

Coniunctio: Transforming the Wound of the Heart

By Carole Darnell

The months have flown by since the first article of this three-part series. Allowing oneself to become an instrument of the transformational power of *coniunctio* is beyond my understanding of “field research.” I humbly admit this. When I undertook this project, I planned to use examples from my beloved client’s lives; however, I was clearly instructed by the Mystery Herself, “the story you tell needs to be your own.” Each reader is venturing into this Coniunctio Mystery with me as it unfolds; a kind of absolute transparent surrender to its numinous powers seems to be required. Readers beware; *coniunctio* is not for the faint of heart.

Since the last article, the Coniunctio Mystery has brought about the following life transformations, listed in chronological order:

- After nearly a decade of celibacy, I met an exotic dark stranger from another culture; an experience that allowed me to participate in a courageous and tender thawing of my frozen sexuality.
- My father who died in 2006 paid me a life altering “visit,” which precipitated the third transforming Truth.
- An ominous, dark, omnipresent energy insists on revelatory duets with my most shining occurrences of Joy.
- After living in Georgia for 28 years, I moved to Vermont, settling in a town on the Canadian border.
- My most intimate relationships are being challenged at the deepest levels, melting inner blocks, while opening new spaces for soulful indwelling.

Clearly, each of the above is a book unto itself; nevertheless, these are the vibrant expressions of Life that have been presented for the remaining two articles of this project. I feel increasingly inept at expressing the overwhelming potency of this *coniunctio* energy, pondering my ignorance for taking on such an infinitely Mysterious project. Nevertheless, with absolute reverence I proceed as “instructed,” humbly becoming an instrument through which this infinite Mystery may reveal itself.

First, a bit of back-story: nine years after my divorce, I entered a 15-year relationship. This second marriage repeated the same parent-child pattern present in my first, only this time I felt like the parent and he the child. While I often refer to this second partner as the “love of my life,” in retrospect, I realize it was an opportunity to re-parent my inner child and feel appreciated, even loved for my “feminine” outpouring. Donald Kalsched, in his book, *Trauma And The Soul*, refers to such “rescue” relationships as the “lesser coniunctio, which is the combination of two elements insufficiently differentiated that

cannot yet combine properly,” yet awakens each partner to the “greater coniunctio [of reconciliation], which is the true wedding of equals on the common ground of each partner’s wholeness” (Kalsched, 2013: 310). Nevertheless, embedded in its “love of my life” healing quality was the treacherous theme of abandonment, especially at its end.

My life had become an *enantiodromia* expression; a principle introduced by Carl Jung that the superabundance of any force inevitably produces its opposite. Though “*enantiodromia*” was coined by Jung, it is implied in the writings of *Heraclitus*, stating, “cold things warm, warm things cool, wet things dry and parched things get wet” (Wikipedia). In short, we continue to flip back and forth between opposites until we are able to **consciously** choose to break these repetitive patterns. Kalsched goes on to state that there are two kinds of suffering: 1) an unconscious re-experiencing of unbearable pain; 2) doing this repeating pattern “within a window of tolerance, aided by the witnessing function, the compassion, and interpretive understanding of the analyst [so that] this suffering can become the real, legitimate, God [conscious] suffering that brings transformation” (Kalsched, 2013). By the end of my second marriage, with its repeating parent-child pattern, I vowed to create more conscious relationships between equals, striving for greater wholeness, even while facing the insurmountable patriarchy in which we live.

As a woman, I have spent a lifetime caught in a spell of sexual shame, unconsciously carrying the dark side of patriarchy’s sexual projections. Sex is power. As stated in article one, I was born into a patriarchy in which men held the power, especially sexual power, causing me to unconsciously follow my mother’s footsteps, looking to the masculine to define my sexual expression. Polly Young-Eisendrath discusses in her book *Female Authority* that during a woman’s sexual development, she often looks to the external male authority, seeking to be *like* him, or to be *liked* by him in order to avoid the consequences of utter abandonment. For example, as a prepubescent girl, it was made clear to me that *sex* was a forbidden indulgence punishable by total abandonment. One Sunday as our family was returning from church, my mother flew into a rage, telling the family about a girl in our church that had gotten “pregnant.” She announced, “If either of my girls ever gets pregnant, I’ll ship her off to a home! She’s not going to ruin my reputation!”

