

Elements of INTIMACY

THE DANCE OF LOVING CONNECTION

An abstract illustration of several human figures in various poses, rendered in semi-transparent shades of pink, purple, and magenta. The figures are intertwined, suggesting movement and connection. The background is a soft, warm gradient of light orange and yellow.

Caffyn Jesse

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Acknowledgements

What I offer here is a gathering together of learnings I have gleaned from my dance of loving connection with teachers, students, plants, animals, lovers and friends. I did not originate these ideas and practices, though I have mixed in my own DNA through the process of gathering in the knowledge in and spiraling it out.

Stephen Karpman developed the “drama triangle” of victim, rescuer, and persecutor as a model of conflicted or drama-intense relationships. Leisbeth Van Rompenay shared her experience with Movement Medicine, as developed and led by Susannah and Ya’Acov Darling Khan, to guide an embodied exploration of how we can go from playing roles in the drama triangle to a more spacious place in a dance of archetypes: Fool, Warrior and Elder. I mixed these teachings with Betty Martin’s brilliant Wheel of Consent, which has been foundational to my own teaching and my life. Betty draws a wheel with four quadrants, separating the energies of Taking, Allowing, Serving and Accepting. The archetypes, energies and shadows of the Wheel of Consent are largely incorporated in how I conceive and diagram the Elements of Intimacy. Betty uses her wheel in teaching people to touch, as well as to counsel people in better managing their emotions and commitments. I have also integrated teachings from somatic sex education, the neurobiology of trauma and attachment, my writings on queer archetypes and my work with couples.

Ideas generated with intimates Tricia Bowler, Sophia Faria, Michael Haines, Leisbeth Van Rompenay, Paula Stromberg, and Doug Wahlsten are mixed into my writing here with gratitude and love. Beloved friends and family Wendy Baxter, Corinne Diachuk, Kristan Huthmacher, Britta Love, Lena, Greta Jane, Stronach O’Neill, Christiane Pelmas, captain Snowdon, Max Tea, and Montana Zimmerli all contributed ideas to this text through our connection and conversation. I also acknowledge with thanks Shellyse Szakacs, with whom I discussed early versions of the Elements of Intimacy graphic.

Without the ongoing guidance of my 24 years in 12-step recovery programs, along with the sacred use of heart-opening medicines, I could never have reached for and enjoyed the intimacy – and understanding of intimacy – that fills my life today.

The practice of ongoing discernment between fear and danger is key to the practice of somatic sex education. It has recently been anchored, vivified, and linked with social transformation for me by the writing of Resmaa Menakem on racialized trauma,¹ and Sonia Renee Taylor on radical self-love.²

¹ My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies

² The Body is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love

Introduction



A psychotherapist assisting me at one of my Intimacy Educator trainings brought a morning meditation to the group. To the gentle soundtrack of a heartbeat, she had us imagine being rocked in the amniotic sea of our mothers' wombs, feeling ourselves safe, wanted and cherished. For several in the group (including myself), this visualization triggered great anxiety. We had felt unwanted in our mothers' wombs, unloved. "Imagine being born into a world that truly welcomed you," my colleague continued. "What words of welcome

would have nourished your particular soul?” For those of us caught in feeling the distress of an unsafe womb, this next step was impossible. Each in our private silent way was managing feelings of shame, distress, blame or apathy. We felt locked in private fears, alienated from the group, and unable to imagine words that welcomed us.

As I thought more about the exercise, I found that what I needed to support a sense of safety for myself was the same truth I found to support my feeling, in childhood, that I was safe-enough to live into my own voice and vision. I was born not just to a human family with all its sweetness, flaws and failings, but also to a biosphere of belonging. I had the warmth of the sun, the flow of the river, the intricate branches of trees that offered me breath, the chattering of squirrels who were my kindest companions, the birds whose migrations invited me to imagine places far from the one I knew. The intricate, beautiful nonhuman world was the world that welcomed me. This is where I heard “You are okay. You are enough. You belong”. As I offered this memory to others, I found it resonated with them too. When we anchor and resource ourselves in the biosphere of belonging, it helps us to live into our longing. For each of us knows somewhere inside us we are a unique part of the web of life and death. And each of us knows there is a limitless love that we are capable of sharing, if only we can feel safe to do so. Resourced with feeling our belonging in the biosphere of belonging, we are better able to imagine and share the imperfect welcome of human love.

Through my work as a somatic sex educator with a focus on healing sexual trauma, and in the loving relationships I have found, forged and failed to co-create in my intimate world, I know the longing for love that we have hardwired in our physiology. Love is crucial to our survival. As newborn humans we are completely dependent on our caregivers. We are so vulnerable so much longer than most mammals. The care of other humans is what creates enough safety for our bodies,

brains and nervous systems to evolve into somewhat independent, self-regulating beings. The quality and quantity of human love available in early relationships shapes our biophysical response to others: our vigilance, our fear, our habitual tendencies to feel playful, distressed, alienated or cherished.

Our nervous systems never become completely independent. Throughout life, we remain neurologically linked with other people and with the environment. Our physical and emotional well-being is profoundly shaped by the proximity of a tree, a pet, a stranger or a friend. Our nervous systems are continually responding to other nervous systems, so that we become calmer by being in calm connection with another, and more bold in a courageous group. We are affected by how people around us breathe, eat, play, express themselves sexually, and whether they feel happiness or loneliness. Relationships help us build ever-more flexibility and resilience when they support us in exploring excitement, novelty and adventure while providing a path back to secure belonging. When social relationships are unstable, uninteresting or unsafe, our nervous systems become less and less resilient and self-regulating.

Understanding our biophysical need for love can help us understand the often-dysfunctional patterns through which we manage to love and be loved, or avoid the risks of intimacy. No matter how well our parents behaved, no matter what resources we had or have, we live in a distressed and damaged social environment, where millennia of trauma separate us from nature and other humans. Some 12,000 years ago, with the advent of agriculture, humans began to separate themselves from loving connection with plants and animals through relationships involving dominance and subordination. The advent of patriarchy, the enclosure of the commons, centuries of slavery and the invention of the nuclear family are all wound into our DNA. Rape, war, genocide, famine, and the constant threat of violence

police our possibilities. We experience daily aggressions and microaggressions based on race, gender, class, age, sexual orientation, gender-conformity, ability, and the host of intersecting privileges and oppressions that comprise our social world. Every personal identity and social institution through which we live our individuality and manage our relational environment enforces dominance and subordination. The very idea that we can be met and loved in equal and honoring partnerships with other precious souls is self-evidently preposterous. We scramble for scraps and fragments of normative belonging in a dangerous world.

And yet, whenever we feel safe-enough within ourselves, or with others, we can tune into an unstoppable longing. It is an ever-fresh artesian spring within us. It is a boundless desire: we want love endlessly and enormously, and we know our own capacity for endless and enormous love. I have met and felt this boundless desire in every human soul I have ever touched. In the limited, partial and imperfect ways I have found to uncover and live within this spring of longing, I have seen love flourish and make magic in my own and others lives, and in communities.

To live into our love and longing, we can begin by making a commitment to get out of the pinball machine of reactive energies that comprise everyday patterns of social interaction, connection and conflict in a dangerous world. We can stop accepting as “good enough” the normative patterns of love and belonging based on threat management, fear and greed. I offer *Elements of Intimacy* as a description of practical strategies we might employ, so we can learn to identify reactive patterns and use them as portals through which we can step into a dance of loving connection based on goodwill and welcome. In all our relations, we can learn to choose kindness, and practice gratitude and generosity, to attune our energy with the biosphere of belonging. We can commit to noticing and savouring

pleasure and happiness, and settling our own nervous systems as best we can, so that we harmonize our own vibrations with the welcome we meet in the world of energy and matter. There might or might not be other people we can attune with. Our welcome might be better felt with plants, or pets, or waterfalls. With each breath, we connect with and contribute to the living system that comprises our intricate biosphere. We can attend to the quality of our own breath.

It is a joy and a calling to transform traumatic acculturation in whatever ways we can – in friendships, lovemaking, gardening, parenting, work, play – in all our relations, including our relations with our own bodies and the human and non-human world around and within us. We can only do our part. We can choose a different way of living as a *Dao*, a practice, because it is joyful as well as purposeful. In settling our own nervous systems, and living ethically instead of reactively, we feel more joy, more resourced, more welcomed and welcoming – and so our relationships begin to sustain and empower us at a micro and macro level. When we weave connection through love and pleasure, instead of fear, aggrandizement, and the continual management of threat, we foster a different neurochemical environment in our bodies, and in the neurobiology of social life.

I have felt the actual transformation that is possible in my own life, in my experiences of intimacy with lovers and strangers, and in community with humans and non-humans. The practices I describe in *Elements of Intimacy* help to create a bridge of “Being With” between us, where we feel empowered to gently unfold our capacities for self-trust and for loving connection, without encountering others’ expectations and entitlements. With enough space, time, trust and safety in Being With each other, we can unfold more and more of our selves and our capacities. We can build more bridges of open-hearted love that spiral out to touch the world around us, while they spiral in to hold us ever

more intimately in a uniquely personal experience of love and belonging.

Intimacy that touches us deeply – true love - is intimacy that is just for us. The feelings of love and belonging we can rest in, and believe in, are nothing like the provisional belonging we might win through threat management in normative environments. True love is palpable; it is unearned grace; it is enormous and endless. It is love like earth, solid and forgiving, supporting our life, until death brings us closer together.³ It is love like sky, enlivening our cells and receiving our selves with every breath.⁴ It is love like fire that warms and cooks and transforms, and makes the world habitable for our vulnerability and nakedness. It is love like water, uniting, flowing, absorbing us into itself, so we are one with love and our beloveds. Real intimacy is spacious, giving room for self-definition. It allows many unique and precious experiences of boundless love. This is the intimacy we can viscerally feel through a conscious and cultivated connection with the nonhuman world of nature. Resourced by our knowingness, we can bring these qualities to the dance of human love.

Unfolding our love and longing requires courage. For all my lived experience in finding more and more love, pleasure and happiness, I want also to honour what feels like a relentless tsunami of grief and loss and less. In the last few years, I have had to be with the long illness and death of my life partner, the heartbreak of a great love lost, the depression and suicide of a most cherished friend, the murder of my favorite forest, the vanishing of ninety percent of the birds of my home place. And I can only be with the enormity of it – without vanishing the depth of feeling in blame, shame, distress or apathy –

³ with gratitude to Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens and the Ecosexual Manifesto.

⁴ with gratitude to Greta Jane and her meditation, "Kiss the Earth, Feel the Earth Kissing Back", available on Soundcloud.

when I am held in a web of loving connection. Finding attunement with myself, with the non-human world and with other human souls opens up an endless well of grief along with the ever-fresh artesian spring of love and longing. Perhaps this is why we learn to avoid the web, stop weaving it around and within us, and find ways to live without the generosity and grace.

Intimacy is a counter-normative practice that destabilizes our normative belonging. We run up against our own self-doubt, and challenge others to meet us in expanded possibilities for relationship. We feel our nervous system overstretch with unfamiliarity. We feel afraid of being too much or not enough. We resist the clarity, peace and freedom we begin to access. We keep on getting triggered into reactive energies and habitual dysfunctions, every day. Indeed, we feel the visceral distress of our reactive energies ever more deeply, if we eschew neural habits and cultural patterns of numbing dissociation from ourselves and each other. We wonder: Are we giving away too much? Are we allowing others to impact us too deeply? Are we accepting the unacceptable? Do we want too much from this relationship? We hit our pleasure ceiling, and wonder, “How can love feel this good? When is the sky going to fall?”

As we live into a different future, our vision and our day-to-day practice of intimacy can keep shifting us into right being and right doing, right now. We don't have to join the dance of loving connection because it will change the world. We can do so simply because it makes our own lives more joyful. And in dancing the dance through which we weave and are woven into a biosphere of belonging, we are also giving and living our best in service of social change that might (or might not) come as a result.

Feedback Loops



I work often with trauma as a somatic sex educator. Sexual trauma is ubiquitous; it is the cultural norm. Some people have escaped specific incidents of sexual violence, but we all – even the most apparently privileged – dwell in a violent culture of gender and desire that takes up residence inside our skins.

Trauma is real. We scan and manage our bodies, relationships and environments to address real danger. And trauma can also live in

us as a residue, inhibiting our lives in unhelpful, harmful ways that prevent us from exploring and inventing loving relationships. Experiences of oppression and violence – whether personal or ancestral – can be held in our bodies as hyperactivated stress neurochemistry and chronic fascial contraction that extends into every cell, affecting every organ and system.

With the impact of personal and cultural traumas, and with the ongoing chronic microtraumas we experience every day, the biophysical effects of embodied trauma are likely to set up self-reinforcing feedback loops within us. Our distressed physiology expresses – and also contributes to – chronic anxiety that inhibits blood flow, digestion and immune response (among many other harmful effects). With every cell and system agitated, we become hypervigilant, sensing danger in every environment and relationship. Anxious, panicky energy courses through us, and we cannot settle enough to build safe-enough relationships and create safe-enough environments in which to heal. Unmetabolized trauma shows up as emotional reactivity and anxious rumination. Reactivity makes relationships unsafe. Families, friends, colleagues and countries get triggered into their own reactive patterns. More traumatic relationships ensue, damaging our physiology still further.⁵

Traumatized nervous systems also have a neural groove of dissociation. We feel disconnected from our selves, from others and our surroundings. We aren't in touch with our body sensations and our boundaries. We don't notice and discern real danger. We wander unaware and unafraid into dangerous relationships and environments, tolerating intolerable relational patterns without noticing. We ignore

⁵ For much more information and a bibliography, see my book *Science for Sexual Happiness*, which also includes over 100 neural exercises for working to unwind embodied trauma and foster happiness.

and ineffectively mismanage our stressors as they incrementally overwhelm us, resulting in more damage to our nervous systems.

When we have experienced harmful relationships, we often become skilled at avoiding intimacy, in various ways. Hence we do not have experience and competence in noticing trustworthy people and cultivating trustworthy relationships. We can be simultaneously hypervigilant to insult and injury, and able to ignore and deny truly dangerous relationship dynamics. Through both hypervigilance and dissociation, we experience dangerous others, and learn to trust people less and less.

