

Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn

Forewords written by Jaap van der Wal and Marcy Axness





There's something sensationally delicious about sinking into a good book, letting characters replace my reality with theirs. I breathe deeper, fuller. Expansive inhalations. Pauses become paced exhalations. I submerge, eyes first, into the depth of the white expanse, then trace black printed shapes etched in a linear fashion. The lines, lockstep, herald the bell ringer's message lodged within my no-nonsense brain: diversions are not allowed. I embrace the simple grace that comes with letting someone else's words take command, their pace now my pace, their depth now my depth. I flow in synchrony with what is and allow it to simply be. My mind fashions thoughts, tags after sensations in between blank spaces. My intention is to be with the text without an agenda, without expectations or preconceived notions or definitions of what is to be read. I clear my essence, become a human tabula rasa as I avail myself to what comes from the inner reaches of my knowing and the outer reaches of all knowing. My energy synchronizes with that emanating from the text, words once static on paper are now alive flowering within me, through me, developing meaning within the context of my being that enables me to learn, grow, share, release.

Sitting with Cherionna’s masterful weaving of science and wisdom, I watch as she unveils her mystical process of embodiment from preconception through pregnancy, birth, bonding, even into death through pictures, words, experientials. Her pacing, word by word, page by page, chapter by chapter, matches her belief that when we, as therapists, are working with ‘little one states’, it is essential to slow down, to stay in present time and connect with resources available in the here and now. In a present time, safe relationship, we can differentiate between then and now. Slowing down the tempo is useful in working with any kind of trauma, Cherionna notes, adding that emotional healing can happen more readily when we de-accelerate and avoid knee jerk automatic reactions. In this place of peaceful mindful pause-filled presence we have more possibility to perceive and access options that allow us to heal and grow (adapted from pg. 53). She offers a treasure trove of data with a first-person familiar voice—it’s an academic book that reads easily, no tripping on oversized words or floundering with a distant/disconnected authorial tone. Cherionna is present on the page as details are fleshed out, time and time again. Each thought is stretched as far as one might in a taffy pull, the materials sticking together yet thinning so one can almost see through it, capture the once imperceptible grains creating the whole, resulting in a clearer picture of what some might consider ungrounded, unsubstantiated, perhaps even shadowy concepts.



Cherionna lives and breathes this text. The stories are hers. The knowledge hers. The interweave of all she has gleaned from others, acknowledged, she is clearly grateful. She is one woman comprised of many souls, her energy tapping into the universal abundance that is available to all if we resonate with the fields surrounding us, embracing us, supporting us. If one reads this book slowly, methodically, with an air of open curiosity and willingness to explore, one avails themselves to the chance of a lifetime, to experience a cleansing rebirth starting from one's cellular beginnings through conception, gestation, developmental phases, birth, bonding and beyond.

Deepening movements into the essence of being, beginning with the smallest cell to the largest sense of differentiation, Cherionna explores, expands, presents our creation for reflection and experience. Nothing is left to chance. There is no guessing. All details are presented with the invitation to be open, curious to consider what you might at first think strange, unmentionable, outlandish. She invites room for our spirit to coexist in science, not an either or but a merging, a weave, a space for all that exists to truly exist as it is without distortion or contortion.

According to Cherionna, *"This book attempts through words, images and guided experiences, to share aspects of my own efforts to answer the question, "Where did I come from?" My intention is to help soften the journey for others who have been as haunted and fascinated by the question as I have"* (pg. 15).

### **Why did I agree to read this book?**

When I initially heard about Cherionna's new book, *Spirit Into Form*, I wanted a reviewer's copy because I valued her contributions to our field. Having written together before, I knew her research, methodology, wisdom, and writing style were solid. However, I didn't realize the enormity of this text until it arrived. At 539 pages, *Spirit Into Form* covers an expanse of 17 years of life and study and relationship. Cherionna integrates her experiences with pioneers in the field of and founders of numerous forms of body psychotherapy and prenatal and perinatal psychology and health including but not limited to: Emilie Conrad, William Emerson, Ray Castellino, John and Anna Chitty, Franklyn Sills, Thomas R. Verny, Jaap van der Wal, and more.



According to Michael Shea, an educator and author in the field of somatic psychology, myofascial release, and craniosacral therapy, her "narrative helps us enter the mystery of conception, birth and death." He adds: "This beautiful and spellbinding book must be required reading to become a full human being inherently complete from a single celled conceptus through the moment of death" (pg. #iv).



Thomas R. VERNY, another noted educator, author, researcher, clinician in the field of pre and perinatal psychology and health (PPPH), notes that Cherionna takes readers on a “tour of important developmental stages during gestation” and in addition she offers much regarding the “larger fields of Love, Spirit and Soul” and how they are connected to the human body (pg. #i).

Cherionna’s background in Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy and Continuum Movement are infused within this comprehensive tome resulting in a lifetime compendium that can fulfill anyone’s curiosity about how our earliest experiences impact our lives. The content herein will offer readers support and tools to potentially shift and change and heal their early imprints. We can move through trauma we’ve experienced from pre-conception onward and embrace and embody each stage of our life to live fully present with a compassionate heart. She offers us the grace of awareness and acceptance of all aspects of ourselves, including those areas we tend to relegate to what she calls the shadows.

This is what many professionals in the field call a “definitive book for the prenatal and perinatal enthusiast, and a layer of support for the serious student”.

Kate White, a leading expert, educator, and author, in the field of pre and perinatal psychology and health, writes: “This is a book for our times when we now know so much about the baby’s experience, especially how we can support our unfolding into relationship with our parents and others and the importance of acknowledging our sacredness and sentience from the very beginning of life” (pg. xii).