Racked with fear as I did not know what *pregnant* was, I had my girlfriend ask her mother to explain. I needed to make sure this did not happen to me. I was terrified that I might be one ignorant step away from being sent off to a home. I was only ten and already a family joke that I was adopted had surfaced. Clearly, I was on a slippery slope, especially regarding my relationship with my mother, which was mostly non-existent. It was that Sunday my mother took hostage my sexuality and with absolute finality, seemed to put it high up on a shelf totally beyond my reach.

Kalsched discusses in both his books, *The Inner World of Trauma*, and *Trauma and the Soul*, how such traumatic events promote a “self-care system” of *dissociation* in order to survive. Our soul literally splits off from our body when living in this world becomes too painful, creating a disembodied existence of numbness; the fertile ground for addiction. Jungian Analyst, Michael Conforti, lectures on being caught in repetitive patterns that sabotage our soul’s emergence into its birthright of magnificence. As a child, this was certainly the case for me, being

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caught in a victim/perpetrator pattern.

However, I am now an adult in the second half of life. Jungian Analyst, James Hollis teaches that the second half of life is in service to the soul. Joseph Campbell, the father of myth, states, “God is the God of sex!” indicating that sex and God are the unified creative life force. How can I break out of this spell and put into practice the wisdom of these great teachers, creating a more conscious romantic relationship between equals? Certainly this *inner coniunctio* is not only potent enough to expand into the outer world, but it must? After all, God demonstrates the importance of this physical world manifestation of Divine Love through the incarnation of Christ. Are we not on this planet to manifest such Divine love in all our relationships, especially our romantic ones? Such questions provoked the following dream, which transpired ten months ago:

I’m with my second ex at a beautiful nature scene, standing at the edge of a large lake that is mostly frozen. I sense I’m being urged, I think by my ex, to walk out on the frozen water. This is high risk as the ice is so thin in areas I can see unfrozen water. I’m sure this is very dangerous. Nevertheless, I find myself out on this lake’s frozen areas and soon in the unfrozen water. However, I’m able to swiftly skim across the top of the unfrozen water by some seemingly supernatural means, finding my way to land/safety again. There is a black man at the shore to greet me. He tends to me by inviting me to sit in his warm, dry, very strong lap. While feeling his warmth against my back, he snips off the frozen ends of my curly hair. I feel very comforted by his care.

While the meaning of this dream continues to unfold, I have made the following discoveries: My ex represents the Divine child in me, urging me to venture out onto this “frozen” body of water. The water symbolizes several things, including my unconscious feeling aspect, my feminine, my frozen sexuality, and the high risk of claiming my own sexuality. Yet, there are “supernatural” forces at work here that seem to not only lure me out onto the water, but provide “the way” to navigate this treacherous journey without drowning. The black man holds so much: my shadow, deep sexual shame, huge, dark, unspoken, unknown, feared, negative masculine—perhaps primitive/undeveloped energy. Yet I am surprised to be comforted by his expansive, unspoken, gentleness and compassion for my courageous journey into the unknown. His snipping the frozen ends of my curly hair seems like some kind of ritual for my inner girl’s coming of age in which “his” participation is needed for “her” completion.

This powerful dream has provided many hours of exploration and discovery in my own analysis. Moreover, its “supernatural” quality appeared to be prophetic as well. A few months later, while flying home from a conference, some thirty thousand feet above the planet, I met a black man sitting next to me. We fell into the most deeply intimate conversation that was fully charged with energies that seemed beyond my control, including sexual. I could feel something deep inside me I couldn’t even name as being touched and awakened. I was both exhilarated and terrified. We exchanged business cards and a full body hug that was electric as I hurriedly left his admiring

gaze to catch my ride. I did not expect our paths would cross again. Perhaps the powers to be had other plans. Within a week we were emailing and setting up our next rendezvous. The practical “parental” side of me was crystal clear, “there will be no long-term relationship here! He’s way too young and you’ve already done the parent-role thing. He’s from another culture and yes, he’s brilliant and writing his dissertation, but the gap between your cultures is an impasse. He has never heard of *coniunctio*, nor is he seeking to live it. What are you thinking?” The child in me, perhaps even the Divine child argues, “you can’t plan such Mysterious unfolding. He feels like the black man at the shore in my dream, waiting to comfort me and snip out the frozen aspects of my sexuality, freeing my creative potential that yearns to burst forth. Please, just for once, can’t we *both* participate in this Mystery and see what unfolds, perhaps even learning something about *coniunctio*!”

