



On Articulating Affective States Through Image-Making in Analysis

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Exploring the relationship between image and emotion has long been a central feature of Jungian analysis. Jung states in his autobiography: “To the extent that I managed to translate the emotions into images, that is to say, to find the images which were concealed in the emotion, I was inwardly calmed and reassured. Had I left those images hidden in the emotions, I might have been torn to pieces by them” (Jung 1961, 177). In this presentation, I will attempt to convey my experience of initiating image- making with patients in analysis as a way for them to find the images concealed in their emotions. I will then discuss ways these images, once formed, serve the process of articulating affective states within analysis. In service to this end, I will first explore Jung’s use of the terms affect, emotion and feeling.

Jung conceptualized emotion as a positively or negatively charged psychic energy similar to physical energy. His study of emotion was primarily focused on emotional dysfunction closely linked to the experience of trauma. It was understood that when ego consciousness was unable to express the emotion of a traumatic experience, the traumatic emotion was split off into the unconscious where it functioned as a dissociated, autonomous complex (Compaan, 1997, pp. 4 – 7).

Jung came to differentiate between the concepts of emotion and feeling by describing “emotion” as an intense unconscious reaction that has physiological indicators in contrast to “feeling” – a more conscious and less intense reaction that does not have physiological indicators (Compann, 1997, p. 6 quoting Jung, 1935). Jung used the terms affect and emotion interchangeably. However, affect has come to be used to describe the purely physiological unconscious process or state

that can be considered the biological or innate component of an emotion. Jungian analyst Louis Stewart underscored that affect is an inherited regulatory system of the psyche and is, therefore, the archetypal root of all emotion and feeling (Compaan, 1997, p. 37 quoting Stewart, 1996, p. 277). Emotion, on the other hand, is used to describe a complex experience based on affect combined with learned experience and memories that can have both unconscious and conscious elements. If affect is biology than emotion is biography. Emotion involves a sense of physiological arousal as well as an impulse toward action and can be triggered in response to external as well as internal stimuli (Ibid. p.29, p. 35 quoting Nathanson (1992). A feeling, in contrast, is a discernable subtle quality of awareness that can be introspectively distilled [out] from the physiological urgency of emotional experience, without an impulse toward action (Fratarolli, 2001, p.189). As James Hillman points out, “we possess our feelings, but we are possessed by our emotions” (Compaan 1997, p. 14 quoting Hillman, 1960). In summary, affect, emotion and feeling are three degrees of emotional experience along a developmental spectrum. Affect is the biological/archetypal root that combines with lived experience to form complex emotion, which in turn can be introspectively distilled into feelings through conscious awareness.

In light of these differentiations, we can return to Jung’s quote describing the process of translating emotions into images – of finding the image concealed in emotion. He is, of course, describing the process of releasing internal emotional energy into the image being made. This released emotional energy is no longer just inside him but is also outside of him, now imbedded in the image. Through this process of externalizing internal emotion, his ego is relieved of the

internal emotional energy that might have torn him to pieces. In addition his ego gains the perspective from which to consciously perceive and differentiate aspects of the emotion now expressed in the image. This capacity to perceive and to differentiate emotions now imbedded in the image allows the unconscious aspects of the emotion to be transformed into the more conscious experience of feeling. It is this transformation from unconscious emotion to a more conscious feeling that allowed Jung to be calmed and reassured. It is also this transformation of emotions into feelings that informs my incorporation of image-making into verbal analysis.

