

# TALKING WOOD

Living in the Passaic Watershed

## REMEMBRANCES

We asked some of our grandparent generation, folks with a glint in their eye, to tell us what they remember about living in this place.

## RESOURCES

Whether it's the waterfall at Paterson or the windfall profits tax now before Congress—money, political power and energy have always been linked.

## REINHABITATION

Something new under the sun. It could be tried. Here in the Passaic Watershed.



# RELATIONSHIPS

PAUL RYAN

What God had joined together came asunder before my daughter had been around the sun once. She lived with her mother who lived with a painter. I took her often. We played together. When she reached the babbling stage I read to her from *Finnegans Wake*. She played with the words, "...Kyra run past Eve and Adam from swerve of Bay Shore to bend of little beach..."

Once upon a bright fall day at little beach she had me stand outside the gazebo, the little pavillion, "the woman's church". While I waited, she went inside and prayed. After her prayer she led me to the parking lot, "the man's church". She put me in the corner, said I had to listen 'cause she was the preacher. I sat against the fence while she strode up and down the parking lot babbling. Out of the babble came the words "God is Relationship."

"What did you say, Kyra?"

"God is Relationship." And the babble went on.

When the sermon was over and I had supposedly learned my lesson, she took me back to the woman's church. On the way we gathered an imaginary group of children, each carrying a leaf. All went into the woman's church to wait for God.

The word "relationship" comes from a Latin verb.  
*fero*—I carry  
*ferre*—to carry  
*tuli*—I have carried  
*latus*—to have been carried

The word "difference" comes from the same verb. The verb was used to mean "to bear" or "to carry" a child. Your relatives are those you differentiate yourself from in terms of events of childbearing. Your cousin, your mother's sister's child, is the one who was carried by a woman who was carried by the woman who carried you.

*How can we relate? How can we organize the differences between us?*

## Native - Kinship System

atives in the Eastern Woodlands organize the differences between themselves in terms of the kinship system. The kinship system works through exchange. A man takes a woman away from a man (her father or brother) in order to have a child. The exchanged woman is available for childbearing because she is protected by

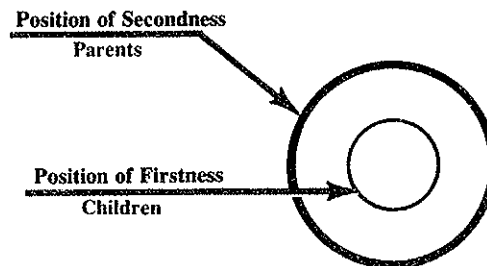
the incest taboo. Brothers cannot have sex with their sisters. Fathers cannot with their daughters. Likewise, mothers cannot have sex with their sons. Nor can close cousins have sex.

A Northern California poet told me he had talked to eight or nine people who had committed acts of incest. None of them felt guilty.

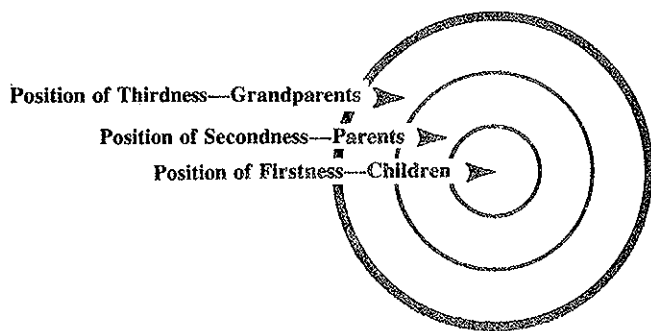
"Yes," I said, "but what would happen if they gave birth to children?"

The movie *Chinatown* involves incest. "My Sister, My Daughter. My Sister. My Daughter!" is the confused cry that comes from a father/daughter incestuous act. The differentiation in terms of childbearing becomes impossible, since there is a missing person. Instead of a mother and a sister, there is one person who is both. That leaves two parties, two relata—daughter and sister/mother—where there should be three. The confused daughter cannot understand the difference between herself and her sister and herself and her mother because there is no difference between sister/mother. *Incest confounds the kinship system by a reduplication of relata.* "My Sister, My Daughter!"

Look at the differences between children, parents and grandparents in a family system that works. Children can bear no children. The mythic story of a girl-child born pregnant is not an account of actuality. In their actual life, children are biologically free to pay attention only to their own sense of life, they do not have to hold in mind offspring that need care. We can say that children are in position of firstness; that is, of freshness, of spontaneity, of being such as they are without regard for any other. Parents are in no such position. They must react to the needs of their children, resist some of their care-free ebullience, contain their activities. Parents are in a position of secondness. A diagram will help.

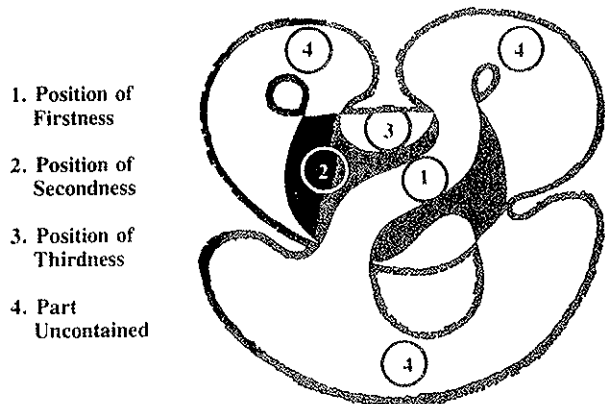


Grandparents are in a position to contain the interaction between parents and children. Their understanding of both the position of firstness and the position of secondness from experience enables them to balance the interaction between parents and children, to keep it from getting caught up in confusion. There is often a special bond between grandparents and grandchildren. The grandparents, freed of the burden of interaction with the world by the parents, can renew their sense of wonder and share the freshness of life with their grandchildren. The grandparents are in a position of thirdness.



The course of one's natural life is a continuous passage from the child's position of firstness through the parents' position of secondness to the grandparents' position of thirdness. Hopefully, the grandparents position of thirdness is blessed by healthy contact with loving children. I want to map the essential differences in this life passage by changing our diagram from three circles to one continuous tube that penetrates itself.

