



The Fully Objectified Catathymic Imagery Method (FOCI): Assessing the Amorphian Inner at Work

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Abstract

The present manuscript proposes an extension of the psychoanalytical method catathymic imagery (also guided affective imagery) based upon Boeschian Cultural Psychology for the organizational domain. Employees need to appropriate their job-related environment in a meaningful way. However, this endeavor is often more complex than it seems. Regularly, employees introject foreign goals and needs within their Self and appropriate their job-related action field in a foreign manner. This leads to repressed personal needs and goals which is called the amorphian inner in Boeschian Cultural Psychology. Yet, this amorphian inner is often a vague feeling or a shadowy intuition, and employees have a hard time to structure it, accordingly. It is in this regard that I propose the FOCI method—the fully objectified catathymic imagery. Here, practitioner and psychologist negotiate the meaning of a painting for instance while being able to rely on visual and acoustic stimuli for that negotiation—in contrast to catathymic imagery where the acoustic focus is pre-dominant. I instance the FOCI method by an autoethnography and show how the method could help people to make a shadowy intuition structured and differentiated which encourages them afterwards to re-appropriate their job-related environment in a personally meaningful way. Questions remain whether FOCI outperforms simple catathymic imagery.

Keywords Amorphian inner · Action field · Boeschian Cultural Psychology · Catathymic imagery · FOCI · Psychoanalytical organizational psychology

General Human Psychology and Organizational Psychology Under the Umbrella of the Quantitative Imperative

Organizational psychology is not different from General Human Psychology when it comes to theoretical underpinnings and methodological design: Both rely on the quantitative imperative (Michell, 2003, 2005) accumulating large data while trying to test specific hypotheses over particular populations (Berry & Houston, 1993; Miner, 1992).

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The consequence is that mainstream psychology focuses on groups (more exactly means) rather than on individuals creating meaning in various situations (Toomela, 2009, 2021). Yet all actions undertaken by organizational psychology (and psychologists) work directly on individuals. Thus, the individual and its creative potential are out of sight in the discourses of organizational psychologists, but they constitute the location of successes and failures of organizational actions.

Attentive readers of these beginning paragraphs would stand up now and argue that organizational psychology—and General Human Psychology—is no longer quantitative as it was but is now penetrated with qualitative research taking a positive stance towards the individual (Brinkmann, 2015). I will not deny this critique as qualitative research took into account a certain increase over the last two decades.¹ However, if we take a closer look at the construction of qualitative studies, we cannot ignore that they starkly overlap with the ones of quantitative studies. Consequently, the focus is on reliable interview schedules—mostly standardized interviews—that do not deny any deviation from pre-defined questions and clarifications (Howitt & Cramer, 2007). Qualitative researchers hope in this regard to translate the psychometric holy grail into their scientific endeavor (Valsiner, 2017). Hence, many qualitative researchers focus upon categories and themes and how often they have been raised by a particular group (Howitt & Cramer, 2007).

Thus, there is no negotiation of meaning between researcher and participant that is inherently important in order to know how meaning emerges in a particular situation (Valsiner et al., 2005). Again, the individual is lost out of sight. Meaning making only plays a minor role in such a scientific inquiry (Valsiner, 2014, 2019). Over the last years, cultural psychologists tried to initiate a turn towards studying the emergence of meaning, individually and culturally (Bendassolli & Gondim, 2019) for organizational psychology. The focus is on the negotiation of meaning in a particular environmental context (conflict, misunderstanding, unfinished business, and so forth). The present paper enqueues itself in this tradition while trying to show how hidden organizational phenomena can be operationalized and transformed on the basis of creative methodology which focuses on the individual.²

Constraints at Work: Employees Hiding Behind a Multitude of Masks

We know that workers (or employees) are constrained by a multitude of job-related demands over the course of their day (Dionne & Jornet, 2018). They need to get the work done, for example, for a specific project. They need to work together with people they might not like. They need to respect their leader even if they are not convinced their leader deserves such respect. They need to be friendly and open to the customer even if those customers are impolite and provocative. They need to smile even if they are more in the mood of crying. They need to act even if they are way too tired to stand up. This enumeration is only a small extract of given problems employees are facing every day. We can also imagine larger conflicts that overshadow an employee's everyday occurrence—bullying at the workplace, for example (Einarsen, 1999). The consequence

¹ For an overview how for example leadership took into account qualitative studies in the past decades, I want to refer to Bryman (2004, 2011).

