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A Dissertation

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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Doctor of Philosophy

By

REINHILD E. MEISSLER

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NEW AGE PARADIGM AND QUANTUM ANTHROPOLOGY

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

BY

Marcin Fort

W. N. W. W.

Neil O. Hansen

Joseph W. White

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Abstract

This project offers a problem oriented approach in which categories and definitions emerge during the dialogue with informants in the field.

Participants of the New Age realm are presented as an interest group loosely held together by shared experiences and insights. The primary concerns, such as health e.g., have been negotiated between informant and ethnographer and will serve as the defining categories for the New Age realm.

An emphasize will be put on the interaction between informant and ethnographer in reversible teacher - student roles. A further emphasize will be the symbolic aspect of the New Age in a specific historical and social situation.

Differences between mainstream and New Age environments will be worked out during the dialogue. The emerging New Age is based on the specific philosophical-scientific basis of quantum physics which provides a language that allows the crossing of barriers between disciplines and social boundaries. This is the context in which a New Paradigm is being negotiated.

Chapter I

Theory

A main concept in the anthropological study of symbolic systems is that of context. Theoretical perspectives are defined and bound by their own disciplinary and social contexts. The system that is being examined is also set in its own context. At the point where both interact a new context is created and so a continuity is established. Every theory is a reflection of a particular social environment that is recreated with each new action. So one could say anthropological theories are formulated by the anthropologist as well as by the "other".

At this particular time anthropology is struggling to retain this contextual continuity with the larger interdisciplinary and social environment. The rise of postmodernism has brought to light biases, problems, and a certain self-awareness of anthropologists but it has yet to offer a workable theoretical framework that effectively handles our complaints. While physics has developed into new physics and so laid the groundwork for

other disciplines to follow, anthropology seems to be stuck with concepts that do not really seem to fit into the new science context that has grown up around it. It is time to catch up.

Marshall Sahlins (1994:415) addresses cultural continuity within a world systems framework. Cultural continuity means change under the influence of dominant (speak: capitalist) systems. So far the world system has been analyzed primarily from a capitalist viewpoint. This may tell me how capitalism works but little else. Although anthropology is ideally concerned with people there seems to be a preoccupation with the analysis of systems. But these are abstract concepts. Systems are being produced and reproduced through people's actions. They cannot be interpreted without taking people's motivations, decision-making processes, and other behavioral aspects into account. Sahlins has a similar concern when he emphasizes that we have to remind ourselves of the particular "cultural dialect" (1994:384) in which we talk about others. Though being aware of the limitation of one particular perspective is important, it is not enough.

In an interesting comparison Marshall Sahlins (1983:534) proposes the collaboration of anthropology and history. The main point being that each social unit has its own history and that our analysis of such is part of the historical process of our own unit as well as that of the

other. Sahlins comes very close to my idea that social units and the individuals within are in a continuous interactive process. This includes the anthropologist. This process is a force that shapes and defines each unit's history and identity.

Indicated above is the development from a purely descriptive approach that takes the ethnographer's background for granted toward a dynamic interpretive framework in which the ethnographer is but one of many actors. Clifford Geertz (1983) observes that this change goes along with a rethinking of the goals of social sciences. One of Geertz' main concerns is how to look at the world through the eyes of the other. This implies that different people may have a very different perspective/interpretation of the same historic situation. I think this is most certainly the case. We are all conditioned to notice that which is different from ourselves. This should not be a problem. It lays the groundwork for the concept that reality and history are created during the interaction of individuals. One might say it is created in a dialogue. This includes the ethnographer's point of view.

With this thought subjectivity has entered the debate. Also the realization that social and cultural boundaries have become less defined. Cultural diversity is part of the historical process that is played out in our own

backyard. Somehow the ethnographer has to make sense of it. Geertz (1994:465) suggests as the main task of ethnography the identification and comprehension of individual elements in an intricate web of diversity. Part of this task is to establish our own position/identity in this web without necessarily the need to dominate or patronize. Anthropology has changed from seeing the other in relation to us (undeveloped, pre-industrial, etc.) to seeing us in relation to the other and both in a dynamic historical sphere of interaction. What Geertz calls the soft facts of social existence (1995:43) cannot be ignored or glossed over anymore. How people think about themselves and how they express themselves has to be a main concern. The idea of notion formation (Geertz 1995:50) indicates an increased sensitivity on the side of the ethnographer. Although he acknowledges the problems with well bounded static categories like culture Geertz (1995) does not offer alternative concepts.

The shift from a static ahistorical analysis of so-called objective facts to a dynamic historically situated interpretation of relationships leads to the concept of the social environment as a symbolic system. The main assumption here is that every expression (economic, political, ideological etc.) stands for how people identify themselves. Enter the ethnographer and her sense of identity and we have a situation of symbolic exchange out of which

a new historical context emerges.

John and Jean Comaroff (1992:96-97) summarize several important points. Every society is part of a process of articulation with elements of its immediate and wider social environment. These processes do not involve abstract concepts like modes of production but human actors in material and symbolic practice. The historic encounter between two social worlds is always dialectical. Finally, the boundaries between internal and external social environment is not fixed. One essential idea here is that the capitalist perspective is not the defining factor for a non-capitalist social unit. Internal historicity is based on the practice of integrating the material and the organizational/ideological elements of a social environment (p.98). A main point is that people are not merely products of their social environment but take active part in a continuous re-creation of their own history. This has to be considered in formulating an ethnographic focus. John Comaroff (1982:146) suggests the process of internal and external dialectic as the "unit of study". I think this is a very vague idea. A dynamic process in which numerous ideological and material elements are involved and that is acted out on two different levels (internal and external) is simply not a manageable unit.

Sherry Ortner (1979) tightens the focus in concentrating on key symbols. Summarizing symbols are associated with

the ideological system and what this system means to a people. Elaborating symbols are associated with communication and ordering activities (p.94). In terms of the symbolic analysis of a system she suggests the distinction between summarizing symbols (belief system), root metaphors (models & images), and key scenarios (stylized actions and the restructuring of attitudes and relationships) (p.98). This typology presupposes a well-bounded system in which it can be applied. But in a global interaction sphere the old boundaries of culture and society have become difficult to define. Another problem is that this approach does not take the ethnographer as participant into account. While key symbols and key scenarios exist in any social unit they may not be easy to identify, given the different perspective of the ethnographer. Although Ortner mentions the restructuring of relationships, a typology like this ignores the dynamics of a creation of social reality.

Ortner (1994) notes two important limitations in anthropological theory. One is the dichotomist view in which we classify the world into nature/culture or objective/subjective (p.379). The line between these opposites have faded. Still, to a large extent our theories are influenced by this particular perspective. The other limitation has its basis in the distinction between the rational/non-rational. In a mechanistic worldview the

rational aspect of social organization has been overemphasized while the non-rational has been ignored or even denied. This is the perspective then, from which we interpret the other who may or may not share our point of view. I agree with Ortner that too much rationality is assumed on the part of the actor (p.401). The key word in Ortner's thoughts is practice. People produce and reproduce their social environment through their actions (p.390).

Anthropological theory is drifting away from rigid typologies, the new focus is a global interactionsphere, the ethnographer's presence has to be considered, the old boundaries of culture and society are breaking down, and social organization has become a symbol of a people's idea of reality. At the same time our western worldview experiences a change from dualistic - mechanistic to interrelated - intuitive. The main task for anthropology is to formulate a theoretical framework that takes these changes into account.

I want to suggest a problem oriented approach based on the idea of a social unit I call "interest group". The interest group is extracted from the larger social environment for research purposes only. The boundary is determined by the anthropologist's research problem. One main assumption is that every individual belongs to different interest groups that can be defined by whatever

the research objective is (e.g. diabetics, female Navy officers etc.). The basis for the choice of research objective is the ethnographer's immediate sense of difference. So one could say the interest group is defined out of the researcher's subjective perspective or reality. But the interest group is not a static entity and the ethnographer not a mere observer. The boundary around the interest group exists in theory only. Once the group is identified it seems useful to establish further boundaries that I would call interaction boundaries.

A concept of Erving Goffman (1959:106-140) is the differentiation between settings or regions that are associated with distinctive forms of communication (language, behavior). The idea of "front" and "back" regions still seems useful. With regard to an interest group one could map out regions and compare vocabularies, gestures, and the use of objects. This concept is related to Goffman's idea that individuals play particular roles in particular regions (p.140-166).

Goffman (1967) discusses interaction strategies that are mainly aimed at preserving the identity of the actors as well as keeping the situation intact. Although individual situations are treated as dynamic encounters between participants, the emphasize is put on face saving and role playing strategies. Digressions from the appropriate or expected behavior are treated as mistakes and social

blunders. The approach is firmly rooted in a mechanistic framework and leaves little room for variation and choice. Goffman follows a long tradition of presenting the individual as a product of her environment.

A more dynamic approach to symbolic interaction involves the idea that the individual's sense of self is created during action (Hewitt 1979:73). This means that other actors and their reactions to the individual help shape her identity and in a wider sense the social situation. I would like to keep this in mind for the role of the ethnographer in interaction with informants. Another key concept is the objectification of society (p.167). Members of a social unit share a definition of reality and base their actions on this definition. They act not only within a social unit but also toward it. Objectification also applies to smaller units and communities (p.168). In terms of an interest group things may not be so simple. After all, the boundaries are theoretical and exist more or less in the ethnographer's imagination. So an important step to define an interest group would be to identify their definition of reality. This can be problematic when a high degree of diversity exists within the group. A main point though, is that social reality is constantly reconstructed.

R.S. Perinbanayagam (1985) carries the thought a little farther and notes that meaning is constructed in interaction (p.18). He picks up on the idea of the interrelatedness

of things and actors as opposed to the more conventional view of opposites. In this sense the observed and the observer are not two isolated beings that play their respective roles at each other. Rather, they are actors whose definition of self is created while they act and react toward each other. One result of this scenario is the emergence of meaning, or rather a redefinition of such (p.18). The act of creating a context/reality is the act of the symbolic ordering of the world (p.99). In other words, there are no symbols that lie outside our actions. This is the same idea as social order is a symbol of our sense of reality. So the term symbolization would be more appropriate. In terms of the ethnographer and the interest group this means that both redefine each other as they interact, both see each other as standing for something or other (e.g. the ethnographer symbolizes nosy scientists), and the interaction itself becomes meaningful for both participants in that it will be interpreted (perceived) in certain ways. This is an important step towards integrating the ethnographer into the interest group.

But there are limits. Every individual is conditioned and socialized by a specific social environment (home and academia). So responses to stimuli and interpretations of other's actions will, to some extent, be preprogrammed. In case of an ethnographer who has chosen an interest group on the basis of difference, this is dangerous. In the

extreme case one may perceive the other as too different to be understood and the interaction may become meaningless. Or so it may seem. I think a situation of mutual misunderstanding or non-comprehension would only be another context, however frustrating. Misunderstanding and non-comprehension are loaded with meaning. One can define oneself by what one is not. Consequently there is no meaninglessness. Instead there is an ongoing negotiation of reality.

What I have called negotiation is what Anthony Giddens (1986) means by structuration. The theory is based on the idea that social systems and the institutions which represent them are constantly recreated through the interaction of its members (p.24). Each instance of interaction between two or more actors creates a particular social context as well as social institutions (p.69). Every encounter is located at a specific point in time and space and the actors move from one encounter to the next, constantly creating situations and contexts of their own social environment. In every encounter the power relationship between actors will be different, although it will remain the same in the same type of encounter (p.73-76).

The most basic element of an interest group is the individual and it is the individual's actions that help create the social context. Seriality is the succession

of situations in which the actor participates throughout the day. Each situation is relatively well bounded by opening and closing gestures or words (p.73). In identifying an interest group it seems practical to choose a certain type of context, keeping in mind that people interact in a number of different types of context. Types of context can be defined by physical settings, linguistic and behavioral routines, or in other words, shared symbolic expressions that are particular to a context type. Giddens (1996:86-87) uses the term framing to describe a temporarily and spatially situated encounter or interaction scene. Each frame requires a routine of communication that makes sense only within this frame. That a frame is situated at a particular point in time does not mean that it is a one time only occurrence. It is the routine behavior of the actors that recreates the institutionalized aspects of a social unit (p.86).

Two things have to be mentioned here. At first glance it may seem that the analysis of a frozen point in time may be ahistorical. But a type of context can consist of a sequence of situations over quite a long time. The way the participants relate to past situations is the way they create their history. This means that the ethnographer becomes an increasingly integrated part of an interest group's history. The other point is that Giddens' approach emphasizes routine communication and the reproduction of

social institutions (p.258). Routine symbolization is certainly important to maintain social stability. But it is only half the story. Social interaction or the practice of symbolization is not that predictable. A symbolic system has to be flexible enough to absorb chance, innovation, mistakes, and still make sense to its members.

One key idea in structuration theory is knowledge. Giddens (1986:335-338) distinguishes between mutual knowledge, common sense, and new knowledge. Mutual knowledge is shared by both actor and observer as basis for action and analysis. Common sense is often regarded as a form of belief by the observer while the actor includes it as part of knowledge in the decision-making process. The main difference seems to me the knowledge based on scientific "proof" on the outside and the "proven" knowledge on the inside. To use Giddens' example of the rain dance (p.337-338), the actors would probably not perform a rain dance at a particular time to ensure their crops if it would not usually rain then. I do not want to imply here that one kind of knowledge is more correct than the other, but would suggest to include both in the term knowledge and leave it at that.

What is important, is that "common sense" is included in the decision-making process and the resulting actions of the other. This goes for the anthropologist too in her home environment as well as in an interaction situation

with the other. This concept carries the hint of intuition, an element that is undoubtedly part of human behavior but has been ignored or denied by conventional science as "unscientific". But in a shift in emphasize from systems to people it needs to be considered.

New knowledge is the information that enters into a group from the outside and is taken into account in future actions (Giddens 1986:341). This is a vital link between the interest group and the ethnographer. New knowledge then, would be the basis for the new context/reality and also for a new historic sequence of a social unit. The public, split into interest groups, is to a large extent aware of scientific literature that is often written for their consumption. This, of course, triggers some sort of reaction which may or may not be intended by the author. Members of an interest group may discuss current theories they can relate to or they may be influenced by outside knowledge indirectly. The latter draw on something that Giddens (1986:41) calls practical consciousness.

The process of creating new realities works both ways. Anthropologists can also be defined as an interest group. Their publications often reach a wider audience and so may have some impact in a wider context. New knowledge of this kind may not be included in practical consciousness until it is established and reinforced as some kind of social rule/routine. It may also trigger a discourse and

create new desires which eventually would have influence on the political and scientific arenas. So there is a constant feedback situation between interest groups that spirals outward onto the global level. I would say there is a constant process of negotiating going on between both levels that may not only recreate interest groups and social institutions but may also result in change. I think change is inherent in interactive/re-creative processes.

The negligence or outright denial of intuitive human behavior has led to a major rift between participants in the scientific and the non-scientific contexts. The former lacked the theoretical framework to include a large part of the other's behaviors and attitudes and the latter could not relate to scientific inquiries and results. The estrangement made it difficult to get along and mistrust and ridicule from both sides were quite obvious and unfortunately still are.

With postmodernism a shift began that manifested itself as self-awareness and self-criticism. Interpretation and subjectivity became key words. With the realization that interaction spheres overlap whether the participants get along or not a new theoretical framework was needed, maybe even a new way of thinking. At the bottom of the problem was basically the split between the rational-mechanistic and nonrational-intuitive point of view, or order and chaos. The danger was and still is that enthusiasts carry the

latter concept to the extreme in an effort to overcompensate for past blunders. On the other hand, the former has been and still is being carried to the extreme. To discuss the reasons for this would go beyond the scope of this project but would no doubt be quite revealing (and uncomfortable). In any case, the goal is not to discard objectivity but to balance it with what I call human aspects. Human behavior cannot be broken down into a mathematical formula. I think the idea that actors negotiate or structure their contexts as they go along is an important step towards a new perspective that allows the inclusion of both rational and intuitive actions.

Every action is based on a decision the actor has made either rationally or intuitively. Even spontaneous actions need some sort of trigger or motivation. Jon Elster (1994) discusses resources as decisive aspects in the decision making process. An individual may not be aware of all the opportunities available and may also hold specific beliefs about those that are available. I think this is important to remember in terms of anthropological research. It is possible to identify a wide range of options from the outside of a specific interest group. However, the perspective from the inside may be entirely different. Elster sees opportunities as more fundamental than desires because the former are constricted by social norms. Though this may change depending on the motivation a person has

for a particular action. Action is the intended outcome of desires and opportunities (1994:91). It is more difficult to enter unintended consequences into the decision-making process. Elster (p.91-92) sees a change of desires and an impact on opportunities as results of action. Also one person's action may have some unintended influence on another person's action (p.97). Another variable is action based on emotion rather than rational choice. Sets of core emotions (e.g. anger-joy) guide human decisions and actions (p.67). In terms of social norms and sanctions they are relatively easy to enter into the sociological model. Elster discusses social norms as avoking certain emotions. Fear of sanctions may prevent a certain action while wish for approval may lead to another action (p.118-119).

However, it is not always so easy. There are emotional behaviors that appear to be irrational. I would argue that whatever triggers an emotional (or intuitive) response is real. It may not be part of the ethnographer's usual reality, but it certainly is part of the other's reality and therefore has to be taken into account. Trying to integrate human emotion into an explanatory framework is an important step toward a more dynamic and a more realistic approach to social organization. But there are still limits. The biggest is the identification of core emotions that are discussed as dichotomies. I do not think that these can be easily extracted from an intricate pattern of

behavior that is in constant motion.

I would prefer a more scale-like model on which emotional expressions can be placed according to degree of intensity. There is never anger alone, there is anger-frustration, anger-pain, anger-hate etc. I believe that the dichotomous model is too restricting, even artificial to provide clues to real life actions. A scale model may be more helpful not only with regard to emotional behavior but also in terms of other manifestations of human actions. We have to remember that the order-chaos dichotomy exists in our minds and that our reality is in constant flux between both extremes. It is essential to associate each emotional (or other) expression with a particular scene in which it is played out. This includes the reactions of the ethnographer. As a consequence I think it would be insightful if the ethnographer would briefly describe her own reactions to certain situations in the field.

Of course, this is where subjectivity enters. But this is just part of the negotiating process. The ethnographic text is the connecting point between different interest groups who may use it to create different realities out of it. First, there is the instant in which the ethnographer creates the text. This nails down a particular reality as perceived and negotiated by the researcher. Second, upon publication the text will be reinterpreted as each reader tries to fit it into his or her reality (tries to

make sense of it). So action and the text about it are constantly reworked which leads to the idea that the written text is not so much different from the life action. It is part of the creation of reality.

Paul Ricoeur (1991:154-155) understands action as a text that needs to be interpreted in order to give meaning to it. Human action then can be read like a text. This means that it can also be interpreted in very different ways. To find the most likely interpretation he discusses the dialectic between understanding and explaining (p.157-165). How the reader understands a text is not necessarily what the author had intended to convey. The reader recreates a text or action by filtering it through her own background and then integrates it into the group's social environment. This is almost like the feedback situation between members of an interest group and observer while both are acting in the same encounter. Especially when the members of an interest group take the ethnographer's interpretations into account and include it as new knowledge into their action plans. Structuration theory and the idea of the interest group can be extended to the analytical level with this concept of text appropriation and interpretation.

The meaning of action is dynamic (1991:167). This corresponds to the feedback situation between participants from different contexts that create a new context. With

the creation of a new context meaning is also created. This is what the negotiation is all about. If something is supposed to be meaningful it has to make sense or it has to fit into my perception. Only if something has meaning can I include it in my reality, can it become real to me. This is why some new science theories that include intuition appear unrealistic or "far out" to some of the more conventional researchers. This is exactly true, these ideas are far out of the researcher's reality.

I agree with Ricoeur that the written text is open to interpretation but I do think that there is also something final about it. If the notion of free-for-all-interpretation is carried too far social organization and interaction would slide toward the chaos side of the scale. There has to be some degree of consensus, something that members of the interest group share, that members across different interest groups share, out to that the human species shares. I think if there is one element that is essential in the creation of our reality and is shared by all members of humanity, it is imagination. Paul Ricoeur (1991:117-136) observes that imagination is not at the basis of art only, but that imagination at work produces the world in which we live out our reality. In this concept language does not exist outside our reality and on the other hand it is a vehicle for our perception. This describes a dynamic dialectic between reality and

language. One could say, we create our reality while we talk about it. Talking is one type of action and so is writing. Carried to the extreme this concept may lead to the notion that we are making things up and that everything is fiction. I would not follow this panic reaction, but I think that imagination is the one driving force beneath our actions. That does not mean we are "making things up" but it does mean that in our actions we shape or interpret or react to the external world to create a reality that we can relate to. There is no real reality out there. There's only us trying to get along and make sense of it all.

An important mechanism to do exactly this is discussed by Pierre Bourdieu (1990). Objectification is the means by which structure and meaning are given to dynamic social processes. In anthropological practice this results in mechanistic rules and measurable objective facts that make the anthropologist's model more real than the actor's reality (p.39). The rational actor approach that is mostly at the bottom of mechanistic models assumes that rationality itself is the driving force of human decisions and actions (p.50). Approaches like these, one may also say attitudes, reduce human actions to a mechanical, predictable behavior.

Bourdieu (1990:52-65) proposes an approach that goes beyond objectivity and subjectivity. Habitus describes a people's practice that is generated anew within each

situation. This practice is always logical in it's particular situation as it is practical for the actors in defining their identity and creating their reality. Habitus is a concept that can encompass an infinite number of practices. In terms of social organization, institutions, and power relationships habitus is the mechanism by which these elements are reproduced. A key aspect here is that of symbolization. Based on the degree of rarity, differences in the value of social units are symbolically expressed and labeled as status groups (p.138). From an economic perspective capital has to be transformed into symbolic capital (credit) in order to reproduce the system of economically differentiated social units, or to make denied capital legitimate (p.118). Symbolization is a practice in which people reproduce their social environment. Important to note here is that social/economic differences are symbolically institutionalized. One might call difference the factor by which an individual situates/identifies herself in relation to everybody else.

According to Susanne Langer (1979:71-72) a symbol is the vehicle for a concept. But an individual's interpretation of or reaction toward a concept creates a private conception. This is a very subjective creation of our imagination. Langer (p.71) discusses symbols in terms of sensory input. No two people have exactly the same perception. Sensory input is transformed into symbolic

expressions in order to make sense of our surroundings. Meaning here is a function of a term and can only be discerned if the term is situated in relation to other terms. Langer sees function mainly as pattern (p.55). Central to her analysis is the universal recognition of patterns like sun and moon cycles that eventually lead to their symbolic expression in myth and religious ritual (p.144-203). Published originally in 1942, Langer's ideas fit better into the contemporary debate. The theoretical framework currently favored reaches beyond religion and myth to include human social organization in a more general way. Still, at the core of symbolic practice are perception, imagination, and pattern recognition.

A key question in symbolization is that of identity. Francisco Varela (1979) develops the idea of the autopoietic system. The bottom line is that each organism is an autonomous autopoietic system that maintains its identity in closed mechanistic processes. It is not the organism but the process of reproduction and the relation to other autopoietic entities that establishes identity. Varela's assumption is that there is an organizing principle that is common to all living systems (p.6). Any evolutionary change occurs within the limits of a system's immediate environment. The history of a species is that of continuous change or adaptation (p.39). So the identity of a living system, whether cell or person, is established through

its own reproductive processes and through the relationship to other living systems. Also all living systems follow the same pattern of organization.

I doubt though that any living system can be truly autonomous. The idea that there is no input and no output (p.32) seems to negate the basis of interrelationship and the principle of identification. Varela takes change as a selective principle to maintain identity. His approach seems too deterministic. But the theory hints at a continuity between biological/physiological processes and social/cognitive behavior. Where Langer made a tentative start in connecting sensory perception and cognition, Varela goes a step further and suggests physiological processes that maintain a biological entity's identity and organization. In consequence this would mean that these processes are a factor in symbolic practice and human social organization. Change in this sense would mean the constant redefinition of self that would then be an individual's history or the history of the interest group. A constant redefinition which I find more useful than "maintenance of identity", would mean the ongoing structuring or negotiating process discussed above. The connecting link between physiological and social processes is the idea of a universal pattern.

Gregory Bateson (1979) talks of a pattern that connects or a metapattern (p.10). Assuming that everything in our

world is interrelated, metapattern is the underlying principle of organization or the way we find our position in this web of relationships. Important here is the notion of context which is seen as a pattern through time (p.14). So we find our place according to our context and we also put manifestations of other ideas into their contexts. This is the pursuit of meaning or the creation of history. Inherent here is the constant recreation of context and the constant redefinition of self within a context. Negotiation after a pattern.

If we want to maintain our relationship with the external world, to imagine a metapattern seems to be unavoidable. In order to act according to the pattern we rely on our perception which in turn is based on difference. This is an essential factor in Batesons's discussion (p.29). In putting ourselves and other symbols in relation to our surroundings we commonly classify on the basis of difference. The degree of difference is determined by our perceptory threshold (p.29). I think to see difference as a matter of degree is crucial to our understanding of social organization. To keep up the negotiation or to maintain our interrelationships we cannot cut ourselves off by imagining the world in opposites. A scale model seems more constructive and would be more in line with the idea of a connecting pattern.

The dynamic element in Batesons's approach is that

of stability (p.62) This means within the framework of our perception we compare and describe our environment. This is a continuous process by which we create our reality. We constantly negotiate our position while we participate in a sequence of situations. Another more subjective dynamic element is our individual perception. It is our brain that creates (imagins) the images that we think we see (p.31). All our past experiences provide the basis for comparison and establishing difference. It follows that each perception is subjective. Sensory input provides information that is processed and organized on a continuous basis. This is an essential part of a very dynamic interactive process within our environment.

A more detailed analysis of metapatterns is offered by Tylor Volk (1995). He distinguishes between geometric-symbolic concepts by which the physical world as well as human symbolic behavior is organized. Here temporal and spatial organization follow patterns of cycles, borders, calendars etc. Where Bateson's concept remained in the abstract, Volk examines organizing patterns in their actual application in biological and social contexts. These patterns still emerge out of the big pattern that connects - from simple to complex, from center to periphery. This apporach offers more possibilities than one that is too abstract. It is important to note that Volk's patterns are universal. In terms of an interest group one would

look for symbols (including symbolic behavior) that correspond to Volk's patterns, e.g. the cycle. This seems to be a productive starting point for a behavioral analysis in terms of symbolic practices.

This theoretical outline has gradually entered the realm of the new science in which imagination, mind, and a creative dynamism are taken into account. Danah Zohar and Ian Mashall (1994) discuss consciousness, cognitive processes, and their effect on behavior and social organization in terms of quantum physics. It has been physics that spearheaded the development from a Newtonian mechanistic worldview to one that is based on quantum reality. I want to remind here, that scientific theory and method grow out of a contextual perception of the world and that in turn the world is then explained in terms of the resulting theory. One point Zohar and Marshall make is that life is not as deterministic (or predictable) as a Newtonian scientist would like us to believe. They enter the "Uncertainty Principle" (p.69) to point out that individuals can either follow rational reason or gut feeling in their actions. They associate gut feeling or intuition with creativity as opposed to efficiency.

An important thought in Zohar's and Marshall's discussion is that there is an underlying quantum principle in the way our consciousness works and our self-identity is created (p.70-72). The unity of the self is greater

than the sum of its parts (p.71) reminds very much of Batesons's metapattern. In an interesting example they describe how a dance is created while it is performed without any previous arrangements between the dancers. The idea is that the dance (or self, or social unit) can have an identity of its own (p.105). Carrying this thought further it means that a particular historic situation is being created through the actions of the participants in the scene. In Zohar's and Marshall's approach lies very much the notion that intuition and creativity ride on a quantum principle or on the metapattern. In terms of the dance it would be this metapattern that allows the dancers to be in sync with each other. This makes a discussion of how our consciousness works even more important.

Zohar and Marshall (1994) establish a close link between human social organization and quantum physics asserting that both follow the same principle. So the quantum principle is the integrative aspect that holds us in place and everything together. How this realization has shaped our attitudes and behaviors can be seen in numerous ways, e.g. counter culture, self development etc. Although we still encounter social phenomena that seem strange and sometimes an informant's words remain outside our reality, I think quantum theory is a decisive step toward the development of theories that do human nature more justice. The theoretical debate seems to have reached a point where

a shift in perspective is not enough anymore and a shift into a new paradigm would seem more appropriate. Maybe it is time to leave postmodernism behind and enter into quantum anthropology.

Chapter II

Method

The social environment in which the new paradigm of quantum reality finds its expression is that of New Age. The main objective of the research project is to examine how individuals of the New Age interest group put ideas and ideals of the quantum paradigm into practice. Of further interest will be to see which of these ideas already permeate the mainstream social environment. In finding the interest group New Age I relied on a general impression without at first trying to formulate a fixed definition. I chose the Norman area as the physical boundary for my research.

At the beginning of my fieldwork I had only a very vague idea of what New Age really included. These were mostly mainstream ideas and stereotypes that expressed the distance and difference that lay between New Age and the rest of the social environment. Notions of crystal gazing, candles, astrology and the like did not seem to fit into the hard fact reality I and others had grown up

in. However, the sense of difference did not lead to disdain for New Age people. Quite the contrary, it inspired curiosity. As more and more ideas and concepts associated with New Age began to surface in the mainstream, I became aware that there must be something more to it than I had thought and that maybe it was a sign that our own mainstream environment is changing in a remarkable way. Most notably, the emergence of new science seemed to express the same notions as the New Age realm, although I could not exactly grasp what those notions were.

So for a beginning the New Age environment seemed to be the most likely context in which I would find the New Paradigm. A first important decision was to not begin my research with a fixed definition of my subject or a set of preformulated categories. I believe this is a serious mistake of so-called objective researchers. The danger here is that the definition is based on superficial impressions, stereotypes, and unacknowledged biases. How can I define something that I have not even studied yet? A set of preestablished categories means that the data will be interpreted so as to make them fit into these categories. Everything that does not fit in will be dismissed as non-existent or irrelevant. Science according to the rule: it cannot be what must not be. This is what I see happening in conventional approaches. However, New Age is about change as is the New Paradigm.

I began my research with a loose idea of New Age that will be kept flexible throughout my description of the realm. A definition, based on the dialogue between New Age participants and me, will emerge as I go along and will be formulated clearly at the end. It is important to keep in mind that change is a key term in this project. It follows that no definition is absolute or final but rather represents a condition or process that grew out of the interaction between ethnographer and subject. This also means that the definition of my interest group will be colored by personal insights and subjective perceptions. This is not bias in the negative sense, this is a bias we have to accept as unavoidable and use it to our advantage. To be up front about it seems more integer and productive than to cover it with a blanket of false objectivity and "professionalism". The categories I will use are not my own but are extricated from the New Age/New Paradigm context in which they represent major concerns, and realms of experience and expression. Therefore they will emerge during the ethnographic description.

To create a broad view of the New Age realm I decided not to concentrate on one particular group. So the focus will be on individuals that may or may not belong to any New Age group. There are several such groups in the Norman area that I associate with New Age. These are the Organization of Psychic Educational Research Associates

(OPERA), the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans (CUUPS), and the Oklahoma Metaphysical Society (OMS). I had learned that the OMS occasionally invites speakers such as Matthew Fox. Fox is a former monk who has become a very successful and influential New Age author on the subject of spirituality. So to find a first informant I contacted the OMS - and was promptly rebuffed. One of their directors explained in no uncertain terms that they had definitely nothing to do with New Age. Puzzled, I asked what they were doing and the answer was, "We do serious research." Aha. In other words New Age is not serious. My further questions were all deflected with variations of, "You are certainly welcome to visit our booth at the mall." I began to have a feeling that this would be more complicated than I had imagined. Here were people who were concerned with New Age topics, literature, and people and yet they wanted nothing to do with New Age. During the course of my fieldwork I would encounter the same situation over and over again. The definition of New Age and what it entails is subject to debate even among participants and the boundary between mainstream, New Age, and all their subgroups is fluent and flexible. Although I knew this would make my work difficult, I felt this was realistic. This first experience forced me to decide on how to handle the diverging views on New Age or where to draw the line. At first this seemed almost an insurmountable obstacle.

On the other hand, I was not willing to follow conventions and simply dictate a boundary. I decided to wait and see what would emerge from my further enquiries.

The next chance to find a New Age participant came in an office on campus. I spotted a necklace in the shape of an Egyptian hieroglyph on a secretary. I had seen the same necklace in a New Age catalogue and therefore felt I could put it into context. The secretary looked confused when I asked if she is interested in things New Age. She shook her head, "Yes. No. Uhhh... I don't know". Obviously she did not know what I was talking about. Then she explained that her father had recently visited Egypt and brought the necklace as a souvenir. So much for that.

Meanwhile I had acquired a T-shirt with a New Age topic, a seasonal cycle motif. I had it on as I stood at a bus stop and noticed that a woman kept looking at it. I said, "Hi," and she asked if I like New Age stuff. I told her what I was doing and returned the question. She nodded her head eagerly and said, "Oh yes. I'm really into that New Age stuff. I'm a psychology major." Her name was Tiffany and she gave me her phone number. She agreed to talk to me about her interest, "You can write about me as a twentysomething mother of two." We decided to meet the next day and ride the bus together. The "mother of two" stuck in my mind. This was somehow what I usually associate with more conservative people, women who identify themselves

by their roles as mothers. Tiffany also did not strike me as someone I would identify with New Age, even though I had no clear notion of how a New Age person would appear to me. I could not put my finger on it but there was something wrong here. Her appearance and demeanor pointed at conservatism. When we met the next morning my suspicions were confirmed. She was much more subdued and spoke only a few sentences in almost a whisper. I felt she wanted to keep her promise to talk to me while at the same time she tried to get it over with. The gist was that she went to a Baptist church regularly and that she was aware that not all New Age people go to church. "I wonder if they are really Christians," was her conclusive remark and it was delivered with an expression of doubt and distrust. A slight emphasize was put on "they" and it became clear that Tiffany found conservative Christian New Age people (this is almost a contradiction in terms) acceptable but the non-church going kind she viewed with suspicion. My suggestion that we meet again was met with a polite refusal, "Maybe we can talk on the bus next time." I never met Tiffany again, she had not given me her last name, and her phone number turned out to be a wrong one.

However, I had found a store that appeared "new agey" to me. The Star Cloud was a small place that stood out from the surrounding businesses because of its window dressing. At first sight it did not seem to offer anything

to buy. In the big front window a fantasy scene was set up that consisted of magi, castles, dragons, skulls, and the like. A big white cloud and a rainbow were painted on the glass. "Welcome All!" was printed in bold black letters across the window. Smaller announcements read, "Meditation Healing Circle, Wednesday 7pm", or "Candlelight Meditation, Sunday 6pm". This sounded New Age and I hoped I was at the right place.

When I first entered the store a small bell cord announced my arrival to one lonely customer and a tall lanky mid-thirtyish man behind a display counter. They were both engaged in a whispered conversation and ignored me. I did not really know what exactly I was looking for. So I wanted to spend some time to just look around and get a feel for the place and hopefully for the New Age realm.

The first impression was that of chaos and randomness, plus a terrible smell that I could not identify but that permeated the whole store. Two big glass counters, one of which served as a sales counter, dominated the place. Along the walls stood several large bookshelves and a trophy case was in one corner in the back. Scattered throughout the store were small tables and racks of various sizes. Two of the big shelves were set up so they reached into the room. This provided a strange lighting effect. While the front of the store lay in normal daylight the light

grew increasingly dimmer towards the back. On all my subsequent visits I never failed to notice this and I always thought that it added to the sense of strangeness, even mystique. Another part of me wondered if this was good business sense.

The Star Cloud did not seem to have been set up with the idea of selling anything. The scattered furnishings, the lighting, the rocks, baskets, and other containers that littered the floor made it difficult to get around. I found myself among a jumble of articles that were so diverse and obviously so unrelated that made it hard to focus on anything in particular. Models of Egyptian pyramids stood side by side with statues of European medieval witches, trolls, and dragons. Tarot card decks, masks, dream catchers, colorful stones, herbs, soaps, oils, books, magazines, postcards, T-shirts, coasters, wreaths, tapes with nature sounds, incense sticks (aha! this must be that awful smell), Rune Stones, key rings, art posters, coasters, figurines, mandala, and what I could only perceive as clutter. All this was laid out and set up at random and the general idea seemed to be disconnectedness. What does an Egyptian pyramid have to do with a self-help book on drug abuse? Where is the connection between a Tarot deck (what is Tarot anyway?) and Darwin's Origin of Species? To put it mildly I was confused but also enormously intrigued. This was a kind of atmosphere that I had never

been in before. Adding to this was the rhythmic beat of some synthetic medieval music and a constant chuckle of a white pigeon. This was a whole new world to me.

I knew I had come to the right place. I also felt I had to leave before that incense smell would make me seriously sick. I thought it might be a good idea to get used to it if I wanted to work in this kind of environment. So I bought a handful of incense sticks. The man behind the counter kept listening to his visitor, a plump middle aged woman, as I paid for the sticks. I overheard her mentioning "powerful women" she had met at some workshop. The conversation was about offering similar workshops at the Star Cloud.

An early idea of mine had been to ask something like, "What makes you a New Age person?" or "How did you get involved in the New Age environment?" Now these questions seemed far too simple. I realized that there was a whole lot more involved than a couple of people who were sick of mainstream life and tried to solve problems by gazing into crystals. Real life and the real New Age is more complex than that. The questions that were on my mind for the next couple of months were, "What is this all about?", "Where is the connection between all these different things?", and "What have I gotten myself into?" I had the feeling my "getting a feel for the environment" would take a lot longer than I had anticipated. Questions like "What

makes you a New Age person?" seemed almost ridiculous at this time.

My fieldwork did not only take place in an obvious New Age setting like the Star Cloud. I also wanted to find the area where mainstream and New Age overlap since there is no strict boundary between both. As an avid reader I always found bookstores to be very important places. Just by looking at what sells well, what is on the grab table, how the different sections are arranged, can provide a wealth of information about a social environment and changing social conditions. So I chose bookstores as a kind of indicators for mutual interests of New Age and mainstream.

I had noticed that sometime in the early to mid-seventies the science fiction section began to be positioned more prominently and also offered a far wider range of subtopics. Soon after that a new branch developed into what would become the fantasy section with a heavy mythological emphasis. It did not take long that completely new sections opened, New Age, Self-Help, Health/Nutrition, Philosophy/Religion, Science, and Psychology. It is especially interesting to note that Science, previously only available in a few specialized stores, had made it into the mainstream. It is even more noteworthy that it surfaced in the mainstream at the same time when the New Age and related sections began to blossom. Today they both

stand back to back not as contradiction (as one might expect) but as complementaries, tied to one another in a fiery and productive dialogue on all topics imaginable. I have to insert my personal bias here and state that I view all dialogues automatically as productive that include diverse perspectives regardless of whether I agree with the contents or not.

When I walked into a bookstore with the idea that this would be part of my fieldwork environment something happened that I had not expected. A totally familiar place became a place of difference to me as I had assumed a different role from that of the browsing customer. I encountered the same confusing, hard to classify assemblage of topics that I had found at the Star Cloud, although to a lesser extent. The question that arose as I walked among the shelves was, "How do I distinguish between literature that has some scientific credibility and junk?" Always maintaining my habitual suspicion towards conventions, I thought simply going by the classification that the store offered would be a bit naive. Just because a book ended up in the New Age does not mean it lacks scientific credibility. Of course, the science shelf is no guarantee for credibility either. How many well established scientists get scoffed at for their work? More importantly, how often is a publication based on manipulated data and put out for political, economic, or career purposes alone?

Things have become more complicated and more interesting because conventional science and new science are in a tangle over a power position at this time.

My way to sort out the confusion was the same that I adopted with regard to social groups, to discard standard boundaries and do things my own way. After all, I wanted to write about real people in real life. Is that not what ethnography is all about, getting to know the Other as it/she/he really is? Besides, one of my emphases is change and that automatically excludes any static boundary. So I decided to wait and see what my conversations with informants would bring up. Then I would read up on the subject that is important to them. I would choose literature from all sections in which the subject is represented and present/include my findings as part of the ongoing dialogue between New Age/New Science and mainstream. I will also have to make a distinction between believability, productive speculation, and hollow sensationalism. But it is important to keep in mind here that the latter is an integrated part of the public debate and so contributes to the overall social atmosphere.

As I continued to look for New Age participants I discovered several more stores that I, until further enquiry, classified as New Age because they offer similar items as the Star Cloud. I have always perceived Norman as the most conservative place I have lived in. So the

obviously very active interest in New Age came as a surprise. One of the representatives of New Age's more commercial concerns is Henry. At a chance meeting he introduced himself as a witch. My first reaction was that I have never met a witch before and I wanted to ask him what that was like. And what exactly is a witch? However, Henry proved to be elusive. In our first and all subsequent meetings he quickly stirred the conversation towards his business interests. He is the owner of the Stonehenge store. He is also the only one I have met in the Norman New Age realm who introduces himself with an assumed New Age sounding name. Henry is quick to point out his successes. He has several degrees in various fields, is a business owner, and a published author of a couple of fantasy novels. Our (mostly chance) meetings never lasted long as he seemed to be in a perpetual hurry or on the phone when he was in his store. For some time one could find him quite often in the local papers where he continued his self advertisement. I will include Henry in further chapters. For now he is important to mention because he helped to reveal an important aspect of the New Age realm as I began to stake out my research area.

For now I had chosen the Star Cloud as my home base. To integrate myself into the environment and also to show support, I usually bought something on each visit. This was usually an incense stick or a small colorful stone.

I also offered to help out in the store.

During the following months I took part in meditation sessions and discussions that took place at the Star Cloud. The individuals I met on those occasions provided further contacts in the Norman area. I also participated in palmetry and psychic sessions. On those occasions it was not always easy to distinguish the legitimate from the less credible. For a long time there were numerous situations in which I doubted my informants, then believed that they believed in what they do, and finally learned to ask questions that might shed some light on things that are awkward. Learning to ask the right questions or adapt my questions to the context turned out to be one of the most valuable lessons I learned during the early stage of my fieldwork.

Although I have always been interested in the so called paranormal, it took a long time until I had overcome the feeling that everybody was trying to pull my leg. I did not plan to make psychic phenomena a central concern of this project. But during the course of my work I found that it is a major focus in the New Age scene of Norman and so I will discuss them where appropriate. To avoid misleading connotations I will not use the term psychics but from now on refer to sensitives. Further reasons for this will emerge in coming chapters. What is important in this regard is to show how conventional science has

largely failed or even prevented an approach to issues like this. I will provide examples of how theoretical and practical approaches from the New Science realm can be used to study that which is strange to us or awkward. To some degree I have always been disappointed in anthropology's handling of aspects like magic, supernatural, witchcraft and the like. I have never found a real effort to get at the bottom of such phenomena. Since these issues are not well accepted in the western mainstream, much less academia, those who include these things in their lives are automatically a notch lower on the social scale. This does not only go for New Age participants but all other peoples. My personal bias here is that there is nothing supernatural but only the natural, nothing paranormal but only the normal, and nothing extrasensory but only our senses. To find explanations seems to be more useful than scoffing at somebody else's experiences and convictions. This is the attitude then, on which I will base my approach with regard to the very different. To demystify the mysterious turned out to be an important part and challenge of my research.

The New Age is not an abstract term but is created and recreated by the people who participate in it. Anthropologists like Margaret Mead have been criticised for ignoring the individual. I will put an emphasize on individuals and present a range of personalities and

histories that reflect the New Age realm. In doing this I will give the reader only a general idea of a person's age. In my opinion chronological age has become practically meaningless in our time and I consider it a dangerous and unfair practice to categorize people like that.

Who does and does not participate in the New Age is difficult to find out. Since it is not a cohesive group but rather an assemblage of individuals and subgroups. There is certainly no membership rule. To point at subgroups that do have membership lists would lead back to ignoring the individual. There is no information available as to how many individuals are involved. I do not see this as a disadvantage. It merely reflects the experimental and individualistic attributes of the New Age. This meant that finding informants also had to be experimental to some extent. Lacking a definition, a set of categories, and even a full theory at that time made the whole project very challenging but also very realistic.

At the time of my first visit to the Star Cloud I had just begun to formulate my theoretical approach. My primary concern at that time was to let the informant say who he/she is. So I made the individual part of the decision rather than apply categories that she/he cannot relate to or does not agree with. At first this felt awkward, like two people who do not know what they are talking about. Over time however, this part of my work became one of the more

important and revealing ones. The lack of certainty, the different opinions, the openness to negotiate all indicated change and flexibility. So this was exactly what I had been looking for. I just had not imagined that it would be difficult in practice.

Although there are several groups in Norman that may be seen as representative of the New Age realm, the idea of this project is not to study institutions but people. Informants belong to either one, several, or none of the groups in town. Generally participants are engaged in a network that lacks any formal organization but is loosely held together by shared experiences, concerns, and ideals. During the course of my research a few names were mentioned to me repeatedly and I identify these individuals as the pillars of the Norman New Age context. They will emerge in the following chapters as my key informants. Many others move between these few without knowing each other. But everybody knows or at least has heard of the few main characters. This is very much a symbolic expression of the New Age context, a wide seemingly unrelated diversity connected by a few major focus points.

If all of the above seems unrefined and vague it is an accurate impression of how the New Age context appears to outsiders. From a theoretical standpoint the vagueness is a necessity at the beginning of the project, no matter how troublesome this feels. Definitions, identities, and

context have been created during the fieldwork period and will be recreated in the following chapters. My theory also has been fleshed out during the active period of the project as new insights and literature became available and significant. So of course, all the above cannot be described as fixed entities before the process (before the fact, as Clifford Geertz might say).

I want to remember of the historical context here. The three developmental stages of the New Paradigm/New Age seem to be the following. First, New Age was a movement that expressed ideas and followed practices that seemed to be radically different from the larger social context. Second, the urgency of the movement ceased and its members established themselves as a network across the country and the global environment. Finally, New Age ideas have been integrated into the larger social environment. It is possible for an individual to pursue some activity that has originated within the New Age context and not be aware of it. I believe that the movement is over whereas the second and third stage are still in progress. They are in fact determining factors of the current historical period or age. So the interest group New Age has to be defined in terms of its historic context.

Defining the New Age context and the identification of its participants are dynamic processes in this study. Criteria for selecting participants evolved during my first

visits to the Star Cloud and the first meditation sessions. The diversity of objects and personalities seemed to imply a social process of integration. Those who make an effort to integrate an aspect from the diversity of objects and ideas that are available into their everyday lives would be considered candidates of the New Age realm. The next step then would be to discuss this possibility with the informant. Also an open curiosity about personal and social possibilities would have to be obvious. In practice this means to actively use alternative medicines, a generally more experimental lifestyle, an attempt to formulate an ideology that tries to integrate the rational/materialistic with the non-rational/emotional. The difficulty that both participant and ethnographer have to deal with is to translate this ideal into actual practice. But this is part of the social dynamic process and is by no means complete or perfect. In some cases the individual was ambiguous about the term New Age but still showed a definite interest in things that are associated with it. In these cases the individual usually agreed that I use New Age for lack of a better term. On my part I will describe the individual's concerns.

The one expectation I had with regard to participants was that they all would share some ideal or experience despite the diversity among them. Again, I chose a few focus points based on conversations and also the literature.

These will emerge during the following ethnographic description. Many of the experiences are very much part of the mainstream. What puts them into the New Age context is, how people deal with them or how they try to solve problems and make decisions. The active application of the New Paradigm or alternative ideas is most obvious in these cases.

It seemed more complicated to find a boundary between active New Age participants and mainstream individuals who use New Age ideas or symbols that are already well integrated into the mainstream. However, an initial conversation (negotiation) usually revealed an unawareness or even rejection of anything New Age. So these individuals are not included here. Since New Age stores and catalogues are abundant it is to be expected that people use things New Age for other reasons than to create an alternative lifestyle. So another factor for defining New Age is meaning. More specifically, meaning in terms of an alternative practice or lifestyle that draws on New Paradigm principles.

Following the ethnographic description I will analyze each concern and type of experience in separate chapters. To place New Age participants on a specific point on the historic scale I will outline the context of popular culture in which New Age attitudes and behaviors can be integrated. Popular culture will be briefly reviewed in its historical

development and will then be defined in terms of the (theoretically) bounded environment of social interaction. The definition will be based on degree of difference from the wider social arena. This reflects Gregory Bateson's (1979) idea that difference is the defining factor in a classificatory system. In this case it would be the organizing principle among social units in a historical context. Part of a definition of New Age will be the degree of difference from popular culture.

It is important to note that both popular culture and the New Age interest group are concepts that exist in theory only. There are no clear cut boundaries between both and between either of them and the wider social environment. But for research purposes only boundaries have to be established to keep control over the data. Concepts like society, culture, or subculture are too wishy washy. Symbolic practice can only be analyzed in a defined context because it is the immediate context that gives meaning to it. The difference between this project and more conventional ones is that only a few focus points are being chosen at the beginning, like the main authorities of the scene, physical environment like a store, and practice/idea like meditation. From there participants will have an influence in defining their context by providing insights and criticisms with regard to the realm that is, after all, theirs. From an ethnographic standpoint this seems

to keep the New Age realm in their hands and prevents an appropriation of it (at least to some extent) by an outsider. Although the appropriation of a research context cannot be avoided and is a normal part of the negotiation, it is important to realize that writing about others brings with it a certain responsibility. To let the other have an influence can work as a safeguard against assuming an unjust superiority and an "I-know-better" attitude regarding a context that is, after all, NOT ours.

Numerous publications and symbols of the New Age realm emphasize spirituality and/or religion. My informants will be the ones to distinguish between both. I will use their definition of each.

Using Tyler Volk's (1995) geometric-symbolic concepts I will choose several that play an identifying role within the interest group. The examples will come from the material, terminological, and behavioral realms. These concepts provide the symbolic-organizational context of the analysis. With reference to Sherry Ortner (1979) I will also examine key symbols and scenarios to demonstrate specific practices and the expression of specific concerns. Key symbols are here identified according to frequency of use and/or prominence in action and discussion. This means that the key aspect is only obvious in these particular situations. What has to be kept in mind here and what I will repeat during the analysis, is that my

interpretation is the result of a dialogue with New Age participants in those situations. According to Paul Ricoeur (1981) this means my interpretation may not be what the informant had intended to convey. In most instances I checked back with the person I had talked to, to make sure I got it the way he/she had meant it. So sometimes my own interpretation would lead an informant to adapt to my perspective or to use expressions she/he had heard from me before. These are prime examples of the dialogue between participants from different contexts.

R.S. Perinbanayagam (1985) provides the theoretical framework here in that ethnographer and informant act toward each other instead of opposite each other as isolated units. Especially in the New Age context anthropological research is of great interest and on occasion my role as anthropologist does have an influence on how individuals react to me. According to Clifford Geertz (1994) this would lead to the question how anthropology as a scientific discipline is influenced by attitudes from outside. Anthropology can be put in a specific relationship to New Age participants. In terms of context I will place each example in a particular physical and behavioral position. This will narrow the concept of interest group further down but it should clarify the situatedness of human interaction. The boundaries around each situation will be drawn according to Erving Goffman's (1959) regional

interaction spheres.

To see if and how New Age ideas are put into practice it seems practical to select representative aspects of the social environment in which to place the practices. In the concept of John and Jean Comaroff (1992) these would be the area of articulation. They are conceptual contexts that are not associated with any particular interest group in this analysis. Instead I will examine to what extent the New Age/New Paradigm has taken hold of these realms. I believe this is an important part of the integration of an interest group into the wider social web. It demonstrates Marshall Sahlin's (1981) idea that different social units have an impact on one another and that scientific analyses are part of the creative process of history.

A personal concern for me in this project is to find a theoretical and methodological platform with regard to possible future projects. Therefore it seemed necessary to work out in greater detail the broad philosophical difference between the New Age and the mainstream contexts. Also the diversity of issues involved in the New Age needed to be taken care of. So my literary references will often reach beyond anthropology. However, authors like Clifford Geertz or Edward T. Hall kept me anchored in my home field.

Some interesting developments can be observed in anthropological writing. One of the first to include the

struggle of personal involvement was Colin Turnbull (1972) in his account of the Ik. From there, ethnographies became increasingly reader friendly. With regard to the New Paradigm, it took time to overcome conventional obstacles of thought and practice. It is not surprising that Gregory Bateson is a more important and acknowledged author today than at the time he actually thought and practiced. In the New Age context anthropologist Carlos Castaneda is a major literary success. That his ethnography was mostly fiction cost him his degree but his subjective drug induced mind explorations are overall acknowledged and accepted inside and outside scientific circles. As scientific research began to focus on the inner subjective world of our minds, so did anthropological writings and Hank Wesselman ("Medicinemaker" 1998) or James Redfield ("The Celestine Prophecy" 1993) are examples. Even those who do not write directly about the New Age, like Edward T. Hall e.g., assume an increasingly personal tone in both ethnographic and theoretical writings. Also a critical attitude with regard to conventional methods and ideas as well as a high degree of self-reflection have become characteristic for the discipline.

Anthropology reaches out into other disciplines for material and ideas. Since we are writing about people in interrelationships, this is to be expected. But that does not mean to lose our identity as a discipline. The same

process takes place from the outside. Prime example here is Oliver Sacks. A neurologist by training, he calls himself a neuroanthropologist because he analyses his patients in their social context. Naturally, his writings are peppered with personal anecdotes and can easily pass as ethnographies. So we, as anthropologists, reach out and others reach in. A main author in this project will be Fritjof Capra who is a physicist by training but moves comfortably in realms like biology, philosophy, and history. Master of all, of course, is Stephen J. Gould, who manages to use baseball scores and his uncle's birthday to make a scientific point. Both the inclusion of personal anecdotes and the reaching out into other disciplines reflects the shift into the New Paradigm where everything is indeed connected. This type of exploration makes it necessary to outline one broad basis or framework to prevent the impression of disconnection and random use of data. These days, it is exactly this widening of interests that makes me an anthropologist. At the same time I have kept my account in a fairly conventional structure. Where previously chapters carried titles like 'Kinship', 'Politics', 'Religion', and so forth, the following chapters will be headed by 'Spirituality', 'Science', 'Self' etc.

The New Age interest group has developed out of a particular historical situation in a particular social environment. Its defining concepts now have an impact on

this environment and shape its present and future history.
This is a very dynamic interactive sequence of events.
But at the bottom of it all is still the individual that
makes things happen.

Chapter III

The Environment

After my first visit to the Star Cloud I spent some time trying to make sense of what I had seen. I could relate to the more use oriented items such as T-shirts and coasters. But what does one need a big quartz rock for? or a Rune Stone? and what are Medicine Cards? or what is aromatherapy? In short, my head was spinning. I certainly had not expected such a diversity of apparently disconnected and unrelated items in one context. Most of which were totally new to me. To learn about the use and meaning of all of them became an ongoing endeavor. In hindsight I realize that with this simple decision part of my life became very experimental and that means I had taken the first step of becoming, at least part time, a member of the New Age realm.

The next time I went to the Star Cloud I felt I could handle the incense and stay a while longer. The sticks I had taken home to practice with had turned out to be quite pleasant. When I entered the store it was empty again.

Behind the counter was a small, slim, dark haired woman around fifty and the background music, that reminded me of medieval monks, was the same including the pigeon. I introduced myself and asked if it would be okay for me to hang out in the store. The woman introduced herself as Dale, smiled shyly, and said that would be okay. I was immediately alarmed by her appearance and demeanor and my first thought was that she has a rough life. Her features were drawn and haggard with deep lines in her face and dark shadows under her eyes. We exchanged a few words about New Age in general, i.d. I said that it really seemed to take off. Dale's answer consisted of a smile, a nod, and a whispered, "Yes." This was definitely not the enthusiastic New Age store owner who would be eager to talk about things New Age. Dale appeared very ill to me, not necessarily physically but emotionally. I decided to go slowly here. For now she did not seem to be prepared to talk much more. That was fine with me because I wanted to take a closer look at the baffling contents of the Star Cloud.

I had noticed the jewelry before because it was the most abundant item in the place. Now I saw that most of it was made of pewter, stone, leather, and crystal. The motifs seemed to be taken from mythology. There were fairies, dragons, swords, crosses and so on, but also more general shapes like teardrops, triangles, and circles. Now that I thought of it, there were actually a lot of

such geometric designs all over. On bookcovers, postcards, key rings, coasters, drawings and paintings. New Age people seem to have a fascination with geometric symbols. This was one bit that I tucked away for further analysis. Beyond that, the jewelry was doubtless very beautiful, at least for my taste. Most of it seemed to be handmade, at least as far as my untrained eyes could tell. I had always found the little hearts that I saw in other jewelry stores excessively silly and had (almost) expected to find them here in abundance. Instead they were surprisingly scarce compared to other designs. Somehow I felt relieved. Of course, all these impressions were fleeting and not anywhere near ripe for an anthropological analysis. What was decidedly not a fleeting impression were the prices of the jewelry items. A small pair of earrings for \$ 250 seemed absolutely normal.

I looked at the other items and their prices. A single Rune Stone of lithic material and a leather band to make a necklace for \$ 8 to \$ 12, a thumb sized container with oil for \$ 6 (and my thumbs are not big), a Tarot Card deck for \$ 36. Who has that kind of money to buy stuff like that?! For what?! It was exasperating. Of course, from my perspective these things were out of my reach. On the other hand I knew that New Age has become big business and so there must be a lot of people out there who are willing to spend quite a bit of money on New Age things.

On the other hand the Star Cloud and some of the other items just did not fit into the picture of a trendy upper middle class hobby. At this time I could not put my finger on it, but this did not strike me as an exclusively "upper" anything. "Other items" brings me to the bookshelves.

Titles that feature alcoholism, domestic abuse, obesity, and depression do not make good conversation topics in upper middle class circles, unless in reference to general social (speak: other people's) conditions. These things are certainly nothing to show off with. The other titles referred to witchcraft, astrology, herbology, alternative medicine, prehistory and history, psychology, occultism, symbolism, religion, UFOs, dreams, etc. As I had noticed before, the degree of credibility varies and the line between fiction and non-fiction is fluid both in terms of topic as well as author. Can one believe Carl Sagan? who is Mary Summer Rain? is Charles Darwin more credible than Fritjof Capra or Wabun? I had heard of Starhawk who had been required reading in my courses in Comparative Religion at Bremen University. To me, this fluidity in New Age literature (if Darwin knew! but C.G. Jung would probably feel at home) cast by no means a negative light on the context. Quite the contrary, the first dim notion began to form of what would become one of the first cornerstones of my idea that New Age is a huge arena of dialogue, negotiation, and change - it only exasperated

me.

Gradually I began to notice something that seemed to be odd. Looking around the store from the books to the objects I had a sense of history. In the back of my mind I had the idea that I was standing at the hub of history of cosmic dimensions - and the wheel is turning. It may sound silly to a lot of people, but this is what it felt like (and still does even as I am writing this). Egyptian pyramids, Celtic witches, Ancient Chinese medicine, African masks, Australian pictographs, dragons from the mythological realm, and possible visitors from far away worlds. Images from the explored and unexplored realms of our mind, quantum physics, death as a beyond life realm instead of the End, dolphins as our fellow creatures, the Earth's soil and oceans as our supportive fellow beings, monks/nuns and shamans as our teachers. It did not hit me like a rock but as it dawned on me what I had found, the impact could have been that of a meteor. Something BIG is happening, something really BIG. And it all came together in a small unassuming store. And I was in the middle of it. At the time I would not have been able to describe exactly what it is that is happening, but it was awesome. I thought this is beyond anything humanity has ever seen. We have always gone through historical phases (or Ages). But I felt compared to what is happening now the Industrial Revolution is puny. Perhaps I should insert a personal

bias here and say that I have always had a sense of history. Having been born in the late fifties in a tiny rural town I remember very well steam locomotives, I can still hear the old saw mill up the road and the church bells at six in the evening. Only a few years later I was glued to the TV set and followed each and every Apollo flight and the moon landing. I have always felt that I have lived through the seam where two Ages come together and I have always appreciated that very much. So thinking in historic terms came automatically.

Now it felt the same, only more so. Even if I could not put it in words at that time, I felt I had found the connection between all the things that I had seen at the Star Cloud. Even if a lot of things still did not make sense to me, I found myself looking at them with a different feeling that I could not really describe yet. The whole store seemed to take on a different atmosphere somehow. The idea that I could put down in my notes was that New Age crossed boundaries. Temporal and spatial, historical and cultural, science and fiction, rational and intuitive, ancient and postmodern, cosmic and earthbound, solid and mythological existence, and finally proof and disproof. In the world I live in most of the time these are dichotomies, contradictions, opposites, and causes for competition and arguments. Here I saw them brought together. Since antagonists would probably not visit the same

specialty store, I figured these things are brought together not as opposites but as complements. Could that be? I was not exactly sure but at this point it seemed almost likely.

I turned around to see what Dale could tell me. But she had almost disappeared behind the big glass counter sitting on a low stool and reading. She was so studiously reading that I got the message: do not disturb. Somehow that clicked with my first impression. She is a very shy person and as I saw her sitting there she seemed like an injured creature to me. She was using a book as a boundary to create a sphere for herself that I was not to transgress. I understood perfectly because I had used the same technique as a small child when I had spent long times in hospitals. Of course, I had not consciously chosen that technique and now I thought neither had Dale. I decided that I would not ask her anything but rather take my time to get acquainted with her and win her trust as best I could.

Still impressed by the prices I had seen I began to look at the New Age catalogues that had begun to arrive in my home. I discovered that the Star Cloud was not expensive at all by New Age measures. Statues, jewelry, instruments (flutes, e.g.), and other items are often offered for several hundred dollars. The Star Cloud was well within market boundaries. The only things that are comparable to prices elsewhere are books, tapes, and some of the clothes. Business seems to be booming too. I do

not only receive catalogues regularly, but inside are hundreds of addresses of related business, organizations, and programs. If my first impression had been that New Age was something for insiders, it slowly dawned on me that a lot more people must be involved in or affected by it than I had thought. I made a note to watch attitudes about commercialism among my informants.

I remembered Henry and looked him up in his store. The Stonehenge had just opened a short while ago and I had heard him say that it was going pretty well. However, when I entered it looked rather bare to me. It was a small rectangular affair with white walls and a small counter. One wall carried hooks with plastic sack of herbs. In the back were a few Asiatic looking shirts, and finally a small board with oils. Then there was Henry, behind the counter, on the phone. He finished his conversation, greeted me very friendly and seemed willing to talk. So I shot my first, "What is New Age all about?" off at him. The answer was, "You know, I am very relaxed about it. I take it with the old Chinese idea that everything will work out." Combined with his body language, backstretch and wide arm wave, and his next action, grabbing the phone, I translated this as, "I don't have a clue and I'm really too busy right now." This was typical for Henry and I felt a mixture of amusement and exasperation. I just hoped that not everybody would have answers like that for me. Henry now sat on a

low chair, turned away from me, and immersed himself in his business. There was not much to look at either. I could nothing I saw there relate to Stonehenge. I bought a few herbs that I like for cooking and left. Over the next couple of months I followed the articles about Henry in the paper but nothing revealed any thoughts about New Age or being a witch. The articles were purely promotional for the Stonehenge and himself. Every now and then I would meet Henry on campus, with similar results. The gist of the conversations was, "I'm busy", "I'm successful", and "I'm changing majors". Usually he would always add, "I'm really not in a hurry", while dashing off on his bike to tend to his business. If he has another interest in things New Age, it is overshadowed by his concerns of being a business man.

Since the beginning of my research I had been on a constant lookout for signs of anything that may fit into the New Age context. At the Star Cloud and in the catalogues I had noticed an emphasis on medical issues. Curious, I checked the phone directory of Norman. I searched for something that did not seem to fit into our standard medical context. It was quite revealing. Chiropractors, acupuncturists, alternative massage therapists, Reiki (healing based on energy as a life force) specialists, traditional midwives with home birth specialty, health clubs, fitness centers, martial arts centers, health food

stores, and a certified specialist in Chinese herbs. In no way did I want to associate all of these with New Age. For now I was just scanning to get a general impression of the "Big thing" that I thought was happening. This was certainly very different from "the doctor" or "the hospital". I decided to watch for anything New Age participants would tell me with regard to their health and medical history.

