# Beyond 'Individualism'

## personhood and transformation in the
## Reclaiming Pagan community of San Francisco

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Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is the result of original work carried out by the author.

"ideas, which conquer our intelligence, which overcome the outlook that reason has riveted to our conscience, are chains from which we cannot tear ourselves away without tearing our hearts; they are demons that man can overcome only by submitting to them"—Karl Marx

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# Abstract

Many social scientists have sought to understand the dynamics of personhood in Western modernity, asking in particular whether it can be said that personhood in 'the West' is more individualistic than is typical elsewhere. Following Marcel Mauss, a number of anthropologists have suggested that the dominance of commodity exchange in modern Western societies lays a basis for individualised social relations over and above the relational patterns of gift exchange prevalent in many smaller-scale societies. Theorists from Weber to Foucault have likewise suggested that rationalised institutions in Western modernity condition an individualisation of subjectivity. Members of the San Francisco Reclaiming Pagan tradition seek to challenge the individualism, atomisation and rationalisation of social life they associate with wider US society, through ritual magic, activism and community-building. At times, they are able to create numinous worlds of beauty and interconnection against what Weber calls the "disenchantment of the world" (Weber [1919]1991:155), helping to forge, in part, a more relational basis to their sociality. In doing so, they foreground many sites of relationality that exist in US society under a veneer of individualism, from gift exchange among kin networks to corporeal dissolution in crowds. Yet, their theories and cosmologies also valorise a particular type of artistic, expressive individualism, while their practices absorb and mirror some of the individualising and rationalising tendencies of wider systems and discourses they seek to resist. As a result, patterns of personhood and sociality in Reclaiming illustrate some of the complexities obtaining in US sociality more broadly. Examining these complexities highlights the individualising effects modern Euro-American institutions can have on subjectivity, while calling into question any overly-simplistic link between Western societies and 'individualism'. As such, this study can contribute to the project other anthropologists of personhood have begun: of problematising the dichotomy of 'Western-individualism' and 'non-Western-sociocentrism' which has at times underpinned anthropological studies of personhood.

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Too many others to name have informed my thinking on this research and on social theory more broadly, but some in particular deserve a mention for the insights they provided at key points as this project took shape (in some cases unbeknownst to them). Lindy Orthia shared many of my research interests,

## Twilight falls at Mendocino Woodlands…

*The drummers drum their call to ritual. The fire-tenders put the final touches on a growing ritual fire. We all walk down to the ritual circle—a hundred or so campers who have come to spend a week in the woods at California witchcamp. Some are unsure, some seem more confident. Some have been doing this for years, some are brand new. Many are decked out in ritual finery—beautiful robes, costumes, a few are wearing very little at all. We gather around the ritual circle. In the clearing, we clump, wander, watch, talk, sway, dance to the drumbeat. Some begin to shout and hoot, some sing, some jump, clap and intone.*

*As the drumbeat dies down, we move outwards to form a single circle. We take stock of those around us, shaking off the tension of the drive and the stress of new experiences. A priestess steps forward to ground the participants. On her instruction, we draw our roots down, deep down into the earth, down to the very centre, sending our stress and bother and fears and daily worries down with them, drawing up energy and life force into our bellies. Then upwards, shooting our tendrils right up into the darkening sky. The twilight glistens with the first evening stars between the redwood trees. We are invited to feel that energy flow through our arms, our crowns, to mix with the earth within our bodies. We are conduits between earth and sky. And we are 'present' to ourselves, each other, and our surroundings.*

*The circle must be cast, so a second priestess steps forward. In dramatic motions, she draws the pentacle on each of the quarters, then above and below, marking the boundaries of sacred space, creating the container for our magical workings, saying: "The circle is cast; we are between the worlds; and what happens between the worlds can change all the worlds."*

*And, once the container is prepared, it is time to call in those who will help us with our work. A priestess invokes the element of air, and no sooner has he begun but wind is blowing from every voice, birds are singing, the sounds of air whistle and whoosh through the bodies and the trees. Fire…and all around the circle, campers begin to click their fingers, some slapping their legs. Others join in, and the snap and crackle sends the experience of fire through the whole circle. The ritual fire in the centre echoes, sending sparks into the darkening trees. And then water, and earth—a hundred bodies bring the elements to life, invoking them into the circle. And then the fifth sacred thing, the mystery—the centre of ourselves and the centre of everything, woven together in an unfathomable web of life. The centre that is the mixing of the four elements in the cauldron, becoming the complex living, connected, evolving, ever-changing thing we call the cosmos.*

*And then the allies are called in. The spirits of this land of Mendocino, so well-loved by witchcampers over the years. The fey: the strange fairy folk. And the ancestors: grand and modest, famous and unknown, graceful and shameful. And finally, Goddess and God, aspects of the all-encompassing sacred life-force of the universe.*

# Introduction

## Personhood and the gift

One of the most compelling questions anthropology can ask is: who are we? What is it to be a person? Ever since Marcel Mauss wrote The Gift, this question has held an important place within anthropological literature. Mauss wrote in a Durkheimian tradition which stood opposed to the liberal individualism of English utilitarianism (Douglas 1990:x-xi). Introducing Mauss's essay, Mary Douglas has written: "The theory of the gift is a theory of human solidarity" (Douglas 1990:x). While Mauss's essay was primarily ethnographic, it involved an implicit critique of the post-Enlightenment conception of the person that has come to be called *homo oeconomicus*: the bounded, self-interested, rationally calculating individual of industrial modernity. In taking up themes of reciprocity and mutuality, and their association with practices of exchange in societies from Melanesia to Native North America, Mauss was arguing for greater social attention to communal needs and shared interest. Referencing King Arthur's Round Table, the essay concludes with the contention: "People, social classes, families and individuals will be able to grow rich, and will only be happy when they have learnt to sit down, like the knights, around the common store of wealth" (Mauss [1950]1990:83).

In recent decades, anthropologists have reinterpreted, extended and contested Mauss's work, developing his analysis of 'the gift' into a theory of personhood and its relationship to systems of trade and economic exchange. Writing about Melanesia, Gregory (1982) has explored the poles of gift and commodity exchange, referring back to Marx's theory of the fetishism of commodities (Marx [1867]1976). He connects the mediation of social relations to these processes of exchange, suggesting that "commodity exchange establishes objective quantitative relationships between the objects transacted, while gift exchange establishes personal qualitative relationships between the subjects transacting" (Gregory 1982:41). Strathern (1988) develops this theory further to suggest that sociality in Melanesia is characterised by a relational understanding of the self in which persons are considered to be fundamentally constituted by the network of relationships in which they are embedded. Here, a person's relationships are seen to be inherent within them, rather than external. She calls such persons 'dividuals', opposing this conception to the 'individualism' of Western models (Strathern 1988:13). In Strathern's analysis, we encounter a breadth of implications of a relational model of personhood for our understanding of social practices beyond forms of exchange: including gender, power, agency, production, and the concept of 'society' itself.

Gregory's and Strathern's work has been critiqued by subsequent anthropologists as overly dichotomising their conceptual categories: gifts versus commodities, dividual versus individual personhood (Appadurai 1986, Carrier 1995b, LiPuma 1998). Strathern, in particular, could be seen to be guilty of what Gregory later describes as conflating ethnographic classification with logical conceptualisation (Gregory 1997:50): equating 'Melanesia' with gifts and dividuality, just as 'the West' is equated with commodities and individuality. In this way, her depiction of 'Melanesia' runs the risk of reintroducing a reifying notion of a 'culture' seen as a unified whole, effacing specificity, contestation and history (Carrier 1995b:98, see Abu-Lughod 1991 for a critique of the concept of 'culture'). Nevertheless, as Helliwell and Hindess (1999a:17 n7) suggest, Strathern's model remains useful as a

framework for conceptualising relational personhood and the ramifications that different conceptions of personhood hold for a wide array of social practices.

This project is an attempt to turn the lens of this theoretical framework back onto 'the West' by taking up the question of how personhood is expressed and reproduced in a specific Western context: a feminist, anarchist tradition of contemporary Paganism known as 'Reclaiming'. Communities such as Reclaiming emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century as part of a wave of new religious movements that swept through Euro-American societies (Wallis 1984). Reclaiming was founded in San Francisco in 1979 out of a fusion of counterculture and 'new left' activist politics. Practitioners of Reclaiming emphasise the imaginative, expressive dimensions of human behaviour, the importance of communality, and above all a spiritual-political intention of undoing the atomisation, alienation and mechanisation they associate with Western modernity. According to the opening statement of their Principles of Unity: "The values of the Reclaiming tradition stem from our understanding that the earth is alive and all of life is sacred and interconnected" (Reclaiming 1997). This emphasis on the relational, numinous qualities of the physical world suggests fruitful possibilities for a study of the potential for relational sociality to emerge in the seemingly individualistic world of contemporary urban industrial capitalism in the United States.

In part, this study attempts to problematise the dichotomy between 'Western' and 'non-Western' modes of personhood and sociality by looking specifically at the complexities and contestations around 'Western' personhood expressed by Reclaiming practitioners. This continues the work of some of Strathern's critics, as well as other anthropologists of personhood, who, while recognising that there are important strains of individualism that run through Western sociality, have suggested a need to interrogate an overly simplistic notion of 'Western individualism'. Responding to Strathern, LiPuma (1998) suggests that 'individualism' must be seen as much as an ideology as a fact of Western life, and that relational and individual aspects of personhood coexist in Western

settings. He argues that this ideology of individualism is a corollary of the fetishising processes by which social relations are disguised in capitalist society. Nevertheless, the existence of this ideology can not fully conceal "the reality that Western persons are interdependent, defined in relation to others, depend on others for knowledge of themselves, grasp power as the ability to do and act, grow as the beneficiary of others' actions, and so forth" (LiPuma 1998:60). Others such as Carrier have argued that commodity and gift exchange themselves overlap within Western contexts, suggesting a concomitant overlap in forms of sociality. Carrier critiques what he calls "Maussian Occidentalism" for conflating complex phenomena in Western and Melanesian social exchange into simplified categories (Carrier 1995b). Instead, he examines how practices of commodity and gift exchange flow into one another in the US in such commonplace activities as Christmas shopping (Carrier 1995a).

Outside of the Maussian literature, other anthropologists have taken up the question of Western forms of personhood, many suggesting that there has been a widespread and unhelpful dichotomising in ethnographic studies of what Kusserow calls "Eastern sociocentric selves 'versus' Western individualistic selves" (1999:541).[1] Concomitant with LiPuma's analysis of an association between ideologies of individualised personhood and capitalist social relations, Ouroussoff, in her study of a multinational firm, found working class informants were less likely to apply individualist values to themselves than the middle class managers she studied (Ouroussoff 1993). By contrast, in a study of child-rearing in New York, Kusserow suggests that parents of all class backgrounds showed both sociocentric and individualistic concerns in child-rearing; yet the specific qualities of individualism encouraged in children differed according to class (Kusserow 1999:554–6). Studies such as these serve as reminders that it is important when looking at

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[1] See Ewing (1990), Ouroussoff (1993), Murray (1993), Spiro (1993), Conklin and Morgan (1996), Holland and Kipnis (1994) and Kusserow (1999) for examples of analyses that attempt to break down this dichotomy by exploring some more complex dimensions of Western personhood.

personhood to explore exactly with whom and how threads of 'relationality' and 'individualism' play out, and even to examine the very different notions which together serve to constitute the phenomenon of 'individualism'.

Despite these critiques, a general recognition remains through much of this literature that there is something meaningful in an association between individualism and Euro-American modernity, despite the many caveats and corrections needed. In particular, several of these theorists of gifts and commodities would agree that, with all the complexity of how these modes of exchange operate in practice, the gift-commodity dichotomy remains a useful conceptual distinction with some bearing on patterns of sociality (Carrier 1995a, Gregory 1997, LiPuma 1998). Similar themes run through other social theories outside of these anthropological writings. For example, ever since Weber wrote of the "disenchantment of the world" and the rationalisation of the Western psyche, linking this to the rise of Protestantism (Weber [1919]1991, Weber [1920]1956), a picture has arisen of an internalised, methodical disposition of rational accounting associated with personhood in Western modernity. Shortly after Weber, Lukács ([1922]1971) took up these issues, bringing Weber's work into conversation with Marx's theory of commodity fetishism.

Decades later, Foucault (1983) addressed similar themes, writing about the many 'rationalities' that have come to shape Western subjectivity since the rise of modernity, reviving and updating Nietzsche's rejection of the normalised homo oeconomicus of liberalism. In particular, Foucault suggests that, through knowledge regimes by which the "figure of man" has become the object of study, persons in modernity are continually constituted as individualised, sovereign subjects (Foucault [1966]2003). In response to work such as Foucault's, many post-structuralist theorists have attempted to disrupt the sovereign individual of this Western intellectual tradition, decentring the Western subject from an essentialised view of the person as neatly bounded, autonomous and unique. More recently, feminists have extended the post-structuralist critique to challenging tightly-bound gender dichotomies (Butler

1990), and to more comprehensive theories of intersubjectivity (Diprose 2002). In doing so, among other things, they have foregrounded embodiment as a structuring and structured social reality, calling into question the disembodied 'rational' subject of liberalism. As we explore questions of sociality in this particular setting of Western modernity, the work of these theorists can help us understand the multifaceted nature of personhood in the West, the complex field of social conditions which structure sociality, and the possibilities here for disrupting the autonomous, rational individual of Western liberalism.

## Paganism and sociality

Contemporary Paganism offers promising ground for a study of these issues. The Pagan movement is a Romantic spiritual and religious movement which embraces a view of humans as imaginative and emotional, and emphasises the connections that exist between people, with nature, and with a magical world of spirits, ancestors, fairies and ancient powers. Pagans' understanding of the cosmos as an interconnected, unfolding web of energy in which all living things are embedded leads them to seek a sense of themselves as interwoven with this sacred cosmic energy, and thereby with the rest of life. This has important implications for their conception of personhood. As Rook, a teacher in the Reclaiming and Feri traditions, described her model of the self to me:

> And our macrocosmic soul is our God Soul, and that relates to deity, that relates to God Herself, the fabric of all. And that also relates to the ancestors, to space and time. It's connected into the larger picture. So it's the part of self that we really want to align ourselves with, so that we're not just being run by variant personality parts all the time. We're connected with the flow of God Herself, when we're connected with our own Divine nature. So in that way, my Divine nature is both immanent— it's both indwelling and outside of me, because it connects beyond what I call 'self'. It's still myself, but it's not just, it's not only myself.[2]

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[2] In quotations such as this from interviews with field informants, italics reflect clear verbal emphasis in the interview. Italics in quotations from the literature are as per the original, except where otherwise noted. Spelling throughout this thesis reflects standard Australian English except in direct quotations from US field informants, which

Already in this description we have a picture of the complexities involved in a Pagan understanding of personhood, and of a fundamental understanding of persons as inherently interwoven with "the fabric of all".

Furthermore, through rituals, trance-work, classes and festivals, Pagans engage in what Pike has called "[s]erious playing with the self" (Pike 2001:183). This involves both 'inner' and 'outer' processes—remaking personal narratives, introspection, and imagined 'journeys' into inner magical landscapes; but also tattoos, costume, name changing and ecstatic dancing around the ritual fire (Pike 2001). The purpose of this 'play' is that practitioners reconstitute themselves along new, more enchanted lines, with a greater sense of their place among others and in the cosmos. In traditions such as Reclaiming, this magical-religious practice is aimed at nothing less than a thoroughgoing personal and social transformation towards a more relational mode of sociality.

What Reclaiming practitioners aim to remake is not just their personal identities, but the mode of sociality through which they collectively operate. This would be expected to have interesting implications at the boundaries where their practice intersects with wider social conditions. As noted above, while anthropologists have suggested a need for greater nuance in approaching questions of personhood in Western societies, many agree that some sort of relationship exists between individualism, commodity fetishism, rationalisation and Western modernity. In examining attempts by Reclaiming practitioners to remake themselves and their social worlds along more relational lines, this raises the central question: 'to what extent is it possible to develop a relational mode of social being in a society dominated by the commodity relations of capitalism?'

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reflect US standards, and in quotations from the literature, which are as per the original.

## The approach

From one angle, this research is an investigation into the way in which personhood is expressed and contested in a particular social and religious setting. From another, it is an exploration of the social dynamics that drive religious and political practice in the contemporary decades of the US. In a study such as this, these questions are restatements of each other. The way Pagan practitioners experience their own personhood in wider society—as isolating, atomised, and mechanised—appears to be a core part of what has driven so many of them at this particular point in history to explore and create their political, religious and magical practices. In turn, these practices are fundamentally shaped by being rooted in particular experiences of personhood, and by the continual articulation of religious experience with economics, law, politics and other spheres of social life; or to put it another way, by practitioners' everyday encounters with the regulatory systems of modernity: from public transportation and housing to supermarkets and the need to make a living. In order to pursue this subject material, I have therefore turned not only to the anthropological literature, but to the work of those theorists of Western modernity such as Marx and Weber who approach questions of personhood and religiosity as aspects of what Mauss has called "'total' social phenomena" ([1950]1990:3): as inseparable from law, economics, education and other myriad institutions and social practices.

The intersection of personhood and religiosity with wider social institutions brings up the dynamics of secularisation in modernity. The starting point of this thesis is that religiosity in a secular society reflects a wider point of tension around which questions of personhood turn, a key for unlocking a social understanding of how people express themselves as persons today. Many theorists have pointed to a personalisation of religious life, particularly arising in the United States since the 1970s, flowing from a decline in religious institutionalisation (Hammond 1992). Yet other questions arise from this. For example, as early as 1843, Marx argued that the prominence of religion in legally secular societies such as the North American states expresses a tension

people experience in modernity between their collective social life within the state and their individualised life as private persons in civil society (Marx [1843]1967:224–6). He suggested that conflicts in people's experiences of themselves between and within these competing spheres of modernity are important in driving and shaping people's religious commitments and aspirations. If we are to understand how religious experience articulates with dynamics of personhood, this suggests we must look beyond religious practices themselves to these broader social dynamics and institutions.

A related dynamic to secularisation is the centrality of scientific rationality as a means of comprehending the world. A prominent sociology textbook from the 1980s opened its section on witchcraft and rationality with the claim: "To the modern consciousness, the very idea of witchcraft is preposterous" (Hirst and Woolley 1982:213). The growth of witchcraft practices under the rubric of modern Paganism in Western settings begs the question of who defines "modern consciousness", who embodies it and lives it. For there is something to the contention that the "modern consciousness" rejects overtly 'superstitious' ways of framing the world. But if the "modern consciousness" is not the consciousness of all people in modernity, what is it? Studying modern witchcraft from the perspective of the social sciences, themselves impacted by secularisation, therefore launches us into questions of hegemony and resistance. The existence of growing communities of witches, magicians, druids and shamans in the midst of secularised Western modernity offers us a window onto these complex dynamics.

Finally, in a study of relationality and individualism, it is important to recall that the assumptions, categories and modes of thought used by social theorists are themselves products of an epistemological individualism that infuses the social sciences. If Foucault is to be believed, the influence of the humanist "figure of man" goes beyond the specifics of one or another theory to the very constitution of the social sciences themselves, where knowledge systems such as ethnology have both been made possible by and reflect back upon the "absolutely singular event" whereby 'man' emerged as both subject

and object of study (Foucault [1966]2003:407–421). It is probably not possible to move completely beyond the reach of this humanist figure in an ethnological study. Nevertheless, Foucault's work can help us to recognise some of the implications this figure holds for our theorising. For example, Helliwell and Hindess point out that widely deployed concepts such as 'culture' and 'society' are themselves outgrowths of this "figure of man", and the individualised perspective prevailing in the social sciences, whereby people are seen as otherwise inherently unsocial (Helliwell and Hindess 1999a).

At the same time, important attempts at a relational approach to social theory have been made and continue to be made, giving rise to interesting configurations of thought and language which often defy 'commonsense' theoretical conceptions. Ollman furnishes us with an example with respect to Marx's relational approach:

> Vilfredo Pareto provides us with the classic statement of this problem when he asserts that Marx's words are like bats: one can see in them both birds and mice (Ollman 1971:3).

While I cannot pretend any great skill at using words like bats, I will make the more modest claim of hoping to contribute to the problematising of some of the assumptions of social theory which flow from an approach rooted in individualism.

# Chapter 1

## RECRAFTING THE SELF:
## modernity and Pagan visions of sociality

*The values of the Reclaiming tradition stem from our
understanding that the earth is alive and all of life is
sacred and interconnected.
– Reclaiming, Principles of Unity*

*At the boundaries, endless possibilities seem to exist,
but so do their limits
– Pike, Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves*

## Contrasting themes of Pagan personhood

In 2005, before moving to San Francisco to do research in the Reclaiming
community, I worked among a group of eclectic self-styled 'dark Pagans' in
Melbourne, Australia. As with Reclaiming and many other strands of modern
Western Paganism, their practice was heavily shaped by a backdrop of 'British
Traditional Wicca' popularised by Gerald Gardner in the 1940s.[3] But, these
edgy, boundary pushing practitioners of their own locally-grown style of
Paganism also counted many more controversial trends among their key
influences, including chaos magic, notorious Ceremonial Magician Alistair

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[3] Gerald Gardner was a British occultist whose publication of several prominent books
and other writings on witchcraft in the 1940s and 1950s was enormously influential in
the foundation of modern Paganism. Gardner claimed that his teachings were based
upon a pre-Christian folk religion passed down to him through his initiation into the
'New Forest Coven'. This claim was never taken particularly seriously in academic
circles, and more recent systematic research by historians, in particular Ronald Hutton,
has undermined these claims of the provenance of Gardnerian Wicca as the 'Old
Religion'. It seems reasonably likely that Gardner and his co-religionists were
responsible for creating and/or distilling from known occult sources most of the
central elements of the religion they called 'Wicca' (Hutton 1999:205-308).
Nevertheless, Gardnerian Wiccan ritual forms represent perhaps the most prominent
and consistent common thread through the wide variety of Western Paganisms that
have flourished from that point (see Clifton 2006 for a discussion of British Wicca's
central influence on US Paganism).

Crowley and the 'Left-hand path' (Satanic-influenced) Temple of Set. A month after first meeting some of these practitioners, I had already sensed that among this group of Pagans were many who welcomed controversy, who seemed almost to invite conflict—not, perhaps, the most obvious place for a study of relationality and interconnection. At the end of a festival weekend outside of Melbourne, I sat speaking with the recognised High Priest of the community, Falcon, who asked about my research interests. I told him that I was interested in challenges to so-called 'Western individualism', and in particular how Paganism is used to explore more relational processes of personhood. With some cause, he told me I was looking in the wrong place: "I think you will find that those ideas are more in the Goddess traditions."

Later that day, I was driven in a car back to Melbourne by two of Falcon's former students, Lilly and Simon, now a High Priestess and High Priest, respectively, who teach and lead covens of their own. They informed me, too, that they felt their own practice to be highly individualistic, in the sense that every person is on their own path to understanding and wisdom. This idea of a personal spiritual path or journey is a central theme across many Pagan traditions, and is fundamental to the anti-dogmatic ideology to which Pagans generally adhere. Among most Pagans, it is not '*the* truth', but '*my* truth' that is the measure of appropriate spiritual knowledge. Pagans emphasise 'what works' and 'what is true for me' as the source of religious understanding—and in this they place the focus on an individual's personal journey as the centrepiece for religious practice (see Eilberg-Schwartz 1989 for a useful discussion).

When I enquired further, however, I found a number of contrasting dynamics to this fundamental attitude of my informants. Behind the individualistic surface of their practice was a sense of 'inner' personhood that is highly interconnected, firmly embedded within the energies of the cosmos. "Oh yes," said Simon when I asked if the inner self was connected to the world or universe around, "everything's connected, it's all energy." He went on to suggest that a 'disconnected' person—one who is not magically conscious—is

someone who is disconnected from this inner source of guidance and from a sense of their place within the cosmos, disconnected from the fluid and shifting energies around them. Even the development of a person's magical 'will' must be seen in this light of interconnected energies: it is only by knowing one's inner self and sensing how one fits in to the world that one can find out what it is one truly wills. Truly magical people are therefore those who are highly conscious of how they are embedded within the wider stream of the cosmos. The purpose of magical practice is to awaken this consciousness of the interconnected universe and to act from a greater knowledge of one's place within it.

At a social level, reciprocity, sharing, helping each other, and 'pitching in' to make community events run were greatly valued within this group. My interlocutors became highly animated as they described the joy of teaching others what they have learnt, of working together to produce a successful event, of how important others in the community are to them and especially how central were the processes of mutual support in the life of their coven. They described how, when someone in their coven is having some difficulties, their discussion group is turned over to working this through; how they offer each other material as well as emotional or spiritual support; and how they regularly perform rituals to help particular members with challenges they are going through, such as changing jobs. They also work hard at trying to ensure members' other important relationships are integrated with their Pagan lives, holding dinners and social gatherings to which non-Pagan family members and partners are invited, so that they can share in the close relationships practitioners develop with their fellow coven members.

These values of mutuality are so fundamental among this group of 'individualists', that when someone breaches them, for example by deciding to act differently from how a group has planned a ritual or event, it is often a source of major tension. In the central ritual of this festival—where a large 'Burning Man' was to be set alight—one participant had stepped in to set the effigy ablaze. It was early in the ritual, before there had been much chance to

develop the ritual mood. As it turned out, this took place well before the time intended by the event's planners. The effigy, once set alight, sent dangerous flames into the dry grass and woods surrounding the circle, and the fire wardens were unprepared at that point. The controversy polarized the festival's creators, with some defending the person who lit the effigy, while others felt betrayed and as though their efforts were undermined. Some in this latter group were particularly angry: one practitioner told a group of us later that night that he was not going to go back to the fire twirling circle because he did not trust himself to hold his temper around 'those people'. He then decided that he would go after all, and show everyone that he was 'better than them'. While the hoped-for ideal relationships among Pagans may not always materialise, even this example of conflict highlights that *expectations* of mutual respect and cooperation surround collective activities in this group which are sometimes at odds with their overtly individualist outlook.

While it is true, as Falcon told me, that Goddess traditions provide in many ways the most fertile ground for a study of relationality, these events highlight themes of connectivity that run through Pagan communities more broadly. Certainly, there are strong threads of individualism in Pagans' beliefs and in their conceptions of their own intentions. Yet it is clear that Pagan communities frequently bring to their practice an anticipation of reciprocity and close bonding, especially across coven relationships, while holding to ideas of the ontological interconnectedness of all things. As Pike suggests in her study of Pagan festivals, "[w]hile Neopagans at first seem to have picked up the trend toward personal autonomy identified by analyses of the sixties, they embed this trend in a framework of interconnectedness" (Pike 2001:223). And particularly in feminist Pagan communities, where a more overt emphasis is generally placed on themes of community and interrelationality, these contrasting tendencies point to compelling possibilities for a study of personhood, individualism and relationality within a contemporary, urban Western setting.

Furthermore, Pagans place a great deal of emphasis on remaking the self through their practice. Pike describes this well, saying:

> Festival goers compose their own stories through costume, body art, masking, altar building, and ritual dance. They share with each other autobiographical accounts of childhood experiences and past traumas…Festival workshops are set up to nurture the "real self", and rituals are organized around the pursuit of self-knowledge (Pike 2001:xxi).

This goal of self-transformation does not exist in isolation, but forms part of the Pagan practice of attempting to create new forms of sociality. Pagans seek to create a sense of belonging within more explicitly interconnected social relations than those typifying urban modernity; tropes of "family", "community" and "tribe" hold an important place within Pagan narratives (Pike 2001:222). As Pike explains:

> Their search is not solely for the self, but is significantly for them, also about relationality. What Neopagans want is to belong to a viable religious community and its gods (Pike 2001:131).

At the centre of this is the practice of ritual. As Salomonsen suggests in her study of Reclaiming:

> Ritualizing is…understood to have the peculiar ability of combining two levels of human life: it forms and transforms people; it forms and transforms community and culture. Religious rituals create bonds between humans and gods, between humans and nature, and create interhuman fellowship (Salomonsen 2002:286).

These threads of self- and social-transformation are linked within Pagan conceptions by a mystical belief in the parallel operation of 'microcosm' and 'macrocosm', captured in the common Pagan maxim 'as above, so below' (Greenwood 2000:23,67). As Berger suggests, Paganism fits the model Beckford outlines for New Age religion, whereby changing the self is seen as inherently connected to changing structures at a social or cosmic level:

> Individual growth is simultaneously regarded as connected to cosmic changes and as helping to usher in those changes. The development

> and transformation of the self are therefore perceived as part of a
> process of social change (Berger 1999:5).

Pagans' beliefs about cosmic interconnection, the premium they often place on mutuality and community, and their valorisation of self-expression are best understood in the light of this emphasis on transformation, as part of an ongoing project by which they seek to change both themselves and the structures of sociality through which their selves are given expression. The purpose of this is to foreground their deepest spiritual values in their lives, including what they see as the interrelation of our lives and the ontological interconnection of all things. Pagans can therefore be seen as engaging in a process of attempting to transform the individualised sociality seen as typical of Western personhood into a form of sociality in which the person is more explicitly and consciously embedded in networks of interconnection and reciprocity.

The Reclaiming community, on which this study is centred, shares in, and in many ways amplifies, these general Pagan tendencies of striving to transform the self to achieve a sense of both social and cosmic interconnection. Reclaiming emerged in the late 1970s as part of a broader upsurge of new religious movements sweeping the US. Influenced by many of the same British Wicca threads that form the most consistent backdrop of modern Pagan practice, they were equally shaped by the radical political milieu of 1970s San Francisco—influences which have been important in positioning Reclaiming on the left wing of the broader Pagan movement. Despite a broadening membership base which has diffused some of its more revolutionary, activist foundations, the focus of many core practitioners remains on radical social transformation and overthrowing the hierarchical capitalist order.

At the same time, Reclaiming's founding was also part of a wave of feminist spirituality emerging across Anglo-American societies at this time.[4] This is

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[4] A few words of demarcation are in order. While there is no single definition of these terms, 'Paganism' or 'Neopaganism' have become umbrella terms for a wide array of earth-based religions that have emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century in

important in understanding the strong emphasis on social as well as cosmic interconnection amongst Reclaiming practitioners. As one observer of this feminist Goddess movement notes:

> Words like 'embodiment', 'nurturance' and 'connectedness' became part of the lingua franca of women's spirituality, Christian and Pagan alike...In fact, the values associated with the Goddess tended at times to overshadow the Goddess herself, with Pagan feminists sometimes appearing closer to Christian feminists than to Wiccans and Neopagans who did not share the same political goals (LeMasters cited in Clifton 2006:120).

Reclaiming members straddle both camps—feminist spirituality and the Pagan movement. In Reclaiming, themes of nurturance and connection sit side-by-side with the esoteric and mystical practices of ecstatic sexuality, shamanic drumming and instrumental ritual magic typical of broader Paganism. Likewise,

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Anglo-American and Western European societies. Where this also involves ritual magic such as spellwork, it is generally known as Wicca or witchcraft. The term Wicca, an Old English word meaning witch, was first popularised by Gerald Gardner in the 1950s (Clifton 2006:83-4). The term has since spread, and in the US in particular has come to signal an eclectic array of practices, from self-styled non-initiatory groups calling themselves 'covens' through to the 'original' initiatory traditions of Gardnerian and the closely related Alexandrian Wicca (Clifton 2006, Pearson 2000). Many practitioners outside these British traditions refer to Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca as 'British Traditional Wicca' or BTW. At the other end of the spectrum, an array of High Magic and Western Mystery traditions carry on as inheritors of nineteenth century Western esoteric magic (e.g. Luhrmann [1989]1994:20-1, Greenwood 2000, Pike 2004), and continue to exert an influence on practitioners of British Wicca and groups such as the dark Pagans I worked with in Melbourne.

The 1970s saw a rise in feminist and women-oriented spirituality. Some of these spiritually-inclined feminists saw Wicca or witchcraft, with its focus on 'the Goddess' and opportunities for women's leadership, as a vehicle for their newly found religious identities, some founding new traditions such as Reclaiming and the 'Dianic' (women-only) covens styled after the work of radical feminist and separatist Z Budapest (Budapest 1979). Some call themselves 'witches' but not 'Wiccans', attracted to the disruptive image of the witch but not claiming affiliation to the new Wiccan religion; others see themselves more as 'Goddess feminists' or 'Goddess worshippers' than Wiccans or Pagans. Many of these feminist practitioners were equally influenced by writings from the broader feminist spirituality movement such as Mary Daly's ([1978]1990) *Gyn/Ecology* and Christ and Plaskow's (1979) *WomanSpirit Rising*. Still today, they often overlap at events and in groups with Christian, Jewish and other spiritual feminists.

in their conceptions and practices of personhood and sociality, Reclaiming members share common ground with both, while dosing their outlook heavily with their particular flavour of radical, direct action politics.

In recent decades, contemporary Western Paganism has emerged as a viable field of research for a small but growing number of anthropologists and sociologists. While few have dealt singly with Pagan conceptions of personhood and structures of sociality, many recent ethnographies have touched on aspects of these issues, especially in dealing with questions of community and belonging (e.g. Berger 1999, Pike 2001); human relationships with the natural world (e.g. Greenwood 2005a, Clifton 2006); and issues of cognition and rationality (e.g. Luhrmann [1989]1994, Greenwood 2005a). Some ethnographers have also engaged more directly with questions of subjectivity in Paganism, albeit in relatively brief discussions (Eilberg–Schwartz 1989, Greenwood 1996, Raphael 1996, Pike 2001:219–226).[5] As with the dark Pagan example above, this literature points to complex, intersecting patterns of relationality operating alongside individualist assumptions within Pagan structures of sociality, suggesting fruitful ground for further inquiry into the complex and contested threads of personhood in these urban settings of Euro–American modernity.

Dynamics of personhood in Reclaiming operate against this backdrop of broader Pagan practices and beliefs, likewise both inheriting and contesting features of 'individualism' that shape sociality in contemporary urban US settings. These contested threads of personhood and sociality within Pagan traditions more broadly are therefore worth fleshing out for how they influence and impact upon Reclaiming practices. But before exploring this further, it is worth taking a brief look at the wider context in which religion and magic operate today. Western Paganism in its modern form is a recently invented religion, one which has grown out of the specific social and historical contexts

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[5] The one previous ethnography of Reclaiming, Salomonsen's *Enchanted Feminism* (2002), touches only incidentally on these themes.

of late modernity and post-modernity. This has given it shape and affected the way in which adherents approach it.

Paganism is by and large peopled with those who have chosen it out of a very broad 'marketplace' of religious possibilities, within a largely secular social context. It has a growing number of adherents, but remains largely marginal to mainstream religious and social practices in Western societies. Many Pagan practitioners also practice ritual magic and spellwork, and identify as witches, raising the question of what witchcraft and magic mean to these practitioners, and how they navigate their own forms of rationality in the face of the hegemony of 'rational' science. These questions shape not only the assumptions of personhood which practitioners bring to their practice, but the field of possibilities for transforming self and sociality in which Pagans operate.

## Religion and witchcraft in the modern world

### After Enlightenment: intellectual roots of modern Paganism

Placing modern Paganism and Goddess religion within the history of modern Western thought is not a simple matter. With their emphasis on the sensory, imaginative and feeling dimensions of human experience, and in particular on the centrality of nature as divine source, these new religions are most readily seen as inheritors of nineteenth century Romanticism (Hutton 1999:20-6, Pike 2004:78). Their Romanticism is set in opposition to an Enlightenment view of the world as mechanised and made up of individuals as 'atoms' whose connections are merely accidental. Paganism involves a holistic worldview, emphasising interconnection, interchange and fluidity within and between the elements and persons that comprise the universe (Greenwood 2000:23). As Greenwood describes it:

> The idea of feeling connected to nature, feeling energy 'pulsating through the blood and body' as a spiritual experience, is the very essence of witchcraft ideology. This idea of connection is formed through its antithesis—the alienation from nature, developed from the

> Enlightenment idea that the self is essentially rational, disembodied and solitary (Greenwood 2000:111).

Thus Paganism can be seen as offering a critique of this atomised, rationalised worldview of the Enlightenment, and the individualised model of personhood that goes with it.

Yet the religious traditions that have emerged under the guise of contemporary Paganism have also been identified variously as inheritors of the Enlightenment, of late modernity and of post-modernity (Eilberg-Schwartz 1989, Raphael 1996, Pike 2001:220-1). Eilberg-Schwartz has suggested that practitioners of Paganism and Goddess religion, in placing themselves in opposition to major religious traditions, are usefully seen as following in the tradition of the Enlightenment critique of religion (Eilberg-Schwartz 1989:80-1). He draws parallels to eighteenth century Deism, arguing that in breaking down religious tradition and authority and emphasising personal reason over religious revelation, Deist religion "restores autonomy and dignity to the self" (Eilberg-Schwartz 1989:82). Like Deists, he suggests that Pagans locate the source of truth within each person; indeed Pagans go further than this, holding to a theology which emphasises that all people are themselves divine. In doing so, they appear to inherit rather than critique the Enlightenment valorisation of the individual. "Raising the human to the level of the divine is part of the neopagan desire to celebrate the value and importance of the individual" (Eilberg-Schwartz 1989:83).

The apparent contrast between these two brief sketches of Paganism's conceptual roots touches on the fundamental questions of this study. I would argue that this ambiguity in tracing Paganism's intellectual and social predecessors reflects not simply an ambiguity in defining and differentiating post-Enlightenment schools of thought, but ambiguities within Paganism itself. Like any social phenomenon, Paganism is multifaceted and contested, and reflects the complexity of the world around it. The appearance of new religions that celebrate the individual while seemingly seeking to undermine the conceptual and social basis of the varying practices signalled under the

rubric of 'Western individualism' is a reflection, I would suggest, both of the complexity of the phenomenon of 'individualism', and the persistence of epistemological individualism as a basis for Western social thought.

An interesting indication of this problem appears in discussions surrounding the 'post-modernism' of Paganism. Eilberg-Schwartz points to highly relativist conceptions of religious 'truth' among Pagans, suggesting that Paganism in fact completes the Enlightenment critique of religion which began with Deism with a relativism typical of post-modernity. As he argues:

> "Hardly any religion," writes Feyerabend, "has ever presented itself just as something worth trying." But that is precisely what some strands of neopaganism are attempting to do (Eilberg-Schwartz 1989:95).

Indeed, Eilberg-Schwartz critiques what he calls the Enlightenment's "monotheism of Reason", arguing that even the diversity of religious forms within Pagan beliefs reflects a post-modern sensibility: "[p]olytheism celebrates diversity and multiple truths rather than a single truth based on a secure foundation" (Eilberg-Schwartz 1989:88).

When applied to questions of personhood, Paganism's emphasis on pastiche, performance and multiplicity can be seen as inheriting what Pike calls post-modernism's "free flowing, decentered view of subjectivity" (Pike 2001:220). Implied in this Lyotardian model of the self is a critique of the essentialism, boundedness and rigidity of Enlightenment conceptions of personhood, and particularly the Enlightenment model of liberal individualism. And yet, Eilberg-Schwartz's depiction of post-modernity appears to show more continuity than break with Enlightenment liberalism. He writes of freedom of thought, diversity and "equal rights and equal access to education and other positions of power" (Eilberg-Schwartz 1989:94) in a way which fails to problematise the epistemological individualism at the heart of these liberal ideals. Flowing from his understanding of Paganism and Goddess religion as reflecting a post-modern "polytheism" that "truth resides in many different traditions", he presents us with a picture of post-modern eclecticism as involving a kind of

multicultural tolerance embodied in the ideal of the "traveller" (Eilberg–Schwartz 1989:94), blissfully free from any structural concerns about racial or economic inequality or histories of colonisation and oppression. The liberal individualist values reflected in his depiction of post–modernity raise questions about the extent to which the 'post–modernism' of Paganism indeed represents a break from Enlightenment conceptions of the self and sociality.

In fact, in place of interpreting Paganism as a post–modern religion, Raphael (1996) prefers to characterise at least its Goddess feminist expression as a religion of late modernity. She suggests that Goddess feminists' project of challenging the mechanisation of Enlightenment science is too self–conscious of its place within what she calls "the grand narrative of patriarchal history" to qualify as post–modern in the Lyotardian sense (Raphael 1996:205). Instead, she aligns Goddess feminist practice with Giddens' conception of 'reflexive' modernity (Raphael 1996:203). She cites Giddens' model of the self–observing self, in which "what the individual becomes is dependent on the reconstructive endeavours in which she or he engages…self–understanding is subordinated to the more inclusive and fundamental aim of building/rebuilding a coherent and rewarding sense of identity" (cited in Raphael 1996:205). Far from the free–flowing self of post–modernity, Raphael suggests that this self–conscious framework in which Goddess feminism approaches the self is much more reflective of a late modern sensibility. At the same time, she critiques this self–reflexive project as leading to what she calls the "radical privatization" of religious experience, suggesting that in "privileging private experience over received, communal synthesis", Goddess feminism:

> …fails to ask the characteristically 'postmodern' constructivist question of whether private experiences of the Goddess might not be mediated, organized by, or at least reciprocally related to communal conceptual structures which would help a woman to identify and value the experience as that of the Goddess in the first place (Raphael 1996:205).

These contrasting threads of 'late modern' and 'post–modern' dynamics of personhood in Paganism are drawn out further below. Yet, however it is diagnosed—whether 'late modern' or 'post–modern'—the relativisation and

'radical privatisation' of religious belief is indeed one of Paganism's most central features.

## Secularism, rationalisation and the individualisation of religion

This relativisation of belief in Paganism can be seen as reflecting a personalisation of religious belief more broadly in contemporary industrialised countries. As Pike points out in her study of Pagan festivals, contemporary Paganism partakes of a general pattern of a "personalization of religion" (Pike 2001:xxiii), which has been particularly prominent in North America since the 1960s. She cites sociologist Phillip E. Hammond, who contends that since "the social revolution of the 1960s and 1970s", institutionalised religion has declined in the US. As a result religion "is more likely to be *individually* important and less likely to be *collectively* important" (Hammond 1992:10–11, see also Pike 2001:xx–xxi). Drawing on earlier social theorists, Hammond refers to this as the "third disestablishment" of religious life in the US (Hammond 1992:10),[6] resulting in what he argues has become a situation of "near absolute free choice in the religious marketplace" (Hammond 1992:168).

This pattern of religion as increasingly a personal choice is of course part of a wider dynamic of secularisation, which has been widely discussed and debated in sociological literature since before sociology was founded. In fact, this idea of a tendency of religion in modernity to take on an increasingly personal, individualised quality was commented on by Marx in 1843:

> [Religion] has become the spirit of *civil society*, of the sphere of egoism, of the *bellum omnium contra omnes*[7]. It is no longer the essence of *community*, but the essence of *division*. It has become...the expression

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[6] The first two 'disestablishments' being the founding of the Bill of Rights following the revolutionary era, and the religious downturn following World War One through to the 1920s, both of which, Hammond argues, constituted "jolts" accelerating a decline in hegemony of establishment Protestant churches and an eroding of the project among these churches of trying to establish an "American Christendom" (Hammond 1992:8–10).

[7] The war of all against all.

> of the *separation* of man from his *community*, from himself and from
> other men…The infinite splits of religion in North America, for example,
> already give it the *external* form of a purely individual matter (Marx
> [1843]1967:227).

Key to this pattern of the individualisation and fragmentation of religious life is an ongoing interplay between religiosity and secularisation in modern industrialised societies. On the one hand, religious belief and practice persists among many people in modernity, particularly in the United States, despite the early institution of political secularisation in eighteenth century North America. According a 2008 study, in the US today, 92 per cent of people believe in God or a Universal Spirit while 83 per cent are affiliated with a major religious tradition (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008b). On the other hand, as many theorists have argued, religious institutions have steadily relinquished their central position with respect to social life in modernity, including their claim on defining morality and knowledge. As Weber argued when he diagnosed the "disenchantment of the world", religious truth and revelation no longer have an official place in modern social understandings (Weber [1919]1991). Landy and Saler have summarised the situation thus:

> For while religious faith continued to exert its hold over the vast
> majority of industrialized souls, its claims had become considerably
> more modest. It now allowed secular law courts to adjudicate matters of
> morality; it permitted scientists to explain away the miracles of nature;
> it dismissed as frauds those whom it had formerly persecuted as
> heretics; and most of the time at least, it delegated cases of possession
> to psychologists and psychiatrists. Stone by stone, the more baroque
> buttresses on the cathedral of traditional belief were being carted away
> to the museum of cultural history (Landy and Saler 2009:1).

While this process is by no means total, this increasing secularisation of the official institutions of modernity has contributed to the "personalization of religion" Hammond identifies; meanwhile religious inclinations continue to have a claim on the beliefs and practices of a majority of people in the US today.

In order to understand the role of personhood in new religious movements such as contemporary Paganism, it is therefore important to place these movements in a context of the political transformations that have taken place with modern industrialisation, which appear to have fundamentally altered the way religion is expressed. By placing religion in the realm of private choice and (at least officially) separating it from the collective institutions of the modern state, industry and science, this dynamic of secularism has individualised religious belief, pushing further the pattern of individualisation that Weber famously identified with Protestantism (Weber [1920]1956). As Weber points out, religion no longer acts as a social binding agent providing overarching coherence to the social order, but has become a matter of private conscience. Fundamentally constituted as a response to these conditions, it should not surprise us if new religions such as Paganism express this democratisation of religious belief in particularly pronounced ways. Since it is as 'private' individuals that Pagans have approached, created, shaped and spread their religious ideas, we must assume that this individualism remains threaded throughout their religious practices.

At the same time, Pagans reject the rationalisation and mechanisation of modern life which has emerged with industrialisation. And in this sense, the rise of Paganism can be seen not simply as a product of the secularisation associated with 'disenchantment', but as a reaction against another set of social processes tied to secularisation: a rising centrality of a scientific worldview in Western ideology, or at least of its most mechanistic expressions, which can in turn be seen to constitute persons as individualised points of rationality. If, as Weber argues, the scientific model of rational causal explanation has displaced religious belief as the central explanatory paradigm of Western modernity, the choice of Pagans to engage in 'magic' and 'witchcraft' must be seen as attempting to reverse this process.

Indeed, despite the fact that most Pagans embrace science and attest to the compatibility of science with their magical religious outlook, it seems that there is a tension between these worldviews which is not always acknowledged

by practitioners. Luhrmann, in her ethnography of London Pagans, identifies the cognitive shifts that take place when Pagans begin to engage in and internalise magical thinking from a starting point of scientific rationalism—a process she calls "interpretive drift" (Luhrmann [1989]1994:340). In embracing a magical worldview, practitioners begin to adopt new approaches to what counts as evidence in helping them to explain the world. The significance of events becomes filtered in new ways, as connections are made between causally separate events in a way which allows magical practitioners to believe they are rationally testing the efficacy of their rituals (Luhrmann [1989]1994:123–86). Meanwhile, what practitioners call "new ways of 'knowing'"—emotional, poetic and intuitive means of interpreting their world—come to take a central place in their understanding (Luhrmann [1989]1994:12,189–283). Luhrmann suggests that these processes allow practitioners to see themselves as engaging in rational activity, in response to the strong hold which faith in their own rationality has upon people in Western societies (Luhrmann [1989]1994:14). And yet, as she contends, despite their protestations, these magicians are also aware that their practice is by and large not recognised as rational or scientific in wider society (Luhrmann [1989]1994:289–96).

There is an interesting contrast at play here. While attempting to justify their practice as according with scientific testability and empiricism, it is clear in Luhrmann's work that practitioners are emotionally drawn to ideas and practices that are not rational by the mechanistic standards of cause and effect recognised in modern science (Luhrmann [1989]1994:12–13). In fact, Pagans draw on means of interpreting the world that are intuitive, non-linear, emotional and holistic, seemingly in order to disrupt received ideas of the 'rational', to engage in what Greenwood calls "learning the language of another mode of reality" (Greenwood 2000:49). This is important when it comes to questions of personhood, since the 'rational' person of Western modernity is intimately tied to the self-consistent, effective, purposeful individual—our object of study. As we will explore further, learning the language of magic is

connected to learning a less individualised, more interconnected way of viewing the world and the persons within it.

The idea of 'witchcraft' plays an important part in this. Central to Pagans' re-conceptualisation of sociality is the figure of the witch as a counter-hegemonic figure.[8] While contemporary Pagans in reality have little in common with those accused of witchcraft in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the witch as a figure of the modern imaginary plays an important role in Pagan self-conceptions. A substantial historical distancing is of course required here from the terror with which the witch was understood in European early modernity, as a socially disruptive boundary-crosser who stood outside the norms of acceptable society (see e.g. Purkiss 1996:91-118). Today, her very marginality lends her a liminal quality that challenges the social order.

Pagan mythic histories frequently depict their religion as the inheritor of a pre-modern nature religion, and associate the historical witch with "[h]ealers, teachers, poets and midwives" (Starhawk 1999[1979]:29). While the witch may indeed have stood outside of, or on the margins of, a community, this is now read as a positive valuation not only of her autonomy and power, but also of her special relationship to the land and her independence from the encroaching influences of the Christian church and of the rising centralised social control of medicine, law and education (Starhawk [1982]1988:199-205).

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[8] It is worth observing that modern Pagans depict witchcraft beliefs as countercultural to the rationalising and reifying effects of the capitalist market and the related individualised forms of personhood associated with 'modernity'. By contrast, a range of anthropological studies have linked a rise in witchcraft and occult beliefs in specific local contexts to the introduction of commodity relations and modern practices of individualised personhood, including to the disruptions associated with the intersection of cash and commodity economies with pre-established social and economic structures (e.g. Taussig 1980, Englund 1996, Comaroff and Comaroff 1998, Eves 2000). The relationship between witchcraft beliefs, capitalism, modernity and personhood is clearly a complex affair involving a range of contrasting and perhaps contradictory dynamics, and a fuller study of how this relates to the way the notion of 'witchcraft' is deployed in modern Paganism is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, the fact that there does appear to be a relationship between these phenomena is intriguing, and suggests possibilities for further study.

Her ability to cross social boundaries is now read as the capacity to connect to all members of society, regardless of their standing, to knit and weave together the social fabric, perhaps behind the scenes; while the fact that she has power over childbirth (and death) places her in a generative capacity that links her to all of life (Starhawk [1982]1988:183–5).

The process of constituting modern Paganism as a countercultural religion has involved Pagans positioning themselves within an array of intersecting ideas about modernity and pre-modernity. While the personalisation of religious belief in recent decades may mean practitioners approach their religion from a highly individualist standpoint, many adopt a counter-hegemonic stance of resisting the individualising, mechanistic effects they associate with modern industry and rationalistic science. The result is a complex array of beliefs about interconnection and individualism, as a closer look at themes of personhood touched on in the ethnographic and Pagan literature will begin to illustrate.

## Personhood and sociality in Paganism

### Belonging: family, community, tribes and ancestors

A useful starting point for themes of relationality within Paganism is the emphasis on "community" and "belonging" threaded throughout the ethnographic and Pagan literature. As we have seen, in her ethnography of US Pagan festivals, Pike suggests that if Paganism is indeed a religion of 'personal autonomy', it is equally a religion in which people seek to form community and to experience and develop themselves from within that community (Pike 2001:xxii). Pagan festivals, in particular, are places where Pagans can feel a sense of "belonging" and have ecstatic experiences only possible in large gatherings of people (Pike 2001:xxiii). "Family" and "tribe" are important notions within many Pagan festivals, signalling the sense of connection practitioners seek, particularly where their families of origin may be abusive or distressing, owing for example to rigid Christian beliefs or homophobia (Pike 2001:222).

Many practices contribute to the development of a sense of community within Pagan festivals. The creation of festival boundaries, of colourful, 'magical' spaces set apart from the mundane world, can lend festivals an air of intensity, while often uniting participants in a mutual sense of their own difference from wider society (Pike 2001:29-37). Cultural borrowing from indigenous earth-based religions, such as Native American and African drumming, invokes an atmosphere of pre-modern 'tradition' that can generate a feeling of tribal identity, while creating "a sense of connection with the past and with other cultural traditions" (Pike 2001:188). Likewise, shared living helps contribute to the sense of mutuality and interconnection, often linking the festival atmosphere to idealisations of life in small communities. As Berger describes this:

> At most festivals there is a dining area or hall, where people communally prepare and share food...the sharing of food—preparing meals and sitting down together—is an important part of creating a village atmosphere. During meals people sit at long tables, talking to old friends and making new ones (Berger 1999:73).

In practice, Berger suggests, this "village atmosphere" can be a tense experience of close living in confined and sometimes crowded spaces (Berger 1999:72). Nonetheless, she contends that Pagans attending these festivals tend to view them as "models for the development of Neo-Pagan community life" (Berger 1999:75).

For many practitioners, the coven or circle forms the heart of their collective Pagan life (Berger 1999:47-64). As we saw with Lilly and Simon, coven life is not simply dedicated to the practice of magic or the transmission of magical knowledge. Belonging to a coven can involve practitioners in each others' lives in intimate ways. As Berger describes, "covens are, among other things, friendship groups, whose role in the formation of networks and interlocking associations is important to understanding the functioning of Wicca" (Berger 1999:52). Involving large time commitments and the intimate sharing of personal stories, hopes and problems, coven life can frequently become the centre of a practitioner's world (Berger 1999:52-8). Berger quotes an oft-

repeated metaphor that "the coven is like a family" (Berger 1999:50); and like a family, she suggests that covens can involve stress, tensions and power struggles (Berger 1999:62). But they can equally be places of mutual aid, in which participants help each other out in times of illness or need. Describing the coven of which she had been a part, she says, "[m]agical rites to send energy for healing were always done, but so were the mundane jobs—picking up food, doing laundry, and helping clean the person's apartment" (Berger 1999:63).

Unlike communities of birth and locality, the chosen communities of Paganism involve an interesting interplay between belonging and self-definition (Berger 1999:67–8). As Pike points out, coming to belong in a Pagan "family" or "tribe" frequently involves a conscious process of breaking with the past and identifying with the new (Pike 2001:123–54). Practitioners often use rites of passage as a means of foregrounding changes in their relationships with their chosen families and communities (e.g. Berger 1999:26–7). Likewise, Salomonsen sees initiation rituals as playing out an "existential dilemma of separation versus unity", bringing the initiate into a sense of belonging with other initiates (Salomonsen 2002:254). While in Reclaiming, initiation is voluntary, so that initiates and non-initiates belong equally to the social group, nevertheless Salomonsen suggests that initiation is seen to transform practitioners' internal qualities, bringing them into new relationships with respect to their religious practice and other initiates (Salomonsen 2002:253–5). Similarly, Pike discusses how practitioners mark their bodies with tattoos and change their names as visible signs of identification with their communities of choice (Pike 2001:132). This is not necessarily a trivial matter, but can involve years of ritual and research into folklore, myths, deities and religions in carving out and coming into a new identity (Pike 2001:132–134). And although a practitioner's identity may be made up of eclectic pieces from a wide array of cultural traditions, this is not simply a free-flowing movement, but involves practitioners in mutual self-definition in relationship with others (Pike 2001:128–31).

A related process of developing a sense of belonging involves connecting with ancestors, with 'the land' and with specific spiritually significant locations. Greenwood describes her encounter with a series of Pagan and shamanic practices which emphasised these dimensions of belonging (Greenwood 2005a:61–85). Coming from a social world in which neither ancestry nor connection to the land is particularly well established, she describes the dissonance that can arise in seeking these spiritual connections (Greenwood 2005a:65–6,78–85). In particular, borrowing shamanic techniques to contact one's ancestors can itself be seen as a displacing activity. She quotes MacEowen, who speaks of the "enactment of traditional shamanic rituals that reaffirm the person's place in his or her family, clan, community and culture" (cited in Greenwood 2005a:76). By contrast with this picture, she suggests, shamanic techniques practiced in Paganism are themselves uprooted from this context of family and clan. The very eclectic nature of modern Paganism, and its lack of clear tradition, can therefore cut against the development of rootedness through spiritual contact with ancestors (Greenwood 2005a:76). Nevertheless, she found that Pagans frequently do emphasise such practices as a way of affirming their sense of belonging:

> Ancestors, who might inhabit a certain landscape, are often seen as a benevolent source of collective wisdom and tradition; they bring order and healing, putting a person back in touch with their own inner nature as well as the environment. Relating to the past helps people locate themselves in the present (Greenwood 2005a:62).

With respect to US Paganism, Pike links tensions over ancestry, and the issue of Pagan cultural borrowing, with what she sees as a broader ambivalence towards ancestry within US culture:

> The preoccupation with ancestors is characteristic of European American Puritan culture that embedded this yearning deep in the American grain. The United States is a culture that simultaneously yearns for and denies its ancestors—yearns for them in order to provide some stability in a relentlessly convulsive society, rejects them as one of the preconditions for success in this economy (Pike 2001:150).

She describes situations in which Pagans attempt to reconstruct 'traditional' practices in their 'pure' forms, often becoming more concerned about maintaining cultural purity than practitioners from these 'traditional' communities. She suggests, "Neopagans thus reflect the ambivalence toward ancestors characteristic of American society when they long for cultural purity, but constantly shape and change borrowed practices to suit their needs as contemporary Americans" (Pike 2001:150). The ambivalence around ancestry, tradition and belonging in Paganism therefore raises broader issues of rootedness and uprootedness in Western sociality, and brings us back once again to the contingencies of the individual's position within a modern economic system. Thus 'belonging' is a central theme in Paganism, but one which is sought in an ambivalent social context.

## Organicity and interconnection

Underpinning this Pagan yearning for belonging is a cosmology which is both radically diversified and organically connective. Pagans hold to an animist theology of 'immanent' sacrality, emphasising an inherent quality of spirit which is present in all things, linking the whole universe like a thread running through the cosmos (a typical characterisation is given in Fisher 2002:77–78). Metaphors such as the 'web of life' abound in Pagan writings, depicting the universe as interwoven through networks of sacred interconnection. Pagans' most common symbol for this interlinked sacrality is 'the Goddess', their central and most prominent image of deity. Pagan writings emphasise that the Goddess is not an entity separate from matter; rather, she *is* the living cosmos, intertwined and constantly changing through its material and 'energetic' interactions. Famous Reclaiming practitioner Starhawk, whose writings have influenced many Pagans, calls the Goddess "the ever-diversifying creating/destroying/renewing force whose only constant is, as we say, that She Changes Everything She Touches, and Everything She Touches, Changes" (Starhawk in Madsen et al. 1989:105). Although many Pagans relate to the personalised image the name 'the Goddess' invokes, this central cosmic divine unity is generally held to be without gender or personhood (Fisher 2002:45–6).

This organic picture of interconnection is complemented by an ecological emphasis on diversity and differentiation. In her ethnography of feminist spirituality, Eller describes her informants' cosmology as simultaneously monistic, pantheistic and polytheistic (Eller 1995:134)—expressing both this sense of interconnection of enspirited matter in the cosmos, and a celebration of diversity given form in individual deities and localised spirits. The many personified deities upon which Pagans draw are seen as aspects of the one ultimate force, just as people are particular elements of the interwoven universe (Farrer et al. 1995:15, Fisher 2002:48–49). As prominent Pagan authors Janet and Stewart Farrer articulate it, "[Pagans] regard the cosmos as a total organism, of which they are individual cells" (Farrer and Farrer 1987:3). They go on to explain the relationship of individual deities to this overall cosmic organism:

> All goddesses are one Goddess, but the cosmic organism is made up of many entities at many levels, some 'bigger' than others. If we are individual cells in that great organism, we must recognize that it also has 'limbs' and 'organs'—multi-cellular entities on a much larger scale than ourselves but still only a part of the whole (Farrer and Farrer 1987:15).

In the spiritual cosmology of Paganism, spiritual entities and deities are interlocked in a great overarching web of 'the Goddess'. And these cosmic relationships mirror a social order in which humans and other entities are seen as cells of a great organism, interlocked within a diverse, ever-changing web of life.

While the cosmic Goddess illustrates an overarching interconnection within the universe as a whole, Pagans also apply this ecological framework to the Earth, which in all its parts—rocks, mountains, trees, animals, molten core and atmosphere—is seen as enspirited and interwoven. Many Pagans draw analogies to the 'Gaia hypothesis' of biologists James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, in which the Earth as a whole is theorised as a single self-regulating system, believing this to be a scientific expression of their own intuitive theology of organic interconnection (e.g. Farrer and Farrer 1987, Starhawk

2004:43, see Adler [1979]1986:303, and Clifton 2006:55 for discussions of the influence of this idea). Indeed, pre-empting Lovelock by several years, the highly influential US Pagan Tim Zell has suggested that his cosmological thesis of Earth as a single unified organism has precedence over Lovelock's (Clifton 2006:55).[9] Unlike Lovelock and Margulis, Pagans generally adhere to an idea of the 'consciousness' of the interconnected Earth organism. Nevertheless, Lovelock's adoption of the name of the Greek Earth Goddess to label his hypothesis resonates with Pagans, for whom Gaia is a conscious, living entity: the mother Goddess of the Earth. Such ecological conceptions of an organically unified Earth are now widespread within Pagan writings, lending scientific-theological expression to Pagans' sense of sacred interrelationship.

Pagans seek to find their place within this sacred web of life. They view as central to their practice a re-engagement of their relationship to 'nature', which is seen to have been severed by conditions of modernity (Greenwood 2005a, Clifton 2006:37-70). As Adler found in her interviews with Pagans from a wide range of backgrounds, most viewed a "reverence for the earth and nature" as a unifying theme of their religious practice (Adler [1979]1986:399). This focus on nature expresses themes of interconnection in two ways: firstly, through emphasising interrelationships *within* the natural world, and second through instilling in practitioners a sense of their own relationship with the world around them. As Goddess feminist Christ expresses it:

> To know ourselves as of this earth is to know our deep connection to all people and all beings. All beings are interdependent in the web of life (Christ 1997:113).

The Pagan emphasis on 'nature religion' aims at developing in practitioners a more relational awareness of themselves, locating them cognitively and emotionally within the networks of relationship they believe exist around them.

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9 Tim 'Oberon' Zell was one of the founders of the Church of All Worlds, an early US contemporary Pagan group founded in 1962, strongly influenced by the publication of Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*. While the group remains small in size, its influence on US paganism has been substantial, most notably through the publication of its journal *Green Egg* from the early 1960s to 1976 (Clifton 2006:145-8).

As Clifton argues, there are in fact several different and sometimes competing ideas of nature operative within Paganism. For the purpose of understanding Pagan practices, he finds it useful to distinguish three analytic categories: in addition to the 'Gaian Nature' of rocks and trees touched on above, he identifies 'Cosmic Nature', and 'Embodied Nature', which he also calls 'Erotic Nature' (Clifton 2006:44–5). Within each of these areas, in Clifton's outline we can find descriptions of several dimensions of interconnection with which Pagans imbue the universe. Under 'Cosmic Nature' are theories of cosmic correspondences rooted in Renaissance magic, such as practitioner Scott Cunningham's articulation of a magical link of identification between the plant horehound, the planet Mercury and the element of earth (Clifton 2006:48).[10] Likewise, through systems such as astrology, and through a magical focus on the cycles of moon, sun and seasons, humans are also recognised as partaking of these cosmic correspondences (Clifton 2006:46–9).

The relationships of Gaian nature, on the other hand, are more likely to be relations of proximity and immediacy, including in a very practical sense. They encompass the biospheric sciences and tropes of organic connection and balance outlined above; and extend to practices of 'going out to spend time in nature', and—for some Pagans at least—a commitment to environmentalism (Clifton 2006:53–57). As the second principle laid out by the Council of American Witches in 1974 reads: "We seek to live in harmony with Nature, in ecological balance offering fulfilment to life and consciousness within an evolutionary concept" (quoted in Clifton 2006:52). Often, Pagans emphasise human dependence upon the Earth to make the case for developing greater environmental awareness. As Fisher asserts, "in the long run the Earth is what

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[10] Tables and charts of such correspondences are commonplace in Pagan books and how-to manuals, especially those with a focus on spellwork. Three of the first four books I pulled from my Pagan bookshelf to check this assumption – all introductory texts on witchcraft – had sections or chapters dedicated to laying out lists of correspondences between seasons, planets, plants, herbs, colours, ritual purposes, semi-precious stones, and so on (Starhawk [1979]1999:283–93, Moura 1996:67–9, Cunningham 1997:159–73).

sustains us and…we are products of our environment" (Fisher 2002:96-7). It is also this immediate, pragmatic kind of relationship Starhawk evokes when she writes:

> People often ask me if I *believe* in the Goddess. I reply, "Do you believe in rocks?"…we do not *believe* in rocks—we may see them, touch them, dig them out of our gardens, or stop small children from throwing them at each other. We know them; we connect with them. In the Craft, we do not *believe* in the Goddess—we connect with Her (Starhawk [1979]1999:103).

As with theories of correspondence, beliefs about the effectiveness of magical activity rest upon invoking these kinds of relationships. As Rountree suggests of the group of feminist witches she worked with:

> Central to their holistic worldview and their theories about magic's efficacy is the shamanistic belief that all things—plants, animals, people, rocks, the elements, and so on—are connected in dynamic relationship" (Rountree 2002:44).

As such, while pragmatic, scientifically-recognised causal relations form the starting point for what we might see as the relationality of 'Gaian nature', these concepts include dimensions of a more mystical kind. Salomonsen's description bridges these dimensions when she suggests that for Reclaiming practitioners, the "building of spiritual connections with the extended family (including people, plants, trees, sun, moon) is regarded as an integral part of the job of growing up and as measurement of emotional maturity" (Salomonsen 2002:285).

Finally, under the concept of 'embodied' nature fall tropes of gestation, fertility and sexual connection, which are highly influential in Pagan cosmology (Clifton 2006:62). These themes focus practitioners on the physical relationships of overlapping and intersecting corporeality that exist between humans in the most everyday sense. And by metaphorical extension, they also draw attention to parallels between human fecundity and earthly fecundity, again projecting humans as connected through their 'erotic' selves to the generative, prolific cosmos (Clifton 2006:61-2). In fact, Pagans often describe the sacred energy

of the cosmos as an erotic energy, an idea which Clifton traces to radical psychologist Wilhelm Reich (Clifton 2006:63–4). Reich's vitalist philosophy rested on an idea of an erotic "orgone energy" extending throughout space via the 'ether' and infusing Earth's atmosphere and all living beings. His ideas became popular among US Pagans in the counterculture atmosphere of sexual freedom in the early 1970s, which in Clifton's words, "gave an intellectual justification to where Paganism—Wicca in particular—was headed in the 1970s" (Clifton 2006:64).

Other themes of interconnection expressed within 'embodied' or 'erotic nature' are more elusive, and relate to the Pagan conception of a fundamental relationship or mirror between microcosm and macrocosm. Greenwood touches on these ideas in her ethnography of British witchcraft and ritual magic. In Paganism, practitioners must learn to 'balance' the internal relationships within themselves in order to become connected to the divine and to channel the powers of the cosmos more effectively (Greenwood 2000:117). This is connected to an idea of magic as a process of healing the self. In fact, a central concern of Pagan practice is healing the practitioner from the impact of pervasive Western cultural dualisms. For Pagans, mind and body, spirit and matter, male and female, 'light' and 'dark' form aspects of the cosmic order which practitioners believe have become separated out and imbalanced in modern societies (Greenwood 2000:85,121,163,200–2, see also Salomonsen 2002:82–4). Through restoring the relationship between these elements within themselves, practitioners believe they are helping restore the balance at a macro level. In this way, they hope to become better channels for cosmic forces (Greenwood 2000:85).

An important dimension to Pagan themes of interconnection can be seen at the cognitive level, in what Greenwood has identified as a mode of consciousness which, following Lévy-Bruhl, she calls 'participation'. Greenwood argues that "[m]agical consciousness is based on analogical rather than logical thought, and involves the association of ideas, symbols and meaningful coincidences", which speak to "an awareness of holistic interconnections and cosmologies"

(Greenwood 2005a:89,91). We can see the ideas outlined above of magical identification between plants, planets and magical purposes as reflecting such analogical thinking. In understanding magical and ritual practices, Greenwood directs our attention to the centrality of altered states of consciousness in helping practitioners access and work in non-linear ways with these connections they see in the universe around them. As one of her practitioners describes this process, "[i]t is a whisper away; it is a shift in consciousness to see the bigger picture and the threads that weave through everything that ever existed" (Greenwood 2005a:98). Rather than viewing magical thought as anti-rational or illogical, Greenwood argues that it is valuable to view participation as another equally important mode of cognition to that of scientific rationality, one which links to the holistic and interconnected worldview Pagans generally espouse (Greenwood 2005a:92).

As Greenwood outlines, processes of developing participatory awareness are often embodied, mythical, artistic or metaphorical, and therefore involve modes of cognition that mean that they cannot always easily be described in words (Greenwood 2005a:95). She describes Gordon MacLellan, a shamanic practitioner who at one point invited her to watch him "dance the spirits" that he has worked with, in some cases for many decades (Greenwood 2005a:93–4). In observing MacLellan's dance, she describes how she felt she could see a communication taking place:

> As the drumming increased, it was evident to me that there was a participatory communication between Gordon and the spirits in the process, the other-than-human was coming through into the human form. At times there seemed to be a non-verbal discussion going on as Gordon's body appeared to act out questions and answers in a swirling profusion of expressive movements (Greenwood 2005a:94).

MacLellan himself describes this experience:

> When I dance, my innermost self becomes still and the movement of the dance sets me free, I become all the spirits that I work with. I see with all their eyes, we enjoy the physical form of the dance. I feel a world that thinks and its presence humbles me and sets me free (cited in Greenwood 2005a:95).

To understand the communication taking place, Greenwood suggests that the processes she describes can perhaps best be seen as operating from an unconscious part of the mind, in which connections and patterns are readily drawn and thought is more automatically relational (Greenwood 2005a:95). Through engaging in such activities involving participatory consciousness "new connections are made, relationships are renewed or created, and a new pattern emerges" (Greenwood 2005a:97).

Greenwood's analysis points us to a central theme of participatory modes of thinking: that they involve overwhelmingly a relational rather than an atomised view of things in the world. Greenwood draws on Tambiah's development of these ideas to suggest that participatory thinking places the person within a totality, whereas causal thinking emphasises "atomistic individualism and distance" (Greenwood 2005a:92). In Tambiah's (1990:84–110) work, he explicitly links these two distinct modes of thought—scientific causation and participation—to two opposing models of social being (while recognising these models can be found simultaneously within one society). Following Lévy-Bruhl, he suggests that, where a scientific causative mode of thinking tends to view things in their separated component parts, participative representations reflect fundamental connections between people and land, animals, each other, and other social beings in their surroundings. He argues, "[p]articipation can be represented as occurring when persons, groups, animals, places and natural phenomena are in a relation of contiguity, and translate that relation into one of existential immediacy and contact and shared affinities" (Tambiah 1990:107). This suggests an important connection between magic and relationality which bears further exploration.

## Will, energy and the otherworld

If the ideas outlined above express how Pagans affirm an inherent relationality in the universe, and how they seek to develop relationships with 'nature' in its various guises, equally important are the processes by which Pagans learn to relate to and channel the spiritual or energetic forces they believe are all

around them. As we have seen, Pagans generally hold to a conception of a dynamic life force running through the universe, animating everything. Greenwood draws a comparison here to the Chinese concept of Tao; like Taoism, the point of Paganism is to act in harmony with this life force (Greenwood 2000:198). Yet where Taoism is based on what she calls a "positive non-intervention with the Tao", Pagans who practice witchcraft "attempt to influence 'the flow' of the cosmic forces" (Greenwood 2000:198–9). The effectiveness of their capacity to do this depends on how well practitioners align themselves internally and how sensitive they are to their place within this flow. Ritual practices are intended to help achieve both: to 'heal' the practitioner of blocks and imbalances and to provide a sacred setting in which to ensure that ritual goals are in line with the cosmic order (Greenwood 2000:117,199).

