

The Birth of Intima

Capstone Year, Output 2



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Output Specification

Welcome to this output, and thank you for sharing this process with me!

As you read, I encourage you to remain present with the sensations in your body, how what you are reading affects how you feel. I hope that this output packet can inspire you and open new visions for you, as it has for me.

I am an associate in [Gaia University](#), a self-directed, non-residential action learning program. I am in my final year of my Bachelor's degree in Integrative Ecosocial Design, with a focus on Right Livelihood and Regenerative Entrepreneurship. This output describes the beginning stages of the creation of an experimental business venture called Intima, which constitutes my capstone project for Gaia U. In this document, the Main Report, I describe how the business came to be and how it is evolving, and give a report from my first public event. In the Appendices, which you can access from the Mahara page, I report on the design process of this output, offer some extracts from my learning journals, evaluate what skills I have developed in the last couple of months, and offer the resources I have learned from. The main report is meant to be read from beginning to end. Enjoy!

Pathway Reflections



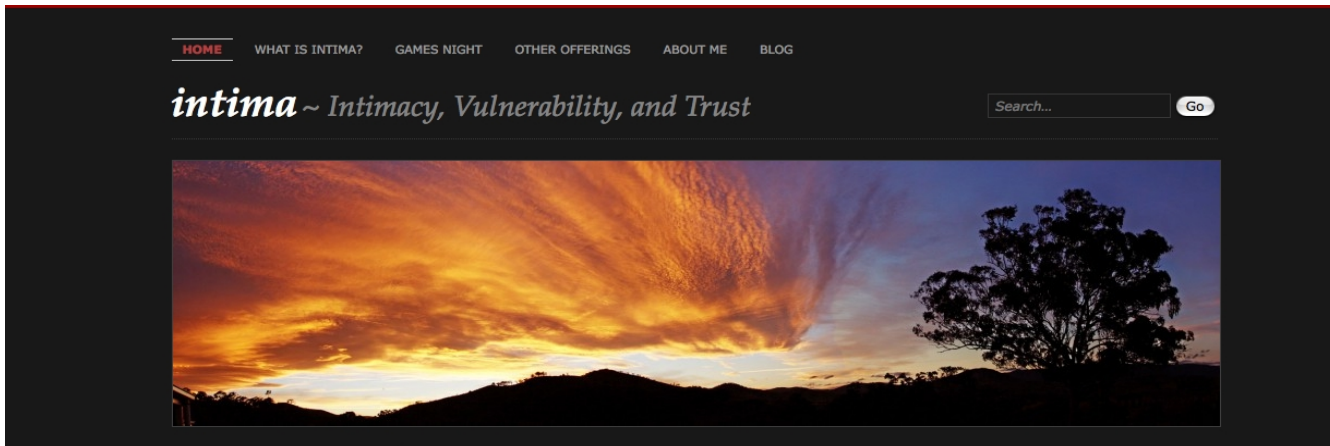
After completing one year of Gaia University, and then taking nine months of pause, I am coming into my capstone year with a new sense of clarity, purpose, and confidence. In my first year with Gaia U, I pursued a pathway of roller coaster learning. A common pattern in my life, roller coaster learning looked like diving into challenging, exciting, unpredictable experiences without a clear design or desired outcomes, hanging on for the ride, and then attempting to sort out afterward what I had learned and how. Each of these roller coasters left me a changed person, more skilled, more accepting of life's twists and turns, and with a new perspective. However, each ride also left me a little more confused, a little more unsure about who I was and where I was going, and, in most cases, no closer to establishing the kind of regenerative livelihood I envision for myself.

During my pause from Gaia U, I continued to follow this pattern, and dove deeply into the feeling of not knowing. I stopped asking myself what my long term goals were, and truly allowed myself to not know. This was terrifying, as I watched my closely held beliefs fall apart, my relationships suffer, and my general happiness dissolve into long periods of existential crisis. For the first three months, I was living in Oakland and looking for work. When the stress of city life became too much for me, I moved back to Earthaven, with no clear plan other than to be in a more supportive environment for my soulcraft. After a turbulent and trying spring here at Earthaven, I went back to California to work at [Camp Winnarainbow](#). There at camp, in my longtime spiritual home, I began to slowly rediscover myself. Inspired by my surroundings, I began to come out of existential crisis, and envision what I wanted to give to the world and how. In September, after camp had ended, I arrived once more at Earthaven for the Gaia Gathering, feeling alive and on fire and ready to step back into my life.

