

The Battleground of the Occult: Freud versus Jung

Bobbie Stephens-Wright discusses the falling out and ongoing feud between two mind doctors, Freud and Jung.

If my television could talk, it might be concerned to tell of the occasion when a bright pink pull-on slipper was thrown at it. As I get older I seem to have less and less patience with what I regard as injustice. This was when I was watching the film *A Dangerous Method* on DVD, about the breakup of the relationship between Freud and his one time 'crown prince', Carl Jung.

Freud was the father of psychoanalysis and has helped me to understand myself and integrate parts of my personality that might have been otherwise adrift. This has not made me into a superior being but has dismissed forever the unpleasant psychological experience of depersonalisation. The feeling of this, for those fortunate enough to avoid the experience, is to feel that one is not quite present, to the point that one may be dreaming or perhaps imagining reality. Perhaps it was particularly the experience of feeling marginalised in this kind of internal experiences that caused me to have empathy toward others who were marginalised or alienated, 'splitting' as the famous analyst D.W. Winnicott would name the experience. The up-side of this alienation from any sense of self appears to be that my self esteem was never high enough to feel that I could judge and find others lacking. Winnicott's assessment of psychological health is that it can never result from the denial of anything where that funny old thing called 'the self' is concerned. One might include in this one's homosexual tendencies or even the denial of death.

The film *A Dangerous Method* shows the famous scene where Freud supposedly asked Jung to create a bulwark and when Jung asked 'against what', Freud answered 'against the black tide of the occult'. There was the famous cracking sound of the bookcase in the room where their meeting had taken place, which was meant to signify, one supposes, the presence of supernatural powers at work. This appears to be grist to the mill of Jung's personal fascination with the spiritualism of his family.

This event had been well documented and a similar occurrence was conveyed to me by my psychoanalyst friend who told me of an incident where a youngish man was referred to her following the breakdown of his marriage, when his wife left him for another man. He was in an acutely depressed state and for some

weeks she wasted their sessions trying to get him to speak. Then she had the very notion of how to do it. She referred directly to the leaving of his wife and as she went on and tensions rose, there was a very loud explosion in the room. They both hit the floor and in German he said, 'What the hell was that?'

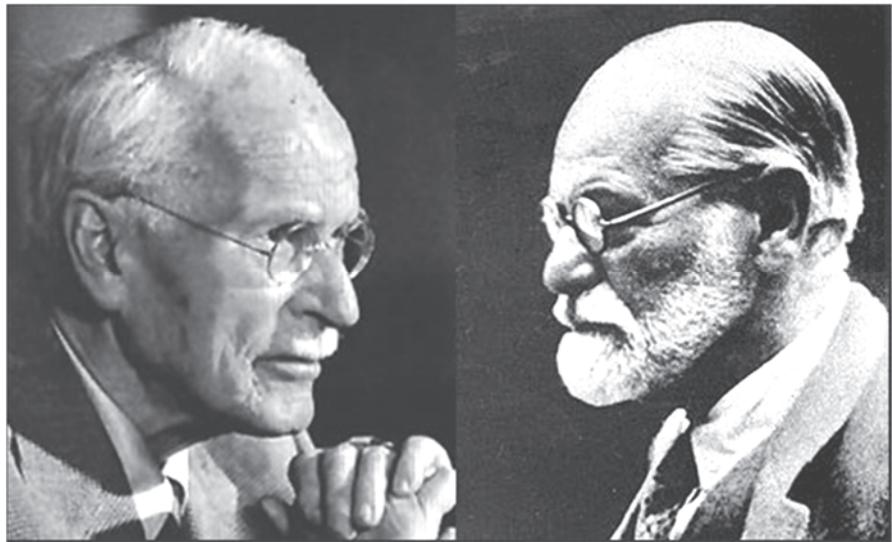
Unorthodox, perhaps, but from that moment they were in dialogue. This was absolutely necessary for the 'talking cure', as psychoanalysis has become known, to do its work. There was never any thought in her head or mine, when she told me about the incident, that there were 'occult forces' or 'supernatural powers' at work. Whatever happens in the natural world may be even super and splendid but never 'supernatural' from my perspective.

