward into new forms that are profoundly organic expressions of his

life experience (1976:22).

The actor's deepest task is to be "trans-formed," in a spiritual experience of "total self" (23). Even the conventional actor is trained to suspend his or her habitual social roles and discover original impulses. A performer draws on his or her unconscious resources to open up new possibilities of interaction with inner and outer reality. A participant in transformative ritual processes suspends his or her habitual, analytic faculties and social roles when entering liminal territory.

In his definition of performance Victor Turner suggests that the inner process or performing mechanism is complex and involves the power to "complete a more or less involved process rather than to do a single deed or act" (1982:91). Although conventional performance theory reflects a concern with a performer's inner process, the emphasis on internal processes reaches its peak in experimental and ritual theatre, in which the finished product becomes secondary to the potentially transformative experience of performers and audience members. The experimental movement strives to create and communicate liminal, transformative experiences. Richard Schechner is one of the leading theorists and practitioners of experimental theatre. His performance theory discusses two processes unfolding together in a performance: the "evanescent process of the performer," and the work of refining the form that becomes performance (1977:19). Ideally, the structure, or finished product provides a place of freedom within which the performer and audience can explore. Schechner's (1985:118) distinction between conventional and experimental performing processes lies in the actor's relationship to intuitive, unconscious factors. He explains that the conventional Stanislavsky system involves training an actor to develop conscious control over intuitive flow. "He wanted the actor to be carried away not into chaos but into the precise score of what had been prepared through rigorous training.... "

(1977:18). Although a conventional actor works with internal process, his or her training is designed to hide this behind the structure given by the playwright, director, and character being portrayed. In contrast, experimental theatre performance strives for "actual," or authentic states of being, "...instead of the smooth 'professionalism' of the 'good actor,' there are rough and unexpected turbulences, troubled interruptions." These constitute actual, or genuine interaction between the performer, script, and other actors on stage. In ritual and experimental theatre, a performer's process in the here and now is emphasized and theatrical "tricks" to disguise an authentic immediate response are discouraged.

In his discussion of liminality, Schechner (1985:118) examines and contrasts the potential for "transportation" and transformation of performers and audience. He believes that transformation and transportation is possible within ritual or theatre. Whether transformation is permanent, as in an initiation rite, or temporary, as in trance, the difference is only in degree. Schechner (1985:125-126) explains that transportation occurs when performers are returned to their original state after a temporary transformation. A temporary shift in identity or perception occurs while experiencing an altered reality on stage.

A transformation, such as initiation, involves a permanent change of status and/or psychological identity. Performers return to their "normal" lives with a permanently altered way of perceiving reality. Whether in ritual or theatre, the potential for transformation and transportation presents itself:

When the performance is over the transported have been returned to their place of entry and the transformed have been changed (130).

Schechner measures the strength of a performance by the degree of liminality, or potential

for transportation and transformation that is present. A number of factors can influence the degree to which participants may be transported or transformed. If the ritual or performance structure is set within clear boundaries, participants will experience a safe enclosure for exploration and surrender to unconscious impulses. The individual needs and motivation of participants will also determine the degree of transportation or transformation that will occur.

Both transformation and transportation would fall under Turner's understanding of ritual as opposed to ceremony. According to Turner reinforcement, as opposed to transformation, is the aim of ceremony. Although Schechner's terms can be misleading, whether a participant is transformed or transported, he or she experiences a liminal process.

Liminality is not usually comfortable. Schechner describes it as precarious and subjunctive:

...resting not on how things are but on how things are not; its existence depends on agreements kept among all participants, including the audience. The field is the embodiment of potential, of the virtual, the imaginative, the fictive, the not not. The larger it gets, the more it thrills, but the more doubt and anxiety it evokes too (113).

The liminal nature of the performing process is the agent of transformation. Schechner (113) writes that performance takes place, "in the 'not me...not not me' between performers...[and] between performers and texts,... and environment." The performers are neither themselves, nor are they not themselves, suspended between non-identity and a symbolic identity. The possibility for transformation presents itself as a performer behaves as someone else, experiencing "me in another state of feeling being, as if there were multiple 'me's' in each person " (1985:37).

The ritual theatre of Grotowski's "Poor Theatre" deliberately cultivate liminality in both rehearsal and performance mediums. Ron Grimes turns to Grotowski's work in order to elucidate contemporary, transformative ritual processes. I will focus on Grimes' description of one period of Grotowski's ritual theatre work, keeping in mind that Grotowski's focus has changed considerably since then. Grotowski's work is valuable to the contemporary ritualist in that it provides a concrete example of some of the ways in which contemporary individuals are creating liminality.

Grimes explains that Grotowski's actors are "poor" in a religious sense; they aspire "not to illustrate 'acts of the soul,' but to actually accomplish them" (171). Through ascetic elimination of all "extraneous movements and motives" they strive for the expression of purely authentic impulses (171). Grimes describes Grotowski's theatre laboratory as "a place where disciplined self-examination, ritualized expression and mystical revelation can occur with unusual intensity" (177). Grimes has developed the term "ritualization" to describe preconscious, spontaneous ritual processes, refining the meaning of "ritualizing" to describe deliberate cultivation of ritual, as in the re-enactment phase, as opposed to the originaive stage (1990). Grotowski's actors work with both ritualizing and ritualization. In ritual theatre, as in other experimental forms, the performers strive to portray through art "actual" or "authentic" states of being. According to Schechner, the performer of ritual theatre captures "the authentic" by revealing and ritualizing his or her relationship to intuitive, unconscious factors that are activated in the here and now (118).

Members of Grotowski's "Poor Theatre," seek personal liberation and meaning through austere discipline and suffering. Grimes (1982:168) writes, "The price of Grotowskian myth, ritual and meditation is poverty and self-examination." Grotowski's

exploration attempts to replace the tricks of theatricality and empty forms of religiosity with a theatre of genuine, secular holiness. His actor's, Grimes (169) says, are trained in an ethos of "holiday" or "holy-day," constantly in search of a way of being disarmed so that genuine meeting and communication can take place. Grotowski believes that both theatre and the church is dead. He works to retrieve the source or ground of both theatre and the church through "'a holiday,' 'not hiding,' 'bodily sincerity'" (169), "a ritualized act carefully aimed at releasing spiritual energy" (169). This *via negativa* aims at removing resistances of the actor's psyche in order to facilitate self-revelation. This "theatre become religion" is a negation of the conventionally sacred and a renewal of authentic, secular holiness (166). (See Appendix 3 for an autobiographical description of my work at The Actor's Lab, a ritual theatre company modelled after the work of Grotowski).

LIMINALITY IN THE WOMB MEDITATION

Liminality was a predominant feature of the Womb Meditation, which aimed for healing and transformation. Participants were guided into a liminal space in order to establish a deeper relationship with the feminine, a source of healing. The initial separation stage involved renouncing structured patterns of consciousness and acknowledging any repressed pain that required healing. Participants were guided into unconscious liminal territory primarily through meditation and visualization.

Diane and Shuli provided a very clear and safe ritual container within which intense emotions could arise. One participant said that she experienced Diane and Shuli as "doorkeepers of the threshold." Initially, we were encouraged to surrender to the

guidance of the ritual leaders and cross the threshold of consciousness. We were asked to place our trust in the unconditional compassion of the goddess that arise out of the nothingness from which transformations were born.

The re-incorporation stage in transformative rites restructures new patterns of consciousness with unconscious material. In the Womb Meditation this stage commenced at the end of the guided meditative journey. We were asked to open our eyes, make a circle and share our experiences of the meditation. This was the first time that we were invited to communicate with one another verbally. The sharing included describing images, emotions, thoughts, memories, and bodily sensations as well as responses to the journey. Psychologically, this provided the opportunity to integrate the material that had been uncovered into various conceptual frameworks. The act of communicating personal experiences with others can facilitate rational, structured thinking.

Many of the participants left the rite expressing a sense of a renewed and altered relationship with their reproductive functions. Judging from my own experience and reports from several other participants, we took with us a new sense of honour for the wonder and mystery of our own bodies.

It is not within the scope of this study to determine the degree of transformation that took place, or whether it was temporary or permanent. The Womb Meditation contained the three phases of transformative rites and was a potential catalyst for change.

There are some fundamental differences and similarities between ritual theatre and Diane Mariechild's ritual workshops. The major difference lies in an emphasis in ritual theatre on producing art, while Mariechild's rituals focus on leading participants into an experience of immanence. Even in Grotowski's ritual theatre, which reflects a strong religious emphasis, the aim is to create a work of art. Artistic expression may lead

individuals into transcendent realms, but this is a bi-product of an excellent work of art. In conventional and ritual theatre alike, an excellent performance will transport a performer into an experience of complete harmony with the actions of the character being portrayed in a way that temporarily transcends all distinctions between the performer and the role. The performer feels that he or she is participating in a greater reality that blurs distinctions between personal and transpersonal realities. Similarly, ritual participants may be transported into an experience of transcendence and unity with universal forces that temporarily obliterate distinctions between personal and transpersonal realms.

Mariechild believes that she embodies the sacred during her performance while also guiding others to an awareness of their own potential for healing and transcendence. Diane and Shuli's pre-performance activities include dancing, meditation, invocation of the four directions, earth and sky, and purification of the ritual space with sage. All of these ritual activities are designed to invoke transcendent states of being within the ritual leaders themselves. When the participants enter the rite, their guides are already "charged" with spiritual energy.

Although the actors and ritual leaders both utilize performance to communicate their message, the audience have a different set of expectations than ritual participants have. A theatre audience expects performers to portray a genuine experience, while they witness it and vicariously experience themselves. A ritual participant expects ritual leaders to guide them into a direct, and not vicarious, experience. Whereas Mariechild's participants are attending to their own processes, audience members are primarily attending to a performer's process and secondarily to their own.

Confusion and self-consciousness arose in Mariechild's Crystal Visions rite when they were asked to release personal obstacles because they likely thought that they were

expected to perform. When the rite began to flow once again, participants were attending to their own liminal experiences and not as concerned with performing. Ritual theatre fails when performers lose sight of their goal to produce art and become self-absorbed in their own experience. Rites fail when performing becomes an obstacle to experiencing genuine internal processes.

This fundamental difference between ritual theatre and ritual is embedded in history, when theatre moved ritual out of the church and art replaced faith. In his early work, Grotowski endeavoured to bridge the gap between art and faith and created performances that at times transcended art.

The fundamental similarity between ritual theatre and Mariechild's rites lies in the creation of liminal spaces in which transformative experiences may occur. Using Grimes' terms, both groups work with ritualization and ritualizing, that is with preconscious, as well as, deliberately cultivated ritual processes.

