

**The Transpersonal in Shadow and Self:
Finding Catharsis in the Second Half of Life through the Visual
Arts, Referencing Deborah Bell, Colin Richards and Paula
Hulley**

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SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

As candidate's supervisor I hereby approve this dissertation for submission.

11 March 2017

Faye Spencer

DECLARATION

As required by University regulations, I hereby state unambiguously that this work has not been presented at any other University or any other institution of higher learning other than the University of KwaZulu-Natal, (Pietermaritzburg Campus) and that unless specifically indicated to the contrary within the text it is my original work.

11 March 2017

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the relevance of the transpersonal approach in research. In an historical overview the value of the transpersonal in visual arts is discussed with particular reference to Deborah Bell, Colin Richards and my own journey in creative practice. The study examines the terms *self*, *shadow*, *catharsis*, and the second half of life in relation to painting and the use of mixed media in visual arts. This dissertation illustrates, through selected works of Deborah Bell, Colin Richards and Paula Hulley, the transformative role of transpersonal research, with a focus on the method of organic inquiry and the three steps of preparation, inspiration and integration. Deborah Bell's creative practice acknowledges her quest for a spiritual truth, which has parallels to my own personal narrative in search of self and shadow. Memory, and recovery of memory, in Colin Richards' art-making, is discussed as potential transformation and catharsis in the second half of life. Organic inquiry, a qualitative methodology to the transpersonal approach, is examined and applied to my experience of going inward to self through painting and mixed media.

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GLOSSARY

Carl Gustave Jung (1875 -1961):

Swiss psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, founder of analytical psychology, also referred to as the “first modern transpersonal art therapist” of his time (Farrelly-Hansen 2001:14).

Catharsis:

Healing, and finding relief from the release of strong, repressed emotion.

Consciousness:

An internal knowledge, awareness; the understanding of one’s personal needs, attitudes and behaviour either as an individual or collectively as a group, tribe, nation.

Ego:

The ego is the known half of self; the rational, conscious part of self modulated by the ordinary, known world of experience.

Holotropic Breathwork:

An approach to self-discovery and self-exploration through conscious, controlled breathwork that can influence an individual’s wellbeing through altered states of consciousness, and or the release of repressed emotion.

Immanent Divine:

A spiritual experience that transforms perceptions of everyday existence to view God within all animals, plants and inanimate objects.

Liminal:

Refers to a transitional, intermediate, in-between stage or process, the position of which can be occupy both sides of a threshold or boundary.

Midlife:

A central, or pivotal period in an individual’s life which is situated around 45–60 years of age.

Organic Inquiry:

A qualitative approach to research that promotes and invites transformative change within the heart and mind of the researcher and the reader (observer) as an outcome of the process.

Practice as Research:

A research methodology that is an original undertaking and or investigation to gain new insights and knowledge through practice and the symbiotic outcomes of research and practice.

Process Art:

A creative, artistic approach to art practice where the outcome and end product of the process is not the principal focus. Art-making is viewed as a creative process or journey.

Self:

The essential being of an individual that differentiates them from others; the point of introspection and or internal, reflexive consideration, action. The personal being, personality or ordinary ego of an individual. The integration and totality of the unconscious and conscious psyche.

Shadow:

The hidden, repressed, darker tendencies of the psyche, personality that differ from the individual's consciously expressed ego or persona.

Transcendent Divine:

A spiritual experience where the individual is transported to other or parallel realities that are not ordinarily perceived in everyday reality.

Transpersonal:

Going beyond the individual or human experience; honouring the lived, felt experiences in research and psychology.

(The Glossary definitions are my own definitions. The understanding of the terms derives from reading the authors I have listed in my Bibliography on page 72).

INTRODUCTION

(i) Background and Motivation

This dissertation is a transpersonal exploration investigating catharsis using the visual arts as a tool for transformation. The work focuses on self and shadow and the connections between art-making, psychology and the sacred, while referencing the creative practice of Deborah Bell, Colin Richards and myself, Paula Hulley. It is about midlife transition from the first to the second half of life, and finding catharsis through exploration of the shadow and self through research and the visual arts.

My interest in the potential transformative role of creative practice was piqued during my Honour's dissertation where I wrote on visual journalling, the art therapy centre Lefika La Phodiso, and work by Dan Rakgoathe and Dina Cormick. Reflections on this research instilled a feeling that I would benefit from a more immersive and detailed investigation on healing through art-making. This culminated in my commitment to examine the self and shadow and their relationships with art-making and healing in a transpersonal approach.

I am a mature student, with a family, and intend, as I transition into the second half of life, to find meaning in life. My theoretical research, together with my creative practice, is driven by my need to address my shadow (and personal perception) of failure. In the first half of my life I had no voice. Voice is a metaphor for something that is missing within, an aspect of my shadow. Finding my voice embraces an exploration of, and transformation, of self. In this dissertation it is my choice to allow my voice to emerge as an agent to the healing of self. Awareness of the unconscious within myself allows all that has remained hidden, dormant or undeveloped to be made conscious (Elbow 1984:19).

Failing the fine art component of my Fine Art degree in my first year in 1983 became a suppressed shadow. Creativity and art-making is important to me. Failure as an art student rendered unbearable shame, something I could only address in maturity. My dissertation and creative practice become the catalyst for catharsis.

Together with my own art practice, I reference South African artists Deborah Bell and the late Colin Richards. Their use of imagery and metaphor, their analysis and self-reflection of their creative practice contribute to my own enquiry and art-making.

South African painter and sculptor Deborah Bell has contributed to my creative development through my enquiry into her consciousness as an artist, and in her “making of Self” (Burnett 2012:2). This is reflected in her art works as a quest for ‘spiritual truth’ that Bell defines as a “presence” and being very “present” during the creative process (2). Equal emphasis is given to the process and the creation of a “power object” that invokes the imagination of artist and observer (3). Bell’s personal transition and transformation through art in her creative journey are useful to my own research and personal journey. I find Bell’s connection to a divine presence and her ability to access the self through her artwork inspirational and relevant to my own creative search.

Prior to his death in 2012, Richards’ self-reflexive writing, his “deep interest in the power of image”, his reference to memory, and instability of memory, all contribute to this dissertation and my understanding of catharsis (Lamprecht 2003). I draw parallels between Richards’ exploration and recovery of the past with my own intention to delve into past fears; Richards’ art-making informs my understanding of catharsis.

In my initial body of work my paternal grandmother’s crystal trinket jar (hereafter referred to as the jar) acts as a metaphor of shadow and self. Each facet represents an event, experience, belief, memory. The paintings are an interpretation of the duality between good and bad, light and dark within my own psyche. The crystal facets and the emerging patterns can be likened to prison cell bars. My mind can remain imprisoned by the shadow, or find catharsis from acceptance and release of what lies in the shadow. The jar series embodies the transpersonal in moving beyond the physical self to expose aspects of the shadow.

Over time my art-making shifts from looking externally to an inward experience of self, questioning who am I, who have I become, where am I going? Relinquishing the jar as subject matter was a momentous decision that preceded nine months of depressive thoughts and non-productivity. I busied myself with alternative therapies, including process art, which initiated the creation of *Self Series I–VIII* (2016) where I choose my body as subject to depict my journey to self. This series documents the process of releasing old unuseful beliefs of self, allowing a time of catharsis, and symbolising new foundations to underpin life’s second half.

(ii) Key Objectives and Questions

The primary objective of this dissertation is to frame the dual register of technical enquiry with painting and imagery, and scholarly enquiry, using philosophies of being and psychology. Analysis of the terms transpersonal research, organic inquiry, self and shadow provide foundations from which my quest for self can emanate. This dissertation focuses on the art-making of Bell, Richards and my own in-studio practice as an exploration of how the visual art component contributes to finding self and catharsis.

My personal objective strives to make sense of self, by focusing on my shadow through research, self-reflexive writing and painting. I draw parallels between myself and the art-making of Bell and Richards to examine the potential transformative validity of this research and to interrogate how this approach benefits me as an individual (Anderson and Braud 2011:157).

My dissertation is a transpersonal approach to research and a key objective to the research component lies in outlining my understanding of the term transpersonal and the sub-category of organic inquiry. In asking the question, what is transpersonal research and organic inquiry?, I question how these concepts contribute to my understanding of self, and how they manifest in my art practice. A key objective focuses on defining the term shadow, shadow in the wider community and as a concept of transpersonal psychology.

In Chapters Four and Five, as the dissertation and research unfolds I ask the questions: How is the transformation of self described in the creative practice of Bell? How do Bell's paintings contribute to my own thinking and arts practice? How does Richards' work contribute to my own thinking? What do I understand by catharsis and the search for catharsis through uncovering and recovering memory in Richards' art-making? As I explore these questions they enable me to answer the questions I ask of myself.

My paintings of the jar and figurative paintings of myself illustrate intent to find my voice and ask questions of self and shadow. Transpersonal research is a fluid approach that allows for my questions and objectives to evolve, metamorphose and change as awareness of self and shadow emerge in the process of transformation through focus on organic inquiry. The questions I ask of self reflect how this fluid approach to research unfolds to allow greater awareness of self. My initial questions are simplistic: Who am I at midlife?

Who have I become? Where am I going? As the thesis proceeds the questions become more complex and allow further questioning of self by introducing further complexity to the questioning: Why am I afraid to tell you who I am? I acknowledge the connection between creativity and the sacred in pursuing the questions I ask in the beginning and in my conclusion. My questions are indicative of the process which focuses on change of awareness of self.

(iii) Thesis Structure

The Introduction details the history, psychology, understanding and background to my dissertation. It also discusses the key objectives and questions asked in this dissertation.

Chapter One outlines reading and research pertinent to this study. Concepts of transpersonal, organic inquiry, self, ego, metaphor, and practice as research, are introduced. The second section in this chapter summarises the methodologies I have contextualised and used to conduct this research.

Chapter Two defines the term transpersonal and gives insight into what constitutes transpersonal research. It presents a brief overview of the three categories within transpersonal research, namely, intuitive, integral and organic inquiry. Organic inquiry is selected as the preferred qualitative approach to this dissertation. The three-step process of organic inquiry, preparation, inspiration and integration is discussed, and is used as the theoretical structure of this study.

Chapter Three introduces and references theory on shadow, both in the wider community and in transpersonal psychology. This chapter concludes with discussion on the definition and theory of self.

Chapter Four describes transformation of self in the creative practice of Deborah Bell. Three of Bell's paintings, *Lovers in the Cinema* (1985), *World on Fire* (1990) and *Traverse* (2014), are chosen to illustrate the quest for a spiritual dimension in Bell's art-making.

Chapter Five examines the concept of catharsis and the search for catharsis through uncovering and recovering memory in Colin Richards' art-making. *The Veil Series* (1998), references Richards' personal involvement in documenting South African detainee Steve

Biko's death. Through Richards' art-making process, I discuss memory and the notion of recovery, as a form of catharsis.

Chapter Six is a self-reflexive narrative of the journey to self in my own creative practice. I apply the organic inquiry methodology (preparation, inspiration and integration) to my in-studio practice to document my quest for meaning and catharsis as I transition into the second half of life. *The Shadow Series* (2014), *Lion Self* (2015), *Self I* (2016), *Self VII* (2016) document the confrontation of shadow and an attempt to understand self. Chapter Seven concludes this dissertation.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Literature Review

In this dissertation I contextualise research within the visual arts to illustrate the relationship between transpersonal methodology (organic inquiry) and creative practice. I examine the concepts of self, shadow, catharsis and the role transpersonal research methods contribute to this exploration. A review of pertinent literature follows.

William Braud and Rosemarie Anderson (1998, 2011) define transpersonal research as honouring the ordinary in human experience and elevating it to an atypical experience. Transpersonal has etymological roots in Latin: *trans* means beyond or through, and *personal* references a mask or façade to facilitate access beyond the known (Braud & Anderson 1998:xxiii). Transpersonal research, a qualitative approach, illustrates human existence as valuable content for research, contributing to inner growth and self-reflection. Honouring human experience is interpreted as moving beyond the physical, to an acceptance of “human experiences that are *personal, subjective, significant*” (19). These experiences are evidenced as personal in nature and not necessarily witnessed by external observers (xxvii). Understanding these experiences and reflecting on them may influence the individual positively: “Profound impacts and significant, perhaps radically transformative” opportunities can arise in the experiencer’s life (19). This applies to my own thinking, creative practice and research within this dissertation.

Anderson and Braud (2011) endorse three research approaches: intuitive inquiry, integral inquiry and organic inquiry developed within transpersonal psychology. These methodologies emphasise “multiple knowing”, an organic, evolving approach to research, the will of the researcher and acceptance to study experientially based topics” (5). Organic inquiry is pertinent to my dissertation and is influenced by: (i) Jung’s (1969) theory on transcendent function and the four functions of thinking, feeling, intuition and sensation; (ii) qualitative data collection, analysis and interpretation: an approach arising from researchers’ lived experiences (personal story); and (iii) emphasis on transformative change of mind and heart (142).

Organic inquiry is a three-step process involving preparation, inspiration and integration of data. My journey, narrated through the medium of painting in mixed media, draws on

organic inquiry as the methodology from which to construct my reflexive account (Anderson & Braud 2011:141). Traditional research sets out to prove a hypothesis; organic research is an alternative method that attracts participants and topics related to “psycho-spiritual growth” (131).

In his text *Shadow, Self, Spirit: Essays in Transpersonal Psychology* (2005), transpersonal psychologist and author Michael Daniels collates transpersonal theories, of which Carl Jung is a main proponent. Jung’s psychological development theory proposes that the human lifespan falls into two main phases (181). The first half of life is an “initiation into outer reality”. Here the birth of the ego is defined by “physical, intellectual and social development” (181) forming a sense of self; balancing the masculine and feminine; and consciousness. The second half of life, often pre-empted by midlife crisis, is characterised by the individual’s attention turning inward, undergoing an “initiation into inner reality” (181) to realise a wider sense of self. Jung’s theory acknowledges four main archetypal realities: shadow; soul-image (anima/animus); mana personalities; the self. This dissertation focuses on the shadow and the self (181).

