

# LUMINOUS LIFE MAPS SYSTEM

## RESEARCH BEHIND THE ADVENTURE

TOOLS TO BUILD EMBODIED CAPACITY  
AND IMAGINAL FLUENCY FOR BRAIN CHANGE



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## ABSTRACT

This paper highlights a synthesis of evidence based practice which create an experiential and integrative way to work with a wide variety of issues that face us as humans, from a non-pathologizing and Soul centered perspective. It also lends itself to a clinical mental health perspective, addressing issues from acute to chronic, including addiction recovery, issues of development, adjustment and transition. The unique emphasis of supporting clinicians to work with trauma and a wide range of mental health issues by linking brain and Neurocartiology research with the more Soul centered invitation that Art Therapy, movement, embodied awareness, guided visualization and expanded states of consciousness brings is the corner stone of this work, which we have called NeuroImaginal practices prior to 2016. This paper is heavily focused on the application of NeuroImaginal practice to clinical practice. The roots of NeuroImaginal practice are interwoven with the refocused work of Dr. Shannon Simonelli in the broadly accessible Luminous Life Maps System.

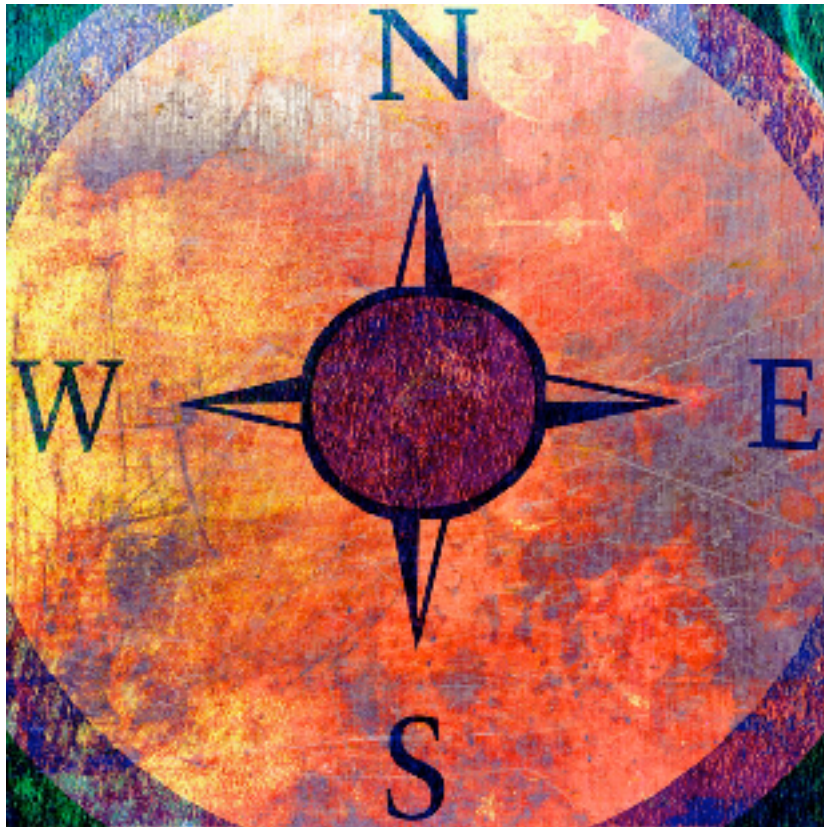
Additionally, the paper makes the point that beginning with one's direct experience and building capacity for one's own personal content, from the inside-out, allows clinicians to foster both better self-care and expanded capacity in client care. This inside-out way of learning, in Dr. Simonelli's Luminous Life Maps System is applied to training professionals through the Become A Guide certification track for both clinicians and lay people to become certified. Guides in training learn to draw from their own lived experience as they navigate the Luminous Life Maps System, using NeuroImaginal practices, and then learn 'how to' skills to apply this to their current scope of practice, helping service or healing business. This expansion in skill building includes experientially based work but also fosters expansion in the lay person or the clinician's ability to *be with* those they serve by increasing their ability to *be with* themselves through expanded capacity for presence. Learning through experience and applying to one's general well-being practice helps to develop an expanded capacity for meeting the ups and downs of life or one's inner turmoil from a place of greater access to one's wholeness and then drawing on this well of expanded embodied resource in serving others.

