The Body in Depth Psychology:
Psyche as the Container of Potentiality—Soma as the Vessel of Actuality

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Purpose Statement

The purpose of this theoretical study is to examine the image of body in psychological healing, using a hermeneutic approach. This theoretical research is an attempt to design an integrative approach to healing psychological trauma through the application of a combination of depth psychology, alchemy, neuroscience, and quantum physics.

Introduction

The body, similar to the voice of the feminine, has been absent from depth psychology. A few clinicians and theorists, such as Marie-Louise von Franz (1964), Marion Woodman (1980), Nathan Schwartz-Salant (1991), Donald Kalsched (1996), Ginnette Paris (2007), and Judith Harris (2009) have challenged the disembodied nature of the field. Each in his or her way has attempted to make a shift from a Cartesian split between matter and psyche to an integration of psyche, matter, and body. Jung (1946/1969) himself had an ongoing interest in the multi-sensory nature of the psyche and was aware of its apposition to the tension of opposites, such as “the potential and actual, the fluid and fixed, creative and receptive, heaven and earth, high and low, young and old, the wise and foolish, the male and female—all that we imagine as the yang and the yin” (Zabriskie, 2005, p.225).
The Cartesian mind-body dualism has been sustained by the image of body in Western culture (Sandner & Wong, 1997; Woodman, 1980). Drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze, “a philosopher who has challenged the notion that reason or thought is negation, repression, or ordering of some prerepresentational matter or presence” (Bray & Colebrook, 1998, pp. 35-36), recent feminist theorists, such as Moira Gatens (1996), and Rosi Braidotti (1991), have looked at how bodies are formed as “imaginary bodies” (Gatens, p. i). Rather than a mind-body split, these feminists suggested that “the body is a crucial site of gender constitution” (Bray & Colebrook, p. 36), historically devalued as feminine, that has “represented that which was excluded, disavowed, or devalued by a masculine logic” (p. 36). This idea of dehumanizing the feminine body had already been seen in accounts of eating disorders. Marion Woodman (1980) wrote numerous accounts of the symbolic representation of weight disturbances and eating disorders. In *The Owl Was a Baker’s Daughter*, she invited us to view bodily symptoms as a manifestation of the unconscious femininity in a patriarchal culture.

My personal interest in this topic stems from an experience of inner duality, a lifelong struggle with a fragmented self. The split between my own mind and body manifested in an egocentric attitude toward life, a thinking function that dominated an embodied sensibility. My gut-wrenching need for intimate connection and expression of the feminine, coupled with a fear of closeness and disintegration, kept me in a constant state of disembodied
isolation. Through this process, I learned to mediate the tension of the opposites within and embrace the void between them, what quantum physics refers to as the zero point field, and Eastern philosophy calls Tao. It is in this gap, this nothingness, this place of utter emptiness and fullness that psyche and matter both do and do not touch. The place of “utter emptiness and silence . . . is timeless and free from the pairs of opposites because it has no quality” (Jung, 1997, p. 1025). This is where my healing took place.

Jung (1951/1968) stressed the importance of enantiodromia, a tension of opposites within the psyche, which holds conflict as well as resolution. In Jungian psychology, “conscious distress activates the effort toward integration” (Zabriskie, 2005, p. 228) and healing comes from a place of attunement to both polarities: light and shadow, masculine and feminine, eros and chaos (Kearney, 2009a). As Jung (1955-1956/1963) stated in Mysterium Coniunctionis, a union of opposites like psyche and matter, conscious and unconscious, can only take place in a third thing, which represents something new.

My fall into the chaos in my life, or what I have experienced as the black hole, began the integration of my fragmented self. The drop into the void was where I found true access to the inner way, the healing of my trauma; it was where I began my own transformation. The descent into the symptoms, the suffering, the darkness, the alchemical cleansing contained in the vessel of my physical, emotional, and subtle body, brought forth a coniunctio, a third thing: the birth of my dissertation.
Relevance to Clinical Psychology

As psychology has celebrated the *Decade of Behavior* (n.d.), it is time for a psychological celebration of the *Year of the Whole Person* (Serlin, 2001). This paradigm shift would take the form of a new holistic perspective on psychology that brought behavior, cognition, and consciousness together in a dialectical relationship. A psychology of the whole person integrates body, mind, and psyche, and embraces a diversity of techniques and approaches to include the imaginal realm (Serlin). Expanding the definition of *body* from purely somatic to include the psychological and mystical in clinical psychology is the wave of the future. Movement from a mind-body dualism, a split reinforced by the field, toward an integrative approach in healthcare is inevitable. It is time for psychology to bring its unique contribution to healing and consciousness (Kearney, 2009b; Schlitz, Amorok, & Micozzi, 2005). As depth psychology collaborates with neuroscience, quantum physics, and metaphysics, disease and healing can be approached from a multi-disciplinary perspective, crossing cultural and theoretical boundaries toward a more integrated approach to wholeness.