In the next chapter I will discuss some of the strengths and weaknesses of feminist spirituality and Mariechild's ritual work.

CHAPTER 4

FEMINIST SPIRITUALITY AND RITUAL: CONCLUSIONS

First, I will examine the strengths and weaknesses of feminist spirituality: individualism, psychological religiousness, and polarization in the feminine. Then I will consider some of the problems that may arise working with feminist ritual: the workshop circuit, the need for community, embodiment, and the responsibilities of working with liminal rites.

FEMINIST SPIRITUALITY: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Psychological religiousness has its strengths and weaknesses, three of which I will discuss: increased personal responsibility, eclecticism and narcissism. Psychological introspection may facilitate growth, encouraging individuals to re-evaluate and refine personal values. Feminist psychology has cultivated women's increased sense of personal responsibility for creating their own reality. Feminists maintain that because many women have relied primarily upon the needs and approval of others for self-definition, their healing requires the development of an increased sense of personal self, or empowerment.

While the benefits of increased personal responsibility are evident, extremist positions within the human potential movement advocate that individuals possess absolute control over the creation of reality. The notion of complete individual freewill assumes that people are completely immune to external factors that invariably influence the course their lives. A child does not possess the power to determine his or her family

of origin and socio-economic conditions which provide the basic foundations of personal development. Persons from privileged socio-economic backgrounds have a wider range of choices available to them than the less advantaged. Psychological theories, such as Freudian psychotherapy and family systems theory have established that early childhood experience has an unconscious impact on the choices we make throughout our lives. Personal insight often occurs in retrospect after choices have been made. As relational beings who depend on support and personal validation by members of our family and community, our reality is created, in part by our interpersonal relationships. We have minimal control over who may enter and leave our lives.

A danger of attempting to live according to this myth of complete responsibility is that it may create delusions of grandeur (if one believes that he or she is completely in control) or unnecessary anxiety and feelings of inadequacy (if one feels unable to maintain complete control).

Bellah and his associates (1985:viii) point out that individualistic thinking also contributes to increased isolation. Inner experience advocates are no longer willing to adhere to an obligatory set of values and roles set down by tradition. They value above all freedom to make private decisions apart from the public domain (Bregman 1982:133). The problem of making choices that are based solely on the self is that there are no objectifiable criteria for choosing one value over another (Bellah 1985:75). Bellah and his researchers explain,

It [individualistic thinking] presumes the existence of an absolutely empty, unencumbered and improvisational self. It obscures personal reality, social reality and particularly the moral reality that links person and society (80).

Extreme individualists tend to be apolitical, a highly unethical stance to assume as the

world rapidly approaches potential global disaster.

Traditionally, religious individuals have defined themselves according to moral standards and truths sanctioned by an "objective," higher source of knowledge. Traditional moral standards cultivated group solidarity, in which members abdicated personal needs in order to participate in community membership. Inner experience advocates are less willing to abdicate their own needs for group ideals. It becomes very difficult to create a cohesive, spiritual community when each person is making choices based solely on internal reference points. A spiritual movement, such as feminist spirituality that is based on personal definition and empowerment, may have difficulty creating any sense of solidarity between its members. However, there are a number of common concerns uniting feminists that may not be as prominent in other new age groups. The feminist interest in the creation of supportive community may potentially counteract increasing isolation of individuals in our culture. Feminist communities are not altogether immune to the dilemma of individualism, and some feminist writers tend to gloss over it.

In my experience with women's communities, the initial phase resembles a romantic love affair. Individual differences are overlooked in an experience of community and support. But when the love affair loses its novelty and daily routines and decisions must be made, a great deal of conflict may arise. As a result, many groups tend to be impermanent, with a regular turnover in membership, as people leave because their values become incompatible with the group. This lack of continuity is particularly acute in the workshop circuit, which is a primary means of communicating feminist spirituality. Unsustained group work presents a major problem for the development of feminist spirituality.

Because of Diane Mariechild's extremely individualistic approach, isolation is a potential problem. Of the three rites that I participated in, a large percentage of the time was spent in introspective meditation. Mariechild's written work also focuses on meditation or visualization practices. Mariechild successfully balances her predominantly introspective work with repeated intervals of gathering, either in large or small groups to share the material that emerged during the meditations. In the Womb Meditation Diane instructed participants to sit back-to-back with a partner for added emotional support. Her spiritual emphasis on the interrelationship between all things also helped to alleviate feelings of isolation.

Another problem with psychological religiousness is that it may cultivate a narcissistic preoccupation with self, resulting in the tendency to pursue personal pleasure at all costs, or dwell on one's own pain. This orientation can undermine a cohesive community, because people are unwilling make compromises for the benefit of the group that involve any sort of personal adjustment. Many of us have been socialized to believe that we are entitled to personal comfort and self-fulfillment regardless of the impact of our desires upon others.

In spiritual disciplines preoccupation with self-fulfillment may prevent individuals from following any particular practice beyond its novel and pleasurable stage. New age spirituality has been criticized for its eclectic assortment of beliefs and practices which encourage individuals to indulge their personal whims until the beliefs and practices lose significance. This sort of spiritual indulgence can obscure distinctions between the personal self and transcendental Self.

Lucy Bregman questions the degree to which inner experience advocates distinguish between the Self as cosmic transcendental reality and the self as the "empirical

personality" (1985:141). A review of new age literature indicates that it is the personal self or empirical personality that is viewed as "unsatisfactory and in need of expansion, transformation, and transcendent grounding" (141). Simultaneously new age thinking advocates that we are also universal, impersonal energies and not individual souls, suggesting that Self and ego are identical. This lack of clear distinction between personality and transcendental Self cultivates a narcissistic approach to spirituality. Bregman defines narcissism as "an exaggerated, immature belief in the self as the center of reality" (140). The narcissist's self-love does not indicate genuine self- acceptance, only "a cover-up for a basically unsatisfactory and loveless relation to the world" (140). Individuals become trapped in the ego's perception of the world, unable to penetrate deeper levels of awareness beyond the personal self that provide increased meaning.

Most spiritual traditions require a firm commitment from individuals to pursue a particular discipline; pain and discomfort as well as pleasure are viewed as secondary- mere concerns of the personal self, or personality, that obstruct recognition of deeper truths. Depth psychology also reinforces the necessity to reach beyond the ego into unconscious depths. The therapeutic process is often an uncomfortable and painful task due to the unpleasant, repressed material.

The eclecticism of feminist spirituality as well as the emphasis on healing the personal self can cultivate narcissistic tendencies and blur the distinctions between the personal self, or ego and the transcendental Self. Narcissism is particularly problematic in feminist spirituality because it lacks prescribed practices, such as meditation, that can relativize the ego, and transport the individual beyond ego orientation. In other words, once the feminine ego is fortified, what practices can the woman utilize to get beyond the personal? In one of her workshops Diane criticizes new age eclecticism and cautions

against the dangers of engaging in superficial spirituality. She emphasizes the importance of placing enduring commitment to one of many viable, traditional spiritual disciplines. Mariechild's own fifteen year commitment to Buddhist meditation is a reliable indicator of the depth of her spiritual pursuits. Mariechild's first book, *Mother Wit* was extremely eclectic, superficially covering a wide range of topics including relaxation, energy and vibration, psychic communication, healing, dreams, witchcraft, ritual, and others, reflecting a relatively diffuse and undeveloped spiritual search. In her later work, *The Inner Dance* Diane has developed a much sharper and detailed focus on psychological exploration, healing, and integration. The meditation techniques that she utilizes in her rites have the power to carry participants beyond personal dimensions. The basic awareness and breath meditation allow participants to renounce an ego-orientation and explore transcendent dimensions. The blend of the two practices work well together for women with feminist concerns. Eclecticism has given women the freedom to select empowering beliefs and practices from a number of diverse sources that were not previously available to them. Even when distinctions are clearly made between the personal and transcendental Self and separate practices are developed to serve both, the traps of narcissism invariably arise.

One of the most serious weaknesses of feminist spirituality lies in its potential perpetuation of sexist stereotyping and its tendency to polarize women against men. Although my own training as a therapist allies me with a movement emphasizing feminine values, I do not wish to perpetuate a common feminist bias that feminine qualities are positive and masculine qualities are negative. For the purpose of understanding certain fundamental principles of the psyche, it is useful to categorize them into complementary opposites. Although this way of perceiving reality has its

limitations, it nevertheless gives us a map within which to explore the territory.

Many women have been sufficiently victimized by men that they chose to create an alternative lifestyle, in which feminine values are predominant. Other feminists claim that a balanced recognition of masculine and feminine values contributes to a healthy psyche. All women carry the inheritance of the female body that has given birth, been burned at the stake and experienced persecution through the ages. Feminism encourages women acknowledge and respond to these truths in order to obliterate themes of victimization in their own lives. Periods of bitterness and rejection of men and patriarchal values are often encountered in the process. Some women chose alternative, Lesbian lifestyles, while others attempt to refine the nature of their relationships with men. The tendency to generalize from one particular man to all men, or vice-versa may be problematic. If women have been oppressed and made to feel ashamed of their femininity, feminist spirituality may provide a way of healing. The problem arises when women are unable to let go of their old victim roles and unwittingly feed on feminist anger to fuel these roles. It is crucial that while women work through the initial healing stage involving affirmation of the feminine, that they also attempt to remain open to positive aspects of the masculine.

Mariechild's Womb Meditation served the purpose of a first stage healing rite well. The question is, was it in any way counterproductive to further integration? Could Mariechild have somehow pointed toward future integration, or redeemed the masculine in some way? I wonder if it was necessary to feminize all of the healing sources, for example, Mother Earth and the loving compassion of the goddess? Could she also have explained the dangers of using such work as fuel for further polarization? Could she have designed a meditation to follow the Womb Meditation involving exploration of the

positive male figures in the women's lives? I think there were other options available. On the other hand, perhaps this was too much to ask of participants in a single afternoon. And perhaps this would defeat the purpose of the rite entirely. However, in work of this kind, it is important to suggest integration whenever possible.

