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Journal Title: The Politics of women's spirituality : essays on the rise of spiritual power within the feminist movement /

Call #: HQ1154 .P6

Location: I-UNIVLIB STACKS

Volume:

Item #:

Issue:

Month/Year: 1987

Pages:

Article Author: Kay Turner

Article Title: Contemporary Feminist Rituals

Electronic Delivery? Yes

Imprint:

Shipping address if no ElecDel:

Debbie Dale
CA 335
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all energy for projects and enterprise. Human effort is seen in a realistic fashion. Times of depression and withdrawal are expected, and there is no intense pressure to effect major changes in one's life or circumstances immediately. The philosophy of Witchcraft is a patient one that encourages steady, gradual transformation.

This attitude toward change guides the procedures for all rituals and spells directed toward self-transformation. At holiday gatherings, for example, Starhawk uses a cup of wine to encourage meditation about gradual change. She passes the cup around the circle and asks each covener to gaze into the wine and envision herself changed in some desirable fashion — either in outlook or in material circumstances. Each Witch then swallows just a small sip of the changed picture she has projected into the wine. No sudden alteration is expected. Nevertheless, by visualizing the change, a goal for self-development has been set. By symbolically internalizing that goal in the small swallow of wine, Witches hope to initiate a cycle of progress toward it.

With the moon as their main metaphor for growth and development, Witches have a theme of a slow and steady process in any work of psychological transformation they might undertake. A place for the wandering moon encourages acceptance of inevitable setbacks and regressions as well.

Contemporary Feminist Rituals

Kay Turner

Comprehend, we sweat out our rituals together. We change them, we're all the time changing them! But they body our sense of good!

—MARGE PIERCY, *Woman on the Edge of Time*

The body is the image relator. In ritual, we *embody* and activate images of the archetypal, the eternal feminine, the Goddess. Images of power, of transformation, of harmony, and of duality. One woman empowering another. The crucial exchange of gifts. I cross the circle to give you something; you cross the circle to give her something. And so on until we have all changed places. Power held is powerless; power given is power for all. In feminist ritual we maintain a center of which we are all aware. It is our collective heart which beats there. We hold together, our center endures. Even the most painful separation, the dispersal which is feared but necessary, cannot disconnect us from that ritual circle. Once that circle is created and affirmed, chaos is subdued. We survive. We thrive.

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Although some theoretical attention has been given to the recent spiritual awakening within the women's movement, very little writing has been directed toward analysis of the use of ritual by women. What do these ritual acts mean to contemporary U.S. feminists? And what is their significance in terms of the women's movement?

Feminists are primarily at work revising the male-biased ideological bases of culture; some are now engaged in the creation of rituals to promote and sanction this serious turning away from the old to the new. As in traditional societies, feminist ritual provides an emotional, descriptive, intensified and sanctifying version of emergent ideological systems. Feminist ritual offers an imagistic revitalization for women and a participation in the concrete, bodily expressive creation of new images of the feminine which helps alleviate the stress of liminality.

The evaluation of culture by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo in her theoretical overview for *Woman, Culture and Society* serves as useful background material for answering why women have created rituals as an expression of the need for revitalization and as an impetus for political action. First, Rosaldo establishes a model for interpreting the difference in status between men and women, a model based on extensive contemporary cross-cultural analysis of male/female roles and behavior. She states that "an asymmetry in the cultural evaluations of male and female, in the importance assigned to women and men, appears to be universal."¹ This asymmetry is manifested in

the fact that male, as opposed to female, activities are always recognized as predominantly important, and cultural systems give authority and value to the roles and activities of men. . . . Everywhere, from those societies we might want to call most egalitarian to those in which sexual stratification is most marked, men are the locus of cultural value.²

Over the past few thousand years women have not been culturally granted a legitimate, overt way of demonstrating their power, their personhood. Only men define, possess, and confer power or authority, and power is the necessary ingredient for the creation of culture. Women are therefore consigned to live on the fringes of culture, locked in domestic zones which are rarely defined as part of the cultural territory. Rosaldo elaborates this point by using Mary Douglas's notion of "the anomalous."

