



Aphrodite Aging

by Jan Carlson, LPC-S

(to the Jung Society)

First I want to thank Jo Todd for giving me this idea, over tea, with a simple rhetorical question about archetypes, can they age,? This question required a lot of research, thinking,and Jane Fonda, and has led me to our conversation tonight. One of my dear friends, who has known me since College, told me when I told her the name of my talk, Aphrodite aging, “All you have to do is stand there”. True enough.

Tonight I want to talk about the Aphrodite of myth and legend, forever young. And then we will leap thru the bible, gnosticism and new age theology to regard Sophia, the spirit of wisdom. We are, of course, as usual, skimming the surface of a collective unconscious of the Western world from which we ourselves have emerged. The centuries are encapsulated the stories conflated, for the purpose of our discussion here tonight. I am hoping for a spirited discussion after my presentation if you are so moved. As you know, I don't have answers, you do. When I was teaching woman's groups at the Isis Institute I was humbled by the brilliance of the women. I asked Z Budapest, a wiccan feminist, how do I do this, I don't know the answers, she said just listen.

Some of you have heard me talk about aging, the developmental theory of aging presented by Carl Jung. That theory is sound, about addressing this profound process with seven steps that include

acceptance and life review. But this work doesn't touch the grief and loss I see in my practice among women who are identified with an Aphrodite archetype, and that energy becomes lost to them as youth retreats. There is no model for Aphrodite aging.

These women were once beautiful in their youth, actually all young girls are beautiful, but some identify with their beauty, it becomes a way to glide through the world, a kind of power that they use to thrive. They usually appear in my office confused, over 40, often over 50 or 60. How do I live now? They ask. I worked with a professional model, who married a millionaire, divorced him and arrived wanting to find her soul, her purpose and meaning. She was so lost. Her dreams led her to the discovery of her artistic talents and she became a commissioned artist.

I worked with a former airline stewardess, from back in the day where stewardess needed to be the perfect women as defined by masculine anima image., who is still stunning at 67. She tried photography,

piano, and is now a national champion at ballroom dancing.

All of these are stories of adjustment, to finding life without a previous ego identification. How does this happen and what can we do for ourselves our clients and our friends?

Some of you might remember as women of my generation sought to adjust to early aging, the books on menopause, and the rituals, and Margaret Meads often quoted(at least by me) line about Post menopausal Zest. Some of us even jumped over brooms in a croning ritual like ancient pagans, leaping symbolically, and bravely, into the next phase of life. Jungian analysts have sought to identify the transitions since the early times and you find this in the works of Ester Harding and Jane Wheelwright and Irene del Castillo.

Who can blame us for being lost? We feel cast aside, our feminine denigrated as we lose culturally acceptable appearance. I will not minimize this with talk tonight of the rewards of aging, becoming a grandparent, or retiring, or free time or self actualization like the many

consolation prizes. You didn't win the Car!! So you get the luggage set.

We must address the sadness, offer gratitude to Aphrodite, then greet the even more universal goddess awaiting us.

We live in a culture that adores youth and appearance, and our fear of irrelevancy is valid. Generations hit this wall, but our generation lives longer, We live an average of 30 years longer than our great-grandparents did. That's an entire second adult lifetime that's been added to our lifespan. our culture has not come to terms with what this means. I am quoting Jane Fonda here.

This is actually a developmental stage of life with its own significance -- as different from midlife as adolescence is from childhood. And they are asking -- we should all be asking -- how do we use this time? How do we live it successfully? What is the appropriate new metaphor for aging women? Now that I am here, I am not satisfied with the word, however much we have worked to reclaim it, the word "Crone".

Women have attempted to recapture the word crone as an honorific for maturity and experience.

Because we live in western civilization we are moved by certain western images and archetypes. Women may unconsciously or consciously identify with certain goddesses, such as Aphrodite or Athena. Each goddess brings an aspect of the human soul, all of which were contained in ancient beliefs. These aspects were split apart for the Greeks and Romans and others before. We had a deity for the fields, for childbirth, for crossroads. These separate deities live on as archetypes in our culture, in spite of the reign of monotheism., the emergence of God as masculine..

In our life and practice we see the women who identify with a goddess archetype and with age, or change of circumstance stare at the void where previously there had been identity and meaning. Demeter a mother archetype falls into grief as her children leave home.