### **From Cover to Cover**

The cover image and the 90 illustrations within were drawn by Cherionna. She offers clinical case studies, noting that client names, characteristics and events were changed or collaged with several other clients to protect their identity. There are two forewords. One by Jaap van der Wal, a spiritual embryologist, and another by Marcy Axness, a colleague who Cherionna met while at an APPPAH congress when both were new to the field.



The Introduction starts on page 13 and from there 15 chapters follow, adhering to phases one might experience in the birthing process, albeit allowing for oscillations rather than a strict point A to point B direction. She begins with Establishing a Context: Creating a Field, then flows through meeting and being with our early history in healing ways. She moves on to discuss preconception, conception, implantation, layers of support, embryological arising, folding into form, nerves, brain, and consciousness, digesting experience, the portal of birth, beyond the womb, grace, peace, and passing, and prenatal and birth experience, to finish with shadows and potential. There is an appendix that offers a prenatal and birth history questionnaire, a glossary of terms, an index and information about Cherionna.

### **Going Forward**

Jaap van der Wal writes: *"The book is imbued with the serious belief that the human mind and soul is not an accidental side product of genes, brain and body, but a dimension in the human where he/she strives to fulfill his/her talents and aptitudes, including the possible healing of traumatic experiences in earlier stages. Spirit as well as body as necessary but not sufficient condition for being and becoming human"* (pg. 7).

He notes that Cherionna offers a *"phenomenological description of the body as soul, of embryo as incarnating being, and of the human as a lifelong self-organizing and orchestrating appearance . . . this is a book about the human body in which notions such as Spirit, Love, Soul, and Meaning are not avoided"* (pg. 7).

According to Jaap, the book is filled with insights, inspiration, and guidance. It adds to what will be an ever-growing body of literature whose orientation is not to a person's trauma but to the inherent impulse toward health. Cherionna "traces the contours of our earliest days of existence as we merge our mysterious spiritual essence with the shapes we enfold ourselves into. She dares to use the S word weaving the scientific and spiritual into synthesis" (pg. 11). She is clear that our conception and early development in the womb involve a transition between spirit and form (pg. 19).

### **Bits and Pieces**

*"Imagine if you didn't need to shut down? Imagine if we could all feel and be safe to fully express our fullest potential? Our health, our wholeness, our brilliant bio-intelligence? That is what this book is about"* (pg. 49).

To cover a book of this magnitude in precise detail demands a review beyond the length most readers are amenable to . . . in today's society it seems as if readers want sound bites, small bullet points that bring out the most critical aspects of what is being said. I have already allowed myself the luxury of dropping into my experience of Cherionna's book, tried to impart more of a feeling with the text than data about the text. Coming to a sense of closure, then, I offer a few remarks or concepts that stayed with me:

Doing Not Doing: Wu Wei. Cherionna discusses action that is non-action and offers that the human embryo is spirit coming into form: it is passively growing and developing. Yes, it is actively engaging in life, but it occurs at a more subtle level than we are often aware of.

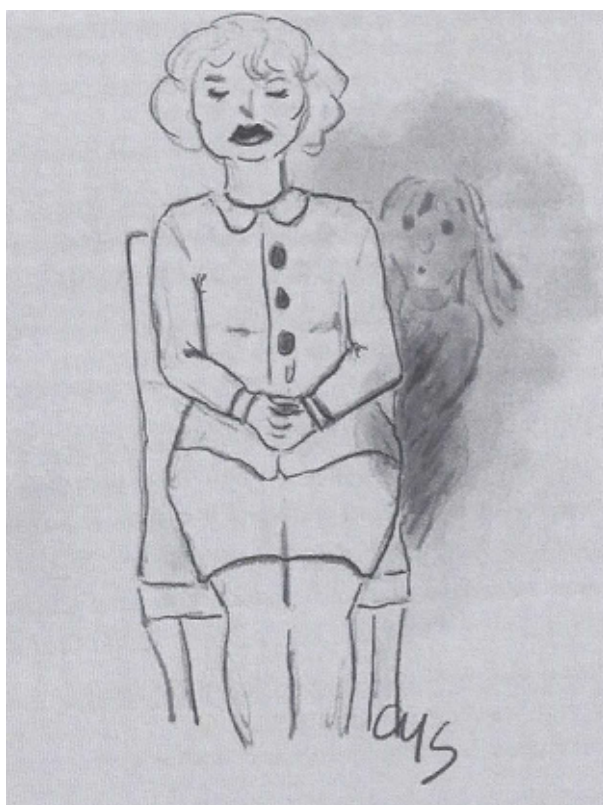


*"The human embryo forms itself naturally, without attachment to how it evolves . . . embryos are masters at being . . . metabolizing, growing, dividing, shapeshifting, migrating . . . all involve communication at a subtle level . . . they interact with what surrounds them, simply being with what is . . ."*

*"As we are born, so we die. Birth and Death are two portals, leading into and out of life as we know it. We arrive from a mysterious source and leave at death into an equally mysterious something"* (pg. 421).

Our 'Shadow' material . . . is destined to unconsciously pervade our lives. It deprives us of choice, leads to suffering . . . when we explore aspects of our prenatal experience and our accompanying embryological development in relation to both trauma and potential, we have the chance to release ingrained patterns, to come into new ways of being, to heal and grow beyond.

At this point, I offer my recommendation to not just buy the book but be with the book, take time to read and experience it.



#### Photo Credits

Book: Photo by [Aaron Burden](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Shadows on lawn Andrew Martin from Pixabay

Baby: Photo by [Carlo Navarro](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Embryo spiraling into form: Cherionna Menzam-Sills

Shadow material: Cherionna Menzam-Sills

Headshots: from SPT Magazine files and online sources