Recent studies of symbolic culture have suggested that whatever violates a society's sense of order will be seen as threatening, nasty, disorderly, or wrong. Douglas has called this sort of thing "anomalous." The idea of

"order" depends, logically, on "disorder" as its opposite, yet society tries to set such things aside Insofar as men . . . define the public order women are their opposite. Where men are classified in terms of ranked, institutional positions, women are simply women and their activities, interests and differences receive only idiosyncratic note.³

Women are anomalies in many cultures and have no cultural recourse for demonstrating the reality of female power. Female power is almost without exception displayed covertly under the rubric of influence or association. But Rosaldo makes a unique claim for the possible use women may make of their anomalous or liminal positions.

Even though women's status is lowest in those societies where there is the greatest distinction between the public and domestic realms and where women are isolated from each other, "their position is raised when they can challenge those claims of male authority, either by taking on men's roles or by establishing social ties, by creating a sense of rank, order, and value in a world in which women prevail."⁴ It is also clear that historically women have taken on very active roles in social systems by "manipulating, elaborating, or undermining" their domestic roles and by stressing their differences from men. In other words, by giving special attention to their anomalous status, women have been able "to take on powers uniquely their own."⁵ Especially pertinent to our discussion, Rosaldo mentions the roles of nun, midwife, Witch, and religious prostitute as making particularly positive use of women's "anomalous" sexuality. "These examples suggest that the very symbolic and social conceptions [the notions of purity and pollution associated with women] that appear to set women apart and to circumscribe their activities may be used by women as a basis for female solidarity and worth."⁶

Of course it is most significant that these roles include the classic examples of women who have been allowed to utilize ritual means as a source of gaining and transferring power. Generally, men have held the rights to ritual use; in fact, the participation in ritual by men has been their most profound display of cultural authority and their most direct access to it. The performance of ritual in most societies, "primitive" and "civilized," is a simultaneous acknowledgment of men's warrant to create and define culture and, by exclusion, a sign to women to keep in their place, a place which we have already designated as outside culture and without the symbolic or real attributes of power.

Here we see a further distinction between the sacred and the profane based on the asymmetry of male-female relationships. Men have

claimed sacred space as their locus for effecting control over and/or maintaining harmony with each other and the Fates. As Mircea Eliade has shown, sacred space is "manifested space"; it is created as sacred by men and in most societies women have little or no access to it.⁷ Women live in the profane world, the world that is incapable of being transformed or of transforming those who live in it. Of course men live in the profane world too (in fact we all live there most of the time), but when they choose to do so (or when the "gods" command them to do so) they may enter another world, a world of the sacred, and through ritual practice they may take part in ordering that world and themselves. The sacred realm is that of being and becoming, a realm saturated with power and critically "off-limits" to the female half of the human species.

That women in the United States and elsewhere have begun to claim sacred space for themselves, to create rituals which emphasize their loyalty to each other and finally name the powers which men have found "anomalous" (i.e., nameless) is indeed an ultimate, radical (proceeding from the root) affirmation of the revolutionary potential of the feminist movement. Asserting the right to ritual means as a source of power, vision, and solidarity is the symbolic corollary of equal pay, choice of abortion, domestic freedom, the establishment of women's businesses, etc. Successful and enduring change in the status of women will come only through the parallel transformation of symbols and realities. Feminist ritual practice is currently the most important model for symbolic and, therefore, psychic and spiritual change in women.

Here I would like to describe briefly a number of feminist rituals which characterize but certainly do not exhaust the kind and variety of expression this form has taken.

