

# Intentional Transformative Experiences



Theorizing Self-Cultivation in Religion and Esotericism

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Karl Baier

# Chapter 10

## Intentionality and Non-Intentionality in Jung's Active Imagination

This chapter examines the relationship between intentionality and non-intentionality in transformative practices of the self<sup>1</sup> using the example of active imagination.<sup>2</sup> This form of meditation was invented by C.G. Jung (1875–1961) and became a cornerstone of his psychotherapeutic method. The first section presents the theoretical framework applied to explore the topic. Then, I argue for interpreting the discovery of active imagination as the ritualization of a conversion-like experience. This is followed by a look at representative post-Jungian approaches to formalize the technique. Finally, the problematic transition from the mode of being-in-the-world governed by willful thought and intentional action to an attunement to the world based on undirected openness is discussed. Jung's statements about this change in the practice of active imagination are especially juxtaposed to Heidegger's reflections on the cross-over from will-directed representational thought ("vorstellendes Denken") to contemplative thought ("besinnliches Denken") and releasement ("Gelassenheit").

### 1 The Path of Active Imagination from a 'Margalogical' Perspective

For lack of a more appropriate term, I suggest the neologism margalogy (from Skt. *mārga*: pathway, road, proper course, inquiry, path to salvation) for the academic study of what one could call path cultures.<sup>3</sup> I derived the ideal type of path culture from my study of pre-modern and modern meditation instructions and manuals<sup>4</sup> and my explorations in the fields of modern yoga, Buddhist traditions, spirituality research, and psychotherapy. This notion has helped me to better conceptualize the commonalities and specific differences of these diverse fields and currents. It gave me a better understanding of what they have to offer their par-

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1 Foucault 2005.

2 I would like to thank Jens Schlieter, Bastiaan van Rijn and Sarah Perez for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

3 Baier 2012.

4 Baier 2009.

ticipants and what fascinates me about them. Perhaps it could be helpful for other scholars as well. With the image of “path” I take up a metaphor that is known in the Near East, Europe, and other cultural areas but is especially common in East and South Asia (see terms such as *dao*, *do*, or the said *mārga*). Meanwhile, the image of the path spread worldwide due to the global popularization of Asian concepts and practices of self-cultivation.<sup>5</sup>

Path cultures focus on inventing and propagating transformative lifestyles and practices that aim to shape the way people relate to themselves and the world they live in, and often refer to what Tillich called “the ground of being and meaning.” These “schools of life” usually include at least some of the following typical elements: first, a set of practices—shaping life according to rules of conduct/ethical guidelines, meditation techniques, rituals, prayers; second, descriptions and interpretations of significant changes, insights, experiences, or states of mind that are said to emerge during the practices or outside of them, and are considered significant for the path; third, advice concerning the obstacles on the path and how to overcome them; fourth, the embedding of these practical teachings within cosmological, anthropological, or soteriological frameworks; and of course, interpersonal relationships in which path knowledge is transmitted (guru/chela, teacher/student, therapist/client, spiritual guide/directee, certain forms of community life and so forth).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, path cultures form social institutions from small, informal groups to large organizations to develop and preserve their respective path, and to create and maintain social spaces that enable personal transformation.

Within the path cultures I have studied, transformative experiences “that change what it is like for you to live your life, and perhaps even change what it is like to *be* you, deeply and fundamentally”<sup>7</sup> are thematized in three major ways. I mention them here because all three occur in Jung’s practice of active imagination. First, as involvement in short and intense disclosure situations, game-changing moments or “peak-experiences” to use Abraham Maslow’s famous term; second, conversions or similar transformative mid-length processes often triggered by the first way; and third, walking the path as a whole with all its lightful heights, frustrating downs, and neutral plains can be conceived of as transformative experience. The exploration of the functions and modes of experience within path cultures plays an

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5 On the different concepts of *mārga* in Buddhism see Buswell and Gimello (1992), Pecchia and Eltschinger (2020); for the early spread of the concept of *dao* within all schools of Chinese philosophy see Graham (1989).

6 Bastiaan van Rijn’s contribution to this volume drew my attention to the fact that with regard to path cultures several forms of path-related knowledge are relevant, which should be differentiated in future research.

7 Paul 2014, 3, emphasis in original.

important role within my margalogical research, which I cannot go into further detail here.

I conceive margalogy as exploration of path cultures using methods and theories of the relevant human sciences: cultural studies, social sciences, historiography, psychology, cognitive science, theology, philosophy and, last but not least, religious studies. The field of religions as conceptualized and popularized primarily by nineteenth-century scholarship, is an object for margalogical research insofar as “religions” as a whole can be interpreted as path cultures or contain such cultures as subsets. However, margalogy is not limited to the study of “religions.” Its subjects also include e. g., ancient European philosophical as well as modern psychotherapeutic schools, self-help organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous, the practices, intellectual and institutional frames of MBSR or Sensory Awareness trainings, the Feldenkrais method and Autogenes Training, schools of martial arts and modern yoga, dance and other forms of art, provided these disciplines are taught and practiced with the aspiration of contributing to the self-awareness of the practitioner and the practical care of the self in the sense of the Greek *epimeleia heautou*.

Using a very broad functionalist concept of religion, many of these and similar disciplines could of course be called “religious” or labeled as “invisible religion.” A handsome number of them could be brought under the umbrella “spirituality.” This term originally refers to path cultures within Christian and other traditional religions. Today it also stands for highly individualized care of the self, ethical attitudes and path cultures that draw on various worldviews and practices of different origin and are only loosely, if at all, tied to specific religious symbol systems and organizations. I am not sure if it makes sense to extend the meaning of the term religion or the adjective “religious” to such a degree that it covers this whole fluid area. But it is quite obvious, that path cultures are structuring and stabilizing it. This is one of the reasons why I think that margalogical research is relevant to understanding contemporary culture.

C.G. Jung's psychotherapy can be described as a modern psychological path culture that was influenced by the comparative study of myths and religions. Jung received inspiration from Christian and several Asian *mārga*-s, from spiritualism, psychiatric sources and psychoanalysis. He believed that his path of individuation was particularly close to early modern spiritual alchemy. Yet he did not preach a new religion (although being criticized from various sides for having done so) but situated his path in the field of psychology. Accordingly, active imagination became an essential part of his psychotherapeutical practice. More precisely, it forms a rather independent “small” path within the broader Jungian

path culture, a practice which in principle could be integrated into other contexts without major changes.

## 2 Intentionality, Grace, and the Pathless Path

In the following discussion, “intentionality” denotes the realm of everything “deliberate, done on purpose.” It includes voluntary bodily actions as well as mental acts performed of one’s own free will. The term “non-intentionality” refers to a receptive but not necessarily passive openness towards what is ultimately beyond the control of the experiencing self. In his remarks on active imagination, Jung time and again addresses and problematizes the relation between intentionality and non-intentionality, without, however, using these terms. He is by far not the first path-oriented thinker to do so. The role of intentionality and non-intentionality, their entanglement or incompatibility, has long been disputed in various path cultures. The pan-Asian Buddhist discourse on sudden or gradual awakening is a good example for this.<sup>8</sup> The Pelagian controversy in late antiquity and its repercussions throughout the ages kept the topic alive within Christianity until the present day.<sup>9</sup>

On the one hand, intentionality in the form of exercising self-discipline through compliance with certain ethical principles, the deliberate practice of prayer or meditation and e. g. the regular attendance of therapy sessions, are constitutive for path cultures.<sup>10</sup> But not only actions, also deliberately refraining from doing something falls under the category of intentional behavior, e.g., the voluntary acceptance of austerities such as fasting, sexual abstinence or sleep deprivation.

