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**Posttraumatic Play in Art Therapy:  
A Case Study Exploring the Ritual Play Process  
in the Art Making of a Sexually Abused Child**

**Marielle Geoffroy**

**A Research Paper**

**in**

**The Department**

**of**

**Creative Arts Therapies**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts  
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## **Abstract**

### **Posttraumatic Play in Art Therapy: A Case Study Exploring the Ritual Play Process in the Art Making of a Sexually Abused Child**

**Marielle Geoffroy**

Sexual abuse in children is presented as having a traumatic impact that involves emotional shock, distress, and critical damage to the psychological organization of the self. Young children who have been traumatized demonstrate a particular type of play called posttraumatic play. Children relive their trauma through compulsive repetitions that show ritualistic enactments in play. Trauma reactions following sexual abuse have been considered by some authors as responses to grief and inner losses. Through a literature review, this paper examines the therapeutic functions of play and ritual, and focuses more specifically on the role of ritual in times of crisis. Crises are defined as involving experiences of loss and separation that require a grieving process for new life conditions to emerge. The author proposes that sexually abused children, through the ritualistic dimension of posttraumatic play, may express an unconscious need for a process that can help them grieve inner losses. Based on this premise, this research studies the development of ritual processes in the posttraumatic play and art making of a sexually abused child in art therapy. It explores a treatment approach that encourages the development of ritual making in art therapy with sexually traumatized children, in order to foster creative changes in their play patterns. It proposes a therapeutic model of intervention based on play and on the ritual dimension of movement stories in art therapy, to support the symbolic externalization of trauma and to offer a transitional space for grieving inner losses.

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## **Introduction**

### **Subject Area of Study**

The subject of this research is concerned with trauma reactions in child sexual abuse, and their effect on child development. The main focus of study is the posttraumatic play observed in sexually abused children. More specifically, this research wants to investigate the ritualistic aspect of posttraumatic play, in relation to the art process of these children in art therapy, by exploring the meanings, purposes, and functions of rituals.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The interest of this research stems from my observations, in art therapy sessions, of the ritualistic nature of the play and art processes of a seven year old girl who suffered sexual abuse. The motivation behind this study is to examine the symbolic expression in ritual patterns, and how it relates to trauma experience. Through the particular study of this client and the different perspectives gathered on the subject of posttraumatic play and ritual. I hope to contribute to a better understanding of the art and play processes of sexually abused children in art therapy. I also hope to raise interest in further inquiry into some aspects of this research, that could lead to the development of therapeutic and clinical interventions for treatment of sexually abused children in art therapy.

### **Statement of Research Questions**

There is very little research done on the posttraumatic responses of children (O'Connor & Schaefer, 1994), and on the subject of posttraumatic play. Posttraumatic reactions in children have not been examined in the context of art therapy. My primary research question is concerned with the ritualized play behaviours of posttraumatic play. It

asks if it is possible to facilitate a creative development in the ritualistic play patterns of sexually abused children in art therapy, to support the working through and integration of trauma. This paper inquires into the role and purpose of ritualized processes in posttraumatic play, with the view of offering new perspectives on this type of play.

Through a literature review, this research proceeds to examine the nature and functions of ritual. It looks more specifically at the functions performed by ritual in times of major critical life change. In times of crisis, ritual creates a transitional space where experiences of loss and grief can be lived (Eliade, 1995; Shaughnessy, 1973; Shorter, 1976; Turner, 1969). This engenders a subsidiary question, that asks if we can understand the ritualized gestures present in posttraumatic play as the expression of children's need for symbolic behaviours that can contain and process states of crisis and transition.

Another question asks if specific rituals of loss, death, and grieving inherent to human rites of passage (van Gennep, 1960) can be highlighted in the ritualized play patterns of sexually traumatized children. By observing the posttraumatic play patterns of a sexually abused child in art therapy, this study links the specific rituals produced by the client with her experiences of loss and grief. The research proposes that issues of loss and grief in child sexual abuse should be further investigated in art therapy.

This research wants to raise awareness on the therapeutic potential of symbolic expression in art therapy, that can facilitate the development of compulsive ritualistic play patterns of posttraumatic play into more creative rituals. This development would promote therapeutic changes and address the need for transformation in sexually traumatized children. Through the case study, an art therapy approach which favours the symbolic development of play and ritual making is explored, with the aim of helping sexually abused children in their grieving and healing process.

### Research Design and Method

This qualitative type of research provides an in-depth inquiry through the case study of one subject, and uses a metaphorical and narrative form to study the essence, qualities and ambiguities of experience of the child-client. The research method focuses on the contextual and experiential dimension of a case study to examine, apply and integrate theory provided by a current literature review. This critical review addresses issues of child sexual abuse, posttraumatic play, play therapy and ritual, and links relevant aspects that are applied to the case study.

This research paper focuses on the process of sexually abused children of the age of eight years and under, who can spontaneously engage in posttraumatic play. The research is not intended to be generalizable, as it is based on the observation of only one subject, but its purpose is to investigate new areas related to child sexual abuse, with the aim of generating new possibilities of inquiry on a larger population in future research.

### Introduction to the Chapters

A literature review on child sexual abuse is offered in the first chapter. Sexual abuse is defined as psychological trauma and its effect on children's development is discussed. One of the main developmental damages is the erosion of the sense of self, that produces a loss of identity with a loss of healthy relationships. Critical life changes and separations are also viewed as traumatic events experienced by sexually abused children, and are linked with experiences of grief. Treatment approaches address issues of loss and grief, and the need for empowerment and corrective emotional experiences.



In the second chapter, description of posttraumatic play following sexual abuse and trauma is presented through the work of play therapists. Therapeutic interventions based on the principles of non-directive play therapy are explained in the context of posttraumatic play, to facilitate the working through of trauma and promote integration and healing in children. This section focuses particularly on the ritualistic aspect of posttraumatic play.

In the third chapter, the human need for ritualization is examined, together with the functions and purposes of rituals. These functions of ritual are defined as providing connection, refuge and meaning, and as creating a symbolic context to live experiences of crisis and transition. Rituals are also viewed as offering a symbolic space for a grieving process, that can promote transformation of inner experiences of loss and death.

The fourth chapter examines treatment goals in relation to sexually traumatized children. It addresses the need to develop a treatment approach in art therapy that can meet the needs of sexually traumatized children. Art therapy authors who have addressed the role of visual expression in the treatment of sexually abused children are considered. The use of rituals in art therapy as a symbolic and creative treatment approach is proposed.

The fifth chapter offers a summary of the client's history and process in art therapy, together with the main ritual movements and symbolic themes present in her therapeutic process. It offers a narration of the art therapy sessions, by organizing the commentaries through four main periods of development present in the sessions, and by focusing on specific movement themes observed during therapy. Finally, the last section ends with a conclusion that gives a summary and evaluation of the art therapy approach and proposes further research in art therapy.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Sexual Abuse in Children**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a conceptual framework for a basic understanding of child sexual abuse. It begins with a definition of child sexual abuse, and presents sexual abuse as a traumatic event causing severe psychological stress to the individual. To better understand the impact of psychological trauma on the self, this chapter explains the basic changes in memory, and in physiological, psychological, emotional, and cognitive states that occur following sexual trauma. It examines the disruptions that happen in the development of children who have been sexually abused, due to a fragmentation of self that prevents the integration of experiences and impairs relations with others. Loss of identity, loss of healthy relationships, and loss of significant others due to separation from family members after disclosure can add to the trauma of sexual abuse itself, and put children in a state of grief. General treatment issues when dealing with trauma survivors are reviewed, that focus on providing corrective emotional experiences, empowerment, and hope.

#### **The Psychological Trauma of Child Sexual Abuse**

Roberge defines sexual abuse in children as "the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities they do not truly comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent or that violate the social taboos of family roles" (Cattanach, 1992, p. 21). Sexual abuse is understood in the literature and in clinical approaches as psychological trauma caused by a traumatic event that creates enormous stress on the individual. Psychic trauma is defined by Schaefer as

"the damaging effect on an individual of an extremely stressful external event that is beyond the range of usual human experiences" (1994, p. 297). The impact of sexual abuse on children is presented in the DSM-IV with the range of symptoms listed as posttraumatic stress disorder. Sexually abused children regularly exhibit the following symptoms: fear or anxiety, depression, learning difficulties in school, anger or hostility, inappropriate sexualized behaviour, running away or delinquency (Finkelhor, 1986). In fact, many of these psychological reactions can be considered as posttraumatic reenactments of unresolved trauma (Gil, 1991).

The traumatic event of sexual abuse is reexperienced in recurrent recollections of the event, through intrusive and sudden images, thoughts, perceptions, or dreams that cause psychological distress (Reid & Wise, 1995). Trauma reaction due to sexual abuse engenders four main problematic issues in the victim: powerlessness, a sense of betrayal, stigmatization, and sexualization involving pathological sexual behaviours (van der Kolk, 1987). Whilst these main features of the posttraumatic syndrome related to sexual abuse remain consistent among individuals, the severity and nature of the trauma will determine individual capacity for future adaptation.

Traumatic experiences cause a threat to the physical integrity of the self and elicit intense fear, helplessness, or horror from the victim. Herman presents trauma in general as a "threat of annihilation" (1992, p. 50). She explains that trauma implies the impossibility for the victim to resist or to escape. Consequently, the system of self-defense of the individual becomes overwhelmed and disorganized (1992). Physiological arousal, emotional and cognitive states, and memory are profoundly altered. These functions become disconnected from each other and are dissociated from the whole system of the self. Dissociation serves as a defense against severe stress (Gil, 1991). After the traumatic event, the individual's system of functioning has been changed significantly and manifests

reactions that can alternate without control between a state of alarm involving intense feelings of fear and anger, and a state of numbness.

### Trauma and Changes in Memory

Due to severe psychological stress, traumatic moments of sexual abuse are recorded by an abnormal primitive form of memory, that can intrude spontaneously into consciousness, in the form of flashbacks or nightmares (Herman, 1992). Research concerned with the study of memory concludes that in the case of trauma, traumatic memory is not repressed, but dissociated (Bell-Gadsby & Siegenberg, 1996; van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1991). During events experienced as traumatic, due to overwhelming stimulation combined with severe threat, the more developed cognitive system of memory is bypassed and a form of primitive visual memory takes over. The traumatic event is encoded in photographic form and remains separate and unintegrated from other memories. Many of our early childhood memories are based on this type of primitive coding, which explains why early childhood years are usually not remembered. Traumatic memories are not verbal, linear or narrative, but are registered in the form of intensely striking sensations and images, that seem arrested in time and space (Herman, 1992).

### Trauma and Disruption of Normal Development

Van der Kolk (1987) highlights that trauma seriously damages young children, because it produces deep changes on the central nervous system and on cognitive functions that have not yet fully developed. In the case of children who have been sexually abused, the fragmentation process caused by trauma is seen not only in dissociated memories but extends to the erosion of the sense of self. Young children who have been abused have experienced "a monstrous invasion of their whole being", says Cattanach (1992, p. 125).

At a time in their development when they are just starting to differentiate between self and others, the overwhelming physical intrusion by an adult is an incomprehensible and destructive experience that damages their whole sense of being as separate persons (Cattanach, 1992). Sexual trauma causes core damage to the psychological organization of the self. The fragmentation of self prevents the integration of emotional, bodily and cognitive experiences, and of memory. When a child is sexually abused, there is also a splitting occurring in the inner self-image. The organization of the ego is altered to preserve its survival, and it separates itself into good and bad parts, the good part functioning while the bad part is repressed (Herman, 1992). Sexual trauma in childhood puts the child in the midst of many conflicting experiences, sensations and feelings. For example, the child can be physically aroused while experiencing fear and terror. There is a strong inner conflict between the need to deny or suppress horrible events through numbness, and the need to relive the events, to bring them into consciousness to try to resolve them (Herman, 1992). Children try to resolve conflicts in themselves by internalizing the anger and confusion and becoming depressed, add Everstine & Everstine (1989). Trauma in childhood distorts the personality structure, and the self spends most of its energy in mobilizing defenses to cope with intense inner conflicts and difficult challenges of adaptation. (Herman, 1992).

The trauma of sexual abuse also creates a fragmentation of the inner representation of others and impairs the development of relations. The child comes to feel damaged, soiled, isolated and an outcast (Finkelhor, 1987; Johnson, 1987; Shengold, 1979). The abused child, says Cattanach, is "the invisible child", because "to have your rights disregarded is to become invisible, not to count, so the sense of self is eroded" (1992, p. 17). Sexual abuse is an intrusive act that violates children's boundaries, their right to say no, and their sense of control in the world (Bass & Davies, 1988; Gill, 1991).

The child who has been sexually abused most often has gone through the experience of being betrayed by an adult and the child's trust in adult caretakers has been seriously damaged. "A secure sense of connection with caring adults is the foundation of personality development" says Herman (1992, p. 52). Abused children have lost this connection and their inner relationship to primary caretakers is usually ambivalent and split. Their lack of trust and a sense of betrayal is contradicted by their needs of dependency. Being dependent on adults for survival, often abused children are forced to relate to unreliable or untrustworthy caretakers. Despite feeling unsafe and betrayed, children may be faced with the conflicting task of finding security, control and power in unpredictable and helpless conditions (Herman, 1992). As the child is not able to rely on an inner sense of security and independence, finding comfort in external sources and attaching indiscriminately to strangers becomes a coping mechanism. The abused child alternates between anxious clinging to others and trying to protect oneself by withdrawal (Herman, 1992). The development of healthy boundaries with others is impaired, and a fragile sense of self can easily become mixed with the abusing other (Cattanach, 1997). Consequently, the separation and individuation process becomes a challenging task for abused children (Sgroi, 1988).

### Trauma and Treatment Issues

Gill (1991) reports that the field of child therapy in general and of therapy of abused and traumatized children in particular is evolving rapidly. However, she deplores that studies focusing on treatment approaches with abused children are very rare in literature. She agrees with Finkelhor (1984) that more quality research is needed on a variety of aspects concerning child abuse, to allow clinicians to develop more precise treatment strategies. One of the aspects that has to be researched is how to address dissociation and develop a treatment for dissociation in child sexual abuse (Gil, 1991).

