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Positive and Holistic Couple Relationship Development, the Soul Mates Model, and select Pictograms of Alchemy: A Visual Autoethnography

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Positive and Holistic Couple Relationship Development, the Soul Mates Model,
and select Pictograms of Alchemy: A Visual Autoethnography

by

Luisa Batthyany De La Lama

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Curriculum and Instruction
with a concentration in Counselor Education
Department of Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career and Higher Education
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ABSTRACT

To help contemporary couples successfully navigate the 21st Century's individualistic, diverse, multicultural, global, postmodern relationship environment, individual, couple, and family counselors, marriage therapists, couple therapists, family psychologists, relationship coaches, marriage educators, counselor educators, and other helping professionals need to understand and promote the positive, strengths-based, holistic, and wellbeing development of couple relationships to help them succeed and flourish in the long-term.

This qualitative, narrative, visual autoethnography explores the researcher's own experience of the culture of her 27-year long soul mate relationship with her partner through the lens of Positive and Holistic Couple Relationship Development Theory (PHRDT), its 7- phase Soul Mates Model, including encounter and dating, commitment, intimacy, building a life, shadow and adversity, renewal, and completion, resulting in the metaphorical development of the philosopher's stone or gold of the philosophers, and its 12 positive relationship development principles. The study also explores the meanings derived from 8 alchemical pictograms associated with the Soul Mates Model's 7 phases, which of the 12 positive principles played out in her relationship, and the effectiveness of her and her partner's deliberate efforts at positive relationship building, as well as how these experiences may inform her teaching and practice.

Based on the findings, which include the recall of fourteen years of spiritual, psychic, and visionary encounters with her partner before they met, the researcher concludes that she and her partner are not only *soul mates* engaged in the *soul mating process*, but also *twin souls*, linked together by an unfathomable bond that has helped them develop intimacy, remain bonded

through adversity, and flourish as a couple in the long-term. Additionally, the researcher concludes that the Soul Mates Model and 8 alchemical pictograms are useful mythopoeic tools to explore the positive and holistic development of the couple relationship, that all 12 positive principles played out in her relationship, and that the process of soul mating may be taught to others with help of strategic positive, holistic, and mythopoeic interventions, yet that twin-soulship cannot be taught. She thus concludes that soul mates can be grown, yet twin souls must be born.

CHAPTER I:

OVERVIEW

In this chapter I first provide the background for the study of positive and holistic relationship development by describing the sociocultural changes of the last decades that have led to the challenging relationship environment contemporary couples now face, and need to navigate in order to flourish in the 21st century. Second, I define the *problem, purpose, goals, and rationale* of the study, describing why the positive and holistic relationship development of couples can and should be studied in the particular way I am proposing here. Third, I describe the *significance of the study*, to the counseling field, the academic community, and the public at large. Fourth, I delineate the *research questions* that guide this investigation. Fifth, I briefly introduce the reader to the design of the study, including the qualitative method that I used, the settings from which I collected my data, the type of data I collected, and the analysis strategies I employed. Finally, I complete this introductory chapter by describing my *personal background as a social science researcher*, my understanding of my *role as researcher* within the context of this project. I state some of the main philosophical assumptions I bring to this study, and define some of the *key terminology* I used in this dissertation.

Background

The sociocultural changes that swept through Western society in the last two centuries have drastically transformed society's conceptualization of what a successful, long-term couples' union should be (Cherlin, 2009; Coontz, 2005). This conceptualization of couple unions has changed over the years, first from the traditional marriage of past centuries, to the companionate

marriage of the early and mid-20th century, then to the individualized marriage of the late 20th century (Coontz, 2005), and finally to the individualistic, postmodern, diverse, and challenging relationship environment contemporary couples now face and need to navigate to flourish in the long-term (Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007; Batthyany De La Lama, De La Lama, & Wittgenstein, 2012b; Van Acker, 2008).

The traditional marriage model

For centuries, traditional marriage, and the relationship defining, sealing, securing, and preserving role it historically provided a couple's union, had been the only prescribed, acceptable, and desired long-term model for the committed relationships of couples (Amato, et al., 2007; Bishop, 2007; Cherlin, 2009; Long & Young, 2007; Thornton, Axinn, & Xie, 2007; Van Acker, 2008). Until the recent past, marriage was expected to last an entire life-time, divorce was considered a moral failure, if not all together illegal, and spirituality was addressed within religious dogma (Cherlin, 2009; Davis, 2010; Long & Young, 2007; Serlin, 2005). Although other arrangements besides marriage have existed since antiquity, mainstream society barely tolerated, and usually condemned these arrangements (Coontz, 2005).

Traditional marriage, which originated in a patriarchal and largely collectivist worldview in which each individual fulfilled a utilitarian role within society (Amato, et al., 2007; Cherlin, 2009; Coontz, 2005; Davis, 2010; Knudson-Martin & Rankin Mahoney, 2009), also prescribed sex essentialist gender roles and duties for each partner such as "Men's traditional roles included husband, father, breadwinner, sexual aggressor, financial planner, and household mechanic" and the "traditional female roles were wife, mother, homemaker, sexual recipient, child-care provider, and housemaid" (Long, & Young, 2007, p. 9). In this marriage arrangement, the husband made all important decisions, controlled and managed the finances, and owned all the

property. The wife owned nothing, had few if any legal rights, and was expected to be subservient to her husband (Cherlin, 2009; Coontz, 2005).

Rigid marital roles for husband and wife were not the only constraints traditional society imposed on couples through the institution of traditional marriage. In Western civilizations, traditional marriage, often under the guise of conservative family values, implicitly reinforced the gender inequality, racism, ethnocentrism, religious intolerance, and homophobia often prevalent in traditional societies (Serlin, 2005; Van Acker, 2008). Gender inequality was not only prevalent within the marriage bond, but also demonstrated when extra-marital relations were frowned upon in men, yet condemned and often penalized in women (Coontz, 2005). Racism was enforced by making sexual relationships and marriage with members of a different race illegal or taboo; homosexual relationships, though accepted in ancient Greece, were condemned in the Christian era, and still are by many conservative Americans. Inter-denominational marriages were strongly discouraged, and divorce was considered a sin by the Catholic Church (Cherlin, 2009; Davis, 2010; Van Acker, 2008).

The companionate marriage

In the second half of the 19th century, societal changes resulting from the industrial revolution, increased literacy, better education, as well as greater rights for women (Coontz, 2005; Tyack & Hansot, 1992), shifted the traditional marriage ideal toward a more companionate model, which also elevated the status of women within the marriage bond (Cherlin, 2009; Coontz, 2005). While the traditional marriage agenda had focused mainly on raising a family and acquiring property (Long, & Young, 2007), this purpose of economic and social stability was no longer seen by social leaders as the only, or even the main function, of marriage. Instead, they believed that the marriage bond needed to be infused with new meaning to counteract the erosive

effects of urbanization, factory work, and immigration that threatened to tear couples apart and destroy the stability of families (Coontz, 2005; Tyack & Hansot, 1992). Thus the companionate marriage emerged and was promoted as a new ideal based on romantic aspirations, enduring love, mutual support, companionship, and by necessity, slightly more egalitarian gender roles (Coontz, 2005).

The companionate marriage model, which reached its peak in the 1950's, and integrated some of the psychological and sociological advancements of the times, began to move the psychological needs of the marriage partners to the foreground. (Coontz, 2005; Long & Young, 2007; Weeks & Treat, 2001). This marriage model appealed to many couples as a welcomed improvement over the often cold- hearted, materialistic, and utilitarian marriages of ages past, thus effectively setting the stage for the later advent of the individualized marriage (Cherlin, 2009).

The individualized marriage and the rise of expressive individualism

As a result of the medical, technological, economic, civil rights, feminist, cultural, religious, and psychological developments of the 20th century, the life circumstances of couples continued to change dramatically (Cherlin, 2009; Coontz, 2005; Van Acker, 2008). The life expectancy, for example, increased by more than 30 years between the years of 1900 and 2000 (Health; Santrock, 1999), providing marriage partners with decades of additional time to spend with each other after the needs of their offspring had been met, and the last child departed the home. Thus the meaning of “until death do us part” was entirely different in 1800 than it is today. The infant mortality rate was drastically reduced, thus freeing parents from having to raise a large number of children in order to guarantee the survival of a few. The invention of safe and reliable birth control in the 1960's allowed individuals to experiment sexually without the fear of

pregnancy; it also provided women the opportunity to delay pregnancy until they secured a college education or obtained gainful employment. Reliable birth control also permitted marital partners more careful family planning, thus freeing time and money for their personal needs and interests. The replacement of heavy human labor by machines, as well as other technological advances, opened new jobs that men and women could perform equally well (Cherlin, 2009; Coontz, 2005). These changes coalesced with civil rights, the women's movement, no fault divorce, and legal protection of women and children to provide an unprecedented array of choices and opportunities for men and women (Tyack and Hansot, 1992), and freeing individuals to focus on their personal growth, pleasure, leisure, satisfaction, consumption, and individual life style (Cherlin, 2009; Penn & Zalesne, 2007).

By the late 20th century, many couples, eager to seize the enormous opportunities for personal growth and self-expression available to them, had long ago rejected the rigid limiting gender roles and values of traditional marriage (Cherlin, 2009; Coontz, 2005; Knudson-Martin & Rankin Mahoney, 2009; Thornton, et al., 2007). Yet, in the late 20th Century, the companionate marriage, no longer offered an sensible alternative for many couples because, though rationally appealing to some, still prescribed specific roles for each partner and was therefore not flexible enough to help couples seize the opportunities or face the demands of contemporary society (Bennetts, 2007; Cherlin, 2009). The companionate marriage model, still largely based on the external locus of control imposed on couple's by society and economic circumstances, also failed to provide partners with the desired breathing room for the growth, expression, and actualization of the self, which began to take center stage in the last decades of the 20th century, and which couples now felt entitled to achieve (Amato, et al., 2007; Bennetts, 2007; Cherlin, 2009; Van Acker, 2008). Thus individuals not only hoped for, but also demanded, that a marital partner

“improve one’s quality of life, facilitate one’s personal growth and be a true soul mate” (Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007, p. 71, emphasis mine).

Therefore, in the 21st Century, many couples now reject both the traditional marriage and the companionate marriage models in favor of a postmodern, individualized marriage ideal. Such a postmodern marriage is expected to successfully integrate the Zeitgeist’s philosophical stance of expressive individualism, and thus help to promote each partner’s contemporary ideal of the good life (Bishop, 2007; Cherlin, 2009), while also fulfill the last remnants of the traditional marriage myth with its white dress, expensive wedding, and happily ever after dream, which most couples, though individualistic at heart, have not excised from their romantic narratives (Bishop, 2007; Cherlin, 2009; Illouz, 1997). Thus the individualized marriage model was born as an attempt to create a long-term, committed relationship model that would successfully integrate the contradictory (and perhaps irreconcilable) philosophies of postmodernity’s expressive individualism and its focus on self-expression, self-actualization, and personal emotional satisfaction (Bishop, 2007), with the ideal marriage union most American’s still aspire to in their romantic narratives (Amato, et al., 2007; Cherlin, 2009; Davis, 2010; Van Acker, 2008).

Contemporary couple’s unions

While some contemporary couples may still follow the traditional marriage model, others choose companionate marriage, and many attempt to integrate the contradictory directives of expressive individualism and marriage in the form of an individualized marriage, a large number of reciprocally committed couples (Del Rio & Mieling, 2010) choose not to marry in the first place (Cherlin, 2009; Penn & Zalesne, 2007; Van Acker, 2008). Other couples, for a variety of reasons, may select not to remarry after a divorce, opting for non-traditional relationship models instead (Cherlin, 2009; Penn & Zalesne, 2007; Van Acker, 2008). In fact, several millions of US

citizens are cohabiting, and 40 % of cohabiting couples have children (Penn & Zalesne, 2007). The issue of marriage has become political, and an un-marriage movement is on the rise, even while traditionalists are promoting marriage as the number one solution to a host of social, economic, and moral problems with renewed zeal (Long & Young, 2007; Thornton, et al., 2007; Van Acker, 2008). Consequently, marriage between a man and a woman sharing a home and raising children is no longer the primary and socially sanctioned ideal for all couples. Other options include: cohabitating unmarried couples, open marriages, GLBT, and couples in reciprocally committed unions living physically near yet apart for independence and financial reasons, as well as other more traditional forms of committed couple's unions (Penn & Zalesne, 2007).

Negative effects of expressive individualism. The unprecedented sociocultural developments of the last several decades, and the advent of postmodernism and diversity consciousness, have significantly empowered the individual to emancipate him or herself from the traditional views and restrictions of society. This individual emancipation resulted in a vast array of life- style and partner choices and opportunities, which are welcomed by most, yet also generate a confusing array of difficult existential questions, dichotomies, and social complexities that individuals and couples now need to navigate and resolve. At the core of these dichotomies lies expressive individualism's contradictory "me vs. us" directive which 21st century couples are struggling to apply in their already complex and challenging lives. They do this with little guidance, few role models, and no clear understanding on how to engage in the inner strengthening of the "us" without diminishing the "me" and thus being able to flourish as a couple in the long-term (Amato, et al., 2007; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008;

Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b; Bishop, 2007; Cherlin, 2009).

Younger couples, in fact, “are largely left to adapt to new circumstances on their own, trying as best as they can to avoid making the relationship mistakes that they believe their parents made, even while they attempt to develop new scripts and story lines to help them succeed in contemporary society without a viable model for long-term success” (Batthyany De La Lama et. al, page 284). While “society’s scripts for relationship success, influenced by consumerist attitudes and celebrity worship, remain largely focused on the young and the beautiful” (Kenneth Gergen, Ph.D., personal conversation February 2010, cited in Batthyany De La Lama et. al, page 284), mature partners, “who may realize that they can no longer rely on their sexuality to generate the relationship coherence it may have provided during their younger years have no viable model to guide them” (p. 284) even as they try to “work to infuse meaning and intimacy into their union” (Batthyany De La Lama et. al, 2012, p. 284). Today’s diverse and non-traditional couple’s unions, such as multiracial, multid denominational, same- sex, long- distance, and others are particularly vulnerable to relationship failure, as they are left to chart their own course with few sociocultural role models or viable scripts to guide them (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b).

Moreover, under the guise of seemingly well-deserved individual freedoms and self- expressions of the postmodern era, expressive individualism’s philosophical stance is easily appropriated by the free-market economy and its consumerist media machine, eager to capitalize on the individual’s unchecked and perhaps even unconscious narcissistic drives to justify selfish, hedonistic, shallow emotional pursuits and immediate life-style satisfactions, in the pursuit of personal happiness (Cherlin, 2009; Illouz, 1997). Therefore, disguised as a healthy drive toward

the pursuit of the rightful and good life of the individual, expressive individualism, and the unions it informs, has no provision for the long-lasting love, the meaningful endurance, the collaborative alliance, the self-sacrifice, and the conjoint intimacy development and long-term meaning- making so necessary to the positive and holistic relationship development of contemporary couple unions.

In fact, instead of guiding couples on how to develop a *positive internal locus of control* for their relationship in order to counteract negative media influences and defer gratification when needed and focus on developing intimacy, joint meaning making and the pursuit of long term dreams and goals, (Cherlin, 2009; Gottman, Driver, & Tabares, 2002; Schnarch, 2009), the expressive individualism stance, dictates *that if a marriage or relationship is no longer satisfying to the individual, it becomes disposable* (Bishop, 2007; Cherlin, 2009; Van Acker, 2008).

Problem statement

Mental health experts agree that healthy intimate relationships are vital to mental health (Long & Young, 2007). Yet despite the sweeping sociocultural changes of the last decades, and the challenges they pose to the long-term flourishing of contemporary couples, “helping professionals are still largely attempting to address 21st century couples’ needs with the marriage- centric, problem-centric, and remedial conceptual frameworks of the mid and late 20th century” (Batthyany De La Lama, et. al., 2012, p. 283). Yet twentieth-century methods, though useful to resolve relationship problems in the short- term, do not focus on, and do not promote the positive and holistic long-term relationship development that 21st century couples need to flourish in the long-term (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b). It is thus imperative that counselor educators study the positive and holistic relationship development of couples to

explore the factors that may help couples' unions strengthen their relationships from within and flourish in the long- term.

Purpose of the study

The *purpose* of this study is to explore my experience of the processes and dynamics of positive and holistic relationship development within the culture of my own 27-year long relationship *through the lens* of the Positive and Holistic Relationships theory's Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), and to uncover if and how any of the theory's 12 positive principles of relationship development (Batthyany De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a), played out in my relationship, and what, if anything may be discovered from this investigation that may help inform my own teaching and practice.

Goals of the study

This study fulfills a series of goals that can be categorized as, *academic, intellectual, professional, personal, and practical* (Maxwell, 2013).

Academic goal. The study fulfills my academic goal of completing my dissertation and obtaining my Ph.D. in Counselor Education.

Intellectual goals. This study fulfills the intellectual goal of integrating many of the core concepts from the conceptual papers I developed during my Ph.D. course work, the graduate course syllabus (Batthyany De La Lama, 2011o), the proposal for a graduate certificate, the relationship education handbook, the presentations (Batthyany De La Lama, 2010g, 2011a; Batthyany De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011, 2012a), and the paper published (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) into a conceptual framework through which to study the positive and holistic relationship

development of couples which I and other researchers, educators, and helping professionals can use to inform research, teaching, and practice.

Professional goals. Professionally, this study fulfills a long- term goal of helping me further explore what I know, what I have experienced, developed, and observed regarding the positive and holistic relationship development of couples, and then use my findings to develop college courses, workshops, trainings, consultations, and media pieces on positive and holistic relationship development, as well as on emerging qualitative methods such as visual autoethnography.

Personal goals. This study fulfills several personal goals I have had for many years. First, it fulfills my goal of obtaining a doctorate degree, second, it fulfills my goal of exploring the topic of positive and holistic relationship development from a scholarly perspective which I have had since 2007, as a result of an extraordinary experience I have described elsewhere (Batthyany De La Lama, 2010a). Third, it fulfills my goal of exploring my own relationship to discover and delineate those facts that may be found in this relationship which may help me better understand the processes and dynamics of long term-positive and holistic relationship development, and thus help inform my teaching and practice.

Practical goals. This study fulfills the practical goal of allowing me the opportunity to study the relationship which is the most meaningful, the most available, and also the closest to me. Studying my own relationship allows me to look deeper into a relationship than I could ever look were I to study the relationship of other couples. With my interest, knowledge, experiences, education, and training, I feel a deep responsibility and interest in utilizing the research opportunity this dissertation is providing to research my own relationship.

Rationale of the study

Positive relationships are essential to mental health, yet couple's counseling has been largely relegated to the MFT field. Mental health experts agree that positive relationships are vital to the mental health of individuals, couples, and families (Dattilio, 2010; Davis, 2010; Gilbert, 2004; Gottman, et al., 2002; Gottman & Schwartz Gottman, 2008; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Long & Young, 2007; Van Acker, 2008; Weeks & Treat, 2001), yet 21st century couples face a relationship environment that is more challenging than ever before. The counseling field, however, has largely ignored couple relationship issues, relegating this topic to the Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) field.

The MFT field is largely focused on 20th century's marriage-centric, problem-centric, and remedial methods. The MFT field, so far, has largely focused on studying and treating couples through the marriage-centric, problem- centric, and remedial conceptual lenses of the 20th century such as Bowen Family Systems Theory (Gilbert, 2004; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Klever, 2009) developed in the 1950's to 1970's, and Cognitive Behavioral Theory (Craske, 2010; Dattilio, 2010), developed in the 1970's and 1980's. Such lenses, though useful to fix couple's immediate problems, do not focus on the long- term positive relationship development 21st century couples need to flourish in the long-term (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b).

Counseling Research thus needs to focus on positive and holistic couple relationship development. Counseling researchers now need to study the contemporary relationships of couples through the lens of positive and holistic relationship development theory to uncover what makes couples relationships work in the long-term. Once positive and holistic couple relationships development is better understood, this understanding may help practitioners and

educators to inform their couples' counseling interventions, and design new graduate courses focused on strengths-based methods (Jones-Smith, 2014) for couples. Because I am a counselor educator working on my dissertation, and I intend to further develop my strengths-based method for individual couple's counseling, coaching, and consultation, as well as graduate level courses and training for other professionals, it is vital that I study the positive and holistic relationship development of couples in order to help me inform my practice.

Studying and examining one's own self and one's own relationships in order to be a better teacher and therapist has a long tradition in psychotherapy and MFT. Examining one's own life by undergoing a personal analysis is a common practice in psychoanalytic training, based on a nearly 100 years old tradition. Today, the National Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis (NAAP) recommends that candidates must undergo their own analysis to graduate from a Masters-level program. Moreover, most counseling experts have long advocated that counselors-in-training seek out their own counseling with the help of a professional in order to investigate their own lives, promote their own introspection, and become psychologically aware (Corey, 2008; Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2006; Sue & Sue, 2007).

Following this tradition of self-examination, and in the context of this study on a couple relationship, I am basing my need to study my own relationship on the example of Dr. Murray Bowen, the founder of Bowen Family Systems Therapy in particular. Bowen developed his theory on how to help family members improve their lives during the course of his work with schizophrenic families (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Klever, 2009; Titelman, 1998). Once he felt confident that he had fleshed out his theory and the 8 core constructs of Family Systems Therapy, he went and *applied them to himself and his own family*. He engaged in immersion experiments with his own family of origin, scheduling appointments to meet with and reconnect

with estranged members, and repeatedly traveled back to the small town in which he grew up to test his newly developed theories and strategies, work on his reactivity to the family's emotional system, and self-differentiate from its emotional mass. He thus conducted extensive examinations of his own role in his family of origin. Upon discovering how transformative these activities were to him, the powerful effects they had on his own family dynamics, and the way the strengths and insights he gained helped him refine and improve his theory as well as his practice, he became adamant that Bowen therapists and consultants work on studying themselves within the context of their own reactions to their own families. He saw "the capacity to learn Bowen Theory and to observe one's own emotional functioning as directly correlated" and believed that "one cannot master Bowen Theory without becoming a master of self-observation" (Comella, 2011, p. 4). Bowen thus noted that Bowen Family System Theory practitioners, consultants, and leaders needed to work on their own self-differentiation from their families of origin in order not to be drawn into emotional reactivity by the families they treat, the students they teach, or the groups they lead (Comella, 2011; Gilbert, 2004; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Thus in the spirit of the late Murray Bowen, one of the most prominent and influential 20th century figures in Marriage and Family Therapy, and whom I greatly respect, it is thus advisable and responsible that I study, observe, and examine my own experience and functioning within the context of my own 27-year long relationship's positive and holistic development, and do so through the conceptual lens of the Positive and Holistic Relationship Development Theory (PHRDT) that I describe in the conceptual framework for this study.

Positive and holistic relationship development emerges within a distinct couple's culture.

Relationship experts agree that "The creation of a marriage and a family involves the active creation of a new culture that has never existed before." (Gottman, et al., 2002, p. 387).

Therefore, I conceptualize the study of my own relationship as the study of a *distinct couple's culture* as in “the beliefs, customs, arts etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time” (Merriam-Webster) with its norms, rituals and behaviors within the larger context of positive couple's relationship development. In this dissertation, therefore, *I study my experience of the culture of my relationship through the conceptual lens of PHRDT.*

The need for a visual, archetypal component to aid in this exploration. Exploring my own experience of the processes and dynamics of positive and holistic relationships development in the context of my own relationship is at best difficult, abstract, elusive, and unwieldy. Therefore, to help me focus this study, to aid in this exploration, and to help me better depict and communicate what I find, I employ a series of eight 17th century alchemical pictograms which symbolize the integration of the masculine and feminine archetypes as they relate to the 7 phases/stages of the Soul Mates Model, and which I have already presented elsewhere (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b).

Jung conducted extensive studies of some of these symbols of alchemy (Jaffee, 1979; Jung, 1966/1992, 1968/1993), and used some of these pictograms in his study of the psychodynamic phenomenon of integration of opposites in the transference between doctor and patient (Jung, 1966/1992). In this study, however, I am using these pictograms in the context of my own conceptual framework of PHRDT, which transcends the one applied by Jung. The processes and dynamics I am investigating here, however, were foreshadowed by Jung's follower Edward Edinger when he asserted in *The Mystery of the Conjunction* (Edinger, 1994), that these alchemical pictograms could be interpreted as a) symbolizing “an intra-psychic process where each individual works to integrate the opposites, symbolized as male and female forces,

within his or her psyche”, and b) “As a process of integration in a committed relationship between two individuals.” (p. 40).

Significance of the study

Functional, happy and successful couple relationships are essential to mental health; research shows, that despite our increasingly individualistic society, a stable and long-lasting intimate couple relationship - regardless of whether the couple is married or not - tends to be healthier, more rewarding, and fulfilling for the couple, their children, and their families, than would a short- term relationship, or even remaining single (Cherlin, 2009; Coontz, 2005; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004; Gottman, et al., 2002; Gottman & Schwartz Gottman, 2008; Long & Young, 2007; Penn & Zalesne, 2007; Thornton, et al., 2007; Van Acker, 2008). Yet today, “1 in 7 marriages is considered unhappy... and couple and marital troubles are the precipitating factor in 50% of admissions to mental hospitals” (Long & Young, 2007, p. xvii). In fact, most counselors and therapists know that “...marital difficulties may be the most common problem that most clients present when they seek any kind of therapy” (Long & Young, 2007, p. xvii).

Yet despite the fact that intimate couples’ relationships are vital to the mental health of individuals, that the couple dyad is a significant factor in a well-functioning family and society, and that separation and divorce create enormous economic and emotional difficulties for all involved (Amato, et al., 2007; Cherlin, 2009; Coontz, 2005; Van Acker, 2008), “the mental health community has not focused strongly on the couple relationship”, and as a result, “training has focused almost entirely on working with a single client” (Long & Young, 2007, p. xvii). Although on-campus Marriage and Family Therapy programs may offer electives to counselors-in-training, such programs often center on family issues and dynamics, and thus lack special

courses on couples counseling and therapy (CCT). If specialized courses on CCT are available, they most often center on the popular yet traditional marriage-centric, problem-centric and remedial methods such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Craske, 2010; Dattilio, 2010). Thus, to guide their students' learning and future effectiveness as professional counselors, counselor educators, and therapists, it is imperative that counselor educators learn about couples' relationship issues, and study them through the conceptual lens of positive and holistic couple relationship development. Studying contemporary couples through this strengths-based lens will help counselor educators to learn what helps couples positively develop their relationship and flourish in the long-term.

To date, however, except for the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) and the 12 positive principles for couples relationship development presented by Batthyany De La Lama and De la Lama, (Batthyany De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a; Batthyany De La Lama, De La Lama, Wittgenstein, & Wittgenstein, 2012) little is known about how such positive and holistic relationship development should be conceptualized, how it is experienced, or how it may be deliberately promoted. This study thus attempts to fill this gap in knowledge by exploring my own experience of the culture of my own 27-year long couple relationship through the lens of PHRDT.

Research questions that will guide this study

The research questions this study intends to explore include the following:

Main question: What is my experience of the culture of my 27-year- long relationship with my partner, when viewed through the lens of Positive and Holistic Couple Relationship development theory?

Sub questions:

- How have the processes and dynamics of the Soul Mates Model's 7 phases of positive and holistic couple relationship development played out in my own 27-year long relationship?
- What meanings and interpretations can be derived from the alchemical pictograms associated with the 7 phases of the Soul Mates Model in the context of the positive and holistic development of my relationship?
- Have any of the 12 principles of positive relationship development theory played out in the 7 phases of this relationship, and if so how?
- What is my experience of the long-term effect of what I see as our deliberate efforts at positive relationship development on my 27-year long couple relationship?
- In what ways can my observations and experiences of the positive and holistic development of my couple relationship help me inform my teaching and practice?

Overview of the study's design

This study is based on the conceptual framework of Positive and Holistic Relationship Development Theory (PHRTD), on concepts derived from relevant existing literature, and on the theoretical modules I have previously developed (Batthyany De La Lama, 2010a), presented at conferences (Batthyany De La Lama, 2010a, 2010g, 2011o; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011, 2012a), and published (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b). In this study I use this conceptual lens to look at my own 27-year long couple relationship and explore my experience of how the positive and holistic relationship development constructs of the 7 phases of soul mating (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) and the 12 positive principles of relationship development (Batthyany De La Lama, 2011a;

Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) have played out in the culture of my relationship with my partner.

Because the focus of my study is centered on my exploration of the processes, dynamics, meanings and interpretations of my own experience, instead of on the quantification of behaviors, variance theory- driven statistical analysis (Maxwell, 2013), or the mere factual description of events, the *method I selected for this study is qualitative, interpretive, and autoethnographic, aided by a visual component.*

In this study, therefore, I first gather *narrative* data based on my experiences and observations of my relationship's 7 phases as described in *The Soul Mates Model* (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), then include eight alchemical pictograms as visual data. After compiling the narrative and visual data, I analyze and interpret the data with help of the conceptual framework of PHRDT, which I will have outlined in Chapter II of this study. In Chapter III, the methodology chapter, I describe the *qualitative visual autoethnography method* I used in this dissertation. In Chapter IV, I compile first the narrative data, and then the visual data, and then analyze and interpret the data to answer the research questions; in Chapter V, I provide the data analysis and interpretation, synthesis, and discussion, and in Chapter VI, I will conclude the study and provide recommendations for further research.

The researcher

I am a white, heterosexual female, yet my cultural background is diverse. To get a better sense of this diversity and how it informs my personal beliefs and philosophical stance as a scholar, as well as my interest in the wellbeing of couple's relationships, I provide a brief overview of my life history and background.

My father, the oldest son of an aristocratic Hungarian family that knows every name on its family tree all the way back to 1450 A. D., was born in Hungary. His family became a persecuted class during World War II, and he was forced to flee the country on a bicycle, leaving everything behind. After the war, he became an Austrian citizen, and set out to travel through Europe and South America, intent on finding a new country to settle in and a suitable wife to marry. Although he lived in several European countries, and speaks 5 languages, including Hungarian, German, French, English, and Spanish fluently, he nevertheless remained Hungarian at heart, and single-mindedly focused on restoring the wealth he and his family had lost in his youth.

During his travels to Southern France, my father met my mother in Biarritz, and married her. My mother, descendent of an old Spanish aristocratic family with ties to Mexico on my grandfather's side, and another old Spanish family with ties to Peru on my grandmother's side, was already fluent in three languages: Spanish, French, and English. After my parents married, my mother taught herself German. They settled first in Madrid, where I was born, and then in Marbella, Southern Spain, still traveling to Austria and France during the spring and summers. My parents separated when I was 16, and my father moved us to Austria. I went through middle school in Spanish, French, and English, and completed high school in German. My parents, who are still on good speaking terms, still converse in French with each other whenever they see each other. My father speaks German with me, my mother mostly Spanish. My father and my paternal grandmother spoke Hungarian and German with each other. Thus there are usually at least three languages spoken and four cultures present whenever my family convenes. I spent my childhood and adolescence traveling and living between Spain, Austria, Switzerland, and France, spending

time in Germany, Morocco, Peru, Mexico, the USA, and the UK before I married my first husband Richard, a German citizen, at age 24, and moved to Munich in Southern Germany.

Richard was bilingual; German and English were spoken interchangeably at his home. We lived in Germany for four years together, and in 1983 we moved to New York with our baby son, yet we still spoke German to each other and to our children. In 1989 Richard and I divorced and I met Luis. He is originally from Mexico, now American, raised in Tijuana across the border to the USA, thus also bicultural and bilingual. Luis and I speak Spanish to each other and English with my two children (who unfortunately lost most of their German by now). Luis and I have lived together in Kitzbuehel, Austria, Marbella, Spain, San Diego, California, Raleigh North Carolina, Maui, Hawaii, and now in Florida. I became a US citizen in 2012, and our favorite place to live is Hawaii, where Luis, my children, and I spent four years in the 1990s. As immigrant to the USA I cannot say that I feel “uprooted” from my home country, because I don’t really consider any of the countries I lived in as my one and true home, nor do I feel strong loyalties towards them. Today I mostly feel American, and the place I feel is my true home, and where I want to return to eventually is Hawaii.

Although my culturally and linguistically diverse background has made me an outsider for most of my life, causing some pain and confusion over the years, it also made me keenly sensitive to the value of positive, enduring relationships, first with my two grandmothers, one in France and one in Austria, then with my two life partners, first Richard who brought me to the US, and then Luis, my soul mate, and, of course, with my two children.

From my current vantage point, I can see how my background may be an asset to my scholarship. Instead of focusing my scholarship through one disciplinarian lens, informed by a single, localized, mono-cultural or ethnocentric perspective, I naturally strive to bring an

interdisciplinary, pluralist, meta-theoretical, and diversity -conscious viewpoint to my scholarship. Having lived in Europe for so long, I am also keenly aware of how history, art, and classical philosophies have shaped human culture, meanings, and behaviors centuries before the USA was founded. Having lived in Hawaii for so long, has allowed me to learn about and appreciate the depths, beauty, and reverence of the Hawaiian people's relationship to their ancestors, to each other, and to their, volcanoes, and their land and sea. I believe that these experiences have inspired my broad, inter-disciplinarian approach to social science.

Non-academic studies that shaped my position as social scientist

As a result of several intense and spontaneous spiritual experiences I had as a teenager, I developed an early interest in spirituality, leading me to study and practice various spiritual traditions, especially the Hermetic Tradition (Evola, 1995; Manly P. Hall, Knapp, & McManus-Young Collection (Library of Congress), 1928). I believe that these studies reinforced my interest in exploring how certain universal archetypes and conceptual molds underlie and integrate the differences we encounter today in human individuals, families, and groups across the globe. I believe that the Hermeticist in me informs my scholarship, in that this philosophical position has led me to study ancient and symbolic conceptual frameworks, such as the Tree of Life of the Kabbalah, and the pictograms of alchemy. These studies led me to adopt a systems perspective to my outer an inner life, and served as tools to help me understand and navigate the experiences of the psychological and spiritual dimensions of awareness.

Moreover, my life-long interest in the visual and the arts has led me to be first a quilter and fiber artist, and now a jewelry maker, photographer, and visual storyteller. I believe that the visual artist in me informs my scholarship in that it leads me to seek and find conceptual links and patterns across disciplines, helps me to structure my social science, and inspires me to

develop useful conceptual models and visuals that aid the conceptualization, investigation, and presentation of information.

Theoretical orientations that inform my scholarship

During my BA studies in Applied Behavioral Science I conducted an independent study on the positive role of spiritual beliefs in trauma recovery. During my MA in Mental Health Counseling studies, I conducted an independent study on the value of Transformative Learning, as well as several presentations on holistic trauma recovery, transformative learning and posttraumatic growth at conferences and conventions (Batthyany De La Lama, 2013). In 2009 I integrated this work with counselor education and received a student grant from the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision to complete a study on Transformative Learning in Counselor Education . This work provided a scholarly framework for my belief that in order to grow, not only post-traumatically but also from a positive psychology, from a good- to- great, adult-development perspective, deep introspection, meaning making, reassessing ones philosophy of life, and renewing ones spirituality were of paramount importance. Most importantly, I developed a better understanding of the power of the individual mind to attribute meaning to experience, and how wielding this power for better or for worse may be decisive in leading a person towards a life well lived, or a life of misery and victimization.

During the years I worked on my master's degree, also I trained with Narrative Therapy founder Michael White, and practiced counseling at a long-term, residential substance abuse recovery facility for women, as well as at a community agency where I counseled families in crisis. During those years, my work and scholarship became more aligned with my personal outlook on the importance of positive values, assumptions, beliefs, and meanings to mental health and wellbeing. This focus led me to develop the holistic, developmental, positive

psychology, strength-based, appreciative inquiry, and narrative and visual/imaginal perspectives that I now bring to my social science inquiry and to my counseling practice.

How my Background Shaped my Beliefs and Assumptions about Scholarship. Being moved from country to country, repeatedly uprooted and exposed to so many languages and cultures from a very early age, I developed a powerful interest and ability to uncover what is universal in human beings, what resonates with and unites diverse individuals across cultural, language, and socioeconomic boundaries, and to learn to function well in foreign and ambiguous situations. I learned to read visuals, symbols, non-verbal facial expressions, and body language, and focused on learning about the myths, legends, and spiritual traditions of cultures I was exposed to, and needed to function in. I thus became proficient in uncovering what helps individuals build positive relationships from within, regardless of culture, socioeconomic- and marital status, religious affiliation, or sexual orientation, and I became keenly aware of what resonates and unites people across cultures, language barriers, and national borders.

Language, perhaps due to the casual, fluent, and interchangeable manner in which it has been and still is used in my life, does not take the prominent position in my mind that it enjoys in the writings of many postmodern and contemporary social scientist and philosophers. To me, language is the icing on the cake of human relating and communicating, but what I am more interested in is in exploring the deep, mysterious ocean of inner life in which meanings, relationship dynamics, love, commitments, intuitions, intentions, perceptions, inspirations, feelings, creativity, and dreams emerge, exist, and inform individual and couple behaviors. An inner life in which an ultimate human and universal resonance and unity exists underneath language, spans across cultures, and resonates across differences.

In the context of this study on the positive and holistic development of a couple relationship, therefore, I am most interested in uncovering how this fathomless ocean of inner life energizes and sustains the positive aspects of a long-term relationship through love, commitment, and deep intimacy, how this vitalizing force or soul of the relationship can be better understood, and how it may be strengthened and developed for the long-term flourishing of the couple. That is why today, I am most interested in researching the world through the lens of my own experience, using autoethnography as method, because looking into my own experience I can see deeper and further than I could ever look into the experience of another, and therefore uncover information that could be useful to others in my field that would otherwise remain inaccessible.

Researcher assumptions that guide this study

Based on the common assumption underlying qualitative research, in this study, I see myself as fulfilling the role of research instrument. This means, that the nature of the problem I am investigating, the data I select and gather, and how I conduct the analysis and interpretation of the data is intrinsically linked to my own worldview as a person and as a researcher. Instead of bracketing out the assumptions and beliefs that underlie my worldview in an attempt to be neutral and removed from the study, which most qualitative research experts now agree is neither advisable, nor realistic (Lichtman, 2013; Maxwell, 2013), and probably even impossible (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011), I see the assumptions and beliefs that I bring to the study as part of a unique yet useful conceptual lens that will help inform my research activity. I describe some of my assumptions below.

Interpretivist-autoethnographic. As counselor, counselor educator, and in my personal life I believe that the narratives, meanings, and interpretations each person constructs about what

happens in their lives and their relationship are often more important to the happiness of an individual and to the wellbeing and flourishing of a couple than the facts of what actually happened. In other words, what happens to a person is often less important than what he or she makes of it in his or her inner life perspective. Due to the highly emotional and communicative nature of intimate relationships, I thus agree with Gottman and Schwartz Gottman (2008) that in the case of couple's long-term relationship development, shared dreams, meanings, and interpretations, are especially important to long-term flourishing.

Based on this researcher assumption then, I do not see myself as merely compiling a factual report of what occurred in the 7 phases of my relationship to later compare these events to a gold standard of factual truth (Maxwell, 2013) about the positive and holistic development of my relationship. Instead, I focus my investigation on the deeper meanings and interpretation I derived from my experiences. I thus intend to provide the reader a sense of what it looks like, feels like, and means to experience a couple's positive and holistic relationships development from the point of view of a participant.

In this study, I am also taking an *autoethnographic stance* because I am interested in, and also assume and/or expect that the insider, self-as-researcher-and-participant perspective of auto ethnographer which I am taking, will reveal unique and profound aspects of the processes and dynamics of a couple's positive and holistic relationship development that could not be investigated by someone looking into my experience from the outside (Denzin, 2014). Therefore, in this study I take an interpretivist and autoethnographic stance in that the investigation centers on my own experience, meanings, and interpretations of the culture of my relationship (Denzin, 2014; Maxwell, 2013) because I expect that such investigation will uncover valuable and unique

information about the processes and dynamics of positive and holistic relationship development that could not otherwise be uncovered.

Critical Realist. In conducting this qualitative, interpretivist, and autoethnographic study I am also taking a critical realist stance (Maxwell, 2013), in that I see the meanings, interpretations and experiences I will describe and analyze not merely as socially constructed, but also as emerging from, responding to, and thus intricately related to a real objective, factual environment (Maxwell, 2013).

Trans-Jungian. In this study I take what might best be described as a trans-Jungian stance. To some extent this study is based on a set of assumptions previously described by Jung, who was an avid scholar of alchemy. This study thus includes Jung's concepts of the opposite nature of the masculine and feminine archetypes, their psychodynamic expression in the individual the problematic and unwieldy processes necessary to their integration, and the fact that such integration is desirable and ultimately leads to the mental health and wellbeing of the individual (Jung, 1966/1992, 1968/1993, 1983, 1989). Yet I am also basing this study on a set of positive, strengths-based assumptions that transcend Jung's largely problematic conceptualization of the integration of opposites in that I view the integration of the masculine and the feminine archetypes that is necessary for the long- term, positive and holistic relationship development and flourishing of couples (soul mating) not only as the integration of opposites that are different, but also as the integration of opposites that are equal and complimentary to each other. Their integration enhances each half as well as the union of the two.

This conceptualization of the opposites thus transcends Jung's largely problem-centric view of the integration of opposites as the merging of the largely bright masculine integrating with a mostly dark and problematic feminine on the one hand, or the weak, unfocused, and

overly emotional feminine integrating with the clear structure of the masculine on the other (Jung, 1966/1992, 1968/1993).

Definition of key terms

Alchemy. In the context of this study, the term alchemy will be inferring a process of psychological, meaning-based, and/or spiritual alchemy within the individual and within the relationship echoed in some of the following definitions of the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (2013) described below.

1. A medieval chemical science and speculative philosophy aiming to achieve the transmutation of the base metals into gold, the discovery of a universal cure from disease, and the discovery of a means of indefinitely prolonging life.
2. *A power or process of transforming something common into something special.*
[Emphasis mine]
3. *An inexplicable and mysterious transmuting.* [Emphasis mine]

Bodhisattva. A person to vows to become an enlightened Buddha; and to show an unconditional availability to help all sentient beings.

Conjunctio. The Latin and Alchemical term for the act or state of conjoining. Used in its original language to connote the Alchemical importance of this state.

Development (of adults). Since this study focuses on adult relationships, in this study, the term *developmental* will refer to adult development, and denotes “a process of qualitative changes in attitudes, values and understandings that adults experience as a result of ongoing transactions with their environment” (Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddler, 2000, p. 10) that leads them to greater depths of meanings and understandings.

Hermetic Tradition. A spiritual and philosophical instructional tradition primarily based on a series of Egyptian-Greek texts from the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.C., which are attributed to Hermes Trismegistus; a mythic character which, in a series of dialogues, enlightens one of his disciples on spiritual development, the relationship between the divine cosmic mind and the natural world, and related alchemical and astrological concepts.

Soul. In the context of this study, the term soul can be understood according to the following definitions in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (2014).

1. the immaterial essence, animating principle, or actuating cause of an individual life
2. the spiritual principle embodied in human beings, all rational and spiritual beings, or the universe
3. a person's total self
4. an active or essential part

Western Mystery Tradition. A group of spiritual/instructional organizations characterized by multi-level initiatory and meditative, ritualistic, mystical, and spiritual practices that derive their symbolism and their worldviews from the Western world of antiquity, and which that were also influenced by beliefs originating in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and the Sinai Peninsula. Some of these schools of thought include the modern Freemasonic, Rosicrucian, Hermetic, and Wiccan initiatory and instructional associations.

CHAPTER II:

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter includes two main sections: The first section contains the *literature review*, in which I review the existing literature on the positive, the systemic, and the developmental conceptualization of couple relationships. The second section outlines the *conceptual framework* of the PHRDT that guides this study.

Literature review

The traditional methods that most couples counseling and therapy experts use in their practice have largely been based on a linear and problem-centric conceptualization of the couple relationship (see Gurman 2008 for an overview). Yet, as stated in the introduction to this study, the problem-centric conceptualization of couples relationships and the methods it informs, may no longer be sufficient to help contemporary couples navigate the challenges, seize the opportunities of the 21st century, and succeed as a couple in the long-term (Batthyany De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b). Therefore, in addition to the problem centric conceptualization of couple's relationships and the interventions they inform, a positive and holistic relationship development outlook is needed (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b; Kauffman & Silberman, 2009) to help counselors understand and promote the positive and holistic development of contemporary couples' relationships.

To better understand the difference between the linear problem-centric view of couples relationships, and the positive, relationships- as- developing-complex-holistic-systems outlook

underlying this study, I first provide a brief *overview of the problem-centric outlook*, and the therapeutic modalities informed by this outlook. Second, I describe the *positive turn in the social and behavioral sciences* which led to the emergence of *positive psychology*, the *strengths-based outlook*, and *Appreciative Inquiry*. Third, I describe the four ways in which couple relationships are currently being conceptualized in the literature, including the *individualistic*, the *systems*, the *complex dynamic systems (CDS)*, and the *holistic* view. And fourth, I describe how the *positive development* of couple relationships is viewed in the literature.

Brief overview of the problem-centric outlook in social and behavioral science

Throughout most of the 20th century, social and behavioral science inquiry has mainly focused on identifying, analyzing, and solving problems (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). Most experts who advise graduate students, grant seekers, faculty, and other researchers on how to write thesis, dissertations, and grant proposals, suggest that inquiry be centered on the investigation of a problem (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2007; NIH, 2011). In line with this tradition, the American Psychological Association's annual call for convention programs indicates that submissions should first include a "statement of the problem" in the proposal abstract (APA, 2012, p. 4). Similarly, the National Institute of Health grants application guide asks applicants to demonstrate the significance of their project by addressing the question: "*Does the project address an important problem [emphasis mine] or a critical barrier to progress in the field?*" (NIH, 2011, pp. I-124). This approach, though useful to help focus a study, encourages the inference that if the problem is addressed and/or the barrier removed progress in the field is expected to naturally proceed successfully.

This problem-centric approach, therefore, reinforces two hidden but important assumptions about human nature, namely that a) the description of problems, scrutiny of

problems, and the removal of problems may be sufficient to naturally and automatically promote growth, positive development, wellbeing, and flourishing. And b) that studying problems, providing detailed accounts of what hurts or what is broken, and pointing out how to fix then will somehow mobilize someone to improve the situation (Cooperrider, et al., 2008). The problem-centric approach to social and behavioral science and the implicit directive to inquire into the problematic have become so ubiquitous today, that they remain largely under the conceptual radar of scholars, students, researchers, experts, funding agencies, and many counseling and therapy experts and couples relationship educators (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012).

The problem-centric view of couple relationships. From the problem-centric perspective, removing problems and barriers in the relationship are seen as the primary means of helping a couple's relationship thrive (Kauffman & Silberman, 2009; Singer & Skerrett, 2014). This focus is based on the underlying, linear, and mechanistic assumptions that *if a couple's relationship problems are removed*, the couple's relationship will naturally and automatically begin to grow and flourish *on its own*. In couples counseling and therapy, this problem-centric outlook informs most Cognitive Behavioral Couple Therapy in which couple relationships are predominately viewed as a support system consisting of two individuals in an intimate relationship who help each other to learn and practice how to control, reduce, or eliminate clinical mental health symptoms (Abramowitz, et al., 2013; Brown-Bowers, Fredman, Wanklyn, & Monson, 2012; Dattilio, 2010), and/or correct faulty thinking and problematic behaviors (Dattilio, 2010; Dattilio & Bahadur, 2005; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004; Hrapczynski, Epstein, Werlinich, & LaTaillade, 2012; Sperry, 2007).

Other problem-centric, deficiency-based outlooks in couple therapy inform interventions designed to remediate deficient communication skills through skills training in Cognitive

Behavioral Couple Therapy (Brown-Bowers, et al., 2012; Monson, Fredman, & Adair, 2008), and the Gottman Method (Gottman, et al., 2002; Gottman & Schwartz Gottman, 2008).

Practitioners working within the problem-centric perspective have also focused their therapy on resolving emotional attachment problems through addressing problematic childhood experiences and trauma within the Emotion Focused Therapy framework (S. Johnson & Denton, 2002; S. M. Johnson, 2004; Susan M. Johnson, 2005; Susan M. Johnson, 2005). Others, working within the Bowen Family Systems Therapy framework (Gilbert, 2004; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Moultrup, 2005; Rovers, et al., 2007; Schnarch, 2009; Titelman, 1998), focused on lowering emotional reactivity by resisting the family system's emotional undercurrents. Although fixing what has gone wrong in a couple's relationship is necessary and useful to the long-term positive development of the relationship, repair may not in and of itself lead to the positive growth and development of a relationship (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b; Kauffman & Silberman, 2009; Singer & Skerrett, 2014).