I kept visiting the Star Cloud and usually found Dale behind her counter. For a long time nothing much changed between her and me. I would enter, greet her, and receive the same shy smile and the whispered "Hi". I told her if there was anything I could do around the store or if she needed help with anything, she should let me know. She accepted the offer graciously, but she never did. After a few visits I decided to begin to break down the wall that I felt was between us. I told her what I was doing and what I tried to find out which was, "What is New Age all about?" Dale did not look at me but she smiled, nodded once or twice and said, "Yeah, that's interesting. It's hard to say." I was reminded of Henry. If things would go on like that my project would be a brief one. Didn't they know what they were doing? I had to fight an anxious reaction as I saw my research project peter out in vagueness and confusion. On the other hand it was funny, of course. Here I stood in the middle of an obviously very active

New Age environment and the apparent authorities couldn't tell me what it was all about. This would take time.

At least I made a little progress in trying to see some order among the things that I saw. I noticed for example that there were a lot of ideas taken from the American Indian context. What I thought was noteworthy was that most of it related to the Southwest and some of it to the Great Plains. There was nothing from other culture areas such as the Southeast or the Northwest. The catalogues, that I kept using as guides, offer an occasional birch bark item that is associated with the Northeast. There some motifs are also derived from the other culture areas, but not many. Overall, the Southwest seemed to be a central region in terms of inspiration for New Age participants. I did not know how to use this bit of information at the time or what it could tell me about New Age. But the Southwest has always held a special fascination for me mostly because of its geographic features and climate. Now I found the same interest in the New Age context. This discovery made me more comfortable in the store as well as with regard to New Age in general. This was something that I could relate to.

I made it a habit to buy some small item each time before I left the Star Cloud. Partly, because I wanted to get more comfortable by surrounding myself with New Age stuff, partly, to show support, and partly, to lure

Dale out from behind her book so I could talk to her. I began by having her identify objects in the store for me that I was unfamiliar with. Her answers usually consisted of one word (the name of the item), always accompanied with a shy smile, and that was that. Though I noticed that she seemed more ready to answer questions her customers had. But her voice never rose above a whisper. So I thought it was my being an anthropologist that may make her uneasy. I wanted to make sure that she understood that I was no threat to her. To establish that she was the authority figure of the two of us, I asked her if she could recommend something to read that would help me get a start. Dale went over to a bookshelf and picked out a small pocketbook on how to develop psychic skills. I was a bit puzzled since I had already explained my work to her. She obviously knew what an anthropologist is and she had said that I was more than welcome to the Star Cloud. I could not exactly say what I had expected - but a "how to" thing on psychic skills? The significance of this little gesture escaped me completely at the time. It would reveal itself to me much, much later.

Over time my concerns for the Star Cloud as a business deepened. It was always the same scene, Dale hiding behind the counter, a confused looking anthropologist wandering aimlessly around the store, and one or two visitors who dropped by to look at things, with "look" being the

operative term. Occasionally one would buy a postcard or a 5 ¢ incense stick, but one cannot possibly survive on that. The Star Cloud seemed doomed. I fell into the habit of buying small colorful stones that I found beautiful. But they did not have any meaning, much less use, beyond that, I thought in typical mainstream fashion. For now the store appeared more like a curiosity shop to me and, judging by their spurious behavior, for the people in Norman too. At times like this I almost began to doubt the whole New Age movement. Maybe it really was just a fad like I had heard people say. Maybe I was just overreacting to the diversity bunched in one small place and there was nothing big happening. Fortunately, these spells never lasted long enough for me to throw in the towel.

In terms of the announced meditation meetings, the Star Cloud did not fare much better. They were canceled over and over again. It would be several months before I would have a chance to attend one. My frustration increased. When I asked Dale who usually participated, the answer was pure Dale, "Oh, anybody who is interested." I prodded on, "How many are there?" "Between four and twenty-one." It was hair raising. "Is there a leader?" "Yes, anybody who wants can lead a meditation." "Anybody who wants? What do you mean?" "There is no one special person who does that." Here for the first time Dale became more enthusiastic and raised her voice slightly in

emphasize, "We don't want that. Anybody can do that." Then she became quiet again, turned around, and moved away from me. I did not want to push my luck and decided to save further questions for my next visit. But I had obviously hit on something that could bring her out of her withdrawal. Dale had almost sounded angry which was extremely unusual.

During my visits to the Star Cloud I had noticed two other characters that seemed to belong there. One was the same I had seen on my very first visit. The other was a big, bearded mid-fiftyish individual. With both developed a strange pattern of interaction that I always found funny, no matter how frustrating it could be at the same time. After I had seen them in passing a few times and figured they belonged to the Star Cloud, I asked Dale who they were. It turned out that the younger was her son Josh and the other was Dan who had a jewelry workshop behind the store. So the jewelry really was handmade, as I had suspected. Dale did not offer any more comment on them both, but I had noticed that she mentioned Dan's name with obvious respect. He seemed to be someone important. Somehow, judging by Dale's slow deep nodding and raised eyebrows, he was not just important because he delivered the jewelry. As was typical for Dale, her sentences remained short and not exactly to the point, "He is.... Oh yes, he is good. He really knows a lot. He is really..."

So I decided to get acquainted with both of them. Next

time Josh appeared in the store I tried to make eyecontact and approach him. As I came closer however, he raised up on his toes, raised his head and looked straight out the window - right over my head. Since Josh is at least three heads taller than I and I was practically standing right in front of him, I felt like a part in a comedy act and had to fight down the laughter. This would be another tough case.

Things didn't go much better with Dan. Most of the time he stayed out of sight. After a few weeks he began to come into the store for a brief moment. He was so obviously not seeing me that I thought he must be bursting with curiosity. But whenever I opened my mouth to say "Hi" or tried to make eyecontact, he looked away or down at his shoes or began to whisper with Dale. I thought maybe they need time to get used to the idea that an anthropologist is among them.

Over the next few months the little scenes with Dan and Josh would be repeated with almost exact choreography. In the end I felt we would make a pretty good comedy team. Patience would hopefully solve the problem.

Things began to shift slightly one saturday afternoon. I wanted to write up some fieldnotes which I sometimes did in the backroom of the store. This room was part office, part meeting place. A few chairs and an old sofa were scattered across the room. A few empty magazine racks and

an old empty bookshelf stood around. A small camping table held a coffee machine and some snacks and next to the door stood a small metal container with "Donations" written on it. A child's drawing and a long poster that said "Universal Love Center" hung on the walls. A third of the room was partitioned off with a big white sheet on a clothesline. Behind it were the storage area and a computer desk. The whole affair looked rather bleak and a bit shabby. The single lamp at the ceiling cast the whole room into an unpleasant yellow light. But it became my hang out. As I walked in this particular afternoon I drove out Josh who had been working at the computer. The reaction seemed to be part of our little dance. With a sigh I sat down and began writing. After awhile I noticed a few little children peeking in from the door at the backwall that led into Dan's workshop. I smiled at them but received blank stares. Somehow it didn't surprise me. Then a little girl of about five years came closer and stood near my side with a thoughtful look on her face. I tried it again and smiled, "Hi". "Are you the anthropologist?" came her answer in a small shy voice, carefully pronouncing a difficult word. When I said I was, she turned around, ran back to her buddies and they all disappeared. I have never seen those kids again but I had gotten a clear signal. They were beating the tomtoms about me. Good. All I needed was patience.

I still had no idea what distinguishes a New Age person from a mainstream person. After these first few months I would have said "shyness", but that was not really an answer. I had learned to divide the few customers into a few broad groups. Most of them seemed to be merely curious and the Star Cloud seemed merely to be a curiosity store to them. Occasionally someone would ask Dale a question or two about one or the other item. I saw these as the slightly interested. Then there were those who knew exactly what they wanted, e.g. incense stick. They would come in, get it, and leave. None of them stayed longer than a few moments and this pattern never changed.

I asked Dale about the type of person who would buy New Age stuff. She basically confirmed my observation. There were the curious, the mildly interested, and the insiders. Dale added with uncharacteristic optimism that the curious and mildly interested would sooner or later become insiders. This was another surprising reaction from Dale. Not so much because of what she said, but that she said it at all. Most of the time she still retreated behind her book. But I felt that maybe I was slowly getting somewhere. I did not dare make assumptions about the age range or sex of New Age customers. The Star Cloud was close to the campus environment and so naturally most people I saw there were of college age and female. Dale had said that the core customer was female and somewhere between

thirty and fifty. However, I saw very few of those.

I wanted to find out what kind of New Age customers are out there. But I did not want statistics on New Age demographics. I am interested in real life and real impressions. I went back to the mainstream bookstore. There I had often seen teenagers sit snickering and giggling on the floor and browse through astrology books. I see this as a normal teenage thing and do not associate it with an interest in New Age. I would have to rely on the clerk to get some information. The first response was, "From all walks of life." She almost made me laugh when she said, "There are people who are very well dressed and those like you and me." She also noticed that those who were even poorer than we would buy New Age books. "Even people who don't seem to be able to afford a book," she exclaimed with some astonishment as if my questions made her realize this for the first time. She could not single out a particular kind of New Age customer. From teenager to the elderly, male and female equally would come for New Age literature. She set the upper limit, obviously randomly, at eighty years. This does not mean very much to me because it does not tell me anything about the person in terms of mental alertness, physical condition, attitude, or life experience. So to me she still said 'Everybody'. She confirmed my observations that teenager in general seem to browse more than actually read and so were not

really interested in studying New Age things. On the other hand the elderly seem to have a preference for prophesy issues and Nostradamus is a big hit with them.

When I asked where New Age ranked on the bookmarket I received an interesting reaction. Spontaneously the clerk tried to place New Age among other genres and promptly ran into a problem. She started with fiction but stopped and shook her head briefly. Then she placed it closer to science fiction but put an emphasize on science here. Something was wrong and she looked bewildered. I smiled because I knew what had happened. Does New Age belong closer to science fiction, fiction, or science? She scanned the bookshelves for a moment and then put New Age somewhere between science and fiction. She assured me that it is undoubtedly very popular. There is no particular issue that sells better than others. According to her observations, people are interested in everything the wide range of New Age has to offer.

I had also seen Henry again who was busy moving the Stonehenge to a different location in town. When I dropped by to see how that was going, Henry was not in. It looked like he had found a focus on themes that involved body piercing, leather, whips, chainmail, and other devices that can be used to pleasantly torture. My first reaction was to laugh. In an environment that I had always experienced as extremely conservative, the Stonehenge stood

out like a sore thumb. Although I found it funny, I also felt there was a very slight sinister aspect in it now (I am well aware that others may experience the atmosphere at the Stonehenge differently). The place had an entirely different atmosphere than the Star Cloud or anything that I had picked up in the literature. I decided for the time being, that I would move the Stonehenge to the margins of the overall New Age environment and would let other participants decide whether or not it belonged. It is, after all, their scene. Another factor in this decision was that I had marked diversity as a hallmark of New Age and for that the Stonehenge had simply become too specialized.

Back at the Star Cloud a few surprises waited for me. The first came when I entered the store one morning. Dale stood behind the counter and laid out Tarot cards. She looked up when she heard the bell chain and with a broad smile called out, "Hi! How are you?" I was startled and relieved at the same time. After more than six months the ice was breaking. I had acquired a Tarot card set myself some time before to become familiar with New Age activities. I told Dale that I could never remember what the pictures represented and she said neither could she. Now she kept looking down and seemed to be embarrassed. I pointed at a little troll figure and told her that some anthropologists believe that the legendary Scandinavian trolls were really

Neanderthals. She laughed at that (a first) and things seemed to be okay again. The ice was breaking but I felt I was skating on it. I was trying to find a way to make her feel more comfortable with an anthropologist or scientists in general. The little anecdote had worked and I wanted to keep things going. So I mentioned that a lot of scientists are suspicious of anything New Age but I wanted to learn about it. I had said before that I wanted to study New Age. Now I was separating myself from the bulk of scientists and I did that intentionally. It seemed to make the difference that I had hoped for. Dale began to talk.

She had been sick with anemia for a long time. Doctors had not been able to help and so she began to meditate. It worked and after awhile her anemia went away. Her teenage son had not wanted to meditate for a long time but now he did. "When you're forty-seven and still don't know what you want to do with you're life, that's pretty bad. So I had to do something."

The words came rapidly in a low murmur. Dale had turned away from me as she talked and looked down at the floor behind the counter. This was not simply embarrassment. It was painful to watch and I almost held my breath. Again, Dale reminded me of a wounded animal. She was struggling to deal with something that went a lot deeper and farther than a mere anemia. Until I knew exactly what that was

I had to be careful with my questions. I did not want to close the door again that had just begun to open. So I picked up on the anemia issue. I told her that alternative medicine seemed to be a part of the New Age scene. Dale relaxed a bit and looked up again. She still did not look at me but she nodded and said, "Yeah. That's really important." "Doctors couldn't help you?" "No. They don't. They don't believe in you." "And meditation did?" "It took care of it and it never came back." Dale looked withdrawn again & the spell seemed to be over. I did not want to push her. It had been too obvious how difficult it was to talk about her life.

It was only a brief conversation but it erased the urgency and frustration that I had felt so often before. Now I had no doubt that I would learn Dale's story and that my patience would pay off. Somehow I felt I had to establish a good rapport with Dale first before I could move on to someone else. There is really no good reason for it but that's how it felt at the time. Since Dale was a permanent presence at the Star Cloud she set the tone for the atmosphere and I was drifting along in it. What I found baffling was that no one I met at the Star Cloud, not even Dale, could tell me who else is involved in the New Age scene. I could not decide whether they really did not know or whether they did not want to say. So I continued to visit the store, learned more about all the objects,

dabbled a bit in Tarot, and acquired a nice collection of beautiful stones.

A few weeks later came the second surprise. I had arrived early one morning and waited for Dale to open the store. But it was Josh who unlocked the door. Then he held it open and said, "Hi. Have you been waiting long? Come in." The tide began to change. From then on, Josh appeared more open, friendly, and willing to talk. Although our encounters were few and brief he would become a very insightful source.

The relationship with Dan began to change also. I had begun to visit him in his workshop. This was a small room with several workbenches, chairs, and tool panels on the walls. In the back was a door that led outside and that was open whenever the weather permitted. Despite its smallness, this was the brightest room at the Star Cloud and a place where I felt immediately comfortable. On our first direct encounter I told him what I was doing and that I wanted to learn more about New Age. He agreed that our social environment is changing rapidly and that New Age plays an important part in this. Without too many words we both knew what the other was talking about. I was far from naming anything in particular to characterize New Age. Even if I had some ideas in my mind, I kept them to myself. So to find out if we could agree on some observation that we had made, was very important. What exactly the

change or New Age consisted of was something that I wanted to hear from Dan. But that was more difficult than I had expected. Dan was not given to speak a lot. He would agree with a smile and a nod, would comment with a more serious nod and raised eyebrows, or he would say something like, "Yeah, that's true." His voice was soft and his demeanor shy. He was also a very big person and overall appeared like a big gentle bear. Somehow I knew that we were on the same wavelength and that he knew exactly what I was after. He had no problem putting himself into the New Age context. He said he found it fascinating to study too. I could not exactly say how I knew that, but I felt Dan was a keen observer and a deep thinker with a sharp mind. So I kept talking about my work hoping that he would pick up on something. Which he did when I mentioned science and physics. His voice rose slightly when he suggested, "You should read 'The Holographic Universe'." I found my impression that Dan had an analytical mind, confirmed. 'The Holographic Universe' is situated in the explorational, experimental, theoretical New Physics realm. This is not standard fare for the average reader, New Age or other. At the same time Dan had established himself as a representative of a particular literary/reader trend that is beginning to take off. I could not say if I was more surprised by Dan knowing this book (would have been impossible twenty years ago) or by having my observation

about people's reading habits confirmed.

In any case, this discovery was the high point of our encounters for several months. Most of the time I would come in, sit next to his bench and watch him work. He would mumble a greeting and continue to work. So I began to ask questions about his work hoping he would pick up on something. One day he was putting together a little blue dragon. I had seen the dragon motif in various forms all over the New Age context. So I asked, "How are dragons important for New Age?" Dan's answer, "Good question." So much for that.

The commercial issue was slightly more insightful. Dan had just returned from a fair where he had offered his jewelry products. Dan complained that it was difficult. Things 'mad in Taiwan' were offered at much lower prices and he could not keep up with that kind of competition. I was not surprised and neither was Dan.

Often when I came into the Star Cloud Dan would not be in. Dale had mentioned a back problem that he had and that kept him out of his workshop a lot of times. Here was another chance to offer a topic to see if he would pick up on it. It was really important to me to make sure I did not introduce any issue into the New Age context. I wanted to hear from the participants what they associated with it. Next time I saw Dan I asked him about his back and what he was doing about it. His answer was really no

surprise anymore. He said he saw a chiropractor about it. As usual, I had to prod him. "That helps?" "Yeah. At least it makes me feel better for awhile." "Have you tried doctors?" "They can't do anything." Dan shook his head in annoyance and looked down in front of him with a serious frown. He seemed almost angry. Considering that he was usually an extremely quiet person, I found this remarkable. "So what's the problem with doctors?" "They only give you drugs. They don't really explain anything to you." Dan was seriously angry now. He admitted that the chiropractor's treatment brings only temporary relief but he found that more acceptable than to be disregarded as a person. Dan was not interested and did not talk about any kind of treatment per se. What was more important to him was the attitude with which he would be treated. In his experience the chiropractor took the time to talk with him and deal with him as a person. The absence of drugs in this kind of approach was also important to him. The way he said the word 'drugs' made it sound like he was talking about an overdose of heroin. Judging by his expression that was pretty much the same thing.

Aside from these few glimpses into Dan's thoughts and experiences, he remained largely a mystery to me for a long time. But I did not want to give up on him either. I knew there was a lot on his mind, probably exactly what I was looking for. One just had to be lucky to hit on

something that brought him out of his shell.

The next lucky break came one afternoon when I found Josh minding the store alone. I knew by then that he offered astrological evaluations and he said he studied it since about fifteen years. Something sounded odd in what he said. It did not really sink in at first. But this was not what a mainstream person would say. I had to look up my notes later to find out what I had picked up there. I had expected something about doing astrological charts for people. Instead he had said he studied it. It was the same thing that I had heard from Dan when he said he found New Age interesting to study. At the time I could not do much with that bit of information. But it was different enough for me to notice at that point.

On this particular afternoon the Star Cloud was, as usual, devoid of customers. So Josh took a little time to think about my question, "What is the common thread in all this New Age stuff?" I looked around the store to indicate the diversity. He leaned on the counter and looked into the distance wrinkling his forehead. Then, slowly and carefully came, "Love. Respect for life. Spiritual awareness." "How do you define yourself?" This answer came quickly. He straightened up and said determined, "I don't. I don't define myself at all." I had hoped to get at a definition of New Age through the self-definition of its participants. That didn't seem to work. Josh explained,

"Defining myself would impose limits. It would be against the discovery of my full potential and it would also be against change." Now I had something to think about. The possibility of change was important to Josh and it sounded like constant self development or exploration were central to his idea of himself. I thought this is also a way to define oneself.

For an instant the "full potential" part had sounded like something a mainstream person would find "typical" New Age and use it to make fun of New Age people. I kept noticing little things like these, mostly terminology, that were different from the mainstream. Over time they would become more frequent and more obvious. On the one hand I felt I was finally getting somewhere but on the other hand I could not really grasp what the point was. The terms Josh used sounded like ideals to me, things that are hard to define and difficult to talk about, especially in a scientific context.

That change was important to both of us seemed to put us on common ground to some extent. So I pointed out that our social environment seems to be changing rapidly at this time. I wanted to know how he thought his ideals could be put into practice. He looked concerned and his answer sounded almost harsh to me, "I refuse to acknowledge institutionalized leaders," because he is aware that those concepts can be abused. Immediately he softened it a little

and added, "I mean spiritual or religious leaders here, not necessarily political ones." Josh admitted that a society that could be run without any institutionalized leadership would be ideal. I was reminded of Dale who also seemed to have a problem with leaders. It was obvious from his tone of voice and his expression that Josh took the whole matter very serious. He seemed genuinely worried about the dangers of power abuse and manipulation. Since I share this concern I sighed, "Yeah, but what can you do about it?" I wondered if a New Age person would have a way to solve this problem. Josh's answer was, "Teaching and learning are really important." There it was again, the study thing. "Teaching and learning what? Some kind of religion?" "It doesn't matter which tradition it comes from. I'm basically anti-religion because religion is too dogmatic." This made sense when one considers that change and self-exploration are important to him. But that it doesn't matter from which tradition a teaching comes from was more difficult to understand. However, he emphasized that self-discovery is his primary concern. He is looking for ideas that would initiate change in him and this is a never ending process.

Josh had become immersed in our talk now and offered, "You know, quantum physics, they really took off here." He continued in a slight lecture tone, "They accept the awareness that Earth as a living organism. Humans are part

of this organism and everything is interrelated." He seemed enthusiastic now and I noticed again his choice of words, 'they accept the awareness'. Here seemed to be another key term. Josh explained further, "To know this, really changes people's outlook on life and their selves." "How so?" "It makes them feel good, in tune, in harmony with themselves and their surroundings. To be more aware of all of this means to be more responsible. Most religious movements, I mean prophets, started out with ideas like these. Then it starts to permeate everything in society." Josh insisted that we need this movement before Earth and life on it are gone.

What had started with a word on astrology had quickly developed into a very serious speech about the future of our survival. In no way did Josh appear like the stereotypical New Age guy that a mainstream person might have in mind. He had put a lot of thought into this and he was quite articulate about it. Despite the seriousness with which he spoke, his outlook for the future was optimistic.

To lighten things up a little I asked about the Star Cloud and it's history. Just a short while before I had found Dale working on her accounting book. "How's it going," had been answered with a deep sigh and a "Not as well as it should. In the black, just so." I could never get rid of the feeling that the Star Cloud was doomed. So Josh

talked about its history. The original store had been opened in 1983 by Conny not far from where it was now. At that time it offered mostly wicca oriented things. In 1991 Dale bought it, moved to its present location, and branched out. "The goal was to explore the full potential of New Age." There it was again and as far as I was concerned they certainly had accomplished that. Branching out had been more than a business decision. Dale had wanted to know what New Age had to offer in terms of objects and ideas and so it had also been a learning experience. I noticed the books and the diversity of authors they offered. But Josh pointed out that other bookstores in town had a lot more to offer. Books were really not a big emphasize at the Star Cloud because they would not be able to keep up with the competition.

A few weeks after my talk with Josh, Dale began to rearrange the Star Cloud. Most of the tables and racks were gone. A few big bookshelves lined the wall and in the center of the store four glass counters were set up in a square. A great number of the items I had gotten used to had disappeared too. Overall the Star Cloud looked bigger and airy. The white walls were not hidden behind posters and shelves anymore and made the place look bright. Although I had repeatedly reminded Dale that she should call me if she needed help, she had never done so. I asked her what had made her rework the store. By now Dale had become

somewhat more open, although she never lost her basic shyness. She raised her head, smiled, and said, "Yeah, let's see how this works." There was an odd mixture of accomplishment, hope, and apprehension in her voice. I had mixed feelings about the store. It was certainly an improvement in terms of space management but at the same time it looked empty. I still had little hope for it.

A short while later I found signs in the window that offered jewelry for 50% off. I went in and asked Dale what happened. She appeared surprisingly collected when she answered that she was closing the store. I knew this was a big set-back for her, not only as a business woman but also in a personal sense. Dale explained that it was really the fault of the construction work on a nearby street that had delivered the death blow. It must have sounded lame even to her. None of the other businesses next to the Star Cloud had problems and I knew she knew I didn't buy her explanation. After a brief moment of looking out the window Dale said, "This is not a good place. This campus is not right. In another place it would have been better. The people here are just not interested." I could not tell to what extent that was true. Dale seemed surprisingly upbeat but I felt it was mostly for show and I had to admire her. I did not stay very long because I felt she kept up the good mood for my sake. A short while later the Star Cloud closed its doors. It would be almost two

years until I would meet Dale and Josh again.

A month after the store had closed I met Henry again and we talked about it. He said he had offered her to merge their stores but she was just not a business woman. He would not elaborate on that but knowing Henry, I thought he meant she was not aggressive enough to promote her business. He also found it difficult that she had tried to support five people, herself and four children on this one small business. Henry found the demise of the Star Cloud not surprising.

Meanwhile I had found Conny, the original owner of the Star Cloud. After she had sold it to Dale, she had opened another New Age store, the Rune Stone, in a different section of town. The Rune Stone is small and offers a lesser variety than the Star Cloud had. Two big bookshelves stand along one wall and a few glass counters take up the rest of the space. The walls are decorated with fantasy drawings and dream catchers. Other objects include stones, feathers, jewelry, prophesy cards of various sorts, and the inevitable incense sticks. I noticed that most of the books are of the used variety. Overall, there are fewer things available but the diversity is still present.

My first impression of Conny was that she is a very serious woman. I would guess that she is in her upper forties. Her face is deeply lined in an I-have-seen-a-lot-in-my-time kind of way that was instantly

fascinating to me. Her voice is deep and a little rough, probably thanks to the chain smoking. I had to grin at the amounts of second hand smoke I would inhale. But that was all right. I told her what I wanted and she agreed that she would answer my questions and talk about herself. She did not seem too enthusiastic about it but neither did she refuse to cooperate. Her straightforward demeanor implied that if she did not want to talk about something she would let me know. Until then, "Ask away." I found her easy to negotiate with. Her attitude bordered on bluntness in behavior as well as words and this I find endlessly refreshing. No game playing here.

In our initial introduction Conny labeled herself a practicing psychic. I needed more information and time to think about before I could really pick up on that. I have neither a bias for or against it but simply wrote it down to be explored at a suitable time. First I wanted to establish whether we would talk about the same thing when we would say 'New Age'. I began in the most simple way by saying that it seems to be associated with all those changes I see in our environment and that stores like hers seemed to express. Conny's reaction came flying towards me like a cannonball, "The New Age hasn't even started yet!" She said that with a suddenness and determination that I was startled. "What do you mean?" She began by telling me her husband works on an oil rig up in northern

Alaska. They have brought pine wood from thousands of feet beneath the ice. "That are changes," Conny said. Not quite the changes that I had meant but this was taking an interesting turn. "You mean changes in our environment? What's got that to do with New Age?" "There will be a lot more disasters. Storms, earthquakes, and so on. I mean, I'm talking about winds of 120 miles an hour here," and like an afterthought, "Oklahoma won't be so bad. I think we'll be relatively safe. But California will disappear." This sounded a bit as if she thought her words would frighten me. They did not - I was absolutely fascinated, especially at the tone of her voice. Harsh and absolutely sure. It was strange too because I had recently begun to wonder whether all those catastrophes, natural and man made, really had increased dramatically since my childhood or whether it was just my perception. People also seem to be less and less satisfied with the explanations the experts come up with. Now that Conny mentioned it, it felt like my suspicions were true. It was a little like "the historical moment" that I have described before. Conny delivered the answer, or at least part of it, before I could ask, "Man-made disasters too." "Like airplane crashes?" "Yep," and deep nodding. Major climatic and geographic changes will occur before the New Age can begin. This was Conny's point and the word 'cleaning' came to my mind. She agreed with that, "A certain kind of people

are necessary to bring the New Age about." Sounded almost apocalyptic but the atmosphere around Conny was not dark or sinister enough for that. She just seemed absolutely sure and there was no hint that she was predicting anything. She just said things how she knew them. As clumsy as this may sound, this is exactly what it felt like on that first encounter with her. It was probably exactly what she intended to convey.

As usual I picked up a neat stone for my collection and browsed through the books while Conny accepted a phone call. I returned to the counter when she was done and mentioned that most of the books are used ones. Conny's answer was realistic, "People can't afford to by thirty dollar books. So I have used ones." Simple.

I also pointed out that a lot of New Age literature revolves around UFOs. "Do you believe in them?" The answer was typical Conny, "I can't say it that way, I just want to know. I have never seen any evidence that they exist, so I can't say I believe in them. But I have never seen any evidence that tells me they cannot exist, so I can't say I don't believe in them. I just want to know." That made sense to me and I felt a bit foolish for asking. As every archaeologist knows, absence of evidence is no evidence of absence. Conny's answer stuck in my mind. It seemed like a little swipe at scientists and it made me laugh. She had told me something, probably unintentionally,

about my own context of academia here that I could not put into words yet. But I had to laugh and that is always a clue for me that I had picked up more info than the obvious one. Once she got to thinking about UFOs she came up with an interesting idea, "I think they could just as well be from our own past or future than from a different planet." I had not heard this before and it showed me a little that Conny seemed to like to think about things.

I could not decide whether Conny was a phony and tried to impress me or not. Somehow I did not think so and I have usually a pretty good feel for people. Conny sent me off with a warning, "You have to be real careful to whom you talk. There are a lot of charlatans out there. They will tell someone that a psychic reading will cost so and so much and that they'll need at least ten candles and so on. Those are fakes. You got to be real careful." I had the feeling she did not just mean a psychic reading and a price tag. The atmosphere had become a little heavy and I wondered what I had gotten myself into. And how was I supposed to tell a fake from a real psychic (if there is such a real thing)? I felt exasperated again. But this was also exactly what made me eager to move ahead and experience as much as I could in this environment that still seemed strange to me.

I picked up on the atmosphere and probed into a new direction. "Have you ever had any problems with people

from the mainstream?" I had to ask because I still was not over the contrast between a conservative place like this town and in the middle of it, New Age. There had to be clashes. Conny nodded, "Yep, found something on my door. I get pamphlets. They have me on their list." "They have a list of people they target?" I could imagine who she was talking about but I had not really taken them serious or thought they would deliberately go after certain individuals. She raised her eyebrows and nodded. There was a lot more here than pamphlets I thought. I had the impression that she wanted to say something more but she did not. So I prodded, "From whom? Who are 'they'?" Conny hesitated, the first time in our conversation. Now she became visibly uncomfortable, "Oklahomans for Families and Children." Not totally unexpected. I wondered if I would end up on that list too at some point. Probably. Always the adventurer, I thought it would be intriguing to get into that sort of mess. But it was clear that Conny did not want to talk anymore. This seemed to be more serious than the disasters she had mentioned. I decided to bring this up again at a later time.

Even though I found Conny's bluntness refreshing and enjoyed talking to her, there was something about her that made me a little tense (although I don't know if that is quite the right word). For one thing, she never smiled. Not once. Not a hint. She tended to look at other things

around us more than at me. But when our eyes met, I felt skewered. This was not really unsettling to me. After all, she had said she is a sensitive (whatever that meant at that time). So I expected to be scrutinized. I could not put my finger on it, but I had begun to feel weird. It was almost as if I was not fully in control of myself. "You got to be careful," was what I heard when I left.

I felt heavy as I got out onto the street, emotionally, mentally (lots to think about), and also physically. Frankly, I was zapped. Our talk must have affected me more than I thought or wanted to admit. Though I had not heard anything really disturbing or 'weird'. There had been some interesting turns in our conversation but nothing really that blew me away. I looked around and had to make a serious effort to find out where I was (in a section of town that I know in my sleep) or what I had planned to do next. I climbed on the bus to pick something up at the mall. A wave of sickness came over me and stayed for the rest of the afternoon. I must have looked sick because I noticed that people kept looking at me concerned. I got off at the mall feeling dizzy and began to wander around aimlessly. I felt lightheaded and heavy at the same time. For the life of me, I could not remember why I had gone there and I had totally lost my orientation. I also did not remember what time it was or how long I stayed at the mall. I vaguely remember eating a hot dog. But I was not hungry, nor could

I tell whether or not I had had lunch. I remember at what time I had left the Rune Stone because I had looked at the clock at the wall. Now I did not have a clue what time it was. I still felt sick. I had to gather all my concentration to find my way to the bus stop and get on the bus again. Frankly, I felt like a zombie and I still noticed the looks of the people. When I finally arrived home over two hours more had passed than I had expected. I had recovered completely only the next morning. I felt like I had been out of control. I recount this here for completeness and not to make a point about sensitives. The simple fact is, that during or immediately after my talk with Conny I had lost my temporal and spatial orientation to an extent that went far beyond a mere dizziness or anything I had experienced before. I could not help but wonder whether this had anything to do with Conny herself, something she had said, or whether it was just a strange sequence of events that I could not explain. Put together with Conny's words, it almost felt like a warning. I could not help but feel a degree of wariness towards her. I wanted to ask her about the incidence when I would get a chance.

Of course, my perception is subjective and I am very aware of the danger of a serious misinterpretation here. But I cannot omit it from my account without losing integrity. So for now I want this to be read as it stands

without any implication whatsoever. It is simply something that happened while I was doing my work and I thought it was strange because nothing like it has ever happened to me before. Whether it is of any significance or not will have to remain open at this point.

Walking around town I had begun to keep my eyes open for anything that looked like it might fit into the New Age context, e.g. a sign, a poster, or a store. So I discovered 'Fairies & Magic'. That sounded right to me. When I entered I promptly ran against a wall of noxious fumes. Of course, it was just another bunch of incense sticks. At least, they did not make me sick anymore. No doubt I was at the right place, which was a surprise. New Age seemed to be thriving. The store is a rectangular affair of medium size. It looks just as cluttered as the Star Cloud had looked. But the atmosphere is lighter for some reason and so is the light, thanks to strategically placed spotlights. Racks, shelves, and tables are set up forming two narrow aisles toward the back. At first glance I saw the familiar New Age items like postcards with fantasy and mythological Indian (both Native American and Asian) prints. Crystals, tarot sets, and fairy figurines were further hints. A glass counter on the left side displays jewelry and serves as sales counter. Farther inside to the right I saw a gap in the wall. That was where the sound of a hammer came from. The gap turned out to be a large

niche and the hammer was used by a young woman. She was busy nailing a big black cloth with a white wizard to the wall. I wanted to make sure we agreed that this had something to do with New Age, "I see a lot of New Age stuff here." "Yes, I sell New Age things because I am New Age. I also sell some other things." The young woman was Toby, the owner of the Fairies & Magic. The first impression was that of an open, good-natured, and confident person. I told her I was doing my anthropology research in things New Age and asked her about the history of the store.

Toby had opened the Fairies & Magic about four years ago "Because there was a need for it. People just kept looking for New Age things and I'm interested in it myself. So it seemed the right thing to do." "Is that how you identify yourself? New Age?" "Yeah, I am pagan." "What does that mean?" "I belong to a pagan circle here in town. I'm also interested in Buddhism and have read about that. I think there are some things in that that I believe. I believe in a lot of things. I believe in magic and things like that. The pagan circle is really a very eclectic group where you find a lot of different ideas and beliefs and I like that." "Is that how you've been raised? Did you grow up in a pagan environment?" "No, I've been raised Baptist. But my family is really not extremely religious. It's not like they go to church every sunday. I grew up overseas and that makes a difference too. They are really

not extremely religious." She continued building on her overseas experience, "It's not that Christians are especially powerful. It only looks that way because there just happen to be a lot of Christians in this place. There just are not that many Jews or Hindus and others here. Most of the churches you have here are Christian. You don't have that in other places."

Toby could not say how exactly how it happened that she ended up in a New Age environment. "I don't know. I have never really believed in my religion. I grew up Baptist but I did not believe it. At high school they said I was saved but I didn't know from what I was supposed to be saved. It didn't make sense to me. I think there are not many who really believe in this kind of Christianity. They say they believe in it but they don't really. They belong to a church for social reasons. Of course, there was the peer pressure, so I went to church too. But now I am really very eclectic. I pick up ideas here and there and put together my own belief. I haven't made up my mind yet and maybe I won't make up my mind. I just came to New Age a few years ago and I'm still learning."

On my way through the store I had also seen items like T-shirts and newspapers with gay/lesbian and feminist themes. So I picked up on that. "Yes, I began to sell lesbian and gay things two years ago. I am lesbian and I think there's a need for that kind of thing. There are

some places up in the city that sell that sort of thing. But not in Norman." I tried to ask if she had encountered any difficulties because of her identity as a lesbian, but Toby kept looking above my head and continued, "It's really an educational thing for me. To offer things like that in my store." "Like confirming your identity?" "Yeah, but also for other people. Actually, most of my customers are straight. So it's not like I make a lot of money with gay and lesbian things. But I felt someone has to offer it here and so it was also a business decision. But I think I would carry it even if nobody bought it. I think people have to be exposed to the idea. They have to get used to it and this is a good way to give them the exposure to it. So that's why it's educational," she looked thoughtful for a moment and then repeated, "Yeah, I think I would carry it even if nobody bought it."

Toby appeared perfectly at ease and content with her identity. Her round face was open and smiling and her voice strong and steady, there was nothing of the suppressed, angered, and conflicted homosexual that I have encountered before in various contexts. While she was talking she kept looking around in her store with the obvious pride of a successful business owner and she spoke with the enthusiasm of someone who enjoys her life. Overall, Toby radiated good-heartedness almost in a cliché kind of way. I found the impression confirmed when she continued, "You know,

I think Christians are really..., I mean they're good persons. But they are also bigoted, narrowminded, and so on. I think they have their hearts in the right spot, they don't mean to be nasty. But they are just narrowminded, just don't understand. They have to learn." It was fun to listen to her. She came across completely positive and optimistic without appearing unrealistic or "New Agey" in the mainstream's idea of New Age. Of course, I could not leave the Fairies & Magic without a few of those neat stones.

I expected that my work would affect me or maybe better, my perspective. That this was happening became obvious when my surroundings began to look different to me. Suddenly little things that I had known existed but had never paid much attention to, jumped out at me like neon signs. Not only that, but they made sense in a different way than before. I am not a great TV watcher except for a few favorite shows and one or the other movie. So I cannot say why I did that but one Saturday I turned on the TV for an episode of "Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman." Watching with mild interest at first, I sat up when I caught on to a particular storyline. The conflict between two doctors, one applying medicine ('modern' and traditional Native American) when necessary and the other applying medicine for profit and a misguided sense of progress. Was that not what Dan had complained about? Was that why

this show is so successful? Once I had latched on to this kind of development, other shows began to look like much more than mere entertainment. They began to make sense in a larger social context. Of course they do, but many of them reflect the same concerns that I would find in the New Age context. It would require a separate study to analyze this. In this project I will only mention situations that directly relate to experiences with participants.

My work also began to have an effect on others around me. For example on a friend who does not consider himself a member of the New Age environment. He called one morning to ask if I would come on a shopping trip to help him look for objects like dragons. I asked him what he needed a dragon for and the answer was, "I decided my life is a mess. So I want to feng shui my apartment. I thought you could help me." I don't know whether I helped or not. But I found a porcelain egg and explained that it symbolizes new beginnings. This was one instant in which I felt rather amateurish compared to people like Dan or Conny. But it also told me something of how my role began to change.

Somewhere shortly after I began my research I seem to have climbed on a perch between the mainstream and the New Age environment. Keeping a tentative foot carefully touched down on either side, I felt my situation was precarious at times. I find myself sometimes defending

one side, sometimes the other, when all I am looking for is explanations. The most difficult thing seems to be to convince members of both sides that I am neither for nor against one or the other, but am simply curious and want to discover.

The most common critique I have been presented with against New Age, is that it is not new at all. Always being aware that this is meant as a fierce critique with a touch of denigration, I readily agree. That usually wins over someone who had made up his mind to perceive me as an enemy (representative of New Age). The next step is to point out that New Age provides a context in which a lot of 'old' or 'ancient' experiences, symbols, and beliefs are being brought together to form a 'new' environment. The reactions or criticisms that I receive from the other side are fortunately few and imply distrust because I come from an academic/scientific setting. In one instance the main critique from one participant was that my work lacked an emotional aspect. I am trying to take care of it by recounting personal reactions, experiences and bits of personal background and generally to write in a style that both sides can find agreeable.

So my experiences in the New Age world, that had only just begun, had already an effect on my position in both contexts and sometimes I found (and find) myself betwixt and between. But this is as it should be because this is

the negotiating process that I had expected.

Chapter IV

The People

I cannot say what kind of people I had expected in the New Age environment. A vague and distant notion was that of naive or perhaps unrealistic people, but there was nothing concrete that I could put my finger on, nor could I say how I had gotten this idea. I was aware that mainstream people often react with ridicule or downright nastiness towards them. But then, that is how they usually react to everybody who is different (or frightens them).

So I expected people that are different. But the only difference that I could see at first, was the environment they lived in and that I have described in previous pages. The people look, dress, move like everybody else. There is no particular type of person, sex, age group, social class, or occupation that is particular to New Age. There is nothing obvious that sets them apart from the mainstream. This is one reason why it is hard to say who or how many people consider themselves New Age.

I would meet several more individuals that are central

to the New Age context. But whenever I asked Dale, Josh, or anybody else for more contacts, they referred to the same individuals whom I had already met. I found it significant however, that none of them ever mentioned Henry. This seemed to confirm my impression that he is somewhat marginal to the New Age scene in town. Overall it seemed that Dale and the others all knew each other but really had no idea who else was involved although all agreed that there are a lot New Age participants around. Not for the first time, I thought it was funny. First they could not tell me what New Age is, now they could not tell me who New Age is. It also made me even more curious. What kind of people are these?!

In that regard I would get two surprises on the same sunny saturday morning. As usual, Dale was alone in the store when I entered. As usual, she was reading a book. We exchanged a few words in greeting and then a young man came in whom I had not seen before. But he was familiar with Dale. He ribbed her lightly about her business & Dale's response was a wide friendly smile. For once, she did not seem embarrassed. She introduced me with the words, "This is Reinhild, our anthropologist," which made me laugh. So far I had felt independent of New Age people and environment. Now the brief thought, 'They begin to take possession of me,' crossed my mind. A few moments later I would see how true that was. The young man was Ray. He

had come from Colorado to visit friends for a few days. We shook hands but it was clear that he barely noticed me. I was not impressed either for reasons I could not tell. He seemed superficial. He asked Dale if he could use the phone.

While Ray was on the phone, Dale took me aside behind a magazine rack. What happened next came totally unexpected. Dale stood close to me and stared down at her feet. Her whole body seemed tense and there was not a trace of that smile she had just a few moments earlier, instead she looked like she was going to cry. I felt myself becoming tense too, 'What now?' I was prepared to catch Dale if she should faint. But she did not faint, she began to talk. In short rapid sentences and in a whisper. I was only a foot or so away from her but I had to strain my ears to understand what she was saying. At first I did not even know what or who she was talking about. And then I understood. What Dale was pouring out in one long breath was her own story.

"I'm an alcoholic," was the first and most difficult thing she said. It came out with obvious emphasis and also obvious pain in her voice and facial expression, that I felt this was the most significant thing for her to tell me. Reacting to her, I tried to convey, 'That is perfectly all right,' with my expression alone. I dared not say or do anything for fear she would stop talking.

"My family was Baptist. They were very strict. A lot

of them were alcoholics too. I married a Catholic man. He drank too. His family did too. I was a teenager then. Then I had my son. Later I had three more children. The man started to abuse me. Abused the children. Threatened their lives. I had to get out. But I couldn't. I had become an alcoholic myself then. I knew I'd lose my job. My son was raised by his grandparents. I talked to my family. Then I talked to the priest of my husband's family. They said it was my fault. I felt deserted. I got deeper into drinking. I got out. Had to start over. To protect their lives."

Dale did not elaborate on anything while she talked. The only time she referred to an emotional matter was when she said she felt deserted by those around her. That was it. Dale stopped talking and retreated behind her counter. I felt almost relieved that this was over and no doubt, so did she. The whole episode could not have lasted longer than a few minutes. My first impression of her, and the secret suspicion that she had a drinking problem, had been right.

I went into the backroom to write down what I had just heard. I also took note of my own reaction to her. Instead of appearing like an alcoholic loser, Dale began to look like a winner to me. I felt she had guts. There was no denial, no excuses, no self-pity. Even though her body language expressed misery, the way she talked expressed,

'These are the bare facts.'

I was interrupted by Ray who wandered into the room and sat down across from me. "So, you're an anthropologist. I'm an anthropologist too. But I don't practice." "What are you doing?" "I'm learning to be a welder." There was something about him that bugged me. A superior air about him, spends a minute too long in front of a mirror, is just a touch too comfortable. Somehow all my internal alarm bells were sounding. I wished he would go away. Instead he said, "I don't like the whole New Age thing." I thought, 'Then why are you here?' and felt my defense shields go up and the torpedos lock into position. He continued, "I'm a member of a drum group. We meet this afternoon at the duck pond. You should come and look at us." I tried not to be confrontational, "You are in a drum group and don't like New Age? How come?" "The New Age is really not new. Their beliefs and ideals have always been there." I had heard that before but not from a participant. Now I really began to feel defensive, "Yeah, but they put them together in new ways." "That's interesting," he said in a tone that implied he was not. "But you should really come to us and study us." He waved his hand around, "This here is really too commercial. They just want to make money," I kept my eyes locked on him. "Ah, I mean, they are really nice people here. Really. But this is not New Age." "Then what is New Age?" "It's what we are doing. We meet several times a

year and there are really interesting people in our group. You should come to us and study us. Not the people at the Star Cloud." By now I had turned to ice. I had felt resentment right from the beginning, but now I really had a problem with his coercive, domineering manner. Subjectively of course, and after what I had just heard from Dale, I was not in the mood to play stupid little games with this artificially styled pretty boy. Perhaps he felt that our conversation was over. He got up and moved towards the door, "Come to us and study the Paganists. We can tell you a lot about us. That's where you can learn about the real New Age." I forced a smile and said, "Yeah."

After he had left I finished writing up my notes. But now there was something nagging at me. After all, I am an anthropologist. Could I let a chance to study them escape just because I don't like one of their members? I decided I could not. I had no intentions of studying a group but it would be an opportunity to make contacts with individuals. I also decided to wait until Ray had left town.

When I was finished with my notes I wandered over to Dan's workshop. The door had been open the whole time that I had talked with Ray. When I entered Dan sat hunched over his workbench concentrating on a tiny piece of metal. I said, "Hi." Dan did not look up and I heard, "Mumble mumble," or something like that. I sighed. This would be

another time where information would come slowly. I moved closer and looked over Dan's shoulder. He was working on another dragon. I really had begun to like those creatures. I also began to be honestly interested in this kind of work. So for an easy start I asked what he used for glue. He still did not look up and mumbled, "Resin." I remembered that my father had used that for various things. Good, this was something familiar. Because I received contradictory signals from Dan, I always felt I had to be careful when I talked to him. On the one hand he radiated authority and confidence, on the other hand his mannerisms were extremely shy and quiet. So I felt if I said a wrong word, he would withdraw completely.

Before I could say anything else however, I got the second surprise that morning. Suddenly, Dan jumped up, lit a cigarette and began in a loud and excited voice, "It's the church that's the problem. What they teach is gobbledigook. They don't want people to know. They are more concerned with power and politics. Their doctrine is designed to make people submissive and to keep them from thinking." Dan's excitement had caught me off guard and I had stood up too and leaned against the wall. He had been almost angry but now calmed down and continued in a softer lecture style tone, "You see, Adam really means a group of people and Eve is consciousness. The church teachings set both against each other. This is not the

way it was supposed to be. Both should complement each other. So in the long run the antagonism between Adam and Eve led to antagonism between genders, cultures, and nations." I had already experienced that Dan had an analytical mind. "Is that why you got interested in New Age?" "Yeah, mostly that. As a child I grew up in a real conservative environment. They were going to church and really believed what the church taught them. But all I got out of these teachings was fear. And to this day I can't..." Dan shook his head looking distraught now. This was an upsetting memory to him. He looked down and then picked up again, "They always read the Bible, always quoting from it. But the two things that I saw in it were really only two topics, wrath or threat and love. That just didn't make sense to me. I always felt afraid. For everything you did you were threatened with the wrath of God. There was always punishment for everything. There was a lot of fear. Most of the time I was scared." He looked down with a frown shaking his head. I could practically feel the fear that stood out so clearly in his mind. But he quickly became determined and said, "I cannot love someone who threatens me." That was a very clear broadside against the conservative version of the Christian God. I had never before or after seen Dan so upset. Whatever else has happened in his childhood, this was by far the most impressive memory. I asked if he had any other childhood

memory that stood out to him and he said simply, "No."

While we had been talking a woman had entered the workshop, sat down on a chair, lit a cigarette, and listened. Now introduced her briefly with, "She's a nurse." I asked if she was into New Age also. She laughed and answered, "I'm a regular nurse." Then she picked up on what Dan had said about churches. "The problem is that church leaders are in control. They have power. They don't want people to think. That's why people started the whole New Age movement. They began to think. They are becoming more open to new ideas." While Dan stood quietly and nodded in agreement she offered a historical insight, "Earlier in history very few people knew how to read and write. So those who could, told people what to believe. It is still so today. That people join different churches is a sign that they are searching. People want to know."

I thought, 'They don't talk often but when they do, you get a whole lecture.' Somehow I found this significant because it showed that these people are really very much involved with the New Age concept. This certainly sounded much more serious than a mere fashion. That I was surprised again at their analytical endeavors showed that perhaps I had been more biased against them than I had realized. But if this was true, then this bias was quickly eroding. I wanted to change the mood a little that had become a bit heavy. The fact that here was a nurse might give

insights into other aspects of New Age. "Does New Age have anything to do with health?" "Illness really begins in the mind. I see that every day in the hospital. How a patient feels, good or bad, that's really important. That can change everything. It has a big influence on how sick they are or how they get better. But karma has an influence too. You know, everything's connected. You're bound into the whole thing." She stopped realizing that this sounded a bit awkward. Dan also remained silent now.

I knew already that it is often difficult to put new concepts into words. Our language does not seem to be well prepared for these kinds of ideas. Perhaps here was another reason why New Age people sometimes sound funny to others. I felt that we all had enough for now. I made another attempt with, "So if New Age has something to do with health, what about health food?" But this was a half-hearted shot in the dark and they started to laugh. Dan shook his head and said, "Nothing." I was skeptical but it was clear that we would have to continue at another time.

This had been quite an interesting morning. Things were clearly picking up now. But I doubt that Dale and Dan would have reacted like this if Ray had not been there. I think it was his presence and/or his domineering behavior that had triggered their outbursts. There could also be a possible competition between groups. On one of my visits I had asked Dale about that. But her answer was that

everybody is getting along fine and there is no competition whatsoever. Later, I would learn otherwise. Although there is no direct competition between groups like CUUPS and OPERA, certain sub-contexts within the New Age provide a competitive background for individuals. But I would hear this from different people.

Over the course of several months I would get more insights from Dale and Dan. The encounters were generally brief and took place at the Star Cloud. Both never lost their shyness and both never offered their thoughts at great length as they had on that remarkable Saturday morning. Especially for Dale insights always seemed to come at some emotional cost. But bit by bit I could round out the picture a little with their ideas and experiences.

Dale could talk about her experiences with a voice that was a little stronger than before. Since meanwhile I had had the chance to attend and participate in several meditation meetings, I asked about her interest in meditation. She began by remembering her marriage again. "I went to my family and then to our pastor and then to the Catholic priest." She shook her head and looked down at the counter behind which she stood. "They only made me feel guilty. It was as if everything was my fault. But after twenty years... I had become an alcoholic. I had missed a lot of work. I knew my boss would fire me, so I quit before he could fire me." "What made you get a

divorce finally?" "I had to get the children out. I knew I was getting worse. I was sick with the anemia and that wasn't getting better. Doctors gave me all kinds of stuff but nothing worked. I had to do something. To me it was really the word choice. One day I just knew that it was my own choice. I had relied on other people and that was wrong." Dale stood straight now looking at something behind me. She looked almost defiant when she continued, "I don't need anybody now. Then I thought I needed a man. That's what they taught you. But now I don't need anybody. I can be responsible for everything I do. I make my own decisions." "And choice is the key?" "Yeah, it became planted in my head when I was at the lowest point. I kept thinking about it all the time. It was really important to think about it. So then I felt ready to get a divorce."

Dale glanced in the direction where the workshop was but Dan was not in at that time. She said, "He helped me a lot. I really learned something from him. I've been lucky. He knows a lot." There was no indication of a personal relationship in her voice or demeanor but a great deal of respect for Dan. With a serious nod she quietly said, "You know, when you're in your late forties and still don't know what you'll do with your life.... It was time."

So now Dale ran the Star Cloud, a business that was limping along and gave her considerable headaches. Also she would have liked to see more people attend the

meditation meetings. Dale herself could not always be there though because she had a teaching job in the evenings. I asked her about that because she had quit her previous teaching position.

"I like it now. I can concentrate on it and it doesn't bother me anymore. It doesn't bother me to stand in front of other people and talk." I had doubts about the latter considering her manner of talking. But then, in class she did not have to talk about her personal life. Maybe that makes a difference. Dale continued, "I felt miserable on my earlier job because I felt like a failure to begin with. I thought I wouldn't be able to live up to my boss' expectations. And also that I was an alcoholic then, to stand in front of a class like that, I thought everybody would be able to tell."

"So the alcohol problem is solved now?" Dale laughed briefly and sighed, "You've got to start over every day. It's a battle. Every day. You've got to make that choice every day." "Sounds tough." She nodded but let out a brief laugh, sounding determined, "But once you cross the gap, once you make that decision, you can't go back anymore. It doesn't feel good anymore to go back. It makes you feel guilty and miserable. They are lazy or it's convenient for them to go back. But you can't do that so easily when you cross the gap." I noticed that Dale put an obvious distance between herself and others who fall back into

alcoholism, implying that that could not happen to her. Somehow I had a hunch that Dale had not crossed the gap as completely as she wished. She sounded just a tad too sure about that. Her next words sounded like they were based on experience and so confirmed my impression, "You can let yourself go, but it doesn't feel good anymore."

The key for not falling back is meditation for Dale. Everybody develops her own technique. Having arrived back at our topic, I asked again why the meetings were an on-again-offagain thing. "They don't have the discipline to keep up with it," was the slightly aloof answer. The word 'boring' came to my mind and Dale explained, "Meditation is exciting only at the beginning. But then it becomes boring. But you have to keep up, keep working on it. The idea is to stay in control of one's emotions. The goal is to feel good by choice." Dale sounded like a pro now and I was surprised. I had heard of doing something to make you feel good, but 'to feel good by choice' was different. When I asked Dale about it she answered, "The most important decision on a daily basis is to choose between a negative and a positive attitude. That's your choice." I could see her point and the part about discipline became clearer. To have a really bad day and still make myself feel good without faking it, would be quite a feat. Dale continued, "There are good and bad spirits and you can choose which ones you'll follow. There's

a higher power within each person. One has to follow this power and find a balance." Although Dale's choice of words was esoteric, in this context it made more sense to me than I would have thought. I decided to set words like 'spirits' and 'higher power' aside for now. At this time I was simply surprised how easily they fit in and how easily I could relate to the idea. I felt like I knew exactly what Dale was talking about, but the meaning of those words was still just beyond my grasp. I knew if I would ask her about spirits and the like, I would make things more complicated than they were. I wanted to wait and see if words and meanings would sort themselves out over time. This was one of those points in my work where I had one foot in New Age and the other in the mainstream.

Dale does not belong to any church because that would be too routine for her. Church service does not evoke the emotional balanced feeling she needs. But she goes to church for others, such as a funeral or a wedding. This would be an act of friendship.

She admitted that sometimes things go bad. "But today I'm more ready to accept that and I feel more ready to cope with bad incidences. That makes it important to keep up with the meditation, so you won't be discouraged when something goes wrong. A lot of people give up on it because it isn't exciting anymore after awhile. You have to take responsibility, not avoid it. So you can't blame anybody

when something bad happens, you can't look for scapegoats. It's your responsibility to deal with it." Dale thinks that everybody gets to a point that triggers a self-help mechanism. Mainstream people look like outsiders to her that are searching for something. "But they get focused on material things like job, bottle, food, possessions and so on. They search and don't have a clue what for. Sooner or later they'll meet an incidence where they have to make a choice. The balance will be between the inner balance of the higher power and material or social things." I thought it was funny that Dale saw mainstream people as outsiders. Usually it is the other way around. To me this was a sign that Dale felt very secure in her attitude. But she did not sound superior or snobbish. If anything, there was a little sadness in her voice. Again she became determined, "I don't need particular material items. I don't need alcohol and I don't need a person to depend on. I can make it on my own. I'm responsible for me and my actions. It's a struggle, but it works. I can handle my teaching job. People don't bother me anymore."

Dale was visibly proud of her accomplishments. I could see that material success was not immediate but I also saw her determination to succeed on a mental and emotional level. I do not think she noticed it, but while she was talking her voice had become uncharacteristically strong and steady. She was completely immersed in the subject.

In one of our conversations Dale picked up again on a word that I had noticed before. "The learning experience still goes on. I'm always learning." She did not say exactly what she was learning. I could not ask for specifics because it was clear to me that learning here meant something far more encompassing than in the mainstream. So when Dale said, "I'm learning," from the way she said it, I knew this was different from learning a skill. Learning here was a never ending endeavor to discover and experience.

Dale had also taught her children to meditate. "The nineteen year old balked at New Age for a long time. He saw everything as negative. Life was terrible, people were awful. He had a real pessimistic, negative outlook. I told him to keep up with the meditation, not give up. Now he's better. Life is not so awful anymore. People are more acceptable now".

A few weeks after the Star Cloud had been rearranged I saw the 50% off sign in the window when I arrived. I knew this was the end of the store, although Dale had never mentioned anything about closing. I knew this must be tough for her. Running a business all on her own had been one of her major accomplishments. I felt terrible for her and worried what an effect this would have on her. When I entered I found Dale behind the counter. She was not hiding behind a book. She stood straight up. She looked straight at me and smiled, "Hi", in a very steady voice at a normal

audible level. Now I was off the track here. I seemed to feel worse than she did. "You're closing?" "Yeah," she looked out the window. "Sorry," "That's okay. Just didn't work." "Any idea why?" "Oh yeah, they closed the street and that keeps the people away." I didn't buy that and she knew it. "It's just not the right place. In another place it would have worked. But not here. On another campus..." Dale knew her answer sounded feeble and she gave up. I did not want to push her.

We talked about New Age customers instead. From what I had seen most were female and between twenty-five and upper forties. Dale agreed but shifted them up one decade. "They are curious mostly. But once they learn about it, they really get into it." I was surprised at her optimistic outlook on a day like this. It sounded like she wanted to make a point of the impact and importance of New Age. The demise of one store did not mean the end of New Age. On this, of all days, Dale sounded solid and steady, self-assured and with both feet on the ground. The effect of 'choosing to feel good'? I thought this was what she had been talking about. The store had been her ticket out of misery, the proof that she could make it on her own and be successful. Yet, here she was refusing to be defeated, instead she swung the conversation around to churches.

"I can handle my life. It's the churches that don't

want us to think. To them it's all about economics and power. They don't want us to think. But I can think for myself. I don't need them to tell me how to feel." It was one of those rare occasions when Dale became visibly angry and her voice rose above normal levels. I had no doubt that this was the outlet for her disappointment. "So you think people will leave the churches?" Dale already mellowed again, "No. I think they will return to the Christian churches. But they will demand changes, go back to the original Christian religion." She did not elaborate on what 'original' meant and it would have been hard to explain. "They are too dogmatic. They have to change. The hierarchy is just like in politics. It's a political power game. Once people figure out how to think for themselves, the hierarchy will break down. At least the church will have to be restructured. If they don't change, the people will take over and go back to the original Christianity." "What do you mean, 'original'?" "Love. It's love." She began to be busy.

This was the last time I saw Dale for about two years. Several weeks after our last talk I met Henry. He knew about the Star Cloud. "Yeah, at one point we tried to combine our businesses. But she just wasn't a business woman. She just wasn't a business woman. She tried to support five people with it. That was unrealistic. That couldn't work. It's too bad." With that, he was gone. I

had to chuckle when it occurred to me that Henry used the word business more often than store. He was a business person.

I went to the Rune Stone to look up Conny again but instead found a different woman, perhaps in her early thirties, sitting behind the counter. Conny was out and the stranger introduced herself as Jean. Conny is a friend of hers and she occasionally helps out at the store. My first question was, "What are you doing when you don't stand in for Conny?" "I'm a traditional midwife," she said, sounding very professional about it. That sounded New Age to me and images of home births flashed by in my mind. "What does 'traditional' mean?" "It means natural child birth. I specialize in home births." "How many people call a traditional midwife?" "Not too many. Home births is maybe one percent." She did not give me a number and so I have only a vague idea of how many people prefer home births. At least we had the same idea of what constitutes a 'natural' birth. I had already experienced confusion before about that. The daughter of an acquaintance had been expecting a baby and she informed me that the birth would definitely be a 'natural' one. To me that meant at home without technology, drugs, and the implication that a pregnancy is a contagious disease and a normal birth a disaster. If a slight bias comes through here, it is intentional. After the baby had been born I learned that

the daughter had been in a hospital and they had induced the birth after it had been a few days past the expected date. I remeber saying, "I thought you said it was a natural birth?!" "It was." Words have different meanings in different contexts and to different people in different situations. In this case it seemed to be a fashion statement.

"What are the reasons for people to choose a traditional midwife?" "They want more control over what happens to them and the baby. Economic is also a reason. It's cheaper. I don't like that reason." The latter reason is understandable and the former seems to express dissatisfaction or distrust towards the medical establishment. Something that was already implied by Dan.

I asked Jean how she got into New Age and how she became a traditional midwife. I had told her that I am an anthropologist and maybe that was why she immediately began to tell her story at the beginning. "I grew up in Oklahoma. We were Episcopalian and my father was a preacher. He was really strict and the whole environment was alcoholic and totally destructive. My mother was more open, especially after my father died. But the whole environment was a lie, the way they lived. In public it was the preaching and morality and so on. But at home it was the exact opposite." Jean put a lot of disgust in her words. "My mother never returned to church after my father died. She became a pretty

experimental person, trying meditation and getting into various New Age themes. But when I was a kid they were all total hypocrites. I think they couldn't deal with it. With their alcoholism or their other problems. So they acted as if they were totally moral people, preaching, and living by the bible and so on. It was all a lie. The whole family was destructive. It was the negative, repressive church environment. We couldn't show emotions and couldn't talk about our problems. Everything was simply denied." Jean spoke with great emphasize and sounded straight forward. She made it clear that growing up had been a traumatic experience under the circumstances.

"By the time I was twenty-one I was an alcoholic." She said that very directly in a matter-of-fact way without the slightest hint of guilt or unease. She decided to get away from her home environment and moved to Atlanta. "I jobbed, tried to get my feet on the ground somehow. It was really important to get away from home at that time." "How did you get involved with the New Age thing?" "I don't know exactly. I was searching. I became aware of it gradually. I read about alternative lifestyles and tried to find something for me, some direction. Then I became pregnant by my then-boyfriend. That was really a sign for me. That happened at the right time and I think that's no coincidence. I started to learn about birth methods and so I heard about traditional midwives. That gave me

a direction and a particular goal. That was not a coincidence then that I became pregnant. I was searching and it gave me a direction."

After the birth of her daughter Jean began to build up a life as a traditional midwife. "I got rid of the alcohol problem too at that time. Then I moved back to Oklahoma."

The birth of her daughter was a major turning point in her life. As she continued to talk about it, I was surprised how close she came to what I had read in the New Science literature and had used in my theory. "I think everything is interrelated. I mean, really everything. There's a big pattern that we all follow and everything that happens fits into that pattern." "So your pregnancy had to happen?" "Yeah, absolutely. It had to happen at that time. It was one thing in the pattern that is unfolding around us. It's part of a chain of events." "Do you mean there's a purpose in those events?" Jean hesitated a little, "Yeah. I mean you have to be aware of the pattern. You've got to be able to read the signs. That's really important in our craft, to be able to read the signs and see the big pattern." "What do you mean with 'craft'?" "The way to see things, to be aware of the pattern." "Like intuition?" "Yeah."

I looked at Jean and decided she is definitely not rich or even successful in the mainstream sense. But she

seemed very content and sure of what she was saying and how she lives her life. Maybe this is a gross injustice to many people, but I thought for someone near the bottom of the social hierarchy she had some pretty sophisticated ideas. I had to think of Gregory Bateson while she explained her thoughts to me. It was a clue for me that New Age people really interpret success differently than mainstream people. This was something that became increasingly obvious in my encounters with them.