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## INTRODUCTION

Psychology and Mental Health professionals are all working with clients and patients to foster better self/life understanding and create life-affirming shifts in thoughts, behaviors and outcomes. The growing body of research related to brain function, neural processes and life change is exciting fuel for this field. For Depth and Jungian oriented clinicians currently working in the field, there may be an overwhelming amount of information without clear ways to apply or operationalize the research, while still holding true to a more Soul centered clinical conceptualization. NeuroImaginal practice was born to walk in these seemingly opposite worlds. We share the excitement in neural research and anchor the practice in an experiential, interdisciplinary, integrative approach; harnessing a synergistic combination of tools for change we call NeuroImaginal Embodiment Practices. The Luminous Life Maps System takes these practices and makes the experience and learning available to the general public and to mental health professionals alike. You are already likely using elements of this potent combination in your own practice.



## WHY NEUROIMAGINAL EMBODIMENT PRACTICE

The founding partners of the NeuroImaginal Institute have struggled with their own personal life challenges, health issues, stress and fatigue related to our work in the medical and mental health world. *We have come to understand that recharge and real change happens when clinicians care for themselves first and then those they serve.* We believe that strong clinical relationships with those we serve are born from clinicians with a richly examined (and lived) personal life; that our personal struggles and humanness, when forged in the fire of personal transformation, are alchemized into nuggets of relevancy, which invite our clients and patients into their own deeper knowing. *We know that building our capacity for holding our own complex life experience in greater awareness and kindness protects us against burnout and brings an alive, dynamic and vital presence in a palpable way to our sessions.* We understand that direct experience fosters this deep knowing and capacity building, sparks remembering personal guiding principles, work-life balance, and reasons or purpose for being of service.

In their book *Therapeutic Presence* Geller and Greenburg define *Therapeutic presence* as:

A state of having one's whole self in the encounter with a client by being completely in the moment on a multiplicity of levels – physically, emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually. Therapeutic presence involves being in contact with one's integrated and healthy self, while being open and receptive to what is poignant in the moment and immersed in it with a larger sense of spaciousness and expansion of awareness and perception. This grounded, immersed, and expanded awareness occurs with the intention of being with and for the client, in service of his or her healing process.

The only thing I would add to this most complete and research rooted definition is the *Imaginal (mundus imaginalis)*(Corbin, H. 1972) – images, stories, dream figures, embodied imagery and movements that come to us from some dimension beyond our rational intellectual perspective. When tuned into, the Imaginal Realm is perceived of and experienced as real, existing above our ordinary reality, we are informed by 'it' and it is informed by our life imagery and our imagination or direct experience's ability to tune in. As we practice and allow ourselves the direct experience of being with these Imaginal figures it is as if a new life begins to breath within us, we are revived, restored, made more whole and healed. The direct experience of the Imaginal is a cornerstone in Jung's work, he considered image the language of Soul and a deep voice or force within us. Corbin, who originally coined the term *Imaginal* from his work as an interpreter of Islamic thought and poetry, describes image

as thoughts of the heart and holds imagination as the authentic voice of the heart, an interesting distinction as we connect science with the Imaginal.

Psyche or Soul has an active voice through the Imaginal, and a new pulse begins to awaken us to a more integrated, whole and holy experience of being in Self, Soul, the Sacred and the World. Naming and including the Imaginal into healthy and whole self-expression is central to the NeuroImaginal way.

How does NeuroImaginal Embodiment Practice come together?

NeuroImaginal Embodiment practice supports therapists and the general public to access the power of brain and heart based shifting strategies and the Imaginal realm through one's own body, imagination and personal imagery. These skills and practice build capacity in your life first and then revitalize your practice or business with patients and clients. Lets take a closer look at research and how we see these worlds beautifully weave together:



## THE BRAIN AND HEART

Currently, much attention is given to helping clients and patients better understand and then create change in their brain, neurobiology and hormonal response systems. This is becoming a well-founded approach in treatment with excitement about how to best apply the principles in a working format for patients and clients. The NeuroImaginal Institute and now the Luminous Life Maps System, shares this excitement and anchors itself in not only brain based research, but draws on less known research from the field of Neurocardiology. With a focus on psychophysiological coherence of the heart, this research offers quick and simple ways to support mind, body and soulful order, or coherence within the human system. With this order people are able to shift their lived experience in the moment, which allows a shift in perspective, behavior and invites a shift in beliefs.