Not unlike I had ventured out onto that frozen lake of my dream, I found myself being lured out into this Mysterious relationship with this exotic dark stranger from another culture. The inner battle ensued, causing self-doubt and contemplation over the terrible consequences with which I might be flirting. Could anything fruitful come of this union? Can there possibly be any *coniunctio* potential in *these* dark waters? Not one clear answer surfaced. I was left to rely upon purely intellectual resources, which under these supernatural circumstances seemed totally unreliable. My plan was to proceed with utter caution as long as I felt I was growing. In the end, all I could do was surrender to that which seemed to be in control. As the relationship heated up, the “thin-iced” sexual tension became overpowering and uncontrollable. Summoning my most consciousness self, I created every kind of ritual imaginable in an effort to open space for conscious Love making to unfold. I bought red and white roses; red for passion and white for spiritual purification. I lit four white candles, one for each of the following levels: physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. One of my soul sister’s gave me an image of a descending white dove. My *coniunctio* research had revealed the *heiros gamos*, or Hierogamy (Greek meaning “holy marriage”), which refers to a sexual ritual that plays out a marriage between a god and a goddess. The dove represents the Holy Spirit that descends in order to contain the entire experience. Something informed me this experience was going to be beyond what I alone could contain.

It is critical I express this clearly. It was not the physical love making itself that was so powerful, it was all that came out of holding the tension of these multi-pairs of opposing forces and seeming taboos: me daring to leave the Light of “spiritual” dissociation and risk being plunged into dark unconscious sexual taboos from my childhood, going against everything my mother, culture, the church, and patriarchy had demanded around my sexuality, taking it down from that shelf upon which my mother had placed it and desperately working to transform my shame and fear of abandonment. Nothing is ever your own unless you are willing to die for it and this seemed like a life or death struggle. Perhaps this is a paradoxical Truth that until we can truly hold this Life and death in one experience, we are not open to living *wholly*. Approximately 24 hours after experiencing ecstatic love making with this exotic dark man, there followed a “spiritual” orgasm that was “otherworldly.”

Upon arriving home from this weekend of exhilarating yet exhausting love making, some 48 hours of non-sleep had transpired. I collapsed in my bed for urgent reparative sleep. Around