When I met Conny again I still planned to ask her about that strange experience I had had. I did not really think anymore it had anything to do with her, but I had not forgotten how intense she had come across. However, right when I entered the Rune Stone I noticed a change in her before either of us had said, "Hi." She was softer, still serious, but by far not as piercing as before. I almost laughed because I had felt a little anxious to meet that piercing gaze again and I did not want to experience that disorientation again. So just for fun I had thought, 'Tone it down!' before I entered the store. Now she seemed to have done exactly that. Unfortunately, from a scientific viewpoint, I cannot repeat incidences like that to test if there is a relationship. These things happen spontaneously. So I have to leave it open. But for some reason I felt I could not ask anymore. Maybe I was afraid what the answer would be and there is just no way at this

time to write that up in a dissertation. The fact that I mention it at all, is a sense of truthfulness. I am aware of a gray zone in science and academia and while I have no intention of overstepping the boundaries (too far), I prefer to be blunt. Not out of disrespect for current attitudes or to perpetuate the questionable but rather to encourage questioning and legitimate research in exactly this gray zone.

So I did not ask Conny right out about my perceptions. But I did ask her what she calls herself. "I'm a practicing psychic. I see myself as a teacher." "So you can predict the future?" "Gary England does that all the time." Again I had to laugh at her quick wit. I thought she had a point there when she said, "They do that all the time. They just use technology or science or whatever. But they try to make predictions about everything. We just use a different method." I could not deny that we all are obsessed with finding patterns so we know what our economy, social life, etc. etc. will look like ten years from now. Predictions? Conny's answer had somehow an eye opening effect. She certainly could put things in a different perspective for me.

"How did you become a psychic?" "I have always been one. I always new I was different, even as a kid. I knew things. I thought everybody could know things the way I do. But the others saw me as different, I was aware of

that. I was always the weird one. But I didn't know about psychic things. That didn't exist there." "So you had no contact with other people like you?" "No. Those things were denied or rejected. There was nothing about psychics." She shook her head. I thought of how the others had remembered their upbringing. "Was the religion of your family a problem or was there any abuse?" "No." "How did you feel?" "Isolated. I couldn't ask about how I felt because those things didn't exist." "You never read anything about things psychic?" "No. I didn't know there were books out there. There was nobody to talk to. I felt the others couldn't relate to me and I could not relate to them. They were always total strangers to me. That went so far that I really thought they had adopted me. I was really convinced I was adopted. I believed that for a long long time. I just didn't fit in there." "So when did you become aware of being a psychic? Any special event?" Conny shook her head, "No. Nothing special. When I was twentynine, about that time I became aware of the literature. Then I knew there were others like me." "Was there anything in particular that brought you into the New Age thing?" "No, nothing." When Conny gave short answers like this one, they always sounded final. She could elaborate on her ideas but she never rambled.

Since she became acquainted with others like herself and the New Age literature, she developed her skills

consciously. "How do you see yourself today?" "I see myself as a teacher to other people." Although Conny advertises her store, she does not advertise her skills as a sensitive nor does she offer her services unless asked. "Is your life different from that of other people?" "It's better. It's more stable. I have more security." Spoken from the mainstream perspective, although Conny's main occupation is being a sensitive, she always appears as a very realistic and level headed person. She knows exactly who she is and where she stands. That she thinks of herself as a teacher is not far from the others' concern with learning.

But teacher is not the only way she identifies herself. I knew already that she is married. So I asked how her husband feels about her skills. "He's supportive. He's interested and he's very open." What she said then came as a surprise. "We're both open. I'm also open sexually. I'm married to him but I'm also open to the other side." She stretched her arm to indicate how open. "What does your husband think about that?" "It's okay with him." Conny shook her head in a manner that seemed to imply, 'Why would he have a problem with that?' But this was all that Conny said about her sexual life. Since it would not have occurred to me to ask under the circumstances, I thought it was important for her to mention it. Considering that her husband is away on his oil rig job for extended periods of time, it even sounded like a practical solution to what

could have become a problem. Conny did not use the word 'bisexual' however. Somehow I noticed this only later. But it was quite obvious that she preferred the word 'open'.

During the following visits Conny became even mellower, greeting me with "Hi, sweetheart," and I had no experience of disorientation anymore. She also greeted other customers in the same manner, occasionally adding a hug.

Conny revealed her ideas about the universe to me. "It's a network where everything is interrelated." She looked at me as if to make sure I understood. So I said, "Yeah, I know. There's a theory out there..." She waved her arm impatiently, "I don't know about your theories!" She grabbed a piece of cardboard and a pen and began to draw. A kind of circle and what looked like a spider's web around it. "I don't know if you understand this, but this is the Godhead," she tipped the pen on the center, "and this is the universe." Okay, I could follow so far. "It's a network of relationships with the Godhead or whatever you want to call it, at the center. This is really the driving force that makes everything happen." While Conny was talking she was completely focused on her drawing and getting quite intense. She wanted to make sure I understood. Somehow I had to think of the Big Bang and the energy that is said to have been released and makes everything happen. Conny used different words but the idea was the same.

It was not easy for her to put her ideas into words, although she clearly knew what she was talking about. Mainstream language does not include much esoteric expressions and what there is still makes people sound awkward. Conny tried to put her thoughts into words, mindful of that I, as a scientist, might not be able to grasp it. It was an interesting experience to be on the receiving end of the attitude. Conny tried to explain how the network functions. "Whenever something changes somewhere in the network, everything else changes also. Everything that happens, has an effect on everything else. So everything changes all the time." All this sounded all too familiar to me. Her Godhead was my Big Bang, her Starhawk was my Gregory Bateson. We used different words but we had the same idea. I had had this notion before but now I felt excited, having it so clearly laid out for me. Finally, I banged my fist on empty air and exclaimed, "You're talking pure energy here!" She looked up with wide eyes and nodded, "Yes."

While Conny was talking on the phone I would wander around looking at the books on the shelves or pick up a new addition to my stone collection. Conny watched me browsing through books and said, "You should read Starhawk. She has a new one out that's pretty good. She has everything in there that you're looking for." Although I followed her suggestion I wanted to know more from Conny not

Starhawk.

"What do you mean, you always knew things?" "For example, I knew whom I would marry. Before I had seen him. I met his little daughter and when I saw her I knew I would marry her daddy." "And you did?" "I did." "Hm. Okay." One of those things that I need to leave open. I tried something different that felt close enough. "You rely on your intuition when you decide something?" "Yes." Simple. "Is that reliable?" "Yes." "How do you know?" "It makes you feel good. I mean, not good in a superficial sense like in immediate gratification. I mean good in here." She put her hand on her midsection. She followed her gut feeling. I had this sense of history again that I have mentioned before. When Conny brought up 'goodness' it reminded me very much of early Greek philosophers who also put goodness at the center of their quest for truth. 'Coming full circle?' rushed through my mind.

I could follow her ideas easily if I translated her concepts into psychology, even though I did not always have explanations. But then she through me off the track when she said, "It's the spirits that tell me what to do?" Oh my. Is it appropriate to translate spirits into something else and if it is, then what could they possibly be? I tried, "Is that the same as intuition?" Conny thought for a moment and then answered, "You may call it intuition." She put an emphasize on 'you'. Whenever I talked to Conny

I noticed that she drew a line between her and me along the New Age - Science border. She never implied that I was wrong and she was right. But she always took into account that I may see things differently even when we basically have the same idea. This was another hint for me that one of the main differences between New Age and others is terminology more than concept.

Sometimes we both got excited while we talked. It felt like we were both pursuing ideas that are still quite elusive at this time. Conny came back to her way of 'knowing' and said, "I also know that I have lived before." I raised my eyebrows at her. This was again one of those things where I thought, 'I'm sure there is an explanation for why she has this impression. But how in the world do I put that in a dissertation without subjecting them to ridicule?' By this time I had begun to think of New Age people as 'my people' and to feel protective towards them. I treaded carefully, "Why do you think so?" Conny made several starts and then became exasperated, "I don't know! It doesn't make any sense to me! I can't explain it. I know that can't be!" Conny got more and more upset while she talked and put her hand to her hair as if she would tear at it. "It just doesn't make sense biologically or genetically. I can't have lived before, I know that. My parents would have had to live before then and their parents before them and so on. That is not possible!" She leaned

towards me and for a moment I thought she would grab my shirt and shake me, "YOU are the scientist! YOU explain that to me!" I felt a mixture of laughter, confusion, and the same exasperation. This was great. I like challenges like that. Unfortunately I did not have any answer either. I was racking my brain for something useful and started, "Well, if you take the idea of collective subconscious and then there's an idea in microbiology about a biological memory. I would start looking there. I'll think about it." "I don't know about your science." "I'll think about it." I have ever since and Conny's problem is noted down as a future project. Perhaps my acceptance of Conny's notion may appear naive to conventional scientists. So be it. I never doubted that she had some mental or emotional experience that gave her the impression of a former life. It dawned on me that we are often asking the wrong questions and on the basis of that dismiss other people's ideas as irrelevant or phony. The question in this case is not, 'Has she lived before?' The question should be, 'What exactly does she experience?' Then go at it from a psychological and/or microbiological angle.

I was just as exasperated as Conny at this time. But we both had gotten tired and were slowing down. I tried to get a grip on my idea that we are doing an injustice to other people. I asked her, "What if the guardian spirit of American Indians is really an image or symbol of their

intuition?" Conny knows about intuition and I was looking for feedback. "Yeah. Could be. That's your job to find out." So much for feedback. Conny yawned and I felt tired too. We seemed to have exhausted each other.

I had asked Conny if she would read what I had written so far and she agreed. When I asked her for comments about the first few chapters she said, "Went right over my head. That's science. That's what You do." I felt a little defensive and asked, "What's wrong with it?" "You left out all the emotional stuff." "What do you mean?" "Emotions. How you feel." I could see her concern. After all, she lives on gut feeling and intuition. Since I had earlier on decided I would let my informants have a word in the negotiation, I am trying to take care of Conny's complaint.

Several months after our very first encounter I brought up what Conny had told me before. I reminded her that she had said the New Age has not even begun yet. She looked at me and shook her head. "No. I don't know about that." It may be a misperception on my part, but she seemed to know exactly what I was talking about. I wanted to ask why she had changed her mind, but it was clear that she did not want to talk about it. I wondered if she had also changed her attitude about her opponents in this town. "Do you remember when you told me about Oklahomans for Families and Children and how they sent you pamphlets?" Again she looked at me astonished, "No. No problem." "You

don't remember that you told me about it?!" "No. I never had a problem with them." She shook her head. She did not want to talk about that either. I tried a different subject. "Some sensitives I talked to work for the police. Do you do that to?" "Yes. I have done that." As usual Conny looked very serious and nodded slowly. "Can you tell me about it?" She looked at me and answered in an untypically formal tone, "I'd rather not talk about that." This was either a bad day or something had happened. Since this was right after she had read my pages I thought she might have become wary of scientists and simply clamped up. I tried yet another topic that I had not explored yet with her. From others I knew that Conny was a Wicca priestess. "How does Wicca fit into the New Age thing?" Conny shook her head. "That's got nothing to do with it." I was surprised. "What do you mean?" "Wicca is religion. That's different. New Age is about the psychic things." I thought this was a unique distinction that I wanted to know more about. But for some reason I ran against a wall and that was that. She continues, however, to answer less intrusive questions and is still a gracious and supportive friend.

Conny helped to pull me out of a tight spot that I had gotten myself into with another informant. I understood and was willing to give donations for any professional services that I may receive from them, I also keep mentioning that I do not have the money to donate for every

conversation or interview that does not directly include such services. However, I felt tricked into giving money, services or no services. Usually this was done with a hint about all the checks that come in from other people. But it was done in such a manner that seemed to allow no resistance. I felt extreme resentment although I liked the person nor did I want to antagonize a valuable informant. I asked Conny what to do about it. Conny's answer was simple, "Say you don't have any money." "I did." She thought for a moment, "Bring them a plant." She looked at me closer and said, "You understand?" I understood. Actually, I was surprised at how well I understood. I had not realized until now how my thoughts could flow along New Age lines. What Conny was talking about was, they give you their energy and you give them something back that restores their energy. I cannot say why I did so, but I thought plants do this perfectly. Maybe I had learned to anticipate New Age answers to mainstream problems. Conny on the other hand, was not so sure if I knew what she was talking about. She explained, "You know, they give you some of their energy when they talk to you. A plant gives that energy back."

At one point Conny could not help with a problem but instead we discovered something that we shared to some degree. I had had a very unsettling experience and was quite upset about it. Having worked with sensitives for

some time I had begun to pay attention to my own intuition or hunches more than I usually do. I was seriously looking for explanations and to figure out how it all really worked had become a continuous concern. Perhaps unavoidable under the circumstances. One result was that I had begun to wake up after two or three dream cycles per night. This can be rather disturbing at the best of times. But one night I shot up into a sitting position with my heart pounding like a sledgehammer, panting, and drenched in sweat. I clearly remembered my dream. I had lain in a bed in my parents' home when a monstrous rumbling and shaking set in, an earthquake. I had never experienced one in waking life, so it could not be a memory. I felt the air pressure from an explosion in my back and was absolutely terrified. It seemed to last for hours and there was nothing I could do about it than to ride it out. To make things worse, I saw an image of people running in terror and they were all dressed in loose flowing clothes like those people wear in Arabian countries. But worst of all were the screams of little children. I forgot my own fear over that and the feeling of helplessness is not describable. The next day I felt extremely apprehensive and kept scanning news stations on TV. But there was nothing. Still, I stayed up late to watch the last news for the day. Nothing. I turned in still feeling apprehensive. The following morning the headline in my Sunday paper read, "Earthquake in Iran.

2400 people dead." The picture accompanying the report was similar to the one I had seen a little more than twenty-four hours before. I was shaken and the only thing I could think was, 'And there was absolutely nothing I could do about it.' The thought followed an attack of fierce defensiveness with regard to the children. I felt bitterly angry and became even more determined to find explanations. Although I did not make it the topic of the dissertation, it led to a long list of things to do.

I went to Conny and told her about it. She nodded gravely and understood perfectly. Then I asked, "Do you think I can teach myself to dream so I can pinpoint exactly when and where something like that is gonna happen?" I was completely aware of how naive that was, but I was not over the shock yet. Conny answered, "And what are you gonna do about it? How are you gonna evacuate 2400 people? Besides, they wouldn't believe you." She was right about that. After all, New Age people are mostly nuts according to the mainstream. We looked at each other for awhile and I thought, 'Is this what they experience day in day out? Is this what they have to live with all the time?' I did not have to ask Conny, the look on her deeply lined face gave me a pretty good hint and we both had become quiet. I realized only later that our mutual quietness probably contained more information than any discussion could have. Sometimes things are hard to put into words.

I felt at this moment I had both feet in the New Age context. It felt like I had passed a threshold somehow. With regard to my work, I could not let that happen. But it took a long time until I had found the right equilibrium again to be able to continue my work. To this day I can hear the screams of the children and I still feel great regret at our lack of understanding.

The whole episode also had another effect. It seemed to emphasize what Conny had told me at the beginning. There are a lot of charlatans out here and one had to be careful. At first, I thought about clients being conned out of their money by some telephone psychic. Or bored housewives gossiping with a fake sensitive about their neighbors. The sensitives I have talked to are quite aloof about that sort of thing. Now I became aware of a far more serious aspect in the lives of people who seem genuinely more sensitive than others. The possibility of misuse or the irresponsible use/interpretation of creative mental images seemed to loom large over the whole New Age context. For the first time I thought about mainstream's attitude toward New Age people in a different way. Could it be that behind the ridicule was a subconscious fear? It seems possible. It made me uneasy, more determined than ever to demystify, but also very wary. Now I was walking on thin ice not only with regard to the expectations of mainstream science but also with regard to my personal life and how it would be

affected by my work. What had begun as a fun research project had acquired a darker and shadier aspect. I had also gotten a pretty good idea of what life looked like or felt like on the inside of the more serious part of the New Age arena that is still mostly hidden from mainstream view.

One of my objectives for this project is to let my informants have their own say in it. Since Conny was less articulate about explaining New Age concepts to me than others, I asked her specifically, if she would like me to include something that seems important to her. This could be anything that she thinks I should say. Her reaction was typical, "It doesn't matter what you write. You write things the way you see them, no matter what I say. And everybody who reads it will interpret it in his own way anyway. So it doesn't really matter what I say." I had to laugh when I had to think of Paul Riceour who had made this observation into a career. For Conny it was simply stating the obvious.

I explained to her that I do not want to go over the head of an informant but instead let her have an input. But the conversation had taken a different turn than I had expected. When I said, "I also have to negotiate it with others who will read it," Conny got upset. "That's what I have a problem with. Just because you write what you think doesn't mean others have to agree with it. You

got to write what you got to write. And this is your dissertation. What does it matter if anybody disagrees with it or not?" "Yeah, well....That's why I asked you if you'd like me to put in something that's important to you and I'll do it. But with the New Age thing I'm often walking a fine line so I have to negotiate." She shook her head impatiently, "If anybody disagrees I'd say 'Fuck you.'" I nodded laughing, "Okay." As usual, I found Conny's directness refreshing. This was not the kind of negotiating that I had imagined but I also did not try to stop her. What Conny said here revealed very much the same attitude towards mainstream/science thinking that I had heard from others.

But now Conny was really upset and continued, "Most people are narrow minded. I'm being condemned for being different. Hastings sells New Age books. The bookstores at the mall sell New Age crystals to people and that's okay. But if I do it, I'm being condemned just because I have it all in one place." I looked at Conny and repeated, "Exactly. Because you have it all in one place. That makes you too different from the mainstream." Conny nodded. "Yeah, it's the same with religion. If I'm in the Baptist Church down the street and I don't believe exactly every word they tell me, I'm evil. Everybody who thinks differently is evil. I can't condemn people for being different. I can't even condemn Satanists. I may not believe what they

believe, but I cannot condemn them. They're simply pissed at Christianity." She summed up her outburst with another, "People are just narrow minded," and then added another thought. "That's a real problem with organized religion. But we deal more with the spiritual side." "That seems to be a difference that New Age people make, organized religion and spirituality." Conny nodded, "Yes. The spiritual aspect is personal. That's what you really believe."

I had asked Conny for more contacts and she had given me the same names that I had heard before and that will appear in the following pages. One of them was Mark. "You should talk to him. He's a pussycat."

I called him at his home and he invited me to his house. As I wrote down the directions I noticed that it would be long walk for me out there. That was fine, but I would have to rearrange my work shift. However, Mark called me back and suggested a coffee shop that would be closer to my work place. Conny seemed to be right. He was nice.

My first impression of Mark was that of a big boy of about forty. His politeness as he suggested a table was without any phyness or superficiality. We would get along. When I asked if I could tape him he asked back if the background noise would bother and maybe I wanted a different table. But everything was fine.

To give him the opportunity to choose what is important

in his own opinion instead of mine, I began with the broadest question, "What's your story?" "I was born in New York," he began in a soft and patient voice, "My ancestors are Italian and African. So you can say I'm an Italian-African-American. I was raised in a foster home." He paused for a moment and then said quietly, "So you see, there was nothing... I had food and a place to sleep.... But....." Somehow I thought he wanted to say more, making a start but then only shook his head. He continued, "My lone mother was sick most of her life and could not take care of me." "What about your father?" But Mark only shook his head. "Did you know your mother?" "Yes," he seemed to brighten up. "I saw her the first time at her burial." At first I thought I had misunderstood because he really seemed to become more lively now. Maybe he had met her at someone else's burial. But no, "I was twelve years old then and it really affected me." This was quickly becoming confusing to me. I could understand that a twelve year old would be affected by his mother's burial, but certainly not in the joyous way that Mark displayed here. Was I misunderstanding somehow? He had seemed like a nice guy. I started to ask but he must have seen my confusion. He explained, "Until then I had shared the fate of other children being raised in foster homes. The burial of my mother was really a turning point. That was the first time that I realized that I had a mother at all. That made me

feel good." "So the funeral was really a positive experience?" "Oh yes. I got a great deal of comfort from that. Also hope for my own future." Mark spoke with an articulateness and humbleness that would have made other people appear phony. It was obviously difficult for him to talk about his experiences in the foster home. I would save that for later. "How did you get involved in the New Age?" He thought a moment deciding where to begin. Then he said, "After I had left high school I, ah, was drifting around a bit." He seemed a little embarrassed about that and added, "There was that too." I nodded in encouragement. "I joined the military for a while." He took a deep breath and continued more enthusiastically, "Finally I ended up in Los Angeles. I received training as a nurse there. You have to understand that I realized that it had been a sickness that had deprived me of my mother. That had probably fueled the wish to help. I worked in a hospital then. I thought this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. It really was." However, things turned out differently than he had imagined.

Mark sighed, "But I became quickly disillusioned. It was a very disillusioning experience." "Why? What happened?" "I really wanted to care for the patients. I really thought I could help and be useful and contribute something. You know, do my share." "Didn't work out that way?" "No." "What exactly went wrong?" "It was the treatment of the doctors.

They made me feel like a bell hop. I wanted to feel useful and I really cared about the patients as persons not as objects. But the doctors didn't want to hear about that. That would have been unprofessional, I suppose. It was really very discouraging. It was quite an eyeopener, this realization about hospitals." Mark did not speak in a loud voice but now he lowered the volume even more and leaned closer, "In a hospital the patient's well being is not necessarily a focus." What Mark implied here but was too polite to express more directly, was the same idea that I had heard from Dan and Dale. Now I had someone who confirmed the experience from the insider's perspective so to speak.

"What is the focus?" I knew it but I had to hear it from Mark. "The politicking, the business aspect, all that," he answered with obvious distaste. "Their own concerns came first. Their position in the hierarchy and their status." Like the others he never mentioned a particular medical procedure. The upset was about a certain attitude that people meet inside the medical establishment. "There was also my own feeling of incapacity. I felt I was not allowed to care for the patients as human beings. But they are human. So I quit the job."

"And then what?" "I became a massage therapist. I found this is really what I want to do. I can concentrate on each individual and treat people like persons." Mark became

more energetic and it seemed like he really enjoyed his work. He had a broad smile and stood up, "May I?" he asked and put his hands on my shoulders. I nodded, "Sure." Demonstrating a few moves, he explained, "This allows me to really give some of my own energy to someone else. There's an energy flow between people and it's important to align the two energy currents." Of course, I was listening to what he was saying and not paying much attention to the massage. All I can say is, it did not feel bad but I don't know about energy flows.

Mark has a home practice but admitted that it is economically not always easy. Proudly he showed me his little ad paper that he had designed himself. He had also designed a logo of two open hands. It appropriately expresses his idea of what a massage is all about, "It's not only for specific problems. A good massage affects the whole body." Now I noticed that he had it also sewn on his black uniform. The uniform was also his idea. Mark did not come across like a sales person. I could see and hear by his tone that he is honestly involved with his occupation. But this does not mean that he is oblivious of economic concerns. "I also advertise in nearby hospitals." "Do they refer patients to you?" Mark shook-nodded his head and shrugged, "Nnyeahhh." That didn't seem to go too well. But he had an idea, "I would like to set up shop at the airport. When people have a long

flight behind them they might be grateful for a relaxing massage. That may be very lucrative." Having been on long flights myself I knew how right he was, but somehow I had doubts that an airport terminal would work. Although it is at times difficult to make a living on the massage therapy alone, Mark seemed to have found his niche. "Now I can take full responsibility for my work. That is something that I have missed in the hospital environment."

Mark's 'whole person' idea had brought us closer to a New Age concept. "What kind of people are your clients?" "They are from all walks of life." "So they are not only New Age people but mainstream too." "Yes, everybody." "Why do they want a massage from you? Anything in particular?" "It's stress mostly. They are out of balance. Also they sit at a desk a lot and it affects their posture and that affects the whole person." Mark looked at me with an 'you understand' expression.

Then I found myself on the other end of the interview. Mark asked how I had come to be an anthropologist and do this kind of research. When I gave him a brief outline of my education and interests, I realized that at the time I decided to study New Age people I had already drifted into it more or less unintentionally. My graduate studies in Montana had begun with an archaeological interest in Medicine Wheels. Then through a series of quirks, coincidences, and other things I had ended up writing a

chapter on New Age use of Medicine Wheels. When I recounted this, I felt a bit baffled myself.

I wanted to know the same thing from Mark, "What brought you into the New Age?" "I think it was that sense that I wanted to fulfill my place in the web. Do what is right regardless of social-material accolations. That's what a lot of other people do." He frowned and added, "Of course, I like my creature comforts. Not everything in our techno society is bad. But it's how we use it. My family is important, my wife and my little daughter. My personal integrity is important to me. And the satisfaction in my work." Some of what he said was already familiar, "So you think there's a web out there?" "Oh yes, everything is interrelated," Mark leaned closer and looked straight at me, "Do you think there's a reason we had to meet at this time? You work in this and I do. It's like we were on an interception course." I only raised my eyebrows and nodded a 'maybe'. I could neither agree nor disagree with Mark. But he had found an interesting expression for the web that he had mentioned. Of course, if there is such a web and every event affects every other event, then there cannot be coincidences. This would be a New Age argument, but at the time I was not too sure of how far I would agree with it. Mark continued, "It's not the technology that is destructive. It's how people use it. It's good to be successful in a material sense. But if business is carried

to a point where people give up their personal integrity to make a profit or climb the social ladder, that is destructive." "And your experience in the hospital was the decisive factor?" "Yes. I didn't like the way the patients were treated, like objects. That is really not a healing environment."

Mark had shown genuine interest in my work so I asked him if he would like to read what I had written. His answer was, "Oh yes. I would like to read. You want comments. Yes, I'll read it. And you should come to our house some time. I want you to meet my wife." "Okay."

When I called Mark several weeks later his wife was on the phone. Mark was busy at a mall where he had set up shop. So I called him there. Although he was as friendly as before, I noticed a distance in his voice. "I'm really very busy. I have hardly any time to go to the bathroom." I asked him if he had read what I had given him his answer was, "Yes. It was very interesting but I haven't had time to think more about it. My new shop keeps me busy." "I understand." "I'll call you back." That felt like a hurried exit. I realized that I had overburdened him or he took things more serious than I had intended. Anyway, I had to postpone a further meeting with him indefinitely or until a future project would allow us to find more common ground.

Others to whom I offered a chance to read my pages

responded with variations of, "Whatever you write is fine with us." This was not exactly the negotiating process that I had imagined. But then, perhaps such responses are exactly part of our interaction and just as informative than a direct feedback to our work.

I had been aware from the beginning that sensitives are part of the New Age context. But I had not intended to make this aspect a primary focus, it was merely one part of many. However, I realized that to some degree psychic phenomena seem to permeate other aspects and are important to more people than I had realized. Despite my hair raising dream experience, I was ready to go wherever my informants would lead me. I also realized that in terms of a scientific study, this would make my work a rather hazardous obstacle course.

So I was not surprised when another contact I had from Dale and Conny turned out to be yet another sensitive. I called Mary at home and she began to blurt out information before I could even ask a question. It turned out she is a member of OPERA. I do not want to make a particular group my research focus, but since I had already noticed that the balance in town seemed to list toward sensitives I decided to include what Mary had to say. OPRA has about twohundred members from all walks of life. "What kind of people are that?" I asked and Mary answered, "From Ph.D. to no education at all. We have quite a few school

teachers." "Anything in particular? Age, sex, or something?" "No. They are from all walks of life, from all kinds of occupation." "What are they doing?" "They are mostly psychics or healers." This was too murky for me. "What do they have in common?" "They all have a problem with modern medicine and they all have a problem with organized religion." This sounded more familiar but I couldn't get a word in. I had called to see if Mary would meet with me but Mary continued, "About half of our members are dyslexic." Now I was surprised, "What's got that to do with being a sensitive?" Mary explained, "It gives people a different perspective of their environment. They see things differently than other people." "Yeah, but dyslexia?" I really could not imagine. So far this was the first time that I could not follow an informant's line of thought even though I understood her argument. She tried to make it clearer to me but left me deeper in the woods instead, "It's related to the static electricity in their bodies," "Aha." "That also makes them sensitive to jewelry and wristwatches." "Okay." I tried to find something in her words that my mind could get a grip on. It would have been easier if Mary had sounded like a giggly, immature, gossipy person. But her middle range voice was strong, steady, and matter of fact. Fortunately, Mary led us back onto safer ground, "Most of them have had clairvoyant experiences as children. So we test children for psychic sensitivity."

"You have children there?" "Oh yes, with their parents."
"What's the test?" "We have someone think the child's name at its back. If it responds and turns around, it has passed the test." I had to think of the sensation that one can get if someone stares at one's back. We pass these things over, people like Mary emphasize them. To be sensitive in a mental/physiological way seemed to be a differentiating factor between sensitives and mainstream people. I also thought of the isolation that others had mentioned to me. I asked about that, "Oh no. They are really gregarious people. A lot of them have been abused as children, as happened to me." "What kind of abuse?" "Everything from total neglect to sexual, verbal, emotional, and physical abuse. It's all there." "That's got something to do with being a sensitive?" "Yes. The only way to protect themselves is to learn very quickly to assess people. So they learn to observe body language, voice and speech patterns and everything else in their surrounding that gives them a clue when the next attack will come." Mary was talking rapidly and I understood perhaps more than I liked to admit. This time her words made perfect sense to me.

I wanted to know more about her personally. "Abuse. And my grandmother was a fortune teller in the old traditional sense. I read officially since about ten years."

I thought of the others I had talked to so far and none of them seemed particularly gregarious. Although with

Mary I had a different impression. I asked about it. "They are gregarious and manipulative too. They use manipulation as a protective device. If you suffer a lot of abuse you become crazy, mentally ill. But psychics have found a way to protect themselves, so they won't become crazy. They have found an outlet that helps them to cope with their experiences. You know, when people are pushed to the extreme, emotionally or whatever, they have two options, fear or love. Psychics are the ones who have chosen love. Those who choose fear become ill." This was easier to understand than the dyslexia thing. While Mary talked I thought it is irrelevant here whether sensitive skills really work or not. What is relevant is that people like Mary believe they do. This is what helps them to deal with difficult situations. I said, "But being overly sensitive to other people can also be a rough ride, can't it?" Mary answered with a determined, "Oh yes."

"What's their problem with religion? You said they don't like it?" "Most believe in God but they find different ways to express it. It's not one particular religion. Most have a problem with organized religion. God is more a protective concept. There are all kinds of religions in OPERA, none of our members is a churchgoer." I had to grin. The way Mary said it, a 'churchgoer' is to an OPERA member what a 'dirtwalker' is to an astronaut." "Are you anything?" "I am a Hindu. I can identify with a lot that I find there."

Love, family, health are major concerns for most of us. Religion helps provide a framework for that. Religion is really personal, not public." The last sentence was the opposite from what I usually find in the mainstream where going to church on Sundays and meeting people is very much a public-social concern.

I wondered if Mary was more willing to talk about working for the police than Conny. "Several of our members have done that. But they have stopped or don't do that very often." "Why? Can you tell me about it?" "No." "Why?" "It is just too awful," and now Mary sounded distressed. She repeated, "It is just too awful to talk about it. I really don't want to." There was a very strong aversion against that kind of experience there.

Over time I learned more about Mary's personal background although the information came in telegram style. "The social environment I come from is upper middle class. My father was a musician. There was lots of abuse, verbal, emotional, sexual. All kinds of abuse. I had a Welsh grandmother and she was a reader of people in the traditional sense. You know, more like fortune telling. And when I was ten years old she began to teach me how to read. So I learned to read Tarot, palms, tea leaves, you know, everything." "What made your grandmother do that?" "She just thought I had the gift. And I'm doing it ever since." "For a long time I thought I shouldn't read people

in public or officially. I thought that was unethical. But then someone convinced me that it can be used to help people. So now I'm doing it for other people since about ten years." Then Mary had a question for me, "Do you meditate?" "Not really." "You should. Maybe start with Yoga. You breath very slowly and deeply. That slows down your brain." Then she continued, "I also know what person I have been in an earlier life." I tried to be careful, "I'm sure you experience something that gives you this impression but what does it feel like? Can you describe it?" Mary's answer was straight forward, "It's a memory. I remember things. I remember things that I know I cannot have seen or experienced in this life." I had to think of my idea of a biological memory. So many things we do not know.

"I was sick at some point in the mid-sixties. There was an awful lot of pain involved. That's when the appeared." "When what appeared?" "The apparation. It talked to me. Until then I had not read for other people because I thought it was unethical. My children were little then and I had other things to do. The apparition told me to start reading for others. It also reminded me of my past life impressions. It told me to read. So now my children are grown and I read." I thought it was funny how sensitives use the word read compared to mainstream people. It always sounds like people are books for them to read and interpret.

Mary had given me some insight into the concerns of OPERA and so I decided to get the same kind of general overview of CUUPS. The first step was to visit the building in which its members meet and the chance came at an open house day. I saw a few familiar faces in the meeting room. A small group stood in one corner singing and playing guitars. Tables were set up along the walls offering New Age items of various sorts. But the main activity consisted of sensitive readings. Tarot cards were spread out over tables, palmists were studying the hands of their clients or gazing deep into their faces. The whole atmosphere seemed to have more to do with fortune telling than with a legitimate sensitive/psychological reading, but who am I to judge? When I saw these people sitting next to each other at their tables, the word 'competition' came to mind.

In the hall outside the room were bookshelves with material on paganism, wicca, witchcraft, and the like. I should add here that members of the group refer to themselves as witches and/or priests/priestesses in different degrees. The social structure of the group remained largely elusive and did not become a focus in this project. What is relevant here is that the bulletin boards were filled with notices of political, social, and environmental activities. This was something I could relate to but it was also a surprise. Although I had a notion that Wicca members have a concern for the environment,

I had not known that they are really active about it.

To get the broad perspective I was looking for I contacted Beverly whose name I had found on a business card I had picked up that afternoon. She is the only informant who asked me not to use her real name. I asked for her reason and the answer was, "I'm a school teacher. So...." I understood that in this town membership in a Wicca or Pagan group might be perceived as inappropriate. Beverly, her husband and their three little children are members of CUUPS since about eight years. Before that they lived in a Quaker community in Oklahoma City. The main reason for joining CUUPS was that it offers a religious education for children. I have to admit that I was skeptical. "So what is CUUPS all about?" "We are both activists. So here we have a chance to be more involved in political activity." "Can you explain that?" "It's empowering to be able to do something, to show some concern. It makes me feel good to be able to do something. I just have more to do now." "Others are politically active. What's got that to do with paganism?" "It's the female power that is being used in a positive way. We take ideas or inspirations from the paganist ideal. It's more inclusive. We don't like the exclusivity in Christianity. They put an emphasize on male power." "And that wasn't a problem in the Quaker community?" "No. They offered the same inclusive environment as the paganists. The only reason

we left was that we wanted our children to be religiously educated. CUUPS has lessons that are especially designed for children. The Quakers don't have that." When I asked about her childhood and how she grew up the answer was that it had been a normal uneventful one. Beverly was raised in a Protestant environment mixed with some Catholicism. In the late sixties her teenage friends became interested in paganism but not Beverly. However, when she was twenty she had a vision that she cannot describe. "It was in my head but I don't know how to describe it. But I became interested in magic then. My goal was to develop some self-discipline and work with the good parts of magic. You know, there's good and bad magic." Beverly became a member of the Quaker community in 1978. "You were interested in magic and became a Quaker?" I thought that was not really a good match. But Beverly explained, "They don't ask what you believe. I liked the silent meditations especially. They also perceive women as equal."

As I continued to contact Beverly she became even busier. She began to study human relation and also trains to be a priestess of the First Degree (there are three) in the Wicca coven. "I feel supported in this group and I appreciate the chance to offer support." "Tell me more about the ideals of CUUPS." "The idea is that of the three-fold return. Three is a holy number. The idea is to pay attention to one's own conduct because every act

or every action will be returned in a 3-fold way or magnified three-fold. This includes good and bad actions. The return will have to be expected in this lifetime." Beverly had emphasized female power earlier and I wondered if that did not cause problems. "Do the males in the group have a problem with that?" "No. There is no overemphasize on only one aspect. It's exactly the complement of the energy or power that is central to us. The God and the Goddess rule together." Then Beverly suggested, "If you want to know more you should read 'The Chalice and the Blade' and 'Spiral Death' by Starhawk. They can give you a real insight."

When I next talked to Toby again she also mentioned the 'Chalice and the Blade' and asked if I had read it. Meanwhile I had and we both agreed that it offered a rather strong feminist view. Toby laughed and said, "I thought she was really a little tough. But some things have to be said." She is also a member of CUUPS and I asked what she liked about it. "I really like the idea of 'An ye harm none, do as ye will'." "What's that?" "'An ye harm none, do as ye will'. That's from the Wicca Rede." She gave me a decoratively printed page with the Wicca Rede that also mentions the three-fold way that Beverly had mentioned.

Toby seemed to like the idea that an anthropology takes up New Age, "Some of my friends have taken anthropologist classes. It's really interesting. I think the New Age will

really grow and the word needs to be spread." That seemed to remind her of something else, "You know, scientists always say they are objective but they aren't. Everybody has his or her own perspective. You cannot separate yourself from your environment." I don't know if she realized how close she came to my own theoretical outline. I had not based my theory on any New Age idea per se, but rather on what I thought and what I found confirmed in the New Science context. This is undoubtedly part of the wider New Age arena, but now I realized how close I seemed to have come to some sentiments that exist out there in the New Age world.

I had not seen Dan in a long time and had heard rumors that he would move away. Luckily we could continue to talk several more times before I lost sight of him for good. I asked him what he wanted to do in the future. He contemplated to enroll at the university. "I have a degree in philosophy and maybe it would be good to get my master's," he said in his slow deliberate way. "Sounds good to me." "Yeah, but I don't know. I'm really afraid of getting into academia again." "Why's that?" "They still think in the old ways. They don't see that science is changing. I really had fights with my teachers before. I don't want to get into that again. You can't win because they have the power." He seemed exasperated, "You know, most people don't really study. They don't think. They

simply believe everything that is being taught. Or they don't care about anything at all, they just want a degree and so agree with everything their teachers tell them. And the teachers are the same way. They do whatever gives them a professional advantage but they don't really care about the subject. People believe whatever is convenient." Now he had talked himself into despair. He pulled himself out of it with a laugh, "People are basically lazy and they don't want to get involved." Dan switched to slight anger, "This obsession with work or career is nothing but putting on blinders. They work so they don't have to think. And scientists hide behind objectivity so they don't have to get involved. All that is just a way to avoid having to deal with all that emotional stuff. This obsession with rationality, or objective science is a very convenient way to ignore all those things that are hard to define." "Like emotions," "Like emotions." "So you see career and science as escapes?" "Yeah. There's nothing wrong with having a career, I guess. But they are misusing science." Dan's outlook in this matter did not seem optimistic. "So what do you think will happen?" He let out a laugh, "What will happen? They'll continue to misuse it. They're too immature to handle all that stuff. Their rational thinking will develop more and more but their non-rational thinking is still in kindergarden. They'll find all kinds of rational reasons to come up with more and more destructive things.

Doesn't look good." I'm afraid that my questions only reinforced Dan's decision not to pursue another degree after all. On the other hand, I could see his point.

Dan's favorite topics were religion and philosophy. One day he picked up on his complaint about Bible interpretations. "It was Queen Theodora, the bitch, who started the Eve myth," That was new to me and it must have shown, "You should read up on that part of history," he added with a stern look at me. I felt a little like I hadn't done my homework. Dan continued in a friendly lecture tone, "The legends in the Bible can be analyzed in terms of astrology and astronomy." "You think there's a relationship? I mean does astronomy work?" Dan explained patiently, "The moon is related to our tides and births occur more during full moon phases. All that is related. But the moon is also only one small thing in the bigger pattern. There's a relationship there. The influence on us may be very small but the relationship is still there," he said reasonably. "The Three Wise Men in the Bible?" he continued with a questioning look at me. I nodded to indicate I knew who he was talking about, "they followed the star to Bethlehem because they were astrologers. Astronomy and astrology weren't separate then. But they were scientists, astrologers. Astrology was the first science. Our planets have an influence on our behavior. There are some studies on that. You see, that's where the teachings of the Bible

got totally screwed up." I failed to see the exact connection. Dan explained, "How they interpret the Bible has become a politicalpower-control thing." He had talked about that before and now basically repeated his ideas. It certainly was something that upset him a great deal.

Despite his negative experience with Christianity as a child he was not against it at all. But Dan is fiercely against the abuse of religion and philosophy as a political power tool and manipulator. I asked, "How are you going to prevent that?" "People should study more for themselves. That is really the crucial point. The Rosicrucians, you should read up on them, they really have some good ideas. They're getting there." Then he came back to his other favorite thought, "But studying and following God require an effort. Technology makes things too easy for them. They really have gotten themselves into a corner there. They have become so dependent on technology that they don't know anymore how to think and don't know how to deal with stuff that doesn't involve technology. But technology does not have all the answers or solve all our problems. They are too immature to see that."

"You think things will change?" "The main thing for the church is to stay in power. So they can't tell people too much." "If people would think for themselves, would that mean there will be no churches anymore?" Dan jumped up from his chair and exploded, "Are you crazy? Pandemonium

would break loose." Then he calmed down again, "Change can't happen too quickly or we'd have chaos. You have to release knowledge bit by bit. You know, in an evolutionary sense. People have to evolve into more mature and more spiritual beings." "How can they do that?" "Studying. Meditation is the technique that get's them there." "Can they do that?" But Dan only shrugged.

After our last talk I lost Dan out of sight. The Star Cloud had closed and everybody associated with it had obviously disappeared. Again, there were rumors that Dan had moved north, but that was all. To me it showed that the members in the New Age are not necessarily a cohesive close-knit group.

What Dan had outlined in our conversations made me a little uncomfortable for a while. We seemed to have made the same observations. Dan's complaints were more or less the reasons why I had developed that particular theory in the first chapter. Was I still part of the mainstream or was I more New Age than I had realized? Above all, would it be a problem for this project? For several weeks these were serious questions that I tried to resolve. I finally decided that I certainly seem to share some things with New Age people. On the other hand I was part of the mainstream because I did not back out of the science/academic context and so separate myself from the mainstream like Dan had done. The situation that I found

myself in emphasizes my idea that there is no clear cut boundary between contexts and that each of us has to negotiate her way through the maze.

One person that every-New-Age-body in town seems to know is Kari. I had seen her briefly at a meditation meeting and had noticed the respect that others showed towards her. She turned out to be a delightful and most valuable informant. I called her at home and explained what I was doing. She agreed to talk to me and invited me to her house around noon about a week later. That day was a hot spring day and my walk to her place took over an hour. I enjoy that sort of thing and was walking along briskly, looking forward to our meeting. I had to smile when I saw her house. The small buffalo skull near the door signaled either a shaman or a sensitive. I rang the doorbell and as the door opened I was first greeted by a little poodle whom I greeted back. Then I straightened up again to see Kari standing in the door. She is a middle-aged woman with long dark hair and a round friendly face. She looked at me for a briefly and then invited me in. For a brief moment I felt apprehensive but that was gone quickly. Kari walked ahead of me and asked if I wanted a glass of water. I could imagine what I looked like, sweating from the heat and the walk and in cut off jeans and tank top. But I felt vigorous and was excited. Kari did not stop in the small living room but said, "Then let's go to the bedroom." I

almost stopped in my tracks and felt the laughter bubble up in me, 'What does she think an anthropologist does?' But I didn't say anything and followed her through the hall. I looked at her back and saw that she had a slight difficulty walking that was barely noticeable. Could be a hip or a back problem, I thought. Besides, she is only slightly taller than my own 4'10'. 'Easy,' I thought grinning. I thought the situation would make a good comedy sketch. We entered indeed a small bedroom. The dog jumped up on the big feather bed and Kari moved on to the window where two wicker chairs stood. She indicated for me to sit down. I sat. Then she sat down in the chair across from me. I felt more and more confused, but still did not say anything. I was too curious what would happen next. Kari pulled her chair closer to me until our knees touched. 'What have I gotten myself into?' was by then a very familiar thought. Kari looked down and rubbed her hands. I didn't know what to make of this. Then she took my hands and looked in my face. It was really hard not to laugh. So finally I said, "Ah, what are you doing?" She looked at me astonished, "Didn't you want a reading?" So that was it. It could have occurred to me but I just never had been officially read by a sensitive. I explained that I wanted to ask her a couple of questions. I remember that I had introduced myself on the phone and had said something like, "I would like to talk to you." Obviously that had

come across as a request for a reading. Kari said, "Okay, I just got so much information from you when I opened the door." I thought that this is perhaps not an unexpected statement from a sensitive, although it certainly sounds strange to a mainstream person. That is why I think it may be important to briefly describe my appearance, as I have done earlier.

We straightened out the misunderstanding and agreed that Kari would read me and then she would talk about her life. She asked, "Are you going to tape this?" with a slight smile. I said, "No." For some reason I had the impression that Kari would not be tapable. I had made the experience in earlier fieldwork projects, primarily with American Indians, that some people cannot be taped for some reason. I do not know why I thought that about this particular person or why I did not try it. We would talk about it after we had gotten more familiar with each other. I will describe the reading as a ritual in a later chapter. For now Kari's life will be the main focus. She talked about her insights and experiences in several conversations.

As usual, I gave her a broad opening, "What's your story? Tell me about your life." "I come from a very religious family. My parents were 7-Day-Adventists and they were very strict. My ancestors are Irish, Celtic." Kari chuckled, "I think that has more influence on me as a psychic than my Indian heritage." "Why do you think so?"

"Well, the celtic are more open to psychic things. My father was German/Indian and he had prophetic dreams that he never used. He saw births and lost people. But he never used it." "What's your Indian ancestry?" "Yuchi and Cherokee. My mother was Mexican/black and she was very creative. She would sit on the porch and analyze people as they walked by. You know, as a passtime. She would tell me, 'That person there, he is...', you know. The whole family was very creative. They were doctors, musicians, and artists." "That's got something to do with it, being creative?" Kari nodded, "Yes. My mother was very observant and she taught me to analyze people." Kari came back to her religious upbringing. "My family was very, very, very, religious. You know, you can go to church, but not every day. They went every day." "Are you anything?" "I'm eclectic." "You don't belong to any particular group?" "No. There's a little bit of truth in every belief. Do you know the story about the 'Pearl of Truth'?" I shook my head and Kari told it to me.

"There was a pearl of truth in the sky. One day the pearl dropped and shattered and so every part has some of the truth. It's the same with religion." Kari thinks her sister has been coerced into her belief. "Jehova's Witnesses, they came to our house and they had these records. My sister would sit there and listen to them over and over again. For hours every day," and with a

good-natured amused smile she added, "I think she has been brainwashed." "Does it make her feel good?" Kari drew her answer out a little, "She is not unhappy, I think." I noticed that we were both grinning slightly and that was an indication for me that we had the same perspective to some degree. "Adapted?" I suggested. "She was always the proper and adapted one. She was perfect. She had good grades at school. She was the perfect person to everybody." Kari grinned when she continued, "I was the class clown, you know. I just didn't study." She imitated a look of cheerful oblivion. "But I had a good relationship with my teachers. I think they liked me more than my sister. I think they liked me more. They hugged me. I never fit in. I was pretty rebellious. I was always different." "In what way?" "I was psychic." "How did you know?"

Kari talked about the following in several conversations. It seemed to be the one outstanding experience of her childhood. "I was sick when I was a child. I was ten then. It was chicken pox, whooping cough, and apendicitis." "All at the same time?!" "All at the same time. And my family was poor, so I wasn't in the hospital. I was at home. That's how things were then. I remember that I was barely conscious. I saw visions. I think that's what kept me alive. I think I was fighting for my life then." At first this was all that she said. Later, when she had gotten to know me a little better, she completed

the story by describing the visions in more detail. "It was an out of body experience. My body felt cold. I could see silver strings coming out of people's heads. They looked like puppets. It was like dreamtime." "What did you think about it?" "Now in hindsight I know that I focused on the vision and that was probably my fight for survival, that I could focus on something. The whole experience gave me a broader view on everything." She looked at me and added, "To this day, you know, I'm not here a lot. I mean I'm here but I'm not here." This was probably the most New Agey thing that Kari has ever said. We both had to smile at how awkward things sometimes sound in the mainstream context. What she wanted to say was that she spends a lot of time in that dreamtime she remembers. Putting herself in an altered state of mind creates an out of body experience and letting herself drift in search of images or impressions is what she is doing when she 'is not here a lot'.

"Did your sensitive existence somehow cause problems in your family?" Kari answered with a lot of regret, "Yeah. My parents were very religious, very strict. So those things were denied. I was isolated. I could not talk to anybody about it. And of course I was not allowed to ask about it. It was hard to get along with them." I was surprised that there was no hint of anger or accusation. Kari has a sense of humor and can laugh about the religious attitude

of her family. There seems to be only regret and somehow that weighed heavier than anger. The impression was emphasized when she added softly, "I guess I only became really free after mom died." Kari never mentioned any kind of abuse other than the isolation. But it was noticable that the isolation weighed heavy on her. She looked down and to the side and her voice softened when she talked about it. There is a serenity and quiet acceptance around her that distinguishes her from the others.

"I worked as a federal employee as an adult," she continued her story. "But I have a back problem and so I'm retired now. It's not what happens to you, it's what you make of it that counts. It gave me the opportunity to study more and to be a professional healer. It's what made me the person I am today." "So you have some thoughts about medicine? Any preference?" But Kari shook her head, "I have been sick and close to death many many times in my life. But there's no medical way that I prefer. It's whatever applies, whatever works. It's like the Pearl of Truth. There's a little bit of truth in all of it. I became a member of the World Federation of Healers. There's not only one way of healing."

Kari has been married and has three adult children whom she describes as 'integrated' into mainstream life. One daughter is also a sensitive. "How do you get along with your sister now?" "We get along," she hesitated a

moment. "I think she is not unhappy." "You get along with your children?" "Yes. My children are used to it. You know, sometimes I have ideas and then later they become reality. When we had dinner at my son's home I said we could use something like a tortilla warmer. That was before they were on the market. My children's reaction is, 'Yeah, that's Mom.'"

"What about the neighbors?" Kari shook her head. "No problem. There is a law from 1864 that makes fortune telling illegal. But as long as nobody complains," she shrugged but then added, "I'm not too comfortable sometimes. When I drive and there's a police car behind me...I feel a little bad." Then she told me about a law suit that OPERA was involved in. Somebody had complained about their sensitive activities. "The only reason they got free was that it's a non-profit group."

I noticed that Kari ended our meetings almost exactly after one hour. This was the time slot she would allot a client. So obviously I fell into this category, even when there had been no reading. Sometimes the next client would already wait when I left. I also noticed that I ended up writing checks even when there had not been a reading. Kari never asked for one but always brought up the subject in some way. I still don't know whether it was my own oversensitivity or if there really was a slight pressure. Anyway, I resented it, not to mention that I could not

afford it. At some point it became funny, because I had taken Conny's advice and brought a plant, then I told Kari I'm broke, Kari had even assured me that she would conduct a reading for free and she still received her check - and I felt bad about it too. Kari mentioned that, as donations go, twenty to twenty-five dollars are minimum. To me twenty dollars was the absolute maximum that day. I am perfectly willing to take the blame. But I found it odd because I have been known to bargain successfully at flea markets, get everything reduced, cheap, or otherwise avoid payment. Now I found myself writing checks that had not even been asked for. I felt I could not escape - I do not exactly know what.

Then things got a little stranger, at least from my perspective. I had heard rumors that Kari had moved to the other side of town. The next thing I heard was that she had stopped reading. Since she is the most prominent sensitive in town, this would have been a major development. I wondered what had happened. The first address I received turned out to be wrong. When I finally tracked her down again, we agreed to meet at her new home.

When I arrived Kari stood waiting in the door. I said, "Hi," and got a little jolt, a brief physical sensation in my head that came with a thought or impression. Kari leaned forward and looked at me and thought, 'She'll die.' I handed over the plant I had brought and she gave me a

hug, something she had not done before. The impression Kari had of me stood out so clearly in my mind that it was a physical sensation. Fortunately, the moment was brief and we went inside. But I was rattled a bit. On the other hand, I had just that morning learned of the death of a distant friend of mine, so I thought if she can really pick up something, this is probably it. I was also aware that I was underweight at that time which might have given her a certain impression. However, at the end of a summer this is a normal condition for me and in no way a sign of illness. Not being a heavy person in the first place, I tend to eat very lightly during the hot summer season. So I can imagine how I appear to those who are not used to my annual food cycle. I also wore a big T-shirt and wide shorts that day. So all of this taken together may have given her an idea. I was not concerned about her thought. But I certainly found it a very unsettling experience to have it stand so clearly in my head that it came with a physical sensation. Although intriguing, it is difficult to experience.

I asked her when she had moved, "About three months ago. The house was too big. This is neat," she swept her arm around the comfortable little apartment. "I heard you stopped reading." "Yes, I did. I did not feel good about it and so I stopped. I just started again since about a week." "What happened?" "I did not feel good about it.

I had headaches." "For how long didn't you read?" She leaned forward and looked at me intensely as if she wanted to ask something. She didn't. It felt like she was scanning (for lack of a better term) me. I thought her reaction was odd and I had noticed something else. The time period she indicated was the same period that I had worked myself up into a major resentment against her which I had only a few days before been able to overcome. Was that what she picked up from me? For some reason I felt unable to ask. I would have written the whole episode off, if Kari had not looked at me the way she did. This was what made it stuck in my mind.

The relationship between Kari and me had changed that morning. I will describe her insights about sensitive practices in a later chapter. For now I need to mention that I had felt resentment from her when I had asked her how she picked up things from people. Her first response had been, "I don't know." I had pushed a little, "Okay, it's looks, gestures,...What else?" She had leaned back in her chair and continued reluctantly, "Voice, eyes, expression." She did not seem to like my inquiry at that point. This morning, that was different. We responded to each other easier and Kari appeared warmer than usual.

I cannot say what exactly had happened but I suspect it has something to do with our first reactions that day. What had transpired in those first few moments seemed to

have an effect on both of us. What I have described are purely subjective impressions that lie right in that gray shady zone that is hard to write about. I will not attempt an analysis but I have to include it for completeness, because this is exactly the stuff that any newcomer to the New Age sphere finds herself in. It is irrelevant whether such personal and subjective impressions 'really happen' or not (from the mainstream's point of view). What is relevant here, is that the individual who perceives such impressions will react to them. The choice lies between dismissal or acceptance or lying about it (i.e. dismiss to conform to the mainstream and deal with it in private). Of course, from an anthropological point of view the first and the third choice would make the ethnography a hoax.

After the reading I had more questions, "What kind of people come for a reading?" "That has changed in the past ten years. In the eighties it was mostly housewives who wanted to know if their husbands had an affair. Today it's Ph.D.s, law enforcement officers, lawyers, doctors, everybody. Sometimes they don't reveal themselves to me, but of course..." We both laughed. "There was one who came about the Oklahoma City bombing. He did not say it but I knew and I told him and he said, 'Yes'." I observed, "So that are exactly those who would never admit to go to a sensitive." "Exactly. Sometimes they come with personal things about relationships..." Kari seemed a little

exasperated, "I tell them, 'You should talk to each other'. Of course, it's also a lot cheaper than a psychotherapy," she added with a smile.

The material-monetary aspect is a favorite point of critique from the mainstream against New Age. As it turned out, it is also favorite critique within the New Age environment. Kari elaborated on it. "I don't care if I have a dollar and a half in the bank. It's how the money is earned that's important. I don't go to psychic fairs anymore. They are so competitive. It's only competition. And I can't teach classes." Then she added with a grin, "But I do have an acute sense of business. On the other hand I almost have an aversion against money." Kari shuddered slightly and added, "My piece of mind is more important. Making enough to survive but not so much that it becomes unethical, that's what's important to me. Where I don't have to use unethical practices, and a lot of them do, or where I don't have to be part of the rat race." She grinned satisfied, "I can sleep at night." "Is that a question in the New Age world?" "That's a real bone of contention," Kari agreed. "But they argue that this is America. That's what clients expect, to be charged. That's what they understand. I don't charge, I accept donations and if a client doesn't have the money I will do it for free. Just don't give me a dollar. Because that would be like saying, 'Your reading isn't worth anything.' Healing

and teaching shouldn't be sold but sometimes it's hard to draw a line between the ethical and the unethical." To give me an idea of what people donate for a reading she gave the example of a client of a different sensitive, "She gives \$ 50 for every reading every week." Kari said exasperated. "That's too much. That's not necessary."

In terms of New Age Kari walks a tightrope and she is wary of its members. "I'd like to be with likes. But I also... It's difficult. Seven or eight years ago there was an important astrological event that everybody wanted to see." "What was it?" "It was a harmonic planetary convergence." She saw the look on my face and explained, "Planets were aligned so you could discern the Star of David. So people went out to Chaco Canyon to observe that. At first I wanted to go and they asked me. But I drove out to a small village and watched it alone by myself." She chuckled, "The last thing I would have gotten would have been harmony with all those people around. So I went out by myself to watch it." She added, "There are a lot of people who take the New Age as a cop out."

She is also quite realistic about her position as a sensitive. "I don't like the competition at the Fairs and I don't go there anymore. My predictions are more a guidance of pointers for a client. They are not hammered in stone. I don't tell people what to do. They have to make their own decisions. That's what most people don't realize, that

it's not the psychic who runs their life. So if a prediction is vague they think they don't get enough out of it. The individual can choose the way I map out for them or they can turn into a different direction." Kari has a sense of humor which I thought expresses her humbleness about her position. "There's a friend of mine for whom I do readings. And one day I told her, 'There's a decision for you ahead,' and she said, 'Oh Kari! That is the most wonderful thing you could have told me!'" Kari waved her arms around laughing and continued exasperated, "I said, 'What're you talkin' about? All I said was, you've got to make a decision.' But she wouldn't listen. She repeated again, 'Oh Kari! That is so wonderful.'" By now we were both in laughter. Kari draws a clear line between herself and a certain element among New Age people that use the idea as a cop out or a kind of fashion. "There are a lot of psychics out there that take advantage of that. They read people for the money only." The disdain in Kari's voice was obvious, "They will be successful for a couple of years, but then they'll be gone. People will notice that they can't trust them." "How do you recognize a phony?" "They advertise." Kari does not advertise in any form but relies on her clients to pass on news of her services. She also does not seem to be desperate for new clients. "There was this guy who wanted a reading. I started but then I saw.... I said, 'Oh, you have a lover and your wife

is at home.' He got up and left," Kari laughed. "He didn't come back." I was laughing too, "He should have known that you'd know." In the back of my mind was the thought that there are one hundred other ways to find out something like that about someone. On the other hand, a relationship is an emotionally loaded situation and so from a sensitive's point of view it may have been written all over him.

"What about police work?" "Yes I do that." "How does that work? Do people ask you?" "Sometimes they write or call on their own. Sometimes they say, 'The family wants you.'" "What's the attitude that you meet there?" Kari laughed and admitted, "It takes about twenty years to break in an officer, the old ones. It takes a long time for them to warm up to psychic methods. There's one, a Ph.D., he was the head of the NPD. He was good. I was surprised once about a young officer. There was a store that I thought would be robbed soon. So I told him about it and he said, 'Oh, good. You should let us know when you know something like this.'" I remembered the law against fortune-telling that we had talked about earlier. "Isn't that a conflict? They use sensitives and there's a law against it?" "They don't enforce the law unless somebody complains. Then they have to. But if they don't have to do anything about it, they won't."

Kari always appeared optimistic and so I asked her, "What do you think will happen in the future? Where are

we going?" "What is happening now to individuals is a kind of..." she was groping for a word, "...a kind of self actualization. I think that will happen on a social level too. I have a degree in anthropology, so I know what you're talking about. But you got to be patient. Time circles and science is still evolving and so are we as a species. There's always change." She added with a laugh, "The only thing static is the scientist's mind. For now it's right for people to wear blinders. A narrow outlook protects them from the unexpected, the new, and the change. If change would happen too fast, we'd have chaos. You know, fear is a powerful motive for people to act or not to act. Some people can only function with blinders on or they would be overwhelmed."

As I have mentioned earlier, I never tried to tape Kari. Although I always had my tape recorder with me, in case I should change my mind, I always took notes while we talked. One day Kari asked, as she has done before, "You're not taping this?" Only this time she said it with a small mischievous grin. It was a sign for me that we had become familiar enough to pick up on each other's notions. I knew why she grinned and she knew exactly why I didn't tape her. I started laughing and waved my hand at my backpack, "No way. Doesn't work. Forget it." We were both laughing now and I continued, "I've got my recorder right here but I won't use it. You're not tapable. Forget

it." Kari's response was not unexpected, "Nobody has ever been able to tape me." For a moment she looked thoughtful and then offered, "I think it might be because I can slow down my brainwaves." "You can do what?" "Slow down my brainwaves." It occurred to me that if this was true, the brain frequency might interfere with the recording technique. But I am not an engineer and this is pure speculation. But I also thought that there might be ways to study such things (instead of taking the easy way out). I looked around and saw a picture of her on the sideboard. I almost said, "At least, you're on the pictures." I did not say it. I did not have to. Kari had seen my look and we were laughing again. Kari leaned back and said, "You make me feel good. At least you don't think I'm crazy and I can talk to you." "No, I don't think you're crazy. Just different."

So I never taped Kari and as usual, transferred my notes into something more readable. I thought I had avoided an unpleasant or unexplainable situation by not using my recorder. I did not expect to experience something odd with my notepad after our last conversation. At the beginning Kari had read me and thought she picked up a kind of nickname or some such word from me. I could not make sense of it and asked her to write it down for me. Kari wrote it on the top of the first page of my new notepad. She did not turn the pages and I turned the

notepad around to me when she was done. At the end of this meeting I had filled several pages of the notepad. When I transcribed them at home I found these words at the end of my notes, 'I love you.' I was confused, to put it mildly. I leaned back in my chair, took a deep breath and told myself, 'This is not possible. There's something that I have overlooked.' The last page of my notes was about half full. This sentence stood removed from the rest of the text at the bottom of the page. It was my handwriting as far as I could tell. But it crossed several lines which was untypical. Everything I had written ran straight along the lines on the pad. These words had absolutely no relation to anything we had talked about. What was most unsettling was that I for the life of me could not remember having written them. I had also not left the room and left Kari alone with the notepad. It was a simple, totally isolated sentence that stood removed from everything else we had talked about or I had written up. At the time I had convinced myself that I could handle everything that came along in the New Age realm. I thought I had gotten used to the unusual. But this was so completely unexpected, that it shook me up. I still do not know what happened. Instead I made a mistake. I tore the page up and through it away. Perhaps a sign that I am more rooted in the mainstream than I had thought. The only non-sensitive explanation that I can offer here is that somebody had

tried out a pen on the pad in the store before I bought it. How likely is that? I do not know. But tearing up my notes does not make the incident go away. I still beat myself up over it. I still hesitate to call Kari and ask about it. As I have said before, sometimes some things are difficult to ask about. It took a great deal of thought to include the incident here. But to do otherwise would be a denial and an omission of data.

As I continued my research I also continued to read more of and about New Age and New Science subjects. After seeing me with such material repeatedly, a friend revealed that she also reads a lot of the same. I had not known Rose for a long time then nor did I know her very well. So her revelation came as a surprise because she always appeared like the perfect mainstream, very well adapted, person to me. She has an office job, talks a lot about her middle class family, and goes to church. She had never said a word that might hint at an interest in anything New Age. Rose is a very pleasant easy going person who always emphasizes that she has a very good marriage. Talking with her is always nice and consistently remains at the surface. From my perspective this is a hallmark of a well adapted mainstream person. I would never have guessed what lay beneath the surface.

