

Sea Change Design
Case StudySM

Lauralee Alben
Alben Design LLC

**Designing Lives
Worth Living**

Dr. Riane Eisler



The problem is not “human nature.” It is not science and technology. The problem is that the domination system leads to imbalanced relations with ourselves, our planet, and those with whom we share the planet.

Viewing our challenges from **the perspective of partnership** is the first step. By expanding our awareness and helping expand that of others, we begin the long journey home to the kind of society we need to survive and thrive.

*Riane Eisler, excerpted from *The Power of Partnership**

Summoning Sea Changes

Our world is in the midst of a turbulent transition so great that no one and no thing will remain unchanged. This is the era of sea changes, as Shakespeare first described, both rich and strange. What sets this moment in history apart is that human beings have evolved sufficiently to actually design how this saga turns out, if we choose to do so.

Some people say they know nothing about design, let alone designing change on a global scale. My response is simply this: Design is our birthright. It is as much a basic human activity as breathing. The difference is we must use design consciously to realize its full potential.

Design is the conscious planning of meaningful acts that influence our relationship to ourselves, each other, those yet unborn, the sacred, and the web of life.

We can choose to design climate change and an end to extreme poverty. Or peace in our lifetime. Or, we can choose to design a life-sustaining world, as Riane Eisler is doing, a partnership world instead of one based on domination. (We wouldn't be the first civilization to do so.)

Design no longer just applies to the well-defined domain of products, services, and systems. It is a continuum from artifacts to ways of being to shifts in consciousness, from the most intimate conversation to international conflict resolution. While we definitely need to design sustainable consumer products, we desperately need to design businesses with triple bottom lines and a shift to a global consciousness—if this “blue marble” is to continue on its evolutionary path around the sun with human beings on board.

As we stand poised at this precarious moment in our precious existence, together we can design a future worth inheriting. What we need are more leaders like Riane Eisler, to show us how. Hopefully, that's what this Sea Change Design Case Study will inspire you to do too—in your life, your organizations, and in the world.

Lauralee Alben

Overview

Sea Change Design Case Studies feature individuals who have manifested positive, profound, and lasting change. Typically these are ordinary people who take extraordinary leaps of courage to design lives of integrity, innovative work, and sustainable legacies. These aspects, when taken together, depict lives worth living.

Each case study answers these three questions:
In your life, what is the source of your creative inspiration?
What creative acts define your work?
How is your legacy evolving our world?

Each life is examined through a design story and the discerning lens of the Sea Change Design ProcessSM. This holistic, integral approach provides insights, ideas, and information about how we can extend the power of design into everyday human activities, illuminating the hidden realms of the intellect, heart, and soul. While this process is typically used to proactively direct a life or a calling, it can also be used, as in this case, to reflect upon and surface the often hidden and surprising patterns that reveal a life design.

Integrated throughout this case study are answers to the five questions at the heart of a well designed life: What is an intentional life? A whole, coherent life? A life congruent in body, mind, heart, and spirit? An interconnected life? A meaningful life?



humanitarian
mother
macrohistorian
passionate activist
best-selling author
loving revolutionary
beloved wife
attorney
grandmother
goddess
inspired leader
social scientist
practical visionary

Dr. Riane Eisler

This design case study features the life, work, and legacy of Dr. Riane Eisler, best known for her ground-breaking book, *The Chalice and the Blade*. Riane is a person some call an inspired thinker, and others title a practical visionary and a loving revolutionary. All bestow accolades upon this remarkable woman who has dedicated her lifetime to uniting both halves of our humanity into a partnership society.

When someone like Riane creates a systemic approach to change that, by its very nature is an intrinsic, integral part of every aspect of our world, it is often difficult to grasp the magnitude of the actual and potential impact. Yet Riane's Cultural Transformation Theory and her partnership and dominator systems are so much more than abstract concepts today. The ripple effect of her books alone (printed in more than 25 languages) influences everything from economics, education, and the environment to women and children's rights, peace, and governmental policies. The results flow on and on while rectifying history, reclaiming the present, and inspiring the future.

