



# ENCOUNTERING *Jung*

*Jung*  
on

## ACTIVE IMAGINATION



Edited and with  
an Introduction by  
Joan Chodorow

ENCOUNTERING

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**J U N G**

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ON ACTIVE IMAGINATION

**EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY JOAN CHODOROW**

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**J U N G**

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ON ACTIVE IMAGINATION

E N C O U N T E R I N G

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J U N G

JUNG ON ALCHEMY

JUNG ON EVIL

JUNG ON ACTIVE IMAGINATION

JUNG ON MYTHOLOGY

My most fundamental views and ideas derive from these experiences. First I made the observations and only then did I hammer out my views. And so it is with the hand that guides the crayon or brush, the foot that executes the dance-step, with the eye and the ear, with the word and the thought: a dark impulse is the ultimate arbiter of the pattern, an unconscious *a priori* precipitates itself into plastic form.

(C. G. Jung 1947, par. 402)

# Illustrations

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# List of abbreviations used in notes

Numbered notes at the end of the chapters are mainly previously published notes by Jung. Additional notes are from Aniela Jaffé [A.J.], Cary F. Baynes [C.F.B.], Joan Chodorow [J.C.], the editors of the *Collected Works* [EDITORS] and *Letters*. Works by Jung cited in the endnotes are identified by the following abbreviations.

MDR	<i>Memories, Dreams, Reflections</i> by C. G. Jung. Recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffé; translated by Richard and Clara Winston. See Jung 1961 in Bibliography.
CW	<i>The Collected Works of C. G. Jung</i> . Edited by Gerhard Adler, Michael Fordham, and Herbert Read; William McGuire, Executive Editor; translated primarily by R. F. C. Hull. New York and Princeton (Bollingen Series XX) and London (Routledge), 1953–83. 21 volumes.
<i>Letters</i>	<i>C. G. Jung: Letters</i> . Selected and edited by Gerhard Adler in collaboration with Aniela Jaffé; translations by R. F. C. Hull. Princeton (Bollingen Series XCV) and London (Routledge), 1973, 1975. 2 volumes.

Works by other authors cited in the endnotes are identified by title, author, or both. For more information on Jung's sources, see bibliographies at the end of CW volumes 7, 8, 9.I, 13, 14, 16, 18. Further abbreviations used in the notes include:

Cf.	confer, or compare
DV	<i>Deo volente</i> . God willing
f.	and the following page
ff.	and the following pages
fig.	figure
Ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place (refers to a single work cited in the note immediately preceding)
n.d.	no date
ms.	manuscript
s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> , under the word
viz.	<i>videlicet</i> , namely



# Acknowledgements

When I first met Ruth Thacker Fry, she invited me into her office to see a notebook that contained everything she could find of Jung's writings on active imagination. This was many years ago, long before the time of desk computers, scanners or copy machines. Jung's papers had been typed on an old-fashioned typewriter, including scholarly footnotes and annotations. In a playful way she told me that it was not her idea, but her animus led her to do it. We both laughed, because I too know what it is to be seized by the spirit. As we looked through her notebook together, I asked if she planned to submit it for publication and she said no, there wasn't enough interest yet – but someday, a volume of Jung's papers on active imagination would be published. That unique collection was for her own use. Her passion for active imagination impressed me deeply. Dr. Fry, Founding Director of the C. G. Jung Educational Center of Houston passed away some years ago, but I trust she would be pleased that the time has come for *Jung on Active Imagination*. The early collection she compiled and edited is a source of inspiration for this work.

I am happy to say that *Jung on Active Imagination* will now be simultaneously published on both sides of the Atlantic. David Stonestreet initiated the project from London when he invited me to submit a proposal. For many years now I have been impressed with his vision of Jung and the depth of understanding he brings to his work. I am grateful also to Edwina Welham for her patience and skill in moving it all toward publication; to Patricia Stankiewicz for her fine desk editing; I owe a debt of gratitude to Jo Thurm and Judith Reading, all at Routledge in England. My appreciation to Deborah Tegarden at Princeton University Press in the United States, and to many others who work their magic as they transform a manuscript into a book.

