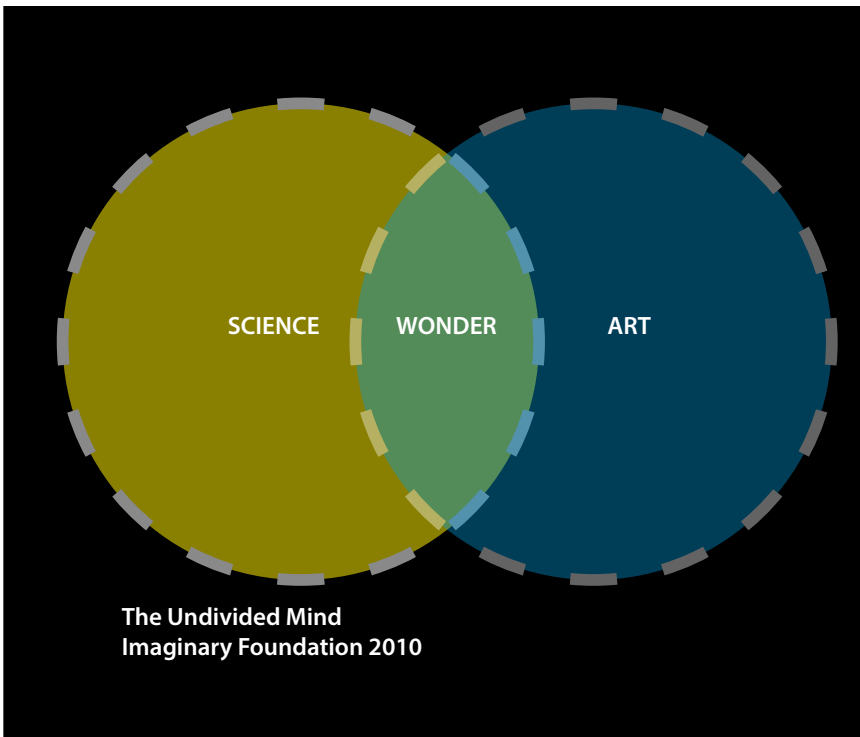


| On Curiosity

by *Orla Crowley*



There are various sorts of curiosity; one is from interest, which makes us desire to know that which may be useful to us; and the other, from pride, which comes from the wish to know what others are ignorant of.

François de la Rochefoucauld

Curiosity, from the Latin *curiosus*, *to take care of*, connects *care* and *cure*; negatively denotes the exaggerated inquisitiveness of nosy neighbours or totalitarian states; more constructively, suggests a quality of careful enquiry, a reaching beyond accepted meaning, a wish to go deeper, to seek beyond the surface understanding, a desire to solve.

Psychotherapy is traditionally seen as the process of discovering and

coming to terms with emotional, cognitive, and imaginal material that has been repressed or kept secret as being too painful or shameful to be consciously borne. Healing within the confidential therapeutic relationship is considered to occur through the uncovering of such secrets. By subsequently integrating the newly-conscious material, the personality is enlarged. The impact of symptoms, disturbances and defences connected with the secret

is considered to be ameliorated by its release.

At the cutting edges of fields as diverse as nuclear physics and systems theory, relationships are seen as the central organising concept of theory and practice. Nothing in the universe exists as an isolated and independent entity; nothing living lives alone. Buber (1958) used the term “I-Thou” to describe a relationship in depth, one which encompasses the mysterious in self and other. I can relate to you in depth only if I relate to my own depth, to that part of myself which is incomprehensible. To relate consciously to the incomprehensible, I need a standpoint in the rational. Otherwise I am on shifting sands, fascinated and absorbed by the incomprehensible, not at all the same thing as relating to it.

All Jung’s theory is organised from the point of view of the Self, a supraordinate totality, the essence of whose nature is ultimately unknowable. To live consciously is to live in harmony with this Self, finding meaning through serving something greater than ego, more than the ego’s plans and schemes, relinquishing the idea of ‘control’.

Jung considered the psyche to be inherently dissociable, giving us many secondary selves or complexes. In contrast to reductive analyses where we can be seen as the result of what has happened to us (a causal aetiology), Jung’s synthetic and progressive method moves us beyond being the mere playthings of our history, knows us as more than the sum of our parts. Seeing symptoms as having a teleological function - a goal, in other words - the Grail question becomes “What

is this for? Where is this process taking me? What is its purpose?" As a stream rushes downhill, its goal is to find the lowest possible level; how it gets there, or what it contains, are other issues - the "instinct" of water is to find the lowest level. This is what interests Jung; analytical psychology emphasises purposive development toward discovery of a sense of personal meaning, as well as a creative adaptation to life.