For our meeting we had chosen a pleasant quiet restaurant that would provide the tranquil atmosphere that

seemed appropriate for a conversation with Rose. I asked if I could tape her (no question that she was tapable) but Rose was uncomfortable with that and so I took notes again. I started as usual, "Can you tell me about you? How did you grow up?" "I grew up here in Oklahoma in a Baptist family," Rose started and then looked at me not knowing what I expected. I asked, "Was there anything outstanding in your childhood? Any event that you remember?" But Rose shook her head, "No. It was a very normal childhood. Uneventful. I went to school and then to college. Then I got married. I married the boyfriend of my friend," she added with a smile. "No, there was nothing outstanding or unusual. I really like my job, I can,t imagine doing anything else. And I like my home. It's my haven, you know, my sanctuary. I'm very comfortable." She smiled at me. In terms of New Age, this did not seem to lead us very far. I thought she is far too pleasant to say anything out of line. Remembering the religious upbringing of the others, I tried, "You said you grew up in a Baptist family. Any problem with that?" Rose shook her head, "No. We went to church and that was okay." I tried her family, "What is your relationship with your family?" "Good. No problem. My father died several years ago. I get along very well with my mother." Rose leaned forward a little and continued, "My sister is very conservative. She is really extremely conservative. She is the exact opposite of me." Rose did

not sound as if she wanted to put her sister down in any way and she added, "We get along fine. We don't fight. Just now she is loosening up a little. She begins to listen to New Age music and she likes some of it." Rose seemed to insist on her New Age interest but I just did not see it. "So what is your interest in New Age?" Rose hesitated and then began, "There was something... I really haven't talked about this to anyone before." She seemed embarrassed and I assured her again that I would not use her real name. Then Rose began what sounded like a confession. "When I was seventeen I had to undergo heart surgery. And shortly after that I had a problem with my throat. The could not find anything wrong so they did an exploratory surgery. But they still could not find anything. It got better eventually and I haven't had a problem since. But at that time... You know, I have never told anybody except my husband. When I was in the hospital after the second surgery I had a real strange experience." She laughed embarrassed and I was visibly shy now. I could tell from the way she looked that she doubted I would believe her and that she might be making a fool of herself. But she continued, "I had an out-of-body experience." I nodded indicating that this is perfectly normal and Rose relaxed a little. "I had several of them." I encouraged, "Great. Stuff like that happens to a lot of people. Everybody I talked to has some sort of mental experience like that. What was

it like?" She could talk about it freely now. "It was beautiful. There were people and they had white tendrils coming out of their heads. This was really the only solid picture I could see. But there was so much peace and beauty. It was inside me and I still remember it so clearly. It was beautiful." Now Rose was completely relaxed. There even seemed to be a sense of relief around her. I kept up my end, "A lot of people have unusual experiences like that and never talk about it. New Age people talk about it and I'm glad you do." "I didn't know there were others like me. I'm glad you tell me. I don't feel so isolated anymore." I almost started laughing as I imagined that there are very likely many more people like Rose out there. Everybody is doing her best to hold up the mainstream facade. No wonder mainstream people resent New Age so much. This is a psychological tangle that is probably as old as our species. I felt glad that I could get Rose out from behind the veneer.

Now that Rose felt better about herself, she admitted that over the years she has become dissatisfied with her church. "I really think it's too male oriented. I cannot find much for me in there. It puts me in a lower position. I finally left the Baptist church. Now I go to the Presbyterian church and I feel a more comfortable there." That did not sound too convincing to me. "Yeah?" I asked doubtfully and it had the desired effect. "It's not perfect.

I still feel a little suppressed, maybe overlooked." Rose's body language was a slight squirm and a frown with a smile. "It's important for my husband to go to Sunday services and, you know, that's all right. I go along. Then I give him these meaningful looks everytime I hear something I don't like. He always sighs. He doesn't know what my problem is." Rose sounded cheerful and presented this part with good-natured humor. She added quickly, "But we have a good marriage. We have a good marriage. We're always fighting over it but it's not serious." Rose hesitated and on a slightly more serious note said, "You know, sometimes I wonder. He doesn't understand what my problem is. Sometimes I wonder if I have become too dependent on my husband."

As Rose became more and more open during our conversation I became more and more surprised. I discovered that underneath the mainstream surface lay experiences and concerns that seemed to belong into the New Age context, at least marginally. Assuming that other obviously mainstream people share Rose's experiences the question is, what is the dividing line here between mainstream and New Age? The clue to the answer is the change that Rose underwent during our conversation. In the mainstream her experiences remain beneath the surface while in the New Age context, these things are openly debated and explored.

Although Rose is content in her church, she admits that there is a restlessness in her. "It's like I am still

searching." "For what?" She shrugged her shoulders slightly and smiled a little embarrassed. "I had joined a feminist group for a while. I thought I could find some outlet there. You know, I thought I would fit in. And for a while it was okay. I felt accepted. But then they circulated a pro-abortion petition. They asked everybody to sign it. You know, that was real difficult for me. I didn't know what to do. I always felt I was a modern upto-date woman who can stand on her own two feet, but then I realized I couldn't sign something that represents exactly that kind of woman. I had to think about that. It was a difficult situation. I could not sign the petition. I felt I didn't fit in anymore and I didn't go there anymore." "So what do you really want? What are you looking for?" Rose sighed and smiled and I could see that she was a little apprehensive that her next words might seem silly to me. I did not perceive them as silly, I practically heard them coming, "I want to experience that kind of peace that I had when I had those out-of-body experiences." "That's it?" "Yes," she laughed. "Is that silly?" "No. Why would it?" "I have never been able to recreate that feeling again. But I have never forgotten. That is really like a deep longing that I have, to experience that kind of peace again. That is really all that's missing. I have a wonderful life. But that's missing." Rose was completely honest and it sounded like she opened up her heart here. I also sensed

that she had a wish to connect to people would understand and not find her silly. I told her that I had been very close to death several times. Although I had no out-of-body experience, I do remember very clearly the perfect peace and floating sensation that sets in at some point. I could understand Rose very well. I also felt a little helpless. She was looking for a way to recreate the feeling while I find it permanently sustaining. Rose looked at me and there seemed to be surprise and perhaps relief in her expression. I also told her that altered states of mind are everyday fare in the New Age. "I didn't know that. I had no idea that there are others like that. I have never told anybody." Rose's surprise seemed so heartfelt that it was my turn to feel a little embarrassed.

I changed the subject. "Why are you going to church if it doesn't really match your ideas?" "I guess I still have faith. But it's more the ceremony that's important to me, not the belief. I enjoy the ceremony. It's something stable." "What is your belief?" "I think it's basic Christianity, not anything particular. There are so many different churches. I think I could go to any of them. It doesn't really make a difference to me. It's the basic Christian belief that's still important to me." It occurred to me that this may be exactly the factor that makes Rose fit into the mainstream. "So you're basically content with your life?" "I'm happy, I love my family, I love my work.

I couldn't imagine doing anything different. Sometimes people come into my office and say, 'Oh, still the same chair,' and I haven't even noticed that nothing has changed. Yes, I'm happy. Except for that restlessness. I wished I could go back and experience that peace again." She leaned forward and looked at me with an expression of regret. I certainly didn't wish her to be in any life threatening situation just to recreate that out-of-body experience. So I suggested that somewhere in the New Age may be a niche for her but she is already reading the literature.

Rose cheered up and said, "I really have to thank you. I would never have known that there are others like me out there. I always thought I could never talk about this to anyone. You really made this possible for me." I felt a little embarrassed and thought her reaction was a little extreme. I laughed and thought, 'There goes objectivity, non-involvement with your informants, and possibly the Prime Directive.' I found the whole encounter with Rose neatly exemplified my point that it is not realistic to assume or expect that the anthropologist has no impact on an informant. I would rather make it work for me than deny it.

As my work continued I had to think more and more often of Pam. She is not part of the Norman community and I had met her a few years ago in the context of a multicultural "encounter" program. Originally I had not

planned to use my experiences with Pam in this project. But I had saved notes of our encounters and it became clear that Pam represented a type of New Age participant that comes closest to the image that mainstream people have about them. Perhaps more important is that Pam provided a learning experience for me that would become important in my future work with people that are different.

From the moment we were introduced our roles were established. Pam was the featherbrained woman who tried to act postmodern-feminist without much foundation and I was the wealthy spoiled brat from Europe who could afford to study in the US unlike poor hardworking people like her. Although our perceptions of each other remained basically the same, each of us softened somewhat as time progressed. My annoyance at her patronizing behavior softened into amusement and Pam did her best to teach me about life in the US.

At the time we met she had just bought a small house and was eager to show it to me. It was a tiny three-room affair that needed some repair work but was overall in good shape. The few pieces of second hand furniture stood amidst a chaos of household items and clothes. Pam sighed and said she still had a lot of work to do to get the place into shape. I imagined that would be something like replacing the plastic with glass in the window. The table in the kitchen caught my attention. It looked like it came

from an antique-cum-thrift store. I thought it would be a very neat piece once Pam would apply some sandpaper to it and put a new finish on it.

Pam introduced me to Margot, her cat. She looked old and very ill. She also looked cranky. Pam told how Margot got run over by a car a long time ago and since then does not go outside. This was something that she would repeat often whenever we talked about the cat, "She does not go outside. She is too scared." Margot was wary of me at first but over time we got along fine and she would spend hours on my lap or sleep on top of my head when I stayed over. The fact that Margot was occasionally incontinent did ruin some jeans and sheets, but of course did not put a strain on our friendship. Margot and I soon had a little secret that we kept from Pam.

I had begun to wonder why Pam emphasized so often that Margot was too scared to go outside. I had a hunch that this might be more about Pam than about the cat. So when Pam was gone for a few days and I took care of Margot, I let her out of the house. Margot seemed shy at first, but then had a good time investigating her surroundings. Fortunately she did not run off but stayed close to the house and came when I called her. We would repeat this quite often whenever Pam was out of sight. I thought it was funny that Margot would beg at the door when we were alone in the house, but never when Pam was around. Until

Margot's death Pam believed that Margot was too scared to go out. In itself this little episode seemed unimportant. But it confirmed my impression of Pam's personality and, together with other episodes, I soon had a pretty clear idea of who Pam was.

The next piece that would become a picture of Pam was the house. Pam would put a lot of effort into making it a nice livable place. However, it never changed. The window never got replaced and I spent some cold nights sleeping on a thin mat on the bare wooden floor at minus temperatures. Thank goodness cat's have furs. The table, to my great regret, was never improved. The carpet was a kind of thick net that made vaccuuming a useless endeavor because everything fell through on the surface beneath. I decided that this was life beneath the poverty line. But I also wondered if this meant that the jar with the orange juice never got washed before it was filled up again. Never mind that my favorite table acquired a rather sticky surface that never got wiped off.

Pam's actions and attitudes fit into the picture. When I stayed over I offered to share the heating and food costs. Pam agreed and promptly began to ask for more money. The food was scarce and I would take both of us to eat out so I could have a full meal. Of course this reinforced her idea that I had more than enough to spend. In the end I decided to see her less frequently.

Pam did her best to be a good host whenever I was over at her place. I think she was the person who broke me in to do real fieldwork. I do not count the interviews that I did in safe and relatively familiar environments. The freezing nights and Margot's incontinence problem were first clues. But it would get better. Pam picked me up one day at around lunch time and we went to her house. She said she would fix lunch which was fine with me. She warmed up what looked like the leftovers of a meat lasagna and then served it to me. I wondered why she did not have some herself but she just shook her head. I had not expected her to go to the trouble for me but I started to eat. It tasted a little funny but overall not bad. Pam sat across from me and watched me. When I was done she asked if I had liked it. Slightly embarrassed that I had been the only one eating, I assured her that it had been great. I have not forgotten her answer, "Oh, I'm glad you liked it. I had it standing around for a week, forgot to put it in the fridge, and I was worried that it may have gone bad." I sighed. I had a hunch what would happen. I spent the next four days recovering from a food poisoning. I never found out what went through Pam's mind at that time. It may sound odd, but the same thing happened several months later. Pam and I had been invited to a picnic potluck event. Pam had brought a fish dish and invited me to try it. On the ride home she revealed that she had had the fish in

her car from morning to late afternoon and it had been a hot summer day. I became quite good at treating food poisonings without seeing a doctor.

Incidences like these and her rapid breathy way of speaking reinforced my perception of a featherbrain. But there was also something else in her personality. Pam was always nice, helpful, and eager to please. But talking to her always felt like walking a tightrope. I could feel a brooding and perhaps even dangerous nature beneath the surface. It did not take long to notice that her mood could change in an instant and she would become moody, defensive, and closed off. Her voice would take on a sharp edge and she would speak in short cut off sentences. But Pam never shouted or became openly angry. Instead she would stare in front of her with a deep frown that made her almost look sinister. It was this 'bottling up' effect that made her appear dangerous.

Pam had no problem talking about her background and her family. She talked about them often and always in a very pleasant friendly way. Her parents are divorced. Her mother is a teacher in a small town several hundred miles from Pam's place. Pam described her father as a schizophrenic who has been given to sudden violent outbursts. However, he has stabilized with the help of medication and is now working as a ranchhand. Pam never mentioned any abuse of any kind but very subtly indicated

some unpleasantness in her upbringing. This was also typical for Pam. It was important to put up a very pleasant and proper appearance and never say anything negative about anybody or anything. From my perspective this made her a firm part of the mainstream. I thought it also caused her 'bottling up' behavior. One of Pam's brothers is a teacher like her mother. Her other brother had a job as a sheep shearer at the time but is usually drifting around. Pam is in contact with everybody in her family but she rarely sees any of them because they all lived in about a fivehundred mile radius from her home.

Pam is closest to her mother and talked about her most often. Like her Pam wants to become a teacher eventually and a few months after we met, she enrolled at the university. Pam had earned a degree in Liberal Arts in her early twenties. Then she had gotten married and put her education on hold. The marriage ended in a divorce and provides another clue to Pam's behavior pattern. She enjoyed talking about it and showing me pictures of their home. Typically, the only negative thing she said about her marriage was that they did not get along very well. Even this was uttered in a most pleasant and understanding tone. I was puzzled, especially since she brought it up repeatedly. Finally I noticed that she mentioned her ex-husband but never his name. 'Having been married' was more emphasized than the divorce. At first sight this may

be the same, but I see a very significant difference here. It dawned on me that Pam seemed to care more about her position/role than about the person. I would get ample confirmation of this in my encounters with her.

Most of the time that I knew Pam she was out of a job. She admitted that it had been her fault sometimes that she lost her employment, e.g. losing files on a computer. Pam applied for all kinds of different jobs, from office clerk to cook but was seldom successful. Whenever she received a rejection she would tell me about it in the most pleasant terms. "They wrote a real nice letter," "They were so nice when they told me," were her standard comments. My impression was that she was extremely naive about such things but at the same time I had noticed the same kind of attitude in the mainstream. I call it 'polishing the surface'. As a bias serves my own background where people say what they think instead of keeping up appearances. So my impression was probably colored by my own impatience with an environment in which people are too nice too often.

Pam has a particular attitude towards work which is of course also influenced by my own attitude towards it. I want to remind that my perception is based on comparison and difference. She offered to store some boxes for me during one of my moves. For her efforts I invited her out. Pam accepted and afterwards complained that loading ten boxes in her car had been really hard work. I knew her

by then and had anticipated a reaction like this. But I was still surprised at how serious she sounded. Putting ten light to medium weight boxes in a car does not classify as work for me.

That Pam was interested in anything New Age became more evident when I looked at her books. Some titles came from the New Age section of a bookstore, others were sociology books concerning feminist issues. I asked her about it and the answer was, "I really think women are not being treated fairly." That was it. From time to time I would try to pick up the topic again but I only received variations of the above. It seemed difficult for Pam to express herself in this regard.

On a rare occasion her mother visited and I got some more insight into their ideas about feminism. They both clearly saw themselves as modern up-to-date women. It was not what they said but how they said it. They spent the evening debating 'men' in sophisticated voices and slightly exaggerated feminine gestures of their hands. The content of their debate, however, was dim and sounded more like gossip to me. It consisted mostly of, "Men do this... Men do that..." It made me laugh because they made it sound like they were talking about a different species. At the same time they were very effective at putting a distance between themselves and, ahem, men. This distance then, seemed to be their expression of feminism.

At the end of their discussion Pam's mother asked me, "What do you think about men?" Since I do not think of them as a different species, I answered, "Depends on the individual." Her reaction of, "Yeah, you're lucky," baffled me a little. Then Pam added, "She's smart." I didn't know what to make of that until several days later Pam enlightened me. "See, you have it easy. You don't need men." This seemed to be Pam's interpretation of my single status.

Pam was on a perpetual search for a man, any man. She would make passes at joggers who passed us by or other unsuspecting victims. In situations where I should have been appropriately embarrassed I couldn't help but be amused. Despite her hair trigger mood swings, being with Pam was no doubt entertaining. "I just cannot live without a man. I need a man, you know," made me feel like I was in a soap opera. At first I tried to explain to her the difference between individual persons and a whole category of people. That went right over her head and I had to be careful not to be too insistent and set off a nasty mood. But I became increasingly exasperated. It was difficult to talk to her because she never really said anything except, "I need a man." I soon ran out of replies. When she was totally frustrated she would swing into a stubborn and angry mood and on those occasions there was absolutely no talking to her.

In contrast to that Pam interacted in an almost stereotypical way in groups. At least, this was how I perceived it. She presented herself as a very upbeat and cheerful person who always knows what to say and how to adapt to any social situation. She introduced others to me as her friends but watching them, their interaction consisted of platitudes and seemed perfunctory and superficial. One evening she had invited several people to her home. She said she would send over a friend of hers to pick me up, adding with a grin that he is single and I would probably like him. I sighed but then I had to laugh about Pam. This was so much like her. My contentment with my single status at that time was probably just as puzzling to her as my exasperation at her obsession with men. The evening felt rather forced to me. Pam had the music on too loud for a conversation but nevertheless tried to converse. There were five people and everybody seemed to be a little uncomfortable. Pam did her best to be a good host and provided beer and snacks for everybody. But even her friendliness seemed artificial that evening. There was even an edge in her that everybody seemed to pick up on. We found ourselves looking at each other, wondering what to say next without setting off a bad mood in Pam. The party lasted roughly two hours. I did not have the feeling at all that these were close friends. Instead I got the impression that they had showed up to be nice to

Pam. Needless to say that her efforts as match maker were futile.

That was also the impression that I had when a woman dropped by one evening with the words, "I just wanted to check on you to see if you're all right." She sat down on the sofa, put a pillow on her lap for Margot and spent a few minutes talking to Pam about job opportunities and neighbors. The visit did not last longer than thirty minutes. The friendships that Pam had did not seem to go very deep. She never mentioned a 'best friend' or any special person. Over time I began to feel that with all her cheerfulness in public, Pam was essentially lonely or disconnected somehow.

Her job search continued and so did her search for a man. One day she called me to tell me she had begun to date an attorney and would I take a look at him. I laughed, silently banging my head against a wall. "Okay Pam. But you're the one who has to make the decision." "Yes, I know. But I want to know what you think. We can go to lunch together and afterwards you can tell me how you like him." "Oh man, Pam. How long do you know him?" "Oh, about a week. We went out only once, but he's an attorney." I thought, 'There we go again. She couldn't care less about the person.' So we met for lunch and her date turned out to be nice. Later Pam asked, "Well, what do you think?" "Nice." I knew my opinion wouldn't make a difference to Pam and

I had no intention to try to influence her decisions. Pam saw the attorney only a few more times before he disappeared. Pam never seemed sad when one of her attempted relationships did not work out. When I asked how her dating was going, her answer was always the same, "Oh, no. He's gone. I don't know where he is." She could have talked about the weather and even sounded dismissive at times.

Before long Pam had found someone else at a disco. This time she was convinced it would work out. She was honestly excited when she said, "That was a real good evening. He told me he was looking for someone. I said, 'Look, I want a baby, so let's not waste too much time here.'" At first I thought I had not heard right. Then I had a hard time to keep a straight face. I nodded and said, "What did he say?" "He said he'd call me. He has to be out of town for a while. He's on a business trip but he'll call when he's back." Of course, the business trip was permanent and Pam's reaction was the same as before, "Oh, he's gone."

I still found Pam entertaining but I also began to feel sorry for her. Gradually I began to notice that it was not only a man she wanted, but that her real desire seemed to be a baby. She talked about it as frequently as about men. But as usual, she expressed her wish in a very singular way, "I want a baby. I'm almost forty years old and time's running out for me." I thought this could

be why an emotional involvement did not seem important to her. She needed a man to have a baby. Now that I began to pay attention to that part of our conversations, I realized that the baby had been the real focus for Pam all the time. But it was difficult to find out why a baby was so important. Pam's standard answer remained, "I want a baby," and she found ways to build this in nearly every time we talked. Not that she discussed it in any way, but it was like the conclusion of every conversation.

Finally, Pam found a job in an office and managed to hold on to it. She also did well in her studies. But her mateless and babyless state remained a problem. Her attitude about both remained a puzzle to me. Also my attempts to get any insight about her interest in New Age did not produce any results. According to Pam, she was very interested, according to her bookshelf this was true, but Pam avoided talking about it for reasons I could not understand. Since she was not very articulate about her feminist concerns either, I thought maybe she just cannot express her thoughts about New Age and did not want to be embarrassed.

Pam did not really belong to any particular religious organization. But occasionally she attended Sunday services at an interdenominational church. Pam said she liked it there but offered no particular insights about her beliefs. Religion did not seem to play an important part in her

life. The one Sunday that I joined her I got the impression that she enjoyed being part of a small community in a context that provided a comfortable and emotionally safe atmosphere. She had told me that she liked the minister very much and that he was a good friend. When we left she stopped to shake his hand although not everybody did that. She also seemed to try to extend the contact by continuing to talk to him longer than seemed necessary. His responses were brief and polite. She did not mention him or his church again.

Then Margot died. It was the first thing Pam told me when I walked in the door one afternoon. It had happened several days ago. Pam talked about it in a calm voice, the closest she came to express her sorrow in an emotional way. We sat at the kitchen table as Pam continued to talk about the cat. Although Pam could not be emotionally very expressive, how much Margot's death had hit her was evident from her next words. "I called my mother and asked if she could come. She said yes and so I waited with the burial until she was here." Considering that Pam's mother lives several hundred miles away, Pam must have been in despair. But then came 'typical' Pam. "I also waited with the grieving until my mother arrived. I didn't want to grieve alone, so I waited for her so we could grieve together." As usual I was amazed at Pam's detachment, knowing at the same time that Margot's death had been a hard blow. My

usual reaction to Pam's attitude was shaking my head or trying not to laugh. But now I began to realize that Pam seemed to be trapped somehow in a psychological sense.

Pam kept talking about her grieving. "My mother and I did a little ritual for Margot and we grieved together. So now I'm done with that. I'm okay now." "You're done with that? Just like that?" "Yes. I went to a friend's house to meditate. We meditate together sometimes. So that helped too." There I had pestered her about New Age things and she had never mentioned that she meditated. "I didn't know you meditate. Is that kind of a New Age thing?" "Yes. It makes me feel better." Pam looked into space a moment and I felt she was groping for words. But she gave up and remained quiet. I was still working on Margot's demise and so we sat in silence for a while.

Then Pam began to update me on her latest dating adventures and as usual I tried to convince her that it would maybe be a good idea to treat men as persons and not as objects. This had become almost a ritual between us. Inadvertently the debate led to Pam saying, "But I want a baby. Time's running out for me. You have it easy." I rolled my eyes at Pam's resentment at me. But I was getting frustrated that all our conversations ended with, "I want a baby." I remembered her precarious financial situation and said, "You cannot even support yourself. How do you think you'll support two people? Why is it so

important to have a baby?" Pam did not look at me. In a very quiet voice she answered, "Because then I'm closer to the universe."

I almost started to laugh. This was such a typical New Age answer that sounded as lofty and unrealistic to me as the whole New Age circus. And at the same time it all fell into place. I am glad I could stop my laughter before Pam noticed my reaction. She was absolutely right. She did not have much contact with her family members, her husband was gone, she was not particularly close to any of her friends, she drifted from job to job. Margot had been the only continuously stable factor in her everyday life. Now Margot was dead and Pam's mother had left again to go to her own home. A baby is the only person who could not walk out on her and with a little bit of luck it would not die on her.

As to her New Age interest, she could never offer any insights or ideas when I asked. But now in this special situation she wrapped up her whole existence in one little New Age metaphor, 'Because then I'm closer to the universe'. With a baby she would have a connection not just to one person but be part of a wider whole. As the import of what she had said hit home, I had to take a closer look at myself. I had gotten miles of entertainment out of Pam, I had been exasperated with her obsession to obtain a man, and I had almost laughed at a New Age expression just

because it didn't make sense to me. I decided that as a member of the human species and especially as an anthropologist, I had a long way to go.

This humbling experience became a permanent reminder to me to get rid of any personal and professional arrogance. The lasting effect of it became obvious when I began to work with my other informants. This is the reason I include Pam at this late stage. Even though I still find many things funny (not silly or ridiculous!), I certainly do not feel superior but rather see an informant as a teacher. After all, I'm the one who wants to learn about them. In this case Pam taught me something about myself.

During my fieldwork period I also taught some anthropology classes and sometimes included anecdotes from the field. The students seemed to enjoy them and one woman, perhaps in her late forties, asked if she could write her term paper on the subject. I said sure but suggested she be more specific since New Age is such a wide field. She brought up the Wicca movement and witches. So my question, the one that I have never gotten around to ask Henry, was, "What do you mean by witch?" Sandy seemed to know what she was talking about, "Oh, witches are concerned with the environment. They have rituals to symbolize our relationship with the Earth." "So witches are positive?" Sandy nodded, "Yes, the Wicca movement is about our relationship to the environment and to the Earth." Sandy

wanted to think about the topic of her paper. I hesitated to ask her to work with me as an informant because she was a student of mine at that time. So I decided to wait until after the course before I would approach her. A week later she announced that she would like to write her paper on alcoholism. I knew Dale's story by then but I still had to ask, "You think alcoholism is part of New Age?" "Yeah, the AA seems to be a part of it and I'd like to write about it's history." "But AA exists longer than New Age groups." "But it's one of those groups that has a program that you go through." I began to understand how Sandy saw a connection between Alcoholic Anonymous and New Age. "Like self-help?" I suggested. She nodded, "Yeah, it's part of the self-help programs and that's part of New Age." So Sandy had no problem putting a relatively old group into a new context. Now that we had negotiated that I realized that the new context for AA also gave it a new meaning. When I asked Sandy why she wanted to write about AA, her answer was, "Because I'm an alcoholic. I go to AA meetings and that is the greatest thing that ever happened to me." I believe that before the social-historical era of New Age a statement like this would have been unthinkable. I know that mainstream people have become generally more open about their problems without putting them into special contexts. But Sandy placed AA firmly into the New Age environment and saw herself as active

part in it. So I decided to go along with that.

When we met again I started as usual, "So what's your story?" "I'm from the South, from Alabama. I grew up in a real typical Southern Baptist family. They were very strict." Sandy's rough voice sounded somewhere between amused and resentful. "They are real Southern Baptists and how they raised me, that is still haunting me to this day. Their God was always punishing and angry. There was never anything loving in it. Everybody was always punished. That is an image that I still carry around with me, especially when I'm in a crisis. When something goes wrong I always think of all the traumatic or frightening things in their religion. It still scares me or makes me feel guilty. Somehow I can't get rid of it. I can deal with it better when things run smoothly. Right now I still think about it but I can handle it better."

"You're part of a Wicca group?" "Yeah, occasionally. My priestess is a member." "You talk to a Wicca priestess?" I knew that Sandy was talking about CUUPS. "I had this dream recently where I saw a big snake flying through the air. I didn't know what that meant and so I called her to ask." "What did she say?" "That it's a powerful symbol. It's a sexual symbol. So I think it means I'm developing in that aspect of my life." Now I had a hunch that the Wicca priestess she was talking about was Conny. For integrity's sake I kept the thought to myself. Sandy did

not seem too interested in talking about her Wicca experiences. She does not see herself as an active permanent part of it.

I wondered why she thought she was developing her sexual aspects. "I was married once and I have three children. One's in his mid-teens and the other two in their early twenties. That was an abusive relationship. Then I've just come out of a ten year relationship that was also totally abusive." Sandy did not play the victim's role however. "You know, it was also my fault. I was the one who kept going back to him. I had left when I couldn't take it anymore. But after a week or so I was the one who called him and begged him to take me back, 'Honey, I miss you. I want to come back.' He knew that. That's how he controlled and manipulated me. That's what gave him power over me. It was nothing but a power game. It was hard to learn to get passed that, you know. I knew what was going on but I just didn't have the strength to do anything about it. It was real hard to learn to assert myself." "So how did you do it?" "That came at a moment when I felt pushed over the edge. It was a point where I was totally desperate. You could say, the point of desperation was the new start for me. I had just been pushed too far."

I was impressed with her attitude. She did not sound angry at her abusive partner, she did not seem to put the blame on him. Sandy sounded more like she was taking a

look at herself. I was curious what her reaction would be, "A lot of people have been abused and write books about it. There's the abuse excuse." Sandy nodded seriously, "You can spend the rest of your life blaming others. But it's up to you how you deal with the abuse. You can use it as an excuse for everything that goes wrong or you can use it for something positive. Learn from it. It's everybody's choice. The bad relationship that I was in, that was just as much my fault as his. You can't change people. This is how he was and I knew that."

In all this she had not mentioned her alcoholism and so I asked, "What about your alcohol problem?" Sandy nodded, "That was something that I have to deal with also. When I broke out of that relationship I had been going to AA meetings for a long time. That also helped. A lot. I have to give them a lot of credit." "How did you become an alcoholic?" "It runs in the family. My uncles, cousins, and various other relatives are all alcoholics. The whole environment is like that. There may be a genetic disposition. But, you know, a lot of other factors have to fall into place too. Just because you have a genetic predisposition doesn't mean you have to become an alcoholic." "So what were the other factors in your case?" "I don't know. There was a lot I guess. But I can't really say what it was. The whole environment was like that." "You said AA meetings helped. At what point are you now?"

"I have been dry for almost ten years now. That's really important to me." Sandy grinned and her voice took on a lighter tone now. "I'm really proud of that. AA is the best thing that happened to me. They are really great. Almost ten years now." Sandy was visibly proud of her accomplishment. I thought ten years of not drinking is no mean feat for any alcoholic.

"Do you belong to any religious group now?" "No, except that I talk to my Wicca priestess sometimes. When I lived in Florida I belonged to the Metropolitan Community Church there. I felt pretty good there. I had hoped to find something like that here in Oklahoma, but I haven't." I had not heard of a Metropolitan Community Church before. "What kind of a church is that?" "They include lesbians and gays. I'm lesbian now." I was astonished, "You're lesbian?" "Yeah, I'm lesbian." "I thought you said, you have been married and been in a bad relationship with a man?" "Yes, I have. The way I grew up you could not say that you're gay or lesbian. That didn't exist then. So I guess, I carried that around with me all the time. Anyway, now I'm lesbian and I can say it and feel comfortable with it." It occurred to me that Sandy might also have developed a distrust against men, but I did not say anything. On this particular day she appeared tired. I could see it was difficult for her to sort out the confusing aspects of herself. Sandy never appeared to be the type who would

become easily distressed. But when we talked she did not simply answer questions. She also thought about them and tried to work through her memories and concerns. Not for the first time with an informant, I felt I was serving a little as a psychological relief station. It seemed to me that listening was sometimes no less emotionally confusing than talking.

But I wanted back to the church. After her experiences growing up, I was puzzled that she showed interest in any church at all. "What kind of belief did you find in that church?" "It was not really the belief. It was more the rituals that I liked. I would say they were pretty catholic. I liked the rigid formalized rituals. The contents of the rituals or the belief, that's not really important to me. But there was a fixed structure that I could participate in. The behavior of the people was predictable." Considering her background, I could certainly understand why that would be important to her. It also occurred to me that a good number of mainstream church attendands may have a similar motive.

I had to wonder about Sandy's relationship with other people, now that she was openly lesbian and had reached the stage of a recovering alcoholic. "How do you get along with your family now?" As before, Sandy spoke without any sign of bitterness or accusation. "We get along. The relationship with them is a little strained. But we talk.

They don't really understand what the problem is. They say, 'If you would only turn around and see Jesus.' They think that would fix everything. They cannot understand that that is exactly, I mean their religion, is exactly what caused the problem in the first place. I cannot make them understand. But we talk and we get along." Sandy described her parents to make me understand, "My mother is cold." I waited for more as I watched Sandy thinking, but she repeated, "She's cold. My father is a typical Southern Baptist. He firmly believes that if I would only see Jesus, that would fix it. It is totally incomprehensible to him how that could be the problem."

Talking with Sandy was always interesting because she would get involved in our conversations and often included an analysis in her answers. Like other New Age people I had met, one focus was always psychological and she liked to think. It would not have occurred to me at that time, but Sandy saw similarities between being raised a Southern Baptist and being an alcoholic. "I think they're both the same. They're both about escape and suppression of emotions. This religion does not allow people to express emotions and alcoholism drowns them literally. To me, that's a kind of escape. People don't want to deal with their emotions." What Sandy said reminded me of Dan's words about work and science as a means to escape emotional matters.

When I had talked to the others, I never had a problem

seeing at which points they distinguished themselves from the mainstream. This was more difficult with Sandy. Although she had proclaimed an interest in Wicca, visited a priestess, and identified herself as part of the New Age, she was not really actively involved (except for the AA meetings). To me she was borderline mainstream/New Age. I let her make the decision, "Do you see yourself as being different from the mainstream?" "Yes. There are some things where I am mainstream, I think. But there are also things where I am definitely not mainstream." "Like being an alcoholic?" "No. I think that's where I am mainstream." "Really? How's that?" "There are just so many alcoholics that they are pretty much part of the mainstream. I feel mainstream as a recovering alcoholic." "Then how are you different from the mainstream?" "As a lesbian. That's where I'm outside the mainstream. I think that's how others look at me. Also as a left wing liberal. But mostly as a lesbian. That's not part of the mainstream."

Sandy seemed to be on her way out of the dark phases of her life. Her demeanor suggested enthusiasm about her studies and she was trying hard to put herself together as a person or to form an identity she could live with. She had set herself goals, such as reaching her ten year milestone and completing her studies to become a teacher. But then came a major set back.

I had tried to reach her for some time but she seemed

busy. Then she called back and burst out, "I started drinking again. Two weeks ago I started drinking again." She sounded seriously distraught and I was worried. I remembered how proud she had been of her ten years of being dry. Everything has a reason. "What happened?" "I haven't been doing so well lately. It all got on top of me at some point, I guess." Sandy sounded like a different person to me. I wished I could have seen her but now the phone would have to do. "So what happened?" "The past eighteen months several relatives and friends that I like very much have died. That was rough. It was just one after the other. Then my teenage son has been arrested on a drug charge. So I have to deal with that too. And then two weeks ago my little dog was run over by a car." Sandy sounded close to tears and paused, then continued, "I think that was what broke the camel's back. After that I started to drink again." "I'm very sorry, Sandy," and I meant it. Sandy sounded awful like I had not heard her before. I wondered if all her goals would go down the drain now. "Are you doing something now? Like going to AA meetings?" "They couldn't stop me from starting to drink again. But I can't blame them. They are great and they're doing a real good job. I wouldn't dream of stopping to go there. Of course, I go to AA meetings." The last sentence sounded defiant and I had to smile. That was the old Sandy coming through there. Sandy continued, "I just come from my counselor

and she said, 'You should always expect the worst, then you won't be surprised when something bad happens.' So I guess I'm a pessimist." I thought this is certainly not a counselor I would seek help from if I were in trouble. Once again, I wondered about our mainstream education system.

"Do you go to Wicca meetings now?" Sandy's answer was a surprise. "No. Certainly not. Right now I want nothing to do with anything like that." Sandy sounded almost angry. "Why not? What's the problem?" "I don't want to get involved in anything New Age right now. I really don't want to know about New Age now." This sounded really serious. It was the first time that I heard any resentment from an insider. "But why not? Did you have a bad experience?" "No, not really. But I want to stay away from it now. After I started to drink again, I went to my counselor and I went to my priestess. She performed a ritual with me. You know, with candles and incense. I don't think it helped. Maybe it brought a little temporary relief. But I don't really think so. I got scared in the middle of it and we had to break it off." So Sandy blamed herself for the ineffectiveness of the ritual, at least partly. On the other hand, she did not indicate that the ritual in any way exaggerated her problem. It just did not work because Sandy got scared. "Why did you get scared?" "You know, I really believe in spirits and all that. I really believe that. In a situation

like this, you never know what powers you unleash there. And then you cannot control it then. That really scares me." I thought from her fragile emotional state, this was certainly something to think about.

Talking about all this seemed to have done something good for Sandy. She had sounded angry at the end which I interpreted as a hopeful sign. At least it was better than being distressed. But I was still worried. "What are you going to do now?" "Oh, I may someday go back to Wicca or something like that. Only right now I'm not ready for that. I will also continue to go to AA meetings of course. Seeing my counselor has helped also. And then there is my college degree. You know, I'm only five credits away from graduating and I'll not give that up. I still want to become a teacher. So I'll keep working on that." The more she talked now the brighter she sounded. "The priestess gave me a yellow candle to look at. I put it on my desk. You know, it's something to hang on to." I will explain what Sandy meant in the next chapter. I had wondered before if Sandy was able to trust people and so this seemed a crucial time for her in this regard. "Do you have anybody to talk to? I mean, is there anybody you feel you can trust?" "My daughter and three friends, maybe four. I talk to them."

Sandy seemed busy to work herself out of a state of despair during our conversation and she did a good job.

At the end Sandy was on her way. It is too bad that she did not make the ten year anniversary of her non-drinking. This was a serious and major set-back. But while I listened to her I realized that Sandy is a fighter. She seemed determined to be successful.

At one of the meditation meetings at the Star Cloud I had met Laura. She was definitely interested in New Age and had come to see what the meditation meeting was about. Laura also mentioned her family but from what she said I could not make out whether they were interested or not. In any case, Laura seemed enthusiastic about talking with me and we agreed to meet some time during the following weeks.

Laura is in her mid-thirties and works as a secretary. At first sight there is nothing in her demeanor that suggests an interest in New Age. Aside from the one visit to a meditation meeting, she remained inactive in the public New Age scene. All she said during our first brief encounter was, "I'm really interested. It's really fascinating. It's great that you write about it." During the meeting and small talk she was quiet. As we sat in the circle she appeared a little out of place, more an observer than a participant. But when I asked her if she would like to talk to me, she was open and enthusiastic. "Yes, of course we can talk. I'd be happy to." I was curious what she would have to tell me.

When we met again I let Laura begin her story wherever she wanted. "My mother and my grandmother both have psychic abilities. I learned a lot from them. I have some too. It runs in the family." So Laura seemed to associate New Age with sensitive skills. She added a little story. "One day I was alone in the house. I was resting on the sofa in the living room and suddenly I heard footsteps upstairs. I knew they were made by an older man." "How did you know? Did you check?" "No. I was scared, so I didn't go look. But I knew there was an older man. I mean, I sensed it. I had this experience several times and it's scary. I have never actually seen him, but I know with absolute certainty that he was there." My reaction to Laura's story was profound doubt. I have no intention to dismiss stories like these before there is a way to examine them. It was the way she talked about it. I could not put my finger on it, but there was something in her voice that made me skeptical. At that time I had already talked with Conny and Kari, both of them sensitives. Both had always sounded more realistic than Laura. Perhaps because they both had always expressed more skepticism and analytical thought than Laura.

Whatever Laura had heard, she insisted it had been the presence of an older man and it was a bad presence too. "There was something bad coming from him," she continued. "So I never went to look for him. I had this

experience several times when I was alone. I never saw him but I always knew when he was there." Laura sounded a touch too cheerful, perhaps even gossipy. "I told my husband about it. But, you know, he's used to that from me and my family. He says, 'Yeah, that's you.' He doesn't really believe in any of this and he has no psychic abilities. So I think he acts like a buffer, sort of. I have those experiences less often when he's around and they're not so intense then. So I think he's a buffer. He doesn't believe it but he accepts it." Laura laughed and it seemed that sensitive occurrences are an every day fact to her. But she was not trying to analyze or to explain it.

Then Laura had a question for me, "Do you know Kari? She's great. My grandmother, my mother, and I, we all have talked to her. And she has told us so much, just incredible. She has helped us a lot. Her predictions are really reliable. She's great."

After assuring her that I knew Kari, I wanted to know more about her family and her upbringing. "I was raised by my grandmother mostly. That's how I learned a lot about my psychic abilities. My mother got divorced when I was little and she had to work fulltime." Laura seemed uncomfortable for a moment. After a little skip, she rapidly moved on with her story. She did not really want to talk about her family life. "So my grandmother took care of

me and she taught me lot." "For example?" "That the psychic experiences I had really exist. But I think most of all, she taught me to rely on my intuition." "You use that to make decisions?" "Yes, most of the time. I talk about it with my husband and we debate it. He's the rational one. I mean, I use rational reason too. But mostly it's intuition. When something is really important, then I rely on intuition. I base all my major decisions on my intuition more than on rational reason." "That works?" "Yes, it works. Every time."

"What about the meditation? Do you still meditate?" "Yes, but you'll probably laugh about it." "Why's that?" "I have an unusual way of meditating." "What do you do?" "I meditate in the bathtub." "Okay. How does that work?" I laughed a little, probably more to satisfy Laura's expectations. Somehow she seemed more and more superficial to me. I still could not make out what bothered me. It was the way she talked that distinguished her from the others. Where other informants had often put in a lot of thought with long pauses in between, Laura breezed through her story. She described her meditation method to me, "I sit in the tub, head bowed, and with the water running over me. It's a soothing kind of feeling. That's how I meditate. That's the time where I relax. Sometimes I can go on like that forever. Until my husband becomes impatient. But this is my time, you know. I do it whenever I feel

like it. I can think about things that are important to me then." This is exactly what I had learned to avoid during the meditation meetings, to think about specific things. If I had gotten it right when I watched Dan, I was supposed to let go of everyday brain clutter. As far as I knew, that was the gist of the literature too. So here was one more reason to be skeptical of Laura. I did not doubt that she went through her exercise to produce that relaxing feeling. But to her meditation seemed to mean something entirely different. It had absolutely no relation with what I had experienced during the meditation meetings and also not with anything Dan or Dale had said about meditation. Laura moved herself farther and farther towards the margin of New Age while we talked.

Other than her scare story she did not seem to have much to offer for now. "Are you going to go to another meditation meeting?" Laura hesitated, "I don't know. Maybe." "What about your mother or grandmother?" "No, they're not interested in that." We were still sitting outside in some drafty breezeway and it was early evening now. It had been raining all day and my clothes were still damp from an earlier rain fall. I was freezing, hungry, and a little frustrated.

I was fishing around, "What else do you find interesting about New Age? I mean, other than meditation? What about health?" Laura perked up, "Oh yes. I think that's a very

important issue in New Age, alternative medicine. I'm thinking of becoming a midwife. I would like to learn more about alternative birth methods. You know, natural birth. A cousin of mine just had a baby. That was just not right the way they went about it." "Why? What happened?" "I think the family should be more involved or participate. My cousin was giving birth and her husband just sat there and read the paper." "That was in a hospital?" "Yes," Laura looked at me a little astonished it seemed. So I had to ask, "What do you mean by 'natural' birth?" "Well,....," she hesitated, "I mean, the family should be more involved. It should be more natural." She was searching for more to say, but then gave up. Laura did not seem to have a clear concept of what natural birth should entail. I decided for more productive times and asked her if she would be willing to talk to me again. Laura smiled and said, "I have to think about that. I'll let you know. Just give me a call and I'll let you know." "What about your grandmother? Would she be willing to talk to me?" "I'll ask her."

Several weeks later I called and asked for another meeting but Laura said she was busy. When I asked about her grandmother, the answer was, "I don't know. She's sick right now. My mother is taking care of her. So she's busy too. I don't know. We'll see." A few weeks after that I tried again. Laura sounded more determined now, "I'm really busy." "What about your plans to become a midwife? Are

you doing something about it?" "No. I put that on hold for now." "How's your grandmother?" "Oh well. She's a little better now. Not too well, but better." "Do you think she'll talk to me?" "No. That's definitely not going to happen." I was running against a wall here. I'm not quite sure why Laura was so resistant. I would think she has not been as interested in New Age as she had said at the beginning. I include Laura here as a representative of the 'mildly curious' and as a client of Kari, but not as a full participant of the New Age.

Almost two years after the Star Cloud had closed and I had lost contact with Dale, Dan, and Josh, I got a super surprise. As usual, I boarded the bus to campus early one morning. As I walked towards the back of the bus I discovered Josh sitting there, smiling and nodding at me. I began with, "What happened? Where is everybody? What are you doing now." Josh laughed, "I'm fine. We all have lost contact after the store closed. But I met Dan a few weeks ago at a fair. That was the first time I have seen him. I didn't know where he was. He has moved to Claremore and he's gotten engaged. They're running a health food store now. I think I have his phone number now somewhere." "What are you doing now?" "I'm studying sociology and I've gotten married a few weeks ago." Josh agreed to meet with me later that week. I was looking forward to it. He seemed much more open and talkative than I remembered him.

I had several more opportunities to talk to Josh and to put his story together. "I was born in Colorado and was raised by my grandmother. My mother was divorced from my father. She had an alcohol problem and that made it impossible for her to raise me." "What about your father?" "He....," Josh shook his head impatiently. "The whole environment was dysfunctional. A totally dysfunctional family. Alcoholism was a major problem. They were Catholics too." "Do you think that had an influence on your upbringing?" "No. I don't think so. No, it hasn't. I don't belong to any religious group now. But I don't think that has anything to do with my family being Catholic." "Is there any significant incident that you remember?" "Yes. My grandmother was a sensitive and that impressed me very much. I think that had more influence on me than her religious beliefs. I remember that she knew when my uncle had a motorcycle accident before they received the message. It was a really bad, really bad accident. It took a long time for him to recover. She knew when it had happened before anybody had told us. That impressed me very much. That is still with me today. I was nine years old then and that certainly had an influence on me." "In what way?" "I became interested in such phenomena. I developed an interest in astrology too. I didn't really study it then, but I think that was where it started."

"I had to get out of that family. So when I was sixteen

I was more or less on my own. I joined the army and that was my salvation from that totally unstable family environment. The army was the best thing that could happen to me. It gave me the stability that I needed. It has done a lot for me in terms of development, focus, and stability." Josh spoke in a calm even voice. Only when he mentioned his family, I noticed a slight edge and some impatience. The army was clearly a major milestone for him. "What did you do in the army?" "I was a technician. I have won prizes and awards for my work on bomber technology. I have spent time overseas also. I was in the Gulf War."

I did not have to ask Josh to tell me more about his life. He continued on his own. "In my private life I was married and I have a teenage daughter. My ex-wife was a member of a New Age circle in Colorado. That was how I got into into. That really dominated our life for awhile. I had begun to study astrology and other aspects." I understood that Josh did not mean a formal study of astrology but that he meant the word in the New Age sense. Josh looked thoughtful for a moment and then continued, "But there is really quite a bit of responsibility involved. How much influence do you have on a client? That's a big question. And there's a dilemma." I grinned, knowing what would come. "When I see an event unfolding, is my prediction already part of the outcome? Or would something be different if I would not know about it? I mean, would it happen

anyway?" This is indeed an old problem. Josh and I chuckled a little at the seeming impossibility to find an answer here.

Although both Josh and his wife were active New Age participants and shared the interest, their different perspectives of New Age eventually led to a divorce. "She is still in Colorado", Josh said raising his eyebrows, "And that pleases me very much." "What went wrong?" "She was involved with people... There was a lot of drug abuse and promiscuity. That is not an environment where I can responsibly raise my daughter." "She's with you now?" "Yes. She lives with us." "What kind of drugs did they use?" "Marijuana and cocaine." Josh was visibly disgusted.

In addition to his private troubles, Josh became increasingly dissatisfied with the rat race kind of life. "I made a good living as an air force member and running a few businesses on the side." He grinned slightly, "We had a nice house, cars, all the material things..." "So what was wrong with that?" "I became dissatisfied, more and more uneasy about the whole life style. Mainstream life began to look more and more like plastic. It's focus is on indiscriminate consumption, cop outs, quick fixes. 'More and faster' is like a goal in that kind of life and it's nothing but plastic. Plastic, that's what I call it. So I quit." "What do you mean?" "I didn't want to be part of that anymore." "How did you quit? Was there a particular

moment or incident where you made the decision?" Josh looked past me, thinking or trying to remember. Then he said slowly, "That's a good question. I don't know. It happen gradually. There was no particular moment, I think. It just built up. It happened gradually." "So how did you do it?" "I got a divorce, left my possessions behind, moved to Norman, and started over."

Josh wanted to build up a life that would keep him out of the rat race. But since it is still the rat race powers that dominate life, I knew this would be a precarious balancing act. "How do you do that?" I wondered. "I just don't need a lot of that material stuff that people accumulate. For example, I don't have a car," he said and looked almost smug. Josh definitely seemed very content and much happier than I remembered him. He enjoyed his studies, had a job on campus, and had gotten married only a few weeks before. Life was running smoothly for him. "What does your wife think about the simple life?" "She's active in social work and she shares my opinion. That's what I would like to do someday, some kind of social work." "We have the same concerns and attitude."

When Josh broke out of the rat race he also left the army behind, a decision that had not been easy. "I'm enormously grateful. Without them I would no be what I am today. I learned a lot there." "Then why did you leave?" Josh sighed and raised his eyebrows in a regretful

expression, "I could not stand up for the way it is used, as a weapon. It is exiting to be part of it, to be involved in building the technology. That was really something I enjoyed. But as I became more and more dissatisfied I could not live with that anymore. Being part of building weapons. I did not throw bombs or anything like that. But just being part of building the technology made me partly responsible. I'm not against the army," Josh added quickly, "but I'm against the way it is used, for destruction and gaining power over others. It should be used for defense only and for research. It should be a research institution. When I decided to change my life, I made a commitment to my New Age attitude. So I could not stand up for what I was doing in the army anymore. This is the only reason I left." The regret in his voice and face were obvious. But Josh was also very certain of his decision. There was no question for him that he had done the right thing.

The ability to stand up for one's beliefs against popular opinions seems to be one of the characteristics of serious New Age participants. Josh had no need to seek the next advantage in terms of social ranking or material well being by submitting (or sucking up) to mainstream notions of success. It was quite obvious during our conversation that he was very comfortable with that and even got a certain satisfaction out of it. He appeared to be extremely content. I had to think of Kari's, 'I can

sleep at night'. This attitude and ability is also the one that seems to trigger the most cynicism from the mainstream.

"How do you get along in the mainstream?" Josh laughed softly. "I know. You have to make compromises here and there. But that's okay. But I don't need to look for approval from other people. I mean, from friends or family, a few people that I respect. But not from others. I would say to get along you need a capacity for compassion, patience, love. If you have that kind of inner peace, it's really not so hard." What I had called contentment Josh referred to as inner peace. He certainly radiated it. "How do you get along with your family?" "My sisters have their families and... They go to church." Josh grinned slightly, "We talk and we get along. But they don't understand. But that's okay. We get along. My mother's in town. She has two jobs but..." He shook his head a little annoyed. I felt there was something wrong. Josh did not seem to agree with Dale at this time. But he was quite eager to talk about his ideas and perspectives.

Explaining his worldview to me, he brought up Saddam Hussein as an example, "I have been in the Gulf War. But still, you have to try to see the world through the eyes of others, like Saddam. I have to grant him a degree of sincerity in his actions. Who am I to say that his worldview and his values are less valid than mine?" I thought this

was a remarkable statement for a Gulf veteran. "To get along people should not dominate but communicate," Josh continued. "I think this is something our government has not learned yet. The people haven't learned that."

Josh feels he does not have to dominate or suppress others in order to be successful. His calm way of speaking expressed an emotional security, that I find rarely in mainstream people. There I perceive the same tone of voice often as fake or a cover for anxiety and competition.

"I don't have to prove myself in this way. I don't have to show my worth by dominating others or by competing against them," Josh explained. Except for those I care about as persons, I don't seek other people's approval. I am very happy the way I live now. I'm not driven to prove myself to others. I don't have a car now because I don't need one. When I lived in Colorado I had a big one. But when you think about it, it's so... I don't need that. Maybe I will have a car someday, when I think I need one. To get around more. But then it's only a means of transportation and nothing more." Josh sounded very insistent here. "Do mainstream people react to you?" Josh chuckled, "I don't mind being laughed at and I don't mind being different."

I had noticed that Josh's attitude pointed at some ideas that I had tried to express in my theory. So I asked, "Would you be interested in reading what I have so far?"

Josh agreed. When he gave it back to me, he looked serious, "Now I don't know about the literature you have there. But... I don't know that part. But this is basically the only way to do it. It looks like a new model to me. And I think human behavior doesn't fit into the old model anymore." I nodded and thought, 'My point exactly.' Josh's reaction showed me, from the viewpoint of New Age participants, that I seemed to be on the right track. It was important to me to know that I was working with ideas and concepts the insiders can relate to. This was an important aspect of the negotiation process.

I asked Josh if he knew anybody else who is part of the New Age scene. He thought for a moment and then shook his head, "You have met them. I don't know anybody else. Some are members of CUUPS, but New Age people are really not a cohesive group. There's Kari, she's a good friend of mine. She's partly Indian, so she has that background." I had to smile when I remembered that Kari put more emphasize on her Irish ancestry, but I didn't say anything.

The look on Josh's face told me that he was not a member of CUUPS or any other New Age group. I wanted to see his reaction, "You're not a member of CUUPS?" "No. I don't like Paganism." "Why not?" "I suppose it reminds me too much of my ex-wife's group. The Irish-European Paganism, there is too much of... It reminds me of the loose morals I have seen in the group my ex hung out with." "Do you

think so because of your Catholic upbringing? Does that have an influence here?" Josh shook his head, "No. I don't think so. I don't think that that has any influence. It's more about personal responsibility and trust or faithfulness. Personal integrity. A lot of the New Age is more an expression of insecurity, as in making false statements." I understood insecurity, but he lost me at the false statements. "What do you mean?" "I mean, they talk about responsibility but they don't live up to it." "You're thinking about the group of your ex now?" "Yes. They were good examples of that. They talk a lot but in reality that's all it is. It's more words than deeds. So I prefer Native American philosophies." "How come?" "Being of European ancestry, Indians were perceived as more honest, more open, with a better sense of integrity."

During most of my talks with Josh he seemed to do more than just answer questions. His responses were sometimes quite long, were delivered slowly and he was very articulate about his ideas. He seemed to be in a very reflective mood. By and large Josh placed himself firmly in the New Age context. He drew the line inside between those who lived up to their New Age philosophies and those who use them as a cop out without any real consequences (or inconveniences) to their mainstream life.

"How do you identify yourself today?" Josh sighed and said slowly, "To find an identity... To find out who one

really is takes some meditation. It takes a long time. Maybe that's why I cannot say when the change in me happened. To find out who one is, is often misinterpreted as phony or lofty New Age babble. I'm trying to find an identity that is not influenced or shaped by others. I want the personal independence and perhaps the courage to find my own way of life and my own convictions. At this time that means to go against the mainstream, to expose oneself to ridicule," Josh smiled, "That's fine with me. At the time I could not be proud to be part of the Air Force anymore I had reached a state of identity that meant separation from something that was really important to me. That was a real turning point in my development, to let go of that. I still think having an army is not necessarily wrong for the nation, but at this time it is certainly wrong for me."

"How do you define success?" "Success is fulfillment and at least not distaste." He came back to the military. "There are still things I like about the military. But I think more of individuals than nations. We should try to imagine what the world looks like through the eyes of other people." "That can get you into trouble," I suggested and received the response that I had expected. "Yes," Josh laughed, "It's not easy to decide what's right or wrong. You have to make compromises. The popular press always accentuates the dramatic and the destructive. They

perpetuate this attitude that domination is right. Reporters are biased because they have been raised in this particular context. I'm not against power relationships. But the application of power is important to me." This brought him to the next topic, subjectivity. "You can't get around subjectivity. But a social environment that acknowledges subjectivity requires trust. That is definitely absent in the western world. To live in a global community means one has to be responsible to oneself."

"So what does it all come down to?" "Personal integrity." "As opposed to public integrity?" "Yes, as opposed to public integrity. Most people just play along. Deceit is the accepted norm..." For a moment he seemed to want to say more, but then he only looked disgusted. "You have to make compromises if you want to get along. But deceit as the proper and accepted behavior permeates the whole environment." Josh was very serious now. He was visibly disgusted and exasperated. "To accept that as the appropriate behavior... I am really a supporter of the free market system. But it is carried to the extreme. I think workplace relationships really bother me the most. Deceit, lies, and betrayals are disguised as 'it's just business'." The more Josh thought about these problems, the more upset he became. "It's not 'just business', it reflects a person's attitude. It tells me what kind of a person someone is. That has nothing to do with 'business',

it's the person. 'Business' is used as an excuse for this kind of behavior or attitude. 'Business' is really only a cheap excuse for deceit and betrayals." Josh slowed down a little and smiled, "I had a few businesses on the side when I was in the army. I know what it's like. I have an almost childish sentiment for the old style business, where a deal was sealed with a handshake." He added almost sadly, "It's really personal integrity that is missing. And they don't even notice it. They think they're smart when they lie and deceive."

I had gotten a little exasperated myself as I listened to Josh. "They're all just playing the game?" "They're all just playing the game," he agreed. It seemed we were on the same wavelength here. A lot of what Josh had said, had been on my mind for a long time. But what astonished me now was that the idea that lies and deceit are considered smart seemed to weigh heavier on our minds than the integrity we were both missing. This was probably the one moment during my fieldwork, where I felt the closest connection to New Age.

Josh came repeatedly back to the army that still seemed to be a constant in his mind. "I like the technological development. The army should be a research institution. Technology in itself is not bad. But it is also carried to the extreme. The cost in terms of humanity is too high. But it fits into the business mentality. This is poison

for any social relationship."

The nice thing about talking with Josh was that he went from one issue to the next all on his own. I think this is far better than having to ask a lot of detailed questions. In this way I heard what he really thought instead of what he thought my questions implied. I kept my input limited to occasional pointers and was usually rewarded with long insightful answers.

There was one aspect that we had not explored yet. Several of the others had offered ideas about health or medical issues. But it was still difficult for me at this time to find the right expression for their concerns and experiences. None of them had mentioned any disease or medical problem and the issue seemed still rather vague. "Do you have any experience with medicine, doctors, any health problems?" It felt like a shot in the dark. I was not too comfortable mentioning something that he might not have brought up on his own. It is certainly not my task to introduce topics into the New Age context or into the life of my informants. For a moment I was worried that my asking would make an incident in his life more important than he usually would think of it.

Josh continued along previous lines with his answer. "Medical care is too expensive. I try to cure everything myself and beyond that I try to live healthy so I won't have to depend on medical treatment." I had the feeling

that he was not only worried about his medical bills. Josh grinned at added, "I do my best to avoid doctors." I could guess what the answer would be but I had to ask, "Why?" "I have a blood disorder and as a child I was in danger. My life was at risk when I was a child. The doctor prescribed a drug, but that only made me sicker. So the doctor prescribed more of the same." We both started laughing. I knew exactly what he was talking about. I also avoid mainstream medicine like the pest for exactly the same reason. I wanted to hear a little more from Josh. I still had not really found out what the focus in this issue for New Age people is. "What do you do?" I kept my question deliberately vague because I did not want to push him in any particular direction. Josh picked up nicely, "Homeopathic medicine works very well for me. I can keep my blood disorder under control and live very well with it." "So you still have the same medical problem?" "Oh yes. I'm not trying to get rid of it. To do that I may have to rely too heavily on mainstream medicine and their cures often do more damage. They may be able to get rid of the disorder but I may end up with other problems from their treatment. I have accepted my disorder as part of my system. It does not bother me at all. It's an integrated aspect of my system rather than something that needs to be corrected. It's part of me and I'm comfortable with that." I understood very well what Josh was talking about.

I have been through the same thing when doctors tried to keep me treatment dependent.

As I listened to Josh I could not help but wonder how I had ended up in this situation. The choice to study New Age people had been independent of any of my personal experiences as far as I could tell or rather, as far as that is possible. I certainly never counted myself as a New Age participant. But now I found that I seemed to share more experiences and attitudes with them than I had anticipated.

Several of the others had voiced their opinion about science and so my next question for Josh was, "What do you think about science?" He raised his eyebrows, "OU is certainly very conservative. It has a very conservative curriculum. But generally science has taken on a very positive direction. To study humanity is a big deal. Humans are individuals and they do not fit into categories. It's these individuals that make humanity great. This kind of study that you're doing would not have been possible a few decades ago."

So Josh had obviously made part of his New Age ideal a reality. Being busy with his new family, his studies and his job, he had put his astrological pursuits on the back burner for now. He still has a few clients but does not accept any new ones at this time.

I usually set up a tape recorder for our conversations

but I also had a notepad as a backup. Experience is a good teacher. I had made sure that the tape ran and had made a little test recording (before Josh showed up) which worked fine. I still was very particular about taking notes. I had been right. Josh had left and I was too curious to wait until I was home. I wanted to listen to the tape right away - nothing. Absolutely nothing. I had to think of the Blackfeet and the Salish Kootenai Indians that I had interviewed once. They both had answered my questions with a smile. Now I did not even know what the right question would be in this situation. Was Kari right? Does it have something to do with brainwaves? I don't know but I know that some people are not tapable. But now my exasperation about these things had turned into determination. So much to study.

Between my conversations with Josh I got another surprise. As I walked into a supermarket one day, out came Dale. We looked at each other, called each other's names, and started laughing. "What have you been doing?" I started. "Oh, I've been learning, Reinhild, I've been learning and growing." Of course she did not mean the latter in a physical sense. But I thought the answer was typical Dale. In another respect however, Dale seemed to have changed. She appeared more open, her voice was stronger and louder, and she looked straight at me with an open smile. We were both in a hurry that day but now I knew where to find her.

Can a New Age person call it a coincidence that I run into both Josh and Dale within the same two weeks after two years?

I saw Dale at her workplace several more times. Besides working at her two jobs she also read Tarot cards for clients. But she lowered her voice and looked around shyly when I asked about it. She seemed uncomfortable talking about it in public. So we agreed that we would meet in a more private place and Dale gave me her phone number. She also mentioned that Josh was in town. But she did not seem to know what he was doing or that he had begun to study. "I don't know what he's doing now," surprised me. But it also reinforced my impression that I had gotten from Josh, that there is a rift between him and Dale. Somehow I had the idea that this might have something to do with Dale's alcohol problem that did not seem to be as much under control as Dale would have liked. I could not tell whether this was something I had picked up in Josh's reaction or in Dale's voice. But I was certain, that this was still very much an issue.

Before I could get into contact with Dale again, she seemed to have disappeared. Her phone number did not work out and she stopped showing up at her workplace. I asked one of her co-workers where Dale was. She answered, "Oh, she moved to Las Vegas." "Las Vegas? What's she doing there?" "She found a job at a casino. She thought that

would be a much better deal than what she was doing here. She was really happy about it."

So Dale was gone. The needle disappeared from my worry barometer. Was a casino job in Las Vegas the right environment for a recovering alcoholic? Without wanting to perpetuate cliches about Las Vegas, I didn't think so. I wish Dale all the best but for now, Josh seems to be the most successful person in making the New Age philosophy a living reality.

Chapter V

Rituals, Symbols, Interaction

While the Star Cloud was open Dan offered weekly meditation sessions. Although these had to be canceled frequently for lack of participants, I did have the chance to participate in those that did take place. The sessions followed the same formula each time. So I will describe one as representative.

I will also describe a typical psychic/palmistry reading. Since these readings are based on confidentiality between the sensitive and the client, I underwent a few readings myself. So it cannot be avoided that this part will be somewhat autobiographical. But I will put an emphasize on the ritual aspect rather than the contents of the reading.

Every action and object can be viewed as a symbol of some sort. Mostly we take this for granted in our every day lives. In the New Age environment symbols abound. There seems to be a heightened awareness of the symbolic aspect of life and this is reflected in a pre-occupation with

meaning and analysis. It is impossible to include all of the symbols, objects and actions, in this study. I will describe an overall impression and then discuss several symbols in more detail. These will be the circle (spatial), energy (physical/metaphysical), books (object), and terminology (linguistic).

I have met New Age participants mostly as individuals. However, a meditation session was usually followed by a brief period of socializing. Here anecdotes and experiences were shared. Also a social hierarchy was established during these encounters.

