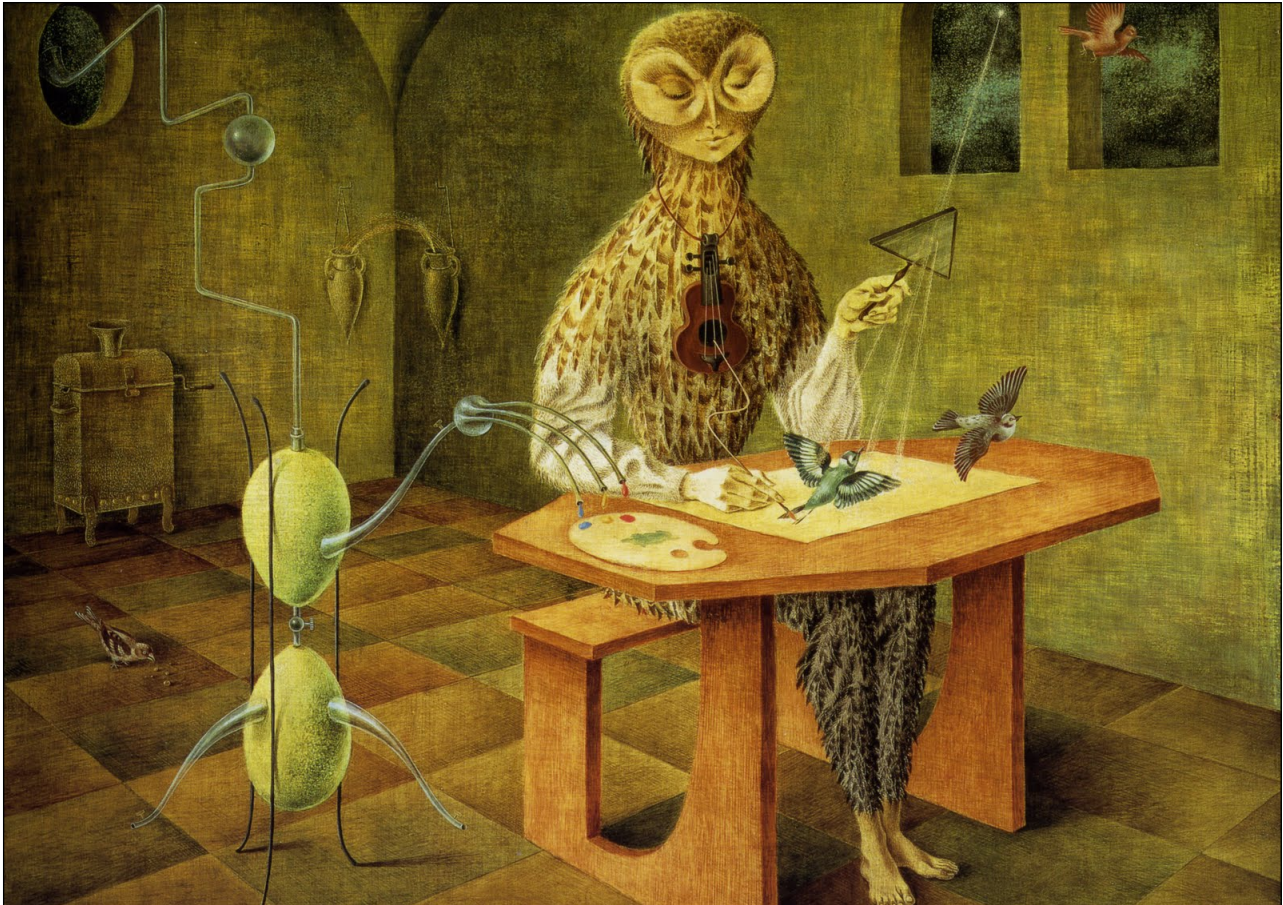

Mundus Imaginalis

Module 8: Actualisation

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Incarnation

Following in the footsteps of Jung, a number of Jungian authors have proposed an outline of the stages of active imagination. The first to do so was Marie-Louise von Franz a close colleague of Jung. She proposed—empty the mind of the ego, let the unconscious fantasy image arise, give it some form of expression, conduct an ethical confrontation and apply it to ordinary life.

Janet Dallett and Robert Johnson built on von Franz's work and both authors give equal importance to the last stage of active imagination as being living it. Robert Johnson speaks of incarnating active imagination—giving it a physical quality.

*"...to bring it off the abstract rarefied level and connect it to your physical earthbound life."
(p. 196)*

This requires a physical act—a ritual—that will affirm the message received in active imagination. At its best, Johnson says,

"ritual is a series of physical acts that expresses in condensed form one's relationship to the inner world of the unconscious" (p. 103)

But anything that "keeps and honors the process"—making an apology, putting flowers on a grave—may be enough.

From these authors we learn that the specific images and message received from the active imagination bring with them an energy that contains transformative potential. But understanding the images, understanding the message of the active imagination, while bringing insight, will not necessarily bring about transformation. To transform we need to turn our insights into action, bringing the messages out of the realm of imagination into the world. We need to live them.

