

**DRAWING THE MANDALA:  
A SPIRITUAL PATH TO WHOLENESS**

**A PROJECT/DISSERTATION**

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**DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

**by**

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Dedicated to

My husband, Richard

My son, Riall

Who Reflect the

Wonder of

God

In my inner circle of the great

Mandala circle of love

## **Abstract**

This study used a heuristic method to explore the question: “What is my experience of drawing the mandala?” The mandala is a Sanskrit word meaning both center and circle. The purpose of this dissertation was to arrive at a description and understanding of the experience of drawing the mandala and its meaning in the author’s life and ministry from a theological, spiritual and psychological perspective. Two co-researchers were chosen for this study. This work examined the research question through the stories of the author, which unfolded throughout the creation of her mandala drawings and the co-researchers’ stories of their experience of drawing their mandalas. The author used image dialogues with her mandalas, while open-ended interviews were conducted with the co-researchers to gather the themes for this research. Major themes of self-integration and expanded awareness led to a deeper trust in the experience of drawing the mandala to express the individual’s spiritual and psychological journey of transformation. One of the unique contributions of this dissertation is the inclusion of the author’s original mandalas, as well as those of her co-researchers.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who has journeyed with me in the birthing of this Project/Dissertation. You all created a living mandala circle rich with insight, encouragement, support and availability. Each of you, in your unique way, nurtured me in my mandala journey.

Bill Close, now in Halifax, was director when I entered the Doctor of Ministry program. He provided a warm, accepting and caring environment for my exploration in my research question, and continues to be a dear friend.

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My co-researchers are ‘Mark,’ who lives in England, and ‘Julie’ from Edmonton. Both willingly entered the realm of their imaginations, risked creating and sharing their mandala drawings which emerged from their inner soul work. They enthusiastically spent many hours describing the stories behind their mandalas with a beautiful openness.

Marian MacIntyre, who introduced me to the ‘heuristic’ method through her own research and work with Clark Moustakes. Her knowledge and wisdom helped me tremendously in the design of my Project/Dissertation.

Evangeline Rand continually offered support and encouraged me to return to the Doctor of Ministry Studies after one of my difficult ‘detours.’ She has been constantly present to me in ‘soul-filled ways.’ Her wisdom into the feminine psyche has helped me to respect my own voice.

Judith Cornell, in California, has included me in the “Spiritual Sisters of the Sacred Mandala Circle.” Her encouraging words during the Mandala Intensives at Mount Madonna Retreat Center, ‘to

let go and just draw,' enabled to me to risk, silence my 'inner censor' and enjoy spontaneity in art expression once again.

Mercy Gilpatrick, a dear friend for over thirty five years, in Chicago, believed in me from the beginning of this quest. Her endearing words, "We're not sisters by birth, but we knew from the start, God put us together to be sisters by heart," were reminders I had a 'sister in spirit' who would do all she could to companion me. She shared her own wisdom and experience about communicating my ideas, and generously gave countless hours to the 'editing' of this work.

My colleagues, counselees, and friends provided me with ongoing supportive prayers and enthusiasm about 'drawing mandalas.'

Two treasured men in my life are Richard and Riall Laplante. My husband Richard, my 'soul-partner' and present coordinator of the Doctor of Ministry Program has walked with me on this long journey with unwavering support, patience and love. His extraordinary capacity to encourage and affirm me in the face of insurmountable struggles indicate his beautiful sensitivity to my 'way of doing things' and respect for my own expression of creativity. My son Riall desperately tried to help me befriend the computer, used his own creative gifts to photograph the mandalas, created wonderful meals to nourish me during this journey and delighted me with his wonder, curiosity and his expressed desire to actually *read* his mother's Project/Dissertation.

Lastly, my mother, when she was alive frequently made the delightful comment, "I guess that [Project/Dissertation] will go on forever." For me, her remark has become quite meaningful. I hope this mandala journey *will* go on forever. It has only paused in an interesting place!

For all of you, who have been part of my wonderful mandala circle, I thank God.

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## **Prefatory Note**

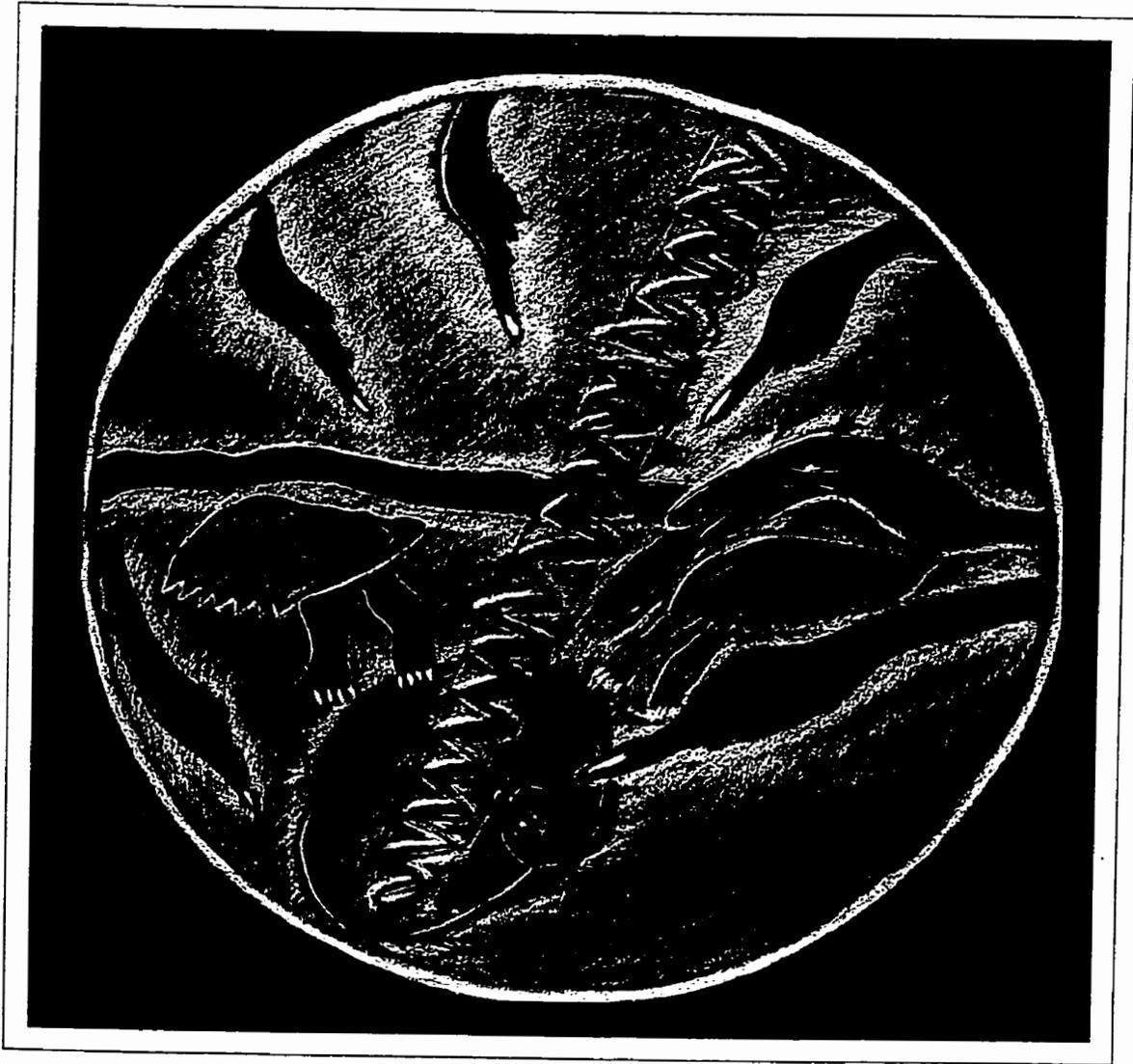
Throughout this Project/Dissertation, I have referred to myself as a Pastoral Counselor and a Psychotherapist. In the process of completing this Project/Dissertation (June 15, 2000), my employer, due to national and provincial regulatory requirements has decided to use a different terminology to describe some of its professional staff. Originally, I was hired as a Pastoral Counselor. I am now called a counselor. I provide therapeutic services in a clinical setting. I have used the term psychotherapy throughout this Project/Dissertation in the traditional understanding. I do not use the terms pastoral or psychotherapy with the implied sense of an official/regulatory certification with the Canadian Association for Pastoral Practice and Education (CAPPE) or with the Psychological Association of Alberta (PAA). Currently I am applying to be clinically regulated with a professional association in Alberta.

# **Introduction**

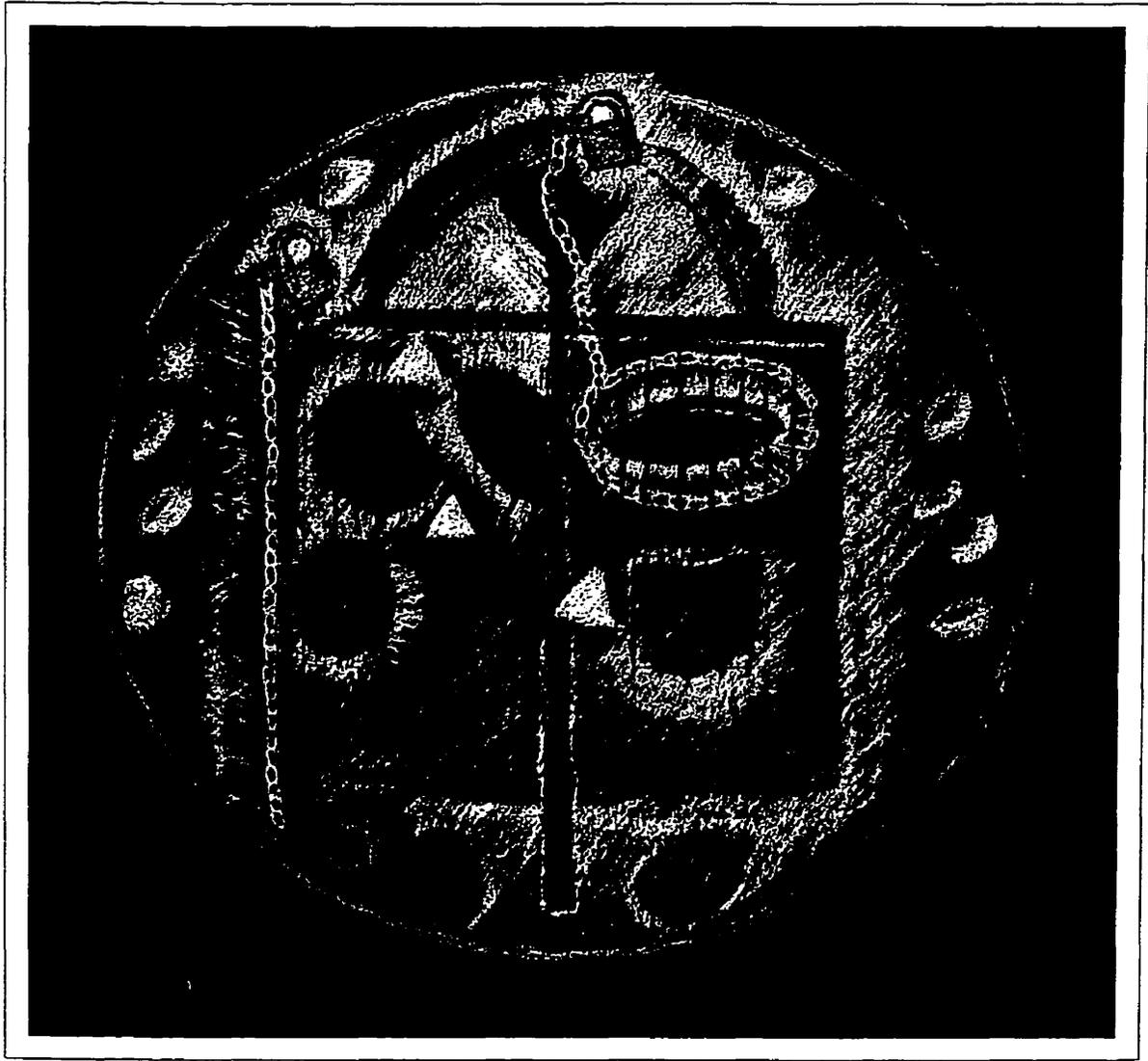


***My Story***

***Begins***



Pointed Fingers



The Prisoner of Linear Thinking

After all these years, I have finally found my voice. In some ways, I think of myself as a two year old who gradually transforms babble into words, then sentences, and eventually stories. Although chronologically I am approaching my ‘senior’ years, I have, through the process of this Project/Dissertation, gradually transformed the fragments of myself, my babble, into a story that reflects my Self and my journey to wholeness. I am hopeful that this story, while personal in its detail will also carry universal wisdom and application. The theme of my story deals with discovery – the discovery of the power of creativity when drawing the universal symbol \*<sup>1</sup> of wholeness, the circle. These circles become mandalas,<sup>2</sup> or representations of the Self.\* My story has villains and heroes; conflict and resolution. It is my story, the story of my co-researchers, and the story of all who seek to know themselves.

According to many theologians and psychologists, stories and personal anecdotes can be tools that reveal and explore the psychological, theological, and spiritual dimensions of the storyteller. Both the storyteller and listener (or reader) are united in a process taking place in sacred space. As Robert Wilhelm, founder and director of the “School of Sacred Storytelling” notes:

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<sup>1</sup> All words followed by an asterisk can be found in the Glossary.

<sup>2</sup> The mandala is considered a sacred circle and was developed originally in the Eastern cultures. It is a Sanskrit word meaning both center and circle present in all cultures and is considered a concrete symbol of its creator’s absorption into a sacred center. It will be defined and described more extensively in Chapter Seven of this Project/Dissertation.

Storytelling is not a quick message, but a slow message. Stories are seeds that are sown. In time they sprout, take root, grow, and ripen... Storytelling is therefore a tool to the discovery, not of knowledge, but of wisdom.<sup>3</sup>

As Wilhelm implies, stories happen ‘in time.’ Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin, researchers in narrative inquiry also stress this point. They emphasize the importance of the time and space one needs in telling a personal story.<sup>4</sup> So I am encouraged to take the time and find the space to share my story with you.

Through stories that empower, the individual finds a voice, an expression of self. In my view, the strength of the St. Stephen’s College Doctor of Ministry Project/Dissertation is the honor it gives to the story behind the dissertation.<sup>5</sup> I have come to appreciate the importance in knowing something about the reasons an author has chosen to research and write about a particular piece of work. I believe that sharing the story about how I came to participate in the Doctor of Ministry program will benefit others as well as myself.

I am a Pastoral Counselor and Creative Expressions’ Therapist for a day therapy program in a private counseling clinic. In my work in the day therapy program, I often use the lyrics of Mark Hobson and Jennifer Corlett, OSU from their song titled “In the Name of Love.”<sup>6</sup> This song reminds

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Bela Wilhelm & Mary Jo Kelly Wilhelm. Lectionary Storybook. Hagerstown: Storyfest Press, 1999, 15.

<sup>4</sup> See discussion of this in D. J. Clandinin & F. M. Connelly. “Personal Experience Methods.” Handbook of Qualitative Research. N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (eds.). Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1991, 413-427.

<sup>5</sup> The St. Stephen’s Doctor of Ministry Program utilizes its own language when describing the research process and product. “Every P/D has two parts: a project part and a dissertation part. Although the two parts are intimately connected, it is helpful to keep them separate in one’s mind. The dissertation part of the P/D serves an academic purpose. It establishes through a survey of existing materials and literature review why there is a need for this particular project. It outlines the candidate’s theology of ministry which informs the development of the project. It explores any relevant theoretical bases such as psychology, sociology, history, politics, theology and biblical studies. It outlines the methods adopted. The project part of the P/D is something like a product. It is complete in itself. In the case of a research P/D, the project part may be thought of as that part of the process when the researcher actually engages some aspect of ministry-observing processes, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting data, making recommendations. It is what the researcher must get out and do in the field as opposed to what might be done at the writing desk.” Doctor of Ministry Program, Project Dissertation Guide. Edmonton: St. Stephen’s College, 1999, 5.

In my case, the project part is immediately related to the mandalas developed and reflected upon for this research.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Hobson and Jennifer Corlett, OSU. “In the Name of Love,” Producer unknown.

me to value the stories and myths of my clients. The song's first three lines are powerful reminders of the sacredness of storytelling:

Do you remember the call?  
When did you hear your name out loud?  
Can you remember the word that you heard, when the story began  
in you?<sup>7</sup>

My story will also be illustrated. My pictures, or mandalas are an integral part of this story of discovery as you will quickly see. Unfortunately mandalas cannot be placed along side the narrative. The mandalas referred to in this Introduction can be found in its preliminary pages. So, let us begin this story slowly and enter into a sacred space.

### **My Story Begins**

#### **Into the Circle: The Externals**

My own story, at one level, begins in another story. In 1980 my husband Richard, entered the Doctor of Ministry program at St. Stephen's College. His personal and professional growth won through his journey of scholarship and reflection teased me with the idea that perhaps 'someday' I might consider applying to enter the D. Min. program myself. The impact of that program and his journey was significant and affected our lives in profound and unexpected ways.

As I watched Richard study, I witnessed a transformation. He grew in his own individuation \* process and became more sensitive, loving and confident in his understanding of himself and others. Books, notes, writing papers and documents became the central focus of our home in those years.

Like mustard seeds, the ideas of scholars took root and flourished in Richard throughout his course work. Despite his academic pursuits, our family managed to balance travel and play. Richard and I

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

continued to grow together in our marriage while enjoying our young son Riall. Richard finally celebrated his academic journey at his convocation in 1986, six years later!

### **Where Does the Story Really Begin?**

#### **Into the Circle: Coming Inside**

Just as the mustard seeds took root and flourished in Richard, into a healthy tree, his experience planted seeds which lay dormant in me. During the years he worked on his Doctor of Ministry program, we traveled to international conferences at which Richard frequently made presentations. I also attended sessions at these conferences, which left me energized with many questions about my future.

At one international conference, I began to seriously consider my own interest in pursuing another degree. I am a mature woman, and my age seemed like a major obstacle. A comment that was directed towards me in one of the International Seminars on Religious Education and Values (ISREV) in Ireland (summer of 1986) by a woman researcher left a strong impression on me. She addressed my concern about my age with intensity and stated: “You can engage in research at any age if you have the fortitude and perseverance. But you must be passionate about your research topic!”

The ISREV conference and Richard’s participation in a Canadian Association for Pastoral Practice and Education Unit (CAPPE)<sup>8</sup> encouraged me to seriously consider the Doctor of Ministry degree for myself. Those considerations soon led me to confront the villain in my story – my own fears and ambivalence. I feared that I did not have the passion for research and the persistence of spirit required for this journey. And the ambivalence about my age surfaced. Completing the Doctor of Ministry degree would take years. I had already lived out many of them!

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<sup>8</sup> The acronym CAPPE will only be used hereafter when speaking of the Canadian Association for Pastoral Practice and Education.

**First Steps on the Path**  
**Into the Circle: Closer to the Center**

In 1989 I entered a CAPPE program with apprehension. I felt this experience would help me in my encounter with the villain of my fears and ambivalence as well as aid my discernment process. After several extended units of Pastoral Counseling Education (PCE), I applied to enter the St. Stephen's Doctor of Ministry Program. I knew many challenges lay ahead in the next years! However, I felt I could grow as Richard had from his own experience. The seed containing my own growth and flowering was firmly planted with my acceptance. I became the student with the books, papers to write and redo, collegians, three required yearly core courses in Interdisciplinary Study in Ministry,<sup>9</sup> and notes everywhere. The atmosphere of the house in the 1990's resembled the chaos of the 1980's.

**Detours on the Journey**

I used to have a poster hanging on my wall which announced *Life is something that happens while you are planning something else*. I came to appreciate the truth of these words. My personal and professional life was constantly interrupted because of my parents' major illnesses. After frequent emergency trips to Chicago, doctors informed me in 1994 that my parents could no longer live independently and, as the sole care-provider I must bring my parents to Canada. Six months later my father died. In January of 1998, my mother was institutionalized with Alzheimer's disease and subsequently died in August, 1998. I often lost focus and at times nearly gave up the pursuit of this degree because of the demands of caring for aging parents.

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<sup>9</sup> The acronym ISM is used for Interdisciplinary Study in Ministry courses. These three required yearly core courses are held on campus during the doctor of Ministry degree program.

## Into the Circle: The Heart of the Matter

Meanwhile, as life had interrupted my plans, it also suggested uncommon considerations of alternative therapies - which were being discussed in medical and psychological professional ‘circles.’ These discussions, plus my own counseling practices provided a strong motivation for this present study. I had been using many kinds of art expression in the context of my counseling practice. I included more art expression in my pastoral counseling work. I began to see possibilities in the therapeutic use of the archetypal symbol of the mandala.

In addition, my personal awareness and self-integration was greatly facilitated by my increasing pursuit of mandalas. I came to appreciate the process of creating mandalas as both an expression of self-consciousness and as a means for therapeutic self-integration. I came to appreciate how this form of artistic expression empowered me personally and my clients to tell our stories and speak with growing self-awareness. My respect for the process of creating a mandala supplied the final incentive to plumb the depths of this experience in the context of the Doctor of Ministry program at St. Stephen’s College. I knew more research was needed. I relied on my intuition and knew that the only way intuition reaps its harvest is if it is attended to with rapt attention.<sup>10</sup> As an introverted intuitive (INFP)<sup>11</sup> I wanted to respect and nurture my intuition. Gradually, the questions pursued in this research became personally and professionally meaningful to my experience of drawing and reflecting on the impact of the mandala.

For years I had practiced a type of meditation by which I would engage in reflection and meditation by drawing a mandala. I found that drawing a mandala was a way that I could explore relevant issues in my life in a creative process that engaged my spirit and utilized my professional training as a

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<sup>10</sup> See my own D. Min. Professional Paper I, *Intuition & The Creative Arts*, St. Stephen’s College, Spring, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> An INFP is one of the sixteen types found in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator™. Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1975. This personality typology indicator was developed by Isabel Briggs Myers and Katharine C. Briggs in 1942. It is based on C. G. Jung, Psychological Types. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1923. An INFP is considered to have an introverted function of intuition and an extroverted function of feeling. For information on all sixteen types, see Isabel Briggs Myers with Peter B. Myers. Gifts Differing. Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc., 1980.

Pastoral Counselor and a Creative Expressions Therapist. Then, in January of 1997, I attended an intensive seminar on mandalas given by Judith Cornell at the Mount Madonna Center in California. In addition to the drawing of mandalas and reflecting on the images and process of creation, we chanted a mantra \* of a Yogi Master. The mantra was sung several times a day to honor the Divine Mother.<sup>12</sup> In the course of that seminar, I came to realize that images and metaphors of a Divine Mother God were absent in my religious tradition. I missed this feminine expression of God and sensed that countless women experienced the same unnamed longing for a feminine God with whom they could more closely identify. Only in relative recent years have feminist theologians challenged the absence of the Divine Feminine in mainstream religions. As a result of the profound impact which the experience of drawing mandalas had on my own spiritual and professional life, this study will focus on the role the creative process of drawing mandalas has on the integration of self and the effects of this process on my own theological, spiritual, and psychological development. In addition, I will also explore the therapeutic impact the creative process of drawing mandalas has in the lives of others.

I entered the Doctor of Ministry program with a commitment to investigate the experience of drawing mandalas, to explore their meaning in my own life and to consider the therapeutic impact of the process of creating and reflecting on mandalas of clients. I was interested in the significance and power of mandalic images and their relationship to one's theology and spirituality. I sensed that this artistic, psychological and spiritual expression was broad enough to invite more investigation of the creative and therapeutic experience itself. My Doctor of Ministry Project/Dissertation grew out of my own research about mandalas, my participation in the process of creating mandalas and acknowledging their power and significance in a spiritual and therapeutic environment.

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<sup>12</sup>The mantra is written by Paramanahansa Yogananda. The words which inspired me to explore the image of God as Divine Mother are: "*Who tells me thou art Dark, O my Mother Divine: Thousands of moons and stars from thy body do shine.*"

## **Personal Roots of My Study**

### **A Long Time Ago**

From childhood, I was intrigued with the symbol of the circle that occurred within my ‘family circle.’ We celebrated family meals at a round table, and recited the daily rosary in a circle. We sang ‘around’ the piano and danced in circles to the folk music of my father’s concertina.

My parents were both musicians and gardeners, who delighted in creating landscape designs, which were ultimately transformed into exquisite floral arrangements inside our home. These two individuals instilled in me a love of beauty and a creative spirit which flourished in various expressions throughout my entire life. Money was scarce, but we enjoyed the treasure of creativity and imagination.

### **Fourth Grade: A Villain in My Life**

My notions of creativity and my experience of artistic expression are deeply rooted in a fourth grade event. I recall how I proudly drew my Christmas tree as part of the art class assignment. As the students finished their drawings, I waited for the religious sister (a nun) to view my work and bestow her approval. Because I was always the ‘new’ student,<sup>13</sup> recognition through approval had become extremely important to me. But instead of validation, she reacted with anger and reprimanded me for my inability to draw the tree the way it was ‘supposed’ to appear. Her outburst terrified me. I unconsciously thought of her as an authority on the Christmas tree. To my horror and extreme embarrassment, she displayed my drawing before the class, warning everyone to avoid what I had done. The whole experience of an authority figure’s rejections of my own artistic expression and her projection of her own judgments on my personal creation frightened me into a shame which culminated in a genuine hatred of drawing. I dreaded and avoided art. I found instead another artistic expression in

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<sup>13</sup> I transferred to seven different schools in eight years because of my father’s employment.

music which eventually led me to an undergraduate degree in music, a career as a music educator and years of professional stage work in musical productions through the United States.

Apparently, this experience of having an art ‘critic’ or authority-figure who voices disapproval of creative expression that blocks further creative expression for years is fairly common. Author, storyteller and poet, Robert Bly, writes how Jungian analyst, Marion Woodman’s experience at age seven was similar.

A woman teacher gave each child in the class watercolors and told them to paint a house and a lawn. Marion liked the look of blue, so she painted the lawn blue. Her teacher was furious, and said, “You will stay after school until you learn to paint grass the right color-green!” This time Marion did paint the grass green, but also the house, the roofs, and the sky. The teacher wanted what was literally green to be green and what was literally blue to be blue, so her response was a redoubled fury. Marion said, “I put my head down on my desk, and didn’t raise it again for six years.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Discovering the Mandala**

Only much later, did my participation in numerous arts therapy conferences help me understand how drawing affects others and myself. I was able to draw a mandala that represented that awful fourth grade experience. This was one of my earlier mandalas and I called it “Pointed Fingers.”<sup>15</sup> This mandala offers a mirror in which I can express the piercing hands of the negative authority figures and the animals of the underworld. I am the embryonic figure at the bottom. For me, this mandala represented the authority figures (or fingers) in my life who told me to “get it right, do it right, and be a good girl.” The streak that runs through the mandala represents the anger I felt inside me. The ugly little creatures that seem to be the targets of the pointed fingers represent my little friends. One of them is sticking out its tongue in defiance of the authority. The eyes in the mandala tell me that I feel like someone is always watching and I have to be vigilant. I continued to discover a new psychic energy in

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Bly and Marian Woodman. The Maiden King: The Reunion of Masculine and Feminine. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1998, 24.

<sup>15</sup> I refer to two mandalas in this Introduction. See pp. 2 & 3.

artistic expression in general and in mandalas in particular. I developed skills to dialogue with images which surfaced in my drawings and those of others. I began an inner journey through an exploration of mandala images and active imagination.\* Another early mandala, which I called “The Prisoner of Linear Thinking” began to reveal itself to me through active imagination. As I stared at the images and talked with them, the mandala helped me understand my feelings of rage at my perception of stifled creativity. I felt locked up. My femininity was blocked, my spontaneity was locked up, and my creative expression had nowhere to go. The faces seemed to represent various authorities in my life and they seemed to pop out at me in every aspect of the circle. They seemed angry. Then I noticed the floating white objects around the inside perimeter of the mandala. These seem to remind me of eggs. They were embryonic life, waiting to take form. I began to realize how much the mandala could reveal about myself and my story.

Through the images in this mandala, I became aware of the ‘boxed cells’ in my life which related to issues of power, authority, need for approval from others, and a lack of self-confidence all isolating me in the arena of total distrust of my own creative process in the visual sense. The boxed cells had kept me in exile and frozen in my creative process. The Anthropologist and Jungian analyst Clarrisa Pinkola Estes discusses how this frozen state leads one into a death to creativity.

For a human to be frozen means to purposely be without feeling, especially toward oneself, but also and sometimes even more so toward others. While it is a self-protective mechanism, it is hard on the soul-psyche, for the soul does not respond to iciness, but rather warmth. An icy attitude will put out a woman’s creative fire. It will inhibit the creative function.<sup>16</sup>

I learned these skills for creative interaction with an image. I grew in the understanding that drawn images are reflections of soul qualities that are already present but often unseen. In other words, I learned to follow the lead of the image itself, and used this method with my clients as well. The images reflect psychic content which is accessed through active imagination.

The internationally known artist, creative arts therapist and psychotherapist, Shaun McNiff describes the uncertain process of creativity:

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<sup>16</sup> Clarrisa Pinkola Estes. Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype. New York: Ballantine Books, 1992, 184.

In my experience, the path of the creative spirit is not clearly marked. When it does appear, it emanates in instants, fragments, and insights. Yet somehow the pieces find a way to form a whole, a broader vision tied together with the threads of feelings that keep returning and asking for a response.<sup>17</sup>

Creative persons live in a world requiring continual exploration. Somewhere in my readings, I came upon the philosophy of Satish Kumar, an Indian founder and director of the Schumacher School in London. He holds that the function of art is not a product, but a living process, and the artist is not a special kind of person but every person is a special kind of artist. There is a creative spirit in all individuals and every person possesses it in his or her own way. As a pastoral counselor I value the journey with individuals who get at the heart of their soul experiences through the creative process. This journey is similar to a pilgrimage. As a fellow pilgrim, I feel privileged to accompany another on an inner journey of meaning which the famous Swiss Psychiatrist Carl C. Jung called the process of individuation.

There are many ways to participate in this process of individuation. I have chosen to focus this study on my personal experience of drawing the mandala as a vehicle for self-awareness and individuation. In this sense, the mandala became a mirror that both expresses and reflects who I am at any given time. Such personal expression is created without fears of unsatisfactory performance or imperfection. Through the experience of creating mandalas, I was able to confront and overcome a terrible childhood fear of art that I came to realize is a common phenomenon I share with most of my clients.<sup>18</sup>

Part of my exploration into the significance of the mandala occurred in 1991-1994, while I was participating in six Pastoral Counseling Education units in a CAPPE program at one of the major hospitals in Edmonton. The importance of integrating music, art, and movement expression became increasingly significant in my ministry with clients. I discovered that as I invited each client to reflect

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<sup>17</sup> Shaun McNiff. *Earth Angels*, Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1995, 7.

<sup>18</sup> As a pastoral counselor, I work with many men and women. Women frequently find themselves in a paradoxical position in the world of therapy. In my experience, it seems that they are the ones who reach out and seek therapy most often, and yet are offered theoretical solutions conceived by men and sometimes by women who offer a linear, sequential model of dialogue. Much of our society has been caught up with linear 'verbiage', a rationality, and is now beginning to slowly accept alternative therapies such as music, art, dance, and poetry, etc., as therapeutic models which can be used effectively in their work.

on his/her own interpretation of personal artwork, I decreased habits of labeling, reductionistic diagnosis, and prescriptive thinking. It was at this time that I embraced the position developed by McNiff, which focused on a process in which the individual dialogues with the images.<sup>19</sup> I will return to this process later in Chapters Five and Seven.

### **The Mandala Journey Continues**

In addition, my journeys on several pilgrimages sparked continued interest in the mandala. My discovery of the magnificent circular rose windows in Christian cathedrals throughout Europe provided me with another dimension to the sacred mandala. Other circular structures experienced on these pilgrimages were rich in symbolism. For instance, Newgrange, the Neolithic burial site in Ireland, contained elaborate carvings of circles and spirals on the inside walls of the tomb; the round architecture of Mt. St. Michelle in France; the circle chants of the monks of Solemnes Abbey in France; the labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral; and my memorable visit to the Terezan Concentration Camp in the Czech Republic. This concentration camp with its circular shape stands as a stark reminder of a World War II Nazi concentration camp. It heightened my awareness that the form of the circle often becomes a powerful symbol that carries unconscious issues not only in clinical work, but in social and cultural milieus as well. The camp was constructed in a circular fashion which pressed me to explore the circle from its historical expression to the present.

### **Banishing the Villain**

I had to learn to embrace the position that when the Creator made people, they innately shared in the creative act. As a result, all people are creative in some way. For many, early childhood experiences crippled their creativity through criticism or lack of opportunity. I have chosen to

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<sup>19</sup> Shaun McNiff. Art as Medicine: Creating a Therapy of the Imagination. Boston: Shambhala Publications Inc., 1992, 105 – 226.

investigate the mandala as a container which allows every person an opportunity to appreciate his/her creativity. Having introduced my research topic through recasting of the familiar 'a long time ago,' I will move to the present by now stating succinctly my research question: "What is my experience of drawing the mandala?" It will be formulated in the context of my theological, spiritual, and psychological process of integration.

## Chapter I

### My Search for a Good Beginning

I have been led to share my story through this project and writing this dissertation for several reasons:

- The example of the personal and professional growth of my husband as he participated in the Doctor of Ministry program at St. Stephen's in the 1980's.
- My own interest in self-integration and my struggle to facilitate the process of individuation in my clients in my work as a pastoral counselor and creative expressions therapist.
- My search for artistic expression despite childhood experiences that squelched endeavors in art. This search both mirrored the psyche and became a process of healing and integration.
- My wish to explore a process of integration that reflected my pursuit of theological, spiritual, and psychological realities.

All of these factors brought me to the decision to enter the Doctor of Ministry program at St. Stephen's in 1992. While I knew that my practice of drawing mandalas was going to be an integral part of my story that would be expressed in my Project/Dissertation, I still had a difficult time finding a way to begin the story, the process. In the context of the Doctor of Ministry program, my 'good beginning' had to be expressed in the formulation of my research question. Since I already had a glimpse of the experience of drawing and reflecting on mandalas and a growing respect for the therapeutic application of the process with my clients, I gradually came to formulate my research question. The question itself "What is my experience of drawing mandalas?" became a vehicle for telling my story of self-integration. I suspected that in sharing that story, a therapeutic model for my counseling ministry might emerge as a surprise ending.

My research question "What is my experience of drawing mandalas?" allows me to start the story. I am drawn literally to examine my own experience as a way of developing a greater awareness of Self. This experience becomes a journey into a labyrinth with the spiritual and psychological dimensions of Psyche.\* On this journey, I hope to investigate the application of the process of drawing mandalas and reflecting on their images in the therapeutic context of my counseling ministry.

This question and its resultant Project/Dissertation is pursued within a phenomenological orientation towards qualitative research. The overall goal of this story - project is to arrive at a description and understanding of the experience of drawing mandalas and their meaning in my own life and ministry. Its methodology will pursue the heuristic research model of Clark Moustakas<sup>20</sup> as a specific way of doing phenomenology.<sup>21</sup> The Project will unfold through the creation of a collection of my own mandala drawings as well as those of my co-researchers.

### **Introducing the Stories of Co-Researchers**

I asked two co-researchers (male and female) to participate in this research. In selecting them, the purpose was to have both genders represented to eliminate issues of gender bias. Throughout this study they will be referred to as *co-researchers*. Rather than being seen as subjects, they will be viewed as: "...human beings whose willing and informed cooperation is integral to the researcher's efforts."<sup>22</sup> I prefer the term co-researcher because it implies an equality of status between the researcher and participant. "The researcher is not seen as possessing a superior epistemological stance."<sup>23</sup> Neither of the co-researchers had previous experience with drawing mandalas.

The process of gathering data involved phenomenological interviews with my co-researchers based on their own experiences of drawing mandalas.<sup>24</sup> In the course of twelve interviews with each co-researcher, we gradually explored the stories reflected in each of their mandalas. As we learned to dialogue with the images in the mandalas, we gradually arrived at a greater self-awareness. With their participation I was able to conduct qualitative research that focused on the experience itself.

In the course of these interviews, the co-researchers brought their mandalas for observation and reflection. They described the beliefs, feelings, and associations attached to their mandalas. I made

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<sup>20</sup> C. Moustakas. *Heuristic Research*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990.

<sup>21</sup> The heuristic model as developed by Moustakas emphasizes experience instead of experiment. A major part of the research relies on the intense involvement of the researcher.

<sup>22</sup> K. Aigen. "The Music Therapist as Qualitative Researcher." *Music Therapy*. Vol. 12., No. 1, 25.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> This process usually consists of in-depth, open-ended interviews.

laser colored copies of their mandalas, tape-recorded the interviews, and had the recorded interviews transcribed.

### **Introducing my Research Method: The Heuristic Journey**

Clark Moustakas writes: "The (heuristic) methodology flow(s) out of inner-awareness, meaning and inspiration."<sup>25</sup> Because these words address what is essential for the creative act, I wanted to understand the impact of this heuristic method on my psychic, spiritual, and transformative journey. In addition, I needed to assimilate the perceptions of my co-researchers regarding their experiences of their own creative energies. I also had to integrate these findings and their consequences for my study. My experiences of creating and reflecting on mandalas joined with the similar and shared experiences of my co-researchers have produced the content for this story, the Project/Dissertation.

Despite the common elements shared by the vast array of artistic expressions of the mandala, everyone's 'creative experience' is unique. McNiff's position regarding the most fundamental skill of the creative person appeals to me because he respects each person's potential for the creative act. He describes that creative act and the creative person as:

...the ability to constantly re-vision the world. Everything is subject to reconstruction and renewal. The "re" factor is the basis of resurrecting, reshaping, regenerating, reviving, and rejuvenating. Creative persons live in a state of constant search and exploration.<sup>26</sup>

In my attempt to 're-vision' my world, I formulated my research question and began to 'live in a state of constant search and exploration.' I discovered through the experience of drawing mandalas, reflecting on their images and the process of creation, the inner unobserved aspects of my co-researchers, my clients, and myself. We became integrated through this process of individuation. This Project/Dissertation will demonstrate that this study is well grounded in the methodology of Moustakas

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>26</sup> Shaun McNiff. Trust The Process: An Artist's Guide to Letting Go. Boston: Shambhala, 1998, 69.

with important personal and therapeutic implications. I will also show how the results of this study are credible.

I then moved through the phenomenological process of reduction of the significance of my own drawings and theirs. As Moustakas has observed, that process of reduction involves the following:

The insight or illumination is followed by a comprehensive explication of the core themes developed into an individual depiction of each research participant's experience... From the totality of individual depictions a composite depiction of the experience is constructed.<sup>27</sup>

To accomplish the goals of this research Project/Dissertation, I needed a framework that would coincide with my own personal goals as well as honoring and respecting my own process along with those of my co-researchers. I selected the heuristic method for my research question because of its focus on subjectivity and self-exploration. In general, the heuristic method involved three stages. First, it begins with a process of self-exploration, then it expands to include investigation with others and finally it concludes with a careful examination of the literature. I want to briefly examine each of these points here although they will be developed at length in Chapter Three.

### **Self-Exploration**

The heuristic framework allows me to explore the phenomenon of personal artistic expression within the context of the images created within my mandalas. In other words, the heuristic method recognizes the relationship between the researcher (the subject) - and the object researched, in this case, the experience of drawing mandalas. This method requires an attitude of "open ended presence to the phenomenon that is unfolding."<sup>28</sup> According to Moustakas, important components of heuristics include an awareness of the subject's (researcher) creativity, intuition, flexibility, the capacity for spontaneous analysis and intellectual judgments, and emotional involvement. This kind of research recognizes the

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<sup>27</sup> Moustakas, Op. Cit., 50.

<sup>28</sup> C. Moustakas. "Heuristic Research." In J. F. Bugental (Ed.) Challenges of Humanistic Psychology. New York: McGraw Hall, 1967, 105.

presence of tacit knowledge, understood as knowledge that guides actions and beliefs. Heuristics places a great deal of responsibility on the researcher. In working with the mandala drawings, it was important for me to remember that the process was most important. The first phase of the process of heuristic research is that of self-exploration, which emphasizes the researcher's being rather than the technique employed.

### **Exploration with Others**

In the qualitative research approach involved in the process of data collection, the researcher conveys to the other participants an equality of status. Moustakas indicates how this second stage demands a mutuality and opening up of oneself. He emphasizes the heuristic requirement of being vigilant to the presence of the phenomenon in others, which ultimately brings the researcher and participant into the activity of shaping each other. Together, the researcher and co-researchers create the data through a continuous unfolding and interaction. Researchers Lincoln and Guba emphasize this relationship when they write: "The ultimate credibility of the outcomes depends upon the extent to which trust has been established."<sup>29</sup> Moustakas also notes in this particular phase how researchers come to 'know' through participant observation, intimate encounter and dialogue. By inviting co-researchers to participate in the research for this Project/Dissertation, we created the data together. In addition, the very interpretations and conclusions of this Project/Dissertation are in essence connected to our mutual experiences and sharing. Aigen states: "...all participants and researchers have reactions to one another in a way that influences findings."<sup>30</sup> I was transformed and shaped by my own experiences as well as the experiences of my co-researchers.

Neither traditional hermeneutics nor phenomenological methodologies *demand* that the researcher have personal experience with the theme or question being studied. I did not see how I could research my mandalas and those of my co-researchers using those methodologies. Only through the heuristic

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<sup>29</sup> Y. S. Lincoln and E. G. Guba. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1985, 287.

<sup>30</sup> Aigen, Op. Cit., 27.

method could the researcher have personal experience of what is under investigation. Personal involvement is essential to heuristics. In my research question, for instance, there is always an interplay between the images in the mandalas and the person drawing them. He/she is the central instrument in the study's process. This method requires that the researcher is constantly "open, receptive, and attuned to all facets of one's experience of the phenomenon."<sup>31</sup>

### **Exploration in the Literature**

According to Moustakas, immersion in the review of literature occurs at the end of a heuristic study. He writes:

But this was at a point near the end, not at the beginning, where it might have acted to predispose and predetermine and color my own growing awareness.<sup>32</sup>

Even though this might seem contrary to traditional research methods, this process allows the researcher to explore the phenomenon without danger of personal bias. I found this difficult but I wanted to stay close to his framework in order for the review of literature to serve as a culminating point and clarification of the study. It constitutes the last phase in coming to know the phenomenon. Because of my own experiences in workshops, intensive seminars, training programs, and years of intensive Jungian therapy, I had already accessed considerable literature on my research topic before I started writing this dissertation. Nevertheless, I felt there was a vast amount of material 'out there' which had not already been researched. Therefore, I could work within Moustakas' model including the review of literature at the end of the Project/Dissertation.

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<sup>31</sup> Moustakas, *Op. Cit.*, 1967, 11.

<sup>32</sup> C. E. Moustakas. "Foundations of Humanistic Research." Unpublished Manuscript, 1967, 105.

### Applying the Heuristic Method to My Research

My research question was pursued in the following sequence. First, I immersed myself in the process and experience of creating my own mandalas. Then I solicited mandalas from my co-researchers. Finally, I sought to reflect on the process of drawing mandalas as well as integrating the themes that emerged from the creative process with hope of gaining insight into the individuation journey. In my effort to collect data, each co-researcher agreed to draw a minimum of twenty mandalas. The interviews were limited to twelve one hour individual sessions for each co-researcher. Their mandalas and the interview process became part of the heuristic method advocated by Moustakas. He places the importance of the validity in heuristics as:

...not a quantitative measurement that can be determined by correlation or statistics. The question of validity is one of meaning: Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one's own rigorous, exhaustive self-searching and from the explications of others present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience? <sup>33</sup>

Utilizing the heuristic method, the overall purpose or goal of the research question is difficult if not impossible to discern at the beginning of the experience. Certainly this research project probed the unknown unconscious \* territory of my own mandalas using the tools of research, creativity and intuition. The heuristic process falls outside the bounds of conventional research methodology in as much as the researcher is also the subject. Through the heuristic method, my inquiry produced therapeutic results which have empowered me to share my story. So the inquiry became the therapy for me as well. In the course of my research, I hoped to comprehend the 'language' or meaning of my mandalas. I expected this language to evolve from the actual experience of the drawing and reflection process. With this language, my story was told.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 32.

### Seeking Meaning Using the Heuristic Method

The strength of qualitative research lies with a process of arriving at meaning. In the context of my research question, my co-researchers and I created mandalas and tried to understand what significance each had for us as individuals as well as their possible role for the pastoral counseling ministry. Using Moustakas' research method, I have investigated my research question and attempted to integrate the process in the findings I will describe in the following chapters.

While I briefly reviewed some of the vast literature on mandalas, I kept in mind that the experience of drawing mandalas left room for more possibilities for research and could broaden the range of an understanding of the experience within the existing psychological and pastoral counseling literature. I have relied on the literature of the Carl Jung, Judith Cornell, and Shaun McNiff. Jung's contribution to the psychological field on mandala drawings and interpretations became very significant in the quest for material related to my research. Cornell helped me explore the mandala in a very challenging way. I was privileged to engage in training sessions with her on three different occasions (July, 1996; January, 1997; and October, 1997) and have been profoundly influenced by her investigation of the phenomenon. The feminist theologian, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza has been a major influence in the direction of my growing awareness of the struggle for women in my Church tradition. Her numerous books and 'addresses' prompted me to explore at deeper levels an understanding of ekklesia.\* Through her, I entered the circle of the feminist theologians, whose thoughts and reflections challenged me as I sensed my hunger to re-envision a God who is the Divine Feminine, a God who might look like me.<sup>34</sup> McNiff introduced me to the process of 'image dialogues.'

It is my hope that through this investigation of the experience of drawing mandalas, I can come to know myself better and enhance my counseling ministry. I believe I will be able to contribute to a more complete understanding of the phenomenon of the experience of drawing mandalas for those who seek alternative ways of expression. The primary reason for conducting research is to add knowledge to the

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<sup>34</sup> For a treatment of how women struggle with this concept, see Charry Ruth Anderson & Patricia Hopkins. The Feminine Face of God. Toronto: Bantam Books. 1991.

field as well as to enrich the researcher's and reader's understanding of the topic. This experience requires an internal self-exploration with a focus on my insights. I will respect the specific strategies of the heuristic method and will allow the phenomena to speak for themselves.

### **The Creative Process**

I heartily embrace McNiff's philosophy about staying in touch with one's creative process:

Research in the creative arts therapies should have the smell of the studio, stay close to the practice of art and the statements of artists, respect images, and allow them to present themselves in way native to their being.<sup>35</sup>

As I apply McNiff's thinking to my own research question, his view suggests how the experience of drawing mandalas could provide a visual way for me to delve into the process of self-exploration. In addition, my co-researchers were willing to engage in the drawing of mandalas, reflect on their experiences and articulate them clearly. Their participation helps validate the research and increases the weight of the conclusions since I am using their mandalas along with my own as means of gathering data.

### **A Unique Story**

The originality of this dissertation is related to both the research topic – the creation of mandalas – and the process for analysis – the experience of and reflection on the creative process of individuation. In addition, the selection of the research model, the choice of the participants who had no previous experience with drawing mandalas, and the heuristic methods of collecting and processing the data, all contribute to the unique aspects of this dissertation.

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<sup>35</sup> Shaun McNiff. "Research and Scholarship in the Creative Arts Therapies." The Arts in Psychotherapy. Vol. 14, No. 4, 1986, 291.

There will also be a strong focus on the role of mandalas in ministry and their relationship to spirituality, theology and psychotherapy. Finally, I will remember that humans participate in Divine Creativity in a variety of ways – including the drawing of mandalas.

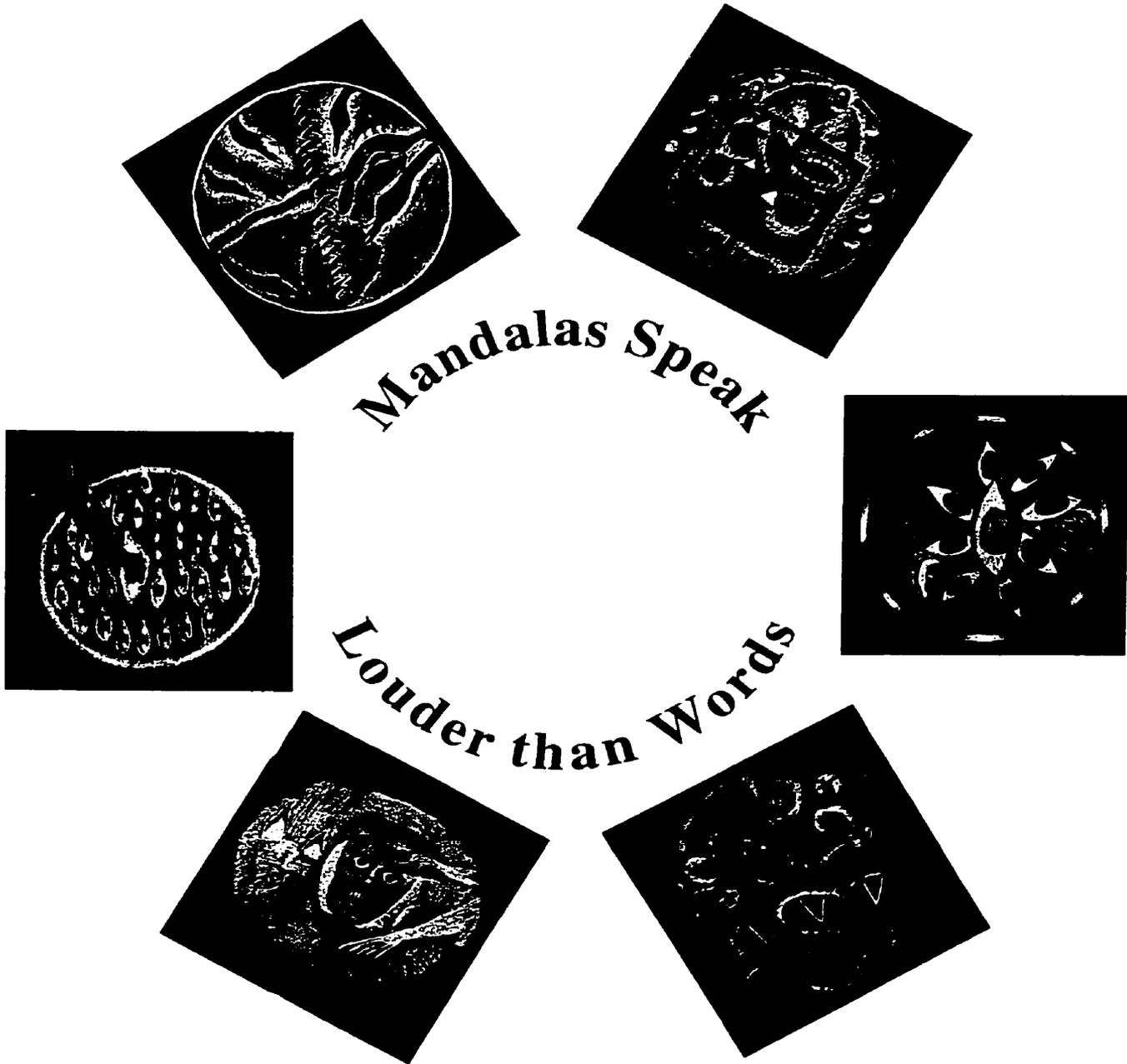
### **What to Expect**

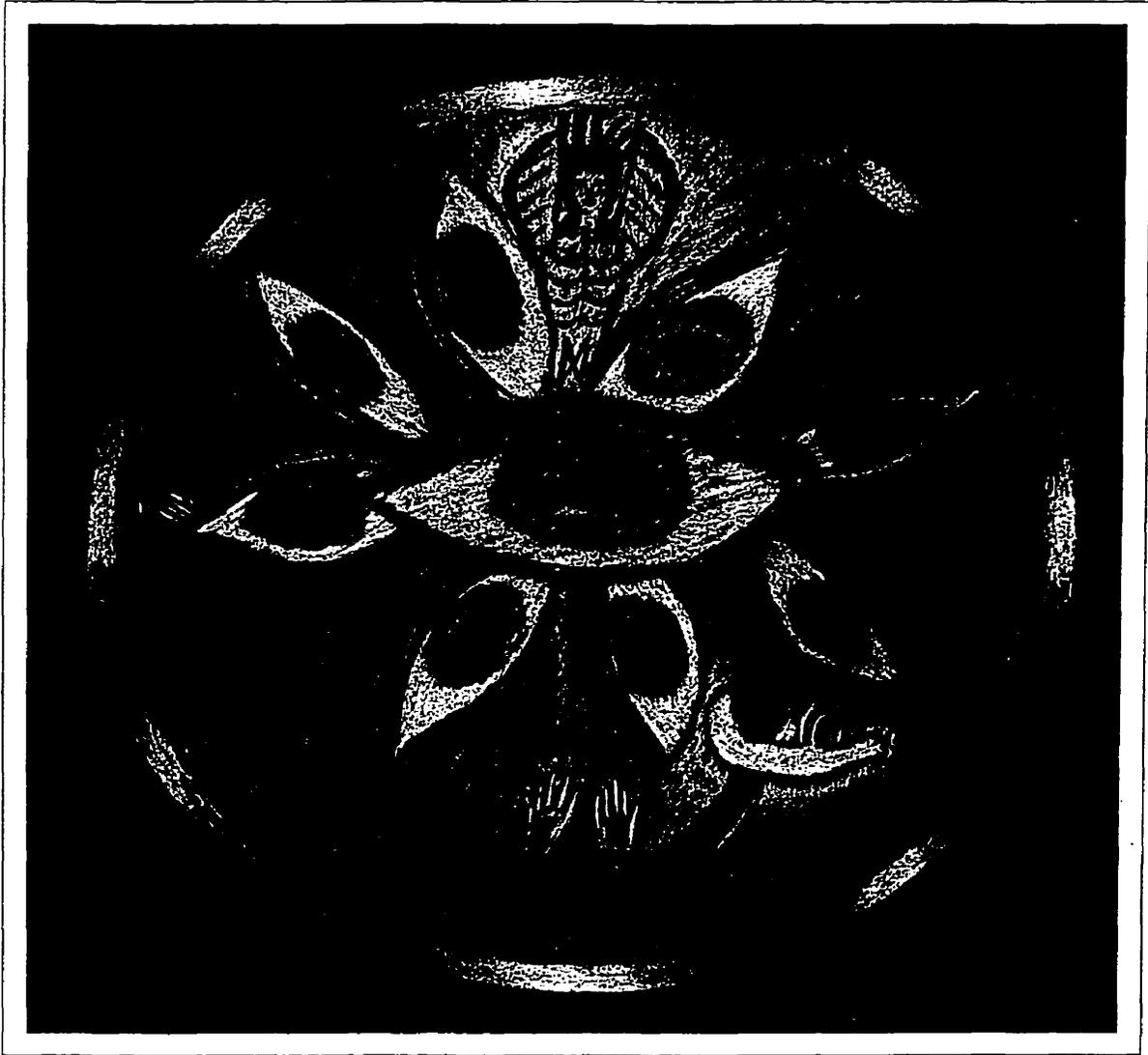
In Chapter One, I have stated my research goals and briefly addressed the heuristic model of research. In Moustakas' terminology, the Introduction and Chapter One have described my 'initial engagement' in deciding to enter the Doctor of Ministry program at St. Stephen's and in formulating my research question. In the following chapters, I intend to establish the uniqueness of this study within the existing literature in the field of mandalas as well as the limitations of the study.