The positive turn in the social and behavioral sciences

Since the last decade of the 20th century, a growing number of psychologists and other social and behavioral scientists have addressed the assessment and application of the positive, (Biswas-Diener, 2010; Donaldson, Csikszentmihalyi, & Nakamura, 2011; Fredrickson, 2009; Linley, Harrington, & Garcea, 2010; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Linley, Joseph, Maltby, Harrington, & Wood, 2009; Lopez & Snyder, 2003; Seligman, 2002, 2004), the affirmative (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012; Cooperrider, et al., 2008; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005), and the strengths-based (Buckingham, 2007c; Clifton, 2003; Ward & Reuter, 2011), collectively creating an extensive interdisciplinary body of work loosely termed the strengths-based movement. The results of their positive orientation is now evident in the scholarly, professional, and applied work in the fields

of: Positive Psychology, which focuses on the study of strengths, values, virtues, wellbeing, happiness, optimism, and flourishing on an individual, group and global level, among other topics (Lewis, 2011; Linley, et al., 2010; Peterson & Park, 2011; Peterson & Seligman, 2004), Positive Organizational Scholarship, which centers on the study, development, implementation, and practice of positive, appreciative, and strengths-based approaches to organizational development (Cameron, 2011; Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010), and leadership (Cameron, 2008; D. Whitney, A. Trosten-Bloom, & K. Rader, 2010), as well as the strength-based movement in counseling and therapy (Jones-Smith, 2014; Ward & Reuter, 2011; White, 2007; Michael White & David Denborough, 2011). Based on the magnitude of these recent developments in the social and behavioral sciences, all unified by a paradigm of positivity, this strengths-based movement can now be said to constitute the Positive Turn in the social and behavioral sciences.

Inquiry into the positive is different from inquiry into the problematic. The positive, strengths-based movement has been compared to a conceptual wave that has “lifted us up, spun us around and revealed to us all a new world” (Buckingham, 2007, p. 4). This wave of positivity centers on the idea that “excellence is not the opposite of failure” (p. 5), and therefore that social and behavioral scientists will “learn little about excellence from studying failure” (p. 5, emphasis mine). Yet, for most of the 20th century, “virtually all business and academic inquiry was based on the opposite idea, namely that a deep understanding of failure leads to an equally deep understanding of excellence” (Buckingham, 2007, p. 5). Consequently, most inquiry continues to focus on the study of “unhappy customers to learn about the happy ones, employee’s weaknesses to help them learn to excel, sickness to learn about health, divorce to learn about marriage and sadness to learn about joy” (Buckingham, 2007, p. 5-6, emphasis mine).

This positive outlook, however, is only slowly being embraced by couple relationships experts and practitioners, perhaps due to the core problem-centric stance of psychotherapy which is still firmly anchored in the premise that “progress is based upon the clarity of the problem” and that “the more exact the diagnosis, the better the psychotherapy” (Conoley, & Conoley, 2009, p. 12). The conceptual framework informing this study, however, is firmly based on the premise that a.) Inquiry into problems, failures, and dysfunctions of a couple’s relationships is fundamentally different from inquiry into the positive development, wellbeing, and flourishing of a couple’s relationship, and therefore b.) The investigation of a couple’s positive relationship development must be based on a positive, strengths-based (Conoley & Conoley, 2009; Kauffman & Silberman, 2009), holistic and appreciative inquiry outlook on couple relationships (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b).

Positive outlooks on couple relationships. The positive outlook on couple relationships consists of three somewhat distinct conceptual frameworks, including Positive Psychology, the Strengths-Based outlook, and Appreciative Inquiry.

Positive Psychology. For over a decade now, Positive Psychology has been leading the way in inquiry into the positive and the affirmative under the philosophical stance and methodology inspired by its founder, Martin Seligman. Seligman (2004, p. xi), states that Positive Psychology may be called a movement but “not a paradigm shift since it uses the same tried and true methods of mainstream science”. With this post-positivist and objectivist approach Positive Psychology has defined, operationalized, measured, and assessed a variety of positive constructs such as *courage* (Rate, Clarke, Lindsay, & Sternberg, 2007; Woodard & Pury, 2007), *hope* (Cheavens, Feldman, Woodward, & Snyder, 2006; Lopez, Snyder, & Rasmussen, 2003), *wellbeing* (Bornstein, Davidson, Keyes, & Moore, 2003; Frisch, 2006), *virtues* (Cameron, 2011;

Peterson & Park, 2011), *happiness* (Pictet, Coughtrey, Mathews, & Holmes, 2011; Seligman, 2002), *positive emotions* (Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson & Kurtz, 2011), and *positivity at work* (Lewis, 2011). Positive psychologists have also developed surveys such as the VIA or Values in Action (VIA, 2012), and a series of measurement scales (Lopez & Snyder, 2003), and interventions (Biswas-Diener, 2010; Kauffman & Silberman, 2009). Positive Psychology has thus established much needed credibility, and given legitimacy to the strengths-based movement. Positive Psychology also inspired some researchers as well as couple and family therapists to base their work within this framework (Conoley & Conoley, 2009; Singer & Skerrett, 2014).

Positive psychology oriented family therapists Conoley and Conoley (2009), for example, state that “focusing on the problem rather than the goal is detrimental to growth” (p.12). In fact, the “approach-motivation research strongly supports the benefit of a positive goal orientation” (p. 12) in family therapy; they urge practitioners to conceptualize the treatment of relationships from a *goal- approach motivation standpoint* as opposed to a *problem- avoidant motivation standpoint* (Conoley & Conoley, 2009). Couple therapists Singer and Skerrett (2014) integrate a Positive Psychology and a Narrative Therapy conceptualization of couples, in that they assert that couple counselors and therapists view the positive aspects of the couple’s relationship as based on positive “We” stories that the couple needs to build and expand in order to grow and flourish in the long-term (Singer & Skerrett, 2014).

Strengths-based outlook. The strengths-based outlook is based on the premise that uncovering, understanding, and promoting the development of a person’s strengths is different from, and often more effective to positive change and wellbeing, than focusing on the problems, difficulties or barriers to mental health and wellbeing that a person may be encountering in his or her life (Buckingham, 2007a). In the context of mental health, Smith- Jones (2014, p. 13) states

that a strength is defined as “that which helps a person to cope with life or that which makes life more fulfilling for oneself and others”, and she asserts that in strengths-based therapy, “even the most challenging life stories that clients bring to therapy contain examples of their exercise of strength in their struggle with adversity” (p. 12), and that the strengths based outlook is well suited to complement the traditional, problem-centric diagnostic stance (Jones-Smith, 2014). Jones-Smith (2014) organizes individual strengths into 11 strength zones that have now been identified cross-culturally, including wisdom, emotional, character, creativity, relational/nurturing, educational, cognitive- analytical, financial, social, survival, and physical (Jones-Smith, 2014).

The strengths-based perspective thus shares a focus on human strengths with Positive Psychology, but it is distinct in that the strength-based outlook appears to be more specifically concerned with individual human strength, how to uncover them, develop them, and promote their application for the wellbeing of individuals. Positive Psychology, in contrast, is not only concerned with individual strengths, but with the understanding, measuring, describing, and promoting of the positive and affirmative on an individual, group, organizational, workforce, national, and global perspective (Lopez & Snyder, 2003; Snyder & Lopez, 2005)

Although the strength-based outlook in mental health has so far largely focused on the individual’s strength (Jones-Smith, 2014), some researchers are now also studying families from a strengths-base perspective, such as DeFrain and Asay (2014) in their compilation of articles on *Families around the World: Strengths-Based Research and Perspectives*, which focuses on studying families from different ethnicities around the globe through the strengths-based perspective, and on uncovering what strengths and resiliencies are found in these families (DeFrain & Asay, 2014).

Couple therapists Kauffman and Silberman (2009) combined the positive psychology and the strength-based outlooks on couples counseling into their 3-step approach. The first step calls for a balancing of the common problem-centric conceptualization of couple's relationships with a positive, strengths-based outlook that focuses on the couple's strengths and goals. The second step is to help a couple to "increase a couple's reservoir of positive emotion" (p. 521), and third, to build a couples lexicon of strengths and uncover the partner's and the relationship's greatest qualities (Kauffman & Silberman, 2009).

Several couple therapists and relationship educators have also combined the strengths-based conceptualization of couple's relationships with a spirituality and/or religious outlook. Hendrix and La Kelley Hunt (2009), for example, developed a strengths-based conceptualization of a couple's relationship as a laboratory of positive, spiritual growth which they adapted for Christian, Jewish, and non-denominational couples in their relationship education curriculum and training programs (Hendrix & LaKelley Hunt, 2009). Olson (2008), inspired by a marriage-centric, Christian outlook, developed a couple checkup survey to help couples at different stages of their relationships uncover their strengths (Olsen, 2008). Batthyany De La Lama et. al. (2012) integrated the strengths-based outlook on couple relationships with the processes and dynamics of the integration of opposites leading to the development of the philosopher's stone—the metaphorical goal of spiritual alchemy (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), an aspect of the Hermetic Tradition also extensively explored by Jung (Edinger, 1994; Jung, 1966/1992, 1968, 1983, 1989).

Moreover, other therapists, still working primarily from the problem-centric perspective, are becoming cognizant of the need to complement the deficiency model with a strengths-based component, such as integrating the positive outlook with batterer intervention (Lehmann &

Simmons, 2009), and including a strength-based component into the traditional family systems therapy modalities (Fraser, Grove, Lee, Greene, & Solovey, 2014).

Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a philosophical approach, method of inquiry, and practical intervention for organizational development (Cooperrider, et al., 2008), which is being applied in a variety of disciplines such as *positive organizational scholarship* (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012), *leadership* (D. Whitney, et al., 2010), coaching (Orem, Binkert, & Clancy, 2007), as *a research orientation* (Reed, 2007), *self-help* (Kelm, 2005, 2008), and *evaluation method* (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). The Appreciative Inquiry outlook is based on two core concepts: a) To first pivot inquiry from inquiring into a problem to inquiring into an affirmative topic, and b) to expand inquiry from a static, linear conception of the positive (as is most commonly conducted within the Positive Psychology framework) to a non-linear, dynamic and complex (Guastello, Koopmans, & Pincus, 2009) inquiry into the emergence, processes, dynamics, growth, development, implementation, and sustainability of the positive, with use of questions generated by the AI 4-D cycle (Cooperrider, et al., 2008), also referred to as 4-I cycle (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012; Preskill & Catsambas, 2006; Reed, 2007).

From the Appreciative Inquiry perspective, relationships are seen as an active and creative locus of ongoing social construction of meaning and narratives (Cooperrider, et al., 2008; Watkins & Mohr, 2001; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010; D. Whitney, et al., 2010). Therefore, the questions that are asked of a couple, in therapy, in research, or as part of relationship education, will activate this social construction mechanism between partners, eliciting the construction of certain types of meanings and stories instead of others. Such meanings and stories will thus influence how the couple members perceive each other and their relationship, and also the co-constructed relationship narrative (Stavros & Torres, 2005; Whitney

& Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Therefore, from an Appreciative Inquiry perspective, asking affirmative questions of the couple partners is essential not only to enlarge the positive conceptualization of couple members and of their relationship, but also to help develop their relationship in a positive, long-term direction (Cooperrider Dole, Hetzel Silber, Mann, & Whitney, 2008).

The systems outlook on couple relationships

In order to study the positive and holistic relationship development of a couple, it is important to understand the four distinct conceptual lenses through which couple systems are being conceptualized within the social and behavioral science literature today. The following section describes the individualistic, the systems, the complex dynamic systems (CDS) –also called complex adaptive systems (CAS), or complexity perspective (Sawyer, 2005; Stanton & Welsh, 2011, 2012; Willis, 2007), and the holistic (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) perspective.

Individualistic conceptualization of the couple relationship system. The individualistic conceptualization of couple relationships views couples as primarily constituted of *two separate, distinct individuals in an intimate relationship* (Baucom, Epstein, & LaTaillade, 2002; Dattilio, 2010). This conceptualization of couples and their relationship is useful when the focus of an investigation or intervention is primarily on helping control and/or reduce one of the partner's clinical symptoms. In this case, the healthy romantic partner–viewed as a useful resource to help the symptomatic partner–is primarily brought into therapy as coach to help reduce clinical symptoms in the primary client (Abramowitz, et al., 2013). The individualistic outlook is also utilized in Conjoint Cognitive Behavioral Therapy where one (Brown-Bowers, et al., 2012) or both partners (Monson, et al., 2008) present with a clinical diagnosis, the partners

are viewed as resources of coaching and emotional support to each other, and therapy is primarily directed at reducing the clinical symptoms *and secondarily also at improving the relationship*. This individualistic outlook on couple relationships naturally aligns with the problem-centric, deficiency-oriented outlook of the medical model and with the post-positivist scientific methodologies that help to measure outcomes within this framework.

This individualistic conceptualization of couples and their relationship, and its easy association with the deficiency outlook of human functioning, however, has shown to be more problematic when applied to the interpersonally intimate, emotionally-laden, context- rich, and meaning-infused conditions such as long-term intimate couple relationships which call for a more positive, strengths-based, affirmative, systemic, contextual, social-constructionist, integrative, and transcendence-oriented approach (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, 2011a; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the strictly individualistic view of couples and their relationships will not be part of my conceptual framework. Instead, I am basing this study on the systems, the complex dynamic systems (CDS), and the holistic outlook on couples described below.

The 2nd wave family systems outlook on couple relationships. The family systems outlook on couple relationships states that although there are two separate individuals in a couple, the couple, its nuclear and its extended family, are nevertheless *a system* that constitutes a large, somewhat contained unit of interacting and mutually influencing non-linear, often circular dynamics and feedback loops (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Titelman, 1998). This large relational family system unit which connects and contains both of the couple partners, produces an ongoing emotional and informational interaction effect between the two partners, any children they may have, their extended family and relatives (even deceased ones) where emotion,

information, and narratives are constantly subjected to, amplified by, pressured by, or distorted by *systems dynamics* (Cohn Bregman & White, 2011; Gilbert, 2004; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Stanton & Welsh, 2012).

One of the most prominent proponents of the 2nd wave family systems perspective was Murray Bowen, who developed the method of Bowen Family Systems Therapy based on natural systems and evolutionary theory, as well as on his observations of schizophrenic clients and their families (Cohn Bregman & White, 2011; Gilbert, 2004; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Bowen viewed the family emotional unit as the primary, mostly self-contained system that links the members of the nuclear dyad – the couple, their children, their parents, and their extended family, even across multiple generations. The therapists who work with the Bowen method focus interventions towards helping the couple dyad navigate the larger emotional system of their own relationship, as well as their relationships with their nuclear, extended, and multigenerational family unit (Gilbert, 2004; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Klever, 2009; Schnarch, 2009; Titelman, 1998).

From this 2nd wave family systems perspective, the family unit is seen as bound by an emotional mass that, in a natural effort *to gain and sustain homeostasis*, exerts a powerful influence on all the members of the system. This influence, though prevailing, is difficult for individuals to see, understand, or resist. Based on this systems epistemology, the cause of problems may follow a somewhat circular causation, in that the cause of a problem may not always lie with the individual exhibiting the symptoms, but may be instead originating in other members of the system (Gilbert, 2004; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Titelman, 1998).

Based on the Bowenian conceptualization of couple relationships, the ideal state of the relationship is harmony and homeostasis, and the ideal state of each couple member is self-

differentiation. Thus the 2nd wave family systems outlook is still individualistic to some extent, *setting the individual up to be at odds with the system* in an ongoing struggle to differentiate his or her individuality from the system on the one hand, and to protect himself or herself from being overwhelmed by, manipulated by, influenced by, or swallowed up by the system's emotional mass. Interestingly, this view in which the individual is basically at odds with the system in which he or she is embedded, was also professed by Jung (Jaffee, 1979; Jung, 1966/1992, 1968, 1983). Although Jung described the struggle of self-differentiation as individuation from the collective unconscious instead of Bowen's self-differentiation from the family system's emotional mass, the ideal state of the individual aimed for from the Jungian as well as the 2nd wave family systems perspective share similar dynamics and trajectories in that they position the individual as at odds with the system.

The Bowen Family Systems outlook on couple relationships is useful in helping counselors organize complex, emotional, developmental, and systemic dynamics into a coherent understanding of a couple's situation from a specific, individual perspective as well as from a family systems perspective, which many contemporary therapists find essential (Gilbert, 2004; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004; Gottlieb, 2008; Klever, 2009; Moultrup, 2005; Schnarch, 2009; Stanton & Welsh, 2012; Titelman, 1998). This outlook on couple relationships, however, originated in the mid-20th century, and thus does not account for or address postmodern, social constructionist, diversity, and social justice concerns (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004), and is thus somewhat limited, and to some extent outdated in its conceptualization of contemporary couple relationships. In this study, I will thus only refer to this 2nd wave systems outlook on couple relationships as needed, but my main focus will be on the 3rd wave systems perspective of complex dynamic systems (Sawyer, 2005).

The 3rd wave, dynamic, complex adaptive systems view of couple relationships.

The 2nd wave family systems outlook described above, developed in the 20th century, and inspired by mid-20th century cybernetics, still informs most systemic conceptualizations of couple's relationships today (see Gurman 2008 for an overview)). As stated above, from the 2nd wave systems perspective, the couple's relationship and its family system are viewed as a mostly closed system, and the ideal state of the couple relationship is seen as one of harmony and homeostasis (Sawyer, 2005). In the last decades of the 20th century, however, based on the new scientific developments in non-Newtonian physics, quantum mechanics, mathematics, meteorology, non-linear dynamics, chaos science, biology, ecology, computer sciences, information science, game theory, and other disciplines (Gleick, 2008; Mitchell, 2009) the new trans-disciplinary *science of complexity* emerged.

Complexity Theory is the interdisciplinary theory that unifies complexity science, and which marks a “shift from reductionist [linear] analyses” to the study of complex dynamic and adaptive systems based on a non-linear dynamics outlook which transcends the linear cause and effect premises of Newtonian physics, and focuses on the study of complex systems that exist at the edge of chaos (Peters in Mason, 2008, p. xi). Complexity theory, which spans across the natural and social sciences, including biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, meteorology, ecology, economy, psychology, sociology, and education, considers human beings as dynamic, complex adaptive systems, and includes the positive phenomenon of *emergence* (Goldstein, Hazy, & Lichtenstein, 2010; Sawyer, 2005) as one of its central tenets. Complexity science informed by complexity theory gave rise to a new, more complex, open, and interconnected, conceptualization of systems which is often interchangeably termed complex dynamic systems (CDS) perspective, non-linear dynamic systems perspective (NDS) (Goldstein, et al., 2010),

complex adaptive systems (CAS) outlook, 3rd wave systems perspective (Sawyer, 2005) or simply *complexity* perspective (Mitchell, 2009).

Due to the complexity paradigm's strong base in complex, lengthy, and sophisticated mathematical calculation made possible by the advent of super computers, the CAS paradigm is now at the forefront of many hard sciences (Gleick, 2008; Mitchell, 2009; Morin, 2008), yet it is only slowly gaining prominence in the social and behavioral sciences (Alhadeff-Jones, 2012; Morin, 2008; Palombo, 2013).

Morin (2008), for example, has written extensively on the transformational nature of the complexity paradigm when it is applied to conceptualize contemporary education, the role and function of the educator, and the position of the student within the educational system (Morin, 2008). Alhadeff-Jones (2012) has analyzed the salience of the complexity paradigm in educational research. Goldstein and colleagues have investigated complexity in the context of organizational development and leadership (Goldstein, et al., 2010). Palombo (2013) has described the advantages of adopting a complexity paradigm in psychodynamic psychotherapy, and described how such thinking should change the psychodynamic practitioner's view of the self, how complexity thinking changes traditional psychodynamic views on stages of development in developmental psychology, and how the complexity stance radically transforms the psychodynamic practitioners approach to case conceptualization and intervention (Palombo, 2013).

When applied within social and behavioral science, complexity theory provides a useful framework to study human intrapersonal, psychological (Palombo, 2013), and interpersonal, relationship systems and dynamics (Stanton & Welsh, 2011, 2012). Because complexity science is inherently affirmative in its study of how the dynamics of complex adaptive systems lead to

positive self-organization emergent behaviors including new strengths and adaptability, it is especially suited to guide the understanding of the emergence of positive qualities, strengths, talents, intimacy, positive communications, narratives, meanings, enduring love and transcendence in couple relationships.

When viewed through this 3rd wave, non-linear, dynamic CAS perspective, what French education philosopher Morin terms the *complexity paradigm* (Morin, 2008), individuals are no longer seen as largely separated, discreet, isolated, self-contained, closed systems (Goldstein, et al., 2010; Palombo, 2013; Stanton & Welsh, 2012) nor are they seen as embedded in (2nd wave) closed systems of nuclear and extended families (Palombo, 2013; Sawyer, 2005; Stanton & Welsh, 2011). Instead, individuals are viewed as agents within a complex web of interconnection on a multitude of levels including the biological, ecological, economic, political, family, emotional, intellectual, and even spiritual within the larger complex open, dynamic, non-linear system of the universe (Capra, 2014).

The complexity, 3rd wave systems perspective (Sawyer, 2005; Stanton & Welsh, 2011), transcends the traditional 2nd wave systems perspective focused on understanding circular causation and promoting stability and homeostasis, because it focuses on leading systems *through chaos and turbulence towards the development of the emergent, self-organization* qualities system-members co-construct through their interactions and exchanges of information in the relationship, and which individual members as well as the system as a whole need in order to flourish. At the core of complexity theory lies the premise that the *dynamics of complex adaptive systems, are universal to all systems, regardless of the system's components*; they include the following: linearity versus non-linearity, extreme sensitivity to initial conditions, bifurcation, criticalization, turbulence, chaos, attractor states, emergence, and self-organization

(Goldstein, et al., 2010; Mitchell, 2009; Palombo, 2013; Stanton & Welsh, 2011, 2012). The complexity paradigm is not only useful but also necessary to understand a couple's positive relationship development towards a future ideal state (in contrast to viewing couples from the traditional problem-centric and marriage-centric perspective). The complex dynamic systems perspective informs the PHRDT that guides this study; I will draw from select complexity theory constructs when analyzing and interpreting the data collected in this study as needed.

The holistic systems outlook on couple relationships

Batthyany De La Lama and colleagues (2012, p. 285) assert that “the holistic outlook states that the whole (the whole individual, the whole relationship) is greater than the sum of its parts, that the intrapsychic parts of the whole are in a dynamic, fluid relationship to one another, and that, for optimal functioning of the whole, the parts must be individually addressed and intentionally integrated” (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b). From this holistic perspective then, relationship partners are not merely bodies with the capacity to engage in behaviors, feel emotions, and think thoughts. They are also seen as conscious and intentional beings constantly engaged in meaning making, forming, holding and dissolving beliefs and ideologies, *relating to the universe and/or to a higher power through their personal spiritual and/or existential orienting system* (Pargament, 2007), and *animated by a soul or vital core*. Couple partners are thus interacting and relating with each other on all of these multiple levels of consciousness *at the same time* (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b). *Jungian analytic psychology and the holistic view of couple relationships*: Jung asserted that the investigation, conceptualization, and treating of any human relationship needs to first uncover and address the intrapsychic relationships each individual is experiencing with his or her intrapsychic archetypes, especially the counter sexual image of the animus in a woman and the

anima in a man (Jaffee, 1979; Jung, 1966/1992, 1968, 1983). Therefore, it is important to note that in “a committed relationship between two partners invariably constellates an *interactive field*, in which the inner opposites and shadows come alive, interact, and generate the powerful dynamics that fuel the relationship” (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b). (p. 287)

Schwartz-Salant (1989), for example, who investigated Jung’s mythopoeic descriptions of the relationship between alchemy and psychotherapy (Schwartz-Salant, 1995), also explored the phenomena of mad areas of sane people that he saw as emerging in the relational interactive field between him and his clients in therapy, and between his clients and their significant others during the course of Jungian analysis (Schwartz-Salant, 1998). Moreover, Edinger (1994) not only extended Jung’s life-long work on the *alchemical conjunction of opposites within the individual*, but, also expanded Jung’s notion of the *alchemical conjunctio between masculine and feminine archetypes to more clearly address the relationship between two intimate partners* (Edinger, 1994). Due to the powerful involvement of the intrapsychic dimension of individual couple members in the relationship, and the basic *teleological* outlook underlying the holistic systems conceptualization of couple relationship, this perspective is one of the theories informing the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), and is thus integrated into the PHRDT informing this study.

Developmental outlook on couple relationships

The development of adults “is distinguished as “a process of qualitative changes in attitudes values, and understandings that adults experience as a result of ongoing transactions with their social environment” (Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddler, cited in Batthyany De La Lama, et al., p. 285). Within the context of couple relationships the adult development orientation states that “*individuals and their relationships* are continuously engaged in a natural, developmental,

growth process through time that extends beyond the body's functional maturity, and proceeds in a series of stages throughout the life cycle" (Batthyany De La Lama et. al., 2012, p. 285).

Although couple relationships are seen as changing and evolving in a vaguely parallel manner to the individual couple member's life-span development (Papalia, Wendkos Olds, & Duskin Feldman, 2004), in order to understand the positive development of couple relationships, it is useful to more accurately distinguish between 4 specific developmental outlooks on couple relationships, including the individualistic developmental outlook, the 2nd wave systems developmental outlook, the complex dynamic systems developmental outlook, and the holistic developmental outlook described below.

The individualistic developmental outlook on couple relationships. This individualistic outlook, which is often implicit in contemporary society (Bishop, 2007; Cherlin, 2009), is based on the philosophical stance of expressive individualism (Batthyany De La Lama, 2010y; Cherlin, 2009), which I described in the background section of chapter I. Within this context, the expressive individualist outlook on couple relationships sees the relationship largely as a support system for the individualistic self-expression of each partner. From this point of view, the ideal relationship for each partner becomes one of convenience, personal satisfaction, status, material security, and other tangible qualities that can be summarized as providing high support for each individualized partner and requiring low maintenance by them. This outlook does not account for the development of the relationship itself, nor does it provide an ideal for the positive, long-term development of the relationship. It is also not suitable for psychological development of individual partners resulting from their relationship, towards transcending the mere satisfaction of material, immediate, and tangible needs (Cherlin, 2009). This limited

individualistic development perspective is thus not included into the conceptual framework that guides this study.

The 2nd wave systems developmental view of couple relationships. The 2nd wave systems developmental outlook within the context of couple relationships, of which Bowen Family Systems Therapy is a good example, centers on the development of each individual couple member as a result of his or her membership in the intimate relationship. This process, according to Bowen family systems therapists (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Schnarch, 2009) follows “a cycle of differentiation and integration that varies for each individual and results in an increasing capacity to reframe and make meaning out of experience” (Batthyany De La Lama et.al., 2012 p. 285), and through which the individual develops the capacity to stand up for self in face of the emotional demands of the family system. However, as stated above, the 2nd wave Bowen Family Systems conceptualization of couple relationship development focuses primarily on the individual’s development and the level of his or her capacity for self-differentiation from the relationship’s emotional mass (Schnarch, 2009). The development of the system as a whole is secondary, vaguely conceptualized, and if addressed at all, it is mostly seen as incidental (Gilbert, 2004). The 2nd wave family systems view of the couple relationship development is thus primarily individualistic, and only secondarily systemic, it does not provide a clear understanding of the development of the couple relationship in itself.

The 3rd wave complex dynamic systems developmental outlook on couple relationships. Stanton and Welsh (2012, p. 16) describe this outlook as conceptualizing couple and family systems from a complexity perspective, and state that “moves beyond the familiar cybernetic idea of homeostasis in favor of existing at a state far from equilibrium – at the edge of chaos” (Stanton & Welsh, 2012). From this perspective couple systems are viewed as “dynamic,

continuously changing, spontaneously organizing, and relentlessly adaptive” (Stanton, & Welsh, 2012, p. 16). From this perspective, couple systems development occurs “as complex systems move further away from equilibrium, the system can destabilize and transform into an even more complex system spontaneously producing a new set of properties and organizational structure (termed emergence)”. From a CDS perspective this emergence is considered as a positive and desirable process leading to the development of new positive qualities, strengths, and skills in couple members and in the relationship system that were hitherto unknown or unavailable to the system, and which should be encouraged and promoted (Batthyany De La Lama, 2011a; Mitchell, 2009; Stanton & Welsh, 2012; Weigel & Murray, 2000). This 3rd wave CDS outlook on couple relationship development directly addresses the development of the couple system, and is thus integral into PHRDT.

The holistic developmental outlook on couple relationships. Batthyany De La Lama et. al (2012, p. 287) describe how the mythopoeia of Carl Gustav Jung is useful to understand the positive and holistic relationship development of couples, and how this positive development is conceptualized within the framework of the Soul Mates Model.

Throughout his career, Jung worked on deciphering the hidden archetypal meanings of the symbols, teachings, and metaphors of the Western esoteric tradition [Western Mystery Tradition], including renaissance alchemy, and combined his findings with select psychodynamic and developmental concepts, successfully integrating them into 20th century psychology and psychotherapy. His work, in combination with the rich imagery of renaissance alchemy thus provides the contemporary practitioner with a wellspring of visual symbols, metaphors, and images to help [understand and] guide individual and couple’s growth and development, such as the metaphor of the alchemical *Conjunctio* or integration of the inner masculine and feminine

opposites which leads to the creation of the philosopher's stone, a metaphorical substance that turns metaphorical lead, or the dross of life into the gold of spiritual achievement, and the completion of the great work or magnum opus).

Batthyany De La Lama et. al (2012) also state that the 3 metaphorical and mythopoeic concepts of the conjunctio, the development of the philosopher's stone, and the completion of the magnum opus...

...are relevant to couple's long-term relationship development because they suggest that *the ultimate goal of a couple's union is its inner marriage or conjunction* [italics added], the "great work" of building an integrated inner world of love, intimacy, and meaning, in dedication to a cause that may include but also transcend self and family, an inner union the couple builds and sustains throughout their entire lifetime, of which the outer commitment ceremony or marriage is but the humble yet necessary beginning (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b).

This aspect of the Jungian theory on the integration of the masculine and feminine archetypes leading to the teleological development of the relationship's completion and sustainability described mythopoeically as the development of the philosopher's stone, is thus well aligned with the contemporary complex dynamic systems view of couple relationships, and their non-linear trajectory through bifurcation, turbulence, chaos, and emergence, and then their renewed, strengthened, and more adaptive dynamic self-organization.

Integrating the positive, the complex dynamic systems, the holistic, and the developmental outlooks on couple relationships

In order to conceptualize, understand, investigate, address, and inform interventions into a couple's positive relationship development, Batthyany De La Lama and colleagues integrated

the positive, the 3rd wave dynamic systems, the holistic, and the developmental outlooks on couple relationship development into the 7stage/phase *Soul Mates Model* (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) and the 12 Positive Principles of Couple Relationship Development and Flourishing (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a).

The soul mates outlook on couple relationship development perspective. Batthyany De La Lama and colleagues (2008, 2011, 2012) assert that when long-term, intimate couple relationships are viewed from this holistic and developmental perspective, the partners are conceptualized as mating on several consecutive levels, from the most obvious, concrete, objective, physical level as they engage in dating and sexual mating, to the most subtle, subjective, internal level, and existential and/or spiritual level, where they may engage in *soul mating* (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008). From a holistic, complex dynamic systems, and developmental perspective, therefore, couple relationship dynamics occur on an emotional, intellectual, identity, meaning/ideology, and spiritual orienting system level all the way to the deepest yet most intangible soul mating level. In order to understand and promote the positive and holistic relationship development of a couple, the 5 levels of holistic relevance of each couple member as well as the 5 levels, as well as the core, soul or spiritual dimensions need to be explored and addressed (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b). These researchers assert that ...

...adult development theory posits that developmental stages continue in the inner, intra-psycho world of emotions, mind, meaning, and spirituality/consciousness once the individual's body is fully grown at the stage of young adulthood. Couple's relationships are developmental, in that they grow and develop along *a relationship life-*

cycle that may run parallel to, but does not always coincide with the individual partner's life-cycle (285).

The Soul Mates Model thus “provide a developmental positive psychology perspective in which problems are seen as opportunities to seek out new resources and develop new strengths and skills that serve as springboards to a new developmental level. The model's 7 stages delineate this relationship life-cycle” (Batthyany De La Lama, et. al, 2012, p. 285).

The Soul Mates Model's 7 stages/phases, and the 12 positive couple relationship development principles provide the core structure for data gathering, analysis, and interpretation for this study, and will be described in greater detail in the conceptual framework section of this chapter provided below.

Conclusion of literature review

In this literature review I have described the most salient outlooks on couple relationships, including the positive turn, the 2nd wave systems, the 3rd wave complex dynamic systems, and the developmental perspectives, including several distinct outlooks within each of these broad perspectives. Gaining an appreciation for the complexity of these distinct perspectives on couple relationships is useful to understand the conceptual framework that informs this study, which is based on the integration of the positive, the 3rd wave complex dynamic systems, the holistic, and the developmental perspectives on couple relationships developed by Batthyany De La Lama and colleagues (Batthyany De La Lama, 2011a; Batthyany De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011, 2012a; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), and which I am presenting below.

Integrating the positive, the complex dynamic systems, the holistic, and the developmental outlooks on couple relationships

Conceptual framework

Positive and Holistic Relationship Development theory.

The conceptual framework that guides the data gathering, analysis, and interpretation for this study integrates the positive, the complex dynamic systems, the holistic, and the developmental outlooks on couple relationships into a Positive and Holistic Couple Relationship Development Theory for Couples. The 3 main components of this theory include the following:

1. The Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b),
2. The future-oriented, teleological, metaphorical, and mythopoeic attainment of the philosopher's stone (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) as an ideal state of long-term soul mating, wellbeing, and relationship flourishing, also referred to as the completion of the magnum opus, and
- 3.) The 12 positive relationship development principles developed by Batthyany De La Lama and colleagues (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a).

The Soul Mates model. Batthyany De La Lama et. al (2012) developed a 7 phase/stage model to conceptualize the positive and holistic relationship development of couples based on the Hermetic tradition's concept of the dynamics between opposite and complementary universal archetypes, and their integration leading to the metaphorical development of an ideal state of holistic integration or *conjunctio*, metaphorically expressed as the development of the philosopher's stone. This developmental process scales up from the intrapsychic integration of the masculine and feminine forces *within an individual*, to the inter-psyche integration of masculine and feminine archetypes in a long-term committed couple relationships as described by Edinger (1994), all the way to the broader struggle and potential integration of the collective

masculine and feminine forces within the collective unconscious described by Jung (Jaffee, 1979; Jung, 1968, 1983, 1989).

Pictogram for the Soul Mates model and the development of the philosopher's stone.

Batthyany De La Lama et al (2012, p. 287) use a 17th century pictogram (see page 196) to provide a visual and metaphorical representation of the phases, process, and dynamics underlying the integration of opposites leading to the development of the philosopher's stone. This pictogram represents the 7 phases/stages of a couple's positive and holistic relationship development or *soul mating*. Batthyany De La Lama et. al. (2102, p.287) state that:

...descriptive images or pictograms are helpful to engage both sides of the brain in memorizing complex models. Renaissance alchemist Count Michael Maier's emblem XII, Squaring the Circle (De Jong, 2002, p. 169) provides a useful pictogram for the Soul Mates Model, *if the words man and woman in Maier's corresponding motto are taken to denote the archetypal masculine and feminine forces, predominantly expressed by each of the partners, regardless of their biological sex.*

The 7 phases/stages of the Soul Mates Model will provide the structure for this study's data collection and analysis.

The development of the philosopher's stone. Batthyany De La Lama and colleagues describe the *future-oriented, teleological, metaphorical and mythopoeic attainment of the philosopher's stone* (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) as an *ideal state of soul mating*, characterized by deep intimacy and communion, conjoint meaning, wellbeing, and flourishing, which the couple is moving towards in the positive and holistic development of their relationship as opposed to merely preserving the glory of a marriage that already occurred *in the past*. In the Hermetic tradition (Evola, 1995; Manly P. Hall,

et al., 1928), this branch of Western spiritual tradition is termed *the completion of the integration of opposites*, resulting in the development of the philosopher's stone capable of producing the metaphorical gold of the alchemists (Biederman, 2006; DeJong, 2002; Edinger, 1994; Jaffee, 1979; Jung, 1968, 1983, 1989; S. Klossowski de Rola, 1973; S. Klossowski de Rola, 1988/1997; Schwartz-Salant, 1995; Von Franz, 1980). **k**

The 12 positive principles of couple relationship development. Batthyany De La Lama, and De La Lama (Batthyany De La Lama, 2011a; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) developed 12 positive principles for couple relationship development. These principles stand at the core of the Positive and Holistic Couple Relationship Development theory, and help guide positive couple relationship development interventions. The 12 principles include the following: positive, developmental, holistic, polarity/complementarity, love/transcendence, simultaneity, alchemical, transformative, narrative, creative/artistic, emergent, and action (Batthyany De La Lama, 2011a; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a). The 12 principles, adapted from Batthyany de La Lama (2011a) are described in more detail in table 1 below:

Table 1
The 12 Positive Relationship Development Principles
<p>1. Positive Principle & the Development of the Positive Core (what?)</p> <p>This principle states that individuals and their relationships change and develop positively by focusing on the development of their individual and their relationship's positive core. The positive core is developed by focusing on an affirmative topic, strength, or positive dynamic to grow and expand</p>
<p>2. Adult Developmental Principle (why?)</p> <p>This principle states that when the body is fully grown, individuals and their relationships may continue to develop in the inner world of emotions, mind, identity, meaning, worldview, values, beliefs, and spirituality. Positive development of individuals and of their relationship is promoted when couple members strive to develop and soul mate beyond the immediate, physical, emotional, and communication levels into these higher, more abstract levels</p>

Table 1: The 12 Positive Relationship Development Principles (Continued)

3. Holistic Principle: (where might the positive be developed?)

This principle states that individuals and their relationships have large unaddressed, underdeveloped, and untapped emotional, intellectual, meaning, narrative, creative, and spiritual areas of their self and their relationships that contain great potential for positive personal and relationship growth. For positive and holistic relationship development to occur, these areas need to be understood and addressed, individually and conjointly

4. Polarity & Complementarity Principle

This principle states that polar opposites constitute the fabric and core organization of our universe, including male/female, +/-, North/South. Polarity fuels the dynamic interaction of the couple dyad. The positive and holistic relationship development of couples is promoted when the psychological fuel generated by polarity is directed towards complementarity and soul mating.

5. The Love, Soul & Transcendence Principle

This principle is at the core of a flourishing relationship; it integrates the polar opposites and helps to balance the 4 relationship dynamics of growth and stability, intimacy and independence, providing the glue that holds the partners and their relationship together. The positive and holistic development of couple relationships is promoted if this intangible, elusive, subjective, imaginal, and sacred principle in each individual and in the relationship is actively and creatively strengthened, honored, nurtured, and protected from the individualistic and utilitarian meanings and narrative of consumerism and its tendencies in society.

6. Simultaneity

This principle, which is based on quantum physics' concept of an observer created reality, and on Appreciative Inquiry's principle that inquiry is always simultaneously intervention, states that the instant a question is asked, change is set into motion. The person asking the question has the power to direct and change awareness and the flow of consciousness. With this great power comes great responsibility. The positive and holistic development of couple relationships is promoted by asking the questions that direct awareness towards the positive and the soul mating process.

7. Alchemical Principle: the power of the interaction effect

This principle states that the couple's committed relationship is an alchemical vessel in which the relationship is alchemically cooked, exerting pressure on each partner to transform the gross aspects of the relationship into alchemical gold. Positive and holistic relationship development is promoted through alchemical cooking which stimulates non-linear, complex, dynamic, individual and relationship development as the partners stay with the relationship, navigate turbulence, face chaos, and ultimately gain a higher level of psychological functioning, deeper intimacy and love, and the positive emergent characteristics of self-organization, long-term wellbeing, and flourishing

8. Transformative Principle

This principle states that people understand their world based on their assumptive world, or conceptual box. Ideally, conceptual boxes, like complex dynamic systems, should be flexible, resilient, open and receptive to new information from the environment. Committed relationships are powerful stages - like theater stages - for conceptual box-growing. The positive and holistic relationship development of couples is promoted through an ongoing challenge of and reorganization of the couple partners' conceptual boxes, dissolving some assumptions, beliefs, and ideologies, and developing others, sometimes through crisis and subsequent posttraumatic growth.

9. The Narrative Principle: meaning and identify matter!

This principle states that individuals and couples are largely defined by the stories they tell themselves about themselves, and by the stories others tell about them and their relationship. Individuals and couples have choices about the stories they choose to tell. Positive and holistic relationship development is promoted when couples develop positive stories about each partner and about their relationship in answer to the questions: What are we about, and why? What do we want to be about and why?

10. The Creative-Artistic Principle

This principle states that affirmative creative, artistic, and imaginal actions focus physical, emotional and mental energy to open up to inner life, uncover and develop positive meanings, develop and focus the relationship vision and goals, and engage the whole being of the couple. Positive and holistic relationship development is promoted when the couple engages in creative, artistic and imaginal practices to encourage the emergence of positive content, help embody the vision of the positive core, and focus the narrative/story the couple wants to be about.

Table 1: The 12 Positive Relationship Development Principles (Continued)

11. Emergence/self-organizing principle

This principle states that couple relationships are complex, non-linear dynamic systems. Such systems move through bifurcation, turbulence, and chaos into phase changes that revolve around new attractor states, and lead to emergence and positive self-organization. Positive and holistic relationship development of couples is promoted when couples seek out and settle around new, growth-oriented and affirmative relationship attractor states that allow for positive, growth-centric insights, strengths, and transformations to emerge suddenly, non-linearly, under the pressure and seeming chaos of the crisis situation, leading to a higher order self-organization of their lives and their relationships, that is more resilient and sustainable.

12. Action Principle

This principle states that the actions and behaviors that individual couple members engage in matter to the story of what they each are about, and to the story of what they want to be about together, in their relationship. Positive and holistic relationship development is promoted when positive actions are engaged in, not only for their immediate reward, but as symbolic enactments, rituals, and practices that reinforce the greater narrative of what their lives together are about and/or should be about.

Conclusion to conceptual framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study is the PHRDT which includes the Soul Mates Model, the 12 principles of positive relationships development, and the concept of the development of the philosopher's stone described above. In this study, the 7 phases of the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) will serve as conceptual boxes to organize my collection of narrative data about my experience and interpretation of what I consider to be some of the most salient scenarios I experienced in each of these 7 phases of my 27-year long soul mating relationship. The alchemical pictograms associated with each of these phases by Batthyany De La Lama and colleagues (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011), provide the visual data to help me focus the data gathering and to uncover additional aspects of my relationship experience that I may not be able to probe into with verbal means alone. The 12 positive relationship development principles (Batthyany De La Lama, 2011a; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) described above, will provide me with a framework to analyze and interpret the data I collect in order to help answer my research questions.

CHAPTER III: DESIGN AND METHOD

Chapter overview

In this chapter I first repeat the purpose and the research questions guiding the study from chapter I. Second, I provide a rationale for the qualitative research design and for the method of visual autoethnography that I have selected as best suited to help me answer the research questions. Third, I provide a statement of confidence of my prior knowledge regarding the use of the autoethnographic method that I have selected. Fourth, I describe how I actually gathered the narrative and visual data for this study, and what role the visual component will play in this study. Fifth, I will describe how I will interpret and analyze the data. Sixth, I address the issue of validity within the contexts of my selected research method of autoethnography, and last, I address the delimitations of this study.

Research design

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is threefold: First to explore my experience of the processes and dynamics of positive and holistic couple relationship development within the culture of my 27-year long couple relationship through the lens of the Soul Mates Model's seven phases (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), and their corresponding alchemical pictograms. Second, to uncover if and how any of the 12 principles of PHRDT (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) played out in these 7 phases. And third, to explore if and how any of these findings may help inform my own teaching and practice.

Research questions guiding this study

The research questions this study explores include the following:

Main question: What is my experience of the culture of my 27-year- long relationship with my partner, when viewed through the lens of Positive and Holistic Couple Relationship development theory?

Sub questions:

- How have the processes and dynamics of the Soul Mates Model's 7 phases of positive and holistic couple relationship development played out in my own 27-year long relationship?
- What meanings and interpretations can I derive from the alchemical pictograms associated with the 7 phases of the Soul Mates Model in the context of the positive and holistic couple relationship development of my relationship?
- Have any of the 12 principles of positive relationship development theory played out in the 7 phases of this relationship, and if so how?
- What is my experience of the long-term effect of what I see as our deliberate efforts at positive and holistic relationship development on my 27-year long couple relationship?

Overview of the study's design and method

To fulfill the purpose of this study I have selected an interpretivist qualitative design (Dale Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Denzin, 2014; Grbich, 2013) and the method of visual autoethnography (Chang, 2008; Chaplin, 2011; C. Mitchell, 2011) as best suited to help me answer the research questions described above.

The qualitative design rationale. Grbich (2013) asserts the appropriateness of the qualitative research design to investigate “culture, phenomena, structural processes, and historical changes (Grbich, 2013, p. 5). The investigation of culture and phenomena are particularly relevant to this study in that the investigation of culture involves “anything from investigating the behaviors and rituals of a particular tribe or group of people in a particular setting” (p.5) and the investigation of phenomena involves “detailed investigations over time of a particular experience” (Grbich, 2013, p. 5), which is what I did in this study.

Rationale. The rationale for selecting a qualitative design as most suitable to answer the research questions guiding this dissertation is based on the fact that the purpose of this study is centered on A. the *qualitative, interpretive exploration* of the processes, dynamics, meanings, and interpretations of my own experience of the 7 soul mating phases *within the culture* of my own couple relationship, as well as on B. the *meanings and interpretations I derive* from the alchemical pictograms associated with these 7 phases. Because this study is *not* focused on the quantification of behaviors, and/or variance theory- driven statistical analysis, it is not suitable for a quantitative design (Maxwell, 2013).

The interpretive position of this qualitative study. Qualitative studies can be conducted from a variety of philosophical frameworks. Qualitative studies that center on the mere factual description of events may very well be conducted from a post-positivist, objectivist philosophical stance, even if such factual descriptions are gained through qualitative interviews (Crotty, 1998; Paul, 2005). This study, however, is based on an *interpretivist stance* (Dale Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Grbich, 2013; Paul, 2005; Willis, 2007), which rejects “contemporary ideas that social science should emulate the positivist methods of the natural sciences because humans could be treated like complex machines” (Willis, 2007, p. 7). Instead, this interpretivist stance asserts that

although humans are influenced by their environment, “humans are also influenced by the subjective perception of their environment –their subjective realities” (Willis, 2007, p. 6). Therefore, “*for interpretivists, what the world means to the person or group being studied is critically important to good research in the social sciences [emphasis mine]*”. Researchers conducting their investigations based on an interpretivist stance thus “favor qualitative methods such as case studies, interviews and observation because those methods are better ways of getting at how humans interpret the world around them” (Willis, 2007, p. 6) The interpretivist philosophical stance, combined with the critical realist philosophical stance I described in chapter I, will thus allow my inquiry to answer the type of qualitative, experiential, culturally complex, meaning-, interpretation- and context-rich questions this study intends to explore (Dale Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Denzin, 2014; Grbich, 2013; Maxwell, 2013).

Method

Introduction to method

I have selected the qualitative method of visual autoethnography (Chaplin, 2011), as best suited to answer the research questions guiding this study. In this section I will thus first describe the method of autoethnography, its basic interpretivist stance, and when the use of autoethnography as method may be appropriate to help answer the study’s research questions. Second, I will describe the visual autoethnography, why the visual component is helpful to this autoethnographic investigation, and describe the content of the visual component I am including into this autoethnography. I complete this section with a statement of confidence regarding this method of visual autoethnography based on my prior experience with the method.

What is autoethnography? Autoethnography is a qualitative research method in which the researcher and his or her own personal life experiences become the subject of the research

study. The method of autoethnography thus combines elements of autobiography and ethnography to help the researcher first gather the data, then interpret it and finally write the autoethnography (Chang, 2008; Chaplin, 2011; Ellis, 2003; Ellis, et al., 2011).

Most autoethnographies are interpretivist. Ellis embarked into the development of autoethnography as method from a *social interactionist* stance (Ellis, 2003; Ellis, et al., 2011) and others have termed their autoethnography research *critical autoethnography* (Boylorn & Orbe, 2013). Yet most autoethnographies can be considered to be basically *interpretivist*, because, as Denzin, states (Denzin, 2014) “the subject matter of interpretive autoethnography is the life experiences and performances of a person” (p. 1), which is what all autoethnographies have in common. This study will thus be an autoethnography conducted from a *basic interpretivist stance* as described by Denzin, (2014) who asserts that in a person’s life experiences, their remembering, telling, interpreting, retelling, and reinterpreting is what matters to the inquiry, because there is no so-called objective gold standard of truth that the stories told today can be compared to for an objective, absolute accuracy and/or factual truth about what actually happened and how it might have truthfully felt to the researcher-participant conducting the autoethnography. In fact, “there is no truth in the painting of a life, only multiple images and traces of what has been seen, what could have been, and what now is” (Denzin, 2014, p. 1).

When is autoethnography as method appropriate? Grbich (2013) asserts that the qualitative method of autoethnography is best suited for the investigation of “the self in various contexts” (p. 119), as well as for the investigation of the experience of the researcher’s own life. She considers the core reason for conducting an autoethnography as “the existence of a personal experience as a part of a group or culture and the capacity to create sufficient distance in order to write and analyze this experience” (Grbich 2013, p. 120). The method of visual autoethnography

is well suited to the purpose of this investigation because this investigation centers on my personal experience within the culture of my couple relationship, and it is intended to uncover the phenomena that constitute the positive and holistic development of my couple relationships in the context of the 7 phases of soul mating, as well as the meanings and interpretations I derived from these experiences and from the eight pictograms of Alchemy associated with the seven phases of the soul mate model.

