THE PRACTICE OF SALON by Tom Ward

Salon is the art of polite conversation.

There is no business to be decided in salon, no agenda,
no fixed goal; everything to do, nothing to get done.
What one has to say should have something to do with what has been said before,
by others.
We know salon is going well by the ease of the flow, the
quiet and pause between speakers.
Everyone and no one is a facilitator: watch to see that everyone gets
to speak, no one dominates the conversation.
Perhaps, use a talking stick.

Extended Suggestions (December 2006)

To start a Salon, the folks gather and chit chat quiets. There is a period of silence and as in a Quaker Meeting someone is moved to speak to the whole group with a concern or idea. Anyone can start, there is no one person in charge, although there may be an experienced facilitator who can explain the guidelines and who may have put up posters to help us remember how to proceed.

What one is especially eager to say will soon be said by others, if one is patient.

Having patience while listening allows a return loop – the idea gains depth – comes back around again.

Meanwhile take short poem like notes - cribs to hold ideas.

Inspirations held beyond the time of circle can come back to the next gathering as poem, art, song or essay. Our considered response will and can mature after Salon – inspiring Art to be shared and shown in community at large. Thus Conversation Expands.

Salon goes on and comes back.

Avoid argument or dialog. Address comments to the whole group. As everyone is a facilitator, when a two-person exchange excludes the rest of us, anyone can say "DIALOG" as a clue to break it up and return the conversation to community.

Anyone can ask or answer any questions. Do not expect the expert to respond.

We can experience and participate in the flow by listening as well as by speaking; active observation lends a tone and is an important contribution.

Background Story

In France a Salon is the public room just inside the front door. This is where one meets visitors and solicitors without taking them into the home. During the eighteenth century time of revolutions the Salons were the locations of many conversations and arrangements. This is where women facilitated emerging culture and where even today social meetings and social planning takes place. The Salon represents the best of polite and reasonable culture.

More recently Salon has become a concept of gathering for conversation. The Utne Reader published a book in the 1990's encouraging neighborhood Salons. The subject was often declared in advance and folks arriving had some idea of what was to be talked about.

In Ecotopian Permaculture courses Salon has become a place and time where one can have the depth of sharing and discussion that does not often happen in the flow of presentations and exercises. On evenings during the course those folks who miss the comfort of slow consideration and thinking have a chance to sit with a cup of tea and listen and think and bring forward ideas missing or passed over too fast in the curriculum. Although a list of topics to potentially be discussed ("take it to Salon") is accumulated during the busy class periods, when we sit down comfortably any subject can lead and the conversation often goes beyond the expectations.

SURROUNDED WITH SALON
(seminar without certificate)

The language we are using is a disservice
to the resonate complexity of farming,
restoration and coevolution.

I use a different epistemology.
The nature of truth has many dimensions
and is unspecific, perhaps even passive.
Yet there is study and mimicry,
patterns and precedence.

Bear with me, we may converse convivially,
gathered in a circle, rippling pleasantly out,
words are for song.

tom ward, 26 September 1994
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