Self & Society, 2016
Vol. 44, No. 3, 278–286, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03060497.2016.1226763

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

INTERVIEW

The therapeutic dimensions of walking: an interview with art therapist and walker, Karin Jarman

Karin Jarman[a] and Richard House[b]*

[a]*Registered Art Therapist, St Luke's Therapy Centre, Stroud, UK;* [b]*Educational Consultant, Stroud, UK*

Self & Society
(Richard House [**RH**]): Karin, I already know quite a bit about your extraordinary relationship with walking, and no doubt we'll go into that in some depth later in this interview. But could you first tell us a bit about your own personal/professional involvement in therapy/counselling; and also, can you remember when in your life you first really noticed some significant personal connection to the phenomenon of walking?

Karin Jarman [**KJ**]: My therapeutic journey began in the then West Germany around age 19 when I heard about the idea of self-development for the first time through a lecture by an anthroposophic doctor. I had never come across this idea before and it immediately fired me up: it is indeed possible to change oneself! We don't have to put up with how we are, our hang-ups, our self-destructive messages, our ingrained patterns.

I did the Steiner teacher's training at the age of 21, and looking back I can see that for me, this was not in order to become a teacher but to have the education that I would have liked. During this course I was exposed to art experiences that I'd never had in my own education and gradually felt that this was a possible path for me. I applied to an Art Therapy College in Germany, only to be told that I was still too young (I was 23 at the time). Soon after this I moved to Britain, met my husband, started my family and lived in a community with special needs adults – my wish to be an art therapist had to be shelved for an indefinite period of time! When my youngest child approached Kindergarten age, a friend came to visit who noticed that I somewhere carried an unhappiness. Conversations with her gave me the courage to explore the idea of training in art therapy at a small college near Gloucester (UK). A couple of years later, in the midst of a huge marriage crisis, and with no finance to speak of, this same friend helped us to make the big leap from protected community living to all the uncertainties that this move would bring with it. Her encouragement and faith in my destiny made all this possible. Our marriage gradually healed, too, as I dived into the world of colour like someone starved – this is what my teacher had observed.

After graduating I worked freelance for a couple of years before joining the St Luke's medical team in Stroud in January 1990, an innovative NHS GP practice with a therapy wing and with a number of therapies on offer. I have been part of this organization ever since, and in 2001 we were able to move to new purpose-built

*Corresponding author. Email: richardahouse@hotmail.com

premises with a splendid art studio. I also became involved in setting up an Art Therapy College in Stroud after the retirement of my teacher, and began to travel abroad to run courses and offer an annual summer school for lay people.

I have a special interest in developing art journeys in relation to people's own life stories. To this end I work closely together with a counsellor, and we run support groups under the name of Oasis, offering a programme of 3×12 sessions over nine months, combining personal biography work and art. This is a highly successful venture, enabling participants to create a new relationship to their stories and find creative ways to make lasting changes in their lives.

This potted history is a useful and necessary background to your other question about my relationship with walking! The inspiration for this work bears a direct relationship to my walking practice (I can go into that later, perhaps). My very first memory aged 2½ is about having walked away from my parents and being found by my frantically searching father. I remember the guilt feeling, even though I don't think that I was told off! I think he was just so glad to have found me and, I remember, this was at a crossroads.

Another memory at age five was standing at the bus stop with my mother waiting to go into the next town for shopping. I looked at the straight road, just making out a church tower in the distance. In that moment I said to myself: one day I will walk this! It was about two kilometres in distance.

Looking back on this event it becomes clear for me now that a very important aspect of my walking is that it helps me to make sense of the sensory world, in particular in relation to space and time. Only the walking pace is in harmony with our bodily rhythm; even cycling is too fast for this. Measuring space by walking helps me to feel the real distance between places.

RH: Thank you for that fascinating answer, Karin. There's much that I'd like to pick up on, but first, I wonder whether you could expand a bit on your statement (which feels like a very important one) that 'Only the walking pace is in harmony with our bodily rhythm'. (I'm assuming that this could be answered at different levels – biological, physiological, archetypal, symbolic, holistic – but do please answer it at the level(s) that has/have meaning to you.)

