

THE VALUE AND WAY OF RESEARCHING
PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE INDIVIDUATION PROCESS

Running Head: Research, Individual, Individuation

David Johnston

ABSTRACT

In this paper I discuss methodology to research individual involvement in the individuation process. First, I delineate my basic assumptions as a “bracketing of being.” Next I discuss various research methodologies, all which seem to be appropriate. These include research as a qualitative phenomenological study, as a hermeneutic study, as a dramatic aesthetic study, as a religious way of knowing, as an ethical study and as a depth psychological study. Acknowledging these various research methodologies as integral to my research are in keeping with the subject matter and the nature of the depth psychological perspective. Only the quantitative method seems inappropriate in the proposed research, although I indicate where it could be of value in the study of depth psychology.

THE VALUE AND WAY OF RESEARCHING PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE INDIVIDUATION PROCESS

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to examine the nature of research methodology, specifically related to writing about depth psychology and the individuation process while using oneself as the research subject. There are several ways of knowing and the choice of research method(s) should reflect, I believe, the most meaningful way(s) to both explicate the subject matter and allow for phenomenological interaction with it, possibly to the point of enhancing self-knowledge and a personal process of transformation. Awareness of the strengths and limitations of different approaches to research, that is their subjective bias, potentially encourages the creative release of knowledge.

Epoché or Bracketing of Being

Life is a mystery and individuation is the mysterious unfolding of the Self, which is one's wholeness and unique destiny over space and time. Individuation, that is to say, is an individual life form's intrinsic urge to seek and realize self-definition however fully or partially it succeeds in any one given expression of life, human or otherwise. It is a natural process of nature (Jung, as reported in Jacoby, 1974). The individuation process, on the other hand, is a conscious and self-reflective involvement with life, potentially leading to a profound personal transformation of being. Jung, (as reported in Adler, 1975) accordingly, makes a clear distinction between individuation *per se* and the individuation process.

I am writing this preamble in order to help determine the parameters for a methodology concerning research on an individual's involvement in the individuation process, essentially as based on one's own lived experience. I

also feel the need to further clarify some basic assumptions and briefly indicate the nature of one's personal experience with individuation. This exercise allows me to do what phenomenologists call the epoché or "bracketing of being (Brooke, 1991, p. 33)." This helps define and recommend (an) approach(es) to depth psychological research, especially regarding the individuation process.

My theoretical assumptions are based on my understanding and experience with the writings of C. G. Jung, in particular in relationship to the individuation process. This means that I relate to Jung, the depth phenomenologist, and not whom Brookes (1991) refers to as the Cartesian Jung. The individuation process is, firstly, a psychological endeavor that paradoxically both demands an acceptance of one's nature and is a work against nature, something in the way of the kingly salmon swimming upstream in order to spawn. As Jung (as reported in Jacoby, 1974) insists, individuation or the coming-to-be of the Self, which involves differentiation of collective qualities of being, needs to be differentiated from individualism, which has to do with an inflated ego.

Secondly, and most importantly, the individuation process is teleologically or intentionally directed by the Self for its fulfillment over space and time, with the Self being defined as both wholeness and the centre of the unconscious, indeed the centre of the psyche itself. What individuates is both the ego, or perhaps better said, the ego complex and the psyche, what Brooke (1991, p. 85) refers to as the "lived-world." What generates individuation is the Self. In Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's terms, the true individual, the psychic being, a formation of the incarnated soul comes forward, while there is a transformation in the mental, vital (life) and physical natures, potentially at different levels of spiritual realization (Pandit, M. P., 1966).

The psyche consists of a kind of paradoxical, psychological hierarchy through which one moves as a result of a spiritualization process. By way of amplification (Jung, as reported in Brooke, 1991) or “free imaginative variation (Husserl, as reported in Brooke, 1991 p. 40),” Jung (1970) describes a symbolic hierarchy of the anima or soul from Eve, virgin nature and mother of all living, through Helen of Troy, courtesan and wife, Mary, mediatrix to the Word, and Sophia, the mind of God, or Wisdom. Likewise in Indian Yoga Philosophy, there is a clear distinction made between Prakriti or lower, apparently mechanical nature and Paraprakriti, or higher nature (Sri Aurobindo, 1971). In the individuation process this “upward” movement involves a deepening and spiritualization of one’s connection to the psyche. This process consists of both a descent and ascent of consciousness.

