

# **Imagining Research**

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## Abstract

Creating connections between analytical psychology and other disciplines requires imagining a research paradigm that draws on a Jungian as well as traditional scholarly perspectives. This paper uses stories and images to explore elements of research such as knowing and not-knowing. Active imagination, amplification, and immersion can be incorporated in any research strategy to take a more wholistic approach to inquiry. Instead of our methodology becoming a means of bracketing parts of ourselves, it becomes a way of inviting the participation of inner resources represented by archetypal images. In the exploration of such images, regardless of our methodology, we can bring more depth to our research and more joy to the experience of inquiry.

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The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.  
(Albert Einstein, p.24)

## **Introduction**

I started imagining research out of necessity when I could not find a methodology for my dissertation on the medial woman's encounters with archetypal images. I found ideas in hermeneutics, phenomenology (van Manen, 1990), heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990), and transpersonal psychology (Braud and Anderson, 1998). However, none of these gave me an actual procedure. Since my topic involved archetypal images, I turned to Jungian theory. Although Jungian thought has not had a well-developed tradition of scholarly inquiry (Barnaby, 1990), I did find two powerful tools, active imagination (Jung, 1997 and Chodorow, 1997) and amplification (Jung, 1966).

Although active imagination has not been widely employed as a tool of scholarly inquiry, I thought I could develop a methodology in a recursive fashion by applying active imagination to images of research. During the many months that I spent on this process, I also discovered that the internet provided a way of immersing myself in an image and its associations that went beyond the conception of amplification as described by Jung.

Eventually I did complete my dissertation but found that I had gotten hooked on this idea of imagining or reimagining research, using the methodology that I've come to think of as autohermeneutics. As part of my analytical process I unraveled some of the underlying structural patterns of research such as knowing and not-knowing, voice, procedure, discovery, creation, and revelation. Much of my work consisted of looking for

images, stories and music associated with these patterns. For example, research can be imagined as a rite of passage. An essential first step in such a ritual is severance or separation (Mahdi, Foster, and Little; 1987). In research, this might be seen as a psychological severance from the consciousness of the old identity to allow a new researcher, transformed by the inquiry, to emerge.

Not knowing when the Dawn will come,  
I open every Door  
(Emily Dickinson, 1976, p.666)

### **Not-Knowing**

Of all the elements of inquiry the one that I have found most fascinating is not-knowing and it is on this that I have focused most of my research. I believe that the cultivation of not-knowing is the key to the development of essential research skills such as data collection without filters or preconceptions and analysis that allows the patterns in the data to emerge free of predefined expectations and categories.

The most powerful image of not-knowing that I have discovered is the story of Inanna's Descent to the Underworld a myth that may be familiar from Sylvia Perera's book (1981). In this story, the Sumerian Goddess, Inanna decided to visit her sister, the Queen of the Underworld. As she passed through each gate, Inanna was forced to surrender an article of her attire, her crown, her jewels, her girdle, and her robe – until she entered the Underworld naked and powerless. I have worked with this story quite a bit and I have come to imagine Inanna in a cap and gown and full academic regalia. At each gate she has to relinquish her mortarboard, her class ring, her hood, and her gown. However, for a scholar to make the descent into the Underworld, even more precious things must be surrendered – theories, assumptions, definitions, methods,

attitudes, hopes, and fears and all else that shields us from the direct experience of the inquiry.

As Hélène Cixous (1993) has pointed out, the descent to not-knowing is hard work. In fact, meeting resistance is an indication that you are headed in the right direction and it is only by shedding the accoutrements of knowledge that you can move through this resistance in the direction of the unknown. Disciplines such as meditation and yoga can be helpful in the practice in descending to deeper levels of inquiry. The imagination can also be a powerful agent in the practice of not-knowing. By activating the imagination, even the most highly educated scholar can surrender to the experience of not-knowing.

Another story now, from the Irish tradition, is one that I associate more with the element of knowing.

### *The Salmon of Knowledge*

*This is a story about the great Irish hero, Finn Mac Cumhail.*

*Although destined to be a warrior, like all Irish princes, it was important that he also know poetry. So Finn was sent to Finegas, a poet who lived on the banks of the Boyne River, Finegas taught the boy many things. As well as poetry, he introduced Finn to the magic of music. He showed him how to make riddles and how to solve them.*

*Now, the Boyne River was the home of the Salmon of Knowledge. The salmon was a great fish who had acquired his wisdom from feeding on the nine magic hazelnut trees that grew beside the sea. Not only was the salmon wise and wily, but he had hypnotic eyes that would mesmerize*

*anyone who gazed into them. Although the prophecies said that he was not the one destined to eat the fish, for seven years Finegas tried to catch the salmon and thought about nothing but how he could ensnare him. For it was known that whoever was the first to eat the salmon would become the wisest man in Ireland.*

*One day Finegas and Finn were sitting at their lessons by the river. Suddenly Finegas saw the great salmon swimming by and ran as fast as he could to find a net to catch him. He tried for several hours to catch the fish, but it wasn't till night was falling before Finegas finally snared him in his net. Even then, it was many hours of battle before he could finally drag the salmon onto the shore.*