The Relational Figure



This figure gives us a clear understanding of relationships in terms of unambiguous positions. The three positions are clear and there is but one part uncontained connecting firstness with secondness, one part uncontained connecting secondness with thirdness, and one part uncontained connecting thirdness with first-

ness. The differentiation obtains not in terms of child carrying but in terms that are wholly positional. A difference in position makes a difference in relation to other positions. We will return to this way of ordering differences.

Tribal societies develop when the kinship system is not confounded by incest, generations work out their relationships, and other factors are favorable. Tribes establish patterns of communications that reinforce their basic social organization. For example, just as child-birth involves the whole being of both mother and child so the healing ceremonies of the false face society in these Eastern Woodlands involves the whole being of both the healer and the healed.

The most striking system of communication developed by natives on this continent that I know of is the pulse drumming of the Southwest. As the musician Tom Ehrlich explains, the rhythm for their ritual is based on the heartbeat. The raising and dropping of the drumstick is synchronized with the beating hearts of the participants. Night-long full moon rituals with such pulse drumming creates a common understanding that pervades the entire organism of each tribal member.

Communication is the creation of a redundancy pattern. The word "redundancy" comes from *unda* a Latin word meaning "wave". The image is of waves breaking on the shore again and again. Always happening, each time differently, providing a common referent. So with the pulse drumming. The hearts of the living are always beating, each time differently. The heartbeat supplies a common referent continuing from birth until death. The drumming ritual takes the heartbeat as a figure of regulation for tribal life. It establishes a redundancy pattern that all can share. When I took part in a heartbeat ritual with Tom Ehrlich drumming, the awareness of my heart beating carried for hours after the ceremony.

### Invader - Nation State

The invaders from across the ocean were not organized in tribes. They were organized as nation states. England, France, Netherlands and Spain competed for "The New World". By the time they hit these shores the nation state had a long and complicated history. Its decisive struggle with the kinship system happened in Greece. There was a definitive shift from a matriarchal society in which the ritualized event of birth meant participation to a patriarchal society in which public speech and acts constituted membership. This basic shift found reinforcement in the communication modes. Ritual gave way to drama. The oral culture gave way to literacy. The story telling of Homer yielded to the categories of Aristotle. Later literacy was simplified and extended by the printing press that visualized vernaculars for the French, the Germans and the English; and strengthened the one man, one vote arrangement through the ideal of universal literacy. The nation state, imported from Europe, with its civic and economic organization of our

life, is clearly the dominant organizational mode on this continent.

The nation state works in terms of classifications, not relationships. Kinship systems are not encouraged. Nepotism clauses abound in state regulations. If anyone of your relatives is in a position of power in this or a closely related state agency, then you cannot have the job. You are ineligible. The basis of choice in the state must be in terms of agreed upon classification systems. People are not brothers and sisters, they are G-8 or G-11.

The proper classification systems are arrived at and agreed upon by men sitting in congress and voting. One man. One vote. Who will go to war? Who gets welfare? Who must retire from the work force? Who is eligible for CETA? Who must pay taxes? The answer to each of these questions is a certain class of people, all those who can be put in one to one correspondence with the laws and regulations agreed upon by the cumulative choice of those voted into congress. Sorting and dividing the population.

Such sorting and dividing extends to the landscape. The state assumes eminent domain and allows its citizens and other legal entities to buy and sell the land in terms of lines on paper with little regard for the web of life that exists in this Watershed and elsewhere. Passaic County was mapped out for the convenience of the business community, not because of natural boundaries. Only recently have we begun to realize that the system of ownership and rights of exploitation supported by the state may be as destructive to the landscape as its laws and regulations are to the kinship system. Our deeds of ownership deal us pieces of land as if the land were a puzzle that could be boxed and unboxed or a warehouse full of resources that could be bought and sold. Such "property rights" are paralyzing our efforts to reckon with the ecocycles natural to the landscape regardless of ownership.

Consider this. There's a house in Wayne, the Colfax House. It's been in the family for eight generations. Eight. That's a rare exception. Real estate people in Wayne will tell you with glee that people there move on the average every 3.5 years. When you move that much you can't possibly care for the landscape you live in. What happened to all the family farms in Wayne? Generations can care for a place, grandparents to grandchildren, in a way that "owners" cannot. Affection for favorite places can be passed on. When a grandfather takes a grandson on a day-long hike to the Great Falls, that's an event to be remembered for life.

Part of the problem is that there's been a double migration. Many people came from the countryside of Europe to the industrial city of Paterson. Across the ocean and from country to city. The Dublin ghetto of Paterson was a different cup of tea for the Irish than the familiar city of the Emerald Isle, or the farmland that had failed to yield the critical potatoes. Similarly, the Hispanics now in Paterson cannot but be confused by the cement landscape that threatens kinship relations once nurtured in a variety of native ecosystems.

No ongoing correlation between kinship and landscape has developed in this watershed with the notable exception of the Ramapo Mountain people. It's a common problem for the Eastern Woodlands. There are no Connecticutians or New Jerseyites the way there are Bretons, Celts and Basques in Europe. Twice in this century our young men have gone back across the water to fight on European soil. Immigrants understood the family feuds of Europe and fought. Part of my generation's resistance to the war in Vietnam was that it had no such resonance. But World War I and World War II did little to help us understand long term living in place in this landscape. The land was looked at in terms of natural resources for munitions, not in terms of biological cycles. Iron mines in the highlands were reopened for both wars. Families lost their young men and their continuity. My grandfather was gassed in WWI and spent the rest of his life in and out of VA hospitals. He was never reconciled with my grandmother in Bloomfield.

A large part of the reason the state has been so successful is that an accommodation was worked out with Christianity whereby the vitality of tribal emotions has been successfully contained. This took place largely during the time of the Roman Empire. Christianity is a slave religion. The cross of Christ, so central to the emotional configuration of Christianity is a Graeco-Roman torture instrument. It became central to the organization of emotions and attitudes known as Christian. "Not my will, but Thine be done," said Christ in his agony in the garden. And so Christians are disposed to subject themselves to authority. Contradictory commands within the family system were reckoned with by identifying one's suffering with Jesus; similarly with political struggles such as those in modern Ireland and Spain. The Church diffused resistance. So powerful was the imprint of the Judeo-Christian slave morality on West that it was only revealed as exhausted in the last century by Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morals*.