KJ: The life of the human body is carried by rhythms, which in themselves are reflections of the wider rhythms of nature. Any form of movement influences those rhythms, particularly the ones to do with breathing and heartbeat. Our current age is obsessed with speed. People want to travel as quickly as possible, as far as they can in as short a time as can be managed. Most of this way of travelling does not involve moving at all. We sit still and something else does the moving. Body and soul become utterly confused.

The practice of walking changes this quite radically. It is an inefficient mode of travel, but one that makes the journey itself into a rich and textured experience, and the arrival into a big event. I experienced this very deeply when, one summer, I decided to walk from home to Stonehenge, a destination that I had visited a couple of times before by car. On the walk I remember the moment when I saw the stones for the first time on the horizon: then they disappeared again, the next time they were closer, only to disappear again. During the last couple of miles, I left the footpath on an impulse and, instead, crossed an adjoining field, climbing over the fence, so that I would have a better view of the Henge. In that field I found some burial mounds and

other ancient relics. Then, quite by chance (this was not a public footpath!) I stumbled upon a plaque which read: 'This is the original avenue leading to the stones'! By the time I got to the entrance gate I had been so profoundly touched and felt that I had connected so deeply to this sacred place that I felt no need to pay the extortionate entrance fee! And how different this was from my previous visits, where I had only seen the stones and not been aware of the wider context in which they stand.

An experienced walker knows that there is an optimum pace, different for each person, that can be sustained over a long period of time. Walking more slowly than this can in fact be more tiring. I believe that this ideal pace is the one that allows us to take along our soul, so that our movement is imbued with our inner experience. The world outside of us matches our inner world, and the two can converse, and even be merged. The usual split between inner and outer that we all suffer from is temporarily healed. I have no doubt that this in turn has a hugely beneficial effect on body and soul. I have not gone on to study this physiologically, but here is a nice little article about a doctor who prescribes walking for his patients (Pemberton, 2014):

> **Hurrah for the 'walking' doctor who dared to innovate**
>
> Dr John Morgan is a GP on a mission. The 41-year-old ex-professional rugby player, who now runs a surgery in Wigan, made headlines last week when he criticised the NHS for failing to prescribe walking as a treatment.
>
> Dr Morgan set up a walking group for his patients a decade ago, and students from Manchester University have now analysed the impact this had had on their health. The results are startling. They found more than 90% of patients attending his walks reported an improvement in their mood, with a nearly 30% reduction in antidepressant use. Almost all had reduced blood pressure and nearly two thirds had lost weight.
>
> Dr Morgan's initiative harks back to the good old days when doctors were expected – and allowed – to think for themselves. They identified a problem, came up with a solution and acted on it. He is clearly passionate about improving the lives of his patients and he took it upon himself to do something to help them.

I mentioned earlier that, for me, the importance of my own walking practice is to make sense of time and space. I have memories as a child of being utterly bewildered by this strange world, by my hugely different qualitative experiences of time, particularly after a lengthy car or train journey, by traversing what I felt to be vast differences (nothing compared to what I sometimes do now, flying to another corner of the world in a matter of hours) and arriving somewhere, having lost a thread, a connection, feeling there is a missing link that I cannot get hold of.

When, in contrast, I walk to a destination, I am fully present with every step, even when I am dead tired at the end of a long day, my body feeling the reality of that distance and the time it takes to cover it. My arrival is complete, my inner eye can trace all that lies between where I started from and where I got to.

RH: Phew … That's more than I'd bargained for from my question, Karin! But a very pleasant surprise that I've inadvertently asked a question that has opened up many of the issues I was wishing to ask you about. Having only just recently discovered the wonders of walking myself, I really resonate with what you've written here. I find myself wondering about understanding walking as, in many ways, a holistic microcosm of human existence (if that doesn't sound too improbably grandiose) – for

example, in relation to beginnings and endings, time and space, being attuned (or not) to natural rhythms, the will, being a bridge between inner and outer that (crucially) includes the body, engaging with nature in real rather than fabricated, technologically accelerated time – and of course the rich metaphor of 'the journey' and its soul resonances. This in turn leaves me wondering whether *everyone* who is recommended for counselling or psychotherapy, and who is physically able to walk, should, as a matter of course, at the same time be advised to start walking regularly – and indeed whether there has been any empirical (health?) research done on the therapeutic and health effects of walking.