Chapter Two will explore the personal dimensions of my research question and elaborate on the 'initial engagement' stage relative to the pursuit of this Project/Dissertation. In Chapter Three, I will trace my personal origins with the mandala and enter into the internal process of the creative self-process. I will then elaborate on the methodology used in this Project/Dissertation. Chapter Four will explain the process of data collection using the heuristic method and the participation of my co-researchers.

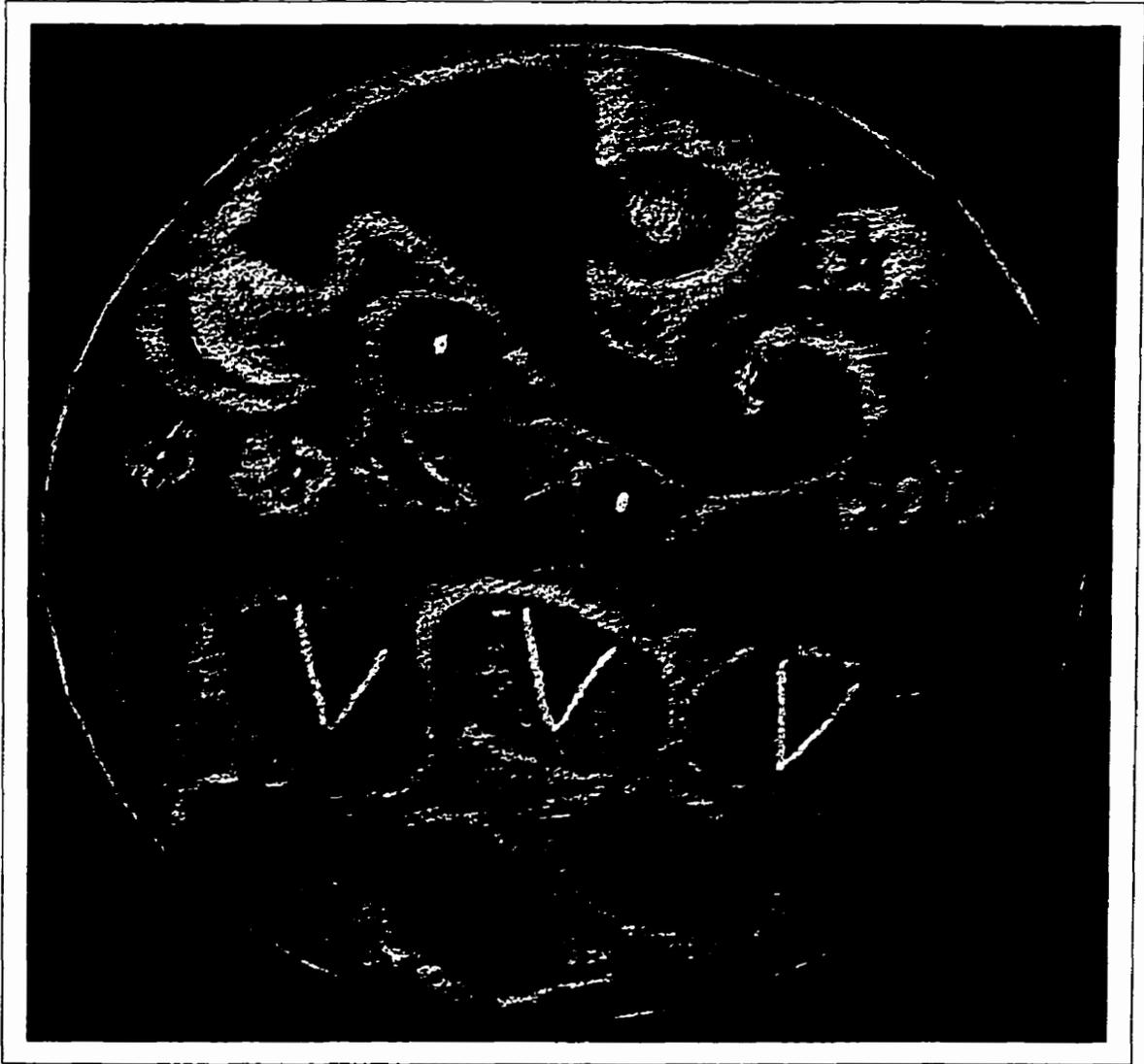
Chapter Five takes the inquiry further by examining the process of drawing mandalas in detail and reflecting on what Moustakas calls the 'Immersion and Incubation' stages of heuristic research. Chapter Six will present a spiritual and theological integration of the experience of drawing the mandala. It will also touch on what Moustakas calls the 'Illumination' stage of the research process. In Chapter Seven, I will review the literature that applies to my research question. Chapter Eight will present a summary of this Project/Dissertation and its conclusions. It will reflect what Moustakas calls the 'Explication and Creative Synthesis' phase of the heuristic method. In other words, this final Chapter will examine the research question for the purposes of a 'research in ministry' using the mandala as a tool for the experience of self-discovery at many levels.

# Chapter II

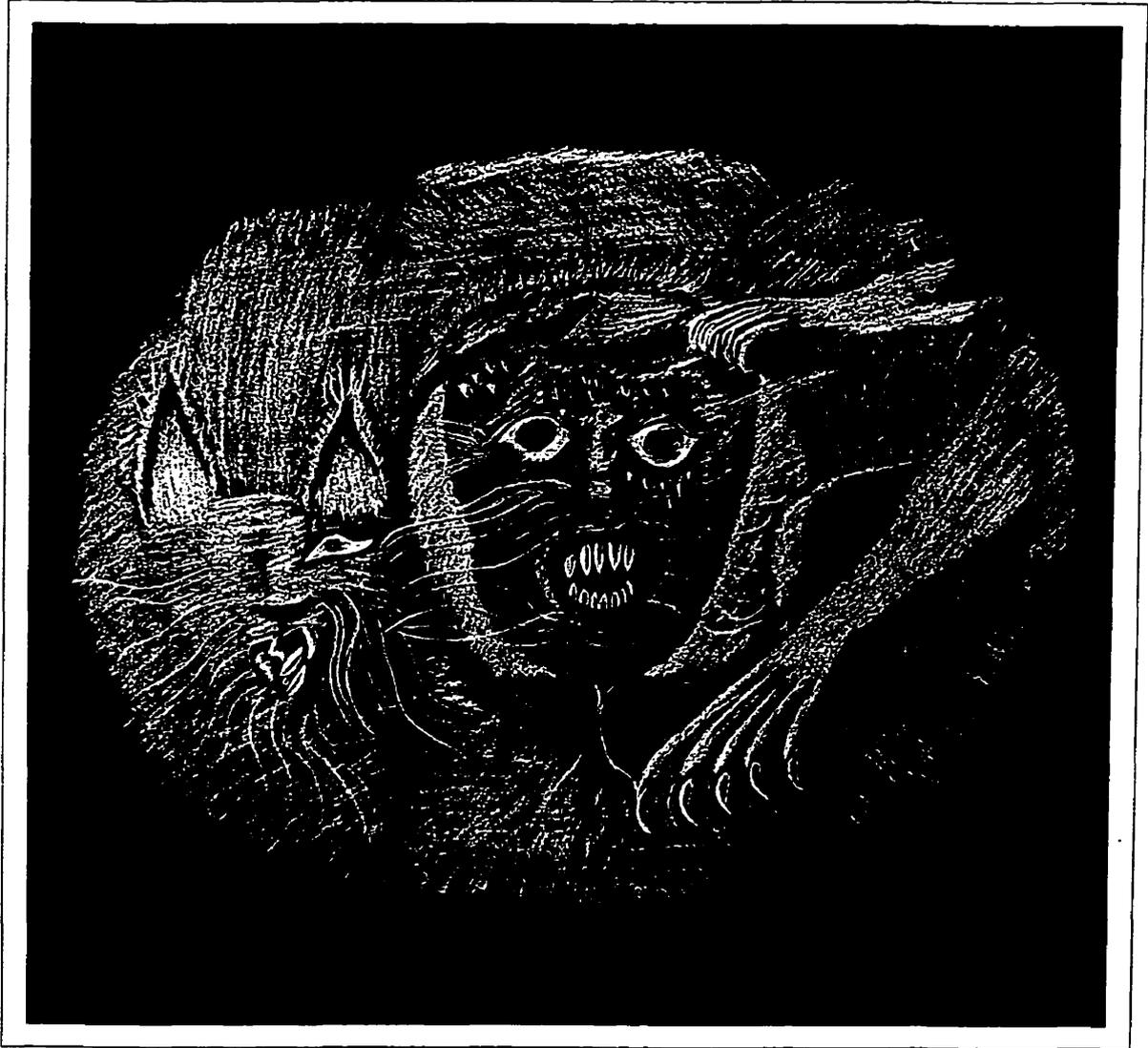




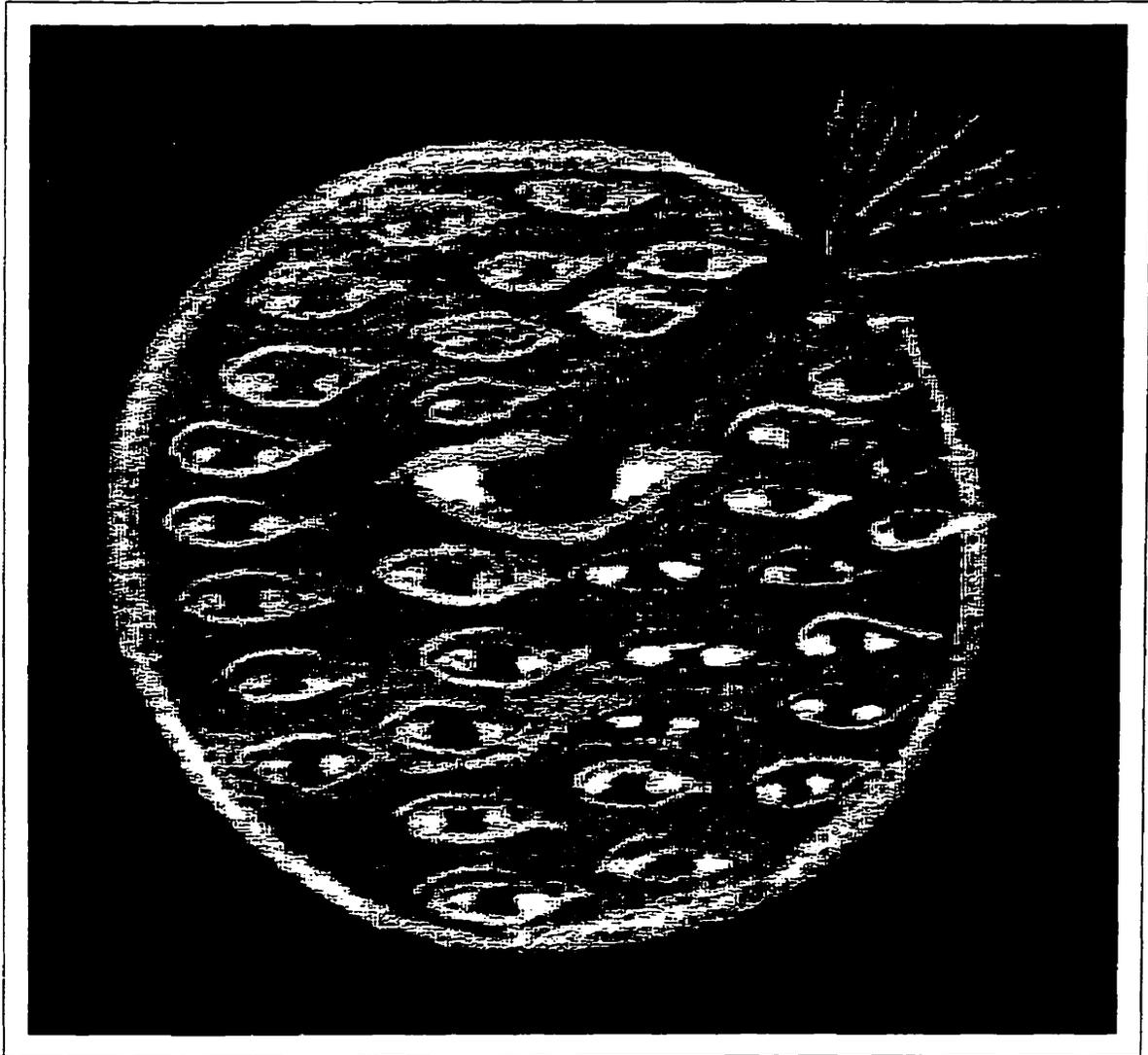
Under the Microscope



Mother and Eggs



The Wolf



The Phallic Eye

Stories instantaneously bypass the ego. The soul and spirit are always listening deeply. The story of one's experience flows where it is needed, and applies itself there. The story helps to make that part of the psyche clear and strong again.<sup>36</sup>

Since 1991 I have been employed as a Creative Expressions Therapist and Pastoral Counselor at a Pastoral Counseling Clinic in Edmonton. During this time, I was accustomed to using various artistic expressions as a therapeutic way for clients to access hidden reservoirs buried in their unconscious. My work with these clients and their response to the artistic expressions of music, art, and dance reinforced my awareness of the power of creativity as a process revealing the subtle nuances of the psyche. Through creative expression, clients have been able to integrate previously repressed material into their consciousness and come to a deeper sense of wholeness.

### **Traditional Tools for Self-Revelation**

As a Pastoral Counselor, I have often administered the Myers-Briggs Typological Instrument (MBTI), a Jungian-based personality assessment tool for clients.<sup>37</sup> In addition, I used the MBTI in presenting workshops for various groups in other contexts. The MBTI identifies and emphasizes the gifts, strengths and differences in the dynamics of personal behaviors. Because it also reveals personal patterns when working with shadow \* material, I recognized the MBTI as a very practical tool for

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<sup>36</sup> Clarissa Pinkola Estes, interviewed in "Sounds True Catalogue," 1992, 29.

<sup>37</sup> See Footnote 11, Chapter One.

identifying underdeveloped aspects of the personality. As a result, I began to use the MBTI more frequently because I thought it was a strong instrument for determining the most effective kinds of interventions for clients who came to see me for counseling.

As I worked with the MBTI data, I would often use circles and other symbols. I found the circle to be the most effective symbol to visually demonstrate the concept of the whole personality of each type characterized by the Myers-Briggs instrument.

### **Mandala MARI® Card Test©**

I happened to chance upon an article describing the Mandala MARI® Card Test©<sup>38</sup> developed by art therapist Joan Kellogg. I wondered if the mandala could also aid me in my counseling practice. I suspected that the connection between the mandala and self-awareness could be strong since I knew that the circle is considered the first graphic realization of an individual's sense of wholeness or Self. The simple circle becomes the mirror of the Self. As psychoanalyst, Erich Neumann, who was strongly influenced by Carl Jung suggests:

The earliest symbols to emerge are the simplest, which we usually designate as "abstract," e.g., the circle and the cross. They are closest to the non-visual character of the "*archetype an sich*," and are to be understood as the pre-concrete and pre-pictorial form of the beginning, whose simplicity is elementary and not abstract.<sup>39</sup>

Since the individuation process is a journey into the development of the total Self, I suspected that the mandala could be a vehicle for this self-discovery process.

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<sup>38</sup> The MARI® Card Test©, developed by Joan Kellogg (1993) is an assessment process based on mandala form, cross-cultural archetypal symbols, and color (hue and tone). It is referred to variously as a life-cycle process or an archetypal process. It presupposes that inherent in the existence of organic and inorganic matter and nonmatter, there is a natural unfolding sequence. I wish to express my thanks to Jonna Douglass for both her direction in my level I training with this method and for her Ph.D. thesis, The MARI® Card Test©: A Reliability Study of an Adapted Group Version Administered to Sex Offenders. Santa Barbara: Pacifica Graduate Institute, 1995, 45.

<sup>39</sup> Erich Neumann. The Great Mother. (trans. by Ralph Manheim). Bollingen Series XLVII. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991, 19.

It is important to understand how the concept of Self will be used throughout this research. Art therapist, Ryce-Menuchin, describes “self” as represented in the mandala:

The self is believed to be represented by the center, by the surrounding contents and by the circumference jointly. The mandala is thus, the most powerful symbol of the self-known to Jungian psychology.<sup>40</sup>

In addition, Kellogg’s work influenced me to seriously consider the use of the mandala in my own counseling ministry. In 1996, I attended a workshop in Florida on “Kellogg’s Mari Course in Mandala Assessment” given by Jonna Douglass, a Jungian psychotherapist. This workshop trained clinicians to administer and to interpret the Mandala MARI® Card Test©. Douglass reinforced Kellogg’s position: Artistic expression is a process which has the potential to reveal and integrate the Psyche. At that time, my own experience of drawing the mandala was quite limited. However, I began to create mandalas as a personal discovery in order to explore applying the process to my clients. As all therapists know, it is important and essential that creative techniques be experienced personally before introducing them to clients. The power of a non-verbal expression can only be fully understood through personal exploration. The MARI® Card training seminar consisted of an introduction to Kellogg’s theory and the recognition of its archetypal \* stages<sup>41</sup> set within the context of Jungian psychology. In addition to the theory, we did mandala work which consisted of drawing mandalas, choosing various designs and colors from cards,<sup>42</sup> discussing and interpreting the results. Kellogg’s theoretical foundation centers on how symbols and colors convey unconscious issues. The MARI® Card system she has developed relates symbols, shapes and colors to the various stages in the life and self-awareness of the individual.

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<sup>40</sup> J. Ryce-Menuchin. The Self in Early Childhood. London: Free Association Books, 1988, 67.

<sup>41</sup> J. Kellogg’s Mandala: Path of Beauty. Baltimore: Mandala Assessment and Research Institute, 1978. Joan Kellogg based the MARI® Card Test© on Jung’s theories of archetypal imagery and organized her observations of hundreds of recurring patterns, images, and shapes in mandala drawings by several patient populations, into a circular design with 13 basic structures, called the Archetypal Stages of the Great Round of the Mandala.

<sup>42</sup> Kellogg developed a system of analyzing color implications within the mandala based on the research of German psychiatrist Max Luscher. He developed an intricate diagnostic system linking color choices with current feeling states and psychological concerns. See M. Luscher. The Luscher Color Test. New York: Random House, 1969.

The MARI® Card Test© addresses methods of assessment based on a relationship between the selection of certain symbols and the structure of the Psyche, which manifests itself in particular behaviors.<sup>43</sup> Through this training seminar I discovered an assessment tool which uses the mandala to manifest aspects of the psyche and particular behaviors of individuals.

While I respected the Kellogg training in using the mandala and could see its value in client assessments, I feared a counselor-centered approach to its interpretation. I questioned how clients could possibly integrate elements of their own psyche, especially, if *I, the counselor, interpreted their images*. This apprehension was based on my own anxiety over what my peers in the training group might impose on me as they discussed and interpreted the ‘stages’ of my mandalas. I felt exposed and vulnerable before my peers in the training seminar.

My mandala “Under the Microscope” expresses this fear.<sup>44</sup> All of the eyes I drew seemed to represent the sense of exposure I felt in front of the others in the workshop. Would my self-revelation lead to negative psychological labels? The central female figure represented a nurturing goddess holding me in her many arms despite the prying eyes of those who surrounded me. I felt the big eye in the center of the mandala represented the authorities who knew more than I did and who would expose my unknowing. The color of the eyes was the color of my own eyes suggesting the strength of my negative critic.

Intellectually, I knew that the purpose of the various projective tests (assessments) was to possibly inform the professional about important issues in the client’s life requiring attention. But my own clinical experience revealed clients were more comfortable with their art expression if they were not concerned about being categorized in some professional handbook like the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, (DSM-IV™).<sup>45</sup> Clients knew their art was respected as a unique reflection of themselves. Reflecting on my own apprehensions which surfaced in the Kellogg training workshop and in my own clinical experience, I came to this conclusion: When a therapist has a positive, open attitude towards the client, therapy was more successful. In my practice, most clients

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<sup>43</sup> Op. Cit., 4.

<sup>44</sup> The mandalas referred to throughout this Chapter are found on pp 28-31.

<sup>45</sup> Diagnostic Criteria from DSM-IV™. Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1994.

entered into a counseling relationship because they had lost their ability to grasp what was happening in their life situation. They usually felt that they had no guidelines, no voice, and no inner authority to handle the presenting problem.

### **A Client's Voice**

In light of this desire to help my clients express themselves, I wondered how the use of a projective instrument, like the mandala and the MARI® Cards might give voice and authority to the client. This question led me to explore various assessment models. At the same time, I invited clients to engage in active imagination techniques using their mandalas.

It became apparent to me how the process of employing a projective assessment tool contradicted the thinking of McNiff<sup>46</sup> whose work on creativity had influenced my practice. Artistic images revealed through the creative process should be viewed as independent beings, with which one dialogues. By giving these images their independence, they were liberated from the client's well-worn schemas. Neither McNiff's position on image dialogue nor active imagination techniques lead the client to censorship or negative judgements. McNiff states:

In order to practice imaginal dialogue, it is necessary to respect the image as an animated thing that is capable of offering support and guidance.<sup>47</sup>

I became aware of my lack of comfort with many projective assessment instruments. I had to examine the source of my own discomfort with art therapy assessment instruments. I came to realize how the source of my discomfort stems from my own fear of being labeled with a pathology. Empowering the client to speak led to greater possibilities than I, as a counselor, could ever have imagined. I considered the words and stories of my clients to be sacred. I would never attempt to interpret another's 'soul process.' A clinician's interpretation of the assessment tool in my experience did not make sense in the context of my therapeutic approach. The clients' words were most important

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<sup>46</sup> Shaun McNiff. "Ethics and the Autonomy of Images." *The Arts in Psychotherapy*. No. 18, 1993, 277-284.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

when attempting to uncover their deeper messages through imagery. I became more convinced how the secrets of the soul were revealed when wrapped in an aura of safety which surrounds the visual form.

### **Letting the Mandalas Speak**

Since the interpretation of the mandala involved the use of words, I turned my attention to the language of the soul. I have participated in a Jungian Study group, which studied several of Jung's Collected Works.<sup>48</sup> While in this study group, I also discovered a wonderful little book titled Psyche Speaks by Jungian analyst, Russell Arthur Lockhart. His thoughts on 'sophistication' captured my imagination immediately. Since I was brought up to value what I perceived as 'sophistication' in an individual, Lockhart's concept forced a re-examination. In his chapter on "Inaugurating's Hidden Image" Lockhart writes: "The more sophisticated we become the more distant we are from the images hidden in the language we use."<sup>49</sup> The images expressed in the mandala speak louder than words. Still, the creator of the mandala struggles to talk with the images to arrive at a deeper understanding of Self. The language of the mandala demands a dwelling within soul with what Lockhart called "things of truth and reality."<sup>50</sup> I reflected on "the things of truth and reality" in my life, and in the life of others. When applied to the interpretation of mandalas, how could "the things of truth and reality" be revealed in the images and words used to describe the images?

One of my goals in Pastoral Counseling has been to assist an individual to reach a level of self-empowerment through his or her own insights. An essential component of the self-empowerment process is the discovery and verbalization of what the client perceives to be the truth of their selves and situations. This attempt to verbalize the story of the soul is often facilitated by the personal images represented in the mandala. Lockhart also stresses the importance of words as a tool for self-awareness

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<sup>48</sup> We studied in great detail C. Jung's Aion, Answer to Job, and his last book, The Mysterium Coniunctionis. The last book was studied along with E. Edinger's The Mysterium Lectures. We have met bi-monthly over several years and continue to meet at the time of this writing.

<sup>49</sup> Russell Arthur Lockhart. Psyche Speaks: A Jungian Approach to Self and World. Wilmette: Chiron Publications, 1987, 43.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 46

and empowerment. He referred to a dream in which he was asked: “Do you not know that words are eggs, that words carry life, that words give birth?”<sup>51</sup>

The idea of words as eggs has found expression in my own struggle to express my truth and feelings. I drew a mandala of an image of the divine mother resting above her eggs. I have called this mandala “Mother and Eggs.” This mandala grew out of meditation. These images express my hunger for the divine mother. She is represented in a reclining position holding the full moon. Below her are numerous eggs, some seem to have hatched, others are still waiting for the completion of the birthing process. These eggs seem ready to burst forth and express new images of the divine feminine. This mandala invites me to discover what nurtures me as a woman and to explore what life I create.

Many years ago I wrote a poem titled “The Flowering.” The words of the poem seem to connect to the very essence of my images of the eggs represented in my mandala. The eggs were breaking open – and birthing – all images of the feminine. My poem, “The Flowering” is as follows:

#### THE FLOWERING

Psyche opens windows at soul level  
 Overcomes blocks, those unwanted tenants  
 Bridges consciousness with dreams, images,  
 Mandalas and stories

Creativity, intuition and unity  
 Responsibility to be, to pry open,  
 Rid emptiness of old roles stuffed with rules

Clean performance cages  
 Sweep out left brain crumbs  
 Let inner voice sing

Attention stirs truth  
 Playfulness becomes the work  
 Seriousness becomes the play

Midwives dance to the birthing  
 With surrendering rhythms, metaphors and metamorphosis  
 Without self-consciousness or egotistical craving

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 45.

New soul emerges to deeper realities  
 Beyond explanations to what is other  
 To profound wisdom

New soul life, wisdom, Sophia  
 To in, intuit...  
 What may flower in me.

Marjorie Laplante

### **Mandalas and the Spiritual Voice**

I began to see the links between my poem and my mandalas. I wanted to seek a more direct connection between the emerging images and themes of my mandalas, my ability to articulate my process of individuation along with self-integration. My search led me to Judith Cornell. I began working under her guidance and direction in her intensive mandala workshops. The participants in her workshops were from varied professions... some were 'professional' artists, others were art therapists, pastoral counselors, or psychotherapists. Cornell's workshops introduced me to the spiritual dimensions of the mandalas. She demonstrated how the mandala was considered a spiritual experience within recognized spiritual traditions and emphasized the practice of drawing mandalas offered the possibility for spiritual transformation.

Within the context of the Cornell workshops, I began to understand how the images created in the mandala were metaphors representing both matter and spirit. With this twin nature, the mandala can assume the role of a transformer, encouraging those on the journey to greater self-awareness to move from one state to another. Through Cornell, I learned a process to extend the experience of drawing a mandala to reach the significant images of the sacred. This experience encouraged me to explore the divine feminine in my own spirituality and theological dimensions. I have included a further reflection on the divine feminine in Chapter Six in my study.

Cornell expresses the power of the mandala to reveal the sacred in personal experiences when she states: “Like Hildegard, we are unique sparks of divinity meant to reveal an essence of God that is uniquely ours to express.”<sup>52</sup> Hildegard von Bingen was a twelfth-century mystic, who was guided by the inner eye and the inner ear of soul. The eye is a well-known symbol for God. The eye is the circle of knowing represented by the mandala. Hildegard used mandalas to express spiritual truths as well as a vehicle for illuminating her revelations from God.<sup>53</sup> Her creation-centered spirituality emphasized her perception of people as called to assist the creative God. Jung also emphasized how the mandala is considered an ‘eye.’ He wrote:

The eye may well stand for consciousness... an organ of perception, looking into its own background. It sees its own light there, and when this is clear and pure the whole body is filled with light. Under certain conditions consciousness has a purifying effect.  
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The mandala, or eye, expresses a symbolic language which gives voice to both the feminine and male characteristics of a loving God. This is done in the context of human relational, loving, and nurturing activities associated with God. The experience of drawing mandalas enabled me to journey inward and witness the alchemy,\* or transformation of spirit through art. I came to anticipate the possibility of my mandalas becoming the rich feminine soil to explore the mystery of Sophia-God. Continued exploration of the eye-mandala relationship brought me to reflection on the gospel passage on the simile of light.

No one who lights a lamp hides it away or places it [under a bushel basket], but on a lamp stand so that those who enter might see the light. The lamp of your body is your

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<sup>52</sup> Judith Cornell. Mandala: Drawing Luminous Symbols for Healing. Wheaton: Quest Publications, 1994., 123.

<sup>53</sup> One of Hildegard’s mandalas is: “On the Articulation of the Human Body” as found in Cornell, *Ibid.*, 126. (See Appendix A) This mandala reflects Hildegard’s thinking on the way the Divine is revealed through sound and light.

...I am the day that does not shine by the sun; rather by me the sun is ignited. I am the Reason that is not made perceptible by anyone else; rather, I am the One by whom every reasonable being draws breath. And so to gaze at my countenance I have created mirrors in which I consider all the wonders of my originality, which will never cease. I have prepared for myself these mirror forms so that they may resonate in a song of praise. For I have a voice like the thunderbolt by which I keep in motion the entire universe in the living sounds of all creation... By my word, which was and is without beginning in myself, I caused a mighty light to emerge.” Matthew Fox, ed., Hildegard of Bingen’s Book of Divine Works. Santa Fe: Bear and Company, 1987, 128.

<sup>54</sup> C. G. Jung. Mandala Symbolism. trans. by R.F.C. Hull. from *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Vol. 9, Part I. New Jersey: Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, 1973, 53.

eye. When your eye is sound, then your whole body is filled with light, but when it is bad, then your body is in darkness. Take care, then, that the light in you does not become darkness. If your whole body is full of light, and no part of it is in darkness, then it will be as full of light as a lamp illuminating you with its brightness.<sup>55</sup>

I realized that the purpose of mandalic imagery is to bring to light what is in the darkness or in our unconscious.

### **The Spirits of Expression**

According to McNiff, “Creative expression generates rays, energies, vibrations, forces and spirits that influence people who contemplate them.”<sup>56</sup> My therapeutic work utilized such creative expressions as McNiff described. I have discovered how energies are indeed generated in those who contemplate creative expressions. The images generated by creative expression have invited both my clients and myself to respond with language, movement, and sound. Together, we have experienced a constant interaction between our words, our stories, and our pictures. In working with my mandalas, I realized how I was trying to utilize a language about what I experienced through my senses. I learned how to become ‘intimate’ with my mandalas so that I might discover new ways of ‘being with and understanding them. As I became more comfortable with my own creative expressions, I recognized the significance, the unity of images, forms, color, and objects surfacing in my mandala drawings. With this clarity of understanding came an infusion of creative vitality.

This new vitality was fueled by some of the thinking of Rudolf Steiner, an educational philosopher, who developed a theory about a ‘spiritual science.’ This thinking supposes that spirits, not molecular structures, are what really exist ‘behind the sense world.’ He applied a spiritual approach to the arts in therapy and education. But Steiner’s view was limited because it excluded the shadow

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<sup>55</sup> Luke 11: 33-36. Also see Matthew 6: 22.

<sup>56</sup> Shaun McNiff. “Auras and Their Medicines” in *The Arts in Psychotherapy*. No. 4, 1995, 297.

component of the spirit world as recognized in depth psychology.<sup>57</sup> For instance, depth psychology embraces both the light and shadow sides of the creative process. In the darkness of self-doubt and confusion, the creative process brings forth a new reality or expression of self, which can be accepted as real, true, and beautiful. Depth psychology embraces the soul's aches, pains and transformative disturbances. Disturbing images in mandalas, for example, can be very transformative when they are accompanied by reflection and understanding. The disturbing images that presented themselves in my mandalas emerged from the shadow side of my psyche. By paying attention to them, I embarked on a spiritual journey that has gifted me with greater self-awareness, individuation and a greater commitment to use this process in my ministry.

While I was in the process of recognizing the shadow, or dark spirit energy within me, I drew my "Wolf" mandala. The mask in the center of the mandala seems to represent my shadow side, the things I want to cover up about myself. In particular, I want to cover up my rage at being repressed as a woman in our culture and church. I cover up my rage at being so slow to 'grow up.' I am angry about the delay in my awakening to the realities of spirit and Self. The wolf is the companion to the mask and symbolizes yet more anger and rage. To me, the wolf is primal and relies on instinct for survival. The teeth of the wolf are menacing and the wolf howls in frustration. Yet somehow, the wolf stands in a strong relationship to the moon. Howling at the moon, the wolf gives voice to my sense of betrayal of the divine feminine. I felt good about drawing this mandala. I could express my anger. I could get 'my claws' into something, even though I was unable to articulate exactly what that was. This "Wolf" mandala is the stuff of soul work. I greeted my shadow side and I began to experience and discover the ways of the interior journey.

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<sup>57</sup> Depth Psychology was developed by Carl Jung and is considered a branch of transpersonal psychology. It examines early life experiences, unconscious forces which influence behaviors and ego development. It is a branch of psychology that concerns itself with the phenomenon of the unconscious at the personal, archetypal, and collective levels.

### The Villain's Return

Other mandalas also revealed the shadow side of my self. My mandalas were filled with images of snakes, hands, animals of the underworld, funny little creatures, and many eyes. These images surfaced in the context of personal meditation. However, these images precipitated a great battle within me. My psyche entered an enormous struggle with the ego. My ego wanted to draw mandalas with images of flowers, fairies, and things I considered to be beautiful. Above all, my ego wanted to use beautiful colors. Color and shadings are principal transmitters of emotion and of feeling for me in my drawings.

Timidity was an overwhelming demon. It seemed to censor my soul expression. I had to learn to trust the images and the colors of 'each image' as they wanted to be drawn. I wanted to draw 'lovely' mandalas. But my spirit preferred something else. When I would compare my mandalas with those of others, I would often be frustrated and despair. In other words, I lost a sense of self. I forgot to honor my images at times and overlooked how images can be "our co-participants in creative activity."<sup>58</sup> To let go of ego was foreign to me. My ego held there must be a right way to draw and needed to be in control. The fear controlled my soul completely. Judith Cornell writes:

As an artist I discovered that when my consciousness was based on fear, I felt fragmented in mind, body, and spirit and produced disjointed, dissonant imagery in art. This realization was my first that the mind has the power to alter both internal and external reality, depending on how it is focused.<sup>59</sup>

Cornell's comments about fear are a strong reminder of my memories of the Christmas tree fiasco in grade four. Now I seemed to have even greater fear of 'doing something wrong' in the creative process. Tears often streamed down my cheeks in this struggle to trust the process instead of my ego. But to trust the process meant battling the demon, the negative art critic clothed in the nun's habit. Facing

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<sup>58</sup> McNiff. *Art As Medicine*. Op. Cit., 63.

<sup>59</sup> Judith Cornell. *Drawing the Light from Within: Keys to Awaken Your Creative Power*. Quest Books: Wheaton: 1997, xxii.

these villains led me to realize the importance of an inspirational environment and an atmosphere of safety as essential ingredients for spontaneous creative expression.

### **A Turning Moment**

At one of the intensive seminars with Cornell, we were invited to draw a mandala which represented something we would like to let go of, or leave behind. We were asked to draw this mandala in the most beautiful way possible, with colors that spoke to us. I drew the “Phallic Eye.”<sup>60</sup> This “Phallic Eye” was a conscious attempt to represent animus energy. In working with this mandala, I grew more aware of the negative perceptions that surrounded the eyes and phallic image. For me, this mandala came to represent an explosive and negative energy seeming to clash with the gentler feminine anima energy. The phallic eye seemed like it could explode at any time and deface the image or truth of my own self. This was definitely not a welcome image for me. I reflected on the use of color in this mandala. I realized the camouflaging role of color for the seductive male who eventually shows his “true” colors. Despite the negative associations attached to the images in this mandala, I was pleased with the visual representation. For once, I had drawn my mandala and experienced an aesthetic gratification!

After working on this mandala for several hours, Cornell ushered us into the courtyard where a fire was lighted in which each one of us was individually invited to burn her/his mandala. Despite my pride and satisfaction in the creation of this mandala, I was asked to destroy it. A professional artist in the group had come to admire my mandala. I felt proud with the praise my work received from this ‘authority.’ My old demon was back, but this time disguised! Cornell’s request to burn this mandala was an unforgettable moment in which I experienced life as very temporary. I could not let my mandala

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<sup>60</sup> The mandala of the “Phallic Eye” took several hours to draw. We had not been alerted we would burn it in a ritual setting. In my surprise and shock I grabbed my camera because I wanted to keep this mandala. Of course, many questions surfaced around the reasons I wanted to hold onto this image.

be burned without snatching my camera and taking a photo of it. At one level this experience seemed to bring to the surface my inability to let go, my need to hold on.

However, upon deeper reflection, I began to seriously question this particular activity which is definitely based on an eastern spiritual tradition. In the Buddhist tradition, a sacred sand mandala is dismantled in a ritualistic way after it is completed. This is usually interpreted as an act of detachment. In the Buddhist mind however, the act of dismantling the mandalas is the most effective way of preserving it. For me, this tradition seemed to contradict Western spiritual thinking, especially with respect to the feminist spiritual theologians. In this instance, I felt I had burned away a part of my soul life. Putting the Phallic Eye mandala in the fire reminded me of how women for centuries had been burned for their expressions of their soul lives. At the time, I was unable to express how profoundly I was affected by this experience. I had remembered the words of poet Rainer Maria Rilke who put it simply: "Words are the last resort for expressing what happens deep within us." Although this ritual caused a conflict in me, I sensed it was very important for my inner soul journey.

The reasons why this burning of the phallic eye mandala was both important and difficult would be revealed through the heuristic method I would employ in this research.

## Chapter III

### Not Your Ordinary Story

The methodology of the qualitative researcher departs from traditional procedures and is best suited to the kind of interior investigation pursued by this research project. Still the methodology is hard to describe and validate. Even experts in qualitative research have pointed out:

In presenting the pros and cons of their work, qualitative researchers cannot point to the test, the sampling procedures, the statistical treatment, the outside expert. They can only point to themselves and to how they decided to sample, to treat data, to work with others, to confer with experts, to carry out their research, and to share their findings... The sum total of what people are will shape them as qualitative research instruments.<sup>61</sup>

Heuristic research involves a relationship between the researcher and the person(s) researched. In their exchanges and interactions they can transform each other and give birth to something new in their intercommunication.

This study is about the experience of creating mandalas. This experience involves a particular kind of relationship between the creator of the mandala and the mandala itself. In addition, this study also explores the experience of co-researchers and their relationships to the process of creating mandalas. This study is both a personal encounter with creativity as well as a psychological dialogue with both my personal process and the process of my co-researchers.

Rollo May describes creativity as the desire to bring something new into being.<sup>62</sup> He argues creative people are always seeking new forms for the expression and comprehension of their creative efforts as well as seeking a synthesis that demands communication. In other words, creative people want others to perceive the art form in a new and different way. In writing about the importance of creativity, May emphasizes how: "Creativity is a necessary sequel to being and exists for deepening

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<sup>61</sup> M. Ely, with M. Anzul, T. Friedman, D. Garner, A.M. Steinmetz. Circles within Circles: Doing Qualitative Research. London: The Falmer Press, 1991, 103.

<sup>62</sup> For a complete investigation into the creative act, see R. May. The Courage to Create. New York: Norton, 1975.

and enlarging the meaning in our lives.”<sup>63</sup> May also highlights the basic importance of subjective knowledge in the phenomenological method when he writes:

There is no such thing as truth or reality for a living human being except as he participates in it, is conscious of it, has some relationship to it.<sup>64</sup>

### A Method for the Mandala Story

The word ‘method’ is rooted in the words ‘beyond’ or ‘after,’ and ‘way or journey.’<sup>65</sup> In selecting the qualitative way to approach this mandala story, I felt as though I was walking on new and sacred ground. It seems similar to the experience of walking a labyrinth which, in the context of my research project, is an open mandala, full of twists and turns leading to the center... the essence or heart of the matter. In some respects, the qualitative method is a process that carries the researcher along a circular path which leads beyond, a beyond the expected or anticipated findings to, a process of self-reflection. This interior journey gives the researcher an opportunity to re-search again and again.

Jungian therapist, Deborah Barrett addresses the question of selecting a research method that is most suitable for a chosen topic. She writes:

The research method acts as the container and, perhaps, the catalyst for the relationship between the researcher and the research topic. When selecting a method, then, it seems appropriate to begin by asking two questions: What do the natures of the research topic *and* the researcher require so that the union might be a fruitful one, and what best contains the alchemical process of this particular research?<sup>66</sup>

What Barrett calls the ‘alchemical process,’ the mysterious transformation that occurs in the interaction of two substances, is a key ingredient in qualitative research. In selecting this qualitative or heuristic approach for my research project, I hoped to honor the nature of the mandala as well as the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., viii.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>65</sup> Deborah A. Barrett. “Through the Forbidden: Journeys of Suffering and Transformation.” Ph.D. Thesis. Santa Barbara: Pacific Graduate Institute, 1996, 11.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 12.

interactive process of creating and understanding it. I anticipated and welcomed the 'alchemical process' of self-transformation.

In choosing the heuristic approach for my research project, I opted for a form of phenomenological research. Another possible choice of methodology for this research project could include other forms of phenomenological research. In general terms, this method emphasizes inductive analysis, description, and the study of the individual's (researcher) perceptions. Phenomenological research is unlike quantitative or empirical research which is concerned with variables, measurements, and numerical data to support an hypothesis or prove cause and effect. In phenomenological research the researcher is focused on the process and not the product or the outcome of the process. Phenomenology places great importance on the nature and meaning of the process rather than the truth of the object. Phenomenology is based on assumptions which differ from those of empiricism. It asserts human beings are 'experiencing creatures.'

One of the most basic concepts of qualitative research is that of the researcher-as-instrument. The researcher as the research instrument takes full responsibility for the quality, accuracy, and trustworthiness of his/her findings. Phenomenology requires a return to the subjective, the experience as it is lived, to gain understanding. It is discovery oriented and therefore well suited to the theme of my Project/Dissertation story. Phenomenology explores how things appear to consciousness or how phenomena are experienced. Instead of a focus on theoretical knowledge, phenomenology values a person's experience of the world as it is experienced.

The concept of phenomenological reduction (a qualitative procedure for dealing with the data) plays an important role in research because the process attempts to arrive at an attitude free of any biases or presuppositions. The phenomenological framework provides a strategy for arriving at the essential meaning of the research findings. Drawing a mandala is not merely the experience of drawing within a circle. The drawing of a mandala is a personal revelation. Part of its essence lies with the individual researcher's perceptions of images as 'personal.' The individual realizes how much of the mandala's meaning comes from the psychic context. The researcher becomes a participant-observer

because this is “closer to the way events take place in everyday life since phenomena are rarely experienced in isolation.”<sup>67</sup>

Moustakas utilizes the phenomenological method and expands its framework to include a heuristic requirement whereby the investigator must have had “a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated.”<sup>68</sup> The word heuristic stems from the Greek “heuriskein,” meaning to discover or find.<sup>69</sup> Moustakas’ concept of heuristic research goes beyond the phenomenological method when he insists that the researcher is not only discovering the essential meanings in a phenomenon, but he/she is also engaged in a process of self-transformation. He states:

...only the experiencing persons... by looking at their own experiences, perceptions, thoughts, feelings and sense... can validly provide portrayals of experience. If one is to know and understand an other’s experience, one must converse directly with the person.<sup>70</sup>

He also asserts the “heuristic researcher [must have] undergone the experience in a vital, intense and full way.”<sup>71</sup> Further, as the researcher reflects on the experience, core themes surface which form the essence of the phenomenon.

An additional meaning of heuristics applies the process to education. The Oxford dictionary also refers to heuristics as “...a system of education under which the pupil is trained to find things for him/herself.”<sup>72</sup> This facet of heuristics is emphasized by art therapist Ratcliffe.

Research on the special place of heuristic learning in psychological growth and change—as opposed to simple accrual of knowledge for practical use—has shown that in order for an individual really to learn something “new,” he needs to have some sort of prior connection so that he can make a meaningful transfer between what is already familiar and what is as yet unknown and irrelevant. Information acquired simply through memorization may be useful for specific purposes for a specified time span, but only when learning occurs as a joint process between inner and outer—when it is

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<sup>67</sup> A. Giorgi. “Convergence and Divergence of Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Psychology.” In Giorgi, A., Fisher, C. & E. Murray. (eds.), Duquesne Studies in Phenomenological Psychology. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1971.

<sup>68</sup> Moustakas. Op. Cit., 1990, 14.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 9. Obviously heuristics relates to the research method of self-inquiry.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>72</sup> The New Oxford Dictionary of English. Oxford: Clarendon, 1998, 861.

actually self (or heuristic) learning, is its value lastingly integrated into the individual as a part of his deepest self.<sup>73</sup>

To promote the connection between the inner and outer aspects of learning, I tried to create an island of peace within myself to leave behind the clutter of daily distractions and psychological theories. I wanted to be free and in direct contact with the phenomenon of my experience. This practice of suspension is known as 'bracketing,' which implies a "suspension of all narrowly confining interests preceding attention to the phenomenon."<sup>74</sup> In other words I deliberately set aside any expectations or associations I might have regarding the phenomenon. Through the practice of bracketing, I developed an approach inviting an "open ended presence to the phenomenon that is unfolding."<sup>75</sup>

Moustakas acknowledges the dynamics of the heuristic odyssey as "the mystery that surrounds me and lures me to let go of the known and swim in an unknown current."<sup>76</sup> Moustakas' heuristic model offers me a framework which is apropos for my study of the mandala drawing experience because of its non linear process. This model also has potential for unearthing rich experiential data in the interaction between researcher and mandala. Moustakas sees research as an "approach which encourages an individual to discover the methods which enable him to investigate further by him/herself."<sup>77</sup> The researcher, as fully as possible, becomes the instrument of research, which is the most distinguishing characteristic of the heuristic process.

Moustakas developed the method of heuristic research and applied this method to the field of psychology in his study of loneliness.<sup>78</sup> The power of his study came from his self-search and self-disclosure. Upon completing his study on loneliness, Moustakas was able to state:

I now believe in such a process of searching and studying, of being open to significant dimensions of experience in which comprehension and compassion mingle; in which

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<sup>73</sup> E. R. Ratcliffe. "The Old Masters' Art Collage: An Art Therapy Technique for Heuristic Self-Discovery." Art Psychotherapy 4, 1977, 31.

<sup>74</sup> A. Giorgi. "Phenomenology and the Foundations of Psychology." In J. F. Cole & W. J. Arnold (eds.), Nebraska Symposium on Motivation (1975): Conceptual Foundations of Psychology. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 313.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Moustakas. *Op. Cit.*, 1990, 13.

<sup>77</sup> Moustakas. "Heuristic Research." *Op. Cit.*, 1967, 101.

<sup>78</sup> See C. E. Moustakas. Loneliness. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1961, Loneliness and Love. 1972, and The Touch of Loneliness. 1975.

intellect, emotion, and spirit are integrated; in which intuition, spontaneity, and self-exploration are seen as components of unified experience.<sup>79</sup>

Out of his study on loneliness Moustakas developed the major steps which contribute to all phases of heuristic inquiry, resulting in a six-phase model.<sup>80</sup> The basic characteristics of the heuristic research model are discernable in his earlier 1967 study in which he began to recognize emerging patterns for the heuristic method. Moustakas outlined a three-phase method of heuristic investigation. This preliminary methodology identified three phases: First, a searching into self; second, a searching with others; third, a review of the literature. He later expanded this model to include six stages which he named: 1) Initial Engagement, 2) Immersion, 3) Incubation, 4) Illumination, 5) Explication and 6) Creative Synthesis. Each one of these stages of heuristic inquiry proved to be important for completing a thorough investigation of my research topic. Each stage generated new and refined thinking which ultimately prepared the ground for a creative synthesis based on the phenomenon.

### **Initial Engagement**

The first stage of Moustakas' research model is called the 'initial engagement.' In this stage the researcher initiates a self-dialogue to discover an area of intense interest carrying enough energy to commit the time and resources to enter into a major study. Often, the phase of initial engagement is a natural outgrowth of the researcher's life experience, both personal and professional. Often the researcher recognizes a prior connection with the research question. In my case, I experienced a prior connection with the experience of drawing mandalas from early workshops helping me to understand the impact of my traumatic fourth grade art experience. As it applied to my research project I described this phase of initial engagement in Chapter Two.

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<sup>79</sup> Moustakas, *Loneliness*, Op. Cit., 107.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

### **Immersion**

According to Moustakas, 'immersion' is the second stage, during which the researcher comes to realize the significance of subjectivity as vital to the heuristic method. My immersion in my research question led me to appreciate the power of the subjective process so essential to heuristics along with calling me to validate this process with co-researchers who shared in the experience of creating and reflecting on mandalas. This stage will be described in Chapter Four.

### **Incubation**

'Incubation', the third stage, is the period of intense creative reflection. However, it is also the time for the researcher to implement a necessary distance from the topic in order to gain a new perspective and renewed understanding of the research topic. The creative reflection must emerge spontaneously out of the researcher's experience. Moustakas describes incubation as a "...process in which the researcher retreats from the intense, concentrated focus on the question."<sup>81</sup> I will describe this stage of my research in Chapter Five.

### **Illumination**

The fourth stage in the heuristic method is 'illumination.' In this stage the researcher arrives at a moment of insight concerning the phenomenon's qualities. This clarity of vision allows the researcher to organize the process and insights into themes. Within the illumination stage, the researcher is guided

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 28.

by his/her trust in the process and in the personal intuition, which illuminates the study's creative drawings and reflections. I will describe this stage in Chapter Six.

### **Explication**

'Explication,' the fifth stage invites the researcher to reexamine the work thus far generated with a 'microscopic' review to make sure the description matches the original creations. Moustakas notes in this stage how: "Concentrated attention is given to creating an inward space and discovering nuances, textures, and constituents of the phenomenon."<sup>82</sup> I will pursue this stage of the research in Chapter Five.

### **Creative Synthesis**

The final stage of heuristic research is the 'creative synthesis.' It encourages the researcher's creative expression to shape the tacit dimension of the conclusion. The synthesis draws on the data and constitutes its own new reality. It ... "may be expressed in a poem, story, drawing, painting, or by some other creative form."<sup>83</sup> I will describe the creative synthesis resulting from this process in Chapter Eight.

### **Finding the Words**

In addition to the pursuit of heuristic inquiry as an avenue to understanding the experience of drawing the mandala, my research question requires a language adequate to this experience. By nature,

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<sup>82</sup> Moustakas. *Op. Cit.*, 1990, 31.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

mandala expression is a unique and highly personal creation. Speaking and writing about the process of creating mandalas requires a ‘nuanced’ language which relates to aesthetics and imagination. Only with such a specialized language will the mandala stories speak from the heart and engage the storyteller and the listener. Van Manen addresses the need for such a language which he calls “a language with its own grammar.”

Objects of art are visual, tactile, auditory, kinetic texts... texts consisting of not a verbal language but a language nevertheless, and a language with its own grammar. Because products of art are, in a sense, lived experiences transformed into transcended configurations.<sup>84</sup>

Using the heuristic methodology, I hope to create mandalas that are “in a sense, lived experiences transformed into transcended configurations.”<sup>85</sup>

### **The Inquiry Design and Process**

Using the heuristic method, I followed a particular sequence of steps in my own investigation of my inner life while drawing mandalas. In the context of this research project, my quest for enhanced self-awareness led to steeping myself in the relationship between myself as the perceiving, experiencing individual in my drawing mandalas and in the context of my life at each given moment. The heuristic method as described by Moustakas is a highly disciplined process which demands a personal and intellectual passion. The intimations of the discovery are sustained by a passion to pursue a question to its satisfactory completion. The researcher is challenged to discover things independently as familiar guidelines are often abandoned. In this way, the researcher becomes something of a pioneer in exploring the stated research question.

Because artistic expression is such a personal experience, the heuristic method seems particularly well suited for my research question. McNiff acknowledges the complexity of this method

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<sup>84</sup> Max Van Manen. Researching Lived Experience. London: The Althouse Press, 1990, 74.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

as it applies to the experience of the creative process when he writes of the opportunities and difficulties related to the personal interaction between artist and the self:

When therapists research their artistic expression, there is a two-way interaction between the artwork and the self... (which) presents both opportunities and difficulties.<sup>86</sup>

When I researched my mandalas, I interacted increasingly with them. I became both the creator and the outside interpreter. Maintaining this dual role required a willingness and ability to move back and forth from moments of solitude, meditation, reflection, conceptualizing, and doing. I faced this ebb and flow of the work in process as a challenge rather than as a difficulty. I accepted this as the pulse or rhythm of the heuristic research process. The rhythm of the heuristic method is like the slow and steady movement of the pendulum in the grandfather/mother clocks in which there are periods of active involvement and passive receptivity. Within this rhythm, I felt both points of connection and separation.