The self embodies the unconscious and conscious part of our psyche: the totality of the individual, referred to as the “psychological goal of union between consciousness and unconsciousness” (Daniels 2005:182). Here the self is viewed as inner guidance, constantly seeking balance and unity within the psyche (Jung 1964:161) where the totality of self cannot be fully actualised or known. Self is experienced through dreams, fantasies and myths (Daniels 2005:181) and examples of perfection: Christ, the universe, circles. The self is half known and half unknown (181). The ego is the known half: the rational, conscious part of self modulated by the ordinary, known world of experience (286).

In his later years, Jung secretly documented and explored his “two selves” (Jung 2009:198). Jung considered his shadow as “the ‘negative’ side of the personality, the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide” (Storr 1983:87). Understanding the “negative” aspect of the personality requires a desire to go inward and to self-reflect. This process can meet with resistance, as dark characteristics of self can be painful to acknowledge and accept (91). By acknowledging his shadow self through the subconscious, Jung allowed the shadow to come forward. Validating his visions and fantasy world within his theory and understanding of self allowed Jung to acknowledge the existence and importance of transpersonal research (Jung 2009:198).

Finding self may occur at midlife, leading to transformation of spiritual and emotional thought patterns. The midlife point is suspended between letting go and anticipating the future: from imprisonment of the mind, to emancipation within awareness (Rohr 2011:122). In his book *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (2011), Richard Rohr discusses Erik Erikson's term "generativity" (122) as a midlife point where there is an awareness of life and accumulated wisdom; where the individual focuses on what has been received. It is a time of inner awareness and gratitude from lessons learnt in the first half of life. I have included the term generativity in this dissertation because it correlates with the third step of integration in organic inquiry (Braud & Anderson 1998:141). Generativity and integration are platforms in midlife for reflection. Both allow for a sense of renewal, moving forward and a "rebirth" of both the individual and of God within the consciousness of the individual: synonymous of hope and renewal of spirit (Jung 2009:203).

This study examines the self and shadow through art and the use of metaphor. Metaphor is defined as a "figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object different from, but analogous to, that to which it is properly applicable" (Simpson and Weiner 1989:676). Author Raymond Gibbs (2008) explains nonlinguistic metaphor as the experience of feeling ourselves into an artwork using the imagination. Metaphor can become the gateway to our visual experience in all art forms (11).

Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (2007) comment on the process of art-making, and that the reflection thereon can "be recognised as valid research within itself" (35). Gaylene Perry, in Barrett and Bolt, identifies how research and writing practice, as creative acts, allow personal gain that can "effect change" in one's life (5). According to Kolb, in Barrett and Bolt (2007), the experiential approach is initiated from "lived experience" and "personal reactions" where "learning takes place through action, and intentional, explicit reflection on that action" (5).

James Elkins' *In What Painting Is* (1999), Angeles Arrien's *The Second Half of Life: Opening the Eight Gates of Wisdom* (2007) and Peter Tyler's commentary *St John of the Cross* (2010) all contribute to the reflection of this process. Elkins references the "mundane", the "transcendental" and "alchemy" in art-making (Elkins 1999:187); Arrien observes an individual's "courage" to change at midlife (Arrien 2007:4). Both authors

inform parallels between the dark night of the soul experienced and documented by St John of the Cross (Tyler 2010) and my own journey in going inward.

Perry describes this two-way process (applicable to my own experience) by illustrating that her work is never driven by theory, although theory plays its part in her understanding of the issues (Barrett & Bolt 2007:67). Similarly my research has informed my art-making, and my art-making has informed my research.

1.2 Methodology

I focus on a transpersonal methodology in this dissertation which embodies qualitative and self-reflexive approaches to research.

Qualitative research methods lay emphasis on “discovering and exploring alternative” methods to conceptualise and appreciate research (Barrett and Bolt 2007:126). A process of “simulacra”, paradoxically similar but different to “traditional” and “established” research criteria (126), “embraces numerous personal meanings and gives voice to experience” (132). Qualitative research generates information in the form of “observations that are recorded in language” (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2006:47).

Self-reflexivity validates the duality between studio practice and enquiry, and an expansion upon the outcomes of research (Barrett and Bolt 2007:161). My research honours and my “lived experience” (Anderson and Braud 2011:xxvii) form the foundation of this methodology. A self-reflexive approach to my study enables “a powerful catalyst” to realise the transformation I seek (Spencer 2016:16).

The methodology of triangulation, in particular data triangulation, observes my own particular stance in relation to two South African artists, namely, Bell and Richards. Triangulation comprises a methodology by which the researcher makes observations in relation to two or more other positions (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2006:380). The sub-category of data triangulation enables the researcher to focus on the aspect of the story chosen to interrogate and achieve transformation. The methodology of data triangulation filters out components, allowing a focus on what is currently relevant in the individual’s narration (380).

In my dissertation I have focused on the transpersonal research method termed organic inquiry as being the most suitable to this study. This qualitative, self-reflexive methodology permits me to express the emotional and descriptive journey I have embarked upon to allow an emergence of shadow and self. It enables, through research, a conduit of self-analysis and self-disclosure to encompass personal experience, introspection, life story and reflections that relate to a narrative that emerges in my art-making.

Aiming to document the effectiveness of healing through the visual arts, particularly through my own creative output, practice as research is the praxis of my dissertation. Practice serves as a research method, whereby an original investigation is pursued to gain knowledge through means of practice and the result of that practice (Barrett & Bolt 2007:3). This is a symbiotic relationship where writing and research fuels my art-making and in turn my creative practice nurtures the research, thus facilitating personal insights and awareness.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 An Introduction to Transpersonal Research Theories

In Chapter Two I define transpersonal research and theory. It highlights why, as a deviation from traditional western psychology, the psycho-spiritual nature of this approach is pertinent to my dissertation. Organic inquiry, as the principle approach to the theoretical framework of this study, creates a balance between the qualitative, self-reflexive methodology and my practice of painting.

Transpersonal research embodies spiritual and transcendent aspects of human experience (Anderson & Braud 2011: 3). Previously marginalised human states of mind, as feelings and thoughts in psychoanalysis, are supported in transpersonal ideology. The human psyche, in wholeness, is contemplated, and non-ordinary states of consciousness – valued in transpersonal approaches – are given credence (Grof 2008:48). Mainstream psychology refers to “altered states” of consciousness (48) to imply a negative connotation to a state of being. Interest in non-ordinary states of consciousness having “heuristic, healing, transformative and even evolutionary potential” is prominent (48). Shamanic journeys, ancient rites of passage, mystical experiences, folklore and primitive narratives, and individuals in spiritual stress, are states of being that Grof terms “holotropic” (48).

In ordinary states of consciousness individuals identify with a fragment of their self-awareness. A “holotropic” state enables an individual to transcend the mind, body and ego to observe a spectrum of experiences to discover a full identity (Grof 2008:49). The holotropic in transpersonal psychology takes non-ordinary states of consciousness and acknowledges them as ordinary states of consciousness. Transpersonal observations are recognised as “ontologically real” and not dismissed as “pathological processes in the brain” (49).

Grof (2008) describes the spiritual dimension of transpersonal psychology as immanent divine and transcendent divine (49). Ordinary states of consciousness manifest in immanent divine through a perception of “God as Nature” (49). Everyday objects are viewed as part of a greater whole. Plants, animals and cosmos are viewed as one creative energetic whole.

Transcendent divine refers to states of consciousness not manifested in everyday life, described by Grof as another form of reality, appearing as a parallel dimension to what is ordinarily perceived; existing beyond everyday consciousness (2008:49). If these states of consciousness are accessed they can precipitate transformation within the individual (49).

Both immanent and transcendent divine are relevant to my investigation. To pursue catharsis in the second half of life, an individual has a choice to engage ordinary or non-ordinary states of consciousness as part of their enlightenment of shadow and self. Movement forward of self can remain in everyday consciousness or it can embrace another dimension to self-actualisation and self-exploration (Daniels 2005: 118). For the individual who feels incomplete, such as myself, a transpersonal journey is an evolution in attaining wholeness.

2.2 Transpersonal Research: An Introduction to Organic Inquiry

From the outset, transpersonal founders recognised a need to integrate transpersonal and spiritual research within the scientific community. Empirical research required an expansion and inclusion of inner experiences, defined as personal, private and unobservable by external measures. The inner experience forms the praxis of transpersonal research findings, evaluations and transformation (Anderson & Braud 2011:3).

Transpersonal vision aims to enliven scholarly and scientific enquiry by “investigating the nature and potential of human experience”, and, more generally, it supports imagination and creativity throughout scientific research and inquiry (5).

Transpersonal research is categorised into three areas: intuitive, integral and organic inquiry (Anderson and Braud 2011:5). The three areas differ on theoretical practice and in breadth of field. Intuitive inquiry is considered to be influenced by “classic hermeneutical understanding” where research is “personal and cyclical rather than linear and procedural” (6). As noted, organic inquiry is influenced by Carl Jung’s theory of “transcendent function” and the four brain functions of “thinking, feeling, intuition and sensation” (5) and emphasises the narrative: telling one’s story is of primary importance. Integral inquiry differs in structure by its “integration of quantitative and qualitative data collection, analysis and interpretation” (5), whereas intuitive and organic inquiry rely predominantly on qualitative measures (5).

Organic inquiry plays an integral role in the foundation of this dissertation and evolves as a search for my own catharsis. It is a personal choice to use South African artists, namely Deborah Bell and Colin Richards to explore the visual component to this dissertation and to aid in the narration toward a re-discovery of self. Together, research and my creative practice enable a review of self and an acknowledgement of the shadow.

2.3 Organic Inquiry

Organic inquiry is a transmutable process, recognising transformational challenges of the mind and heart, by enabling the researcher to tell a story (Anderson & Braud 2011:134). Stories cultivate foundations of change by evolving ideas affecting narrator, research participant and reader. Relatedness between stories, individual, researcher and group participants are an evolution of journeying to “self, spirit, and service to others” (Friedman & Hartelius 2013:251).

Transformation, the objective within organic inquiry, is an important component in research results. The method in choosing a relevant topic and the level of success in the experiment is defined by the “degree of movement along a lifetime path toward transpersonal development” (Friedman & Hartelius 2013:252). The transformational process refers to changes in thinking and feeling from two perspectives: the researcher and the reader. Organic inquiry, also categorised as narrative inquiry, evolves from the researcher’s story and insights received from the experience (252).

The psycho-spiritual element to organic inquiry sets it apart from other transpersonal research models. In her essay ‘Organic Inquiry: Research in Partnership with Spirit’ (Anderson & Braud 2011), Jennifer Clements refers to the researcher’s psyche as the “subjective instrument” which requires working in tandem with spiritual and liminal (extra-ego) influences, such organic inquiry, as defined earlier (131).

The first two steps in the organic inquiry process are preparation and inspiration, determined from the researcher’s ability to access liminality to obtain data (Anderson & Braud 2011:132). Integration, the final step of the process, occurs alongside the ego as a cognitive examination of facts (132). In liminal experience the researcher’s psyche is a point of departure where the individual transcends ego control by moving beyond the busyness of the mind, to create a sense of mental spaciousness (Singer 2007:128). In this place

of liminality, experience/data is accumulated by the researcher and then integrated in ongoing research (Anderson & Braud 2011:141).

2.4 Preparation, Inspiration and Integration

Preparation involves recognition of a topic, question or intention (Anderson & Braud 2011:137) requiring the researcher to achieve liminality where ego, neutral and non-curious, respects the values of reverence, cooperation and mutuality. (142). There are no guidelines in achieving this process. Being organic, it is unique and focuses on an individual's preference and strengths (142). The four functions of thinking, feeling, intuition and sensation are important in achieving liminal experience (Jung 1971:453). Thinking and feeling are described as two functions of choice (Clements in Anderson & Braud 2011:142). Thinking is defined by logical choice, and feeling is determined by worth and value. The functions of intuition and sensation are a way of seeing, becoming the extremes of perception. Sensation relies on the physical world and intuition emanates from the interior world (142). Clements states that scientific enquiry uses all four functions but only credits thinking and sensation because they relate to the physical world and can be logically accounted for. Organic inquiry accepts that an individual may favour one or two functions, but these rarely operate as separate entities since they are connected and supported by each other (143).

Preparation through thinking is broadly defined as meditation, “focused attention” or contemplation on a topic of focus (Anderson & Braud 2011:143). Feeling, in a liminal or spiritual context, refers to the narrative where stories are tools to “gather, understand, interpret, and explain data and findings of a study” (143). Narratives, viewed as a whole, are more impactful and effective in communicating than the “conceptual process of the thinking mind” (143).

Preparation through sensation refers strongly to “holotropic breathwork” to initiate liminal and spiritual experiences (144). Less formal rituals such as lighting of candles, writing and contemplation can accomplish a purpose beyond the logical mind (144). Through intuition, preparation observes a space that is cleared mindfully for insights to filter in, in contrast to a direct action taking place (144). Intuition comes in many forms: clearer understanding, a knowingness and/or deeper insight (144).

Jung in Anderson and Braud (2011) describes inspiration as a springboard of “pure possibility” inhabiting a space beyond the threshold of the controlling ego but not the open psyche (145). Inspiration gives rise to a spectrum of unique experiences that surface as visions, voices heard, intuition, synchronicity of events, places, people, spirits and dreams (147).

The third and last step of integration in organic inquiry relies on information received through preparation and inspiration. Clements clarifies this as the researcher returning “to the rational world” with collected data and information (Anderson & Braud 2011:148). Here the researcher re-engages with the ego and the material to examine its meaning and prepare to be transformed by it. The change may be observed as a self-awareness; a greater connection to self through heart and mind; or of service to the greater community through personal transformation (149).

The validity of transpersonal research and organic inquiry relies on asking the question: “Is this useful to me?” (Friedman & Hartelius 2013:252). I will examine this question through this dissertation and through my creative practice. To do so I will refer to my own story, and the creative practice of Deborah Bell and Colin Richards, to investigate the potential transformation through the visual arts. Answering the question “Is this useful to me?” requires going beyond the “I”, beyond the small self, to encompass the wider community, and beyond.

