

The Women's March on Washington: Pink Pussyhats - Enantiodromia

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The idea of a Women's March on Washington on January 21, 2017, the day after Donald Trump's Inauguration, ignited the largest protest in American history, one that spread to 673 cities in 92 countries; an estimated 5,600,000 marchers in all. The idea traveled faster than wildfire through the internet. The symbol of the marches—a sea of them, seen all over the world was the hand-knitted pink pussyhat. It began with a Facebook page begun by Teresa Shook, a retired attorney and grandmother in Hawaii who posted the idea of the Women's March on Washington on November 8, after the election results were in. The next morning, there were 10,000 responses, and from there--the rest is history.

I came back from Washington, D.C. profoundly affected by being there with over a half a million others: grandmothers, mothers, grand-daughters and grandsons; young parents with young children, fathers carrying babies, high school and college friends, gray and white haired older women, a diversity of ages and races—though predominately women and lots and lots of hand-lettered signs. There were no confrontations with police, kindness and consideration were the norms. It was, to quote a man I overheard, “the nicest mob scene I've ever been in.” There was hardly room to move, and no room to march, with so many of us packed into the mall.

Most of the women I knew who had planned to march in Washington, DC, in San Francisco and in other cities close to home, were participating in their very first march. Like me, they had felt called to the March – with some stress and anxiety at not knowing how it would turn out and online advice on what to do if it turned into a riot. The reality was anything but this. There was togetherness and human warmth, humor and kindness. After reflecting and contrasting this with

other demonstrations, I think that this can be attributed to women's oxytocin-estrogen response to stress that is in contrast to male-led adrenaline-testosterone protests that often invite retaliation by police. Researchers at UCLA called this the "Tend and Befriend" response to stress, which is characteristically what women do. Hillary Clinton's unexpected loss to Donald Trump and the anxieties about what would happen next was a major source of stress. Through tending and talking, women reduce the stress and as they do so, oxytocin (the maternal bonding hormone which is enhanced by estrogen) increases. We were in a sea of pink pussyhats and oxytocin.

There was consideration of each other, yielding and helping out, bursts of laughter at reading some signs, some singing, some chanting, and a sense of participating in something significant and wonderful. The signs were inclusive, and made us think as well: "Black Lives Matter", "Medicare for All" "This is what a Muslim looks like!" "My Great Grandmother didn't escape Warsaw for this!" Sign carried by an elderly white haired Japanese-American woman in a wheelchair: "Locked up by US Prez, 1942 -1946. Never Again!" LGBT rainbow flags.



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My favorites: Under image of Carrie Fisher as Princess Leia of Star Wars: “A Woman’s Place is in the Resistance!”, Heart-Shaped sign: “Make Facts Great Again”, words within an outline of a tooth: “Fight Truth Decay”, Sign carried by a man, “Not usually a Sign Guy, But GEEZ”, I laughed out loud at “So Bad, Even Introverts are Here!” “I’ve seen Smarter Cabinets at IKEA.” Sign carried by two kids, (Harry Potter fans) “Dumbledore wouldn’t let this Happen!” Another little girl wore “I want a GIRL for President” Two powerful graphic symbolic statements have stayed with me: the Statue of Liberty (Lady Liberty)—her hands covering her face in grief, and another of Trump groping her.



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Pussyhat as Symbol and Enantiodromia



A day after I returned from Washington, DC. I put on my pussyhat to keep my head warm while I walked in Muir Woods. I got to thinking about the millions of women marching with the pink pussyhat, the defining symbol. Photographs of marches were of a sea of pink. I thought of how mine was knitted in Alaska by Jewel an indigenous elder and several of her friends in a retirement home, and though they couldn't be on the march, their energy and support was in my hat. [The idea and the pattern](#) was sent from women to women on the internet in the weeks just prior to the

Washington march. The project was launched Thanksgiving weekend, with 30 days to knit, crochet, and sew their goal of 1.17 million pink pussyhats for the Washington march, even before sister marches proliferated. The knit pattern sent to me by Redwood Mary— was not something I took up, since I don't knit. Also true for my friends Beth and Carole in Alaska who enlisted Jewel and her friends to knit a number of them to take to Washington, with one for me. Wearing my pussyhat I thought about the knitting circles, about how each hat was made to support the women's march, and how the energy of the women knitters were in each hat. So beyond the numbers who were at the marches in person, were all those not present but whose presence was knit into pussyhats. I learned that a great many yarn stores had run out of all shades of pink.