On the other hand, some schools assume that the soteriological goal of their practices is already present within the practitioner, albeit more or less veiled. From this point of view a practice that understands the path as road to a remote goal achievable only step by step through intentional practice is at most a thing for beginners and of limited use. Examples for this position are found in several Zen

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<sup>8</sup> I would like to thank Carmen Meinert for pointing this out to me in an email exchange.

<sup>9</sup> Pelagianism, the theological marginality of the fourth century British monk Pelagius and his followers, affirmed human kind’s good nature and the God given ability of human beings to become righteous through their own efforts. The most influential opponent of Pelagius was his contemporary Augustine of Hippo. Pelagianism was condemned at the Council of Carthage in 418.

<sup>10</sup> A good example of a strong emphasis on intentionality is the emerging path culture of reality shifting analyzed by Sarah Perez in her contribution to this volume. The future will show in which direction the practice of the shifters will develop and what role the experience of non-intentional content will play in their fantasy journeys into other worlds. At the moment, total immersion into the desired world, seems to be the crucial non-intentional element.

schools as well as in rDzogs chen, or in Advaita Vedānta and in Master Eckhart's teaching of the pathless path beyond will and images.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, concepts of salvation that are based on pure grace and assume that man's will is too corrupt to approach the redeeming reality by its own power attribute a subordinate, if not counterproductive role to intentionality. One could mention here Augustin's theology of grace and strict interpretations of the Protestant principle of *sola gratia*, as well as the soteriology of Jōdo-Shinshū. Frits Staal<sup>12</sup> once compared the debates about such "easy ways" and "no-effort doctrines" in Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism with the then very heated discussion whether psychedelic experiences are real "mystical" experiences, since nothing is needed for them but to take a pill (which is already a low level intentional effort) and then wait. In psychedelia, however, it was assumed that the drug experience depends on set and setting. Deliberate preparation and ritual framing were therefore considered useful.

Of course, even schools that adhere to "no-effort doctrines" frequently emphasize the importance of practice. In this case, the exercises are often designed in a way that strongly relativizes the intentional moment or dissolves it in the course of the practice. Master Dōgen should be mentioned in this regard. He does not view *zazen* (seated meditation) as a gradual purification of the mind, but rather as a manifestation of awakening from the very beginning.

In this chapter, I will try to show that following a path consists of intentional and often ritualized behavior with built-in openings that allow non-intended disclosure situations to happen.<sup>13</sup> This duality applies exemplarily to the case of active imagination, but can also be shown for other forms of self-cultivation. There are path cultures in which renunciation of intentionality is a crucial element and those that emphasize the importance of intentional effort in progressing on the path. However, both are in fact inseparably linked.

### 3 Jung's Invention of Active Imagination: A Conversion-like Experience and Its Ritualization

Jung began to develop the method that he later called active imagination during the autumn of 1913 as he went through a life crisis after completing his book

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<sup>11</sup> See the contributions of Geisshüsler and Canna on rDzogs chen and Advaita Vedānta in the present volume.

<sup>12</sup> Staal 1975, 123–34.

<sup>13</sup> For my understanding of the term "disclosure situation" see Baier (2008, 193–94).

*Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido*, a phase when he also broke with Freud.<sup>14</sup> He describes this time as a period of disorientation, uncertainty, and stagnation. He did not enjoy his work anymore and gave up his teaching position at the university of Zürich. After distancing himself publicly from several basic assumptions of Freud's psychoanalysis, the need to lay the foundations for his own psychology and psychotherapy became urgent. He had some confusing dreams at the time that neither he nor Freud were able to interpret. The self-analytical review of his biography and especially of his childhood memories also brought no clarifying insight into his situation. "Thereupon I said to myself, 'Since I know nothing at all, I shall simply do whatever occurs to me.' Thus, I consciously submitted myself to the impulses of the unconscious."<sup>15</sup> If his autobiography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, co-authored by Aniela Jaffé, is to be believed in this matter, that was the initial event which led to the development of active imagination.

Already at this point, both intentional and unintentional elements intertwine in Jung's description. After all other conscious efforts to end his crisis had been unsuccessful, Jung admits to himself that he does not know how to get out of his mess. In accordance with an idea that arose unintended, he decides voluntarily to abstain from all further attempts controlled by will power, and to do whatever comes to his mind next. This implies an obligation to take what spontaneously occurs to him seriously, and to follow the clues it offers. In the quoted passage, Jung interprets this new attitude as submission to the unconscious. I will return to this and to the problem of purposeful transition from the intentional to the non-intentional realm below.

The first thing that popped up in Jung's mind was a childhood memory he had not yet thought of. He remembered how, as a little boy, he had enthusiastically built houses and castles out of building blocks, a game he continued in his later childhood using stones and clay. Jung felt that the boy he had once been had the vitality and creativity he now lacked, and that somehow this boy was still alive. He realized that the only way to get back to his original vitality was to start playing like a child again. "This moment," he writes, "was a turning point in my fate, but I gave in only after endless resistances, and with a sense of recognition. For it was a painful humiliating experience to realize that there was nothing to be done except play childish games."<sup>16</sup> He started to collect stones, pieces of wood and other things that had washed up on the lakeshore of Lake Zürich in front of his house and gradually built a whole miniature village from them. Even in the

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<sup>14</sup> See for this period of Jung's life Jung (1995, 194–225) and Bair (2003, 344–63).

<sup>15</sup> Jung 1995, 197.

<sup>16</sup> Jung 1995, 198.



time of his crisis, Jung stuck to his regular daily routine and the playful work on his village became a fixed part of it. He occupied himself with it every day after lunch until about two or three o'clock in the afternoon. Then he worked with his patients. If there was still time afterwards, he continued building his village until nightfall.<sup>17</sup>

Jung describes the creation of a church as the climax of his building activity. "The church was still missing, so I made a square building with a hexagonal drum on top of it, and a dome. A church also requires an altar, but I hesitated to build that."<sup>18</sup> Preoccupied with the question of how to design the altar, one day he was walking along the lakeshore collecting stones when a pyramid-shaped red stone caught his eye, and he immediately knew that this was the altar. "I placed it in the middle under the dome, and as I did so, I recalled the underground phallus of my childhood dream. This connection gave me a feeling of satisfaction."<sup>19</sup>

In this final phase of his work on the miniature village, again intentional and unintentional moments interweave in the creation of a meaningful result. Deliberate search is followed by a chance discovery, which he immediately knows to be the solution to the altar problem, without knowing why. While finally placing the stone intentionally in the small church, the spontaneous memory of the childhood dream emerges, and the altar is thus given the meaning of a repetition and appreciation of his early key experience.