What is a visual autoethnography? A visual autoethnography is an autoethnography that includes a visual component to aid in the data gathering, interpretation, and communication (Chaplin, 2011; Rose, 2012; Spencer, 2011). The visual component of the autoethnography thus serves the triple function of helping me gather more relevant data, better organize the data, and better communicate the findings or stories uncovered in the autoethnography to my audience.

What is the visual component of this study, and why is it useful? In this study I will gather narrative data derived from my experience with, and my interpretation of the 8 or more 17th century alchemical pictograms associated with the 7 phases of the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, 2010g; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b). These pictograms have helped guide the understanding and mapping out of the processes and dynamics of the inner life of followers of the Hermetic Tradition for many centuries (Biederman, 2006; DeJong, 2002; S. Klossowski de Rola, 1973; S. Klossowski de Rola, 1988/1997). In the 20th Century, they have also informed the work of Carl Gustav Jung and his followers (Edinger, 1994, 1995; Jung, 1966/1992, 1968, 1983, 1989; Schwartz-Salant, 1995, 1998). As a life-long student and practitioner of Hermetic Philosophy, and based on my prior knowledge of their metaphorical significance, these images helped me to better understand the intrapsychic dynamics of the development of my relationship as I have experienced it.

The pictograms I am utilizing have the potential to generate a unique visual and emotional impact on me, the researcher/subject of this study because they will speak to the right, intuitive, emotional, and creative side of the brain (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2009). The pictograms are thus expected to extend, complement, and organize information that may be gathered through other, more traditional sources such as journal entries and memory recollections. These pictograms are thus expected to provide holistic, imaginal data that may not be otherwise obtained (Chaplin, 2011; Rose, 2012; Spencer, 2011).

The alchemical pictograms I am using in this study will thus help me better understand my own experience of my couple relationship culture from an *interpretive* and an *inner life* perspective, and allow me to more accurately describe my experience of the processes and dynamics of my relationship's development to my readers, than I would ever be able to do with words alone. The images thus serve a 3-fold function: A. To help me better understand my experience of the 7 phases of soul mating. B. To help me delimit my data gathering. C. To help me better describe and illustrate these experiences to my readers by providing visuals that can help make my abstract experiences more perceptible.

Statement of confidence about visual autoethnography based on prior experience.

At this point in my doctoral studies I feel confident of my ability to conduct an autoethnographic study based on my training in, and on my prior experience with this method. In the fall semester of 2010, I completed a doctoral level course on autoethnography at the Department of Communications at the University of South Florida, Tampa campus, and received an A grade. This course was especially important to my learning of the autoethnography method because it was taught by Dr. Caroline Ellis, who is considered the founder and foremost expert on this method worldwide (Ellis, et al., 2011). As a capstone project in Dr. Ellis's course, I completed a

visual autoethnography that included the alchemical pictograms I am using in this study (Batthyany De La Lama, 2010a). Although Dr. Ellis did not specifically teach the inclusion of a visual components into autoethnography at that time, today, visual components have been successfully included into a variety of qualitative methods (C. Mitchell, 2011; Rose, 2012; Spencer, 2011), including autoethnography (Chang, 2008; Chaplin, 2011). In 2013, as capstone project for my Introduction to Qualitative Research course as part of my doctoral studies, I completed a second visual autoethnography, this time using 3 researcher-generated photographs (Batthyany De La Lama, 2013).

Data collection

In this section I describe the collection procedures I will employ to gather the data for this study. The terms “setting” and “sample” are not applicable to the autoethnography method (Chang, 2008; Denzin, 2014; Ellis, et al., 2011); I am thus refraining from further addressing them in this study.

Types of data I collected. In this study, I collected two kinds of data, including a) The data derived from my engagement with the visual component of this study which includes the eight or alchemical pictograms, and b) the narrative data derived from my key experiences in my 27-year long relationship with my partner in each of the Soul Mates Model’s 7 phases.

Data derived from my engagement with the alchemical pictograms. The data I derived from my engagement with the alchemical pictograms is descriptive and interpretive in that I first briefly describe the general symbolic meaning of each pictogram, and then interpret its meaning in the context of my experience of the positive and holistic development of my couple relationship.

Narrative data from key experiences with each of the Soul Mates Model's 7 phases. The narrative stories constructed from the experiences, observations, and interpretations of the narrator-researcher-subject's life stand at the center of an autoethnography (Denzin, 2014; Ellis, et al., 2011). I thus constructed stories based on my experiences, observations, thoughts, feelings, interpretations, and reflections (Dale Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Maxwell, 2013) of the positive and holistic relationship development of my own 27 year-long couple relationship in each of the Soul Mates model's 7 phases (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b). The 7 phases have served me as categories, or "bins" for the collection and organization of the data (Maxwell, 2013).

Data collection procedures I employed. In this study I gathered data through a variety of procedures, including: 1.) the engagement with the pictograms. 2.) the compilation of narrative data from my memories, recollections, journal entries, old photos, family conversations, meditative experiences, dreams, and reflections on the positive and holistic relationship development of my 27 years of couple relationship. 3.) Data derived from notes I took during the months in which I conducted the data gathering for the study.

Selection of 8 alchemical pictograms from my previous work. I selected eight alchemical pictograms to be investigate based on my prior work with these pictograms (Batthyany De La Lama, 2010a, 2010b; Batthyany De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008), and am including a copy of these images in chapter IV of the study.

Engagement with the pictograms. To collect the data from these eight pictograms, I engaged with these pictograms in a series of imaginal practices (Cranton, 2006; Dirx, 2006) to uncover if these pictograms helped me understand the positive and holistic relationship development of my couple relationship in the 7 phases of soul mating. During these imaginal practices, which took about 20-30 minutes a day over several days, I used these allegorical

images as visual and imaginal gateways to access relevant data about the key experiences of my relationship culture in the 7 phases of soul mating. Following each session, I took notes of any insights, reflections, and reactions, and repeated the procedure over several days until sufficient new data was gathered. I then included these data under each of the 7 phase sections as part of the final report.

Compilation of narrative data from my experience. In order to answer the research questions that guide this study and to create the autobiographical and interpretivist stories that lie at the heart of autoethnography (Chang, 2008; Denzin, 2014; Ellis, et al., 2011) I compiled narrative data from the investigations of *my most salient experiences*, based on memories, recollections, journal entries, old photos, family conversations, meditative experiences, dreams, and reflections on the positive and holistic relationship development of my 27 years of couple relationship in each of the 7 phases of soul mating. These narratives were constructed based on the suggestions by Bochner and Riggs, as cited in Denzin, (2014, p. 4), who state that the stories that build an interpretive autoethnography should include the following:

1. People depicted as characters.
2. A scene, place or context where the story occurs.
3. An epiphany or crisis that provides dramatic tension, around which the emplotted events depicted in the story revolve and toward which a resolution is pointed.
4. A temporal order of events.
5. A point or moral to the story which gives meaning to the experiences depicted.

Data analysis and interpretation

In this section I describe how I organized the data, how I analyzed and interpreted the data gathered from the visual component, and the narrative data, and also describe the theories

that I drew from to analyze and interpret the data in order to “provide a sense of how the analysis will actually be done” and “make explicit why these strategies were chosen (Maxwell, 2013, p, 104).

How I organized the data. As stated above, I utilized each of the 7 phases of the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) as a conceptual “bin” to organize my data gathering. Following the data gathering and their compilation in the form of narratives, I proceeded to analyze and interpret the data in each of these 7 bins, starting with an image of the pictogram and a section addressing this visual data, and then followed by a section addressing the narrative data. This structured approach helped me keep my data, their analysis and their interpretation well organized, thus facilitating the analysis, interpretation, and communication of the processes and dynamics I investigated.

How I analyzed and interpreted the data gathered from the visual component. I analyzed and interpreted the data I gathered from examining the visual alchemical pictograms to uncover *what if any meaning these pictograms provide* for the understanding of my couple relationship’s positive and holistic development in the key experiences of the 7 soul mating phases based on the conceptual framework of Positive and Holistic Couple Development Theory that guides this study.

How I analyzed and interpreted the narrative data. I analyzed and interpreted the narrative data by looking at each of the stories constructed from my key experiences of the 7 soul mating phases and *uncovering if, where, when, and how any of the twelve principles of positive couple relationship development played out in my experience* of the 7 soul mating phases in the culture of my couple relationship.

Theories I drew from to analyze and interpret the data. To make sense of the data as well as to answer the research questions guiding this study, I drew upon concepts derived from the *Positive and Holistic Couple Relationship Development Theory* described in chapter II of this proposal, thus using mainly my own theory to make sense of the data in the way described by Grbich (Grbich, 2013). Moreover, because the *complexity paradigm* is not only useful but also necessary to understand a couple's positive and holistic relationship development towards a future ideal state (in contrast to viewing couples from the traditional marriage-centric perspective), and this complexity paradigm also informs the 12 positive principles of couple relationship development (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) that guide this study, I also drew from select core constructs of complexity theory to analyze and interpret the data collected in this study. The core constructs of complexity theory include: linearity versus non-linearity, extreme sensitivity to initial conditions, bifurcation, criticalization, turbulence, chaos, attractor states, emergence, and self-organization (Goldstein, et al., 2010; Morin, 2008; Willis, 2007). I thus also brought in select concepts of existing theory to make sense of the data as described by Maxwell (2013), Lichtman (Lichtman, 2013), Willis (Willis, 2007), and Grbich (Grbich, 2013). In addition, I also drew from relevant, interdisciplinary concepts found in the literature to analyze and interpret the data *as needed*, following the general, basic qualitative data interpretation approach described by Lichtman (2013).

Researcher bias and validity

In this section I address the issue of the self of the researcher as instrument of inquiry and the concept of researcher bias in qualitative investigations, as well as the issue of validity in the context of this qualitative visual autoethnography.

The self of the researcher as instrument of inquiry. As is common in qualitative research, in this qualitative study, I am the research instrument for this investigation. This means, that the nature of the problem I am investigating, the data I select to gather, and how I analyze and interpret it are intrinsically linked to who I am and what I believe in, as a researcher and as a person (Dale Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Maxwell, 2013; Piantanida & Garman, 2009; Willis, 2007). Therefore, in order to help the reader get a sense of who I am, and where I come from as a social science researcher, I have described my background in chapter I of this study.

Moreover, as qualitative and interpretivist-oriented researcher conducting this study, I also understand that *attempting to remove personal bias from my inquiry is impossible* because as qualitative researcher I am the primary research instrument (Dale Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Maxwell, 2013; Piantanida & Garman, 2009; Willis, 2007). In fact, many contemporary qualitative research experts assert that concerns about possible bias in qualitative research are based on outdated conceptual models of what qualitative research is or should be, which have been carried over from quantitative research design and methods. These experts thus assert, that the term *bias* has no place in contemporary qualitative research design (Dale Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Maxwell, 2013; Piantanida & Garman, 2009; Willis, 2007). Consequently, because in this autoethnographic study my experiences, meanings, and interpretations are the ones under investigation (Denzin, 2014), instead of attempting to “bracket” out my own beliefs and worldview to avoid bias, as some qualitative researchers may still attempt to do, I will use my assumptions, beliefs, and worldview as tools to help me conduct this study (Dale Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Maxwell, 2013; Piantanida & Garman, 2009).

Validity. Schwandt (2007), states that in the social sciences, validity “traditionally serves as benchmark for inquiry”. Therefore, “to say that the findings of social scientific investigations

are (or must be) valid is to argue that the findings are in fact (or must be) true” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 309). True here “means that the findings accurately represent the phenomenon to which they refer” (p. 309). Yet this traditional concept of validity has been criticized by many qualitative researchers during the last decades who argue that this notion of validity rests on a *naïve or direct realism stance* based on “the idea that we can have direct or unmediated knowledge of the world” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 309), and thus the belief that there is one, pure, discoverable truth “out there” independent from the observer and which can serve as gold standard by which to judge the truth or veracity of the results of an investigation. The concept of a factual, independent truth that can be discovered, and that will look and mean objectively the same to all observers, independently from the worldview and bias of such observers, has been rejected by many interpretivist qualitative researchers (Denzin, 2014; Schwandt, 2007; Willis, 2007). Therefore, the concept of validity as it is traditionally applied in quantitative research designs is seen as problematic by many (Denzin, 2014; Maxwell, 2013; Willis, 2007), even inappropriate by some interpretive qualitative researchers, and by most autoethnographers (Denzin, 2014; Ellis, 2003, 2008; Ellis, et al., 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2008).

At the time of this writing, therefore, experts do not appear to agree on validity criteria for qualitative research in general. See, for example, Altheide, & Johnson (2011) for a multiplicity of views on validity in qualitative research, or Lichtman (2013) for autoethnography in particular. And although some experts mention authenticity and trustworthiness as an early mark and possibly still a basic necessity to qualitative research validity (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011), and others have devised new forms of validity such as Richardson’s crystalline validity (as cited in Lincoln et. al., 2011), for the purpose of this visual autoethnography I believe

that it is most appropriate for me to adopt a set of validity criteria derived from the recommendations of several autoethnography experts, which I am describing below.

The first 3 validity criteria which most contemporary autoethnography experts endorse have been set forth by Ellis (Ellis, et al., 2011), and include that (a) good autoethnography should be evocative and thus engaging to the reader (b) it should contain rich description, and (c) that researcher reflexivity be actively employed (Chaplin, 2011; Ellis, et al., 2011; Grbich, 2013). In addition to these three criteria Chang (2008) also asserts that good autoethnography needs to “transcend mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation” to uncover cultural themes (Chang, 2008, p. 43).

Moreover, Chang (2008) has set forth a series of 8 criteria for conducting a good or valid autoethnography including: 1.) that a good autoethnography needs to address exceptional occurrences, 2.) analyze omissions, shadow narratives, and alternative interpretations, 3.) connect the present with the past, 4.) analyze relationships between self and others, 5.) compare personal experiences with those of others, 6.) contextualize broadly, 7.) compare with social science constructs, and 8.) frame with theories. I will thus hold my autoethnography to the two sets of validity criteria for autoethnography described above.

Delimitations of this study

The following section describes some of the delimitations of this study. Limitations are addressed upon completion of the data gathering, analysis, and interpretation.

This study focuses on the positive processes, dynamics, meanings, insights and behaviors I experienced as occurring within the culture of my 27-year long relationships. This does not mean that my relationship is superior, more positive, or less prone to problems and disagreements than other long-term couple relationships. It simply means that within the context

of this study my relationship problems will not be the focus of my inquiry. Moreover, the study will focus on the 7 distinct phases of my relationship as delineated by the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), and the data gathering will center on one or more representative scenarios of each phase. This study is not intended to provide an exhaustive account of my experiences in each of these 7 relationship phases, nor is it intended to investigate my partner's or anyone else's experience of the 7 phases of our relationship. Such as lengthy investigation would exceed the scope of this dissertation.

Although a theoretical framework of Positive and Holistic Relationships Development Theory is utilized to focus data gathering, analysis, and interpretation, this study is *not* a Grounded Theory method study, because theory is not being built as data is gathered, but theory is already brought in a priory, to serve as a conceptual lens to focus the data gathering, interpretation, and analysis.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

Overview of this chapter:

In this chapter I describe the findings of this study, which include the narrative and the visual data, their discussion, analysis, and interpretation, which provides the answer the various research questions guiding this study. This chapter is comprised of two main sections. In the 1st section I compile the narrative data and present it in the form of key scenarios in chronological order. In the 2nd section of this chapter, I assemble and describe the visual data of the 8 alchemical pictograms, and then proceed to analyze and interpret both the visual and the narrative data to help me answer the remaining research questions guiding this study.

Overview of the narrative data section:

In this following section I am compiling the narrative data for this study in the form of key scenarios which I believe best describe how I experienced the culture of my 27-year- long relationship with my partner, viewed through the lens of the 7 phases/stages of Positive and Holistic Relationship Development Theory (PHRDT). I am using the 7 phases/Stages of Soul Mating described by (Batthyany De La Lama, 2010g, 2011a; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) as organizing “bins” for the data as described in the methodology section of this study, and present the scenarios in a chronological manner, spanning several decades.

I present these scenarios *in a chronological and uninterrupted sequence*. I have chosen to present the narrative data in this chronological and uninterrupted manner in order to fulfill one of the most salient criteria for autoethnography stated by Ellis and colleagues (Ellis, et al., 2011),

namely that *good autoethnography be evocative*. Please note that although I experimented with different structures at the onset of my narrative data gathering, including the blending of these key scenarios with their immediate analysis as it is often done in autoethnography (Chang, 2008; Grbich, 2013; Lichtman, 2013), after much experimentation, I found this chronological and uninterrupted sequencing of the key scenarios to be more evocative, and thus to allow the reader to experience the scenarios in a more direct manner.

Disclaimer

Note to the reader: Some of the names of the individuals appearing in the narrative data of this study have been changed for privacy reasons.

Encounter

Marbella, Spain, 1969. I'm a teenager, spending another summer in Spain where I grew up. My mother and my father have separated several years earlier; my Dad moved me and my siblings to Austria after they split up. When in Austria, I live in Salzburg where I attend Hotel Management School. For the summers I come back down here to Marbella to visit my mother and spend some time with my old friends. At this time, she is still living in the larger house she had formerly shared with my Dad. I grew up with her living in the same house, but emotionally she wasn't there at all. Then one day when I was 13, she decided to turn her back on the aristocratic elite and business tycoons she frequented with my Dad to start an affair with the gardener. When that relationship fell apart, she befriended the local gypsy Flamenco musician and dancer community, declared herself a psychic, and began to read Tarot cards. She left my father and us kids, and did not look back much.

But today is a perfect day in July. The sun is high in the sky, the Mediterranean at the bottom of the hill of which the house is perched, looks silky and flat like a lake. I can see the rock of Gibraltar crystal clear on my left, and if I look hard, I can even make out the outlines of the Atlas mountain chain on the African coast beyond. In this region, the clarity in the air usually heralds a weather change, but today, the climate is pristine. Behind me the house is quiet, empty; everyone has gone to town. I have my bathing suit on; barefoot, I walk across the warm tiles of the terrace floor and dip my toes into the pool, then sit down at the edge. The water is glossy and calm, only the sound of bees stirs the air, as they busily search for honey in the geranium and bougainvillea gracing the yard. The pool is circular, the nicest my father has built so far. Careful not to disturb the water too much, I submerge my body into the liquid, and let myself float a while.

Suddenly my perceptions of my body and my surroundings change, and I enter an altered state.

I have lost the awareness of my body, and instead I now feel surrounded by a substance of love—the Universe's, the Source's, God's love. I see how everything is made of this substance, everything emanates this all-encompassing love, and everything pulsates with this love. Instinctively, I look at myself and see that I am surrounded by an oval, aura-like, crusty substance that normally prevents me from taking this love into my being. The love is there, has always been there, and would always be there for me; I had only to let it inside of me. This love substance is ethereal, yet also very strong and firm. It is inside every particle, a powerful force that holds everything together. This love is ever expanding, pressing against my crusty egg shell aura, working to erode it until a crack forms somewhere so that the love can penetrate more easily and do its job. I sense that this love is intelligent, that it can communicate, that it can

imprint me with an idea. At that instant, I sense that the reason I am on earth is to develop a language to communicate to others what I have seen here. Perhaps such language could help others see and feel the Love that was ready for them if they only knew how to open up and let it in.

I remain in this strange state of bliss for three days and three nights, and then I simply return normal awareness of my body and my surroundings; my perspective on life, however, is forever changed. Immediately I make plans to act on the imperative of developing a new “language”. I already speak three languages, German, Spanish, and French, yet none of them seem adequate to describe what I have seen. Perhaps if I change my career to psychology, I will be able to develop the language I needed to talk about the intrapsychic, transpersonal, and spiritual realm I see. So that’s my plan, when I complete Hotel Management School I will go the University in Austria and study psychology.

Marbella, Spain, 1975. I’m spending another summer with my mother. She has now moved from the pretty house with the circular pool up on the hill that my father built during his years as a real estate developer, into a small bungalow by the sea, one that my father let her use after they split. The bungalow sits in one corner off his large estate, in the back yard of his own house. So even though I am supposed to be with my Mom, I still see my Dad every day. This morning, on my way to the beach, my Dad calls me from the upstairs window of his house.

“Hey Lille, wait down there, I need to talk to you”.

“Ok.” Within minutes he is by my side; we take a stroll through the mature landscape of his estate.

“I hear you have been hanging out with that Guti friend of yours all summer, the son of that cab driver from town. That’s a very bad idea. You better fish yourself a rich and aristocratic husband soon, because I am not supporting you much longer”.

“Yes Dad, you’ve said that before. And Guti is a friend, I’m not dating him. And what’s wrong with his father being a cab driver? At least he has an honest job, not like some of your ‘friends’ like that guy Gerard, who said he is trying to print money in his garage”.

“Well I’ll settle for rich as long as he is not a Jew, but you’ve got to get this together soon!”

“I won’t just marry for money Dad, you know that. It’s not easy to find someone to love.

“Bah, love is overrated! Marriage is a financial transaction, believe me. Aristocratic women, Countesses like you are worthless unless they’ve got “goods” to trade. If the woman is ugly, she better have money for a decent guy to be saddled with her. If she doesn’t have money, she better have looks”.

“Yes, you’ve told me that before”.

“I’ve said it clearly enough. You girls (referring to me and my 9 year old sister) won’t get a penny. I won’t split my estate. Your brother Zsigmond, the male, *the heir* is the only one that counts as far as I am concerned. He is the 14th Zsigmond (or was he the 13th?) in the Batthyany lineage; he gets everything”.

I still love my father, and I would like to please him. Yet I much prefer to socialize with my local friends from Marbella while in Spain. Back in Austria, I prefer the “normal” friends I have at Hotel and Tourism Management School. Socializing with the aristocracy and the jet- set my father frequents feels inauthentic, contrived. I simply cannot get myself to share their values

and beliefs. Although groomed from a young age to know how to move and talk appropriately in those circles, I have tried to avoid them as much as I can.

Was this avoidance severing me from my own Batthyany roots, cutting me off from my own flesh and blood, my aristocratic heritage?

Late that evening, under a glorious full moon, feeling lost and utterly alone, I walk down to the beach, the one adjacent to the jet-set hot-spot that was the Marbella Club Hotel - now eerily quiet and empty at this late hour of the night. I dip my toes into the balmy sea, and my world came crashing down on me. Perhaps I am indeed worthless as a Batthyany because I cannot envision finding a suitable mate among aristocracy that I could love. Taking refuge in my mother's new social circle of chaotic and underachieving hippies, gypsies, and New Age divorcees, is not an option for me. Being forced to move to Austria after my parents split has helped me build new relationships with Austrians and make some good friends over there. But my Austrian friends are not here in the summer. On the other hand, living in Austria all year has now severely strained my ties to my local Spanish friends. I had become a dweller in two worlds, not really from there nor from here. Now my Dad wanted to push me to add the aristocratic world to all that...

The truth is that I'm not fully in any world.

I start to pray.

God, I can't fit in with any one of them? Who, where are my people? To what world do I belong? I don't feel much for a while, and then suddenly I become aware of a presence. It feels clean and pure, spiritual; it starts to speak. "Lille, I am your ancestor, Prince Rakoczi of Transylvania. I am here to tell you that you must return to your Batthyany roots; seek out those amongst nobility that have a good heart, and you will fulfill your destiny!"

I'm shocked; this makes no sense at all. In my mind, returning to my roots amongst aristocracy is the most *unspiritual* life I could possibly imagine—shallow, materialistic, hypocritical, vapid, and fake in every way. In aristocratic circles people are glorified for the families they are born into, not for their strengths of character, their noble values, or for what they have accomplished themselves. It felt unnatural that a spiritual presence would give me such a seemingly materialistic directive. Nevertheless, based on the intensity of this presence, the authenticity with which its words came across, as potent as when I had sensed God's love attempting to permeate my being, there was no doubt that I had to take this message seriously. Feeling severed and uprooted from ones country and ones friends feels awe full, but the worse severance of all is the one that might happen between ones consciousness ones inner spiritual guidance system, between conscious awareness and soul. Although I know that I have to take telepathic messages from invisible beings with a grain of salt, I am committed to do all I can to remain aligned with my inner guidance at all times. I cannot dismiss this communication as hallucination. The quality of the encounter brings a sense of honesty, authenticity, and depth that makes me feel that it is not only true in the ordinary sense, but belongs to a higher reality that may be even more genuine than what I see most people experience down here, in the physical realm. In fact, it shares core qualitative characteristics with what I felt when surrounded with Universal Love. Given these impressions, I must give this being and its message the benefit of the doubt.

When I return home in the early morning hours, I find my mother sitting in her tiny kitchen, barefoot, artfully wrapped in a colorful sarong, her long, died blond hair draped over one shoulder, patiently spoon-feeding *flan* to her latest lover, a married, father of three, Moroccan bar tender. I wait until Antoine leaves, then tell her about my experience and declare

that I am deciding to take the voice's advice seriously, seek out my Batthyany relatives in Vienna and start to study psychology as soon as I graduate from Hotel Management School.

She dismisses my vision as nonsense, not due to its psychic nature but based on what she believes to be wrong advice. I would never be pleased with a pale, bland, central European, she says. I need a fiery southern man, someone with dark chest hair like her Antoine. With that she marches off to her living room, where she turns up the volume on her favorite Flamenco song, begins a trance-like flamenco dance of *bulerias*, and stomps away at the wooden planks she had custom made to be inserted into her tile floor in front of a giant mirror.

We were not close, my mother and I. But this takes me aback. How could she, of all people, not understand the importance of a spiritual message, especially one received in answer to an urgent prayer? Was she not a psychic card reader now, into spiritual stuff? Or, were her psychic utterances mere flamboyant posturing, not really connected to the other side? I felt completely isolated and unsupported, but couldn't wait to get started with my new plan! I didn't even imagine then, that "fulfilling my destiny" would prove to be much more complicated than finding and marrying the aristocrat with a good heart.

That night, asleep in my mother's tiny bungalow, I dream that a warm, male voice calls me by my name. I get up from my bed to answer his call. It is a very handsome, attractive, gigantic man standing behind La Concha, the highest mountain in Marbella. I see that his eyes are brown, his hair is black, shoulder length, and he is wearing a blue shirt and khaki pants. He feels overwhelmingly familiar, beloved, like a long lost brother, like part of me. I walk towards him; I start to grow in height. I grow so fast, so high, that soon I become a giant like him. Now I easily step over the mountain and fall into his embrace. The fragrance of his being envelops me;

I recognize him as one I have always known, yet he resembles no one I do know now, in this life. I wake up certain that I have just met the most important individual of my life, but... Who was he? Had we met in a past life? Was he from my future? Was he the spirit of a dead lover coming to visit from the other side?

Munich, Germany, 1981. I live in Munich now, married to Roger, a blond, blue-eyed German Prince; the one aristocrat with a good heart. I love Roger, and it looks like I am truly fulfilling my destiny the way that voice on the beach advised me to do 6 years ago. Yet there is a side of me, the mystical, psychic, spiritual side which I cannot share with him. I've tried, but he tells me he cannot "jump over his own shadow" and is unwilling to "scratch his brains" and talk about any of this stuff so close to my heart. We have an unspoken truce; I try my best to take him as he is, and keep "that stuff" to myself. Roger knows that I keep a ton of esoteric books in the bedroom, and that I am passionately interested in this "strange stuff"; he is o.k. with me meditating every day. Still, he is utterly disinterested in my beliefs, and could not care less about my practices. Thus I live a double life: one life in the realm of my family, acquaintances, and social responsibilities; the other in the world of my readings, meditations, visions, and spiritual practices.

Inside, this "stuff" does not rest, nor do I want it to. It drives me to seek something I can only vaguely define, yet feels very much alive, often even more alive than my outer life. I started the study of psychology in Salzburg as planned, then had to stop because of my marriage to Roger and my move to Germany. Now I study naturopathy, but it doesn't completely fulfill. So today, while Roger is at work, I go downtown to browse the *Hugendubel*, a 3 story high

bookstore on Munich's beautiful *Marienplatz*. I take the interior escalator to the third floor, where they keep the imported esoteric books.

There is a thin paperback that jumps out at me. It's a reprint of an early 20th century volume, the author famous for her contributions to the Western Mystery Tradition. I quickly call up to spirit to show me something meaningful, and then I close my eyes and pick a random page. On the page I open by luck, the author talks about reincarnation, soul mates, twin souls, and cosmic ties. Writing in the characteristically authoritarian and now antiquated English of her time, she describes how soulmates are lovers who may not have known each other from previous lives, who meet on earth for the first time, fall in love, and then stay loyal and committed to each other until they deepen their relationship to grow from a bond of the body, to one of the emotions, emotions, and then of the mind all the way to a deep bond of the soul, building their relationships from the bottom up so to speak. Cosmic ties, she contends, are souls who know each other from having been partners in many previous lives, and now come together once again in this life to co-create, in the service of a special work or cause. Twin souls, are like two halves of one whole. Whereas soul mates work at deepening and elevating their relationship in this life, cosmic ties have taken a sacred vow in a previous life to dedicate themselves together to a cause; then they meet life after life to complete this work. Partners in a cosmic tie, the author states, feel a powerful sense of recognition when they first meet again on earth. They feel a sense of fate directing their lives, guiding them towards the work they have come together to co-create. Twin souls, she declares, because they are as two yolks of the same egg, if they were to meet on earth, will feel a powerful sense of being drawn together ever closer, until finally they merge as one once again. Once they become aware of the existence of the other, it becomes intolerable for them to stay separate for long, and the universe will draw them together ever more...

I read the words, and my eyes start to blur...

I know I have a cosmic tie.

As soon as I acknowledge this, a powerful sense of order and rightness envelops my body, a high-level energy similar to the one I felt when enveloped with God's love back then in my Dad's circular pool in the house on the hill. The energy is all good, all order, all right. It is the *me* and the *not me* merged into one. There is no way I can defend against this dynamism, reject its influencing me from now on; this is not something that I feel I want to push back, nor do I believe that I can. It is fate, destiny, certainty, and loving emergence all wrapped into one. I feel light, by entire body tingles, the hair on my arms stands up. I feel elevated, as if suddenly weighed much less, and now could hover over the ground. Then the levity turns into expansion, I suddenly feel majestic, my life more significant than I thought it had been until now. I recognize this expansion on some deep, intuitive, even instinctual level; I feel that it is right. I welcome it; mark it as very desirable in my mind, integrate it as a new part of who I truly am.

I have a cosmic tie; I now feel certain of this.

Immediately, fragments of past lives begin to play like a video before my mind's eye. It's me and the tall, dark-haired man from the dream I had in 1975, together we join, and then separate in multiple past lives. The wave of awareness washes over me, cleanses, fills those spaces that had remained so lonely and locked up until to now. It takes a few minutes, I'm in the whitewash, I let it do its work, but then, as mysteriously as it came, it is gone now. I try to hold the book a bit tighter, conjure up the sense of wholeness and inner knowing one again, but to no avail, I cannot call it back at will. Disappointed and a bit dazed, I leaf through the volume for another clue. I find the address of the organization this author founded while she was still alive,

it appears to still be active in the U.K. I make a mental note to contact them, see what else I can find out.

Pulling myself out of my deliberations, and back down to the ground, I walk the three stories down to the register to pay for the book. On my way, I start to pick the authors theories apart. I don't agree wholeheartedly with what she says, not about soul mates anyway, nor am I completely clear about the distinction between *cosmic ties* and *twin souls*. Like if twin souls are indeed two halves of one whole, why on Earth would they go through the agony to separate the one in two to come down here if not to do a very important job? So where cosmic ties not rally also twin souls? Or rather would twin souls not also be cosmic ties? I have no way to sort it out right now, maybe I would never know.

As soon as I get home, I read through the entire book. I see that the organization this author founded in the early 20th century teaches a specific type of meditation focused on the Kabalistic Tree of Life, and other symbols of the Hermetic Tradition. I write them the next morning, requesting to join. Within a few weeks, they answer, stating that they only take members from within the U.K. They do have a sister organization, however, that takes international members and operates entirely by mail. They refer me to its leader, Margaret. Within a few weeks I am corresponding with Margaret and she welcomes me to join. As the link between us is sealed, I am overcome by a powerful sense to *have finally come home*.

New York City, 1983. Roger gets an offer to work in New York City. He moves me and our 8 month old son from our little house in rural Bavaria to Manhattan's Upper East Side, where we have the opportunity to house-sit a majestic 5-story brownstone that belongs to a Swiss business friend of Roger's dad. The brownstone on East 68th comes complete with interior

elevator and a Roman bath. We haven't been here a month, and though I'm still improving my English and working on my culture shock, I'm already in love with New York.

Today, while Roger is at work and the baby takes a nap, I sit down on the king size bed, prop my back against the headboard, tuck my feet up under me, take several deep breaths, and start to meditate. Today's exercise calls that I construct a splendid medieval building, and then explore specific rooms. I build the structure with the ease of practice; it virtually unfolds on its own before my inner eye. I enter the hallway in my vision, pause. Something pulls me away from my straight path and to the right, down a flight of stairs. It is dark and damp on the way down; my hand gliding along the wall, I can feel the moss on the stone. Downstairs there is a passage, it leads me deeper underground. Then the passage opens into a chamber, there is a statue of an ancient goddess in a shrine on the far wall. The air feels charged with portent, candles burn at her feet. I sense a strong presence about three feet away to my left. It's *him; the man from my dream*. He stands there mute, dressed in some historic garb, his chest bare.

"Why are you here now?" No response.

"I need to concentrate on this exercise. Can you please go away?" No words, just an unmistakable presence, a powerful link.

I sense him breathing gently, very much alive, but he won't talk, won't leave.

Most of me feels deeply for this figure, but another part of me still tells me that he might just be an illusion, a figment of my active imagination. It might even be dangerous for me to allow his appearance, even worse to conjure him up. Right now I don't want to deal with this. I don't want to be confronted with his existence, not here, not right now. Anger, resentment, fear rise up in my chest.

If I can't control my own visualizations, prevent his intrusion, I may truly be going mad.

Yet no matter what I think, hope for, or do, there it is; a live, intense, heart- gladdening, soul-drenching, otherworldly connection between the two of us. The energy of recognition, kinship, and love arcing so powerfully between us, it obliterates all doubt. I try to keep a skeptical eye on my state of mind, but in reality I cannot help myself but to allow the link to form. There is a hunger that builds up, as if there were a reunion of long lost lovers who recognize each other yet are unable to touch or talk. Then, after a short while he is gone. Shaken and careful not to allow myself to be bumped out of the inner work, I retrace my steps back up into the building's main hall, complete my exercise, and write down my experiences into my mediation journal.

I've been a member of Margaret's organization for 2 years now. They provide training on how to work with the Tree of Life. Every month I send them my mediation journal notes, and then receive feedback and guidance from Erin, the senior practitioners to whom I've been assigned. This month I send a note to Erin, asking her what to do about this meditation intruder. I refrain from telling her how I think that he is the same figure I've seen in a dream, or that I feel an intense connection with him. Part of me still hesitates, still isn't sure to own up to all of this. She writes back immediately, advises to dismiss his presence on the spot.

Days go by, then weeks. He continues to appear, on and off. Sometimes a week or two goes by before he returns, and then he is be back in my vision for several days in a row. I tell him to leave, but he won't go. Meanwhile, some of my dreams take on a life of their own. I begin to dream about him, he shows me about his life, what he is about, what he likes and dislikes, how we are similar in certain ways.

Weeks turn into months, and then finally I give in. The connection is so intense, it feels so right, so real... and who is Erin anyway to tell me what to do? What could she possibly know

about this man? I decide not to shoo him away anymore, to let him stay, in my vision, in my inner work, and in my heart.

That is when he begins to talk. We are now having full blown conversations inside and outside of my meditations, in real time.

New York City, 1985. Its 3 p.m., the traffic already fierce along the FDR drive. While my two year old son naps peacefully in his seat, exhausted from his visit to the doctor, I keep my eyes peeled on the road, the East River flowing on my right. I've been warned by the German expats not to use a car in New York. Now that we live in Westchester County, Roger mostly uses the commuter train. But I really dislike the train; it's cumbersome to take with a little boy. And to be honest, I like to drive the car and welcomed the escape. I know that since I left Europe I'm not in Kansas anymore, but with careful attention, I drive well enough to handle Manhattan, have an adventure, and make it work. The traffic eases; I take a deep breath, move forward a bit. Then the line of cars stops once more, I hit the break. I let my gaze drifts over the water, in the distance I see yet another bridge, connecting two islands, connecting two worlds... and before I know it, I think of *him*.

Where the heck is he? Why didn't he come down to live this life with me?

I immediately feel his presence, as if he were sitting in the seat next to me. In fact, I could almost swear there was an indentation on the seat, so solid was the presence to me. The eerie sense of familiarity, of compatibility, of unconditional acceptance and love is instantly reactivated; there is that sense that we just fit, like two halves of a larger whole. The intimacy dissipates all loneliness, questions and fears. I know without the shadow of a doubt, that we have shared this connection many times before, in another place, another time.

But why not in this life?

“Why do you just appear like this? Why don’t you come down here into real life? This seeing you with my inner eye and feeling that you are so real, but not really here, on this side, it’s driving me nuts! I’m afraid that I’m going crazy every day, scared I have a mental disease! And there is nobody I can talk to about this, it would only make things far worse.”

“You’re not going nuts”.

“But that is how it feels, there is no real proof that you exist except in my own mind!”

“I’m real, and we are speaking. But I cannot come to your life now. Not until you finish this one. We will meet again when you are done.”

“So we will meet after I die?”

“We will meet when you are done with this life”.

I can see that, based on the psychic and visionary experiences I’ve had from an early age, based on the fact that my own my mother now openly promotes herself as a psychic and reads Tarot cards, or even perhaps as a result of the encephalitis I had when I was two years old from which I almost died, I might now be more open to and capable of receiving communications from the dead than most other people would. The dead, after all, are known to appear to their loved ones in their dreams, and in their waking life. My own grandmother Carmen had her long-dead friend Isabel appear to her when she was hospitalized for a heart attack, trying to entice her to come and cross over to the other side. My grandmother, survived the attack and lives a full life. But why is the ghost of *this man* emerging *now* on the scene of my life? I am committed to Roger. He *is* the aristocrat with the good heart which the spiritual guiding voice on the beach had urged me to seek out. What, if anything, should I make of all of this now?

Rye, New York, 1985. It is 9 p.m. My son is upstairs, sound asleep. Roger and I have just had a disagreement, and I'm very upset. I leave him sitting in the den, watching T.V., I stomp into the living room, throw another log onto the fire, and sit down to ruminate what was just said. Trying to calm down, I stare into the soft flames, their dance around the wooden logs comforting, graceful, and smooth. After a few minutes a towering presence forms in the midst of the flames, it's *him*. Standing tall, commanding authority, he asks:

“Remember this?”

His words plunge me into a vision of a past life. I get a sense that in this life we are training together in a temple, that we have taken some formal vow to dedicate ourselves to a spiritual cause, to what Hermeticist call the Great Work.

We are young, in our twenties, standing by the Nile, at the edge of a small cliff. He grabs my hands, looks me in the eyes, the air is tense.

“My older brother was killed in the war. I must replace him now.”

“But you are sworn to the temple work, you are not a warrior!”

“Father is dead. I have to fulfill my duty.”

“What if you die, what if they kill you, what happens to us, to the work?”

“Don't worry, if I die, I will build myself another one just like this one and come back.”

He says, beating his chest.

“Before you know it, we will meet again.”

Overwhelming grief washes over me, as I sense that in that life, I never saw him again.

The images of the past life fade away as fast as they came; then his body reappears inside the flames.

“From now on, I want you to call me by my name. My name is A. If you call me by this name, I will come.”

Seattle, Washington, 1989. From New York, we have moved to Kansas City, then to Michigan for Roger’s job. In 1987 he gets a job offer to transfer to Seattle; we move with my now 6 year old son and 3 year old daughter to Bellevue, across the lake from downtown. I still practice my daily meditations on the Tree of Life, but I haven’t sent my work in for feedback for a while. From what I was told, Erin got married and was no longer taking on students, and Margaret had not gotten around to pairing me with another practitioner for several years. Word had gotten around that she was so swamped with requests; she was now sweeping unopened letters into piles on her office floor, then dumping them into the trash. But at the moment I don’t really care, I’m getting pretty good at this work all by myself.

Today, I find a brochure from Margaret’s organization in the mail. No personal note, just a flyer announcing a workshop she will be leading in Michigan in a few months. I take it upstairs into my sewing nook, read it carefully. At first I’m exciting to receive some signs of life from her, but pretty soon I remember the disorganization and even the neglect. Annoyed, I toss the flyer into the trash.

Days go by and I start to feel uneasy. I have a sense that it has to do with this workshop Margaret was announcing. Perhaps I should go after all, give it a try. Luckily, nobody accessed my sewing room; the flyer would still be there. Determined, I retrieve the discarded piece of paper from the sewing room’s wastebasket, and decide to sign up. The unease lifts, replaced by a strange sense of foreboding. I feel how something clicks, aligns inside, and suddenly *everything starts to feel right*.

The morning before my trip, an inner certainty arises within.

I'll meet someone very important during this trip.

Once in Michigan, I enjoy the workshop. In fact, I feel elated all week, drifting in and out of heightened states awareness, and experiencing intense dreams in which I am with A. I enjoy reconnecting with Margaret; she is truly a great teacher. The rest of the attendees are nice, yet none of them feel truly remarkable or in any way important to my personal life. This is completely incongruent with the feeling I had had prior to embarking on this trip. On the second to last day, irritated at how my intuition let me down, I approach Margaret to ask her to finally assign me to a new practitioner to review my work.

Margaret, apparently completely unaware of the problem that I had to work for years on my own, apologizes profusely. She knows exactly who to assign. There is this man in Tijuana, Mexico, who's been a member for many years. He is well qualified to comment on my work. Besides, he speaks Spanish. Because I know Spanish, this may be helpful to him in case he becomes uncomfortable corresponding in English.

The following day, her assistant hands me a blue post-it note, it says:

Luis Flores De La Lama

P.O. Box 1378

San Isidro, CA 92073

I tuck the note into my wallet, determined to write to this Luis person as soon as I arrive back home.

Commitment

Seattle, Washington, 1989. It's a rainy spring morning in the Pacific Northwest. I lie down on my bed, ready for my meditation practice. Roger is out of town for work, and the kids

are still asleep upstairs; I am happy to have this time of silence to myself. Today I need to visualize the Tree of Life, zoom in onto a specific area and start my work. But this time, when I close my eyes and take my first deep breath, the Tree appears alive, fully built before my inner eye. It's like a living vortex that pulls me in and up along its paths. There is a strange force that controls my awareness as I ascend; I can't stop the process even if I want. After a steep ascension I shoot out at the top right of the Tree and into outer space. I leave the Earth behind, it turns into a tiny spec. Now I'm suspended in the cosmos, and something luminous builds around my head like a crown, it is made up of twelve little stars; humbled, I'm exhilarated, blissed.

This feels so very right.

Now I ascend further, then emerge in the center of a circle of beings suspended in outer space. I sense that they are conscious, like force fields of superhuman intelligence. I cannot discern their faces; I sense that they don't have a human form. Their presences are powerfully attractive, even while strangely familiar.

"Who are you?" I manage to ask, the resonance of our connection flooding my senses like a super charged aurora. Flooded by the rush of information they emanate, my mind has no space left for my own thoughts.

"We are the S." they say without a sound.

"Where am I, why have I come up here?" I want to know, so I can come back to this heavenly encounter in case the connection snaps.

"We have called you up here because we want you to know that there is a work you need to do; we will guide you" I sense them say, even while they imprint me with a torrent of information, transmitting its meaning to my brain with unquestionable clarity; a clarity that would take me the rest of my life to even partially understand. Something made me look down at

my body then. I see it lying on my bed way down there, in my home, connected to my consciousness by a faint, ribbon-like glow. I don't want to go back down there, not now, *maybe not at all.*

"Go back now, or your body will suffer" they advise.

I don't want to leave their energizing company, the vital connection, the exquisite telepathic interaction; I don't want to go back down to my ordinary life. Yet I have read how dangerous things can happen to a body that is left unattended by its soul.

The kids need me down there! I need let go of my resistance or I might never be able to go back down.

Vertigo rises in me immediately, and I am pulled back down into the body very fast. Within a few seconds I am back in my body, resting on my bed. Gone is the telepathic connection, gone the torrent of information, gone the heightened sense of meaningfulness, gone the awareness of being in the immediate presence of the sacred.

Yet I still feel whole and right.

Something majestic has touched my being; some extraordinary meaning has been conveyed. Still a bit entranced I look at my watch. Over two hours have gone by! Relieved, I hear the sound of cartoons wafting in from the family room; the kids must have come down on their own, grabbed some food, and turned on the T.V.

A few hours later, I sit down in the dining room to open the mail. There is a letter from this Luis, addressed to me; he writes in Spanish.

"I'll be glad to provide feedback on your work. But this is strange, I don't know you yet, but I already feel a very strong spiritual connection with you".

His words throw me into frissons of ecstasy, an instant and deep bodily recognition flooding my senses. I am overcome by the certainty that our souls know one another and that at this very moment they touch, embrace, and even merge.

My God, this resonance feels just as powerful as with A. No, it feels even more intense! But why on Earth am I feeling this connection to Luis? Who is he anyway? Why this overwhelming attraction? This might be dangerous! I must truly be going mad!

A is my true, spiritual love, my one and only...and well... I also love Roger, of course. Roger is a kindred soul to share my earth-life with, but A... well, no one can ever replace A.!

What in heaven is going on here?

Intent on checking this out, I go into my bedroom and lie down on the bed, control my breathing and relax, guiding my mind deliberately to try and find out about this sudden connection with Luis. It takes me quite a while to quiet my mind; eventually I succeed and enter an altered state. Suddenly I am no longer a body; I am one in myself, a sphere of golden light. I remain in this state for a while, and then I feel as if my energy becomes denser. Suddenly I sense that I am drawn to the city of Tijuana, to where I know Luis lives. Like a spectator, I find myself hovering inside a room, an office perhaps, or a bedroom. I don't know for sure... I see it but dimly, it has white walls. I make out some of what it contains: a white drafting table with stencils, a compass, and other art materials are scattered about on its top. On the wall there is a big, artistic drawing with strange symbols in black ink, the frame is made of gold. Then I am pulled out of this office space up and out onto a sunny, open rooftop terrace from which I can see parts of Tijuana, but there is nobody about. Up here it is sunny and warm. I don't see Luis or any people anywhere near.

Where is he? What does he look like? Why is there nobody at this home?

Bellevue, Washington a few days later... It is morning, both kids are still asleep. I lie down on my bed and begin my daily mediation work with the Tree. I start at the ground level, and then ascend through the paths. I stay a few minutes in several areas, opening myself to any insights that may come. I visit some of the Tree's energy nodules, absorb their distinct force fields, worldviews, and meanings, and then travel along some of the path-like information highways that connect the grid. I enjoy the diversity, absorb the significances. Suddenly, a powerful force field pulls me upward once more. I cannot resist it. My consciousness shoots up through a swirling tunnel of light to the top right nodule, then beyond.

I resurface in the midst of the circle of star beings, suspended in cosmic space. The sky is indigo, stars twinkle all around. Amongst their formless presences I recognize a familiar face, a human form; it's A! He is wearing a dark blue blazer, light shirt and tie. I notice the oddity of his casual attire in this mystical environment, but have no time to think, as the formless entities impress meanings into my mind. I understand them clearly, but they don't use a particular language, they do not use words at all. Information is transmitted already embedded in meanings, some with images, some not. It flows very fast, like a torrent of charged, informational particles unloading into my brain. I know nothing one moment; and the next moment I know everything they said.

"We brought you here because we want you to know that Luis is A. They are one and the same person".

I'm hit with a jolt of focus; *it feels right.*

“You will soon meet on Earth. When you do, the two of you will recognize each other instantly. All your fears and concerns will fall away. You will know that you need to be together and that there is a work you need to do”.

There was no time to think; just trust and open up to take it all in.

“We want you to know that you will marry Luis.”

It all overcame me with such force, I had no time to question, or object. It felt clear and pure though, eliciting instant, sacred trust.

“Now we need you to commit to Luis. You need to give us an oath right here and now, that no matter what happens you will stay together, you will stay with him. Will you?”

I’m trying to feel, trying to sense if this is still right. But the rational mind is foggy; it does not seem to work up here, only my visual, intuitive, feeling, sensing side functions now. I see him standing there, tall, dark-haired, blue blazer, light shirt... He is attractive, and yet also so familiar, as if we’d walked the universe together so many times, as if we were made of the same fabric, the same substance, the same stardust. Up here, we truly are as one.

Luis is to me like A. No one else feels to me like A. but now here he is, in the form of Luis... They are one and the same, or maybe now I’m completely nuts.

“Do you commit?”

Luis was perfectly still, looking intently into my eyes, as if holding his breath. If he is one and the same as A, why was he so mute today? With that he nodded silently in affirmation as if to underscore the beings’ urging, encouraging me to commit.

I love A. How could I not commit to stay with him no matter what happens? The presences, they feel high-strong, pure, spiritually clear, some of the most high I have ever felt. I cannot really question them, their energy is too insistent, fast, high frequency, and so very pure.

And if he truly is Luis, alive now in Mexico, and if we truly recognize each other as long lost twin souls on the day we meet, what could happen that would be so terrible as to not want to stay with him?