Much like a prism can refract its spectral colors, the partnership system reveals an interconnected web of respectful relationships, from the most intimate (the self) to the infinite (the sacred) and incorporates healthy families, just and equitable communities, and a sustainable planet. In contrast, looking at the world from the perspective of the domination system suddenly explains all the depressing newspaper headlines, every corporate boardroom power struggle, each geo-political disaster, and even personal tragedies.

Riane writes in her latest book, *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics*, "Imagine a world where economic systems are what they should and can be: means to meet human needs and aspirations. ...A caring revolution is a sea change. It is the cumulative effect of all the ripples flowing from giving visibility and value to the most important human work: the work of caring and caregiving."

The choice is ours. Riane's life intention has never wavered, and lucky for us, neither has her belief in humanity.

El Encanto The Enchantment

It was a stunningly serene day and the sweet scent of jasmine hung in the air as I pushed the heavy wooden gate open into the courtyard of Riane Eisler's mission-style house in Carmel where she lives with her husband, David Loye. Massive California oaks stood sentinel, their ancient limbs creating sanctuary, their green canopy offering shelter. Splashes of purple agapanthas, strikingly red geraniums, and riotous rainbows of rose bushes flourished.

Inside, carefully arranged bouquets enlivened every room. As Riane and I sat ensconced in her spacious living room I wondered who this gracious and gutsy woman really was, this person who has inspired generations of women and men, beginning with her groundbreaking book, *The Chalice and The Blade* in 1987. How had she designed her life? I had three questions for her and she, intrigued, had agreed to answer them. But I had not anticipated how she would alternate between succinct, inspiring sound bites and achingly honest stories. I had not foreseen the lasting impact of the questions she posed in return.

As she spoke of unspeakable experiences, I could not reconcile the sepia-toned family photographs with others of burning buildings and broken glass. I could not imagine the shattering of Riane's security by a world gone insane. In one photo, a darling baby is bundled up in a knitted hat tied with a giant bow under her chin, in another a little girl in round glasses wearing a pretty, flowered dress with a white collar, ankle socks and patent leather shoes, looks directly into the camera, smiling sweetly.

"We survived Kristallnacht and lost everything," Riane continued, looking at me with that same clear gaze. "I saw my father dragged away by the Gestapo. My mother insisted he be released and eventually she got a safe conduct for him, a piece of paper that we had to show at the door again and again. Eventually we got out. She saved our lives. And that's a powerful thing. I call that spiritual courage, to stand up for what is right out of love. Not the courage to kill the enemy, which is the way we depict courage in a domination system. My mother wasn't slaying dragons. She wasn't killing anything.



The infinite source of creative inspiration

"Life was not always so secure," she said slowly. "It took me a long time to design my life. I did it with passion, inspiration and desperation. When I was seven, I fled from the Nazis to Cuba with my parents. From that time on, I have asked why is there so much cruelty, insensitivity, and destruction in our world? The questions that animate my life are questions about being hunted. And having to flee. Why is domination so prevalent instead of partnership, when we humans have such a great capacity for caring, consciousness, and creativity?"

Unearthing photos from albums on the bookshelf, and others from various boxes and drawers, the wounded child, the lawyer, the activist, the matriarch, the creatrix all surfaced as Riane revealed her life to me.

She was just saving a life that she loved. And yes, risking her own." I thought of a passage from *The Chalice and the Blade*, where Riane quotes the Greek poet Sappha of Lesbos, "...some say calvary and others claim infantry or a fleet of long oars is the supreme sight on the black earth. I say it is the one you love."

"So, Riane, "I prompted, "What then is the source of your creative inspiration?"

"My spiritual courage is like my mother's. My source is love." Riane answered simply. "I think of it both as the need to give love and to receive love, which is so basic. I call it caring. Because caring is more operational. It's not only a feeling. It's an action."



The worthwhile work of caring

"After we left my Vienna, we escaped to the slums of Cuba with my parents. I was very lost in Cuba. I was really terrified. Somehow, my parents were good people, but they never talked to me about the realities of my life, of our lives. I was a kid who looked different than the others, spoke a different language, was made fun of. It was very difficult. It hurt.