Jung had the dream he mentions here, when he was a three- to four-year-old child. He dreamt of a giant phallus on a golden throne in a subterranean room. Jung later said that this dream had been his "original revelation"<sup>20</sup> and that it had been an initiation into the mysteries of the earth and the realm of darkness.<sup>21</sup> According to him sexuality in general—and in this case the phallus—has a numinous quality because it is an expression of the "chthonic spirit," the other face of God, i.e., the dark side of our image of God.<sup>22</sup>

He says nothing about why the placement of the phallic stone in the miniature church made him feel satisfied. The context of Jung's autobiography suggests that in doing so he was giving a dark manifestation of God, which he had already experienced as a child, its rightful place in the microcosm of his village and thus of his world. With this conclusion of his village project, he found the appropriate articulation of his personal phallicist religiosity that he had been searching for.

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<sup>17</sup> Bair 2003, 350.

<sup>18</sup> Jung 1995, 198.

<sup>19</sup> Jung 1995, 198.

<sup>20</sup> Jung 1995, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Jung 1995, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Jung 1995, 192.

From the *Red Book* to his *Answer to Job*, the notion that in God coincide the opposites of darkness and light, good and evil remained a central theme of his life.

The building of the miniature settlement was only a beginning. It triggered a stream of fantasies that Jung carefully wrote down. This eventually led him to the form of practice that he preferred in the following years. As Shamdasani points out: “From December 1913 onward, he carried on in the same procedure: deliberately evoking a fantasy in a waking state, and then entering into it as into a drama.”<sup>23</sup>

The initial, path-opening intuition led to a cascade of further unintended flashes of inspiration, and their conscious, intended repetition and elaboration. He repeated the childhood game that he had initially remembered spontaneously every day for a longer period of time in order to build up his village. Since the spontaneously arising fantasies did not stop, he also returned to the original act of opening up and ritualized the surrender to the unconscious by making an exercise out of it.

He practiced this regularly for several years, usually at night before he went to sleep and while lying on a couch in his library. He recorded what he experienced during his fantasy journeys and carefully edited his notes. In addition, he created paintings that responded to his imaginations. The notes and paintings eventually flowed into the composition of his famous *Red Book*. In later years, he resumed this kind of exercise whenever he got into similar troubles as in 1913. “This sort of thing has been consistent with me,” Jung writes, “and at any time in my later life when I came up against a blank wall, I painted a picture or hewed stone. Each such experience proved to be a *rite d’entrée* for the ideas and works that followed hard upon it.”<sup>24</sup> Through conscious repetition, a spontaneous idea and action became a pattern of behavior for overcoming deadlocked situations.

Jung’s description of his invention of active imagination uses *topoi* well known from conversion narratives.<sup>25</sup> He did not undergo a change of religious affiliation including the admission to a new religious organization, but a change of his personal religious attitude. We have a defining moment with a before and after: Jung speaks of a turning point in his fate. The time before is depicted as a period of stagnation and crisis in which all known means to get out of it fail. At the climax of the crisis, the inner resistance is overcome. Jung abandons his self-will and leaves his known identity behind. Comparable to conversion narratives

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<sup>23</sup> Shamdasani 2009, 23.

<sup>24</sup> Jung 1995, 199, emphasis in original.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hindmarsh 2014.

this process has painful sides to it. At least in the beginning, it brings up several negative emotions. The whole process of Jung's village-building culminates in the creation of a church, which suggests that at its core it is about a religious reorientation. As a result, a new life is given to him.

When conversion leads to membership in a particular religious community, the decisive turning point is usually followed by ritual acceptance into the new community and full participation in the community's rites. It supports the converts in deepening their faith and consolidating their new lives. In Jung's case, he developed his own ritual that in a similar fashion stabilized his new life, helped him to further unfold his personal myth, and to strengthen his faith in it. In this way, active imagination became the process of an ongoing revelation.

Similar to Jung's autobiographical accounts, dreams and visions often play an eminent role in conversion narratives. And, finally, Jung's narrative, like many other examples of this genre, serves an apologetic purpose. By telling his story, Jung offers his patients and readers the model of a transformative experience and wants to motivate them to engage in a similar experiment and use active imagination to change their lives, as he has successfully done himself. An important aspect of Jung's experiments with imagination is that by way of their ritualization he turned them into practices that can and should be repeated by others. Thus, active imagination became an integral part of the Jungian psychotherapeutic path culture:

Jung's self-experimentation also heralded a change in his analytic work. He encouraged his patients to embark on similar processes of self-experimentation. Patients were instructed on how to conduct active imagination, to hold inner dialogues and to paint their fantasies. He took his own experiences as paradigmatic.<sup>26</sup>

If he did not convert to the path to salvation of a particular religious community, then where did he convert to? It may sound a bit strange, but I think he converted above all to faith in the wisdom of the unconscious. In the 1958/59 preface to his essay *The Transcendent Function* from 1916, he claims that the question of how to give due practical regard to the unconscious would be "posed by the philosophy of India, and particularly by Buddhism and Zen. Indirectly, it is the fundamental practical question of all religions and philosophies. For the unconscious is not this thing or that; it is the Unknown as it immediately affects us."<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere, he explicitly

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<sup>26</sup> Shandasani 2009, 39.

<sup>27</sup> Jung 1953–1983, 8:68.

says, “I prefer the term ‘the unconscious,’ knowing that I might equally well speak of ‘God’ or ‘daimon’ if I wished to express myself in mythical language.”<sup>28</sup>

In his conversion, he surrendered his conscious will and knowledge to “the Unknown” and entrusted himself to the healing potential of the unconscious. This resembles the surrender to the hidden god, the *Deus absconditus*, to receive the unexpected revelations the godhead might grant. At least the passages just quoted suggest that Jung treats the term “the unconscious” as a psychological category that functions as a placeholder for a transcendent ultimate reality. However, often in his writings it is unclear who is speaking when the unconscious manifests. Often his formulations are less theological such as in a passage from *The Transcendent Function*, according to which it is “the anthropoid and archaic man” with “on the one hand his [ . . . ] world of instinct, and on the other, his [ . . . ] world of spiritual ideas,” who “compensating and correcting our one-sidedness, emerges from the darkness and shows us how and where we have deviated from the basic pattern and crippled ourselves psychically.”<sup>29</sup> One could interpret this in a strict naturalistic way, in terms of an inheritance of archaic behavioral patterns that are activated when psychological imbalances occur. But Jung probably mixed a Lamarckian biological approach with the idea of primal revelation. Then the natural archaic human being, who is still alive via the genome in the unconsciousness of modern man and not corrupted by civilization, would represent an archetype of wholeness and freedom, which is a pure image of God and therefore a divine revelation. If this is the case, the establishment of a balance between the conscious and the unconscious would be a renewal of the *imago Dei*, the God-likeness of man.<sup>30</sup>

Be this as it may, the interpretation of Jung’s accounts of the discovery of active imagination as a conversion narrative and of active imagination as the central ritual of the born-again Jung is supported by the Swiss psychologist himself. Commenting on his age when he finished his book *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* and entered his life crisis he says, “This book was written in 1911, in my thirty-sixth year. The time is a critical one, for it marks the beginning of the second half of life, when a metanoia, a mental transformation, not infrequently occurs.”<sup>31</sup>

Metanoia, as is well known, is a Greek term used in the Bible for a radical change of mind and repentance that are seen as necessary to become a follower of Christ. In this text, and in his autobiography written a little later, he further

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<sup>28</sup> Jung 1995, 369.

<sup>29</sup> Jung 1953–1983, 8:90.