Johnson (1989) supports this view, as he underlines that one of the central tasks of posttrauma treatment is reorganization, following reexperience and release.

The main goal when formulating a treatment plan for traumatized children still remains "to provide corrective and reparative experiences for the child", says Gil (1991, p. 52). These experiences should occur within a context of safe and well-contained therapeutic interactions, that create a sense of security, trust and comfort. Early interventions should follow a non-directive approach, so as to be nonintrusive and encourage the child to create boundaries (Gil, 1991). As we have seen, the child's ability to trust and develop healthy connections with others has been impaired, and the child is also confused about role boundaries between self and others, particularly adults.

Another main task of a therapist working with sexually abused children is to help the child distinguish between actions experienced as traumatic and the self, and to reconstruct the self as distinct from the trauma (Everstine & Everstine, 1989). Experiencing powerlessness due to trauma impairs the development of the self and affects the self image of the child; the inability to comprehend the traumatic experience further creates self-blame and guilt. Children have to be helped to understand they did not have the skills or the power to protect themselves (Bass & Davies, 1988). Another important part of the therapeutic process, once children begin to feel safe enough with the therapist, is to help them connect with their anger repressed under depression and fear. The therapist helps them to channel their anger. It is to be expected that it will take a considerable amount of time before a child can express feelings about the traumatic event (Bass & Davies, 1988; Everstine & Everstine, 1989; Sgroi, 1988).

In summary, the sexually abused child has experienced traumatic events that impede development and create psychological losses. The erosion of the sense of self

produces not only a loss of identity, it also engenders a loss of healthy relationships with the self and with others. Furthermore, disclosure of sexual abuse often leads to separation from family members. The physical or psychological loss of significant others may be experienced as traumatic events for these children. The traumatic impact of losses and separations is then mixed with the trauma of sexual abuse itself, leaving the child in a condition of grief. The therapeutic process should consider issues of loss, identity, and grief when working with sexually abused children (King, 1996). The child's recovery, says Herman (1992), will depend on empowerment and the creation of new and healthy connections with others. It also becomes crucial to inspire hope to help the child develop a more positive outlook toward the future (Gill, 1991). Corrective emotional experiences should be provided, to recreate the psychological faculties that have been arrested in their development: capacities for trust, autonomy and initiative, mastery and competence (Herman, 1992; King, 1996).



## Chapter 2

### **Postrumatic Play in Child Sexual Abuse, From a Play Therapy Perspective**

#### Introduction

Child victims of sexual abuse or trauma, often spontaneously generate a distinctive type of play that indicates prior trauma. This chapter gives a description of posttraumatic play observed in abused children. It presents the goals, process and methods of play therapy in general, and of non-directive play therapy more specifically. Finally, it reports how play therapists with a non-directive approach work with posttraumatic play and make clinical intervention for treatment.

#### Description of Posttraumatic Play

The phenomenon of posttraumatic play in abused children seems to have been mostly explored by play therapists, although it was first observed by Freud and recognized by other authors. The concept of posttraumatic play has been defined by Terr (1981), and is derived from her observations in a study of twenty-three child-kidnap victims. More extended research on this type of play is required in order to differentiate between the various stages in the play, the development of play, the gravity of cases, and to provide us with a greater population sample. In fact, the concept of posttraumatic play is sometimes defined differently by authors, and can take on a positive or negative connotation, depending on how the concept is being used. The lack of clarity relates to the time when the play of traumatized children is observed. Some authors discuss a type of play observed prior to the therapeutic intervention and others play in the process of therapy. I will base my definition of posttraumatic play on that given by Terr, who describes posttraumatic play

as a spontaneous type of play observed in traumatized children before any therapeutic intervention. The basic characteristics of posttraumatic play observed by Terr are: compulsive repetitiveness in play, no conscious connections made by the child during play to the traumatic event, and the failure of the play to relieve anxiety (1981).

As observed by Terr (1981), traumatized children have a compelling unconscious need to relive the trauma in play, obsessively repeating over the same sequences of acts in their play with very little changes, and without being able to stop unless someone tells them to. This is linked to their inability to create emotional or symbolic understanding of their play as it relates to the original psychic trauma. The play is literal and far less imaginative or elaborate than usual play. Terr explains it as an unconscious repetition of the traumatic experience, based on a simple defense mechanism that alternates between identification with the aggressor and a passive role. This play is monotonous, with very little creativity in it, and does not change much over time. It appears devoid of enjoyment or freedom of expression. It remains an unsuccessful attempt at desensitization and at relieving anxiety. "The play aggravates rather than soothes the condition" says Terr (1981, p. 756), and the play mechanisms are inadequate to dissipate the anxiety and to bring about some corrective developments. The child repetitively acts out a series of sequential movements that result in an identical outcome. Posttraumatic play reflects a compulsive and repetitive desire to gain mastery over the traumatic event through projection, but it stays unsuccessful at integrating trauma (Herman, 1992; Spring, 1993). There is an inability to play out in a symbolic way thoughts and feelings related to the trauma, reflecting an incapacity to create some distancing. James adds that this play often remains hidden from others and has ritualistic features (1980). Ritualistic or ritualized acts are defined by Grimes (1982) as being not only repetitious, but as presenting stylized gestures or postures that seem to be motivated by a need for meaning and communication.

### Principles of Non-Directive Play Therapy

The foundation of play therapy is that play is the child's natural form of self-expression. "The child plays out his feelings, instead of talking out his difficulties", says Axline (1947, p. 9). In play therapy, the process of play is considered to be therapeutic in itself, and not just a treatment modality. Play becomes the means of communication between therapist and child, and their relationship in play is used to provide a corrective emotional experience for the child (O'Connor & Schaefer, 1994).

Non-directive play therapy is based on the belief that the child has the creative power to deal with problems and can rely on an energy of growth that strives towards more mature behaviour (Axline, 1947). In this regard, the therapist encourages the sense of responsibility and direction in the playing child. At the same time, the play therapist accompanies the child by participating in the child's play, being emotionally engaged while at the same time practicing active observation. This involves mentally making notes of the sequences of play, the themes, the conflicts and resolutions, the child's affect and the verbal communications, while playing with the child (Gil, 1991). The therapist's position is one of unconditional acceptance and containment of the child (Axline, 1947).

In a safe and supportive environment, the child can play out and bring to the surface conflicts and stressful feelings, involving anxiety, confusion, shame, aggression, anger, and sadness. Through playing, the child experiences emotional relaxation and begins to discover the inner capacity to make choices and to effect changes (Axline, 1947).

### Therapeutic Uses of Non-Directive Play Therapy in Posttraumatic Play

Terr mentions that posttraumatic play, even in its most pathological form, can be used creatively in a therapeutic context. It is in fact, she argues, "the most potent way to effect internal changes in young, traumatized children" (1990, p. 299). Freud (1920) was the first one to note that play offers a unique opportunity to work through traumatic events. He saw the repetition compulsion in the play of traumatized children as reflecting their need to master the painful event. Piaget (1962) saw play as having an assimilative rather than accommodative function and perceived repetitive compulsion in the play of traumatized children as an effort to gradually mentally digest and gain mastery over trauma- a slow healing process based on repetition.

The role of the play therapist is to help the child move from a passive and compulsive reliving of the trauma to an active play reenactment that mobilizes the creative resources of the child. With children suffering from moderate to intense stress reactions to trauma, the therapist, says Schaefer, must become a mediator in the play reenactment, helping the child experience a sense of control and mastery (O'Connor & Schaefer, 1994). As the overwhelming event is reenacted in play, but this time in a controlled and safe environment, it can provide great relief for the child and offer a new context of experience for possibilities of change. The role of the therapist as witness and alter ego empowers the child through reexperiencing the trauma with someone in play. It also supports the development of new roles in relationships (Gill, 1991; Schaefer, 1994).

The reenactment of a trauma can then move towards creativity and mastery rather than stay stuck in retraumatizing play. The therapist helps the child feel in control of the outcome, and encourages a satisfactory ending to their play. The play might be interrupted at times by the therapist to create new alternatives and to help the child express confusing

thoughts and feelings. This is done to promote a sense of control and mastery, to encourage the expression and release of negative affect, and to develop a cognitive reevaluation of the event (Gil, 1991; Schaefer, 1994). Play can then become an exploration process through which to assimilate and understand traumatic experiences at the child's own developmental level. This process can also support the child in developing new perspectives toward the future (Cattanach, 1992; Gil, 1991).

Play is a most powerful mode of communication when dealing with a child. It is the intense and yet pleasurable nature of play therapy that allows traumatized children to let go gradually of defenses and become emotionally receptive to positive messages offered by the therapist (James, 1989).

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Need for Ritual in Human Experience and in Traumatized Children**

#### Introduction

As was mentioned before, one of the aspects of the play of children who have been traumatized is its highly ritualistic quality. This chapter will first focus on the process of ritualization that is found in normal play, by way of understanding the needs for ritualization in children. It will then explore the meaning of ritual through a review of the literature on ritual studies, in order to understand the nature and functions of ritual in times of crises and transition. The experience of the traumatized child who faces deep challenges of identity and many losses, is related to a state of crisis and transition. Rituals are considered a containing place for grieving and mourning losses, that can support the healing process of the abused child, and offer possibilities for psychological change and transformation.

#### The Human Need for Ritualization

Grimes (1982) defines ritualization as common to animal and human species, a "stylized and repeated gesturing and posturing, motivated by need for meaning, communication and performance" (p. 36). Ritualization is recurrent throughout children's play and usually emerges with movement (Lowenfeld, 1971). In rituals as in play, there is a repetition of well-defined acts that create an ordered sequence. Elements of repetition and alternation form the basic rhythm of play and ritual (Huizinga, 1962). According to Lowenfeld, sequences represent concrete expressions of an unconscious thought process manifesting through a series of symbolic occurrences (1971). Ritualization is a basic human

psychosomatic need to align the rhythms of our bodies to those of our psyches. The gestures being formed are physical ways of searching and trying to connect what feels disconnected: it is a bodily way of knowing (Grimes, 1982).

Grimes (1982) underlines the basic polarity of the nature of ritualization, and states that the dominant state of affect in ritualization is ambivalence. He comments that ritual enactment is a gestural explanation of a psychological conflict. When opposite elements coexist simultaneously in the psyche and cannot be distinguished or separated from each other, the person is then faced with the impossibility of choosing from either polarity. The only action that can effectively translate this ambivalent position is ritualization. The main purpose of ritualization is to overcome paralyzing ambivalence by establishing dialectic gestures between conflicting forces. Erikson supports this view by saying that in play as in ritual actions, there is a central conflict as the source of motivation (1977). In ritualizing, the individual is compelled to make gestures that will bring up the conflict. These gestures bring feelings to consciousness and intensify them. This awakening provokes an anxious mood that will in turn be calmed by the repetitious monotony of the ritualistic movements. Ritualization meets in this way needs for disclosure as well as for control. When used creatively, the dual nature of ritual behaviour can be effective in controlling excessive impulses and monitoring compulsive self-restriction (Grimes, 1982).

Ritualization is common in normal children's play, and should not be seen as a pathological occurrence (Lowenfeld, 1971). However, levels of ritualization are to be found on a wide range of human behaviour, from creative ritualization in normal play, to ritualistic rigidity in obsessive and compulsive reactions (Erikson, 1977). As was described earlier, abused children engaged in posttraumatic play are locked into patterns of ritualistic rigidity. For Herman, ritualistic repetition in play becomes "the mute language of the abused child" (1992, p. 110). For traumatized children, fixed and unchanged

repetitions become the priority of their play. Behind the repetitions of abused children lies a traumatic anxiety that is calmed by the controlling effect of ritualizations (Terr, 1990).

There is a need to better understand the highly ritualistic patterns of play in traumatized children, and the functions that ritualization serve in their play. In trying to address these issues, perspectives from authors who have mostly done research in the field of ritual studies will be explored in the following pages. Research literature in this area has developed interesting studies on the nature and function of ritual at the individual and societal level. These studies show how the existence of rituals is linked to times of crises and transitions. Present in deep changes and crises is the inner experience of death. Rituals in this context are considered as powerful instruments to allow a grieving process that can lead to positive changes and transformation.

### Purpose and Functions of Rituals

#### Rituals as Symbolic and Mediating Actions

Livingston introduces rituals as actions endowed with meaning, that can be likened to "condensed symbols" (1993, p. 105). Rituals are the making-place of symbols. When one is confronted with a power beyond human comprehension, rituals act as symbolic containers for personal encounter with the transcendent and the irrational. Their purpose is to reconcile the paradoxes of human experience, to bridge the gaps between ego and Self, individual and cosmic, human and non-human, unconscious and conscious (Shorter, 1976). The performative aspect of ritual is compared by Shorter to "the theater of the soul" (1976, p. 380) that enables the individual to bring together body, mind and emotions through the repetitive sequences of body gestures and speech (Livingston, 1993). Rituals engage the individual actor fully, connecting body with soul.



### Rituals as Providing Refuge and Restoring Order

Girard argues that "violence is the matrix of all ritual" (1977, p. 30), and that ritual and the sacred are concerned with powers outside our control and mastery. Based on his study of rituals in different cultures, he concludes that the function of ritual is to transform violence. Girard observes that rituals emerge in societies whenever there is a potential for dangerous change or chaos. Ritual creates a structure that serves to expel disorder from a social group and to reestablish stability and control. The objective of ritual is to keep violence outside the community and to exorcise it through acts of sacrifice and purification, in ritualized forms that can contain the violence (Girard, 1977). A striking feature of many rituals is the offering of a sacrifice, mentions Livingston (1993). The ritual process creates order, control and continuity by getting rid of all elements of change. It offers a structured pattern of acts that help to differentiate between good and bad elements and between individual and social roles. It also "seeks to extract from the original violence some technique of cathartic appeasement" (Girard, 1977, p. 102). Ritual is performed to dispel or reduce anxiety associated with a state of unclear boundaries that create instability and unrest. The repetitive gestures in ritual channel dangerous tensions into ordered, controlled and expectable actions that become acceptable (Livingston, 1993).