² I want to mention briefly this tradition that has gained popularity over the last years. Guenther's allegorical analysis (2020) or Valsiner et al.'s (2021) Pre-construction method is one of some popular examples of cultural psychologists who try to develop methods doing justice to the emergence and negotiation of meaning.

is that the majority of workers represses their thoughts and feelings because they need to get their act together. Thus, all too often we hide behind a mask at the workplace that we are not likely to take off in order to face our genuine thoughts and feelings (Perls, 2002; Schneider, 2019; Schneider & Krug, 2010). This results in us not dealing with what we need and how we feel if those needs remain unmet (May, 1981, 1991, 2007). We are so busy in hiding our genuine thoughts and feelings that we forget dwelling into their true nature (Polster & Polster, 1973). Consequently, we do not ask ourselves why we hide, why we take on a specific mask and not another one, why we are not likely to take that mask off, and how we feel over the course of this process. Hence, we repress our true needs and feelings because we incorporated dominating needs and goals of our enterprise (or leader). In this process, we distance ourselves from exploring what we truly need in our organization in order to work effectively as well as how we want to satisfy those needs—e.g., by which trajectories. It is in this regard that we create unfinished business growing bigger and bigger insight ourselves (Perls et al., 2000).

The Amorphian Inner and its Characteristics

Cultural psychology has a promising concept for this unfinished business that operates between past and future and that can be made fertile for the general organizational inquiry. This concept goes back to the Swiss psychologist Ernst E. Boesch (1991, 1998, 2005) and is called the *amorphian inner*. But before we look closer at this particular concept, we need to define first of all Bosch's symbolic action theory. For Boesch, culture is constituted by overlying needs and goals that develop in symbiosis involving person and culture (1991, 2006). A specific cultural group constrains the individual in pursuing several goals as well as how to reach them (Boesch, 1971). Yet, the individual is not forced to adopt or introject those goals within his Self, causally. He might ignore or resist them. Or he is willing to re-negotiate specific needs and goals that he thinks are more central to himself (Boesch, 2002). Hence, the individual is creating his very own action potential in the midst of cultural constraints (Boesch, 1991). The cultural setting confronts him with specific myths (narrations) how to accomplish goals and how to overcome obstacles and hindrances (hero narratives) but it is up to the individual to appropriate that cultural setting individually or personally (Stern, 2020) with his personal fantasems (needs, wants, wishes and so forth). Personal and collective culture are thus indispensably intertwined with each other (Boesch, 2021), and it is only possible to look at the person transforming cultural texts in a personally meaningful way (Lotman, 1990). This in turn enlarges his action potential and creates I-world-balances for the person (Boesch, 1998, 2005, 2021). The outer gets transformed by the personal inner and is made compatible with the deepest needs and goals of the person. Hence, the world is experienced coherent and harmonious (Boesch, 1998) from a personological viewpoint.

It is here that the amorphian inner comes into play. If the individual experiences severe I-world-disbalances and cannot transform the outer in harmony with his inner core regions, the individual is left in a state of experiencing the world foreign and threatening (Boesch, 2005). In Boesch's words (1998):

The construction of the moral subject [within a cultural setting] requires adopting specific rules. However, those rules are often in contradiction to our very own action tendencies. This in turn means personal sacrifice and creates ambivalence – that all too often lead into contradictory actions. Sacrifices – psychoanalysis has taught us

– leave traces within us. Weaker or stronger we are confronted with unfinished business, the unfulfilled, even latent action tendencies. Those un-lived alternatives of past or present actions promote dissatisfaction and longings – often quite unclear as tensions, resentments or personal unrest. But sometimes they compress in an uncontrollable anger, in a confused amorousness, in aggressive or panic dreams, in alcoholic catharsis or in the simple sentence of ‘What do I care?’ which shows the longing for a meaningful life without getting aware about the details of such life. (p. 135, author’s translation³)

Thus, the amorphian inner operates between past, present, and future—including action alternatives that are always present for the individual deciding which way to go or reflecting about past decisions. This leaves the individual in an ambivalent and tense state that requires him to develop a personal stance towards his decisions. Wearing a mask at work and hiding one’s true thoughts and feelings means a sacrifice of being honest and flowing with one’s needs and emotions—which is a healthy characteristic of a mindfulness-centered life (Fischer, 2003, 2010, 2015). It means a sacrifice of personal truth, of pressing needs that are over-shadowed by foreign needs that are interpreted as more central. Thus, foreign should-values are incorporated within the Self to the disadvantage of one’s very own personal should-values—fantasms how the world should be transformed in a personally meaningful way. The consequence is denying one’s very own action potential for the sake of the generalized other’s action potential. As a consequence, the amorphian inner starts to grow and wants to be expressed by the individual. Again, let us hear Boesch (1998):

I do not want to equate the amorphian inner with the Id of psychoanalysis neither with the collective unconscious or the archetypes of Jung. It should not be an inner tropic, but only a latent experiential potential. Besides unsocial impulses it incorporates the unfulfilled and the unfulfillable, besides the repressed the missed opportunities, besides the ignored the obscure anticipation of something. But because it does not get the opportunity to be structured by actions and to become differentiated, it remains more or less amorph. This in turn builds up its immediate impact because it can manifest itself everywhere and anyhow: silent, almost unnoticed for example in the way how it leads our empathy, slowly and powerfully it penetrates us in a creative fight with ourselves or exploding in a dark anger. But importantly, it is always dangerous because it threatens accommodated action tendencies – usual and successful structures of our everyday occurrence and sometimes our very own identity. (pp. 135-136)

