

# **Art Creation Using Active Imagination To Express Collective Unconsciousness**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article aims to explore the active imagination as strategy to create visual art to express collective unconsciousness. The psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung believes that in the deepest mind of the human being we are all unconsciously connected by symbolic images inherited from our remote ancestors, that phenomena define our instinctual behaviour. This research used qualitative approach applying art-based methodology. Two volunteers who are interested in visual arts participate in this research. The technique to collect data is by observation, structured interview, reflective portfolios and study document. The practices are implemented in an art studio at Bandung-Indonesia within November 2021. During the encounter, we explore the method with drawings and painting. The findings show that if the volunteers are committed to follow the steps of active imagination, they can create visual arts that reflect the collective unconsciousness.

**Keyword:** Active Imagination, Art Creation, Archetype, Jungian Theory, Collective Unconsciousness.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Active Imagination is a psychotherapeutic method introduced by Carl Gustav Jung. It is designed to access, externalize and analyse images located in the collective unconsciousness [1]. The collective unconsciousness is the deepest layer of the unconsciousness that links all human beings, independent from the cultures, ages or races [2]. It is not related with personal experiences but inherited from our remote ancestors. These universal images contained in the collective unconsciousness, are patterns of our instinctual behaviour, and are known as archetypes [3].

There is narrow connection between symbolic language contained in art and the active imagination, both hold aspects of the person such as senses, feelings, emotions, cognition, and imagination, becoming one of the most effective tools to communicate and place knowledge [8]. Some scholars have studied this connection. Schaverien (2005) states that active imagination describe all forms of creativity, and art evokes the active imagination [9]. Bacon (2007) combines focusing and active imagination to create therapeutic and creative environments with psychic contents to for performance art [10]. However, Osman et al. (2018) states that artistic practices in the area of healthcare, fail to provide evidence of its success, and are not design by experts artist nor educators. Osman et al. (2018) suggest to include them to understand the impact of art in the process, to ensure the pedagogies and evaluation methods, and to scope the investigation in a multi-disciplinary research to collect the required evidence [11].

There is little research publication about relationship between archetypes and active imagination. There is also no recent study about active imagination with art-based approach specially with visual arts. There is none founded studies of how to assess the method of active imagination with art-based approach. For this reason, the importance of this research is to fulfil the gap by bring new thoughts about the method of active imagination, and its practice in visual arts, to provide keys to assess the active imagination with art-based approach, and to understand the relationship between the archetypes and the active imagination.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The Active Imagination has been synthetized by Comandini (2009) in the next four main phases [1]. The first phase is emptying the mind. The participant must keep

a deep concentration rather in an image as reference or an emotion. The second phase is let the psychic event happen. The participant who choose an image will experience its deformations, and the participant who choose emotions will experience its formation. The third phase is objectivation. The participant will give personality to the image with unique characteristic and its own reality. It cannot be reduce to our caprice and put our personality neither appearance on it. The four phase is Ethical confrontation with the unconscious. The participant take dominion inside the image by asking and giving answers to the images that emerge from the imagination, to understand how the image is related with the participant and validate the active method.

Dietrich (2021) presents interpretative phenomenological analysis research to compare participants experience with Jungian theory, and establish a corelation with the archetypes and techniques that guide to the imaginary images. His findings shows that there is a little published research about guides forms to the imaginary [7]. However, Jung's depth psychology provides active imagination with a well-established methodology.

Bowman (2017) states that active imagination is a process to explore the psyche thought free play of fantasy [12]. In contrast, Schaverien (2005) states that the active imagination can be as real as if it has life of its own, like in a dream. But it is not always active imagination, sometimes it can be merely fantasy. "Fantasy is your own invention, it remains on the surface and the conscious expectations of a person. But active imagination, means the images have life of their own in which the images cannot be reduce to our caprice and put our personality nor appearance on it." [13]. It corroborate the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase according to Comandini (2009), in which the image must have its own reality and cannot be reduced to our caprice and put our personality nor appearance on it. "The symbolic events happens if your consciousness does not interfere" [13]. It corroborate the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of active imagination, according to Comandini (2009), in which the participant will experience formation of the emotion or the deformation of the previous image, if the consciousness let the psyche event happen. Furthermore, fantasy is a passive joy, different from the active imaginations that involves the ethical commitment of ask and give answers to the manifested images [14]. It corroborate the relevance of the 4<sup>th</sup> phase of the active imagination according to Comandini (2009) in which the ethical dialogue with the unconsciousness is important to validate the active method.

