The Transformation of my Personal Mythology in the Journey of Becoming an Art

Therapist: A Heuristic Perspective

Marie-Elene Morin

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Abstract

The Transformation of my Personal Mythology in the Journey of Becoming an Art

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Marie-Élène Morin

The following qualitative research paper is about the transformation of my personal

mythology while completing my master's degree in Art Therapy. This was accomplished

through a five stage exercise series elaborated by Feinstein (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988).

The method of inquiry is heuristic (Moustakas, 1990) and the data was collected between

the timeline of winter 2007 to winter 2008. This study is a result of a concern regarding

the proportion of the personal component in the education of Art Therapists. The primary

objective is to evaluate the shifts in my personal and professional identities, as reflected

in my personal mythology. Heuristic inquiry is used because of the inherently personal

nature of the experience of becoming an Art Therapist, and also because of its

correspondence with the five stage model. The data includes journal entries, art, and

descriptions of rituals and dreams. From one symbol to another, a deep transformation is

revealed. The result is a concretely different symbol expression, actualized and

transformed, identifying the self, and a renewed way of visualizing life's challenges.

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Finally, I wish to send the most thankfulness to my beautiful son. You are the wisest and strongest being I have ever encountered. I can't wait to see what you will become...

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Introduction

Relevant literature suggests the old saying "know thyself" is one of the most

important elements in becoming a therapist. *Personal mythology* is a concept that is

easily adaptable to achieve this goal. In the present paper, I explore the transformation of

my personal mythology in my journey to become an Art Therapist. To examine this

process, I utilized a five stage model suggested by Feinstein in: *Personal mythology: the*

psychology of your evolving self (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988). I then propose to examine

my own art making as it unravels in the process of transformation of my personal

mythology, structured by the program outlined by Feinstein (1988). The results of my

exploration are framed within the timeline of winter 2007 to winter 2008, in which I was

in my second and third year of my master's degree in Art Therapy in the Department of

Creative Arts Therapies at Concordia University.

My primary objective is to self-evaluate the shifts in my personal identity while

learning to become an Art Therapist. The journey of becoming an Art Therapist requires

many adjustments and transformations. The self-exploration, proposed by heuristic

inquiry, is a method of choice to examine that matter further. The tools particular to art

therapy imply the use of personal imagery in the ongoing process.

The main question I intend to answer with this paper is: What transformations

will my personal mythology go through within the five stage process suggested by

Feinstein (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988) in my journey of becoming an art therapist? I

also attempt at responding to two subsidiary questions. The journey of becoming an Art

Therapist includes different elements, related to professional and personal factors. Accordingly, I am interested in: What will be the proportion of representation of the personal and professional factors and the various elements they enclose in my self-exploration? Also, I would like to enquire about: What will be my critique on the different types of exercises proposed in the five stage model, their easy application and efficacy in a journey of self-exploration?

In the quest of pertinent literature, it appears that there are no art therapy studies using the personal mythology construct in regards to analyzing one's journey of becoming an Art Therapist. There seems to be extensive literature on the subject of Art Therapists' professional identity, but few on personal identity. One of the reasons may be that "The art therapy literature is so heavily focused on the analysis of artworks by clients that it may feel odd, or inappropriate, for us to present our personal artworks in our professional studies" (McNiff, 1989, p.120). This is why I consider it to be of great interest and pertinence to contribute to filling that gap and to enlightening this process by examining my own. Also in this regard, the heuristic perspective, because of its nature, is inherently original and convenient for this type of research, as it pertains to the personal and subjective experience of the researcher.

In order to answer my questions, I present, in the first section, a literature review of the different key concepts related to my exploration: becoming an Art Therapist, the personal mythology, the five stage model and the heuristic method of investigation. Becoming or being an Art Therapist presents its own personal and professional challenges. I discuss several authors who have written about their own self-enlightening experience as something crucial to their profession.

In the second section, I present and discuss my chosen method of inquiry, the heuristic paradigm as proposed by Moustakas (1990). First, I explain why it is relevant to my exploration and why I chose it to answer my inquiry. Then, I examine the key concepts relating to the heuristic methodology. Also, I address the issue of validity and reliability of this design. Third, I go through each of the six phases proposed by Moustakas (1990) that guide the exploration of the heuristic investigation. Fourth and final, I explain how I envision the two models pertinent to my research, Feinstein's (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988) and Moustakas, weaving in the process of my exploration.

In the third section, I present the data I collected. Through multiple practical exercises, I have accumulated hard data in the form of journal entries, artwork and several rituals and visualizations I describe. I have worked on creating opening and closing rituals that frame these experiences in order to become more focused and delve into myself in a deeper manner, which is fully explained in this section.

In the fourth section, I go through each of the five stages of the model I have chosen to work with as created by Feinstein (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988). The first stage is to bring into awareness the mythic conflicts. At this point, through the relevant exercises, I was able to assess my conflicts, find a symbol for each and connect present feelings with previous experiences that have occurred in my life. The second stage involved discovering where my current personal mythology came from. This meant examining my life history, past experiences and their ongoing consequences. Furthermore, this stage implied identifying my emerging myth that comes in conflict with the previous one. It fostered active participation in the development of my new personal mythology, which is more integrated and adapted, and which addressed myself as a

whole. The third stage essentially consisted of the conception of an overarching, integrated personal myth. Here, images synthesizing the two colliding myths were able to surface, due to my increased awareness of their respective natures. The fourth stage's goal was to hasten the commitment in creating my unifying mythology. The use of altered states of consciousness, rituals that got me in touch with the deepest and hidden parts of myself, facilitated a deeper understanding and a more authentic way of finding a resolution. The final and fifth stage allowed the transposition of my new inner myth into my everyday life, and into the external world. Here, integrating my new choices into practical daily life was quite challenging. Making behavioural changes to sustain my vision was the main focus. The personal rituals were designed to foster a different set of thoughts and behaviours related to patterns within my personal way of being. This section holds also a section developed on recurrent themes and symbols that came up during these fruitful exercises.

In the fifth and final section, I offer a discussion of these findings and how they answered my initial questions. I explore the transformations my personal mythology has been through during the five stage process while learning to become an Art Therapist. What transformations can be noted? How do I interpret them and the process? I review the results of my exploration. I explain what I consider to be the proportion of personal and professional factors implicated in my results. Also, I comment on the five stage exercises proposed by Feinstein. By doing so, I critique the process and the results. Finally, I propose future areas of exploration and research regarding the very exciting field of personal mythology in art therapy.

Literature Review

The following will give a review of what has been written on the journey to become an Art Therapist and what purposes it serves to take a closer look at it. Also we will examine the personal mythology construct, and the proposed five stage program (Feinstein, 1988, 1990; Feinstein & Krippner, 1988; Feinstein, Krippner, & Granger, 1988; McNiff, 1989) to illustrate the process of transformation and deeper self-discovery. Follows is a review of heuristic inquiry regarding its concepts, philosophical bases and a critique.

Becoming an Art Therapist

Becoming an Art Therapist is not an easy task. Although one may argue that the qualities needed are inherent to some of us, the process implies change and adjustment. In order to become more aware of the experience of the *other*, our client, we need to be enlightened about our own selves. Several Art Therapists have spoken their concerns regarding this particular issue, clearly exemplified here by McNiff : "Our experience with training students in the United States and other countries repeatedly demonstrated how the person, is a major instrumentality in psychotherapy"(1989, p.120). This is also very well illustrated by Jung (free translation from French):

> I did not know that I was living a myth and would I have known it, that I would not have even then the knowledge of the myth which organized my life without my knowing it. Hence naturally forming in me the decision to come to know "my" myth and I considered this my duty above all, because – saying to myself – how in the presence of my patients to hold into account exactly of my personal

factor, of my personal equation so indispensable for the knowledge of others, if I

did not have any conscience of it. (1993, p. 36)

McNiff (1979) made the parallel between the journey and the role of Art

Therapists and shamans. He suggested that, like Art Therapists, shamans had to go

through their own struggles with the spirit world in other to accompany others in theirs.

Their journeys may be linked as such, "Nevertheless, if the shaman was able to heal

himself/herself and others, it is because he/she understood the process of emotional

disturbance" (p. 156). McNiff also suggests that Art Therapists should embody what they

propose to their clients regarding the idea of self-discovery:

> I believe that if art therapy is going to have a larger impact upon society, our
>
> primary identification will have with the art of self-formation. The Art Therapist
>
> will be an agent of creation, inspiring others to shape, transform and recreate their
>
> lives. The art objects emerging from this process are companions, helpers and
>
> records of involvement. (1989, p.105)

In order to take on that journey, we need to consider its crucial aspect, but also the

way we intend to do it. As Art Therapists, it is important to ponder on what kind of tools

we can use for our self-examination. We possess a tool that distinguishes us with the

other therapeutic professions, the artwork. What could be a more natural and intrinsic

way of embarking on the transformation process, than to use our own tools? In fact, the

therapist can be seen as an example of commitment to self-actualization and to his own

discipline: "The therapist is a teacher who demonstrates a commitment to the discipline.

In this respect the therapist's influence and reason for being in the role is based on a

commitment on the ongoing practice of the art" (McNiff, 1989, p.104).

Personal Mythology

David Feisntein is a pioneer in the field of personal mythology in psychotherapy (Feinstein, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1997, 1998; Feinstein & Krippner, 1988; Feinstein et al., 1988). The extensive aspect and the quality of his work, and his easily adaptable model with art, have guided my choice in allowing his concepts to be central to my research. He defines personal myths as "inner models that, for the individual, interpret the past, explain the present, and provide guidance for the future in a manner parallel to the way cultural myths orient entire societies" (Feinstein et al., 1988, p. 29). They are models inherent to a person that help make sense and organize the past and present, and at the same time guide our future actions, goals and dreams (Feinstein et al.). He explains that personal mythology is inherently unconscious; it guides our sense of identity, direction and purpose in life. It is independent from, but reflects our surrounding culture. Personal myths form with the various experiences we encounter, they influence our emotions and cognitions, as well as our actions (Feinstein et al.). Their impacts encompass the way our personalities are constructed, as recognized here by Jung, (free translation from French): "Finally, there are imaginative systems totally unconscious in a complex now autonomous that present a tendency to constitute a personality on their own. What we just said shows how the products of the unconscious are related to myth" (1993, p. 83).

While our personal mythology is adaptable to a certain extent, receiving feedback from inner and outer sources, certain events or feelings can challenge our *guiding myth*. The result of this is a deformation of the guiding myth, or with time, the creation of a discrepancy between what is being lived internally and externally, resulting in various

emotional disturbances (Feinstein, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1997, 1998; Feinstein & Krippner, 1988; Feinstein et al., 1988).

