

QUEBEC CITY, FRIDAY APRIL 20, 2001

We are dancing in the midst of a battle. The Pagan Cluster, the Living River, was formed to draw attention to issues of water in the Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement being negotiated behind the nine-foot high fence that we now face. We have proven that water can flow uphill, to where the perimeter has been breached and now riot cops are driving back the crowd with tear gas. We move in singing and drumming, and people are glad to see us, to feel supported by our energy. We are singing through vinegar-soaked bandannas while around us tear gas canisters fly and masked figures hurl them back at the police. We begin a spiral, keeping a wary eye on the clouds

behind us and the lines of riot cops just up the hill by the theater. Our drum beat is punctuated with the boom of exploding canisters. I look across the circle at my friends. We've done many, many spiral dances together in beautiful places, around campfires, under stars shining through clean skies. We've raised many cones of power, in the safety of protected circles. But there is a power and a freedom in this circle we've never felt before, compounded of pure joy in defying the powers that loom over us, immense love for all our sisters and brothers around us, and released and transformed rage.

SAN FRANCISCO, MAY DAY 2001 Reclaim the Streets has marched

> through downtown San Francisco and occupied the intersection in front of the Metreon and the Imax theater. A loud sound system blasts hip hop. A live marching band plays drums in a counter rhythm while majorettes perform sex dances. A stand is set up, in two minutes a Maypole crowned with the black flag of anarchy is erected. The noise around us is deafening: there is no chance to issue instructions, to ground, cast or explain. We simply pass out rib

bons and begin the dance. Punks, anarchists, youth, old union organizers, the hard core of San Francisco's political scene weave in and out, their faces coming alive with amused delight. Above us, people peer out of their office windows. Behind us, a group of the black bloc are smashing TV sets on the pavement, while the Tango for Protest group dances. In the midst of the chaos, we raise a sweet, honey-toned cone of power. The police simply watch.

RECLAIMING WAS founded to bring together magic and activism, and we've been practicing both in one form or another for more than twenty years. Our level of activism has varied partly with the state of the surrounding movements — from frenetic blockading in the early eighties to building our own alternative organizations in much of the nineties. In the late nineties, Oak and others in the Bay Area began a concerted campaign to teach some of the skills of magic to activists. For the Seattle WTO protest, we had a small Pagan cluster that brought magic into the action, and was also able to offer a pre-action ritual and magical activism training. In Washington, we also offered trainings and a ritual the night before the blockade. Witches have been part of many, many other antiglobalization actions since.

Quebec City taught us that we can hold magical space in the midst of an actual battle. It brought new challenges to both our magic and our activism.

Photos by Barbara J. Walker Graham
— see also pages 12-15

Most of our cluster had never been in an action like Quebec. Although I've been in many, many other actions over the years, I can't recall ever being in one that so resembled an unrelenting, all-out battle. I was afraid that for people new to action, Quebec would have been too much too soon. But the conversations I heard at night were very different:

"We need better gas masks! Then we could stay up on the front lines and really hold the energy."

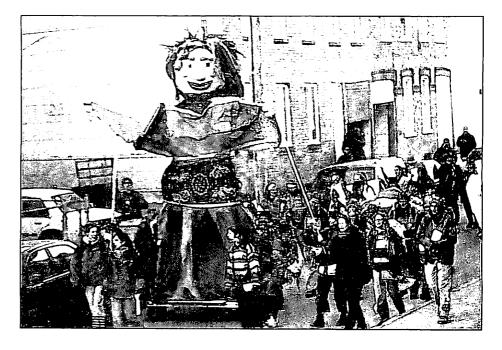
"Yeah, better gas masks! The new look in ritual wear...."

"This is what we've been training for. This is just the beginning."

QUEBEC FELT like a beginning of a new level of struggle. Through the clouds of tear gas one thing became blindingly clear: Those in power will use the immense violence available to them against anyone who challenges the consolidation of their power. And unless we want to live in a world bought, sold, controlled and irrevocably damaged by corporate interests, we are going to have to find more and more creative, transformative, and courageous ways to confront that power.

If we have in some way been in training for this moment in history, what have we learned? What can magic bring to action, and how do we learn to be good at tactical street ritual?

Magic teaches us to be clear about



our intention whenever we do something. And that intention must ultimately be a positive one: We must know what we want, not just what we don't want. We hold a vision, not just a negation.

