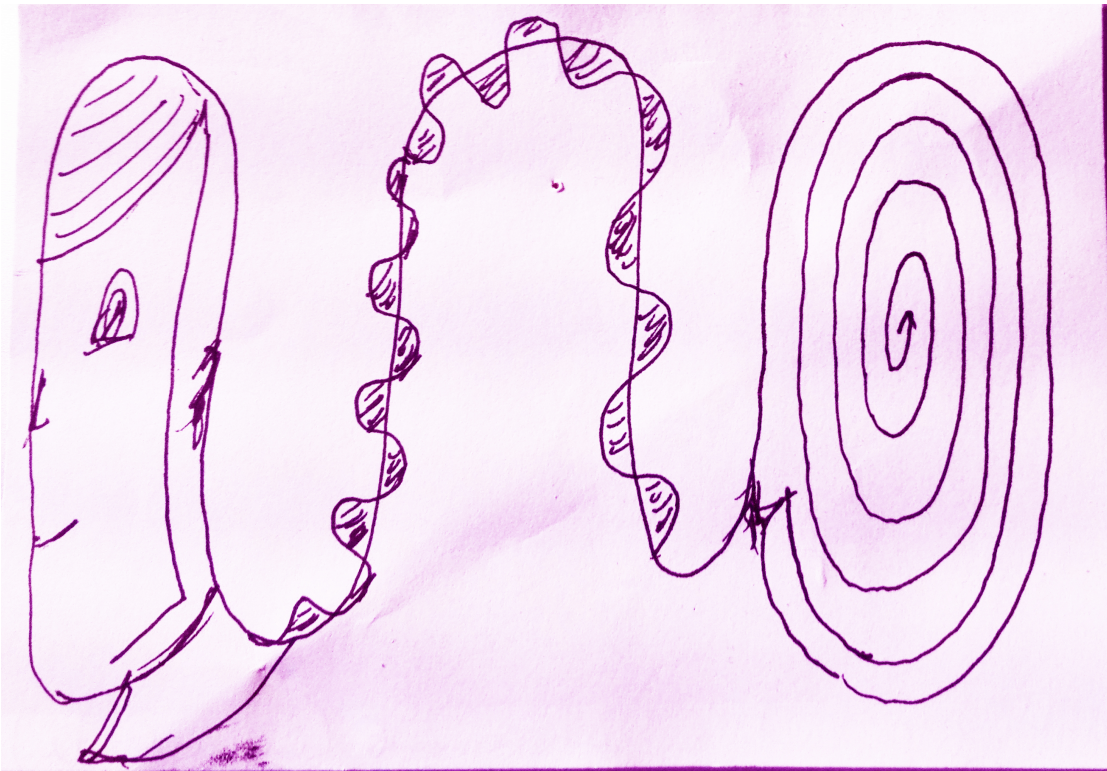


# THE POWER OF MATERNITY

FINAL PROJECT OF PROCESSWORK DIPLOMA

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<sup>1</sup> This drawing was made while I was pregnant while I was talking on the phone in unconscious scribble mode. Some time later I realized the connection of the drawing and my new process of emerging motherhood.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Motherhood is an experience that, among many other things, has taught me about the importance and need of relationships and bonds. So to begin with, I need to thank my son, Guillem, for our relationship - an intense relationship, difficult at times, precious at others, that challenges me and makes me grow day by day at your side. Thank you for your arrival, your presence and your love.

In the same line, my partner, Angel, has played an important part. I feel grateful for the vision we have shared around parenting, the importance and need to give a focus to vulnerability, pampering it and caring for it. I love our intimate conversations about Guillem and about us. Thank you for your sensitivity and your sincere love.

I also feel the need as a daughter to thank my mother and father for giving me life and accompanying me in the best way that they could or knew how to. My new identity as a mother has helped me expand my understanding and relationship with my parents. I also want to thank you for your support in my new role as a mother with the bringing up of Guillem. Motherhood has allowed me to feel the pleasure of letting myself be looked after by them as I had not done for years. Through the gift of motherhood learning the value of vulnerability and thus appreciating the care you are offered. In turn, seeing the beautiful and special bond that my son is building with you is an experience for which, I feel fortunate and grateful. In my childhood I did not have the opportunity to interact with my grandparents, neither maternal nor paternal. Living it now through my son seems magical to me, and I feel that his bond has strengthened ours. Thanks mom and dad for being there. I love you.

Throughout the many years of studying Process Work I have had the privilege of meeting wonderful people who have supported me in different ways. To begin, I want to thank my therapist, Evelyn Figueroa, for her constant accompaniment since the beginning of my studies. Her experience and personal wisdom have been an important pillar in my personal process, supporting me through especially difficult times such as the complications with getting pregnant, and the many challenges that motherhood has given me.

I also want to thank Gill Emslie, my mentor for all these years and who at the end of my studies supported me in the process of creating this project, especially encouraging me at the beginning when I doubted the importance of writing about motherhood and challenging

me to go further. Similarly, I want to thank Boris Sopko, who has supported me in the second phase of my studies, and now with support and supervision offering me a valuable vision for my project, has encouraged me to continue writing on the subject.

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I also want to thank the Process Work community of which I am a part and that has been growing in recent years in a surprising way. I feel especially grateful to my initial study group as well as to those with whom I have shared the end of the same ones; Anna B, Anna E, Anna P, César, Mireia, Conchi, Bàrbara, Eva, Peix, and Sara with whom I have shared a long life journey.

Thank you to Neus Andreu who encouraged me to write about this subject when it still seemed absurd. To Ainhoa, a fellow student who, with her enthusiasm, encouraged me to write about motherhood at a time when I felt dispirited. To Blanca Fariña for her friendship and shared motherhood. To the Migjorn Mothers Group, always there to share and support us in our new roles as mothers. And to all the Gelida's mothers with whom I have formed friendships along the way and shared intense and passionate conversations about motherhood. Thanks Neus, Azahara, Mireia and Marta. Thanks.

## **PRESENTATION: OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES**

Talking about the subject of motherhood was previously of little interest to me. In fact, that's still the case at times. There is something very strong that makes me undervalue an experience that in turn, I also consider very powerful. The gestation of a living being, giving birth or raising a little person seem to me to be experiences with brutal force and great impact. On the other hand, my first impulse is to underrate it, as if it weren't such a big deal. The aim of this project is to shed some light on this dynamic that I detect clearly in myself and at the same time I intend to take it beyond myself to connect it with a social dynamic. What belief system says that focusing on the experience of motherhood is not important or interesting? And what is the relationship between my personal belief system and the social belief system? To do that, I'm going to focus on my own experience, through exploring other questions as well: How do I relate internally to my own motherhood? And what place does the experience of motherhood occupy for me in the world? In order to answer these questions, I am going to focus above all on the power dynamics that are in interaction. How does power affect the maternal experience? How is the value or importance I give to it articulated? And under this umbrella, how can we give potential to the experience of motherhood and make it a source of personal as well as social learning?

## **METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS**

The main methodology of this project is focused on the paradigm of Process Work or Process Oriented Psychology as a means through which to study or explore the proposed theme. Process Work was created by Arnold Mindell, a Jungian physicist and psychologist, in the mid-1970s. His focus is on becoming aware of the diversity of sensations, states and/or experiences with which we live but often tend to marginalize or not acknowledge. Giving space to all this diversity (internal and external) allows us to have a more global vision of ourselves (or of who we are) and of our environment.

One of the starting points of Process Work is the assumption that the key to sustainable

solutions lies in the disturbances themselves.

It is based on awareness and the principle of Deep Democracy, which emphasizes listening to and valuing all the voices and dimensions that make up the experience at its different levels: personal, relational, group and/or global.

*"Every time you ignore sensations that normally go unnoticed, perceptions that are like dreams, something inside you goes into a slight state of shock, since you have overlooked the spirit of life, the greatest power you can achieve".*

Arnold Mindell, "Daydreaming"

At the same time, with the Processes Work methodology as a general framework, this project also makes use of auto-ethnography as a social research method that is characterized by linking the researcher's own personal experience with social, political and cultural concepts. Auto-ethnography is a modality of ethnographic research that uses the researcher's autobiographical materials as primary data. Unlike other auto-referential formats such as auto-narrative, autobiographies, memoirs or diaries, auto-ethnography emphasizes cultural analysis and interpretation of the researchers' behaviors, thoughts and experiences, usually from fieldwork, in relation to others and the society it studies. It is explained by various authors in different works on this genre of ethnography, such as the exploration of the interaction between the personal self and the social (Reed-Danahay, 1997), or between the introspective being and the cultural descriptors (Ellis and Bochner, 2000), that is, the observation and detailed and in-depth description of the connection between the personal and the culture<sup>2</sup>.

For me linking Process Work with the method of auto-ethnography has a profound meaning on the way in which social reality and its multiple dimensions are conceived from Process Work. Making use of quantum physics as a metaphor, A. Mindell speaks of the concept of the hologram applied to an approach to social analysis, where in a small particle we can find the complete image because it contains in itself all the information. Therefore, from that point of view, exploring my personal experiences (from auto-ethnography) not only allows me to learn more about my personal process but also to understand and shed light on some of the social dynamics that are in interaction.

