Two Healers on Preparing for the Trump Era

The intensity of 2016 has yet to ease up and my Kava Kava tincture chased with a Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup is the only thing getting me through the day. While trying to tune out the voices of the politicians, liberal media, and shitty activists alike, I’ve been looking to the witches, the freaks, and the healers for guidance. Thank goodness for Antonia Estela Pérez and Jennifer Patterson, two herbalists who inspire me to find ways of thriving under the conditions we live in, with a little help from some plants.

Antonia Estela Pérez carves her own knives, posts pics of skateboarding and sycamores, and teaches free plant medicine workshops in the Bronx and Washington Heights with the BRUJAS, the feminist skate collective. Antonia reminds us to heal by connecting with the histories that run through us, as well as the natural world that is always already right in front of us.

Jennifer Patterson makes medicine with Corpus Ritual Apothecary, including favorites of mine like Build Back Up and the Give Less Shits Elixir, which is “for the days you just need to not give a fuck...” (most days). She teaches writing workshops for queer and trans survivors of violence, embroiders her beautiful poetry onto old handkerchiefs, and edited the recently published anthology, Queering Sexual Violence. Jennifer reminds us of the healing power of dwelling within our wounds and going in deep with collective trauma.

If you need some tips to get through to 2017, these are your people.
What tradition(s) are you working from? How do you locate your healing work as part of a lineage of healers?

I have been reconnecting to my Mapuche roots. While I do not use many plants from Chile in my healing practice, Mapuche cosmology is very important to me. Living on this land, I have connected intimately with the plants growing here, both native and those brought via colonization. Indigenous plant knowledge has been a huge influence, but also Western herbalism, since so many of the plants that grow here now originally came from Europe or Asia.

I see myself as part of the generation of women of color healers who are drawing upon their own diasporic roots. So many of the well-known mainstream herbalists are white men or women. While I have learned from many of them, there is always a sense of something missing. I want to see the queer community of color becoming herbalists and tapping into their ancestral knowledge.

How do you see the role of trauma healers in the midst of state violence? What does collective healing look like to you in the face of ongoing trauma?

Integral. State violence has always existed and it is especially out of control right now. Those of us with indigenous ancestry hold a lot of trauma that our current generation needs to work through. It is important to know our history and to connect with our roots, especially if that knowledge has been erased from our immediate family.

Some of the best work we can do to heal trauma is to connect with the land to learn more about ourselves and where we come from. The earth has also experienced a lot of trauma that is tied to the trauma we feel. Capitalism does not really discriminate between exploiting resources and exploiting people. Trauma exists in all forms: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual.

I see collective healing as the act of coming together to make space for this, whether in someone's living room or at a party. I see it happening more and more, which is wonderful because there will never be too many healing circles, or too many healers.
What plants are you hanging out with lately?

When I go on my run I like to hang out with bittersweet, burdock, and mugwort. The bittersweet has opened up its yellow casing and the red fruit is now decorating the bare trees around which this vine tightly wraps itself.
If you had to pick three plants to bring with you into the Trump era, what would they be?

During this time it is essential that we find support in plant medicine. Plants are our allies and will help keep our body and minds balanced as we organize. We are going to need many adaptogens and nervines – herbs in these medicinal categories generally help strengthen our nervous system and increase our resiliency under shifting conditions and environmental stress. Three herbs that I think will be crucial are skullcap (Scutellaria lateriflora), passionflower (Passiflora Incarnata), and mugwort (Artemisia Vulgaris). Skullcap for anxiety relief, headaches, insomnia, muscular and skeletal pain. Passionflower to de-stress, relieve nerve pain, heart palpitations, and as a general sleep aid and anti-depressant. Mugwort so that we can connect deeper with messages coming through in our dreams. Mugwort is a digestive stimulant and eases nervous tension.

What creative work is giving you energy?

I have started drawing and writing poetry again. Writing poetry on the train is by far my favorite, there is so much content in the constantly changing scenes. My drawings tend to be of creatures and forms that just come out of my subconscious.

What are some tools, exercises, or rituals you use to stay grounded, or to stay in the body?

I massage myself every single day with sesame oil. This is how I tell myself I love myself, and care for my muscles, bones, and skin. I take a shower in the evening before going to sleep to cleanse away the day and then do some stretching before going to sleep. I put herbs and stones in my bed to influence my dreamtime. I also burn copal, sage or mugwort as often as possible. Most importantly I put my phone on airplane mode when going to sleep and I don’t look at my phone first thing in the morning. Running is very meditative for me, it helps to clear my mind and get my heartbeat up. Skating through the city always gets me hyped.
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What makes you feel good that might not be so “good for you”?

Instagram and chocolate. Sometimes I’m scrolling and I think to myself, WTF am I doing? It can be such a waste of time. It is mostly in the last year that I have been using my phone a lot more, and while I find great things about it, I still continue to feel a huge resistance to having a tracking device on me all the time.

Where can we get your stuff?

I am beginning to do herbal consultations for people interested in using herbs to bring their health into balance.

You can find me on Instagram @antonitalbrujita