Heart rate variability research (McCraty, R. et al, 2006) tells us to focus on the rhythm of the heart as a powerhouse for changing limbic response, stress and trauma formations in the brain and body response system. The new field of neurocardiology studies the neuron pathways in the heart itself. The brain is traditionally seen as sending all information out to the heart and other parts of the body. What is now known is that the heart also sends abundant messages to the brain (Wilson, 2008). When people are in ‘high frequency’ or highly resonant feeling states (gratitude, appreciation, compassion, love, enjoyment) they are activating the powerhouse of electromagnetic frequency in their coherent heart rate variability – the heart is sending high power communication to the brain. This positively impacts physiological functions including brain processes and psychological/behavioral outcomes. In short, people who intentionally generate and practice being in more positive emotional states use the power of their heart to change their brain and experience less stress, greater mental clarity, sustained positive states and greater emotional stability (McCraty, R. et al, 2006).

This research is intrinsic to Dr. Shannon Simonelli’s approach to increase neural plasticity effectiveness. Understanding that the ultimate goal is to support healthy brain based change, we find it quicker to teach simple heart based focusing tools using breath, imagination or the power of personal imagery (the ‘thoughts’ of the heart) and intention, which in turn immediately reduces trauma response. By teaching people how to access greater coherence they learn to calm stress hormones, get out of limbic brain and trauma responses and into higher or creative mind where the perception of greater possibility lives. With practice, this becomes a new standard in the brain and bodies way of perceiving and processing information and offers more flexibility and spaciousness in belief structures.

Harnessing the power of the heart by *imagining* and *feeling* the positive is built upon by using deeper brain-body coherence techniques from Psych-K, which utilizes the *Whole-Brain* (Fannin, W & Williams, R. 2012) to build new perspective on past experiences and lead to more productive and positive behavior. The Whole-Brain state stimulates both hemispheres of the brain, the vestibular system and the motor coordination system to bring the entire body-brain system into coherence and a peaceful, non-activated state. When in this state the brain-body system can easily release out dated or unwanted beliefs and ‘upgrade’ or replace them with more life affirming positive beliefs. With more life affirming, positive beliefs introduced and a coherent and calmed system, new behaviors and outcomes follow naturally and easily. Basic elements of this straightforward work are integrated into Dr. Shannon Simonelli’s work integrates this work in the Luminous Life Maps System.

## MOVEMENT, EMBODIED AWARENESS AND PRESENCE

Movement, embodied awareness and dance are utilized for a number of benefits and to work synergistically for change and transformation. Continuous Awareness, Authentic Movement, 5Rhythms Movement Therapy, dance therapy and Gestalt based work are the traditions we draw from. These modalities offer space and set structure for the Imaginal to embody. Movement experiments teach appropriate risk taking, invite vigorous exercise for cleansing toxins, offer somatic, psychological and emotional resources and create ground for embodied imaginal experience. Movers learn to wait for inner impulses, to allow movement to take shape, inner imagery is awakened, unfinished body stories are moved, patterns, relationships, memories explored.

Maps of movement development are offered and hold movers in both structure and an invite into freedom or expanded movement expression in the body and in life. Movement maps link with the elemental world, our indigenous nature, the textures and tempos of engaging more authentically with self, others and the group. Movers practice and learn to unwind outdated patterned ways of reacting to life. They learn to embody a more responsive, primal or indigenous way of being in relationship with their movements, body experience/expression, and by extension, in daily life. This invitation into greater embodied awareness and fluency supports participants in strengthening their capacity to witness. The skill of witnessing is free from pathologizing, judging, projecting, or solving/fixing. As witnesses in embodied practice and in life, we bring great healing and clinical skill to our clients and patients.





Through inviting greater awareness in the body and increased range of motion in the body, participants can experience increased range of motion and perceived options in life (Casasanto, D. 2012). We know that novelty and exercise impacts neural plasticity through generating more brain cells in the hippocampus (Reynolds, G. 2012). Increases in dopamine, accessing GABA states and connecting with the parasympathetic nervous system are all activated with dance, joy, pleasure and enjoyment.

