

## THE THERAPEUTIC WOMB SPACE

### A feminine approach to psychotherapy and embodied transformation

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This is the beginning:

One egg is released from the ovaries and in an arch-like movement enters the fallopian tube. Here it travels womb-ward and meets the sperm which has made it all the way and which got there first. The sperm penetrates the egg's permeable membrane and loses its tail while its head releases its genetic content. The egg immediately seals its fertilised cell and starts dividing and multiplying whilst continuing its travels further down the fallopian tube. It actively makes its path through the nourishing lining and eventually drops into the womb. Here, it searches the territory for a well suited place to burrow into and merge with the lining of the womb – a process which eventually leads to the formation of the foetus, umbilical cord and placenta. This takes about twelve weeks after which the pregnancy is pretty sure to last.

This is the beginning:

*I am your client and you are my therapist. I get out of my chair and kneel on the rug in the middle of the therapy space. I close my eyes. I sense a tingling in my toes, they want to move, are itching to go. I allow my toes to lead the way. My feet push forward, the right one further and further until it slips off the edge of my rug, slides over the floor space between my rug and your rug and eventually pushes over the edge of the rug on which you sit on your chair. The surface of your rug feels warm and soft, and I have a sense of arrival. I come to rest with my whole body, stretch out and lie down. I feel as if I have reached 'the other continent' as well as a place of nourishment. After a little while I start moving again in the direction of where I came from. My eyes are closed but I am aware of your presence at a distance and above me. Knowing that you are facing me makes me aware of my own warm and soft face. It feels sensual, like lying in the sun. As I sit up to open my eyes I briefly turn away to compose myself before facing you and returning to my chair after what has felt like an intimate experience. When I leave the room at the end of the session I feel pregnant: pregnant with potential.*

This is the beginning:

*You are my client and I am your therapist. I hear you say that you would like to start today in the place on the floor where I often sit when I witness you move. "I want to step into a more authentic way of relating to you", you say. I feel my own body respond with a brief tingling in my vagina. I stay in my chair and see you stepping into 'my space'. I notice that I am holding my hands cupped over the place of my womb and I sense an inner gentle pressure at the*

*entrance of my uterus. After a while I see your hands shaping a growing space in front of you. "An egg", you say. I see you place your hands on the floor behind you and hear you speak about your sense of a wall in front of you which doesn't leave you much space to breathe. You reach through it and say it opens to a dark space. Slowly, you enter what you describe as a long, narrow, dirty and wet tunnel. I see you inching forward on your front, the sides of your body in contact with the wall. You speak of your body becoming fluid and liquid, melting into the ground. I see you breathing onto the floor, leaving a small moist patch on the wood. "I was completely in it", you say afterwards, and report a sense of excitement and aliveness throughout the week that followed this session.*

There are more beginnings, many more. Some come before, some follow. Each of them carries a resonance with our original beginning in the body, our own body and our mother's body, both intimately connected. Sometimes the resonance is like a vague echo from a very distant time perceived through other layers of more recent history. Sometimes the resonance is immediate and experienced with clarity. This is true for me and for you, and when we work together as client and as therapist each new beginning in the therapeutic process offers a chance to drop deeper into the mysteries of our incarnate being, a being that is essentially and necessarily a being in relationship.

Regardless of whether we are woman or man, for each of us the original experience of becoming a human bodily being was in relationship with the female body. The body of a woman in whose womb we grew and whose womb grew with us. The body of a woman with her own personality, history, habits and dreams. The body of a woman within her particular natural, social, economic, political and cultural environment. Unfortunately, for a long time in Western patriarchal history, much of this body has been forgotten, dominated, controlled, demonised, infantilised, objectified and abused. Fortunately, times have changed. Women have challenged their roles and changed their lives and continue to do so. Women and men are changing their relationships, too. Much change is still needed, however, to heal our relationship with the female body and to give birth to ourselves as whole beings in body and soul.

## **OUT-OF-BODY PREGNANCY**

Giving birth to one's true self and becoming a whole being – this has been a cornerstone of psychotherapy for a long time, particularly under the influence of C.G. Jung and those who have developed his work further. The notion of relationship and psychic exchange between client and therapist is not new, either. Nor is the womb as a symbol for the therapeutic container in which transformation can take place. The latter, however, is not much developed and rarely taken into account in its tangible reality. Instead, much Jungian literature on transformation centres on the meeting of masculine and feminine aspects of our being through the process of coinunctio, a psychic sort of intercourse which leads to the renewal and rebirth of the soul, seemingly forgetting that in real terms the sexual act might be the job done for the man, for the woman, however, the creation of new life only starts then and takes place through a lengthy and complex process of pregnancy and giving birth. Whilst this dimension is not ignored in Jungian literature the formation, maturation and coming-into-this world of new life is often conceptually lifted from the female body. In some alchemical imagery, for example, the soul leaves the post-coital bodies to rise to heaven for

purification only to drop back down into the body briefly before being magically born into standing (or rather floating above the world) as a united and whole being.

This out-of-body pregnancy (and caesarean section-like birth) is also present in the well-known symbol of the cocoon or chrysalis. In Jungian symbolism the caterpillar-like soul enters the chrysalis in order to spend some secluded, protected, inner-directed and transformative time and emerges eventually newly-born in the form of a beautiful butterfly. Again, we are in the presence of an air born and ascending creature, light and beautiful but silent, pretty fragile and short-lived, too. The chrysalis and the butterfly are far removed from the fleshy and clearly female container of the womb as well as the powerful, painful, often messy, ecstatic and noisy process of natural human birth. As if re-birth necessarily means that we have to transcend and remove ourselves from our original physicality and must not also (and most urgently!) descend and re-insert ourselves into our original ground so that we become and stay a connected being.

### **THE EMBODIED WOMB SPACE**

The aim of this paper is to put the process of psychotherapy and transformation back into the human body, more specifically into the womb of the female body, so that a way of working can be born that enables us to get and stay in touch with our soulfully embodied being. Within the context of our beginnings in the womb, the female body is not only 'the other' but also very much 'my own': the body from the inside, the soft body, the forming and vulnerable body, the body sensitive to inner states and outer influences, the cyclical body, the rhythmic body, the sensual body, the body that takes in and gives out. Above all: the body that always changes.

To consider the body has recently become very fashionable in psychotherapy and is frequently celebrated as the latest and most profound road to insight and understanding of 'what is going on'. Very easily the excitement becomes similar to the one about the latest gadget or a new tool within one's practice: the body that tells us how it is; the body that we can feel, touch, look at and analyse; the body whose language we can translate and thereby understand. This is bringing the body into psychotherapy as yet another object in the room.