A meditation meeting was usually led by Dan. But he as well as Dale insisted that anybody could lead one if she or he wished. I usually dropped by at the announced time of a meeting and Dan would decide whether or not we would meditate. At first I only observed a meditation from the sidelines. Later I participated and once I was asked to participate. On this occasion there were two mid twentyish women and Dan who waffled over the decision. He thought we would not be enough participants. "How many people do you need for a meditation?" I asked. He looked down at me with a slight smile and said, "Oh, about four would be good." "Why's that?" "We need the energy." One of the other women grabbed my arm, "Now you're here, now you meditate," she declared and pulled me into the backroom of the Star Cloud. We laughed and Dan decided that we could

go into a meditation after all.

The ritual itself was always performed the same way and with the same spoken formula. Only the participants and their number varied. Dan explained that we should stand boy-girl-boy-girl fashion whenever possible. This way our energy would be evenly generated as well as distributed. As he talked I had to think of an electric circuit with plus-minus outlets. At first I took his idea as more of a metaphor, but as I followed the words of his formula I got the feeling that he may also mean it in a very physical way. On this particular evening we were all women with the exception of Dan. But at the last minute one younger man showed up and found his place in the circle.

For a moment we just stood there relaxing. As for myself, as usual I tried to keep my mental position between observer and participant. On the one hand I felt I should go into the full meditation with the others because otherwise my participation would be a betrayal. On the other hand I did not want to lose control over my mental faculties, although I trusted Dan. But in the end I was probably more drawn into it than I had planned.

Dan began to make sweeping motions with his hands all over his body. He explained, "This is a cleansing. It is good to get rid of all that you have accumulated throughout the day before you meditate. Your minds should be clear and clean and so should your bodies. Get rid of all the

bad stuff that clings to you. Cleanse your mind." We followed his movements while mentally relaxing, trying not to think of the events of the day that stuck to us. Gradually the laughter and talking died down. Dan pointed at his forehead and explained, "The pineal gland is important here. This is what they mean by 'Third Eye'. We rely on our imagination and intuition." Then he stood quietly and we all joined hands. Dan's breathing became deep and even and he closed his eyes as he began to concentrate. We all closed our eyes and became very still. It felt like we were aligning ourselves somehow and the quietness felt good. After a moment, Dan began slowly in a low soft voice,

"There is energy in us - it flows through our bodies - through our legs - through our arms - from one to the other - all around the circle - there's energy - our energy gathers at the center - there's a column of light at the center of the circle - the column of light - we move up - above Norman - above Oklahoma - above the United States - out into space - we are out in space now - seeing the Earth - becoming smaller - we pass the moon - the planets of our solar system - we are at the outer rim of our solar system - slowly we return - past the planets - the moon - back to Earth - we are above North America - above Oklahoma - we can see Norman - we are above Norman - back

into the column of light."

The trip lasted for about ten minutes. We stood quietly for another moment and it felt like one by one we all came back into the presence as we opened our eyes. Due to my hesitation to let go completely I cannot possibly have experienced the full meditation. But I was aware that at some point I leaned backward slightly and felt as if I was floating on my back. Later I realized that I had indeed followed Dan more than I had intended and could visualize in great clarity the images he suggested to us. I usually do not imagine myself to float around in space but I remember clearly a very bright column of light rising upward and the moon passing by within arms' reach. I also remember my surprise when I saw that space is not as dark after all as I had thought. Of course, I do have by nature a lively imagination and so that has helped here even though Dan was the one to suggest the images.

While the others seemed to enjoy the trip, I felt wary of the whole process. I have no doubt that a meditation is very relaxing in a special kind of way. It seems to clear the mind and one feels ready for a new start with renewed energy. This is how the others described it. But I felt uneasy at letting myself be guided (controlled) by someone else and letting go so completely of my mental state. My hesitation also had another reason. As a ten

year old I had developed an interest in "parapsychology" and had actively begun to experiment with altered states of mind. One day while I was alone in my room I lay on my bed trying to move to a different plane. Soon I felt a floating sensation and I tried to let go of my rational awareness completely. Then suddenly I felt something in my mouth like a big cotton ball. At the same time I felt like I would fall into a deep abyss. With a sudden very bad fright I jerked myself out of that state and back into awareness. The scare ran deep and felt like I almost "lost it" and I have never tried something like that again. Many years later a Japanese friend of mine talked about his daily meditations that he had learned as a student of a Shinto priest. I asked, "How long can you keep that up?" "I try not to do it longer than ten minutes. I'm addicted to it. But longer would be dangerous." "Dangerous? What do you mean?" But I already had an idea of what the answer would be. "I might not come back. I may get lost in my mind so completely that I do not know how to come out of it. That has happened to others and they had to be institutionalized. Nobody knows what they experience in their minds and nobody can reach in to get them out." I remembered my own experience and I knew exactly what Koji was talking about. But only now, over twenty years later, the full impact hit me. I had been incredibly lucky.

So I perceive a meditation as a very precarious balance between letting go and staying in control. Even though I resented being controlled by someone else, I was grateful for Dan's guidance. At least he always knew where I was and could guide me out of it. The others are aware but unconcerned about any such dangers though. Many, like Dale, meditate alone and find it helpful in clearing their minds in order to make decisions or to get a handle on a problem. "You need to practice it. Then you'll get the hang of it," was the standard answer to my concerns. Dan is aware of the dangers of course. But his response was only raised eyebrows, a nod, and a 'can happen' smile.

The other meditation sessions followed the same procedures with the same formula. The number of participants never reached more than nine though. Gradually, I learned to feel more 'safe'. But I still would never attempt anything like this when nobody knows where I am in my mind and can't lead me out. I was constantly baffled at the ease and carefreeness with which others seemed to handle the matter. Hopefully we will one day have the technology to make our mental images visible on a screen so that somebody can reach in. This would also be endlessly helpful for patients who are in a coma.

I had already a good idea what meditation meant to Dale. But since Dan is a different personality I assumed that it must mean something different to him. His answer

was, "Meditation is a spiritual exercise that has an effect on the body. The trick is, you have to concentrate." "What do you mean, 'has an effect on the body'?" "There's a relationship between meditating and body, mind, posture, and thought." He gestured with his hands to indicate inclusiveness. I knew what he meant but as usual, it was not easy to express ideas like these into words. Dan took his time carefully choosing his words. "Meditating helps solving problems. It connects life and spiritual life. It's a kind of withdrawal or sleep. The point is to let go of the brain clutter and of the external world." "That's what the cleansing is about?" "Yes. Meditation is insightful in a lot of ways. It helps to stay focused. Especially children or teenagers that have various problems. You know, like alcohol, social and behavioral problems. It's good for them. It teaches them discipline. It's a kind of discipline that doesn't come across as punishment. If you practice it regularly it becomes part of your life." He smiled, "It's like brushing teeth. It becomes a habit. That's how it is for me. It helps me to deal with everyday life."

So Dan practices meditation not really for a specific problem but more to maintain a spiritual/physical equilibrium and an undistracted perspective on himself and his life. The other kind of ritual I experienced were several palmistry/sensitive readings by Kari. The first

one happened as a result of a misunderstanding as I have described before. Every such reading also followed standard procedures and so I will describe the first and a later one as representative.

Kari and I would sit across from each other in a quiet undisturbed environment, usually her home. Kari would take a moment to prepare herself. She rubbed her palms, closed her eyes and looked down in a moment of concentration. Then she would take my hands and look them over in a brief cursory survey. She usually let go of my left hand and concentrated on the right one. She traced several more pronounced lines with her finger, tested for thickness and firmness on different parts on my palm, and also looked at my wrist. Although this was less obvious, I noticed that she also studied my face. I, completely unfamiliar with the procedure, did my best to sit still and relax. To be on the safe side and feeling a little silly, I also did my best to think of absolutely nothing. I imagined I would try to present a blank brain to her. I can't exactly say why I did that. Perhaps I felt uncomfortable to be under such close scrutiny by someone I didn't know very well. Later I would be more open but I never felt comfortable to have someone extract information from me that I did not offer verbally or voluntarily. I did not presume that Kari could 'read my mind' as we understand the expression in our common language. But I knew that

she got a lot more from me than I would offer under ordinary circumstances.

I got a surprise. Looking at my palm, Kari leaned back slightly and exclaimed, "Oh, you had problems. You had problems." I could feel myself becoming tense but also curious. I held still and waited. Kari continued with a question that surprised me even more, "Did you have a hysterectomy?" "Noooo," I answered carefully. But I knew she had hit an important spot (I'll explain in a moment). I did not want to influence her and so I kept quiet. Kari continued, still gazing at my hand, "You didn't? Hm. There's something. But you're alright now. There will be a minor thing, probably when you're around fifty-four. But they'll know what it is and it will be alright. There's probably a minor surgery coming up. But that's okay. You are healthy now and that will last." Kari kept looking and then sighed, "You'll have money. Oh, you'll be wealthy. You'll have it all." Did I hear resentment? "But that will come later in life. But you have nothing to worry about." Now I was puzzled and amused. I could not imagine anything on me or in me indicating a fate like that. Especially since I'm not even striving for it. Still I said nothing and waited. "You have not have a lasting relationship yet. Or had one that is long past." She looked at me and I nodded. I'm aware that I involuntarily give off the 'unattached' signal that is sometimes perceived as naivete

by others. No surprise this time. Kari continued, "But there will be one!" she exclaimed triumphantly with a little glee in her voice. She kept looking and then said more seriously, "And it will be a good one. A good relationship. But it will be several years until you come together. But it will be good. It will be good. He is already in your circle." Somewhere in the back of my mind I felt something like a hunch, but I could not put my finger on it or a particular person.

Kari looked at me, "Anything else?" "No. How do you do that?" I could not help asking. I have to admit that I was more impressed than I liked to admit at the time. I went over previous conversations with the others. I have never mentioned anything about my health to anyone, as far as I could remember. The one thing I said to Dale once was, "I've been sick too." Had this gotten around to Kari for her to build up on? Her reaction seemed rather strong for a remark like that. In a next desperate grasp my thoughts went to my medical papers that I had to submit to the health institute on campus when I arrived. But this seemed outrageous. Would anybody there blab about it to Kari? The funny thing was, that the problem Kari had mentioned does not show up anywhere in my health records. In my late teens I had been afflicted with a 'toxic anemia'. This is the official statement in my records. A real cause and a real diagnosis have never been established. The main

symptom though was excruciating, paralyzing pain to the point of passing out and heavy sedation with every monthly cycle. After about ten years of the same I knew my insides had taken a tough beating. After doctors had given up on me and announced my demise within two weeks, something I could clearly feel at the time, I went to a naturo healer in a 'nothing to lose' effort. Within three weeks and some homeopathic medicine that involved the smoke of Chinese herbs and Royal Jelly, I was perfectly healthy and have remained so ever since. I also have an enlarged heart that became life threatening in my mid-teens (it increasingly cut off the oxygen supply to my brain with predictable results) but has been corrected at that time. This is also something that I had not mentioned to anybody at that time. I simply had not been in the state long enough to make friends that are close enough to mention it to.

I have to apologize for bothering the reader with my medical history (that's nobody's business) but since Kari brought it up it seemed unavoidable to clarify things. This is also the reason why I am submitting myself here to the scrutiny rather than somebody else. What made me wonder was not so much her insights but more that the magnitude of her reaction seemed to match the magnitude of my problems. I told her my story and then asked, "How do you know that? How can you figure that out by looking at my hand?" I felt exasperated when I remembered that

I would have to present data like these in an academic setting. What had I gotten myself into?

Kari pointed at two strong lines on the inside of my wrist. They both showed a chain link pattern. "See this? People who had major health problems have this." "Hm." What could I say? She obviously pointed out a pattern to me. Maybe palmistry was not just about 'making things up' after all. Maybe it rests on the observation of particular patterns. I decided to be careful. Kari explained, "Every doctor could look at your hand and tell you that you had a heart disease. Or in your eyes. Also when there's something wrong with the liver. Things like that show up on your body." I felt a grin creep across my face and Kari picked up on it. She grinned, "Of course, they would never look at your palm for a diagnosis." 'That would discredit them' stood clear but unspoken between us. I began to relax. There is no mystery involved in a sensitive reading. Of course everything has an explanation. It's up to us to find it rather than ridicule our informants.

Kari's impressions also seemed to come spontaneously. While she was talking about her family, she suddenly stopped. Her face took on a distant expression. Then she turned her head and looked out the window with a far away look. I kept quiet. I was not sure whether she tried to impress me and put on an act or whether this was a real spontaneous reaction. I waited. After perhaps slightly

less than a minute she 'came back'. At least, this was what it looked like to me. Her eyes looked alert again and she turned toward me. "Mountains are important to you. You come from where mountains are," she stated. For a moment I was startled. I tried to test her a little and said, "I'm from northern Germany. There are no mountains." "Yes. But there are mountains associated with you." The way she said it, she had no doubts about it. I felt a little strange here. She was absolutely right. I remembered when as a child I had dragged my parents up every little hill I could find because I love mountains so much. These days it's the mesas of the Southwest desert that are my favorite place. But I had also lived three years in the Rocky Mountains of Montana before I came to Oklahoma. I said, "Yes, mountains are important to me. I have lived in the Rocky Mountains before I came here." Kari nodded seriously, "I didn't know that. But I saw mountains there for a moment." I am not at all sure how easy or difficult it would have been for her to find that out about me before our meeting. So I left it at that without deciding anything about this insight of hers. But in any case it was an interesting reaction that I had the chance to observe. I had never seen anyone before blank out like that.

Near the end of our conversation I got another surprise. Kari was still talking about her life when she suddenly leaned forward and looked closely at me. I thought, 'What

now?' As before her next words were completely unrelated to what she had just been talking about. "You are a writer." Again, she had no doubts about it. I was not sure how to handle this and hesitated, "Well, I'm an anthropologist." Kari made a dismissive gesture with her hands and said impatiently, "Yeah, that too. But you are a writer." Could this be possible? Indeed, writing is a passion of mine and I can easily identify myself as a writer. I could not deny it, so I wanted to know, "How do you know?" Kari took my right hand again and traced a long deep line from between my thumb and index finger across the palm. She pointed at where the line split approximately below my ring finger. "See this split? Writers have that." No doubt in her voice. This time there was no doubt in my mind either that this was a genuine palmist analysis and a correct one at that. Unless of course, Kari had requested one of my best term papers from one of my teachers. How likely is that?

That day I walked home in a muddle. What to believe and not believe. How did this all work? I was too confused to ask further questions about this that day. I did not even know what kind of questions to ask. Kari observed patterns in my hand that untold other palmists before her had passed along among each other. But did that make every palmist reliable? Certainly there are phonies out there. But where to draw the line? And the ultimate question: What had I gotten myself into?!

It took considerable time for me to straighten my thoughts. These things are not really the issue of this project. But they are such an undeniable part of the experiences in the New Age that I cannot omit them. Although Kari's spontaneous reactions are not strictly speaking a ritual, they seem to be part of a sensitive's life and/or performance. I would classify them for now as experience patterns.

I already mentioned the tension that existed between Kari and me for a while. During this time we had another conversation that did not include a reading but the contents were related to her impressions. So I will include them at this point. I was struggling with how to include her experiences into this project. More specifically, how could I write about it without discrediting her or myself. While I refused to dismiss her before I could disprove her I also had no way to prove what she read out of me. At least not what seemed to be standard acceptable prove in the conventional science context, not to mention conventional academia. This dilemma became part of my field experience and a constant issue that needed to be dealt with. I wanted answers.

Kari seemed uncomfortable at first when I asked, "So how does it work?" She answered, "I don't know," and looked away. I didn't want to let her off the hook with this. "It's gestures, expression..." She nodded. "Okay, what

else?" "Voice," she said with a trace of resentment in hers. "Voice. And...?" "Movements, eyes, clothes and things like that." "So you pick up all the little hints and clues about somebody that everybody else could also see but doesn't bother to think about?" Kari relaxed and seemed more forthcoming now. "Yes. Everybody gives off signals, mostly involuntarily. You have to be aware of them and learn to interpret them." "But what about 'predictions'? How does that work?" Kari shrugged and said, "I don't know. I just know." "Yes, but how?" "I don't know," was the very exasperated answer. Then, calmer, she continued, "It's knowing in a different way. There's knowing and there's the Knowing. I can't tell you how that works. It feels like a sense. Knowing as a sense like smell or vision." At least it was something. Her answers were what I had expected. But I needed to hear it from her of course. It supported my idea that people like Kari should be called sensitives.

As it happened, during the same week I watched an episode of the popular X-Files series of which I was not a regular viewer. But on this day the story contained a scene in which an involuntary sensitive was asked the same question, "Yes, but how do you know?" The answer was, "I don't know." What struck me as funny but also a little weird was that the tone and degree of exasperation was an exact match of Kari's. I laughed but at the same time

I felt that my life had become slightly surrealistic. I felt I stood on a very thin edge between our common reality and an increasingly alternative reality that had begun to unfold itself in popular culture. A medium that reaches millions of people and thus spreads its ideas and suggestions with lightning speed. I think that the rank the TV show has achieved in our popular culture at this time is not a coincidence. I have not watched X-Files since.

The second reading I will describe took place about two years later. By this time Kari and I had become more comfortable with each other. We sat across from each other at a small table. Kari prepared herself by rubbing her hands briefly, closing her eyes and concentrating. Then she took both my hands but let go of my left hand after a brief glance. This time her analysis was short and to the point. "You've got too much potassium. You shouldn't eat all those carrots. You're in bad shape right now. Overworked and stressed out. But if you get that right again you'll be okay. If that is past, you'll be okay." She looked thoughtful and looked away from me. I had been particularly careful not to drink so much carrot juice that my skin would acquire an orange tint. But at the time I was trying to improve my vision with various methods. One of them was to drink lots of carrot juice. It felt funny to me. In a hospital they would have to get blood from me and do a lab test and here was Kari taking

one look at me and throwing her analysis at me in a of seconds.

This was the day where I had gotten a strong and slightly shocking expression that I would die. I wondered what she was thinking. But neither of us said anything. Then Kari continued, "You've got nothing to worry about your career. See the big square here?" She outlined a big square in the center of my palm. "That means success or completion." Somehow I had the feeling that Kari was not necessarily talking about anthropology here. Her next words were, "You will publish." She still saw me first as a writer and still seemed to dismiss the anthropology part.

I never learned to interpret the lines in my hand. But I have to admit that after our first reading I had looked at my hands more closely from time to time. Over the course of many months I had noticed subtle changes in the smaller lines. Whatever that meant. But I figured that any physiological (and with this psychological) changes in my body would be reflected on the outside. What Kari had told me here would in mainstream language sound like, 'You look pretty bad right now.' As a sensitive Kari seemed to pick up the details. "But why hands?" "Oh, you can look at other places. Face, feet, back...Hands are just easier because the lines are more pronounced."

I reminded Kari that in one reading she had predicted my return to Germany that summer. I had responded with

a very energetic shaking of my head and, "Nooooo!!" "Yes, I think you will." "Nooooo." She had smiled, "No? Well, let's see what happens then." Obviously I did not go. At least not that summer. But I asked Kari about it now. She looked at my hand, "No. You won't go back. The only situation where you go back is when your mother dies." I thought for a moment that it was strange that she mentioned my mother again. Why her? My father is also still alive. Both were in reasonable health at the time. Or so I thought. A few months later I learned from my brother that they both had gone through an extended and quite serious health crisis that summer. Fortunately they had recovered and were back on track. In addition, I know my mother to be someone who expects her impending demise ever since I can remember.

As to my return to Germany, I interpreted Kari's words as 'you may or may not go', considering how off she had been the first time.

Kari next offered, "You met someone who's important to you." She looked at me and I nodded. She looked back at my hand, "But I think there's another one." I shook my head. "No, not now. Later. I think you haven't met him yet. Have you ever been in Mexico?" "No. I've been in New Mexico." "Ah, that's it then. You'll go back there. I think you'll go back three times. He's somehow associated with Mexico. He's a dark one. An Indian." She looked at me

sharply. I put on a poker face and shrugged. She scrutinized my hand some more and traced the lines right beneath my fingers. "He may be even darker than an American Indian. He may be from India. He's really dark." I listened patiently but most of this did not make much sense. Kari appeared like a hound that had found a trail. "He has never been married. He thinks you're smart. I think he's from Mexico or India." She grinned and added, "A good catch. I would take him." I felt like we were discussing fish on the market. I rolled my eyes, "I don't know anybody from India." Kari answered with a hint of impatience, "You're just not paying any attention." I shook my head, "Look, I don't want someone just because he's a 'good catch'. What about the other one you mentioned in our first reading?" Kari shook her head, "Yes, you know him. He's a good guy. But I don't think..." Somehow I felt resistance now. I refuse to think about people in utilitarian terms. Kari looked at me and gave up, "Well, let's see what will happen."

She was right. Although I had met someone about whom I do care, but I would describe it as a floundering friendship that has never gone beyond occasional public encounters. I was aware and amused that we had sent friends and others into wild speculations and so Kari may have picked up something from the moccasin telegraph. After all, she is very well connected in the Norman community.

On my part, I will not let myself be manipulated by gossip or sacrifice a friendship because of it. I suspected, that Kari had gotten caught up in the guessing game here and as usual, I was amused. But I decided not to pursue the matter further. So far, I have not met anyone special from India or Mexico. But then, I don't pay attention.

What was more important to me at this time was to account for the changes in her 'predictions'. The old doubts about the credibility of a sensitive reading were back. "How do you make sense of the changes?" Kari was serious, "I wished I knew how that all works," she said with a deep sigh. "I spend a lot of time studying this and thinking about it. Things change. Nothing remains the same. There's always movement. Everything is interrelated. So wherever a change occurs, that has an effect on everything else." "So something changed in my context and my life will be affected differently now?" "Yes. There are so many variables involved that all have an influence on us, on how our lives go. We cannot possibly know all those variables. Sensitives know more of them and so we anticipate things that may happen or how things may develop. But everything can change any time." She was quiet and I could see that she seriously struggled with these ideas. She tried to make sense of it and find a way to explain her impressions. At this moment she couldn't have been more removed from the favorite image of a 'psychic' in a gypsy outfit and gazing into a crystal

ball.

Sometimes it did not seem to be so easy for Kari to speak about these things. She was quiet for awhile and looked away, then said, "I don't tell them everything. I don't tell them when their mother will die or something like that." There was my mother again. Somehow an alarm bell went off inside me. Not very loud, but some part of my brain was on alert. I began to feel uneasy but tried not to show it and Kari changed the topic.

She took a deep breath and making a fresh start, she said, "Now I have a question for you. Do I know because things are already happening or do they happen because I know?" Kari seemed concerned. I could understand why when I thought of the latter possibility. I realized the weight of her question. It felt like she had asked, 'What am I setting in motion when I think of something?' But of course, I did not have an answer although I thoroughly enjoyed the brainstorming. It was my turn to sigh. "I don't know. Maybe if you knew my ideas a little better you could use them?" Kari nodded, "Yes, I have an anthropology degree. So I know what you're talking about." I gave her a brief outline of my theory with an emphasize on interrelatedness and continous change. Then I realized I was more or less repeating what Kari had already told me. We were talking in circles now. There are many questions unanswered but at least we were asking questions.

Every now and then during the following months I remembered the strong impression of my death that I had received on this visit. Doctors had predicted my death several times before. The last time twenty-three years ago. So the thought itself did not disturb me. But I am absolutely sure that I physically felt that brief electric jolt in my brain. I cannot deny the message I received. Thinking about it, I felt I was entering a world that I could not make understandable to anybody else.

Several months later I began to notice that a third chain link line began to form on my wrist at a distance beneath the other two. I did not want to jump to conclusions. It was very faint and I had probably just not noticed it before.

Almost exactly one year after this meeting I was taken to the hospital with a sudden unprecedented and severe case of cardiac arrhythmia. I'm still around. The chain link pattern on my wrist is faint. But I am not so sure anymore that my first explanation was not a means of denial. Is there really a relationship between the impression, Kari's analysis, the pattern on my wrist, and the arrhythmia incident? I have no way of knowing at this time. Hopefully, somebody someday will be able to show (prove?) me. Until then I am grateful that I have the chance to include this experience into my work.

One of the characteristics of the New Age seems to

be a preoccupation with symbols. The interpretation and the history of symbols is the subject of the bulk of the literature. It is also often at the center of a conversation, e.g. what do the lines in my palm MEAN? One of the most obvious and oft repeated symbols is the circle. It appears in countless versions and in equally countless contexts. During a meditation we stood in a circle to create an even and closed energy flow. Mary, a CUUPS member, explained to me, "The circle cannot be interrupted while you stand in a meditation or any other ritual. That would disrupt the energy flow and the whole ritual would be ruined." During one of our sessions three young men entered the room after we had begun. I expected them to take up their positions in our circle, start talking, or at least say, "Hi." None of that happened. The three stood quietly and respectfully a few steps from the door and waited patiently until we were finished.

Dan explained, "The circle stands for wholeness. Everything is interrelated and you can express that with the circle." Dan leaned over and looked at me as if to make sure I had understood. 'It is really very simple,' somehow hung in the air. There did not seem to be much more to say about the circle. Responses from others came down to the same interpretation, wholeness and interrelatedness. The integratedness of everything is a major premise of the New Age context. It seems so natural,

matter-of-fact, and obvious, that it seems difficult to describe it in more detail.

Kari shares this interpretation but adds that she also imagines a spiral. "It's really all about evolution. There's always change around us. It's about historic and biological change. That never stops. We still evolve as biological creatures. But we also evolve as social creatures. It's really evolution what we're talking about. It moves us and everything else along. I imagine it as a spiral. We go through circles and some things repeat themselves. But at the same time we change and our environment changes. So I see a spiral." The thought that we are evolving seemed to fascinate her and I could see a genuine interest in her to think about these things.

A more abstract symbol that seems to be important, is energy. It is hard to say what exactly it represents. It was of obvious importance during meditations. According to Dan four people could provide the minimum amount of energy for a successful meditation. The circle has to be closed so the energy can get around. Then Dan created an imaginary column of light that represented the energy we had generated between us. This column of light represented our personal energy and would carry us out into space. This was a mental/spiritual exercise but there was also undoubtedly a physical component involved (the slight floating sensation and the refreshed feeling afterward).

One afternoon I had the chance to ask Dan about it. At that time I had already dived into the physics literature and had a pretty good idea what kind of answers I would get. So I kept my question as vague as possible so not to reveal any assumption I may have consciously or subconsciously. "What about energy?" Dan raised his eyebrows and in his soft voice answered, "Energy?. It's what everthing's made of, what keeps everything moving. We're all made of the same stuff. There are different aspects of it, depending on how you look at it." That was more or less the gist of the literature. Then came the unavoidable, "You should read physics. They have some good ideas there." I nodded, "Yeah, I have. Depending on what kind of technology you use, you can measure a certain aspect of energy." Dan nodded, "Yes, but they..." He sighed. I continued, "They are a little naive about technology, aren't they?" Dan nodded grimly but seemed to be too disgusted to say anything. I tried, "There's more to energy than machines can show us at this time." Dan nodded, "There sure is." "Like chi?" He nodded again, "Yes. That's a better way to think of energy. It permeates everything and not just our bodies." "You think they'll learn how to handle it?" Dan almost exploded, "The haven't even learned yet how to handle all the technology they already have. They think it's gadgets that fixes every problem. What do you think will happen if they get more knowledge, more

technology? They'll misuse it. Just like they misuse science now. It's all for their careers, their status, and the money. It's too early to have all that knowledge. They haven't grown up yet. It's like giving a two year old a machine gun." Obviously, Dan had a pessimistic day. But I found that he had brought some of my own worries out in the open. Although I am more optimistic in terms of our long term development.

The topic energy came up during a talk with Conny. She tried to explain her ideas about the universe to me and drew a little sketch on a piece of cardboard. I looked at what appeared to be a spider's web with a circle in the center. "I don't know if you understand this, but this is the Godhead," Conny pointed at the center, "and this is the universe." She pointed at the web. "It's a network of relationships with the Godhead or whatever you want to call it, at the center. This is really the driving force that makes everything happen." It felt like she was explaining a physicist's idea of the Bing Bang. Conny had integrated a metaphysical aspect by calling the center 'Godhead'. She spoke in a determined voice but it was not easy to find the right words. I felt she wished she could be more precise but I understood anyway. "You are talking pure energy here," was my reaction. She nodded, "Yes. That's it. It's what makes everything happen."

One evening, after a meditation, I got another insight

into New Age people's idea of energy. We sat on the floor in a circle, of course, and were curious about one man who had joined us that day. He seemed to be a stranger to everybody. I was curious because he seemed a little out of place. Not that I would be able to point out any external sign by which to identify a New Age participant. But in this case he looked like someone I would definitely not expect in a place like the Star Cloud. He seemed to be in his early to mid-fifties with thick silver-gray wavy hair. His clothes were simple but not cheap. He appeared like a successful upper middle class business person to me. He had introduced himself as Ben. He seemed to take the meditation serious and then acted relaxed and friendly while we sat around. Somebody asked him, "Where are you from?" "I'm from Louisiana. Baton Rouge. I'm on a business trip and I thought I'd stop by when I saw the store." "You like to meditate?" He nodded, "Yes. It's relaxing. I'm on the road a lot and I get stressed out. With a business there's always something going on, the phone rings, you've got papers to read....So I took up meditation. It really helps. I'm much more relaxed now." "What are you doing?" "I own a construction company." My guess had been right. I was only watching and listening at this point. The next question came from Kari, "Baton Rouge. Who is your teacher?" "The Basketmaker." Kari laughed in surprise, "Really. She was my mentor for ten years. Give the Basketmaker my

greetings when you get home." Ben said he would and then added, "I also rub crystals." Everybody grinned and chuckled in a kind of good natured way. Now it was my turn, "Why do you rub crystals?" He smiled, "It makes me feel good. I don't know. It gives me energy." He seemed to grope for more but nothing came. I saw that Kari nodded in understanding. The others also seemed to know what he meant.

I was aware that 'rubbing crystals' is one of the more eccentric habits of some New Age people, at least in the eyes of the mainstream. But if someone like Ben did it, it acquired a whole different connotation. I wanted to find out and it was time for a little experiment. I got myself a small ¢ 75 cent imitation crystal which was just about all I could afford. But it felt comfortable in my fingers. I sat down on the floor in my living room and began to rub, slowly and rhythmically. I was getting bored. But at the same time I began to see the 'energy' part of the exercise from a different perspective. My fingers began to get warm and I became aware of the muscles moving in my forearm. Warmth is a manifestation of energy and the slow rhythmic movement reminded of a rocking chair or a baby's crib. Soothing, especially when one is stressed out. I believed every word Ben had said.

I had learned perhaps the most important lesson from my New Age teachers (informants) here. It is absolutely essential to approach strange practices and beliefs from

different angles. I believe, one will always find an explanation and there is no such thing as the mysterious 'beyond our grasp'. It is simply a matter of breaking free of current standards and assumptions and take on a new perspective. Rubbing crystals is not so strange to me anymore. Although I have to admit that it is way too boring for me to practice it myself.

Mark had explained to me how energy and healing are related. His words were more metaphysical than biomedical. He put his hands on the spot between my shoulders and neck and said, "There's an energy flowing from me to my client. It's not only the mechanical aspect, it is really the energy that is important. The body has energy paths and the energy has to be in balance. Most people are out of balance and that's why they feel stressed. So a massage can do a lot to rebalance the energy flow. That has also something to do with myself. If I'm in balance then my energy will help the client." I had to suppress a laugh when I thought of what would happen to my neck if he had a bad day. I am not sure if he realized that and I did not want to influence him in this regard. But Mark was talking about the Chinese idea of energy, chi. This is also a more encompassing than the strictly physical one that we like to think of. So healing and energy are related and Mark had found a way to make use of it.

With regard to energy, New Age participants are aware

of its many possible manifestations (nobody has ever seen the real thing). They seem to have no problem moving the term back and forth between the physical, metaphysical, physiological, and psychological realms. I should perhaps say, they don't distinguish between these realms. Everything is interrelated and energy is the symbol of integration.

A major part of New Age consists of literature. Magazines, newsletters, and books are part of a New Age person's life. There is no New Age store without books, new or used. There is no mainstream bookstore anymore without a New Age and related sections. This was really no surprise. But what struck me as funny at first, was that Dan and the others always suggested books to me whenever possible. They covered a wide range of subjects, from the more vague to the scientifically grounded and everything in between. They all seemed to be avid readers and there always seemed to be books around.

Over time books, regardless of their contents, became a symbol in themselves from my point of view. I will describe a few situations in which this will be more obvious. One day I sat around with Dan and a few others in the backroom of the Star Cloud. The conversation revolved around the Little People (I will talk more about this later). I had asked about the phenomenon and the idea was to get a grasp on the concept. Tiffany, a secretary in her upper twenties, pulled out a book from her handbag.

It was about Fairies and Withces and she said, "I just read this one. It's really good. She knows a lot about it." She passed the book around for us to look at. Somebody said, "Yeah, but it's hard to explain, really." Tiffany laughed and looked at Dan, "You can. You have read all the big books." Dan's response was a self-effacing smile. He raised his eyebrows and nodded but remained quiet.

When I asked Dale where to begin with my research, she went over to the shelves and gave me a book. I would find her many times in the store reading. One reason seemed to be to protect herself from the customers. But she actually read what she held in her hands. I also would find Conny reading at her store. In almost every situation that I have experienced with New Age people, books were always present in one way or another.

Of course, books can be seen as symbols for certain ideals. Learning, teaching, and knowledge emerged as the most frequent concepts that were mentioned. When I met Dale again after almost two years, my question was, "What were you doing?" "Learning. I've been learning, Reinhold." She did not mean a particular skill or a trade. Dale used the word in a more encompassing way. Learning as in gaining insights, discovering things and ideas, or gathering experience. Also it seemed to be obvious to Kari that Ben must have had a teacher for his meditation practice when she asked, "Who was your teacher?"

Dan makes a rather sharp distinction between the formal education process of the mainstream and studying. "They don't want to know," he says of the former. "They're only interested in their careers and in academic politics. Everything that's new frightens them because it threatens their position." He was clearly disgusted. Dan is still learning as his continuous reading indicates. But he is also a teacher during the meditation sessions. He also answers questions that other New Age participants might have. As the one who has read all the big books, Dan is clearly an authority in the New Age community based on his role as teacher. But he is also on an ongoing quest for knowledge. His reading covers a wide range of subjects and his familiarity with something like "The Holographic Universe" shows that he is indeed up to date.

Kari integrates a further concept into the studying - teaching context. She thinks of herself as a healer and is a member of the World Federation of Healers. She provides insights about a person's medical/psychological/historical background and offers clues as to how someone might choose to continue her/his life's path. Thus she is a teacher/guide/healer. On the other hand, it is important to her to think about her impressions, to analyse and find possible explanations. What I found fascinating about Kari is, that she does not seem to distinguish between insights that she gains as a sensitive or more conventional thoughts.

Both are different but of equal importance and reliability.

There is one problem that Kari seems to have though.

"Sometimes I can't remember where I got an impression.

Whether it was from the non-rational or the rational part of my brain. When I first saw you I got so much information. I get confused and I forget things."

Studying, teaching, and healing are important concepts that are part of everyday existence. They are not categorized nor are they separated from the overall context. I was often astonished to find sharp analytical and critical minds that seem to take nothing for granted (certainly not current parameters, standard or assumptions). There is an endless curiosity out there and there is always one more thing to discover. Whether knowledge involves fairy lore, ancient Greek philosophy, or the latest in quantum physics does not seem to matter. Studying, teaching, k(K)nowing, and healing are inseparable parts of life in the New Age.

Although I have mentioned at the beginning several groups that can be associated with New Age ideals, the creators of the New Age context do not constitute a cohesive community. The meditation meetings however, provided the opportunity for group interaction. I arrived at the Star Cloud a few minutes before the announced time. Dale was just closing the store. I was curious who, or better, what kind of people I would meet this evening. At this time

I was still looking for some external clue as to how to recognize a New Age person. I wandered into the backroom to find several people hanging around and waiting for Dan who would lead the meditation. If I had expected to find "the" New Age type that evening, I was in for a disappointment. The group could not have been more diverse. I said, "Hi," and the others responded alike. I said nothing more at this first encounter because I did not know what the rules were. The others were just as quiet. As we slowly gathered in a circle and waited for Dan, I looked from one to the other. There was the heavy-set woman in her mid-forties in a simple flowery print dress. She wore no make-up and no personal adornment. To me she did not come across as someone who would have the money to spend in the New Age environment. I could easily place her at the average kitchen table for a chat about the neighbors. At her side was her little daughter of about ten years. She seemed to be used to the environment. For a moment I thought she might get bored or not be able to relate to a meditation. But as it turned out, she was alert and seemed to take the ritual just as serious as the others. Then there was Dale who rarely participated because of her evening job. Next came a young woman in a business suit who appeared to have just come from her office job. Her hair in full waves and with make-up she also did not really fit my idea of a New Age person at that time. Somehow I

had expected someone less conventionally adapted. I have already mentioned the frail looking man in an old thick sweater. Dan was about to begin when three guys in their late teens arrived. In their company was a young woman, also in her late teens. She was tall, slim, and appeared like the average pretty teenage girl. Two of the guys wore leather jackets, jeans and boots and the third one had on an open white sport shirt and sneakers. They quietly took their places among the others so that a girl-boy-girl-boy circle was created.

I was surprised to see a mixed group like this. They did not seem to have anything in common other than an interest in New Age or any of its aspects. In future meetings, the actors and their number changed. But the picture of diversity remained the same.

My impression that I probably should not introduce myself seemed to be right. Nobody else did. Until one day when someone hesitantly asked who the others are. Dan smiled and pointed at me, "She's our Anthropologist. She works with us." Then Dale, in a rare moment of outspokenness, chimed in, "Yes, and this is the Jeweler," and pointing at Josh who was about to leave, "and that is the Astrologer. I wished we could stick to names like that. But they always forget." Everybody laughed but no personal names were mentioned. The only one who consistently referred to others by their occupational names was Dale.

It became obvious during these meetings that Dan was the leader. He was always quiet and never said a word more than absolutely necessary. But as soon as he took his position in the meditation circle, he radiated a presence. It was funny in a way, because although we stood in a circle, Dan seemed to stand at its head. He was usually taller and bulkier than the other participants and that might have contributed to the impression. Most of all though, it was obvious that everybody else looked at him.

After each meditation we stayed a few minutes. This was the time when Dan would answer questions. Most of the time it felt a little awkward, at least to me. Dan seemed to wait for questions and the others waited for him to say something. I held back at first because I wanted to know what they would talk about. From time to time it seemed to me as if they were expecting me to bombard them with questions. This situation repeated itself almost everytime. Mostly, I think, because the actors were different ones in each encounter. After a few moments though, someone would bring up a topic that would be briefly discussed. This was of course much more informative and interesting to me than if I had asked anything. This was also the time when I got a few more surprises plus headaches over how to write about them.

One evening, someone asked a sickly looking young man, "How are your Little People?" "They're fine," came the

answer with a smile. My first reaction was that they were talking about someone. After a mental double take, I realized they really ment Little People, as in fairies, leprechauns, and company. I also realized that I was already sneering at them before they had had a chance to say more. This was not a good sign. I had to think of the lesson I had learned from Pam. So I asked, "Little People? What are you thinking of?" The answer came from Dan. "Every culture has some idea about the Little People," he explained patiently. "They are called fairies and elves and they represent helpers. But you can find them in every culture." I began to sink into the floor. Dumb anthropologist, doesn't know what Little People are. I felt like I had put myself at the bottom of the hierarchy this evening. I reformulated the question, "What are they doing?" This didn't sound much smarter and I resigned myself to the idea that if I wanted to learn more about New Age, making a fool of myself would be part of the game. This time, Peter answered the question himself. "They do a lot of things. They have done a lot in my house lately." This was a little vague and I repeated, "Yeah, but what for example?" "They give me a lot of energy. They spread energy. My house is affected by it." "Sometimes they play tricks," somebody else added. Peter nodded, "I give them some food. They like that." "What do you give them?" "Chocolate and wine. I set that out for them but they don't touch the chocolate. They don't

like that." He could have talked about his roommate. I tried to decide whether everybody was pulling my leg here or whether he really lived with, well, the Little People. I got no conclusive answer that evening. But the notion of energy was interesting. To analyze the Little People would of course require a separate project. But it seems that energy is the key here. Peter derives some satisfaction (energy) from the idea of living with his fairy housemates. From a psychological standpoint this might not be as trivial, nor out of the way as it sounds. To me at least, it makes sense.

On another occasion, the three teenage guys I have mentioned above, had brought something interesting. It was a piece of paper with a color drawing on it. He handed it to Dan who studied it closely. He nodded, smiled, and said, "Yeah." Then he held the drawing up for us to look at. It showed a wizard kind of figure with geometric drawings like circles and triangles around it. It looked interesting but meant absolutely nothing to me. The others did not react to it either, but everybody showed interest. Dan asked, "Where did you get this?" Dennis' answer was, "From a shaman on Hawaii." 'So he was on Hawaii. That's neat,' I thought. Dan nodded and smiled. "What did he say?" he asked further. Dennis said, "Not much. That he's on Hawaii and I should pay attention to this. But I don't know what it means." "Then he will probably come back and

tell you. Pay attention to what he says." Now I was getting confused. Had he been on Hawaii or has the Hawaiian shaman come here (which I could not really imagine)? I was sure I was missing something important. Dan seemed genuinely interested in the drawing. "He showed you this?" he asked. "This is how I saw it in the dream." Aha! This solved the travel problem. Dan and Dennis talked quite matter of factly about a dream association with a shaman from Hawaii. Dan passed the drawing back to Dennis. "Let us know when he gets into contact with you again." Several weeks later when Dennis was with us again, Dan asked if he has had more contact with the shaman. But Dennis shook his head. He was still waiting and still did not really know what that drawing that had appeared in his dream was all about. Things would have been more easy for me if they had just treated it as a normal dream and interpreted it. But the interesting element was, that they interpreted the whole event as a communication from a distant person. The other participants listened with interest but remained quiet. The matter of the drawing was never really resolved.

What is typical in this scenario, is that everybody looked to Dan for answers or guidance. This was certainly his role with regard to the whole New Age scene in Norman. Dan on his part was always an attentive listener. He never lectured, put himself in the center, or tried to influence anybody in his or her views. He gave subtle hints and

suggestions and that was all and this seemed to be exactly what put him in the power position. I got the impression that it was exactly this self effacing quiet aura of 'knowing' what made people trust him. Nobody could be farther from the stereotypical New Age guru than the Jeweler.

Things were not always that mysterious. But one teenage boy was puzzled by the red marks he found on various parts of his body one morning. He looked at Dan. "I'm sure I haven't scratched myself. But they were on my chest, my legs, my arms." Dan smiled and nodded. The boy continued, "They looked like scratch marks. But they were gone the next day." Dan smiled and nodded. "That happens," he said.

Dan's responses seemed a bit thin at times. But they reflect very accurately the atmosphere of these moments. There was never much discussion or interaction between the participants. While one told of an event or asked a question, the others remained quiet. Everybody looked at Dan and listened carefully. But it seemed, there was just not much to say. There was a constant sense of 'There are a lot of things that we can't explain out there.' I had expected a lively discussion of these things. It appeared to me that the others were in the same situation as I in some way. Not knowing enough to ask anything specific or generating a discussion. Occasionally they would laugh, although not very loud. It sounded more mystified, perhaps

even embarrassed. My impression was, that these people were genuinely interested in as yet unexplainable phenomena and certainly did not want to deny them. On the other hand, they lacked an explanatory framework to adequately deal with these things. The one step then, that separates these New Age participants from the mainstream is their unwillingness to ignore or deny events that seem unexplainable to us today.

One day Dale told me that Kari would lead the next meditation. Kari is undoubtedly the other prominent figure of the New Age scene in town. That evening, we were five people including Dan. I wondered how Dan and Kari would act with regard to their positions in the group. It turned out that Dan completely stepped aside for Kari. He stood as part of the circle and this time he blended in. This was easy to do because Kari is a much more powerful personality. She does not 'take over the room' when she enters but you notice that she is there. Her voice is louder than Dan's and her movements more forceful.

Before she began the meditation, she gave a brief insight for us. "You can use different things when you meditate. Crystals, candles... Candles are powerful. They really are. They show you a lot. But everybody has his own way to meditate and you can use whatever helps." She used the same formula for the ritual that Dan used and she also led us on the same trip into space.

Afterwards we sat comfortably on the floor (Dan preferred a chair). Dale had said that Kari would give a presentation on palmetry and I was looking forward to it. Kari did not give a real presentation though. She briefly named the major lines that are visible in our hands and pointed out their positions. The life line running straight up across the palm, the heart line running below our fingers and ending at our index finger. Being new to the subject I gazed into my hand but had a problem following her. Then she took Dan's hand who sat next to her. "You are not too good with details. Right now you are a bit out of balance emotionally." Dan grinned and nodded. He appeared like a school boy with Kari as a teacher. Their roles towards each other were clear. I saw myself as the newcomer and would have expected that the others knew more about palmetry than I. But everybody remained quiet. Also everybody seemed a little disappointed. This had not quite been what Dale had announced. Nevertheless, Kari held center stage and the others paid attention to her. Dan had almost disappeared and that seemed to be fine with him.

Then Kari told us about a fungus that could induce altered states of mind. "They grow it in California and it's big business there. I read about it but they're doing it all wrong. I have some of it in my fridge. You need to process it and that takes about two weeks before you

can use it. They do it in a few days to sell it. But it's wrong. They just do it for the money. I wrote them a letter." We all laughed. Kari presented her tale in a voice that showed exasperation with greedy business people. "They sell it for \$ 4000 per pound." We all nodded and laughed. We all were familiar with that problem. Although Kari was really annoyed, she was also good natured and laughed with us. After the slightly disappointing moments, this was a welcome relief. The atmosphere was pleasant again. But Kari was done with her story and looked around expectantly. The others, including me, looked at Kari, also expectantly. I was still hoping to see some spontaneous interaction between the participants. But nothing happened. It seemed as if everybody was waiting for somebody else to say something. It was the same situation that I had experienced before. Despite our genuine interest in the subject, we all simply lacked the conceptual and linguistic basis that would have made a discussion possible. There was certainly no social problem because we all got along fine and shared a sense of fun and interest in our little circle. At the beginning we all had been looking forward to Kari's presentation. So the interest was certainly there, and it was a serious interest too, I felt. I have never heard anyone talk like a stereotype New Age person, rambling on about some fancy spiritual enlightenment or an exciting 'psychic' experience. All accounts I had heard up until

then (and later) were delivered in quite a natural way, almost matter of factly. Occasionally, a slight embarrassment or puzzlement would be present. I felt, these people share an honest interest in phenomena for which the mainstream does not provide a conceptual or linguistic basis that would make a sensible communication possible. Although I was the ethnographer on the scene I would have expected of myself to be able to ask a lot of questions. After all, the situation was ideal. But I found to my great dismay, that I ran into the same linguistic and conceptual problems as everybody else. In moments like these, there did not seem to be a difference between me and the others. We all stood on the verge of a New Age that required new skills. We all stumbled around as if learning to walk in the new context.

After a moment Kari clasped her hands and said, "Well, if nobody has a question... I guess that's it then." I had to smile. Again, Kari was more forceful than Dan here and had fully taken control. By now we had almost forgotten about Dan who had truly blended into the background. He of all people did not have a question or a comment either. We shuffled out of the Star Cloud into the night and that was the end of the evening.

There are numerous symbols in the New Age context that could be analyzed. But in practice only a few were brought to my attention by the others. Kari had mentioned candles

that could generate powerful visions if one concentrated. For Sandy, a yellow candle represented a focus, peace, and stability in times of stress. She had placed hers on her desk to help her when she studied. Here the candle and the color were both important.

Color symbolism would be a chapter in itself, of course. For Kari they are important. She gave me a list of colors and their meanings that she uses. "What's it for?" I asked innocently. "That's how I see people." "You see them in an aura?" She nodded, "Yes." Simple and matter of fact, but there was no explanation. This is how things are, accept it or leave it, seemed to be the message. I looked at the list: pink - love; turquoise - serenity; red - physical & sexual energy, anger, sore area; orange - change, growth, ineffective behavior, immaturity; gold - strong spiritual direction, honest; yellow - intelligence, intuition, active mind; lime green - devious, liar; green - healing, green thumb, teacher; dark blue/gray - depression; blue - spiritual seeker; purple - spirit; brown - pain; black - disease, evil; white - purity of purpose. I have of course no way to verify these impressions because I have never seen anybody with an aura. However, we all have certain impressions of the people we meet throughout the day. The colors may be an extension of these impressions for those who pay more attention. I do not mean this as a conclusion of course but as the beginning of a thought that might

be worth to be investigated.

As to the symbolic content of colors, I noticed some apparent contradictions, e.g. orange means growth but also ineffective behavior. I pointed my problem out to Conny, "Isn't that a contradiction?" "It depends how you look at it," was her reply. One of those answers that made me want to tear my hair. "What do you mean, depends how you look at it? How do I know which meaning applies?" Conny gave me one of her very grave, 'straight in the face' wide eyed looks and intoned, "That is magic." I sighed. I believed her but how could I possibly communicate what she meant and what I had just begun to grasp somewhere in the back reaches of my mind? I looked at her and wanted to know but was at a loss of what to ask. I tried, "How does magic work?" Conny was dead serious and kept staring at me. I felt like I would fall into her eyes. "I cannot tell you," she said being her blunt straight forward self. "Intuition?" I suggested. She nodded tentatively, "It's all emotion. You have to experience it. Then you will know." I nodded. I felt somehow I knew exactly what she was talking about. I knew exactly what magic meant. But I had no words to talk about it. I had begun to understand New Age, I was sure of that. But the fleeting notions and beginnings of thoughts raced through my mind and I had nothing with which to capture them and to express them to the outside world. Conny simply accepted this limitation. Her attitude

appeared like a marker to me with which she separated herself from the mainstream. 'Know and be content with what you know. There's no need to try to convince anybody else of your knowledge.' Conny had this kind of patience about her. Her words, 'depends how you look at it' began to make sense to me only later. Of course, she was right. We are talking about symbols and contexts here. So it would depend on the situation which meaning would apply. It would also depend on the subjective perceptions of the actors in a particular situation. With that resolved, apparent contradictions did not bother me anymore and even seemed to be unavoidable.

At the beginning of my work, I had been concerned with my role as ethnographer. To what extent was it realistic to assume I could be neutral? Would I be affected by my contact with the New Age? Over time the answers presented themselves. The first came as a surprise to me.

One day I wandered into the Star Cloud to find Dale with three other people standing around something on the counter. As they made room for me to look, I saw a long extremely beautiful sword lying on the glasstop. It was obviously handmade with a shiny blade and a very fancy gold, blue, green and red handle. "Excalibur!!" I exclaimed. The others looked at me and laughed. I was surprised by my own reaction. Especially since I have no particular interest in anything Arthurian and neither has anybody

else ever mentioned anything in this regard. It was just the first thing that popped into my mind. This must be a replication of Excalibur. I took it as a sign that I had somehow mentally adapted to my new environment so that spontaneous reactions like this had become possible. But there was no particular reaction from the others. We all stood around admiring the sword. I would have bought it immediately, but it came at \$ 365.

I noticed something else at that moment. Somehow I felt touched by the sight of the sword. It felt like one of those historic moments that I have described at the beginning. Although Excalibur is a legend, that does not make it less real to us in terms of what it inspires in us. It felt like I was reaching back through time into a mythological era. The others seemed to share the impression. The few words in which we expressed our admiration were spoken in low voices. Then we just stood quietly around the sword for a few minutes. It reminded me of the moment I had had the chance to touch the skeletal hand of the australopithecus Lucy. I had put my own hand on hers and it had felt like I was greeting a long lost ancestor - like I was in a timewarp. All of a sudden I could understand better the interest that New Age people have in mythologies, fairies, and fantasy stories. That was something that had escaped me before. But now there was indeed a sense of continuity and connection, even though

it is not always easy to put it into words.

At the beginning it created some frustration when I realized that I share some of the experiences that New Age people have made. What would that do to my role as observer? I found it did nothing special, other than that I can understand what they are talking about. Since I shared my experiences with them, it helped to win their trust. It also put us on an equal footing and elicited probably more insightful and personal information than it would otherwise have. This is the one interaction scene that I will not describe to prevent shifting the focus too much on myself.

Have I become a member of the New Age? Probably not more than I apparently already was anyway. Even if I had not realized that when I began my research. Were the others affected by my presence? I do think so. The most explicit reaction was probably Kari's when she said, "At least you don't think I'm crazy." She clearly seemed to enjoy our combined efforts to crack some of the more difficult questions that New Age people deal with.

A lot of aspects of the New Age still remain elusive to me and have to await further research. But sometimes I also get little surprises and I have to admit that the project has altered my routines in some small ways more than I expected. The first task to immerse myself into the New Age was to get used to the 'noxious fumes' of

incense sticks. These days I burn them quite frequently, especially while I am writing. The effect is soothing and it creates a warm, down-to-earth atmosphere which I appreciate very much.

Over time I have accumulated a variety of small stones that come in all kinds of amazing colors and shapes. I also have an old rocking chair in which I like to sit when I'm thinking about my work. I had to laugh when I found myself slowly rocking back and forth, gazing at a beautifully colored stone and rubbing its smooth surface - while I was thinking, among other things, of how odd it is that some people rub crystals.

Little changes like these have obviously somehow entered my daily life without my intention. I noticed them only 'after the fact', so to speak. So maybe I have become a little more New Age after all.

As for Conny, Kari, Dale and the others, they seem to have enjoyed moments in which we could share ideas. I found their agreement and appreciation when I explained my 'new paradigm' approach as opposed to a more conventional scientific one. With that they have given anthropology another chance. Hopefully, in the long run, we will be able to close the gap between academia/science and the public and create an environment in which we can communicate as equals. Then we will be able to appreciate our informants as partners in a dialogue through which we create

a reality that has room for both of us and in which we both learn from each other. To assume the mutual roles of both teacher and student would hopefully prevent us from reducing those who trust us to pawns in a political game. I feel, we have taken the first bumbling steps in the right direction.

Chapter VI

Spirituality

One of the main objectives of this project is to let the definition of the interest group emerge during the interaction between the participants and the ethnographer. The definition will then constitute the context for an analysis of the group and their interests. To extract specific characteristics for a definition I paid special attention to ideas, complaints, experiences, or expressions that came up more often than others. The discussion of these characteristics can be seen as the negotiating process between participant and observer. The following chapters will focus on several such characteristics that will serve as cornerstones for a definition of New Age.

Of course, this project is about people, not systems. So there is a degree of individual variation even in experiences and attitudes that are shared by the participants. I have avoided to set up rigid categories in which these variations get lost and people 'fall through the cracks' as is so common in our mainstream social system.

Still, the characteristics that will be discussed in the following chapters stand out clearly enough to count as a foundation for life in the New Age. With this in mind, I wish these characteristics to be understood as primary concerns of a particular group of fellow humans and on a secondary level as temporary analytical units for this project.

Listening to my informants quickly brought to light an experience that seems to be more impressed in their minds than anything else, a particular kind of religious upbringing. It involves a strict, forbidding religious background of various Christian denominations. Especially emphasized are the denial and suppression of any positive emotions and curiosity, the manipulative use of ideals like love and faith in order to control, a constant threat of punishment, a generally hateful attitude towards everything outside the restrictive boundaries of this religious context. The atmosphere of homelife is described as generally dysfunctional with personal experiences of guilt, distrust, isolation, and fear. On one end of the scale is Rose who feels quite comfortable in her faith but is nevertheless dissatisfied and longs for the deeper emotional experience that she had in her out-of-body moment. On the other end of the scale are Jean, Sandy, Dale, and Dan who all describe their religious upbringing in terms of abuse.

On a more analytical level, and more importantly for my purpose here, the complaints of the participants are not directed against the contents of their respective faiths but rather against the manipulation of same for political, economic, and personal power. In other words, the problem is the organized hierarchical church as a power factor that sets the boundaries for peoples' knowledge, experience, and emotional expression. The problem are also individuals, the families of my informants, who accept these boundaries without question. While Dan's focus on the political and economic aspect is perhaps obvious, Dale's complaint is more outstanding to me. "They don't want us to know. They don't want us to think," are probably an appropriate summary for what I have come to call 'religious abuse', or in Kari's terms, religious brainwashing.

I need to point out here that the participants come from Baptist (admittedly Old Southern), Catholic, Presbyterian and other publicly appropriate backgrounds and not from any fringe group of these denominations. In other words, religious abuse and brainwashing are part of acceptable mainstream behavior according to a New Age perspective. From this viewpoint organized religion is associated with power games, intimidation, and the denial of knowledge and personal experience or development. In a wider sense it is associated with a resistance to change. These can perhaps be seen as the primary complaints.

The social and cognitive boundaries that are set by organized religion have come into question. The reality organized religion claims to create is not necessarily the one some of its members experience. There emerges then a gap between prescribed religious attitude and inner personal experience. The latter having been denied to those children who would eventually become New Age participants. I want to remind here, that some members of a community are not voluntary members. This is especially true for children who are quite alert to their surroundings and more aware of their perceptions than they are often given credit for. I think this is a fact that is often overlooked by anthropologists.

I believe the gap between officially approved religious attitude and a certain kind of inner personal experience is a crucial element in the search for a New Age. It is difficult to say what exactly this personal experience consists of or if it can be described at all. It is also difficult to say who or how many people are unaware that the gap exists, do not think about it, or simply deny it. What is clear to me, is that New Age participants are those who are aware of the gap, think about it quite a lot, and do not deny it.

The rest of this chapter will be divided into two sections. First, I will examine the current position of organized religion. Its social role in terms of

legitimization, knowledge, and reality are important points here. Secondly, I will examine the inner experience that I will call 'spirituality' here in the same way. I use the term for convenience sake on the basis of a mutual understanding with my informants. They know what I mean by it. I will discuss the term further at the appropriate point. The goal here is to look at the social and personal conditions that created an awareness of the gap and that resulted in a certain response to this awareness.

Sacredness is often named as the defining feature of religion (Berger 1990, Durkheim 1965, Eliade 1987) and I will adopt this concept here for my analysis. The early authors associated with it the sense of something greater than humans (Durkheim 1965:257) or a transcendental realm that reaches beyond the profane realm that surrounds us in a more immediate way (Eliade 1987:43). With this they try to describe that sense or personal experience that I have called spirituality above. Although they do not always make it clear whether they are talking about an assumption of transcendence or an actual personal experience. The authors wrote before the beginning era of the New Age and so sacredness was ascribed to all religion, institutionalized or personal. If a description of the transcendent is difficult, a scientific analysis seems to be even more so, perhaps even impossible. As a result, religion and sacredness have been interpreted almost

exclusively in terms of their social function as legitimizers of a certain attitude and a particular social reality.

Religion has been interpreted as a system of ideas with which people represent the social environment they are part of (Durkheim 1965:257). The connection of this system to the transcendent lends a hint of absoluteness to it. Peter Berger (1990) says basically the same with a focus on cognition. That which is sacred is primarily a product of human projection. The legitimizing power of religion derives from its sacred aspect and the objectified realm of the transcendent that the human mind creates (p.89). It is interesting to note here, that both the symbolic and the cognitive interpretation ignore the possibility of a genuine spontaneously experienced and/or created transcendent. Anyway, sacredness is a powerful legitimizer because it moves the social order and attitude outside human reach and manipulation, at least in a believer's mind. This would make it very difficult to accept change.

Conventionally and conveniently, the legitimization of a particular context on the basis of sacredness seems to imply that this context is approved by its members. As long as we are dealing with a mono-traditional system, this may not be a problem for neither believer or researcher. But history has a way of changing a context

that can cause confusion for both. In order to hold up its legitimizing power, a religion has to be plausible. Both social environment and religious tradition will only be real to the individual if both are in synch (Berger 1990:47). The introduction of foreign traditions into a formerly mono-traditional context throws social reality and religious tradition out of sync.

In a world wide web context of communication and information multiple cultural traditions, worldviews, and philosophies have become available to the individual. Also multiple personal experiences of individuals from different contexts have become available. This multi-traditional environment is part of the reason why religious traditions lose their plausibility (Berger 1990:49).

Another important point Berger (1990) makes is that in a modern context a secularization of consciousness has taken place and the realm of the transcendent has become meaningless to them, often degraded to the level of superstition (p. 6-8). In this context, sacredness has been shifted to a different level without losing its power. To make the difference more clear, texts on tribal, pre-industrial, etc. religions bear the implication that sacredness is still associated with personal inner experience. In industrial modern contexts sacredness is seen as powerful but politically calculated legitimizer of a certain status quo. The 'gap' couldn't be more obvious.

It is the same that New Age participants experience on an individual level.

In any discussion of religion or spirituality three aspects have to be mentioned. They are reality, knowledge, and history. Clifford Geertz (1966) interprets religion as a system of symbols that represent and reinforce ideas of an extrinsic reality. Distinct from the symbolic system are cultural patterns that serve as models for this reality (pp.4-7). For extrinsic one can plug in transcendent. It is important here that this realm is perceived as reality by the believers. It is the association with the transcendent that makes religious symbols especially powerful and their contents real. Cultural patterns as models of pre-established non-symbolic systems imply that symbolic structures can be manipulated to apply them to the non-symbolic system. Cultural patterns as models for a non-symbolic system imply that the non-symbolic system can be manipulated according to the symbolic structure (p.7). Geertz' models are, as expected, mechanistic. Though pre-established non-symbolic systems seem too deterministic. I would think that the development of a symbolic structure and of a non-symbolic system go hand in hand and influence each other. The line between both may often be blurred which I would take for the reason why it is difficult for the believers to separate them. It is hard to say whether they live in an institutionalized reality or whether their

reality has become institutionalized. I would say that depends on the individual's inner experience or the degree to which this experience matches the social environment. The manipulative aspect plays a role when both realms, the symbolic and the non-symbolic, threaten to drift apart. The greater the danger of separation, the greater the efforts to align both realms. The greater the manipulative efforts the more obvious they are, especially to those who have experienced these efforts in the most negative form at an impressionable age.

One of the key words above is reality. I will distinguish here between institutionalized reality and other realities. In this part I will discuss the former and will take up other realities in the next section. As a first step it is important to remember that there are indeed different realms around us that are experienced (and not just perceived) as true factual realities. This is something that seems to escape our thoughts most of the time.

A particular social order becomes institutionalized when it is encapsulated by a symbolic universe that lends meaning to personal biography as well as to the historic social environment (Berger & Luckmann 1989:96). The symbolic universe is the all encompassing cognitive framework for a perceived reality, that integrates all institutional processes (p.103). This social order is of course the one

into which the individual is enculturated. The implication is that the individual is taught to and expected to perceive this particular reality. The institutional processes, including the powerful sacred symbolic frame of reference as motivation, are thought to ensure exactly this. Once this is accomplished, the individual becomes part of the institutional process herself and so does her part to hold up the reality. At this point it does not seem to be so important anymore, whether the individual actually perceives the reality in question or not. What is important is that she fulfills her function in the prescribed role to keep up the status quo. This seems to be the mainstream idea of "well adapted".

Things become complicated however, if the individual's experiences do not fit into the institutionalized reality. In the case of children the problem is easily solved with intimidation, suppression, denial, and punishment. This is what the people in this project have experienced. To me it is also a fairly good indicator of the status of children in the mainstream environment. The association with religion made this an especially severe experience for someone like Dan for example.

The mainstream environment faces a problem if the individual hangs on to her own reality into adulthood. The problem increases if the one person finds others who share her experiences and a group is formed on the basis

of an alternative reality. The problem increases even more if it cannot be denied anymore that very large groups (e.g. American Indians) share an alternative reality. Alone the possibility of an alternative reality will be perceived as a threat. The institutionalized reality will not feel as safe and reliable anymore and, perhaps more importantly, neither will the institutions.

The response to this situation is described by Berger and Luckmann (1989) as universe maintenance. They discuss various interpretations and actions that are designed to keep the symbolic framework and the reality it represents intact, for example therapeutic means. Everything that does not fit into the institutionally approved symbolic framework is considered deviant. The authors refer primarily to a multicultural environment. But the application to the symbolic universe of New Age is easy because the symbols are drawn from all over the globe.

