

## Golden Waves & Priestess Bodies: Establishing a Queer-Centric Poly-Normative Aphrodite Cultus in Cascadia

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### Areia, Hoplismena: Warlike, Armed ~ A Lover's War

*Societies never know it, but the war of an artist with his society is a lover's war, and he does, at his best, what lovers do, which is to reveal the beloved to himself and, with that revelation, to make freedom real.*

– James Baldwin (The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985)

The culture we were born into and grew up within — USA, neoliberal, capitalist, racist, sexist, hegemonic oligarchic — can be referred to as “the fading uberculture.” This fading uberculture is not *for me*, and resisting the fading uberculture is exhausting and does not provide enough pleasure. As pleasure activists, we want to focus on creating more of what we desire: an intimate community of gender varied friends and lovers who are magickal practitioners focused on creating new ways of being loving humans. In effect, we find ourselves at war/odds with the culture we were born into because that culture does not have a place for us. The fading uberculture does not even have words that we can use to describe or accurately convey our internal experiences of divinity, love, and sex; we must invent new words, use different pronouns. In search of ourselves and our culture we have gone through a series of becomings, an ongoing unfolding of Self that have inspired us to invent/center our own understandings, language, and definitions of what the central mysteries of divinity, love and sex are and can be.

The use of the pronoun “we” throughout this essay is an intentional and admittedly unique usage. The intention is to express my internal experience of being a collective of beings, a multiverse of personas, an individual embedded in an ecological web of relatedness. It is impossible for me to separate “myself” from the complex interweaving and histories of (1) sex-positive and queer ancestors of choice, (2) biological blood ancestors of DNA family heritage, (3) the internal environs of my body that include biota, neural networks, and assimilation of animals and plants as food, (4) the fluidity of ideas, conversation, and activities shared within and between the many people in my communities, (5) the fluids and bodies I exchange when being sexual with others, (6) the lived environments of my physical existence taken in by my body's sensory precepts. It is also important for me as an ecosexual animist to approach the non-human persons around me as an integral part of my Self. So while the use of the pronoun “we” for self-reference is clumsy, it is also for me the most truthful and authentic.

We offer this article as **an** example, only one example, of one potential way forward. The LLR is not THE WAY forward. We are not a “royal we” and there is no expectation that anyone reading this essay do things the “LLR WAY”, in fact, we think a key to our thriving is for each person to build their own visions based on their own personal gnosis. It is our thinking that a culture worth living into would build

bioregional subcultures that are, simultaneously, different from, and in allyship with, each other. Living Love Revolution is only one of the multitudes of possible imaginative examples of how queer magical practitioners can center their magick's and their lives around their own values. Creating our own counter cultures is revolutionary praxis and can be more empowering and pleasurable than resisting the fading uberculture.

My work as a Living Love Revolution (LLR) Aphrodite Priestess and Temple Hierophant is my Great Work, an unfinished but steadily building artistic communal masterpiece of transpersonal love and social transformation. The Aphrodite Temple system we have designed and many have co-created over the years is an endeavor in the art of culture building. Since 2009, LLR has produced 3 or 4 weekend-long Aphrodite Temple retreats per year. Both Living Love Revolution and Aphrodite Temples are a social experiment, an attempt to co-create an evolutionary focused, socially diverse, consent-based, queer-centric, poly-normative, ecstatic culture that is worth living into.

We are using the word culture quite specifically here, to indicate both modern and ancient meanings. In modernity this is approached as a particular society that has its own beliefs, ways of life, art, paradigms of thinking, and behaving that exist in a particular place. From antiquity, we call forth the Roman orator Cicero's meaning of "cultus animi" or the cultivation of the soul. We also invoke the Aphrodite cultus as a postmodern series of happenings and events that actualize Cicero's definition of religion as *cultus deorum*, "the cultivation of the gods," or the knowledge of giving the gods their due. The Living Love Revolution Aphrodite Temple system is a culture designed to take care of, tend, and dwell within the Cascadia Bioregion 1 in a manner that confers respect to the deity Aphrodite, the land itself, and the complex ecological web of human and non-human persons coexisting here.