We also see how rituals, when experienced in a religious or spiritual context, provide the individual with a sense of meaning and continuity. In times of personal changes or upheaval, they can become instrumental in helping a person regain some sense of order. Ritual can offer the space for a personal dialogue with symbols and metaphors of cosmic proportions when individuals are touched and troubled by events beyond their human control and understanding (Shorter, 1976). "Rituals provide the patterns that hold life together", says Kollar (Doka, p. 272).

### Rituals as Liminal Stage: Crisis and Transition

Throughout human history, humans have used ritual behaviour to cope with critical moments, says Margaret Mead (Shaughnessy, 1973). Ritual is a way to safeguard a dangerous passage (Eliade, 1995; Shorter, 1976). It provides gateways between one state to another (Bolen, 1996; Livingston, 1993). Ritual appears when life is experienced just at the border realm between life and death, in a liminal time and place (liminal comes from the latin word 'threshold') (Bolen, 1996). Turner describes the liminal stage as a limbo state, a twilight zone located between past and future and between dying and becoming (1969). Rituals are sought at times of critical transition among individuals or societies (Shorter, 1976). Most rituals deal with change and are rites of passage, connected to the human life cycles of birth, marriage, death, and crises (Turner, 1969).

Van Gennep divides rites of passage into three stages: preliminal, liminal and postliminal. The first stage of preliminal rites is concerned with the experience of separation from a previous known existence. Any major moments of change, such as birth, marriage or death, require individuals to detach themselves from a previous state and to renounce their usual frame of reference. Washing and cleansing rites in funeral ceremonies constitute rites of separation and deal with leaving behind the body of the deceased. In the second stage, which deals with the experience of transition in its wider application, liminal rites create a protected space for the individual who has to live in a transitional state for a while. Some mourning rites prescribe the suspension of social life for a definite time, to create a "territorial passage" for those involved in a grieving process (van Gennep, 1960, p. 20). The last stage deals with the experience of reincorporation into a new state. This postliminal stage includes rites that facilitate the process of integration into a new condition. One rite of incorporation is the sharing of meals to reunite surviving members after a funeral period (van Gennep, 1960).

### Ritual as Catharsis: Loss, Death, Mourning, and Transformation

Mourning rites are found, says Livingston (1993), at times of separation and transition. Rituals are created around the experience of death and loss, to offer a transitional place that can mark the passage for the soul. Mourning acts as a transitional period for survivors and is entered through rites of separation (van Gennep, 1960). Funeral rites offer individuals the opportunity to grieve and are a way for humans to adapt to death (Davies, 1997; Some, 1993). They are rituals of loss that reach out into the realms of dreams and myths to provide us with a passage through death into rebirth, "where burial is a precursor to renewal or resurrection" (Bolen, 1996, p. 168). Mourning rites are a descent into the underworld, where the mourner experiences the death of a former identity, and the death of one's hopes or illusions. Through this descent into the realm of death, the possibility of transformation occurs, as forgotten elements in the psyche may be brought to life (Bolen, 1996). Only through this kind of initiation, can death be given a positive value. Transformation cannot happen without the pain of loss and grief (Eliade, 1995). In fact, says Shorter, the purpose of rituals is "the mediation of dread, suffering, and transformation" (1976, p. 62).

### Childhood Sexual Trauma and the Experience of Loss, Death and Mourning

The inner losses experienced by traumatized children are very great, but are often overlooked by therapists who can tend to focus on the more dramatic events of the trauma (James, 1989). Symptoms following the trauma of sexual abuse include numbness, followed by intense pain mixed with pining, sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety and despair. Stages of helplessness and disorganization are also involved. The grieving process of individuals who have experienced the death of a loved one includes dealing with the same powerful and difficult emotions. This suggests that posttraumatic reactions in sexual abuse

could be consequences of experiences of deep loss that need to be addressed as a grieving process (Raphael, 1982).

With sexually traumatized children, it becomes especially important to recognize and understand the meaning of lost childhood (Spring, 1993). The child is involved in a mourning process, and the mourning is for the loss of childhood, says Terr (1990). Herman supports this view by adding that years after the event, many individuals who were traumatized as children report feeling that a part of themselves has died (1992). In general, losses experienced by children are usually not openly acknowledged, or given a place of mourning. Children are often denied the validity of their loss (Doka, 1989). And children lack models of experience to help them deal with their grief (Jewett Jarrat, 1994). It is also important to realize that emotional reactions associated with grief will become complicated when grief is not recognized and given a voice and a place (Doka, 1989).

Loss of identity can be seen as a grieving experience. Not only do personal constructs and cognitive concepts of the world get altered by trauma, but the organization of the self itself is affected and damaged. Traumatized children have been shaken at the very roots of their being, and the resulting loss of identity will demand a mourning process before a restructuration of the self can begin. Other serious losses accompanying loss of identity may include the loss of idealization of parent figures and of mother-father relationship. Children may also blame themselves for the losses, which complicates the grieving process (Raphael, 1982). The struggle involved in grieving is often a struggle for comprehension and a battle against despair, that challenges basic trust in life (Dalley, T., et al., p. 60). Ritual forms can act as much needed rites of passage for the grieving child.

### Ritual and the Mourning Issues of Sexual Abuse

In the difficult times of crisis and transition, ritual acts as a safe container for experiences of loss, and can facilitate the grieving process. Rituals offer a symbolic and transitional space that can guide the individual toward psychological changes (Shorter, 1976). Ritual, adds Neumann, is the main area of psychic transformation (1959). A ritual is a symbolic action that operates with a transformative purpose. It taps into archetypal images and meaning that help the person dialogue with experiences of loss and death in a symbolic way (Bolen, 1996; Shorter, 1976). The transcendent nature of ritual enables one to translate an identity crisis created by profound losses into a language symbolic of death and rebirth, thereby transforming personal experiences and leading to new life meaning (Shaughnessy, 1973; Shorter, 1996).

Ritual operates as a "clarification and purification of emotions", says Livingston (1993, p. 131). Ritual actions connect the individual to essential layers of meaning, that have the capacity to touch upon very deep emotions. They can contain and ultimately transcend sorrowful experiences. In ritual are to be found primal acts such as washing, cleansing and dissolving, that become alchemical metaphors for the transformation of emotions through a purification process (Davies, 1997; Eliade, 1995; Huntington & Metcalf, 1979).

## **Chapter 4**

### **Facilitating the Ritual Processes of the Sexually Abused Child in Art Therapy**

#### **Treatment Goals With Sexually Traumatized Children**

Sexually abused children have suffered trauma. It is only quite recently that people have begun to articulate a specific kind of therapy to meet the needs of traumatized individuals. Ochberg (1991) offers three main principles of posttraumatic therapy to focus on during treatment. First, there should be a normalization of experience, reassuring the client that the intense feelings or reactions experienced are within the normal range of responses to be expected, considering the extraordinary events faced by them. Second, the therapeutic relationship should be collaborative, to lead to the empowerment of the individual who has diminished self-worth and security. Finally, the therapist should recognize the fact that every individual will have a unique way to recover and should appreciate and validate the coping skills of the client. He adds that a sacred, ritual dimension to the treatment becomes essential in the therapeutic approach, to restore a sense of meaning and of belonging. James (1989) also highlights the fact that although treatment strategies must meet physical, cognitive, and emotional dimensions, the spiritual dimensions can have the most lasting impact on the child. The therapist should support children in relating to their spiritual essence, so that despite the damage, they can experience the source of life in them as untouched and unspoiled. This is accomplished by providing opportunities in therapy for children to experience beauty, power and continuity.

## Developing a Treatment Approach to Answer the Needs of Sexually Abused Children in

### Art Therapy

Spring mentions that there is a lack of specialized treatment modalities for sexual abuse victims (1993). Play therapy is one therapeutic discipline that has been developing strategies to help children reexperience traumatic events in play, with the aim of integrating and transforming painful experiences.

Until recently, the literature on art therapy treatment for sexual abuse has focused mostly on the diagnosis of the abuse and the uncovering of traumatic memories (King, 1996). Siden and Rosenthal (1987) point out that there is a pressing need to develop specific techniques to deal with problems of sexually abused individuals and to focus on restoring the victim through personal creativity. Brooke (1997) says that we should change our focus and begin to explore art therapy as a potentially very effective mode for integrating fragmented parts of the self as well as dissociated memories and experiences. Therapy with sexually abused children could also begin to focus more specifically on grief issues.

Art therapy, through the use of art materials, can help children relate to sensations and emotional feelings, through tactile and physical experiences (Brooke, 1997). Like play therapy, creative arts therapies offer a transitional space where feelings can be approached at the symbolic level, and in a gradual and indirect way. This creates a safe and non-threatening environment for the client who struggles with issues of trust, secrecy and ambivalent feelings. The development of metaphors and symbols in art therapy allows individuals to revisit traumatic experiences at their own pace, while gradually developing new perspectives and positions (Johnson, 1987). This process provides them with

opportunities to transform destructive self-tendencies by discovering creative resources and positive levels of meaning through the symbolic experience.

### Visual Expression in Art Therapy, in Relation to Sexual Abuse Treatment

Victims of psychological trauma have difficulty expressing their experiences in words. For this reason, creative arts therapies have a unique contribution to make (Johnson, 1987). Traumatized children cannot express complex and conflicting feelings and ideas in words, because they lack language skills (James, 1989). Highly visual language is probably the real language of psychic trauma, argues Terr, because trauma is first perceived in pictures, and traumatic images will continue to reemerge spontaneously and without control afterwards. Art therapy can then be a most appropriate and effective modality to deal with the manifestations of posttraumatic stress (1990). Garrett & Ireland mention that the disturbing state of invasion by fragmented and vivid images occurring in flashbacks, phobic images and nightmares in posttraumatic stress can be transformed into a constructive and healing mode when imagery is used to release the trauma story and its affect (Peacock, 1991). The visually expressive potential of art can facilitate the exploration of the traumatic experience, as visual images provide a concrete meeting place to clarify and integrate the experience. The active choosing and manipulating of images can also increase the client's sense of control over past events and present life (Peacock, 1991; Peake, 1987).

Hidden images and unconscious thoughts and responses tend to resurface through the process of art therapy. Through the making of images, a silent dialogue between client and therapist, conscious and unconscious, begins to weave itself. For the sexually abused client, images can act at first as private messages that respect their needs for secrecy without threatening consequences. At the same time, this secrecy cannot be turned into



denial, because of the lasting power and testimony of images (Spring, 1993). As trust develops in therapy, the pictorial production can be gradually deciphered and interpreted, but in a self-monitored way. Clients gradually revisit the trauma, through silent productions and eventually verbal translations of the meaning of the art piece. Spring (1993) argues that ritualistic and symbolic language and behaviour can best contain the conflicting needs for the secrecy and unveiling of traumatic experience in the sexually abused person.

### Considering the Use of Rituals With Sexually Abused Children in Art Therapy

The repetitive and compulsive nature of the play of traumatized children has been addressed by play therapy authors. Play therapists have begun to design therapeutic strategies to help these children transform traumatic experiences by facilitating a creative development of their play. However, the creative potential lying in ritualistic aspects of posttraumatic play has not been researched until now. Creative arts therapies, because of their emphasis on symbolic experience, are at a privileged place to provide a transformative therapeutic space that can allow the development of creative ritual making inside the experience of art. Rituals can then be used as therapeutic tools to help traumatized children work through painful experiences by tapping into the well of their creativity.

Furthermore, play is inherent in the expression of children involved in making art. When dealing with traumatized children, play combined with artistic expression and focusing on ritual making can become a most powerful medium to support these children in their grieving and healing process in art therapy.

## Chapter 5

### **Exploring the Ritual Play Processes Through the Case Study of a Sexually Abused Girl**

#### Summary of the Client's History

Judith is a seven year old girl who has been diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder due to chronic sexual abuse. The observation of severe behavioural problems at school the previous year led teachers to report the child to Youth Protection. Judith was described as a disturbed and isolated child who was very aggressive towards other children, often hitting and biting them. She was also two years behind classmates academically, and was failing grades in all subjects. An interview process led to the discovery of sexual abuse by her father and a paternal uncle. A court ruling ordered foster home placement, following the mother's lack of support for Judith's disclosure of sexual abuse by the father. Youth Protection referred Judith to the Child Psychiatry Department of a hospital, for immediate intervention and treatment.

Judith has been enrolled in a special education program provided by the hospital, which was the site of my art therapy practicum. When I began to see Judith in art therapy sessions, she had been living in a foster home with her younger sister for the past six months. Judith's parents are now legally separated. Judith visits her mother at her home three times a week, and sees her father in a supervised setting once a week. The mother is now in individual therapy and in family therapy with her two daughters. She has herself a history of sexual abuse.

Judith's parents met as new Canadian immigrants and got married after the birth of Judith. They had a very confrontational relationship, with violent verbal and physical fighting. Judith also suffered incidents of physical abuse by her father, who has a drinking problem. After fighting with his wife, the father would go sleep with Judith. There is documented evidence of the father touching the child and having her touch him in a sexual manner. This seems to have started when Judith was around two years old. At the time of disclosure, Judith admitted to sexual play with her father, saying that she enjoyed the activity. At the present time, she tries to minimize her father's responsibility, saying that he only touched her once. The main perpetrator of sexual abuse seems to have been an uncle, who lived with the family for more than three years. He engaged Judith in sexual play, while her younger sister was made to watch. The uncle has pleaded guilty, but the father still denies the abuse. At the present time, the children's home placement is being reviewed in court, to decide if the mother is ready to care full-time for her children.

### Aims and Goals of Art Therapy

My initial goals were to provide a safe and well-contained environment, to facilitate the development of trust and to alleviate some of Judith's anxiety. Sessions were first intended to strengthen her ego structure by developing a sense of self-worth through gratifying art experiences, and by encouraging a sense of initiative. Ongoing goals were to support the externalization of trauma through symbolic representations and through a play approach that could provide corrective emotional experiences. A collaborative approach in play was used to help Judith recreate connections with another adult and to allow her to develop boundaries through the relationship. I also sought to empower Judith's sense of self by fostering autonomy and mastery in the accomplishment of art projects. Other aims throughout therapy were to facilitate the gradual expression and clarification of thoughts and feelings and to instill a sense of hope toward the future.

