Drawing from life:
An autobiographical study in the creative work of Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur with reference to selected female artists

Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur

862868415

Supervisor:

Mrs Michelle Rall 838290

Co-supervisor:

Dr Jessica Draper 641837

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art in Fine Art,

Centre for Visual Art, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

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Declaration

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art in Fine Art, in the Graduate Programme in Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, declare that:

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.

2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.

4. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:

    a. Their words have been re-written, but the general information attributed to them has been referenced
    b. Where their exact words have been used, then their writing has been placed in quotation marks, and referenced.

5. This thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the References sections.

Student Name: Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur

Date: 9/7/2020

Sign:

Supervisor Name: Mrs Michelle Rall

Date: 9/7/2020

Sign M.M.Rall.

Co-Supervisor Name: Dr Jessica Draper

Date: 9/7/2020

Sign:

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- And my heavenly Beloved for breathing life into the embers of my inner being on this journey.

Dedication

This dissertation and the body of artwork that support it are dedicated to my beloved father and mother (affectionately and jointly named 'LolliPops') who together gave life to my corporeal embodiment and taught me to pray:

'Our Father who is in heaven
Hallowed be Your name
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us
And lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil
For Yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever
Amen'

and to my earthly and heavenly Beloveds.

Abstract

This practice-based research (PBR) project facilitates the use of creative studio practice as research together with theoretical research that culminate in an integrated exhibition and written dissertation for examination for the degree: Master of Art in Fine Art – Research (MAFA-R).

This research adopts an heuristic approach to allow for flexibility, un pre-determined outcomes and tacit knowledge. Heuristics is suitable for autobiographical study as the subjective experience of the researcher is not only acknowledged but becomes the focus of the research. The phases and processes of heuristics become guides to the research process. The heuristic phases are also used in discussion of the processes and artworks of creative studio practice from a retrospective 'bird's eye' view. The process becomes an immersive one in which the researcher embodies the research question and follows intuition, personal interest and emotion to engage with the materials of creative practice, to incubate inner knowledge and wait for emergent illumination.

The theory of autobiography as influenced by feminism provides a theoretical framework that respects the influence of existential-phenomenological, psychoanalytic and spiritual frameworks and recognises the possibility of philosophical engagement. Autobiographical subjectivity, composed of experience, identity, memory, embodiment and agency, is implicitly and explicitly expressed in creative expression. Materiality and metaphor as embodied are also discussed as relating to autobiographical and creative expression in which varied themes emerge.

The written and artistic work of Käthe Kollwitz and Wilma Cruise produced during midlife during which they experienced the loss of a loved one and psychological and/or spiritual existential crises is discussed in relation to the work and experience of personal loss and midlife of the author, Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur. In this context the metaphors of birthing of self and creativity and nurturing creative seed within are discussed as is the equation of mother and artist.

The use of figurative work and self-portraiture and the materials and processes of drawing and clay for artworks in 2D and 3D are considered in terms of their materiality and personal and implicit autobiographical expression in the quest for articulation of a personal and universal voice. Visual journaling of the process and curation of the artworks are recognised as significant in their contribution to the production and presentation of the creative studio practice and are unable to be reduced to or subsumed by the explication or exhibition.

Key words

Autobiography/autobiographical, practise-based research, heuristics, metaphor, feminism, psychoanalytic, spiritual, tacit, Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Käthe Kollwitz, Wilma Cruise, implicit, self-reflective, subjective, embodiment, identity, agency, death, loss, women, midlife transition, mother, artist, tactile, materiality, drawing, clay, curation

Prefatory note

The following procedures have been adopted:

1. The focus of this research is the autobiographical investigation and creative practice of the researcher, Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur. As a result, the first person is used in this dissertation when referring to my own work and concepts, and in discussion of my research frameworks and artists.

2. The Harvard short form of referencing and citations is used in this text. A list of all references cited in the text appears at the end of the dissertation.

3. For the sake of keeping in-text citations from The Holy Bible shorter, I do not state 'Bible' each time, only the name of the biblical book used. However, for the sake of simplicity in the reference list at the end of the dissertation, the biblical books cited (Genesis, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Luke, John, Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians and Revelation) are not separate entries but all fall under 'The Holy Bible'.

4. This dissertation consists of four chapters with subsections and a stand–alone conclusion. In-text images are integrated into the text and these images are labelled with 'Figure' and numbered consecutively.

5. All photographs of my work and visual journal pages in chapter four are taken by me, Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, except for those in which I appear, which are taken by friends on my behalf for the purpose of my research and are used with permission. All these images are ©Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur. Sources are provided in captions for images in chapter three and for images that depict artwork not my own in chapter four.

6. Dimensions of my artworks are included in my captions of the images where applicable and are given in order of height x width x depth in centimetres.

7. A List of Figures is supplied after the Table of Contents.

8. During the reflexive process of writing, my own visual journals were referenced as primary sources but not cited. Specific examples are included as Figures to illustrate their value and centrality in my research process. Extensive visual journals are included in the final exhibition of works for examination.

List of abbreviations

CVA	Centre for Visual Arts
ESV	English Standard Version
IEB	Independent Examinations Board
MAFA-R	Master of Arts in Fine Arts - Research
PBR	Practice-based research
SACBT	Spiritually augmented cognitive behaviour therapy
UKZN	University of Kwa-Zulu Natal
WWI	World War One
WWII	World War Two
2D	Two-Dimensional
3D	Three-Dimensional

Table of Contents

Declaration ii

Acknowledgements iii

Dedication iv

Abstract v

Key words v

Prefatory note vi

List of abbreviations vii

Table of Contents viii

List of Figures xi

Chapter One 1

Introduction 1

Background and Motivation 1

Aims, Objectives and Research Questions 3

Survey of Literature 4

Theoretical Framework 9

PBR 9

Heuristics 10

Methods and methodology 11

Reflection, journaling and sketching 13

Studio experimentation with my media 13

Conclusion 14

Chapter Two: Autobiography, materiality, metaphor and emerging themes 15

Introduction 15

Autobiography: historical perspective and a theoretical lens 15

Memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency 21

Materiality 29
Metaphor and emergent themes 32
Conclusion 33
Chapter Three: Two Women Artists 35
Introduction 35
Commonalities 35
Käthe Kollwitz (8 July 1867 – 22 April 1945: 77 years) 36
Background and context 36
Autobiographical writings and artwork 38
Wilma Cruise (b.1945) 47
Background and context 47
Autobiographical writing and artwork 48
Conclusion 59
Chapter Four: My heuristic autobiographical PBR 62
Introduction 62
An overview of heuristic PBR 62
Initial engagement 63
Pops/ Lollipops 63
Immersion 71
Clay/ paper reflections: my foot in the water 71
Three broken monuments to me/ Three monuments to broken me 73
Incubation 76
'Pregnant' me at 50 77
Illumination 83
Sculpture as my 'birthing buddy' 83
Swallow girl 84
Birth and buddies 88

