

## *Active Imagination and Identity- Self Concept*

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### **Abstract**

For Analytical Psychology, the *Self* is a borderline concept because it is not only the center of the psyche but also the whole circumference which embraces both conscious and unconscious; and this totality transcends our vision. It is a veritable *lapis invisibilitatis*. It is the center of this totality, just as the ego is the center of consciousness. We may be able to identify the limits of consciousness, but the unconscious is simply the unknown psyche and for that very reason, unlimited because it is undetermined. According to Jungian hypothesis, the unconscious possesses an etiological significance, and since dreams are the direct expression of unconscious psychic activity, the attempt to analyze and interpret dreams is theoretically justified from a scientific standpoint, as is Active Imagination. Both processes aim at assimilation, that is, the mutual penetration of the conscious and unconscious resulting in the birth of the unique and singular identity of the human being: the Self, which brings with it the realization of the divine in man. Our proposal with this article is to search for the origin and development of this highly unique human identity through the Active Imagination technique.

Keywords: Active imagination. Self. Identity. Analytical Psychology

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## **Introduction**

Jung discovered active imagination during the years 1913-16. Following the break up with Freud (1912-13), he experienced a time of intense inner inquietation. "He decided to engage with impulses and images of the unconscious" (Jung, 1997, p. 1) and after a process of symbolic play, inevitably, the fantasies appeared as an incessant stream. "The fantasies seemed to personify his fears and other powerful emotions." (JUNG, 1997, p. 2). Jung says: "To the extent that I managed to translate the emotions into images – that is to say, to find the images which were concealed in the emotions – I was inwardly calmed and reassured" (JUNG, 1989, p. 177).

He comprehends that as he "lifted those images hidden in the emotions", it was possible having "been torn to pieces by them off" (JUNG, 1989, p. 177), but in that case he "would inexorably have fallen into a neurosis and so been ultimately destroyed by them anyhow" (JUNG, 1989, p. 177). Jung wrote down the fantasies as well as he could, and made an effort to analyze the psychic conditions under which they had arisen, and with this, one of the greatest difficulties for doing so lay in dealing with negative feelings. He was voluntarily submitting himself to emotions of which he could not really approve, and he was writing down fantasies which often struck him as nonsense, and toward which he had strong resistance.

### **The first registered Active Imagination of Jung**

This is Jung's first active imagination among many others, which Jung wrote:

It was during Advent of the year 1913 - December 12, to be exact - that I resolved upon the decisive step. I was sitting at my desk once more, thinking over my fears. Then I let myself drop. Suddenly it was as though the ground literally gave way beneath my feet, and I plugged down into dark depths. I could not fend off a feeling of panic. But then, abruptly, at not too great a depth, I landed on my feet in a soft, sticky mass. I felt great relief, although I was apparently in complete darkness. After a while my eyes grew accustomed to the good, which was rather like a deep twilight. Before me was the entrance to a dark cave, in which stood a dwarf with leathery skin, as if he were mummified. I squeezed past him through the narrow entrance and waded knee deep through icy water to the other end of the cave where, on a projecting rock, I saw a glowing red crystal. I grasped the stone, lifted it, and discovered a hollow underneath. At first I could make out nothing, but then I saw that there was running water. In it a corpse floated by, a youth with blond hair and a wound on the head. He was followed by a gigantic black scarab and then by a red, newborn sun, rising up out of the depths of the water. Dazzled by the light, I wanted to replace the stone upon the opening, but then a fluid welled out. It was blood. A thick jet of it leaped up, and I felt nauseated. It seemed to me that the blood continued to spurt for an unendurably long time. At last it ceased, and the vision came to an end. (JUNG, 1989, p. 179).

This Active Imagination is the first of Jung's personal journey and points toward the fact that the images that appear in imagination are in fact symbolic images, representing deep interior parts of ourselves. It symbolizes the contents of the unconscious and for this reason, Jung considered Active Imagination as a more

effective path to the unconscious than dreams, because in active imagination the conscious mind stays awake. "It participates consciously in the events." (JOHNSON, 1986, p.139).