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Renate Oppikofer's beautiful translation of a passage by Tina Keller has restored a long-lost piece of history about dance as a form of active imagination. Who would have believed that Toni Wolff was not only an early

Jungian analyst, but also perhaps the first dance therapist? (See my Introduction on p. 16.)

For me, the great gift of this study has been to immerse once again in Jung's writings on active imagination. I have been inspired and informed also by the contribution of many colleagues whose works are cited in the bibliography and text. As I extracted my questions and explored this rich material, many individuals offered support and feedback. Others brought to my attention resources from the literature that I did not know. Thomas Kirsch was generous with his knowledge and interest in historical questions. Reference librarians Marianne Morgan and Alison Leavens of the C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco, Ann Miyoko Hotta of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Lore Zeller of the C.G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles, and Jan Perry of the C.G. Jung Educational Center of Houston helped me locate essential papers and passages that are not easy to come by. My appreciation also to Janet Adler, Antonella Adorisio, Shira Barnett, Eugene Chodorow, Lillian Chodorow, Claire Douglas, Ainsley Faust, Carolyn Fay, Neala Haze, Carol McRae, Renate Oppikofer, Karen Signell, Daniel Stewart, Tina Stromsted, Howard Teich, and Marta Tibaldi.

It is a special pleasure to thank my beloved husband and colleague Louis H. Stewart for his differentiated understanding of the emotions as sources of the imagination. Every aspect of my work has the benefit of his wisdom and playfulness.

The book cover shows part of a painting by Jung from his *Red Book*: A small figure bows low close to the ground in homage to an enormous fire spout; as it erupts the air is filled with intricately formed red, orange and yellow flames. The original work refers to the *Satapatha Brâhmana* 2, 2, 4, a particular section of an ancient sacred text of India. The passage begins with a description of Pragâpati (the creator) and Agni (the fire he created). When Agni turns toward Pragâpati with open mouth, the creator is terrified that he might be devoured by his creation. But then, through a series of ritual offerings, Pragâpati reproduces himself, new gods are born, trees spring forth, songs are sung, and Agni too is reborn. The painting seems to express Jung's fears and passions, as well as his attitude of reverence toward the creative activity of the psyche. Many years later he wrote: 'I hit upon this stream of lava, and the heat of its fires reshaped my life' (see p. 41, below).

In closing, I want to acknowledge the heirs of C. G. Jung and their representative Leo La Rosa for permission to publish this anthology and for useful remarks that helped clarify certain aspects of the work. Finally, I express profound gratitude to the memory and spirit of C. G. Jung for his magnificent contribution.

J.C.

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# Introduction

It is a great pleasure to introduce this volume of Jung's writings on active imagination. For many years, people have had to search throughout the *Collected Works* and elsewhere, to identify and then read and read again these marvelous papers. Now for the first time they are gathered together for publication.

My task is to present Jung's ideas about active imagination as clearly as possible and set them in context. Jung's analytic method is based on the natural healing function of the imagination, so there are obviously many ways to express it. All the creative art psychotherapies (art, dance, music, drama, poetry) as well as Sandplay can trace their roots to Jung's early contribution. I begin with Jung's discovery of active imagination and then go into his ideas. An in-depth review of the post-Jungian literature on active imagination is beyond the scope of this work, but my discussion of Jung is interwoven with some wonderful contributions from Jungian authors and others. In closing, I say something about each of Jung's essays and then it is time to tell the story of the Rainmaker.

## CONFRONTATION WITH THE UNCONSCIOUS

Jung discovered active imagination during the years 1913–16. Following the break with Freud in 1912–13, he was disorientated and experienced a time of intense inner turmoil. He was able to carry on his practice, but for three years he couldn't get himself to read a professional book and he published relatively little. He suffered from lethargy and fears; his moods threatened to overwhelm him. He had to find a way, a method to heal himself from within. Since he didn't know what to do, he decided to engage with the impulses and images of the unconscious. In a 1925 seminar and again in his memoirs, he tells the remarkable story of his experiments that led to self-healing. It all began with his rediscovery of the symbolic play of childhood. As a middle-aged man in crisis, Jung had lost touch with the creative spirit. A memory floated up of a time when he was a 10- or 11-year-old boy, deeply engrossed in building games. The memory was filled with a rush of emotion and he realized the child was alive. His task became clear: He had to develop an