Mariechild's ritual workshop, entitled *Lovers and Warriors: Integrating Compassion and Action*, was designed to facilitate integration of masculine and feminine values. The rite was sponsored by The Women's Centre at the University of Ottawa. Approximately twenty women were in attendance, ranging in age from twenty to sixty. On the Friday night before the workshop, Diane and Shuli had given a public talk entitled *The Inner Dance* which covered the material in Mariechild's latest book. Children, men and women were welcome for the public talk. However, only women were invited to attend the two day workshop. The flyer for the workshop described the Inner Dance rite in this way:

Every human being has many facets or aspects of self. Often these aspects seem conflicted and we struggle with an either/or position. The most challenging integration is the synthesis of the female and male polarities. In this workshop we will look at ways of celebrating both our radiant and reflective qualities so that our hearts are open and our actions are clear and purposeful (See Appendix B for a description of the rite).

Mariechild's rite very thoroughly provided participants with an opportunity to explore and share their experiences of masculine and feminine archetypes. She placed equal emphasis on the exploration of both polarities, as well as on their eventual joyous union. Diane's creation of a rite of this nature is indicative of her efforts to overcome some of the negative sexist stereotyping that is prevalent in the feminist movement. However, her prohibition of men's participation in the rite seems to me a direct contradiction of purpose and perhaps an indicator of one of Mariechild's growing edges.

It seems reasonable that both men and women would be invited to attend a workshop devoted to the integration of masculine and feminine values.

Mariechild's eclecticism is evident in her use of Native, Buddhist and Wiccan beliefs and practices. The rites that I have described are based on sound feminist psychological principles. Mariechild's eclecticism enables her to chose beliefs and practices that facilitate women's healing, transformation and empowerment, while also recognizing the importance of integration of the masculine and feminine. This is her strongest contribution to women's spirituality. An eclectic spirituality is not useful to individuals if the beliefs and practices and remain superficial and lack transformative power. A spiritual practice with depth has the power to transport an individual beyond the personal self into new dimensions of the Self. Mariechild is wise to advise individuals to make a firm commitment to one particular spiritual discipline, as she has with Buddhist meditation. She emphasizes that the journey into personal depths requires an acceptance of suffering as well as joy. Only then can real growth take place. The three workshops of Mariechild's that I participated in were emotionally and physically demanding, and not suited for anyone wishing a light, pleasurable experience. As a participant I also felt that Mariechild herself was extremely familiar with the psychological territory that she led participants through because she herself had experienced it.

The eclecticism of new age spirituality has also been criticized on ethical grounds, directed against those individuals who borrow and misuse the sacred beliefs and practices of another tradition. This is most offensive when an individual exposes and shares confidential teachings of a particular tradition that are meant to be shared only with the initiated. It is unethical to take any teaching and share it with outsiders against the wishes

of the individual within the tradition who is imparting that knowledge. A few members of Native and Buddhist traditions are willingly allowing North Americans access to their rites and teachings. In my opinion these traditions have a great deal to offer individuals who are searching for more meaningful beliefs and practices. However, it is extremely disrespectful to borrow and share these teachings without acknowledging their source. In her rites, Diane Mariechild does an adequate job of explaining her sources of teaching, however her explanations tend to be too brief and general. For example, instead of acknowledging that smudging and invoking the four directions and the earth and sky was a Native tradition, she may have explained the specific origins and who had taught this practice to her. In her written work, Mariechild acknowledges her sources in more detail, expressing gratitude to her teacher Dhanyi Ywahoo, in particular. In her acknowledgements, she writes:

The deep clear stream of the Sunray teachings runs through my life and continues to inspire and infuse my work. I am most grateful to Dhyanī Ywahoo, my spiritual mother, whose clear, powerful teaching has been a doorway to enter the divine within myself (1987: Acknowledgements).

Mariechild also explains the origins of each meditation that comes from Ywahoo's work throughout the book.

FEMINIST RITUAL: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The ritual medium is an effective means by which women with feminist concerns can express and actualize them. Feminist ritual can reinforce the creation of spiritual community, embodiment, healing, transformation and empowerment. I will point out some of the strengths and weaknesses in these areas, and also discuss some of the

challenges of the ritual generating process that feminists face.

Feminist ritual occurs either in the context of small community groups who gather together regularly, or on the workshop circuit. The workshop circuit can be problematic for many feminists concerned with the creation of supportive communities. The usual time span of a workshop is a weekend, or a week at the most. Women who attend often travel a substantial distance and cannot sustain contact with other participants at the end of the workshop. Women at the spirituality retreat in Eganville had come from Quebec, the southwestern and eastern United States, Denmark and Ontario.

The emphasis on healing in feminist spirituality leads to the creation of rites that explore deep psychological territory. Due to its temporary nature, the workshop circuit cannot adequately meet the needs of the initiates who, following the rite, may feel too vulnerable to cope with the normal world. As I discussed in Chapter Three, liminality in transformative rites may draw participants into precarious and sometimes extremely frightening, unfamiliar experiences. It is somewhat unrealistic and dangerous to expect ritual participants to surrender to liminal territory in an unfamiliar and therefore relatively untrustworthy setting. Therapeutic processes are best cultivated within places of protection and familiarity.

In a rite such as the Womb Meditation in which liminality and the potential for transformation is evident, participants may have difficulty dealing with the intensity of the meditation or with the re-integration process. The lengthy meditative periods and introverted focus, combined with Diane and Shuli's powerful presence, draws willing participants into deep unconscious realms. In response to my expressed concern about liminal vulnerability and adequate re-integration, Diane explained that she takes this into serious consideration with every rite she leads. She is convinced that the process of

grounding through meditation fortifies individuals for what may be a perilous journey

In choosing the appropriate rite for particular settings, Mariechild considers the emotional condition of participants and other supports available, above all else. For example, she would not have conducted the Womb Meditation at a weekend workshop. At the week-long spirituality retreat people had already developed a degree of trust with one another. In addition she deliberately scheduled the rite in the middle of the week and offered her support and counsel to participants for the next several days in order to integrate the material before leaving. Some women did seek her assistance in the few following days. She explained that in her role as workshop leader she has never experienced problems in this area. Her therapeutic training has, no doubt contributed to her ability to guide and support individuals through liminal territory and to anticipate problems that could arise. After one of her rites in Ottawa, in which I was a participant, Mariechild provided extra individual support to one participant while Shuli took leadership. She appears to have the necessary skills to attend to individuals in crisis if should the need arise. Although Mariechild appears responsive to the constraints of the ritual workshop circuit, I question the degree to which this is a viable medium for truly responsible therapeutic or ritual processes. Personally, I found that the meditation had a fortifying effect, however, I am not convinced that this practice would guard against all potential crises reactions among participants. Mariechild is venturing into extremely dangerous territory, particularly if her rites continue to penetrate to the depths which I witnessed and experienced.

Re-integration, which involves a synthesis of new psychic material into consciousness, can be difficult in the workshop circuit due to a lack of continuity. Conscious integration of a ritual experience is important if ritual is to serve the purpose of

creating meaning. In my experience, not all of the liminal material can be integrated, even in the best of circumstances. Sometimes the impact of certain liminal experiences can take days to gestate before adequate integration will occur. Re-integration is much easier in a context of supportive, ongoing, spiritual community. A sustained ritual group may permit an individual to repeat or discuss impulses that arise in a rite many days or months later. Many of the participants on the workshop circuit do not have this opportunity and significant material may be lost.

Mariechild explained to me that her personal preference is presently to expand her workshop circuit because she enjoys working this way. Based on the limitations of the workshop medium itself, I question the degree to which Diane and Shuli can effect major healing within individuals. The re-integration period after such intense workshops is difficult. If an individual does not have adequate support to further process and clarify the meaning of unconscious material that has arisen during a powerful ritual experience the negative impact may outweigh the therapeutic value. An individual may continue to experience frightening, disorienting and possibly self-destructive unconscious impulses and lack the ego strength to defend against such forces. Depression or more dangerous states of mind may develop without ongoing therapeutic guidance through these difficult periods. Ritual participants may leave a workshop with a heightened state of expectation that everyday life will somehow be qualitatively different. The therapeutic value of renewed hope may be completely undone when an individual realizes that while he or she may be transformed, the rest of reality remains the same.

Diane conducts her workshops with an adequate amount of responsibility for participant's welfare. She exudes a sense of warmth and compassion and a healing presence. I am not convinced that she is cognizant of the impact that her rituals may have

on participants. I suggest that she lessen the psychological intensity of her ritual work, and not attempt to be as therapeutic in a structure that cannot adequately support it. In the Ottawa workshop, for example, I was surprised to learn that participants had the option to attend either one or two days of the weekend. Although the thematic material was different each day, the lack of a continuous group from the first to the second day was jarring. This indicated to me an underestimation of the continuity factor in ritual work of this nature.

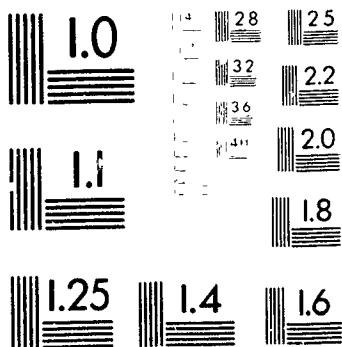
Mariechild successfully reaches and inspires many women within a short period of time. Her rituals are educational and encourage women's personal and social evolution. One of the benefits of the workshop circuit is that it facilitates the creation of women's ideological networks. In her discussion of feminist ritual Kay Turner (1982:220) points this out: "As in traditional societies, feminist ritual provides an emotional, descriptive, intensified and sanctifying version of emergent ideological systems." It provides a medium within which women can share their deepest concerns and values. Kay Turner (221) explains that generally men have held the right to ritual use. Their participation in ritual has been, "...their most profound display of cultural authority and their most direct access to it." Women are now finding personal as well as social validation for their concerns in the ritual context. Feminist ritual is reaching many women in many places through the workshop medium.

In general support of the ritual workshop circuit, I would recommend that women conducting and participating in rites on the circuit cultivate an awareness of some of the strengths and weaknesses discussed above. Discrimination should be exercised in the choice of a suitable rite for each unique workshop setting. Participants should be prepared for the re-incorporation process before leaving the workshop, by suggesting that

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they honour their potential fragility and seek sources of ongoing support if necessary. The creation of sustained ritual groups should always be encouraged.

Another strong value of feminism that the ritual medium cultivates is embodiment. Kay Turner (1982:219) explains that in feminist ritual women embody and activate new images of the archetypal feminine. Many feminists are concerned with redeeming and re-claiming their bodily processes as positive and powerful aspects of their identity. Generally, in our society the ritual expression of bodily impulses has been de-emphasized in favour of intellectual processes. Stanley Keleman suggests that the rational mode has become so predominant that many of us are being denied access to our somatic processes:

Modern forms of rationality have desecrated our emotional lives, and we have discovered that the fulfillment of an idea, an ideal, is not necessarily emotionally satisfying. We have neglected our emotional reality, and the source of our self-nourishment: our bodies (1979:13).

