

Active Imagination Technique

Setting

- Quiet
- Alone
- Comfortable

[Invitation]

- An act of recognition of the subconscious as real, sentient, yet distinct from your conscious mind.
- More helpful when starting out. As you continue, a genuine relationship forms with the other half of your totality. When two friends meet, they may choose to dispense with formalities.

Beginning

- Imagine yourself during a daydream: the feeling of withdrawal into the mind and sense of thoughts coming forth from within rather than without.
- Quiet your mind, your inner voice. Do not think to yourself; do not speak within your mind.
- Images will come and go. Do not necessarily seize upon the first one (though sometimes it is the first image that will take hold).
 - “Take hold” – an image will appear more strongly, persist, or bring with it more emotion or profundity than others. This is the scene.
- Let events unfold. You are an observer, and once the subconscious engages you, you then become a participant.

During

- What occurs is meant to be recorded *as it happens*. You will lose much of the experience if you wait to write later. This may be done at a “typewriter” as Robert Johnson says, but for us, it may be done at a computer, with a phone, or handwritten.
 - Handwritten transcription seems best because one is free to conduct active imagination in a place of one’s choosing (not necessarily wherever one’s computer is), and paper is inherently distraction-free, unlike phones, which are designed to consume attention.
- The subconscious is patient; I have not found it to leave as I write. In fact, I have had sessions interrupted and resumed hours later without problem; Robert Johnson notes this (*Inner Work*, 153).
- Recording what transpires is a demonstration of respect for the subconscious. It also provides an accurate record that you can return to and reflect upon.

- Practically speaking, after seeing the image that takes hold, I write a description of the scene. I describe what I see, where I look, what is taking place. I close my eyes once more, refocusing, and the scene is still there. During conversation, sometimes entire paragraphs are spoken to me. I write as I hear, the experience continuing even as my eyes are open and I am writing.
 - You may intuitively understand this as you listen to someone speak as you play on your phone; your mind is focused both on what you are writing on your phone and what is happening around you. The difference here is that your mind is turned within, focusing just enough on the external setting to write. You are straddling the line between the conscious and unconscious; with one hand you receive from the unconscious, and with the other you set it down in the conscious realm.
- You may need time to reflect on what is said, to prepare your response. For me, this pleases my subconscious. Do not rush.
 - You may think that the subconscious, compared to your conscious mind, is rather insignificant. I find it to be just as profound as the conscious mind. Do not condescend to it; more often than not, I feel that it condescends to me.
- Do not withhold deep questions; do not hold back feelings. Express everything to the subconscious. The goal is to understand the subconscious and how it understands your conscious mind; if there is ever a time to take off personas and pretensions, it is during active imagination. It sees you as you are; it is unaffected by the masks we tend to wear to manipulate others' perceptions, and in fact, in my experience, this is problematic to the subconscious. If you seek peace, take off your masks and behold yourself as you are, and let the subconscious behold you.
 - The subconscious can be surprisingly specific and to-the-point.

Ending

- The ending is an intuitive occurrence (at least for me).
 - There is a sense that what is said has run its course, that all the points have been laid out. It is like coming to the end of a story, and you know it is the end because everything was introduced, carried on, and reached a point of conclusion/resolution/application.
 - You can also simply ask whoever is speaking if there is anything else to add. If you have any final questions, ask them. When all is said and done, I always try to politely bid my goodbye. If the subconscious responds similarly, you know the end has arrived.
- This has never been a difficult part of the experience, for me. In all likelihood, it will not prove troubling to you, either, once you have gotten your feet wet, so to speak.

After

- There is a sense of progress, a sense that something important that has hitherto been mute has been given expression. I feel as though I have gotten something off my chest, as the saying goes,

or rather, that my subconscious has gotten something off its chest. The goal is harmonization with the unconscious mind.

- The feeling is like coming out of a daydream¹; you were not asleep, but your mind was far from your surroundings.
- Return later to your transcript; re-read and digest it.

Other Notes

- Robert Johnson and Jung mention alternative methods of conducting active imagination, though what I have described is Jung's method. Jung also drew mandalas, and encouraged his patients to paint what they beheld within, even those with no artistic talent whatsoever, for art was not the point, but expression of the inner mind (CW, 16 §§101-106). Some may only hear, but not see. Some find they see or hear nothing, but must dance, sculpt, or paint the experience. Jung acknowledges these very individual differences in *The Transcendent Function* (CW 8, §166ff).
- What is the point? Why is this method, in particular, beneficial? Jung answers in *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (CW 14, §706):

This process of coming to terms with the Other in us is well worth while, because in this way we get to know aspects of our nature which we would not allow anybody else to show us and which we ourselves would never have admitted. It is very important to fix this whole procedure in writing at the time of its occurrence, for you then have ocular evidence that will effectively counteract the ever-ready tendency to self-deception. A running commentary is absolutely necessary in dealing with the shadow, because otherwise its actuality cannot be fixed. Only in this painful way is it possible to gain a positive insight into the complex nature of one's own personality.

The conscious mind has a way of "forgetting" what it does not like, doesn't it? Active imagination is thus rightly prefixed as *active*. It is deliberate. It requires exertion. It requires the determination to behold who you really, truly are. If you have this passion, and if you believe that there is much more to you than the surface dressings with which we tend to content ourselves, then let that energize your pursuit into the unconscious mind.

¹ Daydreams are connected by Jung with the subconscious (CW 5, §39), but I make the connection loosely. Daydreaming is distinct, to Jung, in that the mind is not actively involved in the transpiration. In active imagination, you place yourself in the scene, experiencing and interacting, consciously, and you do not control what exactly takes place. Daydreaming is considered "passive fantasy," whereas active imagination is considered "active fantasy" (CW 6, Bollingen Series XX pub. 1971, §§712-14; 722, see footnote 45).