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ongoing relationship to this lively spirit within himself. But how was he to bridge the distance? He decided to return in his imagination to that time and enact the fantasies that came to him. And so he began to play, exactly as he had when he was a boy. The process of symbolic play led him, inevitably, to one of his deepest complexes and he remembered a terrifying dream from his childhood. This startling moment came in the midst of the building game. Just as he placed a tiny altar-stone inside a miniature church, he remembered his childhood nightmare about an altar. The connection impressed him deeply. We know from his memoirs that his religious attitude was shattered when as a young child he came to associate the Lord Jesus with death. Instead of the comfort he used to feel from saying his prayers, he began to feel distrustful and uneasy. Surrounded by grown-ups who spoke only of a light, bright, loving God, he could not tell anyone about his ruminations (1961, pp. 9–14). He spent all his life re-creating what he had lost as he developed a way to approach the psyche with a religious attitude. His early nightmare both expressed the problem and pointed toward the solution. Along with retrieving the fearful, long-buried dream, he gained a more mature understanding of it. His energy began to return and his thoughts clarified. He could sense now many more fantasies stirring within. As he continued his building game, the fantasies came in an incessant stream.

Around the same time he began to experiment with specific meditative procedures, various ‘rites of entry’ to engage with his fantasies. For example, he was sitting at his desk one day thinking over his fears when he made the conscious decision to ‘drop down’ into the depths. He landed on his feet and began to explore the strange inner landscape where he met the first of a long series of inner figures. These fantasies seemed to personify his fears and other powerful emotions. Over time, he realized that when he managed to translate his emotions into images, he was inwardly calmed and reassured. He came to see that his task was to find the images that are concealed in the emotions. He continued his experiments, trying out different ways to enter into his fantasies voluntarily: sometimes he imagined climbing down a steep descent; other times he imagined digging a hole, one shovel-full of dirt at a time. With each descent, he explored the landscape and got better acquainted with the inner figures. He used a number of expressive techniques (mainly writing, drawing, painting) to give symbolic form to his experience. Here it is important to differentiate between symbolic expression and a state of unconscious merging or identification. For Jung, the great benefit of active imagination is to ‘distinguish ourselves from the unconscious contents’ (1928b, par. 373). Even as he opened to the unconscious and engaged with the fantasies that arose, he made every effort to maintain a self-reflective, conscious point of view. Another way of saying this: He turned his curiosity toward the inner world of the imagination. His scientific interest kept him alert and attentive. The process led to an enormous release of energy as well as insights that gave him a new orientation. The fantasy experiences ultimately reshaped his life. When he emerged from the years of pre-

occupation with inner images (around 1919), he was ready to take on the leadership of his own school of psychology.

Many fundamental concepts of Jung's analytical psychology come from his experiences with active imagination. For example, the Shadow, the Syzygy (Anima and Animus), the Persona, the Ego, and the Self are concepts, but they are at the same time personifications of different structures and functions of the psyche. Affect, archetype, complex, libido – all of these terms are based on real, human experiences.

In a similar way he reminds us that active imagination is a natural, inborn process. Although it can be taught, it is not so much a technique as it is an inner necessity: 'I write about things which actually happen, and am not propounding methods of treatment' (1928b, par. 369).

## JUNG'S IDEAS

It is not a simple thing to present Jung's ideas on active imagination. In his writings it is almost as if he invites different inner voices to speak. As the scientist, he presents his ideas in a clear understandable way. But then he turns to explore another perspective that may seem to contradict the first. Sometimes he is the poet, weaving word images of haunting beauty. Other times ancient prophets and mystics seem to speak through him. When the Trickster appears, his writings may seem deliberately ambiguous, even vague. Just when you want to hear more, he says something like: I must content myself with these hints. The reader may be left in a state of questioning and wondering, turned back to his or her own imagination. Dr Tina Keller, a member of Jung's early circle in the years 1915–29 wrote a wonderful memoir that describes the beginnings of active imagination. Here she sheds light on Jung's multi-faceted approach to important ideas:

I feel privileged that I met C. G. Jung in the times where he was searching and had no definite formulations. I remember how I said: 'But what you say today is just the contrary of what you said last week,' and he answered: 'That may be so, but this is true, and the other was also true; life is paradox.' It was a most stimulating experience.

