

Art Therapy Online: ATOL

OEDIPUS REX (Reclaiming the Myth) [Click here for video](#)

A CPD Workshop for Arts Therapists

Tony Gammidge

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This workshop used as its theme and starting point the Sophocles' play Oedipus Rex (Sophocles 1988) and took place at the University of Hertfordshire in 2008. The workshop was open to anyone from all of the arts therapies, though only art therapists actually attended the workshop which ran over the course of 2 days.

Central to the workshop was in making art using multi media techniques including animation, installation, sound, puppets and more traditional methods such as drawing and painting. The participants were very much encouraged to make work in response to the story rather than try and 'illustrate' it in a way that is linear and rational. I wanted a personal engagement with the story and not an intellectual analysis of the possible meanings within the narrative. I hoped that by working in this way the participants would almost place themselves in the story and thus come to a deeper and more personal understanding of it via a visual, poetic, physical, emotional and collaborative process.

Working with narrative in this way and using multi-media and digital technology I think is an important way forward for us as art therapists. In working with people

we are already engaging in their own stories (not to mention our own). There is something in doing this intentionally and consciously that can be very powerful and meaningful. Animation is the perfect medium for exploring and working with narrative as is digital technology and a multi-media approach.

I think it is important for art therapy to fully embrace digital technology both in clinical work, evaluation and in documenting work. Neil Springham has innovated the use of podcasts with carers at Tate Britain (Shaer et al 2008) and Cathy Malchiodi addresses the issue in her article 'Art Therapy Meets Digital Art and Social Multimedia' in *Psychology Today* (Malchiodi 2009). I suspect most art therapists now use digital cameras to photograph client's work but it feels like art therapy has some catching up to do with contemporary art practice in the use of technology in a clinical setting.

I decided to work with this particular story for a number of reasons. Certainly the fact that Freud used the myth to formulate his famous Oedipus complex played a part (Freud 1910). There is a part of me that feels that the story has been somehow reduced through having a theory based on it as if that is all there is to the story. I wanted a re-engagement with it as a way of exploring how rich and complex and multi faceted it is. I first came across it through the stunning film by Pasolini filmed in Morocco (Pasolini 1967). So many of the images in the film, the costumes, the hats, the landscape, the Moorish architecture, the sounds, the music (Moroccan and Tibetan) seemed to sear themselves into my memory. While I did not want to re-create the film in the workshop, I was hoping to reach similar levels of intensity and ingenuity.

The work made was edited into the short film which will give you an idea of how successful we were. We used animation, performance, sound, installation, singing (and screaming), drawings, lots of salt, foliage, and puppets (amongst other things) over a couple of days. The participants seemed to totally immerse themselves into the creative process in a way that was playful, brave and profound. Themes of loss, sexuality, pain, destiny, powerlessness, shame and in the end redemption emerged through the work that was made together.

Biography: Tony Gammidge is an artist, film maker and art therapist. He has exhibited and shown in film festivals including in London, Brighton, Cannes, Gerona, Chicago, Berlin and Iceland. He has been artist in residence in USA, Finland and Estonia. He makes work using multi media techniques including video and animation, puppets, installation, handmade books, text and sound.

As an art therapist Tony mainly worked in adult psychiatry in the NHS and in the voluntary sector. He has been a visiting lecturer in Art Psychotherapy at Goldsmiths College, University of Hertfordshire and Roehampton. He leads CPD workshops for arts therapists in the use of narrative with video and animation (www.movingtalesworkshops.blogspot.com). He also runs video and animation projects on locked secure forensic wards. 'Supreme Court', one of the films made on one of these wards won a Gold Koestler award in 2009. Tony also won a special commendation to contributions to the field of Arts and Mental Health Practice in 2009 from the Royal Society for Public health. He has presented a paper on 'Joseph Beuys and Art Therapy' at the TAOAT conference in 2003, was a guest speaker at the 2007 British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT) AGM and presenter at the Arts and Attachment conference organized by BAAT in 2010.

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