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<sup>2</sup> Joaquín Guerrero Muñoz (2014) *El valor de la auto-etnografía como fuente para la investigación social: del método a la narrativa*. REVISTA INTERNACIONAL DE TRABAJO SOCIAL Y BIENESTAR N.º 3

## LIMITATIONS

The fact of using my own experience as a field of social research obviously makes my study biased. First of all because there is not just one way of living motherhood, there are many motherhoods. With this in mind, I am going to talk about maternity from a partial, biased point of view, above all because of my condition and privileges, which often prevent me from being fully aware of the diversity of social and personal realities. My privileges are defined, among other things, by being a white, western, heterosexual woman with a partner, with university studies and coming from a middle-class family. In turn, my conditions are also defined by my health, living with a disease called endometriosis that has prevented me from becoming pregnant naturally and has meant living the pregnancy process painfully and emotionally charged. At the same time, the fact of being the mother of a small child has also been a conditioning factor and a limitation when it comes to developing a project of these characteristics with the time and constancy it requires. I mention all of this because my experience or view of motherhood is inevitably tinged with all of these privileges and conditions that often prevent me from seeing beyond my reality, as if it were an entirety. I know that's not so. And I want to apologize for all those moments when some people may feel unnoticed in my story. Some of the realities of which I am aware that are not included in this project have to do with all those maternities lived in other ways. Ways that come from other family models (single mothers, homosexual or lesbian couples, non-nuclear families, ...), from other ways of approaching maternity (surrogate wombs, adoptions, natural pregnancies), from other cultural contexts and from other gender identities that do not necessarily go through a binary system. And I'm probably still marginalizing some other reality that I haven't contemplated.

And even though I am aware of my incapacity of encompassing all the experiences lived around maternity, I do so from the need to shed light, albeit partial, on a subject that I feel needs more space and attention in the world.

I would also like to address all those women who are not mothers (whether by their own will or by impossibility). I'm aware that in our society, not being a mother still puts you in a difficult place that's not always comfortable to inhabit. Thank you for holding that place. This story is also for you. Because in the end motherhood is not only about mothers, but also

about the place that we give socially and individually to care, dependency relationships, our relationship with power... so I would like this story to be a contribution that challenges all of us.

Finally, I would like to mention that I am going to talk about motherhood, especially in its first years, aware that the development of this identity also changes according to the moment of upbringing.



## INTRODUCTION

As far as I'm concerned, maternity is a complex experience, to begin with because it is not possible to speak of a single maternal experience, there is a diversity of maternities. We could say that there are as many maternities as there are mothers, because in part it is a profoundly subjective experience. There are many ways to reach motherhood, the meaning that each one of us gives to wanting to be a mother or has to be a mother. As Dawn Merken says in his book "Raising parents, raising Kids" *"parenting is a path, a calling. Each of us has a different path created by our dreams, longings, intentions, and the great mystery of life"*<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, that diversity can also be defined by objective factors such as social conditioning, whether these are in relation to classic sociological indicators such as social class, ethnicity, or health, or to specific social conditioning factors around the subject, such as the family model (biparental/bimadrenal family, single mother or other family models) or the maternity process (artificial fertilizations, adoptions, biological pregnancies, etc.). Even so, motherhood is still seen as a basically personal experience. This is in part a first indicator of the place that we assign to maternity, that is, the private and invisible sphere.<sup>4</sup> To be invisible is not only a personal choice of each mother, but it is defined by certain social dynamics that promote it and that form part of the backdrop that defines the place that maternity occupies in our western society. Giving voice and space to the different internal experiences that in my case have been activated as a result of being a mother and relating them to the social model in which I live is part of what I intend to do in this paper. In Process Work we speak of the concept of Deep Democracy<sup>5</sup> as an approximation to the reality that tries to give space to and be conscience of all the parts, experiences and realities that are present in the processes. The importance of doing it has to do with the belief that when we don't do it, we are marginalizing something and therefore denying a part of reality, generating oppression and discomfort. Thus, by giving space to the diversity of experiences

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<sup>3</sup> Merken, Dawn (2013). *Raising Parents, raising Kids*. Belly Song Press. Pag. 170

<sup>4</sup> Cristina Bernis Carro, Rosario López Giménez, Pilar Montero López (Eds.) (2009). *Determinantes biológicos, psicológicos y sociales de La Maternidad en el siglo XXI: Mitos y realidades*. XVII Jornadas de Investigación Interdisciplinaria. Ediciones de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.

<sup>5</sup> Arnold Mindell (2014). *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums. Practical steps for the prevention and resolution of family, labor and global conflicts*. Deep Democracy Exchange

we are nurturing an awareness about the processes that happen to us, whether personal or social, making it possible to broaden our horizons about reality and its potentialities.

And in this exercise I'm basing my exploration on the dynamics that are activated around maternity on my own experience because as I have mentioned, maternity, in my case, is an experience that affects me you on a personal level. And that, as opposed to it being a circumstantial aspect, I want to defend it, to give it value, because it is a way to take it out of the invisible sphere and bring it into the world as part of what it is, a social experience.

The key principle of personal feminism is political. I want it to have real meaning and process work allows this in the sense that it understands that personal experiences are not only personal, but like the image of a hologram, they are a picture of what we are also as a society. It is understood that internal (personal) dynamics and external (social) dynamics are one and the same image. Thus, my approach to motherhood is going to focus on how my internal dynamics are a reflection of social dynamics. And therefore my identity is defined by what the world is, and at the same time, the world depends on who I am. So from there I can connect with our capacity to affect the world, seeing that my identity can also define what the world is.

The contribution of looking at motherhood, and concretely my motherly experience from the Process Work approach has to do above all, with making an exercise of awareness. This means being able to realize my experience, not only from feeling it but also from being able to narrate it and understand in greater depth the dynamics and aspects that I experience. In order to do this, Process Work gives me a perspective and framework that understands reality from a triple dimension. The first dimension, called Consensus Reality, is that of the most tangible and objective aspects, such as for example the understood agreement that I am a mother by the fact of having a child. A second dimension that speaks of those more subjective aspects, where perceptions and the emotional world enter. This is what A. Mindell calls the dreaming Level, since at this level reality is presented as a less conscious experience. Here for example, being a mother ceases to be a closed concept or defined by the unique fact of having offspring and opens up a whole world of subjective possibilities that are expressed through polarities. Thus, for example, at the Dreaming Level, my son, beyond being an external person to me, is also an internal experience, which in Process Work we call "dream figure" and which shows me my inner child, as part of my maternity as well.

And finally we have the Essence dimension, a deeper level where there is no polarity, because in it we can connect with something bigger than ourselves, such as feeling part of the earth. It is the level where we come into contact with spirituality, understood in a broad way. The experience of connection with the basic meaning of life, of nature, of our totality. The three levels of reality are important and essential. Socially we tend to understand the world above all, and sometimes exclusively, through the level of Consensus Reality. That look is necessary but insufficient, since simultaneously there are more experiences that are happening and that often are doors of entry to understand us on a personal level and also on a social level.

Throughout this project, I am going to talk about my maternity taking into account the three levels of reality because without any of them I would be denying or marginalizing part of the experience and therefore, undermining my ability to understand and become aware.

## **THE PERSONAL EDGE AND THE SOCIAL EDGE**

When I was thinking about what I was going to write for my final project, I thought it had to be a topic with enough energy and personal motivation to be able to maintain the interest without it fading. Then I wondered about the themes that were present in my life or that had some kind of connection with me, and there it was clearly evident that motherhood was one of those themes, and by far the most significant. In spite of that, my first reflection was to marginalize it and keep thinking about other topics. Someone also suggested that I dedicate the project to something related to motherhood, given that for me being a mother has been an intense process and has often occupied a central space in my life. And once again I thought that this was not a topic for a final project. Who would be interested in this subject? My difficulties or experiences related to motherhood were my problem, my way of being or living it. It was nothing to write about, much less anything that could arouse interest.

Suddenly that clear refusal to give value to something that in turn on a personal level had so much impact on me, aroused my curiosity. What makes me think that focusing on the experience of motherhood is not important or interesting? What belief system says that

focusing on the experience of motherhood isn't important or interesting? And what relationship is there between my personal belief system and the belief system of the world?<sup>8</sup> Exploring those questions I realised how both personally and socially giving space to the experience of motherhood is marginalized. And I say "give space to the experience of motherhood" because on the contrary, motherhood is very present in the world. Being a mother or having to be a mother is a social mandate, from which motherhood is presupposed as something "natural", "normal" and "universal".

It has to do with that social myth of motherhood that is so deeply rooted, that equates being a Woman to being a Mother, as the only final destiny of every female<sup>9</sup>. Even though I have been questioning this sentence on a theoretical level for some time, it wasn't until relatively recently, through my own experience, that I really realised the profound impact that the stereotype around the importance of being a mother as the main form of self-realisation can generate. For years I had the impulse to be a mother but because of my state of health (endometriosis) it was not possible. This process produced a very high level of exhaustion and emotional discomfort. I felt amputated, frustrated, victimized, incapable and incomplete. For me it was shocking, to realise the automatism that made me unconsciously conceive myself as a future mother and everything that was generated when that ideal was suddenly called into question. There were parts of me that connected in a profound way with a feeling of being less womanly or less valid. I dedicated quite a few hours of therapy (within my Process Work training) to work on it all. It was a painful process. In turn, that same process allowed me to connect with other spheres of my person that made me feel complete, fulfilled, and meaningful. There was a moment when I felt at peace with my impossibility of being a biological mother, accepting my reality, not as a condemnation but as something valuable and meaningful. In that process, chance presented itself in the form of a public health charter announcing that we had access to in vitro fertilization. We had already made a failed attempt before. My first reaction was: Now? Again the question on the table. We decided to accept the invitation, it seemed like an opportunity after so many years. Evidently, I started the process eagerly but also with an acceptance that it might not come about. I finally became pregnant with my son, Guillem. It could have gone the other way.