Embryonic 'I' 90
Maquettes and Despair 91
My beloved is mine I am his 96
Explication 98
Creative Synthesis 98
Exhibition of selected work 98
Validation of the heuristic enquiry 100
Conclusion 101
Further possibilities: 103
'Pregnant' me: New beginnings 104
Conclusion 105
List of References 109
Primary sources: 109
Secondary sources: 109

List of Figures

Figure 1.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb, *Self-portrait*, c 1987. Charcoal on brown paper, 60cm x 60cm	**2**
Figure 2.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb, *Figure study*, c 1988. ink on paper, 75cm x 35cm	**2**
Figure 3.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb *Self-portrait on director's chair* c 2011charcoal on paper 36cm x 23cm	**2**
Figure 4.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *My Blue Eyes*, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, 75cm x 100cm	**2**
Figure 5.	Käthe Kollwitz in her atelier, 1935 (Jalon 2017)	**35**
Figure 6.	Wilma Cruise in her studio (Wilma Cruise 2019a)	**35**
Figure 7.	Käthe Kollwitz, *Self Portrait en Face*, 1910. Charcoal on grey-blue Ingres paper. Collection: The Cologne Kollwitz Collection © Käthe Kollwitz Museum Cologne (Käthe Kollwitz Museum Köln 2019)	**40**
Figure 8.	Käthe Kollwitz. *Self Portrait with Hand to Forehead*, 1910. Etching and drypoint. Collection: Museum of Modern Art © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York (MoMA 2019b)	**40**
Figure 9.	Käthe Kollwitz. *Small Self Portrait*, 1920. Lithograph, 23,1 x 20,5 cm. Collection: Museum of Modern Art © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York (MoMA 2019a)	**41**
Figure 10.	Käthe Kollwitz. *Self Portrait*, 1921. Etching with aquatint, 21,7 x 26,6 cm. Collection Unknown © Spaightwood Galleries. (Spaightwood Galleries, Inc 2017)	**41**
Figure 11.	Käthe Kollwitz. *Crouching Woman with Child in Her Lap*, 1916. Coal on handmade paper © Collection: EWK, Bern (Kultur Online 2016)	**42**
Figure 12.	Käthe Kollwitz. *Standing Mother Squeezing Infant to Face,* 1915. Charcoal and ink. Collection: Cologne Kollwitz © Käthe Kollwitz Museum Cologne (Käthe Kollwitz Museum Köln 2018)	**43**

Figure 13.	Käthe Kollwitz. *Killed in Action,* 1921. Lithograph, 41,0 x 38,5 cm (plate). Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales © Art Gallery of New South Wales (Art Gallery NSW 2019)	**43**
Figure 14.	Käthe Kollwitz. *The Grieving Parents*, 1932. Stone. Originally in the Roggevelde Cemetery in Belgium; now in the Vladslo German War Cemetery (Clara Barton Museum 2016)	**44**
Figure 15.	Käthe Kollwitz. *Death and Woman Wrestling for the Child,* 1910. Etching and drypoint, 40, 8 x 41, 1 cm (plate). Collection Unknown © DACS 2013 (German Expressionism Leicester 2019)	**45**
Figure 16.	Käthe Kollwitz. *Woman with Dead Child,* 1903. Etching, 41,5 x 48 cm. Collection: The British Museum © Trustees of the British Museum (The British Museum 2019)	**45**
Figure 17.	Wilma Cruise, *Without Title With A Mirror*, 1988-1990. Ceramic, altered bed, box and mirror, 115 x 148 x 62 cm. Artist's Collection. (Cruise 1997 Vol II)	**50**
Figure 18.	Capitoline She-Wolf. 11th century (wolf) and late-5th century (twins). Bronze, 75 x 114 cm. Collection: Capitoline Museum. (Musei Capitolini 2017)	**50**
Figure 19.	Wilma Cruise, *Self-portrait*, 1992. Ceramic on concrete base, 173 × 62 × 45 cm. Collection: Private. (Arnold 1996: Plates 55 and 56)	**51**
Figure 20.	Wilma Cruise, *Self-portrait*, 1992. Ceramic on concrete base, 173 × 62 × 45 cm. Collection: Private (Cruise 1997 Vol II)	**51**
Figure 21.	Wilma Cruise. *John's Wife (Yellow) (Blue) (White)*, 1995/6. *John's Wife (Yellow)* Fired clay (yellow pigment) and found objects, 101,5 x 84 x 45 cm; *John's Wife (White)* Fired clay (white pigment) and found objects, 110 x 85 x 66 cm; *John's Wife (Blue)* details unavailable. Collection of the artist © Wilma Cruise (Wilma Cruise 2019b)	**53**
Figure 22.	Wilma Cruise. *John's Wife (Yellow)* Fired clay (yellow pigment) and found objects, 101,5 x 84 x 45 cm. Collection of the artist © Wilma Cruise (Wilma Cruise 2019b)	**53**
Figure 23.	Wilma Cruise. *John's Wife (White)*, 1995/6. Fired clay (white pigment) and found objects, 110 x 85 x 66 cm. Collection of the artist © Wilma Cruise (Cruise 1997 Vol II)	**55**

Figure 24.	Wilma Cruise. *Youth Beauty…*, 1996 (View at First Gallery, 1996). 5 photocopies, 2 poems, pegs and string, 4 X A3 mounted on A0 and 1 x A0 print. Collection of the artist © Wilma Cruise (Cruise 1997 Vol II)	**57**
Figure 25.	Wilma Cruise, *…le with care*, 1995-96. Photocopy, laminated and altered, 84 x 55 cm. Collection of the artist © Wilma Cruise (Cruise 1997 Vol II)	**58**
Figure 26.	Wilma Cruise. *The Nurse of The Mad*, 1990. Exhibition of ceramic figures and sixteen black & white drawings. University of South Africa, Pretoria (Wilma Cruise 2019c)	**59**
Figure 27.	Wilma Cruise. *Conversations*, 2000. Exhibition of digital reproductions of original documents. University of South Africa, Pretoria (Schmahmann 2000)	**59**
Figure 28.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Heuristics Phases, 2019. Visual Journal page (unpublished and unpaginated)	**63**
Figure 29.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Pops Seated*, 2016. Earthenware clay: Images of clay ‘drawing’ process with earthenware clay coils and slab rolled onto image **a.** clay coils laid onto transparent film covering original drawing on paper **b.** rolling slab over clay coil ‘drawing’ **c.** clay ‘drawing’ inverted into Plaster of Paris mould to shape as vessel	**64**
Figure 30.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Lollipops series* (details of vessels) 2016. Mixed earthenware, 1080˚C, 28cm diameter **a.** detail showing more ‘linear’ approach to clay ‘drawing’ **b.** detail showing more blended/ ‘finger-painted’ approach to clay ‘drawing’	**66**
Figure 31.	**a.** Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Lollipops: Commemorative Vessel*, 2018. Mixed earthenware, 1120˚C, 37 cm diameter **b.** *Lollipops: Commemorative Vessel,* detail interior **c.** *Lollipops: Commemorative Vessel,* detail exterior	**66**
Figure 32.	*Lollipops: Commemorative Vessel,* 2018, detail showing damage from transportation	**67**
Figure 33.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Process of embossing and repetition with Plaster of Paris mould and wet clay slabs, 2017 **a.** Silicone drawing on sheer fabric. **b.** Silicone relief image embossed in clay **c.** Embossed clay made ready for Plaster of Paris mould.	**68**