In the quest for authenticity, discovering and analyzing our personal mythology becomes crucial. During a time of transformational experience such as becoming an Art Therapist, it is important to seek out the pathway to our inner selves, so we can encourage our clients knowingly in doing so (Melanson, 1985, ; Politsky, 1995). A view well illustrated by Politsky: "Art Therapists serve themselves and their clients best when they engage in this type of self-exploration through art" (1995, p. 19). The scientific community hardly agrees on the definition of the widely used transformation construct, some even argue that it is non-existent (Avalon, 2007). Seemingly its definition is extremely variable and depends on the field of inquiry. It is most often used in psychotherapy and spirituality. In the dictionary, transformation refers to the verb *transform* (free translation from French): "To pass from one form to another [...] To become different, change, evolve [...] To better, regenerate visibly" (Robert, 2008, p. 2602). Transformation is understood as a previous state that is altered in some way during a process of some kind; it is closely linked to change, but unlike it, it seems to imply improvement. In the present case, interest is on transformation of the self. Its process can implicate, as Greenberg and Watson put it, "both generating new, more resilient emotional responses and validating the new feelings and the emerging self-organization"(2006, p. 281). In the personal mythology program, interestingly, transformation is not addressed as a construct *per se*, and yet it underlines the whole book. Indeed, if the construct's use is based on the alteration of personality, it also comprises the idea of a more wholesome view of the psyche; the integration of denied

aspects of the self. For some, this can be seen as a two part process that includes "the articulation and strengthening of individual self-boundaries, and the reclaiming of split-off, denied, or projected aspects of self"(Cohen Bertram & Rutgers, 1999, p. 61).

Through unravelling our personal myths, we can understand how they provide guidance to our life and begin to take control in areas that seemed already paved out for us. We can gain insight into our true selves and participate knowingly in the choices we make to orient our lives towards a better integration of who we are (Feinstein et al., 1988). The process of doing so is outlined by Feinstein (Feinstein, 1988, 1990, 1997; Feinstein & Krippner, 1988; Feinstein et al., 1988) in a self-guided program explained in the next section.

Five Stage Model

Feinstein (Feinstein, 1988, 1990, 1997; Feinstein & Krippner, 1988; Feinstein et al., 1988) proposes a five stage program aimed at engaging dialogue within ourselves between our colliding myths. By the emergence of this dialectic conversation, we want to enlighten the most important parts of these opposing systems and foster the creation of a new one, more adapted and transparent, but most importantly, self-created (Feinstein et al., 1988). The steps are conceived as *personal rituals*, relating to shamanistic practices and ritualistic behaviours in ancient culture, but adapted for individualistic contemporary purposes (Feinstein et al., 1988; McNiff, 1979). This process is adaptable for clinical practice, but also for self-guidance. All the stages propose the use of guided imagery and journaling with some variations. The following is a description of each of the steps provided by Feinstein (Feinstein et al., 1988):

First Stage

The first stage aims to bring into awareness the mythic conflicts. The resolution of conflicts is envisioned as a healthy part of the personality development. The conflicts can present themselves as "difficulties making a decision, unfamiliar fears or anxiety, puzzling dreams, self-contradictions, nagging confusion, ambivalence, and even physical symptoms"(Feinstein et al., 1988, p. 36). A series of exercises are proposed to favour the rise into consciousness of these conflicting systems of personal myths, but are also used in the other steps, like guided imagery, journaling, making a personal shield (a piece of artwork that represents us and acts as a protection mechanism), free associations with symbols and remembering dreams.

Second Stage

The second stage involves finding the source of our current personal mythology. This means examining our life history, past experiences and their consequences. Personal myths are formed experientially, but are also interpreted in context, both familial and societal, as illustrated here: "A comprehensive theory of human development that is based on the individual's evolving mythology integrates the biological, psychodynamic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of experience" (Feinstein, 1998, p. 71). Fully considering this implicates finding the usefulness of a mythology that no longer is an ally. Personal myths are based on our past experiences. When these experiences do not correspond with our actual experiences, they cease to be useful and ought to be renewed in order to serve their purpose in a more efficient way. It is suggested to try to find the way and the reason a certain personal myth was created and the purpose it served before trying to find a new one that is more coherent with our current selves. Further, this stage

implies identifying the emerging myth that comes in conflict with the previous one. Why is this myth more appealing? Bringing awareness onto the area where the two myths collide helps create an active participation in the development of a new personal mythology that is more integrated and adapted.

This stage proposes exercises, constructed towards its previously stated goal. They involve creating the first and second of a three-part personal fictional story or fairytale, journaling, identifying difficult emotional bodily sensations and the use of it as a metaphor, calling of the *inner shaman*, guided imagery and attending old wounds. The inner shaman concept elaborated by Feinstein (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988) for the purpose of his exercise series is derived from the shaman as healer and spiritual leader of tribal cultures. It is used to imaginatively embody deeper wisdom, guidance and enlightenment in oneself.

After completing the proposed outline, we are better equipped to have a more constructive conflicting myth. Because both mythologies are seen more clearly for what they are and where they come from, the mystery surrounding those fade away and allow an enlightened point of view of our situation. Knowing why and how we needed a certain mythology helps us create a new one more adapted and effective in our daily lives.

Third Stage

The third stage essentially consists of the conception of an overarching, merged personal myth. Here, images integrating the two colliding myths are more prone to surface, due to an increased awareness of their respective natures. Being outside of our comfort zone, neither residing in one mythology nor the other, can present its challenges.

While the previous myth is outdated, the new one seems incompatible with reality, so it calls for the creation of a merged myth, made with the others two:

> In the creation of strong life-forms the coming together of different elements creates a transformative energy which makes a new whole which is greater than the sum of its parts. The structures of the formative elements are themselves changed through the transformation process. (McNiff, 1989, p. 97)

The personal rituals proposed at this stage tend to create a balance, and transcend both the conflicting areas into the creation of a new myth, making the best of both worlds. The exercises consist in creating a chart for each one of the personal mythologies with their own mottos, the personification of the myths and engaging an imaginary dialogue between them (as symbols), journaling, identification of one underlying unifying quality, using body metaphors (to bodily enact different parts of our psyche) and taking the symbols of the two myths in order to create a fantasy where they integrate one another. The use of symbols to reconcile opposing tendencies in the psyche in the field of depth psychology is known as the transcendent function, a concept elaborated by Jung (1958) which I elaborate further in the discussion section.

Concluding this stage, it might feel difficult to draw any resolution between both our mythologies. The coming stages will help in doing so.

Fourth Stage

The goal of this stage is to hasten the commitment in creating a unifying mythology. The use of altered states of consciousness (such as meditation and breathing techniques), rituals that get us in touch with the deepest parts of ourselves, facilitate a

deeper understanding and a more authentic way of finding a resolution. As the outcome draws near, we will be able to outline a new pathway and will be more engaged in it.

The personal rituals imply deepening the conversation between myths with the inner shaman as arbiter, finding our power object, journaling, guided imagery, finishing the last part of our personal fairytale and preparing a sequel, examining our dreams, affirming our beliefs and finishing our personal shield.

Fifth Stage

The final stage allows the transposition of our new inner myth into everyday life, and into the external world. Because old patterns of behaviour are strong, "focused attention is required for anchoring even an inspiring new myth that has been wisely formulated" (Feinstein et al., 1988, p. 36). Here, integrating our new choices into practical life is the challenge. Making behavioural changes to sustain our vision is the focus of these exercises.

The personal rituals include several cognitive and behavioural elements, designed to foster a different set of thought and behaviour related patterns. Components of these exercises are role play, mental imagery, the creation of a ceremonial like enactment of the beginning of our new myth, the creation of a contract with our inner shaman and making a commitment to the constant re-evaluation of our personal mythology.

Heuristic Inquiry

What is its historical/ philosophical base? The term heuristic comes from Greek, *heuriskein*, which is the act of finding out or uncovering (Sela-Smith, 2002). This type of research stems from phenomenological and existential perspectives in psychology (Bloomgarden, 1998; Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). A heuristic inquiry consists of "a

passionate and discerning personal involvement in problem solving, an effort to know the essence of some aspect of life through the internal pathways of the self" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 39). This method unfolds meaning by processes of initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis, detailed further in the methodology section.

There are some concerns regarding this type of inquiry. Sela-Smith (2002) presented a very well articulated critique of Moustakas' method regarding the apparent contradictions inherent to it. Indeed, heuristics does not supposedly prescribe a methodology but rather an attitude regarding research. Nevertheless, Moustakas does prescribe a methodology to follow, with clearly delineated steps and guidelines, alienating the researcher from his central focus point, himself. The philosophy of the heuristic phases is in fact the researcher in experience, in a free-flowing indwelling process, but the frame takes him away from that point, and there are no directions on how to surrender, let go or even acknowledge resistance in that quest.

The steps of the Feinstein's five stage model (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988) are the tools I propose to use in guiding my heuristic self-exploration. By their very nature, they mesh at some points and come in contradiction at other points with Moustaka's steps, but they are sequential in a parallel way. I will use Feinstein (1988) steps as a guideline and adapt his model for Art Therapists, like myself. This adaptation is inherently intuitive, but also prescribes a certain sequence and frame, similarly to the heuristic steps.

Method

Here, I explain the rationale of the choice of heuristic methodology concerning my research project. I explore the kind of information that can be collected, the limitations of the heuristic study, the conclusions that can be drawn from it and address its validity and reliability issues. Then, I expand on the various key concepts relative to heuristic inquiry and onto the phases it comprises. Finally, I weave together the phases of the two models structuring my study, explaining how and why they mesh at certain points while not at others.

Why Choose a Heuristic Model?

I was first attracted to the heuristic methodology because of a concern regarding my formation as an Art Therapist. Although I appreciated the theoretical content and practicum placements I was going to, I felt somewhat unsatisfied in my thirst for a more personal experience. Indeed, there were so many changes happening in me I felt were crucial to being a therapist and that were left unaddressed. I needed a deeper self-exploration. I felt more and more strongly about the fact that a therapist, if he is to ask such an involvement and self-disclosure in his patients, ought to go through the same process in order to guide them more knowingly. In a parallel way, the notion of "whom is guiding who?" in drama therapy is addressed by Landy (Landy, McLellan, & McMullian, 2005). He believes that therapists should internalize their own guide through teachers, themselves and clients, as a balancing force if they are to become guide to their clients, so they can, in turn, internalize it in the course of therapy. When I examined McNiff (1979) and his parallel between a shaman and a therapist, it validated my deepest beliefs about my chosen profession. I also found an analogous frame of mind in Irwin: "If I were the

therapeutic traveller, I know I would want a guide who had made the trip before, one who would not be afraid of the unknown, for a guide who had been a voyager before would be far better prepared than one who had only studied maps and books"(Irwin, 1986, p. 194). In order to incorporate and deepen more fully my experience, I opted for a heuristic research.

Also, in the first year of our program, we were asked to fill out a questionnaire on temperament types (Keirsey & Bates, 1984) based on Jungian psychology. We were rated on four temperament poles. In this test, I found my type was extrovert, intuiting, feeling and perceiving (as opposed to introvert, sensing, thinking, and judging). In the interpretation of the results, I found I valued personal knowledge and experience above all other scientific knowledge. This and my dissatisfaction with the lack of personal content in my formation all came together and forced me to ponder these questions in my head for several months. Due to the nature of the experience of becoming an Art Therapist, or what I thought it should be, and as a complement to my professional formation, I thought heuristic inquiry was well-suited. I found Art Therapists often use it to deepen their understanding of their experience towards the exploration of self-discovery (Barca, 2004; Boettger, 2002; Sweetman, 2000). Not to mention heuristic inquiry is very intuitive and rich in personal experience by its nature: "Heuristics offers an attitude with which to approach research, but does not prescribe a methodology. […] It is the human person in experience and that person's reflective search, awareness, and discovery that constitutes the essential core of heuristic investigation"(Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 42). This is how I knew heuristic inquiry is what I wanted to do.