Unfortunately, even in the emergent field of prenatal and birth psychology which puts the world of the womb centre-stage in associated practices such as primal therapy, re-birthing, and birth process work the tendency can at times be also one of objectifying the body. In this context, the womb is approached as a particular setting, a store hold of very early, intra-uterine and character-shaping trauma which can be read, mapped out and unlocked in collaboration with the skilful practitioner. In such undertaking, the womb becomes an environment of the past and often stands for the trauma-causing mother whose imprint needs to be recognised and neutralised. Moreover the womb becomes a clearly delineated territory with specific zones and dynamics of danger and (if lucky) bliss. Engagement with such a womb and associated experiences can become controlling through coded language and particular forms of handling and runs the risk to, once again, reduce, objectify and vilify the female body and female being. Whilst I draw heavily on the insights of prenatal and birth psychology and have myself gained and continue to gain invaluable experiences through birth process work I at the same time resist any definite and 'objective' mapping of the womb space and its reading in terms of past and trauma only. Instead I favour a concept which allows for the

unknown and unexpected and, at the same time as exploring past trauma, for an experience of the gifts and power of the womb and body as lived by woman in the here and now.

I have worked from within my body and with sensitivity towards the bodily presence of my clients for many years and I cannot tell you: this means this and that means that, and this is how you do it. My experience is rather one of immersing myself in the world of the body as a current of life which has often gone underground and is mindlessly being trodden on in our rational and goal-driven culture. By sinking into the world of the body I become alive to what has gone numb, is badly hurt or even killed off. I also step into pools of experiencing which are rich in nourishment long forgotten or never known. By allowing my body to sense and move without my conscious direction and control I unfold and enter my own story as a being incarnate. I become immersed in a world in which I am also in relationship with other beings incarnate. Here, whatever is happening to you is also happening to me, although we might respond quite differently.

Bringing psychotherapy and transformation into the body rather than the body into psychotherapy means a complete change of scene. In the context of our long history of male-dominated Western culture in general and male-dominated evolution of psychotherapy in particular (and this includes above mentioned practices based on pre- and perinatal awareness) this other scene is necessarily feminine. Not because it is the only way to be, but because it is the way that has barely been (for a very long time). In the context of the work presented here I understand the feminine as a principle of being which rises from the biological ground of the female body, is shaped through human interaction, and lives as cultural norms, social behaviour and psychological tendencies in and through each member of society. As the feminine has had and still has a rather stifled life in our society I am hesitant to describe it in terms of distinct features. I believe it needs to be deeply experienced before it can be named without being constricted again by generalisation and stereotype. The feminine in its liberated form might still be quite unknown.

I prefer to turn to the tangible: the female ground of our existence, the womb. The womb that, as a woman, I inhabit and cultivate as home. The womb that, as a client, I inhabit and explore. The womb that, as a therapist, I inhabit and express through attention and through care. I believe that making the female body our home once again gives us a chance to recover what we have lost by giving preference to an inflated masculine in our outer and inner lives. When we dwell womb-like in our body we loosen the grip of masculine dominance in our psyche. When we grow in a bodily holding, intimate and nurturing therapeutic environment we rediscover the nature and value of the feminine within and around us. At the same time we grow to invite and inhabit a masculine which supports rather than suppresses the feminine in us. When we voice our experiences and truths gained from such reunion inside the female body we make more space for the feminine in our modern world. By choosing the womb as a tangible as well as conceptual frame for transformation in psychotherapy I therefore wish to redress an imbalance rather than ousting all things male and masculine. In fact, the masculine, its change in quality and its transformed relationship with the feminine is crucial in bringing about a womanhood which is whole in body and soul.

The therapeutic womb space presented here enables a deeply feminine way of being in-body, of being in relationship, and of attending to the process of becoming whole. In order to make this palpable I weave together moments of my experience of being in embodied relationship with several clients and with one therapist. I thereby bring together a number of stories: my own story of

feminine discovery and transformation in the presence of my therapist, a man; my women clients' stories of dropping deeper into their bodies to find their own truth and transformation in my presence as a woman therapist; my story as a witness to all these relationships as they gradually redress the balance in favour of a reborn feminine. The different moments presented in this text are not connected chronologically. Nor do they provide full insight into each person's story. I deliberately do not delineate and identify my clients' stories as belonging to one person or another, nor do I present an in-depth analysis of each individual experience, whether that is mine or that of any of the other women in this text. I do this partly for reasons of confidentiality, partly as I believe that any such analysis would be reductive. Instead I weave together the various experiences with the aim to gradually build up a sense, a picture and a frame of experiencing which I am inviting you to join.

### **ENTERING THE THERAPEUTIC WOMB SPACE**

So let me inspire you. Let me take you into the world of the body as I have come to know it as a woman and psychotherapist in the times that we both live in. It is a world that is physical and psychological at the same time, it is tangible and imaginal, explainable and in-explainable. Let me take you into the world of the pregnant body where you and I are intimately connected whilst sensing, moving, thinking, imagining, feeling and nurturing what wants to grow. This is how we wait for the time of birth.

*You are my client, I am your therapist. We are both sitting on the floor and your talking has found a pause. In this pause I see you becoming tense and moving slightly back, further away from me. You say you fear we might stay the rest of the session in silence. I suggest I join you in the silence and we both take the time to just sit and note what we sense, feel and think as time passes. A deeper silence descends. We both look onto the ground in the space between us. After a while I hear your breath deepening and at the same time I have a sense of the space around us becoming clearly delineated and containing us in a circular shape. I remember the womb you spoke about earlier in which you were waiting as a baby not wanting to be born. Once born you were met by a violent world and much of your childhood was spent in fear of being beaten.*

Going into the therapeutic womb space means starting out again. This time, however, with the consciousness and choices of an adult, in safety and in caring connection with another adult with a heightened sensitivity towards that which is subtle and bodily unfolding. In the therapeutic womb space we find ourselves in a time that passes differently, slower and in cycles. In the therapeutic womb space we find shelter from being viewed. Here, we are not seen but experienced and our final form can only be imagined. It is a time to find ourselves at our most basic and fundamental level: our cellular being. Breathing, we take in the air that we share, the air that surrounds us, the air that travels through both of us. Breathing, we take in oxygen which is brought through our blood stream to each individual cell in our body. Here, the most fundamental exchange of all takes place: the oxygen is absorbed through the permeable membrane of the cell and fuels its inner workings. As the oxygen is transformed into vital energy in the core of the cell waste gases are released through the membrane and back into the blood stream. We breathe out.