### Introduction to the Client's Process in Art Therapy

Judith's process in art therapy has been a very particular one, because she used the art materials in unusual ways. From the early beginnings, Judith added silent movement ritualizations to her activities of drawing and painting, and sometimes these would be accompanied by musical intonations. The animation of her art products in a kind of mute play became one of the dominant features of her art making. From this process emerged small silent movement stories, that would sometimes include verbal responses to some of my questions. These ritualistic movements developed into silent dance rituals, where I was asked to narrate the movements. Movement sequences from the dances gradually articulated themselves into dance stories that I would also narrate. These dance stories eventually became drama enactments using verbal dialogues between characters taken by Judith and myself.

### The Sessions and Their Sequence of Development

Art therapy with Judith spread over thirty-seven art therapy sessions. The first two months and a half included eleven weekly sessions of forty-five minutes, and the remaining four-month period consisted of twenty-six biweekly sessions. This increase in weekly sessions was implemented after discussion with the clinical team on Judith's condition, which was perceived as requiring more intensive therapeutic support. I saw the child at her school setting, in a large room especially used for art therapy.

I will divide the sessions in four periods, to follow the sequence of development observed in Judith's art process. Within these parts, I will discuss the movement themes and mythical characters that developed through the sessions. Judith used the first period of sessions to explore sensations through materials, moving from simple silent movement

rituals to short play stories involving water, paint, crayons, clay, or sponges. A second period was represented by Judith's involvement with "making cloth" with tissue paper, followed by sewing fabric pieces to make dresses. This developed into a third stage, where Judith began to dance wearing her dresses. This was done at first silently with repetitive movements, and evolved gradually into dance and drama stories. Mythical characters were introduced or further developed at that time. A final stage involved going back to water play that led to the exploration of different states ranging from liquid to solid, but this time with more elaborate and verbalized stories.

### Narration of the Sessions

#### Judith's Beginnings

I will begin by presenting the first image made by Judith in therapy. This first drawing represents important aspects of her personal experience, and is an opening door to her inner world. It will also serve as an introduction to her process and as a forecast for some of the themes that will unfold in future sessions.

My first impression of Judith is of a shy, withdrawn and isolated little girl in the classroom, who clings to me before even knowing me. Her sense of role boundaries is confused and she displays inappropriate closeness. Judith draws in silence a very small central figure and tells me that it is a bad witch. The witch has big anxious eyes and no hands. Judith then draws besides the witch what appears to me to be a big fist, but she says it is the witch's broom. She traces a line from the broom to underneath the skirt of the witch, saying: "the broom goes under her". The broom has a phallic and aggressive shape. Instead of sitting on the broom, the witch is moving away from it with a frightened look. Judith then draws the witch flying in the air, saying: "up and up she flies". The witch is

still not sitting on the broom, but this time it is drawn over her. As she is drawing, Judith makes small rhythmic sounds with her voice. Clouds are added just over the witch's head, blocking her escape towards higher regions. Judith then draws the witch for a third time, at the bottom right corner. She seems to have fallen, and besides her is a cauldron. She tells me that the witch is bad, she has some poison and some sticks, and these are drawn inside the cauldron. She proceeds to draw a huge figure coming out of the cauldron, saying: "it's a bad ghost". The ghost's arms have spiky ends, and the ghost has big watching eyes. The third witch is very small and looks powerless besides the ghost (see Figure 1).

The symbols of witch, ghost and cauldron will reappear in various forms in my subsequent sessions with Judith. The witch is associated with the primitive female aspect. She acts symbolically as the scapegoat that can contain the darker side of women's energy. She is in this way the repressed side of feminine experience, that demands the gradual integration into the conscious personality of the elements emerging from consciousness. The witch is the black magician, who casts spells on humans, and she is the guardian of death and of the unknown world. The cauldron is one of her attributes, and we find the symbol of the magic cauldron in many shamanic cultures around the world. The boiling cauldron is the site of magical rites of initiation, it is the alchemical vessel where the soul is boiled, cooked, and where it goes through death. But it also offers a promise of transformation and rebirth. Ghosts are the unquiet spirits which return to life to trouble the souls of humans, they are the visitors from the unremembered past, they emerge from their burial places and come back to haunt and to repeat the past into the present. They represent the repressed stirrings of the unconscious, they embody fears that cannot be understood and they inspire panic. They also represent what has been dead or lost (Chevalier & Gheerbrandt, 1982). These three symbols were to become potent carriers of Judith's traumatic soul's experiences.

## Exploring Sensations: Playing With Water

### Painting on sheet and newspaper. (Session 1)

When painting material is presented to Judith in the first session, she picks some red paint and begins spreading it in circular shapes, eventually spreading it on the desk itself, unable to contain her gestures. After newspaper has been put under the sheet to protect the table, Judith begins to cover the photograph of three men's faces in the journal. A large portion of the text is also covered. She seems to take pleasure in making things disappear. She becomes very focused on painting the edges of the newspaper, as if trying to hold on to the paper boundaries. She puts black paint over the photographs already covered with red, and begins to mix paint directly on the newspaper. She is becoming more involved and messy. She makes a shapeless form and says: "it's scary". She now mixes all the separate colours of paint contained in the tray, and begins muddling the jars of paint with her brush. Her compulsive and regressive activity seems to be stimulated by confused and anxious feelings emerging. Judith begins a kind of ritualistic intoning of sounds, while she puts paint on her brush and cleans it with water, in repeated gestures. The brush is covered and uncovered with paint, being washed in the process. This ritual act appears to me as a symbolic attempt to contain her anxiety provoked by stirred emotions and to restore some sense of control into an increasingly chaotic process.

Judith makes a purple shape on the newspaper. She suddenly stops, making a high pitched sound, and she covers rapidly the shape with more purple. I ask her: "what did you see?" She answers: "a bad man". She is becoming more intensely involved and regressive. She now covers her tray with paint, mixing and messing all the colours. She paints her hands with grey, white and blue, and prints them on the paper. She adds black paint on her hands and covers a red sun previously painted. Judith now uses two paintbrushes and creates a kind of silent play by using them like puppets. She looks at them, makes sounds

to them as if speaking an unknown language, and then looks at me. She goes back and forth between looking at her brushes and at me. She seems isolated in her own world of meanings, yet she is trying to establish some kind of silent communication with me. This act looks like the mute beginning of a dialogue with herself and with another. Her ritualization seems to express something that words cannot express, or something that cannot be disclosed. I notice that for a second time during the session, she resorts to the use of ritual when anxiety and overwhelming emotions threaten her sense of containment. Issues of containment and boundaries seem to be particularly challenging for Judith. At times, she looks almost engulfed in sensations. Her acts of covering with paint and uncovering by washing speak to me of a conflict between her unconscious need to express intense impulses and feelings and her conscious need to control overwhelming affect.

Clay with water: washing and sponging. (Sessions 1 & 2)

Following the painting activity, Judith decides to use clay. She takes a ball of clay and puts it in the large container of water. Water splashes around, and it is hard to contain her. She seems compelled to drop and drown the clay in water, repetitively and in a sort of ritual manner. She then flattens the clay, uses a sponge to soak the clay with water, until it becomes a liquid mud. She tells me that clay is like soap, and she uses it as soap, as if washing with sponge and clay. She ends up making small blobs of clay, which she calls fries. She drops each of them into the container of water. This brings back to my mind the theme of the boiling cauldron.

In the next session, Judith is again involved with the silent act of covering newspaper photographs with paint. She also puts paint over her hands, and prints them on newspaper. This primitive gesture used by children can be linked to a need to mark one's identity and to establish one's territory. Judith decides to use clay again, makes a slab out of it, and decides to hit it on the table repeatedly. She asks me to count the hits with her.



We count up to thirty, and she tells me to stop. She obviously takes pleasure in this repetitive act and in my participation. At the end, she makes a pie out of the clay and offers it to me. I pretend I am eating her pie. She looks delighted. An act that could have turned into destruction and violence transforms itself into a moment of sharing and union. The ritual enactment of counting done with my active containment, provides this space for transformation, by allowing Judith to control her own process, while letting anger impulses emerge, and maybe some memories of physical violence.

Painting with sponges: "the white ghost". (Session 3)

Judith chooses a blue sheet of paper and decides to explore printing with small pieces of sponges. She starts printing green square shapes. She likes the texture of the sponges, saying that they are "soft and comfy". She puts her hand into paint and covers the sponges with her fingers. She takes another sponge and dips it in white paint. She starts smearing it into a small circle, and tells me that "it's a white ghost". The circle becomes larger, she spreads it around in repetitive gestures and says that "the white ghost is running after the sister, and the mother, and the father, and the family" (see Figure 2). But she does not mention herself. The family is trying to escape from the ghost. She also talks about a stranger trying to get them. I enquire about how the sister feels and she tells me that the sister does not feel safe, that she is scared. She starts covering with red two images of women appearing on the newspaper underneath her paper sheet. I wonder if it represents herself and her sister, or her mother. I tell her : "you like to make people disappear, to cover them", and she says yes. She continues to smear paint on the newspaper, and says: "I like newspaper". Her hands have become red, and she pretends for a few seconds to put them over my face, expressing a tip of aggressivity and anger. The newspaper allows Judith a space to express some difficult feelings; yet it represents cheap material that maybe she would like to discard. Her gestures of covering also present the simultaneous needs to destroy, to hide, or to get rid of problematic appearances.

Judith proceeds to wash the sponges in the water container. She makes them sink and float back. She plays with her sponges like dolls, have them walk on the table, then washes them. She has them talk: "Oh, I'm all clean, now!" I tell her she is like a good mother taking care of her children. She looks at me and smiles. She tells me: "the mother makes sure the children are safe". She now washes each sponge with white paint. All the sponges have been thoroughly cleaned with white paint, except for the last child-sponge. Judith takes some black paint and scrubs this sponge with great intensity. It looks like cleaning has become an almost impossible task, but she succeeds at finally cleaning it. At clean-up time, Judith goes to the sink and works very hard at cleaning the sponges with real soap and water. Clean-up becomes in itself another ritual, and there is a compulsive quality to her activity. When we come back to the table, she suddenly grabs a brush and smears paint on the clean tray. She seems to be telling me she feels soiled and dirty despite all her efforts, and there seems to be repressed anger at having to separate from me.

#### Clay in water: "mommy, baby, and daddy". (Session 4)

Judith gets herself organized and she displays more initiative. I tell her: "you are in charge". She covers the table with paper towels. The squares of paper are precisely put and symetrically organized; she also uses the rectangular sponges used for clean-up to cover the surface. I tell her that she is making order. She tells me: "I am making things straight". She seems to be laying a new ground as she is putting pieces together. She takes a small piece of clay and drops it in the water container that she has put on this surface. She then takes a towel paper and soaks it in water. She wraps the clay into the towel, sinks it in the water, and repeats this ritual several times. She does not speak, but makes sounds with her voice. She indicates with her fingers that I have to do the wrapping with her. We roll together the piece of clay in the towel, our hands at each end of the clay. When she unwraps the clay, she makes me hold it before she wraps it again. While I am holding the piece, she starts caressing it. I tell her: "you are petting it". She smiles and pets the palm of my hand as well

as the piece. Judith wraps, unwraps, and submerges the piece in water, repeating this pattern many times. The clay seems to me to drown. I tell Judith: "it disappears and you bring it back again". Suddenly, Judith holds her breath as she sinks the piece into water. I imitate her by catching my breath, and I say: "taking a big breath, going under". She turns her face and looks in my eyes intensely and silently.

Judith now takes a bigger piece of clay: "it's the mommy". She puts the small baby piece on the mommy. She wraps the baby in the towel, drops it in the water, recovers it, and then it is the mother's turn to be wrapped. She tells me it is the ghost who is wrapping. She makes the baby cry for her mother. The baby gets reunited with the mother. She explains: "but the ghost brings the baby back". She takes another piece, and "it's the daddy". Daddy is also taken by the ghost. But the family is reunited together at the end.

Through the wrapping and unwrapping, Judith seems to be reliving the trauma of loss and separation in her life. Her enacting of apparitions and disappearances through the figure of the ghost, reminds me of death rites from Africa, Oceania, and North America mentioned by Eliade (1995), where initiates imitate the behaviour of the ghosts, because they are considered to be in between the world of the living and the dead, in a liminal state. Ghosts also appear when life loses definition and clarity (Herman, 1992). Terr mentions that children who feel simultaneously traumatized and bereaved see ghosts and sense presences (1990). Judith has indeed lost her family following the trauma of sexual abuse.

Through her water play, Judith shows a need to go back to an earlier stage of development, and her play story is about experiences of separation and reunion of an infant with her parents. In funeral rites, says van Gennep, purifications such as washing and cleansing constitute rites of separation (1960). Hertz mentions Jewish and Indian death rituals involving washing and wrapping the corpse. Taking care of the dead body involves

a wet and a dry stage. The wet stage involves washing the body of the deceased, and deals with the experience of dissolution and transition. The dissolution of form becomes a metaphor for a liminal state. The following dry stage, by wrapping the corpse in sheets or in bandages, is involved with preservation and incorporation into a new state (Davies, 1997).

### Making Cloth and Making Dresses: Layering Tissue Paper and Sewing Fabric

#### Painting and collage: "a cloth" on red sheet. (Session 5)

Judith chooses watercolour crayons. She dips a crayon in water and tries it on a paper towel. She sinks it again in water, this time keeping her hand on the crayon in the water. She returns to the paper towels and takes two sheets, puts one on top of the other, and tells me they are to be sewn. I ask her: "like a skirt, or a dress?", and she says yes. She dips the paper towel that she calls "cloth" in the water and paints the wet surface with the watercolour crayons. She lifts the two layers of towel paper, separates them, and puts them back together in water again; she adds more colour to it and repeats this a few times. The colours of the cloth have been washed and are paler. Judith's process is concerned with acts of transition and transmutation. Through the repeated gestures of putting together and of separating the two layers, she is attempting symbolically to transform as she dissolves, makes disappear, and recreates the cloth with more colours. This pattern follows closely the stages of separation, transition and reincorporation in rites of passage presented by van Gennep (1960).

Judith picks the cloth and observes it from both sides, and I admire it. I feel I should mirror her like a good mother, give her appreciation and support her enthusiasm. She starts moving the cloth in the air, as if it was flying. Then she suddenly lets it fall on

the floor. She picks it up and announces: "I'm finished". She chooses a red sheet and glues her cloth on it. She is proud of the result and writes her name on it.