Data, Assumptions and Limitations

The data collected through my research consists mostly of images and journaling. In a heuristic investigation, all kinds of qualitative information can be collected, like the ones that I used. The data is analyzed qualitatively; therefore it cannot be predicted.

A major assumption in heuristic inquiries is that we must have experienced what we are studying, personally, or at least include ourselves in the study. Heuristics is also based on the premise that relating to "my" experience is relating to "another's" experience. This type of investigation adds to the body of knowledge in art therapy by revealing an account of one's journey, by mirroring another's experience or opening the perspective to that experience. Heuristic offers a deepening of our personal knowledge which contributes to our ability to accompany future clients in their own (Bloomgarden, 1998). There is an inherent subjectivity in this process, a will to find the truth by experimenting fully our subjectivity (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). By its nature, heuristic research is inherently "self-directed, self-motivated and open to spontaneous shift" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 44). The assumption underlying the premises, which also poses a limitation to the study, is that the self guides the self. Moreover, it is expected from the researcher that we will be motivated and reveal ourselves in an honest manner (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Nevertheless, this has been challenged, calling for an acknowledgement of resistance to live through or reveal certain aspects, which shakes the very foundation of Moustakas' heuristic model (Sela-Smith, 2002). Indeed, Sela-Smith noted many contradicting points in Moustakas' heuristics. The inclusion of the other in an utterly personal experience seems to make the focus shift away from depth work on the self and spontaneous creative synthesis, made to fit in a strictly designed

research paper seem to lose its meaning and authenticity. Last but not least, resistance to getting to know one's dark side may prevent the researcher from ever attempting to grasp his own truth.

Another assumption relates to tacit knowing: our knowledge, as therapists, is beyond words and includes intuition (Bloomgarden, 1998; Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). It is that tacit knowing that is expected to be there and come through in the heuristic phases. In a parallel way, the underlying assumptions of the heuristic model, even though it supposedly does not prescribe a methodology, is that we will in fact go through each of the six phases (Moustakas, 1990). There is the assumption that heuristics suits art therapy more efficiently because of the subjective and creative nature of our medium (Bloomgarden, 1998). Then, again, "Qualitative models emphasize the clinician's involvement in the process and have the potential to reflect on the use of art in therapy more accurately than quantitative analysis" (Bloomgarden, 1998, p. 51).

No hypotheses are pre-supposed, and I am, like any heuristic researcher, collecting qualitative data, so the results are impossible to predict precisely. Whatever the conclusion, in the end, the results will be inherently subjective to my experience, thus generalization is impossible. We have an account of my personal experience of transformation in the process of becoming an Art Therapist, using the five stages of Feinstein (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988).

Validity and Reliability

The validity of this study, as in all heuristic inquiries, "is inherent, insofar as it pursues the truth, to the extent that it is conducted through authentic self-processes, and to the degree that after repeated examinations of the data, the same essences are revealed

with the same degree of plausibility" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 44). The terms

validity and reliability are linked with quantitative data. Hence, qualitative inquiry has

developed its own language, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Patton (Patton,

2002). Indeed, the terms internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity,

used in quantitative inquiry are replaces in qualitative inquiry by credibility,

transferability, dependability and confirmability, respectively (see table 1). Considering

the heuristic model, its advantages and limitations, I have tried to address each issue.

I addressed credibility in my choice of model to follow. Indeed, the steps

proposed by Feinstein (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988) are my way of being rigorous and

systemic in collecting my data. My training as an Art Therapist assures me some amount

of credibility, although I am not an experienced researcher, nor clinician. Also, I have

strong belief in qualitative inquiries, as shown in my choice of methodology.

I addressed transferability to the extent that I checked back with my original

theoretical framework, i.e. the personal mythology steps and its underlying archetypal

theory, in order to stay on track in my data collection. I also provide a thick description

(detailed account of each of the steps of my self-exploratory journey) of my process, for

anyone who would wish to try it on their own.

I addressed dependability in my understanding of the nature of heuristic studies,

in which the process is inherently complex, personal, and changing.

Finally, I addressed confirmability, intrinsically, in my methodology, which asked

that I dwell in my personal experience of a phenomenon, including addressing my

presumptions and limitations.

The Concepts of a Heuristic Inquiry

The key concepts of heuristic investigation are: Self-dialogue, tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling, and focusing (Moustakas, 1990).

Self-dialogue is a process of discussion that occurs inside the researcher. He has to be aware and have knowledge of his own experiences in order to question them and uncover their meanings. Direct experience forms knowledge and self-questioning and inquiring permits access to that intimate knowledge. In order to do so, the researcher has to be utterly truthful with himself, granting special access to the essence of his experience, the core of heuristic investigation.

Tacit knowing is at the core of heuristic process, it underlies every other concepts in it. Moustakas used Polanyi's (1983) concept of tacit knowledge, which was derived from Gestalt psychology. Tacit knowing is knowledge that is not conscious, that expands from what we think we know to beyond. It encompasses and guides intuition; it completes and deepens the experience. It is valuable because it provides context and shapes our experience. Polanyi (1983) suggests that tacit knowledge in science, as in society, is indispensable in the search for the innovative or the unknown. He even goes to say that every kind of knowledge, hence the explicit, is rooted in tacit knowledge, because all knowledge has a personal component. In that way, he derives from the interpretation of his work by Moustakas, who observes an opposition between the explicit and the tacit. Polanyi (1983) also maintains that tacit knowledge is hardly communicable by external means, with the exception of intense personal self-scrutiny and truth; however, it is attainable by doing, by being in experience. This precept is what

Moustakas' based his key concept of tacit knowing on, in the development of the heuristic inquiry research design.

Intuition, for Moustakas, is "the internal capacity to make inferences and arrive at a knowledge of underlying structures or dynamics" (1990, p. 23). Intuition is the realm lying in between the tacit and the explicit, between the conscious and the unconscious (Williams, 2006). It is useful in the experience of the wholeness of things, given that we cannot, often, have a global view of them; we have to intuit the rest. Making or inferring relations, correspondence and patterns are parts of the intuitive capacity, which can be strengthened and exercised simply by being attentive to it and following it (Moustakas, 1990). In heuristic inquiry, intuition is the guide for the voyage inwards, the principle to which we attend in hope of encountering our tacit dimension in a truthful manner.

Indwelling consists of "turning inward (sic) to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of the nature or meaning of a quality or theme of human experience"(Moustakas, 1990, p. 24). Indwelling is highly connected to intuition, which constitutes its process. In order to expand the meaning of a concept of personal experience until insight, one must dwell with it for as long as it takes for him to be able to clearly explain and depict it. A major part of the heuristic investigation lies in the indwelling. In fact, writing and reporting about deep personal experiences requires a clear and detailed explanation which stems from this process.

Focusing is the last of the key concepts. It is based on a consistent and pervasive attention to detaching the core meanings of a particular personal experience, which is the base of the research. In this process, the researcher is to take the time necessary to clarify and identify the elements of a lived experience.

The Phases of a Heuristic Inquiry

Heuristic inquiry, as envisioned by Moustakas (1990) is composed of six phases: Initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis. These phases are the back bone of the research design, and utilize many of the key concepts outlined earlier, as described in the following.

Initial engagement is the first phase in which the researcher dives inwards to discover an intense interest for a particular concern regarding his life, in relation to the outer world. The self-scrutiny and passionate interest ultimately come together in a question. This phase requires a commitment to the discovery of this concern and, in time, question. The researcher has to analyze where and why this concern is so compelling.

Immersion is the second phase when the researcher becomes "obsessed" with his question. He has to live with and let himself be impregnated with the question, seek wherever it leads him, foremost inside himself, go out on hunches and let himself be immersed in the emotions, ideas and concepts that come to him in this phase.

Incubation is the third phase, when the researcher gets out of his immersion and into the real world. He has to detach himself from his question and its possible meanings in order to foster a deeper reflection about it. Outside of the immediate awareness, the tacit dimension can reveal itself and weave its net. Incubation occurs when the researcher does not direct its efforts towards it.

Illumination is the fourth phase, which occurs when the unconscious processes come into awareness with a new meaning. Pieces of knowledge that were lying dormant suddenly find their way into clustering wholes, provoking a new creative synthesis.

Explication is the fifth phase, when the researcher tries to explain and detail each component of the dominant themes. Attention is given to the inner world, as it is required to an understanding of the outer world. The little nuances and angles are examined further in order to be incorporated more fully in the truth of an experience.

Creative synthesis is the sixth and final phase, when everything comes together. Only when all the elements are fully understood and mastered can they join in a unifying, creative whole that is much greater than the addition of his parts. Through intuition and often with the use of narrative depiction, a new creative form is given birth, the expression of the essence of the lived experience.

The Correspondence with the Five Stage Model of Feinstein

Both models use the key concepts in the heuristic investigation of self-dialogue, tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling and focusing. Indeed, Feinstein (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988) does not utilize the tacit knowing term, but refers to a very similar process of a deeper personal knowledge, immersed out of awareness that guides our actions and thoughts. The other concepts are used in a variety of creative ways during the multiple exercises comprised in the five stages. Here I present a very personal understanding of the weaving of the steps of the two models. I have compared both series of stages and evaluated their correspondence by the similarity of the objectives, exercises or actions suggested and conceptual bases.

Moustakas' (Moustakas, 1990) first phase is initial engagement into the discovery of an important problem or question relating to the personal experience of the researcher. Similarly, the first stage of Feinstein's steps (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988) is comprised of a series of exercises aimed at surfacing the conflicting systems present in the personal

mythology. A similar willingness and passion about entering the process of self-discovery can be connected to both first steps' models.

The second phase of Moustakas (Moustakas, 1990), immersion also corresponds with Feinstein's second stage. Immersion is about an obsession with the question, the idea. It is a moment to seek out everything related to the object of study, live with, and be immersed in the emotions regarding it. The second stage of Feinstein's model (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988) is parallel in the deep examination of the personal mythology, where it came from, its usefulness, how and why it was needed and how it is not anymore. It is a stage in which the interpretation and detailing of past history and familial and societal context. I find these two phases similar by the depth of the self-reflection they propose. They both are moments of a highly emotional nature.

The third phase of Moustakas (Moustakas, 1990), incubation, corresponds with Feinstein's (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988) fifth and final stage. Indeed, both stages processes require a step back into the real world. For Moustakas (1990), it is a way to detach in order to find a deeper connection, to think of something else to find what is really wanted. For Feinstein (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988), it is about integrating the new choices our renewed personal mythology has led us to into everyday life.

The fourth phase of Moustakas (Moustakas, 1990), illumination, corresponds with the fourth stage of Feinstein (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988). In illumination, the unconscious becomes conscious, a new awareness and a new meaning are found to piece together a new knowledge. With Feinstein (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988), it is a moment to hasten the commitment in creating a new unified personal mythology by finding a new pathway and deepening the conversations between myths and the inner shaman. In both

cases the objective is to find the "aha!" moment by assembling together and trying new avenues.