As Greenwood suggests, this relationship to the realm of magical life force or energy is central to understanding the practice, cognitive framework, and moral outlook of Paganism. This realm, which, following her informants, she terms the 'otherworld', provides the ordering principles and the compass by which practitioners navigate their actions in ritual space, and very often in mundane life. She contends that failing to recognise the otherworld as an ontological source for Pagans places the observer in danger of misinterpreting Pagan practices and misreading their intentions (Greenwood 2000:210–11). In a study of personhood, this becomes particularly important when interpreting Pagan morality and notions of the magical 'will'.

Will is central to magical practice, since it is seen to determine a person's ability to effect change through focused intent. At first glance, Pagan conceptions of the magical will and the moral conditions of its use appear very much to accord with an outlook typical of liberal individualism. For many Pagans, particularly those influenced by Gardnerian Wicca, the central moral

precept is "Do what ye will an ye harm none"[11] (Hutton 1999:248). This injunction, known as the Wiccan Rede, modifies Aleister Crowley's 1929 charge "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law" (Hutton 1999:247–8). Crowley saw every person as a 'star', arguing that:

> In a galaxy each star has its own magnitude, characteristics and direction, and the celestial harmony is best maintained by its attending to its own business. Nothing could be more subversive of that harmony than if a number of stars set up in a uniform standard of conduct insisted on everyone aiming at the same goal, going at the same pace, and so on (cited in Greenwood 1995:194).

Greenwood compares Crowley's notion of will with Nietzsche's will to power; Crowley's conception of will is agonistic and cosmological (Greenwood 1995:194). In Crowley we see a decentring of the subject: Crowley's 'Do what thou wilt' is not simply an individualist claim that every person should be free to do whatever they want, but rather that every human's goal should be, as Hutton puts it, "setting of oneself in harmony with a universe in which all things were probably connected, although humans did not actually know how they were" (Hutton 1999:174). Thus, while Crowley's philosophy of Thelema was highly egocentric, there is an anti-humanist quality to it that can also be seen as cutting against a prevailing liberal humanist model of the unitary, autonomous individual (Greenwood 1995:194). Crowley's striving for moral independence can be seen as much as a challenge to the normative, atomised subject of liberal moral philosophy as it was a reinforcement of an idiosyncratic egocentrism.[12]

In this light, the modifications made in the Gardnerian Rede can be seen as something of a return to liberal humanism. While on the surface this law

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[11] The Rede was authored by Doreen Valiente around the mid-1950s (Hutton 1999:247), the archaic-sounding language lending it an air of mystique. In common parlance this is expressed as, "Do as you will, so long as it harms none". Many variations of language and phrasing can be found throughout Pagan literature, but the sense remains the same.

[12] The conceptions of personhood within Crowley's magical philosophy deserve a study in their own right.

appears more cognizant than Crowley's of the person's relationships with others, the Rede's injunction to harm none also alters the apparent character of the first clause 'Do what ye will'. In fact, the moral quality of the Rede appears to be not very far from John Locke's injunction in his early liberal humanist statement on individual liberty, that "no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions" (Locke [1690]1980:9). Despite the fact that Gardnerian Wicca retains from Crowley a sense of the importance of the practitioner placing herself in harmony with cosmic energies, in discussing the Rede, many Pagans appear to interpret it in a Lockian manner, where 'Do what ye will' is read simply as 'do what you want'.

This conception of 'will' as the desire of an autonomous individual is expressed, for example, in a discussion outlined by Greenwood (2000:203–4), drawing on a series of articles on ethics in the Pagan publication *American Circle Network News*. As one contributor to the journal suggested:

> Your choices may be some of the same things I have chosen, or they may not. One of the best things about paganism is its individuality (Ravenwood 1996).

Another argues, "the Rede's passive nature, as well as its broad interpretations, fail to provide an adequate ethical structure for Paganism as a community" (Scott 1996). In both of these articles, the notion of will the writers see expressed in the Rede is of human action guided by individual desires. Ravenwood sees this as a strength, while Scott is concerned that it provides an inadequate guide to communal action, but in both cases, the view presented of will aligns much more closely with a liberal conception of 'free will' as the choice of individuals than it does with Crowley's agonistic striving towards alignment with cosmic harmony. It is notable that Scott assumes that 'Do what ye will' does not represent an active ethical injunction, as it arguably does for Crowley. Rather, it is the constraint of "An ye harm none" which represents the ethical component of the Rede for Scott (Scott 1996). In this context, the Rede is seen as offering a guide to action which fits unproblematically within a framework of liberal individualism.

This, however, is not the sole way the Rede is conceived within Gardnerian-influenced magical traditions, nor even necessarily the dominant one. Fisher, in her book on Wiccan philosophy, restores to the Rede a sense of the centrality of wider, energetic, cosmic relations, breaking from the liberal framework in which discussions like that in the *Circle Network News* are framed. She says:

> On the surface, the Rede seems simple: don't hurt anybody and you will be all right; you will be within the confines of the Wiccan religion. If we accepted the Rede in this way, we would accept it as a simple, passive guideline. Yet once we start to take the Rede apart and analyze it, we can see that it is actually a very complex and aggressive rule and one that we may have difficulty understanding right away (Fisher 2002:142).

For Fisher, the magical will is very different from the 'individual' desires of a person:

> The recognition of the Will as part of us draws us to the Goddess, since the Will is her mark…When we talk about our Will, we are not talking about what we want at the moment. We are talking about what drives us, what defines us (Fisher 2002:150).

Nor does Fisher view the person driven by their will as an autonomous individual. As she points out, in Wiccan philosophy, what she calls "the Goddess energy that permeates all things" is seen as inherent in every person (Fisher 2002:147-8). In this light, the 'you' in question in the Rede,

> …means 'you as the Goddess'…*Thou* is no longer a single, selfish, autonomous being; it is the Goddess manifest in our own being (Fisher 2002:148).

Furthermore, she gives a description of the Goddess very similar to the energetic conception outlined by Greenwood above:

> Some people call it *chi*, or the Tao, or the Force—but we all understand that it is energy that encompasses a balance and harmony of the spheres…It is simply the energy that provides us with life, nurtures us, and aids us. This force will never lead us wrong (Fisher 2002:148).

Thus we see in Fisher an understanding of will and an interpretation of the Rede very different from the liberal individualist reading above: that a person is

embedded within cosmic relations, and magical will is an expression of these relations. As Greenwood argues, it is through recourse to this energetic, interconnected 'otherworld' that Pagans find their primary moral guidance (Greenwood 2005a:205).

Greenwood's research points us in an important direction in studying Pagan conceptions of personhood: that the flowing energy field of the 'otherworld' must be taken into account. Drawing language from practitioners of a Northern European Pagan tradition, Greenwood describes this engagement with the otherworld as "the power of an individual to negotiate their own life pattern within the larger web of the universal Wyrd" (Greenwood 2000:199). In her description, practitioners engage in a dynamic back-and-forth between a receptive aligning of oneself with universal energetic forces, and an active stance of attempting to direct these forces. In other words, there appears to be an interplay between the person navigating this terrain seen in individualised terms and a perception of the person embedded within a set of 'energetic' relations. This interplay is a starting point for our study of Pagan personhood and what it means for Pagan attempts to develop a more relational approach to sociality.

## Decentring and re-centring the self

Beyond the notion of relational personhood, a second significant dimension to academic critiques of Western liberal models of the self are those which contend that the person is less unified, whole or self-consistent than these models suggest. Anthropologists such as Ewing have argued that, even in Western settings, people are less self-consistent and more multifaceted than this idealised Western model would predict (Ewing 1990). Drawing on Ewing's work, Pike suggests that contemporary Pagans deploy many complex and layered concepts to describe and understand the self, some supposedly given from birth, while others are "culturally constructed and thus more malleable to human will" (Pike 2001:xxii). She outlines four dimensions common to many Pagans' conceptions of the self: a performed self that can be consciously

constructed, and which emerges from interaction with others; a more fundamental personality, which includes characteristics shaped from birth which can be understood through systems such as astrology; an 'astral' self connected to the universe; and a soul which has lived through many past lives (Pike 2001:xxii). This list is not exhaustive, and throughout her work we see references to different aspects of the self of which Pagans make use.

Pike suggests that Pagans are often highly aware of the multiplicity of their personhood and are conscious of shifting between different dimensions of themselves. Pike draws on Charles Taylor's analysis of modernist thinkers whose work, Taylor suggests, shows "an awareness of living on a duality or plurality of levels, not totally compatible, but which can't be reduced to unity" (Taylor 1989:480). Pike argues that:

> Neopagans speak directly to the experience of living with multiple selves when they describe "real," "mundane," "higher," and "child" selves. They tend to be acutely aware of shifts between selves and contexts and even make these shifts explicit (Pike 2001:221).

Accordingly, Paganism appears to provide fertile ground for theorists of personhood whose work on the multiplicity and contextualisation of Western personhood has problematised the Enlightenment liberal model of the person.

Pike explores extensively the flexible, performative dimension of personhood, examining how Pagans use their festivals to reconstruct themselves, their bodies, affiliations, genders and personal histories. As touched on earlier, she likens this to the "post-modern self" described by Lyotard, suggesting that it involves a fluidity and decentring of subjectivity: "a self with no depth or essence" (Pike 2001:220). At the same time Pike's work provides an important corrective to those such as Eilberg-Schwartz who emphasise the flexibility of Pagan personhood at the expense of understanding the limitations of this model. Eilberg-Schwartz's focus on the eclecticism, diversification of belief and stance of anti-orthodoxy within Paganism tends to lead him to imply that Pagans adopt a thoroughly de-essentialised approach to personhood, or at least that their practice leads in that direction. In his characterisation of the

common threads between Paganism and post-modern culture, persons, ideally unbound by any notion that they have the capacity to discern reality from non-reality, are truly free to express or create themselves (Eilberg-Schwartz 1989:93-4). While Pike acknowledges this dimension of Pagan personhood, she outlines many limits to the elasticity of this process: "how difficult it is to unlearn behavior, to be new selves" (Pike 2001:211).

More fundamentally, she suggests that this flexible, self-created self is only a part of the picture of Pagan models of personhood; that there are also elements of stability, self-consistency, and 'inner truth' which Pagans seek to uncover. Indeed, the notion of a 'true' or 'real' self within Paganism provides an important anchor to Pagan personhood which cuts against a post-modern flexibility. As Pike outlines, within the multifaceted layers of the self she describes remains a kernel of a notion of a 'true' or 'real' self which should be excavated and revealed through magical practices (Pike 2001:220-1). She draws on Taylor's notions of 'depth' and 'inwardness' to explain this dimension of Pagan personhood, pointing out that the multiple selves that Pagans relate to are part of the layering of the self Taylor associates with Western modernity (Pike 2001:220). Excavation through these layers in magical work is seen by Pagans as allowing them to uncover their 'real' selves (Pike 2001:221).

Focusing on feminist practitioners, Greenwood, too, points to a concept of inner truth which underlies conceptions of magical practice:

> For feminist witches, the idea of an authentic self is a powerful one...It implies a fluid categorisation, a flexible technique to discover who you really want to be rather than what you should be...The ultimate aim of feminist witchcraft spirituality is the connection with the true self; this liberates the individual's latent power and potential which are developed into 'the magical will' that is seen to be the way, through the 'networking' of covens, to change society (Greenwood 1996:129).

Again, despite the powerful emphasis on re-creating the self that typifies Pagan practice, a certain essentialisation inhabits Pagan conceptions of the

person, suggesting that Western models of a unique, self-actualising individual continue to play an important role within Pagan understandings.

The tendency to inwardness also has important implications for Pagan hopes of developing more relational forms of being, which are touched on by Greenwood. Writing of her fieldwork among London Pagans in the 1990s, she points to limits in her field informants' relationships to the environment, suggesting "there was more emphasis on ritual and psychospiritual 'internal' nature as personal experience rather than a connection to, or even an interest in, the environment" (Greenwood 2005b:70). She points to the way in which Pagans adopt a notion of relating to 'nature' more as a tool for psychological work than for practical relationship:

> Nature, despite the ideology of connection and involvement on a practical level, is seen as a beautiful backdrop against which to practise an intense, intimate and highly emotional spiritual religion. I have witnessed little active interest in the environment. One feminist witch told me that one of her fellow coven members…had told her that nature documentaries on the television were 'boring'. One wiccan, when invited to go for a walk, cried off because it was raining and he might get his feet wet: 'Can't we just visualize it?', he said (Greenwood 2000:113).

While this is not true of all Pagans, it suggests perhaps that a degree of separation between practitioner and environment develops when the practices which purport to enhance the relationships between human and environment adopt an 'inward' focus.

For Greenwood, these developments seem to be inseparable from a general movement of sociality in Western modernity. Discussing fairy stories, which Pagans often use to enhance their sense of wonder at the natural world, she argues:

> [L]anguage makes explicit human values and relationships, and Western cultures have lost the rich description that aids this process in relation to the environment. Perhaps this is due, in part, to the fact that fairy stories, although originating in orally based folk tales, have become part of a literary genre, one that is a stage removed from direct experiences of the land (Greenwood 2005a:166).

She suggests that in general, Western cultures no longer express a participatory awareness of the land or of "knowing the particularities of place" (Greenwood 2005a:166), and so it is very difficult for Pagans to develop a truly ecological outlook of direct, specific relationship with the natural world.

Here Greenwood briefly touches on Reclaiming, suggesting that this community's use of fairy stories is likewise "too anthropocentric" and thus holds problems for developing a truly participatory relationship to nature. She argues that as a result of the Reclaiming emphasis on "individual therapeutic experience combined with political activism…[t]here seems to be little space for reflection on a wider non-human inspirited world" (Greenwood 2005a:167). She goes on to critique the notion of 'the natural' as it tends to be used within groups such as Reclaiming as being overly romanticised and linked to the myth of a pre-patriarchal "past golden age of the Goddess" (Greenwood 2005a:167). She argues:

> The myth rests on the notion of 'the natural' as a way of being in harmony with a nature uncontaminated by alienating patriarchal culture. The language of the Goddess does not sit easily with the more ecological and shamanic Faery aspects of feminist witchcraft (Greenwood 2005a:168).

While there may be some truth in these critiques, they bear further examination. Particularly, her counterposition between human concerns and awareness of nature seems problematic here. If Pagans are attempting to develop a more ecological, relational mode of personhood, we might indeed expect this to have both human and environmental dimensions. In fact, Reclaiming members engage in environmental as well as social activism, as a brief glimpse at Starhawk's website of activist writings illustrates (Starhawk 2002-6).

Greenwood's comments suggest a compelling avenue to explore in understanding Pagan personhood, and possible limitations in Pagan aspirations towards relationality, in the form of the psychologisation of concepts such as 'nature'. Nonetheless, since many Pagans emphasise the

personal and social as well as the environmental dimensions of their project of transformation, and since groups such as Reclaiming seek practical engagement with their social and natural environments as part of this project, this suggests the need for further exploration. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the possibilities of transformation which Paganism offers, it seems important to take account of all three of these dimensions of relationality—personal, interpersonal and environmental—and to assess these practices as both a spiritual and a practical project in practitioners' lives as a whole. This will help us both to assess the Pagan project itself and to explore what this says about Western practices of personhood more broadly.

## Multiplicity and wholeness

In Pike's and Greenwood's work, we see that two seemingly competing notions of personhood seem to coexist within Paganism—that of multiple selves, and that of a 'true' inner self. One of the ways of understanding this further is through the Pagan emphasis on healing, which is an important component of Greenwood's earlier study (Greenwood 2000:117–132, see also Crowley 2000). Among Pagans, healing is not simply a physiological or medical notion, but relates to the spiritual healing of the psyche; in keeping with their holistic philosophy, healing the mind and body are seen as aspects of a single process (Greenwood 2000:121). The aim of this healing is to restore harmony, balance or alignment within the self. As mentioned earlier, this can involve restoring a balance to the socially-distorted dualisms of light/dark, mind/body, and so on, which Pagans see as creating imbalance cosmically, socially and within the person (Salomonsen 2002:82–4). Similarly, many Pagans draw on Jungian psychology to understand healing as integrating different aspects of the unconscious, such as the Shadow, the anima/animus and the 'Wise Old Woman/Man' (Greenwood 2000:125–8). Thus in a range of ways, practices of healing can be seen as aiming to bring multiplicitous, often conflicting aspects of the psyche into 'alignment' or 'integrity' to reveal a more balanced, truer version of the self.

Central to Pagan practices of healing are notions of 'wholeness' and psychic 'unity' (Greenwood 2000:121–2). These concepts are threaded throughout Pagan literature, suggesting that an important goal of Pagan healing is the creation of a unitary, whole individual in possession of itself. Indeed, British Wiccan High Priestess Vivianne Crowley defines healing as "making whole" (Crowley 2000:154). For feminist Pagans in particular, this emphasis on wholeness can be seen as a continuation of feminist aims of advancing women's empowerment in the face of what is seen as a historical domination in "patriarchal" societies (Greenwood 1996:111,125–7). And as Greenwood argues, an awareness of connection and community remain important themes for healing within specifically feminist versions of Paganism (Greenwood 2000:130–1). Nevertheless, these themes suggest the self-possessed individual as an important Pagan ideal, including for feminist Pagans (Greenwood 1996:111).

Healing is an ongoing process. We could argue that a self complete-unto-itself is seen as a goal of Paganism rather than a social reality. Still, the fact that this is a high ideal among Pagans is significant. The whole, healed self is one which is neither in conflict with itself, nor requiring approval from others for its own validation. Such concepts as healing therefore fit comfortably within a model of sociality as comprised ideally of autonomous individuals. Thus we arrive at another version of the tensions we have been exploring within Pagan models of personhood. On the one hand, Pagans aspire to a relational mode of the person seen as breaking with the atomisation of Western modernity; on the other hand, they emphasise 'wholeness' and 'integrity' in a way which seems to reinforce a hegemonic model of Western personhood as individualised.

Yet there is an important corollary to this which might help us begin to unlock these tensions. Greenwood touches on this when she discusses healing in the context of perceptions of social fragmentation and meaninglessness. Citing Foucault, Judith Butler and others, she suggests that:

> According to what have often been termed postmodern perspectives on identities; the self is fragmentary and the site of multiple and potentially contradictory subjectivities—subjectivity is not singular or fixed (Greenwood 2000:118).

Furthermore, following Giddens, she argues:

> In high modern societies personal meaninglessness is a fundamental psychic problem, because modernity disembeds social relationships and traditions have disappeared (Greenwood 2000:118).

For Greenwood, the search for wholeness among Pagans is driven by such a social context of fragmentation and meaninglessness; like Raphael, she cites Giddens' reference to the "reflexive project of self-identity" which emerges from such conditions (Greenwood 2000:118).[13] Thus the goal of healing among Pagans can be seen as a response to a sociality seen as fragmented and impacting on the personal psyche in uneasy ways, quite contrary to the more harmonious models of liberal individualism, in which the person is seen as unproblematically and naturally an individual, with society simply the sum or equilibrium of these social atoms.

Greenwood cites Moore's contention that there is a gap between the model of an individual, autonomous, unitary self and people's lived experience in Western societies (Greenwood 2000:119). As Moore states:

> Many people, I would venture to suggest, have occasions when they find it extremely difficult to conceive of themselves as rational, autonomous and unitary. Western European culture has evolved a number of ways (many of them connected to religious belief as well as to popular psychoanalysis) to deal with the fact that individuals do not necessarily experience themselves as the authors of their own experience and of their knowledge of the world (Moore 1994:35).

Thus the Pagan emphasis on healing can be seen as a reflection of this gap between lived experience and social ideal. In particular, Greenwood contends,

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[13] This analysis of the Pagan project of identity-making in terms of Giddens' theories is also suggested by Pike (2001:223–4) and Berger (1999), though with less emphasis on the problematic nature of sociality in 'high' modernity.

it is a response to the fragmentary effects of modern sociality which lead to a sense of dissociation within the modern psyche. As she claims:

> All magical practices draw heavily on notions of healing as part of their philosophy and way of working...Working in this way is seen to be therapeutic, a way of uniting mind and body and healing the splits of mind/body and the social fragmentation resulting from the pervasive cultural acceptance of this dualism (Greenwood 2000:121).

If Greenwood is right, Pagan aspirations towards wholeness and integrity reflect not a social reality of ontological individualism, but a social reality of fragmentation both between and *within* persons, to which Pagans then respond with practices designed to undo these internalised fractures. If this is a reasonable reflection of the source of the Pagan emphasis on healing and integration, this should cause us to question a model of Western sociality made up of already autonomous, integrated, self-contained individuals. It seems that a greater degree of internal fragmentation is reflected in these Pagan practices than a liberal individualist model would suggest.

It seems significant that the model of personhood Pagans aspire to draws heavily on tropes of self-containment and autonomy, and thus connects directly to this hegemonic Western individualised self. This seems more than coincidence, and we could approach an explanation in two ways. On the one hand, the hegemony of this model of autonomy and self-containment might be seen as generating its appeal as an ideal among Pagans. On the other hand, the hegemonic ideology of autonomous individualism could itself be seen as arising from the same source as Pagan aspirations towards integrity—both emerging as responses against fragmentary social pressures. In fact, from Greenwood's brief remarks, there appears to be a complex, mutually constitutive set of conditions here between practices and ideas of individualism, fragmentation, autonomy and relationality within the broader realm of Western sociality, which demands further investigation.

While reflecting the 'inward' quality which Taylor ascribes to modern persons, the Pagan emphasis on healing the self is not seen by practitioners as simply a

self-absorbed, individualistic process. Rather, as we saw earlier, healing the self is seen as an integral component of restoring balance to the cosmos. As Greenwood argues, "[i]nitially the magician has to heal her- or himself by 'balancing' the microcosm to become a receptacle, a 'form', for the forces of the otherworld" (Greenwood 2000:117). In this conception, the self can be seen as a microcosm of the whole, and action on the self is therefore seen to transform the whole. Likewise, for Pagans, the self is embedded in a network of relationships, a web, and thus self-transformation ripples outward to impact on the whole. As Starhawk contends:

> The concrete reveals the unseen; the microcosm is shaped by the same forces that shape the macrocosm. As above, so below. And so the personal is political: the forces that shape our individual lives are the same forces that shape our collective life as a culture (Starhawk [1982]1988:28).

This interplay between microcosm and macrocosm, between personal and political, suggests that more is going on with practices of healing the self than simply an affirmation of the integrated, self-contained individual. A study of Pagan personhood will require that we keep sight of these connections that Pagans envision between self-work and social and cosmic transformation.

## At the boundaries: conflicts for individuals in community

As the above discussion suggests, notions of individualism and interconnection interplay within Paganism, and intersect in complex ways within Pagan practices and in studies of Paganism. Such ideas are frequently counterposed within the ethnographic literature, as with Greenwood's suggestion in analysing the Wiccan Rede that the writers were calling for "a balance between staunch individualism and communal ethics" (Greenwood 2000:204), or Pike's statement that Pagan festivals are "an opportunity for self-expression and an experience of community" (Pike 2001:13). Indeed, a central theme of Pike's work in particular is that these two poles—individual and collective selves—are often in contradiction with one another in Pagan festivals (Pike 2001:13,210–1,225).

Pike discusses several cases of concerns about sexual harassment at ritual fires, where 'wild' dancing and self-expression, including sensual expression, are encouraged as part of an exploration or remaking of the self. For some, this can be a daunting and overwhelming experience. In some cases, she found that women felt that their free, sensual dancing was interpreted by some male festival-goers as a sexual advance, leading to highly conflict-ridden situations of harassment and perceived harassment (Pike 2001:207–11). She describes one practitioner, Rose, whose friend had been harassed, who felt that people's changes "on the astral" were not realized at a material level. This points again to the centrality of a multilayered analysis of Pagan personhood, but it also highlights what many practitioners see as a tension between individual and community needs. Pike states:

> In Rose's view, this failing was due to the overemphasis on self-realization and the neglect of the needs of the community. When individuals are given complete freedom, she implied, substance abuse, sexual harassment, and other problems are often not dealt with, undermining Neopagan efforts to build community (Pike 2001:210).

Thus we see a counterposition between self-realization, freedom and individualism on the one hand, and the needs of community on the other.

In fact, this counterposition between individual and community can itself be seen as arising from an individualised model of personhood. As Helliwell and Hindess argue, concepts such as 'society' and 'culture', and we might add 'community', serve to "account for meaningful interaction in a system…where such interaction is a problem to be accounted for" (Helliwell and Hindess 1999a:7). Where a relational model of personhood such as Strathern's is employed, the very question of how individuals can form collectives is rendered meaningless, since in such a model, sociality is seen to inhere within the person (Helliwell and Hindess 1999a). It is an individualised model that requires us to explain human interaction by invoking such "mediating conceptual unities", since notions of 'community' and 'society' form the collective corollary to a presupposition of persons as social atoms (Helliwell and Hindess 1999a:7). The problem of how 'individuals' can function in

'community', then, fundamentally stems from an individualised conception of personhood. Where, in Pike's and Greenwood's work, we see a dichotomy between 'individual' and 'community' as a pivot of their analysis of conflict among Pagans, this is an assumption we will want to problematise as we explore further how relational and individualised tendencies interplay within Paganism.

An understanding of these implications of individualist assumptions for social analysis can help us better to see tensions within Western conceptions of personhood themselves, including how these are depicted in the sociological literature. Among other things, it can help us to understand the continuity between 'Enlightenment' and 'post-modernist' conceptions of the self identified in Eilberg-Schwartz's work earlier. Pike provides us with a description which can help us unpack these issues:

> The tension between the pursuit of self-realization and the desire for a place in community is most sharply defined where the self encounters limits in the community. Neopagans seem to have taken the postmodern creed and run with it, only to find that there were limits to where they could go: limits set by their neighbors and limits set by other cultures on the margins of American society. The apparent freedom to reimagine the self at festivals, for instance, in erotic dancing, is ambiguous freedom, casting Neopagans back onto traditional assumptions about gender and sexuality at the same time that gender flexibility and sexual self-definition seem most attainable. Although self-exploration and sexual expression are promoted at festivals, they must be limited by the needs of others, by sexual-harassment policies and advice on safe sex. Rather than an untrammeled realm of sexual and social freedom, sexual and self-experimentation at Neopagan festivals necessitates hard work and results in new regulations of behavior (Pike 2001:225).

This passage is significant for two reasons. First, it points to limits placed upon the Pagan project of self-transformation by inherited social practices, for example around gender and sexuality. But more subtly, it points to the persistent role of an individualised model of personhood in analysing sociality and conflict in Pagan practices. The opposition outlined above between "freedom" and "limitation", and the tendency toward externalised regulation

and policies to mediate conflict, fit very neatly within a liberal individualist model of social contract. Furthermore, in Pike's analysis, these seem to arise directly out of what she calls "the postmodern creed". While many postmodernists critique the unitary model of identity propounded by liberal individualism, we can see from the description above that applications of postmodernist ideas of performance and self-transformation can easily fall back on practices that rest upon assumptions of liberal individualism.

In more politically active Pagan communities, and particularly in Reclaiming, this transformation of the self is not done in the isolation of individual lives. Rather, practitioners place a heavy emphasis on total social transformation towards a sociality of greater interrelation, intended to undo the individualisation of sociality in Western modernity and remove what we might call this 'problem of being-in-relation' altogether. Given this, and given the foregrounding of relational conceptions of the person in Paganism more broadly, Reclaiming provides an ideal site for a study of personhood in the modern West, of the possibilities and limitations of a challenge to Western individualism from within an urban Western setting. In taking up these questions, it will be important to problematise not only the individual, but notions such as 'community', and the way in which practitioners think about conflicts between 'individual' and 'collective' interests.

At the same time, as we have begun to see, the character of 'Western individualism' is highly complex. The self-transformative, fluid performed individualism of post-modernity is not the same as the inwardness of introspective layered selves, nor the atomisation of a fragmented sociality; and all are different from the liberal individualism of the Enlightenment, though they share features in common. In studying Pagan personhood, then, it seems critical to recognize the complexity of 'Western individualism', where it functions more as an ideology or more as a set of practices, and where it is contested or partial or problematised, both within Paganism and in wider society.

## This study

Reclaiming Paganism provides fertile ground for such a study. Possibly more explicitly than the members of any other contemporary Western Pagan tradition, Reclaiming members emphasise transforming the self not as an end in itself, but as a basis for altering sociality as a whole. The most prominent writers and teachers in Reclaiming see themselves as actively trying to unravel the structures of capitalism and resist the cultural conditions of modernity, in particular the atomisation and mechanisation of sociality which they attribute to the rise of modern social conditions. Emerging from the countercultural and radical milieu of 1970s San Francisco, still today, members are active in social and environmental movements, and many see themselves as revolutionaries. As such, Reclaiming, of all Pagan traditions, offers perhaps the most promising prospects for remaking sociality and challenging the individualisation of personhood frequently associated with Western modernity.

Furthermore, like many other spiritual feminist groups, Reclaiming practitioners place a much more explicit focus on social connectedness and interrelationship than most other traditions of Paganism. At the same time, where much of the post–1970s feminist spirituality movement has emphasised 'nurturance' and 'connectedness' as qualities explicitly or implicitly associated with 'femaleness', Reclaiming members generally hold more fluid, less essentialised ideas about gender. This is important in a study of personhood, since it allows for greater possibilities of disruption of the boundaries supposedly cleanly separating 'male' and 'female' persons from one another. Where many feminist Pagans emphasise women-only practice, following prominent founders such as Z Budapest (Budapest 1979), Reclaiming has been gender-inclusive from its foundation. In more recent years, this in turn has opened up more flexible possibilities than many other strands of Goddess feminism permit, including a space for celebrating transgender personhood. Combined with a feminist critique of the individualist model of highly bounded, autonomous, self-contained persons, this suggests compelling possibilities for a challenge to a sociality of liberal individualism.

The following chapters represent an attempt to tackle the complex questions of personhood and sociality expressed within Reclaiming, and what this says to wider practices of personhood in Western modernity. Chapter 2 outlines some background to Reclaiming and its origin in the counterculture and new left milieu in San Francisco. Chapter 3 addresses Reclaiming's practical structures and systems of 'community', and explores questions of power that arise within Reclaiming collective life. The question of how practitioners seek to form relationships and overcome the alienation and separations of modernity are addressed in Chapter 4, taking up Greenwood's contention of the limitations to Reclaiming's ecological framework, alongside questions of the interiorisation of consciousness and issues of wholeness and social fragmentation touched on above.

At the heart of Reclaiming life is a desire to create a way of life of interconnection and wonder, against the disenchantment of modernity. Chapter 5 explores Reclaiming members' attempts to re-enchant the world, particularly in the intensive setting of the week-long 'witchcamp' festival retreats. Here I take up questions of rationality and rationalisation, and explore further the notion of cognitive 'participation' put forward by Greenwood and Tambiah. Finally, in Chapter 6, I return to the issues of gifts and commodities touched on in the Introduction, looking at Reclaiming relationships to objects and what these say about wider systems of sociality in capitalist modernity. These questions have been surprisingly little explored in the Pagan literature, given the centrality of 'things' to Pagan life. The theories developed by anthropologists of personhood can help us understand the importance of objects within Paganism and recognise the work being done by Pagans in their emphasis on materiality and exchange of objects. I come back to address what this says about structures of personhood in the modern West, and the possibilities that exist for challenging these structures.

# Chapter 2

## LIVING BETWEEN WORLDS:
## social myths and urban realities in "the last free state"

*Careful now.*
*We're dealing here with a myth.*
*This city is a point upon a map of fog;*
*Lemuria in a city unknown.*
*Like us,*
*It doesn't quite exist.*
*—Ambrose Bierce, c.1900*

*San Francisco is 49 square miles surrounded by reality*
*— Paul Kantner, Jefferson Airplane*

## Forty-nine square miles surrounded by reality

### On fog and poverty

San Francisco is a beautiful and difficult place.

When I first arrived in the city known as 'The City' I thought I could become anyone I wanted to be. Walking down Haight Street and Mission Street, ducking into thrift stores with their mountains of low-cost clothes, proffering styles from any of the last seven decades; exploring a new persona through street wear and ritual dress, these small acts felt like windows onto endless possibilities for becoming a new version of 'myself'. Ahead of me lay witchcamps, new friends, my first encounters with the Reclaiming community I had admired through books and websites and discussed with Pagan activists and spiritual feminists ever since I first picked up Starhawk's *Dreaming the Dark*. It only occurred to me years later that I was simply doing what generations before me had done. I had come to San Francisco looking for something.

Much has been written about the intriguing qualities of the city of San Francisco and its Bay Area surrounds. Discussing my thoughts on this chapter with a Reclaiming friend, she told me of a saying, "People go to New York to be somebody; they go to L.A. to be someone else; but people come to San Francisco to be themselves." An internet search of famous quotes pertaining to this much-adored city turns up a wealth of appreciative and occasionally satirical quotations on its natural and elusive beauty and its striking social diversity. Some of these make social metaphors of the enigmatic weather; at the turn of the previous century, poet Ambrose Bierce likened San Francisco and its inhabitants to the mythical lost land of Lemuria, drawing attention to the ineffable qualities of a city that is "a point upon a map of fog" (quoted in O'Reilly et al. 2003:vii). Others describe San Francisco as a welcoming, open city. In an anthology of writings on the city, a tour guide of a self-consciously sardonic tour of San Francisco's back alleys and long-standing excavation sites seems to lose her sense of irony in introducing the tour participants to a city where she suggests that as early as the nineteenth century the "pursuit of happiness, more than the pursuit of power and prestige, had staked its claims here" (Lubell et al. 1998:141). Another author in the same volume gives a more pragmatic reading of San Francisco's famed habitability:

> San Francisco is renowned as a beautiful, vibrant, livable city. But it was not always so: nineteenth-century San Francisco was excoriated as a wood yard of unusual extent and, later, as a scene of vulgar display by the newly rich. And it would be less admirable today were it not for an extraordinary popular upheaval against the wrecking ball and new construction. Nowhere else in America was such opposition as successful as in post-war San Francisco, and this revolt conserved much of what makes the city livable (Walker 1998:1).

Yet, more than the individual threads of geography, history or its social character, San Francisco is loved for the joyous impression it has left upon many who visit or inhabit it. Author William Saroyan captured this sentiment:

> No city invites the heart to come to life as San Francisco does. Arrival in San Francisco is an experience in living" (quoted at S.F. Heart 1997).

Pagan authors generally concur with the admiration other writers have shown for San Francisco, making explicit what they see as the magical qualities associated with its natural and social geography. In a fictionalised account, Starhawk describes the impressions of her novel's protagonist on waking in San Francisco for the first time:

> From her perch on the roof, the city stretched out before her, white and gleaming in the mist-filtered light, seductive as a veiled dancer. The hills to the west rose like gold-crowned islands through a sea of fog. To the east, the spires of downtown hovered over the Bay, magical towers, fantasy palaces of elves and queens. Karla wanted to run out and enter the city, be enfolded in its embrace, give back in turn some spectacular act of love (Starhawk 1997:93).

A book for Pagans and shamans practicing in urban environments lists San Francisco as a:

> ...magical city, nestled by one of the most beautiful natural bays in the world, but teetering, as well, on the edge of a powerful fault line. Here, a polarity of energies is at work, the giving mother ocean and the unforgiving San Andreas Fault. This sometimes-volatile mix has made this land to be a center of creativity, arts and tolerance, a pioneering city in the dawn of the Age of Aquarius (Penczak 2001:289).

This author describes the city as "the womb" of the rebellious social movements that characterise its history (2001:290), as though the city itself has a power to generate human social realities.

Yet, despite these "magical" qualities, like any urban centre in a modern, industrialised setting, San Francisco is a site of steep contradictions. Huge houses in the wealthy Northern neighbourhoods look out onto shining white vistas of mist-laced buildings. Surrounded on three sides by shimmering water rimmed by golden hills, the city's size is held to natural limits by the confines of its geography. Although the Bay Area is peopled by several million, San Francisco itself holds less than a million people; as a world-class city it is nothing on the scale of a Chicago or a London. Yet this modest-sized city has the dubious honour of being the second most expensive rental location in the

United States.[14] For decades, and more rapidly since Silicon Valley left its economy awash in 'dotcom dollars', San Francisco's mythical drawing power and measurable scale have made it the beloved home of an increasingly exclusive and affluent professional middle class.[15]

In the valleys of the South Eastern pockets of the city, poverty lines the streets. The generally fine weather is poor consolation for the thousands who sleep out, many having done so since public housing and mental health facilities were defunded in the 1980s (Fagan 2006). Many more low income residents find making ends meet a source of anxiety and strain: even before the economic crisis unfolded in 2007, incoming waves of high income earners and unprecedented eviction rates during the dotcom era left in their wake homelessness and immense housing pressure. For many, social security or minimum wage is insufficient to cover the cost of living. Early in my fieldwork, a close friend of my housemate moved to Texas to live with his son, since at seventy years old, his pension could no longer cover his rent, and he was unable to find a job.

Reclaiming members are dispersed throughout the Bay Area, but the heart of the San Francisco community is the Mission District, where a concentration of Reclaiming households is clustered. A world within a world, the Mission refracts these wider contradictions through its specific history as a working class Latino neighbourhood. One of the oldest European settlements in

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[14] Data on California and San Francisco demographics and US comparisons are drawn from the US Census Bureau 'American Community Survey'. The data are generally from 2008, the most recent year available at the time of writing; comparisons between cities such as rental rates are drawn from 2003, the most recent available date for ranking tables at the city level (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

[15] Income comparisons show the median household income in San Francisco in 2008 to be $71,957, compared to a median US household income of $52,175. One quarter of full-time workers in San Francisco earn more than $100,000 per year, compared with ten per cent of full-time workers across the US. The proportion of San Francisco residents holding a Bachelor's degree or higher is almost twice the national average: 51 per cent, compared with 28 per cent for the US as a whole (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

California, its wonderful and fraught social history is written into its structures, in murals painted on the walls of houses and community buildings, in public celebrations for the Mexican Day of the Dead and Cinco de Mayo, in its churches and pretty Victorian housing, and in another sense in the filth accumulated from heavy traffic and a lack of public trash collection. The marks of urban blight are visible in the police traffic, people sleeping in the street, and the occasional human faeces on the pavement.

The challenges facing the poorest layers suggest that for some, this 'unreal' city is likely all too real. As I wrote to a friend of mine shortly after moving here:

> Here in my neighbourhood, there are 15 undocumented day labourers who stand around on the street corner at the end of my block, waiting for someone to pick them up and give them $20 to help them move some furniture. Some days they might get lucky. Some days they will walk home with nothing…
>
> Getting on the bus is another telling experience. Up the front, they have areas reserved for people with disabilities. So many people are there. Half-blind people with walking difficulties. People with mental illnesses…Old people whose teeth are bad, and clothes are scrappy and ill-sized. So much poverty and untreated illness.

The neighbourhood's rich and troubled heritage is threaded into the woodwork. The old Mission Dolores sits at the northwest corner of the Mission District, a standing reminder of when the state was 'Alta California', long before it was wrested from Mexico by war. Originally dedicated to missionising the Ohlone Native American people, it is now a marker of two major waves of colonisation, and many smaller waves of economic dispossession that have followed, displacing working class communities of colour (Association of Bay Area Governments 2009:32). Nevertheless, the Mission's Latino heritage remains one of its enduring features. Spanish and English play out contrasting tempos on store windows and churches, while workers in businesses, banks and community agencies are generally bilingual or multilingual, serving a diverse multiracial community.

Though many working class households remain, the Mission is a neighbourhood becoming gentrified. A rapid acceleration of household evictions during the dotcom decade of 1990–2000 witnessed the formation of organisations such as the Mission Anti Displacement Coalition in an attempt to stem the tide. Despite the slowing of this displacement as the boom came to an end, from 2000 to 2006 the Mission region saw over a fifty per cent reduction in very low income households and an eighty per cent reduction in low income households (Association of Bay Area Governments 2009:37). While many families and community organisations have sought to resist this process through lobbying and protest, for the most part, new high-cost restaurants, businesses and renovated houses spring up unopposed.

The Mission neighbourhood has long held an attraction among the arts community and other people seeking 'alternative' lifestyles. In this context, many older Reclaiming residents were part of an influx in the 1980s of what one Reclaiming teacher, George, describes as the 'déclassé middle class': well-educated but generally lower-income people whose politically left-leaning lifestyle trumped a desire for career or professional advancement. Many of this generation of Reclaiming residents of the area bought their houses before prices soared in the 1990s. Others have lived in place long enough that rent-control laws have limited the impact of rental increases. Nevertheless, eviction by owners wishing to occupy or renovate older houses remains a possibility; as I write this, this has recently caused the dissolution of one of the former mainstay Reclaiming houses in the northwest of the Mission. At the same time, as a layer of Reclaiming community members have risen in professional standing, become reasonably settled and modestly affluent later in life, some have surely become themselves part of the gentrification of the neighbourhood.

The hub of San Francisco Reclaiming is a collective household where several community elders and priestesses live with partners, children and animals. The household has an open-door policy, and many friends and community members drop by to visit each day, staying for cups of tea or meals or just to

'hang out'. Upstairs, an attic has been converted to a dedicated ritual room, which is often booked for Reclaiming classes and other community events. Elsewhere in San Francisco, the community members identify with their more public home territory in the Ocean Beach and parts of Golden Gate Park, where many of the public rituals are held each year. Beyond San Francisco, clusters of Reclaiming members can be found in Berkeley, the North Bay, and Sonoma County. And further afield, the Mendocino Woodlands is for many a home-away-from-home, a camp retreat amidst the quiet Redwood trees where California witchcamp is held each year.

Overlooking the Mission Valley from Dolores Park on a summer afternoon, the pale houses and the distant stands of downtown high-rises shine white in the sun. The afternoon fog rolls in from the West, curling its tendrils down the hillside behind. Perhaps it is the fog, as Bierce once provocatively described, which lends the city its mystical quality. Or perhaps it is the quality of the gleaming light: whatever time of year, however dark the paintwork on a given building, the unmistakeable architecture shines in pastel hues reminiscent of Mediterranean cities of old, the sky stretching a pale arc above. Surrounding this eerily iridescent landscape on three sides, the waters of the Bay and the Pacific Ocean glow mother-of-pearl amidst the yellow-green hills, while to the North, fog rolls in to embrace the vermillion struts of the Golden Gate Bridge.

## California is a state of mind

To many people living in the Bay Area, California, and Northern California in particular, can appear as something of an exception in the general pattern of what is too loosely labelled 'American culture'. Known as the 'Left Coast City', San Francisco and surrounds represent one of the most liberal regions in the country. It was fairly common at the time I began my fieldwork in 2006 to hear pride expressed at the perceived open-mindedness of the Bay Area and California populations, and a level of disdain for the remainder of the US. As one anarchist friend of Reclaiming greeted me upon learning I was new to the region: "Welcome to the last free state in the Union".

There is some truth to this idea of a 'Northern Californian culture' which is more liberal, sexually open, nature-oriented and spiritually alternative than is typical for much of the United States, although the history of this is complex. In the decades immediately before and after the Second World War, alternative spiritual, literary and artistic communities grew up in California around places such as the hot springs at what is now known as Esalen. Many of these alternative spiritualists expressed what one author describes as "the 'obscene' eroticism, nature mysticism, experimental poetry, and adventure novels of a Pacific Coast literary culture" of writers such as Steinbeck, Huxley and the San Francisco Beat poets (Kripal 2007:34). From such milieus, European-Americans began to explore Asian religious practices, psychology and psychical research, giving early expression to practices focussed on developing what Huxley called "human potentialities" (Kripal 2007:69–156), which later became more widely popularised with the spread of new religious movements.

In a similar vein, Clifton states that one of the earliest Pagan festivals in the US, Feraferia, "emerged from a utopian California subculture of simple living, minimal clothing and 'natural' foods that predated the better-known 1960s counterculture by at least thirty years" (Clifton 2006:142). One of this festival's founders lived on a commune in California in the mid-1950s "where a group of families celebrated seasonal festivals, practiced nudism, and experimented with entheogens[16]" (Clifton 2006:142). While communities such as Esalen and Feraferia grew up in conversation with similar experiments elsewhere in the US (Pike 2004:67–73, Clifton 2006:11–33), they helped shape Northern California as, among other things, a destination for alternative spiritual seekers, laying a basis for the social, sexual and spiritual experimentation of the counterculture movement and later groups such as Reclaiming.

Combined with the political liberalism of the Bay Area, such a backdrop of social experimentation can help create an appearance among those seeking alternative lifestyles in Northern California of a wide social and cultural

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[16] Hallucinogenic drugs used for spiritual purposes.

divergence between themselves and the remainder of US society. Many Bay Area Reclaiming members feel they can be more open about their Paganism, their sexuality and their political views than they would feel comfortable being elsewhere in the country. In the last few years of the George W. Bush administration, as frustration grew among liberal-minded voters about the Iraq war and a perceived erosion of civil liberties and social services, my field informants commonly spoke about the 'Red State/Blue State' (Republican/Democrat) divide that they felt existed across the country, outside of what is often called the 'San Francisco bubble' of liberalism.[17] Rose Aguilar, a self-described San Francisco liberal, captures this sentiment in her 2008 book *Red Highways: a Liberal's Journey into the Heartland*:

> [A] conversation [with Republican voters] got me thinking about how small my bubble really is. As a journalist living in San Francisco, just 40 miles south of Petaluma, I rarely met people who supported George W. Bush or the invasion of Iraq. In my corner of the world, no one could understand how anyone could vote for Bush. "Who are those people and what is happening to our country?" became something of a mantra for despairing citizens, but no one seemed to have any answers (Aguilar 2008:2).

Many San Francisco residents also reject the Democratic Party as too conservative and pro-business, and in the early 2000s supported the Green Party as a political alternative (Aguilar 2008:6). This is the pattern within the radical wing of Reclaiming, where both mainstream parties are often viewed as two sides of the same 'two-party system'. These dynamics create a sense of political exceptionalism in the Bay Area, which holds a powerful influence within groups such as Reclaiming, where members feel strongly that their values, assumptions, and ways of life stand in opposition to those of 'mainstream America', and particularly the America of the 'heartland'.

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[17] This sense of a Red State/Blue State divide was significantly eroded among those community members I spoke to around the time of the 2008 election, as Obama's campaign drew mass participation across the country, most counties in the US shifted in the direction of the Democratic Party, and states such as Virginia, North Carolina and Colorado voted majority Democrat (New York Times 2008 provides a useful breakdown of the 2008 election results).

Nonetheless, a large dose of caution is demanded in identifying any kind of specifically 'Californian culture' out of these threads of liberalism and libertarian humanism. Defending an influential work he co-authored in the 1980s on American individualism, *Habits of the Heart*, against a mistaken charge that its sections on the psychotherapy movement were California-centric, Robert Bellah once suggested that "California is not a place but a state of mind, the middle-class American mind" (Bellah 1988:288). His comments ring a cautionary note on two fronts. California is the wealthiest and most populous state in the United States, and, alongside other regions such as New England, it possesses a kind of hegemony in US political, economic and cultural life that can at times make it seem more of a 'centre' than other parts of the country, more of a source of cultural values than a recipient. Yet Californians are, consciously or otherwise, heavily embedded in, and in conversation with, wider geographic and social surrounds—not only the rest of the US, but with the world, most significantly with those countries to the south with which a third of the state's population hold ethnic ties (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

And just as pertinently for our purposes, much of what passes for 'Californian culture' is in fact typical of only a particular stratum of the Californian population: the urban, educated, predominantly white middle-class. This is in fact the stratum from which Reclaiming has emerged, and much of what can be said of 'Northern Californian culture' in this narrow sense could also be said of Reclaiming. And yet the Bay Area is also famously the historical locus of a capitalist elite, of union resistance, Black urban rebellions and immigrant struggles, of waves of immigration from around the world and from elsewhere in the US. There are many important influences which have shaped the cultural history of the region. In a study which aims to trace the specific dynamics of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic social practices, it is essential to recall that the white middle class, though arguably socially dominant within and beyond California, cannot by any means be taken as representative of a totality of people's lives in the Bay Area, much less in the US as a whole.

# Individualism and communalism: religious and political context

## Religion in the United States

An important backdrop to this study is the wider context of religiosity in California and the US. Theories of secularisation in the social sciences have long held that religious belief and affiliation have a tendency to decline with industrialisation and modernisation (Bruce 2002). While the explanatory power and testability of these theories have been much debated, their most general observation—that people living in industrialised nations tend to be less religious either than their historical counterparts or others in developing nations—is difficult to dispute. Yet the US is one of the major exceptions to this broader pattern. By all measures, the US, while the wealthiest and perhaps the most industrialised nation in the world, is also one of the more religious—more comparable to Poland and Iran than to Germany or Japan (Rees 2009). Among industrialised countries, US residents display comparatively high rates of religious belief, prayer and worship attendance and comparatively low rates of atheism and agnosticism; only Ireland can claim higher rates of religiosity than the US, and then on only some of these measures (Paul 2005).

According to a 2008 survey on US religious life, nearly four in five Americans are Christian, and two thirds of these are Protestant (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008b:8). Given findings that Protestants in the US tend to be more internalised and personalised in their religious orientation than either Jews or Catholics (Cohen and Hill 2007), this centrality of Protestantism to US religious life helps set a broader cultural tone around religiosity as personal belief and direct relationship with God. Yet the depth and nature of religious belief in the US is highly variable. While 92 per cent of Americans believe in God or a universal spirit, only 39 per cent attend weekly worship services; over one quarter of Americans seldom or never attend worship (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008b:26,36). Among different denominations and religions, those affiliated with evangelical and

historically Black churches are significantly more likely to attend weekly services than either Catholics or mainline Protestants, while Jews, Buddhists and Hindus are still less inclined to do so (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008b:36). Those associated with evangelical and historically Black churches are also more likely to pray daily, believe in miracles, and feel that religion is very important in their life (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008b:23–52).

Regional variation is significant here. Evangelical Protestants and those from historically Black churches—denominations that overall show a higher degree of religious piety—are most heavily concentrated in the South (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008a:69,90).[18] Likewise, Southerners are more likely to describe themselves as theologically conservative than other Americans, and are more than twice as likely to believe in an authoritarian God than those from the Western states, who more often believe in a benevolent or a distant God (Baylor Religion Survey 2006:17,29). Meanwhile, the Western states reflect a higher degree of religious pluralism than the US as a whole: only 38 per cent here are Protestant, compared with two thirds of Southerners, while these states have the highest concentrations of Buddhists, Unitarians, Agnostics and Atheists of any region in the US (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008a:69,90).

California, with its significant Latino population, has a relatively high concentration of Catholics (31 per cent). At the same time, one in five Californians claim no affiliation with any religion (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008a:100). While non-Christian religious affiliates represent a fairly low percentage of the California population overall (7 per cent), this population—particularly Buddhists, Jews, Hindus and Unitarians—is significantly higher than most other states, and represents the second highest concentration of non-Christian religious believers outside of the North East.

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[18] Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses also tend to hold very committed religious views (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008b:23), but they are a much smaller proportion of the population in most states.

Given the relative degree of religious pluralism in both the North East and the West, it should not surprise us that these are the regions where alternative religious traditions such as Paganism have most flourished.[19]

Two recent cross-national studies comparing religiosity and social indicators can help account for the relatively high religiosity of the US, while shedding light on some of the dynamics of sociality surrounding patterns of religiosity and secularisation. Gill and Lundsgaarde (2004) found that state welfare spending explained the observed variation in religiosity between the countries they studied better than any other factor they tested associated with industrialisation, including degree of urbanisation, literacy, television, and level of religious regulation. They hypothesise that low state welfare provision makes people more likely to attend religious services to receive support. At the same time, they report:

> People living in countries with high social welfare spending per capita…have less of a tendency to take comfort in religion, perhaps knowing that the state is there to help them in times of crisis (Gill and Lundsgaarde 2004:425).

Similarly, Rees (2009) suggests that personal insecurity (measured by income inequality) could be a key driver of religious practice. Comparing frequency of prayer (as a measure of religiosity) with income inequality across 55 countries, he found an inverse correlation between these factors that explained most of the observed variation in religiosity, although in this case the US remained an outlier.

There are of course many factors by which people come to hold the religious beliefs and engage in the religious practices they do. In the US, tradition, ethnicity, education and income all play a strong part in shaping religious

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[19] In fact, North-Easterners are the most superstitious population in the US, believing more than any other regional group in haunted houses, telekinesis, psychics, astrology and communing with the dead. At the same time, those alternative beliefs most closely associated with the New Age movement – such as claimed UFO sightings and the existence of Atlantis – are found most often in the West (Baylor Religion Survey 2006:45-7).

practices (Baylor Religion Survey 2006, The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008b). But if these studies are correct, the relatively high degree of personal insecurity and low level of state welfare contribution may contribute to religion's drawing power in the US. And these findings point to a second dynamic pertinent to this study: the ideological individualism underpinning mainstream political discourses around such issues as income redistribution and welfare spending, which contributes greatly to wider patterns in US sociality.

## Variations on 'American individualism'

Such patterns of political and social individualism provide a central dynamic of the wider US social framework, which has helped shape communities like Reclaiming. As *Habits of the Heart* puts it, "[i]ndividualism lies at the very core of American culture" (Bellah et al. 1985:142). Shain points to the prevalence of such statements in academic and popular writing, quoting public commentators who have made claims like "the animating idea of the American Founding was individual liberty" and "this country's originating ideas were…notions of individual autonomy" (cited in Shain 1994:10). Certainly, coming in as an outsider, it was hard not to see more individualistic tendencies in my everyday experience compared to what I had known in Australia. Ideas of 'rugged individualism' and the 'American dream'—of success through individual hard work—pervade television shows and news reports. Commentaries on health care playing in the media throughout my fieldwork years tended to depict the country's largely privatised system as reflecting individualistic values. Conservative commentators frequently disparaged the rising influence of the Democratic Party as an unhealthy sign of 'creeping socialism' which would erode the individualist economic and social base of US life. Unlike most industrially developed countries, the US has no prominent labour or socialist political party, so political ideas are commonly expressed in terms of the poles of liberalism and neoliberal conservatism, both of which are underpinned by an individualist epistemology. Furthermore, the relatively low level of state welfare across many sectors seems to have generated among

many poorer working people I spoke with an uncertain atmosphere that at times feeds an ethos of 'looking out for number one'.

A central tenet of much writing on the subject is the supposedly foundational influence of individualism in US politics. In *Habits of the Heart*, four major strands of individualism are identified as core to US political culture. The historically precedent of these—what the authors call 'Biblical' and 'Republican' individualism—are seen as having been particularly influential around the foundational revolutionary era, placing images of "the active citizen contributing to the public good" and "a notion of government based on the voluntary participation of individuals" at the core of US political life (Bellah et al. 1985:142). By contrast, 'utilitarian' individualism, exemplified by Benjamin Franklin, focussed on the idea that the social good would emerge from each person's pursuit of self-interest (Bellah et al. 1985:33). Finally, what the authors call 'expressive' individualism started as a reaction against utilitarianism in the mid-nineteenth century literary and social renaissance, among writers such as Thoreau and Whitman (Bellah et al. 1985:33). While the authors here propose a re-working of US political culture to draw on what they view as the more civic-minded, collectivist strands of the earlier individualisms, they nevertheless argue that individualism in some form is indispensable to US life. Abandoning individualism wholesale, they contend, "would mean for us to abandon our deepest identity" (Bellah et al. 1985:142).

When we take a closer look at the dynamics of individualism in the US at the level of popular culture, we likewise find not one individualism, but many patterns of individualism that cross-cut each other, sometimes reinforcing and at other times contradicting each other. US popular cultural figures of the individual include the lone wanderer of the Wild West, the pioneer, the 'self-made man', the entrepreneur, the inventor, the rugged detective and the eccentric artist, writer or millionaire. While these figures share some characteristics, such as self-sufficiency, there are also important differences between them. They rely on very different facets of individualistic behaviour, from emotional expressiveness to utilitarianism to gritty self-determination.

More empirically, in Kusserow's research on childrearing in three communities in New York, she likewise found very different patterns of individualism operating according to the background of her participants. Among working class communities, what she calls a "hard defensive" individualism of perseverance and 'standing your ground' or a "hard offensive" pattern of self-determination and 'breaking through' typified parenting styles (Kusserow 1999:555). These were in striking contrast to what she calls the "soft offensive" individualism typical of the upper middle-class, where ideas of uniqueness and self-esteem, 'blooming' and 'blossoming' characterised child-rearing. Such research reminds us that a study of personhood should explore not simply whether or not certain behaviour is individualistic, but what kinds of individualism operate, where, and in what ways.

Kusserow's research aside, these popular characterisations of individualism are most often gendered male, white, and socially located in the middle class or among the wealthy. Indeed, much academic writing on US individualism has likewise emerged from descriptions of, and research involving, a well-educated, professional, largely white social layer (see for example Bellah et al. 1985:viii, Taviss Thomson 2000:7).[20] Yet, as we dig deeper, we can find important differences of class, race and gender operating to shape sociality. The figure of the entrepreneur, for example, sits at the head of a large corporate body of people whose 'individualism' may be more in question. As Ouroussoff's (1993) research in a British manufacturing firm found, manual workers in a large corporation seemed less inclined to apply individualised conceptions to themselves, and less likely to be thought of by managers in individualised terms, than the view these managers held of each other. To the extent that there may be parallels between this British firm and US corporate life, this suggests some caution in assuming that popular US ideas of success through individualistic striving apply equally across all social classes. Other authors have similarly called into question the applicability of assumptions

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[20] For critiques of *Habits of the Heart* along these lines, see for example Albert (1988), Harding (1988) and Di Leonardo (1991).

about individualism across lines of gender (e.g. Gilligan [1982]1993) and race (e.g. Gaines et al. 1997, Komarraju and Cokley 2008).

Kusserow likewise suggests we should be cautious about applying too totalising an assumption of 'individualism' altogether when analysing US culture. Having witnessed many sociocentric practices such as shared child-watching alongside more individualistic practices, Kusserow suggests a need to recognise that "individualism does not preclude sociocentrism" (Kusserow 2004:71-2, Kusserow 1999:545). She argues against what she sees as overly dichotomised notions of 'Western' individualism versus 'Eastern' sociocentrism that she believes characterise the social science literature (Kusserow 1999:541-53). While it seems there is something to the notion that US sociality tends towards comparatively greater individualism than is typical elsewhere, it is worth recalling that these patterns are always complex, contested and incomplete.

## Puritanism and capitalism

One of the central tenets of much literature on individualism in the United States is that the prevalence of individualist tendencies in US political and social thought is tied to the centrality of Protestantism, dating back to the earliest British settlements in New England. In this view, industrialism and early capitalism arose from a social base of Protestantism and the individualism which Protestantism tends to engender in its adherents, for example through its emphasis on a personal relationship with God outside of the mediating requirements of church or clergy (Cohen and Hill 2007:710). Writing in the 1830s, the French social observer Alexis de Tocqueville, in a widely-quoted treatise on democracy and individualism in US society[21], observed:

> [T]he early settlers bequeathed to their descendents those customs, manners, and opinions which contribute most to the success of a

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[21] The translation of de Tocqueville's work represents one of the earliest uses of 'individualism' in the English language, and perhaps the first known application of the concept to describe life in the US (Shain 1994:91).

> republican form of government. When I reflect upon the consequences
> of this primary circumstance, methinks I see the destiny of America
> embodied in the first Puritan who landed on those shores (de
> Tocqueville [1835]1899:311–2).

Tocqueville's comments and his general analysis of US individualism and republicanism provide a touchstone for many writers on the subject today (e.g. Bellah et al. 1985, Shain 1994:15–6 n44, Cohen and Hill 2007:710).

Probably the most well-known articulation of the thesis that there is a relationship between Protestantism, capitalism and individualism came almost a century later, with Weber's publication of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber [1920]1956). This essay was written as a general contribution to social theory, illustrating the interaction between religious, economic and other social factors influencing the rise of capitalism. Nevertheless, it touches specifically on the US, referencing the Puritanism of New England as foundational to industrialism in North America and focusing on Benjamin Franklin as a key proponent of the 'spirit of capitalism' (Weber [1920]1956:47–56). Central to Weber's argument is the notion that this early Puritanism gave rise to the careful personal accounting and inner disposition of rationalisation which characterises the 'spirit of capitalism', laying the basis for capital accumulation in the North Eastern states (Weber [1920]1956:47–78). He notes that the New England colonies, which were "founded by preachers and seminary graduates with the help of small bourgeois, craftsmen and yoemen [sic]", eventually became more successful as industrial centres than their counterpart colonies to the South, despite the latter being "founded by large capitalists for business motives" (Weber [1920]1956:55–6). Weber's thesis provides us with an important starting point for understanding how Protestantism and individualism might interrelate within a rising industrial society.

These relationships between patterns of puritanism, industrialisation and individualism can be approached from many angles. Gramsci, writing on "Americanism and Fordism" in the decades after Weber's essay was published,

addresses prohibition and related morality campaigns, which he sees as attempting to control the private lives of workers (Gramsci [1930–2]1996). Contrary to the popular notion that these restrictive measures were manifestations of US puritanism, Gramsci suggests rather that the new industrial methods of Fordism and Taylorism being developed at the time demanded new social conditions outside of the workplace in order to maintain the workers' "psychophysical equilibrium" for the rigours of a highly rationalised workplace (Gramsci [1930–2]1996:216). He suggests these new laws were part of a deliberate social process by which persons in modernity could be newly constituted for the sake of industrial capitalism:

> Those who deride the initiatives and see them merely as a hypocritical manifestation of "puritanism" will never be able to understand the importance, the significance, and the *objective import* of the American phenomenon, which is *also* the biggest collective effort [ever made] to create, with unprecedented speed and a consciousness of purpose unique in history, a new type of worker and man (Gramsci [1930–2]1996:215).

This new type of worker—highly rationalised and scrupulously self-monitoring—has resonance with Weber's self-monitoring individual of the Protestant ethic. We should note that what in Weber appears as an emergent religious phenomenon influencing personal, economic and political matters through the rise of industrial society, in Gramsci is depicted as the product of a political process developed towards industrial interests already hegemonic. Nevertheless, in both writers we see links drawn between an individualised and rationalised personal disposition, elements of Protestantism and social puritanism, and the rising economic and political hegemony of industrial society. Whatever the complex causal relations, each of these phenomena has significantly influenced the history and development of US social life, forming a backdrop to patterns of sociality in communities such as Reclaiming.

Yet, more specific questions have also been raised about whether there is any necessary relationship between Protestantism and individualism. Since Weber's writing of *The Protestant Ethic*, a number of theorists have pointed out that

early Protestant theologians such as Calvin were far from endorsing liberal ideas, but rather emphasised the importance of communal Christian authority over the individual, defending freedom of individual conscience only with respect to worldly authorities, not with respect to the community of believers (Troeltsch 1912:148–52, Trevor-Roper [1956]1967:205–9, Shain 2000:25–9). As Troeltsch put it, "in its view of the relation of the individual to the community…Protestantism is very far from being individualistic and non-authoritative" (Troeltsch 1912:150). Trevor-Roper has suggested that many of the Enlightenment humanist ideas central to modern individualism have their origins less in Protestant thought from the Reformation than among contemporaneous Catholic theologians such as Erasmus (Trevor-Roper [1956]1967:204–226). He argues that the Dutch and Flemish urban bourgeoisie were overall drawn to this democratising Catholic theology, yet turned to Protestantism because of its weak and decentralised ecclesiastical structure, in contrast to the rigidity and increasing taxes of the highly centralised Catholic Church (Trevor-Roper [1956]1967:8–31). According to Shain, this urban class was then able to "subvert the religious polities of those authentically Calvinist within a generation or two" (Shain 2000:32–3). Thus these authors suggest it was not so much the theology of early Calvinism as the challenge the Reformation presented to the centralised power of Catholicism that paved the way for Protestantism to become a vehicle for the rise of a modern, individualist sensibility.[22]

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[22] Even Tocqueville, in his US study, found that the relationship between Protestantism and individualism was not straightforward. In investigating the ideals of liberal democratic republicanism, he found support for these ideas to be very high among the Irish Catholic immigrants he encountered in the US, more so than among the general Protestant population (de Tocqueville [1835]1899:323–4). Suggesting that a theological basis for individualist republican views can be found in both Catholicism and Protestantism, he proposed that the Catholics' status as a religious minority concentrated among the poorer sections of US society is what primarily led them to "adopt political doctrines which they would perhaps support with less zeal if they were rich and preponderant" (de Tocqueville [1835]1899:324).

Indeed, Shain (1994) argues that this Protestant emphasis on the authority of the community over the individual pervaded US life in pre-revolutionary and revolutionary America. Among these early Protestant communities, he suggests, a notion of public good tied to "an ordered and purposeful universe" generally stood ahead of the interests of constituent community members (Shain 1994:21), what Archer calls the "dictatorship of the holy" (Archer 1999:888). While the colonies by the eighteenth century exhibited a high degree of religious pluralism overall, this developed in a highly segregated manner, leading to what Bender describes as "a heterogeneous culture made up of homogeneous and largely isolated individual units" (Bender 1978:69, c.f. Shain 1994:95). This combination led to what Shain calls the "twin" features of communalism prevalent among the rural population in the revolutionary era: a moral existence collectively shaped by each community, and a localism which viewed community autonomy as central (Shain 1994:39–40). While he suggests a competing thread of individualist political thought emerged alongside this communalism from amidst a commercial, urban, national elite in the late eighteenth century, nevertheless communal Protestantism "was the primary soil in which American political thought grew" (Shain 1994:327). It was this emphasis on communal autonomy, rather than any premium on individual liberty, which he suggests gave rise to the widespread opposition to the centralising desires of the Crown and the later Republican reformers (Shain 1994:52–5,86–95).[23]

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[23] It is this opposition which he argues is often misread by social historians as signalling the centrality of individualism to revolutionary American popular thought. A similar dynamic of local, communal autonomism can be seen in the influential notion of 'States rights' in which a state or local government's authority to impose norms suppressing minority rights has often been seen as trumping a more generalised Federal individualistic structure. Shain suggests it was not until well into the twentieth century, for example with federal intervention around civil rights, that a more individualist approach of defending individual autonomy over communally imposed norms finally became the dominant political current across the US (Shain 1994:141–6). While this shift in the mid-twentieth century was significant, the notion of a State's 'collective' right to suppress individual autonomy continues to hold currency as one thread in contemporary political debates where differences are seen to exist between

Whether or not these theorists give an accurate characterisation of revolutionary era political and religious thought, it is intriguing to note that such a valorisation of locally autonomous communities remains an important current in US popular thought. It can be found in a widespread idealisation of 'small-town life' in relatively homogenous and autonomous communities. More specifically for our purposes, it exists as a utopian ideal of small, independent communities popular in the anarchist, environmentalist and alternative spiritual milieus from which groups like Reclaiming have emerged. While these modern utopians generally value a much greater degree of personal latitude in defining the interests of their collective than did the Reformed Protestant communities of the eighteenth century, Shain's work reminds us that there is a long social tradition in the US of such communalist ideas.[24]

The political, economic and religious foundations of communitarian and individualist ideas in the US clearly represent a complex field whose interweaving influences are well beyond the scope of these brief introductory remarks. Nevertheless, even in this brief survey, we find an array of foundational concepts that appear to have influenced Reclaiming. Though Reclaiming members place themselves in opposition to industrial society, many ideas of self-improvement and personal spiritual rigour that other theorists have identified with industrialisation hold an important place within Reclaiming; meanwhile, these patterns of early Protestant sociality may also have played a role in the formation of the utopian communitarianism central to Reclaiming. As we explore these questions in subsequent chapters, it is worth bearing in mind this broader backdrop of social ideas which inform the many threads of US sociality today.

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States or between State and Federal levels of government, as with recent bans on same-sex marriage and limits on the rights of immigrants.

[24] Indeed, we might suggest that it is upon such soil of communalist values and local self-determination that reformers from Robert Owen to Jim Jones have seen the US as fertile ground for attempts to build their utopias as autonomous sites of communitarian experimentation.

## Politics of solidarity and interrelation

While the shape of broader religious and spiritual ideas is important for understanding a community such as Reclaiming, equally central for this group which emerged from a radical activist milieu in the late 1970s are the currents of individualism and collectivism in the political culture of the US left. In this vein, one of the central tenets of much literature on US individualism is that individualist values among American people have prevented collective political strategies from taking hold in any significant way. In particular, in comparisons made with other industrialised countries, an often lower rate of unionisation and relatively low level of socialist and labour-based political organisation in the US are often taken as signs that such practices of solidarity are anathema to a culture based on the 'American Dream'. Thus, McElroy, opposing what he sees as the "anti-Americanism" of the "counter-culture movement", argues:

> [T]he revolutionary method of arousing class hatred encounters serious problems when applied to American culture and its history. From the beginning of its history, the overwhelming majority of America's population has descended from immigrants who left their grievances behind them in Europe (and elsewhere) to start life over again in America. America represented for them the chance to build a better future for themselves as *individuals*. The self-selected immigrants who came to America by their own free choice came as hopeful individuals in search of opportunities to improve their individual lives (McElroy 2006:60).

Nor are such beliefs confined to self-identified political conservatives such as McElroy. As Bellah wrote in response to Fredric Jameson's critique of *Habits of the Heart*:

> In America, where Marxism and socialism have little legitimacy (the research university is an exception), they have no social basis other than coteries of left-wing intellectuals...If Marxism is ever to be an effective public voice in America, it will have to learn to speak American (Bellah 1988:281).

Smith (2006) in her work *Subterranean Fire* has attempted to counter this widespread idea that American workers are uniquely resistant to socialism, communism and class solidarity. Pointing out a long history of political

collectivism within the US working class, she challenges what she calls this "myth of 'American exceptionalism'", which suggests that "the promise of upward mobility has rendered the American working class uniquely incapable of sustaining class consciousness" (Smith 2006:5). Focusing in particular on labour and union organisation, Smith argues for a recognition that many threads of class solidarity have flourished throughout US history following the Civil War, pointing in particular to organisations of socialism and communism influential in the early twentieth century, with memberships and supporters in the tens to hundreds of thousands (Smith 2006:69–100). While such ideas have arguably held considerably less sway since the Second World War, particularly after the McCarthy era, Smith's work provides a counter to the idea that US political culture has rendered the American people inherently resistant to such collectivist political beliefs.

Other authors have focused on more recent waves of post–1960 'new left' political organising to illustrate patterns of interconnection and collectivism within social–political movements (Breines 1982, Epstein 1991, Lichterman 1996). Central to many of these movements is a prefigurative politics which has sought to place a communitarian ethos at the centre of political organising (Breines 1982:46–65, Epstein 1991:58–124). Lichterman sees what he calls these "radical democratic" movements as breaking through the "seesaw" of individualism-versus-communitarianism prevalent in writings about US political life, in which individual and collective are painted as counterposed (Lichterman 1996:9–20). Examining several political organisations such as the US Greens as loci of community, Lichterman suggests that threads of sociocentrism and individualism coexist here, as activists express a high level of individuality within their practices of building community, through adopting a critically reflective stance towards the collective bodies in which they participate (Lichterman 1996:16). In this way, he suggests, "self-realization means fulfilling individual potential in a social context, not finding a pre-social, pure self" (Lichterman 1996:16). Thus, the model of sociality

propounded within these movements is one of persons who are both self-expressive and fundamentally interdependent.