<sup>30</sup> Baier 2009, 636–41.

<sup>31</sup> Jung 1953–1983, xxvi.

states that the study of historical myths during the writing of *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* led him to ask which myth is ordering the life of contemporary man and which myth in particular he, Jung, himself is living.<sup>32</sup> He tells us that he could not answer this question. The only thing he knew was that the Christian myth was no longer his. So, he set out to discover his own personal myth. Jung presents himself as a post-Protestant religious seeker who, like many of his contemporaries, strives to find his own religious truth.<sup>33</sup> In his opinion, active imagination serves this quest, as can be seen from the following statement which also underlines the ritual character of it: "Of course, I thought about the meaning of my playing, and asked myself: 'What are you actually doing? You are building a small settlement and performing it like a rite!' I didn't know the answer, but I possessed the inner certainty that I was on the way to my myth."<sup>34</sup>

The passage just quoted also indicates that Jung's conversion was linked from an early stage to a theoretical reflection on the process in which he found himself. In my understanding of experience, this process of cognitive clarification is an essential part of the unfolding of the experience itself, not something separate or posterior. A central concern of his theorizing was the interpretation of the practice he had found to communicate with the unconscious.

Seminal to Jung's understanding of active imagination is the 1916 essay *The Transcendent Function*, written while he was still in the midst of his intense self-explorations and published only in 1958.<sup>35</sup> In this paper, Jung explains why and how imaginations can become the source of cognition of unconscious contents and their integration into consciousness. He explains the significance of the intentional induction of unconscious contents within a psychotherapeutic treatment and for the time afterwards. Jung also compares it with the function of transference within the therapist-patient-relationship and with the analysis of dreams. *The Transcendent Function* can be read as a reflection on the relationship between intentionality and non-intentionality. Jung argues that the ability to focus one's will, and behave purposefully, are extremely important human achievements. "Without them science, technology, and civilization would be impossible, for they all presuppose the reliable continuity and directedness of the conscious process."<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, intentional consciousness would involve the danger to exclude everything that is not compatible with its intentions. The directedness of the conscious ego is necessarily one-sided as

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<sup>32</sup> Jung 1953–1983, 5:xxiv–xxv; Jung 1995, 174–75.

<sup>33</sup> Another example of this kind of modern seekership is presented in the chapter by Steven Sutcliffe and Joseph Azize on Gurdjieff in the present volume.

<sup>34</sup> Jung 1995, 198–99, translation slightly altered by the author.

<sup>35</sup> Jung 1953–1983, 8:131–93, for a detailed interpretation see Miller 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Jung 1953–1983, 8:135.

every direction one takes will exclude others. Jung conceptualizes the psyche as “a self-regulating system”<sup>37</sup> that usually reacts to this one-sidedness with unconscious complementary tendencies.

There would not be anything problematic in this constant interplay of opposites if the psychic state of modern man was not chronically unbalanced due to a hypertrophy of intentionality. This imbalance tends to cut off the connection with the unconscious completely and thus destroys the self-regulation of the psyche:

If the conscious attitude were only to a slight degree ‘directed,’ the unconscious could flow in quite of its own accord. This is what does in fact happen with all those people who have a low level of consciousness tension, as for instance primitives. Among primitives, no special measures are required to bring up the unconscious.<sup>38</sup>

Jung compares the psyche of modern civilized man to “a machine whose speed-regulation is so insensitive that it can continue to function to the point of self-injury.”<sup>39</sup> To cure its extreme will-orientation and the resulting dissociation of the psyche into two separate systems, he recommends the invocation of fantasies as an antidote. Through the interaction of the ego and the emerging fantasies, the transcendent function, i.e., the balance between conscious intention and involuntary unconscious psychic processes, could be restored.

To summarize this biographical section, it can be said that Jung’s practice of active imagination encompassed all three meanings of transformative experience mentioned in the first section of this chapter. It included peaks such as the initial opening and surrender to the unconscious or the creation of the altar for the church of his miniature village. It was also at the heart of Jung’s conversion experience, which took place over several years and involved an intense cognitive effort to become clear about the meaning of the meditation technique he had invented and the fantasies that arose in the process. Finally, Jung continued to delve into active imagination for decades, practicing it himself and engaging with it through the experiences of his patients and students. This made him an experienced practitioner in the third sense of transformative experience within path cultures.

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37 Jung 1953–1983, 8:159.

38 Jung 1953–1983, 8:158.

39 Jung 1953–1983, 8:159.

## 4 The Practice of Active Imagination

The essential components of the practice of active imagination are already mentioned in *The Transcendent Function*. They are found there between reflections on the psychological theory of the unconscious and cultural-critical reflections on the rationalism and will-fixation of European modernity. In a nutshell, the following phases of practice are mentioned:

The first stage consists in finding emotional unconscious contents. This is done primarily through the exercise of emptying the consciousness, which should lead to their spontaneous appearance. If this procedure does not have the desired success, there is the possibility to resort to an “artificial aid,”<sup>40</sup> for instance, to concentrate on a bad mood or a disturbed state of mind for which there is no apparent reason.<sup>41</sup> By immersing oneself in this state, fantasies and associations related to it can unfold. An alternative to this would be to pick up a motif from a dream and continue to dream it in a day-dreaming mode.<sup>42</sup> What should be done with the material obtained in this way? In *The Transcendent Function*, Jung states that the answer to this question differs from case to case, but that there are two main options.<sup>43</sup> Either it is creatively expressed through a medium that suits the person in question, for example, by writing it down, painting, dancing, etc., or the focus is put on the intellectual deciphering of the unconscious productions. Both expression and interpretation of the unconscious contents would ultimately be closely related and interdependent.

The most important move, however, is that one enters the imagined scene, and thus a confrontation takes place between the individual ego as the “continuous centre of consciousness”<sup>44</sup> and the unconscious, leading to a transformation of the whole personality. Jung speaks of a serious “inner dialogue”<sup>45</sup> in which not only the ego but also the unconscious has its say.<sup>46</sup> “In this way you can not only analyze your unconscious,” Jung writes in a 1947 letter, “but you give the unconscious a chance to analyze you.”<sup>47</sup> Only this kind of confrontation would lead to a convergence and finally to a unity of both systems of the psyche: the intentional-

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<sup>40</sup> Jung 1953–1983, 8:166.

<sup>41</sup> Jung 1953–1983, 8:166.

<sup>42</sup> Over the years, Jung has recommended a number of similar methods to his students which cannot be discussed here.

<sup>43</sup> Jung 1953–1983, 8:172–78.

<sup>44</sup> Jung 1953–1983, 8:182.

<sup>45</sup> Jung 1953–1983, 8:187.

<sup>46</sup> Jung 1953–1983, 8:185.

<sup>47</sup> Jung 1972, 76.

ity of consciousness and the dark unconscious beyond the spotlight of the will-driven ego.

## 5 The Formalization of Active Imagination within Post-Jungian Analytical Psychology

Apparently, Jung was not interested in a systematic exposition and formalized practice of active imagination. As a reason for publishing so little about his invention and talking about it mainly in his seminars, he states that it would be too difficult a subject “to be presented to a purely intellectual audience.”<sup>48</sup> He preferred to share his insights in group talks and letters with patients and psychotherapists who were really working with his technique or whom he thought should use it, adapting his teaching to their particular situation. It is not uncommon for path cultures to make certain practices scarcely public, if at all, because they are reserved for direct instruction and serious practitioners. Of course, this kind of knowledge transfer prevents the widespread dissemination of the respective practice.