When we attend to the rhythm and movement of our breathing we are in resonance with the simple movement of the cell: growing and shrinking, growing and shrinking, growing and shrinking. As we breathe in we open ourselves to our environment to take in. As we breathe out we come back to our inner core. This basic rhythm is accelerated or decelerated depending on the stimulation or lack of stimulation in our environment. And sometimes, in life, the rhythm briefly comes to a halt, we skip a heartbeat, we feel our breath being taken away, we freeze, and we might even lose consciousness. We shrink away from what is happening as it is too unbearable to be with. If that's the case, we make sure we forget. But the workings of our cells are imprinted with this change. The knowledge of what happened cannot be fully dropped. It is stored in terms of chemical and operational changes in our cells instead. At this level, we do remember.

### **FINDING THE QUIVER OF LIFE**

It is a particular kind of remembering when we decide to drop down with our breath to a deeper and more subtle level of awareness. We begin to sense what is brimming with life within us and what is somehow dark, inaccessible, foggy, empty, numb or dead. It takes time to approach the seemingly life-less places. Your presence, waiting with me, gives me the strength to be patient and to keep moving in and down.

*I am your client, you are my therapist. I am standing quite far from where you are sitting. For today, we have agreed to an exceptional session in a larger space and with more time than the usual one hour. As I close my eyes I sense the increased space around me. I feel a little bit lost in the space. Then I hear your breathing and I root myself in the sound of your breath some distance away. Now I can find my own breath. Without thinking I slowly start turning anti-clockwise. My right foot steps around the axis of my left side. Although moving one step in front of the next I have a sense of going backwards. The right side of my body feels dense and heavy, stone-like. I am starting to accelerate, my arms are going out to the side. I am now spinning and my breathing becomes heavier, and deeper and louder. My chest is heaving and I start to sweat. It is a great physical effort and gives me a deep sense of grounding. "Like a screw driving into the ground", you say. "Driving my spirit back into my body", I later write into my journal.*

Bringing the breath of life back into those areas of our body and soul which have been left and locked in former, often traumatic times is essential in preparing the womb space as a personal and interpersonal bodily container that is strong enough to sustain any future soulful pregnancy. As we do so we come in touch with that which has gone before: the often horrifying body mass which at some point had been deemed not worth living: our disconnected, dismembered, disjointed, frozen parts. Our own lost souls which have been aborted or miscarried and are still waiting to be resurrected. As we dare to look at them we start to remember. As we dare to touch them we start to reconnect. When we dare to feel them we start returning them to life.

*You are my client, I am your therapist. We are sitting in our chairs facing each other. You speak about your concerns about your child's eating habits. You also speak of your struggles with your weight at times and how there are some parts of your body that you don't like. Your stomach is one of them, not always flat enough in your opinion. You tell me that you*

*are currently suffering from a sore stomach and have in the past been diagnosed with irritable bowel syndrome. You remember this morning standing in the shower touching and looking at your stomach which you describe as bloated. I see you briefly glancing down to your stomach now whilst you tell me that normally you would on such days sit up straight in social situations to make yourself look flatter. Right now you are sitting leaning back and I feel relaxed in my own body. We are again looking into each other's eyes and I wonder whether I can risk looking at your stomach now whilst you can see me looking at it. I briefly do and I see your hands touching your stomach gently. "I can feel how I am holding in here, holding some breath, always holding that little bit." After a while you close your eyes. I sense a deepening of breath in my own body. Your hands are now moving to the sides of your stomach and you say you remember this feeling from the time when you were pregnant with your child. "It feels soft and warm", you say. You bring your fingertips back to the centre of your stomach and open your eyes to look down: "I can see a little tremor. I can see this place where my stomach is trembling. I didn't know it was there." After a while you close your eyes again and I hear you exhale deeply. "Ah, this feels good.... It feels like life." Later, at the end of the session you mention the little tremor again: "It was as if it was crying."*

## **BIRTHING THE SCRAPS**

In my own movement explorations, my own therapy and as a therapist to others I have come to know this trembling – what I call 'the quiver of life' - as a moving through a bodily and psychic threshold, an entering into a territory which we have previously held at bay. It is the beginning of a deeper exploration which allows deadened cells to revive and energy locked in cells to be released. If allowed physically and emotionally this trembling can direct us towards and activate areas of our body which hold physical and psychic pain. It often leads to spontaneous movements that re-connect us physically and emotionally to experiences that have once been overwhelming and traumatic. Without a strong physical and therapeutic container this can be a frightening experience and possibly re-traumatising. If, however, this takes place within a therapeutic relationship that can womb-like hold our bodily being as a whole and developing being, as a being worth living in its entirety, then we in turn can consciously hold within our body the pain and actively give birth to it. This way it becomes part of life, an integrated aspect of our conscious living.

*I am your client, you are my therapist. I am standing whilst you are sitting to the side of the space. I raise my right hand, my thumb leading the movement. After a while a trembling in my hand develops into shaking. I shiver down my arm as if to bring alive again an old pain inside. I lift my left arm and hold my left hand against my shaking right hand: I want to hear. My left hand becomes a sounding board for the shaking right hand. It feels as if my left hand is the peacemaker and container whilst my right hand is raised in disdain. I step forward, backward, again and again forth and back, the energy builds up. Then I suddenly go down on all fours and I start crawling. I sense my back, the paining right side of my back, and I keep crawling, as if crawling back into my body, into the pain in my back. You see me crawling and you speak of your sense of me crawling towards and into something, as if crawling into a new space.*

*I know that I have been crawling in your presence. This gives me the courage to keep crawling when the next day my back gradually ceases up and goes into spasm until I cannot walk anymore, only crawl. It is painful, I have to cancel all my commitments and plans for the week, and when I see my contorted body in the mirror – right hip in spasm and sticking out – I cry. I go down on my knees and over the next five days I gradually learn what I have never done as a baby: crawling. As a baby I had rolled instead, delighted in rolling, until my parents were told by the paediatrician that ‘time was up’ and if I didn’t start crawling soon it might be a sign of me being ‘retarded’ and becoming ‘disabled’. My parents panicked. My father devised an exercise in which he held me up on my hips, up above the ground, and dropped me like a cat, in the hope that I might startle and stretch out my limbs to land on all fours, ready to crawl. I never did so and he always caught me just before I hit the floor. Eventually, I put an end to the torture by getting up and starting to walk, instead. I remember all this as I now crawl up and down the long corridor in front of my bedroom.*