In her *Spotted Bundle Enclosures*, artist Jody Pinto digs out old brick wells outside Philadelphia. At the bottom of these wells she leaves personal and found objects wrapped in animal skins. Next to these bundles Pinto makes a primitive fireplace with shards and cooking utensils. She constructs a ladder and leaves it down the side of the well as an invitation for others to come in. Reflecting on the creation of these ritual sites and her activity in them, Pinto writes, "The other day I spread wings/split a man in half/spent a year in the earth/excavated my own tomb/rolled over/cut out my heart/and ate it."⁸

Donna Henes's *Spider Woman Series* involves web-building in natural and urban environments. Henes defines web-making as the "most

basic female instinct" and has made a personal ritual of web-making over the past three years.⁹

Margi Gumpert, a Witch by trade and by faith, performs a specific ritual whenever she enters a public bathroom:

I often notice that the mirror reflects an image which makes me question myself, feel critical or dissatisfied with my appearance. I don't ignore it as trivial, because I recognize that the mirror is infested with a very common political poison, *virus hollywoodius* or *televisioniensis*, subtle pressure to measure up to a pattern designed to enslave. Just to free myself of that pressure isn't a magical operation. But hundreds of other women will use that mirror. So after I have cleared my own image of that false cloud, I usually perform some sort of magical activity to neutralize the poison. I pour suggestive energy into the mirror, encouraging anyone who might look in it to see herself in her true beauty. I reinforce the suggestion with all the power of my will and call on the Goddess of Beauty Herself, blessed Aphrodite, to banish that which would deny Her, as She exists in all of us.¹⁰

A ritual for the Autumn Equinox is performed yearly by a group of women living in the country near Wolf Creek, Oregon:

Let friends gather, each bringing with her an article which represents a recent accomplishment — some self-chosen task she has completed. Let a circle form and each one place her article in front of her, and next to it a fruit, seed, or cone. Join hands and chant in unison the names of all present — several times till the energy is high. Then pause and chant the months of the year from the Winter Solstice to the Autumn Equinox.

Now let each one in turn hold her article while she tells her friends of her accomplishment and something she has learned from it. When all have spoken, all shall pick up the fruit, seed or cone in front of them and picture inwardly the process of its change from seed to plant to flower to seed.

Again let each woman speak in turn of what her accomplishment has meant to her growth and how she thinks it may be useful to her self and others. At this time if she feels grateful, let her give thanks. If she wants to dance, let her move. When all have expressed their feeling, with closed eyes ask yourself "What is the next stage in the process of my growth?" Ask your inner self for energy and guidance to continue.

Let all join hands, moving closer into a hugging circle and repeat:

After the joy of harvest
After the work of the day
After the time of fulfillment
Comes the time of rest.
After the seed is planted
Nature takes care of the rest.¹¹

On the streets of downtown Boston a woman wearing a high feather headdress makes a circle of cornmeal, places three ears of corn in the center of the circle, and begins a rhythmic chant naming the goddesses of the Americas before the conquest (Tonantzin, Chicomecoatl, Blue Corn Girl, IxChel, etc.). After the chant is finished, she calls on women passing by, invites them into the circle, and blesses them by saying in litany form an ancient Aztec poem from the *Poesia Nahuatl*:

Now o friends
Listen to the words of a dream
Each spring brings us new life
The golden corn refreshes us
And the pink corn makes us a necklace
At least this we know:
The hearts of our friends are true.

While the women alternate in speaking the lines of the poem to each other, they hold an ear of corn between them and tear the sheaves down exposing the fresh corn.¹²

The following ritual was recounted in *Sundance*, a journal devoted to the study and sharing of dreams.