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<sup>8</sup> A **belief** is the state of mind in which an individual assumes true knowledge or experience about an event or thing when objective, the content of the belief presents a logical proposition, and can be expressed through a linguistic statement as an affirmation. Basically to believe means "to give for certain something, without possessing evidence of it". Wikipedia

<sup>9</sup> Badinter, Elisabeth (1980). *Does maternal instinct exist? Maternal love story. Seventeenth to twentieth centuries*. Paidós.

During my process of wanting to get pregnant, I was told at many times the slogan "you have to stop thinking about it, so that it happens". It's like a kind of collective belief, shared by friends, family and even doctors. It's really hard not to focus on something you want intensely. In my experience, my process was not about stopping thinking about it, but about really accepting and welcoming my identity outside of motherhood. That meant saying goodbye, connecting with the pain that comes with it, and having a grieving process. And so, in my case, not to stop focusing on the goal of getting pregnant, but to let go of the goal altogether. Thus, from the level of Consensus Reality I can read the arrival of the public health letter and my subsequent pregnancy as a coincidence or fruit of chance. However, on another level, from the Dream Level, we can see this process as a sign that supports my inner work. From the Process Work we talk about that often when we complete our states and jump our limits, space is opened for something new, unknown and therefore does not respond to a linear idea. Thus, when I managed to let go of my identity as a mother, a new, unexpected possibility opened up.

From the Process Work we speak of double signal<sup>10</sup> when the same information contains two contradictory messages, an intentional one because it is connected to our identity and a less intentional one, and therefore we are less aware of sending it. In my experience of maternity the double signal is clear. I have openly encouraged or promoted my motherhood as a desirable option. In fact, I've been looking to become a mother for many years. At the same time, and on the other hand, less intentionally, once I have been a mother, I have given very little support and space to my maternal experience. In this sense, at times I have experienced motherhood from the belief that one must go through it, without loudspeakers, "as all mothers have done before me" and assume the contradictions or complexities from loneliness or the private sphere. How are my double signals present in the world as well? From Process Work we say that in the double signals that we emit there is more unknown information about our identity and that they appear as roles or parts of us.<sup>11</sup>

Looking at motherhood from the awareness that these contradictory messages I live in me, are also in the world, connect me with the interest in wanting to explore, with the importance of doing so. It has to do with that look from the Work of Processes that

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<sup>10</sup> Diamond, J and Jones, L.S. (2011). A road made by walking. Process Therapy in practice. CRE-SER Human Development Institute.

<sup>11</sup> Diamond, J and Jones, L.S. (2011). A road made by walking. Process Therapy in practice. CRE-SER Human Development Institute. (pg 109)

understands that the internal experiences are not only in me, but they also inhabit the world. In this sense, the double signs in my motherhood are also social experiences.

So, on the one hand, I am interested in knowing more and go deeper into the dynamics that are in play, and on the other hand as an act of social activism, to help draw attention to and give space to an experience that is very present in the world and at the same time very marginalized. And from there, to claim it as not only personal, but also social and clearly political.

## **MATERNITY AND POWER**

Power dynamics are complex. When I think of power my imagination quickly connects with abuse or misuse and all painful or undesirable experiences. From there, I often refer to power as something I would like to eliminate or avoid. That reasoning is entirely logical if I think of our social and personal contexts where we see that power has often led us into disastrous situations.

In Process Work the approach to power tries to break with the dichotomy of to have/ to not have power<sup>13</sup>. Power is thought of more as a complex, nonlinear system, where there are different types of power that interact simultaneously, and that are highly contextual. And in that system, when we speak of power we refer to our capacity to influence our environment, and therefore one of the key principles is that power is inevitable and that in addition we all have power. This, equally, does not dispute that the distribution of power evidently generates inequalities, and in this sense one of the key elements that is emphasized is the importance of being aware of your own power or powers to be able to use them well and not generate misuse.

Processwork distinguishes between those powers given to you by your environment, such as our privileges associated with socially and/or contextually valued qualities (gender, race, social class, place in the formal or informal hierarchy of an organization, etc.), many of which are inherited. On the other hand, we are talking about another type of internal powers,

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<sup>13</sup> Diamond, J. (2016) *Power: A User's Guide*. Belly Song Pres

which are more of a psychological or spiritual type<sup>14</sup>. For example, our internal abilities and resources to overcome emotionally difficult situations, our internal security, self-esteem, self-knowledge, our ability to connect with something bigger than ourselves. This kind of power can be cultivated.

Thus, when you think of power, you think of privileges and also of a possible source of inner growth. In Process Work we seek to gain an awareness of our privileges and at the same time to develop fully the connection with our internal powers as a form of connection with our creativity and as prevention of abuses. The more we are in contact with our inner source of power the less need we have to seek power outside of ourselves.

Why is it important for me to talk about power in motherhood? Or the relationship between motherhood and power?

On the one hand, because through my experience with motherhood, I have noticed how the relationship with internal power dynamics is brought to light and also related social aspects such as gender and the social system built in relation to it. The internal dynamics that are roused are often intense and seemingly contradictory. You can connect with moments of connection with an immense personal power and at the same time you can feel like the most disempowered person in the world. Strength and vulnerability are expressed in an intense and profound way. Sometimes the diversity of internal experiences associated with motherhood has created a difficult experience for me in the social world, and there power dynamics come into play, often invisibilizing or marginalizing some of its aspects.

Thus, if we look at social power, that is, at all those aspects valued on a cultural level, we find ourselves with the first level of complexity. To begin with, as I pointed out at the beginning of this project, being a mother is a key social principle. In other words, being a mother socially empowers you. It's the power that comes from responding to a social expectation that allows you to be part of a majority. This is a privilege that I unavoidably have, with which I will avoid feeling questioned about my identity, as happens to all those women who by will or impossibility are not mothers, at some time or another in their lives.

At the same time, and as we have already pointed out, the experience of motherhood may also have little social power. Thus, for example, at an economic level, wanting to dedicate time and space to raising children today means reducing and in some cases giving up paid work. In my case, reducing my work schedule was a personal choice motivated by the will to

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<sup>14</sup> Mindell, A (1995). *Sitting in the fire. How to transform large groups through conflict and diversity*. Icaria Milenrama

be present and accompany my son in his early upbringing. And from there, I feel privileged, knowing that not all women can assume it. At the same time, it also implies a high social cost, drastically reducing your source of income. Another example where I have connected with the low social rank, has to do with clearly notice reduced my ability to participate in many social spaces by the incompatibility to be accompanied by a baby. Rarely are public spaces designed to include breastfeeding mothers or mothers with babies. In this sense, gender inequalities, and specifically the fact of living in a patriarchal<sup>15</sup> society, continues to place female mothers in a scenario of invisibility, relegated above all to the private sphere, where reproductive tasks have little social value.

On a personal level, the social dynamics of power affect me, are part of who I am, and make me unconsciously relate to my own experience of motherhood from that perspective. In my maternity I have connected with an endless number of sensations, sometimes in a very polarized way. In that polarization the relationship and tension between feeling connected to my power and feeling powerless has been very present underlying my whole process. In the chapter "Ambivalence as a way of feeling motherhood" I talk in more detail about this dynamic.

In turn, there are more factors that establish my relationship in terms of power with motherhood. The concept from Process Work of power as an internal source of personal growth<sup>16</sup> has been an opportunity and a learning to reverse certain beliefs that gave little value to my maternal experience and made me feel like a victim of my new reality. From the perspective of Process Work, I am aware that power does not have a single face and that therefore there are aspects in me that allow me to feel empowered. In that sense and in the line of Dan Menken (2013), understanding motherhood as a process of growth, not only of my son, but above all mine, has helped me to realize how motherhood has led me to review my relationship with power, and more specifically the connection with my personal power. Subverting the meaning and importance of motherhood on a personal level is also doing it on a social level. It has to do with that conception of Process Work that understands that the border between individual and collective psychology is blurred, we are, as individuals, a

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<sup>15</sup> *"Patriarchy is a historical takeover of power by men over women whose occasional agent was of the biological order, although this was elevated to political and economic status. This form of power necessarily involves the subjection of women to motherhood, the repression of female sexuality, and the appropriation of the entire workforce from the dominated group, whose first but not only product is children"*.

Sau, Victòria (2001). Diccionario ideológico feminista (Volumen I). Icaria.

<sup>16</sup> Diamond, J. (2016) *Power: A User's Guide*. Belly Song Pres



reflection of the world and the world is our reflection. Thus, to feel and place myself on the margins as a mother, is, in part, a reflection of the social model and at the same time is also a reflection of my inner capacity to value myself and my experience. As A. Mindell says, working on our inner edges is a form of social action, because it implies that we are also pushing social limits and changing cultural beliefs.

## **WELCOME TO MOTHERHOOD: THE BIRTH OF A NEW IDENTITY**

In my personal experience, with the birth of my son, I experienced bewilderment. On the one hand, I didn't feel at all connected to that myth related to a natural instinct that guides you and quickly connects you to a spontaneous "maternal" doing. I especially remember the first few weeks, when that little creature seemed to me at times to be a real stranger.