(Keller 1982, p. 282)

Jung's therapeutic method had many different names before he settled on the term active imagination. At first it was the 'transcendent function.' Later he called it the 'picture method.' Other names were 'active fantasy' and 'active phantasying.' Sometimes the process was referred to as 'trancing,' 'visioning,' 'exercises,' 'dialectical method,' 'technique of differentiation,' 'technique of introversion,' 'introspection,' and 'technique of the descent.' When he delivered the Tavistock Lectures in London in 1935 he used the term 'active imagination' for the first time in public.

It seems natural to wonder why it took him so long to find the right name. Since there are many forms of active imagination, perhaps he was open to

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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. The term 'picture method' points to the use of art materials to create symbolic paintings and drawings. We don't know whether Jung ever considered the terms 'sculpting method,' 'bodily movement method,' 'music method,' 'dialectic method,' 'dramatic method,' 'symbolic play method,' or 'writing method.' The individuation process itself 'subordinates the many to the One' (Jung 1933/50, par. 626). Active imagination is a single method, but it is expressed through many different forms.

Ruth Fry reports a conversation with Jung when she was studying in Zurich sometime in the 1950s. He told her he always tested his theories for a period of fourteen years before he shared them with the public. He did the same thing with active imagination, that is, he tested it empirically and scientifically for fourteen years (Fry 1974, p. 11). As we know, Jung's confrontation with the unconscious was driven by inner necessity, but at the same time he conceived of it as a scientific experiment. When he realized his experiment in self-healing was successful, he began to teach the method to some of his patients. He also wrote about his findings.

His first professional paper on active imagination, entitled 'The Transcendent Function', was written in 1916, but it remained unpublished for many years. At the time he wrote it his energy had returned, but material from the personal, cultural and primordial unconscious was still pouring in on him. It doesn't seem surprising that he put the paper aside for publication at a later time. 'The Transcendent Function' (1916/58) sets forth both his new psychotherapeutic method and the deeper understanding he gained about the nature of the psyche. In this early attempt to present his ideas, Jung not only describes the stages of active imagination and some of its many forms, he also links active imagination to work with dreams and the transference relationship.

Jung views emotional dysfunction as most often a problem of psychological one-sidedness, usually initiated by an over-valuing of the conscious ego viewpoint. As a natural compensation to such a one-sided position, an equally strong counterposition automatically forms in the unconscious. The likely result is an inner condition of tension, conflict and discord. Jung used the term 'emotionally toned complex' to describe the unconscious counterposition: 'Everyone knows nowadays that people "have complexes." What is not so well known, though far more important theoretically, is that complexes can *have us*' (Jung 1934, par. 200).

His early concept of the transcendent function arose out of his attempt to understand how to come to terms with the unconscious. He found that there is an inborn dynamic process that unites opposite positions within the psyche. It draws polarized energies into a common channel, resulting in a new symbolic position which contains both perspectives. 'Either/or' choices become 'both/and,' but in a new and unexpected way. The transcendent function facilitates the transition from one attitude to another. Jung described

it as 'a movement out of the suspension between two opposites, a living birth that leads to a new level of being, a new situation' (Jung 1916/58, par. 189). Another time he defined it simply as 'the function of mediation between the opposites' (1921, par. 184).

The term 'transcendent function' encompasses both a *method* and an inborn *function* of the psyche. In contrast, the term 'active imagination' refers to the method alone. But, obviously, the *method* (active imagination) is based on the image-producing *function* of the psyche, that is, the imagination. Both the transcendent function and the dynamic function of the imagination are complex psychic functions made up of other functions. Both combine conscious and unconscious elements. Both are creative, integrative functions that shape and transform the living symbol. Jung's close associate Barbara Hannah (1953) understands the transcendent function as one of Jung's early ideas that was incorporated into his later concept of the archetype of unity, the Self.