I am not talking off the top of my head. I spent four and a half years in a monastic order of the Roman Catholic Church dedicated to preaching the doctrine of Christ's Crucifixion. Part of the obedience to the Sacred Scripture they espoused involved cutting off your perception of the living environment so that you could preach the Word. I spent two years on the shores of Lake Erie meditating on the death of a man that occurred 2000 years ago without ever realizing that Lake Erie itself was dying. This sort of appropriation of perception by mythology is chronic in the West and increasingly dangerous. When I was a child the nuns said that the flecks of red on the white dogwood flowers were the blood of Jesus. The reason the dogwood does not grow straight was that dogwood had been used by the Romans to crucify Jesus and since then the tree refused to grow straight. Only recently have I realized that the twisting growth of a dogwood has to do with a search for the sunlight slithering through the tall oaks and maples. Leafing toward the sun to stay alive. Talking Wood.

## Reinhabitory - Human Species

It is tempting to think that simply by working to restructure the kinship system and reorganizing the state in terms of environmental law we could redress the balance between these two systems and reverse environmental destruction. I think such efforts certainly should be made by those in a position to try, but I do not think such efforts will be sufficient. Let me indicate what I mean through two sorts of environmental problems in the Passaic Watershed.

**Toxic Waste.** Four out of five people you talk to about the problem of recycling and taking care of toxic wastes in the Watershed will tell you there's nothing you can do about it because the waste haulers are Mafia controlled. No serious investigation has been done—I tend to think people have seen too many movies about the Mafia—but for the sake of discussion let us assume that the allegation is true. As an immigrant group some Sicilian kinsmen have maintained a viability living outside the law of the state. It's common practice for immigrants; many do it. Such an adaptation permitted them to continue their genetic line on this continent, indeed in this Watershed. But when their outlaw activity involves the destruction of the environmental support system for their descendants, then there is a contradiction involved that cannot but catch up to a group of people known for their love of children.

**Flooding.** It's been over a century since government bodies in the Watershed started studying and arguing about flooding. The Army Corps has been in on it officially since 1936. Currently they have a \$14 million budget to do a five year study of what to do. The study must be conducted in full public view by order of Congress and nothing will be done unless a consensus of agreement is reached among the governing agencies including the 112 municipalities in the Watershed. At a recent meeting in Oakland where many people vented their frustration over the endless studies, the colonel in charge of the project said that he recently had to tell a congressman there was no reason to expect a consensus in 1985 when the \$14 million study was complete. Competing constituencies in the Watershed would still be issuing contradictory commands as to what should be done and, consequently, nothing would be done.

Environmental problems in the Watershed such as toxic wastes and flooding cannot be resolved in terms of either kinship or state organization. The unit of survival is not a specific kin group or a particular municipality. The unit of survival is a species-in-its-environment, a flexible species achieving interbalance with a changing environment.

*How can the human species organize?*

Certainly in terms of the positional intelligence proper to the diverse parts of this planet. People of the woodlands live differently than people of the plains or people of the coast. Place specific. We live in the Passaic Watershed on a woody spine of Pangaea, one of the

oldest land formations on planet Earth. The seasonal fall of leaves, the butterfly cycle of fresh water lakes left by the last glacier, the storm waters from the tropics and the Great Lakes that find their way over the Passaic Falls, migrating ducks and geese, sycamores by the rivers, muskrats multiplying, the possibility of the Atlantic Salmon returning to spawn at the foot of the Great Falls; all of this is becoming part of our understanding about living in this place. Out of this understanding appropriate ceremonies to celebrate life here can develop.

While place specific intelligence and organization is desirable and necessary, I don't think that sort of organization is sufficient. There are a host of difficulties in human interaction that such organization does not address. What I want to present here is a way of organizing our differences that does deal with many of the difficulties left out of the reinhabitory approach as it has developed thus far. Others who agree on reinhabitation may well disagree with me on this. However, I think that without the sort of backup that I'm talking about, reinhabitation could be reduced to rhetoric by the end of the eighties. In the remainder of this essay I will explain how I arrived at this approach, what the approach is and what difficulties I think it resolves.

*And I saw two insane little boys  
Who wept as they leaned on a  
murderer's eyeball.*

*But two, that is not a number!  
All it is is an agony and its shadow.  
It is the guitar when love feels its  
desperation  
It is the demonstration of someone  
else's infinity*

*It is a castle built around a dead man  
And the scourging of the new resurrection  
that will never end.*

—Lorca

My father died of cancer at age 57 in Saint Joseph's hospital in Paterson, New Jersey, May of 1971. After he died I went to the Walkkill Valley above the Passaic Watershed and worked simultaneously on human interrelationships and our relationship to the biosphere. Support from the New York State Council on the Arts enabled me to work on these problems from 1971 to 1976 with portable video equipment.

I trained myself to do half-hour continuous tapes of the environment in a Zen state of mind. I did a set of thirty-six such tapes dealing with earth, air, water, plants, animals, and man considered in his technologies. I also did a year-long study of a waterfall that yielded a vocabulary of over forty waterflow patterns.

Doing video by myself seemed insufficient so I used video replay of human interaction to figure out ways

people could work together on ecological tape. I did 45 hours of tape with people interacting in sets of three. I set out to "invent triadic behavior", that is, behavior that could stabilize long-term relationships between three people. I had a hunch that came from an understanding of how Yoga and T'ai Chi had started. At a certain point in the history of Eastern cultures the meanings held in its mythologies of birth and death, hero stories and tales of paradise lost common to the symbol systems of tribal cultures didn't work for people. Somehow there arose these practices, disciplines that if taken seriously created an understanding independent of symbol systems. Like many others experiencing the death of a parent in this culture, I had found the symbol systems surrounding death just did not work for the relationship I had with my father. Given the possibility video gives us of recording and playing back our interactive patterns, I thought it might be possible to invent a relational practice that could hold meaning apart from symbology.

In addition to the video work I did extensive reading in the work of the American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce is the little-known giant behind William James and John Dewey. He died in obscurity in Milford, Pennsylvania where he spent the last thirty years of his life studying and writing, sometimes in the attic to hide from bill collectors. He is generally acknowledged as the most original philosopher this continent has produced.