The key is to synthesize mind and body in a healthy balance.

Jungian therapist Marion Woodman (1985:60) points out that the body has a wisdom of its own, that in order to find that wisdom requires dropping the mind into the body and allowing the body expression. She advocates that,

Until the body responses are brought to consciousness so that the individual can recognize what is happening both internally and in the environment, one...cannot respond to everyday challenges, and the ego cannot mature through normal interchange (1985:61).

Keleman and Woodman both directly connect the somatic and emotional aspects of the individual. Woodman (n.d.) believes that repressed, unconscious emotion becomes locked in the muscles, which must be physically released, or somatic symptoms will result. The research in ritualized theatre work indicates a strong emphasis on embodiment, as a vehicle of inner revelation and transformation. Ron Grimes (1986:8)

believes that disembodied intellectuality is extremely subject to self-deception. The body has truths of its own that, if acknowledged, provide important personal information. Grimes (1982:60) describes embodiment in the ritual work at the Actor's Lab as a "non-discursive bodily way of knowing."

In my experience with feminist ritual in many different contexts, and in particular with Diane Mariechild's ritual work, there appears to be a marked difficulty trusting and following bodily impulses. In every feminist workshop that I have attended, the majority of women have demonstrated verbal and rational skills that exceed either their willingness or ability to engage in spontaneous bodily expression. In the Womb Meditation symbolic enactment only took place internally for participants, until the final dance. For the most part, we were guided to embody through visualization internal symbols of the goddess within, Mother Earth, the reproductive organs themselves, energy of light and loving kindness, and negative energy to be released into the earth. Instead of enacting the release of negative energy into the earth we imagined the movement, and felt it in our bodies. Many participants, including myself, reported symbolizing the negative energy in their minds while watching and feeling it pour out of their bodies. In my experience, the degree of embodiment in a ritual can be diminished when it is limited to an internal activity.

Mariechild places more emphasis on spontaneous embodiment in her rite entitled *Crystal Visions: A Way of Personal and Planetary Peace*. Perhaps it was unrealistic to expect participants to surrender to liminality and express spontaneous bodily impulses within an unfamiliar environment among relative strangers. Participants, and perhaps the ritual leaders, appeared to be unable to suspend self-consciousness and embody their own impulses. Self-consciousness can interfere with the individual's total, emotional and

somatic response by objectifying and judging, or second guessing it and paralyzing our creative impulses. It is evident that Mariechild understands the value of embodiment in the ritual process. In *The Inner Dance*, Mariechild suggests that physical exercise is one of the foundations of a spiritual practice. She writes that our body is a temple in which the spirit can manifest (1987:23). However, of the three rites that I participated in emphasis was clearly on stillness, words and visualizing images. Based on these observations embodiment is perhaps Mariechild's most vulnerable and uncertain area in ritual work, as it is for many of us in this culture.

Personal and social empowerment is a central aim of the feminist movement. By claiming sacred space in feminist ritual, women are hoping to re-define the meaning of power and affirm their rights to personal and sacred power. Sally Gearhart (1982:196) explains that the predominant system of power in many interpersonal relationships and in institutions expresses itself in relational attitudes of power-over, or victor/victim, resulting in alienation of the individual from their internal energy source. In contrast, a new womanpower is emerging that is not based on power-over but internal immanence and collective functioning (197).

Starhawk (1982a:13) defines personal empowerment, or immanence as an individual's recognition of "power-from-within." In her ritual practice of Witchcraft, magic is the "psychological technology" of immanence, or the power to manipulate consciousness. This technology involves facing the negative as well as the positive aspects of the psyche (37). One of the greatest obstacles to the achievement of immanence is the internal self-hater, the internalized messages of abusive external authority. As awareness of these self-negating messages increases, a person can develop techniques by which to silence them. Starhawk (1982:177) explains that immanence is

inherently non-hierarchical. Each being carries his or her own value. For women, the goddess restores a sense of internal authority as well as the power of the female body and all of the life process. In an environment that emphasizes the sacred dimensions within each individual personal integrity is valued (1982a:37). Feminist ritual attempts to cultivate the dynamics of power that Starhawk delineates.

Inner experience advocates also understand power as an internal strength and source of wisdom and compassion. Popular ideology of the human potential movement attributes all evil to institutions and the public sphere. In addition to placing the blame on men for all evil, feminists also tend to maintain this new age disdain for the public sphere. Lucy Bregman (1982:159) points out that most new age writers also either underestimate or ignore the dangers of surrendering to the unconscious or hidden dimensions of the psyche. The question of evil is commonly not addressed. They advocate that powers of the unknown are benevolent and that painful aspects of experience can be overcome. Bregman explains that new age individuals ignore the possibility that an "evil person might discover these same forces and use them for his (or her) own selfish and destructive ends" (159). Although in the feminist movement I have observed a number of measures taken to preserve personal integrity, no one is immune to the abuse of power. I suspect that beyond the peace-loving ideology women may be extremely susceptible to the temptations of power. I have encountered women at feminist gatherings wielding their power with extreme aggression and dogmatism. Some feminists believe that by virtue of our gender we are protected against the misuse of power. On the contrary, power could be just as problematic for women, due to the anger and bitterness of oppression. In ritual processes, which often require a guide, the issue of power is an important one. Participants are encouraged to place their trust in a leader and enter extremely vulnerable

psychic territory. The leader, no doubt derives a degree personal power from this role. One way of guarding against some of the self-deception that can arise is to invite ongoing feedback from participants and co-workers. The limitations of the workshop circuit should also be taken into consideration to avoid irresponsibly leading participants into vulnerable liminal territory without necessary supports. On the workshop circuit, honest feedback is less accessible due to the lack of continuity. Strangers come together for brief encounters and leave again before any sort of accurate feedback can be given in many cases. Participants are often initially overwhelmed with the impact of the journey and unable to reflect on the whole situation with any degree of objectivity until the intensity has lessened. In the context of an ongoing community in contrast feedback would likely have more accuracy and impact.

Power does not seem to be a problem in Mariechild's ritual work. Diane appears to minimize her own power by continually making reference to the relationship with her higher Self, or greater universal powers. She cultivates the integrity of each participant in her workshops. She makes it clear in her rites that her teachings are personally relevant and not absolute truth. In her meditation and visualization work she encourages individuals to re-establish a relationship with their inner sources of power and strength. Both Diane and Shuli presented their material with humility and were extremely attentive to the needs and questions of the participants. I sensed that they experienced the workshops as a growth process themselves. Although they were our guides, they did not appear to cultivate power over participants. During the rite entitled *Crystal Visions: A Way of Personal and Planetary Peace* they were probably too tentative and did not provide adequate structure or confidence. Although I have focused primarily on Mariechild's work, Diane and Shuli emphasized the mutuality and co-creative nature of their working

relationship.

This work has been motivated by a desire to understand factors contributing to women's oppression and to discover ritual sources of healing, transformation and empowerment. Both men and women are limited in a culture that is alienated from feminine values to this degree. The depotentiated feminine leaves individuals with an incomplete sense of self and wholeness. A remedy to this situation lies not in placing the blame on men, which perpetuates defensiveness and further alienation from feminine values. Ideally, men and women can work together to reinforce and cultivate the feminine within one another. Many of us men and women alike need to retrieve the values of the lover and incorporate those into a more balanced relationship with the values of the warrior.

Many feminists make a distinction between the terms "religion" and "spirituality." Feminists understand "religion" as a tradition of dogmatic beliefs and rituals which lack flexibility and meaning for many men and women. In contrast feminists understand the term "spirituality" as a living, vital force empowering individual's lives, which is extremely flexible and lacking tradition. As feminist spirituality develops a tradition of its own, it will be interesting to note whether the movement will maintain sufficient flexibility to continue to fulfill the needs of a growing number of contemporary men and women.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW WITH DIANE MARIECHILD AND SHULI GOODMAN

This interview with Diane and Shuli took place in Amherst, Massachusetts, on January 26, 1988. Although the emphasis of the interview is on Diane's (D.) work, Shuli's (S.) contribution to the development of their present ritual work is significant. They are definitely "co-creators" who are effectively pooling their resources, fulfilling a feminist value of collaboration.

E. I want to begin with some biographical questions concerning your spiritual journey. What if any religious tradition were you raised in?

D. My mother was Lutheran and my father was Roman Catholic. When I was young, my parents were still undecided in their religious faith. Together we attended the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches until they decided on the Lutheran tradition.

E. Were your parents very religious, and if so how was this observed in your home and in your spiritual practices?

D. Yes they were both quite religious. There was a strong religious atmosphere in my home. At every mealtime we said grace. My mother in particular was a very spiritual person. She had tremendous reverence for nature. I remember, in particular our many walks to the sea and picnics in the woods. These had spiritual significance for her. Whenever we had been away on holidays, the first thing my mother would do was walk with us to the ocean. She always pointed out the natural beauty in the world.

E. Where were you born and raised?

D. I was born in Neptune, New Jersey, and grew up in a small town on the Jersey shore, Manasquan.

E. Have you always had spiritual concerns? How did this express itself when you were growing up?

D. Yes, I have always had strong spiritual concerns. During my childhood I was involved in an ongoing spiritual church. I visited many Christian churches, searching for the answers to my questions. The music was very important to me, however I was deeply concerned with the contradictions between the words of the clergy and their actions. I couldn't understand why they did not embody their beliefs more fully. My parents

tolerated my wanderings and questions, but offered fairly superficial answers.

E. Can you give me a brief autobiographical description of the highlights of your spiritual development throughout your life, ie. conversion experiences, mystical experiences, awareness of psychic abilities, personal insights?