I'm sure that Jungian therapists will be as outraged at my writing as I was at my DVD. I have frequently been amazed, for years in discussions with others, at the number of fans that Jung has accrued compared to poor old Freud. As the credits rolled up at the end of the film, Jung was unlikely to be identified as a Nazi collaborator. Freud was simply exiled to London, where he died in 1939, whereas Jung was credited with becoming one of the world's leading psychologists.

Yes, Freud was that man who appeared to be obsessed with sexual development and was responsible for that strange concept 'penis envy', which appears to have boiled the blood of every self respecting female. Nevertheless, he changed forever the way we understand ourselves and our deeper motives and actions. Is the fascination with that fluffy psychological bunny Jung because he had a certain religiosity about him, as compared to the atheism of his old adversary Freud? Or could it be that unconscious anti-semitic motives still reside deeply in our psyche? Jung's infidelities were numerous where women were concerned but perhaps his greatest infidelity was towards Freud, when he decided to broadcast on behalf of the Third Reich just as Freud was in the process of being exiled to London from his home in Vienna.

I suppose that Jung would feel that the *schadenfreude* was entirely justified when Freud's work was publicly burned. Perhaps he thought that the elegant writing of Freud might be lost forever and so never

compared to what Don Cupitt once described as Jung's self-styled reverie. I couldn't have described it better. The most disturbing aspect of Jung is, for me, his fascination with the occult. I suppose he is to be excused for his confusions as he sought to reconcile his own personal history between his father Paul, a Lutheran pastor, and his mother Maria Preiswerk, a spiritualist. History tells us that Jung's doctoral thesis was about his research into mediums and spiritualism.



Freud versus Jung

If the psychoanalyst Neville Symington is right in saying that any mature religion is about the conquest of narcissism, then we should immediately be able to dismiss the notion that spiritualism is a 'mature' form of religion. The ultimate form of narcissism is surely the inability to face death as the absolute end of oneself and clinging to the view that one's 'self' must survive death. I believe that I have written elsewhere that I would simply dread the thought of any such survival and the accompanying idea that I could become a passive witness hovering above the ills of this world.

Fortunately, I need not fear that I am alone in my lack of enthusiasm for either the work of Jung or indeed the personality. The work of Richard Noll continues to reveal aspects of Jung's life and personhood which have formerly remained hidden, probably due to the sterling support of his disciples. After all, as Noll has reminded us, Jung's personal assertion that he felt compelled to answer questions that remained unanswered by his forebears managed to create an arcane reality for millions during the twentieth century. But I find the very idea that we are being dangled like puppets by supernatural forces utterly repugnant for a number of reasons.

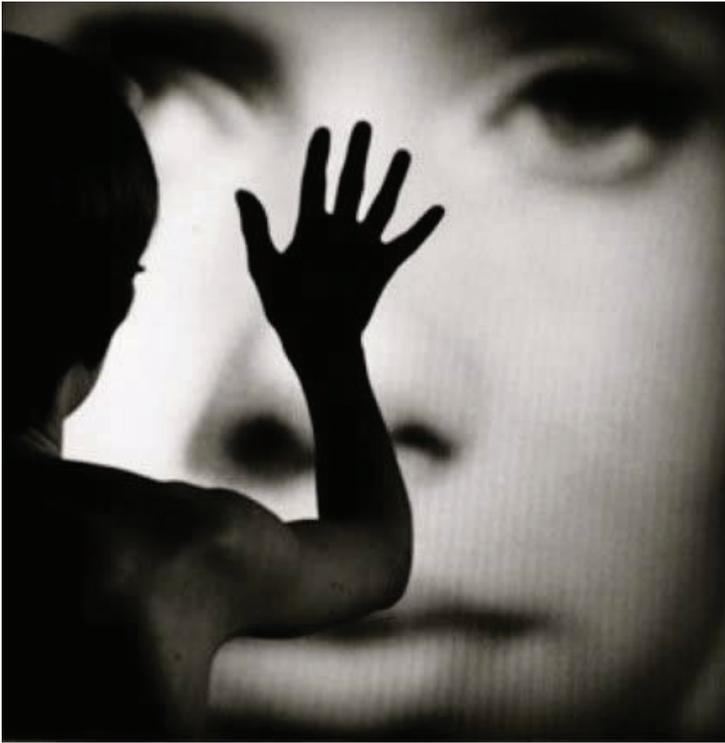
The first of these would be that doing right in order to be rewarded in an afterlife seems immoral. We ought to do what we feel is right because it is the right thing to do, it is in keeping with our cultural guidance in ethics. Perhaps it isn't always easy to decide the right path or decision but surely it prevails upon us to reach our decisions with some degree of autonomy, without recourse to consulting the gods or the clairvoyant. It is also the case, I fear, that we can become far too complacent about the ills of our lives; that we may fail to take action against injustice if we believe that justice is purveyed elsewhere. One's attitude to everyday life could be dimmed by the