Such a developmental process does not entertain a one-sided emphasis on wickedness or holiness, but rather asks us to re-situate opposing energies in a creative reconciliation, a *mysterium coniunctionis*, a mystical marriage whose offspring is an unforeseeable (emergent) third thing which, in its turn, seeks a further mystical union, and so on *ad infinitum*. This dialectic is mirrored in the nature of the artistic process as it arises from human experience (we make it) which then reflectively shapes and influences us, giving expression and meaning to that very experience (enhancing us). It accepts what is, and works toward what might be. Within this process, the necessary suspension of judgement (holding the tension of the opposites) requires one to endure a high degree of ambiguity, of not-knowing, of being in confusion - a strong challenge for the ego, yet one which mobilises imagination to seek and question.

Symbol

With his radical theory of the collective unconscious, Jung proposed an essentially unknowable level of psyche, one which could only be intimated through its affect, and only be referred to via symbols. Such symbols are representations in consciousness of the holding-together at a deep level of pairs of rationally-incompatible opposites, and, in themselves, are ultimately "never quite determinable" (CW16para340). Symbols help join

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together the scattered pieces of our psyches, to knit up the ravelled strands of our potential being.

The hallmark of the symbolic is apparent contradiction. Jung's claim that "*the highest truth is one and the same with the absurd*" is echoed by Neils Bohr's koan-like "*The opposite of a great truth is also a great truth*". The Greek root of "paradox" indicates something that is *contrary to common belief, or, outside or beyond what is initially perceived*. Paradox holds together seemingly contradictory truths in order to locate a greater truth. Paradoxical curiosity respects complexity, going beyond dualistic categories to enquire how seemingly-contradictory energies may both be held within a greater whole. The suspension of judgement necessary to explore what *is* (Jung's empirical and phenomenological stance) while holding open the possibility of a yet-unknown value that supersedes the contradiction (Jung's transcendent function), requires one to have developed the capacity to imagine.

Individuation

Jung's central theme of "individuation" is concerned with the development of personality, of one's uniqueness, and of how, becoming more individual, one is less divided, less split, more whole. Relatedness, both inner and outer, is crucial.

Three fundamental tasks need to be achieved before the process of individuation becomes possible. In order of development, these are:

1. Affect regulation (a consequence of secure-enough attachment).
2. The capacity for mentalisation (the basis for reflective functioning / imagination).
3. The development of a secure

sense of self (also referred to as self-agency / an appropriately-functioning ego / the autobiographical self).

Each level needs to be sufficiently established in order for construction of the subsequent order of development to begin. If the sense of self is functioning at a level where only ACTIONS matter or make a difference, interpretations that rely on the ability to imagine are doomed. I assume that most of us are conversant with the difficulties arising from working with a client whose ability to mentalise is limited - the "as if" dimension is lacking. Transference is perceived as real rather than metaphorical; thinking is concrete, or on the level of *soma*.

For example, with a borderline client, the therapist may be either the mother who made her suffer - or, she may be nothing at all. Within this either / or, black / white thinking, the therapist finds herself in a chaotic situation, although not in the pandemonium of images that Jung often mentions, rather in a pandemonium of EMOTIONS. The client does not have a sufficiently-developed level of mentalisation to organise emotional contents through meaningful images. Emotions do not become images - the symbolic function is lacking. Through creating symbolic representations (words, pictures, sandtrays, music) of unintegrated experiences, whilst held in the mindful presence of a mentalising therapist, sense - rather than chaos - may gradually be made of the past, as a new, conscious relationship is developed with the previously-unintegrated experience. So metaphor, arising from relationship, powers imagination, which in turn provides the basis for a developing sense of self.

The symbolic attitude is ultimately a relational process, an emotionally-invested connection with an Other. What is important here is the process, the dynamic, what moves, rather than the content, the static, the academic. Working from the non-rational does not mean abandoning interpretation - it means being alert to when interpretation cannot work because a more direct and immediate emotional contact is needed. This reaching out, attuned contact is what the Boston Process of Change Study Group calls "a moment of meeting", a transformative experience wherein "communications that reveal a personal aspect of the self have been evoked in an affective response to another. in turn [reveals] to the other a personal signature, so as to create a new dyadic state specific to the two participants". (BPCSG 2010)

Creative Space

Both imagination and art inhabit thresholds, the edges of society. Creative acts move beyond what exists, toward something new and unexpected. Art depends on an essential relationship to reality and to the *experience* of reality. Its place within human life, working with imagination as a means of transforming toward a wider reality, ever processing, is part of an open system without end or consummation, the equivalent of an eternal force.