When I started this creative effort in the pursuit of my Project/Dissertation, I consciously tried to remain open to the heuristic process and the ensuing unfolding journey. My experience of creativity in the pursuit of this research project has confirmed my support for Moustakas' contention of the acceptance of such a knowing-not-knowing state of mind and how it plays a pivotal role in the creative process. In the end, this acceptance of uncertainty, and formless chaos, produces a new form.

As I applied the heuristic method to my research project, my dialogue with my mandalas was my mode of inquiry along with the interactive dialogues with my co-researchers. While drawing my mandalas I tried to get in touch with my feelings. Moustakas reinforces the need to stay in touch with self in this heuristic process: "The methodology flow(s) out of inner-awareness, meaning and inspiration."<sup>87</sup>

As the researcher, I became the subject. I was challenged to both experience and interpret the process. It is a very 'private' and individual process of discovery. Personal knowledge must be respected and trusted. Intuitive activity must be honored and attended to. Heuristic researchers are

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<sup>86</sup> Shaun McNiff. *Depth Psychology of Art*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1989, 121.

<sup>87</sup> Moustakas. *Op. Cit.*, 1990, 11.

invited to be themselves. The philosopher, Polanyi writes about this personal knowledge as "...the passionate participation of the knower in the act of knowing."<sup>88</sup>

### **Validation and Co-Researchers**

Validation of heuristic research is more challenging than validation of empirical or quantitative research which relies upon statistical methods to demonstrate validity. Part of the difficulty in validation is associated with the characteristic of heuristic research in as much as it requires a repeated and careful examination of the data gathered from co-researchers. The work compiled with co-researchers must also be experienced and interpreted just as the original mandalas from the primary researcher must be. Of course this compounds the research process. The primary researcher must review all the work and attempt to discern themes emerging from the creations of the co-researchers in order to create a composite depiction. The resulting composite draws on the shared themes in order to give a sense of universal meaning to the research question. Recognizing the difficulties involved in arriving at a composite research project, Douglass and Moustakas point out how in the final analysis, the primary researcher must make the ultimate judgment as to the validity of his/her inquiry process.

The validity for heuristic research 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... It is self-directed, self-motivated and open to spontaneous shift.<sup>89</sup>

When I selected the heuristic methodology for my research project, I realized it would entail a long, labor-intensive, and passionate process. In the case of my co-researchers, this process was also very time consuming. In open-ended interviews, each co-researcher agreed to draw a series of mandalas, reflect on his/her own experience of drawing them and share the process with me as the primary researcher. Throughout this process, my co-researchers shared their art expressions in the

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<sup>88</sup> M. Polanyi. The Tacit Dimension. New York: Anchor Books, 1967, viii.

<sup>89</sup> B. G. Douglass & C. E. Moustakas. "Heuristic Inquiry." Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 25 (3), 1985, 44.

context of an agreed number of interviews in which they presented their mandalas and reflected upon them.

In conversational interviews, I was able to process the content of their experiences through attentive listening to their thoughts and feelings expressed in their own words. Through these interviews, I explored the richness of their experiences and acquired a more valid understanding of the power of the heuristic method in becoming more self-aware. The interviews also suggested that the heuristic approach had possible application to my counseling ministry. Through the application of the heuristic model, my co-researchers taught me to appreciate the power of the mandala and their dialogues with mandala images in their own lives.

Coming to this understanding of the dynamic of the mandala was directly experiential, and only indirectly theoretical. I found it absolutely necessary to trust in the co-researchers' self-knowledge and ability to participate in their own telling of their stories. The decision to include co-researchers in my research inquiry was a recognition of the limitations of personal 'authority' regarding the research topic. The experiences of the co-researchers helped validate both the heuristic method along with the content and process of this research project.

Researchers who are attracted to empirical research or 'the white coat procedures' would find a certain amount of difficulty accepting the heuristic research model. Junge and Linesch address this in their argument for new research designs for creative arts therapists.

Research does not simply observe, describe and measure. The concurrent subjective and implicit experience and the researcher as active participant in creating the experience under consideration must be understood. Art therapists are particularly adept at and trained in these ways of knowing.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> M. Junge, and D. Linesch. "Our Own Voices: New Paradigms for Art Therapy Research." The Arts in Psychotherapy, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1993, 62. These writers point to the importance of researching about the human condition in our own voices, to trust our own ways of being and knowing for all art therapists in order to claim the authority of their own experiences.

### The Ways of Knowing <sup>91</sup>

There are many ways of knowing. Each discovery contributes to our knowledge, and each way of knowing deepens our understanding and adds another dimension to our view of the world. Art expression is concerned with both universal and unique expressions of language, feelings, and communication. In order to research the experience of drawing mandalas, the researcher would have to be familiar with the mandala in the first place. I have been drawing mandalas over a number of years as well as utilizing this creative expression with my clients in my counseling practice. Because I have used the mandala in a therapeutic context, I have seen how the biases of the counselor can influence the therapeutic process, i.e. in projections. The counselor must accept the unknown and the inexplicable, and be aware of the various ways one can come to self-awareness. In the context of research, the researcher's personal experience of the phenomenon, of the creative process of drawing mandalas, can provide the foundation for supporting the co-researchers' verbal accounts of their own experiences of drawing mandalas.

Moustakas insists that the researcher is always engaged in a process of self-discoveries, awareness, and understandings. As the inquiry expands, self-knowledge enables the individual to better understand the question in multi dimensions. In embracing the heuristic research model as the framework for my inquiry into the experience of drawing mandalas, I explored various ways of coming to know a particular phenomenon.

According to Moustakas the process of coming to know a phenomenon involves six concepts: 1) Self-Dialogue; 2) Tacit Knowing; 3) Intuition; 4) Indwelling; 5) Focusing; and 6) The Internal Frame of Reference. I will briefly describe what Moustakas means by each of these concepts. Then I will indicate useful modifications in my own heuristic methods including the addition of Artistic

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<sup>91</sup> I would like to acknowledge the scholarly work of Marian MacIntyre in her succinct presentation of "Ways of Knowing" in her 1982 Ph.D. thesis: "The Experience of Shyness." Saybrook Institute. As she was a student of Clark Moustakas, I felt privileged to study heuristics with her. Some of the following categories have been borrowed from her Chapter Four on "Methodology: Describing the Process," 107-112.

Knowing because ‘the artist’s way’ seems to represent a unique and different approach to knowing. Finally, I will articulate briefly how Women’s Ways of Knowing is integral to this discussion on ‘knowing.’

### Self-Dialogue

According to Moustakas:

Self-dialogue is the critical beginning... one must begin with oneself. One’s own self-discoveries, awareness, and understandings are the initial steps of the process.<sup>92</sup>

In this research study, self-dialogue was used to explore the direct experience of drawing the mandala to interact with the images represented in the mandala. My co-researchers also engaged in self-dialogue with their own mandalas to explore the meaning of the images.

### Tacit Knowing

According to Moustakas, some knowledge cannot be put into words. “Such knowledge is possible through a tacit capacity that allows one to sense the unity or wholeness of something from an understanding of the individual qualities or parts.”<sup>93</sup> The tacit realm of knowing “gives birth to hunches and vague, formless insights.”<sup>94</sup>

Through tacit knowing I have the ability to grasp more than I am able to communicate. Tacit knowing is a personal and comprehensive way of coming to know the essence of my experience with mandala drawings. The philosopher, Polanyi distinguished two types of tacit knowing. He calls the first one the *subsidiary*, in which certain factors are visible and describable. As applied to my research project, subsidiary knowing occurs when certain elements of my mandala attract my attention. The

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<sup>92</sup> Moustakas, Op. Cit., 1990, 16.

<sup>93</sup> Moustakas, Op. Cit., 1990, 20 –21.

<sup>94</sup> Douglass & Moustakas. Op. Cit., 49.

placement of images, color dynamics, and size all are “elements of perception that enter into conscious awareness.”<sup>95</sup> According to Polanyi, the second element of tacit knowing is the *focal*, which is considered more important because it is the unseen and invisible dimension of tacit knowledge. In other words, there are meanings and messages conveyed through the images found within the mandala. Polanyi claims that when the subsidiary knowledge is combined with the focal knowledge, this opens the researcher to “...a sense of the wholeness or essence of a phenomenon.”<sup>96</sup>

### Intuition

Moustakas considers intuition as a “...kind of bridge (which) is formed between the implicit knowledge in the tacit realm and the explicit knowledge which is observable and describable.”<sup>97</sup>

Intuition is a type of knowledge and is often considered ‘wholistic.’ It is “an essential characteristic of seeking knowledge.”<sup>98</sup> I have appreciated Croteau-Chonka’s definition of intuition. She describes it:

...like the solution to a problem presented without any of the analysis or working out normally associated with such a solution. That is, it [intuition] could be called an “epistemological shortcut.”<sup>99</sup>

A personal example of an epistemological shortcut was in my decision to use my dream in Chapter Six of this Project/Dissertation. Intuition (indwelling) is important to my research study because it suggests avenues to integrating various aspects of images, patterns, and themes within the mandala drawings. This same intuition eventually leads to an understanding of the essence of the experience. Intuition brings the researcher directly into the soul work of the artistic expression.

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<sup>95</sup> Moustakas. Op. Cit., 1990, 21.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Moustakas, Op. Cit., 1990, 23.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> I have found Clarisse Croteau-Chonka’s Ph.D. thesis on intuition to be of great value in my journey. She presents a thorough treatment of the structure, dynamics and characteristics of intuition in her thesis entitled: “Intuition: A Paradigm of the Wholeness Necessary for Holiness and its Relationship to Christian Education.” Princeton, 1986, 151.

### **Indwelling**

Moustakas considered indwelling to be essential to the heuristic process. He described the indwelling experience as:

...a willingness to gaze with unwavering attention and concentration into some facet of human experience in order to understand its constituent qualities and its wholeness... [it] is conscious and deliberate, yet it is not lineal or logical. It follows clues wherever they appear; one dwells inside them and expands their meanings... until fundamental insight is achieved.<sup>100</sup>

He emphasizes how this process requires the individual to return repeatedly to the research question until “one is able to depict it fully in words and pictures.”<sup>101</sup> Hunches and intuition give clues to the procedures and directions in the study of the phenomenon. Polanyi describes the concept of indwelling as a “far more precisely defined act than is empathy, not by looking at things, but by indwelling them can we understand their joint meaning.”<sup>102</sup> Through indwelling I turn inward to relate to my experience of drawing mandalas with a growing awareness of myself. I ‘feel’ into the mandala, and try to articulate what I am feeling, than savor the experience to gain my emotional insight and visual understanding of the images.

### **Focusing**

According to Moustakas “focusing is an inner attention, a staying with, a sustained process of systematically contacting the more central meanings of an experience.”<sup>103</sup> Through focusing on the images presented within the mandala, I gained additional insight into the heuristic process as well as

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<sup>100</sup> Moustakas. *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> M. Polanyi. *Op. Cit.*, 17-18.

<sup>103</sup> Moustakas, *Op. Cit.*, 1990, 25.

experiencing a different type of psychic energy. Through the focusing process, I ascertained core themes emerging in the mandalas and achieved greater cognitive knowledge. Moustakas and Douglass describe such knowledge as “...refinements of meaning and perception that register as internal shifts and alterations of behavior.”<sup>104</sup> Moustakas notes how focusing also “taps into the essence of what matters.”<sup>105</sup> As I repeatedly returned to the process of drawing the mandala, I experienced different energies from the drawing. The co-researchers reported the same phenomenon.

E. T. Gendlin refers to the ‘body shift’ that occurs in the physicality of the experience. He invites readers to “unlock the wisdom of your body.”<sup>106</sup> Staying in touch with the language of the body is yet another way of knowing. This body wisdom is also helpful in the process clarifying the research question, discerning core themes, and explicating the themes.

### **Internal Frame of Reference**

To understand the inner experience of another is to recognize the structure of ‘knowing’ to be always uniquely individual. According to Moustakas,

To know and understand the nature, meanings, and essences of any human experience, one depends on the internal frame of reference of the person who has had, is having, or will have the experience. Only the experiencing persons—by looking at their own experiences in perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and sense—can validly provide portrayals of the experience.<sup>107</sup>

The frame of reference each of the co-researchers brought to the process of drawing and reflecting on their mandalas was certainly unique. In general, we shared in a common process of dialoguing with the mandalas, indwelling with the images, verbalizing insights, and sharing stories and associations which nurtured a sense of Self. Their stories revealed elements of the essential Self. The skills of storytelling are matched by the art of empathic listening and understanding. Together, we worked on the

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<sup>104</sup> Douglass & Moustakas, Op. Cit., 51.

<sup>105</sup> Moustakas. Op. Cit., 1990, 25.

<sup>106</sup> E. T. Gendlin. *Focusing*. New York: Bantam, 1978, 6.

<sup>107</sup> Moustakas, Op. Cit., 1990, 26.

externalization of internal dialogues, which in the end led to a fuller interaction of interpersonal exchange.

In addition to understanding and utilizing these important concepts developed by Moustakas and others, I will also rely on three other ways of knowing: The way of interpersonal knowledge; the artistic way of knowing; and women's ways of knowing. These 'ways' will further the heuristic approach to my research.

### **Interpersonal Knowing**

Human experience exists in an interactive context. These interactions, along with our reflections on them, allow us to make meaning of our experiences. The research quest becomes a collaborative experience through the mutual exchange with my co-researchers. As the primary researcher, I encouraged the interaction of a mutual reflection and sharing. Conducting research with others is a journey in establishing a relationship of trust. The process then becomes a 'we' experience.

The mutual reflections and dialogues associated with this study became the channel of greater self-awareness and a model for the therapeutic process of counseling. I tried to refrain from any attempt to exert authority over the content of the co-researcher's experiential journey and their reflections concerning the research question. Creative Art Therapist, Warren Lett stated some of the procedures for companioning the co-researcher:

The remembering of old images, the connection to stored emotions, the path of association across memories, the flow of the energy of intuition are all components of the process of making or forming new personal knowing which is actually another way of knowing.<sup>108</sup>

To pursue interpersonal knowing, I respected the total experience of the co-researcher through listening, learning, and a willingness to self-disclose appropriately about my own mandala drawings in order to emphasize the equality and authority of my co-researchers' own experiences. This meant

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<sup>108</sup> W. R. Lett. "Researching Experiential Self-Knowing." *The Arts in Psychotherapy*. Vol. 25, No. 5., 341.

immersing myself in their stories of their mandala drawings until "...intimate knowledge is obtained."<sup>109</sup>

In addition to the interpersonal ways of knowing that flowed from our creation and dialoging with mandala images, I also relied on an artistic way of knowing.

### **Artistic Knowing**

The artistic way of knowing involves a respect for the creative process and its outcomes as well as familiarity with archetypal perspectives. I interacted with my mandalas in a process which sought to understand their essential qualities. This required an immersion into the core experience of the creative process of drawing the mandala. It became a journey into the 'unknowns' of this experience. This demanded a trust in the process, a total acceptance in the way it unfolded. Personal immersion and freedom of self-expression were essential to this way of knowing. The artistic way of knowing is woven throughout the stories of the mandalas, used for the Project of this Dissertation. It is found in more detail in Chapter Five.

### **Women's Ways of Knowing**

Women's ways of knowing include the concepts of separate (impersonal) and connected (subjective) knowing procedures. Although both need to be valued, I learned to honor and respect my own experiences. I discovered the joy of using the experience of drawing the mandala to develop my own inner voice with its unique artistic language. Belenky, et al., comment, "To learn to speak in a

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<sup>109</sup> Moustakas. Op. Cit., 1990, 49.

unique and authentic voice, women must ‘jump outside’ the frames and systems authorities provide and create their own frame.”<sup>110</sup> This way of knowing is more detailed in Chapter Six.

The six heuristic stages developed by Moustakas have been briefly described and their relevance to this research project identified in this chapter. In addition, I have briefly portrayed the concepts associated with the ways of knowing as developed by Moustakas. Finally, I have added the interpersonal dimension, the artistic way of knowing and women’s ways of knowing, aspects of which I will use to explore my research question. I am confident the heuristic approach to the phenomenon of drawing mandalas and reflecting on their meaning will be a path to greater self-understanding and a key to effective therapeutic processes.

This heuristic process will continue to lead my co-researchers and me to immersion and incubation. It will encourage both the creation of mandalas and their interpretation. The role of my co-researchers, the research material’s collection and interpretation will be described in Chapter Four. Finally, I will take refuge in the remark of Art Therapist, Lynn Kapitan who suggests that research should be conducted with a sense of vitality and passion:

When alive with the desire of pursuit... all art therapists are and can be researchers.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Mary Field Belenky, et al. Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1986, 134.

<sup>111</sup> Lynn Kapitan. “In Pursuit of the Irresistible: Art Therapy Research in the Hunting Tradition in Art Therapy.” Journal of the American Art Therapy Association, 15 (1). 1998, 28.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Immersion in the Heuristic Process**

After participating in the mandala workshop with Judith Cornell in July, 1996 on Cortez Island, BC, I retrieved my own art expression and the immediate gestation for this research project began. Through the experience on Cortez Island my initial research question emerged: “How would the experience of drawing mandalas effect my own theology, spirituality and psychological well-being and how could this experience be used in a therapeutic setting to foster self-integration in others?” Very early on in the course of this research, the heuristic method led to questions within questions. I realized the experience of drawing the mandala also affected the body. I came to ask myself about the emotions, body sensations, thoughts, and ideas surfacing during the drawing process. I wondered if others would experience the same mind-body connections in the process of drawing mandalas and reflecting on them.

### **Personal Immersion: Data Collection**

Once I had formulated my research question, I began creating mandalas for this Project/Dissertation and working with the personal material emerging from the process. I have used some of my own mandalas in Chapter Five as the basis for the research and story in this Project/Dissertation study. My mandalas became like entries in a diary as each reflected my own ‘state of being’ while I was drawing and reflecting on them. I placed no time limit on drawing the mandala, nor did I limit the amount of time I spent reflecting on them. Each one became its own entity and developed its own life. Many of my mandalas were drawn in the family room of my home in St. Albert, Alberta. Others were drawn while I was on a holiday or at a workshop or conference. I never set aside

a particular time of day for drawing, because I wanted to honor my own way of being spontaneous with the artistic process. Spontaneous creativity is essential to heuristic research.

There was a certain element of playfulness accompanying my approach to drawing my mandalas. I tried to respect this playfulness, hoping the energy of play would interact with the work of the psyche in the alchemy of self-transformation. Derek Phillips discusses play as a ‘revolutionary research.’ He advocated play as a:

...viable alternative to method only if it can be viewed as an individual or private activity, engaged in for its own sake and not because of a concern with other persons, that is, not rule-governed and not methodological.<sup>112</sup>

Phillips further emphasized how “Play may not only give free rein to imagination, intuition, and creative urges, but may help us see more clearly.”<sup>113</sup> Utilizing Phillips’ method, I approached each empty circle with an openness, with the spirit of play and creativity. Intuitively, I sensed the spirit of play was a natural companion to the heuristic method.

In addition to the informal attitude of play, the formal approach to my research was structured in the following four steps. First, I engaged in drawing the mandalas. Then, I reflected on the mandala images and their symbolism. I wrote my personal reflections as journal entries or by audio taping my verbalized reflections about the mandalas. As I moved into relationship with my mandalas, I gradually began to observe certain themes and categories emerge around the images and feelings associated with the mandalas. Finally, I summarized this information so as to report the process and my findings in this research study. I began to hope this project might promote discussion about the impact of a personal experience of drawing the mandala for those who wish to engage in soul journey work.

My mandalas were drawn over a three year period from 1996-1999. After each drawing, I entered the incubation stage of heuristic research as I moved into the process of ‘indwelling’ with the images in the mandala. Moustakas asserts this process “clarifies the research question by enabling the

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<sup>112</sup> D. Phillips. Abandoning Method. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1973, 160.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

researcher to come to be on intimate terms with the question—to live it and grow in knowledge and understanding of it.”<sup>114</sup>

During this time of incubation, I had hopes that the “ inner tacit dimension [of the mandala] would reach its full possibilities.”<sup>115</sup> As Moustakas has stated:

...although the researcher is detached from involvement with the question and removed from awareness of its nature and meanings, on another level expansion of knowledge is taking place.<sup>116</sup>

Gradually, I became more aware of the language and symbols of my inner state of being (my Soul process). During this period of incubation, I focused on the interplay of images, colors, form and movement in each of the mandalas and discovered a richness I had not known before. This is described more fully in Chapter Five.

Following this period of incubation, I then moved into the illumination stage where I experienced breakthroughs of understandings and developed new questions about the themes appearing in my mandalas. This is discussed more fully in Chapter Six. As I continued to examine my creations, I moved into the explication stage. At this time I compared my findings with my original works and moved into a deeper understanding of the experience of drawing my mandalas. Chapter Five describes this process. The final stage of this heuristic research study, the creative synthesis, was expressed in my conclusions about the essence of the personal experience of drawing mandalas. This is discussed in Chapter Eight.

In addition to my own immersion in the process of collecting research material resulting from the drawing and reflections on mandalas, I invited two co-researchers to journey with me in the experience of drawing mandalas.

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<sup>114</sup> Moustakas. Op. Cit., 1990, 28.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

## Co-Researchers

Van Manen addressed the importance of the co-researcher's role when he wrote:

We gather other people's experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves... they allow us to become informed, shaped or enriched by this experience so as to be able to render the full significance of its meaning.<sup>117</sup>

Because of the considerable commitment of time required on the part of co-researchers, I invited only two co-researchers to participate in my study, one male and one female. The pre-requisites for the selection of these participants included the following:

- Inexperience in mandala drawing previous to this study.
- Commitment to draw a certain number of mandalas.
- Availability to complete the mandalas within a specified time framework.
- The willingness to reflect on the meaning of the mandalas using a process of self-dialogue and interpersonal sharing.
- Willingness to meet with me individually for open-ended interviews over 12 one hour sessions.

I searched for people with the above requirements. It was also important for my co-researchers to be able to reflect and to articulate their experiences. The ages of the co-researchers were unimportant to me. Quite incidentally, both individuals who came forward were in their fifties. The man, a Roman Catholic priest, was in the middle of a sabbatical leave from his work as a spiritual director in England. The woman, a pastoral counselor and a Protestant worked in Edmonton. Both were very well educated and enthusiastic about their participation in this research.

For reasons of confidentiality, I have used the pseudonyms Mark and Julie to refer to my co-researchers. Both agreed to work on creating a series of mandalas, reflecting on them and talking with me about the process. After an introductory interview, Mark and I agreed to meet for 12 semi-structured interviews in a counseling office in downtown Edmonton. Mark informed me he would be returning to England at the end of the interviews. This information added a certain pressure to proceed

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<sup>117</sup> Van Manen. Op.Cit., 62

in a timely fashion. Julie and I also met for 12 semi-structured interviews, but the setting was my own counseling office.

Both Julie and Mark agreed to bring their mandalas to the interviews. Their mandalas were drawn during the week preceding the interview in a location of their own choosing. I encouraged them to tell their stories through the experience of the creation of each mandala. To facilitate their stories, I prepared questions that might be useful in the dialogue stage.

Each began to process the experience of drawing the mandala and reflect on its personal meaning. When we met, there was a tape recorder placed in the center of the room. I tried to be sensitive to their comfort level and made sure privacy was observed at all times. As a pastoral counselor, I realized how important a 'safe environment' is to one's sharing of inner soul work, especially when an art form is presented.

As we processed the drawing and meaning of each mandala, this heuristic approach helped me become aware of the significance of James Hillman's emphasis on the need for methods reflecting the episodic, changing, and multi-dimensional nature of any soul experience.<sup>118</sup>

Mindful of the multi-dimensional levels of the dialogue I engaged in with each co-researcher, I wanted to respect the apprehension or fear often accompanying 'soul exposure' through art expression. As a professional therapist I had observed this reluctance or apprehension connected with art expression over and over again. In reflecting on my own experiences of sharing my mandalas with others, I realized my feelings and sensations were very similar to those of my clients. My co-researchers expressed a definite fear of the inadequacy of their drawings for research. There was also a certain apprehension regarding their mandalas revealing a 'symptom' of a psychological 'problem' requiring attention.

This type of apprehension is common and art therapist, Bruce Moon refers to this as 'imagicide' in which a diagnoses of an image as a possible symptom of disease leads to annihilation of

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<sup>118</sup> J. Hillman. Revising Psychology. New York: Harper & Row, 1983, Chapter Three.

the creative act.<sup>119</sup> I encouraged Julie and Mark to trust their process and assured them of my acceptance and the 'safety' of their creativity.

My attempt to encourage Mark and Julie by creating a nurturing environment for interpersonal interaction and self-dialogue reminded me of McNiff's suggestion of how we should step aside to allow the creative process to flourish.

The most pervasive outcome of these extended involvements with the depths of creative expression is a faith in the process... We are needed as active participants, but we have to learn how to act forcefully while simultaneously stepping aside so that the process has the freedom to do its work.<sup>120</sup>

My intuition reinforced the notion of stepping aside in the face of the creative moment as very empowering for those immersed in the creative act. By contrast, any manipulation of the creative process has a stifling effect. Kapitan suggests methods, which identify people as subjects of experiments, are "...simply repugnant because of the ethical unease of having and using power over another life."<sup>121</sup> I believe it can even freeze the creative process.

In addition to creating an environment of trust and sharing, I also wanted to respect the collaborative nature of the research process. Moustakas writes:

Dialogue involves cooperative hearing in which co-researchers and primary researchers open pathways to each other for explicating the phenomenon being investigated. This means receiving the other as a partner, accepting and affirming the other person.<sup>122</sup>

I provided my co-researchers with the same questions I used for my own reflections. (See Appendix B) I also gave the co-researchers an Informed Consent Sheet, which stated the purpose of the study and the procedures we would use (see Appendix C).<sup>123</sup> The preliminary interview began with my

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<sup>119</sup> For a complete discussion in respecting the artistic process within the therapeutic experience, see Bruce Moon. Art and Soul: Reflections on an Artistic Psychology. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1996. See: My experience at the training seminar on Kellogg's MARI® Card Test© in Chapter II of this Project/Dissertation.

<sup>120</sup> McNiff. Trust the Process. Op. Cit., 25.

<sup>121</sup> Kapitan. Op. Cit., 23.

<sup>122</sup> Moustakas, Op. Cit., 1990, 47.

<sup>123</sup> As I implemented the interviews part of procedure # 6 changed. I was able to obtain sufficient material (thick data) and meaningful interpretations of my co-researchers by using a combination of their original mandalas and vignettes from their interviews. In other words, it was unnecessary to conduct a second series of interviews.

expressing interest in mandalas and I told each of them a brief story of how I came to draw mandalas in my own life. I explained the procedures of the research process and made them aware of my intention to make laser copies of their mandalas, some of which would be included in my study.

The following interviews were very interactive and included mutual sharing. Each co-researcher brought their mandala(s) and journal(s) to each interview. They read from their journals using them as a springboard for the story of a particular mandala. I tried to make sure I heard the nuances of the sharing of the vignettes of their 'mandala stories.' I sometimes encouraged them with an example or two from my own experiences in drawing mandalas. I did not take notes while either was speaking; instead, I relied on a tape recorder to capture their stories. The collaborative nature of this kind of sharing is emphasized by Connelly and Clandinin:

In narrative inquiry, it is important that the researcher listen to the practitioner's story, and that it is the practitioner who first tells his or her story. This does not mean that the researcher is silenced in the process of narrative inquiry. It does mean that the practitioner, who has long been silenced in the research relationship, is given the time and space to tell his or her story so that it too gains the authority and validity that the research story has long had. Narrative inquiry is, however, a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and re-storytelling as the research proceeds. In the process of beginning to live the shared story of narrative inquiry, the researcher needs to be aware of constructing a relationship in which both voices are heard.<sup>124</sup>

Thus, as each co-researcher narrated his/her story while simultaneously observing the mandala he/she created, the ability to reflect more deeply on the significance of the images and colors increased. This process often moved them beyond their 'own scripted journaling' into spontaneous insights derived from their mandalas. My role was to guide the process with further questions.

I relied on my counseling skills to affirm, encourage and further question them when needed. Interruptions in the flow of dialogue were initiated only to clarify what was being said. Occasionally, I reminded the co-researchers how the description of the experience was of primary importance. Their specific interpretations of the images, colors and associations were relational to the experience.

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<sup>124</sup> F. M. Connelly & D. J. Clandinin. "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry." Educational Researcher, (19) (5), 1990, 4.

To begin the discussion, I simply asked: Will you tell me about your mandala or what is your story behind your mandala? How was this experience for you? With these simple questions, I asked each co-researcher to describe the living experiences associated with drawing and reflecting on each mandala. Gradually they could recall and describe the experience of the drawing process itself and how it related to their lives, present or past.

The co-researchers were reminded about the main goal for the study – to focus on the process of drawing the mandala. Still, each co-researcher understood they might gain in unexpected ways from the entire experience.

From my own practice in pastoral counseling, I had observed how the symbolic and nonverbal aspects of the art expression provided easier access to hidden aspects of the individual's world. I was faced with some difficulties as the stories of the co-researchers unfolded. Each co-researcher was free to use either white or black art paper. The art medium was left to them. I did not want to contaminate the process of drawing the mandala with any biases I might have towards the art media. However, I was surprised at the choices. Mark used crayons, oil pastels, and large white sheets of art paper from two sizes of drawing pads. Julie used prismacolors, colored pens, pencil, and crayons with various sizes of black art paper and white drawing paper.

As I observed the co-researchers' mandalas and entered the process of 'indwelling' to penetrate the meaning of them, I would often see particular characteristics which I thought to be obvious, but seemingly neglected by the co-researchers as they told their stories. Thus, I listened to what was said, but also to what was not said as I observed their mandalas. My intention was to hear the hidden meanings waiting behind the words. However, I had to intentionally stay away from my own projections which would freeze the energy and movement of the process.

Both co-researchers sometimes requested my interpretation of their mandalas. Instead, I encouraged each individually to respect and hold reverence for their own creativity. As I explained, only the individual who created the art expression is the 'authority' of the experience. Each was encouraged to think of their mandalas as art forms made by them. Only they could interpret its meaning. There is never a right or wrong in mandala drawing. It simply is. There were moments when each co-researcher tried to evaluate the aesthetic quality of their mandalas. I repeatedly assured Julie

and Mark how the aesthetics of the mandala was of less importance than the process of creating mandalas. They were not being evaluated as artists. In my professional role, I had become very aware of how external evaluation of an art expression often inhibits the full engagement of the creative process.

After the drawing and interviewing stage was over however, I was faced with the task of assimilating their creations and reflections. This process is described in the following section.

### **Phenomenological Reduction**

After the interviews with the co-researchers were complete, my challenge was to sort it all out and engage in the heuristic process to try to make sense of it all. The tool I would employ is known as phenomenological reduction. Phenomenological reduction is a qualitative procedure for working with the basic experience. There are two ways this process can be achieved. Phenomenological reduction utilizes the process of bracketing, which involves the researcher's efforts to set aside personal opinions, theories or explanations of what appears to be. In addition to bracketing, phenomenological reduction involves a suspension of belief in the existence of what appears in order for the researcher to be open to what emerges from the process. Francis Flaherty's description of the practices of bracketing and suspension of belief is to the point.

What you have to do is let go, let go every thought of your own, wipe your mind clean; fresh, innocent, newborn, sensitive as unexposed film to take up the impressions around you and let what will come in. This is the pregnant void, the fertile state of no-mind. This is non-preconception, the beginning of discovery.<sup>125</sup>

My use of the method of phenomenological reduction moved through a series of steps during the analysis of the work submitted by my co-researchers. My approach incorporated much of what

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<sup>125</sup> F. Flaherty. The Odyssey of a Film-Maker. Urbana.: Beta Phi Mu, 1960, 20. As cited in MacIntyre, Op. Cit., 1983.

Aigen espouses when he discusses the importance of creativity in the conception and realization in doing research:

...researchers choose from a limited variety of procedural sets and mechanically apply the chosen set of procedures. The particular design is then followed from beginning to end, and each component of the research exists as a discreet step: formulation of research problem, selecting a design, gathering data, data-analysis, and discussion.<sup>126</sup>

He argues researchers must develop their own procedures guided by the demands or expectations of the study. This customization may yield unexpected results in qualitative research, but will “reflect the unique conditions, struggles, and insights of the individual researcher coming to terms with the research problem.”<sup>127</sup>

The artistic and personal expression of mandala drawing requires creativity and spontaneity. It is a complex and fluid process in which the co-researcher is engaged in working at contacting and expressing his/her inner world. The creative act of drawing the mandala becomes the medium for expressing inner feelings through images and color whose meanings emerge in various ways. This phenomenon of drawing mandalas is one of immersion in the working of the psyche and deep ‘nonrational’ involvement. Aigen recognizes this by suggesting:

Because the data-analysis is ongoing with data-collection, there is a constant interaction between what researchers do in the study and what they are learning. Hence, there are more demands placed upon researchers to flexibly and creatively react to the preliminary findings to deepen their insight into the phenomenon under study.<sup>128</sup>

I see a strong connection between Aigen’s comments and the heuristic method of Moustakas in so far as both caution how we can never fully anticipate the important aspects of the interaction between the researcher and the co-researcher. The outcome of the research study is always connected to and dependent on the particular interactions of the individuals involved in the research task.

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<sup>126</sup> Aigen. Op. Cit., 33.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

### **Analysis of the Mandala Experience**

In doing this research I adopted a heuristic approach that resembled a circle in order to honor the “research” in its etymological sense of circling the mandala experience again and again. The more often I revisited the experiences, the more likely I thought I would be to arrive at a deeper understanding. Through ‘circling’, the experiences came into sharper focus. Broad patterns gave way to the unique expressions of self, led to newer, freer patterns and themes.

To circle the mandala experiences, I revisited the tapes of the interviews of each co-researcher. I transcribed these tapes and had their original mandalas laser copied and inserted into the transcript materials. I read through the interview transcripts and reflected on the corresponding mandala (s) of each interview. Mark and Julie created about four dozen mandalas for this project. I tried to maintain an inner openness to their mandalas but found myself a bit overwhelmed with two distinct kinds of information: the stories and the mandalas for each co-researcher. I realized I had entered into the sacred space of each ‘storyteller.’ In addition, I had entered a sanctuary housing the sacred act of the ‘artist at work.’

I realized I would have to immerse myself in the reading and re-reading of these transcripts to ground my intuitions and to listen with my heart to the voice of each co-researcher. This was not a linear process, rather a circular one. It could not be rushed. I kept attentive to my question: What were these co-researchers trying to convey to me about their experiences of drawing the mandala?

Moustakas stressed the importance of immersing oneself in the material. This was clearly the stage I was in as I was ‘re-circling’ the mandalas of my co-researchers. He wrote about how the analysis of the data of the phenomenon required a constant returning to the raw experience until a ‘seeing into the meaning’ begins to surface.

In the immersion stage, I found it necessary to move slowly in order to grasp the multi-dimensional facets of the stories and mandalas. I needed to get into a relationship with their experiences. In this immersion stage, I highlighted thoughts and phrases which flowed through their descriptions of images, feelings, life story vignettes and their associations. I began to categorize them

under themes. I used the margins of the transcripts for notes, key words and images. I returned again and again to the stories of their experiences, organizing and reorganizing themes. Sometimes I realized I observed their mandalas from *my* perspective while I read *their* perspective of their experience of drawing their mandala. I soon realized I needed to develop a coding process to uncover patterns and themes. I struggled to unearth relationships existing in the mandala experience.

Processing this material was challenging for me. According to the Myers-Briggs typology, working with such details belongs to the sensing function of the personality and this was identified as one of my shadow functions. In other words, I wasn't very good at working with the volume of details this analysis of phenomenon called for. I had to give details my strictest attention. This led to much tedious work.

I was not alone in my frustration with working with a plethora of details. Many researchers have acknowledged the difficulty involved in such analysis. Renata Tesch writes:

Phenomenological analysis can't be done on a schedule. Insights don't come, and themes don't emerge because the researcher has checked off items on a 'to do' list. Reflection, readiness, openness, immersion are states more than they are actions, and they need to be sustained.<sup>129</sup>

I also was vigilant in order for my analysis to remain true to the nature of the heuristic method. The non-directive style of the interviews allowed each co-researcher to give voice to individual experiences. I needed to remember the deeper goal of my investigation was to seek out the essence and nature of my co-researchers' experiences of drawing the mandala, not just to 'report' on their experiences. I clustered the edited excerpts from the interviews around themes and these are included in Chapter Five to facilitate the retelling of their stories.

Gradually I was able to synthesize their descriptions. By reflecting on their experiences of drawing mandalas, I realized that their stories and their mandalas acted upon me in a profound way.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Renata Tesch. "Emerging Themes: The Researcher's Experience." *Phenomenology and Pedagogy* 5, No. 1, 1987, 239.

<sup>130</sup> My reflections on these taped interviews helped me to understand how much I was involved in the co-researchers' processes. The dynamic of participating in and being acted on by the mandala drawing process became very obvious to me.

As a reminder to the reader, I applied a similar process as described above to my personal collection and analysis of my own experience relating to the phenomenon of creating mandalas and exploring their meaning.

### **Interpretation of the Mandala Experience**

One of the challenges of qualitative research is how it stresses the interpretation role of the researcher. McNiff states:

The heuristic dimension to this type of research increases the validity of what we say about the process of making the painting because the researcher has directly experienced the process being investigated.<sup>131</sup>

Through the relationship with my two co-researchers, I gained new understandings of the phenomenon of drawing mandalas based on the reflection-based interpretation of their experiences. I was guided in my reflections and interpretation of the mandala experience through the questions posed by McNiff. He raises questions that I think are definitely most important in evaluating the value of a heuristic research art related project.

- Does the project connect to your experience?
- Does it evoke something from you?
- Does the project stand out from others and does it initiate a new dimension to practice?
- Does the project convey a feeling of psychological depth?
- Does it have aesthetic significance?
- Is it memorable?
- Is the project appealing to others?
- Is it helpful to someone?
- Does it provoke, inspire, arouse interest?<sup>132</sup>

Despite the small number of co-researchers, the validity of this research rests with their intense participation in the process, with time available for observation and with the deep experience of

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<sup>131</sup> McNiff. Art-Based Research. Op. Cit., 61.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 172.

immersion into the mandala experience. In addition, the concentration of interviews over a period of several weeks intensified the authenticity of the findings.

The themes emerging from this process of immersion were manifested in different ways. I recognized each co-researcher's uniqueness as she/he unpacked individual experiences. As phenomenologist Giorgi states, it is not necessary for phenomena be examined in identical ways.

...to demand that the essential theme of a phenomenon and its manifestation be constant is an unnecessary reduction that not only does violence to the phenomenon, but also prohibits a correct understanding of it because the various ways it manifests itself also sheds light on its essential nature... One knows that he is dealing with the same phenomenon when the meaning of the phenomenon is essentially the same in spite of the variations in its manifestations. Thus, the insistence on repetition, in the sense of exact copying, is merely a positivistic bias that does not really ensure a greater degree of reliability.<sup>133</sup>

I believe the mandalas and interviews with my co-researchers gave me ample material for a rich and deeper understanding into their experience of drawing mandalas as well as how they experienced the phenomenon in their own lives.

After being immersed in the collection and analysis of the mandala experience, I was ready to move into the incubation stage of the heuristic method. This will be discussed in Chapter Five.

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<sup>133</sup> A. Giorgi. "Phenomenology and Experimental Psychology II." A. Giorgi, W. Fischer, & R. von Eckartsberg (eds.). Duquesne Studies in Phenomenological Psychology: Vol. I., 24.

## **Chapter V**

### **Mandalas Tell Their Stories**

Get thee to a studio. Go there and learn about how to generate artistic energy; how to gauge its effects on you and others; how to discover your personal style of artistic expression and how to integrate it with therapeutic practice and research... identify themes and continuities and discontinuities, and keep all of these things in your creative cooking pot which will continuously nourish and expand your practice of art therapy with others.<sup>134</sup>

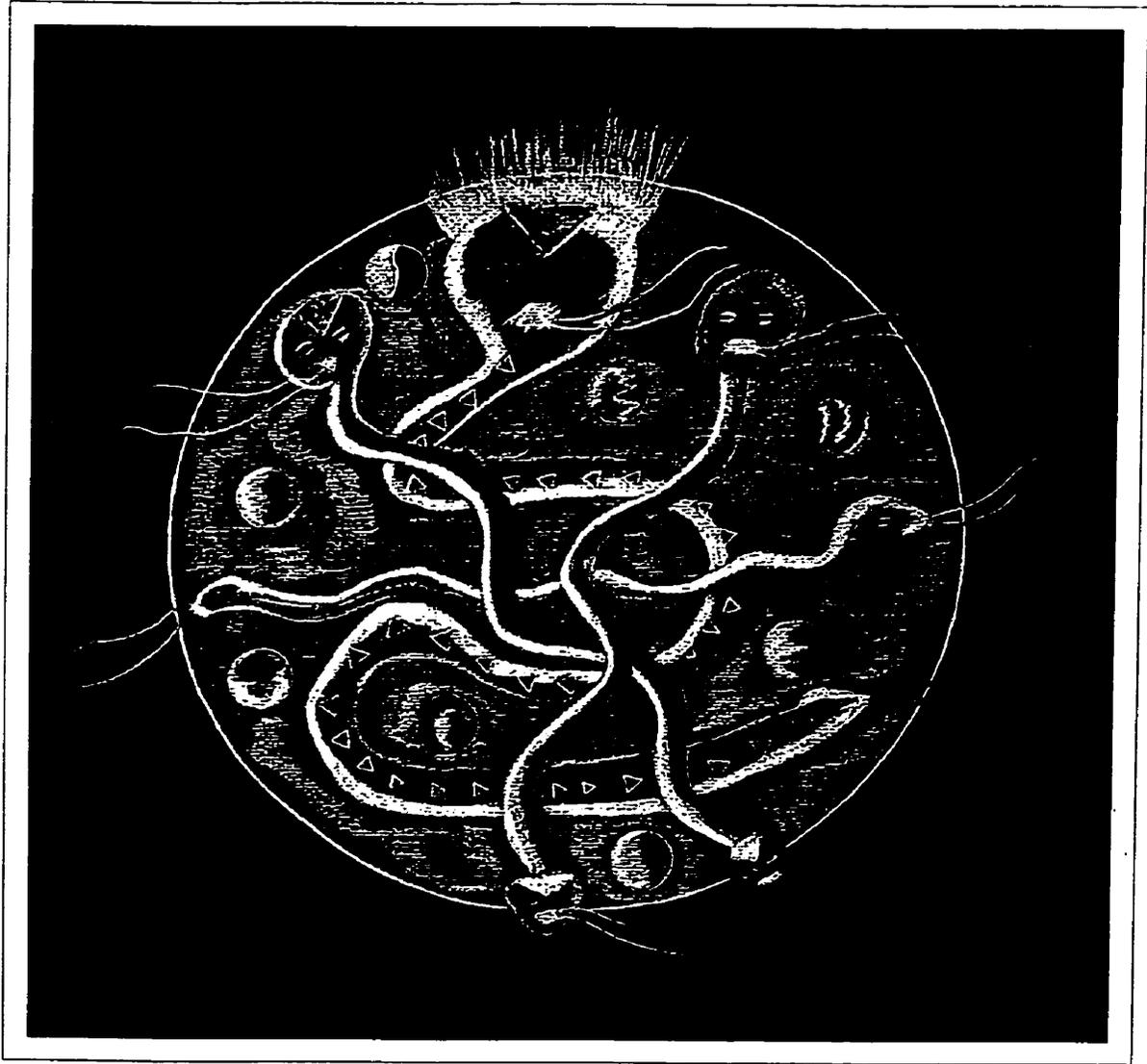
This chapter is the story of our mandalas. The villains, heroes, conflicts and issues in my life and the lives of my co-researchers will emerge in the images represented in our mandalas. I invite you to listen to our voices and honor the time and space it takes to share these stories. Remember, storytelling is a way to discover not only knowledge, but also wisdom.

First, I will tell the stories surrounding the mandalas I have created for this project. The second section will utilize the same approach in presenting the mandalas of my co-researchers and the stories they shared about their mandalas.

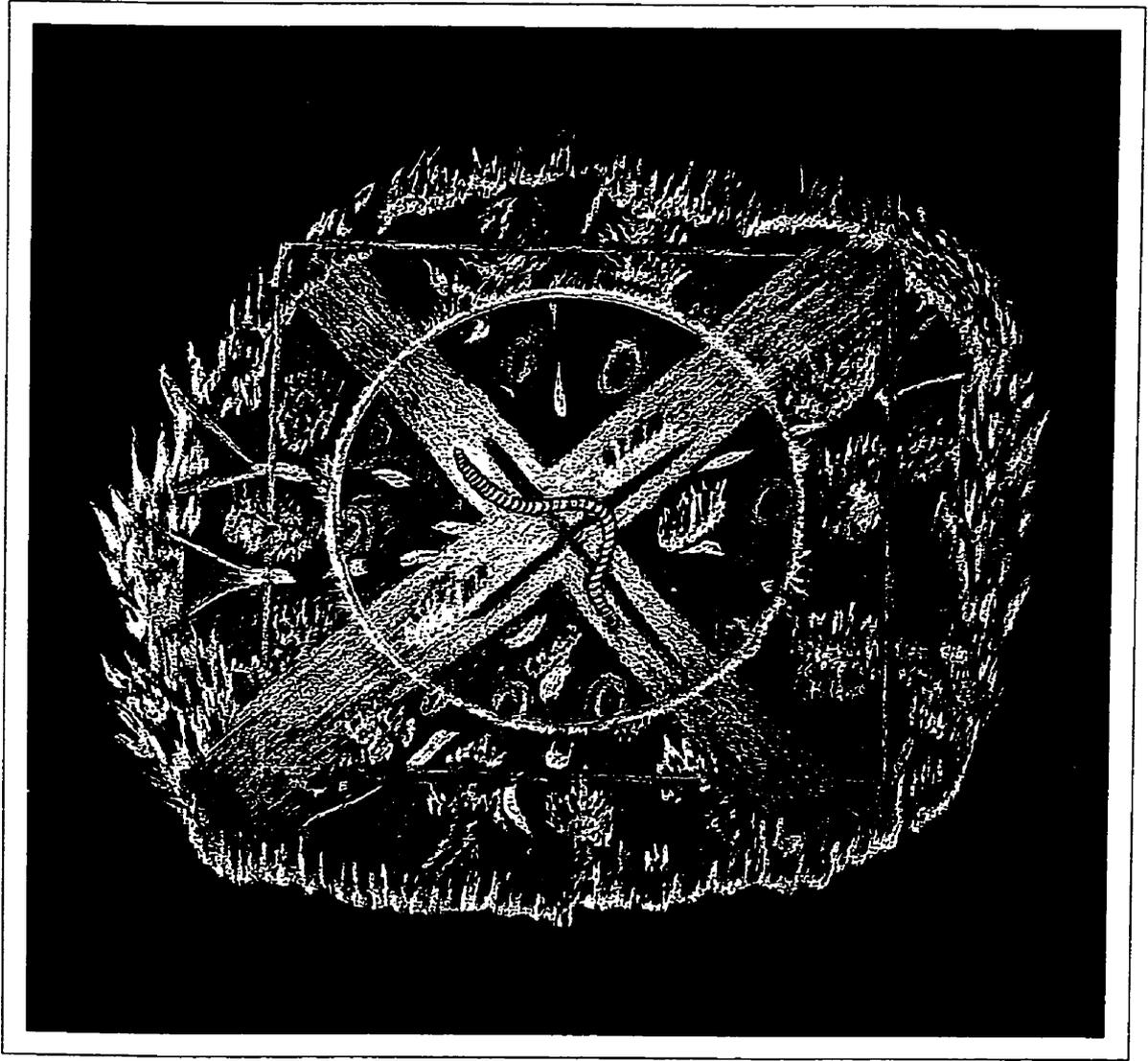
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<sup>134</sup> McNiff. Art-Based Research. Op. Cit., 132.