As Baldwin says, what lovers do best is "reveal the beloved to." We wanted a deity who looked like us, who came from our own blood ancestry, who knew themselves as divine, loving, and shamelessly sexual. In the center of the cultus is the image of Aphrodite. *Chrusee*, meaning "golden" or "goldenness," is the word most frequently used in ancient Greek poetry to refer to Aphrodite. The Golden One radiates love, desire, and erotic life force. In a manner that mirrors my own sacred sexual development, religious scholar Paul Friedrich asks and answers the following question:

Is religion primarily an individual experience that gets extended out to group phenomena, such as communal rituals, or is it mainly a sociocentric reality that is particularized and lived by the individual? Both emphases can be argued for the religion of Aphrodite; some combination of them would be realistic. (*The Meaning of Aphrodite* 1978 p. 130)

Tending Aphrodisiacal culture requires both the centering of the self and the creation of group phenomena like Aphrodite Temples. Having received personal gnosis, we then feel compelled to create communal rituals that give the goddess her due.

*God is Self and Self is God and God is a Person like my Self.*

– Victor Anderson (*Victor Anderson: An American Shaman*, Cornelia Benavidez 2017)

The creation myth that resonates most with our personal experience of deity is from Victor and Cora Anderson's Feri tradition of Witchcraft. Shared by Starhawk as *The Star Goddess Meditation*, (*The Spiral Dance*, Starhawk 1979), it begins:

Alone, awesome, complete within herself, the Goddess [...] floated in the abyss of outer darkness [...] She saw by her own light her radiant reflection and fell in love with it. She drew it forth by the power that was in Her and made love to Herself [...]

We take the time to look deeply into the void of space, a metaphor for our own existential experience that there is no one else to guide or tell us the true nature of Divinity, of reality. We look into the reflection, and choose to see ourselves as Deity.

*i found god in myself  
and i loved her  
i loved her fiercely*

– Ntozake Shange, (for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is not enuf 1974)

We fall in love with ourselves. We choose to love ourselves fiercely as a magickal act and then invent group processes that are holographic reproductions of these autoerotic autonomous actions. We use the image of a golden pillar of radiant light to imagine the divinity that resides in the center of Self. We use this image in the grounding meditations that we teach and embody in order to help people access their own immanence. For if they can palpably experience it within themselves, they can learn to perceive it in other beings. One of Aphrodite's greatest powers is the ability to access/embody the golden light of immanence as the erotic life force that it is.

"Magick," says Aleister Crowley, "is the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will" (*The Equinox: 2 Volume Set (Vol 1)* p.12 1980). Or, if you prefer, magick is the act of creating your world consciously in accordance with your understanding of your divine will.

It is the work of an Aphrodite Priestess to tap into and direct erotic life force – Aphrodisiacal energy – in alignment with their will. Golden light radiates and builds during Temple activities. Skillfully directed by The Priestess Body, this light becomes a golden wave of erotically charged life force that we release as a cone of power at the energetic focal point of our group sex magick. Generating pleasure through sexualoving consensual touch and then directing that energy with intention is the way that we make transformation, healing, and freedom *real* in our Aphrodisiacal rites.

## Pandemos ~ Common To All People

*Enjoy Yourself! The life you live today  
is yours, and all the rest belongs to fortune.  
Honor the god who is by far the sweetest  
to mortals: honor kindly Aphrodite.  
As for all the rest, forget it. Listen  
to what I say, if you think it makes sense.  
– Alcestis 788-93 trans. Svalien 2007*