The birth of my son, absolutely dependent, with a brutal ability to express his needs as a natural survival mechanism was very disconcerting to me. The force with which he complained was overwhelming and exhausting.

This bewilderment, in my case, can also be explained by my previous lack of contact with raising a baby. Starting from a relatively small nuclear family in an urban environment has meant that I'm learning motherhood mostly through my own experience, without many previous real references. This situation, although not shared by everyone, does have certain characteristics that are defined by the social structure in which we live. Social transformation through industrialization led to a shift from an extended family model to a nuclear family model. In this process, parenting has ceased to be an experience shared by different generations, especially among women (mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, neighbours, etc.) to a more solitary experience without many support networks. This relatively new social panorama has meant, on the one hand, a certain ignorance of what maternity and upbringing implies. On the other hand, it has also meant the implementation of a model of motherhood in solitary and with very few support networks.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, it is curious to note how as I became a mother, I almost automatically

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<sup>18</sup> Del Olmo, Carolina. (2013) *Donde está mi tribu? Maternidad y crianza en una sociedad individualista*. Clave Intelectual.

felt that I was also "the main figure of reference" for my baby. A very strong sensation connected me with feeling that my baby's well-being passed primarily through me, both in what I did and what I didn't do. Here on the one hand, and from a more sociological point of view, we again come across an explanation that emphasizes the social inequalities marked by the old patriarchal equation that defines woman=mother.<sup>19</sup> And on the other hand, from a biological perspective we speak of the concept of instinct understood as a natural process that women, during our reproductive function, are activated as part of the survival of the species. In my case, the tension between these two perspectives has been present in the moments that I have felt especially linked to my son or I have felt that his welfare depended very much on me. How much is cultural and how much is biological instinct? It is a difficult question to answer. At the same time, looking at this dynamic or tension from the Processwork helps me to become more aware of it, understanding that they are roles that are in the field and thus be able to interact with them. From the perspective of Processwork, we can say that all the experiences or positions that we detect in a more or less evident or conscious way are roles of the field<sup>20</sup>. Roles are the points of view or experiences related to a subject or situation. And these roles are presented according to what we call field. The field is a unique space that is defined according to the historical, cultural and personal context of each moment.

First of all, it helps me to realize that my tendency has been to further marginalize the biological/ instinctive pull, and put more emphasis on the social construction of gender. This tendency is explained, in my case partly because of my background in sociology but mainly because of my social condition as a woman, from where I connect with all the daily discriminations that I have suffered and continue to suffer from and react to the historic assumption and consequent oppression of women and mothers using biological arguments to legitimize conditions of inequality and marginalization. A part of me reacts to this dynamic, activating my defenses and at the same time, denying or marginalizing those experiences that I have lived as a mother and that connect me with feeling a unique and irrational bond with my son.

I remember that a three days after giving birth, while I was still in the hospital, I wanted to go out alone to the street for a walk. My partner stayed in the room with our son. I took a

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<sup>19</sup> Cristina Bernis Carro, Rosario López Giménez, Pilar Montero López (Eds.) (2009). *Determinantes biológicos, psicológicos y sociales de La Maternidad en el siglo XXI: Mitos y realidades. XVII Jornadas de Investigación Interdisciplinaria*. Ediciones de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.

<sup>20</sup> Mindell, A (1995). *Sitting in the fire. How to transform large groups through conflict and diversity*. Icaria Milenrama

small walk around the block because I felt restless and wanted to go back. Entering through the hospital door, I saw a mother with a baby in her arms leave the hospital. I remember suddenly I felt that this could be my baby, it even seemed to me that it looked too much like him. And then I began to panic as I doubted whether my son would be in the room when he came back or would have been taken away. It wasn't until I took him in my arms that I calmed down again. I remember my surprise at my reaction, from which I wondered "why wouldn't my baby be where I left him? On a non-rational level, my experience connected me with that little being through a deep, unexplainable, life-or-death bond. This experience, which I am recounting here for the first time, at the time I marginalized myself because it made me feel inadequate, of having lost the capacity of common sense or even of madness. Later I talk about motherhood and its relationship with altered states.

The perspective of Processwork makes it easier for me to see these two polarized roles, to understand them more deeply, and to give them equal space. On the one hand, it helps me become more aware of the impact that being a woman in our society has had on me, and on many women, as a way to also honor and appreciate the difficulty that this sometimes entails. At the same time, it allows me to realize how this external oppression is also exerted towards me, when for example I deny or marginalize all these experiences of connection with my son. In this way, I can give myself permission to connect with the moments when I feel a unique and deep bond with my child, without feeling inadequate, but as a gift that our relationship brings.

What happens to us (the first-time mothers) in all this new panorama? What remains of our ancient identity as a person? In my case, I was now a mother. I was no longer just Núria. In fact the people around me began to relate to me through my son. He was the centre of interest. He was also the centre of my interest. With the birth of my son, a new identity was also born, that of a mother. In a sense, my son and I are the same age, we are sharing a new path for both of us, a parallel process of growth, where we learn and mature together in these new identities of mother and son.

My new identity as a mother awakened an intense process regarding how to "be a mother" to my son, about what it means and the importance of educating a little person. A huge world where you are given the foregone task of accompanying a dependent being. What do his need? How do I want to do it? Caring for and respecting a dependent human being, in my case, raises me constant questions and revisions about the way I am and how I function. It's a powerful source of personal revision where you stumble upon parts of yourself that you

had not previously located or that if you had, only sheepishly. In my experience, bringing up a child has the virtue or the defect of a magnifying glass effect, amplifying some of those aspects that need to be dealt with. Between them for example, and as I mentioned above, it has helped me to become more aware of my internal dynamics in relation to gender. How being a woman affects me, noticing the impacts it has on me and being more aware of how the dynamic of oppression is also in me.

During that process, where you encounter difficulties and challenges, a new question also opens up for me and has to do with how to be a "mother" to myself. That is to say, in dealing with this vulnerability, dependency and the care that I have for my child, how am I able to have them present for myself? What place do I give to care? How and from where do I relate to myself and to others? What space do I give to my vulnerability? They are internal questions and at the same time, they are also questions to the world.

## **Responsibility, a giant critic<sup>21</sup>**

One aspect that I have clearly seen in myself, in my surroundings and above all with mothers with whom I have worked in a therapeutic context has to do with judgment. Being a mother puts you in the spotlight. The imaginary and social expectations around how you're supposed to be as a Mother is a huge responsibility in the individual psychology of many mothers. It is a dynamic that is defined with the birth of the baby, when it is more dependent, and also when we unconsciously define the familiar relational patterns. In order to understand this in a more graphic way, it is only necessary to compare for a moment the social relationship that there is with the father figure. Without wanting to criticise, there is a social tendency to appreciate and recognise the acts or commitments that fathers take on in their role as caregivers. Thus, for example, how many times have we heard someone say "What a good father, he picks up his daughter from school every day" or "how lucky you are to have such a partner, who takes care of his son so much". And if that parent doesn't have an active caregiving role, it'll just go unnoticed because after all he's not expected to do it. As mothers, on the other hand, it is clearly difficult to receive appreciation and recognition

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<sup>21</sup> **Critic:** A marginalizing force that is usually structured by a belief system that makes the experience secondary. It is a dream figure. "

Diamond, J and Jones, L.S. (2011) *A Road Made by Walking. Process Therapy in practice*. CRE-SER Human Development Institute.

for your role or commitment to parenting. Basically, because is it taken for granted that this is your role. Rather, there is a tendency to emphasize those details or actions that are not in agreement with your supposed role. For example, those mothers who prioritize their professional careers and at home it is the father who takes the most active role in parenting, are going to have to deal with criticism for their uncommitted attitude

Thus, in my experience I have realized how difficult it has been for me to receive any criticism, however small, from my partner or family. My partner was at times surprised by my strong reactions to any critical comments concerning parenting. I felt incapable of listening to it, much less taking it. I was also surprised to notice the emotional toll that his comments took on me. It helped me a lot to see that same pattern with couples or mothers around me or coming to therapy. This dynamic is explained, above all, through the historical-social imaginary surrounding the gender inequalities still present in our western societies. At the same time, looking at this same dynamic from Processwork allows me to understand it, again, not only as something external to me that conditions me, but also as an internal dynamic composed of different roles or parts. In that social and internal scenario where the belief that the responsibility for the well-being of my child goes, above all, through what I do or don't do, we find ourselves in two roles. On the one hand, what we could call "the good mother", who represents that figure that cares and attends to the child with love. And at the same time we find its polarity that we will call "the bad mother", which represents that figure that hurts or causes harm to the child, either by omission or by her bad practice. Thus, in becoming a mother I become de facto, potentially both, as an apparently inescapable part of my new role. Who decides if I am a "good mother" or a "bad mother"? Here we would find a new role that we will call the "evaluator", that figure who decides if you are being a loving mother or a mother who causes injury. My tendency is to identify myself as a "good mother" and at times as a "bad mother" when I suffer from the role of "evaluator" who tells me that I am not doing well. But identifying with the "evaluating" role is more complicated for me, it is what we in Process Work call "phantom role" because they are far from our consciousness. Even so, all the roles described are part of my experience as a mother, that is, they are social roles and they are internal roles. I am at times "good mother", "bad mother" and "evaluator".