The fifth stage of Moustakas (Moustakas, 1990), explication, corresponds with the third stage of Feinstein (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988). Where in the first one explanation and detailing of nuances are incorporated more fully in the truth of an experience, in the other one it is needed to transcend conflict between mythologies to create a balance or a new whole greater than the sum of its parts. Both phases suggest the integration of the little scattered pieces into a new whole.

The sixth stage of Moustakas (Moustakas, 1990), creative synthesis, corresponds, like the third phase, with the fifth and final stage of Feinstein (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988). Indeed, because of its nature, the fifth phase of Feinstein (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988) is similar to both the third and sixth phases of Moustakas. The transposition into everyday life to integrate new choices echoes the incubation phase, but also the creative synthesis one for the same reasons. In fact, creative synthesis implicates the expression of the lived experience in a new creative form, which could mean the integration of new choices in daily life. So, even if I chose to link incubation (third phase) with the fifth stage of Feinstein (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988) because of similar process, the objective ties it to the sixth and final phase of Moustakas, creative synthesis. The parallel between the phases is illustrated in Figure 1.
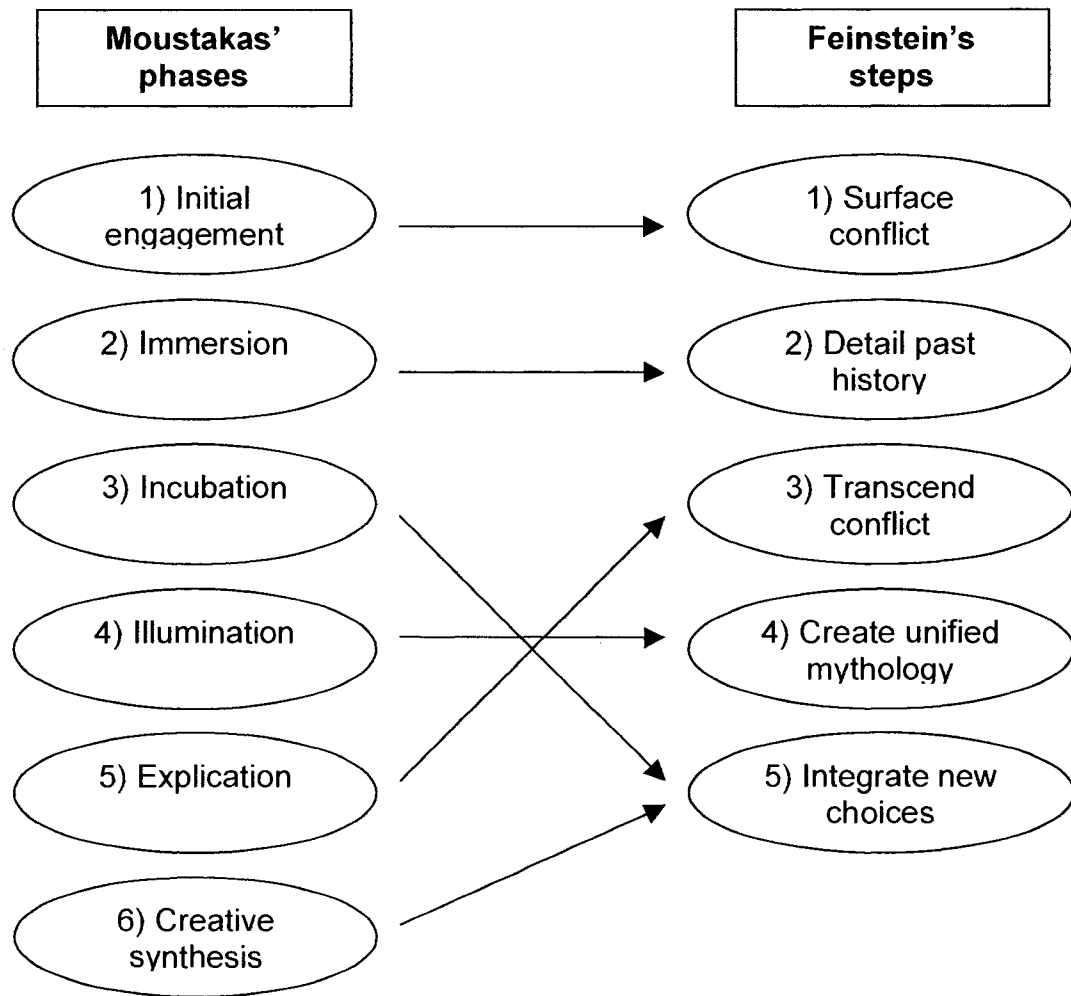
Figure 1. Correspondence between Moustakas's heuristics phases and

Feinstein's personal mythology steps.

Data collection

The following is an overview of the process of the data collection in the many forms required by the personal mythology model. First, I explain the very particular context I was in at the time I was doing the exercises. Then, I go through each category of data, journal entries, artwork, and visualization exercises and explain how and why each one worked or not for me.

Context

The data I collected stem from the required exercises of the personal mythology model developed by Feinstein (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988). I started in June 2007 and ended in December 2007. It is of great importance that I mention the special context I was in at that time. When I decided to do this research, I was very excited to find what had or had not changed in me in my formation as an Art Therapist. But, life had put a much unsuspected twist on my research.

Indeed, I found I was pregnant with my first child in March 2007. By June, I was only three months pregnant and the thought of motherhood seemed somewhat abstract to me. Through the summer, it all became very real. It was discovered that my unborn baby had a very serious disease. This disease had some very handicapping consequences for children. I was waiting all summer to confirm whether or not I could carry on with my pregnancy, depending on the degree my child was affected by the disease. I experienced uncertainty and great suffering from bouncing back from one specialist to the next in a very inhumane bureaucratic and formal process. I learned that my baby would probably have only the mildest consequences of the disease, but it was enough for many parents to

consider stopping the pregnancy. By then, I was five months pregnant. My husband and I decided to give life a fighting chance.

In November 2007, I gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. He had to go through a major six-hour long surgery at only two days old. But my baby is very strong; he made it through like a champ. To this day, we still do not know the exact extent of the consequences of the disease he will keep. One thing is for sure, we were right! My son has put doctors and nurses in awe of his spectacular recovery, bewildering everyone by beating even the most optimistic of predictions!

Although this adventure has been extremely difficult, I still tried to keep on with the personal mythology exercises, as much as I could. This meant I had a moment to myself, outside of the crazy tornado of all the medical exams. Needless to say this ordeal has influenced my personal mythology. It was certainly very hard to separate my pregnancy and my becoming an Art Therapist. They are different parts of me, affecting both my personal and professional spheres. I do not underestimate the effects of this experience on me; it shall be looked at more thoroughly in the discussion section.

Journal Entries

The journaling in the personal mythology program is used to record on paper the lived experiences, and to be able to deepen and enrich them with thoughts and feelings. It is asked that a journal is kept throughout the entire process and, sometimes, before an exercise, to go back to what was previously written to refresh the memory and ignite a spark. Describing the process in writing evokes powerful insights, preceded by unconscious memories and free associations (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988). Intuition,

here, is key. The objective is to describe the process and let intuition be the guide to associations with deeper feelings and earlier memories that usually lay out of awareness.

I undertook the journal writing suggested in the personal mythology exercises with both apprehension and peace of mind. I have always liked writing and feel comfortable doing so. It occurred to me that, even aware of this fact, I never could keep up with an intimate journal myself. Each time I started so, I ended up tearing and throwing the pages away. I was much too hard on myself to ever let less than really good literary and poetic lines to be set in ink forever. In the art therapy program, we were asked several times to make a journal or draw spontaneously. I hated doing so. But, with time, and these exercises, I became more and more at ease with the process. In fact, I became quite happy that I was able to write or draw so freely without asking a masterpiece of myself each time. I love words and writing and I was able to reconnect with that in the art therapy program. I rediscovered spontaneity, before the performance, before the judgments. In this way, I became more congruent with myself and my clients. How could I be so non-judgmental and open in their writing and drawing if I was not with myself?

Personal Rituals: Artwork

Throughout the entire program, each section requires the conduct of personal rituals. I divided them into two categories: artwork and visualization exercises. Here I present the first category. In the next part, I will explain the second.

The entire concept is based on personal rituals, as markers of change and growth, as givers of meaning. Feinstein defines a ritual in this way: "A ritual is a symbolic act that celebrates, worships or commemorates an event or a process in the individual's or

the community's life" (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988, p. 13). The artwork as personal

rituals serves the purpose of uncovering the hidden or unconscious symbolism the psyche

is constantly generating. In a process of change as this one the markers of growth are

crystallized into artwork, viewed as steps to a very creative and inherently personal

staircase. In a parallel way, I analyzed my artwork in a very free flowing and intuitive

manner, following guidelines outlined by both Feinstein (Feinstein & Krippner) in his

visualizations exercises and Moustakas (Moustakas, 1990) in the heuristic process.

In my formation and practicum as an Art Therapist, I have developed great

respect for art production as a process of change. Where I had the same reservations

about writing as producing art, I was able to learn to let go and be spontaneous. Although

certain Art Therapists, like Bruce Moon, value the aesthetic in the art productions in art

therapy, I came to appreciate the immense value of spontaneous, raw and unfinished

productions. Still, it was a challenge to me, even though I went through the art therapy

formation and practicum and the personal mythology exercises, which all require

spontaneous drawing. I cannot say I succeeded completely in letting go of my

apprehensions and judgments, but I am closer to that now than I ever was. The thought of

having some of my production throughout this adventure printed on hard copy as a

research paper for others to view is hard to bear. My ego was and still is in the way. I am

afraid of judgment, as I am judging myself. I am shy to let this intimate material be seen.

But I find in these apprehensions a reconnection with my clients. They too experience

shyness and fear of judgment when they draw in the sessions. Yet, they do it just the

same. It is very humbling to learn from them as artists and clients. I too am an artist and

client, let me never forget it.

Personal Rituals: Visualization Exercises

The guided imagery exercises are embedded in each of the steps. In fact, they are the starting point of each one. I prepared for those exercises by pre-recording myself reading the instructions out loud, as it is suggested in the book. Then, I performed my opening ritual that I designed in the preparatory exercises and finished with my closing ritual. Those rituals I conceived in a guided imagery exercise aimed at finding my inner shaman. Once visualized and found, I asked him how I could call upon him again. He told me how and I added a couple of details that I took from my previous spiritual experiences. I often ask for guidance in my life by first calling on the five cardinal points in a circle of candles. I have practiced this for many years now and found it helped me dive deeper in myself and feel more connected with the universe. I take on my intuition to guide me where I need to be, much like in the personal mythology and heuristic process.

My opening ritual consisted of sitting in a calm place, my bedroom, legs crossed and hands opened to the sky. I had five candles, for each of the cardinal points, North, South, East, West and Center. I lit one and while holding it towards the ceiling, said: "To the power of the North" and, then, I would place it towards the North and so forth. After all candles were lit, I said: "I ask of your presence, guidance and protection in this blessed journey of self-discovery, please hear my call". After which I called, if required, on my inner shaman by repeating, as he told me in the guided imagery exercise: "Find me, find me, find me." Then, the visualization exercise could begin! The guided imagery often calls for pauses to ponder deeper on what is happening, to make artwork or to focus.