### **Approaching the Unconscious**

In 1935, when Jung delivered the Tavistock Lectures, he used the term *active imagination* for the first time in public. After this he called this therapeutic method by many different names: "picture method, trancing, visioning, exercises, dialectical method, technique of differentiation, technique of introversion, introspection and technique of the descent" (CHODOROW, 1995, p. 3).

At the same time, there are "many forms of active imagination, perhaps he was open to the idea of having many names to describe it. Some of the terms suggest a specific meditative procedure and concentration on inner voices or images" (CHODOROW, 1995, p. 4). Active Imagination is a singular method, but it is expressed through many different forms, between them: sculpting, bodily movement, music, dialectic, dramatic, symbolic play or writing. But in Brazil, we especially work with the transformation of symptoms. For example:

Active Imagination technique for treatment of Sjögren's Syndrome is a study of a clinical case proposed as a prototype to, after this, proceed to new active imagination research in Brazil, which intends to gather between 10 to 30 patients, similar to what has already been done with Bruxism. In Germany, in 2013, our team presented ([www.waset.org](http://www.waset.org)), the first piece of research ever conducted in Brazil and in the world, with 21 patients, making use of a single one hour session of active imagination, conducted by doctor Sonia Lyra, Analyst member of AJB/IAAP, previous and posteriorly evaluated by the Dentistry Specialists Daniela Boleta-Ceranto and Tânia Bremm Zaura. The project was approved by CONEP (National Ethics Commission for research in Human Beings) and presented the surprising result of effective symptom transformation to 66% of the patients subjected to the research. After 18 months the same patients were re-evaluated and it was noticed that the results were maintained. With this, other projects were proposed: Active Imagination for treatment of Autism, and Active Imagination for treatment of Psoriasis already approved by CONEP and in progress. A post-doctoral thesis at PUCSP has also been proposed and accepted: Active Imagination applied to post traumatic stress disorder due to urban violence, in progress. Before the perspectives of profound effective transformations that occur for the use of the technique developed by Jung and systematized by Robert Johnson, Lyra is, throughout many years giving light to its effectiveness, especially when focused on the symptom. For that, our proposal for this Conference is to share the advances that have been occurring on this clinical/scientific area and, with that, open the possibility of new debates" (LYRA, 2016, p. 307ss).

As is known, Jung's confrontation with the unconscious was lead by an inner necessity, but at the same time he conceived it as a scientific experiment. So, this problem is identical with the universal questions: How can one come to terms with the unconscious? For the unconscious "is not this thing or that" says Jung, but, "it is the Unknown as it immediately affects us" (CHODOROW, 1995, p. 42). With this,

“the method of active imagination, hereinafter described, is the most important auxiliary for the production of those contents of the unconscious which lie, as it were, immediately below the threshold of consciousness and, when intensified, are the most likely to irrupt spontaneously into the conscious mind. The method, therefore, is not without its dangers and should, if possible, not be employed except under expert supervision” (CHODOROW, 1995, p. 42). But today, these dangers threaten no more, as Robert Johnson has systematized the active imagination.

### **Steps to active imagination**

Essentially, active imagination consists of a dialogue that you have with the different parts of yourself and which lives in the unconscious although it is a fully awakened and conscious experience while passing through it. In the imagination it is possible to begin to talk to the images and they answer back. But not all dialogue is verbal or spoken, says Johnson (1986). The images that appear in the imagination symbolize the contents of the unconscious and the essential aspect of this is the *conscious participation*. “This kind of imagination is active because the ego actually goes in to the inner world, walks and talks, confronts and argues, makes friends with or fights with the persons it finds there” (JOHNSON, 1986, p.140).

For Johnson, the first step of Active Imagination consists in inviting the unconscious to come up to the surface and make contact with us. For Lyra (Brazil), the first step is finding the access to the spontaneous image that unconscious produces. These ways can be: a dream, a symptom, a passive fantasy or simply waiting for the unconscious to send an image. The second step according to Lyra consists in enlarging the image and its whole field, and the third is to observe if the image knows that you are looking at it.

For Johnson the second step is the invitation. For Lyra the invitation is the fourth step, and the fifth step occurs when the dialogue begins. For Johnson, the two others steps are the Value and the Ritual. For both authors, the process of listening stands above all else.