*The next day I find myself stuck in a twisted position in bed. My back hurts so much I don’t know how to turn over. I catch myself crying out: “Oh, please, just let me roll!” Slowly I manage to roll over. I roll out of bed, onto all fours, and I resume crawling. With each length of corridor I discover something new: the way in which the two sides of my body interact to make crawling possible. How to push and how to pull with my lower and upper body in order to move forwards. How the energy in my body moves across between opposite arms and legs when I crawl smoothly and with purpose. All the while I make connections with other events in my life where I had been dropped physically or emotionally, where I had been grabbed by people and gripped by feelings. Again and again I stop, on all fours, as my breath quickens and deepens and draws firmly on my deep abdominals. Underneath I sense the tears wanting to rise. I start to shake and rock, my teeth chatter, I blow out hot air. Then I feel a channel to deep down opening, and as I touch my back the tears start breaking through. My whole body quivers and shakes in deep contraction. One more hard grip and then the release: I am birthing the deep, deep pain. After this my body is weak and shivery and I go back to bed to sleep.*

*As I wake up I write: “Rising star, my little voice, baby, tiny, delicate, miscarried. Now let me hold you here to mend what injury had been done. Gentle, gentle, with quiet hands I find you on the sill between the in and out, the here and there. I hold onto this opening’s frame. My little star, so quivery small, my voice so high-pitch-thin. I honour you, hold, treasure you and won’t abort again. Don’t leave me, my little quiver, don’t leave me my little shiver: you are my gate to my other worlds.”*

## **SLIPPING BETWEEN THE WORLDS**

Slipping between the worlds to integrate what has re-awoken - this is quite a task. In my experience, it requires many acts of birthing the scraps, of bringing forth the pain. And much sleep in-between. Sleep supports the process of physical recovery. When we rest, overworked and depleted cells can be replenished. Deadened cells can be revived. Newly stimulated cells can stabilise. When we sleep, re-activated neural and muscular pathways can be secured as knowledge from now on more readily available to us. Sleep also brings us into the realm of dreams where our deeper stirrings become felt

and visible. Falling asleep and waking up is a movement from consciousness to unconsciousness and back again to consciousness. A similar movement is at the heart of traumatic experiences which in the past had been banned to bodily and psychic unconsciousness and are now being brought back to consciousness. In my practice, I support an active experience of going to sleep and awaking from sleep as a training ground for 'slipping between the worlds'. The task at hand is to carry a deeply embedded knowing over the threshold between the worlds rather than letting it all slip one's mind. This includes careful attention to the need to sleep should it arise for my clients or myself during session. I do not believe that the urge to sleep in session is necessarily a defence against the therapeutic process but can also be a need to enter deeper states of knowing or integration. Similar to the foetus being lulled to sleep when mother is very active and waking up to activity when mother comes to rest, this particular need to sleep can be located in either client or therapist whilst being in service of the same therapeutic process at hand. This is particularly evident when I as a therapist have been feeling extremely sleepy from a particular moment in the session and suddenly feel refreshed and present again as my client starts to settle into rest and a dream-like state, possibly leading towards sleep. Sleeping during session time is something I embrace if it is held (by an awake enough therapist) and processed with consciousness.

*You are my client, I am your therapist. We are both sitting in our chairs. I see you yawning again and again as you stretch your legs and arms and close your eyes. I encourage you to allow the yawning to be part of your stretching and I see you gradually expanding your reach. Your head rolls backwards and forwards. With your upper body you arch backwards over the soft edge of the chair. Then you roll forwards between your legs towards the floor. Slowly you glide out of the chair. As I see you on all fours on the floor I suddenly start feeling very tired. Your movements are getting more energetic. I see you reaching, stretching and standing up. You move around the room, often changing directions, your arms reach into the changing spaces around you. I have an impression of restlessness and searching whilst I myself feel increasingly tired and longing for sleep. You have now come to standing in one place at the other end of the room with your back to me and facing the curtains in front of the large glass doors leading to the outside. I see you framed by the yellow curtains which are illuminated by the evening sun and in my mind I see you standing in front of a threshold. I wait. You turn around and walk into the centre of the space where you gradually come to the ground in slow movements. You yawn, lie down and close your eyes. I have a great sense of relief in my body and suddenly feel much more awake. I see you rolling on the ground and onto the mat, blanket and cushions to the side of the space. You lie still with what feels to me like a deep inner listening.*

*As I attend to your stillness I remember our sessions one year ago in which you would repeatedly sit and lie on the mat and cushions. I remember the start of your search for your deeply emotional and intuitive being some of which you felt had got lost. I remember your questions as how to find your inner self beyond your breath and heartbeat. I remember how you gradually and over a number of sessions found your sense of weight by allowing the pull of gravity, touching the fleshy and soft parts of your body, slowing down, finding pauses and finding rest on the mat and cushions. I remember you falling asleep and dreaming of many voices speaking to you. I remember you waking up with a startle and a sense of voices in the form of heat rising from your belly. And then, one day, I see you lying among the cushions in a foetal position and holding yourself. You tell me that whilst lying in that shape you have*

*the image of yourself as a foetus within yourself, within your own body. I remember how at the end of that session you were speaking of your foetus-self within and how you felt that your umbilical cord was at loose ends. I remember you sitting in front of me and gesturing into the space between us with your right arm demonstrating the movement of the un-rooted cord. I spontaneously extended my right hand towards you. You took my hand, the cord now not being up in air anymore. This was in the early days of our work together.*

*Today, I see you rise from your resting place, slowly open your eyes, close them again, then open them again. You take your time before you speak. You say how important and pleasurable it has become for you to attend to what you call 'my child inside' and to listen to your deep inner voices even if you cannot understand what they say. Heat and emotions always rise with the voices, from your stomach and from your chest. You say they help you to know how you really feel in situations when you have to make decisions. They help you stay true to yourself.*

## **CONCEIVING OF THE CHILD INSIDE**

The child inside in this context is not the same as a child-like and playful state of mind often associated with the term 'my inner child'. Nor is the process of getting in touch with 'the child inside' simply a process of regression in the sense of going back to how it was as a (unborn and born) child. From my experience, 'the child inside' within the context of embodied transformation is related to the playful child and rooted in the historical child, yet it is a distinctly new creature conceived of maturity. It is a child that bears the fruits of deep inner work undertaken. It is a child that bestows gifts upon the one who whole-heartedly and whole-bodily suffers the pain of being human and being hurt. In my own experience and that of many women I work with, one of the prime gifts of the child inside is that of voice: a voice where before there had been silence. This voice rises from deep inside and follows the channels of breath taken into the previous wastelands of body and soul, now buoyant with new life. It is full-bodied and articulates in harmony with the movements of the soul. It doesn't shy away from one's inner truths discovered on the way.