One aspect of the author's discussion seems important here. Realities outside the institutionalized one cannot be denied in a multicultural global environment. So universe maintenance involves a process of reasoning that establishes the institutionalized reality as superior (p.108). Berger's and Luckmann's presentation of the role of experts on both sides of the fence (which quickly evolves into on all sides of many fences), trying to prove the superiority of their respective realities, clearly reveals a comic aspect about

the negotiating process (p.117). It leads me to think that maybe we are taking ourselves and whichever reality we live in a little too serious.

Religion is thought to integrate various perceived realities with the reality of everyday life. Dreams and the like are ascribed a higher cognitive status and can be aligned with waking life experiences. However, many of these 'perceived' realities lie outside the mainstream frame of reference which is backed up primarily by conventional Newtonian science. This makes it difficult for religion to integrate different realities (Berger 1990:43). As a result, different realities which may formerly have been very much part of mainstream life fall by the wayside as superstition. This is an important step in the separation between religion as hierarchical organization to legitimize a certain economic, political, and social status quo and the actual content of religion in the form of experiences and cognitive processes that refer to the transcendence. The problem is of course magnified in a global environment with a multitude of realities, everyday life and others.

Reality is closely associated with knowledge. Several New Age participants in this project have been forbidden to ask questions about the religious status quo of their childhood environments. Others have been denied the knowledge about and the existence of cognitive processes

and psychological phenomena they have experienced. The same line I drew between organized religion and spirituality can be drawn between legitimized knowledge and personal knowledge. Legitimized knowledge seems to correspond closely to what Anthony Giddens (1986:331) describes as mutual knowledge. Mutual knowledge or common sense refers to a cognitive and behavioral framework that makes it possible for people to interact. New knowledge on the other hand will be evaluated by the actors, accepted or rejected and often becomes a political issue. It may or may not have an impact on the social environment depending on its relation with common social sense and practice (pp.341-43). In this project new knowledge includes the experience and traditions of different peoples (historically and geographically) as well as intuitive experiences of the individual. Where new knowledge would bring about change it will have to undergo a legitimization process.

Another way of thinking about this framework is represented in the concept of habitus (Bourdieu 1990). Here a particular practice or set of behavior patterns constitutes an 'objective' framework that 'makes sense' and that works for the participants. The human actors in this framework are themselves products of it and have therefore learned to anticipate events and actions within it (pp.55-56). The key word here is "objective" as in outside our reach and therefore not changeable. With regard

to the mainstream religious framework it certainly seems that it appears objective and therefore absolute or sacred to the believer. This makes any integration of new knowledge immensely difficult. It would not only result in an adjustment of any religious convictions but also reset social practice and create a different habitus.

It is important to note here that there was no criticism of mainstream Christian belief in terms of its basic contents. The criticism is directed against the interpretations of the belief for political and economic purposes and it is directed against the social practice (habitus) that resulted from these interpretations. With regard to the legitimization process of new knowledge, this is a crucial point. New Age spirituality draws on religious believes and spiritual experiences of other people from around the globe and from all historical periods. The rejection and denial of this religious/spiritual knowledge has powerful political implications.

Legitimization of an individual's spiritual experience is even more difficult, especially if the belief system is nonChristian or non-conform Christian. An internal experience is hard to objectify and is therefore easily debunked.

It is the sanctification or objectification of a social practice of a particular brand of religion that is organized to uphold this same sanctity (objectivity) of a political,

economical, and psychological status quo. In other words, 'They don't want us to know.'

The insistence on the correctness of an exclusive cognitive framework and social practice will appear deceitful to those who are aware of different cognitive frameworks and social practices. Those who have been coerced into organized religion against all their intuitive senses will perceive organized religion as a lie. Roy Rappaport (1979) observes that where religious practice becomes a lie (the lie of the coercer) the sanctity of it will be desecrated (p.223). This of course robs any religion of its spiritual content and turns it into a tool. Rappaport argues that the social/religious practice of coercion is maladaptive because it is based on oppression (pk.241). When religious practice becomes a social habit that the actors perform out of fear of sanctions or because they have been coerced into it (brainwashed) it is a lie. In the case of Dan, Kari, Dale, and others it certainly backfired on the coerced in that it encouraged these people to be more critical of their environment, more aware of their own motives for actions, and to look for new ways, seek new knowledge, and to move on into a New Age.

I have no doubt that the religious upbringing described above is the same that generations of other children have experienced throughout the history of our social environment. There have always been dissenters and religious

fringe groups. But overall the mainstream religious attitude has remained unchanged for most of our history.

Traditionally the framework of mainstream Christian religion with all its ethical implications is (was?) simultaneously the framework of a particular economic system, namely the western version of capitalism (Weber 1969). Those with different religious traditions are (were) perceived as economically and religiously inferior. I see this mainly as an attitude problem that is still very persistently among us.

But the development of a global environment has made others' traditions, practices, and knowledge accessible and comparable to our own. Often organized religion does not fare well in the comparison because it is too much a part of the overall social system and too supportive of it. Somewhere along the line organized religion has become symbolic of the polished veneer of a social system and has lost its connection to the (often muddled but real) inner workings and convictions of human beings.

Robert N. Bellah (1992) points out the missing connection when he describes how public policy is directed against religions that do not fit into the historical/traditional framework of dominant and capitalist America. He also notices that purely rational, technical and administrative solutions often miss the real problem and so leave the mainframe untouched and protected. A

reaction to this attitude and behavior pattern is predictably a decline of membership in established religious organizations and an increase in new and more experimental forms of religion (pp.151-155). In my view, the overemphasize of rationality in problem solving totally ignores the 'human' component which is embodied in the concept of spirituality. No wonder people feel disconnected from organized established religions.

The knowledge and experience of other peoples cannot be denied or dismissed anymore in an environment where information and instant access to it have become key elements of everyday life. Religious traditions have become part of the market place. A side effect is the commercialisation of religion and spirituality with both positive and negative results. Another side effect is fundamentalism. Although Oklahoma is a conservative state (compared to California e.g.) the dependence on Christian scripture often seems extreme. I believe that this is also, at least in part, a reaction against change and anything new or from the outside. It is not a coincidence that the New Age and a growing concern about fundamentalism develop side by side.

A main gap between mainstream religion and New Age spirituality is symbolic. From a New Age perspective western organized religion symbolizes primarily a domineering capitalist technocratic social system. Religion is the

untouchable objective framework that gives meaning to this particular social system. In the next section I will discuss what New Age spirituality is about and how New Age participants try to reconnect their social lives to their external and internal experiences.

In the New Age context the transcendent or sacred has its original meaning as I have discussed it earlier in this chapter. From a mainstream perspective it is often difficult to explain what exactly is associated with the transcendent. Most New Age participants I have met were not born into the New Age but had grown up in the mainstream. So there is no fixed definition from them either and perhaps this is exactly a reflection of what it is all about.

New Age participants seem to deal primarily with two major realms. These are the ideas of the transcendence in other non-western cultural traditions and the internal experience of or emotional (perhaps physiological) connection with it. It seems significant to me that the participants feel it necessary to reach out to others to learn how to experience the transcendent that is sacred or how to develop a sense for it. I would call this sense of experiencing the transcendent 'spirituality'. Obviously, the mainstream does not teach this.

In the New Age sense spirituality can perhaps best be described in the way(s) it is thought of. 'To think

of something' comes very close to 'to imagine something' and this is a fundamental difference in emphasize to the mainstream participants' insistence on fixed definitions (without which they seem to be helpless). The former implies flexibility and the openness to integrate new knowledge (if useful), change and adaptation (to altered social or cognitive contexts). The latter implies inflexibility, calculated manipulation, and stagnation. It seems funny to me that mainstream anthropologists rely on the latter while still managing to make 'adaptation' a key concept in their studies.

So how is the transcendent imagined in the New Age context? The closest descriptions were perhaps presented by Kari, Conny, and Josh. Kari imagines patterns of spirals and circles that move, change, and adapt to an eternal evolution on a cosmic scale. The notion that we are all part of it, that we change the pattern and are also changed by it is awesome. Similarly Conny's idea that a "Godhead" ("or whatever you want to call it") is at the center of something that is weblike, expanding, forever changing and weaving, with us somewhere moving along, is quite an awesome thing to imagine. What both are thinking of are evolution in the form of continuous change and energy as the primordial mover, the stuff that everything (including us) is made of. An almost overwhelming idea. How small one can feel in the face of it and yet how big when one

thinks to be part of a cosmic event like this. Awesome.
I believe I have made my point clear here.

Down on Earth on the social level Josh and Dale hold the spiritual/cosmic web together with their idea that the common thread is love, compassion, and empathy. These may be seen as expressions of spirituality in the form of attitudes and behavior patterns. It is significant to note that all three concepts are thought of in purely rational (what do they get out of it?) terms in the mainstream social environment (this includes anthropologists).

It seems New Age people have to start from scratch in finding a connection to the transcendent, figuring out what is sacred and what is not, developing a sense of spirituality, and perhaps most of all, learning how to rely on it in one's everyday actions. I will discuss this more in the chapter on Self. For now the task is to find a spiritual guideline that is more reliable than that of organized religion. Of course, knowledge is essential for this task, especially the knowledge and experience of peoples that are traditionally more spiritual, e.g. Native Americans. So begins a search for and experimentation with other peoples' religion/spiritual concepts and symbols. Historically, the time is ideal because this knowledge is available.

To find an inner basis for thoughts and actions that

cannot be adulterated by justifications and rationalizations for whatever ulterior motives may come to mind, is exciting but not always easy.

In several case studies Wade Clark Roof (1993) found two major steps that are involved. The first step is letting go of things that are beyond one's personal powers to control (e.g. abuse, guilt etc.) and the second step is adjusting heart and mind to the flow of the larger powers of the universe (p.121). Indeed, trying to get over their abusive pasts is one of the major concerns for many New Age participants. Then to adapt one's thoughts, actions, and attitude to something greater like "powers of the universe" or "energy" or the "transcendent". To develop a reliable basis of spirituality that is personal, universal, and cosmic is a goal that is often hard to grasp for practical minded mainstreamers. How would I know that my inner convictions are reliable, that I can trust my own emotions and intuitions? We have to remember, that in a Newtonian philosophical framework we have been taught that emotions are the least reliable faculties we have and intuition does not exist. Conny's straightforward answer was, "If it makes me feel good it's reliable." Conny emphasized that she most certainly did not mean good in utilitarian terms but in a raw gut-feeling kind of way. With this she is on the same course as the early Greek philosophers who were grappling with the same problems

of mind over matter, ethical thought versus utilitarian thought, reason versus senses and so forth. At the core of Plato's perception is "goodness" as inherent in humankind and as the sustaining and perpetuating principle of the universe (Copleston 1993:216-222). A convincing little argument has been presented by Aristippus (ca. 400 B.C.). He thought that our senses alone can give us certain knowledge and it follows that subjective impressions form the basis for practical conduct. Assuming that people are generally not masochistic, the end of conduct then are pleasurable sensations. From that it follows that ethical end is pleasure and positive (Copleston 1993:212). I interpret this in the way that he meant pleasure in a more encompassing way than just instant gratification, which may be included.

It is interesting to see that concepts like goodness, energy, love, empathy, and compassion all come with strong associations to something bigger, universal and cosmic. The idea that each individual is greater than the sum of her parts and that there is some guiding principle out there that we would do good to adjust to. Listening to and reading New Age one easily gets the impression that the participants prefer to place themselves in a metaphysical realm. However, Dan's reading list includes Physics, Kari is concerned with evolution, Conny's imagination includes space in the physical sense (as well

as metaphorical), and Josh is focused on social practice which lies firmly in the material/physical realm. They all easily and freely shuffle the primary concepts from one realm to the other. To me it often looked like integration in action in its purest form, without bothering with boundaries or categories.

For a mainstream person it is not always easy to find out in which realm they actually are at any one time. More often than not, many New Agers tend to withdraw into the metaphysical world when the physical gets too complicated or frustrating. This seems to create the stereotype of the oblivious New Age person. But what I see overall, is an effort to integrate both realms into an integrated sphere in which rational reason as well as intuitive thought are integrated on the basis of a universally applicable principle (e.g. goodness). Perhaps it is not necessary or practical to draw a sharp dividing line between both realms. The main idea is to have a personal (subjective) inner safeguard against the abuse and misuse of basically positive concepts like trust and love. The main idea is to have a spiritual attitude, to be connected to the transcendent both in the physical and metaphysical sense. The concepts derive their validity from their accessibility in the intuitive realm or gut-level feeling.

In the first section I have shown that organized religion gives meaning to certain images in order to

legitimize a particular status quo. The result is that many participants feel cut off from the transcendent due to interference from the church hierarchy. Above I have shown how the connection is reestablished. The next step then is to place spirituality into a social and historical context.

Our social environment is marked by an interesting conversion of two developments, an increasing accessibility of other peoples' spiritual traditions and an increasing dissatisfaction with established hierarchical religion. This is of course not a coincidence. The result is a spiritual crisis that leads to a search for a new spirituality. According to Marilyn Ferguson (1980) much of the spiritual quest is really the search for meaning. The cultural awakening brought about by the information age has made it necessary to renegotiate relationships with regard to oneself, others, and the larger cosmic realm. This shift is mostly an individual phenomenon as people turn inside themselves to disclose the meanings that cannot be imposed upon them from the outside anymore (pp.363-369).

The search for spiritual meanings, the integration of new knowledge, and the renegotiation of one's relationships are all very experimental for the individual. This is the reason why New Age beliefs often seem unstable or fleeting like a fad. On the other hand it is this continuous process of negotiating that is the adaptive

strategy to change personal and social contexts. For the serious New Age participant there is nothing unstable or fadlike, there is only change and adaptation. Both are necessary and useful methods in a developing global environment in which external and internal boundaries become fluent and flexible.

The various ways by which individuals try to establish the connection to the transcendent are sometimes consciously sought out and sometimes spontaneously experienced. Toby participates as a CUUPS member but says she is on an active search for some guideline. Rose on the other hand, describes her out-of-body experience as the awesome experience she would have expected to have in her church.

The discovery that there exist other realities than the mainstream is quite a cognitive leap. Here I will discuss the implications for the social environment. The integration of new knowledge from external and internal sources results in a reconstruction of a social reality. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967) discuss the plausibility structure which sets the boundaries for a particular social reality. Doubts about this structure are met with social sanctions, e.g. ridicule, as a means of reality maintenance (p.156). If the new knowledge to be integrated becomes so vast and diverse, mainstream reality faces a crisis. I believe this is exactly the point our social development has reached right now. In terms of

external knowledge we are past the point where other peoples' realities can be denied. But we are not yet at the point where mainstream reality can be seen as one next to many without feeling the need to establish superiority. Hence ideas about underdeveloped countries from which New Age spiritual ideas often are derived. Any official acceptance of these ideas would result in significant political power shifts that would threaten mainstream religion which is organized to maintain western industrial superiority. This is one of the concerns Josh and Dan have a problem with. The mainstream religious boundaries legitimize certain power relationships. The disclosure of different realities and their meanings (whatever these may be) legitimize change in the New Age context.

A special case is the internal knowledge that begins to threaten the current 'appropriate' reality. Mystical knowledge reveals a reality that is difficult, perhaps impossible, to describe. I have mentioned situations in which our mainstream language simply is not equipped to handle mystical intuitive concepts. Of course, this is why New Age people often sound funny to mainstream people. This is also exactly the spot that much of the ridicule (as social sanction) is aimed at and it seems to be New Age's most vulnerable point. Of course, another form of social sanction from the mainstream religious corner is intimidation. This can come in the form of unasked for

pamphlets with threats of hellfire and damnation that Conny has received. Of course, they were missing the target. It is exactly this negative punishing concept that New Age people reject as manipulative device of mainstream churches. Nevertheless, Conny looked serious enough when she told me about it and later would not mention it again. I take that as a sign that the power shift is far from complete.

Perhaps the biggest threat to the mainstream religious plausibility structure is the realization of New Age participants that people have a choice. This includes choice of social structure, choice of religious/spiritual traditions, and choice of symbols. The task then is to create a new global historical reality. Active creation is seen here as a historical process (Fox 1983:251-252). Implied here is the assumption that every individual has a choice and takes an active role in this historical process.

The task in the New Age then is to reconstruct or renegotiate a reality that integrates traditions, knowledge, and experiences on a global scale and a historical dimension that reaches back into mythological times. It seems like an enormous task, far too complex to ever get a grip on. And yet, it is exactly what seems to be happening. Historically it seems perfectly plausible in Berger's and Luckmann's sense that an increasing globalization would

result in the construction of one unified global context. A key concern in this process is the continuity of multiple cultural and spiritual traditions. Change is often perceived as a threat to this continuity, especially a massive apparently non-directional change. Continuity refers to narrow cultural and spiritual (religious) boundaries. But as history moves along the continuity of one tradition is preserved in change itself (Sahlins 1993:415). Change seems to be inherent in history. Unfortunately, for many traditions this meant indeed the end of their traditions although they continue as a people. It seems to me that the willingness of New Age participants to experiment with a practically unlimited range of traditions will provide a context that is wide enough to allow multiple traditions to continue in it. They will be reinterpreted and adapted to current situations, but they will not receive inferior status, assimilated into a more powerful structure, or otherwise dominated.

However, the adaptation of foreign spiritual traditions to a new context is often a sore spot for participants on both sides of the argument. An example would be the many different ideas about "Zen", the meaning of the word and the practice of the concept. As a result of debates like this and also as part of the perpetual quest for meaning that comes with New Age practice, an interesting phenomenon has developed. The search for origins or the

"real" thing. The "Lost Teachings of Jesus" would be an example. Dale referred to it when she mentioned that people would not have a problem with Christianity if it would be taught in its original form. As the principle of its original form Dale named love which brings us around to the beginning, the effort to find the one original unifying concept, spirituality.

Kari and others think about change in terms of evolution, expansion, and energy. It is a familiar thought in New Age circles to think of our species as being on the brink of our next big evolutionary stage. Similarly, cultural evolution according to Marshall Sahlins and Elman Service (1966:38) is a passage from lesser to greater energy transformation. The authors certainly did not think of this process in a New Age sense but any New Age participant would be able to translate the idea into a universal, cosmic context. To me it sounds very much what Conny tried to convey with her drawing and Kari with her notions of circle and spirals of evolution and constant change.

I have mentioned before the cognitive leap that one has to take to grasp what energy, spirituality, or creativity are really all about. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967) describe primary and secondary socialization processes by which the individual learns the boundaries of her context of action (pp. 129-147). It seems to me that the global and cosmic context of New Age requires

a third step. While the current boundaries still exist and may well be observed, it becomes increasingly useful to grasp a reality of cosmic proportions. The idea of whole-knowing Unitary Operational Thought or Systems Thinking expresses exactly this. It refers to one step beyond cognitive thought. It is the realization or intuitive understanding that there are simultaneous causes that work together bringing about change (Ferguson 1980:371). The idea that there is one unifying principle at work, whether it be energy, love, evolution etc. can be summed up in the concept of spirituality.

The notion that there is an underlying principle that integrates people, social environments and the universe is of course the same as Gregory Bateson's pattern that connects (1979). In the context of this chapter then, spirituality is the pattern that connects. At the same time the quest becomes habitus in Pierre Bourdieu's sense (1990). He may not agree with this since the well regulated boundaries in which habitus is perpetuated do not exist in the New Age context. Nevertheless, spirituality is not only a subjective experience but here it is also the objective framework in which the quest seems the logical practice.

At some point Dale voiced concern that spirituality might become organized. Also Josh fears that the concept of spirituality might be abused as a political agenda or

other ulterior motives. All this happens from time to time. In my experience however, serious New Age participants are quick to point out the phonies. Kari and Conny were the ones who warned me with "There are a lot of charlatans out there who want money." People like Dan, who are the columns in small communities, seem far too critical and analytical to fall into commercial traps and power games. On the other hand Kari's example of her overinterpretive client ("Oh Kari! That is wonderful!!") would be an example of a customers of New Age. There is probably no particular group that fits the description. The teenagers browsing through New AGE books in the stores are another example. This consumer sphere seems to be situated between the core of New Age and the mainstream. This is the sphere where I see New Age as fad and fashion.

Spirituality seems to be the overall concept that integrates attitudes and behaviors like compassion, personal integrity etc. This is part of the framework of the New Age context. The other part would involve materialistic concerns much like the mainstream. After all, Kari does not mind having an acute business sense. The concern is to integrate both parts without compromising the contents of spirituality.

From an analytical standpoint spirituality and its contents must not be defined within too narrow inflexible borders. The danger in objectification lies in a deliberate

misinterpretation for materialistic gains or other ulterior motives. This is exactly what New Age participants try to avoid. There has to be a trust then that behaviors and attitudes like compassion will be understood by all members of our species across temporal and spatial boundaries. They may not be everybody's ideal, but they will be recognized. Any objectification of these concepts would make them vulnerable to a reductionist interpretation unless one could trust the honesty and intuitive grasp of all members of a social environment. At this time the idea seems to be confined to the New Age context.

Chapter VII

The Self

In this chapter I will explore what could best be described as a New Age identity. It refers to a particular attitude, behavior pattern, and style of problem solving that distinguishes New Age people from others.

At first sight there is nothing that distinguishes a New Age participant from a mainstream person. Clothing and adornments certainly cross boundaries both ways.

Membership in various New Age groups is often temporary and sometimes non-New Agers join a certain group for awhile out of curiosity or a sense of being in style. Also the problems that New Age people have experienced can certainly be found among mainstream people, e.g. alcoholism, various kinds of abuse, health crises etc. So for a long time it was difficult to find a common attitude or behavior pattern among New Age participants. Even they could not easily tell me what the difference between them and others really is, although they are aware that a difference does indeed exist.

As in the previous chapter, there are different degrees of difference. People like Conny, Kari, or Josh are fully aware of an approaching New Age and see themselves as full participants in the event. Others, like Pam, Shelley, or Rose, participate more in the mainstream and have only a very loose connection to the New Age environment and this mostly with regard to specific interests or events in their lives.

I have to emphasize here that difference is not the same as separate. On various levels all New Age people also participate in the mainstream. None has fully rejected all aspects of mainstream life. For example, Josh pursues a degree in the mainstream education system, Mark enjoys his creature comforts that are so much part of the mainstream, and Kari is happy that her children are well integrated into the mainstream. It is only certain patterns that New Age people try to avoid, common problems that they try to handle differently, and an attitude that they do not wish to have.

In my encounters with them I made a remarkable discovery that sets New Age participants apart from most mainstream people I have met. Their critique was never directed against a particular person but more against patterns and attitudes. Perhaps most remarkably, none has ever been cynical, superior, or self-righteous. Though there was certainly anger, frustration and occasionally despair.

More often than not, their concerns about mainstream people was often voiced with regret, sometimes resignation, and in Kari's case a gentle humorous exasperation. On the other hand, I have met cynicism and arrogance aplenty among mainstream participants, especially when the topic New Age came up. To me this is an important distinguishing feature.

The identity of a person is made up of many different aspects. What was most notable here is that New Age participants did not identify themselves immediately as such. The extreme example here is Ray who believes that things New Age are really not new at all. I will discuss various critiques later on. Rose, as the most mainstream adapted, would not identify herself with New Age other than with regard to her interpretation of her out-of-body experience. With Sandy it is an on and off thing. On the other hand Dan, Dale, or Conny are full time participants. So participation is a matter of degree and identification as New Age person has a lot to do with particular realms of experience, e.g. religion.

Nevertheless, there are concerns that run like a thread through the New Age community. In various ways these have been pointed out to me as the characteristics that distinguish a New Age person from a mainstream person. This often took the form of complaints of what is missing in the mainstream. The most vocal example here would be

Josh. Most notably there is a concern with personal integrity as opposed to official ideas of appropriateness. It is closely followed by bare honesty and free expression of compassion and care, and holistic thinking. All of these are in various stages of development in different individuals. These are the ideals by which a New Age person would measure her success and value as a person.

From my own viewpoint I have to admit that I have met more curiosity, critical and analytical thinking, and an eagerness to learn among New Age people than among any other group I have encountered. The roles of teacher and student are enacted, or I might say inhabited, simultaneously by the individual. Regardless of occupation or social rank, every individual is to some extent a teacher and a student in her interaction with others.

In the mainstream environment, self is mostly a product of a long socialization process along preset expectations. This means that the identity of an individual is to a large extent determined and shaped by others, e.g. institutions and authority figures. Those in power set the paradigms within which a person may or may not have a chance to develop. The goals seem to be given, a high degree of conformity to these paradigms, material wealth, a higher notch on the totem pole. These are often the markers by which a person is identified and these are the price tags that indicate a person's value as a member of the community.

The goals seem to be a given and so almost non-negotiable. Why anybody would want less material wealth e.g. seems to be beyond comprehension. The boundaries for development within social class, gender role, and norms regarding attitudes and behaviors are mostly set by institutions (e.g. family, church, medical establishment). In other words, negotiation for one's self is fairly one-sided. This is especially true for children as several of today's New Agers have experienced. The role of children as personalities or separate individuals has been mostly neglected by anthropology which is pretty much a reflection of how they rank in the mainstream.

Socialization in the mainstream moves along certain preformulated lines or within set traditions, namely from the center to the periphery. Institutions can be seen as such centers that formulate the beliefs, values, and symbols by which members of the periphery organize their lives and their identities. The idea is to perpetuate a certain social structure which holds these institutions in place (Shils 1982:93). Of course this takes a certain kind of people. The individual has to have the correct self to do her part which depends on her relations with these institutions (Berger & Luckmann 1989:100). This makes conformity to certain social norms extremely important. Jon Elster (1994) points out that people often abide by social norms to avoid disapproval. Fear of social sanctions

makes the bowing to norms appear rational. Important in this argument, is that once certain norms have been internalized they stand on their own (p.119). The latter means internalized norms do not need to be explained. They need only to be perpetuated and where doubts arise reinforced or occasionally rationalized. The sister of Kari, "who was perfect as a child", would be an example of the proper and well adapted individual. She also seems to have undergone extensive socialization procedures which Kari calls "brainwashing". From a New Age perspective it is a mystery why it is so important to be so overly adapted to other people's standards. Josh for example emphasizes that he does not seek anybody's approval except of those who he respects as persons. The puzzlement with mainstream behaviors here seems to be similar to that of Jon Elster (!994) who ascribes norms to psychological quirks that are still a mystery to us (p.123).

Following prescribed behavior patterns is not a bad idea per se. But to do so in order to avoid sanctions, to seek the approval of institutions, or to achieve any of the goals I have mentioned above, does certainly not encourage personal integrity. It also puts human relationships at risk. A concern here is that individuals are being taught to place more trust in institutions than in the persons who represent them. This is another factor that makes personal integrity among other human "soft"

traits seem unimportant or unnecessary.

On a larger scale of course, institution versus human being makes a rather lopsided power relationship. The individual in the mainstream then, is more a recipient and a participant only in the sense that she perpetuates the habitus in Bourdieu's sense (1990). According to Anthony Giddens (1986) a social structure is not created but recreated and perpetuated through praxis by human actors (p.171). Of course this would mean recreating the same kind of human actor or the same type of self also. This makes anybody who displays a different self suspect. From the mainstream viewpoint it is not only strange that New Age selves exist. It may seem even more strange that anybody would want to develop a different self. Of course, for a New Age self a mainstream self looks just as bewildering. I have to think here of Kari's patient humorous exasperation with the "othe". Strangeness appears in the view from both sides of the fence.

Edward T. Hall (1989) claims that social institutions are extensions of ourselves. The tools humans use can tell a lot of who they are. In some situations these tools, science e.g., allow for quick problem solving and rapid adaptation. However, the underlying structure will remain the same. Often, the extension will be confused with the person. But extensions also provide the opportunity to scrutinize them for clues about ourselves (p.25-40). From

a New Age perspective mainstream people are caught in what Hall calls extension transference trap (p.28) where extensions are being taken for the thought processes (intuitions, conscience etc.) that underlie them. From a mainstream perspective New Age people are preoccupied with the scrutinizing which is either narcissism or self-reflection, depending on which side of the fence the reader wishes to be. Extensions can be seen as objectifications of our innermost realms and social norms are one result (hence Elster's resignation). Indeed much of the stories I heard consisted of what I might call "this is how I came to be this way", attempts at self-analysis from mostly a psychological angle. From some, like Jean and Sandy, it didn't stop there but went on to, "now what can I do about it?"

Hall (1989) complains that social norms can become astonishingly rigid over time (p.28) or as Jon Elster puts it, 'it isn't done' (1994:116). As long as the social environment remains sufficiently bounded a certain rigidity in social patterns probably lends orientation and a sense of security to the individual (even if some rationalization or justification may become necessary here and there). This gives mainstream participants the impression that 'the system works'. This makes change very difficult of course because the motivation might just not be there. People seem complacent with who they think they should

be or with the expected selves. This all changes when the social boundaries begin to break down due to external (globalization) and internal (new knowledge) influences. The self has to be adjusted or redefined. The realization that other people work with extensions that may express the opposite of what oneself has internalized becomes a humongous psychological hurdle.

This is also the point where all the rationalizations of one's norms and extensions do not seem plausible anymore. Along with this realization comes the notion that perpetuating old patterns is not necessarily the same as "making the system work". The mainstream self acquires a question mark and the result is confusion, angry resistance, or defensive tactics like ridicule. The New Age self is being negotiated amidst a wealth of insights, new knowledge, a new found sense of liberation, all of which may have positive or negative consequences for the individual. While I have not met an extreme negative example, I am thinking of Rose at this point. She is definitely more mainstream than New Age and yet she is dissatisfied. One might say she is missing exactly those extensions in her environment that allow her to express her cognitive and emotional impressions (out-of-body-experience). It is also telling for our social environment that she misses the institutions that would allow her to preserve and express her personal integrity

without making her look odd (feminist group).

Problematic here would be that it is exactly institutions that New Age people seem to have a problem with. Dale does not want a formal leader for a meditation group which means of course that she got caught in the extension transference trap. Josh on the other hand, seems to be out of this trap. He acknowledges the risk of abuse but also realizes the necessity for institutions, e.g. the army. His demand is for plain, home-cooked, down to earth honesty and personal integrity. I believe the achievement of this goal (this is for the cynics) would at least partly close the gap between the extension and the process. 'If only people were better' is at the heart of Daniel Quinn's "My Ishmael" (1997). An extensive analysis of the primary institutions (e.g. education system) reveals that at the bottom of serious social problems really lie human problems of fear, insecurity, etc. The danger here is of course to overemphasize. But it is quite interesting to notice that these are exactly the attributes that are considered "beside the point" in any mainstream economic or political debate. The "human factor" is simply not important.

The question at this point would be, why not. The reason in part, is the philosophical context which determines which ideals should be internalized. I will address only a few points in this regard because they are often at the

New Age versus mainstream debate in the literature. One name that comes up here is Descartes. His ideas that thinking or mind is separate from the body had (and has) far reaching consequences on people's perception of themselves and their surroundings. The main point against this notion is integration. All kinds of sensory impressions are being processed and integrated by the biological organism brain to create an integrated image. This also includes thought processes about ourselves or self-reflections that create self-images. There is then an argument for a neural self (Damasio 1994). This reaches far and I will leave off here. It is easy to think about these things on an intellectual level. To let the realization sink in is quite a different matter though. One point here is self-image. Once the individual becomes aware of how perceptions, impressions, and images are created, Self becomes a whole different thing. There is a good reason why New Age people seem so self absorbed to the mainstream people. What I see, is a big interest in higher degrees of integration of self. This would be personal integrity from a neurobiological angle for which Damasio makes a good point.

Another factor that has an influence in creating a certain context comes from physics, in itself part of the wider philosophical context. Greek philosophers Leucippus and Democritus (5th century B.C.) developed the idea of

the atom as a basic building block which is being passively moved around by external forces. This led to a mechanistic worldview which is closely related to the Cartesian idea of a compartmentalized self in which talents, beliefs, feelings etc. all exist as isolated units. This is the same perception with which the physical environment is being explained in the mainstream context which in turn was projected back onto the individual self. The consequences were (are) a perception that emphasized separation, disconnectedness, and compartmentalization. The perception became a pattern or an unreflective 'this is how we do things' with disastrous consequences for our environment, human relations, and our selves (Capra 1991:20-23). Compartmentalization can be translated into unrelatedness and isolation. In a symbolic kind of way it seems significant that these two impressions are important and defining aspects of the early lives of Conny (I thought I was adopted), Kari (I felt isolated), Jean (I got out of there), and most significantly Pam (because then I'm closer to the universe). These seem to be hazards of mainstream life, especially for those who try to be true to their intuitive and sensitive impressions.

In the mainstream context social relationships are built on formal (even if they are personal, e.g. family) predetermined connections which may or may not work for the individual. Although clearly defined social roles makes

social interaction more predictable, this kind of formal structure seems to come at a cost. I believe the danger here might be that the rigid outside structure of social relationships can easily become a veneer that hides personal despair, loneliness, and lost individuals. Jean's parents come to mind who kept up the public impression of the righteous preacher's family while beneath the surface tragic dysfunction ruled their lives. Polishing the surface or playing the game keeps formal social structures connected and the individual in place. But if it becomes a preoccupation at the cost of humanity or spirituality and its contents, the foundation underneath the structure will rot away, perhaps unnoticed by most. Of course this will lead exactly to the disintegration of the structure that mainstream people try to avoid with the 'more of the same' approach. But more and more formal official rules, laws, and regulations will lead to more and more rigidity and less and less personal and social flexibility. As a consequence the individual gets caught in a system that is in the end self-defeating.

I also have to think of Dan's suspicion here that the obsession with career and social rank is a psychological reaction to avoid having to deal with "all that emotional stuff". As we have seen, our social context is built on a mechanistic worldview which lets the human factor appear unimportant, or in everyday social life, improper. The

overemphasize on rational thinking and the internalized distrust of anything non-rational or intuitive creates a self that is based on denial and is blind to problems of humanity.

In the previous pages I have tried to separate a New Age self from the mainstream self so to speak. The next step will be to show how a New Age self is actually defined. What has to be remembered first here is that the usual response to this question were variations of Josh's, 'I don't define myself'. Josh wants to avoid being put into a cognitive straightjacket. Growth as in acquiring new knowledge, flexibility in the face of changing contexts, and honing critical and self-critical skills are the key ideas here.

Processes of socialization are as important in the New Age context as they are in the mainstream. The main difference is that the orientation points are not preformulated by institutions or other abstracts but by human beings. To create a constructive positive social environment in which basic human qualities within the framework of spirituality are the major orientation points requires a high degree of personal integration or integration of the self. In this context it becomes clear why self-development is a preoccupation. Closely associated with this are the roles of teacher and student which can be seen as major defining characteristics of a New Age

self in terms of social relationships.

Socialization of self in a New Age context occurs on two levels, the internal cognitive and the external social. We have seen above that there seems to be a gap between these levels in a mainstream self. The task in a New Age self is to integrate both. What makes this both complicated and fascinating is that New Age participants are completely aware of the process, internal and external. The result is that there never seems to be an end to self.

The idea of a moving flowing self is ultimately a result of discoveries in quantum physics. The self here consists of quantum particles or subselves that constantly reintegrate to create the unity 'I'. The crucial thought here is that this unity gains its identity only through the interaction and integrating processes of its quantum particles. The meaning of the self, or in other words who I am, is the process. It is not an end result of the process. The underlying concept here is energy without which of course nothing would happen (Zohar 1994:114-115). What comes to mind here is the "the sum is greater than its parts" idea and this is really what being human is all about, at least from the New Age perspective. As a contrast in the mainstream the unity "I" would be reduced to its subselves. These fragments then would be related to other fragments that come in the form of social institutions instead of persons. Perhaps it is

understandable why a New Age participant might think that the mainstream has a mental problem. It follows from the above that a high level of integration leads to a high level of awareness with regard to "I" and the environment (Zohar 1994:115). The idea of self-awareness or the fact that we know that we know is not foreign to the mainstream of course. The difference is that it is being intellectualized or objectified there whereas in the New Age context participants attempt to really internalize the idea (which can be a staggering experience). From this point of view it may also be understandable why mainstream participants might think that New Age people also have a mental problem. The self in the mainstream is only real as an object ('thing') that can be extracted from its context and its relationships. The self in the New Age context is only real in relationships (Bateson 1991:190). Self is at any given moment the result of the interaction (integration) of quantum particles, constantly shifting and changing and in turn being part and particle of the same dance on the cosmic level. The constant negotiating of self takes place on a pure energy level.

I believe that a high degree of self-awareness includes awareness of one's innermost motivations and intuitions which cannot so easily be denied, suppressed, or glossed over anymore. The self in the New Age context can be interpreted as an autopoietic system which is characterized

by its continuous reintegration to preserve its identity (Varela 1979:15). It seems reasonable to assume that self-preservation would favor constructive, life affirming attitudes and actions as opposed to the destructive, life negating attitudes that Jean, Dale, Sandy, and Conny have experienced. In some cases the response seemed like a fight for their survival indeed. According to Conny the sensation of "good" is an indicator for integration or being true to one's self and is absolutely reliable. This is part of the self awareness mentioned above. Rationalizations for destructive attitudes and actions, the camouflaging of ulterior motives for superficial gains would run contrary to the preservation of self. Rational thought, while not dismissed, is balanced with intuition and integrity of emotions.

Socialization on the external social level is the same process of Self directed toward the outside. I will discuss interaction as symbolic behavior in a later chapter. For now I will focus on two key identities that a New Age self assumes in relation to the social environment, teacher and student. Again, integration is a key element of social practice and personal identity. In other words, one finds both as key components within one and the same person. Conny openly considers herself a teacher, Dan is a guide/teacher and student, and Kari thinks of herself as a healer which includes teaching and studying (more of

this later on). Further indicators for these roles are their eagerness to discuss books and their open curiosity. I was often quite impressed by their analytical efforts with regard to their social/historical environment and certain phenomena that are not easily explained in the mainstream. In almost every conversation there was a heavy element of critical and analytical thinking, more so in fact, than I usually encounter in a mainstream setting.

It is significant here that every individual is both teacher and student and that these concepts reach far beyond the formal education context (although this may be included). Habitus in Bourdieu's (1990) sense then is the constant reintegration of knowledge. There are two steps involved here. New knowledge from those who function as teachers in any given situation and old knowledge that needs to be reinterpreted and adjusted by those who function as students in any given formulation. Since New Age participants deal with information from their own contexts but also with information from a global and historical context, the negotiating process can be complex and is certainly never finished. In terms of Self this means a constant redefinition or self-assessment. From the mainstream perspective this might appear as rather vague, the idea that there is no goal lying ahead contrary to our common ideals and goal oriented behavior patterns. From the New Age perspective, learning and redefinition

are part of everyday life as adaptive strategies in an environment of a growing body of information. The logic of practice in Bourdieu's (1990) sense lies in self reflection. The same thought was expressed by Kari when she looked forward to our next evolutionary step as a species. On a historical/evolutionary note, it is fascinating to remember that reflection or self reflection did not seem to be issues for a homo habilis. Reflection on the Big Questions (e.g. where do we go from here) emerged curiously enough at roughly the same time (about 600 B.C.) in different geographic regions, China (Lao Tzu), Persia (Zoroaster), India (Buddha), and Greece (Heraclitus) (Capra 1991:93 & Mitchell 1996:138). The shift into the new millennium seems to coincide (?) with the development of self reflection on a large scale.

Self actualization is an important aspect of the teacherstudent complement. This can only occur if we interpret the two roles as complements, not as opposites as it is being done in the mainstream context. Self actualization is associated with self assertion because it involves a sense of personal empowerment. If carried to extremes however, self assertion can lead to dominance and control of others by force. In the mainstream environment self assertion is encouraged as part of a competitive attitude and behavior pattern. It is discouraged as part of critical thinking and questioning authority

(Capra, 1988:44). This is a crucial distinction between the mainstream and the New Age realms. I believe the reason why self assertion works itself out or has a different meaning in both contexts, lies in the social roles of teacher and student. In the mainstream both are separate and thus only one is in power. In the New Age realm both roles identify one Self in a complementary way. This seems to provide a safeguard against overuse or misuse of one or the other. I find that both aspects do have a visible influence on attitude and behavior patterns. I also think, that this is the reason why self reflection is so important in the New Age realm. It seems to be the balancing act between being a teacher and being a student.

With regard to institutions, the identity of the average mainstream person is that of customer, client, or recipient. That is, of knowledge, status, education, social and health services, and religious dogma. The identity of the average New Age person is that of participant, giver and taker at the same time, creator of her own Self and of her environment. The notion of a Self in flux comes up here. Indeed, New Age/New Science thinking is based on Quantum Physics as opposed to Newtonian physics. In the latter, events are measurable fixed points in time and space. The atom as well as the human individual are separable from their surroundings as isolated particles or events. It seems not so strangely symbolic here that isolation was

one of the more significant childhood experiences of several participants. In Quantum physics the basic idea is that energy has both particle (local) and wavelike (nonlocal) qualities. In terms of the individual self, after all we are all made of the same stuff, this means we are both particles and waves simultaneously (Zohar 1994:326). As particles we are exactly here and right now. As waves we are forever emerging, redefining our Selves, learning, integrating new knowledge, reinterpreting old stuff, and interacting with everybody and everything across all temporal and spatial boundaries. Remember, that New Age participants draw on knowledge and experiences from across all historical and geographic boundaries. This is their context in which their selves are being renegotiated to continuously emerge anew.

The above probably sounds like chaos to a mainstream person who is used to well defined categories with fixed rules and expectations for attitude and behavior. To the extent that I am a mainstream person, entering the New Age realm brought indeed an amount of disorientation and confusion with it. Everyday life felt slightly surrealistic. The struggle and concern is to overcome the notion that one could get lost in a jumble of apparently disconnected and unrelated information. To make decisions seems to be impossible under the assault of so many different traditions that often seem contradictory too. Is there such a thing

as too much knowledge? Mainstream selves often seem either lost or desperately hanging on to familiar concepts, perceiving everything from elsewhere as a threat, and withdrawing into the boundaries of their own selves that are mostly defined by others. Out of control (that goes for chief executives too), isolated, feeling ill in personhood, frightened of the external world, and isolated in terms of relationships with other creatures. This is an accurate picture of how a New Age person perceives a mainstream self. The reaction is of course defensiveness in attitude and behavior (cynicism, denial, ridicule, and arrogance) and, self defeating, even more competitiveness and aggression. More of the same is deeply ingrained. Medicinal drugs, and according to Dan, work and prestige are escapes that often backfire and reinforce the misery. A pretty sorry sight. It becomes understandable why New Age participants see no need to strive for an existence like that. Kari seems equally content with either one dollar or a hundred dollar in the bank. She can also afford to view life in general and particular with a sort of detached amusement. Conny on the other hand seems almost a little resigned in her seriousness, "They just have to learn." Even though Rose is quite comfortable as a mostly mainstream person, she feels a void where an OBE should be.

So how does a New Age self make it through the mass of information and sort out what is important and what

is not? Filtering and sorting information is a cognitive process. Although it sounds very similar to what a computer does, a human brain is different in the way it processes knowledge. The idea of autopoiesis describes how a self-organizing network of biochemical reactions produces a unit (molecule) with a boundary which in turn constrains the very same process. This bootstrap method is the key to producing an identity or a self (Varela 1985:212). Although bootstrap idea means there is no external influence on the creation of an identity, I do believe that external information is absorbed and might occasionally alter (widen or tighten) the boundaries. Varela speaks of biological identities and after all, cell membranes are not steel walls as we know from the process of osmosis. Although Varela talks about biological entities, there are implications for human (and others') psychological and social identities here. His conclusion in this regard is important to us. Biological cognition is a continuous process of creating our world. The surroundings we see are not a representation of an objective outside but a representation of what we make of it (p.211). I believe the implications for our social, political, and private lives are humongous. The reality we live in is the one we create not only through our social actions but on a very basic level, our biological and cognitive very own Selves. With regard to knowledge, it coevolves with us

and our sense of self (p.215).

I need to resolve two points here. It may seem that I am moving back and forth in a sort of carefree way between biology and psychology with the occasional detour into more philosophical regions. That is intended and I think it demonstrates that our minds, perceptions, realities, organs, and cells are all part of the same network. If we plug knowledge into the feedback loop that Varela describes, we can get an impression of evolution with a spin, with the spin factor being "Self".

The other point that is important here, is that the above process works for both mainstream and New Age people of course (as well as every other creature). So what's the difference? It seems to me the key here is awareness. Knowing that we know, being aware of our own reactions to the world around us - that is cognition New Age style. Self-reflection, critical thinking, continuous analyzing are integrated parts of New Age life. That is exactly what the people I talked to seemed to have a perpetual interest in. There is an unsatiated curiosity, an extreme awareness of continuous change, and a constant emerging of reality and self, that the participants seem completely aware of and try to take into account. I believe it makes all the difference in one's perception (and creating) to take the process into account in some way. Kari, as one of the most sensitive persons to her surroundings, has probably aimed

at the farthest boundaries when she wondered, "Do I know because something is already happening or does something happen because I know?" I think this is as close as one gets to Varela's concept without reading about it. Josh is also close to the idea when he refuses to define himself (or his Self) because that would impose artificial boundaries on him and his development. It would appear as if he could not be part of the negotiation process anymore.

Of course, mainstream people engage in critical thinking, but in a very different way. It occurs along preset lines, within restricting boundaries of institutions (those in power), with little room for change and adaptation. I observe a much lower degree of self-reflection and a much higher degree of worrying about 'fitting in', specifically fitting into the mold cast by well established institutions. The autopoietic system and the bootstrap mechanism work in mainstream people just as well. But there seems to be an unawareness of the big underlying pattern that connects and an unconcern with independent self development. Change is mostly perceived as threat to the established public Self while the inner personal self (as in personal integrity e.g.) remains unattended and will ultimately disappear completely into the depths of the unconscious and publicly become unimportant. In the mainstream the cell walls seem to be made of steel, at

least from a New Age perspective.

Bootstrapping then, is a favorite New Age activity. Since we are talking about evolution here, New Age biological entities do not have to read Francisco Varela to get the idea. It seems almost funny to me that Kari mentioned spirals and circles when she imagined evolution. That seems to be a more than appropriate symbolic representation of the process. One can easily imagine little leather loops on opposite sides of the top circle of a tower of spirals. It seems to confirm the idea that knowing and self are inseparable and part of the same process. Francisco Varela's concept is, next to spirituality, a further aspect of the pattern that connects. With regard to self it allows us to see how external forces of our environment connect with our inner biological and cognitive selves. Once this connection is discovered, there is no turning back. My own struggle with the question whether or not I or anybody else is ready for "all this stuff" is probably a sign of passing a threshold here. Thoughts like, 'What am I getting myself into here?' or 'What box am I opening?' often came with a sense that something deeper and more awesome is happening around us historically and also mentally that went far beyond the expected 'fieldwork' experience of strangeness. We have reached a point in our evolution in which images such as Kari's become a very realistic reflection of our being and becoming.

Edgar Mitchell (1996:78) suggests an increasing impact of human intentionality on evolution. I believe we have mislead ourselves with our model of a linear evolution (simple to complex) and a linear type of relationship (cause and effect). I do not think that evolution or relationships are linear but rather a whirl of variables that we seek to order into managable patterns. And now I have intentionally (!) built in a fallacy here. Please notice that I wrote "mislead". Of course we haven't mislead us or anybody else with our model. If that were true then I would have to assume that the alternative ideas I am presenting here will also be revealed as misleads when we reach the next threshold in our development. So I will have to say, both the linear and the spiral-circle models are appropriate for their contexts because they reflect our perception of the reality we create. We cannot step out of our own contexts. Not even, or perhaps especially not as observers.

From simple to complex does not match our reality anymore. As every physicist knows, and every social anthropologist should know, it will eventually lead to entropy, a massive collapse. It is not the purpose of this project to analyse illnesses of personality. But I do not think that it is a coincidence that we have so much dysfunction of Self in various ways than at the time we pride ourselves on how sophisticated (a euphemism for

complicated/complex) we have become.

Human intentionality in evolution implies a high degree of creativity or imagination. The integration of a vast diversity of symbols, philosophies, etc. requires new patterns and new models of integration. This is especially true with regard to our personalities. Self-reflection alone is an indicator for creativity and integrative skills. I have often been impressed by the degree of curiosity among New Age participants. This is perhaps the most obvious expression of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1993:326). In a multi-cultural environment the global self simply needs better integrative skills and a better imagination in order to make sense of all the variables that assault the senses. Remember my confusion and disorientation when I entered the Star Cloud for the first time. Without curiosity I would have had to reject most of the impressions because they did not fit onto my cognitive map.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1993) states that we can never see beyond the context of evolution or self to find one ultimate answer or truth. The process of creating our selves and our reality can be determined by either external, e.g. cultural, or internal, self certainty, factors (p.62). This is exactly the same thought that has been expressed by Conny, 'If it makes me feel good on a gut-feeling level, it is the right thing to do.' As observers we will always be part of our observations and so 'Self' will remain

elusive if we insist it to be something static, objective, to look at and to measure. New Age participants are not inhibited by these external boundaries, that Csikszentmihalyi (1993:62) finds illusionary because they often do not reflect who we really are or want to be. The external boundaries and explanatory models seem often more like mental and emotional crutches instead of guidelines. Self is mostly perceived as a cultural construct without much influence of the individual. As such Josh would call it plastic. Traditionally, Self has been interpreted as a construct of external forces (plus perhaps a genetic influence). Now the participants insist on doing some of the constructing themselves.

An interesting hurdle New Age participants (like everybody else) have to overcome is acceptance of self or of who they are. As they grew up the standard external boundaries did not allow them to express their innermost notions and experiences and so self was not accepted. Gregory Bateson (1991) discusses several of those external forces (family e.g.) by which self-respect is being enculturated. Self-respect is a prerequisite to dignity (pp.29-34). What is mostly ignored is the individual's intuitive experiences which is, so to speak, deculturated in our own context. So a large part of New Age self development consists of learning to accept those intuitive impulses and to trust them. The most remarkable example

here is perhaps Sandy. Raised in a Southern Baptist family, being in heterosexual relationships (destructive) before settling into a lesbian self, coping with alcoholism and memories of abuse, she undergoes many different stages in trying to negotiate her own Self. Maybe one should better say here, extract her Self that has been buried under a pile of cultural expectations that contradict her Self. What is admirable about Sandy is that she insists of taking a large part of the responsibility for her experiences past and present and is actively involved in creating a Self that is truly hers, allows her to be true to herself.

To a New Age participant such as Josh, Self is important as a foundation for a more integrated and honest social environment. This is closely associated with self respect and dignity. His main complaint against the mainstream is the complete lack of personal integrity that he sees there, with an emphasize on personal, internal, gut-feeling. To him this seems to be the main difference between mainstream and New Age. He does not want to shape his personality by other people's standards (not to mention others' political, economic, or social goals) but by his own sense of who he is and how he can be true to himself. This of course requires a certain self-discipline and honesty (which he also misses in the mainstream). It also requires the ability of self-reflection, and not least, a certain amount of courage to be different. But then,

that is what personal integrity is all about.

In the mainstream the integrity of the institution (of those in power) is often seen as more important than personal integrity which in some cases is being sacrificed or denied in order to comply. I am afraid that in studying systems instead of people we have contributed to this practice. We forget that it is humans who create institutions and therefore our own personal integrity has to come first regardless of whether 'the system' agrees with us or not. We are preoccupied with playing the game which often looks like polishing the surface to me and the foundation underneath is rotting away. This is a betrayal of ourselves and our Selves, not to mention everybody else's Selves. Some among us have taken it upon themselves to put in a new foundation. Hopefully one that will reconnect different aspects of the pattern.

Intentionally shaping our destiny, a high degree of curiosity and creativity, and a concern with a more integrated truer self are the primary characteristics of the New Age version of Self. Although this realization of self is also only possible within a certain historical and social context, it seems more self reliant or self trusting. Self will always be to some extent a cultural construct but half of the construction job is done by the individual. In social terms, she evolves from a recipient of culture to a creator of it.

I believe New Age participants in a sense have managed to let go of the apron strings that our social institutions have provided for so long. To turn away from the fixed categories and static models by which our selves have been formed and to simply accept change (social and personal) as part of life and come to terms with it, in fact include continuous change as an extra kick in the life experience, is a most important step in our growing up. It makes perfect sense then that the roles of teacher and student are integrated in the same person. This is the only way the bootstrapping can work in terms of self-development.

That everybody is a teacher and also a student to everybody else, is the same idea on the social level. With regard to change and emergence, this expresses it exactly. I believe we are at a very important fork in the road on all levels of our experiences. On the mainstream side, self seems to be overwhelmed by an increasing complexity of information and seems to be headed for entropy. On the New Age side, the foundation of our new ordering system has to be personal integrity, trust in one's guts, and the courage to go through with it. As a species we have our fingertips on the next spiral, but the push up is yet to come.

The pattern that connects will to some extent remain elusive to us or exist mostly as a theoretical idea (after all, we can only see manifestations of energy but not the

real thing). Tyler Volk (1995) sums up all of the above by imagining a sequence in which parts become wholes which in turn generate new types of relations which in turn will become parts of yet greater wholes (p.194). I think we can get a good grasp on the pattern by examining or temporarily (!) objectifying certain aspects of it. In the previous chapter the aspect with our cosmic ordering system was spirituality. In this chapter the aspect of the pattern associated with Self is personal integrity. In the social context the integrating is expressed in the teacher-student relationship. And if the teaching and learning are good, one is also a healer.

Chapter VIII

Health

As I was asking for more contacts Conny referred me to Mark who turned out to be a massage therapist with a New Age attitude. His experiences as a nurse in the mainstream medical environment had been discouraging. His main observation was that the patient's health is not necessarily the primary concern in a hospital. If I plug in mainstream medical environment for hospital, this is an observation I would hear repeatedly in variations from the others.

Dale feels doctors did not accomplish much in healing her anemia. Instead her meditation exercises did. Dan is not being cured of his back problem, but that does not seem to be the main issue. However, the attitude of the practitioner, his own role as a patient, and the application (or misapplication) of medical knowledge are important concerns. Josh has experienced something that seems to be typical in the medical mainstream, "More of the same" or in his case, higher doses of drugs when smaller ones failed to do the job. He finds it alarming that this

principle was applied even after smaller doses had put his life at risk. Josh probably went the farthest by integrating his blood disease as part of himself. It is something that he now can live with, is not scared of, does not perceive as a threat, and can take care of himself with homeopathic remedies. In other words, he is in control, not a mainstream medical practitioner. The goal is integration, not extermination of the disease (or himself).

Kari identifies herself as a healer and observes with a laugh that her advice and insights are cheaper than a psychotherapy, which is undoubtedly true. It is also Kari who does not seem to have a major problem with mainstream medicine per se. Every method holds a bit of the truth and whatever helps can be applied. Here lies the problem, though. Kari implies that there are more methods than one while in the mainstream there is only one method. This limits the options for any patient.

Rose is the most content with following doctor's orders. Her experience of "exploratory surgery" that did not accomplish anything (the problem disappeared all by itself) is almost funny (in a hopefully not too cynical way) from a New Age perspective. Not having made a particularly bad experience, her attitude is understandable. It seems the others though, have lost trust.

Two issues stand out to me which seem to be of concern to New Age participants, social context and a very inclusive

idea of energy. Both Jean and Laura propose natural births. Jean as the traditional midwife is the more extreme and wants to see pregnancy and birth as a normal integrated part of life instead of a disease. Laura is more integrated in the mainstream but still finds it important that various family members are integrated into the the process.

Mark identifies his clients' problems as stress and associates them with a hectic mainstream lifestyle. He seemed to get caught up in the same though as his business began to flourish. Ben, as the mainstream business person, learned to take care of stress that is the result of a particular lifestyle.

Both Mark and Ben are aware of and make use of the second important issue in this regard, energy. Mark thinks of energy very much like a Chinese medical practitioner. Chi is probably the most inclusive and most elusive concept of energy that is known to those who want to know. Ben uses energy, rubbing crystals, in much the same way. The point for both seems the same, to direct its flow, to re-integrate it into a pattern that is already there.

This is also the context in which I share a lot of the experiences with my informants. The resulting deep distrust toward biomedicine (which may put the individual at risk because doctors are to be avoided), the concern with a developing drug culture (also Dan's concern), and the insistence of taking control not only over my health

but also over whatever disease I may encounter are all issues with which I can empathize. These are the main foci in the New Age realm. Overall, the primary concern is not so much with a specific healing technique or tradition, but with a particular attitude New Age participants meet in their healers and in the wider social environment.

The wider philosophical basis for mainstream science and therefore also medicine, is Newtonian physics. I have already mentioned its main characteristics in the previous chapter. So here I will only point out the implications and consequences with regard to health and healing. As part of a Newtonian mechanistic worldview our notions about health and illness are to some extent cultural constructs. They are meant to fit into our perception of our reality which here consists of individual parts, each separable from the organism.

The most important consequence is a very narrow idea of health and treatment. The application of a specific remedy to a specific and limited problem (Csordas & Kleinman 1990:11). This also reflects a very linear idea about cause and effect relationships. If a particular part is broken, a particular treatment is applied. A key word here is treatment, not healing which would imply a more holistic approach. A result is a sharp distinction between biomedicine and all other healing traditions.

Implied in the very word of biomedicine are several

assumptions. The natural world can be understood rationally and logically through the application of science and we will have control over our bodies by technological means. Although non-western healing traditions are being acknowledged to some extent for their psychological effects, they are seen as inferior to biomedicine (Lock & Scheper-Hughes 1990:48). Technology and control are two important factors with regard to biomedicine. The need to be in control, the exclusion of intuition (on the sides of both doctor and patient), and the increasing dependence on technology (including drugs) imply a deep distrust of ourselves as human beings, an ignorance of our abilities, and also a rather immature (or perhaps insecure) attitude. It seems we have not let go of the apron strings yet. The Cartesian legacy has become a trap that puts constraints on our perspective and our ability to communicate about illness in contexts (Lock & Scheper-Hughes 1990:53).

Since the basis of our biomedical context is a specific kind of physics I will translate the above into physics terms. In biomedicine we put an emphasize on the isolated parts (particles) and ignore the relationships (waves). The result is an approach in which Mr. Smith becomes the gallstone. This is pretty much how Mark described the attitude he encountered in the hospital. In my own observation the difference between taking a car to the garage or a body to the hospital is not a big one.

The idea of curing a disease is more graspable in the biomedical context than healing a person which is still quite elusive. The doctor is more a technician than a healer, the specialist almost a symbol of our fragmented perspective. Although specialists are a good idea, what is missing is the learned skill of integration. The focus is put on external factors (e.g. germs) rather than internal (e.g. natural healing processes). The emphasize is on the disease instead of on the patient. Death is to be defied at all costs regardless of the patient's suffering and the terminality of the disease. It seems sometimes treatment is inflicted rather than applied. As Mark observed, "The health of the patient is not necessarily a primary concern."

In practice disease is objectified in biomedicine. Of course, in order to examine it this is to some extent unavoidable and even desirable. The picture of the object however would be more complete if we would allow the integration of different viewpoints. As Pierre Bourdieu (1990:28) notes, the assumed superiority of scientific knowledge is a formidable barrier to any kind of knowledge from outside and often against all common sense. Knowledge from outside here can be the patient's subjective experience, a non-biomedical tradition, or the practitioner's own subjective impressions. All these are kinds of new knowledge that are being excluded from biomedicine as they are perceived as threats to the approved

version of reality. Since biomedical superiority is at stake here, negotiating a more integrated perspective is not likely.

I find it interesting that Bourdieu named common sense here. Anthony Giddens (1986) states that mutual knowledge or common sense are the basis for practical everyday life. The distinction he makes is that mutual knowledge is seen as knowledge while common sense is seen as fallible belief (p.337). This distinction resembles very much the line between scientists and the footfolk. On a more practical side, empirical research (e.g. laboratory tests) are associated with knowledge while the patient's own observations are dismissed as belief, perhaps not totally wrong but certainly not reliable. What is being overlooked is that the observation of patterns and the following conclusions are part of empirical practice. But patterns do not care who observes them. Kari's palmetry exercises with regard to health are based on the same idea, e.g. chainlink pattern around wrist as a repeated observation and associated with same physiological states through generations of palmists. An important insight on common sense comes from Clifford Geertz (1983) who associates it with immediate experience instead of reflection (p.75). I see this as extremely important with regard to a patient's experiences and interpretations of her condition. Local knowledge here is the patient's knowledge.

Which one is the more reliable empirical method is open to debate. One could argue that laboratory tests in a closed environment and with controlled variables are the least reliable because real life (e.g. disease) does not happen in a closed environment nor can we know all the variables.

The debate then seems to be more about power relationships than health and illness. Better perhaps, the latter are being interpreted to confirm or even legitimize the former. Clifford Geertz (1966) interprets religion as a cultural system. The same can be said about biomedicine. In fact many of the same arguments I brought up in the Spirituality chapter can be applied here again. Severe illness and possible death however are more immediate concerns to the individual and so to go against doctor's orders would be a specially bad idea. Legitimization is here closely associated with intimidation. The authority of the doctor is reinforced by language, ritual, and a general atmosphere of mystery. To perpetuate this relationship the patient has to be convinced that things are as they should be (Berger & Luckmann 1989:88). Rose is ~~probably~~ a good example here. She accepts doctor's advice and treatment without asking too many questions and in good trust. But significantly, her trust does not go so far that she would tell her practitioner about her OBE even though it occurred in a medical context.

The major institutions representing biomedicine are the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the World Health Organization (WHO), and Health Management Organizations (HMOs). They are not only medical institutions but also important political and economic powers. In the mainstream social context they dominate and so perpetuate a particular structure (Giddens 1986:31). As an economic force they are part of the capitalist system with all the concerns that this entails. Marshall Sahlins (1994:384) associates with this system the idea of material rationality as one of its main foci. I have already mentioned above that rationality is part of our wider philosophical framework. So it is no wonder that the interests of major medical institutions is directed towards the visible and immediate. These are profit, application of technology and drugs, and the quick fix immediate gratification behavior. All of this often at the greater cost of the patient's long term well being. I have to agree with Sahlins who finds this system bizarre.

I also find it increasingly dangerous as material gains become a greater and greater concern, defensiveness about power and prestige become a more pronounced attitude and behavior and the interest of the patients or health in general become less and less important. It seems the FDA is more concerned with the safety of the pharmacy industry (legally) than with the safety of the consumer. On the

business side, illness is lucrative. Drugs that come with side effects that also need to be treated besides the original problem, trap the patient in a treatment loop from which it is difficult to escape. I certainly don't mean to imply any intentional trap here. But the effect is just the same.

Since I am more concerned with people than with systems, I have to take a brief look at the people side at this point. I wonder what is on the mind of an HMO employee who refuses a procedure knowing his decision may result in a person's unnecessary suffering. I have to think of Josh's concern with personal integrity, honesty, and decency here. But these are on the non-rational (wave) side, not on the rational (particle) side and so people probably have not been trained to pay attention. I think it would lead too far to go too deep into a debate about this issue. Nonetheless, it seems serious enough to mention.

Of course, the patient is part of the system that is being perpetuated and legitimized here. In the capitalist system value means money value. Rationality and practicality are defined by economists (Sahlins 1994:384). Thus drugs sell easy, high tech paraphernalia appear not only intimidating but the logical choice, aggressive treatment is delusionally assumed to be most effective. All this works if the patient buys it, literally and figuratively. Of course, the price of non-compliance could be high. On

the doctor's side the predicament is much the same. A glaring example is Josh's doctor who knew no better than to increase the dosis of a drug after the same drug had made Josh more ill than he had been in the first place. Life is a gamble and it seems safer to trust the visible (particles) than the invisible (waves). Doctors and patients are trapped in the same philosophical context of which this particular form of capitalism is but one aspect.

What makes the system work is that it is taken for granted. Pierre Bourdieu (1994) calls the realm surrounding the social environment, doxa. It is kind of a cognitive sphere, a body of undisputed assumptions that legitimizes and objectifies social reality. It is ingrained to such an extent that the question of legitimacy never comes up, except when a threat from the outside appears. Since it is never talked about, it is never questioned (p.161-164). I think this is as close as a mainstream thinker gets to the wave aspect of our social environment. The point here is integration. Doxa holds together various subsystems under the basic assumptions drawn from Newtonian physics, utilizing all its implications. Here is how it works.