This is the reason why art is so compelling for us as human beings. It is no wonder that all too often we are confronted with an artistic oeuvre and begin to feel emotions that are shaking our entire being (Peterson, 2002). Crying in front of a painting, feeling amazed in front of a forest during autumn, and feeling aroused by the fresh breeze of the summer in front of an intensely green meadow, we start to wonder about this amorphian inner that is only hard to grasp. And we are completely overcome by these thoughts and feelings—it is as if we were transformed by getting a glimpse into something unknown, invisible that is only tangible in a few seconds of the day (Boesch, 2005, 2021). Describing these feelings as awe or wonder

³ All quotes are translated by the author. It is important to bear in mind that Boesch had a unique scientific writing style that I tried to do justice to during my translation. That’s the reason why I preferred to translate several sentences literally, sometimes rejecting English syntax conventions. This is done on purpose.

(Schneider & Krug, 2010) is not enough because it introduces an irreversible transformation of our Selves (Boesch, 2005)—a peak experience that unites the unknown with the known, the hero with the anti-hero, the explored with the un-explored and we start to feel whole (Boesch, 1998; Vygotsky, 1976). This is the power of creating I-world-balances—and be it only by watching a particular painting. It is in these moments that we do drop our masks and that we allow ourselves to be (May, 1991). It is a revolutionary thought to incorporate theories and methods within the organizational sector that helps us to live more genuinely and to confront the amorphian inner in order to do something with it.

This leads exactly to the next paragraph: The question arises how the amorphian inner can be met, sustainably. Boesch has also an answer for this problem.

Where the amorphian inner is really confronting us, we will try to give it structure (...). Such projective structuring ensures two things: it enables the inner to get a concrete, tangible outer form – it objectifies it and it equates parts of the outer world with the inner fantasems and action tendencies. If this structuring is accomplished in a culturally appropriate manner – be it for example in art or in humor, in a joint picture of the enemy – we are decreasing the contradiction with our amorphian inner to the norms of the group and are thus increasing our I-world-congruence as well as the I-Self-congruence, thus the harmony with ourselves. We are experiencing that as a success which increases our action potential. Such digestions happen creatively but also protectively. We experience the outer as a concrete symbol of our inner, the amorphian detached from our self, the inner threatening as foreign; because it became an object, it is now easier to grasp and to structure. (1998, pp. 136-137)

Operationalizing the Amorphian Inner

It is therapeutically evidenced that the threatening loses its threatening characteristics if it becomes verbalized or tangible (Jung, 2014). We are now able to look at an object—and be it only a thought as object—and can tackle the nature of the problem or conflict from a multitude of perspectives (Bachtin, 2021). We have given the thought a form through speech (in dialogue), for example. And now that the thought is out there in the world, we can approach it from different angles. Moreover, this is the basic advantage of objectification—it becomes visible for the social other and can become an entrance point for dialogue that helps us to adopt a new perspective onto the *Gegenstand*. Now intertextuality comes into being—we can unite or synthesize a new perspective from a multitude of perspectives that have been given to us by and through dialogue (Bachtin, 2008, 2010). Polyphonic synthesis transforms the meaning of an object and gains new semantic qualities (Bachtin, 2008, 2010). This is what Boesch meant by structure—as an object in the outer world is never the single oeuvre of one person but a product of creative cooperation by a multitude of persons with different perspectives based on their needs and goals (Boesch, 1998, 2005).

Now, I am convinced that we can translate those positive therapeutic effects into the domain of organizational psychology by means of confronting the amorphian inner of a particular worker or leader. But before, I want to present a new method on how to confront the amorphian inner from a cultural psychological perspective; I'd like to show the reader already existing methods that try to operationalize the amorphian inner. I then compare this pre-existing method with my methodological proposition and instance my methodology by a single-case analysis.

Catathymic Imagery as a Psychoanalytical Tool to Operationalize the Amorphian Inner

Catathymic imagery by Leuner is a prominent tool to objectify the amorphian inner by a fantasmatic journey (1989, 2012)—which is mostly applied in psychoanalytic therapy. In other words, catathymic imagery is guided daydreaming in which a therapist and patient explore unknown territory, jointly (Leuner & Wilke, 2005). It is called guided because the therapist or practitioner helps the participant to freely associate based on affective stimuli explored during the fantasmatic journey (Leuner, 1970). The guided imagery is a thus an emotional confrontation with repressed territory of the Self (Leuner, 1989). The stimuli encountered during the fantasmatic journey are always in a stark relation to pressing needs and goals of the individual. They are thus in stark accordance with a future action potential that wants to be established by the participant.