Persephone, the daughter becomes the eternal daughter called a

puella by the Jungians, unable to navigate in the real world, be it money, driving, or forging and maintaining adult relationships.

Briefly, we know that Myth, from Webster, is person or thing having only an imaginary or unverifiable existence.

It is a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon

Myths are "stories about divine beings, generally arranged in a coherent system; they are revered as true and sacred; they are endorsed by rulers and priests; and closely linked to religion. Once this link is broken, and the actors in the story are not regarded as gods but as human heroes, giants or fairies, it is no longer a myth but a folktale. Where the central actor is divine but the story is trivial... the result is religious legend, not myth.

Aphrodite came to us from Hellenistic period about 600 BC in Greece.

Aphrodite is often dismissed as the Greek goddess of love, we know she is so much more than that. She is said to be older than Time.

She governed the world by the natural law of the maternal clan. She was not only Greek, she was known as Asherah or Astarte, the Goddess of the oldest continuously occupied temple of the world.

Her story in Greek mythology is that she was born of the sea . . .

She emerged and was welcomed to the camp of Olympians. She had many love affairs which she entered freely. Like Hera, she was later forced to marry, to Hephæstus, the disabled blacksmith who lived underground.

the youth and beauty of Aphrodite has come to be revered in our culture, our cultural consciousness and our cultural unconscious. Yet it diminishes as quickly as our bodies begin to age and no amount of surgical reversal will bring that energy back to us. Our model, as Jane Fonda points out in her book "the third act," is that we peak and decline. This is not a way for us to look at this part of our life, and we can find more pleasure in aging than is available as being objectified. Fonda says we move upwards, toward spirit, as on a staircase.

In our Cultural unconscious Aphrodite has become almost

unattainable, since her media moved from renaissance art to Hollywood. Aphrodite went to Hollywood and become Marilyn Monroe and Jean Harlow. Much is lost to us about who she was before being captured by media. The media images we have are from the Renaissance and the modern world. I am aware of the patriarchal interpretation of this archetypal image, the anima nature of media Aphrodite. But we are here to talk about substance for women, not bemoan patriarchal dominance and anima projections.

Who are some Aphrodite types in modern culture? Not Madonna, but Adele? Can you think of some?

Slides

Read reflection on Aphrodite

I want to segway into one brief definition of archetypes, so that we can earn our CEU”S.

In [Jungian psychology](#), [archetypes](#) are highly developed elements of the [collective unconscious](#). Being unconscious, the existence of

archetypes can only be deduced indirectly by examining behavior, images, art, myths, religions, or dreams. [Carl Jung](#) understood archetypes as universal, archaic patterns and images that derive from the collective unconscious and are the psychic counterpart of [instinct](#). [1] They are inherited potentials which are actualized when they enter consciousness as images or manifest in behavior on interaction with the outside world. [2] They are autonomous and hidden forms which are transformed once they enter consciousness and are given particular expression by individuals and their cultures. Think of the new planet recently discovered. Beyond Pluto, Planet X. The scientist know that it is there, tho they cannot see it. They can tell it exists from the impact on the surrounding space, the gravity, the wave forms. That is like an archetype.

Strictly speaking, **Jungian archetypes** refer to unclear underlying forms or the *archetypes-as-such* from which emerge images and motifs such as the [mother](#), the child, [the trickster](#), and [the flood](#) among others. It is history, culture and personal context that shape these

manifest representations thereby giving them their specific content. These images and motifs are more precisely called *archetypal images*. However it is common for the term *archetype* to be used interchangeably to refer to both *archetypes-as-such* and *archetypal images*.[\[2\]](#)

Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin did this great series on Netflix, “Grace and Frankie.” It is about 2 women in their late 60's whose husbands come out as lovers and move in together. Now they are trying figure out what to do with their lives. Here is a clip:

Jane Fonda Clip and discussion:

How did this make you feel?

After the break I am hoping you might share stories of the moment you realized you were becoming invisible.

So how do we live this extra part of life, one that our great grandparents did not experience? Carl Jung gave us a wonderful gift

by understanding that our second part of life contained meaning, one which we need to explore and discuss together. But in my research I discovered that the transformation that is available to us, has always been there. We have only to look outside of our cultural norms, our cultural demands. The idea that If we outlive the power of youth as women there is nothing there. . so says this media driven patriarchal country, where we have learned to objectify ourselves to remain viable in the youth culture of the western world. Our sense of self has become , transactional. By transactional I mean: If I look good you will, love me, won't kill me, will save me? My own mothers battle cry after sliding on her girdle, gloves, hats, corset bra, was"you have to suffer for beauty".