Aphrodite is available to us; there is plenty to go around. Oh Sacred Whore, who sees the divinity in all beings and eternally longs to merge! By centering our own queer, fat, kinky, gender-fluid, aging Self and declaring ourselves Holy, we create a safe space for others who are also marginalized by the fading

uberculture. Our Aphrodisiacal culture is simultaneously erotic, educational, and therapeutic. LLR Aphrodite Temples are oriented toward healing the erotic traumas inflicted on all of us by the dominant paradigm and shifting our lived experience from one of oppression and obedience to one of sovereignty and authenticity. As a trauma survivor, we are aware that slow somatic experiences build trust and help us stay in our bodies. As a person with a fair amount of social anxiety, we understand what activities are more likely to move us towards self-acceptance and increased resilience. We take our time, breathe slowly and cycle back to grounding and embodiment; we call this: “presencing” or praxis. We use Dan Siegel’s acronym C.O.A.L. to remind ourselves to remain Curious, Open, Accepting, and Loving (Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. *Mindsight* 2010).

Aphrodite herself is very clear that she embodies solutions to many of the traumas and conflicts that exist in the fading uberculture’s sexual paradigm. She is sweetly insistent that we offer the opportunity to be with her to all people. In choosing to have public events, we are embodying Aphrodite Pandemos, or she who is “for all the people.” These teachings are coming from our communion with the deity of Love herself. We are channeling these materials from a holistic dimension that is the non-dual nature of Reality itself. There is a vortex: the space/place in the center of Self—and in the center of the Multiverse—that we inhabit that is beneath/beyond human understanding. This is the source of Love and all experiences of sexual communion. In order to experience the beauty and magnificence of this love and communion, we must remove the false divisions of dualistic man-made religions and reductionist Western intellectual constructs that currently dominate our experiences of deity, love, and sex.

We developed an event structure that honors the Goddess of Love and Lust and allow our personal praxis of deity, love, and sex to be available to any person who feels called to experience it. This event structure both imitates ancient Temple environments and invents new forms of Aphrodisiacal culture. The intention is to help meet contemporary people’s needs for touch, belonging, acceptance, and the giving and receiving of sexual pleasure as a joyful act of communion.

We call the core group of individuals who lead temples The Priestess Body. The Priestess Body is composed of people who have attended at least one LLR Aphrodite Temple and desire to help produce the events and begin training to be a resource of transpersonal love in community contexts.

In temple, we introduce Aphrodite as the erotic life force we will be tapping into and communing with. We cast a magic circle of protection and honor the directions, the Ancestors, and the Land. The Priestesses invoke the Golden One opening their bodies through singing and dancing, palpably celebrating her presence.

*All Hail Aphrodite, fill me with your loving energy. Honeyed Aphrodite, pour your golden waves all over me.*

– Chant channeled during 2010 Aphrodite Temple by Teri Ciacchi

## Doritis ~ Bountiful

*I can’t understand why people are frightened of new ideas. I’m frightened of the old Ones.*

– John Cage (US composer 1912-1992)

Aphrodite is abundant and expansive. She both inspires autonomy and facilitates reciprocity. She calls us to deepen our self-love and invites ecstatic sensory exploration in myriad forms. If we are to truly embody and embrace her we must have social structures that emulate her sovereignty and our interdependence. Because our definitions of deity, love, and sex are so different from those of the fading uberculture, we seek to create Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ) within Temple. These TAZ are spaces where people of all sexes, genders, sexualities, bodies, and relationship structures have the opportunity to explore and develop sexual autonomy. A *Temporary Autonomous Zone*, as described by Hakim Bey as “a mobile or transient location free of economic and social interference by the State” (Hakim Bey, *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, 1985). Bey argues for the production of greater autonomy in the present moment, rather than the acceptance of domination in exchange for the promise of some future utopia. TAZ is the concept behind a lot of contemporary festival culture and was influential in the creation of Burning Man. Bey quotes Stephen Pearl Andrews as saying a TAZ is:

[...] the seed of the new society taking shape within the shell of the old” (IWW Preamble).  
The sixties-style “tribal gathering,” the forest conclave of eco-saboteurs, the idyllic Beltane of the neo-pagans, anarchist conferences, gay faerie circles – all these are already “liberated zones” of a sort, or at least potential TAZs.

