

Revealing the *Embodied Imagination*

WARNING! It might be thought there is a conflict of interest here. Robert Bosnak is presenting a lecture to, and giving a workshop for, the Jung Society and he provided the draft copy of his manuscript for review. Thankfully, however, he has written a good book which describes *embodied dreaming practice*, its theory and its relation to Jungian and post-Jungian thought.

THOSE WHO have used Robert Bosnak's technique, or participated in one of his workshops, may well gain more from the book than those who have not. That also could be a virtue, as the book is deeply experiential and grounded in practice, and as such welcomes the reader's participation. It is by no means a dry academic tome, despite having many interesting asides and references to other research and ideas.

The book opens by describing one of Robert's dreaming workshops in the caves along the Vézère River in France, showing how the magnificent prehistoric artwork, and the place itself, act in the imaginations of the dreamers. Here as elsewhere the dream presents itself as a total real world with separate beings which act independently of the dreamer and are capable of surprising them. These active dream images not only present themselves as physical in the dream but, when slowly focused upon, arouse strong

physical responses in the dreamer's body. Dream images are not things of air alone; they are independent alien intelligences which we meet, which affect us and which shape our bodies – hence the title 'embodied imagination'. Robert here draws attention to the important difference between consciously directed 'confabulation' and the more spontaneous and apparently other-directed embodied imagination.

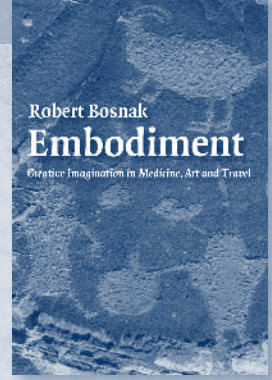
The consequence of Robert's approach opens us to revelation. The dream is not, as Freud would have it, a puzzle to be decoded and then reduced to an already expected series of complexes, nor are the dream images simply subparts of a unified Self, as Jung would assert; they are forces to be encountered. The techniques of embodied dreamwork aim to help us amplify these forces until they can be noticed, not just by themselves, but as a network of effects in differing parts of the body. "The main task of imaginal

BOOK REVIEW OF ROBERT BOSNAK'S

"EMBODIMENT: CREATIVE IMAGINATION IN MEDICINE, ART, AND TRAVEL"

Imagination

reviewed by Jon Marshall



work is to let the variety of substantive selves be aware of one another." Again, Robert interestingly departs from Jung, who tends to see psychic forces in terms of binary opposition and synthesis. In this work the forces may manifest in almost any number, and there may never be any conscious unifying symbol, even if the dreamworker's bodily and psychic states change productively after the encounter.

While this encounter and the change it produces is the central point of the work, in the course of the book Robert considers the main scientific theories of dreams, some of which argue that dreams are meaningless, simply random nerve signals for which the forebrain has tried to provide sense. Using the work of Mark Solms, Robert makes the case that meaning formation is inherent in the dream itself. However, it is really what we can gain from dreams that demonstrates their power, not how they arise, and although it is tempting to think of images as translations of unconscious forces, this work focuses on the images entirely as they reveal themselves to be (ie phenomenologically), not as symptoms or as 'something else'.

The book goes on to discuss applying the technique to trauma and the intense repetition of images with apparently good results. This leads to

the healing effects of embodying dreams and we are reminded of the processes of dream healing in the temples of Asclepius. Another chapter makes use of the metaphors and images which have arisen in alchemy, in which the alchemists seem to meet the quasi-physical intelligences evoked in the work in matter: *"While the alchemist was identified with embodied substances in the process of phenomenally revealing their alien intelligence, the state changes observed could be infusions of fresh intelligence arising from the mutual interaction between the alchemist and substances he was cooking"*. Alchemy shows the importance of recurrent affliction and the processes of concentration of essence which can heal or raise the matter to a different level. Finally we are shown the ways in which the work can expand the embodiment of characters and interpretation in theatre in an encounter with the Royal Shakespeare Company.

So, all in all, this is an excellent wide-ranging book with something of interest for anyone who feels the call of their dreams, or the ideas and practices we call Jungian. You are bound to learn something from reading it, and possibly you may come to see the world and your dreams in a new and challenging way.

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