There is, in other words, a transformative process that potentially both moves one up a hierarchy of being, and yet deepens one’s connectedness at all levels of being. In this sense, the psyche or “lived-world” can be described paradoxically as neither democratic nor hierarchical, or both. While the teleological goal of the psyche is the unfolding of the Self, it is fulfilled through the syzygy, that is to say the inner marriage of the male and female principles of Eros and Logos, connectedness and differentiation, and the realization of meaning along with consciousness-life. This implies relating, to some degree, to a structure of consciousness that is experienced as both centered in unity and open to plurality or multiplicity, an integral consciousness with a transparent presence. The research method(s) need(s) to reflect this.

Jung has been an extraordinary source of inspiration and guidance for me. Now, after many years of experiential involvement with his teachings, my

accumulated personal understanding of the individuation process, I believe, gives own voice credibility. My understanding is phenomenological in the full sense of the word, as it has grown directly out of my own experience of life and the individuation process. Nonetheless, when studying the psyche, inasmuch as we are part of the created world, there is no Archimedean point outside of it. We are the psyche or, at least, contained in the psyche, and a differentiation of the psyche, and there is no way around it. Yet, inasmuch as the psyche is objective and the opposites can be reconciled by access to what Jung (1964) refers to as the transcendent function, which unites both conscious and unconscious factors, there is potentially a place to stand, at least for a kind of relative objectivity. Indeed, what is remarkable for me is that, in essence, the individuation process, as described by Jung in his voluminous writings, fits perfectly my own experience. In contrast to many post-modern Jungians, who seem to believe that they have gone beyond him in some way or other, (Samuels, 1985) I rather see my own experience and understanding as being simply a confirmation of Jung's central thesis on the individuation process, although in keeping with his assertions, a unique one.

Research Method(s)

Given this background, I now examine my research methodology. Before doing that, however, some further clarifications are in order. My research subject is myself and my experience of the individuation process. The final outcome, be it an essay, a book or a dissertation, as I conceive it, is part of a more or less long process that involves other forms of self-reflection, including the examination of my dreams and art and/or other forms of an active meditative process. Active imagination and dreams, particularly those of an archetypal nature, serve the purpose of putting one in touch with a metaphorical way of thinking and a

symbolic reality, even, following Jung (as reported in Brooke, 1991, p. 59), what can be called a “symbolic life.”

Active imagination is a form of active meditation or dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious propagated in contemporary times by C. G. Jung, which can take a variety of forms e.g. art, writing, dance. In my own case, painting and working in clay has been a vehicle for active imagination of inestimable value. It often allows me to realize a direct connection between my inner life and my lived expression in the world. I see, often through my art, what can be called archetypal or mythological images behind both my inner experiences, that is my dreams and my actions. Intense involvement with the images themselves through dream work, the act of painting and clay modeling, then, has a transformative effect on the psyche.

The purpose of such research, then, is to amplify one’s experiences or “vary freely” on it in a variety of ways that ties them into the general experience of the individuation process, as described by Jung and others. The potential value of such an exercise is augmented understanding of the individuation process *per se*. It also enhances one’s own process of transformation and quest for self-knowledge. Others interested in the individuation process may also find it to be of value.

As a Case Study of One

First and foremost, then, the type of research that I am describing is a case study of one, the researcher him/herself, which, as Kvale (1986) has shown, can be a valid form of qualitative research. Although one may come out of a depth psychological tradition, specifically, in my case, that pioneered by C. G. Jung,

the field of study is life itself rather than the therapy room. As an examination of the individuation process, it is less a study of pathology *per se*, although that, too, is there, and more a study of a psyche consciously involved in its own self-unfolding. As a case study, the principal type of data is dream and image, particularly from active imagination, as well as life itself as myth. The strength of this method lies in its potential for intense in-depth probing of a life, specifically one involved in the process of individuation, and the discovery of existential meaning for that life. What remains in question is the wider validity of such a study.