The goals of catathymic imagery are three-fold (Leuner et al., 2017). First, it can help participants to deal with stress. Here, they can learn to deal with a stressor, adaptively insofar as they realize that the stressor per se is not as threatening as imagined. Hence, participants can learn during their fantasmatic journey to tolerate a potential stressor. While learning to tolerate that stressor, they experience the non-threatening characteristics of the stressor. A crowd that is usually perceived in an anxious way can be encountered in a different manner. During guided imagery, client and practitioner might shed light onto other characteristics of an unknown crowd—such as making friends with a foreigner or getting a date with a potential partner. It is in and through dialogue based on catathymic imagery that not only the stressor loses some of its threatening characteristics, but the stressor can be also re-evaluated and made fertile for the personal action potential of the individual as shown in the abovementioned example (Leuner, 1970).

This brings us directly to the second aim of catathymic imagery—that is, getting stimulation for the re-appraisal of conflicts and misunderstandings in inter- and intrapersonal settings (Leuner, 1989). Thus, catathymic imagery is a creative tool to trigger the re-structuring of one's very own perspective towards a conflict. In relationships, it is quite common that one partner gets angry because the social other gets too late from work. Thus, he or she confronts the partner with some accusations of neglecting the other. During catathymic imagery, the participant can appropriate another perspective onto the conflict such as an appreciating one. In our example, the participant might realize that one's partner is only getting late from work because she/he does additional hours in order to pay the joint vacations. Getting late from work is thus not the neglectation of oneself but quite the opposite—an appreciative symbolic gesture that operates between past and future of the relationship.

But catathymic imagery can go beyond those two functions and incorporate an additional one. The third aim of katathym imagery is to trigger personal growth within the participant (Leuner & Wilke, 2005). Over the course of catathymic imagery, the participant might explore his repressed or forgotten needs and goals that are central for his specific I-world-balance. To remain within our example, the participant might get aware of his strong need of personal appreciation and recognition. Thus, the participant might ask himself whether his specific need of appreciation and recognition is valid or a consequence of some earlier disappointments. Consequently, the participant can develop a personal stance towards the explored repressed needs and goals—that is, either re-structuring the importance of exactly that need (intrapersonal resource) or ask for more frequent recognition by the social other in the future (interpersonal resource).

Here, we become rapidly aware of the underlying premises of this third function of catathymic imagery—that is, to stimulate the development of one’s very own personality. I am aware that the abovementioned is valid mostly for the therapeutic setting—and there are not many authors that have tried to expand catathymic imagery onto the business sector or organizational psychology. This is surely a huge gap within research as creative methods are still rare but mostly needed within organizational psychology (Bendassolli & Gondim, 2019).

However, coming back to the general nature of catathymic imagery, it is based on three major phases—which are relaxation, journey, and return (Leuner, 1970). It is within the return phase that the practitioner enters into dialogue with the participant. He does so by asking open questions about the journey such as *How did you like the journey? What did you see? What did you feel? What was comfortable for you and what not? Was there something that is connected to your current life situation?* Importantly, the practitioner is a phenomenological guide during the return phase. He does not try to superimpose his meaning making onto the participant. Hence, he needs to be shy in over-interpreting specific events and incidents that the participant encountered during the journey (Jacobs, 2012). It is in this regard that the experiential qualities of the participant remain at the foreground and are not shifted to the background by an overactive practitioner trying to make sense of the visualization. Significantly, the practitioner guides the participant to find additional facets of meaning—triggered during the visualization. It is not upon him to find that meaning for the participant. Meaning needs to be discovered by oneself because only then can it be appropriated and connected to pressing needs and goals (Marrow, 1957, 1969). An I-world-balance cannot be done for another person. The person needs to construct that balance for himself/herself. This is called the phenomenological imperative (von Fircks, 2021a, b, 2022c)—thus a concentration on the meaning for the participant. This does not mean that the practitioner incorporates a passive role in that process but that he is only a mediative figure trying to facilitate the journey for the participant (von Fircks, 2022d). Fixing the participant in a foreign meaning pattern is incarcerating the participant in a cage of a foreign experience that is not in accordance with his true and genuine experience.

Catathymic Imagery: An Autoethnographic Example and its Analysis from a Cultural Psychological Perspective

Let’s illuminate catathymic imagery within a practical example. This is an autoethnographic example, thus an example from my own experience. Here, I do rely on the journey towards my safe place. After that journey, I try to connect it to my current work situation: Let’s dive into my catathymic imagery:

I am in France. In the south of France. I am at a tennis court. It is an open tennis court. Everybody can come and go. The sun is shining. It is hot but not too hot. There are meadows next to me. I hear birds singing. Every now and then a car passes by. Silence. Beauty. I am alone on the tennis court. I practice my service. I need to improve my service. I can take my time. I can try out some things. Nobody is watching me. I feel secure. I feel at ease. I feel enthused. I am sweating but not too much. I do not feel tired but neither inert. I am wearing my favorite tennis dress – something my sister offered me. A tractor passes by. I take something to drink. I watch around. Nobody’s here but I do not feel alone. I look at the sky. Almost no clouds. And I feel connected to the world.