"I remember one day, I stood in front of a restaurant where American tourists used to go. It was called El Encanto, "The Enchantment." It had windows, big, big, windows where I could see the people inside. And on this day, there was a really beautiful woman sitting at the window having dinner. I looked at her and I saw that I really wanted to be her instead of me, this little kid on the outside. She looked so safe and beautiful and I wasn't.

"Many, many years later I was in Baja California in a restaurant where I was eating at a table by a window. All of a sudden I looked up and there was a little girl looking in at me. And I so wanted to run out and hug her and tell her, It's OK, it's going to be fine. But I didn't run out. I wish I had."

"She was a mirror of your past," I mused.

"Yes, she was a gift. I have been given a good life. A life of purpose—to bring forth energy and ideas that can move us into an authentically caring world. My work is about reclaiming caring. Not just in rhetoric, but in ways that put food on the table and roof over our heads. You can solve the problem of poverty, which is mostly the poverty of women and their children, if you have an economic system that gives training for caring, pensions for caring, and support for caring. It's what I call caring economics in my new book, "The Real Wealth of Nations."

"What will it take for us to care again?" I asked.

"Caring is associated with women and the feminine. What it will take is to give higher value to women and the feminine so that men can embrace it. Because who wants to be identified with something that's inferior? The dynamic has to do with gender."

I stared at Riane, thunderstruck. Who wants to be identified with something that's inferior? I'd spent my whole life proving I wasn't less than any man, but never had I experienced hearing the hard truth said aloud, by someone I so deeply respected.

Understanding my pain, Riane continued, "If you want to create a systemic change, you must rebuild the foundations of the primary intimate relations, of man and woman, parent and child. We need gender-balanced families where children are treated with respect so they can learn respect rather than fear and submission to authority."

Riane followed my gaze to a beautiful African painting on her wall. "I bought that in a restaurant in Nairobi where David and I were having lunch. It summed up for me the U.N. Women's Conference we had just attended. It spoke to me, reminding me that we must persevere, no matter what obstacles, in our struggles to change traditions that have caused so much suffering to women and children." I stared at the swift, sure strokes that brought to life the dark-skinned mother sitting on the soft earth, her legs stretched out providing a cradle for her baby. Soft sunlight falls on her breast, which it seems, her child has just nuzzled within the sanctuary of her arms. The mother looks down at her little one, the child gazes out at the world. "Look," Riane urged, "it has such a positive feeling. There is so much love and strength in it."

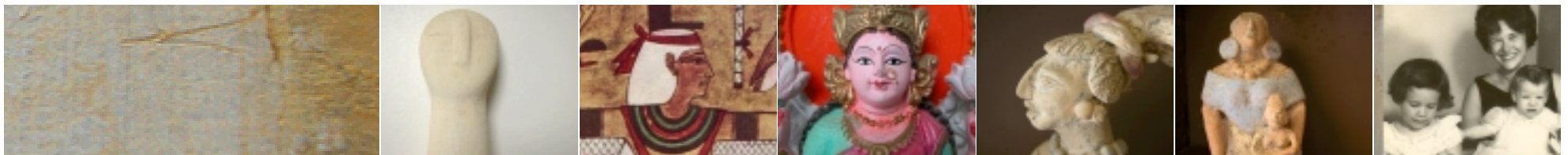
"And caring," I said, smiling.

"Yes, Riane said simply. "And there you have the answer to your second question, 'What creative acts define my work?' My work is really all about redesigning relationships."

"In all my research, writing, speaking, and activism, I have focused on power, sex, and money. In my first book, *The Chalice and the Blade*, I researched the two very different ways of exercising power. Both the chalice and the virgin are symbols of the "feminine" power to create and nurture. And both the blade and the dynamo are "masculine" symbols of insensate, destructive technology. One survives by domination and destruction, the other cultivates the life-sustaining capacity of all human beings to live in partnership and peace."

“For four thousand years partnership societies flourished, fostering technological process in pottery making, weaving, crafts, metallurgy, engraving, architecture, and trade—beginning with the domestication of plants and animals. Without this ‘most fundamental of all material technologies’, scientist Nancy Tanner asserts, in concert with many scholars of today, civilization could not have evolved. She says that it is also more than likely that women invented this. An alternative evolutionary model proposed by eminent anthropologists today also asserts that the first human-made artifacts were not weapons. Rather, they were containers to carry food (and infants) as well as tools used by mothers to soften plant food for their children, who need both mother’s milk and solids to survive.”