The research of Bacon (2007) reveals that apart from active imagination there is another method called "focusing". It responds the idea that beyond our five senses, we can perceive an imaginal realm [10]. To access this realm, Gendlin (1981) developed the following six phases: clearing a space, felts sense, finding a handle,

resonating, asking, and receiving [15]. According to Bacon (2007), the goal is to acknowledge what is intrinsic in a moment of movement and its symbolic archetypal potential [10]. This method is similar as active imagination. In spite of it, focusing is more suitable for artistic expressions such as dance, performance art and any other expression that involves body movement as their final product. Even though active imagination applies the body movements to create art, its final product is more suitable for visual arts, due to the symbolic language reflected as the image of the archetypes [16]. However, the similitude of both methods, remains in the acknowledge of the archetypes that must be identify in the final product of the imagination.

Moreover, Osman et al. (2018) analysed 62 art-based interventions to find evidence of its benefit in healthcare education institutions. The findings shows that 79% of the 62 studies report success but are not defined nor measured. Furthermore, only 34% of them involves collaboration with artist or art educators, questioning who has the expertise to design and precede the interventions. The author suggest artist and art educators to be involved in the art-based interventions to ensure the pedagogies and evaluation methods, and to scope investigation with a multi-disciplinary research to collect the necessary evidence. The author also recommends a closer observation of the participants and personal feedback, as well as self-assessments to be analysed by the tutors [11].

Finally, there are two keys to assess the method of active imagination founded in the literature review. First, to committedly follow the 4 phases of the active imagination synthetized by Comandini (2009). Second, to recognize the potential archetypes in the final product of the active imagination.

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

This research used qualitative approach, employing art-based method to adapt the values of arts in a social research project, to engage the theory and the practice with a generative approach for an aesthetic understanding, evocation and provocation [17]. The technique to collect data is by observation, structured interview, reflective portfolios, and study document. The present study explores the method of active imagination using the assess keys and recommendations founded in the literature review. Two volunteers take place in the research. We will call the first volunteer (NS). He is 42 years old graphic designer. The second volunteer we will call (YH). He is 49 years old artisan. We make a one day workshop since 9 am until 6 pm on the November 28<sup>th</sup> 2021 in Bandung-Indonesia. One day before the workshop, the volunteers did an interview with 25 questions divided in four topics. The first topic is about their relationship with art. The second topic is about their familiarity with mental

healthcare. The third topic is about their experience with dreams, the fourth topic is about Jungian theory.

The interview helped us to collect the data from the volunteers before the workshop, it provided information to plan the strategy to approach every phase of active imagination with the volunteers. Moreover, the reflective portfolio was relevant to collect data from every step of active imagination from the perspective of each volunteer in order to assess the procedure. The workshop was divided in three parts. The first part is the introduction of the workshop, and the development of the first and second phases of active imagination. The second part is the development of the third and the fourth phases of the method. Finally the third part the development of the reflective portfolios and a personal feedback from the observations of the whole process.

#### **4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

##### **Structured Interviews Results**

(NS) has very strong relationship with art, making the workshop smooth, especially in the second step where the artistic technique is important to give shape to his emotions or to deform his reference. He is somehow familiar with mental health, becoming a good beginning for the step number one in which he has to choose a previous reference or an emotion and concentrate about it in a sort of meditation. He also has some experience with dreams, that helps us explain the third and fourth step of the method, in which he has to give specific characteristics to the image he found in his art work, and he has to conceive this image as if it comes from a dream, he cannot use his mere caprice to personify the image with his ego, but he must let the psychic event happens, as if the image is a character from his dreams that he cannot control it consciously. His experience with dreams also shows that he has some kind of dialogue with his unconscious mind that will be helpful for the last step of the active imagination when he must confront his unconscious mind in a sort of dialogue, ask questions and give answers in order to give the image a meaning and validate the method. He has previous knowledge about Jungian theory making the dialogue with him more efficient.

In the case of (YH), his relationship with art is good, so it will make the workshop goes well, especially for the step number two, similar than the previous volunteer. He is just a little familiar with mental healthcare so my approach with him for the step number one needs to be more specific in the sense that meditating in an image or emotion is not going to be so easy for him. He has some experience with dreams that will help him giving specific characteristics to the image and some ideas for the confrontation with the unconscious mind. He got some previous knowledge of Jungian theory, making our dialogue more efficient.

##### **Volunteers Arts Work Discussion**

(NS) experience was clearly deep. Since the beginning he showed commitment to the practice, and at the end, it helped him release his anxiety. Moreover, he successfully expressed the collective unconsciousness. The proof is explained below, in the archetypes identification at his final artwork and reflected portfolio.

First of all, his struggle was real. In the second step, (NS) states in the reflective portfolio “At the beginning I wanted to draw a dancing man, but my feeling of anger was stronger, anyways I follow the emotion of anger in the flow of a dance.” We can see that in this point the dialogue of the opposites is taking place and he achieve to unify them and let them work together, conscious and unconscious for one mutual goal, that is the representation of the self-archetype [18].

(NS) also states, “I start to define arms and hands in just one body, this body was still in the same place, but his hands move in circles and then I figure it out he had four heads, in movement too, and they were watching all that I do.” Therefore, the hands moving in circles represent the archetype of the mother that Jung associate with a mandalas as magic circles where the birth can take place as a shelter or uterus [19].