Without practices and experiences to bring witness and choice to both hypervigilant and dissociative responses, and the unique ways hypervigilance and dissociation are woven together within each one of us, we are liable to keep on experiencing more danger, dysfunction, neglect and violence in our lives. Or we compress our lives into coffins, staying safe by staying small, because any challenges to our nervous systems feel overwhelming and unmanageable.

IT'S A DANGEROUS WORLD FEEDBACK LOOP



In contrast, safe-enough relationships – including friendships, intimate partnerships, therapeutic containers, collegial connections and caring communities – can potentially provide “holding environments” to support neurological change within and between us.

Donald Winnicott, a psychoanalyst, and Clare Britton, a social worker,⁶ coined the term “holding environment” to describe the supportive environment that a therapist creates with a client. A holding environment is like the womb, or the parent, or the biosphere of belonging that holds us safe-enough, and nurtures and protects us long enough, for us to settle into trusting our basic okayness. In a therapeutic context, we understand that creating a holding environment is critical to the process of learning and growth that a client undergoes. We hold people in our loving, positive regard, while maintaining clear boundaries – even when they try to engage us in dysfunctional interactions and seduce boundary transgressions. This holding is probably the single most important component of any therapeutic relationship. The safety we offer each other is not perfect. But Winnicott and Britton observe that babies and children actually benefit when their mothers fail them in manageable ways. An ideal holding environment challenges us to develop our own unique self-regulating capacities. As we fail each other, support each other and challenge each other to change dysfunctional relationship patterns that are personal and cultural, we can stay grounded in a commitment to goodwill and kindness. We can keep refocusing on our belonging in the biosphere of belonging, and keep showing up for each other as best we can.

⁶ The two were collaborators, though Britton is generally not credited. She published the work under her husband’s name after his death.

IT'S A WONDERFUL WORLD FEEDBACK LOOP



Relational well-being produces its own positive feedback loop. When we feel resourced, safe-enough, and challenged in manageable ways, we experience a cascade of beneficial physiological effects. We gradually let go of chronic fascial contraction, emotional turmoil and anxious thoughts. When our relationships include safe and wanted touch, shared goals, respectful interactions and erotic connection, our

nervous systems suppress the corrosive stress-chemistry of cortisol and adrenaline, and activate feel-good neurochemistry, including oxytocin, dopamine, serotonin, endorphins and endocannabinoids. Our safe-enough relationships create holding environments where our physiology can calm down, heal and grow.

I have witnessed this process at work many hundreds of times as a teacher and practitioner of somatic sex education. The holding environment of professional practice with trustworthy, caring and educated practitioners supports traumatized people who want to make journeys of recovery and reconnection with their own bodies, desires and capacities for intimacy. Somatic sex educators have protocols, exercises, a professional training and a community of practice to guide us in creating safe-enough holding environments for clients to heal and grow. But for all the tools and techniques I teach and recommend, there is one act and attitude I think essential. I understand my most important role and responsibility is to love.

Love that can gladly meet strangers, all genders, dysfunctional people, and people who seem unattractive in every conventional way, is not love as an empty word. It is love comprised in acts and attitudes of body, mind, spirit and emotions. Offering whole-body touch, I love people's bodies. Caring, safe and exciting touch helps people build a feeling of loving connection from the inside. I love their cells and skins. Loving touch contradicts self-loathing, soothes the effects of trauma, and helps to replace the imprints of painful and inappropriate touch with pleasurable and respectful touch. I love people's minds, coaxing their communication, honoring their desires and my own boundaries, listening to their stories with my unconditional positive regard, helping them groove new neural pathways that link brain, voice and feeling. I love people's spirits. I stand with my own spirit connected to earth and sky and greet their unique spirits with wonder and amazement. And I meet each person emotionally and offer my love, as

one wounded human being to another. I hold them in my heart as they ride waves of feeling, often traveling from deep grief to elation in a single session. This is love in action. It has nothing to do with standards of attractiveness, partner choice, or making the selective judgments about who is right and wrong for us that usually limit what we call love. This is a profound connection of souls.

One client described the experience as being “held in an ocean of love” while “my body felt completely electrified..., pulsing with energy head to toe”. Knowing, feeling and sharing love, we can create holding environments that invite a communion of cells and souls.

We can create all our intimate relationships as loving holding environments, if we act consciously and creatively to do so – offering consistent love, acceptance and welcome; trusting that each person has their own wisdom and inner truth; seeing relational failures and setbacks as ways we offer each other manageable challenges; making safe paths back to love and belonging; allowing ourselves to be held and feel held; honoring when the time comes to bring a specific holding environment to an end.

Traumatized nervous systems create feedback loops, so every new experience further impacts our physiology, creating and confirming that we live in a dangerous world. Settled nervous systems practicing love in action create feedback loops too. If we meet inside a commitment to support the physiology of loving connection within and around us through respect, self-respect, connection, care, and wanted touch, we can co-create relational environments that empower us to meet manageable challenges. We can practice love in action. Savouring the pleasures of excitement and contentment within and between us, we experience more and more joy in our cells and our souls.

Sacred Intimacy



Love and longing for belonging is the fundamental pulse of matter and vibration. It is in the ocean offering itself to rain and clouds extinguishing themselves in rivers. It is fire at earth's core, reaching for sun through our synapses. The dance of loving connection manifests in every unfolding of coming into being and passing away in the intricate web of life and death. We love and we long for each other. We shine more brightly, becoming more fully and uniquely ourselves, in the presence of beloved beings with whom we feel a resonance. Our

shining paradoxically contains a willingness to sacrifice, and give away all we can. True wealth emerges in and around us when love and belonging flourish, as we find our wantingness and willingness to live our giveaway, and lean into deeply receiving the giveaway of others. We polish our souls' shining with awareness and active loving, and we simultaneously bring sparkle to each others' souls with brighter shining.

Intimacy unfolds this net of jewels that comprises the biosphere of belonging – Indra's net, in which each soul is alight and alive in reflecting each other's. In every jewel, there is a reflection of the whole. The whole exists through the shining of each one part of it. Our impulse to love and our longing for each other's love is enacted in the continual weaving and reweaving of the net: a net of union and communion that holds, supports and empowers us.

In the forms of loving connection we inherit and co-create, we try to live our shining. Even when our efforts appear impossibly dysfunctional, destructive and harmful, they stem from an inner impulse to weave a net of love and belonging in which our unique soul can receive light from and give light to the net of jewels. In our connections with others, we are always feeling for what is occluding or supporting our shining. What is the just-right place of relational alignment? Can this one's gifts resonate with my longings? How do their wants connect with my willingness?

If we are weaving our net of love and belonging outside the social meanings we inherit from a traumatic overculture, how do we invent what is right? What guides us in finding the alignment where our shining is supported by others' shining? What does it feel like and look like to be met in a dance of loving connection that is not guided by threat management? How can we step together into relationships where love brings us more fully into life? Without elders, rituals or

customs to guide us, we feel blindly into what right relationship comprises. We feel the Yes and No and Maybe in our guts and skin, and in relationships that are continually shifting as we unfold (or retract) our desires and build (or diminish) our competencies.

Our capacities for loving connection are impaired by the punishing relationship paradigms and experiences offered by the traumatic overculture. Neurologically damaged in our families of origin, some of us navigate the world with an “anxious attachment” style – coming too close, giving too much, clinging too tightly. Others of us have an “avoidant attachment” style where we want too little and take too much.⁷ The armour we don to survive and protect our light creates perpetual constraint and dis-ease within and between us. We feel too vulnerable to dwell inside our need and longing for others, and so we extinguish our light by failing to truly give and receive. We protect our diminished selves by becoming imposters in the world of normative belonging, assuming roles and relationships that afford us some scraps of (temporary, provisional) safety.

For many years I have worked as a sacred intimate – offering my caring presence and my touch to clients, creating erotic rituals with them. The term “sacred intimate” draws on the history of holy whoredom, as practiced in many different cultures around the world. It was coined by Joseph Kramer in the 1980’s as he guided gay men in offering sexual pleasure and erotic ritual to other gay men, and cultivating erotic energy in groups, in the midst of the grief and fear of the AIDS epidemic. This was the original manifestation of a training that later morphed into Sexological Bodywork and then Somatic Sex Education. My own practice through all these iterations has stayed grounded in the holy resonance and queer roots of sacred intimacy.

⁷ For much more on this plus bibliographical references, see my book *Science for Sexual Happiness*.

The exchange of money for intimacy is widely denigrated, and even (in some forms) criminalized in this culture. “Sex work” can be a desperate choice by marginalized people who are injured and endangered by the thousand ways this work is despised. The historic enclosure of sex in married monogamy coincides with the enclosure of the commons, the consolidation of patriarchal power, and the violent suppression of erotic alternatives. When intimacy escapes the prison of prescribed lifeways, it admits the dream of freedom. Sacred intimates offer a path for the conscious practice of relational freedom. We are creators and innovators who see a universe of possibility in the fact that getting paid for intimate connection gives value to our time, our learning and our love. Money releases energy, so people do not need to organize their longings for love inside compulsory forms of social safety and belonging based on family, faith, gender identity, racial identity, nationality, age, class, sexual orientation or standards of attractiveness. With loving relationships based on joyous and equitable exchange, we can practice a possible future through the medium of money.

In sacred space, apart from ordinary life, sacred intimates meet people intimately and erotically. Temple time with a holy whole is time outside the forms and gestures of conventional social relationships. The love we share in temple time does not confine or define us. Meaningless in terms of social norms, it is freed to become love in a universal sense – offering solace and whole-hearted acceptance, while inviting ongoing courage, exploration and growth. Sacred intimacy is a call to aliveness. I won’t judge, shame, fix or marry you. Within the temple time we are together, it is my job and my vocation to love and honour you. In this role, I can welcome the unfolding of your deepest vulnerabilities and meet your monsters with equanimity.

My own identity and experience as a queer and genderqueer person is key to the counternormative space I offer. I am able to meet your soul as it is and touch it as it yearns to be touched, outside the posturing and paring away of capacities that gender imposes. You don't get to bully me because you are trained to behave as a man. You don't get to endure unwanted touch because you are trained to behave as a woman. We play together, and hold each other, stretching bodies, souls, and communication competencies so we can feel the pleasure and allow the grief in tenderness, passion, power and powerlessness. I have seen again and again how making this kind of open and counter-normative relational space – whether in one-on-one work, or in groups and communities – offers a way for people to open their hearts and become joyful, feel the divine in themselves and others, put down the armour, and let their lights shine.

I am committed to bringing insights from my vocation of sacred intimacy into all the other ways I weave loving connection into my life. In diverse friendships, I find passionate, productive and powerful connections. Even when biophysical limits restrict the quantity of time we spend together, the quality of our connections is deeply resourcing. In the devotional temple time we share, I find and re-find the sweet balance of acceptance and challenge, and feel the free flow of energy with equity. We support each other in singing our earth songs, even when that brings us to endings.

In my chosen family (including some of my family of origin), I feel held in an ocean of love. We are forever. I cannot be me without their shining. Holding one another with trustworthy loyalty and consistent care, we go on feeling into our wantingness and willingness. We meet each other's desires as invitations, responding with our Yes, No, Maybe or I changed my mind. We know our choices will be welcomed and honoured, even if they bring grief to ourselves or the other. Our mistakes and messiness are challenged, and we belong.

In my intimate lovership with the non-human world, I feel passion and kindness. I spend sacred, intimate time with plants, tides, mountains, animals and rivers. I foster my awareness and experience of an energetic merging and separation that supports us learning each other, caring for each other, and shining in each other's shining.

In my communities – queer community, local community, community of weirdos, community of practice – I don't need to get distracted by blame, shame, distress or apathy. I spread my wings and growl and meow and build the biosphere of belonging. To live in this pulse of love and longing, I know I need to keep tracking the limits of my wantingness and willingness, and work responsibly with my reactivity. Resourced by my experiences of sacred intimacy, I choose love.

In all my relations, I want to foster authentic, embodied joy. I want to cultivate erotic energy in all the ways that are appropriate to – and welcomed by – my companions. In the paradigm of sacred intimacy, erotic energy is life force energy. It is an aspect of constellations, trees and tides. Sharing erotic pleasure is a way to honor and practice the divine within, and to meet the divine in one another. Sacred intimacy is prayer, celebration, healing and transformation. Our practice of embodied joy is supported when we share the beauty of the nonhuman world and our own souls. It is supported when we sing, cuddle, exchange wanted touch and share meals in loving connection. Where appropriate and welcome, it is supported by sharing diverse erotic practices. Sometimes we unfold our intimacy with lovemaking, and sometimes we meet in counternormative ways like mindful erotic practice and erotic massage that cultivate expanded arousal, invite relaxation as well as excitement, and separate giving from receiving. After a morning in erotic temple, my beloved Liesbeth Van Rompaey shared, “Communal mindful erotic practice is going in an erotic temple to pray in the most

divine way – meeting each other in an act of self-love, and accessing the deep transpersonal love for all who are present in the magic circle”. Sharing and weaving erotic community keeps teaching me to live in integrity with my own spirit, and to dance in loving connection with the world.

Attunement



As my partner of 31 years lay dying, I held her in my arms. This is the song that came through me:

“I will walk in beauty
Beauty is before me
Beauty is behind me

Above me and below me
Around me and within me”.⁸

It comforted her, and it comforted me, in the grief and fear and relief of letting go.

For me this song based on the Navajo/Diné traditional prayer is a perfect evocation of the net of jewels that goes out from who we are in all directions. Across, up, down, back, forward and through all time, we shine in each other’s shining. Beauty is the dark web that holds it all together; beauty is the infinite intricacy we meet in each other; beauty is me being the very best that I can be, in me, right here, right now. Let’s walk in beauty.

We walk alone, as we must. As we tune into our knowingness and welcome the learning we bring to each other, we unfold the only one we are, in our own shining. We create our unique gifts; we become our unique offering.

We walk together, as we must. A limitless and inescapable web of love connects us. We feel it inside, always, in our inexhaustible longing for what is no longer, not yet and not now. We feel it all around us, right there for us to cherish in what is, what happened, and what comes.

The Beauty Way is a way of infinite sadness. I grieve my aloneness and feel my powerlessness, without being numbed by the dominant cultural paradigm of self-sufficiency. I know I cannot be fully myself without your shining. I mourn every loss and less of you. I know my aching, endless longing for the brighter, better and forever, when I am not distracted by blame, shame, distress or apathy.