On Riane’s table lay a book, *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community* by her friend and author, David Korten. She picked it up and turned to a place she had marked, so pleased that she had been credited as a cultural historian who had profoundly influenced him. She read aloud:



“... In her classic work, *The Chalice and the Blade*, Eisler placed the conflict between dominator and partnership models of organization in deep historical context and brought to bear the lens of gender analysis to illuminate the deeper roots of our contemporary political struggles for justice, peace, and environmental stewardship. By her reckoning, the repression of creative potential I had been witnessing for more than thirty years has been playing out for some five thousand years at every level of human organization, from relations among states to relations among family members. She traced the tragedy to the subordination of the feminine to the [stereotypically] masculine and the organizing principle of partnership to the organizing principle of domination.”

“Five thousand years of creative repression,” I echoed incredulously. “Riane, what keeps you from feeling hopeless and alienated, given all that you have experienced, researched and learned?”

“Knowing that it hasn’t always been like it is now,” she paused. “The problem isn’t human nature. It isn’t science or technology either. The problem is that the domination system leads to imbalanced relationships with ourselves, our planet, and those with whom we share the planet. Viewing our challenges from a partnership perspective is the first step. By expanding our awareness and helping expand that of others, we begin the long journey home to a kind of society we need to survive and thrive.”

“In my work as a macrohistorian, I have restored what has been deleted from the study of history and society. For more than five thousand years, one half of humanity—women—has been missing.” She picked up another book, *Macrohistory and Macrohistorians: Perspectives on Individual, Social, and Civilizational Change* by Johan Galtung and Sohail Inayatullah. She explained, “in this book of twenty eminent cultural historians, from St. Augustine and Ssu-Ma Ch’ien to Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and Arnold Toynbee, not one took into account the fact that humanity consists of two halves: male and female. As Galtung writes,

‘these are all macrohistories produced by men, and to a major extent for men.’

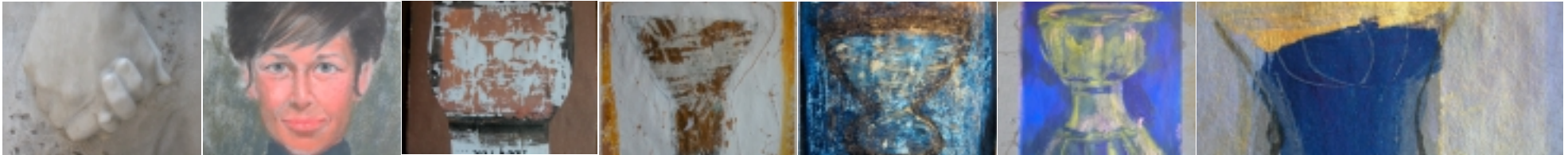
Riane continued, “In my macrohistorical theory, I propose that to better understand the patterns of history we look at the intersection of two key movements: technological phase changes like the introduction of agricultural and then industrial technologies, and cultural shifts between the partnership and domination systems—shifts in which the construction of gender roles and relations plays a major part.”

She turned back to Galtung’s book: “For Eisler, the contrast is not between a patriarchy (suppressing so much of the life-sustaining capacity of human beings and not only the women) and matriarchy, but between patriarchy and a gynanic world of partnership where humanity can express itself fully as enlightened peaceful humans.”

The Goddess legacy

As I listened, my eyes focused on the small goddess figures that grace so many of Riane's shelves. In every room there are tapestries and vases and paintings depicting a partnership world. Some are reproductions, like the Venus of Willendorf and some are contemporary creations.

I recalled reading in *The Chalice and the Blade* the spellbinding history in which Riane explains how the Goddess appears to have been worshipped in all ancient agricultural societies—giving birth and nourishment just like the earth does—in three main centers in which agriculture originated, Asia minor and southeastern Europe, Thailand in Southeast Asia, and later on in Middle America.