In the beginning, the voice of the child inside is not easily perceived. It first doesn't come in words. Similar to the communication between a mother and her unborn child during the early weeks of pregnancy it is an intuitive, felt understanding. It passes through the bloodstream. First a vague sense that something has changed, new sensations, ominous dreams, new feelings. Our body possibly in turmoil with sensitivities, reactions and desires unknown before. This is the beginning of our inner soulful pregnancy. Deep down we know this is a special time, but is it really true? Can it really be that our life has changed forever we just don't know yet how? For much of this early time we still keep quiet, don't dare talk much about this new life within for fear it might just disappear again. Yet, if in the quiet we listen, we listen deep into the changes we can start to hear what we so desperately want to hear: our own true nature speaking.

It is my experience that as we begin to nurture our nature, our child inside, we are being confronted with our own past nurture through the layers of our history right back to our very beginnings. This is the historical child revealing its territory of incarnation. And it is our chance to attend to our

beginnings with consciousness and draw on the playful child to weave the strands of past with our present being. Here, we make new out of the old: a re-conception in its truest sense.

*You are my client, I am your therapist. You talk about your dreams. Dreams of change, you say. After many years of recurrent dreams about your dead father you have recently dreamt about him coming back, coming back to stay. It is your mother in your dream who announces his return. Last week you dreamt again about your father and your mother. They are back together and they are arguing. 'That's how it goes', says your aunt in the dream. You continue telling me about your dreams including one in which you undergo surgery. Your brain is to be changed and the right side of your body is cut open to let all your blood flood out. In your dream you watch from above as your white, bloodless body is being sewn up again along the right side. At the end of the dream you start to re-inhabit your body with a sense of tenderness. As you speak to me about this dream you move a little, gently move the right side of your body, you cry a little, and you say it makes you think of your father.*

*Today you come in and say you feel 'at boiling point'. Your menstruation started yesterday, four to five days earlier than normal in your otherwise regular cycle. You say that these days you feel as if anything you say at work or in your private life created conflict. You have started making demands and taking a stand after some years of feeling unhappy at work. You are also taking more space at home. It doesn't always feel comfortable, and you say that your experience of conflict 'in the world outside' was a reflection of conflict in your world inside. After a while we stop talking and you close your eyes to attend more fully to your bodily sensations. You say you see red, that you are fully 'in it' and that you have no perspective on it. I then see you pressing the palms of your hands together, hard. You speak of friction. As your two hands come together again and again you say you feel the impact of bone. You speak of two opposites colliding with a bang. In my own body I sense a lot of energy rising along my spine.*

*After a while you say you are starting to see a bit more clearly and have the beginning of an image: a zigzag line along the centre. I feel a desire in me for this line to be more tangible, more in this world. I ask whether you would like to draw it. You do: a blue thin line, radiant, in the centre of the piece of paper. You say it feels like a spark, a spark created 'where the two bodies meet'. You move again, turning round and round your central axis and circling your hips. Your arms repeatedly extend and your hands reach out, open and stretch, then close to come back again into and across your chest. As I see your movements I am reminded of the movement of a cell, radiating and pulsating.*

*In-between moving you repeatedly go back to the piece of paper to draw, first a faint outline of a body around the blue central line. Then a stronger and clearly female outline with an earth-coloured crayon. When you come back again I see you take a yellow crayon and fill out the empty space within the body starting from the hips. As I see you do this I feel a sensual sweetness in my own body and I hear you say that the electricity generated by 'the spark' makes the body become flesh. The drawing is now complete: a full-bodied and bright female form. I see you standing upright in front of me and I hear you speak: "This is Me. Me, Anna [name changed], meeting the world. I am strong, full of blood. I can ask for what I want and I can get it."*

## EMBODYING RECLAIMED TRAITS OF BEING

Our newly and more fully inhabited being comes in many forms and shapes. What, however, seems fundamental is that it embodies re-claimed aspects of our being. This process of embodiment is not achieved by insight (of what these aspects are) but by experience: it needs to grow on you. As the biological child in the first term of pregnancy grows into and out of shared tissue with the mother, so does the soulful child inside grow into and out of our existing fibre of being. As in the first term of biological pregnancy this brings with it dramatic bodily and psychic changes for the mother, so can this period of transformation feel very unsettling. It can be quite a challenge to hold the child inside as it morphs from one stage to another, incorporating trait after trait to find its novel form of being. Nor is it always easy to hold these changes in the therapeutic relationship at this time of profound development. Particularly difficult moments of the inner re-configuration might be reflected in the dynamic 'outer world' of the therapeutic relationship and it takes great discernment and commitment on both sides to see this through.

In my own work and that with other women I see this process of reclaiming take place time and again in relationship with the masculine as we experience it in our outer and inner lives. I have come to know it as a process which transforms masculine presence from one that threatens or abandons our womanly being to one that respects and supports it. The dialogue that ensues is bodily distinct and involves bodily experiences, body parts and areas, or gestures which previously had felt 'other', 'not me', 'not in the picture', or 'split off'. It is a dialogue which psychically and bodily gives rise to the voice which has been whispering deep inside now for some time. It gives it strength and greater volume.

*I am your client. You are my therapist. After a long time coming I have started to write. I tell you that I have finally found my beginning this week. It is this very paper that I am writing - something we have talked about several times and you have encouraged me to do. I know this is my voice starting to come through. I must not betray its spirit as my body of work from the last few years is slowly coming into words. Yet I struggle. I struggle with my fear that I might be selling myself to a rational and analytical world divorced from the body. I fear that I won't do my working truth justice in the world of professional thought and text.*

*I stand up to move. As I move to almost the other end of the room from where you are sitting I hear both our stomachs rumbling. I feel slightly nauseous, as I have done for days now, since starting to write. It is particularly bad in the mornings and it feels like morning sickness as I remember it from being pregnant with my children. I am standing in the dark, turned away from the light. You seem far away and with my eyes closed I ask: "where are you right now?" I hear you say that you have just been somewhere else with your thoughts. I feel quite alone, determined at the same time. I move a bit closer in your direction and lift my hands above my head. My fingers touch the ceiling. I begin to trace a big, circular and somehow flowery shape. I have no idea what it is. I seem to be following a pattern that I am trying to discover and I feel like a fortune teller trying to read the signs. Again, I ask: "where are you?" Again you say you are finding it difficult to stay with my movements. In a strange way this is as I expected it to be. Over the past few weeks you and I have become quite polarised at times with you in my mind taking a masculine, pinpointing and thinking-oriented*

*stance whilst I felt called to defend and demand a feminine, permissive and body / sensing-oriented approach. I remember this now and I keep tracing whilst repeatedly turning around myself. I keep slowly moving closer in your direction. Once again, I ask. Again, a similar answer.*