### Play, fantasy and the imagination

In reflecting on the nature of the imagination, Jung recognized its inestimable value – not only to the development of the individual but to human culture as well:

Every good idea and all creative work are the offspring of the imagination, and have their source in what one is pleased to call infantile fantasy. Not the artist alone, but every creative individual whatsoever owes all that is greatest in his life to fantasy. The dynamic principle of fantasy is *play*, a characteristic also of the child, and as such it appears inconsistent with the principle of serious work. But without this playing with fantasy no creative work has ever yet come to birth. The debt we owe to the play of imagination is incalculable.

(Jung 1921, par. 93)

When he speaks of play, fantasy and the imagination, his spirit seems to soar. He cites Schiller, who said that people are completely human only when they are at play. From his experiments with the building game, he knew the creative, healing power of symbolic play. Subsequent studies have confirmed Jung's ideas: Allan (1988), Erikson (1963), Roberts and Sutton-Smith (1970), C.T. Stewart (1981), L.H. Stewart (1982), and Winnicott (1971) are among those who recognize the healing function of play and the imagination. As with so many of his ideas, Jung's early understanding of play anticipated later developments in the therapeutic mainstream (Samuels 1985, pp. 9–11). The great joy of play, fantasy and the imagination is that for a time we are utterly spontaneous, free to imagine anything. In such a state of pure being, no thought is 'unthinkable.' Nothing is 'unimaginable.' That is why play and the imagination tend to put us in touch with material that is ordinarily repressed. In the spontaneous dramatic play of childhood, upsetting life situations are enacted symbolically, but this time the child is in control. The child gains a



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sense of mastery by playing out little dramas voluntarily with a doll, a stuffed animal, or perhaps an imaginary companion, or a pet, sibling, or friend. Unlike the original experience that may have been overwhelming, in play the child gets to imagine all kinds of variations and creative resolutions; for example, an imaginary companion may bring courage, strength, magical powers – whatever is needed. Sometimes role reversal helps. The key to the transformative healing process is – play is fun. In a seemingly magical way the life-enhancing emotions (joy and interest) modulate and transform the emotions of crisis (Stewart 1987a, 1987b). It seems clear that symbolic play is based on an inborn psychological process that heals emotional pain.

For Jung, the imagination is ‘the reproductive or creative activity of the mind in general . . . . Fantasy as imaginative activity is identical with the flow of psychic energy’ (1921, par. 722). Whether we are children or adults and whether we are conscious of it or not, imaginative activity goes on all the time. It is expressed in many ways including play, dreams, fantasy, creative imagination and active imagination.

### Active and passive fantasy

Jung distinguishes between active and passive *attitudes* toward one’s fantasies (1921, pars. 712–14). An active fantasy may be evoked when we turn our attention toward the unconscious with an attitude of expectation; something definite is about to happen. Such a state of readiness brings new energy and consciousness to the raw material emerging from the unconscious; themes are elaborated through association with parallel elements. Through this process, the unconscious affects and images are clarified and brought closer to consciousness. Such an active, positive participation of conscious and unconscious corresponds to the method of active imagination.

By contrast, a passive attitude toward fantasy does nothing at all. With a passive attitude, fantasy is not evoked, rather it drifts around unnoticed, or it erupts into consciousness uninvited. Lacking the active participation of consciousness there is the danger of identifying with a mood or dream or fantasy. For example, a person might assume that just because he or she is thinking or feeling something: ‘It must be true.’ A more constructive response to a compelling idea or mood might be to consider the question: ‘Is that true?’ Then: ‘How is it true – and how is it not true?’ People may then discover thoughts in their mind they don’t even agree with. Passive fantasy is always in need of self-reflective, critical evaluation from the conscious everyday standpoint. Active fantasy does not require criticism: rather, the symbolic material needs to be understood (Jung 1921, par. 714).

### Starting points

The raw material of the unconscious is mainly emotions, impulses and images. Everyone gets at it in their own way. Some begin with a vague mood,