

Jill Greenhalgh

Dear Friends

Llangrannog, June 2008

*What is the letter
I need to write?
To say thanks for so many
meetings, thanks for
so many experiences and
so much solidarity - of course.
But also to write
of work and of writing.
And an apology.*

Dear Friends,

I have sat down at this computer a hundred times in the last weeks impelled by what I feel is my obligation to write for this issue of *The Open Page* - and I have written reams. But it is reams of - in my opinion - worthless words. So this letter to you begins with an apology for failing.

When the proposal of "Letters" was first articulated the image and memory of *that letter* written ten years ago almost to the month flooded my mind. We all agreed it should not be mentioned, not exhumed. But I am perverse. *That letter*¹ was a turning point, a milestone. It was a hard and painful letter to receive and I reeled and raged at what I believed to be the injustice of its words and its suggestions. That letter, a response to my words in a paper outlining a possible way forward for The Magdalena Project, marked the beginning of a volcano of many more distressing words. With the hindsight of time passed, I believe all these words were the violent death throes of an entity that needed to be buried.

I am at my kitchen table. It is summer and the valley is blooming gloriously. Everything - the roses, trees, weeds, my salad crop - is ripe. Yet I know it will all soon be over. The seasons impose regeneration, and a million tiny deaths will happen outside my window making way for the winter again to enshroud the seeds of new possibilities. Next year.

In the last ten years the young and energetic, all over the world, whose creative strength has flowed, have made so many events and meetings happen under the name of this project. In Spain, Denmark, Colombia, Peru, Argentina, New Zealand, Australia, Norway, Brazil, Singapore, Cuba, the USA. This energy and will has harvested many new relationships, understandings and actions. It has been truly

1. A letter sent by the Magdalena Project's Cardiff Board to Jill Greenhalgh in response to her plans for the future of the Project. In the letter the Board criticised the lack of a definite programme and decided to withdraw.

fecund. The work and commitment from all these tireless women has given voice to more women. Little by little this voice will become both a symphony of resistance and a cacophony of celebration. I believe this. Little by little. It has been good work. Failure giving space for re growth - perhaps.

In this last year I have been in a dark and isolated place; a place of loss, grief and of regret. It is not a pretty landscape and its bedrock reeks of self pity - so I did not invite anyone to visit. It is a place I needed to reside alone.

I had an ideal marriage - I thought: a place in the country, a good enough job that could support my performance making and my family; two healthy, smart, good looking kids. But I always wanted more. Wanting and fighting for more fed the pariah of loss. It seems.

What is the letter I need to write? To say thanks for so many meetings, thanks for so many experiences and so much solidarity - of course. But also to write of work and of writing. And an apology.

I have no compulsion: *compel* from the Latin *pellere*: to drive; to urge on with force. I have no drive, but a strong instinct for the opposite. What is the opposite of compel? I am urged more than anything to do nothing - am I afraid of more loss?

My work and I have been searching for a quiet force of stillness; the strength of silence with an authority that neither judges nor accuses. What is the opposite of accuse? But this stillness I am seeking is not stasis, it is dynamic. I may have the possibility to be effective if I can form this. It is perhaps the only thread of belief I have. Right now.

My friends try to draw me out, to get me back on the horse. But I am not sure I want to ride any longer, perhaps I want to float with a current to where - I have no idea.

...

*you may not like what I'm going to tell you
you are stuck now
you must seek nothing but the source*
Rumi

So what is this source that must be sought?
Self-knowledge?

For a long time I knew another wanted my lover. Constant and consistent denial led me to disbelieve what I knew. This disbelief in my own knowledge led to distorted behaviour. Which then justified each rejection. And further nourished the pariah of loss. She succeeds. My rage despises the cheat and yet she accompanies me in the darkness of this new searching for a wordless form that can hold the loss. A new piece of work.

My work and I are not depressed. We are as alive as we have ever been. My work finds itself in the blood of these wounds. There we delve in the muck of it knowing within resides a something as yet unknown that once revealed can heal. The work that can transform and resist the desire for revenge.

*These wings of yours
are filled with quests and hopes
if they are not used
they will wither away
they will soon decay*
Rumi

JILL GREENHALGH (Wales) is a producer, director, performer and teacher. In 1986 she founded the Magdalena Project and has remained its artistic director since. Her current performance work includes different groups of women performers across the globe. This work, *The Acts - Vigia*, is a response to the killings of young women in the border towns of northern Mexico, it asks "what is the feminine for revenge?" She is a lecturer in Performance Studies at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.