It is no coincidence that totalitarian regimes are wary of artists, who, like prophets, offer visions alternative to the official party line. To imagine oneself in relationship even with one's enemies calls for moral imagination. With patience and endurance, braving the unknown, with no guarantee of safety or success, John Hume, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King have shown us that when a cycle of conflict or violence is broken, space opens up to envision and give birth to

that which already exists *in potentia*. Ego, we could say, begins the hero's journey, learning along the way to leave space wherein may incarnate some of the Self's infinite potential.

"I don't know beforehand what I shall put on the canvas, even less can I decide what colours to use. Whilst I'm working I'm not aware of what I'm painting on the canvas. Each time I begin a picture, I have the feeling of throwing myself into space. I never know whether I'll land on my feet". (Picasso, in Berger, p. 136)

The Development of Personality

The human personality can be conceptualised as an aggregate of ill-matched parts, a grab-bag, patchwork, shifting kind of thing, a coat of many colours, a motley garment, a fool's jerkin or magician's cloak. Its construction bears witness to past injuries and on-the-go repairs. Unlike most biological structures, its form varies extravagantly from one individual to the next within a single species. It is structured, however, according to some invariant principles, and it must function as a unit as well as accommodate itself to its immediate environment. Relatedness, inner and outer, is vital, and for Jung, is a central goal of individuation.

In brief, to relate is to engage consciously with the Other as found both within and without; to relate in depth we must be open to that part of the Other which is mysterious. The phenomenal, the Real, consciousness, man, body, matter - are all accessible to investigation and measurement; the problem is how do we approach the Other - the nominal, the Ideal, the irrational, the unconscious,

God, mind, psyche, soul? Often, it is only when consciousness has been defeated, do we pay attention to the unconscious (which can seem to have created the whole predicament for just that purpose. If there exists a viable conscious course of action, the unconscious tends to be ignored).

The task of analysis is to help redirect psychic energy toward development by means of a symbolic expression of unconscious material. In working with dreams it seems the unconscious has a goal in mind. Current dreams address current problems; dreams are forever correcting a one-sided view and suggesting how the dreamer might proceed. From a rational point of view this poses a problem. Whose purpose? If my dreams are messages to me, then who or what is "sending" them? Is there an agent (the Self?) within the unconscious that has its own point of view, its own plans which are different to my ego's plans? Individuation's goal of integrating new resources from the unconscious (becoming more whole) includes the archetypal processes of defeat, loss, decay, and death - and if I am to mature, I have to admit these also to integration and relationship.

The Other Side

In the creation myth of Adam and Eve, the desire to know, to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, has many consequences.

Suddenly, the initial unity of all things, the bliss of paradise, is rent asunder. Cast out into the temporal world, into awareness, "the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew they were naked." Hurriedly they sew garments to cover their nakedness - as if with knowledge

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comes the need also for hiddenness, for a place to cultivate mystery. In a similar vein, secrets, and the ability to hold them, are, for analytical psychology, at the very heart of individual identity. *“The individual on his lonely path needs a secret which for various reasons he may not or cannot reveal. Such a secret reinforces him in the isolation of his individual aims... a great many individuals cannot bear this isolation. They are the neurotics, who necessarily play hide-and-seek with others as well as themselves... they end by surrendering their individual goal to their craving for collective conformity... Only a secret which the individual cannot betray - one which he fears to give away, or which he cannot formulate in words, and which therefore seems to belong to the category of crazy ideas - can prevent... regression.”* (Jung, CW18, p376-)

We can discern in Jung’s work two basic lines of thought - scientific discourse, and the reality of the imagination; rationality and non-rationality, cognition and perception. Painting, sculpture, architecture, music, poetry, the study of myth, folk-tale, and religion, products of perception and the senses, all engage us through imagination and through emotion. They open up to us the possibility of a *beyond*, of what cannot be fully expressed, of something that permanently resists closure, that continues to elude us, enticingly drawing us on, a siren call whose refusal condemns us to neurosis. Those who cherish one-sidedness or long for an unequivocal approach must bail out here!