Activism is necessarily often a process of saying a loud "No!" to something oppressive — the FTAA, for example. But our training in magic would tell us that within that "No!" must be embodied a "Yes!", and that part of the power of the action lies in making that "Yes!" visible. So in Quebec, we carried the Cochabamba Declaration [see page 17], which we saw

as a clear expression of our vision of what should be.

Quebec City was the first time we had a Pagan cluster large enough and organized to create an energy field around us. People sensed the energy; many have told us they felt safe when we were there. To dance the Maypole in an intersection, to spiral amidst the tear gas, is to embody a different possibility of human interaction and community, to literally create a different space and time, to make visible a glimpse of another world.

Street ritual requires a somewhat

different set of guidelines than the rituals we do under the full moon in the woods or even in a protected, enclosed, safe urban space. Here are some basic guidelines:

Keep it simple, simple, simple, simple! And fast — the situation can change at any minute. Anything complicated just won't work.

Be flexible. Don't stay wedded to all our usual forms and structures — you may not have time

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for them. Focus instead on being able to change and respond to what's actually happening.

Street ritual cannot be dependent on words or explanations. Drums, rhythms, a dance form like the spiral dance, simple songs, wordless invocations, movement and action work well. When we're trying to share information during actions, we often do a call and response: "repeat after me." This can work powerfully for very simple invocations:

"Air." "AIR!"
"Fire." "FIRE!"

Use big, portable and simple art: yarn, water to charge, seeds to scatter, flags, puppets (hard to carry), banners, etc. Our Living River in Quebec had four lengths of blue cloth suspended on poles that could billow in the wind, and a big river Goddess puppet head for us to follow. We wore blue to mark us out as a group. The Reclaim the Streets Maypole was designed to be erected instantly, the ribbons only needed to be untied and handed out, and the dance could begin.

Street ritual might develop new forms that are intense but interruptible: Quebec City was dynamic, exciting, and ever changing. The spiral worked well because it could gather the energy of a crowd together. But many actions include long periods when nothing is happening, when you're simply standing in a



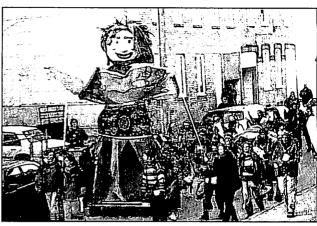
blockade line for hours and hours. Ritual forms like our healing ritual that sustain an energy for a long time might work well in those situations. However, people need to be prepared to snap out of them suddenly, and be prepared for abrupt interruptions rather than smooth transitions.

For street ritual.

those who work the energy need to be self-responsible, to know how to ground themselves instantly, to move themselves quickly in and out of altered states of consciousness. It is possible to go very deep in the midst of a street fight — but you need to be able to pop out of that aspect in a moment if necessary. And you need to remember to ground, cleanse, and take care of yourself afterwards.

If you want to be prepared for actions in the street, it helps to have an ongoing spiritual practice. Here are some that I recommend. I don't have space to describe all of these exercises here, but Reclaiming classes teach them all [see listings, page 38ff]. Many can be found in *The Spiral Dance* and all are described in *The Twelve Wild Swans*.

- Grounding, centering, an ongoing personal practice. Moving while grounding and grounding with your eyes open.
 - Anchoring to your core self again, do it so often it becomes automatic.
 - Magical allies a strong relationship with your ancestors, with the Goddess/Gods that you identify with, with those larger powers you can call on when necessary.
 - Create an anchor to some deeper state dropped and open attention, trance, a particular light aspect. Again, practice quickly getting in and out, holding that state while walking around, doing other things.



- Divination some sort of divination practice that you're familiar with. In Quebec, we read Tarot every night and sometimes in the morning as well, to give us insight into what each day might bring.
- Energy work sensing, shifting, cleansing, healing all those skills are helpful on the street or in jail. All the tools we use to help groups bond, achieve a group identity, and link energetically are helpful in functioning in an action, moving together on the street, and embodying an energy.

To be a Witch in these times is to be working, one way or another, for a major shift in our collective consciousness that can bring us back into balance with the earth and with each other. For most of my life, I've imagined that change occurring sometime in the future. But now the damage caused by our present system is rapidly becoming irreversible. The future has arrived, and to make that change we will need our magic to carry us into activism, and our actions to be rooted in and supported by our magic.

More Quebec stories and the full text of the Cochabamba Declaration can be found on Starhawk's website: www.starhawk.org

Starhawk is the author of many published books on Goddess religion, from The Spiral Dance to Circle Round: Raising Children in Goddess Tradition. She is a feminist, activist, teacher, Witch, gardener, drummer, and one of Reclaiming's founders.