d. Plaster of Paris poured into mould covering embossed clay image
e. Lifting embossed clay off Plaster of Paris relief mould
f. Glass on top of Plaster of Paris mould ready for firing in kiln

Figure 34. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Glass with embossed image, 2018 **68**

Figure 35. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Translucent high fired embossed porcelain, variable dimensions, 2018 **68**

Figure 36. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Translucent high fired relief printed porcelain, variable dimensions, 2018 **68**

Figure 37. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur *Pops series* 2018 Mirror relief and emboss, studio mix with oxides and transparent glaze 1080˚C 23cm diameter **69**

Figure 38. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Rubbing from silicone drawing, 2018 **70**

Figure 39. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Drawing into rubbing with charcoal, 2018 **70**

Figure 40. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Use of earth tones over rubbing, 2018 **70**

Figure 41. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Mum*, 2018 (with drawing materials). Mixed earth on primed paper, 51cm x 77cm **70**

Figure 42. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Pops in Earthenware*, 2018. Mixed earth and charcoal drawing on primed paper, 51cm x 77cm **70**

Figure 43. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Selfies Series*, 2017 - 2018, Clay, oxides, underglazes and paper **72**
a, b, c. Experimental ‘clay prints’ on paper lifted from images printed, drawn and painted on wet clay slabs with oxides and underglaze pigments, 47cm diameter; 45cm diameter
d, e, f. Corresponding clay slabs once dried and bisque fired, 45cm diameter; 43cm diameter

Figure 44. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Molly*, 2016. Fenix clay raku fired, variable dimensions **73**

Figure 45. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *monument 1*, 2017. Studio mix (exploded in kiln), 26cm x 41cm x31cm **74**

Figure 46.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *monument 3*, Red terracotta with paper and grog (slid off pedestal), 28cm x 27cm	**74**
Figure 47.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *monument 2*, Red terracotta with paper and grog (flung onto floor), 50cm x 28cm	**74**
Figure 48.	Paula Modersohn- Becker. *Self-Portrait on the sixth wedding anniversary*, 1906. Tempera on canvas, 101.8 cm × 70.2 cm. Collection: Paula Modersohn- Becker Museum. (Independent 2007)	**78**
Figure 49.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Mother/ Incubator of life*, 2018. Charcoal and earth on fabriano, 130cm x 150cm. **a.** In process on the wall **b.** drawing with cotton gloves **c.** on the ground, drawn on with earth	**78**
Figure 50.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, 2017. Hand-crushed earths as drawing medium	**79**
Figure 51.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, 2018. Visual journal page with sketches and thoughts regarding depiction of *Mother/ Incubator of life*	**80**
Figure 52.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Self as Artist/ creator*, 2018. Charcoal and crushed earth, 130cm x 150cm	**81**
Figure 53.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, 2018. *As He is/ Christ rising/ One*, 2018. Crushed earth and earth clod, 130cm x 150cm	**81**
Figure 54.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Swallow Girl* concept sketch and reference photographs, 2019. Visual journal 2019	**84**
Figure 55.	**a, b, c, d.** Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Swallow Girl* process photographs, 2019	**85**
Figure 56.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Swallow Girl* visual journal process, 2019. Visual Journal page depicting reflexive process (unpublished and unpaginated)	**85**
Figure 57.	**a & b**. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Swallow Girl* (unfired), 2019. Red terra-cotta with paper and grog, 44cm x 40cm x 30cm	**86**

Figure 58. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Birth*, (unfired) 2019. Red terra-cotta and grog, 24cm x 19cm x 20cm **88**
a. *Birth* in progress (wet)
b. Curve that developed (dry)

Figure 59. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Submersion,* 22cm x 32cm x 15cm **89**

Figure 60. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Process of hollowing sculpture **89**

Figure 61. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Emergence* **89**

Figure 62. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Combustible paper armature experiment **89**

Figure 63. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Working clay around armature form **89**

Figure 64. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Pupa* building complete (unfired), 2019. Black charcoal sculpture clay, 24cm x 11cm x 12cm **89**

Figure 65. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Embryonic I: Who do I say I am?* (detail) 2019. Process depicting drawing with cotton glove and engagement of my somatic self with the picture plane. Charcoal and earth on fabriano, 100cm x70cm **90**

Figure 66. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, 2019. Experimental combustible armatures for maquettes and *Despair* **91**
a. Armature of card and quilting
b. Armature of wood and chicken wire
c. Armature of wooden skewers, card and cotton wool

Figure 67. Käthe Kollwitz, *Hunger*, 1922. Charcoal on paper. Collection Unknown (Zimmermann 2012) **92**

Figure 68. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, 2019. Visual journal page with sketches and thoughts regarding depiction of *Despair* **92**

Figure 69. **a & b.** Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Despair* in progress **93**

Figure 70. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Image showing completed *Despair* figure with supports, 2019. Black charcoal sculpture clay **93**

Figure 71. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Image showing me holding *Despair* **94**