Many religious myths explicitly attribute the invention of agriculture to the Goddess, like Isis in Egyptian records and Ninlil in Mesopotamian tablets. As far back as c. 5600 in Catal Huyuk to the classical Greek times of the Goddesses Demeter and Hera who were revered for their wisdom, guidance, and justice, from the worshipping of Cerridwen, the Goddess of intelligence and knowledge by the Celts to the medieval Christian Goddess, the merciful Madonna, femininity was associated with the sacred.

I picked an English copy of *The Chalice and the Blade* from the stack on Riane's coffee table from versions printed in languages from Arabic to Swedish, 22 to be exact.

The book fell open to passage: "...this theme of the unity of all things in nature, as personified by the Goddess, seems to permeate Neolithic art. For here the supreme power governing the universe is a divine Mother who gives her people life, provides them with material and spiritual nurturance, and who even in death can be counted on to take her children back into her cosmic womb."

I was silent for a moment, letting in the wonder that Riane writes about. I remembered the many beautiful gifts she has been given from

men and women from all over the world in gratitude for her words and wisdom. One stood out, a precious book of art, called *Songs for Riane*. Riane offered it to me. "Isn't this lovely?" she asked.

Turning page after hand-made page of chalices painted with vibrant brush strokes thick with pigments of gold, blue, and vibrant red, I came upon a telling dialog between the artist, Barbara Schaefer, and a friend:

"When Tico asked me "Perchi dai tutto questo a lei?" Why do you give her all this?

I said, "Perche i una guida per me." She is a mentor to me.

"Cosa significa veramente?" What does that really mean?" he asked.

"E come avevo incontrato la dea and l'immagine di lei tiffessa a me. Come fosse, io la stessa." It is like meeting the Goddess herself and having the same image mirrored back to you, I replied."

Understanding perfectly, I remembered Riane placing her hands on my shoulders as we stood in her kitchen discussing some of the daunting personal challenges I was facing. She looked me directly in the eyes and said, "I want you to know, Dear, it is going to be fine."

I knew Riane's words were not spoken lightly to comfort me. She, of all people, was well versed in the knowledge that spiritual vision had long been seen as the gift of women, of Goddesses who were revered for their wisdom, mystic insights, and creativity. Riane, like the ancient weavers and spinners of cloth in most ancient mythologies, carries forward the legacy of the "female deities who, like the Greek Fates, are still said to spin the destinies of "men." Riane's warp is partnership, her weft the world, and the fabric she weaves wholeness.

Seeing myself mirrored in the eyes of this modern day Goddess, I recognized in a flash, that my turn would come, when one day, a younger woman would look at me, and long to be me. And I would take her in my arms and know exactly what to say. And so the circle completed that began so long ago in Havana at the restaurant called El Encanto.

Riane spoke, waking me from my reverie. “You know, from the earliest neolithic societies to classical Greek times we have found Goddess figures with their arms raised in reverent blessing in the spirit of harmony between women and men as joyful and equal participants in life.

“And that is my legacy is one word—Life.”

Riane fell silent and thoughtful, tired from a long summer afternoon of storytelling. She studied the bouquet of crimson and coral and white roses from her garden.

“That one rose is really amazing,” she mused. “It’s like a mystery. The whole world is a rose.”

Later that day, I researched the history and folklore of the rose, discovering with delight in Gabriele Tergit’s book, *Flowers Through the Ages*, that “the rose was dedicated to the goddess of love, that is, to the eternal mystery of the continuity of life.”

Still later that evening, I checked my email and found the book of poems that David had written for Riane, called *1001 Days of Love*. He wrote this poem for his beloved on May 25, 1996.

A Single Rose

A single rose knows
what roses bunched
together however beautiful
cannot tell so well.

It is that love,
while multiple, has
a single voice at those times
when out of crisis
relief comes.

Such a rose I give to
you, now, today, at this
healing time after fear
beyond contemplation,
grateful that you
are here to receive it
and I to give it.

My legacy is life.



What must it be like, I wondered, to be so blessed by a man who twenty years ago put aside his own pioneering work as a social scientist to embrace what he terms his life’s calling—to support Riane in publishing her world-changing books, and to provide her with the sanctuary she needed so desperately.

I remembered Riane telling me, “David is my best friend, my husband, my home.”