In certain classes in art therapy, we were also asked to participate or create an opening ritual. It felt awkward at first, mostly because we were in a group and had to follow someone else's ritual. Rituals can be personal or collective. I feel more open to engage and relax in a dyad rather than in a group. Still, these exercises encouraged me to keep on and renew my practice of personal rituals as it can be so enriching. I loved having designed the opening and closing rituals in the personal mythology program, I felt more engaged and personally involved than if I had followed one already prescribed. I feel it was so meaningful and pertinent to the objectives of this change process that I take something of my past and expand onto it in the present. This has much inspired me to guide my future clients in designing their own opening and closing rituals.

Data analysis

Here I analyze the data I collected through the personal mythology program. The data, as I already mentioned, comes from journaling, artwork or guided imagery exercises.

First Stage

The first stage is all about finding a personal myth that used to be an ally, but is no longer. The guided imagery exercises helped me to come up with vivid images and old memories. By taking imaginary journeys back in time in my life, I was able to project emotions into scenery and symbols where memory was not enough.

The first thing I did was find my inner shaman. He often is a centaur, but shifts sometimes to just a horse or a man. I know he is a part of me that I give life to, and yet I have a hard time believing it. How could this much wisdom already be in me for all this time and I was not aware of it? I often use the horse symbol in my artwork. My family used to have horses and although I did not ride them often, their touch was very important to me. I see them as wise companions, guides to the travelers we are on this earth. I guess that is why the image of the horse came to me as my inner shaman.

In this stage, I constructed a personal shield (see figure 2). A personal shield is a circular piece with symbols on it. It is used for identification, protection and healing. The shield is divided in five sections: Paradise, paradise lost, paradise regained, the quest, and the fifth slate is left blank for future exercises. In guided imagery, I saw paradise as the infinity symbol and pastel colors. It relates to a time or more precisely a moment of bliss in my childhood. I was drawing on the kitchen table with my cat while my mother was still asleep close by. I was making a gift for her. I felt so full of love and apprehensive in
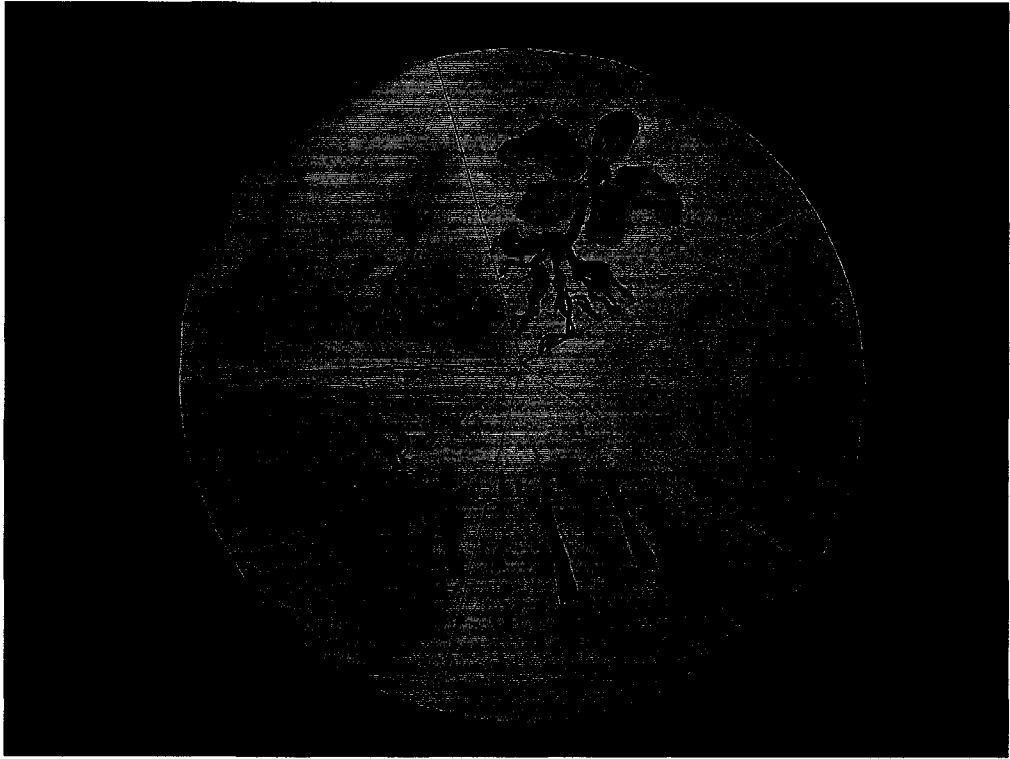
Figure 2. My personal shield.

regards to her surprise when she would receive my gift. Paradise lost was two black and blue steel spikes. It related to the time when my bliss had passed and was interrupted. When my step dad arrived to live with us represented that moment. I was trying so hard to be loved by him, and I only got rejection and bitterness in return. This section of my shield also related to the time I started dating. I was always attracted to guys like my step dad; I was searching for love in the wrong places. Paradise regained was vines intertwining and a glowing white flame in the middle. This portion of my shield represented when I gradually found myself again and had found a sense of peace. I remember struggling for so long and then, slowly, some kind of stability in who I was and how I saw myself. What I had become as an adult pleases me, although there is still room for improvement. The quest was a foot standing on a tornado, in bright red and orange colors. Like I said, I have worked long and hard to find my true self and get out of the malignant cycle of searching for love I was into. I never stopped asking more of myself. I learned to walk, talk, and look differently in order to attract different lovers and friends. It also influenced my feelings about myself in a major way, just by changing posture and physical demeanor. I guess that is why the foot came to my mind as a symbol representing all my efforts.

In assessing my predominant underlying mythical conflict, I had to first chart some of my self-defeating behaviors, troublesome feelings and symbols of conflict. Many symbols came to me: my intestines becoming a snake (see figure 3), myself in a constraining body cast, a glass house, Medusa and nausea represented by my heart pouring out of my mouth (see figure 4). These symbols, inspired by my troublesome
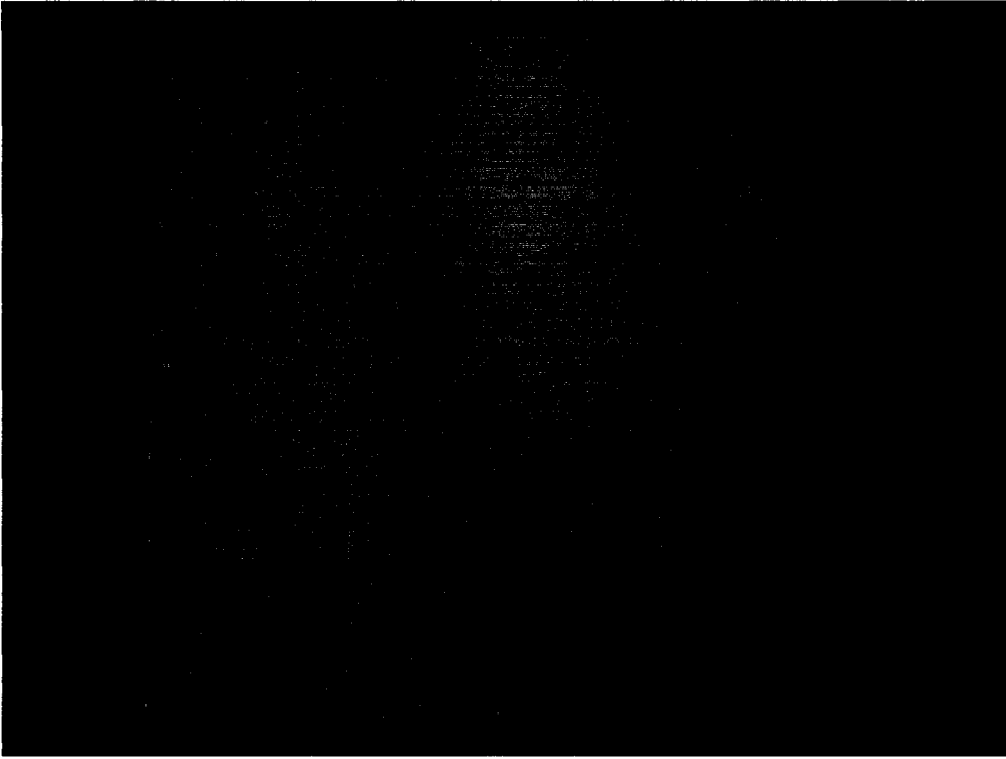
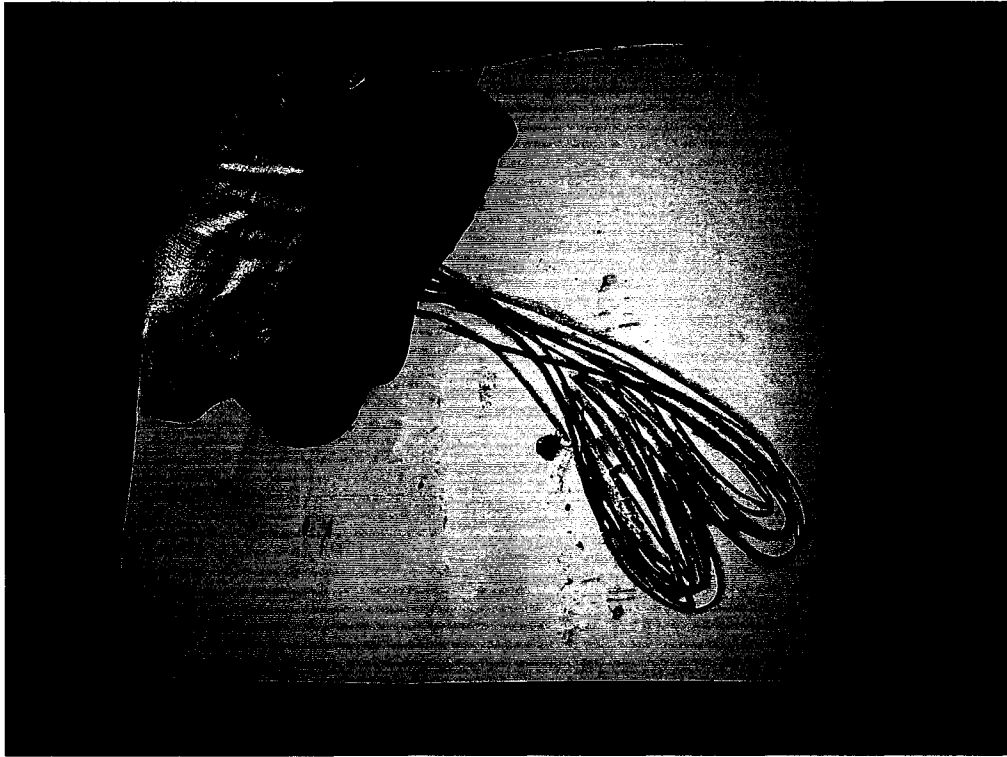*Figure 3.* My intestines becoming a snake.