Taviss Thomson (2000) contends that such a model of the individual-in-community has applied broadly as a social model in post-1960s America, when an important shift took place in US conceptions of sociality, such that the individual is no longer seen as essentially in conflict with society. Where she reports that popular literature and social science in earlier eras[25] frequently emphasised the dangers of the individual capitulating to the 'conformity' of her or his social milieu, concerns about conformity have lessened in recent decades. This, she suggests, is a product of a change in conceptions of the individual, which is now seen as strengthened by interdependence and embedded within social relations, such that "individual uniqueness may be furthered through community with others rather than in opposition to them" (Taviss Thomson 2000:26). As she frames this shift: "conflict with society is no longer seen as an essential aspect of self-definition...setting oneself apart from the group or community is no longer required to mark one's individuality in American culture" (Taviss Thomson 2000:3).

The extent to which such a model has become hegemonic in the US may be subject to question. Recent political debates such as that around health care—where opposition to reform was frequently expressed in terms of a perceived threat of 'socialised medicine' to US values of freedom and market competition—suggest that a more oppositional dynamic of individual-versus-society still holds important currency within US political discourse. Nevertheless, the concept identified by Lichterman and Taviss Thomson of the individual strengthened by interconnection is highly central among many I encountered, particularly within Reclaiming and its surrounding social milieu. Several influences Taviss Thomson points to in giving rise to this new model of personhood—the civil rights, women's and counterculture movements—were

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[25] Taviss Thomson's research drew on an analysis of social commentary as it has appeared since the 1920s through social science literature, self-help books and two prominent National magazines targeting a professional audience.

at the foundations of the more recent movements studied by Lichterman, which display similar interrelational dynamics. Alongside a rising interest in psychological and psychic phenomena in post-war Northern California, these new left and counterculture movements also form the immediate ancestral roots from which Reclaiming has grown.

# Reclaiming roots

## The New Left: the personal becoming political

Early on in my field experience, Benjamin, a visiting Reclaiming member who had been centrally involved in Reclaiming-related activism in the 1980s, took me for a tour around Berkeley, visiting Sproul Plaza at the University of California Berkeley campus, People's Park, and the nearby People's Park memorial mural. For the more radical members of Reclaiming, the social history of these sites—central locations of the new left and counterculture movements in the late 1960s—has since become interwoven with their own history. At Sproul Plaza, made famous through Mario Savio and the Free Speech Movement of the mid-1960s, Benjamin told me of how he and several Reclaiming members were arrested after an act of civil disobedience by the anti-nuclear Livermore Action Group (LAG). At People's Park, where the counterculture and new left movements came together in 1969 to protect the community garden created on university property, members of the social activist group Food Not Bombs now hand out free food. Food Not Bombs forms part of the broader milieu in which the more radical members of Reclaiming move; for many years, Food Not Bombs members have created the North Altar at Reclaiming's most prominent public ritual, the Spiral Dance, and more recently the group has supplied food to the Reclaiming activist witchcamp held in Oregon since 2005. Introducing me to the nearby People's Park mural, Benjamin explained to me that Osha Neumann, one of its creators, was known to him and other Reclaiming members through LAG and broader Berkeley activism in the 1980s. The mural depicts the earlier activist history of the area, from the Black Panthers to the fatal police shooting of Berkeley student James

Rector during the People's Park protests. In this personal history tour of radical Berkeley, older stories of the area's activist hey day became threaded into newer ones in which the founding generation of Reclaiming members are embedded. Through stories of places, people and community organisations, emerging and intertwining in the four decades since the 1960s, Reclaiming members from this activist core of the 1980s trace their own personal and social histories back to these more famous radical oppositional movements.

As suggested in the research cited above, there is a fascinating interweaving of communitarian and individualist ideas through the new social movements that began to arise from the late 1960s. On the one hand, many of these movements have emphasised an ideal of creating 'community' through the methods of organising adopted, such as participatory democracy or consensus decision-making (Breines 1982:46–52, Epstein 1991:116–7). On the other hand, many participants of these movements have focused on de-centralisation, self-expression and personal autonomy against what they have seen as more traditional centralised, bureaucratic political structures (Breines 1982:52–65, Epstein 1991:58–124). Overall, these movements represent an attempt to pre-figure the idealised social worlds they seek to usher in. As Epstein summarises this ethos with respect to the direct action movement she studied:

> The utopianism of the direct action movement and its insistence on a radically egalitarian form of democracy likewise strike a chord, as do its emphasis on building community, its orientation toward spirituality, and its attempt to bring questions of meaning to the foreground of political action (Epstein 1991:265).

Epstein's work focuses specifically on the direct action movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s, including two West Coast networks in which early Reclaiming members participated: the Abalone Alliance and LAG (Epstein 1991:136–8). Her study touches on many of the political ideas which have become central to Reclaiming, including an attention to organisational structures as anticipating the needs of an idealised community, and a focus on transforming the self in parallel with social transformation. Drawing on other

new social movement theorists such as Habermas, Epstein suggests that such emphasis on transforming personal life and cultural patterns in addition to addressing political, institutional and structural concerns is an important feature common to many of these movements (Epstein 1991:265ff). According to Epstein, this emphasis has contributed to a blurring of the private–public divide so central to sociality in a modern industrialised society:

> By calling for cultural and personal transformation as well as economic and political change, the movement breaks down the boundary between public and private realms (Epstein 1991:265).

This focus on undermining the boundaries between public and private, in order to re-knit these realms into new forms of sociality, is a central theme in my study.

At the same time, Smith (1994) has argued that the new left emphasis on personal transformation, expressed in slogans such as 'the personal is political', often in practice has had the opposite effect to that claimed by Epstein, further reinforcing an attitude of isolation and atomisation at the expense of more public concerns. Touching on practices such as consciousness-raising in the early years of women's liberation, Smith suggests that while such strategies were initially intended to "propel women into action" from a starting-point of their own experiences, they in fact often ended up leading women out of political activity (Smith 1994:9–10). She cites examples where such personal politics, in emphasising self-examination, often led groups towards a greater personal and internalised focus, frequently involving judgmental standards of moral rigour applied to participants' lifestyles (Smith 1994:10–11). Contrary to other writers who have argued that the new left emphasis on personal expression represented a break from the 'older' left with its emphasis on large, hierarchical organisation and political debate, Smith traces such practices back to the influence of Maoism, and in particular to the popularity within the new left of the Chinese practice of 'speaking bitterness' (Smith 1994:9).

It seems likely that these contrasts between Epstein's and Smith's analyses reflect broader contradictions within the social movements under study. It is worth noting that the most commonly-held political identity within both the direct action movement and the radical wing of Reclaiming is anarchism, which has at its core a valorisation of individual autonomy. Nevertheless, as Epstein found, many within the direct action movements found a strong sense of community here, at least for the brief periods these networks came into existence (Epstein 1991:8–9). She suggests that this sense of the centrality of community grew alongside a growing prominence of spiritual and religious ideas introduced by Christians and Pagans in the movement, both of whom "saw community as a necessary base for political action" (Epstein 1991:155).

Epstein's study explores some of the features of a prefigurative, communitarian politics within the framework of movements that were relatively short-lived. She asks the question of whether a movement based on these utopian politics can sustain itself over time, and finds many points at which the sustainability of these political ideas hit its limits, such as the anarchist opposition to formal organisation and leadership which she suggests was central to the demise of the Abalone Alliance (Epstein 1991:118–121). Reclaiming is a direct descendent of the direct action movement Epstein studied, both as a group which participated in it and as an inheritor of its utopian ideational and organisational systems. Yet, unlike the Abalone Alliance, LAG and similar organisations, Reclaiming has displayed much greater longevity, continuing now for thirty years, spreading numerically and geographically. It therefore presents an opportunity to explore some of the questions Epstein asks within an enduring social milieu.

## Counterculture: summers of love

In the Bay Area, the development of radical activism from the mid-1960s was closely interwoven with the rise of the counterculture movement, although their marriage has not always been happy. A number of the older generation of Reclaiming members told me they came to the Bay Area for the counterculture

movement either in the 1967 Summer of Love or in subsequent years. Several were young women travelling far from their homes and reasonably affluent families, in what Lemke-Santangelo identifies as a common pattern among counterculture women seeking to escape upper-middle class suburban life (Lemke-Santangelo 2009:35-8). Some of these young people who would later join Reclaiming also became political activists; others sought social change through exploring spirituality and alternative lifestyles, through community service or through work in social services or the healing trades. Their common ground was that many of these young idealists were seeking to create a more meaningful sociality against what they saw as a militaristic, materialistic, environmentally and socially destructive cultural mainstream.

This process whereby many thousands of young people moved to cities like San Francisco to join the counterculture involves interesting dynamics of individuation and dissolution. Although there seems to be merit to Taviss Thomson's contention that the counterculture helped usher in a broader social conception of the individual-in-relation, the initiating dynamic of the counterculture movement for many was a desire to escape from the conformity of their origins and express their personal freedom. Lemke-Santangelo quotes Carolyn Adams (Garcia) giving a fairly typical account of this process:

> I was jealous of the freedom the boys seemed to have and I was always angling for another little slice of freedom. Independence. That was my big goal as a child. Complete Independence (Lemke-Santangelo 2009:44).

In Taviss Thomson's analysis, this counterposition of freedom and conformity represents an older conception of individualised personhood, whereby resisting the norms of one's social milieu was seen as necessary for the individual to find true expression (Taviss Thomson 2000:14-6). As a foundational dynamic of the counterculture, it is therefore worth noting.

At the same time, what these counterculture members sought to create was a sociality that broke through the barriers of autonomous, bounded personhood, to generate a sense of what Turner has called "communitas". In sections of his

landmark study *The Ritual Process*, Turner identifies the search for communitas with the counterculture movement then unfolding. Describing the intense "happenings" designed to disrupt the senses and generate "spontaneous" communitas, he says:

> Some attempts have been made fairly recently in America and Western Europe to re-create the ritual conditions under which spontaneous communitas may be, dare one say it, invoked. The beats and the hippies, by the eclectic and syncretic use of symbols and liturgical actions drawn from the repertoire of many religions and of "mind-expanding" drugs, "rock" music, and flashing lights, try to establish a "total" communion with one another. This, they hope and believe, will enable them to reach one another through the "dereglement ordonne de tous les sens,"[26] in tender, silent, cognizant mutuality and in all concreteness…What they seek is a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person's being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared (Turner [1969]1995:138).

Likewise, he suggests that counterculture experiments also represented the search for "ideological communitas": attempts to change how people interrelate in a more enduring way, to discover "the optimal social conditions under which such [spontaneous communitas] experiences might be expected to flourish and multiply" (Turner [1969]1995:132). This was sought, in part, through assuming a low level of social structuration, through voluntary poverty, the rejection of rules and laws, and resistance to formal social hierarchies (Turner [1969]1995:133–5). As we shall see, this countercultural search for communitas is foundational to Reclaiming, where ecstatic ritual and a Romantic imaginary of structural simplicity have similarly cohered.

## Psychotherapists and psychics

One final foundational pillar to Reclaiming sociality has been a growth in interest in the techniques and theories of personal development, both broadly in the US and more specifically in Northern California in recent decades. On Thanksgiving weekend during the first year of my San Francisco research, my field informant Suzanne arranged for me to travel with her to the Esalen

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[26] Ordered disruption of all the senses.

Institute, south of Monterey, where she planned a personal retreat in the last months of her pregnancy. Natural spas set into a cliffside overlooking the deep blue waters of the Pacific on the coastal stretch of the Big Sur, Esalen has been a popular retreat centre for theosophists, philosophers and others seeking spiritual insights for forty years. Several years earlier, Suzanne had attended a workshop by Starhawk at Esalen, introducing her for the first time to Reclaiming. On this occasion, we kept for the most part to ourselves, although I frequently found myself overhearing stretches of conversation on esoteric philosophy and the development of human consciousness from visitors sharing the space in the public pools where I sat quietly relaxing.

In settings like Esalen, we find the legacy of a movement for the exploration of human consciousness through spiritual, psychological and psychic means, which predated the counterculture movement in Northern California. As we have seen, the exploration of what became known as the Human Potential Movement formed part of a growing alternative social scene in the post-war period in this region. Here, in communities such as Esalen (formally founded in 1961), ideas inherited from nineteenth century alternative traditions in the US such as spiritualism and theosophy intermingled with practices and philosophies introduced from Eastern and Native American religions, and with scientific and pseudoscientific research into psychic and psychological phenomena (Kripal 2007:27–180). From the late 1960s, the spread of such ideas accelerated in and around the Bay Area, leading to a proliferation in new religious movements, practices such as meditation and yoga, and the founding of institutions offering classes, training, and formal courses of study in the development of human consciousness, which many Reclaiming members now attend.

In a broad sense, psychotherapy, social work, counselling, hypnotherapy and related practices of self-examination and self-improvement have become highly influential in US society in recent decades, particularly in cities such as San Francisco. Reclaiming members are no exception to this: many undertake therapy as a regular practice, or have done so in the past. More than this, a

disproportionately high number of Reclaiming members are trained and work in one or more of these fields. Practitioners often bring a particular holistic approach to this work, influenced by their religious practices and beliefs. Many Reclaiming members who work in these fields consciously integrate their spiritual values, creative artistic skills, body work and psychic techniques with more established psychotherapeutic practices. The existence of alternative institutions offering formal training, emerging from the broad movement for human potential, has aided practitioners in developing these skills.

At one end of the spectrum are officially accredited academic institutions such as the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS).[27] Since its 1968 founding, it has grown into an interdisciplinary institute with teaching in philosophy, religion, psychology, counselling and health studies (CIIS 2009). CIIS is somewhat different to most teaching institutions in similar fields, in that it takes a holistic approach encompassing spiritual values and bodily health alongside more intellectual components of learning (other Bay Area colleges such as the now disaccredited New College have taken a similar approach). The first of the seven ideals of CIIS states:

> The Institute facilitates the integration of body–mind–spirit. It values the emotional, spiritual, intellectual, creative, somatic, and social dimensions of human potentiality (CIIS 2009).

During my field experience, I spoke with three Reclaiming members taking accredited courses in counselling and social work at CIIS, attracted by this approach which openly integrates core teaching with spiritual values.

At the other end of the spectrum are institutions such as the Berkeley Psychic Institute (BPI), founded in 1973, where many Reclaiming members have taken classes, in some cases introducing techniques they have learnt there into their teaching in Reclaiming. BPI offers both non–accredited "Graduate and CV

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[27] CIIS was founded in 1968 by Dr Hauridas Chauduri, a philosopher originally from India, as a means of fostering greater religious understanding, with a particular focus on Asian religions (CIIS 2009).

classes" and public workshops, such as the following one advertised on their website:

> Living at Your Highest Vibration…: Join other male psychics for a powerful lecture and receive healings from the Trance Medium Channelers (BPI 2010).

BPI is the teaching offshoot of the Church of Divine Man, a "community of psychic Christians who encourage each other to attain physical health and spiritual growth, awareness and understanding" (BPI 2010). The Church's creed reads:

> "What if a man gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" asks Jesus. To a mystic with eyes turned inward towards infinity and cosmic conciousness [sic], his words have great meaning.  Psychic freedom creates no ideologies, no isms, no dissenting philosophies which divide, corrupt and destroy communication between human souls.  No governments are upturned, no faiths cut down by the sword, no sects or types eliminated; only a one to one contact between the cosmic and a living soul, which flames quietly, bringing a lifetime of contentment and a realization that nothing in this world is worth exchanging for that attainment (BPI 2010).

This statement reflects an ideology downplaying social structuration similar to that described by Turner above. And yet in this we also find a strong reference to "turning inward" as a central dynamic of psychic work.

While these institutions occupy very different institutional and intellectual territory, they share a focus on the development of 'consciousness' that involves a similar emphasis on turning inward towards self-examination. Indeed, such an inward dynamic can also be found in more traditional psychotherapy, for which it is subject to occasional critique as overly individualising in literature on US sociality (e.g. Bellah et al. 1985:113–41, Throop 2009). As Throop suggests, psychotherapy has become the primary structuring metaphor in US society contributing to what she calls a growing pattern of "hyperindividualism" (Throop 2009:128,22). While Throop's assessment is particularly harsh, the inwardness of these various methods of

self-work forms another important thread in the background to understanding personhood within Reclaiming.

## The rise of feminist witchcraft

These three roots—the new left, the counterculture movement and an array of practices dedicated to the development human consciousness—form the fertile ground from which Reclaiming emerged. Linked to these, in the years before Reclaiming's emergence, was a growing Pagan movement, which had already seen several prominent traditions and groups established within the Bay Area, including the Church of All Worlds and the New Reformed Order of the Golden Dawn (NROOGD) (Salomonsen 2002:38). Most immediately important of these for Reclaiming was the Feri Tradition founded by Victor and Cora Anderson, where Starhawk received her early training and into which many Reclaiming teachers and elders have been initiated. At the same time, a seismic shift in the ground of Paganism occurred in the decade before Reclaiming's formation, paving the way for groups such as Reclaiming. This was the rise of a specifically feminist form of Paganism, birthed from the radical feminist consciousness-raising movement and tied to the re-creation of a particular strand of women's 'herstory' out of a reclaiming of the figure of the witch as a symbol of women's power, and a re-imagining of witchcraft as the practice of a pre-Christian Goddess-centric 'Old Religion' of Europe (Adler [1979]1986:176–89, Griffin 2003:253–62).

The first prominent catalyst for this new feminist interest in witchcraft came not in fact from radical feminist consciousness-raising, but from amidst a group of Marxist-identified women in New York, with the creation of WITCH, the 'Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell' (Morgan 1978:71–81). WITCH's first appearance was on Halloween of 1968, when this band of women's liberationists dressed up with hats and brooms, traveled to Wall Street and hexed various banks, bars and clubs along with the Federal Reserve Treasury and the New York Stock Exchange (Morgan 1978:71–81). The women from WITCH were unaware of contemporary Paganism, hostile to radical

feminism and focused on political action not spirituality (Morgan 1978:71–5). Only later did members of the first WITCH coven adopt consciousness–raising techniques and learn about feminist spirituality and wiccan practices (Morgan 1978:74,188). The New York chapter of WITCH was short–lived, undertaking only three actions in total, yet the popularity of the WITCH idea demonstrated the potency of the witch as a symbol of deviancy and women's revolutionary power (Morgan 1978:71–4, Griffin 2003:254). It morphed in name and spread across the US, becoming Women Incensed at Telephone Company Harassment, Women Indentured to Travelers' Corporate Hell and Women Inspired To Commit Herstory and other variations, springing up among "covens" of activist women who were drawn to the acronym and the guerrilla theatre style of activism (Morgan 1978:72).

While the WITCH movement was a far cry from the spiritual, magic–practising feminist wiccan covens which were later to emerge, its imaginative content placed the figure of the witch firmly in the minds of second wave feminists (Griffin 2003:254). It inspired many women to explore the history of witchcraft and, through the writings of Jules Michelet, Matilda Jocelyn Gage, Margaret Murray, Robert Graves and many others, to tie this history to the 'recovery' of witchcraft as the 'Old Religion' of Europe (Adler [1979]1986:193–7, Griffin 2003:254–5, Clifton 2006:118–23). Influential writers, such as radical feminist theologian Mary Daly, drew on the history of the witch persecutions to establish what Eller calls a feminist "martyrology" as a launching pad for a specifically feminist theology, breaking from Judaeo–Christianity (Eller 2000:35). Not least of the women influenced by these developments was Z Budapest, feminist witchcraft's most famous initiator and proponent in the 1970s (Griffin 2003:255–8, Clifton 2006:120–2).

Nor was it simply a few prominent figures who laid the groundwork for feminist witchcraft and Paganism to emerge. Pagan practitioner and journalist Margaret Adler quotes Rennie and Grimstad, editors of the *New Woman's Survival Sourcebook* written in 1975, who in their research across the US found that:

> [W]herever there are feminist communities, women are exploring
> psychic and non-material phenomena; reinterpreting astrology; creating
> and celebrating feminist rituals around birth, death, menstruation;
> reading the tarot; studying pre-patriarchal forms of religion; reviving
> and exploring esoteric goddess-centered philosophies such as Wicce[28]
> (cited in Adler [1979]1986:180).

Their research suggests that already by 1975, Goddess-centred spiritual practice with some links to contemporary Paganism was widespread in the women's movement at a grassroots level. As Adler suggests, much of women's exploration of this history and of spiritual practices quite possibly began with consciousness-raising:

> The step from the CR group to the coven was not long. Both are small
> groups that meet regularly and are involved in deeply personal
> questions (Adler [1979]1986:182).

While only a minority of women involved with consciousness-raising eventually turned to Goddess religion and Paganism, the practice of moving from the personal and particular of inner exploration to raising broader social questions provided a conceptual backdrop for feminists forming Pagan covens and circles with a similar dynamic (Eller 2000:34-5).

## Between the worlds

### Reclaiming at home

Starhawk's first book, *The Spiral Dance*, published in 1979, was itself another milestone in the development of a feminist Pagan movement. In the 1970s, Starhawk had received training from Z Budapest and Victor and Cora Anderson, had explored feminist ideas for many years, and had fused these ideas with her own sense of the numinosity of nature, which she first experienced in the summer of 1968 (Salomonsen 2002:37-8, Starhawk [1979]1999:15-6). She had taught classes in witchcraft in Berkeley in 1976, and founded three covens (Salomonsen 2002:37-9). Out of this experience she began to generate her

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[28] Wicce, the feminine form of the old English word Wicca (Clifton 2006:82), is occasionally used by feminists to describe a specifically feminist Wiccan practice.

own vision of witchcraft, which blended feminist history, nature spirituality and Jungian theory with a non-separatist, gender-inclusive practice designed, in her view, to revive the 'Old Religion' into the present among both women and men, and overturn the oppressions ushered in with the witch trials of early modernity (Starhawk [1979]1999:29-39). *The Spiral Dance*, her first published articulation of these beliefs, has become a foundational text, sold hundreds of thousands of copies and undergone two major reprints. As one Pagan internet reviewer, otherwise critical of the book, describes it:

> Nobody nowhere can *ever* measure just how influential this book has been on the modern neopagan movement. I would guess that just about every pagan I know, myself included, has a copy on the shelf (Grey 2001).

This work's influence reaches beyond self-identified Pagans to spiritual feminists and environmentalists. My own introduction to it is probably not unusual: the book was loaned to me by a friend, a feminist theologian and ordained Anglican priest, as part of our mutual interest in feminist and goddess-centred spirituality. Many non-Pagans I have met through my field research in both Australia and the US, from Christian feminists to alternative lifestyle environmental activists, have read and are familiar with this or other of Starhawk's major works.

In the Bay Area itself, Starhawk's influence is much more closely tied to the emergence of Reclaiming, and her ideas have therefore interwoven with the lives and ideas of many other priestesses, teachers and community members who have been equally pivotal in shaping Reclaiming. In its early days, the Reclaiming Collective formed out of a series of classes in magic taught by Diane Baker and Starhawk between 1978-1980, supported by other members of their coven, Raving (Willow 2000, Salomonsen 2002:39). During these years, several students from these classes joined their teachers to begin planning public rituals, publishing a newsletter and developing new classes (Willow 2000). A critical turning point came in 1981, when Starhawk and Rose May Dance attended the direct action blockade organised by the Abalone Alliance at

the site of a proposed nuclear power plant at Diablo Canyon (Salomonsen 2002:41, Starhawk [1982]1988). As Starhawk tells the story, those who stayed behind continued to plan the public rituals, electing to form the Reclaiming Collective during this time. At the same time, Starhawk and Rose brought back from Diablo Canyon an excitement about direct action political activism, a greater awareness of organising methods such as consensus process, and a layer of new Collective members from the blockade (Logan and Martin 1995, Salomonsen 2002:41, Starhawk [1982]1988). Out of this mix, a tradition of magical activism was born. While Reclaiming has always had a spectrum of more and less politically active members, which Salomonsen (2002:97–128) describes as a difference between 'utopian' and 'generic' witches within the community, in the broader Pagan spectrum and to many of its members, Reclaiming has come to represent a tradition consciously committed to fusing the spiritual with the political.

Today, Reclaiming members span ages from childhood through to over eighty years of age, with the bulk of community members aged from their 20s through to their 60s. Many founding members are now in their 60s, while new layers of people continue to join the community, either as participants in public events, or in a more central way, volunteering to take up work such as ritual planning on the 'cells', learning the skills of priestessing rituals, and in some cases training to become teachers themselves. While the broader community includes some 'second generation' adult members who were raised in the community, most of the younger members central to Bay Area Reclaiming activities came from outside, through classes or public rituals, most commonly in their 20s or 30s.

Among Reclaiming members in the area, there is a mix of collective households, couples with and without children, sole parent households, and single-person households. Some Reclaiming residents live consciously in communal households for political reasons, though according to one of my field informants, the number of such households declined through the 1990s and early 2000s, as many began to live as nuclear families. Certainly, far fewer

than the 55 per cent of Reclaiming households estimated by Salomonsen (2002:62) to be collective households in 1990 remained so in 2007. Among the 32 core Bay Area community members who closely informed my research, only 37 per cent lived in collective households at the time of my research, representing one third of the households involved. Arguably, shared living among a younger generation of more loosely affiliated Reclaiming members may be set to replenish these numbers, yet many of these newer households take a form of more 'accidental' collective households among a younger generation whose low incomes prohibit other accommodation; only a few take the form of Reclaiming-inspired intentional communities.

The core demographic profile of Reclaiming members is women and men of European ancestry who work in skilled white collar, professional or managerial positions and are very highly educated. More women than men are involved in Reclaiming, though the gender balance varies with context: public rituals tend to be around 60 per cent women, while Reclaiming classes seem to be more often 80 to 90 per cent women (the exception being occasional classes designed specifically for men). Reclaiming members pride themselves on their sexual diversity and inclusiveness, and many openly identify as bisexual, gay, lesbian or 'pansexual'. Polyamory is reasonably widely practiced, and is present across all adult generations. In what seems to be a significant development, the years of my fieldwork, 2006–7, witnessed a growing layer of increasingly open transgender practitioners, culminating in more recognition of gender fluidity in public ritual, including an invocation of transgender deity alongside Goddess and God in the annual Spiral Dance ritual for the first time in 2009.

Reclaiming members are extremely well-educated compared to their peers in the population as a whole. In data I collected from twenty one core Reclaiming members through interviews and follow-up surveys, the most striking characteristic was the education profile: 67 per cent held a Bachelor's degree or higher; 38 per cent held a Master's Degree or PhD. This compares with 26 per cent and 8 per cent respectively for the US population as a whole.

Comparing this survey data with data from the US census, and data from the Pagan Census collected by Berger et al. between 1993 and 1995 (Berger et al. 2003:32), San Francisco Reclaiming members are significantly more educated both than the highly educated San Francisco population and than their broader Pagan counterparts. Among those who attend the yearly California witchcamp, it seems the education level may be even higher. In one ritual during my first camp, we were led in an 'allies' exercise in which a series of questions were put, to which those who assented were asked to step inside the circle. My visual estimate suggested that 95 per cent of those present stood inside the circle when the question was asked: who present has a college education?

To the extent that community members may once have been typically part of the 'déclassé' middle class—well educated but holding less skilled work—the employment profile given in the surveys suggests there has been a shift away from this, a pattern which several of my informants also identified in interview. Although not as striking as the educational profile, the employment profile of those surveyed paints a picture of a skilled, largely white collar population: 38 per cent of respondents identified as 'specialist workers', mostly in fields such as social work and publishing; another 29 per cent identified as professional. Twenty four per cent were self-employed, for example as writers and massage therapists. While a few of these make a fairly marginal living through this work, the majority of those I interviewed among the self-employed have become highly successful in their fields. Less than one in five described some sort of manual labour as their main lifetime occupation, including several who also identified as self-employed or specialist workers.

From my general observation, discussions with informants, and from the survey data, the demographics of Reclaiming members' families of origin seem to occupy two major poles. On the one hand are those whose parents were highly educated for their generation (44 per cent of respondents had at least one parent with a Bachelor's Degree or higher), and whose primary breadwinner held a managerial or professional position (53 per cent). On the other hand, there is a significant layer of Reclaiming members who come from

poor and/or working class backgrounds, whose parents worked in blue collar or less skilled white collar jobs, where they worked at all, and whose highest education was at most an Associate Degree, and very often a High School Diploma (47 per cent of respondents fit this profile).[29] Rook's self-description represents an example of this second type:

> What I always say of myself is I come from this big working class family, and somehow I became intellectual class. I don't know how that happened, but it was always true of me.
>
> You know, my whole family, they're all still that working class; that is— working class jobs that have firmly middle class income. You know, they've got the big houses and the widescreen TVs...and they're carpenters and fire fighters and nurses, that whole array of skilled labor. And I became this intellectual-artist-type, somehow, out of that milieu.

Thus, while many Reclaiming members come from affluent middle class families, others originate from less well-off backgrounds: the first generation of what George described to me in interview as "successful social atoms". George gives an apt summary of the class profile of Reclaiming which captures both these trends:

> ...asking a question like how many people's parents [hold a college education]; I can't remember if at camp, we asked that—but that's a key question. How many people's parents went to college? 'Cause then you might actually start to see the splits...
>
> Reclaiming is so distinctly, I mean we're saying middle class, but we're really, I mean the term that I use is petit bourgeois. It's not the bourgeoisie, it's not the working class, it's that middle strata there that has a little bit of power, and kinda tastes management positions, and thus occasionally has some independence, but has no access. I think a lot of people probably come—if you go back a couple of generations, you'd find working class, and farmers, and people like this...
>
> We were talking earlier about the class relations, and the fact is, most of us that are drawn to Reclaiming *are* people who are doing fairly well as social atoms. We're not the people who are getting buffeted onto the

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[29] Given the differences in how I asked these questions, this seems commensurate with Salomonsen's finding that 37 per cent of her respondents identified as coming from a working class background (Salomonsen 2002:44).

streets. We're not the people who grew up with labour union background, and therefore have moved into it ourself because that's what we saw as most powerful. We're the ones who our parents or ourselves have somehow succeeded at this system. You know, I moved from Indiana to California. That's a hard move. Not very many people make that. So I'm a successful social atom.

As we shall see, this trend of aspiration conditioned by these class dynamics among Reclaiming members is an important characteristic for unlocking Reclaiming patterns of personhood.

Reclaiming members come from typically British and North-Western European heritage. Most respondents gave descriptions of their ancestry fitting this profile, such as "Euro-American", "German, Irish", "White (English, Dutch)" and "Caucasian mutt". A minority of respondents fit a slightly different profile: two reported mixed Caucasian and Hispanic ancestry, two were of Eastern European Jewish descent, and one reported Southern as well as Northern European ancestry. While many Reclaiming members hope to build a community displaying a high degree of social and ethnic diversity, as it stands, most members fit more comfortably within the depiction of contemporary Paganism given to me by one practitioner: as the European brand of nature-based-spirituality.

The religious background of Reclaiming members is not particularly typical for the US population as a whole. Of the twenty-one survey respondents, 14 per cent came from non-religious backgrounds and 10 per cent were raised as secular or religious Jews. Both of these percentages are significantly higher than the reported pattern of religious upbringing for the US population found by the Pew Forum in 2008: 7 per cent non-religious and 2 per cent Jewish (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008b:256). The remainder of participants gave their backgrounds as Catholic (19 per cent) and Protestant (57 per cent), which is more typical of the wider US population, though it may

point to an under-representation of Catholics.[30] Interestingly, although the level of religious involvement during their childhood reported by respondents varied substantially, those who reported their families as "very involved" all came from Protestant backgrounds.

For whatever reason, this mix of people from diverse religious backgrounds has drawn together to create a highly ecstatic, charismatic Pagan tradition. As Magliocco (2004:145) reports, Reclaiming members are known among other Pagans with more staid ritual preferences as the "Pentecostal Witches". Walking late towards my 'path' class one morning at my first witchcamp, having been held up dealing with a personal matter, I recalled this description as I heard the rising tones of a song sung in ecstatic voices. My ear slowly made out the words as I approached, watching participants sway and clap with their eyes closed: "Here we are, we've come a long way, it's a brand new day. Hey!" I could not but recall charismatic Christian services from my childhood.

According to a workshop I attended comparing Reclaiming and Feri traditions, this ecstatic approach to ritual defines one of the major differences of Reclaiming from its closest Pagan sibling. Reclaiming teachings draw substantially from Feri, and many prominent Reclaiming members and teachers

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[30] This is in contrast to Salomonsen's finding that 35 per cent of her respondents were raised Catholic (Salomonsen 2002:44). This difference may be a product of a low sampling rate, or may reflect the broader shift away from Catholicism which has occurred in the US in recent generations (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008b, compare p.8 and p.256). Although Salomonsen reports her finding as reflecting a higher than typical proportion of Catholicism in the background of Reclaiming members, this is less true of her sample when a comparison is drawn with the typical profile of religious *upbringing* in the US, rather than with a current profile of religious identification. The lower proportion of Catholics in my sample also runs contrary to the earlier suggestion by Melton (cited in Adler [1979]1986:311) that Pagans might be expected to come from Catholic backgrounds, perhaps drawn by their experience of ritualistic religious tradition. While Melton later questioned this assumption based on further empirical research, both his and Adler's surveys of the Pagan movement from the 1980s showed a higher proportion of Catholics than my own (cited in Adler [1979]1986:444). It is possible that this pattern may reflect the more Protestant-like style of religious practice typical of the specific Reclaiming tradition, but more systematic quantitative research would be needed to unpack this.

are also initiated Feri practitioners. Yet where Feri is an esoteric, initiatory 'mystery tradition', Reclaiming is an exoteric ecstatic tradition. While Feri draws on ecstatic ritual as part of its repertoire, this is not the fundamental feature it is in Reclaiming. The centrepiece of almost every Reclaiming ritual is the raising of the 'cone of power' through song and dance towards the end of the ritual. As one workshop participant described it, "I'd be willing to go as far as saying [ecstatic ritual] is a value [in Reclaiming]—it sometimes feels like forcing an orgasm" to reach an ecstatic peak; "If you don't, you've failed." As such, understanding personhood in Reclaiming means understanding this emphasis on ecstasy, and in particular the work being done during this ecstatic heart of ritual.

## In the field: She changes everything She touches

I began my studies with a plan to investigate multiple traditions of Paganism in a comparative investigation in two field sites: Melbourne, Australia and Florence, Italy. In order to study these in as much depth as I hoped, I rearranged my life and my studies to be able to undertake two full years as a participant observer. Part way through the initial phase of this research in Melbourne, it became clear to me that Reclaiming, with its focus on political and social transformation, its explicit feminist emphasis on interconnection and its relative longevity in contemporary Paganism terms, was the unavoidable 'ideal' setting for my research questions. Accordingly, I changed my plans. Making arrangements to relocate to the US at fairly short notice is not easy, and finally having had visa and travel plans fall into place, I left for San Francisco without having heard back from either of the two email addresses I had contacted to request permission to study in the community: the San Francisco Ritual Planning Cell and California Witchcamp. Fortunately, as my informants would say 'it was meant to be'; just as I arrived, Rose May Dance had written to me to suggest a meeting before the Solstice ritual, to 'check me out'.

My gate-keeping interview with Rose and one other Ritual Planning Cell member was the most rigorous of any I have had in any Pagan community. Though friendly in tone, it was clear to me that this was a test, and it was quite possible I would not pass. I told them why I was there, both academically and personally, and especially about my personal interest in Reclaiming that had grown from Starhawk's activist writings. We talked about other ethnographies, about how Jone Salomonsen's earlier work had been received in the community, and about what community members had made of ethnographies such as Tanya Luhrmann's, which reads with a sometimes critical, etic tone that has concerned some Reclaiming practitioners.  Whatever Rose's intention, this interview left me with a feeling of caution about how I should approach writing about the community that has stayed with me to this day. It created in me a sense of obligation to the community which has kept me as honest as I can be, and which at times has felt extremely discomfiting as I wrestled with the questions the field site raised with me about my personal and professional understanding.[31]

Having passed this interview, I spent the remainder of my field time as a participant observer in Bay Area Reclaiming, between June 2006 and December 2007. Beginning with the Summer Solstice ritual, I threw myself into Reclaiming life; choosing to undergo the naked dip in the Ocean as part of my first ritual symbolically felt like crossing a threshold into being a full participant in community life. Over this eighteen months, I attended eleven public rituals, corresponding to one and a half cycles of the ritual calendar, participated in seven Reclaiming classes for one evening a week over six weeks, and attended three weeklong Witchcamps: two in California, and the 'activist camp' in Oregon. Shortly after my first witchcamp, I joined a circle with some friends I had met at camp, which had earlier formed from an 'Elements'

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[31] The volume *Researching Paganisms* offers many rich and provocative discussions of the often-difficult methodological questions surrounding research in modern Pagan communities (Blain et al. 2004). Sarah Pike's essay in this volume, 'Gleanings from the Field: Leftover Tales of Grief and Desire' captures well the heartbreaking ambivalence of the position of 'field researcher' in contemporary Paganism.

class, and which met monthly. Later, I joined two other Reclaiming members to form a dream circle, again meeting monthly. I volunteered in two community 'Cells'—the Ritual Planning Cell and the Spiral Dance Cell—to gain insight into the planning and organisation of the community. Where they occurred in the Bay Area, I joined Reclaiming members at protests and political events. Beyond Reclaiming events, I attended the Pagan festival Pantheacon and a NROOGD ritual with a Reclaiming friend. Besides these major activities which structured my year, I attended many shorter workshops, discussion forums, and several private rituals to which I was invited, along with celebrations, parties and the birth of a child.

Since I felt it was inappropriate to make extensive notes during magical activity, after a ritual or class I would use my few brief notes to write more extensive descriptions of these events, reconstructing them as best I could from memory as soon as I had the chance. In addition to these field notes, I conducted forty semi-structured interviews with over thirty participants, selected for their central role as teachers or organisers in the community, or for the unique perspective they could bring to helping me understand the community (such as the adult children of Reclaiming members), or simply because they offered to be interviewed. Here, I asked questions ranging from the history of the participant's involvement in Reclaiming, the phases of Reclaiming organisation and practice, the relationship between spirituality and politics, their beliefs about community, relationships and interconnection, the role of magical objects, the nature of deity and the ontology of matter and spirit. Interview questions were tailored to the interests and knowledge of each participant. In a few cases, the interview was conducted with a more specific purpose in mind, such as an issue arising from a workshop, ritual or class.

At least as important as this formal activity was the informal time I spent with community members. I rented a room in a house I shared with a Reclaiming member who owned the property and another housemate, a priestess from a Dianic Pagan community, which offered opportunities for casual conversations and insights into everyday life. I spent a great deal of time sleeping on the

couch at another Reclaiming household shared by two friends, while we helped one of them, Suzanne, with practical preparations for the birth of her child. Here we read tarot late into the night and woke to discussions on the meaning of our dreams. I met other friends for coffee or hours of discussion strolling the walking routes of the Bay Area, or occasionally stayed overnight at others' houses (I became an expert at sleeping on couches and in strange beds). I let friends and field informants take me to local sites, and travelled with Suzanne on two longer trips to New Orleans and Esalen as part of her personal and spiritual preparations for her child's birth.

Since my research is focussed on spiritual practice as part of a whole way of life, on the possibilities of transforming sociality, and the relationships of ritual activity to work, wider social relationships, politics, and navigating the bureaucracy of an urban environment, I also spent what time I could in 'mundane' activities with my field informants. In particular, I volunteered several times at the workplace of one community member, at the business then being established by another, and visited the workplace of a third close informant. I undertook a work exchange to help a community member learn computing as she tried to change her line of work, in exchange for body work. And on top of this I spent time in houses, cars and organic supermarkets, asking community members what they thought.

While many Reclaiming practitioners refer to themselves as 'witches' and/or 'Pagans', not all are comfortable with these terms. Hence, throughout this thesis I have chosen to use the terms 'participant' to refer broadly to those taking part in a Reclaiming event, and 'practitioner' to refer to those who identify with Reclaiming and attempt to put its tools or ideas into practice. For theoretical reasons, I have tried in many places to limit the use of the word 'community' to describe Reclaiming, as it is too singular and reifying a term to capture the many layers of involvement people typically have with Reclaiming as a social and spiritual set of practices. Where I have found it more convenient to use the term, 'community' refers to a multilayered structure, which has at its core various working bodies peopled by many of those most strongly identified

with the tradition, and which on the outside edges encompasses many who attend rituals, classes or other events without becoming more involved, or who form part of the friendship networks of Reclaiming members. In acquiring consent from interview participants, many signalled to me that they preferred to be identified by their legal name and/or their magical name. Where this was not the case, I have substituted a pseudonym either of that practitioner's choosing (where they suggested one), or of my own.

Several ethnographers of Paganism have written about the centrality of developing an 'insider' perspective through full participation in ritual life in order to understand and theorise magic (Greenwood 2000:11–19, Salomonsen 2002:17–21). There is no question in my mind that this is true. Being bodily, emotionally and cognitively in a ritual setting, experiencing altered states and ritual ecstasy, feeling the emotional impact of the ritual and the moving of energy, was essential, not only to gain the trust of Reclaiming members, but to have any hope of grasping Paganism as a religious and personal practice. Early on, I realised that the field researcher had to be let go if I was to fully participate in a ritual's intention, and I began a long journey of doing 'inner work' on myself in Pagan rituals. It was not until the last nine months of my time in the field that I felt I was able to bring the researcher back into ritual space without losing the cognitive and emotional thread of the ritual activity. The technique I picked up while working on the visioning for the Spiral Dance of staying 'dropped and open' (in a meditative state) while still having enough analytical capacity to write or consciously store analytical and factual information for later became useful in later rituals and witchcamps. On the whole, however, the 'processing' I did through ritual, tarot, dream work, ecstatic dance and late-night conversations was of a deeply personal nature; the relationships I developed with community members were genuine and sometimes intense. Indeed, it could not have been otherwise in a setting where so much focus of activity is on interpersonal relationships and self-transformation.

In a situation where an anthropologist seems much like her informants, a certain level of confusion can surround field relationships (see Pike 2001:xv–xvi). Indeed, at times it was possible for me to blend so seamlessly into the community that the line between participant–observer and community member became very blurred, both for me and it seems for many of my informants. While I was broadly aware of these dynamics from early on and accepted them as part of my learning in the field, it became an interesting problem for me later in my field research, as I began to confront my own questions of belonging in Reclaiming. At one point, I became exhausted from my research and the very intense level of magical work and personal openness I had allowed myself to experience in the initial months of my field research. For other community members, reaching such a point of over–exposure would simply mean taking a break from classes or rituals. One of the tenets of Reclaiming is the importance of 'doing what is right for you' and 'taking care of your needs'. Indeed, I did step back from the intense level of activity for three months, even missing a public ritual and dropping a class I had enrolled in after a death in my family. Around this time, I became more heavily involved in activities outside of Reclaiming, balancing community activism and external friendships with my research as others balance jobs, families, social lives and volunteer activities outside of Reclaiming with their spiritual activities. Nevertheless I continued, by and large, to show up for Reclaiming activities whether I felt like it or not, and regrouped around my involvement in a new way, because as I conceived it, 'this was my job'.

This process of returning to a greater level of activity after allowing myself to drop away from my earlier very intense level of involvement raised the question of my field relationships in a new way, as it became clear to me that I was seen by some of my informants at least as much as a community member as I was a field researcher. When one longstanding member said to me at Witchcamp "It's good to see you, I thought we'd lost you", I realised that my primary reason for showing up—I was an anthropologist with a job to do, regardless of my personal inclinations or beliefs—was not read the same way by all

practitioners, even ones who knew me quite well. Among some of my informant–friends, I began to suspect that my professional disposition of listening and asking questions had been read more as core to my personality than as a cultivated professional stance, and I began to feel the need to express more of my own opinions, even where these ran counter to the ethos of Reclaiming or the energy of a particular setting. Through this, I began to confront the question of the need to put myself 'fully' in the field in a new way—this time by allowing my doubts, my concerns, my exhaustion, and my deep questioning on the roles of anthropologist and community member to surface. This process was not always pretty, and I am deeply grateful to those friends and Reclaiming members who bore with me through it, despite the difficult implications my personal questioning could at times have for their beliefs, our relationships and the trust they had shown me in sharing their lives with me.

My research activity in this later period was undertaken with something of double–vision. I began thinking in different ways about the role of magic and religion, its relationship to political, economic, and social activity, and the possibilities and limits to transforming sociality through ritual and magical work. I tested ways of thinking from one setting more consciously and actively against what I learnt in another. Where I had earlier adopted the studied embrace of paradox common to Pagans in understanding the world, in which both 'a' and 'not a' can be true at once, I began to ask what I really believed about the spiritual and magical ontology which shapes the Reclaiming world. This can be a difficult position for an anthropologist of magic, and one which surprisingly few ethnographers of Paganism have written of in depth— Greenwood (2005a) is an important exception. My intellectual stance approaching the field had, like that of Susan Greenwood, focussed on the importance of taking seriously the spiritual and magical ontologies of my field informants. However, at this later point in my field research, I reached a limit to how effectively I could develop my ideas through such a stance of openness. I felt myself needing to close some doors intellectually if I was to take any

further steps in my understanding of Reclaiming. This took me in directions which as often as not challenged the beliefs of my field informants, but it also opened up a deeper level of questioning for me about how to think about the status of ideas as 'true' and 'not true', and why that should matter. While some of my most fruitful research was carried out during this period, this did not always sit with me easily at a personal level; at times I felt like I was dishonouring the relationships of trust I had developed with my field informants.

I can certainly say I have been transformed by my time in Reclaiming, though not always in ways that I or my field informants might have predicted, or wanted. This analysis is a product of that transformation—both the powerful experiences I had in the field, my integration into the life of a community, and the deep questions which would not let go of me. I can only say that I hope I have done justice to the immense generosity of spirit shown me by the Reclaiming members who shared important parts of their lives with me, and that I have stayed true to the spirit of Rose's unspoken test.

# Chapter 3

## RELIGION, POLITICS, POWER:
## Reclaiming community as created/contested practice

*We are sweet water, we are the seed,*
*We are the storm wind to blow away greed.*
*We are the new world we bring to birth*
*The river rising to reclaim the Earth*
*— Reclaiming chant by Starhawk*

*The main objective of these struggles is to attack not so much*
*"such and such" an institution of power, or group, or elite, or*
*class, but rather a technique of power, a form of power.*
*— Foucault, 'The Subject and Power'*

## Magic, power and personhood

### Connection, immanence and power-from-within

It is early October, and a Reclaiming friend has invited me to a play called *Kissing the Witch*, in which she knows some of the performers. The play is a well-acted recreation of fairytales put together by three self-identified witches: tales of princesses and servants and a witch living alone in a cave near a village. For most of the play, it is not clear where the creators are headed with their depiction of the witch. But at the conclusion, the character of the witch stands and addresses the audience directly. Why did she choose the path she did, starved and mistrusted and isolated, inflicting suffering on others? Because she wanted power, and power comes with a price.

It takes a while after the play is over to emerge, but it turns out my friend is angered:

> I didn't like what they said about witches and power. There are so many
> different definitions of witch out there—as an anthropologist, you would
> see witches and the way they are defined in cultures all over the world,

> blamed for everything that goes wrong. And people in this country are
> so used to the witch as the bad person. And there's Glinda the good
> witch and the Wicked Witch of the West. I'm angry at those witches for
> presenting that definition of a witch. Reinforcing that stereotype.

In adopting the term 'witch' to identify themselves and their religious practice (as most do), Reclaiming practitioners are aware of the fear and mistrust this word can cause, including among some they seek as allies (see e.g. Starhawk [1987]1990:17). Yet they embrace this identity with the intention of disrupting the negative stereotypes surrounding the word that they believe became established during the "Burning Times" of early modernity, with its associations with corrupted sexuality and malice. In part, this follows earlier feminist critiques, whereby modern witch myths are said to associate women's power, autonomy and sexuality with evil. But the identity of 'witch' also points to a much wider social and political project for practitioners: of overturning the oppressive and atomising institutions and ideologies they associate with Western modernity.

In Reclaiming, the concept of witchcraft links practitioners to the living, flowing, interconnected cosmic totality that they believe represents the true nature of the universe. The mechanical and atomised worldview of science which informs modern life is seen as simply a surface appearance overlying this numinous reality, to which magic and ritual gives access:

> The word *Witch* throws us back into a world who is a being, a world in
> which everything is alive and speaking, if only we learn its language.
> The word brings us back to the outlawed awareness of the immanence
> of the sacred, and so it reeks of a holy stubbornness, an unwillingness
> to believe that the living milk of nurture we drink daily from the flowing
> world can be reduced to a formula administered from a machine
> (Starhawk [1987]1990:8).

Tapping into the power of witchcraft means tapping the power embedded in this universe made up of ecological relations. The word 'witch' is a lens into the project through which practitioners seek to remake the world: in claiming this identity, practitioners seek to awaken in themselves a vision of the cosmos

as essentially relational, and thereby (re)introduce relationality as a fundamental principal into their social world.

At the heart of this re-envisioning is a reworking of concepts of power. My friend's anger at the play was sparked by the fact that it presented the witch's power as abusive and manipulative. For practitioners, the true power of witchcraft is not that of domination and violence, which they call 'power-over', but 'power-from-within': a living power that infuses the cosmos and every being within it, the power of being able, of potency and potential.[32] By contrast, they see power-over as the source and basis for war, oppression and environmental exploitation. As the Reclaiming Principles of Unity[33] state: "Our feminism includes a radical analysis of power, seeing all systems of oppression as interrelated, rooted in structures of domination and control" (Reclaiming 1997). This opposition between power-over and power-from-within forms a pivot around which Reclaiming hopes for world-transformation turn. By tapping into the much more cosmically fundamental power-from-within, magical practice is designed to shake up and unravel systems of power-over, reawakening power-from-within into the social order to remake sociality and infuse the world with its sacred connectedness.

The most systematic theoretical and mythological framework for these ideas was laid out by Starhawk in her books *Dreaming the Dark* and *Truth or Dare*, which paint a picture of the development of structures of power-over through centuries of increasingly hierarchical societies tied to the rise of male dominance (Starhawk [1987]1990:32-67, Starhawk [1982]1988:5-8).[34] This

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[32] As Starhawk points out, the word power derives from the Latin root *podere*, which means to be able (Starhawk [1982]1988:3).
[33] The Principles of Unity were developed by consensus at a Reclaiming Collective retreat in 1997. They represent the most general statement of collective Reclaiming beliefs.
[34] In keeping with Reclaiming members' prefigurative politics and experiential doctrine-wary outlook, I found most to speak much more readily about their magical, imaginative experiences and their everyday concerns about people, relationships and ritual organising than about the systematic theological or political analysis behind their practices. Nevertheless, the ideas Starhawk articulates here represent the cumulative

slow process accelerated in early modernity, ushered in with witch burnings, enclosures and social upheavals (Starhawk [1982]1988:183–219). This led to what she calls the "dismemberment of the world", a transformation of sociality from interrelationality to atomisation:

> The story of the rise of power-over is the story of the literal dismemberment of the world, the tearing apart of the fabric of living interrelationships that once governed human life (Starhawk [1987]1990:33).

Starhawk links this social atomisation to a rising mechanisation, whereby objects and people were seen to lose their value as the world was divested of sacrality, paving the way for environmental exploitation: "[g]oodness and true value were removed from nature and the world…[n]o longer were the groves and forests sacred" (Starhawk [1982]1988:5–6). Likewise, the "removal of content from human beings allows the formation of power relationships in which human beings are exploited" (Starhawk [1982]1988:6). Through these centuries of "dismemberment", of atomisation and exploitation, practitioners believe relations of power-over have become hegemonic. And through the stories and structures these relations have given rise to, the patterns of power-over are now seen as lodged in the bodies and minds of the people trapped

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insight of covens, affinity groups, anarchist coffee houses and groups locked together in the prison cells at direct actions during Reclaiming's formative years. As Ash, one of Starhawk's close collaborators from this time, said of *Dreaming the Dark* "of course it's the one of her books I have never read. That's neither here nor there. I know what's in that book, because I was living it at the time." On another occasion he explained to me that *Dreaming the Dark* represents the collected wisdom of many people around the direct action movement and the early Reclaiming community. In this milieu, a feminist critique of power and anarchist models of consensus-based organising formed a political backdrop which fundamentally shaped Reclaiming. Subsequently, these principles have been passed on to new generations of practitioners and teachers through apprenticeships, word-of-mouth and general use. The ideas presented in these works, particularly *Dreaming the Dark*, thus form a bedrock of Reclaiming ideas of social transformation as they are expressed in classes, rituals and retreats, even while the books themselves remain less widely read and the ideas are often less explicitly articulated. Many smaller, casual comments such as my friend's discussion of issues of power emerging from the play reflect the pervasive influence of these ideas in Reclaiming.

within them, who are thus cursed to perpetuate their destructiveness (Starhawk [1982]1988:6–10, Starhawk [1987]1990:10–14;20–27;74–89).

The contrast between power-over, linked to atomisation and mechanisation, and power-from-within, linked to sacred interconnection, is thought to give rise to differences in how these forms of power are used and experienced. Where power-over tends to be static, power-from-within is thought to be flowing, dynamic and connective:

> When the world is seen as being made up of living, dynamic, interconnected, inherently valuable beings, power can no longer be "seen as something people have—kings, czars, generals *hold* power as one holds a knife."[35] Immanent power, power-from-within, is not something we *have* but something we can do (Starhawk [1982]1988:12).

Practitioners believe they can use their magical skills to tap into the life-giving force of power-from-within. Witchcraft for Reclaiming members is thus both theological and instrumental; by unearthing this power within themselves, they believe it is possible to unearth the cosmic relations this power represents, thereby foregrounding truer, more harmonious and interconnected patterns of social and environmental relations.

This emphasis on an interconnected cosmos stems from what Reclaiming members describe as their theology of 'immanence'. According to practitioners, the idea of sacrality being immanent in the living world is what essentially differentiates their Earth-based spirituality from Christianity and other major religions, where they argue the sacred is seen as transcendent above or beyond the world, in Heaven, the afterlife or Nirvana (Starhawk [1982]1988:5). Immanence by contrast implies that this world is imbued with sacrality, which in Reclaiming is therefore ever-changing with the changing processes of the world. As Starhawk says, "the consciousness I call *immanence* [is] the awareness of the world and everything in it as alive, dynamic, interdependent, interacting and infused with moving energies: a living being, a weaving dance" ([1982]1988:9). Behind the seeming separations of things and

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[35] This quote is from the handbook of the Diablo Canyon anti-nuclear blockade.

people that condition a modern understanding is a fluid field of cosmic 'energy' that bonds things together, a field of interconnection which forms the ground for an ever-evolving cosmos (Starhawk [1982]1988:135–153). By tapping into this cosmic energy, by learning to embody it and by awakening its principles into the world, practitioners believe the nature of sociality can be remade.

In a practical sense, the theology of immanence is thought to express relationships between things by locating sacrality within objects in their immediate, everyday contexts:

> All the beings of the world are in constant communication on many levels and dimensions. There is no such thing as a single cause or effect, but instead a complex intertwined feedback system of changes that shape other changes. The destruction of the Amazon rain forest changes our weather. The murder of a health-care worker in Nicaragua by the Contras affects our health. And so our health, physical and emotional, cannot be considered out of context (Starhawk [1987]1990:22).

These practical connections on the physical plane and the thread of sacrality that runs through the cosmos are viewed as complementary expressions of the same theological insight: that all things are in constant, evolving relationship in a sacred web of life. The ontologically atomised individual of Western modernity is therefore viewed by practitioners as incompatible with such a theology:

> [I]mmanence is context, and so the individual self can never be seen as a separated, isolated object. It is a nexus of interwoven relationships, constantly being shaped by the relationships it shapes (Starhawk [1982]1988:37).

While qualities of self-expression and uniqueness are valued, this model of personhood is interdependent rather than independent:

> The world of separate things is the reflection of the One; the One is the reflection of the myriad separate things of the world. We are all "swirls" of the same energy, yet each swirl is unique in its own form and pattern (Starhawk [1979]1999:49).

Because people are seen as embedded in networks of relation, practitioners believe that it is possible to base an ethics on a person's sense of pride and integrity, since a truly "integrated" person will be integrated into their social relations—an "integral and inseparable part of the human biological community" (Starhawk [1982]1988:37).Through the theology of immanence, power-from-within is seen as connecting practitioners with a sacred web of life viewed as fundamentally harmonious; the ethics of power-from-within are seen as ethics which value the ecologically balanced patterns of cosmic and earthly diversity. By thus placing the emphasis on relationships, immanent sacrality is seen as leading automatically to practical, world-transforming activity, militating against unethical behaviour. While it is certainly seen as possible for practitioners who have developed their personal power to become out of balance, power-from-within tends to counter this:

> We each strive to increase our power-from within, and this growth in power is beneficial as long as we remain centered and in balance...Personal power, *ache*[36], power-from-within, depends on a moving, living balance of energies that sustain interconnected life. To misuse it is to lose it. Energy, like water, has power to shape only when it is in motion. Dammed, it stagnates and evaporates (Starhawk [1987]1990:23).

Furthermore, because everything in the cosmos is said by practitioners to hold equal intrinsic value, power-from-within is depicted as essentially anti-hierarchical:

> [Magical] techniques, like any techniques, can be taught in hierarchical structures or misused in attempts to gain power-over. But their essence is inherently antihierarchical. As a means of gaining power-over, magic is not very effective...Magical techniques are effective for and based upon the calling forth of power-from-within, because magic is the psychology/technology of immanence, of the understanding that everything is connected (Starhawk [1982]1988:13).

Thus magical practice, as a means for practitioners to cultivate power-from-within, is seen as necessarily generating a structure of sociality that unites

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[36] Ache is a Yoruba term for personal power taught to Starhawk by Luisah Teish (Starhawk [1987]1990:23).

interconnection with anti-hierarchy, leading to a respectful awareness of the needs of others and the environment.

A third type of power, described by Starhawk in *Truth or Dare*, is what she calls 'power-with'. This type of power is much less commonly referenced by practitioners; indeed I recall only two conversations in which this concept was explicitly spoken about. Nonetheless this conception of power points to an important modification of these basic ideas. Where power-from-within is "linked to the mysteries that awaken our deepest abilities and potential", Starhawk defines power-with as a social power, "the influence we wield among equals" (Starhawk [1987]1990:9). She likens this to the influence of elders within "tribal and traditional societies" (Starhawk [1987]1990:13). It stems from personal relationships, experience and trust rather than formal roles of authority, and its source is "the willingness of others to listen to our ideas" (Starhawk [1987]1990:10). Since it is based on the respect of others, Starhawk suggests this is a kind of power that is easily lost if abused. It demands restraint and judgment, since "[t]he elders, the wise ones, retain our respect when we see them as working for the good of the whole". But should a person attempt to gain personal benefit at the community's expense, "the good will upon which [their] influence rests would rapidly disappear" (Starhawk [1987]1990:13–14).

Like power-from-within, power-with is seen to be grounded in the sacred (Starhawk [1987]1990:16). Nonetheless, Starhawk depicts its operations as more potentially ambivalent than power-from-within. Indeed, she suggests power-with "bridges the value systems of power-from-within and power-over" since it not only sees the world as built of relationships, but can also "rate and compare, valuing some more highly than others" (Starhawk [1987]1990:15). In a society where power-over is the primary form of power, the boundaries between power-with and power-over can at times appear "fuzzy" (Starhawk [1987]1990:11). For example, in a world in which teachers are figures of authority, one teacher may work to empower her students, while another might behave in authoritarian ways (Starhawk [1987]1990:11). Recognising this form

of power therefore places the onus on practitioners to beware of its potentially damaging effects:

> In the dominant culture, power-with has become confused with power-over. When we attempt to create new structures that do not depend upon hierarchy for cohesion, we need to recognize power-with, so that we can work with it, share and spread, and also beware of it. For like the Witch's knife, the *athame*, power-with is double-bladed. It can be the seedbed of empowerment, but it can also spawn oppression. No group can function without such power, but within a group influence can too easily become authority (Starhawk [1987]1990:10).

Thus Starhawk's theory of power-with, though not widely discussed by practitioners, begins to highlight a level of ambiguity in the social dynamics of power. And indeed, the Reclaiming community is not immune to challenges of navigating influence and authority, a problem to which I will return later in this chapter.

## Circles, cells and wheels

These ideas about power, hierarchy and connectivity are put into practice through Reclaiming's organisational structure. The community is organised as a loose affiliation of circles, cells, classes, public events, households and informal relationships. Its contemporary structure, in which individual working groups called 'Cells' send representatives to a 'Wheel', allows for the coordination of planning and ideas across a wide arena of activities. During my time in Reclaiming I participated in the San Francisco Ritual Planning Cell, responsible for envisioning and organising rituals for seven of the eight major festivals, and the Spiral Dance Cell, which coordinates the enormous theatrical-ritual enterprise that takes place yearly at the festival of Samhain, the witches' New Year. Other cells in the Bay area include Teachers' Cells, a Listening Cell, and a cell for the production of the online magazine Reclaiming Quarterly. As the religion has spread geographically, an overarching structure called BIRCH—"Broad Intra-Reclaiming Council of Hubs"—has been established to coordinate work between Reclaiming communities across the US and internationally.

This structure emerged following the dissolution of the Reclaiming Collective in 1997. At this point, the broader Reclaiming community had grown, and the smaller size of the Collective had become unwieldy for organising large numbers of activities. Typically, the Collective numbered around twelve to fifteen members, yet dozens of people were involved in planning and organising events, and larger rituals were attended by many hundreds. Personal conflicts had begun to enfold the Collective, while fewer members were taking up work like ritual planning. As George describes looking at it from the outside, "the Collective was pretty burned out at that point. There were only about four or five people still wanting to do things." Around the same time, members of the wider community had begun raising concerns about the accessibility of the Collective, and during consultations about a community venue it became clear that many lacked knowledge of the existing structure (Logan and Martin 1995). In the mid-1990s, ritual planning was opened up to two newer people who were not Collective members. Soon afterwards, as the strains on existing Collective members grew, a broad community consultation and discussion was initiated, out of which, at a retreat in November 1997, the Collective elected to dissolve itself and make recommendations which provided a blueprint for the current structure (Willow 2000).

There are common threads underpinning both the Collective and Cell-Wheel structures in the principles of non-hierarchical organising and consensus-based decision making. This approach has roots in the feminist and anarchist organising of the direct action movement, through which many founding members of Reclaiming deepened their activist experience.[37] These methods of consensus and anti-hierarchy are seen as essential to valuing each person's contribution to the group, while developing a harmonious synthesis of ideas across the group as a whole. An article on consensus reprinted by Reclaiming

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[37] The Philadelphia-based Movement for a New Society, a group with Quaker origins, was instrumental in helping introduce practices such as consensus-based decision making, non-violent direct action and forming affinity groups into the direct action protest movements of this period (Epstein 1991:67,199,268).

member Luke Hauser from the handbook of the Livermore Action Group[38], states:

> Consensus is a process in which no decision is finalized until everyone in the group feels comfortable with the decision and is able to implement it without resentment. Ideally, the consensus synthesizes the ideas of the entire group into one decision (Livermore Action Group et al. [1981–3]2003:12).

Where methods such as voting are seen as adversarial and potentially coercive, consensus methods are intended to synthesise the views, feelings and concerns of each member of a group into a working whole:

> Unlike voting, consensus is not an adversary, win/lose method. With consensus, we do not have to choose between two alternatives. Those who hold views different from ours do not become opponents; instead, their views are seen as giving us a fresh and valuable perspective. As we work to meet their concerns, our proposals are strengthened (Livermore Action Group et al. [1981–3]2003:12).

The starting point is seen as an openness from group members to each person expressing their beliefs, ideas and feelings (Livermore Action Group et al. [1981–3]2003:12). In practice, this demands a delicate balance of group members influencing each other without being seen to coerce each other. As Luke described to me the decision-making around the blockades at Livermore Laboratories:

> ...there was a real high bar, a real high expectation around consensus, non-coercion—I mean, these meetings would drag on forever because people were really trying not to coerce the last few hold-outs.

The guiding tenet here is upholding each person's individual authority in shaping group decisions. Thus the foundation of consensus is the integrity of individual truth, a premium on difference between group members, and a belief that through discussion, understanding, and disclosure of feelings these differences can cohere into an underlying unity.

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[38] In the appendices to his historical novel *Direct Action*, Hauser excerpts material from the Livermore Action Group and other alliances and affinity groups, via which many Reclaiming members participated in the anti-nuclear movement in the early 1980s.

Similarly, a group structure without formal leadership is seen as essential to valuing the integrity of each member of the group equally. The Livermore protests were organised around a structure of small 'affinity' groups of friends or like-minded activists, which were seen as creating centres of "love and trust", cutting against isolation by generating strong bonds between members who might work and possibly socialise together over long periods (Livermore Action Group et al. [1981–3]2003:16). In planning an action, each affinity group would send a spokesperson to a central spokescouncil, where the ideas and decisions of each group could be synthesised, and then returned to the affinity groups for further discussion until consensus (if possible) could be reached across the whole structure (Livermore Action Group et al. [1981–3]2003:14). Ideally, the personnel in these "spokes" were rotated to ensure that "power remains decentralized" (Livermore Action Group et al. [1981–3]2003:14). This structure of what Starhawk calls "Circles and Webs" (Starhawk [1982]1988:114) was designed to allow for decision-making across larger groups while neither establishing formal leadership positions nor allowing any one group to become entrenched as decision-makers.

This suspicion of formal leadership or "authority" infused early Reclaiming practice, framing the non-hierarchical principles upon which Reclaiming structures are built. In one of her later writings, Starhawk signs off with the phrase, "Yours in Persistent Opposition to Authority" (Starhawk 2001). She outlines her basis for this suspicion more fully in *Truth or Dare*, where she quotes the Oxford English Dictionary, which defines authority as "the power to enforce obedience: moral or legal supremacy: the right to command, or give an ultimate decision" (Starhawk [1987]1990:10). In this view, formal leadership and authority are equated with fear and obedience, seen as expressions of power-over. Furthermore, structures which embody formal leadership are seen to reproduce these problems of power-over:

> Structure, not content, determines how energy will flow, where it will be directed, what new forms and structures it will create. Hierarchical structures, no matter what principles they espouse, will breed new hierarchical structures that embody power-over not power-from-

> within…The structure itself reinforces the idea that some people are inherently more worthy than others (Starhawk [1982]1988:19).

Thus the avoidance of formal leadership structures within these movements is based on the belief that this is necessary in order to avoid power-over and ensure each person's inherent worth is valued in equal measure.

Many of the methods used within these movements emerged out of the previous decade's feminist consciousness-raising groups, and at the time were often called "feminist process". As the phrase "affinity group" suggests, a considerable emphasis was placed here on the importance of personal relationships, emotion and co-operation, as well as on valuing each person as an 'individual'. The Direct Action Handbook sums this up as follows:

> When we say that we use feminist process, we mean that the relationships within our groups cannot be separated from the accomplishment of our goals. We mean that we value synthesis and co-operation rather than competition, that we value each individual's contributions to the group and encourage the active participation of everyone involved. We mean that our organizations are non-hierarchical; that power flows from the united will of the group, not from the authority of any individuals (Livermore Action Group et al. [1981–3]2003:22).

Thus in the structure of personhood and sociality expressed in these processes, we see an interplay between individualism and interconnection. Individuals bond through a particular emotional and affective mode of relationality, relying on the similarities within the affinity group and techniques of trust-building and encouragement to ensure the synthesis of each individual's perspective into a harmonious whole. In the movement more broadly, the larger framework of "Circles and Webs" is one of egalitarian individualism between groups, providing a loose framework for coordination which permits a high degree of autonomy for each of the circles. It is a structure of sociality built upon cohesion and affinity within, diversification without.

These same principles form the foundation from which Reclaiming's organisational structure has developed. The Cells and Wheel form a system of "Circles and Webs", while the decisions within groups are made by consensus. For the same reasons, Reclaiming rituals are performed in circles with each participant asked to participate equally:

> In the circle, we all face each other. No one is exalted; no one's face is hidden. No one is above—no one is below. We are all equal in the circle…(Starhawk [1982]1988:114).

While the impact of the circle structure may be lessened by the fact that those priestessing[39] the ritual often stand at the centre, each role is rotated, so that the person casting the circle is not the same as the person invoking a deity or leading the trance. Often, the more major roles are done in pairs or groups as a way of modelling 'shared power'. Similarly, the core classes and most non-core classes are taught by more than one teacher, often with a student teacher as well, to demonstrate to the class a model of power distributed between people of different skills, personalities and levels of experience. Thus the organisational forms of Reclaiming are thoroughly infused with these principles of non-hierarchical structure and ideas of individual expression contributing to an interconnected whole.

This link between harmonious interconnection and egalitarianism also takes theological form. Most fundamentally, this is expressed in the ecological notion of the sacred 'web of life', in which interconnectedness and diversity are seen as complementary facets of a harmonious whole. This imagery of a cosmos connected through a constant interplay of individually unique and self-expressive parts infuses Reclaiming spiritual beliefs. It is expressed for example as the 'Star Goddess' whose expansion and differentiation is thought to have birthed the universe through fecund and erotic interaction, a

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[39] "Priestess" is generally used as a gender-neutral term in Reclaiming. While some male practitioners refer to themselves as priests, priestess is considered the generic term, and the action of leading a ritual part is referred to with the verb 'to priestess'.

foundational myth which sets the stage for a theology of diversification underpinned by an underlying thread of sacred interconnection.[40]

Another expression of this ecological diversification and interconnection is the oft-invoked Greek Goddess 'Gaia'; as with other Pagan traditions (as we saw in Chapter 1), in Reclaiming, Gaia is often taken to represent the Earth as a single ecosystem uniting differentiated parts. Like other Pagans before her, Starhawk develops a mythology around the 'Gaia' theories of Lovelock and Margulis (Starhawk 2004:41-9). She speaks for example of the reciprocal and complementary inbreathing and exhaling of oxygen and carbon dioxide by animals and plants as the respiration of a single organism, a self-regulating system that guarantees the possibility of life (Starhawk 2004:45-6). For Starhawk, this is more than a mechanical biological fact:

> Of course, scientists are very careful not to imply that this living planet has consciousness or self-awareness…For Witches, Pagans, and the like, however, having already removed ourselves from the realms of academic respectability, there are no reputations to protect, and thus we are free to experience Gaia as more than mechanistically alive—as a conscious being, a vast ocean of awareness in which we swim, always communicating, always present (Starhawk 2004:43).

For Reclaiming practitioners, the source of sacrality is in part the interconnection of this 'vast ocean' of consciousness and awareness.

Starhawk's spiritually-enhanced 'Gaia' theory has practical consequences. From this scientific base, she proposes a social theory of 'Social Gaianism' as an ethical principle for living, opposing this to sociological theories of Social Darwinism (Starhawk 2004:41-9). The latter, she argues, overemphasise individualism and competition at the expense of cooperation and complementarity (Starhawk 2004:48). By contrast, "Social Gaianism would acknowledge individual needs and self-interest but see them best served in systems of cooperation and mutual aid" (Starhawk 2004:49). Just as the regulation of the interplay of biological systems by its complex parts is seen as

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[40] A version of this foundational myth written by Starhawk appears in Appendix A.

ensuring a natural environmental equilibrium (Starhawk 2004:46), so the adoption of a social Gaian perspective would be seen as promising social harmony through the regulation of individual interests in systems of cooperation.

Thus the Cell and Wheel structure of Reclaiming, models of consensus, the emphasis on shared power and participation, the holding of rituals in a circle, are seen as the organisational conclusions of this theological and political outlook. They are founded on the interlinked principles of interconnection and diversity, and the theory that the sacred interconnection of the cosmos guarantees the mutuality and complementarity of individually differentiated parts. Just as developing individual power-from-within is seen as naturally leading to a relational worldview, consensus methods that hold to the 'truth' of each person are seen as offering the best assurance of agreement and accord, of solutions that synthesise each individual perspective into an integrated, interconnected whole.

