
Mundus Imaginalis

Module 5: Amplification, Part 1

Course created by Tasha Tollman & Anja van Kralingen



The Lens of Mythology

From Jung's point of view, the method of associations is not the only way to work with active imagination and he first introduced the idea of amplification in an essay in a collection edited by Freud in 1908, where he stated that he did not want the process of interpretation to proceed "entirely subjectively."

In 1935, he talked about the need to find "the fabric in which the word or the image is incorporated" (Jung, 1968, p. 84). Here he makes the claim that the amplification follows a kind of natural "logic".

In 1947, Jung tells us that the value of amplification

"lies in the fact that it can allow us to reach, by inference, the archetypal structures of the unconscious mind that, by definition, are unrepresentable in themselves, and must be distinguished by their appearance in culture, and that, therefore, they can only be evaluated using techniques, such as amplification." (Jung, 1947).

Amplification then, is a method of associations based on the comparative study of mythology, religion and fairy tales, used in the interpretation of images in active imagination. This amplificatory process takes us in a different direction from personal associations and it is through using amplification that we are able to discover connections to universal cultural themes.

Returning to the active imagination we used as an example in Module 4, the swan/druid priestess, let's take a look then at what insights amplification might bring. Turning to the world of literature we might notice the similarity between the Swan looking down into the lake and then noticing the other swans as the final scene in the story of The Ugly Duckling by Hans Christiaan Anderson. We then ask ourselves, does this story resonate or hold relevance for this active imagination? Interestingly then, we discover here that the person who conducted this active imagination is an INFJ in Jung's typology and that The Ugly Duckling is a central story in this typology who often feel as if they don't belong and have difficulty finding community. This active imagination then points the way towards

community, firstly the community of swans and then the movement towards the druid priestess and the community we see on the banks of the river. We might then ask ourselves, “What type of community is then represented by the swans? What type of community is represented by the Druids or Celts?” In Celtic mythology, the ceremonial cloak, the Tunga, is used because of the swan’s association with love, the power of words and the power of music. Here we discover the realms within which the person may find community.

Amplification opens us to the great teachings that are alive and active in the active imagination images.

In the same way that myths express something meaningful about life, the dreaming and imaginative psyche is generating something of our own personal mythology, informing us about our lives, our wounds, our complexes, our values, our beliefs and so on. Jung tells us:

“Myth is the natural and indispensable intermediate stage between unconscious and conscious cognition. True, the unconscious knows more than consciousness cognition; but it is knowledge of a special sort, knowledge in eternity, usually without reference to the here and now, nor coached in language of the intellect. Only when we let its statements amplify themselves, [...] does it come within the range of our understanding; only then does a new aspect become perceptible to us.”
(*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p.353.)

A single active imagination image, amplified through literature and mythology, can offer us tremendous insight into our life. These stories tell us about the perils of our situation, the potential positive outcomes, the strategic teachings, and the collective wisdom of generations past.

To understand the dynamics behind amplification, we need to take a look at Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious.

The Collective Unconscious

The collective unconscious, sometimes referred to as the “objective psyche”, refers to the idea that a segment of our deepest unconscious mind is genetically inherited and is not shaped by personal experience. According to Jung's teachings, the collective unconscious is common to all human beings and is responsible for a number of deep-seated beliefs and instincts, such as spirituality, sexual behaviour, and instincts.

According to Jung, the collective unconscious is made up of a collection of knowledge and imagery that every person is born with and that is shared by all human beings due to our ancestral experience. Jung believed that the collective unconscious is expressed through universal concepts called archetypes. Archetypes are patterns of thinking and behaving that are inherited from our ancestors. These mythological images or cultural symbols are not static or fixed; instead, many different archetypes may overlap or combine at any given time.

Some examples of archetypes that Jung proposed include birth, death, rebirth, power, the child, the mother, the father, the hero.

Jung considered the mother archetype to be the most important. He thought the archetype not only manifested in literal form of personal mother, grandmother, stepmother, mother-in-law, or nurse but also in the figurative form of mothers, including:

- A garden
- A plowed field
- A spring or a well
- Country
- The church
- The earth
- The Mother of God
- The sea
- The woods

Jung believed that the mother archetype could contain either positive aspects, such as motherly love and warmth, or negative aspects such as the devouring mother or goddess of fate.

Archetypes, then, are inherited, inborn potentials; patterns of thought and emotions which provide us with a set of tools, skills, capabilities, lessons, opportunities and potential for this lifetime. They form the foundation upon which each individual builds his own experience of life, colouring them with his unique culture, personality and life events. Since they are unconscious, they cannot be known or experienced in themselves and can only be known indirectly through examining their effects, their manifestations in images and symbols and by examining behaviour, images, art, stories, myths, dreams and active imagination.

Jung was convinced that the similarity and universality of world religions pointed to religion as a manifestation of the collective unconscious. Similarly, morals, ethics and concepts of fairness or right and wrong could be explained in the same way, with the collective unconscious as partially responsible.

Amplifying the Active Imagination Images

To perform this step, go back to the beginning and deal with each image, one at a time.