TAZ are a potent form of declarative social Magick. In order to resist the default heterocisnormative patriarchal contexts for sex, The Priestess Body teaches and embodies a sex-positive, consent-oriented, queer-centric, and poly-normative sacred space.

We create our new paradigm by merging group dynamic practices from social change activism, therapeutic frames of Existential group therapy, and Witchcraft into a program of somatic exercises that take people through the LLR 6 steps of Sex Magick™. We display this poster in the Temple space and teach the steps to all participants, first verbally, then experientially.

## Living Love Revolution Sacred Sex Magick Overview™

Sacred Sex Magick is the practice of consciously directing one’s life force energy, in alignment with your will and stated intentions, for the manifestation of chosen outcomes. Temple is a sex magick ritual, with each part building on the next as we move through all six steps of the Living Love Revolution Sacred Sex Magick Formula™.

- 1) Create the Container: identify the boundaries of the physical space, cast the circle, share your relationship agreements and personal agreements, and establish group norms.
- 2) Purify the Container: distillation by recognizing what is already in the space that you do not wish to invoke. Speak and release fears.
- 3) Focus the Intent and Cast the Spell: Imagine, visualize and feel what it would be like to already have and be that which you seek.
- 4) Energize the Spell with Pleasure: Engage with pleasure through touch, breath, sound, and movement.
- 5) Release the Energized Spell: Utilize the Cone of Power to focus the sexualoving energy.

Release attachments to the outcome and devote the erotic energy to the will of your higher/deeper self, the greater good of the planet, and the benefit of all beings.

6) Ground, Separate, and Aftercare: Re-finding our individual centers, releasing all Invoked beings, checking that all are present in their bodies and grounded to reintegrate back into their lives outside of Temple.

Our Sacred Sexual paradigm is reinforced by the magickal protocols we use throughout the event. We purify, consecrate, and decorate the Temple room. We carefully tend the altars and set our charged 3-foot icon of Aphrodite in a central location. A person designated as the “Anchor” grounds the ritual container and attends to the energetics of it from beginning to end of the event. Each guest is greeted individually as they enter the temple space. Priestesses purify them; sprinkling ritually sanctified salt and water over their bodies. Priestesses charge each participant with fire and air, passing incense over their bodies. The High Priestesses offer each guest a blessing: anointing their foreheads with sacred oils and their hearts with magical powders as they approach the altar. Music is playing, incense wafts about the room, and beauty and grace are present in the carefully chosen aesthetics of dress, decoration and adornment displayed within The Priestess Body and the Temple room itself.

Step One: Creating the Container is the longest step in the process by far. In some ways, this step begins eight weeks before the official temple weekend through our administrative and magickal preparations. This time includes interviewing first time attendees, connecting to and thinking well of those who will attend, and sending out a registration letter. This pre-temple work already begins the process of shifting expectations and norms of all attendees. We begin temple programming with a series of magickal declarations called “Creating Temple Context” that carefully define what is meant by sex positive, queer-centric, and poly-normative. The declarative statements are spoken in a relaxed, resonant manner that speaks the values and group norms for our TAZ into being. We state the intentions of the Temple and make a series of verbal consensual agreements with all the participants. The social hierarchy is transparently shared by introducing all members of The Priestess Body and naming their leadership roles.

During this step we review basic sexual etiquette that includes 2 1/2 hours of consent praxis; safer sex demonstrations, and risk aware information about sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Finally, we also give all attendees and priestesses a chance to declare our identities, boundaries, and STI statuses to the group as a whole, which is one way that we normalize the diverse expression of behaviors, sexualities, genders, and relationships that exist within and between us all. Every individual has many opportunities to speak their truth to the group as a whole or within small groups, helping to co-create the Temple atmosphere, encourage authentic vulnerability, and deepen the intimacy between all present.

