

ACTIVE IMAGINATION AND IMAGINATIVE ACTIVITY

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Active imagination is a term used by Jung to describe the procedure whereby the images of the archetypes can be formed by bringing the ego into relation with the "inner world" of archetypes. He calls it (1947, p. 412) ". . . the task of elaborating or developing . . ." fantasy by giving "free rein" to it.

The concept of *Auseinandersetzung* is allied to this conception, for the ego is conceived as meeting the "unconscious" and as a result an inner drama is developed. Active imagination, says Kirsch (1955, p. 324), is ". . . a sequence of images actively produced or incubated by the ego". This idea is evident in the work which has clearly been put into the pictures published by numerous analytical psychologists, they could never be mistaken for the spontaneous fantasy products.

The term active imagination has, however, always tended to have a wider application, indeed in his paper Kirsch uses it to cover the production of a story in which the ego is not meeting the images nor interacting consciously with them. He recognizes that this is not (p. 324) ". . . active imagination in the strictest sense of the word . . ." but is not deterred from using it. He claims (p. 324) that "an '*Auseinandersetzung*' takes place within this intense concentration on the inner process. This concentration is characterized by a keen perception of the images as well as the thoughts which arise in her [the patient], accompanied by a warm affectionate participation of the conscious ego."

Yet if the term is used too loosely it only leads to confusion. This occurs, for instance, if it be applied to the play and fantasy of a child, as Zueblin (1955) does in his recent paper, "Die aktive Imagination in der Kinder-Psychotherapie".

In childhood the archetypal images are indeed active, and children play and dream in them, they "swim" in them and, even if they seemingly "confront" them, this is not a true *Auseinandersetzung*. They fear them, attack them, and enjoy their activity, so that it is easy to assume when watching children playing that this is the same process as Jung described.

Those who have practised active imagination in its classical sense will at once realize, however, that there is an essential difference. The play of

children is altogether more plastic; its emphasis is upon the *imaginative activity* and little, if any, on the active induction of the imagination by the ego.

For these reasons it is better to say that children experience *imaginative activity*, whilst only adults to whom individuation is an issue induce active imagination.

By making this distinction the terminology is kept definite enough to avoid danger of it being thought that painting pictures or modelling objects *ipso facto* means a manifestation of the individuation process. Zueblin appears to make this assumption, which I have contested elsewhere (Fordham, 1955, *et al.*), when he says (1955, p. 317): "This story patently represents a process of individuation." Painting pictures, fantasizing, etc., may just as well be imaginative activity as active imagination, the distinction depending upon the activity of the ego. In favourable circumstances imaginative activity leads to growth of the ego, active imagination to consciousness of the self. Therefore each form of imagination leads to different conclusions and to different treatment of the material.

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