Tissue paper collage: "a piece of fabric". (Session 6)

Judith comes in the room and puts my apron on me, tying it at the waist. This has become an important opening ritual for our sessions together, that started a few weeks ago. This ritual is followed by me helping her put her paintshirt on and tying the ribbons at the back. These gestures are accompanied by these words from me: "you take good care of me, and I need to take good care of you". She now expects to hear those words. This symbolic act seems to contain her needs to keep me, to tie me to her, to control me, and may also have a reparative function toward the mother whom she lost. Maybe Judith feels also guilty for the splitting of the family.

Judith decides to spread some liquid glue with her hands over a large white sheet of paper and she layers coloured sheets of tissue paper over it. She keeps adding layers over layers, invested in a covering that I am not sure she will be able to stop. She makes sure to also cover all the edges of the sheet. I have to set some limits for her at this point. She tells me she is making a piece of fabric. When finished, she holds it up with her two hands and shows it to me. I suggest that we look at it against the light. We each take two corners of the sheet, and walk toward the window. She begins to make it move up and down. I say: "Oh! flying in the air!" We both start walking around the room, moving the "fabric" up and down. Then, suddenly, Judith stops without warning, and lets it drop to the floor. I say: "it fell..." Judith remains silent.

Judith wants now to add more tissue to her piece. She brings the container of glue, with some sponges, to the floor covered with plastic. She pours the glue too fast and there is a spill. She starts sponging the floor, and keeps expanding her cleaning in wider and

wider circles over the floor. It is becoming clearly compulsive. I tell her she does not have to wash the floor, only the spilling area. She will not listen to me. I tell her: "you like to clean". She tells me: "we are two cleaners", and she adds: "the guards want me to clean". I ask if they are prison guards and she says yes. I tell her it is not her job to clean the whole floor, it is the janitor's job, that she did a good enough job, she should stop now. She now listens. I notice that Judith's compulsive cleaning follows the dramatic fall of her piece. She appears imprisoned in intense and confused feelings of shame and guilt, that seem to be related to some kind of traumatic memory.

### Tissue paper collage: "a purse to carry". (Session 7)

We tie each other apron again. Judith decides to do another collage with tissue paper. She works silently, adding layers and spreading the glue with large movements of the hands. She keeps covering until the result is mostly opaque colours of dark green and pink. When she is done, we each hold two corners of the sheet, and make the sheet go up and down in the air. Judith starts moving backward, and I follow her in the room. I ask her where we are going, but she remains silent. How could she know? she is walking without being able to see her direction. Does she feel lost, without references to guide her? She suddenly drops the piece on the floor. One corner brakes. I say: "oh no, it fell down, it hit the ground, it's broken, but I will repair you". Judith picks it up, and makes it fly again, and even higher this time. I say: "you can go up again". Metaphorically and indirectly through Judith's creation, I am trying to show my support and convey a message of hope. Judith brings her collage back to the floor, where she cuts some ribbon, makes a knot and a bow with it, and glues it to her piece. She takes some string of wool and glues it to the top of the sheet, making it the handle of a purse. Her face lights up as she says: "I will carry it as a purse". This purse may be a symbol for the secret inner places of the female body, and it is also a symbol for Judith's sense of self, acting as an object to contain her identity. It can protect her belongings, she can move and travel with it. It is a transitional

object that can be useful in her life of transition and crisis. Carrying the purse becomes the metaphor in action for Judith's experiences of living in-between two homes, in-between losses, in-between past and present (see Figure 3).

I reflect that the rituals of tying and making a knot are concerned with holding together what could disappear from Judith's hands. Tying my apron reveals Judith's ambivalent needs to take care of me and to control me. The knot, as researched by Chevalier and Gheerbrandt (1982), symbolizes attachment, and has an ambivalent meaning as every symbol. The knot represents entanglements and constraints, it can bind but it can also free when untied. The Ancient Egyptians considered the knot to be symbolic of both earthly and immortal life. By loosening the bonds that tie the soul down, immortality is attained. In magic rituals, bonds are used as protection against evil and death. Van Gennep adds that in rites of passage, there is a widespread use of the knot as sacred bond (1960). Through her ritual of tying my apron, Judith also tied me with the sacred responsibility that came with her trust invested in me.

#### Pattern and pieces for a dress. (Session 9)

Judith chooses some fur fabric and puts it around her neck. She says she could make a collar out of the fur and a dress. She likes the soft and "comfy" feeling. She glues and tapes two pieces of fur together and she adds some green ribbon. She chooses other pieces for the sleeves of her dress and some blue ribbon for the waist. I tell her that I will bring some larger piece for the body of the dress next time. She decides to draw her idea of the dress on newspaper, making a pattern for it. She shows me how she would like the dress to be laced and tied with four rows of blue ribbon at the waist (see Figure 4). At the end of the session, Judith hugs me at the waist. She tells me: "when I hug you, you are like my mother". I say: "you miss your mother", and she says yes. From her child's height, Judith must experience the waist of an adult body as the place where she can hold

on to and be protected in an embrace. It symbolizes mother's presence and her attachment to her. My waist becomes this special place when she ties my apron, and that is where she wants to tie her own dress.

#### Judith's dress. (Session 10)

Judith is very excited that I brought some pink fabric for her dress. She asks me to help her glue the shoulder seams and the blue ribbon at the waist. She tells me that "we each work on our separate parts". She chooses some brown lace, wonders what she could do with it, decides to try it around my face, in a gesture of tying under my chin, and says I look like her mother. She finally makes a collar out of it and we put buttons at the back. We try the dress on her body a few times. I tell her this is the only dress like this in the world, she cannot buy a dress like this, she made it herself. She suddenly hugs me at the waist and says: "Thank you!" I tell her: "you made this dress yourself, and I am glad to help you, you have lots of great ideas". At the end of the session, she wants to put all the things she has done until now into her purse.

Judith is involved in activities that put pieces together, that can tie things together, that can assemble and contain. Working both side by side helps her reconcile a need for togetherness with the need to define and maintain boundaries, as she mentions with her words: "we each work on our separate parts". She is creating a new garment for her body, and for a new identity. She now has a symbolic dress to wear and a purse to carry into the world, that can hold her belongings...

#### Sister's dress. (Sessions 11 & 12)

Judith tells me that her sister would like a dress too, so she wants to make a dress for her. She chooses a black velvet fabric and decides it will be the collar piece. We work side by side, I help her glue purple lace around the black piece of velvet. Judith shows



more spontaneity and more sense of initiative, and she gives me a few orders. I acknowledge how well she works and how organized she is. In the following session, she cuts some fabric for a skirt, threads a needle for me, and I sew the seams of the skirt for her. As she waits for me to finish, Judith begins to dance with a piece of fabric in a sunny area of the room. She hums to herself as she dances, and smiles. She asks me to bring some music to dance on for tomorrow. At the end of the session, she tells me she also wants to make a dress for her mother. Making these garments seems to be an act of reparation toward her sister and her mother. Judith has ambivalent feelings and behaviour toward them, a mixture of love with anger and guilt. Judith intends these dresses to be worn while dancing with her mother and sister at home. She symbolically wishes to create and embody new identities and roles for the three of them together. As Judith finishes to clean up, she picks up a paper bag full of fabrics, and walks in the room with it, smiling and saying: "I am going shopping!". This seems to show her contentment, with some hope and direction toward the future.

### Dance and Drama Stories With Costumes and Accessories

#### Dance on music and a dress for mother. (Sessions 13 & 14)

Next day, I bring some Vivaldi music and some scarves, and we both begin, at Judith's request, to dance together. I imitate her movements as she plays with the scarves. She seems to open up as I mirror her movements: she smiles and becomes more joyful. She tells me to watch her, and she shows me how she can juggle with scarves. After this short dance, Judith decides to make the dress for her mother. She cuts the fabric and wants me to teach her how to sew. I praise her concentration and fine motor skills. She shows pride in what she is doing. She tells me she wants to make another dress for herself after this one, but this time she will make it all by herself. Judith is gaining more confidence by

feeling supported in her tasks, and she shows more initiative and a desire for competence and mastery.

Next session, Judith wants to dance again. I narrate the movements of her dance, trying to keep my words to the behaviours observed. This activity seems to answer her need for an experience of mirroring and containment by a mother figure. After this dance, Judith looks at the fabrics I brought. To my surprise, I realize that I forgot to cut into pieces a white satin slip brought to be used as fabric. Judith picks it, and asks me what it is. I explain that a slip is a piece of underwear that women wear under their skirts, it keeps some of their body parts private, and it protects them. Judith decides that it will be part of her costume. My explanation about protecting the female body must have felt particularly relevant to her. She starts cutting some fabric for her dress, but wants to give up and asks me to do it for her. I remind her that she wanted to do the dress all by herself and that she will be very proud of herself if she does it all. I want to encourage her sense of initiative and mastery. She pursues her task, while at the same time beginning a kind of baby talk. She tells me: "You are like my mama, helping me to sew". She seems to simultaneously have two opposite needs, the dependency needs of the young child and the autonomy and competence needs of the older child her age. At clean up time, she wants me to watch her do the clean up all by herself. I sit and watch her. She does it very well, focused and in silence. I tell her at the end that I am proud of her. I am playing the role of mother, having to recognize and meet dependency needs while at the same time teaching how to become gradually more autonomous.

Blatner (1988) explains play in children as a development in four stages. The first stage is one of sensory exploration, that leads to a second period of interaction with objects. In the third stage of play, called the useful stage, or the stage of "look at me", the child learns to gain an identity and begins to interact with others. Judith seems to use the

mirroring patterns established by dancing together to strengthen her sense of self. These patterns will continue to unfold in the following dance sessions.

Dance of "the Princess" and "the Queen -Mother ". (Session 15)

Judith wants to dance right away. She alternates between dancing by herself and dancing with me. As she dances, I narrate what she does. She then goes back to sewing her skirt, and she is now sewing better and faster. She finishes her costume and wants to dance wearing it. She puts the slip under the skirt, puts a black stretchy fabric around her waist to hold the pieces together, and I tie the black belt behind her. She puts a red piece of fabric over her shoulders. She wants me to wear something too. She finds a brown piece for me to wear as a skirt, and she ties a piece of the same black fabric around my waist. I tell her: "you used to tie my apron, now you tie a skirt around me". This ritual act now unites us in a performing activity of great symbolic importance to her. These ties hold our new dresses and identities together, and they also hold new patterns of relationship.

We start dancing and Judith says she is a princess and I am a queen. She later specifies in the dance: "you are my mother the queen". She dances in a very noble manner as she pretends we are in a palace. She asks me to watch her. I say I will sit on my throne and watch the princess. She puts a big chair for the queen, and a smaller chair for the princess besides it. These are magical moments, Judith's fluid dance is full of grace and soul, and I become moved to tears. At the end of her dance, she bows in front of me, I bow silently in response and I finally applaud. She rushes towards me and hugs me. I hug her back, and I tell her that she is a princess in her soul, and that there is nothing dirty or ugly in herself. Her eyes become filled with tears, and for a short moment she looks intensely into my eyes. We are both silent, I feel a deep emotion beyond words between us. As we come to a close, Judith asks me to watch her do the clean-up. I sit and watch her in silence. Without speaking and in a ritualistic manner, she folds the pieces of fabric with

graceful, slow and precise movements. Throughout the session, Judith uses ritual movements to create a symbolic space where things can be restored, ordered, and where she can regain a sense of herself as whole.

The rise and fall of "the Princess"; the intrusion of "the Stranger". (Session 16)

We both put our costumes on, going through the ritual of tying each other's skirt at the waist. This time Judith also has to put a top on me, tying a string under my arms at the front. I also have to wear a scarf on my head. As our relationship is deepening, her attachment to me is increasing, shown in the number of ties needed for my costume. Judith is very silent and is not smiling today. I sit and watch her as she begins to dance alone in the sun, and with her shadows on the floor. She wants me to talk and to describe her movements. She becomes gradually more animated, she whirls, spins, dances with her scarf, and starts to smile. She does some jumps and she runs. Then, suddenly, she slides down on the ground, and lies on her side, eyes closed. I say: "Judith is sleeping". She opens her eyes, stretches, and gets up. I say: "she gets up again". She dances a little, and falls on the ground again. She stays there a little longer. I keep narrating her movements, and she rises up again. Her movements have become quite vigorous. She flaps her scarf up and down in the air, and she throws it on the floor in an angry gesture, she crosses her arms and makes an angry face. I say: "Judith is angry now". She smiles and expresses herself more fully. She throws herself on the floor again, this time violently. She does not move. I say: "Judith does not move anymore, she's been there for a long time, is she sleeping? is she dead? she can't be dead, she always comes back, she is strong". She gets up again and repeats this sequence of rise and fall a few more times.

She now wants me to dance and sits on the small chair. As I dance, I try to repeat her movements, saying that I dance with my shadows like Judith, and I whirl like Judith, etc. As she watches me, she pretends she is the princess sewing. She indicates silently

with a gesture of the hand that I have to sit down again. I take the small chair by mistake, and Judith makes me change to the big chair. She puts some fabric on my head and my shoulders, arranging it in a perfectly symetric way, and with ritualistic gestures. She says: "this should not change, it has to be right". Judith begins to dance again, falls on the floor and stays there for a long time without moving. I say: "oh no, she can't be dead, what's happening?" She starts opening and closing her mouth, slowly and silently, like a baby, and she says: "mama! mama!" I say: "she is calling for mama, she seems so alone, so lonely". She says: "mama, help me, where are you?" I say: "she needs her mama, and her mama isn't around, she is so little, and her mama is not there for her". She calls for her mother again. She then tells me that I have to pretend that I am the mother. I come by her side and I tell her: "here I am, my child, I am here to protect you, I won't let you be alone, you're just a child, I shouldn't have left you alone". She smiles and gets up again. She runs around the room, pretending to flap wings with her arms. She asks me to run with her, and we dance together.