In the 1860's Peirce was saying that Western Culture had about another hundred years to go before it would fall apart. It would fall apart because it was based on an exhausted logic of classes developed by Aristotle. What we need to survive, said Peirce, is a logic of relationships, not classes. Such a logic could provide us with the basic architecture with which to build a new richer understanding of living. Peirce spent his life clearing the ground so that such a logic could be realized. In working with video and Peirce simultaneously, I arrived at what I regard as the logic of relationships Peirce was after. That logic is wholly evident in the figure I used earlier in talking about generations. That's it. If you've understood that then you've understood the basis for the approach to relationships I'm putting forth.

### The Approach - A Relational Practice

In three-party interaction (ABC), the normal pattern is for two parties to combine against a third party so that one dyadic relationship (AB) is strengthened and the other two (BC & AC), are weakened. This pattern is based in part on our bilateral symmetry. You cannot look in four eyes at once. Some Chinese counter this tendency in conversation with the following technique: if A asks B a question in the presence of C, B answers the question as if C had asked it.

The relational practice is a recurring intentional non-verbal interaction between three parties (ABC) that reinforces all three dyadic relationships (AB, BC, CA).

The core set of interactive patterns are presented here. A relational figure is placed on the floor and moved through according to the traffic pattern described. I will

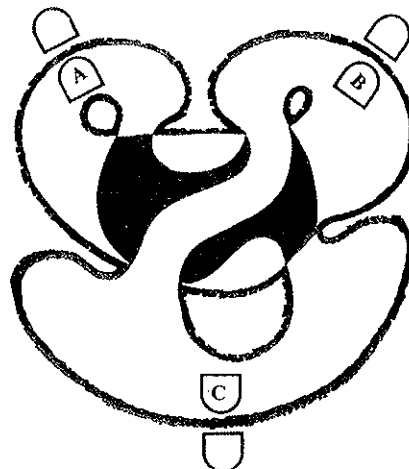
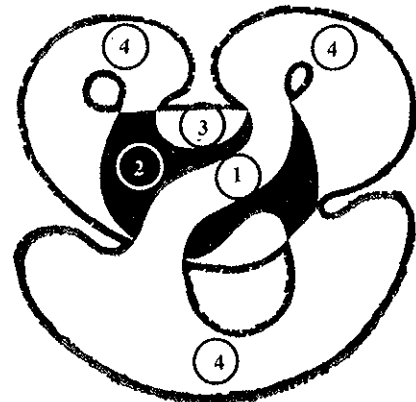
present the instructions for the traffic pattern in a flat formal way, much like one presents a music score or a cake recipe. This is because the ultimate interpretation of what I am presenting is not in the reading of the instructions any more than the ultimate interpretation of a cake recipe is in reading the instructions. For a cake recipe or a musical score the ultimate interpretation is the experience of eating the cake or listening to the music. One does not even attempt to describe the taste of the cake or the musical experience. For the relational practice the ultimate interpretation is the living experience of the relationships, which I will not attempt to describe beyond passing on these comments by participants. One participant commented that when you finished the practice you knew quite clearly where the relationship with the other people stood. Another person said that when he did the practice at a public session his mind went back to a dream he often had as a child. In the dream, his left half was going down a tunnel and his right half was going up a stairs. The tension that was never resolved in the dream was resolved in the relational practice when the tunnel met the stairway.

#### The Relational Practice

Draw an outline of the relational figure on the floor, making it large enough so that people can move through it. The outer boundary of the parts uncontained should correspond to the circumference of a circle with an eight foot diameter. The practice begins with each of three parties entering a part uncontained.

#### The Relational Figure

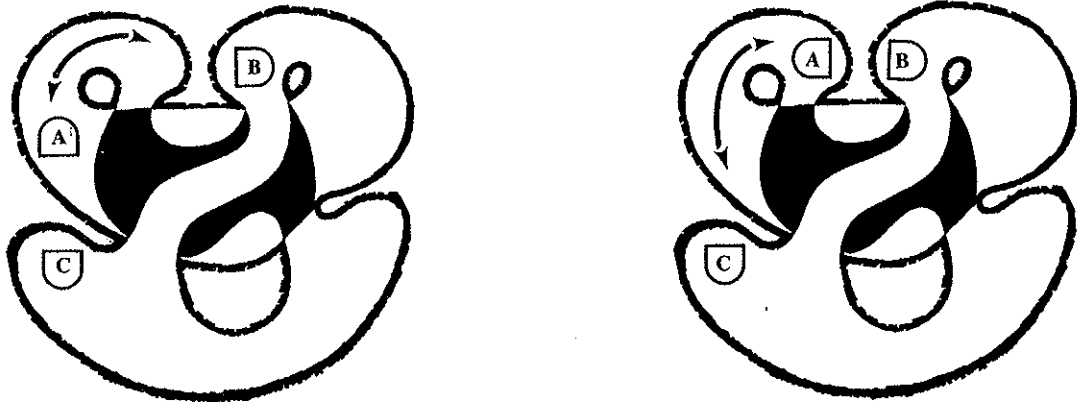
1. Position of Firstness
2. Position of Secondness
3. Position of Thirdness
4. Part Uncontained



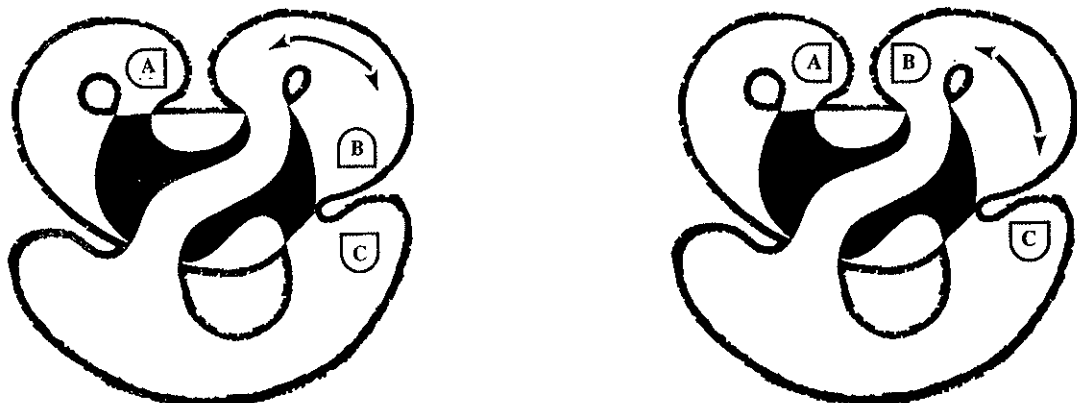
*Front and Back (the basic traffic pattern)*

**Front (oscillation)** Any party can start moving back and forth, oscillating between the two other parties. The other two parties move to positions in the parts uncontained facing the oscillator. If either of the other parties turns away from facing the oscillator before he/she turns away, it is that party's turn to oscillate. This back and forth movement is like in the child's game, monkey in the middle, only without the ball.