During all of this section, we are accomplishing four main goals of creating TAZ. First, we are declaring what the group norms are. Next, we are teaching the group norms by both role modeling them and practicing somatic exercises that embody them. Third, we are holding people responsible for behaving in alignment with the group norms they agreed to. Finally, we are gently correcting and re-aligning their behavior if it is not resonant with the group norms they agreed to honor as part of the agreement of attending.

*For surely, one must be either undiscerning or frightened to love only one person, when the world is so full of gracious and noble spirits*

– Edna St. Vincent Millay (*The Letters of Edna St. Vincent Millay* 1982)

There are several ways that Temple processes carefully establish a polyamorous frame. One way is in the “How:” the structure of how we create the small group containers during Step Four: Energizing the Spell with Pleasure. Groups are determined by divination; each participant has a personal token in a bowl on the altar presided over by the Aphrodite statue. The Priestess leading each small group draws the tokens from the bowl by touch but without looking to determine who is in their small group. In the previous Steps 1 through 3, participants have been given the concept of a safer/braver social sexual context and the opportunity to somatically investigate their desires without shame. Small group exercises are timed and each person is offered a turn: an equal amount of time to request and receive the erotic fantasy of their choice based on their internal somatic awareness of what they want.

*Oh, I know, I know. She is dark.*

*And so's the coal before the spark*

*that makes it burn like roses*

– Asklepiados trans. Sam Hill (*The Infinite Moment Poems from Ancient Greek* 1992)

A second way we generate a polyamorous frame is in the “What:” what are we doing? Within the small groups of Step 4, Priestesses endeavor to embody the Sacred Whore archetype by acting as if they are the central tuber root in a polycule of rhizomatic intimacy. Once again intentionally centering a marginalized identity, we reach into the ancient pagan past in our bloodlines to cast a light upon the obscured and denigrated avatars of the Golden One. We re-member, we re-create, we re-enthrone, we be-come Aphrodite. We take the hotly debated shreds of historic evidence for the existence of temple prostitution and use them as a foundation for illuminating a specifically queer polyamorous form of sexual relatedness. We become Holy Whore peers and create a partnership model of transpersonal sexual caretaking. We take turns being of service and stewarding each other's sexual/spiritual development. We tend to each other's desires, generating a wide and vast network of priestesses, feeding the soul of all who enter the Temple precincts and building The Priestess Body throughout Cascadia.

## Morpho ~ Imagining Shapely Forms

*The only war that matters is the war against the imagination and all other wars are subsumed in it [...] it is a war for this world, to keep it a vale of soul making.*

– Diane diPrima “Rant” from *Pieces of a Song: Selected Poems* 2001) hear it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bw8IUZCihzA> accessed 2017

When we hear the word “sex,” what images arise? Are these images coming from direct experience? Are they images absorbed from media streams? Does what you are imagining involve yourself and one other? Are you alone in the throes of self-pleasuring? Are you on your bed, a forest floor, a rushing stream, an actual cavern? Are you human or animal? Are you your deified self, your child self, or your “regular everyday” “adulting” self? What does queer sex look like? What does engaging in queer-centric sex magick entail? Who is responsible for your experiences?

Our theory of human sexual development is based on three narratives for sexual behavior described by Galen Moore in his article *Quantum Sex* (2009, July Quantum Sex. Examiner.com web

<http://www.examiner.com/article/quantum-sex> accessed 2010) and further articulated in our essay

What's Sex Got to Do With Ecology? (*Ecosexuality: When Nature Inspires the Arts of Love* ed. Anderlini-D'Onofrio & Hagamen, 2015). The three frames are Procreation, Recreation, and Quantum/Communion. The fading uberculture's frame of sexuality is determined by the hierarchical male dominant Judeo Christian belief that sex is for procreation and anything else is immoral. We suggest that all sex that is not about procreation is therefore sex ripe with queer potential. We assert that all consensual sex that is either recreational or Quantum is queer-ish and wyrd as it requires imagination and inventiveness, two things that are just not found in your standard gender essentialist socialized expectations of procreative sex. Temples are a much-needed TAZ for the exploration of queer sexual expression and embodiment without punishment, policing, or judgment.