If Luis is A, if they are... – well how can I deny him?

“Yes, I do”.

As soon as I utter the thought, I feel so very right once more, aligned with a higher pattern, an invisible, universal force, a spiritual grid. I have an overpowering sense that two cogs in a giant mechanism have now come together in the right place, at the right time for the cosmic machinery to move forward correctly, to do its work.

The feeling lasts only seconds and then I was back into my body on my bed. I could not believe that A. and Luis was the same person.

How could a discarnate entity suddenly be somebody alive? Their personal imprint had felt so similar, what else could explain the similarity other than that I was truly going mad, inventing the similarity, the attraction to justify a lonely woman’s needs and desires? But I wasn’t mad. I didn’t act mad in any way. I was a responsible person, a good mother, daughter, and wife.

I hear the kids in the kitchen; their little voices pull me out my ponderings with a jolt. Everything falls back into the ordinary, as I am left with the fainting image of A./Luis in a navy blue blazer, silently nodding his approval, then smiling down at me as I am pulled away and back down into my body once more. I walk into the kitchen intent on preparing scrambled egg for the kids. I crack the first egg, it has two yolks. Then another, it too has two yolks. I crack more, one after another... The whole dozen of them have two yolks.

Seattle, 1989, a few weeks later... My mother and grandmother have come to visit us from Spain. They are hectic two weeks, and I go to bed late. In the middle of the night, I wake up from a very intense dream.

In the dream, I see my mother walking towards me. She has come to tell me that a very important man was waiting for me in the garden; he has come to take me with him. I have my baby daughter in my arms, and now hand her over to my mother for care. She takes the baby into my grandmother's townhouse in Marbella, to the second story, and then steps out onto the balcony with a maid; they all wave at me from there. I go alone into the garden to meet the man. In the garden, I see an extremely tall, handsome man sitting on a little bench in a white gazebo. He resembles A, but with a much wider face. His legs are very long, and clad in black jeans. Extremely excited, I walk towards him, and then sit down next to him. I put my hand on his knee, touching the fabric of his jeans, Powerful sensations of familiarity, destiny, and déjà-vu wash over me. I feel the muscle and bone of his leg and knee underneath my hand—strong, sinewy, warm, solid, and alive. He was so attractive! It felt so right to be with him! Everything else fades away into the background right now. We get up, and I walk away with him, arm in arm with a stranger—my lover.

Suddenly the scene changes; we are on the beach; inside of what looked like a thatched, Polynesian hut. The floor is warm, smooth sand; the walls are covered with hieroglyphs. He makes a sweeping gesture, tells me he hand-painted these himself. We face each other, I touch his shoulders, he is A now, chest bare, dressed in his historic garb. He grabs me tight, looks deeply into my eyes "Lille, our work is done. We have no more duties to the gods." We hold each other, embrace; we lie down on the makeshift cot that sits against the wall, make love.

I wake up in my bedroom encased in a bubble of love. The dream lingers, envelops me in a surreal sense that I had just witnessed a fast-forward vision into a distant future that will come to pass. The beach atmosphere reminds me of the Hawaii I visited in 1980, yet the hieroglyphs don't quite match.

Later that day, I ask my mother to give me a Tarot card reading and see if we can find out more about this Luis person who is now reviewing my meditation work. We sit down on the carpet in an upstairs room; she lays out a traditional spread.

“He is a very intense person, likes to seclude himself, sort of like going into a retreat, for spiritual practices, by himself.”

“I see”. This matched with what I sensed on the inner plane. “Is he married?” I was eager to know.

“Let me see, pick three cards” She says, hands me the deck.

I shuffle the deck, pick the cards, hand them back over to her. She lays them out side by side.

“No, he is not married right not now.”

I take a deep breath. “Can you see more?”

“Pick another three cards” she says, I pick them, she lays them out.

“Well, I'm not sure, but there is something that happened in his past, not too long ago, he is not happy about it... pick three more cards to cover these”.

I pick three more cards; she lays them out on top of the previous sequence, they show lots of swords.

“There was a break up, a great disillusionment, a divorce...right now he doesn't want to start a new relationship; he wants to be free, alone.”

“Can you see what kind of person he is?”

“Not with these anymore, I’ve seen all I can with this deck. Hand me that Egyptian deck you have, maybe it will help us see more”.

I fetch the Egyptian deck; she shuffles it thoughtfully, and then picks a card.

It’s *the Scarab*.

“So what does that mean?”

“He is a transformational being; maybe a *brujo*, he likes to walk between the worlds, go in and out of the dark”.

I am not at all sure that this will help.

Bellevue Washington, 1989, a few days later... It is morning, and I am resting on my bed ready to start my daily practice with the Tree of Life. My mother and my grandmother have left for Spain. Today I need to work on the left side of the Kabbalistic Tree, then cross one of its paths to work on the right. I visualize the Tree before me, it comes easy today. I enter one of its nodules to my left, do my work there, then pause, ready to continue on through one of its paths. Suddenly I see Luis spontaneously appear inside my visualization practice, standing at the gate to the path. His right arm is outstretched, inviting me to walk on into the Tree with me. I cannot see his face all that clear; right now it appears like a mixture between the face of A. and the one of the man I saw in my last dream, the one that sat in the gazebo and was coming for me. But I know for certain in my heart, that this man is Luis.

I eagerly take his outstretched hand; together we walk on gracefully through the gate and onto the path. I no longer need to continue my work alone since he guides and directs me now. Like dancers, we glide through this path and then on to many more. Finally we pop out at the top

of the Tree. We like two explores that just conquered a high peak; we stand firm at the cusp, hold hands there; survey the land. Then he points down at the majestic Tree below our feet....

“Lille, I have come to help you turn yourself inside out, like the fingers on a glove”. He shows me this in a visual, how each finger of a silky glove has to be reversed and then gently pulled back out.”

“Now you cannot stay up here, you need to go back down” He says, and the vision begins to fade, yet the magic of traversing the Tree of Life together with him still very much alive.

But what on Earth did he mean by helping me to turn myself inside out like the finger of a glove? It sounded like a lot of effort to reverse each finger so to speak, one by one. But how could this be something that I wanted, or apparently had even requested, when I had no idea what this was?

At my inner questioning, I am immediately and completely pulled back into my body and onto to my bed at home. I don't want to exit this exquisite state just yet though, perhaps I can somehow find out more. With great concentration I succeed to once again enter the altered state, and now sense feel a powerful electric energy rise up along my spine, integrating my whole being, until my consciousness once again becomes a golden ball. And then suddenly, there is Luis. I sense him as a powerful presence next to me, formless, just a consciousness this time. It's an inner knowing of his identity, like hearing his personal note resonating in an invisible ear I have inside my heart. We are drawn together, his closeness so very heartwarming, a perfect fit. Instantly we unite, become one golden sphere. Then as soon as we merge, a magnetic force pulls us apart. Then again we unite. Every time we are on the way to unite, we compress, as if a magnetic force were being encapsulated into our united form. When we begin to separate we

expand, as if the force were again released, then spent. This rhythmic process goes on for several rounds; it is delightful yet somehow also oppressive all at the same time. I cannot stop it nor direct it. It just is. It takes over my awareness, floods my being with power and bliss.

After several rounds of expansion and compression I sense that we – the golden ball that we now have become – develops a strange inner lightness and gains levity, as if it had suddenly sprouted a pair of wings that lift us above an experiential abyss, into a new layer of the multiverse, far away from this Earth, On this new level it feels as if our merged consciousness, now winged golden sphere, does not experience contrast in the same stark manner it did down below on Earth; the contrast of opposites no longer feels taxing or even adversarial up here; it's invigorating. Where down on Earth there is polarity between evil and good, suffering and joy, illness and health, up here contrast is different, more like the complementarity of the lights and shadows an artist uses to create three dimensional art. Up here, the opposites complement, merge, and then expand in a fertile, thrilling cycle of co-creation instead of facing each other in adversity, conquering one another in battle, and subjugating in domination, grinding gridlock or obliteration. Instead of the masculine and the feminine being locked into an adversarial, black and white duality, up here they complement each other and both work to shape the joyful, thrilling form of the sphere. Just like star's nuclear fusion fuels its existence from the very core of the seemingly perpetual yet harmonious interplay of opposites, I feel that we are now fueling our own golden sphere. In fact, we not only fuel ours, but we could, if we desired, direct our attention to our surroundings and fertilize other, smaller spheres. Awestruck by this realization, I look down towards the region on Earth from which I fell that we ascended. I cannot see much, but I am struck by the shapes we took on our ascent....two small spheres of consciousness, Luis and I, then we turned into a pair of stream of focused awareness, like twin electrical serpents

twined around a common pole as they ascended, first their heads, then their entire bodies touching the periphery of a golden sphere, wings suddenly sprout where they touch the globe, then they are both absorbed completely into the sphere, and the globe begins to gain levity, it drifts up and off into a new world.... I recognize the caduceus, both a promise and a reward.

Relaxed in this new awareness that Luis and I have now become winged beings so to speak, merged into One; that our new form, our us is now a golden sphere in a new world, we drift on gracefully through space, one more golden globe in the sphere of the stars.

After a long voyage in this strange interstellar world, I am suddenly jolted back down. I re-emerge in my body, resting peacefully on my bed. But this time is different, I feel invigorated instead of exhausted; I am overcome with the certainty that I could have stayed longer and no harm would have come to my body down here. But most importantly, I now know, that there is something truly magical, even supernatural happening between this Luis and I.

The next day I am on a quest, I load the kids into the car, and drive across lake Washington and into Seattle to scour through the bookstores I can find, intent on seeing if anyone out there might have had such a strange experience as mine. I find some books on Egyptian mythology by Sir Wallis Budge; I resonate with some of the Egyptian myths he describes. The Egyptians had many gods that were divine pairs that said to trace back their origins to the stars. But I don't feel that I was merely impersonating a myth in my imagination. This feels much more personal that. I have to look further, dig deeper than that.

So I pick up other books, some about people telling their accounts of traveling with their light bodies on the inner planes; but their accounts are more linear and predictable, none of their experiences even remotely resemble mine, nor are any of them about love in any way.

Disappointed, I return feeling lonely and empty handed, except for a used copy of the Egyptian Book of the Dead I picked up at a garage in the University District on the way home.

Intimacy

Denver, Colorado, 1989. It's August, I's on a window seat on my flight to Denver. Tomorrow I'll attend Margaret's workshop; tonight I'm expecting to meet Luis. I have no idea what he looks like, or how old he is. I trust that he is not married; my mother is usually pretty accurate with her Tarot cards.

How can I love someone I've never seen before? Will he reciprocate?

Clutching my frigid cup with the Diet Coke, I think back to the conversation I had with Roger a couple of weeks ago. We were dining at a restaurant in Kirkland by the marina, near where we kept our boat. With the setting sun casting a warm glow over our faces, I explained how I felt that we'd grown apart, that I wanted a divorce. Although I did not yet say a word to Roger about Luis, I had to be congruent with what was going on inside, I had to be true to Roger and to myself.

My experiences in the inner world, first with A, and now with Luis had grown to such intensity over the years, they had completely changed who I am. My need for spiritual and philosophical companionship had now become so overpowering, that nothing would ever be the same with Roger after these last few months. I could never go back to being the person that I was when Roger and I first met. So it was time for me now to bring my outer life in line with my inner visions and experiences; it was time – for better or for worse- to take a stance, to act. It would be plain wrong to pretend that nothing was happening, and attempt to continue life as usual.

Yet from where I am today here in Kirkland, facing Roger, I only have a vague idea on how to proceed. Meeting Luis and finding out in real life if there is any truth to all my mind-blowing visionary experiences and intense telepathic connections, is the first step in my new life. If it turns out that Luis is not the person I had imagined, then I will have to face the consequences. I will still leave Roger, and God willing, be able to take the kids and then start anew somewhere else. I will then have to start my search for someone with whom I can share my spiritual worldview and my path, develop the intimacy of souls that I now crave yet never achieved with Roger.

Sitting with Roger at this nice restaurant, our fancy meal still untouched, it is excruciatingly painful to have this conversation about divorce. I still love Roger in many ways, and he is very taken aback. Although he was gone on business trips four days out of the week, and did not communicate much on the other three, in his mind, he says, he had no idea that I had felt we were drifting apart. I had thought he might have noticed, but right now, it truly no longer matters at all. I have a deep sense that our time together was beautiful, but that now it has come and passed. He is my companion, the man I've shared my life with for 11 years; Roger is essentially a good man, we have simply drifted into worlds that are too far apart.

And then, of course, there are the kids. My decisions now will impact their lives forever, for better or for worse. The decision to leave crushes my chest; it's almost too much to bear. But at this point, there really is no other choice. I need to move on. The intimacy between Roger and me never really developed the way I now realize it could or even should have grown. There was no way for the two of us to go on together from here, except as parents and friends.

The flight attendant's shrill voice brings me back into the present; it is near ninety degrees in Denver and overcast, she says. Paying no attention to the weather, I exit the plane

with purposeful strides. Once on firm ground, I march towards the baggage claim and retrieve my massive suitcase from the conveyor belt. The bag is unruly, twists this way and that as I lift it onto the luggage cart.

"I must have packed enough clothes for an entire lifetime! Please God, let this be true, let this be right. Please let it all turn out well!"

Smiling broadly to my fellow passengers in a vague attempt to cover up my mounting distress, I guide my possessions to the row of cabs lined up beyond the gate. I greet the first cabdriver with an oversized grin, and articulate the directions to the hotel. The driver heaves the overstuffed bag effortlessly into the trunk and off we drive. My stomach churns, and I'm doing all I can to hold back my tears as we approach the hotel.

What on Earth am I doing here?

The Park Place is a medium priced, all- suites hotel catering to the visitors of the nearby hospitals across the street. The cab pulls up to the building, bringing up yet another fear...

What if he is there already and I bump into him right now, nervous and disheveled as I am? Will I know him on sight? God, pleaseeease give me more time.

With shaky hands I pay for my ride, thank the cabdriver, and retrieve my bag. Dragging my suitcase up the small steps to the hotel like a large, disobedient dog, I walk into the lobby.

The place looks shabbier than I anticipated. "Do you have a reservation?" The woman at the desk inquires. "Ah, I recognize your accent from our phone conversation the other day" she chats, utterly oblivious to the fire eating its way through my body right now.

"Your ID please?" The woman pipes, shuffling through the pile of registration forms. I hand her my ID. "Here, sign this and let me call my Mark to help you up with that bag of yours."

"I am expecting a friend, Mr. Luis Flores De La Lama, he is also attending this workshop with the rest of the group. Has he checked in yet?"

"Let me see... Flores, Luis... He has reserved # 33, that's the two-bedroom suite, together with three ladies. Nice guy, as far as I remember him from last year. As to his Spanish girlfriend Maria... some or other, a classy lady that one! But no, they haven't arrived yet."

I knew he wasn't married, but this? I'm floored.

Temporary relief came as the woman hollered through a greasy intercom. "Mark honey, would you please take the lady's bags up to number 11?"

He is not here yet, that gives me a bit more time.

Seconds later, her Mark, a brawny and slightly balding blond, materialized in the lobby. He sauntered toward me to do his mothers' bidding. So this would be the same Mark that is actually organizing Margaret's workshop. He seems nice. *Does he know Luis?*

Upstairs, Mark deposits my bag in the suite and departs with a polite nod. Exhausted, I collapse on the sofa.

I had nothing else to do for now but search Luis out in my inner world, investigate if the energy had changed between us; if he now loves someone else. I lie down on the bed, stay very still, and breathe rhythmically in and out. I focus on my body, its weight on the mattress; I follow my breath, as it moves in and out. After a while, I am relaxed and one of the starry beings' prophecies plays back in my mind...

"When he sees you in the flesh, he will feel as if struck by lightning, and know you for who you truly are. Past denial will melt away in the firestorm of your encounter. There will be no escaping the turn of fate. Time and space will compress, your past and present lives will intertwine for the last time, and you will recognize and know each other in the eternal now."

At that time, their predictions provided a sense of certainty which I have no way to bring back here, right now. Yet the mere recollection of their communication floods me with a

lightness of being that tells me that whatever happens, it will most probably be all right. This is good, but I need more right now, I need to rekindle the thread of connection between us, regain the sense of certainty, of “us-ness” that I seem to have lost.

I concentrate on my breathing, relax once more. And then it’s there, the gossamer thread linking me to me to him. Now I sense, even see the silky thread of consciousness, resonance, and attraction that signal my ongoing connection with him. All the familiar feelings return, the floating, the bubble of ecstatic energy that surrounds our union, encases, and protects. The overpowering sense that he is there for me now, always was, and always will be. Here, in the inner world, we still are ONE.

Right now, that was as much as I could get. No details, no reassurances beyond this abstract certainty that *on some deep level, we were one*. The certainty sweeps over my frayed nerves like a balm; I slowly regain my faith. The cosmic bubble still surrounding me like an ethereal womb, a strange calmness takes a hold of me, as if gentle, invisible fingers were combing and soothed the tangled and frayed fibers of my soul... exhausted, I almost fall asleep... then suddenly, a sharp rap on the door jolts me wide awake.

“Hey Lille, its Andy, are you in there? We are all going to Rachel and Jeff’s room; they have drinks and snacks. The rest of the gang is already there. Do you want to come?”

“I’ll be there in a minute!” I reply. Thank God, Andy was a familiar face. I could handle Andy; he was Margaret’s assistant, the one that had handed me Luis’ address in Michigan months ago. I walked into the bathroom to touch up my makeup, brush my hair and teeth. I took one last glance in the mirror, let out a deep breath.

This is it. I’m about to face reality, and the possibility that I had been completely deluded, crazy, even insane. Please God, let it be right.

I walk out of my room, through a corridor, and then take the elevator down to the second floor. The door to Rachel and Jeff's room is slightly open, a cacophony of voices wafts over me, voices from people having fun. My body moves forward in slow motion, I knock. The workshop attendees call out merrily, inviting me to join the group. Trembling, yet feeling as if I float above the ground, I open the door and let myself inside. Starting on my right, I scan the room. I see a sea of faces, waves of people conversing, most are a bit older than me. I know no one except for Andy and his wife. They people, they are scattered all over the room, eating and drinking, laughing; they sit on the chairs, on the sofas, and on the floor. I'm dizzy, my vision blurs, I'm unsure what to do, but something carries me forward like a leaf floating on a powerful stream, and I move into the throng.

Suddenly the blur clears, I can see anew. There is a man in the way back, perched on the corner of a sofa, in conversation with someone, and looking away from the door...

It's him.

He turns toward me as I move forward into the room...his physical presence hits me with full force, the silky black hair, the unruly lock that always falls on his forehead, the high cheekbones, the full mouth... My eyes barely registered other details of his face, they didn't need to.... a compelling attraction builds between us, pulls me towards him. I stare into his eyes; he jumps off his seat, incredibly tall, overwhelmingly magnetic....just like I knew him from my dreams, from my inner work.

I recognize him immediately; he doesn't have to say a word. We are part of each other, together we make up the ONE.

Guided by our locked gaze, floating on a river of the most sacred energy, I move towards him; he stares, smiles, extends his hand. Time compresses to the here and now, everything else

ceases to exist. The walls of the room, the furniture, and the other participants receded from my vision as if swallowed up by a fog. Only Luis and Lille matter right here, right now, in this body, in this room.

“Luis Flores, a tus ordenes,” a Mexican formality.

I grab his hand with mine; his handgrip is firm, warm, present, and very much alive.

“Hola, encantada de conocerte”... A Spanish formality.

After the handshake, he leans forward, kisses me on the cheek. I catch his fragrance... the very same I had caught in dreams and visions since the time I lived in New York. There was no turning back, no hesitation, only intimate familiarity, ultimate recognition, soul drenching, eternal love. This Luis is indeed one and the same as A.. He is the man I communicated with in the inner realms of consciousness for over a decade now, the one I spent many past lives searching for, finding, committing to, dying for, loosing again and then finding once more. He is my soul’s mate, my other half. He is A. and Luis all merged into one.

And yet here he is now, a distinct human being, clad in the very same black denim trousers I had seen him in my dream three months ago, exuding the very same magnetism I had come to associate with him from our inner encounters. Yes, he had come into my life. Here he was, an incredibly attractive, full human being in the flesh, approximately my age, much younger than I had anticipated, with a distinct Mexican accent, and a pair of white so very un-cool sneakers...

I sit down beside him, within seconds, oblivious to his friends and conversation partner, he squeezes my hand “Let’s go somewhere quiet”, he says. Unable to talk just yet, I nod. With that, we both stand up like puppets controlled by a higher force, and walk together out of the full room. I sense an uncanny high frequency force field encasing us in an intimate, egg-like aura, a

strangely thrilling magical space much more powerful than anything I have never experienced before. I don't remember if he kisses me again. It doesn't really matter now. Energy so intense was binding us together, that kisses seemed way too material to punctuate our reunion; at this moment, we are already glued.

Silently, we exit the noisy gathering of fellow workshop attendees, and move towards the stairway, warm, protective familiarity enveloping us like a womb. Driven by a force much larger than ourselves, we take the fire staircase and walk up to his hotel suite, my body afloat as if I were hovering above the ground as I follow Luis. Not many words are needed, no explanations seem necessary. There is an eerie sense that we are both naturally picking up our intimate relationship from some place we must have left it off somewhere, some long time ago. Where exactly we had left it doesn't really matter right now.

Upstairs, we sit on a sofa for a few minutes, and then someone comes in – one of the three ladies he is rooming with – she interrupts. Although it turns out that none of these women really was his girlfriend, it's clear that we need to move over to my suite. Luis stuffs his things into his suitcase, tells me a bit about his other roommates whom I have yet to meet. He describes their interests and quirks, we joke about his observations like two siblings sharing an inside joke about long-time friends. Now he is done packing, he drags his stuff downstairs to my suite. In my place, we fix a snack together. Then sit on the couch. We eat. We smile. An overwhelming need to touch takes over. I touch his knee. I feel the black cotton of his pants. They are the same pair of pants, the same long, sinewy legs underneath that I had touched in my dream just a few short months ago...

An eerie shiver runs down my body. I touch his hands. They are long, strong, smooth, an artist's hands. I know them so well. They are the most important in the world to me right now.

So unbelievably real, after so many ghostly encounters. And I had thought for years that I was going mad, that I was inventing things! And now here he is *a live person*. Just the way I had seen him in my dreams - the kind one has while sound asleep.

I sit down at one end of the couch. He stretches his 6' 4" frame along the length of the couch sofa, props his head on my lap, and lets his feet dangle over the armrest at the other end. I grab his hand with my left, comb through his black hair with my right.

Stunned, I look around the room. There is a plain, brown coffee table near the sofa, a lamp on a side table, an oldish TV on a console against the wall... there is a bag of Doritos, half an avocado with its pit still intact, the chunk of cheddar cheese we used for our snack. They all lie abandoned on the Formica countertop in the kitchenette, our mugs of tea still waiting by the microwave. Even the fridge, like a friendly family pet, is making its ordinary, whirring sound. It's a normal hotel suite.

We are really here, it's all real. I am not mad.

This is all really happening right now; to me, to us.

Everything was true all along.

How can this be?

I wish there were a witness to this scene, a witness in this so ordinary room, but there is none. No one is near. And even if there were another person around, nobody else in the universe could ever see what I had seen, experience what I had gone through that brought me all the way here, to this encounter today, to this room.

This encounter is life- transforming, sacred; it completely alters my conception of what is possible, what is real.

Soon an even greater need to really know each other bubbles up like a freshwater spring between the two of us. Words, lots of them, in eloquent Spanish with a Northern Mexico accent tumble out of his mouth. He tells me about growing up in Tijuana, about the way his Dad built a business designing, manufacturing, and installing neon signs for the local restaurants and hotels, how his Mom loved construction and had built the house they lived in right now. He told me how he was the oldest of three brothers, that he'd gone to the university in Mexico City with two artist's friends to study art, but then changed to the more pragmatic carrier of graphic design...

Aha, that's why there was a drafting table, the instruments to create his art...

My left hand grips his right, afraid that he'd vanish any second, that he'd dissolve back into the otherworld from which he had materialized. I'm still combing through his hair, as if smoothing out the edges and angles of his growing up. His stories are highly plastic; they easily form images in my mind. I get a sense of grit with the scenes, as if I'd been there, seen his life with my own eyes.

Then it's my turn. I tell him about my growing up in Marbella, how my Dad had built our house on a hill, far away from town, how I ran wild all day, exploring the countryside because nobody seemed to care. How I craved to move fast and far, first on a donkey, then a mule, a horse and finally a trail motorbike. How I'd spent hours and hours swimming alone in the pool. How nobody really cared about what I did or wanted, how nobody was really around. How they'd sent me to boarding schools to learn languages, how I'd grown up bilingual between Spanish and German and then soon taught myself French reading the comics of *Tintin*. How my Dad made his fortune buying small farms, building fancy houses, developing the real estate. How the little town of Marbella, on the *Costa del Sol*, the Sun coast where I grew up, had been a small fishing village when we moved there, and how it had grown into the bustling tourist town

it now was. I told him about my days in Salzburg in Hotel Management School, and my marriage to a prince, my life as a princess... I told him about my kids, their personalities, and then about the boat Roger and I had bought, the trips we took up to the San Juan Island and British Columbia. I told him about the time we traveled up the Inside Passage... How we almost capsized in a storm... how I was always happiest in nature... I told him how some of the best times in my life were spent roaming the countryside as a child spending many hours alone exploring the small creeks, catching turtles and frogs... riding my bicycle down to the beach, searching for shells, crabs and random debris.

“Yes, that’s strange, it was the same for me” He says, a relaxed, faraway look now on his face. Still, his hand holds tightly to mine, as if he too were unsure that I’ll stay.

“In the years before Tijuana became what it is now, I was most at ease by myself, exploring the land. I caught frogs, lizards and snakes and brought them home; even a baby squirrel one day. I wanted an iguana really bad. I got a boa instead. My Mom was good; she helped me care for the critters. Tijuana was not as built up back then, there were wild areas full of life. I wandered the countryside every day, thinking, meditating, and catching stuff”.

“It might have been healthier back then, I think”, I said, a deep longing for those easier, carefree days welling up into my throat. A time where grown up life was a foggy concept and difficult decisions – for better or for worse - were done by someone else.

“Very much so” he agreed.

By now we’d filled each other in well on the more mundane aspects of our lives before this day. But what about his inner life, what was that like? How might it have become similar to mine?

“So what started your interest in Western Esotericism? What brought you all the way to this workshop with Margaret and her group today?”

“Yeah, my Mom, she had this idea that my brothers and I needed to learn how to read and write at a very early age. We were intellectually gifted, my brother and I, so she sent us to school very early, years earlier that would have been right. The kids, they were much larger and meaner than us, not nice. But my Mom did not understand, so we had to fend for ourselves as best we could. I turned inward then, had few friends. I guess it made me an introvert. At about 11 I began to study Yoga. When I moved to Mexico City I joined an organization, became a Yoga teacher. Then I studied the Western Mystery Tradition, and practiced several types of rigorous exercises and meditations every day...”

He continued on to tell me all the stories, the details of where he'd been, what he'd practiced, who he'd met, worked with, and what all he'd done. He told me how he'd felt about it all back then, and how he felt about it right now. Then I told him what I'd practiced, how I'd come to meet Margaret in London once, how my mother was a psychic, and everything else that I had experienced, and how I felt about it now. We talked with ease, our conversations so very natural, as if we'd known each other since we were small. Yet our hands still clutched, on some level afraid that one of us could suddenly be gone.

“So what changed to make you more gregarious now?”

“By the time I was in my teens I had grown so tall, I towered above most Mexicans in my school. Luckily, my younger brother grew just as tall. That now made the two of us not only smarter but taller than the whole bunch. Ha, everything changed. Nobody dared to bother the two of us at school or elsewhere anymore. But I truly no longer cared. I had turned my attention increasingly towards my inner life by now”.

Seeing him now, the tallness, the self-assuredness... I could not imagine kids daring to be mean to him at school.

“So you were kind of a loner?”

“Yeah, so much so that at some point I decided to get married, start a family. I was concerned that if I did not start a family I might remain too disconnected from society, too much on my own... but after a while it was problematic... and then we had that grueling divorce...”

“Do you want to tell me about it”.

“It was not nice...” he said, and then he told the story of him and his ex-wife.

“So how do you feel about all this right now?”

“I like the company of women, of course, and I don’t particularly care about my ex-wife. But now, I want to be my own person, travel to India and Nepal, *be free*”.

The fingers of my right hand still play with his black hair; my left is still locked tightly with his right. He seems very comfortable; we are relaxed with each other like only siblings can be, yet still hold each other tight, afraid on some level that the hand of destiny might somehow pull us apart yet again. Then a mysterious alchemical process begins: like two vessels pouring liquid into one grail, we take turns at telling each other more details about ourselves, our lives, our troubles, our hopes and even our dreams. Our individual souls pouring into each other through the vehicle of our words, while our love caressed and filled the cold, lone, doubtful inner spaces we had kept to ourselves, sealed away for so long.

We made love that night, a lot of love; the actions of our bodies a mere reflection of the powerful, albeit vulnerable merging of two halves into one whole.

The next day is sunny and the sky deep blue. During the workshop's lunch break we walk into a beautiful small garden nearby. I see a shiny object in the dirt. I pick it up. It is a bronze key, with A1 engraved on it. I show it to him, and then slide it into my pocket. We both acknowledge that it must be a good sign.

We sit down on a small stone bench. He breaks off a twig from a nearby bush, plucks the small leaves off the stem, and twirls the stick in his hands. He is Mr. Cool today, skeptical of what the emotional intensity and the outpouring of trust between us really means.

But after all this, I need more reassurance that this is all real, that I am not insane. I prop my elbows on my knees, lean forward, cross my hands under my chin, take a steadying breath...

I need to ask.

“It's strange that your real name is Luis”.

“Well yes, and because your legal name is Luisa, that is an amazing synchronicity” he says.

“Well yes, my real name is Luisa. But I don't really use it. My father decided to call me Luisa because of my grandmother Louise, my Dad's mom, whom he adores. She is called Louise because of Louis the XIV, the Sun King of France. Go figure.”

“Ha, that's interesting. It's another coincidence right here. I was named Luis because of my grandfather Luis. I am told that he was named Luis because his family was obsessed with the same French royal, Louis XIV the Sun King”.

“Really? That is eerie. But during the years I saw you in my dreams and meditations you gave me a different name, it does not match. This throws me off, I don't quite understand...”

“So what name did I give you?” He asks, his tone casual, as if nothing groundbreaking could come of it. My hands are a bit damp now and tremble. I wipe them on my jeans.

There is so much at stake here.

I focus on a bee combing the tops of a bunch of miniature roses on my left. She does not seem too excited about any of them, sits down on one for a mere few seconds, fiddles with the nectar, then moves on to the next. Finally she finds a different flower she likes a bit further away. She dives in deep for the honey, the whole branch shakes as she works. My voice is hoarse as I try to speak. I clear my throat, try again.

“You said that your name is A. You said that if I call you A. you would appear in my vision. For 5 years I have been calling you A. and you indeed appeared in my vision when I called this name. Now it turns out your name is Luis. It does not match”.

Time stretches, and then seems to stand still. There is a silence, it lasts very long. I focus on the bee, her buzz comfortingly familiar as she dives in for yet another treat. More time passes, he looks into the distance, is very still. I don't know what to do; I wait. Finally he closes his eyes, heaves a long sigh, then speaks.

“It matches perfectly” he pauses again, then...

A- it is my inner name”.

“What do you mean?”

Another pause, then another deep, deep breath...

“You guessed this name; it changes everything for me”

“Why?”

“In the Western Mystery Tradition in which I trained, one is encouraged to take on an *inner name* and use it in one's meditations. It's a secret name only the user himself or herself knows. I have certainly not told anyone about my association with this name, nor is anyone aware of why this name is tied to my inner life identity. There is a myth in Western Esotericism

that if another person guesses someone's secret name they gain power over that person, they establish a deep connection. It may stem from Egyptian mythological lore... like when Isis found out about the name of Ra and was then able to control him".

"But your inner self told me that name then, I did not guess it. I don't want power over you".

"I know. It's just that, well from the traditions from which I come, the fact that you know my secret name establishes an irrevocable connection. It's something I cannot brush away or pretend to ignore. Do you have an inner name too?"

"No, but in that memory in which you'd said you'd come back with a new body you called me by the name R. I'm not sure what it meant."

"The names A., and the name R., well, they both, in some way, have to do with the Sun".

Building a Life

1989, San Diego, California. It is late August. I've known Luis for less than a month. My flight from Seattle is about to land in Sand Diego; I've come to spend 4 days with Luis and his family in Tijuana, across the border. I look out the window, the pilot takes plane in low. We swiftly fly over Balboa Park, then a busy highway, then the half-moon shaped marina, and we are ready to touch down. I fix my makeup, comb through my hair one last time, then lean back against the seat, bracing for the descent.

Will this reunion be as magical as the last?

In Seattle, Roger and I have separated, and I've got almost all our things ready to move me and the kids out, and back to my father's house in Kitzbuehel, Austria. I hope this encounter with Luis goes well, that we are able to make constructive plans, but I'm not sure.

Soon we are allowed to exit the plane. Like so much driftwood floating on a stream, I am pushed forward by the sea of bodies moving to the gate. Eventually the throng breaks up into smaller swirls, as people start to meet up with their loved ones, and move towards the baggage claim. I see Luis at the gate, he towers above the rest. We make eye contact, embrace, and hold tight, even while I sense an invisible, warm and protective cocoon that drops upon us out of the sky, holding us tight like two insects in a cosmic butterfly net. I feel as one with him, joined and entangled by a higher force, entwined.

It takes me a few seconds to see his mother standing next to him. I'm a bit disappointed that she tags along; I had hoped to spend time alone with Luis. Yet to my relief, Gloria greets me warmly; we are instant friends. Later she confesses that she had grave reservations about her son's new relationship with me, but that when she saw me approaching them at the gate, she felt that Luis and I were indeed meant for each other, that we even looked alike, like brother and sister, and her apprehension dropped away. After our re-encounter, we pick up my luggage, retrieve the car, and drive over the border to Tijuana.

1989, Tijuana, Mexico. We arrive at his parents' house. It feels foreign, nothing like the houses in Southern Spain where I grew up. But yet it is large, and there is plenty of room for everyone. I meet his Dad. I'm very comfortable with them.

I feel like I've known these people for a long time, like they are my family too.

The next morning, a rooster calling out under my window jolts me awake before dawn. I listen to the sounds of the Mexican city, dogs barking in the distance, a woman calling out to someone, a motorcycle that won't start. In the kitchen, I'm desperate for a strong coffee. They

are all vegetarians here; the brew might be difficult to come by. Finally Gloria finds the instant coffee she keeps around for Luis's dad, and whips me up a cup.

Armed with the coffee, Luis and I descend to his basement office to plan our future life.

“So, when is your flight back to Austria?”

Mesmerized, I look around. I see the white architect's drafting table, the clamped-on lamp, and the tools of his craft ... graphic design and art. Then there is the sofa bed covered with the white sheet, the large shelf stuffed full with esoteric books, and finally the framed ink-drawing of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life on the wall, the one framed in the gold..., it's exactly the office I had seen in my meditations a few months ago.

How can this be? How can I know this place, recognize the furniture? I have never physically been here before. Maybe it is all true, that we can travel in the inner realms, beyond time and space... that we know each other from beyond, that we have come with a plan to meet again, be together, and co-create. What if it is true, what does this mean for how I see the world from now on, for what I believe in, what I will focus on, how I will act?

What does this mean for everything else from now on?

“So when are you leaving for Austria?” he asks again.

“Ah, well yes, my Dad says that me and the kids can use the garden cottage in Kitzbuehel for now. I'm leaving Seattle as soon as I pack our stuff, 2 weeks, maybe three. When can you come?”

The ink drawing of the Tree of Life, it is several feet high, the Hebrew letters, names of the archangels and Sephirot artfully drawn with Chinese ink in black. I slide my index along the picture's golden rim. “This is beautiful, did you draw this?”

“Yes, a few years ago. I had the frame handmade by a local artisan, with leaves of gold”.

I can't believe that it is actually real, just like I saw it in the inner realms.

I sit down on the sofa bed, he takes the drafting chair.

“If you help me promote the workshops in Europe, I can come visit you and stay for a couple of months.”

A couple of months? I want him to stay forever.

“Yes, of course, I want you to come! Maybe we can prepare some of the materials for the workshops together, my English might be a little better than yours.”

“Yes, I hate to write; your English is good. That would be perfect *trato hecho*, we have a deal”, he says, we kiss, shake hands.

“So why don't we start to sketch out the brochure for the workshops right now?” I ask.

“Let's do it!” Enthusiastically, we start to delineate the 3 levels of our program, then he sketches the brochure. There is no awkwardness, some macho bantering, but underneath it all there is companionship, and immense universe of immense of co-creativity and a gut level trust.

Two months later Luis travels to Austria to visit me and the kids in Kitzbuehel, he stays for two months, then returns home to spend Christmas with his family while Roger and I officially divorce. Luis returns again after Christmas, stays for another 2 months. Soon the situation with my Dad and my stepmom becomes unbearable, and we decide to move to Spain, and see how it goes with my mom. While the kids are in Spain, Luis and I travel to the U.K. where Margaret performs a small and lovely marriage ceremony for us in the countryside near her home. We celebrate with a small group of friends. After a few more months, the two months Luis had initially intended to stay with me in Europe looking more and more like the mere beginning what could be an entire lifetime of togetherness for the two of us.

After a couple of months near my mother, it becomes obvious that we don't fit in with her. She does not support our relationship either, and it becomes apparent that something drastic needs to be done. Although we had initially planned to stay in Europe to be near family and ease the divorce transition for the kids, confronted with the fact of my parent's behavior, and the reality that Marbella is not really a healthy enough environment in which we would like to raise the kids, we decide to leave, and move back the US.

In June of 1990, as soon as my son is out of school, we move to the Sand Diego area to be near Luis' parents. That way, we reason, the kids will have a healthier environment in which to grow up, be closer to their Dad, and have all the advantages of good schools, and of being raised in the US. Luis knows San Diego very well, he loves the area, and I love the United States. The decision thus seems a win –win for all. The move is good, it empowers both of us, and our workshops business begins to thrive. Luis and I now focus on developing the business; he travels and works with the clients, while I work from home, and take care for the kids. Roger, stays in Seattle, remarries, and we remain very good friends. He flies down occasionally to visits the kids, and he even stays at our house. It's eerie to see how much he respects Luis, how well the two get along. With my parents in Europe, however, a rift begins to form.

La Perouse Bay, Maui, Hawaii, 1994. It's a balmy winter morning in Hawaii, and the sun is already way up in the sky. I'm sitting on a camping chair sipping coffee in front of the tent we pitched here at La Perouse last night. Luis has gone for a walk, to meditate, to feel the energy of nature, to see if inspiration strikes. The kids got up early; put on their water socks, and went off to explore the shore. We have moved to Maui a year ago, and I'm so very proud of how well they are adjusting to this new place, making friends at school, getting straight A's. They are so

much healthier than on the mainland, and take to the ocean as if they'd lived by the shore all along.

This place is no more than a little patch of curvy, thorny Kiawe trees on the flanks of *Haleakala*, sheltered by large outcroppings of lava rocks. But the ocean forms a little shelf here just beyond the rocks that is full of tidal pools where the kids like to look for crabs and shells. Occasionally, when the surf is calm, we all jump off the rocky shelf into the deeper waters, we snorkel there and swim. But this time we would have to stay on land; the waves were very rough. La Perouse is our little private gem in paradise, yet there are no services, no potable water here. Everything we need we have to bring with us, and leave nothing behind when go back home. Accessible only with help of a powerful 4WD, hours from the nearest settlement, few people even know about this place, and only occasionally we see a few locals venture here. Thus the shore remains clean, the campsite primeval and pristine. Today, as usual, we are all alone here.

The surf is unusually high this weekend, yet the waves have thrown up large quantities of goodies into the tidal pools and on to the beach last night, some gorgeous cowry shells, and large urchin spines. Our buckets full of treasures, we'd roasted hot dogs and marshmallows by the camp fire at night, and told each other stories of our past once the kids had gone to sleep. Our bellies well satiated, our souls at rest, we had fallen asleep under the glow of the full moon, to the sound of the rolling surf.

God, I'm glad we moved to Hawaii. It's rough to make it on these islands, and it wasn't easy to move all the way here. I'm so very glad we made it, I'm so glad we did. I hope we will succeed, I hope it will last.

I pour myself another coffee, and sit in contemplation for another while. Soon Luis saunters down the hill with long-limbed grace and sits down on the lawn chair next to mine. I hand him some coffee, and he picks up a stick, uses it to stir some ants around on the ground.

“So how was it up there? Did your meditation go well?”

“It was great, lots of good energy. It is enchanted here. I can feel the nature spirits, I feel very connected to this place. The desert landscape, the rocks...yet there is also the Pacific... it reminds me of Baja California, of when I roamed the countryside as kid, of the landscape where I grew up”.

“It’s the same for me, the dryness and the crisp, clean air, the ocean that is never far away... the feel is so similar to Southern Spain...but, well, after everything that happens, after everything they did, that place is no longer home. I’m glad we didn’t stay there”. Tears welled up in my eyes; I tried to push them back. I didn’t want to allow the ghosts of the past to ruin this perfect morning.

“I love the Pacific more than any ocean; don’t ask me to explain why, but here I see how much I’ve missed this ocean all my life”.

“Well, here you have it now”. He said, threw the stick onto the ground, marched to the cooler to grab a drink, then sat back down.

“You know, while I was meditating up there this morning, I thought about what brought us all the way here”.

“*Dime*” Tell me, I said.

“Well first there was your intuition that we needed to come here, that it would be good for the kids to get closer to nature, that it would be healthy and special for us. And I think it is clear that it is.” He said.

“Absolutely, look at us, look at them now.” I said. My son and daughter had now abandoned their buckets with the spoils of the sea and were attempting to climb two nearby trees. My son just helped my daughter up onto the first, and was now climbing up on another one nearby. They waved at us from up there.

“They would never have touched nature in North Carolina or even in San Diego the way they do here now”.

“It worked out really well, I think”. He agreed.

“Yes, and it has been so healing and refreshing for the two of us as well”, he added. “And then there were the workshop students, remember how they’d practically begged us to lead our groups in a sexier place?”

“Yes, but we’ve not brought them here yet. Perhaps we should and soon, don’t you think?” I ask.

“No, we have not brought them over, but we have added more groups, in Malaysia, and we will soon add some from Singapore, perhaps even from Australia. Moving here has certainly been great for the business”.

“Yes, I’m so glad it’s going so well”.

“So when I looked at all this in my meditation, I saw that it is time to revise our story, that we need to change how we see your parent’s influence in our past”.

“What do you mean? They did what they did, they are who they are. I’ve tried to improve things with them, but it seems to be to no avail”.

“I’m not saying you should do more. What I say is that we can flip the narrative if we want. See, all these years we have dwelled on how your parents, your Dad , your stepmother, and then even your Mom were against our relationship, how much pain they caused with their lies, deeds,

and bigoted remarks. On some level we have seen ourselves as running away from Europe to leave all that behind”.

“Well yes, on some level we have. Those were not nice things that they said and did, and just when we needed their support the most... I’m just not able to get over it, I never expected they would act this way”.

“You might not be able to get over it if you face it head on, but try to think about it in another way for a moment” Luis said.

“Ok?”

“I mean, we have looked at our lives as if we had to push against your family in Europe to make a life in the USA – your Dad certainly wanted us to fail, he said as much. What if we change the narrative, see your Dad as an old fashioned Western Mystery kind dweller of the threshold?”

“Like that the Universe put him there to guide us away from Europe, incite us to start our own grand adventure, strike out from the shackles of my Old World family ties, build a life over here, explore the New World on our own, even show the kids a healthier, freer way of life?”

“Yes, in a way their behavior was so intolerable, that it practically forced us to move away, and face our fears to have to strike out on our own. And now, well, we are doing all right, living life on our own terms. Not too bad, not that bad at all. What do you think?”

“I never wanted to stay in Europe anyway, I love the USA. I love the day Roger brought us here, I loved to live here with Roger, and I always wanted to come back to the USA. It’s just, that for a while there... before our business took off... it would have been nice to have their unconditional support, as parents and as grandparents.”

“Yes, it would have been nice; it would have helped a lot. But like I say, there must be a higher reason why they did not, why we were pushed to blaze our own trail, why we came all the way here. We need to start building up this story of inner guidance and success”.

“You are right; it was always my dream to live on a Pacific Island. When I grew up in Spain, my friend Mariela’s mother was from Tahiti; she took her home to live on the island for a year, and I remember Mariela sending me a Christmas cards with an outrigger canoe decorated with Christmas paraphernalia. I remember how impressed I was at the thought that their seasons were reversed, that they lived near a crystal clear lagoon that they walked around in flip flops and sarongs all year.

“See? So then you/we were meant to come all along. Let’s look at your family’s behaviors as a blessing that led us all the way here, to this life, to coming into our own. Besides, you never really wanted the kids to grow up in the social environment in which you were born”.

“No, not really, I’m not sure it’s good for the soul. So my plan is that when they grow up they can go back and check it out. If they are ambitious in that sort of way, they can go and expand on their princely heritage and see where that will go. If not, they will have more American roots to help them grow. They will always have their special memories of nature as only living in in a place like Hawaii can provide”.

“See? So all is well. We wanted to leave Europe behind, we wanted to come here; a higher part of us was guiding all these happenings from above. Your Dad was a mere *dweller on the threshold* of our coming into our own. You know how in the Western Mystery Tradition they say that once you know the dweller’s name, he can no longer scare or obstruct? Painful to deal with yes, but hugely empowering nonetheless” Luis explains.

“If you look at it that way, yes, my family’s attitude can be seen as a blessing in disguise. Still it hurts” I said, tears welling up again.

“But haven’t we become stronger for facing all this? Isn’t the narrative that the Universe was somehow wisely guiding us through all that turmoil until it lead us to where we are supposed to be, right here, more empowering and positive than if we remain polarized in our position, victimized? Should we not choose this positive narrative as our preferred view of how things really went?”

“Yes, we should. But it still hurts”.

“Please, look around” he said, sweeping his right arm towards the sea. Is this not a thousand times better than what we could have had if we had stayed in the Old World?”

I follow his arm with my eyes across the channel to the island of *Kahoolawe*. I take in the churning sea, the surreal blue of the water, the mighty swells that roll in from the south this time of year. Closer to our bay, I see two lone surfers braving the waves, their silhouettes two specs of black against the churning turquoise waters, swiftly swinging their boards this way and that. I see one surfer, then another catching a good wave; they glide forward on the curl, then stop and turn, a mere few feet before the swell crashes into the sharp black cliffs of the lava rock.

I am so glad we made it to Maui, that we were able to bring the kids to this place, that we are able to enjoy this as a family now.

“Europe is esthetically pleasing, but of course this is so much better in every way. But then, at the end of the day, no matter how we tell our story, it still hurts”.

“How so?”

“Because they are my parents. The place they could have, should have occupied leaves an empty space. What I thought could have been, what I wish should have been there between them

and me... what I now see might never truly have even been the way I'd thought it was... well, that relationship that I would have wanted to have had between all of us.... I see now that it might never be".

"Like I said, it may never have been meant to be" said Luis.

We both fall into a silence that stretches for a while.

Luis breaks it first "Yes, I understand that it is difficult to deal with, and sad, really" he says.

"Yes, it's sad" I say and wipe a tear away from my cheek, unclear really if this tear was a result of my deep sadness or my immense joy.

"But here, now, we need to focus on the good that we have", says Luis. "Let's look at how the Universe is really smiling at us. Look at the two kids over there, they are growing so tall, the time is passing so fast. I'm proud of them; they are two really good kids".

"They are exceptionally good kids, they really are. They might not have turned out this way, if we'd stayed in Europe".

"Yes, they might not have" he says.

"Whatever the reasons for our coming here, we did the right thing. We came just in time for the kids to experience nature, experience this" I say, pointing at the channel beyond. "If we had waited until they started High School, it might have been too late."

"Yes, as teenagers they might have been too engrossed into their own inner world to find the joy in nature that they are finding now. We did the right thing in coming here". With that Luis gives me a kiss, sets down his drink, and grabs a bag of chips. "I'm starving; do we have anything left to eat?"

"I'll scramble some eggs, if you light the stove".

He lights the stove, I scramble the eggs. We call the kids, and eat a quick breakfast of eggs, whole wheat bread, and fruit. Soon everyone is finished and the kids climb on nearby rocks to explore the view.

“Luis, why don’t we bring the workshop students here? This place is so magical! I mean right here, and the rest of the island is magical too; they might be very excited to come”.

“That might be a good idea, but it’s also a lot of work, with the sleeping and the food, they won’t all fit in our Jeep...”

“But it’s like a sanctuary here. It would fit perfectly with what we teach”.

“I’m not sure that my students from Malaysia would want to come all the way here, but the Canadians might”.

“We could do a 5 Elements theme! You know, take them to the secret lava cave for the Earth, then to the waterfalls for the Water, the top of the volcano on the Big Island for Fire...”

“That might work, if you do all the organizing”.

“I can do that; I’ll organize the lodging, food and transportation. We can rent some more Jeeps, buy a few more tents. It will be great”.