It's not as if any of this is especially new, of course. Over a decade ago (House, 2005), I reviewed a new book by psychiatry professor David Servan-Schreiber called *Healing without Freud or Prozac* (Rodale, London, 2004; 2nd edition 2011; see the Retro Review Essay in this issue), in which he argued, among other things, that sustained physical effort can put a halt (at least temporarily) to depressive thoughts, and that simple exercise and what he calls 'listening to the heart' are often the key to harnessing the body's own healing patterns.

You said earlier that walking helps you 'to make sense of the sense world, in particular in relation to space and time'. I know you are an adherent of Rudolf Steiner's cosmology, Anthroposophy (something we share), and readers of this journal may not know about Steiner's depiction of the *twelve* human senses (as opposed to the five of mainstream thinking; see Sousman, 2001), and also about Steiner's complex discussions about the human being in the context of space (cf. 'spatial dynamics') and time. I wonder whether this might be the point to introduce Steiner and his relevance to walking, the senses and the body? But do please pick up on whatever you wish from my discursive response.

KJ: When I go walking I have a choice to go more into my inner world and process what I need to look at in my own soul space, or I can consciously choose to direct my attention to the world around me and to activate my senses of touch, seeing and hearing. Just the other day I focused my attention purely on sound and was astonished at the rich tapestry of bird song, humming, barking, traffic and distant voices, continuously changing but also discovering rhythm and repetition in the bird song that I hadn't noticed before.

These two gestures, of attending to the inner and outer world, can be likened to breathing in and breathing out. We need to do both in order to stay alive and healthy. For someone suffering from depression, for example, the inner-world gesture has almost completely taken over, and one can get truly stuck in this. It is like being in a cave, enclosed and with very little light. Our worries and sorrows are magnified, bouncing off the walls of this inner cave. The opposite happens in an acute anxiety state – the outer world is the enemy, intruding into my inner world and not giving me any peace. This is like being out and unprotected in a vast outer space and at the mercy of the elements. So, by walking I literally create a rhythm between the two, and thus can regulate my breathing, which after all links my feelings and emotions to my bodily nature. Walking briskly, I breathe more deeply, more fully. The world around me changes as I walk, but not too quickly, just in the right measure for me to notice, process and be stimulated by what I see and be able to enrich my inner world by doing it.

Rudolf Steiner, along with other spiritual researchers, works with the ideas of Macrocosm and Microcosm, saying that there is a symbiotic relationship between the two.

The result of having lost the understanding and experience of this is our feeling of loneliness, being utterly thrown back onto ourselves, unconnected and isolated. The activity of walking, I would suggest, is uniquely suited to bring this relationship into soul experience – even running or cycling is actually too fast! A regular practice of walking in all weathers and seasons is a tremendously powerful medicine, particularly if it is always done at the same time and in the same space. I have done this, for example, every morning for over 10 years now, getting up at 6 AM and walking for an hour and a bit, from my house, climbing a hill and returning home, before breakfast. My inner experience of the change of light throughout the year is now deeply imprinted in my soul: the deep velvety darkness in the winter time for the whole way, the exciting spectacle of early dawn, later sunrise, during the equinoxes, and the gentle morning light in summer time – but also the rain, the wind, clear frosty mornings, the dew, larks rising … . Whatever the day brings, I have had this gift to carry within me! This is why I recommend this practice to my patients with anxiety and depression, and those who have taken it up have all reported what a tremendously helpful suggestion this is. An important aspect of it is to take the same route at the same time every morning – to bypass the mind activity that would like to make it more 'interesting' in deciding where to go, and before you know it, you have shut out your feeling life that is so wonderfully attuned in the time of gradually waking, rather than rushing into the day, overtaken by all the worries before the day has even happened.

RH: Thank you, Karin. You give something akin to a poetic description of your walking process – I find it very beautiful. It left me wondering whether the regular keeping of a 'walking journal' might also be highly effective in therapeutic contexts, and whether you might have ever experimented with this, either yourself or with your patients/clients?