## Individualism and relationality

At the centre of these systems of relational organising, a degree of methodological and theoretical individualism remains. Consensus models and the principle of non-hierarchical organising stem for Reclaiming practitioners from a premium placed on individual integrity and the importance of valuing each individual separately and equally. Starhawk is explicit: "We make decisions by consensus, as the process most in keeping with our recognition of the sacred within each individual" (Starhawk n.d.-b). This precept of sacred individualism is fleshed out in the Principles of Unity:

> Each of us embodies the divine. Our ultimate spiritual authority is within, and we need no other person to interpret the sacred to us (Reclaiming 1997).

As with the modelling of shared power and systems of consensus, this avoidance of dogma and priestly authority rests upon a notion of individual integrity.

In exploring the implications of this individualism for practitioners' attempts to develop a more interconnected sociality, it is useful to turn to anthropological theory. In particular, Marilyn Strathern's relational model of personhood, based on an interpretation of sociality in Melanesia, provides a means to conceptualise the repercussions of individualist assumptions at the centre of many social models. In Strathern's model, persons are not the unitary site of individual identities, but rather each person embodies their social relations within them:

> Far from being regarded as unique entities, Melanesian persons are as dividually as they are individually conceived. They contain a generalized sociality within. Indeed, persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them (Strathern 1988:13).

For 'dividuals', social relations are seen as intrinsic rather than external to a person. Furthermore, people are not idealised to grow up into independent adults, but into "sets of particularized social relationships" (Strathern 1988:92); they are "multiply constituted" through the "general enchainment of relations" in which they are embedded (Strathern 1988:165). From this brief outline, we can see that the Reclaiming understanding of interconnected personhood is not the same as this fundamentally relational model Strathern outlines. Based as it is on a valorisation of the individual, the Reclaiming picture is not one of persons seen inherently as "the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them", but rather provides us with a hybrid model that in many ways confirms individualised personhood while attempting to overturn it.

Nevertheless, if practices such as consensus decision-making are viewed as processual rather than static, the hybridity of this model comes into clearer focus. In emphasising the contextualisation and synthesis of individual perspectives into a harmonious whole, these practices can seen as a way of transforming personhood, a means of beginning with a collection of individualised consciousnesses and attempting to synthesise these into intersubjective beliefs, ideas, values and strategies by which a group can move forward. Understanding Reclaiming as a project aimed at transforming

sociality, Reclaiming practices of personhood are best viewed not simply as expressions of already-existing relational consciousness between community members, but rather as attempts to transform people's consciousness and sociality from individualised to relational. This process is fraught with challenges, and in reality the hybridity in Reclaiming models can be seen as both in-built and produced by this context of transformation. Yet recognising the processual quality of this hybrid model places at the centre of our analysis the world- and self-transforming project upon which the community was founded.

## Personal and social transformation: 'inner' and 'outer' work

Reclaiming practitioners place a premium on attempting to change the structure of sociality in wider Western society. Many view modernity and its vast social malaise as radically out of step with their sacred principles, and with what is demanded for human beings and for everything else to survive. The word "revolution" is commonly heard, while others prefer the concept of "evolution" to describe what they think is needed to overturn the existing social order of atomisation and power-over and found society anew. Indeed, most practitioners view their religious outlook and their ritual practices as contributing towards social transformation as well as providing personal support, direction and healing.

Exactly how this process of social change might unfold is less clear, and exploring this with practitioners begins to highlight some of the contradictions between individualism and interconnection that shape Reclaiming sociality. Rose is a leading community member and anarchist who joined Reclaiming in the early Direct Action days. When I asked her how she envisioned a challenge to the systemic problems she saw arising with modernity, she told me:

> I mean, you know, how does it get undone? I mean we have to fight!
>
> On a lot of different fronts. I mean, it *does* start individually. And it *is* important to join together. It *does* start individually. It does.

> Or, it might start collectively, and that draws you back to individual, you know. But the individual stuff is important, and the—the teamwork, the connection, the working together is very important as well.

This oscillating movement between individual and collective action is a common way of framing Reclaiming action for social change, especially among activist-practitioners. As David explained it:

> [A]fter things reached a crisis in 1969 and people were starting for the first time 30 day jail sentences—I saw some of my comrades at Dartmouth start, you know, 'Well, first I have to purify myself before I can have the pretence of purifying the world.' And I saw that then and I still see it as kind of a cop out in some sense.
>
> That if you're trying to fight the world without dealing with yourself, you're not going to be successful. If you're trying to change yourself without having fought in the outside world, you're gonna—the danger is you're going to lose the point. And they have to sort of happen simultaneously and I remember claiming at a certain point [in his ritual activist coven] that 'I have the fear that we're going to become too inward focused. Too much trance and that sort of thing.' And I brought that in as a concern at one meeting and we came out of that with a understanding—consensus if you will—that we'd try to maintain a kind of 50/50 balance—you know, going into trance, going to our place of power, trying to scry what was going on, but also being in the streets…

For activist-practitioners, this is a balancing act between two poles of individual and collective action, commonly metaphorised as a distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' work.[41] The movement between these helps us understand how Reclaiming members approach social transformation.

## The art of changing consciousness

One of Starhawk's oft-quoted definitions of magic is that of occultist Dion Fortune: "magic is the art of changing consciousness at will" (Starhawk [1979]1999:42). Reclaiming priestesses and teachers use story-telling and myth-making to help remake people's understanding of themselves and the

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[41] For example, in Starhawk and Valentine's book *The Twelve Wild Swans*, Reclaiming methods of magic through myth and storytelling are outlined in techniques classified into these two areas, the 'Inner Path' and the 'Outer Path', along with an introductory 'Elements Path' (Starhawk and Valentine 2001).

world, escaping the confines of the prevailing myths of Western culture. Many of these modern stories—the 'Great Man' version of history; 'good versus evil'; 'the American Dream' of success through individual effort; and so on—are seen as inscribing the structures of power-over on people's psyches (Starhawk [1982]1988:15–32). So a large emphasis in Reclaiming magic is to help people develop different stories through which to interpret themselves in relation to the world around them, from fairy stories and ancient myths to newly invented modern tales. Valentine has this to say about the use of fairy tales within Reclaiming:

> The fairy stories are told from a completely different cultural and psychological perspective than our modern one. In these stories women and men and even little children each have their own powers, cleverness, and magical abilities. The natural world is a great resource that helps those who respect and care for it and punishes the selfish and exploitative...The stories don't recommend a spiritual way of life; instead, they assume a spiritual way of life. There is much we modern people have to learn from the assumptions of these ancient tales (Starhawk and Valentine 2001:25–6).

Reclaiming teachers emphasise the importance of lateral and symbolic means of helping people access this magical way of life. It is not sufficient to reframe the cultural stories that are told. These stories must emerge from and enfold the experiences of each practitioner, who is encouraged to draw on elements of the magical story to make it her own. This is seen as allowing practitioners to tap into the deeper wisdom of power-from-within to which each person is seen to have access. A trance leading to the Celtic goddess Brigid's forge, a ritual visit to the Arthurian land of Avalon, a dream class based on the tale of the fairy Melusine such that elements of this story work their way into people's dreams over subsequent weeks: these techniques are means through which practitioners laterally tie their self-conceptions to an 'older', underlying world of interconnection, numinosity and personal power.

Central to this process of changing consciousness are the techniques used to create altered states within rituals and classes. This begins with 'grounding': shaking off the cares of the day, sending 'roots' down into the Earth to draw

up the Earth's energy and send down the psychic waste matter to be recycled, then shooting that energy upward to connect the grounded person to the sky and stars above. After this, a circle is 'cast' around the group, the four elements of air, fire, water and earth are 'called in' from the four compass directions, and deities and other spirits are invited to join the circle. Generally, invocations are tied to the mythical themes of the ritual: the Greek goddess of grains and fertility, Demeter, is often invoked at the Harvest ritual, a motherhood ritual could involve the Santeria deity Yemaya, while a ritual for initiating change might involve the Celtic goddess Cerridwen with her brewing cauldron. Techniques such as trance, ritual play, chanting and wild behaviour might be used to 'open up' the consciousness of participants. At summer and winter solstice, ritual participants plunge naked into the freezing Pacific Ocean, shocking themselves into an altered state, and then dance around the ritual fire. At the climax of almost every Reclaiming ritual, singing and dancing are used to 'raise energy' and generate an ecstatic ritual state.

Threaded throughout this process are elements of myth and story that suggest for each practitioner a way of reframing their own personal stories, hopes and fears. In one late summer Lammas ritual, participants were symbolically taken through the Welsh goddess Bloudowydd's journey, seen as a story of personal transformation from her beginnings as a soulless flower goddess. After many years with her husband Lugh, three drops from the well of life, planted in the flower goddess's throat by Lugh's mother Arianrhod, reached her heart when walking in the woods one day, just as she saw the dark god. Betraying her husband through following her heart's desire for the dark god, she was turned into an owl, thus initiating a traumatic and powerful transformation into a goddess of dreams and night time. Before the ritual, Bloudowydd was created in the ritual space from nine types of flowers. Participants were encouraged each to take a flower from Bloudowydd's body to remind them of their pledge made at an earlier ritual in February. As the flowers were taken, the goddess was dismembered. After a meditation reflecting on hopes and fears of betrayal around what each practitioner had done and what they had left undone from

their February pledge, participants were invited to take a risk, 'to follow in the path Bloudowydd has forged of coming into her own.' Three drops of flower essence were given to each participant who wished for it, to symbolise this choice. Thus myth and personal story were woven together for each participant throughout the ritual in symbolic and intuitive ways.

Such ritual storytelling is designed to change not only the 'internal' consciousness of practitioners, but in doing so to remake the 'cultural stories' surrounding practitioners' lives. Reclaiming practice is thus seen as being directed both 'inward' and 'outward', toward both the individual psyche of practitioners and the cultural patterns seen as surrounding their lives. Yet, in practice, the greatest focus of this activity is on undoing the internalised patterns of 'disconnected' consciousness seen as arising from a sociality of power–over. For the most part, rituals and classes involve deep 'inner work', leaving participants often feeling profoundly changed, but with less immediately apparent results for wider sociality.

At the same time, there are some practitioners for whom ritual is a complement to street activism, social justice work or direct action to challenge the structures of power–over. Among these activist–practitioners, rituals can be used as preparation for political actions, or as a means of renewal to counter burnout. In settings like the annual activist witchcamp, the traditional ritual greeting used to close a ritual—'Merry meet, and merry part, and merry meet again'—is often morphed into the salutation, 'Merry meet, and merry part, and see you in the streets!' On some occasions, magical techniques are brought directly into sites of political action. Together, these expressions of magical activism form the most striking components of what practitioners see as 'outer' work.

## 'Merry meet. Merry part. And see you in the street!'

On March 18th 2007, the fourth anniversary of the Iraq war, twelve Reclaiming members stood in circle together. We were preparing to join a march of ten thousand people calling for US withdrawal from Iraq. Some invoked elements

and deities that would help to usher in change. At the previous day's Spring Equinox ritual, dozens of community members had danced a double-threaded spiral dance, chanting:

> We are the power in everyone
> We are the dance of the moon and sun
> We are the hope that will not hide
> We are the turning of the tide

The 'dance of the moon and sun' referred specifically to a solar eclipse happening that day, whose energy, it was felt, could be harnessed for social change. At the march, three people held the standards of the sun, moon and earth that the previous day had been used to lead the dance. The focal point for both ritual and action was "Harnessing the exuberant energy of the dance of the sun and the moon for ecstatic uprising."

The ritual political action was initiated by members of my own circle and was brought to the San Francisco Ritual Planning Cell, who decided to put forward an open invitation to other community members at Equinox. While the group at the street action was small, the idea was that those present would 'pick up the thread' of energy raised at Equinox and bring it into the march. We magically 'called in' that thread at the ritual opening by reaching out to grab it and haul it in, while the many strands that tied one event to the other—the standards, the common ritual themes and the presence of many of us at both events— enhanced the sense of overlap between the two events. This illustrates some of the ideas behind Reclaiming magical street activism: the value of cohering and 'charging' a group of individuals for the duration of an action, while drawing in magical 'energy' to boost the potential transformative power of the action as a whole.

Many of the skills taught in Reclaiming magical classes are valued by Reclaiming street activists for use in demonstrations and direct actions. Starhawk teaches classes on magical activism that translate the ritual skill of grounding into a technique for staying calm in a chaotic street protest, and to aid activists in standing ground in the face of police attempts to break up a

demonstration. Likewise, the skills of 'reading' and 'harnessing' the energy of a crowd, which are seen as essential for priestessing a ritual, are also valuable skills to apply to street activism. This can be done overtly or covertly. In some cases, a spiral dance, magical chant or other ritual device might be used to energise and cohere a group of protesters. In other cases, more subtle techniques might be used, such as the drums at a small march of striking workers led by a Reclaiming union organiser, which underpinned chants of "this is union territory!", lending an air of confidence, coherence and festivity to this action.

The sense of cohesion developed through applying magical tools to protest is seen as central to Reclaiming activism. As George, a long-time Reclaiming member and activist, explained to me, magic can be used to break down the feelings of alienation he associates with mass protests:

> I'm thinking of the downtown type of protests, where there is a lot of yelling, and there's a lot of standing around being powerless, hoping something will happen…at some point I just get so depressed, I just turn around and walk off to [the train] by myself. I've done that plenty of times. Yeah, just like, 'Ugh this doesn't feel any good anymore, I gotta get out of here.'

> Reclaiming's contribution in a big way is overcoming alienation, and where I see Reclaiming's contribution politically, at the street protests, is counteracting the fizzle-out tendency. Reclaiming's ability to say— and it only takes a few people to say, 'Let's do a spiral dance before we go home'—oh, what a difference it makes. When people just somehow, we call it raising energy or something. We have language for it, and most political people don't have language for it. But, 'Let's just raise a little energy together, for what we just did. Let's, like, put our energy together for a moment, instead of just out, out, out.' That's a huge contribution—it's undervalued, but people that go to protests here, when something like that happens, appreciate it.

Thus the use of ritual tools in street action is seen as helping to transform the atomisation of participants into feelings of solidarity, empowerment and connectedness.

The underpinning approach to Reclaiming street activism is not simply to stand 'against', but to actively work to change those participating, and bring forth a different way of being in the world. Similar themes thread through street protest to those that shape Reclaiming practice as a whole: empowering, building cohesion, developing self-expression, 'reconnecting' people with their bodies and the earth, and creating new social visions. The emphasis is on creativity, connection, allegory and celebration: street theatre, puppetry, costumes and street parties are valued elements of Reclaiming street action. Starhawk describes a ritual action at the G8 meeting in Calgary in 2002 which brought many of these elements together:

> On Thursday, we had organized our own ritual action, Earth People...After casting a circle and calling directions, about sixty people covered themselves with mud, losing their powers of speech and normal locomotion. The following prophecy was read:
>
> When eight kings in a fortress meet
> Trading greed and lies
> Out of asphalt and concrete
> Beings of earth arise
>
> Grunting, dancing through the street
> Ancient powers awake
> In everyone they touch or meet
> Hidden chains now break
>
> The kings trade lies and costly gifts
> Protected by their walls
> But when the ground beneath them shifts
> The mighty fortress falls
>
> Fertile compost out of blight
> Living seeds take root
> Of beauty, balance and delight
> Trees bear living fruit
>
> No army can keep back a thought
> No fence can chain the sea
> The earth cannot be sold or bought
> All life shall be free!

> The army of Earth People stalked, danced and slithered through
> downtown Calgary, followed by winged Beings of Liberation and
> beautiful banners proclaiming "Resist!" and "Insurrection!" Alarming and
> delighting the public, they stopped at the GAP and at major oil
> companies to perform a dance ritual of awakening, rising, uprooting the
> anchors of corporate power, and planting seeds. Drumming and
> chanting built the energy to a peak again and again, and the Earth
> People succeeded in completely taking the streets. Mesmerized
> members of the public followed and the action became an impromptu
> snake march, with amazing energy. It ended at Eau Claire market with a
> spiral dance, and then a procession down to the river and a ritual
> bathing. At the moment the circle was opened, raindrops fell and
> thunder and lightning filled the sky (Starhawk 2002a).

As with Reclaiming 'inner' work, the emphasis here is on reframing modern stories in mythical terms. Yet this example is much more explicit in referencing wider social problems than most rituals and classes. Here Presidents become "kings", while "ancient powers" are available in which to topple the "fortress" of the G8 meeting. Themes like "awakening" and "rising" signify what practitioners think of as the reclaiming of a numinous, interconnected sense of power-from-within, while spiral dance, snake march and procession suggest people coming together to create charged assemblies that tell different cultural stories than those of G8 trade deals.

Starhawk sees a continuity between these processes of re-writing myths for 'inner' and 'outer' work:

> The tools of magic—the understanding of energy and the power and use
> of symbols, the awareness of group consciousness and of ways in which
> to shift and shape it—are also the tools of political and social change.
> Dion Fortune's definition of magic as "the art of changing consciousness
> at will" is also a fine definition of transformational political praxis. We
> construct our world through the stories we tell about it, and the practice
> of magic is the art of cultural storyshifting, the conscious dreaming of a
> new dream (Starhawk 2002b:263–4).

Thus in magical activism, there is a sense not only of transforming the consciousness of participants, but of projecting these new cultural stories out into the world through visible action. In the process, emphasis is placed on

bringing new structures of sociality into being, of people building groups and restructuring their relationships to the wider environment. As Rose describes:

> I see really good efforts in Reclaiming right now of people learning about permaculture, and people learning how to do various things to live in right relationship to the earth. And people building—building something, building connection, building groups that try to create something, rather than just always going out and protesting something.

What is built in the connections and the 'right relationship' to the earth is intended by practitioners to grow in the interstices of modern life, eventually swelling to push aside the more fragmented and utilitarian sociality they associate with Western modernity.

Similarly, direct action is seen as a means for practitioners of bringing this numinous world into being. While this can take the form of blockades, tree-sits or occupations, it also encompasses more mundane acts. As Rose describes:

> What I did around providing needles to junkies [which helped found a needle exchange], that was a proactive, that was something that I didn't, you know, I didn't go protest the laws or anything. I just started taking direct action. And direct action is great. Direct action doesn't have to be a protest, it can be just fixing the thing that needs to—or building the thing, or opening the thing that needs opening.

Starhawk sums this up with a description of what she calls "empowered direct action", through which she illustrates this intention of bringing a 'new' social world into being to challenge existing structures of power-over. She defines this as:

> ...embracing our radical imagination and claiming the space we need to enact our visions...It challenges the structure of power itself and resists all forms of domination and all systems of control. It undermines the legitimacy of the institutions of control by embodying freedom, direct democracy, solidarity and respect for diversity (Starhawk 2002b:97).

## Problems of individual and community

While the majority of Reclaiming members do not regularly engage in the kinds of political praxis described above, this general outlook of challenging Western

sociality through creating something new infuses the sentiment of Reclaiming spaces as a whole. Practitioners are fond of quoting Gandhi's injunction: "be the change you want to see in the world", and many see themselves as aiming for this attitude. At the same time, such an outlook can often lead in a more individualising direction. While Rose, as we saw, views social transformation as requiring both 'individual' and 'collective' efforts, for many practitioners this intention of embodying their social values is more commonly expressed as individual choices: consuming organic food, recycling, or in a more general sense living in a self-expressive and spiritually 'centred' way.

In practice, collective Reclaiming activism is much more sparse and difficult to find than the magic classes and public rituals that form the core of Reclaiming life. While several magical classes are often running in the Bay Area at a given time, in eighteen months, I saw only a handful of Reclaiming-influenced activist events. Nationally, a loose network of Reclaiming and other Pagan activists sometimes meets as the 'Pagan cluster'. During my time in the field, the cluster converged on Washington DC for a climate change and global justice protest, while many had worked in New Orleans on rebuilding efforts in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Yet in the Bay Area, as George explained, the Pagan cluster never fully cohered:

> [Reclaiming members] were part of larger movements here in the Bay Area…When Reclaiming's really mixed in with the rest, the activist core of Reclaiming is scattered to the winds. I mean Star, and [the other activists] and myself, we're, every one of us is off with a different group. We're not Reclaiming.

At the same time, Reclaiming activism appears to have waxed and waned over long periods, broadly following wider political trends in social movements. As Pagan cluster member Kevin explained to me, Reclaiming's activist foundations in the early Reagan era lasted around eight to ten years of diminishing activity, at its height during the early 1980s, a period of protest movements against nuclear research and US intervention in Central America. After that time, "Reclaiming focused less and less on activism and more and more on personal work", while "the activism they were doing was healing themselves." The core

of people involved in Reclaiming activism grew smaller and smaller, until the Seattle protests in 1999 spread the emerging 'global justice' movement against the International Monetary Fund and other international bodies of capitalism to industrialised countries. Several of the earlier generation of Reclaiming activists, including Starhawk, went to Seattle for this convergence, out of which the Pagan cluster was born. In more recent years, the activity of the Pagan cluster has diminished again as this movement has waned.

For some, like Rose, the number of people in Reclaiming with little commitment to activism is a source of concern:

> There's something that really disturbs me in Reclaiming circles which is a—not disturbs me, I think that's too strong—but there's always been people that are far more interested in self-discovery than anything else. And I'm just sort of over it. And I don't want Reclaiming to be this academy of self-discovery. I want Reclaiming to be a tradition of activism.

Yet the Reclaiming approach to seeing social problems as rooted in the internalisation of structures of power-over is a significant factor in this dynamic. For practitioners, changing the world means, among other things, working to unlearn how these structures of domination have become rooted in our psyches and our everyday assumptions and practices. This has tended towards an individualising of Reclaiming practice, in which healing the self has become, for some, an end in itself.

More fundamentally, it is not simply that an individualised approach to 'renewal' and 'transformation' often takes precedence within Reclaiming practice, but that the very opposition between 'individual' and 'collective' activity that runs through Reclaiming, which we saw in Rose's and David's descriptions of transformative social practice, is itself reflective of a personhood fundamentally conceived as individualised. Yet if a relational model of sociality such as Strathern's is taken as the starting point, the problem of how persons come to 'act in relation' disappears; as she suggests, "[w]e must stop thinking that at the heart of [relational] cultures is an antinomy

between 'society' and 'the individual'" (Strathern 1988:12). As Helliwell and Hindess (1999a) argue, where sociality is seen as relational there is no longer a dichotomy between the person and their social relations or the actions they take in relation to others. Rather, this model,

> ...renders unnecessary...any need (however implicit) to account for the fact that individuals are able to relate meaningfully with respect to one another, since in [this] model it is possible to act only on the basis of such meaningful relatedness: one is constituted in and through such relatedness (Helliwell and Hindess 1999a:7).

The very tension we see in Reclaiming between individual and collective action indicates the ongoing hold individualised conceptions of social praxis have over Reclaiming members, laying the basis for the dichotomisation of action that we see in Reclaiming into 'individual' and 'collective', 'inner' and 'outer'.

## At the nexus and the point of divergence

In Reclaiming praxis, there is one key moment where inner and outer, individual and collective can be seen to be fused together. This is the ecstatic pinnacle of ritual—the cone of power. Ritual planners build this into almost every ritual they plan, from the seasonal celebrations through to the nightly rituals at a witchcamp. This involves having participants sing and 'raise energy' which is focused inward toward the middle of a ritual circle. Often, this is achieved with a spiral dance, in which members lock hands and spiral inward, then outward, then back around until everyone is facing towards the centre. At this point, as the song harmonies reach ecstatic heights, they morph into a resonant humming, focussing in towards the centre of the circle and upwards into the sky. By the time this peak is reached, many if not most participants have achieved an altered state of consciousness—what Durkheim refers to as a state of "effervescence" (Durkheim [1912]1995:218–220, 424). The air pulsates with the concentrated power of participants' voices, while each person's awareness is directed at 'raising energy' toward the intention of the ritual to 'send out' into the world.

This condition of ecstasy is critical in creating a state that momentarily seems to break the deadlock between individual and collective action. The trance state attained allows participants to experience a dissolution of personal boundaries, chanting in unity and feeling the vibrations from others' voices and moving bodies. Simultaneously, the concentrated focus of the ritual allows each person to feel their individual transformation contribute to the transformation of wider sociality, as the collective energy is 'sent outward' to do its work in the world. The ritual story helps frame each participant's personal concerns in a shared mythical form, while the ritual intention, generally fashioned by ritual planners in an open-ended way, shapes how these stories are used, providing an axis around which the ritual revolves:

> Turning the silver wheel to transform the old corruption into a new web of courage, creation, justice and healing

> *Harnessing the exuberant energy of the dance of the Moon and Sun for ecstatic uprising*

> We dream and we open to remember who we are

At the ritual climax, the dissolutive state and this level of ambiguity in the ritual intention helps participants conceptually bridge personal and social goals. The hope of 'transforming', 'remembering' or 'rising up' can at this ecstatic moment merge to appear simultaneously as an individual and collective process.

At the same time, Reclaiming religious beliefs themselves carry the signs of an individualised sociality, which marks this point of nexus also as a point of divergence. We have already seen a number of expressions of the sacrality of the individual within Reclaiming, but one example will hopefully serve to illustrate this dynamic further: the Reclaiming conception of divinity itself. While practitioners hold to and develop relationships with deity in many forms and from many mythological traditions, one of the most fundamental statements of Reclaiming theology is the declaration "I am the Goddess". This is said both one on one, and in workshops and rituals, where practitioners may

affirm this of themselves or each other. While this is an extension of Reclaiming's pantheism, and in one sense is therefore also an affirmation of each person's connection to the cosmic divine, the effect of these utterances is to affirm the individualised person as a key dimension of the Reclaiming conception of the sacred. Indeed, the chant that often sustains the healing ritual at California witchcamp runs:

> My body is a living temple of love
> My body is the body of a Goddess
> Oh-oh-oh I am that I am

Ending as it does on an earnest reframing of Yahweh's well-recognised statement of his identity, this chant is an unmistakeable declaration of the divinity of the individual.

To understand the implications of this for Reclaiming sociality more fully, it is useful to examine these beliefs in the light of Durkheim's theories of religion and society. For Durkheim, religious belief emerges in moments of collective effervescence as an expression of the sociality of the group as a whole (Durkheim [1912]1995:421–424). If we take as our starting point his contention that "the idea of society is the soul of religion" (Durkheim [1912]1995:421), we can see that religious beliefs within Reclaiming can be taken as a mirror for their sociality. Thus the social form expressed and affirmed at the ecstatic peak of Reclaiming rituals includes a valorisation of individualism.

This aspect of the Reclaiming notion of the sacred suggests that Reclaiming practitioners place the individual at the centre of their shared ideas of sociality.[42] Reflected in this is a worship of the very thing many practitioners would profess to have rejected: a sociality of individualised persons affirmed in their own separate identities. While practitioners would argue that those affirmed individuals are being affirmed as part of the web of life, the question

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[42] A similar contention can be seen in Durkheim's suggestion that a commitment to the individual is part of a shared collective belief that binds a society such as modern France together (Durkheim [1898]1975).

remains why those persons are affirmed in themselves, and not, for example, in their relations, as members of a group, or in other ways which would signal their relational qualities. At the centre of Reclaiming ritual life, we might say, is a fetishism of the individual. Thus we come to the key tension in Reclaiming sociality: given that the Reclaiming Principles of Unity begin with an emphasis on the "interconnection" of all persons and things, why is individualism so persistent within Reclaiming social life? And what are the features of this individualism?

These questions will be addressed more fully in subsequent chapters. At this point, however, it is worth returning to Reclaiming social structures and collective activities, to examine how they are contested, both mirroring and reproducing particular contradictory modes of individualised and collective sociality. Within these structures, individualised and competitive practices of personhood persist despite the ideally 'connective' and 'harmonious' qualities attributed by practitioners to the development of power-from-within. Examining these practices also highlights questions about the appropriate extent of relational communities, and brings to light deeper questions of sameness and difference in Reclaiming conceptions of relationality. Finally, in exploring these tensions, we come to some limitations in the Reclaiming model of power-from-within as a basis for developing a relational personhood.

## Reclaiming religion as contested practice

### Power, self-knowledge, subjectivity: can there be too much empowerment?

As we saw at the start of this chapter, for Reclaiming practitioners the transformation of the self and sociality rests on an opposition between power-over and power-from-within. The belief is that, through magical practice, a greater degree of power-from-within can be developed in practitioners, leading to a personhood that is more connected and in harmony with other persons, the world and the cosmos as a whole. The purpose of developing this power-from-within is in keeping with that of other Pagans and magical

practitioners: to become more successful at effecting change, both practically and magically (the difference being a much greater emphasis in Reclaiming on thereby developing a harmonious, interrelational sociality). While Starhawk has adopted and popularised Fortune's idealist definition of magic as the art of changing consciousness[43], this is not intended to exclude, but rather to embrace, the ways in which practitioners view their empowered actions as highly pragmatic. As Starhawk describes:

> Magic can be very prosaic. A leaflet, a lawsuit, a demonstration, or a strike can change consciousness. Magic can also be very esoteric, encompassing all the ancient techniques of deepening awareness, of psychic development, and of heightened intuition (Starhawk [1982]1988:13).

The purpose of developing personal power through magic is therefore to hone one's skills in effecting change in oneself and the world. And this brings us to the question of how it is that practitioners understand and assess how successful they are in developing this personal power.

There are two related measures here. On the one hand, practitioners gauge this by a feeling of greater purpose and focus in the practical and magical activities they undertake. Power-from-within is the ability to take effective action, and it is measured both by external evidence of one's effectiveness in the world—getting a job, winning a wanted item at the witchcamp lottery draw, or building a social movement—and at least as importantly by an internal sense that one *feels* focused and able to affect events. This encompasses a feeling of consistency with one's own internal values. For, while power-over may display the trappings of such personal effectiveness, for practitioners its misalignment with deep spiritual values is also ultimately its weakness. As Starhawk says:

> Integrity means consistency; we act in accordance with our thoughts, our images, our speeches; we keep our commitments. Power-over can

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[43] Compare Crowley's definition: "Magic is the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will" (Crowley [1913]1997:126).

be wielded without integrity, but power-from-within cannot. For power-from-within is the power to direct energy—and energy is directed by the images in our minds and speech, as well as by our actions. If these are consistent, energy flows freely in the direction we choose and we have power. If what we do is at odds with what we say or think, then energy gets blocked or mis-channeled. If I think and say I hate pollution, and yet walk by and leave the beer cans lying at my feet, the energy of my feelings is dissipated. Instead of feeling my own power to do something, however small, about litter, I feel and become more powerless (Starhawk [1982]1988:35).

Practitioners feel that they have become more empowered when they have a personal sense that their actions are self-consistent and align with their environmental and social values, and when they feel a growing trust in their ability to achieve their goals because of this internal consistency and assuredness.

While in many ways, such prosaic measures of power-from-within as effectiveness and internal consistency seem no different from common-sense definitions of power, in Reclaiming, power-from-within can only arise from a deep sense 'within' of interconnection with the cosmos. This points to the second measure practitioners use to gauge power-from-within: a practitioner knows he is acting in accordance with power-from-within when he has done consistent inner magical work, through which he feels he can get in touch with the web of life. Empowerment is thus recognised as an interior awareness of connection to the cosmos and to the practitioner's greater purpose and pleasure in life.

As we have seen, the shift from power-over to power-from-within for practitioners corresponds to a shift in personhood from a perceived atomisation and alienation to a sense of interconnection with the whole, organic 'web of life'. The success of achieving this interconnection is measured internally for practitioners by how well they can make meaning of their daily actions in terms of their 'higher' purpose, and how well their actions align with other fundamental values such as environmentalism, social justice and creativity. In turn, each practitioner's sense of their 'higher' purpose is

interpreted and refined in myriad ways through a rich tapestry of activity: in meditation, ritual trance-work, dream analysis, reading, divination, in conversation with friends and fellow practitioners, and through everyday application. And, since practitioners believe that what is in keeping with the cosmos is also what gives us our deepest pleasure, this sense of alignment is measured, too, by feelings of contentment, excitement and joy.

There are profound consequences for personhood in the choice practitioners make to take such internalised and subjective standards as their measure of success in magical work. Many of these I will flesh out in the following chapters, but for now it is worth noting that the kinds of 'deep' work in which practitioners are consistently engaged reflect a specific mode of interiorised, self-reflexive personhood particular to modern, Western individualism (Taylor 1985, 1989). In turn, this can be argued to reflect particular operations of power that are not nearly so automatically harmonious and connective as many practitioners would hope. To understand this more fully, it is worth now turning to the extensive work on power and subjectivity developed in the writings of Foucault.

As with Reclaiming conceptions of power-from-within, for Foucault, power is not something that is had, but something that is done.[44] The exercise of power is a set of "actions upon other actions", which is expressed wherever one person attempts to influence, persuade or shape another: "a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it constrains or it forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action" (Foucault 1983:220). Like power-from-within, and unlike power-over, Foucault's conception of power is not of something static and possessed, but

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[44] There are of course many significant differences between Foucault's conception of power and Reclaiming understandings, most crucially that Foucault's anti-humanist philosophy would reject the essentialisation of the person implied in the Reclaiming notion of 'power-from-within'. This analysis is not intended to imply that these concepts are commensurate, but rather to draw on Foucault's theorisation of power to explore the dynamics, strengths and limitations of Reclaiming conceptions.

of something put to use: fluid and shifting in the myriad acts performed between people (Foucault 1984:3).

Yet, unlike either Reclaiming notion of power, for Foucault power is morally ambivalent, neither automatically bad nor automatically helpful or liberating. It is simply ubiquitous. For Foucault, strategies of power are seen as circulating through all social relations via discourses that encompass both normalisation and resistance in complex and unstable ways (e.g. Foucault 1978:100–2). As he suggests, "I don't believe there can be a society without relations of power, if you understand them as means by which individuals try to conduct, try to determine the behaviour of others" (Foucault 1984:18). Yet this does not mean that power relations for Foucault are always innocuous. Situations can arise that he calls "states of domination" in which "the relations of power are fixed in such a way that they are perpetually asymetrical [*sic*] and the margin of liberty is extremely limited" (Foucault 1984:12). In particular, Foucault extensively critiques those expressions of power tied to the modern state, the "coldest of all cold monsters"[45] (Foucault 1988:161), and related knowledge regimes by which persons in modernity have become constituted as subjects with particular dispositions and inclinations, tied to their individualised identities, and thus more amenable to management and control (Foucault 1983).[46]

When we examine Reclaiming measures of empowerment more closely, we can see in them signs of this less automatically optimistic conception of power. On

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[45] The phrase is from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* ([1887]1978:48).

[46] Foucault's position shifts at different points regarding the emphasis he places on how much relations of power are worthy of concern. At times he points to the commonplace and innocuous operations of power in everyday situations, speaking only of concerns about "domination" (Foucault 1984:16, see Helliwell and Hindess 1999b). At other times, he speaks of "excesses" of power (Foucault 1983:210) and the demand for resistance to the particular operations of power which subject people to their totalising and individualising effects (Foucault 1983:212, see also Foucault [1975]1980, Foucault 1980). Compare his later comments on the operation of power in the education system, where he sees the challenge as being to simply avoid subjecting students to "arbitrary and useless authority" (Foucault 1984:18) with his earlier analysis of the pervasive and thoroughgoing disciplinary regimes within educational institutions (Foucault 1977:135–69).

the one hand, power-from-within is registered internally by a sense of connection to the 'web of life', and externally by a practitioner's effectiveness at getting things done. In practice, this implies a person's ability to influence their social world (materially or magically) to achieve desired ends. Thus, once power-from-within is realised, it begins to look much closer to Starhawk's later concept of power-with, the ability to influence others, and is very much in keeping with Foucault's conception of "action on the actions of others". And as Starhawk points out, power-with has an ambivalent moral quality; the boundaries between it and power-over are not always clear. Thus we can understand not only power-with, but power-from-within, as possessing a morally ambivalent and potentially problematic character.

A Foucauldian understanding of the everyday, ongoing operation of power in interpersonal interactions suggests that the two poles of power in Reclaiming may not always be easily distinguishable. In Starhawk's example of a teacher becoming empowered touched on above, that teacher is part of an extensive, institutionalised educational system in which students are shaped as obedient, competitive and self-disciplining subjects.[47] In this context, enhancing a teacher's confidence, focus and effectiveness may not automatically provide any immunity against these processes, and may actually make that teacher more successful at imposing these ubiquitous and routine disciplinary practices. Within this wider context, the teacher's development of personal power could become as much a barrier as an aid in overcoming that consistent asymmetry of power relations in modernity that practitioners identify as power-over.

Likewise, the intention that power-from-within will connect the practitioner to greater awareness of others via the cosmic web becomes problematic once we see that it is measured by an internalised self-consistency. While thought by practitioners to create a more relational awareness, this could in practice

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[47] See for example Foucault's discussion in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1977:135–69).

operate to further individualise and atomise them. As Foucault has argued, relations of power operate not only between persons, but within them, internalised through those methods of governmentality that are particularly prominent in modernity; discourses tied to "knowledge, competence and qualification", such as psychiatry and criminology, by which people learn to monitor themselves (Foucault 1983:212, Foucault [1977]1986:27–9). He calls this pattern of learning to examine oneself for self-consistency the "government of individualization" (Foucault 1983:212), for he suggests such processes are profoundly individualising, having the effect of marking each person off from all others as each monitors him– or herself against totalising standards (Foucault 1983:208–16). While the particular practices that shape Reclaiming subjectivity are quite different from those of the hegemonic knowledge systems of Western societies, the fact that practitioners, in measuring their development of personal power, are encouraged to turn inward and examine themselves intensely and often should at least alert us to the individualising possibilities of their practice.

In light of Foucault's work on power and the subject, we are led to ask: is an internally gauged idealised awareness of the web of life sufficient to develop a relational sociality amidst the dominance of the government of individualisation, or does it merely contribute to further individualisation? The concept of power-from-within contains within it an inherent tension, between practitioners' hopes that it will deliver a more relational sociality, and these internalised processes of self-examination by which they judge their success. It is not clear that developing power-from-within, whatever its perceived connections to the cosmic web, is in itself a guarantee of increasing interrelational awareness within a sociality still made up in critical ways of persons seen as individuals.

Reclaiming processes likewise institute their own complex and contested power-knowledge regimes. Asad's (1983) critical reflections on religion and power highlight the ways in which religious knowledge, laws, disciplinary activities and personal and social institutions can be seen to reproduce

complex and interlocking effects of power. He points out that religions are not usefully viewed as homogeneous systems of meaning or belief, but are contested systems whose power-knowledge dynamics constitute their subjects as they suggest meaningful interpretations of the world. His focus is on medieval Christianity, whose vast capacity to constitute subjects through knowledge practices is very different from that of small, socially marginal religions like Reclaiming. Nonetheless, as he suggests, even within much more modest religious systems, the dynamics by which particular systems of knowledge become religious 'truth' are not easily set aside (Asad 1983:244–246). The systems of power and knowledge within these more marginal religious settings should likewise be understood as constitutive, contested, and intersecting with wider social discourses.

Examining Reclaiming practices of knowledge and power enables us to better understand the content of contested processes within the community. And here, it is not simply that interpersonal relations of power within Reclaiming are impacted by wider social patterns of individualisation; nor that practices aimed at the realisation of personal power can themselves be constitutive of particular patterns of individualised subjectivity. It is also a question of who defines those practices, how they are contested, and the limitations they circumscribe on the actions of individual Reclaiming members. Formally structureless and consensus-based organising, models of conflict resolution based on inner truth and integrity, an emphasis on relations of affect, and a religious tradition erected on the 'veracity' of personal revelation, each build upon, mould and in other ways constitute subjects that exhibit strong tendencies toward individualisation. This in turn can lead to sometimes-hidden, sometimes-open disputes around whose individual 'truth' will win out, demonstrating the less innocent operation of power and knowledge within Reclaiming and highlighting the dynamics of Reclaiming as a contested practice.

During my time in Reclaiming, I encountered myriad small examples, and some larger ones, whereby practitioners felt that their 'truth' had been shut down by

another's more confident and influential assertions about the life of the community and what needed to be done. I discussed these concerns with Ash, who said that he believed the collective assumption in Reclaiming—what he called a "'Dreaming in the Dark' viewpoint"—which he himself had shared, had earlier been that "with the right tools, and enough consensus, and enough facilitation, and enough skill, we could transcend this stuff" of problems of power and exclusion. He now felt that, although such methods are important, equally important is for people with a great deal of "earned authority" to be conscious of how they are with others, particularly those who are not their peers. Speaking of the authority leading members tend to have vested in them by others, he said:

> I think that a wise person that has a lot of earned authority realises that some of that is going to be misplaced projection. And you have to always be taking the cover off and saying…'I'm just a person, no more no less than…any other person…And that I'm just as screwed up as anybody I want to point fingers at…' And sort of holding that humility is key to my own personal practice around these issues. Because otherwise it's too easy, once you start getting that earned authority, to let it go to your head, that every jewel that comes out of your mouth is worthy of everyone's snap attention.

Key to this is self-examination:

> Part of [earned authority] is being empowered, that gives you a lot. But if empowered means I get to say anything I want, any time, to anybody, without thinking much about the consequences, that can start to get power-over.

> And we all have the shadow of our needs at play. And unless you're doing the work that…'how am I getting my needs met in this situation, and what are my shadows at play?' Unless you're doing that, the possibility for power-over is rampant.

Ash is a member of the Listening Cell, which was established by the San Francisco Wheel in recognition of the need for a mechanism to monitor the community's health and help resolve ongoing conflicts and sporadic disputes that emerge periodically within the life of Reclaiming. Following months of deep contemplation "plumbing…some of the assumptions that underlie us",

Ash came to the conclusion that sometimes a highly influential person must consciously curb that influence to ensure the wellbeing and functioning of a group as a whole.

This critical insight has important implications for understanding Reclaiming. For if power-from-within is not its own corrective, but itself must be curbed by conscious self-limitation, then its development through magical activity cannot be seen as automatically assuring harmonious social relations through its underlying link to cosmic interconnection. In practice, it seems very difficult to differentiate this from Starhawk's concept of power-with; as such, both are perhaps better understood in Foucauldian terms, as the capacity to act to influence the actions of others in ways neither inevitably positive nor negative, but inherently ambivalent. As Ash's comments suggest, these are issues under discussion among several of Reclaiming's more experienced members and teachers. Yet tensions in these conceptions continue to influence community events, and these issues remain fraught, particularly in cases where conflicts arise within the life of the community. Examining these conflicts in the context of Reclaiming institutions and knowledge systems therefore allows us a more critical look at the operations of power within the community, and its implications for creating a new sociality.

## The tyranny of structurelessness?

The first such issue arises when we look at the operations of the structures of decision-making. Most decision-making in Reclaiming is based on a level of informality, whereby everyone present in a particular group or Cell comes to an agreement or chooses to hold their peace. Ritual mechanisms such as breathing or trancing together are often used to help groups develop a harmonious vision of the action or ritual being planned or the decision being made, but when more verbal methods are needed to resolve an issue, a consensus model is used. While this model allows for people with very strong feelings against the direction of the wider group to block the decision, in

practice this is very rare. Thus, decision-making is formally flexible and involves a low level of structural conflict-resolution process.

In these circumstances, decisions arrived at can at times become heavily influenced by informal relationships within these decision-making bodies. Often, members of a Cell or group who know each other well discuss their ideas and develop an amalgamated position separate and prior to the meeting of a group as a whole. As George explains, when this happens, it tends to undermine the intended egalitarianism of the consensus process:

> I think when that happens, what you're doing—it's not intentional, people don't go in there with this intent—but you're subverting democracy...you're having one group of people make a decision. And when you have those four or five people turn up at a meeting, they're going to overwhelm everyone else there, unless there's somebody with a really strong opinion. They're organized, and everybody else is a free agent...if a power bloc comes in...it doesn't matter if they're only a quarter of the group—they'll overwhelm it.

Thus, within the wider Cell or group, personal friendships, coven relationships, households and other socially established subgroups can have a disproportionate influence on decisions made.

This problem was analysed by feminist Jo Freeman with respect to the formally structureless organising models prevalent in feminist organising in the early 1970s. In an article entitled 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness' (1970)[48], she argues that formally structureless groups are often less inclusive and democratic than those with a transparent, formal structure. While she suggests informally structured groups can be very useful for personal transformation and consciousness-raising—encouraging participation and eliciting personal insight—in groups designed to take action, informal structures generally

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[48] 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness' is an article that has been widely reproduced among feminists and other activist communities, particularly during the 1970s. It has formed part of discussions on power and organising processes among at least some Reclaiming members: one person I interviewed mentioned the article to me in a discussion on power, having had it recommended to her by a prominent Reclaiming teacher and activist.

hamper inclusive decision-making by allowing friendship groups within the wider group to hold sway:

> These friendship groups function as networks of communication outside any regular channels for such communication that may have been set up by a group. If no channels are set up, they function as the only networks of communication. Because people are friends, because they usually share the same values and orientations, because they talk to each other socially and consult with each other when common decisions have to be made, the people involved in these networks have more power in the group than those who don't (Freeman 1970).

Likewise, she points to the barriers that less time, money, education or simply less ability to 'fit in' can erect against gaining influence in these informal structures. She suggests these patterns tend to arise even when those involved in the influential group intend to be inclusive and egalitarian, simply because such informal networks are bound to grow. Thus she argues that exclusions tend to become systemic; formally flat, open structures for decision-making become simply a cover for imbalances of influence in decision-making bodies.

The emphasis in Reclaiming on connections of affinity as a basis for more relationally conscious and empowering decision-making can at times elide these problems further. As we have seen, a premium is placed within Reclaiming on small groups developing strong personal bonds, socialising, playing and working together. In fact, as Freeman's analysis and George's comments both suggest, relying on connections of affinity as a solution to challenges of group decision-making can actually deepen problems of access and power, as informal friendship groups begin to develop more influence within the wider body.

A similar and related problem arises with the collective structure of Cells and Wheel upon which Reclaiming decision-making rests. This system can be beset by issues of accessibility, as some outside the structure are unsure of how to enter or whether they would be welcome. Several then-peripheral community members described to me occasions of feeling slighted by existing Cell members and of being unsure how to go about 'getting in'. Although the Cell

structure seems to provide more opportunities than did the Collective for a newer person to become involved in activity and decision-making, entry to the Cells in some cases involves being 'consensed' in by existing Cell members rather than, for example, selected by the community at large, or involving people on a purely voluntary basis. This allows for a level of continuity to be maintained in the skills, dispositions, beliefs and level of commitment within Reclaiming decision-making structures. However, in practice it can also serve as a barrier to participation. Being consensed onto a Cell is generally more straightforward for community members who already have strong personal and social connections to those within the structure.

One young Reclaiming member aspiring to teach and lead rituals described to me what she called the "little big witches". These, she said, were teachers and priestesses generally with an intermediate level of experience, less senior than the founding Reclaiming members and elders, who she felt often acted as gatekeepers, discouraging newer people like herself from coming in. This is not a universal viewpoint; many newer people find teachers to be helpful and supportive mentors. Moreover, these situations are often fluid, as members who have raised these kinds of concerns with me have in several cases since found opportunities to teach or priestess rituals. Yet such concerns were expressed to me on numerous occasions. It seems that the lack of clarity and the personal dimensions to the process of entry into some of the Cells is frequently a cause for concern among people less central to the existing community structures. For newer members 'outside', trying to work out how to 'come in', it can be a source of confusion and mistrust.

Just as with the level of influence over decision-making, the need for newer people to convince existing members of the contribution they could make to the Cell places a premium on interpersonal relationships with existing Cell members. These relationships are shaped by an unequal informal status between existing and newer members, since teachers, ritual planners and others are more likely to play prominent roles and have many more opportunities to share their visions and ideas in rituals and classes. While no

Reclaiming member formally stands 'above' any other, these informal status measures can have enormous influence on the extent to which people feel valued within the community and are listened to and respected by others. Thus the discourse behind the Cell and Wheel structure emphasising consensus, trust and interpersonal relationships is also a source of a subtle operation of power, which can at times act as an exclusionary barrier.

One incident illustrates the impact of these semiformal social systems. In planning for Summer Solstice, some members of the San Francisco Ritual Planning Cell, including two who were less embedded in Reclaiming social networks, felt called to invoke a Greek deity, Pan, at the ritual. When this was announced to the wider Cell, many Ritual Planning Cell members absent from the meeting (some currently inactive) were very concerned that the habitual practice of invoking the Celtic deity, Lugh, at this time of year was not being honoured. After the ritual, other concerns were raised about the priestessing, and in particular about the way the trance was led. Over subsequent weeks, I was party to several discussions about these events, and differing positions began to distil. At the Fall retreat meeting of the Cell, a decision was made to provide space to air some of these concerns. One of the Cell members chiefly responsible for the controversial decisions, in part sensing the brewing conflict, decided she was too busy to come.

At the retreat, a significant group of people who were friends, housemates and members of the same ritual circle came to raise their concerns about the ritual and its breach with Reclaiming tradition. Having discussed their concerns with each other over preceding weeks, they came to the retreat with a strong representation of mutually reinforcing critiques, which carried the weight of the discussion. While each of these members felt their concerns genuinely and wished to put forward what they believed was best for the community, their close ties with each other and frequent opportunities for discussion outside this formal space formed what appeared to be the most significant networks of communication shaping the dynamics in the room. Some of these Cell members also put forward a position that membership of the Ritual Planning

Cell should be contingent on having taken the introductory Reclaiming class, Elements, which the priestess in question had not done. This had been a semi-formal guideline earlier, and now was affirmed by the Cell as very strongly recommended, despite the fact that this priestess had been a member of the Cell for several years before this incident. In effect, this could be seen as a way of reconsolidating a return to established Reclaiming traditions, from which some Cell members felt the Cell had strayed. But it also had the effect of denying the newer visions and voices represented by those who planned the Solstice ritual. Thus the strong personal bonds existing within parts of the Cell and the internal process of consensus whereby existing members agree on principles of Cell membership combined to reinforce the cohesiveness within the Cell at the expense of one person whose choices were unpopular.

Here we see that the very centrality of affective, personal interconnection as a means of creating a more interpersonally aware and consciously relational social practice can also serve to create exclusions and devalue the contributions of some members. Relying on the synthesised wisdom of an existing Cell at times acts to institutionalise a semi-permeable boundary between those within and those without, despite being based on a model of full inclusiveness and interrelationality. There was no explicit operation of formal authority in this setting; each person acted by speaking and sharing what they felt was true for them. And yet a more subtle operation of power took place, whereby certain members forged a cohesive position, while the priestess in question, in part perhaps sensing her relatively weak position, made a personal choice to retreat.

If Foucault is right, there is no way to avoid such constant interactions of power, which take place in all dealings between people seeking to influence one another. Through such interactions, community traditions are shaped, visions are realised, skills are shared, and structures of leadership and influence emerge, re-form, dissolve or become sedimented. Yet, if it is not the case that such operations of power can be avoided, then the question of how such influence can best be wielded remains one of judgment and assessment.

Starhawk's analysis of power-with is designed to explore this reality, and she identifies among other things this very challenge of how problems can arise when influence of individuals or cliques within a group goes unrecognised. However, her solutions rely heavily on voluntary self-monitoring both by influential members and the group as a whole in order to curb the risk of such influence crystallising into power-over (Starhawk [1987]1990:265–73). In order to check the effects of rising authority, practitioners can thus be turned back in on themselves, towards a stance of self-monitoring which Foucault links to individualisation.

As we have seen, developing power-from-within is part of what allows a person to wield more influence, and is not always easily distinguishable from power-with. At times, then, developing power-from-within institutes not only connection with some people, but separation from others; it is not so clear in these cases where influence ends and the use of authority to circumscribe the influence of another begins. In relying on the magical development of personal power linked to internalised feelings of interconnection to deliver a relational social ethic inclusive of each Reclaiming member, members are thereby caught in a bind: between conscientious self-monitoring and the risk of "too much empowerment".

## Consensus and conflict resolution

As we have seen, at the heart of consensus process is the valorisation of each individual within a group, whose commitments and hopes can ideally be synthesised into a relational whole through magical, discursive and practical means. While an individualised sociality is ideally transformed in this way into a more relational one, there are ways in which the emphasis on the individual is also reinforced and conditioned by these same processes. The methods used for conflict resolution within Reclaiming also serve to illustrate these dynamics. As with any group of people, there are times in the life of Reclaiming when issues surface in the form of more serious conflicts, which those involved may 'work at' to try to resolve. The mechanisms for this are constantly being

developed and matured, but the basic model resembles the consensus model of decision-making: the parties come together, often with the help of a trusted mediator, and each person is encouraged to speak their truth and be heard in the hope of finding a cohesive way out of the conflict. Devices such as speaking in "I" statements, not interrupting others and not speaking for them are fundamental to ensuring each person is heard. And, in order to create trust and a free space for discussion, the group is bound to confidentiality: what is said in the room stays in the room.

Practitioners frequently find a great deal of value in these practices, and such methods are applied widely both within private groups and more officially via structures such as the Listening Cell. There is much to be said for such methods having the capacity to clear the air. In one of my circles, such a discussion helped to reduce the sense of unease among circle members after an email which some considered inflammatory was sent by one member to the circle's listserv. The conflict-resolution process made it possible for us to meet and perform rituals together for several more months. While underlying differences eventually resulted in the group's dissolution, this was on reasonably amicable terms.

However, by encouraging deep introspection and the expression of uncomfortable feelings, such processes can also be highly involved, even agonistic, resting on a deeply interiorised notion of personal truth. When one conflict arose around the organising of one of the witchcamps, including concerns over how funds had been managed at a previous camp, organisers of the camp, including those at the centre of the controversy, spent many months in debate in order to work out what to do. Immediately prior to the camp itself, they dedicated several days to discussion with one another designed to find a way forward that could heal the breach of trust and still include those at the centre of the conflict. Describing her experience of the camp, one of the organisers said to me simply, "I learned a lot about conflict resolution." These processes take a great deal of patience on each person's part, and require a willingness of each participant to engage in introspective practices—to 'look

honestly at your feelings' and 'express what is true for you', as these ideas are commonly expressed.

These challenges reflect what Strathern describes as the problem of being-in-relation that arises out of an individualised personhood. As we have seen, for Strathern, in a relational model of personhood, the question of how persons might 'connect' is not at issue, since persons are already imagined as intrinsically in relation (Strathern 1988:12–13). By contrast, in Reclaiming, being-in-relation is seen as a problem to be actively worked at. As Rook says:

> I think that it takes a lot of navigational skill to work in community, live in community, and to be in healthy relationships with each other... It's hard to be in good healthy relationship with a lot of people, especially if you haven't done a lot of work on yourself.

This is an agonistic model of being-in-relation that presupposes an underlying pattern of conflict or incompatibility of personal interest, where interest is located within each individual. Furthermore, the solution to this tension for practitioners lies in individual self-work. Thus the Reclaiming model of 'working in community' is an intriguingly individualist one, where each person is seen as the unique locus of their own needs, desires, motivations and capacity.

It is clear that this perception of conflicting interpersonal dynamics is not merely a social model, but a lived experience. Practitioners do not simply imagine, but believe and experience that some conflicts require hours of self-expression and discussion; they are frequently willing to dedicate the hours necessary to reach resolution. In these cases, it is not completely possible to distinguish to what extent this conflict-resolution model is based upon their pre-existing experience of their own individualised personhood, and to what extent this individualised experience is further conditioned by the model employed. But it is apparent that practitioners enter into and experience conflict resolution through the lens of their own individual needs and concerns, and the desire to integrate these with the whole.

This individualisation of perception is illustrated most sharply by the case of one practitioner in the conflict over witchcamp funds, who found his individual beliefs and principles incompatible with the conflict-resolution process altogether. Having become concerned about this issue through a discussion with a camp organiser, Matthew felt very strongly that what had happened at the previous camp should be disclosed beyond the organisers to the wider community of witchcamp participants. Thus he felt the established conflict-resolution mechanisms to be in tension with his concerns. Fearing that he might learn further concerning information which he would be prevented from disclosing, he refused to engage in mediation with the parties concerned owing to the pledge of confidentiality that sits over such discussions.

Matthew's experience of this conflict was highly marked on his person. Over many months, concern over the non-disclosure made him both depressed and physically ill, and was expressed in his body as sleeplessness and vomiting episodes. This, along with the isolation he felt by not feeling able to share information, and his refusal to participate in established conflict-resolution mechanisms, set him apart from the other parties to the dispute and from most other members of Reclaiming. At the same time, the individualisation of the conflict-resolution mechanisms—in particular the requirement for secrecy seen to allow a 'safe space' for personal, introspective and emotional expression of each individual—was part of the problem for Matthew. What he felt was needed for both himself and the community was not his personal disclosure of his feelings to the responsible parties, but disclosure of factual matters to the wider community.

In part, at issue here was a disagreement about the boundaries of a legitimate community of concern. Matthew's view was that the whole of the witchcamp community should have an opportunity to learn about and respond to events that he believed affected them. The remainder of organisers felt it primarily involved current organisers and the immediately concerned parties to the original matter, and that it would be easier to reach resolution and avoid this possibility in future if the problem could be resolved privately between these

immediate parties. Here, we see a tension between a closed and open model of decision-making: whether the synthesis of a group solution should take place within small, bounded groups or involve a loosely-bounded and much wider layer of people who might potentially be affected. Many particulars in this situation, including the sensitivity of the matters in question, led to the decisions taking the form they did, and in other conflicts the larger group of camp members can often be involved. Nevertheless a more systemic tension underlies this conflict, arising from a difference in whether the Reclaiming social model of overcoming conflict and building relationality through deep conversation should be rooted in small groups of affinity or opened up to embrace a wider layer in diffuse and less bounded networks of interrelation.

In either case, this example illustrates that Reclaiming members, both at a personal and collective level, are beset by the problem of being-in-relation, which Strathern suggests emerges from individualised sociality. The need to resolve this problem lies at the heart of the tension between Matthew and other Reclaiming members, as well as the hours spent by organisers working through their disagreements by each expressing their own personal positions and feelings on the matter. In the end, Matthew found that his own individually-held wishes could not be integrated into the synthesis developed by others, not only because he found the synthesis inadequate, but because he disagreed that the relational cohesion developed within the small, bounded group was more important than reaching out to a wider level of sociality. Each party was grappling not only with how to develop that relational cohesion out of conflicting needs, but what the legitimate boundaries of the relational sociality forged through these processes might be in this case. Both aspects of this problem arise fundamentally from a starting point of personhood perceived and lived in individualised terms.

## Small worlds or world-community

This tension between a sociality of small, tightly bounded social worlds and an outlook of diffuse openness is a pattern throughout Reclaiming, and

practitioners hold markedly different views on the matter. At one end are those who believe that small communities, often made up of like-minded persons, are the only possible foundation for relationality. At the other end are those who consciously and explicitly reach outwards to engage with large numbers of people, hoping to draw more layers into Reclaiming and involve Reclaiming members more widely in non-Reclaiming social activities, whether this be in joint community activism or planning a multicultural ritual. Many practices and beliefs of practitioners fall somewhere along this spectrum. Nonetheless, this distinction provides a useful point of departure for understanding tensions within Reclaiming hopes of developing a relational sociality.

In another way, this tension can be understood as a conceptual opposition that appears within Reclaiming between 'looking back' and 'looking forward', since small scale societies are also generally seen by practitioners as societies of low technology and social complexity. For example, many practitioners envision their project as requiring a society-wide reduction in the level and scale of technology akin to that of a harmonious imagined past (pre-historical, pre-colonial or pre-capitalist). Starhawk asserts:

> It is interesting to try to envision a large society based on this principle [of each person's intrinsic value]. At first, one is struck by how much less would get done. We could build no more freeways through neighborhoods if those whose houses would be destroyed could veto the project...We might no longer be able to carry out any projects that involve vast, sweeping changes in the land or in neighborhoods.

> Instead, we would turn to changes that were small, organic, incremental, cooperative. We would have to transform our technology, our economy, our entire way of living (Starhawk [1982]1988:36).

For Starhawk, such changes in outlook limit the scope of collective social action. For others, they necessitate limiting the boundaries of sociality itself. In an extreme case, one Bay Area practitioner told me she was against immigration, because her vision of the world was of small communities of similarity, each embedded on their own land. A much more commonly-held view was expressed by one practitioner at the activist witchcamp, who shared

with me that what she deeply longed for was this possibility experienced during the week of camp, living in the woods and having a small community there. Some take this vision further, moving from the cities to work the land and building communities on private or collectively run farms.

There is a Romanticism behind many of these ideas of small communities which others reject. As Chris told me:

> Reclaiming members seek to change the world both in revolutionary and reactionary ways. Reactionary ways being the Romanticism: wanting to 'go back'.

He held strongly to the revolutionary path and to an outlook of engaging with the realities of modern life with an outward, activist stance. Others speak of 'evolution' rather than 'revolution', but nonetheless seek a place within the messy complexity of the urban world, whether to establish a needle exchange, commit time to a soup kitchen, or defend the rights of LGBT workers or homeless people in community agencies. Similarly, some see themselves as actively diversifying Reclaiming. George told me he sees his role as an organiser, bringing large numbers of people together and providing as open, accessible and welcoming a space as he can.

These two positions can also be viewed in terms of the distinction made by Wallis (1984) between "world-rejecting" and "world-affirming" tendencies of new religious movements (although the revolutionary current within Reclaiming is perhaps better described as world-transforming). Wallis describes world-rejecting movements as maintaining sharper boundaries among smaller groups of affinity (1984:9–20), while world-affirming movements look outward to loosely embrace much wider layers of people, and are more compatible with members living 'ordinary' lives in modern societies (1984:20–38). What Chris describes as the revolutionary Reclaiming attitude encourages many practitioners who hold to it to place themselves in the midst of the conflicts and contradictions of urban modernity.

We can see this in part through looking at Reclaiming models of temporality and change. As part of their cosmology of immanence, Reclaiming members adopt a model of cyclical temporality, which they see as more in keeping than the 'linear' temporality of modernity with the 'natural' motion of the 'cycles of life': of the seasons and the waxing and waning of the moon. This cyclical temporality speaks to practitioners of change and their desire to affirm things-in-relation. Themes of change in Reclaiming cosmology appear frequently, in images such as the brewing cauldron, where the four elements are seen to come together to be transformed into the many myriad possibilities of creation that emerge in the unfolding universe, and in the patterns of death, decay and rebirth they associate with the organic world. The Reclaiming emphasis on change, death and rebirth, links practitioners to what they see as the fecund processes of nature. But it also grows out of a hope for political and social change, for the kind of change that could see the 'death' of patterns of domination and control and the 'birth' of a new kind of social world.

Reclaiming members' relationship to temporality, change and seemingly irreversible events such as endings and death depends on context. In some circumstances, death and rebirth are invoked as part of the life cycle, providing assurance of the continuity of existence, affirming the organic, tangible cosmos, in contrast to the non-life of mechanisation that modernity is seen to have layered over the organic world. In this model, events begin in this already-numinous world, then cycle around and come back to a point something like where they started. In other contexts, the starting point is the dismembered world of power-over. From here, time moves 'forward', away from this world, so that real change happens and there is no going back. While the two theological concepts of temporality and change can be brought together in productive ways, they also signal something of a conceptual dissonance, reflecting in another way Reclaiming's two contrasting 'Romantic and 'revolutionary' orientations to the world.

Such disjunctures in notions of temporality can be heard in the Goddess invocation song at the Spiral Dance ritual, perhaps one of the best-known

songs in this beautiful liturgy. It was adapted by DJ Hamouris from a song originally written by Starhawk. The original contains three verses developing the theme of the cyclical Goddess in her triple aspect (young, mature and aged)—each verse corresponding to one aspect—plus a fourth summarising the themes of the first three.[49]  In the adaptation, these themes are developed, and an even stronger emphasis is placed on the cyclical process contained within the three aspects:

> I am the Spring, I am the young moon gleaming.
> A new song to sing. Wild desire dreaming.
> And if you think to see in me your daughter,
> There is a crone in me, I'm future's mother.
>
> *There is no end to the circle, no end. There is no end to life, there is no end.*
>
> I am the Earth, I am the forest growing.
> I give you birth. I am the full moon, glowing.
> And if I cradle you, as your loving mother,
> I am the lion, too, fierce passionate lover.
>
> *There is no end to the circle…*
>
> Dark of the moon, I am all loss and grieving.
> The uncurable wound. Grandmother Spider weaving.
> And if you fear to see the face of your future,
> There is a womb in me, dark place of nurture.
>
> *There is no end to the circle…*(Hamouris and Starhawk 2003).

We can see in these verses a powerful emphasis on time as a cycle, in which change means eventually returning to a place very similar to where one started. If change involves a step into the fearful unknown, we can be comforted with the thought that ageing and death are simply a part of the process of life, followed by a promise of new beginnings with which the cycle starts over. And

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[49] The Triple-Goddess is commonly referred to in Pagan circles as Maiden, Mother, Crone, but many in the Reclaiming tradition prefer to shift these categories slightly, to challenge conventional identifications of womanhood primarily with reproduction. In both songs, ideas related to each traditional aspect are developed, but the naming is done with something of a level of ambiguity and room for a more open interpretation.

contained within the seed of new life is a certainty of the aged crone, which completes the circle of time, and assures us that in the face of change, time is working as an organic whole to ensure continuity.

In this context, the fourth verse of the adapted song leaps out as epistemologically separate from the other three. It develops another, contrasting sense of temporality as allowing people to act to change established patterns in more permanent ways. Instead of a sharp break with the linear temporality practitioners associate with modernity, this mode starts from within the immediacy of contemporary conditions:

> I am the change, I am the tide that's turning.
> Your love and your rage. Passion for justice burning.
> And when you take a stand, I'm the courage that guides you.
> I'm in the streets, I take your hand. I'm marching beside you.
>
> *There is no end to the circle…*(Hamouris and Starhawk 2003)*.*

The discrepancy between these two contrasting models reflects a disjuncture in Reclaiming's prefigurative politics between the world-as-hoped-for and the world-as-lived. Notions of temporality and change in Reclaiming are aimed at achieving two goals simultaneously: on the one hand, affirming that cyclical time exists in the world as it is, underlying the mechanical processes of modernity; and on the other, seeking a more total change from a world in which linear time is hegemonic, to one in which cyclical time becomes the predominant mode, reflecting a notion of non-cyclical change towards a genuinely different goal.

Likewise, these distinctions in social outlook between what Chris calls 'Romantic' and 'revolutionary' modes are reflected by distinctions within the Reclaiming mythos itself. There is a range of issues here, including whether Reclaiming members should seek to 'recover' the old religions from European history or look to create a new mythology. While the Romantic mode is more likely to encourage 'traditional' mythologies suited to communities imagined as small and relatively homogeneous, the latter suggests a more

problematised, diversified mythos adapted to urban modernity. At the far end, this latter position suggests fascinating juxtapositions of old and new. As Rook put it, the forge of Celtic Goddess Brigid is best understood in the modern context as "the automobile plants or the computer chip factories". Yet I have rarely seen such juxtapositions expressed in ritual. As Rook points out, most practitioners reject much modern technological practice as mechanised and alienated, so this idea is highly incongruous with their cosmology.

While the correlations are not one to one, there seems to be some association between a 'small-community' outlook within Reclaiming and an attachment to perceived pre-modern European mythical traditions. I spoke with several practitioners living or seeking to live in more 'traditional' ways on the land who specifically place themselves as recovering the Celtic beliefs of their ancestors. As one member involved in a community farm told me, witchcraft is the earth-based spirituality of Europeans, and it should not be seen as a problem that it is mainly a religion of white people and of European, especially Celtic deities, just as other traditions represent the earth-based spiritualities of other ethnic groups. For others, this view is anathema. To them, Reclaiming is necessarily multi-ethnic and eclectic, needing to be responsive to the demands of the diverse populations of cities such as San Francisco; its practices must be ever-open to whoever is shaping it, rather than centrally relying on the 'ancestral traditions' of its mainly Anglo-European founders.

The conflict around Summer Solstice in the Ritual Planning Cell illustrates these tensions in another way, in the opposition that developed between the idea of the traditional Reclaiming Solstice invocation of the Celtic Lugh with the innovative invocation of the Greek Pan which the then-current planners felt 'called' to. As one Cell member expressed her concerns about the boisterous ritual content surrounding Pan at the retreat meeting, "This is my religion, not a game". But George, who had been part of the original planning, was deeply concerned. Himself in part from a Mediterranean background, he later spoke to me in interview:

> I've been in Reclaiming 20 years, and it never occurred to me we couldn't choose the deity we wanted, and that called to us! And, to be told, 'Oh, no, we work with Lugh', who is a Celtic deity.

> …there is no historical evidence for the way Reclaiming reads Lugh. And then, to impose that on people. When my entire experience of Reclaiming is The Goddess, capital 'T', capital 'G'. The Goddess that is— she is all names, she is all places, and all cultures. And to be told that we have to acknowledge it as a male deity, from a particular culture. That is sooo…not what Reclaiming is about to me.

> It's ironic some of the people that were driving that point…To me, I'm not gonna use the 'r' word. But it kinda smacks of that…when people are taking a Northern European tradition and pasting that over…the Mediterranean traditions, that are much more mixed. I mean, the Mediterranean: the Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Middle Eastern mix that comes out of there is so multicultural. And the Celtic is not multicultural.

> With so many things about the cultures that we're trying to undo. It strikes me as really ironic.

These questions – of which religious traditions it is appropriate to draw on or hold to, and under what circumstances – is one to which many teachers and priestesses have given thought, and there are not always easy answers to the tensions that can arise. In particular, for a predominantly Euro-American community, there is no straightforward line between the need for the community's cosmology to reflect a potential diversity of its members on the one hand, and risking appropriating the religious stories and deities of other religions on the other (see Magliocco 2004:215–38 for a useful discussion of these issues). Nonetheless, in this particular case, another tension is also at play: between self-consistency and diversification: to what extent should teachers and priestesses seek to establish a recognisable tradition for a closer-knit group of people, and to what extent should Reclaiming mythos be open to constant revision, impacted by newer people coming in and changes in wider society?

As we have seen, these dynamics have implications for personhood and sociality, related to the issues of bounded or diffuse sociality outlined above.

In the Romantic model, sociality is generally painted as being built out of collectives of affinity, created among groups of essentially like-minded people, perhaps on a narrowed down basis such as focusing on recreating a Celtic tradition. While coalition between different groups is often central to this model, essentially this generates a sense of separateness between communities, where diversity is reflected primarily between collectives reflecting perhaps distinct social formations. Practitioners inclined to a smaller-scale or more tradition-focussed practice overwhelmingly embrace the idea of coalition with other earth-based spiritualities (though this can be hard to achieve in practice). Yet they tend to reveal more essentialised conceptions of affinity and difference in their practices and models of social structure. By contrast, practitioners of the world-transforming type often embrace eclectic experiences of religious practice and a diversified cosmology. In practice, many practitioners cross between these two models, operating under different assumptions in different circumstances. But it is useful to understand these two models as coinhering within Reclaiming, carrying with them contrasting ideas of collectivity: one built primarily across lines of similarity, the other extending outward across lines of perceived diversity and multiplicity.

## Cohesion, contestation and power

These contrasting ideas reflect differences of opinion about the legitimate extension of a relational sociality. For many practitioners, it is not viable to imagine a fully relational sociality across the wide extent of social networks in urban modernity. And this is indeed a legitimate question for those seeking to overturn the basis of individualism in Western societies: whether it is possible to build a relational sociality such as that which Strathern portrays across the far reaches of industrial modernity. For practitioners who hold more to the small worlds view, this is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive.

