

Deconstruction of my performativity as a feminist
from a post-modernist perspective: Do WHAT?

Charlotte Babb

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Janis Jennings

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Recently, I have been practicing the exercises suggested by Abraham, a group of channeled beings who speak through Esther Hicks. Their message is very simple: Each of us creates our own reality: to get more of what we want, pay attention to what we have (Hicks & Hicks, 2005).

My ability to write the sentence above with a straight face should indicate that I accept the possibility of a much larger and more complex energetic universe than is presently verifiable even by today's science. According to Abraham and possibly according to other channeled beings—Oren, Daben, Seth, etc.—we are all physical manifestations of the energy of the universe, "on the leading edge of thought," and it is our own desires which fuel the expansion of the universe (Hicks & Hicks, 2005, par.2). Our Inner Being, the soul, and/or perhaps the "superconscious," is our connection to that source. I use the word "superconscious" because that being is conscious of me, even if I am unconscious of "her, it, or them." Imagine my surprise to read in Tarnas (1991), "nature's unfolding truth emerges only with the active participation of the human mind. ...[it] comes into being through the very act of human cognition. Nature becomes intelligible to itself through the human mind" (p. 434).

My impulse has been to rant about the inability of Jung and Freud to understand women given the time period and culture in which they lived. However, I cannot answer Freud's most famous quote, said to Marie Bonaparte, "The great question that has never been answered, and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is 'What does a woman want?'" (Freidan, 1963, par. 28). Of course, I can't find out what

Bonaparte replied, either. I grew up in the realm of the *Feminine Mystique* and the other incidents of my times and places: McCarthyism, the Civil Rights Movement, Feminism, the Vietnam War, the descent of Acid Rock into Disco and Alternative—just as much limited to my cultural world views as Freud and Jung, and with less understanding of their time as they would have had of mine.

In fact, Ellenberger's (1970) description of the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, what I would call the Gilded Age, shows a world parallel my experience of the late 1960-70s, but one so "secure that many people lost interest in social and political problems and lived from day to day" (p. 255), rather than living day to day in the twentieth century in the face of instant annihilation. The world of Nietzsche's middle age, Freud's youth and Jung's childhood was not only unquestionably male dominated, and segregated intellectually and socially on sexual, racial and class structures, but was to their minds, a dignified, disciplined "reaction against the dissolute life of eighteenth century English life" (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 257) and presumably that of the rest of Europe. They were not as sexually repressed in Europe as I had always thought, yet there seems to be just the slightest notion of how liberated from Victorian prudery everyone was to be exploring and publishing about sexual matters (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 291) The concept of a childhood with special needs different from adulthood, and as market for educational books, had begun in the seventeenth century and was established fully in the early nineteenth century (Shavit, 1986, p. 6, par. 2), giving Freud the basis and background for making his brilliant analysis of the Oedipal repression in children, much as the rise of the concept of the teenager as demographic market with disposable income shaped my world. Freud and Jung's own cultural lens however, prevented them from seeing the social repression of women that coincided with the sexual repression.

Jung seemed much more connected to women, but while he postulated an animus for women, reflecting his own anima, he seems to have forgotten his other 'other,' "No. 2 [which] had something to do with the creation of dreams" (1989, p. 89). Their writings do not seem to pertain to me until I get to the feminist revisions of their work, when my personal issues are nailed: "females tend to have problems with individuation" (Gilligan, 1993, p.8) In 1993, I was 42, mother of an 11 year old daughter, married to a 30 year old boy, struggling to find out what I was and what I was supposed to be.

I had rejected my first marriage, my religion, and most of what my mother tried to teach me. None of it seemed to apply to me, and I could not find the rules to play by:

It all goes back, of course, to Adam and Eve—a story which shows, among other things, that if you make a woman out of a man, you are bound to get into trouble.

In the life cycle, as in the Garden of Eden, the woman has been the deviant.