I also want to ask you about your extraordinary walk to Prague from Stroud (Jarman, 2008), but before I do, in your previous answer I found your framing of anxiety and depression in relation to 'outer' and 'inner' really useful and illuminating. It leads me to ask you whether an anthroposophically informed approach to 'therapy' would tend to focus more on helping 'the organism of the person' back to a healthy dynamic balance of mind–body–spirit–soul (if I can coin such a term), rather than focusing on removing or 'managing' specific presenting symptoms – or is it more complex and subtle than that? It would be really interesting to hear a bit about the underlying philosophy of the specifically anthroposophical approach to counselling/therapy (perhaps using the phenomenon of walking as a vehicle for this), as it's an approach that really isn't well known about; and this will also help pave the way for our theme issue on 'Rudolf Steiner and the Psychological Therapies', which will appear in 2017. I also sense that Humanistic Psychology has a lot to learn from this little-known approach, and find myself excited at the possible cross-overs. Over to you!

KJ: I would like to say something about the idea of taking up walking because 'it's good for me'. How about walking for the joy of it? It's a bit like with meditation, which is often promoted as being a wonder tool to combat stress, for example. At various points Rudolf Steiner speaks about meditating as *a service*, a practice to contribute to the healing, the making whole, of the world and ourselves. I have found walking to be needful for the earth. When I was in North America, in rural North Carolina, I was shocked to find the landscape soulless and empty. I observed that there

were no footpaths, that the earth was only ever touched by wheels, in agriculture and transport. As I was walking along the roads, the only option left for my daily walking, I frequently had cars stopping and people asking me whether I had run out of gas (petrol) or whether my car had broken down. On one occasion a police woman suspected me of some more sinister scenario. People visiting each other 500 metres down the road invariably would take the car.

When walking, the journey takes on a different dimension, and arriving somewhere is but an end-point of a profound process. After a long day's walk during which I had a deeply felt inner experience, I wrote the following in my log book:

> I believe that this sacred moment brought me closer to the secrets of birth, destiny and death: I was able to grasp in one brief moment the meaning of our existence on earth. It was much, much deeper than simply understanding it. It was there, and it was gone again almost in the same breath, but the memory of it has stayed with me and still fires me with enthusiasm whenever I call it up. (Jarman, 2008, p. 30)

I don't measure the miles I walk, and barely make a note of the time it takes me to go from one place to another. Soul time is not clock time, soul distance not measured in miles or kilometres. Each walk differs entirely from another. So although I do recognize and realize the therapeutic value of walking, I have so far been reluctant to formalize it in any way, although I have had many suggestions, and even offers, for doing so. I may need to review this, though, because if, by offering 'Soul Walks', I can enable someone else to go into a deeper inner space and thereby benefit their well-being and spiritual connection to the world around them, then it must be done. I just want to avoid walking becoming another consumer article to be purchased.

From a therapeutic perspective, something similar could be said about 'walking being good for me'. If I do it because my therapist promises that it will relieve particular symptoms, I again look to the activity of walking in a one-sided way, only considering the physical or emotional benefit. It is so interesting to see the faces of people who are walking on one of the treadmills in a gym – very often watching a film on a screen in front of them. They are truly walking just for the imagined benefit of it, but not at all paying attention to the walking itself in its absolute fullness of allowing the soul to become one with it and feel oneself to be part of a much greater wholeness than just being imprisoned in the limitations of one's body. Walking as an act of love, both for myself and the world – this would constitute a path of healing, which in fact means 'making whole'. To a modern mind this may well sound too metaphysical and fanciful. To this I can only reply – do try to give walking full attention and see what happens! I cannot really describe the actual joy and passion arising from it – indeed, I have compared it to the joy and passion of love-making! It is really on this level that we're speaking of. Giving someone or something my undivided attention is an act of love. If you have ever noticed how young children respond to just that, you will understand what I mean. Equally, witness the distress in the child if it continuously has to clamour for it.

In anthroposophic therapy we look at the human being in a fourfold way: physical, life forces, soul and spirit. The life forces express themselves in the feeling of wellness or otherwise, different from feelings and emotions in the soul space. The spiritual aspect of the human being expresses itself in the life story or biography, which literally means 'engraving the life', making a mark. Each person's biography is unique. Any therapeutic intervention would need to take into account the playing together of these four parts.