Figure 72.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Image showing afterbirth-like plastic around left foot after first firing	**94**
Figure 73.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Image showing squashed babylike nature of Despair's right foot from below	**94**
Figure 74.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Image showing Despair from below in labour/ a supine birthing position	**95**
Figure 75.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Image showing *Despair* in position of prayer and petition	**95**
Figure 76.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Image showing cracking on *Despair* after second firing	**95**
Figure 77.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *My beloved is mine and I am His,* 2019, Conte and earth on mulberry paper, 75cm x 143cm **a.** *My beloved is mine and I am His* in process **b.** Working earth onto paper with gloves. **c.** *My beloved is mine and I am His* (detail)	**97**
Figure 78.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *I too*, poem in visual journal, 2019. (unpublished and unpaginated)	**97**
Figure 79.	Exhibition trial run- Suspended paper and porcelain artwork	**98**
Figure 80.	Exhibition trial run- Embossed porcelain on lightbox	**98**
Figure 81.	Exhibition trial run- Charcoal and earth drawing of *Pops* on lightbox	**98**
Figure 82.	Exhibition trial run- *Swallow girl* on found wooden crates looking up at *My beloved is mine and I am His* to create focal point in main gallery	**99**
Figure 83.	Exhibition trial run- *Swallow girl* on found wooden crates; earth drawings on floor in background	**99**
Figure 84.	Exhibition trial run- *Despair* back-lit by lightbox in womb-like atmospherically lit side gallery	**99**
Figure 85.	Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Concept sketch for cement sculpture, 2019	**104**
Figure 86.	Process of building armature, with Peter Hall (sculptor)	**104**
Figure 87.	Armature for cement sculpture	**104**

Chapter One

Introduction

This dissertation, along with the body of artwork it refers to, reflects my practice-based research (PBR) towards a Masters' degree in Visual Art. In this first chapter I will provide background and context for this research. Thereafter, I will present its aims and objectives followed by literature consulted. This will be followed by the first part of my theoretical framework discussing PBR and heuristics. My theoretical framework will be continued with increased focus in chapter two. In closing chapter one, I will explain the approaches and methodologies I will be using for this research project.

The autobiographical as formative of this PBR will be the focus of chapter two. This will comprise a historical overview and a discussion of autobiography theory with specific focus on the components of subjectivity namely memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency. Materiality and metaphors as embodied and as relating to the emerging themes of my practice will also be considered.

Chapter three examines selected work of Käthe Kollwitz and Wilma Cruise: the two women artists I have chosen to discuss. I will outline biographical information before proceeding with an examination of selected work pertinent to my topic of autobiography.

Reflexive writing about my own creative practice and research will be discussed in chapter four. I will first provide an overview of heuristics as an approach as I will then discuss the autobiographical artwork produced during this PBR from this 'bird's eye' and retrospective view.

This will be followed by a conclusion which will sum up my discoveries and look at opportunities for further research.

Background and Motivation

Having taught for many years, a desire to extend myself as an artist brought me back to my alma mater, the CVA at UKZN, to pursue a MAFA-R.

This desire to nurture my creativity, intensified by the urge to attend to my inner self (Northrup 2009: 38) was magnified in my mid-forties after years of teaching art and learning styles, both privately and at high school level (IEB Visual Art), and subsequently also becoming a new wife and stepmother. Gratefully, this also facilitated the opportunity to study and I re-entered the academic world.

In the eighties, the then Fine Art department had firm roots in the British Formalist approach and laid a strong foundation of techniques in the various practices (Bucknall 2015: 57, 58). Although I had also done ceramics at first year level, I majored in painting and drawing, which had subsequently remained at the core of my creative practice (Figures 1 - 4). Now, wishing to explore clay anew and investigate the synergy between the two-dimensional elements of my background and the more tactile elements that ceramics and sculpture offer, I began exploring with clay to see where my PBR would lead. My father's death at the outset of my research became an initial immersive theme within this exploration as he had, in life, also been a recurrent subject in my drawing and painting (Figure 4).

Figure 1. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb, *Self-portrait*, c 1987. Charcoal on brown paper, 60cm x 60cm

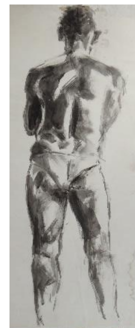


Figure 2. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb, *Figure study*, c 1988. ink on paper, 75cm x 35cm

Figure 3. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb *Self-portrait on director's chair* c 2011charcoal on paper 36cm x 23cm

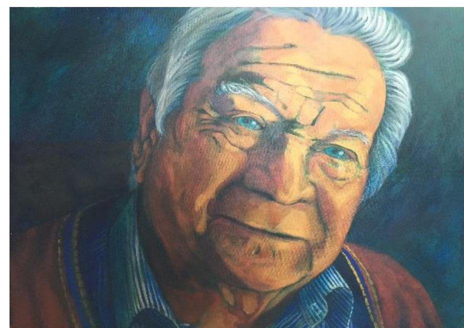


Figure 4. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *My Blue Eyes*, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, 75cm x 100cm

Portraiture or figurative work has consistently been at the core of my artmaking. While autobiography does not necessitate the use of either, these are frequently a vehicle for visual autobiography (Borzello 1997: 19). They are used as powerful expressive tools to reflect universal human emotions (such despair or hope), experience, conviction and spirit, often what I have most admired in the work of other artists. This, together with observations made about the nature of my work by my colleagues and supervisors, convinced me that autobiography should be the focus of this research. The perspective I will be adopting is framed by my personal convictions and my worldview, as well as my current subjective experience. I identify myself as a cisgender, heterosexual, monogamous married woman and stepmother in midlife transition, South African, and a person who is working out issues of relationships with myself, significant others and Christian faith and belief.

In my early university experience, the voice of the so-called second wave of feminism was predominant. Marion Arnold (1996: 146) recognises that in pre-democratic South Africa many women did not identify themselves as feminist, despite standing for women's perspectives. This was largely due to the patriarchal nature of our culture and the oppressive political regime of apartheid. The focus of social resistance at that time was the urgent need for racial, as opposed to sexual, emancipation. Feminism was also often associated with strident radicalism and reactive women-only organizations (Rampton 2015; Bate 2018: 151), which is largely why it did not appeal to me at the time. Subsequently, more nuanced and diverse feminist perspectives have arisen with more latitude to speak of spirituality and alternate modes of perceiving reality, which is part of my subjective and autobiographical exploration (Diamond 2009: 213). Of particular interest to me in this research is how autobiography as a field of study has been influenced and expanded by feminist thought.

Aims, Objectives and Research Questions

To accomplish my autobiographical investigation, it is necessary to clarify my objective and formulate relevant research aims and questions. These aims and questions need to reflect the qualitative nature of my research and to facilitate flexible, intuitive, emergent and open-ended discoveries within this autobiographical investigation. They will serve as threads that run through both my creative studio practice and this dissertation, which must be viewed as an integrated body of work.

PBR has come to be an accepted mode of research in the academic world. It recognises the dynamic relationship between artistic practice and research (Gray & Malins 2004: 1, 2). I use the term 'practise-based research' (PBR) as opposed to 'practice-led research' on the grounds that PBR is argued to be research carried out in the production of artefacts and other creative practices which underpin the research and must be submitted for examination together with the written dissertation. These terms, however, are often used interchangeably (Gray & Malins 2004: 202; Candy 2006: 3, 9).