⁸ I apologize that I do not know the singer or songwriter whose version of “The Beauty Way” this is. Please write me if you know!

The Beauty Way is the way of boundless joy. It is the bright delight of you, shining deep inside me. I feel you in my gratitude and gifts. I savour the undeserved grace of you. I accept, trust and respect the magic that you are, were and will be. Without the numbing encasement of trying to control, fix or stop caring about you, I feel my endless love.

When relationships unfold within dominant cultural paradigms, driven by reactive energies and threat management, we are busy trying to manage others to avoid fear and pain. We isolate to protect ourselves, or we grasp at social connections that will soothe. We ruminate anxiously on injury and potential peril. If we don't step back and breathe into curious inquiry with our reactive energies, we are likely to find that our own and others' entitlements and expectations take up residence inside us, like an inner bully who inhibits us from taking a deep breath, and feeling into our choice or lack of choice in the moment. The bully comes into every cell through an anxious fascial clench and stress-based neurochemistry that riles our emotions, triggering thought-loops and motivating dysfunctional behaviors that want to defend and win our worthiness. The inner bully would convince us to betray our cellular knowingness of how to walk in beauty. Whether we are trying to overly accommodate others' desires or fearfully protect ourselves from even encountering them, the inner bully would have us betray the Beauty Way, and hurt anyone who hurts us.

Some of us are well-trained in accommodation, appeasement and taking care of others. Feeling into who and how we are inside takes practice. Self-intimacy is a primary challenge. We can cultivate a capacity to attend to our own inner knowingness, and believe in ourselves enough to defend our truths in our interactions with others, by noticing any sense of cellular protest, constraint, withdrawal, collapse or caving in. When and how do we feel a sense of "enough!"?

And what if our truth is one that endangers us, injures another, or separates us from the world of normative belonging? Our worried hearts can sometimes open more easily when we accept and assess our fear. Taking a breath and orienting to the present moment, instead of falling into habitual patterns, we can ask ourselves, “Is this a moment of real danger, when accommodating another is the wisest thing to do? Or is it a moment when I can choose to act with courage, and ask for what I want? Can I speak my truth and defend my boundaries, even if that hurts and disappoints another?” Every fear we face and integrate creates more space and freedom within us, as we stop collapsing ourselves to win others’ acceptance.

For those of us trained in paying attention to our own needs, and used to having others take care of them, feeling into who and how other people are takes practice. How do we cultivate an ability to invite another’s truth? How do we find room to allow it without resentment, even when it disappoints us or seems uncaring? Our reluctant hearts can sometimes open better when we accept and assess our pain. Can we find a way to be with what hurts, without blaming, feeling personally rejected, or wanting to correct another? Taking a breath and orienting to the present moment, instead of rising into habitual patterns, we can ask ourselves, “Is this a moment of real danger, when fighting another’s truth is the wisest thing to do? Or is it a moment when I can choose kindness, and really listen – however softly this person may be expressing themselves? Can I accept another’s boundaries, even when that means accepting my own pain and disappointment?” Every pain we face and integrate creates more space and freedom around us, as we stop trying to change others so that we can stop hurting.

We can hone our attention to small shifts in posture or tone of voice that say we are pushing in too fast or falling back too much, or that signal more closeness and connection may be possible. We can

notice any felt sense – in ourselves or others – of pushing back, reaching toward or turning away. We can attend to tiny facial expressions and subtle verbal invitations and evasions. Intention matters. When we are not proceeding from pre-determined images of intimacy, but are actually willing and wanting to meet in right relationship with the one right here with us right now, we become more sensitive to many small cues that help us find alignment in the moment.

Attunement is this delicate, ongoing process of finding, feeling, believing, communicating and accepting our own and others' truths. A felt sense of attunement in any relationship is the sum of many small acts and attitudes, and much ongoing practice in harmonization and walking the Beauty Way. Our capacity for attunement is profoundly impacted by the attunement we have experienced or failed to experience in early life, and in all our relations. Understanding that we each have different needs and competencies is essential. Some of us need more relational space in order to trust another and listen to ourselves. Others need more closeness and connection. With each soul, there will be a meeting place where we are not pushing in or pulling back, but finding just-right alignment and harmonization.

Finding a place of attunement may require more and more distance, or even disconnection. Although one person may feel a desire for deeper commitment and more closeness, the person who goes slowest and moves farthest away must set the pace. We can only invite intimacy; we cannot compel it – and every time we push too hard or move too fast toward another, we bully. We tell others that we are unwilling or unable to ally with them; their reticence is unnoticed and their boundaries are unwelcome. By watching carefully for tiny signs and inner sensations that signal our own or others' push-back, push-in, collapse, withdrawal or accommodation, we can keep making space for each person to be exactly who and where they are in the moment. We

can notice there are many different ways of joining and allying with another, including face-to-face, side-by-side and back-to-back. Some people might feel alliance better when we stand behind them. Others need us up ahead so they can follow. When we experience someone's withdrawal, we can attune to it by re-centering in our own integrity and good-enoughness. Allowing each relationship the space and time it needs, we create a possible future in which we can approach each other again – when and if that is wanted – from a place of full heart.

We can see how power dynamics in the dominant culture create huge barriers to our finding attunement with one another. The dance of loving connection unfolds in many gender configurations, but it is often apparent that people socialized as men are trained and expected to push in, while people socialized as women are trained and expected to collapse, appease and accommodate. Finding attunement whenever there are habits, expectations and entitlements based on socialization and life experience obviously requires special attention and care. People in various subordinate social roles are often well-practiced in accommodating people in dominant positions, while people in dominant roles often claim rights to others' emotional labour, or move into physical proximity in ways that usurp access instead of inviting attunement. We need to practice noticing and being responsible to the ways privilege and oppression play out in how we ask, expect, listen (or fail to listen) to others and ourselves, and how we co-create what is possible in different social environments.

Each culture and community has different unspoken rules and common practices that determine the shape and permeability of people's kinesphere, the volume and tone of voices, and the expectations we hold about physical and emotional availability. Misattunements can result from cultural differences, conscious or unconscious entitlements, and conscious or unconscious accommodations. We can fail to learn each other because we haven't

had teaching and practice in learning others. We simply don't know how to do it, or haven't made time and space enough, or don't have sufficient goodwill to listen deeply to each other.

The dominant culture paradigm bullies us in so many ways. One way is all the relationship requirements and expectations that shame neurodiverse people. The fact is, some people feel safe only when they are soothed and companioned by others. Others experience human companionship as fraught with danger, and feel far safer when alone. These attachment patterns are grooved into our nervous systems by early experiences of love and intimacy, and are affected by our relationships throughout life. We can challenge ourselves to lean into the learning – learning to feel okay with small-enough time alone, or okay with safe-enough others. We can co-create forms of connection and community that accommodate neurodiverse people, by integrating flow within structure, choice, radical acceptance, mindful navigation of power dynamics, and lots of downtime. But let's jettison the medical model that tells us that brains and nervous systems that diverge from some ideal norm are disordered or dysfunctional and need to be fixed, treated, or cured. There is nothing “wrong” with me, even though I am a person who thrives with predictability, order, ritual and solitude. If our nervous systems do not conform to an arbitrary definition of “normal” or attain the supposedly “right” way to be, we can celebrate diversity and feel the enrichment. I for one am done with trying to create intimacy in relationships and communities governed by an impulse to “fix” neurodivergent people and shame us into believing there is something “wrong” with us so we go to dangerous and self-destructive lengths to “improve” ourselves or pass as “normal”. I am grateful to be part of a counter-normative culture and communities where we are learning and teaching ways of holding and being held in all our diversely beautiful ways of being.

The holding environment and open-hearted relational space we can create in temple time together does not always translate well into the everyday lifeworld, where we slip back into roles and relational habits that preclude attunement. Same-gender spaces where we work to unwind gender oppressions, queer space to celebrate queer pride, and space for people to work on anti-racism with others who are racially identified as “the same”, are some examples of social environments where we might more easily find attuned connection. In such spaces, we can sometimes turn our attention away from threat management towards dismantling oppressive social structures that harm us all. Yet counternormative spaces often assume their own conformities and enact their own vectors of oppression and privilege.

We can be afraid of sharing anything more than superficial connections with others, and become distressed when conversations veer from convention. Or we can be afraid of insignificance, and push others or ourselves into connections that get too big too fast. Finding attunement requires courage – we lean out of the familiar as we lean into connection with another human soul, and find the joyful stretch into our personal and interpersonal neural learning zones. It can also require reticence. Sometimes sharing ourselves in words feels way too vulnerable, but there might be other ways we can courageously reach for attunement. We might share an activity – cook, camp, do dishes together, sing a song or walk by the sea. If that is the shape of connection that feels right for us, it can build intimate connection better than prematurely sharing secret stories of our lives. Sex can be a way of fostering intimate relationship or avoiding it.

Many small and large experiences of attuned connection shape our brains and nervous systems. These are the intimacies with others that resource us. Being seen and heard, met exactly where we are, invited and welcomed, and supported to find a joyful stretch into deepening intimacy – are experiences that teach our nervous systems

to become more capable of both self-regulation and co-regulation. Feeling safer with others, we become more willing and able to be fully ourselves. We become more able to attend our own body sensations and emotions, and more willing to accept – despite our fear – our inner truth as that changes from moment-to-moment. With practice in safe-enough relational environments where our truth is noticed and welcomed in its ongoing unfolding, we gain courage to speak it. We become more attuned to others when we feel safe enough and self-regulated enough to cultivate our curiosity. When we no longer need others to simply soothe and serve us, we can really take in the diverse verbal and non-verbal ways people express Yeses, Nos, Maybes, and changes of mind from moment-to-moment. Our neural capacity to be with another fully while simultaneously being fully with ourselves is what allows us to feel safely held and supported in the net of jewels. We can vibrate to another's vibration, we can shine in another's shining. I can welcome you in, without losing track of myself, my difference and my choice.

Attuned connection with others feels so good. And the experience of misattunement feels so bad. Literally, viscerally, through agitation of our personal and transpersonal nervous system, experiences of being overwhelmed or abandoned distress and undermine. And yet, building tolerance for feeling fear and pain without going into reactivity is an essential element of intimacy. To walk the Beauty Way in connection with others, we must be willing to be with our own and others' fear – not cowering or condemning it – and be with our own and others' pain – not trying to ameliorate, project or fix it. Cultivating a capacity to hurt without hurting back, to invite intimacy without demanding it, to feel our fear and act with courage despite it, we come to know and communicate the boundaries and biophysical limits we need to stay in right alignment. We make relational space for really knowing and communicating ourselves, and

learning one another. And we can only expand what is possible for us by finding the joyous stretch within our personal and interpersonal neural learning zones. Too much stretch will injure and cause harm.

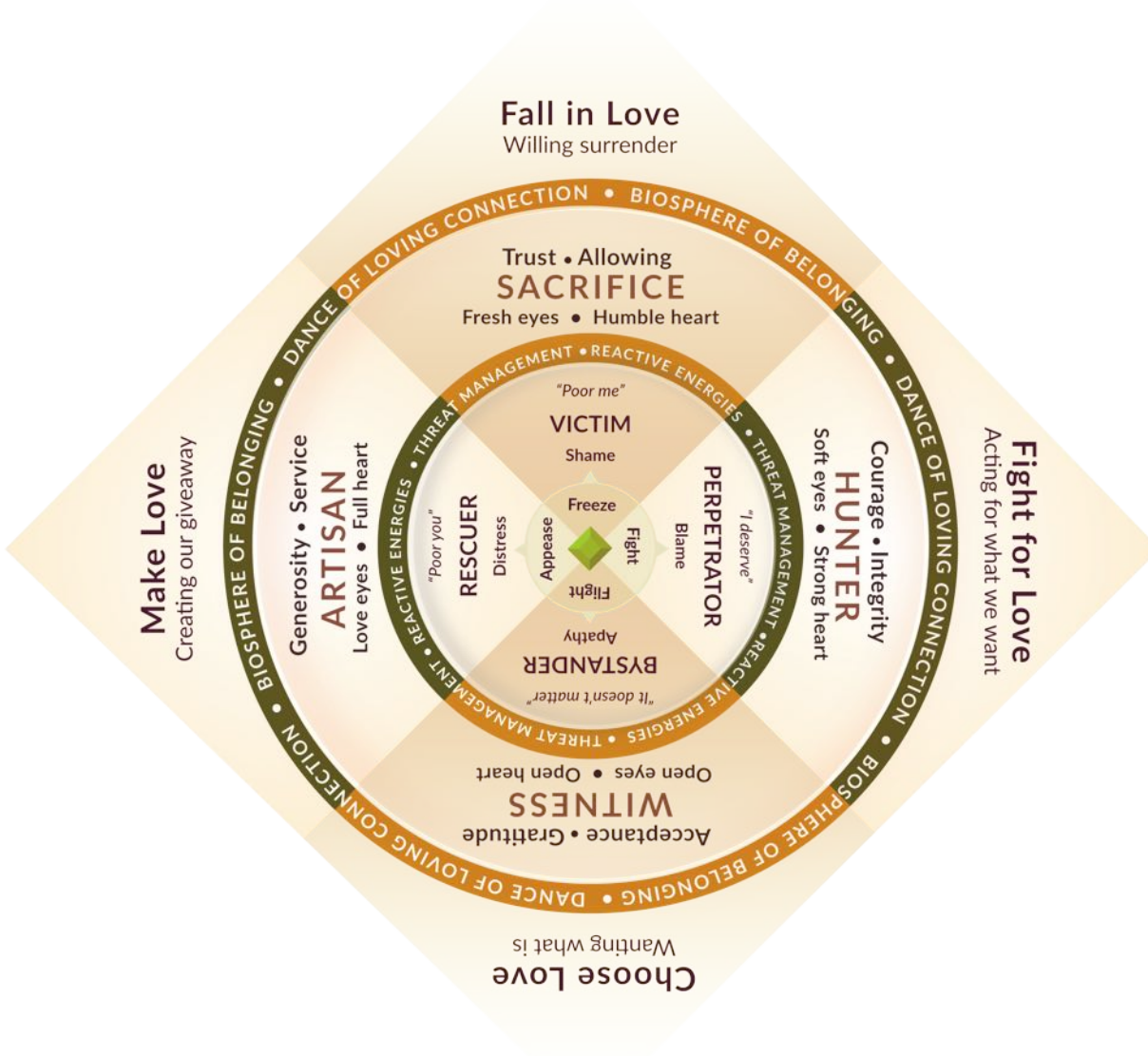
A commitment to the dance of loving connection in the biosphere of belonging may guide and resource us to follow our cellular knowingness with more grace and integrity. Others requests of us are not requirements; their desires of us are not prerogatives. Our own enormous longings are not demands or destiny. Love within us and between us is infinite, but we each have – in one way or another – real limits. In taking space, taking breath, and connecting with the *Elements of Intimacy*, we shake off the suffocating grip of the inner bully.