So in the example above, when I have received some criticism from my partner in my role as mother, my strong reactions have to do with unconsciously occupying some roles more than others. In other words, I feel like a victim of the role of "evaluator" who tells me that I am being "a bad mother". But the interesting thing is to notice that this evaluator is also in me,

that is to say that beyond the external criticism, at times I become my own evaluator judging if I do it "well" or "badly". Therefore, my strong reactions are often not in relation to what is being said to me from the outside, but rather I am relating to my own internal "evaluator" who oppresses or punishes me as a mother. Being aware of this dynamic helps me to be able to relate to my different roles as parts of myself and therefore with the capacity to choose. I'm no longer just a victim of external criticism, but above all, I can be my own critic and from there, decide the space I give or not to the oppressive message.

In that process I realize the presence of another phantom role that I will call "support", and that would be that figure that does not judge but supports the figure of the mother. Taking this role more consciously helps me to give myself support and confidence in my own way of being a mother. So, in another example where this same dynamic was activated in me, it has to do with the moment we decided to take my child to the nursery. On the one hand, connecting with my need for personal space after 2 years of high dedication to parenting, made me feel the option as legitimate and necessary. At the same time I felt that it could even be beneficial for my child. On the other hand, I felt that this was not a real need for my son, that what he needed was still space to share with me. The internal critic who woke me up to feel that I wasn't doing "the right thing" in terms of his needs was difficult. There, my internal "evaluator" reminded me that I was being a "bad mother. Feeling, for example, that I could cause early trauma to my child by exposing him to an environment (a classroom with 20 2-year-old children with the accompaniment of an educator and a half) without him being prepared for it. Obviously, on one level this is undoubtedly an unsuitable scenario for good child accompaniment. Even so, from another level, when I only identify myself as a mother caregiver, in the role of "the good mother" I feel like a victim by not responding to the pressure of the demand for care. But if I give space also to the other roles that are in me, and I enter especially in the phantom role of the "evaluator" I broaden my understanding of the dynamics. Entering the critic, beyond the oppressive content, I find a certain energy, very clearly, that supports his own criteria. In that sense, looking at my reality as a mother from this energy allows me to hold all the different roles that are in me, connecting with a new role, absent until now, which is the one that supports my way of being a mother, the "support" role. And so, on the one hand, to support my criteria about the importance of taking care of my child's needs and at the same time also my need to take care of myself. And from there, also trusting in my son's capacity to manage some of the changes that life and the society we live in present us. Being able to connect with this new role has been very revealing for me, because it has to do with trusting and supporting me in my unique way of

being a mother, outside of constant judgment.

## **Ambivalence as a way of feeling maternity**

*"We assume that the phrases would always have two parts: the second apparently contradicted the first, but its unity was always subject to our ever-increasing ability to tolerate this ambivalence, for this is precisely what maternal love is all about."*<sup>24</sup>

In my personal experience motherhood has been very much linked to the intensity and multiplicity of sensations, emotions and feelings. To begin with during my pregnancy, especially during the first trimester, I had many physical symptoms (nausea, vomiting, discomfort, ...) which I experienced with great intensity. The pregnancy connected me with something that was out of my control, my body was in full explosion of sensations in a very intense way and I felt victim to all of them. Exploring that intensity during my therapy sessions connected me with an indomitable, wild, very powerful energy that appeared through my bodily symptoms. It was an energy that resembled a rough sea, moments of a sea storm. Being that wild and indomitable sea connected me with a brutal internal force, from where I didn't feel like a victim of intensity because suddenly I was that intensity. And from there, it allowed me to live my pregnancy, with its different stages, appropriating my process, as a way to connect with the savage and indomitable to gestate a life within you.<sup>25</sup> With the birth of my son the intensity did not go away, it has continued to accompany me in various ways, beginning with the simple fact of having an absolutely dependent creature hooked to my body almost permanently, crying to express its needs and sucking my breasts on demand. For nearly the whole of the first year I couldn't sleep more than 2 hours in a row during long nights full of altered states. Surprisingly for me, during the day I still had energy like I had never felt before. The feeling that something was escaping my will or control was still very much a part of this new reality. The tension between my own needs and those of the creature is part of the everyday scenario, especially in the early years of parenting. My need for the baby to fall asleep and his refusal to do so, or to not eat according to my

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<sup>24</sup> Lazarre, J. (2018). *"El nudo materno"*. Las afueras

<sup>25</sup> See exercise steps for working with body symptoms in the Appendix

expectations, or not achieving that he calms down in the care of another person...Being able to adapt myself to the lack of control of situations or the unexpected response to my expectations is a challenge that has generated much frustration. Working on my frustration on a personal level, I realised that it was a reaction to something. In Processwork it is understood that often in experiences that bother us there is valuable information about some aspect or quality that we need to incorporate into our life. In that sense they are opportunities to learn more about our process and what we need right now.<sup>26</sup> So, frustration in my case was a response to an energy that was very clear about my unmet needs. That energy was presented through my son not wanting to sleep or not wanting to adapt. By becoming that unadaptive energy I realised the importance of connecting more with what I needed, putting the focus on myself, giving myself space. As a mother it's easy to get into the role of keeping on relentlessly, without giving yourself permission to check in on how you're doing. So in my case I was generating a lot of frustration, especially when my son put me to the test not accepting my will or proposal. Being a little more like my son, connecting with myself and my needs is an important aspect of my personal process. From my experience, my son is in many moments my best teacher. It has to do with what Dawn Menken names in her book about how we grow through parenting. It's not just our creatures growing up. Our daughters or sons constantly challenge us by testing our personal boundaries and questioning who we are and who we want to be.<sup>27</sup>

Maternity opened a new and intense type of relationship, and with it the pack of polarized feelings. Before becoming a mother I had never connected so deeply with theoretically contradictory feelings. To be able to feel love and at the same time hate, illusion and despair, joy and sadness ... everything with the same magnitude and power, connects you with an internal judgment of not responding to a supposed expectation. "Either you love or you hate" has more to do with my unconscious imagination of the emotional world and its relationships. But loving and hating at the same time may mean that there is something going wrong.

At the same time, there are emotions that I welcome more than others. Thus, I give myself more permission to feel love for my son than to feel hate for him. Here again, the imaginary of the mother as a figure of unconditional love is present. Thus, when I have connected with moments of exhaustion and boredom towards my son, my internal "evaluator" has activated

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<sup>26</sup> See exercise steps for working with disturbances in the Appendix

<sup>27</sup> Menken, Dawn (2013). *Raising Parents, raising Kids*. Belly Song Press



herself by criticizing my inability to be a "good mother".

This experience of such opposing feelings has made me feel confused and often lost. This bewilderment has to do with a belief system that recognises the control of emotions. If, suddenly, there is no apparent control, what could happen? I don't know. It touches my personal edges. The concept of edges is defined by Process Work as a point of contact between everyday identity and an unknown experience.<sup>29</sup> We all tend to identify ourselves in certain ways (for example, in my case, being a loving mother). On the contrary, there are aspects with which we do not identify at all, either because we think they are far from our way of being or simply because we do not like them (for example, in me, being a mother who doesn't care about my child's welfare). In the separation between what we identify with as people and what we don't, we find the edge. The edge structures our belief system, keeping in order who we are and who we are not. Limits are useful in the sense that they allow us to define and protect our identity. At the same time, edges can often get in the way of us learning more about ourselves, of broadening our way of being and understanding ourselves. Giving space, for example, to moments in which you feel that having become a mother has destroyed your life and, at the same time, feeling that you love it with all your strength and that you would not change it for anything in the world. How is such a contradiction possible? It is such a non-linear way of feeling that it makes me feel out of control, being lost at sea. My belief system tells me that I have to feel one thing or the other, but both at the same time in such an intense way means that there is something in me that isn't working.

Being aware of how motherhood, in my case, is about this, that is to say that part of its pattern is non-linearity, the multiplicity or ambivalence of emotions, has helped me to give myself more inner permission to feel my various emotions, and to minimize the judgment automatically activated by the way I live it.. To be able to connect more freely with the flow of emotions, with the poles, welcoming my diversity, as part of the gift that my motherhood brings. Here my son has helped me to get in touch with this ability to flow without judgment. My child, for example, can cry in a disconsolate manner in an attack of anger and rage and after a moment be playing so happily. Seeing him has also helped me to give permission to my ambivalence, as a skill that my son teaches me every day and that reminds me that I also had integrated when I was little.

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<sup>29</sup> Diamond, J and Jones, L.S. (2011) *A Road Made by Walking. Process Therapy in practice*. CRE-SER Human Development Institute. (page 145).

## Maternity and the double bind

*"I can't wait for tomorrow so that you can take care of the children," she confessed, "but I'm terrified of leaving them."*<sup>30</sup>

Another interesting aspect of how I as a mother relate to this polarity of feelings is defined by the concept of the double bind. The theory of double binding was coined and developed by anthropologist Gregory Bateson and his research team in Palo Alto, California (1956). It is framed in the systemic perspective and refers to those communicative situations in which contradictory messages are received from an authority figure. Thus, double binds are communicative dilemmas due to the contradiction between two or more messages in a power relationship. This leads to the fact that, regardless of how the receiver responds, he or she will always be making a mistake. In developing his theory, Bateson looked precisely at the relational dynamics within the family environment to explain the psychological origin of schizophrenia. It is interesting to note how in his approach, the subject creating the dynamics of double bind within the system is the mother, and that he, totally unconsciously, exaggerates the mother figure without any kind of critical social analysis of gender. It is, once again, that social critic which I have previously mentioned that places the mother in the focus of the judgment. In this sense, the reflections and analysis that some authors of family therapy make on this subject<sup>31</sup> are very revealing.