Judith then goes to the wall, hides her face, and starts counting, saying that we are playing hide-and-seek, and that I have to hide. She comes and gets me. It is now my turn to count. She hides under the table. I say: "where is my child? I am so worried, I should not have left her alone". I find her and I say: "here you are, I am so happy, I should not have left you alone". She asks me to hide again and I hide in the closet. She starts looking for me and says: "mama, mama, where are you? there is a stranger in the house, mama, mama, where are you?" There is real anxiety in her voice. I come out of the closet and I say: "Judith, here I am, how could I have left you with a stranger, I won't do that again, I promise, I should have protected you". She smiles and we end on this note. For the clean-up, Judith wants to fold my clothes. I say: "these are my clothes, it's my job, my responsibility". She folds her clothes and I fold mine. She tells me that she did a good clean-up last time.

Judith at the beginning of the session seemed isolated and overwhelmed by feelings that she could not express verbally. By moving in silence and feeling her body, she began to connect with intense emotions and started to embody them. It seemed to have helped her get in touch with her own power, which allowed her to express some anger. Shock, numbness, powerlessness, maybe despair and some splitting of consciousness were expressed silently in her fall and immobility. Her numerous attempts at rising from this state show the beginning of hope and of trying to work through and master traumatic events. The repeated sequence of fall and rise in her dance follows on the same pattern that was used in art making: sponges drowning in water and coming back to the surface; cloth flying up and being dropped on the ground. This symbolic movement was already introduced in her first drawing of the witch flying and falling on the ground. Her first painting in art therapy also consisted of a strange ghostly dress that seemed to fly away and to fall at the same time (see Figure 5).

The repetitive and almost compulsive nature of Judith's play has posttraumatic features. Her repeated needs to relive traumatic moments in play express her needs to make sense of overwhelming events. Metaphorical play offers her a safe place to begin to absorb some undigested traumatic experiences, that cannot be expressed chronologically or rationally. There are probably many experiences contained in the story of the fall and the stranger, linking indistinct memories of sexual abuse with trauma of separation from the mother. The silent dance patterns are evolving into some verbal expression. My participation in Judith's repetitive play provides some corrective emotional experience as I become the good mother offering protection, safety, and reassurance. Through her rituals of dressing me exactly as she wants, Judith also recreates some omnipotence over mother, and some stability in time and space. The two chairs become the ritual place for distinguishing between mother and child roles, and between adult and child positions, often confusing to Judith. Her traumatic experience of separation and abandonment is

compensated by the repetitive and reassuring appearances of mother. On the issue of early development, Erikson says that the first interpersonal contact developed by infants is a pattern of mutual recognition rituals with the mother, and the sense of security and identity is built through repetitiveness (Shaughnessy, 1973). Judith's repeated pattern of greetings and recognition, amidst the disruption of upsetting events, and her game of hide-and-seek are employed to repair and to recreate the relationship between mother and child.

"Sleeping Beauty". (Session 17)

Judith dresses up in her costume and helps me to put mine on. She puts a shawl over my head and over hers. Silently, she orders me to sit on my "queen's throne" and to "watch and talk". As she dances, the expression of her movements increases. She then indicates with a hand gesture that it is my turn to dance. I dance in silence, imitating her movements and adding new ones. She seems to take pleasure in seeing me mirror her actions. She decides to join me and we dance together. I follow her movements and I sometimes create my own. She asks me to sit down again: it is her time to dance and she begins her pattern of falling and getting up, repeating this sequence many times. Seeing her lying on the floor, I say: "I wonder what's happened to her? is she dead?" She moves her eyes upward until only the white of her eyes is visible, and opens and closes her lips slowly. She looks like someone slowly dying. Then she gets up, and I say: "but she gets up again, she is strong now and she dances again".

I ask Judith to correct me if what my narration is not accurate, because I want to understand what she is doing. As she starts dancing again, she interrupts her dance and comes to whisper in my ear that she is in fact Sleeping Beauty and that Sleeping Beauty will touch a spindle. She goes and touches some shelves in the room, and falls dead asleep. She tells me that she is dead and that I have to carry her. I carry her in my arms and pretend I put her in her coffin, with red roses all around. I say: "I am sad, all the people are

sad. Something bad has happened, Sleeping Beauty sleeps, like dead, for a long, long time". Judith begins to dance again, and touches the spindle. She now pretends there is a bad fairy around her, and she makes the laughing sounds of a witch, explaining that the bad fairy killed her. She tells me I have to be the good fairy, and I have to carry her to her palace, so she will become alive again. Variations on the theme of dying are added as this sequence is repeated a few times. Once she eats an apple and is poisoned. In another version she is struck by something invisible coming from the sky. As I carry her, she tells me that the fairy has to always carry her, so that Sleeping Beauty can come back- otherwise she will die. I respond to her by saying: "but as the good fairy carries her, Sleeping Beauty starts to feel she has wings, she can feel the wind in her arms, and she starts practicing flapping her wings". Judith follows my suggestion, and she begins to smile as I carry her while she flaps her arms wider and wider. I add: "and she discovers she has not lost her wings, she can learn to fly, she is practicing... she can fly! Let's see if she can fly!" I put her down, and we begin to "fly" around the room together a few times. She tells me she is a horse flying. She starts galloping, and I say: "see how strong she is!". Several times she repeats the pattern of falling dead, being carried to the palace, and flying and running. It is intense, but Judith is clearly enjoying herself, although I am exhausted...

In this session, Judith continues to elaborate on a verbal dialogue initiated in the past session. The use of taking turns sitting on our respective chairs maintains the needed boundaries that allow her to develop a sense of self and more independence from me. Movements of separation and union in her dance reflect a more solid sense of relationship, that can weave both states of being alone and being together harmoniously. Our roles are also becoming more defined through the development of dramatic play into characters.

The emergence of the myth of Sleeping Beauty in Judith's dance relates closely to her own life story. In the original story, Sleeping Beauty is cursed at birth by a bad fairy,



who condemns her to die, her body pierced by a spindle. Judith has also had a terrible fate as a child, cursed by bad deeds from the early years of her life. The sexual trauma has challenged and damaged the development of her potential at a young age, just like Sleeping Beauty born with so many gifts and talents is threatened at birth by the forces of evil represented by the bad fairy. The sharp and potentially dangerous spindle can be associated to a phallic object invading and poisoning one's body and consciousness. As I become the good fairy in Judith's story, my therapeutic role includes the offering of hope, to wake from dread and slumber, and to survive death and despair. In carrying Judith, I felt a great responsibility toward her, who was putting her trustful self into my arms. I also felt the danger of her becoming overly dependent upon me. At this moment, the metaphor of the wings came through my mind, and Judith gladly responded to my suggestion of empowerment, by beginning to fly.

"The Princess and the Queen"; "Esmeralda". (Session 18)

Judith sets up the two chairs and puts the music on. She puts the necklace she was wearing on the table, and arranges it in the shape of a heart. I have to sit and "watch and talk". She pretends she is a bad witch, who steals the heart away and hides it in an imaginary box at the other end of the room. She becomes a princess and asks her mother the queen to find the necklace she has lost. I find the necklace and put it back on the table in its heart shape. Judith becomes the witch again, who steals the necklace while laughing. She gives me the necklace, saying that I have to hide it in my hands and hold on to it. She pretends that the princess has been taken away by the witch. The princess falls dead on the floor. Judith starts the sequence of the princess being carried until she flaps her wings and dances again. This is repeated a few times.

Judith now changes the princess into "Esmeralda, from the story of The Hunchback of Notre-Dame". She changes her hairdress for the new character, by draping a

scarf around her head in a gypsie fashion. She decides she needs another kind of music, and we find something with a faster tempo. She claps her hands and uses her feet to mark the rhythm as she dances. She pretends Esmeralda is eating something and has a stomach ache, she looks dizzy, faints, and falls dead. She repeats this sequence many times. At one point, she tells me to carry Esmeralda in the sun, "because she cannot stay dead in the sun". The sun brings her back to her senses, and she stretches her body in the sun. She now has to be carried in "a bed for people who are dead". She decides to make "a real bed". She takes all the purple mats that are stored in a corner of the room and wants to put flowers around it. We find some white lace and ribbons, and some coloured pompons as imaginary flowers to decorate around the mats (see Figure 6). She lies on the mat, and pretends to die and be reborn a few more times.

I observe that Judith has more energy and is more alive and alert these days. It seems to coincide with the developing dramatic expression of the bad witch in therapy. In this session, the witch who steals the heart of the princess is letting Judith express some of her inner conflict between good and bad. Although she is trying to identify with the good princess, the bad witch keeps reappearing and interrupting the princess life. Through the witch character, Judith is beginning to let self-destructive impulses and intense feelings of anger and resentment emerge. This enactment may also be an attempt at a kind of integration of evil, by externalizing and embodying in play the darker sides of her traumatic experience. In this process, I am asked to hold and protect Judith's heart.

#### Esmeralda's story: making a spindle. (Sessions 19 & 20)

Judith dances with a lot of energy. She alternates between being Esmeralda and becoming the witch who kills Esmeralda by having her touch the poisoned spindle. Through her play, Judith is compelled to repeat the symbolic process of death and rebirth many times. Toward the end of the session, she decides to make the spindle by taping

popsicle sticks together into a long stick, wrapping string around it (see Figure 7). She becomes intense and says that the stick has "to be longer and longer". She takes the voice of the witch and pretends she is hitting me with the spindle. In the following session, I tell Judith that it is normal to have angry feelings at times. She pretends to hit me again with the spindle, and I tell her: "you're angry at me". She smiles in silence. She then puts the mats in the centre of the room. She does not want my help and says: "I am stronger". She also wants to put her dancing costume on without my assistance. She puts the two chairs exactly where they should go and is very precise about that. I have to watch and talk as usual. She becomes the princess and then switches to Esmeralda, "the Gypsie Princess". Esmeralda sees a prince and falls in love with him, and he comes to dance with her. But the prince sees another princess and abandons Esmeralda for her. She tells me that the prince is in love with the other princess. Esmeralda becomes very sad and falls dead. She drinks the poison prepared by the witch and becomes sick. She is changed into the witch, her hands become crooked and menacing. At the end of the session, Judith puts all the mats back by herself and tells me: "I feel stronger".

In these two sessions, Judith is starting to express angry feelings toward me, that are linked with my announcement of termination at that time. This anger could also be related to memories of abuse, brought up by the phallic spindle. Judith also expresses feelings of abandonment and despair toward life, in the metaphor of Esmeralda being rejected by the beautiful prince. I notice how the emergence of the expression of anger seems to empower Judith, who feels "stronger" and is more independent. This independence, however, is ambivalent, and hides an attitude of withdrawing from me, because she feels I am abandoning her. Feelings of anger mixed with sadness and despair will erupt in subsequent sessions not reported here, and will bring intense regression from her part. For the purpose of this research, I will move directly to the last period of therapy.

## Water and Dough Stories: Separating

### Washing and dressing up "children-sponges". (Session 27)

Judith continues some printing started previously. She makes sounds as if speaking an unknown language, and sings instead of speaking. After printing the shapes of four sponges on paper, she begins to talk and makes stories about a sponge being sad, and about a little girl who is going to sleep, becomes a butterfly, and changes colours. Later on in the session, she decides to give a bath to the sponges. She puts one sponge at a time in a water container, puts a towel paper over the top, and asks me to tie a string around it. She adds a bigger container besides the first one, and continues to wash the sponges, removing them from the containers to paint and wash them again and again, in a pattern of covering and uncovering the containers. At one point, she cuts through the paper lid with scissors, in an urgent operation. Towards the end of the session, she writes with a marker the words "little" and "big" on the paper lid of each container: one container is for "little people" and the other for "big people". At the end of the session, all sponges have been thoroughly washed, although one sponge managed to get very black just as Judith seemed to have done a good washing job. She asks me to "dress up" the sponges, by wrapping them with paper and tape. She puts the sponges in a row, and writes a letter on each of them. She then creates names out of the letters, and my name and hers are among them (see Figure 8).

Through this complex ritual, Judith is putting together symbolic acts that were present in other sessions. With the dual movements of covering and uncovering, wrapping and unwrapping, tying and untying, washing and soiling, she seems to be shaping unspoken patterns of meaning and order amidst the basic experience of change. These movements also serve the purpose of connecting the polarized states of separation and union that appear in her experience of change. Her process is strongly involved with a transitional condition and with a metaphorical process of transmutation. Judith is also

going back to playing with water. Since the announcement of termination, she appears to be retracing her steps back to earlier sessions, integrating and summarizing the most important moments of her experience.

Mother and daughter make milk and chocolate. (Sessions 28 & 29)

Judith pours water in a green dishpan, and adds glue to it. She says that it is milk. She stirs it with a spoon. She pretends to give me some and I do the same in return. I tell her that it is delicious and that we are feeding each other. She adds some black paint to the mixture and the milk gets dirty, but she tells me that it will turn into chocolate milk. She adds more brown paint. It has now become "yummy chocolate". She pours some for me in a container, and I do the same for her. We pretend to drink our chocolate together.

Next session, Judith uses the green dishpan to make chocolate milk again. We feed each other and she becomes the daughter making chocolate besides her mother. Then Judith makes an anxious face and starts breathing rapidly, as she pretends to be separated from me. She is trying to hold on to my hands as she appears to be grabbed by someone. She says: "mama, mama! someone is taking me away!". I pretend I am upset and I try to hold on to her. Judith then becomes the witch taking the daughter away from the mother. I stand up to protect Judith and I pretend to dial an emergency number. I tell Judith that I do not want anybody to touch her, that she did not do anything wrong, that I will protect her and that this is not going to happen anymore. She looks delighted.

Judith makes chocolate milk again, this time with white paint instead of glue. She pours some into a brown dishpan. She puts some black into it and asks me if I have ever drank black: she says she did. I ask her how it felt, but she does not want to talk about it, she only says that it was like a magic potion. She keeps adding white, but her mixture remains rather black. She is upset that it cannot change. She says that she wants white, and

asks me to help her change this quickly. There is a state of alarm in her gestures. We go to the sink together and we rinse the pan with water. Judith makes white milk again. She offers me a glass of milk, and we both drink together. She says that it is very nice and cold. She then repeats the play story, with the stranger taking the daughter away from her mother. This time, she asks me to phone the police. I act as the policeman who comes to put the man in jail.