In a past issue of *WomanSpirit* there is an article by Hallie Iglehart describing an overnight wilderness event attended by twelve women. The purpose of the venture was to share dreams, become deeper friends and explore the meaning to each of them of being women. To prepare for dreaming together, the twelve women arranged their sleeping bags into a "wheel" surrounding a central pole. In addition, each woman had two strands of ribbon attached to her sleeping bag which were then attached to the pole, making a "dream net." The arrangement is quite similar to the May Pole and Sun Dance ceremonies, except, in this case, the people are lying down, asleep and dreaming. As an approximation to a contemporary experiment in revelation, a twelve-person "dream wheel" inspires continued exploration.¹³

By way of contrast and comparison, I want to present a woman's ritual which has been practiced on the Yucatan Peninsula for centuries. A form of this ritual is still performed today but the following account was recorded in 1930 by Basauri and translated by J. Eric Thompson in his "The Moon Goddess in Central America." The ceremony is called "the song of the roses," KAIK' MIKTE.

A hollow is made in a level place and filled with water. This hollow should be of sufficient size so that a woman may take a bath in it. The woman, who hopes to benefit from the ceremony is placed in it completely naked.

Once she is in and the liquid reaches to the height of her breasts, they [other women who participate in the ceremony] cover the surface with flowers. Several women, friends of the one to be benefited, the number of which may vary, but never falls below five, take hands and dance around the bather, some singing and others saying a prayer in Maya. The dance lasts an hour, and during that time the dancers take flowers which they have already prepared, stoop down to moisten them in the water in which the principal bathes, and throw them on the breast of the woman making the ceremony (la solicitante). During the dance it is the custom to make nine turns in one direction, stop a moment to moisten the flowers, and then repeat the same number of turns in the opposite direction. When the ceremony is ended, the dancers retire, the woman remains alone in the water, and, on coming out, she takes a quantity of it, which she carries with her to employ in the preparation of her husband's or lover's food.¹⁴

Although the ritual is ostensibly practiced to make their lovers remain faithful, the beauty of the ceremony lies in its kinship with all ritual acts, both past and present, which describe the healing, nurturing effect of tribal sisterhood. The overt goal of the ritual is not the only reason for performing it; something significant is taking place in the act of performance, too. An individual woman is uplifted and sacralized by her sisters, her *comadres*, her C-R group, her kind.

In "The Qualitative Leap Beyond Patriarchal Religion," theologian Mary Daly makes the following statement:

The Women's revolution is not merely about equality within a patriarchal society (a contradiction in terms). It is about *power* and redefining power. Within patriarchy, power is generally understood as power over people, the environment, things. In the rising consciousness of women, power is experienced as *power of presence* to ourselves and to each other, as we affirm our own being against and beyond the alienated identity bestowed upon us within the patriarchy. This is experienced as *power of absence* by those who would objectify women as "the other," as magnifying mirrors.¹⁵

Daly's insistence that redefinition of power is a central goal of the women's movement is crucial for understanding the use of ritual by feminists as a symbolic model for discovering how to give and get "power of presence." One woman empowers another (or herself) through reaffirmation of the body as an instrument of communion (not alienation).

None of the rituals mentioned above would be considered effective if a transfer of power had not resulted. Yet it is of critical importance to note that power is rarely considered an object of possession which the

group or individual may get hold of during ritual activity. What is stressed through ritual is the dynamic quality of power, the continual exchange of gifts which heightens the affirmative identity of all who participate. Power emanates from within as it is simultaneously received from without. For women in revolution it is imperative to create an entirely new value system, the heart of which will be a dramatic reassessment of the use of power. Ritual serves as a primary way of affirming commitment to that reassessment. The ritual setting provides a place for knowing the easy, direct exchange and sharing of power. Certainly ritual is an idealized microcosmic experience, but it may be an enduringly important means of invoking a new order of things in the macrocosm. At the very least, it has been a useful mode for envisioning what a different world for women might *feel* like.

The word "feeling" deserves special mention in connection with women's rituals. In fact it is a word we must never neglect in talking about any ritual. Evon Vogt once asked a ritual participant, "Why do you go through the ceremonies? Why do you do what you do?" The participant replied, "To feel better, I want to make myself feel better."¹⁶ In the context of ritual women are creating a space in which to feel better, to feel more, to feel the past as well as the future. Perhaps most important is the way in which ritual upholds and celebrates the validity of feeling as a mode of revelation, communication, and transvaluation. In some of the rituals described above, the flow of feelings, change in feelings, or sharing of feelings with others is a highly desirable goal in performing the ritual.