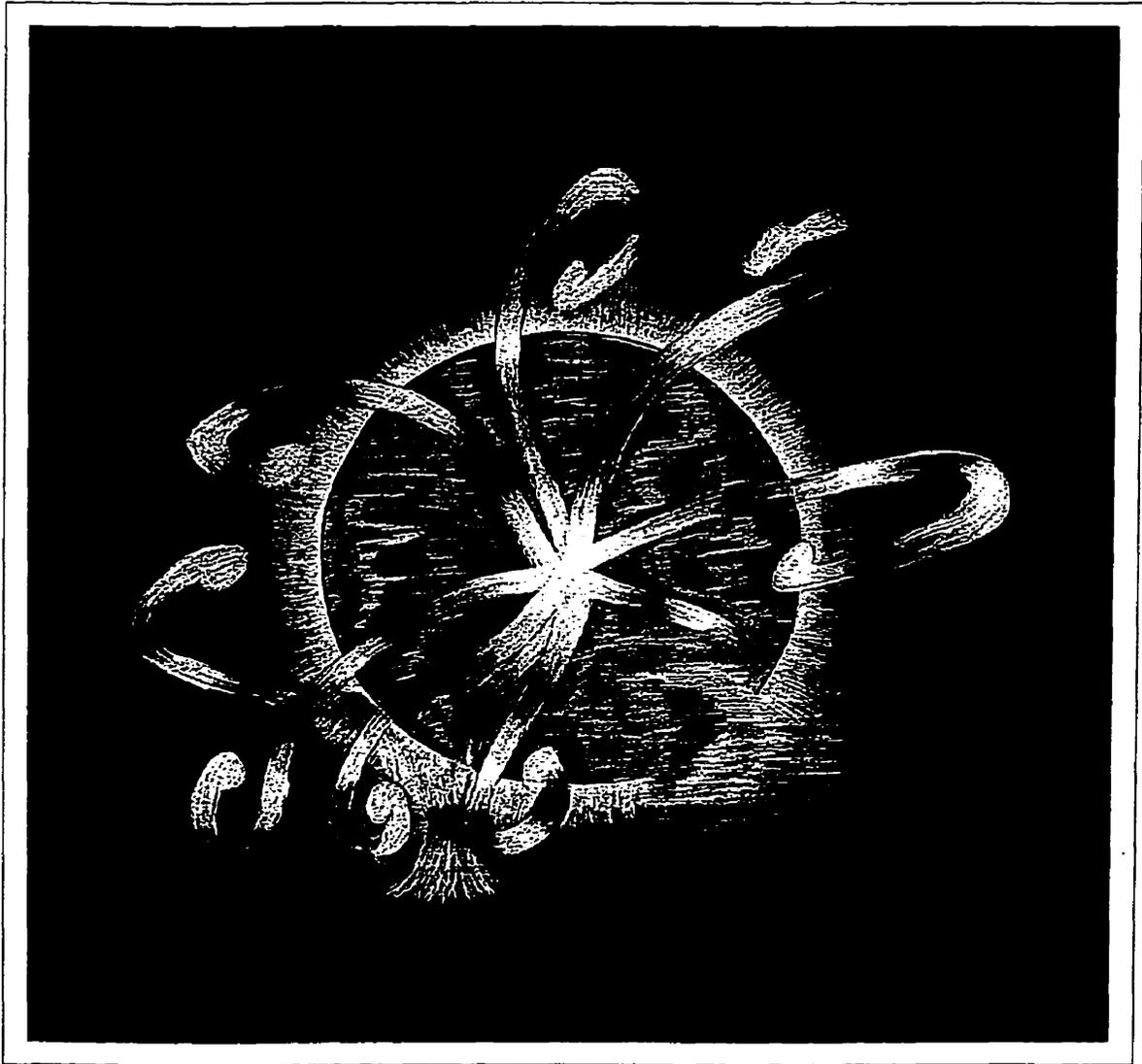




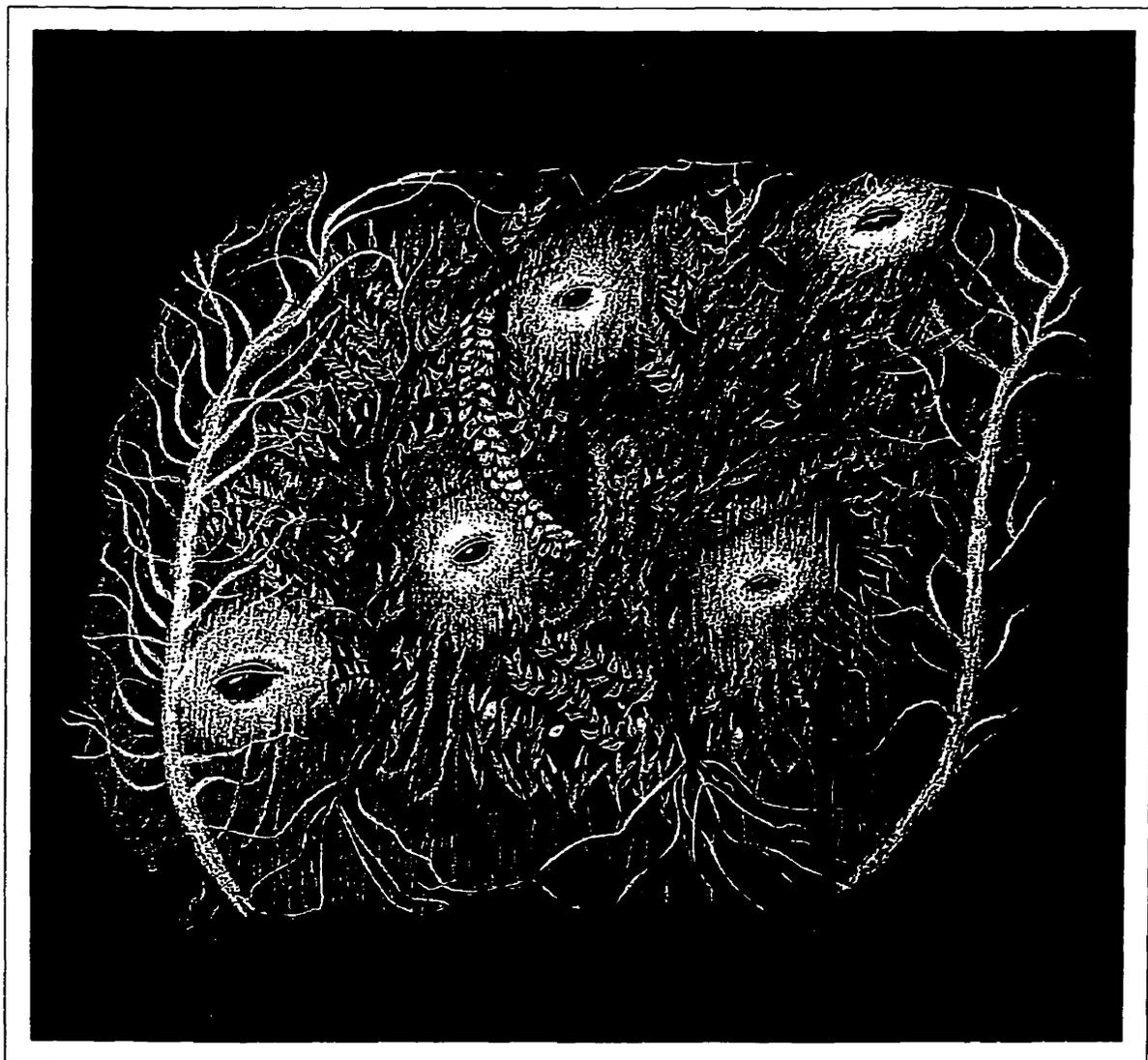
Snake Wisdom



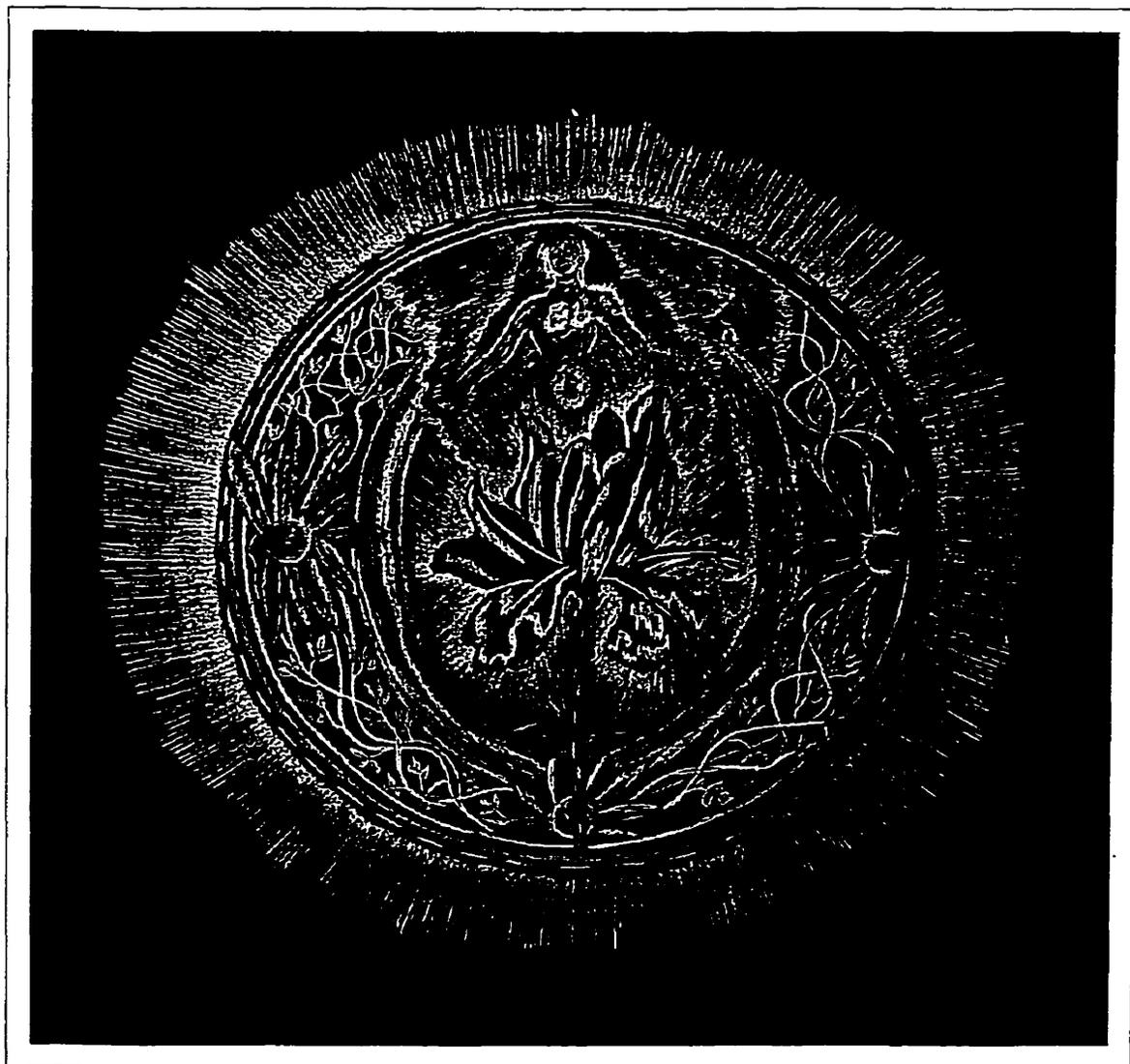
The Burning Wound



**Beyond the Boundaries**



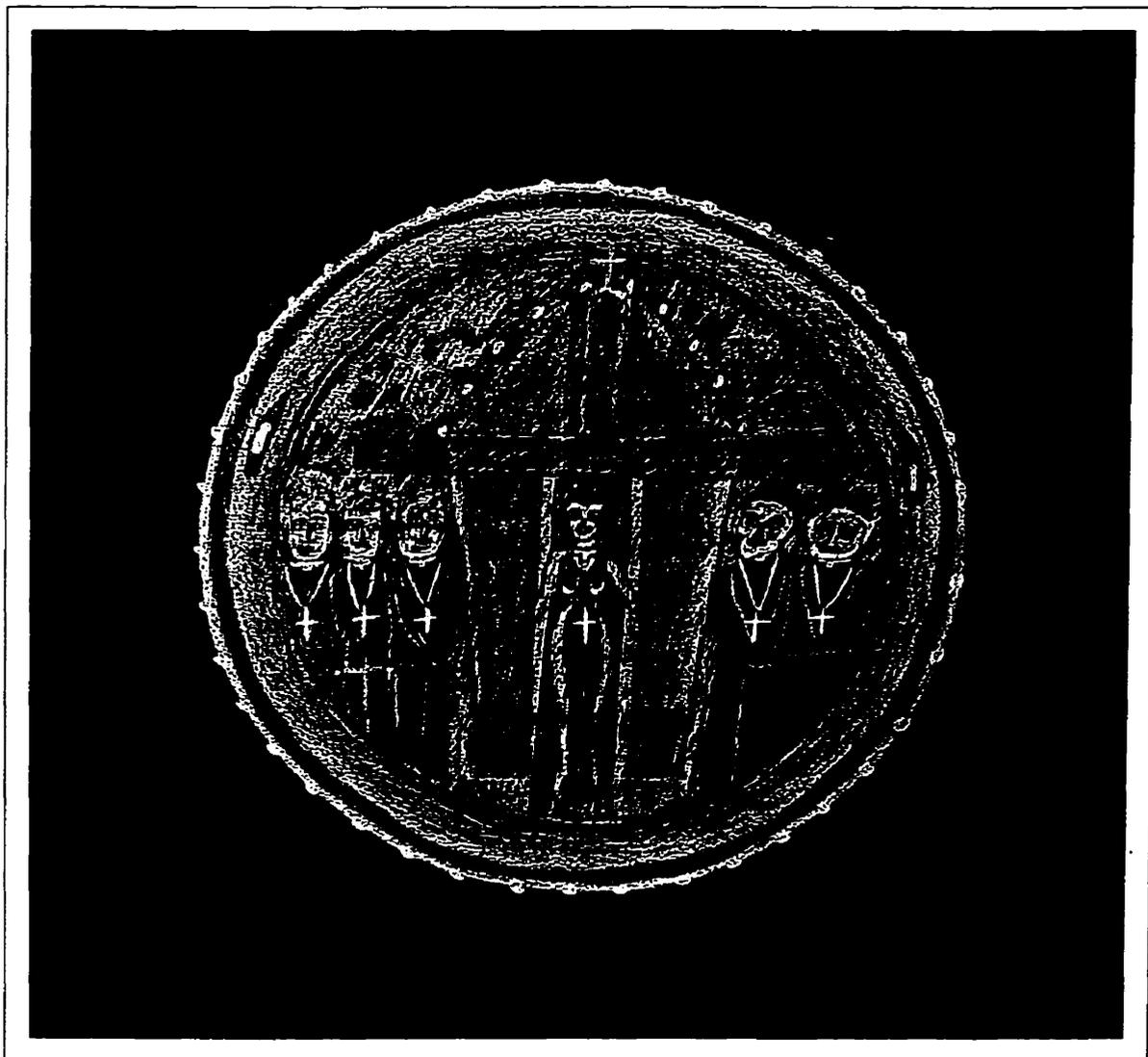
The Watchful Forest



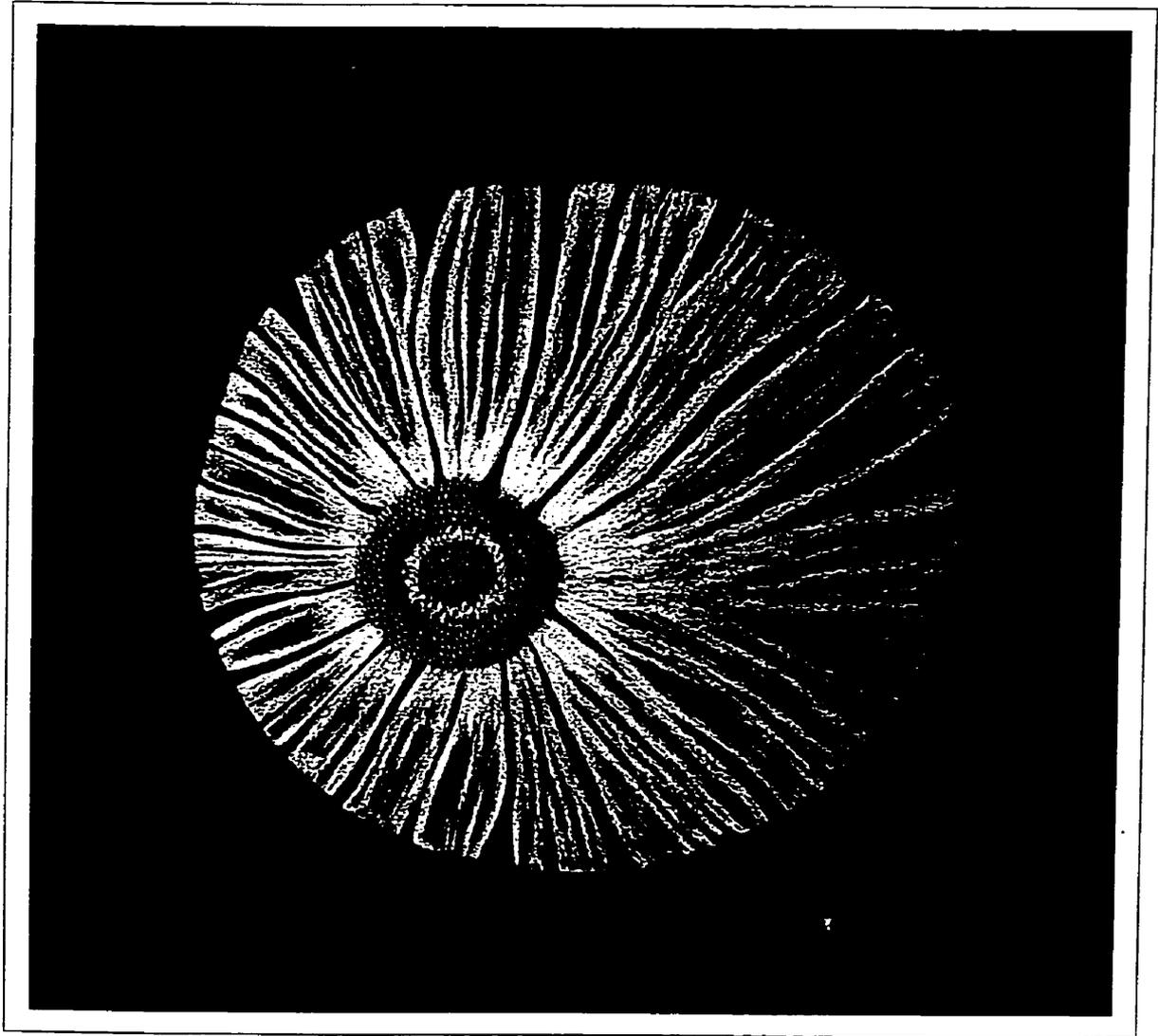
The Dream of the Iris



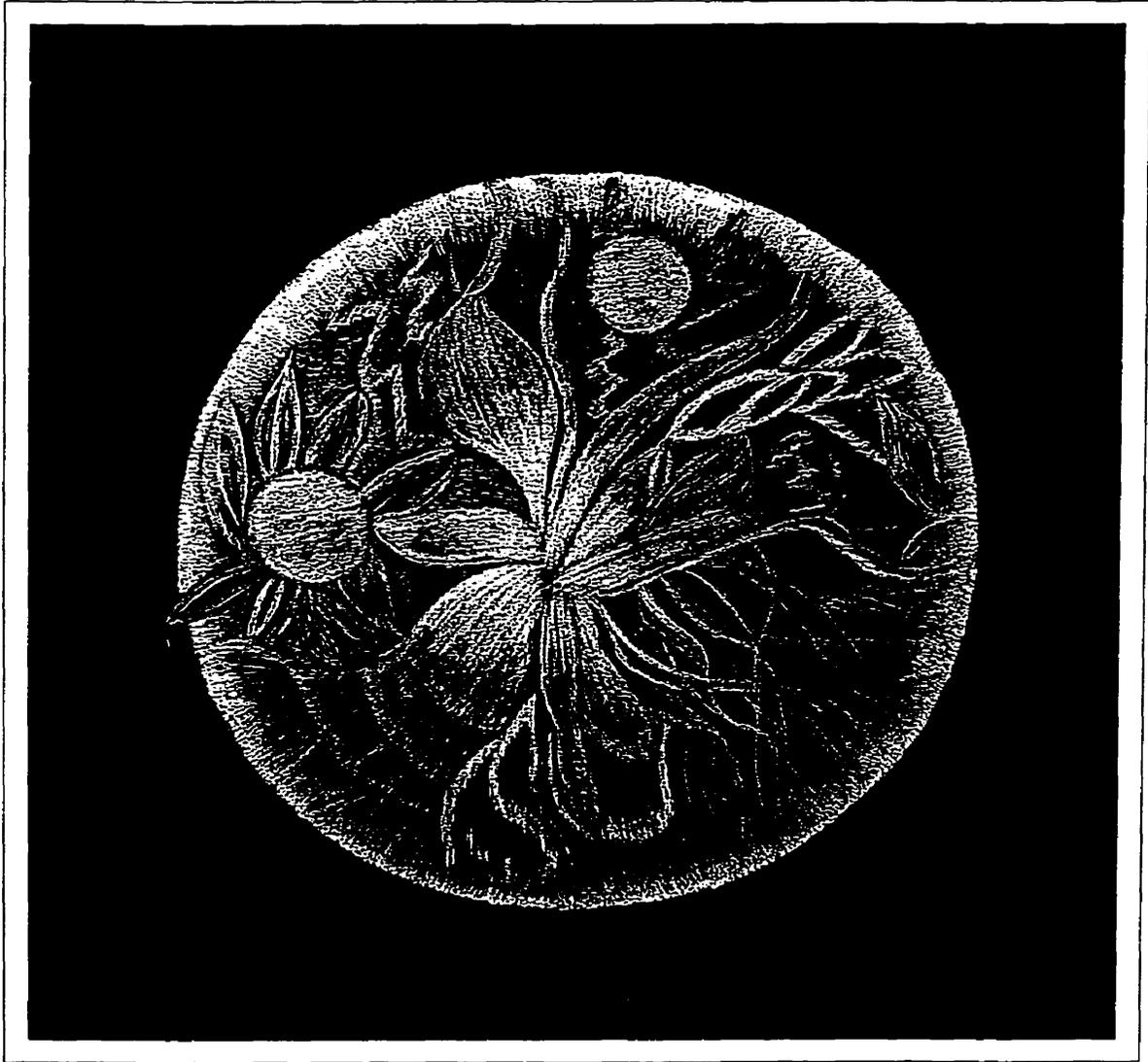
The Tree Goddesses



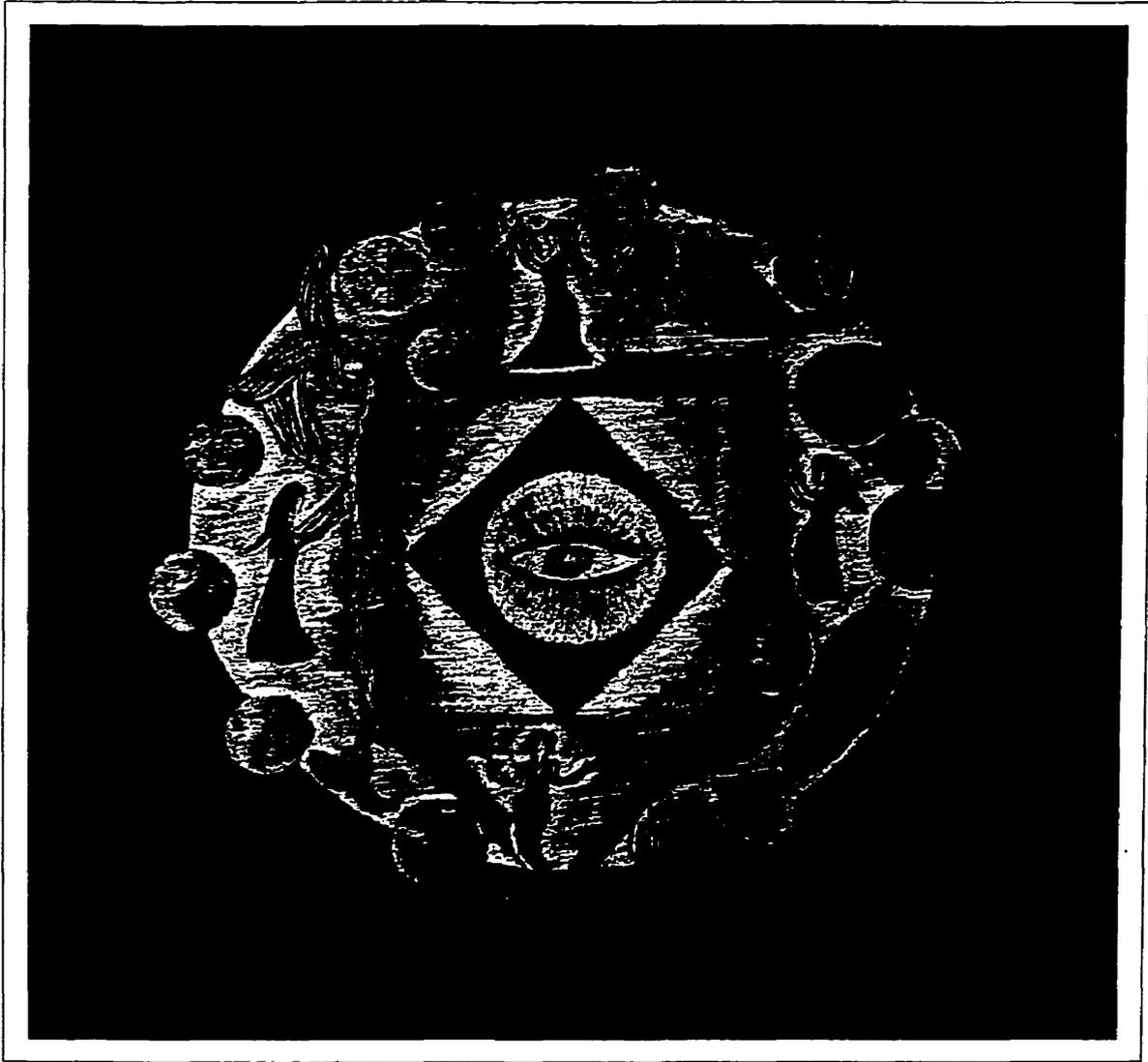
Walking the Party Line



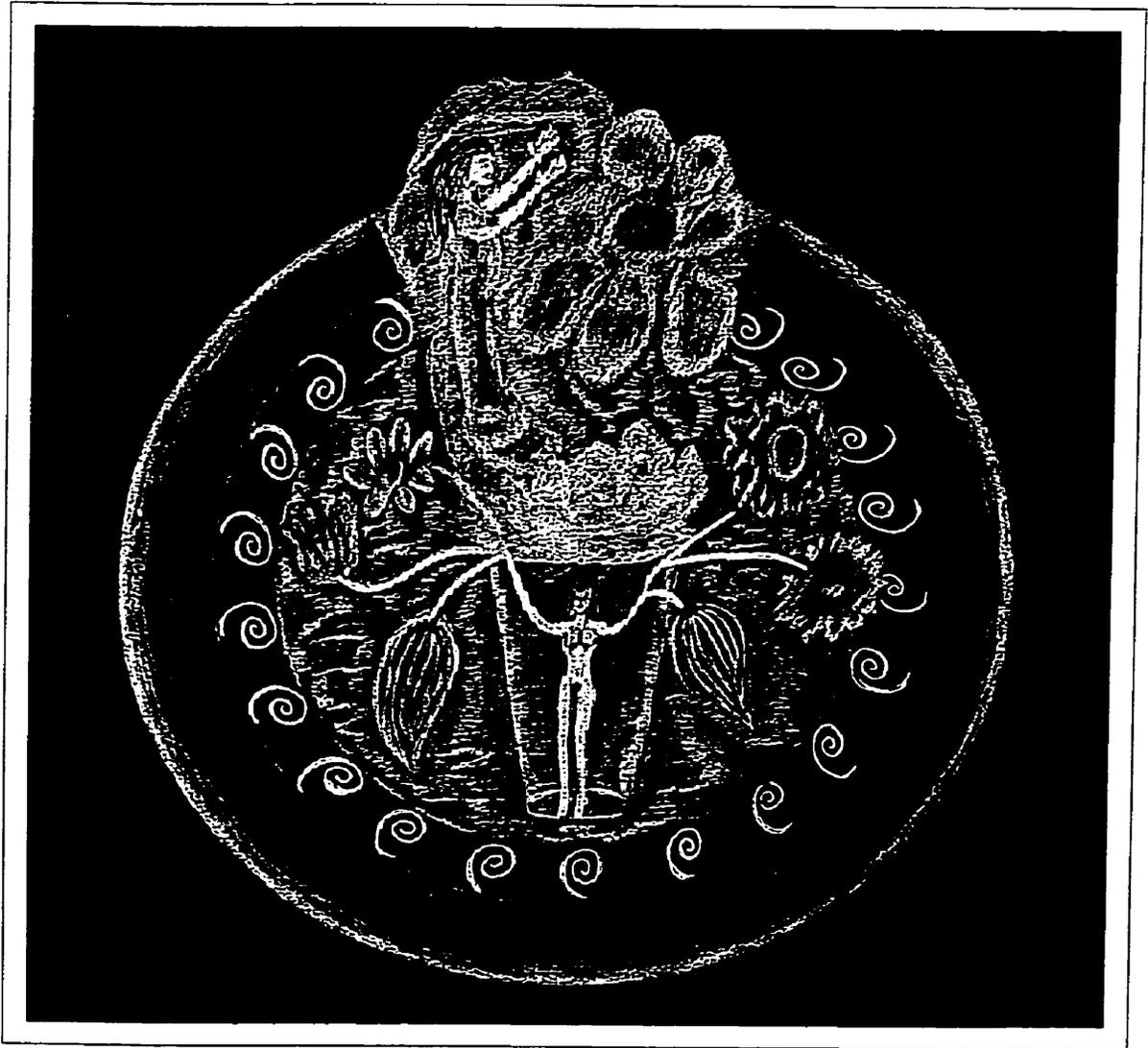
The Lie



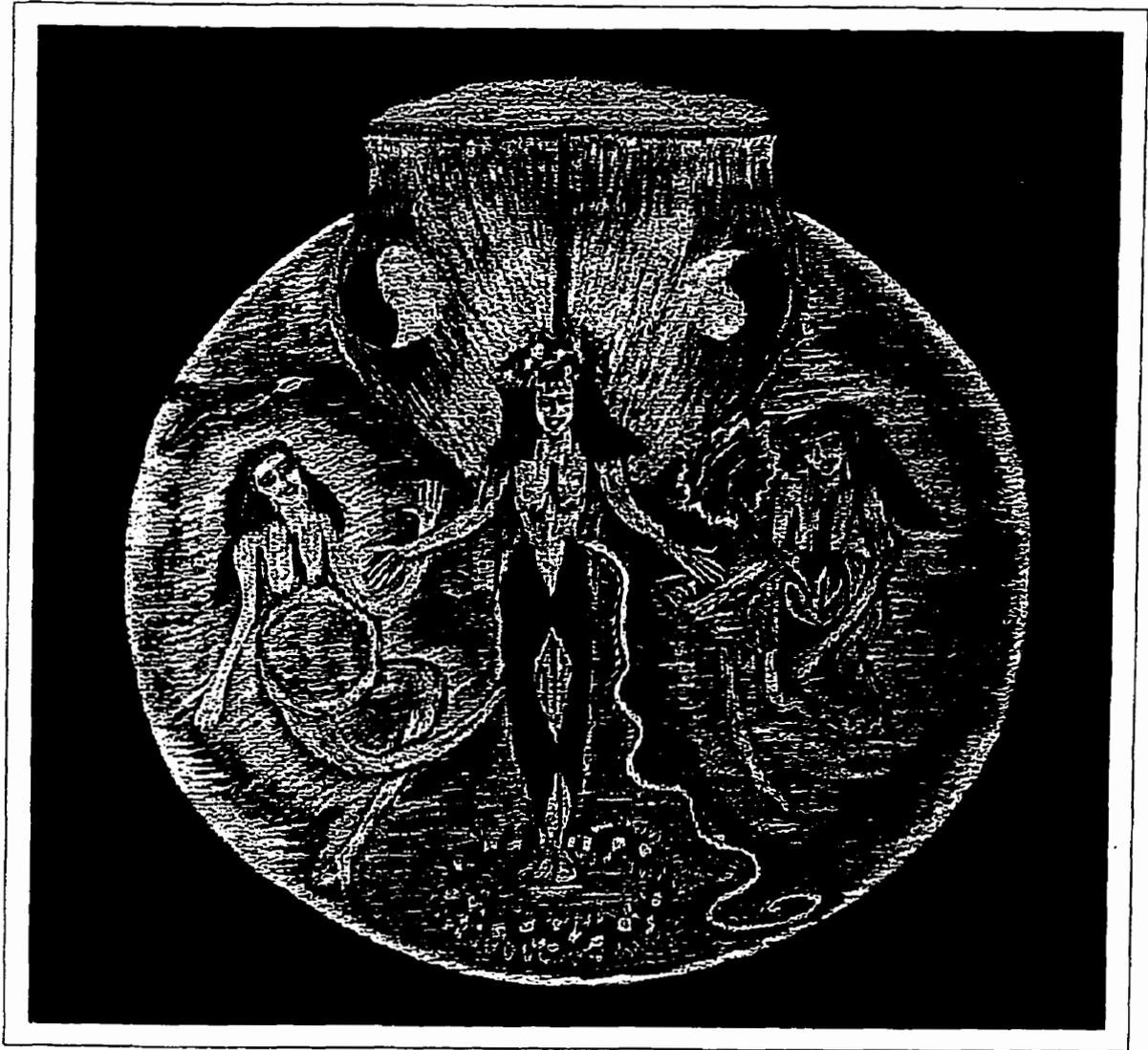
**My Way of Knowing**



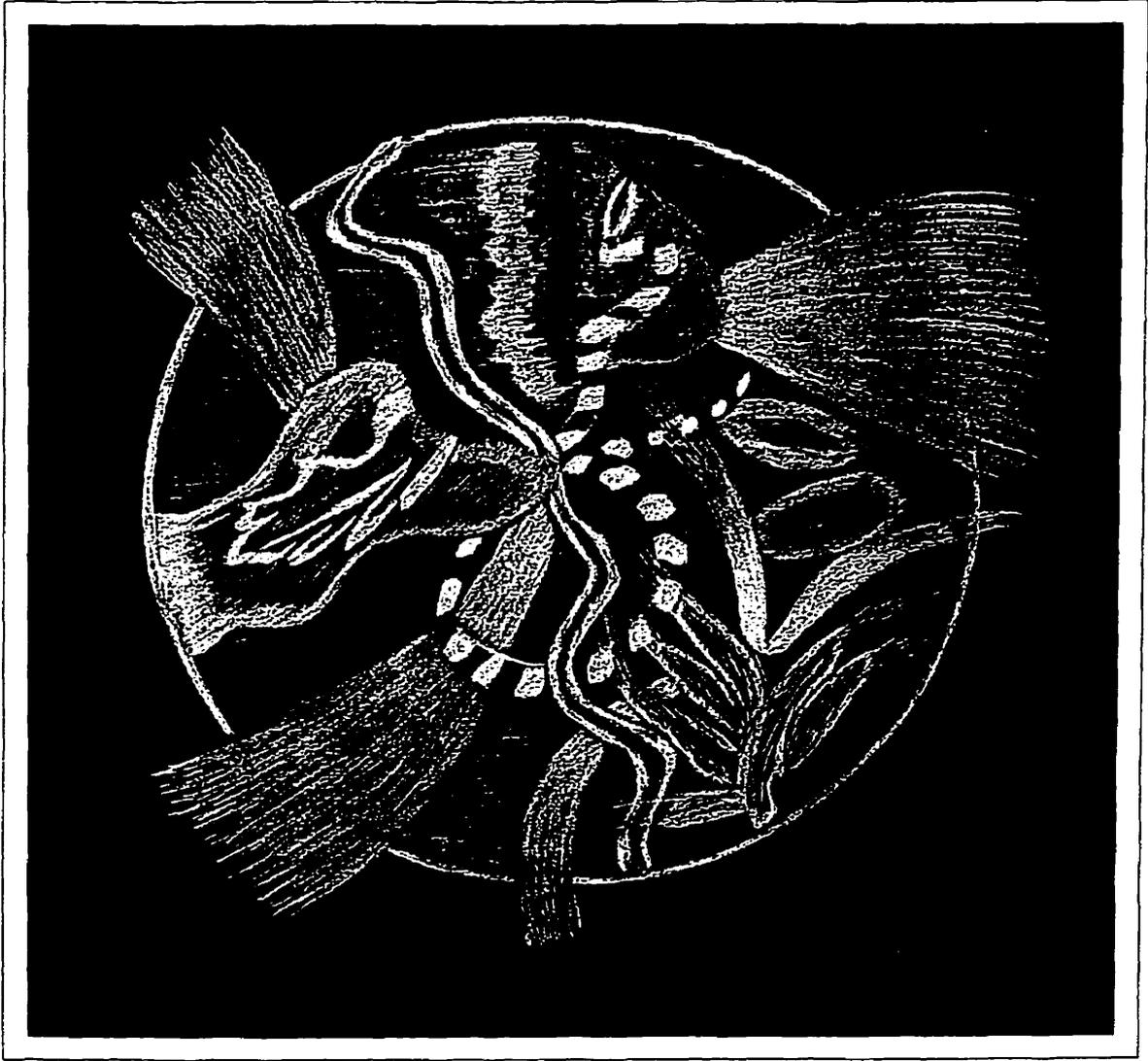
Via Positiva



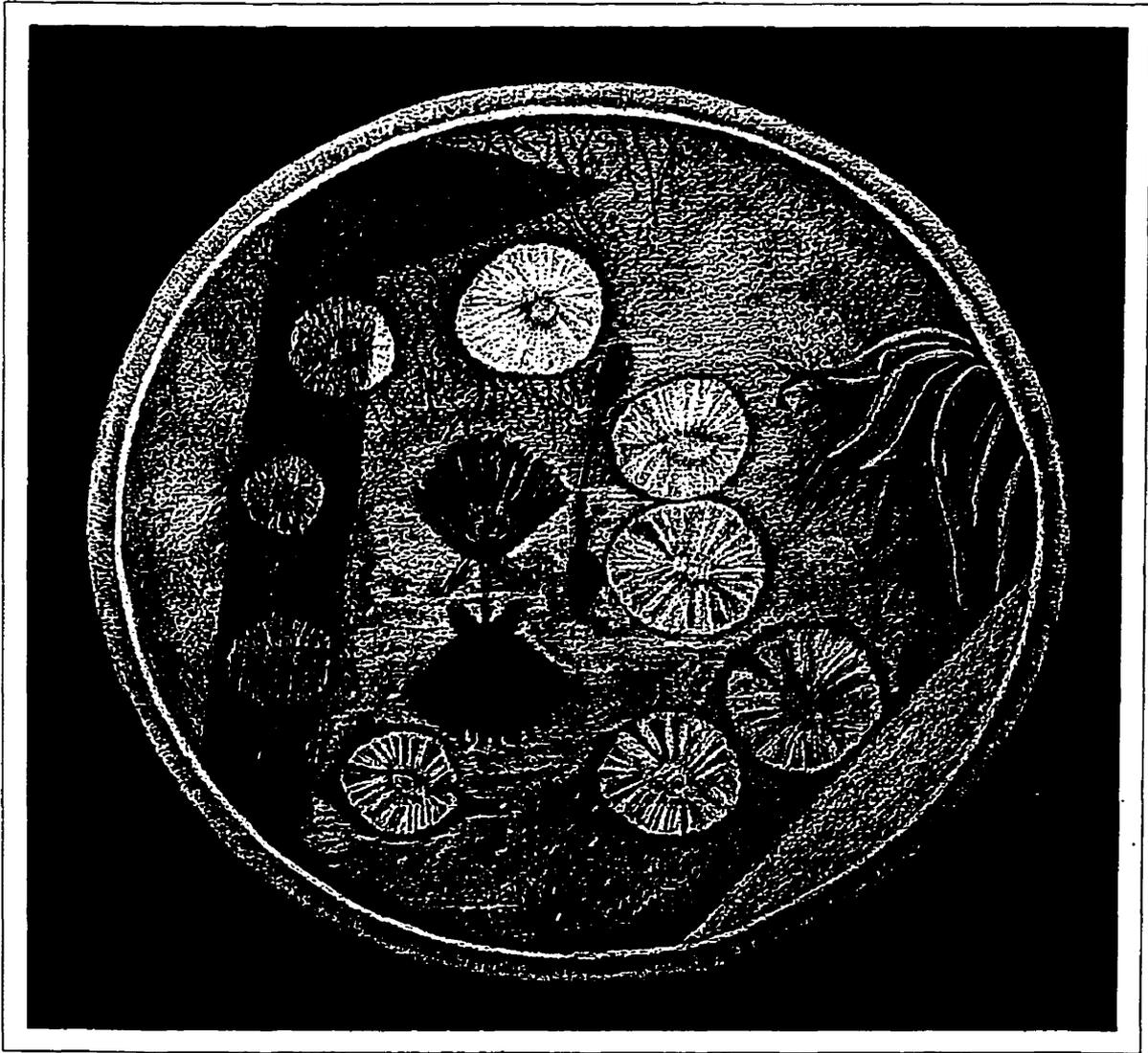
Flowering



The Feminine



Energy Bursts



Alone With the Shadow

As I began each mandala for this project, I sensed the pregnant moments of creative expression. My personal inner journey provided me an opportunity to explore the birth experience of each of my mandalas.

The experience of drawing mandalas led me on a journey that moved from not knowing into knowing more of personal self-awareness. My mandalas became mirrors of my soul consciousness. When I was in relationship with my mandalas they spoke to me and mirrored my fear, frustration, joy, and pleasure in their various images and expressions of the imaginative process. These characteristics became important in the search for the meaning of this experience of creating and understanding my mandalas. In this period of incubation, I truly felt growth was taking place. This growth would take place in the dark, often hidden from my own view. Then in surprising ways, a new insight or understanding would reveal itself. I truly felt like the pregnant woman waiting to give birth, not knowing the time or place but patiently waiting for the new self to be revealed.

As I began this process of incubation I was filled with the excitement and expectancy of tracking the elusive insight which would someday see the light of day. This period of incubation involved more than just waiting. It required a way of 'seeing' the images and experience of creating mandalas at once direct and intuitive.

To 'see' these mandalas required the art of gazing, the experience of seeing beyond without an emotional attachment and longing for something other. In this sense, seeing moves the researcher into the world of inner vision with a sense of wonder, stimulating deep reflection which provides nourishment. In this process of seeing, the mandala reveals its full beauty.

As I allowed these mandalas to incubate within me, I felt a combination of excitement, fear and awe. I wondered if I could articulate the mystery and uniqueness of this creative experience in a language encouraging others to use this art form as a means for self-integration and therapeutic counseling. I hoped to express new insights born of my interaction with these mandalas and their stories. I hoped my ability 'to see' would manifest itself in insights and illuminations which would give me a deeper clarity and perspective on my research. I had no guarantees. Still, it was important to seek and speak my truth, avoiding the trap of clever jargon, in order to remain authentic in the creative process.

Once again, I rely on McNiff, to voice concerns about the traps which can muddle the understanding of this creative process.

...As we become increasingly concerned with research in art therapy, we need to be wary of its potential to interrupt the creative flow of the art therapy process with overly technical methods and jargon which distance us from the language of image.<sup>135</sup>

In my own experience, McNiff's remarks applied to my attempt to find a language aptly depicting the process and meaning of my experience with the making of mandalas. This also included my focus on the relationship between my artistic process and the mandala itself. Each of my mandalas became a tool for understanding.

Once I surrendered control over the creation of my mandalas, I drew each one and watched it take on a life its own. The creative environment of each mandala became a studio for research and discovery. Through my mandalas I was able to generate and respond to images, ideas, forms, colors, contours, and energy forces. I became involved in the act of creating something on paper already alive inside me. I also realized how the popular use of the title of "artist" can often do a disservice when it emphasizes the 'product.' In the context of this heuristic research, the mandala itself was not as important as the creative act. I was also challenged to see what images recurred in my mandalas. These repetitive images ultimately led the way for the thematic development in this study. The emerging themes are represented by the boldface in the following explanatory narrative.

I would now invite the reader to enter into the sacred space of the artist and storyteller to witness the creative process of drawing and interacting with mandalas. In the first part of this chapter I will share with you the mandalas I drew for this project. Copies of these mandalas are found on pp. 83-96 and are listed with titles, dates and themes in Table 5.1 on p. 99. The second portion of this chapter will include the mandalas created by my two co-researchers with vignettes from the interviews with them. These vignettes will give voice to their stories. (See Tables 5.2, 5.3, pp. 123-124) The first nine mandalas belong to Mark; the next ten belong to Julie.

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<sup>135</sup> McNiff. Art-Based Research, Op.Cit., 124.

The table below contains the titles, dates and themes of the mandalas chosen for the autobiographical component of this project. This list will be useful in the following discussion.

**Table 5.1**

**Marjorie – List of Mandalas**

<b>#</b>	<b>MANDALA TITLE</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>THEME</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Snake Wisdom</b>	<b>October , 1997</b>	<b>Goddess/Divine Feminine</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>The Burning Wound</b>	<b>October, 1998</b>	<b>Patriarchal Consciousness</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Beyond the Boundaries</b>	<b>January, 1999</b>	<b>Playfulness/Poetry</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>The Watchful Forest</b>	<b>February, 1998</b>	<b>Archetype of Forest</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>The Dream of the Iris</b>	<b>March, 1999</b>	<b>Honoring My Truth</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>The Tree Goddesses</b>	<b>June, 1999</b>	<b>Goddess/Transformation</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Walking the Party Line</b>	<b>July, 1999</b>	<b>Woman's Role in Church</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>The Lie</b>	<b>August, 1999</b>	<b>Betrayal/Perfectionism</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>My Way of Knowing</b>	<b>August, 1999</b>	<b>Honoring Self-Process</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Via Positiva</b>	<b>August, 1999</b>	<b>Container</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Flowering</b>	<b>August, 1999</b>	<b>Container</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>The Feminine</b>	<b>August, 1999</b>	<b>Divine Feminine</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Energy Bursts</b>	<b>September, 1999</b>	<b>Trust in the Process</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Alone with the Shadow</b>	<b>September, 1999</b>	<b>Unconscious</b>

These mandalas were selected for this project because they seemed most connected to my experience of life events, my key psychological issues and my spiritual awakenings of the past few years. Some of the mandalas took an extended period of time to draw while others developed more quickly. It became very obvious to me how one mandala grew from another and was related in some way. Psyche moved at its own pace!

When I wondered if a particular mandala was “finished”, I recalled my 1999 visit to the beautiful Joyce Petter art gallery in Saugatauk, Michigan. There, I happened upon a quote by Paul Gardner: “A painting is never finished – it simply stops in interesting places.” This quote became extremely important for me because I often saw new possibilities when revisiting my mandalas.

The mandala can take on its own personality and can raise its own questions about its relationship with its creator. Only when the creator is in relationship with the mandala can the self-

dialogue begin. And once it begins, the outcomes can be surprising. All these characteristics invite a deeper relationship between the maker and the mandala, the product of the creative process.

Often the process of making a mandala led to a sense of frustration because I felt I had in some way failed to adequately represent an image or experience. In these instances, I had to learn how to understand the deeper implications of self- discovery and the therapeutic processes when I failed to express an image adequately. I discovered how I often fell into accepting a stereotypic perception of what is labeled 'beautiful.' When I compared my mandala images with my unexamined notions of what I considered 'beautiful' I was disappointed with my efforts. I learned to use these 'disappointing' mandalas to explore my own shadow material. My shadow represented all the dark, undeveloped, and repressed material in my psyche. I struggled with my creative process and wondered how my own faltering steps could possibly encourage others wanting to explore their own psychological and spiritual perspectives. I took comfort in the words of Jung when he commented on the process of making mandalas:

It is not important for the picture to be technically or aesthetically satisfying, but merely for fantasy to have free play and for the whole thing to be done as well as possible.<sup>136</sup>

When I became afraid, I would ground myself once again by remembering to not give any importance to fear. It was more important to risk and trust my process than fear disappointment or failure. This commitment to trust became the greatest challenge in my experience of drawing mandalas.

I began the creation of each of my mandalas with various rituals. These rituals included lighting my candles on my altar to still and ground myself and listening to music wrapping me in the tenderness of the creative moment. Then I blessed the large black paper and pencils I would use to create the mandala and continued my soul journey by creating images within the circle I drew. Some mandalas were completed in a day or so, others took several days to complete. I remained as open as possible to their own development. While I drew, I made a mental note of my inner feelings. After I finished each mandala, I clipped it to my drawing board and placed it where I could spend time

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<sup>136</sup> C.J. Jung, Collected Works, Vol. 8, par. 168.

reflecting on its birth, development and completion. I then photographed each mandala, gave it a title and dated it. Then the challenging work of interior reflection and inner dialogues ensued.

To share the story of these mandalas, I have included segments from my reflections on my experience of drawing the mandalas. I worked with my unconscious and used active imagination to access unconscious material. Using active imagination is a dramatic method of inquiry which integrates all of the imagination's faculties. It is in the interplay between the conscious and the unconscious where the alchemy of transformation can take place.

As I applied active imagination to my process of drawing the mandala, I became aware of the connections between the conscious and the unconscious in this process. Jungian analyst, Angelo Spoto noted:

Active imagination conveys the sense that the conscious individual is actually working with the unconscious. When Jung is explaining active imagination, it is not unusual for him to urge the unconscious to speak directly on the matter at hand, as if there were a person in the unconscious.<sup>137</sup>

When I used active imagination, I found I 'caught hold' of an image or feeling. It demanded full participation in the process and moved me into a deeper sense of 'creative immersion.' Let me show you how this process of self-dialogue works in the heuristic approach to exploring the experience of making mandalas and awakening to their significance.

**Mandala # 1: Snake Wisdom      October, 1997**

The music I listened to as I prepared to create this mandala was very primitive with strong drums. The music helped me move into my instinctual animal energies and I began to imagine what a snake looks and feels like. I was surprised that I was not frightened. Many snake images began to appear as I moved my white pencil to form patterns and images. In my active imagination with these images they seemed to say:

**We slither and move in waving rhythmic patterns. The black paper is inviting. It feels good to stretch out across the paper and have our heads at each end. We don't want to slither off the paper! Those who see us often jump and scream. We**

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<sup>137</sup> Angelo Spoto. Jung's Typology in Perspective. Boston: Sigo Press, 1989, 116.

want you to be our friend as well as tap into our marvelous dance of energies. When our cobra visitor appears you stare at it. The cobra feels powerful and certainly occupies a supreme position among us. We begin to throw colors. We are beautiful. We dance a duet. We are all awed by the cobra's strong feminine energy. There is a sense of Kundulini energy rising throughout our snake bodies. As you draw we sense your feelings of the power of Mother God, the goddess, and transformation within your soul. We thank you for honoring your snake wisdom.

While I was drawing this mandala, I found it a challenge to stay with the feelings and refrain from analysis. I began to like this mandala and allowed the experience of it to flow through my body without intellectualizing the process. This new experience demanded that I surrender my ego to the entire creative process with all its unknowns.

In reflection afterwards, I became aware of many of my mandalic drawings leading me to new territory where I could freely embrace the **Goddess**. In Jungian thinking, the snake is a major symbol of psychic energy. In archetypal psychology, the snake is respected as a feminine symbol representing instinct and female divinity. I sensed my soul was speaking to me in imagery which reflected the **Divine Feminine**. I soon learned the images of the Divine Feminine would recur in my mandalas. This became a theme of great significance for my internal process of self-awareness and integration.

### **Mandala # 2: The Burning Wound      October, 1998**

This mandala developed out of my discovery of how **patriarchal consciousness** caused me to enter a place of fire, pain and deep woundedness. This discovery helped me become aware of my pain as a woman who often feels powerless in the structures of patriarchy. Throughout my own intense therapeutic journey I came to see my own massive wound around Feminine issues.

I began this mandala by drawing a circle but found that its shape was not enough, so I added the square. The following was expressed in the process of active imagination.

**I cannot move out of the center of my mandala because I feel I am being burned and imprisoned by an enormous circle of fire. At every turn, I see another woman burned as she is trying to speak her voice. This fire is surrounding not only me, but all women. I am on this cross. It feels horrible and terrifying. I do not want the flames to move in on me and engulf me completely. As I am wondering how I can protect myself, my cross seems to light up and shadow me with a larger one. The light cools and soothes me. I am burning with a longing to be rescued from**

**these fires of patriarchy and strongly sense that these flames will completely engulf me and reduce me to ashes if I do not find a way. I do not want to be another sacrifice or victim to this burning energy which kills off the feminine. There must be meaning in all of this. I long to be heard.**

I realized that creating this mandala eased my sense of pain. This mandala was a way of getting the wound out of my body and externalizing it so I could see it. My pencils seemed to incessantly create the fires and the mandala continued to grow larger. Working with this mandala I felt I was in an **alchemical process** in which I would be **transformed**. As I became more focused I could hear my own inner voice screaming for life. In this scream, my inner self reached into the outer world. It was as though a psychic energy had encompassed me. The mandala and my person were almost entirely intermingled. I was able to enter my woundedness and embrace it through this artistic form.

**Mandala # 3: Beyond the Boundaries      January, 1999**

It was created in meditative response to the words of the Indian Spiritual writer and teacher Paramahansa Yogananda:

Behold, beyond the limits of the moonbeam—revealed scenery, the bedimmed fringe of the shining horizon. Let your meditation run past the rim of the visible world to the lands of fancy...Meditate until, in the cool moonbeams of your calmness, you race over trackless skies and, in realization behold the universe as Light. <sup>138</sup>

I wanted to 'gift' a friend with a mandala expression of these precious words. My mandala spoke to me in the following words as expressed in active imagination:

**I feel very expansive and playful as I think about my friend's upcoming trip. My pattern moves out and beyond, full of life and colors. I vibrate with expectation and light. My large size startles me at first, but enjoys this movement and become larger and moves beyond the limits of my circle. My spontaneity feels very good. As my colors fill in my pattern, I feel like gliding over the earth, water, and skies. I feel the radiance of God's love and the rush of energy which penetrates my entire circle.**

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<sup>138</sup> Paramahansa Yogananda. Mandala seminar with Judith Cornell in 1997 at Mount Madonna Center. These words were read as a meditation.

The descriptors here are characteristic of an **analogical process** in my creative process. In other words, the expansive and vibrating patterns are parallel descriptions for my feelings of excitement and anticipation of my friend's trip. I saw this mandala as an entry into the making of the image. Again, I existed within it and enjoyed the spontaneity of the creative moment outside of it. The **poetic words** of Yogananda had inspired this mandala into creation.

**Mandala #4: The Watchful Forest      February, 1999**

As I began to draw this **forest**, I became aware of my fear about entering into any heavily wooded areas. As a child I grew up with frightening stories about what I might find in the woods. As I recalled these stories, images of eyes began to take shape. As I drew, I gradually recognized that this mandala held elements of self-portraiture in it. This forest was me. I entered into my own 'wooded psyche'. This mandala told its story through active imagination:

**You have created me with characteristics of protectiveness and vigilance. Your graceful curves of my trunks and delicate leaves leave me to wonder how comfortable you are living in the primal world of nature filled with deep darkness. As you move into the details of my forest, my five eyes watch you with concern. You draw me with considerable energy and spontaneity. Are you trying to finish me quickly so you can move out of my darkness? There is both life and death here in my forest. I enjoy the way you shape and work on my eyes. Yes, I am staring right back at you, observing you as you move into your inner consciousness.**

I realized how necessary it was to draw this mandala. I fully realized the **forest** is a strong **archetype** in Jungian psychology. Only in my forest, the image of my unconscious, would I be able to find my shadows and seek the solitude necessary for my soul growth. In moving into the forest of my unconscious, I was able to explore many of the feelings I had been holding in my body. I was aware of my tendency to intellectualize whenever I felt overwhelmed by emotional material. When I drew this forest, I acknowledged my fears and examined the obstacles which hindered my soul growth.

**Mandala #5: The Dream of the Iris      May, 1999**

The image of an iris floated unexpectedly into my empty circle. Facing my ability to draw an iris adequately, I hesitated. However, I realized this was going to be *my* iris and I wanted to embrace its

own beauty. As I drew its shape, the color purple came to dominate the image. I began to wonder what it feels like to be an iris. The image seemed to stare back at me with its dreamy quality paying little attention to me. It eventually noticed me and began to speak. This is the story of the iris as told through active imagination.

**You seem unsure about my identity. I sense you don't think there is any beauty in me at all. Please let me share my dream with you. Slow down so you can hear, enjoy and appreciate it. You are frowning as you draw my dream image of the goddess. I notice your frenzy about your hang-up around 'beauty.' Don't press so hard. I can feel your frustration as you create my goddess image. It really hurts when you say this looks awful. You are making me feel worse with each passing moment. But remember that I appeared in your Psyche and this is the way I am. I just am. This is my truth.**

My goddess image represented by this iris did not appear delicate and feminine for me. This perception pushed me to face my stereotype concerning what is 'generally' accepted as aesthetically pleasing. I was called to accept what is in the mandala rather than embrace the empty stereotype of 'what should be.' In my attempts to beautify this image of the iris, I discovered the truth was in what I had drawn, not in what I hoped I would draw. I sensed the strength in my whole body as I continued to draw the iris. I realized I had received a wonderful message. **Honor my own truth.** The picture does not lie.

#### **Mandala # 6: The Tree Goddesses      June, 1999**

As I was drawing this mandala, the black circle quickly filled with poplar trees of the forest and inner circles which I sensed were connecting to the feminine in my psyche. While I drew, I became conscious of the childhood 'hide and go seek' game. I began to draw faces in the trees. Staring at me, they called out and teased me. They seemed to voice 'special messages.' I began to wonder if these faces were reflections of many aspects of my psyche. As their eyes began to take shape, I sensed how important it was to dialogue with these goddess figures. The monstrosity in the center became the receptacle for the butterfly image of **transformation**. The goddess figures spoke to me in active imagination:

**We are here together to invite you into the world of your feminine. But you have to enter our rich dense forest to find us. It is a solitary experience and very dark.**

**But be not afraid. We realize you do not know us well, because you have spent so much of your life trying to connect to your animus energy which your culture highly appreciates. But we hold goddess wisdom and hope you will discover your own. Our forest is a place where your soul can grow and connect to your spirituality.**

This mandala represented a 'forest period' of my life. This forest archetype theme reappeared. The images in this mandala presented a red flag for me, warning me to stop intellectualizing, to pay attention to my emotions and my dreams. I began to realize the importance of entering the wilderness where my soul and psyche would be nourished.