The somatic aspect of this work also assists participants and clinicians (and clients/patients) to directly experience their emotional life with embodied awareness and with practice, expand their capacity and spaciousness for this. They begin to learn that their body is giving them information worth paying attention to, that somatic cues can be emotionally based and can offer them warning signs to pay attention, and an opportunity back into greater coherence. This work adds to participant's insight base and invites the beginnings of mastery related to the body as an ally and resource for greater interpersonal and spiritual connection, sober enjoyment, and 'aha!' moments that bypass the conscious mind. Patterns of being become clear and possibilities for different action are revealed. Participants experience deeper compassion and understanding of self and others through movement and group process. Clinicians, healers and participants feel what it is like to be in their body with empowerment, and experience a body-based invitation to conceptualize clinical casework and fortify their life.

## IMAGE, IMAGINAL AND IMAGINATION

In addition to brain- based and heart-centered shifting, The Luminous Life Maps System [NeuroImaginal Practice] is rooted in the Imaginal, the power of the imagination and therapeutic art process, which is used in conjunction with many of the modalities. Learning to hunt for the Imaginal through image, then hold, become curious and further explore that image is a central way of working. Image work may be collage based, using pictures and words from magazines or personal photos. Image work may use chalks, oil pastels or other media to 'out picture' what an experience looks like or feels like as another way to approach personal process. This then becomes a way to be with, contain, care for, hold or project on to the image. Working with image allows clinicians and then clients to find new understanding, to 're-picture or re-image' their perception or story from a place of empowerment and personal responsibility. Sharing the image with others in group is a rich and direct way to communicate one's experience and feeling state. Image work can offer insight, solutions and awareness otherwise missed by the cognitive mind. Art process is one way to work with image, we also hold that image comes through the body in movement and

body sculpture work, personal image is also richly activated through guided visualization and journey work.

Guided visualization has become a standard in Mind Body Medicine and is used in many therapeutic settings. Hospitals, Oncology treatment, trauma treatment, stress management, relaxation and many others. The NeuroImaginal way of working with guided visualization is through specifically designed interventions to address targeted clinical objectives and capitalizes on our understanding: what we imagine and feel in the body is perceived by the body-being as real. (This knowing has guided athletes in performance improvement and is the underpinning to trauma triggers invoking full body response.)

Guided journey work connects with the right hemisphere of the brain, bypassing linear logic and opening the client and patient to a more Soul-centered or psyche-centered dialogue. Consider image and guided visualization as the ‘brain of the heart’. Working with the potent inner world of personal image through guided visualization and journey work activates the heart, engages the Soul and invites the electromagnetic powerhouse of the coherent heart.



## ALTERED STATES AND JOURNEY WORK

Stan Groff MD, who was funded to conduct LSD research to study psychosis in the 1970s, originally conceptualized Breathwork in modern culture. What he soon learned is that facilitating an altered state of consciousness in a safe and structured way was creating spontaneous healing experiences for participants. As time went on he stopped using LSD to generate these altered or expanded states of consciousness and used specifically designed music, breath and bodywork to induce the same state. This way of working has ancient roots in tribal Shamanic culture, using drumming to induce trance states for journeying with the intention of healing, transition, insight or assisting an individual soul or the tribe at large. This work has been further developed in modern times and referred to as Psycho-Spiritual Integrative Breathwork, Shamanic Breathwork and now NeuroImaginal Journey Work. The founding tenants of this work remain the same, with the right training facilitators create safe space with intention, use specifically designed music, breath and body work, incorporate art making and group process to hold the container for deep transformation.

Research has been done using the Breathwork with addicts in recovery and for relapse prevention; the results show particular success with addiction recovery, relapse prevention, dual diagnosis, and connecting people with their wholeness (Metcalf, B. (1995). Brewerton, T. et. al (2001). Rhinewine, J., Williams, O. (2007). Dr. Shannon Simonelli and The NeuroImaginal Institute has used this work in personal and professional development settings with Physicians, medical and mental health professionals for over 15 years. Additionally we have conducted workshops for the general public with a wide range of people and desires for their healing. It is a powerful tool to assist people in their reconnection with their essential self and seeing their ego based patterns from a distance that is very helpful. It drops people into their hearts, invites deep embodiment and reconnects people with their indigenous nature, their Imaginal self.

All these modalities and ways of working synergistically come together to create Neuro-Imaginal Embodiment Practice and are the foundational tools in the Luminous Life Maps System.