In discussing the reasons underlying the performance of ritual acts in the feminist community, we must underscore the importance of ritual as a formalized consecration of female bonding. The ritual concretization of the idea reflected in the popular feminist slogan "Sisterhood is Powerful" is extremely important in demonstrating the cohesiveness and commitment of the feminist community. A primary function of ritual is to connect the individual with the group—dramatically, indissolubly. In ritual the desire is to achieve shared meanings, shared resolutions, shared emotion, not to promote private images or dreams. The specific rites which comprise many feminist rituals reaffirm relationship, belonging, and identity. Ritual acts maintain a symbolic center of which all the participants are aware. This center is a place to which one can return for support and comfort long after the ceremony has ended. A relational or ideological bond cemented formally through ritual procedure is nothing if not enduring.

Being capable of membership in a group and finding ways of expressing that membership and acting it out are necessary for the success of any political revolution. Let us not forget that less than ten years ago Lionel Tiger told us "women do not bond"¹⁷ and in so saying implied women are incapable of creating significant political institutions. On the contrary, we often find that the female bonds established in ritual reinforce the female bonds that inspire social change. The use of ritual is significant as a source for the renewal of commitment to evolving and transforming society as a whole.

Many feminists consider the ritual setting and experience to serve as a visionary mode. In authentic ritual experience something, an ability to break through the present, is available which can lead to discovery and creativity. Ritual is a potent source of invention because the participants feel the extreme intensity, sometimes the ecstasy, of openness to possibility and revelation.

Another important consideration is the way feminist ritual purposefully imparts information of a special kind, information which has been unavailable to women and actually suppressed for hundreds of years. I refer specifically to the ritual communication of feminine images, primarily the communication of images of goddesses. The suppression of the Goddess in our culture has meant the loss of images which identify the personal and collective power in the female. Invocations to the goddesses, references to their attributes, a reclamation of the wealth of literature which remains to describe them, the putting on of their symbols—none of these ritual actions indicates a desire to return to a golden matriarchal age as some critics have suggested. It is much more crucial for feminists, for all women, to uncover and recover their imagistic heritage (as represented in the powers and tales of the goddesses) and to create new images which represent women's recent emergence (as many women in the plastic and performing arts are now doing) than it is to prove the absolute historical existence of a widespread matriarchy. I have no doubt that some matriarchies did exist. The important consideration, however, is not the fact that women ruled over men but that they "ruled" themselves and that they had culturally approved or at least culturally active models for distinguishing their particular powers from others. In many ancient civilizations the feminine world was not as "anomalous" as it currently is. Women had access to powerful images and used them to order and maintain their particular spheres of life.

One of the most important shrines in the pre-Conquest Mayan world

was located on Cozumel Island twenty miles off the coast of the Yucatan. It was dedicated to IxChel, the pre-eminent goddess of the moon, water, childbirth, weaving, and love, who was equal in status to the great father god, Itzamna. Her shrine was visited by women from all over the Mayan world, some traveling hundreds of miles from what is now Guatemala and El Salvador. Inside the shrine a giant image of the Goddess served as an oracle for the pilgrims. The statue was hollowed out in back; a priestess would stand in that profound cavity and impersonate the Goddess, become a speaking image of the Goddess and in essence *imagine* herself the Goddess. To imagine is to make an image or become an image; impersonation of this sort was an achievement of relation with the Goddess and a means of absorbing Her powers. Images are sources of identification; they tell us who we most profoundly, most archetypally are. The Mayan women who visited the shrine at Cozumel were seeking affirmation of their own powers (primarily the power to give birth, to be fruitful) and they received it through the pilgrimage itself (the association with peers), idol worship (intense identification with an image of power), and through the ritual blessing bestowed by the personified Goddess, the priestess.