Queer sex is not easy to define. Our "Sexual Etiquette Guide" states:

Sex is an open book: For the purposes of Aphrodite Temple we are not certain if we can define sex. One thing we do know is that it is more than inserting a penis into a vagina. We also know it is okay if sex includes inserting a penis into a vagina.

In order to move beyond sorting a group of people into couples who march off two-by-two to mate in captivity we turn to the queerness of oddity. By this I mean literally engaging in erotic connection in queer groups of 3 and 5, rather than the even numbers of 2, 4 or 6. Odd numbers culture jam heteronormativity by making it more difficult to project an idealized soulmate/spouse onto the other people present in the small group. We avoid dyads and quads in our group exercises and most especially in the small groups of Step 4. Facilitated group erotic and sexual exploration occurs in triads and quintets. Heteronormative programming confines sex to romantic love, procreation, and the perpetuation of capitalism that reinforces and idealizes pair bonding.

If the goal of sex is not to procreate, then we are liberated from biological imperatives of mating. Attraction based on biological determinism; the hormonal drives and pheromone releases, and our DNA's continual incitement toward intercourse and procreation are no longer the reason we are having sex.

As we move away from the gender essentialist binary notions that commodify men as purely financial/resource providers and women as purely social/sexual providers, we then expand the opportunities for negotiating sexual and economic sharing. In recognizing the multitude of abilities, interests, possibilities, identities, and so on that every individual can embody, we move steadily away from heterocisnormativity and toward queerness.

*The erotic imagination permeates the body making it transparent. We do not know exactly what it is, except that it is something more, more than history, more than sex, more than life, more than death.*

– Octavio Paz

If duality is not dominating our understanding of gender, then there are more than two genders and they are not diametrically opposed to each other. There is no "opposite sex" to be at war with; instead there are an infinite number of gendered displays, each one a unique, experience. Each one an ephemeral epiphany specific to the relational context in which it co-arises. Gender itself is a liminal state, a mercurial expression that shifts and glides across the reflective surface of the bodies before us.

The relational perspectives and contexts provided for sex in LLR Aphrodite Temple are “all about” recreation and communion, an ecstasy of autoerotic autonomy. Inside our consent-based TAZ of democratic sexualoving meritocracy, every single celebrant becomes a sacred and holy fractal of Divinity. We are, each of us, a shimmering note in a harmonious chorus resounding with her name.

Aphrodite!

Golden One, we sing your praises,

we keep you always, in the center:

of our hearts, of our lives, of our Loves.

May our names fall from your honeyed lips.

Oh Beloved enchantress,

smile radiantly in our direction.

Blessed Be. Reverend Teri D. Ciacchi 12/2017

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## 1 Cascadia Bioregion 1

Cascadia Bioregion - Bioregions are defined through the ecological aspects of a land base such as watersheds (hydrology boundaries) and mountain ranges or deserts. For me it is part of a radical EcoFeminist perspective to name the place that I live after its bioregion rather than by the state names that were assigned to this land after it was taken from the indigenous peoples that lived here long before colonization

The term Cascadia first came to my attention when reading the utopian novel *Ecotopia* by Ernest Callenbach. Bates McKee “Cascadia: The Geologic Evolution of the Pacific Northwest,” published in 1972, was the first book title to using the word, while David McClosky, founder of the Cascadian Institute, was the first to fully map the Cascadian Bioregion and apply the name. <http://cascadia-institute.org/>

I have lived in the Cascade bioregion since 1989, spending 10 years in Eugene, Oregon, 12 years in Seattle, Washington, and am starting my 6th year in Portland, OR. The parts of Portland’s cultures that I socialize include The Cascadian Coalition Against Hate, attending events like Cascadia Rising and talk seriously about succession. The Cascadian Flag was created in 1994-95 by Portlander Alexander Baretich who maintains the website <http://freecascadia.org/> where more history and free classes on Cascadia can be explored.