## EVIDENCE BASED BENEFITS OF NEUROIMAGINAL EMBODIMENT PRACTICE

Drawing from the therapeutic use of music, art process, movement and somatic practice, guided journeywork, heart based coherence meditations, breathing techniques and group process includes:

- Opportunity to express and represent repressed feelings and conflicts in a safe and supportive environment
- Lower stress and trauma response
- Shift and minimize distress quickly
- Increase brain and heart coherence
- Quiet and regulate over-active/reactive emotions
- Increase ability to access higher cortical function and creative mind
- Increase mindfulness and body based emotional awareness as a tool for relapse management
- Increase perception of possibility
- Increase self-worth and social connectedness
- Build self-esteem, a stronger sense of identity and self-competence
- Build tolerance for differences
- Build congruence between inner and outer worlds
- Decrease anxiety, agitation, and tension
- Experience coping strategies available to choose in daily life

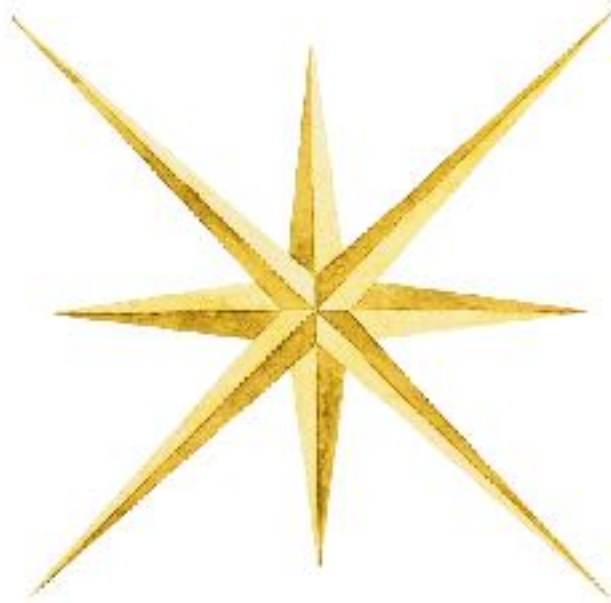
## WHAT WE OFFER - THE LUMINOUS LIFE MAPS SYSTEM

In the words of Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, leading trauma treatment researcher and clinician, “I always wonder how I can continue to do workshops like this and ask you to sit on your rear ends all day listening to me talk, knowing that people only really learn when they move and act.” In this spirit, we have created highly experiential learning weekends for your healing, renewal and capacity building first and then to apply with those you work with.

Training through the Luminous Life Maps System offers mental health clinicians CEU approved hours, and the general public experiential training for their own self-care, discovery and embodiment first, and then teaches how to apply these skills within the scope of their own practice or business through the certification track. Direct experience of and awakening to one’s embodied Imaginal life, coupled with spaciousness in holding it’s unfolding and anchoring it in body, heart and brain coherence is a powerful guiding force for clinicians and through them for their clients and patients.

*To learn more about The Luminous Life Maps System go to <http://LuminousLifeMaps.com>*

*The NeuroImaginal Institute houses evidence based work on NeuroImaginal Embodiment Practice at <http://neuroimaginalinstitute.com/article-archive/>*



## BRIEF BIO



### SHANNON SIMONELLI PH.D., ATR

Dr. Shannon Simonelli is the founder of the Luminous Life Maps System, an experiential journey that supports and guides people through Five Landscapes to unlock their authentic brilliance so they can live more connected, satisfied and fully alive. She is an expert at transforming research into practice through highly effective, potent experiential learning and healing events, programs, retreats and certification training.

Shannon has been in the field of mental health, healing and the arts for over 20 years. She has her doctorate in Imaginal Psychology and Creative Arts Therapy. She co-founded the NeuroImaginal Institute with colleagues Nita Gage DSPS, CSAC and Lee Lipsenthal MD. Shannon has worked at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa on State wide grants to support the inclusion of children with disabilities into the public education system, served as the Director of the Intensive Outpatient Treatment Center at Aloha House, Maui. She served as the Director of the Expressive Therapies Department at the University Neuropsychiatric institute, Salt Lake City, Utah and throughout her career she has worked with women, girls and teens who are troubled.

Shannon is an expert and unique contributor to her field through her writing, speaking, experiential trainings, facilitation and various creative endeavors. Personally she enjoys many wonderful authentic friends, her family, nature, dance, music, and collaborating with her creative graphic designer and photographer husband.

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Please reach out to share your reflections on this White Paper, I would love to hear from you.  
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