Judith's acts are symbolic attempts to absorb and integrate the evil character of events represented by the intrusion of black in her play. The repetitive aspect of her play shows her compelling need to relive her trauma, giving her an opportunity to rework through and slowly overcome overwhelming experiences. Her play pattern starts with making milk and feeding each other, is followed by the intrusion of black enacted by the witch and the stranger, and leads back to reunion through making and sharing milk. Judith is recreating a state of union between mother and child that has been interrupted by traumatic events. This pattern will continue to be visible in future sessions.

#### Milk turns into poison. (Sessions 30 & 31)

Judith makes one dish of milk and one of chocolate. She repeats the story of mother and daughter, with the stranger and the police. She explains some of the story, saying that "this man wants our milk, he wants our food". She makes me lock the doors of the house. The stranger manages to sneak back through another door. This takes place as she is this time making "dumpling soup", by adding some flour to the milk mixture. This is followed by making some chocolate porridge, that becomes black porridge made by a witch. She takes on the voice of a witch. She then becomes the daughter, who is attracted by the potion, tastes it, and falls asleep. I have to carry her, and she tells me to phone an ambulance. I become the nurse who gives her some good medicine. At the end, we feed each other with the milk left intact.

Next session, Judith plays the role of the witch, she takes a nasty voice and she makes "poison". She makes a brown mixture with paint, water and flour, and adds glitter into it. The witch says that this will kill the little girl. She becomes the daughter who is attracted to the beautiful sparkling mixture and is poisoned by the witch. Mother has to carry her to an ambulance, where she is revived. Judith then asks me to narrate the story of Sleeping Beauty. I tell the story, and how "the girl was not going to die, but only fall asleep for a long time". In recalling the story, Judith is making more conscious connections between her own personal experience and the myth of Sleeping Beauty, linking an archetypal dimension to it. She is also getting reassured that her own story can be redeemed, and that she will not die.

#### Making food with flour and water. (Sessions 32 to 37)

Judith tells me today that we each are going to have a dishpan, and that we will make our own recipe. She adds: "you make milk, I make chocolate". She takes the green dishpan and gives me the brown one. She puts flour under each container. We feed each other with drinks. She then takes some flour and puts it in a smaller container. We make porridge and dough, and Judith decides to turn the flour mix into chocolate cookies, by adding some chocolate milk to it. The clean-up is done by going to sit on our respective small and big chairs away from the table, where I ask Judith to observe the room and to decide what has to be done for clean-up. She tells me who does what.

Judith is beginning to establish more defined boundaries between us, while she works through alternating states of separation and union. Her gradual development of boundaries, that will be seen throughout subsequent sessions, also coincides with the separating task of termination. Clean-up is designed with the aim of empowering Judith in the process of leaving the room and separating from me, by helping her create clearer boundaries through the symbolic respective spaces represented by the chairs.

Next session, Judith begins again by putting a bed of flour under and in front of each dishpan. This is her opening ritual, which establishes our respective grounds. We separately make milk, chocolate milk, and dough. Judith explores the textures of dough: soft, dry, drier, mushy, and sticky. She is fascinated by the changes in density. Liquid is separated from solid in different containers, and we are mother and daughter making dough. Judith is manipulating a very plastic substance that keeps changing form. She creates different states, from liquid to semi-liquid to solid, involved in the task of shaping and transforming. She becomes the creator of these transitional states (see Figure 9).

Next time, Judith separates the flour into two equal bags. She decides to make a pie for mother and I choose to make doughnuts for my daughter. Judith wants these to be a surprise for each other, and she puts the two bags of flour between us, to prevent us from looking at each other's creation. This acts also as a clear boundary between us. We end with offering our gifts to each other and by eating them together. The following day, Judith creates the same ritual space with the dishpans and two circles of flour underneath. She then proceeds to blend both circles into one, and says: "we are sharing". She tells me to make cookies while she makes bread. She says she loves working with flour, because it makes her feel lighter. I find two baking pans to put the bread and cookies in. Judith is delighted and flattens her bread into the pan, until it fills the whole space. I put my cookies in rows into my pan. She writes my name on her pie. I write each letter of her name on separate cookies. We pretend to knock at each other's door, defined by an invisible boundary between the two of us, and we offer our gifts to each other.

Through these ritual gestures, a sense of our respective homes is established through imaginary boundaries, while the memory of each other is imprinted symbolically in pie and in cookies. Our numerous meals together throughout the previous sessions recall rites of incorporation in funerary rituals, where meals are shared by the surviving members



to reunite them after the experience of death (van Gennep, 1960). Davies also talks of the symbology of "food against death" in rites of reincorporation (1997, p. 41). Human beings, through the experience of sharing food together, "affirm the positive and ongoing nature of life- the sustaining aspect of life" (1997, p. 41).

Finally, Judith creates a common space of flour for us to work on. She takes her flat bread from the last session and sprinkles flour over it. I do the same with my pan of cookies. She cuts a piece of her bread that she gives to me, and I give her some cookies. She tells me she is sad about me leaving, and we talk about our feelings. She makes marks around her bread, saying that she is writing my name. She then takes all my cookies and sticks them with water to the surface of her bread. She puts a thick layer of flour over them, until they are all covered. They are buried as in a ritual of death (see Figure 10). As we sit together in our respective chairs for clean up, Judith puts her head on my shoulder and tells me she will always remember our time dancing together. She wants us to dance on our last session next week ...

### Summary of the Sessions

Trying to follow Judith's particular needs and creative process led me in a therapeutic exploration that became increasingly focused on the process of interchange and collaboration, and that combined play and art therapy. Judith's art process became an opportunity to engage in creative and symbolic posttraumatic play through movements emerging from art making, dance and drama. Movements rising from seemingly indistinct and confused sensations were the connecting elements that helped her in the beginning to recognize and make sense of an overwhelming amount of impressions, memories, feelings, and thoughts. These ritual movements in space expressed meaningful symbolic acts for Judith, and were the main threads weaving the patterns of the sessions together,

helping her develop an increasingly more complex fabric of expression. Through these movements contained in play, I believe that Judith was able to retrace missed steps in her own development.

In this regard, Winnicott (1974) says that playing in therapy allows the child to revisit and integrate incomplete stages of growth or to absorb painful experiences from the past. Cattanach (1992) presents play as a natural developmental process, that can be observed to follow three main stages. In the first year of life, the child's play is an embodiment play, centered on exploring the senses; the child begins to explore objects outside oneself, mostly through imitation. This stage gradually leads to a projective play, where the exploration of objects becomes more complex and includes some narrative. In the third stage, called role play, imaginative thoughts and dramatic actions can be more fully expressed, through "make pretend" activities. Judith's own play process in art therapy followed this pattern of development.

In examining the sessions, I have tried to distinguish the main themes running through Judith's process of art making, sewing, play, dance, and drama activities. Throughout these various modalities of expression, the most constant and recurrent themes were symbolic actions expressed in ritual movements showing a dualistic pattern. These rituals gravitated around the acts of covering and uncovering, appearing and disappearing, rising and falling, and tying and untying. I believe that the bipolar and ambivalent nature of these symbolic movements could best express the inner conflicts and paradoxes created by Judith's experience of sexual abuse.

In fact, Judith's ritual enactments came to demonstrate the main functions of rituals described in the literature review. Her rituals allowed her to create connections that were missing, by linking unconscious thoughts, feelings and sensations to conscious ones.

Her ritualistic play offered her a safe space in which to find refuge from anxiety, and to begin exploring some difficult issues, by facing paradoxical experiences and intense inner conflict with the help of archetypal and symbolic acts. The ritual movements observed in her posttraumatic play also facilitated the emergence of mythical characters in the later stage of her drama stories, helping her to further process some parts of her painful experience. The archetypal figures of "the Witch", "the Ghost", "the Mother and the Daughter", "the Princess and the Queen", "Sleeping Beauty", and "Esmeralda and the Hunchback of Notre-Dame", were actively employed to work through traumatic material in ritualistic and dramatic reenactments. Rituals also provided her with a symbolic place where she could regain some control over the violence and chaos of past events, and restore some order and meaning in the fabric of her life. This involved the processing of bad and good experiences, through the confrontation of good and evil characters.

Ritualization in play gave Judith the strong foundation of a transitional space, to support her liminal process of death, mourning and becoming, present in all her stories. This space helped her contain experiences of transition involving many separations and losses, that had resulted in a fragmented life story. Rituals created a symbolic passage for Judith, that could lead her to start absorbing, connecting, reorganizing, and integrating parts of her experience. Her ritual acts also helped her move from powerlessness to empowerment, and toward some hope of transformation.

These various functions of rituals became powerful therapeutic tools in Judith's process, around which my main treatment goals could articulate themselves. Rituals enabled Judith to draw from a rich soil of creative energy. They offered the regenerative ground containing the alchemical seeds needed for her grieving and healing process in art therapy.

## **Conclusion**

### **Evaluation and Synthesis of Art Therapy Approach**

At the beginning of therapy with Judith, I felt unsure of how to deal with the intensely repetitive features of her play behaviour. While I observed some pathological compulsion in the repetitions, I also saw in the repeated ritualized gestures a potentially creative dimension. I chose to focus on the symbolic and creative aspect of Judith's ritualizations, which I believe helped her gradual progress in art therapy. This was reflected in the progression from simple ritualistic play patterns to more symbolic and complex ritual making.

Judith's spontaneous activities of play and ritual in her art making influenced my therapeutic interventions, that were developed in an approach combining play, storymaking, movement, and drama. These elements became the basic modalities of a therapeutic process that encouraged the assimilation and integration of traumatic experiences, and supported a greater connection with the self through symbolic expression. This particular approach is evaluated through the following sections.

### **An Approach Focusing on Play**

Through the use of a play approach in art therapy, this client was able to gradually relax her defenses and to feel free to express affect in a more spontaneous manner. Symbolic play acted as a protected space to express ambivalent emotions in a non-threatening way. It also provided concrete forms for un verbalized or unconscious affect. Play themes evolved through numerous repetitions, showing over time a gradual expansion of affect, thoughts, sensations, and content.

The repetitive patterns shown in her posttraumatic play allowed for a gradual process of growth. Through play, the client was able to rehearse past experiences at her own pace, to assimilate them into new perceptions and to develop new ways of relating to herself and to the world. These long periods of make-believe were useful in strengthening her self-expression and in helping her discover her creative capacity to transform experiences symbolically (Schaefer, 1976).

The participatory and collaborative experience of play fostered the development of relationship, together with the development of intimacy and boundaries. The shared acts of playing reassured the child-client that the therapist could really understand her and relate to her inner self. It also enabled her to revisit earlier stages of development by being accompanied in her play by the therapist. Intimacy was built by mutual and reciprocal gestures and speech in play, as well as in mirroring activities, in the same way that it is created between mother and child.

Her involvement in play also gave the child "the capacity for imagining different scenarios through make-believe", that could gradually change the quality of her emotional and cognitive worlds (Erikson, 1977, p. 21). Play became in this way a therapeutic space where corrective emotional actions were created in answer to traumatic events.

### An Approach Focusing on Storymaking

The development of stories in art therapy supported the development of a sequential processing of thoughts- a process that is often a struggle for sexually abused children, who experience dissociation in their thoughts. I believe that stories supported by movement allowed the client to connect cognitive aspects to more unconscious or affective parts of herself. Storymaking can then become for traumatized children an opportunity to

"reconstruct the lost parts of themselves" (Spring, 1993, p. ix). Cognitive restructuring through storymaking can facilitate the reorganization and reintegration of experiences.

Stories using mythical characters allowed the client to connect with her personal story, and to restore meaning to her life's experiences. The discovery of a mythical pattern through the exploration of archetypal figures helped her give new significance to her own story. This process promoted the development of personal identity, which is so important in the therapeutic process of sexually abused children. Successful therapy, says Cattanach, resides in the ability to develop new personal identity (1997). These stories were also instrumental in instilling a sense of hope by creating a larger life perspective that could contain the child's traumatic experiences.

#### An Approach Focusing on Movement and Performance

Ritual movement provided the client with the means to go back to earlier stages of development and to symbolically process some unconscious sensory experiences linked with forgotten traumatic events at a very early age. Dewald and Brenner (Brooke, 1997) present unusual and repetitive behaviour patterns associated with sensory activities as indicators of early traumatic and unconscious memories. Schimek explains that experiences in infancy and traumatic events are recorded in primitive memory, under sensorimotor forms (Johnson, 1987). The narrative form of memory remains undeveloped or inaccessible, and is instead expressed on a visceral and emotional level, returning in fragmented sensory or motoric experiences (Bell-Gadsby & Siegenberg, 1996; van der Kolk, 1987).

Behavioural memory, says Terr, can then become one of the best modes to retrieve and process events embedded deep in the unconscious (1990). Through the use of play

based on movement and sensory explorations, body memories can be brought to surface (Brooke, 1997). Verbal and discursive forms of thought would in fact interfere with the reliving of these unconscious mental representations of events, adds Schimek (Johnson, 1987). When thoughts cannot contain and words cannot describe an early condition of psychic shock, symbolic and unexplainable meanings found in ritualistic movements can become the numinous signs connecting the individual to his/her experience (Shorter, 1976). Rituals can link feelings and thoughts to bodily experiences. The ritual structure of movements created by the client in play helped her build a non-verbal bridge to reunite disjointed parts of herself.

Traumatized children are often alienated from parts of their bodies, and using movement in art therapy helped this child reconnect with her body in a non-threatening way. "Establishing a sense of body integrity should be a treatment goal for most traumatized children", says James (1989, p. 88). He adds that movement with music, body-awareness activities using relaxation techniques, and sensorimotor play can create a very effective therapy (1989). Movement provided Judith with a greater sense of embodiment and sense of self, and helped her calm some anxiety through ritualizations.

Furthermore, ritual movements combined with drama created a safe space of "encounter, contact, and confrontation" (Shorter, 1976, p. 51). The simultaneous needs for self-protection and for expression, that have to be addressed in the therapeutic process of sexually abused individuals, were contained in ritualistic drama. Rituals may also answer the great need for self-transformation in traumatized persons, because they imprint all actions with symbolic meaning (Shaughnessy, 1973). Johnson adds that the aspect of performance in relation to an audience is very important in treating victimized patients. The audience can act as "witness" to empower the actor, and "the self, isolated and stigmatized, can rejoin the world, make contact with others, instead of feeling excluded" (Johnson,

1989, p. 12). In this particular case, empowerment through mirroring and being witnessed was an important part of the client's therapeutic process, that allowed her to grow and develop.

