

Jung and the Alchemical Imagination

I. Structure and dynamics of psyche and spirit

“Simply put, the psyche consists of the ego that is conscious and the complexes and archetypes that are unconscious.”

“The ego carries the ‘I-ness’ of the personality.”

“When the ego is in touch with any psychic content, that content is conscious. When the ego is not, that content is unconscious.”

“Experientially, the self is an inner and subjective figure or center that feels powerful, numinous, and complete in itself.”

“As the ego is the center of consciousness, the self is the center of the whole personality. The self is also the archetype of wholeness, and as such, carries a sense of the complete personality.”

“Part of the work of individuation is the process of the ego’s making experience conscious and thereby effecting changes in the psyche.”

“The actual union of the conscious and the unconscious is the work of a lifetime.”

“The self prior to this union is the ‘latent self’.
As the process of joining those two parts of the psyche begins to unfold, the self moves increasingly to its own manifestation... the ‘manifest self’.”

Three major attributes of spirit:

- 1) "spontaneous movement and activity";
- 2) "the capacity to spontaneously produce images independently";
- 3) "the sovereign manipulation of these images."

"The contents of the unconscious, including complexes and archetypes, had the capacity to manifest themselves as images."

"Balancing this disorder is the self, the principle of order and harmony... the self is the center of the psyche, around which all the other parts orient themselves. The self brings order to the psyche and harmonizes all aspects of the psyche to create an orchestrated composition. "

"The self is the center of the soul around which the archetypes are grouped in their respective order. The mandala is the symbol for the self when it functions in this manner."

"With the latent self, the complexes and archetypes vie for control of the psyche; the intra-psyche situation is chaotic and difficult."

"The manifest self must be created; it rarely emerges from the latent self spontaneously."

"We can view the *prima materia* as the latent self from which the manifest self is created, or even as the psyche's chaotic state at the beginning of the work."

II. The Transcendent Function

“The process by which the latent self transforms into the manifest self...is based upon the union of opposites.”

“One of the characteristics of the self is its ability to incorporate the duality of the opposites.”

“The transcendent function is the psychological mechanism that unites the opposites and helps bring the self to manifestation. As a whole, the psyche includes the conscious mind (with the ego at its center) and the unconscious. To effect a union of opposites, the contents of the unconscious must be joined with the ego so as to create a third possibility.”

III. Active Imagination

“As a first step in engaging the transcendent function, the ego turns to the unconscious with an open and receptive attitude.”

“For the transcendent function to operate successfully, the two opposites must be differentiated and have sufficient tension between them. The ego needs to be fully awake, and aware, and capable of holding its position while interacting with the unconscious image.”

“The ego, having focused its attention on the unconscious, must give up all critical thinking and simply open to whatever the unconscious presents. In this state of receptivity, it must wait for the unconscious to manifest.”

“Just being with the image is not sufficient; the ego must derive meaning from the experience.”

“Although the ego has made room for the unconscious to manifest, and has devoted sufficient attention to the manifestation to discern its meaning, it now must respond to the message from the unconscious. It is essential that this response be genuine and that it accurately reflects the ego’s understanding and feeling. For the transcendent function to work neither one of the oppositional pair can dominate or eliminate the other.”

“The ego must not simply engage in an intellectual conversation with the unconscious, but must try to bring as much real affect to the discussion as it can.”

“Every time the ego contacts an image from the unconscious and engages it in meaningful dialogue, it can trigger the transcendent function. Every time it does so... it has strengthened and transformed the self.”

“Should the transcendent function create a third position, it may be experienced in two ways: sequential (there is a time for busy work, and a time for quiet reflection); and simultaneous (while at work, it remains conscious of the still, small voice within).”

“As the third position is created through the operation of the transcendent function, a new state of consciousness also comes into being. The ego’s sense of itself has altered and its consciousness rests in the newly emerged self.”

“Active imagination is, of course, far more than a technique; it can become a way of life.”

“The ideal form of active imagination is a dialogue or interchange between an inner figure and the ego.”

“An inner figure is a personification of a particular content of the unconscious.”

“According to Jung’s definition, spirit refers to the autonomous power to create and manipulate images. Every active imagination, then, is a direct experience of the spiritual power of the psyche.”

“The ego must develop the means of protecting itself from the destructive influence of the archetype until the self becomes strong enough to harmonize these archetypal emanations.”

IV. Psyche and Psychoid

“In the psychoid experience, the image and encounter with it take on a reality that transcends the psyche.”

“There may be two types of inner figures. The first originates in the inner, unconscious world and personifies archetypes and complexes... The other derives from the psychoid world, from an imaginal world that is real unto itself and that transcends the psychic world of human beings.”

V. The Practice of Active Imagination

There are seven main stages of active imagination:

1. **preparing the mind** to enter the imaginal space;
2. **the ego invites the unconscious** to communicate with it;
3. begins when the **unconscious comes alive** in some way;
4. **Interaction** - the ego responds, the shuttling back and forth;
5. **reflection** - the ego thinks carefully about the experiences it has had; the ego does not give up its position;
6. **resolution** - the original intent or question is resolved some way;
7. **integration** - practicing, living with the new understanding.

“Alchemy is concerned with the self and with its creation, and its symbols depict the experience of active imagination and the transcendent function.”