

Interview: Marian Dunlea talks to Mary de Courcy

I am a Jungian analyst and my interest lies in the interface between body and psyche. When psychoanalysis began much of the focus was on physical symptoms as manifestations of psychological states. However, very soon verbal communication or in Freudian terms 'free association', the talking cure, became the modus operandi for dealing with such symptoms and the body per se was relegated to second place. During these particular years of psychoanalysis, Jung began his own exploration, distancing himself from Freudian theory. He withdrew from the International Association of Psychoanalysis but maintained his practice. Jung started to work creatively on his own dreams. Working with the symbols from his dreams he used different media to express what was going on in the unconscious including drawing, painting, woodwork, visualization, imaginal dialogue, body work and movement. Moving out of the left brain and into right brain, thereby moving out of purely cognitive space and allowing us creative access to the unconscious through a different gateway, is one of the discoveries Jung made. Whereas Freud maintained that you reach that state through free association, Jung says we can do it through active imagination, using very different media, drawing, painting, clay, woodwork, sculpture, dance, movement, music and voice.

Jung became convinced that the theory of opposites was central to understanding the psyche: conscious and unconscious, masculine and feminine, instinct and spirit, mind and matter, psyche and soma, believing that all energy comes from two opposing forces. He felt that by holding the tension of the opposite energies, a new, 'third' possibility emerges which is crucial to healing and his term 'wholeness'. The psyche is constantly moving toward wholeness and will try to move from a one-sided position by bringing in its opposite in a dream. In turn this brings about balance and wholeness. In this way the psyche is self regulatory.

Dr. Marion Woodman, a Jungian Analyst takes Jung's belief in the transformational capacity of the psyche a step further by reintroducing the body and making it centre stage along side the psyche. For her imagination is the key to connecting both. This is body/soul work, not body and soul work. It's not dualistic. The living body is about incarnation. The cells of our

body are vibrant with spirit and energy. We can call it energy, or Karma, or Chi or life force. What we know is that energy exists and it is manifest in body cells and that if I bring my consciousness to these cells, I can bring direction and purpose to my life. It's not about religion or belief systems.

On Wednesday mornings and Monday evenings people, mostly therapists, come and work with me in a group. The group is generally about 6-8 people. We work for three hours together doing bodysoul work as created by Marion Woodman, Ann Skinner and Mary Hamilton. We explore the connection between the psyche and soma, body and soul. We work with dreams, bodywork, movement and relaxation, voice work and art. As a Jungian analyst I'm holding the position of listening to the unconscious and how it is manifesting through the dreams and in the bodywork. We focus on the dreams and their energies moving through the body. I'm working with energy all the time, how it manifests and comes forward believing that the psyche is moving toward wholeness, and in doing so, it can bring us toward healing. This is what Jung refers to as the 'individuation process' so that we can become the person we really are. Jung's notion of wholeness suggests that whatever state you're in, the unconscious will provide the compensatory dream image or symptom to bring about wholeness/ healing in the psyche and in the soma. As Jung says, what doesn't come to consciousness comes to us as fate.

Although we are working within the group, it's the individual process that is central. The group acts as the container for the work. Marion Woodman talks about the importance of creating the archetypal container, giving of sense of containment that is greater than the personal. We open the circle with a ritual, and in that way we are acknowledging the archetypal container. We try to bring to consciousness what is presented in the dreams and equally to bring consciousness to the body and voice. It's about holding and working with energy that needs to come through. The others in the group are there to mirror that emerging energy positively. Mirroring is fundamental to Marion Woodman's work and it's hugely influential and helpful in the whole process. This view of positive mirroring in the body is now being supported by the neuro-scientific research. Neuroscientist Dr. Alan Shores' work shows how neurologically we can change cells, and that damage to the early attachment relationship can be healed through positive mirroring by others.

In the group we work with one person's dream each week. We always consider how the dream is connected to the body; where in the body there's resonance and perhaps whether a different energy is trying to come in with the dream. We look at the dream from a Jungian perspective; what's trying to manifest from the unconscious, where the shadow is, what complexes are activated, where the animus and anima are active, and most importantly what is trying to come forward to compensate for the conscious position of the ego which often can be rigid or one-sided. Jung distinguished energy as having masculine and feminine qualities. These are not gender specific terms. These energies are both present in each of us. 'Masculine' energy presents as clarity and focus, execution, linear in direction and often as logic and rationality as well. In contrast the 'feminine' is relational and more about presence and process and holds paradox.

The group is invited to take active part in holding all the different aspects of the dream so that they can be experienced fully by the dreamer. When we're interacting in this way, there's an opportunity for the dreamer to see what's being held both consciously and unconsciously. We can see how the different energies from the unconscious relate to each other. We're looking at the unconscious material from a dynamic perspective, working with it as opposed to just talking about it. This is very often creative, and perhaps an unusual shift or turn takes place and it very often comes through in the body. The dreamer gets time to hold the new energy, amplify it and experience it fully embodied. We come to realise that the very symptom we have been carrying in our bodies needs exactly this new energy that is coming through for healing. It can be powerfully transformative. This interconnectedness between psyche and soma has huge repercussions for our work as therapists.

The archetypal feminine is invoked as the container for the work. I usually light a candle which is symbolic of bringing light and consciousness to our work. The work is extremely focused in the body mind interface. It's about listening to our bodies and listening to our dreams in order to find what is moving and shaping within. It's not about listening to an outside or higher force, except in so far as that is expressed through the dream and in the body. In Jungian terms it would be called the Self. So the connection to Self is experienced in the connection I make to my own living cells. For me and

guided by Marion Woodman's work, this Self is not transcendent, it is imminent.