*After three times asking I have now slowed down and physically feel as if I have come to a barrier in the open space of the room. My arms are bent with my hands in front of my chest, palms facing out as if touching a wall. I can feel a shiver running through me. "I will lean into it although I feel very anxious", I say. As I start to lean forward I have a sense of the barrier melting. You feel it, too, as you tell me later: "as if, until then, I've been seeing you through a glass wall. After that I feel your presence fully". I take a step forward, my left hand lifting as if holding something out: "It is white - an offering of peace to you." I cry and I stand there for quite some time, with my eyes closed. I hear your stillness. I don't know that in that moment you feel a strong desire to get up, step towards me, look into my eyes and say: "I am fully here." You don't, you later say, as such a step seemed too big for our relationship, for the parameters of our therapeutic work, possibly too big full stop.*

*What I am holding in my left hand at that time turns to white ash. I move my hands and fingers as if scattering those ashes onto what feels like your ground. I don't dare making any further steps as I know I would then leave my footprints on this ground and that doesn't feel right. It feels like a step too far. Instead I let my left arm drop, stand still and feel myself sinking deep into myself. My right hand starts to move with a sense of weight in my turned-up palm. After a while my left hand joins and both hands come together to shape and hold a circular space in front of me. The shape is big, it is the world. And I feel myself being inside the world, at its axis, centred, deep inside. I hear you say that with movement from the world's axis footsteps will come by themselves. I smile.*

*In the weeks that follow this session I repeatedly notice my left hand, arm and shoulder in situations when I doubt my intuitive and bodily knowing or am just about to go against it. I feel them twitch or come into play with a movement not quite a gesture yet. Whenever it happens I feel excited and full of gratitude: my left side is coming to life!*

## **COMING TO FULL TERM**

Coming to terms with the new life stirring and letting it grow and fully unfold – this requires a particular kind of nurture. An allowing of what has not been allowed before. A feeding from places unfamiliar. A bearing with patience and in suspense. During this time old ways of holding ourselves need to give and make room for the added life inside. We need to accommodate and allow whatever is growing, we need to let go of our previous narrower form as it is becoming increasingly restrictive. We literally need to incorporate in order to become fulfilled. And again, in my experience, this is not to be rushed. Both therapist and client need to be patient and willing to wait, not jump to quick conclusions and prematurely name or otherwise bring to light the new life now clearly experienced by both. As client and as therapist I experience this time as one of slowly adding to what has grown. I do this by meeting and fulfilling primal needs for nourishing touch and holding as they arise. I do it in the knowledge that this adds weight to what wants to be born.

*You are my client, I am your therapist. We are both sitting in our chairs. You tell me that you feel you have recently stepped more fully into your life. I see your joyful face. You close your eyes and say that you feel a sudden and brief sadness. Then your body feels heavy. You speak of your sense of wanting to be supported, being able to fully give into your weight without falling, wanting to hang in suspense. I see you bending forward and with your upper body hanging over your knees. You say your head feels heavy, too heavy to lift. I offer to place my hand underneath your forehead for support and you accept. After a while I can feel you increasingly releasing your head into my cupped hand. You say that it feels good although you worry that you might come crashing down to the ground should I suddenly remove my hand. You say your body feels brittle. I assure you that I won't remove my hand and I feel you relax even more into my hands. After a while you say that the weight of your body now feels more equally distributed. With my hand still at the top of your head hanging down you then slowly slide out of the chair and come to lie onto the ground, my hand now cushioning the back of your head on the ground. We stay like that for the rest of the session.*

*You come into the next session saying that you feel as if you have been swimming in an emotional soup since our last session. You sit down in your chair and speak about your throat: the glands by the side of your throat feel sore. There is also a sense of blockage in your throat, as if there were tears that couldn't quite come out. I see you close your eyes and you say your body feels soft, with very little energy, just enough to be: "I feel resigned to be", you say. You don't want to make much of an effort, just somehow swim into the space ahead of you. You ask me for a big exercise ball to roll yourself onto. I see you lying with your stomach and chest on the ball. You say you can feel your pulse in your stomach and it feels intense under the pressure of your weight. Too intense. I see you shift your weight backwards to come sitting on our knees whilst your upper body is resting on and hugging the ball.*

*"My whole body is breathing now, and I can feel my chest and heart opening", you say. As I hear and see you I can feel my attention acutely focusing in on your heart area and I have a sense of being in the presence of something very fragile. I offer to sit behind you and place my hand on your upper back in order to support your developing sense in your chest. You invite me to do so. With my hand on your back I can feel your heartbeat. After a while you say your glands are suddenly hurting again. I encourage you to stay with the soreness. Slowly I feel you starting to cry, increasingly sobbing with strong contractions and release. I wait and stay with you. When you can speak again you say it felt as if the tears were coming directly from your heart, moving through your glands and throat and out through your eyes. You say it feels like a great and much needed release. You want to lie down and rest your head on my thigh. We stay like that for the rest of the session: I sit on my heels and you are curled up in a foetal position, your head cushioned on my thigh. I gently place my hands at the top of your head and on your back at the place of your heart. When you eventually get up to leave you say that you feel open in your heart and with much space to breathe in your chest.*

*You come back the next week and report a sense of being complete, having reached a turning point, the end of a chapter. Your body, you say, feels continuous and whole in itself. In your home and working life you feel increasingly able to stay in your own authority and to trust*

*your own timing when faced with demands and expectations pushing or pulling you away from where you are. Your confidence has grown palpably.*

## **LABOURING INTO THIS WORLD**

Time and timing are very important. In the context of our current Western culture, however, it is not always easy to resist the wish 'to move things along', 'get on with things' or 'go for it' even when time is not (yet) right. This generally over-exercised masculine attitude of pushing on regardless is also reflected in Western practises and institutions of birthing: actual giving birth as well as psychological birth, not to mention creative, economic and other 'start-ups'. Much value is given to planning and control; measuring, monitoring and projecting; special tools and exercises; expert advice and decision making. The going currency is speed and ease in the process of delivery. In terms of actual giving birth this has culminated in obstetric practices which over several generations have denied many women and babies a natural, unhurried, non-invasive, empowering and ecstatic birth. The optional Caesarean section preferred by some obstetricians and women as a planned, quick, relatively pain free (as numbed and under anaesthetics), seemingly risk free and sexy-body-preserving form of giving birth is the most extreme manifestation of this trend. Other practices which have become standard and are readily deployed despite their well-documented risk and negative long term effects for mother and baby are induction and forceful turning, pushing and pulling the baby out. This can be, for example, quite subtle through vocal encouragement and psychological pressure to push early and hard; by less subtle hands-on pressure and not always necessary internal examinations and manipulations to accelerate the process of delivery; or by forceful intervention with forceps or suction tools – often at a time when the previous handling of the pregnancy and the birth process has caused so much distress that forceful and quick extraction of the baby becomes the last resort.