Let's walk in beauty.

From Reactive Energies to Sacred Archetypes



The *Elements of Intimacy* process I describe here is offered as one way among many to help us shift out of fear-based reactive energies into a dance of loving connection. With this process, we can try to create and notice choice points in our reactivity. We can do so by bringing conscious attention to four distinct energies that commonly show up in unconscious, fearful interactions and unsafe relationships. By noticing and naming which of four reactive energies is activated within us in a particular relational engagement, we can potentially open a portal into an archetypal expression of that energy.



Elements of Intimacy Process

1. Ground, centre, and orient to what is happening in the moment.
2. Is this real danger, or unnecessary fear?
3. If this is real danger, address it powerfully.
4. If this is unnecessary fear, identify the quadrant you are in by paying attention to your feelings and thoughts. Pass through the portal of your reactive energy into the archetypal energy of that quadrant.
5. Return to the reactive energy to hear its guidance.

Reactive energies manifest in thought patterns and feeling states. Fear lights up different thoughts and feelings in expressing our nervous system readiness for fighting, fleeing, appeasing, or freezing and disassociating from danger's impact. When we are in reactivity and threat management, we often bounce around in a pin-ball machine of reactive energies, going from feeling victimized, to blaming, to wanting to fix, to not caring – all in the space of a few minutes. Most of us have go-to patterns of thought and feeling and are more familiar with particular reactive energies. I commonly go to Bystander (“It doesn’t matter”) and try to avoid the Victim’s sense of shame and overwhelm. Some folks are most familiar with Perpetrator energy, always eager to blame. Others get stuck in a go-to feeling of the Rescuer’s anxious fixing. Most of us are well-practiced with all the reactive energies. And each person has a unique pattern, in which we can recognize gifts that empower them, as well as constraints to joy and intimacy.

The first and most essential part of the *Elements of Intimacy* process is grounding, centering, and coming home to our bodies, right here, right now. Feeling ourselves in connection with the elements, we step back from being swept up in fear-based physical, emotional and cognitive reactivity. This process allows us to look around and make clear discernment between unnecessary fear and real danger. If we identify real danger, we can choose an effective response. Fight, flee, appease, freeze? All are powerful strategies. When there is real danger, bouncing around in dysfunctional habitual roles is disempowering distraction. And if our practice of discernment reveals that in this moment there is only unnecessary fear, we can use our reactive energies in a different way. We can acknowledge which specific energy is arising inside us, and use it – not to uncover who and how to blame, punish, or escape, or how to fix the threat of danger we have deemed does not exist in this moment. Instead, each specific reactive energy

offers us a “tuning in” to certain powers and practices that support rather than destroy intimacy. By going through the portal of our fear and the reactive energy it generates, we can choose to embody a spacious archetypal energy in a dance of loving connection.

Archetypes are powerful, living symbols that link us to myth and history. Hunter, Witness, Artisan, Sacrifice – these figures have rich historical antecedents. They express aspects of human experience that claim symbolic presence in the myths and dreams of many cultures. Connecting with archetypes, we are linked with myth, history and the world of nature. We expand space for our own unique souls. Each archetype has its council, and can contribute its special gifts to our dance of loving connection.

Stephen Karpman (originator of “The Drama Triangle”) and others who use his work describe the roles of Victim, Rescuer, and Persecutor as parts people unconsciously play, or try to manipulate others to play, not the actual circumstances of a people’s lives. I would like to point out that while these roles may be habitual and dysfunctional, they can also name relationship dynamics that are quite real. Through the *Elements of Intimacy* process, we are guided to notice our roles and also notice our reality. In a given situation or relationship dynamic, I may be dysfunctionally attached to the role of Victim, and/or I may actually *be* a victim of some degree of emotional or physical violence. I may be foundering in Perpetrator energy, and I may actually be doing someone harm. Rescuer behaviors can put us in a position of endangering ourselves, or hurting and disempowering others. Bystander behaviors may be allowing our own or others’ violences to rage unchecked.

As we begin to notice the difference between unnecessary fear and real danger, and to use this discernment to choose the most effective way to act in the moment, we will find that our best ways of

relating with others do not usually involve acting as Victim, Perpetrator, Rescuer or Bystander. These roles need a voice and each one has a particular wisdom to impart, but there is likely to be real danger, to our souls and our society, so long as we move inside the reactive energies. By using our recognition as a portal into the related archetype, reactive energies can become allies instead of enemies.

Fire: From Perpetrator to Hunter



Perpetrator energy is our nervous system's fiery Fight energy, appearing in distorted and dysfunctional relational patterns. We embody Perpetrator energy when we take without consent, blame and bully. The internal and external experience of Perpetrator energy is extremely common in normative culture, which rewards deliberate violence that enforces social domination. Specific traumas, unconscious entitlements and insidious harassments play out in almost every person's experience of touch, love, sex and intimacy. Where there is a social world that privileges men over women, white over

black, straight over queer, thin over fat, adults over children, neurotypical over neuroatypical, genderconforming over gender nonconforming, strong over weak – and all the host of other oppressions and privileges that intersect in our lives and relationships – each interaction between a person with social dominance and person with social subordination is loaded with potential for danger. At best, interactions within these normative paradigms are liable to generate fear and reactive energies, with a probability of one or both people going into threat management behaviors and acting as Perpetrator and/or Victim.



It can be difficult for people to see how they embody Perpetrator energy, because Perpetrator rage is always righteous. Fault lies elsewhere. It is a lot easier to observe or assign the Perpetrator role to others than it is to own it in ourselves. The core Perpetrator feeling-state is blame. People who are behaving as Perpetrators tend to

think themselves deserving of all their conscious and unconscious entitlements, as they accuse and criticize their victims. Perpetrators furiously evade recognition of their powerlessness by forcing those around them to feel it. Dysfunctional Perpetrator energy can also appear in much more subtle feelings and expressions of contempt.

Our Fight energy is not dysfunctional. Fight is the powerful energy of differentiation, resistance and wanting. In situations of real danger, Fight is often our most potent choice. In the dance of loving connection, we can use this energy to feel into our desires, communicate them courageously, and act on our own behalf. Going through the portal of reactivity into the realm of archetypes, we can connect with the energy of the Hunter.

As Hunters, we learn to take for ourselves. To be clean with our wanting and taking, we must trust ourselves and our own deservingness. Bringing Hunter energy into our relationships, we can feel the fiery energy that ignites us and use it to hunt for what we want – to vision, ask for, track and take it. This is the quadrant where we feel our fierceness and know our agency. Hunter energy is a direct expression of our aliveness. We do not hide our wanting in dysfunctional disguises, like giving to get, or taking in ways that bully and blame. The Hunter archetype knows and says, with deep respect, “This is what I want. I ask for your sacrifice”.

To stay in Hunter energy without going into Perpetrator, we must carefully track both our own wantingness and others’ willingness. The Perpetrator has hard eyes, full of blame and entitlement, but the Hunter has the soft, curious eyes of love. We learn to act as agents for our own desires from a place of love and respect. We want from others – but take only with their enthusiastic consent and willing surrender. Where Perpetrators evade awareness of their vulnerability, Hunters bravely know their abject dependency on

others' gifts. Tracking what we want, and hunting for it, we also stay open to accepting what is offered.

Another important condition for staying and playing in Hunter energy is tracking the limits of our wanting. If we exceed those, we become Perpetrators, taking without reason or reverence. And we can only stay in Hunter energy without becoming Perpetrators if our wanting is grounded in paradoxically knowing that we are enough. Without trust in our sufficiency, our wanting and taking comes from a place of perpetual not-enoughness. We live in a cultural milieu that fosters never-enoughness. We are apt to go Windigo and eat our own families. (The Windigo is a selfish cannibal in Algonquin stories. Many North American First Nations, along with other indigenous cultures around the world, describe a Windigo figure – as both an archetypal energy and a real danger.) We need to learn our own death songs, so we can live and feel into our longings within an overarching trust in the web of life and death. We want to live; we take to live, but only with consent. When there is nothing willing to be the sacrifice, we die.

Another question we can play with in this quadrant is whether we feel our own Fight energy directly, or if we habitually feel it only through the energy of others. Do people always seem to be taking too much, disregarding our rights and feelings, trampling on our sensitivities and helping themselves unconsciously? Do we feel guilty anxiety over our privileges and entitlements? This is another place of discernment between real danger and unnecessary fear. Are these thoughts and feelings responses to real danger (including danger to our souls and our society)? Or are they expressions of a corrosive energy that is keeping us in reactivity and threat management, rather than empowering our dance?

Ways to pass through the Portal of Perpetrator Energy into Hunter Energy

- Choose a predator animal to embody. Jaguar, Eagle, Sea Lion? Find the dance of the animal in your body. Track, chase and take your prey. Feel your gratitude.
- Visualize a fiery ball of energy in your personal centre of gravity, your pelvis. *Take* a breath. Take it deeply into your pelvis. Let your breath fan the fire there. Feel the bones and muscle fibers of your pelvic bowl slide apart as you breathe in. Breathe out, allowing the fresh air to flow into every cell and system, bringing energy, heat and sparkling aliveness to your whole body.
- Play with touch in the Taking quadrant of Betty Martin's *Wheel of Consent*. Notice what you want. Ask for what you want. Take it, if it is offered. Savour the gift. Feel and express your gratitude. Savour the welcome.
- Planning, visioning and intention-setting all support our access to Hunter energy.
- Accept your want, and with it, your fear of not being allowed to have what you want.
- Practice deep receiving throughout the day. Normative culture creates a nutrient barrier that prevents people from receiving fully. Slow down, take it in, and give thanks.
- Practice courage in asking for what you want.
- Feel your agency.
- Pray and sing until you know that you have all you need. Grounded in enoughness, dream into wanting more and more.

- When Perpetrator energy arises inside you with feelings of “I deserve” and “Your fault”, meet your reactivity with vigorous embodiment. Run and dance to embody the fight, until you feel more choice in how to express it.
- Play fight with a partner. Feel your body, as you play with and express your inner fire in differentiation from and resistance to another.
- Ground, center and state your commitment to what you want to embody. Hold your goal and intention in your pelvis, mind and heart as you move into your life.
- Track carefully the limits of your wantingness and others’ willingness. Take no more than you really want. Take no more than others give with full heart.
- Ask the person you feel angry with for help, instead of asking them to change.
- Notice the sacrifice in the food you eat. Feel the souls of plants and animals entering your body.
- Say “Thank You”. Savour the welcome you receive for your desires, in whatever ways that manifests in your life, large and small. Know and express your gratitude.

Earth: from Rescuer to Artisan



Rescuer energy appears in our interactions when we go about trying to fix others and make things better. Rescuer is a dysfunctional distortion of the hyper-aroused nervous system's Appease response. Rescuer energy is usually expressed with a conscious or unconscious attitude of pity or "Poor you". When we start thinking that the person we are dealing with really needs to know what we know, or do what we do, we can notice ourselves embodying Rescuer energy.



Rescuers are focused on the other, the one they want to fix; they evade responsibility for their own destiny by focusing on mattering to others. Rescuer energy is inherently disrespectful and disempowering. Rescuers “help” and co-dependently caretaker other people, while eschewing their own needs and boundaries. They can’t

delight in people becoming empowered and no longer needing them. The core feeling of the Rescuer is distress. They are distressed about the victimization of others, and they are distressed by their own fruitless efforts. Caught in the martyrdom of over-giving, their niceness seethes with resentment.

Seeking touch, clinging, being nice, and suggesting better forms of interaction are all useful appeasement behaviors that can help mitigate real danger. Appease energy is often expressed with a worried face, quiet high voice, and offerings of gifts and sexual favours. Appease energy is not in itself dysfunctional. It is an expression of our boundless desire and intrinsic possibility for calming fears, making peace, living generosity, and dwelling in the harmony of erotic communion.

Trees embody this energy. Trees live rooted in Earth – grounded. They practice instant forgiveness; whatever happens, they go on creating the biosphere of belonging. They embody abundance and practice generosity, producing air, water, earth and fire just by being trees. Each tree holds out the chalice of its being, to receive and give back.⁹ In human relationships, we can tap into this energy through the archetype of the Artisan.

We begin as always with grounding and centering, and then the practice of discernment. Is this person or situation dangerous? If so, we can choose a strategy. Appeasement can be a powerful way to mitigate danger, where embodying Rescuer energy is not. And if it the situation is not in fact dangerous, if we are fearful because of old, stuck trauma, and want to step into the dance of loving connection with this person or people or community, we can let any thoughts, emotions and

⁹ this phrase is drawn from Dag Hammarskjöld

behaviors that suggest Rescuer energy remind us to step through the portal into the archetype of the Artisan.

Rescuer energy comes from a place of feeling unworthy and unwanted; danger is mitigated by efforts at earning worthiness. To access Artisan energy we must choose to believe in our worthiness, as best we can, so we can create and give, and stay grounded in our giving. Without a core sense of our own okayness, we cannot feel the beauty and meaning of our generosity. If we are giving to earn worthiness, we are giving from lack, rather than wealth and fullness. We can learn to offer our generosity and selfless giving from a place of good-enoughness. We belong and are worthy of belonging, whether we give or not.

With Artisan energy, there is no fixing in our giving. We have no answers for another; we can only give and live our best. If we give with pure gladness in the joy of giving, we don't need our gifts to be recognized or effect change (that would put us back in anxious fixing energy).

To avoid the Rescuer's distress, we track carefully the limits of our gladness. What can we give with full heart?¹⁰ We need to watch for any tendency or habit of overgiving. Overgiving creates stress and nervous system distress, so we become more reactive, and potentially more dangerous to ourselves and others. Anxiety and exhaustion undo the meaning and feeling of generosity. The Rescuer's eyes are needy, and they are half-hearted in their giving. The Artisan moves in the world with loving eyes and a full heart.