Transcendent means a Self that exists beyond or outside ourselves. An imminent Self refers to being present in one's own personal individual matter within the cells. It's like the quantum physics theory, that we're both particle and wave, we're not separate. And it's about coming to love that particle that I am. That is the relational feminine aspect of the work. It's about building a relationship to the cells of our body, to the rhythm of our bodies, to the breath that connects me to life within me and beyond me. We work with a dream image and it's about the hugely transformative power of bringing that image into our cells and our body. So where there's pain or darkness, we can bring the image into that part and let the image heal and transform, creating new pathways. There is something about moving from the stuck places, letting go of the old patterns and complexes, which is part of moving with the flow of creative life. During the group session you would feel completely connected to yourself, and that would be an experience where you would feel located in your body, in your pulse, in your breath, in your muscles, in your bones and in your movement. You might be surprised at how your unconscious has manifested and given you an image to work with either through the dream or in the body that is precisely the image necessary for what you are bringing to consciousness for your journey in that moment. At the end of the session, you'd have a much greater sense of your 'wholeness' The 'ego- self' axis is experienced in very real, concrete, physical and creative terms.

This is a huge part of my work. I feel incredibly creative and alive in the work. I work with a lot of people individually who may also participate in the workshops. So people who work with me are working on their own dreams, in their bodies, in their drawings or clay work, movement and visualizations. It's a commitment to a relationship with oneself at a very creative level.

In the week-end or week-long workshops that I co-facilitate, the participants dream at night and in the morning we gather the dreams. In the afternoon sessions we work with the body and voice to see what is moving there and to give expression to that energy by making a mask, using

what ever image or colour or symbol that has stirred in the exploration. Each day participants work on the mask and in doing so see the embodiment of the new energy that has appeared in the dreamwork. Throughout the week we work to incorporate the mask into our being, doing voicework and movement so all the cells of the body can be alive to this mask energy. This work is very deep and takes us into our process. It opens up new pathways and new ways of being present in our embodied self. We work with the resistances, giving voice to the complexes that hitherto have kept this energy unavailable to us. We are building strong bodies as well as strong egos to be able to handle the archetypal energy that is coming through in the mask. We are careful not to identify with the new energy but to stay grounded and connected in our bodies. Otherwise we are in danger of becoming ungrounded, and entranced, or possessed by the new energy. Marion Woodman stresses the essential nature of the bodywork, that the body is central and has to be made conscious to receive the energy coming through. In this very real and concrete way the body acts as container, the body is the container. It holds presence for the psyche. This work frees people up and puts them in touch with their bodies and the intelligence of their bodies. It's very integrative and brings body and psyche together. We are one coherent organism.

At the end of the week, there's a sense of new energy and a question of how to incorporate it in life. There's also the question of what's got to be sacrificed? What complexes do I need to let go of in order to bring this new energy into my work? It takes a whole week to get a grasp of this work. There's huge holding in our group so there is little danger of retraumatisation. Containment is the most important thing and we place huge emphasis on it. Marion Woodman views the conscious body as the container and the consciousness we bring to our psyches and the over-arching container of the archetypal space. She refers to this container as Sophia, the Sophia of biblical, wisdom energy. I often invoke Sophia Brigid energy, Brigid being the Irish feminine energy.. That's the sense of the archetypal space that we can create in the holding and the focus of the work. The holding and mirroring comes from a place of love and enormous compassion.

There may be huge resistance to love. Our defences are set up to protect us from experiencing trauma. They may have served us well, but they may also

keep us from growing, from integrating the trauma and from moving forward in our lives. We may even have somatised our resistance with chronic symptoms. We listen to our resistance, dialogue with it, listen to the dreams, and see what is trying to come through. It is a very safe respectful process and is entirely guided by each individual's pace.

The Irish population is a very shocked and traumatised population. A lot of Irish women live outside their bodies, or 'above' the body. That's why I feel the body is the key to our work. What's relevant is what the body is holding. Dr. Peter Levine in his seminal work on trauma, says it's only through the body that the trauma can be healed. Both the psyche and the body are self regulatory, constantly trying to move toward wholeness. When we work with the body we're really working with a very different rhythm.

In psychoanalysis or psychotherapy we can collude with the trauma held in the body by keeping it locked in the body. The client can stay cut off and outside of his or her body and in fact feel 'homeless'. This is because as therapists we're working with the mind rather than the body where the trauma is held. The mind is often experienced as being 'outside' the body, so in psychotherapy we can be working with the disembodied part of the person, ie their mind, thereby colluding with their traumatic defense. The client can learn to re-enter into the place of trauma and heal what has been damaged or split in the bodypsyche. In working consciously in my body the client builds a sense of hope and 'home coming', no longer needing to abandon the body to survive the trauma.

I call my groups, 'Coming Home to MySelf in my Body'. For many people the body can feel persecutory since it is connected to the scene of trauma or through ongoing physical symptoms. The body however can become a gateway into reconnection and healing and can bring us into an embodied sense of ourselves where we are fully present and alive to our integrated bodysoul.

Marian Dunlea is a Jungian Analyst in private practice and facilitates BodySoul work in on-going weekly and fortnightly groups in Dublin. The forthcoming workshop with The Marion Woodman Foundation will be held in Dunderry on July 24-31. Details, Marian Dunlea 30 Alma Road, Monkstown, Co. Dublin. 012800572, Email:redjeep@eircom.net