2.5 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced the term transpersonal. I have reflected on, and provided insight into, the three relevant steps of organic inquiry which is key to my methodology. I will now turn to Chapter Three wherein I review the concepts of shadow and shadow in transpersonal psychology to conclude with discussion on the concept of self.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Theories on Shadow and Self

3.1.1 The Shadow

The term shadow elicits emotive responses when considered in a transpersonal and spiritual framework. Author, and psychologist, Michael Daniels (2005), notes a tendency in transpersonal transformation to focus on the metaphor of “light”, rather than its counterpart of darkness. Light follows darkness, and darkness follows light, a reality that is inescapable from the earth’s rotation on its axis. Light can illuminate dark recesses. By shining light on solid matter it casts a dark shadow (72). The more light used to expose an object in hiding or suppression, the more an object throws a dark shadow. Jung refers to the shadow as “the ‘negative’ side of the personality, the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide” (Storr 1983:87). “Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it is” (Jung 1938:131). The individual’s consciousness refers here to the metaphor of light. If light is allowed into one’s consciousness, access to the shadow may be resisted as an individual’s deepest fears are illuminated.

Light illuminates deep recesses of the self, bringing forward hidden and suppressed emotions, old beliefs and actions into a level of awareness. Awareness creates an individual choice to respond with “intention and rational intelligence”, or not (Daniels 2005:72). The metaphor of darkness has a similar effect, being the symbol for what lies out of the light. Darkness is also a choice. The shadow can remain hidden and purposefully ignored. It represents a level of self that lies beyond conscious knowledge and control of the individual (72).

Daniels refers to the shadow as the other half of the conscious persona (2005:72). The conscious persona is described as our consciously expressed public personality (72). Withholding layers of personality, and only revealing that which is socially acceptable, prevents an individual from achieving a level of maturity in consciousness (72). In treating neurosis, Jung stated that observation and acknowledgement of the shadow “is indispensable, otherwise nothing changes as there is no psychic maturation and no

widening of the spiritual horizon” (Jung 1964:216). In choosing to remain in shadow, the mind gives shelter to the dark, repressed parts of self.

Jungian psychology places importance on individuals’ abilities to locate and accept their own shadow (Daniels 2005:73). If there is no awareness of the shadow, and it remains unconscious to the individual, there can be implications as a result of this denial. It can create “defense mechanisms such as repression or projection”, which facilitate an environment of “psychological and interpersonal difficulties” (73). In times of extreme stress, abuse of substances, familial crisis, the blocked shadow, brought forward by the crisis, can lead to “intense feelings of guilt and unworthiness, or to personally and socially destructive forms of behaviour” (73). This prevents the individual from accessing a “higher order functioning” (73).

Jung views accessing shadow as an empirical process (Jung 1964:462). He holds that without life experience no other solutions facilitate assimilating the shadow (462). Jung observed that a metamorphosis occurs when an individual is able to see both sides of the psyche. They become aware of “not only their moral inferiorities, but also, automatically, of their good qualities” (462). Jung stated that to make a person aware of his shadow is to show him his personal light (463). The awareness of one’s shadow is determined by the ability to view oneself in light and dark simultaneously. Acceptance of the shadow’s presence places one in the middle, between extremities of light and dark, and the individual begins to understand the concept of self (463).

Awareness surpasses a state of suppression, and the shadow has a form of release. It is being able to contemplate answering the question, “Why am I afraid to tell you who I am?” (Powell 1969). When an individual is ready to answer this question, it initiates a process of awareness.

Expressing oneself through imagery has a way of “accessing deep-seated emotional information and moving it through the body, creating awareness of one’s inner being that the mind alone cannot achieve” (Ganim & Fox 1999:85). This reaffirms Jung’s (1964) theory that shadow awareness contributes to an awareness of one’s own personal light. This dissertation arises from the premise that art media has the potential to release, transform and metamorphose the deep wells imposed by past trauma and limiting beliefs, communicating the mystery of the internal world of memory and emotion (Farrelly-Hansen

2001:17–18). Henri Matisse’s statement, “Drawing is . . . above all a means of expressing intimate feelings and moods” (Ganim & Fox 1999:9), highlights how the inner world may be creatively expressed through art-making.

3.1.2 Shadow in Transpersonal Psychology

Transpersonal psychology is a positive and optimistic approach to psychology. Maslow’s theories stand out as a prototype for the transpersonal. “Self-conscious, studied emphasis on self-actualisation, human potential, creativity, love, humanistic education, peak experiences and metamotivation” are foundational to his theories (Daniels 2005:74). Here, the transpersonal journey assumes a fresh, positive, illuminating perspective; once embarked upon, all past negativity or darkness, is left behind. Daniels refers to this perception as “gravitation towards the light, like moths to the flame” (75).

Daniels highlights the importance of shadow in the transpersonal, a viewpoint I support. Without acknowledging the shadow on a transformative journey the finding of self is shallow and simplistic. Daniels argues that the transpersonal, in full effectiveness, needs to be aware of self and the wider community. Maturation occurs when transpersonal psychology faces its own shadow by examining the “zeitgeist” (the spirit) of the movement or culture (Daniels 2005:77). It acknowledges and investigates what is omitted or ignored.

3.1.3 The Self

On a transformative path or when seeking consciousness, an individual may ask the question: “Who Am I?” The Indian Upanishads described this self-questioning in ancient Sanskrit as “Tat tvam asi” (Friedman & Hartelius 2013:93), translated as “Thou art That”. Grof (2008) explains the use of “That” as a reference to the divine: the Godhead. As transpersonal beings it clarifies an illusion that we are not purely “name and form, body and ego”, creating an awareness existing beyond material and physical consciousness (Friedman & Hartelius 2013:93). This refers to liminality discussed in Chapter Two. It is an alignment with the innermost self, an emulation of the “supreme principle that creates the universe” (93). It is an acknowledgement that the self, our true identity, has deep connection with the divine.

Jung alludes to the elusiveness of self when he says , “the eyes of the spirit glimpse an image which we call self, fully conscious of the fact that it is an anthropomorphic image which we have merely named but not explained”(410). I can attest to the human need to want to know, control and fully understand the concept of self. Yet I am aware that self is merely a label suggesting wholeness and totality. I understand Jung’s concept of self as fragmented and dreamlike, remaining elusive in fluidity; occasionally glimpsed, felt and lost again. Self and wholeness become extremes of one another, yet, similarly, can become one. Jung expresses our inability to fully comprehend the absolute truth of self:

By “self” we mean psychic wholeness, but what realities underlie this concept we do not know, because psychic contents cannot be observed in their unconscious state, and moreover the psyche cannot know itself. The conscious can only know the unconscious only so far as it has become conscious. (1964:410)

Jung refers to consciousness as a process that has taken millennia to unfold and reach a “civilized” state yet even so it remains “shrouded in darkness” (1954:23). The psyche is defined as part of nature and the natural universe, which contextualises the psyche as limitless, unknown and vast (23). Jung’s investigation of dreams creates an awareness of the “unconscious aspect of conscious psychic events” (23). With this evidence, psychologists came to assume that there existed an unconscious psyche. This led to critical debate that what existed were “two subjects, or two personalities within the same individual” (23). Jung describes this as one of the modern curses of man, as many individuals suffer from the effects of divided, or two, personalities within one. Jung states: “This predicament is a symptom of a general unconsciousness that is the undeniable common inheritance of all mankind” (23). The belief that there is no unconscious is a “misonerism” (23) – a fear of what is new and unknown.

In my opinion, to understand self, we require an ability to fully grasp the subtlety and intangibility of the concept. Implicit in this is the changing, never stagnant quality of self. Understanding this concept depends on the amount of light shed on the unconscious mind. It is an illumination of part (a facet or fragment) of the unconscious.

Finding self depends on an analysis of the conscious mind (Jung 1964). Consciousness is dependent on an awareness of the unconscious, and the level of unconsciousness is also dependent on being conscious. Michael Singer (2007) corroborates Jung’s theory on self and consciousness when he states that the source and nature of one’s true being is pure consciousness (67). Singer claims that meditation (liminality) is the highest state an

individual can achieve, where *being*, is a state of simple awareness as a contemplation of self (37).

Singer writes that consciousness has no superiority or differentiation, as all consciousness is the same (2007:36). The difference lies in where individuals place their awareness. Singer considers an unconscious psyche to be consumed with fear, because of all that is buried and blocked deep within the psyche. Fear blocks the individual's energy and prevents a healthy state of the heart. A weak heart creates a dense energy that is comprised of a low vibration with fear existing as "the lowest of all vibrations" (73). Fear, according to Singer, is the root of all problems: prejudices and all negative emotions, such as jealousy, anger and possessiveness (73). To grow as an individual and to grow spiritually means freeing oneself of fear and letting go of the "debris" trapped inside (74). "That's what the Self does. Awareness does not fight; awareness releases. Awareness is simply aware while everything in the universe parades before it" (87).

3.2 Chapter Conclusion

In Chapter Three I provide a theoretical foundation to discuss concepts of shadow, shadow in transpersonal psychology and the relevance of shadow in the wider community.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 Transformation and Self in the Creative Practice of Deborah Bell

4.1.1 Chapter Introduction

In Chapter Four I reference Deborah Bell from a personal and academic perspective. Bell's oil paintings on canvas, *Lovers in the Cinema* (1985), *World on Fire* (1990) and *Traverse* (2015), fulfil my research criteria to document Bell's journey to self through her paintings. My midlife questioning of "Who am I?" warrants drawing parallels and observations from a South African female artist with whose search for self, depicted in her creative quest, resonates with my own personal search. I am inspired by Bell's observation that she is more preoccupied with her own transformation than what others think about her art-making (Bell 2015:12). According to Max Beckmann (Stein 2004:6), Bell describes her creations as the "discarded skins of self".

Painter, printmaker and sculptor, Deborah Bell is an acclaimed South African artist born in Johannesburg in 1957. Bell studied her B.A. Fine Arts Honours) and Master's degrees at the University of the Witwatersrand and has collaborated, from the 1980s to the present day, on many South African and international projects and exhibitions. Bell's creative practice exhibits a wide range of media, including oil, water colour, acrylic, pastel, charcoal, drypoint, enamel, gouache and collage, and bronze and ceramic sculpting.

4.1.2 The Transpersonal in the Art-making of Deborah Bell

The term transcendent is frequently used to describe Bell as an artist. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines transcendent as "excelling" and "surpassing", "transcending human experience", "existing apart from, not subject to the limitations of the material universe" (Allen 1990:1296). Author Pippa Stein (2004) describes Bell's art-making as "created in dialogue with multiple worlds, texts, histories and consciousnesses"(5). I have been particularly interested in the titles of Bell's solo exhibitions: *Displacements* (1998), *The Journey Home* (2000), *Unearthed* (2002),

Sentinels (2004), *Alchemy* (2010), *Presence* (2011), *A Far Country* (2012), *What Would Wisdom Say to Your Dark Heart?* (2013), *Dreams of Immortality* (2015) and *Renunciation* (2015) (Bell 2015:70). I perceive Bell's titling of exhibitions as symbolic of deep questioning and spiritual consciousness; a need to transfer what is felt, imagined and experienced onto canvas, paper or in bronze, and shared with the broader public.

Max Beckmann, Weimar artist and Gnostic is described by Stein as an author who profoundly impacts Bell's thinking. His collection of essays, *On My Painting* (1988) is a source of inspiration for Bell (Stein 2004:7).

I assume though, that there are two worlds: the world of spiritual life and the world of political reality . . . I am seeking for the bridge which leads from the visible to the invisible. [. . .] If you wish to get hold of the invisible you must penetrate as deeply as possible into the visible (Beckmann 1988:12)

I see a correlation between the words of Beckmann and Jung. Jung refers to transformation of self as the "conscious that can know the unconscious only so far as it has become conscious" (1964:410). Beckmann's quote highlights the transpersonal transformation of self. In development of self individuals have a choice to remain conscious in the visible world, or strive to penetrate the visible by moving beyond what is known.

Bell's Gnostic beliefs, her alignment to the teachings of Ramtha's School of Enlightenment (USA), and her interest in the writings of Beckmann, all contribute to a creative practice that penetrates the visible, material world with such depth that Bell refers to it as her "journey home" (Stein 2004:7) – the finding of self. She describes this process as an inward shift; a process of exfoliating extraneous layers to "expose the inner self". Bell refers to this inner sanctum as a place that contains and holds life's mysteries (7).

Gnostic beliefs create a yearning to "return to the 'unknown god' who dwells beyond" (Stein 2004:8). This involves moving away from or out of an earthbound sense of self. Self for Bell is an identity beyond what is ordinarily observed, expansive and spiritual by nature. Curator of the Goodman Gallery, Linda Givon, describes Bell's art-making as invoking a "mystical godliness" (8) that reflects a depth in her soul derived from accessing worlds beyond perceived reality. It is Beckmann's "bridge" that Bell uses to access the "transcendent divine" (Grof 2008:49) to expose a dimension that exists beyond everyday consciousness. This bridge can act as a catalyst for those observing Bell's art-making. I feel that if I cross the bridge, as observer, I can glimpse or enter the dimension that Bell

manifests. It takes the observer from an ordinary state of consciousness and enables a holotropic state (Grof 2008:49). I discuss this further when describing my own personal experience of Bell's painting *Traverse*.

The end of the South African apartheid era is described as a watershed time in Bell's artistic career. The release of Nelson Mandela brought about an element of hope and excitement, a prospect of change. With this consciousness in mind Bell says, "My work became spiritual" (Smith 2009:3). Bell's art-making in the 1980s symbolised a self that in turn reflected the political climate of the country. Apartheid exposed feelings of separation and fear: a stagnation of self (Stein 2004:15).

Bell's oil painting *Lovers in a Cinema* (1985), Plate 1, symbolises this state of entrapment. The male and female embrace suggests exploration of "women's consciousness" through Bell's own consciousness and awareness of self (Stein 2004:14). The male figure dominates the female. The positioning of the female's body is laboured, tense and awkward. Bell refers to the late 1980s in South Africa as a time of feeling intense "claustrophobia" within herself. This period represented the erosion of apartheid, a time of "violence, despair and fear" (15), a hostile environment where Bell's discomfort is portrayed through her visual practice of painting.

Placing the female in this awkward pose represents for me a consciousness acknowledging both personal and collective shadow. It is a statement recognising the plight of women in South Africa and symbolic of Bell's grappling with self. Indicative of emotional identification with herself, the body language, the bright hues of yellow, the heaviness of the architecture hanging overhead reveal a deep sense of unease. Satire and political comment are rarely her intention even in her early art. Her creative practice is a desire for art to carry a deeper meaning (Bell:2015:29).