If I compare the journey to my safe place with my current working situation, discrepancies become immediately obvious. Interestingly, I work as a tennis trainer, and I decided to quit my job and to work for another enterprise. But before beginning to work at my new job, I still need to complete my old job. I still got two months to do for my old boss. Thus, I cannot come and go as I wish. I have a responsibility to take on for my old boss as well as for my current clients. I am not as free as in my catathymic imagery. Moreover, as it is winter, I do not work outside. The tennis courts are indoors, and I only get scarcely sunshine. Often, it is quite cold in the gymnasium. I need to wear two or more sweaters. A cold atmosphere. However, while training my clients, I can also train myself and concentrate on skills that I want to improve. But I cannot choose my clients. My boss decided who I am going to train. I do not have any right in defining my training hours or its composition. I often feel tired. I do not sweat. I do feel that I could do a more meaningful job. Moreover, my boss is angry at me because I decided to leave him. He is personally offended and ignored me most of the time. The atmosphere gets even colder.

During the comparison, it becomes apparent that my current work situation creates an I-world-disbalance that I can hardly change. Pressing needs and goals are not part of my daily working at my current position. For example, I do not feel connected to my world—which becomes evident by not being able to enjoy the season's characteristics (sunshine, fresh breeze). Indoors I am not connected to my surroundings—that is, to nature. Moreover, I do not feel connected to my clients as I was not really able to choose them for myself. As a consequence, I have issues in establishing a relationship towards them. This is also mirrored by the fact that I perceive the work as not active. On the contrary, I get tired, too tired. Moreover, I feel watched by my colleague who tries to impose her training schedule onto my training. I feel not respected.

From the catathymic imagery and its comparison to my current work situation, it is evident that my I-world-balance relies on a strong feeling of being connected to nature and to my clients that can benefit from my personal relationship. But for a sustainable relationship to come into being, I need to choose my clients. I need some degree of freedom to train them. Otherwise, I feel disrespected. And I also need clients that make me sweat—which are demanding and that want to learn something. Otherwise, I am asking why I do all of this. Otherwise, there is no personal sense for me. So, for my I-world-balance at work, I need the following pre-requisites: (A) feeling connected with nature, (B) choosing my clients, freely, (C) clients are challenging, (D) personal relationship with clients, and (E) creative freedom how to plan my training.

Catathymic Imagery and its Conclusions for my Specific I-world-balance

It is interesting that with the exception of (A)—a seasonal component of my job—all I-world-balance features were promoted during my job interview with my new leader. This convinced me to leave my old job and to get involved with the new trainer. Interestingly, before the catathymic imagery, I was not really aware of the features why I switched jobs. It was rather a feeling or a shadowy intuition why I would go with the other trainer rather than to remain in my current working position. The catathymic imagery helped me to become aware of my needs as well as the amorphian inner that were central for my decision whether to stay or to leave. Thus, it helped to schematize and structure a shadowy intuition into something tangible and concrete—and it underlined central characteristics how I can create a dynamic I-world-balance for my job-related action field. Again, it is

not about consciencing something unconscious. On the contrary, it is more about giving form to some unstructured and amorphian feeling that is only shadowy present within my Self. And this knowledge helps me to appropriate my job-related action field meaningfully and to structure it in accordance with my inner world—a characteristic that makes us feel comfortable and at home somewhere (Boesch, 1998, 2005). It is no surprise that athletes change their coaches, for example, even if they are highly successful. The amorphian inner creates the urge to appropriate the environment in a different way, thus to create a dynamic I-world-balance that takes into account changing needs and goals.

Limitations of the Catathymic Imagery Method

Now, we have already seen the dangers of catathymic imagery from a psychoanalytical perspective, for example, in the over-interpretation by the practitioner that denies the experiential qualities of the participant (see Jacobs, 2012). However, these are not the only disadvantages from catathymic imagery. Seen from a cultural psychological perspective, the catathymic imagery translates the inner world into an outer form—that is, in and through language (sign systems). This outer form can then be debated and contested through dialogue—a negotiation of meaning takes place as a consequence that helps both practitioner and participant to get further perspectives onto a *Gegenstand* (Boesch, 1977). However, this process relies solely on acoustic and visual means. We get to know the safe place through a narration that reaches our ears and get translated into a specific picture. Yet, this picture emerges insight us and is not touchable and visible for other people. The safe place that we explore through catathymic imagery gets withdrawn immediately the moment we hear the last syllables of the narration. We try to fix it by drawing a specific picture in our head—but the problem is that the picture cannot be touched or visually digested by and for other people. It is in this regard that catathymic imagery only creates a semi-objectification of the amorphian inner and in relation to that of our (repressed) action potential.