As a Qualitative-Phenomenological Study

If this research method is, firstly, a case study of one, it is profoundly qualitative, with pure phenomenological data that comes out of direct experience in life -- my own. However, it is a phenomenology where experience is deepened beyond the merely personal and subjective to the objective and archetypal (Hillman, 1983) including the archetype of the Self. This means that the phenomenological data in question is by and large concerning my personal relation to the psyche or "lived world," particularly its relationship to the archetype of the Self and its transformative effect.

The principal advantage of this approach to research is that it is based on authentic experiential truth and psychological presence however subjective. Since it is consciously related to what Jung (as reported in Brooke, 1991) calls the objective psyche, it should resonate with the experience of other people as well. As phenomenological research, it is profoundly descriptive. Since, however, only one person is actually involved in this study, what remains in shadow is the wider relevance and validity for others. Indeed, from a strictly

phenomenological perspective, there is such a danger of solipsism that Georgi (1985) considers a single subject self-study invalid.

As a Hermeneutic Study

If the research is primarily a qualitative case study, it mostly reveals itself to the reader by way of the interweaving of a theoretical hermeneutic. In my own case, the data from this angle, generally follows a golden thread through the writings of Jung and his disciples, some post-modern Jungians, including, even especially Hillman, Gnosticism, alchemy, mythology, psychology, spirituality and other texts, especially those that relate to the evolution of consciousness. The purpose for this kind of hermeneutics is twofold: to broaden the cultural context of psyche as “lived-world” to pre- and post- Enlightenment and to bring validity to the phenomenological experience. Such a study connects the psyche to its spiritual and cultural history and gives it roots in a deep matrix of being. What remains concealed is repeatability.

As a Dramatic Aesthetic Study

This research can also be grounded solidly on the dramatic method and the aesthetic perspective. As it is about the individuation process and the unfolding of the Self over space and time it is about the drama of the individuating Self. In this sense, it requires non-judgmental openness to life experience and is, therefore, of an aesthetic nature. Inasmuch as the final product is about painting or other forms of artistic expression, even other forms of active imagination, it is also, at least in part, an aesthetic study. In my own case, as art has played such an important role in my individuation and self-reflective process, the research is even fundamentally aesthetic. As my personal relationship to my art has involved becoming conscious of the symbolic dimensions of my life, the subject

matter, the individuation process, based on my lived experience is oriented aesthetically. The strength of this approach is its openness to the mystery of an individuating life. What remain hidden are clarity and explicitness as well as ethical deliberation.

As a Religious Way of Knowing

The self-reflective process points to another way of knowing that is intrinsic to this approach to researching depth psychology. By that I mean the need for a contemplative attitude, while still being fully engaged in life. Not only does it ideally include a considerable amount of time spent in solitude, but it also involves reflection upon both inner and outer events and synchronicities, or meaningful coincidences. As the word “religious” is etymologically based on the Greek word relegere, which means careful observance (Gebser, 1986), such a way of knowing can be called religious. The strength of this approach is increase in awareness and meaning. What remains concealed is positivistic certitude.

As an Ethical Study

An aesthetic approach to life and research always demands an ethical response. Without an aesthetic approach to life and research, there is risk that life is cramped and repressed. Without ethical consideration and judgment, there is risk of life being just a stream of un-reflected events. The value of research having an ethical perspective is that ethical deliberation and judgment is brought to bear on one’s research and implications determined for the conduct of life and the development of character. This, as Jung (1974) observes, is absolutely essential for conscious individuation.

As a Depth Psychological Study

In essence, the research method that I am proposing here is more than anything depth psychological, in the sense of the term employed by one of Jung's disciples, Joseph Henderson (1984). Based on Jung's comments, a depth psychological weltanschauung or worldview includes many different worldviews, such as the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious, and the philosophical, etc. This attitude to research is also in keeping with Jean Gebser's (1989) suggestion that the new integral consciousness is both a "transparent presence (p. 102)" and a-categorical, and requires a presentation he refers to as integral synairesis based on synaireo, "to synthesize, collect," with "everything being seized or grasped on all sides" (p. 312). This research approach, accordingly, includes several methods applied in an integral fashion, which is required for the subject in question by its very nature.