In one way or another, most of us have been born into the hands of a patriarchal medical machinery. It is a world in which the clock and expert intervention rules and little importance is given to the unique and natural rhythm of birth with its inherent pauses and moments of stillness. This has now been recognised by an increasing number of midwives, birth attendants and natural birth advocates who have challenged and dismantled some of the 'medical truths' underpinning Western birth practices. In addition to self-determined and unhurried timing, supporters of a more natural and woman-centred approach make free movement away from the medical bed and attached machinery, conscious use of gravity, free use of voice/sound, and a secluded intimate space free from interruptions a prerequisite for the natural rhythm of birth to fully unfold.

The imprint of our actual birth experiences potently shapes our being-in-this world, particularly in times of transition and acutely at the moment of a new beginning. I am aware of this in my work and consciously engage with each person's individual birth story as well as our collective imprint of often medicalised, mechanically assisted and forceful births in an environment which is distrustful of a woman's natural power to give birth. In the therapeutic relationship and as I accompany a woman in her psychological rebirth I aim to facilitate a distinctly different experience: one in which woman can come into renewed life at her own pace, on her own terms and in full possession of her instincts, her talents, and her voice. This means always giving time and space to listen deeply, to notice little shifts

in bodily experiencing and to allow for associations, thoughts and feelings to be present at all times. It also means abstaining from pressure whenever and however it comes in.

*You are my client, I am your therapist. We are both sitting in our chairs. Your chair is lined with the silky inside of your coat which you have draped over the front of your seat. You tell me about your recent conversation with your father and your new feeling of really having been heard and met as equal. You also speak of your mother's unconditional love which has been a constant in your life. You have returned from your parents' home last weekend feeling nourished and respected.*

*You close your eyes and attend to the sounds around us: the ticking of the clock, the birds outside and the intermittent sound of a chainsaw in the distance. I see you sitting straight, slightly leaning forward and I feel alert and slightly apprehensive in my own body. "I am in a waiting position", you say, " ...waiting to be taken by the sounds." I suddenly feel protective of you and ask you to attend to the sense of your body. You say that all you are aware of is your upper body: your shoulders feel broad and strong, your breathing deep and exaggerated, your head firm and your hands cold.*

*The sound of the chainsaw suddenly stops and you note your disappointment, at the same time a softening in your body. I ask you to further notice any changes, and as you do so I see you very slowly lean back into your coat-lined chair. I have a sense of release in my own body. "My head is now not pushing forward anymore", you say; and then : "My head is back now with the rest of my body." Your attention now goes to your hands which are cupped in your lap. I see your hands slowly opening and your fingers sliding over and away from each other. "I can see bright light coming in" you say as your head starts to drop forward following the sense of a pull towards your hands. As your hands now gently close again your head goes slightly back again. A subtle rhythm of opening/closing hands and forward and backward moving head develops. You say your shoulders want to twist and I offer my hands and arms as a gentle support around your upper back. You accept and as I carefully make contact you notice your urge to ask me to push you. Instead, you relax into the contact and say it feels as if I am "adding weight" to your movement. Together we now attend to the small changes in your experience as you continue to move forward and down with your head. We experiment with potential support from the front by placing my hand on your forehead, but you ask me to take my hand away as it makes you want to push against it, and you don't want that right now. Instead you continue to sink with gravity, pause when you suddenly feel slightly panicky and constricted in your breath, wait until a slight shift in your body frees your breathing again, and finally come to stillness in your curled position to conclude today's exploration. As you open your eyes you say it feels "as if waking up into myself."*

*After you have left I remember the many times over the past year that we have attended to your experiences of 'waking up', whether from sleep at home or from movement explorations in our sessions. Many times you have described your sense of dread, of not wanting to wake up, to 'come back', and your sense of sudden dislocation and disconnection from yourself when you do. I also remember the moments in here when you had to write or present a paper and the panic of not performing perfectly and as expected had sent you into a state which made you feel disconnected from others and removed from the world around you. I*

*notice that I am left feeling very excited and at the same time slightly panicky after your 'waking up into yourself' today.*

*The following week you come in and say you feel very tired. I suggest you find a place in the room where you can make yourself comfortable. You say you would like to be in the corner with the mat and blankets and together we arrange the space to make it soft and warm. You say you would like to lie down but are worried you might fall asleep. I say that I would be ok with that and encourage you to be aware of your process of falling asleep as much and as long as possible. You lie down in a foetal position and I see the small space between your head and the wall. I ask whether you would like me to switch off the overhead lights and you emphatically say yes.*

*Sitting beside you on the floor I see your hand slightly curled in front of your mouth. "I hear my breath, the only sound. It feels moist", you say. "I am alone, in a cave; dark, warm, not hard." I see your head starting to slide very slowly down the pillow and towards your hand: "My head is sinking down." At the same time I see you stretch out your feet and legs "wanting to slide". As you move your head again your breath suddenly feels restricted: "I am loosing my voice. I can't speak", and you start to whisper. I whisper back to you, suggest slowing down the movement even more, and I offer my hand as support on your head. You accept and I place my hand on the side of your head careful not to apply any pressure. After a while you speak again, you voice has returned, and you say your breath is back to normal. You start to move your head again, gently into my hand: "I feel like I am pushing into your hands. My head has got a will of its own." You pause as you want to bring your legs and hips in and they start to slide off the mat in the same direction as your head which I can now feel gliding under my hand. Your hair feels silky and soft on my palm. I see your face emerging between my and your own hand, the gap between gradually widening: "My face wants to come out....I can feel fresh air."*

*After a while you comment on a twitch in your shoulder: "I feel a bit stuck; my shoulder wants to move, wants to open." I place my hand on your shoulder and you ask me to help you move. I apply gentle pressure to your shoulder to add to your own effort to rotate. "It's moving. It's hard work", you say. I see your chest opening and your breathing deepening. Gradually you come to lie on your back and I keep my hand, arm and upper body in a rounded shape near and around you wanting to provide containment and space at the same time. I just am becoming aware again of our place in the room as I hear you comment on your sense of space right now. "That's it", you say "I can feel my breath, I feel warm and relaxed....and I can speak." Your eyes are still closed and you speak of your sense of anticipation: "Shall I open my eyes?" After a while I see you opening your eyes: "It's very easy. Everything looks soft and rounded. There are no sharp angles." You turn your head to look at me. I am very moved and want to cry. We both look at each other with tears in our eyes.*