Another important element of avoiding overgiving is noticing when we are giving more than someone wants. Is our gift wanted and

¹⁰ This question is fundamental to the Wheel of Consent process, as taught by Betty Martin

welcome? Or does it push in and impose itself on another? There is a delicate meeting-place between our generosity and another's desire, where agreements must be navigated carefully, consciously and mindfully.

Artisan energy can be transformational. What can we create or co-create with our gifts and our giving? Where Rescuer energy tries to effect change in dysfunctional ways, with schemes and knowing better, Artisans create and co-create change from a place of deep respect for themselves and others.

Ways to pass through the Portal of Rescuer Energy into Artisan Energy

- Find a plant that embodies Artisan energy for you. Learn about its life: fruit, seeds, roots, leaves, patterns of growth, flourishing and decay. Observe it. Touch it. Open a bridge from your heart to its heart. Ask it to teach you about being an Artisan. Feel the gladness in the plant's generosity.
- Use your breath to heal particular pains or the world pain. Breathe in pain and breathe out loving kindness. Breathe in hatred; breathe out love. For this ancient meditation practice to stay effective, we need to track and notice when toxins build up in us and we can no longer act as filters for transforming negative emotions. As you breathe people and situations in, don't let their poisons poison you. Track and trust that there is real danger, and act effectively to address it or remove yourself from it. You will know by the quality of your breath.
- Play in the Serving quadrant of Betty Martin's Wheel of Consent. Ask a partner: "How would you like to be touched?" Touch them exactly that way, just for them. Keep asking, "What

would make this better?” Don’t have them or let them reciprocate (in the moment). Enjoy your generosity. Welcome and savour their gratitude.

- Practice giving erotic massage or erotic ritual.
- Accept and enjoy not mattering. Notice and celebrate all the small and large ways you aren’t needed.
- Remind yourself there is nothing to fix. Celebrate the perfection of all things.
- Bake. Make. Craft stories, poetry, songs and nourishment. Create your giveaway. Feel your power and sufficiency through your giveaway, without needing to have it fix or change anyone else.
- Be with someone who is dying.
- Be with the environmental crisis and the dying of the world.
- Find your right alignment with this person, in the moment, so that you *both* can shine. Notice how the space and place of right alignment keeps changing, as you create your giveaways separately and together.
- Stop fixing, advising or setting each other straight. Practice trust. Honor each person’s inner wisdom and process.¹¹
- Watch and see if you habitually deflect and refuse others’ gratitude. As best you can, see if you can let another’s thanks really land in you. When someone says “Thank you”, practice

¹¹ see Parker Palmer and his guidelines for Circles of Trust

saying, “You’re welcome”,¹² and try to really feel yourself welcoming another’s gratitude for your generosity.

- Practice generosity everywhere you can - giving and living your best, without attachment to outcome.
- Track carefully the limits of your willingness, and others wantingness. Give no more than you are willing to give with full heart. Give no more than is truly wanted.

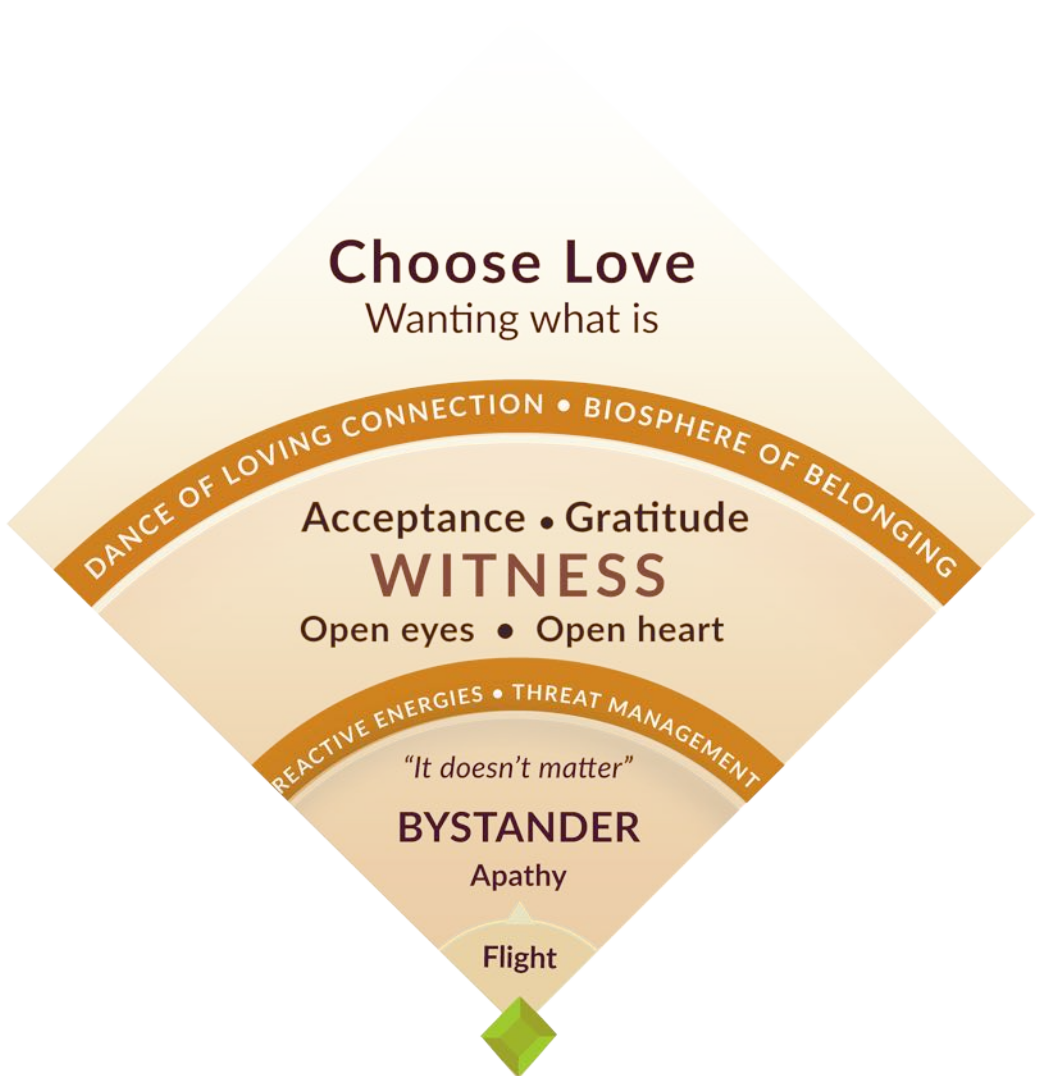
¹² This practice is an important part of the *Wheel of Consent* process, as Betty Martin teaches it.

Water: From Bystander to Witness



Bystander energy comes into our interactions when we “go away” internally from others. We become lost in disconnection or distraction. Bystander is a dysfunctional relational pattern derived from the hyperaroused nervous system’s Flight response. Bystander manifests emotionally as apathy, and in thoughts like “I don’t care”, “Whatever you want”, “I don’t mind”, or “It doesn’t matter”. Indifference is the hallmark of the Bystander. Bystanders not only avoid action, they avoid feeling. They “go with the flow” in a way that evades

responsibility for addressing or accepting their circumstances.
Bystanders eschew connection and meaning.



To shift from embodying Bystander energy into the powerful archetypal energy of Witness, we can begin by noticing the water in our bodies, our tears, our saliva, our blood – and connecting with the water all around us with a sip. From a more self-aware and connected place, we can engage our discernment. Is there real danger here? If so, physical or metaphysical Flight is a powerful way to escape. We might choose to actually, physically get away. We might choose to fly away internally. But when we recognize that what we are feeling is unnecessary fear, and notice that fear interfering with our dance of loving connection with this person or people or community, we can choose to go through the portal of Bystander energy to the archetype of the Witness. Instead of the closed eyes and closed heart of the Bystander, Witness energy means we move in the world with open eyes and open hearts.

The Witness soars into the sky, to better see the intricate miracle of all that is. Witness feels the impossible, improbable grace of it. To step into fully loving, accepting and wanting things just as they are, we can find our appreciation and practice our gratitude. We must also accept our unworthiness, to receive the magnificent complex beauty of the world as an undeserved grace. If we think we deserve all this, we will be caught up in anxious efforts to earn what others cannot, or to justify our privileges. We might imagine that experiences of relative scarcity or plentitude reflect our value or reward our goodness. How preposterous! Witness consciousness requires our wise knowing that we are not receiving abundance and beauty because we deserve it (that is the energy of entitlement). In full awareness of our unworthiness, we receive pure grace.

To avoid being grounded by Bystander energy, we need to track carefully the limits of our wantingness for what is, even as we expand its scope. Is this reality or aspect of reality one we can truly, deeply love, madly and gladly? What parts of the life we are living feel like

unwanted gifts? Who are the people we *really* want beside us? What are the experiences that truly support our soaring? We can notice where our gratitude is heartfelt and where it is perfunctory, and gently bring our lives into alignment with our noticing. To truly embody the Witness, to act from its wisdom and receive its gifts, we need this ongoing process of discernment. Of course, wanting what is does not preclude us also simultaneously wanting what is not (and cultivating our visionary wanting with Hunter energy).

In the throws of a dysfunctional relationship, an ecological crisis, a snowstorm or a shitstorm, we can employ Witness energy to savour the intricate and amazing gifts we are receiving in the moment. Perhaps the gift of one last breath, or one more day in the beautiful biosphere of belonging. No matter what is happening within or around us, with Witness energy we can step into feeling how the world loves and meets us. Witness may resource us for a fight, or help us find loving acceptance that a job, a marriage or a way of life has become untenable. It may offer a way to focus on what choices we really do have, or to accept when we don't have any choice in the moment. In relationships, Witness helps us to love and learn from each other's wounds and gifts. With the power of Witness, we no longer need ourselves or other people to change, improve, wise up, get thinner or get better before we love them fully and deeply. Witness embodies connection, commitment and meaning. Accessing Witness energy in any moment can make a tiny space between an uncontrollable stimulus in the environment and our response. This space is where we find our capacity to respond with resourced integrity.

Ways to pass through the Portal of Bystander Energy into Witness Energy

- Find a bird to represent Witness energy for you. Watch it, and learn about its ways. Use your imagination to fly with

the bird – soar, migrate, hang out in the tops of trees. See the world from a bird’s perspective. Dance the bird to invite your Witness.

- Practice this sequence of breathing and noticing to receive an awareness of yourself as receiving all that is. Notice your breath. Notice your inner body sensations. Notice the edges of your body and what is there, playing on the surface of your skin. Notice the interface between inner and outer worlds, wherever there is an exchange, a penetration. Notice sound. Notice what you see. Soar in awareness of being held and loved into your uniqueness by the biosphere of belonging.
- With touch, play in the Accepting quadrant of Betty Martin’s Wheel of Consent. Tell someone how you would like to be touched. Receive the touch you actually want, exactly. Offer your gratitude. Savour their welcome. Don’t reciprocate (in the moment).
- Practice receiving erotic massage or erotic ritual. Learn to truly receive.
- Commit to a gratitude practice. Write a list of at least five things you are grateful for each day.
- Write lists of why you love and appreciate people, and share with them.
- Notice the miracle of your body.
- Notice the intricate miracle of natural systems.
- Be by water.

- Notice what you eat and drink. Before you do, reflect on the processes and relationships that are embodied in each sip. Give thanks across space and time for what you are receiving.
- Sing songs of praise. Say grace.
- Accept mattering. Notice and celebrate the impact you have on others' lives.
- Honour your dead. Keep noticing the difference between death and aliveness.
- Savour the joys of your gratitude and the world's generosity. Feel it in your blood and bones and skin.

Air: From Victim to Sacrifice



Freeze is a hyperactivated nervous system response that produces a dorsal-vagal drop in our metabolism, with a resulting biophysical, emotional and cognitive paralysis and powerlessness. When Freeze energy is activated, we can no longer act to escape danger. Sometimes stay-so-small death-feigning works to distract a predator, and sometimes it doesn't. When it doesn't, Freeze empowers our dissociative capacities during trauma, so we can at least to some extent escape our skins.



Victim energy is a dysfunctional distortion of this beautiful and brilliant Freeze response. We live in a social world that values dominance and punishes subordination. Experiences of being hurt and lacking agency are deeply shamed. People embodying Victim energy feel humiliated – stripped of dignity and self-respect. We may in fact be powerless in a given circumstance, or we may be in a pattern of evading awareness of our power; or both things could be happening simultaneously. Betty Martin notes how it is so easy to think we are

being taken advantage of when we are not; it is equally easy to not notice when we are being taken advantage of.¹³

If we are embodying Victim energy in a given situation or relationship, we are liable to feel foggy and numb. We have difficulty knowing what we want, problem-solving, and finding the joy of life. We won't understand our own or others' dysfunctional behaviors and energies as changeable, if we are floundering in feelings of shame and helplessness. We don't know our capacity for courage and agency. And we simultaneously evade awareness of the texture and magnitude of our powerlessness, when we are embodying Victim energy and looking for Rescue.

When we find ourselves in Victim energy, the first step is to breathe. We can feel the air bring fresh aliveness into our cells with every in-breath. We can offer a piece of ourselves to sky with every out-breath.¹⁴ From a place of embodied presence, we can practice discernment. Is this a situation of real danger? If so, we can choose our response. Freeze energy is one powerful choice. We can go quiet and still, and try to avoid notice. If danger still overwhelms us, we can journey into transpersonal consciousness, feeling deeply into our powerlessness, surrendering our will. If we survive the danger, we can gradually let ourselves thaw, feeling the return of choice and agency. Tracking our choice or lack of choice from moment to moment, we can feel the ever-shifting interface of power and powerlessness without shame.

If we discern that what we feel is unnecessary fear, and not real danger, we can choose to walk through the portal of our reactive energy into the dance of loving connection. Travelling through our

¹³ in a mentorship conversation Dec 2018

¹⁴ with thanks to Greta Jane and her meditation "Kiss the Earth, Feel the Earth Kissing Back"

Victim energy, we meet the archetype of Sacrifice. Can we allow the impact of another person? Can we choose *willing* surrender? This is sacred work and play, to find our willingness to trust another and the process. We go from the hurt eyes of the Victim, focused on personal pain and shame, to the fresh eyes of a lover, focused on the wonder of another. We see another's magnificent unique presence, and surrender our individuality to the dream of loving connection. We stop waiting for an ideal lover, and allow the imperfect one right there with us to take us. We go from a constricted heart that feels shame at the loss of power and agency, to a humble heart that offers itself to love. Despite the risks, despite the inevitable sacrifice, we fall willingly into our powerlessness.