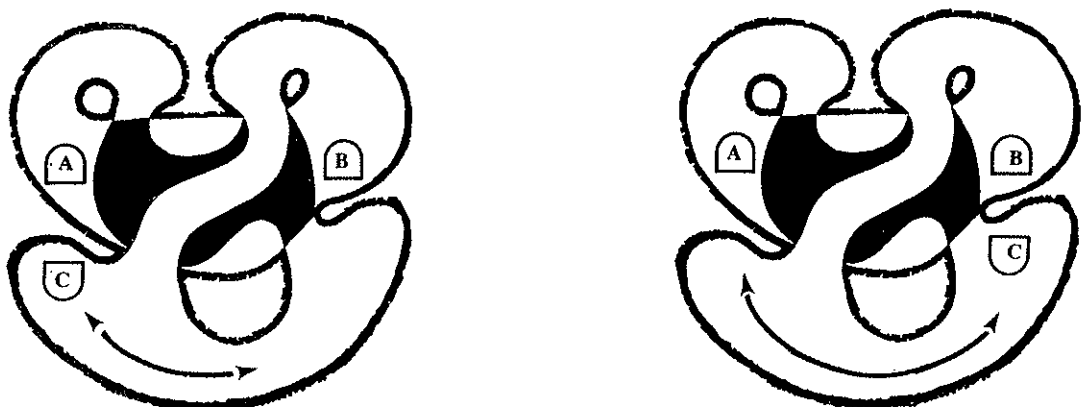
A oscillates



B oscillates



C oscillates



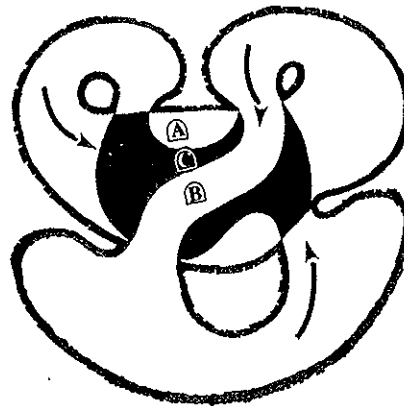
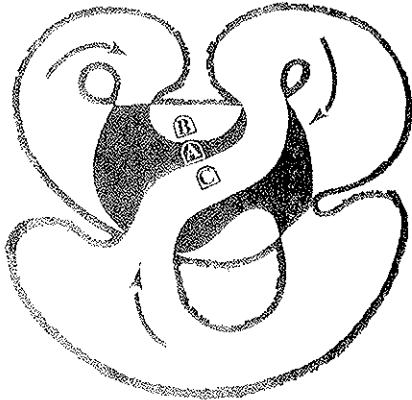
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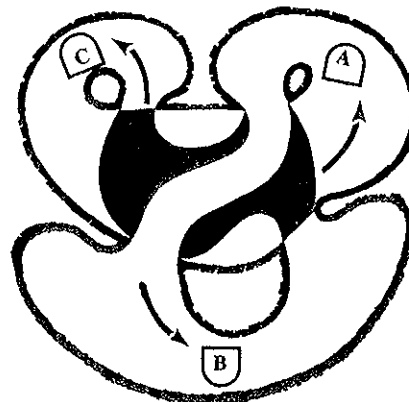
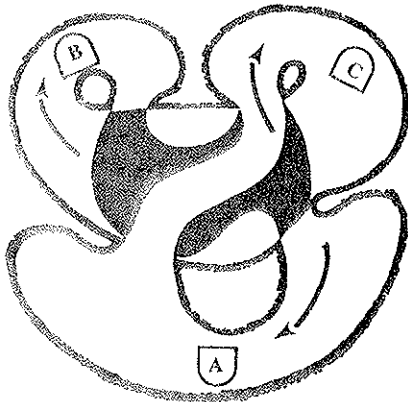


The Relational Practice - *Front and Back* (the basic traffic pattern)

Back (standing) At any point in the oscillation, the moving party in a part uncontained that is continuous with the position of firstness can move into firstness and face the wall of that position. The other two parties move respectively into secondness and thirdness and stand behind the party in firstness.



Whenever it seems appropriate, the party in firstness can move to a part uncontained. The other parties in secondness and thirdness do likewise. Oscillation can continue or parties can move back into firstness, secondness and thirdness in changed positions.



*Flying and Holding*

In Flying and Holding the basic traffic pattern is repeated with the following modifications.

Parties facing each other in oscillation simulate flying with their arms.

A party in the position of secondness embraces from behind the party in firstness.

The party in thirdness embraces from behind the parties in secondness and firstness.

*Soundings*

In Soundings the basic traffic pattern is repeated either with or without the modifications in Flying and Holding. When oscillating, strong affirmative sounds are made while facing

each other. In the positions of firstness, secondness and thirdness, sounds are made in accord with each position. Movement in keeping with the sounds is also appropriate. An understanding of the positions needs to be kept in mind throughout the practice.

Position of Firstness: Spontaneity, freshness, feeling. Being such as you are without regard for any other.

Position of Secondness: Resistance, reaction to the activity in firstness, struggle with firstness.

Position of Thirdness: Moderation, balancing the interaction between firstness and secondness.

A practice session is complete when all parties are in the parts uncontained and none wishes to oscillate or go into firstness, secondness or thirdness. All leave simultaneously.



The fecund minimum for establishing this practice is a set of six people, three males and three females. Such a set allows the participants to take part in all four triadic combinations possible to our bisexual species: MMM, FFF, MFF, FMM.

The core set of non-manipulative interactions presented here is based on simple realities common to all members of our species. We each have a front and back. As infants, our arms will open in a backward fall (Moreau reflex), and contract with a loud noise (startle response). The principle pattern of interaction *Front and Back* is based on the fact of our dorsal/ventral bilateral symmetry. With this pattern secured, *Flying and Holding* transforms the Moreau reflex and the startle response into a practice of symmetric flying and complementary holding. *Soundings* introduces a variation that allows the subtleties of voice and movement to enter the interaction. These modes can be considered core to a non-manipulative interaction between three parties that reinforces all three dyadic relations. Other modes could be developed or rediscovered and used in conjunction with the patterns given here.