At the Gaia Gathering, I noticed a big transition taking place in my life. I am moving from an inward focus to an outward focus, and from roller coaster learning to conscious, focused development of right livelihood. Rather than focus my energy on my internal journey, the realms of soulcraft and emotion, I am focusing my energy outward, learning about the world outside and how I affect it, in everything from my business endeavors down to my closest intimate relationships. As winter approaches, I am starting to feel more introspective again, but it is still against a background of outward focus. I can feel myself being drawn out into the world, ready to engage.

And in order to engage most effectively, I recognize that I need to train myself in conscious, focused, directed ways. There are skills that I need to develop in order to engage in the world in a way that feels fulfilling and healthy to me. I am identifying them, and purposefully creating opportunities to flex them, and documenting my progress. For evidence of how I am tracking these skills, look at “Skillflex Reassessment” in the Appendices. This process feels very grounded in comparison with my old pattern of roller coaster learning.

The Birth of Intima: An Active Experiment in Right Livelihood and Regenerative Entrepreneurship



Introduction

These next four sections tell the story of the birth and development of Intima, and my progress towards Right Livelihood. In “What is Intima?” I explain what Intima is, and why I chose that name. In “Origins of Intima”, I tell the story of how I got the idea for this project, the beginnings of its ongoing design process, and in “Planting the Seed” I report on the first stages of its implementation. Then, in “Collaboration with Lily” I look forward to the deeper visioning that the two of us are doing together. In all, this report offers the beginnings, the first baby steps of this project, as well as a look towards the future.

What is Intima?

The word “Intima” comes from the Latin “intimus”, meaning innermost. It refers to the innermost membrane of an organ, that tender and secret boundary at the center of your heart, or lung, or small intestine. It is the root of the english word “intimacy”. Intimacy is about sharing that tender and secret part of yourself, and having that gift received and affirmed by others. Intimacy has been a major focus in my life, and now, as I embark on my final year with Gaia University, I am experimenting with making intimacy my livelihood.

Intima is a business that I am starting, in collaboration with the wonderful Lily Ovadya. At this point, Intima's main offering is a Games Night where we play games that push our edges of vulnerability and teach important intimacy skills. In addition, I am experimenting with offering people one on one support on their personal journeys towards intimacy and meaningful connection. This is a kind of work that I have been doing informally with friends and acquaintances for a long time, and I am just at the beginning of learning how to offer it as a paid service.

In addition to being a business and a learning laboratory, Intima is also my Capstone Project for Gaia University. It is an experiment in regenerative entrepreneurship and a training ground for right livelihood. Some skills I am flexing in doing this work include marketing and social media, facilitating groups, supporting individuals in their transformative work, and collaborative business visioning and design.

Origins of Intima

In September, as the leaves were just beginning to turn and fall was coming on, I began to plant the seed of Intima. Carefully, I watered the young seed, creating a website, finding a space to host the Games Night, talking to people, creating business cards and twitter accounts and Facebook groups, setting up the life support systems that could keep this seed alive through the winter. In the giddy excitement of getting that seed in the ground, I was swept up by visions of the fruits that this seed could one day bear. I had high expectations, and a lot of impatience. I was counting on this thing to start making money and changing peoples lives, soon. And with all that expectation, as always, came a good deal of stress, frustration, and disappointment at the slow progress of my tender new seed.

Now, however, with winter coming on quick, and the ground beginning to freeze up, I can see that I have done my best to establish the roots of this young plant, in the vision in mine and Lily's hearts, as well as in the tangible elements such as the website and the upcoming Games Nights that will keep the plant alive over the winter. I can see also that as winter comes on, the leaves will die, and the plant will conserve its energy. Just as everything around me is dying back and turning in, so must my business. This natural pattern manifests itself in the human world in tangible ways, such as the slowing of Asheville's tourist dependent economy, and the reluctance of people to travel through cold and snow. We are, after all, animals, and natural cycles affect us all. Coming from California, where the cycle is much less pronounced, this was a new realization for me. Rather than being frustrating, this feels like a huge relief to me. Sure, it would be nice to have the income, but I have accepted that the natural cycle is moving in this direction, and working with it rather than against it only feels, well, natural.

So where did this seed come from? It was harvested from the bounty of the Gaia Gathering here at Earthaven in early September. For me, the theme of that gathering was the importance of stepping into right livelihood, learning how to sustain myself by offering my gifts. One night, a group of us gathered together for a collective brainstorm about regenerative entrepreneurship, what it meant and how we could engage in it. It was a big turning point for me, and I realized that this was a clear next step in my life. But what did I want to offer?