A word of warning at this point! The images, symbols and meaning that have come up from the unconscious are an expression, an appearance, standing for something unknown but real and so should not be taken literally. Don't use the active imagination as a license to act out the fantasies in a literal way, or to destructively confront other

people or take inappropriate action such as breaking up relationships or performing destructive acts like getting drunk or taking drugs. Remember, the conscious self—the ego—still needs to be in control, to be in charge. What we are seeking to do is to take the essence of what has been distilled, the meaning, the insights and turn this potential into transformation, to integrate into our lives. Doing a physical act takes our understanding of the active imagination off the purely abstract level and gives it an immediate, concrete reality. To do this we turn to the meaning and insights we have gleaned from the active imagination and look towards performing either a practical act or using symbols and rituals.

Performing a Practical Act

Often the active imagination will show us where, how and what corrective action we need to take. Demonstrating the need for practical action could include taking control of our finances, becoming more security conscious, finding a more balanced lifestyle such as eating less junk food or exercising more, making amends to someone, or grieving over a loss.

Looking to the meaning and messages from the active imagination, for example, perhaps we discovered that we are being ruled by work and need balance in our lives—relaxation, fun, exercise, etc. Then the action would be to choose one of these activities, decide how much time we wish to spend on this activity and schedule time in the day or week for this activity.

Using and Creating Symbols

Sometimes there may be no practical act that you can do following your active imagination. In these cases, you can bring your active imagination into the real world by performing a symbolic or ritual act such as painting a picture of the dream image, making a pottery piece that represents the dream, finding a symbol of the dream and keeping it in an appropriate place or by writing a letter to someone who you are angry with and burning it afterwards.

Creating Ritual Acts and Ceremonies

Studies show the need for ritual is a basic human instinct, and even the smallest rituals can be extremely effective in changing thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Ritual as an act or series of acts, are carriers of meaning. They serve as a bridge between our outer and inner worlds, between the profane and the sacred, and between the ordinary and the extraordinary.

Ceremonies are simply rituals to which, through our culture or religion, we've attached a certain feeling of significance. We ritualise the things we value—our beliefs, priorities, and the aspects of life/work that we feel are most important. Births, baptisms, rites of passage, marriages, deaths, mourning, all contain rituals. But creating personal rituals not only reinforces the significance of our values, but also helps to strengthen our convictions and commitment to change. Creating personal rituals invites a deeper sense of connection, intentionality and purpose into our lives.

In an often overwhelming and confusing world, creating your own rituals and ceremonies can help elevate daily routines into something comforting and sacred. The power of rituals lies in their ability to tap into your subconscious. By bringing awareness to your senses as you perform a sequence of activities, you create a connection between body and mind that builds over time. In performing the ritual or ceremonial act, the individual is able to enter into or move into another field of existence.

Let's take a look at some examples of rituals:

Marie Kondo's morning ritual, "I wake up naturally around 6 or 6:30 a.m. I rarely use an alarm clock. After waking up, I open all of the windows, let the breeze in, and then burn incense. At home we have a Japanese-style kamidana [Shinto household altar]. On the shelf there is some salt, some rice, and some evergreen fronds, and I'll give this a once-over, freshening things up. Then I'll pray for the health of my family and friends, and also for myself to get done as much as possible what needs to be done."

Gratitude rituals—There are an array of gratitude rituals. The one I particularly like is choosing a beautiful rock and placing it in a visible spot within your home or office. Whenever you see the rock, touch it, pause to think about at least one thing you

are grateful for. Whether it's something as small as the sun shining down on you in this moment or as large as the job that allows you to feed yourself or your family, just think of one thing that brings you joy or fulfilment.

Japan's ceremonial tea drinking, known as *chadō*, is a beautiful practice rooted in Zen Buddhism. Tea ceremonies are still an important part of Japanese culture today—and the ceremony still involves a lot more than putting on a pot of water to boil. It's a carefully choreographed ceremony of preparing and sharing a bowl of finely powdered green tea called *matcha*, served with traditional Japanese sweets to harmonise the tea's bitter taste. Fully engaged in the ceremony, the tea master and his or her guests temporarily withdraw from the mundane world to share a moment of beauty and serenity.

In Japan, perhaps no daily habit is as sacred as soaking in a steaming bath at the end of a long day. The Japanese bathe daily, whether in their own private bathroom, a public bathhouse or a communal hot spring. They don't just plunge in—the tradition of Japanese *ofuro* is carefully crafted to cleanse, heal and relax. Settling into a cradle of soothing warm water and simply experiencing the sensations of the bath—the water, steam, heat and fragrances—brings both the body and mind into a profound state of well-being.

At this stage of the active imagination process, look to the messages received and put in place a ritual that helps you to honour the message. For example, perhaps the active imagination indicated that you are a workaholic and that you need to bring about balance between work and life. You could then honour this message by looking to end your workday with a ritual that helps you transition between work and leisure. Here you look for inspiration in the world of rituals and ceremonies to help you with this transition. Perhaps performing the Japanese tea ceremony at the end of your day is a way of marking this transition, helping you to enter into and move into another field of existence. Or you might want to end your day with a walking meditation, providing you with the space to clear the mind and reflect, or an opportunity to take a break from the hustle of bustle and reconnect with yourself.

Applications

Choose an appropriate practical or ritual act to incarnate and honour the message from your Active Imagination.

Conclusion

We have come to the end of our Active Imagination Course and feel honoured to have joined you on this journey on how to work with and interpret your Active Imagination. We trust you found this course meaningful and transformative and hope that you join us on our next course, The Sacred Marriage, which focuses on the Anima and Animus.