D. I have always had a very powerful imagination and strong creativity. As a child I remember lying beneath the trees and becoming totally absorbed in the movement and colours of the leaves. My dreams have always been important to me. I remember two recurring childhood dreams. In one I am a fairy in a sparkling blue dress, flying everywhere and carrying a magic pouch from which I can draw anything that I need or desire. In another dream there is a ladder descending from heaven, which I can climb whenever I am in trouble or want to leave threatening events on earth. I have recorded the third dream in my book, *Crystal Visions*. It was an important dream for me. There were several visions that were really important to me. One was from a guided imagery that we did in our women's circle, where we imagined ourselves going to a marsh land to participate in a very important ritual. We began to dance around in a circle and what happened was that as we danced, we became geese and we flew off. Where I flew in my phantasy was to the dark side of the moon. I heard a lot of angry voices yelling and screaming, and I was told that I had to look at my anger. And I had flashes of men in my life, my father my ex-husband, the minister of my church when I was growing up, relatives, friends of mine and just generic man. Then I was told that I needed to give up what was most precious to me. And my children appeared. They were young at the time, under ten I guess, and I threw them off the moon. I just threw them out into space, and it was very dark. And what appeared was this winged goddess who caught them. Then it flashed to this marriage between the winged goddess a person who looked like a typical god, or more of a Santa Claus, with a long white beard and long robe. The significance for me was to realize myself and to really balance the energy of the female and the male within myself--what Jung calls the "Holy Marriage." That Holy Marriage, that inner marriage is necessary to be balanced, to actualize myself. To do that, I needed first of all to work with my anger to really be able to relate to that emotion when I am in it. To really look at my anger, look at my relationships with men, look at the male side of myself. And also to look at attachment to anything. To really become fully who I am, I need to be non-attached. Which was not non-caring or connected but it was non-clinging. And it was only by saying, "O.K. I can let go of those closest to me that it came back to that I really didn't lose them, that I really didn't lose my children, that they were returned to me. And it was through that vision that I understood a teaching that, as I was growing up about Abraham sacrificing his son, that to me was always so appalling. What kind of God would ask for that sacrifice--his son. I'm glad he wasn't my father. Another vision that I had that I think is connected happened with my spiritual community. We were meditating together and we had a blue circle in the centre. And what I saw was a frozen lake. The whole lake began to spin and it was like I was underneath and the whole thing turned around. There were four cranes or whatever the bird is that's the protector of the Dharma. Although I didn't know there was a protector of the Dharma at that time. They were moving and turning and the trees that were snow covered began to move and they were transformed into people in my community wearing feathered robes. A lot of this dream, to me is that to really awaken, your whole concept of how the world is and how it operates is turned

upside- down. In the Don Juan books, he talks alot about that. Also it told me that everything is impermanent, that everything is moving and changing. The relationship of everything is clear. We are not more or less important than the trees. There was also a vision about eagles. They perch on my shoulders, one on each side and I feel their power.

E. Could you tell me about the most significant spiritual influences in your life?

D. I became disillusioned with Christianity at the same time that my marriage broke up. I became interested in the goddess and working with those images. The work I did with the goddess is best described in *Mother Wit*. I feel that I was only involved with Wiccan spirituality superficially. I worked with a group for a while and we called ourselves Dancing Wind Coven. But I did not train with a witch. The goddess images of the Wiccan tradition was what really attracted me to it. I have maintained this aspect of Wiccan practice because it reinforces my experience of the feminine. I have been meditating for the past twelve years. For nine years, I studied with Dhanyi Ywahoo and now I practice vipassana meditation with another teacher.

E. In *The Inner Dance* you described meditation as the foundation of all spiritual practice. In your rite you also placed emphasis on this practice. Can you explain the role of meditation in a bit more detail?

D. Meditation is the foundation from which we perceive the connectedness of all things through wakefulness. Many women criticize Buddhism for its emphasis on suffering and the masculine and so reject meditation as a spiritual practice. They are looking at it only on an intellectual level. I think that until a person experiences meditation they can't understand that the suffering is only one aspect of the whole thing. Yes there is suffering. Everyone suffers. But what they don't understand is that the practice achieves tremendous peace and joy. The emphasis is not entirely on suffering. My meditation practice is developing in a new direction. What I worked with on this most recent retreat that I went on was not allowing myself to indulge in any kind of fantasy. Often when I practice mindfulness meditation, which is to be really connected to the breath and to the sensations in the body and the thoughts and images--just to note them and keep coming back to the present, that I would still, not all the time, but I would chose to explore an insight that was coming through, which gave me important information. I'm not saying that you should never do it. But I decided in this time to be much more strict and not to work with images at all, and to look at the ways that I indulge myself in fantasies as an escape. To some really deep existential loneliness that I experience sometimes within myself. I didn't want to let myself be comforted with anything in the past, and it was very profound and tearing my heart out. I have alot of still physical pain in my heart. Sometimes in my arm. It's just that everything can teach us, and we can't really hang onto any of it.

E. Can you tell me a bit about the development of feminism in your life, including your spiritual journey?

D. After the break up of my marriage, I became a "cultural feminist." I was most concerned about the denigration of motherhood, even within the feminist movement itself. Women were giving their children away. I expressed these concerns in *Mother Wit*, where I talk about the healing of the feminine. At that time, I was most concerned personally with affirming those qualities of the feminine within myself, and I could see that other women needed this too. It's important to be able to name. There is a real power in naming. A lot of what we named as female traits--as intuition, emotion, as a kind of diffuse awareness have been used as weapons against us. Like "that's not clear thinking, that we're too emotional. When you are naming traits like that and the traits are used to limit you it's an important process to say, "Yes, these are female traits and they're important sources of strength." That emotions are not preventing us from acting. In fact, that's the heart connection, that's what enriches our lives and what enables us to connect and give shape to our lives. At the same time, we need to look for ways of relating to them without getting trapped in them.

E. Do you still consider yourself a feminist psychotherapist? What does this mean to you?

D. I don't call myself that now. In the early seventies, when I used that label it was primarily a stance against the traditional psychiatric labelling and blaming of women. There was a basic lack of recognition of the feminine. It was important to redeem the qualities of the feminine, particularly the powers of intuition valuing relationship, sensitivity and emotion instead of feeling guilty or denying them. Women had to stop blaming themselves for who they were and celebrate feminine qualities.

E. How would you characterize the evolution of women's consciousness who are committed to living according to feminist values, or undergoing feminist therapy? Do you think that in the initial stages many women require an emphasis on the feminine aspects of the psyche, ie. intuition, because of their previous alienation from their feminine sources?

D. Yes.

E. Can you describe for me some specific themes which you would consider feminist in your ritual work?

D. Honouring the earth, the seasons and cycles of the earth. Honouring the female creative principle that everything is born of woman and all matter is mother. To really celebrate that what we need to survive on the earth is nurturing and caretaking. I would label that as a feminist awareness. Women have been put down while we don't work, we just raise children, and that's not valuable. But that's really the only thing that will save humanity is caretaking and concern and love and kindness. Someone once said, "Think of the major activities that women involve themselves in throughout the world. And the major activities that men involve themselves in. Now which ones could we live

without?" Really, it's a gross generalization, but women are much more intricately connected to birth and the tending of children, the care of the sick and the dying, the growing of the food, the basic life functions the foundations.

E. According to Jungian Silvia Brinton Perera many contemporary women suffer from undeveloped feminine egos. This results in egos that are dominated by masculine values and an inability to consciously recognize feminine values. Would you say this is true for a lot of women with whom you've worked?

D. Yes. I think that's what I mentioned before about being limited or trapped by the stereotype. Where what's healthy are male values.

E. Do you think that a healthy ego is well balanced in feminine and masculine qualities? And, can you expand on your definition of a flexible ego, which you mentioned in *Mother Wit*?

D. Yes, I think that a healthy ego needs to be balanced in whatever we define as feminine and masculine. Whatever that is, we have to be able to be open and kind and nurturing and we have to be able to act in a clear and purposeful way. We have to be able to understand differences and what's universal, what unites us. And it doesn't matter what you call it, just to be a human being we have to do that. What I meant by flexible is that the ego is the part of the personality that we need to get through the world. That gives us our personality, our name, the way we dress, what we eat, how we move through the world. Yet it has to be flexible, in that it can't be the central guiding factor. There has to be something much larger which encompasses that and is more than that. In Jungian terms, that would be the Self. Flexible in the sense of letting the Self--that universal wisdom speak through the ego, the personality. The ego is the part of us that has the desire, and the need. It's not that we shouldn't have desire or need, yet we need to know that it's not fulfilling endless needs that's going to make us happy. We have to have space from those needs. It's fine to take care of our needs but we are just fooling ourselves if we think that desiring and acquiring and fulfilling needs is going to liberate us. It's not. So in that way the ego is the desire, but to be liberated involves the Self.

E. Do you see any dangers in the exclusive focus on the feminine aspects of the psyche?

D. I think that there's an imbalance. Where I see it a lot is being a lesbian and being with other lesbians and whatever the generic lesbian is. If you deny the father principle, it's just prejudice turned around. It's like we've suffered because we're told we have to be a certain way, and then we turn around and hate everyone who's that way. Hatred is hatred, no matter what we're hating. I don't think we can say that there's no masculine and feminine. I think that we can chose who we want to relate to sexually, we can chose who we want to relate to emotionally. We can chose all of those things but everything in nature, it seems to me has a female and a male, a sperm and an egg, whatever you want to

call it. To deny that is to deny life. I think that this culture is very aggressive and so we use everything as a weapon. I see people reacting in very heterosexist ways, where this is the spiritual truth. I don't really know what the ultimate is. How can we know? What's the wierdest feminist thing I can think of? To say that males are mutants. I think that we say generally, that in the new age spiritual practice that there is a majority of women. That women are leading in this, but let's not make the same mistakes. Let's not use our awareness as a weapon. There's been alot of evolution. When I first started working with women it had to do with "I don't want to start from scratch with a man. I don't want to wipe their noses." On the other hand, now I say that sometimes about everybody. You've got to do a little bit of work on your own first. There's a way to celebrate our diversity that I think is very important. If we bond around oppression and just stay there, if people of colour bond around their oppression which is real and does exist and is still happening today, and everyone that's white is the enemy, it won't be healed. If women bond together around their oppression and man is the enemy that won't be healed either.

E. In your work as therapist and workshop leader, do you sometimes run into problems leading individuals into the unconscious--unleashing negative, repressed energies, ie. rage, despair--who have relatively weak ego strength? This question is coming from my response to the meditation that you led us through during your ritual. You took people to such depths that day, I wondered if you ever ran into problems with this.

D. To my knowledge I haven't. The thing is that I was there. I'm very careful about feeling the energy of the people and working with grounding alot and protection on many different levels that I might not always say. Being trained therapeutically and the fact of where that ritual took place--where women were staying for a number of days, so I didn't just come in--do that ritual and leave. I also stayed another day or two and worked with alot of the women individually and continued to work in the group. Did you see someone yourself in that particular instance who was so fragile that they were shattered?

E. No, I didn't. This is a purely hypothetical question.

D. That's why when I wrote to you, I really wanted you to understand that I don't have a particular ritual that I always do. I take into full account where people are and note who's fragile and what's going on.

E. It's very interesting that you place so much emphasis on grounding in this process. I think that's why people touched such depths, because there was so much grounding and security. You spent so long preparing everyone--having us sit back to back for example. There was so much care taken that people felt safe and could handle the work.