*The relational practice would enable us to build a communications system based on shared perception of the environmental realities we live in.*

The kinship system has enabled this species to transmit genetic information from generation to generation. Language as shaped by literacy has allowed the nation state with its complementary religions to perpetuate itself over generations. Both the kinship system and the nation state/church operate in terms of language. The child is told, "No, don't touch! That's hot!" The developing integrity of his perceptual system is stunted and his behavior is linked up to the verbal commands of others. When the competing commands of other speaking organisms become contradictory, the child's behavior can be distorted in relation to other members of the species and in relation to the environment. Extreme cases of such distortion are evident in some victims of schizophrenia who are paralyzed by hearing voices that issue contradictory commands. This paralysis in individual behavior has its complement in the species itself. Inhabitants in the area of Three Mile Island were paralyzed by the confusing and contradictory information coming from different news sources and different government agencies. In a less dramatic way competing contradictory commands about flooding in the Watershed leave us not knowing what to do.

Talk among people now beginning to face the music is that the chemical waste problem will make the nuclear threat seem like child's play. It may not be possible to live in this place if chemicals waste our water supply. It is not science fiction to think that toxics in this heavily industrial place could, in effect, slowly "melt down"

the biological life of this Watershed and force us to evacuate. How will we do it? How could we avoid false alarms? Could we act to restore the biological life? Experience at Three Mile Island and with flood problems suggests we would be paralyzed.

By linking up the relational practice with video, cable TV and other electronic media a reliable communications system could be built based on shared perception of environmental realities. Such a system would give us the capacity to store and transmit information to future generations and the capacity to respond to real situations. It would have an integrity free from the contradictions of language, and draw figures of regulation for a reinhabitory social order from the bioregion itself.

The system would operate in a way that is analogous to the reticular core of our nervous system. The reticular core is the thing that decides whether you'd better run or fight, whether you should wait, sleep or make love. The reticular core has evolved so that it provides an organization of many components each of which is a living thing that senses the world and tells others what it senses. Each of our lives operates in terms of a couple million of these nerve cells getting organized enough to commit the whole organism to act in a coherent way on a regular basis. Individual survival depends on it. An electronic communications system that used this relational practice at its core could provide inhabitants in the Watershed with a similar survival capacity. The system would have a redundancy of potential command. Whatever the ecological situation "dictated" could be met by a range of ready responses rather than paralysis and panic. Including participants from the various kinship systems and classes of people would enhance the possibility of consensus.

The actual construction of such a communications system in the Watershed through the use of video, cable television, etc. could resolve some of the employment problems in the region. Just as kinship communicates primarily with the oral tradition, nation states with literacy, so electronic communication is the proper reinforcement for ecological cultures. Fifty percent of the gross national product is now tied in with the communications industry. As the heavy industry of the northeast winds down and the chemical industry is increasingly challenged, such a project could train significant numbers of people in marketable communications skills. Building such a system would be a much healthier enterprise for workers and communities alike than building nuclear power plants.

*The relational practice would encourage long-term living in place.*

The relational practice is what the philosophers call intransitive. Transitive relationships are of this sort. The biggest child shoves the next biggest child. The next biggest shoves the smallest child. The smallest child does not shove the biggest child but goes out and kicks things. Intransitive relationships are like the child's

game; paper-rock-scissors. In this game each of three children throws out a hand: flat for paper, fist for rock, and forked fingers for scissors. Then they swat each other on the wrists according to the formula: scissors cut paper, paper covers rock, rock breaks scissors.

Long-term living in place requires the capacity for intransitive relationships. The current transitive relations we have with each other and with the landscape such as indicated by the statistics of moving in Wayne tend toward the ignorant destruction of the landscape.

***The relational practice would free the ecosystem from the burden of human confusion about relationships presently resolved through gift giving, market exchange, and political favors.***

I drop a book on the street and go on. You come by and pick it up. Two separate events. I drop the book. The book is picked up by you. Lost and found. There is no relation between us.

I want you to understand how I feel about you because an ambiguity has grown up over the year. I select a gift, a book to give you for Christmas. The book I select and the way I give it to you and the context of the exchanging of gifts at Christmas all work to describe and define the relationship between us. But the books and the items of exchange have to come from somewhere. Trees are cut down for paper, etc. When people start buying cars for each other and competing in gift giving the toll on the ecosystem can become huge. In a similar way, the nexus of political favors and deals can also take a large toll. He did this for us, we'll do that for him; regardless of transgressing the ecosystem. He supported our preservation of this marshland, so we will not oppose the building of that dam he wants.

The relational practice clarifies relationships without taking a toll on the ecosystem.

***The relational practice could stop the Watershed from turning into a behavioral sink.***

Behavioral sink is a term coined to describe what happens when rats are crowded in a small space. Population people use the term to describe the effects of overpopulation on humans. With rats there were random fits and fights. Extreme withdrawal on the part of some. Natural bonds disintegrate. Mothers grew disinterested in their young. Abandoned them. In some instances, ate the young.

The population in the Watershed is now 2.4 million people. That's up from 1.8 million in 1970. Last year the crime rate was up 15% in this area. Cancer rates grow apace of the deteriorating environment. Divorce doubled over the last decade. Our emotional life sometimes resembles a game of bumper cars.

This Watershed is now more densely populated than Japan and it does not have a traditional culture with ceremony to fall back on and orchestrate the crowding.

Tea-drinking ceremonies and care of bonsai trees are not common in Jersey. I think there is a correlation between high density and the ritualization of interaction. Ritual allows caring relationships at close quarters. The Watershed need not be a behavioral sink.

There is another more formal sort of reason why I think the relational practice could offset the pressure of populations. Population people work with large numbers—statistics like those used by insurance companies and television networks in their pooling of political preference. Large numbers allow statistical prediction and are very useful that way. Statistical math is a well-developed field.