My key research objective is to investigate autobiography as a creative fulcrum in my own studio practice. I have chosen to use both terms 'autobiography' and 'autobiographical', as opposed to either or. I prefer having use of the noun and adjectival form of the same root words which come from the Greek. This terminology will be discussed in more depth in chapter two.

Supporting this objective, the following aims and questions have been framed to assist my research.

Firstly, I aim to produce and present a body of work that reflects my autobiographical creative exploration and expression and to explore the synergy of working concurrently in drawing and clay.

The questions I pose in support of this aim are:

- How can PBR together with a heuristic approach and the study of autobiography theory and critique enrich my own process, experience, exploration and expression? (Smith & Watson 2002: 5; Barrett & Bolt, 2007: 12)
- What will emerge from embracing the subjective autobiographical urge in my creative practice technically, personally, expressively and in terms of new learnings?

Secondly, I aim to examine pertinent work of two selected female artists namely German Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945) and South African contemporary artist Wilma Cruise (b.1945), who have produced autobiographical work exploring issues of subjective experience and expression.

The questions arising from this are:

- How do the works of Käthe Kollwitz and Wilma Cruise enrich my own thinking, creative processes, personal experience and visual expression?
- How does the study of their work and writings help me situate myself as a women artist working with autobiography?

Survey of Literature

In order to carry out this research I have consulted established scholars in various fields whose written work can enrich and support my thinking and practice.

Practice-based research (PBR) serves as the primary vehicle for this research. Carole Gray and Julian Malins (2004) and Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (2007) present the theories and methodologies of PBR which will be used to ground my research, particularly as they situate creative studio practice as central to the research and emphasise the process and the experiential, tacit, subjective and individual nature of creative production.

Gray and Malins (2004) describe the research process as a metaphoric journey of exploration. Their endorsement and employment of metaphor as an analytical tool assists with the discussion and analysis of my own work and that of Kollwitz and Cruise. Their

emphasis on visual/experiential learning and visual strategies in research supports my approach as a visual tactile learner.

Barrett and Bolt (2007) emphasise the importance of the process and argue for practice as legitimate research. They assert that the subjective, emergent and interdisciplinary nature of creative practice, with its capacity to generate new findings make it a form of working philosophy. This supports my autobiographical investigation where concerns of meaning and knowledge acquisition are explored.

Within this PBR, a heuristic approach is adopted as it is recognised as a useful system of inquiry for autobiographical creative research. Three texts offer varied insights on employing this approach.

Welby Ings (2011), from an educator's perspective, looks specifically at the adoption of heuristics for autobiographical research by design students and discusses the advantages and challenges of a paradigm that connects investigation with the lived experience of the researcher. Dave Hiles (2001), representing a psychological perspective, supports heuristic's valued role in re-looking at the human psyche and realm of experience. His focus on alternate or more subtle modes of knowing such as discerned, transcendent/ spiritual, transpersonal and transformative experience, invite more open consideration of these in my own autobiographical research. Furthermore, his summaries of the core processes and phases of heuristics by Clark Moustakas provide a working framework for me.

Nevine Sultan (2019), both academic and psychologist, offers a current exposition of heuristics which supports and expands upon the two texts above. It assists me in my quest to get to the very nub of heuristic inquiry by expounding on its characteristics such as introspection, subjectivity and flexibility.

Regarding autobiography, James Olney's seminal *Metaphors of Self* (1972) has been a useful springboard for my research as it reveals autobiography as an implicit metaphor of the autobiographer. Authors are seen to embody themselves in the creation of their work, consciously or subconsciously, and the bias or subjectivity of individual temperament contributes to the vulnerability and success of both the individual and their autobiographical work.

In order to situate myself as a woman artist working in autobiography, I have sourced texts that focus on recent development of autobiography theory and critique, largely influenced by feminism. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson are prolific and consistent voices in the field and together they have co-edited numerous compilations on the subject. They are often cited in texts by other authors and I have therefore largely relied on them as authorities on autobiography and autobiographical subjectivity. *Women, Autobiography, Theory* (1998), is regarded as the first comprehensive guide of its kind in the growing field of women's autobiography. Smith and Watson's extended introduction provides me with a background of the last forty years of the twentieth century, when autobiographies by women became a rapidly growing, researched, critiqued and theorized field of study. Their (2001) guide presents a wider historical perspective of the development of autobiographical inquiry which assists me to situate myself in the greater context of autobiography. More importantly for this dissertation, however, it discusses terms relating to autobiography and introduces the idea of the autobiographical as performative acts of self-representation. It also expands on the complexity and components of autobiographical subjects and their subjectivity - memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency - which I will be following in my outline of subjectivity in chapter two.

I supplement the section of my writing on embodied subjectivity with Joan C. Chrisler and Ingrid Johnston-Robledo's (2018) book on the woman's embodied self as this becomes integral to my discussion of the theory of embodiment and of my own work. They also reference Merleau-Ponty (1962), the philosopher who originated the term 'embodiment', which assists me with my understanding of the concept.

Christiane Northrup MD (2009), an intuitive and wholistic obstetrician, gynaecologist and medical advisor, looks specifically at menopausal female embodiment. She provides insight to and language for the metaphoric rebirth of self and creativity that menopause offers women, recognising its connection to a woman's emotional and spiritual life. She reframes menopause from being a negative to a positive experience that holds the potential for transformation and healing of the body, mind and spirit.

The introduction of Smith and Watson's (2002) compilation provides more specific focus on autobiographical visual artwork (as opposed to purely written texts) of women of the twentieth century. They focus on visual/textual self-reflection by women which is relevant to the interface of textuality and visuality presented in this PBR. They address two long-

standing reservations about women's autobiography which have possibly been part of my own past resistance to the autobiographical and will be discussed in chapter two. Smith and Watson's perception of women artists as creators and makers of their own display who have adopted the use of the body, spaces, seriality and visual narratives to represent themselves (2002: 5) contributes to the discussion of my research artists and my own creative practice.

As the artists I have chosen to research have written about their own subjectivity, autobiographical experience and correlating artwork, I will refer predominantly to texts authored by them. These personal accounts are essential reading for me to hear the voices of the artists themselves. These will be supplemented by supportive texts discussing their work by feminist scholars.

Kollwitz' personal diary and letters with two short autobiographical accounts, were edited by her son Hans Kollwitz prior to publication and translated by Richard and Clara Winston (1988). They contribute to my understanding of Kollwitz as a woman, an artist and an individual and offer insight and context for her artworks discussed in this research. The recurring themes in this reflexive writing are death, loss, aging, mothering, psychological and spiritual grappling and her relationship with her creative practice. Her internal struggle to fulfil her artistic potential and sense of purpose is expressed repeatedly and metaphorically.