This small worlds view of sociality reflects in another form the 'problem of being-in-relation' that emerges from an individualist social model. If relational sociality can only be built effectively across lines of similarity, or at least in

deep revelatory work within small trusted and relatively bounded groups, as some practitioners feel, then the issue becomes one of increasing incompatibility between groups as they become more 'different' from each other. This displaces the problem of being-in-relation onto a social scale, becoming a problem of how to relate between closely-knit groups. Such a model tends to separate each small 'society' from all others, such that each group is seen as an ideational unity somewhat differentiated from outside influence. It runs the risk of minimising differences within, and sharpening differences without (Helliwell and Hindess 1999a:2). Viewing such a model as being necessary to achieve 'community' reflects a sense that being-in-relation is a problem, which can only be solved by bolstering each group in its own identity to negotiate and relate to groups likewise defined by their coherence.

Whatever the spectrum of views on Reclaiming mythos and social practice, a model of personhood built upon small groups of affinity and tradition has had an important influence within Reclaiming. In the conflict over Summer Solstice, the traditionalist outlook shaped the conclusions drawn and led to the withdrawal of one member of the Cell. In the conflict over witchcamp organising, Matthew's wider conception of the community of interest was rejected in favour of the value of reaching resolution through a smaller group. The priestess who left the Cell has since become less centrally involved in Reclaiming organising; Matthew has left the community altogether. Meanwhile, the methods of consensus and conflict-resolution remain central, both of which, as we have seen, rest upon a somewhat agonistic model of deep introspection and cohesion within small, bounded and emotionally bonded groups. Thus the individualising effects behind Reclaiming methods can be seen both in the prevalence of structures based on reasonably marked lines of sameness and difference, and in an internalising of the means employed to develop community cohesion and claim personal power.

The patterns of social action, ritual, decision-making and conflict resolution seen in Reclaiming suggest that we must problematise the assumptions of developing a relational sociality through power-from-within. In each of these

loci of action, there is a tension between the connectivity sought through embracing the diverse, sacred cosmos, and the celebration of individualism at the core of many of these practices. Within each of these sites of practice, it is useful to view the Reclaiming emphasis on developing personal power as part of a nexus of power-knowledge relations. Seen in this light, personal power can be used in both connective and individualising ways, to create cohesion and a relational awareness between practitioners, or to compete, exclude, separate and sometimes isolate certain practitioners from wider Reclaiming sociality. As anthropologist Lynn Morgan has suggested, "[p]ersonhood must be understood as an outcome of power relations, as an unstable project subject to constant negotiation and debate" (Morgan 1996:63). Through a deeper look at the foundations of the knowledge systems conditioning Reclaiming practice, we can gain further insight into the dynamics of knowledge and power in Reclaiming, and the kinds of subjectivities that Reclaiming practices tend to encourage.

In this, the central question remains of why it is that the individual forms such a central figure in a community in which connectivity, relationality and mutuality are seen as core values. And here, we must move beyond Reclaiming to look at the patterns of sociality that condition Western personhood more broadly, and which I would suggest have a powerful impact on Reclaiming. Placing Reclaiming practices in this broader context has important implications, not only for developing a fuller picture of sociality in Western modernity, but for understanding the challenges facing any project seeking to transform sociality from an individualised form to a relational one.

Plate 1: Labyrinth, Berkeley Hills



Plate 2: Ritual Web, Eros Path, California Witchcamp 2006



Plate 3: Marking the land,
California Witchcamp 2006



Plate 4: Iraq and Afghanistan War altar,
Spiral Dance 2007



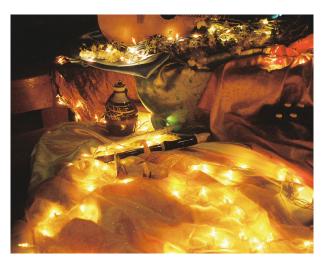Plate 5: A private Samhain altar, 2006; centrepiece: Hecate mask by Lauren Raine

Plate 6: East / Air altar (detail), Spiral Dance 2007



Plate 7: South / Fire altar, Spiral Dance 2007



Plate 8: West / Water altar, Spiral Dance 2007



Plate 9: North / Earth altar, Spiral Dance 2007

# Chapter 4

## ATOMISATION, ESTRANGEMENT, INTERIORITY: inner work and the Reclaiming model of consciousness

*I Who am the beauty of the green earth and the white moon
among the stars and the mysteries of the waters,
I call upon your soul to arise and come unto me.
For I am the soul of nature that gives life to the universe…*

*And you who seek to know Me, know that the seeking and
yearning will avail you not, unless you know the Mystery:
For if that which you seek, you find not within yourself,
you will never find it without.*

*For behold, I have been with you from the beginning,
and I am That which is attained at the end of desire.*

*— Doreen Valiente, 'The Charge of the Goddess' (adapted by Starhawk)*

*When we were pastoral nomads, the Lord was our shepherd…
When we were serfs and nobles, the Lord was our king…
Finally we are businessmen—and the Lord is our accountant.
He keeps a ledger on us all, enters there our good deeds in black,
and debits our sins in red.*

*— Sahlins, Tribesmen*

## Beginning with ourselves: the predicament of estrangement

The new left and counterculture movements of the 1970s profoundly shaped Reclaiming views on politics and personal transformation, yet Reclaiming's founders were also often highly critical of sections of the new left that they feel did not do enough work on transforming themselves. The result, they believe, was the reproduction of patterns of power-over within these movements, reflected for example in hierarchical structures in many of the organisations of the period. A typical characterisation is given in Starhawk's novel *Walking to Mercury*, a semi-biographical account of the emergence of spiritual activism out of the demise of a new left student milieu. The novel's protagonist Maya

finds herself as part of a student group calling itself 'Marxist–Leninist'. Frustrated at their ineffectiveness at ending the Vietnam war, and the seeming apathy of the masses of working-class Americans, and shocked by growing police attacks against their protests, some of the group's founders propose turning to actions of property-directed terrorism (Starhawk 1997:257–270). When one of these actions goes badly awry, leading to a security guard's accidental death, police crack down on the group, culminating in an explosive and deadly shoot-out and fire at the house where they are staying (Starhawk 1997:308–9;316–8). Meanwhile, Maya has spent months in the Yosemite wilderness, connecting with the energy of the trees and the land, discovering a power greater than that of the small human groupings that shape the left. This power helps her unlock the conflict she had felt between personal work and social transformation, showing a way out of the dead end into which her comrades had fallen (Starhawk 1997:296–301).

There are many parallels here to real-life developments. In this period, formations such as the Weather Underground began taking up actions of property-directed terrorism aimed at strategic targets, while the conflagration that ends the lives of many of Maya's cohort is reminiscent of the 1970s shoot-out at the headquarters of the Symbionese Liberation Army in Los Angeles. These parallels provide a vehicle for Starhawk's political critique. While she is sympathetic towards the characters she portrays, speaking through the character of Maya, she is also critical of their tactics of violence, their sexism and their tendency to rely on "boring" dead men such as Marx, Lenin and Trotsky (1997:257–282). In short, she sees these activists' actions as both stemming from and reinforcing the alienation they have internalised from living in capitalist society. They, like the people they oppose, lack connection with the deeper powers of the universe that could teach them the love and interconnection they need to break the hold of power-over, and so are condemned to mirror the dynamics of the system they reject.

The key to this trap is what Starhawk in her theoretical works calls a culture of 'estrangement', drawing the term from Marx:

> The relationships we have mostly known and the institutions of our culture are based on power-over. So our inner landscapes are those of the stories of estrangement, and they are peopled by creatures that dominate or must be dominated. To free ourselves, to recover our power-from-within…we may have to…change the inner territory as well as the outer, confront the forms of authority that we carry within. For we shape culture in our own image, just as it shapes us. If we are unwilling to confront ourselves, we risk reproducing the landscape of domination in the very structures we create to challenge authority (Starhawk [1982]1988:46–7).

Starhawk links this estranged or alienated consciousness to the atomisation of sociality in modernity, and thereby to the problems of power-over that we explored in the previous chapter:

> I call this consciousness *estrangement* because its essence is that we do not see ourselves as part of the world. We are strangers to nature, to other human beings, to parts of ourselves. We see the world as made up of separate, isolated, nonliving parts that have no inherent value. (They are not even dead—because death implies life.) Among things inherently separate and lifeless, the only power relationships possible are those of manipulation and domination (Starhawk [1982]1988:5).

Many other practitioners, especially of this founding generation, speak of these problems of 'estrangement' or 'alienation'; these ideas form a theoretical bedrock for a wide array of Reclaiming practices. Deep within our being, Reclaiming practitioners suggest, modern Western persons carry the mark of social dislocation, through which we mirror and perpetuate the dislocation inherent in our societies as a whole. For Reclaiming practitioners, in order to undo these separations, it is necessary also to remake the self, undoing the alienation embedded deep within.

As we have seen, the rise of an atomised and 'dismembered' form of social being is seen as a direct result of the social, political and ideational upheavals of the early modern era, in particular the enclosures and witch trials. Where "[f]eudal society was, in reality, a system of complex, interlocking rights and responsibilities that functioned, in many ways, like an organism" (Starhawk [1982]1988:190), alienated modern sociality is conditioned by separation and

atomisation. A mythic history[50] links this transformation in sociality to an often violently enforced change in rural folk spirituality, from earth-centred to heaven-centred.[51] With the witch trials, the 'older' spiritual traditions of community and ecological connection were crushed, while the enclosures severed these relationships materially. As a result, modern persons are disconnected from the land, from each other and from their own spiritual experiences.

The estrangement arising from these social upheavals is now deeply internalised and embodied, giving rise to the immense physical and ideational systems of modernity which Reclaiming members abhor:

> This alienation is no accident. Our economic and political systems, our science and technology, are rooted in our alienation from our own bodies and from the realms of deep feeling. The imposition of a puritan ethic in the seventeenth century and the denigration of sexuality that accompanied the Witchburnings created conditions in which capitalism was fostered and peasant classes were forced into alienating wage labor (Starhawk [1982]1988:137).

Subsequently, these separations have become so entrenched within modern culture as to be self-perpetuating, learned from birth by anyone growing up within the grip of estrangement. As Starhawk says, "our own consciousness, our beliefs and plans, and the very ways we go about working are themselves

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[50] Starhawk uses this term to describe her own rendering of the rise of modernity and the demise of pre-modern earth-centred witchcraft traditions (Starhawk [1979]1999:263). It allows her to navigate the contested nature of this analysis, much of which was developed through the feminist movement of the 1970s and has since been critiqued, while still holding to the importance of its emotional content and implying some level of historical validity. In Reclaiming, the idea of "myth" is not surrounded by the same connotations of true and untrue as in popular use.

[51] In her essay, "The Burning Times: Notes on a Crucial Period of History" (Starhawk [1982]1988:183–219), Starhawk draws on a range of academic, non-academic and Reclaiming sources to develop her thesis that Paganism, or what she calls the 'Old Religion', set the prevailing religious and cultural tone among peasants and others living close to the land until the early modern period (Starhawk [1982]1988:183–5; 215–9). Even while Christianity was socially hegemonic, she contests, Pagan festivals and practices continued as the folk religion for the labouring classes up until the social upheavals of early modernity (Starhawk [1979]1999:28–9).

molded by institutions of authority that are so much a part of us…that we cannot even see them" (Starhawk [1982]1988:18). Undoing these processes, for Reclaiming practitioners, means not just challenging the prevailing social order, but undoing the way these experiences have become lodged within our very selves.

Estranged consciousness is seen to give rise to dislocations between persons and with the non-human world, which enable the perpetuation of practices of power-over. One of the key ways in which this is thought to occur is through the internalisation of a system of hierarchical dualisms through the cultural stories dominating Western thought (Starhawk [1982]1988:19). In particular, the growing hegemony of Judaeo-Christian religious beliefs arising through centuries and consolidated in early modernity is believed to have paved the way for this, through a dualistic theology of good and evil (Starhawk [1982]1988:5). Here, spiritual value is seen to have been removed from the earth and placed in heaven, while earthly things are spiritually devalued. From here, a series of dualistic oppositions arose, splitting the world in two:

> In the split world, spirit wars with flesh, culture with nature, the sacred with the profane, the light with the dark. Men are identified with spirit, culture, the sacred, and are idealized; women are identified with flesh, nature, the profane, and are excluded from culture (Starhawk [1982]1988:20).

By contrast, Reclaiming beliefs are theologically and ethically monistic. Reclaiming members seek to reunite 'spirit' and 'matter', and undermine these dualistic modes of thought. By embracing those things seen as devalued—sensuality, fleshiness, nature, darkness, woman—practitioners intend to restore sacrality and value to those things which they believe have been divested of respect, viewed as profane and degraded. The idea is not to reverse the hierarchy, but to infuse each side of the dichotomy with elements of the other, to undermine the divides between them.

## Atomisation and isolation

At a social level, estranged consciousness is seen by practitioners as mirrored in and reproduced by the built environment and the prevailing structures of sociality. As Starhawk describes:

> This room in which I sit...with its solid walls and concrete foundations, is a product of all the unspoken assumptions our culture makes about how we live. It is fixed, solid, filled with heavy furniture; a product of a world-view that sees things as fixed and solid...The room is an object in a world of separated, isolated objects (Starhawk [1982]1988:18).

Rook described to me how she sees these alienated social relationships reproduced across the landscapes of modern cities:

> Suburbia has enabled people to live completely isolated lives. They just go to their own home, consume all their own stuff, consume the fuel to then go to their job, consume the fuel to get things shipped in to the big supermarkets. The only time they see their neighbours is if there are children of similar ages in the same area—so the children might bring people together. But, other than that, there's complete isolation. And that isolation isn't healthy for humans. We need each other. And we need to need each other...
>
> The extended family was the norm for thousands of years. Then you get this nuclear family, and then further isolation with the suburbs, and when things go wrong, they go really *wrong*. And so now, we splinter into further isolation.

This picture captures what many practitioners diagnose as the problem of the modern condition. Isolation and atomisation, spread over the wide reaches of modern cities, have created a condition in which people are lost from the networks of social relations that historically are seen to have sustained them. Without networks of support, individuals can rapidly find themselves without the social support they need to navigate difficult situations. In the absence of reciprocal relations, humans as atomised entities become further withdrawn into themselves.

At the same time, these conditions are seen as driving ever-increasing levels of consumption and environmental devastation. This establishes a vicious cycle,

in which atomisation drives consumption, and consumption drives further atomisation and alienation. Rook elaborates:

> You've got social, spiritual and emotional isolation, coupled with extreme consumption of resources. There's going to be conflict. And, there's going to be further alienation.
>
> Part of it, I suspect, came about from the shift from a need-based economy to a want-based economy, which was cleverly orchestrated by Freud's nephew, Edward Bernays. He used Freudian psychology to help manufacturers convince people that they needed what they wanted, rather than buying what they needed. And that, of course, is so clever because it preys on all of our insecurities—and, you know, buy this product and it will change your life, sort of thing. Which has only existed in the last hundred years.
>
> …So that, I think, gave rise to, 'I want everything by myself, for myself', which led to more suburban households with more suburban cars and more suburban washers and dryers. That all I need to do is share this thing with six to twenty other people, but I've now been convinced that what I want, which is this thing for myself, 'cause it's more convenient, I'm convinced now that I need that thing.
>
> So my isolation has, actually, in a way, been glorified, and made a good thing. And it's proof that I have enough, and I can provide for my family, and 'look at this big house that we have all to ourselves', and 'look at all these things we have all to ourselves'. So, people forgot that they were interdependent. And food got shipped in from further and further distances, so you no longer had to know the farmer, and you no longer had to grow your own vegetables, and trade some of your squash with your neighbor for her tomatoes. So the concept of interdependence and reliance on other creatures in your biosphere went away, and we forgot, and so we became further alienated and isolated and disconnected.

In Rook's analysis, alienation arises from vast distances and the loss of face-to-face relationships of reciprocity, while consumption becomes removed from its source in production. As individuals turn to greater levels of consumption to fill the void created, they perpetuate their own isolation, with destructive consequences not only for themselves but for the biosphere as a whole.

## Disconnection in consciousness

Reclaiming practitioners draw on a model of disconnected consciousness to understand this unfolding of estranged practice through modern social life. As Rook says, "[t]he trouble most people have is that they're completely disconnected internally, and therefore it's that much harder to connect externally, and therefore it only happens randomly." Wider conditions of atomisation both reinforce and rest upon this internalised disconnection. In its widest sense, Reclaiming practice can be seen as a response to this sense of dislocation that practitioners feel to be at the core of their lived experience. Classes, rituals and personal practices are intended to heal the alienation that is seen to lie at the centre of social being, reuniting sensuous experience with daily social existence, allowing people to 'connect externally' in a truly meaningful sense.

Reclaiming teachers draw on a three-part model of the self to understand this process of disconnection and explain how magic can work to redress it. This model depicts consciousness as made up of three quite distinct aspects of a person: 'Talking Self'—a person's primary channel of interaction with the world; 'Younger Self'—their playful, uninhibited, desirous self which comprehends in symbols rather than words; and 'Deep Self'—the part of the self connected to the life-giving, sacred and interconnected energy of the cosmos, which knows the broader arc and purpose of the person's life.[52] In the Reclaiming model, the outward aspect of Talking Self has no direct access to the cosmic Deep Self, but can only communicate with Deep Self via Younger Self. The symbolic, playful, lateral world of magic is designed to break open

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[52] Starhawk has written about this model of human consciousness many times, beginning with her first book *The Spiral Dance* (Starhawk [1979]1999:45-7). It has its predecessors in earlier Western mystery traditions, most immediately the Feri tradition of magic taught by Victor and Cora Anderson, of whom Starhawk was a student. In Feri, the three selves are often referred to as Shining Body, Sticky One, and God Self (Coyle 2004:46). Younger Self or Sticky One is also commonly referred to by Feri-initiated Reclaiming practitioners as 'the Fetch'.

Talking Self's protective inhibitions and give expression to Younger Self, in order to provide a way through to Deep Self's wisdom.

In ordinary social life, Reclaiming practitioners believe these aspects have a tendency to come out of alignment. This problem is especially manifested in the behaviour of Talking Self, which most of the time is believed to tend toward an overly-analytical, heavily distracted mode of being. Prone to abstraction, Talking Self tends to go on 'autopilot', engaging in activity by rote and losing sight of any underlying meaning or reality. It is excessively rational, and while chatting away and engaging in a myriad of bureaucratic tasks, will generally miss the wood for the trees (Starhawk and Valentine 2001:11–12). As Valentine explains, "Younger Self may have known for years that a certain job wasn't right for us, but Talking Self may not know until carpel tunnel syndrome sets in" (Starhawk and Valentine 2001:12). Thus the three selves risk coming into conflict and working at cross-purposes, so that Talking Self—a person's most everyday mode—begins to operate at odds with the more fundamental needs of Younger Self and especially of Deep Self. Since people are believed to interact in the world primarily through Talking Self, this in turn is seen at hampering people's ability to connect to others, and to the 'sacred' world around them.

Owen describes this struggle to stay in alignment through everyday life in between rituals—what he calls staying 'conscious':

> I could be conscious a fair bit more than I am. For myself, definitely there's a dance to it...It is very difficult to be more conscious than the people you are around. So I would try to be around others who were more conscious, to avoid distractions, some of which I like...some TV shows...It depends on what kind of boundaries you have with that. My wife and I are trying to set more limits around how much we watch TV, how often we watch movies, use the internet.
>
> Gardening, for example [helps him stay conscious]. The actual gardening—having hands in the dirt—is the really sacred bit. Where I can get off track is the endless data analysis. What I call "metagardening" is where I tend to get off track.

Here we see the dominant role of Talking Self in undermining Owen's attempts to maintain consciousness, both in the stereotypical Talking Self activities of television and internet and more subtly in "endless data analysis" driving what is viewed as the ideally earthy, anti-analytical activity of gardening. Here, the tension between Younger and Talking Selves is expressed as an opposition between doing and analysing. In this worldview, having 'hands in the dirt' and the analytical activities that make gardening a conscious activity are seen as being in conflict with one another. Allowing Talking Self too much latitude to analyse over and above the activities of Younger Self undermines the process of maintaining the soul's internal alignment.

The aim of the healing, self-examining and internal work underpinning Reclaiming classes and rituals is to bring the self back to 'presence' through realigning Talking Self with Younger and Deep Selves. As Rook, a Reclaiming member and Feri initiate, describes this process:

> Also, in Feri, there's a profound knowledge of the parts of soul, and that we are ensouled beings, and our souls have these disparate parts that we need to bring into good order, and right relationship. And that includes parts that I might call a microcosmic soul, and parts that I would call a macrocosmic soul. And our macrocosmic soul is our God Soul [Deep Self], and that relates to deity, that relates to God Herself, the fabric of all. And that also relates to the ancestors, to space and time. It's connected into the larger picture. So it's the part of self that we really want to align ourselves with, so that we're not just being run by variant personality parts all the time.

Constant alignment with Deep Self, or what Rook calls the 'God Soul', is considered core to keeping practitioners on an appropriate spiritual track.

Talking Self is seen as the part of human consciousness that comes to the fore when people engage in the activities of daily life. Valentine refers to it as the "logical, verbal, task-oriented" part of the self we use to "drive the car, answer the phone, write checks" (Starhawk and Valentine 2001:11). It is therefore the part of consciousness that negotiates often bureaucratic tasks. These

pressures lead people to absent themselves mentally from their surroundings. As Rook says:

> Many people live in quite a fantasy-world—they're having arguments in their heads, or conversations, or spinning what they would like to be doing, rather than their boring job—they're not present in their lives, many of us are not at all present in our lives. And as soon as we're not present in our lives, there's disconnection.

Under these everyday pressures and temptations—from unfulfilling jobs to watching television—practitioners feel they become 'less conscious', get 'distracted from their path', are 'caught up in the daily grind'.

Reclaiming teachings are ambiguous about to what extent this three-part consciousness and its tendency to come out of alignment are cross-culturally and historically universal. Generally, teachers speak and write as though the three part self is an innate structure of human consciousness. In this understanding, the pressures of life which lead to Talking Self becoming disengaged are seen to have their equivalents in non-Western and pre-modern societies. Many teachers nonetheless believe there is a much greater tendency towards distracted, unconnected behaviour in modern urban settings. They suggest that the hurriedness and stress of modern life, its technology, wars and patterns of widespread environmental devastation, exacerbate this tendency. In this conception, indigenous societies and social systems of the past are viewed as being far more 'connected' than their own. The problem of estrangement in modernity can then be seen as an endemic pressure towards the three selves coming out of alignment, and a more systemic tendency for persons to live overwhelmingly in the abstracted mode of Talking Self. This internal disconnection hampers people's ability to relate to others from a position of 'deeper' awareness and 'presence'. Patterns of disconnection, misunderstanding and power-over are thereby perpetuated in the wider social world.

## Recovering what is lost

Most people do not come to Reclaiming through such comprehensive analysis, but rather, as Valentine puts it, out of a sense that "we feel that something is wrong, something is missing, and we don't even know what it is" (Starhawk and Valentine 2001:27). Indeed, the name 'Reclaiming' is about reclaiming those parts of the self and one's experience that are seen as missing from life in a world of estrangement. As Valentine describes it:

> We have lost parts of ourselves because in order to function in a culture that is hostile or indifferent to the whole lives of our human souls, we have learned to hide our true natures: harlequin, mischievous, fierce, tender, animal, changeable, wild, inspired. It simply won't do on the bus, in the office, at the grocery store. And the pieces of ourselves that we mustn't use or show gradually fade behind the veil until we ourselves don't know where to look for them (Starhawk and Valentine 2001:27).

In Valentine's description, we can imagine the disposition of sensible rationalism which restricts the articulation of tender emotions or wild dancing in the grocery store or office, stultifying the development of these modes of expression. This analysis suggests there are significant human capacities that are poorly expressed within the public settings of Western modernity.

Valentine's description rests on an idea of 'true' natures—a common notion within Reclaiming. As discussed in the opening chapter, this Pagan model of 'inner truth' runs counter to more post-modernist and post-structuralist understandings of the decentred subject, in which needs and desires are seen as fluid, contested, intersecting, potentially self-contradictory, and/or produced by social conditions, rather than innate within the person. In particular, where post-structuralist models attempt to disrupt the assumptions of liberal individualism as the locus of a singular, unitary identity, this notion of a 'true' self in Reclaiming has a tendency to shore up the individual. This has consequences for the individualising tendencies in Reclaiming practices, which we will explore further below.

At the same time, it is important to engage with the felt experience of something 'lost' being 'found' which draws people to Reclaiming and very often inspires them to stay. This is particularly palpable in the excitement of new practitioners encountering the community for the first time. As I noted at the end of my six-week introductory Elements class, most participants expressed effusively the sense of joy and connection they found through this experience:

> Amanda, who described what had happened—that she'd been uprooted from her home, 3 acres, and moved to the West Coast with three of her friends—had no job, knew no one, and was hating the fact that there was no winter here. And in the time we had the class, she had found a job, met all these new people—'and it's nice not to have all your friends being the people you live with.' And she was starting to see that it was winter here, and to know what that looked like.

> So many others spoke of what it was to find connection, community, belonging. Hannah mentioned as she had told me in person that she feels she'd 'found her people'—people she could do that magic with— and we are 'all waking up together'.

This sense of belonging and of 'waking up' generates wonder among many who encounter Reclaiming through classes, witchcamps and rituals.

Valentine's description of the pieces of ourselves we must not use or show can be seen as an internalised expression of what Starhawk describes externally when she says "we are strangers to nature, to other human beings, to parts of ourselves". Both paint a picture of alienation that resonates with Marx, from whom Starhawk drew her theory of estrangement (Starhawk [1982]1988:230 n5). For Marx, the human capacities that go unexpressed within alienated conditions leads to a stunting of development inseparable from the distortions in relationships with other humans and the wider environment (Ollman 1971:137–41). He sees these relationships as internal to the person; the alienation of these relationships, which in capitalist conditions become externalised and altered through being mediated via the infrastructure of commodity relations, therefore alters the person. The human capacity for expressing these internal relationships with others and with the natural world

is thereby stunted, deprived of immediate means of social expression (Ollman 1971:142–153). At the same time, a person's creative capacity to substantially shape the world around them is also externalised via the wage–labour relationship (Ollman 1971:142–7). Thus the three dimensions of estrangement described by Starhawk—alienation from others, from the environment, and from parts of oneself—are akin to the dimensions Marx identifies. Likewise, the need to counter each of these dimensions of alienation is foregrounded by practitioners as something to address through Reclaiming activity.

The desire to 'reconnect' with other humans is explored throughout this work. In the previous chapters, we have seen how practitioners create households, circles and affinity groups through which to develop deep bonds with others. As we can see from Amanda's story above, many people find in Reclaiming a bulwark against the sense of isolation and loneliness that they experience amidst the complexities of modern life. These themes will be explored further in subsequent chapters. For now, it is also valuable to look more fully at the other two dimensions: how practitioners seek to overcome their estrangement from the environment, and from their own creative expression.

## Nature religion

As an Earth-based spirituality, finding connection to the natural world is perhaps the most central theme of Reclaiming life. Many Reclaiming members find opportunities to spend time with what they see as natural or wild places: hiking, visiting the ocean, streams or lakes, holding rituals in state or city parks, or on farmland owned by someone in their group. In San Francisco, four out of the eight major festivals are celebrated in Golden Gate Park, while two are held at Ocean Beach. I was taken on many walks by Reclaiming friends in Marin country, South San Francisco and the Berkeley Hills. Early on, a friend brought me to a location in the at the back of the hills where people unknown to her have made labyrinths in the landscape, which many Reclaiming members like to visit and occasionally use for rituals (see plate 1). Over time, practitioners develop deep bonds with the places they know. Most important

for many in the Bay Area is the redwood forest of Mendocino Woodlands, where the yearly California witchcamp is held.

Some practitioners develop regular personal practices that they use to forge and deepen a sense of kinship and active relationship with the land around them. Growing up in a town in the North Bay, Urania told me of her practice of what she calls "singing up the land":

> I can only speak to it in regards to my personal experience in my valley, which is that…So when I first sort of connected what I called it to what I was doing, I was walking through this back part of the valley, which happens to be a cemetery, and I was singing this chant, "Oh, she will bring the buds in Spring…" Well, anyway, it goes through all the seasons.[53]
>
> And I noticed that I had this experience of the local devas, plant devas…I just had this experience of things—like after the tenth time I'd sung it through, of things kind of popping in a way…I mean there was a real sense of the broadness of the valley paying attention. Not necessarily *to me* paying attention. Although I was present.
>
> I mean, I would encourage you to consider trying it somewhere that you could go back to regularly, and sing to, in a way that you have—a place you have fondness for…it seemed like several things all converged at once, and I went "whoa!". And was that the fey? Mmm, possibly, yes, ish. I mean I've definitely had experiences with the fey on my property and in the valley.
>
> But this felt bigger. This felt like the land itself sort of being like, "Oh yeah! I like to be sung to. I like to feel the vibration of the song or the voice or the tone." It had—to me it felt like it had to do with vibratory recognition between something that vibrates at a much lower level than

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[53] The full verse runs:

> *Oh, She will bring the buds in the spring*
> *and dance among the flowers.*
> *In summer's heat Her kisses are sweet,*
> *She sings in leafy bowers.*
> *She cuts the cane, She gathers the grain,*
> *when fruits of fall surround Her.*
> *Her bones grow old in wintery cold,*
> *She wraps Her cloak around Her.*

It was developed for use in ritual by members of the New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn (Turner and Athearn 1996).

> I do, and then song, which tends to vibrate at a higher level than
> humans normally do, which is why we like to sing. And having those
> things sort of converge.
>
> And so that's—like I kind of have that as a, if not a whenever practice,
> like a quarterly practice, at the Spring Equinox and the Autumn Equinox
> and the Solstices.

Urania's practice is not simply to go out in nature and observe, appreciate or wonder at it, but seeks actively to engage the land in relationship, to offer it something it will 'enjoy', and to look for some kind of response. Others might walk a labyrinth to renew the land, or make marks to beautify and honour the landscape, building rock sculptures, leaving behind offerings, or crafting altars from stones and leaves. In so doing, they believe they have a positive impact on the land, that the spirits dwelling in each place appreciate their actions. In this way, practitioners seek to give to the land as well as receive back from it, to engage the land around them and the spirits that dwell within it in what they hope will be a reciprocal relationship, and in doing so to reengage those parts of themselves that suffer for expression in a world of concrete, cars and oil refineries.

In fact a double sense of loss—horror at environmental damage and a personal sense of disconnection from the natural world—characterises what practitioners seek to reverse in their relationships to the natural world. This mirrors what Marx described of alienation from nature under capitalist conditions. As capitalist production comes more and more to dominate human needs, taking on a life of its own, human appropriation of the external world becomes increasingly destructive (Marx [1844]1977:69). Meanwhile this disconnect becomes internalised in the estrangement of humans from those parts of themselves that are connected to what Marx calls "external nature", the "plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc., [which] constitute theoretically a part of human consciousness" (Marx [1844]1977:72). Since humans come to understand these relationships through seeing themselves reflected in what they shape and alter in the world, likewise in "tearing away from man the

object of his production [in] estranged labour…his inorganic body, nature, is taken away from him" (Marx [1844]1977:74).

The Reclaiming desire to reconnect with 'nature' indeed taps into a profound sense of sadness practitioners feel at both environmental devastation and the separation from contact with the natural world that they personally experience, living as they usually do in urban settings. One Reclaiming teacher and priestess spoke to this sense in introducing the class she taught at a California witchcamp, which she called 'Taken by the land/Singing the soul back home'. She shed tears as she announced the class's theme to the collection of campers, speaking of her own bittersweet sense of bereavement and wonder at coming back to the trees and landscape of California, to parts of the world she felt connected to. She drew this out to describe the obstructed connections to land many people experience in modern lives, and the need many feel to call 'back' that part of themselves that recognises their kinship with the natural world.

Concerns about the distortions within these practical ecological relationships mirrors a deeper sense of loss surrounding the potential for internal kinship with the natural world. Likewise, this witchcamp path linked connecting to land with finding 'lost' parts of the self. In one exercise, practitioners sang to the group about their magical inner selves: "My name is…I come from…I am seeking…". In this way, loss of belonging was linked to the need to find new ways to describe the self that could reverse this sense of disconnection within.

## Self expression

A further dimension of the alienation practitioners seek to counter is a sense of internal disconnection between a person's creative potential and their opportunities for expression in the world. As Marx framed the issue, in capitalist society a person's self-expression in labour "does not belong to his intrinsic nature;…in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind" (Marx

[1844]1977:71). For practitioners (as for Marx), this is not confined to the site of production, but extends, as Valentine says, onto the bus and into the office and the grocery store. Reclaiming rituals and classes create a space in which practitioners feel more confident to express themselves, to shout or laugh, dance, dress strangely or beautifully, and act in ways that many feel they otherwise could not. As Starhawk describes it:

> Rituals create...a meeting-ground where people can share deep feelings, positive and negative—a place where they can sing or scream, howl ecstatically or furiously, play, or keep a solemn silence. A pagan ritual incorporates touch, sensuality, and humor (Starhawk [1982]1988:155).

This process of self-expression outside of normalised activities in many public spaces is part of what practitioners feel helps push them into altered states of consciousness; at the same time, it allows them to validate sensuous, creative and emotional parts of themselves that they feel are poorly expressed within what they see as a bureaucratic and oppressive wider social context.

In a pragmatic sense, Reclaiming encourages creative outlets in performance, music and visual arts, which play a central role in rituals. Many practitioners are musicians, artists, dancers and craftspeople, sometimes professionally, more often in addition to their day job. Teachers often weave these skills into their classes as a means for practitioners to learn to express themselves artistically, and as a central set of skills underpinning priestessing and teaching. Music, in particular, plays a prominent role in shaping the aesthetics of Reclaiming. Reclaiming Quarterly, the magazine collective, has released four compilation CDs of music collected and recorded from across various Reclaiming communities. Many more individual artists perform and produce their own music, often released by Serpentine Music, an independent Pagan label established by a long-standing Bay Area Reclaiming member, with dozens of titles released over its fifteen-year life. Ritualists create songs and chants for ritual use, for personal expression and in order to share stories of the Goddess, of deities, or of Pagan religion with a wider audience. And in their homes and ritual spaces, Reclaiming members craft beautiful environments

with objects of spiritual meaning, decorations and art works bought, made or given by friends.

In addition to these creative and artistic dimensions, Reclaiming ritual also provides a space for emotions to be expressed that are not considered safe in typical public settings. Erin's story illustrates how practitioners use this environment to shift their understanding of themselves and work to express themselves differently, with more confidence in their talents and capacities. Believing she comes from fey (fairy) blood, before the start of her first witchcamp she had lost this sense, and had come to feel aged, unattractive and self-critical. At the evening in the camp ritual, as the priestess led participants into deep trance, there was silence across the ritual circle. Erin describes how something in the trance evoked huge tears from within her:

> I can't remember what she said that evoked it in me, but I just started crying. And I was really, really sobbing, and…really, really moving a lot of energy…so I'm grieving, I'm grieving, I'm grieving. I'm really crying. And I saw [the priestess] look at me across the circle, and she saw that I was like, a *mess*, you know. And she said to the circle, 'Is there anything else you want to express'. And I just stuck my fist up in the air and I was, like, 'Yhoooooooaaaaaarrrrrrrrrrr!!', and just let the rage go, and I was totally like that, 'Oh god! I'm going to be so exposed', and then I did it. And then…as soon as it started to go for me, thirty other people stuck their fist up and did the same thing.

Erin had a long history of difficulty with men, and later that night she realised in conversation with a friend that her grief and rage was about past abuse, including in a former Pagan community. Although she had done a great deal over the years in healing that abuse, she decided to use the week to work intimately with male manifestations of deity for the first time in her many years of practice. She realised:

> …if I really wanted to heal this thing, and move forward in my life, and have…a way to relate sexually with men, or even emotionally with men, that I needed to do some work with the God. And so, I decided to invite him in to all the work that I did that week.

Using the ritual to express her pent-up anger allowed something to move within her, enabling her to reinscribe her own body with a new story. By the end of the week, she felt she could find the fey in herself once more, could accept that she was beautiful, and could begin to experience the possibility of healthy intimate relationships with men. At the fairy ball ritual later in the week, she chose a dress of an airy, pale blue material, open at the front-centre between her breasts, more exposed than anything she would normally wear. Borrowed from the costume cabin, it became such an important symbol of this change in her that she arranged to swap it for something else so that she could keep it.

The skills learnt in Reclaiming encourage a very different kind of expression than that typically found in the workplace or the store. Whether it be through music and art, through gently steering the focus of a ritual group, through using intuition to interpret a dream or a tarot reading, or channelling healing energy while reading a person's 'energy body', Reclaiming techniques tend to be lateral and intuitive, intended to link together mind, body and emotions in a single mode of expression. Most importantly, they are skills practitioners use to create their own ends, outside of the ends of industry, bureaucracy or retail outlets. They encourage practitioners to give their attention to objects outside of the vast haphazard systems of capitalist production and exchange over which they have little control.

As we shall see in the next chapter, practitioners use these skills to weave rich worlds of beauty around them and between them. Yet, most often the work that they are doing is toward the production of themselves. As we saw with Erin's experience, practitioners use ritual to rewrite their own stories, not simply to 'realign' their consciousness internally, but to embed themselves in a numinous world of beauty and wonder. Instead of being a tired restaurant worker in her mid-30s with no partner, Erin used the ritual opportunities to give her personal story a new context: one which conceptually connected her to the land through the fey, gave her confidence to express herself, and helped put her on a new footing in her ability to relate to others, which had been

damaged by an abusive past. In this way, Reclaiming practitioners use magical techniques to express themselves more fully, while placing themselves in a context of connection to those things from which they feel modern life disconnects them. They use ritual to counter alienation.

## Going within: interiority and integration

The focus on personal stories within Reclaiming, and the emphasis on a 'true' self, nevertheless creates a certain pressure towards inwardness, which in many ways further reinscribes the individualism practitioners seek to overcome, mirroring some of the individualising technologies of the self widespread in modernity. For practitioners, patterns of estrangement in the world are seen to have their own 'energetic' signature which becomes inscribed in the person, shaping what they see as an inner landscape. Thus a practice of 'changing the underlying patterns' is seen as both personal and collective, but the focus is most often given to 'remaking' this inner landscape. This in turn gives rise to the tendency we touched on in the previous chapter for 'inner' work to come to dominate Reclaiming activities.

### Inwardness

The single most common thread through the wide-ranging themes of Reclaiming rituals, camps and classes is the pattern of tying personal journey to outward events. In Reclaiming ritual, participants are invited to reflect on their own lives in terms guided by the time of year and the theme of the ritual. My field notes from one Autumn Equinox ritual illustrate how this is accomplished:

> A cold day in Golden Gate Park. 110 witches, friends, children, priestesses, men and women gather to honour the time of darkening— or is it the time of awakening? The Mabon Reclaiming ritual had been planned by George and Moss a couple of weeks earlier, on a Monday night on which even Moss had to rush to our house to come to Burdock's birthday dinner party. George was basically the container for the ritual, and, as Suzanne said afterwards, anything planned by George, community will be the theme.

> As the priestesses gathered up in a huddle, and we went round with names, breathed together, got started, the surprise of the day was the Eleusinian Mysteries—the idea that here in San Francisco, as in Greece, we have a Mediterranean climate. This is the time of the year when Persephone emerges from the Earth. As the year darkens, the trees grow, flourish, burst forth.[54]

> And so the ritual was one of walking the mystery, into Hades and out again. Four stations—the first, Ash and others singing. The second, Hades in the bushes [welcoming people to the time of darkness asking "What is your work here? What are you leaving behind?"]. The third, which I was priestessing with Moss and Jade. "What have you learnt in your time in the underworld? What have you found? What will you take with you that you have found in the underworld?" Which were the questions I settled on, with Moss's prompting, as she played the Shruti box and also asked questions, while Jade, whose voice was fading from the play she was directing and a cold, handed out tarot cards, and I offered the autumn leaves I'd collected off the ground. And then, station number four, the return to the centre, where several priestesses held space and sang.

Ritual methods such as these help remind practitioners of their place within a wider ritual cycle they celebrate to honour the earth, while simultaneously directing them to a pattern of self-examination typical of modern individualised personhood.

Other techniques—trancing to a place of power or personal meaning, reflecting on dreams, laying out a tarot spread—have a similarly personalised focus in Reclaiming, directing consciousness "inward" towards a person's own

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[54] In Greek mythology, Persephone's emergence from the Underworld ushered in the fertile time of year. This is generally interpreted among both Pagans and folklorists to refer to the summer months. George's contention at this ritual was that, in a Mediterranean climate, winter is the fertile time, while summer is barren and dry. He had read of a theory that the nineteenth century folklorists who recovered these myths of the ancient Eleusinian mysteries, looking ethnocentrically through the lens of Northern European and British climate patterns, may have misinterpreted the timing of the two mythic components of the story. While George took the lead in suggesting a reversal of these celebrations in Reclaiming to better match the Mediterranean climate patterns, other ritual planners chose to support this choice. This decision helped feed the controversy that developed the following year relayed in Chapter 3, of the tension between the 'tradition' of Reclaiming celebrations and the latitude ritual planners have to bend or alter these traditions.

individual stories and self-understanding. While participants may be encouraged at some point in a ritual or class to share their insights with others, only a slice of a much larger private story will generally be shared. Participants have a sense of being tied together by the common ritual or mythical theme of the event. At the same time, the visions, thoughts and ideas each person acquires through a ritual or class are seen as having the greatest meaning for the individual. The focus of these activities and experiences is individualised and personal, rather than communal or collective.

Such practices of self-examination are typical of what Charles Taylor identifies as the "inwardness" of Western personhood, which he traces back to Augustine (Taylor 1989:131). This inwardness is tied to what he calls "radical reflexivity" or the "first-person standpoint", a position which holds that "[t]he world as I know it is there for me, is experienced by me, or thought about by me, or has meaning for me" (Taylor 1989:130). In this standpoint, awareness is directed not to the things experienced in the world, but to the process of experiencing itself. In so doing, people "become aware of our awareness, try to experience our experiencing, focus on the way the world is *for* us" (Taylor 1989:130). In the Mabon ritual above, each participant was invited not simply to recognise the shortening days of the year or the turning of the Autumn leaves, or even the mythically reconstructed realm of Hades designed to reflect these seasonal processes; their attention was also turned towards examining what these things might mean for them personally, towards noticing themselves notice these things. Their attention was directed inward, in a way which not only invited the radical reflexivity of a first-person standpoint, but which encouraged each participant to construct the inner stories and images upon which such a radical reflexivity rests. In this way, Reclaiming methods help to constitute a landscape of the interior through which practitioners come to view and interpret their lives.

The radical reflexivity of Augustine, as outlined by Taylor, involves a double-motion. Taylor suggests that Augustine's concern "was to show that God is to be found not just in the world but also and more importantly at the very

foundations of the person" (Taylor 1989:134). The turn towards what Augustine called the 'inner light' is simultaneously a turn towards God. As Taylor expresses it: "the way within leads above" (Taylor 1989:135). Such an inward move to approach the sacred is very much the pattern in Reclaiming. Accessing Deep Self within means touching the cosmic interconnection of the Goddess through an interior turn, via the symbolic world of Younger Self. Through Taylor's work on interiority, we can place Reclaiming spiritual practices on this spectrum of Western individualism, drawing on a long tradition of Western religious self-examination.

Taylor traces this early influence of Augustine through its many subsequent iterations in the emergence of modern Western personhood. One of the most important of these for our purposes is the work of Rousseau, whose *Confessions* were named for those of Augustine, written more than an millennium earlier. Rousseau's work shares the inwardness of Augustine, but with substantial modification (Gutman 1988). As Gutman points out in his essay "Rousseau's *Confessions*: a technology of the self", their intentions were very different: where Augustine sought to direct the reader towards God, Rousseau's object was the 'self' itself. His purpose was "to create a 'self' which can serve to define himself, to himself and others, in the face of a hostile social order" (Gutman 1988:103). As Rousseau described it: "I decided to make [the *Confessions*] a work unique and unparalleled in its truthfulness, so that for once at least the world might behold a man as he was within" (cited in Gutman 1988:105). In telling the 'truth' about himself and exposing his senses, feelings and dispositions to the reader, he depicts these same senses and feelings as fundamentally and uniquely constitutive of 'Jean Jacques'. Rousseau therefore reveals, perhaps for the first time, a thoroughly individualistic depiction of the self. In Gutman's words "Rousseau reveals and celebrates the atomistic, autonomous self: He is perhaps the first human being to insist upon his own singularity" (Gutman 1988:100).

In Rousseau's emphasis on elaborating upon and granting a language for the world of 'inner' feeling and sensation, we see the foundations laid for a long

tradition of Romanticism (Taylor 1989:361-3), of which Reclaiming members are inheritors. Reclaiming practitioners are less inclined to exhaustively vocalise their feelings, encouraged instead to share verbally only those parts of their story they most want to share, and to express themselves instead in symbolic ways. An exercise in a Reclaiming class might involve drawing a picture of one's emotional energy body, or dancing a story about oneself. Yet this basic conception of the inner world of feeling as uniquely defining the person is a fundamental thread in Reclaiming practices of the self. Much work on the constitution of the modern subject focuses on the analytical and rational aspects of the liberal tradition (two notable examples are Weber [1920]1956, and Foucault 1983). It is therefore important to note that in Gutman and Taylor we see an analysis of the way in which the feeling and sensory world has likewise been harnessed in the constitution of the individual.

One of the important features that Gutman points out with respect to Rousseau is the systematisation of the 'inner' world of feelings that Rousseau attempts in apprehending his individualised self. It is not merely the expression of his feelings, but the total exposure of his soul, which Rousseau aspires to achieve in intimate detail. As Rousseau explains:

> I cannot go wrong about what I have felt, or about what my feelings have led me to do; and these are the chief subjects of my story. The true object of my confessions is to reveal my inner thoughts exactly in all the situations of my life. It is the history of my soul that I have promised to recount, and to write it faithfully I have no need of other memories; it is enough if I enter again into my inner self, as I have done till now (cited in Gutman 1988:102).

This is not merely a revelation of a pre-existing inner truth. As Gutman points out, it is an early articulation of a set of techniques through which the modern self has come to be constituted (Gutman 1988:103-4). As Foucault explored the role of confession in defining the modern subject, Gutman suggests that, in this systematic truth-telling, Rousseau has contributed enormously to the process by which the modern subject is both constituted and governed (Gutman 1988:103-4).

We can therefore see in Reclaiming an extension of myriad social practices by which the interiorised, self-examining modern individual is produced and reproduced. In Reclaiming, practitioners are encouraged to understand themselves in terms of their 'personal journey', and to read the symbols and signs of their inner world—dreams, visions, feelings—as signposts to this journey. A huge weight is given to these processes of growing self-awareness. A person's insights gained in ritual might be applicable to action in the world, but nevertheless they begin most often as personal insights about themselves and their place in the world. As the Charge of the Goddess suggests:

> And you who seek to know Me, know that the seeking and yearning will avail you not, unless you know the Mystery: For if that which you seek, you find not within yourself, you will never find it without (Starhawk n.d.-a).

The participant coming to a ritual with a conception of herself as an individual therefore most often has this conception reinforced in important ways: that her story, her journey, her inner world matters in a truly cosmic way. Thus an individualised, uniquely constituted self-concept is reinforced in the inward turn central to Reclaiming activity.

## Rationalisation of the soul

Gutman's work on Rousseau's systematisation of the world of inner feelings can help us to understand Reclaiming in terms of another key dynamic in the development of modern individualism—that of the rational examination of interior life explored most famously by Weber in his essay on *The Protestant Ethic*. Weber outlines the process by which a meticulous self-examination of behaviour, motives and dispositions emerged with the rise of Protestantism, and Calvinism in particular, as a psychological defence against the rigors of religious beliefs such as the doctrine of predestination (Weber [1920]1976:98–154). This exacting methodism—what we might call a petty accounting of the soul—infused the outlook of proponents of early capitalism, establishing a philosophy of careful accounting of behaviour and frugality, which Weber suggests laid a foundation for a rationalisation of the social order as a whole

(Weber [1920]1976:155–183). In the process, it likewise created the conditions for the emergence of a particular mode of personhood—a technology of rigorous self-examination that set the stage for the constitution of modern Western persons as rationally calculating individuals accountable to themselves.

To Weber, this rationalisation of interior life is intimately tied to the individualised relationship to God ushered in by Protestantism, which established the individual as his or her own examiner and judge (Weber [1920]1976:104–5). Such an individual relationship to deity is likewise present in modern Pagan religions such as Reclaiming, reflected in precepts such as "I am my own spiritual authority". This helps establish a certain tendency to self-examination and personal accountability within Reclaiming, despite an overarching emphasis on community and collective social concerns. For example, Starhawk argues:

> Earth-based spiritual traditions are rooted in community. They are not religions of individual salvation, but of communal celebration and collective change (Starhawk [1987]1990:23).

At the same time, in a communication from a protest at the Republican National Convention, she writes:

> If there's a core belief in the Goddess religion, it's this: that each of us is part of the web of life, and precious, bringing our own unique gifts to the world. We don't ask people to believe in things, not even the Goddess who is simply our term for the great creative mystery that weaves the world. But we do ask people to believe in yourself, in your own deep work, in your sacred purpose. You are here for a reason (Starhawk 2008).

In these ideas about "sacred purpose" we see a close mirror for the Protestant emphasis on vocation, while an injunction to "believe in yourself" is a Reclaiming adaptation of individual salvation. Thus an emphasis remains in Reclaiming on the centrality of individual action and the meaning behind each person's life, which inherits aspects of the Protestant disposition of personal salvation.

At a surface level, the Reclaiming emphasis on celebration, joy and sexuality could not be further from the worldly asceticism Weber ascribes to early Protestantism. As the Charge of the Goddess claims "All acts of love and pleasure are my rituals" (Starhawk n.d.-a). Yet this overarching 'irrationalism' of ecstatic ritual does not itself preclude the kind of individualising methodism and systematisation of behaviour of which Weber writes from conditioning Reclaiming members' daily lives. On the contrary, self-consistency, honesty, focus and effectiveness in worldly activity are seen as essential preconditions to the effective use of magic. Often in practice, pleasure is not simply an end in its own right, but is also more subtly taken as a pointer along a road to greater consciousness. This raises the intriguing question: to what extent is it possible to rationalise pleasure and joy?

In *Twelve Wild Swans*, Reclaiming priestess Hilary Valentine describes 'Pomegranate's Life-Purpose Exercise' (Starhawk and Valentine 2001:199–201). In this exercise, participants in ritual trance trace back over the embodied memory of their lives to think of five times when they experienced joy in their bodies. Still in ritual space, they break down these experiences by directional correspondence, writing the results on pieces of card: East/air for the quality of thinking associated with that experience, South/fire for energy, West/water for emotions and North/earth for how the physical body felt. They look for patterns and variations that connect each of these experiences together. Practitioners then check these experiences against their daily lives, ordering the cards in terms of how often they experience these feelings, and whether this is as often as it should be. Finally, they rearrange the cards in the order they would prefer, as a 'magical act', i.e. with the intention that they be able to prioritise their actions in life better to reflect the passions represented.

The central idea presented here is the possibility of gaining self-consistency and purpose in one's daily activity. Valentine introduces the exercise through the myth of Rose, who must weave shirts from nettles:

> Some of us may already be committed and purposeful, knowing just what we are meant to do with our lives. But others of us might be wondering what shirts we are supposed to be weaving (Starhawk and Valentine 2001:199).

Thus purposefulness and commitment are enshrined as values within Reclaiming; a sense of purpose should stem for the practitioner from sacred knowledge obtained from deep within. For Reclaiming members, experiences of joy point towards higher purpose just as other Godly signs might point towards vocation for the dedicated Protestant. As Pomegranate says of her ritual exercise, "When we go toward goals that do not create this feeling of joy, we are going down the wrong path" (Starhawk and Valentine 2001:199–200). Here, experiences of joy are read as so many signposts along the road to a higher calling.

Indeed, Reclaiming members often refer to their 'Higher Self' or 'Deep Self' as helping lend this sense of purpose and consciousness to their daily activities. The signs of alienation described at the opening of this chapter—watching too much television, or fantasising an escape from one's 'boring job'—are also read by practitioners as signs of lacking purpose and consciousness in one's life. This is not so far from the statement of the Puritan Baxter, that "outside of a well-marked calling the accomplishments of a man are only casual and irregular, and he spends more time in idleness than in work" (cited in Weber [1920]1976:161). While casual leisure time is encouraged in Reclaiming, decisions are certainly made about more and less 'conscious' ways to spend that time, in which more earthy or social past-times are judged as preferable to watching television or 'escaping' on the internet. Similarly, practitioners value 'daily practice' or other regular spiritual activity. Whether this be meditation, walking in nature, or reading a tarot card each day, such ideas about the importance of regularly reminding themselves of spiritual values inform the choices Reclaiming members make about the use of their time. Even while many practitioners joke about how often they fail in their goals of establishing a daily spiritual practice, an underlying sense of spiritually better or worse uses of time remains to guide their actions. Thus practitioners have

generally internalised a range of methods of spiritual self-regulation which are ideally aimed at helping them become and remain more spiritually conscious and purposeful at each moment of their everyday lives.

A similar dynamic pertains to the regulation of consumption amongst practitioners, the most obvious example of which is that Reclaiming rituals and witchcamps are 'clean and sober' events. This is different from many other modern Pagan traditions, where consumption of alcohol and drugs is often widespread, and wine is frequently used in ritual space as part of the feast sharing that generally follows a ritual. The specific context for the Reclaiming approach was a decision made early in the life of the Collective to accommodate participants in recovery from addiction, many of whom feel safer and more comfortable in an alcohol-free space. While individual practitioners consume alcohol and recreational drugs in their leisure time, and some use entheogens occasionally in private ritual, there is a widespread view within Reclaiming that the altered states of ritual are better achieved *without* mind-altering substances.

The Reclaiming decision to create spaces and practices clear from certain substances is a long way from the harsh puritanism associated with early forms of Protestantism. Indeed, the central emphasis on pleasure, ecstasy and sexuality in Reclaiming and other modern Pagan traditions can be seen as much as a reaction against the social puritanism that has shaped US society in important ways. Yet at a more subtle level, Reclaiming practitioners monitor their sensuous activity in a way which reflects, in significantly less stringent form, Protestant ideas on the corruption of the flesh and practices of self-monitoring for purity or pollution (Weber [1920]1956:105;263-4). As we saw in the previous chapter, practitioners have adopted the chant "my body is a living temple of love", which expresses the centrality of valuing and monitoring the self-care of their bodies, through the acts they engage in and the food and drink they consume.

Such ideas around purity and impurity are also reflected in Reclaiming attitudes to consumption outside of ritual space. Many practitioners prefer organic to inorganic fruit and vegetables, or home-cooked meals to McDonalds. Within weeks of my arrival, I was introduced to Rainbow Grocery, a local cooperative where my housemates and other practitioners buy their organic vegetables, herbs and bulk supplies. Many Reclaiming members are also vegetarian, and in California the witchcamp is entirely catered as high-quality vegetarian food with vegan options. Thus a hierarchy of values applies to items consumed, and this is reflected in the food items brought into ritual space to share with others, and echoed in casual comments such as compliments for home-baked goods. The hierarchy might look something like:

| more valued ↑ | Home-grown, organic fruit or vegetables<br>Home-cooked meals or snacks from organic ingredients<br>Bought meals or snacks from organic ingredients<br>Home-cooked meals or snacks from non-organic ingredients<br>Bought meals or snacks from non-organic ingredients<br>Highly processed bought food<br>Food produced by prominent multinational corporations, e.g. McDonalds, Coca-Cola |
|---|---|
| less valued | |

In line with the open-endedness and emphasis on personal authority in Reclaiming, such assessments operate as general social norms rather than any kind of spiritual mandate. Furthermore, the specifics of how such ideas are applied vary according to regional practices. Urania describes:

> One of the most shocking experiences of my Reclaiming life was going to another camp [outside of California], which I loved, where they sold Coca-cola as part of the fundraiser…Can you imagine my poor little Starhawkian trained heart? I was heartbroken and probably called [her partner] and cried on the phone about it.

Bay Area Reclaiming is influenced by Northern Californian norms, and probably tends further towards the more stringent end of this scale of appropriate consumption than Reclaiming communities elsewhere. Nonetheless, such habits of assessment around purity in consumption are in keeping with

broader Reclaiming values of bodily and spiritual self-monitoring and awareness.

This regulation of consumption by practitioners is seen as spiritually-guided, and, like the use of one's time for purposeful activities, is important for maintaining a sense of consciousness in daily life. Rook describes the limits she sees as necessary to apply around what she calls 'Pagan materialism'. On the one hand, she says Pagans have a healthy appreciation of material objects. On the other, she feels it is necessary to consciously police and curb such consumption:

> Now, we can go overboard on that too, you know. And I think this is also where our awareness of the fact that we are part of a larger environment, and part of the natural world comes in, is that we recognize that in our enjoyment of things of this earth, and the good things of life, we need to not be gluttonous. There needs to be enough to go around, and we need to not become blind consumers.

Thus, a value hierarchy is established for practitioners between 'conscious' consumption and 'blind' consumption.

Similar guidelines apply to Reclaiming approaches to sexual activity. Safer sex became a central value in Reclaiming through the years of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s. Initially, the context for this was primarily social rather than spiritual: the severe oppression associated with the spread of HIV/AIDS and the devastation in San Francisco, particularly among gay men, had a tangible impact on the views of many Reclaiming members of the time, which endures today. Nonetheless, it is interesting that, at least among some practitioners, the choice to engage in safer sex appears not simply as a health choice, but has taken on a moral quality, expressed, for example, in tones of outrage and disdain levelled against those who do not practice safer sex, which I encountered in several conversations.

At a more fundamental level, there are subtle hierarchies that operate among practitioners, regarding different ways to engage in sexual acts. Those sexual methods that express erotic values connected to what practitioners understand

as the eros of the cosmos are seen as affirming deep spiritual values, while those that play out received hierarchical sex-roles, sado-masochism and other forms of power-over are often seen as damaging (see for example the discussion in Starhawk [1982]1988:136–141). Differences in interpretations as to what constitutes spiritually appropriate and inappropriate sexual expression lead to occasional conflict within the community, which will be explored more fully in the following chapter. Nonetheless, the idea that one *should* shape one's sexual desires and expressions according to spiritual values is central.

What is important about the Reclaiming approach to both consumption and sexuality is that the lines of purity are not marked by external measures, but are based upon an inner judgment of what one's 'true' desires are, ascertained through maintaining connection to the spiritual realm. The particular choices made will vary between practitioners, based on their internal sense of whether a given activity is helping them 'connect' or leading them to become 'unconscious' again. Thus, the specifically open-ended ideas about purity and pollution in Reclaiming are part of a process which can actually reinforce within practitioners the disposition of self-monitoring individualism. A practitioner's feelings and internalised bodily sensations provide the data needed to interpret the appropriateness of his actions: whether they are in touch with the sacred or lost in the unconsciousness of everyday de-sacralising reality. Practitioners are encouraged to become self-aware as feeling and sensing creatures. Drawing on Weber's work, we can therefore see how Reclaiming ideas about sacred sexuality and pleasurable consumption inherit a tradition of highly individualising approaches to personhood. Here, the awareness is turned inwards into a methodical monitoring of one's spiritual condition in order to maintain a spiritual consciousness, which, like ascetic Protestantism, is infused ideally throughout as much of one's life as possible.

Reclaiming theology offers important safety valves, which make Reclaiming practice both considerably less demanding and arguably more pleasurable than life under ascetic Protestantism. One of these is a conception of inevitable

imperfection. This was expressed around one witchcamp with a chant adapted from a Leonard Cohen song:

> Forget your perfect offering
> Ring the bells that still can ring
> There is a crack in everything
> That's how the light gets in

Such ideas make it more possible for practitioners to act in a complex, messy world with far less rigour about their personal activities than was possible for the seventeenth century Puritan, and give practitioners confidence in aspiring towards consciousness even while beset by repeated 'failures'. It eases the psychological pressures on practitioners to monitor their actions, allowing more room for the enjoyment and pleasure that they see as lying at the heart of their spiritual value system. Nonetheless, while many of the criteria have changed from those dominant in the rationalised measures Weber outlines, there is a strong encouragement in Reclaiming theology for practitioners to act as self-monitoring individuals, measuring their actions and practices against internalised criteria that are seen as reflecting greater or lesser consciousness and connection to the sacred.

## Monads, reified consciousness, and modernity's 'double life'

The continuing presence of the individual as a centrepiece of Reclaiming practice can in fact be understood in terms of the very alienation that practitioners seek to overcome. We can see this when we look at the way in which the Reclaiming model of consciousness reproduces the dichotomies and fractures practitioners seek to undo, and in particular how these are reified in their three part model of consciousness. In the words of Reclaiming teacher Seed, these three parts of the self are "not blended, but completely unique". In other words, the tensions and contradictions within a person's consciousness are seen by practitioners as fundamental rather than socially conditioned. This conception helps to entrench the reifications in consciousness they critique.

Returning to Marx's writings on alienation, we can explore how these individualising tendencies are linked to wider tensions in sociality. According to Marx, human experience in capitalist society is depicted as subject to tensions pulling in several different directions, which are mirrored within people's experiences of themselves. In an early articulation of these ideas, he draws on Hegel's distinction between the 'political state' and 'civil society' to examine the consequences for social being that he argues emerged with the rise of the bourgeois state (Marx [1843]1967). Where the state has become hegemonic, he suggests, it takes the form of "man's species life, in *opposition* to material life" ([1843]1967:225). In relation to the state, a person is "divested of his actual individual life and endowed with an unactual universality" ([1843]1967:226). At the same time, the particularities of human experience that lend people their distinctive qualities, including those things designated by early bourgeois thinkers as the 'rights of man' such as freedom of religion and conscience, are relegated to the domain of civil society. Here, they become individualised—a situation that constitutes "the liberty of man viewed as an isolated monad, withdrawn into himself" ([1843]1967:235).

This reflects what we might more broadly call the public/private divide in modern Western societies. Here, we have two distinct modes of being: collective but abstract, and sensuous but atomised, into which persons are drawn by turns. This leads to what Marx calls a 'double life', reflective of the broader tensions he ascribes to social being under capitalist conditions:

> Where the political state has achieved its full development [in modern, liberal democracy], humanity leads a **double** life…not only in thought or consciousness, but in *actuality.* In the *political community* he regards himself as a *communal being*, but in civil society he is active as a *private individual* (Marx [1843]1967:225).

The Reclaiming model of divided consciousness mirrors Marx's description of a 'double life' in intriguing ways. In Reclaiming, Talking Self corresponds to the part of us that manages our regular interactions with other people, yet is prone to abstraction and distraction. It is therefore a self of collective interaction and public activity, of bureaucratic processes and rational calculation. It develops

habits by rote, and becomes accustomed to being treated and treating others in routinised ways, without regard for specific needs or unique qualities of persons or situations. Disconnected from the other parts of the self, it becomes indeed divested of its "actual individual life and endowed with an unactual universality". Younger Self, on the other hand, expresses the immediacy of concrete, sensuous experience. It knows about "passion, hunger, will and ice cream", and knows nothing of words, analysis or rationalised calculation of means and ends (Starhawk and Valentine 2001:11). At the same time, as we have seen, Younger Self's expression in magical practice can readily become interiorised and individualised. While ritual exposes Younger Self to interaction with others, the thread of sensuous experience that runs through these experiences is individualised through frequent reference to 'inner needs' and self-examination.

The disconnected model of consciousness in Reclaiming therefore mirrors in significant ways the reification of the person that Marx sees as stemming from conditions of alienation. In separating out Talking Self from Younger Self, we see elements of the separation between abstract life in the political community and concrete sensuous life in civil society. Reclaiming practitioners seek to deepen their awareness of how life could be expressed through Talking Self and Younger Self, and to overcome this dichotomy through reference to Deep Self—processes which we shall explore further. Even so, conceptualising consciousness in this way and creating practices that reflect this conception serve in part to crystallise and reinforce this same dichotomy.

The continuing appearance of the sensuous, self-expressive individual within Reclaiming provides some support for this conception of capitalism's "double life": the abstracted Talking Self foregrounded in the "dehumanised" collective realms of jobs, grocery stores and bureaucracies; alongside sensuous and concrete Younger Self drawn into itself and expressing its own specific concerns and will as a 'unique' individual. In turn, this dichotomisation of the person into abstract-collective and particular-monadic encourages the recurring appearance of the individual at the centre of Reclaiming practice,

since practitioners choose to accentuate the latter half of this paired experience through emphasising particularity and concrete experience in Younger Self. Since it is as private monadic individuals that persons in such social systems experience their intimate human relations, their consumption and their religion, it should not surprise us that it is as individuals that they approach Reclaiming, nor that Reclaiming practice should very often rest upon and readily return to such sensuous individualism.

## The problem of fragmentation

It is nevertheless useful to understand the Reclaiming project of 'excavating' the self in search of a 'truer' identity not simply as a case of Reclaiming members inheriting wider social forms of individualism. As Greenwood has suggested, it is also helpful to see it as a reaction against social fragmentation (Greenwood 2000:118–121). As we saw in Chapter 1, many Pagan traditions emphasise achieving integration of the person through healing and other magical work, often speaking of this as 'becoming whole'. Looking in particular at the work of Giddens (1991) and Moore (1994), Greenwood argues that this Pagan project of self-reflexive identity construction can be seen as a reaction to problems of personal meaninglessness that arise from relationships becoming increasingly disembedded from traditions and local contexts, and the complexity of negotiating many competing social discourses. In this light, Valentine's assertion that "our lives [are] becom[ing] more hectic and hurried, more fragmented and isolated" (Starhawk and Valentine 2001:8) can be seen as the starting point to the Reclaiming search for 'wholeness'.

The Reclaiming saying, "Whole and complete unto myself" illustrates this point. This is a reflection of Reclaiming members' perception that this sense of wholeness *requires* affirmation in the face of the fragmentary effects of everyday life. Speaking about the challenge of becoming 'disconnected', Starhawk suggests:

> If we become partially disconnected, as we often do under stress, we
> become un-grounded in every sense. We are easily drained, fragmented,

> unable to concentrate or proceed deliberately, and emotionally ragged (Starhawk [1982]1988:53).

Reclaiming teachers often speak about the process of recovering from this sense of disconnection and fragmentation as 'looking for lost parts of the self'. In this light, a similar affirmation adopted from Feri highlights the partiality experienced at the centre of this striving for wholeness:

> Who is this flower above me? What is the work of this god?
> I would know myself in all of my parts.

Thus the search for 'wholeness' looks to practitioners like drawing together into a more coherent whole the 'parts' of themselves that practitioners otherwise feel have become separate and disconnected in the face of harried social conditions.

In Reclaiming belief, when a person does not understand themselves well enough or recognise all of their parts, these parts run the risk of emerging in problematic ways in contexts where they are otherwise pushed to one side. Healing is spoken of as a way of 'getting to know' these 'lost' parts of the self, of 'reconnecting' with them, so that, as Rook phrases it, "we're not just being run by variant personality parts all the time." Following Jung, this is often spoken about as becoming familiar with one's 'shadow'. In the Reclaiming view, recovering these parts and incorporating them into a self-consistent story helps prevent them from inappropriately impacting on one's actions in the wrong context.

It is worth noting that, in many societies, people express themselves differently in different social contexts (behave in 'partial' ways), yet do not see this as a problem to be solved (Markus and Kitayama 1991). What is different here is a sense of an overarching social dynamic of incoherence and contradiction, which troubles a person's being: a worrying separation or conflict between the parts making up the whole of a person's experience. These variant parts of the self, while seen as part of the human condition, are particularly thought by Reclaiming members to arise from anxieties surrounding an uncertain world

and the rushed and conflicting demands of life in a very complex social order. In other words, the search for wholeness can be seen as a way for practitioners to react against the partiality and overarching irrationality they encounter in wider life.

Becoming whole also aims at helping practitioners develop a sense of purposive action in the world ("the work of this god"), in the face of a feeling that otherwise, one's actions are merely a jumble of incoherent experiences. The life-purpose exercise discussed above is a good illustration: while it reflects the demands for self-consistency typical of individualised personhood, it is also useful to understand it as being designed to help overcome problems of fragmentation. In particular, it is useful to note what is going on with the idea of 'purpose'. Valentine's description of life as "hectic and hurried" suggests a constant process of activity, in which people make judgments to achieve given ends—writing cheques and driving the car—presumably to many particular purposes within the moment. Yet the name of this exercise suggests that an overarching sense of purpose is missing from all this activity, reflecting practitioners' sense that the demands of daily activity frustrate their ability to work towards truly desired ends. In this exercise's search for "common themes and threads that connect these [joyful] experiences" in a person's life (Starhawk and Valentine 2001:200), we see a longing for some pattern of self-consistency which could help practitioners make sense of the disconnected complexity otherwise plaguing their daily experience.

Further to Greenwood's analysis of these themes in Giddens and Moore, it is useful to look at this through Lukács's analysis of problems of partiality which he sees as stemming from conditions of alienation. According to Marx, one of the results of alienation is that social processes become externalised, tending to develop according to their own dynamics. As Ollman describes this:

> At the same time that the individual is degenerating into an abstraction [divested of human specificity], those parts of his being which have been split off (which are no longer under his control) are undergoing their own transformation. Three end products of this development are

property, industry and religion, which Marx calls man's 'alienated life elements'. (This list is by no means complete...). In each instance, the other half of a severed relation, carried by a social dynamic of its own, progresses through a series of forms in a direction away from its beginning in man. Eventually, it attains an independent life, that is, takes on 'needs' which the individual is then forced to satisfy, and the original connection is all but obliterated (Ollman 1971:135).

Building on this, Lukács suggests that such processes have "the effect of making these partial functions autonomous and so they tend to develop through their own momentum and in accordance with their own special laws independently of the other partial functions of society" (Lukács [1922]1971:103). Thus we see increasing fragmentation between the various domains governing social life—law and administration, economics and politics, science and aesthetics—into separate realms which are themselves only contingently connected. This creates a conflicted tendency at the total social level, culminating in the unpredictability of the system as a whole.

In the Reclaiming emphasis on collecting together the 'parts' of a person's experience, we can see an attempt to reverse what Lukács describes. In these competing, partial domains, taking action towards larger ends—what practitioners would think of as developing a more conscious approach to life— becomes a principal challenge. In cases such as the life-purpose exercise, Reclaiming members meet this challenge with reference to a sought-after holism of individual experience. Thus, as Greenwood suggests, this emphasis on the coherence of the subject can be seen in part as a means of finding meaning and stability amidst an apparently incoherent social order.

Thus we can see the Reclaiming desire for unitary identity and purpose as a reaction against people's experiences of inconsistency as they move through separate, partial, contingently connected spheres of order. Yet it is important to note that these challenges of fragmentation are nonetheless sheeted back to the individual to figure some way through. While the underlying interconnectedness tapped into through magical practice is thought to ensure that any direction taken is in harmony with the cosmos, it is nevertheless up to

the individual to draw on and interpret the deep insights gained through these experiences. And here, the problem remains whether this meaning-making individual can provide the way out practitioners are looking for from a world already seen as fraught with atomisation and fragmentation.

## Reification and dualism

### Appropriation, labour and alienation as a mental condition

The heart of alienation for Marx is the labour process, since it is through creating objects and shaping the material world around them that persons most profoundly experience themselves, their creative capacities, their relationship to nature as an extension of themselves, and so on (Ollman 1971:131–157).[55] Understanding alienation for Marx means understanding how estranged labour estranges people from their own embodied capacities, from their internal connections to nature and from other humans (Marx [1844]1977:74–75). In doing so, it separates and externalises the processes of production, consumption and exchange through which people meet their needs, thereby establishing a person's individual needs in opposition to social life. It turns collective life in society—what Marx calls our 'species-being'—into "a being *alien* to him, into a *means* for his *individual existence*" (Marx [1844]1977:74). It thus establishes the basis for the double life he refers to in earlier writings.