On the Quantitative

There is one approach that is missing here and that is the quantitative. The very subject matter discounts this research method, whatever may be its validity and reliability from a so-called objective scientific point of view. The research under discussion is about the mystery of life, and specifically the mystery of the individuation process, the prospective teleology of the Self and life in conscious evolution. The quantitative approach, with its demands for certitude, clarity, exactness and solutions to problems, and repeatability is reductive and only capable of measuring mechanistic nature. It is, moreover, based on the assumption of a Cartesian split between mind and matter, instinct and spirit, and inner and outer, which contrasts sharply from the basic assumption of this study, which is that there is a whole person dynamically engaged in the world. To

apply its statistical method to the individuation process would therefore produce fallacious results.

I make these observations notwithstanding the fact that there may well be a valid place for objective scientific research with respect to the observation of selected archetypal patterns of behavior, the transformation of shadow and animus/anima figures over time as well as MRI, CAT SCAN and other brain research on transforming brain dynamics over time as a result of conscious involvement in the individuation process. Comparative studies of self-reflective and consciously individuating individuals on different archetypal patterns in their dreams, visions and life would be a fertile field for research.

The Question of Repeatability

The question of repeatability and the valid application of this research to other lives can only remain concealed in this study. What is required are many such studies, which will, I propose, eventually reveal underlying similarities, despite all differences and the uniqueness of individual lives involved in the individuation process. The reason for this is the archetypal or universal nature of existence. What will give this kind of research eventual external validity is the subjective confession of many different self-reflective people, especially those who have taken a holistic scientific attitude to their inner and outer lives.

In this essay I discuss an approach to researching depth psychology, especially the nature of the individuation process. As this paper unfolded, it became clear that my suggested research method is psychological, in Joseph Henderson's use of the term, which embraces several different approaches. The reason for

this is that it is intrinsically interwoven in a piece with my life, which can partake of these different perspectives. The quantitative method is not only unsuitable for this type of study, but there is a danger of it producing superficial and distorted results. To satisfy requirements for repeatability, several studies of this type, that is subjective confessions of people consciously involved in the individuation process, are necessary. This will allow for both exposition of the unique quality of each life of individuation as well as essential underlying similarities.

REFERENCES

- Adler, Gerhard, editor (1975). C.G. Jung: Letters. 2 volumes, volume II. Translation from the German by RFC Hull. Bollingen Series XCV. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Aurobindo, Sri (1971). Centenary Library, popular edition, 30 volumes, volume 20. The Synthesis of Yoga. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- Brooke, Roger (1991). Jung and Phenomenology. New York: Routledge.
- Gebser, Jean (1989). the ever present origin. Authorized translation by Noel Barstad and Algis Mickenus. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Georgi, A (1985). "The phenomenological psychology of learning and the verbal learning tradition." In A. Georgi (Ed). Phenomenology and psychological research. (pp 23-85). Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Henderson, Joseph (1984). Cultural attitudes in psychological perspective. Toronto: Inner City Books.
- Hillman, James (1983). Archetypal Psychology: A Brief Account. Dallas: Spring Publications, Inc.
- Jacobi, Jolande (1974). C.G. Jung: Psychological reflections: A new anthology of his writings. RFC Hull (collaborator). Bollingen Series XXXI. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jung, C. G. (1970). The Practice of Psychotherapy. Translated by RFC Hull, second edition. Bollingen Series XX. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jung, C. G. (1964). "A psychological view of conscience." In civilization in transition, (p. 437-455). Bollingen Series XX. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jung, C. G. (1974). Psychological types. A revision by RFC Hull of the translation by H. G. Baynes, second edition. Bollingen Series XX. Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Kvale, Steiner (1988). "Psychoanalytic therapy as qualitative research." Qualitative research in psychology. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press. p. 155-177.
- Pandit, M. P. compiler (1966). Dictionary of Sri Aurobindo's yoga. Pondicherry: Dipti Publications.
- Samuels, Andrew (1985). Jung and the post jungians. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.