D. Yes, I think that you can do it if you're really careful. I remember teaching womencraft years ago, that one of the women who used to teach it would have that problem. I guess she didn't do the grounding or wasn't grounded herself. There would

always be someone freaking out in her group and I never had that experience. I don't think it's because I'm perfect and will never have the problem, but I feel like I'm aware of that and I think it's not something to be fooled with.

E. Sylvia Brinton Perera believes that an image for the goddess as self needs to have a full-bodied coherence, which includes both the negative and positive aspects of the feminine archetype. She thinks that the Greek deities and Mary, the Virgin Mother represented only partial aspects of feminine wholeness. She chose the journey of the Sumerian Goddess Inanna to most accurately describe feminine wholeness. Inanna voluntarily surrenders to death; she descends into the underworld and is reborn on earth. I observed a descent/rebirth motif in your guided journey during the workshop. You invited participants to surrender to the fertile void. Do you think that Inanna's journey may have relevance for contemporary women? Do you think that the death/rebirth motif is the foundation of the transformational process?

D. Yes. To me that's what the feminine is. It's that recognition of that life cycle--of dying and being reborn again. Because in this culture we're so cut off from the feminine, there's such a thing around material possessions, even the body, and such a fear of death because we don't recognize the cycles. Which isn't to say that you're not terribly sad for years if someone you love dies, but the fact is that it's not the end, it's a transition. I think that a lot of it has been the repressed awareness of the feminine. When I wrote *Mother Wit*, my intention was to deal with just specific aspects of the feminine that had been used in our past to negate women and to reframe them. Whereas *The Inner Dance* dealt with both sides, the light and the dark more equally--there was a lot more emphasis on therapy. That's something that Shuli and I ran into in our touring, in terms of new age people. A lot of times they focus so much on the affirmation and the positive, that there is this group amorphous high that people go off with and then they crash when they get home. Our stuff turned out to be so much more grief work--we had celebration, but we really got into the pain and the expression of the fear and the anger--the crying and going down into the depths of it. We couldn't celebrate without doing that. I know in one place, the people were really taken aback by it, I think on two levels. One, they were very homophobic, and this I'm still trying to deal with. I've written them several letters and they don't respond to anything--how busy can they be after all of these months? The week before we had arrived there had been a lot of singing and storytelling and people were basically on a big high. Which was fine, but when we got there we were doing a workshop on peace for women and men. Unfortunately or fortunately, however you want to look at it, there were two men in the group and they were your archetypal, rigid and withholding men. Even the people there were saying, "these aren't the usual men that take our workshops." Usually to take a workshop like that a man would already have been experiencing his feminine side. I don't know, these guys came from someplace. One of them wanted to be intellectually stimulated by ideas from people and we were saying it's not about intellectual stimulation, it's about experiencing within yourself all of those things that keep you from being peaceful, which is your fear and other things. So in this way the workshop people eventually polarized for a time around the female/male thing and I'm assuming that this was projected onto us, that maybe we were man haters, so that's how it happened. To me that's one of the core issues of why we don't have

peace. How can we have world peace if men and women in the same country are so polarized? We got into some really intense stuff. One woman was in a lot of pain, dealing with the death of her brother and she said to these men, "Do you have to be in your death bed to really open up?" It was really intense and so of course there were a lot of emotions--releasing and crying. People came back around again, but it was certainly a much different feeling than the singing of nice songs. We have found that a lot in the new age movement. There's an abuse of that positive thinking and creating their own reality.

E. They seem to think that there is a simple formula for happiness which doesn't involve pain.

S. One of the things that Diane and I have been talking about is the concept of co-creation. Very often in new age spirituality one of the things--I think is actually a reaction to our parents, is a rejection of externalized power and victim roles. We then say, "No you create your own reality." Our parents lived through two wars and grew through an incredible transformation of the world, on a militaristic and geo-political level. So they say, "Oh no, we can't stop this power, nuclear war and so on." The children then rebel and say, "Oh no, you create your own reality and then eventually, I think, end up being in as much pain as their parents, because it's really about co-creation. There's a wonderful commentary in the Torah about co-creation. In many ways I feel that that is what causes a lot of pain. Shirley Maclean, who has done incredible work as far as getting new age philosophy out there--her whole thing is, "You create your own reality." So people are walking around going, "Oh yes, I was a victim of incest. I created that for some reason." That may or may not be useful in their exploration of their incest. Or, "I had cancer, I created this." That may, or may not be useful.

D. Because what happens is that people blame themselves. Steven Levine has talked a lot about that in his work, because he's seen so many people die feeling that they had been failures, because they hadn't been able to heal themselves. Yet everyone has to die. There is a quote about God creating the world and leaving everything a little bit undone. We can affirm, and certainly I know from my own experience that I created a whole lot that's good in my life through affirmation, but I don't have total control. If I blame myself for not being responsible for everything, it has to be "responsible to." That's why I love the Buddhist practice, because it shows us a way of responding to whatever is occurring.

S. To really accept in your body and your heart and your soul that we're not in control is terrifying, so we say, "Oh we create our own reality." Then we can side-step real surrender to life. Here's the quote that Diane referred to earlier. "When the world was created, God made everything a little bit incomplete. Rather than making bread grow out of the earth, God made wheat grow so that we might bake it into bread. Rather than making the earth of bricks, God made clay, so that we might shape the clay into bricks. Why? So that we might become creators. So that we might become partners completing the work of creation."

E. How would you describe your function in your ritual/workshops? And your motivation for doing them?

D. I think my function is of a spiritual friend and as a guide. My motivation for doing it--I love it. I love people. I want to share what's been important for me, what's helping free me. As I share I notice that it helps free other people.

E. Have you had any experience in traditional theatre as a performer or director?

D. No, not at all.

E. Stanislavsky, a performance theorist believed that the creative state of mind was based on the individual's connection with his or her inner truth. In your ritual workshop you placed emphasis on the positive relationship between creativity and inner truth. In your experience as ritual workshop leader, do you find that your creativity arises out of your inner truth? In the creation and planning of your workshops is this true? How do the rituals evolve over time? Do you always create them in direct response to each group spontaneously, as you did with the Womb Meditation?

D. I think that they're almost always created in response to each group spontaneously. We would usually know when we're going to do the Womb Meditation, because we only do that when we have a longer time to spend with people. We have objectives and different things that we could do, and those things are shaped according to who's there. Maybe they're added to or thrown out.

E. I'm interested in both aspects of that process. How do you get those core elements to do. Actually, Shuli you should be answering this too. What do the two of you do to come up with your repertoire of things that you adapt to groups?

S. I have a really hard time with remembering. So I have to be spontaneous. So we might know that we're going to do the Womb Meditation, but I haven't memorized a womb meditation. I have ideas each time and judge what is better or worse. I've just been doing women's rituals for years. When I lived in Oregon, I was in a company with some incredibly creative people--a lot of theatre people. I've also done a lot of theatre work myself. It's basically out of that spontaneity that it gets created. Sometimes I think, "My God what are we going to do? I have no idea." But that's my head talking. Then I feel like more than anything, my job is to bring together--of course I feel that it's already there and it's about my really being able to bring it together. I use voice and sound a lot in ritual. I think that theatre is ritual. Theatre is just ritual that's repeated over and over again. I think that a spiritual practice is how we prepare for ritual. To just do ritual without a spiritual practice really limits the depth of the ritual that you are going to do. Like the Yoga work, it's through the postures that you really develop the flexibility to

then do the dance, or to do the stream. If you haven't practiced then that will limit your dance. The same thing is true of ritual.

E. That's exactly what I was getting at before you arrived. I was talking about Stanislavsky, who says that creativity is directly related to inner truth. The practice is a way to tune into inner truth.

S. Right. You know the way Stanislavsky talks about "the rivers." The rivers are what the ritual is in many ways, only it's done in relationship to other people. In "the rivers" you use your body and the movement of your body to create a stream of movement. So you might start with a movement like this and go to a movement like that, which changes into another movement. Basically, you follow the bodies' movement. You create a stream. Theatre has become entertainment and so what ritual requires is interactional experience between the performer and the audience. It depends on the integrity of the performer doing the performance. If that integrity is lost, then it appears that what we're doing is really an objectification, rather than something that is whole.

E. I'm most interested in the work of Grotowski and Richard Schechner. They both talk about performance as a holy act. I want to draw together how performance can be ritual.

D. I don't know that work, but I'm sure I would agree with you. I do believe that performance is holy. I believe that the origin of all of these things--dance and music was a way of expressing the sacred, and to bring people into that awareness. It didn't start out as entertainment. It was meditation in motion.

E. So, do you feel that in your process as ritual leader, that you are embodying the sacred?

D. Yes, yes.

E. That was what I felt from both of you during your ritual work.

D. Yes. I think that to do a ritual it has to be embodied. It has to be from your direct experience and your practice. It can't be just, "Well this is a great idea," or "I've seen somebody do this and now I'll try it." And I think that's where the problems can come in where people are taken too deep. If you don't have a spiritual practice you don't respect the power of it and you don't really know. I feel like what I've done, what Shuli's done and now what we're doing together is from our own experience. If we've meditated or we've done imagery or we've created altars ourselves or with other people, and what we've met when we've done it, then it's from that that we share.

E. What difficulties, if any have you experienced in the ritual generating process?

S. I think that there's a really fine line that needs to be created around control and not controlling, and I would say that that's in my mind the problem. You can tip either way. We can let go of control and then it can all get lost. On the other hand, we can keep too much control and somebody else can take control and the ritual might go in a direction that isn't successful. We never had this happen, but....

D. I'll say this, because I feel like we have a similar thought on witchcraft and what the dangers can be. One of the ways we open things up is ask people to share songs and stuff. One of the concerns I have is wanting right speech. I want songs and chants that are affirming the whole of life and the balance and not in any way devious, or having hatred or aggression, or which would in any way increase attachment to anything. We have to ask ourselves, "Is this letting go?" So there was only one workshop in Chicago--one or two songs that I didn't feel totally thrilled with, but basically I try to be really careful what I ask for, so that people are into that same place.