Figure 4. My feelings of nausea.

feelings, feelings that I was ashamed of, tried to hide but were persistent. Some, like the intestines and the nausea, came from actual persistent physical sensations I was having, then. Others I had already seen in thoughts or dreams, like the glass house and Medusa (on which I have done a paper in the symbolism class in the Art Therapy program).

This all led to identifying one major conflict and symbolizing it in a single symbol. My symbol is a big dark box with a tiny me sitting in it. There was also a thought that I could come out of the box as a snake. This symbol came to me in a visualization exercise where my conflict took me back in time to identify its roots. Although I could not specifically identify one single memory, I could sense an old feeling that predates my remembering, something that was always there with me, for as long as I could remember. I am not loved for me, I have to gain love, and more importantly, I can lose it. This feeling was so poignant, it gave me stomach aches. It is as if my life could have been destroyed completely just like that. I had to shut myself in a box and never get out again. I had to bury the box and forget it ever existed, forget that I as a true person ever existed. I had to be what I am needed to be or else I could be annihilated.

Now that I was aware of which conflict guided my life in a direction I did not want to take anymore, I could go along stage two or bring the roots of mythic conflict into focus. At this point, I was not feeling very good. Unearthing early conflict that rules one's life and seeing how it did so all these years is a bit discouraging. I hoped it was going to get better, I hoped I could go on with my life and be courageous enough to change.

Second Stage

This stage focuses on unearthing the roots of mythic conflicts in the past. It is about following the path backwards to find the usefulness of a personal mythology, as it permits to elucidate how it has become unsatisfactory in the present life. An outdated personal myth is being compensated for its limitations by the creation from the psyche of a "counter-myth". The bridge between the two colliding myths is a fertile terrain to work in creating a new updated and unified personal mythology. It represents the battle between past and present. This battle took place in a fairytale where I was the heroine.

Part one of my personal imaginative fairytale consisted of a woods fairy (me) watching over my many forest friends. I was flying swiftly and smoothly, visiting many bears, mice, water nymphets, and other imaginative creatures. One day, a giant walked by. We talked together for a while, had tea and became friends. But, he started to get obsessive and aggressive, until he decided to kidnap me. None of my friends tried to come after me. They were scared of him in the first place; they did not want to have anything to do with him. In fact, why did I bother with him? The giant wanted me all to himself, never sharing me with the rest of the forest. He placed me in a bag and took me to his home. There, he put me in a cage. I knew nobody would come for me, so I decided I was the only one I could really count on. I had to think of a strategy and fast. How far was I willing to go to get out of there?

After this exercise, I had two dreams that related to it. In the first one, I was in a natural foods supermarket and a goat was chasing me (see figure 5). For some reason, I was looking for green sprouts and the goat furiously chased me around the alleys. I found the sprouts in a huge cold tank of water, but the goat had also found me. When it jumped
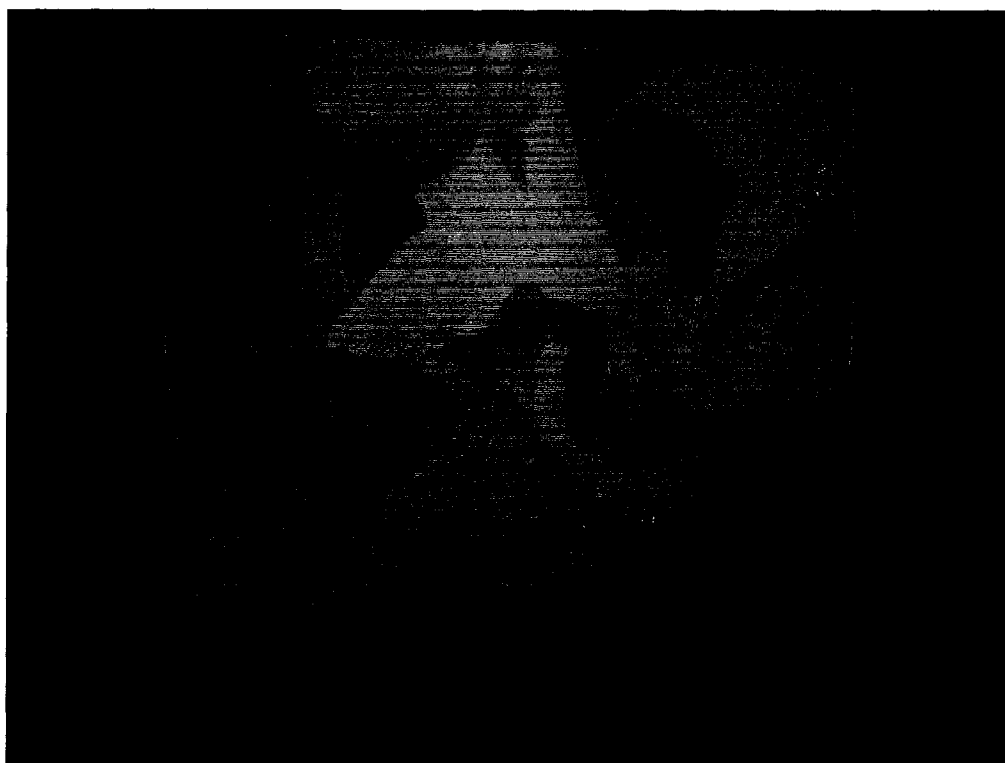
Figure 5. My dream about the goat chasing me.

me, I moved to the side and it plunged right into the freezing water. I helped it out. It was so ashamed, I could not figure out why. It walked slowly away, head down. My second dream was I attending a party with old friends and lovers. There was a game being played about pretending to be with someone. Nobody picked me. In fact, they all seemed disgusted by me. They started laughing and chasing me down the streets. I had to find shelter in a stranger's apartment. When I woke up, they were catching up with me. These two dreams showed me how my old myth of not being loved for myself was still so gripping and current in my life. My psyche was very active and illustrated my fears and feelings of not being loveable. It helped me identify aspects of my old myth that were so uncomfortably incrusted in me.

The assumptions of my old myth that I thought would be difficult to change revolved around the idea of gaining love. I was afraid that if I stopped trying to deserve love, I would not get loved anymore. I had no reason to believe that my true self was loveable, that is to say if I had a true self. The visualization exercise aimed at finding glimmers of hope in the old myth, bringing me closer to my counter-myth, led to memories of childhood of competency and worth. Based on that, I then adopted rules of conduct on the premises of self-reliance and autonomy. It influenced my life in a positive way in it that I carried out many personal projects and passions. I was not afraid of a challenge. Although, this suggested that I had a hard time accepting help and trusting anyone to do things for me correctly, or the way I would do them.

The second part of my fairytale revealed an imaginary solution to the dilemma that occurred in part one and provided instructions on how to carry it out. I thought I would have a dream. In that dream, I saw a butterfly come next to my cage. I had

telepathic powers, so I imprinted its wings with images of what had happened to me for my friends to see and to call for help. After a while, the whole forest came and besieged the giant in order to save me. I was so moved.

The two parts of my fairytale represented my myth and counter-myth. In another guided imagery exercise, each hand represented a myth. While my myth felt cold, weak and tired as my right hand, my counter-myth felt hot and glowed in my left hand. Surprisingly, the one that felt most comfortable, my counter-myth, also felt unrealistic, very heavy to hold and quite dangerous. It made me think about movies about heroic sacrifices in them. They are my favorite movies; they always move me to the point of crying like a baby. None of my myths felt comfortable anymore. I wondered how it would be possible to bridge them together.

Third Stage

This stage resides in the space that unifies two colliding myths. The focus is on a larger view, integrating both sides of the old myth and the counter-myth. The objective is for "the psyche [to] reconcile opposing tendencies that reside within"(Feinstein & Krippner, 1988, p. 109).

First, I had to find a motto for each of my myths, the previous one, which is part one of my fairytale, and its counter-myth, consisting of part two of my fairytale. For my previous myth, I immediately heard a song of The Pixies music group entitled "Where is my mind?" I had not heard this song in a great deal of time, so I took its sudden intrusion as a significant sign. I decided my motto would be a line from that song: "Where is my mind? Way out in the water, see it swimmin'." This song represents for me the emptiness and strangeness I can feel to my own self. It made me think of the way I behaved in the

art therapy program. I was always on my own, never trusting anyone to help me, never engaging in any social activity. I did what I had to do, without ever asking anything. Where was I during that time? I was denying myself any kind of pleasure while I was doing my duty of being a good student. While I was pregnant and my baby was diagnosed with a severe illness, I never called anyone to ask for help. I did not want to always be the bearer of bad news. I kept all my pain to myself. The name of my old myth is "Mother Theresa"; the symbol is me carrying a huge cross like Jesus (see figure 6). That is how my old myth made me feel.

The motto of my counter-myth came to me as a souvenir of the movie "Braveheart". The battle speech, referred to as the freedom speech, spoken by the movie's principal character, William Wallace, resonated in me: "They may take our lives, but they can't take...our freedom!" This movie represents for me the epitome of love and self-sacrifice, which always moved me so much. Gradually, after my baby was born, I started to accept help more and more. We had to move, so everyone was there to give a hand. It made me feel really good to see how everybody cared and wanted to help, even if I didn't solicit it. Everyone gave without asking anything back from us. The name of my counter-myth is "Star", its symbol is me people surfing, like a rock star (see Figure 6). The symbol shows how loved and supported I could feel, but somewhat ungrounded and undeserving.

The dialogue between the two symbols was signified by Mother Theresa accusing Star of being egocentric, undeserving, an unfit mother and lazy. Star noted that both of them have a thing with support. While one carries a heavy cross, the other one is being carried off the ground. Immediately, a symbol presented itself as a possible start of

resolution. Star said to Mother Theresa that they should ask the dolphin on what unified them as a single whole. Right then, I had no idea where that came from and where it would take me.

Figure 6. Mother Theresa (left), the heavy cross bearer, and Star (right), the

people surfer.

In the transformation exercise, I had to find a personal quality that I thought was keeping me from a conflict resolution. I found two: The fear of rejection and the fear of being empty. In a particularly special encounter with my inner shaman, those qualities were transformed into a symbolic seed (almond piece) planted in me that made me feel affirmative, assertive, loved and confident. I was ready to change. In another guided imagery exercise, my two myths fused into one that first took the image of a friendship circle with a cross in the middle. The appearance of catholic symbols in my personal mythology quite surprised me, as I have not been raised in a rigorously religious home and that I am not myself a catholic. Then, the people in the circle morphed into a dolphin, swimming in and out of the sea. In a subsequent body metaphor exercise, the dolphin dove into a light tunnel and I saw myself running towards the opening at the end of the tunnel. The tunnel glowed of light and I could feel all the people I loved, even though I was alone in the tunnel, cheering me on and waiting for me. This scene made me think of near death experiences that people tell about. Yet, it did not feel macabre at all, but rather warm, supportive and lively. I was by myself, but felt incredibly supported and loved.

While I had not yet analyzed all the symbols that occurred to me in this stage, as the personal mythology program asked for, I was quite curious about their significance. Were my two myths really ripe for integration? I wondered. Was the tunnel symbol really a unified vision of my renewed mythology? I felt quite unsettled, as I did not find answers to those questions in the exercises.