Introducing the Fully Objectified Catathymic Imagery Method (FOCI)

This is where I want to introduce another method that fills that research gap and gives full visualization and structure to the amorphian inner. It is in this regard that I want to present the following: Out of a selection of at least three pictures or paintings, a participant can choose the one that mirrors most adequately his current experience of his job.

As a consequence, the participant sets the stage for selective, fully objectified imagery. Then, the practitioner⁴ asks the participant to travel insight the picture and to imagine a specific story or narration where he is the specific protagonist. He should explore what he does, how he feels, how he cooperates with the social other, which goals he wants to

⁴ I want to thank one reviewer for his remarks concerning my manuscript. The reviewer raised the question how participant and practitioner choose the paintings. As art is a fundamental subjective endeavor triggering strong emotions, it is important that the participant initiates the process of bringing the paintings into the practitioner's office. However, we need to bear in mind that this affective work can only be accomplished if participant and practitioner already have established a strong relationship with each other (see also Glasser, 2000).

reach, and by which trajectories. Then after the guided travel, there is the return phase in which the practitioner asks which elements remind the participant of his current working situation establishing specific analogies to the work-related amorphian inner—like I did in my autoethnographic example, aforementioned. Then, the practitioner and the worker can work out jointly the dynamic components of the worker's job-related I-world-balance and the repressed action potential. This knowledge can help to improve intra- and interpersonal resources in order to discuss concrete strategies how to give structure to the repressed action potential or how to reach the specific I-world-balance.

The advantage of this method might seem trivial but comes with far-reaching consequences. By means of the picture, practitioner and participant can negotiate visibly several elements of the painting's meaning. The practitioner might ask the participant for example: What is the symbolizing feature of the stormy sea in picture A? And additionally, he might point with his finger to the specific element insight the picture. Thus, elements of the picture are accessible both for the practitioner and for the participant and the negotiation of meaning can happen more openly in contrast to katathym imagery where meanings remain more private. This adjusted method helps practitioner and participant to better structure their experience and to become more adequately aware of specific symbols that can be openly discussed. Here, dialogue relies on fixed and open trigger points that function as door opener for the journey towards one's repressed action potential (amorphian inner). Thus, the proposed method is argued to facilitate dialogue by means of this initiative trigger points—where symbolization is more catalyzed than in simple catathymic imagery.

Instancing FOCI by an Autoethnographic Example

Again, I am aware that the abovementioned might remain abstract for the general reader. That's why I want to present another autoethnographic experience in order to shed light onto the practical application of this fully objectified catathymic imagery (FOCI). I want to concentrate myself on another working experience in which I felt a shadowy intuition in regard to how I want to work or how I do not wish to work. It becomes obvious why I do not want to analyze my first autoethnographic exploration by means of the FOCI method as I have already given structure to that experience. There are not many repressed features left in regard to that experience. I present myself the following three pictures and ask myself which one is in stark accordance with the thoughts and feelings of my job experience. The first picture has been drawn by the realist Gustave Courbet (1854) and is called *Le bord de mer à Palavas*. For me, the picture does not really mirror my shadowy intuition in regard to my job experience that features more negative characteristics than positive ones. Thus, the painting is too harmonious for me. I cannot picture myself into the painting, for example, feeling into the person that welcomes the sea. For me, the sea is too calm, and it portrays Yang while leaving out Ying. As my job experience featured severe negative stress, the calm sea is too weak as a symbol (see Fig. 1).

The second painting is made by the famous Russian painter Aivazovsky and is called *The ninth wave* (Fig. 2). It has been created in 1850 by the Russian romanticist. If I feel into the painting and picture myself as one of the protagonists, I can only hardly see some relations to my job-related action field. The sea is stormy. Threatening waves are everywhere and destroy the ship. There is no escape anymore. The human beings are buried by the waves. They are wrestling with nature. They are fighting for their lives. The ship's mast is twisted and forms a cross for me. Death. But the searing sun symbolizes salvation



Fig. 1 Courbet, G. (1854) *Le bord de mer à Palavas*



Fig. 2 Aivazovsky, I.K. (1850) *The ninth wave*

for me. Clearly, I can feel myself better into the painting. Yet, I still have issues in finding analogies to my repressed action potential concerning my second work experience. The sea is too dangerous in the painting. Death is too much in the foreground as a symbol. The human beings—the protagonist—need to surrender in front of the natural forces and can only wait passively for salvation. This passiveness is something that is in stark contrast to my job-related action potential.