Beyond the success or failure of Bateson's conjectures, the concept of the double bind as a dilemma is very interesting.

As a mother, especially in the first few years I have found myself trapped in opposing dynamics that paralyze me.

On the one hand I feel the importance of being very present with my child, above all to guarantee his well-being. It has to do with that automatism that places me as the main figure of reference and that makes me feel hugely responsible for this vulnerable and dependent being. In this scenario, when I begin to connect with my own needs, putting the

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<sup>30</sup> Lazarre, J. (2018). *"El nudo materno"*. Las afueras

<sup>31</sup> Marianne Walters, Betty Carter, Peggy Papp, Olga Silverstein. *The Invisible Network. Gender-related guidelines in family relationships*. Family Therapy.

baby aside, I have an internal tension. My needs and those of the baby become incompatible. This tension has to do with the dynamic I spoke about above in the section on "Responsibility, a Giant Critic" around that construction about the ultimate responsibility of mothers in the upbringing and welfare of our children. In other words, this dynamic that makes me a "bad mother" if I attend to my needs apart from my child, because that implies not attending to his needs.

On the other hand there is another experience, perhaps less evident, that can also be stimulated with maternity. In my case it has also been very present and has to do with the part of me that connects, unconsciously, with being a woman from a classical feminist<sup>33</sup> point of view. It is related to that feminism of the 60s and 70s, which emphasized personal self-realization as a form of women's liberation and which rejected women-mother equality. In fact, it was claimed that motherhood had been a decisive obstacle to women's growth and had relegated them to an unsatisfactory private life. Motherhood was seen as the main obstacle to women's liberation and gender equality, creating the conclusion: motherhood=dependence=oppression.<sup>35</sup> There, I connect above all with my personal and professional projects and with the importance of giving them space. From that perspective I start to criticize myself for being relegated to this role and not being able to be more in the public sphere, in the world doing things. And there, the critic appears to me in a heartbreaking way telling me that I am throwing away my life, and my personal and professional projects, and becoming submissive to my role as a mother. A woman trapped in the clutches of patriarchy. The judgment for feeling that I devote too much time in my life exclusively to caring for and raising a child can present itself as the worst of my nightmares. To realise how this second mandate has also articulated my conception and experience of motherhood has been hard on the one hand, and at the same time very revealing.

In such a scenario, as a mother I have often found myself trapped by that double bind that translates into "If I dedicate myself exclusively to the needs of my son I feel bad, and if I

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<sup>33</sup> "**Feminism** is a social and political movement that formally began at the end of the eighteenth century - although it has not yet adopted this date- highlighting awareness of women as a group or human collective, of the oppression, domination, and exploitation that they have been and are subjected to by the male collective within the patriarchal system under its different historical phases and models, which moves them to action for the liberation of their sex with all the transformations of society that are required.

Sau, Victòria (2001). *Feminist Ideological Dictionary (Volume I)*. Icaria.

<sup>35</sup> Cristina Bernis Carro, Rosario López Giménez, Pilar Montero López (Eds.) (2009). *Determinantes biológicos, psicológicos y sociales de La Maternidad en el siglo XXI: Mitos y realidades*. XVII Interdisciplinary Research Conferences. Editions of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

don't do it I also feel bad". So you are left with no choice, because neither of them are acceptable.

That relationship with ambivalence makes you feel edges with both options, because choosing one or the other connects you with an internal judgment. That is, the part of me that wants to and feels that focusing on my child's care is vitally important, and then, the other part of me that wants to and feels that focusing on my own needs is also vitally important. These edges are articulated through my belief system that doesn't allow me to identify fully and congruently with either side. On both sides I suffer because I criticise myself. On both sides there is something important that has to do with being able to connect with the deep sense of both and with the power of conscious decision. When I am in a double bind I feel powerless, I suffer and feel like victims of both sides, unable to find answers .

The look of Processwork has allowed me to understand this dynamic of double bind with new information. On the one hand, I realize how in reality behind the two messages that paralyze me, "you have to prioritize the care of your child" and "you have to prioritize your personal and professional sphere" I find, again, the same role that judges and in this case belittles the care, whether their own or that of others. It is a role of authority that exercises the two contradictory messages. In turn, there is another role that is the victim, who suffers from that authority. Both are roles that are present in me, although I only identify with the victim from the start. And therefore I feel trapped and paralyzed. From Processwork we would say that the way to get out of the double bind is to connect with the power of the role of authority and thus be able to stop the dynamic that blocks me. In my case, jumping the edge and connecting with my power has to do with appreciating and giving real value to the care. To begin with, it helps me to connect with the underlying sense of wanting to be a mother. My motherhood has not been an easy road, I was involved in an intense process for 6 years until I became pregnant. I refuse to think that it was in vain. There is something deep in my search for motherhood. And I realize that it has a lot to do with paying attention to care, to accompanying vulnerability and fragility, to welcoming them as part of life and strength. To be present with what happens on an emotional level, to sustain me. And this process is an invitation through my child, to pay attention also to my own emotions, vulnerabilities and strengths.

From here, I am aware that I have made decisions about my motherhood. That I am not only a victim of a double bind that paralyzes me, but that I can connect again with my power of decision, with my way of wanting to be and to take care of myself.

What is the place of care in our world? How do we tend to marginalise the importance of care in Western society? To be able to give care the value that it really deserves, and in this case to motherhood as an experience based above all on care, I believe that it is an issue of social justice. Caring, as an act of activism, to give the space and importance that care deserves, to bring into the world little people who appreciate care, who can feel that caring for themselves and others is fundamental to living in community. And that's where placing the importance of care at the center is an act of activism because that is profoundly transformative. From there, in the maternal experience the need to care for a child is just as important as the need to care for oneself. But this cannot be done by mothers alone, nor by fathers or maternal figures. For that, the commitment of the whole society is necessary because in order to be able to take care others, it is essential to be able to take care of oneself. In my own experience I have realized the difficulty of being able to take care of my child when I don't take care of myself. And at the same time, the lack of congruence with which I do it, generates an unhealthy message. For me it is of vital importance that my son feels cared for and that he learns to take care of himself, and for that he needs to have close references of people who take care of others at the same time as they know how to take care of themselves.

Take care of my lips,  
Take care of my laughter.  
Carry me in your arms,  
Don't rush me.

Never mistreat my fragility,  
I'll step on the ground you step on.

Take care of my hands,  
Take care of my fingers.  
Give me the caress,  
That rests in them.

Never mistreat my fragility,

I'll be the image in your mirror.

Take care of my dreams,

Take care of my life.

Take care of those who love you,

Take care of those who take care of you.

Never mistreat my fragility,

I'll be the hug that relieves you.

Take care of my eyes,

Take care of my face.

Open the roads,

Give me the words.

Never mistreat my fragility,

I'm tomorrow's fortress.<sup>38</sup>

## **MATERNITY IN THE WORLD**

How do all these aspects and internal experiences that I have been talking about present themselves in the world or in the public sphere?

For me, fitting my reality as a mother into the outside world has been a difficult time. When I speak of the outside world, I am referring to the world of the public sphere, of productive life, of the visible, against what would be the private or more intimate sphere.

Being a mother has led me almost inevitably to the private sphere, as a space that is sought after for moments of security and comfort and at the same time as an option that is taken for granted. I remember very much in the beginning the need to have spaces with more mothers where we could share experiences and realities. The burden of caring for a baby

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<sup>38</sup> Guerra, P. (2014). Song "Take care of me" from the album "20 years".

can be exhausting and the house at times can become a prison. Being able to share with other mothers for me was a lifesaver. I am deeply grateful to the mothers I befriended along the way. I feel that we share that level of deep intimacy that comes when you meet people who are having life experiences similar to your own. Even so, and from the awareness of the importance of feeling supported, I have felt the lack of organized spaces where we can share experiences and network.

In my professional situation, as a result of my pregnancy, I decided to leave my job as a salaried employee in the community environment because it was incompatible (especially due to timetables) with my way of wanting to manage the upbringing. I got unemployment benefits for a while, and finally became autonomous as the most compatible form with my new reality. The flexibility of the hours that that allowed me, even with a substantial decrease in my income, compensated me for the decision.

I especially remember the pleasure that I felt the first moment that I reconnected briefly with my work, leaving aside for a while my role as a mother. Being able to be in touch with my professional sphere was super gratifying. It was a way of being able to reconnect with those aspects of my identity, prior to my motherhood, that allowed me to feel beyond being a mother. In my case, having this type of space has been almost essential, as a way of seeing my being in a more complete way. Here I want to thank my partner for his support, accompanying me with my son in some of the places where I went to work to continue breastfeeding.

On the other hand, when I wanted to reconnect with some of the social spaces of my life before motherhood it was especially difficult for me. I found it painful to try to incorporate myself, now with my son, into places that were once easy and important, and to realise my inability to feel comfortable. The intensity of the maternal experience with its ambivalence of emotions made it difficult for me to reconcile the non-linearity of those emotions in a world that at times I conceive as linear, stable, where you have to know what's going on for you and why. A world that also emphasizes our capacity to be autonomous and independent people. For me, submerged in a sea of emotions in many uncontrollable moments, being in the social sphere made me feel inadequate.