Jung’s pragmatic and flexible use of active imagination was used by several of his students as some published case studies show.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, active imagination played only a marginal role within the Jung school during the post-war period and after his death in 1961. Not even the publication of *The Transcendental Function* in 1958 could sustainably increase attention to this important element of his therapeutic practice. At the beginning of the 1970s, the French Jungian therapist, Élie G. Humbert wrote:

The form of psychological work called active imagination occupied a considerable place in Jung’s life and in the lives of most of his students. Today this seems to be no longer the case. The method is little used and is presented only occasionally in terms which render it either banal or esoteric. Can it be, one may ask, that the school which calls itself Jungian is in this way manifesting a profound resistance to the unconscious?<sup>50</sup>

Over the next decades several attempts were made to change this situation, of which only a few significant ones can be highlighted here. An important factor that contributed to the renewed attention paid to active imagination by protago-

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<sup>48</sup> Jung 1972, 76; letter to Mr. O., May 2, 1947.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Chodorow’s afterword in Jung (1997, 177–79: 177).

<sup>50</sup> Humbert 1971, 101.



nists of Jungian therapy was the emergence and spread of an alternative religious milieu (Human Potential Movement, New Age, Transpersonal Psychology) with a strong therapeutic component. There, structured meditation rituals of Buddhist and Hindu provenance boomed, and also non-Jungian forms of psychotherapy spread in which imaginative experiences and methods of producing them were as significant as they were, for example, in psychedelic and neo-shamanic contexts. The Jungians were aware of this cultural shift, which involved a reassessment of the therapeutic value of meditation and imagination. In a significant 1978 article, Marie-Louise von Franz (1915–1998), a close associate of C.G. Jung, responds to the new religio-therapeutic scene and relates active imagination to the practices currently in vogue. She divides active imagination into four to five stages or steps treated below and thus takes an important step in the formalization of the practice.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, she discusses the psychotherapeutic imagination techniques of Leuner, Desoille, Happich and Schultz in relation to Jungian active imagination. She also draws on Zen Buddhism, yoga exercises and Daoist meditation for comparison and discusses the psychedelic classic *The Invisible Landscape* (1975) by Terence and Denis McKenna, as well as the imagination practice described as “dreaming” in the books of Carlos Castaneda. Her discussion of these authors and the currents they represent attempts to prove the superiority of Jung’s method.<sup>52</sup>

In a modified form, Robert A. Johnson (1921–2018) gave von Franz’s classification of different levels of active imagination a broader impact. The Jungian therapist from the United States wrote a series of bestsellers that popularized Jung’s psychology in a contemporary and innovative form. One of these was *Inner Work. Using Dreams and Active Imagination for Personal Growth* (1986). As the title suggests, it is a self-help book to promote personal growth, thus picking up a buzzword of the Human Potential Movement.<sup>53</sup> In the following, I focus on

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51 Von Franz 1978.

52 In 1969, Charles Tart had published the reader *Altered States of Consciousness* (Tart 1969), which was an important contribution to the identity formation of transpersonal psychology. In this book, an English translation of a German-language essay by Wolfgang Kretschmer from 1951 was republished (Kretschmer 1969). It discusses the authors mentioned by von Franz as pioneers of therapeutic meditation. C.G. Jung is not mentioned by Kretschmer as a pioneer of this genre (probably simply because of lack of information) and Jung’s concept of the collective unconscious does not come off well in comparison with Desoille. This may have also motivated von Franz to recall Jung’s contribution and present active imagination as superior meditation technique.

53 Johnson had become acquainted with von Franz’s systematization through a lecture given by her in Los Angeles in 1979 (Johnson [1986] 1989, 161). He quotes her designations of the stages and their sequence, but they do not correspond exactly to her 1978 publication on this topic. Maybe she changed the scheme somewhat for her lecture or Johnson did not remember them correctly. His account is much more detailed than that of the Swiss Jungian therapist and is embellished

Johnson with the aim to highlight the differences of his understanding with Franz's model in order to show the dynamics of formalization and ritualization within the Jungian school (See Table 10.1).

**Table 10.1:** The formalization of active imagination by von Franz and Johnson.

	von Franz 1978	von Franz 1979 (according to Johnson 1989)	Johnson 1989
<b>Stage 1</b>	Empty the Ego-Consciousness	Empty the Ego-Mind	Invite the unconsciousness
<b>Stage 2</b>	Allow the unconscious contents to flow in	Let the unconscious flow into the vacuum	Dialogue and experience (plus recording)
<b>Stage 3</b>	Give external form to the fantasies		
<b>Stage 4</b>	Moral confrontation with the fantasies produced	Add the ethical element	Add the ethical element of values
<b>Stage 5</b>	Apply in everyday life	Integrate the imagination back into daily life	Make it concrete by means of physical ritual

Johnson conceives of active imagination as a ritual for individuals who want to work on themselves. Thus, it is not necessary to be in therapy in order to practice it. But one should at least know a therapist or an experienced lay person who is familiar with the art of imagination and to whom one can turn when overwhelming images occur, especially if the practitioner is in danger of becoming obsessed with them in daily life. In preparation for the practice, one should choose a method of documenting the imagination (mainly through writing, secondarily through other media such as dance or painting) and find a place that is free of disturbance during the time of practice.

According to Johnson, the theme of the first stage is to invite the unconscious to manifest itself. While von Franz identifies this stage with the “emptying of the mind of the thought processes of the ego,” for Johnson this emptying is only one way among others to begin active imagination. He values the technique of emptying as “perhaps the purest form of Active Imagination.” It consists of clearing the mind of all thoughts of the outer world and simply waiting, with an alert and attentive attitude, for who or what will appear. Nevertheless, according to the American psychotherapist this method has the disadvantage that many people are not able to

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with many examples. He formalizes the practice relatively independently and does not strictly follow the steps of von Franz.

set in motion the flow of imagination in this way. Similar to Jung he suggests using certain imaginations to start in such cases, such as a daydream one had, a character from a recent dream, or the image of a significant place, for example a seashore. One could also address a momentary feeling as if it were a person.

With his second step, Johnson follows von Franz by taking up her main point and integrating it into his expanded framework. Like von Franz and Jung, he emphasizes that it is crucial in this phase to give up one's own intentions. "Making dialogue is mostly a matter of giving yourself over to the imagination and letting it flow. There are various principles we can follow, but moving the experience ahead consists, more than anything else, in letting the inner figures have a life of their own."<sup>54</sup> This requires a willingness to listen and a serious emotional participation in the imagination. One should stay with the imagined situation and participate in its development until some kind of solution is reached. "Active Imagination is a complete experience, one that has a beginning, a middle, and an end."<sup>55</sup> Obviously, Johnson understands this experience as a process of problem solving. The imagined situation and its unfolding usually revolves around a problem, or an inner conflict, the confrontation with it from different perspectives, and finally the finding of a solution. The result cannot be forced. Dialogue with the figures of the imagination involves giving up desires for control and manipulation. "You don't know what is going to happen until it happens."<sup>56</sup> However, one should not only let the imaginations appear, but also learn to respond to what the inner figures show, to ask them questions and to articulate one's own feelings towards them.