“O.k. let’s give it a shot. I’ll send out the newsletter to promote the trip, and I’ll lead the group once they are here”.

“Deal” I say, we kiss, shake hands. “Let’s go for a walk now, and pick a date for the workshop when we get home”.

We picked a date that week, organized the workshop, and several months later brought a group to Maui, then another; the 5 elements theme tuned out to be a great success.

Shadow

Maui, Hawaii, 1996. It is late morning. I've brought Luis to the airport in Kahului to catch his flight to Honolulu and then on to Singapore to teach and run his groups. We are standing in the open air corridor outside of his gate. It's warm, but the trade winds are already blowing strong, ruffling the palm trees in the parking lot, pulling at the painted roses on my Jamsworld dress. He stands tall and straight, his thick long hair blowing around in the wind, a rumpled white linen shirt accentuating his tanned skin, dark pants gracing his interminable legs, a classy Mont Blanc pen tucked into the pocket on his shirt. His face is strong, tanned, his demeanor so seemingly sure of himself. Standing against the backdrop of the West Maui mountains, with the trade winds pushing the mid-morning clouds into Iao valley and then up, curling them over the mountain peaks, he is a coveted *semi-god* all dressed for work.

I grab his shoulder "This thing you did, it is not good at all. I need to talk to someone about it. I need help".

A storm rise in his eyes, then ebbs. There is guardedness, anger, sadness, and then finally remorse. It's so swift, that if I weren't used to these fleeting displays, I might have thought it was all in my mind.

"Do what you have to do, I can't stop you".

My arm drops away, I try to smooth out my dress.

I look down onto my sandals, then up again into his eyes. "But don't you see that this was wrong?"

He looks into the distance, surveys the airport building; then I see another flicker of remorse, and then again he closes down. He looks stern, even while his hair flies wildly around his face. An eternity goes by, then...

“Yes, it probably was” He says, his chin jutting out in defiance, his jaw set.

I lean against the doorjamb, take a deep breath. I try to hold the wildly fluttering dress down around my legs. I see another storm passing through his eyes, confusion, love, loneliness, and then longing.

I touch his shoulder, pull him near and whisper a “Fly safe”.

He grabs me, holds me tight, expressing with the body what he was now unable to say in words “Be safe”.

“Call me when you get there?” I ask.

“Yes” he says. “And give the kids a hug for me”.

“I will”.

They call his flight; we cling to each other in a long, gut-wrenching embrace, holding on tight, until they almost close the gate.

Tears streaming down my face, I march into the airport’s parking lot to retrieve the Jeep. Confused, about why this is now happening, yet determined to move it forward and get some respite, I pull onto Haleakala highway heading upcountry along the gently sloping flanks of the volcano. My mind churning, my body as if in a trance, I let the car take me up the four lane road, taking in the lei of clouds that circle the mountain at this hour, majestic expanse of the island land, the wide sugar cane and pineapple fields that rim the way. At the moment I am sad, and really also quite mad, but not in any way losing my mind. I know what happened, what is going wrong, what he should never have done. But what I don’t know is what this all means, for our love, for our relationship, where this will or should take us from now.

Once in the therapist's office, I explain what I know. She nods, is empathic, tells me that she takes a Jungian approach. I think that is good, that is one of the reasons I came here. I feel a good rapport.

After some discussion, she picks up a pen and paper, draws a face, then a vertical line down its middle. She fills the left side of the face with black.

“You know about the shadow-right? People repress it, they keep it inside. The shinier they make themselves on the outside, the more powerful the shadow grows on the inside. Then when there is stress, or a cataclysmic event that the person can no longer control, the shadow bursts through and out. Suddenly it shows an aspect of the person that is the total opposite of who he thinks that he is, and of who others have come to expect him or her to be”.

“I see” I say, but I'm not really sure I do see this right now.

How could such a thing happen, how, if we were always so careful to look so deep and process so much of our past?”

“Once the shadow erupts, it's sort of like the genie in the bottle; it cannot be pushed back” the therapist continues to explain.

“It has to run its course?”

“Yes, and no, well perhaps to some extent. When the shadow that has been repressed a long time spills out, it often prompts behaviors the person would not have been happy with in their prior frame of mind”.

“So what does that mean for me, for us right now?” I understand about the concept of the shadow, but what on Earth does that mean now, for us, for me? What help does this understanding provide?

“It needs to be faced, dealt with, and integrated in some way. The shadow contains all the power – you see? Integrating it leads to individuation, to getting closer to one’s real Self”.

“How? He is so rebellious, obsessed with freedom. There is no way I can control his actions.”

“Of course you cannot control him, nobody can. But what you can do is influence the shadow dynamics to some extent. From what I hear, up to now you were the solid ground under his feet, the one that was holding on to the marriage”.

“That’s true. But there still is much love, I think. But yes, I was the steady and responsible mother and wife, holding down the fort, so to speak”.

“When the shadow erupts, it forces people to face the opposite of what was previously visible and believed to be the true, not just in him now, *but also in you*. For example in a marriage it often... maybe a reversal is now needed. Well, have you thought of getting a divorce?”

“What? No! I cannot split up from him, he is my closest kin, like my brother...like my own flesh and blood”.

“Yes, I can see that you feel this deep kinship by the way you describe your relationship. But then, you need to consider this: *Women tend to get submerged in marriage*. But of course, it’s up to you”.

“I’ll think about it, thanks”.

“And what about *your* Bodhisattva path? From what you told me it sounds like you were born to be a helper, a guide. *What about you, what about your path?*”

“I’ve been writing all the manuals for our workshops, but that is not really my stuff. I always wanted to help people with their relationships, teach how to gain a deeper connection with their partner – to develop a soulmate relationship and such, you know....”

“So what about that?”

“I don’t know; I’ve sort of lost my groove right now”.

“But it’s valuable, maybe you need to refocus on that. Just think about it until next week, and let me know”. With this she stands up, signaling that the session was complete. She gives me a warm hug, and walks me to the door.

A few minutes later I’m driving down the highway on my way back home.

Divorce? How can she suggest such a thing!

We have barely started to work things out. But one thing was true; it would never be the same between us. He crashed our glass castle of trust. As a result, nothing might ever ever be the same between us. Upholding our marriage as if all was well might be a hypocritical thing to sustain, and besides, it would burden me again to be the preserver, the sustainer of stability, the one that needs to work the hardest to hold the shadow at bay. But I’ve tried everything, and it did not seem to make a dent in keeping the shadow contained. Something has to give to bring a shift...like sandbags that must be thrown overboard to lift the relationship higher towards our goal. O.k. maybe this marriage is already stale; maybe it has been stale for a while.

Trying to find my way in a cloud of confusing feelings and thoughts, I drive down automatically towards the valley, turn left onto *Hana* Highway, and take the shortcut through the *Pu’unene* sugar mill. I drive slowly over the narrow, bumpy road, my car enveloped in a swirl of red dust, until the little road takes me back to the Highway and on home towards *Kihei*.

But which marriage would we divorce?

Well, the one that counted for me was the one Margaret performed for us in the U.K. that was the truly spiritual one. There is no way that divorcing legally would even be able to touch that. So what would we divorce? Truth is that there really was no “spiritual divorcer” we could hire to divorce us on that level, if that was even possible at all. The only marriage we could dissolve then was the legal marriage, the one that was conferred by the state of California, in Vista, on March 3rd of 1991. That one, we could work with, that one we could dissolve. It was merely a piece of paper really, a social agreement, a document given by the court. Luis had never really seemed to care for it that much, and honestly, right now? Neither did I. Maybe it was time for me to face the shadow of it all. Maybe if I gave the relationship a bit more breathing space the emergence of the shadow would calm down. Maybe we should try to work with that.

The next day Luis called from Singapore as agreed.

“How was the trip?”

“I had a few strange dreams on the plane, but otherwise it was o.k. I’m always glad to come back here and be with the group”.

“That’s nice, I’m glad your trip went safe”.

“How is everything going over there, kids doing o.k.?”

“Yes, they are fine. I saw the counselor. I’ve thought about it, and about us - a lot. I think something needs to be shifted, like to allow steam to escape, to integrate the shadow and such. I think we might need a divorce”.

“I’ve thought about us a lot too. But I haven’t thought about divorce” He paused for a while. An eternity seems to go by...

“Are you still there?”

“Yes. I’m here. Now that you say it, maybe divorce will give us some more space to breathe”.

“I am and was breathing well all along. I just cannot be the one polarized in upholding the entire steadiness in this relationship while you hog all the freedom. It is not good, nor is it fair. So I think that it is time that I now shift the polarity, that I upturn the apple cart. I want us to get a divorce!”

He paused for a long while, and then said “O.k. If that is what you think will shift the shadow, if that is what you want”.

“It’s not what I want, but we cannot go on as before, something needs to be done. The shadow is consuming our every interaction, and not much has worked well between us during the last few months. It is just too painful to go on like that”.

“Yes, it hurts. And I agree that we need to change something, integrate the shadow somehow. This should truly help me with my freedom drive”.

“Who knows, maybe I will be the one enjoying my new freedom now” I say.

“Nah, you aren’t going anywhere, you have always been the homey one” he says.

Yet there was a growing insecurity in his voice, like the ground under him was no longer all that stable, like things had begun to move. Hopefully, they were moving to the center, more closely to where they should be, where they should have been all along. But divorce was a powerful force and archetype if you will. I had no idea if or how things could and would work in the long run. I felt the ground move just then under my own two feet as well.

“We will just have to see where this takes us” I say.

“Yes, we’ll have to see. So why don’t you go and find out how the divorce is done, prepare the paperwork and such for when I get back home?”

“No, I’m not lifting another finger for us to get along. I’ve tried and done everything I could; now it’s your turn. You get the paperwork prepared, you pay the fee. I’ll show up and sign.”

“O.k., o.k. I’ll take care of it when I return.”

It is 12: 45; Luis and I are sitting outside, at our favorite coffee roaster in the center of Kihei town. Several weeks have passed since we agreed to get a divorce. We are both picking nervously at our lunch of Caesar’s salads with sourdough bun. I feed breadcrumbs to the sparrows and the little Zebra dove that usually shows up here at this time. It is hot in Kihei at this hour, and the iced teas we ordered cool us down a bit, but not nearly enough.

Luis glances at his watch. “The paralegal said 1.p.m. I hope he is not on island time.”

“It’s o.k. if he is a bit late. Let’s just enjoy our lunch”. I say, uncharacteristically calm.

“I’m not that hungry today” he admits.

“Neither am I”.

We grab each other’s hands; he pulls me towards him, looks into my eyes.

“The truth is I am a bit scared” he says, and squeezes really hard.

“So am I” I squeeze him back.

“But I think you made the right decision, it is the right thing to do right now” he says.

“I don’t know what else we could do.”

“No, neither do I”

With that, the paralegal arrives, sits down at the café table, and, within a few minutes, Luis pays him \$ 25 and the deed is done.

To our left, the majestic volcano *Haleakala* stands stoically, its flanks surrounded its lei of clouds. The little dove coos happily, still pecking the ground, the sparrow hop around, jostling for the last sourdough crumbs. I feel relief.

I get the sense that I just underwent a difficult surgery, as if someone had just cut off a body part. What exactly was just severed, what exactly we had lost, however, I am not sure at all.

Luis bends over, gives me a heartfelt kiss, and squeezes my hand once more.

“I love you”.

“I love you too”.

With that, we stand up and drive away in the car. Our salads left untouched, doves and sparrows atop the table now, feasting gleefully on our abandoned sourdough buns.

Most people come to Maui to get married; I guess we had somehow found our way out here to get divorced. But were we really? What, if anything can divorce a pair of twin souls? A huge weight was lifted off my shoulders today; that was for sure. Yet on the other hand, it felt awkward, even unnatural to even imagine divorcing a pair of twin souls. In my mind, and as far as I know also in Luis’s mind, we had merely terminated the legal contract of marriage. In fact, we did not, *could not divorce the twin souls*. Nevertheless, the whole thing, though liberating, was painful in some way, as if we each had to cut off a limb to save the heart. Divorce carries a heavy weight, and for all our talk about marriage being merely for society’s sake, none of us knows for sure right now how all this would play out. For that, we would have to live on and find out.

St. Petersburg, Florida, 2006. Since that fated day of our Maui divorce, our life has taken several interesting twists and turns. We stayed in Maui for another year, and then moved to Florida. Now, our relationship as strong as ever, we live together in St. Pete.

Its early morning, and I wake up, drenched in sweat. My hands are shaking and it feels as if someone has just punched me in the gut. Trembling, I drag myself over to the small kitchen and start the coffeemaker. I listen to the comforting gurgling sounds emanating from the percolator; I wait a few minutes until the brew is ready, then, mug in hand, I sit down on the bed, and call Luis on the intercom.

“*Hola*, how is it going?” He answers in his usual, upbeat way.

“Not good today. Can you please come fast, and help me with this dream?”

“*Ahi voy!* I’m coming!” Within seconds, I hear him stumping up the stairs.

It is our usual routine, he gets up very early and goes downstairs to his office, I wake up later, prepare the coffee. Then he joins me to analyze our dreams and make plans for the day. But today was not normal. It looked like it would be a difficult day.

“So, what happened?” he says, pouring himself a cup.

“I can’t talk right now. I need to settle down a bit. Why don’t you tell me how your night went while I take a few sips of the coffee? It helps me focus and calm down”.

We take our dreams very seriously; we each usually remember two or three every night. We discuss them every morning to see what meanings and premonitions might be derived from them that could help us guide our day. We have been doing this for nearly two decades, since the first time we met.

“Well my night went sort of uneventful. No dreams to report. I did get up at 6, sat down to meditate. It wasn’t that good”.

“Why do you think?”

“I don’t really know, but I get the sense that the energy of this area has not been the same after the 4 hurricanes hit two years ago. I just cannot get that peaceful feeling here anymore”.

I sipped my coffee in silence, looking at two squirrels playing on the railing outside the sliding glass door. To enjoy the amazing tree-top and roof-top views of the Old North East in St. Petersburg from this second story, we had set up our master bedroom in a small studio apartment outside our main house. The morning light was now streaming in through the windows on all four walls, illuminating the room and the small deck nestled under the low hanging branches of a huge centuries- old grand oak that sheltered our small abode.

“Yeah, it is strange how since those hurricanes it has never felt the same around here. Maybe your Native American friend Charlie was right after all”.

Charlie is a Native American leader, healer, and visionary friend of Luis who lead sweat lodges in the North Tampa area for years. Then one day, shortly before Hurricane Frances was about to hit the Tampa Bay area, Charlie had told Luis that he’d felt a dark foreboding, a negative vibe that warned him that the Tampa Bay area was going to go down. He said that he’d decided then and there to sell his property and move his family and his Native American group up North.

“Yes, the Lakota have a powerful connection with the Earth. They sense a lot of things. But it is hard to know what to do about all these weird feelings that something is not right, to decide what they may mean in the context of our own lives.”

Luis and I had also felt a similarly uncomfortable energy during the Hurricane season of 2004, especially since we now owned several rental properties that could be damaged by the storms. Yet we had both just started graduate schools at a local University, and there was no way

we could move, nor had we had an intuition to do so at that time. Instead, we had attributed the negative feelings associated with the storm simply to the sheer oppressiveness of the hurricane's weather system, and were not able to derive any actionable intelligence from the sense of doom we felt, except to stay put and protect the houses as best we could.

“Lucky the grand oak did not shed a single branch during those hurricanes; he could have crushed us in our sleep. But he did not”. It did not escape either of us that this majestic tree that spanned three lots was a *live oak*. To us it was like a physical representation of the metaphorical Kabalistic Tree of Life that had connected us so many years ago.

“So what was your dream about?” He asked.

“I dreamt that I was on the ground floor of this concrete high-rise; huge flames were raging around. Beyond the flames, it was dark. The fire had already scorched everything, furniture, personal belongings, the window treatments, and the walls. Only the concrete structure, the floor and the stairwell remained. I knew that Ariana (my daughter) was lost somewhere in the building; she was younger in my dream, only about 12 years old”.

“Did you find her?” He asked.

“Panicked, I looked everywhere for her. Finally I found her, I did not know in what state. I tried to drag her somewhere higher, but I no longer knew what was up, what down”.

I paused. My hands were still trembling; I took another deep sip of the coffee, then a deep breath. “I was trying to run up the stairs, trying to drag her with me. I was exhausted, disoriented, failing. I thought it was the end. Still I kept on trying to climb upwards, rise above the blaze. Suddenly a strong pair of arms picked us both up and carried us swiftly up the remaining stairs and up to a rooftop platform. It was a firefighter...”

“And then?”

“The flames were now engulfing the whole building, licking at the concrete under our feet. But there was a huge contraption that had been lifted by a fire truck all the way to the roof. He gently laid us on its platform and the machinery slowly lowered us to the ground. I woke up on the way down”.

“So what do you think it means?” Luis asked.

I stared straight ahead through the glass door. The two squirrels were still enjoying their dance. The room was practically leaning onto the grand oak like a tree house, its branches embracing us like a loving parent. The tree transformed our yard into a miniature world all its own, providing shelter and food to all sorts of wildlife right here in the middle of town. In fact, a whole colony of squirrels and a family of raccoons, generations of Cardinals and Blue Jays too had made it their playground and their home.

“I think it has to do with the real estate, with our rental properties, but I don’t really know”.

“Well, saving Ariana could be about rescuing your own, younger self from a disaster”.

“Yes, that’s what the Jungians would say, that the images in your dreams are all projections of your own self. But you know, we don’t always see it like this. In this case, I think it has more to do with that dark foreboding your friend Charlie the Lakota talked about. I’m really scared that it is about the real estate. I have a sense that it may be way worse than everyone thinks. The house on the beach we remodeled, nobody is buying it for the price it was appraised for. Nobody is showing interest. In fact nobody is buying anywhere around here now anything at all!”.

“So what does Tina say?”

“You know, she is in the business of selling real estate, she always says the same ‘we just need to be patient, wait for the right buyer, people are still spooked from the hurricanes, it is just a slump, it will pick up soon....’ But I think this dream is a powerful warning, I think that I need to act soon”.

I had invested a small settlement I’d received from my father in some rental properties a few years ago. Over the years, we had remodeled and sold some, reinvested in others. The real estate market on the Florida Sun Coast had been booming until two years ago. The work was lucrative, but hard. It had allowed Luis to focus on his art, but it also drained much of our energy and our savings too.

“Lawrence? What does he think?”

“Well, as a property manager he should know what is going on. But you know, he also has his whole life invested in that condo high-rise he is preselling now. It’s easy to think that because he has been at this job for so long, that he is the expert I should listen to. But then, his own view might be biased by wishful thinking, he might be too optimistic because otherwise he would have to give up on this project right now”.

“O.k. But what role does Ariana play in this then?”

“I helped her with the down payment of her house- remember? It was meant to be an investment. We are both in this “building” stuff together now, her and me”.

“That’s true, and then her presence in the dream might be about her actual person, not a symbol of your internal dynamic”.

“Yes, with due respect to Jung, but I think that in this case... I think the dream points to a calamity that could actually befall the two of us”. I said.

“It’s difficult to know what to do. I get this weekly newsletter from this investor that has been warning about the real estate bubble for a while now, yet nobody else seems to think it’s actually happening.” Luis says.

“Yes, the local papers and market watch reports all sound like it is just a temporary slump in the market, a healthy redress even after the prices shot through the roof in 2004, right before the hurricanes hit. They back up their reports with all the historical sales data for the region. The reports make rational sense, but they don’t match what I get from my intuitive sense”.

“Well, like I said, this investor guy that writes this newsletter would agree with the darker view. But it’s difficult to know how to take this. We can think that this is just a nightmare that you had, that it came out of the blue and has no meaning other than being a weird dream. We would then say that you are emotionally overreacting, making a drama of it. If we decide to think this way, then we go on as usual, do nothing, don’t act on it”.

“But it does not feel trivial; it feels highly significant, like a warning from the other side”.

I explain.

“Yes, I believe you. And we’ve both had inner warnings through dreams and visions that turned out to be true. Thank God we acted on those!”

“Exactly!”

“So if we decide to believe that you are not overreacting, but instead are highly intuitive, and that this intuition, or inner guidance, or whatever you want to call it, can avail itself of any visual and emotional means it has at its disposition, including your dreams in order to sound a warning, then we would certainly interpret this dream not in the Jungian fashion – as expressions of inner dynamics – but as an actual, real warning about the real estate market going down, and about the need of swift, decisive action to save us and Ariana from financial disaster”.

“I don’t know which is scarier, that I am irrational and over reacting, or that it is a message from my inner, intuitive self.? Because if it is a message, then it’s also a call to some drastic action that is scary to take...”

“If it were indeed a message from your inner self, what would it be telling you right now?”

I paused, tried to sense the inside of my body, get a subjective sense of what my intuition was telling me right now. It was there immediately, on the surface, not even skin deep.

“If the images in the dream were indeed a message from my inner self, then they would be saying that the real estate is not in a temporary slump. *That it is actually in free fall*, or worse, that it is already gone down, that the investments are already burnt out, like the walls and furniture of the building. The building then might represent the market, and *I need to get out*”.

“Yes, but the dream is also showing you that you are not alone, that someone helps you move up and out fast enough to save yours and Ariana’s life”.

“That’s true, but you know what this really means? It means that if the market is really going down that bad, all the rental properties need to be sold *right now*, before everyone becomes aware of what is going on, before all the down payments are lost”.

“Yes, that is exactly what this would mean” he says, grabs my hand tight, leans back against the headboard and heaves a deep, soulful sigh.

I set my coffee on the nightstand, rub my chest with my right hand soothing the small cramp I’m beginning to feel there, and curl the fingers of my left into a fist around his hand.

“I don’t know how to make such a decision, to walk away from what I, what we have worked for all these years. I don’t know if I have what it takes to sort it out, do what may need to be done. I’m terrified”.

“You know I’ll help you out. Why don’t you call Tina and Lawrence this morning and see what they say today?”

We sit in silence on the king bed for a while longer, drawing sustenance from the warmth and comfort of each other’s presence, from the deep understandings we have built between us for so many years, from the worldview that unites us. We try to breathe deeply and enjoying the shelter we have in each other, before facing the rest of the day. The many windows offer an unobstructed view of the grand oak, the tree tops and rooftops of our neighborhood, the bougainvillea vines draping themselves over neglected orange trees, fences, and wooden posts now drenched in the morning sun. This is our magical abode; we reconnect to nature up here. Surrounded by Mother Nature’s mystical creatures, protected by the centuries-old grand oak that, like a truly magical creature spanning three worlds, spans the three large lots..... After a few minutes, our emotions settle a bit, and Luis is ready to go back down. He marches down the outside stairs to his office, and I pick up the phone.

“Hi Tina, so, did you show the house over the weekend? Any other agents show the house at all?”

“No, not this weekend, I checked the lockbox. It was really calm. It’s strange, because the house is in such good shape. At this price two years ago, Ha! It would already have sold by now. But I think we are good, we are both doing all we can. People might still be a bit spooked out here by the increase in homeowners insurance and the bad press. But you just reduced the price last week, now we just need to wait a bit for the right buyer to show up”.

“So you still think it’s just a temporary slump?”

“Yeah, and I talk to the people at my office every day, and they all think the same thing. It’s just one of those small dips in the cycle; we just have to wait it out.”

“Tina, I’m not sure it’s just such a temporary small dip, I don’t have such a good feeling at all”.

“Well it’s your decision, it’s your house, if you want to lower the price again, I can do that for you right now. But if you ask my opinion, I think we should wait”.

“Thanks Tina, I’ll think about it a bit longer and then I’ll call you back”.

I hung up the phone with Tina and immediately called Lawrence. I asked him how his condo project was going; he said it was ready to go, but that there simply seemed to be no buyers around right now.

“So what do you think is going on?”

“I’m, convinced it’s just a temporary slump. Luckily, we have enough business from the property management side that we can afford to tread water here for a while. But honestly, it sucks”.

“Do you think it is still a backlash from the hurricanes?”

“Yeah, there were huge vacancies then. Some people even got so spooked that they moved away. But we are targeting a younger, hipper crowd with our project, they should soon come back”.

“What about the rentals, what are tenants saying?”

“Well, many wanted to get out of renting and buy, you probably know that. Others might have lost money during the hurricane season two years ago and are still trying to recover; others moved inland or back up North. But your properties are fully occupied now, you should have nothing to worry about. It’s just a temporary slump”.

“Well, you know, we remodeled that rental we had on the beach, listed it for its appraised value a few months ago, since then, we’ve had to reduce the price several times. It would have sold like hotcakes a couple of years ago. I have an uneasy feeling about all this.”

“Same here, no buyers. But I would not worry too much about it, like I said; it’s just a temporary slump”.

“Thanks, I’ll keep that in mind. Take care, I’ll talk to you very soon”.

I hung up the phone, engulfed by a deep sense of doom.

Later that evening, the dream still haunts. Luis and I congregate in our living room to reevaluate. I sit down on the sofa, he takes the chair.

“I’m really nervous, Luis. I’ve feel this sense of impending doom all day”.

“What did Tina and Lawrence say?”

“I called both realtors, they keep saying the same, that it’s just a temporary slump. But it doesn’t calm me at all. I feel this urgency to act, like something horrible will happen if I don’t do something *now and fast*”.

“Do you want to try a *pathwork*?”

Seconds later I was stretched out on the couch, gently breathing in and out. After a couple of minutes I am relaxed.

“Are you ready?”

“Yes, go ahead, but please take me slowly, so I can stay in the vision. And remember, I don’t do well when you tell me to imagine I am flying high above things. For me, the beach is always a good way to start.”

“Ok, ok. So you are walking along the beach now, the waves are gently lapping at your bare feet. You are walking along well and relaxed. Breathe deeply in and out”. He lets a minute

or two pass, and then continues “Now as you walk on along the shore, you know that in front of you is a disturbance, something that has to do with your unease. You walk towards it, and you recognize what it is. What do you see?”

“There is no beach at all. There is high water; the ocean is flooding up the land, forming large dark rivers carrying huge chunks of debris. It’s moving back and forth, as if pushed by the tides.”

“What kind of debris?”

“The debris is large pieces of wood, like parts of structures, of houses and buildings and such. It looks just like those currents of destruction that flooded those Indonesian villages during the tsunami of 2004”. I was deep into my visualization by now, almost in a trance. Yet still my body began to shake at the impact of what I felt and saw.

“O.k. Now imagine that the dark river of floating debris is like on a film, a movie screen”.

“Yes”.

“Good. Now pull at the film and peel it off to see what is behind”.

“Yes.”

“What do you see?”

There is a deep dark cave, I am inside. I see a small, evil-looking gnome-like figure that is dancing and singing around a small chest of gold. The chest is half open, gold coins are spilling out of it. There is a small golden glow emanating from them. The evil gnome is circling the chest, rubbing his hands together in glee, seeking the warming comfort of the golden glow”.

“What does he chant?”

“I’m not sure, foreclosure? Yes. He is dancing around the glowing chest, gleefully chanting *foreclosure, foreclosure, foreclosure it shall be!*”

“What sense do you get from this? Why do you think he is saying that?” Says Luis.

“It has to do with the debris. It’s made up of broken houses, structures, broken lives and broken dreams. It’s the real estate. He wants it to foreclose!”

“Ok. Keep breathing deeply, in and out. Now let’s call in a spiritual figure to help you out.

“Ok.”

“Good. Now imagine that Meher Baba is walking into the cave. What does he say?”

“It’s making me too nervous, pulling me out of the visualization. I can’t see it that fast. Please take me slowly, so I can stay with it.”

“O.k. O.k. Imagine that Meher Baba is walking down the stairs towards the bottom of the cave. He is wearing his white robe, the lei of flowers around his neck, his hair tied in the back. His feet are clad in his usual sandals...he arrives downstairs commanding authority, takes in the scene with the gnome He lifts his right arm, pointing his palm toward the chest. What does he say now?”

“Baba says ‘No foreclosures! You will have no foreclosures here, but you need to start acting now!’ Ha, it’s funny. The gnome does not like it at all! He looks scared, cringes. Now he starts to whisper ‘Noooo, Meher Baba, Meher Baba....’ as he bows his head down in front of the spiritual Master and recedes into a dark corner of the cave, leaving the chest of gold alone in the center of the cave.”

The next day I call Lawrence to help me start to sell of the rental properties. I call Tina to reduce the listing price on the beach property one more time. Luis decides to pivot from teaching

art while attending graduate school, to start working as a counselor right now. He gets a job at the same sight he is interning. We all decide to keep my daughter's house. By 2008, when the global financial crisis hit, and it becomes clear that not only the Tampa Bay area real estate market but the entire nation takes has taken unprecedented economic plunge, we have paid off most of our loans. While foreclosures ravage the area for several years, we are somehow able to stay afloat. Years later Lawrence, who must have lost his condominium project, but who does not like to talk much about the past, muses...

"I don't know what inspired you to sell off all those rental properties when you did, but it sure was the right thing to do".

Renewal

Detroit, Michigan, March, 2007. I'm at the American Counseling Association's Convention in Detroit, sitting in the front row of Dr. Walsh's and Dr. Dasenbrook's presentation on how to develop a private practice. Luis and I are both pursuing our MA in Mental Health Counseling, and we have flown up from Florida two days ago to present here at the convention.

I'm trying to pay attention to the presenter, but my head pounds and I'm barely able to think through the brain fog permeating my mind. My head feels as if my skull has been ripped away, and I am immersed in a wobbling pudding of mind-brain that extends 12 feet into the room, even while a large boulder presses down onto my chest. I struggle to take one deep breath, then another. As if on automatic pilot, I manage to ask a few intelligent questions - things like how to join an existing private practice, or how much time the third party reimbursement would take.

God, this is unbearable! Maybe I should leave.

But leaving now would be irresponsible; private practice is where I want to be as a mental health professional. Wasn't I ready to help people, make a difference? If not, then why was I attending graduate school right now? Tomorrow, Luis and I will present *Trauma, Transformative Learning, and Posttraumatic Growth*, the culmination of my 4 years of work; work that is so very relevant right now when many soldiers are returning traumatized from the war. Advice on how to start a private practice is exactly what I need right now. It all seems to fit so well.

So why am I feeling so awful, why am I not feeling the joy?

I am vaguely aware that my migraine may signal an internal conflict, even a major fork in my life road. But right now I am all about the pain; I have no clue what exactly this may be about. With trembling hands I rummage through my purse, find the side pocket, unzip it. As inconspicuously as possible, I remove two Advil, press them onto my tongue, and flush them down with the cold, bitter Starbucks I had kept nearby on the floor.

Am I sabotaging myself; afraid of success? Wasn't this my so called bodhisattva trek?

Exhausted, I lean back in my chair waiting for relief. Minutes pass, nothing. Dr. Walsh's partner, Dr. Dasenbrook, is speaking now. Yet to my ears, his voice sounds metallic, distorted. The overhead lights stab my eyes, nausea roils in my stomach. I can barely see out of my left eye.

Do I have a brain tumor? Should I lie down? I should, but not here...

I seize my bag and slip outside. On the corridor, I stop to grab a glass of water from a nearby table. Perhaps I am just dehydrated, and the pain will soon go away. I down one glass, and then another, the ice cubes tumbling, choking in the the back of my mouth. I make my way to the exit. Outside the convention center, the pale sunshine hits me in the face. Desperate for

oxygen, I inhale the frigid air. Luckily, a train from the inner city rail pulls in just in time. I drag my body up the steps and collapse on a seat beside the door.

Air, I need more air and an empty room...

The train pulls away from the curb and moves toward the Renaissance Center, back to my hotel. I am glad I don't have to walk. Downtown Detroit, with its boarded up buildings and empty streets, doesn't feel all that welcoming right now. I try to relax, take deep breaths, lean back into the chair. *What is happening with me, why this terrible unease?*

I let my mind drift around a bit, to see what comes up. I don't get a message or an explanation, but my mind takes me back to another time, another place. I'm at another American Counseling Association Convention, two years ago, when Luis and I, at the beginning of our graduate years in school, attend a workshop led by Dr. Allen Ivey and Dr. Mary Bradford Ivey on *Spirituality and Development: Using Developmental Counseling in Therapy and Practice*.

Dr. Ivey, considered by many to be the grandfather of counseling, assigns an exercise to the audience: "I want you to break up into pairs. Then I want you to think deeply about the following questions: *What is my special reason to be here on Earth? What is my spiritual mission in this life?* I want you to write the answer down and then take turns in sharing and discussing it with the other member of your dyad".

I watch Luis pair up with a stranger across the room. I pair up with a female LMHC from the Midwest. She tells me that she feels her mission is to counsel women because that is when she feels at her best. I tell her that have a sense that *I came to promote couple's optimal relationship development, and to write, speak, and teach about soul mates and twin souls*. I describe my experiences with Luis, about the way I had seen him in my dreams and my

meditations for 14 years before we ever met, how I recognized him when I first saw him at a workshop in Denver, how we have now been together for 16 years...

“That’s fascinating. You need to write this down! So what *is* holding you back?”

My voice breaks, my shoulders slump; I scramble for an answer. “I’ve worked on this project before” I tell her. “I wrote two manuscripts. I’ve tried to approach this project from several different angles, but none of them felt right. I guess by now I just gave up”.

“You should just go for it, give it another try”, she says.

“It is complicated. Something always seems to be missing. I don’t think I can”.

“But people, *couples*, need to hear your story; there are so many breakups and divorces out there. People are desperate. You could really make a difference with your work. Look within one more time, and then describe to me, what *is* stopping you?” She was positively insistent, I thought; she must be very good at what she does.

At that point my efforts of the previous years flashed before my eyes. The years I spent writing the manuscripts, the various graduate programs on Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) I visited and considered to attend. The literature and course textbooks I reviewed and studied on my own. The graduate courses and the trainings I took. How it had soon appeared to me that at least at that time, the field of MFT was mostly concerned with the welfare of children, disinterested in the couples’ success. How many couples come to therapy when their relationships are already beyond repair. How MFT appeared to subtly discriminate against sexual minorities and non-married unions, how attachment and behavioral theories ruled, how spirituality was often left unaddressed. How little the field appeared to focus on helping couples strengthen their relationships while they were still on good terms. Everywhere I had looked,

things just did not seem to quite match, in fact, at that time the field of MFT had felt a bit stale for me.

“Nah, I am keeping the couples project shelved for now. I’m focusing on the individual instead”.

“Wait a moment, let’s be more positive here”, the therapist said. “What would it take for you to start working on this project again?”

“At this point, I don’t really know. Something major would have to hit me from outside. *Something... like, well ...angels flying down from heaven, sounding their trumpets, telling me that now is the right time!*”

“Oh, don’t be so cynical. Your work is much needed now. Perhaps the Ivey’s will inspire you today to get started once again”. She really was dogged and very kind.

“Thanks for your support. But I feel that something vital is still missing from this project. Maybe it’s time has not yet come”.

What was the “something” that was still missing? Why had its time not come?

The old disappointment still lingering like an acrid cloud, I stare out the window onto the frozen Detroit River as the train takes me safely back towards my hotel room. The Michigan afternoon is sunny but pale. Seagulls perch on a large chunk of ice as it floats downstream; their beaks turned into the wind; their shoulders hunched, as they brace against the freeze. Everything looks lifeless, surreal. Soon the train pulls up to the Renaissance building; I buy another Starbucks at the café, and take the elevator to my room.

Upstairs, I have the room to myself. Luis, ex-husband, intimate partner, and always twin soul, is still at the convention, attending a day-long workshop with Dr. Corey. He won’t be back anytime soon. I collapse on the bed. As the minutes pass, my body settles down, the nausea

fades, my eyesight starts to improve. I pull the curtains wide open, sip my coffee, stare at the view. Outside my twenty- two story window, I see more ice floating downriver, pale yellow and blue in the late March sun. The window here faces north...

Where is my North?

So far, I had made sensible, rational decisions about my personal and about my professional path, and then followed through with actions. Yet my body and my feelings now seemed painfully severed from my rational mind. How to bring them back together, how to bridge this gap? Tears streaming down the sides of my face, I grab my journal, the one with the whimsical, embroidered blue moon and scattered stars. I wait. After a while I begin to feel that perhaps all is not as bleak as it looks. The river still flows predictably downstream; the ice is melting, heralding the rebirth that comes with spring.

Ever so slowly at first, then more vigorously, a powerful force emerges from inside my core, resolved it seems, to dissolve the ice, to clear the pain and the fog. I recognize the force. I've felt it before. It's the sunshine of my own spirit, resolved to burst through the clouds of confusion, and shine onto my frozen mind from above; determined to melt a path for the river of my emotions to flow once again through my body, in sync with my mind and soul, *to make me whole.*

Hurriedly, I begin to write: "I went to the private practice workshop and now I have a huge migraine. *Why?*" Pen in hand, I pause, wait, hope for explanations, even insights to emerge. Then more words tumble out...

"I am afraid that private practice is not for me because what I want and need to teach and facilitate doesn't fit into the medical model practiced there. I don't want to label the people who come to me for counsel as *sick*...if I work in private practice as a mental health professional I will

have to match their problem with a medical diagnosis. What I want to do is foster positive development in others. I want to promote wellness; I don't want to heal the sick!"

Now I see the huge *fork* in my road. Although my thinking about opening a private practice as a trauma counselor was the logical next step to take in my career, neither my inner self, nor my emotions, not even my body are on board with this plan. In order to remain true to my commitment to integration, wholeness, and authenticity, I have to face the fact that despite outer appearances or externally- defined success, the path I had charted for my career was not right for me in some important way.

But isn't trauma counseling all I have? What other course could I possibly chart?

Seeking to find answers inside, I stretch out on the bed, close my eyes, breathe deeply, and turn my awareness deep into my inner being. Sometimes, when I look within in this particular way, I see, sense, or hear nothing. At other times I sense more than see something, a presence, an intelligence that guides; that helps me *see*. At other times a holistic, transpersonal force impacts my awareness, provides with *the insight* I need to develop my answers. This time gold would strike.

After a few minutes, I suddenly feel as if a crack opens in space-time. Completely alert now, I sense a transpersonal force fill the room and begin to guide my intuition. I trust this power; I've felt its presence before, I recognize it when it comes. Suddenly, I see the 17th century engraving *Squaring the Circle*, designed by the renaissance physician and alchemist Count Michael Maier (p. 195), and which I had known and read about years ago, appear suspended before my inner eye - as if printed on a large, wavering curtain, it feels alive.

The vision hits me like the meteor that hit the Yucatan. It alters my conceptual atmosphere; kills the dinosaurs that were roaming about in my mind. It sets the stage for higher

order inspiration and self-organization to emerge. I instinctively call my experience a *vision* because it is visual, *graphic*, and not a mere surreal impression. It pulsates with meaning, with holistic wealth. To me, this vision is as much an image as it is a doorway, a passageway to the future that had been there, suspended outside of space-time, waiting to be discovered. Yet like the gate to the secret garden, it had been so well hidden from my awareness, I could not have found it until I was as desperately seeking as today.

As goose bumps form all over my skin, the riddle contained in Maier's emblem *Squaring the Circle* suddenly becomes clear. *I know at once, with all my body, heart, mind, and soul what this image means, what it could further mean to me, to us, to my future work, if I let it. I know what this is all about.*

In fact, I can now mentally "click" on a select section of Maier's pictogram much like one clicks on a Google map, and is able to select first a nation, then a state, then a town, and then a neighborhood, revealing ever greater detail, scaling all the way down.

As I continue to scribble and sketch in my journal, I realize that if I decode *Squaring the Circle* with the help of the symbolic language of the Hermetic tradition that I know, combine this with Jungian psychology, and select images from other alchemical texts of Maier's era, this engraving works like a graphic Rosetta Stone that provides me with the conceptual roadmap I need to integrate the existing literature on marriage and couples therapy, Jungian psychology, adult development, positive psychology, and much more. I now clearly see how this pictogram can delineate a roadmap for couples' soul mating process, a guide to the squaring of the circle of couple's positive and holistic relationship development.

The pictogram is a powerful didactic tool!

In fact, based on Maier's conceptual map, I can now develop a body of work that can guide couples develop their relationships from good to great. I see the amount of work ahead, it is heavy and large, it may entail *the rest of my life*. This vision then is an *executive vision*, it can guide the creation of a 5 and a 10 year plan.

Squaring the Circle thus gifts me with the conceptual piece I need and had been waiting for to start my work on couples, soul mates, and twin souls. Yet this vision is more than a conceptual map to me. It is a living thing; it has a genetic code, claws, and a heart. It captivates, engulfs, thrills, promises, envelops, and transforms. It links me to an extemporaneous, transpersonal source, gifts me with a piece of eternity that I can, to some extent hold, develop, and even own for a period of time. Yet while this vision grants me its transcendental presence, the promise of integration, and of fulfilling my dreams, it, like a newborn baby, also evokes instant love and care, and a profound sense of duty momentarily overriding all my objections. My vision sweeps away the very foundations on which I had hitherto thought that I was building a solid counseling career. Like a helpless, fragile little child, the vision not only gifts, but demands that I believe in its future success, *that I answer its call*. Now that I have the missing conceptual piece for my work, I also have a duty: I must overcome my fears, resolve my resistance, past disillusionments, and concerns, and turn the vision into practice.

Will Luis be drawn into this work as well? Will he be willing to help?

St. Petersburg, Florida, March 2008. Luis has finished his master's degree, and I am almost finished now. We are both considering a Ph.D. Today we have a projector and a large screen set up in our living room. We are rehearsing *From Sex to Intimacy to Soul Mating: 7 Steps to Lasting and Fulfilling Relationships*, which we are scheduled to present at the 2008

American Counseling Association Convention in Honolulu this month. The presentation provides an overview of the work on positive couple relationship development based on *Squaring the Circle* which I have completed so far. Today we are finalizing the correspondence between the 7 stages/phases of the soul mates model, the 17th century alchemical pictograms of the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, and Michael Maier's *Squaring the Circle*. My son John, and my daughter Ariana, both college seniors now, are our audience.

"Hey guys, it's obvious to me that the first stage must be *dating*. Although the *Rosarium* provides an image for this stage, Maier's pictogram does not; any suggestions?" I ask my audience.

"Mom, the man and the woman in the center of Maier's emblem are the symbols; they represent the *dating couple!*" John says.

"You are so right! Why didn't I see that? I must have been so caught up in seeing them as masculine and feminine archetypes, the way Jung described them, that I did not see them as the representation of the bodies of the actual partners. Now I see how well this fits. Thanks, that was really great! But what about *soul mating*, and *soul*, what do you guys think, should I use these terms?"

"If you were counseling the military, they would not want you to say that you are messing with their souls; it wouldn't fly", says John, his blue eyes flashing, his broad shoulders squared, every bit the Sargent now recently returned from serving in the war.

"That's a good point. But in other areas of counseling, spirituality is well established; the ACA has even developed spiritual competencies for counselors. Some educators of adults openly speak about *soul* in their work.

"Yeah, but the military is different" says John.

“I get it, but I want couples to become aware of their own, as well as of their partner’s *soul as they see it*. Should I use another term just because I’m afraid they’ll criticize me?”

“No, not out of fear” says Luis. “But you need to consider what audience you want to address. If you were addressing an audience within an organizational development setting, I would say that *core-self* would be a better term”.

“Mom, you need to be prepared that some people will always be unhappy with whatever you present” Ariana says, her green eyes flashing, dark, waist-long hair artfully draped over one shoulder, one long slim leg tucked up under her body on the sofa chair. “Besides, with this work you are not really intending to address the traumatized returning from the war– or are you?”

“No, I am not. I will not combine the trauma counseling work with the couples work, at least not now. I want couples to become aware of *soul*, in their relationships, that’s why I want to specifically talk about *soul mating*, and *soul mates*. If I bleach my message out too much, nobody will even care to listen to what I have to say”.

“If you are addressing an audience of couples, soul is fine, I think” Luis says.

“That’s what I thought. Besides, Jung started out with the term *soul* as well. The original title of his book *Mysterium Conjunctionis* uses the German word *seelisch*, meaning *of the soul*”.

“Yes, exactly” said Luis. “But in the post- Freud era in which he wrote, his American publishers must have thought it more politically correct to replace the German *Seele*, with the Greek word *psyche*”.

“That’s very probable. But these are different times. Okay guys, I’ve just decided to use *soul*. How else will I be able to start a dialog on my topic of soul mates and twin souls? If I don’t dare to come out of the closet with this stuff, if I sanitize my message too much, I will distort its meaning and lose the passion for my work”.

“Then go for it Mom. It’s your work”, said John. Luis and Ariana agreed.

“But wait, what about alchemy? Will they ridicule it, like so many have in the past?”

“Mom, are you kidding me?” said John, blue eyes flashing once more, his voice powerful and deep. “After the huge volumes Jung and his followers wrote on alchemy, they definitely legitimized it for psychology”.

“Lille, we have at least 10 of those volumes on alchemy and Jungian psychology here on our shelves. That should suffice as a scholarly base!” says Luis.

A few weeks later - Honolulu, Hawaii 2008. It is the morning of our presentation for ACA. Luis and I are on the balcony of our 24th floor room at the Hotel. He is videotaping our ocean view, the Ala Moana park in the distance, the graceful sailboats on the azure Pacific beyond. I stand up to grab him. My mind is clear; my feet feel warm and comfortable, securely planted on the concrete floor. I circle his waist with my arms. I pull him to the present, to celebrate *this* moment we have *right now*. I look up into his eyes, from this angle all marks of age are erased from his face. We are young again, eternal. His eyes haven’t changed in 19 years, not from this angle. The world I see in his eyes, through his eyes, the world that he and I truly belong to, the one that exists not only in this body, on this Earth, but also on the *other side*, in eternity, *our* world, it is still there unchanged; it is also here, right now. He pulls me to his chest, hugs me close. I hear his heartbeat, feel it on my cheek. We are *One once more*.

“I am glad we are not presenting on trauma recovery. Soul mating means so much more”, Luis says. We sit down, sip our coffee, and feed muffin crumbs to a pair of colorful birds that have come to our balcony. We wonder how these creatures managed to fly up to this 24th floor and beg for food. We photograph the birds, adorable in their audacity.

“Come on Luis, we need to rehearse our presentation, don’t be lazy”.

“I don’t want to; it’s a waste of time”. He begins to sketch on his pad, turning it this way and that.

“What are you sketching?” I try to pull the ever present sketch pad out from under his fingers, but he is stronger, holds it away. “Ah, you are sketching the birds! Give me that!” The Rosarium’s picture *9 Reunion of Soul and Body*, flashes before my inner eye, the one with the two soul-birds emerging from the earth. I have a sense of what it means, for us, for the project, maybe for our life-long work.

“Come on Luis, we need to rehearse the presentation!”

“Why are you so nervous anyway? You’ll do fine”.

“What about the challenge I am presenting to the ideas of Jung? What if there is a Jungian analyst in the room?”

“You’ll have to stand firm by your approach. Besides, you and I have studied this for decades; we support our theories with current literature. It’s time to transcend Jung”.

“But are we *the right persons* to do this?”

“Who else should do it? After my boss looked at my oil paintings the other day, she called me a renaissance man” he says. Then he sketches another figure

, me, wide eyed, standing behind a lectern...wearing a strange, medieval robe, the *philosopher’s* hat from Maier’s pictogram... “Believe me, it is time to transcend Jung”.

“But what about the alchemical images, will they think we are crazy to bring this non-scientific stuff up now? Will they say it is nonsensical gibberish, even New Age?”

“You said that you wanted to start a conversation on *soul, soul mates, and twin souls* – remember? You need to throw some controversies at them to get them talking. Besides, alchemy

isn't gibberish or New Age. It has not been soiled and consumerized in the same way other elements of the Hermetic Tradition have. Alchemy is too difficult to comprehend for most people, that's why most of them have left it alone so far. We'll be okay".

"But will they understand that we are not really trying to teach them alchemy; that we are using the images as metaphors and illustrations of psychological processes?"

"Yes, metaphors and visual images are always welcome in mental health. But let's be honest, between you and me, we know that soul mating is spiritual alchemy, right?"

"Well yes, and no. They don't need to know anything about alchemy to make the process work."

"No, they don't, and that is the beauty of the model!"

That same morning, shortly before 11 a. m., we approach our presentation room at the Honolulu convention center. Despite the fact that our presentation was scheduled for the last time slot of the last day, and that even the tables with the ice water have already been whisked away, people are lining up at the door and requesting handouts. We walk into the room, and after a few minutes, it fills with nearly 100 people. We take this as a good sign that our title and our program description are resonating with this audience of professional counselors and peers. We start our presentation by telling our story, how we met, why we believe we are twin souls. They listen in rapt attention. Then we speak of Isaac Newton. When we ask if they are familiar with Jung, they nod. We introduce the alchemical images; they welcome them, call them great visuals. We ask them if any had seen such stages unfold in their clients' lives or in their own, and they say that yes, they have. We ask the audience about the way in which we are using the term *soul*; they say they love it. We explain how this is meant to work with same-sex couples, with atheists and agnostics, and they are all on board. Once the discussion becomes deeply personal and

powerfully universal, our presentation flows with amazing intensity, and my concerns no longer matter at all. As the audience listens in fascination at how the stages, task, strengths, and challenges of intimate relationships may apply to them and their clients, we all enter a powerful *state of flow*.