Of her subject matter, Bell states, "I am the subject" (29). In consequence, it is understandable how Bell's journey of transition and transformation is as much for herself as for those who choose to witness it.



Plate 1. Deborah Bell, *Lovers in the Cinema* (1985), oil on canvas, 101 x 165 cm

Source: Stein (2004:13).

World on Fire (1990), plate 2, forms part of Bell's *Desert Expulsion series* (1989 -1991). There is a shift of self in this series. The female's upright stance; her stable and peaceful bearing, her outward gaze, direct and engaging, all suggest a newfound self-confidence. Her presence suggests a statement of "Here I Am" (Bell 2015:18). The female's nakedness and barefoot connection to earth are symbolic of this new self. I am unsure who the observer is in this artwork. Am I making eye contact with this person or is she watching me? There is a mutual acceptance of observing self: an outward self and an inner self, and inherently this emerges from the ease of her nakedness.

Bell's shift of awareness is depicted in the new relationship with the male figure. The male is portrayed in shadow with back and face averted, still connected, yet no longer dominant. I explore Bell's figurative use of light and dark in this composition. The use of colour and her brush stroke are highly emotive. The background landscape is reminiscent of a barren desert or deserted war zone that is predominantly red, blue and grey. The use of light emphasises the female form and the river course in the landscape. The clear sky surrounding the heads symbolises for me a new light emanating from her sense of self, symbolic of a clearer mindset with a peaceful headspace. Use of white and light in the river suggests a path that can be seen and followed, engendering hope.

The vivid red of the landscape fire suggests that what was once close and fearful is no longer an imminent threat. The redness of the fire presents the viewer with an understanding of what transpired to get to this position of ease. The red could be symbolic of past wounding, hurts, anger or emotion (Brennan 1988: 238). The fire flares up and rages on in the quiet of the painting, it does not affect the sense of internal ease and quiet of the two figures. The shadow self, the male, appears to be aware of the female figure. They are in close proximity, at ease yet alert. The female figure, represented as the lighter form of the two figures, depicted in a painterly brushstroke with light and shadow, represents for me Bell's acceptance of self. Transition has occurred with an appearance of light. A sense of self has been ignited with light.



Plate 2. Deborah Bell, *A World on Fire* (1990), oil on canvas, 161 x 121 cm.

Source: Stein (2004: 17).

Bell describes the female form in her *Desert Expulsion Series* (1989–1991) as, “she was I and not I” (Stein 2004:18). I feel there are many facets to Bell’s use of the subject I. Bell alludes to her past, present and future understanding of self. This statement acknowledges who she thought she was, and it intimates a state of transition. It could also reference her female consciousness and the greater consciousness of women. “She was I and not I” references Bell’s statement “I am the subject” (Bell 2015:29). In a direct translation Bell is the subject and yet she is not the subject. Indirectly, it makes reference to the greater I in “Tat tvam asi” or “Thou art That” (Friedman & Hartelius 2013:93) as recognising the divine spark or Godhead as part of self. There may be no conclusive understanding of the I in this statement. However, it highlights how Bell’s art-making has gained a spiritual quality and alludes to Bell crossing a bridge to penetrate the invisible world.

In conversation with artist and colleague Ricky Burnett, Bell discusses her exploration of the art-making process as a transformative action (Burnett 2012:1), a subtle process containing power to shift thinking and feeling. Bell references this as personal alchemy; art-making becomes a spiritual practice, a transmutation where Bell is the base metal. In an alchemical sense, Bell allows the change to happen through her, a conduit for the alchemy to occur. Experiencing consciousness, Bell taps into this reservoir of knowledge. Ideas, images and concepts flow through her as if precognitive.

Bell describes this as dialogue opening with another world. On the first brush stroke Bell is uncertain where her art-making will lead and an other-worldly conversation occurs between Bell, the canvas, paint and brush. One mark suggests the next. Bell says creative process for her is a way to delve into another realm. Here Bell says, “I do know things (but I don’t know that I know them), and bringing them into this reality” creates the alchemical process of allowing the unfolding of possibility in the moment. (Smith 2009:3). Elkins (1999:199) refers to the alchemical unfolding and allowing when he states, “science has closed off almost every unsystematic encounter with the world. Alchemy and painting are two of the last remaining paths into the deliriously beautiful world of unnamed substances”.

I attended the opening of Bell’s exhibition *Dreams of Immortality* at the Everard Read Gallery in Johannesburg on 7 May 2015. Bell’s exhibition displayed a body of work including bronze sculptures and mixed media paintings. Of all the art work on display, it was Bell’s painting *Traverse* (2013/14), Plate 3, that captured my senses and imagination. I

stood in front of *Traverse* and relaxed in the magnetism and mystery of the composition. In hindsight, I recognise how I witnessed alchemy as observer. It was an understanding of how “I do know things (but I don’t know that I know them)” (Smith 2009:3) and how a moment of pure possibility occurred.

The title *Traverse* suggests a journey: the indigo-black mountain range set against a dark monochrome grey palette; the gold luminescent square on the horizon; the scumbled golden light on the right-hand side; the lime-green dripped reflection on the river; deep scratches intersecting a mythical hound silhouette; a dugout and figure float down a river. The images converge on the senses to create mystical timelessness. A trip, a pilgrimage, a sojourn, a journey is taking one hound creature one figure, and the observer down the course of a river. Many questions arise from viewing this composition. Is the scumbled wall of golden light an apparition? Is it a ray of light? Is it a destination? Is the mythical creature a hound or horse? Bell’s mark-making contributes to the profusion of questions. This highlights for me the way in which Bell poses questions in her art-making, which she does not try to answer. As observer, I feel those questions arise within me and I ask why this painting has such a profound effect on me. I query what has been stirred up in my consciousness, yet in the noise and activity of the opening night the questions remain unanswered.

Three days later I am back home in KwaZulu-Natal. I take the dogs for an evening walk, setting out later than normal. Dusk is falling and I am deep in thought, preoccupied with thoughts of Bell’s exhibition, my response to her mark-making and the effect the exhibition had on me. Darkness falls and I turn homeward. There is a momentary hesitation; I stop walking and stand still. On an out-breath I feel a letting go and a sense of familiarity enfolds me. I am in a state of deep observation, a liminal space. The Drakensberg mountain range stretches out in front of me in deep indigo. The viridian green of the surrounding pastures blend into the indigo blackness of landscape and mountain skyline.

My black labrador cross pointer pauses, then turns and focuses on a distance distraction. This is what I know, yet I don't know that I know it. The realisation of awareness is swift and comes in a flow. I am part of and present in Bell's painting *Traverse*. There is no separation. It is an alchemical moment of absolute awareness of being part of a greater whole. It is an acknowledgement of being part of the universe. This moment does not belong to Bell, or what Bell created. Bell's art has initiated an experience of timelessness, transcendence and an archaic sense of belonging. I feel it and I have stepped into it.

Reflecting on this moment, I recognise that the act of walking a dusty farm road parallels the journey the solitary figure is taking down the river. The consciousness of the lone figure converges with my own sense of journeying. I feel the unity. There are no answers to rising questions; there is instead an understanding of a phenomenon (initiated by Bell as artist) that resonates with my own life experience. There is a sense for me that the shadowed figure and dog have traversed the dark night of the soul (Tyler 2010:2) and are in the process of emerging from it. The light, and what is unfolding ahead, makes their focus steadfast and determined. I feel this. I am also walking. My focus is on finding light in the darkness. I am still on the path, sometimes in deep shadow and sometimes in light. I am aware of continually raising my consciousness while fully surrounded by the mystery of life and living. Reflection allows me the realisation that I knew this at the Gallery opening night, yet I did not know that I knew it at the time. Awareness filtered through later. This shift lifted me from deep shadow to a feeling of well-being. A transformation occurred within me, being open to the possibilities Bell created as artist.

Elkins observes that in painting there exists an "impossibly thin membrane between the mundane and transcendental" (1999:187). He completes this by saying, "that is what perfect painting is" (187). Perfection hovers in this delicate space of membrane and is made manifest with the artist's ability to differentiate between "substance and illusion" (188). I question where Bell's rendition of *Traverse* is situated: Can it be categorised in the realm of substance or illusion? I acknowledge that each observer will come away from viewing *Traverse* with a different opinion. *Traverse* may be viewed as a night landscape, a river journey or it may be viewed as a dream of immortality. Responses are neither correct nor wrong, merely determined by recognition of Elkins' theory on substance or illusion through individual consciousness. As Jung stated, the conscious can know the unconscious only so far as it has become conscious (Jung 1964:410).



Plate 3. Deborah Bell, *Traverse*, (2014), oil on canvas, 267 x 153 cm

Source: Photograph taken by Paula Hulley at Everard Read Gallery, 2015.

In light of Elkins' and Jung's statements, the observer meets the artist in an artwork on a level of consciousness that is appropriate for them, and allowed by the artist in the art-making. The artist is the conduit or bridge for the observer to encounter something beyond that which is experienced by the artist in the making of the art. In this way, Bell, as alchemist, witnessing her own personal transformation, also sets a platform for the alchemical process to be experienced by the viewer.

I respond to the alchemical platform set by Bell in *Traverse*. It lingers in my own desire and need to experience the divide between the mundane and transcendental (Elkins 1999:187). I, too, acknowledge "that there are two worlds: the world of spiritual life and the world of political reality" (Beckmann 1988:12). I also acknowledge that if I wish to access the invisible I must "penetrate as deeply as possible into the visible" (12). The enormity of this acknowledgement rests in my response to *Traverse*. If I remove the ego in my response to *Traverse*, it is an acknowledgement that my response embraces a feeling of being one with the universe. It is what Grof refers to as transcendent divine (2008:49). My experience of being part of a greater whole through the imaging of Bell in *Traverse* is in hindsight the manifestation of this personal desire. I feel that it was an experience within another reality, separate to everyday consciousness. I can walk that dirt road again, at night, with my dogs, and I may or may not encounter the same expansive consciousness. As Grof explains, transcendent divine accesses parallel dimensions to what is ordinarily perceived and this fuels my need to cross the bridge and to move through that impossibly thin membrane (49).

In Bell's *Dreams of Immortality* catalogue, Burnett asks Bell her thoughts on "processes of transformation – transformation of matter, of self and the intimate correlation of these two drives". This particular conversation ends with Burnett's query to Bell, "Can transcendence be pictured?" (Bell 2015:14).

In answer, Bell references Elkins' premise that "one goal of the alchemical process is balanced stillness" (Bell 2015:14). Bell, in her creative practice, and Elkins, in his theoretical praxis, embrace the notion that the transformative act of painting can be likened to alchemy in art-making. Alchemy for Bell is translated into the search for stillness in art and in life (14). Balanced stillness in the history of an art work is creating layer upon layer

as mark-marking constitutes the history of the composition. It is the pivotal point, to represent the infinite, where Bell's imaging conveys "something complete, beyond time, to touch on eternity and immortality" (14). The "terrible beauty" of an object serves as the mediation between material and spiritual worlds. There is a liminal space, where Bell, in communion with God, situates herself within this delicate membrane (14).

4.1.3 Organic Inquiry in the Creative Practice of Deborah Bell

I recognise how Bell's view of transcendence captures the "liminal realm beyond the ego" (Anderson & Braud 2011:132). If Bell's theory of transcendence begins within the imagination, it works in tandem with the first step of organic inquiry as preparation. Anderson refers to preparation as working through intuition to observe a space that is mindfully cleared for insights to filter in (132). Mindfulness and working beyond will and power bring to the creative practice a surrender to the moment, igniting imagination and mindfulness. Bell elaborates on the process of being mindful and present:

I work at it every single day. I work on emptying my mind, being absolutely present. I work on seeing and using words and voice and holding them in a conjunction of presence (Burnett 2012:2)

The state of mind in which Bell is "doing" artwork references Grof's "holotropic breathwork" (Friedman & Hartelius 2013:144), which initiates liminal and spiritual experience. Being present and emptying the mind requires being in a state of balanced stillness. It is a level of consciousness that can be reached, through conscious breath work, to allow intuition, sensation and inspiration to filter in. In preparation of an art work, Bell, I believe, sets a goal to achieve stillness through state of mind, breath work and presence. This is reflected or transferred into the "doing" and process of the art-making and is recognised by Bell in the completion of the composition as stillness.

Inspiration is viewed as the second step in organic inquiry and is defined as a springboard of "pure possibility" (Anderson & Braud 2011:145). Bell's move from preparation to inspiration is the manner in which Bell situates inspiration as a "summoning from the unknown" (Bell 2015:14). The art-making reveals through "time and material" (14) something that has always existed. This process requires working in a liminal experience. Bell refers to her earlier art-making as control of subject matter, composition and outcome.

In *Traverse*, Bell acknowledges that when she put aside her personality, as in the I (ego), interesting phenomena arose. Bell intimates how mindfulness in her creative art-making requires practice (Burnett 2012:2).

This element of allowing the unexpected to arise can be fought against or welcomed. It is a process of trust that presents itself as a dialogue between herself, the canvas, the material and the unknown. Inherent trust leads Bell to the next step of integration (Bell 2015:14).

Organic inquiry clarifies the last step in the process as one of integration. On completing a composition, Bell states that she may or may not know when the painting is complete or what its significance is for her as this knowledge may only become apparent later.

Integration makes reference to returning to the personality, to the I and the ego. It is about observing what has taken place and allowing the meaning to unfold organically.

The integration period is an individualised one. Even though it is the final step of organic inquiry, it may be the initial step towards greater awareness of self or transformation of self. Integration also encompasses the response of the observer and the wider public, and, if I use Bell's painting *Traverse* as an example of integration in my own experience, the full significance of this work only manifested several days later.