Amplifying Active Imagination Characters

Jung discovered that whether known or unknown, people in the active imagination represent some aspect of our personality, projections of some aspect of the archetypal nature of our psyche. Think of each person in the active imagination as an autonomous personality that lives within your psyche. How would you describe the character of the person/people that appeared in the active imagination? What kind of person is this, what are their main characteristics, what does the person want and mean to you? Here, turning

to archetypes helps us to see which aspect of our inner world is coming to the fore in the active imagination.

Common archetypal figures that appear in active imagination include:

- **The persona.** The word persona comes from the large carved masks worn by Greek actors as they performed before audiences, and means “to sound through”. These masks, besides identifying the characters in the play, served as primitive megaphones to carry the voice of the actors to the top benches of the amphitheatre. In the same way our persona facilitates communication between ourselves and the world, serving as a bridge between our ego and the external world. The persona is our public personality, the face we show the world. The persona is the mask through which we get to know each other and interact with each other. The persona is a compromise between what society expects of us and our own inner personal identity. Most of us are inclined today to identify ourselves with our inner world or at the very least with our private selves. The persona is seen as a necessary evil, a mask that needs to be worn for the world out there. And it is this negativity towards the persona as being somehow less than one hundred percent authentic that casts it in a poor light. It is the persona that is the true carrier of our essential being into the world. It is through the persona that the world comes to know us, not through our inner life. In active imagination, dreams, myths and stories, the persona is often symbolised by what we are wearing, our clothing, uniform, animal skins or other covering or by our own skin, our nakedness.

- **The ego** is the centre of consciousness; it is the bearer of our personality, our concept of ourselves. It distinguishes us from others and gives us our sense of identity, our “I”. The Ego stands at the junction between our inner and outer worlds, performing the function of perceiving meaning and assessing value. The ego provides a sense of consistency and direction in our conscious lives and plays an important part in the development of a healthy psyche—for without the ego there is no driver of the psyche. In active imagination, dreams, myths and stories the ego is often symbolised by the Hero.

- **The shadow** represents unknown or little-known characteristics of the ego. The shadow is the inferior being in us all. It wants to do all the things that we do not allow ourselves to do, or that we don’t want to be. It is our uncivilised desires and emotions,

our dark side, those aspects of ourselves that exist but which we do not acknowledge or with which we do not identify. It is the unconscious aspect of our personality, usually hidden and repressed. It is all we are ashamed of, such as egotism, laziness, lustfulness, selfishness, greed, envy, anger, rage. Whatever we see as evil, inferior or unacceptable and deny within ourselves becomes part of our shadow. It is in our active imaginations and dreams that we encounter many unsavoury aspects of life and shadowy characters that in waking life we may shy away from. We learn from depth psychology that all of these dynamics being acted out in our dreams are aspects of ourselves. In our imaginative state the conscious censor is sidestepped and we see directly into the unconscious. Once we learn to interpret and understand our active imagination, we gain a direct line of sight onto our shadows. In active imagination, dreams, myths and stories, the shadow is often symbolised by an inferior figure—tramp, beggar, servant, drug addict, pervert, thief, gypsy, prostitute or by anything dark and threatening such as a zombie.

- **The anima/animus.** Jung thought that the psyche was inherently an androgynous entity regardless of the physical gender, containing and embracing both the feminine and masculine. In a woman, her contra sexuality is masculine and governs her rational thinking function and we call this the Animus. In a man his contra sexuality is feminine and governs his irrational feeling function and we call this the Anima. In active imagination, dreams, myths and stories, the anima is often symbolised by a person of the opposite sex to the dreamer; a woman, a sister or by a cow, a cat, a tiger, a cave, a ship. In addition to a person of the opposite sex, the animus would be symbolised by an eagle, a bull, a lion.

Looking to the characters in your active imagination, you may then discover an aspect of the persona or shadow or anima or animus at play in your life. You can then ask yourself, “Where do I see that same trait in my personality? What part of me is it that feels like that, thinks like that, behaves like that? Where have I seen it functioning in my life lately? Where have I seen this character at work in my life lately?”

Amplify the Characters in your Active Imagination

Looking to the characters in the active imagination, we discover the Druid Priestess. Mythologically the swan represents the soul and amongst the Druids is associated with the pagan goddess Brigid, who represents the triple aspects of maiden, mother, crone. As maiden she rules over poetry, writing, inspiration and music. As mother she rules over healing. As crone she rules over fire which is transformation.

Application

Amplify the characters in your active imagination.

Looking to the characters in your active imagination, can you identify the aspect of the persona or shadow or anima or animus at play in your life?

Ask yourself, “Where do I see that same trait in my personality? What part of me is it that feels like that, thinks like that, behaves like that? Where have I seen it functioning in my life lately? Where have I seen this characteristic at work in my life, lately?”

RECOMMENDED READING

Man and His Symbols conceived and edited by Carl Jung

Tracking the Gods – The Place of Myth in Modern Life by James Hollis

Mythologems – Incarnations of the Invisible World by James Hollis

The Mother – Archetypal Image in Fairy Tales by Sibylle Birkhauser-Oeri