Much of our thinking is being done in terms of evolution of various sorts, linear, multilinear, punctuated equilibrium, and so forth. This goes for both mainstream and New Age participants. The difference is that evolution in the mainstream occurs in a straightforward linear fashion

(with us coming out on top of course) whereas in the New Age environment it occurs in vaguer forms of circles and spirals and direction here is more implied than given. Another way to express the difference would be materialism (immediate) and esoterism (less immediate). Thus it is really no surprise that evolution or development in the mainstream is measured in terms of technological accomplishment and sophistication. In the medical context this means fancy equipment and fancy drugs. The linearity of our mental workings is expressed in procedures that are directed against a particular point (organ/disease), bypassing the person so to speak. Our current economic system with money as the most visible measure delivers the rational and practical appearing arguments that perpetuate and reinforce the system.

This is basically what Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1989) mean by integration of meanings. Although the process is subjective, the result is an objective appearing institutional order (p.82). This works as long as no interference from the outside raises the question of legitimacy. As long as participants inside and outside institutions converse about the same kind of knowledge and thus reinforce it. Knowledge is a social product and a factor in social change (Berger & Luckmann 1989:87).

The discussion has come around to knowledge again. But here it will be the bridge to the New Age section of

the chapter. Mainstream medical practice as it is described above can only appear acceptable if there is no other knowledge available for the patients. In an increasing global environment, the New Age realm is built on knowledge from all over the world and from all historical periods (there is no such thing as prehistory). Much of it is knowledge about healing traditions or better, life practices. New Age participants draw heavily on the notion that health encompasses all aspects of life and is the natural state of being. So health and the practice of healing (instead of curing) are major contexts in the New Age realm.

Healing and health as wide open contexts becomes obvious when one thinks of Kari and Mark. As a healer Kari not only provides medical information but also psychological advice, personality profiles, common sense advice, possibilities for a person's future medical, social, occupational, and relational development. Mark is more specialised as a massage therapist. But he is aware and takes into account that his clients' medical problems are related to social, occupational, and psychological problems. Jean associates her own healing from alcoholism with her development as a traditional midwife. Both processes occurred at about the same time and she identifies events in her life (e.g. birth of her daughter) which triggered the development and aligned these parallel tracks.

Comparing mainstream with New Age it seems that illness is a focus in the former while health is a focus in the latter realm. It seems almost funny to me that New Age participants are being ridiculed for being health nuts. I personally find a preoccupation with health more life sustaining than a preoccupation with illness. But that is of course, a bias.

So the knowledge base in the population has expanded which poses a threat to the established institutionalized knowledge. This is an important first step to break the constraints of an established social structure. Where no alternatives exist the individual is forced to comply and thus reinforces the structure (Giddens 1986:309). The availability of alternative healing traditions force all participants to renegotiate their positions with regard to authority. The broader base of information also makes it possible for patients to point to failures of biomedicine. This was more difficult to do before and is yet another sign of the liberation of people from previous institutional constraints.

Another factor in this regard is the rift between two social interest groups, the provider and the consumer. The rift here seems primarily one of language. Medical language as spoken or written on instructions is usually not comprehensible to the average person, especially not the consumer. The provider and the consumer can be likened

to Edward Shils' (1982) model of center and periphery. The ritual language of medicine here can be seen as an integrative factor that established the relationship between the center and the periphery. However, in a widening context the periphery is not bound to one particular center anymore. So the language rift now becomes one more reason for distrust and one more incentive to look for options. This is clearly evident in Dan's complaint that mainstream doctors never explain anything but simply prescribe drugs.

In a wide context of diverse medical traditions, curing is being replaced by healing. In a circle and spiral context the old linear model (e.g. one germ, one disease, one cure) is difficult to apply. Dale had and has very specific problems like anemia and alcoholism, yet she applies the broadest technique, meditation, that involves every aspect of herself. At this point it is not too important to examine if this really works in a biomedical sense. What is important though, is that Dale feels it works which gives her a boost towards more constructive activities.

For Dan healing also is a much wider context than in the mainstream. The chiropractor takes care of his specific backproblem, but more importantly approaches Dan as a person and not an object. The language barrier I mentioned above does not exist in this relationship. Admittedly, the backproblem still persists and the chiropractor can only provide temporary relief. Still,

Dan prefers this treatment over a mainstream one because it makes him feel good overall which might make it somewhat easier to live with a problem like that.

Like an answer to Dan's concern is Mark's approach who puts an emphasize on caring that combines professionalism with basic human compassion. Human values and a professional caring are major components in the New Age context of healing. Other emerging ideas in this regard are treatment of symptoms as well as a search for patterns and causes (Ferguson 1980:246-47).

The most specialized patient is probably Josh, who relies primarily on the homeopathic tradition and besides that tries to avoid doctors. His attitude towards his blood disease would certainly not sit well with the mainstream medical establishment. Josh perceives his illness as an integrated part of himself that he sees no reason to have fixed if that should involve prices (social, economic, personal) that he is not willing to pay. This idea about integration is an important aspect in the New Age context. The body is a process, an everchanging system in which a certain condition is but one aspect of the context (Ferguson 1980:247). Josh does not treat his conditions so much as keeps it in a stable relationship with his body-mind-system. For him it seems to work. Self acceptance for what one is has probably no grounding in biomedicine. But in a concept in which one's mind or emotional state

plays an important role in terms of overall well being, self acceptance is a component in healing and maintenance of health (Moyers 1993:149). This is important to remember because in the mainstream environment the standards for self are set by powerful institutions and not by the individual.

My own background is highlighted by various conditions that were indeed life threatening and in every instance my death was predicted after biomedicine had reached its limits. As an infant my survival was ascribed to willpower which in biomedicine means "We don't know." My enlarged heart was a grave concern for everybody but me even after successful surgery. My life was scheduled to end in about two to four years and activities like sports were strictly prohibited. Intuitively? I promptly was 'Back in the Saddle Again' riding horses and taking up aerobics and squash to boot. That was twenty-four years ago. I still receive questionnaires about what drugs I take (none) and if I sleep in a sitting position (flat like a board). In the third instance (like Josh a blood disorder) I was being sent home from the hospital after refusing an exploratory surgery, that I was too weak to survive regardless of their findings. The prognosis was about two weeks which felt fairly accurate at the time. As a last straw I grasped for homeopathy. Within three weeks I was back on my feet and never had a problem since. However, my report to the

hospital was met with disbelief and ridicule. I recount these experiences here to indicate how very well I understand Josh and the others. This is most certainly a bias but one I am glad to have as I find it extremely insightful and helpful to understand New Age participants' concerns.

The biggest concern for me and Josh is probably to have absolute control over any decision that involves health, choice of procedures, and acceptance of personal conditions and eventually acceptance of death. All these are important elements in the pattern of life. These experiences and attitudes have of course a solid basis in terms of the objective and subjective perceptions. A disease is defined in a biomedical sense and so objectified while the experience of it is a highly subjective one (Moyers 1993:326). In the mainstream both concepts are being separated instead of reconciled as complements of the same patterns, e.g. person of patient or relationship between doctor and patient. The communication breaks down and the patient ends up alienated from his body that is suspended in a passive state, from the disease that is being controlled by external means, and from the doctor who looks more like an extension of his equipment than a human being. Treatment is distributed from the center to the periphery while carefully maintaining certain social power relationships. The center is the place of action

(Shils 1983:94) which means here the periphery is in a state of passivity. With his avoiding doctors Josh expresses a kind of passive resistance.

The downside of our experiences is that Josh expressed when he said that he avoids doctors. So do I. The first thought here is that this would increase risks considerably. In some cases it probably does. But this dilemma is also perceived out of a very special context, namely that disease is the norm and a major preoccupation in social, political, and economic realms where health is the rare exception. It is not the goal of this project to resolve this dilemma here. But it is important to me to be aware to what extent I and my informants are tied into our mainstream attitude. Balancing the risks then, is part of the decision making process.

Kari seems to have the most practical outlook and suggests to apply whatever works, regardless from which medical tradition a procedure comes from. She seems the most serene in her attitude after being severely ill and almost dying more than once. I do not notice the distrust in her that I see in Dan, Josh, or even myself.

Kari's approach would of course involve a tremendous amount of research, money, and time on the side of the patient. Although a broad knowledge base is available to the individual, access and regulation are entirely different matters. The situation is different in China.

Western biomedicine became a status symbol among the elite while at the same time traditional practices and concepts remained part of the wider social environment. Biomedicine and traditional practices complement each other in the health care system. The conceptual basis consists of balance in life-style and makes no distinction between mind and body (Moyers 1993:252). The concept of healing is only just emerging in our own environment. That it provides a context in which a wide range of diverse traditions, including biomedicine, can be integrated has yet to be realized. Ironically, a main motive for this development is an economic concern in a context in which non-biomedical traditions are still perceived as competition instead of as complements. This is in accord with the mainstream philosophy that I have laid out before where success in all realms is measured in economic terms.

Conceptual obstacles are more difficult to overcome than practical ones. One very important concept in New Age health is energy. Mark works with it on the basis that its principle with regard to a living organism is one of integration. The flow of energy has to go in particular directions through our system. His main goal is to realign the energy flow in our system. Mark attributes most of his client's problems to stress and lifestyle. For example wrong body postures while sitting at a desk, a state of non-relaxation puts enormous stress on the system and also

blocks the free flow of energy. Mark explained it almost like a physicist with a human body as the main circuit. Significantly, Mark included his own energy flow in the procedure. In praxis this means he has to be involved with the client, has to focus on the whole person but also on himself. It is therefore important for Mark to do his work with integrity and honesty, those two major concerns of Josh.

Mark described energy very much in the same way that New Age health practitioners talk about the Chinese energy principle, chi. In this context, any illness is seen as a disruption of balance or energy flow. The body is divided into yin and yang complements (not opposites as in the western sense) in which meridians guide the energy flow very much like in an electric circuit. The task then is to realign the flow. Chi is a force that has a more encompassing meaning than the energy that we know from physics and even Chinese practitioners have no real definition for it (Moyers 1993:253).

The idea of energy finds wide application in the New Age realm and is here just as difficult to define. Physicist Fritjof Capra (1991) explains chi in terms of an energy field. Chi is translated into ether or gas and referred to cosmic energy, or more metaphorically, vital breath (p.213). Two points are important here. It becomes obvious in this explanation that what we look at in specific

contexts, are only manifestations of energy itself depending on what measuring devices we use. A significant difference between the mainstream and the New Age realms is the linear to the point concept and the circular-spiral field concept. Both are mental concepts that I could also express with particles and waves. The same difference appears in the doctor and patient relationship which is static in the mainstream but flowing or active in the New Age realm. Our imaginings draw wide circles. Energy or chi, the "real thing" escapes us, at least in our western thinking. Which brings me to the second important point.

One very important notion in our mainstream realm is an insistence on scientific proof (as defined by those in power), a dependence on fixed definitions, and the attitude that if it does not fit into our current mainstream science, it probably does not exist and there certainly is no need to examine it. On the other hand, Chinese doctors as well as New Age participants are perfectly comfortable with a concept that escapes definition. The proof lies in practice.

I have used Pierre Bourdieu's (1994) idea of doxa before with regard to a paradigm that is external in so far as it is centered in a certain distribution of power with the decision makers at the center and the perpetuators in the periphery. Here now doxa assumes a slightly different meaning. It is related to a habitus that is taken for

granted because it makes sense in a very practical way (1990:68). Members of the periphery have a wide range of choices and will select a procedure that is most practical and makes the most sense to them. The main difference here is that the decision is made by the patient, not by the doctor. Doxa is internal not external. The decision making rests on trust and practical experience of the individual not on preset institutionalized standards dictated from the center. The decision making process is not a one-sided affair anymore but a balanced negotiation between individuals from a particular interest group and those who offer choices and opportunities. Symbolic power rests on the control of people's bodies, as Bourdieu observes (1990:69). Power in the New Age realm seems more evenly distributed in a context where all members become participants and negotiators. In physics terms power becomes nonlocal and is distributed more or less evenly across a field of interconnections (both practitioners and patients). This is where a New Age participant would see chi as the force that holds us together in a socially interactive system. In this particular instance, healing is the border of the system, a very flexible and negotiable border. This is in social terms what Tyler Volk (1995) discusses in ecological terms. There is no specific functional border between elements of a system. Rather the network of relationships is the border and is therefore quite flexible

and negotiable. The cohesiveness of the network is ensured in a constant flux of connections and separations (pp.58-59). The functional borders that kept doctors and patients, specialists and specialists, biomedicine and traditional medicine separate, do not exist in this context anymore where the metapattern is healing and where particles or participants contribute their energies equally to a wave field that keeps them connected and the system alive.

Integration in the New Age healing context is quite a different thing than in the mainstream, at least from the analytical perspective. In the mainstream social structure (and here the health care system) integration is often taken to keep the structure intact. Power institutions at the center provide not only their services but also the tools or arguments to legitimize the exact same arguments. The patient or consumer simply follows those guidelines and so perpetuates the structure. Physically speaking, it holds the particles in place. The fragments of the system, e.g. specialists, are not connected with each other but are in linear fashion bound to the center as is everybody else. A dangerous and rather fragile structure, I would think. Also one that perceives change from the outside, e.g. alternative healing methods, as a threat to the structure which is always thought of in economic terms, not in terms of healing. In other words, they are thought of in strictly functional mechanistic

terms instead of in terms of dynamics. At the very best, dynamics still means the legitimizing tools that keep all the fragments in their proper places and dependent on the center. Considering that we study systems more than people, especially world systems, I am baffled. It seems Descartes and Newton are still part of our minds.

With an increasing globalization, increasing options for patients, and the development of a New Age context, integration becomes more organic and so should our analyses. After all, I still study people (human organisms to be perfectly clear) and not abstracts that would not exist without people in the first place. The basic change is suggested by Fritjof Capra (1988). All our systems are dynamic living systems and need to be studied as such. The focus has to be on the network of relationships, not on selected individual fragments of the web (pp.266-267). I believe, this goes for a human body in case of illness as well as for a social system. New Age participants do exactly this and in a way that is based more on practical experience than prescribed rules dictated from the outside. In this integrated social context, the patient, the medical problem, one or more specialists and so forth are all part of one flowing flexible network. Information flows freely in this network in all directions, from the molecule in the patient's body up through the world wide web to find an applicable procedure and an appropriate practitioner

somewhere, and historically, at some time in the past. The key in this type of integration is the free flow, spirals and circles again, of information between all participants in all places at all times. Never before has this been possible and yet it seems difficult to grasp the idea.

The health of a person depends on the natural and social environment. A changing environment is directly and indirectly related to the changing condition of the individual's health and will of course include phases of ill health. Sometimes the distinction between health and illness will be fuzzy (Capra 1988:322). But then, this only reflects the wave aspect of a very dynamic system, which also appear fuzzy to most of us. I believe Josh comes close here by accepting his disease without feeling ill and in fact being quite confident about it. It is just a part of it all. Also Dan fits in here by putting more weight on the relationship (wave) between him and the chiropractor than on a fix of the problem. Of course, Dan is considerable pain on and off and craves a fix. But if nothing else works, an overall feeling of relative well being is still better than to be drugged. The latter is also a big concern for Dan who complains, "They don't tell you anything. They just give you drugs." What he is complaining about here is what I have mentioned above, the blocked flow of information in the mainstream system.

For my part, I am flowing freely between social, medical, organic, and physics contexts to drive the point home. I will talk more about this in the next chapter.

A common critique against "all that New Age stuff" is that it is not really new at all but often appropriates ideas and traditions that have existed for a long time, sometimes so long that they have been forgotten. Of course this is true. In a New Age realm, this is not a critique but simply a sign of integration. This is a good spot to insert a fairly drastic example for demonstration. The doctor in my home town is a conventionally trained family or general practitioner. He is in contact with state-of-the-art medical centers all over and knows exactly where to send his patients for specialized treatment. Mostly he is a mainstream doctor who shares his praxis with his son who contributes the latest and newest in biomedical knowledge and expertise. The interesting thing is that they also send patients to a nearby naturo healer if they think this is useful. This healer in turn sends his patients to them if this should be necessary, usually in cases that are 'too late' for non-invasive procedures. In addition, the family doctor also sends patients with hard to treat skin problems (scars, warts, burn injuries etc.) to a sensitive in a very matter-of-fact way. The sensitive applies a "speaking" to the problem and participants report success (although sometimes temporary) and satisfaction.

One patient informed me that, "...only the old doctors do that. The young ones don't know how that works." Of course, sending patients to a sensitive is an old time practice and in this sense New Age is a new context for them. I think this is a prime example of New Age integration in full force. I have to think of Kari here, who's reading always includes medical information. I won't even make an attempt to explain this practice. But I will defend it as an integrative aspect of an all around dynamic health care system. The concern about people's health cannot be whether or not our biomedical system is legitimized or not. The primary concern in an integrative health care system has to be how the patient feels about it.

There is another aspect to integration in holistic medicine, creativity. I have named creativity as one of the most important characteristics of the New Age realm. Of course, all people are creative in various degrees, mainstream as well as New Age people. The difference is that New Age participants are fully aware of it, make full use of it, and try to increase it. To act out or even increase creativity choices or opportunities are essential. Jon Elster (1989) interprets opportunities in the context of constraints. For example, economic, legal, psychological, or social boundaries. Within this context the individual develops certain preprogrammed perceptions and beliefs about opportunities. The perspective from the

outside of course is a different matter (pp.13-21).

The construction of this context relates to my remarks about knowledge and integration. To avoid repetition, in the mainstream these constraints were much tighter than in the New Age realm. In a wider global contemporary and historical context opportunities abound. It is difficult not to be creative, not to be experimental, and not to feel more empowered as an individual or as a patient. It is easier to break the constraints of the mainstream and to be more critical and selective about institutionalized services. The New Age participant creates health based on her own ideas and experiences.

The downside is that a wide range of options can leave one confused. In a medical context, this could be dangerous. According to the World Health Organization health is a state of complete social, physical, and emotional well-being. A New Age person would say sense instead of state. In the mainstream sense often not taken into account because it is too hard to measure and impossible to define. In other words, it is subjective (that's bad). A biomedical practitioner is trained to trust the hard facts of mechanistic science. He is not trained to listen to the senses of his patients. In the New Age context, sense is just as hard to measure and just as difficult to define. It is a very subjective thing (that's good). So how does the New Age person decide whether or not a medical procedure

is needed? This is where creativity comes in.

We all possess what Deepak Chopra (1991) calls creative intelligence. The idea is that the individual generates positive thoughts, emotions, or attitudes and so triggers corresponding biochemical reactions in the brain. These then take part of keeping (or restoring) a combination of psychological and physical well-being. The message the individual receives from body and mind (and there is no separation) is, all is well. Ideas here acquire physical manifestations. Mind here has organizing power that Chopra calls knowledge. The integrative aspect is that sense organs, mind (comprehending and intuiting), and intellect (analyzing and organizing) all work together. Intelligence here is not only what we usually think it is, but also exists on a subcellular level. Thus enzymes, receptors, or antibodies all work together smoothly (in harmony) to create a healthy environment (pp.79-88). I realize, this must sound fuzzy to the non-New Ager. It is really quite simple, from the cell nucleus up to the complex organization of our brains and beyond to what this organ can absorb and create, we are one big autopoietic entity the identity of which is kept intact by integrating all of these factors. In my opinion, we have become quite knowledgeable in terms of neurobiology and the biochemical processes Chopra refers to. But I am still missing some plausible explanation as to the how and the why. For example, I know I can willfully

raise my adrenalin level in my bloodstream by working myself up into a temper tantrum. No big deal. But how the non-physiological part (waves) exactly connects with the physiological (particles) is still not totally clear. But of course, just because we cannot explain something yet does not mean it cannot work. The mind-body debate would lead us beyond the boundaries of this project.

Of course, all of the above also works backward, so to speak. If something cannot be taken care of by mental activities alone, the patient will intuit it possibly long before it really starts hurting. We are talking about subjective processes and levels of experience here, so the degree of awareness about one's condition will differ from person to person. The point however is, that subjective sense and the creative powers of the individual can make a difference. To translate into Conny's concept, if it feels good it probably is (but only if it's honest and not the immediate gratification kind). As to the knowledge that is mentioned here, I believe it comes close to what Kari calls the Knowing. She described Knowing as a sense. Anticipating, intuiting, creating, imagining, and organizing the impressions into something comprehensible or a pattern are implied here. Finding a connection between the waves (impressions, sensing) and the particles (physical manifestations) is part of the process. Being is a form of knowledge at its most integrated. The result of all

of this is that the New Age participant seeks help when his senses tell her that something is wrong that cannot set right by mental processes alone. Of course, the more sensitive the person is the earlier the detection. Chopra's and Kari's ideas express systems thinking and establishing organizational relations. The organism is the relationships, it is not isolated parts working together (Capra 1996:37). The former's perspective is that of the explainer (particle), the latter's is that of the experiencer (wave). Spiraling upward in an evolutionary sense, aware and active participants would reach a point where they create an intuitively ethical behavior pattern. What is meant is, that whatever feels good (in Conny's sense) and is enjoyable is good for the individual. Intentionally positive life enhancing behavior patterns are not yet part of the mainstream lifestyle, but are seen as an eventual outcome of this kind of creativity (Chopra 1991:186). This would of course mean an all encompassing context of health on a global scale. This idea or ideal is very much related to the idea of spirituality from a certain philosophical perspective, where goodness is the central evolutionary life sustaining concept (see chapter V).

Fritjof Capra (1982) mentions creativity with regard to experiences of health crises. Major sicknesses can leave the person in a heightened state of health than she has experienced before. Periods of ill health are natural

stages in an ongoing interactive process between the person and the environment. They contribute to an individual's experience, knowledge, and growth (p.323). In Kari's concept, the experience carries one up to the next spiral. I certainly can agree with that from personal experience. Both Kari and Josh are impressive in their calm, confident approach to life and its problems. Although I am far more excitable than those two, I do feel contentment, appreciation, and satisfaction mostly in a context of simplicity and ordinariness. Like those two I am independent of social pressures, consumer pressures, lifestyle pressures, peer pressures and the like. Overall, I feel more integrated, together, and free than most of my contemporaries. In other words, a sense of well-being down at the gut level, is definitely present most of the time. This I also see in Josh and Kari, perhaps more so than in the others. In a social, economic, and political context, this sense of independence together with the awareness of an abundance of opportunities creates a higher level of personal power. This is power over our own health and diseases, but also over medical institutions and attitudes.

To discuss special procedures or alternative healing traditions would be too much in this project. However, I want to mention one practice briefly because it is important for many of the participants and is part of the literature in this context. Meditation serves Dale and

Dan in a very broad way that includes all aspects of their being. Both practice it to create a sense of stability (mental and physical), discipline, and well-being. The key for both is, that they do not use it to aim at specific health problems, but rather as an integrative practice of which their medical conditions (back problem and depressive tendencies in Dan, anemia and alcoholism in Dale) are only parts. Thus they address the whole person, or the relationships that are the person. It is important to notice that Dan sees it also as a spiritual practice which would be one more aspect in the integrative process.

Meditation has been explored from different angles. One that Dan agrees with is that it is a kind of directed concentration. This means to focus, to pay attention without distracting thoughts or other external stimuli. Paying attention to the here and now, to be focused, is the key of the practice. It is also a way to become aware of the mind-body connection which we do not learn in our cultural environment. So it serves as a kind of communication channel to our internal mental processes. As mentioned above, this is essential in creating health. To pay attention to the images our mind's eye presents when we disengage from external stimuli establishes a connection to the inner Self. This integrative, healing process is often dismissed as "daydraming" in our mainstream environment (Weil 1995:198-199). Dan often made us aware of our mind's eye

or pineal gland when he led us out into space in a calm and gentle imaginary trip. The pineal gland is an eyeshaped gland in our brain approximately slightly above and between our eyes whose function is still badly understood. People like Dan associate the wave aspects of our perceptions and physiological rhythms with it. Recently the pineal gland came under closer scrutiny in the study of mind enhancing drugs, biorhythms, geriatrics, and the sleep cycle. For the participants this was an exercise in paying focused attention, the ideal of which is to do this all the time. According to Dale and Dan it works. For Dan it seems easy (like brushing teeth) and he uses it to teach teenagers not to be distracted by external stimuli that result in behavior problems (e.g. drugs, peer pressure). For Dale it seems to take more effort and the key is to recenter herself and establish some discipline and gather energy to order her daily life. The attention to internal images and fantasizing are sometimes confused in mainstream thinking. It corresponds to Kari's, "I am just not here very often," which means that she pays more attention to her inner reality than to her external reality.

Meditation as a perpetual exercise creates a kind of mindfulness that means to pay attention to every breath, movement, and task in the immediate here and now. To be perfectly calm and relaxed and undistracted in thought and act. This ideal is associated with Zen practice, where

it creates an inner joyfulness and sense of fulfillment (Thich Nhat Hanh 1995:14). These ideas are of course the same that I have described above in a more spiritual context. None of the participants in this project has carried meditation to this extreme. But I have to think of the atmosphere of calmness, confidence, quiet contemplation, and sometimes even serenity that I noticed on various occasions. This atmosphere I have never found anywhere in the mainstream to this extent. It feels good and does create a sense of well-being. It seems to correspond to the Chinese idea of meditation. The optimal outcome is when participants become aware and capable of inner stillness in difficult situations. Meditation is the ability to attend from moment to moment. In contrast, mainstream life is oriented towards the next moment and so participants may miss the present as they rush through (Moyers 1993:117-121). This is basically the same difference that I noticed above. I am reminded here of early childhood experiences in hospitals that for a three or four year old are always hostile environments. Whenever I felt threatened I decided to "slip" as I called it then. It was a voluntary act to disengage from the external and be totally inward. As a result I was praised for never making a fuss no matter how uncomfortable the procedure was. They did not realize I could not be uncomfortable because I was not there. That is a pretty accurate

description of how it felt. The astonishment to find the very same processes described as traditional ZenBuddhist practice and Chinese medical tradition as I pursued my research was awesome. It leads me to believe that these mental abilities are part of our natural design and that other people throughout history have been successful in acknowledging and integrating these processes into their contexts. It makes our own mainstream look rather shallow, missing out on a lot of opportunities.

The pattern that connects in this context is healing as a continuous creative process. It reaches far beyond the immediate medical condition. Identity, spirituality, knowledge, creativity are all integrative aspects that play roles in the healing relationships inside us. They also play roles outside us providing a mental conceptual framework that integrates medical practice (institution), political and economic power relationships, and social and personal behavior patterns. Gregory Bateson (1991) notices that it is difficult to think about health because health means an integrated system and it is difficult to talk about everything at once. This is where health is associated with sacredness or spirituality. To talk about it may change it and perhaps turn it into a pathology (pp.265-266). With this he expresses the wave aspect that is all encompassing and to disconnect a particle from the process would compromise the integrity of the organism.

This principle applies to the medical context as well as to every other context, not least to the Self where personal integrity is the result and the cause for a healthy person displaying intuitively ethical behavior. So the metapattern is the integrated process of Spirituality, Self, and Healing.

Chapter IX

Science

Perhaps the most important explanatory framework for both the mainstream and New Age participants is science. However, ideas about what science is about and how it should be practiced clearly establish two camps. The differences reach down to the fundamentals.

Immediately obvious in the New Age realm is a wealth of apparently unsorted information, the widest and most diverse base of experiences, knowledge, traditions, and also speculation I have ever encountered. Here speculation is not a bad word. Rather it indicates exploration, curiosity, and experimentation until one comes up with something that applies to real life. The atmosphere is one of a neverending curiosity, scrutiny, and analysis which is most impressive. The thinking about things, the experimentation with ideas seems almost more important than finding answers. Indeed, many questions that we tried to explore had to be left unanswered.

Several of the participants have university degrees

in various disciplines, philosophy or anthropology for example. They make use of a more formal language based on their formal reading. The others often voice the very same ideas and concerns but use a less formal language. For example Dan often encouraged me to read quite sophisticated material in physics, history, or philosophy. Mark on the other hand seemed unaware of the formal knowledge of Chinese healing but talked about and applied in practice the very same principles. Conny relies almost completely on personal experience, creative thinking and her sharp wit. She is the one who can describe how the universe functions and hit upon basic principles of quantum physics and evolution. This comes the closest to what I would call intuitive knowledge and pattern recognition and organization at a very high level of creativity. Kari, with an anthropology degree, has the same formal basis as I and easily translates New Age symbols and concerns into a formal scientific language. There is never a lack of engagement, enthusiasm, and involvement while talking about science.

The one thing that they all have in common is books. No matter what books. After all; legitimacy is debatable. Terms like debatable are negative terms in the mainstream indicating uncertainty. In the New Age realm terms like these are positive. They simply mean more to think about. Uncertainty here is a fact of life indicating the continuous

change or the wave patterns that unfold around us. So uncertainty does not bother and if it does, "Think harder". Reading seems to be done on the basis, it is always good to know. But this must not be confused with naively believing everything one reads. It is simply a quest for more food for thought. On the basis of these observations I will not make a difference between those with a formal education and those without. The ideas about science, how it should be practiced, and what it should mean to us are the same for both.

The basic attitude towards mainstream science is probably expressed in Kari's, "The only thing static is the scientist's mind." But she also tries to understand the resistance to change and new knowledge in a very human sense. Any kind of change is a threat to one's own worldview, professional position, lifestyle, and simply to one's safety. She points out the possible usefulness in the ongoing denial and resistance and realizes that too much change in too short a time would lead to chaos. A viewpoint that is shared by Dan. But while Kari watches scientific and other developments with a detached amused exasperation, Dan is far more upset and his view on mainstream science is indeed dim. His main complaint is that science is being misused to legitimize current political and economic relationships and practices without regard for people or longterm consequences. In this sense

the scientist is no better than crooked characters in big business and politics. But Dan also offers a more psychological insight and a more humane one. The obsession with objectivity, rationality, and the next higher place on the totem pole is an escape. In this context everything that is remotely human, e.g. emotions, phenomena that do not fit in, intuition, the knowledge and experiences of others, are systematically denied and/or rejected, often with a big dose of cynicism. "Not having to deal with all that emotional stuff", describes a pretty sad figure of a scientist. Escaping from humanity so to speak, selling out one's integrity as a scientist and as a person to keep the status quo intact, makes the successful mainstream scientist almost look like a loser by New Age/New Science standards. Especially scary to Dan is the more or less random application of and the increasing dependency on high tech solutions. At this point I have the picture of a toddler with a machine gun in mind. In this regard Dan noticed an important difference between mainstream and new age paradigms that are reflected not only in the science context but in the education system in general. The overemphasize of hard science, technology, and rationality and the almost total neglect of philosophy, ethics (the kind that is not politicised), spiritual sciences, arts and crafts are reflected in our mental, social, and natural world. I have to agree with Dan here, although he is far

more pessimistic and grim than I.

From a New Age perspective mainstream science is being misused to legitimize exploitative and ultimately destructive power relationships. Science here has nothing to do with seeking knowledge, discovery, exploration, change, growth, or integration of every member of a global community. Any knowledge that does not support the status quo of the dominant is being suppressed or dismissed as unscientific. Science then is about what the powers want to know and what others are being allowed to know. In the New Age realm science is about what we do not know, where 'Think harder' is the order of the day, and where unanswered questions are only a new challenge. Change is not a threat but an opportunity.

To understand science, mainstream or other, it is important to remember that it is an expression of our basic philosophical and perceptual framework. It is a process of explaining and asking, legitimizing and questioning that is in step with our historical, political, social, and mental evolution. In this process two forces are at work, change and wanting to know versus non-change and not wanting to know. Ideally these forces would be balanced with both having about the same influence. It would be the negotiating process at its most creative and integration at its most complete. However, the mainstream force has been the dominant force for a long time and on a global

scale. The resulting problems, social and environmental, appear unrelated to the mainstream participant. They are being solved at the surface and individually with the one problem at the philosophical or ideological basis going unnoticed or denied. After all, philosophy is not important, psychology is probably not a science, and spirituality is something for those New Age nuts. And so the mainstream person is caught in a loop.

The quite recent emergence of the new science provides the first real counter force. I see this development as a direct reaction to all of the above. One can spend time discussing all the individual aspects of both forces. But what it really comes down to is a significant difference at the philosophical basis. As more and more people (scientists as well as non-scientists) make an effort to formulate a new paradigm the overemphasize of rationality is being toned down and complemented by the integration of the nonrational or intuitive aspects that are inherent in our species.

Throughout the text I have already indicated several of the key characteristics of science that are associated with a particular view of our world. Here I will summarize to provide a basis for the rest of this chapter. To begin with, I find it quite remarkable that a whole worldview or philosophy or ideology or whatever one wants to call it, is based on a discipline as hard and dry as physics,

or I should say as classical. Somehow this seems like a contradiction.

Physics has always been one of the most influential sciences in our world. Perhaps it seems the most likely to hold answers to questions of "How things work". For the past threehundred years Newtonian physics has provided some of the basic principles of how to explain the world. Isaac Newton (1642-1727) had a rather rigid view of the universe. It was an absolute unchanging space based on three dimensional Euclidian geometry. All physical changes took place in absolute smooth flowing time with no connection to the external material world. The particles "out of which everything was made" floating around in this sphere were thought of as material particles (matter) which were also unchanging. Changes in the physical realm were due to a certain force, gravity, that acted on these passive particles and was firmly connected with these particles (Capra 1991:55). To reduce it, the motion of constant particles in absolute space and through absolute time occurred through the force of gravity. As a consequence, the universe appeared rather predictable, functioning according to unchanging natural laws. It looked simple and neat and plausible. One only needed to work out the math to discover the laws and everything would be explainable, with an emphasize on everything. The material world, including people, was rather passive in this enormous

universal mechanism and change was really not the issue.

A very similar notion came from Renes Descartes (1596-1650) who created a method of analytical thinking. The ideas was that one had to break down units into their smallest possible particles to find out how the units worked. The subjects of study were the particles and everything else, the human mind for example, was an entirely separate thing that need not be taken into account (Capra 1996:19).

Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) gave us the idea that science means one need only study those phenomena that can be measured and quantified (Capra 1996:19). Quantity won out over quality probably because it also made the world seem more predictable and more certain.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was a proponent of the empirical method. Experiments from which general conclusion can be drawn which in turn can be tested in further experiments, became an apparently relieable method to figure out how things work. As a philosopher Bacon redefined the purpose of science. Knowledge was a tool to dominate and control. This was opposed to eastern philosophies where science had an integrative purpose and knowledge was associated with wisdom and understanding of "tao" or the way (Capra 1988:55-56).

It is easy for a scientist to imagine the thrill thoughts like these would bring. The prospect that one

need only do the math and find answers to everything, the idea that the world is measurable and therefore a predictable and safe place are truly very exciting. They also reveal something darker about us, the need to be in control. On a softer note, not being able to live with uncertainty, unpredictability, change, or as equals to others also reveals our vulnerability and fearfulness.

In sum, the world and its inhabitants function like machines. Everything that cannot be measured, quantified, made visible, or hit other people on the head with, does probably not exist. I feel a little as if I am describing a kindergarden scenario. The mental, social, economic, etc. implications of all of the above should be obvious even to the casual observer of mainstream life and have been mentioned in previous chapters. The results for anthropology specifically have been discussed in the methods chapter.

Lineal thinking and objectivity are two main foci in mainstream science. I will briefly discuss both. The idea that one cause leads to one effect resembles the rigid model of the Newtonian order of things. One of the more obvious pitfalls of lineal thinking is noted by Gregory Bateson (1991): if A then B or if this then that. In this scheme B is never used to reaffirm A. This method is made to fit the epistemology of conventinal science, not a pattern in nature. A certain neutrality of mind is asked

for here which is really a mind that is locked in said epistemology unable to open to the outside. According to Bateson, quantification is a device to avoid noticing patterns (p.192). If a scientific experiment starts out with an assumption which is never tested (from B to A, e.g.) then the whole exercise is simply an act to legitimize or reaffirm the epistemology. In this sense the scientific experiment itself becomes a mechanism to hold the particles in their place. The idea that everything has a definite cause and a definite effect implies a determinate universe.

Circles and spirals are out and so are creativity, imagination, and curiosity. In a closed context like this the outcome of an experiment is predictable which is indeed a goal here. Quantification can be associated with static while patterns imply change. But change would mean that the world is perhaps not as predictable as one wished it to be.

The fierce rigidity with which experiments and their predicted outcomes are pursued reminds me in a curious way of a little analytical thought that Pierre Bourdieu (1990) applies to others but which would never be applied to ourselves. The most fundamental ritual actions are denied transgressions which would threaten the reproduction of the group (p.212). Dale's 'They don't want us to know,' seems to apply just as well to a scientist who has ingrained the beliefs of classical physics.

The philosophical basis for a determinate universe is the idea of a strict separation between the universe and the observer. This leads to a further characteristic of classical physics, objectivity. The human observer is not part of the context she observes and the world can be described from the outside (Capra 1991:57). It is really quite simple: the objectified reality of the observer was assumed to be the objective reality of nature. Which brings us back to Gregory Bateson's assumption problem. I want to add a slight twist to the idea of objectivity. The observer on the outside can be seen as the A point/particle that is connected in a rigid straight line to the B point/particle on the inside and this is a powerful position indeed.

This detour through physics may seem strange considering that the context is anthropology. But the characteristics I have discussed above taken together became ideology, ideal, and defining framework for all of science. From there it became our reality. Everything that could not be measured along visible sightlines did simply not exist or was dismissed as irrelevant. Theories and methods that were designed to include imagination, subjectivity, understanding, feeling, fantasy, etc. were (and still are) considered failures or anti-science (Geertz 1973:55-56). The social ramifications of this particular philosophy are our next concern.

If we understand the underlying philosophical basis we will be able to get beyond the problems on the surface and solve the one major problem at the foundation that is the main cause for all the other problems. However, in the mainstream this may not be desirable.

In a mechanistic worldview everything that cannot be measured, quantified, coded, or categorized is irrelevant. The separation between the observer and the observed implies a power relationship that reminds very much of Edward Shils' (1982) model of center and periphery where the knowledge approved by the center becomes the official knowledge (p.93). The observer is in a position where she is able to select, control, and manipulate data regardless of their context. Since categories, definitions, and codes have to be formulated after the scientific ideal, they are by necessity prefabricated and automatically exclude any kind of information that does not fit into our own worldview. In fact, this kind of info is often perceived as contamination because it makes the outcome of a scientific test less predictable.

As official knowledge the mainstream scientific paradigm became our doxa. According to Pierre Bourdieu (1990) the order that mainstream science established tends to produce the impression of the naturalization of its own arbitrariness. The classification systems used in this order reproduce the order and the power relationships

within. Bourdieu notices the correspondence between the observer and the objectified classes (p.164). So our scientifically established world order becomes ingrained in us through enculturation and most notably, formal education, that our objectified reality appears natural. Thus reality as we see it is limited to our scientific knowledge.

A key word for Bourdieu here is arbitrariness. I do not think that there is anything arbitrary in the ideals, goals, and mechanisms of our mainstream paradigm. After all, it does have a historical and philosophical evolution or a metapattern. A mechanistic worldview is bound to create a corresponding mentality. I have mentioned in a previous chapter that the easiest to count and the most obvious item in our objective world order is money. It is a perfect tool to manipulate power relationships. Perhaps even more importantly, it is a powerful argument for a utilitarian mechanistic mind. I think this mentality is what Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1989) refer to as reification. A perceived reality becomes objectified to such an extent that it is totally separate from humans or dehumanized (p.89).

Dehumanized has a deeper meaning here. A utilitarian mechanistically trained mind perhaps cannot comprehend "all that emotional stuff". Both Kari and Dan see the ideals of the mainstream paradigm as escapes from the less

measurable. The categories of science provide safe limits within which the official knowledge becomes practical. Both lament the blindness of mainstream scientists and the fear of the unfamiliar. Many of our scientific goals and inventions are being misused for life threatening and destructive purposes in order to keep the established objective reality intact, meaning power relationships. Josh believes the military could be a wonderful research institute if the main drive were curiosity or problem solving. However, the only problems that exist in the military or anywhere else in the mainstream are those, that threaten certain power relationships. The greater the risk to the established order, the stricter and more rigid the codes of behavior (Bourdieu 1990:78). Bourdieu is talking about the habitus in social relations here. But the idea just as easily applies to our context here, especially when we keep the psychological implications in mind that I have pointed out.

A further implication of dehumanized and a direct consequence of a mechanistic worldview is the rational actor approach. My favorite example is the explanation that altruism, if such a thing exists, is probably good for the survival of the species. Less funny, it is rare to read an ethnography in which any kind of human relationship is not interpreted with the attitude, "what do they get out of it?" Many utilitarian relationships

do indeed exist and need to be interpreted as such. But to ignore the nonrational or maybe even the irrational aspects of our existence is really ignorance.

Jon Elster (1994) discusses emotions, nonrational choice and actions, irrational actions, and subjective beliefs in terms of their interference with rational choice or optimal adaptation. Mostly these terms are negative and rationality is still an ideal. The key idea here is that an individual cannot possibly have all the information plus the razor sharp rational mind to be able to make a successful rational choice with an intended and predictable outcome. Indeterminacy is part of the game and so most of our actions are more or less arbitrary because they depend largely on our beliefs about our choices and bits of information at our disposal (pp.30-81). It is significant to notice that Elster moves the discussion along cost-benefit lines and presents the nonrational as interference or at least a diminishing factor. Where would all this leave Conny and Kari, who avoid the pitfalls of an attempted rational choice by relying on their intuition for important decisions? Both experience intuition as far more reliable as an attempt at rational argument of pros and cons exactly because of all the reasons Jon Elster noticed in his discussion. The outcome of any decision is often just as unpredictable in the details. But all those who rely on intuition can distinguish between really

good and really bad sensations and this will give directions for actions. A degree of unpredictability is simply part of life. Kari emphasized that her impressions are not hammered in stone because everything is in constant change and there are too many interconnected variables involved for her to be aware of. This is basically the same in green. In the mainstream that's bad, in the New Age realm that's good.

It seems then that a major distinguishing factor between the mainstream and the New Age realm is control. Mainstream science is based on controlled data in a controlled environment to create a scenario in which rationality makes sense and is even necessary but ultimately only recreates this environment. New Age participants are far more comfortable with change and new knowledge from all directions. I have to wonder who has the greater mental flexibility here and thus the better chance to adapt to changes that are eventually unavoidable because they occur in the course of our history and evolution. "The only thing static is the scientist's mind". That could be fatal.

I have said rationality makes sense and is necessary in the mainstream but ultimately only recreates it. Which is of course an intended outcome in this context. We are speaking of the relationship between institutions and the individual, objective reality and subjective reality, official knowledge and new knowledge, and academe and the

general population.

The context for official knowledge is the academic institution. This is the environment in which a certain kind of knowledge is being formulated within the boundaries and according to the standards of its ideology. The result is presented to the public as objective reality. As long as members of the public are being raised in the same ideology, this is not a problem. In a shared context official knowledge and common sense create a kind of mutual knowledge. Here is where the problems start. Anthony Giddens (1986) notes a major gap between mutual knowledge and common sense that reflects a certain power relationship. Mutual knowledge here is the official objective knowledge while common sense is often treated as belief since it cannot be measured or tested in a scientific way. Giddens suggests that belief or common sense has to be treated as knowledge in its association with action (pp.336-337). The gap is especially noticeable in anthropology where we know but others believe. The us versus them relationship is thus safely reaffirmed. So our informants are either dimwits, liars, mental cases, or perhaps only less developed. Giddens speaks of a 'critical moment in anthropology' here (p.338). To me it looks like integration mainstream style. Only that knowledge is being allowed that supports the mainstream structure. I had the feeling I was doing something right when Kari laughed, "You make me feel good. At least you

don't think I'm crazy."

As long as participants in academic institutions and the lay population are being enculturated in the same historical and philosophical context, it will be easier to establish a mutual knowledge as both parties have the same beliefs about their reality, namely that it is objective and therefore absolute. Problems arise when new knowledge becomes available to the public from other historical and philosophical contexts, when change becomes an issue, and when the gap between the prescribed objective reality of the institution and the subjective reality of the individual becomes too wide so that one becomes incomprehensible to the other. In this situation, the language of academia becomes defensive, easily speaking of anti-science or unscientific hokuspokus and, maybe it is funny, being absolutely right. The rational objective mainstream scientist get stuck in her own context without being able to extricate herself from it and can still insist on being totally objective.

The academic mainstream has put itself in a threatened position by refusing to communicate with the population other than handing down bits and pieces of its doctrine. Dale referred to religious institutions, but her complaint is just as easily applicable here, "They don't want us to know. But I can think for myself." Academic science has created a symbolic system or language that is

incomprehensible for the public. The meaning of the symbols is presented without explanation and memorized as pieces of a doctrine. The symbolizing is being done by those in power. It makes sense that in a fragmented particle environment this symbolic system is also fragmented and communication across disciplines is difficult. The same practice of memorizing meanings applies in this situation. It is not a coincidence that memorizing is a hallmark of our education system. Perhaps this was what made it difficult for Dan's teachers to understand him and his inquiries were rejected. All this does not create an environment in which creativity, imagination, curiosity, integration, or other wave activities are encouraged. The formal language of science is comparable to Saussure's *langue*, a kind of code that describes objective relations that do not exist in the subjective reality of those who rely on *parole* or speech as an immediate and practical way to communicate in everyday life. That objective language is a product of academia and so only applies to this particular context is predictably overlooked by its creators (Bourdieu 1995:30-31). *Langue* and *parole* can also be translated into particle and wave, of course. In my encounters with New Age participants we all have experienced many situations in which our mainstream language did not provide the vocabulary to adequately talk about the wave aspects of life. While the New Agers muddled through in

a practical sense by simply speaking what came to mind and negotiating a meaning, I was left stranded without a proper terminology to talk about their experiences without making them look silly. Any "folk-code" would have simply recreated that us versus them problem and made them look backward. On a positive note, one of the most significant experiences was the discussion with Conny when she insisted that she has lived before. The realization that we absolutely have to learn to ask better questions, or rather questions that apply to our informants' experiences rather than to our own, was most important. Otherwise we practice science with the attitude it cannot be what must not be, and never mind the powers. This means selling out our integrity as scientists.

It is exactly this integrity that the population is beginning to miss in our institutions. The separation between academia and public is established and so is the power position of the former. However, it is exactly this separation that now keeps academic institutions and its mainstream participants in an increasing vulnerable position. The reaction is as expected defensive. One example is the experience that members of the Noetic Research Institute made in the 1970's. Articles based on legitimate and recreatable lab tests were denounced by peer reviewers as unscientific (Mitchell 1996). The only way the mainstream can handle Knowing is through standardized tests in schools.

Any other way of Knowing or the study of it is not part of the mainstream's reality, or should one say political climate? This is especially true if Knowing is included as a sense like Kari describes it. I find it amazing that 'objective' scientists have no problem rejecting an idea because they do not 'believe' in it. It seems that Conny shows a far more objective and scientific attitude when she refuses to think in terms of belief or disbelief unless she knows about UFO's.

In a historical context where new knowledge from different paradigms becomes available to the public, our own paradigm does not appear to be so absolute anymore and its representatives not so trustworthy after all. When the first reaction of a person feeling sick is to head for the library for research instead of for a doctor, it is a sign that something is changing. If the options available come from everywhere throughout history (and that includes mythological history) it is a sign that we are probably moving into a New Age and are negotiating a new paradigm. But this means we need a new philosophical or ideological foundation.

Again it was physics that initiated a shift in our perception of the universe. One important change was the observation that each charge of a negative or positive particle creates a condition in its environment that is felt as a force by another charge. Thus the attention

shifted from particles in rigid relationships to more flexible energy fields. The next thought was offered by Einstein who realized that these fields were entities in their own rights moving through space and time. The model of static and mechanic relationships of absolute time, absolute space, and particles collapsed. Space and time together are a four dimensional environment in which all absolutes lose their meaning. It is a relative environment in which events are ordered depending on the observation methods of the observer. Space and time are only meant to describe these observations but have no absolute relevance and cannot be measured in any absolute way. They reveal themselves in their relation to the observer. A most important realization that came out of these observations, is that mass is a form of energy (Capra 1991:55-63).

I am very much reminded of Conny who explained the very same ideas to me as she struggled to explain the workings of the universe to me. She relies on lay language, practical common sense insights, and New Age literature that is often based on physics. Conny's diagram of the universe in which everything is interrelated and in constant change showed nothing but an expanding wave field. We both could sum up her explanation with, "You're talking pure energy here."

A further discovery that would become important for

us was made by Max Planck. The energy of heat radiation appears in energy packets or quanta. Every electromagnetic radiation can appear as either waves or particles. In the mechanistic model of either/or thinking this would be a paradox. The discovery brought up the question of the reality of matter. At the subatomic level matter does not exist with certainty but rather has a tendency to exist and atomic events have a tendency to occur. It makes sense when one remembers that in a relative environment absolute forms of time and space also do not exist. Atoms have been found not to be the hard indestructible objects that fit so neatly into the mechanistic context. Rather they consist of vast regions of space in which tiny particles move about at the speed of light. Subatomic particles can appear as either waves or particles depending on how one looks at it. Tendencies are expressed as probabilities that are associated with mathematical quantities in the form of waves. This means that one can never determine with absolute certainty where (space) a particle can be found or when (time) an event will occur (Capra 1991:67-68).

The development I have outlined here began at the turn of the century. The wider implications of this development began to be recognized only in the 1960's and are still being worked out. It seems somehow significant in a symbolic kind of way that the shift would occur at the turn of the millenium.

One of the major consequences of quantum physics is the need for a new way of thinking about our reality. For science this means to bridge the gap between theory and real life. The conflict is between reality and what we think reality ought to be. We have to change what we expect from reality (Zohar & Marshall 1994:38-39).

Edward T. Hall (1989) distinguishes high-context and lowcontext systems. High context systems are associated with communication about a phenomenon while low context systems are associated with information retrieval. Most scientific taxonomies are low context and therefore farthest removed from real life (p.122). In other words, Hall calls for a more integrated comprehensive system to understand real life instead of the categories and theories that have been devised in consideration of the academic or institutional context but not of the one in which the phenomenon occurs. Hall is aware of the uncertainty factor and sees it as the essence of life. Uncertainty and the involvement of the observer in the experiment make it important to pay attention to the observation as well as to a detailed and accurate description of real life (p.126). The key word is real life. Hall complains that most of his students have to know what they are supposed to discover before they head out into the field (p.39).

Contextual thinking is related to systems thinking in which the attention rests on integrated wholes instead

of on separate particles. Systems thinking has a long history, but in tandem with the new physics it acquires a new significance. Systems are dynamic environments and the properties of its parts can only be understood in the context of the whole. Our attention then shifts from parts to networks. In this context our scientific models and concepts comprise a network of knowledge (Capra 1996:36-39). I think this has a most important consequence in terms of communication. If we accept the principles of quantum physics and contextual thinking as kind of a meta-concept or the new mindset, the language of this concept will be translatable into all other disciplines. The principles of quantum physics apply to all other physical realities (Zohar & Marshall 1994:39).

I think my experience with Conny's concept of the universe is one example of how the same model can be expressed in different languages. But that was only possible because we were both thinking in terms of energy. Her term Godhead was notably accompanied by a 'whatever you want to call it'. Throughout the text I have included exactly such translations.

Another interesting example of contextual thinking comes from Jean, the traditional midwife with an alcoholic past. The parts in her life would be alcoholism, strange city, boyfriend, pregnancy, traditional midwife, job. On a more psychological or wave level one could perhaps include

desperation, fear, unemployment, aimlessness, new interest, and eventually finding a calling. Jean connected all these particles with intermittent 'this had to be so' or 'this had to happen' either directly or by implication. The particle "pregnancy" for example only makes sense to her in its relationship to the midwife she met during that time and to what would become her own occupation. I would call this contextual thinking on a quantum basis applied to real life as she perceives and experiences it. A result of this seems to be Jean's satisfaction with her work that has nothing to do with how much she earns (not much) or what social rank she occupies (what rank?). Describing her development, the impression of an integrated person comes to mind. As a contrast, to think of a pregnancy from a temporary relationship as something positive that had to happen in order to set her on the right track, would sound superstitious in the mainstream conceptual framework. This is especially the case in science where her success would still have been measured in terms of rank and income by mainstream standards and where her own interpretation would have been largely ignored as irrelevant for a scientific analysis. Thus maintaining the gap between us versus them. I see Jean's interpretation as an important contribution to the analysis of the New Age realm. The interpretation that I am delivering here is my part in the contextualizing. I want to emphasize both Jean and

I are part of the same context and that I am not somewhere outside peeking in. The principles of quantum reality require a new model for our social and political relations (Zohar & Marshall 1994:33). The same is true for the relationship between the anthropologist and the informant. I think this situation with Jean is a good example. A consequence is that I do not have any kind of authority over her context or her knowledge and experience. My interpretation is not more valid as hers. A common context, even though we use different languages, eliminates the power relationship between the author and the informant. I will discuss the symbolic implications in the next chapter. Here it is important for us to come to terms with the idea that the native and the ethnographer are two subatomic particles whose interaction in an energy field has an effect on both and thus exerts a force that expands the field, both anthropology and cosmos.

To connect seemingly unrelated events into one larger whole is a process of integration. Contextual thinking with context as a dynamic energy field seems to become the habitus of New Age participants. Pierre Bourdieu (1990) describes habitus as a subjective system of internalized structures that is shared by members of the same class (p.86). I would exchange class here for interest group. As events are biographical their interpretation is by necessity subjective. What Bourdieu means by structures

here are experiences or sequences of experiences that members of the same class (interest group) have in common. Habitus is thus a way to integrate these experiences (p.86-87). It is interesting to remember that one often shared experience of New Age participants is the sense of isolation as they grew up in the midst of the mainstream environment. If this is the first internalized structure it should not surprise that they intuitively would drift toward something to latch on to. A context and conceptual framework that would provide the notion of relationships and belonging. I say intuitively here because obviously not everybody has read quantum physics to find the way. Intersubjectivity is the idea that individuals conceive reasonably similarly similar things (Geertz 1983:154). Things would be needs in this case and intersubjectivity describes the relationship or wave aspect of New Age participants in their newly created context.

Which brings us to creativity. First, a little translation. Quantum physics speaks of an energy field or a force that has an impact on the subatomic particles in the field. In New Age terms that is similar to the idea that everything is made of the same stuff (energy). The universe and everything in it is one big unfolding event and creativity, whether human or cosmic, is the force that makes things happen (Swimme 1984:28-29). For quantum science/anthropology this has consequences. The first

obstacle to overcome are the limits of academic institutions. Their needs are usually defined by a western industrial context and linear thought processes. Mainstream institutions are low context environments in which high context thinking is too complex (Hall 1989:125). To me this is the exact opposite of what science is all about. The same complaint is voiced by James Lovelock (1991) who sees peer reviews as the bane of all science because they are motivated by everything but scientific ideals. More importantly, the rules of the discipline put constraints on what a scientist is allowed to do or can do (p.178). Lovelock eventually quit his job as an employee of such an institution to become a free lance scientist, depending on private funds, but also being able to develop the Gaia Hypothesis which has become a defining classic of the new paradigm.

I have pointed out previously that integration has a wider meaning in the new paradigm. The complexity of interrelated systems requires complexity of thought. Freedom to think is an essential requirement for a scientist in the new paradigm. That means the employment of creativity instead of selecting data to fit into one dimensional categories to recreate our own limited environment over the heads of our informants.

The application of creative thought in real life is expressed in an observation by Edward Shils (1982). There

are always some individuals who have a greater sensitivity to the sacred and an uncommon reflectiveness about the nature of the universe and the rules that govern their social environment. These individuals will eventually set developments in motion which will alter this environment. The context will most likely be academia (pp.179-201). Although Shils is not anywhere near the new paradigm, I have the feeling he is talking about people like Fritjof Capra or James Lovelock. With regard to academia my fate is by no means decided but I see Shils' views confirmed as I find myself in this time and place having been granted the freedom to think about our new quantum reality and to be part of the development. Josh sees the same thing happening when he observes that the fact that this project has become possible is a clear sign that we are in the midst of the shift.

The changes in scientific thought and imagination can be seen as a force that expand the energy field "science". So my next step will be to describe this emerging context to present an overall picture of the context in which we work. Clifford Geertz (1983) states that we can never apprehend the other's imagination (p.44). But we both can imagine in the same context on the basis of the same principles. In fact the goal is not so much to climb into the other's skin and see what the world looks like from there. The goal is to create an environment in which we

can communicate freely because our thoughts are based on the same principles of dynamics and interrelatedness.

The creation of an integrated context begins with the appearance of an anomaly (e.g. quantum physics). If this anomaly is too big to be just the ordinary puzzle, it will upset scientific routine and we are headed for a crisis. Conservative thinkers will attack the anomaly along the standard arguments of the dominant paradigm. However, if the anomaly still persists, the paradigm itself will be attacked. At first only here and there. But eventually the structures of it will break down and a new paradigm will emerge (Kuhn 1996:82-83). Kuhn puts more importance on paradigms than theories that are only the result of any given paradigm. In lay language paradigm is attitude. This is what we are really dealing with here. The emergence of an attitude that emphasizes knowing over ignoring, integration over selection, and interaction over domination. For scientists this means to formulate a paradigm that reflects this attitude. I think this cannot be done without the aid of the public, or specifically our informants.

Books are one of the most obvious characteristics in the New Age realm. They are read, talked about, collected and exchanged, and significantly, recommended to the ethnographer. At the same time quantum scientists present their ideas in a literary style that can be understood by the public and is being absorbed by intellectual New

Age participants like food. For those not formally intellectually active, the less formal literature is available which often draws on ideas from quantum physics. For example, New Age author Starhawk (1989) explains that theoretical models of magic are based on quantum physics by using magic more as a metaphor than scientific proof (p.126).

This emerging literary context is called the Third Culture by John Brockman (1995). Scientists are directly communicating with the public. Thus science has become an essential part of public life (p.18). Of course, science has always been part of public life. The differences lie in language, power relationships, participation, and integration. I have discussed all of this throughout the text. The context of the third culture is one of integration, in which scientific theories and common sense exist in a dynamic relationship. This will sound like anti-science to the mainstream scientist and I acknowledge that the fear of letting go of control over our disciplines might present a psychological hurdle for some. But I also think that ultimately third culture is far more realistic if we don't want to degrade science into a political power game in which we all are but pawns of those who pay us. Biting the hand that feeds me is of course where uncertainty and unpredictability come in. But in the New Age, that's good.

This literary context closes the gap between us and them. Of course, one result is that the line between non-fiction and fiction becomes blurred. New Age bookshelves are full of nonfiction material. However, it still deals with the same ideas and concerns. One way to solve the problem might be not to see this as a problem at all. If the formal thoughts of science are taken as more legitimate than the informal musings of an imaginative if untrained mind, we will be back to square one. Among New Age participants and for myself I found the rule, first read the book and then decide if it's plausible, quite useful. To interpret the less formal New Age literature as a kind of metaphor as Starhawk suggests, might also prove helpful.

Teilhard de Chardin (1975:250) sees as the fundamental ideal of science to learn to master the energy that everything is made of, or the "essential fire" as he calls it. This sounds what mainstream scientists have been trying to do all along. Of course, this is not quite what Chardin had in mind. The idea here is to find the final value of every human element so as to integrate them into one organised whole (p.250). As Jesuit and paleontologist, Chardin combined spiritual thoughts with science. The organised whole would be the universe with humans as subatomic particles. Mastery of energy can here be associated with the driving force of our creativity. The final value aspect reminds very much of "goodness" or

"intuitive ethical behavior".

Dana Zohar & Ian Marshall (1994) argue that in the context of our new paradigm the knowledge we derive from science is compatible with our spiritual intuitive aspects as human beings (p.32). This requires the professional scientists among us to integrate spiritual insights and intuitive Knowing as parts of our dynamic field of interaction.

One example from the field is Conny's notion that she has lived before. This would be subject to immediate dismissal in mechanistic science. In quantum science I am aware and take into account that a less formal language does not automatically mean that she is either lying or delusional. Anthony Aveni (1996) uses the concept of analogs to discuss magic and compare it with science which also relies on analogs (p.325). I find this useful in this situation where "former life" stands for an intuitive experience for which there is a lack of a better term.

But there is more to this situation. Conny's request, "You are the scientist. You explain this to me," as well as my careful if clumsy response, "I'm sure you had an experience that gives you the impression that you have lived before," is the sort of dynamic interaction scene that quantum scientists dream of. That we did not find an answer right away, is beside the point. What is important, is that we both could communicate about the

same thing in our respective roles as informant and ethnographer. What's more, we could do so as equals. Both of us were teacher and student simultaneously. Conny taught me that I have to learn to ask better questions if I want to take my informants serious. I hope to have shown her that scientists are willing to make an honest effort to include the informants' experiences into science without mangling them beyond recognition or dismissing them out of hand. This was certainly one of the most satisfying and exciting situations I had in the field of the New Age realm, even if it makes me feel like the magician's apprentice sometimes.

The above scene could also be interpreted in evolutionary terms as progress towards the next loop in the spiral, to use Kari's model. Marshall Sahlins and Elman Service (1966) did not have quantum reality in mind when they laid out their ideas of energy transformation in specific and general evolution. Energy transformation is here the creation and perpetuation of a cultural organization (p.35). Evolutionary thought is prevalent in the New Age realm and the concept seems to be translatable into the quantum context. Conny's and my interaction is an example of energy transformation in that we created a new cultural environment through our dynamic interaction. The main difference seems to be that Sahlins and Service think phylogenetically along lines and we think

in spirals and circles. The upward direction that is implied in this model would be perceived as a straight line in mainstream thought. In quantum thought it would be perceived as an upward and outward towards cosmic or wave/field realms. Conny's and my interaction here is also a pretty good example of bootstrapping in the social sense. It seems funny somehow that both Conny and I got excited, or better, energetic as we talked. Energy transformation seems remarkably appropriate in this scenario.

So we have a new context of which science is but one part, quantum reality. An energy field in which ethnographer and informant interact in a dynamic relationship like subatomic particles. Quantum reality is actually the meta-context here because it is so inclusive. The interaction here is an integrated part of a network that Gregory Bateson (1991:265) calls ecology of mind. Creativity, intuition, spirituality, integrity, curiosity, cognition and so forth would be the wave aspects in this ecology. All these have their manifestations as particles in culture, organisms, science, art etc. Since the relationship between these particles is dynamic, they are temporary and local. They only reveal themselves to us if we use certain techniques and theories to study them. Of course, the act of studying involves wave aspects which causes a change in the condition of the field which in turn changes the particles. In this sense, this text has

a tendency to exist.

Chapter X

Symbols and Meanings

In the previous chapters I have worked out some of the major differences between mainstream and New Age thought. Every idea or ideal of the New Age realm gains its meaning in a specific context. Therefore I will take these thoughts as the defining parts of New Age reality and of the emerging New Paradigm. In quantum language this means we have the field (context objectified) and the particles (thoughts objectified). The next step is to work out the force that integrates the particles into one comprehensive whole. I take New Age participants as the carriers of this force and their symbolic interaction as the active integration of their ideas and ideals.

We are all constantly engaged in the act of symbolizing as everything we do and say is interpreted. Most of us do not waste much thought on this in our everyday lives. One of the most striking discoveries in the New Age realm is, that its inhabitants seem to thrive on symbols and symbolizing in a very experimental and very conscious way.

My very first impression of the Star Cloud was its vast assemblage of objects, colors, geometric shapes, etc. A main topic in New Age literature is the interpretation of various symbols or symbolic actions, e.g. dreams, colors, chants, etc. Ads in New Age magazines offer participation in practices of which the symbolic part is often more emphasized than the practical. Of course, I am talking in mainstream language here. In quantum reality, the symbolic (wave) and the practical (particle) comprise one pattern of thought and behavior that is completely coherent for the New Age participant.

So the main wave feature, if I may call it that, is an extreme awareness of symbols, symbolic actions, and meanings. This awareness seems to make all the difference as it opens up possibilities and opportunities that the average mainstream person has not been trained to see or even been taught to ignore. Hence, New Age behavior has definitely an experimental aspect to it. It would go far beyond the scope of this project to discuss particular items or practices in detail. I have pointed out the major ones throughout the text, e.g. books. In this chapter I will explore two symbolic contexts in which I find the ideas and ideals of the new paradigm expressed, ritual interaction and language.