Brief Literature Review

Scholars and clinicians appear to view the body in three distinct ways: as independent of the mind (physical body; Wilber, 1990), integrated with the mind (emotional body; Wilber, 1990), and as a site for symbolic representations of divine archetypes (subtle body; Goodchild, 2001; Jung, 1982). In Western culture, the body is seen as something to be controlled by the mind (Mansfield &
Spiegelman, 1996). For example, according to Merleau-Ponty (1962), “it is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive things” (p. 186). In his book, Eye to Eye, Ken Wilber provides an overview of the different ways of seeing. One way is "of flesh, one of reason, and one of contemplation” (p. 28). According to Wilber, the eye of flesh is the empirical eye, participating in a world of shared sensory experience. The eye of reason, or the eye of the mind, transcends the sensory field and engages in a world of ideas, images, and concepts. The eye of contemplation transcends both reason and flesh, resulting in a gnosis of the true self.

I believe there is yet another way of seeing, and that is by being seen (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). I propose that the body and the psyche work in conjunction to achieve the desires of the self, to convey information to the self, and to connect with the Divine in a complexly orchestrated expression of somatic symptoms.

**Physical Body**

Somatic symptoms may be seen as a way to communicate unbearable traumatic anxieties (Kalsched, 1996). In the absence of a voice, the body can articulate complex affective and object-relational losses (Levine, 1997). In cases of early trauma, some of the basic aspects of the self’s existence—a sense of physical boundedness, cohesion, and integrity—are called into question, resulting in primitive anxieties (Heineman, 2000). Disintegration becomes a defense of the self against what Donald Kalsched refers to as “archetypal
anxieties” (p. 84). Such stress would threaten the existence of the self, so the trauma becomes “dissociated, encapsulated, or evacuated into the body” (p. 84). Many times, attempts to counter these anxieties result in physical illness, as the body continues to reestablish the necessary sense of a bounded self (Kalched).

In working with a somatically preoccupied patient, in whom emotional conflict and intense affect is converted into bodily symptoms and splitting is used as a primary means to organize affective experience, a therapist can use his own bodily sensations to appreciate the somatic field created between them (Heineman, 2000). As the ‘feel’ of the co-created somatic world is brought into awareness, feelings and sensations in the transitional space can be experienced and observed through the body, thus facilitating connection between affect and image, symptom and emotion, mind and body (Heineman, 2000).

**Emotional Body**

Bessel van der Kolk’s (1994) work with patients who experienced trauma led to his belief that talk therapy by itself was not sufficient to reverse the profound physical and emotional changes brought on by pervasive hideous experiences (Wylie, 2004). He believed the inability to move during a traumatic event was what made trauma so damaging. According to van der Kolk (van der Kolk, Hopper, & Osterman, 2001), traumatized patients need to establish their physical efficacy as a biological organism and recreate a sense of safety in order to prevent the development of PTSD. Furthermore, he argued that a more integrative approach to the treatment of trauma was needed, for words alone
cannot integrate the disorganized sensations and action patterns that formed the core imprint (2002).

In his paper *The Body Keeps the Score*, van der Kolk (1994) described how trauma disrupted the entire nervous system to keep people from processing and integrating memories into consciousness. He explained that traumatic memories, in effect, stayed stuck in a brain’s nonverbal, subcortical regions, where they were not accessible to the frontal lobes and where reasoning and logic occurred. Therefore, these memories were not understood. Van der Kolk reports that neuroimaging studies have shown that the executive functions of the brain became impaired during attempts to access trauma, further suggesting that a traumatic imprint was situated in the subcortical areas—in the amygdala, hippocampus, hypothalamus, and brain stem. Thus, he reasoned that effective therapy must include nonverbal techniques of accessing the somatic memory of trauma.

Peter Levine (1997), founder of an approach to trauma treatment called Somatic Experiencing, argued that trauma was locked in the body and, therefore, must be accessed and healed through the body. According to Levine, PTSD was a result of an incomplete biological response to threat, where the undischarged The emotional body holds the memories of the intense fear, threat, and horror of the original trauma and speaks of them in terms of physical behaviors, such as disorganization; agitation; distressing, intrusive recollections; frightening dreams;
and a sense of reliving the experience. This is different from the response of the subtle body to trauma and disease.