Another area of math that is well developed is the area dealing with equations. Equations allow us to understand sides very well:  $a = b$ ,  $b = c$ ,  $a = c$ . We can work the two sides of an equation with enormous sophistication. However, in the area of from three to a hundred where statistical patterns begin to operate, current math has not been successful. Outstanding is the three-body problem in physics. Physicists don't know how to think about the relation between three bodies. They use equations to deal with two of the three and then cheat by using more equations. The best understood system that deals with the realm of three to a hundred is the kinship system. If I am right about the logic of relationships, it formalizes our understanding of this realm. I don't claim that the three-body problem could be solved by the relational figure, though it would be illuminating to try. I am only saying that the statistics now used to account for human interaction would have to be rethought if people took this relational practice seriously.

***The relational practice could stabilize an organization of differences between men and women.***

I met a Persian in Spain. We hit it off, hung out together for days. One afternoon in Barcelona we got quite drunk. He said, "In the last ten years, I have been all over Europe. I have been with many women. I have seen many men and women together. Because men and women have not made it on this planet—finito—it's over!"

### Schizmogenesis

In the 1930's the anthropologist Gregory Bateson worked with the Iatmul people in New Guinea. The tension between males and females was so strong that Bateson wondered why the culture simply did not explode. What the Iatmul had worked out was an elaborate transvestite ceremony called *Naven* that muted the tensions by shifting roles at critical points. In studying the Iatmul, Bateson arrived at the notion of "schizmogenesis." The word means "growth of a split".

Bateson saw dyadic splits as resulting from the cumulative interaction between two parties. He identified two sorts of interactions that tended toward progressive

change. One sort he called symmetric, the other, complementary. People in a symmetric interactive pattern do similar things that tend to reinforce each other. Two boxers standing toe to toe and slugging it out are in a symmetric relationship. Other examples of symmetric interaction would be keeping up with the Jones' or the armaments race.

People in a complementary interactive pattern do dissimilar things that tend to reinforce each other. An exhibitionist is encouraged by the applauding of a spectator. Dominant people are encouraged by submissive people to be more dominant. The interaction between a dependent child and a succoring mother can grow progressively monstrous.

Originally two parties may find in each other the possible resolution of a difficulty in relating. As they continue to interact, however, the differentiation demanded by the complementary or symmetric mode will tend to distort the personalities of the participants. Discomfort will follow. Ambiguities of interaction will accumulate as misunderstandings grow. Mutual resentment toward the other as the source of the distortion enters. Jealousy develops as each sees overdeveloped in the other that part of themselves that has been suppressed by the pattern of interaction. No longer does the resolution originally sought hold sway. Each party simply enters into a pattern of reacting to the emotional reactions of the other party and the relationship moves exponentially toward a split. Facility in switching from complementary to symmetric modes of interaction hold in check the runaway of either mode. The trouble here, however, is in developing reliable context markers to indicate whether the relationship is in a complementary or a symmetric mode. If A thinks he is helping B, but B thinks A is being competitive, pain and confusion will result.

In the relational practice, complementary interaction takes place in the positions of firstness, secondness and thirdness. Symmetric interaction takes place in the parts uncontained. The interaction keeps shifting back and forth so that neither pattern becomes cumulative. Schizomogenesis is precluded. A steady state of interaction develops, like in the Balinese culture as described by Bateson.

### The Relational Anomaly

In the triadic video studies I did, one pattern kept recurring: two parties combined to extrude a third party. "Two's company, three's a crowd." It was clearest in the instances where one party was blindfolded and the other two were sighted. What happened recurrently was that the two sighted combined against the blindfolded party and reinforced their relationship at the expense of the third party.

An experimental study with baboons in the fields of Ethiopia revealed the same extruding pattern. There are no "free" females in a baboon troop. The males possess the females and will fight to hold onto them if necessary. Much fighting is avoided, however, since the

"rival" male is generally inhibited by seeing the male/female pair. When such a triad is put together the social behavior of the rival is inhibited while the social behavior of the pair is enhanced. In the presence of the rival, the pair bond matures rapidly. The rival "outsider" is extruded in the process.

In Western society, the "rival" has been institutionalized as eunuch, celibate priest, and starving artist who threatens to run away with the possessed woman but could not afford to support her childbearing. The rival female becomes the childless nun, the whore, or the mistress without property rights whose children are bastards. The function of the triad is to reinforce the dyad, the third party is extruded in the process.

What is going on relationally? On the one hand you have the schizomogenesis of dyads and on the other hand you have a pattern of dyads extruding third parties. Two's company, three's a crowd, but two can be hell. Two is somehow incomplete, but three is inconsistent.

As individual organisms we make choices between incompatible acts. You cannot both sleep and not sleep. You cannot both fight and not fight. You cannot both make love and not make love. You cannot both stay and leave. Acts of choice are in the realm of individual control and individual survival.

In a relational nexus, individuals make choices that involve other individuals. I will make love with this one and not that one. I will fight with this one and not that one. Consider this simulation of human interaction done at a research center in California. Three people are seated at a round table with partitions so they cannot see each other. In front of each is a two-minute timer. Each has two buttons on the table in front of him. Only one button will work at a time. Each button closes an electric circuit that includes getting time on the timer, a light, and one other participant if he is also closing the circuit. The object for each participant is to be in contact for more than either of the other two parties. A choice must be made between the other two in order to score. Only one dyadic combination can be scoring at any one time.

By contrast with individual choice, relationship involves the ongoing organization of difference between at least two individual organisms. However, in a two-party interaction it is impossible for the two parties to understand and correct their relationship *qua* relationship without the presence of a third party that interacts with both. A understands how his relation to B differs from B's relation to C, because A is in relationship with both B and C and can compare. All three dyads are required in order to understand and organize respective differences. When the mechanism of choice inhibits two of the dyadic relations in a triad and extrudes the third party, it leaves the selected dyad severed from the very relational interaction that would allow that dyad to balance and correct. This is the relational anomaly. To say it succinctly another way; *relationships are routinely subsumed by acts of choice*.

This anomaly generates a cluster of partial solutions to relational balance for dyads, among them risking peri-

odic interaction with an outsider that allows the parties in the dyad to renew their mutual choice of each other. In effect, they are saying that whatever the ambiguity that has grown up within our relationship, it is at least clear that each of us prefers the other to the third party.

The relational practice presented above resolves the relational anomaly by neutralizing the effect of choice on relationships. Choice is exercised not between incompatible acts nor between mutually exclusive partners but between unambiguous positions. The unambiguous positions are part of a figure or regulation that balances triadic relationship. No one is extruded. The relational practice consistently reinforces the complete set of dyadic relationships, AB, BC, CA. It does not reinforce one dyad at the expense of the other two.