Alienation for Marx involves a two-fold process, or a single process with two related halves. On the one hand, alienated labour produces objects which circulate independent of their producer and which contribute to the accumulation of capital under its own dynamics, which then impacts back on the alienated workers, furthering their subjection (Ollman 1971:190–204). On the other hand it leaves behind persons shaped by their subjection to these dynamics: hampered in their full expression of their powers, stifled in their

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[55] This is not to say that for Marx alienation can only be found within the labour process; but rather that alienated labour provides the engine for wider processes.

relationship to nature and to others, more likely to understand their membership of human and non-human societies as a means to their own individualised ends (Ollman 1971:137–157).[56] While these two halves must be understood as inseparable aspects of a single process, focusing on one or the other side of these processes provides a different angle from which to view the problem.[57]

According to Ollman, the terms 'alienation' and 'estrangement' loosely carve out this territory, the former referring what is given up by the alienated person and the relations this generates between donor and object, and the latter more often to what is left behind, the distortions arising within persons themselves as a result of this process (Ollman 1971:299 n20). It is perhaps significant, then, that Starhawk chooses to use the term 'estrangement' to illustrate the social dynamics she critiques, taking this theoretical starting-point from Marx in a way which emphasises alienation internalised within the person: alienation as a state of being. This mirrors her primary concentration on psychology and embodiment over and above the social processes, and particularly labour processes, that for Marx are the source of estranged personhood. It is consistent with the wider tendency we have seen in Reclaiming of giving the greatest attention to healing alienation within the person. Consequently, there is an effacement of the labour process in Reclaiming, despite frequent references by practitioners to estrangement and alienation.

This could be said to arise perhaps from two related sources. Firstly, Reclaiming members—even those who confront urban realities through activism and community work—on the whole believe it is most effective to give the greatest focus and energy to utopian ideals rather than existing conditions. In general, this creates a pressure towards displacing social realities considered alienating from the Reclaiming gaze. Secondly, a layer of leading

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[56] As we saw above, he sees similar processes of externalisation taking place with regard to other social realms such as religion and law.

[57] The development of alienated social products through their own dynamics, and the relationship of these to sociality, will be taken up further in Chapter 6.

practitioners make their living outside of wage-labour relations, for example as writers, artists and body workers. As a result, their own experience of alienation can be seen as being removed from the nexus of producer-product which Marx identifies as the two sides of the primary alienated relationship, thus placing them at one remove. This in turn could be said to give rise to a more static, psychological conception of alienation than one that focuses on the labour process. As Marx suggests:

> First it has to be noticed that everything which appears in the workers as an *activity of alienation, of estrangement*, appears in the non-worker as a *state of alienation, of estrangement*. Secondly, that the worker's *real, practical attitude* in production and the product (as a state of mind) appears in the non-worker confronting him as a *theoretical* attitude (Marx [1844]1977:80).

For Reclaiming practitioners, it is this theoretical attitude, this *state* of alienation, that is most often understood when they speak of alienation or estrangement as a personal sense of damage or loss, or conversely of the need to heal from the ills of modern society. Estrangement becomes a condition in itself, not simply an expression in human consciousness for a set of social processes. Hence, we can see arising from this theoretical base an overarching emphasis within Reclaiming on remaking internalised experience.

One of the unintended effects of this choice seems to be a further entrenchment of the separations that exist between practitioners and the things (including other persons) they seek to develop relationships with. In focussing on the reflection of alienated processes within human consciousness, rather than on the processes themselves, this disposition tends toward an objectification and reification of both the alienated consciousness and the objects it is observing. The relationships practitioners seek to develop then come to take the form of external relations between separate objects, rather than seeing humans as inherently holding these relations as part of themselves.

To see this more fully, it is worth taking a specific look at one of the clearest examples of this dynamic: how the human–nature relationship is expressed and understood within Reclaiming.

## Reification of nature

As we have seen, nature worship is central to Reclaiming, as it is for many other Pagans. Images of nature infuse Reclaiming mythos, from moon goddesses and harvest gods through to invocations of oceans, mountains, sunshine or forest fires common to the calling of the elements into ritual circle. The Charge of the Goddess opens with the lines:

> I Who am the beauty of the green earth and the white moon among the
> stars and the mysteries of the waters,
> I call upon your soul to arise and come unto me.
> For I am the soul of nature that gives life to the universe.

For many practitioners, reclaiming a relationship to nature consists of finding ways to experience trees, grass, forests, beaches and other environments as free from obvious human intervention as possible. Typical is the Mendocino woodlands, where California witchcamp is held every year. With small, unassuming wooden cabins set amidst redwoods, bisected by a creek flowing over a stony creek-bed, the woodlands provide an ideal retreat from the industrialised world in which to create a week's work of deep magic, enabling practitioners to reach 'deeper' parts of their Deep Selves and develop forms of sociality in which participants relate through their Younger and Deep Selves as much or more than through Talking Self. The kind of magic possible at a witchcamp is seen as hampered by the pace, distractions and deadening effects of urban life—the pollution, cars, television and advertisements, and the 'closed' and 'distracted' people who are seen to people modern communities as a result of their social and material environments. In this regard, a semi-overt nature/culture dichotomy is assumed and projected within Reclaiming.

The other side of this dichotomy are the urban environments of which Reclaiming practitioners are wary. While members are drawn to aspects of human culture that are seen as numinous—such as art, beautiful architecture, non-hierarchical human communities, solar power or holistic medicine— the Reclaiming stance towards 'nature' is that it provides an escape from the excesses that are seen to typify modern Western human sociality particularly in heavily urbanised settings. The general direction of the Reclaiming imaginary is towards less technology and a 'return' to a Romanticised history of pre-industrial relations.

Starhawk's highly popular novelised vision of an idealised future San Francisco, *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993), gives an illustration. Here, a human-made cataclysm allows the spiritual, earth-centred inhabitants of the city to undertake an Uprising, restructuring sociality and dismantling much of the technological innovation that characterises the city today. Clear water runs in streamlets through the streets to quench the thirst of the home-gardens cultivated in each household (Starhawk 1993:168). Roads have been dug up and planted; cars eliminated. "Vidsets" and widescreens are demolished, while "[w]e print a lot of books, but we make paper from hemp, not from trees" (Starhawk 1993:396). Starhawk's depiction highlights tensions inherent in the Romantic standpoint. She is careful to point out that the city's inhabitants retain as high a level of sustainable technology as they can, yet the vision of the technology she puts forward is a highly naturalised and pre-industrial one. She speaks of computers based on:

> …silicon crystals we grow from sea water. The tecchies direct their formation by visualization. It's a very specialized skill, and not everyone can learn to do it (Starhawk 1993:396).

Thus the technology retained is painted as magically ingenuous, drawn from the abundant resources of the earth shaped by the skilled human mind, by-passing the awkward need for mechanistic skills and equipment.

Developing a relationship to 'nature' in Reclaiming is seen as both a means to deeper personal and social transformation, as well as an end in itself, a way of honouring the sacred within the world. In this, 'nature' is reified, seen as a thing in itself, separate from and more easily sacred than modern human 'culture'. It is important to note here that when Reclaiming members relate to 'nature', they do so as observers of something seen to have meaning in its own right. 'Nature' is a place to find renewal, or a realm to be preserved. Developing a relationship with 'nature' means observing it closely, or doing ritual in it, singing to it or beautifying spaces with altars (see plate 3). Some have made labyrinths in their gardens or hung art work from trees. Yet, rarely does this relationship to the natural world, either practically or ideationally, involve overt acts of appropriation or transformation on a large scale. For the most part, 'nature' is something to be lived in and learned from, rather than something to be modified or absorbed by human ingenuity. Thus relating to nature involves the practitioner primarily as an observer and appreciator, rather than as something embedded in and part of the surrounding non-human environment.

Raymond Williams (1985:120-6) traces the history of just this kind of detached mode of observing land in the development of the imaginary of 'landscaping' in England through the eighteenth century. He describes the division of the land in this new imaginary into 'practical' and 'aesthetic', associated, respectively, with working environments and landscapes, labourers and landlords. What was new here was not the appreciation of natural beauty, which he argues can be traced in different forms through "long generations of observing", but rather:

> The self-conscious observer: the man who is not only looking at land
> but who is conscious that he is doing so, as an experience in itself, and
> who has prepared social models and analogies from elsewhere to
> support and justify the experience: this is the figure we need to seek:
> not a kind of nature but a kind of man (Williams 1985:121).

The Reclaiming practitioner is just such a new kind of person, one who is a self-conscious observer and appreciator of nature, who invokes deities,

magical creatures and myths, who creates art works or music, to express and interpret what is seen. Thus the kinds of relationship to nature seen in Reclaiming—this 'going into the woods' to listen and learn, to observe and absorb its lessons; this appreciation of a 'nature' apparently free from human intervention—these are modes of seeing and experiencing 'landscape' that have actually been generated within a thoroughly modern sensibility.

As Williams contends, such an experience of personhood rests on separation and observation as modes of experiencing 'nature'. Williams attributes the possibility of this new kind of person to a fairly new and sharpening factual separation between production and consumption (Williams 1985:121). The landscapes of modernity are very far from the working land of older imaginaries and of continuing rural experience; they are places of consumption for a specific section of society removed from the immediate demands of production. As Williams contends, "[a] working country is hardly ever a landscape" (Williams 1985:120). In a more urbanised world, the possibility of a detached observation of nature is further conditioned by the dislocation of production from immediate, self-evident operation within the natural world, from the concentration of working populations in cities; and the parallel creation of spaces in 'nature' set apart specifically for human appreciation (Williams 1985:124). Thus this stance as an observer and appreciator of 'nature' seen within Reclaiming is a distinctly modern mode of relationship, built upon a division between production and consumption not hitherto seen on such a scale as in modern capitalism.

As outlined earlier, Reclaiming practitioners and theorists emphasise experiences of estrangement outside of the production process, and as a result are more likely to view estrangement as a state of mind rather than a social process. The implications of this for practitioners' relationships to the natural world are important. For Marx, human relationships to the natural world must be seen as processual, not only because humans must of necessity appropriate objects from their environment to survive, but also because human ingenuity develops in relationship to this process of adapting and modifying:

> The worker can create nothing without nature, without the sensuous external world. It is the material on which his labour is realised, in which it is active, from which and by means of which it produces (Marx [1844]1977:69; see also, Ollman 1971:143–4).

By contrast, most practitioners prefer to experience nature in a 'pristine' state, in and of itself. In this way, for most practitioners 'nature' has become reified, an extension of the long tradition of Romanticism to which Williams refers. For practitioners, the world around them is not the set of relations in which humans live with the environment, appropriate and shape it, but a set of relations that exist in their own right, into which the practitioner might consciously insert herself through internalising and examining her understanding of her place within this natural order.

This is not in itself a surprising development. The new kind of naturalist observation Williams describes as arising in the eighteenth century likewise involves witnessing the seasons and 'nature's internal laws'—similarly a way of viewing "nature in a sense that could now be separated from man" (Williams 1985:119). Developing this further, in poets such as Wordsworth and Clare such separation becomes "mediated by a projection of personal feeling" into 'nature' in what Williams describes as a mediation achieved by turning inwards (Williams 1985:133–4). Yet in attempting to develop a relationship to 'nature' reified in this way, Reclaiming practitioners also come to invest this nature with an agency largely independent from human interaction. In this development as 'nature-religion', this idea of 'natural' agency Williams describes is not merely separated from humans or used as a touchstone for 'inner' feelings and sentiments, but returns to make its independent demands upon humans.

In one story cycle at a witchcamp I attended, based on the Arthurian myth of Avalon, the climax was our visit to the land of the fey to make a 'new treaty' to replace the one broken in the past around the time of the magical land of Avalon's retreat from the mundane world. Here, we were each required to pledge in our hearts our deep commitment to honour this treaty with the fey and the land. In this ritual culmination, humans are not seen as producers

relying on the land while we shape it. Rather, the focus is on humans as consumers—dangerous ones at that—who must learn through religious obligation what is not immediately apparent through estranged experience: that humans are intertwined with our environment, and that what happens to the environment will affect humans. Thus, in Reclaiming, the spirits of the land, the fey, the ancestors, are all creatures of this nature-based imaginary that turn around and obligate humans to obey them, to commit to them, and to behave according to their instructions and will.

As we saw earlier, Ollman analyses this tendency of the alienated aspects of a person's social life to become separately subject to the independent demands of these separated realms of the social order, such as religion. Each realm that is 'split off' from immediate human experience emerges with its own set of compulsions, dictating the actions demanded of the person subject to them. In this way, in Reclaiming, the idea of nature's sacrality—intended to heal the breach of human-nature relations—takes the form of a compulsion outside of the person, of an external relationship rather than an internalised one. It is not what people experience of, or appropriate from, the practical world around them, but what they are encouraged to experience ideationally in ritual, that centrally commands practitioners' attention. Furthermore, these ideas are often laden with notions of betrayal and guilt in order to compel practitioners to act in particular ways. At the fairy ball, the historical processes led by landowners and capitalists which transformed the countryside in recent centuries (Williams 1985:96–99)—through which modern environmental relations came to be constituted—were effaced. Instead humans in general were said to have 'broken the older treaties with the fey'. By extension, each person present was made equally responsible for environmental devastation, and each participant was required to commit consciously to a 'different' path than that followed by 'us' in the past in order to win the forgiveness and trust of the fey and sign a new treaty.

The centrality of the idea of 'nature' within Reclaiming can be seen as a response to a social environment in which a person's productive relationships

with the natural world are generally at so many layers of remove as to render them effectively inaccessible. Reclaiming practitioners recognise themselves largely as ideational consumers (observers) and as physical consumers (devourers) of the resources of the natural world. Yet this religious means of trying to reclaim those parts of the person 'lost' in the separation of production from its tangible relationships to the natural world also concedes to this separation in important ways, placing 'nature' as something outside of and in some senses hostile to human needs and desires.

This stance toward the natural world reinforces the existing social separation of consumption from production, emphasising humans as (problematic) consumers quite apart from any recognition that humans as producer-consumers have always appropriated elements from their environment for their own ends. In sidelining these relationships of appropriation as they exist today, the Reclaiming imaginary conceptually entrenches the perception that humans are set apart from their surroundings. Furthermore, the individualised character of consumption under capitalism means practitioners' experience of themselves as consumers is also highly individualised (Marx [1844]1977:74). Hence, the emphasis on consumption, and the need to monitor and limit it, reinforces the internalising and individualising tendencies outlined earlier. While Reclaiming members are encouraged to approach the natural world not as a means but as a valued thing in itself, this relationship remains characterised by reification and individualisation.

## Country and city

The exception to this general separation between human productive activity and the natural world within the Reclaiming imaginary are the pastoral relationships celebrated in the ritual cycle of planting, germination, fruition and harvest. Here, human appropriation of the environment is expressed as a set of relations bounded by ideals of the 'rural idyll'. From the mythic history of rural folk-religion touched on at the start of this chapter, to the imaginative elements of harvest, Maypole and wicker-man that lend content and detail to

ritual celebrations, the quiet round of an imagined rural temporality heavily informs Reclaiming imagery. Even in the basic ritual calendar, the 'Wheel of the Year', public observance is arranged according to a purported pre-modern rustic calendar, with major celebrations tied to the Equinoxes, Solstices and each of the cross-quarters in between.

Through both oblique and direct references to cultivation, this Reclaiming seasonality highlights what practitioners feel is a spiritually accessible form of human appropriation of nature: food production in pre-modern agricultural societies. Winter Solstice is a time of withdrawal and contemplation, when the seed of new beginnings lies buried deep underground. At Brigid in February, the new light of the year and the first sprouting of the year's planting allow practitioners a time to commit themselves to new plans for the coming year. In spring, flowers adorn the ritual; at May Day, the Maypole is woven around to celebrate and encourage the fertility of the land. At the peak of the ritual year at Summer Solstice the Wickerman is burnt to symbolise burning away the unwanted chaff of the year's activity, in what is believed to be a druidic tradition. After this, there is a time of waiting, watching with apprehension to see whether the 'harvest' will come to fruit. This journey culminates in the Fall Harvest ritual, where the table is laden with food, which is blessed and shared; one typical ritual announcement invited practitioners to bring: "homegrown or local harvest—foods that are being harvested around this time". Thus imagery of planting, growth and harvesting sit alongside festival elements associated with pre-modern Britain such as the Maypole and the Wickerman to evoke a pre-capitalist pastoral tradition.

Williams brings into view the constructed character of the long literary tradition of British rural idyll upon which Reclaiming builds, and the Romantic lens of timelessness through which a rural 'past' is often viewed, set against an encroaching and destructive urban 'present' (Williams 1985). His work provides a useful lens into the Reclaiming reliance on the pastoral as a generative religious category. From the point of view of Williams' critique, it is striking that a contemporary, largely urbanised new religious movement in the US

should have as its most fundamental structuring narrative an imagined pattern of ritualised pre-modern English agricultural temporality. Yet, Reclaiming ritual forms are heavily laden with this rustic imagery, much more so than with ideas drawn from the actual pace of lives or conditions of work of most practitioners. As Rook points out, there is no Brigid of the Autoworks in Reclaiming mythos, but there is the Celtic Lugh the Sun King who dies and is reborn at the solstices, and there is the God of the corn and the grain, who is reaped at Harvest; and, in a continuation of the adoption of classical themes within the British pastoral tradition (Williams 1985:254-8), there is Demeter whose loss of her daughter Persephone to the underworld leads her to blight the land. The overarching narrative of production in Reclaiming guides our vision backwards and away from contemporary urban productive life. Reclaiming mythos plays on an ideational opposition between country and city that, as Williams points out, has long been part of a European Romantic tradition.

Starhawk's *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, as we have seen, is an attempt to draw country and city closer together. Yet here this is achieved by radically reducing what the city is capable of enabling in human achievement. Labour in this vision takes the form of localised cultivation on the minute scale of each household, and in a slightly broader view, in holistic healing centres, social planning and ritual organisation (Starhawk 1993-9;71-9). The kinds of professions mentioned are healers, teachers, farmers, carpenters, and musicians (Starhawk 1993:396), a list much more compatible with human labour as pre-industrial craft-guilds than the large-scale production of industrial society. We must presume a background of industry to maintain some level of urban infrastructure, but this is largely unaddressed. Beyond the home-gardens, most of this labour is implied rather than seen.

Furthermore, from this picture, the hard and precarious conditions of historical pastoral production is excised, as it largely was in the British tradition of pastoral imaginary (Williams 1985:120-132), in favour of a stereotyped vision of gentle earthly bounty brought forth by modest hands in spiritual synch with nature's temporality. As Williams argues, such imagery of nature's bounty,

introduced into the pastoral tradition, served historically to efface the intense labour upon which rural wealth was sustained (Williams 1985:32–37). In Starhawk's work, it conceals the immense infrastructure of labour and technology (both urban and rural) upon which modern households rest. The devastation of drought or flood and the exposure of dependence on primary production for social needs is not part of this picture. Rather, the threats in the novel come from without—from the devastation wrought by human hands in the crisis that sets the novel's scene, and in the course of the narrative, from another human society to the south (Los Angeles) organised according to heavily stratified, socially constrictive and environmentally destructive principles (Starhawk 1993). Thus Starhawk's vision rests upon a Romanticised view of primary production, and of the level of population concentration it is possible to sustain without the aid of substantial technology. This Reclaiming Romanticism fits comfortably within the framework of the English pastoral tradition Williams examines, the idealisation of pastoral life, and the opposition between country and city upon which these depend, effacing the existing social relationships that in reality cross between country and city, producing both.

## The human animal

Finally, the same separations between nature/culture and country/city that are threaded through Reclaiming are mirrored within Reclaiming models of consciousness itself, in a tension between what we might see as 'human' and 'animal' qualities. This is most clearly expressed in the characterisation of Talking Self and Younger Self. Valentine describes Talking Self as the "grown up" part of ourselves (Starhawk and Valentine 2001:11), and in this sense Talking Self could be expected to most fully express the capacities of a mature, well-rounded, social human being. And yet it is this very Talking Self that we are encouraged to leave behind in entering magical space. By contrast, Younger Self by its very name is depicted as lacking in mature human qualities. Nor is it simply younger, it is also commonly described as 'wilder', more 'instinctive' and more 'animal'. It is telling that in Feri, from which the

Reclaiming model was developed, Younger Self is referred to as one's 'Fetch', an Anglo-Saxon term designating a 'guardian spirit' that often takes the form of an animal (Wednesbury-Shire n.d.). Thus, Younger Self or the Fetch evokes a sense of instinctual, pre-conscious drives, which in Western popular thought are often seen as expressing a more basic, originary, animal aspect of ourselves.

Thus, for Reclaiming, magical practice is intended to put practitioners 'back in touch with' that part of their experience of themselves which is least distinctly human, most similar to the world of animals, and to the natural world more broadly. One of the anticipated experiences at each California witchcamp is the emergence of the 'mud people', in which, on one morning part way through the week, one path group strips naked, covers themselves in mud, and becomes speechless. The symbolic removal of clothes strips the mud-people of their distinctiveness as humans, while the mud ties them to the earth. They lose the trappings of what it is to be human—including the capacity for speech—in order to let Younger Self or the Fetch emerge. Outside, they play, they chase passers-by, they try to touch others with their muddy hands. A particularly enthusiastic mud-person (who chose to join in even though he was not in the elected path), sniffed over the bodies of the people passing and in their ears, as might a dog.

In his analysis of alienation, Marx points to this tendency of 'human' and 'animal' experiences within a person's being to become separated and inverted in just the way expressed in these Reclaiming practices. He argues that it is in sensuous experience most akin to the experiences of animals—consumption and sexuality, for example—that people most immediately experience the human qualities of themselves under capitalism. By contrast, in our ability to radically transform the world around us as we plan and effect change on a wide scale, most humans feel stunted and ineffective as a result of the capitalist labour process. As Ollman summarises Marx's position: "the activities which man shares with animals appear to be more human [under capitalist

conditions] than those activities which mark him out as a man" (Ollman 1971:140).

> As a result, therefore, man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc; and in his human functions, he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal…
>
> Certainly eating, drinking, procreating, etc, are also genuinely human functions. But taken abstractly, separated into the sphere of all other human activity and turned into sole and ultimate ends, they are animal functions (Marx [1844]1977:71).

So, for Marx, alienation is not simply reflected in being pulled in two directions in a 'double life', but in the fact that "[w]hat is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal" (Marx [1844]1977:71). The Reclaiming inversion of 'animal' and 'human' qualities in Younger and Talking selves, and their emphasis on "eating, drinking and procreating" suggests there may be merit to this claim.

Reclaiming practitioners play with the tensions that emerge from their felt experience of these conditions, by exploring those functions which Marx refers to as 'animal', attempting to be creative with them and express them in ways which bring a self-awareness to these processes. Sexuality, consumption, dressing up are all explored as potentially sacred acts in a way which attempts to elevate them to a more self-conscious activity: food is cooked and shared to suit the season; sexual acts are explored in sacred space. At the same time, however, these characteristics are also valorised as 'instinctual' drives, while we see a tendency to downgrade qualities of analysis, foresight, planning and complex articulation. Thus the Talking Self/Younger Self dichotomy reinforces this separation Marx describes between "animal functions" and all other human activity, while reflecting the experience that it is through such "animal functions"—through Younger Self—that persons will find their humanity.

In turn, this can be seen as a reflection in consciousness of what the culture/nature distinction expresses for practitioners at a social level. As

Marx's analysis hints, the separation between 'human' and 'animal' characteristics within a single human can itself be seen as a product of the reifications resulting from estranged conditions. The valorisation of 'animal' qualities in Reclaiming through the celebration of instinct and through ritual activities that encourage wordless, animal-like behaviour builds upon such a separation, in a way which downgrades skills of reason, foresight and analysis associated with Talking Self. As Rook explains:

> It's tricky to bring those [rational and animal qualities] together—to not preference one thing over the other, and to not keep separating those things out from one another. And one problem I see with Neopaganism is, since we realize it's vitally important to connect our animal nature, and the part of us that is more, that feels more immediately connected to what we call nature, we stop thinking sometimes. We, rather than say we're going to use our rational brain for the greater good, we just want to stop using our rational brain. We end up making that the problem, because that's the thing that invents these technologies. So rather than saying, 'No, let's bring these things into balance', we say, 'Let's get rid of it.' And that's not of help—'cause we can't get rid of it, and why should we?

In practice, this downgrading of the analytical and rational leads to tensions at times for some practitioners, who disagree with the suggestion that they might better leave behind their critical selves in ritual space. As one informant who had grown up around the community said about a ritual class that emphasised wordless, embodied interaction with others,

> I'm glad I'm taking this...No I'm not...I'm getting more out of having an intelligent conversation with you.

## Divided ontology

Overall, Reclaiming practice rests upon an imaginary that leaves in place many of the dichotomies it is intended to shift—nature/culture, country/city, animal/human—while reversing their sense. This in turn can be said to arise from a particular approach to estranged consciousness that in important ways reifies the separations estrangement is thought to engender. On the one hand, persons and the objects they relate to ('humans' and 'nature') are seen in

Reclaiming as separate from one another, while the social processes such as labour, mass agriculture and industry through which they are practically related in modernity are set aside. On the other hand, these separations are reinforced by a Reclaiming model of human consciousness that reifies the competing experiences of 'social' and 'private' life that exist in modern sociality into an internalised contrast between 'Talking' and 'Younger' selves.

These separations in Reclaiming conceptions mirror practitioners' experiences of living urban lives seemingly removed from the natural world. Practitioners are able to exercise different parts of themselves and feel genuinely changed when they spend time in less heavily industrialised or bureaucratic environments. Yet, by setting aside the broader social processes that practically link people to their non-human surroundings in modernity and which also intersect across urban and rural environments—the mines, agribusiness, construction, autoworks and so on—the opportunity to attempt to transfigure these (estranged) relationships is generally missed, leading to a somewhat Romanticised view that sets the 'primitive', 'instinctive' and 'natural' over the 'reasoned' and 'rational'.

As we have seen, this effacement of labour processes and the reification between human and nature are both connected to a view in Reclaiming of estrangement as a state of mind rather than a set of social processes. This in turn results in an emphasis on healing the damage 'within', which has a tendency to turn practitioners 'inward' toward the practices of self-examination and interiority that continue a long Western tradition of individualised personhood. The result is that to some degree, practitioners undermine their own attempts to undo the separations and dualisms they see impacting their ability to connect with other persons and with the wider natural world.

Deep Self is seen by practitioners as the means by which they might overcome their dual experience of themselves as one the one hand rational/human/social and on the other sensuous/animalistic/natural. Rose

describes Deep Self as "the part that's there to remind us that we are Goddess, that we are part of everything that is, that we're no different, that we're just a piece of the whole thing." It allows practitioners to affirm their relationality through access to the sacred cosmos of ecological interconnectedness, while not losing their capacity for consciousness and discernment. Nevertheless, Deep Self shares many of the heavily interiorising qualities that turn persons 'into' themselves and away from a relational, social disposition. This is recognised as a tension by practitioners seeking social transformation as well as personal enlightenment. As Rook expresses it:

> You know the mystic that kind of goes off and drools in the corner is not so helpful…we want the Bodhisattvas that come back and help the rest of us. In Kabbalistic terms, the adept who has crossed the abyss is really only good to the community if she returns back down the tree, and brings that direct experience to the rest of us.

This is not an easy line to walk for practitioners, and, as we saw at the opening of this chapter, many express being caught in between, trying and struggling to maintain 'consciousness' through the mundane activities of their everyday lives.

There are, however, settings within Reclaiming that help practitioners attempt to bring this deeper sense of themselves into a collective space. In particular, these are the week-long witchcamps, which bring people together over longer periods and take them through intensive ritual work together. In some ways, these intense settings allow practitioners some means to move beyond some of the tensions between Younger and Talking Selves, and to bring a fuller sense of all three 'parts' of their consciousness into alignment, while interacting with others through the course of the camp. It is to these spaces, and into the heart of what Reclaiming practitioners call 'magic', that we now turn.

# Chapter 5

## BUREAUCRATIC ORDER, ENCHANTED POSSIBILITIES:
## rationalisation, reification and the making of magic

*Weaving our way between the worlds*
*Awakening we touch the source*
*And when we dream*
*And when we open*
*We remember who we are*
*— Reclaiming chant*

*The fate of our times is characterized by*
*rationalization and intellectualization*
*and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'*
*— Weber, 'Science as a Vocation'*

## Creating a 'new culture'

Sitting on the bench one evening at witchcamp, I found myself in a conversation that recalled for me of the wonder of encountering Reclaiming for the first time. That night was the talent show, a generally uproarious, energetic, community-building event that felt too much for me at the time. I took myself out of the dining hall into the dark, and listened to the performances I could make out, while sitting quietly with my own thoughts. Joining me at the table was a woman in her 60s, a first-time camper, Julia. She had been involved with the counterculture movement forty years earlier, and identified herself as an "aging hippy and proud". She told me she was loving the camp, and I asked her what stood out for her about it. She said:

> **Julia:** It's hard to put into words. It's the fulfillment of a promise I made to myself a very long time ago, and wasn't even fully aware I'd made.

> **Me:** And what was that?

> **Julia:** To be part of creating a whole new culture. You see, I am from the early end of the baby boomers. I went through the 60s. And this is what a lot of people back then—myself included—what we wanted to create.

The utopian dream of most of Reclaiming's elders, teachers and core organisers is to usher in the seeds of a new eco-socially respectful society under the auspices of modernity, and, from that base of strength and interconnection, undertake to unravel the old order, corroding its tenacious structures of power, war and devastation so they crumble. At their most hopeful, Reclaiming practitioners seek to re-enchant the world through creating a sense of beauty and wonder in rituals, in their homes and friendship networks, and most especially in the intense environment of the week-long witchcamp retreats. In this way, they seek to infuse what seems a callous, mechanistic modern world with numinosity and love. Through myth and ritual, they seek to remake the world.

After a few months full time in Reclaiming, my life had come to be overwhelmed with ritual imagery. For the first period of fieldwork in San Francisco, I had no job beyond the community, and few contacts outside of it, so with the intense pace of fieldwork activity, I felt like my life had come to take form with the colours, symbols and patterns of the vast mythological landscapes to which I was exposed. When I took my Elements of Magic class a few months in, the week I spent working with water was lit up in shades of aqua and blue, and the fire week in deep red. The symbols in my trance-imagery started to come together in a more coherent way to tell arcs of stories in my wider life. Valentine says of the use of fairy tales in Reclaiming that the "spirit world of dreams, visions and magic is walking invisibly behind each character" (Starhawk and Valentine 2001:25–26). In ritual, the everyday difficulties of our seemingly mundane lives are lent a grander, more heroic status by being painted against a backdrop of this world of dreams and visions.

## Modernity and disenchantment

### Magic retreats from the world

According to theories developed by a core of founding Reclaiming activist-practitioners, a central cultural shift took place in early modernity which ushered in the social dynamics of power-over and estrangement: the shift from an organic to a mechanistic worldview. As historian of science and Reclaiming member David Kubrin has argued, the social upheavals of early modernity—from colonialism to the witch campaigns to the first appearance of capitalist production—went hand in hand with a scientific revolution which divested the natural world of its animate qualities and marginalised a magical worldview (Kubrin 2002–3). According to this analysis, estrangement and power-over were made possible through what Starhawk calls this "mechanist view of the world as composed of dead, inert, isolated particles" (Starhawk [1982]1988:216). It is this mechanistic understanding of the world which practitioners seek to undo by generating magical spaces and practices.

Central to this for Reclaiming members was a growing hegemony of scientific methods of interpreting the world, along with a general retreat from public life of religious value as a unifying principle. One of the features of this process is a shift from qualitative to quantitative methods of apprehension; a setting aside of the unquantifiable sensuous features of any object under study in favour of those which are amenable to calculation. As Kubrin outlines this mechanistic worldview:

> Matter itself…existing in empty space…is all there is, all that underlies the whole of the sensate world of phenomena. Changes in the phenomenal world all arise out of the "matter and motion" of the underlying molecular or atomic world, each of the atomic or molecular particles in itself having *only* size, shape, and its state of motion—all quantitative entities—as its attributes. The world, in essence, is colorless, tasteless, soundless, devoid of thought or life. It is essentially dead, a machine (cited in Starhawk [1982]1988:216).

As Kubrin points out, this analysis is in many ways concomitant with Weber's famous diagnosis of the "disenchantment of the world" (Weber

[1919]1991:155). For Weber, disenchantment is a product of what he calls rationalisation: an understanding of the world as intrinsically subject to rational apprehension, and in particular the application of methods of calculation to vast spheres of the natural world and of social activity (Weber [1919]1991). In examining many of the institutions of Western modernity—enterprise, bureaucracy, science, ascetic religion—Weber focuses attention on these dynamics of rule-driven, precise, formal and abstract calculation (Weber [1919]1991, Weber [1921]1991, Weber [1920]1956).

For Weber, rationalisation does not imply that everything about the world is finally understood. Rather, it is:

> ...the knowledge or belief that if one but wished, one *could* learn it at any time. Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation (Weber [1919]1991:139).

Thus, older ideas of religion and magic—that matter is animate or that "mysterious" forces are active in the world—become marginalised as ways of understanding how the world works. Understanding these dynamics of rationalisation is therefore useful for seeing what it is that Reclaiming practitioners seek to do in recovering 'magic' as epistemology and practice.

## Rationalisation and rationalities

As Weber has argued, with the rise of modern social sciences, rationalised methods have been introduced into understanding human behaviour, and have infused bureaucratic institutions governing human activity. In the process, he suggests, they have pushed aside those qualities of human existence which cannot neatly fit into a process of calculation. Thus, rationalised modernity is reflected in a bureaucracy the nature of which "develops the more perfectly the more the bureaucracy is 'dehumanized,' the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation" (Weber [1921]1991:216). At the same time, the method of precise calculation treats

each 'object' it apprehends as a separate entity. This has the effect of abstracting from concrete conditions while atomising human sociality, removing the sensuous qualities of a given situation from the view of the rationalising methods used to understand and govern.

Accordingly, rationalisation is a process both of the abstraction of social being and of the atomisation of social entities. In the bureaucracies, public institutions and workplaces of modernity, we thus find a strange form of collective life which is characterised by an ongoing individualisation of its parts: a splitting of social life into its constituent human and non-human atoms. Building on Weber, Lukács paints a concomitant picture of the rationalised production methods introduced in the 1920s. Here, the human beings involved in the labour process are reduced to "a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system", while the mathematical breaking down of the work-process "denotes a break with the organic, irrational and qualitatively determined unity" of the production process (Lukács [1922]1971:88-9). He suggests that, "[h]ere, too, the personality can do no more than look on helplessly while its own existence is reduced to an isolated particle and fed into an alien system" (Lukács [1922]1971:90). Thus rationalisation goes hand in hand with an atomisation of the social world, contributing to the individualisation of sociality.

For Lukács, the systematic reproduction of abstraction and atomisation in modernity has its foundation in the commodity logic that underpins capitalist society as a whole. He calls this process "reification", arguing that this has come to be extended over ever wider spheres of human activity (Lukács [1922]1971:83-222). On the one hand, he suggests that the demand of capitalist enterprise for predictable legal, political, administrative and cultural systems has driven the extension of rationalising methods into every sphere of life, where they have taken on an independent life of their own, even extending into the realm of human ethics itself, and thereby deep into people's intimate experience (Lukács [1922]1971:90-100). On the other hand, the spread of capitalist enterprise into almost every aspect of social exchange fragments

society into an individualised, "rationally reified" pattern of human relationship. As he argues:

> The atomisation of the individual is, then, only the reflex in consciousness of the fact that the 'natural laws' of capitalist production have been extended to cover every manifestation of life in society; that—for the first time in history—the whole of society is subjected, or tends to be subjected, to a unified economic process, and that the fate of every member of society is determined by unified laws (Lukács [1922]1971:91–2).

Thus, he sees an objective condition of rationalisation and a subjective experience of reified, individualised consciousness as two aspects of the same totality of human experience under capitalist conditions.

A similar concern with the individualising and totalising effects of rationalisation has been taken up by Foucault in his analyses of systems of knowledge and regimes of governmentality in modernity. Foucault emphasises over Weber and Lukács the differentiating effects of specific domains of rationality such as criminality or insanity, and he is characteristically wary of speaking of an overall process of 'rationalisation' (1983:210–12). Nonetheless, he shares with these theorists an analysis of the normalising and atomising processes of these specific rationalities. As we saw in Chapter 3, in asking what it is to be a subject in modernity, Foucault describes what he calls the "government of individualization": the "simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures" (Foucault 1983:212;216). As he suggests, "the main characteristic of our [modern] political rationality is the fact that this integration of individuals in community or in a totality results from a constant correlation between an increasing individualization and the enforcement of this totality" (Foucault 1988:161–2).

For Foucault, the effectiveness of modern governmentality lies not in the severity of its disciplinary methods, which are often subtle, but in their unrelenting consistency (Foucault 1980:154–5). In studying the prison system, for example, he draws attention to the weight of social processes brought to bear on the condemned: not only judiciary and police, but educationalists,

psychologists and psychiatrists have a role in judgment, punishment and rehabilitation (Foucault [1977]1986:29–30).[58] Such processes locate prisoners as subjects, reshaping their very selves to suit social ends (Foucault [1977]1986:29–30). These processes are tied to the rise of a subtle and pervasive exercise of political technologies which reshape the subject through what Foucault calls "[a]n inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself" (Foucault 1980:155). The combined effect of these methods of governmentality is then the "irrigation by effects of power of the whole social body down to its smallest particles" (Foucault 1980:156).

The purpose of Reclaiming practice is to re-enchant this mechanised world, to counter the atomising, dehumanising and disenchanting effects of rationalisation. Through song, poetry, costume and artistry, Reclaiming members weave worlds of beauty and creativity that resist the mundane conformity they believe characterises modern, urban life. Against the abstracting effects of bureaucratisation, they seek to awaken their concrete, sensuous desires and redefine their bodies as sites of intuitive, feeling knowledge. In opening to the thread of interconnection they see running through all existence, they seek to overturn the isolating, atomising effects of rationalisation. Finally, in imagining a world peopled by fairies and spirits, elemental energies and timeless sacred forces—in envisioning the world as a place where magic is real—Reclaiming members assert, against the claims of rationalised science, that in fact there *are* "mysterious incalculable forces that come into play" in our everyday lives. The attempt to create a 'new culture' through Reclaiming rituals and witchcamps can therefore be seen as a direct resistance to processes of disenchantment in modernity.

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[58] More broadly, subjects who meet the criminal justice system have already been conditioned by their experiences of rationalising processes in schools, at work, in their homes and throughout their lives (Foucault [1977]1986:29–30).

## The reification of 'magic'

In his study of modern occultism, Hanegraaff (2003) suggests that magical thinking has not been lost in the face of a growing disenchantment of the world; but for modern occult practitioners, it has become reified into a separate 'magical' realm. Drawing on Lévy-Bruhl's concept of 'participation' introduced in Chapter 1, he argues that human beings have a 'natural' propensity for this kind of affective, analogical mode of thought, quite counter to the linear, cause–effect logic which dominates Western science. He suggests that conditions of disenchantment are characterised by "the social pressure exerted upon human beings to deny the spontaneous tendency of participation" (Hanegraaff 2003:377). The focus of Hanegraaff's article is on rationalisation as a cognitive process, and it is useful to broaden this cognitive analysis to include the affective, embodied, generally messier and stickier aspects of human experience likewise pushed to the margins of public discourse by rationalisation (see e.g. Jackson 1983:327–30). Nonetheless, his argument points to an important dynamic of Western magical practices: that they take place under conditions of disenchantment that have gathered these practices together under a general rubric of 'magical activity', marginalised them into a separate and reified realm, and reshaped them in the process.

Reclaiming, like other Pagan traditions, reflects this process of the reification of magic particularly clearly in the sharply contained conditions under which magical workings are undertaken; in particular the creation of sacred space, which is the basic starting point for rituals, classes, spell-casting and other magical activity. The description given at the opening of this thesis is a typical example, showing the pattern of grounding, circle casting, calling the elements, and invoking the allies and deities which typically opens any ritual, creating a specially sanctified environment for magical working. The words with which the circle casting concludes—"The circle is cast: we are between the worlds; and what happens between the worlds changes all the worlds"—

illustrate clearly the sense of separation practitioners seek to engender with this process.[59]

Such methods of separation are used more intensely still in witchcamps, where the creation of sacred space to 'contain' the camp for the whole week is combined with more mundane means of generating a set apart magical realm. In California witchcamp, the camp is strictly closed, run on a basis of people coming for the full duration, or not at all. No one may enter late, as it would 'disrupt the energy'. People leave early only under extreme circumstances. There are no newspapers, televisions or radios. While participants are free to drive into the nearest town, in practice, few do. The purpose of these rules is to create a world apart from the mundane for the duration of the camp, reducing outside interference and creating a bond between participants for the purpose of magical working.

Respect for sacred space is one of the most basic demands of magical practice. The circle is thought to create an energy barrier between participants and the rest of the world, through which anyone leaving or returning must open a 'doorway', for example by parting it with their hands and then closing it up behind them. Without this, the energy of the circle is seen to dissipate. Within sacred space, practitioners cultivate a centred, 'present' mode of awareness which maintains their focus on the ritual working. While practitioners are encouraged in self-care, and while ritual space allows for the expression of a vast range of moods, energies, actions and ideas, which vary enormously both between and within rituals, certain conditions are seen to break this pattern of centred awareness. Activities like smoking and drinking are unequivocally banned from Reclaiming ritual space, as is the use of any recording devices or

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[59] Experienced practitioners, when asked, describe 'between the worlds' as meaning between the realms of the mundane and the energetic or spiritual. This points to an important disjuncture in the identity Reclaiming practitioners generally seek to draw between matter and spirit: although practitioners insist on the inseparability of the two, in practice the world of spirit is often conceptualised as a realm unto itself, connected to but also distinct from matter, which can be accessed much more cleanly when sacred space is created. This issue is taken up further in the following chapter.

photography, which are seen to disrupt the energy of magical working. Use of such tools except under highly selective circumstances would constitute a major violation of participants' right to privacy and sensitivity in their intimate work. Rituals are explicitly participatory: all must take part; no one may observe from the sidelines. In practice, while some people take themselves to one side if they feel the need to be apart from what others are doing, most participants most of the time participate in the flow of energy with which the ritual moves: dancing when others dance, being meditative when others are meditative.[60]

The key purpose of this setting apart of ritual space is to generate a sense of removal from the disenchanted world, while opening up a possibility for greater creativity, imagination, and bonding between participants. George describes this as follows:

> I think [sacred space is] a container…Partly it's to keep energy out that
> we don't want. When I try to create my own personal sacred space every
> day, it's deliberately trying to keep out energy that I don't want in my
> space. And, more and more, I recognize that that's good energy and
> bad energy. I just don't want other energy invading my space. I want to
> relate to the Universe—which I perceive…that as vertical, and everything
> else is coming in from the sides. So I'm kind of blocking out the sides,
> and opening to the vertical. And, I'm aware that that means that I also

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[60] For an explicit Reclaiming articulation of ritual space etiquette, see M. Macha Nightmare's article 'Etiquette of Ritual' (Nightmare 1995). The contrast for me came on one occasion at a small, Reclaiming-identified ritual in Australia at the climax of the ritual, where we were to 'charge' the wishes we had written on a piece of paper to place them in the burning cauldron. I had come to expect this as a point in ritual when participants give the greatest focus to a meditative mode of consciousness in order to 'pull the energy of the ritual together'. As we walked around the cauldron, one of the organisers continued discussion of the stories that had been read out earlier, talked about a previous time when they used the same cauldron and the flames went too high, and noted how well the flames were now spiralling into the air. I found it hard to concentrate on 'charging' my wish, and another participant later told me how difficult she had found it to do the kind of inward work she would expect of such a ritual, to turn the year 'psychologically' as well as experiencing its turning 'energetically'. This is a situation that practitioners would generally describe as a 'dissipating of the energy of ritual space'.

> have to block out the affection…that people project onto me, as well as the expectations.
>
> Sacred space then is trying to create a pristine environment, in which to do something new. I mean…well I know it can't happen out in the world. It's opening up a space for my imagination maybe, and a space for consciousness.

Within this 'container', the ritual's stated intention, how the invocations are performed, which deities are called, and what is said to set the scene and ritual story all contribute to taking practitioners through the ritual's transformative process. Through such means, practitioners establish a consecrated space that sets those within apart from the wider world. Within this reified magical realm, possibilities for re-enchanting the world are grown.

## Threads of magical weaving

### Cognitive participation and relationality

To understand Reclaiming practices of re-enchantment it is useful to explore the spiritual technology of magical entities, of 'energy' and spellwork, through the cognitive processes involved in magical working. As other theorists have suggested, one of the central features of magical practice is the cultivation of modes of cognition very different to those of modern science (Luhrmann [1989]1994, Hanegraaff 2003, Greenwood 2005a). In Reclaiming, this consists of both looking at the world in ways which defy scientific logic, and seeking altered states of consciousness: shifts in one's mode of apprehending the world particularly achieved in ritual space. At the end of an intense week of magical work at witchcamp, I have noticed that it feels as if I am looking at the world through a different lens. Everything is clearer and shinier, but my vision feels also distorted, as though warped by hallucinogenic drugs. Witchcamps are strictly clean and sober spaces, so whatever it is I am seeing has been created through the collective mind-altering processes of magic, the 'opening to the world' that Reclaiming practices seek to engender in the minds and bodies of participants.

Reclaiming magical practice rests upon an understanding that what it is possible to see and know in ritual, meditation and trance states is different from what we can know in mundane states of consciousness. For most practitioners, the magical entities, deities, spirits and fairies that populate their imagination are also real (although their ontology is subject to dispute); yet most often their reality status is seen as occupying a somewhat different level from the everyday. Magical working is seen as a technology for opening up to this level of reality which exists at slight remove from the mundane. This is easiest in intense ritual or over a full week at witchcamp, but with practice it is also possible to cultivate this awareness in everyday life. As Rose describes it:

> I do believe that life is sacred, and that the Goddess is immanent. And I think that it's like a lens. And sometimes you can't see through that lens, and sometimes we're allowed to see through that lens…When I can't see through that lens, is just when I get into the daily grind and the crazy struggles and the wasteful practices.

Some practitioners are seen as naturally better at seeing through this lens and accessing this other level of reality: more clairvoyant or intuitive, or especially skilled at healing or directing the energy of a group. Occasionally, practitioners have stories of things they 'knew' or could do as children, such as communicating with the spirits of the land, which they later became more conscious of as practicing Pagans. Nevertheless, Reclaiming members believe that every person is capable of learning skills for accessing this realm. Reclaiming teaching is designed to cultivate these skills and techniques, helping practitioners 'open up' to this other reality.

One of the common techniques used in ritual and classes is adopting a diffuse state of awareness, which allows information to 'enter in' from outside or from a person's unconscious. On the first day of our 'Lady of the Lake' path at witchcamp, Erin describes cultivating such a state of awareness through altering her vision, to help her with something she was struggling with personally. At the start of the class, she had been saddened by what she had seen as she looked into a mirror:

> I'm looking at myself, and I immediately started crying…I saw that I'd aged, and my edges had blurred, and I was kind of numb; and that, you know, I couldn't see the fey in there at all.

She adds:

> I went to the water at some point I think on that first day. And I was gazing at the light on the water, kind of how you do with those posters…if you sort of relax your eyes, the image will come out. And I was kind of focusing in that way on the light reflection on the water. And I got a message from the Lady [of the Lake] that, I *was* very fey, and that could never be killed within me, and I needed to stop judging myself.

In a similar vein, Inanna described to me a way of seeing the spirits of the land in her peripheral vision, moving with the shadows and motions of trees. Over time, it seems such methods of diffusing consciousness and altering one's visual perception can be cultivated into a habit, developing into a more readily accessible practice of 'shifting' to receive information from the spiritual realm.

One of the most important ways of accessing this realm is through entering a state of trance. The very powerful trance states practitioners occasionally describe are achieved most often in private rituals designed to 'go deep', or in intense environments such as that which develops late in a witchcamp. Public rituals are often thought to be too crowded, brief and diffuse for such deep work, but an exception to this is those who volunteer to 'anchor' the Spiral Dance, who enter into 'deep witness' to ground the ritual energy of the many hundreds of participants at this ritual for the dead. One practitioner describes receiving visions during such an experience:

> I saw a great vortex already in place beneath the ritual, going into the earth.

> I felt that feeling of thrill energy moving through me…and I saw two white spirit dragons flying widdershins [counter-clockwise] around the room, near the ceiling…

> I saw ripples of light being cast off from the spiral dance into the city, into the ether.

> lots of skeletel [sic] dead in the room, skulls and bones, but joyful!

> at the end of the spiral dance the dragons suddenly
> became multicolored and left the building, one flying out through the
> back of the building, one out through the front.

Here we see a description of a practitioner reading the 'energy' that moves in ritual with a large group of people. Energy is a concept better recognised in practice than understood in theory, but as with spiritual entities, it is accessible through senses honed with magical training. For practitioners, energy can be felt, raised, lowered, directed towards a place or person in need, and most importantly can be sent out into the world, carrying an intention for change, as it is at the end of public rituals such as this. While some practitioners may describe seeing, smelling or tasting it, this is more likely from someone in a deep trance state, as in the description above.

The body, too, provides an important source of information, interpreted intuitively or through systems such as the Hindu chakra system. Another anchor gives this description from the same Spiral Dance ritual:

> During the invocations, I was settling in and felt an opening in my heart
> and throat (for personal reasons these chakras have been clamping
> down a bit).  I took this as a sign to open and be receptive.  Then I
> began to feel an incredible sense of clean/cleansing, which came
> more with the fire than with air...Then during the Goddess invocation, I
> was so hot, I burst into a profound sweat...which felt more in line with
> cleansing than passion, or maybe a combination of both.  Then, all of a
> sudden an opening across my upper back—I was in the midst of FLOW
> that extended through my back out the top of my head.

Just as with the dragons above, here the anchor's physical experiences through the course of the ritual provide information about its workings at the level of magical or spiritual reality. This time, the data is received somatically rather than visually. Just as in a mundane sense people can learn to recognise how they relax during a celebration with friends or take on the excitement or tension of a crowd, Reclaiming members learn to read the information in their bodies for what it says about their surrounds. In this way, multiple sensory

interpretations of the magical realm are seen as allowing access to what has happened energetically or spiritually through a given situation.

In each of these cases, we see practitioners shift their mode of sensory perception to open themselves up to information from the magical realm. What is observed here is seen as connected to mundane reality, reflecting the energy of a ritual for example. In some cases, this sensory data interacts mentally, emotionally or somatically with more specific conditions from the practitioner's life, as in the 'opening' of this anchor's heart and throat chakras. The magical realm is seen as lying parallel to and 'just above' the mundane, requiring merely a shift in perspective to apprehend it. This is achieved through data drawn from the senses in ways generally unaccustomed or discounted by rationalised science: through a consciously diffused or peripheral visual awareness, through mental images or through sensations in the body.

Likewise, the imagination is given a central place in practitioners' cognitive theories of how magic operates, and what they hold to be valid about the spiritual realm. In approaching these questions, practitioners generally start less with what is true, and more from 'what works' to bring beauty and meaning or effect changes in their lives. As Chris explained to me part way through the Avalon witchcamp, "This is not a religion of truth, it's a religion of beauty and power." He went on:

> Dreams are epiphenomenal, but there is a sense in which they are real and I live there. A great deal of me really lives there. Psychology is inadequate to [describe this process] because it is not just about healing. It's art. What we do here is poetry.

> The ontological status is only important if it's about truth. Art is kind of about truth—the "lie that tells the truth".

Earlier that day in our path class, I had invoked the tarot card figure of the Knight of Flames, connecting with its symbolism as the card of 'Air of Fire'. Referencing this invocation, Chris said:

> You called the Knight of Flames. And I'm not saying there is a Knight of Flames out there. But you *called* him.

He went on to explain that the fabrications created through magic can come to have dynamics of their own, similar to the way authors speak about their fictional figures coming to life. Yet, unlike much art in modernity, the reality created is shared between participants: "It's not just purely subjective because the reality that we create here is intersubjective." In this way, the intersubjective reality created evolves under its own momentum, impacting back on those who have created it.

Indeed, as Chris suggests, rituals are works of art in their own right. A beautiful, two-hour sung liturgy underpins the Spiral Dance, while invocations are the work of dancers, performers or community members who have felt called to tell the story of an element or deity with their movement and costume. A trapeze artist in white winds herself around a rope above the crowd to invoke the air. Fire twirlers toss red torches in elaborate patterns, to light the element of fire into the circle. One year, dozens of women invoked dozens of Goddesses in costumes created by their own hands, donning masks made by artist Lauren Raine. Likewise, practitioners use art to modify the physical space surrounding rituals and witchcamps to support the imaginative worlds they seek to weave. Every year, the Samhain Spiral Dance is a breath-taking creation of hundreds of volunteers, many working all day—and some for weeks beforehand—to craft a space of sacred beauty. A dozen altars line the rim; the well-loved North altar, the work of members of Seeds for Peace, displays sheaves of wheat, webs, branches, skulls, fruits and icons of deities spread over a whole corner of the stadium, telling a story of ancestors, harvest and endings (see plate 9). In other rituals, participants may be invited to bring their own objects—something signifying the fey, or something which speaks to them of the element of Water—to be interwoven with each other in an altar for that day's working. At witchcamp, participants in path classes may be assigned tasks such as creating altars in the surrounding woodlands to reflect the working of their path. Out of such a fabric of myths, poetry, song, dance and craft, Reclaiming practitioners weave magical worlds in their rituals and

witchcamps, and in their more everyday lives, which in turn shape their sense of themselves and the world around them.

When it comes to the ontological status of spiritual entities in Reclaiming, most practitioners seem to hold to something akin to the paradoxical claim Starhawk expresses in discussing the Goddess:

> I have spoken of the Goddess as psychological symbol and also as manifest reality. She is both. She exists, *and* we create Her (Starhawk [1979]1999:107).

While some practitioners prefer to think of deities as archetypes or symbols, most shift between such scientifically acceptable interpretations and more confident claims to their ontological status as real entities which interact with their lives. Rook goes so far as to express her disconnection from the more psychological interpretations of deity, finding them unhelpful. In her view, the gods are real, pre-existing human creation, perhaps as energy forms. She sees them as evolving in interaction with humans, who have given them the shapes they take through their worship, myths and stories; the gods take shape in response to human activity, just as humans respond to the gods:

> [My] belief about deity is that there are rays or streams of deity energy, and that they come up with different faces according to the culture, according to how the people relate to them, just as we have different facets of self...So, just like we are formed by our friends and our culture, these deities are formed by the people that worship them. However, I don't believe they are created whole cloth by the people that worship them. I believe that Demeter—what we call Demeter—was some natural force that helped things grow better, and that was hooked into those Mediterranean cycles of things grow in the winter, and were dead in the summer, and what does that look like? And people picked up on that and said, 'Oh, it would be really helpful to get to know this force. How do we do that? Let's give it a name. Let's create mythos around it, so we can relate to it better.' So, I do believe that deities are *strengthened* by people, and formed by people. But I don't think that they're actually necessarily *created* by people.

For Rook, the spirit-forms that become deities pre-exist human imagination as forces in the natural world, evolving through time, just as humans have,

through interacting with human societies and responding to the changes that have taken place in the world.

In Reclaiming epistemology, magic evolves through a relationship between an active role played by practitioners opening to the spiritual realm and the entities which exist at a spiritual level. This process of interaction underpins the description given by a third Spiral Dance anchor, who describes the entry of the dead into the ritual setting:

> The first thing I noticed was a feeling of excitement/anticipation that increased in intensity as the doors open and folks started coming in -- from both sides of the veil.  I was very conscious as people walked around and looked at the altars that they brought their dead with them, invoked by thought and memory -- those that weren't already there, that is, called by the mere presence of their name on a list soon to be read, waiting.
>
> Tiny explosions of presence, sparks of joy and celebration relieved the anticipatory excitement as the names were read.  They were there, had been waiting for this moment, this chance to join, to celebrate with the living.  I got the words: "We are all eternal, we are creating this together."  After that I felt like I rode on waves of Love/bliss/ecstasy for a while.  There were smaller waves of sadness, from this side of the veil, but always they were answered by the larger waves of Love/bliss/ecstasy.
>
> I did notice a bigger, stronger sparkle of energy around some of the more famous names -- I think because those were the ones that more people (living) recognized and responded to.  If I were going to headline a review of the ritual, it might be something like "Pavarotti Attends Spiral Dance".

Reclaiming members have adopted the phrase 'What is remembered, lives' to express their sense that what happens at Samhain, when the dead come to visit the living, is engendered by the memories of the living. Such an understanding is reflected in the claim above that the dead were "invoked by thought and memory". At the same time, we can see from this description that the dead respond to this invitation from the living with a level of independence, anticipating, sparkling with energy, and answering sadness from 'this side of the veil' with waves of joy.

As other ethnographers of modern Paganism have suggested (Greenwood 2005a, Hanegraaff 2003), it is useful to understand what we see in these shifts in states of awareness and modes of perception as a conscious effort by Reclaiming practitioners to develop in themselves habits of participatory consciousness in the sense proposed by Lévy-Bruhl. As Tambiah (1990:108-9) argues, this represents a different mode of cognition from a rationalised causal scientific mode; to apply such a scientific model to judging these phenomena would potentially limit our understanding of how they operate. As Evans-Pritchard explains in his exegesis of Lévy-Bruhl:

> Primitive man does not, for example, perceive a shadow and apply to it the doctrine of his society, according to which it is one of his souls. When he is conscious of his shadow he is aware of his soul...In the same way, a primitive man does not perceive a leopard and believe that it is his totem-brother. What he perceives is his totem-brother (cited in Hanegraaff 2003:374).

The inclination to perceive a personal message through watching the pattern of light on the water, or to experience the 'energy' of a ritual in the responses of one's body, suggest just such an analogical mode of apprehending sensory phenomena.

As touched on in Chapter 1, Tambiah (1990:84-110) links the cognitive mode of participation to a relational worldview, where scientific causation is based upon an atomised view of the world as composed of isolated entities. As he argues, "[p]articipation can be represented as occurring when persons, groups, animals, places and natural phenomena are in a relation of contiguity, and translate that relation into one of existential immediacy and contact and shared affinities" (Tambiah 1990:107). In the examples above, we see that the consciousness and physical being of these practitioners is thought to overlap with their environment, allowing messages and information to be received as thoughts, visions or sensations from the physical surroundings or from the energy generated when a group of people move in ritual. Similarly, the idea of this energy rippling outward to the surrounding city or calling in the spirits of the dead speaks to the sense of connections existing between geographically

and temporally separate things. Since for Reclaiming practitioners, everything is seen to be woven with this energetic, sacred thread, such energetic rippling outward is understood to impact on the objects it touches, altering them in the process. These forms of magical thought thus emphasise connections between things, people and places otherwise seen as causally separate.

As Tambiah describes it, participation draws connections "to the point of identity and consubstantiality" between what seem to Western scientific thought quite disparate phenomena (Tambiah 1990:86). At times in Reclaiming, this is spoken of in an 'as-if' mode, contrasting in some ways with other forms of participatory thinking, in which the everyday world is unproblematically 'magical'. For example, modern magic is seen to have a representative quality of symbolic simile. In sympathetic magic, a green ribbon or candle is used for wealth because it looks like the colour of the US dollar, or salt water is used to cleanse emotions, because salt represents purification through its preservative properties. But in other settings, participatory thinking is not *as if* or *like*, it just *is.* As Hanegraaff (2003) argues for Renaissance magicians, resemblances between the appearance of things and their magical properties were as they were, not because of anything that happened in their minds, but because that is how God made the world. He draws a contrast between this unproblematic association and the elaborate metaphorical and psychological hoops through which modern Pagans often express similar ideas.

Nevertheless, experienced practitioners also describe a process of coming to see the world as inherently magically connected. Starhawk describes an intuitive process of walking through her garden gathering up the herbs that 'feel' right for a particular working she plans, contrasting this with her earlier tendency to use objects as symbols for spells (Starhawk [1979]1999:273-4). Intuition and a relationship with the plants she grows have come to substitute for her earlier emphasis on symbolic simile. Similarly, she speaks of developing her relationship with the Goddess as a process of learning to hear the actual conversations of trees and birds, coming to recognise how to distil their real

messages from those of her own imagination (Starhawk 2004:5). The adoption of magical names provides a way for practitioners to express this sense of relationship. Names like Seed, Moss and Rose express identification with non-human entities. In this way, magic offers a lens through which to view the world which allows that people live in direct, overlapping relation to their environment: that spirits and other living entities communicate with humans and that connections observed between objects and events are often more than random.

Likewise, 'chance' repetition is read by practitioners as representing the relationships between causally separate events. As one practitioner told me:

> I…see synchronicities in things other people just want to call coincidence. In Paganism there is a space where people don't judge me for saying things like that.

One witchcamp participant, seeing a gnat flying close to her face over many weeks in different states across the country, read significance in that event, using it as a starting point to try to understand what lessons she might learn from 'gnat' at this time in her life. Learning to recognise patterns in events reflects a belief that a fabric of interconnectedness underlies the seemingly atomised world, pulling events together and inviting the recurrence of seemingly chance patterns. Thus attuning their cognitive processes to synchronicities in time and energetic interactions, practitioners open themselves to an awareness of their constant relationship with the evolving world around them.

One of the most central means practitioners have to express their sense of participation is through the use of altered states of consciousness to problematise the boundaries between self and world and dislodge their accustomed sense of being in their body. This involves a range of techniques loosely termed shamanic practices—practitioners taking the form of animals, trees, spirits, or melting down to become part of the earth. When used in ritual, priestesses often invite participants to bring back messages from these

experiences, not always in words, but often in feelings, senses and intuitions. One early ritual at an activist witchcamp had us shape-shifting into the animal form we felt 'called' to. Bears, wolves, rabbits, dogs, birds and snakes circled the ritual space as a way for practitioners to perceive what these animals could tell them about how humans impact on the world. Practicing cognitive shifts in this way can move practitioners from their received awareness of themselves and their established perspective on the world. In the process, they shift their perception of the edges of their skin and the limits of their personal boundaries.

Similarly for many, the practice of 'aspecting' is a valued, though controversial, instrument. In aspect, practitioners draw in the energy of a deity or other spirit to become a part of themselves. The method involves setting aside one's own consciousness and inviting the spirit to speak and act through one's body.[61] Although there are some for whom aspecting is seen as an indulgence—Rose describes it as an "excuse for somebody to show off, or have their words be more important than other people's words"—for many it is an important magical tool for widening one's awareness and gaining a different perspective on a situation.

The line between imitation and aspect is not always clear. As Sally-Ann, an older camper described it to me:

> Part of it may be acting. We have studied lots and we know a lot and that's OK. I think dressing up—not only is it really fun, but I guess it really does add to the milieu. If I dress as a fairy, I start to feel fairyish…

Yet when a priestess works in aspect in ritual space, it can carry a profound feeling for those observing. Voices deepen (or lighten), bodies change in their bearing. Sally-Ann suggests:

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[61] There seem to be compelling links between the practice of aspecting and practices of spirit possession seen in many other religious contexts (see for example Crapanzano and Garrison 1977), which may be worth exploring further. See Ezzy (2011) for a discussion of Pagan aspecting in the context of a collection of essays on spirit possession.

> Ivy *was* the Fairy King. Part of it was the voice, part of it her skill. But she embodied that.

At this same camp, Chris explained what it was like to aspect one of the fey in ritual at a fairy ball, to which we humans had come to make the pledge that we would honour the land once again. At first, most of the fairies were youthful, playful, mischievous, but Chris spoke of how, as the night wore on, by the end of the ritual a feeling of great age and dignity came over him, and he grew very old and found he wanted to be much quieter. In this way, aspecting allows the participant to leave aside their 'own' automatic reactions to situations, and to attempt to experience and express how the entity aspected understands and reacts in a given circumstance.

In other ways the very challenges of aspecting testify to the power of this technique to disturb and reshape consciousness. After one intense Spiral Dance in which aspects of the goddess Hecate began to shout and get out of control, and could not be properly protected from the jostling of the large crowd, Reclaiming teachers have introduced substantial limits around aspecting in large rituals. Similarly, several practitioners identified to me that they felt that an earlier period in which the audacious and difficult Fairy Queen was aspected imprudently was partially responsible for serious conflicts which later arose. Here, the characteristics of the deities aspected are seen to linger on within the person of a practitioner beyond the aspecting itself. Some practitioners now approach aspecting with a level of circumspection and caution, as with one teacher who explained that she avoids completely retreating her own consciousness, so that she can make sure the deity does not do anything with her body she would not do herself. In any case, aspects must always have a tender in Reclaiming events, someone who will help them return from aspect and make sure they are cared for while still in an altered state, since this practice is felt to substantially alter the participant's self-awareness, and to hamper her normal 'earthly' sense for some time afterwards.

The process of aspecting is thus a powerful cognitive technique for dislodging the supposedly stable and unitary consciousness of the Western self. Following

his experience aspecting the fey, Chris spoke to me about the cognitive processes he felt this might involve:

> I think it's interesting that we call it "aspecting" and to think about what we might mean by that. An aspect of me? A many-faceted jewel? Rather than aspecting being calling a spirit being down into myself, we could see it as calling one of the many voices that is an aspect of me. Forget this unitary ego bullshit!

He went on to say:

> I wonder how aspecting is an expression—even in its name—of a kind of relationality. And when we're doing it what sort of personal and cultural histories is that touching on? And what does that mean for the formation of an individual?

> I like to think about the phrase from nineteenth century philosophy: "the other that is myself and myself that is the other". We could see aspecting as a form of the intersubjectivity that is a part of myself.

Chris makes clear here the dissolution of unique boundaries around the self that he sees involved in practices like aspecting. This allows practitioners to come to experience themselves as both multifaceted, and as overlapping with other beings in the world through the crossing histories of the spiritual entities embodied. Such practice broadens a person's awareness beyond his atomised boundaries, offering experiences that trouble the unitary ego and bounded personhood.

We can see from the foregoing descriptions that Reclaiming practice is heavily concerned with developing 'participatory' cognition; and that this is linked to practitioners' desires to cultivate a sense of being-in-relation. Yet the relationality recognised here is partial, marked in significant ways by the reification Hanegraaff identifies with modern magical practices. To see this more fully, it is worth looking at the debates surrounding Lévy-Bruhl's conception of participation, and how we might better understand this concept today.

Initially, Lévy-Bruhl defined participation as a 'pre-logical mentality' which he associated with 'primitive' thought (Tambiah 1990:85). He was heavily criticised by others, notably Malinowski, for ignoring the many ways in which people in small-scale societies regularly employ logical, causative thinking in their decision-making. Yet, as Tambiah points out, Lévy-Bruhl later in his career came to see participation and causative thought as co-existing to different degrees and with different prominence within all societies (Tambiah 1990:91-2). Tambiah himself goes on to explore the ways in which participatory thought remains present in the West: expressed in the arts, recognised in kinship and frequently deployed in psychoanalytic theory (in Freud's dream work, for example) (Tambiah 1990:93-105). And we could speak of other examples in Western common sense: people's overlapping consciousness at a dance party, or the sense of 'becoming one' in a sexual encounter. Nonetheless, distinguishing a notion of participation remains valuable if for no other reason than the hegemony of scientific thought in the West. Rather than seeing participation as the mode of cognition primarily associated with 'pre-modern' social thought, as Lévy-Bruhl initially suggested, it is perhaps more useful to think of rationalisation having distilled out a scientific/logistic worldview and set it over and above other modes of cognition. Thus, we could suggest that a meaningful distinction between logical and participatory cognition has in fact been created through the hegemony of rationalisation, outside of which it may not make much sense to discuss these modes of thought in such oppositional terms.

As we can see from the Reclaiming examples, the process of rationalisation has not eliminated participatory consciousness. But it has separated out such forms from logical and scientific ways of understanding, which are socially valorised and systematised as the central, reliable path to knowledge. Instances of participatory thinking within Western social discourse are just that—instances, which largely remain unsystematised, and which in fact are barely perceptible to a rationalised worldview. In social science, they are noticeable as 'facts'—communitas, eroticism, and so on—but they are not

widely recognisable as ways of knowing in their own right. By contrast, Reclaiming practitioners, like other magical thinkers in Western modernity, seek to foreground many aspects of participatory thinking, and to intermingle these with science into a whole way of knowing about the world, drawing both logical and analogical modes of comprehension into a systematised whole.

Linking this to Tambiah's arguments about forms of cognition and social being, we can see this as part of a process by which Reclaiming members seek to place relationships at the centre of how they process information about the world. Yet, in many ways, this is still carried out at one remove. In Reclaiming, relationships are most often seen as mediated by the field of energy which is connected to physical things, but which also exists somewhat independently; things themselves remain largely conceptualised as cognitively distinct from one another. As Starhawk says, "[f]orm is more rigid, fixed and resistant to change than energy" (Starhawk 2004:34). While shamanic practices and the deunifying processes of aspecting somewhat cut against this rigidity of form, it seems it is hard for Reclaiming practitioners to completely break from this model of the physical forms of objects and people seen as separated out from one another.

Naming practices express a similar tension. While names frequently convey a desire to identify with something beyond the self, magical names remain a referent for that person herself, a unique identifier which she feels expresses something essential about her. In this sense, they are unlike the myriad kinship terms and similar relational referents by which people know each other in many relational societies, which operate as relativist terms between people as markers of social relationships or specific moments in their history (see for example Strathern 1977). Reclaiming names speak of a relationship between things, but it remains just that—a relationship between *things*, which continue to carry unique identities of their own. In this sense, we might suggest that many of Reclaiming's cognitive practices mark a half-way point between analytical and participatory thinking, rarely reaching a place of affirming participation "to the point of identity and consubstantiality". In this way, they

continue at least partially to reflect the atomising conditions of rationalisation which these cognitive practices of enchantment aim at overturning.

## Encounters with the uncanny

Unlike in rationalised thought, where everything is in principle calculable, Reclaiming members embrace an idea of the ultimately incalculable, in nature and in humanity. At the heart of their mythos is an emphasis on the unknowable. Practitioners speak, for example, of sending intentions out into the world energetically to manifest in ways which cannot be predicted nor fully understood by science. Speaking with Inanna one afternoon, I suggested it might be possible to meet the kinds of ends Reclaiming offers in ways other than through religious or spiritual practices; she argued otherwise, saying, "religion is the choice to open up to something you do not understand." Fundamental to religion's transformative potential for Inanna is this essential inability to rationalise the matter of religious experience. She links this to a worldview in which many things in the material world—notably its spiritual and energetic components—are not amenable to "scientistic" analysis. Thus she rejects rationalisation through emphasising the ultimate incalculability of matter.

This emphasis on incalculability is reflected in Reclaiming ideas about the magical potency of things that are 'wild' and 'strange'. For many, this is an important aspect of their embrace of the natural world, connected to the idea that 'nature cannot be tamed'. A chant popular among the Earth activist circles of Reclaiming charges practitioners to:

> Humble yourselves in the arms of the wild
> You've got to lay down low and
> Humble yourselves in the arms of the wild
> You've got to ask her what she knows

which expresses this importance of 'wildness' as a magical quality for teaching people to unlearn received patterns. Another chant proclaims, "We are wild-eyed witches, we can change the world", reflecting the potent value

practitioners place upon identifying as witches, as wild, strange, untameable, and therefore dangerous to the status quo. Similarly, a path I took one witchcamp focused on finding within ourselves the queerness, wildness and strangeness. Here, the wildness of nature, 'queer' sexuality and social non-conformity were linked together as portals into exploring difference from the norm as foundational. The 'wild ones', the 'queer ones', the ancestors who refused to conform were invoked as allies in a struggle to honour ourselves and the world in all its surprising oddity. All those things which could not be put in a box, which resist rationalised calculation, were seen as key to transforming our lives.