One interpretation of ritual that I find useful here comes from Victor Turner (1967). Rituals are patterns in

time the units of which are symbolic objects and serialized items of symbolic behavior (p.45). This interpretation is general enough to be flexible and it contains two ideas that are important for this project. Rituals contain individual symbolic objects (e.g. crystals) and symbolic actions (e.g. meditation). Also ritual symbolic actions may involve any number of individuals from one (meditation), two (sensitive reading), or several (meditation circle).

Clifford Geertz (1973:48) sees the increasing reliance on symbolic behavior and symbolic systems as an important step in our evolution as biological and social creatures. Kari speaks of self actualization as the next spiral for us to climb. Sensitives like her have made it a life style to interpret symbols, e.g. the patterns of the lines in our hands. On a wave level, people like Kari also seem to have a high degree of sensitivity for moods, atmospheres, and the unfolding of events that surround us and of which we are a part. In the mainstream this phenomenon of anticipating developments or becoming aware of unfolding events long before anybody else, can be found in the works of artists. Which is why they are often not being recognized, just as sensitives are easily dismissed as fakes (Eliade 1967:187). The purpose of this project is not to attempt an analysis of the activities of sensitives. But intuitive pattern recognition seems to play a major role here. It seems significant for our context to point

out the one aspect that is perceptible to the ethnographer. There is a genuine interest in exploring cognitive abilities, to train intuitive skills, and to learn to pick up on events that have yet to manifest themselves concretely. There seems to be a desire to discover the wider network, the pattern that connects. Intuition and pattern recognition without scientific aid has always been part of human evolution. However, in our mainstream the Newtonian worldview put constraints on them and the traditional shaman or vision quester was constrained by specific cultural boundaries. Both these kinds of boundaries are falling away though. The individual has a pool of resources available that allows for experimentation and perhaps more importantly, self actualization. I think that the training of integrative and intuitive skills might very well be the next spiral in our evolution.

In self actualization ritual acts and objects are being used in a symbolic way in order to create a better integrated self. Integration here goes two ways, in relation to the environment and in relation to one's Self. Rituals of self actualization involve the individual as a symbol. One example is Dale, who meditates daily to distance herself from the sick fragmented, and abused self and to create a healthy and integrated one that is acceptable to her and to others. It is significant to notice that meditation is practiced on a daily basis or as Dan puts it, "It's

like brushing teeth." Susanne Langer (1979) sees the symbolic aspect of common everyday rituals as an expression of our general orientation (p.287). The general orientation in meditation is integration, gathering oneself as in Dale's case or connecting with wider realms as in Dan's symbolic travels through space.

A key symbol of the New Age realm then would be the individual. In the mainstream persons can be seen as symbols too. The difference is that New Age participants are aware of their status as symbols and therefore have an opportunity to create selves that are meaningful to them but not necessarily to anybody else. Dale does not care anymore how her former church representatives see her. What is important to her is how she feels about herself. This also means she has freed herself from the external influences that formerly defined her Self. Now, Dale chooses her own symbolic Self.

Sherry Ortner (1979) discusses key and other symbols as products of one dominant cultural orientation (p.82). In the New Age realm individuals seem to have liberated themselves from the constraints of the dominant institutionalized symbolic framework of their immediate cultural environment. The field of symbols and meanings has assumed global and historical proportions. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to speak of historical process instead of cultural contexts as we interpret rituals and

their symbolic contents.

Creating meaningful selves is to choose one's own symbolic content. The rituals involved can be seen as punctuations of a continuous process as one constantly adapts to the flow of unfolding events. New Age participants are keenly aware of the constant change of the field that surrounds them and so self here becomes also a continuous process. Rituals are the contexts in which self is temporarily and locally articulated and/or reinforced. John Hewitt (1979) notes that non-compliance with the dominant set of symbolic meanings is part of the process self and is often overlooked by mainstream sociologists (p.95).

One significant difference to the mainstream in individualized experimental rituals is that the New Age participant is in control over the symbol and the symbolizing act. Rituals are a form of self expression that project the individual's beliefs into the open (Dolgin, Kemnitzer & Schneider 1977:36). In the New Age realm internal and external integration of the individual is the main concern. In the mainstream realm rituals are associated with the socialization of the individual according to the preset structures of the dominant cultural domain (Hewitt 1979:95).

One main symbol in the New Age realm is energy. It has been mentioned throughout the text as a primary concept

in New Age thought and the new science paradigm. Therefore I want to call it a summarizing symbol according to Sherry Ortner's typology (1979). It summarizes a system of ideas or stands for a system as a whole (p.94). Translated into quantum thought, energy expresses, or rather, is the wider realm of our actions and interaction, the ultimate context. At the same time it is the integrating aspect for individuals like Ben who rubs crystals to relieve stress and harmonize his internal energy flow. It is also an important integrative symbol in the wider social context of a group like the meditation circle. Here energy was being gathered to lift the participants out into space. Dan does this to "give them a view of the big picture". The way Ben refers to energy reminds very much of chi and obviously the meditation in the group did have both physical and mental effects. To draw a line between effective and symbolic contents would be typical fragmented mainstream thinking and would not make sense in the New Age realm.

Anthony Giddens (1986) detects institutionalized behavior which recreates the social network in any however small ritualized or routine act (p.139). Integration is a main concern and in the participant's awareness in the New Age realm. The rituals of individuals may appear inconsequential in the mainstream network. But in the reality of a New Age the actors are aware that every individual and every act works to integrate the system

as a whole. This seems to be a main difference to the mainstream in terms of thought patterns, level of self awareness, and self perception.

A characteristic interaction ritual in the New Age realm is the sensitive reading. A ritual or routine action is situated along a time - space continuum in which the actors recreate their social positions in a face to face encounter. The zone in which the ritual takes place is part of a wider integrated system that is being reproduced along the time-space continuum (Giddens 1986:84-85). So the sensitive reading is a kind of temporally and spatially bounded manifestation (particle) of a more fluent historical and social realm (wave) in which social roles are acted out to integrate subsystems and also to keep the wider realm flowing along the continuum.

The front region, as Erving Goffman would call it (1959) of a sensitive reading would be the spatial area where a more formal language and behavior is observed than in a back region (p.107). In a reading with Kari the situation was very well bounded by a very obvious formal ritual gesture. After we had taken our seats across from each other, she bowed her head in a moment of concentration and rubbed her hands. Symbolically this can be seen as sensitizing herself to me and to the task before her. At the end of a reading the situation was closed less formally, but involved also some routine remarks like the mention

of checks and some concluding remark like, "I think we're done now." Throughout the reading neither one of us used any kind of code or ritual language. Temporally every encounter lasted for almost exactly one hour which was determined by Kari. In Goffman's (1959) concept, the ritual opening and closing (by Kari), but also her reading as well as my interviewing her would be front performances (p.22).

Power is not necessarily associated with conflict but rather is the capacity to achieve outcomes (Giddens 1986:257). In the readings I experienced with Kari, both aspects were present and sometimes required careful negotiating. The peculiar thing about our meetings was that we would switch roles or positions of dominance in the middle of it. Kari would turn from sensitive into informant and I would cease to be the client and become the ethnographer. In Erving Goffman's (1967) concept this would establish a symmetrical interaction scene (p.52). In reality however Kari assumed dominance at the end of the whole scene by bringing up the subject of money and also by ritually concluding the meeting. This is where conflict becomes an issue. More specifically, I felt alienated. The money topic was brought up repeatedly and thus became an expected part of the ritual. This comes close to Goffman's (1967:117) external preoccupation and established a kind of separation between us.

An interesting symbolic aspect lies in the role of sensitives themselves. In the New Age realm sensitives are only different from others in degree. The reliance on intuitive impressions is more pronounced and they are better trained in interpreting these impressions. In the mainstream realm however, sensitives and their actions are sometimes perceived differently. The overreaction of a client who read more into Kari's impression than Kari herself had meant to imply seems to be a good example. I do not want to dismiss this as a simple misunderstanding. As I have mentioned at the beginning, misunderstandings are loaded with meaning.

Paul Ricoeur (1991) interprets action as a form of discourse that can be read like a written text. The risk here is that the reader interprets the text differently than the author intended (p.148). In this case, what the text means depends more on who the author is than on the contents of the text. If the author is a sensitive, then surely her impression must mean more than simply, "You've got to make a decision." To me this is a very meaningful misunderstanding as it reflects certain attitudes prevalent in the mainstream with regard to sensitives or perhaps even New Age participants. Involvement with the mysterious or transcendend implies a depth that escapes the average mainstream participant who has been socialized along external milestones and not around circles and spirals.

Significantly, there also seems to be a certain distribution of power implied. Symbols are instruments of knowledge and communication. Symbolic power is defined in a relationship by those who exercise and those who undergo it (Bourdieu 1979:7785). Kari's power is created in the relationship with her client and only manifests itself during the interaction or more specifically here, in the interpretation of the client. I find it telling that a mainstream participant would ascribe power and knowledge to a status of the New Age. Despite the naivete, there seems to be a void that needs to be filled.

A system of social action consists of three aspects according to Clifford Geertz (1965). He distinguishes between the cultural system that is associated with meaning, value, style, etc. and the social system which is associated with organisms in a causal web of relationships. One does not automatically imply the other. Both are mediated by a third component, the personality structure of the individuals whose motivation and interaction integrates the system as a whole (p.549). With main motivations being integration and personal integrity, self actualization of New Age participants gains perhaps a fuller meaning than Geertz had imagined.

The meditation circle is perhaps an instance in which all three components come into play in the most obvious way. The social system or our relationship would be

symbolized through our dependency on each other. Everybody would contribute enough energy to move all of us out. The cultural system would be the concept of energy itself, the form of the circle, or Dan's ritual formula. The personality structure of the participants would make the ritual a success and give it a cohesiveness that can only be achieved in a temporally and locally bounded context. They are motivated by distrust towards the mainstream on the one hand, on the other hand their primary motivation is compassion, love, integrity, caring. All this seems to be symbolically expressed in their interaction in a mediation circle.

Of course, participation in a ritual does not necessarily imply belief. But according to Roy Rappaport (1979) acceptance in the absence of something profound would be fragile. Those who experience the profound or the transcendent, lose their sense of distinction and grasp a sense of ultimate unification. Ultimate meaning is not referential but rather a state of being (p.217). From a New Age perspective this is a major difference to the mainstream in terms of reference points and power distribution.

Mainstream rituals are referential in so far as participants have to rely on mediators of church or state in order to get a whiff of the transcendent and to act out their roles as participants. The symbols that are being

used are perceived as tools to manipulate participants in order to keep dominant power structures in place. "They don't want us to know," as well as a deep distrust towards any institutionalized leadership are expressions of this sentiment. It seems significant that such symbols in the mainstream context are often used in a dichotomous way, e.g. heaven and hell as in love versus punishment or material wealth and poverty as in mansion on the hill versus soup kitchen. Dan still suffers the after effects of his upbringing.

The meditation circle is a symbolic expression of power distribution New Age style. First, there is no designated formal leader. Better perhaps, Dan is chosen as a meditation leader because of his knowledge of the subject and his personality which is unassuming and nonpretentious, to say the least. Participants trust and respect him as a person. Second, every individual shares or contributes energy that makes the mediation possible, but each individual also could meditate alone which would require less energy. The symbols (circle, boy-girl-boygirl grouping up, holding hands) that are used express integration or inclusion of individuals instead of fragmentation and distance to the leader. I have said before that in the New Age realm the individual has more power as a participant than the mainstream individual. The power of the leader lies in his personality, not in his formal position. Dan

stands as part of the circle, not in front of rows of people. His non-instituted state makes it possible to step aside to let someone else take over, as the incident showed when Kari, who is also a respected and formidable personality in the New Age environment of Norman, led a meditation one evening. The personality structure that Clifford Geertz speaks of, takes on a new significance in the New Age realm.

What is symbolically expressed in a ritual are power relationships which makes the context of the ritual a power field (Turner 1977:266-267). This goes for both mainstream and New Age ritual. The difference is that the emphasize in the New Age ritual lies in the sharing of power among participants. The same idea was expressed by Beverly who described a circle meeting of CUUPS participants in terms of male and female power that is equally shared.

The ultimate motivation of the participants can be expressed in many different terms. Perhaps the most significant was named by Josh and Dale, love (associates are compassion, caring, and empathy). This is seen as the one common thread or integrating principle of the realm. Of course one could analyze it in terms of the standard mainstream 'what do they get out of it' attitude. The question would be a legitimate one even applied to New Age thought. After all, they benefit from participation

in some way. However, to actually analyze the idea in this way would mean to objectify it and this would destroy its meaning that is important to New Age participants. It would also become vulnerable to manipulation as Dan has experienced it in his childhood. In the New Age reality love cannot be objectified and assume the substance of a particle. It has to be left standing as a less defined wave principle. It is the unspoken underlying theoretical understanding that motivates the actions of the participants (Giddens 1986:5). As a unifying principle or doxa, love perhaps best expresses the general orientation of the New Age worldview or the pattern that connects.

The best hope to let love and its associates become reality lies in the participants' ritual enactment of it. Mimesis is the repeated or ritual mimicking of desired conditions. As such mimesis is more profound to the participants than mere imitation. It is the enactment of an inner attitude or state of mind. The primary achievement of a mimetic enactment is morale. Mimesis is the outward transformation of what one is (Langer 1979:156-157 & Bourdieu 1990:73). Action in the form of the meditation circle becomes meaningful in that it involves the practical knowledge of the participants in a non-objectified (or pre-scientific) way. The ritual then is a kind of discourse the participants engage in on the basis of one principle that they all understand and that does not need further

explanation or interpretation (Ricoeur 1981:203). I find it significant in this context, that any question concerning New Age definition was never answered fluently and immediately. It always involved some mental groping and then the answer was always one word, love. To interpret it would mean to talk it to shreds and to expose it to the manipulations of the outsider including the anthropologist.

All of this runs somewhat contrary to Mary Douglas' (1970) ideas who associates the preference of intuitive knowledge, rejection of mediating institutions, or a concern with ethical sensitivity with anti-ritualism (pp.19-22). Douglas refers to the perceived restricted codes of rituals of mainstream institutions. However, to the New Age participant the problem does not lie in the ritual but rather in the dictated meanings of its symbols. The task then is to create rituals that are integrative, that take account of the individual speaker or participant, and that allow every individual access to the same fundamental assumptions without a mediator. I think the meditation circle ritual combines all of this and is still a very well bounded and structured ritual.

Practical knowledge is important in a different, less ritualized context, the discussion after a meditation. Our interaction here is perhaps the best example of a negotiation of a common ground and our respective roles.

Erving Goffman (1967) associates a certain image of self with a certain set of rules which determines the positions and expected behavior of the participants (p.50-51). Our formal roles were ethnographer and informants. I was acknowledged as such formally when Dan introduced me to others as 'the anthropologist'. This also indicated an approximately equal status with others who were called by their occupational names, e.g. the astrologer. As a rule I was expected to ask questions. This I could not because I simply did not know enough about their context and concerns. So I stayed in the background and waited for them to bring up a subject. Next, it turned out that I could not relate to concepts such as the Little People without being unfair to the participants or without exposing them to ridicule. So I asked for clarification which was answered in the form of an anthropological lecture. My status dwindled accordingly or in Goffman's terms, I became discredited by breaking rules of conduct (p.51). Luckily I managed to reestablish myself in following interviews with individuals.

A major difference between mainstream and New Age participants is the use of different symbols. A difficulty here is that New Age participants rely on symbols, e.g. Little People, that are known but discredited. Thus their discourse was irrational or unintelligible to me. My questions generally were no more specific as, 'What are

you doing?' Theoretically, these questions would still establish a kind of acceptability if they can be answered with 'because' to everybody's satisfaction (Ricoeur 1991:189). As mentioned above, the difference in symbols and perhaps more importantly, the value that is ascribed to them is a main difference between our two contexts here. As a consequence, all our interaction was more or less a discourse in negotiating some sort of acceptability that would make our practical reasoning possible. As usual Conny hits the nail on the head and sums up Paul Ricoeur in the process, "It doesn't matter what you write. You write things the way you see them, no matter what I say. And everybody who reads it will interpret it in his own way anyway." There went my idea of letting my informants have an equal share in the power, or so I thought. But Conny's attitude expresses exactly the open endedness that one finds in the New Age realm and all our interpretations (including misunderstandings) keep the negotiation process alive. The uncertainty that is implied here, is not only realistic but perfectly acceptable in quantum thought and New Age attitude.

The shift from the mainstream symbolic system to the New Age symbolic system is not complete by any means. Participants have not cut themselves off from the mainstream and interact in both realms. I think that an occasional slight embarrassment when it comes to describing experiences

that are ridiculed in the mainstream is one consequence. The concern is with the impression one makes on the other participants. Goffman (1967) discusses social embarrassment in terms of preserving the standard expectations of the group (pp.104-105). I find it noteworthy here that all participants in our discussion group expected to hear of so-called paranormal phenomena. Yet when such an experience was reported by one individual, a mildly embarrassed reaction, usually in the form of smiles or minor laugh vocalizations, came from all present. It seems then that all participants interacted in keeping the cohesiveness of the interest group intact. Cohesiveness here refers to the temporally and spatially bounded encounter of the discussion group and so establishes a clear demarkation line to the mainstream environment where such phenomena are not part of any acceptable discussion. Yet the embarrassment hints at conflict. Goffman (1967) associates embarrassment with the blunders of one individual rather than with a group of actors. But a key concern is that such embarrassments indicate conflicting selves (p.110). The conflict of New Age participants lies in their being members of two interaction or interest groups, mainstream and New Age. In practice, such moments were brief and easily absorbed and in every case the desire to explore or even mention such phenomena outweighed the embarrassment.

There is one other kind of interaction that is specific

to New Age reality. Participants have trained themselves to be sensitive to the moods and state of being of others. Thus they receive more information than would be expected and considered appropriate in the mainstream interaction sphere. Individuals like Conny and Kari are concerned with ethical conduct and therefore would not give away their impressions. But the unexpected can and does happen as I had occasion to experience when Kari could not conceal her impression of my approaching death from me. I am sure of this experience because it was completely spontaneous without any preceding reference. Erving Goffman (1959) speaks of destructive information that is being sent off through events such as unmeant gestures (p.144). Kari's and my exchange raises this type of interaction to whole new levels and due to the content of the information, destructive seems an appropriate term. I find it significant and validating of the experience that Kari never brought it out in the open but in the following interview kept coming back to instances of ill health or death in my family. Overall, The event is almost classical for the New Age realm in which 'unmeant event' can very well mean spontaneous mental impression sent and received. No doubt, events like these happen all the time in the mainstream as well. The difference is the degree of sensitivity or awareness with which participants experience it. Although neither Kari nor I were prepared to discuss it, there was

certainly no denial in either of us.

Silence is rarely mentioned as part of a text but is nevertheless part of it and needs to be interpreted, especially when silence occurs in significant moments which indicates that it is not the random gap in a conversation. In other words, silence is filled with meaning. Examples here are the instance in which Conny and I discussed my dream experience of the earthquake or when the teenage boys in the discussion group talked about their encounters with the Hawaiian shaman. In the first instance, the silence was heavier and deeper but I think the difference lies in degree rather than in kind.

Implicit meanings refers to the contents of silences that need not be spoken because they are understood by the participants. The idea here is that silence is part of human speech pattern and this pattern is associated with social relations (Douglas 1975:173-175). In the examples above the mutual understanding was that some things leave us unprepared to deal with or to talk about. This is rather negative compared to what Mary Douglas had in mind. But it is significant in terms of social relations. These silences were most pronounced in situations where participants felt they have been left unprepared by the mainstream. Where concepts as well as words were missing from the reservoir of mental images and verbal expressions. Conny's, "They wouldn't believe you," sums it up neatly.

In this sense a heavy silence in New Age reality marks a thick boundary to mainstream reality.

An important aspect in New Age thought next to creativity is imagination. Paul Ricoeur (1991) associates imagination with metaphor. Imagining here is a process involving the restructuring of semantic fields and indicates constant change. This is in contrast to the static idea which indicates a mechanical interaction between mental atoms. The image is emerging meaning and imagining is the schematizing of metaphors. Important for us here is the intuitive grasp on the similar (p.173). Ricoeur describes a typical distinction between paradigms. New Age author Starhawk (1989) notes that old symbols began as metaphors for observed recurring patterns in nature. In contrast, mainstream scientific metaphors are expected to conform to an objective reality (p.202-203). She makes the same distinction as Ricoeur. The observation of natural patterns could be expressed in metaphors because people intuitively understood their meaning. I have mentioned earlier intuitive pattern recognition. The expression in form of a metaphor is a further step making it possible for participants to engage in a meaningful dialogue. The key here lies in the words intuitive and spontaneous. In contrast, the reality expressed in mainstream scientific symbols is not only not spontaneous but seems totally detached from the natural environment

which science is supposedly observing. It is no wonder that to New Age participant intuition and spontaneous knowing seem more reliable and realistic.

The best example of the intuitive grasp of the similar came from Pam who summed up her whole isolated existence in one small but profound metaphor, "Because then I'm closer to the universe." Her desire for a baby that is expressed here carries the realization that she is without orientation or connection. Universe implies integration and belonging with a baby being the connecting link. The important point here is that the profoundness of her statement lay in the intuitive non-rational realm and not in any rational analysis of her situation.

Meaning emerges in a sequence of interaction events between two or more actors who act and react toward each other. The participants read, interpret, and react in each encounter which can be seen as a negotiating of meaning. All these aspects are part of the same process (Perinbanyagam 1985:1821). While this is true in any interest group, it seems to be especially so in the New Age realm. Negotiating of meaning becomes intensified when one deals with symbols and traditions from an integrated but open system. Negotiating a meaning in the mainstream occurs on the basis of more or less shared symbols. This is what the culture concept is all about. Interaction follows established routines with more or less expected

outcomes. This makes an interaction sequence fairly predictable in all its aspects. No wonder Erving Goffman could treat digressions as social blunders or embarrassments.

In the New Age realm, the boundaries of one particular culture and the constraints of a dominant social environment do not exist, at least in theory. Participants draw on a wealth of resources of global and historical dimensions. Not all are interested in the same traditions and so symbols and their contents are not necessarily shared to the extent that they express an existing doxa. Meaning has to be negotiated and a likely result is that it will be altered and adapted to the context of the interaction in which the negotiating takes place.

In my conversation with Ray, this seemed to emerge as the difference between the mainstream social environment and the New Age environment. Ray's observation that New Age is really not new because the participants use old symbols was countered by me with, "Yeah, but they put them together in new ways." This somewhat floppy response was meant as a defense of course but it also hints at the process of creating meanings that take on a new significance in a contemporary context that is still emerging. It seems then, that New Age participants not only break through cultural boundaries but also through temporal and spatial boundaries. Interaction, interpretation of symbols and

symbolic acts are far less predictable and always involves a higher degree of uncertainty than in the mainstream.

Interaction means something different in the mainstream than in the New Age environment. In the former the average individual is in a rather passive role. Interaction here means recreating a certain polarized power structure according to the dictated concepts of those in power. The most obvious constraint seems to be language that does not allow the expression of personal internal experiences that do not fit into the conceptual framework of a mechanized mainstream paradigm. The situation is different in the New Age environment in which the individual takes on an active role. Interaction means to partake in the creation of a power structure in which everybody has a more or less equal share as it is symbolized in the meditation circle. Lacking an appropriate language that would allow the expression of certain experiences and thoughts, the metaphor is a way out of a tough situation and is thus a main feature of New Age language. It is understandable therefore, that New Age participants sometimes sound a little flowery to the mainstream population. Prominent examples of metaphorical examples that express an ideal of unity and integration are the Old Religion, or the Big Sisterhood.

In terms of interaction, this way of imagining things to be is important if one acts on the assumption that one

can make things happen. The difference is exemplified in a sensitive reading. In the mainstream the individual would seek out a sensitive, ask what will her future be like and then wait to see if the prediction comes true. In the New Age realm that leans heavily on eastern traditions, the individual already has a good idea of what she wants her future to be like and would formulate her questions along the lines, "What can I do to make this come true?" The answer then would be based on the expectations of the individual and could contain a suggestion in terms of proper attitude or course of action. The key here is that symbols, e.g. yarrow sticks, are used to reinforce a positive and creative attitude and outlook of the individual who in turn is already committed to a course of action that will create a reaction (Legge 1996:x). In the context of a sensitive reading the interaction between sensitive, client, and energy forces are symbolically expressed. I have to emphasize here that the line between symbolic and effective action and interaction only exists in the mainstream perception. In New Age perception symbolic action IS effective action.

The notion that the individual has her fate in her own hands so to speak is a powerful one but is often taken too literally. New Age participants are quite realistic in this regard. Kari emphasized that her predictions are not hammered in stone because we are caught up in a cosmic

current of energy that is constantly changing and that involves too many variables for the individual to control. Starhawk (1989) puts on a similar damper. In casting a spell or controlling energy one must be aware of broader social, economic, and political forces around us. Not to mention our own subconscious motivations and past actions (p.127). The uncertainty principle is well taken into consideration here, and Kari's, "Well, let's see what will happen then," is a good expression of it.

This chapter began with some thoughts on evolution and self actualization. This relates to C.G. Jung's notion of psychic growth. The development of the individual's maturity is directed by an organizing center in our psychic system. The development is represented over time in symbolic dream images and is mostly subconscious. Although Jung acknowledges that people have an intuitive awareness of this process which is more pronounced in traditional groups than in our own mainstream environment (Franz 1968:159-162). The preoccupation with the interpretation of symbols and the symbolic enactment of attitudes and ideals in the New Age realm seems important in this regard. The increasing awareness of the growth process appears to open possibilities to take active part in it. This would mean that our personalities and identities are not alone shaped by external factors as mainstream theories seem to imply. The individual will assume an active part in the creation

her own identity and this will have to be taken into account. The critique against anthropologists like Margaret Mead for ignoring the individual in generalizations that are too broad to be applicable to real life takes on new importance here.

There is another factor that has to be mentioned here. The overemphasize of rationality has led to the neglect of and ignorance about processes like the one Jung talks about. It seems that current developments in the New Age realm might create a more balanced perspective on our capabilities as individuals and as a species. At this time we appear like emotional and mental cripples to New Age participants ("The only thing static is the scientist's mind."). Perhaps quantum thoughts and a new paradigm are indicators that we have at our fingertips the next spiral in our evolution.

Chapter XI

Contexts

The New Age realm developed in two main social historical contexts, popular culture and global mainstream (mechanized industrialized capitalist). In this chapter I will present a broad outline of its development to show New Age as integrated and perhaps even unavoidable direction in our history. I think it is not a coincident that New Age peaked as a movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, leveled off in the following decade, and today overlaps here and there with the mainstream which seems to be nudged into a different direction than it had gone without New Age thoughts and ideals.

John Storey (1993) traces popular culture, that which is most visible in public life, through history. The term appeared first at the beginning of industrialization and urbanization when an extreme social stratification became manifest (p.20). For most of the time popular culture and those who are associated with it have been put on the lower strata of the social hierarchy. What was popular was common

and therefore of lesser value. After World War II popular culture became synonymous with mass culture, especially in the US (p.33). The various definitions of popular culture in this country reveal an interesting conflict. On the one hand American ideology emphasizes multiculturalism and inclusion. To be popular, to display popular objects and attitudes means to be included. This is especially obvious in a rapidly changing consumer environment that is based on mass production. Cultural products are being used as symbols to reinforce one's position and identity as part of the community. On the other hand certain social distinctions and power relations have to be maintained. So that which is too common or too popular is perceived as a threat to these power relations and to the status quo (Storey 1993). The conflict reveals the struggle between eagerness to move along with social change and a resistance to change. In a postmodernist era popular culture symbolizes this struggle between consensus and conflict (p.186). The social interactive dynamics that this struggle brings about are obvious. Popular culture can be seen as the context in which political and social conflicts are played out (Mukerji & Schudson 1991:1).

Consensus and conflict here run exactly along the line between mainstream and New Age attitudes and behavior. 'Healthnuts' or 'they're making a lot of money with it' are common critiques leveled at New Age participants.

Remembering that those who suffer under illnesses brought about by lifestyle are mostly mainstream participants and that material wealth is an ideal of the mainstream, those critiques take on a symbolic meaning. It seems those who struggle are mainstream participants more than New Age participants. Dan and Kari understand the resistance to change as a rather positive force that prevents chaos and disorientation if change would happen too rapidly. I think it is not a coincidence that at the time New Age ideals become political agendas, right wing extremists make headlines and Conny receives hateful pamphlets.

Some of the more obvious features that indicated the popularity of New Age was the appearance of health food stores, alternative medicine like acupuncture, New Age and Self Help sections in bookstores. At the same time the science fiction genre branched out into fantasy. According to a sales clerk at an outlet of a major book store chain, New Age literature and practice kits are popular with people from all walks of life. With the elderly Nostradamus is a big hit while teenagers brouse through astrology charts. For a categorizing mainstream scientist, this is bothersome. In reality however it represents the broad sphere between New Age core and mainstream popularity (perhaps fashion). In quantum thought, New Age would appear as a more solid manifestation in the New Age core than in the mainstream where its appearance seems fleeting.

I find it significant that the clerk placed New Age between fiction and science in terms of its popularity. This has a symbolic aspect to it. New Age literature often combines science (quantum physics e.g.), fiction, and mythology often in the same book. It seems that the conflict is here revealed as that between powers of literary authority and authorship. According to Michel Foucault (1991) the author is tied to institutional systems that set the parameters for discourse (p.256). In the current mainstream environment this means that scientific text will be taken serious if it appears in the expected context of the established scientific genre that is legitimized by scientific institutions. The legitimizing process here includes peer reviews and so serves to hold the powers in place. For New Age authors who do not always have a formal scientific background nor write in a technical language this means they will not be taken serious by representatives of the mainstream realm. On the other hand many formally trained scientists take up New Age topics and so create a bridge between New Age and mainstream. The Third Culture I have discussed before is very much a development that falls within popular culture. The dynamics here have the result that both New Age and scientific topics become popular items for people to think about. A consquence of course is a corresponding shift in power relations.

The notion that popular culture represents lesser values still seems to be with us to some extent as it is often dismissed as a fad. One reason is certainly its focus on metaphysical topics which is an obvious contrast to utilitarian oriented mainstream interests. Of course, to the New Age participant, the metaphysical is extremely useful as we have seen in previous chapters. The conflict mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the difference in power structures, and the different paradigms are combined in the notion that New Age is a fad. As Kari said, "Fear is a powerful motivation."

Within the context of the mainstream philosophical framework I have discussed earlier it makes sense that the consumer industry is primarily interested in creating consumer demands for new fads and fashions. Especially books, tapes, and art prints are products that come out of a specific cultural environment (Hirsch 1991:315). These are also the items that one finds outside the confined environment of a New Age store. They are therefore more visible to the mainstream population. On the one hand this reinforces the impression of a fad that will pass in time. On the other hand it exposes a larger part of the population to New Age ideas. It is especially important here NOT to draw a demarcation line between mainstream and New Age. New Age as a social and historical process is indicated in exactly this zone in which both realms mix and the

paradigms overlap. What I have called New Age core is perhaps best expressed in Conny's words, "Just because I have it all in one place means I'll be condemned."

The most popular item in New Age both in its utilitarian and symbolic sense (the division does not exist in New Age and I use it here to pacify the readers) is books. Since books are also a primary object on the mainstream market they make a perfect medium for interaction and discourse between both realms. It is important to note here that the Third Culture that John Brockmann (1995) discusses is created in and through books. The development of the New Age realm meant a new market and a new target audience. Target is the key word here because it brought about a new specialized genre which would make it easier to aim specialized publications at a specific interest group (Hirsch 1991:321). New authors, publishers, and marketing efforts all have an impact on the mainstream economic system. The creation of new specialized genres such as New Age, Self Help, and Fantasy extended the popular culture realm and seems to form a bridge between the wider audience and the interest group. Ironically, it is the mainstream economic system that helps create an environment that essentially speaks out exactly against this system.

Some popular symbols that have been integrated into the mainstream are the recycle and the no cruelty logos. Of course, there is the familiar feedback situation I

have mentioned above. One consequence is that science, just as vulnerable to popular ideas as any other realm, is not unaffected by the development of New Age and the formulating of a new paradigm. The popular interest has shifted from 'food chain' to 'life cycle' or from 'who eats whom' to 'how our environment is recreated'. I can detect a shift in attitude here that expresses typical New Age concerns with positive and integrating aspects of life.

Natural materials have long been established in the wider market place but still remain specialized enough to be noticeable as different in the mainstream. These would be organic foods, clothes of non-synthetic fibers, and non-chemical medicines. In the course of our social development these items have become easily available and easier acceptable to the mainstream population that seems eager to buy them. This has an impact on the wider market system, on agricultural practices, and on the health care system. All this keeps the New Age phenomenon in a dynamic relationship in a local (popular culture) and temporal (historical) context.

As Kari stated, commercialism and competition between sensitives which puts a question mark on their integrity, are a major concern in the New Age realm. My conversation with Ray is also an example here. It is the popularity, expressed in sales rates, that integrates New Age items

and ideas into the wider market system and so into the wider social environment that consists of both New Age and mainstream realms. Material wealth per se is not a bad thing in New Age thought. It is how it is being produced and what it is being used for. In the mainstream environment there is the utilitarian, quick fix, immediate use attitude that are being exploited. In the New Age environment there is long term use, slow development, and patient application, not to mention symbolic value. The problem with commercialism then is that it sells the goods but not their meaning. Also a high degree of exploitation and deception are implied in mainstream commercial practices where money is the measure of all value and interaction and relationships remain on the surface and have a primarily utilitarian function. While such concerns are legitimate from a New Age perspective, commercialism can also be seen as an integrative factor.

Anthony Giddens (1986) discusses social and systems integration in terms of co-presence (p.142). I will apply this idea to value systems in this instance instead of interaction behavior. In the US capitalist market system the acquisition of material goods is still very much an ethos in the Weberian sense (1973:42). It is endowed with a positive value. One of the hallmarks of the New Age environment is the sceptical attitude towards exactly this ethos. We have here the co-presence of two opposing value

systems. Places like the Star Cloud are environments in which both value systems are being compared, negotiated, and integrated. Ray's criticism was not directed at the sale of things New Age per se. But it expressed a concern that such things are being sold for money only. If the customer is a mainstream person then there might also be the danger that she would buy the item as a superficial fashion statement, after all, New Age is popular, and not make herself knowledgeable about the symbolic context of the item or its history. I do not expect this conflict to be resolved any time soon. It seems to be part of the negotiation of values between mainstream and New Age paradigms.

On a more optimistic note, that the above concerns exist at all, is a reflection of a change in social values. Edward Shils (1989) associates central values with social elite and authority (pp.94-95). So the negotiation of value systems is also a negotiation of power relationships which in turn gives rise to the competitive behavior that I could see in Dan's reaction to my conversation with Ray. Kari found an easier solution by staying out of it all and not participating any further in 'Psychic Fairs'. The luckier New Ager is perhaps Mark, whose massage therapies are not fake, have definitely a positive effect, reflect his personal care and compassion that grew out of his bad experience in mainstream hospitals, and also do not exploit

or deceive anybody. Mark is one example where a New Age idea can be lucrative and still be ethical in the New Age sense. That Mark takes care to think about his personal integrity, is an extra bonus. On the other hand, my own experiences with Kari seem to indicate a shadier aspect as I felt definitely manipulated.

Popular culture and public attitude are closely related. Within the context of popular culture the change could be seen in the 1960's with Star Trek which really became popular a few years after its cancellation. Before Star Trek science fiction on TV was based on the concept that everything from outer space is probably an enemy and needs to be eliminated. It reflected but also reinforced the typical us versus them approach which was how things were being done in politics, economics, military, and not least anthropology. Star Trek was really the first event in popular culture that reflected a different idea. A multicultural environment in which difference and diversity are contributing and essential elements of survival and adaptation. In fact Star Trek and what it represents has become deeply incorporated into both mainstream and New Age realms and provides an excellent context in which both camps can freely communicate. I have once told a friend that it has almost become impossible to read a science work in which Star Trek is not referred to in some form (so I had to put it in here).

A related issue here is UFOs. Instead of debating whether or not a UFO has crashed near Roswell, I find it analytically more useful at this time to see Roswell as a symbol. People gather at Roswell not with weapons but with the welcome mat. The word growth comes to mind or perhaps even growing up.

Another popular feature in the mainstream that is also important in the New Age realm, is martial arts. It has mostly been popularized by Chuck Norris in the 'Walker, Texas Ranger' TV show. It compromises in that it contains the usual fare of action scenes that please the mainstream but are significantly mostly engaged in by the bad guys. In contrast the central figure represents the exact opposite style by employing a fighting technique that is based on precision, timing, as well as mental and physical discipline. The purpose is to limit the fight to what is absolutely necessary to accomplish a specific goal. Nowhere could the two value systems be better represented and squared off than in this bit of popular culture. Although Norris himself does not put an emphasize on the esoteric aspects of martial arts, he does highlight the idea of self-control and discipline (Norris 1996). Violence is lack of control. Fighting without violence is being in control. That the main character of the show is also a picture of personal integrity, is no coincidence but part of the overall value system and attitude the show

represents. A plus are of course a dash of spiritual:
(Native American) and a touch of the sensitive (the
effect that simulates a mental shift).

It is interesting to note here that Norris is known
to be rather conservative in his worldview. He and his
show may be an example of the syncretism between main
and New Age/New Paradigm. As contradictory as it may
syncretism is simply the state of being for those in
It does not necessarily cause a problem (Sahlins 199.
Syncretism and compromises certainly do not cause a
for New Age participants to whom reality does not conform
in neat categories anyway.

As I have pointed out in previous chapters, control
is a central concern in the New Age realm. It is especially
important to those who have experienced hard times in
mainstream, people like Dale, Sandy, or Jean. This can be
a problem. Throughout the text I have presented mainstream
institutions opposite New Age ideals. Both Dale and Jo
have expressed concern about institutionalized leadership
positions. Both associate abuse of power and misuse of
ideals with institutions. But popular culture is one
in which New Age ideas are being instituted. Also groups
like CUUPS or OPERA are institutions. The problem then
does not lie with the institution as an abstract, but with
the people who run it. So far, popular culture is still
largely determined by those with mainstream values and

attitudes. The main fear of New Age participants is that New Age institutions would be susceptible to the same corruption that they see in current mainstream organizations. To prevent that from happening is a main concern and makes the formulation of a different attitude even more important, so that those who represent institutions can be trusted. It is not a coincidence that an important aspect of the popular literary market are biographies with a psychological focus. It seems that people of public life are being scrutinized for their character and personality. I think this true even when the main reason for a person buying such a biography is a bit of juicy gossip. Anthony Giddens (1986) speaks of reflexive monitoring of conduct when people pay attention to events or developments around them to be able to relate their own behavior to those events (p.44). In this case this reflexive monitoring seems to involve a great deal of self reflection.

Popular culture then can be seen as the symbolic sphere (Volk 1995:25) in which mainstream and New Age participants interact to negotiate a new reality that can be shared by both. As such popular culture is the energy field in which new meanings and values are being created in a dynamic interaction and mutual monitoring of behavioral and attitude patterns. The result should be a new practical knowledge shared by all participants. But the popular culture sphere

also implies boundaries. Star Trek, Walker, and the contents of books are solid manifestations that can only exist in a meaningful way within a certain context. They are temporal and local. In other words, they are created within a very specific historical environment. To place New Age into the wider historic context will be the next step.

Throughout history there have always been 'Ages' that are associated with particular events or manifestations, e.g. Dinosaurs, Industrialism, or Information. History has subcontexts of which popular culture is but one. All of these subcontexts are associated with personalities, events, or fashions that are particular to a certain time frame or period. We speak of the golden age of TV or the McCarthy era. It is important to note that all social realms are interrelated and affect each other. This means that by and large the same patterns can be found in all social realms within the same time frame.

New Age can only have emerged at this time and here. Participants associate themselves with the Age of Aquarius which we are entering now in astrological terms. This brings a new set of characteristics about. Yet Ray argued, that New Age is really not new at all. In a mechanistic fragmented and compartmentalized reality the individual features of New Age were also fragmented. Historically, they were kept within the constraints of their particular cultural and political environments. As such they were

part of 'their' behavior, but not part of 'ours'. It is interesting to note that fragmentalism affected spatial (geographic) realms but also temporal (past). Even more interesting is that this included our own past. Many of today's New Age features, e.g. fortune telling, are categorized as folk practices which neatly creates a distance between us today and them of our past.

Many of the ideas and practices that would become characteristic for the New Age have existed for quite a long time in our social environment. Madam Blavatsky was one of the first popular psychic media in Europe. More adventuress and con artist than sensitive she seemed to answer a need of her clients, the fascination with things beyond common reality (Washington 1995:41-42). Although her credibility is questionable she established nevertheless the Theosophical Society on September 7, 1875 in New York (p.53). One personality who has practically been raised and educated in the Theosophical Society is Krishnamurti. He was probably the first teacher-student combination who expressed the very concerns that I have discussed throughout the text. For example, former crises in our history have been marked by the exploitation of things. Today's crisis is marked by the exploitation of ideas, that is the rationalization and justification of destructive patterns. Systems have become more important than persons (Krishnamurti 1970:145-146). This text could only become

possible as a result of the very same observation.

Peter Washington (1995) makes an important observation in his analysis of Blavatsky. Her book "Isis Unveiled" was published at a time when mass education raised the first doubts about the status quo in the populace, especially in religious matters (p.53). The same reaction has become immediate in our contemporary environment where people fear that instead of saving us, our dependence on objective mechanistic science is about to do us in. The results are a search for the transcendent and an increasing interest in matters of spirituality but also fundamental religionism. The consequence is that spirituality and religion become part of popular culture at a specific historical point (Fishwick 1995:228). This confirms Kari's idea that we can find recurrent patterns in our history that she imagines as circles.

Another popular teacher-healer is Edgar Cayce who was a young teenager at the time of Blavatsky's death in 1891. The credibility of both Krishnamurti and Cayce has always been questioned by mainstream participants. In the New Age realm they are still considered inspiring and influential teachers. Cayce was a sensitive with a high success rate and Krishnamurti captivated huge audiences with his insightful monologues on life and spiritual issues. It is important to note that both combine the teacher-healer-student roles. A contemporary personality

who is important in the New Age realm is the Dalai Lama (who is a Star Trek fan I might add). He is probably the only New Age teacher who finds acceptance in the mainstream. Historically, this is significant in that he seems to bridge the gap between New Age and mainstream.

Other characteristics of the New Age realm that have existed in isolation for a long time are certain practices that are part of the 'other's' traditions. Now that there is no other in a quantum social environment (Zohar & Marshall 1994), these traditions become part of one big global tradition. They are healing methods like Ayurveda (India), the energy principle chi (China), expressions of mental and physical harmony like feng shui (China), or the relationship between astronomy and human existence (Egypt and North America). It is only in the context of the New Age realm that all of these characteristics can be pulled together to create integrated global traditions and patterns.

It is the new combination, interpretation, and application of all of the above that makes the New Age new. The frequent reference to the past also establishes a historic continuity. Thus the New Age is a temporally and spatially bounded event or manifestation in the history of our species (global is still spatially bounded).

That all of the isolated characteristics could fall into place could only happen at a particular time. The

historical stage had to be set, certain things had to happen in our environment before any of the New Age ideas would make sense in it. I think these events in the US were the Vietnam war, the student protests, the Civil Rights Movement, the first moon landing, and the assassination of three important political personalities (John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy). These historical (temporal) events in combination with popular culture (local) events are important in the social environment in which the New Age realm would develop. These were the external historical and cultural forces by which the New Age realm began to be shaped (Comaroff 1982:144). That all these events took place in one decade gave the social dynamics a powerful momentum.

It also involved a great number of people that were all focused on their particular subcontexts but taken together formed the critical mass that could bring a social change about. As Marilyn Ferguson (1980) points out, a collective paradigm shift occurs when a critical number of thinkers has accepted a new idea (p.28). The dialectic between local systems (Comaroff 1982:146) took the form of a dialogue between representatives of the two value systems I have discussed earlier. One important medium for this dialogue is popular culture with its various subcontexts such as literature, TV, or music. It is interesting to note that several personalities of popular

culture such as Shirley McLaine, John Denver, or Apollo 12 astronaut Edgar Mitchell would become activists of the new paradigm. McLaine in promoting ideas of the so-called paranormal, Denver by founding Windstar which is an experimental environmentally oriented research and learning center, and Mitchell by founding the Noetic Research Institute. All of these efforts are based on the same ideal, to carry out legitimate scientific research that is unconstrained by mainstream political and economic forces but is solely done for the sake of knowing and for the creation of a New Age. All this is only possible in this particular historic context.

Theodore Roszak (1995) analyses the disillusionment and dissatisfaction of the 1960's in terms of a counter culture movement. It was directed against a technocratic hierarchical system in which scientific research and results were (are) misused to justify exploitative practices against the social and natural environments. The two important factors on which such a perspective is based are 'scientific objectivity' and mechanization. The latter also means mechanical thinking which leads to the denial, degradation, and ridicule of everything that does not fit into the social environment and mental attitude that are the foundation of a technocratic system (pp.228-229).

In the past leaders of this system who came in contact with outsiders expected them to become 'civilized' only

when they were disgusted with themselves (Sahlins 1994:388). It seems that this idea applies very well to us also, especially at the beginning of the paradigm shift. A larger and larger number of people became disgusted with their way of life to an extent where a social revolution could begin. This is the historical context in which New Age ideas could find an application.

The most profound realization was perhaps that all parts (of all environments) are interrelated and have an effect on each other. The behavior of any part is determined by all other events of the whole network. The linear cause and effect relationship becomes implausible and has to be replaced with statistical causality (Capra 1988:83-86). I believe though, that statistical causality would be difficult to apply to human behavior. It seems more realistic to be comfortable with uncertainty. It was this shift in perspective that brought us to the 'Turning Point' which is truly a historical event of magnitude.

It seems people had to be pushed over the edge to get there though. Fritjof Capra (1988) notices several social problems that I consider hallmarks of our mainstream historic era. An increase in sociopathic behavior patterns, alcohol and drug abuse, accidents, violent crimes, suicides, children with learning disabilities. An astonishing number of New Age participants have to deal with exactly these problems. Alcoholism, drug problems, abusive relationships

are common experiences. I would also add religious abuse to the list.

In a very general way the mainstream system develops cracks and there is something unfolding that I can only call failure. I found my hunch confirmed by Conny who expects a kind of apocalyptic event out of which a new kind of people will emerge. Remembering my sense of something big happening in a more positive way when I first stood in the Star Cloud, I think we are in the middle of it.

Capra (1988) also points out that none of the proposed solutions addresses the real problem that underlies all of the above. The real issue is the narrow perception of reality in which all of the above problems are treated as isolated incidents instead of part of larger interrelated patterns (p.25-26). For example recent political and economic events are characteristic in a historic sense. From the perspective of the new paradigm, the predicament of our president, the problems (economic and political) that Russian president Yeltzin faces, and the economic problems of Japan are all direct results of mainstream thinking and attitudes rather than of the specifics that those involved insist on debating. Josh would probably blame it all on a complete lack of personal integrity (of all participants on both sides of the fence). In our own environment it seems ironic but historically significant

that the attitude for which our president is now being chastised is the very same one that got him the job in the first place. The real problem then is attitude or value system rather than missing evidence or information. The pattern that connects can be imagined as a dance of interacting parts more than physical limits (Bateson 1979:13). This implies that creative and imaginative powers are essential in finding relationships. In the mainstream, culture has been materialized but it becomes obvious that culture can also be understood as creative transformation of meaning through metaphorization. History is the dynamic relationship between ideas and their external articulations. It is a process in which meanings take on a life of their own and become reality (Wagner 1975:17-34). This is exactly the particle-wave relationship with a dash or bootstrapping that is defining for the new paradigm. Creativity and imagination have to be taken into account as cultural and historical forces. Perhaps this is why someone like Kari comes out of a very creative family of artists and doctors. I think this is also why popular culture and its representatives are essential in moving the historic process along.

The New Age is firmly integrated into the historic global realm in which it interacts with other historical and social forces. It could only emerge in the historic process of globalization. Important to remember here is

that participants pull symbols and meanings together from a wide range of historical eras and geographic regions. Anthropologically, we are speaking of a world system. It is in this context where the participants of all subcontexts assume their integrative positions. Dale divided participants up in New Age core, the interested, and the mildly curious who may or may not develop into New Age core participants. In a global context these are the particles that interact across three different spheres. This is one version of the idea of interregional exchange and interaction pattern. In this concept regions are divided into the dominant and the periphery. Trade occurs across the boundaries with the actors being cultural mediators on the periphery side and cultural brokers on the dominant side (Pailes 1990:213-222). The periphery would be the New Age sphere as it is still subordinate to the dominant sphere in the global system. New Age participants are mediators in that they pull together symbols and meanings across spheres to create a new social and historical context. Cultural brokers act in the dominant sphere handling the commercial or trade aspect and forming a link to the interested and the mildly curious. The idea gets a little twist here in that mediators and brokers both act across local but also temporal boundaries. In popular culture a mediator would be John Denver e.g. while the record company would assume the role of the broker. This

type of interaction seems symbolic for a certain mental pattern. Mainstream thinking is based on the perception of mutually exclusive opposites and conflict while new paradigm thinking is based on synthesis and harmony (McLaughlin & Davidson 1994:88-89). Although the terms used in the concept still indicates the traditional power relationship between dominant and periphery, the focus seems to shift toward bringing together instead of separating.

It seems that in a global context the pattern that connects is becoming the new paradigm with all its symbolic contents and metaphorical expressions. From an analytical perspective it means that systems thinking has to include more dimensions that we previously have relied on, such as imagination, caring, creativity, spirituality, and so forth. Gregory Bateson (1991) remarks on the consequences with regard to the boundaries of our mind. He states that thinking is part of the circuit and not contained within physical limits (pp.260-261). For mainstream thinkers this sounds esoteric. But we have to remember that our analysis is only the external expression, the particle aspect of a communication process. The wave aspect would be our perception, interpretation, and of course our attitude and feelings toward our informants. Interaction involves both aspects and so our thinking and perceiving does make a difference beyond the mere limits of our written accounts.

This pulls the ethnographer into the field situation in which she becomes an active participant instead of neutral observer. Negative, aggressive, or destructive perceptions can have exactly these effects on our consciousness which will affect our actions and interactions with others. Although newspapers thrive on catastrophes and hate, it has been found that positive reports will be received equally enthusiastic and will affect people's perception of others and their environment. This realization indicates an awakening of what Peter Russell (1995) calls the global brain (304-305). Implied here is also a change in power relations where the individual assumes more of it in terms of her own identity and also in terms of her interaction with others. I have remarked on this in previous chapters.

The idea that we can consciously partake in shaping our consciousness is truly one of evolutionary and historical proportions. There is a symbolic aspect involved that is typical for new paradigm/New Age thinking. Astrologically the sky is divided into twelve signs of the zodiac. The Earth moves around the sun and also spins on its own axis. The tilt of the axis changes gradually making it appear as if the sky is wobbling around the Earth completing a circuit every 26000 years. Our calendar is based on the seasons and in the process seems to move backward through the signs of the zodiac, passing into a new sign about every 2100 years. The point of measure

is the spring equinox at March 21 when the new astrological year begins. The exact date of the shift is a matter of debate but is assumed to be about the late 1960s (Russell 1995:241-242). Whether or not there is such a date is not important. What is important though, is that people are aware of a profound historical shift and have found a way to express this awareness. I have to think here of my impressions when I first stood in the Star Cloud and my sense of something going wrong on a large scale when I look at the news. There is an overwhelming notion of something big is happening to us - something really BIG. I think our becoming aware of the transcendent or wave aspect of ourselves might very well be the next evolutionary spiral. It is certainly part of the historic process.

Chapter XII

Spiraling Out

Throughout the text I have worked out the main differences between mainstream and New Age interest groups. In traditional mainstream anthropological practice these differences are being objectified with the result that they seem somehow more absolute than they really are. This adds a symbolic component which turns less noticeable differences into absolute ones and reinforces perceptions of status groups (Bourdieu 1990:137-138). It also reinforces fragmentation, us versus them attitudes, and seems generally part of the mainstream mindset. In the context of the new paradigm this would be anthropological malpractice.

I think instead that any definition is a process which is different from defining. The four major analytical topics, spirituality, self, health, and science emerged during the fieldwork phase. They constitute the main contexts in which contrasts between mainstream and New Age thought are most clearly expressed in behavior but also in thought which is of course also a social practice.

Therefore, I will take these contexts as the energy field of the discussion and the ideas/ideals that are objectified within it, as the structural parts that define the New Age realm and the emerging new paradigm.

In quantum reality any definition is by necessity temporal and local. The thoughts that are expressed are objectified in relation to the specific context for the duration of the discussion. But when our voices are silent and the keyboard is at rest, these thoughts merge into their respective contexts to be integrated into a pattern of perception and behavior. This means that a definition of New Age has both a particle and a wave aspect and I will have to leave it at that because this condition is exactly part of the definition. Hence there can be no conclusion but only the move towards the next circle in the spiral.

That the definition of New Age is a process seems to be indicated in the stages that James Redfield (1993) calls the Insights. The text is a symbolic representation of the process of realization and awareness. At the same time it describes a moving away from a mainstream thought pattern and working out an alternative one. The stages involve Critical Mass (spiritual awakening), Longer Now (more complete worldview), Matter of Energy (dynamic universe), Struggle for Power (conflict & dominance thinking), Message of the Mystics (sense of love & end of violence), Clearing

the Past (connecting), Engaging the Flow (daydreams & intuitions), Interpersonal Ethics (attention to guiding coincidences), Emerging Culture (transformation) (Redfield & Adrienne 1995). All these stages have in some form been pointed out by the participants in this project.

An insight with regard to science is the realization that holistic and ecological theories can be scientifically sound. Science cannot deliver definite descriptions of reality, but only approximations (Capra 1988:48). While this is certainly clear, to put the idea into practice is a different matter entirely. Two major obstacles which I have mentioned in the text have to be overcome here, current institutionalized power relations based on a reductionistic mechanistic worldview and the notion that our objective observations refer to one common reality with those who offer different observations being somehow less developed which in turn reinforces the power relations. That sounds like the dog that bites his tail.

People overestimate their objectivity because they pay selective attention to those fractions of the observed which is an act of categorization (Sahlins 1995:155). This is of course problematic if we insist having all our categories neatly in place before we go out into the field. Edward T. Hall (1981) refers to this as brainwashing in our education system (p.39) which reminds of Kari's observation about her sister being brainwashed into a

certain religious attitude. It seems that the task is to overcome dogmas, both religious and scientific. The training of our senses according to social dogmas of relevance is the real issue here (Sahlins 1995:155).

One way to handle the problem is not to insist on our authority but to accept our role as students whenever we are in the field and letting our informants be our teachers. In other words to see science as but one interaction sphere among many and therefore subject to negotiation, mediation, brokerage, interpretation, and not least imagination. In anthropology this means that our informants have to have a say in what our discipline should be like. We have to learn to trust their authority. We cannot be teachers without being students. I am certainly not free from the influence of mainstream thinking but here and there I felt I had the chance to put an alternative approach into practice. In terms of entering into a strange sphere one situation stands out to me. The first time I visited Kari at her home and had absolutely no clue what to expect. All I could do was to assume the attitude, "Let's see what happens next," and keep my mouth shut. It worked out well. Later I received the very same response from her when I resisted some of her predictions, "Let's see then what will happen." I think of this as highly symbolic for the interaction between informant and anthropologist.

For those who use mainstream scientific categories

as a security blanket (to avoid all that emotional stuff), the shift into a new paradigm will be rough and entail a sense of loss. But this is a familiar experience for all those who are aware of their own growth. Much of New Age thought revolves around growth in various ways, e.g. growth of consciousness. This is what the new paradigm is all about. Clifford Geertz (1983) notes that our task is to place the things we study into the larger texture of a pattern of life. The variety we expect in our familiar categories extends beyond these categories and needs to be taken into account (p.97). Geertz was talking about art and aesthetics here but the idea applies to all other forces also. The key is that there are forces at work that transcend the boundaries of mainstream classification systems. Some of the more important forces are creativity and imagination. "It is all in your mind," is of course true. Where else would our ideas be? But in mainstream attitude this is being used as a dismissal or denial. "We don't need to study it. We know there is NOTHING." Fear is indeed a powerful motivation.

As understandable as this might be, science is not about what we know. It is about what we don't know. Just because something is in our mind does not make it less real. We have to devise strategies to take the transcendend, the spiritual, the caring and creating and imagining into account. In our informants as well as in ourselves. One

realization was especially important to me during my fieldwork. We have to learn to listen to our informants better and to ask better questions. Conny's, "I know I have lived before," was neither a lie nor a delusion.

Thomas Kuhn (1996) speaks of a mature science when he addresses the shift into a new paradigm. In our choice of paradigms there can be no one specific criterion that leads us. Rather it is a process of deepening and broadening of scope in scientific disciplines as well as science at large (p.170). In order for this to happen though, the scientist as a person has to grow also. For anthropologists this means to build our knowledge on the realities of our informants. It does certainly not mean to reduce the knowledge of our informants to our own reality.

Kuhn suggests that we account for science's existence and its success in terms of evolution from the community's state of knowledge at any given time (p.98). Implied here is an outlook that reaches beyond the immediate problem solving approach but also stays within the limits of the knowable in which absolute truths have no place. I am very much reminded of spirals and patterns. I am also very much reminded of growing up.

Gregory Bateson (1991) points out that a change in thought pattern from person versus tree to person as part of a circuit that includes the tree has consequences in terms of our responsibility (p.261). When the observer

does not include herself in her observations it is easy to dissociate oneself from one's observations and refer to 'objective' observations and conclusions based on rational thought. This is a touch too convenient for my taste. When the observer becomes part of the observation it is not so easy anymore to avoid taking responsibility for our accounts.

There is also a further aspect with regard to responsibility. Throughout the text I have offered different terms for the pattern that connects, depending on the specific context. This pattern can also be seen as a metaphysical power or a unifying reality that is part of our being (Peters 1991:67). Once we are aware of this power, we cannot act as if it only applied to our informants. We are all part of the same cosmic reality in which our different ways of knowing are only different aspects of the same force. Once this realization is there, there is no turning back. As a consequence we cannot use our scientific or anthropological perspectives as screens to weed out those bits and pieces of the other's reality that don't fit into ours. If we are concerned with our own development then we have to ask ourselves seriously, if we dismiss the knowledge, experience, traditions, and expertise of the other, then what does that tell us about ourselves? More specifically, what kind of anthropologists are we? On a purely intuitive hunch, there is something

wrong here. This is the kind of abuse that Dan has in mind and that he does not want to be part of. It is one of the major grudges New Age participants (next to an increasing number of indigenous people) hold against the mainstream.

We may not be able to see the world through the eyes of the other. But we can offer our perspectives as complements and accept theirs as complements to our reality. I think, this would give us all a much bigger picture of a reality we all share internally and externally. It would allow us to interact as teachers as well as students and discover a reality that is perhaps of cosmic dimensions. In this kind of dialogue my question would be, "Gee, what did that feel like when Conny had the impression that she has lived before?" and her question to me would be and really was, "You are the scientist! You explain that to me." It seems we have made a beginning.

I have said at the beginning that if there is really one thing that we all share as members of one species and also across species, it is imagination. Throughout the text I have indicated that we need to include our own imagination and that of our informants if we want to talk about people and a web of life. David Spangler and William Irwin Thompson (1988/1989) give science, especially New Age science, a mythic and storytelling dimension. Both aspects deal with the impact that science has on a social environment. The images we create become metaphors and

language by which we think about and describe our world. The authors see this not as a contradiction to techno-science, but as a complement (p.90). This simply means we live in exactly the world we create. In the mainstream this means we make everybody live in our world. In the New Age realm this means we all live in the same world which is not quite the same.

Implied in all of the above is the realization that metanoia, change of consciousness, begins with us. To overcome fear is an important part of the process. The most important thing to learn is how to be instead of how to strive. To change a system of death requires the realization of goodness in life itself (Radford Ruether 192:269). I have discussed in a previous chapter how goodness is related to our survival. I think the implications for our work and for our goals as scientists and anthropologists are obvious.

We are still very much rooted in mainstream thought. Letting go of the apron strings and learning to trust our intuition is not an easy task. But compared with the upheavals and fears of the 1960's we have come a long way. The New Age movement is over but the New Age is only just beginning.

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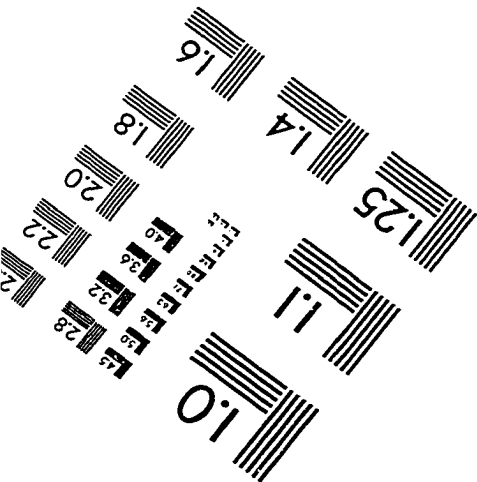
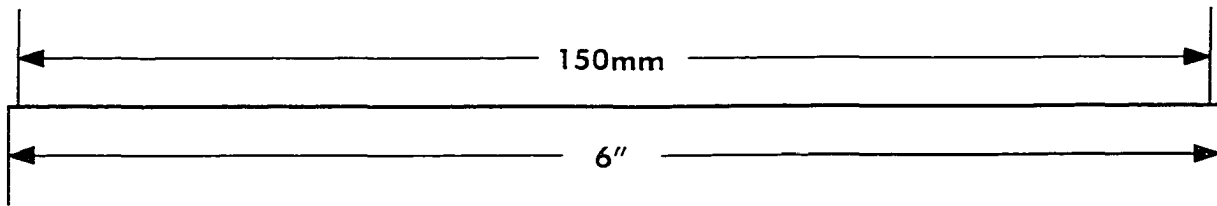
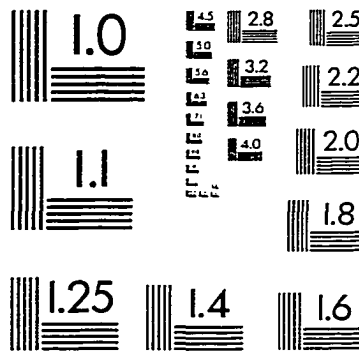
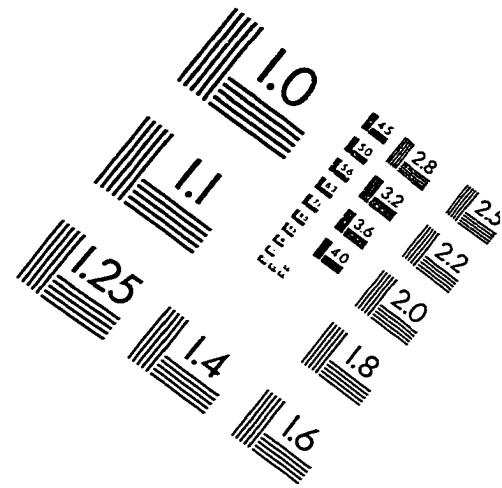
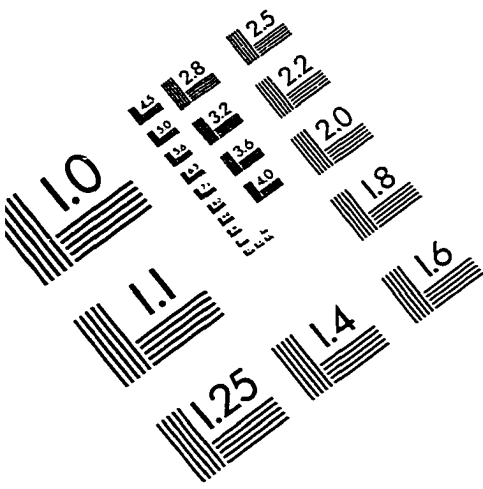
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