Riane’s legacy, I realized as tears suddenly filled my eyes, is far beyond making a case for caring economics or persuading this violence-torn world to embrace partnership and peace. Riane has spent a lifetime creating the foundation for a future we can all call Home.

The Sea Change Design Process

In the following pages, you will find excerpts from the Sea Change Design Process illuminating the depth and breadth of Riane's life, work, and legacy.

Living an intentional life

Every life, when lived within a question big enough to constantly challenge and inspire, has a compelling clarity of direction and diversity of answers. Likewise, the way one manifest one's life's work, or calling, can also formed into a question. These two intentions are like stones cast consciously into the ocean, and give a design to the ripple effect of one's life, work, and legacy.

Living a whole, congruent life

To live a life of integrity means to be whole within oneself, to be whole (complete), sound (unimpaired) and to adhere to a moral, ethical, or artistic code. In this process, this last refers to adhering to one's life intention.

Diving into the depths of one's being, encourages awareness and alignment of all four levels: physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual. Then one can be consistent in actions, thoughts, feelings, and being. This process is calling Fathoming and results in a Deep Synthesis. Fathoming can also be done in relationship to other people.

Surface Ripple Map

Riane's Life Design

Life Intention

How can I help humanity express our enormous capacities for caring, creativity, and consciousness?

Calling Intention

How can I identify the essential foundations for a partnership world and inspire leaders to build it?

Riane Eisler

Physical

"In my research, writing, speaking, and activism, I have focused on power, sex, and money. My work is really all about redesigning relationships."

Riane Eisler



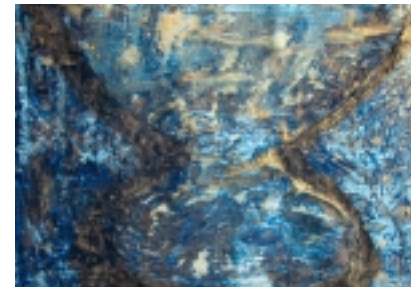
"Breaking new ground, with keen insight and brilliance, Eisler charts the journey to freedom and well-being."

bell hooks

Cognitive

"Partnership is a commitment to a way of living...based on harmony with nature, nonviolence, and gender, racial, and economic equity. It takes us... to a future of flourishing untapped human potential."

Riane Eisler



"Riane Eisler has always been a revolutionary who has forced us to confront our conventional conceptions with unconventional thought."

William F. Schultz

Emotional

"My source is love."

Riane Eisler



"Riane Eisler speaks from the heart showing us how we can make a better world for our children and our children's children."

Joan Blades

Spiritual

"We need a caring revolution."