After we finish, a counseling professional comes to the front and asks if we can test our model on her relationship with her husband. She invites us to her home in Ohio to work with her and other couples. Another Ph.D. congratulates me on my “command of the literature”. Luis and I are astonished at such a whole-hearted response. We return to Florida satisfied that we started a dialog with our peers, reassured that we are on the right track.

Upon our return from Honolulu, we find our yard abloom with *angel trumpets*. I am humbled yet again, as I suddenly remember the off-handed, cynical comment I made 5 years ago: “... *like angels flying down from heaven, sounding their trumpets, telling me that it is time*” I take the blooming angel trumpets as a sign, that *now indeed it is the right time!*

Completion

Tampa, Florida, Spring 2009. Luis and I attend a conference sponsored by our university. We stroll through the ballroom during lunch hour and spot one of our favorite professors sitting at a linen-covered table with a new graduate student. We approach the pair.

“Hi, Luis and Luisa! I saw that you are presenting *Soul- Self Retrieval for Trauma Recovery* this Sunday, which sounds fascinating! I hope I can make it”. Smiling like a proud father, he introduces us to the female student as Luis and Luisa De La Lama.

“Why Luis and Luisa?” She asks.

“Well, because they are soul mates, of course!” The professor answers with aplomb.

Luis and I are stunned. Not once had the topic of soul mates come up during the 4 years we attended this small, private university in which this professor taught several of our classes.

Why now?

A few weeks later, an administrator at the big research university to which we are now transferring, reviews our transcripts. She takes her glasses off, looks us deep in the eyes. “Luis and Luisa De La Lama? How long have the two of you been together?”

“Twenty one years”. Luis and I say at the same time.

“Really? Ah, I get it. You guys fell in love back then, and then changed your names so that they would match”.

“No, no, we didn’t. In fact Luis was named by his mother after her father Luis, and I was named by my father after his mother Luise”.

“Well whatever”, she says, perches her glasses back on her nose, and continues to decipher our transcripts. “Wow, your MA and your doctoral transcripts are identical except for one course, and you got all A’s while going to school *together*. How on Earth did that happen?” She pulls her glasses off again, her sharp blue eyes scrutinizing ours.

“We wanted to be together. We like to go to school together”.

“You must be Soul Mates then”, she says, hands us our files, and gives us directions to another building in which someone would need to help us further. An uncharacteristically youthful spring in our steps, we walk through the grass that spans the spaces between buildings.

It feels as if something positive is in the air now. The past few years had been pretty tough times. I hope that things will start to turn around.

We walk in silence for a bit, then I pull Luis by the sleeve “They called us soul mates twice this week! How weird is that? Do you think that is a sign for us, an encouragement from the Universe to continue with my couples work?”

“Who knows? It could just be a coincidence. But maybe they do sense something different in our aura, like an unusual harmony, some sort of twinning perhaps?”.

“That could be.” I say a bit resigned.

We arrive at the office where our transfer process should now be finalized. This administrator, a middle aged male, takes one look at our files and asks “Luis and Luisa? Have you ever considered that you may be *soul mates*?”

Speechless, we look at each other, smile, then look back at him.

“Yeah, we are Soul Mates”. We agree. Everyone laughs.

A few minutes later we leave the administrator’s office with assurances that our GRE’s will indeed be waved, and stroll toward the parking garage.

“Yeah, soul mates? Not really. We are twin souls!” Luis says in his characteristic accent with emphasis on the *twin*.

“Yes, we are twin souls. But they don’t know about twin souls, or if they did, they would probably not know the difference. It’s way too complicated. But tell me what this is all about? First the professor, then the two administrators... These people are not New Age at all, yet they speak about soul mates”?

“They may be speaking about soul mates, but they do not really know what it may imply. The term is used more loosely now. Things have changed since we first met” says Luis.

“Don’t be so cynical!”

“Okay, I agree that it is weird that all these people are suddenly calling us soul mates. Perhaps they do see something different in us, especially here, in the midst of this dry, academic environment. But speaking about soul mates has also become popularized, it is politically correct now, even desirable, a compliment to give”.

“But don’t you think that this is a sign from the Universe that the idea of soul mates has become important now, that it is on people’s minds, that it represents the kind of relationship many would like to have but don’t know how to achieve?”

“I am sure most people are eager to find their soul mate, to live with one. But I am not so sure you should go as far as to think that this is all an encouragement for you to work harder on developing the Soul Mates Model stuff. I don’t want to see you exhausting yourself because of this work. I don’t want to see you hunched over a keyboard writing training manuals for the rest of your life”.

“Well, that is nice of you, but what if this work is my, our destiny? What if, the Couples work it is in some way that Great Work which Hermeticist believe in, the one reminiscent of the of the Bodhisattva path? The work that the S. told me I needed to complete with you? What if we came here to complete it and we won’t be at rest until we do?”

“I don’t like that idea; it is way too deterministic for me. If you ask me, I’m not sure I want to work with couples. That is more your thing. What I want is to write a graphic novel, to go back to my art. ”

“But will you be there to help me if I go that route?”

“Yes, it is a beautiful model after all. You know I’ll help you; I’ll be there”.

“Well I want to take it all as a sign that the Universe is smiling at us, supporting our relationship, maybe even encouraging my work. Let’s take it all as a good sign, okay?”

“O.k., let’s do that.”

St. Petersburg, Florida, Summer 2011. I sit on the living room sofa, my three Pekingese asleep nearby, punctuating the calm with their soft snores. From here I can look all the way through the kitchen’s glass door and see my favorite two squirrels munching on the peanuts I just set out for them. I curl my fingers around my coffee mug, take a sip. I am comfortable, happy even with how things now are. Luis and I have come a long way since we first met; we’re empty nesters now. My son John is studying for a Ph.D. in Industrial and Organizational Psychology in Miami. My daughter Ariana, who is a doctoral student in Clinical Psychology, has also left home, and lives nearby.

But my calm does not last for very long. Luis, a man on a mission, slams the door of the rear bedroom, and stomps toward the living room on the way to his office. He is packing up his stuff for our upcoming trip to the American Psychological Association’s Convention in Washington D.C. where we are scheduled to present an expanded version of The Soul Mates Model together at the end of this week.

I jump up, block his path. I grab his shoulders then circle his waist with my arms, lean my cheek on his heart. If I don’t grab him now, slow him down, he will just walk past me, and the moment will be lost. My feet are bare; my toes curl into the woolen rug; it’s warm and soft like the sandy beaches of Maui we walked together so long ago. I grab him harder, afraid sometimes that he may just suddenly disappear, dematerialize into the Ether, the same strange way that he came into my life.

“So Luis, *why are we twin souls?*”

“I feel it here” He beats his chest with a tanned fist.

“But feeling is not enough. Anyone can feel love in the heart for someone else, can’t they? Loving in the heart does not make you a twin soul. Like for example, I love my dog Bowser in my heart” I say, pointing at my male Pekingese snoring stretched out belly up.

“That’s different, a different kind of love”.

“Well, of course, I wouldn’t call him my twin soul. He is definitely a kindred soul perhaps”

“Some people would question if dogs have a soul” says Luis.

“I think that they do, to me it feels as if they do, and that is enough” I say.

“So there you go. Now you are saying that knowing another’s soul is a feeling, or rather an inner knowing with the heart instead of with the brain” Says Luis.

“So being a twin soul is a bodily knowing then? Is that how you, how we would describe how we sense this?”

“Yes that too, but it is so much more than just in the body. It is in the mind, in the philosophies we share, the things we like to talk about....the many books you and I read....” Luis says, his eyes taking on a faraway look.

“That’s true. Remember the truckload of books you brought from Mexico when we moved in together in San Diego?” I still can’t believe how most of the hundreds of books you brought were identical to mine. We must have been reading the same stuff for decades before we met. I had totally forgotten about those”.

“Yes, the books that although show how despite the fact that I was a bicultural Mexican living on the border to USA, you an Austrian/Spanish/Hungarian, growing up in Spain and Austria we were already curious about many of the same things, thinking along the same lines, exploring the same spiritual paths, practicing the same meditation techniques over many years

before we met. We grew up growing up on different continents, in very different cultures, but in reality we had belonged to one and the same culture during all those years before we met; in worldview and practice we were both fervent Hermeticist at heart”.

“We were, still are to a large extent” I said.

“And think about it, this was way before the internet. We had to actually seek out those specialty bookstores, buy the physical books, read them on our own, and then keep them safe for years. We did most of those mediations and practices in social isolation, all by ourselves”.

“We share so many interests and beliefs, but then we are also so different, even opposite in many ways! It is so irritating– don’t’ you think?”

“Like what?”

“Our creative process for example, I like to talk everything through with you, but you don’t”.

“I hate to talk about my creative process; it saps all the energy out of it”.

“See? For me it is the opposite. I like to discuss it with you. You are the only person that really understands my process in depth – or maybe at all. It energizes me and spurs my creativity to talk about my creations with you as often as I can. I don’t understand why you don’t feel like that. It drives me nuts”.

“Maybe this is just a gender thing and has nothing to do with *twin souls*” says Luis.

“Maybe”.

“Or maybe it has to do with the *giant zipper* I saw, remember?” Says Luis.

He was referring to a vision he had right before we met. I was living in Seattle then, and we were already corresponding by letter. He told me that the day he’d received my letter, he’d gone into his studio downstairs in Tijuana to compose an answer. He had never met me in

person, had never spoken to me. All he had was a couple of letters from me – and during those years there was no internet, no Googling somebody, just letters and the telephone. He said that when he held started to compose his answer to my letter; he had a spontaneous vision of a giant cosmic zipper that was bringing us together. He saw us already joined at the top, in the spiritual realm, the cosmic, starry realm. And then he saw that someone or something, a giant being perhaps, was pulling down gently but swiftly on the zipper’s tab, closing the zipper’s teeth one by one all the way to the lower sections until, finally, our bodies would join at the bottom, in the physical realm. To his astonishment, he saw how the indentations of the two halves of the zipper fit so well together, that they would close almost seamlessly when united all the way down.

“Yes, the zipper. I didn’t see a zipper, but what I felt was very similar, as if a higher force was pushing us inexorably together, that we could not separate or halt a process that originated in such a lofty realm; that our coming together was fated, as if led by a guiding star”.

“Exactly; now I think that my vision of the zipper was showing me that although we hare opposites in many ways, these differences actually complement themselves to form a whole in many ways. The vision I think, showed me that we stem from a unified spiritual source. This zipper was gradually completing our union from the top down, from the subtle areas of consciousness to the more concrete; binding us as spiritual partners, then as visionaries, philosophically, mentally, emotionally, and eventually all the way down to our bodies and physical lives. So now here we are, both pursuing our Ph.D. together, ready to help other people develop zippers of their own...” With that he pressed me close, as if, making sure I’d have nowhere else to go. Which in truth, I had not.

“Yes, and remember how nonchalant you sounded in your letters, as if you did not care much about what you had seen, but then still went ahead and wrote to me about it in great detail?”.

“I did not want to sound too committed. I was terrified of what this zipper meant; the freedoms I’d have to give up if it were all true. Still the vision was so powerful; I had to share with you what I saw.”

“But when you told me about the zipper you saw, I thought that zipper effect would bring us unity and harmony, not also the discord and the disagreement that we have also had”. I said.

“It looks like the zipper brought not only harmony, but everything else we need to exist, to fuel our life down here, controversies and all”. He swept his arms around the room. “I think the zipper is definitely working, its results are everywhere to be seen. It’s very powerful, even too powerful perhaps. Sometimes I worry that it is making us too similar, that it keeps us locked in our own shared inner world”.

“I don’t agree. We are always learning, together, yes, but very open to new information, to the world. Changing professions, sharing our knowledge and wisdom, applying our creativity, trying out new things to see if they work...”

“Well yes, that’s true.

“Besides, what other inner world would you rather be in, Luis?”

“None, you are right. I like to be in ours. To me, ours is by far the best” he says and beats his chest.

Washington D.C., 2011, a few days later... Luis and I are at the American Psychological Association's convention in Washington D.C. Our presentation on the Soul Mates Model is starting in an hour; we are standing in line at the cafeteria to grab a bite to eat.

"My migraine is getting worse. I'm going to sit down. Can you please grab me something with protein and a bit of lettuce, if they have any, and a Diet Coke?"

God, this is another one of those heavy ones, what might this be about now?

Unable to dig for any deeper meaning right now, I take several deep breaths, pop two Advil, down them with a gulp of water from my bottle, and lean back into the chair for a rest. Within a few of minutes Luis returns with the meals and digs into his salad.

"Hey, please help me out. What do you think this awful migraine could be about now? Am I not doing everything that we think is right?"

"Maybe you are just nervous about the presentation. We will know more in a couple of hours when it's done".

"I like giving presentations; I don't think it's that. Do you want my food? I'm not hungry anymore."

"O.k., I'll take it. Just try to relax."

After our presentation, which went well, we decide to split up, to explore the goodies on display in the convention's merchant's mall. I walk around for a while, zombie-like, trying as best I can to get inspired by the nice books and the pamphlets on display. I pick up a book here and there. Everything I touch seems to focus on a problem... the books are on clinical problems, family problems, educational problems, veteran's problems, children's problems, substance abuse problems, domestic violence problems, training problems, clinical supervision problems, organizational development problems, research problems, ethical problems... I go to the New

Harbinger Publications booth, talk to the nice lady to see if they'd be interested in a workbook on positive couple relationship development, she tells me that it sounds like an interesting topic to her, that they'd love to work with me as an author. Then she tells that my workbook idea has one major hurdle to overcome - unless I focus the book's concept around a difficult couple relationship problem, the publisher would not be interested in publishing it at all.

My head pounds badly; I thank her absentmindedly, and walk out of the rows of booths in search of Luis. I find him by the cafeteria's coffee cart as agreed. He sits on a table, concentrated on his iPad, looking tired and a bit pale. I plop my heavy tote on the floor, drop down on a chair next to him.

"Hi, did you see anything interesting?" I ask.

"I looked at the APA's children's books; they even have some for the iPad. I'm so drawn to the art. I need to balance all this analytical, left-brain stuff. Otherwise? Nah, I've seen most of what they have on display. I'm ready to go if you are."

"But we can't just up and leave now?" I say, pressing my hand to my brow, trying to rub the pain away, to somehow help me see straight. "We came all the way here to attend this convention; it seemed so interesting at the time we signed up" I say.

"Our presentation is done. It was great. So now, let's get a ride back to the hotel, take a short nap and then go out and visit the art museums. This city has so much more to offer than APA. Besides, you have a migraine, how much more can you really take in here at this time?"

"But why are we not feeling the excitement like we felt at other conventions, like at the Positive Psychology World Congress last month or at the American Society for Training and Development convention earlier this year? Remember how excited we were with all that?"

“I remember; we liked the training focus, and the positive; of course. Those were a whole other world for us”.

“Those conventions resonated more with us, felt more dynamic, forward moving, and fiery in a way.”

“And we really are teachers at heart. APA is more about research and diagnosis... Like in the old biology labs, where they killed the rabbit and dissected it in to parts to learn about it, it often seems to me that social science has become too analytical. Yes, you can learn something about a rabbit by studying its parts, but from studying the dead rabbit you cannot really learn what the live rabbit was all about”.

“Exactly. From a social science point of view, looking at objective facts will only reveal part of humans are really about, it won't reveal the whole of the *live* human being, what really makes it tick. Ha! Sometimes I think they should study more of the placebo effect, to learn how to better engage consciousness for the best”.

“Let's go”, he says, and rubs my shoulder with a warm, comforting hand. You are starting to look really pale. Let's leave and go take a look at those museums. This town has great art”.

“O. K. Let's go” Determined to break the negative spell, I heave the heavy convention tote with all the free journals and brochures off the floor, sling the strap over my aching shoulder, and march on hand in hand with Luis.

As we leave the fluorescently lit cafeteria our steps begin to pick up speed. Soon we are hurrying out of the merchants mall, and on towards the gate. On the way out the door, there is a small photography booth. It is manned by a convention staff photographer offering free photos to convention attendees. Luis and I pose for a picture. The photographer develops it in a blink; in a

few minutes we see ourselves looking pretty good together on the classic black and white print. At the hotel we take a brief nap. Without further intervention, my migraine begins to clear and then, camera loaded, we set out on foot from the Hyatt to explore the area near the Capitol, and then walk on to see all the art museums we could reach by foot.

That same evening... It is almost 9 p.m.; Luis and I are seated at a restaurant in the large indoor hall at the Union Station mall. The soft lights illuminating the fancy restaurants and artsy shops bathe the large space in a surreal, golden glow; Luis no longer looks pale at all.

“All of a sudden I feel really good tonight. It’s almost unbelievable after the migraine I had earlier today. I mean, it was one of the worst; I could barely see straight” I say.

“I’m glad you got over that fast, and we were able to see great art all day” he says.

The waiter comes by, takes our order, and leaves. We unfold the silverware from the napkins; place the cloths on our knees. We lean back into our chairs, and as if on command, we look into each other’s eyes, and let out a deep sigh of relief.

“You know what? I also feel particularly positive right now myself” says Luis.

I grab his hand, squeeze hard. He squeezes back, pulls my hand to his lips. “*Te quiero mucho*, I love you so much” he says.

“*Yo tambien te amo a ti*” I love you too, I say.

“Luis, there is really good energy here; let’s celebrate this”.

“Yes, let’s celebrate” he agrees. We lean towards each other, kiss, hug. “It feels strangely good to be here at this time, as if a new phase were starting for us, *an upswing*” He says.

“And there was such a gorgeous moon out in the sky as we walked over from the hotel, as if it were smiling down on us as we strolled by” I say.

“Yes, it’s strange, but we haven’t felt this complete in years. It might be the energy of this city; after all, it’s one of the world’s chief power spots, with the government of the free world centered here” says Luis.

“That’s true, but I sense something much more monumental in the air, like a change for us specifically, personally, as if there were also *a centering of the us*”.

“It really is strange, but I feel the same way”, says Luis.

“So do you think it’s because of the art we looked at most of the day? The paintings you liked, the gorgeous beaded necklaces I like, which they have here on display? Because they inspire us to create more art at home?”

“Maybe to some extent. But it’s not just about you and me looking at art, it is about the very conscious decision we made today to leave the mostly science-based, problem-centric, quantitatively focused APA convention for the day, and focus on what we feel makes us whole” says Luis.

I look at the cute live potted bushes and palms they have here all around, the tiny Christmas lights that grace the leaves. Yes, sure, they are made of glass, plastic, and wire, but to me, now, they are magical, tiny worlds, little celestial bodies awaiting the burst of magnetism and light from their awakening central star. ..

“So our making that decision is what feels so good right now? Do you mean for today, or in a broader sense? Just walking out of APA just seems too small an act” I say.

“The act was symbolic of a broader, deeper realignment, of much much more for us”.

“That’s the sense I get too” I agree.

“I mean, think of it this way” says Luis, “we have both kept some form of art going on the side throughout our graduate studies, me with the fine art painting, and you with the jewelry

making... we kept it up sort of as a personal outlet, to keep us sane so to speak. Today it takes on a whole other meaning, as if our deliberate taking a stance towards *art* to balance and complement the dry, left- brain, hard-science approach taking over APA, was not a mere personal and temporary rebalancing, but the taking of a more significant philosophical stance, a vital step not only in the direction of our own wholeness and health, but one that is needed in our profession, and really also in the world at large” says Luis.

“Yes, science is good and important to fix problems, but at the end of the day, promoting mental health, creating a positive relationship, a positive, flourishing life, is really very subjective, it is an *art*”.

“Yes, that’s why we feel so good today; we took a stance towards seeking wholeness, balance, integration, on a personal and on a broader scale”, says Luis.

“So do we have enough of the *art* in our lives right now?”

“Not nearly enough, it is still on the fringe of our lives. I, personally, need a lot more of it; we both need more of it” says Luis.

“But you know how I feel about contemporary art, most of it is about problematizing and deconstruction, the results are either ugly or dark. There is not much in contemporary art that provides a positive, happy vector to follow. Even some of your paintings are dark. You know how I feel about that, I don’t want them hanging in my living room, reactivating my thoughts about what they say every time I pass by. In a way, I don’t want our *Completion* state to include any of that. That’s why I like my jewelry making, it’s not about personal catharsis or denouncing society, it’s all about the beauty of nature, Earth and Sea, the plainly positive, the pretty, and the light”.

“Of course, we could also say that your art is more classically feminine than mine, and that’s why it is prettier and not dark. But I think it is about much more; it all comes down to what you told Dr. Ken Gergen at USF that day” says Luis.

He was referring to an evening during the spring of 2010, when we attended a presentation by Dr. Ken and Dr. Mary Gergen at the University of South Florida. The Gergens gave a short performance to show the audience how a compliment given to a woman passing by a male admirer could be interpreted in various ways, and how the varied interpretation would end up in the social construction of different realities. They portrayed this construction as merely happening automatically, and several interpretations that seemed to naturally spring from the performance did lead to negative narratives being constructed right there before our eyes. Yet neither the Gergens on stage, nor the audience focused on whether these budding negative narratives should, or even could be uncovered, labeled, and then deliberately pivoted or re-directed towards a better co-constructing of meaning. Instead the Gergens’s performance appeared to encourage the audience to observe this process of social narrative construction in a passive, even objective way. Nobody in the audience seemed to notice that people might have a choice in what and how they constructed a narrative in response to the scenario they’d just observed. It was driving me nuts to just sit there passively and watch. So I raised my hand, stood up, and said ‘now that all of us here in the audience agree that reality (based on the narratives we co-construct and build as result of our experience) is at least to some extent socially constructed, isn’t it time that we focus on what type of narrative we should co-construct? Isn’t it time that we join forces in a positive way, deliberately decide on a better narrative to collectively develop, to socially construct?’ Dr. Ken Gergen’s eyes lit up, he suddenly looked ten years younger, and said ‘exactly, like we, as a society, should be working on developing a more

positive narrative for older couples even while the rest of the world is merely focused on the young and the famous’. And then I said that that was exactly what my dissertation would be about, and I joked with him that I should perhaps transfer over from USF and complete my Ph.D. at the Taos Institute he co-founded. Then Dr. Gergen said “send me a short overview of the proposal, I’ll take a look at it when I get home’.

“Yeah, Dr. Gergen did get the idea of deliberately focusing to develop positive narratives where the automatic social construction of narratives appears to go in the wrong direction, like for older couples in a materialistic society. And that was *the* Dr. Ken Gergen, the father of social constructionism. He completely got what I said, but the audience did not at all. He was several steps ahead of them, perhaps even ahead of himself in his former work. That sure opened my eyes back then”.

“The Gergen’s reassured both of us that you were on the right track with your ideas, but then, it also left us with a sense of how alone we are with our philosophy out there. I mean not even Dr, Bochner, the narrative expert, the one who invited the Gergens to speak said a peep” says Luis.

“No, nobody did. It seems more and more that only Narrative Therapists like Michael White would understand that when a narrative has become unhelpful and stale something needs to be done to it. Few people seem to want to take the risk of making the call that a narrative might now have become unhelpful, or even to make suggestions on how and why to change it. But this, to me, would be the logical consequence of observing social constructionism in action. I think that they don’t want to deal with constructing better narratives, because they don’t want to deal with activism, propaganda, and power dynamics. It’s easier to just let the construction go on and then de-construct it after the fact...”

“That is why we were so attracted to study Mental Health Counseling, because they focus on change and transformation, they have to. In order to do so, they must reframe situations and narratives in a positive way; they cannot allow themselves or their clients to remain negative or fragmented; they must pivot towards the *positive* and always look at the *whole* human being” says Luis.

At this time, the waiter brings our food. Deeply submerged in our thoughts, we begin to eat, biting and chewing carefully, as if digesting an important thing. We eat a few minutes in silence, then something begins to dawn.

“Luis, I think that the building of the upward pointing triangle – the one that gets the soul mating couple unstuck from the square in my Soul Mates model – is really a twofold process. On the one hand, the partners need to aspire to and dedicate to a cause greater than self, their *Great Work*. On the other, they also need to pivot towards the positive and the affirmative, and away from the problem-centric as much as they can. Because the couple’s narrative co-creating is gaining in strengths and frequency as they soul mate and develop their relationships in the long term, it may now also grow in its effectiveness. Therefore, they must deliberately attend to the direction that their co-creating is taking them towards, like on the level of their identity. The reality they are now able to co-construct is more and more self-directed, and to a large extent subjective and philosophical; their worldview, the vessel that contains them, and what it is, may, or should be about must become center stage, especially as their bodies may grow old. Ultimately, love, happiness, spirituality, fulfillment, flourishing, a sense of God and soul, are highly subjective, emotional, susceptible feeling states that flourish in a narrative and philosophical/worldview environment that encourages and promotes them”.

“Absolutely”, says Luis.

“This is important for us as a couple too. To cultivate these higher states in us, between us, in others and in the world at large cannot be achieved with the objectivism of hard science nor with the analysis and deconstruction of social science. This narrative constructing needs to center around a deliberately chosen, positive vector; the worldview needs to be deliberately and creatively built up in the mind and the heart; this really is an *art*. Maybe that is why now that we are seeking *Completion*, we are gravitating so much towards art!”

“And we really are no longer alone with the positive pivoting; there is a whole positive psychology and strengths-based movement out there now” says Luis.

“Exactly, and I am so glad for that! And remember the Caduceus I saw forming out of the union of the two of us, when I read your letter about our connection? Back in 1989? In the Caduceus, The snakes of awareness need to turn back inwards towards *conjunction* before they can pop the pair of wings at the top of the rod that will carry them over the abyss. There is no golden sphere to build, no philosopher’s stone if one merely bleeds oneself out for a cause”.

“That’s why I did not like the idea of you spending the rest of our life writing papers and training manuals, it didn’t feel right” says Luis.

“So based on this, what do you think, are we in the *Renewal* phase?”

“It feels like it. But then we are also getting a glimpse of what *Completion* might entail, something that is whole, that is perfection in a sense” says Luis.

“I’m not sure if perfection is the right world for me, it sounds a bit stiff” I say.

“I like it, and that’s how I see it” says Luis.

“Come on, *Completion* cannot be static, fixed. It is a conscious state of creative, alive, positive emergence and flow. As something that integrates the opposites of science and art, qualitative and quantitative, Sun and Moon, King and Queen, thinking and feeling, body and

soul, the inner with the outer, the upper with the lower, *the above with the below*. *Completion* is the development of the philosopher's stone a state of being that is alive, moving forward in every sense, yet combines the energies of its internal opposites in a self-generating and self-re-balancing way; held together in a *gestalt*, zippered together, or *alchemically glued* at every seam, yet still in motion, in flow, sort of like the inside of a star like the sun”.

“I personally like the idea of envisioning *Completion* as a state of pristine, ultimate, and timeless perfection; that's what I experience so often when I meditate. But yes, o.k. we can also envision *Completion* as the continuous motion, self-generating powerhouse, the nuclear fusion inside of a star which you so often talk about” says Luis.

“The operation of the Sun”

“Yes.”

“So are we then in the Renewal phase Luis?”

“It's difficult to tell, because right now, we are getting a glimpse of *Completion*, of what it may all be about. But this moment sure feels as if our *Renewal* is now in full swing”.

Orlando, March 2015. It is a warm March afternoon, Luis and I are at Lake Eola - a favorite happy place; the sun is high, thunderclouds are already building up in the sky. He has finished his Ph.D. I'm finishing up mine. He teaches at a nearby University, runs a private practice; I am working on this dissertation's *Completion* scene. On the glossy surface of the lake, the swans swim gracefully in and out of the wide dark stripes of shadows cast on the silken water surface by the high-rise buildings on the Western bank. I'm fascinated by the movement of the swans as they glide on the lake's glimmering surface into the dark shadows, and then reemerge into the light, even while the sun reflecting off the colorful glass buildings on the South side of

the lake cast pastel reflections onto the water at the southern edge. There are many white swans on this lake, some swim alone, some in pairs; some are black, some are even black and white. The lake's mercurial waters glisten, invite. We take in the magical scene together, sitting near the edge of the water, on a low ledge.

"Tomorrow is the Equinox, you know?" I ask. This is a special day of the year in which the night and day are of equal lengths, to us, a symbol harmony of the spheres, the balanced interaction of opposites inside the One. On the Equinox, we pay particular attention to our intuitions and our dreams.

"That's true. It's strange that we haven't gotten any special dreams today".

"Maybe coming here to discuss *Completion* is significant enough".

"It is" he says.

"So are we in the *Completion* phase now?"

"I think we can say with confidence that we have had a glimpse of what the *Completion* mystery is all about. But have we firmly established *Completion* in our lives by now? I don't think that we have".

"It's emergent, and ever changing in a sense. As soon as you try to label and define it, it tends to fog up. Yet on the other hand, you must have known it on some level to recognize it when it appears...it really is a paradox".

"That's why *Squaring the Circle* was considered to be an unsolvable riddle, fascinating to many, deciphered only by a few; a true enigma. Even to us, on many levels it still is a mystery" says Luis.

"*Completion* and the philosopher's stone, they really are similar to that swan over there" I say, pointing at the large one just swimming out of the dark and into the beam of sunshine

breaking through the thunderclouds. “When I was a kid, I used to hate swans. There weren’t any in Spain where I grew up. I knew them mostly from the Swan Lake ballet, or the Neuschwanstein castle in Bavaria, both of which I thought stiff and contrived. Then there were images of swans on cheap corny trinkets of love and romance. I didn’t understand what people saw in them. Later in life there was the Swarovski logo, a symbol of glitter and glam. But eventually, when we moved here and I began to take pictures of these swans here on lake Eola, I noticed the symbolic way in which they appeared on my photographs, pictured gliding in and out of the dark. That’s when they became a highly charged symbol of Spirit to me. The meaning of what these animals represented in my life transformed itself before my eyes *as I worked with the image, and became more consciously aware of what they could represent to me, to us*. Now they are not just pretty birds with white feathers, clipped so that they won’t escape the lake, ready to beg for popcorn from the little kids that visit the park, no. Now they are no longer merely symbols of romantic love, although they have not lost that quality, but they have become much more, a symbol of Spirit, of Supreme attainment, emergent, unfathomable in their depth and complexity; to me they have become a symbol of the One”.

“Like I said the other day, you now see them each as *Paramahansa*, the Great Spiritual Swan, one of the Hindu terms for the manifestation of Spirit” says Luis.

“Exactly! And when you look into Spirit though something that has become its symbol for you, like a window to the other side, there really is no way to describe what you see on the other side” I say.

“That is why maybe we shouldn’t even try” says Luis.

“So do you think we should not even try to describe how we see *Completion*?” I ask, pick up a few pieces of discarded bread lying by my feet on the ground, break it up into smaller crumbs, and feed it to the pigeons that are begging, circling around us.

“Maybe we should not even try to describe it directly, but we can try to do it obliquely. So what do you think is the most important realization you gained from your experience of *Completion* as of today?” He asks.

“When I started working on the Ph.D., I felt I was fulfilling my part of getting ready to teach my method, promote my work. I thought that the couples work was in a way a part of that Great Work that is so often talked about in the Hermetic Tradition”.

Luis picks up a piece of discarded bread as well, and joins me in feeding the pigeons that have now formed a pecking and cooing half-moon around our feet...

“Yeah, Margaret talked about it, and many people took it as serving a cause until they burned themselves out. They became dry and judgmental, their teachings stale; not really a positive or even a viable vehicle for spiritual emergence, I would say”.

“No, I don’t want you to end like that” says Luis.

“And that’s exactly it. Now that I have had to revisit and study all this alchemical material about the alchemical work, the way that the ancients symbolized the spiritual path, the integration of opposites and such, and then what Jung had to say about it all...now I see that there are really two Great Works that they speak about”.

“And?”

“One is the Great Work that Margaret and other Hermeticist talk about, an outer sort of service work to a cause. This is the one I always thought our twin soul relationship was going to be about; it’s how I interpreted the message of the S. to mean when they said that I should swear

that I would stick to you and to our relationship no matter what because we had a work to do together. It matched the concept of the *cosmic tie* that I had read so long ago”.

“On some level we both felt that we would leave a legacy and all that. I definitely felt that I was doing that type of work, during the years in which we had the workshop business, but I am no longer into that”.

“I know, but see, it’s about much more than whether we do or don’t do the outer work, what I had though was the *Opus Magnum* of Hermeticist talk about. What I can see more clearly now, after all these years and phases, is that the real work, the one that counts, is the other one, the *Opus Alchymicum*, the alchemical wedding of Sun and Moon, the one that you and I are about, *the one work that is done on the inside*.

“Yes” says Luis.

“Before it seemed to me that our relationship was instrumental for the work to spill out from us to others, while now I see that the integrating of the complementary opposites in ourselves, in our relationship was and is, in itself, *the work*. From that core work, like from the core of a star, a whole universe may be born, fertilized, imbued with positive and higher meaning, flourish, and be sustained. But we have no clear idea from where we stand right here what this may actually look like, what it might entail.” I say.

“No we don’t know where exactly it may lead us to. That is the mystery of the Stone, the Great Spiritual Swan” says Luis.

“We both have an attitude of love and service towards helping others, that won’t go away. But from where I stand right now, I can firmly say that the *Magnum Opus* has become the *Opus Alchymicum*. The compass point of the Opus has shifted to the inside, where the world is mental, a game of deliberate directing of the energies of consciousness, the mind, and the heart.

Developing the philosopher's stone is thus an art, *a relational art*. The positive results may very well spill out to help others, but the true achievement is the creation of inner, spiritual gold. The operation of the Sun is thus a state into which you and I enter together, *on the inside*" I say.

"Yes, I also see it that way now", says Luis.

Visual Data, Analysis, and Interpretation

Overview of this section

In the previous section I provided the narrative data that answered sub question 1 of this study. In this section I will now first provide the visual data for this autoethnography in the form of 8 alchemical pictograms, followed by a brief description of the metaphorical meanings of each of these images based on how they have they have been traditionally interpreted within the context of alchemy. Second, I describe the meanings of each of these 8 alchemical pictograms as understood within the context of Positive and Holistic Relationship Development Theory (PHRDT). Last, to answer sub question 2, I combine the discussion, analysis, and interpretation of the meanings I derive from these 8 pictograms into the larger discussion, analysis and interpretation of all the data, including the narrative, story data *and* the visual pictogram data, to answer the study's remaining research questions 3, 4, and 5.

The alchemical pictograms included in this study are allegorical images. This means that they are loaded with highly symbolic and subjective imagery that is intended to be interpreted differently by each individual who attempts to decipher their meaning from a personal, individual point of view (Edinger, 1994; Jaffee, 1979; Jung, 1966/1992, 1983, 1993). These pictograms may thus elicit entirely different meanings from each reader, individual or couple

seeing them, and attempting to interpret how their symbolic meaning may apply to their individual lives and/or their couple relationship (Edinger, 1994).

Squaring the Circle: The blueprint



Translation: “The Philosopher says: Make a circle out of a man and woman, derive from it a square, and from the square a triangle, make a circle and you will have the Philosopher’s Stone.”

Michael Maier, in *Atalanta Fugiens*, Oppenheim, 1617, as cited in De Jong, (2002, p. 169).

Figure 1 - Maier's pictogram

The first alchemical pictogram used in this study, *Squaring the Circle* by Michael Maier, is derived from his 17th century work *Atalanta Fugiens*, edited and interpreted in depth by De Jong (DeJong, 2002).








In the context of alchemy, the core elements of this pictogram are well described by Abraham (2006), who states that the term *philosopher* denotes an alchemist, especially a spiritual alchemist or wise man. Abraham (2006, p. 144) explains that “the alchemists were known as natural philosophers because they were concerned not only with researching the outer aspects of

the workings of nature but with discovering nature's inner essences and subtle virtues. The alchemical philosophers were concerned not merely with material alchemy but with medical and spiritual alchemy" (L. Abraham, 1998/2006).

The couple in the center of the pictogram represents the "alchemical brother and sister who are united in the alchemical wedding to produce the philosopher's stone" (Abraham 1998/2006, p. 206). This couple is also conceived as the "alchemical twins who when united form one perfect whole" (p. 206). *The circle* in this context of alchemy "signifies the perfect, eternal, spiritual realm in contrast to the square, which signifies the earth, the corruptible world of illusion, the four elements" (Abraham 1998/2006, p. 41). *The square* in this context, as stated above, symbolizes the earthly, physical realm, its four corners associated to the four classical elements of Greek philosophy, which include earth, water, air, and fire (DeJong, 2002). *The upward pointing triangle* in this context denotes the element of fire as one of the Aristotelian elements in Classical Greek philosophy. This symbol has been used in the Western world since antiquity to denote not only the physical characteristics of fire, but also the psychological and metaphysical qualities and correlations attributed to the element of fire since antiquity (L. Abraham, 2006; Biederman, 2006).

In the context of alchemy, the outer circle refers to the *Auroboros*, a mythical serpent or dragon shown eating its own tail, and which represents the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega, occurring simultaneously. In alchemy, the symbol of the circle is therefore often used to symbolize the completion of spiritual alchemy, the creation of the philosopher's stone, the realization of the One (L. Abraham, 2006; Jung, 1966/1992, 1983, 1989).

In the context of Positive and Holistic Relationship Development Theory, this pictogram provides the blueprint for the Soul Mates Model, which is at the core of PHRDT as described below (Batthyany De La Lama, 2010g; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b).

Table 2: Correlating the Soul Mates Model to Maier's Pictogram	
	Stage 1: Dating/Encounter: the man and the woman
	Stage 2: Commitment, the pair draws the circle of commitment around their relationship
	Stage 3: Intimacy, the pair fills the circle of commitment with intimate knowing and love
	Stage 4: Building a Life, the pair draws the square, grounds their vision in physical reality
	Stage 5: Integrating the Shadow, the pair stuck in the square, must integrate shadow, rise upward
	Stage 6: Renewal, the pair draws the upward pointing triangle of higher aspiration, transcendence
	Stage 7: Completion, sustainability, flourishing, the pair draws the larger circle of completion, sustainability and flourishing around their relationship, engages in the great work

In the context of my own relationship: Although “alchemical symbols are ambiguous, multidimensional, flexible, and with a tendency towards eluding any attempt to define them once and for all (Abraham, 1998/2006), this pictogram inspires two distinct sets of meanings for me. On the one hand, it serves as an *organizing blueprint* to understand what has already occurred in the development of my relationship. On the other, it serves as a *mythopoeic and strategic roadmap* of the positive and holistic development of my relationship that may be possible in the future.

Squaring the Circle as a relationship development organizing blueprint: Although some may consider this alchemical engraving could be regarded as a whimsical and perhaps a bit antiquated depiction of a couple’s spiritual alchemy endeavor by a mostly discredited 17th century body of knowledge – alchemy - Jung (Jaffee, 1979; Jung, 1966/1992, 1989) and others

believed it to be a wise and profoundly meaningful depiction of the integration of opposites in the form of the masculine and feminine archetypes. This pictogram, therefore, if read with a deeply symbolic and metaphorically oriented mind, provides an enormous wellspring of higher meaning for the individual. For a couple, it also serves as a relationship organizing blueprint that can help a couple understand the stages and phases of the positive and holistic development of their relationship development for the rest of their lives together, which is what it is now helping me do with mine.

In my personal case then, based on the strange initial conditions (Goldstein, et al., 2010) through which Luis and I met, and the ensuing deep compatibility we have experienced undiminished over so many years, the metaphorical representation of what we have already experienced symbolized in *Squaring the Circle* (DeJong, 2002) is a valuable *organizing blueprint* to help me order the various phases of my experiences of my intimate relationship with my partner. Without this blueprint, my relationship experiences would seem incoherent, and largely incomprehensible.

Squaring the Circle as a mythopoeic and strategic relationship development roadmap. As a mythopoeic blueprint, *Squaring the Circle* (DeJong, 2002) does not only help me understand where Luis and I have been in our relationship; it also helps me understand where we might be now, and where we ought to be headed as a couple in our future together. *Squaring the Circle* provides me with a blueprint of how an intimate couple relationship can be viewed as a powerful stage in which to integrate the universal complementary opposites, in the form of the masculine and feminine archetypes. Alchemists (L. Abraham, 2006; Biederman, 2006), Jung (Jung, 1983, 1989, 1993), and Jungian analysts (Edinger, 1994, 1995; Schwartz-Salant, 1998) believe that this integration of opposites is at work microcosmically within oneself and within one's intimate

couple relationship (Edinger, 1994, 1995; Schwartz-Salant, 1998), as well as macrocosmically in the relationship between the individual human being and the universe at large (Edinger, 1994; Jaffee, 1979; Schwartz-Salant, 1995). The work and the fruits of this integration, the pictogram shows, will result in the metaphorical creation of the philosopher's stone, or gold of the philosophers, an inner, spiritual achievement and enduring fulfillment that transcends the age of the body (Jaffee, 1979).

Maier's Squaring the Circle (DeJong, 2002) thus shows me that there is a whole other world of positive relationship dynamics and holistic meaning to be co-constructed in the context of a soul mating relationship, in addition to, above, and beyond the traditional marriage goals of ages past of securing a living and building a family (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b). Squaring the Circle thus shows me that the most important work in my integration of opposites and the positive and holistic development of my relationship is yet to be done as my partner and I build the triangle out of the square and move our relationship and ourselves as human partners ever closer towards Completion and the achievement of the philosopher's stone.

Analysis and interpretation of the 7 Stage/Phase pictograms

In the context of PHRDT's Soul Mates Model, each of the 7 relationship phases/stages represented in the relationship blueprint symbolized by *Squaring the Circle*, also associates with a particular alchemical pictogram (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011). The pictograms shown below, which are associated with phases 1 and 3-6 of the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011) are derived from a compilation of 17th century engravings and commentaries generally referred to as the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (Jung,

1966/1992; Smith, 2003). The pictogram associated with phase/stage 2 is adapted from the anonymous XVII century book *Donum Dei. Ortus divicicarum sapientiae Dei*, and the pictogram for stage/phase 7 is adapted from the engraving by Lukas Jennis in his 1624 *Chymisches Lustgaertchen* (Biederman, 2006). In this section, I am first describing and then interpreting the symbolic meanings of these 7 pictograms, and then I proceed to integrate these interpretations with a broader discussion of the relevant stage/phase of my own relationship.



Figure 2: Encounter

Stage 1: Encounter/Dating. This pictogram shows the soul mating, alchemical partners encountering each other, which in practical, terms correlates with the couple's dating phase.

Within the context of alchemy, this Encounter phase is represented by picture 2 of the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (Jung, 1966/1992; Smith, 2003) is represented in Maier's emblem *Squaring the Circle* (DeJong, 2002) by the couple in the inner circle. The star in this context represents the mercurial star or "starr of the wise" (Sloan, quoted in Abraham 1998/2006, p. 190)

an ominous harbinger of spiritual encounter and transformation. The dove represents the alchemical mercurial dove – which signifies the emergence of true love. Depicted together, the star and the dove represent the transformative and formidable mercurial power capable of wedding the seemingly opposite yet complementary dual forces undergirding the universe. The Solar King and the Lunar Queen then represent the physical manifestations of these universal complementary opposites as embodied in the encounter of the soul mating partners. In fact, “the form of the [six pointed] star specifically represents the mercurial power which unites heaven above (the downward pointing triangle) and earth below (the upward pointing triangle)”, states Abraham (1998/2006, p. 190).

Coincidentally, in Western cultures, and perhaps because the dove is known to mate for life, the dove has traditionally come to symbolize true love between intimate partners. The flowers with which the partners are shown to touch each other - or rather sense each other - are lilies, an alchemical, and also a Western cultural symbol of purity (L. Abraham, 2006).

In the context of PHRDT's Soul Mates Model (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), the figures represent an actual man and an actual woman. Alternately, if the partners are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, asexual or any other type of relationship, the figures represent the intimate encounter of the actual person/partner who predominantly carries the masculine or solar archetype or quality, with the actual person/partner who predominately carries the feminine or lunar archetype or quality in this particular relationship.

In the context of the alchemical encounter of the couple, with the potential to develop into an alchemical couple, or soul mates (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, 2010g) the couple is checking each other out with the help of “lilies”

white flowers that have traditionally symbolized purity. In this context, the lilies thus represent the intuitive sensing the partners are deploying to ascertain if indeed they are a viable couple to work together through the phases of soul mating (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, 2010g). The couple is thus utilizing their intuitive, higher, (in our case psychic) psychic senses, or aspects of their pure, better, inner, spiritual natures to get to know each other, and perhaps determine if indeed they have the potential to – metaphorically - awaken the transformative forces of the substance of the alchemical mercury that will aid them in mating not only their physical persons, but also their inner Solar King and Lunar Queen within each of them individually and within the relationship as an intimate, soul mating, alchemical couple.

The actual archetypal embodiment of each partner in the encounter/dating as embodiment of the complementary opposites denoted in this alchemical pictogram as well as in the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, 2010g) aligns with Edinger’s interpretation of the encountering couple as intimate partners (Edinger, 1994), and moves beyond Jung’s preferred interpretation of seeing the two figures as merely representing the intra-psychic manifestation of masculine and feminine archetypes within a single, individuating individual (Jung, 1966/1992). Therefore, in the context of this study, I am focusing on the interpersonal meaning of the pictograms instead of their intra-personal significance.

(Sub question 2) In the context of my own relationship this pictogram has come to signify the extraordinary (signified by the Sun and the Moon, the King and the Queen archetypes), fated, spiritually significant (6 pointed star), and love-imbued (dove) way in which Luis and I encountered each other. Despite the fact, that Luis and I did not actually “date” or even meet in the physical realm, to me, our Encounter occurred during the years before we actually met,

culminating at the physical moment in which I received that post-it note with his actual physical name and address.

The intuitive and psychic abilities I developed at a young age, which I had to engage to get to know A./Luis in the inner realm of consciousness before I met him in real life, and which he later tells me he also used, are to me represented by the lilies with which the couple “touches” each other, intuitively. This pictogram to me thus represents the powerful, *initial conditions* of the complex system (Alhadeff-Jones, 2012; Morin, 2008; Stanton & Welsh, 2012) that would become our relationship and our life together (which in our case were transpersonal initial conditions), and the very basis for the positive couple story (Conoley & Conoley, 2009; Singer & Skerrett, 2014) of soul mates and twin souls we would develop during our *Intimacy* phase.

(Main question:) My experience of the long-term relationship with my partner in this *Encounter phase of my relationship*, from the first encounter with him in my dream as a teenager spending the summer in Spain, until the day I received the note with his P.O. box in San Ysidro, CA, to the day we actually met, I had this sense of fate or destiny pushing me forward to encounter with Luis. During those years it felt to me as if a guiding star were indeed leading me inexorably to the locus of our actual encounter. Based on the exalted feelings of wholeness, unity, love, and grace that our rapprochement engendered I me, as well as due to the psychic phenomena through which it unfolded, this guiding force definitely felt as intruding into my life from what alchemists call *the above* (L. Abraham, 2006; Edinger, 1994), a supernatural, spiritual realm, where such qualities are immanent. Through the initial conditions of our *Encounter* it became clear to me that in the world of our intimate relationship, Luis and I are indeed King and Queen *to each other*, representations and embodiments of the Sun and the Moon archetypes in the flesh.

The dove, to me represents the transcendent love and grace – reminiscent of the dove of the Christian Holy Ghost - that emerges ever anew between the two of us, the very same love and grace that Luis tells me in our conversations that he too senses, and which we both agree is still as present today as it was at the time we met. Based on everything that has happened to us so far, I see the initial conditions of our relationship and our life together clearly represented by this pictogram. On a mythopoetic and on an archetypal level, it does indeed seem to me that the archetype of the alchemical twins (L. Abraham, 2006; Edinger, 1994) descended upon, or perhaps emerged within Luis and me, took a hold of our lives, and decided to express itself through us.

The PHRDT principles that played out most prominently in the Encounter phase of my relationship include the positive, holistic, love/soul/transcendence, transformative, alchemical, and narrative. The positive and the love/soul/transcendence principles (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) played out in my relationship with A. from my very first encounter with this entity in the dream I had in Spain, in which I felt that the A. was intrinsically meaningful, positive, and linked to me through a powerful sense of unconditional and transcendent love, which continued on undeterred throughout the years that passed before we actually met in physical reality. During the years that followed that dream, every time I encountered A. in dreams, in my intentional meditations, and/or in spontaneous visions, the positive and deep feeling of love, of soul-encounter and of transcendence at the core of our relationship sprung up undiminished, and grew ever stronger the closer we moved to our physical encounter.

The holistic principle (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) played out in my encounter with Luis in that the experiences that led to my receiving his address were occurring at the same time that I was pursuing an intense quest to develop my inner, holistic, psychic, and

metaphysical side, training and practicing with great discipline every day. I have had extrasensory experiences since my late childhood as far as I remember, perhaps as a result of the encephalitis I suffered as a small child, which some experts believe can result in extraordinary capacities similar to those experienced by individuals suffering from the acquired savant syndrome, but without the learning disability associated with that condition (Treffert, 2011). Although psychic experiences were frequent for me in the years of my encounter with A/Luis, I kept my spiritual and psychic world to myself for many years. This spiritual quest on which I embarked in my twenties, however, transformed me into a more openly holistically minded (Shannon, 2002) individual.