Much the same identification is sought and achieved in feminist rituals. Ritual is a special vehicle of communication for feminists; ritual speaks a visceral language of the restoration of symbols and provides an opportunity to utilize them personally. Sherry Ortner says that "Efforts directed solely at changing the social institutions cannot have far-reaching effects if cultural language and imagery continue to purvey a relatively devalued view of women."¹⁸ The imagery conveyed woman-to-woman in ritual experience is imagery that upholds the value of women and symbolizes the varied kinds of their power. If, as Vogt maintains, "Ritual perpetuates knowledge essential to the survival of the culture,"¹⁹ women are just now learning how important it is to their survival to store and transmit feminine knowledge through ritual means.

Much of the available data on women's rituals reveal the prominence of one individual as instigator or leader of the ritual. This is not always the case as many rituals are performed without a leader, including rituals which follow a format repeated the same way every time, rituals which rely on group spontaneity, group meditation or chanting, etc. Nevertheless, a number of women in the feminist community have emerged as ritualists, the counterpart to the shaman in traditional societies. Most women involved in introducing ritual performance, however, do not call themselves shamans or think of themselves as such; they are

most widely known simply as ritualists (or practitioners or Witches if they adhere solely to the Witchcraft tradition). The comparison between shamans and feminist ritualists is instructive only in demonstrating that their goals in performance are similar and, to a certain extent, their conception of self is analogous.

If the ultimate goal of ritual experience is to effect transformation, in most cases someone must prepare the participants to undergo change. An appropriate procedure must be decided upon and followed correctly to lead the participants from one state of feeling to another. Both the shaman and feminist ritualist make preparations and later facilitate the group's progress in the actual ritual; both are capable of helping transformation to take place if the participants will trust them. I am stressing here the fact that both shaman and feminist ritualist express a powerful sense of capability, that they can serve as links, as surrogates, that they can connect different realms of reality and facilitate change by embodying change. Both roles are played by individuals who have changed and are concerned with enabling the change of others. Eliade says of the shaman: "He is, above all, a sick man who has been cured, who has succeeded in curing himself."²⁰ The feminist ritualist is also one who has been "sick" in the sense that oppression makes one feel sick. She who is now cured of the tyranny of oppression offers that new sense of well-being to others.

An obvious similarity between the traditional shaman and the feminist ritualist is that both do their work through performing (singing, dancing, displaying, holding, hugging) and, moreover, the performance is quite often geared to awakening and stimulating the participant's body, for both ritualist and shaman see the body, not the mind, as the locus of transformation. The body is our first and last outward reality; it defines and conditions our life experience and gives us personal identity and continuity. Both shaman and ritualist take the body to be the clearest, purest expression of self. And it is that aspect of self which must feel change before the intellectual or soul self can change. A chant I used in a ritual performance called *Seeing the Voice* expresses the bodily locus of ritual transformation:

My hands
Open the curtains of your being
Clothe you in a further nudity
Uncover the bodies of your body
My hands
Invent another body for your body²¹

The body is recognized as the means for making conscious interconnections and unions that were unconscious or suppressed. Ritual creates a new body, one body made of many, through which can be realized and understood the extremes of fear and love, the truly political dimensions of humanness.

Finally, the relation between the shaman and his participant community and the parallel relation between the feminist ritualist and her participant community bears notation. Richard Schechner maintains that "the deep structure of shamanistic performance is a protagonist-antagonist conflict by means of which the secret wishes of the community are exposed and redistributed. . . . The Shaman is the vessel through which all that is powerful chooses to express itself. And these powers are inherent in community itself, are the community."²² Thus both shaman and ritualist exist primarily within a community and the powers they exemplify ultimately belong not to themselves as individuals but to the community which is the actual source of their power. The work of both the shaman and the ritualist is to make available, to clarify and intensify powers that are the essence of community. Transformation is useless in isolation.

