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The Radical Gesture of Generosity:
A Dialogue Between Paula Sager and Bonnie Morrissey

Bonnie and Paula are teachers of the Discipline of Authentic Movement on the faculty of Circles of Four—they are based in Vermont and Rhode Island, respectively, on the East Coast of the USA. In the following conversation, they discuss the relevance of the Discipline in a time of much political and cultural unrest. Perhaps now more than ever, we see the value of cultivating the refined awareness of the inner witness and heed the call to the mystery of the unknown, in support of invisible presence.

Paula: I woke up this morning, feeling a strong desire to connect with you, Bonnie. It was a call to inwardly attend to our preparations to teach together at our April weekend retreat in New York.

There's always something so potent about not knowing what will happen, not knowing who will come. The empty space of the circle is here, and now people are starting to step in. Something is underway. I wonder if there are folks who are drawn to our offering of retreat, but are feeling ambivalent? Is there something in the directness of our flyer, the explicit connection to what is happening in our country, in the world right now, that stirs an element of inner resistance?

Bonnie: Why do you ask this?

Paula: I'm aware of my own ambivalence in the current political climate. *I want to act, I want to participate* and I feel my own resistance—I can feel overwhelmed by the level of political chaos and uncertainty—I'd rather not get involved.

Bonnie: When I feel resistance, it can be almost to anything, to everything. It's easy to go with a general feeling of distrust, a turning away, because of how hard it is to trust so many things in our culture. Now it's gotten stronger—*oh boy, it's really getting bad out there*. I think I'll not go, I'll not do. I can become more closed down as a kind of protection. The tendency to not trust can get really strong.

Paula: For me, this state of resistance has a feeling quality of bracing, hunkering down, becoming hard and immobile like a rock, putting up a wall.

Bonnie: I respond differently when people offer generosity and kindness. This is what I turn towards. In the presence of fearlessness and generosity, I feel awe. I'm aware of who is stepping up. After the election, I was seeking places of sanity in the culture. Every time I turned on National Public Radio, they were doing something meaningful on race, gender, or some other social issue impacting real human lives. This seemed strong and supportive. I felt they took their muzzle off, and while remaining respectful, stopped trying not to offend anyone.

The New Yorker magazine is another place I feel has risen to the challenge. Their articles, the covers, the cartoons they are printing are courageous. Right after the election, I think they offered a 20-issue subscription for only \$5.69 or something like that. I found that to be a lovely gesture of generosity.

Paula: It's interesting to see who steps up in this way. I remember imagining, after the election, a new kind of alliance between forward-thinking companies and their consumers. We saw the power of this when the North Carolina Republicans passed legislation restricting bathroom access for transgender people. There was a groundswell of outraged response from individuals and also some corporations who chose to cancel events or boycott the state altogether.

As citizens we can wake up to the power of our voice and action through the choices we make in our purchases; our choices of where we go and what we do.

Bonnie: In our personal lives each day, in our simple individual ways, what we say and do matters. I want to be more mindful of my speech each day, to say what I really mean. I don't want to waste my words, my actions, my energy. It's not about getting tight or shutting down. It's about focusing my attention. Like this kerosene lamp here on my table this evening. I work with the wick, try to get the flame just right, not too big, rather getting the beam of fire and light smaller and more focused, more intense. There's a clarified quality to this focus. The refinement of our attention is what matters.

Paula: Wow, I suddenly feel so warm—the heat! Wait, I'm putting down the phone, I have to take off my sweater. (*Laughs*) There's something here in what we're saying that is about warmth.

Bonnie: (*Laughs*) Yes, and it's related to compassion and love. The heart. It's like there are two opposing energies: One has its roots in fear, aggression, retaliation, greed. It is a perfectly understandable response to shut down, withdraw and turn away—*I need to protect myself from what is happening, from the darkness and danger*. Alternatively, generosity is true resistance to greed and fear. It's a life affirming expression that can serve as counter-energy and antidote.

Paula: *Generosity is true resistance.* Yes. This is connected to my feeling of wanting to be *for* something rather than just *against* something.

Bonnie: What have you found yourself doing that has the feeling of being *for* something?

Paula: Some of it is self-care—noticing when I need to step back from reading or hearing news and when I need to know what’s going on. But mostly I feel renewed commitment to what matters to me in the world: Circles of Four and teaching the Discipline, and also Mariposa—supporting the young children and their teachers, who I’ve become so involved with. But there’s something else.

It’s hard to put into words...there’s a way that I’m attending and listening that feels new and different. It’s not in the inward way that I’m used to. There’s a sense of being called to attend in a new, more outward way. What is here? It’s almost a sense of *who* is here. So much not knowing.