This personal transformation - which shows the *transformative and the alchemical principles* (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) in action – appears to have changed me in such a way that I became progressively incompatible with the more pragmatically oriented Roger to whom I was married during those years. The holistic development that I was undergoing as a result of my personal studies and practices, and the increasing incompatibility or lack of mating on the inner, metaphysical and spiritual realms that I was experiencing with Roger, may have predisposed me to be open to an encounter with someone like A. who presented himself as an intensely spiritual and metaphysically oriented spiritual entity, so very similar to the Luis I would later meet in my physical life.

The *narrative principle* (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a), evidenced itself in that the story of who I saw myself to be about changed on the day I went to the Hugendubel bookstore in Munich where I read about the existence of souls that may be cosmic ties, who have a transcendental link with another soul, and are dedicated to come back to a life together to complete some “great work”.

Before reading about the concept of cosmic ties I saw myself as an individual on a spiritual path, a person with occasional bouts of psychic visions and inspirations, interested in learning more about the spiritual and the holistic realms, following a bottom up path if you will. Yet after I read about cosmic ties, I suddenly saw myself not as a lone individual on a bottom up spiritual path, but as an individual already tethered to another soul in a spiritually meaningful way even before being born into my body and into my present life.

My narrative about myself was thus drastically changed from that of being a lone traveler to that of being one half of a cosmic tie, the other half being the man with the dark hair I had dreamt about in Spain, who I must have known very well in a past life (based on my belief in reincarnation), a soul whom I thought was not currently in the body, yet was my lover, and who in fact was *not* Roger.

From the day I read about cosmic ties at that bookstore in Munich, I thus began to increasingly see myself as someone who would someday reunite with this otherworldly partner and complete some important *work*. What exactly that work would be I had no clue during those years. In the absence of any clarity about this “work”, I interpreted it as a work of service and dedication to others, which in its extreme form would entail the so-called bodhisattva work (Insight, 2015), which is also the attitude the organization led by Margaret which I joined, the one through which Luis and I met, would actively promote.



Figure 3: Commitment

Stage 2: Commitment: the couple draws the inner circle around their union. This stage is represented in Maier’s emblem Squaring the Circle (DeJong, 2002) by the inner circle the “philosopher” draws around the couple.

*In the context of alchemy, this pictogram shows the successful *conjunctio* of the alchemical couple literally “coupling” inside the vessel is shown by the four heads floating around them, representing the four alchemical, Aristotelian elements with the fifth element or *quintaessentia* floating above them in the form of a magical baby or Christ child. The fruits growing out of the top of the vessel are the fruitful results of the couple’s successful integration of opposites as they have agreed to work with each other within the confines of the alchemical vessel (L. Abraham, 2006; Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Edinger, 1994). In*

alchemical texts, this vessel is also referred to as the pot, kettle, oven, body, grave, bath, womb, box, and several other allegorical names (L. Abraham, 1998/2006). In fact, in alchemy, the entire *Rosarium* series is said to develop inside the alchemical vessel, showing that the couple is under intense psychic pressure, being cooked, so to speak, and thus undergoing deep transformation (Edinger, 1994), because “in one vessel the whole mastery is performed” (Bacon in Abraham 1998/2006, p. 6).

In the context of PHRDT’s Soul Mates Model (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) *Commitment* refers to a state of mind of commitment to each other and to their relationship for better and for worse as well as a commitment to exclusively focus on their dyad and exclude other potential partners from the union. This state of mind of commitment is a prerequisite for the establishment and development of an *internal locus of control* (Coleman, 2003) for the couple’s intimate relationship. The alchemical vessel of *Commitment* thus serves the dual purpose of protective womb, and pressuring container in which the relationship is being developed or cooked, and the relationship’s individual culture is protected, nurtured, and able to ultimately flourish (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008).

As stated in the background section to this study, in the contemporary climate of expressive individualism (Cherlin, 2009; Knudson-Martin & Rankin Mahoney, 2009) in which couples now find themselves in, the external, traditional forces of religion, community, traditional family values, and law can no longer counted on to hold couples together from without (Cherlin, 2009; Long & Young, 2007). Therefore, in order to counteract the disruptive, and often relationship corroding ideology of expressive individualism, a state of ongoing inner commitment, must be firmly agreed to and established by contemporary intimate couples if they

want their relationships to develop positively and succeed in the long term (Amato, et al., 2007; Cherlin, 2009; Cook, 2008; Coontz, 2005; Davis, 2010; Knudson-Martin & Rankin Mahoney, 2009; Serlin, 2005; Van Acker, 2008).

(Sub question 2) In the context of my own relationship this pictogram has come to signify the pressure “cooking” of my own self in the alchemical vessel of the relationship with my partner. Today, as I look back to this initial Commitment phase of my relationship with Luis, I still feel as if the commitment I made to Luis was thrust upon me by higher forces that appeared to me in my vision of the S.

Instead of seeing the S. that appeared in my vision as external supernatural entities, and their directive to commit to Luis an order from above on how to follow my destiny, my vision could, of course, also be understood as a mythopoetic way in which my own mind interpreted a powerful directive stemming from my own intuitive/transpersonal/soul nature, or alternately also from the intuitive/transpersonal/soul nature of Luis and me combined. If I were to interpret my vision of the S. in this manner, I could say that the figures of the S. symbolized what is represented in Maier’s *Squaring the Circle* pictogram (DeJong, 2002) by the figure of the philosopher/chemist circumscribing the alchemical couple within the circle of *Commitment*. From this point of view, the philosopher of Maier’s diagram deliberately encircles the pair, enclosing them in the alchemical vessel, knowing very well that this confinement would eventually help the couple flourish and develop the metaphorical, spiritual gold, the substance of the philosopher’s stone. This encircling or circumscribing of the couple’s union which both pressurizes the relationship and protects it, leading to the development of the philosopher’s stone, is symbolized in the alchemical image of the vessel shown above by the fruits emerging

from the top of the vessel, and by the emergence of the Christ child, a symbol of spiritual achievement and transcendence (L. Abraham, 2006; Jung, 1966/1992).

Although at the time of their appearance, the S. did feel like supernatural entities, and to me they still do today (perhaps because I am still a die-hard mythopoeist, and romantic at heart), at the end of the day, it does not appear to matter all that much whether the S. are defined as supernatural beings, or as psychodynamic manifestations of my/our own soul/Self. What does matter is that their presence in my consciousness elicited a powerful commitment from me towards my relationship with Luis. Upon our physical meeting, I also saw that commitment reciprocated by Luis towards me. The way I see it today, is that despite our divorce, Commitment and the alchemical vessel worked very well to this day, which to me is proof enough that the S. were not a delusion. In fact, following our Commitment, I can see that both Luis and I are still cooking inside the alchemical vessel, even while we are also reaping a good amount of ripe fruit.

(main question): My experience of the long-term relationship with my partner in this Commitment phase, springs directly from the life-altering conditions of our encounter, which set me up for a soul- deep commitment to a relationship that would begin a decades- long game of love, endurance, growing, creative expression, and flourishing, which ultimately resulted in the flourishing of our love for each other, our life together, and the love and care for my children. Nevertheless, the sense of being suddenly enclosed with another human being into an alchemical vessel to which – metaphorically speaking – heat would be applied from the outside in order to “cook and blend the souls” has often felt like a heavy pressure almost too suffocating to bear. The alchemical vessel of Commitment that we were practically thrust into, however, also provided us with a locus of intimacy, a home for the union of our souls so to speak, and a sense

of ongoing communion and camaraderie, allowing us to transcend the life-long existential isolation and loneliness most people are set to periodically experience in their life ((Corey, 2008; Yalom, 1980). To me, this experience of Commitment is thus an ongoing, dissolving, extinguishing, and re-incinerating process affecting everything that I thought I was, even while it is also fertile, life- enhancing and fulfilling, promoting unprecedented personal and relationship growth and flourishing, and most importantly the experience of true love that I could never have even imagined before my Encounter with and Commitment to Luis.

Moreover, Commitment, in the context of my own relationship is twofold in a more luminous manner. On the one hand it is a deep sense and act of commitment to Luis, and on the other it is a soul-deep commitment to the processes and dynamics of our soul mating, the positive and holistic development of our relationship towards the flourishing we are both intent to achieve. These two commitments then combine into a highly intense, and possibly inescapable life-long experience; a perfect stage for the integration of complementary forces reminiscent of the sphere atop of the Caduceus – which is both, a symbol of the sun, the One, and the philosopher’s stone. The very same Caduceus which I saw spontaneously appear when first connecting with Luis by letter during our Commitment phase.

The PHRDT principles that played out most prominently in the Commitment phase of my relationship include the positive, the holistic, the developmental, the polarity/complementarity, and the creative principles. The positive and the holistic principles (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) played out simultaneously in 3 ways. First, the concept of committing to what I perceived as being a long-term relationship with the person that was A./Luis, with whom I felt that I could develop a more holistic relationship on the meaning, worldview, philosophical, and the spiritual levels of relevance, as described in the Relevance Model (Batthyany- De La Lama &

De La Lama, 2007), even though I had not yet seen his physical person, felt so intrinsically positive and spiritually significant, that it carried me through any doubts, concerns, or objections that rose up in my mind.

Second, the *holistic principles* played out in my experience of my relationship with my partner in that the need to commit to Luis was presented to me in a vision, and from what I believed was as a credible spiritual source at that time. I based this belief on my over 10 years of arduous, disciplined, and focused meditation and visualization practices in which I explored areas of myself and the universe from a holistic perspective (Shannon, 2002). The *positive principle* played out simultaneously in that my positive need for a more holistic and complete mating with another was becoming so important to me as a result of my inner explorations and practices, that I began to sense that no other relationship would be truly fulfilling in comparison. At that time, *Commitment* to Luis thus appeared to me as the next necessary step to fulfill the positive, meaningful life with a holistically, philosophically, and spiritually compatible partner that I had begun to desire based on my experiences. Third, the profound sense of familiarity and kinship, of having known each other before which I felt in my encounters first with A and then with Luis, called out to a deeper, more positive and holistic (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2007; Shannon, 2002), part of myself that would not be denied.

The developmental principle (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) played out in that this process of encountering A/Luis and then being called upon committing to marrying him, to working with him, and to staying together with him no matter what would happen, forced me to come clear with my own growth towards seeking a more honest, spiritually significant life, and a more holistically compatible life partner, a soul mate (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b). Despite all the hardships that the tearing down of my then current life and the building of

my new life might entail, to me, *Commitment* was a powerful developmental step that would prove to alter the trajectory of my life towards a more honest, and integrated existence.

The polarity/complementarity principle (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) played out in the *Commitment* phase of my relationship in that at the time of my commitment to Luis I was in an intense inner growth phase in which I was increasingly developing aspects of myself that I could see would remain unmated if I remained in my relationship with Roger. As stated elsewhere in this study, while Roger and I could communicate well about the material, concrete aspects of life, and thus were well mated on that level, it was impossible to conduct a meaningful conversation with him about artistic, philosophical, meaning perspectives, psychic, spiritual topics, leaving me with no opportunity to relate to and develop conjointly with him on those more subtle, holistic, philosophical and spiritual levels (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2007; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b). Those increasingly important aspects of me were thus unmated by Roger, and at the time I was being confronted with Commitment to Luis, would no longer be denied. Something in me now deeply craved the complement of a partner who would be capable and willing to mate with me on those more abstract levels in addition to the physical and more concrete, material levels of a couple's relationship.

The creative principle (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) played out in that lacking any other means of finding out about this Luis person at that time – before the advent of Google and the internet - I had to use creative means to attempt to gather more information about him in any way I was capable of, including visualizations, imaginal practices, and my mother's psychic abilities and expertise with the Tarot cards.

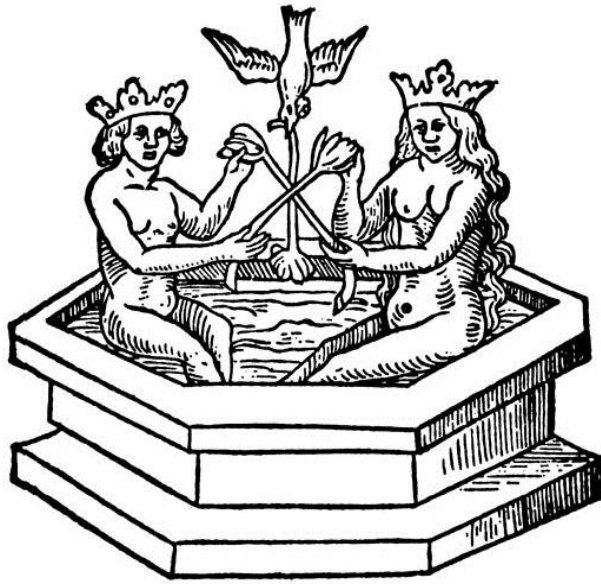


Figure 4: Intimacy

Stage 3: Intimacy. This stage in the couple's soul mating process is symbolized by pictogram 4 of the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (Edinger, 1994; Jung, 1966/1992; Smith, 2003). This stage/phase is not directly depicted in Maier's pictogram *Squaring the Circle* (DeJong, 2002), but it is implied by the space inside the inner circle in which the alchemical couple is enclosed .

In the context of alchemy this pictogram signifies the alchemical couple's descent into the mercurial bath (L. Abraham, 2006; Jung, 1966/1992). At this stage, the star is no longer present, but it appears to have been integrated into the dove, which is still present and is now adding to the couple's intimate encounter with a lily flower of its own, descending from the heaven above, and touching the below in the physical union of King and Queen so to speak, thus appearing to bless and enhance the couple's efforts at intimacy. In this image, the Sun and the Moon are no longer present, being subsumed into the King and Queen who are now naked, and engaged in a

more intimate encounter inside a hexagonal mercurial bath. The hexagon being a hermetic and alchemical symbol of harmony and the integration of opposites (L. Abraham, 2006), shows that the couple is engaged in a harmonious process, their naked bodies symbolize that now they are both more exposed and more vulnerable to each other, and the lilies that they use to touch each other signify that they are still effecting this rapprochement from their pure and intuitive natures (L. Abraham, 2006). Moreover, in this context, the mercurial, water-like substance in the bath stands for a spiritual and/or etheric substance that is deemed capable of integrating the archetypes of King and Queen; a substance that is metaphorically referred to in alchemical writings as the alchemical *glue* (L. Abraham, 2006), the indispensable ingredient to the development of the philosopher's stone (L. Abraham, 2006; Edinger, 1994; Jung, 1983, 1989, 1993).

In the context of PHRDT's Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, 2010g; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) this pictogram depicts how the couple both explores and develops their relationship's interactive field (Schwartz-Salant, 1998) also referred to the relational space between them as the between (Hendrix & LaKelley Hunt, 2009), as the couple individually and jointly self-explore and self-reveal (Schnarch, 2009). This interactive field is represented pictorially in this alchemical image by the water in the bath surrounding the naked bodies of the King and the Queen. Metaphorically speaking, the royal couple is now working the phase in which they fill the circle of their relationship with the physical, emotional, mental, meaning, and spiritual intimacy, thus beginning to grow the alchemical glue (L. Abraham, 2006) that will allow them to develop the philosopher's stone, and thus build up a long-lasting meaningful and emotionally fulfilling soul mates relationship (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b).

In the context of my own relationship this pictogram has come to signify the natural way in which we “descended into the mercurial bath of intimacy” with each other, a state of bodily, emotional and communication flow that we somehow naturally achieved practically from the moment we set eyes on each other.

My experience of the long-term relationship with my partner in this Intimacy phase is thus characterized by an almost ready-made capacity to flow with each other that emerged *between us*, or in our *between* as some Jungian analysts would term it (Hendrix & LaKelley Hunt, 2009; Schwartz-Salant, 1998), which allowed us to easily communicate our self - exploration and self- revelation to the other partner on every level of holistic relevance, physical, emotional, concrete mental, abstract mental/ meaning/worldview and spiritual orienting system (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2007). This capacity for intimacy that sprung up between set the stage for me to develop the long-sought soulmate relationship with another human being on every level that I was capable of meeting him, and which was also the type of mating I had so desired.

This emergent capacity for intimacy between Luis and me does not mean that we saw, or even now see the world exactly the same, or that we agreed or do now agree on most topics. We didn't then, and we don't now. What this means is that we are able to communicate about any topic in the deep, honest, and natural manner needed to develop true intimacy of the heart and the soul. Through this capacity of intense and intimate interaction that sprang between us, we have been able to build a strong, peculiar relationship culture (Gottman & Schwartz Gottman, 2008) that is very unlike that of any other couple that I have known in my life .

Over the years, of course, Luis and I also had periods of extreme dryness and difficulty during which we had to work harder than usual to nurture and maintain the flow of intimacy like

most other couples have to. Nevertheless, the mercurial substance of alchemical intimacy does seem ever present at some level *between us*, gluing us together on some intangible level, and allowing us to descend into this metaphorical bath of intimacy in which we are capable of openly self- exploring and self-revealing in the presence of the other most of the times we desire to do so.

In my experience of my relationship to my partner, I feel the mercurial fluid that bathes my consciousness like a torrent that wants to flow towards expressing myself to him as deeply as I can. I feel this metaphorical mercurial fluid urging me to me to express myself and invite him to discuss with me not only what he and I are doing, did, or will do, but also how I/we feel about it, what we think about it, what meanings we derived/ derive/will derive from what was/ is/could be going on during the day, and most importantly what meanings we should ideally be deriving to promote and maintain the positive and the holistic development of our relationship (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b).

In fact, unless interrupted by important scheduling concerns, we are at about a two hour to three hour interval schedule in this natural flow of interaction. It appears that unless we are able to talk and discuss the events of our day as they unfold nearly in real time, including our dreams and hunches as they appear, we begin to feel a staleness creeping in. It is as if the open communication and interaction between soul mate and soul mate, consciousness and consciousness, renews the mercurial element, the between that binds us. The flow of consciousness, love, feelings, insights, ideas, information, and communication between partners symbolized by the mercurial fluid in the bath and the lilies that the pair uses to sense each other, demands to be continually refreshed several times a day in a deep and meaningful way; it cannot be denied. We have thus made every effort to build our relationship rhythm and culture to

support and nurture it. Incidentally, as I analyze these data, I now remember that Mercury is, off course, the Roman name for the god Hermes, the figure at the core of the Hermetic Tradition. For Luis and I to be bound in intimacy and living our relationship metaphorically submerged in a mercurial fluid would be very appropriate.

The PHRDT principles that played out most prominently in the Intimacy phase of my relationship described in this study include the positive, the holistic, the love/soul &transcendence, the transformative, the narrative, the emergent, and the action principles (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a).

The positive, the holistic, and the love/soul/transcendence principles (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) played out in this phase as a direct carryover of the two previous phases of Encounter and Commitment in a continuation of the development of a powerful positive core to our relationship, which was intrinsically holistic, centered on an integration of body, emotions, mind, and soul (Shannon, 2002), based on deep love, a sense of soul connection, and a feeling of transcendence that marked our union from the start.

The transformative, the narrative, the emergent, and the simultaneity principle (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) also played out strongly in this phase of our relationship development in that the moment that I met the physical Luis in Denver, he not only looked like A. and like the Luis I had seen in prior visions, but his presence also felt the way that I had felt it in my inner visions and meditations, and thus expected that it would feel, and that his behavior matched the way the S. had predicted that he would behave.

This experience of a match between the inner and the outer, the above with the below so to speak, was transformative to my worldview on a personal microcosmic level, in that I now found a partner to whom I was intensely attracted and who promised to be the soul mate I had so

longed for during the past decades. In fact, he not only felt like a promising mate to enter the soul mating process with, but he also felt like a long- lost twin soul, a soul mate already mated, and a soul mating partner readymade. This realization brought a game changing shift in identity and life-narrative for me. While hours before meeting Luis I had felt like a crazed, delusional, suburban housewife following an inner siren call to meet a potential Latin lover in a mediocre Denver hotel, now I was a smart and practical, yet also psychically gifted, and spiritually dedicated, even heroic introverted young woman carefully answering a decades-long and relentless higher calling to reunite with her twin soul!

The shift felt natural and so right while we were together in our own, intimate world. But in face of the opinions and the derisive remark of those who passed judgement on our outwardly new relationship it had to be actively protected and defended. Friends and family from my then current life back in 1989, could not see past the young Austro-Hungarian Countess married to a German Prince they thought they knew, the only one me they really wanted to see and know. To them, my meeting and loving Luis was nothing more than a sudden, irrational whim to willingly tear apart my highly prized aristocratic marriage, only to start a relationship with a dark-skinned Mexican of questionable descent. During those days, my family's and their friend's vicious reactions against my decisions, as showing a whole other side of my family which I had only seen so fully displayed before. This negative reaction from my loved ones, as well as the heart break and the logistics of breaking up my life with Roger and start a new one with Luis felt like the flames of the alchemist's furnace heating the alchemical vessel from the outside, cooking the relationship that hides within. Therefore, I can say today, that the intimacy that sprang between us in our Intimacy phase, was confirmatory of the inner truths that had guided me for so long,

and incidentally also of my sanity; yet this intimacy was also difficult to protect and uphold in the midst of the flames that raged on the outside.



Figure 5: Conjunction

Stage 4: Conjunction, the building a life phase - the couple draws the square. This stage is symbolized in Maier's emblem Squaring the Circle (DeJong, 2002) by the square – a Hermetic and alchemical symbol of the four Aristotelian elements (L. Abraham, 2006); it is expressed in the Rosarium Philosophorum by picture 5 (Jung, 1966/1992; Smith, 2003).

In the context of alchemy, the pictogram of the Conjunction symbolizes not only the middle stage in the Rosarium sequence, but it also symbolizes the alchemical wedding in a broader sense, in that “this alchemical wedding is one of the central images of the Opus Alchemicum and a crucial operation in the creation of the philosopher's stone” (Abraham, p. 35). In fact, Jung tells us that “On a superficial view it looks as if instinct had triumphed. But if we examine it more closely, we note that the coitus is taking place in the water” (Jung, 1954/1966 transference, p. 86) which, of course, in alchemical terms is not ordinary water, but the mercurial

water, the prima materia, the alchemical base substance the royal couple works with to develop the philosopher's stone (Edinger, 1994, 1995; Jaffee, 1979; Jung, 1966/1992, 1968/1993, 1983, 1989).

As “to the frank eroticism of the pictures”, Jung (1966/1992, p. 88) reminds us “that they were drawn for medieval eyes and that consequently *they have a symbolical rather than a pornographic meaning* (emphasis mine)”. Therefore “the alchemical pictures of the conjunctio are to be understood in this sense: union on the biological level is a symbol of the *unio oppositorum* at its highest” (Jung, 1966/1992, p. 88). The alchemical symbolism of the conjunctio in this sense “means that the union of opposites in the royal art is just as real as coitus in the common acceptance of the word, so that the opus becomes an analogy off the natural process by means of which the instinctive energy is transformed, at least in part, into symbolic activity” (Jung, 1966/1992, p. 88).

In the context of PHRDT's Soul Mates Model (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), this couple is not just any couple copulating, but represents a very specific type of couple relationship, namely, the relationship of two partners capable of, and deliberately willing to engage in soul mating with each other. Therefore, this *conjunctio* of soul mating partners signifies a union between two partners in which *the universal complementary opposites symbolized as Sol and Luna have sought, and are continuously seeking expression* from the time of the couple's commitment to the soul mating journey together, and which was perhaps already potentially there in their first encounter. Successful Conjunction of Sol ad Luna in and through the lives of the partner's union is then believed to lead the couple to gain the capability to birth the fifth element, spirit, and/or gold of the philosophers and develop the philosopher's stone (Edinger, 1994; Jung, 1989).

In the context of the Soul Mates Model then, (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), at this stage/phase, the couple committed to soul mating now works with their bodies (corresponding to Earth), emotions (Water), intellect (Air), creativity, worldview, meaning, identity, and values (Fire), which relate to the 4 Aristotelian elements alluded to by the square in Maier's Squaring the Circle (DeJong, 2002) to build a successful life together, raise a family, secure a living, and ultimately promote the emergence of positive self-organization in themselves and in their relationship and lives from which they are able to develop the philosopher's stone (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b)

(Sub question 2) In the context of my own relationship this pictogram has come to signify the physical, emotional, intellectual, philosophical and spiritual fertility that emerges from my ongoing relationship with my partner, which we consciously nurture on a daily basis, strive to maintain in a positive state of flow, and work to recuperate whenever we feel that it might be dissipating in any way. Although Luis and I have not had any physical children together, we have engendered creative works together that went above and beyond tending to the family and securing a living. When we first met, we developed our workshop business, which expressed our creativity, teachings, and our philosophy of that time. Over the years we have conjointly created numerous international seminars, workshops, and retreats, a small publishing house, photography collections, remodeled and rented several properties in Florida, and created numerous academic papers and conference presentations. All of these co-creations, can be seen in this context as outer results of our disciplined working to achieve and maintain our conjunctio.

(Main question) What is my experience of the long-term relationship with my partner in this Phase? My experience of the Conjunction phase in my relationship with my partner Luis centered around our ongoing work of the integration of the universal and complementary

opposites symbolized in alchemy by Sol and Luna (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b; Edinger, 1994; Jung, 1966/1992) in the fertile mercurial waters of (Edinger, 1994; Jung, 1989), and the directing of the creative energy resulting from such our *Conjunction* towards the positive communications, co-creations, meaning-makings, and behaviors that underlie the successful building of our life together.

The achieving of a state of *conjunctio* of the complementary opposites in and through us has required concerted and disciplined effort on a daily basis throughout the 27 years of our union. Today, I believe that such concerted effort, has allowed us to develop a positive core at the center of our relationship, which spills over into our relationship's *between* (Hendrix & LaKelley Hunt, 2009), the relationship's interactive field (Schwartz-Salant, 1998), a space that functions as a wellspring of positive emotions, love, fresh spiritual inspiration, and creativity from which we can draw sustenance, gain balance, and renew our resources.

Yet despite the intense attraction and love that I can see Luis and I express for each other, my experience of the deliberate achievement of the state of *Conjunctio* has been and still is paradoxical in that I have experienced it as difficult, slippery, and fragile, even while I have also been keenly aware of its transcendental as well as real-life potential from the first time I encountered A., and I am aware now of all the riches this state has already brought to our life together and how many it is even now bringing to us.

My experience of the state/phase of *conjunctio* is that in our intimate, soul mating relationship we have been and are keenly aware of the centrality and desirability of this metaphorical state, yet we are also aware of how difficult it is to achieve and maintain. This difficulty to me, stems from the fact that the highly volatile, powerful, fiery, oppositional, and sometimes even controversial forces that emerge in the encounter of universal opposites in the

relationship of a couple engaged in soul mating (Batthyany De La Lama et al. (2012) are very difficult to manage, even while these same forces are also the very energies and dynamics which provide the fuel for their possible integration and the release into real life of a tremendous creative potential, physically, emotionally, intellectually, philosophical, and spiritually in the couple's lives, which characterizes successful *Conjunction*. In my experience this potential may suddenly break through into actuality, opening up the success of life of the couple like a gift from the gods raining down on the couple at any time, a process underscored in alchemical texts (L. Abraham, 2006) as well as by Jung (Jung, 1966/1992, 1989) and others (Edinger, 1994, 1995; Schwartz-Salant, 1998).

Thus, at the time of this writing, echoing the statements found in the literature on this topic, I can say that achieving the Conjunction state is probably difficult for any couple (Edinger, 1994), and especially for a pair of strong willed, independent, and creative individuals such as Luis and I. Yet despite the difficulty and perils that may await a couple seeking alchemical conjunction as described by Jung (Jung, 1966/1992, 1989) and others (Edinger, 1994, 1995; Schwartz-Salant, 1998), it appears that with focused discipline over the years, Luis and I have succeeded in many ways, and indeed managed to recreate the state of *Conjunctio* on every level of our lives together, resulting in a deep sense of fulfillment, soulmateship, and creative flow in our relationship together, which I hope also spilled over to some extent towards my children.

The PHRDT principles (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) that played out most prominently in the Conjunction – Building a Life phase of my relationship include the Positive, Holistic, Developmental, Love/transcendence, Narrative, Emergent, Action principles.

The positive, the holistic, and the developmental principles (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a), to me were active in my relationship since the day Luis and I met. *Positive*,

because our relationship was experienced as very positive when it started, and because it has now shown to be a tremendously positive and creative force in my life, allowing me to bloom as a woman, partner, mother, business owner, intellectual, philosopher, artist, and as a whole person in ways that I may never even have thought possible before encountering Luis. *Holistic*, because our relationship has always involved all levels of our awareness and experience, including the physical, emotional, intellectual, meaning/philosophical, soul, and spiritual. *Developmental*, because from the day I first encountered Luis, I have been forced to embrace an accelerated experience of adult development (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), the depths and transformative effects of which I would never have imagined while I was living my more mainstream relationship with Roger.

The narrative principle (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) evidenced itself in the *Conjunction* phase in that the personal and relationship narrative - our sense of what we were about and what we wanted to be about - always revolved around the mythopoetic sense of being twin souls - two complementary halves of one greater whole. This narrative carried us through the various expansions and the many compression phases of our *building a life* and always helped us to focus on the prize of achieving the integration of the internally and externally contending opposites towards the creation of an integrated whole. This narrative of an a-priori twinship, has helped us to keep our eyes on the bounties that we knew would be available to us to be harvested every time we succeeded in achieving a new phase of integration through a state of *Conjunction*. The story of who we see ourselves to be as a couple, was, and still is vital to the positive and holistic long-term development of our relationship.

The Emergent principle (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) evidenced itself in the *Building a Life* phase of our relationships in that as we became increasingly adept in

integrating our complementary opposite forces and achieving conjunction, ever higher states of alchemical relationship “glue” and positive self- organization (Goldstein, et al., 2010) emerged between us, which helped us unite our creative forces and talents in a disciplined and fruitful manner, from raising a family, to building a business, to going back to school and working on our Ph.D. together every step of the way, and ultimately to develop a coherent, integrated, holistic and positive philosophical stance of who we are and what we believe in as individuals and as couple.

The *Action Principle* (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) played out in the Conjunction phase of my relationship with Luis in the way in which we both took action over and over again to fulfill our ideal of the life that we believed we wanted to lead as persons and as professionals – including moving to Europe, to Hawaii, and other places, and to take the risks associated with our chosen creative life path that often led us outside of the mainstream.



Figure 6: Shadow

Stage 5: Shadow, facing adversity, stuck in the square. This stage is symbolized by image 7 of the Rosarium Philosophorum (Smith, 2003); it is not explicitly depicted in Maier's emblem *Squaring the Circle* (DeJong, 2002), but based on the alchemical tradition's belief that the square of the four Aristotelian elements can easily entrap the alchemists working to develop spiritual gold (L. Abraham, 2006), it is implied.

In the context of alchemy, in the Rosarium Philosophorum (Smith, 2003) this pictogram is described by the motto "Here the Four Elements are separated, and the Soul is most subtly severed from the body" (p. 43) and in Jung's *Psychology of the Transference* (1966/1992, p. 95) "Here the King and Queen are lying dead, in great distress the soul is sped", showing that as a result of the couple's successful alchemical integration of opposites, they have in fact succeeded in metaphorically developing one body (they have succeeded in a materially- focused integration), but they have not yet succeeded in integrating their mind and/or their consciousness, since they still are of two heads. The dynamic of their efforts at alchemically wedding (soul mating) has in fact propelled them to this state of alchemical death or putrefaction. Despite their best efforts, they have now become stuck in the square of the 4 elements represented in this case by a tomb, where their bodies are now starting to decay, (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Edinger, 1994; Jung, 1966/1992), undergoing *putrefaction* which is an important stage in the alchemical "cooking" process (L. Abraham, 2006; Jung, 1966/1992).

Jung (1966/1992) tells us that "after the *conjunctio oppositorum*", when "the opposites unite, all energy ceases, there is no more flow. The waterfall has plunged to its full depth in that torrent of nuptial joy and longing; now only a stagnant pool remains, without wave or current. So at last it appears, looked at from the outside" (p. 95). Although "this picture represents the *putrefactio*, the decay of a once living creature" in alchemy "the picture is also titled *conceptio*,

indicating that this death *is an interim stage followed by a new life* (emphasis mine)” (p. 95). From an allegorical perspective, it is interesting to note, that “the corps left over is already a new body, a Hermaphroditus (a compound of Hermes-Mercurius and Aphrodite-Venus). For this reason one half of the body in this illustration is masculine, the other half feminine (in the Rosarium this is the left half). Since the Hermaphroditus turns out to be the long-sought *rebis* or *lapis*, it symbolizes that mysterious being yet to be begotten, for whose sake the opus is undertaken” (Jung 1966/1992, p. 96). The mysterious hermaphrodite to be borne by the couple, in this case, is a symbolic representation of the successful completion of the alchemical wedding, by the alchemical couple or alchemical twins (L. Abraham, 2006), and of the emergence of the philosopher’s stone (L. Abraham, 2006; Edinger, 1994; Jung, 1966/1992).

In the context of PHRDT’s Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), this pictogram symbolizes the stage/phase in which the soul mating couple faces inner and outer adversity, addresses, and integrates personal and transpersonal shadow elements (C. S. Hall & Nordby, 1999; Jung, 1993; Schwartz-Salant, 1995). In the context of the counseling profession, this is the phase during which couples will most often seek help in therapy.

At this stage, the partners may feel as if their dreams have died, their lives have lost all meaning, their soul has left their relationship, and their love has died (Batthyany De La Lama, 2010g). Inner adversity may emerge as a struggle with cultural ideologies that pull partners apart. Outer adversity may overwhelm coping mechanisms, and result in psychological trauma and/or dysfunctions (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008). Within the context of the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), this phase is actually understood as the direct result of the couples’ successful navigation of the previous four stages of soul mating. Because this shadow phase will thus push the relationship partners to face their own limits and

the limits of their relationship as well as to purge emotional and mental baggage, if successfully managed, it sets the stage for further positive development and flourishing of the relationship. This shadow phase thus propels the couple forward to deal with what needs to be dealt with in order to enter the renewal phase in which they may emerge purified and more united than ever in their soul mating adventure (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008).

(Sub question 2) *In the context of my own relationship* this pictogram has *now* come to signify a temporary state of apparent relationship demise that actually results from an increase of positive soul mating dynamics within the relationship's positive core. Unfortunately, the shadow phase, as it occurs in real time, does not feel as if it were a positive phase in the relationship cycle, a preamble to Renewal. Instead, my experience of the *Shadow* phase, felt as if either the relationship itself (during the time preceding our divorce), or the support system we had built (during the time of the real estate downfall) had almost entirely and irreversibly collapsed.

Nevertheless, looking back at my experience of the *Shadow* phase as described in this study, indeed set the stage for letting go of personal, relationship, and other baggage left over from previous phases, opening up the stage for the renewal phase of a deeper, more intimate soul mates connection that would not have been possible had we been able to avoid deal with the emergence of *Shadow*. According to Jung, however, sidestepping or silencing the emergence of *Shadow* cannot truly be accomplished. Dealing with *Shadow* can only be held at bay for a while, the shadow will not be denied for very long (Edinger, 1994; Jaffee, 1979; Jung, 1966/1992, 1968/1993, 1983, 1989).

My experience of the Shadow phase in my long-term relationship with my partner was twofold. First, I see us as having faced internal adversity as a result of some choices Luis made which violated the commitment and intimacy agreements we had made for our relationship years

before. As a result, a great amount of shadow material flooded our union. Through his actions, the walls of the castle of trust which I had believed we had both carefully built around our union were suddenly shattered. This devastating blow to what I had thought were solid walls had revealed their fragility. From this point on, even if we succeeded at rebuilding our relationship and/or rebuilding our lives, my sense of the strengths and reliability of our commitment and/or of our business to sustain our life, would never be the same as it had been before.

This experience of the braking of our vessel was a tremendous shock for me, which plunged me into a desperate quest to pick up the pieces of our relationship (during our divorce) and of our livelihood (during the real estate crisis) and see what, if anything, could be glued back together. The emergence of the Shadow phase in my relationship thus irrevocably changed my perception of our lives, giving me an impression of fragility, but perhaps also of fluidity which I had not had before its emergence.

During the *Shadow* phase that led to our divorce, when confronted with the words of the counselor I sought out for help, a completely new, mainstream opinion- transcending phase of our relationship suddenly began to emerge. As we dealt with setting up the divorce, it became increasingly clear that although on some level we were both horrified that it was coming to down to such a drastic decision, we were also increasingly realizing that the legal marriage could actually be dispensed with, without killing the relationship itself. Although getting a divorce was sad and regrettable, and did feel like a failure on so many levels, this legal matrimony that we were severing was by no means all that was keeping us together. In fact, it became obvious to us that the legal marriage may just be a very small and almost insignificant part of what our relationship was truly about. Thus, although it was disturbing, painful, awkward, and even socially embarrassing to some extent to get a divorce, this very divorce showed us how to let go

of an enormous load of relationship and cultural baggage, take a deep look at who we really were as a couple underneath all of that.

What we began to see was really good, and a thousand times more durable than a legal marriage certificate declaring us husband and wife. In fact, looking back from where I stand today, I can say that living together as a divorced couple has really allowed our relationship to blossom on a more equal footing than ever before. For me personally, it has opened up something vital that allowed me to come into my own even while being intimately soul mated to Luis.

So although our divorce can be seen as a relationship failure when viewed from a materialistic, linear, modernist, mainstream-culture perspective, from our own spiritual perspective, our divorce and the events that lead to it were some of the most transformative events of our lives, which eventually led us to a greater phase of growth, deeper love, and more lasting fulfillment. Being the physical person in a body and the spiritual person at heart that I am, I can see how both the narratives, the more materialistic, mainstream culture narrative and the spiritual/transformational/chemical are true on some level. Nevertheless, I am much more impressed by the spiritual one, which is not only the one I feel in my heart, but the one I have seen play out in the rest of our lives together until today.

During the real estate crash, in in 2006, when Luis and I had to deal with another powerful wave of shadow influx into our lives, we were faced with the fact that our dreams of financial independence might never be fulfilled, and all our hard work might now go to waste. More specifically, Luis had to face the fact that he might not be free to dedicate to his art as he had hoped that he would if the real estate business continued to work out. I had to face the fact that despite my best efforts, all my work might now be lost. This plunged us into a difficult phase

of intense internal questioning about what might truly have gone wrong in us, as well as in the economy at large, followed by an intense period of soul searching on how to re-direct our lives from there.

All of the outer work of selling the real estate off in time to avoid a financial disaster on and of redirecting our lives lead us to eventually enroll in the University of South Florida together to pursue our Ph.D. During the years of our doctoral studies, we attended almost every class together, read innumerable books and papers, and discussed every nuance of what we studied and read. We also completed many a presentation together and published several academic papers, which brought us closer together than ever before. But most importantly, we began to face the prevalent philosophies in the Social Sciences which many of our professors endorsed. Together, we found out that although we clearly appreciated all those philosophies, on some level, we also had different views, which helped us enrich and reaffirm our own philosophies. The intense experience we entered as we embarked full sail into first our master's degree and then our Ph.D., thus brought Luis and me together in a way we might never have experienced if I had succeeded in my real estate business and if Luis had had time to dedicate to his art. Thus even in the face of this great adversity, to me it appears that there was a guiding hand, an over-soul so to speak that guided our individual and our relationship's growth towards a higher, positive, holistic and developmental completion goal.

The PHRDT principles that played out most prominently in the Shadow phase of my relationship include the holistic, the narrative, the polarity/complementarity, the love/soul/transcendence, and the simultaneity principles.

The holistic and the narrative principles played out conjointly in the Shadow phase in that in both scenarios described in this study, Luis and I had to draw from our deepest

transpersonal, philosophical, and spiritual resources to regain our balance when faced with adversity. When faced with our divorce, I saw us intuitively, or perhaps instinctively, reaching for a deeper and higher meaning to our union in a tacit agreement that the real world marriage license we had acquired in California was in fact dispensable precisely because there was a deeper, transpersonal bond between us that such earthly marriages could not engender, nor earthly courts could sever. While this dynamic could have looked very much like a metaphysical band aid hastily applied to a painful wound to cover the ugliness and the pain, in retrospect, almost 20 years later, it indeed appears to be true that there was and still is a deeper, transpersonal bond between Luis and me that was *not severed* at the time of the divorce. Instead, once the societal constraints implicit in the legal marriage had been peeled away by the divorce a deeper bond was actually uncovered, allowed to grow stronger and become more visible, and ultimately flourish in plain sight.

During the 10 years after our divorce and before the collapse of the real estate market, our inner relationship dynamics had been restored to a more fluid complementarity, and we had regained and developed our capacity to work well as a team. Thus the encounter with adversity as a result of the real market estate collapse appeared to us more like an external enemy, and we were more easily capable to externalize the problem –in the Narrative Therapy sense of the phrase (White, 2007; M. White & D. Denborough, 2011). This externalization of the problem, allowed us to join forces and bring all of our holistic and creative strategies to bear in order to assess the situation, decide on a way forward, and refocus our energies to move the situation to a positive resolution.

Although, our own instinct, inner practices, and intuition helped us to quickly externalize the problem of my premonitory nightmare about the real estate collapse, taking action on our

insights did not come easy because it ran against our own wishes and dreams as well as against the mainstream expert opinion that the real estate market was only undergoing a temporary slump. The more logical and perhaps natural assumption would have been to believe that I was simply severely overreacting to what was merely a nightmare; that I should listen to the opinions of experts, and calm down.

Thankfully, in this case Luis and I were back to working as a complimentary couple. As a result of this, he took my premonitions seriously, helped me explore them with every creative means we had at our disposition, and, together, we came to a resolution. After years of working to soften the financial blow of the real estate crash, I can now retrospectively say that focusing on our Ph.D. together brought us closer together, and that it was thus a decisive influence in the positive and holistic development of our relationship. Hindsight is always said to be 20/20. From where I stand today, however, it appears that if the real estate investments had succeeded as we had hoped, we might never have experienced the philosophical challenges we had to work through in graduate school the way we did, we might not have had to reflect deeply on where we ourselves stand on a philosophical base, and perhaps we might not have developed as fast or as deep in our union as I can now see that we have.

The love/soul/ transcendence principle I see as having been very active in this *Shadow* phase in that when the societal strings of marriage were severed, we were compelled by a sense of existential liminality to focus on the love we felt for each other right underneath the turmoil of the whole phase. This love focus helped carry us through this difficult time. During the time of the real estate crash, our love was not at stake; the love principle continued smoothly in action from where we had learnt to strengthen it during the trying time of our divorce.

The simultaneity principle played out during the time of our divorce, in that the moment that I was able to loosen my side of the strings of the marriage that we thought somehow held us on firm ground by acknowledging my need for a divorce, Luis appeared to suddenly feel the ground shaky beneath his feet. Like two children on a see-saw, when one held the balance to the ground, providing stability, the other one, fooled by the seeming buoyance, wanted more freedom. But the minute I lifted the balance off the ground, the lack of balance registered in Luis and he felt how uncomfortable the instability really was. From my point of view, I see that this shaking of the balance in our polarity (Schnarch, 2009), provided the necessary movement to later regain a more stable, yet higher and more positive ground for our relationship.



Figure 7: Renewal

Stage 6: Renewal: The couple draws the triangle. This stage is represented by picture 9 of the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (Smith, 2003). In Maier's *Squaring the Circle* (DeJong, 2002)

it is represented by the upward pointing triangle, a Hermetic and alchemical symbol for the Aristotelian element of Fire (M. P. Hall, 1928/2003; Jung, 1968/1993).

In the context of alchemy, the upward pointing triangle of *Fire* stands for renewed passion, aspiration, deliberate direction of the will, enthusiasm, and devotion to a higher, greater, spiritual cause, *a cause greater than self*, which the partners need to commit to, and work towards in order to develop the fifth element, the quintessence or Spirit/soul that will provide the levity they need to escape the entrapment of the now stale square that has become their tomb. When the couple succeeds at refocusing their goals and their philosophy of life, a sense of soul returns to their committed relationship, and their renewal begins to flow (Edinger, 1994; Jung, 1966/1992; Smith, 2003).

This *Renewal*, or return of the soul is depicted in the Rosarium (Smith, 2003) as a single, unified soul, the *soul-mated soul* or *twin soul* of the alchemical couple, returning from the heavens above to the already united body of the couple, even while two birds, the soul-birds, emerge from the ground fully alive. In the context of alchemy, birds often denote the soul or the spirit, as well as the various stages of the development of the philosopher's stone (L. Abraham, 2006). In Christianity, the Holy Spirit is, of course, represented in the form of a dove.

In the context of PHRDT's Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), the *Renewal* stage/phase represents the stage in which the partners, having endured an encounter with the *Shadow* that almost destroyed their relationship, compelling them to let go of baggage on every level of relevance, material, emotional, mental, philosophical, identity, and even spiritual (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2007) in themselves and in their relationship (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2007, 2008), must now find a way to consciously and deliberately redirect their individual and

their joint forces to a higher, greater, spiritual, or humanitarian (for atheists and agnostics) cause, *a cause greater than self*. Such redirection of their aspiration, passion, and deliberate focus, will help them rise above the square of the 4 elements, and develop the fifth (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011). This *Renewal* stage may not be easy for the couple because the traditional social narrative for Western cultures usually culminates in the material achievement of the proverbial house in the suburbs, with the white picket fence, the two kids, and the Golden Retriever dog (the life-building phase of the square), and does not provide a positive, ready-made, role-model narrative for couples on how to integrate the benefit of the work they have already done with the 4 Elements to and develop the fifth. Prevalent social narratives thus often fail to guide the couple on how to move past the stage of building a life, rising a family and securing their property towards developing a more complex narrative of what they are about and what they want to be about in the time that they have left after their material life has been reasonably built and their children have left the home (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b). As stated before, this is especially true for older couples for which contemporary Western society, excessively focused on the young and the famous, seems to have no viable narrative to adopt (Dr. Ken Gergen, personal conversation 2010).

Therefore, for the long-term positive and holistic development of their relationship, and to continue their soul mating process, the partners must work with the qualities of the Fire element– their passion, inspiration, enthusiasm, creativity, higher aspiration, and meaning-making capacity in themselves and in their relationship - symbolized by the upward pointing triangle - to lift themselves out of the square and experience the renewal of their relationship and of their life together above and beyond of what a circling within the confines of the 4 elements

may provide (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b).

Within the context of the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, 2010g; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), and based on the fact that by the time the couple reaches this stage they will probably have had to face considerable inner and outer adversity, this Renewal phase centers on the 3 directives for posttraumatic growth (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2007; Pargament, Desai, & McConnell, 2006): 1. The reevaluation of the individual and the couple's philosophy of life, and making changes where needed. 2. The reassessment of the couple's friendships, and letting go of those that no longer align with who the partners and the couple as a whole have become, or what they want to be about, and also deepening those relationship that do align with their newly revised core values, their renewing selves and their current life. 3. The deepening of the partners and the couple's spirituality. If this work of renewal is accomplished, their sense of love, higher meaning, and soul returns to their relationship (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008).

In the context of my own relationship this pictogram has come to signify three distinct aspects of our lives: First, it denotes the start of a happier, more stable time in our relationship, steadied on a higher philosophical arch than the one we based our meaning-making on when we were younger. Although in our thirties, the energy and passion might have been a more defining aspect of our encounters, in this Renewal stage, our increasing philosophical depth paired with a longer life experience, both together and individually, has brought about a richer experience of our togetherness on every level, despite the fact that our bodies have started to show their aging for over a decade now.

Second, this pictogram denotes the emergence of a viable professional path, centered around the Soul Mater Model (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) which provided me with the blueprint for a full professional path as an educator, counselor, trainer, and facilitator of the positive and holistic relationship development of couples, one which Luis could join if he so wished. In my mind, this was part of the great work that I felt I had committed to when I signed up to become part of Margaret's organization so long ago.

Third, to me this pictogram signifies the beginning of a phase in my soul mating relationship with Luis during which we had to dig deeper and uncover what *Renewal* actually looked like for us as individuals and as a couple, a difficult yet crucial developmental endeavor necessary to and intrinsically tied to the *Completion* phase we began to envision and now longed for.

To me, the experience of *Renewal* in the context of the long-term relationship with my partner occurred in daily, monthly, and yearly cycles over a period spanning many years, during which we felt that we had navigated some inner and/or outer difficulty, cleared some heavy baggage, and were now able to feel a renewed sense of Soul. It seemed to start in earnest from the time we focused on building a life, all the way through various *Shadow* phase experiences, and ultimately into 2011, when we began to have a more serious vision of what needed renewing, and what may in fact be renewing, where it might be taking us, and where we would like to go with it (which I am describing below, in the section on *Completion* below). *Renewal*, although portrayed in this study as occurring during a specific year, was in fact an experience of cycles within cycles of smaller and greater episodes culminating in the summer of 2011, when we first felt that we actually were in a state of complete renewal, but which for me, retrospectively, really marked the beginning of the *Completion* phase.

During the last few years culminating in the scene described in this study's *Renewal* scenarios, the concept of *Renewal* appeared to me as intrinsically tied to some pathway in which each of us, and hopefully also the two of us together, would be able to integrate our personal experiences, interests, and professional achievement. Thus when the inspiration on how to use the *Squaring the Circle* pictogram (DeJong, 2002) as a didactic and transformative learning tool for the facilitation of couples positive and holistic relationship development emerged in my life in Detroit in 2007 (Batthyany De La Lama, 2010a), I interpreted this as a vector around which I could build a body of work that would integrate my experiences, training and interests. People responded very positively to this work, and thus as it progressed, I hoped that Luis would want to be a part of it too, not only because he has talents that could be a great help, but mainly because when we work together, the work feels a lot more dynamic, fun, and fulfilling. It was not until later, when we could see that we were now firmly established in the *Renewal* phase, and were gaining glimpses of what the *Completion* phase – the formation of the philosopher's stone - might possibly entail, that it began to dawn on me that *Renewal* was and had all along been about something entirely different and much more complex than I had previously thought it to be

The PHRDT principles (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) that played out most prominently in the Renewal phase of my relationship include the positive, developmental, holistic, alchemical, narrative, transformative, emergent, and action principles.