In incorporating image making within the analytic frame, I have had to modify aspects of my previous art therapy practice. For example, I do not use the word “art” when initiating image-making with patients. I present the process as “making *marks* on paper” rather than “making a *drawing*” because engaging visual materials can be preceded by doubt and anxiety for many, but especially for non-artists (Edwards 1987, 100). By imagining this process as mark-making rather than art-making, doubt and anxiety are reduced. Similarly, the product is valued not for its artistic qualities but for its symbolic capacity to generate meaning within the context of analysis. Visual materials are streamlined for easy use within this setting. This emphasis differs from the work of many art therapists, who value the art making process as the central component of the therapeutic process, with verbal interventions serving mainly to support the psychic integration of the image. Following this point of view, patients use art materials in a space that is set up as an art studio and produce works that serve both aesthetic and therapeutic aims (Case and Dalley, 2006). While I value the

work of art therapists who have focused their practice on art therapy as the central modality, I believe there are also some distinct advantages to the inclusion of image-making that serves to support verbal analysis.

I suggest the use of visual materials within an analytic session in response to a felt sense of something emerging within or between the patient and me. This “something” can feel like a disturbance, a sadness, a confusion or just a kind of “stuckness.” This something can also be understood as an unconscious affect. While staying attuned to what seems to be pressing forward for attention, I make space to engage the imaginal process and at the same time, safeguard against needing to make it happen. In initiating an imaginal process within an analytic session, the analyst must tolerate the experience of not knowing in order to allow imaginal space to open of its own momentum. As the analytic couple engages imaginal space, the analyst provides the necessary holding to allow the patient to access and to experience emerging affects and emotions. Visual materials are introduced while a focused concentration on these internal states is fostered. As internal states merge with external media an image finds form on the surface of the paper. The emergent image is a reality that exists within an imaginal play space bridging the opposites of outer and inner, of known and not known. This imaginal space incorporates the process of active imagination within the analytic container as well as creating an intermediate space within which transitional phenomena as well as the symbolic function are activated. (Cwik 1991, 106-107).

As mentioned above, I have streamlined the visual materials used within the context of verbal analysis for easy use within the consulting room. I keep a clipboard (18” x 24”) with the same sized paper attached and a basket of pastels

within easy reach. I place the pastels on the couch next to the patient and the clipboard with the paper attached on the patient's lap. The process begins with analyst inviting patients to go inward – to close their eyes and to deepen their breath. I do the same. Staying attuned to the patients, I muse aloud about the conflict, sadness, confusion or stuckness that seems to be pressing forward for attention. I ask the patients to imagine these feelings in their bodies – to feel where they are located in their bodies and to be with these feelings in that place. I use the word feelings to initiate a more conscious awareness of unconscious affects and emotions. After some minutes of continuing in this fashion –our eyes closed – I say: “Imagine the color of these feelings.” After a short pause I say: “Open your eyes and pick one or two pastels that align with these feelings in your body.” Having selected the color(s), they again close their eyes and continue to observe their breathing, staying connected to these feelings. At some point, I say: “Allow this feeling to move through your body, down your arm, through your hand and pastel and onto the paper – let these feelings make marks on the paper.”

Giving visual form to affective and emotional states is a type of active imagination (Chodorow 1997, p. 4). It initiates a lowering of waking consciousness, which differentiates active imagination from other forms of imaginative activity, like the free flowing play of children and the creative involvement in painting pictures and creating objects (Cwik 1995, 142, quoting Fordham 1956). It is also unlike forms of active imagination in which one's concentration is focused on a specific image. In this use of active imagination, the focus is on accessing and attuning to these internal states. The task for the

analytic couple is to stay imaginally connected to the accessed internal states as they reside in the body staying with them as they move down the patient's arm to merge with the medium making concrete marks on paper. What I am describing is a mode of being aligned with an instinctual experience of affect or emotion as it merges with the chalky substance of the pastel moving against the surface of the paper as it is being released into an image. This image-making process takes place halfway between daydreaming and purposeful or expedient action (Milner 1993, p. 22). This process exists in an intermediate area of experience in which the patient makes use of a medium as a part of the external world that is pliable and safe enough to treat as a bit of oneself (ibid., 33).