Planting the Seed

The first answer to emerge was the idea of hosting different kinds of workshops. I love holding space for groups, and I do it very well. I could offer different kinds of events, things I already knew how to lead, for an affordable door price. This idea was attractive because it had extremely low overhead, very little structure or setup necessary, and I already had most of the skills I would need to pull it off. Of the several ideas that I had for workshops I could lead, the most exciting one to me was a series of games that I had learned from a community called Onetaste in San Francisco. I appreciated what I had learned from these games, and I felt confident that I could lead them well. At first, I was also thinking about hosting conscious cuddle sessions, and I set out to find spaces to host these two events. Soon enough, it became clear that the intimacy games were more exciting to me than the cuddle parties and that my energy was limited, so I began to focus exclusively on that project.

I sat down one day with a dictionary, looked up the word intimacy, and chose the name Intima for this new creation. Then I wrote the text that would later become the majority of the content on [Intima's](#) website, answering these basic questions:

- What is Intima?
- Why Intima? Why is this work important?
- What does the Games Night look like?
- Why me? Who am I to be doing this work?

Key Learning:
My energy is finite,
best to put it where my
greatest passions are

In doing this writing, I took the idea of hosting these games and made it into a full fledged project, with a purpose, a strategy, and a plan for implementation. I created a website, learning how to use [Wordpress](#) as I went along, and started a blog with an article entitled "[Intimacy is Revolution](#)". The seed was ready, and all that I needed was soil to plant it in, a space where the Games Night could be held.

One of my favorite communities in Asheville is the Asheville Movement Collective, a group of people who host free form dance events every weekend. I love the community that comes to these events, and I knew that it would be a great place to find support for my project. I made an announcement after dance, describing the project and asking if anyone knew of a good space. After the announcements were over, a woman came up to me and introduced herself. Her name was Peace Weaver, and she was the founder of the [Asheville Tantra School](#), a project that I had heard of through friends at Earthaven. The school, which hadn't opened yet, was looking for more games and more focus on intimacy, and she thought that my games night could be a good fit. We went out to lunch that day and talked it over, and by the end of the day, I was signed on as a faculty member! I couldn't believe my luck. My seed had been planted in rich soil, with the support of a community of like-minded people and as part of a garden of learning and teaching about sexuality, intimacy, and relationship. I was overjoyed.



Collaboration with Lily

Lily Ovadya and I have known each other since May of 2010, when we met at the Village Building Convergence in Portland Oregon. In that time, we have been dear friends, lovers, support people, and many other things. Since we met, we have been closely involved in each others lives. She is one of my dearest and closest loves. And now, by the grace of all that is holy, she has agreed to be my business partner.

I am extremely grateful to have Lily as a business partner. Our energies balance out so well. She is slow, deliberate, and careful where I am confident, precocious, and impatient. She is intensely tuned into deep purpose, where I am active, experimental, and sometimes more surface oriented. Our talents and skills complement each other, and, more importantly, we are able to communicate extremely well.

So far, we have just begun to design our collaborative relationship. One exciting thing to emerge from that process has been our experimenting with offering to each other the kind of support we intend to offer to the public as a paid service. We have had two sessions each, in which we supported each other in clarifying our desires in intimate relationships. Over the course of the winter, we will continue these sessions, flexing our skills as support people, as well as reading and learning about techniques that others have used in this kind of work and sharing that learning with each other. In addition to this hands on practice, we will be collaboratively visioning what we want Intima to become, and how we will work together to achieve that goal.



Conclusion

This project, the creation of a business that is aligned with the things I love the most and is in service to my community and my world, has been a huge step forward in my life. It has realigned everything. It has been a step out into the unknown, often uncomfortable, always engaging. From its beginnings as an exciting idea at the Gaia Gathering, to its implementation in the first Games Night, every step has been new, terrifying, and terribly exciting. As the winter comes on, I look forward to going deep into the vision and purpose of this work, and emerging in the spring with even more powerful and valuable offerings.

Report From the First Games Night

It was the night of Intima's first Games Night. Lily and I arrived in West Asheville around 5:30 and sat down to eat at the West End Bakery, near the Asheville Tantra School where the games would be held. Lily, my longtime friend and collaborator and soon to be business partner, had agreed to be my support person for this night, for which I was incredibly grateful. Although I felt fairly calm and present, considering that this was my first time offering something like this for money, I also felt some nervousness, and had quite a few things I wanted to go over before the games began. We ate slowly and gratefully, and the nourishing food grounded me further, helped me to feel even more clear and present. After eating, Lily and I began to talk about the evening. We went through the upcoming night in order, and I shared insights and ideas that had come up for me during the trial run that we had done a week ago here at Earthaven. I mentioned things that I'd like to do differently this time, and she offered feedback and questions. Having her as a support person was very valuable, and her feedback and questions helped me to feel prepared for the event.