This phrase just came to me this morning—invisible collaborators are here. It feels really important to engage and acknowledge this quality of invisible presence, to be in relation to the invisible and open to the mystery.

The sky has come closer to me. This is the feeling of it; there is so much subtle activity above and around me—my hands rise just above my ears; I feel a faint weaving of vibrations, stirring in the air. As my hands lower, what I mostly experience in relation to this is an invitation to notice.

Something about the soft falling snow today and the recent loss of my dear cat intensifies all of this for me. Two days ago, I was holding Pierre, wrapped in a blanket in my arms, while Jeremy drove us to the vet. Pierre had lost so much weight; he was so light, but still so present, letting himself be held and sometimes lifting and turning his head to look out the window at the passing landscape. At the veterinarian’s office:

I lay Pierre on the metal table to receive his euthanasia shot. He stays close to me, his soft back pressing lightly against my belly. And then I see a gentle tilting of his ears to the side, his head dropping slightly, such a quiet releasing of his cat life. Witnessing life leave. With so much sadness, I pick the bundle of him up again and carry him, his body, back to the car. On the drive home, I hold his body close—it is so heavy in my arms, in my lap. Is life light?

Bonnie: Oh Paula, I am so sorry for your loss. Dear Pierre.

Wow... *Is life light? Invisible collaborators. The sky has come closer.* And an invitation to awareness around the portal of death. Witnessing spirit flow out of bodies. There is the energy flowing among the living and then the mystery of... do we dare to say it, the energy that may

flow between the living and....(*silence*)... no word comes...something of the emptiness... I'm at the end of my vocabulary.

Feeling into the relationship between the energy we experience among us as living beings, and this other energy that maybe we can let ourselves know. This place feels close to empty mover, empty witness.

Paula, your words about the sky coming closer cause me to remember:

I am in the Pocono Mountains. I am young, maybe 21, and one evening a small group of us are sitting on the floor, listening to First Nation Mohawk-tribe elders as they stand before us and speak. They are telling stories from their hand-woven belts, stories about life forces and about being human. Things they know and we don't. They are offering these stories to we white people as an offering, in what I experience as an act of unmediated generosity. I take in all I can, impressionistically. Afterwards, I go outside and stand on a balcony, gazing up at the night sky.

I feel myself fall into the embrace of this vast star-studded darkness. And now, in a powerful flash I am "hit", stunned by a laser-like beam from somewhere out in the cosmos, overwhelming me utterly. This zap is a circuit connecting, an instantly changed body-consciousness, a receiving of what I know as an immediate and permanent cellular reorganization.

I knew this experience then as an imprint of evolutionary change, for me as one person of many. I name this experience now as an aspect of energetic phenomena, an early strong kria, an initiatory moment. I've avoided speaking of this, protecting the mystery by surrounding it with silence, and protecting myself as well, since I had no words to render my experience in a grounded form. Now four decades later, the experience continues to ripen as I name and further integrate what happened then, thanks to my practice of the Discipline of Authentic Movement. And now is a time to speak.

Paula: This is a precious gift, Bonnie, so moving. Thank you for speaking something that you have held protected, with care and silence. *Now is a time to speak. Now is a time to hear.*

Bonnie: Coming into relationship with what is *big* might really help us. Can we let this relationship become stronger, more real? Can we feel it as an invitation that has to do with our potentiality as human beings?

Paula: Such a beautiful offering that you received—the stories told through the hand-woven belts—and the generosity of the offering, an invitation that bears such a poignant longing for human awakening. I imagine, on these days when the news is filled with stories of lies and diversions, a great cosmic longing is calling for us to wake up.

Bonnie: We're the ones who can take the first steps, who can let ourselves be vulnerable. We're the ones who can name our fears and still take a step toward the unknown, within the protection of our practice of embodied awareness and the circles we co-create.

It's so odd to be experienced practitioners - we think we know all this stuff and we do know some things – and yet what we know is miniscule. I feel a fluttering now in my belly as an invitation into a place that feels deeply unknown. I am being called, and it feels necessary. Refining our attention and intensifying our awareness. Opening a door to the unknown and paying real attention. This is a form of dissent, a resource of civil society, a movement towards embodied consciousness in the collective.

What we're addressing is a kind of edge. It's an invitation to the edge of awareness, where more might be known about receiving assistance from that which is invisible.

Paula: I have a feeling now of wanting to be very simple—wanting to simply create an open space suffused with the mystery of not-knowing, in order to welcome others. To stay focused consciously on the quality of the space we are creating. The generosity of unfolding life; this is what we can embody.