

The Imagination Issue

Letters from the Editors

Carrie Ruggieri, Danny Yeung, Mary Androff

“The Much That Asks for More”

By Carrie Ruggieri, LMHC, Editor-in-Chief

Imagine the therapist, notebook on lap, pen in hand, leaning in with an attentive, soft gaze, receiving with the “third ear” the client’s words, emotions, and somatic signals; noting their moments of alignment and misalignment; tracking patterns and threads of the narrative; attending to the experience of sitting together; noting emotions that arise within herself and what they may be signaling; feeling through empathic engagement; differentiating her own experience and reactions from the client’s experience.

On reflection, I marvel—what we do is amazing. I think of the innumerable threads of learning, experience, and cultivation. Threads sometimes entangled, sometimes running smoothly alongside one another, held within the structure of a weaver’s loom. These are the threads, but the handling of the threads is another matter. It requires tenderness and discernment, the ability to hold the entire process without knowing exactly what pattern will emerge, while trusting in the expertly crafted loom, the quality of the threads, and the capable hands.

After reading these imaginative, brilliant, and inspired articles by our author-therapists, I discovered that *even this* is not all. There is more.

In a mishmash play on the title of one of Diana Fosha’s papers, *Feeling Bad Is Never the Last*

Step, combined with the great Margaret Fuller's self-assessment as "the much that asks for more," AEDP proves itself to be, like ourselves and our clients, ever emerging and always becoming more fully itself.

This is the much that asks for more. Here is the more:

The therapist, having not written in that notebook, loses awareness of time, knowing her body will inform her when the hour approaches. She prepares herself, while preparing her client, with a practice Danny Yeung devised called Dyadic Heartfelt Imagination (DHFI), wherein the therapist deliberately suspends her linear reality and, as Danny explains, allows "the primary process flow of a deeply therapeutic, dream-like waking state to come to the fore." Now prepared, she is liberated to inhabit a state of co-consciousness that, while anchored to her practice is prepared to accept an invitation into an imaginal realm spun from the client's unconscious. There is no protocol for this, no deliberate practice; yet, through experienced attunement, resonance, and trust in the inevitable flow into core state, she enters.

She does this to accompany her client, now in a deeply dis-associated (from reality) imaginal realm, and, as Jason Trowbridge emphasizes, to explore each moment unprepared and unpreparing for the next, while remaining safely anchored within the dyad. Androff and Russell's term for this is "the third space": a space where the therapist recognizes emergent imagery as an invitation to explore and play with her client in the imaginal realm. This is located not solely in one mind or the other, but in a co-created third space induced by spontaneously emergent imagery.

These articles each convey different ways of therapist and client entering and experiencing this third space—which, in the moment of it happening, can really be said to be a third reality, wherein the past is suspended and the future is being written. Centuries ago, this process might have been called alchemy or magic; today, as Yeung explains, it falls under the neuroscientific umbrella of the Free Energy Principle—a brain activity we extrapolate from examination of brain matter we can touch and see.

Jason Trowbridge offers his practice of co-creating, through interoceptive attunement, a simulated psychedelic state of mind known as REBUS (Relaxed Beliefs Under Psychedelics). Matt demonstrates his fluid creativity in responding to emerging material within a structured portrayal. Anthony generously gifts clients and non-clients with a way to practice imaginative healing on their own. For the very many who cannot afford to access therapy, he is ever-present to the reader's imagination through the words of his book. We can clearly read Anthony's imagined presence with his unknown readers.

In this state of mind, therapist and client co-create experience and insight that would not otherwise occur—what would be impossible (to change one's experience of the past or patterns of perceiving and relating) becomes possible. What is imaginative becomes real in its effect on the self. In this state, image/symbol and emotion are reciprocal, a language unencumbered by words. Imagination participates and is most alive when it is in communion with another's imagination—unfurling what would otherwise not have been there.

When Kev Kokoska enters prison walls under rigidly supervised conditions, it is not possible to use language for private, personal needs. He explains that the culture, speaking through symbolic images, spontaneously emerges in such environments—the images therefore bear a significant weight of pain and inconceivable loneliness. Kev willingly enters the cage and brings with him the possibility of third space with a third language, enabling his client to feel and express, and to experience being deeply seen. Kev writes, “the clinical significance of such imagery lies not primarily in what it represents, but in what it has learned to hold. When met with sufficient attunement, an image that has long kept feeling still may become the very place where feeling starts to move.”

Abraham's moral imagination extends to his insight that the inherent moral capacity - an inherent moral capacity affectively imbued with the truth sense and moral beauty discoverable in in core state. He describes this quality of moral affect as part of the tapestry of core self. It is not indoctrinated or a product of social learning; it is something recognized as True when we are fully embodied in core self.