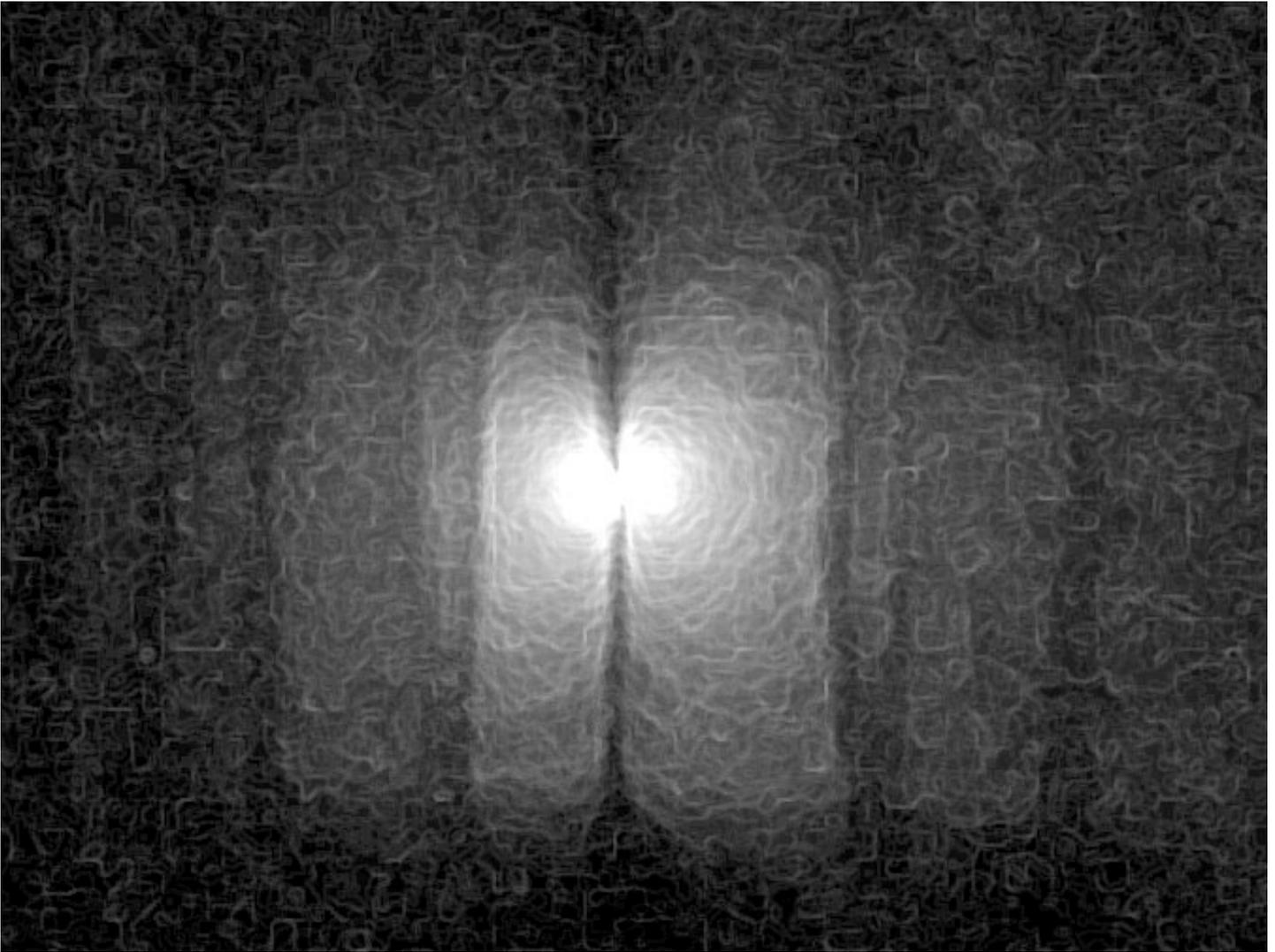


Photo by Carole Darnell, digital manipulation by Don Huntley

three in the morning, the hour of the wolf, I was awakened by my bladder's need to eliminate. I stumbled into the bathroom where there is a huge window. Instantly I was captured by the scene outside. There was a full moon. The forest encircling my lodge-home was laced with a shimmering mist set a glow by the moonlight; trees standing like vertical shadows in this misty cocoon of wonder from which I peered as if from the Great Mother's womb. I saw a dark male shadow wearing a hat walk out from behind a tree in a slumped position. I instantly "knew" him to be my father who had died in September of 2006. Once I realized this, "father" began to transmit the following: he was deeply sorrowful and apologetic that during our time in the family he had not realized Life's True purpose was to Love. He could hardly relate his overwhelming grief over this, but he was able to instructively add, "Dark always resides with Light. One cannot be experienced without the other. The dark and Light exist as a symbiotic duet. You must learn to hold the Truth of this and even as the dark presses in on you, lean toward the Light." I *felt* everything my father relayed...felt it viscerally in my body, in the same place where my sexual shame resided. This *felt* message doubled me over, causing me to wail out the deepest grief I had ever experienced; deeper than when he died. Deeper than when my dog was killed. Deep archaic grief that is so vacuous it bent me in half and my mouth flew so wide open

that drool poured out. It was instant and total, coming in waves that got more powerful, like a tsunami my body convulsed, just as it had during orgasm with the exotic dark man, crashing on the shore of my heart over and over. I stumbled outside sobbing; hoping to get a better *feel* of what was unfolding, taking my cell phone so I could snap a photo, thinking I might prove I was not going crazy, or that this photo might reveal my dad was really there. He wasn't. Only dark vertical shadow-trees were revealed, piercing the all-encompassing misty moonlight. I uploaded the image to my computer so I could see an enlarged version. Something strange appeared. There were horizontal rays of light streaming down from the upper left corner of my screen to the bottom right. It was as if the whole scene, the whole experience, my body orgasm, this spiritual orgasm, and the apparition of my father were all being *held* by something much greater! Something profoundly Mysterious had made itself Known to me. Something I cannot name. Something I cannot prove. Something so otherworldly powerful it has transformed me; opening a space in me that seems to be allowing my Soul to slowly come back home into my body!

To be continued...