Donald Trump's words "Grab them by the pussy," on an Access Hollywood videotape (and New York Times Transcript) was the inspiration for the

pussyhats. Trump bragged to interviewer Billy Bush: “I’m automatically attracted to beautiful—I just start kissing them. It’s like a magnet. Just kiss. I don’t even wait. And when you’re a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab ‘em by the pussy. You can do anything.”

Until the marches, “pussy” was treated like a four-letter dirty word, initial reporting required filling in the missing letters: “P - - - -” What followed, as women responded to the crass reference to them as a body part, became an enantiodromia—a derogatory and shameful word became transformed into its opposite. Signs carried in the march turned the meaning around: Under an outline of a cat “Grabs Back,” “Sisterhood is Powerful,” “Grab ‘em by the Patriarchy!”, ‘My Pussy isn’t up for Grabs & Neither are my Rights!’ “Pussy Majority.”





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There is smile-magic in pussyhats. When I boarded the connecting flight from Denver to Washington DC, and saw women wearing their pink pussyhats, the sight made me smile from inside-out, it literally warmed my heart (the body sensation in the center of the chest, between the breasts which is the location of the heart chakra) Pussyhats bring out the girl in the woman who wears one and evokes a shared sense of sisterhood. I asked the flight attendant to make an announcement about the pink pussyhats, which she did — but more needed saying, so I stood up and said, “ everyone who may not be wearing a pussyhat, but is going on this flight to march, raise your hands and cheer,” It seemed to me that half to two-thirds of the passengers were going to march! Wearing one brings out trust and friendliness in the wearer—which can overcome feeling foolish or shy—introverts become more extroverted, and its hard not to smile back at a pussyhatted hello!

Not only did Trump’s and patriarchy’s demeaning reference to women take on a positive meaning, this symbol made people smile, as did the words on a placard: “Viva la Vulva!” Could it be that this enantiodromia of pink pussyhats is drawing from a pre-patriarchal layer in the collective unconscious, when divinity was female, and images of women’s sexuality and fertility were sacred not prurient?

Ana-suromai

Ever since I began seeing the classical Greek goddesses as archetypal patterns and wrote *Goddesses in Everywoman* (1984), I have drawn from the myth that is told in its entirety in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, and one that is very much alive in the retelling of it, a tradition I have carried on as a storyteller. One minor figure grew in meaning as an archetype: Baubo, a post-



menopausal maidservant with a cameo role in the myth (and likely a prominent one in the Thesmophoria women-only fertility ritual.). Baubo made the



withdrawn goddess smile, and restored her to the here-and-now of the situation by lifting her skirt and exposing her vulva, after telling bawdy jokes and dancing, an act called *ana-suromai* in Greek religious writing. Baubo figurines date back to the paleolithic era through to the middle ages, they are small clay figures, mostly belly and legs that invite smiles, sometimes a smiling face was actually represented on the belly.

Baubo's counterpart in Japan was Uzume, the goddess of mirth and dance, who joked as she danced on a huge drum, and with this identical gesture of lifting her skirt, drew Amaterasu the Sun Goddess out of the cave,

which brought sunlight back to Japan. In *Goddesses in Older Women* (2001), after seeing parallels in the unselfconscious laughter of post-menopausal women, I described Baubo and Uzume as Goddesses of Healing Laughter and Mirth and archetypes in older women. Bawdy humor is juicy humor about earthy and sexual appetites and foibles, an acknowledgment of sensuality and sexuality as components of an older woman's zest and vitality.

The act of *ana-suromai*, to lift one's skirts can also serve as a reminder of an earlier matriarchal time when the pubic area of the goddess was the holy gate through which all life



came, and the inverted triangle was a sacred symbol. In Nazi Germany, homosexuals were forced to wear inverted pink triangles when Jews had to wear the yellow six pointed star, in the shape of the Star of David.



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More images from the Women's Marches [here](#).

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