### Jealousy

If you attempt to shake hands with yourself in a mirror, the simulation will not work. The image the mirror holds is a separate reduplication of yourself. It is not continuous with your self-perception, your integral sense of all possible body positions. The mirror image is a spectral image, separate from your introceptive sense of self. It is by way of a spectral image in the mirror that we first understand as children that we can be seen by others, that what they see is distinct from our sense of ourself. This spectral image becomes the basis of our social identity, our mask, our *persona*. By means of this spectral image others can tear us away from our introceptive self, confiscate us and force us into alienating interaction.

Watch two children playing together. Often the more dominant child is the one providing the social *persona* while the other is the onlooker admiring and reinforcing that *persona*. It is a master/slave relationship with the master dependent on the slave for acceptable feedback to the *persona*. The slave, meanwhile, has not the feedback and attention necessary to do spectacular things and feeds vicariously on the achievements of the master, all the while growing resentful at his failure to fulfill himself. Both master and slave conspire to maintain this arrangement. Third parties are seen as threats to their mutually reinforcing blindness. Each one's identity depends on the other.

In the relational practice the *persona* of the spectral self can be dropped. The practice works in terms of presence to each other while maintaining the introceptive self. There are no fixed identities as in the master/slave arrangement, since people take turns in the various relational roles. Because the *persona* is dropped during this practice it is important that the practice be done with clear thresholds of beginning and ending. The openness to others involved in the practice would make participants very vulnerable in normal social interaction.

### Sexuality

It does not necessarily follow that a relational practice which could give the species a shared perceptual system

could also be used to regulate the propagation of the species. Certainly work on building and maintaining a shared perceptual system could proceed without sexual discrimination simply by organizing the work in accord with the four possible cases of triadic combination for a bisexual species: MMM, FFF, MFF, FMM. As for propagation, that is a different question.

The various restraints on triadic interaction inherent in a bisexual species could not be arbitrarily overridden. There is a difference between ovulation and ejaculation of sperm that has consequence. Account must be taken of the fact that in any potentially fertile male/female relationship a third party is implied. The desirable and necessary fusion that results in a fresh offspring would have to be given proper place in a triadic social order. Pair bonding protects the possibility of a new generation and it may be a grave mistake for any one generation to attempt to undo this mechanism for its own gratification. Our American cult of youth could be reduced to the absurdity of geriatric trisexuals with no young.

It may be that the introduction of the relational practice as a means of developing shared perception, which seems to me to now be critical to species survival, would only have indirect effects on the kinship system and propagation. For instance, the incest taboo, exchange of women, and pair bonding could be maintained at the same time a kinship system used this practice to clarify relationships between and among generations. Grandmother, daughter, granddaughter; Father, uncle, cousin; Sister, sister, brother, etc.—all possible triadic combinations in a kinship system could engage in this practice. Stepfamilies could benefit.

On the other hand, if the kinship system were to be replaced by a triadic community of lovers, the status of women as a class of people to be exchanged by men would dissolve. Such organization could, it seems, do much toward freeing women from oppression. In a triadic social order women could enter and leave triads as freely as the men—they could not be reduced to pieces of property.

There is no formal reason I can see why a completely relational social order, a community of lovers, could not in fact develop. Much can be learned from experiments already tried. For instance, the Oneida Community survived for 35 years without monogamy, breeding children. The way they did it was to have all acts of copulation mediated by a third party. No one could be approached directly, male or female. The constant go-between prevented people from getting caught up in confusing schizmogonic relationships.

Biologically, copulation is reversible capture. Let me explain. To stay alive, the human organism must capture and ingest other living organisms. To capture other living organisms the predator must undergo a discontinuity from self, must allow the self to be dominated by the image of another, must temporarily become the prey. A temporary fusion with the prey is made possible by the predator's nervous system which enables it to dance outside itself, to become something that it is not. The human mammalian nervous system can be seen as such

an organ of alienation. Plants have no such organ with which to achieve capture. The capture process is at work in courtship and copulation. However, it is reversible. Both parties can walk away from the act.

The morphology of reversible capture does not map onto the figure of regulation for the relational practice. However, in a strictly formal way, reversible capture could be accommodated in the gaps between the parts uncontained in the relational figure.

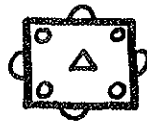
Of the four cases of triadic combination, only FFM and MMF are capable of conceiving a child. In the case of FFM there would be no confusion as to who the pair determining the firstness of the child would be. It is only in the case of MMF that the conception of a child would cause confusion as to who was the father. Moreover, the way our bisexuality is set up, one of the two males is superfluous in nature's design. Another difficulty with this configuration is that the woman is without another woman to exchange mother roles in a way that might sensibly transform the situation in infancy.

Some of these difficulties could be resolved in a community of lovers by reserving childbearing to the MFF triads. Since any one person could take part in more than one triad, no one would be formally excluded from the possibility of parenthood. In this way an accurate record of the firstness of each newborn could be kept and combinations encouraged that precluded weakening the genetic code by disallowing arrangements that tended toward the reduplication of relata. Another interesting

fact is that under such an arrangement with recombining triads, a community of only firstborn children would be possible.

I hope from what has been said that the reader will realize that configuring ongoing triadic relationships that include sexuality is not something to attempt lightly. Those who simply count to three and jump in bed will have difficulty sharing the toilet in the morning. The range of human behaviors having to do with capture, schizogenesis, jealousy and the relational anomaly, as well as other things not now apparent, would have to be reckoned with before a community of lovers could configure. My own sense is to get on with the relational practice to share perception and leave the sexual possibility to later generations.

The initial effect of an innovative practice is usually to allow the conservation of a traditional pattern. The creatures who first learned to live on land were scurrying from dried up water holes to more viable water environments. Land was an obstacle to their desired habitat, just as the deterioration of the biosphere is an obstacle to the perpetuation of family systems. Perhaps in like manner, the relational practice described in this paper could be initially used to conserve the family pattern common to all men and women. It might take a few generations of using this practice to stabilize families and share perceptions before a triadic social order could develop in its own right.



**Who, who will be the next man to entrust his girl to a friend?  
Love interferes with fidelities;  
The gods have brought shame on their relatives;  
Each man wants the pomegranate for himself.**

—Pound