The writer in me now closes my essay, and I reorient myself to the humans involved in this ambitious project. I thank all the authors who worked so hard to produce these unique, creative, and inspiring articles. Getting to know the hearts and minds of each of you through such wise and tender work is a gift I now carry within me.

Danny Yeung, thank you for your diligent and supportive reading of every word of every article, your great cheerleading of me and the authors, and your expert knowledge of all things AEDP. Finally, a special thanks to our guest editor, Mary Androff. Thank you, Mary, for taking on this huge task with love for the writers and the work. Your insights helped shape these articles into the masterful works they are.

Entrancing and Kaleidoscopic

By Danny Yeung, MD, Senior Editor

Imagine with me a kaleidoscope. As we gaze through the eyepiece into the light, we are met with a mesmerizing, ever-shifting configuration of spectacular forms and colours. This issue of *Transformance*, zooming in on the different aspects of imagination, features precisely that kaleidoscopic view as each page turns. Across diverse theoretical and clinical lenses, what unites the compelling visions in these papers is the healing power innate within the lived imaginal space.

Diving deeply into the wisdom portrayed throughout this collection evokes my interoceptive and felt sensible hunger for more: a yearning to explore further into the depths of this imaginal space. The inner chamber of this healing kaleidoscope points directly to what Henry Corbin termed the *mundus imaginalis*—an ontologically real, imaginal realm where AEDP clinical work activates the innate transformative potency residing within our clients' and our own generative unconscious.

Allow me to introduce the contributions in this issue:

Transformative Dao of Waking Dreams: Dyadic Heartfelt Imagination, Active Inference and the Flow Towards the Neuro-Archetypal Self

By Danny Yeung

Joining my esteemed colleagues in this issue, which focuses on Facets of Imagination, I propose that therapeutic potency occurs when client and therapist enter a co-waking dream state through the practice of Dyadic Heartfelt Imagination (DHFI). Informed by research on dreams and their auto-therapeutic function, DHFI's seven interconnected steps form a scalable protocol for facilitating deep psychic healing. Whether used as a stand-alone intervention or integrated within standard AEDP® psychotherapy, DHFI's therapeutic potency can be understood through integrating four major theoretical frameworks: 1) interactions within the large-scale triple brain networks; 2) the active inference cycle as an application of the free energy principle to mind and brain; 3) brain-based archetypal patterns, activated and manifesting mythopoetically in waking-dream phenomenology; and 4) effortless flow and teleological attraction toward a holistic Self. Ultimately, I am making an ambitious initial attempt to ground AEDP® psychotherapy in the free energy principle — hailed as a unifying theory of brain science.

Emergent Imagery: Unconscious Processes, Play and the Co-Construction of Healing

By Mary Androff and Eileen Russell

“What is the role of imagery use in the theory and practice of AEDP Therapy?” Androff and Russell remind us that imagery has long been central to AEDP practice, most concretely through the structured intervention of portrayal in State 2 work. They extend this foundation with the concept of emergent imagery — a use of imagery that moves beyond the classical structure of portrayal. Their argument draws on philosophical roots as far back as Aristotle, alongside the contributions of Fried and Jung, and integrates recent neuroscience — including Damasio, Panksepp, and Schore — to make a compelling case for imagery's centrality to therapeutic change. Furthermore, Androff and Russell's exploration of how emergent imagery intersects with social engagement and the function of play significantly enriches and expands AEDP's healing

work. Finally, Androff and Russell propose a third space - the creative, dyadically co-constructed space- is arguably the potent imaginative playground where transformation can occur.

Dry Psychedelics™: Going Inward Without Going Alone: Reproducing the Depth of Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy Through AEDP Without a Substance

By Jason Trowbridge

The recent introduction of psychedelics into psychotherapeutic work has been revolutionary in relieving mental suffering. Furthermore, their clinical use has uncovered deeper layers of the psyche than ever seen before. This begs the question: is pharmacological access the only path to such depths? Jason Trowbridge persuasively argues otherwise. In his paper, he shows that in AEDP work, sustained dyadic attunement coupled with interoceptive work offers a distinct, viable pathway into these same deep psychic states—without pharmacological means. His work on Dry Psychedelics™ — a psychedelic-like experience without the substance — offers hope for clients who may be contraindicated for psychedelics for medical, legal, or personal reasons, or who simply prefer another route, while still allowing them access to deep psychic healing. This hope is beautifully captured by one of Trowbridge's clients who, after going inward with his unwavering accompaniment, concluded: "Trauma is not permanent. What is permanent is love."