**Subtle Body**

Carl Jung (1952/1973) described the psyche as an "unextended intensity" (p. 45), and Wolfgang Pauli (1955), the Nobel-prize-winning physicist, called it a "frequency" (p. 150). Furthermore, according to Zabriskie (2005), the human psyche could be imagined as a continuum, "as an energetic intensity, a frequency, a wave, both discovered and invented, as its particles" (p. 225). The Jungian notion of synchronicity presumed a person was "an integral and potentially pivotal part of the world’s impersonal fabric" (p. 225). Because it was made of the same cloth, psyche and soma could affect and penetrate the other. Zabriskie further suggested that “the body speaks its mind, expresses its psyche, and moves its spirit through image” (p. 225). Through the human capacity for perception and language, images were then interpreted into shared experiences in a particular time and place.

Jung (1952/1973) became interested in quantum physics while researching the phenomenon of synchronicity. According to Marialuisa Donati (2004), as a result of his collaboration with Pauli, Jung’s perspective shifted considerably from phenomenological and empirical features to a more ontological and archetypal worldview. Synchronicity, defined by Jung as “a modern differentiation of the obsolete concept of correspondence, sympathy, and harmony” (p. 530 [CW 8, para. 995]), was a numinous experience, one that
revealed the deep connection between man and nature. The sympathy that existed between man and the universe was observed through an ultimate oneness of both fields and studied by physics and psychology. As Jungian psychologist Marie-Louise von Franz (1964) stated, “a unitarian idea of reality, which has been followed up by Pauli and Erich Neumann, was called by Jung the unus mundus, the one world, within which matter and psyche are not yet discriminated or separately actualized” (p. 384). This universal connection with everything was the bridge between macrocosm and microcosm studied by quantum physics (Harris, 2010; Mansfield, 1991; Mansfield & Spiegelman, 1991; McFarlane, 2000; Mindell, 2004).

When Jung (1952/1973) explored synchronicity, he brought new light to the meaningful coincidence when he recognized the potential for psychological transformation by one’s complete presence in the moment of a noncausal event. Throughout the development of the synchronicity concept, Jung drew a distinction between archetypes and the phenomenal manifestations of a synchronous event. Archetypes were primordial images and energetic frequencies that could be accessed through synchronistic events, when inner and outer worlds were connected (Edinger, 1972). The images, complexes, and symptoms mediated by the unconscious were not the archetypes per se, but the manifestations of the psychoid factor that was unreachable. In order for an archetype to be integrated into consciousness, it must be embodied through dreams, physical sensations, or synchronistic events.
Jung (1954/1969) uses the word psychoid to refer to the psycho-physical nature of the archetype and the unitary reality consisting of both psyche and matter that he refers to as *transcendental* (Hannah, 2000; Harris, 2001). This intrinsic unknowable quality is the principle studied by quantum physicists and referred to as the zero-point field, the place of interconnectedness of all things, where opposites meet at infinitum to produce vast and immense energies (Harris, 2010). This space between psyche and soma does not belong to the psychic or material world, rather to what Jung calls the psychoid nature of the archetypal world, and it is experienced through the acausal phenomenon of synchronicity.

Quantum theory contradicts the fundamental concepts of classical physics; it emphasizes the principle of complementarity in which all matter previously thought to be particles consists of a wave aspect (McFarlane, 2000). This wave-particle duality brings to light the relationship between the observed and unobserved and questions the definition of *seeing*. Although observation is necessary to bring the potential into actual, involving a projection of the wave function, one’s perspective and the interpretation of the phenomenon can vary based on positionality. The analogy suggested is that the “wave-particle complementarity in quantum physics parallels the unconscious-conscious complementarity in psychology” (Psyche and Matter section, para. 5).

A quantum leap into Jungian psychology would be to consider archetypes as dynamic, unobserved wave functions that only when *seen* can be integrated into consciousness. As von Franz (1964) explains: “What Jung calls the
archetypes . . . could just as well be called, to use Pauli’s term, 'primary possibilities' of psychic reactions” (p. 383). The objective psychic world, or collective unconscious, is thus similar to the physical realm in that “both have an autonomous activity that is relatively independent of our personal consciousness” (McFarlane, 2000, Jungian Psychology section, para. 14), yet requires observation to be known. This suggests that the unus mundus behind both psyche and matter is also a continuous world of potentiality. Jung (1955-1956/1963) elaborates:

The background of our empirical world thus appears to be in fact an unus mundus. . . . The transcendental psychophysical background corresponds to a potential world in so far as those conditions which determine the form of empirical phenomena are inherent in it. (p. 538)

Physicist Victor Mansfield and Jungian psychologist Marvin Spiegelman (1991) further point out a similarity in which potentialities are transformed into actualities in the realms of psyche and matter:

In physics the irreversible measurement process transforms the potentialities into actualities. What is the corresponding psychic function that transforms ‘the potential world . . .’ into the world of multiplicity? It is reflective consciousness, the association of knowing with the ego, which makes the empirical world possible and brings the transcendental into the empirical world of multiplicity. (p. 276)

Embodiment thus becomes a necessary mode of actualizing the inherent psychic structures toward an evolution of wholeness and integration, a process Jung calls individuation.