In this chapter I have asked the question, "How has Bell influenced my own creative practice?" Bell's art-making resonates on an extremely deep level of consciousness for me and I see how my own studio practice has evolved since I initiated the research for this dissertation. Bell's ability to cross the bridge from the visible to the invisible, the time and toil present in depicting transcendence, the multi-layering in her striving for a balanced stillness, are all direct influences on my thinking and challenge my present creative practice. It has made me aware of possibility: Elkins' (1999:187) impossibly thin membrane between the mundane and the transcendental references a creative state open to change and process. This place of absolute presence, where Bell describes being in touch with an invisible force, the God within her, creates a platform of pure possibility for me as an artist. I witness the challenge within myself to persevere in finding the bridge between the material world and greater consciousness of the mind. I am aware of a new mindfulness in the process of creating art, and I allow what I know, but do not know that I know, to come forward. When Bell refers to the "terrible beauty" between the worlds of the visible and invisible, I have a desire to experience this myself through my painting (Bell 2015:14).

Transformation of self through the tool of visual art, witnessed through Bell's art-making, propels me forward and I take my first step of preparation.

4.2 Chapter Conclusion

In Chapter Four I document the quest that Bell undertakes to journey home to self through her creative practice, painting. Bell's art works, *Lovers in the Cinema*, *World on Fire* and *Traverse* illustrate Bell's spiritual evolution which contributes to my own understanding of self and shadow. Having also considered ways in which Bell's practice and my own intersect I now turn to Chapter Five to consider select works and ideas on catharsis by artist Colin Richards.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 In Search of Catharsis: Referencing Memory in the Art-making of Colin Richards

5.1.1 Chapter Introduction

I examine the concept of catharsis in relation to South African artist, the late Colin Richards' installation and reflections on *Veil Series* (1996). Richards' memory of a particular event remained dormant for twenty years prior to his retrieving it and incorporating it in a series of eight artworks. The process of Richards' memory retrieval; the act of using memory as a powerful, iconic image in art-making; the exhibition of the installation at the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town; and the subsequent international tour of the art show, all contribute to finding catharsis through the visual arts on a personal scale and in the wider community of South Africa and abroad.

Prior to his death in 2012, Colin Richards (1954–2012) is described by Andrew Lamprecht (2003) as an individual of many talents: artist, writer, curator, medical illustrator and art therapist. Lamprecht notes Richards' "deep interest in the power of images" (Lamprecht 2003:2). I, in turn, interpret Richards' use of the image, as a memory agent, to find catharsis from the release of repressed emotion.

5.1.2 Preparation: Referencing Memory

For the purpose of this dissertation, I draw upon a specific time in Richards' artistic career as medical illustrator and artist. Catharsis, described by transpersonal psychologist Michael Daniels (2005), as the release of powerful emotions (282), becomes the focus of my discussion in this chapter. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Allen 1990) refers to catharsis as a process of freeing emotions through art or drama, the freeing of "repressed emotion by association with the cause". Catharsis is also acknowledged as an act of cleansing (Allen 1990:177). In this regard, I use Richards' art-making to review the process of catharsis from his perspective as an artist skeptical of claims that art is healing and redemptive (Richards 1999:19). I believe that catharsis is the act of retrieval of memory, which may or may not contribute to healing, but could diminish the emotional pressure of the memory.

In 1977, Richards, employed by the Department of Medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand as a medical illustrator, was requested to identify and label post-mortem photographs of unknown origin by the resident forensic pathologist (Lamprecht 2003:2) Of this task, Richards observed that he noticed the images were different to previous work that required labelling; “I had to indicate and code swellings, contusions, abrasions and cuts which were not always clearly visible” (Richards 1999:9). Of memory, Richards states, “personal memory is deeply unstable” (3) and what “memory throws up often suffers not only the insults of passing time but the disfiguring pressures of present needs” (3).

5.1.3 Inspiration

Richards writes that he was unaware in 1977 that the images belonged to the deceased body of South African activist and detainee, Stephen Biko. Twenty years later, this “memory”, a disfigurement in his own memory, and a reflection of disfigurement in the greater memory of the South African community (revealed in the unveiling of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)) led Richards to participate in the exhibition *Faultlines: Enquiries into Truth and Reconciliation*. Richards describes his participation as a response to the TRC, which “begged a cultural response” (Richards 1999:1) to initiate balance of traumatic experiences and memories, stable and “unstable memory”, highlighted during the TRC proceedings to expose the narrative of a South African apartheid era (1).

5.1.4 Integration: Richards and Catharsis

In *Faultlines* and the subsequent exhibition *Memórias intimas marcas*, Richards observes:

these two exhibitions thus made it possible to materialise, explore and reflect publically what I had consigned to imperfect forgetting [. . .] however difficult, such a project feels important, an importance which hopefully extends beyond the merely personal (1)

Richards’ dialogue references “imperfect forgetting” and going beyond the “merely personal”. It takes on a transcendent function to achieve a catharsis on a national and subsequent global level as the exhibitions toured internationally after the initial exhibition at Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town in 1996. Richards speaks to catharsis saying the exhibitions opened up an opportunity to “recover this ground [. . .] I mean “recover” to be ambivalent here” (Richards 1999:10) referencing something once lost, forgotten, and then

“packing it away again – recovering it” (10). Richards’ statement has a powerful effect on me. I also focus on delving into my past, opening up old packages of emotion long buried and “consigned to imperfect forgetting”. I question whether a memory can be forgotten? Richards’ emotive words “imperfect forgetting” answer this for me. I, too, feel the power of memory. Shadow lies in memory and shadow is implicit in the act of forgetting. This conversation metaphorically images memory as an exhumation, precipitating an unveiling of the forgotten.

The *Veil Series* is metaphorical in title, content and form – an unveiling of truth. The series, an installation of eight laser printed images on folded white cloth, comprises archival photographic evidence of the cell where Biko was detained (and where he died), his injured body, two sleeping dogs and the Veronica (Richards 1999:11). The image – the Veronica also referred to as a “*sudarium*” (6), is described by Richards as, “thus allegedly a *true* image bearing the direct imprint of Christ’s face without the mediation of the human hand” (6); the original cloth used by St Veronica to wipe the sweat and blood from the face of Christ (6).

Richards comments on the Veronica as a highly contested narrative of truth (7), a powerful image symbolic of truths and untruths surrounding Biko’s death, alluding to the significance of this event in Richards’ personal shadow, and shadow in the wider community of apartheid South Africa – an unveiling of truth and untruths (6).

Considering Richards’ *Veil Series* as an example of the personal and collective shadow, I document Richards’ installation to examine catharsis. Catharsis is encountered in the art-making. There is Richards’ own truth he recovers as medical illustrator and memory in documenting Biko’s deceased body, and the truth pertaining to political and moral implications. There is a complexity of truths amongst artist, the witnesses to Biko’s death, Biko’s family and contemporaries, South African citizens and an unfolding truth as lived experience, past and present. Of the energy inherent in this truth, Richards stated that through this art work he was “exercised by the treacherous linking of art with truth and art with redemption” (16).

in South Africa some idea of “art as healing” is widely held. While I am deeply skeptical [sic] of [...] such claims, I am less so of the actual power of the visual image (Richards 1999:19)



Plate 4. Colin Richards, *Veil Series Detail* (1996), mixed media

Source: <https://www.wits.ac.za/health/adlermuseum/exhibitions/colin-richards-born-1954/>



Plate 5. Colin Richards, *Veil Series* (1996), mixed media

Source: <http://theconversation.com/under-the-influence-of-paul-stopforths-biko-painting-called-elegy-64031>

Richards' use of the term "deeply skeptical" implies mistrust and doubt in the power of art as healing, attributing power to the "visual image" to achieve catharsis, not the making of the art work. The image conduits release of powerful emotion. My opinion differs from Richards' statement. There exists a grey, fine line between what is perceived as cathartic and healing, a personal response to the release of powerful emotion in the process and/or the purging of repressed memory and feeling. I agree that too often the statement "art is healing" is glibly uttered when the artist is intent on processing "lived experience".

Richards' statement that the visual image contains the power to "heal" purposefully ignores where the image was sourced. The image, I believe, is forged with the process of the art-making, whereby the image chosen and the artist's consciousness are in relationship.

In the *Veil Series* the white veil is the metaphor. Placed on a black background the veil creates a dramatic impact of line and colour. I question the dominance of the line: does it delineate the positive space occupied by the veil or does it enhance the negative space of darkness and shadow? It appears, to me, to create an ambiguous shadow space. The use of white, symbolic of "truth", black, symbolic of the "absence of light, profound forgetting and thwarted ambition" (Brennan 1988:238) creates a sense of uneasiness where Richards' contrast of colour and iconography contest space between forgetting and allowing memory to come forward. A space for truth emergence is created in the remembering. Richards' own "unstable memory" channels and brings to the surface his personal shadow and the shadow of a nation.

The sequence of events from Biko's existence as a political activist, Biko's death as a detainee, Richards' illustrations of Biko's body, the exposure of truth (TRC) in all its complexity, emerges as transcendent functions through Richards' art-making. The inscription on Richards' folded white veil reads: "the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" (Marx in Richards 1999:17). What surfaces, too, is my personal discomfort as an observer of the *Veil Series*. I am of European descent, born in 1965 into the apartheid era of South Africa. My discomfort lies in asking myself: Who am I? Who have I become? What have I done to serve others in need? My vision is hampered by my own self-absorption. I am plagued with the atrocity of apathy, the blame I attribute to "others" (Jung 1964:296). I endeavour to keep moving forward, to keep asking questions of self.

Transcendent function allows the beholder, the artist and witness to enter into consciousness and recognition of truth. I question the rawness of the words in this inscription. Would the act of choosing these words not have had a cathartic effect on the artist? To acknowledge the impact of the “visual image” of this inscription, would Richards himself have felt the weight of these words? I can only ask the question. I cannot answer it. For me, Richards’ words invoke powerful emotions. I view these words as impactful: an act of healing to liberate repressed emotion on personal and collective levels.

In creating the *Veil* series, Richards tore up a “domestic bedsheet from our household, material with its own wrinkled and stained history of intimacy” (Richards 1999:11). Personal history of the bedsheet places the imagery into the realm of transcendent function. It is about experiencing, through creative practice, the incredibly thin membrane between the mundane and the transcendental (Elkins 1999:187). The installation generates a balance, both delicate and brutal, between conscious and unconscious responses from the observer. The bedsheet, with Richards’ own personal history, the sheet as reference to the Veronica as a religious icon, the inclusion of an inscription to activate memory loss and recovery, begs other questions about whether art “soothes or awakens, casts shadows or brings light” (Fisher 1963:14).

According to Ernst Fisher in his book *The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach* (1963), it is the purpose of art “to move the *whole* man, to enable ‘I’ to identify itself with another’s life, to make its own what it is not and yet is capable of being” (14). Fisher refers to the power within art. Richards ascribes a role to art that is pertinent to the individual artist, which questions whether catharsis, personal or collective, is sought. It is about the “somatic working through” in a liminal state without egoic aspirations. Richards illuminates how, as an artist, art can be an inner compulsion, and if allowed to emerge, becomes a conduit to show him/her a pathway to exposing feelings and memories.

It is perhaps better to ascribe to art [. . .] the role of critical interrogation, affective, cognitive, somatic working through. In this way art might beg questions we might want to overlook, even while it cannot excuse itself from such questioning (Richards 1999:19)

The visual arts become one approach for achieving catharsis: “the process of freeing repressed emotion by association with the cause” (Allen 1990:177). Viewing Richards’ “cause” to release suppressed emotion, he refers to going beyond the “merely personal” (Richards 1999:1). Is it possible for Richards to have created *The Veil Series* without a

personal level of catharsis? I believe that Richards' choice of image, the visitation of an old memory, had the potential to liberate strong, repressed emotion, to bear witness to Richards' breaking through his own dense shadow held in stored memory.

5.2 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered catharsis as a metaphorical resting place, where memory, which cannot be erased, rests after being recovered and then packed away again. Reference Richards' *Veil Series* to speak to catharsis as the uncovering and recovery of memory, I suggest original memory. I am inspired by Richards' honesty and courage in exploring a dormant and difficult memory. I use Richards' courage to instigate my own process of recovery of memory, asking myself questions that for three decades I have imperfectly forgotten.

Having referenced some key ideas on catharsis and considered these in relation to select work by Richards I will now turn to Chapter Six where I discuss and reflect on self, shadow and the search for catharsis in my own creative practice.

CHAPTER SIX

6.1 Self, Shadow and the Search for Catharsis in the Creative Practice of Paula Hulley

6.1.1 Chapter Introduction

In finding my narrative through the visual arts I become the subject documenting an evolution of self. The methodology, a transpersonal approach, encompasses organic inquiry approach, self-reflexive writing and a personal narration as the praxis of this chapter. In assuming the stance of experiencer, observer, author, artist and researcher, it enables a critical awareness of myself, with close personal insight or distanced observations as appropriate. As the subject, I immerse myself into organic inquiry research to investigate the three-step process of preparation, inspiration and integration to contemplate who I am at this point in my life. My painting is the vehicle to traverse the territory of shadow and fear, and to reflect on why I am afraid to tell you who I am.

In this dissertation, my catharsis is my own personal inquiry and focus. Within the search for self and shadow I interrogate whether catharsis can be assisted through the medium of the visual arts and in doing so I question whether catharsis can be measured and observed as an outcome for myself?

In self-reflexive writing, Anderson and Braud note that the “psyche of the researcher becomes the subjective instrument of the research” working in partnership with liminal and spiritual influences (2011:131). Collaboratively, the steps taken – preparation, inspiration and integration – guide “both the data collection and the analysis” (131) and I take into consideration how these steps have informed my own practice.

As noted, the process of engaging self and shadow is entrenched in Michel Foucault’s observation, which I embrace as my own: “I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing, because my problem is my own transformation. [. . .] Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting?” (1997:131).

6.1.2 Preparation

Preparation begins as a need to tell my story. Athol Fugard's statement, "I know I had an appointment with that story in some way or the other" (Meersman 2010) informs my story of self. I know, in a similar way that I have an "appointment" to honour the confrontation of the shadow, the fear and failure in the "who" I think I have become. Without integrity in facing my shadow, a veneer of transformation arises, resulting in a dishonest, futile appointment with self.

In preparation, there are four tasks to be implemented: to acknowledge the intention and question/s asked; to distance oneself from ego; to become a willing participant within the research; to be open to liminal experience (Anderson & Braud 2011:142). The tasks become a guideline to beginning and understanding the individual's unique journey. My own intentions are specific and I, through this process of writing and art-making, intend to focus on the following questions: who am I, who have I become and where am I going?