This image-making process can continue with the patient's eyes closed – focusing on the emerging internal feeling states – or the patient can work with eyes open – responding to and expanding on the initial marks laid down. At this stage, the analyst avoids any tendency to anticipate what should happen, but rather remains open and attuned to the feelings being experienced by the patient. During the image-making process, the analytic couple is required to endure the liminality of regressive and prospective psychic energies activating infantile residue as well as archetypal potential, all seeking conscious expression through the common channel of the image. Obviously, when a patient makes an image in the presence of an analyst, it can be a meaning-saturated experience for both.

The analyst and the patient receive the newly hatched image together, careful in their observation and silent in its presence. The image now exists before them as an external presence, outside the maker and, at the same time, is temporarily inhabited by a part of the maker (Schaverien 1991, p. 19). The

actively imagined *internal* feeling states are now concretized within this *external* image. The image is both a statement about and a depiction of what was formerly an invisible (and often unconscious) inner state (Edwards 1987, 103). The image is also the ocular evidence emphasized by Jung as necessary to promote a conscious relationship to the unconscious. This ocular evidence counteracts the tendency to self-deception and helps prevent the contents of the unconscious accessed through active imagination from slipping back into the unconscious (Cwik 1991, 103 quoting Jung 1955).

At this point in the process, there is a shift from imagining internal feeling states to encountering the newly drawn image. The analyst's first response to the image is not directed towards understanding the image for analytic aims. Rather, it is to sit together with the patient in the transitional space between the formal and ideational elements of the image and the internal states now embodied in the image in order to witness and receive the emerging potential meaning within and between the analytic couple. This process of responding to the image requires the analyst to tolerate the experience of being adrift, a state that should not be rushed to closure (Ogden 1997, 160-161). The job of the analyst is to create a safe holding environment to allow the patient to discover what is happening in the image. At the same time, the analyst's steady attention to the specificities of the image allows the image to accrue meaning even when a resistance within the image-maker might wish to avoid particular aspects of the image.

The process of moving towards verbal symbolization of the image can now begin. There are no strict rules governing the interpretation of images in

Jungian analysis. (Schaverien 1992, 3). In taking steps towards the verbal symbolization of the image, the analyst invites a gathering of sensory experiences of the formal elements composing the image. This is a process of attuning to the physical presence of the medium (pastels) as it exists on the paper and how it may resonate in one's body. The analyst invites the observation of separate visual elements that make up the image. What is the dynamic quality of line, from its initial point on the paper through its movement along a path that gives shape to the image (Klee 1953, 16-18)? Is the line fast moving or slow, pressured or faint, precise or meandering? Observing the dynamic quality of the lines that form the image can convey qualities of the feeling states they portray. Another visual element to consider is color – those initially chosen by the maker and the forms they made using those colors. And finally, it is important to consider the size and intensity of the forms, as well as the spatial relationship between the forms. Attuning to the sensory experience of these visual elements lays the ground to visualize and to relate to the ideational content of the image as it portrays the intensity and energetic qualities of the internal affective states in relationship to the ego's capacity to regulate them.

When the analyst and the patient observe the image together in this way, the patient is often struck with an immediate sense of what is happening in the image. Even at this early stage, the newly formed image almost always reveals more than was consciously intended or imagined. At the same time, there can be something in the image or another way of viewing the image that is obvious to the analyst but remains obscure to the patient. In this situation, the analyst provides the necessary holding so that the patient can [both] witness the iconographic

power of image as well as make use of the image at their own pace without being overwhelmed (Edwards 1987, 103; Schaverien 1991, 107).

Translating emotions into images provides an opportunity for the analyst and patient to actually observe the emotional dysfunction portrayed in the image – its intensity, its positive and negative valence and often its function as part of an autonomous complex that inundates the conscious personality. As the analyst and the patient stay with the affective and emotional elements imbedded in the image various feeling qualities and feeling tones can begin to be perceived and experienced. Finding the emotions portrayed in the image increases the ego’s capacity to observe the emotional intensity of the complex that had habitually been eliminated from perception and experience. Gaining the capacity to discern and distill an awareness of our feelings differentiated from the emotional intensity of the complex not only defuses the emotion but also contributes to the development of the ego’s feeling function to contain, express and witness the emotional complex. It is only possible to discriminate emotions and feelings by consciously feeling them. Thinking can then assist the feeling function in understanding and integrating feelings, but cannot replace it (Compaan, 1997, p.4).