Fourth Stage

This stage furthers the concept of a renewed personal mythology into a long term commitment. The exercises are aimed at affirming the new myth and thinking of ways to weave it in our psyche.

I started this part of the program quite confused about the symbols emerging in my mind. In a guided imagery exercise, I made my two alter egos, Mother Theresa and Star, dialogue under the mediation of my inner shaman. Their last conversation left a bitter after taste and did not seemed finished. In fact, Star was quite angry with Mother Theresa and my inner shaman wanted to find out why. After much agitated discussion, I found that my old myth, Mother Theresa, was terrified of annihilation. That is the reason why she was clinging so hard. Star came up with a solution. We came to an agreement that when Mother Theresa, the cross holder, was feeling quite weak, tired or stretched by her important work, she could go and see Star who would hold and rock her for a while. Both personas are very important, I came up with this solution in order to incorporate the best elements of the two. I was very pleased with this arrangement.

In the power object ritual, I found my object was a chunk of pink Himalayan salt. This object had big teachings for me. It told me I should be like it: embracing, warm, luminescent and very importantly, intimate. What it had to teach about my life was that I am a part of something bigger, not alone, not responsible for everything, but connected and rooted with the energy of the earth. I had to trust everybody to do their part, as I did mine.

In another exercise, I had to finish my fairytale. In this part, my forest friends came to help with the giant, but I had to get out of my cage by myself. Everybody did his

part. I went home in the woods and took many moments up in the air, near the head of the trees, to contemplate my freedom. She became careful in where she invested her love, because it was precious. She did not feel obliged to be everybody's friend anymore. She found a husband and had a child. They lived in a nest on a tree head. She learned how to be loved unconditionally, how to let herself be and she taught those lessons back to her beloved child.

The sequel to this fairytale is a projection in the future, about five years later, and concerns me as a real person, not as a fairy. In this part I am in a beautiful country home, with my husband and three children. We are a playful team. Each one has a very different personality and they teach me so much. I have my work, which I love, my garden and my animals. I am independent, strong, confident and loved. I am proud of my life and my children.

This vision crystallized in a guided imagery exercise with the "powers that be" in a new myth illustrated by this paragraph:

> I am my own
>
> Connected to everything
>
> The energy circulates smoothly
>
> Between me and the Earth

My new myth called out a new symbol. It came to me as an orchid in the wind, pollinating, with huge roots plunging into the earth. This symbol completed my personal shield in the portion called "a renewed vision" (see figure 2). Previously I had doubts to where this was going but now I was quite pleasantly surprised to see the difference between my "paradise regained" symbol and this one. Where I was growing leaves in the

air and just a glowing bud, I became a full grown flower with huge roots planted firmly in the ground and participating in the wonderful miracle of life that is pollinating. I was and still am very happy with my new myth and symbol. It filled me with joy and peace when I looked at it. It felt quite strange not to analyze everything I was doing in the process but I should have had more trust in it, as it probably was better this way, I could not intellectualize too much and could finally let go.

Fifth Stage

The fifth stage's main objective is to ingrain the new myth into habitual, behavioral everyday life. The exercises aim at creating thought and behavior changes that will sustain the commitment to the renewed personal mythology while discouraging the old mythology from contaminating present life.

I started this final exercise with the invocation of my "subtle body", seen metaphorically as the bridge between thought and action. It is believed that affecting the subtle body with mental imagery has a potent effect on the physical body. I stood in a trance like state, concentrating on my renewed vision symbol on my personal shield. Gradually, my breath transformed into a slow rocking dance while I embodied my symbol, an orchid with huge roots deep in the earth (see figure 7). As I became my symbol, I could feel the delicate wind rocking my petals, spreading and bringing to me fertile pollen. I could feel my roots deeply anchored in the ground, growing deeper and deeper, and I could hear from a voice inside:

I am an orchid

Beautiful and rare

My roots are deep in the earth

Figure 7. My renewed vision symbol: The orchid

I am well anchored

I tilt slowly in the wind

Receiving pollen from my sisters

Mixing it with mine

Continuing the cycle of life

Then, I was able to envision myself in a real life situation where my old myth would generally prevail, feeling my symbol inside me in near reach. I felt that I could become my symbol and use its positive forces when in time of need. I started to think about self-statements, an automatic dialogue that occurs inside oneself regarding the actions taken, that supported my old myth. If I were to change effectively my path towards my new myth, I had to think of a way to immediately stop these self-statements when they came, and replace them by ones that were aligned with my new myth. I thought about a technique I learned while in psychotherapy. I had undergone the same kind of problem with negative self-statements and my therapist suggested a surprising technique. I wore an elastic wristband and each time one of those thoughts came to me, I would say "stop" and pulled the elastic to gently slap my wrist. It was very effective. I tried to apply it here and added, after saying "stop" a positive self-statement that supported my new myth. It worked very well, although I found it was a bit more complicated than the time I had tried it before in psychotherapy. The key element here is to clearly identify the negative self-statement. I had to go back to modify them accordingly to a more realistic view of my life. I found there were a lot of those self-statements that crowded my inner space, too much to remember. So, I regrouped them in themes related to feelings of guilt, feelings of unworthiness of love and feelings of

selfishness. These self-statements I tried to replace with those of being loveable and worthwhile, being whole, assertive and strong.

In order to ingrain further my new myth into my life, I had to create a daily ritual that was in tune with it. I carved my renewed vision symbol, the orchid, onto a pocket mirror (see figure 8). That way, my symbol and my commitment to it I could keep with me when I needed to and could also look at my image and its image superposed on one another. My public ritual involved destroying something that represented, for me, my old myth and make it into something else. I chose to destroy the Alice Miller book, "Drama of The Gifted Child"(1996). This book represented what I consider to be the epitome of my old myth. I destroyed it and used it as a base to create a beautiful piece of artwork, which is now one of my favorites (see figure 9).

The last part of this last stage made me create an ecology surrounding and supporting my new myth. I solicited more often friends that supported the behaviors related to my new myth and I informed those who helped maintain my old myth of my wish to change. Then, my friends and family became a support system to help me in my transformation. I talked more in details about my new myth to a particular friend whom I knew could help me keep on track and be my companion in this journey. We talked, and still do, about my objectives and the difficulties encountered. It keeps me focused.

Recurrent Themes and Symbols

I explain here, with the help of pertinent reference literature, the personal meanings of some meaningful symbols that came to me while going through the steps of this program. Keep in mind that although I refer to literature, my interpretation is very
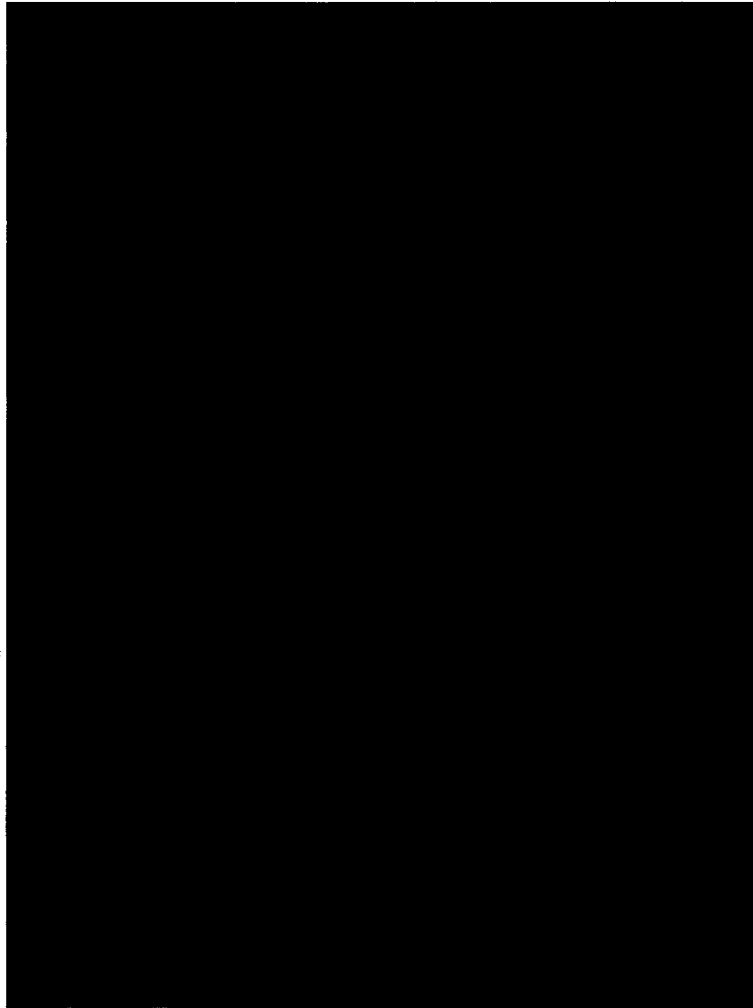
Figure 8. The orchid carved onto a pocket mirror.

Figure 9. The destruction of the Drama of the Gifted child book.

intuitive and personal. Although there are many symbols to choose from, I will concentrate on the goat, the orchid, the belly/stomach, and the cross.

Goat

While evoking obstinate resistance, and robustness in precarious situations, the goat seen in dreams can also mean, because of the V shape represented by its two horns and triangle face shape, a necessity to untangle the parental threads (See figure 5). It can mean ambivalence towards the image of the mother who has acted as both parental figures (Albin, 1995). This makes particular sense for me, as being an only child and having a mono-parental mother acting as both mother and father. It is said that the sight of goat in a dream can represent the rejected *animus* (masculine) part (in Jungian psychology) in a feminine dreamer and the symbolic push to the rise in consciousness of an insight regarding this subject (Albin). In my dream, the goat was chasing me around a natural foods grocery store. I escaped its attack by going sideways as it plunged in a cold water container. I helped it out, but the goat did not seem very happy about it. Instead, she walked away soaked and shameful. I dreamed this after completing the second stage of the program. At that time, I had completed part one of my personal fairytale, in which I was a fairy, took care of everyone until a giant kidnapped and imprisoned me. I can only infer that my dream was related to my fairytale. I needed to integrate more fully the more aggressive aspects of my personality, left behind as I took care and attended to everybody but me. It is true that my mother is a much more overtly aggressive character than myself, and I always deferred to her wishes to the point of denying myself. I needed to become more assertive, to integrate the masculine aspect of myself. The confusion over my parental figure prevented me of experiencing fully my animus or masculine part.

Then again, while looking for something entirely different in an article I was

reading, I experienced a sudden illumination on the meaning of the goat symbol. In an

article on transference, there was an interpretation of the ancient sacrifice rituals of two

goats in Judaism and Christianity. This aimed at finding the source of the *scapegoat* term,

and yet it spoke to me very personally:

> The scapegoat is a widely applied ritual for purging a community or individual of
>
> ill- affect and disease [...] It is thought that, in the early forms of this tradition,
>
> there were two goats, one was a sacrifice and the other a scapegoat. The scapegoat
>
> was transformed, through prescribed ritual, into an embodiment of the sins of the
>
> community. It was then banished into the desert and so the sins, in embodied
>
> form, were disposed of. This ritual purges the community of its ills and therefore
>
> disposal is crucial. (Schaverien, 1999, p. 482)

I could see the goat being the embodiment of my sins or my unexplored parts of my

psyche that were waiting for integration being conceptualized as the goat. In a journey of

self-discovery and transformation, the latent parts of my psyche were sensing their

imminent outing. But why did the goat seem so shameful after her dip in the water tank?