**Mandala # 7: Walking the Party Line      July, 1999**

As personal background for drawing this mandala a friend and I had recently discussed the role of women in our church. Our conversation led to some disheartening and depressing conclusions. I suspected many women were living under the mask of a 'liberated' church which is hiding its masculine shadow. I was saddened.

In this mandala, I began to draw an image of a miter representing church authority. As I drew the miter, a seductive woman appeared in my psyche. A giddiness swept over my body. This sensation intrigued me. Clergy figures entered this mandala. Their caricature natures surprised and embarrassed me. As I tried to work with these figures, their images became more and more grotesque. The mandala voiced its amusement.

**After gloomily sitting before me for some time, your sudden eruption of laughter surprises me. You have centered a very seductive woman in my miter! I love your spontaneity. Do you think she represents many women in the church? Your mumbling and giddiness is fascinating. You ask me: "What will the Church do with her?" I know that the hierarchy recognizes her as symbolic of Eve. However, your position of her might be threatening. My priests and monsignors are watching her with skepticism. Your nervous laughter increases. I hear you comment how terrible we all look. You are trying to redraw my clergy! Are you embarrassed? Sure they look grotesque. They tell the woman they have bestowed her with dignity and equality. But her hands are tied by the patriarchy! Your comments are negating my truth. It is painful to hear "I should never have drawn you." I won't leave your psyche even if you throw me away. You have created me. I believe you have something to learn from me. Don't resist me. I occupy an important place in your psyche right now.**

I felt shocked with disbelief and shame over this mandala drawing. But after working with this mandala through reflection and active imagination, I realized I had ‘imaged’ my own reality as I live out my **role as woman** within the patriarchal church structures. The paradox here was how the mandala evoked a plethora of emotional reactions reflecting the sadness of personal experiences of isolated women in my church tradition under the official guise of inclusiveness.

In opening myself to the playfulness of these images, I was able to give shape to very difficult experiences of my church’s treatment of women. With reflection I realized that this mandala, with its caricature images, had everything it needed to help me uncover the layers of unconscious material associated with ‘my role in a patriarchal church.’ The truth of this mandala frightened me. The pain lingered and the childhood memories returned. In my church, I had learned an ‘encoded’ language which forbade an expression of true feelings. Nice girls were taught to silence their anger over the injustices in the church, especially about women.

**Mandala # 8: The Lie      August, 1999**

After drawing “Walking the Party Line,” I realized how upset I was because the mandala contained images I felt were ugly. I remembered a picture I had photographed of a friend’s daisy mandala from a previous workshop. My tendency to intellectualize when I am insecure took over again. I fell into the pitfall of an imitation drawing to cover the shame of the previous ‘poor mandala.’ I tried to copy the image of my friend’s daisy mandala and make it pretty. I was in a serious struggle with my own negative critic and slipped into a total betrayal of trust in my process. I experienced guilt and fear about expressing my truth.

**Fear** of the truth does strange things to the human being. Fear of criticism existed in every cell of my body. In response to this fear I dashed into my photos from previous seminars and chose a magnificent flower drawn by a friend. I spent hours trying to imitate the beauty of this woman artist whom I admired. As I reflected on my attempt to imitate someone else’s creative expression I realized I had given part of my soul life away. I was horrified to become aware I had betrayed my own soul! The poet Ralph Emerson gave voice to this sense of betrayal:

The soul created the arts wherever they have flourished... Insist on yourself; never imitate. Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life's cultivation; but of the adopted talent of another, you have only an extemporaneous half-possession. That which each can do best, none but his (her) Maker can teach him.<sup>139</sup>

My sense of guilt drove me to spend hours in imitation of another's creative work. I struggled to maintain some kind of relationship to this daisy mandala, but it remained outside of my psyche. My sense of alienation was deep. I grasped for something that was totally inauthentic. I have included this mandala in this collection to assist in the understanding of what happens to Soul when betrayal takes place. The mandala 'knew' with each stroke.

**You are running from your truth. You are imitating the photo image. This is not your soul. You have taken flight from our sanctuary. My daisy petals feel brittle and plastic. When you throw away your authority like this, your white pencil touches my shape without passion, love, or any connection. I feel aborted... dead. I cannot hear your voice or see you. I feel you have sold out your own creativity and lied to me. Your insecurity has caused a wedge between us. How can I help you to regain your confidence? What do you need from me at this time?**

I faced my old tapes of **perfectionism**. I had unconsciously stifled my own creative energy by hiding behind someone else's imaginative process. Through the act of splitting off from myself, I lost my own sight and became an empty vessel. "The Lie" mandala became an example of a short circuit experience of my creative process.

I felt doubly ashamed at having spent the time on this mandala, but in the end I realized how it made me face my demons of perfectionism and my tendency to transfer my authority to someone else. I re-examined my narrow view of what constitutes an aesthetic image and realized how the drawing of this mandala informed my psyche.

**Mandala # 9: My Way of Knowing      August, 1999**

When I began this mandala, I was quite frustrated. The large circle held many possibilities, yet I had no clue what might evolve. With much restlessness and self doubt about my Project/Dissertation, I began to voice out loud my lack of confidence in my creative process. With the white pencil, I began in the center and let it move freely throughout the circle. As it gradually flowed

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<sup>139</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson. Selected Essays. New York: Penguin Classics, 1985, 198-199.

into graceful images my body began to relax within the emerging images of the mandalic circle. The mandala speaks as she observes me.

**I heard you sigh and berate yourself over being stuck. Remember, I am here to help you. I can hold all of your frustration if you allow me the chance. But start caressing me with your colored pencils. I love the feeling of their delicate tips. There you go again with negative comments about your creative process. It is both an abusive cycle and is destructive to my beauty. You are always listening to your negative critic. How can that make you happy? Your way of creating is a precious gift. I will soothe your anxiety with my unconditional love and acceptance of all your designs, nuances, and colors. In fact, I love the uniqueness of your approach as you risk drawing me with your feelings. It is a sacred moment. We have become one with each other. It is blissful. I sense your energy and delight as you move into your discovery. I am expanding and intensifying with your energy. I am non-linear. I feel the goddess chants echoing everywhere. You appear to be so grounded and yet exhilarated. I am amazed at how you are beginning to realize the richness of your own creativity.**

As I reflected on the creative dynamics of this mandala, my awareness of how easily I allow myself to be influenced by **male thinking** became very apparent. The negative critic can overpower me quickly if I am not cautious. I do a terrible disservice to the feminine when I abuse her with pre-conceived expectations derived from an anthropocentric perspective. My free use of colors with the swirling and graceful design freed me from my status as a prisoner of patriarchal thinking. My new found freedom burst into the ‘no restrictions’ zone of creativity.

I was profoundly moved by the experience of how the creation of the mandala can be so insightful, healing and transforming. This mandala held crucial information for my understanding. My creative process is very circular and connected. This mandala in essence represented my way of knowing.

**Mandala # 10: Via Positiva      August, 1999**

As I began this mandala, feelings of intimidation and anxiety washed over my body. I wondered if I was competing with my own mandalas. After some time, images broke through to my consciousness. I slowly sketched out four women to represent the four elements, the four directions and wholeness. A chain image developed. The women held the chain as a **container** to protect my inner eye of consciousness. Animal creatures gradually took shape. I was stunned by the large mouse - - a

rodent! My concept of ‘beauty’ was challenged once again by this mouse image. Why such a large mouse? With the entry of other creatures, I decided to let my ego go and see what else would develop. Multiple images of balls and circles appeared. I struggled with the desire to analyze this mandala, but I feared I might block my creative flow if I stopped to analyze this while it was in process. As I reflected on the images, the women spoke.

**We want to accompany you on your journey towards individuation. We have roped off your inner eye consciousness to protect the wisdom of your heart. We carry a strong sense of matriarchal consciousness which is all about us. She sings her songs and beats her inner rhythms. We sense your fear as you speak your truth. But we are here to pave the way. Your animal creatures dance with us. Do not be frightened by your mouse. He wants to be recognized. Wholeness demands full acceptance of spirit and earth (matter) to be birthed. We urge you to take time to live with nature. We are all interconnected – every one of God’s creatures. Enter Mother Territory and bring her to your consciousness. We will be with you as you continue to release your creativity.**

This mandala connected to my struggles with patriarchal and **matriarchal consciousness**. My associations with matriarchal consciousness involve the inner processes of growth. This growth and integration is not under control of the ego. Whereas patriarchal consciousness employs an ego which acts on its own behalf. I realized how necessary it was for me to dethrone the ego in the service of the Self. I sensed my **individuation** process would continue if I kept a deep resonance to my inner center. For me, this was a Via Positiva! I felt hopeful.

**Mandala # 11: The Flowering      August, 1999**

Before I began this mandala, I wondered what I might draw to sooth me. I listened to soft music in the background. As I grounded myself I slowly experienced creative energy filling my whole body. I knew something was going to take shape. I started with a glass and as I gently worked on it, a woman appeared with her long graceful blooming flower arms. The glass called for another flower which floated above the women’s head. There was a real sense of pregnancy in this drawing. With the new life the flowers loomed larger. The boundary around this mandala became thick and protective. I felt a strong connection to my inner feminine. This mandala seemed to be waving to me. I listened.

**You are having a glorious time with my beauty. Do you realize that you have drawn me without worrying about where to place each of my flowers? Look at the extension of each one of them. My goddess images are strong. You have protected them by drawing them within the blue mist. You have surrounded my beauty with a wonderful boundary of strong color. I feel very wise. You fill in my colors with a beautiful reverence. I see your beauty in all my lines. It feels deeply spiritual to be so connected to you at this time.**

With reflection, I realized I had drawn a highly symbolic metaphor of the feminine reproductive system. The fallopian tubes and ovaries almost came to life in the mandala while I drew. My goddess figure was already in the birth canal as represented by the glass. The joy of creativity connected to me at a deep spiritual level. This mandala contained the nurturing force of the **Divine Feminine**.

In addition, I realized the theme of 'flowers' had a way of cropping up in my creative expressions. You will remember my poem, "Flowering" in Chapter Two. Many of my mandalas contained flower images. This mandala invited me to reflect on the aspects of myself that might be represented in my flower images.

**Mandala # 12: The Feminine      August, 1999**

I had been reflecting on the **Divine Feminine**. The weather outside was warm, calm, and seemed very beautiful to me. I drew with a curiosity and openness to whatever might evolve in the large circle of the mandala. A large chalice appeared. Its size amazed me and extended beyond the circle. A goddess figure emerged. Her joy fascinated me. As I continued to draw, two other very pregnant priestesses entered my mandala carrying large symbols of life in their bellies. Their breast images told me these feminine figures have birthed many children. With animation, their voices clearly cried out the following.

**Your freedom in the expression of our feminine bodies is vibrant with color and motion. It feels wonderful. We want to help you let go of some of your enmeshment with church doctrines and ideology which no longer holds meaning for you. We have been sacrificed. We have embraced our darkness. We are here to help you recognize the patriarchal shadow of the church and release you from its bondage. Enter into communion with us and drink from our chalice, our moon and flower vessel. Enter into this very safe sanctuary of Mother Ecclesia. Drink from the large chalice vessel. There is plenty. You gave us the size. It is filled with**

**the delicacy of the Divine Feminine. As you drink you will discover your holy cup containing all of humanity with the full feminine mixed with the divine.**

I wondered what it would be like to attend the Catholic Mass and see these goddess and priestess figures busy at the altar. This desire meant I would be drinking from the Grail vessel and ingesting the mother bread of the underworld. However, in my Roman Catholic Church tradition there is little or no recognition of the underworld in practice. I experienced deep sadness with this thought. Both the light and darkness must be recognized in my church. Too often my Church has considered human sexuality to be evil.

This mandala put me squarely in the face of the primordial Feminine and was a strong reminder of how Patriarchal Christianity has repressed the Feminine. The Church acts as if life was divided into spirit and matter. We have no image of the Mother in the godhead. And yet as a woman, I feel it is my responsibility to live and express myself as a true image of God. I refuse to be connected to God only through a male. Wisdom literature presents us with images of the divine bride and groom. My spirituality is grounded in relatedness to both the feminine and masculine energies.

**Mandala # 13: Energy Bursts      September, 1999**

This mandala was off to a slow start. The blank paper rested before me. Why wasn't anything coming? My inner critic nagged me. "Everyone else would have had something 'out there' by now. I told it to 'shove off.'"

With the white pencil I began to slowly form an abstract pattern. It didn't look like anything in particular but I began to have fun. Somehow my energy picked up and another pattern formed followed by a third pattern which just burst forth. My entire mandala seemed to be vibrating with colors and flowing patterns. It spoke with excitement and an insightful message.

**Why are you so impatient with me? Start anywhere. Relax and quit worrying about how other mandala creators work. I know what you are thinking. You should be doing this a certain way, but I like the way *you* work. You don't have to finish me today. I will always wait for you. Believe in me. Love what you are doing. You are becoming more absorbed and fascinated as you color and shade my patterns. I like it. I feel we are dancing a 'soul duet,' a sort of a pas a deux. As I unfold before your eyes, you sometimes stare at me with disbelief. Oh, Oh! I think you want to analyze what's happening. Don't! This will stop our dance and**

**spoil everything. Let us continue playfully. When we are tired, we will rest and talk later. You have blessed me with your own unique style. It feels so freeing.**

Two things suddenly occurred to me; first, I work in bursts of energy and second, I had to move out of the way of the creative process in order to allow it to come to fruition. I needed to respect and trust the unfolding process of the images in the mandala. With confidence, my colors became bolder. Imagination was heightened. Two snakes entered the mandala. I looked for meaning which quickly threw me into doubts about this mandala experience. I liked the colors, but felt they needed to be more brilliant. I reminded myself to refrain from an analysis. Stay with my process. I kept drawing. It felt good. For me to trust my process was a challenge. The message became clear. **Trust!** Don't censor my creativity!

**Mandala # 14: Alone with my Shadow      September, 1999**

When I began this mandala, I felt overwhelmed with anxiety. I prayed for quiet as I sat before my empty circle for quite some time. Eventually, a lily pond floated into my consciousness as I became more grounded. The tranquillity of a lily pond with its brilliant delicate blossoms had always attracted me. My lily shape developed simply and beautifully out of the very still water and cast a deep shadow on the quiet water. At first I paid very little attention to the **shadow**. I started drawing other lily pads and before I realized it I had shaped my lily blossom with a very distinct shadow. The lily called for the blending of oranges, pink and magenta. A certain peacefulness evolved from drawing this mandala. But the shadow caught my attention. The lily whispered her message as I stilled myself and listened.

**Floating here in this lovely pond I feel very connected to you. The sunlight brilliantly shines on my petals and causes my shadow. However, I see how your expression changes when you draw and color my shadow shape with the black pencil. Your tension shows in the pressure of your hand. I don't feel you are comfortable with my darkness. Please know I cannot be fully seen without my shadow. I feel your anxiety about my blackness and what might be found in my shadow image. Come with me into my darkness. This is where transformation takes place. I hope this journey will help you 'see' into my total beauty. My gently imaged lily pads float about, surround me and graciously add to the splendor of my mandala. I feel your uneasiness again as you shadow some of my companion lily pads. Is it hard for you to include both light and darkness in my lily pond? I will move with you as you encounter my darkness.**

This mandala brought me into the descent of the unconscious. There was a darkness beyond the light here seeking understanding of my soul's depth. The water which could be penetrated is where my soul lived. The mandalic imagery became instrumental through its invitation in moving me into the sea/journey of my unconscious. There was an interplay here in my imagination of both the physical and spiritual worlds. Drawing the lily blossom plunged me into my shadow elements which I sensed represented the yearnings of my soul. There was work for me to do and the mandala had provided a gateway into the world of my unconscious. Interestingly, I realized I had to still myself in these quiet lily pond waters which contained enough sacredness and safety for me to move where I had to go.

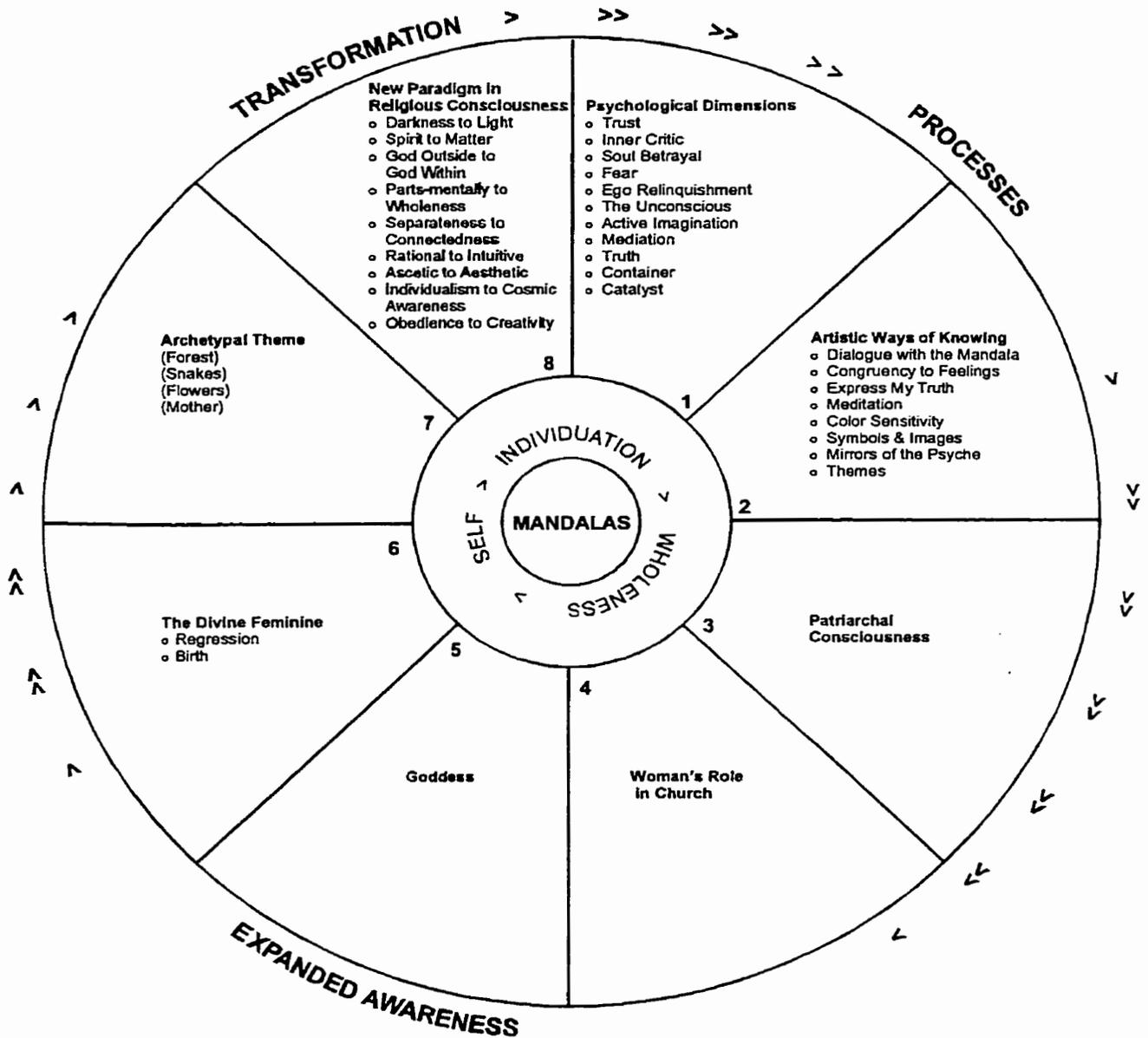
### **My Mandala Story: Heuristic Insights**

As I reflected on each of my mandalas, their individual stories certainly were present to me. But waiting in the period of incubation, I began to sense the growth of something else, something beyond the individual experiences. Gradually I began to see this experience in a new way. These mandalas began to resemble a tapestry with the images and themes born in the individual mandalas joining to form a large scene, almost resembling a pageant, the pageant of my soul journey.

In an effort to articulate my mandala story and bring this tapestry to light, I developed a chart to present the thematic patterns emerging from the creation of my mandalas (see "Heuristic Insights: Marjorie's Mandalas," Chart 5.1, p. 115). There are eight rays that emanate from the central experience of the self's journey to individuation and wholeness. Each ray represents a specific characteristic of my total experience. As I moved from one ray, or characteristic, to another, I became aware of the multi-dimensional and multi-layered nature of my expanded awareness. Gradually, the richness of my compounded experiences of drawing mandalas led me to an understanding of my own personal transformation and to a better realization of my individuation journey. Not all the rays in the chart have equal significance. Some hold more significance and are particularly unique to me. Most importantly, the rays emanate out of the core of this circle which centers on the individuation process.

Chart 5.1

## Heuristic Insights Marjorie's Mandalas



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By way of highlighting these unique rays of the heuristic insights arising out of my work, I would like to briefly move the reader through the rays. Let us start with the ray, "Psychological Dimensions." Within the heuristic process, I came to value, grow and respect the elements of trust, the need to let go of ego, the roles of the unconscious and active imagination, the power of meditation and the search for truth in this entire process. The psychological dimensions of the entire Project/Dissertation have expanded my own personal awareness of the elements of my psyche and have helped me integrate these aspects into a more whole sense of Self. In order to fully enter into the experience of drawing the mandala, trust in what may happen, or what may appear in the drawing became essential to my journey. I worked on creating an environment of psychological safety. In order for this to happen, I intentionally let go of ego concerns to allow Psyche to move freely in my process.

There was little premeditation or intentionality associated with any of my mandala drawings. This allowed me to tap into the fertile, mother territory of the unconscious, which revealed new vistas with each drawing. With the use of active imagination, I was shown aspects of myself in a metaphoric fashion which connected me to my deepest self and helped me maintain an intimate relationship to each mandala. With the ascent of my unconscious material to the conscious, I recognized that I achieved a certain element of psychic balance and harmony. In fact, my themes and patterns appeared more clearly as I immobilized my ego, attended to the distinct images of my mandalas and addressed these images as true representatives of my unconscious. The rich symbols found in my mandalas became important windows through which I was able to 'see' the truth of my Soul. As the dream 'just is' in the unconscious, so the mandala 'just is' and can become a wonderful map of the inner truth of Psyche. No mandala ever lies. With total acceptance of the mandala as an expression of my inner Soul life, I was then able to access the multiple levels of meaning which became important to my individuation process.

As I respected the life of each of my mandalas, I blessed my materials and opened myself to God's love. In this act of blessing, I entered into a meditative aspect of this entire experience which was both transforming and healing. I remained open to the analogue process whereby in the creation of the mandala there was an awareness of a fusion between it and myself. I used color, shape and form as analogues to express my interior Soul journey.

The second ray of the chart represents the “artistic way of knowing” which helped me access conscious and unconscious material through visual images and intuition. As I progressed with my series of mandalas, the images which appeared invited me to dialogue with my shadow side. I came to understand how the recognition and integration of my shadow nourished my creative process. I uncovered the meaning of my images and symbols in my journal writing and in my own therapy. I wanted to honor the feelings emerging during the creation of the mandalas and during the periods of reflection. I could not deny or avoid “messy” feelings but learned to welcome the opportunity to give them validity. I recognized the healing effect of the process I had gone through. The creation of these mandalas healed me at the psychological, emotional and spiritual levels. In understanding the rhythm of the feminine, I attuned myself to its pace and flow. During the creation phase of each of my mandalas, I allowed plenty of time for particular images from my unconscious to surface and then gently engaged them. I did this in meditation and dialogue. I gradually came to understand, accept and express my own truth without reliance on the “authorities” that have so often haunted my spirit.

The rays labeled “Patriarchal Consciousness,” “Women’s Role in the Church,” “Goddess,” “The Divine Feminine,” and “Archetypal Themes,” all represent significant issues surfacing in the course of this experience of drawing mandalas. My mandalas asked me to examine my issues related to my role as a woman and my struggles with a church which has repressed the Divine Feminine. I tried to embrace God through images and symbols which I could understand. I risked drawing my concept of the feminine to allow my appreciation of woman and matriarchy growing in my consciousness. This growth in respect for matriarchy came at the expense of my inflated sense of the impact of patriarchy in my life as well as in society and church structures. Patriarchy was losing the battle for eminence in my Self.

The ray, “Archetypal Themes” represents Jungian images seeming to reside in what Jung would call the collective unconscious.\* Some of these archetypes surfaced in my mandalas -- specifically, the recurring images of snakes, forests, and flowers. I was invited to reflect on why they arose from my unconscious. When these archetypal themes presented themselves, I remembered the entire archetypal journey includes a mysterious path into the depths of one’s soul. This journey with archetypes moved me into the darkness of my own unconscious where my shadows liked to live.

Meeting these elements of the dark led them to enter into the light of self awareness. In this light, changes took place transforming my soul.

Traveling around and through the circles of my mandalas , I found I did indeed move from “going through the motions” of the heuristic method to an expanded awareness of Self and all the elements living in my Psyche. The expanded awareness of self moved me into yet another state of being, a sense of transformation and growing wholeness. I continued to re-circle the journey and realized with each turn in the path, much greater richness and insight. I have experienced a sense of liberation from old patterns and ways of thinking. I have found the freedom to trust the self-healing and transformation process which comes to those who take the mandala journey and listen to her stories.

My co-researchers also tell their stories through the images of their mandalas and their interaction with them. Listen as their story unfolds.

## **Co-Researchers' Stories**

My co-researchers, Julie and Mark, produced 48 mandalas and generated 350 pages of transcribed material from the taped interviews. The volume of their work plus my own descriptions of my experiences of drawing mandalas led me to feel quite overwhelmed. I knew I had a vast amount of significant material before me and was amazed at the meaningful disclosures of the co-researchers in the interviews. The reflections from the interviews revealed stories of their own inner journeys. I almost felt paralyzed by the magnitude of the task before me and struggled with how to facilitate the telling of their stories. I wondered where to begin with the wealth of material before me and experienced a deep sense of reverence and wonder.

Like mine, their stories required time to incubate. To extrapolate the findings of my research required time, centering, and stillness. Research methodology repeatedly warns about rushing, assuming and avoiding preconceived ideas of outcomes. Art therapist, Patricia Fenner invites the reader to remain vigilant to these matters as she describes her search for patterns in her own research on her image-making experiences.

Due to the potentially unconfined nature of the indwelling experience and the heuristic research process itself, a clear grasp of meanings could be rendered difficult should one step too rapidly follow another.<sup>140</sup>

My research question was grounded in the experience of creating a mandala as well as describing the experience rather than merely observing the co-researchers' creation of the drawings. I moved into this part of my dissertation with respect for the essence of my own drawing experience and that of my co-researchers.

Their stories began with some hard work. First, they took the time to make the mandalas, trust the process and share their impressions in our series of interviews. Then I spent hours pouring over their mandalas to unravel their meanings along with listening to the transcribed interviews. I took notes, annotated the transcriptions with color-coded comments and identified possible categories of themes. With the accumulated mandalas and transcribed material, I poured over the words from the interviews

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<sup>140</sup> Patricia Fenner. "Heuristic Research Study: Self-Therapy Using the Brief Image-Making Experience." The Arts in Psychotherapy, Vol. 23, 1996, 40.

and studied each mandala. Each was rich in description with multiple layers of symbols. I considered the co-researchers' descriptions as valid data.

I realized each one of the mandalas of the co-researchers became in some way catalysts for their life issues. In interpreting this process, I knew I had moved into the essence of this study which was to try to make sense out of the 'making of the mandala' while preserving the mystery of the experience. This required immersion in the data and deep non-rational involvement during the period of incubation. It was necessary to trust this process. McNiff writes about the fruits of such an experience. "Trusting the process is based on a belief that something valuable will emerge when we step into the unknown."<sup>141</sup>

I knew that this very important part of my study would depend upon my ability to attend to details. This required my moving into my shadow functions of sensing and thinking. I needed to honor my own pattern and rhythm in this process while respecting the unique experiences of my co-researchers.

The large amount of mandala reflections generated by my co-researchers made it difficult for me initially to grasp and to integrate coherent meanings. So, I adopted the following steps. First, I wrote descriptions of the co-researchers' experiences of drawing their mandalas based on their observations and discussions in the interviews which had been transcribed. Second, I followed Colaizzi's suggestion for extracting significant statements in order to cluster themes in the emerging categories.<sup>142</sup> Third, I organized and revisited themes repeatedly after re-reading the transcribed interviews several times. The themes were then organized into general categories: One related to the co-researchers' experiences of drawing the mandalas; another to their discussions of their mandalas and a third category emerged around the intro-psychic and inter-psychic effects of these experiences. Eventually the data were organized into several smaller subcategories. I tried to observe the "rule of parsimony" as described by researchers Janice Morse and Peggy Field. They state:

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<sup>141</sup> McNiff. *Trust the Process*. Op. Cit., 27.

<sup>142</sup> P. F. Colaizzi. "Psychological Research as the Phenomenologist Views It." In R. S. Valle & M King (eds.) *Existential-Phenomenological Alternatives for Psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, 48-71.

Categories are initially kept as broad as possible without overlapping. Therefore, few categories are chosen in the initial stages of the analysis. Then, as more data accumulate, the major categories may be sorted into smaller categories. This *rule of parsimony* enables the data to remain manageable and permits subcategories to be derived from the large domain. Experience has shown that it is difficult during the initial data-coding stage to work with more than ten major codes and still keep them distinct.<sup>143</sup>

I experienced some difficulty at this stage of identifying subcategories because each time I revisited the transcripts and the mandalas, I was tempted to add other categories. The interviews were filled with details of the co-researchers' passion and excitement in their process. I attended to the details which best addressed the essence of their stories of creativity. The analysis of the mandala experiences was not a linear process and could not be rushed. I wanted to honor my own intuitive process. I worked in a circular fashion but needed to start somewhere. I believe it was the German poet Goethe who stated: "Begin, and the work will be completed." And so I immersed myself into the stories of Mark and Julie's experiences. What emerged were tables identifying all of the mandalas created by each co-researcher: Table 5.2 "Mark – List of Mandalas," and Table 5.3 "Julie – List of Mandalas." These include a list of each co-researcher's numbered mandala titles (M = Mark; J = Julie), interviews (Arabic number with a lower case alphabet), dates for each interview, and transcript page numbers. However, I decided to feature only some of my co-researchers' mandalas. Thus, the co-researchers' mandalas which have been used for this chapter are the same mandalas highlighted in Tables 5.2 (p. 123) and 5.3 (p. 124).

I then clustered their themes in Chart 5.2 (p. 125) "Co-Researchers' Mandala Discoveries." In some cases I identified key anecdotes for a theme based on each co-researcher's account of his/her experiences. In the end, I reviewed these anecdotes and themes along with my auto-biographical mandala series to arrive at some concluding comments for this research.

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<sup>143</sup> Janice M. Morse & Peggy Anne Field. Qualitative Research Methods for Health Professionals. (Sec. Ed.) Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995, 132.

Table 5.2

## Mark – List of Mandalas

#	Mandala Title	Interviews	Date	Transcript
1	Kaleidoscope	1a	March 18, 1997	1 - 10
2	Green Moon	1b		10 - 16
3	Gypsy	2a	March 25, 1997	16 - 31
4	Cranes	2b		31 - 35
5	Face	3a	April 1, 1997	1 - 12
6	Negative Self Portrait	3b		12 - 24
7	Mystic Orb	4a	April 8, 1997	1 - 9
8	Green Man	4b		9 - 19
9	Matter of Fact	5a	April 19, 1997	1 - 7
10	From Outer Space	5b		7 - 13
11	Eagles Nest	6a	May 2, 1997	1 - 5
12	Play	6b		5 - 15
13	Valley of 5 Lakes	7a	May 13, 1997	1 - 10
14	Portrait	7b		10 - 16
15	Burning Bush	8a	June 6, 1997	1 - 5
16	Pentecost	8b		5 - 6
17	Eye of the Storm	8c		6 - 12
18	Underwater	8d		13 - 18
19	Snakes	8e		18 - 21
20	Untitled	9a	June 10, 1997	1 - 10
21	Eye of Horse	9b		11 - 17

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Table 5.3

## Julie – List of Mandalas

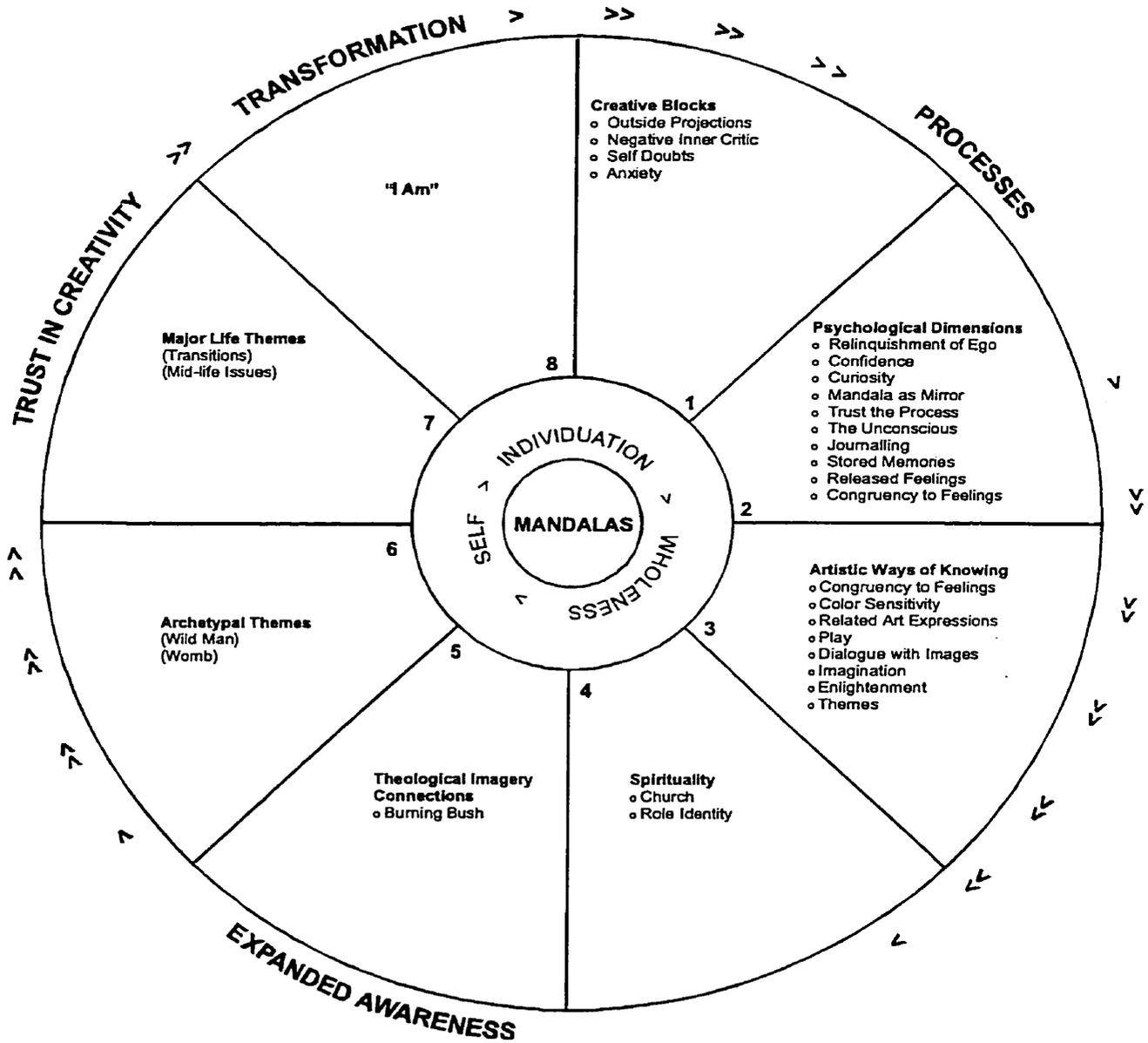
#	Mandala Title	Interviews	Date	Transcript
1	Autumn	1a	October 6, 1997	1 - 6
2	Spinning	1b		7 - 12
3	Dandelion	2a	October 29, 1997	1 - 7
4	Migrating	2b		7 - 13
5	Locked	2c		14 - 17
6	Open & Alive	2d		17 - 20
7	Untitled	3a	November 5, 1997	1 - 9
8	Transitions	3b		10 - 21
9	Woman	4a	November 12, 1997	1 - 8
10	Broken Window	4b		9 - 12
11	Dream Image	5a	November 17, 1997	1 - 9
12	Iceberg	5b		10 - 17
13	Emerging	6a	November 26, 1997	1 - 7
14	Untitled	6b		7 - 11
15	The Elk	6c		12 - 19
16	Padlock	7a	December 10 1997	12 - 14
17	Companion	7b		1 - 7
18	Caldron of New Life	7c		8 - 11
19	Wheel of Life	8a	December 17, 1997	12 - 14
20	Snowflakes	9a	January 21, 1998	1 - 6
21	Animus Energy	9b		7 - 10

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Chart 5.2

# Co-Researchers Mandala Discoveries



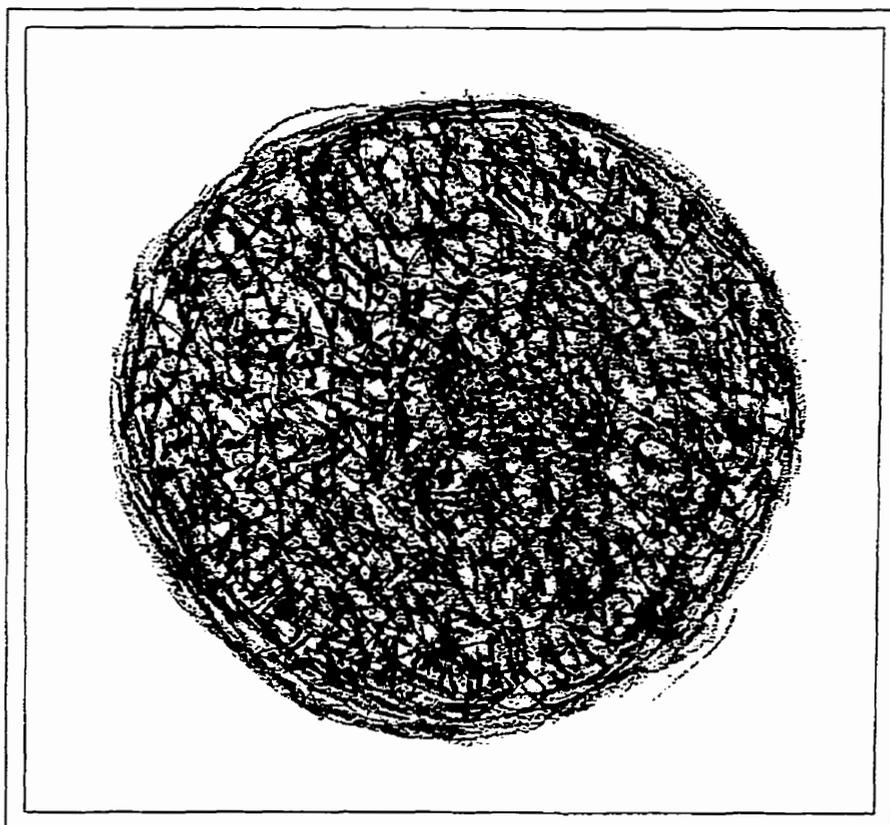
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### **Selection Process**

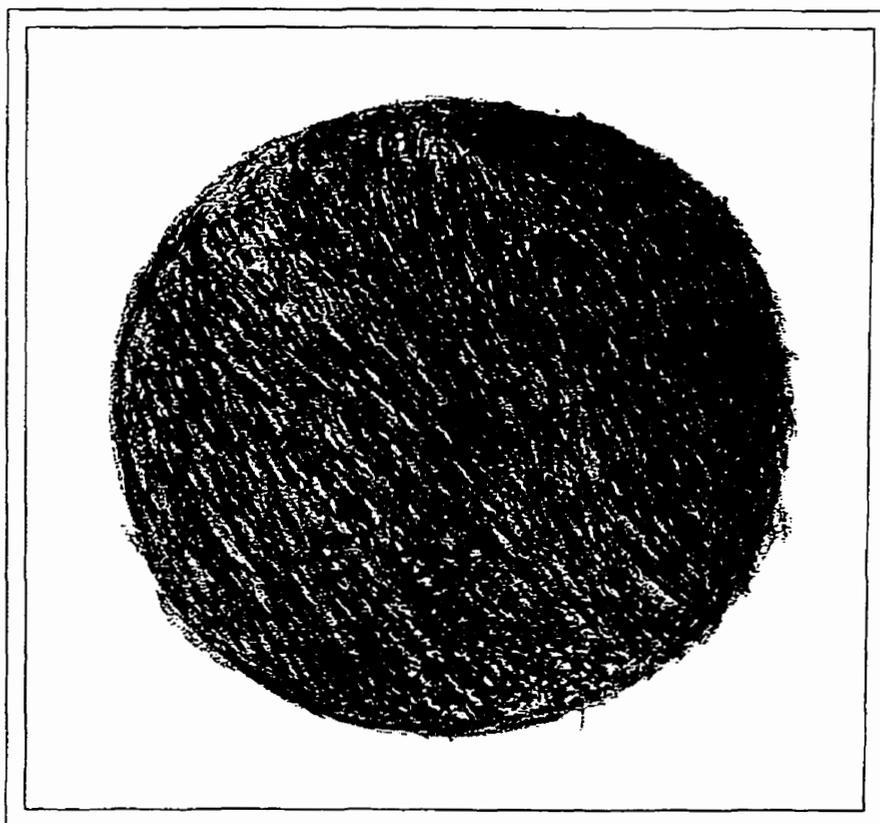
I chose the following vignettes from selected interviews of the co-researchers. In other words, I did not utilize all the interviews as I had originally planned. There was simply too much material. Furthermore, not all interviews were of equal quality. This became apparent to me as I continued to revisit the stories within each interview. In the end, my selections were based on my observations of the co-researchers' levels of emotional intensity, body language, ability to make connections, ability to relate to his/her mandala, sensitivity to color, intuitive insights, moments of transformation and 'soul expression'.

*Mark's Story*

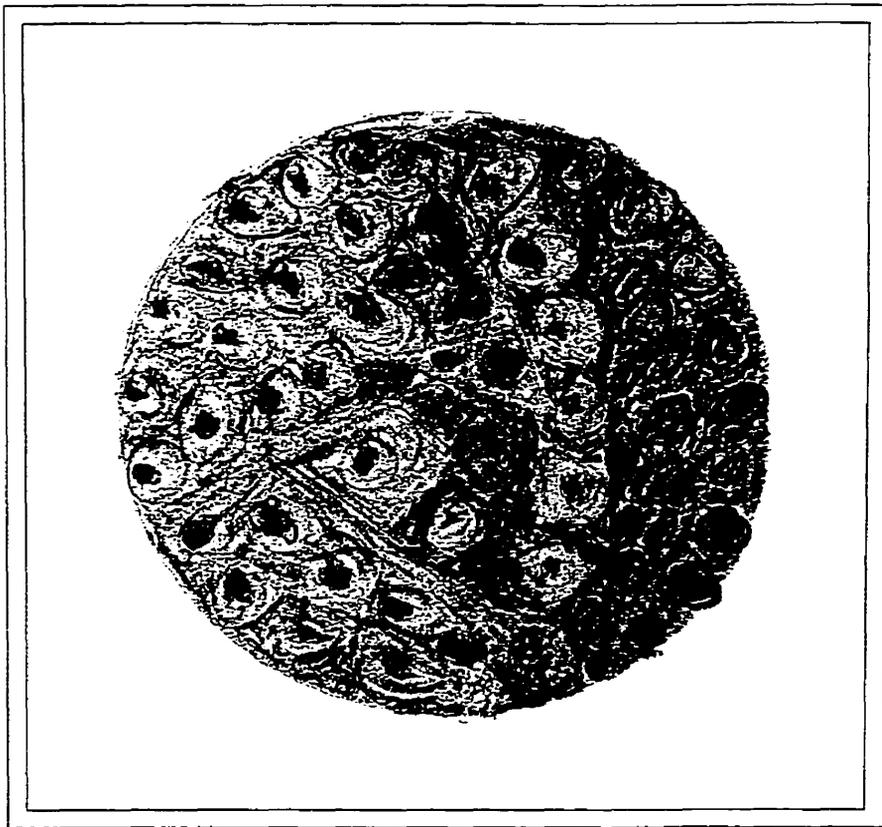




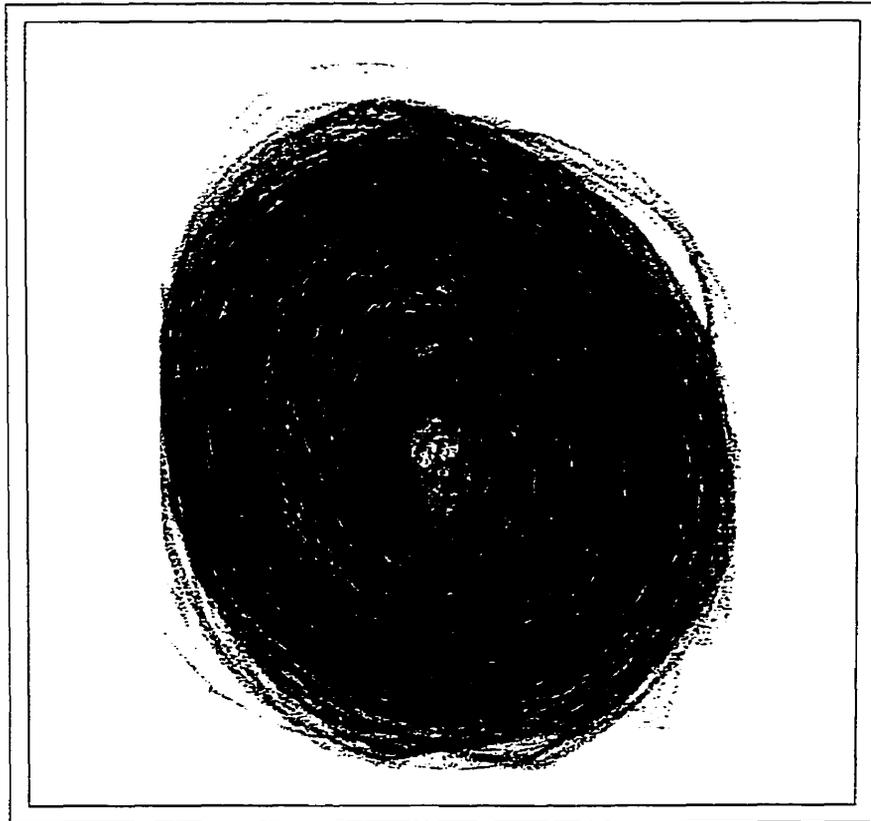
**Kaleidoscope**



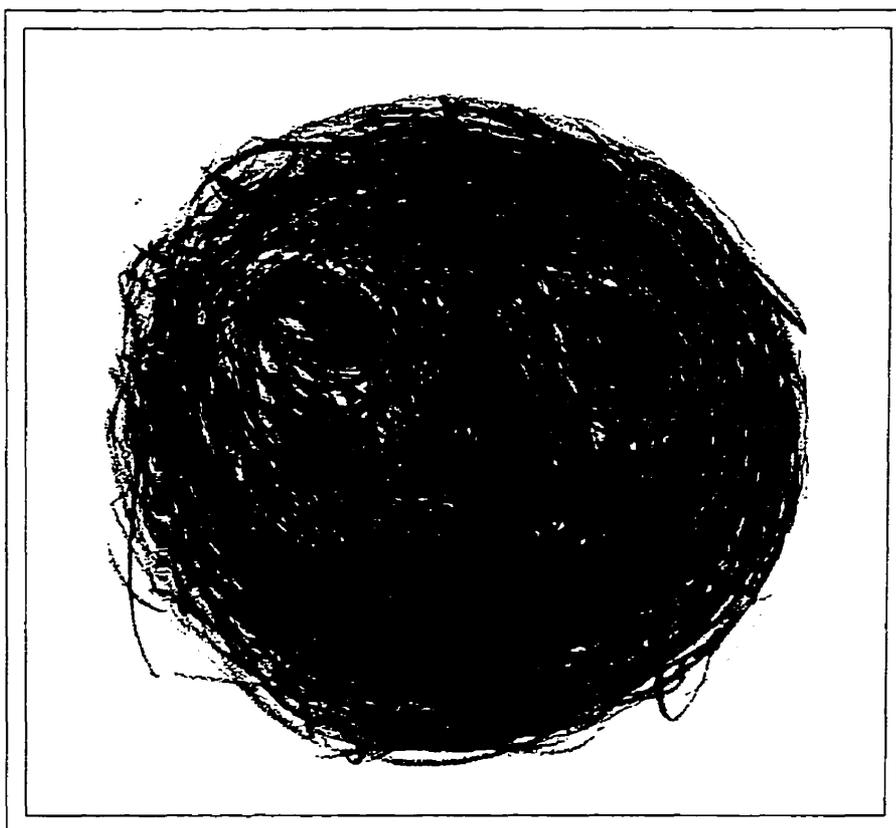
**Green Moon**



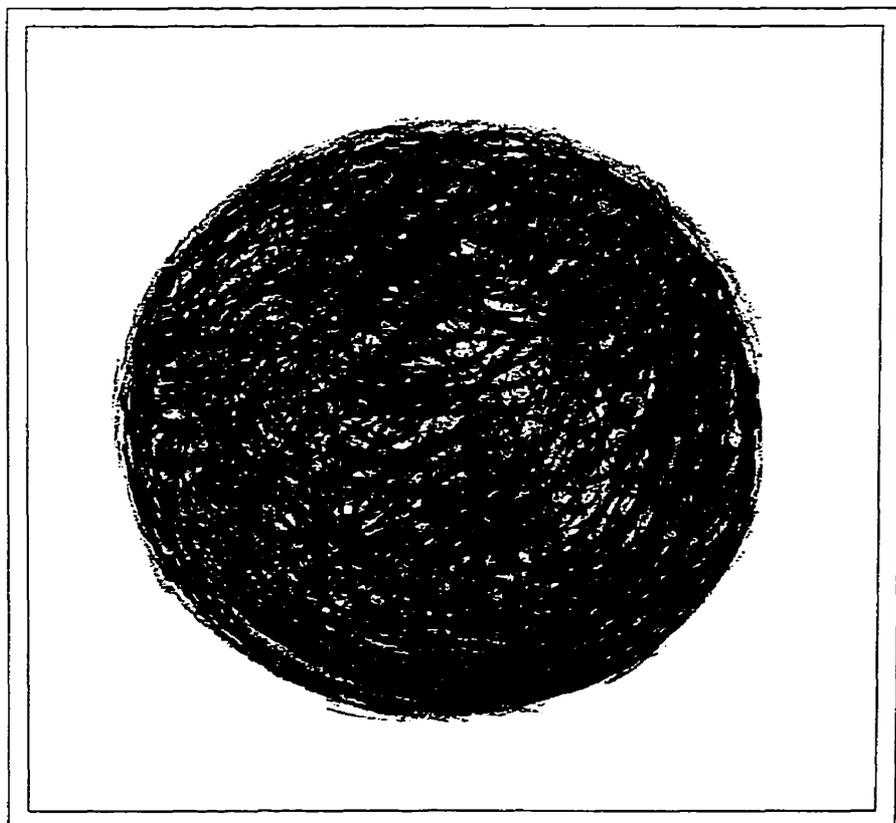
Gypsy



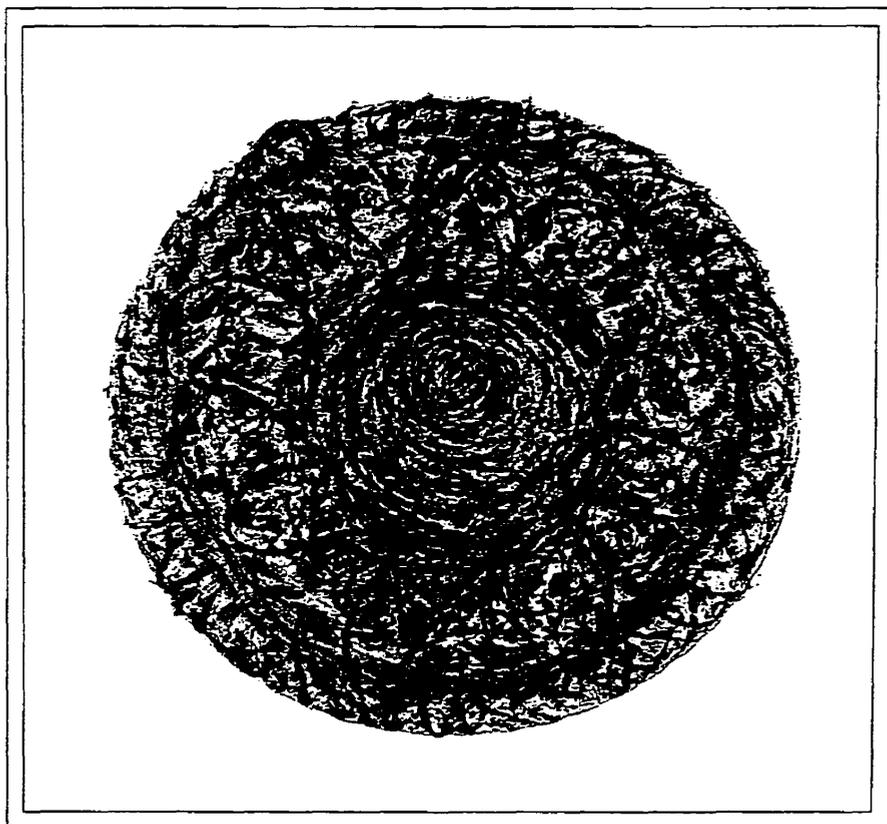
Crane



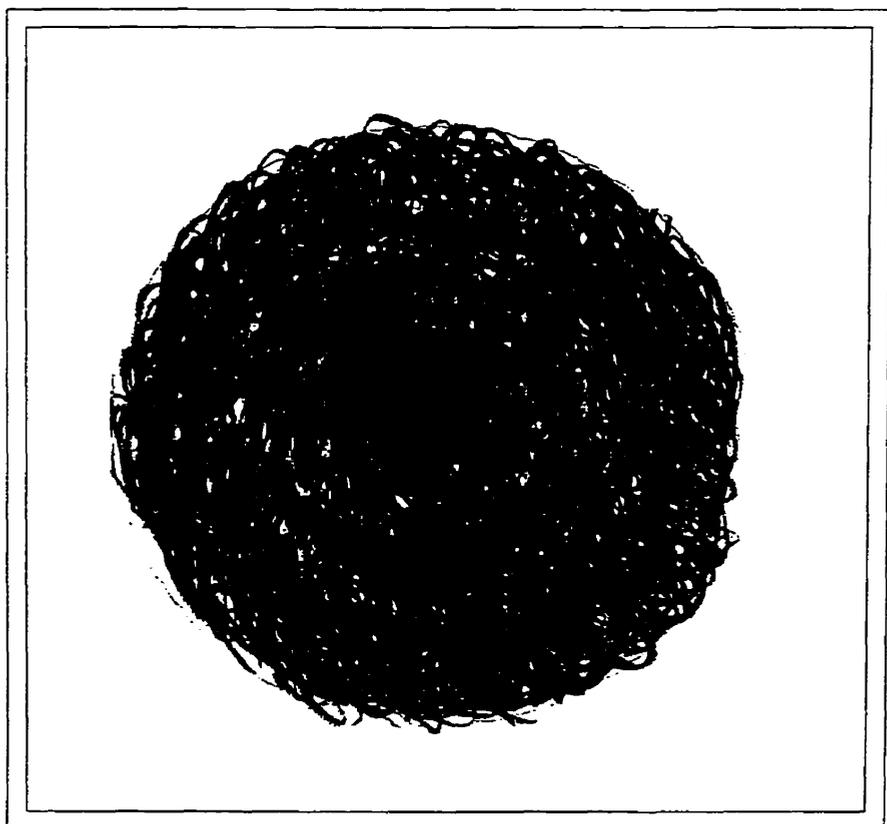
**Negative Self Portrait**



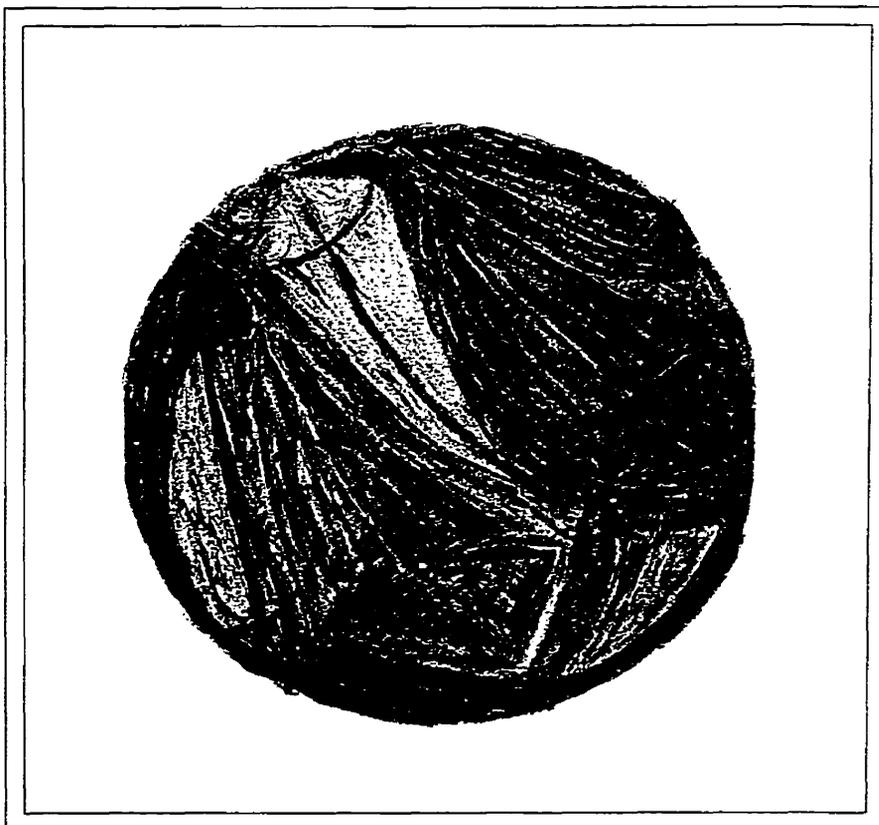
**Mystic Orb**



Play



Burning Bush



Untitled

**Mandala # 1: Kaleidoscope****March 18, 1997****(M- 1, 1a)**

In this interview Mark indicated how family memories surfaced for him as he drew his mandala. He noted as well a ‘sticky’ feeling from the oil pastels and a certain unpleasantness from the friction between the art paper and his pastels. He explained how this caused him to use very light strokes while he drew. His choice of the red pastel prompted him to punctuate his mandala with red dots which brought back the following memory.