WE HAVE TO CHANGE WHAT WE VALUE ABOUT OURSELVES.

I had a wonderful conversation recently about what we all experienced when we went through the 60's. We emerged from the repression of the 50's with the vote, birth control, and a world where color,love, Eros

and successful protests had meaning. We fought for civil rights while we slept with movement leaders. Some of us became musicians, or mechanics, rejecting a world of materialism and wage slavery. We lived with each other, literally wore costumes all the time, feathers and paisleys and we left religion for spiritual practices. I am not trying not romanticize the 60's, the arrival of hard drugs and children and responsibility drove most of us back into the main culture. But who was the Goddess of that cultural revolution? Wasn't it Aphrodite that stuck the flower in the Gun muzzle? Her Eros and poetry and sensuality and free love?

Slides

Where did she go? Why is our world filled with colorless cars, and hook up sex on Tinder ,without the Eros, and disembodied gatherings on line?

But lets go back to ourselves, our friends, and the women we see in therapy. An Aphrodite who ages well does so because she has

developed Wisdom,. She is not driven solely by the Aphrodite archetype, nor has she been deserted by it. She is fascinated by beauty and experience and appreciates the sensory experience of life. Like my artist and dancer.

If we want to transcend the meaning of Aphrodite we have to pass through Christianity to get there. If we want to understand the essence of Sophia, the spirit of wisdom, we have to move through the old testament to Tiamat, the first goddess of the earth in a Sumerian creation myth. How can we move to that sacred time?

ON the wings of a slow white dove.

There is a great synchronicity here.

The symbol for Aphrodite is a white dove. The symbol for Sophia is a white dove. the symbol for the holy ghost is a white dove. Like a not so hidden mystery, the feminine face of God appears.

Did you know doves produce their own milk? Yes, it's called "crop milk" or "pigeons milk." It's an oddity in nature for birds to produce

their own milk to feed their young. From this unique ability, we can glean **symbolism of nurturing**. Perhaps motherhood.

Doves often cease their foraging for food just before their babies are born. This temporary starvation insures a pure formulation of milk (otherwise their offspring could not digest bits of solid food in the milk).

The dove is even associated with several mother figures in historical dove symbolism. Take the Mother Mary in Christian legend. The dove is commonly seen in Christian art with Mary as a **symbol of care**, devotion, purity and peace. The dove is a companion of Ishtar too, the Great Mother of Assyrian culture. In this motherly light, the dove elicits a promise of hope and salvation.

And speaking of divine presences, the dove symbolism is often equated to heavenly visitations.

'As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God

descending like a dove and alighting on him.” (Matthew 3:16)

Because, almost unanimously birds (of all kinds) have been viewed as **celestial messengers**.

The white dove appears in the Bible with Jesus at his baptism, on church windows, in the Vatican.. The dove that brings news of land to Noah and Gilgamesh after the deluge. (conflating myths here) the dove of peace. The feminine face of god. The spirit and the symbol of the oldest goddess of all , Sophia.

Have you ever wondered about that gorgeous woman in

Michelangelo’s painting on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel—the one that God has his arm wrapped around while his other arm extends to touch the hand of Adam? Some art historians believe the blonde female represents Jehovah’s grandmother, the Goddess Sophia. In the Judea-Christian tradition the goddess Sophia is the beginning, the source of wisdom, and keeper of the knowledge of all that is righteous and just.

Sophia was Canonized by the Gnostics. She is symbolized by the

dove of Aphrodite later transformed to the Holy Ghost. She was passionately adored by Eastern Christians. Her greatest shrine was erected in Constantinople during the 6th century AD and was one of the wonders of the world the Church of Holy Sophia , Hagia Sophia. (meaning Holy Female wisdom) Roman Christians were embarrassed by this magnificent monument to the Great Mother..Catholic scholars claim the Church of Hagia Sophia was never dedicated to the great mother, in any form. . Jewish Wisdom literature owed much to the cult of Sophia, who was to reappear in medieval Jewish cabalism as the Shekina of God. A translation of Proverbs 8:1-11