According to Johnson, what has happened should be recorded right from the start. One should immediately note what the inner figures do or say, and one's own response to it. "It is extremely important to write down everything as it happens and everything that is said."<sup>57</sup> Writing helps to avoid getting lost in passive fantasies, to stay focused and to deepen the experience. Letting imaginary figures rise from the unconscious and entering into a conversation to better understand them is not enough. "It is the conscious ego, guided by a sense of ethics, that must set limits in order to protect the imaginative process from becoming inhuman or destructive or going into the extremes."<sup>58</sup> The moral values of the practitioner are to be set against the involuntary impulses that appear as *dramatis personae* in active imagination. For Johnson, this is part of a dialogue among equals: "You can say: 'Look there are some human values here that are very important for me. I

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54 Johnson [1986] 1989, 178.

55 Johnson [1986] 1989, 180.

56 Johnson [1986] 1989, 185.

57 Johnson [1986] 1989, 180.

58 Johnson [1986] 1989, 189.

will not give up the love and relatedness that I have with my family and friends. I do not want to pursue some idealized goals to the exclusion of everyone and everything else.”<sup>59</sup> This confrontation already heralds the final step, integration into daily life.

Already in Franz’s approach, the moral confrontation with the contents of active imagination, if taken seriously, leads to consequences in everyday life. Johnson deals with this step in more detail. He emphasizes that implementation in real life is not identical with simply acting out one’s imaginations. “To incarnate your imagination, during the fourth step, does not mean to act out your fantasies in a literal way. It means, rather, to take the *essence*, that you have distilled from it—the meaning, insight, or basic principle that you have derived from the experience—and incarnate it doing physical ritual or by integrating it into your practical life.”<sup>60</sup> According to him, the imaginations (and also dreams) should be honored in real life in two ways: first, through concrete behavioral changes that affirm the results of active imagination, and second, through a ceremony invented by the practitioner that expresses the new inner situation.

Von Franz and Johnson were not the only ones in Jungian legacy who began to structure active imagination more accurately at this time. Rudolf Müller, for example, chose a relatively orthodox approach that adheres closely to Jung’s texts. However, he cautiously corrects Jung and recommends a more ritualized practice. Müller advocates relaxation exercises in the initial phase as well as a ritualized return from imagination to reality.

And when Jung says that this theory is less programmatic than other meditative methods and does not require a relaxation exercise and guidance, this is only partly true. A guidance and thus an embedding in a ritual is given in the therapeutic situation anyway, which Jung presupposes as a matter of course. And even in the therapeutic setting, one will cautiously apply a ‘rite d’entrée’, e.g. in the form of an invitation to a certain body or lying posture and physical relaxation. Equally necessary is a certain ‘rite de sortie’ to bring the analysand back into the real situation.<sup>61</sup>

Four years later, Verena Kast also integrates relaxation exercises at the beginning of active imagination and describes them in detail in her monograph on imagination (feeling the ground and the feet, letting go of the shoulders, deepening the breath).<sup>62</sup> In doing so, she explicitly borrowed practices from Sensory Relaxation Training as well as from behavioral therapy and followed a trend that can generally be observed in modern meditation.

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<sup>59</sup> Johnson [1986] 1989, 193.

<sup>60</sup> Johnson [1986] 1989, 197, emphasis in original.

<sup>61</sup> Müller 1985, translated by KB.

<sup>62</sup> Kast 1988, 26.

Moreover, Kast describes a ritualized group practice of active imagination.<sup>63</sup> After joint relaxation exercises in a seated position, participants were asked to tune into seeing the inner flow of their images. In Jungian tradition, it is important for Kast to allow timewise the images and the emotions associated to develop, and then to express and communicate them in speech or by other means. “In a group, I proceed in such a way that we tell each other the imaginations, then paint them, write them down or enact them in the manner of a psychodrama play.”<sup>64</sup> It is typical of Kast and more recent Jungian studies on active imagination that they increasingly combine it with other therapeutic and theoretical approaches involving imagination than has been the case in the more orthodox Jungian ritualizations presented by von Franz and Johnson. The latest developments concerning active imagination within post-Jungian analytical psychology cannot be covered in this chapter.

## 6 The Transition from Will-Guided Thought to Non-intentional Awareness

As we have seen, active imagination, especially in its initial stages, involves a shift from volitional perceptions and thoughts to a non-intentional openness that allows visions, auditions, and similar phenomena to emerge. The following section explores what Jung and others have to say about this change in mental state. The transition from the intentional to the non-intentional is not a peculiarity of Jung's active imagination. It is also discussed in other path cultures and thus forms an important subject of margalogical research.

In his book *The Ascetic Self*, Gavin Flood explores Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian ascetic lifestyles. He aims at reconstructing what it means to lead an ascetic life from the perspective of practitioners who made such a way of life their own. One of the features of ascetic life, he argues, is the ambiguity of the ascetic self. When performing activities such as fasting, ascetics are caught within a dichotomy between the general intention to extinguish the will, or in a certain sense even the self, on the one hand, and the conscious, volitional efforts made to this end on the other hand. How can one willfully achieve something that is beyond the will? Is it possible to successfully intend not to intend? As far as I understand him, Flood argues that there is no convincing solution to this problem. Ascetics

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<sup>63</sup> Kast 1988, 30–31, 33.

<sup>64</sup> Kast 1988, 33, translated by KB.

must somehow learn to live with the unresolvable tension between intentionality and non-intentionality. “It is this ambiguity of the self,” he says, “that goes to the heart of ascetic performance, expressed as practice through the body and as discourse in language.”<sup>65</sup>

The psychiatrist and mindfulness teacher Michael Huppertz addresses the same problem against the backdrop of mindfulness meditation and proposes a solution.

The ‘non-intentionality’ (‘Absichtslosigkeit’) of mindfulness regularly leads to discussions. After all, mindfulness is an intentional endeavor. The problem can be solved relatively easy if you realize that you can take different perspectives in a situation. If one decides to go for a walk and then puts this into action, one does not have to be incessantly intentional during the walk. We do not carry the intention with us in our jacket pocket, but we switch to this perspective if necessary, and decide again for or against continuing on our way.<sup>66</sup>

Huppertz rightly points out that the decision to do something does not have to be constantly repeated during execution. Once the framework “bicycle tour” is set by a decision, there is no need for repeated intentional acts to maintain it. The mind is free to engage with anything that happens on this tour (the beauty of the landscape, the headwind, spontaneous thoughts, etc.) as long as the basic decision to go cycling is not questioned. Nevertheless, the cyclist who proceeds from decision-making to the actual tour does not leave the realm of everyday volitional action and thought. Active imagination and other meditation techniques including mindfulness practices aim at a more radical abandonment of the realm of intentionality. It requires at least a slight alteration of the state of mind. Therefore, the shift to the new attitude is not as easy as the example given by Huppertz suggests. The intended transformation is not just a matter of deciding on a perspective that can be determined by the will.