The disturbing, unsettling and uncanny are also deliberately deployed in magical practice to create a sense of dislocation. Exposure to the uncanny can open up cracks in a person's immediately-felt embodied experience, disrupting received expectations about the self in the world. This was my experience of the Wild Hunt, a ritual which was part of the witchcamp sequence in which we travelled to Avalon to pledge fealty to the land. The hunt took place early in the week, part of our spiral downward into the world of the fey. It was led by the Fairy King Gwyn ab Nudd, who was introduced in this ritual as follows:

> Once they say he lived under the mountain.
> They say he still lives there.
> And he would come out on stormy nights to lead the wild hunt,
> lead the hounds through the thunder and the fog,
> to gather up the lost souls, to gather up the dead.
> They say he still does.

We began with an instruction to walk the nearby labyrinth, reflecting on what we were afraid to see, on whether we were prepared to face the dark. As I did so, wondering if I had not already looked into the dark enough for now, I fell into what I later called 'serious trance'. As I wrote then:

> The wolves howling half way thru my walk sent shivers up me, and as
> the hounds drew closer and I realised they were indeed people—the
> fairy people dressed in white with red-lined eyes—I knew the next stage

was entered. I knew I should follow them—and I was cast out with the small band into the night. The fey went back to gather the next lot, and we walked under the light/darkening sky.

…I walked through the 'village' of huts [into which the camp cabins had transformed in my perception], one with its lamp on. The howling of the hounds raised my hackles, and I imagined the restful people of the village sleeping while Gwyn ab Nudd rode past to call the unfortunate— or the fortunate—to ride with him…I heard a couple of people inside one of the huts, chatting and laughing, as though nothing was going on outside.

I walked a clockwise circle around our path place, and then made my way down to the river. I feel courageous, but I was feeling the fear too, walking through the dark alone, while wolves and hounds howl about me. It's a new thing for me to face the dark in this way. Such as small step, compared to what the real dangers are.

As I clambered over the wood leading to the bridge, a little shaky in my footing in the dark, I felt the presence. As I stood on the bridge gazing into the dark water, I stood in deep trance, aware of the lady of the lake in her dark self of night time.

The horn blew, calling us back to the circle. I felt pulled, wanting to stay. I climbed back up the bank, but turned back before I left, held to a tree, looking over the still, dark water through the branches of the redwood tree, and thought of the Lady of Shalot. And thought of Ophelia drowning. And wondered at these tales. And realised the words: 'People have drowned in lesser waters than this.' No matter how murky the waters are…the sword must break the surface regardless.

[Back at the circle] We travelled—ran (!)—thru the night, and entered the land of the fey, under the [Glastonbury/Avalon] tor, in the hollow space under the hill (they say it's still there). And when we were there, we were invited to walk the fire, to see the connections with our hazily-set eyes—connections of ourselves to this place [of the fairy country].

The uncanny is used to touch upon the experience of strangeness, speaking of unknown possibilities that seem to move us beyond the things we think we know, and to upset the sense that all things can be apprehended in a rational manner. But it has a twofold purpose here. In my experience of it, it also operated to foreground in consciousness my genuine sense that all is not well with the world, allowing me to feel this as a sensation in my body. The priestess leading the trance upon our return spoke of betrayals and broken

alliances, of the Iraqi mother crying for her children. She said, "We are destroyer and destroyed", and many participants shouted their outrage and anger. Thus, the disruption of the uncanny can help bring into immediate sensory experience the feeling that many practitioners have of the deeply irrational nature of life in modern society. It brings the pain and dislocation associated with modern life into play, side by side with the opening of new possibilities seemingly offered by the 'wild' and 'strange'.

A suggestive framework for reading what may be going on with this ritual's use of the uncanny, specifically relating to the reference made here to the Iraq war, is given by Feldman's analysis of the violent images from the 2001 World Trade Center disaster, 'Shock and Awe' and the abuses in Abu Ghraib prison. Feldman argues that the overdetermined use of such images of violence form part of "visual cultures of risk and threat perception" which have arisen in the latter part of the twentieth century (Feldman 2005:206). He argues that the culture of risk and protection generated through the discourses surrounding these images "unifies culturally dispersed bodies under the symbolic order of a vulnerable yet sovereign national body" (Feldman 2005:207). Drawing on Foucault, he identifies this as part of the "actuarial gaze" of the state, which simultaneously reproduces the integrity of the personal body and the social body as both sovereign and vulnerable to penetration from external threats such as the terrorist (Feldman 2005:207). The actuarial gaze therefore forms a particular rationalising discourse, both totalising and atomising sociality under the sovereignty of the state.

As Feldman points out, the distancing effect of the 'expert' knowledge implied by the deployment of these images, combined with its claim to penetrate into every pore of the society in which they are reproduced, creates a gap between these totalising processes and lived experience, which devalues everyday experience (Feldman 2005:205–6). In Feldman's words, the actuarial gaze "replicates the chasm between transcendental sovereignty and the instability of everyday life structures", stratifying the sensory experience of those within the social body from which they are generated (Feldman 2005:207). The use of the

uncanny in the ritual above can be seen as attempting to dislodge the dispositions created through encounter with such distancing, abstracting processes, returning the ritual participants to the immediacy of their own lived experience. Having thus disturbed the boundaries around their persons erected through these images of violence, thereby upsetting the processes binding them within the national social body, practitioners are able to access more immediately the general sense most Reclaiming members hold intellectually of empathy and emotional connection with the Iraqi mother crying for her children.

Broadly speaking, as we have seen, such a dynamic between 'outside' expertise and penetration is a pattern of rationalising discourses, which abstract from immediate conditions while reaching reifying effects deep into the social body. In opposing the devastation delivered by a rationalised order—wars, poverty and environmental destruction—Reclaiming's use of the uncanny allows practitioners to disrupt any accommodation they may have unwittingly made to what they see as the horrifyingly known of rationalised society. It opens up in consciousness an awareness of those things purported to be known by a rationalised order, but which cannot in reality be fully known or contained, least of all in the case of the traumatising images of war. In this way, reference to the uncanny creates a productive dislocation, placing participants at the edge of a split in consciousness between the known–but–disturbing and the unknown–hoped–for, allowing the ritual space to create a sense of resolving and moving beyond this divide.

## Shifting sedimentation

Key to the working of magic in Reclaiming is recognising the fabric of the 'energy' field which is seen to run through the cosmos, swirling, connecting and charging matter with its dynamic flow. Many teachers describe this as 'erotic', expressing its life–affirming interconnective properties. Learning ritual skills means learning to 'read' the energy of a situation, how to 'move' it and direct it towards desired ends. Among other things, this involves

understanding how energy can move between people, interweave, bind them together, and combine into a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

One of the most intense examples of what Reclaiming practitioners mean by this interweaving of energy occurs during the ecstatic raising of the 'cone of power' during a ritual's climax. Anchoring the last portion of the Spiral Dance, one practitioner describes how this process expressed itself for him in visual imagery:

> Fairly soon, I felt and saw the energy of the spiral dancers building into a light gold shimmery cone.  I noted that this was the first time I ever felt or 'saw' the cone rising before the toning (or raising the cone) occurs at the end.  The cone was solid energy but made out of twining and distinct flame-like or serpent-like energy streams which were intertwined in a tight bundle that came up in a 'pole' in the middle.  This looked almost like a may pole, but made of energy, not ribbons.
>
> This energy pole rose up to a large, light-blue, translucent appearance of the goddess and entered her body through her 'womb'.  She appeared wonderfully, even ecstatically grateful for the spiral dancers loving energy sent up to her this way.  Later, I saw that out of her 'head', the energy continued up into a spread-out field which somehow became a woman giving birth to a child.  I then had an understanding that some souls of the dead who were present could let their souls be entwined in the serpent-like energy spirals and thus lifted into the goddess and up into their next incarnation.  The whole manifestation--spiral dancers, cone, goddess, womb, baby--had the appearance of an hour glass.

Here we see how the energy cone is seen to involve both an intertwining of the threads of many individual energies, and a whole unified body of energy raised by the focused intention of the many participants, feeding into the manifestation of the Goddess. In this sense, it is seen as drawing the specific threads of participants' contributions together into the whole, while the whole is in turn shaped and enhanced by each person's contribution.

This process of energetic intertwining in ritual operates on many levels. Being in ritual together, raising a cone together, rubs away at the ego boundaries and invites participants to dissolve into the communal sense of raised power and ecstasy. The spiral dance form is designed to ensure that participants pass

each other face-to-face at least once. Participants are encouraged to look into each others' eyes as they pass; the dance is considered a more powerful experience this way. Looking into the eyes of dozens or hundreds of others, trancing and singing, seeing their tears or their joy, by the end of a ritual, it becomes much easier to open to the bodies of others in a way which would be deeply uncomfortable in most settings—to hug someone barely known, and to feel (at least for a time) a sense of identity and belonging with the diverse group of people who have shared this ritual dance.

As we saw with Pike's (2001) informants at Pagan festivals, who use myriad techniques—from costumes to dancing around festival fires—to transform their embodied stories, Reclaiming practitioners seek to rewrite their bodies, histories and personal stories through ritual activity. Importantly, this process of shifting body stories is frequently achieved with and through one's incarnate intertwining with others. Practitioners find many ways to experience intense intercorporeal encounters, and many circumstances in which to explore the edges of their bodies and the fluidity and stickiness of their interconnections. A key example from California witchcamp is the chocolate ritual held each year. One night during the week, sacred space is set in a room full of fruit and melted chocolate designed to be eaten off the bodies of others. It is a highly eroticised space, and guidelines have been established to open up the safety and the generosity of people's bodies towards others, involving a careful negotiation of proposal and acceptance, in which a person may offer their services ('Can I offer you a strawberry fed from my wrist?') but not request them directly from others. This ritual fits in a spectrum of Reclaiming practices which seek to provide a space for people to explore their corporeal boundaries and push their limits in encounters with others.

A whole array of boundary pushing exercises and rituals are common in Reclaiming classes, most of which do not involve this kind of intimate physical touch. They may focus on the synchronization of breath, the creation of interacting patterns of energy from each others' personal energy field, or on exploring the boundaries between two people by feeling at the edges of

another's aura (an energy body that lies at varying distances from a person's physical body, depending on factors like their mood and state of health). In each case these kinds of encounters define a process in which participants draw on interactions with others to transform themselves, and push their own boundaries in order to open up to others. In the process, practitioners often find this shifting something within themselves.

At one camp, the entire week of the Eros path was dedicated to such exercises, and to the process of 'opening' to which they gave rise. We spent a great deal of time in this almost wordless path in physical engagement with each other, massaging, looking into eyes, dancing, embracing, saying "I am of you". At the beginning and end of many sessions, one of the teachers would put his hand to his heart and say, "And how is your heart?" It was striking how much our bodies, hearts and dispositions softened each day as the path unfolded, how warm our hearts would feel, and emotionally how much stronger many of us felt. The relationships built in a context such as this can rapidly move from stranger to intimate friend. I describe the sensation at the end of a week at witchcamp as a feeling of glowing, in which my heart feels radiant like a star. Practitioners identify this as learning to 'open', learning to practice themselves as being in radical relationship to all that is around them, to feel at a sensory level the wider world moving through them, affecting them, and becoming a part of their bodily experience.

This process is also about enabling radical emotional transformation. By the end of the week, the Eros path opened up a deeply moving sense of revelation and transformation among many of the path's participants. One exercise began with "I wanted to say…", where we wrote the ends of this sentence in our journals in many different forms, and then spoke the parts we chose to the group as a whole, going round the circle several times, building the momentum and energy. For many, the tears were flowing, and the grief was tangible, as they spoke things to parents now dead or estranged, to ex-lovers, to lost children, and to themselves. As each spoke, it resonated with others, so that more people found the courage to express more intimate and emotional

things that they had wanted to say but had not had the courage to or been able to or been aware of at the time. After this, we were instructed to make connections with others, to reach out eyes, feeling, touch, to use our voices, and this developed into dancing and a process of praying for things we hoped might come.

Rituals of intense corporeal encounter are designed to stretch the limits of participants, to use the corporeal interaction with others to move a person beyond themselves, and beyond the boundaries of their accustomed ways of being. It is useful in thinking this through to draw on the work of anthropologist Jackson and feminist philosopher Diprose, both of whom make use of Merleau-Ponty to argue for the centrality of embodied practice in theorising personal transformation. As Jackson suggests in the case of the wild, mocking and unaccustomed dancing and performance associated with initiation rites in the Sierra Leone community he studied:

> [T]his disruption of habitus...lays people open to possibilities of behaviour which they embody but ordinarily are not inclined to express...it is on the strength of these extraordinary possibilities that people control and recreate their world, their habitus (Jackson 1983:335).

This is not simply a case of changing physical patterns in behaviour. Rather, in shifting bodily comportment, loosening muscles and so on, modes of behaviour such as dance and mimesis can give rise to an "altered sense of self", and in particular can challenge habitual corporeal patternings such as gender and social status (Jackson 1983:336). In this, they can be seen as generating new patterns of cognition:

> We are all familiar with the way decontraction of muscular 'sets' and the freeing of energies bound up in habitual deformations of posture or movement produce an altered sense of self...My argument is that the distinctive modes of body use during initiation tend to throw up images in the mind whose form is most immediately determined by the pattern of body use (Jackson 1983:336).

Reclaiming members, like other Pagans, can be seen as making deliberate use of this recognition. By choosing to deploy their bodies in unaccustomed ways—for example, through ecstatic dance, ritual costume, or through the mimesis associated with aspecting described above—they seek to shift not only their bodily dispositions, but long-established patterns of cognition and emotion, to bring to the surface feelings, sensations and impressions that have long been 'locked' away in their accustomed habitus. This allows them to recognise not only new ways of being for themselves, but, as with the recovery of things 'I wanted to say', to re-frame the sensory, emotional and cognitive information they carry with them about their relationships with others.

Closely related is the process by which practitioners use embodied intertwining to shift their habituated dispositions. Diprose focuses in particular on the role of intercorporeality in self-transformation, suggesting that corporeal interaction with the other partakes of the "pain of transfiguration inherent to the generous erotic encounter" (Diprose 2002:88). Building on Beauvoir, she describes this as "the pain of tearing away from the self…the pain of moving beyond oneself through the other and the 'bending'…of the other that this movement involves" (Diprose 2002:88). This description provides a compelling way of interpreting how intense corporeal practice is used in Reclaiming to move the self beyond itself. A notion of productive risk through the other seems to capture the intense, heartfelt and challenging processes inherent in ritual encounters with others' bodies.[62]

For Diprose, to speak of this pain and risk is not to disparage erotic encounter, since she sees risk as inherent to every kind of intercorporeal encounter, and as fundamental to our being. Diprose argues that as humans we are never monadic, but are at all times fundamentally constituted through encounters

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[62] It is worth noting that such a concept of risky and painful transformation through erotic encounter across lines of radical difference is probably not cross-culturally universal: at least some societies rest their notions of sexual encounter on sameness rather than difference (Helliwell 2000). However, we might suggest that such a reading is apposite to Western settings where bodily boundaries are otherwise sharply inscribed and persons are often essentialised as differentiated from one another.

with others, through whom we have developed our basic existence, our skills, styles, ideas, practices and identities (Diprose 2002:1–72,89–90). Yet our bodies also undergo a process of "sedimentation" built upon accustomed ways of being, shaped by our histories and the expectations set upon us by others and by "the bodily and institutional data of our lives" (Merleau-Ponty in Diprose 2002:72, see also 91–93). In erotic encounters, she argues, people risk their accustomed patterns of the self to intertwine with the other, and in the process open themselves to being transformed through the generosity of intercorporeal encounter.

Reclaiming practices of energy exchange and corporeal intertwining can be understood as attempting to extend and foreground this general intercorporeal existence through which, according to Diprose, people live at all times. In the face of the rationalising effects of modern institutions outlined at the start of this chapter, such awareness of the corporeal generosity of personhood is likely effaced much of the time in favour of what Diprose calls the "parsimonious" model of bounded individualism. This a point Diprose herself makes, for example, with respect to the Western contract model of law (Diprose 2002:45–58). In this light, Reclaiming exercises designed to open up the generous corporeal encounter can be seen as a means of foregrounding an underlying thread of interconnection, to remind persons bodily of their radical relationship to others. As one of the Eros path teachers described it, this is about learning to become "allies in the practice of radical generosity".

According to Reclaiming convention, it is fear generated through encounters with the mechanising systems of modernity which pulls people into such a parsimonious disposition with respect to others. It draws people into themselves, sets up rigid boundaries and divisions, and thus holds them back from opening and transforming. For practitioners, learning to dispose of their bodies in unaccustomed ways, and particularly to share in others' bodies, can help dissolve this calcified disposition, opening them to the possibility of shifting something within themselves. Given the right circumstances, this process of moving beyond a sedimented disposition of parsimony can occur

fairly rapidly. The transformations that take place in participants' corporeality and openness to others within the short space of a week at a witchcamp point to a high degree of flexibility of bodies in adapting to new experiences. The generosity of intercorporeal encounter can accelerate these shifts in people's disposition, reconstituting them as beings more fully and consciously in relationship.

## Possibilities and limits of transformative practice

### Challenges of the erotic encounter

There are times, however, when practices designed to open people up to self-transformation can lead to the opposite effect, to bodies shutting down through confrontations between the corporeal expectations of the different bodies present. Here, we see the demands of bodily intersubjectivity in magical practice running up against their own limitations. Risking the self in intense corporeal relationship with others lends much of Reclaiming practice its transformative potential. But with large numbers of people, little shared corporeal history, and few established social guidelines to mark the way, it is not surprising that the embodied experience of some practitioners on occasion comes into collision with that of others. In Diprose's words, "there is a limit to the generosity by which bodies are given to each other in the opening of possibilities for carnal existence" (Diprose 2002:71). From time to time in Reclaiming contexts, one person's corporeal tolerance will be stretched beyond its limit, conditioned by the specific history each party brings into play.

Several events which took place in the Eros path speak to these limitations to the erotic encounter as transformative practice. In witchcamps and rituals, participants are invited to thread together the processes of their own private, personal work with the activity of opening themselves to being-in-relation to others. Yet this very process of opening to the magical experience of interconnection can sometimes trigger a participant to withdraw. I recall one participant confiding in me her discomfort at one of the older men in our group. In several exercises in which we were asked to gaze into each others'

eyes, speaking the words "I am of you", she felt this man's intense neediness, which she later said would have sucked her energy away from her if she had let it. She felt there was no reciprocity in his energy, but a gap created by his own neediness which would not be satisfied, no matter what she offered him of herself. Consequently, she pulled back from him completely, and offered him little, avoiding him in these exercises and remaining on her guard around him.

This particular practitioner brought with her into this space a general intolerance for older men she feels are needy. She also had a history of prolonged deprivation in her childhood and teenage years, and had spent her early adult years in a process of recovering her sense of self and developing an assertive confidence to ask for what she needs from others. As a result, she was not so much disconcerted by her encounter with this man, as determined to give herself what she needed by avoiding him and shielding herself from him energetically. Nonetheless, her inability to open to him illustrates how intercorporeal practice can reach its limits.

Another participant withdrew from the exercises in this path altogether part way through the week. Jessica, a young woman who had been around the community on and off for many years, was finding it difficult to participate in the life of the camp by the middle of the week. She spoke to me of starting the path with an intention of being really open to what was being asked of her. But eventually she found that increasingly difficult to maintain:

> The first two days, I was finding it challenging and intriguing. Today, I was overcome with a feeling of boredom. 'I just don't want to be hugging any more'. And this—boredom—is a big warning bell for me. That something is so challenging that I shut down.

In part, having her need for other people exposed made her feel extremely vulnerable; she spoke of feeling relief when the exercises came to an end. But the process of opening to intimate experiences with strangers also raised fundamental questions for her about the teachers' goals, and what this might say about Reclaiming practice in the world:

> Are we trying to get to a place where everyone can hug all the time? Because I'm not sure I want that. I'm not sure I would want to live in a world like that…
>
> If the whole world were like witchcamp…If we lived in a world where that was normal, where we go around and say 'I am of you', then I think, yes the significance of hugging and saying 'I love you' would be cheapened.

Jessica worked as a stripper. Her own immediate history was very different from many others there, which was central to her sense of separateness from the group as the path developed, and to the difficulties she had with these exercises. As she said, "I spend my life touching a lot of people and feigning intimacy." Being selective about giving and receiving affection was an important way for her to maintain her sense of wellbeing in the face of what she was required to do in her paid job. Here, the ability to be thoughtful and discretionary about intimate relations far outweighed any desire for the physical, non-cerebral dissolution of Younger Self into shared ritual space: "I'm not craving touch. I'm craving meaning behind the touch." For Jessica, the very process of setting aside her judgment and her ability to withhold herself from others for the demands of magical space gave rise to the difficulty she encountered here.[63]

In fact, these challenges arise from underlying assumptions in Reclaiming about individualism, dissolution and empowerment that do not hold true for all practitioners. As we saw in Chapter 2, George describes the middle-class people who comprise the bulk of Reclaiming practitioners as the "successful social atoms" of US society. Speaking of the "unifying of their consciousness" participants experience in large group ritual work, he says:

> For myself, as like an all-American male, who's been a social atom all my life—it's so counteracting that to say let's do this together. Let's surrender a bit of our volition into the circle here.

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[63] By contrast, another practitioner who worked as an erotic dancer linked her profession to her enjoyment in the erotic chocolate ritual at being able to offer affirmation to men who she perceived may not often receive it.

Indeed, the fact that Reclaiming is a community in which most of its participants have become successful social atoms suggests part of its appeal among this social layer is likely to be precisely that such a layer is generally more attuned to themselves as 'autonomous individuals', and so are more likely to find it productive surrendering "a bit of their volition" in ritual space. By contrast, he describes the situation of a friend, who he says reacted against the diffusion of identity which occurs in large group ritual:

> She got very disturbed by that, because she felt like—she's working class. And so she got very disturbed by what she felt was giving up her individuality, and people being asked to surrender individuality. She kind of had a reaction against witchcamp after a few years.

George describes his friend as "a working class woman, who was trying to move into a professional relation in the world." In fact, in all three cases described here, the practitioners were either raised working class or currently work in a working class job. They are each people who feel they have had to work hard to define their individual needs in the face of these experiences, and we can see their concerns around giving themselves over in ritual space as precisely related to this desire not to surrender too much of their volition.

We can begin to see from this how the ecstatic practices upon which so much of Reclaiming is built are perhaps a corollary for the kind of self-contained individualism that many practitioners experience as a pressing limitation in their daily life. Ecstatic dissolution is designed to help practitioners shake off the sedimented layers of life in urban modernity. Yet for such ecstatic dissolution to move persons beyond themselves, it has to be experienced as challenging the layers of sedimentation that have been built up around a specific body without violating the limits of tolerance given by that body's specific history (Diprose 2002:91–93). As Diprose suggests, for those whose corporeal openness to others has been forced or denied by a social order that privileges some bodies over others, a transformative encounter may not consist of being radically and undiscerningly open to others, but rather may arise from choosing whether and how to place their own corporeal history in

front of others, and when not to (Diprose 2002:179–88). This kind of dissolutive practice is much less likely to appeal to those whose experience is less affirming of their distinctiveness and success as 'social atoms'. Among other things, this means that it is likely to be more attractive to middle class people, whose individualism is generally more affirmed in their social roles, and to be less so among working class people, as George suggests, possibly providing part of an explanation for Reclaiming's appeal largely among middle class people.

Something else is worth noting here. These examples suggest that such practices of ecstatic dissolution popular in Reclaiming are probably tied to an individualised order of sociality through providing a counter to these hegemonic social conditions. The kinds of methods that Reclaiming teachers and priestesses use to move people beyond their experiences of themselves can therefore be seen as shaped in response to these conditions, appropriate for a specific form of sociality, and not necessarily in general. Jessica's contention—that it would not be useful for the whole world to look like a witchcamp—seems apposite. This highlights once again the tensions between responding to existing conditions and pre-figuring new ones, since practices shaped by the existing order are not necessarily those that will be useful for the new sociality practitioners wish to create.

## Bounding sexed difference

Processes of reification can also be found to mark themselves upon the way practitioners draw on sexuality in an attempt to re-enchant their lives. The chocolate ritual, an event which is always a source of excitement at California witchcamp, is also a source of great controversy. Immediately after I announced my presence as a researcher in my first camp, several older campers sought me out to speak of their discomfort with the chocolate ritual and the turn it has taken in recent years. While ostensibly the ritual room is divided into a 'quieter' and a more 'rowdy' half to allow participants to choose their level of exposure to sexual activity, as the night deepens, the activities of

the more risqué half tend to spread to dominate the room. Those present become less likely to observe the careful rules of chocolate ritual etiquette: one participant's experience was of being propositioned by someone asking for sexual favours upon entering in her pyjamas late at night to locate someone. From her attire, she expected it should have been clear that she was not engaging in the space sexually. But more importantly she was affronted by the propositioner not observing ritual etiquette, which should dictate that sexual favours in chocolate ritual space can be offered to others, but not directly requested.

A more challenging issue is that forms of sexualised 'disciplinary' practices are enjoyed by groups of campers in the chocolate ritual. Even when engaged in by consent according to the guidelines, with some of these activities, such as whacking with paddles, it becomes impossible for the physicality of these encounters not to invade the bodily space of others present. Sounds and sights spill over into the rest of the room, with unavoidable consequences for others. One camper confided in me his feeling that this kind of behaviour was not commensurate with the Reclaiming core value of non-violent respect. Another spoke to me of how she found such practices invasive precisely because they were part of her own corporeal history—not because she did not find them erotic, but because she found them *too* erotic, and had engaged in them many years in the past. Now that she felt her life to have moved away from this history, to be around these practices again evoked for her an embodied memory of that earlier time, upsetting the equilibrium of her personal work today.

Like the conflicts surrounding money, authority and power we encountered in Chapter 3, questions of sexuality are highly fraught within modern Western societies; as such, it is not surprising that conflicts arise around these sexually charged settings in Reclaiming. Yet unlike the problems and abuses practitioners encounter outside of Reclaiming contexts, which are discussed in depth and spoken about freely in the community, these challenges of the Reclaiming erotic encounter are not so easily made conscious or understood by

priestesses or teachers. Conflicts surrounding practitioners' expectations of safety and trust in magical space do occasionally surface in discussions: sometimes in debrief meetings and workshops, and more often in private conversation. Some teachers and organisers take them seriously; others may see them as trivial or marginal, depending on the situation and the organiser in question. Where these issues are spoken about, the problems arising from this kind of challenge are generally framed as occasional unfortunate side-effects of important magical practices, rather than central concerns. Reclaiming methods do not always provide an obvious path through these challenges, and the core disagreements remain.

In circumstances such as this, practitioners are encouraged in self-care: newcomers are instructed to be prepared to say what they need, to remove themselves from uncomfortable situations, and to speak directly to any people they have felt affronted by if they feel they can. Voluntary workshops are offered on managing self-care in highly charged sexual environments, and other steps such as mediation are available to handle more serious situations, should they arise. It is notable that this is spoken of as 'self-care', ultimately giving priority to the needs and experiences of the individual to answer challenges of shared corporeality. In practice, many do choose to remove themselves from the chocolate ritual. This is seen as a partial solution, perhaps the only one available; but for some, it is also a source of resentment, since they feel such a major experience of the camp, held in the central location of the main dining hall, is effectively off-limits to them if they are to respect their own embodied needs. For some of these people, training on self-care and mediation only go part of the way to a solution. As with the conflicts explored in Chapter 3, conflicts around sexualised ritual can sometimes go beyond immediate, personalised solutions, raising questions for those involved about whether what is needed are more social, community-wide solutions to their concerns. In these circumstances, unless those who see themselves as affected choose to let the problem rest, they easily become sources of resentment and

ongoing controversy that can occasionally spill out into the rest of the community.

The central problem in conflicts such as these seems to arise from the Reclaiming idea that 'healthy' sexual expression in ritual automatically opens up a path to self-transformation and liberation. In this, Reclaiming follows in the counterculture and earlier Romantic traditions which have viewed sexuality as an 'untouched' and 'untamed' essence of the 'natural' self which, unleashed, holds the key to freeing the person from the parsimony and oppressions of a mechanised world. While Reclaiming members believe that distortions are imposed upon sexuality by conditions of power-over, many feel that underneath these distorted sexual expressions, there is in each person an innate source of eros and desire which can be tapped as the basis of liberatory practice (Starhawk [1982]1988:136–144). Settings like the chocolate ritual are intended to open up this innate erotic energy within participants in ways which connect them to the larger eros of the cosmos. Such a model makes it difficult to recognise the problems which can arise when one person's expression of desire hits up against another's.

By contrast, since Foucault's (1978) foundational work, theorists have called into question this idea of sexual desire as standing outside of or pre-existing social conditions, suggesting that desire should rather be understood as socially produced in settings from the school to the clinic. Furthermore, as Diprose contends, the field of possible encounters in which a given body is comfortable moving is shaped by that person's specific corporeal history. As she suggests, "my freedom to be open to a particular project, including a particular sexual encounter, is limited by my social history, and in the wake of this, my bodily tolerance to the present situation" (Diprose 2002:92). With the array of corporeal histories present in a room of scores of people, and given the primacy given to the sexed body in the formation of identity in modernity (Foucault 1978), it is inevitable, or almost so, that a 'free' expression of eroticised desire in the chocolate ritual should bring some to the limits of their corporeal tolerance. While self-care can provide a safety valve, the deeper

problem is a model of sexuality which suggests that eros can somehow be tapped as an innate force immune from the social production of sexuality.

Several theorists offer us a way to approach these questions, suggesting that sexuality is not an 'innate' property of personhood pre-existing socialisation, but rather has been co-produced within modern subjects, particularly in terms of sexed difference and normalised heterosexuality (Foucault 1978, Butler 1997). As Foucault suggests, discourses on sexuality arising since the eighteenth century have operated to bind persons to their sexed identity and mark this as fixed and sharply in opposition to the other identities (Foucault 1978:38–44). This, he argues, reflects and reinforces wider social processes which have constituted modern persons as self–governing, bounded entities (Foucault 1978:53–73). Nor does this simply involve marking sexual identity. As Butler suggests, the sharply defined heteronormativity associated with "heterosexual" and "homosexual" identities in modernity co–produces sharply bounded gender identity, so that persons come to be constituted in their sexed nature by their rejection of same–sexed possibilities for desire (Butler 1997:144–8). By contrast, many anthropologists have argued that gendered identity is not cross–culturally tied to bodies and sexual desires, and as such is often subject to a much higher degree of fluidity than that experienced when primacy is given to different and opposing sexed bodies (e.g. Oyewumi 1997, Helliwell 2000, Nanda 2004). Similarly, feminist theorists have studied how human bodies, including their 'sexed' features, are themselves not fixed and given, but instead are physically constituted by cultural factors (e.g. Butler 1990, Tuana 1996).

In this light, the emphasis given in Reclaiming to gender fluidity and 'queer' sexuality can be read as an important marker of resistance to the rationalising effects of these discourses. For example, at the ritual dedicated to finding Beauty during the Sleeping Beauty witchcamp, a young woman dressed in a glorious, shoulderless evening gown stepped into the circle and said, "I am Beauty". Just at the moment many of us present assumed the invocation would stop there, another woman stepped into the circle saying, "I am lesbian

beauty". What followed were over half a dozen incarnations of beauty, all making increasingly elaborate statements about their identity and their relationship to their own beauty: "I am lesbian mother beauty", "I am Native American man–woman Two Spirit beauty", and similar ideas. It became clear that the confirmation of a stereotype by the woman who opened the invocation was a deliberate springboard for a series of repetitions designed to disturb this assumption of normative gender and heterosexuality.

At the same time, problems of normalisation are, perhaps unsurprisingly, felt to creep into the community. Even in this example, the challenge to gendered and sexualised normativities was given in terms of practitioners declaring identities tied to gender and sexuality, however multiplicitous the field of possibilities proffered. At a more striking level, at one Spiral Dance ritual, the fire altar was created from an enormous phallus and yoni, each decorated in reds and purples and placed side-by-side with one another (see plate 7). This reinforced the heteronormative notion that one phallus and one yoni constitute a necessary and sufficient symbolic expression of sexuality. More subtly, it expressed an idea that sexuality lies primarily in the genitals, and that these genitals are marked as very different from each other. It presented sexed difference in an unproblematised way. Yet, as Helliwell (2000) suggests, this idea of men's and women's genitals as markedly different, and as fundamentally defining a person's identity, is fairly specific to Western modernity.

Broader concerns about heterosexism in Reclaiming are spoken about in the private corners of conversations with 'queer'-identified community members. As with the concerns arising from the chocolate ritual, such concerns are sometimes marginalised within Reclaiming. On two unrelated occasions, practitioners told me about their attempts to raise at a feedback meeting that they had experienced heterosexism in a Reclaiming event. Both were told by different prominent community leaders that this could not have happened in Reclaiming, since it is a diverse, open community. Once again, in attempting to pre-figure a form of sociality which resists prevailing rationalities, we find that

some practitioners assume that the space created in Reclaiming events is safe from the objectifying and reifying effects of hegemonic discourses such as those conditioning sexuality.

Perhaps more fundamentally, if Foucault is correct, the central Reclaiming precept of sexual desire as a liberatory risks reproducing rather than resisting modernity's rationalisation of sexuality, further tying practitioners to their possession not just of a particular type of sexed body, but to a body defined by its sexuality (Foucault 1978:3–13). Indeed, Foucault argues that the very idea of ourselves as persons possessing a sexuality which must be freed from repression has been part of the proliferation of discourses that have encoded modern subjectivity with an individualised sexual nature (Foucault 1978:32–5,42–3). The effect of these discourses has been to create within modern subjects the idea of:

> Sex—that agency which appears to dominate us and that secret which seems to underlie all that we are, that point which enthralls us through the power it manifests and the meaning it conceals, and which we ask to reveal what we are and free us from what defines us (Foucault 1978:155).

The compelling desirability of sex thus constituted within the subject:

> …attaches each one of us to the injunction to know it, to reveal its law and its power…makes us think we are affirming the rights of our sex against all power, when in fact we are fastened to the deployment of sexuality that has lifted up from deep within us a sort of mirage in which we think we see ourselves reflected—the dark shimmer of sex (Foucault 1978:157).

The Reclaiming emphasis on liberation through sexual expression, in the creation of specifically eroticised spaces and more generally in the conception of the sacred as carried in an 'erotic' energy of the cosmos, runs the risk of further inscribing this essential "point" of sex within practitioners, through which they must come to know themselves. Practices of erotic interaction within Reclaiming can thus be seen as partaking of a dual dynamic: simultaneously opening up bodies to other bodies while further inscribing the

individualising effects of sexuality and essentialising each practitioner with the mirage of the "dark shimmer of sex" within.

## On becoming an active body

Weber argues that rationalisation proceeds by marginalising the sensual and emotive aspects of human existence from the field of institutional calculation, reproducing people as rational, atomised, seemingly disembodied individuals. In telling incarnate stories in and through their bodies, practitioners are affirming their bodies as sites of wisdom, places which are not only valued, but which have something to say about their lives. As we have seen, practitioners are taught not only to retell their body-stories, but to read the signs their bodies are expressing, to recognise when their heart is hardened or their throat is closed down, and to learn how to provide healing and protection for themselves and others. Reclaiming practice teaches participants how to move the energy around their bodies and free blockages, to shift the stories their bodies are telling and to rework their relationship to their own incorporate needs.

Overtly, in treating persons as sites of unitary consciousness, rationalisation seems to set bodies aside, except to the extent that these bodies are viewed as machines, for example to be operated on in a clinic (Diprose 2002:107–21), or set into motion in a production line (Lukács [1922]1971:89). As Jackson argues, in this view the body "is simply an object of understanding, or an instrument of the rational mind, a kind of vehicle for the expression of a reified social rationality" (Jackson 1983:329). Yet, as Foucault suggests, bodies, their desires and needs, are in fact, in an active process, systematically constituted through the rationalising discourses of medicine, psychiatry, criminality and so on. In Foucault's words, such discourses "attach [the subject] to his own identity" and "impose a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him" (Foucault 1983:212). In this confessional model whereby the subject is constituted:

> ...the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained) but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know. And this discourse of truth finally takes effect, not in the one who receives it, but in the one from whom it is wrested (Foucault 1978:62).

In encounters with these institutions of rationalisation, the embodied subject becomes the recipient of knowledge seemingly outside of itself which reproduces its 'truth'. Being produced in this way, the subject could be said to develop what Lukács calls a "contemplative stance" with respect to its own self-creation, lapsing into "a contemplative attitude *vis-à-vis* the workings of his own objectified and reified faculties" (Lukács [1922]1971:98,100).

Where then lie possibilities for resistance? In the case of sexuality, for Foucault, they lie in "bodies and pleasures" (Foucault 1978:157), although as Diprose points out he does not explain how these have escaped the same discourses which normalise and produce sexuality (Diprose 2002:115). Diprose herself points out that rationalising discourses do not take place in the abstract, but concretely between bodies, in the clinic for example, where the clinician's corporeality is as much at stake as the patient's, despite the overt claims of medical discourse which seek to render the clinician's body invisible in the encounter (Diprose 2002:115-7). She suggests that it is in recognising this that the possibilities for shifting the terms of the encounter lie. For Jackson, the body can be broken out of its habitus through altered patterns of use, through mimesis, dance and other bodily techniques which break up accustomed dispositions, which can "induce new experiences and provoke new ideas" (Jackson 1983:334). In fact, part of the strength of somatic expression for Jackson is its indeterminacy, which lays a groundwork for multiple meanings not possible in verbal communication (Jackson 1983:338-341). For Lukács, while reification extends ever further into every aspect of life, its abstracting tendencies leave in its wake an inability to answer concrete, specific phenomena, opening up possibilities for it to be challenged, and, as its effects intensify, for a "cracking of the crust" (Lukács [1922]1971:208).

For these last three theorists, the specificity, sensuousness and corporeality of concrete events generate ambiguities in the field of experience which offer possibilities for transformation. It should not surprise us then that, in looking to transform themselves, Reclaiming practitioners seek to do so through the body, with its fluctuating form, incalculable emotional and sensuous dimensions and its concrete imprecision; nor that they seek to open their bodies to others in unaccustomed ways, foregrounding the wide variety of configurations made possible by shifting and overlapping corporeality. In this array of possibilities encountered in the complex field of the concrete, immediate and given, a body can be recognised as being in motion with respect to other bodies; it is therefore a body theoretically capable of creative and self-creative action in the world. To the extent that this can be achieved, a subject can begin to move beyond a contemplative stance with respect to its own faculties as the recipient of 'truth' about itself.

In another way, the choice to set aside 'Talking Self' in ritual, which we examined in the previous chapter, can be read as an attempt by practitioners to set aside the disposition towards abstraction and calculation associated with rationalisation.[64] In this, the use of altered states, aspecting and cognitive dissonance has the potential to dislodge the received habits of rationalisation and open up possibilities for transformation. For all that rationalising discourses seek to normalise persons as sites of unitary, self-consistent consciousness, this cannot eliminate the ambiguities of cognition, nor avoid the reality that humans can be cognitively as well as corporeally given to each other (nor that cognition itself is corporeal).

It does not do to be overly naïve, as Reclaiming members can be, about the impacts of rationalising discourses on the spaces practitioners create with their emphasis on sensuality and corporeality. As we have seen, the effects of reification on bodies present in ritual can generate parsimonious dichotomies

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[64] It is interesting to note that Jackson (1983:339,341) makes a similar contrast to that used in Reclaiming between verbal and somatic communication as, respectively, dividing and opening up connections.

of gender and sexuality, create conflicts over the giving, taking and possessing of corporeal favours and bring into ritual structural inequalities in the corporeal histories of the bodies present, which can give rise to fractious encounters in ritual space. Furthermore, as we explored in the previous chapter, the emphasis on self-examination in ritual can engender an inwardness among participants which can further reinforce the separations they seek to overcome. Nevertheless, it is useful to recognise the possibilities for transformation opened up when practitioners place their bodies in unaccustomed configurations with respect to each other.

## Two worlds

Through the use of elaborate cognitive and corporeal techniques, and through their collective weaving of stories through myth, poetry, music and art, Reclaiming members create magical worlds of enchantment with which to shake the grip of rationalisation from themselves and undermine its impact on the wider environment. In doing so, they open themselves to each other and to the wider world in ways which can shift their corporeal disposition and their awareness of cognitive participation with their surroundings. Reclaiming practitioners work to inject this magical sense into their everyday lives, to become 'Edgewalkers', to 'Weave their way between the worlds' on an ongoing basis. Indeed, a few have sought actively to draw on the tensions of urban life as a source for magical inspiration, as in the Urban Witchcamp several teachers attempted to organise in Amsterdam (Baruch et al. 2008). Yet this process of trying to introduce enchantment into a rationalised social order involves ongoing frustrations, and ultimately is dependent on developing quite strongly guarded boundaries around creating and accessing the sacred. While practitioners craft worlds of numinous beauty, at the end of a ritual or the end of a witchcamp, the circle must be closed, costumes removed and altars dismantled. Another very different world awaits them outside.

The contradiction between the two worlds can be stark. At the end of every witchcamp, participants go through a process of 'dialling down' the chakras.

After a week of magic in the woods, the 'opening up' of the chakras of sexuality, psychic vision, and so on, is seen to reach a point where they are likely to be embarrassingly and even dangerously expressive for functioning in the wider world. Participants close their chakras down, physically like turning a screw, and when we think they are closed far enough, we are told to turn them some more. We are reminded it will not do us any good to be staring into the eyes of the gas station attendant or psychically receiving thoughts from the driver in the car that is barrelling toward us at 60 miles an hour. The priestess reminds us of Walmart, and we double over with shock. And despite this effort, many leave the camp looking glassy-eyed, having difficulty driving or counting money.

We can see quite palpably here the separation that practitioners experience: between the busy, technological, mass-production everyday world that is felt to shut down consciousness, and the world of the woodlands, of openness, of interconnection, of psychic skills and wider awareness. At witchcamps, people talk about having to go back into 'the real world', and then someone says, 'no, *this* is the real world', and we see in this two separate and almost incompatible realms. Meanwhile, the world of enchantment—designed to replace the rationalised, mechanised social order—is beset by problems of reification creeping into its practices. At the end of the camp at which Julia spoke of a whole new culture, she had visions in the final day's class of the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay. Whatever the beauty of magical space, the wider world has a way of re-intruding.

# Chapter 6

## SOCIAL EXCHANGE AND RELATIONAL BEING: gifts and commodities in Reclaiming social mediation

*We are one with the infinite Sun*
*— Reclaiming chant*

*It is nothing but the definite social relation between*
*men themselves which assumes here...*
*the fantastic form of a relation between things.*
*— Marx, Capital Volume 1*

## The significance of things

In the previous chapter we explored how access to the spiritual realm in Reclaiming helps practitioners to overcome conditions of rationalisation and reification. Typically, this spiritual world is seen as formally inseparable from matter; to view it otherwise would be to reinscribe a matter/spirit dichotomy— what Starhawk refers to as "that false split", which "is the foundation of the institutions of domination" (Starhawk [1982]1988:4). As we shall see, there is a consistent tendency for rifts between spirit and matter to reappear: for less spirit-filled aspects of manifest material reality to be downgraded in favour of others and for present conditions to be effaced through a focus on the more numinous world envisioned and created in magical space. Nevertheless, the Reclaiming ontology of matter and spirit and practitioners' use of objects also suggests intriguing possibilities for remaking sociality.

Reclaiming practitioners place a great deal of emphasis on materiality and on the practical application of their theological principles through reshaping the physical world. Key to this are their processes of using objects, which have many magical and practical applications. In fact, Reclaiming practitioners, like many other Pagans, love things. Practitioners adorn their houses with objects

of beauty; create altars with tchotchke, photographs and seasonal memorials; dress their bodies in jewellery, paint, tattoos, masks and fanciful clothing. In ritual, they use tools, candles and herbs to help get the work done. They create cut-and-paste games from magazines and coloured paper, allowing Younger Self to make objects for symbolic exploration. They pepper their world with tarot cards, runes and charms. And often they create lovingly handcrafted objects for exchange. Personally, I returned from the field with bagsful of handcrafted tools, decorated boxes, rocks, little bags of stuff, woven cords and pieces of string. As much as sacred cosmology and internal trance-journeys, *things* are the bread-and-butter of Reclaiming work.

As we saw at the opening of this thesis, a significant body of anthropological and sociological theory has explored questions of relationality through theories of objects and their social processes of exchange. This work directs us to look at the appearance taken by objects in given social settings as reflecting and reproducing particular forms of sociality. For many theorists in this field, a contrast between individualised and relational sociality is expressed in another form as a contrast between commodity and gift exchange (Mauss [1950]1990, Gregory 1982, Strathern 1988)—a contrast which can help us understand the transforming role of things in Reclaiming practice. Likewise, disenchantment and reification can be understood as outcomes of commodity relations in modernity (Marx [1867]1976, Lukács [1922]1971). As such, Reclaiming practitioners' focus on re-enchanting matter can be seen as a desire to challenge commodity relations, speaking to how practitioners look to reinscribe relationality in a reified social order.

## Enchanted matter

### Matter, spirit and connection

When Weber claimed that "The fate of our times is characterized…above all by the 'disenchantment of the world'" ([1919]1991:155), he indirectly laid down a challenge that researchers would take up eighty years later: trying to locate sites of enchantment at the centre of modernity. Recently, a growing number

of works has addressed the question of 'enchantment' or 're-enchantment' in modern, secular and scientific life (Bennett 2001, Levine 2006, Landy and Saler 2009). Significantly, these secular attempts at re-enchantment foreground the search for enchantment in materiality: in the sports stadium (Gumbrecht 2009), in Darwin's biology (Levine 2006), in a pair of jeans dancing on the TV screen (Bennett 2001:111–131). And indeed, this engagement with materiality is an important outgrowth of the fact that Weber's 'disenchantment' stems from scientific processes, where knowledge-claims are made about the mechanical relations that supposedly govern matter. For Weber, science has increasingly removed both wonder and purpose from the physical world by offering the possibility of calculation of material causes (Weber [1919]1991:155). If one is to challenge this belief, then, it seems important to find wonder and purpose once again within those very physical systems that science purports to explain away. In other words, these secular attempts at re-enchantment seek signs of enchantment in matter understood as fully compatible with a pragmatic, scientific, causal understanding of the world.

It is significant, then, that Reclaiming re-enchantment places materiality at the centre of its conception of sacrality. Indeed, a great deal of attention is dedicated within Reclaiming spaces to the importance of recognising the sacred as immanent within the world. As we saw in Chapter 3, practitioners counterpose this idea of immanent sacrality to the transcendent dynamic seen as typical of the Yahwist religions, which Starhawk suggests historically tended to gut the material world of content and value. This, she claims, is what laid the basis for all the dynamics of disenchantment and estrangement that she identifies with modern existence ([1982]1988:5–6). In other words, at the heart of Reclaiming spiritual ontology is a sense of the urgency and importance of re-enchanting matter. For practitioners, the things of the world matter—matter matters—in a way that they believe it does not in the life of Western societies as a whole or in Judaeo-Christian traditions. Finding 'spirit' connected to matter is therefore a key strategy for them in achieving re-enchantment.

The bearing of practitioners' conceptions of the ontological condition of enchanted matter on magical activity is complex and multilayered. Furthermore, there is a spectrum of belief around the relationship between matter, 'spirit' and 'energy' in Reclaiming, reflecting a variety of often contradictory interpretations of how the material world is enchanted. In one of the first conversations I had on this subject on my arrival, a former community-member visiting the Bay Area told me that in all my interest in dialectics, it would be a mistake to miss the dialectical relationship between matter and spirit. He went on to argue that spirit traces directly alongside the realm of matter, two sides of the same coin. George used the same definition to explain the inseparability of matter and spirit in his conception:

> I'm a materialist, and I think we've talked a little about this. And so my faith, and my—it's like a—it's almost a semantic thing, it's a definition, it's not a faith. My definition is that there's two sides to the coin, and one of those sides is matter, and one of those sides is spirit. And, no matter how thin you slice that coin, you've still got two sides. You can never cut away the spirit from the matter, *or* the matter from the spirit.

> And so, in that sense, I'm a pantheist, I think. And, I feel it in my heart. It's not—I mean, I can work it out in my head. But I can feel in my heart, certainly drugs help with this, and you may have talked to some other Reclaiming people—I've heard people say, informally, and without naming names, drugs played a part in Reclaiming's birth. And, I think, a big part in the whole revival of Neopaganism. Of people realizing: man, that—there's something more to this. That rock, there's something more than a rock going on there. There's something we don't see. There's something more than just a bunch of wood growing there.

> So I—yeah, it's a materialist...faith? definition? whatever. It is almost just a working definition.

> When I've heard Star or others write or talk about immanence, it speaks to me a lot. It's just...it's *in* us, and it's in every living thing. We're not looking for anything that we aren't. We're not looking for something called Spirit that's other than us. No...in that sense, I think of spirit as—it's a part of every—It's part of *being*. And, conversely, there is no spirit that's not embodied.

It is interesting to note here George's slide between ontology and epistemology: that on the one hand this is a definition chosen for its effect on

consciousness, and on the other that there is something more than a rock going on. This definitional slide, an example of Luhrmann's interpretive drift, in fact allows practitioners to hold open-ended understandings of matter-spirit relations which they nonetheless see as fully compatible with scientific materialism. It allows George to move from his opening testament of materialism to a position that implicitly challenges a scientifically rationalised ontology of matter—an ontology of a rock as fully calculable and separate from everything around it.

This idea of enspirited matter—of there being "something more than a rock"—carries relational implications for practitioners. Talking about sacredness, spirit and energy enables Reclaiming members to recognise connection. This was touched on in the previous chapter with respect to the binding role energy is seen to play linking one thing to another. But there is another, more intrinsic aspect of sacredness that practitioners speak about, which binds in a more fundamental way. George's theory of sacredness is in fact for him simply a statement of this ontological condition of identity between seemingly separate things. Elaborating on his explanation of pantheism above, he contrasts this with Spinoza's definition of panentheism, saying:

> Pantheism says Spirit is *in* every living thing, equally, and everything is part of the whole: Spinoza. There is no Spirit other than the whole. Panentheism says, we all come from Spirit.
>
> I think of it this way. Panentheism is "We all come from the Goddess, and to her we shall return." Pantheism is, "We are one with the infinite Sun." Those are the chants that articulate that difference.
>
> We sing them casually. We go back and forth, and we don't think of them *theologically*. But those two chants enunciate that difference. And I'm "We are one with the infinite Sun," even though I'm *so* moved by, you know, she's waiting for her children to come home—I'm so *moved* by that.
>
> I think I feel almost like we're puzzle pieces. We're Spinoza's puzzle pieces. But we *are* the puzzle pieces. We're not sitting above it looking at the puzzle pieces, we *are* those pieces. We're trying to see, 'How do we connect? Where's the connection with the tree? Where's the connection with you? How do these puzzle pieces lock up?'

> And we—we are all parts of that spirit, and it's a mystery how we fit
> together.

Occasionally practitioners will speak of moments of insight into that locking together of puzzle-pieces. I interviewed Inanna during a period of her forming theories of the workings of different aspects of magic. She described to me many different expressions of 'energy' and 'sacredness', including the layer of sacredness or spark in everything, which she calls 'life force':

> I had a very small glimpse fifteen years ago. Where I happened for a very
> short period of time watched the outside world in an interconnection. So
> I didn't see the actual life force, chi, for example, anything. But I saw the
> connection. So for example, between bird flying, air around, next tree,
> etcetera, that all was one picture instead of singular event happening.

Yet such a way of viewing the world in interconnection proves difficult for practitioners to hold onto with any consistency. Wider social conditions of separation create challenges for practitioners even in their perceptions. Starhawk points to the difficulties for our language of conveying the inherent relationality she wishes to express in her use of words like 'energy' and 'spirit'. She quotes Meridel LeSeur, who states:

> Nouns are patriarchal. They separate us from things, naming the thing
> and making it an object. The American Indian languages have no nouns,
> only relationships (cited in Starhawk [1982]1988:24).

The structuring of the English language around nouns creates problems for Starhawk's desire to express relationships as inherent: "If we say that energy runs through things, we imply that energy is separate from the things that it runs through" (Starhawk [1982]1988:29). Nonetheless, the language and concepts she has inherited give her no choice. "So I will now speak in these metaphors, as if energy were a thing rather than moving relationships, until we evolve the nounless language that would let us speak more truly" (Starhawk [1982]1988:29).

Yet, despite these protestations, Reclaiming members show a propensity to interpretive drift on the question of matter–spirit unity. The theologically open

approach within Reclaiming and a tendency toward definitional slide creates room for ontologies of less absolute ties between matter and spirit. Not only different chants, as George suggests, but variations in cosmology and in magical practices express an openness and fluidity in understanding matter–spirit and matter–energy relationships. This adaptability is important in trying to characterise the varying content practitioners give to their relational worldview. Far from George's puzzle-pieces, other expressions of Reclaiming matter–spirit relations often distil this relational substance of 'energy' out from matter, allowing matter itself to retain a more calculable, separate and bounded form, while energy adds numinosity and connection.

At an earlier point, Inanna expressed what was at the time a working hypothesis for her about how ritual could influence events. Although she later reconsidered this particular theory, its formulation illustrates how at times within Reclaiming, the relationship between matter and energy can be much looser than the inherent life force/interconnection conception above. As my notes of the conversation recorded:

> It started with [another fairly new Priestess] saying, "But we don't change anything in our rituals but our own consciousness, do we? And then changes happen around us because we bring our changed consciousness into the world."

> And Inanna said, "I don't think that's true. I think our rituals have an impact on the world directly." And, as she explained it to me—and this is a hypothesis still in formation—that maybe it works like this:

> "My aura and your aura are overlapping [we sat about a foot separated from each other and she indicated the space between us]. If I do something to change this here [and she felt the air nearby her], it will affect what's here in your space."

> And I asked her, "Do all entities have this, like the trees? And is it just at the individual level, or at the whole ecological level?"

> And she said her hypothesis that she is working on is that everything has it, and that it works at all different levels, and that somehow ("I'm not sure how") they interact with each other.

> "I don't really like the idea of the domino effect. It is not that one thing affects another and then another, but that they all interact with one another."

In Inanna's description, this system of auras operates holistically: as she explained it to me, the whole of the redwood forest where we sat has an aura of its own, in addition to the auras of each of the redwood trees and each of us. Through an overlapping of these energetic bodies within physical space, changes in one can impact the surrounding entities, both individually, within groups and overall.

I frequently encountered many similar ideas of auras and energy bodies extending beyond physical matter, including in the Body of Glass healing class where we worked with moving and altering our own 'energy bodies'. What is interesting about Inanna's picture is the way in which a spiritual force—an aura—is the mediator for changes that take place between entities. We encountered this earlier for example in the cone of power 'sending energy out into the world', but Inanna's description systematises these ideas into a theory of relationships. In this kind of conception, in order to interpret and understand how things relate to one another, a non-corporeal substance is invoked that extends beyond the boundaries of the corporeal, while the 'matter' being related remains reified into separate things.

Here we begin to see a loosening of matter-spirit unity. Unlike George's puzzle-pieces, for many practitioners, understanding how things are related to other things involves calling on a spiritual substance seen as separate and beyond physical matter. George's attempt at conceiving of an intrinsic relationality between things in their physical form is fairly rare; much more common among practitioners is this invocation of spirit or energy beyond matter as a mediator of relationality. In these examples, energy is capable of being disembodied from and acting independently of physical matter.

Finally, a further order of separation is in play among practitioners, in which spirit or energy, separated from material objects, takes on a life of its own and

acts in nebulous and unpredictable ways. In this conception, energy is amorphous and abstracted from physicality. Rose encapsulates this position here:

> ...that's what distinguishes us as witches, from other spiritual groups— that we use *things*. Meridel LeSeur talked about 'thinking in *things*'. Image, image, image. Thing, thing, thing.
>
> Um. It helps us *manifest*, when we work with things. It helps make it *real*. It gives us something to hold.
>
> Take my new cup here. Let's have it, that lovely...
>
> So, I'm working with this cup. It gives me something to *hold*, something *real*, to put something *in*. It makes me feel like there is something to hold the spiritual information. Do the drinking in. [...]
>
> So. Yeah, it brings in a level of reality. [...] It shows the energy what to do—it gives the energy something to live in. [...]
>
> See that altar there? It's got a lot of things on it. A lot of critters. A lot of critters and statues on my altar. Because I tend to draw a lot of spirits. I attract spirit. I got a lot of friends out there, or something. And it gives them something to sit in, so I can talk to them. It gives the spirit some *body*.
>
> So, working with things—it gives the spirit, or the action, or the magic, something to manifest *in*. That's why.

There is quite a contrast expressed here between things, which 'make it real', and energy, which does not know 'what to do' unless it is guided by anchoring objects. In this picture, energy has a tendency to wander off away from matter in unpredictable directions. It is shifting and unformed, and can exist disembodied for indefinite periods. In other words, energy—one of the binding agents and a mediator of relationships for Reclaiming practitioners—has a tendency to abstraction from matter unless the magical practitioner consciously intervenes by using things to give this relational substance concrete form.

Thus we encounter in another guise the difficulty we have seen all along for practitioners trying to conceive of a fully realised practically and inherently

relational existence—this time at the level of physical matter. Relationality in Reclaiming material ontology is not simply expressed pragmatically through physical things and persons, but in a field beyond matter generally called 'energy' that infuses physical matter but is also separate from it, and which has imprecise, malleable and unpredictable qualities. Despite striving for a very physically materialist relational ontology such as George articulates, when practitioners apply these ideas, this 'energetic' conception of interaction tends to swirl about, eluding immediate physical apprehension.

Thus, here we encounter a physiological root to the challenge of Reclaiming relationality that has beset us from the start. Practitioners' experiences of persons mirror their experiences of matter. Just as their conception of sociality has a tendency to become reified into separate realms of 'sacred–relational' (Deep Self) versus 'mundane–atomised' (Talking Self), tensions in Reclaiming material ontologies likewise tend to separate out connective energy from bounded matter, despite attempts to keep them unified. Conditioned by commoditisation and the objectifying effects of their accustomed modes of thought and language, practitioners struggle to consistently maintain a working conception of physical matter as ontologically relational and inseparably imbued with spirit in the way George puts forward.

To understand this problem and its bearing on sociality more fully, it is useful to turn here to the theories of commodity and gift societies built upon the works of Mauss and Marx (Marx [1867]1976, Mauss [1950]1990, Gregory 1982, Strathern 1988). In his essay *The Gift*, Mauss contends that in societies where exchange primarily takes the form of gifts, unlike in commodity societies, objects exchanged as gifts have a quality of persons. "Things possess a personality" (Mauss [1950]1990:46); and thus in being passed around, these objects partake of social relations:

> Souls are mixed with things; things with souls. Lives are mingled together, and this is how, among persons and things so intermingled, each emerges from their own sphere and mixes together (Mauss [1950]1990:20).

Building on this foundation, Gregory and Strathern have argued that the relational nature of material objects in gift societies is linked to a fundamentally relational sociality in these societies, very different from the individualised sociality that forms under commodity conditions. As Gregory sums this up, "things and people assume the social form of objects in a commodity economy while they assume the social form of persons in a gift economy" (Gregory 1982:41, see also Strathern 1988:134). Similarly, in contrast to the interchange of energy abstracted from matter within Reclaiming, Strathern describes how processes of relational transaction between persons in Melanesia, including the exchange of 'spirit', are mediated through substances such as food, blood and semen (e.g. Strathern 1988:110–9,212–9,235–51,375–6 n16).

For theorists such as Strathern and Gregory, the character of Western sociality as an interaction between independent, reified individuals is inherently related to the dominance of commodity exchange. This sociality of separate persons is tied to a social condition of things operating as commodities—as independent, reified objects related only through quantitative, rationalised processes of exchange. For these theorists, where commodity relations have come to predominate, things themselves cease to be seen as qualitatively connected, an idea which stems back to Marxist theory and the alienability of the commodity form. Thus objects in commodity societies mirror reified sociality; as Ollman points out, in Marx the alienability of things from their producers and from each other is simply another way of expressing the alienation of persons (Ollman 1971:176–189). According to this body of theory, under commodity conditions not only persons but things become reified. In other words, it is under these conditions that things become *things*.[65]

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[65] These theorists present one aspect of a complex field of explanations for the noted focus on 'things' in modern Western societies. Other theorists have pointed to other factors, two of whom are worth noting in particular for the relationship they bear to the concerns Starhawk raises on the prevalence of nouns in English. Tyler (1984) in explaining the hegemony of 'things' in "Standard Average European" common sense, points to the dominance of the visual within the sensorium in these social and

We can then understand the Reclaiming tendency toward separation between energy and matter as stemming from a wider social foundation of commodity conditions, in which physical matter appears as bounded, distinct entities. Invoking 'energy' can be seen as an attempt to express an intuited, qualitative, flowing relationality between objects under wider social conditions which make this difficult to apprehend directly. As such, the pattern of 'spirit' or 'energy' pulling away from matter perhaps reflects limits on how physical matter in commodity conditions itself can be reconceptualised as relational.

Nevertheless, it is significant that for these practitioners speaking about 'spirit' and 'energy' reflects their sense that there is something more going on behind the surface appearance of separateness between things. The theory of energy Inanna was exploring reveals that her conception of physical matter is of discrete entities, but her notion of auras points to her strong sense that there is something behind this facade of separateness: a hidden reality of interrelation. Thus spirit, energy and similar non-corporeal ideas are a way for practitioners to express their intuition that things *are* in relation, despite the outward appearance in commodity epistemology that physical objects have a physically separate, sharply bounded existence. In this way, 'energy' or 'spirit', with their loose and overlapping definitions, can be seen as an excess, an expression of practitioners' experiences of matter-in-relation that overspill the limits to understanding imposed by commodity conditions.

## Matter, spirit and value

The concept of 'value' gives us another lens through which to understand the role that sacralisation of matter plays in Reclaiming ontologies of relationality. The importance of valuing the Earth and all the things it contains as a unifying

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linguistic systems, reflected in commonplace phrases such as 'I see' and 'A picture is worth a thousand words'. Ong (1982) points to the role of writing in developing a conception of words as things, linking this to a whole shift in consciousness toward greater interiority made possible with the advent of literacy. These various factors can be seen as interweaving with forms of exchange to give rise to the reifying effects of materiality and sociality in Western modernity.

principle in Reclaiming cannot be overstated. The idea of caring for the Earth, of developing love and appreciation, infuses Reclaiming ritual and social life, its writings, chants, poetry and activism. Starhawk says:

> When I say *Goddess* I am not talking about a being somewhere outside of this world, nor am I proposing a new belief system. I am talking about choosing an attitude: choosing to take the living world, and the people and creatures on it, as the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, to see the world, the earth and our lives as sacred (Starhawk [1982]1988:11).

One of the most striking things about this focus on value in Reclaiming is the emphasis on sensory knowledge, particularity and detail. It is not simply trees in general, but this particular tree, that rock, that river, through which Reclaiming members are encouraged to develop their love for the earth. In one of the first Starhawk workshops I went to, she had us looking intimately at the grass, the dirt, the bark on the trees to see what we could observe. Was the grass wet or dry? The soil loose, sandy, loamy? What did we see, touch and smell? In a later witchcamp workshop, teachers had us blindfolded and led around by a partner to learn about the surroundings through touch—a soft carpet (moss?), a sharp edge (a stone?), coolness (damp?), warmth (sunlight?). This sensory specificity, though counterintuitive for a researcher trained to trade in ideas, is considered a key doorway through which to access our love of and connection to the earth and 'Her' inhabitants, and therefore our ability to act as appropriate caretakers, residents and members of Earth's community.

This emphasis on particularity in the act of valuing directly opposes how value is generally measured and imposed in commodity-dominated societies. According to Marx, under capitalist conditions, social relations are mediated through the exchange value that things and people are seen to possess (Marx [1867]1976:128). This has the tendency to erase specificity, reducing commodities to an abstract comparison. Whereas "as use-values, commodities differ above all in quality…as exchange-values they can only differ in quantity" (Marx [1867]1976:128). In abstracting in this way from the uses through which objects come into immediate, specific relationship with people "we abstract

also from [an object's] material constituents and forms" (Marx [1867]1976:128). As Ollman frames it, "[r]ecalling the definition of 'abstract' as the absence of specificity, [exchange] value could only be the form of the product where it is nothing in particular but, instead, everything which all the products of capitalism have in common" (Ollman 1971:178).

Starhawk ties the question of sacrality in matter precisely to such a characterisation of commoditisation: "when nature is empty of spirit, forest and trees become merely timber, something to be measured in board feet, valued only for its profitability, not for its being, its beauty, or even its part in the larger ecosystem" (Starhawk [1982]1988:6). Thus lack of enspiritedness for Starhawk erases from objects both their relationships and their specific qualities, a pattern of separation and abstraction that mirrors what we have explored in previous chapters for social relationships. As Lukács suggests:

> Consumer articles no longer appear as the products of an organic process within a community...They now appear, on the one hand, as abstract members of a species identical by definition with its other members and, on the other hand, as isolated objects the possession or non-possession of which depends on rational calculations (Lukács [1922]1971:91).

Whether a pair of shoes, a health check-up or a person's labour, the process of each of these things being exchanged on the market treats each entity as its own unit, existing in relation to other things only through a specific kind of quantitative comparison which obscures what is distinctive about it and any qualitative form of relationship between these things. The Reclaiming emphasis on matter as sacred, then, is an attempt to reverse the forms matter takes under commodity conditions—both emphasising the qualitative connections between objects and returning to matter its specificity, sensory qualities and concrete differences from other matter. Using Marx's terms, claiming matter as sacred can be seen as an attempt to turn exchange-value back into use-value.

Unfortunately for practitioners, the sacredness of the world appears as uneven. Viewing the world as sacred is a process rather than a finality, an attempt to affirm something which is not always apparent in the immediacy of experience. As a result, not everything in the existing material world is understood by practitioners as equally sacred, despite the foundational idea of the 'Goddess' unifying all things in a sacred web. When I asked a number of practitioners if they believed a nuclear power plant or other industrial sites to be sacred, almost all respondents answered negatively or with hesitation. As Karen, who grew up in the community, explained it:

> Everything that you mentioned is a human creation. So I don't think the power plant itself is sacred, but I think the earth that it stands on is sacred.

When I asked her about the significance of each of these areas being human creations, she replied, "Well, it means it's not, in the sense, natural and divine in that way." Rose describes the problem similarly:

> Now, as far as immanence, and that everything is sacred. That's easy for me…but that takes journeying into the timeless place. I mean, the corner of Chavez and Folsom [a busy intersection in the Mission District] is sacred, but the overlay is not so sacred, except for the people perhaps…. So there's this *overlay*. There's this, there's this *stuff*—not necessarily very good stuff, that has gotten out of control, and is covering the earth…But, in the *timeless* realm it doesn't exist.

For Rose, some things simply do not exist in the sacred 'timeless realm'. This leads practitioners to downgrade ontologically certain aspects of materiality, resulting in tensions in matter–spirit unity, and at times a tendency for matter and spirit to split back apart.

The most notable exception to this general pattern was Rook, who said,

> There's nothing that's outside of the fabric of God Herself. So, of course, everything's sacred in that way. Some things, however, connect in a more aligned way to God Herself.

Rook uses the idea of misalignment rather than the sharper ontological distinction of non-sacred matter to understand the problem of matter which is

destructive. This for her was very much linked to seeing humans as part of nature, as part of the world: "separating certain technologies out from nature is a *lie*." For Rook, just as other animals can get out of balance, so can humans, "The sheep can eat everything in sight, and starve, which is what humans do, too." Yet most practitioners do not attempt this integration of destructive technology into their sacred worldview; as we have seen, there is no Brigid of the Autoworks in practice. While according to Reclaiming's Principles of Unity "the earth is alive and all of life is sacred and interconnected" (Reclaiming 1997), in the minds of most practitioners many human-created objects are not part of this living world. With many products of capitalist production, the deadening effects of alienation seem too great for most practitioners to overcome theologically.

This in turn conditions the tendency for spirit to separate itself out from matter. When I discussed with George why he thought the tendency had developed for the direction of Centre in Reclaiming to be invoked as the reified element of 'spirit', instead of simply being seen as the meeting point of the four elements, he said:

> It's a good question. You got me stumped on that one…something about Earth, Air, Fire and Water are what we have here. How are we going to get beyond this? And, politically, we *do* want to go beyond this. Materially speaking, that's not my goal.

George suggests that a desire to move beyond commoditised conditions of matter politically perhaps gives rise to this tendency for practitioners to speak of a spiritual world beyond and separate from the material. Thus this pattern of spirit moving apart from matter can be seen as taking root in the face of a frustrated desire to move beyond conditions of existing (alienated) materiality.

## Gifts and commodities

### Things as social mediators

The Reclaiming desire to move beyond commodity conditions is not confined to theologies of matter and spirit. It takes practical form in Reclaiming material

culture, particularly in how practitioners use and share objects in an attempt to transform their sociality to take more relational forms. The fact that practitioners do this, and how they approach it, can teach us not only about Reclaiming, but also about the complex and layered structure of materiality and sociality in commodity societies. Several theorists have critiqued the work done in the Maussian tradition—particularly that of Gregory and Strathern—for relying on an overly dichotomised view of gift and commodity societies, of 'the West and the Rest' (Carrier 1995a, Carrier 1995b, LiPuma 1998). Exploring the Reclaiming sociality of objects and exchange allows us to break down this dichotomisation and develop a fuller understanding of the complexity and contradictions experienced in Western personhood beyond 'individualism'.

The starting point is, however, this same work developed on Mauss's foundation, which can help us to understand the dynamics of relationality that practitioners seek to develop with their use of objects. For theorists in the Maussian tradition, the nature of the person in gift societies is fundamentally different from the individualist model said to dominate Western societies. The process of gift exchange is believed to form one facet of the multitude of social processes whereby persons are produced as fundamentally in relation to each other. Thus by comparing the Reclaiming use of objects with the models put forward by these theorists, we can understand both the strengths and limitations of Reclaiming attempts at building relational material forms.

Of these theorists, Strathern puts forward the strongest statement of a relational sociality fundamental to gift-exchange societies. As we have seen in Chapter 3, Strathern's conception of relational sociality is that in the case of dividual persons, social relations are seen as intrinsic rather than external to a person. Personhood is constructed by the "general enchainment of relations" in which a person is embedded. This enchainment has the potential to implicate persons in ever-wider networks of transaction (Strathern 1988:197–206). Furthermore, people are seen as partible (hence 'dividual'): things or parts of a person can be extracted from that person and given to another, creating and foregrounding the overlapping of relationships that forms the foundation of

relational personhood (Strathern 1988:185; 212; 348–9ff). Just as sharing of food and fluids articulates an overlapping of personhood within more intimate relationships (Strathern 1988:207–219), in gift exchange, according to Strathern, a part of the giver's personhood is extracted from them by the recipient, becoming an object capable of mediating a relationship between them (Strathern 1988:198–9). "An effect of mediated exchange, then, is to make relationships appear as though they were accumulated and increased by the flow of things" (Strathern 1988:206).