The third picture has been drawn by Paul Cézanne and is called *rock near Estaque*. Probably it has been created around 1882. If I feel into the picture (see Fig. 3), I feel somehow recognized by it. My shadowy intuition dissolves freely within the painting. I have no issues in projecting my Self into the painting and creating a specific story. The rocks symbolize for me the negative aspects of my work experience. For my job, I needed to finish a specific project, autonomously. However, I was left alone in this project. Nobody came to help me despite me being an intern at that time. Nobody was interested in what I was doing. Nobody cared. I felt disrespected. I felt not recognized. I felt that I was not welcome. But nonetheless I had to do the work because I was paid for it, and I needed to do the internship for my studies. It was obligatory. So, I needed to resist the negative impact from that internship. So, when I see the painting, I see myself climbing up the rocks. This feels hard. But it also feels good because at least I am doing something. And it is challenging. It is dangerous. But once I have accomplished climbing up the rocks, I get a reward. I get to enjoy the beautiful view over the sea and over the mountains. After enjoying the beautiful and rewarding view, I go the shed hoping to meet somebody that wants to hear my



Fig. 3 Cézanne, P. (1882) *Rock near Estaque*

adventure. I want to socialize, and I am hungry. I hope that the foreigner invites me over to eat with him and to talk with him over my last adventure.

Analyzing the FOCI description, we see the following. During my work experience, I was heavily constrained in creating a specific I-world-balance. Nobody was genuinely interested in my needs and goals nor in the ideas about the enterprise. So, I could not contribute something valuable to the enterprise. I was left alone. And I needed to deal with that situation. I tried to change it while approaching my colleagues in a friendly way, but they did not answer me trying to get acquainted with them. So, I wanted to quit but I could not because I needed the internship for my studies. So, I had to stay. But this was challenging which symbolizes me climbing up the rocks. But after having finished the internship, I was left in an ambivalent space. I was not happy how the internship went—thus that I needed to climb up those heavy rocks, but I was somehow rewarded. I learnt through the internship how I do not want to work. As a consequence, I cannot imagine myself working as a research assistant for an enterprise that says they are interested in my perspective when they actually do not care at all. This feels disrespectful and disgusting for me. And this is not how I want to work with people, especially young people. I want to create something valuable in this life—something valuable based on my knowledge. I do not want to work solely for the purpose of money or for getting ECTS (extrinsic rewards). I want to work in a meaningful way. This means for me to work on projects that help people to better understand themselves and to improve their work based on their needs and goals. So, I want to work closely with people and not remotely, for example, in an office where I do not have contact with my colleagues or customers like in my internship example. And this symbolizes the beautiful view I get when climbing up the rocks.

So FOCI showed us the following in regard to my repressed action potential: For a sustainable job-related I-world-balance, I need the following features to come into being: (1) doing something meaningful that helps people in their concrete lives, for example, a better understanding of themselves; (2) close contact with colleagues and customers to make a genuine impact in their lives; (3) working with young people and helping them to make their first steps meaningfully in their jobs; (4) doing something challenging in my job but taking time to enjoy the rewards afterwards; and (5) establishing relationships with people at my work that goes beyond the official setting. Especially points 3 and 5 are additional features that show incremental value in regard to the catathymic analysis of my first autoethnography. Also, I feel that these two components are highly significant for my job-related action potential. Yet, it is only now after having dived deeply into the painting that I have the feeling of having grasped something that was only shadowy (Boesch would say *schemenhaft*) present as a sort of an atmospheric intuition (Boesch, 2021).

The FOCI method helped me to grasp that atmospheric intuition and to structure it in accordance with something tangible. By the FOCI method, it differentiated and proliferated into a given structure. A transformation of an object (painting) took place that led into the personological appropriation of art which flowed into a concrete narration. Importantly, I became aware of several features regarding the dynamic construction of my I-world-balance. These components have been mostly repressed in the former job experience but show its symbolic significance by the FOCI method. Thus, the FOCI method helps to explore deeply past experiences and to assess hidden or repressed meaning-making opportunities that can flow into the construction of an adaptive future—that is, in the construction of a job-related I-world-balance.

Discussion: Between Catathymic Imagery and FOCI in Order to Make Sense of the Amorphian Inner

The issue with Boeschian Cultural Psychology has always been its phenomenological imperative (Lang, 1997). This issue makes it hard to create methods upon his symbolic action theory. Up to now, there are almost no methods that explore—except ethnographic methods (Boesch, 1977, 2021)—Boeschian Cultural Psychology. But methods are important to formalize a given theory (von Fircks, 2022a, b). Syntax and methodology—that is how to analyze the syntax—need to go hand in hand. Otherwise, a theory remains fantasmatic imagination. Thus, in the following paper, I explored a method—initially derived from psychoanalysis—and expanded it based on the premises of Boeschian Cultural Psychology. We have seen that catathymic imagery operates with fantasmatic imagination such as the travel to one's safe place. This happens in a guided way by means of dialogue between a participant and a practitioner. It is in catathymic imagery that the patient explores ambivalent stimuli during his travel that are in stark relation to his (repressed) action potential, his should-values—thus how the world should be transformed for him or appropriated—and the amorphian inner which includes disappointments, setbacks, conflicts, and misunderstandings of a given action field. Over the course of the first autoethnography and its analysis, we have seen that I was able to conscious some hidden or repressed features of my action potential while giving it some structure in and through my fantasy. Thus, catathymic imagery helps to operationalize ideas and conceptions about an I-world-balance as well as an I-world-disbalance and most importantly this applied also to the working domain.