S. But if people feel controlled, then it becomes difficult.

E. As opposed to invited.

D. Because you want people to bring things together and there's always the time constraint. Especially with a large group, everyone says, "Well, we could do this, or we could do that." I can think of one time, at a workshop we did and someone wanted to do a ritual and she really didn't know what she was doing. We let go of the control and she looked at us and I said, "This is your idea, not mine." This woman was very sweet and well intentioned but, she had just been at another workshop where a ritual was done and it was very important to her. So she wanted to repeat it, but it was pretty much out of context to our whole weekend and what we had been doing. We worked with it, but it brought up all of her ambivalence and even in the sharing of chants, it's hard to do that. It's scary to start singing in front of thirty people. The fear and the ambivalence comes up and even if you are saying it clearly, the people are resonating to your feeling and they just can't get at it.

S. Although I really like encouraging people to do things I also want control to a certain extent. I don't even know if control is the word but, to maintain the authority and leadership.

D. What I like to say is that we will be sharing a ritual, and there will be some spontaneity in creating it. I want the women to understand that it's coming out of our particular group at that particular time, and it's not the only way to do it. It's not done this way everytime. If we have that kind of control around it, that form can be understood

so that they can take it home. It will be a teaching for them, so that they do get a sense of how to create their own rituals. A lot of times there's not enough time to have a total consensus ritual.

S. My experience has been ultimately that the more direction that I take, the better the ritual goes. It also gives people an opportunity to see the ritual contained and done in a high energy way. I find that the energy for me as a leader dissipates when we give over. If I'm not really sure what I want to do and then to ask them what they want to do is, in the end not the best thing to do.

D. I find that as long as we're loving and gentle, people really appreciate more of a direction. As long as they understand that this is not the only way and it's not being superimposed from outside. One of the things that we do around lovers and warriors--concerning balancing different aspects of themselves, is to ask people to bring symbols of qualities that they want to balance in themselves. We will leave a time for them to talk about them. This is so and so, and it represents such and such and we give them a form to very concisely say, "I balance the blank and the blank inside of me." We found that it was really powerful to have someone speak and then hear their words repeated to them. So if we don't really contain that, someone will get up and say, "I balance the such and such and such" and no-one knows what to say in response.

E. I think one of the powers of ritual is that it's a solid container that people can pour their heart into, so if the container has all kinds of leaks, it doesn't feel safe enough to pour.

S. I agree.

D. Yes.

E. Are your workshops ever healing, transforming or empowering for you? Was this one?

D. Yes.

S. Yes.

E. Does your psychological process change significantly when a ritual workshop is repeated over time? If so, do you incorporate these changes into your performance?

D. I don't know how to say that specifically, but to me that's what it means to be really in tune and to be working with material. It's naturally going to change and to grow and you have to have the good sense to let it go if it's not working. Some ritual could be the most powerful thing in your life, but it may not remain that way.

E. When you lead the participants into their internal places of injury and neglect do you also connect with your own?

D. A little, but not too much because it's not the place to do our work.

S. I may say to Diane afterwards, that I started having all of these memories, but if that was happening a lot, I think I would have to stop. It's not clear, it's not clean, it's not appropriate.

D. Even if we are leading an imagery and something that's very joyful, we're not doing that fantasy or that visualization, because our purpose is to be in a meditative state and to generate that heart energy and clear mind--that's our focus. Maybe there will be some image that we'll be working with, which will be our container, a way of connecting telepathically with people, or amplifying the space or bringing a lot more energy into it so it's easier for the people who are there to go deeper, or to see more clearly what their stuff is. But we're not actually going and envisioning travelling here and there. Sometimes, where it comes up is that if Shuli's leading it, I might start to see stuff, but we try to do it in terms of meditation--to note what's happening and come back to our purpose.

E. What does your pre-performance preparation consist of?

S. We dance.

D. Before I started working with Shuli, I always danced before I went out. We sit and meditate together. A lot of times I have a period of confusion. I feel like I'm going into that void and so it's really hard for me to get grounded in the details of what we're doing. I just kind of space out. I know that's my usual thing before I do it. So I'm trying to prepare for that. And now that I'm working with someone else, it directly affects them. I try to be more prepared for that so that there's time for that to happen, and not to be harsh about it. There's always the time constraint. Aside from the planning before we do it, we centre ourselves and then once we get there, we set up an altar and we smudge the area, and we have prayers and chants. We invoke the four directions. We do those to call in a certain energy and to clear out the space.

E. That's when everyone's present?

D. No, we also do that before the people are there. Then we do it again with everyone.

E. Do you do that with everyone everytime--invoke the four directions and create sacred space?

D. Yes, we do.

E. Well, that's all. We're finished. Thank-you.

D.&S. You're welcome.

APPENDIX B: LOVERS AND WARRIORS: INTEGRATING COMPASSION AND ACTION

This rite took place in the same room that the rite entitled *Crystal Visions: A Way of Personal and Planetary Peace* occurred. It was the first of two ritual workshops offered that weekend. Both workshops began in exactly the same way, including the purification and entrance into sacred space (See *Crystal Visions: A Way of Planetary and Personal Peace* in Chapter 3 for description). Following the purification women walked around the circle to find their place, some had their heads down, and others initiated eye contact and smiled. After all of the participants had entered, Diane and Shuli walked straight through the center of the circle to the altar. Diane explained that they could walk through the center because they were our guides through sacred territory for the day. Shuli set her drum on the floor beside the altar. As in the Womb Meditation, Mariechild invoked the four directions and the earth and sky holding the burning sage high above her head. Some of the participants faced each direction with Diane, while others remained facing the middle of the circle. She placed the sage on the altar and she and Shuli sat down on the meditation cushions. The participants sat down on the floor while Diane explained the Native origins of the invocation of the four directions, earth and sky, as well as the origins and significance of the sacred objects on the altar. She also emphasized that they were not teaching absolute truth; that there were many paths leading to the same place, and that she and Shuli had found this path most beneficial. Judging by the smiles and laughter in response, some of the participants found Mariechild's flexibility refreshing, perhaps compared to previous encounters with more dogmatic religious traditions.

Diane pulled a rock out from under the altar and explained that in many of the Native traditions there were times of "council sharing." This often involved passing a

"talking stick" to each individual, which they would hold and use as a device to channel and communicate their thoughts from the heart. In the Native tradition the phrase "Ahoh" was often used by the listeners to acknowledge that the person had been heard. Diane began by passing the stone to the person on her left and asked people to introduce themselves, explain their purpose for attending, and what they hoped to gain from the experience. They also had the option to simply hold the stone in silence, which several people did. After each person was finished with the rock, the group would say "Ahoh." After the rock had circulated, Diane gave the earth and sky meditation. We were then instructed to practice awareness and breath meditation for approximately twenty minutes. After the meditation, Diane passed the "talking stone" to the person on her left and asked people to share any of the meditation experience that they wished to. Some expressed appreciation for the opportunity to slow down long enough to honour their own internal process. Others expressed emotional and physical discomfort. Everyone spoke this time.

Diane then asked participants to form groups of six and sit in small circles. Her introduction to the next guided visualization included a description of the lover and warrior archetypes, and the need to integrate both compassion and action. I turn to Mariechild's (1987:139) description of the lover and warrior in her book to best capture what she said. Although she did not read verbatim from her book, she had it open in front of her throughout the description. She explains that the lover represents our emotions. Feeling is the water element that allows us to participate in the flow of life. The lover is also our creativity and ability to connect with and express divine harmony:

When the lover is awake our communication is clear and deep, from the heart. There are no barriers, no judgements, no expectations. The lover, attuned to all of life, feels the mystery of creation, listens to the voice in the water and the wind. The lover is our joy, our

compassion, our loving-kindness (140).

The warrior is the other aspect of the polarity. Based on Carlos Casteneda's concept, the warrior is impeccable-- living with precision and total attention:

The warrior is at war with all limitations, with every obstacle that prevents the realization of the authentic self. This battle to overcome limitations is a long and strenuous one. It is the central theme of all the great scriptures, this battle between good and evil. The evil is the limitation, the doubt, the restlessness, the hatred and the greed. When we overcome these, we bring peace and joy to ourselves and others (1987:140-141).

The warrior represents strength, courage, fearlessness and the power of the will that is in harmony with the universe. Mariechild contrasts this harmonious use of the will with the abuse of power, or force over others (141). She writes, "As we grow into our humanness, we must deepen our understanding of the will" (141). In the workshop, Diane also discussed the concept of renunciation that underlies the warrior stance. She explained that because many of us feel unnurtured, we experience renunciation as a threat to our self-worth, which reinforces a sense of victimization. On the contrary, through renunciation we can participate in the interrelationship with all things. The warrior's sword cuts through personal attachments and desires and aligns our personal will with the will of the universe. Mariechild's description of the lover and warrior was extensive, lasting approximately fifteen to twenty minutes. Then, while we were still in the small circles, she guided us, with our eyes closed, into a visualization of the lover.^{6/} This visualization lasted approximately fifteen minutes. Then we were asked to share our experiences, if we wished, in our small groups. The following visualization was on the warrior.^{7/} Again we were asked to share our experience in small groups. Diane and Shuli moved around to the various groups, listened and offered support. One woman became

quite upset. Diane spoke with her privately for approximately fifteen minutes.

It was time for a lunch break. We were told that in the afternoon we would visualize the integration of the lover and warrior. We were then instructed to form a large circle, join hands and sing several songs. Many participants were visibly fatigued from the physical and mental exertion of the morning. The songs seemed to raise the energy somewhat. The women seemed more than ready for the break.

For the afternoon session there was no official entrance into sacred space. Participants simply walked into the room, taking care not to walk through the circle, while Diane and Shuli waited, already seated in front of the altar. After twenty minutes of stretching exercises led by Shuli, Diane passed the stone, this time to her right because the woman on her left objected to always being first. Many of the women discussed their experiences of the lover and warrior archetypes. Others described particular aspects of themselves that had been uncovered during the visualizations; some were silent. After the stone had reached the end, Diane instructed us to gather into our small groups once again. After a guided visualization of the earth and sky with our eyes closed, Diane discussed the concept of integration, particularly of the lover and warrior.

In her book, she explains that when the lover is undeveloped, we feel disconnected from our deepest selves and other people. We can be hostile and cruel (141). When the warrior is undeveloped, we lack a sense of purpose in our lives. Our will and intention is weak and twisted. We become restless, grasping at whatever appeals to the senses, moving from experience to experience (141). Then Diane led us into a visualization with eyes closed to explore the integration of the lover and warrior.^{8/} This involved a joyous dancing union of the lover and warrior, who eventually merged to become one androgynous figure, and was finally absorbed, in white light, into each participant. At the

end of the exercise, we were instructed to open our eyes and share our experience. Many of the women in my small group, including myself, experienced a continuous changing of gender of the lover and warrior images during the visualizations. One minute the lover was a woman, alternately becoming a man. The warrior too transformed in this way. As in the morning session, the group then joined hands and sang together before leaving for the day.