*In the next two sessions you speak a lot. You talk about your work, and how the different roles which you perform don't feel disjointed anymore but connected by your particular way of relating with whomever you work with. You also talk about your home life and how things have shifted with your teenage son who has started communicating again and whom you*

*now try to meet from a more equal place. You have also decided to break out of your expected way of working with your clients and you have started to give them more time and opportunities to speak about themselves and their experiences. You still feel nervous at times about whether you have something useful to say in return, but you say you also know now how to trust what comes from deep inside you in those moments - whether that is words or silence.*

## **EMBEDDED IN THE WORLD**

As with any birth, the work doesn't end here. The new life needs continued nurturing and it needs a worldly cradle in which to rest and grow. Our newly gained voice needs exercising and to engage with others. This is not always easy as we try to hold onto our own embodied truth. It helps to have others who understand our nascent language and who can add their faith to ours. In my experience, the loving and supportive company of other women is particularly important at this time as woman claims her rightful place in this world. Her female lineage becomes important and her conscious embedding into her particular heritage as a woman can add power to her voice. The woman therapist can play a particularly important role as companion, guide and role model at this moment where the more outward directed energy of growth demands not only a teasing out of the inner dynamics of feminine and masculine aspects of being but also an active relating with what we share as women of our times. In many ways, transformation at this stage becomes a collective undertaking.

*You were my therapist, I was your client. I haven't seen you for several months now. The time of inspiration and incubation had come to an end and I left looking for my secluded space and a midwife to nurture and accompany me in my giving birth to what I had conceived in our work together.*

*It was in this move away from you and into a women's only space that I have come into full possession of the skills and knowledge that I have laid out here. I found my midwife in a female psychotherapist and doula with particular knowledge of prenatal and birth psychology. With her I keep nurturing the left side of my body and with that what I had once left behind of my womanly being. With her I give the feminine more space and body and I allow it to be held and heard in this world.*

*At the same time I am still held by you in a thought-of and thought-about womb space: the womb-space in my writing. And still with me, you are waiting. We have agreed that I will come back when I have finished writing.*

*Today, my writing has come to a natural pause and we are meeting to talk about what I have sent you and also what you have written and just publicly presented as an extension of your ongoing research into the different alchemical stages and cycles of transformation in psychotherapy. We are both surprised by the many parallels in our writing, unknowingly but now visibly influenced by our encounter as client and as therapist. At the same time, your paper is clearly written from the perspective of a man, mine from within the experience of*

*being a woman. The resulting differences in style and feel strike me deeply. We both leave this meeting with some more to add to our respective writing.*

*Many weeks later I hand what I have written to the women who are also in this text. Most of you are still my clients and I am still am your therapist. I am ready to hear anything you might think or feel in response. I am prepared to change, scrap and completely rewrite or let you write into the text if you wish. Our sessions or contact continue and this sharing is not an afterthought but part of our relationship. I trust that my writing will find a useful place in our work together and I hope it will contribute to our feminine living beyond the therapeutic relationship.*

*Woman inside and outside, you are now my therapist, the one who attends to my body and soul. Today I move in your presence and find a landscape open, wide and warm with a wind of change blowing fertile soil across the earth. I stretch out on the ground and roll to feel the full length of my body and the surface all around. I find my groove in the ground and stretch some more as if embedding in the deep red soil which I have come to love during my many years of living on the African continent. I roll against the door and feel the stream of air from the gap underneath and smell the incense that the air carries in from outside this room. I push off and come to kneel further inside the room. As I settle into my position I notice that the left side of my body feels full, fleshy and much more prominent than the right. It is as if the right has moved into the background to allow the left to shine. "About time!" I say and feel joy rising inside. I feel further into my left arm, shoulder and chest, it's stirring here. Slowly I find my gesture. It's clear. I move my arm and with my hand I pick up something from the ground. I hold it in front of me: it is a golden ball.*

*At this moment I remember the session some months ago when I had also held something weighty in my left hand. Then, it was white and I had offered it to you, the man. You didn't take it and for this I am deeply grateful to you now. At that time my gift had crumbled to white ash. It was not something to give away.*

*Today my hand stays close and slowly I feel it moving up in front of my chest towards my mouth. My fingers touch my lips and very gently I start to take in the golden light and substance. I lick my lips, a taste of nectar of its kind. I swallow. I am ingesting the gold and it feels sensual and deeply satisfying. What follows is a deep state of peace.*

Embedding into this world also means for me to lay this child of mine - this text - into the cradle of my feminine learning. My female lineage as a psychotherapist is long and rich and I am referring here only to a few. I am grateful to you all, the women teachers in my company, past and present, far and near. Firstly, I am grateful to you, my mother, whose calling has brought me into this world, whose teachings have given me many tools, and whose leaving has made it even clearer to me what I am here in this world to do. Throughout the years of my training and becoming a psychotherapist I have had the extraordinary luck and pleasure to be raised within a healing art – possibly one of the only ones among the many forms of psychotherapy – pioneered exclusively by women: Dance and Movement Psychotherapy.

There is Trudi Schoop whose indomitable spirit moving through her veins and animating her every move I was able to witness on video footage. She remains a guiding example to me in her ability to

tease joy and delight out of any soul lost in suffering. Then there is Marian Chace whose writing has instilled in me a deep respect for the powers that hold when we gather to work in the circle. Mary Whitehouse who lay the seeds for movement directed by spontaneous inner impulse, and Janet Adler who developed this work into the practice of Authentic Movement which has become the foundation of my work. Her books and papers have travelled with me everywhere and inspired my writing, too. The way I move and witness has been shaped in Authentic Movement retreats with Tina Stromsted who sees and speaks to body and soul with great clarity and compassion. Her understanding of the feminine cycle of transformation has further informed my thinking and confirmed many of my own experiences.

Janet Kaylo has carried me on her waves of enthusiasm and keen intuition deep into the developmental world of the body, a territory further opened to me by Peggy Hackney and Andrea Olsen whose instructions on paper have guided many hours of mine moving on the living room floor. Linda Hartely in her writing and in person has given me an experience of how far, how deep and how close to the spiritual realms this work can carry us. Firmly rooted in the here and now - whether hard or soft, ugly or beautiful - Sue Curtis has taught me over many years of mentorship, friendship and collaboration what relationship in therapy really means: a deeply mutual exchange. I cherish this as a guiding principle in all my work. I am also grateful to Marion Woodman whose analysis of womanhood has challenged me and kindled my desire to further explore and express what it means to be a woman, now, a generation further on. I thank Hannya Melrose for the opportunity to do so and for her knowing and gentle care as I continue to explore and voice what I find.

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