Yet, we could also show that catathymic imagery only works in a semi-objectified way—that is, the fantasy only becomes hearable but not objectively visual for participant and practitioner. Thus, it might create another picture and meaning in the head of the practitioner than how it might be intended by the participant. This is a crucial research gap that needs to be overcome. For that purpose, I created the fully objectified catathymic imagery method that I call FOCI. Here, a participant is guided to select an ambivalent stimulus (painting) that mirrors best his job-related experience based upon his intuition. If he has chosen a painting or stimulus, he should travel insight the painting and become part of it while trying to re-structure it on the basis of his private needs and goals. It is in this regard that the participant starts to create a narration based on the painting which becomes accessible for both participant and practitioner in an acoustic and visual way. It is the visuality of the FOCI method that is a major advantage within the guidance process. That being said, it is easier for the practitioner and participant to focus upon single elements of the painting and their relation to the whole while negotiating the specific meaning, detail for detail. The FOCI method helped me to explore a shadowy intuition—that is, to structure a loose feeling and to give it a form. This form helped me to produce knowledge that was previously not accessible for me. Importantly, this is a significant knowledge as it helps people to realize how they want to appropriate their jobs eventually facilitating them to change jobs or to initiate change within their current jobs. The practical implications of the FOCI method are vast—for the work setting and beyond.

Of course, we need to speak about some limitations, too. There is no doubt that the FOCI method performed equally well as the simple catathymic imagery method in regard to the exploration of my two autoethnographies. However, we were not clearly able to show an incremental value for the FOCI method, practically. For sure, we have gathered

theoretical evidence for the superiority of the FOCI method but the autoethnographic design of the present study denies the investigation of dialogical implications. We have argued that FOCI outperforms CI because it is a fully objectified method rather than a semi-objectified one. Yet, we have not studied FOCI in dialogue between a participant and a practitioner. In addition, we have not set up a comparative methodological design—that is, the study of CI and FOCI and their basic similarities and divergencies. We are in need of such studies in order to investigate whether there is empirical evidence for the superiority of a fully objectified method (here FOCI vs. CI). Nonetheless, we have shown that CI and FOCI are both valid methods to use for organizational psychology and to help employees discovering additional meaning of past experiences. Thus, past experiences can be re-appropriated and re-structured for the basis of the creation of a more adaptive future (Peterson, 2002). Adaptive means here that FOCI and CI helped me to get to know the features of my dynamic I-world-balance, thus the components that are important for my meaningful work.

Another potential limitation hides itself within the question whether FOCI (and CI) might be beneficial at the workplace for people that are not familiar with arts or do not show any artistic interests. There are a lot of people not appreciating art—in particular paintings—and we need to ask ourselves the question whether those people can be guided towards the exploration of their repressed action potential. Thus, so far, we have no evidence if the method can be applied to different people—that is, people with technical interests, for instance.

Lastly, we need to get aware about the fact that all psychoanalytic tools come with the disadvantage of making something hidden visible. During the exploration of my autoethnography, I became self-conscious why I have decided to switch jobs. Thus, I have structured my shadowy intuition after having taken the decision. Yet, we can also imagine that a practitioner helps a patient to structure an atmospheric intuition before such an important decision takes place. Thus, there comes a huge responsibility for practitioner and participant within such a process. Now, the participant needs further support in his decision because it has shown him that the status quo is unbearable and that he is appealed to jump to a desired state within his work setting. Many negative emotions—anger, frustration, aggression, apathy—feature that process and getting confronted with those emotions should not be under-estimated.

But despite those limitations, I need to remind the interested reader that FOCI has been developed for the employees. This means it is a mediative tool in order to understand one's action potential and its repression. Hence, it helps to structure the amorphian inner and to overcome it, in the same breath. By structuring and transforming the amorphian inner, it becomes bearable, and it can lose its threatening characteristics (Boesch, 1998). Moreover, the implications are vast as employees can become aware now about their private I-world-balance, hence how they wish to appropriate their job-related environment in a meaningful way. This in turn helps the employees to structure their work-related action field in a harmonious way in and through which they will feel recognized and appreciated as well as their work to unfold personal sense in many different ways.

In the final conclusion, we need to say that the present manuscript instanced a method (FOCI) that focuses on the emergence of meaning for organizational psychology. This is something almost unique within psychology (see Wagoner, 2009) in general as well as within the sub-branch of organizational psychology. It is in this regard that we have concentrated ourselves on the individual, and at no point in time, we have lost it out of sight. Individual meaning making was always at the foreground of the present scientific inquiry—an imperative that is only scarcely employed nowadays but important to help people in their action fields (Valsiner, 2017; von Fircks, 2021c). With the present manuscript,

I hope to have contributed to the creative field of organizational psychology while showing interested readers and colleagues some pathways how to understand employees at work, individually and dynamically.

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