APPENDIX C: THE ACTOR'S LAB

This autobiographical description followed by a short discussion further illustrates a contemporary form of ritual exploration that resembles feminist ritual processes in its' emphasis on transformative ritual processes. My discussion will focus on the relevance of the transformative ritual process for feminist rites which aim for the same. Due to the specific nature of my focus, a critique of the ritual theatre work will not be developed. My experience of ritual theatre comes from five years work with the Actor's Lab theatre company, formerly in Hamilton and now in Toronto, Ontario. An eight-member ensemble experimented with processual expressions of the human condition through workshops and performances. We endeavoured to explore, symbolize and perform our deepest concerns and impulses. The processual work involved "journeying" into unknown territory and allowing unconscious impulses to unfold and guide us. We created and refined ritual forms to share in performance. We reached for transformation and the invocation of a similar process in audience members.

Although Grotowski's methods were more austere and disciplined than those at the Actor's Lab, the primary ethos was the same. At Actor's Lab we searched for authenticity, transformation and immanence. Grimes described our work this way:

The Lab aspires to universal theatre; it wants to find archetypal themes, gestures, settings and rhythms. Its ethos is overtly ritualistic and many of its performances are laden with myths and symbols (9).

The training at Actor's Lab consisted of rigorous, daily physical exercises which included yoga, gymnastics and self-expressive movement. All were considered preparatory for individual or group "studies," that were always observed by the director

and sometimes by other members of the company. The exploratory work was considered a study of the human condition, not a rehearsal, as in conventional theatre. The studies were the foundations of the work--an unveiling process which sought attunement to bodily rhythms through creative movement and preverbal expression. Ron Grimes (194) writes that our work was, "elemental, non-narrative with strong emphasis on shadow, silence and a flowing form of movement." The work aimed to cultivate altered and revelatory states of being by stripping away habitual attitudes and behaviours. Grotowski's, the work aimed at the cultivation of altered and revelatory states of being. We sought the transformation of consciousness, through contact with unconscious impulses. We described our process as overcoming the rigidity of the intellect and the sleep of unconscious, habitual, bodily action. The key to this work was to let bodily impulses inform the mind--the reverse of our familiar mode of being in the world. We hoped that by awakening our bodies we would awaken our minds and achieve a more unified sense of being.

Following a study, collaboration between an actor and director involved selecting themes, images and actions that seemed sufficiently powerful to repeat, explore and develop into a score to be performed. The director wrote and adapted scripts that best expressed the material that arose from studies for performance purposes.

The work of Actor's Lab resembled ritual more than theatre in its search for essential human meaning, "immediacy and identification with flow and mystery" (207). Although the directors of both the Polish Lab and the Actor's Lab denied at the time that they were researching ritual, the exploratory work provided important clues about transformative ritual processes. We were participating in what Ron Grimes (1982:67) describes as "nascent ritualizing processes," which were occurring outside traditional

religious institutions in the domain of ritual theatre. This experimentation with symbolic processes is "closely akin to those of religious practice," in which new religious symbols and ritual processes are developing (54). Grimes (56) describes this type of exploration, or "ritualizing," as a spontaneous or preconscious ritual process, which involves the discovery of the "originative moments" of rites (56). Grimes emphasizes that rites are events with lifespans and not static records and texts. Ritualizing is the act of receiving power from an animating force and enacting ritual gestures (59-62). The animating power can be understood in a variety of ways:

Whether we imagine the animating power as a soul, deeper self, god, state, spirit, animal, cosmos, or society, the body in some sense borrows the life breathed into it (59).

Grimes (203) describes our studies as the "generative matrix of performances." The studies contained the seeds, or original impulses, from which ritual performance was generated. The studies can be broken down into the three phase transformative process delineated by van Gennep and Turner. This process is the key to creating transformative rituals.

A description of a typical study will perhaps best illustrate the three phases of a ritual generating process as it emerged at Actor's Lab. Our studies always began with movement into and through an empty space. The overriding theme of our work was "the search," or "exploration." Sometimes, not always, studies would begin with a theme, an image or a concrete symbol. While suspending analytical thinking, we engaged our bodies with objects and images, and they took on symbolic meaning for us. Our experience with the symbols determined their meaning, which could change from one moment to the next. Internal images would sometimes present themselves in rapid

succession. As the images changed, the symbol would be manipulated in a different fashion, thereby changing its meaning.

After about an hour of physical preparation, my studies always began with my imagining a large sacred circle encompassing the room. When I entered this circle, I entered another world in which new rules and endless possibilities presented themselves. I would relax my mind, attempt to suspend self-consciousness and rational analyses and invite my body to move in whatever way it pleased. Rhythmic, repetitive movements would often develop and carry me into patterns of movement, which would usually be accompanied by a wide range of emotions and sensations. At the same time, I would find myself singing in a chant-like manner, or expressing pre-verbal sounds.

On one occasion my body was repeatedly circling and one arm was dipping down, taking the rest of my body with it and extending back up again. There was a tremendous amount of energy behind this gesture, which indicated that it may have significance, so I let the movement carry me. Some rich images began to emerge in a continuous stream--the dark earth, rows of corn blowing in the wind, my hair becoming entwined in the corn silk, preparing the soil for planting the seeds, planting and covering the seeds with the rich dark earth, becoming a seed myself and preparing the ground, digging very deeply for my planting, throwing myself into the furrows and covering myself with earth, craving burial and gestation, comforted by the rich dark soil all around me.

I lay very still in my earth-womb, and a deep yearning to gestate and give birth and be born expressed itself in long wailing sounds. I burst out of the earth into a wide expansive meadow and danced in circles with joy for my own birth and the birth of my child, simultaneously.

Exhausted and satisfied that the study had reached completion, I left the circle to sit

with my co-workers who had been silently watching. Slightly disoriented and seeking the order of the rational world, I was unsure of how my experience could fit into anything rational. For a long while there was silence. Then I began sharing some of the images and feelings of the study.

The movements and images that emerged in that study were later repeated, refined and clarified during rehearsals for a production. The most important aim of the performance was to reveal some of the original receptivity and vulnerability of the liminal state that had allowed the impulses to emerge into a ritualized form to the audience.

How were we generating rituals? Ron Grimes, using Turner's term, explains that "liminars" create rituals. Rituals can be generated, but those who create them "must also stand outside" (202). He described our process as "liminal" because it involved a "crossing of the threshold" and renouncing habitual ways of perceiving the world. Once the threshold had been crossed and the initiate was in new psychological territory, an impulse to create or symbolize and express this new form in repetitive actions and preverbal expression seemed to naturally arise. The form became further refined for ritual performance, preserving the mysterious, powerful impulses that had initially emerged in the study.

My study can be divided into three phases, following van Gennep's model. The warm up process in preparation for the study involved engaging with rhythms and impulses of my body and trusting them to lead me, while suspending to some degree my analytical faculties. A form of meditation in motion, the process helped to minimize self-consciousness and attachment to the thoughts that were arising. The body movement facilitated this process. Just as in meditation, attention to the breath and bodily sensations minimize the impact of discursive thought. Further separation was achieved at the

beginning of the study by leaving the group and entering the "sacred circle," putting my body into motion and allowing images to flow. The liminal phase comprised most of the study, in which images and movements flowed one after another. Often the psychic material expressed itself in mythical images, accompanied by feelings of "otherness," numinosity and unfamiliarity. In the reintegrative stage an attempt was made to re-organize the new psychic material within some sort of framework. In my work this included sharing the images and experience with the rest of the group, repeating and refining the movements and rhythms in rehearsal time and performing them for the public.

Permanent transformation would occasionally occur when the impact of the unconscious material required an alteration of conscious orientation and personal identity. For myself, as well as others in the company, the work was experienced as therapeutic, cathartic and empowering. At times during studies and performances peak moments of awareness and unity would be reached, infusing us with a renewed sense of well-being and permanent transformation. At other times the work and performances would be "transportative" (Schechner's term 1985:130). That is, we were changed while performing and returned to basically the same psychological framework afterwards.

The three-phase model can also be applied to the ritual generating process. The work of the Polish Lab and Actor's Lab explored conditions, attitudes and actions from which ritual impulses arose. The process of uncovering, repeating, symbolizing and enacting essential human impulses led them naturally into ritual generation. Generally, our traditional rituals have been passed down through the generations, maintaining the status quo, with little flexibility for adaptation to our particular experience. Many of us who find that traditional rituals do not adequately meet our needs are faced with the

challenge to create new ones.

ENDNOTES

1. Some feminists consider the term "transcendence" to be a masculine concept describing a higher power which is "wholly other" and cannot be directly experienced by an individual. Within the Protestant tradition "transcendence" has been defined this way. In contrast, feminists understand the sacred as a universal power that permeates and unifies all of reality. The higher self that resides within each individual carries an awareness of this universal power. Throughout this work, the term "transcendence" will denote an experience of internal immanence or higher power that is wholly accessible and unites an individual with all things.
2. In her discussion of Jungian theory, Naomi Goldenberg (1976/77:443-449) develops a feminist critique of Jung's prophetic image, his limited classification and neglect of the concept of the feminine, his poor methodological approach, and the very idea of an archetype.
3. This visualization is recorded in Diane Mariechild's *The Inner Dance* (1987:29-31).
4. In my own ritual work as well as that of others the practice of acknowledging the four directions, earth and sky at the closing of a rite signifies appreciation toward the greater powers that had been formally invoked at the opening of the rite. At the opening of a rite the sacred circle is closed; at the closing of a rite the sacred circle is opened. Frequently, following the dismissal of the four directions, earth and sky, the circle is opened by repeating a chant three times: "The circle is open, but it is not broken." This chant

signifies that each participant should depart from the rite carrying the unity of the sacred circle with them.

5. Janine Roberts also utilizes van Gennep's three phase model to define therapeutic rituals. She explains that in the first stage, separation "special preparations are made and new knowledge is passed on..." (1978:8). The second liminal stage is "where people actually partake of the ritual and experience themselves in new ways, take on new roles, new identities" (9). She calls the final stage reaggregation; in it people are reconnected to their community.

6. This visualization is recorded in Diane Mariechild's, *The Inner Dance* (1978:146). However, in the workshop, Diane divided the one visualization into three stages. The first stage only included the section on the lover.

7. This visualization is recorded in Diane Mariechild's *The Inner Dance* (1987:145-146), and included only the section on the warrior.

8. This visualization is recorded in Diane Mariechild's *The Inner Dance* (1987:145-147).

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