

## CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

# *Cycles of Change and Transition*

*Caroline Born*

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To live life more fully we have to die to old-held feelings in the body and old beliefs in the mind. When a life-change is made with the full involvement of body and mind it is growthful and organic. The mind instigates with plans and visions, and the body discriminates with energetic and feeling response. If a change is made from the mind only it is disconnected from the body response as to whether something *feels* right or not.

Body involvement is easier when the body has been given an opportunity to wake up in its expression and awareness. Life Dancing is a creative therapy that supports the body's need to move as it wants — the expanding personal experience it brings provides a safe place for the body to explore its creative possibilities. Freeing up the possibilities of how you move brings up delight and playfulness. Spontaneous play is a high state of awareness, as it only comes when you are in the moment — which means being in your body. A state of relaxed alertness. Even if long disused, your body remembers how to play freely once you let go. Fully letting go means acknowledging your mind's fears and judgements.

Yet social pressure to conform is immense and is deeply reflected in the way we move as adults. We believe that being a normal adult means limiting our everyday movements to lying, sitting, walking and running — and then only for goal-

orientated purposes. Moving expressively and creatively as a way of life is only for children, social outcasts or 'uncivilised' peoples living close to the earth. The rest of us find our adult body put into a strait-jacket of narrowly acceptable movement, which creates illness, because the body is not allowed to express its energy naturally and balance itself. Most people in the so-called civilised cultures are unable to experience any evolution of their body's organic life because they restrict its natural need to move creatively — thus also restricting the release of the layers of unconscious wisdom hidden within it.

Being asked to facilitate a movement workshop at the 1998 AHP conference on the theme of 'Living through Dying' came at a synchronistic time, as over the past year I have been choosing to experience the dying of my active professional self. Despite great resistance, something deeper has been pushing me to stop and shed my professional identity, to meet myself without a title and find my value in who I am, without a 'what I do'. My work has led me here, honouring the consciousness in the body/my body, in movement and in stillness. After 20 years of getting to know her as a wise and intelligent friend, and developing this work with groups and individuals, it was impossible to deny my body's intuition that it was time for me to stop and give more quality time to her own

timing and process.

I now live in nature by the sea, and as the darkening days lead towards the year's final contraction I sense the promise of new light at the end of this cycle; new ideas and energy germinating from a deeper self underneath the old skins I have shed. Com-

mitting to the life of your body, following its truth, challenges all the patterns we have constructed to avoid the terror of the unknown; yet walking step by step with all of the body's irrational wisdom gives back life, with lots of heart, power and consciousness.

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## ***Ecopsychology: A matter of life and death***

*Mary-Jayne Rust and Ruth Roth*

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**W**e are all familiar with the cycles of living and dying: the changing world of the seasons, loved ones passing on, new beings coming into the world. We know that we, as human beings, must all face our own deaths at some point in the future. In the world of psychotherapy we are also familiar with the cycles of living and dying in our emotional lives.

What is harder to take on board is the wider reality that unless we act now to radically change our lifestyles, our whole species is threatened. The human race may face a premature death at our own hands. Many other species — without the words to protest — have already become extinct as a result of our lack of care for our environment.

How are we coping with this? We are faced daily with information about the environmental crisis; to acknowledge the uncertainty of our future and all that is entailed to set us on a sustainable course is a monumental task and can feel overwhelming. So overwhelming, in fact, that most of us can only survive by living in

total or partial denial of our current reality. Perhaps in our minds is the thought that 'they' will sort it out one day with 'their' wonderful science and technology. Such faith in the omniscience of humankind!

We have been members of an ecopsychology group which has been meeting regularly for the past three years. The group emerged from PCSR, Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility. We are all therapists who feel passionately about the state of our planet and the impact this situation has on our psyches — and the psyches of the people with whom we work. We believe it to be a matter of life and death. We have been, and are still, exploring the layers of complicated feelings that we all carry, from guilt, despair and hopelessness through to excitement about the possibility of change. We question the traditional psychotherapeutic definition of mental health, which has been focused solely on human relatedness. We believe that maturity and mental health might be better described as a far more inclusive relatedness.