Mara Witzling (1991) and Wendy Slatkin (1993) focus specifically on female visual artists' autobiographical texts and journal entries. Witzling (1991) speaks of the importance of writing to many women artists in the finding of their own voice and vision and asserts that Kollwitz' work was nourished by her autobiographical experience and her family life, not purely socio-political as some have perceived. Slatkin (1993) offers perspectives on how to read women's written texts and autobiographies so that the complex, layered and irreducible identity of the author is appreciated.

Rosemary Betterton (1996) discusses women, art and the body and Kollwitz' representations of the maternal nude. This text will be a useful in contributing to my discussion of Kollwitz' work based in her subjective embodied experience of motherhood and loss. Betterton's recognition of the correlation between mothering and Kollwitz' ownership of being an artist will also contribute to the metaphoric relationship between motherhood and creativity.

My discussion of both Kollwitz and my own artmaking and navigation of midlife is enriched by Estella Lauter's (1984) *Women as Mythmakers*. She refers to Kollwitz' graphic representation of a universal mother/matriarch archetype and links this to Kollwitz' personal and creative re-emergence beyond the low-point of her menopausal years during which she lost her youngest son. She also explores the psychological significance of this for other women.

The Käthe Kollwitz Museum Cologne (Käthe Kollwitz Museum Köln 2019) and other online sources are accessed for images of Kollwitz' artwork and supportive research.

Cruise's (1997) Masters dissertation discusses her artwork produced during midlife through feminist, existential and psychoanalytical frameworks. Its focus is the relationship between her roles as both subject and object of her work, and the self-acknowledged subjective bias in her work. It also considers her use of written word and supportive texts and assists my discussion of the visual/ textual interface in her artmaking and her curation. Online sources, including Cruise's website (Wilma Cruise 2019) provide further relevant autobiographical and technical information.

Arnold (1996), originally based in South Africa, discusses Cruise's work from a South African feminist and political perspective, recognising the strong statement Cruise's work makes about female subjective experience.

Metaphor is a recurrent theme in my autobiographical creative practice and thought, and something I will discuss in relation to my research artists. George Lakoff (1993) discusses a contemporary theory of metaphor which recognises metaphorical thinking as embodied. This relates to my use of metaphor in my creative practice and that of the artists I research.

Considering my specific choice to work with the medium of clay and include materials such as earth, I consult Amanda du Preez (2008) who explores art in terms of materials used and why they have come to matter. She refers to Marshall McLuhan, the leading media theorist of the twentieth century and his theory of materiality, which is pertinent due to link between material and message in my work. I also refer to Priska Falin (2014) who speaks about materiality with specific reference to engaging with clay in ceramic practice and Cathy Malchiodi (2017) who refers to the therapeutic effect of engaging with the material.

The Bible provides a conceptual and metaphoric base for my engagement with clay and its link to the human. The language of this metaphor and the embodied materiality of clay is further supported by Andrew Livingstone and Kevin Petrie's (2017) ceramics reader.

Theoretical Framework

I will first discuss PBR, as the vehicle for this research and then I will look at the theoretical grounds for my adoption of heuristics. The autobiographical, being at the heart of my research, requires significant consideration and focus. For this reason, I will make it the focus of discussion in chapter two, along with materiality and metaphor.

PBR

PBR supports artistic investigation, providing a theoretical base on which studio practice and dissertation writing are integrated (Gray & Malins 2004: 1, 2). PBR provides for the interdisciplinary nature of my creative studio practice as well as the diverse and complex theoretical frameworks of heuristics, autobiography, materiality and metaphor and the study of other artists. It also recognises the subjectivity and personal interest and motivation of the researcher. Prior and tacit knowledge, intuition, lived experience and practitioner engagement with materials is valued, together with the emergent knowledge gained from the process of research (Barrett & Bolt 2002: 3, 4, 143).

My research is implicitly subjective and the research paradigms I adopt will be influenced by my worldview (Bourdieu cited in Barrett & Bolt 2007: 4). PBR's recognition of this fact facilitates exploration and discussion of my subjectivity as implicit to the creative process. The explicitly subjective nature of this autobiographical research is also supported by PBR which endorses emotional engagement with the research problem, where problem, context and solution are entwined (Barrett & Bolt 2007: 2, 5).

My subjective engagement does not negate the need for a degree of objectivity and distance from the research. Whilst legitimizing my individual subjectivity of action and thought, PBR requires me to articulate knowledge that is robust enough to be regarded as objective and generalisable.

The documentation of my creative process becomes a vital part of ensuring that the processes and discoveries are not forgotten or diminished by the act of explication. Furthermore, the critical focus in the production of creative work can move beyond

evaluating its outcomes as product, to an understanding of creative inquiry and its outcomes as process (Barrett 2007: 135; Gray & Malins 2004: 95).

As the practitioner-researcher my improvisation, intuition and tacit knowledge is valid (Schön cited in Gray & Malins 2004: 2, 22). This not only enables me to build my learning upon my prior knowledge and experiences, which, for me, includes drawing and painting, but also allows me to intuitively explore the materiality of clay. In PBR, new learning and understanding takes place through my active involvement and exploration and emerge from my engagement with media and materials (Heidegger cited in Barrett & Bolt 2007: 6, 143). This embodied way of learning and knowing often generates new ways of perceiving because of the very unpredictable nature of its outcomes (Barrett & Bolt 2007: 3).

The cyclical nature of this research, produced through immersion, action and intentional, explicit reflection on my work (Kolb cited in Barret in Barrett & Bolt 2007: 5; Gray & Malins 2004: 69), recognises the dynamic relationship that exists between myself as researcher, my creative practice and my research (Gray & Malins 2004: 1, 2). This metaphoric relationship, also referred to as a conversation, allows me to engage reflectively with my creative work and research and is evidenced by my visual journaling of the process (Schön cited in Gray & Malins 2004: 153; Barrett & Bolt 2007: 5).

Heuristics

Much of the theory and methodology of PBR is endorsed by heuristics. However, there are crucial aspects and perspectives of this autobiographical research that require a heuristic approach. Heuristics goes beyond PBR in that, as an exploration and interpretation of experience based on the researcher's own self, it enables me not only to recognise and explore my subjective experience, but it makes this subjectivity and lived/living experience the focus of the research (Hiles 2001: 3; Ings 2011: 227; Sultan 2019: 2, 4). It foregrounds 'self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery' (Moustakas cited in Hiles 2001: 5).

