



EMBODY

By Sossity Chiricuzio

Perspectives

Embody - Self Care, Community Share

by Sossity Chiricuzio, PQ Monthly

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We are fed a loaded bunch of nonsense about our bodies. What they should look like, who they should attract, what is proper to do with them, whether clothed or naked or eating or sleeping or fucking or dying.

We are taught we are not the authority about our bodies, that doctors and priests and parents and even God has a better idea about what we need, and what we are capable of. We are taught that we should fix our size, and our smell, and our self-image. We are taught that the type and shape of fabrics we drape over us are inherently connected to our value and our beauty and our gender. We are taught to not know ourselves other than as something opposite to something else.

Sometimes, some of us try and break free of this conditioning. A small group, or a culture, or even a whole generation. My first five years were spent in the organic glow of flower children actively

unlearning as much as they could. My body was naked or clothed based on weather and costuming and adventures. My body was fed when it was hungry, cuddled when it was seeking contact, and respected at all times. My body was just a part of me, and we had an easy, loving, joyful relationship.

It took only one year of public school to subvert all of that. One year of judging and sideways glances to teach me to be ashamed of being a mammal, of being clad in second hand clothing, of being in love with sensations.

I tried to catch up on the rules as fast as I could, certain I was always getting it wrong. I learned to expect negative attention and feedback. I sucked in my stomach and rounded my shoulders and minimized my breasts. I learned to dislike my hair, my arms, my chin, my neck, my teeth, my legs, my ass, my belly, my voice and my back. I learned to hide and disguise. Struggling to pass as socially redeemable became a state of being in my body.

Meanwhile, my body became a danger to me, way too soon to understand the why, though I learned fast enough the who and how. It took only one not-quite-stranger invasion to realize that others were going to want to force their way inside my body, and I was going to have to fight to keep them out. It took much longer to realize I would eventually have to fight to let some folks in, even though I wanted to. Fighting had become a state of being in my body.

In fact, the thing that became hardest was actually being in my body. Staying engaged and present, all the way up to the skin.

In the midst of the learning and unlearning, the unwinding of tangles and trauma, was the increasing pain of my body. Arthritis struck hard, not long after 18, for reasons I am currently trying to decipher. At first it seemed it might be one last viral parting gift from the last cis-man I ever dated, lodged in my joints for 20+ years and festering like his jack Mormon desire for my forbidden body. Now it seems instead that my own antibodies are lost in the "fight" response, even though their target is actually also me. Thyroid trapped in emergency mode, joints made of spikes.

Fighting has become a state of illness for my body, even as I have to continually fight for the needs of my body. Advocacy is, after all, another way to struggle.

I continue to find ways to hold fast to the joys of flesh and senses; to be who I actually am; to ask for what I need. I have found many rituals to anchor myself inside this body. I have shaped and shorn and inked and carved and pierced and consecrated it with blood. I have found a path that wends between slinky fabrics and work worn boots; between gentle voice and sharp teeth; between the mines laid down by both passing anonymous judgments and intimate deliberate shaming.

I find it again, with every new lover, with every source of chronic pain, with every day spent in the public eye.

I am able to find much of this because of the way our queer community shares resources and skills. The way we lift each other up and create an altar of ourselves, seeking truths, polishing them against each other until we all see us shine. The way we make a life's work out of helping and modeling and listening and seeking. The way cradle and adorn and heal one another.

I want to take a moment and thank some of the many queer businesses, in Portland and beyond, that have used the labor and skills of their bodies to help support the identity and healing in mine, and to share them with you.

Remember: your body, your rituals, your way. And also: your money/labor is a spell as well, cast it wisely.

Asha Wellness, Aster Wolfe, LMT, As You Like It, Big Mama's Hair Design, Blue Door Farm, BodyQuirks, Brazen Bee Beauty, Common Ground, Cotton Cloud, Cypress Tattoo, Empower Oil, Fat Fancy, Fire Horse Acupuncture, Galactic Rabbit Horoscopes, Good Margot, Hairparty, In Other Words, J Tyler Huber Photography, JD's Shoe Repair, Kinky Craft, Levy Chiropractic, Little Shop Of Hairs, New Rose

Tattoo, Protean Arts, Q Center, Re/Dress, Ritual Arts, Ritual Ink, She Bop, Size Queen Clothing, Star Magic Take Root, The Equi Institute, The Vital Compass, Zócalo Wellness, and of course the many odd job folks, home grown medicine makers, and mutual advisors that I can't properly name or mention here.

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