What started to come up are some childhood memories of the hens, pecking oats and my mother feeding them... as I’m pecking on this (mandala) the hens are pecking on the oats, and it takes me into a fairly significant re-assessment of who my mother is. I am seeing her as a young woman, off in a very rural, unsophisticated area, without any kind of street wisdom or academic education, with only her experience of having a family, and managing the farm with my father... It brought up all the family stuff. (p.2).<sup>144</sup>

I observed how Mark’s sensitivity to color helped him move beyond the art materials into **stored memories**. Color attracts Psyche. In this same interview Mark shared an incident in which he placed this mandala on a chair and repeatedly looked at it before falling asleep. That night he reported having a dream which he considered connected directly to his mandala. This experience provided him with a new method of **journaling**. He described it in the following words.

I left the mandala and placed it on a chair and looked at it several times. That night I had a dream... It wasn’t a comfortable dream. There was an awful lot. I was struck by the fact that it included almost every period of my life... I think I’ve got a different dream journal now – the mandala. At a conscious level, the mandala allowed me to hold different pieces of my life before me. (p. 3).

**Mandala # 2: Green Moon****March 18, 1997****(M –2, 1b)**

Mark illustrated excitement over allowing his imagination to lead his process. As he reflected on his mandala, he expressed enthusiasm about every time he looked at his mandala he saw something new. It became obvious how Mark connected to the **playful** aspect of his personality while exploring **new meanings** in his mandala. His enthusiastic words reflected his new insight.

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<sup>144</sup> These paginated sources were for internal research reference only. They provided the audit trail for me, and my research committee.

I like it (mandala), I like it a lot... That's exciting. I like that image. I must write that down. ...and I thought I have never looked at a drawing that way before. And this is fun. Lots of fun. I was pleased about finding a new way of getting an angle on something. (p. 10).

**Mandala # 3: Gypsy                      March 25, 1997                      (M – 3, 2a)**

In this interview Mark expressed his curiosity, excitement and 'venture-ness' (his word) about drawing mandalas. He notes how he is **energized** by the drawings and is easily moved into his sense of playfulness. Here again, he named his **wild man archetype** theme and moved into another dimension of self-understanding.

He (wild man) hasn't got his full square on the planet yet. And he's been waiting around for a long time... I have for too long lived in a way that got me a whack on the knuckles from somebody coming from behind my shoulder, and I have often monitored myself and reacted with I better do this, I better not do that, because there'd be shit hitting the fan or whatever. What I would like to do, what I am coming into is being able to let what is in me out, for the sake of the truth of me...in that sense I want to be a wise man. I want to see how I am in the moment and respond out of that. (p. 23)

Mark continued his story with an introduction of his **poem** entitled 'Tom the Traveler' (See Appendix D) which he wrote immediately after drawing his second mandala, "Green Moon" and completed after his third mandala, "Gypsy." He moved into the interconnections of his poetry to family members:

Whatever I see – it is actually here in this poem. When I think about it now, it is a darkness within the lightness. (p. 30).

Mark has used both his mandala and his poetry to release feelings associated with personal family relationship struggles.

**Mandala # 4: Cranes                      March 28, 1997                      (M – 4, 2b)**

In this interview, he pointed to the impact the mandala had on his understandings of his personal dynamics. He also alluded to the importance of the **dialogue process** with the mandala by using the metaphor of the 'nest' image of the cranes.

The nest, if you just let this (mandala) speak to you, the nest is very large, the nest fills the paper. And something is going on in the psyche that wants to make sure that everything is protected, very protected. It's just a wonderful expression. (p.33) I'm

struck by the fact that I had no conscience agenda when I was drawing it (mandala) other than I'll do whatever I please, and that it should and does offer so much possibility to learn what is going on inside of me, what I need to do, what I would benefit from paying attention to, and how to support that journey in the process. (p. 34).

**Mandala # 6: Negative Self Portrait**

**April 1, 1997**

**(M – 6, 3b)**

During the creation of this mandala Mark struggled with his feelings of **low self-esteem**. During this interview, he read from his journal several **self-effacing** statements about his ability to draw. He remarked about how this mandala evoked feelings of **inadequacy** in him and his ongoing struggle with his inner critic. At the same time, he was able to move into a strong relationship with the features of his self portrait mandala.

My mood is on the dark side today. ..It's about someone burdened with something. ..It feels like dark underground stuff. The mandala looking back at me does not cheer me up. I add more lime and orange color around the edges. ..I left and came back and thought holy shit...I mean I can't draw. ..But there's me looking back at myself...with feelings of inferiority and unresolved sexual desire vis-à-vis my lifestyle. (p. 12).

During the interview, Mark demonstrated a **congruency** with his feelings and acknowledged how the mandala **mirrored** his psychological process. He observed how the mouth of his 'self portrait' appeared to be clamped shut. After long pauses, and an apparent struggle to articulate what he was feeling, he shared his pain over being 'silenced' in family discussions, particularly around the topic of sexuality, which was avoided at all costs. He studied his mandala with intensity and expressed the following:

It (the face) actually looks to me like a clamp is on the mouth... uh, it was severely monitored... Yes, some feelings, but particularly anything to do with sex or the difference between masculine and feminine bodies, that sort of thing. (pp. 17-18).

As Mark moved through his story of this mandala, he recognized the dark dimensions of himself and again identified the '**wild man**' **archetype** in his face. He gave free reign to his imagination and allowed the mandala to mirror his own process. In fact, he demonstrated how he increasingly trusted his process as he moved into relationship with his mandala.

I like the mandala now. It is so accurately my portrait. I couldn't draw a portrait of myself, but I'm wondering if there it is.. . It feels like I see those dark dimensions of

myself that I'm almost proud of. I have a man with a dark wildness inside me. I like having an access to another dimension of myself. (p. 13).

**Mandala # 7: Mystic Orb**

**April 8, 1997**

**(M – 7, 4a)**

Mark elaborated on the energies of colors. By this time he allowed himself to enter into his 'free spirit' and watch his process with **curiosity** and **playfulness**. He used background music of a blind harpist while he drew. After creating this mandala, Mark let his mandala 'incubate' for a while. He reported how this time for reflection evoked **religious images** into his consciousness. He described his process in the following:

At some point I take the pastels in both hands and dance with both of them again, making little jabs and dashes and touches. Lastly I dance with purple on its own. The music really gets inside of me. I feel like I am in unexplored country and yet it is a familiar landscape. And it is new with possibilities. It is a dark hilly landscape with crevasses, hills and cloudy skies. There is movement in every direction. Fluctuations are playing and interpolating with each other... When I come back after forty-five minutes later to look at it, (mandala) I see some kind of orb that's kind of like a dome of a cathedral... It might be a sort of stained glass window with the Virgin or Mother and Son, like as in the Pieta or some kind of blue figure in the middle with a likeness and the red in it attracts me very much. At that point I call it a mystical mandala, a classic stained glass, a Sistine Chapel roof, or a dome of some cathedral. (pp. 1-2).

Mark also pointed out how the mandala had an illuminatory (his word) feel about it. He commented on how the mandala contained:

Something illuminative within a dark container. Yes, illumination contained within darkness. The experience itself had an illuminatory feel about it. I felt enlightened. I felt there was a quality of light in me as I looked at it, and that it drew a quality of light out of me, and I was somehow relating it to the creative bit that I am gathering in the fluency of what I am able to let come out of me. I'm gaining in a confidence that it will surprise us all. (p. 6).

Mark became aware of his inner light and showed increased confidence in his process of drawing mandalas for himself.

**Mandala # 12: Play**

**May 2, 1997**

**(M – 12, 6b)**

In this interview Mark began to gain confidence with mandala dialogues. Through his dialogue he recognized the 'otherness quality' of his mandala as another way to engage in the expression of his creative spirit. He placed his mandala on a chair and immersed himself in this **mandala dialogue**.

**Mark:**

Thank you... for showing... surprising me with yourself... for enriching me with your presence. You're very beautiful. I wasn't expecting you to be. I had no expectations of who you were... and you're beautiful... you came from inside of me and I didn't know you were hiding in there.

**Mandala:**

Stick around... there's lots more of me. I have infinite possibility of shades and coloring. I can change, expand, retract, and become more pronounced or quiet down. My variety is infinite.

**Mark:**

I like that. I want to learn more about you. . to let you show me how to let color happen like poetry happens.

**Mandala:** Here I am. You let me happen. Thanks for trusting me. (p. 13).

Mark also observed how the experience of drawing the mandala was a profound and powerful way to express his creative spirit. As he **relinquished his ego**, his creative spirit entered his process. He put it this way:

...what's happening in drawing mandalas... it encapsulates my aspirations for exploring, discovering and being creative... actualizes my desire to let creativity speak in me rather than to commandeer creative resources. (p. 9).

**Mandala # 15: Burning Bush****June 6, 1997****(M – 15, 8a)**

During the interview Mark referred to the strong energy which surrounded his mandala during his creation of it. He had been writing a poetic piece about "Moses and the Burning Bush," (See Appendix E) a story from the Hebrew Scriptures, rich in **theological imagery** and discovered through his poetry his mandala image of the Burning Bush. He recalled his process in the following:

I'd been working on some poetry with Moses and the burning bush ...when I looked at the mandala, it was the image that came to me... I felt I would be able to write... the energy was flowing. When I look at it today those sort of rings, the ring of fire on the outside seems so strong and vibrant and I like it. I like the yellow and the blue, each of them in their own way, with the flames licking up. That pleases me – strong energy. For myself, there is fire in here. I have this power within me and that it is there to be allowed to come out whenever it wants to. That feels good. I'm a person with fire in me. (pp. 1-2)

Mark evidenced increased sensitivity to color and a congruency to his feeling. As well, he recognized the parallel energies and the process of both his mandala and poem. This recognition enabled him to move into a deeper awareness of his creative self.

I've been trying to understand what the experience was like for Moses. In the poem, I describe the young man with his new wife and their child. She has just felt movement inside of her from the new child. And he goes out tending the sheep. He is full of this tenderness. He notices all the little details of the landscape. While he's looking at the foliage of the hills and the liturgy of bird life, he notices this small blue fire which he would have missed had he not been so tuned into little things. Then there's this overwhelmed feeling by this fire. He takes his shoes off because he doesn't know what else to do. He wants to hear what the ground is saying. He feels the calligraphy of the grass on his feet, and the phrase comes: "I am, I am, I am." So there's something about "I am" in this mandala for me. (p.2).

Mark recognized how his creative expressions had the possibility of being shaped by each other. He clearly recognized how his mandalas held the possibility of being catalysts for his poems in the future.

**Mandala # 20: Untitled June 10, 1997 (M – 20, 9a)**

In this interview, Mark observed how certain images seemed to recur throughout his mandalas and moved him to explore the material in his **unconscious**. Mark evidenced a deeper understanding about how his art expression called forth those hidden aspects of his soul. In his preliminary remarks during this interview, he named his **thematic** material (the face) which resurfaced throughout his mandala drawings.

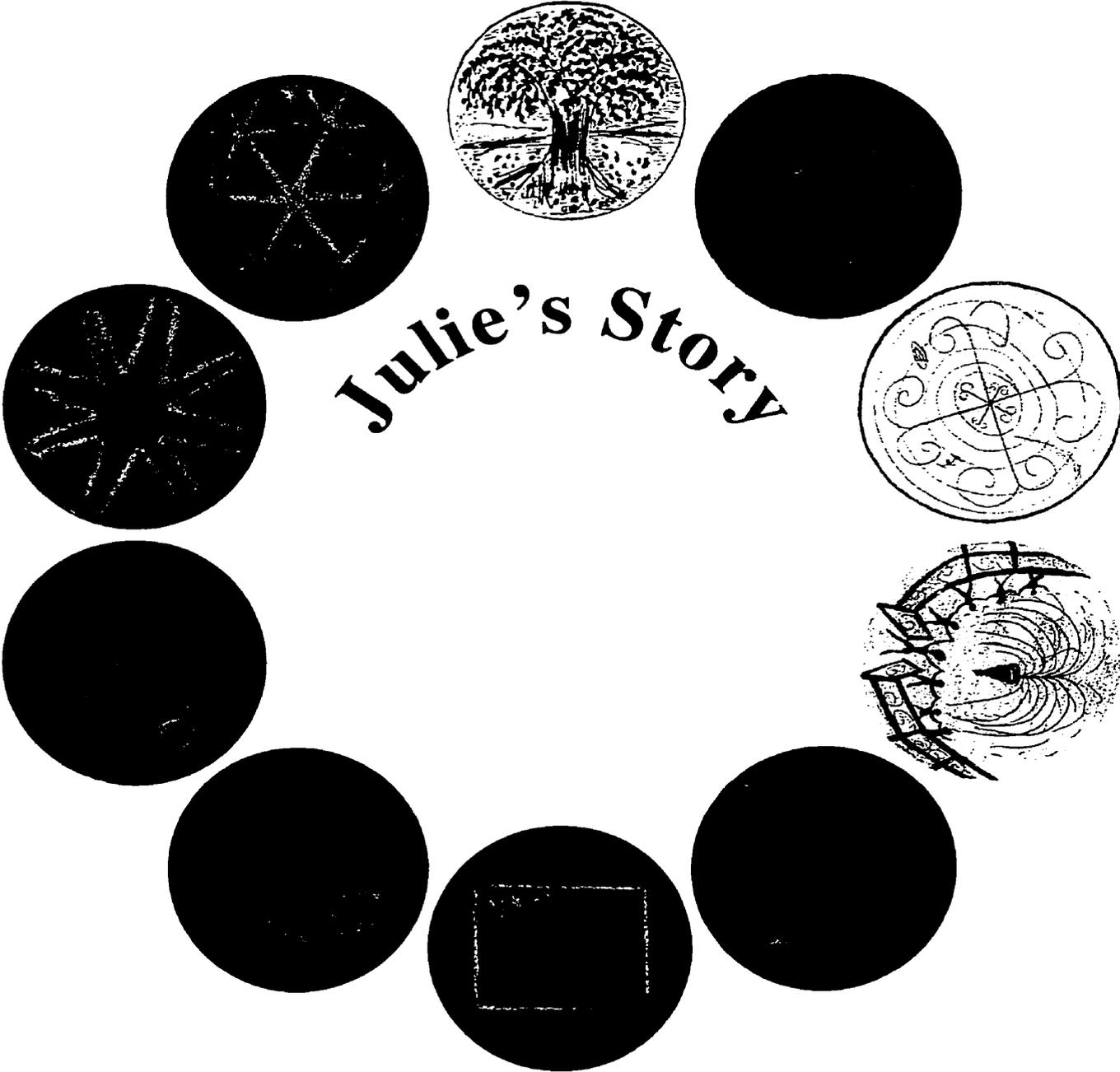
I'm struck by the way my face keeps appearing, even though the mandalas are not 'facial' in their intent. People spend endless time trying to cure writer's block and trying to get in touch with energy . The Mandala seems to be a very immediate way of doing it, of warming up, of loosening up.. . of inviting unconscious material to the surface... a safe way to get in touch with the complexity and richness of my interior... My interior (unconscious) is inexhaustible and blessing my mandalas is a very concrete way to have it happen. (pp. 1-2).

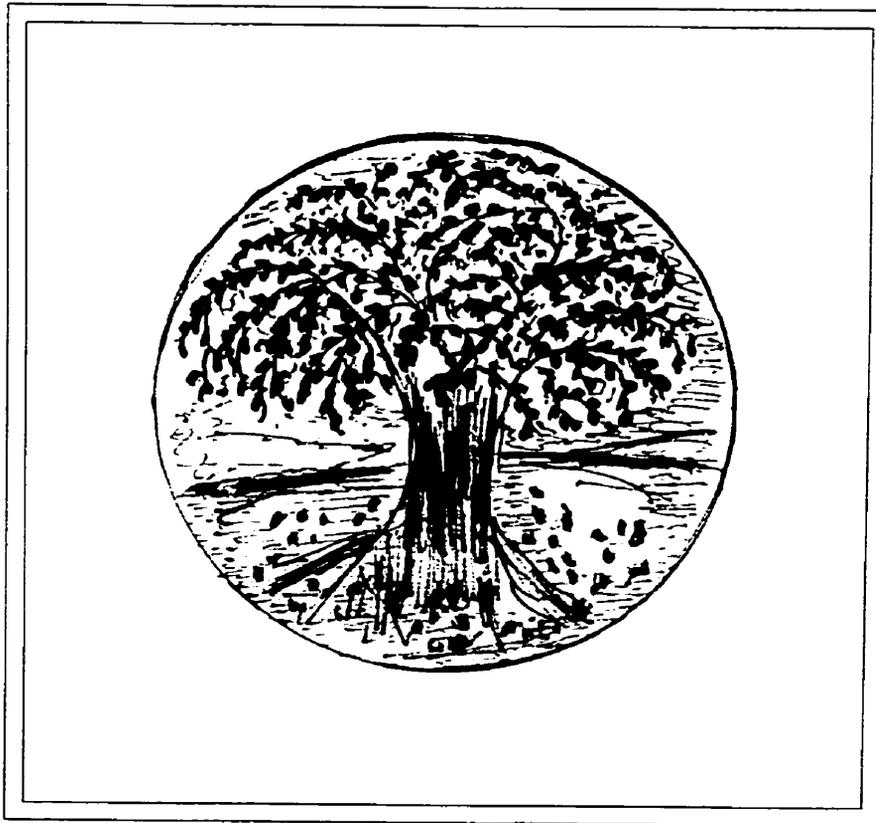
There was no intention of an image when Mark created his "untitled" mandala.

I drew it without thinking. I just got the colors. But when I decided to work around them and saw that I had these fixed shapes (I thought) it might have been fun if I had

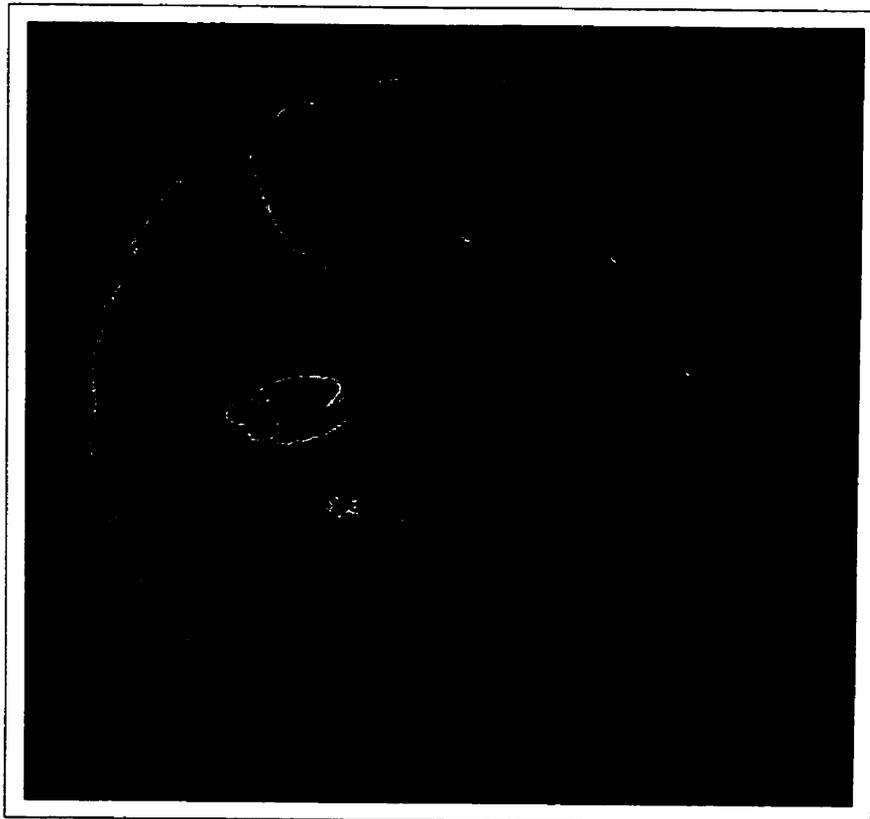
less concern about making them look sort of like regular shapes, ...if I did something that is not a recognized shape... What interests me most are the bits of hue that are not regular or identifiable shapes. When I do something deliberately... these (shapes) are gonna be these triangles... when I see different things coming out of them other than triangles I begin to get excited. (pp. 7-8)

Mark's stories of his mandalas have unfolded, revealing a man who enjoyed the process, surfaced archetypal themes and interfaced his mandalas with his poetic expression.

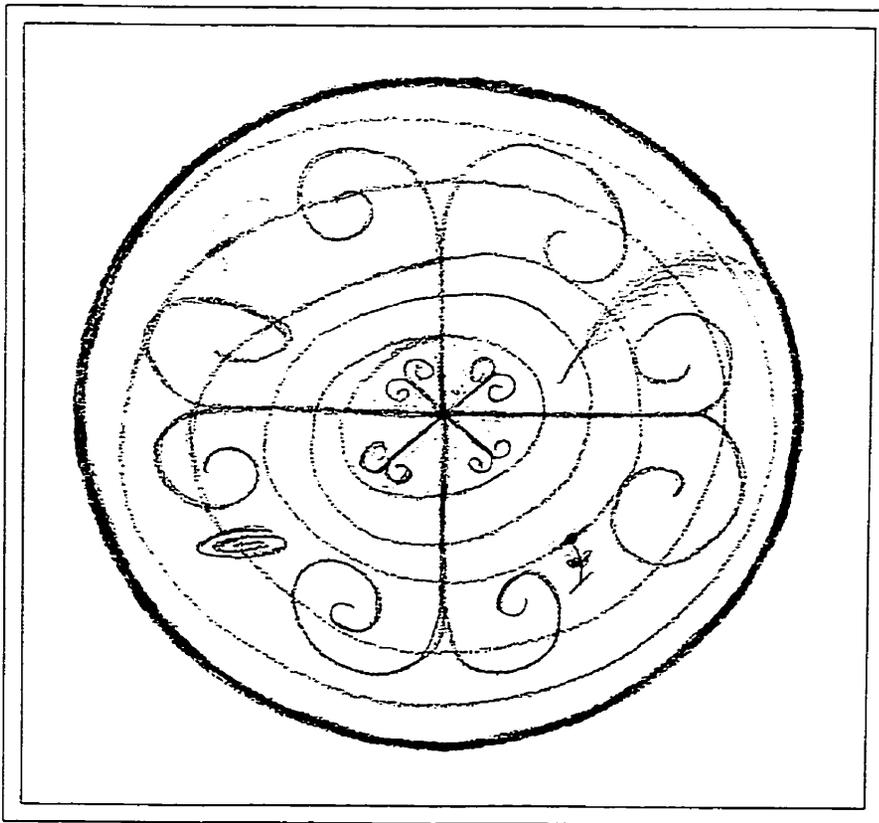




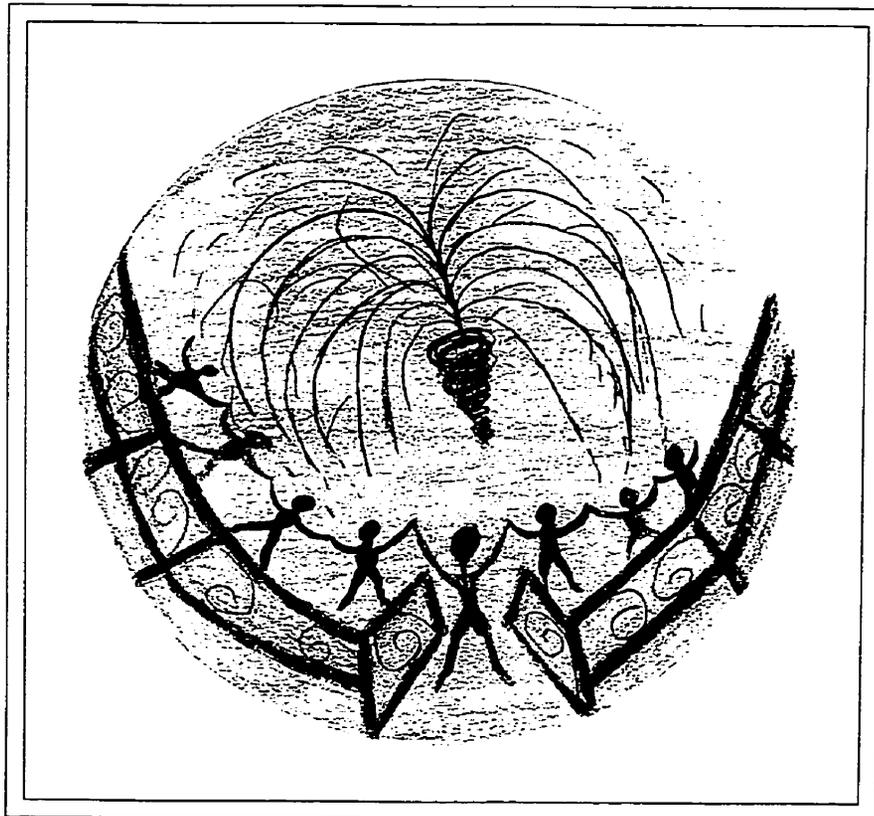
Autumn



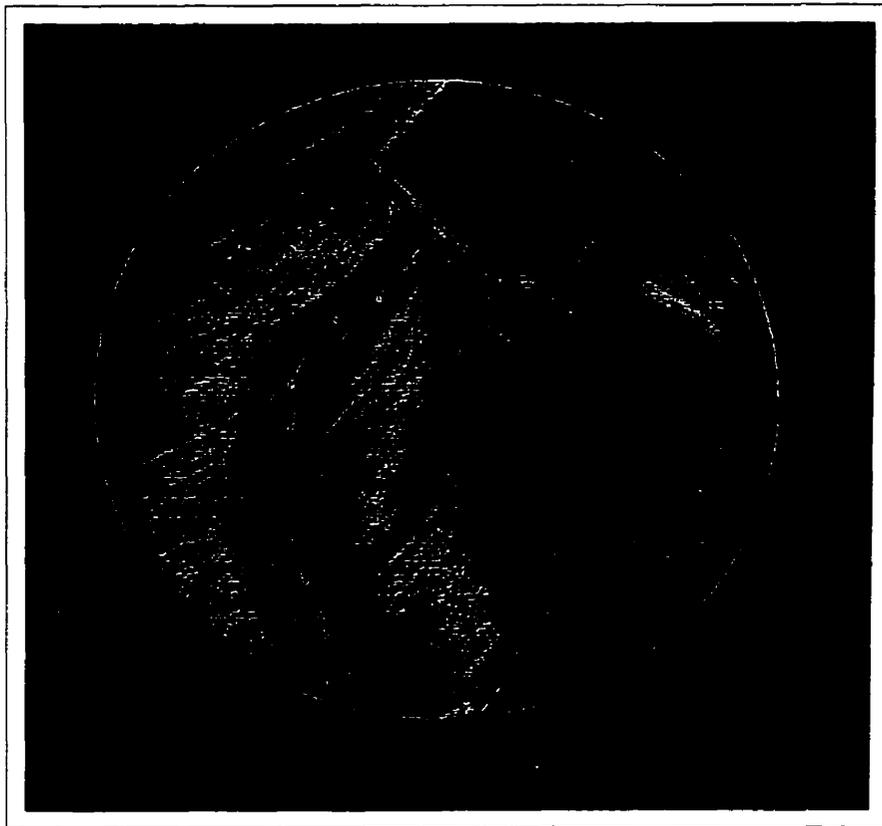
Dandelion



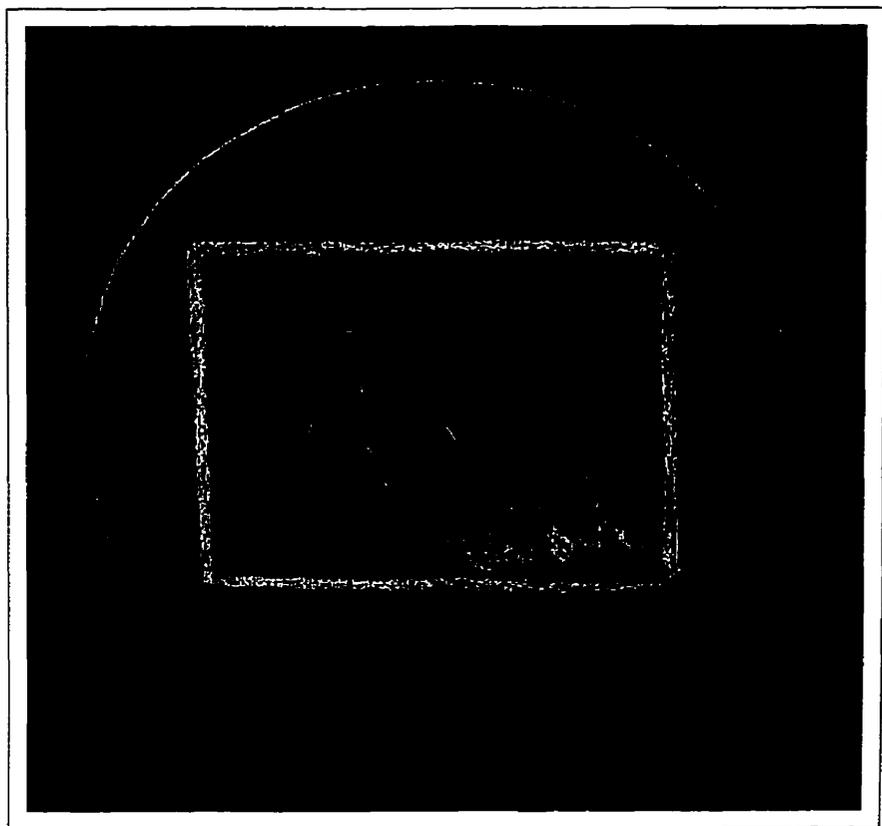
Locked



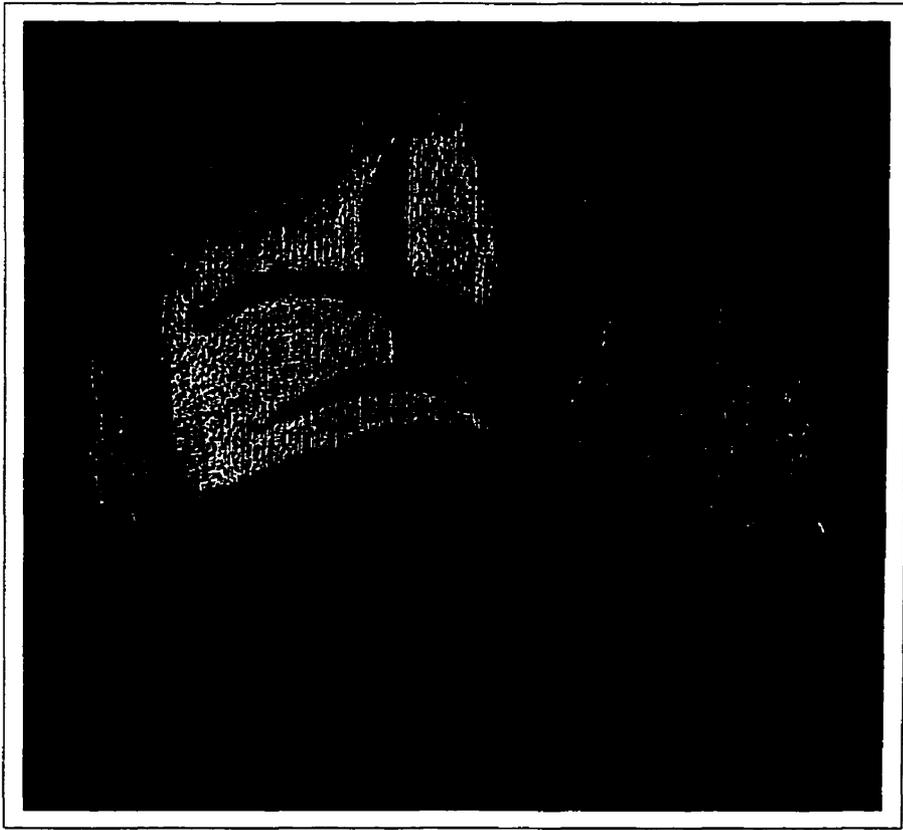
Open and Alive



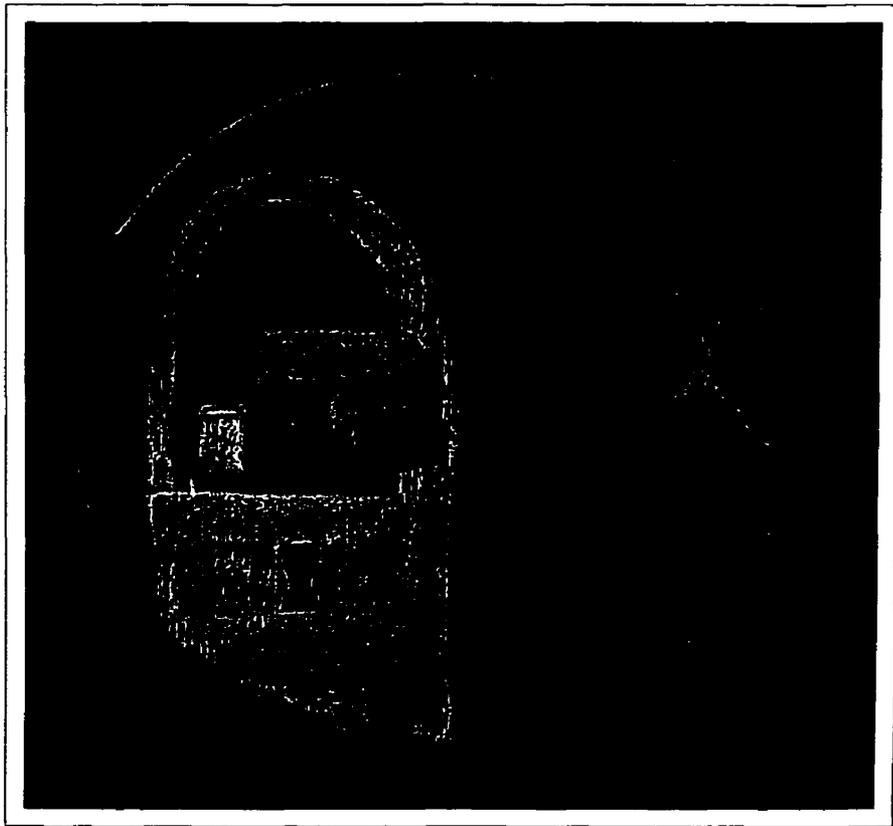
**Transitions**



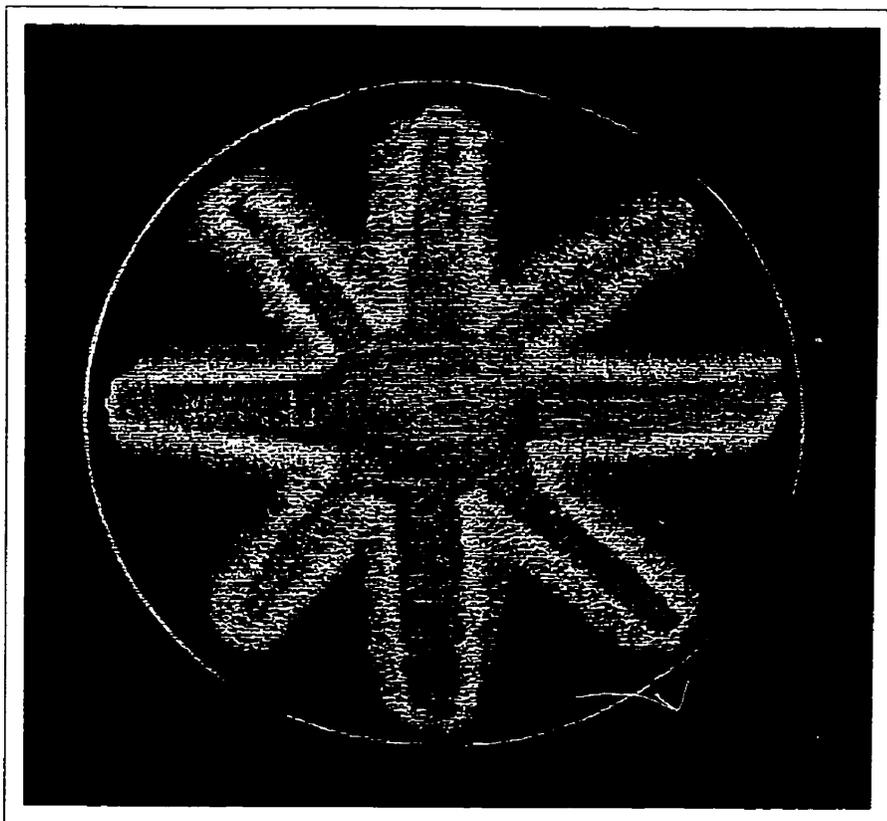
**Broken Window**



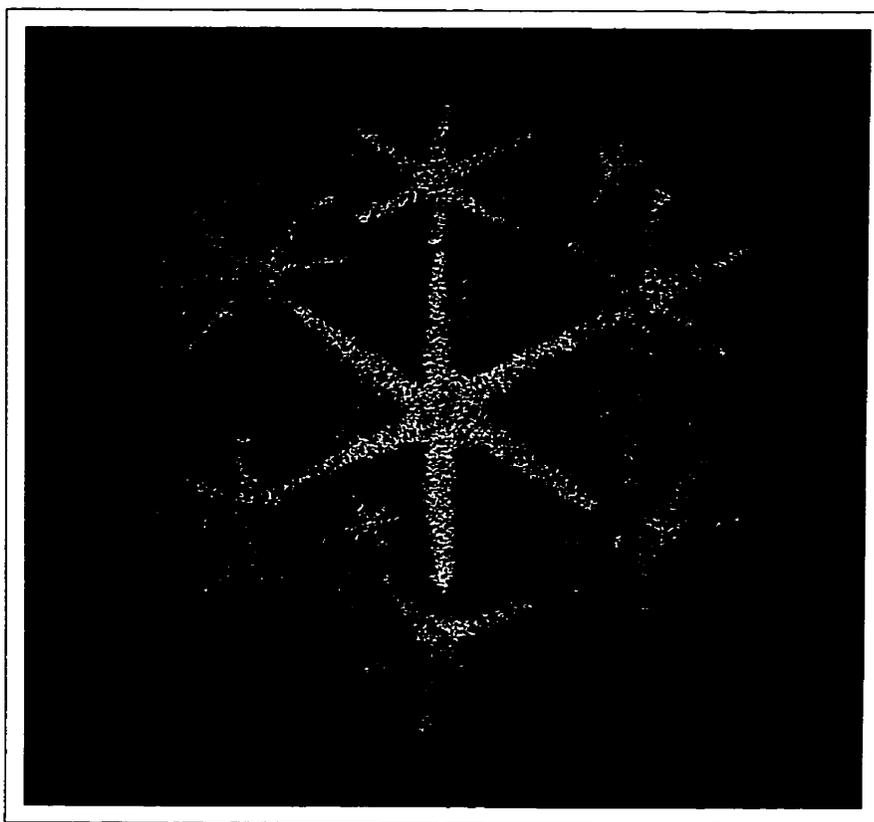
The Elk



Padlock



Wheel of Life



Snowflake

**Mandala # 1: Autumn                      October 6, 1997                      (J – 1, 1a)**

Her mandala was inspired by a book she had read on women's spirituality and mid-life. With her prismacolors and white paper, she sketched her image uncertain about her artistic ability. As she risked expressing herself, she pointed out her feeling about entering into her process of drawing a series of mandalas.

I had been feeling kind of,- well excited, and scared, both...scared because...what if I can't draw, what if you don't know about the tree (I'm trying to draw), and what if the image doesn't go on paper? I don't know what you want here, so I just sat with it... It was the first one and I felt it was more the fun of , well I just felt excited to see what was going to happen and how it would be to work in that art expression. I don't know what you want here, but then I just sat with it. (pp. 1-2, 3, 5).

Julie struggled between her anxiety and her curiosity. She risked entering into her creative process. Her struggles with issues related to **inner censorship** and outside expectations diminished as she immersed herself in her first mandala.

**Mandala # 3: Dandelion                      October 29, 1997                      (J – 3, 2a)**

Julie described the playfulness and fun in her creative process. She let her imagination lead her in her drawing process. She reiterated an incident of an interruption from another person which was an uninvited projection on her mandala. She explained how the experience of this **outside projection** disturbed her creative process.

I was still drawing my mandala when Sue came into the room and tapped my elbow and laughingly said, 'well, that's a happy picture.' I thought, oh is it? She saw summer and winter in my mandala. It just kind of got me out of where I had been with the picture... I hadn't thought about it that way. In fact, when I look at it now, I don't think I would see what she saw. (p. 4)

Julie's awareness of this disturbance during her creative process helped her to look at boundary issues which caused the rupture in her drawing of her mandala. She came to understand unwanted projections could hamper her creative process. During this interview Julie gradually got in touch with her feelings about this incident.

I wanted to say to her, well you know...it certainly would not have been my word. (happy) I wondered why she would say that's happy. She said she saw summer and

winter. I felt like what she saw was wrong. I felt like I wanted to argue with her. I also felt like she had poked fun at it. (p.7)

It became obvious how Julie's creative process had been jarred by the **unwanted projection** and how she was able to identify body sensations with this experience.

**Mandala # 5: Locked                      October 29, 1997                      (J – 5, 2a)**

In this interview Julie described her feelings and observations of her mandala. As she became aware of the pain and **woundedness** she carried which related to **church issues**, she read the following words from her journal:

I went with the drawing... maybe it is about church and my little symbols look like fish hooks. In fact the whole thing looked kind of 'hooky'... It had a kind of trapped feeling... it's about church and that's how I often feel, contained and caught. I colored in the circle, hoping to soften it. I put in the spiral, feather, little flower and the moon. But it still reminded me of a container... a rod-iron gate... and a jail... I saw the hierarchical, patriarchal stuff. It looks like a jail, or a container, a rod-iron fence or a gate. (p. 14, 16).

Julie honored her expression and let the metaphorical images of her experience of church lead her in the creation of her mandala.

**Mandala # 6: Open and Alive                      October 29, 1997                      (J – 6, 2d)**

In this interview Julie points out how her previous mandala "locked" called forth this new image in her of openness.

I wanted to pursue this (mandala) from the one before. So I began with a fence with an open gate...I put in the spiral from the earlier drawing from my gate. Then I drew a peach figure in the middle...like in a celebration or invitation...and then I wondered what she would see...the image that came to me was fireworks...something that was colorful, celebrative and joyful. And when I saw with it I wondered...I imagined a 'yea..the gate is open!' (p. 17)

Julie also showed how she stayed in relationship with her mandala and had engaged in **active imagination** with both her little peach figure and the gate. She continued to link her two mandalas by commenting:

I see a birthing kind of image in terms of the gate being open, being some kind of possibility to kind of come and go. I feel a "womb" kind of image in the gate itself. I

was still thinking of church and what if my gate from the “Locked” mandala was open rather than locked. (p. 19).

Julie was able to name the contrasting energies between her mandalas. She identified the metaphorical content of this mandala as she described her thoughts during her drawing process.

**Mandala # 8: Transitions**                      **November 5, 1997**      **(J – 8, 3b)**

In this interview, Julie expressed that she felt she was caught in a place of ‘unknowns’ about the **transition** periods of her life. She struggled with a predominant image which appeared and surprised her as she drew her mandala. As she tries to absorb the meaning behind this symbol for herself, she commented:

When I looked again... when I went back to it [mandala] last night, I saw a phallic symbol... that’s my perception... it’s there. I see it. And the more color that went into the mandala, the worse it got. (14).

Julie discovered the unwanted phallic symbol would not disappear even though she tried to alter it. Later on in this interview, Julie reflected on her experience of some pervading feelings that sometimes left her confused and pondering. She stated:

There’s a little bit of me that feels... it’s like a split... a part of me that draws and there’s a part of me that wonders about... so what are you doing and what’s it going to be? It feels like two parts... The reflective part of me isn’t necessarily the same [as the drawer] and is surprised, even by the drawing itself. (p. 19).

She was able to articulate this split part of herself within her own creative process. She was also able to recognize the power of the ‘otherness’ of her mandala.

**Mandala # 10: Broken Window**                      **November 12, 1997**      **(J – 8, 3b)**

In this interview Julie gives an account of her experience of another **outside projection** from an individual as she was drawing her mandala.

I was sitting there pondering and deciding if I wanted to color my mandala or put anything else in it . Anyway Dan came along and said ‘ it looks like slugs’. It never would have occurred to me they were three slugs. I had already colored them in and they have a ‘icebergy ‘ look. But when he said they were slugs, I thought like I’m

locked...couldn't go anywhere with this drawing. I fell out of relationship with my drawing. It's like I can't seem to get it back...it just looks like slugs. (p 10.).

This time Julie identified the **freezing process** involved in uninvited outside projections. She clearly saw how the creative process of her mandala was aborted.

**Mandala # 15: The Elk                      November 26, 1997      (J – 15, 6c)**

Julie's growing confidence in her own creativity became apparent as she described her process of drawing this mandala. She identified how **colors** reflected her levels of **energy** and moved her to ponder the dimensions of her **spiritual life**.

I was surprised when I drew him, because I had the feeling that I can't draw. But hey, this looks like an elk... I have no idea what I'm doing but I enjoyed playing with the colors. This mandala has an active kind of energy – like movement energy... There's something about the pinks and the purples that are at a feeling level... including my theology and spirituality... the pinks and purples do that for me... The black paper feels like the night sky... anything can happen in it. It feels like more of an effort to make something happen on the white. (p. 14, 19).

Julie also became aware of her preference for working on the **black art paper** rather than on the white paper. She described it with intensity.

**Mandala # 16: Padlock                      December 10, 1997      (J – 16, 7a)**

As Julie drew this mandala, she realized how strong her feelings were around the institutional church. She found the creation of this mandala to be a very intense experience because it put her in touch with her anger related to **church authorities**. As she reflected on her mandala in the interview, she said :

When I was coloring, the padlock image came to me and I debated about putting the padlock on the door, but the door wasn't anywhere big enough. It needed to be a very big padlock. Yep! That's exactly what it feels like. I just couldn't finish it. When I sat down I was imagining that the energy was in there, the life-giving and exciting kind. But I got so into my anger that that's all there was. All the energy is there in the padlock. It kept growing as I was coloring and I think that's why the padlock is so huge. (pp. 4-5).

Julie's experience of drawing a 'growing padlock' showed her how this symbol represented an indication of her passionate intensity around church **authority**.

**Mandala # 19: Wheel of Life**                      **December 17, 1997**                      **(J – 19, 8a)**

Julie connected to her **family of origin** material as she unfolded her experience of the pain of being ‘orphaned’ by her mother. She gave herself the time and space to reflect on her mandala and recognized how images just appear during the process.

The tear drops were about my grandmother dying when I was eight. When I started this [mandala] there was the pain of being orphaned around mother. The reflection about my grandmother happened in the middle of the drawing. When I sat back and looked at it I thought it looks like a shield. Then I made the connection with my grandmother and the shield. (pp. 3–4).

Julie again pointed out her preference for working on the **black art paper**. She stated:

There’s something about drawing the circle on the black that pulls everything into the circle. The black background does what the white doesn’t when I work with it. [p. 5].

**Mandala # 20: Snowflakes**                      **January 21, 1998**                      **(J – 20, 9a)**

In this interview Julie moved into a discussion of how the power of the **unconscious** manifests itself in her mandalas. She articulated it in these words:

I think my head usually knows what goes on at the time. But in terms of my last two mandalas, Snowflake and Animus Energy, that was a surprise...if I just draw it, sometimes I have a strong image but more often it is that the process itself changes the image. And then when I look at it afterwards, there’s always a surprise.. . like those phallic images that were just suddenly there... not conscious when I was drawing. I’m surprised how powerfully the unconscious comes through. (p. 12).

Julie’s process evidenced a growth from an initial stage of anxiety to a sense of confidence about her ability to create a mandala adequate for a contribution to this Project. She used her mandalas to reflect on transition in her life, her role in the church and her repressed childhood memories.

### **Our Mandala Stories Come Together**

Each co-researcher became a living laboratory of creativity, as shown in Chart 5.2 (p. 125) “Co-researcher’s Mandala Discoveries.” Both Julie and Mark presented various levels of psychic consciousness throughout their experiences of drawing mandalas.

Their experiences of drawing mandalas became a process involving the relinquishment of ego consciousness. Both co-researchers saw how their images unlocked their creative energies. For both, archetypal themes and mid-life issues were presented in their mandalas, explored in their reflections and in their discussions recorded in the taped interviews. Mark and Julie used their mandalas as isomorphic mirrors. In other words, there was a correspondence between each of their internal and external states. Their souls were in harmony with the mandala process. Both used the mandala as a form of meditation. Rather than intellectualizing their mandalas, both risked entering into a relationship with them whereby the mandala was then allowed to have its own autonomy. When the co-researchers entered into the making of their mandalas, the experience resembled the ‘immersion step’ mentioned by Moustakas.