While the flow of things in Reclaiming practice may not be as vast as the networks of sociality described by Mauss and Strathern, there are many ways in which the use of objects in Reclaiming stands out from everyday practices seen as typical of Western societies. Handcrafted creations, home-grown food, found objects and even labour itself in work-trade are made sites of Reclaiming social relations. Particularly prominent among these are altar objects, which in addition to connecting practitioners to the season and the spiritual 'web of life' can also mediate more concrete social relations between persons. Very often, altar objects are not commoditised objects isolated from their context, but are expressions of connections between people. As Rose put it, "My altars are not very often clean or neat or visible…but, yeah, in a perfect world, there's always things that connect to other people… or figures that I admire." When I suggested that perhaps these objects gave those connections tangible form, she said, "Yes…It brings them to mind."

When I asked George about his altar, he started by telling me it was not really that interesting, just some tarot cards and a few things that remind him of other people. For many practitioners, it is so intuitive to represent their relationships on their altars that they may not give it much thought. George went on to describe a pair of earrings, one of which he had given to a friend who had once been very close, and the other of which he kept on his altar:

> I love doing that at witchcamp, buying two earrings from one of the
> merchants, give one to one person, keep the other one. Because they go

> together. They are the same object. Now, she's got one, I've got one. So
> yeah, I guess, it is trying to mediate that distance.

Once he thought about it, he realised he uses his altar for dedicated objects representing relationships with people in his life who were now some distance away, geographically or socially. Among other things, altar objects carry the relationships of the people who have had contact with them materially into a sacred setting. In thus sacralising these relationships, George describes how he is foregrounding relationships that might otherwise get hidden in the rush, confusion, complexity, and vast distances of modernity.

In many cases, these kinds of relational altar objects sit alongside other objects of personal spiritual work. The earring sits amidst the tarot cards. The statue that for another practitioner was a gift from her grandfather sits side-by-side with the wishing box and the goddesses. At Samhain, photographs of the 'beloved dead' are set amidst seasonal reminders and valued personal items (see plate 5). With their altars, practitioners are telling sacred physical stories of a different kind of sociality from that which is widely understood as Western individualism: that people are not in fact unified, bounded and separate, but are partial, relational beings whose lives and personal evolution are at every point interwoven with others. Altars speak of how practitioners view themselves as embedded within a network of relationships such as Strathern describes.

For Reclaiming practitioners, altar objects are examples of what Mauss describes as things that "possess a personality"; they can therefore be seen as taking the form of gifts in the Maussian sense. Many other objects among practitioners likewise show elements of the gift form. This can be seen in Reclaiming practices of giving handcrafted objects and home-grown food. Organic vegetables grown in someone's farm or yard are a very popular item on the Harvest ritual table. And many practitioners display around their homes artwork, tchotchke and other reminders connecting them to their loved ones. Vibra pointed out to me her sister's art work covering her walls; Suzanne's home has many images and reminders of her son who had been stillborn,

given to her by friends and family members. These, too, represent attempts by practitioners to cut against the domination of commodity exchange, re-investing shared objects with the personhood of the giver and the specificity of the context of their creation. This is intended to bring these objects to a healthy and sacred life which can then be used to establish connections with others on more reverent ground.

Rook articulates well the contrast practitioners draw between things that take 'sacred' versus commodity form and the benefits of being surrounded by the former:

> I really think—it's my hope, at any rate—that one of the really good things about Pagan materialism, is that it can actually be an antidote to contemporary cycles of blind consumption and greed. Because, when you're consuming things that Madison Avenue tells you to consume, you're not making the choice, and you're not doing it because it actually gives you pleasure, you're doing it because you've got a yawning void you're trying to fill, or you feel insecure.
>
> It's not, 'Wow, I bought this painting from an artist in Venice because it was so beautiful! And I really responded to *her* work. And so I wanted a bit of that to come with me.' That's different than, 'Someone told me if I bought this certain pair of socks, that it would change my life, you know. It would give me this whole lifestyle.'
>
> So, in that way, the objects being sacred means that we are less likely to buy soulless, mass-manufactured, cheap, slave-made goods. 'Cause we're trying to connect to the spirit that is in matter…so we're trying to connect with things that feel like they have some resonance with us— and that's going to be less likely with the thing that was made by a slave in a factory.

For Rook, it is the connection of the practitioner to the object and its spirit that characterises Pagan materialism. In her example, the art work serves as mediator of a relationship between artist and admirer; this purchase involves taking a piece of the artist's creativity with her, and thus the object is seen as transmitting personhood from one locale to another. On the flip side, commodities offer no 'connection', but rather give rise to an internal 'disconnection' that mirrors external dislocations:

> I think what happens is that we get bombarded by too much stuff,
> bombarded by objects, bombarded by noise, bombarded by image, and
> that shuts us down, because we get overwhelmed. And, when we shut
> down, we disconnect.

Thus, the contrast between "objects with personality" and objects that are simply things is linked by practitioners to a contrast between personal connection and disconnection.

Reclaiming practitioners are of course not the only people who honour their relationships through material displays. In reality, it is a widespread practice in many capitalist societies, from the Christmas cards on a shelf, to photographs, to the valued gifts displayed as treasures around a home. Underneath the commodity veneer of Western societies, people actually do live in constant relationship with others, and they embed and embody their relationships in objects in myriad ways (see for example Carrier 1995a). Nonetheless, in gift societies, social relationships are forged and foregrounded with each interaction, in the everyday, commonplace exchanges of objects that take place (Mauss [1950]1990). By contrast, in commodity societies gift-giving is widely consigned to people's 'private' lives, while the most widespread mechanisms of exchange take place through the market. In sacralising a wide array of objects, practitioners are actively working to build, open up and bring to light a genuine interrelationality that they see under the surface of Western societies, broadening the base of the material means through which relationships can be expressed, thereby giving relational personhood concrete form around them. The Reclaiming focus on changing the way in which objects are viewed, handled and shared can be seen as a material attempt to turn commodities back into gifts, exchange-values back into use-values, and thereby to unravel the reified basis of social relations under capitalism.

## Pagan 'kula'

One of the most well-known cases of gift exchange involves the festivals of exchange across the Trobriand Islands famously analysed by Malinowski: the kula (Malinowski [1922]1960, see also Mauss [1950]1990:21-34). Reclaiming

practitioners make use of a form of 'kula' as a mechanism for both distributing material goods and engaging reciprocity and contribution as social binding agents. Each year at California witchcamp, an auction and raffle takes place of beautiful, often handcrafted objects generously donated by their makers to raise money for the camp's scholarship fund. The money raised is used to fund the next year's scholarships to subsidise low-income people to attend. In turn, scholarship holders are strongly encouraged to sell tickets to the raffle where many dozens of items of smaller value, also donated by campers, are distributed. All of this is done in an atmosphere of excitement, consciousness and respect over many days, forming part of the fabric of the camp.

This conscious process of redistributing wealth ties many campers together in an enchainment of mutual obligation: people of more means donate goods, bid on auction items and purchase long strands of tickets; those with particular skills produce highly-valued items; those with few means receive subsidies while engaging in the (modest) extra work needed to keep these goods and money circulating. Some of these roles may overlap and interchange: a camper who has received a subsidy may also donate some ritual clothes or a tarot deck no longer used; a person who one year received a scholarship might at a later time make a hefty bid towards the auction. Aside from donations, which are normally low-key, these various roles of exchange are highly visible: part of a spectacle of camp life. It is clear who is selling tickets and who is buying auction items. Even with the smaller items, once raffled off, donors sometimes make themselves known to recipients to share a bond around the object donated.

Much ritual and revelry surround these various exchanges. Tickets can be purchased in ribbons of twenty or more, including the risqué 'around the world' purchase which involves the seller measuring the ticket ribbon around the purchaser, from genitalia to top of the head and back around. Campers with tickets pore over the many magical items available for raffling, choosing how best to distribute their tickets into containers near the items they desire. Many of the objects donated have a magical character: tarot decks, jewellery,

decorative clothing for rituals. The lottery of these smaller items takes place during meal breaks over a few days. Campers do magic to obtain the items they seek; a few confident campers are typically vocal about the intention they injected into winning a particular item, and often they indeed win it. All of this adds to the celebratory atmosphere in which these exchanges take place.

The auction night itself takes place amidst the festivity of the talent show just over half way through the week of camp, where many campers sing, play music or perform comedy. In keeping with the high level of creative skill encouraged in Reclaiming, many of the acts are superb and moving; often they involve a level of personal revelation befitting the camp atmosphere. Interspersed throughout this evening, the very precious donated objects are auctioned in order of increasing estimated value. Their giftors are brought forward to explain or describe the item's origins. While competition between bidders plays a part in raising the stakes, so too does the fact that other bidders frequently offer money to help another camper win the object they desire. This might be a friend, but can also be a camper who has met the bidder only days earlier, with whom they have shared a connection over the week. Thousands of dollars change hands at this event between the few items auctioned.

In addition to the interpersonal connections and the general feeling of goodwill generated by the auction and raffles, a second dimension to the relationships expressed through exchange in this kula can be found in the nature of these goods themselves. The auction objects in particular often represent the connection practitioners feel to witchcamp and the woodlands in which it is held. At my first camp, these included a large silver photographic print of the woodlands created by a camper, and a lavish hand-knitted rug produced by another, knitted over the course of the camp and charged that day in the centre of the Healing Ritual. A few items, like the precious *vaygu'a* exchanged in the Trobriands (Malinowski [1922]1960:103), make temporary stops in the hands of each recipient. In one case, a sculpture thought to induce powerful dreams was re-auctioned by its recipient a year later, who suggested that the object bore not only these general powers, but the specific influence of the

dreams it had induced in its previous Reclaiming possessors. Expressed and forged in these exchanges are both bonds between campers and the personal ties campers feel with the woodlands as a sacred location.

Outside of witchcamps, a less public pattern of reciprocal exchanges takes place more informally among community members, as work-trades and other gifts of labour and time. I have been involved in many of these, ranging from an arrangement with a friend in which I traded computer training for body work, to a network of mutual support among a group of us around Suzanne, in which I worked alongside others to help paint her house in preparation for the birth of her child, while I stayed under her roof, was fed, and enjoyed the comforts of mutually-supportive friendships. She also covered my costs for two trips: to New Orleans and to the retreat centre Esalen. There was a practical basis for this exchange beyond our friendship: on the one hand, my presence provided her with the security of not travelling alone during her pregnancy and guided her in meditation at the retreat; on the other, travelling with Suzanne allowed me to see these places, experience their ritual qualities, and spend time with her for my research. These kinds of mutually beneficial arrangements come reasonably readily within Reclaiming networks, where an attitude of generosity and giving is cultivated and then naturalised as stemming from the Earth's 'natural' bounty. In these exchanges, goods and labour take on a character as social mediators between community members unlike commodities traded in wider society.

In a broader sense, Reclaiming views of reciprocity are a guide to generosity in action. Processes of redistribution and exchange within the community are underpinned by a cosmology which emphasises the generosity of the Earth and the tendency of things to return to the person from whom they originated. The magical 'law of threefold return'—in which magical acts are said to return to the practitioner many times over, for good or ill—also has a parallel in materiality. Here, practitioners' material generosity is girded by an ideology that what is given away will cosmically return to the giver at some later point. I have often heard it said that someone who gives away money is more likely to

receive it back in greater amounts than someone who 'clings to it too tightly'. Money-generation magic often encourages such practices of letting something go in order to start the wealth circulating or create a space in a person's life for something new to come in. And at times when I expressed concern about receiving generous support from friends in the community, the appropriateness of these gifts was conveyed by the donor expressing the belief that one day I would be in a position to help others, and would do the same. A general disposition of gratitude and joy is encouraged in both giver and receiver around these exchanges of support.

There are important contrasts, however, between these patterns of reciprocity and gift-giving within Reclaiming on the one hand, and the networks of social relations mediated through gift-giving described by Maussian theorists. Mauss writes about the "obligation to reciprocate" that dominates gift societies (Mauss [1950]1990:8, see also Malinowski [1922]1960:98). In societies where gift-exchange prevails, he describes a long series of exchanges of objects of like kind with one another: a "chain of users" well beyond the initial exchange (Mauss [1950]1990:12). This is not the case with Reclaiming exchanges, which generally begin and end with the immediate exchange taking place. Even with the auction-raffle-subsidy nexus, though the exchanges are extended over several days, they then formally come to an end and entail no further obligation outside the camp. Significantly, the extension in time that marks reciprocal obligations in many gift societies and establishes an ongoing social obligation between parties (Mauss [1950]1990:12–14, Gregory 1982:47) is generally absent from Reclaiming exchanges. Thus, while practitioners may feel more bonded together through the mutual exchanges of labour and personal items they create, there is no obligation for this to be consistently re-inscribed through further gift-giving. The hope that gifts given will be returned in Reclaiming is just that—a hope and an ideal, but not a concrete set of social expectations. A widespread fabric of exchange that could give rise to more sweeping, systemic networks of social obligation and reciprocity—Strathern's "general enchainment of relations"—is not apparent within Reclaiming.

When these Reclaiming beliefs are decontextualised from specific loci such as the witchcamp kula, the relational sociality that informs these exchanges appears increasingly abstract. Starhawk writes of a principle of reciprocity that governs the "relationships of integrity" that grow from connection to the Goddess: "the energy each puts out is roughly equal to the energy she or he gets back" (Starhawk [1982]1988:38). Sometimes, this sentiment is expressed by practitioners in the ideal that 'the universe will return to a person what she sends out'. Both of these reflect aspirations thought to be guaranteed by magical practice and cosmic harmony, but they do not constitute a social obligation to act. While gift exchange takes place in pockets of concrete, known relations, practitioners' overarching framework of redistribution and reciprocity is more a cosmic hope, belief and expectation rather than a substantive social law or obligation. This informs the disposition of generosity visible among many practitioners. Yet there is also a great deal of scope socially within the community for holding onto possessions and for not returning favours. Far from systems of ongoing reciprocity binding concrete social relations, the bulk of Reclaiming practices of gift and return outside of immediate household relations take place in isolated incidents within an abstract framework of hoped-for cosmic redistribution.

There are three related issues here. Firstly, the abstraction that tends to shape Reclaiming beliefs about reciprocity mirrors an abstraction inherent in capitalist practices of exchange. For example, as Marx argued, the individualised model of wage-labour as a fair exchange between equals in capitalist conditions abstracts from the concrete circumstances that structure the relationships between owner of capital and prospective employee (Marx [1867]1976:270–280). In Reclaiming, this abstraction of individualism is replaced with another abstraction of cosmic relationality. In place of a model of 'equal' individuals engaged in exchange on a market is a likewise abstract model that all humans are woven energetically into a web of life that will tend to mediate its own laws of return. The onus here is thus not primarily on

human-created social institutions to concretely ensure principles of return, but on intangible and unaccountable cosmic laws.

Secondly, unlike in gift economies, participation in Reclaiming distribution streams takes place between individuals seen as single producers and recipients, rather than involving by extension whole groups of people through multiple authorship of the gifted product (see Strathern 1988:162-3). These individualised exchanges inherit the characteristics of wider commodity relations, by which individuals are fetishised as inherent possessors of property and money, effacing the social relations that underpin production (Marx [1867]1976:165-6). In the background of Pagan kula, a discordant note of wider commodity conditions remains. Particularly for those at the receiving end of witchcamp generosity, the celebration of redistribution can also serve as an uncomfortable reminder of these wider relations, jarring against the generosity of the exchanges. On the night after the auction at my first camp, a lower-income camper and scholarship recipient commented with a note of tension in her voice that people seem to have a lot of money to spend on these luxury items. Another camper with higher disposable income pointed out that the thousands of dollars spent reflect the high value campers place on these witchcamp memorabilia. The friction I sensed in this conversation reflects how witchcamp redistribution imports some of the tensions around money and inequality that frequently typifies commodity conditions.

Thirdly, a material social structure of substantial wealth inequality stemming from capitalist conditions provides an uncomfortable background to practitioners' hopes for cosmic redistributive justice. While practitioners such as the organizer of California witchcamp, who founded the scholarships system, work hard to find ways to make Reclaiming activities financially accessible through systems of mutual exchange, the overarching structure of capitalist social relations limits the scope and impact the Pagan kula can have in effecting the redistribution practitioners seek. At the extreme end, those who cannot participate in these exchanges can sometimes be marginalised,

even left out altogether from witchcamps, classes or other costly activities. As George said:

> …the idea of paying seventy-five for a Reclaiming class…Till I was forty years old, that would have been unthinkable. I mean there was so many other things I had to do with that amount of money. And I know there's so many people in the Bay Area like that that we can't reach.

The webs of connection practitioners hope to achieve through their exchanges are therefore limited, among other things, to those who can afford a level of access to Reclaiming events to begin with.

While redistribution and inclusion is the aim of these activities, the presence of monetary exchange in the witchcamp auction can evoke the dissonant commodity relations that form the backdrop to practitioners' lives. Reclaiming kula and other forms of gift exchange can only go part way to challenging these conditions. Under the pressure of wider commodity relations, such attempts must take the form of important but isolated institutions, which are limited in scope and impacted in meaning by overarching commodity relations. When these ideas are applied more broadly by practitioners, they tend toward increasing abstraction, answering reified commodity relations with ideals of cosmic reciprocity that may not be realised. While these sentiments often underpin genuine generosity among practitioners, the exchanges that result remain largely limited to pairs or small groups, and can relatively easily be left aside when circumstances change for the individuals involved. Embedded within these practices of gift exchange are therefore many of the same patterns and assumptions of choice and convenience that characterise an individualised sociality, while the tensions and disharmonies of commoditisation can resurface at the sites of gift exchange.

## Gifts, subsistence and meaningful work

For Marx, it is not simply objects that take commodity form in capitalist society, but people, in particular workers, who as wage-labourers must turn their labour power into a commodity for sale on the labour market (Marx

[1867]1976:272–4), creating the conditions of alienation. Many practitioners agree with Marx's characterisation, and seek out ways to avoid or minimise the impacts of such commoditisation of the self. Starhawk echoes Marx in stating, "[w]hen we are valued only as objects, for the most mechanical of our abilities, when our work serves the ends that seem meaningless or even harmful to us, we are alienated" (Starhawk [1982]1988:145). She goes on to suggest:

> To change the nature of work would be to change the underlying basis of society. We are challenged to find or create jobs and ways to work that restore value to the work itself, instead of the profits extracted from it (Starhawk [1982]1988:146).

And indeed, large numbers of Reclaiming practitioners take up this challenge, engaging in volunteer activities within Reclaiming and in wider community organisations, and seeking part or all of their means of subsistence outside of wage-labour relations.

Many Reclaiming members spend many hours each month in volunteer work, through which they create their magical worlds. As we have seen, creative production takes the form of priestessing, music, costumes, art, cooking, and dedicated labour to organise events, build community spaces and create shared enchanted realms. Likewise, practitioners decorate their houses to become liveable sculptures, decked out with altars, shrines, words of inspiration and works of art, decorated in bold objects of beauty to suit the season. They organise private festivities around their seasonal celebrations, often giving gifts they make themselves or recycle from previous use. Such labour can be seen as building upon what Di Leonardo (2001) calls "kin work", a pattern of labour she found among the Italian-American families she worked with: the exchange of cards, phone calls and particularly the extensive planning and organising of celebrations initiated mainly by women to maintain extensive kin networks across household boundaries.

Significantly, this kind of work makes little or no appearance on the register in any accountancy of social production and reproduction. As Di Leonardo explains, it is:

> ...as yet unlabeled and has no retinue of experts prescribing its correct forms. Neither home economists nor child psychologists have much to say about nieces' birthday presents (Di Leonardo 2001:383).

She suggests that kin work is flexible, takes place around the margins of more recognised activity, and is largely unrecognised except in its absence (Di Leonardo 2001). Thus kin work avoids the more overtly rationalising features of bureaucratic activity, setting it apart from the reified conditions Marx associates with wage-labour relations. In Reclaiming activities dedicated to building networks of household social relations, beautifying their dwellings and organising their festivities and magical spaces, practitioners can feel they are undertaking meaningful, fulfilling, self-directed labours.

Related to this propensity for volunteer activity are patterns whereby practitioners seek paid work in 'right relation' to spiritual values. As we saw in Chapter 4, for many practitioners, work is not characterised as a necessity to be endured for survival or as a means to an end, but as something which should ideally be fulfilling, an organic part of a practitioner's spiritual journey. Many practitioners earn some of their money in labours of love, into which they can integrate a spiritual sense—in massage, reiki, hypnotherapy, performance, making jewellery, teaching Reclaiming or writing books. While for most people, these activities at best supplement their primary incomes, they are important means practitioners look to, to develop a fuller experience of themselves as connected and conscious persons.

These types of work have two advantages for practitioners over wage-labour. Firstly, they are generally performed in private conditions rather than in businesses under an employer. The practitioner has control over her own conditions, sets the pay scale and receives the payment directly, and therefore sidesteps the immediate commoditisation inherent in selling labour-power. Secondly, such work tends to have a holistic, flowing, integrated quality, avoiding the mechanisation of labour in large corporations, of the production line or sales check-out. In contrast to what Lukács describes for industrial labour, the "human qualities and idiosyncrasies" of the practitioner are

expressed in the flaws and personality of the products or services (Lukács [1922]1971:89). In Gramsci's words, these are labours of the artisan rather than the wage-labourer; thus they allow scope for expressing the 'humanity' and 'spirituality' of the worker:

> This humanity, this spirituality, used to be realized, within the sphere of work, in productive "creation"; it reached its highest point in the work of the artisan, wherein the worker's individuality was wholly reflected in the object created and the link between art and labor was still very strong. But this form of humanity and spirituality is precisely what the new industrialism fights against (Gramsci [1930-2]1996:216).

Earning some proportion of their living in these ways seems to allow practitioners to better link together their spiritual practices, their labours, their money and their patterns of consumption into one whole.

For other practitioners, the spiritual meaning of paid work is sought within the sphere of the wider labour market. Lulu describes what her Reclaiming practice has meant for her career role as a retail manager.

> I think that there was something about believing in non-hierarchical and consensus-based groups that has made me a different sort of manager. And I've had people—I mean I've supervised small groups of three people, but the largest group was 127, and that's a lot of people answering to me. And really, even though we all existed in kind of a top-down structure, I tried very hard to make that be a circle, not a pyramid.

Karen, a pilates teacher who also works part-time teaching dance at a youth violence prevention centre, speaks of the role her Reclaiming upbringing has played in shaping her work choices:

> …there's probably a reason I didn't move into business. And that I am doing something much more closely related to my own talent, hobby and interest and sort of joy as a person. I've chosen to do something that really serves me as an individual. Who I am, in a sense.

> And I've pushed myself to do these jobs that are more social, rather than just making as much money as I can…I'm in a position where I'm working with extremely, extremely wealthy people. And I could easily capitalize on that and be an exclusive high-end teacher. But I spend half

>my time, and I disrupt that so that I can do this other work. And that's important—that is important to me that sense of social service, in a sense. But also that I might make a difference in one person's life. That I might help a woman or a girl or a young man or something like that discover something that they enjoy about themselves. And I think that that is informed by my upbringing.

Thus, in different ways, many practitioners seek to obtain or shape their work in a way that is spiritually meaningful to them as a means of resistance to the alienated labour of commodity conditions. Practitioners generally hold to a common aspiration for work in 'right relation' with their spiritual consciousness, which they hope would let them invest their labour with more personal and relational qualities than wage-labour generally allows.

There is however an unevenness across Reclaiming about the nature of paid work and its relationship to spirituality. In the examples above, a high degree of flexibility and choice characterise the relationship of these practitioners to their paid work. This is not true of all Reclaiming members, nor of wider social relations. Practitioners on lower incomes or with less standing in their places of employment were more likely to speak of their frustrations with their work, of being overlooked for promotion or being transferred against their will. For example, one skilled white collar worker in a large institution, whose area of work was treated by her employers as marginal to their business, fairly frequently expressed frustration at her job for being underappreciated and unable to achieve promotion, despite at times finding the work itself fulfilling. In these situations, it is more likely for practitioners to see a separation between their religion and their employment, while perhaps expressing their hopes of finding more fulfilling employment.[66]

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[66] The Reclaiming-identified practitioners I met in Australia more often held lower-income white collar jobs than in the San Francisco community, and were likewise more likely to express their concerns about the lack of spiritual continuity between their work and their lives as a whole. For example, when I asked Helen, an Australian community member, what she meant when she spoke of believing that it is possible to 'stay conscious all the time', and whether she saw this as possible in her data-entry position, she backtracked and said that that was not really possible while engaged in that form of labour.

Likewise, even some in management positions would at times find the pressures of capitalist relations affecting their capacity to achieve a more personal, less commoditised relationship to their employees. Lulu admits to sometimes having been in the bind of difficult management decisions, under pressure to lay off staff or reduce wages:

> I've done some things that I'm now fairly certain at this point in my life I would not do…But here's the difference. Now I'm in a situation where it would be very uncomfortable and unpleasant for me to lose that work and have to go find a job on the cuff. But at that point, I didn't have a cushion [at all]. So I'm very clear where we all kind of have one another over a barrel by fear of not being able to make our house payments or have food on the table for our families.

Similarly, within a year of opening a new business as a political and spiritual vocation, one practitioner spoke to me of having to reduce the hours of staff members, driven by the dictates of debt repayments and a slow start to his sales. Although his business eventually flourished, it was a sad and difficult choice, confronting him with the uncomfortable reality of being a manager in a capitalist system. In these cases we can see how even these relatively well-positioned individuals have at best a partial and contingent scope to overcome commodity relations within the encompassing conditions of capitalism.

This emphasis on 'right relation' work expresses a hope among practitioners of restoring gift relations to their own commoditised personhood. Such a pattern is also seen in ritual work, where bodies are frequently characterised as sites of gift exchange. This sentiment was explicit in the witchcamp Eros path described in Chapter 5. Unusually for a Reclaiming class, the Eros path opened with theory: the teachers drew explicitly on anthropological literature on gifts and commodities to explain their ideas, elaborating this through the work of Lewis Hyde on *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* (Hyde [1979]2007), and Chögyam Trungpa on *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* (Trungpa [1973]2002). These two works together present a picture of generosity of the body as central to founding an open, creative and relational

personhood. With its intense processes of personal interaction, this path was designed to draw out our bodies as generously 'gifted' to each other.

We saw in the previous chapter how a model of relationality as undifferentiated dissolution and openness in ritual space works less well for those who struggle to bring to this space a pre-existing experience of themselves as confidently 'autonomous'.  Now, we can see further how one source of this tension is a polarisation of commodity-utility versus gift-altruism, which itself stems from commodity logic. On the one hand, it is useful to read Jessica's conflict in the Eros path as stemming from a collision between commodity and gift relations, as her experience of wage-labour was unexpectedly invoked by the activity in the path. On the other hand, the very approach to corporeal generosity in the path displayed the extremes that the idea of 'gift' can become imbued with when set in opposition to commoditisation.[67]

In fact, limitless openness or generosity is no more characteristic of personhood in gift societies than are relationships of 'pure' calculation. As anthropologist Erik Schwimmer has pointed out, a dominance of commodity logic has given rise to an idealisation of gift-giving, such that "Westerners often criticize Melanesians for being too grasping and mean in gift exchange" (cited in Carrier 1995a:151). As Carrier argues, the separation between gifts and subsistence in commodity societies has allowed for an idealistically "pure" and altruistic flavour to accrue around gift-giving. In societies where subsistence is based on commodity exchange, the ideal of the gift is that it be given without expectation of return, with a generous and open heart.

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[67] Hyde writes of developing an "erotic commerce…opposing *eros* (the principle of attraction, union, involvement which binds together) to *logos* (reason and logic in general, the principle of differentiation in particular)" (Hyde [1979]2007:xx). Thus he draws on this polarisation of gifts and commodities to express an opposition between attraction and reason, union and differentiation. When applied to the generosity of persons, this suggests an ideal of 'union' and undifferentiated openness as the basis for building relationality. Similarly, Trungpa suggests: "The bodhisattva path starts with generosity and openness—giving and openness—the surrendering process. Openness is not a matter of giving something to someone else, but it means giving up your demand and the basic criteria of the demand" (Trungpa [1973]2002:116-7).

Generosity then becomes idealised as the cement of personal relationships, set in opposition to the calculations of the market (Carrier 1995a:145–167).

Thus we have come a fair way from the partial, specific, differentiated enchainment of relations described by anthropologists of gift societies. The ideal of interpersonal relations created through gift exchange in Reclaiming can at times take on idealised, unrealistic dimensions. And this in turn can be seen as stemming from the materially and ideally opposed realms of 'public' and 'private', 'impersonal' and 'personal', 'commodity' and 'gift' that have emerged with commodity conditions (Carrier 1995a:145–167, Carrier 1995b). As such, the processes of gift exchange created within Reclaiming, including exchanges of selves and bodies, are impacted by being developed within, and idealised in opposition to, an overarching framework of commoditisation.

## Commodity fetishism and ritual objects

According to Marx, the separation of objects from the underlying social relations that produce them in commodity societies gives rise to a tendency for commodities to appear to take on 'lives' of their own, with their own ideas, identities and needs. Under commodity conditions, objects come to life as independent actors, like the table that in Marx's words "stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will" (Marx [1867]1976:163–4). While people take the form of objects for exchange, objects come to seem real, needy and self-conscious. In Marx's view, they begin to be seen as having social powers of their own independent of human action. Thus for example, "[f]urnaces and workshops that stand idle by night…constitute 'lawful claims upon the night-labour' of the labour-powers" of workers; "[i]t is no longer the worker who employs the means of production, but the means of production that employ the worker" (Marx [1867]1976:425). Such conceptions infuse everyday language, so that products 'beguile' us, while economists enjoin us to respond to the 'needs of the market' and its 'depressed' and 'bullish' moods. In these conditions, things which are the product of human labour

come to seem to all appearances the determinants of human activity rather than the reverse.

This is no less true of many of the objects exchanged in Pagan communities. Pagan stores stock elaborate, sometimes very expensive magical objects, which are frequently characterised as necessary for effective ritual work. Objects found in these settings are often highly fetishised in the powers their vendors ascribe to them; notably much more so than the more modest claims most practitioners place around the objects they find or make themselves. Some of the most extreme examples come from internet stores, such as the "Goddess Shoppe", based in Longbeach, California:

> **Bloodstone runes, known as "the stone of the warrior," this stone enhances courage & brings understanding of the benefits behind each hard-won victory. It helps us to revitalize & open our hearts, tempering strength with compassion. It is a protective stone, & in ancient times was thought to slow bleeding. This stone is often used by athletes to give them both courage & physical vitality. It is also a prosperity stone, helping to manifest wealth. $32.00**

> Goddess Crystal Ultra Wand:
> Staff: Clear, Beads: Moonstone, Ends: Clear Quartz Crystals, Includes luxurious velvet bag, 12", $127.00
> This 12" (Ultra) wand can help you reawaken to the Goddess within, the essence of female spiritual energy, beauty and love. With the infinite power of Goddess spirit you may create harmony, health and abundance for yourself and others. All the power that ever was and ever will be is available to you now (Points-of-Light 2009).

While the local Mission District herb, candle and tarot deck store, the Scarlet Sage, presents a more modest environment, it nonetheless holds items sporting the following kinds of claims:

> **Lucky Karma beads: wear these beads always and everything you desire can come your way. $4.99**

> New Chapter Organics
> Made with activated organic mushrooms. Reishi: the Mushroom for Longevity.* The Reishi Activated Organic Mushrooms have been shown to increase (NK) Cell activity by up to 300%. $27.95

Many Reclaiming practitioners, like other Pagans, are highly critical of such obvious examples of commodity fetishism around ritual objects, especially when used to sell what are often viewed as overpriced items. For most practitioners, the more powerful ritual tools are thought to be those the practitioner makes herself, finds, or is given by someone she knows. In the ritual tools class I attended, we spent many hours making our own tools: shaping wands from boughs brought by other class members, carving wooden pentacles, crafting ceramic chalices from clay, and winding cords from raw thread. The ritual objects practitioners most explicitly value have a life and a history; the source of the branch for a wand, or the use to which a ritual knife has been put, are often integral to the practitioner's understanding of the object's ritual value. Once crafted or purchased, it is also considered important for the practitioner to 'charge' the object in a private ritual, marking it with its new role and its specific relationship to the practitioner. This seems to be a way of ensuring ritual tools, whatever their origin, have a known, trusted and immediate history of place and social relations, demystifying the unknown, alien identity of the commodity object divorced from its social roots.

A similar dynamic applies to the explanation given to the tools themselves. Through the course of the ritual tools class, each new tool was introduced by the teachers with a statement on its origins as a mundane, useful kind of object, which was then elaborated on by participants. Comparisons were made between the athame and tools such as spear and knife used for hunting; the chalice was a cup; the pentacle was linked to stones, plates, wheels and shields, as well as to coins, "a tool for getting the stuff around". This process seemed to be structured towards demystifying the powers usually ascribed to these central ritual tools, providing support for the idea that their use in ritual is merely an extension of the uses of familiar tools in wider life.

In this process, the materiality of these objects was often made the focal point. An interesting illustration was in the case of money. Connecting pentacles to coins, practitioners were encouraged to work to see coins as activating symbols beyond their use-value as objects that facilitate exchange. They were

named as having a 'treasure vibration', and our homework included exploring coins as objects, and how they could be used to generate and link to different meanings and ideas. Below are the notes I took from the coin game I played with Inanna, who was also in this class. We configured different numbers of pennies into patterns and discussed the meanings and associations we saw:

1. Wholeness.

2. Polarity. Attraction—magnetism and repulsion.

3. 2 working together + the product. 2 forces → generation. 1st building block. Small pyramid.

4. Double 2—stability. A chair. 4 elements. Holding pattern.

5. Pentacle. Dynamic. 1st struggle for stability. Struggle for a new balance connected to pentacle human [the star shape we make if we spread our arms and feet apart]—human struggle.

6. Configuration 1: Big pyramid (3,2,1). Configuration 2: 2x3 = Polarity–magnetism (2) x generation (3). Configuration 3: Two pyramids back to back: as above, so below.

7. Next struggle number—how to configure it? 7-pointed star. 3 is birth / 7 is rebirth = 4-stability + 3-generation.

8. 2 columns of 4. Next number of stability. Pretty boring!

9. Endless possibility.

Money in particular is a highly fetishised object under capitalism. Marx speaks of "Monsieur le Capital", and 'his' seemingly self-reproducing capacity to generate interest and profit (Marx [1894]1991:969, see also Lukács [1922]1971:94–5). By contrast, this Reclaiming attempt to work with money as a material object suggests a process of seeking to sideline the mystifications surrounding our usual relationship with money, in which money binds us to purchasing in stores and therefore to the world of commoditised trading.[68]

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[68] I am grateful to a seminar by Bob Foster presented at the Australian National University in 2008, exploring the treatment of money as a 'use value' in Melanesian contexts, in which the material properties of money can be seen to supersede its more widely accepted primary use value as a means of exchange.

This is a double-edged process. On the one hand, practices such as these serve as a means of diverting attention from the extraordinary powers money seems to possess in capitalist societies, attempting to normalise money as an object with mundane, tangible qualities, and thus provide a response of sorts to the commonplace question, 'how can little bits of paper and metal have so much power in our world?' Such games have the effect of temporarily removing money in the eye of the practitioner from the abstractions of market exchange in which it is profoundly embedded, and of which it is profoundly a symbol, reminding practitioners of its physical qualities as a concrete set of small, round objects which can be arranged in different, suggestive configurations.

On the other hand, it appears to further fetishise the object itself, creating meanings out of its physical properties which layer obfuscations upon its already mystified use as 'a tool for getting the stuff around'. In their own way, many Reclaiming practitioners have a concept of money's self-renewing properties that is equally as abstract as the commodity notion of money's self-generating capacity, in the idea that a person who gives money away will find it returned to them in another context. And while such ideas reverse the accumulation logic of capitalism, they are nonetheless based on the belief that money, along with other human-produced objects, has its own relationship to the cosmos independent of human action.

In practice, these ideas cannot be fully separated from commodity relations. This is particularly apparent in the case of a private ritual advertised shortly after my fieldwork had ended. As the new business of the ritual's organiser became more successful, she aimed to help participants develop a 'healthier' and more 'guilt-free' attitude to seeking money in order to allow them to bring abundance into their lives. Far from sidelining the role of money as a mediator of commodity exchange, in practice this helped to validate the practitioner's improved economic standing within capitalist social relations. Often, dynamics such as these involve practitioners in a juggling act between being 'open' to receiving and asking for the money they feel they need, and attempting to avoid the kind of avarice they associate with capitalist social relations.

Reclaiming practitioners live in a society dominated by commodity logic. As such, their magical valorisation of the objects they seek to demystify can easily take on the forms of commodity fetishism. Whether this be the powers assigned to ritual tools sold in stores, or the associations provided to money as a symbolically-charged object, it is difficult to completely remove such objects from their existence as part of a network of commodity relations. Furthermore, in attempting to develop more concrete, mundane relationships with the things around them, to work on a Pagan 'materiality', practitioners too can come to be dominated by the very objects they seek to employ. Organic food which begins as a gift to the self becomes an expensive 'necessity' for those seeking a sense of presence and consciousness in the world. The desire to create a new altar requires the practitioner to maintain it, rework it, and find new things as a means of keeping their cobwebbed psyche clear. Overall, it is not an enormous step from the validation of the 'magical' properties of objects within magical practice generally, to such objects becoming an 'essential' component of a person's wellbeing, and finally to their being sold on the marketplace often at fairly high prices, however much practitioners may resent businesses taking this final step.

## Fantastic forms and real social relations

Several ethnographies critiquing the work of Gregory, Strathern and others on gift and commodity societies can help us unpack the contrasting and contradictory character of Reclaiming practices of objects and exchange. These theorists critique what they see as an overly dichotomised view of Western and Melanesian societies in the earlier ethnographies that equate individual with 'the West' and dividual with 'Melanesia/the rest' in an undialectical and orientalist manner (see e.g. Carrier 1995a, Carrier 1995b, LiPuma 1998). By contrast, these theorists argue that Western personhood has both individual and relational tendencies, based on both commodity and gift patterns of social exchange. While recognising an overarching framework of commodity logic that impacts on sociality in Anglo-American or Western societies, both Carrier and LiPuma point to the complexity of this picture, and the contrasting and

interacting patterns of relationality and gift exchange that are effaced, but not eliminated, by commodity conditions.

LiPuma's central critique is directed at Strathern. His key argument is that, in her elaborate and developed theoretical contrast between Western and Melanesian forms of personhood, Strathern is comparing Melanesian social forms with what is essentially an ideology of Western personhood (LiPuma 1998:59). While this ideology has a basis in legal, political and economic infrastructure, as a "sanctified ideology" it is also necessary for the "reproduction of the person in capitalist society" (LiPuma 1998:60). Yet the centrality of this ideology to capitalist reproduction cannot fully disguise the conditions of dividuality that are also central to Western practices of the person:

> Nonetheless, the ideology of the Western person as fully individual only partially conceals the reality that Western persons are interdependent, defined in relation to others, depend on others for knowledge about themselves, grasp power as the ability to do and act [as opposed to control over others], grow as the beneficiary of others' actions, and so forth (LiPuma 1998:60).

Personhood in Western societies takes many relational forms, in kin work and family gift-giving, and as explored in the previous chapter, in erotic intertwining, the ecstatic dissolution of a dance party and the interchange of corporeal styles through mimesis. In the myriad Reclaiming practices of shared corporeality and gift exchange, we see an attempt to foreground, develop and expand upon these existing social means of building persons as in-relation to one another.

LiPuma's characterisation is supported by Marx's framing of the conditions of the commodity form:

> The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum

> total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensible or social...It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things (Marx [1867]1976:164–5).

Underlying the fantastic forms of commoditisation for Marx are definite social relations between people. Substitution effaces the social character of total human social production in commodity societies, concealing and packaging these interactions in reified form. Sensing something underneath the reified surface of commodity relations, many Reclaiming practitioners through their paid and voluntary work seek to uncover this hidden social character of labour, albeit in narrow conditions and with limited total effect. And added to this picture of sociality in capitalist societies, we could include the labour of reproduction, now crystallised into the privatised domains of families and domesticity, out of which (gendered) ideals of relationality, kinship and generosity are socially distilled in opposition to those of individualism, competition and self-interest (see for example the discussion in Carrier 1995a:200–1). Upon these twin bases of semi-concealed relational forms in commodity society, Reclaiming practitioners build their relational practices.

Nonetheless, describing 'individualism' as an ideology should not distract us from the very material social conditions upon which this ideology has arisen. If the commodity form is 'fantastic', it is also deeply rooted within capitalist social conditions. As we have seen in myriad ways through Reclaiming practices, the everyday reality of effacement of relational sociality under capitalism shapes persons into their commodity form—possessing and possessed individuals—reaching deep into their corporeal perceptions. From these real reifications stem both the limitations in intercorporeal/relational practices that we have consistently encountered, and the centrality in Reclaiming of practices of self-exploration and self-possession that we earlier associated with a 'fetishism of the individual'. Seeing these contradictory conditions—of the 'fantastic forms' of the commodity and the 'real social

relations' of shared personhood—we can recognise in them the split conception in Reclaiming of personhood itself, the internalisation of these contradictions as divisions between Talking, Younger and Deep Self.

In this sense, what LiPuma describes as an 'ideology' could perhaps be better understood in Gramsci's terms as 'hegemony', fusing the sense of ideas and practices inherent in prevailing social institutions. While this hegemony of the individual is never total, we can see it constantly fortified and reinscribed in and through the practices that constitute Western capitalism's total social processes, expressed through people's daily lives. People cannot help but embody and reproduce these conditions in order to function and subsist within capitalist conditions. Thus this hegemony can be challenged, as Reclaiming practitioners seek to do to some effect. Yet the hegemonic conditions are also constantly reasserted, thus partially curtailing, derailing or diverting the challenges offered.

This hegemony of commodity conditions and individualised sociality does not eliminate patterns of gift exchange and relational sociality. Rather, as Carrier suggests, gift and commodity forms exist in active relation to one another, even in Western societies (Carrier 1995a:201–6). Nonetheless, the hegemony of commoditisation impacts upon the forms of the gift and therefore on how relational elements of personhood are expressed. In particular, as we have seen, a separation of practices and ideas of gift-giving from general social subsistence has tended to allow an ideology of "pure" voluntarism and generosity to accumulate around gift exchange (Carrier 1995a:151). Furthermore, the collision of gift and commodity form can create tensions such as those experienced by Jessica in the Eros path. This is a dissonance that Carrier points to as a broader social phenomenon, arising when these rarefied realms of gift and commodity overlap, as they frequently must (e.g. Carrier 1995a:173–181).

Carrier points to the informal economy as an exception to this separation of subsistence from gift exchange (Carrier 1995a–194). Reclaiming practitioners

likewise seek means around the margins of subsisting in more personally relational and more 'sacred' conditions than those offered on the labour market: through work-for-trade and through 'spiritually fulfilling' personal labours as body workers, writers or craftspeople. But most Reclaiming members cannot subsist indefinitely or wholly on informal exchange. Most have to find paid work on the capitalist marketplace. And here we see differences in experience and attitude to paid labour coloured among other things by the practitioner's class position: it is more likely for middle class community members in professional jobs to experience 'right relation' with respect to their paid work. As we have seen, working class members can find it more difficult to feel spiritual at work; they instead experience the abstraction Marx associates with the wage-labour process of persons turning themselves into commodities for sale.

One final layer to this picture is the distinction we must draw between the different shapes individualisation of the person takes in commodity societies. The individualism of autonomous, self-interested persons celebrated in Reclaiming—the kind of individualism also characteristic of academic writing—is an individualism of 'successful social atoms': middle class often professional people who, by virtue of their success socially and at their work have attained a certain sense of independence, creativity and holism about their lives (see comments in Carrier 1995a:198, 211 n1). But there is another kind of individualism—that of abstraction and rationalisation, of commoditisation of work and social life—which is experienced and lived by practitioners but in a way which is generally set at the margins of their religious practice. This is the less conscious awareness of separation of matter from matter and person from person associated with the ideas of Talking Self, distraction and fragmentation, the mundane daily grind, and the dead matter of nuclear power plants. These are the experiences of commodity relations that practitioners tend to efface as less real or true than the sacred cosmos of interconnection they strive to exemplify.

The two forms of individualism are related—reflections of each other from different social standpoints under total social conditions of commodity relations. The individualised 'successful social atoms' of Reclaiming bear similarities to Marx's 'isolated monads' discussed in Chapter 4. Included in the 'rights of man' attributed to these monads of capitalist society is the right to own property (Marx [1843]1967:235–7). These social atoms are thus in some ways expressions of these property relations of capitalism, albeit in modified form. The atomisation of this social layer is different to that of the labourer taking commodity form on the labour market, yet both can be seen as manifestations of common social conditions.

In addition to the hegemonic framework of commoditisation, the middle-class social position of many leading practitioners must therefore be seen as substantially conditioning the specific ways community members choose to emphasise and expand underlying relational forms in their collective practices. Hence, handcrafted objects—works of the artist or artisan—are put forward to counter mass-produced items; 'right relation' work of chosen service or considerate management is emphasised against wage-labour relations. These are of course not the only shapes that relational challenges to commodity conditions could take, even in relation to production: unionisation, mass organising, co-management or worker-run worksites likewise present alternatives to the atomisation of the labour market. Yet, while there are unionists, community organisers and mass-movement activists among Reclaiming practitioners, the exploration of relational sociality central to this community's practices take the curiously individualised and interiorised forms we have seen of self-exploration through ritual work. Yet, whatever the contradictions of these practices for challenging individualisation, this reaching out towards relationality nonetheless reflects that the commoditised, atomised personhood of Western sociality is simply a hegemonically produced, continuously conditioned, living mask, which cannot totally erase a reality of humans in constant, overlapping, sensuous relationship with each other.

# Displacement

## The locus of personhood

For many of the theorists of commoditised sociality we have been discussing, there *are* real social relations that underlie commoditised forms. These relations can be foregrounded and built upon in myriad ways, such as those developed in Reclaiming through gift-objects and work–for–trade labour. Reclaiming material practices can be seen as aiming to unmask the 'fantastic form' of exchanges of things which overlays these social relations, attempting to get at the underlying reality that persons in commodity societies are in fact always in relation with other human beings.

But many practitioners go further than this, and speak of the illusory quality of commodity reality as a whole. We see this in Rose and Karen's sidelining of the matter of industrial modernity. In another way, it was expressed in a piece circulated by Starhawk over email in the midst of unfolding economic crisis in October 2008, entitled 'Meltdown Strategies: Financial Disaster and Climate Change':

> The present economic woes are frightening, but the environmental crisis is truly terrifying. With all the furor about falling markets and frozen credit, nothing real has changed in the economy. Granted, the repercussions will be that many of us have less money in our pockets and fewer opportunities. But we still have the natural resources we had a month ago. We still have our skills, our knowledge, and our productive capacity. What we've lost is a towering edifice of icing with no cake underneath.
>
> But environmental meltdown means we lose the real basis of economy and survival.

Here we see a tendency to see the social impacts of human social relations (the economic crisis) as less real than the environmental impacts of human social relations (climate change). While stories filter through my email inbox of twelve parking lots in Santa Barbara given over to people living out of their cars, of an 80-year-old woman's attempted suicide at the foreclosure of her home, the downplaying of the ontological status of the economic crisis as "nothing real

has changed" seems to set aside the human costs of the unravelling of these social relations which the economic crisis represents.

Valentine captures this sentiment in its more generalised form:

> Witches share with mystics from every religious and cultural background a common insight into the nature of reality. The day-to-day world of apparently separate things—its tasks and worries, its striving, lonely consciousness—is an illusion. Like a veil, it covers an infinitely complex, unified and joyful dance of ever-becoming ensouled creation (Starhawk and Valentine 2001:156).

Such a thoroughgoing approach to downgrading the material world is not very compatible with the theories of commoditisation outlined above. While some writers in the Marxist tradition likewise speak of the "illusory" qualities of commodity relations, they are writing in an epistemological sense rather than an ontological one. As Lukács describes the unfolding of social processes that challenge reification:

> ...the rigidly reified existence of the objects of the social process will dissolve into mere illusion...That is to say...*things should be shown to be aspects of processes* (Lukács [1922]1971:179).

For Lukács, as for Marx, countering the surface appearances of reification can only take place in a series of practical steps directed against the tangible manifestations of these forms. It is not in *assuming* their form as illusory, but in taking on these institutions in concrete struggle, that a path is opened by which these reified social forms can be unravelled:

> [T]hese manifestations are by no means merely modes of thought, they are the forms in which contemporary bourgeois society is objectified. Their abolition, if it is to be a true abolition, cannot simply be the result of thought alone, it must also amount to their *practical* abolition as the *actual forms of social life* (Lukács [1922]1971:177).

In contrast to this "practical abolition", Valentine sees the dissolution of this "mere illusion" as taking place in processes of ideation: learning to see the world in a new way; changing one's consciousness through magical practice.

There is thus a tendency in Reclaiming to see a truer kind of 'reality' in this other realm of "ensouled creation". And this becomes significant in addressing questions of personhood, in that, for many practitioners over years of magical practice, this realm comes to take form as an important locus, perhaps the most important, of a practitioner's being. Thus the centrality of this magical realm for connecting practitioners to their Deep Selves, to other entities and to the web of life reflects the centrality of this realm for practitioners' sense of where their true selves can be found. Significantly, this realm of the numinous contains the features of personhood that practitioners see as most fundamental to themselves. It is from here that they draw guidance and recognise relationships, and it is through this realm that they direct many of their world-transforming attentions and actions.

Understanding this numinous realm as the principal locus of personhood for practitioners helps us to appreciate more fully why this realm is so central to how they seek to effect change. Sending energy out into the world in magical work, building a cone of power through directed intention, is for practitioners a means of impacting *directly* on social relations between people and with the rest of existence. We can see this perhaps most clearly with the instrumental political magic. In one example, a member of an activist coven brought stones back from the site of an anti-nuclear action, to enable the coven to magically 'travel' to this site and prepare their ground in advance of the action. In this way, practitioners use the relationships with each other and with places and objects in the magical realm to alter the way these things manifest on the physical plane. Rose and David described how, doing such work, they encountered others along the way, and even unfriendly entities that they believed were probably people employed to defend the institutions of power-over, who were magically attempting to block, interfere with or divert their magical work:

> I don't think we thought we were the only ones doing it, because sometimes when we would trance, we'd see. Sometimes we'd see things that didn't seem so friendly. But other times we'd see something else.

> See people walking around, you know. See people and say, "Oh, those people fell asleep when they were trancing."

Thus, in the realm of magical activity, quite complex interactions are often seen to take place, between persons and with places and things. By frustrating or unweaving the source of danger, obstruction or alienation in the numinous realm, or by sending healing and renewal to sites of activity they wish to strengthen, practitioners see themselves as working through the relations on the numinous level to effect change in the physical world. This is seen as at least as effective, and often more effective, than working directly through the patterns of reification that often hamper truly 'connected' activity on the physical plane.

The centrality of the numinous realm to Reclaiming personhood is also well illustrated with respect to notions of intention and magical will. In Reclaiming ritual planning, the intention of a ritual is arrived at by lateral and intuitive means, through trance, visioning and drawing from the sense among planners of the ideas that spring up 'spontaneously' in the planning. In ritual, this intention is then accomplished through focusing the magical will, where will is understood not as want, but as courage and focus, coupled with awareness of how to move with the currents of the wider flow of energy, to recognise how the self is embedded within the whole. The magical will calls out the actions of practitioners in the world by tying those actions to the energetically interconnected totality. We can therefore understand this numinous realm as providing the motivating environment for a practitioner's agency. Drawing together Reclaiming ideas about the energetic web of life, Deep Self, will and intention, we can see that for Reclaiming practitioners, appropriate action is not simply the product of an isolated agent, but is directed with reference to this cosmic totality. Magical will, purposeful action and intention are generated and guided by practitioners' awareness of their embedding in the total web of life, and these things are understood and recognised by practitioners in communion with their Deep Selves.

Here again, Strathern's analysis of relational sociality is useful; she suggests that, in order to understand dividual personhood, agency too must be radically reconceived. In relational societies, she argues, people's actions are called out not from within themselves as unitary agents, but from the myriad social relations which constitute them. Dividuals see themselves as acting because of their relationships, not because of individualised will or intention, as the liberal individualist model would have it. In dividual societies, therefore, the cause and the site of action are separated from one another in a way which is hard to conceive of from within Western discourses of the unitary actor (Strathern 1988:268–274, Strathern 1987).

Reference to the realm of spirit in Reclaiming can likewise be seen as a reference to this de-centring of agency from the individual subject. Thus again, we see that in many important ways, personhood in Reclaiming can be understood as located in a backdrop of relationships that practitioners see as expressed and mediated in large part through the numinous realm. Yet unlike in Strathern's model, agency rests not with the total *concrete* social relations in which actors are embedded, but with the generalised *cosmic* relations seen to exist in the realm of spirit. And while practitioners protest that these realms—concrete and cosmic—parallel each other immediately, as we have seen they have a tendency to become separated or disconnected. Magical practice is seen as a key means to realign with the deeper realm to tap once again into guidance and direction. Thus, the Reclaiming model of cosmic interconnection is not relational in the immediate sense that Strathern suggests for Melanesian societies, but is conducted most fundamentally in the rarefied realm of spirit. This is where practitioners find their touchstone for meaningful action and the most common locus of their world-transforming activity.

## A thing a lot like life but without the soul

Looking at this numinous realm as the key locus of personhood also allows us to see how commodity fetishism itself reappears in this realm. The core of commodity fetishism is the idea that human products come to seem to take on

a life and power of their own outside of conscious human will. According to Marx, these ideas culminate in the view that invested money and land under possession of a landlord are mysteriously self-generating in value, as though the myriad processes of human-fuelled production that create interest, dividends and rent do not exist. This, he says, is the completion of the mystification of capitalism, "the bewitched, distorted and upside-down world haunted by Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre, who are at the same time social characters and mere things" (Marx [1894]1991:969).

Certainly, this is often the immediate form that social relations seem to take for many Reclaiming practitioners, living in a society governed by the practices of capitalism which seem at times to barrel on regardless of human will. George articulates this in looking back to the early 1980s as Reagan intervened in Nicaragua and El Salvador, while the numbers of people in the direct action movement declined:

> …at the time they seemed like, 'Why are we doing this? This is insane! Jimmy Carter gave aid to Nicaragua after the revolution, and Reagan comes in, stops the aid, and starts giving aid to the Contra.' It's like, shit. But now we look back and say this was part of a carefully…it's almost as if *there was a thought process that no individual had, and yet Capital had its own thought process* of, 'We cannot let these little revolutions happen. This is not OK. You know, we lost Vietnam, but by God we can't let these little hotspots spring up, we have to—even if we can't stop 'em, we have to smash them so hard that the next country will be scared to try it. Let's just make a wreck of Central America, even if we can't overthrow the Sandinistas, let's make a wreck of Nicaragua, and then maybe Guatemala won't want to go that route.

> But no one was thinking that exactly. It's like—I mean, you know what I'm talking about, *there's a logic of Capital that I think was formed in those years*, and it was…God, if I look at my future I think, how different will it look in twenty years, we'll look back at this period and say, there was a logic of Capital that we never could have stopped.

> But when we're in the moment, we want to believe we can, we want to believe that it *is* about people, and it *is* about changing people's minds. But, God, it just—it seemed like a monster at that time, and it didn't— looking back, *it doesn't seem it was about the human beings, like Reagan and them. It was about a logic of the system.* [Italics my own]

Looking back on this era of reversals of the earlier social movements, we can see how, in George's description, commodity fetishism appears on this grand scale, so that the decisions made by politicians and generals appear to him as the actions of a 'system' outside of human control. These ideas of a system of capital that "seemed like a monster" and "had its own thought process" well illustrate Marx's contention that capitalist relations easily become transmuted into personifications of capital.

But what is most interesting about this propensity to reify capital in Reclaiming comes into view when we see how these personifications express themselves in the magical realm. Working with a coven dedicated to instrumental political magic in the 1980s, Rose explains the understanding that she came to:

> …one of the things that became known to me in my work with [this coven] is that there's an entity—there's something that man created out of greed. It has no soul. And maybe it's Capitalism, or maybe it's…the Corporation—there's something that was created to be a lot like life, but without the *soul*. And that is responsible, as well as through man—the men who created that, and the men who keep it going, the people.

For Rose, this soulless entity in fact took shape at a particular moment in history around the rise of the capitalist system. She and David spoke to me about the work they did travelling back through time to the sixteenth century, around the time of Elizabeth I, Phillip II of Spain and John Dee:

> **Rose:** We were looking for the entity that had been created—the sort of like, the Corporation—the soulless entity that could sit. And looking for the deals that were made that really changed things.

> **David:** I don't remember we were [looking for this], but we certainly found it. I don't—I didn't identify it as such at the time. And we felt we saw…the threads of whatever corruption we're currently living with.

For Rose and David, Capital or the Corporation itself has taken on a form 'a lot like life'; it has become reified into a separate entity that acts as an independent agent, whose origins and existence can be detected, understood and challenged in the realm of the numinous.

This is perhaps the sharpest expression of commodity fetishism I encountered in Reclaiming. Despite practitioners' attempts to foreground gift practices to develop a relational sociality, here commodity fetishism returns to the Reclaiming cosmos within the numinous realm itself, in the form of the soulless entity of the Corporation. Here, the dislocation of human internal and social processes that we have encountered in previous chapters—the separation of the qualities of Deep Self tied to a relational, vibrant personhood from those of Talking Self tied to rationalisation—crystallises in a splitting off of the human social creations of the rationalised world into a separate, singular, soulless entity that grows and spreads on its own. For Rose, this entity exists, and must be fought—through social activism, and just as importantly through magical activism that looks to unravel it on the energetic realm. Thus the reification of consciousness conditioned by processes of disenchantment and alienation under capitalism here culminates in this reification of the source of the disenchantment itself.

This process of separation and reification of the soulless entity can be seen as stemming from Reclaiming cosmology. This cosmology seeks to restore an understanding of the relationships between things and their particular qualities by reference to a view of the cosmos as inherently harmonious, reciprocal and self-restoring. As a result of this emphasis on harmony, as we saw earlier, most practitioners view certain aspects of the human-created environment as spiritually not alive. This has a tendency to set these objects apart from the relations that are believed to govern the universe. While Starhawk acknowledges, "[n]or is the nuclear power plant an object; it too is one aspect of a complex system of relationships" (Starhawk [1982]1988:44), nonetheless, in being characterised by practitioners as outside of the sacred network of cosmic relations, the power plant must be understood as partaking of these social relationships in a different way to other 'natural' entities. Being external to the sacred relations, such entities tend to become reified as separate and objectified—a lifeless force—within the magical realm. When Rose says, "there's this *overlay*; there's this, there's this *stuff*—not necessarily very good

stuff—that has gotten out of control, and is covering the Earth," she effaces the human social relationships that have given rise to this stuff, so that in the final analysis, it seems to be granted self-reproducing capacities of its own.

Finally, dualism re-enters the cosmology in the form of good and evil, soulful and soulless, sacred and profane: as Rose says, "all of a sudden, where there was perhaps no good and evil, then there *was*." It is disenchantment and reification within the material world that is at the heart of this. Thus, we might suggest, the reification of the material world underpins precisely this undoing of the possibility of unification of these dualisms. With reified, disenchanted conditions in the world, objects such as Rose's 'overlay of stuff' come to seem separate from the deep relations that practitioners believe underlie these conditions of reification. Most practitioners articulate this general sense by placing such objects outside of their realm of the sacred-interconnected, which otherwise is understood to encompass the whole cosmos. Being removed from this realm, such objects come to take on a life of their own, to seem monstrous, soulless and evil.

As human beings become abstracted and atomised, treated as things; as things replace humans as the apparent independent actors in the world; a relational sociality becomes difficult to apprehend, even for those like Reclaiming practitioners who work toward it consistently, creatively and with conscious intention. Thus, we see the key expressions of relational personhood in Reclaiming prised apart from immediate physical relations and displaced into a realm of 'spirit' or 'energy'. And even in this magical realm, where practitioners believe social relations are at their most fully formed, here capital takes on a life of its own, becomes an entity in its own right, reified into separate, soulless form and grown into monstrous proportions, but remaining outside of these life-affirming social relations that practitioners see as underpinning the entire cosmos and their own relational, social being.

# Conclusion

Magical cognition, as expressed within Reclaiming, involves a recognition of overlapping ontology between beings and matter which is not generally visible within the rationalised discourses and practices dominant in Western modernity. Reclaiming members look to foreground their recognition of this 'participation' of persons and objects in each others' being through a set of social practices aimed at building relationality between themselves and with the natural world. Through circles and social networks; in gleaning lessons from their physical environment; through techniques of intertwining corporeality; and through their practices of object use and exchange, which seek to turn commodities into gifts, they achieve a measure of success in developing a more consciously relational disposition. In particular, using methods for altering consciousness—shamanic transformation, aspecting, and invoking the uncanny—practitioners work to disturb the boundaries of individualised personhood and unsettle a sense of singular consciousness which otherwise becomes sedimented in their everyday lives. These techniques open up practitioners' consciousness, allowing them to embrace an awareness of other people and the natural world around them within their cognitive perceptions. In doing so, practitioners foreground many forms of relational sociality that exist under a veneer of individualism in Western modernity: from family gift-giving to intercorporeal mimesis, from sexual intertwining to collective experiences in crowds.

This Reclaiming longing for interconnection can be seen as driven by what Foucault calls the 'government of individualisation' in the operations of institutions in wider US urban modernity: by alienation, rationalisation, reification and commodity fetishism, which serve to constitute persons as both atomised and abstracted from the sensuous immediacy of their experience. Practitioners reflect concerns about these pressures of separation and abstraction, both overtly in their fears about becoming 'disconnected' through everyday activities in what they see as a fragmented, harried modern world,

and in shaping practices of resistance that specifically foreground interconnection and sensuous particularity. They seek to resist these pressures not only through working on themselves, but also through political activism in street marches and community organisations, and through ritual activism to effect change in the numinous realm, by which they hope to impact back upon the institutions, systems and patterns of estrangement they see as lying at the root of modernity's malaise. At their most successful, particularly in their witchcamp retreats, Reclaiming members are able to create numinous worlds of wonder and beauty, in which over a hundred people open up a sense of connection to each other and to their environment, thus illustrating the rapid transformations in personhood and sociality that are possible beyond the atomising effects of encounters with modern institutionalised individualism.

Yet practitioners in many ways reproduce the reifications they seek to resist within their practices. This is seen most especially in their three-part model of consciousness, in the separation of public-rationalised Talking Self from private-sensuous Younger Self and heavily internalised Deep Self. This internalised reification opens the door to a return of the dualisms they seek to overcome: in splits between sensuous/analytical and animal/human that arise within their being, and between nature/culture, spirit/matter and sacred/profane that re-emerge within their wider theories, visions and practices. Ultimately, these splits within their model of consciousness help condition the individualisation of Reclaiming practices: the sense that, in order to achieve 'alignment' and act purposefully and consciously in the world, it is necessary to 'go within' to find connection with the cosmos.

Practitioners believe that it is only through deep communication, intense work, and alignment with the sacred that it is possible to develop meaningful, harmonious relations with others and with the wider world. This tenet—which underpins much of Reclaiming practice—reflects what the problem of being-in-relation explored throughout this work, which arises out of an epistemology of individualism that we have seen conditions Reclaiming praxis, as it does broader processes in US modernity. In particular, this tenet reflects the

enduring valorisation of a particular form of unique, self-expressive individualism at the heart of Reclaiming ethics, which lends the development of connection and harmonious relations a curiously individualised form within Reclaiming methodology. At its most challenging within Reclaiming, this epistemological individualism can fuel conflicts over power and position: over whose individuality should be expressed, when, and how. Likewise, it leads to questions over what forms relationality should take, and over the most appropriate boundaries for relational expression: whether a relational sociality should be expressed across small groups of affinity or extend across wider reaches of sociality. In practice, in the conflicts and tensions that arise, we see that empowerment through connection to the unified, sacred, diversified cosmos is not itself a guarantee of harmony in action.

In the face of a fragmented, atomised world, Reclaiming members seek a sense of coherence. This turns them at times both 'inward' and 'upward'—towards a longing for 'wholeness' and 'integration' within, and towards internalised connection with the cosmos of sacred interconnection. This reflects the layering and deep interiority Taylor associates with Western personhood in late modernity. The Reclaiming model of personhood that results is a complex field of interlocking 'parts' and moments of 'connection' and 'disconnection', in which a person's most essential sense of their humanity and their connection with others is to be found deep within, in the sacred realm of Deep Self.

Often the forms that result from Reclaiming efforts at self- and world-transformation represent not the thorough-going relationality described within Strathern's 'dividual' conception of personhood, but hybridities that incorporate hegemonic conceptions of individualised personhood while attempting to resist them. The use of symbolic simile to explain magical working, and a frequent reliance upon the generic and hazy notion of 'energy' as a mediator of cause and effect at a distance, reflect ongoing hesitations within Reclaiming about matter's ability to connect to, and participate in, matter. Naming practices display a desire for modes of address that recognise relationships with the natural and magical worlds, while retaining a level of

individualism in being markers of a particular person's identity. Related to this is the veneration of the individual in Reclaiming mythos, reflected in claims to each person as their own spiritual authority and as a unique expression of the divine, even in the midst of practices aimed at dissolution in the ecstatic peak of ritual. Such hybridities of form reflect limits to the sense of overlapping ontology of being which practitioners are able to articulate and act upon through their magical work.

The limits practitioners reach in attempting to develop relational practices can ultimately be seen as driven by reifications in the world: by institutions of rationalisation and commoditisation which frustrate their ability to develop more numinous, interconnected ways of being. In amongst the beautiful rituals of sacred personal transformation designed to disrupt normativities, binaries of gender and sexuality surface. Amidst numinous practices of bodies generously given to one another, the commodity relations of wage-labour come into view. Within the magical space of a witchcamp, images of violence and 'power-over' intrude. And when returning from witchcamp to function in the everyday world of 'boring jobs' and supermarkets, the pressures of reified interactions drive practitioners back into becoming 'unconscious' much more than they would like, despite their efforts to the contrary.

Reclaiming practices show us the potential that exists for transforming sociality in a context where individualisation is dominant: possibilities for building relational practices by extending and foregrounding existing—albeit often hidden—practices of relationality within wider social settings. They also show us the limits reached when those practices must regularly come face to face with the atomising processes of commoditised modernity. In order to effect their social transformations, practitioners rely upon creating a world set apart from the harried effects of rationalisation and commoditisation: physically in the creation of sacred space and the removed locale of witchcamps, and mythologically in the idea of the sacred, harmonious, interconnected, total cosmos which excludes the sites of industrialisation—the busy intersections and nuclear power plants—that practitioners disdain. This

has the effect at times of eliminating from their magical view some of the less easily numinous experiences of practitioners' wider lives. Eventually, these fields of estranged relations and destructive technology, effaced within theories and practices of the sacred, can intrude back into their magical spaces, even taking on reified form within the realm of the numinous: "something a lot like life but without the soul".

Theories of rationalisation, reification and commodity–gift relations have been useful here in helping to unpack many of the dynamics that Reclaiming members feel impact upon their daily lives, and the processes through which they seek to remake the world. In Reclaiming, I have encountered concerns about the same dynamics these theories address: of separation, dislocation, atomisation and abstraction. In Reclaiming practices, we see both conscious and unconscious resistance to these processes of alienation and disenchantment: more conscious, for example, in practices aimed at overcoming estrangement through developing relationships with the natural world; less conscious, but arguably no less central, in the patterns of object use so central in Reclaiming and other Pagan social settings, which work to transmit and forge a relational sociality. Theories of commodity and gift exchange in particular help us to recognise how practitioners reflect relationships through carrying the 'personhood' of others in objects displayed on their altars and personal spaces.

In drawing on these theories, it has been important to recognise the complexity reflected within them. It is not sufficient to identify 'Western modernity' with commodities, rationalisation and reification; rather, in Reclaiming practices we see how both commodity and gift forms, rationalisation and enchantment, reification and interconnection exist side-by-side, come into confrontation, occasionally collide, and even at times reinforce each other. For example, it is useful to note that a hegemony of reified commodity relations appears to coproduce its corollary in a particularly idealised form of ingenuous, endlessly open giving, such as was displayed in the Eros path. Overall, the complex processes whereby practitioners seek to

achieve relational forms of sociality illustrate that the commoditised, atomised personhood of Western modernity, while deeply shaping Reclaiming praxis, fails to completely erase the overlapping, sensuous, corporeal relations humans experience with each other and with the world around them.

Central to understanding this complexity are the many forms that individualism takes both within and beyond Reclaiming. Among Reclaiming members, as 'successful social atoms', the mode of individualism that is validated is a self-expressive, emotionally articulate and artistically creative individualism suited to the degree of education, lines of work and level of social confidence typical of many core practitioners. Reclaiming members reject both the individualism associated with greed and possessiveness under capitalist conditions—particularly that of the manager or owner of a large capitalist institution—and the atomising individualism of wage-labour relations. Many also consciously distance themselves from what they see as the acquisitive consumption and social atomisation of the 'suburbs'. In other words, while practitioners build their practices around what they see as the importance of honouring the sacred within each individual, this is a particular kind of individualism suited to their particular social position. While it seems likely that these forms of individualism are related—that the artisanal individualism of a well-educated Reclaiming member cannot be separated from the overarching social relations that likewise produce and condition these other forms—in general, practitioners tend not to make any connection between their validation of themselves as 'sacred' individuals and the various expressions of individualism they reject.

Certainly, the Reclaiming engagement with practices of self- and social-transformation shows us that the liberal individualist model of persons as unitary, bounded, autonomous and rational does not hold as a description of personhood among this layer of largely middle class European-Americans living in urban US modernity, despite a commonplace understanding that such a social layer would perhaps most typify 'American individualism'. The longing for wholeness we find in Reclaiming cannot completely erase the sense

practitioners have of their own partial and internally disjointed makeup. No more can a socially conditioned conception of bounded identity remove the sense practitioners have of being given to each other and to their environment; nor can an overarching social expectation of rational self-consistency eliminate the imprecise experience of being embodied. While Reclaiming members seek to affirm some aspects of individualism and challenge others, what we find in Reclaiming is a set of practices and ideas that reflect the complexity of personhood obtaining in reality, defying liberal individualism or any other simple model of personhood.

One of the most valuable things to be gleaned from a study of a community such as Reclaiming, engaged in complex ritual and magical practices in contemporary Euro-American settings, is that there are practices and forms of knowledge that go beyond the rationally calculable and analytical discourses of social science. In other words, what can be learnt through the imprecision of bodily disposition, through corporeal intertwining, or through altered states of consciousness is not always immediately apparent within the halls of the academy nor immediately apprehensible to rationalised social science. As other anthropologists have pointed out, in the development of modern rationalised discourses, the kinds of relational awareness that Lévy-Bruhl named 'participation' have become marginalised as sources of knowledge. In groups such as Reclaiming, these have been recovered by being encompassed under the rubric of 'magic'. Since rationalised fields of knowledge are those which tend to break systems down into their component parts, and in the social sciences are those which are intimately tied to what Foucault has called the 'figure of man', these discourses of social science are intimately connected to patterns and processes of individualisation. As social practices such as Reclaiming continue to emerge, attempting to confront atomisation and challenge the disenchantment of the world, questions remain as to how fully our social sciences can adapt to encompass these non-rationalised, non-linear, often anti-analytical means of apprehending the world, not simply as fields of study, but as sources of knowledge in their own right.

# Appendix A

## The Reclaiming foundation myth

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

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

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

All began in love; all seeks to return to love. Love is the law, the teacher of wisdom, and the great revealer of mysteries (Starhawk [1979]1999:41).

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