In the first of his *Feldweg-Gespräche*,<sup>67</sup> the philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) discusses the transition from intentional cognitive thought and will-driven behavior to a mode of awareness that is introduced as “non-willing” (Nicht-Wollen), a phrase that corresponds to the term “non-intentionality” used in this chapter. When Heidegger speaks of non-willing, he does not mean, as Huppertz apparently does, the ephemeral suspension of an intention because nothing stands in the way of its realization and one is absorbed in its execution. By will, he means a basic attitude towards the world through which one seeks to be master and to preserve and increase one’s own power. This includes a way of think-

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<sup>65</sup> Flood 2004, 13.

<sup>66</sup> Huppertz 2009, 26, translated by KB.

<sup>67</sup> “Country Path Conversations,” English translation Heidegger 2016, 1–105.

ing that he calls objectifying thought (*vorstellendes Denken*), which subjects the world to man's will to rule.<sup>68</sup> He outlines a transition from such a relationship to the world, which for him, as for Jung, characterizes modern man, to an alternative way of being in and understanding the world.

This crossing becomes an important theme of Heidegger's first *Feldweg-Gespräch* because this fictional conversation is not only taking place on a country path. It is meant as an exercise in philosophizing as a life-changing *mārga*, and thus as a path that in itself is a transformative experience. "Non-willing" is a name temporarily bestowed and which is later dropped in favor of more appropriate terms as the conversation progresses.<sup>69</sup> At this early stage of their joint contemplative walk, the interlocutors discuss the question how one can intentionally create a non-intentional state of mind. "Can one then will non-willing? With such a willing, after all, willing is only increased. And thus this willing works precisely and ever more decisively counter to that which it wills, namely, non-willing."<sup>70</sup> This line of questioning equals Flood's reflections on the ambiguity of the ascetic self. But Heidegger's conversation does not end with the statement of an irresolvable dilemma. The interlocutors briefly consider mediating the two opposites in a dialectical manner, but ultimately reject this option. Finally, they conceive the transition in a two-fold way: first, as an abstention exercise, and second, as a matter of retuning through the awakening of a certain basic mood ("Grundstimmung").

Regarding the first aspect, there exists an area of practice between intentional cognitive thought and its complete transcendence characterized by "a willing to renounce willing" that bridges the gap between intentionality and non-intentionality from the side of volitional behavior.<sup>71</sup> The traces of willing required for this exercise in the beginning would vanish while becoming acquainted with the practice of letting go of will-centeredness. "A willing that renounces willing would ultimately twist free into a released engagement with that which lies beyond the domain of the will."<sup>72</sup> If I understand Heidegger correctly, he conceives this phase as a path of exercise. One repeatedly renounces volitional thought and action and engages more and more in non-willing. You wean yourself from the will, just as an addict weans himself off a drug by practicing not to take it until his addiction is overcome and no effort of the will is necessary to keep sober. This kind of abstention exercise, or "learning by not doing," is the counterpart, so to speak, to "learning by doing," the training of the skill of doing something by doing it. Apparently, Heidegger

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68 Davis 2007, 3–24.

69 Heidegger 2016, 48–50.

70 Heidegger 2016, 33.

71 See Davis 2007, 202–4.

72 Davis 2007, 203.

draws here on the Aristotelian theory of exercise, a classical way of mediating between volitional action and non-intentional spontaneity. This theory assumes that through intentional practice the practitioner acquires habitualization, that is, a kind of second nature through which what is laboriously learned becomes easy and natural. The abstention exercise of non-willing that still contains an element of will finally merges into the spontaneous experience of a no longer will-centered way of being in the world.

As to the second aspect, non-willing is not achievable by a mere decision, not only because it needs such kind of accustoming and growth of understanding achieved through practice. It also requires a retuning via the awakening of a specific fundamental attunement or mood that Heidegger calls releasement (“Gelassenheit”). “Gelassenheit,” a word coined by the late medieval philosopher and theologian Meister Eckhart (1260–1328), is difficult to translate. Letting-be, letting-go, serenity, surrender, detachment, poise, calm composure; all these are shades of its meaning, without fully matching the term. I follow the standard translation of “Gelassenheit” by “releasement,” which Davis also chose in his translation of the *Feldweg-Gespräche*.<sup>73</sup> Once the three interlocutors have found “releasement” to be a more appropriate term for what is meant by non-willing, their conversation turns to the issue of how to switch from will to releasement. As one of them says: “The transition out of willing into releasement is what seems to me to be the genuine difficulty.”<sup>74</sup> The transition from intentional cognitive thought to a non-intentional awareness of the world and contemplative thinking (“besinnliches Denken”) as a way of thought that corresponds to this mode of being in the world is at the same time an exercise to let go of the will and to cultivate the basic mood of releasement.

A basic attunement or mood cannot be intentionally produced but one can engage in it, let it come to the fore, and remain awake for it.<sup>75</sup> To let oneself be tuned to releasement, one has to learn to wait, without thinking or imagining an expected object.<sup>76</sup> For Heidegger, releasement is nothing else than this kind of un-specific waiting without representing anything. It serves as the entry gate to what he calls the open-region (“Gegnet,” an old German word out of use today but still echoing in the word “Gegend,” area, landscape), the open (“das Offene”) or the free expanse (“freie Weite”) which lets all things be.<sup>77</sup> To be taken into this open region through pure, objectless waiting that is tuned by the mood of releasement turns out to be what was initially sought under the notion of “non-willing.”

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73 Cf. Heidegger 2016, xii–xv, 70.

74 Heidegger 2016, 70.

75 Heidegger 2016, 70.

76 Heidegger 2016, 76.

77 Heidegger 2016, 81–82.



In Heidegger's *Feldweg-Gespräche*, the cultivation of releasement does not aim at the spontaneous emergence of imaginations that figuratively articulate the unconscious psyche vis-à-vis the will-dominated ego-consciousness. The conversations are philosophical meditations that approach the experience of an imageless "healing vastness."<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, there are remarkable similarities to Heidegger in Jung's understanding of overcoming the dominance of intentional ego-consciousness through the practice of active imagination. Like the German philosopher, he refers to Meister Eckhart's releasement and occasionally to Daoism. The abandonment of self-will, as well as the topics of unintentional objectless openness and pure waiting are fundamental to both.

Why they both refer to Daoism and Meister Eckhart, can be partially explained by their shared cultural background. Editions and translations of Daoist texts by Martin Buber, Richard Wilhelm and others, as well as reprints and translations of Meister Eckhart's writings from Medieval to Modern German, were both very much present in Jung's and Heidegger's generation of German speaking intellectuals. This was especially the case for those who supported the widespread criticism of modern Western culture in the style of the Life Reform Movement. Buber, Jung, and Heidegger accused Western modernity of being dominated by an instrumental, means-oriented rationality and driven by the will for power over nature and non-European cultures. Meister Eckhart's writings, the *Daodejing*, and *Zhuangzi* helped them to develop models of a non-coercive, responsive relation to the world, and to develop forms of religiosity that fit to this attitude.<sup>79</sup>

Let us take a closer look at how Jung describes the transition from will to non-intentionality. In his preface to Richard Wilhelm's translation of the Daoist text *Tai Yi Jin Hua Zong Zhi*, published as *Das Geheimnis der Goldenen Blüte* ("The Secret of the Golden Flower") in 1929, Jung writes that the task would actually be very simple. It would consist in nothing else than observing how a fragment of imagination develops by itself. And yet, the difficulties would start right here, because consciousness would always intervene and try to evaluate and manipulate the process.<sup>80</sup> "Apparently one has no fantasy fragments—or yes, there's one, but it's too stupid. Dozens of good reasons are brought against it. One cannot concentrate on it—it is too boring —what would come of it anyway—it is 'nothing but' this or that, and so on."<sup>81</sup> In order for uncontrolled fantasies to unfold, the tight grasp of the conscious mind has to be relaxed. "The art of letting things happen, action through non-action [reference to the Daoist *wuwei*, KB], letting go of oneself

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<sup>78</sup> Heidegger 2016, 133.