Spirituality issues surfaced frequently, although these issues were different for each co-researcher. Through the use of mandalas, the co-researchers were able to project outside themselves their inner experiences, thoughts and feelings. They often found these too complex to express verbally. They used the symbolic layers of their mandalas as vehicles to express their true selves and overcome initial inhibitions.

At first, the co-researchers reported struggles with their negative inner critics. Both felt anxiety and expressed self doubts about their ability to draw as well as their capacity to meet my expectations for this study. In particular, Julie recognized how easily she became blocked in her creative expression when she encountered ‘outside’ and ‘unwanted’ projections. Both Mark and Julie became aware of the role of the ‘unconscious’ in the creation of their drawings. In fact, they reported a certain curiosity of the ‘unknown’ which eventually took shape in their mandalas.

Julie and Mark recognized how the experience of drawing a mandala became a strong emotional indicator for their psychic awareness. They reported heightened color sensitivity, which increased as they moved into creating their own series of mandalas. Both of the co-researchers expressed delight in their discovery of the mandala art form as a new way to journal.

Both Julie and Mark often accessed childhood memories through the images in their mandalas. Their childhood memories helped them to call forth more images. As they experimented with their mandalas their stories became more detailed and animated. By contrast however, we each focused on different themes. I focused on the Goddess and the Divine Feminine themes. Julie focused on major life themes in her mandalas. Mark embraced his wildman archetype in his mandalas. Mark also used the mandala as a catalyst for other art forms, particularly poetry.

They used their mandalas to make theological connections and to deal with their own issues associated with roles in their church traditions and issues around spirituality.

The combination of my story and the two co-researchers' stories provided me with deeper insights and an enhanced appreciation for the work of the mandala. The series of mandalas created a very broad and rich tapestry woven from the major themes of the process of self integration and expanded awareness. Ultimately this self integration led each of us to individual experiences of transformation. The drawing of mandalas reflected a creative immersion. In the end, each of us honored our own creative process.

Our mandalas became the sanctuaries in which the soul life of each one of us was nurtured. In the words of art therapist Bruce Moon, we were challenged to return to "ideas of depth, imagination, and mystery."<sup>145</sup>

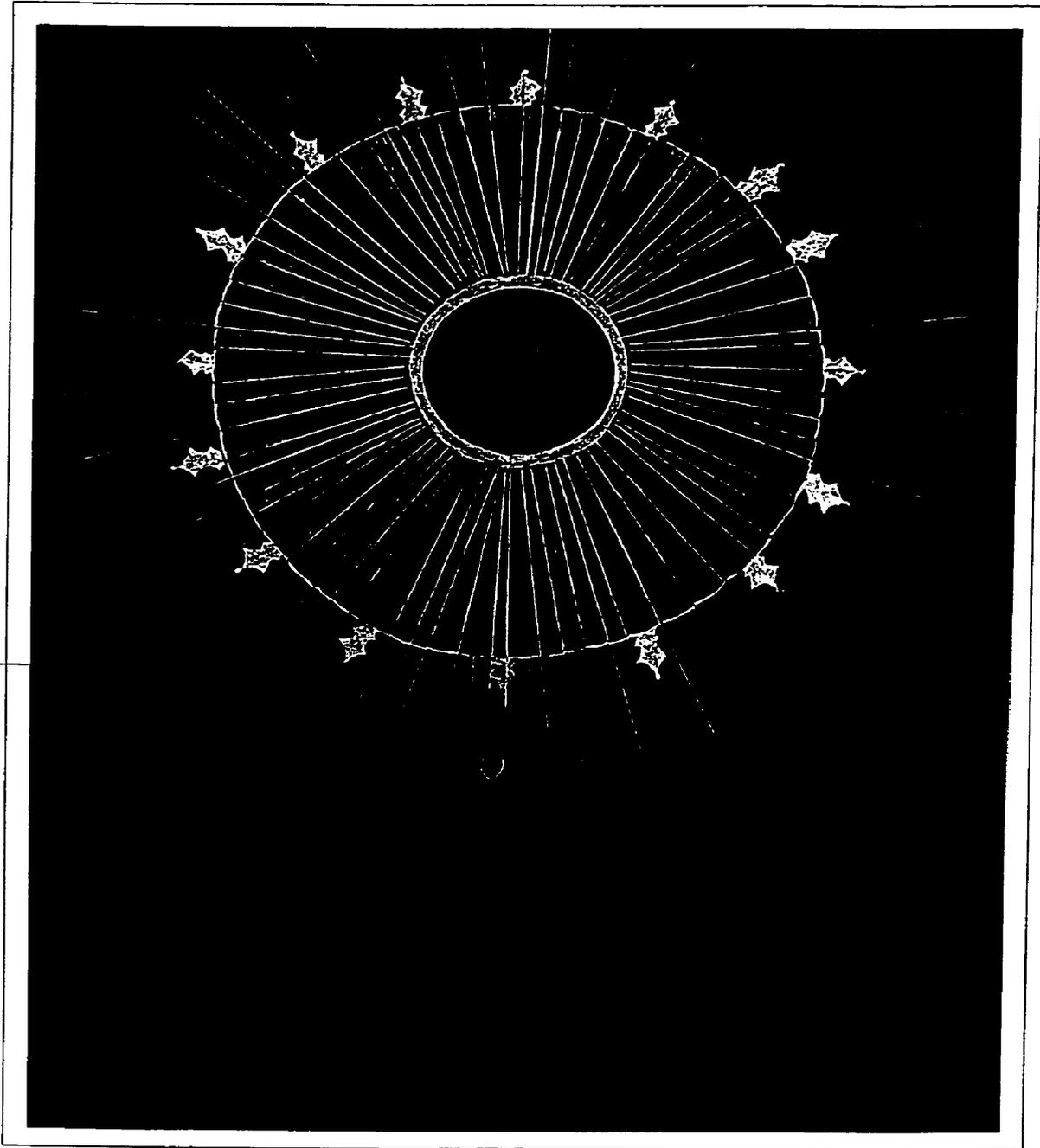
In the end, the co-researchers developed trust in their own capacity to draw a mandala which best represented their truth and their journey in the individuation process. This is very similar to what I experienced in my own journey towards healing and individuation.

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<sup>145</sup> Bruce Moon. Existential Art Therapy: The Canvas Mirror. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1990, 59.

## **Chapter VI**

**Finally, Illumination!**  
**But “*The host was black instead of white!*”**



The Black Host

Those moving to incorporate Jung's psychology in a Christian framework may also be impressed by the reverence in which Jung holds symbolic and mythical expression. They may be aware of his contention that all powerful and religious symbols arise from a common human source and depths, which he called the collective unconscious, to which each individual continues to have access in the pursuit of his or her spiritual life.<sup>146</sup>

In this chapter I will turn the circle once again by sharing an illumination I have experienced in this heuristic process of reflecting on my lived experience of drawing mandalas. This illumination has become for me a theological reflection on the issues emerging during my mandala journey.<sup>147</sup>

To share the illumination I have received as I have walked the mandala journey for this Project/Dissertation, I will make frequent use of a mantra "The host was black instead of white!" This mantra grows from a significant dream I had as I was concluding the heuristic process of writing this dissertation. The dream is the envelope carrying the message of the illumination I have received through this study.

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<sup>146</sup> John P. Dourley. The Illness That We Are: A Jungian Critique of Christianity. Toronto: Inner City Books, 1994, 8

<sup>147</sup> The theological reflection in this chapter is based on the tri-polar model of James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, developed in their book,; Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995. I have adapted their model in the following way for this study: My religious tradition is Roman Catholic. I am a lay woman; the culture is set in Jungian psychology. I am educated as a pastoral counselor with a specialty in the Creative Arts Expressions; and the life experience is the creation of drawing mandalas. These three dimensions of theological reflection will be presented in a dynamic and interactive way throughout this Chapter.

In theological reflection, the essential issue arising from reflection is called the heart of the matter.<sup>148</sup> For me the heart of the matter came to light in the following manner. As I began this section, I had an important dream<sup>149</sup> on November 10, 1999. Even as I recorded it in my journal, I recognized its central focus in my effort to connect my spiritual journey to the mandalas which my two co-researchers and I created for this study.

### The Dream

**I am attending a Catholic mass celebration in a large cathedral with two male friends. Both these males are disadvantaged to a greater or lesser degree. One sits in a wheel chair, totally disabled by multiple sclerosis. The other can barely walk, due to a painful back injury. At distribution of Holy Communion, the man in the wheel chair turns to me and tells me he wants to walk down the aisle to receive communion. I am quite surprised but I feel very responsible for his wish. So I begin to assist him. As I help lift him, I realize how heavy his body is. The weight of his body nearly overpowers me. The other man slowly follows us, shuffling his feet audibly. He also walks with great difficulty. As we approach the communion altar, my eyes rest on a large monstrance, which is elevated above the altar. I am dismayed that the enormous host in the glass enclosure of the monstrance is black instead of white. The priest is distributing black hosts as well. Both men receive the hosts, but the 'wheel chair' man is unable to return to his place without more assistance. I am frantic because I feel responsible for the care of both these men. I ask the man with the back injury if he can help us, but he is unable to support us in any way. So both men crawl down the aisle on their hands and knees to return to their places. There are no other people present. I cannot help these men and finally stop because of fatigue. I also neglect to receive communion due to my preoccupation with the care for these men.**

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<sup>148</sup> Patricia O'Connell Killen and John de Beer. The Art of Theological Reflection. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1995, 61. "In theological reflection we call the significant issue of an event brought for reflection *the heart of the matter*."

<sup>149</sup> Marie-Louise von Franz comments that "Dreams that are an index of the individuation process have, as we shall see, a strange religious or mythological character... it is really religions that have served humanity in the discovery of inner meaning from time immemorial." Marie-Louise Von Franz. Archetypal Dimensions of the Psyche. Boston: Shambhala, 1997, 222.

I suspected that this was a ‘big’ dream.<sup>150</sup> It conveyed a sense of the sacred and seemed to relate directly to several of my mandalas, specifically “The Watchful Forest” “The Party Line,” “My Way of Knowing,” “Alone with the Shadow”, and “The Flowering” discussed in Chapter Five. The dream invited me to re-circle these mandalas which I will do in the course of this chapter. First, however, I will share my reflections of my dream in the hope of indicating how I have moved from initial revulsion to an appreciation of my self-integration and wholeness through a deepening understanding of the image of the black host.

For Jung, ‘big dreams’ move individuals towards personal wholeness. He claimed dreams are messages from that part of the Self, the unconscious which is the ‘writer and producer’ of our nightly soul dramas. My dreams have frequently brought me to a greater consciousness of my spiritual world and have compensated for what I ‘consciously’ know about myself. In Jungian psychology, dreams usually have an allegorical meaning filled with rich symbolic representations of who we are.

My dream challenged me to reflect on the allegorical meaning of the images in this dream, especially the terrifying image of the enormous black host in the glass enclosure of the monstrosity.<sup>151</sup> The image left me angry and confused. It would take soul work to bring its meaning to light.

This ‘dark’ dream reminded me of my first dream when I began my therapeutic journey in Jungian dream work. In this first dream, ‘all the white carpets in my living room had turned dark brown!’ I recalled the awful feeling of not wanting to work with the ‘darkness’ of my Psyche represented as the dark brown carpet. In both the carpet dream and the host dream I was challenged to ponder the message of the phenomenon of color reversal, the shift from light to darkness.

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<sup>150</sup> As an important background to interpreting this ‘big’ dream, I want to remind the reader once again of my involvement in Jungian based therapy over the last seven years. As well, I have participated in Jungian Study Groups for the last five years. For me, this dream and its mandala provided a deeper insight into an earlier mandala, “Walking the Party Line” in Chapter Five. Both mandalas immersed me into the ‘messy’ work of looking at the Church’s shadow.

<sup>151</sup> Throughout this section, along with the following four pages on the black host and the monstrosity, I am reflecting theologically in the manner outlined by Killen and de Beer. In their words, theological reflection is “the discipline of exploring individual and corporate experience in conversation with the wisdom of a religious heritage.” Also, “the conversation is a genuine dialogue that seeks to hear from our own beliefs, actions and perspectives, as well as those of the tradition. It respects the integrity of both.” Killen and deBeer, *Op. Cit.*, 51.

The Host dream was an unwelcome intrusion in my conscious life. I did not choose this dream and resented its arrival. I tried desperately to forget this frightening dream. It didn't work. Besides, all my training urged me to take the psyche seriously. So, to honor the experience, I pursued the now familiar path of drawing a mandala to represent this dream. (See "The Black Host" at the beginning of this Chapter) It was through this mandala that I hoped to access and absorb the message of this dream.

"The Black Host" mandala was created with a great deal of tension. Not only had I never seen a black host but the image was frightening to me. I knew it represented things I didn't want to uncover. I wondered what power in me had caused the host to turn black! On the other hand, I sensed something important had been unearthed. Based on my previous experiences with disturbing images, I recognized they usually offered me an opportunity to move into levels of depth which otherwise might be missed. I appreciated the truth of McNiff's words:

Exclusive identification with light and goodness keeps us in an artificial realm of spirituality and denies access to core homeopathic medicines of toxins serving as anti-toxins. In art, we need the nasty spirits as well as the nice ones.<sup>152</sup>

With these words in mind, I proceeded to explore the truths from the inner world of my unconscious in order to move them into consciousness. This required an entrance into relationship with this image and dream so it could have its autonomy as well as to become alive in me.

The setting of this black host dream was in a cathedral. The word cathedral is derived from the Latin 'cathedralis' meaning "chair or seat of authority."<sup>153</sup> This ecclesiastical building houses the chair of the bishop who is always a male in the Roman Catholic Church. Many gothic style cathedrals were built in the medieval period. They were usually in the shape of a cross. The symbol of the cross can signify suffering as well as the descent of spirit into matter.

*The host was black instead of white!*

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<sup>152</sup> McNiff. "Auras and their Medicines." Op. Cit., 298.

<sup>153</sup> Diane Apostolos-Cappadona. Dictionary of Christian Art. New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1995, 72.

The word *host* has its root in the Latin expression ‘hostia’ meaning bread. Host is often associated with ‘victim’ or ‘sacrifice.’ In my Church tradition the host is usually made from white unleavened bread. My black host dream had reversed this precious white host symbol.

The males in this dream were a ‘marked’ contrast to the clergy I had witnessed in church processions utilizing the monstrance. The male in the wheel chair insists on walking down the aisle in spite of his disability. In this act, he denies his own woundedness.

According to Jung, animus figures in dreams of women represent their inner masculine principle. My dream indicated how part of *my* animus<sup>154</sup> did not recognize its own woundedness.

Instead, in trying to help these men in my dream, I became their enabler to avoid the pain of the patriarchal wound. In other words, I ended up carrying the ‘dead weight’ of the wounded masculine. To take this one step further in my reflections, I not only enabled the wounded masculine in the context of the church assembly, but I also enabled the pathology of the wounded masculine in the church as the official seat of authority. Wound carries soul which always searches for wholeness.

Suffering is important in the full expression of Christ. Within the context of my dream, the ‘crippled wounded masculine energy’ seems to point to a sick or wounded church which has become afflicted with dogmas. These crippling dogmas arrest soul process. In my dream, both men fail to admit or own their infirmities. Both crawl back to their places.

Historically, wounded men tend to act out by ‘denial’ or through ‘behaviors.’ After waking up from this dream, I realized I cannot carry the patriarchal wound or the church’s shadow any longer. The dream also helped me realize I had disowned my own feminine shadow and projected it on to these ‘wounded men.’ My dream became a “...photograph(s) of the conscious situation taken from the unconscious point of view.”<sup>155</sup> My mandala, in reflecting this dream, became a tangible symbol for

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<sup>154</sup> Marie-Louise von Franz identifies the four stages of development of the animus in women. “In the first stage he manifests as a symbol of physical force... In the next stage, in addition he possesses initiative and focused ability to act. In the third stage, he becomes ‘the word’ and is therefore frequently projected onto noteworthy intellectuals, like doctors, ministers, and professors. On the fourth level, he embodies the mind and becomes a mediator of creative and religious inner experiences through which life acquires an individual meaning. Von Franz, *op. Cit.*, 323.

<sup>155</sup> Marion Woodman. The Ravaged Bridegroom: Masculinity in Women. Toronto: Inner City Books, 1990, 8.

working with my unconscious. It provided an entry for me into an expanded awareness of religious consciousness.

*The host was black instead of white!*

In pondering the ‘wounded animus’ figures of my dream and the mandala image with its black host, the theological implications of this dream were becoming more apparent. I was encouraged in this theological investigation by McNiff’s words about the connections between creative expression and spirituality.

(He or she) is an... active instrument through which the soul expresses itself and realizes its purpose. This is why the creative arts are always wedded to religion and spirituality. The freer the artist’s spirit, the more it expresses the divine energy.<sup>156</sup>

My theological reflections came in the manner Jung described when he talked about how to unravel the layers of meaning in dreams. His words encouraged me.

I know that if we meditate on a dream sufficiently long and thoroughly, if we carry it around with us and turn it over and over, something almost always comes of it... an important practical hint which shows the (dreamer) what the unconscious is aiming at.<sup>157</sup>

### **Reflecting on the Dream**

My experience had taught me how dreams present us with images pointing out significant aspects in our individuation process, which eventually leads to wholeness. Edinger suggests that in the darkness of the night, (our unconscious), we return to our “original wholeness out of which we were born. And this return to darkness, to the dream, is healing.”<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> McNiff. *Earth Angels*. Op. Cit., 112.

<sup>157</sup> C.G. Jung. *Collected Works*, Vol. 16. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977, par. 86.

<sup>158</sup> Edward F. Edinger. *Ego and Archetype*. Boston: Shambhala, 1992, 25.

This black host dream pointed out a significant aspect in my own individuation process which involved recognizing and confronting the patriarchal shadow afflicting not only the Church but Western culture as well. Seeing this shadow, I have come to understand the patriarchy of church as tending to 'spiritualize' its problem by the denial of the feminine. The image of the black host moved me to a greater realization of the "official" church as denying the Divine feminine.

This realization has led me to question the goddess territory of my soul. In fact, I felt obliged to ponder the question: Where *is* the feminine or goddess within the church culture which has been and continues to be such an important part of my life?

*The host was black instead of white!*

In trying to answer this question about the feminine in the church, memories returned of my Roman Catholic tradition on Holy Thursday. On this day we made multiple visits to chapels and churches where exposition of the Blessed Sacrament (the host) in the monstrance, was held throughout the night. Those visits encouraged the practice of prayer focusing on an exclusive, private, and vertical relationship with God.

On special feasts in the Roman Catholic tradition, there were solemn processions in which the priest carried the elevated monstrance while the hymn "Tantum Ergo" was sung.<sup>159</sup> This elevated symbol, or mystery was held high above us and 'out there.' These events *high-lighted* the presence of Christ among us. Knowing strong light produces shadow, I recognized how darkness and lightness are both a part of God.<sup>160</sup> But 'darkness' seemed absent in this liturgical experience. The emphasis was on the God of 'light.' Darkness is associated with matter. For me, the church activities and symbols did not seem to relate to the world of matter. In my experience, the procession of the Host in the monstrance focused on the transcendent God rather than on the Immanent God.

In the context of theology, the archetype of wholeness was originally represented by the Christ. Christ was not only a perfect human being, but also represented the primal state of oneness with God in

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<sup>159</sup> Tantum Ergo is the name of a Latin Gregorian Chant which begins with 'Down in Adoration.' It was composed by Thomas Aquinas in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>160</sup> Psalm 129: 11-12: "If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,' even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you."

the human psyche. In Christ, the dark side of humanity was absent and even denied. In the tradition of early Christianity, the dark side of humanity was projected as either the devil or as a woman.

The shadow aspect of church and its religious symbols seemed to be represented in the black host of my dream and in my Black Host mandala.<sup>161</sup> This large black host fixed itself in my psyche. The color black is significant in the context of all cultures.

Commonly, the color black is perceived negatively as it represents the 'rejected' or 'unrelated to' aspect of our psyches, almost as if it were 'evil.'

Jung, however, was careful to differentiate relative darkness from evil. He used relative darkness to describe shadow, which consists of the parts of the Psyche needing to be brought to consciousness for individuation, integration and wholeness. Light is embedded in the darkness. In this context then, black conveys the notion of wholeness because it contains both the light and the dark.

The monstrance is a strong religious symbol in my Roman Catholic tradition. The word monstrance is rooted in monstrare which means to show. It is a sacred vessel sometimes referred to as the ostensorium, which is used for the exposition and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament or the consecrated host. The practice of using a monstrance for this special viewing of the host developed by the fourteenth century.

[The monstrance is described as] . . . a round glass or crystal-covered opening through which the Sacred Host can be seen. The glass enclosure is frequently surrounded by rays or other decorations. These indicate the graces and spiritual blessings that flow from the Holy Eucharist upon those who adore and worship it. The glass enclosure, or "luna," is held up by a stem or base, allowing the monstrance to be placed on an altar or carried in procession, such as on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi.<sup>162</sup>

For me, the image of the host displayed in the monstrance is also symbolic of the patriarchal domination within the church. The monstrance is usually held 'up' by a male cleric priest in the Roman Catholic tradition. This gesture represents the epitome of the male clerical church system because 'no

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<sup>161</sup> According to Killen and de Beer, when we "confirm, challenge, clarify, and expand how we understand our own experience and how we understand the religious tradition," theological reflection is taking place. Throughout this section and through the means of my dream, I am challenging the traditional Roman Catholic understanding of the Eucharistic host. Killen and de Beer, *Op. Cit.*, 51.

<sup>162</sup> Rev. Peter M. J. Stravinskas, Editor. Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Dictionary. Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1993, 336.

one else is allowed to do it.' The sacramental system in the Roman Catholic church is mostly restricted to males, particularly in the celebration of the Eucharist. My dream exposed the pathology of the inflation of the patriarchy. It became very evident to me how busy I am carrying the dead 'body weight' of a patriarchal church.

In the dream, because of my inclination to carry out this task as a 'good Roman Catholic woman,' I did not receive the 'black host.' In propping up the handicapped men and neglecting to receive the black host which represents the shadow of my religious structures and beliefs, I become an enabler of the patriarchal pathology of both the Church and my culture. It is interesting to note the males in my dream needed to ingest the 'black host,' to assimilate the feminine, the luna-like 'moon goddess.'

In my dream, the black host is held within the 'luna,' or the 'mother moon.' The mother moon is carrying the dark feminine. For me, the black host enclosed in the luna 'moon goddess' is symbolic of matter. The moon is often associated with the feminine and in particular, the most feminine of feminine functions, the lunar monthly menstruation. The moon, with close links to the feminine- the shadow side of humanity - represents the dark side of nature. Theologically, my black host in the luna invites an exploration into wholeness. The church, which in my experience has dismissed matter as inferior to things of spirit, and has disrespected the feminine in preference of the masculine, is far from whole. With time, the drawing of the black host mandala and repeated reflection, I have come to a different understanding of the black host dream. The black host is an invitation to wholeness.

### **The Black Host Mandala and Its Friends**

These reflections on the dream also invited me to revisit the host mandala. Just as my 'surprising encounter' in my dream led to a more profound understanding of the black host, so my 'Black Host' mandala has led me to a sense of 'newness' about some of the mandalas mentioned in Chapter Five. For me, these continued reflections have demonstrated the truth in Killen and de Beer's views: "For theological reflection we want to bring our experience to the tradition so that a surprising

encounter—newness—can emerge.”<sup>163</sup> I was convinced my mandalas were both psychic and spiritual maps which would guide me to my destination – a greater understanding of my past theological and psychological experiences and a more integrated experience of self. This journey to wholeness does involve a willingness to descend into the darkness of the unconscious however.

*The host was black instead of white!*

My mandalas had become sacred containers in which an alchemy for healing of my body, mind and spirit took place.<sup>164</sup> In a sense, each mandala became a monstrance containing the full mystery of the body. The mandala as monstrance became an even more profound spiritual experience.

I recognized how the creative act of drawing mandalas, particularly mandalas from dreams, moved my co-researchers and myself into the intuitive, non-rational meditative nature of ourselves. This experience nurtured our quest for inner and outer connections (relationships) and a sense of wholeness (individuation).

### **Its Friends**

This black host depicted in my mandala represented a rich symbolic form which became the lens through which I could relate to some mandalas and findings from Chapter Five. Indwelling with the image of the black host in my mandala helped bring to my consciousness an awareness of my role of a co-conspirator in the pathology of the patriarchy, especially in my Church. In a strange and mysterious manner, my black host dream revealed some of the same themes which emerged through the experience of drawing mandalas for my Project/Dissertation.

Upon further reflection, “The Tree Goddess” mandala (See Chapter Five) was an early hint of the significance of the black host dream. I referred then to the central image of this mandala as a monstrance. Instead of a host, the monstrance is holding a circular image filled with a butterfly, the

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<sup>163</sup> Killen and de Beer, *Op. Cit.*, 64.

<sup>164</sup> “Theology without alchemy is like a noble body without its right hand.” A.E. Waite., *op. Cit.*, 9.

image of transformation. I commented on the dark nature of the forest, the archetypal image of the unconscious. I reflected further “this mandala presented a red flag for me, warning me to stop intellectualizing and to pay attention to my emotions and my dreams.” I believe this mandala sets the stage for the black host dream. In some sense the rays emanating from the “Black Host” mandala resemble the roots depicted in “The Tree Goddess” mandala. I am grateful to the “Tree goddess” who prepared me to receive the black host dream and tells me she is connected to it. The connections between the dream and these two mandalas serve as a wake-up call. I begin to realize the ‘connectedness’ of all things. I am invited to look for the clues and hints pointing to ingredients in my process of integration and transformation.

Another friend of the host dream and the “Black Host” mandala is “Walking the Party Line” mandala. (See Chapter Five) While the “Party Line” mandala was a source of embarrassment when I drew it, this mandala serves as both an obvious statement about the patriarchal church and a subtle invitation to integrate the goddess, the feminine into my Psyche. I notice now the central woman’s hands are ‘tied’ and not visible in the mandala. In my host dream, I used my hands to help the crippled men to the altar. Helping hands is an image for women in our church. The question the “Party Line” mandala asks, “What will the Church do with her?” has become a central issue in my attempts to integrate the male and female energies both in my Self and in my Church.

I think the “Black Host dream and ”Black Host” mandala are also related to the “My Way of Knowing” mandala. (See Chapter Five) I began this mandala with uncertainty about my feelings of creativity. However, the mandala assured me my way was a special gift and it extended an unconditional love to me and my work. This was a very powerful experience. This mandala helped me to realize the power and influence of male thinking over me. Because I was prepared to recognize this aspect of my self, the black host dream and mandala opened me to the understanding of male energy as often crippling. It can be healed and made whole when both the feminine and masculine are honored and integrated in the process of individuation. I am honoring my way of knowing by honoring the dream and the mandalas. Both have gifted me with great insight.

I’m taking another look at “The Feminine” mandala (See Chapter Five) and recognizing its essential links to the black host dream and the mandala. Again, I note the significance of the chalice,

another receptacle for the host. The goddess figures are ‘priestesses’ who tell me outright they want to liberate me from the bondage of meaningless church doctrine and ideology. This related directly to the image of the black host and the men who are crippled with the burdens of the Church dogma. The host is “supposed” to be white. To have anything else has implications for the tampering of Church doctrine and practice. This is why my dream host is black. It represents a breakthrough for Church doctrine. I note how the yin/yang symbols in the chalice of “The Feminine” mandala foreshadow the integration of the black/white, male/female elements in my black host dream and mandala. Once again, I am aware of how the unconscious knows before the conscious. Of course, I take delight in the mandala image of the female priestess! Perhaps this is an image also foreshadowing things to come!

The mandala “Alone with the Shadow” (see Chapter Five) also seems related to the black host dream and mandala. The monstrance in the black host mandala seems like a twin of the lily pads in the shadow mandala. After some time away from the shadow mandala, I am now more aware of how the great shadow cutting across some of the lily pads resembles the black host image. I wrote “At first I paid very little attention to the shadow.” As I came to pay more and more attention to the shadow and pursued the invitation to enter into the darkness of the unconscious, the host dream came out of the darkness and revealed to me a way to wholeness. This path to wholeness included embracing the feminine and masculine, the world of matter and the world of spirit, the world of the conscious and the world of the unconscious.

The black host dream and its mandala are also related to “The Flowering” mandala. (See Chapter Five) Flowers are in themselves similar to the chalice, the receptacle for the host. Raised above the glass, which can be thought of as a more common or universal container, is a flower also suggesting a host. In this mandala, the pregnant goddess raises her hands in the posture similar to the priest raising the monstrance or host for viewing. For me, “The Flowering” mandala suggests there is reason for hope, for new birth in my experience of ‘host’ which represents ‘embodiment.’ I know these mandalas and the dream are speaking to me and helping me on my journey to wholeness.

From my research and these further reflections, I sensed my co-researchers and I had moved into many areas of greater religious consciousness and into a paradigm shift.<sup>165</sup> I had entered into the experience of bringing forth the image for fuller consciousness. This image was the black host.

*The host was black instead of white!*

When I try to integrate the messages of the dream and my mandalas into my Christian theology and pursuit of God, I am guided by the thinking and insights of several theologians. The Lutheran theologian, Paul Tillich supports the notion of artistic symbols, imagination, spirituality, creativity, and play as all interrelated.<sup>166</sup> He had a great passion for the visual arts and he played a role in linking the visual arts with theological reflection. While claiming he was not an artist, he asserted art was a central quality of the human condition. It empowers a person to tap into various levels of his or her levels of consciousness and even the unconscious. In Tillich's words:

...art is necessary. It is as necessary as knowledge and other forms of human spiritual life. It is necessary for it reveals levels of reality, even in such secular objects which are, neither in style nor in content, religious.<sup>167</sup>

This Project/Dissertation has certainly reinforced the connections between the creative act and spirituality. I have accepted the fact the Self 'knows.' It is bestowed with a numinous \* nature. To relate to the Self who 'knows' implies an entrance into the religious dimensions of being.

My black host dream has presented me with a rich tapestry incorporating many levels of meaning including a theological dimension. Likewise, my mandalas also give expression to the inner experience of the Divine. The essence of artistic expression can be observed when one expresses Self

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<sup>165</sup> "My host was black." This is a switch in a 'visual gestalt,' because the host is usually white or today can be a wheat color. Interestingly enough, Thomas Kuhn, in his book Structure of Scientific Revolutions, mentions such a switch as one of the various descriptions of a new paradigm. (Cited by Matthew Fox in The Coming of the Cosmic Christ, 80). In this light, expressions of my own paradigm shift are from: spirit to matter; God outside of us to God within us; parts-mentality to wholeness; separateness to connectedness; rational to intuitive; ascetic to aesthetic; and obedience to creativity. In expressing these shifts I have borrowed from Matthew Fox. *Ibid.*, 134-135.

<sup>166</sup> This work has been inspired by the research of Coleen Lynch. "In the Eye of the Beholder: The Theology of Culture of Paul Tillich as Related to the Visual Arts." M.Th. Thesis. Edmonton: St. Stephen's College, 1998.

<sup>167</sup> Paul Tillich. "Existentialist Aspects of Modern Art." On Art and Architecture. (eds., John Dillenberger and Jane Dillenberger) Crossroad: New York, 1987, 94.

through intense Soul work (moving through conscious and unconscious levels). It becomes a sacred moment... one of Divine mystery.

Paul Tillich recognized the mystical experience as one of participation and recognized the power of the symbolic. The mandala (circle) is a powerful religious and archetypal symbol which can open the inner Soul life of the individual to new realities. In holding the mandala up as a symbol of the Divine and also of Self, we derive meanings for our lives from it. Tillich described this dynamic as the courage to be. He asserted religious symbols reveal a hidden level of reality which lays at the foundation of all other levels and provides the individual with an opportunity to experience the Divine.

We can call this the depth dimension of reality which is the ground of every other dimension and every other depth, and which therefore, is not one level beside the others but is the fundamental level, the level below all other levels, the level of being itself, or the ultimate power of being. Religious symbols open up the experience of the dimension of this depth in the human soul.<sup>168</sup>

Tillich described man's [woman's] ultimate concern as needing to be expressed symbolically. He advances that symbolic language as uniquely expressing the ultimate concern.

Creation - centered theologian Matthew Fox addresses the concept of the birthing of creativity in his treatise on the Four Paths of Creation Spirituality. His third path, the 'via creativa' is particularly appropriate to this research, because the path involves the choice to move into inner work. Our inner work usually gives birth to our creative expression. This creative expression becomes the image of God to its creator. Creativity honors imagination exploring our connection to God. The healing of self happens through creativity. It is a way to arrive at our own empowerment. Fox suggests:

By journeying into our experience by way of art as meditation we come in touch with our images once again and our power for imagery: this is empowering. It gives us our souls back, and our responsibility to express them. In the process, the Spirit returns—through our imaginations and through our hands, bodies, voices, songs, color, clay, words of poetic truth.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Paul Tillich. *Theology of Culture*. London: Oxford University Press, 1959, 58-59.

<sup>169</sup> Matthew Fox. *Wrestling with the Prophets: Essays on Creation Spirituality and Everyday Life*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995, 222.

I have experienced art as meditation<sup>170</sup> to be a deeply spiritual and ecumenical journey crossing all religious traditions. Spirituality is also about journeying down into the deep darkness of our experience where we find God.<sup>171</sup> This requires us to move into the right hemisphere of the brain along with the left hemisphere where words and light are most important.

*The host was black instead of white!*

Further reflection and meditation on the mandalas created for this study resulted in a profound journey into the darkness of the Psyche, and the unconscious. My co-researchers and I were able to journey to these unfamiliar places. Consequently our psyches took on their own luminous qualities and revealed what we needed to know. Through creating mandalas, we began the labyrinthine journey of integration leading to transformation. For each of us, the drawing of the mandala was a kind of representation of the Self. Particular themes surfaced as both common and unique. These themes helped each of us deal with the unconscious content as it flowed into consciousness. As we each reflected on the process of creating mandalas and the emerging images, we each encountered repressed contents in the Psyche. Above all, as we discussed the content and themes of our mandalas, it became clear to me how new understandings were gained regarding both the masculine and the feminine principles.

One of the most significant insights I have had in the process of drawing these mandalas and reflecting on my dream is the extent of the denial of the feminine principle in myself and in my Church.

In a mysterious way, I was meeting the Divine through my image of the monstrance with its black host. I wondered how this vivid dream image would transform my thinking and way of being in the world. Tillich's words offered a hint:

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<sup>170</sup> As I was drawing my mandalas, I often relied on the artistic process as a 'meditative ritual.' See Chapter Five.

<sup>171</sup> The medieval German mystic, Meister Eckhart proposed the inner person is "the soil in which God has sown the divine likeness and image and in which God sows the good seed, the roots of all wisdom, all skills, all virtues, all goodness ---the seed of the divine nature (2Pet. 1:4). The seed of the divine nature is God's Son, the Word of God." The original quote is found in Meister Eckhart, "Vom edlen menschen," in Josef Quint, Meister Eckhart: Deutsche Predigten und Traktate. Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1977, 141.

Artists do not merely express a moment in the social situation of their time. They express the dynamics in the depths of society which come from the past and run toward the future. Therefore, they have a prophetic character.<sup>172</sup>

I have lived out my spiritual life in the Catholic Church with exclusively male gender-biased God images. These male images have been based on patriarchal values and the dualism of the classical world of the Greeks and Romans. In my experience, most women have unfortunately come to know God through male values and images. As a woman counselor, I have observed a complicated reality as I search for the 'Imago Dei' for others and myself. With male images as the exclusive representation of God, females often see themselves as the opposite of the image reflected in the language and visual images commonly used in our society. As a result of this Project/Dissertation, the insights and the individuation occurring, I have asked myself: How might I facilitate the recovery of the Divine Feminine within a Church tradition which is wedded to Patriarchy? Historically, women could take heart in the ancient Goddess images informing and honoring the experience of being feminine. Feminist writer Carol Christ suggests a language focusing on the Goddess as a self-affirming image for women.

The symbol of Goddess has much to offer women who are struggling to be rid of the 'powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations' of devaluation of female power, denigration of the female body, distrust of female will, and denial of women's bonds and heritage that have been engendered by patriarchal religion. As women struggle to create a new culture in which women's power, bodies, will, and bonds are celebrated, it seems natural that the Goddess would reemerge as a symbol of the newfound beauty, strength, and power of women.<sup>173</sup>

Today more women are becoming aware of just how powerful the understanding of Goddess can be as it loosens the grip of patriarchy and its symbols. The experience of the Goddess emerging from within issues a serious challenge to the predominant masculine symbols of the contemporary

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<sup>172</sup> Paul Tillich. "Art and Society." *On Art and Architecture*. Op. Cit., 29.

<sup>173</sup> Carol Christ. "Symbols of Goddess and God in Feminist Theology." *In Laughter of Aphrodite*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986, 286.

Roman Catholic Church.<sup>174</sup> Unfortunately, I continue to experience a Church within the Roman Catholic tradition seemingly held prisoner to sexism. Perhaps Goddess feminism can enrich the spirituality of believers because it addresses fundamental discontinuities between women's experience and the overwhelmingly masculine symbols and language used by the institutional church.

The image of God must come to include both the masculine and feminine aspects of life. The Divine Feminine can be rediscovered and re-envisioned in order to enhance our theological understandings of the Divine Feminine/Goddess.

Feminist writer Joan Chittister aptly uses the metaphor of the circle<sup>175</sup> in contrast to the pyramid structure (hierarchy) to describe a new view of church. She states:

What the world needs are more circles and fewer pyramids. Circles are strange and wonderful things. No one knows where a circle either begins or ends. No one can tell what is its most accomplished part. 'There is no up to go to in a circle, no steps to climb to arrive there, no top to get to, no crowning point upon which to plant a flag or stake a claim or build a throne. In a circle there is only eye-to-eye conversation, only shoulder-to-shoulder contact, only community to aspire to rather than hierarchy.'<sup>176</sup>

Chittister points out:

Patriarchy is theologically incongruent... psychologically unsound... socially destructive... and consequently the spirituality it spawns is deficient... Patriarchy rests on four interlocking principles: dualism, hierarchy, domination, and essential inequality.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Marchiene Vroon Rienstra argues how men's concepts of God usually focus on the transcendence of God. She writes how women are more inclined to relate to the immanence of God, in other words, a God with us, rather than a God 'out there.' Marchiene Vroon Rienstra. Come to the Feast: Seeking God's Bounty for Our Lives and Souls. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995, 138-139.

Theologian Dorothee Solle comments how the mystical theology of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries can be a helpful thread in understanding the tradition for feminists who are currently searching for relationships free from domination. "Mystical theology is based on experience, not authority. It speaks of a God whose essence is not independence, otherness, might and domination. Mysticism speaks of knowing God through experience." Dorothee Solle. "Mysticism, Liberation and the Name of God." Christianity and Crises. 1992, 170.

<sup>175</sup> The description of God as a circle is meaningful in this context: "God is an intelligible sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere." Saint Bonaventure. (*Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, 5) *The Franciscan Vision*. trans. by Fr. James, (O.F.M. Sap. London), 60. 1937. Cited in Mysterium Coniunctionis. (trans. by R.F.C. Hull), Princeton: Princeton University Press, Vol. 14, 1970, 47.

<sup>176</sup> Joan D. Chittister. Heart of Flesh. Ottawa: Novalis, 1998, 160.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

She continues to argue how the world is managed from the top down within a hierarchical structure. She asserts dominion must be changed to companionship which she identifies as Ecofeminism. “Ecofeminism opens the circle and takes the world in on feminist terms.”<sup>178</sup>

*The host was black instead of white!*

As a result of drawing, reflecting on my mandalas as well as my black host dream, it has become very clear to me as a woman how I have come to know God only through male values and images. As a counselor, I have faced the reality of women seeking a God image for identity mirroring. In this process, women find a complex reality because they have been influenced by the male’s way of knowing which is the way of ‘separation.’ In other words, the ‘subject’ as the knower is separate from the ‘object’ which is known. In the world of academics, the pursuit of scholarship has been grounded in the male’s perspective of knowing. Belenky and her co-authors emphasize this when they distinguish the difference between ‘connected knowing’ and the traditional scientific method of ‘separate knowing.’ Both men and women need to feel at home in the birthing of their creative expression. This process demands relationship and intimacy within a new framework.

Separate knowers learn through explicit formal instruction how to adopt a different lens – how, for example, to think like a sociologist. Connected knowers learn through empathy. Both learn to get out from behind their own eyes and use a different lens; in one case the lens of a discipline, in the other the lens of another person.<sup>179</sup>

The ‘artistic way of knowing’ which I introduced in Chapter Five, closely relates to Belenky’s approach in Women’s Ways of Knowing. My honoring the feminine, the intuitive, and trusting my psyche resulted in the creation of an integral symbolic language in the mandala. Both my male and female co-researchers experienced the same ‘feminine way of knowing’ journey.

Interestingly enough, in contemporary Christian spirituality, ‘connectedness’ is emphasized by growing numbers as an essential component. As Elizabeth Johnson puts it:

...it (postmodern spiritual experience) prizes not isolation but essential connectedness; not body-mind dualism but the holistic, embodied person; not patriarchy but inclusive

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>179</sup> Belenky, et al., Op. Cit., 115.

feminism; not militarism but expenditure for the enhancement of life; not tribal nationalism but global justice.<sup>180</sup>

*The host was black instead of white!*

The mandala is one expression of the individuation process. This process of individuation involves a striving towards wholeness. Von Franz identifies the three most important phases of the individuation process:

...the integration of the shadow, that is, the “dark” side of the personality, which belongs to the wholeness but is denied or overlooked by consciousness; making conscious the opposite-sex components, which Jung called the animus (in a woman) and the anima (in a man); and finally, experiencing the Self and developing a relationship with the Self, the innermost core of the psyche.<sup>181</sup>

Jung has pointed out repeatedly we can only achieve inner wholeness through the psyche. The Self unites the opposites – the masculine and the feminine. Meeting the Self is the goal of the individuation process. It is interesting to note the connection of my black host dream and the final stage of Moustakas’ heuristic methodology. This is the stage of ‘creative synthesis’.

The circle is the archetype for wholeness. One of the constant themes throughout Jung’s writings is his emphasis on wholeness rather than perfection. In an address Jung gave to a conference of clergymen, he commented: “...psychoneurosis must be understood ultimately, as the suffering of a soul which has not discovered its meaning.”<sup>182</sup>

Guggenbuhl-Craig, a Jungian analyst, views the concepts of individuation and salvation as being closely related. Psychic wholeness was the heuristic principle of Jung’s investigations. He asserted it is Christ who occupies the center of the Christian mandala. Christ has represented for all Christians the archetype of the Self, the Imago Dei. But unfortunately, in traditional Christianity, Christ became for many a symbol of the heroic ego rather than for the Self. Traditional images of Christ deny any recognition of the feminine in the ‘God/man.’

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<sup>180</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson. The Search for the Living God. John M. Kelly Lecture of 1994, University of St. Michael’s College, Toronto, 7.

<sup>181</sup> Marie-Louise von Franz. Op. Cit., 134.

<sup>182</sup> C. G. Jung. “Psychotherapists or the Clergy.” Psychology and Religion. New York: Pantheon Books, 1958, 330-331.

Jung urged a symbolic understanding of Christian mythology in an attempt to achieve an authentic religious experience. In the search for meaning, mystery and the process of individuation, the symbol is crucial to incarnational theology and the psychology of Jung.

During the last fifteen years of his life, Jung's main preoccupation was the significance of religious experience for psychiatry and psychology. In fact, many writers consider his later work a 'science of the sacred,' very sympathetic to Christianity. He embraced a position whereby the truth of the divine lies in the experience of one's own sacred depths. This conclusion ties in with my earlier comment about distinguishing the experience of the Goddess from the dogma of patriarchy.

Jung's position on faith could be called a mandalic faith. It is a faith based on a mandalic consciousness which focuses on the center as the midpoint between opposites. Jung understood mandala images to have a religious nature, always pointing to God or the Self, as the real basis of the religious experience. In this sense, the mandala as interpreted by Jung is:

An image of radical divine immanence which grounds a sense of transcendence in the individual psyche, even as it drives the ego toward unity with its divine center.<sup>183</sup>

Spirit derives its meaning from 'ruah' or breath. My work with others is about helping people become empowered in order for them to breath and feel alive again, to be in touch with their affect and to trust their own truth. For me, this requires a movement into an inner soul sanctuary in order to awaken a passion for life.

*The host was black instead of white!*

I strongly sense there is a union of the healing process and spiritual/religious beliefs in each individual. In my own experience, I have found psychic, spiritual and physical healing may lead to a greater understanding of 'embodiment' of the feminine principle where there is less vulnerability to the patriarchal culture.

I became conscious of strong thematic material expressed in the mandalas for this study. Specifically, the theme which dealt with patriarchy became a source of enlightenment. This is a theme which has destroyed both masculine energy and repressed feminine energy. As I drew my mandalas, I

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<sup>183</sup> Dourley, Op. Cit., 76.

became aware of my hunger for the Divine Feminine, the Goddess, and a Mother/God. Even though I have been brought up in the Roman Catholic Church tradition, I am pleased to note these themes were not affected by how the Church has viewed the Virgin Mary. The 'cult of the Virgin Mary,' which the Roman Catholic Church has created, is an idealization of the perfect pure mother image. It has robbed women of a total acceptance of their full sexuality. Instead, we are presented with a historically unsound version of a promiscuous Mary Magdalene sexuality represented as an anti-type of Eve. Mary Magdalene is portrayed as an image of erotic love. She represents a passionate feminine woman in contrast to the pure Virgin Mary image who is a masculine construct because of the denial of the full feminine principle. I see this split between the Magdalene and the Virgin as similar to the split of light from darkness. Both are a denial of wholeness.

While I drew my mandalas I became acutely aware of my hunger for images mirroring my own experience of Self and God, and more specifically a Feminine God. I am not abandoning the image of God as Father. Instead I am objecting to the exclusive use of male images and metaphors for God which are also encased in a male language.

My mandalas became containers in which I could express unconscious repressed material. I discovered how my mandalas and those of others mirror in very creative ways relationships, issues, and struggles within the image of wholeness, represented by the circle. I perceive these mandalas as the raw material which is the sacred. The 'experience' of the Divine is contained within Self in the artistic process.

A woman's way of knowing impacts theory and seeks a feminine expression. As a woman who has immersed herself in the richness of the intuitive process, I have encountered the mysteries found in the spiritual experience of drawing mandalas and encountered an openness to the sacred.

In the introduction of my Project/Dissertation I referred to an intensive seminar on mandalas in which I chanted a mantra with the words "Divine Mother."

I came to realize that images and metaphors of a Divine Mother God were absent in my religious tradition. I missed this feminine expression of God and sensed that

countless women experienced the same unnamed longing for a feminine God with whom they could more closely identify.<sup>184</sup>

On the other hand, different from my background, artist/author Meinrad Craighead, coming from a similar background in the Roman Catholic tradition, is able to present an expression of her experience of Mother God, albeit hidden.

God the Mother came to me when I was a child and, as children will do, I kept her a secret. We hid together inside the structures of institutional Catholicism... This natural religious instinct for my Mother god gave me a profound sense of security and stability. She was the sure ground I grew in, the groundill of my spirituality. Yet we remained comfortably at home in the bosom of Holy Mother Church. My Catholic heritage and environment have been like a beautiful river flowing over my subterranean foundation in God the Mother. The two movements are not in conflict, they simply water different layers in my soul. This personal vision of God the Mother, incarnated in my mother and her mother, gave me, from childhood, the clearest certainty of women as the truer image of Divine Spirit. Because she was a force living within me, she was more real, more powerful than the remote Father god I was educated to have faith in. I believed in her because I experienced her. Instinctively I knew that this private vision needed protecting; my identity, my very life depended on its integrity.<sup>185</sup>

While I can appreciate Craighead's 'hidden' experience of a Mother God, I want to be an advocate for the full acceptance of an inclusive God image in the life and practice of the Church.

In conclusion, this whole chapter has been a surprise for me because I have moved away from my pre-conceived 'traditional' style of theological reflection which is largely found in relating to the outer faith expressions such as Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church.<sup>186</sup> For me, theological traditions have been developed within a male milieu and consciousness. It is encouraging to observe how new theological methods have recently been developed by many women theologians.

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<sup>184</sup> See "Introduction" to my Project/Dissertation.

<sup>185</sup> Meinrad Craighead. The Mother's Songs: Images of God the Mother. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985, Introduction.

<sup>186</sup> As I understand it, there are several approaches to theological reflection. Among them are: A way to self knowledge; learning about others; a way of discovering the collective story of a faith community; and a way of doing social analysis. In my work in this Project/Dissertation, I have emphasized the first two. See Margaret B. Clark & Joanne K. Olson. Nursing Within a Faith Community: Promoting Health in Times of Transition. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000, see Chapter Seven.

At the beginning of the writing of this chapter, I experienced fear of being criticized or perhaps condemned for my process. My black host dream has presented me with the full mystery of the body. I have moved through an incredible experience of bringing forth the image. The spirituality of the flesh is recognized through a black host which is held in a sacred container, the monstrance. Thus I have been shown through my dream how my mandalas are sacred and are being elevated in the great 'cathedral of my body' which is the crucifixion. If I leave out the body, I leave out the fullness of my experience! This sentence rings true for me because I have spent so much time 'dismissing the significance of my body.' This dream leads me to question both my role as helper of these wounded males and how I move into the position of 'helping' them. To see a monstrance elevated with a 'black host' can be disconcerting, because 'blackness' evokes so many negative messages. I tried to imagine a woman elevating this monstrance with its black host. It frightened me, because I quickly imaged the woman with suspicion and associated her with witchcraft. In trying to work through this chapter, the thought occurred to me I might get burned, as happened historically to those who were seen as witches. I have also wondered what process a woman would have to go through to elevate the black host in her body and soul. She certainly would have to have enough strength to take the 'fall-out.'

In this manner, I have entered the process of theological reflection through my 'big dream' of the black host and my 'monstrance' mandala. Such a rich experience of this sacred symbol has provided me with the rich soil for my spiritual and theological reflection.

## Chapter VII

### Historical Context

The world of scholarship is one of these magic circles that many of us slip into at regular intervals and bring everything we've thought we thought into question, and it can feel timeless and freeing – even magical.<sup>187</sup>

When Carol Flinders discusses the seductive nature of scholarship, I renewed my own encounters with each book, article, footnote, bibliography and workshop which has shaped my thought and introduced me to new worlds. Flinders describes this seductive nature:

...it [scholarship] is one of the ultimate drugs... and there hovers over you all the time this delicious feeling that any minute you'll have explained Everything.<sup>188</sup>

In much the same way, my experience of creating mandalas, working with their images and the process of self-integration has carried the hope at 'any minute I will have explained everything.' And I am not alone in using mandalas with the hope of explaining 'everything.' Throughout the world, mandalas have become a tool for self-help for individuals, groups, and couples. Mandalas have also been used to aid the psychiatric and geriatric populations. In some cases, mandalas are being used to teach geometry in school settings. They are also used to facilitate meditation and centering techniques with children. Recently, a game has been created with a game board which has a metaphysical representation of energy using numbers, colors, geometrical shapes and holographic light.<sup>189</sup> This game has been developed to encourage the individual to discover his or her own spiritual self, understanding of oneself in relationship to others and the universe. Given the long history of the mandala and its

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<sup>187</sup> Carol Lee Flinders. At The Root of This Longing: Reconciling a Spiritual Hunger and a Feminist Thirst. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998, 180.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-181.

<sup>189</sup> Faith Rothstad. "Cryptic Mandala." Vancouver: Insight Game Production, Ltd., 1998.

recent popularity in a variety of settings, there is a vast amount of literature on mandalas. To completely explore what is already published in the literature on mandalas is probably impossible and would entail writing another dissertation at the very least. However, in order to create new knowledge, based on a solid foundation, I see the importance of examining 'what is.' I will examine various definitions of the mandala as well as explore the richness of the present literature on mandalas, pursuing in particular the links between mandalas and creativity, spirituality, theology, and counseling. I will acknowledge the historical roots of the mandala found in the Eastern Spiritual traditions and examine the contributions of Jung in understanding the present day use of the mandala in the therapeutic community.

### **Definition**

I am frequently asked to define and describe the mandala. This is no easy task. It is important to understand historical mandalas in both the Eastern and Western cultures. In order to gain insight into how the mandala is used today, I have searched for a formal definition and description of the mandala, complementary to the study of the experience of drawing the mandala.

Mandala is the Sanskrit word for circle. Barbara Walker, noted authority on sacred art, emphasizes that the circle "...was always one of the primary feminine signs as opposed to the line, cross, or phallic shaft representing masculine spirit."<sup>190</sup> She suggests how early matrifocal villages had hearths, houses and fences which were all built in the round. Evidence indicates an ancient love of the circle, which is exemplified in architecture, poetry, drama, music, art and dance.

Circles are the earliest forms created by children. Rhoda Kellogg in *Analyzing Children's Art*,<sup>191</sup> highlights the spontaneity of children in drawing mandalas. She shows how the art of children from all over the world illustrates mandala forms when they draw circles, crosses inside circles, suns

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<sup>190</sup> Barbara G. Walker. *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols & Sacred Objects*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988, 4.

<sup>191</sup> Rhoda Kellogg. *Analyzing Children's Art*. Palo Alto: National Press Books, 1970,

and little circles with faces drawn inside them. In her studies on pre-school art she claims the young child experiences the human being as a round, mandala-like shape.