When she was transformed in the symbolic water tank, she was banished from the store

and my sins were banished with her. I had escaped their grip (her attack). For me, this

meant I could go on with my exploration. I took a moment to appreciate them, as I let her

out of the water tank, and she could now go away and change could begin.

Orchid

The orchid with giant roots imposed itself on me as my renewed vision symbol,

representing a successful integration of the different parts of my myths (see figure 7). It is

said that the orchid represents beauty, love and fervour (Julien, 1989). In China, it is a symbol of fertility and perfection whereas in England, its purple spots represent the blood of Christ (Bruce-Mitford, 1997). Orchids are some of my favourite kinds of flowers. I think they are exotic, original and somewhat sexual by their form. I always loved the more exotic and strong flowers. I went to Hawaii twice and the vegetation there made a very big impression on me. The flowers are so strong and powerful, their stem is thick and their form and color striking. It is then, I remember, I came to love orchids. My associations with this flower led me to my trips which led me to my feelings about when I was there. I had very particular spiritual experiences in Hawaii. I found I was feeling so powerful, beautiful, peaceful and connected to everything. I even had moments of epiphany where I sensed I could predict the course of events, which surprisingly I did so correctly. I found unsuspected feelings of being rooted and grounded in the universe. As I struggled to rekindle the feelings I felt in Hawaii, but never really could, I found that the exercises of the personal mythology provided somehting similar to what I felt over there. I think this is what led to my renewed vision symbol.

Belly

I regrouped under belly the stomach, intestines and nausea. In the first stage of the program, I laid out some of my troublesome feelings and self-defeating behaviours that were represented as symbols of conflict related to my old myth in the following: my persistent stomach aches, nausea and digestive problems (intestines). The belly is most of all a place. It is the womb, the living place of the foetus. In dreams, it can express the desire to crawl back or get out of the mother or a need to relive birth (Albin, 1997). It relates to an empty nest and to the original mother-child separation. Now, I have always

had problems with the part of my body surrounding my stomach. Since I am an only

child with a mono-parental mother, my relationship with her is quite symbiotic. As this

relationship symbolizes my suppressed authentic self, I can only hypothesize that in my

belly symbolism lays a need to either get out of the womb or a desire to go back in. My

persistent health troubles related to my stomach are a somatic representative of this

struggle that this stage had shed light upon. I struggled with my autonomous living,

outside of my mother and had conflicting desires attached to it.

    As seen in figure 3, my intestines are becoming a snake. This leads me to the

dangerousness of the womb. My ambivalence towards it is well illustrated in the split

tongue of the snake, representing the contraries separation in two directions, conflicting

paths or desires, good or bad (Albin, 1995). Also, in figure 4, I represented my nausea by

a figure vomiting her powerfully red heart. This similarly illustrates, for me, my

ambivalent feelings about my return to the womb. It seems there is no place inside for

me, so I have to extract or vomit myself out. These associations led me to interpret a deep

need for assertion and owning of my own self, desires that came to light in the

subsequent stages of the program.

Cross

    What I have read on the cross symbolism seemed erroneous when I interpreted

my drawing of Mother Theresa (see figure 6). It is said that it symbolizes the tree of life,

redemption, the link between man and God (Julien, 1989). Instead of this, I felt that the

cross the character Mother Theresa was carrying was rather negative in connotation. I felt

its heavy weight, pressure, and its wood harshly rubbing on my skin. This drawing

symbolized, for me, the burden of always thinking and taking care of others before

myself. Perhaps the history of my province, Quebec, is more appropriate in guiding my interpretation.

Here, we have long been under the rigid control of Catholic priests. After years and years of repression under its firm regime, the people started to rebel and abandon the church. Nowadays, all that is left of our all emcompassing Christianity is ingrained feelings of guilt: guilt over success, money, our children, one another, etc. Although I have not been raised in a religious family at all, this atmosphere prevailed simply by the fact we were a typical Quebecer family. It seems surprising that I have carried the roots of Christianity in me, as evidenced in the many cross symbols that came up in the exercises. Indeed, this may explain why I distance myself from the tree of life symbolism written about in the literature and why I associate it with burden and guilt.

Discussion

In the beginning, what prompted the desire to go through with this research is the dissociation I felt during my formation as an Art Therapist between being the one "learning psychoanalytic theory and the one who is able to intuit psychic reality. [...] For in this work we have to be both wide awake and dreaming" (Williams, 2006, p. 95). I felt my personal self-exploration was not accounted for enough in the process of my becoming an Art Therapist, and I thought Heuristic inquiry was the best way to attend that dissatisfaction.

The exercises in this program were very intimate and personal and related to me as a whole made of opposites that were trying to reach out consciousness. I felt really engaged but somehow confused to which parts of me were influencing my becoming an Art Therapist, becoming a mother and ordinary me. In fact, I found there was no big gap between these roles of mine. They were all ingrained and intertwined in my mythology as a single set. My opposing myths related to the pull of conflicting qualities inherent to my personality, my Mother Theresa quality, cross-holder and self-denier, and my Star quality, spoiled and selfish.

The myths that play out in our lives can be linked to the notion of roles elaborated by Landy (1990). Indeed, role theory states that human beings naturally tend towards resolution of the conflicts generated by the different and often opposite roles we take on each day (Landy, 1990, 2003). Role theory also formulates the notion of *guide*. When the process of integration of the two conflicting parts of the psyche, myth and counter-myth, is effective, the new found myth can become a guide figure, like the inner shaman, or an intrapsychic function that facilitates the search of balance and fosters the tolerance of

ambiguity (Landy et al., 2005). My inner shaman exuded wisdom and tolerance, qualities that I should come to conjure often in my life when I feel conflicted or torn.

The guide can also be, on an external level, the therapist taking the role of previous authority figures, like parents. In effective therapy, the therapist figure or guide can be internalized by the patient in order for him to be able to access this balancing force. In this way, we therapists can be both guide and guided by our clients, as the latter provide counter-transferential material to examine attentively and integrate in our sense of self (Landy et al., 2005). This cycle of learning is what I thought should be an integral part of a therapist's journey. The personal mythology exercises series helped me to put more of my personal factor in the balance which I feel equilibrates and integrates in myself the role of therapist in a more profound way. As to the notion of being an enlightened guide, I can say this five stage program, enriched my personal mythology so much. Indeed, I was able to imaginatively and artistically embody different parts of myself in several colorful and meaningful characters. I came to see the pull of divergent qualities regarding two outdated myths to my present life. This rise to consciousness I can see being beneficial for my personal and professional life, as they are so woven together. This way, I am better equipped than I was to deal with counter-transferential issues that can occur in therapy sessions. But, I can see how this is an ongoing process and not a finished ordeal. I can now own but a bit more of my personal factor in my professional life, and there is plenty to discover still! This only confirmed my commitment to continual actualization of my personal mythology in order to foster my own growth and that of my future clients.

In the third and fourth sections, the goal was to integrate the opposite forces of the old myth and the counter-myth into a new creative synthesis called the renewed vision. The symbolic realm between the two myths or colliding forces is also known in Jungian psychology as the transcendent function. This function represents the space between conscious and unconscious, it is "the means of enlarging psychic space in the transference field to make room for coinciding opposites and a creative solution that arises from their conversation"(Ulanov, 1997, p. 119). Indeed, those sections required the use of dialogue between the two symbols representing the myths. The solution created by the transcendent function can come up as a set of symbols that can be a powerful drive to push our consciousness beyond the limits of our psyche and brings us closer to the self or to a new vision of our connectedness with the universe (Ulanov). I sensed that connectedness that enclosed and surpassed me in my renewed vision symbol, as an orchid participating in the pollinating cycle of life. The dialogues between my symbols were extremely enlightening. I appreciated those sections particularly. I am extremely grateful for the feelings of peace and connectedness I felt and look forward to trying the process with my clients.

The fifth stage was a bit more of a challenge. I found the application of my commitment to my new myth into my everyday life was much more difficult than I thought. The focus had to be constant. What was thought about has to be acted out. People around you have to know, you have to take concrete steps to modify your path. I found there was a lot to monitor, like the self-statements, and I sometimes lost track. I think it would be best to zoom in on limited and specific elements, instead of going too large, like I did. This way, the commitment is easier to keep.

Throughout this ordeal, I found, at times, I became very confused about the direction I was following. All the way from the second section to the fourth, an integration of symbols is required. "How much can you really integrate?", I asked myself. Let alone the fact that we were asked not to judge or interpret too much of what was happening, as the symbols emerged. This I found was both a challenge and a blessing because I tend to over-analyze myself. It sometimes hampers my healing and growth. I also found this part difficult because I had to reach out and work with a partner. As I have been told, I am not much of a team worker, although I am more, now, after the art therapy program, then I ever was! This section reminded me of the Heuristics goal, which is to relate to another's experience by relating to ours. This is also done in the end by reaching out and comparing notes. As my friend helped me in my engagements, we also shared on her experience of becoming a young professional in the social field and a mother. This was a very interesting process and it opened new doors in our friendship.

Areas to be explored further but touched upon here include comparing the personal mythology exercise program with the archetypes elaborated by Jung; the application of this program's sequence in therapy; its narration in a case study format, and, finally, the potential for creating a longitudinal study that involves a check-up after a couple of months or, perhaps, years had passed.

My transformation as a budding Art Therapist, illustrated in my personal mythology, can be summed in the following: it came as an increased concern about being true to myself, authentic, as illustrated in my desire to carry on this research. I developed a deep need to be rooted, as I, as an Art Therapist, have often to be an effective *container* for the projections, transference and ambiguity, or emotional volatility of my clients. This

came as a realization when I saw my renewed vision symbol, an orchid with huge roots (see figure 7). Here, my personal and professional life both required that I became more grounded. Also, regarding the process of my training and these exercises, I became more and more at ease with being spontaneous and non-judgmental in my writing and drawing, qualities that will serve me well in being more respectful of the similar demands I put on my clients in therapy.

Finally, my findings have to be carefully interpreted as they are but an account of my personal journey, although it may relate to another's. It is important to keep in mind the major changes that were happening in my life at the time of the exercises. While I was becoming an Art Therapist, I was also becoming a mother, a profound role that I will hold for the rest of my life. I wrote this as a self-exploration, and I really hope it can relate to the concerns of other art therapy students, whether they are experiencing motherhood or just wonder about their experience in their academic program and practicum sites. Being an Art Therapist is a hard job, a continuous commitment to the well-being of our clients and at the same time to our own, but it is also a wonderful and magical voyage in the human psyche and its creative potential. I feel incredibly lucky to have gone through my training, met my teachers and colleagues, and most of all my clients in the course of my practicum. As creative arts therapists, "It is there that our work begins: in role, in story, in imaginary action."(Landy, 1990, p.230), what more could we ask for?

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