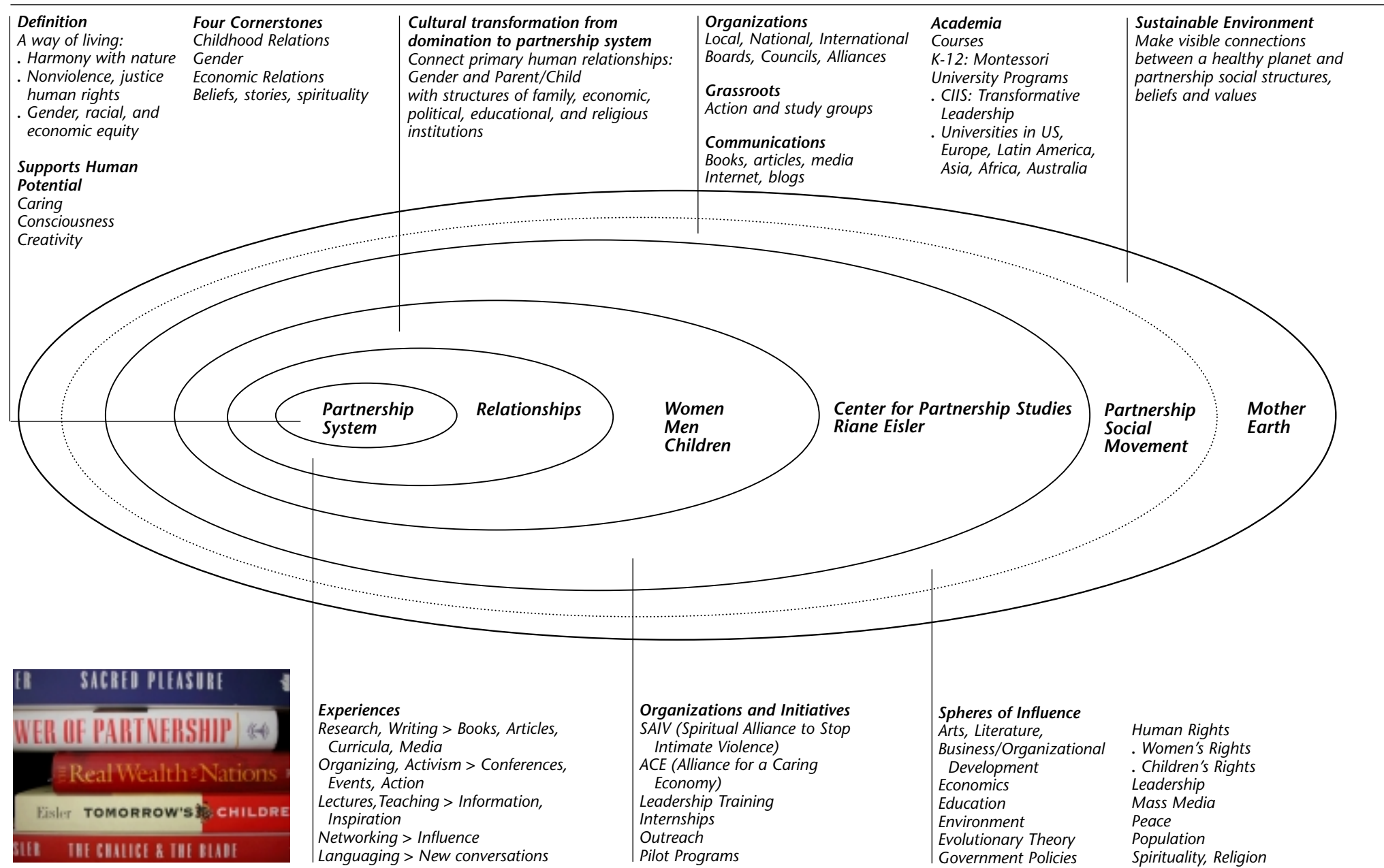
Riane Eisler



"It's like meeting the Goddess herself and having the same image mirrored back to you."

Barbara Schaefer

Riane Eisler: Center for Partnership Studies



From: eisler@partnershipway.org
Subject: Re: Your design story
Date: February 11, 2007 7:22:45 PM PST
To: lauralee@albendesign.com

My Dearest Lauralee:

It is beautiful, so beautiful, and I thank you so very much! I want to cry, because it brings back so much of my life, including my failings and thus the sense that I should not be so lauded. But then I tell myself that this is what women have been taught, to feel we don't deserve. And then I think, it is all right, it is not only for me, it is for all of us, and like everyone, I deserve to feel happy and grateful, and yes, thankful for my accomplishments and my capacity to move others and empower them in turn.

Bless you my dear for this wonderful gift of love you have crafted, for me and for all the women and men that your work touches so deeply. Thank you so much again! Let us continue to design our interwoven future together.

with love, Riane

From: lauralee@albendesign.com
Subject: Re: Your design story
Date: February 11, 2007 9:11:32 PM PST
To: eisler@partnershipway.org

My dearest Riane,

I am overjoyed that you find my homage to you beautiful. If, within it you find core truths about your vulnerability and authenticity, then all the better. Even Goddesses have room to grow. Yes, you deserve to be happy and grateful for yourself and your life. Show us how to celebrate our strength, show us self compassion and self-caring. I am pleased that I was able to provide you a mirror to see your own divinity and yes, your endearing humanity too. I reflect only what, in your heart, you know needs to be seen. And in the end, the whole story is really one great love story—of the partnership you and David share—and of the love affair you have with life itself and this precious world.

Yes, dear heart, "Let us continue to design our interwoven future together."

Much love, Lauralee

Acknowledgements

References

Resources

Center for Partnership Studies
SAIV: Spiritual Alliance to Stop Intimate Violence
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