Strangeness, unnamed and unchecked intercedes in our lives. Sometime it is a global event with hauntingly local effects. It comes highly concentrated in other people. Certain strangeness enchants, while other kinds wound; yet still others are neutral and “ontologically indescribable.” Often the repercussions of a strange event or a strange person aren’t felt until after the event, in laughs, sobs, shudders and flails. A car accident, an altercation with a “crazy” person, a moment of unexpected violence, or a feeling of “offness” inside the body are all strange events we’ve experienced. They are disruptive if you become overly entangled in their energies or are blithely inattentive to their ramifications. With strangeness you must walk that fine line: vigilant insouciance. And the strangeness that is, arguably the most entangling is the romantic and erotic kind.

In every epoch certain courageous explorers rediscover the primacy of Love, as both the primordial force of Eros and as the only pragmatic path towards individual and collective redemption. Yet every epoch seems to forget or forgo this epiphany. Rather, it cannot be distributed in such
unquantifiable doses. The Garters would say the reason is, as it has always been: Fear. But the only Fear that exists is the fear of destruction, of losing one’s identity or meanings in something larger, nameless, more unfathomable. We cling desperately to whatever affiliation, credential, trophy or reminder keeps us seemingly grounded, while Eros keeps cajoling us off every cliff we see. So we fear Love. And in fearing it, we fear and eschew Life.

When this Fear eclipses the Self or the Social, then Eros and Love, once more, become either naïve myths or foolhardy commitments that only fools or mystics undertake. They are no longer seen as primordial energies that can transform our terrestrial conditions, as well as the subjectivities that spatter the earth. Likewise, they are no longer seen as the *prima materia* of radically participatory philosophical engagement.

Love’s range is boundless, as Hesiod knew when he granted prestige to the “Cosmogonic Eros” as the generative force of creation. This Eros, of course, exceeds any straightforward, rational or convenient ideas we might have about it, which might be why its potential healing powers are often forsaken or neglected. For Eros implies a certain relation with Chaos that seems inconvenient and frightening but is also exemplified by the world as it is, in the process of its perpetual fluctuations, vivid errancies, and entropic spasms. My own conceptions of healing, before I became a Garter, conflated it with “judgment” of my own being; a judgment implying that I was “broken” and needed to be fixed, that my maladies were an incriminatory difference to be smoothed over and normalized, rectified into some abnormally static equilibrium. But in fact, brokenness is the given, and, indeed, already a holism, so healing instead is simply care for the parts that is constant and love-driven.
Equilibrium is but a moment of balance among energizing imbalances.

Poets and artists like Walt Whitman and Austin Spare have hinted at such a Cosmic Eros. Thinkers like Ludwig Klages have been quite explicit about its power. More contemporary philosophers like Gilles Deleuze, bell hooks, and Alain Badiou have explored in depth new ways of thinking about love, Eros and desire that entail a more cosmic outlook. Hugely integral to this cosmic view is that Love doesn’t require a Thing to have, hold, lack or pine for. Rather, Love is the movement that renders the world alive and buzzing with relational energy.

It was in the desert that I came upon a notion of Eros as a way of working, practically and spiritually with Chaos and with the volatile energies that it entails. This suggests a form of Love that is ecological in its thinking, which is to say, a Love that considers the myriad relations and inter-workings between entities and energies on all planes of existence. If I think of the spiritual labor that humans will have to take upon themselves if they want to endure, it can only be in terms of ecology: of how to harmonize the myriad, animated parts that are flush with a world, of how to live richly among scarcities, of how to sacrifice small gratifications for larger ecstasies, and of how to navigate new and unusual sensations among unusually divergent entities.

Love as the ecological force par excellence is a complex assertion that the Garters are bringing forth into the gutters of this young century. Such a love is, of course, “hard work,” necessitating risk, failure, collapse and blindness, among other pitfalls, but also insuring potential union with “others” in ways that conventional ideas of love may not encourage. This more cosmic love stands in direct relation to an unknown, which is both fearful and catalyzing. It
also interrogates the possessiveness, materialism and codependence—in a word, the fear—rampant in certain ideas of romantic love.

The doctrine, especially in Western culture, of “love” as a tortured search for idealized, mythic completion through another person, thing, or idea must be ruthlessly questioned and thereby lovingly subverted. This isn’t to say that love should not be entered into passionately and madly—for indeed, the tensions induced by the passions are inherently creative and thus supremely Erotic in their manifestations. The discerning psyche, however, or the Gartered Soul must be able to pass through such passions, such obsessions without being destroyed or nullified by them. To turn the injurious into the edifying is what magic is. Nobody said Easy! Nobody said Convenience! But here again is where a non-dualistic approach to work and play, love and hate becomes the only methodology.

As a Garter, I’ve learned from various Garter teachers, one of whom initiated me in certain Mysteries of Eros on the eve of my move to Las Vegas. After I told her about some of my general anxieties, she said, “The mind in its workings is crazy, the world in its workings is crazy. So the more you build up an indestructible sanctuary inside your soul, the more you can work with the crazy.” Her suggestion for me was to cultivate “structure and devotion,” two ways to fortify this sanctuary on a daily basis. (This Sanctuary notion, then, became an integral one in Garter practice and philosophy. Future dispatches and projects will involve how individual members can build up and cultivate their own Sanctuaries.) Much of this teacher’s own work comes out of Sufi spirituality, Tibetan Buddhism and the Advaita Vedanta teachings of Shankara. For Garters, a major benefit of such spiritual work is the development in each individual
soul of a taste for the pleasures of integration, and of submission to the energies of each day.

This conversation was one of the most revelatory of my life because of its jewel-like simplicity. Of course, its lessons have been difficult to uphold and yet they are always there as lanterns in the darkness. The Garters work separately and together to turn frustrations and disappointments into eerily-lit passageways; group work and group enthusiasm strengthen singular expeditions into the unknown. Later, in the desert, I realized that the unifying force of this sanctuary, the energy that fuses structure and devotion into committed reverential practice is Eros. This Eros is the love for the world in all its crazy manifestations but also a harder, more esoteric love that works with contradictions and complexities without trying to resolve them. The world, of course, tries, at every turn to dissuade us of this Love and this, too is an integral challenge of the path. The world, in all its fearful chattiness tries to inculcate us with the imperative that we must resolve things, tie up loose threads, establish rigorous limits and boundaries and reduce “negative” emotions and things in our lives. This world that instructs us thus is not at all the world that our bodies and souls live in, which is the world of opposing and clashing forces, of inhuman energies that don’t always veer in our preferred directions.

Tantric practice echoes this in a similar fashion. According to Agehananda Bharati in *The Tantric Tradition*: “Reality is one, but it is to be grasped through a process of conceptual and intuitive polarization. The poles are activity and passivity, and the universe ‘works’ through their interaction.” Thus, “self-love” becomes akin to the cultivating of a soul that is agile and generous enough to work with these polar energies. Instead of always seeking what is “similar,”
the soul learns to move among differences with fortitude, open-mindedness and, potentially, joy.

It has taken many blows, as they say, and wanderings, as well as many private joys, to grasp Eros as not just the range of ecstasies and agonies of romantic and sexual love but as a larger, more generous enchantment with the world’s forces. At the same time, romantic and erotic love between entities can be a spiritual undertaking that releases creative and elemental energy, or constructs a “third mind” as William Burroughs and Brion Gysin call it. In this case, then, love is never “ideal,” but instead is an imaginative leap into “real” energies that can seem alien and disorienting. This love can, in the words of a professor of mine, expand one’s “available reality.”

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