*Finegas was almost beside himself with anticipation. He built a fire and waited until it was burning hotly. Then he placed the fish very carefully on a spit over the fire. Once one side was cooked to perfection, he turned the salmon over. However, he was worried that he would run out of wood and went to fetch some more. He told Finn to watch the fish and make sure that it did not burn. As the fish was almost cooked, it started to develop a blister from the heat of the fire. Finn was alarmed and without thinking, he pressed the blister down with his thumb and then put his thumb in his mouth to ease the pain.*

*When Finegas returned, he saw immediately what had happened and was quite distraught. However, he recognized that it was the destiny of Finn to acquire the wisdom of the Salmon of Knowledge.*

*From that day on, whenever Finn needed to know what was taking place at a distance or what was about to happen, he simply had to put his thumb in his mouth.*

This story has wonderful images of inquiry, including the fishing for data and reeling it in. Then the data is set to cook to yield its conclusions. However, the narrative becomes subversive when, instead of the researcher, the young student, who is burned by the inquiry, acquires the knowledge. The story also raises questions about who is at risk from the researcher's gaze. What I like about this story is that it presents an image of being passionate about an inquiry and reminds us that knowing involves the body. When Finn wants to know something, he doesn't consult his head, but his body.

### **Inquiry and Individuation**

Phenomenology has a procedure for not-knowing that phenomenologists call "bracketing." I was very struck by this word in a quite different sense as a characteristic of the positivist research paradigm that seeks to exclude non-rational parts of the self from inquiry. This seemed to be the exact opposite of the individuation process that aims to integrate the Self and I began to wonder if it was possible to include feelings, sensations, intuitions, dreams, and especially imagination in my methodology. As I began to delve into this dilemma of whether research could be a path to individuation, I discovered that the real question was not how to do the research, but rather who should do the research.

In a positivist model, it is the ego that is expected to control and carry out the research. I found that by imagining personifications of the basic patterns of research and inviting them to participate in the inquiry, the process – whatever the methodology – could take on an integrating dynamic. The figures that first came to imagination were

obvious – Athene, the Goddess of Wisdom and Hermes, the Guide of Souls. I also found my particular guide and companion in the Fire Goddess, who appears in many cultures in guises such as Hestia, Sarasvatī, and Brigit. I found other images in the tarot, particularly the Fool and the Lovers. Several images such as the Silent Woman and the personification of Voice were suggested by *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule; 1986). One image I even found in a murder mystery, Tony Hillerman's, *Listening Woman* (1987). The personifications that have been my guides to not-knowing are the Silent Woman and the Fool.

### **The Silent Woman**

The silent women in *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule; 1986), are women who have no voice or have had silence imposed upon them. In contrast, the Silent Woman whom I have encountered as my guide into the unknown depths of inquiry is a woman who embraces silence as the most profound way of knowing. For her, there is no lack in silence, but a transcendent clarity and fullness. It was more difficult to find her, however, in either the interior or exterior landscapes, than the other patterns that often dominate women's experience of silence. *Man and His Symbols* has an image of a Navajo girl meditating in the desert (Jung, 1964, p. 74). In a poem by Gertrude Crumb Harman (1905), Silence is personified as a goddess who gives strength, solace, and serenity. The most compelling image I have found of the Silent Woman is a sculpture in the San Francisco Asian Art Museum (1994) of Brahamini, the female aspect of Brahma the Creator. The Brahamini is seated in lotus position with her hands extended in a mudra. She is depicted, as the Goddess often is, with three heads and, although the sculpture, which dates to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, is damaged, each face radiates a profound silence.

Other artists have tried to actually represent aspects of silence itself. Some of these representations use landscapes to evoke silence, while others are fractal or entirely abstract. The striking thing about all these images is the amount of energy they contain. In the words of Sister Wendy Beckett, “Silence is a paradox, intensely there and, with equal intensity, not there” (1995, p. 24). This paradox of silence is perhaps best expressed by music that evokes silence such as Miles Davis (2002), “In a Silent Way.” It is, after all, silence that creates music. “Music is not merely a rhythmic arrangement of notes, but derives its life from the matrix of silence out of which it arises and into which it inevitable flows” (Steindl-Rast and Lebell, 2002, p. 115). If research is imagined as a musical composition, it is not-knowing that creates the rhythm.

Although to me the paradox of speaking about silence sometimes seems insurmountable, there are authors who have explored the experience in eloquent language. Prominent among these is Sister Wendy Beckett, herself the paradox of a silent woman who is a media figure. Silence is described as a way of knowing in her *Meditations on Silence*. “The capacity for silence – a deep, creative awareness of one’s inner truth – is what distinguishes us as human” (1995, p. 8). Thomas Merton (2001) has referred to silence as traveling to a place where we have already arrived. Nor Hall has observed that it is the Silent Woman who creates the rhythm of our lives. “The periods...of silence that punctuate the journey are her contributions to the cadence of becoming” (1980, p. 66).