Many scholars from the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology and theology agree pre-patriarchal thought was characteristically non-linear and multidirectional. Barbara Walker sums up the meaning of the circle:

The universe begins with roundness; so say the myths. The great circle; the cosmic egg, the bubble, the spiral, the moon, the zero, the wheel of time, the infinite womb; such are the symbols that try to express a human sense of the wholeness of things. Everything and everywhere are circular in most pictographic or alphabetic systems. Birth is roundness; the pregnant belly, the full breast. Death brings life full circle: back to the beginning again. Vessels are round. The house is round, containing all the stages of life. The temple is round, making wholeness visible. The sacred dance is circular.<sup>192</sup>

Art therapist Susanne Fincher provides instructions for creating the mandala with interpretations based on mandala traditions from around the world. She offers a historical overview of the mandala and suggests some of the world's earliest rituals were associated with sun worship. She observes how the carvings of ancient mandalas throughout the world suggest an "awe of the sun and the moon."<sup>193</sup> She discusses how creation myths, which are based on the circle, are found in the traditions of Europe, Africa, the South Pacific and India. Most creation stories from native American cultures are also based on a circle. Egyptian mythology describes the world as a seamless round.

For the purposes of my study, the work of these scholars gives me the working definition of mandala. In the context of this Project/Dissertation, the mandala is any art form drawn in a circular context.

With this brief historical background, Jean Chevalier & Alain Gheerbrant offer the following definition for the mandala.

...[It is a] circle, although it is a complex piece of drawing and often framed within squared borders. Like the Yantra [an emblematic medium], but more powerfully schematic, the mandala is simultaneously an abridgement of spatial manifestation and

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>193</sup> Susanne Fincher. Creating Mandalas for Insight, Healing, and Self-Expression. Boston: Shambhala, 1991, 3.

an image of the world, the depiction and realization of divine powers, as well as a visual aid to spiritual instruction and enlightenment.<sup>194</sup>

In another attempt to define mandalas, the HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion refers to the mandala as:

...an elaborate, symbolic geometric design used in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain rituals. Mandalas are complex multicolored cosmograms representing the totality of the macrocosm in relation to the human microcosm. They provide an ordered, patterned display of the many levels of the sacred inhabited by assemblages of powers and deities. Numerous variants exist, but the geometric arrangement of mandalas typically expands out in layers from a center and is oriented along directional axes. While mandalas are often circular, square mandalas figure prominently in architectural representations of Hindu temples as well as in the design of sites for initiatory rituals in the Tantra. Here they demarcate the sacred terrains within which the deities abide for the space of the ritual.<sup>195</sup>

In the Buddhist tradition, the mandala represents a psychophysical diagram which is used in Buddhist Tantric liturgy and yoga. In this tradition, the mandala is defined as a chapter or division of a book. ...the ten books of the early Hindu scripture Rg Veda are termed mandalas, i.e., "circles" of hymns.<sup>196</sup>

### Early Therapeutic Use of the Mandala

The alchemists, who were the 'chemists of the Middle Ages,' started their practices around 1000, CE. They developed a natural philosophy which was rich in the use of symbols. They exalted the mysteries of matter and invested matter with the same importance as 'spirit' has in Christianity. Alchemists used a major symbol, the 'quadratura circuli,' which really meant the squaring the circle and thus was considered a true mandala. McLean suggests the medieval alchemists 'projected' their

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<sup>194</sup> Jean Chevalier & Alain Gheerbrant. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. (trans. by John Buchanan-Brown). Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1994, 632.

<sup>195</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith. *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995, 679.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 680.

inner perceptions onto outer symbols and developed a language to communicate their own experiences of the soul's architecture.<sup>197</sup>

Hildegard von Bingen was a twelfth-century Benedictine abbess, born in Germany, who used the mandala in a therapeutic context. She is considered one of the great women mystics and spiritual geniuses of the Western Christian tradition. Although Hildegard was 'unschooled' in the tradition of drawing mandalas, she used her own intuitions to create the power of the sacred circle for illustrating her revelations from God. She experienced a therapeutic benefit when she discovered how her frail body became freed of illness as she gave expression to her visions and inspirations in the mandala. She created mandalas to express her own visions and the aural evidence she received of God's presence in her visions. Light and oneness were characteristic of her creative expressions. She describes her image of God in the following:

[God is on] ...a royal throne with a circle around it on which there was sitting a certain living person full of light of wondrous glory... And from this person so full of light sitting on the throne there extended out a great circle of gold color as from the rising sun. I could see no end to it.<sup>198</sup>

The 'great circle of gold' is a natural mandala and Hildegard tried to manifest her visions in this form of the mandala. Her creativity was a celebration of her visions and also provided her with a 'container' for the expression of the numinous in her experiences. Her experience of the numinous led her to focus on inner light and sounds which were close to the Tibetan and Hindu spiritual practices of yoga.

### **Mandalas in the Hindu-Buddhist World**

In both the Eastern and Western traditions, mandalas have been considered visual symbols with physical, psychological, and spiritual elements representing the journey to wholeness. Denise P.

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<sup>197</sup> See Adam McLean. The Alchemical Mandala: A Survey of the Mandala in the Western Esoteric Traditions. Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1989, 9.

<sup>198</sup> Matthew Fox. Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen. Santa Fe: Bear and Company, 1985, 40.

Leidy and Robert A. F. Thurman, curators of the pan-Asian exhibition sponsored by the Asian Society Galleries and Tibet House of New York, have contributed to the historical study of mandalas of the Hindu-Buddhist world by exploring the principles, methodology, and artistry of the mandala as a sacred space. They define the mandala:

The Sanskrit noun mandala means any circle or discoid object such as the sun or moon. In etymological studies, it is sometimes divided into manda – cream, best part, highest point – and la – signpost or completion. The combination is explained as a place or point which contains an essence.<sup>199</sup>

These two authors remind us mandalas have existed in every culture. The greatest profusion of mandalas is found in Tibetan religious traditions within Buddhism. Mandalas are considered the best known of the Buddhist icons throughout the world today.

However, Thurman suggests the ‘mandala idea’ has roots reaching farther back than historical Buddhism.

In the earliest level of Indian or even Indo-European religion, in the Rg Veda and its associated literature, mandala is the term for a chapter, a collection of mantras or verse hymns chanted in Vedic ceremonies, perhaps coming from the sense of round, as in a round of songs. The universe was believed to originate from the mantra hymns, whose sacred sounds contained the genetic patterns of beings and things, so there is already a clear sense of mandala as world-model.<sup>200</sup>

In Tibetan Buddhism, mandalas serve many functions which include decorating temples and homes, as well as initiating monks and rulers and guiding the meditation of the sangha, the community of monks and lay people. The practice of creating a circle for use in personal meditation to achieve enlightenment is at the heart of Buddhism. The mandala acts as an inner mental map through which the mediator can purify the mind and develop the quality desired for himself or herself. Here the intention is: The particular quality is then projected into the world by the Buddhist through actions with hopes of the world becoming transformed.

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<sup>199</sup> Denise Patry Leidy and Robert A. F. Thurman. Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment. Boston: Shambhala, 1998, 17.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 130.

The Tibetan Buddhists represented their Sacred Scripture in mandalas. They used them in the context of the path of the Buddha to achieve the state of enlightenment. In the Tibetan tradition, the mandala is used as a guide to the imagination during meditation.

The Navajos of the American Southwest share the practice of sandpainting with Tibetan Buddhists. In both cultures, the mandala is created through the process of using colored sands to represent mandala images. For the Navajos, the mandala is the symbolic expression for restoring the individual to a state of beauty. They use mandalas for healing rituals to restore the individual to harmony with nature and self. Peter Gold, describes the Navajo sand mandala:

[It] ...consists of a small, inner circle connected to an outer, larger one by means of four lines, creating four quadrants. It is a spiritual draftsman's diagram, a sacred shorthand for the four universal principles of the spiritual path.<sup>201</sup>

In the Navajo culture, a mandala is also used for healing. The person in need of healing does not construct the mandala but instead sits inside the sand painting while those who are recognized as the healers, shamans or medicine man chant healing songs over him or her. The healer's energy is directed into the mandala and into the person in need of healing by touching the heads of the sand figures and the patient's head, neck chest, arms, and legs. After this ritual, the sand mandala is destroyed. The Navajo destroy their sand mandalas so as to not misuse the power of the mandalas. Tibetan Buddhists do the same. The greatest similarity between the Tibetan and the Navajo mandalas is the emphasis on the 'healing' power of the sacred circle. Both cultures also consider the mandalas to be an integral aspect of meditation.

### **Carl Jung and Mandala Symbolism in Therapy**

Jung, a leading psychoanalyst of the twentieth century explained the important links between the psychology of the unconscious and the history of the mandala. He described this link by noting:

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<sup>201</sup> Peter Gold. "Excerpt from Navajo & Tibetan Sacred Wisdom: The Circle of the Spirit." Ibid.,161.

The oldest mandala drawing known to me is a Paleolithic so-called 'sun wheel', recently discovered in Rhodesia. It also is based on the principle of four. Things reaching so far back in human history naturally touch upon the deepest layers of the unconscious and affect the latter where conscious speech shows itself to be quite impotent. Such things cannot be thought up but must grow again from the forgotten depths, if they are to express the deepest insights of consciousness and the loftiest intuitions of the spirit. Coming from these depths they blend together the uniqueness of present-day consciousness with the age-old past of life.<sup>202</sup>

Jung was very open to eastern teachings. Due to his study of the East and of 'Taoist yoga,' he came to understand drawing, dancing, or enacting of the mandala as projections of psychic events which had the possibility of raising the unconscious to spiritual awareness. Through his studies, Jung came to see the mandala as an archetype of wholeness. He described archetypes as universal patterns which come from the collective unconscious and often surface in dreams. Because of Jung the mandala is well known in western psychology and spirituality. He was the very first psychotherapist to utilize the mandala in his own work. After a three-year struggle with depression, Jung drew his first mandala in 1916 in the midst of World War I. Although Jung's knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism was limited, he understood the deep meanings of the mandala as a symbol. During the time he was commandant of a British prisoner's of war camp in French Switzerland he gained insights into his mandala drawings. He wrote:

I sketched every morning in a notebook a small circular drawing, a mandala, which seemed to correspond with my inner situation at the time. With the help of these drawings, I could observe my psychic transformations from day to day... my mandalas were cryptograms in which I saw the self—that is, my whole being actively at work. To be sure at first I could only dimly understand them; but they seemed to be highly significant, and I guarded them like precious pearls. I had the distinct feeling that they were something central and in time I acquired through them a living conception of the self.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Richard Wilhelm. "Commentary by C. G. Jung." The Secret of The Golden Flower. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1962, 107.

<sup>203</sup> C. G. Jung. Memories, Dreams and Reflections. New York: Pantheon, 1963, 195.

He interpreted mandalas as images of the divine.<sup>204</sup> Jung found the mandala to be one of the most universal symbols of mystical self-realization. He describes it in these words:

The mandala's basic motif is the premonition of a center of personality, a kind of central point within the psyche, to which everything is related, by which everything is arranged, and which is itself a source of energy... This center is not felt or thought of as the ego, but if one may so express it, as the self. Although the center is represented by an innermost point, it is surrounded by a periphery containing everything that belongs to the self—the paired opposites that make up the total personality. This totality comprises consciousness first of all, then the personal unconscious, and finally an indefinitely large segment of the collective unconscious whose archetypes are common to all mankind.<sup>205</sup>

The mandala impressed Jung in two major ways. First, he recognized it as a symbol for meditation used in all the great religions of the world. Second, he viewed the mandala as a pictorial representation of the “circumambulation process of development which he took to be basic to the personality.”<sup>206</sup> Jung's position was there were definite differences between the mystical experiences of the Eastern and Western religions, although he saw similar psychological processes in both.

Jung also distinguishes between Christian and Buddhist mandalas through the characteristic differences between how the Christian and the Buddhist meditates. The Christian will say Christ lives within him or her, where a Buddhist meditates with a conviction he or she can ultimately become the Buddha.

Jung also recognized a mandala could be danced and cites the early Christian ritual described in the apocryphal Acts of John as an example.

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<sup>204</sup> Mandalas are included in sacred literature throughout the world. The mandala is often represented in an image of the divine. The Upanishads, which were the ancient religious literature of India, the Tao, The Ching, and I Ching which made up the ancient system for assessing the natural cyclical flow of events according to the patterns of nature, the writings of the prophets in the Hebrew scriptures and the poetry of Dante and Blake are among these sources where the mandala often appears. The Book of Enoch in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English, II., written approximately 100 BC provides us with an example of the concept of the quaternity.

<sup>205</sup> Jung. *Mandala Symbolism*. Op. Cit., 73.

<sup>206</sup> Harold Coward. *Jung and Eastern Thought*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985, 133. Circumambulation is also Jung's expression to describe the nature of the healing process. He defines it as a psychological circulation for a movement in a circle around oneself allowing all sides of the personality to become involved. See Jung's Commentary. *Ibid.*, 102-104.

...a mystical round dance that Christ arranged before his crucifixion. He ordered his disciples to take hold of each other's hands and form a circle. He himself stood in the middle. They moved in the circle while Christ sang the song of praise.<sup>207</sup>

Anthropologist and historian Martin Brauen, refers to Jung's commentary on the round dance and notes Jung's description could be used as well as a commentary on the Buddhist mandala round dance.

From time immemorial the circle and center has been a symbol of the divine, illustrating the unity of the incarnate god: the single point in the center and the many of the circumference. Ritual circumambulation often leans consciously on the cosmic allegory of the rotating night sky, the 'round dance of the stars', an idea still contained in the old equation of the twelve Apostles with the constellations of the zodiac... In every case the ceremonial round dance aims at and brings about the impression of the circle and center as well as the moving of each point of the circumference into the center. Psychologically this arrangement denotes a mandala and thereby a symbol of the self, on which are aligned not only the individual I, but at the same time many others of like mind or linked destiny.<sup>208</sup>

Jung drew many mandalas and recognized they represented a fundamental drive towards wholeness. He experienced a constant return to a single point, which he labeled the Self in his mandalas. He saw how everything pointed towards the center. To facilitate his personal confrontation with the unconscious, Jung drew mandalas every morning.<sup>209</sup> He welcomed the role of the unconscious in the gradual integration of the Self.

Jung distinguished between ritual and individual mandalas.

Whereas ritual mandalas always display a definite style and a limited number of typical motifs as their content, individual mandalas make use of a well-nigh unlimited wealth of motifs and symbolic allusions, from which it can easily be seen that they are endeavoring to express either the totality of the individual in his inner or outer experience of the world, or its essential point of reference. Their object is the *self* in contradistinction to the *ego*, which is only the point of reference for consciousness, whereas the self comprises the totality of the psyche altogether, i.e., conscious *and* unconscious.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Brauen, Op. Cit., 122.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> C. G. Jung. Memories, Dreams, Reflections., Op. Cit., 39.

<sup>210</sup> C. G. Jung. Mandala Symbolism. Op. Cit., 5.

In *Ego and Archetype*<sup>211</sup> Edward Edinger, a Jungian analyst and recognized interpreter of Jung's work, elaborates on the rhythmic relationship between Self and the ego in the context of the development of consciousness which is expressed through a circular pattern. Edinger identifies this circular pattern as "the Psychic Life Cycle."<sup>212</sup> At the top of the circle Edinger situates the Ego-Self Identity as Original Wholeness and moves us clockwise to where the ego separates from the Self. At the bottom of the circle, Edinger represents the ego experience of alienation from the Self. The ego moves closer to Self as it continues its journey around the circle until it finally reconnects with the Self. This identification of ego with the Self results in the experience of inflation. He points out through this cyclic movement, a person experiences a sense of power and inflation as well as a sense of separateness from the Self.<sup>213</sup>

Jung saw mandalas as natural symbols of unity. These symbols of unity appear to us in our dreams. These dream images reflect unifying symbols and innate archetypes.

[They – dream symbols]. . . are usually fourfold and consist of two intersecting pairs or opposites (e.g. right/left, up/down). These four points define a circle, which represents the simplest symbol of unity apart from the point, which is why it is the simplest image of the divine.<sup>214</sup>

Jung used mandalas for meditation and grounding to produce an inner order of wholeness. Mandalas are still being employed for the same purposes today.

Reading the literature on Jung and mandalas, I came to understand how the mandala contributed to Jung's thinking about archetypes. Through the mandalas we are introduced to his notion of the collective unconscious, described as a "psychic substrate of a supra-personal nature which is present in every one of us."<sup>215</sup> Jung suggests archetypes exist as autonomous energy fields which the psyche has a deep need to image and personify. Jung used his theory to show how mandala like

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<sup>211</sup> Edward F. Edinger. *Op. Cit.*, 1992.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>213</sup> For a complete study of this concept of the Psychic Life Cycle, read Chapter Two "The Alienated Ego," *Ibid.*, 37-61.

<sup>214</sup> Brauen. *The Mandala: Op. Cit.*, 122.

<sup>215</sup> C. G. Jung. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. New York: Bollingen Foundation, Inc., Second Edition, Vol. 9, 1969, 3-4.

structures such as the cross and other quaternity symbols are found throughout the world. He defined archetypes:

...like organs of the pre-rational psyche. They are perpetually passed on, identical forms and ideas without specific content. According to Jung it is therefore the collective unconscious that brings forth the archetypal symbols of unity, such as the forms of mandalas.<sup>216</sup>

Jung compiled a list of the designs he observed in the artwork of his clients who were experiencing the process of individuation.<sup>217</sup> He grouped the processes into nine categories, although he does not see the designs as appearing in any particular order in the individuating person. He distinguishes these formal elements of mandala symbolism as primarily:

- Circular, spherical, or egg-shaped formation.
- The circle is elaborated into a flower (rose, lotus) or a wheel.
- A center expressed by a sun, star, or cross, usually with four, eight, or twelve rays.
- The circles, spheres, and cruciform figures are often represented in rotation (swastika).
- The circle is represented by a snake coiled about a center, either ring-shaped (uroboros) or spiral (Orphic egg).
- Squaring of the circle, taking the form of a circle in a square or vice versa.
- Castle, city, and courtyard (temenos) motifs, quadratic or circular.
- Eye (pupil and iris).
- Besides the tetradic figures (and multiples of four), there are also triadic and pentadic ones, though these are much rarer.

The concept of I and of Self is what distinguishes Jung's understanding of consciousness from the Buddhist notion of consciousness. Jung talks about the seriousness of mandala drawings in light of the unconscious.

People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own souls. They will practice Indian yoga and all its exercises, observe a strict regimen of diet, learn theosophy by heart, or mechanically repeat mystic texts from the literature of the whole world – all because they cannot get on with themselves and have not the slightest faith that anything useful could ever come out of their own souls.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Brauen. *Op. Cit.*, 122.

<sup>217</sup> Jung. *Mandala Symbolism*. *Op. Cit.*, 77.

<sup>218</sup> C. G. Jung. *Psychology and Alchemy*. trans. by R.F.C. Hull, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Vol. 12, Princeton University Press: Bollingen Series XX, 1993, 99-101.

This avoidance of facing their own souls might very aptly describe Jung's definition of depth psychology which is concerned with delving into the psychology of the unconscious. Through this definition Jung included the personal, archetypal and the collective levels of experience. Jung maintained both repressed material as well as creative energy were held in the unconscious which encouraged individuation. Through this creative energy, an individual could achieve the integration of all the known and previously unknown parts of oneself into consciousness. So while Jung's studies of Eastern mandala symbolism and ritual influenced him, his psychological contributions to the field of depth psychology are uniquely his.

### **Contemporary Therapeutic Use of the Mandala**

Bruno Barnhart, a Camaldolese<sup>219</sup> monk has written a comprehensive overview of the gospel of John using mandalic imagery. Barnhart has used mandala imagery as a tool in his writing. He has merged early Christian tradition and contemporary studies of the ancient symbol of the mandala in his writings.<sup>220</sup>

I have personally found that this mandalic scheme brings to light more meaning, and more satisfactory meaning, in John's gospel than any other structural proposal which I have explored... one may employ the chiasmic\*-mandalic structure functionally, as a convenient scaffolding from which to enter into the symbolic word of John. One is likely to find, at the least, that the combination of a linear-chronological reading with a centric reading brings one closer to the fullness of meaning in John than merely a linear reading. The density of meaning which this geometrical approach discloses in such related Johannine themes as creation and new creation, woman and spiritual interiority, incarnation and unitive symbolism, will open up the reader to new dimensions of the gospel.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> The Camaldolese family of monks and nuns follows the Rule of Benedict and is a branch of the larger Benedictine community. The characteristic element of the Camaldolese is the hermitage, with its possibility of deeper solitude, to the point of reclusion. Michael Downey. The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993, 107.

<sup>220</sup> Bruno Barnhart. The Good Wine: Reading John from the Center. New York: Paulist Press, 1993. This book is rich in symbolism using the cross and the mandala.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

Art historians and painters, Jose and Miriam Arguelles explored the potential use of the mandala using a biological analogy. These authors compared the structure of the eye to the function of the mandala.

[In the] ...depiction of the structure of the eye, the center corresponds to the 'blind spot.' Since the blind spot is the exit from the eye to the visual system of the brain, you are going into the brain... The mandala is an instrument for transcending the world of visually perceived phenomena by first centering them and turning them inward.<sup>222</sup>

The art therapy field has used the mandala extensively to stimulate a dialogue between the client and the therapist. For instance, personality assessments have been around for a long time. As I indicated in Chapter Two, one of the many personality assessments is the MARI® Card Test©, the culmination of the life work of art therapist Joan Kellogg.<sup>223</sup>

Art therapist Janet Beaujon Couch explored mandala drawing with dementia patients using the MARI® Card Test©.<sup>224</sup> Her study is invaluable in providing the art therapist with an increased understanding of patient's needs which ultimately can lead to better development of treatment plans and interventions. She explored how the MARI® Card Test© can indicate the thoughts and emotions of older adults diagnosed with dementia. She supports the view mandala drawings can provide a stimulus for artmaking, no matter the degree of brain dysfunction.

Art therapist Robert Burns uses the mandala as both an assessment and reassessment tool and calls this projective drawing technique Family-Centered Circle Drawing (F-C-C-D).<sup>225</sup> He relates his use of centering the family members in a circle by first referring to the Rorschach test, a device that engages symmetry and Eastern philosophy in its use of the mandala. His work is based on his study of hundreds of circle drawings. Through drawing within a circle and trying to center the family figures, Burns suggests a client can focus more readily on the unconscious material and reveal the internalized

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<sup>222</sup> J. Arguelles, & M. Arguelles. Mandala. Berkeley: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1972, 241.

<sup>223</sup> This projective instrument is referred to in chapter two of this study.

<sup>224</sup> Janet Beaujon Couch. "Behind the Veil: Mandala Drawings by Dementia Patients." Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association. Mundelein: American Art Therapy Association, 1997, 187-193.

<sup>225</sup> Robert C. Burns. Family-Centered Circle Drawings. New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1990.

images of one's parents, as well as the inner parents. He also concludes the circle creates a non-threatening and nurturing environment allowing greater ease for the client to become more comfortable.

Many other sources explore the development of the mandala and its uses. Among these sources is the 1996 Doctoral thesis by art therapist Jonna D. Douglass.<sup>226</sup>

There are a number of other significant dissertations focusing on aspects of the mandala. Among these are the 1998 Doctoral dissertation by Robert Johnson at the Union Graduate School; the 1977 Master's thesis from Lindenwood Colleges by Anne Simpkinson (Nee Adamcewicz); and a 1975 Master's thesis from John Hopkins University by Jessica Berenz.<sup>227</sup> Johnson's dissertation focuses on the transpersonal exploration of unconscious processes and used his mandala diagnostic system as an adjunct to the therapeutic process.

Also, in 1987 art therapist Maralynn Slegelis explored the use of the mandala on college students for its therapeutic effect, particularly for relaxation. Her study involves 32 students with whom comparisons were made between those who drew within circles and the group who drew within squares. She concluded: Those who drew within the circles, the mandalas, were more receptive to psychological growth. She considered this finding congruent with Jung's claims for the mandala in as much as it promotes psychological healing. A positive affect seemed to be promoted when mandalas were used for calming and relaxation.<sup>228</sup>

Anthropologist Angeles Arrien has written on the use of the spiral, cross, square, triangle and circle as five universal symbols. Her research included the circle in the role of identifying and determining a person's inner, subjective states.<sup>229</sup>

There are many other books now available on the mandala, its uses and the interpretation of the symbolic layers found in the mandalas. Some of these works include Perry, 1953; Tucci, 1973; and Dahlke, 1992.

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<sup>226</sup> See Chapter Two in this Project/Dissertation.

<sup>227</sup> I would like to thank Jonna Douglass for introducing me to this information on these various dissertations as found in her thesis. Op. Cit., 33-36.

<sup>228</sup> Slegelis, Marilyn. "A Study of Jung's Mandala and Its Relationship to Art Psychotherapy." *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, No. 14, 1987, 301-310.

<sup>229</sup> Angeles Arrien. *Signs of Life: The Five Universal Shapes and How to Use Them*. Sonoma: Arcus Publishing Co., 1992.

Judith Cornell is one of the important sources I have chosen to highlight in my own study. In speaking of such sources, a friend wrote: “The final considerations for judging an authority are that it be generative and that it resonate with the individual using it.”<sup>230</sup> Cornell’s work resonates with my own study because of the generative power of her work that emphasizes the mandala as a sacred art expression. It was Cornell who actually prompted me to launch this exploration into my own experience of drawing the mandala. When someone can inspire another person to ‘thought’ and action, I believe the gift of generativity must be acknowledged.

Cornell is a visionary artist, an intuitive teacher and an inspired author. As well, she is internationally recognized for her research on the sacred healing power of the mandala. Her book Mandala: Luminous Symbols for Healing is rich with suggestions for meditations, movement, and guided imagery. She also indicates how sound and song can guide the creative process. She sums up her approach to art:

I developed an approach to art and consciousness that provides an empirical, experiential way to awaken our souls’ creative powers from an inspired level. The model combines the sacred art and spiritual science of the mandala, theories in modern physics, brain research, transpersonal psychology, and cross-cultural spiritual philosophies.<sup>231</sup>

She perceives mandalas as unlocking creative energies for well being. She began to experiment with circular drawings which were filled with geometric designs after one of her mystical experiences. She considers mandalas as sacred circles representing our luminous quality and focuses her work on the subject of luminosity in artistic expression, especially the mandala.<sup>232</sup> She claims the use of black art paper aids the individual in accessing the dark unmanifested side of soul consciousness. In her view, it can simply represent the womb of the universe. Her position is: Mandala images have power and can give intuitive insights into the nature of our reality in addition to our internal radiance.

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<sup>230</sup> Clarrise Croteau–Chonka. Op. Cit., 223.

<sup>231</sup> Judith Cornell. “Becoming Fully Brilliant.” Tona Perce Myers. The Soul of Creativity: Insights into the Creative Process. Novato: New World Library, 1999, 190.

<sup>232</sup> Cornell Mandala. Op. Cit.

On the psychological level, Cornell holds each mandala as a jewel pattern of consciousness.<sup>233</sup> Basically, Cornell focuses on the mandala as a meditation practice in connection with one's spiritual journey. Instead of using the mandala as a projective tool for diagnostic measures, Cornell considers the mandala to be a mirror of an illumined state of consciousness. The mirror reflects symbolic patterns. Her focus is on the creation of mandalas to facilitate healing. She uses ritualistic exercises with meditation to help the individual to:

...integrate the Eastern view that we have evolved from a pattern of consciousness, light, and sound with the Western perspective that material reality is in essence energy.<sup>234</sup>

In Cornell's research on luminosity in sacred art, she finds light and creativity are essential to every mystical experience in the traditions of all world religions.

I found that light was universal to everything! It was universal to science. It was universal to art. It was universal to the religions. It seemed to permeate everything. But even before I researched anything in science I decided I would create luminous, light-filled paintings that were healing not only to myself but to the viewer. In other words, after my experience I saw the role of art as one of healing. Not just for the one doing it—I felt that art's original role had something to do with healing...But I didn't have the connection until I researched the sacred art and found it in the Hindu tantric tradition and in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> However, Cornell asserts a different approach to consciousness than Jung. In a personal correspondence to me she wrote: "Basically I assume that only consciousness exists. Jung on the other hand was trying to prove an interconnection with psyche and matter (atomic energy) and did some research with Nobel Prize physics winner Wolfgang Pauli. Yogis would say that matter also has some degree of consciousness but it is very gross. Therefore from the standpoint of yoga there is a very intimate connection between psyche and matter because all is various degrees of consciousness.

What Jung calls the unconscious or the source of our being the Yogis call Supreme consciousness. Yogis would say that in the waking state people are unconscious. Jung switched the way the Yogis phrase consciousness. To be really conscious one must tap the full consciousness of the Self—until then our mind is unconscious of our true Self or Soul.

My approach to the mandala uses meditation. It does not allow the mind to just wander freely but the process helps quiet the active mind to tap the Self within. It is based on principles of meditative yoga. Jung was afraid of Eastern yoga so he developed active imagination process for Westerners. From my understanding his process does not include experiencing subtle states of consciousness that Yogis have been able to achieve (samadhi or blissful realms of consciousness.)" Judith Cornell. "Personal Correspondence," November, 26, 1999.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>235</sup> Judith Cornell as quoted in Teri Degler. *The Fiery Muse: Creativity and The Spiritual Quest*. Toronto: Random House of Canada. 1996, 73.

She sees the creation of mandalas as a way to touch the spiritual nature in each of us. She views creativity as a birthright of every person. In her view, whatever one's spiritual tradition, personal healing symbols can be achieved through the meditation practice of activating the spiritual eye (the third eye in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions). She stays away from any diagnostic measures asserting through the creative process of imaginative thought, willpower, and sacred sounds, we can "direct subtle energies within the body to foster healing in mind, body, and spirit."<sup>236</sup> This healing can take place in a safe and sacred space if one can open to unconditional love and let go of the Ego. Through an openness to inner light, intuitive abilities are touched and self-esteem is increased as consciousness expands.

Educator Clive Erricker.<sup>237</sup> has explored the therapeutic uses of the mandala in the contemporary context. In an article addressing the place of spirituality and faiths other than Christianity within the curriculum in the state schools in the United Kingdom, he explores how the drawing of mandalas can aid students in the techniques of relaxation, concentration, visualization, response, and recollection. He proposes the construction of a whole mandala is a way to learn about oneself and supports mandala drawings as another way of learning and developing the spiritual dimension within the classroom experience.<sup>238</sup>

Although McNiff does not focus on mandalas specifically, I consider his approach to drawing symbols and images to be important for this study. As I indicated in Chapters Two, Four and Five, McNiff explores how healing can begin in the creative process when persons enter into a relationship with their drawings. He supports the 'autonomy of the image,' or the 'otherness' of the drawing and emphasizes imaginal dialogue. While he respects the creative inner life of the artist, he also asserts it is the 'otherness' of the image which contains power to heal. This is similar to Jung's concept of active imagination. McNiff's books Art as Medicine<sup>239</sup> and Trust the Process<sup>240</sup> focus on the importance of

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<sup>236</sup> Cornell. "Becoming Fully Brilliant." Op. Cit., 188.

<sup>237</sup> Clive Erricker is a Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at West Sussex Institute of Higher Education, Chichester, West Sussex, England.

<sup>238</sup> Clive Erricker. Making Mandalas and Meeting Bodhisattvas: Raising Awareness in Religious Education. Education, No 3 (13). Harlow, UK: Longman Group, 1992, 54-60.

<sup>239</sup> McNiff. Op. Cit., 1992.

<sup>240</sup> McNiff. Op. Cit., 1998.

the process of art-making. McNiff argues for drawings within an art therapy context as moving from the focus on the client-therapist relationship to an exploration of the energies of the creative process itself. In other words, he sees the 'creative process' as an agent of healing and therapeutic change. He implies as one lets go of the 'production' aspect of the creative process and engages in the 'reception' of the image or symbol, transformation can take place. "Creation is an interplay among the artist, the feeling, and the material."<sup>241</sup> He continues:

When we paint automatically and with abandon, the painting and the materials we use are literally "mediums" between consciousness and psyche.<sup>242</sup>

McNiff concludes psychological dialogue is firmly established between the image and the artist. He sums up these image dialogues as feelings the art-maker has about the image, along with the stories in making it. Further these image dialogues include the memories evoked, the things the image says to us and finally what one has to say to the image. He views this process as a series of interpretations, an unending process of attunement to the intimate details of the interpreter's (art-maker's) life. McNiff see art as healing through attunement to Psyche's movements and her subtle vibrations.

McNiff also emphasizes how image dialogues can deepen the creative process. He maintains image dialogues keep us in relationship with our images and through these dialogues we enter more fully into the area of imagination. "Rather than fixing meanings to images, we see them as participants in the soul's dance..."<sup>243</sup> He goes on to say:

Viewing art as an expression of "the unconscious" assumes that consciousness is limited to reasoning. This attitude devalues the intelligence of the senses, the "thought of the heart," the thinking hand and eye, and the thoughtfulness of the moving body. Analysis is an esteemed participant in the making of art, but it is not the director of the operation. It is only one of the many facets of the psyche. Art as medicine enables therapy to use these varied faculties. Its principle contribution is the ability to reframe the entire opus of therapy. Rather than logically analyzing symptoms and reducing them to a rational sequence of causes, the artistic process may instead transform the scenario, completely restate the story and begin again, or replace the obsession with

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<sup>241</sup> McNiff. *Art as Medicine*. Op. Cit., 75.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

aesthetic contemplation. Many of our psychic maladies are in fact caused by the overactive mind, and exclusively analytic therapies may deepen the quagmire.<sup>244</sup>

Authors/painters Michell Cassou and Stewart Cubley explain the methods they use in their studio-workshops, “The Painting Experience<sup>SM</sup>.”<sup>245</sup> Their book is written in the style of a deep meditation on the discovery of one’s creative potential. Their main emphasis lies in creativity as a process. They focus on the beauty of the creative process using spontaneous expression rather than the actual artistic outcome. Like McNiff and Cornell, these authors value the creativity born of each person’s own experience. They do not view creative painting as a diagnostic method, but as therapy:

[This] ...creative force passes through your inner world, it carries images and feelings that are uncompleted, unfinished, misunderstood, not experienced, or denied. By spontaneously painting them, healing happens, not because of what you do with the image or meaning, but because of the powerful cleansing energy of creativity.<sup>246</sup>

They suggest the real and only teacher in the creative process is the creative process, itself. In holding art as a meditative activity, they link the art-making process with spirituality. They devote a chapter to the art process as spiritual practice and identify ten valuable points which they name as ‘practices’ to help the artist move into an authentic expression of one’s creative spirit. This book presents a valuable guide: We all have the gift of creativity.

Jung, Cornell, McNiff, Cassou and Cubley emphasize the creative force residing in everyone. They perceive creation as all around us. Thus creation itself invites us to an encounter. When we become attuned to our inner Self, we tap into our creative energies and encourage them to create again. Everything flows out from God and yet is within God. The mandala is like the womb. From many perspectives, the literature affirms healing happens through creativity. Creativity is a way to come to our empowerment. We are not creative by someone else. If we value our own creative process, birth and honor our images, there is a general belief whereby we open our souls to all of creation. For our

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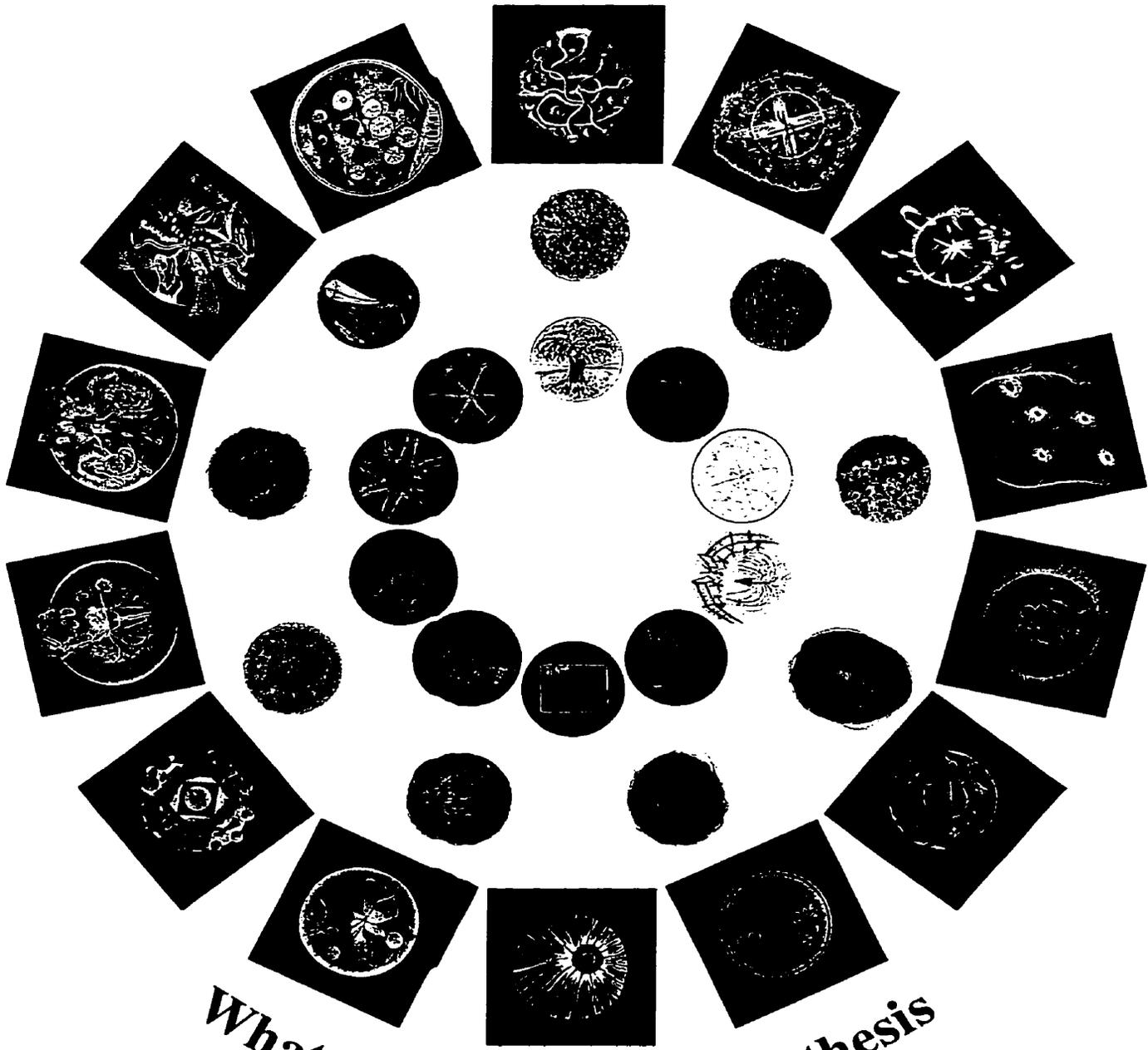
<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>245</sup> Michell Cassou and Stewart Cubley, Life, Paint and Passion: Reclaiming the Magic of Spontaneous Expression. New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons. 1995,

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 40.

creativity to be alive, it must come from within. The mandala which comes from within is both an image and a process facilitating self-integration.

# Chapter VIII



*What If? A Creative Synthesis*

The time has come to try and express the culmination of this project, another daunting task! The previous chapters have demonstrated how the experience of creating mandalas and interacting with the material presented in them have led my co-researchers and me toward individuation and wholeness. I do not think I need to summarize the process here. In this chapter I will assume the voice of a pastoral counselor and explore how the experience of drawing mandalas and interacting with them is an effective therapeutic practice for healing clients within the framework of the goals of pastoral counseling.

### **Pastoral Counseling: Its Goals and Assumptions**

I have been a pastoral counselor for many years and sometimes still have a hard time trying to describe what it is and what I am trying to accomplish. It is a challenge to step back and articulate what it is I hope to do and identify how I do what I do.

Pastoral counseling includes:

A psychotherapeutic activity in which a pastoral psychotherapist observes, understands, and interprets the psychological, religious, and moral dimensions of the ongoing process through psychological, theological, and ethical frames of reference.”  
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As I interpret this, pastoral counseling is a structured process for helping clients to respond to a problem or concern within the presence of God. It is this God dimension which distinguishes pastoral counseling from other types of psychotherapy.

The God dimension of pastoral counseling does not imply a specific religious or theological orientation. It simply means the presence of God is acknowledged as an implied partner or companion in the process of healing the client wishes to experience. The God dimension is also implied in the sense of the sacred surrounding the interaction between client and therapist.

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<sup>247</sup> Chris. R. Schlauch. “Defining Pastoral Psychotherapy.” *The Journal of Pastoral Care*. Vol. XXXIX, No. 3, Kutztown: Journal of Pastoral Care Publications, 1985, 222.

As a pastoral counselor, I have been trained in psychotherapy. Psychotherapy is related to its root words, “psyche” and “therapy”. Psyche refers to the totality of all psychological processes, both conscious and unconscious. Therapy refers to any healing or curative power or quality. Basically, I try to help a person heal him/her self.

### **Therapeutic Practices**

Pastoral counselors use a variety of approaches in the healing process. Many of these strategies are similar to those used in secular psychotherapy. We use commonly accepted diagnostic assessment instruments and conduct “sessions” in counseling. Some counseling sessions are specialized and promote healing through grief counseling, marital counseling, and crisis intervention. Other counseling sessions may be held for individuals, families, couples or groups depending on the needs of the clients.

All pastoral counselors try to bring empathy to the therapeutic process. This empathy involves an active listening process encouraging the client to trust the counselor as experiencing the feelings, thoughts or attitudes being shared. In addition, I try to facilitate the client’s journey into the “soul world”. As James Hillman writes of the dynamic of the soul, “Serving soul implies letting it rule; it leads, we follow.”<sup>248</sup>

I have been specially educated as a Creative Expressions Counselor. I have utilized art, music and dance as therapeutic modalities. I have found many clients respond with greater psychic energy to these less-verbal forms of therapy. Now, as a result of this research project, I am convinced that using the experience of drawing mandalas and interacting with their images is an effective therapeutic modality serving the goals of pastoral counseling.

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<sup>248</sup> James Hillman. *Op. Cit.*, 74.

### What If?

I argue for the experience of drawing and interacting with mandalas as a highly effective form of therapy for several reasons. The first reason is grounded in my own experience. I have shared with you what the experience has done for me. I can only hope that you have come to appreciate the healing, transformative process I have been involved with as a result of working with my mandalas.

The second reason is related to the impact of the experience of drawing mandalas on my co-researchers. Both of them have learned to trust the process and appreciate the power of the mandalas to open the content of the psyche for conscious reflection. Both claim to have greater self awareness. Both experienced the joy of the creative process. Both moved toward individuation with greater clarity and courage.

The third reason why I advocate the practice of drawing mandalas and interacting with them is because they have the respect of history. The mandala has longevity because its power as a mirror for the soul has been experienced in Eastern and Western cultures for thousands of years.

A fourth reason involves the endorsement of respected Jungian psychotherapists who follow in the tradition of Jung who emphasized the ability of the mandala to mirror the Psyche.

A fifth reason is related to this conviction: People learn in various ways. The mandala provides another language for the soul to speak as it comes to know itself.

Finally, *what if* you drew your own mandala and trusted your own creative process? What a gift this could be for you on your spiritual journey!

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## Glossary

**Active Imagination:** A method of assimilating unconscious contents (dreams, fantasies, etc.) through some form of self-expression. The objective of active imagination is to give a voice to sides of the personality (particularly the anima/animus and the shadow) that are normally not heard, thereby establishing a line of communication between consciousness and the unconscious.

**Alchemy:** A medieval form of chemistry. The alchemist's understanding of the world was based on the combinations of the classical four elements: earth, water, fire, and air. Each of these elements were connected to a transformative process known as the Philosopher's Stone, symbolized by gold. This was considered an incorruptible material which represented eternity.

**Archetype:** An archetype is a universal way of perceiving a given set of images. They are the language of fairy tales, legends and dreams. There is an ageless characteristic present in them.

**Chiasm:** A literary form used widely in the ancient Middle East and occurring in the Hebrew Scriptures. This structure has been found in the New Testament writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, in the book of Revelation, in the Pauline letters and in the letter to the Hebrews.

**Collective unconscious:** Consists of universal mythological motifs or primordial images, for which reason the myths of all nations are its real exponents.

**Ekklesia:** A word originally used to describe the totality of Christians living in a particular place – a city or house. These communities saw their task as proclaiming the gospel.

**Individuation:** A process of psychological differentiation, as having for its goal the development of the individual personality. This process is informed by the archetypal ideal of wholeness, which in turn depends on a vital relationship between ego and unconscious.

**Mantra:** In Buddhism and Hinduism, a sacred sound symbolizing a particular divine energy, chanted or repeated inwardly during meditation.

**Numinous:** Points to an intense experience in which the individual feels transcendent energy or an invisible presence.

**Psyche:** It is a complex totality of all psychological processes, both conscious and unconscious. The psyche is the starting point of all human experiences.

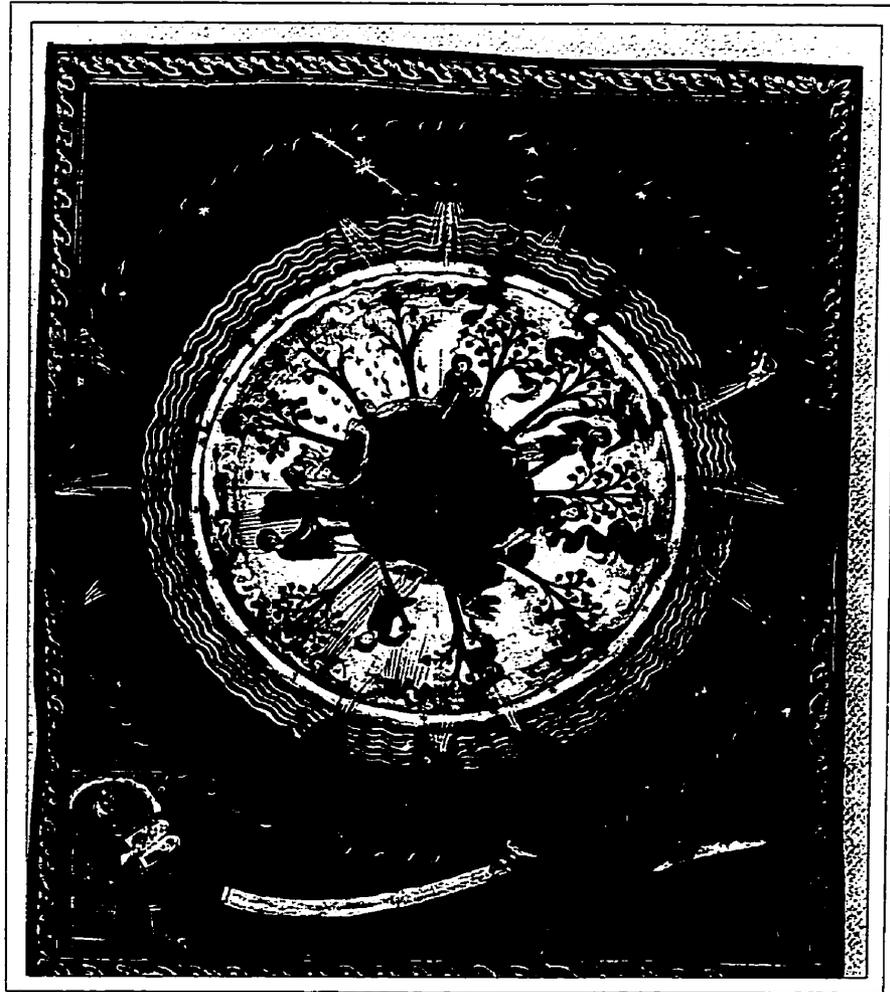
**Self:** It is considered the archetype of wholeness and the regulating center of the psyche; a transpersonal power transcending the ego. It embraces both the conscious and unconscious. It is the center of this totality.

**Shadow:** It is the good and bad unconscious aspects of oneself, which has not been recognized. It is often seen in projections, impulses, and childish behaviors.

**Symbol:** It is a term, a name, or even a picture possibly familiar in daily life, yet possessing specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning. The symbol of the mandala means a holy place, a temenos, or center.

**Unconscious:** The personal unconscious contains lost memories, painful ideas which are repressed, subliminal perceptions, by which are meant sense-perceptions not strong enough to reach consciousness and finally, contents not yet ripe for consciousness.

Appendix A



On the Articulation of the Human Body

Latinum Codex, 1942, Biblioteca Statale, Lucca, Italy. As found in Cornell. Op. Cit., 1994, p.126.

## **Appendix B**

### **Guidelines for Co-Researchers**

#### **The Inner Exploration of the Experience of Drawing Mandalas**

- You will be invited to draw a series of mandalas over a specified period of time.
- You will be invited to reflect on your mandala images and symbolism.
- You will be required to journal your personal reflections which will be shared in a mutually agreed number of interviews.
- All interviews will be taped on a voice tape recorder.

#### **Three Major Questions for Co-Researchers**

- What is your experience of drawing the mandala?
- Can you describe the emotions, body sensations, thoughts, and ideas you may have experienced during the drawing process?
- What is your story of your experience? Name anecdotes, experiences, or incidents which may connect to your experience of drawing your mandala

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent

PROJECT TITLE: The Personal Experience of Drawing Mandalas

1. I understand that this study is of a research nature. It may offer no direct benefit to me.
2. My participation in this study is voluntary. I may refuse to enter it or may withdraw from it at any time without creating any harmful consequences to myself. I understand also that the researcher may drop me at any time from the study.
3. The purpose of doing this study is: To investigate my experience of drawing mandalas and their meaning in my life.
4. As a participant in this study I will be asked to take part in the following procedures: to draw a mutually agreed upon number of mandalas within a certain period of time; to engage in a number of interviews in which I as co-researcher will be asked to reflect on my story of my experiences of drawing mandalas through two questions.
5. I will grant permission to tape record my interviews which will be transcribed and later reviewed with me to ensure that the essence of my experience has been grasped from the collected data.
6. The possible benefits of the procedure might be:
  - (a) Benefits to me: Satisfaction for having participated in a research project.
  - (b) Benefits to others: To encourage others to use mandalas in whatever ways that will serve their needs for personal growth and awareness.
7. The information about this study was discussed with me by the researcher Marjorie A. Laplante. If I have further questions, I can call her at 458-7348 at any time.
8. I will receive no compensation for participating in this study.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D**  
**Tom The Traveler**  
**by Mark**

She doesn't come running to the door with hugs.  
It's not her style. She watches like a robin,  
And when I've passed the test  
She asks me out to play.  
She shows me her new garden first.

We chase each other, each in turn and then  
She takes me by the hand  
To see her horse.

She climbs into the saddle, takes the reins,  
Tells me sit up behind.  
We gallop off to everywhere  
Down past Cappelouin,  
Back along Blackwater valley;  
Her cut-down branch'  
The fastest horse since Pegasus.

Later, you and I drink tea. You say:  
"She's got her brother on a piece of string  
just like I had you," recalling how  
you used to trump my every trick.

And you tell me how  
You bring them to his grave sometimes, and wonder:  
"What would he have thought of them?"  
And last time you wondered:  
"What would they have thought of him?"

He liked to read the paper first,  
Uninterrupted.  
The headlines, then the deaths.

But you would climb inside his elbow  
To check out 'Tom the Traveler.'  
It was the one cartoon he'd countenance.  
He'd ask you to interpret it  
Then laugh out loud;  
Marvel at your wit.

Between us on the table,  
A teapot,  
Bowl of sugar,  
Jug of milk.

The distance paper thin.

## Appendix E

### Burning Bush

by Mark

Gershom had been restless with a broken sleep. His teeth were coming. Zipporah could no longer feed him from her breast. I got up to comfort him then went back to lie beside her. We linger blissful in each others delight.

It was then she felt the new tremor inside her. "Quick, put your hand here." I felt nothing. Later, languoring in semi-sleep, my hand still resting along her belly the movement came again

I had spent the morning absent-minded among the cattle. I was wrapped in tenderness: Zipporah's soft body, our Gershom with his huckleberry eyes, his gurgling, and that tiny kick against the inside of my wrist.

I was looking at the shape of Horeb, its slopes and shelves  
the bushes with their hidden liturgies of bird-life  
the grazing on the foothills

I watched without watching:  
a pair of lambs suckling  
and their mother's concentrated indifference;  
I was enraptured in the smallness of things.  
Otherwise I might have missed it:

The beginnings of a shimmer  
against the blue black of the mountain,  
an almost flame.  
There was no burning.  
There was not the crackle of fire  
Feeding on the brittle dried out branches  
Nor the fleshy fuzz of smoke.  
It was a first  
a yellow geometry of light:  
brush strokes made by sheep or goats,  
the smell of hoof prints; and then  
the bush alive with transparent blue fire  
like the delicate blaze of moon on frost

It seemed like a stroke of sheep-wool on my chest;  
a velvet purse inside my belly, a sorrow  
too sweet to travel down my legs;  
or the circle of a cormorant  
diving in her wing-swept swoop  
as she seeks her most immaculate of fishes.

And a storm held itself at ready,  
 hid in the vacuum between breezes  
 in the small shelter of my eyebrows;  
 its nowness, its unmeasured  
 measurements consuming me  
 It was silent as milk  
 On the palm-rack of a lamb-tongue.

A single lip-turn touched the fringes  
 of the air around me.  
 The flocks watched my wonderment  
 Multiplying the silence.

*Moses Moses Moses!* It came  
 like a mantra from the bush,  
 as if someone were making music  
 or borrowing my name.

“I’m here”. I said. “I’m here.”  
 I didn’t know what else to say.  
 It was then I took off my shoes to hear what the ground was saying.

My naked feet on the earth,  
 the felt calligraphy of grass:  
*I am your father’s father.*  
 (I had never known my father).  
*I am the wind-look the sun-swept,*  
*the language of land.*  
 I became bewildered then.

*I am I am I am!*  
 That’s all I can remember.  
 “I’m here,” I said.