Consciousness, or what Mansfield and Spiegelman (1991) refer to as "knowing with the ego" (p. 285), is perhaps a capacity to not only see the infinite
potential, but also to touch a greater healing phenomenon inherent within the 
*unus mundus*. Psyche is thus the container of potentiality and soma the vessel of 
manifestation; both are complementary aspects of a wholeness. The acausal 
relationship between the two realms, as manifested in the principle of 
synchronicity and quantum theory, brings forth a third space, often called the 
subtle body.

Wolfgang Pauli (1955) contributed greatly to the development of the 
synchronicity concept. In his early 30s, he went through an emotional crisis, 
which led him to ask for Jung’s psychoanalytic help, and thus began their 
collaboration. During his treatment, Pauli had a numinous experience in which he 
became aware of things beyond the material realm. In an attempt to understand 
the nature of the link between psyche and matter, he began to study 17th-century 
philosophy and wrote his “Kepler” paper.¹ In this essay, Pauli referred to Kepler’s 
notion of *archetypalis* (archetypes) as the preexistent primary images “functioning 
as the sought-for bridge between the sense perceptions and ideas” (p. 153).

As envisioned by Jung and Pauli, there seems to exist a greater unity and 
complete world-view that is touched upon by the synchronicity principle and 
quantum phenomena. This view is an integration of science, philosophy, and 
metaphysics. The correspondence between these levels of reality, between the 

1. “The Influence of Archetypal Ideas on the Scientific Theories of Kepler” was 
Pauli’s contribution to the book he coauthored with Jung, *The Interpretation of 
macrocosm and the microcosm, may be considered an evolution of consciousness toward a more complete definition of healing.

**An Integral View**

I posit that an expanded epistemology for depth psychology requires a threefold perspective of wholeness, one that incorporates the mind, body, and psyche. Rather than a top-down or bottoms-up approach to healing, such a process might be viewed as circular, with movement connecting inner to outer, mental to physical, and all to subtle. I describe the latter as an interactive field that is in close relationship with an other (e.g., a mother-child dyad, analyst-analysand, and intimate partners), or in connection with the universe. Thoughts and beliefs (mental processes), symptoms and movement (one’s physical sense of self), and unconscious dynamics (e.g., projections or repressed emotions) have an impact on what occurs in this *third realm*. The field is interactive, for it contains all of my stuff, your stuff, and the situational context.

When client and therapist can enter the unintegrated space in the field, what Winnicott (1953) refers to as transitional space, and tolerate the not knowing, the traumatic particles can be digested and integrated into the ego. Only after the sensing does the subtle become recognized by the physical and integrated by the mental, at which time it moves into ego consciousness.

“Interpretations can emerge out of this oscillating state, especially as it is lived within the felt experience of ‘a third space’ between therapist and client” (Schwartz-Salant, 1991, p. 347). Through movement away from interpretive
knowledge to an experience of the unknown, archetypal potentials can be constellated and lead to an awareness of an interactive field. There the somatic unconscious can transform into conscious reality. This way of being is powerfully supportive of embodiment, for “the body is an energy body, not a thing. It is a process of engaging the somatic unconscious” (p. 352). Schwartz-Salant further identifies the subtle body as "a space of relations" (p. 355), which "must be entered, experienced, and properly exited from" (p. 355). By sacrificing interpretation, one opens to "the imagination of the heart" (p.355) and allows a different way of seeing reality.

Healing physical or psychological dis-ease may need to begin at the subtle level, as opposed to a differential-diagnostic understanding, interpretation, and making-sense-of pain and discomfort. In the consulting room, if a therapist can feel his or her way into a client’s distress and mirror the feeling, it can often activate a sense of the trauma, as opposed to the emotional memory attached to the initial experience. Through movement, breathing, and an embodied awareness of the felt pain, the traumatic memory can be seen and touched. Through this sort of observation, the infinite healing potential of the objective psyche can be activated, blurring the boundaries between conscious and unconscious and moving toward integration. This process is a descent, a collapse of particles into wave frequencies. It navigates the edge and mediates the tension of opposites.
References


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