Heuristics, meaning to discover or find, is a means of 're-searching' human experience and expression. Based in Carl Jung's perspective that humankind's future is held by the single thread of the human psyche, heuristics becomes not only a useful, but perhaps urgent approach to research (Hiles 2001: 2). Responsibility, authenticity and voice are implied, and for me this begins with my autobiography (Ings 2011: 227). Heuristics also offers the possibility of growth and transformation (Sultan 2019: 6, 7, 12).

Heuristics allows for flexibility and pliability and provides support for research situations where there are no 'pre-established formulae' (Ings 2011: 227). As with PBR, it is based on stimulating interest and experimentation, trial and error, problem solving and the evaluation of possible answers. With fluid and undetermined processes and goals, the pliability provided by heuristics becomes particularly relevant.

In its depth of penetration, heuristics becomes a 'self-exposing' approach. It delves into the ontological and epistemological core beliefs of the researcher, his/her most fundamental ideas of meaning, identity and knowledge. As heuristics facilitates a journey through the inner self, it can be a vulnerable, anxious and emotional process. The researcher does not know in advance what will become exposed, revealed or discovered. These aspects are flagged as potential stumbling blocks for the researcher (Ings 2011: 232; Sultan 2019: 12, 13).

An aspect of heuristic inquiry that resonates with me is that together with 'intellectual' inquiry, it respects spiritual beliefs and experience. Spiritual experience and deeper or more subtle states of consciousness, such as dreams, are validated by heuristics in researching human experience (Hiles 2001: 2, 3, 9, 10, 11; Sultan 2019: 6).

Methods and methodology

Because this research is practice-based, heuristic, autobiographical and interdisciplinary, I will employ methodologies informed by a blend of these and a multi-method approach as endorsed by PBR and heuristics and suitable for qualitative research. This will encompass both my studio practice and my written dissertation (Gray & Malins 2004: 22 - 23, 72, 215).

I will adopt a heuristic approach as it is fluid and based on stimulating interest and experimentation, trial and error, problem solving and the evaluation of possible answers. It allows for intuition, spontaneity, subtle modes of knowing, discovery, and a flexibility of approach that is pliable and open to disruption. I will use this system of inquiry to affirm my personal experience as researcher while calling for critical, reflective, investigative problem-solving (Ings, 2011: 226 - 230).

Heuristics offers me 'an attitude with which to approach research' (Douglas & Moustakas cited in Ings 2011: 227). This is one of curiosity, wonder, passion and a sense of personal investedness in the research. However, despite its un-prescriptive nature, the processes

and phases of heuristics as identified by Moustakas will provide support and guide my research. Awareness and understanding of these core processes and phases will help me identify and observe them in my own exploration and so provide me with guidelines, as well as metaphoric language for my own inquiry (Hiles 2001: 3, 4; Ings 2011: 227; Sultan 2019: 17).

The core processes of heuristics are as follows: identification with the focus of the inquiry, self-dialogue, tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling, focusing, and internal frame of reference (Moustakas cited in Hiles 2001: 2, 3 & Sultan 2019: 17). The basic phases of heuristic inquiry are initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, creative synthesis, and validation of the heuristic inquiry. These phases are, however, emergent as opposed to imposed, and cyclical, spiralling or expanding as opposed to linear (Moustakas cited in Hiles 2001: 4 & Sultan 2019: 17).

Due to the lack of control over these phases, uncertainty, anxiety, fear and confusion may be part of the process. This, however, is part of a heuristic autobiographical approach and as researcher, I need to be willing sit with my own discomfort and uncertainty, surrender to the heuristic process, and allow things to emerge serendipitously (Ings 2011: 230; Sultan 2019: 12). What is required is self-reflexivity sufficient to recognise the phases, and periods of immersion will require periods of reflection and pattern seeking from that which has emerged (Ings 2011: 228) as well as mindful reflection on myself as subject (Gray & Malins 2004: 113 - 114).

My focus will be on the process above the product (Gray & Malins 2004: 17). My artworks, however, which serve as records of the process, will be curated into a narrative of the process to emphasise the conceptual content in the work. The processes and knowledge acquired through the 'finished' artworks will be discussed in the reflexive chapter of this dissertation.

The hands-on modes and emphasis on process of creative research account for the emergent nature of PBR methodologies (Barrett & Bolt 2007: 6). The following methods will be employed to create a visual-textual record of the process of my research and will facilitate reflection and analysis (Gray & Malins 2004: 72):

Reflection, journaling and sketching

I will reflect on my PBR and processes by means of journaling. As I prefer visual research methodologies and tend to think in pictures, this will be evident in my mode of journaling (Gray & Malins 2004: 94, 108 - 109). These pages will contain:

- sketches and thumbnail drawings
- expressive 'offloading' (subjective thoughts, emotions, attempts at meaning-making)
- photographic documentation of my processes with notes
- reflective journaling (challenges, observations, insights)
- technical considerations
- emerging ideas
- curational concepts.

This will be in order to:

- tease out nuances, shifts in perceptions and emergent problems and ideas within my process
- gain an overview perspective and clarify my thoughts and ideas for further action.

This accumulated documentation will also:

- facilitate a conversation between myself as researcher and my research
- reveal the layered and cyclical nature of the process (Gray & Malins 2004: 4)
- serve as evidence of the process
- offer a level of transparency of my processes and thinking (Ortlipp 2008: 695)
- provide a platform for more deliberate reflexive thinking about the process, outcomes and meaning of my work and a place for mindfulness and reflection on myself as subject and my subjective experience within the process (Gray & Malins, 2004:113-114; Hiles 2001: 2)
- ensure that the process is given the recognition it deserves and is not subsumed by the product/artworks or explication thereof (Gray & Malins, 2004: 107,111)
- provide primary source material for the writing of my dissertation.

My PBR will also find expression in process drawings that reflect technical and conceptual exploration.