The positive and the developmental principles (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) played out in that when I received the inspiration on how to use the Squaring the Circle pictogram (DeJong, 2002) as a blueprint to facilitate the positive and holistic development of long-term couple relationships, I had the sense that the alchemical twins archetype that was embodied in and through our lives so prominently, was now seeking expression, spilling over as

it were, above and beyond our personal lives to benefit other couples, other facilitators, and thus the world at large. This, to me, constituted a milestone in the positive development of our own relationship, which always appeared to be about something greater than just our own journey as individuals and as a couple.

The holistic principle (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) played out in our relationship when I began to revisit writings and illustrations about alchemy which I had collected for decades. Revisiting this collection, which included the voluminous works of Jung (Jaffee, 1979; Jung, 1966/1992, 1968/1993, 1983, 1989) and those that followed in his footsteps (Edinger, 1994, 1995; Schwartz-Salant, 1995, 1998), as well as a collection of illustrations, reprints and commentaries, and interpretations of 17th century the alchemical works and pictograms (Biederman, 2006; DeJong, 2002; S. Klossowski de Rola, 1973; S. Klossowski de Rola, 1988/1997; Smith, 2003) by other authors unrelated to the work of Jung, made me realized that the strange experiences that led to my first Encounter with A./Luis, as well as the general pattern in which our relationship developed after our meeting in Denver, could be understood as actually following a pattern which appeared to coincide with what ancient alchemists had glimpsed, depicted in engravings, and written about in their texts centering on the alchemical wedding of Sol and Luna (L. Abraham, 2006; Edinger, 1994).

Following this *holistic* realization, I no longer felt that my experiences had simply been very odd. Instead, I could now see a holistic pattern that had unfolded in my life and in my relationship, a pattern that was not only personal but also transpersonal (Jaffee, 1979), and most importantly, a pattern that other couples might also be able follow to develop their relationship beyond the common Western couple narrative that usually culminates in the more materialistic building a life stage of the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b).

This new holistic view (Shannon, 2002) of the patterns underlying my life, my encounter and relationship with Luis, transformed first my own sense of what we were about and what we could be about, and as we discussed my insights in real time, I also saw transforming his understanding of what we might be about. This transformation evidenced the *narrative and the transformative principle* (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) at play in our relationship development in a powerful way. Moreover, in this *Renewal* phase, it now appeared to me that the *alchemical principle* (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) was also working its magic in that the alchemical “cooking” of our personalities and of our relationship in the alchemical vessel was now producing a fruit that was not only improving our own relationship, but also spilling over into our work to benefit others.

The emergent and the creative principles (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) played out in this *Renewal* phase of our relationship in that based on my prior training in deciphering Hermetic symbols, I had suddenly seen a useful pattern emerge from an ancient pictogram which had hitherto remained an enigma to most. With help of my training as a Mental Health counselor, and based on my ongoing readings and practices, I was now able to translate my understanding of this emerging pattern into the context of Mental Health Counseling in general, and into the positive development of couple relationship in particular.

The action principle (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) played out in the *Renewal* phase of my relationship in that, as in many occasions before, we both took physical action to embody an intuitive, visionary understanding and, in the particular case depicted in the scenario of this study, translate it into actionable steps that other professionals could follow in their practices in the real world.

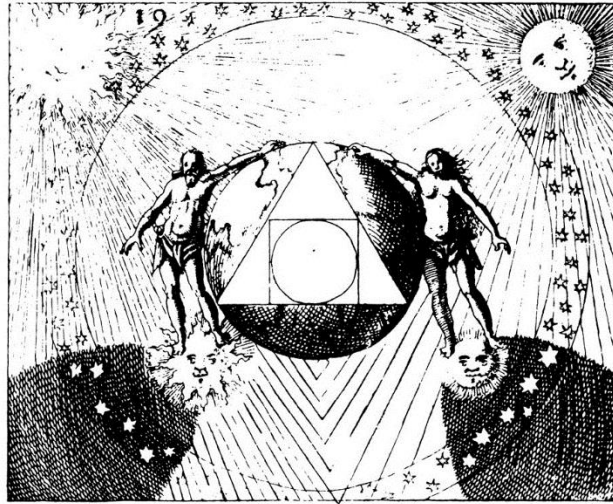


Figure 8: Completion

Stage 7: Completion: The couple draws the outer circle. This phase/stage is symbolized by the outer circle in Maier's *Squaring the Circle* (DeJong, 2002), which also corresponds with the alchemical engraving by Lukas Jennis in his 1624 *Chymisches Lustgaertchen* (Biederman, 2006) depicted here.

In the context of alchemy, this pictogram metaphorically portrays the successful creation of the *Philosopher's Stone*, a substance that transforms the base *prima materia* that the alchemical partners bring to their alchemical wedding (L. Abraham, 2006). Although the alchemical wedding of the alchemical twins is symbolized in its more material aspect by the intercourse of the physical bodies of King and Queen (embodying Sol and Luna) in the Rosarium Philosophorum's pictogram that illustrates the *Conjunction* (Edinger, 1994; Jung, 1966/1992; Smith, 2003) phase, this pictogram by Lukas Jennins (INSERT REF OF ABOVE HERE) depicts the result of the fruits of the integration of the universal polar and complementary opposite in the form of King and Queen on a higher, psychological, intellectual, philosophical,

and spiritual level through the course of the *alchemical opus* which has transformed their union into a whole fertile new world and granted them the capability to create the *stone of the wise* (L. Abraham, 2006; Jung, 1966/1992). The philosopher's stone, the substance or elixir capable of transforming the base into the sublime, the lead of earthly experience into the spiritual gold of the alchemists, which the couple is now ostensibly capable of generating, constitutes the culmination of the *Opus Alchemicum* summarized in the stanzas of the *emerald tablet*, "the alchemist's book of laws" (Abraham, 2006, p. 70), the guiding text of alchemy.

In this pictogram of *Completion*, the alchemically wed King and Queen, the alchemical twins, who are now depicted as older, and purportedly also wiser figures than the ones in Maier's *Squaring the Circle* (DeJong, 2002), are now holding up the world that they have created together as they worked through the stages/phases depicted in Maier's *Squaring the Circle*. It is interesting to see that the couple has not only succeeded in building build a world that contains the same sacred geometrical figure depicted in Meir's *Squaring the Circle* pictogram (DeJong, 2002), but that in this instance the Sun and the Moon archetypes are no longer under or beside the King and Queen, but have receded back into their proper positions in the sky. The couple, having completed the work with these archetypes, is now depicted not only as having created a round, whole world emerging from their work through the stages, but also one that is surrounded by a circle of tiny, budding stars, possibly symbolizing new entities that may benefit from the world created by the pair and reap the fruits of the couple's work.

The new world the alchemical couple has created, which is the fruit of their labor or *Opus Alchemicum*, is constituted of, and contains the essence of the philosopher's stone; it is now uniquely theirs to nurture, fertilize, illuminate, and enjoy. The Sun and Moon's archetypal role

has been fulfilled; the couple's work is complete (L. Abraham, 2006; Edinger, 1994; Jung, 1983).

In the context of PHRDT's Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), the philosopher's stone is a process and an end product. It is the psycho-spiritual result the soul mating partners seek to achieve as they work together and learn to integrate, master, maintain, and apply the state of conjunction in their lives, as physical carriers of the Sol and the Luna archetypes in different variations, combinations, and situations, resulting in a positive state of mind/heart which the alchemical couple becomes increasingly capable to deliberately generate (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b).

In the context of my own relationship this pictogram, like most everything else in alchemy, has come to signify a paradox. On the one hand it symbolizes the bottom up attainment of my soul mating relationship with Luis, the culmination of an arduous path of the integration of the complementary opposites within ourselves and within the relationship. On the other hand it symbolizes a re-encounter with the Universal Whole, the One from which we feel that we came, the very same One that we sense on some level that we have in fact always been, yet that now we more consciously realize that we are.

Nevertheless, in our case, as well as in the case of any other couple who might want to look at their relationship through the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) and who might want to follow this soul mates path, the words of Edinger when he refers to the symbols of alchemy, ring more true than ever: "you have to remember that these symbolic images cannot be approached too precisely. They are slippery; if you try to fix them too definitively, they slip right out of your hands, so you have to

allow for a certain ambiguity. You have to get used to that, otherwise they just fly away”
(Edinger, 1994, p. 92).

My experience of the long-term relationship with my partner in this phase of Completion (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) as can be expected from the interpretation of alchemical texts by Jung (Jung, 1966/1992, 1968, 1983, 1989) and others, is that this state is very difficult to reach and even more difficult to establish. It appears that by now, on most days we experience a glimpse of this state, some days we enjoy several hours, and on rare occasions, we experience an entire day or even several in which we feel Completion is established. During those times of Completion, we experience a period of heightened conjunct, co-creativity and flow in and between us- which at times is turned inward, into a flow of love, understanding, communication, and companionship. At other times, this is directed outward into conjoint experiences, activities, or projects. But one thing seems to me to distinguish the phase of Completion from the previous phases, and that is that in this phase I now see us as able to bring the relationship dynamics up closer and closer to its envisioned ideal state, not only emotionally or physically, but also intellectually, philosophically and spiritually when it slips. This provides us with a welcome sense of agency, of having a certain grip on the dynamics of Renewal.

Based on my experience of the Completion phase of my relationship, I therefore believe that the phase-change (Mitchell, 2009; Sawyer, 2005; Stanton & Welsh, 2012) from Renewal into the Completion is more likely felt as a certainty that Renewal is now in full swing, although one might still be hesitant to declare that Completion has been irrevocably and permanently established.

The PHRDT principles (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) that played out most prominently in the Completion phase of my relationship, include the emergence, simultaneity, and action principles.

The emergence principles (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) played out in the *Completion* phase of my relationship in that as a result of my experiences and observations of the problem-centric, quantitative, and analytical focus of the APA Convention, which to Luis and me at that time was also representative of the broader focus of most of social science, we both felt the emergence of a powerful drive towards seeking out and developing the positive, the holistic, and the creative once more in ourselves, in our life together and in our profession. At that time we interpreted this emergent vector as a drive to move beyond the problem-centric, quantitative, and analytical we had been entrenched in during most of our graduate studies, and pivoting towards the positive, the holistic, and the creative which at that time expressed itself as an urgent need to integrate more *art* into our lives. Through our decision to go and visit the museums in Washington D.C instead of lingering at the APA convention (which would have appeared to be the more reasonable choice) we took a stance towards transcending the philosophical, intellectual, and creative confinement that we had both felt at APA as a result of the presentations offered at the convention, most of the goods, and most of the journals displayed at the merchant mall.

The *simultaneity principle* (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) played out in the *Completion* phase of my relationship in that the moment we became aware of what was dragging us down at the APA convention on the one side, and of the far-reaching, healing and wholeness, yet also isolating consequences of taking a firm philosophical stance in face of mainstream social science sentiments towards a more holistic, positive and creatively integrated

life might have on our lives and why, we began to feel a powerful and utterly positive emotional state of upswing and renewal unlike anything we had felt in a very long time. Thus our focusing on the life-vector that seemed to have emerged for us based on our experience at the APA convention, and our spending the day at the museums, elicited a simultaneous empowering of this very positive vector, scaling up the feeling of renewal and positive emergence (Sawyer, 2005) for both of us.

In addition, when we began to inquire into the possibility that were indeed experiencing a *Renewal*, and then discussed what a state of *Completion* may look like for us, how it would feel, and by what we would recognize it – first as a life, a personal world that was more holistically integrated, creative and fulfilling for both of us, and then as a work that might ultimately be more inner than we had previously believed - at that very moment, the sense of *Completion* itself appeared to begin to *emerge* and make itself felt in our awareness *in real time* even while we were speaking of it.

So from the viewpoint of this *principle of simultaneity and of emergence* (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a), the positive and holistic development of a couple's relationship, at least in our case, is the increasing attitude of inquiry towards this ideal state of first *Renewal* and then *Completion*. The focused inquiry into these two states until they begin to first emerge as clearly recognizable gestalts, and then become firmly established attractor states (Goldstein, et al., 2010; Mitchell, 2009; Morin, 2008) in the dynamics of the relationship, provides a psychological and narrative anchor point that sets the stage for new action to even more firmly establish these two attractors.

The action principle (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) evidenced itself in this *Completion* phase in that looking back to that time, I am not only aware that *Renewal*

occurred, and can point at what I/we believe promoted *Renewal* at that time, but I can recognize when *Completion* is in full swing, and determine what actions might have been associated with the temporary entrance into this elusive state of positive co-creative flow.

Moreover, because I see us as recognizing *Completion* (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) when it *is* happening, I also see us becoming aware of when it is not, which feels very uncomfortable. Therefore, whenever we need to regain the stability and flow of this elusive *Completion* state, which is quite often, I see us swiftly focusing on addressing what may be missing, and implementing a variety of action strategies to regain our sense of completion and flow, like when we decided to walk out of APA and avail ourselves of what other riches were available in Washington D.C to help us gain a sense of creative, holistic and positive flow.

My experience of our deliberate efforts at PHRD in our relationship

My experience of the long-term effect of what I see as our deliberate efforts at positive and holistic relationship development on my 27 year-long couple relationship has centered on two core aspects: First it has centered on establishing the developing, and nurturing of our positive and holistic core-identity, the belief of who we essentially are as a couple, based on our own couple culture and the philosophy, and the spiritual traditions we believe in and practice. Second, my experience has centered on what I see as the positive, holistic, and developmental strategies and interventions we employ in promoting the positive and holistic development of our relationship.

From my experience and observations of my relationship with Luis, I see the *positive, long-term effects* of our efforts at positive relationship development towards on the success of our union as directly related to the way he and I conceptualize our lives and our relationship,

which on some paradoxical level, comes down to the question of whether we see ourselves as being soul mates or twin souls. This might seem like a trivial, romanticized, even infantile, and ultimately useless distinction. But in our case, in the context of our life-long belief in, and practice of a spiritual and Hermetic philosophy, it is a highly significant distinction.

Why Luis and I believe that we are twin souls. Luis and I believe that we are not only soul mates, but also twin souls. Everyone seems to intuitively *get* soul mates. Twin souls are an entirely different matter. It took us 20 plus years to develop a somewhat coherent narrative that helps us to differentiate between soul mates and twin souls, and we are still working on it. Although it would be easier to just leave it at soul mates, in the context of the philosophical discussion of our couple culture (Gottman & Schwartz Gottman, 2008), this distinction is of paramount importance.

Popularized by contemporary online dating sites, the advertising industry, and Valentine's Day cards, the concept of *soul mates* appears intelligible, comfortable, and even glamorous to contemporary society. As Luis and I have noted during the interactions with our audiences during the various presentation we have given on the Soul Mates Model over the years ((Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, 2010g; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2011), most people believe that they have a soul at the core of their self, and say that they either have or would like to have a soul mate. A soul mate then, is someone who is in harmony, and compatible with a person's deeply felt inner core (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008). Thus it seems that many people in 21st Century America understand the concept of *soul mate*, and if they don't have one yet, might be interested in finding one.

The concept of *twin souls*, however, is difficult to fathom. It speaks of an unproven and as yet also un-provable transcendental affiliation. It points to a type of determinism that is abominable to contemporary relativist, postmodernist, critical theorist and/or social-constructionist social science, and other philosophical sensibilities (Bishop, 2007). The concept of twin souls questions origin, deity, divinity, or, if you want to go even further, it leads you to attempt to sort out the function of consciousness in turning quantum waves into particles, what banged in the Big Bang, of whether souls really exist, and if they do, if they can or even should remain tethered to each other as the universe expands, whether there is intelligent design.

It demands that, if you believe yourself to be a twin soul, you continuously take a stand in face of the ongoing disbelief, the criticism, the mention that science does not believe in such humbug, or worse, that your experiences are hallucination, romanticized, self-serving social constructions to be tolerated under the mantle of diversity, or alternately, that because the Bible and other sacred monotheistic texts don't mention twin souls, they cannot exist. It demands that you take a stand in the center of your own intuitive knowing, that you defend it every day as the subjectivity of your inner experience, even while the inner certainty it conveys is contested by other people, outside events, your aging body, and other issues..... Every step of the way, and especially in face of the onslaught of disbelief from hard and social science attitudes, and the lack of a "twin soul tribe" you could just go find and join, you must take a difficult yet courageous stand in which you assert that you are in fact what you feel you are, in this case a twin souls. And if souls can be twins, this means, of course, that they stem from a common womb – does it not? Who or what then is or was their mother? This question needs to be asked.

Moreover, if one knows one's soul so well that one can determine what its twin would look and feel like...that one would be able to recognize it when one sees it...that in itself is a

difficult concept to grasp. Would not one have already known the experience beforehand in order to recognize it when one sees it happening in one's life? Otherwise how would one have anything to compare it to? And if twin souls truly do exist, then what about others - should lovers now refrain from engaging with one another until they are certain that they have found the ONE? And what about those who are already engaged to someone, and those who are already married?

In contrast to twin souls, the concept of soul mates is simply easier, more relaxed. It relieves everyone from either falling into New Age kitsch, or from having to wrestle with the complex metaphysics of what the existence of twin souls would actually entail. That is why we rarely bring up the topic, except occasionally with my children and very close friends. We are concerned that it may come across as corny, or even alienate others the way it alienated my family so long ago. Nevertheless, the fact that reasonable people often see us as soul mates always feels rejuvenating; it hints to the possibility that to others we may at times appear like a window into another reality that they can glimpse into when they see us passing through their lives.

So in my experience, our conceptualizing of our relationship as one not only of soul mates in the process of *soul mating* – a *bottom up process*, but also as *twin souls, paired from the top down*, has had a very positive effect on our relationship dynamics over the long term. If we were to see ourselves as only soul mates; the relationship would be seen as being on a more precarious ground. If we make a mistake, it could still fall apart. If we see ourselves as twin souls, in contrast, we see ourselves as unable to tear their relationship completely apart even if we messed it up or wanted to. To me, this view has taken some of the edge off the relationship difficulties that we find along our path, and helps us face our mortality with a lighter heart.

But our belief that we are twin souls is much more than merely practical and anxiety reducing. Our conceptualization of ourselves as twin souls has deep roots in the exceptional manner in which we encountered each other and later met in Denver. Our belief that we are twin souls stems from our ongoing sense that, based on the Hermetic Tradition, beliefs, and culture we espouse, and the psychic experiences we both have had, and still continue to have, we have had so many lived experiences that point towards our being not only being soulmates but also twin souls, that they cannot be dismissed, but must be embraced.

Several key occurrences that have pointed to our twin soul-ship have been described in the narrative data section of this study, but there have been so many more, they are too numerable to compile. They started with dreams I had, then with my remembrance of past lives with him, the name that Luis went by in those times, a name he also remembers having used, his secret name. Then there are innumerable experiences in this lifetime, before we met, and then after we met, which are too many and complex to describe. Although it cannot be scientifically proven in any way, deep within we sense that indeed, at heart, we are twin souls. This, of course, makes us feel that we are different than most couples, and that our relationship is unusual; after all these years we simply cannot help but feel that way.

The result of the realizations I gained from this analysis on the differences between soul mates and twin souls, and on the insight that, in fact, despite it being scientifically unprovable, we do feel that we are twin souls is relevant for my personal life as well as my professional life and that of others that may be interested in this topic. It points to the probability that those soul mates relationships may in fact be grown from the bottom up, but that twin soul relationships cannot be grown, they are born. Thus soul mating may be teachable, nurtured, and developed to a large extent, but twin soul-ship cannot be developed; it is born.

Strategies and actions. The positive, holistic, and developmental strategies and interventions I have seen us employ in promoting the positive development of our relationship have been many. Looking back at my experience of our relationship over the years, however, I can also see that despite our understanding that we are twin souls, we obviously also ran into a variety of relationship difficulties like most other couples do. In a sense I can say that the lily-white purity of the *Encounter* phase, though still there underneath the surface of the vicissitudes of day-to-day life, was frequently been submerged by the physical relationships of Luis and Luisa working to secure a living, raise a family, and build a life together. In that sense, Luis and I were not different from other couples. We had to work hard at bouncing back from adversity and building a life, and continue to build our life together to this day.

What may have been different for us than for other couples is that we had the privileged experience of encountering each other through extraordinary psychic experiences that pointed toward the existence of previous life experiences together as well as a supernatural inner realm in which we already knew each other. We were fortunate in that these extraordinary perceptions were confirmed upon our meeting each other in real life, affirming our belief that our inner visions about each other were *true*, and underscoring the importance and validity of our visionary, psychic, and intuitive knowing, and the effectiveness of our spiritual practices.

Such confirmation of inner, intuitive, even psychic knowing has happened to other psychic individuals who assert that they have received communications and seen people and events in their minds eye that later proved to be true. Sylvia Browne for example, started first seeing and then conversing with the dead (Browne, 2002), Dolores Ashcroft Nowicki received directives on how to take over a school of occultism from a discarnate entity (Brennan, 2013), and Joan Grant dreamt that she spent the nights comforting the souls of dead sailors from sunken

ships during World War II, and also held inner conversations with her twin soul after he died in a tragic gun accident (Grant, 1988). Our own series of extraordinary experiences have felt to us as highly significant and sacred (Pargament, 2007; Pargament, et al., 2006) until today, and provided us with a source of positive and holistic relationship narrative and meaning-making (Conoley & Conoley, 2009) that helped us navigate through difficult times, which other couples may not have available when they need it.

Yet our case is also exceptional in that the worldviews underlying the different spiritual traditions, and especially the Hermetic Tradition (M. P. Hall, 1928/2003) that we studied before and during our building a life together, provided us with a unique cultural background that helped us map the inner realms of consciousness, and create our own philosophical, psychodynamic, and conceptual blueprint about our relationship. This shared culture and the unique approach it inspires, helped us understand our relationship difficulties as they emerge, from a philosophical, metaphysical, psychic, and psychodynamic perspective, which in turn also inspired us to devise a considerable repertoire of strategies to help us come back together as a couple when personal or external issues threatened to tear us apart.

The strategies, behaviors, and interventions that we use to regain our sense of wholeness and positive flow as a couple can be divided into strengths-based and traditional. The strengths-based strategies, behaviors, and interventions we use are the pivoting towards and expanding of the positive, the affirmative, the creative, the personal agency enhancing, the optimistic, the love, the commitment, and a variety of other nuclei of positivity on any level that may be appropriate and/or necessary to regain the flow of *Completion*. The more traditional strategies, behaviors, and interventions we use to uncover what may be preventing our state of flow, and then implement action to fix what is blocking it, include analyzing our dreams, performing guided

visualizations on each other, emotional abreactions and catharsis, psychodrama (Carnabucci, 2014), energy psychology techniques (Feinstein, 2004) taking time out in nature, practicing and working on our photography, and even shamanic drumming (Drake, 2012), if we feel that such practices are helpful and necessary. Consequently, my experience of the long-term effects of what I see as our efforts at the deliberate positive development of our relationship is that these efforts have been very effective to promote to ongoing positive and holistic development of our relationship (*this answers sub questions 4, section 2*).

How my experience of the PHRD of my relationship informs my teaching and practice

My observations of the positive and holistic development of my couple relationship help me inform my own teaching and practice in five ways. First, looking at my relationship through the lens of the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, 2010g; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), and then uncovering what if any of the 12 Positive Relationship Development principles applied, has provided me with an in-depth and up-close experience of what the key scenarios of a long-term soul mating relationship may look like when viewed from this positive and a holistic perspective, instead of being merely considered from a problem-centric stance (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012). As a result of this in-depth, and positively focused inquiry, I now feel more confident that the Soul Mates Model, and the 12 Positive Principles of PHRDT are indeed useful as a guiding framework to help a researcher, an educator, as well as a counseling practitioner to uncover, define, expand and develop the positive dynamics of a couple's relationship which might otherwise go unnoticed.

Second, the inquiry into the positive and holistic dynamics of my relationship through the lens of the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) and the 12 Positive Principles of and Positive and Holistic Relationship Development Theory (PHRDT) has allowed me to organize the manifold experiences I have had during the decades of my long-term relationship, and then see a pattern of ongoing positive relationship development emerging, which I had not previously been able to see as clearly as I do now.

This tells me that PHRDT framework can be very helpful in the uncovering and in the organizing of the information and experiences of a couple's long-term relationship from a positive psychology (Conoley & Conoley, 2009; Kauffman & Silberman, 2009), appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2012; Cooperrider, et al., 2008; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005), and strengths based (Jones-Smith, 2014) perspective, and thus a valuable organizational and didactic tool to use in my teaching and my practice.

Third, now that I have been able to use the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) to understand the patterns of my own relationship with help of Maier's alchemical pictogram Squaring the Circle (DeJong, 2002), I feel confident that this alchemical riddle can in fact be effectively utilized as a mythopoetic tool to conceptualize the mystery of the integration of complementary opposites within the context of a long-term couple relationship not only from a Jungian perspective (Jaffee, 1979), but also from a positive and holistic perspective (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b). My work in this study, to me, underscores the organizing and didactic power of this pictogram as a visual roadmap to help understand and promote a couple's soul mating - the positive and holistic development of their relationships. Based on this study's findings, as well as on my previous

work, I now feel confident that this allegorical pictogram can serve as a powerful mythopoetic and narrative tool to help organize didactic and training materials for graduate students and professionals, as well as to guide couples counseling case conceptualization and intervention, and couple's consultations and coaching interventions in practice (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b).

Fourth, the inquiry into the positive and holistic development of my relationship with the help of the alchemical pictograms featured in this study, has been very helpful and inspiring to me in that they have stimulated me to uncover a wealth of information on the dynamics of my relationship which I had only briefly considered before I began this inquiry.

These alchemical images, therefore, have proven to be a valuable mythopoetic tool to help me uncover the dynamics underling the positive and holistic development of my own relationship. At the start of this study, I knew from my own training in the Hermetic tradition, as well as from the responses of audience members whenever I showed these pictograms in the context of couple relationship development presentations, that many people respond well to these images, intuitively grasping their mythopoeic and allegorical significance. But now that I have revisited the key scenarios of my own long-term relationship with help of these 8 alchemical pictograms, I see how they have been instrumental in promoting my understanding the abstract and paradoxical dynamics of my own relationship and life-path. These mythopoeic images have thus helped me take my understanding of my own relationship to a whole new level of meaning I have not experienced before embarking on this study. As a result of this work with the alchemical pictograms, I am therefor now more confident than I was before I embarked on this study that these quirky, medieval (Jung, 1966/1992), and metaphorical depictions of abstract

relationship dynamics (Edinger, 1994; Jung, 1966/1992, 1989) are in fact invaluable narrative anchor points and therapeutic conversations starters to be used in my teaching and practice.

Fifth, based on the analysis of my experience of the positive and holistic development of my long-term couple relationship, I can now clearly see that the extraordinary initial conditions that brought Luis and me together provided us with a rich source of meaning, inner strengths, and guiding throughout all the years of our relationship. Seeing how emphasizing these initial conditions has helped us develop a positive relationship narrative throughout the years, and thus buffered our relationship against adversity, and even held it together through our divorce, I now believe that the uncovering, exploring, and even expanding the narrative of the initial conditions that mark the beginning of a couple relationship, even if it is very different than the one I experienced myself, may be vital to the long-term development and flourishing of the relationship. Such initial relationship conditions and should thus be paid attention to in practice in order to build the positive couple story referred to in the strengths-based literature on couple relationships (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b; Conoley & Conoley, 2009; Kauffman & Silberman, 2009).

Conclusion of this section

In this section I have provided the visual data, and the analysis and interpretation of the entire set of data, including the narrative data of the previous section and the visual data provided in this section. Throughout the course of the discussion, analysis, and interpretations, I have thus answered all the research questions guiding this study. In the next chapter, I will describe the conclusions, state the limitations, provide suggestions for further research, and conclude the study with a researcher reflection on my research process.

CHAPTER V:
CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS,
LIMITATIONS, AND RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS

Overview of this chapter

In this last chapter I first offer several concluding statements that summarize what I now know, based on the findings regarding my experience of the culture of my 27-year- long relationship with my partner, when viewed through the lens of Positive and Holistic Relationship Development Theory (PHRDT). Second, I present a series of recommendations for research, education, and practice, based on the study's findings. Third, I describe the study's limitations. Finally, I conclude the study with a researcher reflection section, in which I describe my research process for this study, and briefly explore how this process has changed me as a person, educator, and counseling professional.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: the Soul Mates model. Based on the process of inquiring into my experience of the culture of my 27-year- long relationship with my partner, when viewed through the lens of Positive and Holistic Relationship Development Theory (PHRDT) I can now say that viewing my relationship through the lens of a *positive* (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012; Cooperrider, et al., 2008; Withney, Cooperrider, Trosten-Bloom, & Kaplin, 2005), *strengths-based* (Jones-Smith, 2014), and *holistic* (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2007; Shannon, 2002) *couple relationship model* such as the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La

Lama, 2010g; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) has been very beneficial, enlightening, and even empowering to me personally, as well as professionally. More specifically, inquiring into my experience of my relationship through the lens of this model has: A) provided a useful structure to my inquiry. B) Helped me to uncover a wealth of information regarding the positive and holistic development of my relationship with my partner which I might not have been able to detect and explore without the lens of this positive, holistic, and developmental model. C) This inquiry helped me to examine up close if and how the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) may be used to look at a long- term relationship and to understand better understand the soul mating process. This Soul Mates Model (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) thus worked very well as an organizing and guiding tool to guide my inquiry into my couple relationship from a positive (Cooperrider, et al., 2008), strengths-based (Jones-Smith, 2014) and holistic (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2007; Shannon, 2002), and developmental perspective, which suggests that this model may also be a useful to other educators, researchers and practitioners.

Conclusion 2: The alchemical pictograms. After analyzing and interpreting the findings from the visual component of this study, namely the 8 alchemical pictograms, I believe that these metaphorical images have shown to be a valuable tool in helping me explore the dynamics of my relationship from a positive, strengths-based, (Jones-Smith, 2014), holistic (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2009; Shannon, 2002), narrative (White, 2007), and mythopoeic perspective. In fact, these pictograms have been so helpful in my inquiry, that I now believe that I can and should include them in my couples counseling, coaching, and training practice. To me, Maier's *Squaring the Circle* (DeJong, 2002) in particular has proven most helpful in helping me organize my experience of the positive and holistic development of my relationship. Based on

this experience and on the results of my inquiry into it, I am now confident that I can use Maier's *Squaring the Circle* (DeJong, 2002) and the other 7 pictograms featured in this study as a didactic, narrative, and mythopoetic tool to help clients, trainees, students, and even other researchers utilize this tool to uncover the meanings hidden in their own relationship experiences and in those of their clients.

Conclusion 3: The 12 positive principles. What I know now, after inquiring into how the 12 positive principles of relationship development (Batthyany De La Lama, 2011a; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) played out in the 7 phases of my relationship, is that these 12 principles, and especially the 3 core *positive, holistic, and developmental* principles may be useful guidelines to help understand the strategies a couple may naturally and/or deliberately engage in to promote their soul mating - the positive and holistic development of their relationship.

From the findings in this study, however, it became clear to me that several of these principles may be at work *simultaneously*, making it difficult to detect exactly which one of the 12 may be most active at any given time. Although it may be useful to identify each one of these principles as they play in the relationship for analytic and didactic purposes, at the end of the day it does not really appear to matter which one is most active at a given time as long as all of them are allowed to play out, and/or are deliberately applied.

Therefore, it appears that although in this study identifying which of the 12 positive principles might have played out in the dynamics of my relationship at a given time, these principles seem to be most useful to help me guide couple interventions. These principles are thus not a diagnostic instrument, but rather an intervention -guiding tool. In addition, from my inquiry into the positive and holistic development of my relationship, it becomes clear that the

PHRDT's 3 core principles are the most basic and also the most salient in the development of a soul mating relationship. They are the main principles to keep in mind when intending to inquire into the PHRD of a couple's relationship, and/or to promote a couple's soul mating.

Conclusion 4: The initial conditions. Although the long-term experience of Luis' and my efforts at the deliberate PHRD of our union appeared to be very effective in our particular case, I also recognize that the extraordinary initial conditions (Mitchell, 2009) of our relationship provided us with a powerful and ready-made narrative of our togetherness - i.e. our twin soul-ship - which helped us navigate each of the crisis we faced, a benefit which other couples might not have available.

Conclusion 5: Positive and Holistic Relationship Development theory (PHRDT). After having applied the conceptual framework of PHRDT to my own long-term relationship, I believe that this theory has been very valuable to help guide my inquiry into the positive and holistic relationship development of my long-term relationship. I also believe that it can serve just as well to help guide other educators, researchers, and practitioners inquiry into other couple's relationship – regardless of how they first encountered each other - from a narrative ((Payne, 2006; White, 2007; Michael White & David Denborough, 2011) strengths-based (Jones-Smith, 2014) and holistic (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2009; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) perspective.

Conclusion 6: Our twin soul-ship culture. After analyzing the data presented in this study, I have also come to the conclusion that my partner and I share not only the Spanish language, a Catholic background, and a Western Mystery – Hermetic Tradition cultural background, but in has now become apparent to me that we are actually living in a culture of not only soul mating, but also twin-soul ship. This “culture of two” is not really visible to the outside

observer in the form of specific behaviors (it appears that people who see something will usually interpret it as soul mates behavior) but it is a core structure of what I see us believing in, and of what I feel that we are, consciously share, and participate in. Based on the analysis of my relationship life through the lens of PHRDT that I conducted in this study, I have therefore come to the conclusion that *although soul mating may be taught to other couples through a series of interventions, twin soul ship cannot be taught.*

In conclusion, after completing this study into my experience of the culture of my 27-year-long relationship with my partner, viewed through the lens of Positive and Holistic Relationship Development Theory (PHRDT), I can now say that the Soul Mates Model and its 7 stages/phases (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008; Batthyany De La Lama, 2010g; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), as well as PHRDT's 12 positive principles (Batthyany De La Lama, 2011a; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) may be valuable tools to guide inquiry into the relationship development of a couple from a positive, strengths –based, and holistic perspective, to inform teaching research and practice. Moreover, I have also found the alchemical pictograms to be a valuable aid to mythopoetic and narrative meaning-making and life-story organizing, that although the Soul Mates Model and its 7 stages/phases (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b), as well as PHRDT's 12 positive principles (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) can be valuable tools to promote the soul mating of a couple, and soul mating can to some extent be taught, twin-soul-ship cannot be taught.

Recommendations

In this section I offer several recommendations for teaching, training, research, and practice, based on the findings and the conclusions of this study.

Based on this study I recommend that *academic counselor educators* utilize the Soul Mates Model and the 12 positive principles (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) as a help to structure a syllabus on strengths-based methods of couple's counseling. For *couple relationship educators*, I recommend the use of the 7 phase Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) and the 12 positive principles (Batthyany De La Lama, 2011a; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) of PHRDT to inform relationship education workshops and trainings. For *research*, I recommend that this same model and principles be used to investigate the positive relationship development of other couples, either in the form of a qualitative inquiry, or as a survey questions generator. For *practitioners*, I recommend that the PHRDT with the 7-stage /phase Soul Mates Model and the 12 positive principles be integrated with existing more traditional, problem-centric couple therapy methods, and thus help to provide an added positive, appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider, et al., 2008; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010; D. K. Whitney, A. Trosten-Bloom, & K. Rader, 2010), narrative (White, 2007; M. White & D. Denborough, 2011), strengths-based (Jones-Smith, 2014), and holistic (Shannon, 2002) perspective and/or component to their practice. I also recommend that the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b) and the 12 positive principles of PHRDT (Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a) be used as a stand-alone theory to guide inquiry, case conceptualization, and interventions in couples counseling, consultation, and coaching practice.

Based on the value I have derived from utilizing the 8 alchemical pictograms, and in particular Maier's *Squaring the Circle* (DeJong, 2002) as a visual story-focusing, and narrative-development tool in this study, I recommend that the 8 alchemical pictograms be utilized by educators, trainer, researchers, and counseling practitioners as story- focusing and narrative

development tools, and as visual mythopoetic prompts to help guide the inquiry into the positive and holistic dynamics of couple relationships.

Based on this study's findings I recommend that the 12 positive principles of relationship development (Batthyany De La Lama, 2011a; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama, 2012a), and especially the 3 core principles of *positive*, *holistic*, and *developmental*, be utilized to help inform the education, training, research, and practice of couples and family counseling. These 12 positive principles appear particularly useful to inform couples case conceptualization and intervention in the practice of counseling, coaching, and consultation from a strengths-based perspective (Jones-Smith, 2014).

Moreover, Based on the study's findings, I now believe that the positive initial conditions (Mitchell, 2009) that mark a couple's encounter are vital to their future success as a couple. Despite the fact that this study centers on one unique and somewhat extraordinary long-term relationship case, born from a set of extraordinary initial conditions that helped the couple's relationship remain resilient in face of adversity, I do believe that educators and practitioners alike can benefit their students and clients from focusing on the initial conditions of a couple's encounter, regardless of how dramatic these may appear at first sight.

Although integrating positive stories into couples counseling has been recommended by several experts and practitioners before (Conoley & Conoley, 2009), such integration does not usually focus on the initial conditions of the couple's encounter above and beyond other more current stories. Based on this study's findings, however, I highly recommend that initial conditions of a couple's encounter be brought into the foreground of inquiry. Focus on openly addressing, appreciating, expanding, and developing the positive aspects of a couple's encounter with the intention of deliberately promoting the couple's positive and holistic development

relationship development will aid the couple in building a coherent positive relationship identity and relationship narrative may help carry the pair through times of adversity. Therefore, I strongly recommend that couple relationship educators, counseling practitioners, relationship coaches, and consultants focus their inquiry on the positive initial conditions of a couple's encounter.

Based on the analysis of my relationship as viewed through the lens of PHRDT presented in this study, it becomes clear, that the idea that my partner and I are in a long-term *soul mating* relationship is relatively easy to grasp, despite the fact that there really is no scientific proof that such relationships even exist. Understanding the concept of twin souls, of what it may mean to be *twin souls*, however is ultimately subjective, and thus very difficult to conceptualize and describe. There really is no hard science, or even a social science way to prove that twin souls do exist, and/or if in fact Luis and I are such types of twin souls. Nevertheless, Luis and I strongly believe that we are twin souls. Although this might sound like a trivial difference, the implications of this distinction for education, training, research and practice are that based on the analysis of my relationship life through the lens of PHRDT I conducted in this study, it appears *that soul mate-ship is, to a certain extent, grown, whereas twin soul ship appears to have to be born.*

Consequently, based on the understanding that soul mating can, at least to some extent, be taught to other couples with help of well-designed and targeted holistic and strengths-based interventions, while twin soul-ship cannot, I recommend that couple educators, trainers, counselors, coaches, consultants, and other helping professionals interested in promoting the positive and holistic development of couple relationships focus on designing and implementing the PHRDT informed strengths-based interventions that may lead a couple through the soul

mating process. Because to my knowledge, twin souls are very rare (I have not personally met any, but have read about them) it is unclear to me at this point if I should recommend that researchers, educators and/or practitioners focus on the twin soul phenomenon. Although the twin soul phenomenon is interesting to me, and I imagine that it may also be of interest to other researchers, educators, and practitioners, there might simply not be sufficient scholarly material published on this topic to develop a complete study, and/ or design and implement couple counseling trainings or interventions.

Limitations

This *interpretive, visual autoethnography* is similar to a case study in that it addresses the most salient or representative experiences of one, unique individual, or group of individuals in a specific, unique set of life situations, within a unique context. It differs from a case study, however, in that in autoethnography the researcher's subjectivity is not only impossible to control for, but it is in fact desired, since the central focus of an autoethnography is the telling of the researcher's own lived experience from his or her personal, subjective point of view (please refer to Chapter 3 for a description of researcher bias in the context of this study). The findings of this autoethnography are thus not generalizable.

This visual autoethnography was not designed to be generalizable to other couple's issues in the general population in the way a quantitative study conducted on a large, representative sample of couples could be generalized. Although this lack of generalizability could be seen as a limitation from a post-positivist research perspective, it is not viewed as a limitation within the context of autoethnographic studies. Instead, autoethnographies such as the one presented in this dissertation are designed to contain thick and rich descriptions, narratives, and visuals in the

study's findings, as well as a detailed description of the researcher's background intended to allow the reader to come to his or her own conclusions as to how the knowledge gained from this investigation may be useful in, and applicable in other contexts (Bloomberg, & Volpe, 2012).

This study's main limitations, however, are based on the understanding that "memory is fallible, that it is impossible to recall or report on events in language that exactly represents how those events were lived and felt, and that we recognize that people who have experienced the 'same' event often tell different stories about what happened" (Tullis Owen et al. as cited in Ellis, 2011, p. 32). The truthfulness of the stories of an autoethnographer's lived experiences, such as the narratives that I have presented in this autoethnography, are thus limited by the researcher's own capacity for recollection, and his or her talent to adequately express in language these recalled experiences as truthfully as possible, even while understanding that such telling of past lived experiences is ultimately limited to a narrative truth (Bochner, 1994, as cited in Ellis, 2011).

Researcher process reflection

In this last section of the dissertation I describe my research process, and how this it has changed me as a person and as a professional.

For several decades now, I have wanted to write about the extraordinary experiences that brought me together with my partner Luis. First I thought that this story should be told in the form of a true story. I started writing a memoir about our encounter in the late 1990's, but based on the enormous amount of what I considered significant about our experiences, and due to the limited advice on how to write memoirs that was available at that time, I was not able to find the right angle to tell our story, nor able to decide which of the key experiences could and should be

narrated. The project turned out to be much more difficult to write than I had anticipated, and ultimately too unwieldy to complete.

In 2007, however, when I was almost finished with my Masters in Mental Health Counseling, I received the inspiration on how to utilize Michael Maier's *Squaring the Circle* (DeJong, 2002) as a blueprint for couples positive and holistic relationship development, which I have described in the *Renewal* scenario of this study. This revelation suddenly allowed me to see my own relationship, and the manifold and extraordinary experiences Luis and I went through, in a totally different light. The pictogram suddenly helped me to see a pattern where I had sensed one, but had not been able to identify; a pattern that it brought structure to my experiences and to our story. But most importantly, it also set the stage for me to look beyond merely telling the story of our relationship. With help of my previous training in the Hermetic (Evola, 1995; Manly P. Hall & Knapp, 1928), the Western Mystery Traditions (M. P. Hall, 1928/2003), and my studies of the work of Jung (Jaffee, 1979; Jung, 1966/1992, 1968, 1989), all these in combination with my education and training as Applied Behavioral Scientist and Mental Health Counselor, I also now see our experiences as embed within a greater context of how other couple relationships in general could grow and develop positively and holistically from their first encounter, to intimacy, to soul mating (Batthyany- De La Lama & De La Lama, 2008). This realization of how my personal story was part of the larger context of what I could teach other couples and professionals; it became the driving force that inspired me to enroll in a doctoral program.

Once I started my doctoral studies, I focused most of my academic energy on developing my work on the Soul Mates Model and the other components of PHRDT (Batthyany De La Lama, 2010g, 2011a; Batthyany De La Lama, 2011; Batthyany De La Lama & De La Lama,

2012a; Batthyany De La Lama, et al., 2012b). It was thus clear to me that once I got to the stage of deciding my dissertation topic, it would center around the topic of positive and holistic relationship development for couples, or in short Soul Mating. I was not yet clear, however, on how to include my interest in meaningful personal and mythopoeic narratives, especially my own, into the dissertation. In 2010, however, that concern was resolved, when I was able to attend Dr. Carolyn Ellis's course on Autoethnography, in which we worked on integrating personal stories into a research project. During that course, my ideas on how to integrate my personal experiences in the form of personal stories, with help of the structure of the Soul Mates Model, into a concise and focused manner crystalized for me. Dr. Ellis is a sociologist by training who teaches in the Department of Communications. In her course, she did not encourage storytelling from a strengths-based perspective, nor did she teach visual autoethnography. Nevertheless, I stubbornly persevered with my own focus on the positive, the holistic/spiritual, the strengths-based, the developmental, and the visual take on storytelling during her course. As a result, I developed the confidence to design and organize a strengths- based autoethnography. Fascinated with the possibility of working with personal stories in research, I investigated various methods of visual research during a graduate course in qualitative research that I took with Dr. Wolgemuth, and found that visual autoethnography was indeed a method many autoethnographers were now already utilizing. With this exciting r discovery, I found the method that perfectly fit me as a person. It also fit very well with my intended dissertation project because what I wanted to accomplish was to explore my own experience with help of narratives and visuals.

The visual has always most inspiring to me because have been a visual artist for much of my life and still am today. Moreover, my studies, trainings, and practices based on the Western

Mystery Tradition and the Hermetic Tradition in particular have always been based on meaningful visual symbols and lengthy active visualizations. Visuals and their symbolic meaning are thus highly significant to me; they are an essential component of my personal life, of who I am. It would only make sense that such visuals would help me in constructing the best and most meaningful research project I could possibly construct. After completing this dissertation, I have to say that the method of *visual autoethnography* has been exciting, interesting, and rewarding for me. I highly recommend this method to anyone interested in examining their personal life experience.

Before I embarked on gathering the data from the visual component of this study, I envisioned that I would first take lengthy notes in a journal, and then start to compose my findings on the meanings of the 8 alchemical pictograms I selected for the autoethnography. To get started, I pulled out the large academic poster Luis and I designed for our 2010 presentation on the Soul Mates Model (Batthyany De La Lama, 2010g) and spread it out securing it to the side of a desk in front of me. This allowed me to see the alchemical pictograms printed on the poster in a large format displayed before me while I considered the meanings within the context of my own experience of my relationship, and in the context of the research questions driving this study.

Instead of taking lengthy notes in a journal, however, I found that once the images were displayed before me in large format, I just needed to sit with each one for a few minutes, and an enormous cascade of information would tumble into my mind, allowing me to see first the story of the key scenario(s) that related to that pictogram/relationship stage/phase combination, and then the meanings that I derived from the image. The flow of information was so great, that I had to roll up the poster several times during the mornings in which I engaged in this practice, in

order not to be overwhelmed by more information than would be necessary to complete the section I was working on that day. I thus found that the visual component accelerated and focused my data gathering in a way I had not even remotely anticipated. This, of course, may be due to the fact that I bring a considerable amount of prior knowledge to the viewing of these 8 pictograms, but it may also be due to the fact that *pictures truly are worth a thousand words*. They encode a wealth of meanings that one might not be aware of until one actually focuses on an image and allows it to emerge and be released.

This experience with the visual component made me reflect deeply on the power of images. In fact, it tied to the sentiment that I had as a teenager following the experience of being flooded with universal, Divine Love (described in the *Encounter* section of this study). At that time I had felt that I needed to learn yet another language (I already spoke 3 ½) to speak to others of the Love I had seen and felt that day. I had thought at that time that I would learn such a language by studying psychology. I did study some psychology in my early twenties at the University of Vienna and at the University of Salzburg in Austria. But ultimately I chose to study Applied Behavioral Science, Mental Health Counseling and become a doctor in Counselor Education decades later, here in the USA. During all the years of study and practice, I have learned about the language of social science, and the language of human change and transformation. However, during and after conducting this study I have become more and more convinced that although verbal languages are an essential part of communication between humans, the language that I had thought as a teenager that I should learn to “speak” is in fact a visual language. From where I stand today, verbal language does not appear to me to be in and of itself enough to communicate fully what I see, experience, and would like to share with others. Therefore, based on my experience with the visual component of this autoethnography, I fully

recommend that researchers investigating the experiences of their own lives and perhaps even the experiences of the lives of others consider including a visual component into their research design.

Moreover, I can see today that the process of conducting this visual autoethnography has changed my perception of where I can or should be headed as a professional in the future. When I embarked on this study, I was convinced that the vision I had on how to use *Squaring the Circle* (DeJong, 2002) as a blueprint for couples counseling (which I received in Detroit and describe in the *Renewal* section of this study) meant that I should dedicate the rest of my life to promoting this work in education, trainings and practice. Now, as stated in the analysis section of this study, this concept of what I should do for the rest of my life has been drastically transformed.

Today, after writing about all these experiences of my relationship and analyzing them in this study, I see the value of my vision of Maier's *Squaring the Circle* (DeJong, 2002) not only as an indicator of what I could and perhaps should do for the rest of my life, but also as a marker of completion inside myself and in the inner realm of my soul mating relationship with my partner Luis. As a result of completing this study I now feel ready to go out, teach and work to promote the positive and holistic development of couple relationships. Yet paradoxically, I also now feel freed from the heavy responsibility to do so. From where I stand now I see that the real work was always an inner work, that it happened on the inside all the while. So in the paradoxical sense so characteristic of spiritual change, alchemical processes, and meaning-perspective transformation, I now see that the real work of *Squaring the Circle* is inner; that the *Opus Alchemicum* is being done as I watch, and that, in a sense it is already complete.

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