If we allow too much to be sacrificed in this manner, we erode our wellness. It is our responsibility to carefully track and communicate the limits of our willingness, as these limits change from moment to moment. If or when we exceed these, we need to pause and course-correct, or we will fall into resentment, blame and shame. These corrosive feelings destroy the possibility of intimacy. Inside our limits and out along the edges of our willingness, we can practice trust. We can live a commitment to trust ourselves, trust trust-worthy relationships, and trust the web of life and death. But without an ongoing discernment and communication of the limits of our willingness, we become Victims and make our lovers Perpetrators.

To practice Sacrifice with discernment, we need an ongoing unfolding of self-knowing, and paradoxically we need willingness to allow the mystery. We can feel our longing to be met in the vast mystery of relationship, and our deep knowing of its boundless possibility, while we still track the limits of our longing with this particular person in this moment. Within the limits of what is possible for us in any given relationship, we can choose the sacred path of surrender, and give our self to another, in just-right doses, again and

again. Reaching into our learning edge, we step into the dance of loving connection. We are led. Moving with the archetypal energy of Sacrifice, we fall into our willing surrender, allowing life and love to have its way with us.

Ways to pass through the Portal of Victim Energy into Sacrifice Energy

- Find a prey animal to embody Sacrifice energy. Mouse, Deer, Mosquito? Learn about it, admire it, study it, draw it, and dance to embody its life and death. Know the sacrifice.
- Breathe. Feel or imagine a willing surrender in your outbreath. Hang out at the end of your outbreath, not breathing. Notice the limits of your surrender to non-being and indivisible life. Breathe in. Consciously breathe in to your uniqueness, noticing your cells assimilate the breath. With practice, the surrender in your outbreath might deepen. Notice if that surrender supports or suppresses your commitment to your individual life.
- Play in the Allowing quadrant of Betty Martin's Wheel of Consent. Ask a partner, "How would you like to touch me, for your pleasure?" Track your willingness. Enjoy your surrender. Receive their gratitude with your welcome.
- Wash someone's feet. Have them wash your feet. Fall in love with the intricate, amazing structure of this person's feet, and your own.
- Practice transpersonal consciousness. Breath, meditation, body mortification, medicine, divination practices, ritual – there are many ways to access expanded consciousness and a transpersonal connection with all life.

- Cultivate bliss and communion with nature, the sacred, and other humans.
- Cultivate a neurochemical environment inside you that will support transpersonal awareness, with intention setting, touch, respect, kindness, and the cultivation of erotic energy alone and with others.
- Listen to – become – music.
- Track and communicate the limits of your willingness without shame.
- “Go to the Limits of Your Longing”, as Rainer Maria Rilke writes:

“Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.
Just keep going. No feeling is final”. (Book of Hours, I 59)

- Allow yourself to feel deeply loving, without attaching forms and assumptions of normative social belonging to your feelings. Fall in love in the mystery together.
- Be fully with the Sacrifices you receive every day, as you eat, or turn on a light switch. Receive them with gratitude. Know your affinity.
- Allow the gratitude of those you offer sacrifice to. Let their gratitude really land in you.
- Welcome the unique soul of each beloved. Feel and express your welcome.

Giving Voice to the Wounded Ones



Perpetrator, Bystander, Rescuer and Victim – I have described these characters as dysfunctional expressions of our nervous system responses to threat. Through the *Elements of Intimacy* process we can use these expressions of our Fight, Flight, Appease and Freeze responses to help us mobilize energy in more spacious and life-affirming ways, calling in related archetypal wisdoms. But these wounded ones also keep wanting to give voice to the knowingness that only they can offer. Furious, full of contempt, ashamed, blaming, knowing better, not caring – all the ugly emotions and reactivity we are capable of carry particular pieces of our souls. We may not want

our “I hate you” energy or our dissociative disconnect to host the party, but these wounded ones need a place at the table.¹⁵

How do we find balance – not letting dysfunctional energies overwhelm us, but still allowing them space and place? For they demand it. I might find ways to cunningly pass through my most painful emotions and negative thought loops, but unworthy, unwanted and unhelpful reactivity keeps knocking at the door of my spirit, demanding attention. Wounded parts keep stirring up trouble; they distress and immobilize. I try to ignore them. I develop brilliant strategies to transform and transcend, but I still get sabotaged. I might use the *Elements of Intimacy* process to let go of a hurt-filled relationship, and go to sleep feeling the soaring perspective and gratitude of the Witness. But I wake up in the middle of the night in a panic, heart pounding, feeling a Victim’s shame and overwhelm. I fall in love, and cascade into a deep willingness to feel the Sacrifice of fully allowing another’s impact. But when they start arguing with my choices, I get irritated and anxious, and find myself ricocheting between shame and blame!

I want to cultivate the bravery and willingness it takes to meet my own and others’ wounded ones with an invitation: “There is a place for you at our table”.¹⁶ Accepting dysfunctional feelings without becoming attached to them – engaging with them, without submitting to them – hearing them out, without letting their voices subsume all

¹⁵ Tricia Bowler and Michael Haines keep teaching me this, through our friendship and through their teachings and offerings at www.BeingHeld.ca

¹⁶ This comes to me through Starhawk’s novel *The Fifth Sacred Thing*. The story, set in 2048, describes a utopian society in northern California that is occupied by cruel soldiers from the Southlands, who represent the bleak and terrible development of all that is poisonous and violent in our present culture. Brave citizens face the occupiers’ implacable violence by standing in their own courage and integrity, grounded in love with the sacred earth and a community decision about what matters. They refuse to bow to the authority of the occupation, inviting each soldier to come in, and be welcomed into a new paradigm of power with – instead of power over – with these words: “There is a place for you at our table if you will choose to join us”.

my wisdom and intention, feels like a vital part of living into wholeness. Without a move to integration, unwelcome and rejected parts get too much energy. They manifest in ways that use us and abuse us. Perpetrator, Bystander, Rescuer and Victim gain power – inside or around us. Sometimes these dysfunctional energies win broad economic and social power that gets wielded in terrifying, harmful ways. If we are grounded in our own soul work and guided by our love and longing – if we keep polishing the jewel of our own shining, and reflecting the infinite brilliance of each other’s shining – we can hear from these energies without being inundated by them. We can pay attention to any information and wisdom they hold that is key to our wellness, while we notice and contain ways they might derail and distract. By opening dialogue with reactive energies that fuel us, we gain more choice in how they manifest.

Sometimes reactive energies point to things we would like to bring into our lives. Sometimes they point to things that would be dangerous or destructive if acted upon. A reactivity pattern of Perpetrator, with its blaming, judgmental energy, might pull us into relationships where we are bullying others if it stays unacknowledged and unscrutinized. Yet the feeling of “rightness” it affords might give us superpowers in following our own soul’s calling, if we can find ways to hear and integrate the wisdom without projecting it. A reactivity pattern of Rescuer and “knowing better” might empower us to focus on the soul work of making others feel deeply met and supported, and keeping relationships together, if we can find ways to manifest it that don’t leave us or them feeling distressed, unloved and unappreciated. A reactivity pattern of Victim, with its disempowered sense of collapse and shame, might empower us to fully feel into places and relationships where we are being hurt, exploited and overwhelmed, and to differentiate between our power and powerlessness. A reactivity pattern of Bystander, with its sense of not caring and not mattering,

might make us irresponsible. And it might give us superpowers for protecting our own soul's light from being dimmed by others' demands and expectations. Listening to reactive energies for ways that they can empower us in choosing what really matters requires an ongoing process of dialogue with forces that also can hurt and harm.

It is a truism that avoiding unappetizing aspects of ourselves, or seeing them only as characteristics of unwanted others, can paradoxically further “energize” these aspects in some way that undermines our souls and our societies. “Shadow” is a common term for referring to these rejected and projected contents of mind and culture. I see the “shadow” of anti-blackness in the term itself, and prefer to use the term “unowned” for energies we want to forget and deny. We can become more whole, and more intentional, in dialogue with these unwelcome energies.

We can recognize unowned energies in qualities we especially dislike or see as unattainably wonderful in others. Is there an ‘other’ way of being or thinking that we define as evil, ugly or wrong? Is there an ‘other’ way of being or behaving that seems pure and beautiful? With that information we can look at how judgments of either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ – but different – can show up in various parts of us and our intimacies. What shines in the ways of being we castigate? What is unhelpful in what we worship? Unowned aspects are parts of us, sometimes parts that need to be listened to, and sometimes parts that need to be disregarded.

Reaching back into the pinball machine of reactive energies and asking for their wisdom is about finding balance, and working with density, so that we can explore and integrate nuances instead of seeking clear delineations between good and evil, self and not-self. When we leave the ordinary world of threat management to move into the biosphere of belonging, we are still going to be beleaguered by

reactive energies. We can learn to welcome these unwelcome, rejected energies as potential allies, and learn how and when to resist, and how to embrace.

Reactive energies claim space. They can be expressed in pathologies and exorcised with self-righteousness. Or they can find nuanced expressions that empower our souls and realign our societies, taking up their own right place in the dance of loving connection.

Unity of Opposites



The *Elements of Intimacy* process is divided into ways of Doing (Hunter, Artisan) and ways of Being (Sacrifice, Witness). In the dance of loving connection, we are called upon to Be as well as to Do. But the energy of our Being has an active quality. We are a person being a Witness rather than simply a Witness. We have preferences, choices and capacities that profoundly affect our wantingness, all of which we must

continually track and communicate, in order to show up in the Witness archetype and receive what is offered with full heart. We are a person choosing and being a Sacrifice rather than a Sacrifice. It is only the active tracking of our willingness, from moment to moment, and our commitment to giving only what we can give joyfully, that prevents us from sliding into a Victim-Perpetrator dynamic. Similarly, the doing energies of Hunter and Artisan have the quiet energy of Being inside them. As Hunters we move on behalf of what we want, powerfully. But if all our Doing is not suffused with the energy of Being already enough, we are in danger of becoming Perpetrators, and over-taking. As Artisans, we act to create our giveaway with our best skill and most powerful magic, yet we want all this Doing to be suffused with the Being energy of not needing our gifts to matter, effect change, or fix another or a situation. This hosting of the Being in the Doing and the Doing in the Being is an essential aspect of shifting from reactive energies/threat management into the dance of loving connection.



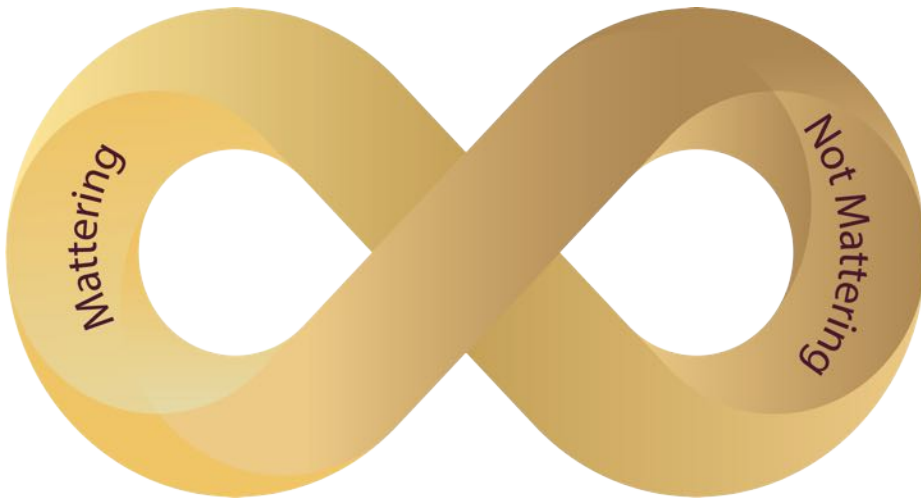
As we track the surface of an infinity symbol, the outside becomes the inside and the inside becomes the outside. Normative culture splits the world into opposites and imagines irrevocable separations between them. This is a way of thinking that encodes better and worse, dominance and subordination in all things, perpetuating fear and power-over paradigms. Through participation in a dance of loving connection in the biosphere of belonging, we soon learn that opposites seduce, unite and dance with each other, inviting dialectical transformations.



One such dancing dialectic is that of power and powerlessness. Normative culture has contempt for powerlessness, expressed and enforced through a wide variety of oppressions. Perpetrators evade powerlessness and impose it. Victims feel powerlessness as humiliation and shame. Contempt for powerlessness shows up in the construction of gender, where people socialized as men are kept in a suffocating box of normative belonging that is supposedly powerful. They are there with white people, able-bodied people, and heterosexuals (among

other punitive identities through which people “win” social dominance in the traumatic overculture). Contempt for powerlessness shows up in our personal and social aspirations, distorting economies and destroying environments. It shows up in spiritual goals and communities, where we create and recreate hierarchies of authority, and exert power-over in ugly exploitations. Yet we know with all that is wise in us that entering a dance of loving connection requires us to accept and welcome powerlessness. Between birth and death, the world requires us to experience powerlessness in thousands of beautiful and terrible moments. Our powerlessness creates space for life to unfold within and around us, in bodies where 99% of us is not us (we share our DNA with bananas and chimpanzees; our cells host algae; there are trillions of bacteria comprising us). We are powerless over others’ willingness and wantingness. Surrendering into our powerlessness is prerequisite for feeling held and led and loved into existence by the pulse of love and longing.

Acceptance of powerlessness, paradoxically, is the ground of our effectiveness. When we stop trying to control, fix, blame, shame, punish and escape our powerlessness, we can also explore the spaces within, around and between us where we *do* have choice, and understand our power to choose our own emotions, thoughts, behaviors and relationships. This is the dialectic that empowers us in creating our giveaway as Artisans and taking respectfully and consensually as Hunters, in feeling our willing surrender as Sacrifice and accepting with the deep gratitude of Witness.