### Further Research in Art Therapy

Play is inherent in the expression of children engaged in art making. The process of play informs the process of art making, and art is embedded in the natural impulses of play and exploration. However, it is an area that has not been specifically explored and researched in art therapy. More investigation on the play processes and on ways to combine play interventions with art therapy techniques could benefit the field of art therapy in general, and contribute to the treatment of traumatized children. More studies on the posttraumatic play processes of abused children need also to be done, with the perspective of developing more specific treatment plans with this population. Areas of study that could be examined include a study of the stages and evolution of posttraumatic play, and of the factors related to these changes. The patterns of ritualization in the posttraumatic play of abused children could also be researched, with the aim of discerning if there are specific patterns of movements, sounds and rhythms recurring in the play of these children. A following exploration would consider if there are relations between specific patterns and particular traumatic reactions. Themes observed in ritualization should also be given some examination. The study of these different aspects of posttraumatic play could help develop therapeutic tools and strategies to encourage a creative play development that promotes greater conscious connection in traumatized children. Degrees of trauma, types of trauma, as well as the onset of trauma, should be considered in future studies.

I believe that therapeutic approaches employing a metaphorical and mythical approach in art therapy are an interesting area to further investigate with children who have



suffered sexual abuse. Although Terr says that "trauma is not particularly translatable to metaphors" (1990, p. 240), the observations based on this case study do not support this view. The child-client was able to gradually develop the simple ritualistic movement patterns of her play into more articulate and creative ritual making processes in art therapy. In fact, a symbolic and metaphorical approach seems to have greatly facilitated the therapeutic process of this client in art therapy, whose actions were deeply invested in myth and archetypal meaning. However, the findings of this study would need to be confirmed by a larger study.

Furthermore, combining ritual making with art making in art therapy could generate new therapeutic strategies that focus on the integration of the fragmented parts of the self in the sexually abused client. As was shown in the literature review, ritual connects psyche with body and mind, and could become a useful therapeutic tool in this respect. An art therapy approach that takes into account the transitional function of rituals could help in symbolically supporting the gradual integration of the self. The transitional quality of ritual also encourages transformative actions, by helping the person "to pass from one state to another" (Livingston, 1993, p. 132). The critical condition of the sexually traumatized child, who is in the transitional state of dealing with profound changes, would be addressed in this way.

Finally, I would like to propose a ritual approach that focuses especially on the grieving process of sexually abused children. As was mentioned earlier, multiple losses suffered by traumatized children need to be acknowledged as such in therapy, and therapeutic strategies that can help them mourn their losses should become a main treatment goal when working with sexually abused children. The development of ritual making in art therapy can promote symbolic enactments to facilitate grieving, a stage that needs to be experienced before any changes or transformation can occur.

It is hoped that this paper can contribute to the development of art therapy in the areas of trauma and sexual abuse, by showing the need to recognize sexual trauma as a condition of loss that requires a grieving process. This research reiterates statements from previous studies that therapeutic approaches for sexually abused clients in art therapy have to shift the emphasis from diagnosis to the development of more specific forms of treatment. It proposes a treatment approach that integrates rituals with art making, to answer sexually traumatized children's needs for symbolic containment, for a transitional passage, and for grieving and transformation in art therapy. It is my belief that further research in this direction has the potential to promote creative and unique developments in art therapy.



Figure 1: Witch, Cauldron, and Ghost



Figure 2: The White Ghost

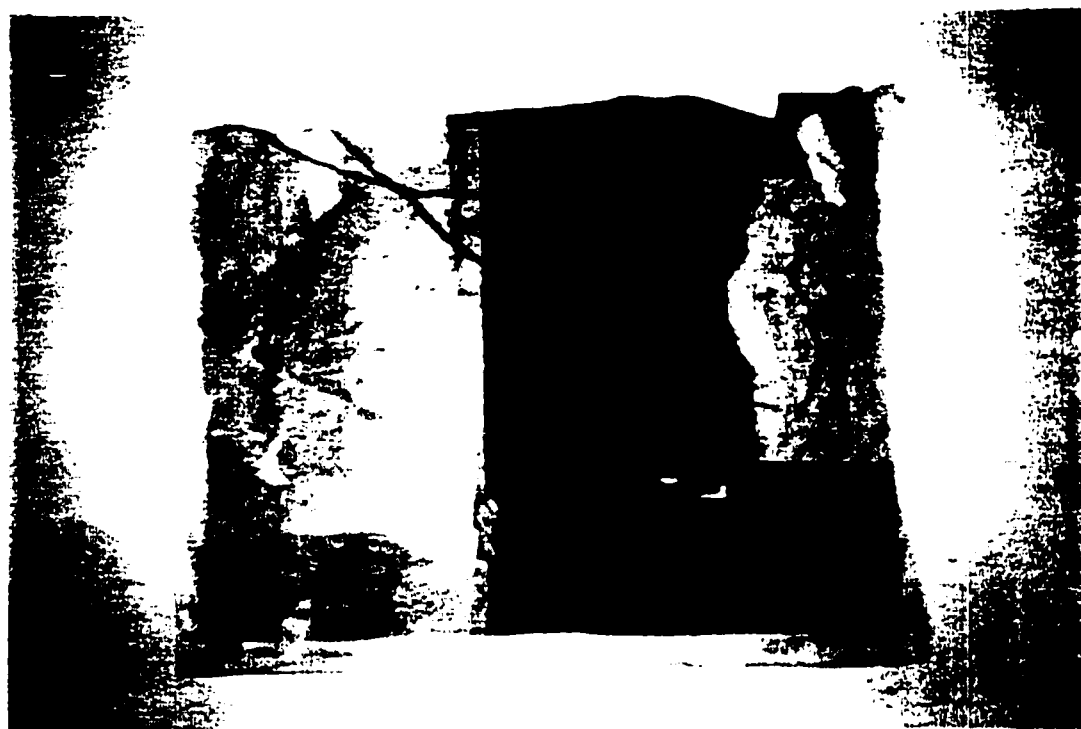


Figure 3: The Purse

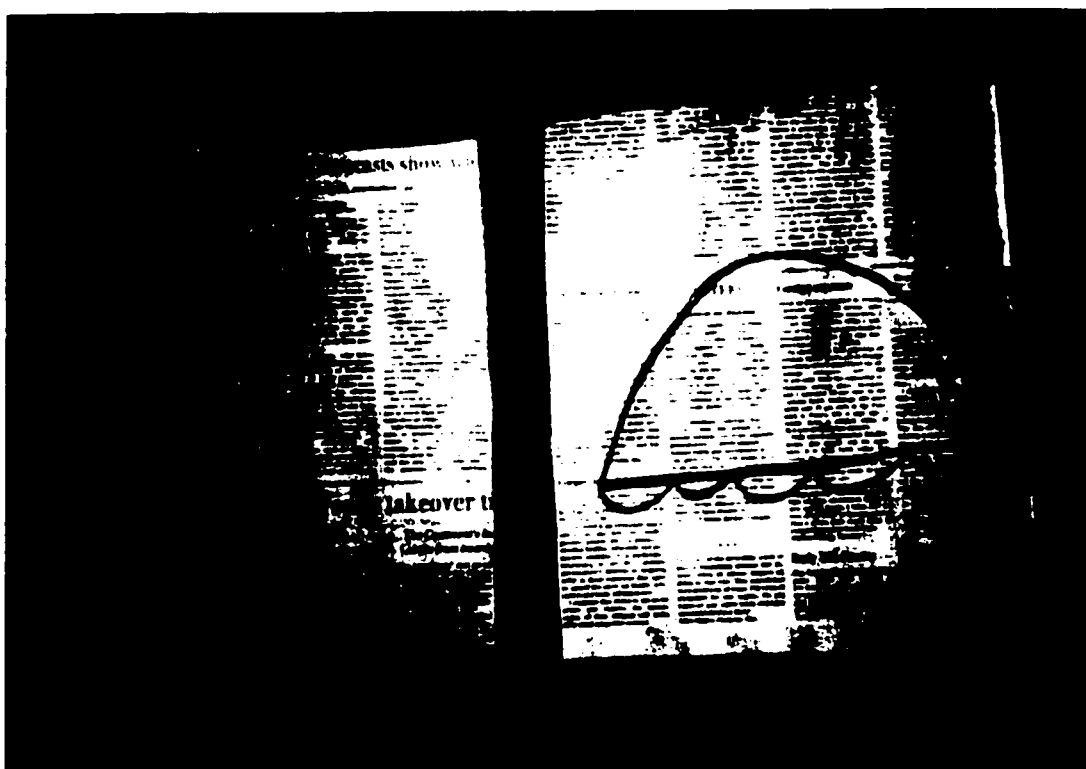


Figure 4: Pattern



Figure 5: The Flying Dress



Figure 6: The Coffin





**Figure 7: The Spindle**



Figure 8: Children-Sponges



Figure 9: Dishpans

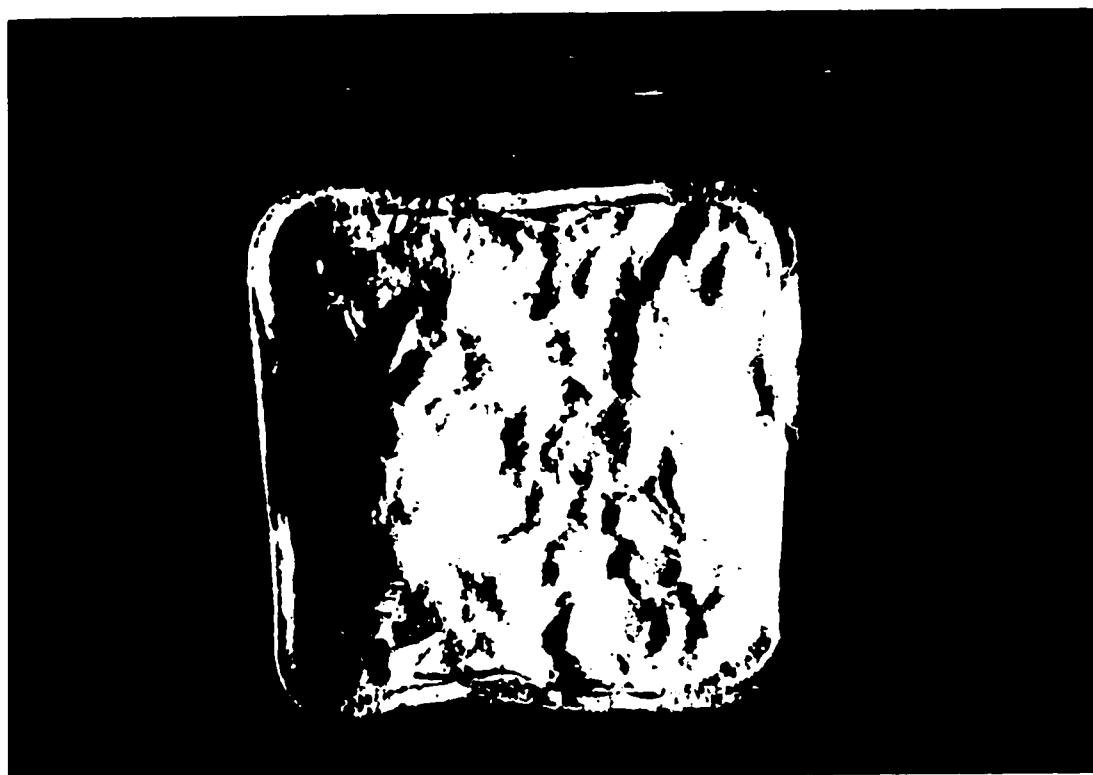


Figure 10: Burial

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## **Appendix**

## **Consent Information**

**Art Therapy Student:**

Marielle Geoffroy  
Concordia University  
1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd. West  
Montréal, Québec

**Practicum Supervisor:**

Leland Peterson  
  
Creative Arts Therapies Programme Director  
Concordia University

### **Background Information**

One of the ways art therapy students learn how to be art therapists is to write a research paper that includes case material and art work by clients they have worked with during their practicum. The purpose of doing this is to help them, as well as other students and art therapists who read the research, to increase their knowledge and skill in giving art therapy services to a variety of persons with different kinds of problems. The long-term goal is to be able to better help individuals who enter into therapy with art therapists in the future.

### **Permission**

As a student in the Master's in Creative Arts Therapies Programme at Concordia University, I am asking you for permission to photograph certain pieces of your child's art work and to include them in my research paper.

### **Confidentiality**

Because this information is of a personal nature, it is understood that your child's confidentiality will be respected in every way possible. Neither your child's name, the name of the setting where the art therapy took place, nor any other identifying information will appear in the research paper. Your child's art work will be completely anonymous and your child's identity will not be revealed.

### **Advantages and disadvantages**

To my knowledge, this permission will not cause your child any personal inconvenience or advantages. Whether or not you give your consent will have no effect on your child's involvement in art therapy or any other aspect of the treatment. Also, you may withdraw your consent at any time before the thesis is completed with no consequences and without giving any explanation. To do this, or if you have any questions, you may contact my supervisor, Leland Peterson, at 848-4643.

## **Consent Form**

**Art Therapy Research Paper  
Marielle Geoffroy, Student  
Master's in Creative Arts Therapies Programme  
Concordia University**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, undersigned, give permission to Marielle Geoffroy to photograph my child's pieces of art work for inclusion in her Master's Research Paper in the Creative Arts Therapy Programme at Concordia University.

I understand that both my child and the setting where the art therapy sessions took place will be kept strictly anonymous and that no identifying information will be given in the research paper. I also understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time before the research paper is completed, without explanation, simply by contacting Marielle Geoffroy or her supervisor, Leland Peterson (848-4643). This decision will have no effect whatsoever on my child's art therapy or any other aspect of treatment.

I have had an opportunity to ask any questions about the implications of this consent, and I am satisfied with the answers I received.

I have read and understood the contents of this form and I give my consent as described above.

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_