To begin with, as I have already explained, because internally it has been difficult for me to accept this dynamic and therefore give it permission, as I have judged it as undesirable. That internal difficulty, beyond being personal, is linked to the social belief system that

emphasizes rationality, productivity and efficiency for its proper functioning. Suddenly going out into the world from that way of feeling places you, very often on the margins of society. It was difficult to me fit into social spaces, where linearity is so present.

For me, reconciling my experience as a mother with my son in spaces designed for adults has been a big challenge. I realize that part of my difficulty was giving me absolute permission to notice my needs as a mother, express them or even ask for support. My edge to feeling as legitimate my needs as a mother made me adapt to the environment and marginalize my reality. It has to do with my edge to being in touch with my vulnerability and feeling dependent. As I explain below, subverting my relationship with vulnerability has helped me to break out of my isolation in such situations.

How do we fit this experience into a world that does not welcome emotional intensity in uncontrolled and politically incorrect moments? The easy thing is simply to label this experience, especially in the beginning when it presents itself with more intensity, as a hormonal imbalance, a passing phase until everything returns to its natural order. We therefore marginalize the experience or don't give it significant value. We even label mothers who more obviously express their altered states as incapable, uncontrolled and therefore unfit as mothers.

In my case, I know that that experience does not go away, it may change in intensity or expression, but the ambivalence in emotions will continue to be present. Because the pattern has to do with ambivalence, that's precisely what it's about. That pattern has to do with motherhood but not only that. It has to do with our way of being in the world, with the space we give to all those experiences that are not linear. Here again, my son has been my best teacher. Seeing his facility to be with all his states in the world, without filters, without marginalizing any of his experiences, has been a model to follow. Now, as I write this, I am moved to realize what an immense gift it is for me, as an experience that teaches me day by day to be more in touch with my emotions and sensibility. At times, his naturalness in bringing his states into the public sphere, especially anger, sadness or discomfort, was disturbing to me. At one point, I realized how what was disturbing to me was that my son was doing something I was not allowing for myself. Realizing that, helped me to welcome my diversity of emotions, however difficult or conflicting they might be, right from the start. And that in turn makes it easier for me to give myself more internal permission to express



them or bring them into the world.<sup>39</sup>

## **Dependency relationships**

Another factor that made it especially difficult for me to fit into the world as a mother was my diminished ability to be an independent person. Up to the time of being a mother, I had tended to identify myself as a fairly autonomous person, the fruit among other things of a belief system built within my family of origin, where independence has always been overvalued. As Carolina del Olmo reflects in her book "Where my tribe is" autonomy and our ability to be independent people is one of the aspects that is especially appreciated in our western societies. It is almost a social maxim that resembles adulthood and maturity. Thus, from a very young age, we transmit to our children our desire for them to become independent people, capable of governing their own lives without the need for external help. Paradoxically, in two of the most crucial stages of our lives, childhood and old age, we are or become, to a greater or lesser extent, dependent beings.

During my pregnancy I began to connect with a need to feel my partner as part of my life system, as something almost essential to my well-being. With the birth of our son that feeling was accentuated. It was a profound need to feel that we were a team, unbreakable, completely congruent. That feeling was very connected with my ability to be in touch with my vulnerability. I didn't feel like an independent being at all, or at least not in the way I had conceived myself until now.

During motherhood, this relationship of dependence is expressed clearly and forcefully. On the one hand, dependence was articulated from my son to me as a mother, a relationship that especially in the beginning I accepted and recognized more clearly. And on the other hand, dependence was also present from me as a mother to my surroundings. As a mother, especially in the beginning, I became a dependent person. Dependent on basic needs such as showering, eating, going to the bathroom. I was clearly dependent on other people to be able to function. What was happening (carrying and raising a baby) was something so great that the wisdom of my body knew I couldn't do it alone. That experience is totally contrary

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<sup>39</sup> See guided exercise to work with something that disturbs us.

to what I think is socially expected of me. I depended on my environment to varying degrees in order to reconcile my child's care with my own. For example, I depended on my partner to rest after a night of intense and exhausting breastfeeding. Or to be able to go to work and have them (my partner and my son) accompany me on my journeys and thus be able to reconcile breastfeeding with my work. Or I depended on my parents to be able to study or go to work when Guillem was not yet in kindergarten. My actions were suddenly not only about me, but required and depended on my environment.

Coming into contact with feeling dependent, at first, can also be a difficult experience, especially if your identity, reinforced by social definition, has been built on a supposed independence and autonomy. Relying on others to do or not do things at many times made me feel incapable.

At the same time, from the pressure to be the emancipated woman who can do anything, you can react to that dependence by trying to become the superwoman, capable of anything and everything. And there, we are denying or marginalizing the part of us that needs support and often external support.

The feeling of dependence is very much connected with vulnerability. It's that internal space where you connect with your most fragile and delicate being. That part that needs support. In the beginning, the relationship with my vulnerability made me feel small, because I wasn't used to being exposed to it in such a clear way. With the birth of my son I have felt vulnerable at many times, especially through connecting with the difficulties and challenges I have faced. I remember, for example, the beginnings of breastfeeding where Guillem and I needed a period of mutual adaptation to find a way to latch on to my nipples without causing me pain. The first days after giving birth, the pain in my breasts was such that every time my child had to suck I felt overwhelmed. I connected with my vulnerability by feeling helpless, until my partner provided support and we sought support in a breastfeeding group. Dependence becomes difficult when I relate to my vulnerability through incapacity or inadequacy. That is, the belief that power is only in the fortress, makes me place myself in dependency relationships, sometimes from a place of submission. But if, instead of taking it away, I place value on vulnerability, things change. Suddenly when I stopped deploring my vulnerability I realised that it allowed me to be in touch with myself in a profound way, that it was a state in which I could feel more easily, and be more connected with my sensitivity to myself and to the world. Motherhood has given me an opportunity to discover and reconcile with my vulnerability. And far from feeling that it is something that makes me small, it has

allowed me to connect with a small gift, to recognise my fragility in order to appreciate the profound meaning of dependency relationships. It has to do with feeling that we are all connected and dependant, that our existence is clearly based on dependence on our environment, that we exist thanks to and in spite of our environment. We are dependent beings, although we have built a society that emphasizes the contrary and denies dependence as if it were one of the worst social wrongs.

Simultaneously to my motherhood I have been able to live closely the aging process of my father-in-law. It has been very revealing to be able to see and feel how his aging and the upbringing of Guillem had in common that relationship with dependency. To notice how dependence manifests itself in its maximum expression in two of the most crucial stages of our lives, the birth and the end of life. It is like closing a cycle, a natural cycle that revolves around interdependencies. And to realize how during my life process, I have been denying that aspect, trying to live in the illusion or fantasy of believing myself independent, emphasizing my individuality. In this way, when old age arrives (as for example through the aging of my father-in-law), I have been able to rediscover the inevitable meaning of relationships, of their dependencies.. And as in upbringing, this not only happens to the one who becomes more obviously dependent, i.e. the baby or the elderly person, but it also touches the whole environment, who directly feels challenged by dependence. Living these two processes in parallel, has opened my eyes to a reality for me invisible until now, feeling deeply moved. Knowing myself and ourselves vulnerable, dependent, interconnected as something central to our existence. In that sense, to live motherhood as an opportunity to remember and rediscover interdependent relationships and ties, not only as part of a life stage but also as part of the sense of who we are as a species.

### **Maternity: shadows of the city<sup>40</sup>**

I have often lived my maternal experience in an altered state. It has to do with those moments when I felt that my experience or reality was unknown to me and out of my control. I remember those situations in which I was immersed in an emotional intensity that

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<sup>40</sup> Mindell, Arnold (2008). *City Shadows: Psychological Interventions in Psichiatria*. Paperback

overflowed me, without the capacity to understand. When my inner experience made me feel like a Martian from another galaxy, a being navigating between love, anger, "I can't take it anymore", insecurity, strength, ... without the ability to explain or share it. The long sleepless nights where I felt lost and confused, at times connecting with an irrational fear that filled everything.

Processwork speaks of an altered state as a state of consciousness that is different from the "ordinary" state connected with social and collective norms. These are states in which the ability to metacommunicate is partially or totally lost. Metacommunication refers to the ability to explain what is happening as if it were happening to another person, it means that there is a part of the narrator who is not identified with the experience and can talk about it. Thus, in Altered States, especially in the Extreme States, we are no longer able to narrate what is happening to us.

The altered states that we experience are not only connected to our personal psychology but also to collective psychology. According to the theories of the field, it is said that every field has its own consciousness. Thus, according to Mindell a useful and tentative theory to consider is that a field does everything it can to reach consciousness. In that sense for example, people experience it when in our lives we realize aspects or experiences that make our lives more meaningful. In the case of Altered States, the person does not have the capacity to metacommunicate his experience and therefore to realize it, although he does have his environment. In this sense, the hypothesis formulated from the Process Work states that the field is expressed through people with Altered or Extreme States (such as Schizophrenia) who cannot communicate their experience, to express before the world and become aware of aspects that we would otherwise deny or neglect. In this way, the field informs the general public about our own conflicts as a society.<sup>41</sup>

Jung uses the term "shadow" to refer to parts of the personality that are separate from the conscious attitude. Mindell extends this idea and transfers it to society: he speaks of the shadows of the city by referring to experiences or information that society marginalizes. This information finds channels to express itself, and people are like a channel to express all those aspects that are not permitted in society. Thus, from that perspective, altered states are processes where all those aspects that are clearly connected with the social and cultural system in which we live are expressed, and therefore looking at them with that understanding makes us take collective, as opposed to just individual, responsibility for them.