(Gilligan, 1993, p.6)

I have always felt like a deviant. I had been in therapy of various kinds since I was in my late twenties, and my therapists always eventually told me that there was nothing wrong with me—that I needed to go back to work after my daughter was born, or I needed to run every day, or “here, take these antidepressants for six weeks and see if you don’t feel better.” Some of them told me their life stories. One even gave me Prozac when he said he thought I was bipolar. I suspect it was because people were supposed to lose weight on Prozac; I gained 75 pounds after 18 months. I don’t remember a lot about that time, but that was when I had an affair, left my husband, and lost my job. I was very angry all the time, often with suicidal thoughts, as I felt that everyone had lied to me and set me up for failure.

Yet the psychologists had studied without understanding the feelings of other women just like me. Piaget found that "girls are more tolerant in their attitudes toward rules, more willing to make exceptions, and more easily reconciled to innovations" (as cited in Gilligan, 1993, p. 10) It apparently never occurred to him that rules are not important when they don't apply to oneself, when the double standard makes different rules for different genders, and the rule for girls is "You can't do that because you are a girl."

Freud also talks about a girl's "castration" at puberty, a "fresh wave of *repression*" (as cited in Gilligan, P. 10), but he doesn't realize that the repression is to save males from having to see the blood she sheds every month. She must deny and hide a fourth of her physical experience (7 of every 28 days) while she supposedly undertakes "to forge a coherent sense of self, to verify an identity that can span the discontinuity of puberty and make possible the adult capacity to love and work" (Erikson as cited in Gilligan p.11), a crisis that focuses on "autonomy versus shame and doubt." (Erikson as cited in Gilligan p.12). How damaging it is to have to deal with a normal process considered "the curse" and "castration" and "a wound" especially at age 10 in fourth grade? Now I know that being overweight probably brought on puberty early, but then it was just another hassle, and as the only girl in the neighborhood, one that I could not share with anyone. None of the other girls in fourth grade was wearing a real bra (36 C) yet, much less bleeding.

Chodorow (1989) discusses how at this time in a woman's life she struggles with "a perceived conflict between femininity and success," (p. 112). My mother told me that I could not play with the boys, that I was to let them win, and that I was to let them think that they were smarter than I was so that they would like me. She also told me that every male that I dated would try to have sex with me, and when he didn't—perhaps perceiving me as a 'good girl'—I felt even more deviant and un-gendered. But this was not my mother's fault, nor Freud's:

Freudian theories were used to brainwash two generations of educated American women ...by well-meaning popularizers and inadvertent distorters; by orthodox converts and bandwagon faddists; by those who suffered and those who cured and those who turned suffering to profit; and, above all, by a congruence of forces and needs peculiar to the American people at that particular time.

(Freidan, 1963, par. 47)

Many women of my generation are hostile to our mothers, including all the women of my personal acquaintance. This hostility even appeared in our on-campus discussion of Demeter and Persephone; some of us felt that Demeter was not allowing Persephone to individuate.

My maternal grandmother died when my mother was 13, and my mother had to deal with a new stepmother, which did not allow her to deal with her mother on an adult basis, affecting her individuation, which in turn affected mine. She based her understanding of her place in the world by the men in her life: her father, my father, her second husband, her son, and her current boyfriend. Chodorow discusses the effect of this kind of understanding, especially for us who cannot seem to understand the rules:

The heterosexual relationship itself gains in emotional importance at the very moment when the heterosexual strains which mothering produce are themselves sharpened. In response to these emerging contradictions, divorce rates soar, people flock to multitudes of new therapies, politicians decry, and sociologists document the end of the family. And there develops a new feminism." (p.78)

So, as I entered the second half of my life (optimistically, at 50 I might live another 50 years), I continued to look for some way to make sense of where I was (widowed, with a daughter starting college, working several part time jobs). I met a customer at the store where I

worked, and asked her to be my grandmother, as I had ascertained that I needed one, someone who could give me the perspective I did not have. Tarnas (1991) says, "The highest value for any perspective is its capacity to be temporarily useful or edifying, emancipating or creative—though...these valuations are themselves not justifiable by anything beyond personal and cultural taste." (p. 400).