Just Imagination: The Suspension of Disbelief and Other Portrayal Principles, Processes and Techniques

By Matt Fried

Regarded as the pinnacle of experiential dynamic affect work, portrayal is a powerful tool in AEDP Psychotherapy. Building on the solid foundation and rich repertoire previously laid out in the AEDP model, Matt Fried expands portrayal work within the AEDP therapy toolbox in this paper. New and insightful, Fried introduces novel elements of reversal of injustice, suspension of disbelief, and theatrical elements—including externalization and visible and/or audible impact. Especially valuable are the do's and don'ts of anger portrayals; this paper explores potential

difficulties with anger portrayal work, along with practical suggestions. Portrayal work on reversal figure portrayals and apology portrayal is particularly enlightening.

From Story to Symbol: Established Imagery in Constrained Therapeutic Settings - PART 2

By Kev Kokoska

Kokoska's paper zooms in on three interrelated questions: How does a clinician work dyadically with a client's emerging image without prematurely converting it into narrative? How does a clinician track the transformation of imaginal symbols in real time, as they unfold? And how can this preverbal, image-based process be integrated within AEDP's existing theoretical and technical framework? The paper's central contention is that the core therapeutic task is to enter the symbolic form dyadically alongside the client, holding the affect with sustained attunement — and that transformation occurs through this shared presence, without narrative decoding of the image itself. Kokoska's creative and highly original work exemplifies the healing power of imagery synthesizing four intersecting strands: (1) the right-brain shared image as an implicit affect regulator; (2) imagery as embodied perception, encoding positive neuroplastic change; (3) the client's self-generated revision and reorganization of images within their own symbolic field; and (4) imagery — rather than narrative — as the referent that becomes thinkable and processable.

Therapeutic Reimagining: Helping Clients to Access Their Transformational Creative zooming in Unconscious

By Anthony Prendergast

Portrayals—regarded as the pinnacle of experiential-affective work in AEDP—have traditionally taken place in a dyadic clinical setting. In this paper, Prendergast explores a pivotal question: can individuals generate their own portrayals outside the therapy room? He proposes that therapeutic imagining allows clients to access their own unconscious in ways that are both creative and transformative. Centered on the deceptive simplicity of a single, potent counterfactual inquiry—“How do you wish your childhood had been different?”—this process empowers clients to

rewrite their life stories along a new, healing narrative trajectory. Prendergast outlines four creative guiding principles that serve as an empowering navigational map for this reimagination project. Finally, do not miss his brief, courageous self-disclosure, where his personal story embodies the healing power of therapeutic imagination.

Uncovering An Inner Moral Compass: The Confucian Four Beginnings (四端) in AEDP Healing

By Abraham Lim

AEDP has long been recognized for offering an explicit map of transformation that guides the therapist moment to moment. But could this map actually be an inner compass? This raises a deeper question: is psychotherapy truly value-neutral? If value means what matters most to a person, then affect is inherently value-laden — what feels "good" signals value, what feels "bad" signals dis-value. Seen this way, AEDP emerges not as value-neutral but as a value-laden journey, transforming its map of transformation into an inner value compass. Abraham Lim advances this argument through the lens of the Confucian Four Moral Beginnings (四端 / Siduan). He contends AEDP reveals a person's deepest moral orientation — not through rigid doctrines, but by accessing the visceral emotional truth that makes moral clarity possible, illuminating compassion, conscience, relational attunement, and ethical discernment as pro-social forces beneath core affect. His central thesis: emotion processed through AEDP, culminating in Core State, is moral imagination par excellence.

An Expanding Atlas

By Mary Androff, MD, Guest Editor

Serving as guest editor for this *Transformance Journal* issue on the imagination has been an enriching experience of discovery. Carrie Ruggieri and Danny Yeung bring tremendous heart and rigor to their roles as editors, and their insightful and precise reflections on every article have inspired me. I've appreciated the opportunity to be in dialogue with this issue's other authors

(Abraham Lim, Anthony Pendergrast, Danny Yeung, Jason Trowbridge, Kev Kokoska and Matt Fried) and to more deeply engage with their fascinating work.

For many of our patients, the imaginal channel offers a portal to (as yet) unformulated experience. If we notice these entry points and collaboratively explore what emerges, the therapeutic dyad may traverse otherwise hidden terrains of experience. AEDP has always incorporated work with imagery, particularly through portrayals. This issue provides an expanded atlas for exploring the imagination, offering theoretical perspectives (from neurobiology, psychology, philosophy and spirituality) along with clinical wisdom that reveal new therapeutic landscapes. May you be enriched by your journey through this issue!