Coming back to walking, its benefit for the body is well documented, and this would also hold true for the realm of the life forces. This is the level where we can say, 'Walking is good for you'. To what extent I allow my soul to become one with it takes it well beyond this. It almost ceases to matter whether 'it's good for me' or not. On a biographical level, for example, going on a really long walk can have the aspect of ritual, that of marking certain life events or ending of phases. There now exists a wonderful variety of collections of stories from people walking the Camino of Santiago de Compostella: a father mourning the death of a child; my daughter walking to open a new chapter in her life before taking on a new job; in my own story, marking the time my youngest child left home. More recently we hosted a young woman who decided to walk 1300 miles around England to pollinate positive change (Carnall, Shaw, Baker, & Bradley, 2015). Everyone to whom I've spoken who's done long distance walking has found themselves profoundly changed well beyond imagining.

However, this is not at all to devalue the humble daily practice of walking of perhaps only 20 or 30 minutes. A good way of doing this is to walk at the same time every day and the same path also, and observe the seasonal and weather changes over time. This can be a deeply meditative practice, which creates a much deeper relationship to the seasons and the weather than merely putting up with it in our parts of the world! Again, the word 'healing' springs to mind, reconciling ourselves to being a part of a greater wholeness, and not a living organism in isolation.

I also have a rhythm of a weekly day-long walk, that I don't want to be without if I possibly can. This is my time of regeneration, of closing the week and gathering strength for the next one, of processing and preparing. In fact, I have often found this to be a time of fertile inspiration for the occasions when I have been asked to run a workshop, give a presentation or to prepare for a painting or teaching course.

RH: I just love the way you've given an impeccably 'post-professional' answer to my tentatively professionalizing questions, Karin! You're absolutely right, of course – the very idea of 'professionalizing' the experience of walking, or of making it into a 'thing' to be subjected to psychologizing, is absurd, and misses the point; and I'm very grateful that you've put me right on that. But that's not to say that there don't exist healing and therapeutic dimensions to the activity of walking, and you've given us more than enough in your profound answers to my questions for readers to glean many ideas and insights in this realm – so thank you for that. In fact, I think that this interview could well be the first of its kind to appear in a psychotherapy/psychology publication – which is quite something! – and also something of a coup for the journal.

We've both briefly alluded earlier to your walk to Prague; and your resulting book (Jarman, 2008) goes into that whole extraordinary episode in your life at some length. Would you like to say something here, finally, about that experience, perhaps in terms of how it came about, and what the meaning of that experience holds in your biography – or indeed, any other aspects of the experience that you think our readers might find interesting?

KJ: Walking seems to have a big significance in my biography; indeed, my very first memory at age 2½ is about walking! As I mentioned earlier, I also recall standing at the bus stop with my mother, which would have been the day before my fifth birthday, because we were going into the nearby town to get things for my party. I saw the town's church tower and remember thinking: one day I can walk this distance! And

sure enough, one day I could, and I saw another landmark in the distance, which compelled me to walk there the next time … and so it went on! Perhaps I need to add that I experienced a lot of conflict between my parents in the home, and no doubt, by the time I started a regular walking practice at age 9 or 10, it was my way of processing and rescuing myself from quite an unbearable situation.

However, the pull of the horizon is what spurred me on, and enabled me to develop the necessary tenacity to walk for hours! This is why I called my book *Touching the horizon*.

The book itself is the account of my pilgrimage, which I undertook in my 49th year. This was to mark my youngest child leaving home, and the inner need to have a ritual to celebrate a new phase in my life. My wish was to finally walk into the blue distance, whose pull I had felt for so long, to walk as far as my feet and legs would carry me, to have my fill … In other words, to fulfil my deepest wish! And so, on my birthday in January, I set out from my front door, taking leave of my husband, children and friends who had gathered to bid me farewell! I cannot begin to describe this feeling, the mixture of anticipation, joy and fear: I couldn't even read a map properly, I wasn't particularly fit, and there I was, with a backpack and new boots that hadn't been walked in, totally unprepared. I suffered terrible blisters during the first three weeks, which nearly caused me to turn back. On one occasion, I found myself walking in a circle without noticing it for two hours, and yet, walk I did, eventually reached Dover, crossed over to Oostend, walked through Belgium and right through the heart of Germany, made a detour into Dresden before reaching the Czech Republic, Prague, and my destination, the Karlsteijn Castle outside of Prague.