Key Learning:
Having a support person
makes all the difference

We arrived at the building and set up the space, organizing chairs and setting out the cake I had bought to celebrate the opening night. Once everything was set up, I sat down on the couch to wait for the participants. As I waited, I sat in quasi-meditation, calming my mind and getting into the space for leading the games. It was just like the moment before going on stage for a performance, that magical space where everything has been prepared and thought about as much as it can be, and all you can do is clear your mind and wait. At 7:45, the time we had intended to start the games, our first participant had just arrived. Lily and I had gone over what I would do if only two or three people showed up, and I had reassured myself that I could still create an engaging and meaningful experience even if there were only two or three people. So I was prepared for that. I felt a twinge of disappointment that not many people were showing up, and at the same time I was not attached to it. I had accepted that this might be a small gathering, and I was ready to make the most of it. Two more people I didn't know showed up, as well as my friend Allison, and we decided to start the evening.

Key Learning:
When there is
nothing
left to do,
Do nothing

I started the games with an eye gazing exercise, encouraging the participants to be present with their own feelings as they looked into their partner's eyes, and share those feelings with their partner using their body language and facial expressions. We did a few moments of shareback after the exercise, and people talked about how surprisingly difficult it was, and also how good it felt. Next, I gave a brief explanation of what the games are for and why I offer this work, and then we began the games. I felt mostly at ease and in my power, and the evening seemed to flow nicely.

The most exciting part of the evening for me was during the game called Hot Seat, in which one person sits on a chair in the front of the room and all the other participants get to ask them questions. My friend Allison was on the seat, and she was clearly a little nervous. She had said during an earlier game that her heart was pounding, and Lily asked her why. She replied that she knew two of the three other people in the room, a married couple named Kevin and Jeannie, and that she hadn't spoken to them in months because of a conflict that they had had. I asked her what she felt in her body when she looked at Kevin, and she said "anger". The room was suddenly electrified and intense. Everyone was on the edge of their seat. We had reached that place of vulnerability and possibility that make the games so exciting for me. We had hit a nerve. Soon, however, questions trailed off into safer material,

and that feeling of intense aliveness was gone, at least for me. Even so, something really alive had come out, and it had changed the energy between these three people, shifting something that had been stagnating and brewing for months.

The rest of the games went well, although for me that moment was the peak of the excitement and juicy potential of the evening. After the games ended, I gave my pitch for my one on one support services, offering my listening and compassionate, constructive feedback and guidance, and formally ended the evening. After I closed the container, however, I turned to Allison and Kevin and Jeannie. “It seemed as though the three of you opened up something really alive,” I offered “do you feel like you would like to get some closure on that before you leave here?” They all said that they would, and we sat down to talk, me placing myself on the floor halfway between Allison and Kevin to act as a facilitator. With only a small amount of guidance from me, they worked through their conflict, expressing what needed to be expressed in order for them to move on. I felt honored to witness their conflict, but very unsure of how I could contribute. Fortunately, they were able to get to a place of resolution without much guidance from me.

Overall, the first Games Night had been a complete success, despite its low attendance. Everybody seemed engaged throughout, and had very positive feedback about their experience. And, I made just enough money at the door to cover the cost of the cake.

Key Learning:
Follow the aliveness,
guide the group towards
that which is most alive



Next Steps

What are my next steps for this project? Where will I put my energy over the winter?

- Vision and dream, alone and with Lily
 - What do I want Intima to become? What does wild, unreasonable success look like?
- Business plan for the spring
 - What will the business look like? What are its needs and offerings? Include plans for marketing, offerings, new games, and other classes/events.
- Sustain the roots of Intima, keep it alive through winter
 - How do I attract enough interest to keep the business alive, and still follow the season and have space in my life to turn inward and dream?

Output Process Reflections

This was the most pleasant, efficient, and graceful output packet creation process I have had so far. In all, I spent approximately thirty hours on this output, and thoroughly enjoyed about twenty five of those thirty hours. Having designed for simplicity and ease of creation, I was able to put my energy into quality content rather than spending many hours trying to figure out how to arrange everything and format it nicely. I finished the output with two whole weeks in which to review and make changes, and I feel satisfied and accomplished.

This output process was also very educational for me. I learned a lot about myself in the writing process, particularly when synthesizing the key learnings and in the creation of my skillflex reassessment, which you can find in the Appendices.