<sup>79</sup> Nelson 2014, 2019.

<sup>80</sup> Jung 1953–1983, 13:16.

<sup>81</sup> Jung 1953–1983, 13:16.

as taught by Meister Eckhart [reference to Eckhart's *Gelassenheit*, KB], became for me the key to open the way. *We must be able to let things happen in the psyche.*"<sup>82</sup>

Similar to Heidegger's twofold transition, the attitude required for this has two sides to it: an abstention from intentional cognitive and volitional activities on the one hand, and the awakening of a mood on the other hand. Both can be cultivated through practice. "The training consists first of all in systematic exercises for eliminating critical attention, thus producing a vacuum in consciousness. This encourages the emergence of any fantasies that are lying in readiness."<sup>83</sup> In the *Red Book*, the emptying of consciousness is described as the abandonment of conscious will and mental reflections. "Do you still not know that the path to truth stands open only to those without intention?"<sup>84</sup> And in a later passage it says: "Whoever wants to see will see badly. It was my will that deceived me."<sup>85</sup> The emptying of consciousness can be further complicated by the fear of relinquishing cognitive control and judgment. "I understand, I must not think either, I should give myself completely into your hands – but who are you? I must learn to love you. Should I also set aside self-judgement? I am afraid."<sup>86</sup>

The last quotation already mentions the second element which, according to Jung, is important for the emergence of non-intentional imaginative processes in the waking state. In a seminar on analytical psychology held in 1925, when Jung first described his meditation practice to a circle of twenty-seven listeners, most of them Jungian analysts and writers from Jung's circle of acquaintances, he explains this point:

The mind of a thinking man is directed during the day [. . .], but dreams cannot be kept in this state. By adopting a passive attitude at night and at the same time directing into the unconscious the same current of libido that one directed towards work during the day, dreams can be kept and the activities of the unconscious can be observed. But this cannot be done by simply lying down on a couch and relaxing; it requires the unconditional surrender of the whole libido to the unconscious. I have practiced doing this.<sup>87</sup>

Here again, intentional and non-intentional elements are interwoven. The practitioners of active imagination should purposely adopt a receptive attitude, supported by a relaxed body posture. But this practice should not lead to an aimless drifting in a half-awake state. Full attention has to be given to the unconscious. It

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<sup>82</sup> Jung 1953–1983, 13:17, emphasis in original.

<sup>83</sup> Jung 1953–1983, 8:155.

<sup>84</sup> Jung 2009, 144.

<sup>85</sup> Jung 2009, 202.

<sup>86</sup> Jung 2009, 138. Jung is addressing his "soul" here.

<sup>87</sup> Jung 2012, 35, translation slightly altered by KB.

must be taken as serious as the work to which one dedicates oneself in the waking state. Furthermore, the sphere of the unconscious should not only be given mere attention and concentration, but “unconditional surrender.” What remains to be done in this mood is to wait patiently, which is anything but easy and again requires practice. Not everybody is suited to endure the wait.

Nobody can spare themselves the waiting and most will be unable to bear this torment, but will throw themselves with greed back at men, things, and thoughts, whose slaves they will become from then on. Since then it will have been clearly proved that this man is incapable of enduring beyond things, men, and thoughts, and they will hence become his master and he will become their fool, since he cannot be without them, not until even his soul has become a fruitful field.<sup>88</sup>

Similar to Heidegger, Jung appreciates the ability to wait without expecting anything in particular as a liberating power. In active imagination, the openness into which one is finally let in while waiting calmly allows fantasies to emerge that convey hidden truths about one's own psyche. Like Heidegger's meditative *Feldweggespräche*, this is an exercise to accustom oneself with a certain way of thinking that is different from usual thought. In Jung's case, it is fantasy thinking from which spontaneous imaginations, dreams, myth, and poetry emerge.

Jung emphasizes the creativity of waiting with patience combined with surrender to the unconscious. It makes imaginary figures or landscapes appear before the eye of fantasy. If one then continues to wait patiently and rest one's mind on the content presented with dedication, it eventually begins to change. A story emerges. Active imagination is thus fueled by the creative principle of the libido, which flows to one's own unconscious. Jung calls this an “incubating gaze.” I quote from the *Red Book*:

Thus do not speak and do not show the God, but sit in a solitary place and sing incantations  
In the ancient manner:  
Set the egg before you, the God in his beginning  
And behold it.  
And incubate it with the magical warmth of your gaze.<sup>89</sup>

Jung's ‘magical’ or ‘enchanted warmth’ [“zauberische Wärme”] is derived from the Sanskrit term *tapas* that literally means ‘heat’ and refers to strenuous practices such as fasting, sitting silently in a remote place, or tiring efforts in preparing a sacrifice. In the Vedic writings, *tapas* is practiced to gain paranormal powers

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<sup>88</sup> Jung 2009, 142.

<sup>89</sup> Jung 2009, 298.

(*siddhi-s*) or the protection of the gods.<sup>90</sup> The Vedic idea of self-incubation fascinated Jung. Already in *Psychological Types* he refers to *tapas* as “self-brooding” and interprets it as “withdrawal of the libido from all contents, resulting in a complete introversion.”<sup>91</sup> In this book he also quotes Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 2.2.4, a passage also mentioned in the *Red Book* where the creator god Prajāpati begets the world out of himself by practicing *tapas*. In his 1925 seminar he identifies *tapas* with the surrender to the unconscious in active imagination.<sup>92</sup> The metaphor of brooding again connects intentionality and non-intentionality, active care and receptive letting be.

## 7 Conclusion

In this contribution, the relationship between intentionality and non-intentionality often thematized in path cultures, was discussed by using the example of Jung’s active imagination. It was shown how in Jung’s case the two modes of mind are closely connected. Already in the early stages of the development of active imagination, the opening up to non-intended insights and experiences goes hand in hand with intended behavior and ritualizations. Their interplay must be regarded as path-generating. I assume that this result is generalizable, but, however, should be substantiated by additional case studies and justified by further anthropological and marginal considerations. The post-Jungian formalization of active imagination is partly due to historical circumstances. But beyond that, it is a phenomenon that has counterparts in other path cultures. The tendency towards more structured methods probably has something to do with the mechanisms of tradition formation, which would have to be verified through comparative studies. Finally, the transition from intentionality to non-intentionality was problematized. Jung’s comments on this were compared with Heidegger’s transition from will-determined thinking to releasement. The investigation revealed that abstention exercises and attunement to an appropriate mood fulfil a bridging function in both authors.

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<sup>90</sup> Mallinson and Singleton 2017, iv.

<sup>91</sup> Jung 1953–1983, 6:118.

<sup>92</sup> Jung 2012, 37, see also Jung 1953–1983, 13:25–26. where Jung defines *tapas* as “self-knowledge by means of self-brooding.”

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