My outer journey became an inner one. One day, a week or so away from my destination, I felt so full of gratitude for the wonder of it all, that I resolved to write a book as a way of thanking all those people who had helped this journey, either by hosting me, holding me in their thoughts, giving me directions, sharing their very moving stories, or simply wishing me well on the way. I felt so truly blessed. I had no intention to have this book published. However, with the help of some dear friends and the interest expressed, it did come about seven years after completing my pilgrimage.

Since returning from this journey I have incorporated a daily, weekly and annual walking practice that are, at the same time, also my spiritual practice. I recently came across an article about the South American artist Daniel De'Angeli, who describes himself as a 'Western painter facing East'. The inspiration for his beautiful artwork comes to him by walking, of which he says that it allows him to live in the moment. In 1965 he walked from St Jean en Pied-de-Port in France to Santiago de Compostella, and his relationship to art changed completely.

> There is a visual power to walking which I have never experienced in any other way. I think inside each person there is the possibility of living in a tangible but contemplative dimension. But walking – the act of putting one foot in front of the other and continually moving – brings me closer to that state. (Quoted in Mills, 1990, 126)

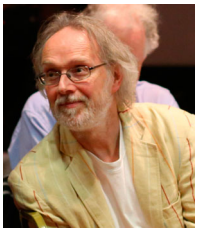
Similarly, for me, working as an art therapist, walking brings me in touch with the meaning of the Journey of Life in each biography that I encounter, reliving the aspects of choosing by necessity one path over another, and wondering what would

have happened had I chosen the other. And by looking back over the journey, many miles later, seeing the deep wisdom of my choice even if this path had led me astray, confronted me with unexpected obstacles, or turned out to be much longer than the other. My ability to 'read' the hidden script and finding the theme of a life story told to me is being ever more refined, particularly through my long distance walking. I am filled with awe and wonder, as well as deep gratitude and joy for the gift of walking.

RH: That resounding final statement seems to me as good a place as any to end this particular journey, Karin. I have learnt a great deal from you about the deep meaning of walking in this interview, as I'm sure will be the case with our readers. It would be wonderful if readers would send in reflections on their own experiences of walking (as 'letters to the editor'), and how what you've written here has helped to elucidate and perhaps deepen those experiences. Thank you again, on behalf of all our readers.

Notes on contributors

Karin Jarman was born in 1953 in Baden Baden, Germany. She trained as an art therapist with Vera Taberner at the Fox Elms School of Artistic Therapy and graduated in 1986. She has worked (since 1990) at St Luke's Therapy Centre in Stroud, runs occasional artistic courses for the public and is currently facilitating an art therapy training in Thailand. She is married with three grown-up children and is a long distance walker. Her book describing her walk to Prague, *Touching the horizon*, was published by Temple Lodge Publishing in 2008.



Richard House, formerly of the Universities of Roehampton and Winchester, is co-editor of *Self & Society*. He is now an Educational Consultant in Stroud, UK.

References

Carnall, E., Shaw, M., Baker, S., & Bradley, S. (2015). *Pollinating change: The Buzz Tour Change the Culture Not the Climate*. Brookwood, Surrey: The Green Woman.

House, R. (2005). Healing beyond modernity and its professionalisation? A review article. *Ipnosis* magazine, 18 (Summer): 28–30 (updated version in this issue).

Jarman, K. (2008). *Touching the horizon: A woman's pilgrimage across Europe to the castle by the Golden City*. London: Temple Lodge.

Mills, S. (1990). Daniel De'Angeli: Healing colour. In J. Lane & S. Kumar (Eds.), *Images of earth and spirit: A Resurgence art anthology*. Dartington, Totnes: Green Books.

Pemberton, M. (2014, September 8). Don't be nasty about Nice (The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence). *Daily Telegraph*. Retrieved from http://goo.gl/KzL6v5.

Sousman, A. (2001). *Our twelve senses: How healthy senses refresh the soul. An introduction to Anthroposophy and spiritual psychology based on Rudolf Steiner's studies of the senses*. Stroud: Hawthorn Press.