Within my intentions, contradictions arise. A tussle ensues within my ego, my field of enquiry and a transpersonal focus on healing and transformation of self. It is important for my work to find a balance between the research required for this dissertation and the narrative of repressed demons. My own lived experience, my reading of Jung (1969) and transpersonal theory, all suggest that research can, at its epicentre, have an emphasis on "transformation as well as information" (Anderson & Braud 2011:132). This type of research cannot suit everyone; it is for the candidate who is open to the "liminal" experience with an interest in the "psycho-spiritual" nature of research (135).

As noted in my introductory chapter I consider the following questions in my ongoing research:

1. Will the subject matter I choose provide the platform to find my voice?
2. What choice of subject matter will expose sufficiently the depth and breadth of my personal investigation of shadow and self?
3. Is my choice of subject matter an appropriate and relevant catalyst to interrogate the catharsis I seek?
4. Will my art-making adequately reflect the objective to descend into self?
5. How will my choice of medium, and the quality of the mediums, contribute to the internal spiritual quest for self-discovery?

In choosing the jar as subject matter to narrate my story, truth is foremost in my mind: authenticity to myself and my transpersonal quest. The “primary use of the feeling function, as a way to spiritual or liminal experiences, is through stories” (Anderson & Braud 2011:143). Anderson and Braud explain how the story is both the methodology and outcome.

The jar is fashioned out of glass. A craftsmanship of facets: octagonal, pyramidal, smooth, cool, jagged. Touch, in holding the jar, evokes a plethora of emotion symbolising the energy of my grandmother: a woman of substance, someone I yearn to converse with and know today. The tight-fitting, silver, embossed lid is a two-dimensional, soft contrast to the lineal structure of the container. Centred on the surface of the lid are my grandmother’s initials: EB.

Ella Bertelsen was born in Cape Town in 1887. At the age of 14, Ella, and sister Nina, remained in Cape Town while their parents and four brothers sought a new existence in Northern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). On receiving news that the entire family had been murdered, Ella and Nina were looked after by family friends until they were eligible for marriage and suitable husbands were found. Ella’s pioneering spirit and her inner strength is the legacy I feel when I sit with her memory. In contemplation (thinking) or in memory (intuition) the jar serves as a way of perceiving and absorbing (Anderson and Braud 2011:145) information of my lineage that is no longer present, but establishes an element of self.

In *Shadow Series I, II, III* (2014), Plates 6 (i, ii, iii), I focus on reflection of light through the facets of the crystal jar and cast shadows. Photographing it in light – full sun, cloud cover, full moon – I observe shadows taking on form and identity. The shadow in full midday sun differs to soft grey orbs of shadow cast by the moon. Shadow of the jar, as in shadow of self, is constantly mutating, and at the whim of the environment – sun, clouds, night. Memories, responsibilities, relationships serve as catalysts to allow my shadow to remain in hiding or to emerge and be recognised. The jar symbolises how I see myself if the lid is removed. I physically expose the internal space. In doing so I am open to interrogating the question “Who am I now at midlife?” Each time I view the jar I interpret it in a new light, the faceted appearance, constantly changing, is a true replica of how I am as an individual.



Plate 6 (i), Paula Hulley, *Shadow Series I* (2014), oil on canvas, 60 x 90 cm

Plate 6 (ii), Paula Hulley, *Shadow Series II* (2014), oil on canvas, 60 x 90 cm



Plate 6 (iii), Paula Hulley, *Shadow Series III* (2014), oil on canvas, 60 x 90 cm

Painting the jar series, I concentrate on the tonal range of Prussian Blue, Paynes Grey, accents of Yellow Ochre, Cadmium Yellow and Titanium White. Barbara Ann Brennan's guidelines in *Hands of Light* (1988) refer to the meaning of colour in direct healing and on a soul level. Brennan describes how in contemplation colours rise up from the subconscious mind to the conscious mind. At soul level, colour imparts meaning to issues meditated on (238). The *Shadow Series* reveals intuitive choice of colour and I use Brennan's colour analysis to interpret chosen options. The presence of blue, suggests "sensitivity" and a "teacher" component (Brennan 1988:238). Of the teacher element I ask whether I will learn something from my art-making or if I am the teacher in this painting? According to Brennan, the colour white suggests "truth" (238). Plate 6 (i) is an abstracted composition of blue-hued fragments, geometrical shapes, small containers within the larger container, with daubs of white to accent light reflection off the facets. Parallels of intention and information received are relevant to me: I seek a pathway to self, in seeking self, I seek my truth, and in doing so I need to uncover and release shadows that have become dense and of which I am fearful (Jung 1938:131). I am allowing light to shine through the facets. However, predominance of Titanium White creates an opaqueness to suggest the transparency of self I seek is not present.

While painting the *Shadow Series*, feelings of stagnation and dissatisfaction emerged and I felt unsure how to proceed. In ego and the intellect (Cadmium Yellow and Yellow Ochre Hues), I was unable to move beyond the frustration I was experiencing. It took an outside source, in the form of open dialogue, to realise I had veered from my intention to descend into self.

A midyear staff/student critique forced a response to being stuck, allowing me to recognise how subject matter has a lifespan. My expired ideas and passion required personal courage to change direction, to rethink how I was portraying this journey to self. A shift occurred within, prompting me to interrogate another level of self. My dissatisfaction verbalised a longing to find subject matter symbolising the desire to descend further into self: to meet with self. The jar had evolved into a metaphor of imprisonment; I was confined by line, colour and fragmentation.

J.M. Coetzee (1992) writes, “The only sure truth in autobiography is that one’s self-interest will be located at one’s blindspot” (392). My blindness created a tunnel vision perspective. The contributing factors of self-doubt, fear of failure and acknowledging my weaknesses perpetuated this position. I had chosen to believe I was making headway, moving inward to self through my art-making. The fragmented quality of the jar series, the metaphorical lines of self-imprisonment, choice of colours had served their purpose. I felt cornered. Give up or go on. I felt compelled to address the emptiness within. It heralded an opening of the dense shadow I was evading.

6.1.3 Inspiration: Acknowledging the Second Half of Life

The Bushmen storytellers talk about two kinds of hunger. They say there is physical hunger, then what they call the Great Hunger. That is the hunger for meaning. There is only one thing that is truly insufferable, and that is life without meaning. There is nothing wrong with the search for happiness, but there is something great – meaning – which transfigures all. When you have meaning you are content, you belong (Van Der Post in Lemle 1996)

At fifty-one years of age, married, mother of four children, mature student, artist, I am acutely aware of the need to find meaning in life. The “great hunger” epitomises how I transition from one life cycle to another, standing on the edge of a precipice, unable to fulfill this “great hunger” within, a void I cannot ignore. Jung reinforces this yearning: “Meaning makes a great many things endurable – perhaps everything” (1963:340).

In *The Second Half of Life: Opening the Eight Gates to Wisdom* (2007), Angeles Arrien states that this period is one of initiation: “In it, we encounter new, unexpected, unfamiliar, and unknowable moments that remind us we are a sacred mystery made manifest” (4). In this space of attending to myself I am faced with many choices. I can remain in denial, unable to face the challenges ahead. In fear, I can choose to ignore the unfamiliar, or I can allow this transition to ignite and develop increased stamina, wisdom and perceptions of self.

According to Arrien (2007), the transition into the next phase of life can be eclipsed with fears that lie ahead: retirement; the concept of becoming a grandparent or mentor; fears pertaining to an ageing body and mortality: death of family, friends and the inevitable death of self (2). Dependant on finding my “purpose” in mid-life (Hollis 2005:69), this exerts pressure to become a self-examining, conscious individual who acknowledges “some force transcendent to ordinary consciousness” within to bring about the ego’s exit

(70). If transformation happens externally and not from within, Hollis explains, the change may not be permanent or authentic. Self struggles to emerge from the confines of ego, but if ego can be moved aside, transition makes way for a new perspective of self, and a purpose to life can evolve. This transition is not particularly easy when “two force fields of conscious life” are in battle (71). The ego is content with stability, “comfort, security, satiety” (71), but the soul of the individual, when emerging, demands meaning (71).

Inspiration, the second step of organic inquiry, “steps over the threshold into the liminal realm” and away from “ego’s territory” (Anderson & Braud 2011:145). In this place the researcher needs to constantly remember it is a place of unknowing, “pure potential” and instability (145). I recognise this time as a place of pure discomfort. Content to paint within the comfort zone of ego, safe, familiar, unchallenged, I was stuck, yet I was afraid to release myself from it. My ego balked at the idea of being challenged and transcended.

Inspiration did not occur comfortably or quickly. Over a nine-month period, June 2015 to March 2016, incessant internal conversations and struggles emerged while being imprisoned in over-thinking my situation. Reliving that time, it feels barren and I chastised myself for being a coward. This feeling would present itself as an internal wall I was unable to surmount. I had no initiative to find a way to climb it, move around it or break it down; it felt like a shutdown of self.

The nine-month period was also a time of inspiration during which five valuable insights emerged:

1. Ego control. My ego was being contested and it fought to stay in command. An internal cauldron of emotion could derail me if ego lost the battle.
2. Desert Time. I felt alone and empty, disappointed in myself. Unable to initiate change I sought through art-making, extreme fear of failure prevented me from transition.
3. Unbearable nothingness: A creative plateau of inertia. I kept my mind occupied and embarked on a number of alternative methods to negotiate what was happening to me.
4. Time Out. I took a three-month break over the Christmas period to distance myself from my challenges.
5. Process art.

Of the five components, I choose to describe process art in detail. After sharing my plight with a friend and artist who had a similar block to the creative process, we met in a private studio for five days. We agreed to accept the creative practice without parameters or fixed destination. Our approach allowed two artists, confined in containers of self-doubt and fear, to initiate an inward journey of showing and revealing the inner self.

Days began in meditation and gratitude. It was a quiet week. Chatter was kept to a minimum and we spoke if there was a need to share or receive feedback. The spontaneity of the present moment freed me from self-judgement, self-sabotage and shame. I journalled, painted and I let the colour red invade the canvas. I painted in the function of sensation: repetitive brushwork to stimulate a surfacing of feeling and memories. A predominance of red, then yellow and orange, in abstracted shapes “circulated” the canvas (Elkins 1999:136). Elkins relates to “circulation” as:

esoteric discipline of recycling substances, especially the body’s products, but also whatever is despised and overlooked, including the dusty waste material of the studio. Circulation is a metaphor, as well, for recycling the waste products of the mind, and somehow going on when nothing can be found (136)

In this space I allowed what had been “overlooked” to surface. My thoughts and fears, old “dusty waste”, were given breathing space (Elkins 1999:136). My thoughts, centered on self, symbolic of mind debris and waste matter, circulate, and feed my “dense shadow” (Jung 1938:131). Eventually the storehouse of mind can no longer support the weight and volume of this burden. There is a tipping point where it requires breathing space and letting go (Myss 2007:220) or it becomes toxic and creates an inner sanctum of reptiles (94). If waste products are recycled they require a process of “digestion” to be purified.

Purification occurs by elimination through digestion or tempering by heat of emotion and thought referred to as alchemy (Elkins 1999:136).

In Samuel Beckett’s play *The Unnamable* (1994), his words reinforce this state of being with oneself. It is about sitting with the unnameable, the dense shadow and the summation of fears.

[. . .] you must say the words, as long as there are any . . . I don’t know, I’ll never know, in the silence you don’t know, you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on (418)

Process art allowed me breathing space: commitment to be. I honoured the space of unknowing. The week did not end with new focus and a clear path forward. The week gave me inner strength to say, “I’ll go on.” I realised patience. Letting the process unfold and finding compassion for myself while lost in desert time, was a time of intense inspiration, a gestation, where I was required to wait for light in the night of darkness.

Our first step, then, is to let “night” speak . . . it is worth letting the resonances which night-time has for us to surface (Matthew 1995:52)

My response to the term night is significant. I associate fear with “night”. In physical and metaphorical terms, it is the fearful unknown of the night. The term “Dark Night of the Soul” derives from a Spanish poem *En una Noche oscura* (*In a dark night*) written by Juan de Yepes (St John of the Cross) in 1591. Today it is known as *Noche Oscura* (The Dark Night of the Soul) (Tyler 2010) and in the prologue to *The Dark Night of the Soul*, St John states the following:

The darkneses and trials, spiritual and temporal, that fortunate souls ordinarily undergo on their way to the high state of perfection are so numerous and profound that human science cannot understand them adequately. [. . .] Only those who suffer them will know what this experience is like, but they won’t be able to describe it (87)

Analysing St John’s poetry, Tyler explains how the monk details the dark night as a “specific spiritual state”, a liminal state, which may not have been chosen; something not recognised while enduring it, and potentially misinterpreted as depression and melancholia (Grof 2008; Tyler 2010:88). From my own experience, individuals who experience the dark night of the soul are “fortunate”, because this experience enables personal growth from suffering. It may be the most difficult period an individual can endure; however, it can lead to a new perspective on life and life purpose.

6.1.4 The Dark Night of the Soul: A Transition to Integration

Artist and writer Julia Cameron accords the creative practice – writing, poetry, painting and dance – as opportunities to reappoint the individual with the true self. Cameron’s “moment of encounter” with self contextualised within St John’s “dark night of the soul” precipitates an awareness of self (1995:82)

Lion Self (2015), Plate 7, describes an encounter with myself and what emerges is an emotional response to the dark night of the soul. Clothed in purple, I travel downriver in a

red dugout. A lion statue, lying down behind me, is my travelling companion; it is dying, symbolic of my depleted strength. In the gloaming I feel despair and loneliness. It is informative, preparing me for the death of a cycle, death of an old self. The grey hues of the lion represent the palette of black and white. Brennan describes black in painting as “absence of light, or profound forgetting, thwarted ambition” (1988:238) White portrays “Truth” (238). Grey hues reflect profound forgetting of my essence, my Divine Self, truth of who I am (238). Trapped in a container of darkness and thwarted ambition I have lost sight of who I am. The small figure is barely present, sitting small with head down. I wonder about this lonely figure, a representation of the small self, the I in how I see myself. I view it too as archetypal, the collective conscious of all selves; for all women and men who have traversed the dark night of the soul.