(NS) states, “I realize we are children of something, let’s say we are the children of the universe”. Jung (2004) explains the archetype of a mother as one of the main and most complete archetypes, from the mother other archetypes arise, the first one to arise is the archetype of a child [19].

(NS) made two statements that are interconnected. The first one, “At the beginning I wanted to draw dancing man”. The second one, “The artwork I made I believe is a woman”. Jung (2004) explains that another archetype that arise from the mother is the anima, that represent the feminine part that contain in every man [19].

The (NS) volunteer also stated that “I found 4 heads that represent for me the cardinal lines, so I feel I am back to the path”. We must mention that in (NS) artwork the 4 heads are surrounding by the hands in movement that create a circle, that we already identified as the mother archetype. Furthermore, Jung (1964) explains, when inside the circle there are the four corners of the world, this is represented as the Great Man that is the self-inside the mother, this is the unification of all the components [18].

The last archetype identified in (NS) reflected portfolio appears in the following (NS) statement, “The anger was gone, and I start to feel happy”. This statement represent the transformation and it is the archetype of rebirth [19].

To resume, we can identify five archetypes in (NS) artwork and portfolio, these archetypes are the self, the

mother, the child, the anima, and the rebirth. Moreover, we identify the unification of all the components with The Great Man's representation, that is the archetype of self-inside the archetype of the mother. Finally, all these archetypes are visually represented in his artwork and reaffirmed in his reflective portfolio, reveling the validation of this research.

By the other hand, the volunteer (YH) stated "My starting point is a reference from a dream, I saved a bird from a cat attack, I put it back to its cage. The bird was close to a pot, and the cat wants to eat it. After putting the bird back, my dead aunt and her son came out to thank me. All the belongings in my dream are from my aunt". We identify a few archetypes. The first one is the archetype of hero which is the hand that take place in the artwork to save the bird. The second is the archetype of shadow, which represents the cat that attacked the bird as counterpart of the hero. The tree represents the archetype of the mother, as well as the circle of light that we can see in the painting in a shape of mandala that represent the archetype of the mother and the self that constitute the unity of (YH) with his ancestor [19][18].

The remarkable facility of (YH) to remember his dreams in detail, make his approach with the active imagination very easy and we were able to identify 4 archetypes such as, the hero, the shadow, the mother, and the self.

Nevertheless, it was hard for him to get deep in every phase of the active imagination. He didn't have to concentrate hard to remember his dream that was used as reference for the first phase of the method. We did not notice any deformation or variation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of active imagination. Therefore, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase, (YH) had not problem at all to personify and give unique characteristics to the images in his artwork, because (YH) just follows exactly what he remembers in detail from his dream. Finally, in the 4<sup>th</sup> phase, he was very fast and simple, (YH) states that, he felt happy that he could help his family in his dream.

(YH) ability to remember his dreams already show us that he can connect with his unconscious mind. Even though his artwork shows us 4 archetypes, we perceived a lack of commitment with the steps of active imagination. Especially in the ethical confrontation with the unconsciousness, letting us in doubt to assess if his artwork expresses the collective unconsciousness or it is just his individual unconsciousness.

We recognize the process of each practician as individual, so the observation and the feedback must be individual too. The reflective portfolio of each practician is extremely important to collect valuable information of the process, it can help us identify and give more evidence of the archetypes located in the artworks.

We noticed in the observation that one practician was very open mind and committed to use the method, at the end, it helps him with his wellbeing, his artistic and personal process, making easy to acknowledge the keys for assess the practice. Yet, the other one was a little bit skeptical, king of afraid to approach his unconscious mind due to his believes, making us aware that this topic still a kind of taboo, the practician at the end did not experience any change in his wellbeing, neither his artistic process. At the end, the assess of his practice still unfinished.

The keys to assess founded in the literature review were used and tested in the practice. Every step of the active imagination is important, and if are not taking with commitment, it may be hard to assess the method even though we already identify archetypes in the final artwork.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research shows that the relationship between the archetypes and the active imagination is very important. Identifying the archetypes in the final artwork of the participants is one of the keys to assess the active imagination, otherwise, the validation of the procedure will be unfinished. In addition, the 4 phases of active imagination synthetized by Comandini (2009) are another keys to assess the active method, otherwise the validation of the procedure will also be unfinished. As conclusion, it is possible to use active imagination method to create art that express the collective unconsciousness, and it can influenced positively the well-being, if the participant is committed to the phases of the method.

Furthermore, we recommend to make more artistic-approach of the method with people in different backgrounds and in larger groups. To understand the benefit in the well-being, the practice should be conducted with a mental health care community. To understand the benefit in art education, the practice should be conducted with art students. Moreover, to clear the way to identify the archetypes for further studies, we recommend the creation of a Jungian archetype's encyclopaedia.

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