A clinical example of this process

Clara could find neither a place nor a situation in her life in which she could experience a sense of competence or enjoy her accomplishments. As a forty-four year old professional classical musician, married and a mother, she regularly felt like a “loser” because she was unable to do things perfectly enough.

This pressure for perfection had been permanently instilled as a competitive structure in her, as well as in her siblings, by her father's demanding and demeaning presence. As an adolescent, she began to study music in order to become excellent at something no one else in the family could do. At the same time, however, being the best at something also made her feel vulnerable and guilty.

After a year and a half of analysis, Clara told me a story from her childhood in which she remembered being alone in the library of her family home, crying and feeling like a loser. Then in an attempt to make herself feel better, she pulled herself together to get her father's attention by performing gymnastics stunts for him while he was watching TV. As she recalled the specifics of this story, she was inundated with an intense emotional conviction that she was a loser. It was in response to the intensity of this overwhelming emotion coupled with a curiosity about the intensity of the reaction that the image making process was initiated.

The initial phase of the imaginal process focused on containing and being present to the feelings brought up by this memory and on creating a space within which Clara could reflect on these feelings from a vantage point outside of their destructive power. She selected the black pastel and, without closing her eyes, made a crying figure on the top right of the page. She then encircled the figure with hastily made lines that almost obliterated it. Then shifting focus to her doing gymnastics for her father, Clara selected the pink pastel and made a second figure at the top left of the page. Still in silence, she then picked up the black pastel and quickly inscribed small black figures under each of the other two, as if she wanted

to get the task over with quickly. My sense was that the haste with which she made these marks coincided with Clara's treatment of herself – giving short shrift to her own self care.

Clara associated the top figures with the two modes of being that dominated her personality. The pink figure on the left was her performing self, and the black figure on the right was the loser. She described these two figures as stamping on the lower ones. The image provided ocular evidence of both sides of the habitual pattern of emotion in which she gets caught between the unrelenting demands to perform coupled with the self-demeaning conviction of being a loser. The size and placement of the upper figures in relationship to the lower figures portrayed the power that the bi-polar complex held over the self-figures beneath them. Another way I came to view the relationships between these figures is that this image initiated a process of differentiation between the punishing bi-polar complex above and the suffering self-figures below.

This initial image continues to serve as a reference point in the ongoing analysis. It has allowed Clara to identify overwhelming feelings in other contexts as either “pink” or “black”. The figures from this initial image also have come to be used as symbolic elements in making additional images. Clara's participation in the imaginal play space of the image-making process has grounded her in an intermediate, mediating process within which she can experience herself and others apart from the oppression of the unconscious pattern of emotion that replicates the demanding and demeaning presence of her father complex. In this way, the image-making process functions as a symbolic activity that provides a

bridge to the creation of a new attitude in relationship to the external world, based on insights into her inner world (Goodheart 1982, 12).

The price of creating a new reality and of discovering the self is, however, the sacrifice of old comforts (Ibid., 13). From the beginning, Clara had wanted the analysis to serve as a magic bullet that would free her from the loser part but without having to relinquish the “best part of myself” – the performing part’s demand for perfection and greatness. Clara’s use of this image and of other images she has made in analysis has gradually allowed her to develop awareness of how her emotional reactions affect her and others in the world around her. With this awareness she is beginning to make small adjustments in her daily life to navigate between the two sides of the complex imaged in this seemingly trivial image. Finally, this image continues to function within the analysis as a means of mediating the transcendent function even as it holds our feet to the fire by bringing to light the intensity of the conflict of opposites it portrays.

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