In stressing the communal nature of the ritual experience, it may appear that the concept of the self and its nurturance are not served; as the examples given earlier indicate, some feminist rituals are performed solely for the purpose of self-revelation. From its inception the women's movement has insisted on the importance of realizing the way in which political change comes out of reinterpretation and reinvention of the personal dimension (the personal is political). All women have suffered the loss of affirmative, positive self-images as a direct result of their second-class status and consequent objectification in the male-dominant society. It is painful to consider the countless lives wasted, the talents atrophied and the sickness suffered by women who were never allowed, least of all encouraged, to know themselves and take strength and happiness in that knowledge. Surely one of the most highly regarded uses of ritual in traditional societies is the curing of "soul loss" of one form or another. Twentieth-century, postindustrial, special-privileged American women are engaged in ritual practice for much the same reason, metaphorically speaking.

For women, the ritual setting is often a place for naming individual powers and sharing the affirmation of those powers with the group or simply internalizing them through private ritual procedure. Ritual provides a mode for getting in touch with the self and staying in touch.

Also, by definition, the ritual space and activity are sacred in the sense of representing the possibility of self-transformation. Part of the power and the fear experienced in ritual is the realization that one may change, become ultimately different, as a result of the experience or that the experience may suddenly make recognizable change that has been slowly rising from the depths of the personality. Victor Turner states, "When a ritual does work . . . it can cause in some cases real transformations of character and of social relationships."²³ I would venture to say that many women have been profoundly affected and, in some cases, redirected through their experience in ritual. A lost self is recovered, nurtured and allowed to emerge fully named.

Ritual facilitates transition for the participant in specific ways. As Turner clearly states, "Practically all rituals of any length and complexity represent a passage from one position, constellation, or domain of structure to another."²⁴ This passage occurs in individual women most dramatically, and not without fear, separation anxiety, and trauma. Before women can enter new roles they must leave old roles behind, roles that once provided the comforts of self-definition and reality structure. Ritual participation can ease transition by rendering it in dramatic, concrete, and symbolic terms and providing a support group to encourage and enable the necessary catharsis to take place.

The transfer of values from one framework to another leaves a woman vulnerable, suspended between two life styles. It is a dangerous time for her, one which requires the support of her feminist community and the use of ritual to promote ease in the transfer. Women are realizing that this is a responsibility and a desire: to help other women cross boundaries in their lives not as aggressive individuals, proving themselves, but as new members of a community who deserve the help and protection of those who have gone before. We have all been guarded and we must all become guardians. The ritual setting allows women to know the power of guarding and the comfort of being guarded in a space that does not demand immediate resolution of the passage crisis. The crisis period may continue through many phases of recognition, adjustment, and readjustment, the assimilation of which will fall primarily on the individual. But the community has developed ritual means by which that transformation may be asserted and its painful aspects somewhat absorbed by a formal claim made on the individual — a claim that she is new, that she is one of many, that she is welcome.

For feminists, as for other practitioners of ritual, doing the ritual is more important than knowing the ritual. The efficacy of ritual is always

in the acting of it, in becoming bodily involved with its elements as a source of knowing through feeling. The essence of ritual is in physical relationship, one woman to another (or one woman to herself) in the circle of affirmation they have created for each other.

This article only begins the necessary process of defining and evaluating the emergence of ritual as an important component of the greater liberation movement. To my knowledge, only Lucy Lippard's article in *Chrysalis* specifically deals with the meaning of ritual for feminists. No other theoretical material is available, although movement media sources such as *WomanSpirit*, *Lady-Unique-Inclination-of-the-Night*, and *Quest* have been documenting ritual practices among women since 1974. My sense of the importance of ritual for the feminist community comes out of an understanding of its historical importance for humanity. Ritual marks the ultimate ideal of relationship between self and community, the fusion, rather than separation, of these two distinct realities.

NOTES

1. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "A Theoretical Overview," in *Woman, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: University Press, 1974), p. 19.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
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