The primary role of the Silent Woman in my research is to guide me out to places that represent a deeper level of insight into my inquiry. In my imagination, she is usually walking away from me. She is often in an enclosed space such as a courtyard or garden

and one way that I give form to the image is through a walking meditation in such a space. However, even when she is seated, she is always turned away, expecting me to follow.

It is she who stays with the inquiry when I am overwhelmed, confused, or impatient. She is unconcerned when an interviewee lapses into silence, seeing this as a natural part of the process. She abides serenely through the periods during data interpretation, so frustrating to me, when it seems that nothing is happening. She moves naturally with the ebbs and flows that form the natural rhythm of the inquiry. Since she has no attachment to the outcome, she is content to let it unfold in its own way without fear or desire.

*In order to arrive at what you do not know  
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance,  
(T. S. Eliot, 1963)*

### **The Fool**

The other personification that has been a companion and guide in my research is a figure from the Tarot – the Fool. The traditional image of this character (for example, Albano, 1996) is a young man dressed in motley, carrying a bundle tied to a stick. He walks heedlessly along the edge of a precipice, his gaze directed upwards. He seems equally oblivious to the small dog nipping at his posterior. He is an image of not-knowing - open to every possibility, trusting, spontaneous and creative. Since he does not know, he experiences life in the here and now and responds to it as it is without theories or analysis, open to change and learning. Since he is unaware of them, he is not affected by social expectations. He is not a hero and does not have the illusion that

he can control the world. He does not overcome obstacles but rather leaps into the unknown (Newman, 1983).

There are hundreds of images of the Fool in various tarot decks. He can sometimes be seen in historical figures such as Saint Francis of Assisi, Mozart, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. He can also be seen as Goofy, Inspector Clouseau, Forest Gump and innumerable other representations on film. In literature, he is a favorite figure in the stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer (1957) and Shakespeare, of course, is famous for his fools. Several contemporary Tarot decks (for example, Nendil, 2002) represent the Fool as Harry Potter about to set off for his first year at Hogwart's. However, my favorite representation of the Fool in literature is *Candide* (1984/1759) in Voltaire's funny and tragic work that can also be read as an allegory of inquiry.

The Fool has been portrayed in music by Gustav Holst (1998) and David Schiff (1992). The most famous song about him is perhaps the Beatles' (Lennon and McCartney, 2002) "The Fool on the Hill." Elvis Presley recorded *The Fool Album* (1994) when he was forty. It is, however, the young Elvis with his spontaneity and fearlessness that evokes the spirit of the Fool for me. I have found that doing an impression of Elvis performing one of his goofier songs as an especially evocative way of giving physical form to my experience of this archetypal image.

It was somewhat of a reversal to try to evoke my inner Fool. Since I usually try to avoid encounters with him because they can be so ridiculous, embarrassing, or even politically incorrect. While he sometimes takes the form of a clown, a jester, or a klutz; he usually appears as a goofy anthropologist, complete with pith helmet.

One of his roles in an inquiry is to ask questions that are motivated by his own curiosity rather than by external expectations. Like Sherlock Holmes, he does not recognize the concept of an unresearchable question. Conversations with the Fool are an important element of my research ethics. He knows nothing of ethics and is disdainful of political and legal agendas that often animate the comments of research ethics review boards. He does, however, respect arguments that come from my most heartfelt ethical values.

The Fool is also quite helpful in data collection. Although he is foolish and quite ignorant, in some respects he is a better researcher than I am – more open to sensory experience and more approachable. He has no preconceived expectations and people tell him things that they would never tell me. However, he has little patience for interpreting data, leaping to conclusions that occasionally show a flash of insight.

The primary role of the Fool in my research is to enjoy research – to actually experience it with all its wonder and delight. Like Candide, he is never discouraged by horrible setbacks. He does not envision fame, riches, degrees, or publication. So he can stay in the moment, cultivating the experience of the inquiry.

### **Towards the Center**

Because his card is numbered 0, the Fool presents a conundrum. Many commentators place him at the beginning of the deck, while others locate him at the end. Other authors, such as Angeles Arrien (1997), have observed that the number zero is a circle, that the Tarot is actually a wheel, and that the Fool's place is in the center. Jean Bolen has pointed out that silence is also a way of connecting with one's spiritual center (1999). At the center, knowing and not-knowing are indistinguishable.

Research is often modeled as a linear process. However, my experience is that it actually follows a movement that can be more closely represented by a circle that symbolizes the movement between the whole and the parts, subject and object, intuition and cognition, as well as knowing and not-knowing. You can imagine this movement between the center and the periphery as creating a mandala that reveals the elegant complexity of the totality of the inquiry. At any point in the research, you can move to the center of the mandala, to the place of not-knowing. You can let go of what you know to observe a research setting with a beginner's mind, to be fully present in an interview, or to leap to a new depth of data interpretation.

### **Conclusion**

For me, imagining research started as a way of developing a methodology. I found that this exploration through my imagination brought me to a greater depth of understanding of the process of inquiry. It also led to my research becoming more rigorous as well as freer and more joyful. And now, research has become a way to integrate archetypal energies, a path to individuation.

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