Does Sophia not call meanwhile?
 Does Discernment not lift up her voice?
 On the hilltop, on the road,
 At the crossways she takes her stand;
 Beside the gates of the city,
 At the approaches to the gates she cries aloud,
 "O people: I am calling you;
 my cry goes out to the children of humanity.
 You ignorant ones, study discretion;
 And you fools, come to your senses.
 Listen, I have serious things to tell you,
 And from my lips come honest words.
 My mouth proclaims the truth...
 All the words I say are right,
 Nothing twisted in them, nothing false,

All straightforward to the one who understands,
 Honest to those who know what knowledge means.
 Accept my discipline rather than silver,
 Knowledge in preference to gold.
 For wisdom is more precious than pearls,
 And nothing else is so worthy of desire

Feminine Theologians have rediscovered Sophia and attempted to restore her to her place in the Judea Christian pantheon.

It is our task to understand Sophia not just from our mind and our animus, but from our imagination, our soul.

truth. She brings meaning to human experience with her gift of understanding “the bigger picture”. Erich Neuman writes about Sophia as spirit mother, she is not like the Great mother interested in the infant the child and the immature. She is a goddess of the whole who governs the transformation from the elementary to the spiritual level .”

(The great mother.pp 331) Sophia’s story tells us that following the path of seeking soul in the world requires us to pay attention to the ‘soul-spark’ of that which is abandoned, thereby bringing psychological consciousness to humankind

Wisdom and authenticity, that's what we need for this third part of life.

This stage is developmental as significant as childhood, adulthood adolescence. Aging. If we think about the goddess archetypical images available to us... Wasn't it Hillman that said the Greek gods suffer for us?

Who is Sophia to us? What possibilities of transformation does she offer?

Wisdom. Individuation. Knowledge. A spiritual practice of worship for all that is. A pulling away from the spiritual materialism of our western culture. An understanding that if you no longer see me as young and beautiful, I am free to become truly meaningful. I put down the artifice of a media driven archetype and I find the roots, the origins of the universe in the energy and spirit of Sophia. She is so hidden but always present, like the holy ghost, the white dove in the church windows. So we sit here in our aging bodies, and the goddess, the holy ghost, Sophia wisdom lies buried deeply within our collective unconscious, like a repressed archetype. Is there such a thing? Can

we ask that question? Can 2000 years of Patriarchy or Christianity affect our understanding of what we value about being a woman? Do we agree we should be invisible if we lose our sexual viability, irrelevant? Or can we stand as beautiful women. How can we free feminine energy, Eros, connectedness, and seek personal freedom. Will Sophia grant us the wisdom to worship her clearly and to experience the transformation to the universal godhead, the return to the great mother. Yes. With the help of our imagination.

I have so many beautiful intelligent clients who beat themselves up with a negative voice, over and over, ruminating on their worthlessness, laziness, ugliness. Grossness. I ask them to try to imagine what the Good mother, the Great mother, might say to them. Good job. Take a nap. You look great. To that internal bully: Leave her alone. Sometimes this is not available to them. Why is that? The wound to the feminine spirit by the patriarchy is very deep. We need our imagination here.

So as I see it, we must seek Sophia, who is just to our left, always here, unseen, like Hestia the goddess of the hearth. She tells us the meaning of life, she helps us move into the moments, no longer the objects and subjects of other peoples lives. But spirited and spiritual, like we were as children, before our lives became transactional. No, I don't feel our looks, I feel Sophia, Sophia, the life force, the creative force, right here now. In this moment. Wisdom.

To review the seven tasks of aging : 1) accepting the reality of death; 2) reviewing and reflecting on one's life (much as Jung did in his retrospective activities in his 70's and 80's); 3) acknowledging consciously that one's life has finite limits; 4) letting go of the dominance of the ego; 5) encountering and honoring the Self; 6) articulating the meaning of one's life; and 7) engaging unused potentials (usually found in the 4th or "inferior" function) so as to foster

late-life creativity.[129]

Post Modern:

. From a postmodern perspective knowledge is articulated from perspectives, with all its uncertainties, complexity and paradox. Thus knowledge is relational and all realities are woven on local linguistic looms.[3] Postmodernism includes skeptical interpretations of culture, literature, art, philosophy,

Post post modern:Postmodern philosophy emphasises the elusiveness of meaning and knowledge. This is often expressed in postmodern art as a concern with representation and an *ironic self-awareness*. And the argument that postmodernism is over has already been made philosophically. There are people who have essentially asserted that for a while we believed in postmodern ideas, but not any more, and from now on we're going to believe in critical realism.