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<sup>41</sup> Mindell, Arnold (2008). *City Shadows: Psychological Interventions in Psychiatry*. Paperback (pag 40-43)

Understanding motherhood as an altered state for me opens a window to an understanding beyond my own experience and gives it a broader meaning. How is motherhood bringing information about what part emotions play in the world? How do we relate to ambiguity and emotional intensity? What place do we give to dependency relationships, vulnerability and care? Possibly, with motherhood we question a personal and social belief system that says that we can only feel one thing at a time, in a linear way, that we have to have control over our emotions, that vulnerability and fragility are not acceptable and that we have to be, above all, independent people. The difficulty in fitting motherhood into that contrary belief system often produces altered states as a way of compensating for a marginalized and oppressed experience.

From there, my view expands to conceive of motherhood as an opportunity to broaden my identity and social identity by allowing me to enter states that cross edges and question who I am and who we are. Motherhood can give us the opportunity to connect with the fluidity between the polarities, to be able to feel the poles and to flow. And that's life. In my case it's very much connected to the source of giving birth. Giving birth for me was an intense experience that connected me very strongly with both life and death. In the process of giving birth I felt very powerful and connected to life and at the same time very vulnerable where death was very present. To know myself in connection and trust with my inner experience and at the same time feel the uncertainty of the process. To feel strength in knowing I was out of control. It's a strange feeling. It is a process where the two energies converge, life and death. There, ambivalence is already present. I can live and give life and I can die and give death. There is once again a point of no control, no linearity. In a certain sense, there is life and death at the same time. A new life and a new identity are being born. And I was also dying a part of what I had been so far.

Motherhood in that sense (like old age or illness) becomes "shadows of the city" bringing dependence and vulnerability as peripheral experiences of our society.

## CONCLUSIONS

This project is based on wanting to explore my experience as a mother through the lenses of Processwork. What did this exercise do for me? How has Processwork helped me to understand and relate to my motherhood? First of all, I distinguish two types of contributions, some at a theoretical level and others that have to do with attitudes. On the one hand, at a theoretical level, the Processwork has allowed me to understand maternity from a triple conception of reality, giving space to different types of experiences, aspects or levels that occur simultaneously and that are all part of the same reality.

Thus for example, broadening my view of motherhood, having understood it as a purely personal and therefore private experience, and then conceiving it as a social experience, taking it into the public sphere, has allowed me to break with its forced invisibility and present it to the world as something that goes beyond mothers and in some way, challenges all people. This is a first level from which I realize as in the dimension of Consensus Reality, maternity is still socially situated on the margins. As mothers, in many moments we continue sustaining an indispensable reproductive role for the survival of the species. But instead of feeling that I am contributing in a meaningful and valuable way to the world, I begin to enter Altered States that connect me with being inadequate and feeling very little power. To understand that my inability at times to feel connected to my power and my internal difficulties with motherhood are also a reflection of that social dynamic that detracts from an experience, which in turn is highly powerful, has helped me to realize how, at the level of Consensus Reality, we continue to live in a patriarchal society where gender inequalities are still very present. This is unavoidable and requires social denunciation to reverse this dynamic.

At the same time, entering into my maternal experience through the Dream Level opens a whole process where I understand the different experiences I experience as roles in a field of which I am also a part. From here, the power dynamics that I observe on a social level cease to be something external to me, to become part of internal dynamics as well. To be able to see that which disturbs me as part of me as well. To be able to relate to my critics as a mother, not only as something that comes to me from outside, but as something that is also in me, and thus be able to dialogue with them. Knowing myself at oppressive moments, not only a victim, allows me to subvert the model of relationship with myself and, therefore, with the world. In that sense, through the Level of Dreams, I realize how motherhood for me has been a call to connect with my personal power, questioning my belief systems environment aspects such as vulnerability, care, dependency relationships or emotional ambivalence. In my case, this is a path of personal growth. All in all, an aspect that has been

revealing for me on this path has been to be able to give space also to that level of reality, the Essence Level, which does not understand polarities and which connects you with something beyond logical comprehension. In my case, motherhood has also been a source of connection with a deep sense of life, which includes death, not as two separate experiences, but as going hand in hand. It has to do with that hard to explain feeling when giving birth, you feel that being born and dying is the same thing. Of interconnectedness, of feeling a deep bond with my environment, of immense love, as I had never experienced before. To connect with the certainty that alone in the world I could not survive. That part of reality, at times I have tended to marginalize it due to my internal critics who woke up needing to classify the experience in a polarity. Seeing this level as part of my maternal reality as well, without denying everything else, has allowed me to feel it with more freedom.

Therefore, at a theoretical level, conceiving my maternity from the three levels of Reality inevitably entails including the concept of Deep Democracy, which means welcoming the diversity of experiences and aspects that form part of my maternity, not only as something desirable but as something essential to understand and become aware.

On the other hand, a valuable contribution that for me means the Process Work, has to do with attitudes. From this paradigm a lot of emphasis is placed on the concept of metaskills. It has to do with the intention or attitude with which we use the skills given through knowledge. Thus, how I approach studying my motherhood is as important as what. In this sense, a first attitude that has helped me a lot in this process has to do with curiosity. Wanting to understand, without prejudging, having curiosity for all parts, both those with which I identify and those with which I do not identify. Here again, my son has reminded me of the importance of this attitude. His way of relating to the world, to learning, feeling that everything is new, allows him to do so from an authentic curiosity. Thus, the attitude of curiosity allows me to go further, entering for example into that which disturbs me, becoming it and transforming myself by connecting to something useful. In this sense, below I propose some exercises that can serve as a guide to explore some of the concepts that I have been narrating throughout my project.

Another attitude that for me has been significant and a contribution to my approach, is being able to be personal. Being able to talk about my experience giving space to my present emotions and feelings allows me to give support to all my experiences. For example, being able to connect with the pain of feeling like a victim also allows me to give space to my vulnerability and the importance of feeling supported. And that also makes it easier for me to go to the other side, and connect in a personal way with the part of me that is oppressive, giving space to power and compassion. Being personal has been a challenge for me that has

meant running into my edges over and over again, until I can gradually connect with valuing my own experience and feeling that doing so generates something valuable and meaningful. I would not have become aware of my experience and be able to transform myself without being personal.

In this sense, the fact that this project speaks of my personal experience has meant a journey for me. A trip with sweet moments, with others difficult and disturbing, sometimes dizzy from the waves and others grateful for the swaying of the waves. I feel like I've come a long way from writing to this day. My project has been transformed to the extent that I have. Now it's not the same project as when I started. And surely from here a year would also be different. And that is part of its nature and also the contribution of Process Work. To understand myself as a living system, in movement and therefore changing and in continuous transformation. There is no end, no permanent resolution. Just a flow of information that I can learn from by becoming aware. I am deeply grateful for being able to travel.



## **APPENDIX: INTERNAL WORK EXERCISES**

Throughout the project I have named some moments of inner work that have helped me in my dynamics of challenge or difficulty in my motherhood process. Here I propose some concrete exercises that I trust can be useful as a personal work tool.

### **WORKING WITH CRITICS**

1. Think of a situation where you feel criticized for your role as a mother.
2. Notice what the criticism is like, what it says, and how it says it. Try to be critical for a moment. Imagine showing someone else what that criticism is like.
3. In doing so, notice the body posture, the tone of voice, the attitude that goes with the criticism.
4. For a moment put aside the content of the critique and notice if there is any figure or character (real or fictitious) that appears.
5. Become that character or figure and move through space being him. Let yourself be seduced by that character, play and imagine that you are that figure for a while. What's so special about that character? Do it until you notice what his quality is.
6. In what way could that quality be useful to you to deal with the critical situation of point 1? What would you do differently from the quality of this figure?

### **WORKING WITH OPPRESSION**

1. Think about how you sometimes feel oppressed in your experience as a mother. Describe in detail what the experience is like, how it affects you.
2. Try to notice what it is that disturbs you the most and try to show it with a movement.
3. Repeat the movement and notice if it has an accompanying sound. Do it as many times as necessary until you feel what its quality or essence is.
4. How could this quality be useful to you in your daily experience as a mother? How could this quality support you in those moments when you feel oppressed in your role as mother?

## **WORKING WITH A BODY SYMPTOM**

1. Think of a body symptom (a physical sensation, discomfort, or pain) that is present now. Describe how it is and how you notice it. Realize if now is a good time for you to explore that symptom or if the pain or discomfort is too acute to pay attention to.
2. If you want to explore it, try to notice, beyond the part of you that suffers from the symptom, what creates the symptom. Is it something that squeezes? Something stabbing? Something that shakes? Try to be as specific as possible in noticing what the symptom generates. Maybe you get an image or a movement.
3. Once you have it, help yourself with the movement and/or a sound to get more into it and gradually become it.
4. Repeat it as many times as you need until you feel that you find a quality that defines the essence of that movement.
5. How could that quality support you in your current vital moment? How does that quality need more space in your life now?

## **WORK WITH A DISTURBANCE**

1. Think of a situation, someone or something that bothers or displeases you. Notice exactly what disturbs you. Be as specific as you can.
2. Represent that which disturbs you with a movement or gesture. And get more and more into that movement. Try to make it bigger or smaller, notice its rhythm, its intensity, its speed.
3. And repeat it until you find out what its essence or quality is.
4. How could you use that quality in your role as mother? How could that energy support you in your maternal role?

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