Jung’s attempt to establish relationships between these two worlds led to his life and work being lived on the borderlands, the interfaces - and sometimes the no-go areas - between sanity and madness, rationality and non-rationality, conscious and

unconscious, human and divine, ego and shadow, matter and spirit; he continually pointed out how one-sidedness dangerously unbalances system dynamics, inevitably leading to an overthrow of the status quo. He told Aniela Jaffé that his works were *“fundamentally nothing but attempts to give answer to the question of the interplay between the ‘here’ and the ‘hereafter’”* (MDR p330).

Creativity: the case against a merely intellectual understanding

Any interpretation is based on the therapist’s understanding of what is going on; it is an attempt to elucidate or impute meaning - to explain or perhaps even reduce to *“nothing but”*.

“Understanding is a terribly binding power, a veritable soul murder when it levels out vitally important differences. The core of the individual is a mystery of life which dies when it is ‘grasped’. ... All understanding... being an integration into general viewpoints, contains the devil’s element, and kills. It tears another life out from its own peculiar course, and forces it into something foreign in which it cannot live. ... The threatening and dangerous thing ... is that the individual appears to be understood”. (Jung, letter 1915, to Hans Schmidt)

In the Red Book, Jung’s anima, or soul, asks *“Have you grasped me, defined me, and made me into a dead formula?”* This warning that she is damaged by his attitude of intellectual understanding toward her results in Jung imaginatively sacrificing his heroic intellectual function; abandoning the desire to conquer and know, to hold power, the drive to understand, to wrest information from subjected material, makes

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possible a real relationship.

“The danger of wanting to understand the meaning is over-valuation of the content, which is subjected to intellectual analysis and interpretation, so that the essentially symbolic character of the product is lost.” (CW8 para 176), i.e. in striving to attribute meaning, there is a danger that a dynamic process may be short-circuited, prematurely aborted or cut short. Here Jung cautions us that imputing of meaning risks killing off individuation. A heroic warrior approach to psyche embodies hubris - appropriating for oneself that which properly belongs to the gods, to the more-than-human. The excitement and thrill of the chase, the spoils of struggle, the victor’s laurels; sacking, plundering, looting, raping; satisfaction in feeling right, a “successful” outcome; the collective, evidence-based endorsement - being seen to be “good” and right; the shadow of power, hero as tyrant; take it apart, see how it works... but all the King’s horses and all the King’s men won’t ever be able to put it together again - an ego-trip devoutly to be avoided by the therapist! Bion’s succinct injunction is *“to prevent someone who knows from filling the empty space”* (Bion, 1990).

Therapeutic attitude needs to be one of reticence and humility (not generally known as attributes of the conquering hero - more like

In striving to attribute meaning, there is a danger that a dynamic process may be short-circuited, prematurely aborted or cut short.

Therapeutic attitude needs to be one of reticence and humility, leaving space wherein a more extensive meaning might, in the in-between, the transference (i.e. unconsciously-shared) space, emerge of its own accord. It requires therapeutic courage and endurance to resist closure and nourish openness.

Peter Falk's "Columbo"!), leaving space wherein a more extensive meaning might, in the in-between, the transference (i.e. unconsciously-shared) space, emerge of its own accord. It requires therapeutic courage and endurance to resist closure and nourish openness in the face of what one does not know or of what one knows too little; to resist a rush to judgement or flight into health (on the part of the therapist); to hold a willingness to be in confusion (*via negativa*). Every act has both good and evil results, yielding pairs of opposites; the best we can do is lean towards the light. Transformation occurs *in* us, but not *by* us - the unconscious changes itself.

To discover - and help to create... the emergent nature of what we do is perhaps, in the end, undefinable.

"So hope for a great sea-change
On the far side of revenge.
Believe that further shore
Is reachable from here.
Believe in miracle
And cures and healing wells.
Call miracle self-healing:
The utter, self-revealing
Double-take of feeling.
If there's fire on the mountain
Or lightning and storm
And a god speaks from the sky
That means someone is hearing
The outcry and the birth-cry
Of new life at its term."

— Seamus Heaney

The Cure at Troy (1990) ◡

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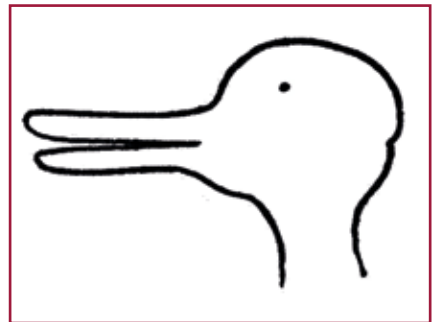
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Depending on how you look at this, it's either a young woman, or a very old woman - but you can't see both together - just one at a time



Wittgenstein's Duck-Rabbit - as with the previous image, one can only see one animal at a time.