Another dancing dialectic runs between mattering and not-mattering. According to the dominant culture, people with power over others matter. Subordinate people do not. We can spend our lives hustling to prove we matter to others and ourselves. We might try to secure our mattering with the anxious busyness of Rescuers. We might assume our mattering with the ugly entitlement of Perpetrators. We might feel shame at not mattering, with the self-focused stance of Victims. Or we can use not-mattering as an escape, with the disempowered apathy of Bystanders. Anxious disavowal of not-mattering runs through our politics, economies, relationship aspirations and spiritual practices. But when we are called outside the dominant culture's dysfunctional paradigms to be held in the biosphere of belonging, we find a different perspective. In the web of life and death, we can find and feel the profound okayness of not-mattering. It is a joy not to matter, when we empower others with our gifts as Artisans, or when we surrender our individuality to love as Sacrifice. Not having our wanting matter more than others willingness is a truing mechanism that brings balance and reverence to our taking

as Hunters. In the archetype of Witness, we soar away from mattering and worthiness, and receive the undeserved grace of all that is.

Our acceptance of not-mattering is, paradoxically, the ground of our true mattering. For how can others truly meet us and love us in the dysfunctional dynamics of the dominant culture? If our mattering needs to be proved and earned, there will always be a fear at our core that we are not enough, that we cannot reveal our weakness or stop our fearful overfunctioning or underfunctioning. When we release our fears of not mattering and step into the dance of loving connection, we can find our true mattering to one another, our unconditional and endless love.

There are many such dancing dialectics in the biosphere of belonging: between knowing and not knowing, between sufficiency and wanting, between meaning and meaninglessness, to name a few. Traveling along a seeming opposition with curiosity, we can often feel a flip of one understanding into its opposite. The spiral dance that creates a unity of opposites is a fundamental design pattern embedded in the living structure of matter and vibration, reflected in the helical structure of our DNA, and the spiral unfolding of the universe.

Living Ethos



What is it to live a deeply ethical life? In normative paradigms for love and belonging, there are set rules for ethical behavior, and there are punishing consequences for those who disobey. We may be people who have been hurt or diminished by these rules – the systems of laws and standards that are often been erected out of fear, and used to oppress. What is a counternormative ethics?

In my own long life as a genderqueer person who loves women, men, and other genderqueer people, I have offended standards and broken rules of belonging in every community. I have been illegal in my gender identity and sexual orientations, and I have welcomed various levels of legalization and partial extensions of civil rights. In following my vocation as a sacred intimate and somatic sex educator, I have had to face the scorn and shunning of deeply wanted beloveds and communities of belonging. I have worked through illegality, decriminalization, and the enactment of a new system of laws that puts my work into a legal grey area. It seems I keep leaving the realm of common sense and normative belonging to venture into dangerous unknowns. For me, a process of courageous finding and following my own deep truths has been key in making choices for ethical life. And I recognize my privileges in making these choices. I assume the privileges of whiteness, wellness, class, education. I walk through the everyday world as a person who avoids continual challenge by passing as a cisgendered female. And even with all the privileges that I hold, sometimes hiding, cowering, clinging, and defending small pockets of safe-enough space to survive have seemed like the best and most ethical choices possible for me. Sometimes my ethical choices have involved less following my own deep truths, and more self-abnegation, and tending to relationship commitments and community. I don't believe there is one way to be ethical, one set of rules to follow, or any way to hold judgments about how you did it wrong. In fact, my commitment to holding you in goodwill, and believing that you are doing the best you can, feels like the cornerstone of a living ethos.

As we learn to have and to hold each other in a dance of loving connection, we need a living ethos that is big enough to welcome our diversity and our magnificence, as well as all is awful and incomplete about us. How can we hold on, even to terrible and tedious aspects of ourselves and each other, inside a space of radical openness? How can

we hold all the glittering immensity we can be and give birth to? Perhaps a living ethos is one that emerges in the co-weaving of a web of belonging where we each feel wanted, welcome and empowered in ways that support the empowerment of others. Can we hold each other in a communion that values and respects our strengths, accepts and supports our weaknesses and vulnerabilities, protects itself from our dysfunctions, and connects us with our own wild selves? Like ecological communities, can we honour the creativity of the margins, and find aliveness and learning in all the ways people come into and go away from community? Rather than a set of specific rules that pits the sanctimonious against those who are deemed unworthy and unwanted, how do we create a calling in to conversation and connection that evokes our courageous integrity? Sharing and caring with goodwill is the basis of a counternormative ethics.

In the co-weaving of counternormative ethics, perhaps we can recognize and be guided by biological principles. What fosters the resilience of living systems? I believe that a deep ecology of self and relationship will support growth and recognize limits, foster diversity and weave unity, and guide us to act with courage, integrity, generosity and gratitude, as we build trust-worthy communion with one another.

Hormesis is a biological principle. Too much stress is harmful; too little stress creates weakness and atrophy. Just-enough stress creates maximum biophysical wellness.

To learn to be in right relationship with one another and the world around us, we need an ongoing commitment to, and an embodied practice of, bringing witness to our level of nervous system activation. When reactive energies get triggered, we need to discern between real danger and unnecessary fear. In increasing our attention

and sensitivity in choosing what is just right, too much and not enough, we withdraw from compulsive participation in the dysfunctional defaults of blame, shame, distress and apathy that are the emotional and cognitive legacies of a traumatic overculture.

Each person has a personal neural learning zone - and that is different with each person. That is why we can't have an agenda for healing, or offer a simple prescription for relational wellness. Outside of our nervous systems' windows of tolerance, effective communication doesn't happen. When we are driven by fear, we go into habitual trauma responses and threat management behaviors. In the pin-ball machine of reactive energies, we can neither love nor learn.

It is also important to know that we learn and grow on the uncomfortable edge of our neural learning zone, not by staying in what is familiar or comfortable. In a commitment to the ongoing process of noticing the difference between what is uncomfortable and what is unsafe, we create space to weave sacred intimacy.

In situations of imminent danger to our individual lives, we can draw on short-term reserves of energy within us. Long-term, sustainable efforts in support of what we value require a slower pace, and can draw on different forms of energy.

When we are in a state of emergency, we use tremendous reserves of energy that are not replenished until we rest. With sympathetic nervous system hyperarousal, breath only gets into our upper chests. Digestion stops. Our minds and hearts cannot be open. We greet others as potential enemies or allies - with decisive judgments. In this state we are not resourced for learning and

unfolding what can be co-created with another. We only expend energy – physically, emotionally, mentally. We cannot receive or give.

Tada Hozumi is a movement therapist, anti-racism activist, author and mentor. They point out that short-term effort meant to save ourselves and sustainable effort on behalf of community are differently resourced at the cellular level. Anaerobic respiration is meant for situations that require short bursts of energy, such as running away from a predator. Aerobic respiration is for lower-intensity endurance-based tasks, and it is powered by the mitochondria organelles in our cells. The mitochondria within each of our cells actually have their own DNA. In humans, it is only passed along the female ancestral line. Deep breathing and sustainable effort literally connect us with all life; we are powered by the Other and Great Mother within.¹⁷

Many people are in immanent danger. Some of us are not, but we can still get caught in trauma-induced feedback loops that keep confirming and creating danger within and around us. When fear is the result of unmetabolized trauma, or driven by unconscious allegiance to a social and economic system that promotes us feeling scarcity and never-enoughness, we will likely spend time and energy in unnecessary sympathetic nervous system hyperarousal. This leaves us biophysically depleted, emotionally distressed, mentally judgmental and incurious. Hyperarousal works for short bursts of powerful self-defense. It doesn't work for creating committed loving relationships and sustainable communities.

¹⁷ See Tada Hozumi's writing on this and other aspects of embodied trauma and effective activism: <https://selfishactivist.com/mitochondrial-activism-and-the-alchemy-of-selfishness-to-love/>

It is a biophysical truth that social power and disempowerment profoundly impact all our relations. Intimate relationships are places where we either reproduce or resist oppressions.

Dominant cultural patterns of privilege and oppression get reproduced in our daily experiences, and in our cells. The relationships between us exist inside a traumatic overculture that privileges pale-skinned people over dark-skinned people, boys over girls, people of European descent over people with other ancestries, gender conforming over gender nonconforming, neurotypical over neuroatypical, and straight over LGBTQA. Finding social belonging comes far less easily to those of us who are awkward, disabled, incompetent or unattractive by conventional standards. Dominant cultural values operate visibly and invisibly to determine our relative social worth and access to human and non-human resources, with profound impacts on our bodies, relationships and communities.

We resist these oppressions by actively co-creating safer social environments that welcome our diverse ways of being. Actively resisting cultural norms in our commitments, we can take responsibility for becoming aware of the privileges we access in any relationship, and stop the wielding of unconscious entitlements. We can understand how we are living our oppressions, catch ourselves going into reactive energies and threat management behaviours when we don't really need to, and make more effective and empowering choices.

Separately and together, we can begin to patiently undo privilege and oppression in their unconscious forms, as they are lived and embodied by each one of us. We embody social dominance and subordination in many subtle and unsubtle ways, including posture, tone of voice, eye gaze, and the amount of physical and conversational space we occupy. We embody what we have learned about how we

need to look and move in the world to be okay, hide, be powerful, be desirable, or to escape being targets of violence. We can bring more conscious awareness to what we are unconsciously embodying by understanding nervous system function and working on our own vagal fitness (see below). We can develop embodied resistance practices by inhabiting our bodies and the physical space around and between us consciously and creatively. Is there a way we can speak truth to power with our everyday embodiment? Can we express counternormative values in costume, performance and relational processes? When men make space to hear women's truth, when white people stop looking to people of colour to take care of them (for example by teaching them how not to be racist and soothing their distress while doing so), when queer difference is celebrated instead of tolerated, when socially awkward people are not punished by social isolation – in many small and large ways, in our everyday interactions with others, social change is an opportunity and a responsibility.

We need to understand how power dynamics profoundly impact consent, and stop behaving as bystanders to the violence of the everyday boundary transgressions that unfold in every normative environment. In my own field, I have seen teachers exploiting students by not honoring the power dynamics in their relationships with clear boundaries. Understanding the biophysical vulnerabilities we experience through neurobiology of trauma, attachment and love, we can see clearly that this is violence. Students and clients cannot exercise empowered choice and voice without coaching and practice in safe-enough holding environments we create with clear and consistent delineations of possibilities, boundaries and roles. Teachers, health-care practitioners, parents, priests, and anyone in a role of leadership with another, must understand that people in our care will have an incapacity to ask for what they want, protect themselves from

boundary transgressions, and make healthy choices inside the power dynamics created in our relationships.

I see power dynamics being ignored or exploited in professional and personal intimacies, when we are not clear about what will happen during a date, an erotic massage, or any relational contract involving sex, and when we don't stick to agreements. When we are under the influence of touch and our longing for belonging, we are neurologically opened, and we can easily agree to – or even ask for – something we don't feel in integrity with the next day. Adding more intimate touch than we have agreed to explore during a session can lead to nonconsensual interactions. The pain of such interactions is exacerbated when we don't create safe-enough holding environments with aftercare.¹⁸ What do we need from each other in order to feel safe and cared for after experiences of physical intimacy? No matter what level of ongoing connection we do or don't want, no matter how good or bad the sex was, attention to aftercare helps us see our experiences as sources of learning that we can integrate into our lives. Having clear purpose and intention for sharing time and touch, navigating that time within agreements set beforehand, and taking time with aftercare and integration, all are vital to co-creating empowered, enthusiastic communication.

We need to recognize the real precarity of people who are disempowered by the dominant culture, and act in our bodies, relationships and communities to stop the abuse of power-over we find everywhere. We need to actively create and co-create counter-normative culture and relationships that produce and practice power-with and power-within.

¹⁸ Thank you to Diane Long of Kaleidoscope Healing Arts for pointing this out.

It is a biological principle that every “one” is biophysically embedded in the whole earth community. There is no “I” separate from the intricate web of life and death. And it is a biological truth that we are simultaneously independent and distinct.

The quality of relationships between us reflects the neural capacities within us. Nervous system unwellness manifests in body health, moods, thoughts, relationship patterns, and how our bodies interact with other bodies.

We can contribute to weaving a web of love and belonging by leaning in to our best possible healing and wholeness in our own domain – our bodies, emotions and thoughts. By daily commitment to relaxing and stretching our muscles, breathing into our pelvis, playing with our posture, singing, behaving with kindness, eating and sleeping well, and doing a host of other activities that build vagal fitness, we can polish our own shining. Vagal fitness is a measure of nervous system health that is quantifiable through measuring the difference in the acceleration of our heartbeat as we breathe in, and the slowing of our heartbeat as we breathe out. This measure is an indicator of our biophysical capacity to be in either excited arousal or relaxed enjoyment, without going into hyperarousal or hypoarousal. With greater vagal fitness, we become less reactive. We thereby become more trustworthy, and can build more trustworthy relationships.

We can honor that vagal fitness is damaged by ancestral trauma, neo-natal environment, personal experience, social status, the welcome we receive in the world of normative belonging, and the scale of aggressions and microaggressions we are subjected to each day. Our vagal fitness or unfitness is not our fault. We can only be exactly where we are, and work to build our capacities within the biophysical limits of our personal neural learning zones. We can attend and honour these limits, and refrain from shaming our own or others’ unwellness. We

can also understand that although nervous system unwellness is not our fault, addressing it within ourselves is our responsibility. By building as best we can our own personal wellbeing, we attend the health of the whole neural network.

It is a biological principle that each “one” is engaged in an ongoing process of welcoming in what belongs, giving away what no longer belongs, and protecting our cells and souls from what does not belong. There is an inner knowing of the ever-shifting boundary between self and not-self, without which “I” cannot differentiate, nor can “We” be well.

Healthy immune response involves all our cells and systems. Our bodies exist by saying Yes, No, Maybe and I changed my mind in an ongoing biophysical process of discernment. Ongoing choice protects us from what is harmful, welcomes what is beneficial, and lets go what no longer belongs. Disorders of the immune system occur when the body generates an immune response against itself (an autoimmune disorder), or fails to generate appropriate immune responses to harmful others (an immunodeficiency disorder), or damages itself with excessive immune response to harmless others (an allergic reaction). Within and around us, we can feel and observe the immune disorders of the dysfunctional dominant culture. Learning better discernment is key to avoiding poisons, and building relational wellness.