Brennan refers to red in creative practice as “Passion, strong feelings. Clear red: moving anger. Dark Red: Stagnated Anger. Red-Orange: Sexual Passion” (1988:238). Executed in the four functions of thinking, feeling, intuition and sensation I have personally chosen to apply Brennan’s symbolic meaning of colour to illustrate the emotional turmoil I am experiencing. The red vessel is primal, an ancient form of transportation; a painterly expression of clear red, dark red and orange red are symbolic of my exploration of self. A vessel of self-loathing and anger directed at who I have become; a questioning of my sexuality and ageing body in midlife. I resonate with the terms “stagnated” and “moving” to describe anger. Anger is never static. It surfaces, disappears and reappears as an uncontrolled aspect of self – my shadow. Amidst tangible sadness sits a purple-cloaked figure. Purple, symbolic of a plea to connect to the divine (238), is indicative of the yearning for meaning I seek: an understanding of self beyond the physical self and materiality of life (Lemle 1996). The dugout, a metaphorical container of emotion, transported on a moving current, in the ever-present progression of life evidences this search and narrative.

I view Bell's *Traverse* as a source of deep inspiration to painting *Lion Self*. In *Traverse* there is an expectant, translucent intensity: the alert hound, of regal stature, stands behind the seated figure, also alert, spellbound by the light ahead. *Traverse* is indicative to me of Bell's journey that has led her to summit her own internal mountain. The climb may have traversed dark nights, yet as the witness to this event, I am observing courage, bold anticipation, the meeting of divinity in the form of golden light. The fight between the two force fields (Hollis 2005:71) is over, and victory is sensed in a new awareness and anticipation of what lies ahead.

Lion Self, symbolic of the beginning of my journey, depicts the dark night of the soul, the shame in witnessing my shadow. The apparition ahead is imprisoned in a capsule, suggesting a barrier between self and divinity. Two paintings, two journeys: one nearing completion and one about to begin. My journey needs to be undertaken and I cannot avoid it. The narrative in *Lion Self* speaks to forward movement. The purple-cloaked figure, the vessel, the emotion all move with the current, they do not oppose the flow and move upstream. However, this could also indicate a resignation to destiny. The lion, figure and self are oblivious to what lies ahead. Both compositions pose unanswered questions: what will transpire next?

The use of white to depict the apparition is reminiscent of Richards' choice of the white veil: a symbol of religious iconography, the veiling of truths and untruths and an act of concealing. The angelic being is concealed by a white container: a veil, creating a barrier between physical self and divinity. In hindsight, integration, this painting symbolises the awareness of self, the hurdles to surmount before transformation can evolve. The apparition is painted in white and orange. Brennan designates "ambition" to orange and "truth" to white (1988: 238). *Lion Self*, on a subconscious level, indicates my soul's deepest need: meaning in life through a connection to the divine.

I am unknowingly traversing the dark night of the soul using colour, metaphor and symbolism to portray thoughts and feelings I receive while doing so. I am aware in hindsight how valuable this transition has become. *Lion Self*, depicted in the gloaming, night still to descend, is painted opaquely to exude denseness, an absorption of light. The red moon reinforces the density of light absorption and a funereal atmosphere pervades the scene. It is symbolic of where I am placed in my journey. In juxtaposition, the ethereal mysticism of *Traverse* is light giving, light emanates from the composition despite the darkness of the scene. Bell, I conclude, emerges from the dark night of the soul.

Earlier in this chapter, I refer cognitively to night and fear. Fear invades all aspects of my mind: fear of self, of the shadow, of where my life path leads me, and fear of failure. It consumes my conscious thoughts. It is about being in the dark. The cloak of ego is pulled close and tight around who I am: I am trapped in thought. In his novel *Life of Pi* (2003), Yann Martel eloquently describes the effects of fear on an individual:



Plate 7

Paula Hulley, *Lion Self* (2015), oil and acrylic, 100 x 150 cm

Only fear can defeat life. It is a clever, treacherous adversary, how well I know. It has no decency, respects no law or convention, shows no mercy. It goes for your weakest spot, which it finds with unnerving ease. It begins in your mind, always (162)

On a personal level this painting defines a moment, a catalyst for catharsis, to voice and release emotion. Naïve and simple, aspects of its execution appear clumsy, yet it is significant to my enquiry, and warrants analysis because it has potential to illuminate the immense dark I feel. It reminds me, in my feeling of isolation, that courage is a relationship with the unknown where “courage is risking the known for the unknown, the familiar with the unfamiliar [. . .] an arduous pilgrimage to some unknown destination” (Osho 1999:2). The “unknown” is a metaphor for absolute darkness, the black night; for not knowing what lies ahead on the river; for what transpires once the ego is reduced to a purple cloak that requires discarding; for appearing vulnerable and naked; for finding courage to say “I’ll go on” (Beckett 1994:418). This composition is about a “meeting with self” and facing the “opponent” of fear.

I recall the process of painting, wondering about the symbolic relevance of lion, figure, red dugout, red orb and tubular apparition. I painted in a liminal state of non-questioning, non-ego. I allowed my inner being to speak through the paint and mark-making. It was a freeing experience on the one hand, and frightening on the other. An element of fear comes in sharing and explaining this process with peers and supervisors. I acknowledge my original tenet in Foucault’s words, “I am concerned with my own transformation” (1997:14). I intended to “fight hard to shine the light” (Martel 2003:162) through the act of painting. Fear cannot be exterminated. Confronting it, I empower my own self, and it becomes easier to live with myself.

Within integration, the researcher has time to reflect and assimilate the previous steps of preparation and inspiration. There is no defining marker where one process begins and another ends, and on reflection I observe an overlap of processes, whereby one feeds the other. For me, integration can occur with immediacy, sometimes through observations of peers and supervisors, in research and writing, or in contemplation of Bell’s and Richards’ paintings (Anderson & Braud 2011:148).

6.1.5 Integration in Transcendent Function

Transcendent function is described by Jung as a “living, third thing”. It is the meeting point of the “unconscious experience and the conscious interpretation” (Jung 1969:90). The researcher creates a platform to gather information and experiences, observations and reflections from all the connections made in preparation and inspiration, to return to the rational world of ego, thought and consciousness. Integration is the merging of these two polarities of the mind. “Living” suggests the mutable, ongoing transformational aspect of organic inquiry. It refers to the non-static way in which, in a journey to self, the individual can only reach the end point of this existence, in death (McFie 2016).

Transformation through integration appears in three different ways. Firstly, the researcher acknowledges greater self-awareness. Secondly, the process engenders recognition and easier transition between conscious and unconscious states of being. Finally, individuals transitioning from personal to collective consciousness become aware of service to humanity (Anderson & Braud 2011:149). In answering the call to go inward, I become the subject (Bell 2015:29) and I feel called to be of service to myself. It feels right to be the focus of my attention, of being in touch with myself; giving permission to descend into self through the choice of medium, mark-making, line, texture and choice of colour. *Self I* and *VII* (2016, Plates 8 and 9) tell the story about a journey in uncovering and recovering self.

Self I portrays a frank self-portrait executed in oil, overlaid with oil pastel to depict a self suppressed by layers of emotion: a metaphysical and physical interpretation represented through layers of glazes, washes and line. Emotion erupts through the use of colour as anger, frustration, woundedness and self-pity. After years of silence, dislike of self courses through my fingers onto the face and upper torso.

Self I speaks to the physical act of catharsis. Prepared in a palette of pink, grey and silver acrylic washes, it began as a separate composition to the self-portrait to fill the void of unbearable nothingness. I began the under-painting by working on the canvas in my garden on a day when the east wind alternatively railed my body and canvas, or was still. In applying the paint I allowed colours to merge, splatter and converge in the centre where the canvas had stretched and become loose. The act of painting was exhausting and exhilarating. Exhaustion came from a tearing rage against the unknowingness and darkness of my mind. Exhilaration surfaced in noticing small happenings. The central pool of paint

was at the mercy of the wind. The viscosity of the paint allowed a separation of colour, creating patterns and swirls that would not settle with the changeability of the wind.

The creation of this work brings to mind Elkins' insight into the temperament of painting: "it is important never to forget how crazy painting is" (1999:147). In this craziness I was the instrument, a pendulum swaying between a state of consciousness and unconsciousness; alternating joy and wonder with worry and ego. The pool of paint was a point of fascination for me. I watched with interest as it reflected the blue light of sky, darkness of surrounding foliage, tree tops converged around the pool perimeter, the formation of iris and pupil. Paint pooled and dried in the shape of an eye: a reptilian eye. Identifying one eye, other reptile eyes appeared within the abstracted pattern of colour.

Caroline Myss (2007) comments on the dark night of the soul, noting how in discomfort "reptiles, the interior sufferings of mind, heart and spirit" can be confronted and expelled from the soul (82). Myss refers to reptilian vision at night, where reptiles "haunt the mind and gnaw at the heart" (82). If I contemplate *Self I*, it transports me to the dark night. I re-experience the feelings of fear, despair and aimlessness. Contrarily, a shift of consciousness is also evident. I have created an image of myself, sitting, arms crossed, head out of proportion with the rest of the body. Self-awareness in this pose reveals a head exploding from thought and self-analysis. My figure, identifiable in a painted red outline, evokes a rawness, a flagellation or new skin recently shed. Colour and line treat the upper body in wild turmoil reinforcing the anarchy of inner thought. The remainder of the body, transparent, allows the background imagery to emerge. The largest reptilian eye sits heavily under the breasts: a suggestion of anxiety and submergence of shadow in the heart centre (Brennan 1988:44).

The armchair is similarly outlined in soft red, a material object: solid, comfortable and functional, it floats on a turquoise bed of water. Water is liquid, moving, flowing to find its own level, it has force and power or it is soft-flowing and gentle. Like water, the dark night of the soul is transitory, it can shift consciousness and another state emerges from the transference of energy. The red line suggests an illusionary quality; neither permanent nor whole. I have given myself the same impermanence as the armchair.

I am naked. An old woman engages eye contact with me, the observer. I do not recognise myself. Her eyes are defiant, clear and hold my gaze. Looking at her I question her stance;

is this a veiling or unveiling of self. The question remains unanswered; it hangs in mid-air, a suspension bridge connecting the visible and invisible.

The image I have created also has parallels with Harry Moody's and David Carroll's reference to completion. There is no fear looking back. My eyes are staring fear in the face. There is a battle to be fought with outmoded feelings about self, deep-rooted patterns to be reviewed and released. It is a response to the "Call" at soul level to pursue "a sense of completion" (Moody and Carroll 1997:109).

The *Self Series I–VIII* (2016) addresses in the most vulnerable way my sense of self, my search for meaning, my battle with self. The act of painting makes me feel vulnerable as I defer to the past and my sense of self is imbued in failure. The act of painting, for me, controversially seeks catharsis and actively ignites my repressed fears. The self-reflexive approach to my practice as research is an attempt to address this incongruity. Gaylene Perry's (Barrett and Bolt 2007) practice-led research informs my understanding of self and Perry's cathartic approach to writing contains parallels applicable to my own studio practice. In citing Perry's perceptions, I have substituted the word *writing*, and references to it, with my own interpretation (in italics) as a means of acknowledging the importance to find the following within the visual arts:

From the act of *painting*, I learned first-hand about the power of *the visual arts* to effect change on the *artist's* self and on the wider community. I found that the act of *painting*, the physical work of *art-making*, and the resistance it seemed to give back, like pressing hard on flesh, even entering flesh, scarring and cutting it, could be seen as a healing process (45)



Plate 8

Paula Hulley, *Self I* (2016), mixed media on canvas, 100 x 150 cm

Perry emotively brings the reader into her transitional space: her sense of, and search for, completion: “As I wrote I learned my own lessons” (Barrett & Bolt 2007:39), “I found the autobiographical traces affecting me” (39), “I started to recognize I had angry feelings [. . .], feelings that needed reconciling” (39). I wrote, and through writing I felt change occurring”, “I wrote as I learned, I learned as I wrote” (39). Perry recognises her writing as healing, “not the kind that sweeps feelings under the carpets: rather the kind that is about *living with* hard scenarios” (39). Perry’s comments are indicative of the vulnerability I have exposed myself to by acknowledging the relationship between self and painting.

I view my creative practice (the act of making and outcomes) as a culmination of “living with hard scenarios”. The hard scenario I live with is the self I have become, an individual holding on to old realities: the shadow of self. *Self Series*, an interpretation of my dark night of the soul, unravels the tapestry of my lived experience. Each painting reflects different stages of the journey. The series was not premeditated or planned; each painting led to the next step in an intense shake-out of self. Red takes a predominant role in the paintings. Cadmium red hue, vermillion, alizarin crimson: a host of reds representing anger, moving anger, stagnating anger (Brennan 1988:238), deep hurt, self-pity, and old patterns; so self-entrenched that I have become this identity I carry. I recognise my attachment to my physical body, disconnected from “That” in “Thou art That” (Friedman & Hartelius 2013:93), disconnected from source.

Patterns and patterning are an integral part of the *Self Series* and *Self VII*. Plate 9, focuses on releasing patterns of identity. The composition is made up of pattern: the bark of the tree trunk, the branches that emulate the patterning of the jar, and the fall of shadows on my body. I cannot escape pattern. It surrounds me: patterning of life created by my lineage (grandparents), upbringing (parents and siblings), education and socio-economic factors, the fabric of who I have become. As I embrace the tree I acknowledge the importance of nature as a reminder to relinquish the old pattern and to accept *That*: an understanding that I am unable to traverse the river of life in my own power. In this knowledge, I seek *That*, a connection beyond the parameters of self. *Self VII* reveals this choice, the decision to meet with myself and encounter my dark shadow (Daniels 2005:73). This canvas is the first in the series to be painted without previous underpaintings from process art. Burnt sienna, an underglaze, is evocative of the colour orange and the re-emergence of “ambition” (Brennan 1988:238), anticipating possibilities and cycles containing challenges and excitement.



Plate 9

Paula Hulley, *Self VII* (2016), oil on canvas, 150 x 100 cm

Five characteristics to organic inquiry, namely, sacred, personal, chthonic, related and transformative are described by Anderson and Braud as cumulative and cyclical, as opposed to progressive and linear in nature, with the propensity to happen simultaneously (Friedman & Hartelius 2013:252).