### **The self identity**

Though the Self has no definable aim and no visible purpose, Jung says “I may define “self” as the totality of the conscious and unconscious psyche, but this totality transcends our vision; it is a veritable *lapis invisibilitas*. In so far as the unconscious exists it is not definable; its existence is a mere postulate and nothing whatever can be predicated as to its possible contents” (JUNG, 2011, p. 256). Consequently the “self” is a “pure borderline concept similar to Kant’s *Ding an sich*” (JUNG, 2011, p.256). It is not necessary to set the limits of the “self” on the individual psyche as it is illimitable, but we are able to indicate the limits of consciousness. The unconscious is simply the unknown psyche and for that very reason it is illimitable because indeterminable and thus, its empirical manifestations contents bear all the marks of something illimitable, and though not determined by space and time.

For the exposed, in active imagination the events take place on the *imaginative* level, which is neither conscious nor unconscious but a meeting place which combines both

elements. But what does this technique and its procedures have in common with the idea of the Self as identity?

The Self, according to the Analytical Psychology, is in fact the original identity, albeit unconscious. Throughout life, it is possible to make a process of progressively becoming conscious of it, which is the assimilation of the unconscious by the consciousness. Jung called this process *individuation*. The Self existence can be empirically verified. This unconscious central archetype corresponds to the totality of human psyche and manifests itself spontaneously in dreams and in active imagination regardless of the conscious will. Such a central position allows approaching its reality to the *imago Dei*, bringing with it a whole symbology which has characteristics that can't be distinguished from the symbols of God. In this sense, says Jung, "the individuation is a religious occurrence that requires an appropriate religious attitude, which is, the ego should submit itself to divine will. (JUNG, 1999, p. 211). Jung, uses the term *individuation* "to denote the processes by which a person becomes a psychological 'in-dividual', that is, an unseparated, indivisible unity or 'whole' "(JUNG, 1989, p. 395).

The psychology stands in an unpleasant situation, says Jung, when compared to others natural sciences, because it lacks a basis that stands out against its object, since it can only be translated in its own language or by copying its own image, making the consciousness aware of the psychological process, but without offering further explanations of this process unless by the **own** vital process of psyche.

"Psychology is doomed to cancel itself out as a science and therein precisely it reaches its scientific goal. Every other science has, so to speak, an outside; not so psychology, whose **object/objective** is the inside subject of all science." (JUNG, 1984, p.228). In other words, Psychology culminates in the process of personality transformation even though the great difficulty lies in the way in which this transformation takes place and in adequately exposing the changes that occur in the subject under the influence of the individuation process, since these are more or less rare occurrences. It "[...] is experienced only by those who have gone through the wearisome but, if the unconscious is to be integrated, indispensable business of coming to terms with the unconscious components of the personality."

But the condition for such an integration of the contents of the unconscious into consciousness is that there is an ego capable of resisting the assaults of the unconscious, and "without its disfiguration loosening its context, assimilation may occur" (JUNG, 1984, p. 228). In this case, both the contents of the unconscious and those of the conscious are transformed. Even though the ego is capable of preserving its structure, it is as if it is wrenched from its central and dominant position, passing into the role of a passive observer and server since the will as available energy submits to a stronger factor, The Self. This process of transformation of the personality whose ultimate identity is a species of two in one, is psychically a limiting phenomenon that needs special conditions to become conscious. It is worth remembering that there is a huge difference between becoming conscious and realizing oneself. Individuation, Jung adds, "does not exclude the world, it encompasses it" (JUNG 1984, 230).

## **Conclusion**

Through the exposed, the psyche is constituted of two identities, which are the ego and the Self. The four stages of this process can be synthesized in this way: a) unseparated in their origin (original unconscious identity as ego/Self); b) by the psyche's structure itself which should continuously separate one from another; c) such a separation should preferably occur in a conscious way; d) these identities (ego/Self) should culminate in one identity (returning to the original state of identity with consciousness).

In Analytic Psychology this continuous re-bonding followed by continuous separations can culminate in the process of individuation. In alchemy, it is the *solve et coagula*, realized infinite times, the process along which the philosophical stone or *filius filosoforum* is created and the goal of all development of the human identity.

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