We co-create the biosphere of belonging when we learn to move from the heartfelt Yes within ourselves, while honoring our No, and letting go – when we stop patterns of enduring what we don’t want and enforcing what we do want, and learn instead to welcome our own and each other’s inner knowing. We can honor that the capacity to tune into our choices and exercise our voices is biophysically impaired by power dynamics, violence, traumatic acculturation and habit, and gently coax and coach each other to feel and express our truths. We

build our personal and cultural immune systems as we track and communicate the ever-shifting limits of our wantingness and willingness in the dance of loving connection.

We are drawn together by the cellular impulse to connect and accept alignments with others that offer more pleasure and greater empowerment. Ethical relationship comes alive in places where we feel and practice our empowered choice and voice, where more joy and aliveness can be found in the blend and co-creation we find together. We feel the pulse of power with adding to our power within. Ethics also lives also in the ongoing attunement and discernment of what is too much and not enough, where a blend is not possible, and more aliveness lives in the contraction away from connections that hurt, neglect and overwhelm.

Mysterious and maladaptive messiness is an integral part of biophysical resilience. Mistakes are part of learning in all natural systems.

We make mistakes. This does not make into mistakes. Understanding and honouring this biological principle is a key part of creating a living ethos. Rules that divide good people from bad and separate sinners from the sanctimonious inhibit us from showing up in our uncertainties and talking about stuff that went sideways. We are creative edgewalkers who fall off the edge sometimes. This doesn't make us disposable, unloveable and never-should-have-happened. We belong. With this principle to guide us, we can help each other find our way home into the jeweled net of resilience and resistance where our yearning and learning can unfold.

In this truth, there are no "experts" and no right way to be. Rather than correcting pathologies, we are guided by a paradigm of

recognizing creative adaptations and co-creating an environment – inner and outer – of expanded choice.

It is a biophysical truth that gratitude and generosity resource us individually and collectively, while trauma, oppression, aggression, anxiety and neglect cause hurt and harm.

Trauma and oppression harm us biophysically. Anxiety, aggression, and neglect all cause damage, affecting blood pressure, sleep patterns, endocrine function, digestion, learning and memory – among many other harmful effects. Fear destroys lives and relationships. Generosity fosters connection and happiness in giver, receiver and witnesses. Grateful people experience more joy, improved physical health, relational wellbeing and resilience.

Relating with one another through reactive energies and threat management behaviors prohibits us from finding space for joyful giving and receiving. If we give to earn our worthiness or ameliorate our shame, we are not giving with generosity. If we don't learn to receive deeply and with gratitude, our taking will be insatiable. We will miss what is actually there to be met.

The practice of gratitude extends into feeling gratitude for each person's process of discernment. Even if your choice triggers deep grief and pain for me, because it is not what I want, my gratitude for your counternormative process of discerning and not enduring makes relational space without shoulds and have-tos. The practice of gratitude helps us learn to lead, follow, and sit this one out in the dance of loving connection.

Endings



A wave surges towards the shore until the tension crests, and then it breaks; matter and energy swirl back into the sea. A tree grows into the light, with limits. Its becoming can only unfold through an ongoing inner knowing of just-right balance in time, seasons, nutrients. It grows according to the welcome it finds in the world around it, and through wise boundaries in its own longing to become. At conception, the embryos that will become us generate our unique cells with eager intensity. Our uniqueness is disaggregated with matching alacrity

when we release our one into all with our last breath. Water flows through every thing and all time, and yet each watershed has a boundary that is inarguable. We only exist through a cellular knowing of the difference between “Yes it is” and “No it is not”.

How can we have a full excited Yes to other human souls and relationships, when that results in entanglements, entitlements and assumptions that mean people cannot honour and thank us for our No? Many people describe intimate relationships as having “failed” because they end. This paradigm dishonours the web of life and death. We cannot truly love the world, if we live in denial and evasion of dying. We cannot truly love one another, if we only accept and offer love in one form forever without end. Paradoxically, if we honor and thank each other’s Nos, undertake conscious uncouplings, and mark our endings with rites of passage, we can potentially bring more stability and permanence into our dance of loving connection with one another. We can let our loving relationships evolve and change as they need to, and accept the lonely loss, grief and relief in letting go.

As a teacher of sex and sacred intimacy, it is my job and vocation to fall in love with each student who comes to work with me. I see their unique soul; I know their magnificence; I allow the wonder of who and how they are to impact me. To offer a safe-enough holding environment for them to learn and grow, I meet them with both my unconditional love and my clear boundaries. They idealize me and I fail them, and in failing them I provide challenges that help them feel their differentiation and polish their own unique shining. And with almost every beloved student, there is a time for our relationship to end. We move apart in the net of jewels, and go into a new alignment that situates us in each other’s past. Where there once was passionate connection, regular engagement and fruitful co-learning, there is silence, distance and done. So it is for all who teach to empower students and not to create disciples and dependencies. And so it is for

how we show up in less formally delineated intimacies as each other's teachers.

The *Elements of Intimacy* process can guide us in honoring the endings of specific ways that we show up as teachers in each other's lives. Reactive energies can open a portal to empowerment. Unmet desires challenge us to differentiation. Situations and habitual relationship patterns that seem like insoluble problems can be turned into opportunities to find more clarity, peace and freedom. We can move into conclusion and distance when that is the learning. We can stop conversations and anxious ruminations about who is really to blame, and find invitations instead of insults in the annoyances and injuries we bring to one another.

However our dance partners (friends, lovers, sisters, students, teachers...) choose to participate (or not) in the process, we can still receive the gifts in the lessons they bring us. Our wholeness is not supported by fruitless efforts to convince others of our worthiness, or to correct the injustice of their ways when we are powerless to do so. They don't need to treat us well in order for us to act effectively and with integrity. When we can take a sacred pause, connect with the elements, and find space for choice inside us, we foster acceptance, self-forgiveness, and our own inner alignment with beauty. When we can bring these courtesies into the world around us, we invite more beauty into our intimate relationships with human and nonhuman others.

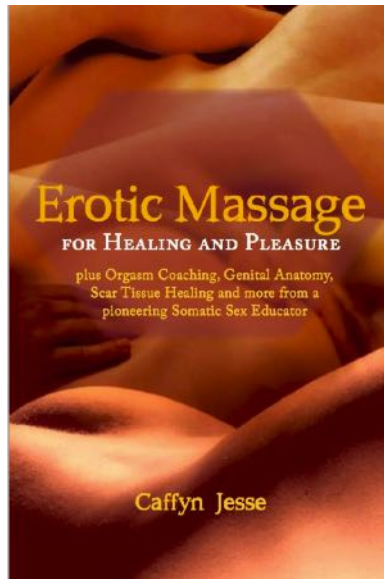
Being our best, shining our brightest, we make a holding environment within and between us, supporting our growth and learning with clear boundaries. We act with willingness to transform and to end. Paradoxically, it is the acceptance of a need for endings in the web of life and death that allows us to feel resourced and not overwhelmed by our capacities for endless and enormous love. We

notice and honour our limits. As we weave the biosphere of belonging in all the ways we can, we can meet endings as another important way we know ourselves – and truly meet each other – in the dance.

Caffyn Jesse



Caffyn Jesse welcomes people from around the world to workshops on encouraging neuroplastic change to support sexual healing and expanded pleasure, unwinding sexual trauma, exploring the intersection of sex and spirit, and creating erotic community. She teaches the Sexological Bodywork and Somatic Sex Education professional trainings in Canada. Caffyn is a prolific author who has researched and written on the science of sexological bodywork, neurobiology and sexual healing, trauma, orgasm coaching and many other topics. Her books (described on the following pages) include *Science for Sexual Happiness*, *Pelvic Pain Clinic*, and *Erotic Massage for Healing and Pleasure*. Video programs (available **free** at her website) include *Healing Circumcision: Work with Scars* plus *Learn Erotic Massage*. You can read her regular posts by following her on FaceBook. See more at www.IntimacyEducator.com.

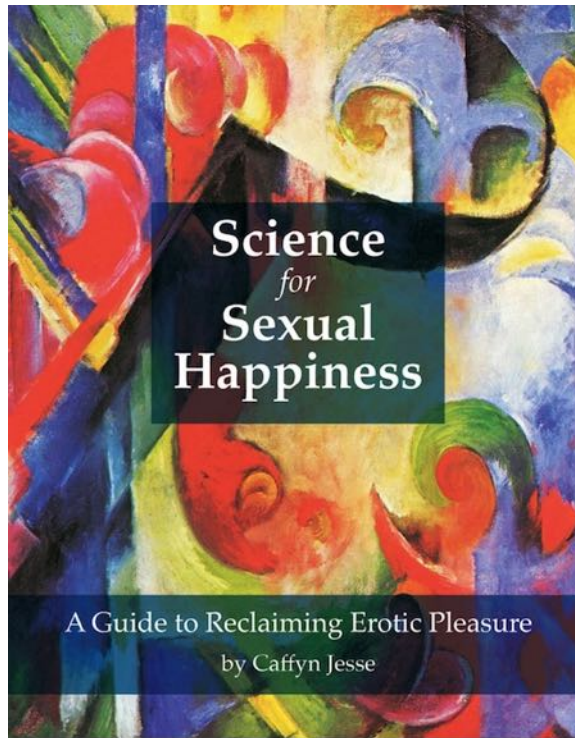


It is your birthright to live a life filled with erotic joy. This book will show you how to make it so, and how to teach others, through touch.

You will learn about sexual healing, erotic energy cultivation, and sensual and erotic massage. Beautiful illustrations show the specifics of pelvic, genital and anal anatomy. Powerful practices guide you in awakening the full potential of your sexuality.

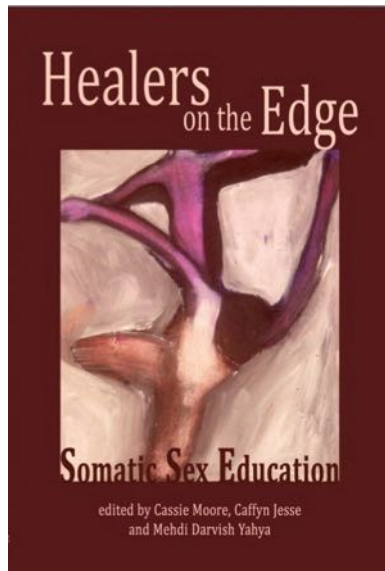
Erotic massage provides an ideal environment for healing and learning about sex. We can experience and cultivate erotic energy and loving connection without the pressures, roles, expectations and entitlements we bring to ordinary sexual experiences. But without appropriate safeguards and clear boundaries, erotic massage can retraumatize already wounded people. Caffyn Jesse offers vital guidance on the ethics of practice.

(Listed as an “Adult Book” on Amazon, this book may not be visible in an initial search. To find it, search “Caffyn Jesse” and click on “enable all listings”.)

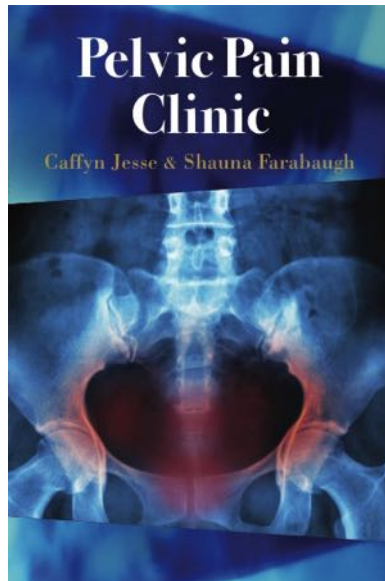


This book shows how new scientific understandings of the brain and nervous system can guide us in creating expanded sexual happiness. With accessible theory, real-life stories, and over 100 evidence-based practices, you will learn to:

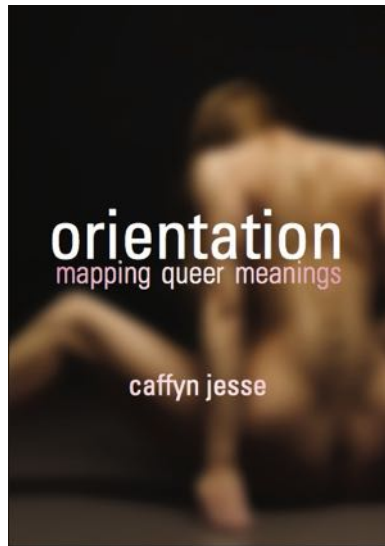
- *unwind the effects of trauma and neglect, and feel safer in your skin*
- *use neuroplasticity to feel more pleasure*
- *create a 'sexual happiness feedback loop' with your own neurochemistry*
- *integrate body, mind, spirit and emotions*
- *understand genital anatomy and sexual reflexes*
- *rewire relationship patterns*
- *cultivate and communicate desires*
- *feel more excited arousal and relaxed enjoyment*
- *explore the science of sex and spirit*



Healers on the Edge is the first anthology to introduce and explain the theory and practice of somatic sex education, a trauma-informed touch modality that uses client-guided touch and the innate wisdom of the body to help heal physical, emotional, and psychological wounds. Coming together from a variety of backgrounds and practices, the authors present an array of examples and applications: from scar tissue remediation to gender identity explorations, from sexual problems and dysfunctions to chronic trauma and neglect. This collection voices a rightful place for somatic sex education as a healing and wholing modality.



This unique approach to the treatment of pelvic pain transforms the cycle of pain, anxiety and tension into one of increasing ease, confidence and pleasure. Many lives and relationships are profoundly impacted by persistent pelvic pain. Original medical conditions frequently become complicated with anxiety, depression and social isolation, as pelvic pain affects sexual pleasure and intimate relationships. All too often, people do not feel empowered to talk with medical professionals and partners. Health-care providers are uneducated on key issues including the impact of trauma, the importance of honoring gender diversity, and treatments that support tissue health and pleasure sensitivity, instead of simply numbing pain.



In this time of social and environmental crisis, insights gleaned from the journey of queer difference empower personal creativity and social activism. The powerful archetypes behind homophobic stereotypes can serve as guides to thoughtful analyses, political choices and personal joys.

“In this book, author, artist, and activist Caffyn Jesse describes how exploring queer difference can offer insights that challenge core structures in society, including gender oppressions, international conversation about our economic systems, and our approach to the ruling class of elites.... These exciting ideas could energize the next wave of queer activism”.

- Paula Stromberg, Foreward to Orientation