I began to study witchcraft with her and met her circle, a group that impressed me immensely on first meeting. But I found as we went along, that none of these women had the strength of character or the deep connection that I wanted to find in my own life. They spent a lot of their energy hiding both their religion and their sexual orientation as lesbians. I was in the same place I had been when I went to church: "grand theories and universal overviews cannot be sustained without producing empirical falsification and intellectual authoritarianism." (Tarnas, p. 401) I found the Dianic lesbian community as hidebound as the Southern Baptists from whom they had escaped, and their passion for life as tasteless as their low-fat vegetarian food. They missed the point of the myth, even as they celebrated Demeter:

The myth of Persephone speaks directly to the distortion in this view by reminding us that narcissism leads to death, that the fertility for the earth is in some mysterious way tied to the continuation of the mother-daughter relationship, and that the life cycle itself arises from an alternation between the world of women and the world of men. (Gilligan, 1993, p. 23)

But eventually I met other folks through the pagan community, in particular a couple of women who introduced (dragged, kicking and screaming) me to the teachings of Abraham and my Inner Being. The method my Inner Being uses to communicate with me is my emotional

state, so Abraham suggests working toward appreciation and joy—certainly a non-objectionable goal. (Hicks & Hicks, 2004)

Now as I read of "postmodern Jungian feminisms," I must deconstruct my own grand narrative of feminism to discourse with my selves and my physical and subtle bodies from a Jungian standpoint: "the body is not an alternative to reason, as it is not transcendent of history, psyche and culture, it cannot itself provide objective grounds for knowledge or truth" (Rowland, 2002, p. 140). I have discounted and abused that physical reality that my "thoroughly modern" mind accepted as real, objective and abjectly female, but if I had read Butler, I would have known that only "through the cultural discourses that construct the significance of my body to me" (Rowland, 2002, p. 140). It is the narrative, the logos of writing, the irrational on paper that has been my method of discourse to begin to come to terms with not only who I might be as an instance of one sublime post-modernist feminist, but of who I wish to become, what desires I have and how to use my unconscious or superconscious or Inner Being to get there.

As I have studied Jung in this class, I can see how the processes and games taught by Abraham help one to connect to the unconscious in a gentle way. Jung (1958) mentions the death of a friend who dreamed of stepping off a mountain; that is the negative side of what Abraham teaches. If one is not consciously choosing what to think about, then one gets whatever the unconscious serves up. In a world driven by media driven by advertising, the unconscious is inundated with disaster, tragedy, and fear, all in the name of evoking an emotional state vulnerable to suggestion. Abraham (2005) teaches that one can choose not only a state of joy, but can also choose physical circumstances: health, wealth, social position, and lovers by means of working with Jung's transcendent, although they do not use that term.

Jung describes the transcendent as that which "makes the transition from one attitude to another organically possible without loss of the unconscious" (1958, p. 69). He goes on to describe how various kinds of creative activities, including fantasy can create:

a new situation, since the previously unrelated affect has become a more or less clear and articulate idea, thanks to the assistance and cooperation of the conscious mind. This is the beginning of the transcendent function, i.e., of the collaboration of conscious and unconscious data. (p. 82).

So I get up in the morning and write down affirmations, statements both of what I appreciate at the moment and statements of how I want my life to be, some personal desires, some copied from all sorts of inspirational sources. I do not focus on changing the entire world—no requests for world peace or the collapse of the patriarchy—only a description of my personal sphere of desires. I hope that Tarnas (1991) is right in his suggestion that the ego death of the masculine western mind is just round the corner: "the feminine then becomes not that which must be controlled, denied, and exploited, but rather fully acknowledged, respected and responded to for itself" (p. 444). At the very least, it is the fully feminine that I wish to embrace in my own life.

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