thought that real life will happen at some other time in some other place. These represent my objections to the idea of the supernatural. In common with A. C. Grayling, I see no reason to treat such archaic views with any degree of diplomacy.

Over time Freud has been roundly criticised for his scientific lacks but at least he did not conceal outlandish religious ideas behind outward scientific practice, as Jung did. Immersed as he was in the spiritualist beliefs of his maternal ties, Jung's experiences with these beliefs were far more important to his world view and psychotherapeutic techniques than is probably imagined. Noll has remarked upon the way that Jung's public statements about spiritualism were always framed within the safe containers of psychiatric or philosophical jargon. He would claim that a number of great thinkers had shaped his own theories, when in truth they simply provided intellectual masks for his activities within spiritualism.

My former remarks that Jung was an alleged Nazi collaborator are not without foundation, although Noll stops short in declaring this to be the case. Perhaps, as the philosopher John Gray says, it seems likely that Jung was hedging his bets, though the accusation that he was anti-semitic would resonate with his decision to make the broadcast on the eve of Freud's exile to England. In a purely selfish regard I am glad that Freud chose, or was perhaps directed to, London. This because if I visit London I am able to visit the Freud Museum in Maresfield Gardens and stand in the room where once he lived and eventually died.

Psychoanalysis is no longer the work of one man, namely Freud. Through their practice and theory his followers have added much to his original ideas, which has helped us to understand some very strange internal



Dissociation. khironhouse.com

states. Dissociation, which Nancy McWilliams has described as the sense of disconnection in thought or in fact from elements which constitute actual personal experience, is identified as an internal defence mechanism. Dissociation is rather different from other defence mechanisms (too many to mention here), in that it is thought to occur in cases of trauma. McWilliams believes that anyone may be capable of dissociating under certain adverse conditions but that people who use dissociation as their primary defence mechanism are essentially 'virtuosos in self hypnosis'. She observes that to move into an altered state of consciousness when in a state of distress is not universally possible; one has to have the aptitude for it. She goes on: 'Some evidence suggests that the kind of person who dissociates is innately more resourceful and interpersonally sensitive than the norm'. (1994: 329).

Yes, the language in which to frame altered states of consciousness is here; it need no longer fall into other nebulous terms. There are very sound, if sad, reasons why people experience different internal states which are not the usual states encountered in everyday life. I am fortunate that I no longer experience depersonalisation. Neither do I feel the need to make the futile search for infantile bliss. I am happy to exist and even bask in everyday reality. That is until I encounter injustice. Then it's time to throw the pink slipper, but never time to throw in the towel, particularly where the subject of the so called 'occult' is concerned.

Many years ago philosopher Susanne K. Langer remarked upon the fact that there was nothing that frightened people more than meeting with something which they cannot easily construe. Langer names this as the 'uncanny'. Earlier in her work she had remarked that, in her view, 'the formulation of experience which is contained within the intellectual horizon of an age or a society is determined not so much by events and desires as by the basic concepts at people's disposal for analysing and describing their adventures to their own understanding. There is little chance that we can finally move to use and familiarise ourselves with new referential frameworks if we continue to give credence to Jung's fanciful notion of a 'collective unconscious' which harbours gods, demons, monsters and angels as archetypes that are decades out of date and appear to have been the product of psychotic episodes. It resonates far better within me to realise that a troubled mind is the product of real lived out experience in the world.

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