Derived from the imagery of a growing tree, I apply these five characteristics to the painting *Self VII*:

The *sacred* is situated at the base of an ancient oak tree. It is where I receive inspiration to draw on, and manifest the peace I derive from nature: a state of preparation (Friedman & Hartelius 2013:252). The *personal* speaks to the act of being naked and vulnerable, to preparing the mind, body and spirit to act on the inspiration from the *sacred*. It is a process of germination. *Chthonic* addresses drawing and painting myself nude. I ask myself questions pertaining to narcissism and self-obsession, and my answer, from a liminal state, addresses the enjoyment of my unfettered spirit of self. In the spread of the tree's unseen roots I gain insight of self from my own underworld. *Related* refers to the reintroduction of the jar's facets from the *Shadow Series*. A correlation between the tree branches and the fragmentation of the jar's facets indicates the relatedness of lived experience and shared experiences. It is allowing my story to reach out, symbolic of growth, from sapling to maturity, expanding from trunk into branches. The *transformative* is dependent on the process of integration. It is a time of harvest, where seeds, leaves, bark or fruit of the tree have ability to nourish researcher and witness.

I drew the glass facet pattern (left side) and the branches (right side) onto the canvas with a black permanent marker. The mark-making implies the permanence of pattern; thought patterns, and how I define myself by them. The tree, symbolic of rootedness in nature, the tree of life, is what sustains the changes I feel within. The patterning is an extension of the branch system and canopy: the capacity to view them as symbolic of a greater whole, not only part of the tree trunk. The facets of life are what I thought made me who I am. My realisation reveals that my fragmented fragility is part of who I am, not all of me. In connecting with "That" I am much greater (Chapter Three, p.19), and I can choose to confine myself to my mind, my physicality or not (Friedman & Hartelius 2013:93).

Painting *Self VII* is reflective of Richards' observation that the visual image may be powerful in positivity:

this seriousness of purpose of art does not, of course, mean that art is not about pleasures, simple or not, cheerfully deviant or not, or about what touches us, or about what moves us, or what helps us envision things differently (1999:19)

Nudity in nature “moves” me. In this moment I disconnect from my thinking self; I am the bridge between the visible and the invisible (Beckmann 1988:12), the mundane and transcendental (Elkins 1999:187). Colour and composition symbolise an inward shift. They reflect a lightness of being, an alignment to self and something beyond me where I can “envision” a different sense of self. Embracing the tree is an act of release; “a cheerfully deviant” act that “touches me and helps me envision things differently”. It is a cathartic moment, capturing a light heartedness of spirit, a move away from imprisonment by my shadow. I experience an interlude, and, in reflection, I am aware of Grof’s explanation of immanent divine (2008:49).

In my lived experience, moments of bliss, in the spaciousness of liminality, are fleeting, momentary and hard to recapture. This painting embodies such a moment. In the act of painting I find acceptance of myself and I do not recoil from the question, “Why am I afraid to tell you who I am?” (Powell 1969:12). I spend time pondering the statements: “I know who I am. I know what I am. I know how I serve” (Selig 2016:365). The composition serves in unravelling the question, “Who am I at midlife?”

The peace I witness in this composition is reflected in the palette of colours I choose; there is harmonic accord with nature. Both glazing and opaque paint is utilized in the construction of the image. Translucent, burnt sienna appears in my feet (feet being symbolic of the journey of life, the walk to self and my connection to earth); the tree trunk (representing a connection to earth and divinity); the facets and tree branches (representing my desire or ambition to unravel the patterns of the past).

Shadow still exists. It is inescapable, and is illustrated in an embrace with an ancient oak tree where my face and upper torso fall into the shadow of the tree and my face merges with the tree’s bark. My body becomes an infusion of light and shadow. In integration, step three of organic inquiry, the shift of consciousness allows for the presence of my shadow. Memory cannot be erased, but today there is less shame. The battle of self-doubt may resurface and fear may reoccur. However, I have a reference point – a meeting with fear occurred and a highly emotive battle ensued.

6.1.6 The Validity of Organic Inquiry

In reviewing the validity of organic research, the shortcomings of this methodology are based on several factors (Anderson & Braud 2011:296). (i) Historically organic inquiry is based on western transpersonal theory and concepts, limiting cross-cultural inclusion and integration. The validity of this methodology in non-western cultures is debatable. (ii) Organic inquiry focuses on the liminal experience and requires an affiliation with psycho-spiritual dynamics. As there is no scientific base for achieving a liminal state, it is open-ended. Its reliability, then, may be questionable. (iii) The personal content of the research could alienate readers who prefer a quantitative approach to research. (iv) Organic inquiry, still in its infancy, invites further research of the liminal experience, i.e., the effectiveness of the individual's narrative as a basis for research; the reliability of the functions of thinking, feeling, intuition and sensation as research indicators; the impact of the individual's personality on research outcomes. (v) The validity of transformation, validated and measured by the ephemeral components of self, spirit and service on integration of the research, is subjective and arguable.

6.1.7 Personal Reflections on the Journey to Self

Transformation in transpersonal research falls into the category of “mundane” (Daniels 2005:82). Contrary to popular expectations, it is not a sudden, “exotic” rapturous transformation of the individual, more often “a gradual, often unwelcome, dawning of awareness” occurring at a time of “considerable personal difficulty, stress, suffering or tragedy” (83). I attest to it being gradual. The process has no specific beginning or end and each step feeds the next; there is an understanding that the journey is never complete. Transformation is a new way of viewing and living with self.

The question “Who are you that is lost and trying to build a concept of yourself in order to be found?” (Singer 2007:130) is pertinent to how I answer this question, “Has this research undertaking been useful to me?” Singer's question represents the foundational blueprint of my journey to self.

I understand self to be the one constant, permanent aspect of my being. It is my consciousness and my very being. My awareness, the essence of self, is cognisant of thoughts, the passing tide of emotions and the receptor of all physical senses (Singer

2007:128). Self, as I mistakenly believed prior to embarking on this dissertation, is not the sum of all my thoughts, emotions and awareness of the physical senses (128). Self is located in a place beyond what is known. The root of self is ‘the conscious being who is aware that you are aware of all these inner and outer things’ (128).

In the first half of life my sense of self was determined by focusing my consciousness on fear, failure, negativity and disillusionment of self (Singer 2007:128). By clinging to this selective field of focus I created constant companions, which became the “building blocks of the psyche” (129). My psyche was decorated with memories from the past (117); a host of situations and feelings that no longer existed but which felt real enough to determine who I thought I was.

My research, the reading it has entailed, my questioning of self and shadow all converge on canvas through my painting. The questions “Who am I at midlife? Who have I become? Where am I going?”; the times of challenge; the dark night of the soul have all led me to conclude that I have lived 51 years of my life based on the parameters I have built around myself (Singer 2007:130). I allowed my thoughts to dictate the person I have become, addicted to thought patterns even though they caused me pain and discomfort. In the process of integration, this has not been an easy realisation and I foresee a gradual metamorphosis, whereby new thought patterns emerge.

During this process of writing, research and painting, fleeting moments of broader consciousness made me realise that to grow spiritually I had to release what was trapped within me. Cyclical thought processes required going beyond my view of reality to enter liminal space. Writing and theorising about liminality is far easier than the actual doing. I found that if I tried too hard, I remained entrapped in mind and ego; moments of liminality occurred when least expected. In the painting of *Self I* – in desperation and pure frustration – I created a very honest portrayal of self by allowing my emotion to be released and exposed without concern for the outcome: a burst of inspiration occurred in liminal spaciousness.

As I complete my dissertation, I can answer the question “Where am I?” with the response “I am here”. Here is a starting point. It is an acceptance to move forward unencumbered with fear, as catharsis has uncovered past experiences, thoughts and feelings, and it feels right to recover them again. I see in retrospect that my previous stance was myself versus

life (Singer 2007:124). I was constantly trying to define, predict and control my existence (71), and change (facing my shadow), was an exceptionally frightening experience. I had become a sad individual, saddened because, according to Singer (2007), my heart was weak. My heart was weak due to the blocked flow of energy, caused by unresolved fear. Singer describes fear as the sum of all buried and unprocessed blocks within the psyche (73).

In using my creative practice as a vehicle to push me to the very “edges” of my resistance, I can only attest to a new awareness of self (Singer 2007:74). This includes my thoughts and how I have the choice to move beyond them if I want to. It is about holding a constant awareness of the present moment and endeavouring not to fall into past fear-based patterns. I conclude by making a commitment with self to continue attempting to go beyond what I know and perceive to be real.

6.2 Chapter Conclusion

In Chapter Six, organic inquiry is the research tool I apply to narrate my personal journey to self through painting. Preparation, the first step to the organic inquiry approach, outlines my intention in this dissertation and the questions I interrogate. Three oil paintings from the *Shadow Series* illustrate how and where I began this journey to self with an explanation on why I use the imagery of the jar to tell my story.

The need to locate meaning in my life as I transition from the first half of life into the second half forces me to examine my existing choice of subject matter. After a nine-month period of desert time, in which I am unable to paint, I am compelled to change direction and find new imagery to illuminate my need to find catharsis in this process. In an intense period of unknowing, when I feel the effects of the dark night of the soul, I describe the stage of inspiration. An analysis of *Lion Self* illustrates how I feel about myself and it provides the foundation, and subsequent impetus to change direction in subject choice, to focus on myself as the new subject in *Self Series I–VII*.

Self I and *Self VII*, oil paintings on canvas, illustrate the journey to self. *Self I* conveys the intensity I feel at the beginning of this journey; intense frustration and unhappiness with self are conveyed in this self-portrait. *Self VII* demonstrates a shift within and I compare this to immanent divine, Grof’s (2008) theory of being connected to one creative energetic whole.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7.1 Conclusion

The objective of this dissertation is to consider connections between creative practice, psychology and the sacred to find catharsis through the visual arts, in particular painting. The transpersonal component of my study dialogues honouring human experience, interpreted as lived and felt experience, as a valuable contribution to research (Anderson & Braud 2011). The personal objective of this dissertation focuses on my analysis of self and shadow, and the transformation of self. The questions Who am I?, Who have I become? and Where am I going? are linked to my perceptions of self; while the question, Why am I afraid to tell you who I am? is contained in unravelling my shadow.

Embarking on this journey to self, my intention never wavered from the need and desire to research, paint and interrogate how to express who I am at midlife, to speak to my shadows and anxieties through artmaking. As a mature student I heeded the call to make an appointment with myself, to release myself from the constriction of who I had become. My perception of self, my lost sense of self, required time and stillness to be reflected upon, to heal. My identity of self became consumed by my past, contained in the roles I found myself living: failed creative, wife, mother, daughter. An urgency arose to address these issues as I approached midlife.

Transpersonal research and psychology, with an emphasis on the psycho-spiritual, in corroboration with the mind, body and spirit, piqued my interest. I felt challenged by the organic inquiry principle, especially the prominence this research method gives to transformation as a means to personal growth and development. It was an opportunity to be the subject, and to initiate an awareness of shadow and self.

The transformative validity of organic inquiry as a methodology lies in the question, “Is this useful to me?” (Anderson & Braud 2011:157). Useful pertains to the measurement of success, whereby the researcher, reader or participants, have realised during or on completion of the study an increased self-awareness, a new appreciation of self and/or a broader sense of knowing, doing and being on their life path or in the world (Friedman & Hartelius 2013:253).

Has this study been useful to me? The answer is not simple nor is it profound. The usefulness of this study lay in the provision of a platform to initiate a deconstruction of self. Acknowledging Jung (1964), that the self will never be fully known, and reiterated by Daniels (2005), that the self has capacity to part be known and part unknown, I transition to the next cycle of life with a new awareness of part-self. In considering the usefulness of this study, I acknowledge how Colin Richards and Deborah Bell have profoundly influenced my journey and interpretation of catharsis. Richards' discussion on the role of memory, in uncovering and recovering truths and untruths, contributes to my own recovery of memory to facilitate catharsis. Richards' voiced skepticism to the healing role of art, his reference to the power of the image as cathartic in art-making, and his own challenging journey to redemption, fed and nourished my understanding of catharsis. By confronting memory, a challenging, sometimes painful, process, the painting of self as subject, research on self and shadow ultimately precipitated a new vision and awareness. It allowed my voice to emerge and be recognised. Catharsis for myself is the release of silenced memory.

From the outset I felt a deep connection to Bell's spiritual quest, evident in her creative practice. Bell's journey home (Bell 2015:12), wherein she "discarded the skins of self", is located in Bell's preoccupation with her own transformation rather than what others think about her art-making (12). Today I am on the bridge between the visible and invisible. I am here. I move forward with an appreciation of self. Free to choose, from the vantage point of midlife to be at peace with who I am, who I have become, accepting of where I move forward to.

I feel strongly that the organic inquiry approach was most suited, as methodology, to my research intention. My approach is individualistic, and I am aware of how little research has been completed within the visual arts, in particular painting, within this methodology. The researcher is the primary "tool" (Friedman & Hartelius 2013:253) in research investigation. I am cognisant then, of how my chosen method may vastly differ from other, and further, studies within gender, age, spiritual affiliation and experience, and intention (253). The transpersonal approach is newly emergent and further exploration is required to fully assess the transformative validity of this methodology.

Adapting organic inquiry to my research praxis enabled me to take the structure of the approach and allow it to unfold in the narration of my personal story, using the agent of visual arts. My writing and research provides the theoretical framework of this study; my

painting and my journey allow the spiritual alchemy of the process to speak through colour, line, texture and subject matter. This process established a starting point and a point of completion for academic purposes, recognising and commenting on my perception of self and shadow. I commenced this practice, cognitively in fear of who I was and who I had become. An outcome of this dissertation acknowledges my understanding of moving beyond ego into liminal space. Manifesting and exploring liminal space is a process. My challenge as I move forward will be to accept the potentiality of liminality as a threshold for transformation to occur (Anderson & Braud 2011:296).

I view the function of integration as an ongoing process. Knowing that integration continues, even on completion of this dissertation, I move forward in hope and generativity (Rohr 2011) with an intention to give back to the wider community. The question, “How may I serve others?” is foremost in my consciousness. I set the intention to probe ways in which I enable women, men and children to empower themselves in an awareness of self through the visual arts. With previous teaching and course work experience, I envision establishing a travelling forum whereby my knowledge is shared in the school environment, in particular, in schools without access to art teachers and materials.

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