Studio experimentation with my media

In order to explore the possibilities available to me, I will investigate the medium clay to establish its materiality (Falin 2014: 6, 7; Gray & Malins 2004: 112). This includes exploration of clay's tactile and plastic qualities, amongst others, to discover what it can yield for me in various 2 and 3D approaches. I anticipate that the 2D and 3D modalities of working will influence and inform one another. My prior knowledge in drawing and

painting, for example, will impact my engagement with clay, such as my desire to create 'tonal qualities' with the different types of clay in a similar manner to the way I would in a painting. My engagement with the materiality of clay will likewise influence my 2D work, for example the use of clay materials in my drawings. I intend to work intuitively to find new ways of working and will try to remain open to unforeseen possibilities. Included will be:

- investigations of the material qualities of various types of clay, including their plasticity, strength, colours, tones and textures, to develop a tacit knowledge of each and sense of personal connection to the material (Falin 2014: 6, 7)
- different approaches to working with clay in a hands-on manner and their suitability for various processes and modalities as well as the therapeutic effect of working with clay (Malchiodi 2017)
- exploration of ways to sculpt and technical options available that enable me to find a personal means of expression (Gray & Malins 2004: 112)
- drawings and prints in, on and with clay, oxides, earth and charcoal
- explorations of clay's capacity to generate 'linear qualities' by rolling thin coils and 'tonal ranges' by mixing red and white earthenware clays (for skin-tones and shading) to enable me to 'draw' with clay
- exploring silicone as a drawing medium for embossing into clay
- the generation of images in moulded vessels and vessels from moulded images
- the production of studio tests and sample pieces for consideration of various firing modes (e.g. electric kiln, smoke, raku) and of temperatures in order to explore the outcomes in terms of colour, porosity and strength, and to consider various surface treatments/ 'finishes'/ glazes (Gray & Malins 2004: 112)

My interdisciplinary autobiographic investigation will culminate in the presentation of a body of artwork together with a written dissertation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced my topic, my aims and objectives, and formulated my research questions. The theoretical framework of PBR and heuristics have provided the means of research through creative studio practice, with emphasis on subjective experience, tacit and intuitive knowledge, the process and self-reflexivity through journaling.

Although the process is fluid and without pre-determined outcomes, with emphasis on the importance of remaining open, I have in heuristics' phases and processes a guide for my research which supports my adopted visual/tactile methodologies and methods a well as an autobiographical exploration.

Chapter Two: Autobiography, materiality, metaphor and emerging themes

Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the terms relating to autobiography, provide a brief historical/contextual perspective of it, and look at two 'suspicions' concerning women's autobiography. Then I will focus on the theory of autobiography that provides a lens for this research and helps me to investigate autobiography as a creative fulcrum. Linking to PBR and heuristics, I have chosen to focus on theories of autobiographical subjectivity which includes memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency. Lastly, I will discuss materiality and the ability of metaphor to be embodied, that is, to be understood through and with our bodies as well as our minds. This will include reference to emergent metaphors and themes within my research.

Autobiography: historical perspective and a theoretical lens

At the root of the word 'autobiography' the Greek words *autos, bios* and *graphe* together read 'self life writing' (Smith & Watson 2001: 1). As autobiography was traditionally seen as a literary genre, the theorizing and critique thereof is primarily directed towards written modes of autobiography. This field of theorizing and critique can be applied to other modes of autobiographical expression, such as visual and performance-based ones (Smith & Watson 2002: 5 - 7). The term 'graphy' refers not only to writing, characters or text, but also to recording and describing which can be made by lines, scratching and drawing (Etymonline 2019).

Many scholars identify St Augustine's Confessions (397 CE) (Di Summa-Knoop 2017: 1; Smith & Watson 2001: 85) as the first Western autobiography. According to Smith and Watson, the term 'autobiography' itself, by the twentieth century, came to be narrowly identified by many critics as the retrospective narration of 'great' public lives, particularly men. For this reason, many subsequently prefer to use the adjective 'autobiographical' as opposed to the noun 'autobiography' when referring to modes of self-life-writing. Sounding less objective or perhaps authoritative than the term 'autobiography', the terms 'life narratives' or 'life stories' are also often used, as well as terms more expressive of the enacted nature and diversity of these works such as 'autobiographical acts' and 'materializations of autobiographical subjectivity'. Because the autobiographical at best can only re-present the autobiographical subject, autobiography is also referred to as

autobiographical presentations or representations. As previously mentioned, I have selected to use the term ‘autobiography’ in its broader application as opposed to the more limited definition above, and to use it interchangeably with others, depending on context (Smith & Watson 2001: 3 - 9, 47).

The traditional perspective of autobiography as a linear, authoritative and definitive narration of one’s own closed past is fruit of the historic ‘master narrative’ of Western thinking, emergent from the Enlightenment, which lauds the individual as sovereign self. Traditionally belonging to the realm of men, or ‘Great Men’ (those perceived of as great or of importance), the literary canon of autobiography (and its visual art counterpart documented in Art History), for the most, excluded autobiographic voices of many others not perceived of as great or authoritative, like those of women and minorities. More informal modes of self-narration, such as diaries and letters amongst others, were not recognised in this paradigm (Marcus 1994: 1; Smith & Watson 2001: 45, 84; 2002: 8).

This exclusive and more elitist traditional Western perspective of autobiography began to be radically critiqued, re-interpreted and re-imagined in the second half of last century by feminist scholars (Marcus 1994: 1; Smith & Watson 2001: 45).

The expanded field of autobiography studies is now more inclusive of previously excluded voices and modes of autobiographic expression. The voices of women and minorities now proliferate. Textual modes such as memoirs, journals, letters and diaries as well as multiple visual modes including sculpture, drawing, painting and installations amongst others, are now recognised as sites of autobiographical self-presentation. Technology expands this field to include cybersites and social media platforms, exponentially multiplying the platforms and scope of autobiographical presentation (Marcus 1994: 1; Smith & Watson 2001: 45; 2002: 4 - 6).

The major critique of and shift away from the androcentric (male dominated) nature of the tradition and critique of autobiography is ascribed to feminist criticism and historiography (the re-reading of history from a female perspective). These examined the theories, techniques and principles of historical scholarship of autobiography. The writings and theory of women’s autobiography have been crucial for revising our concepts of women’s lives and life issues, as well as the concept and practice of autobiography itself. From the 1970s, during the second wave of feminism, the formerly neglected fields of scholarship of autobiographies and artwork done by women became much researched and critiqued

subjects by feminist scholars and theorists and this spawned an explosion of autobiographies done by women. The field of autobiography is said to have been ‘enlivened’, ‘transformed’ and totally ‘revolutionised’ by feminist thought. The work done by these feminist historians, critics and theorists certainly enlarged the field of autobiography studies and recognised the subjective nature of the autobiographical (Borzello 1998:159; Marcus 1994: 1; Smith & Watson 1998: 5).

Feminism, often preferring more eclectic and evolving theoretical frameworks, has appropriated blends of other theories which in turn have contributed to the study of autobiography. This is reflected in writing on women’s autobiography and the development of this field of scholarship. These include postmodernist, postcolonialist and post-structuralist analysis, outside of the scope of this dissertation (Smith & Watson 1998: 4-5, 15-16).

Psychoanalytic theories, however, deserve specific mention here. The feminist embracing of psychoanalysis during the so-called second wave of feminism, is also a well-recognised part of the current fourth wave (Diamond 2009: 213, 219), and means that psychoanalysis directly influences autobiographical theorizing (Miller 2010: 63). Psychoanalysis focuses on the stories people tell themselves, and the subconscious and repressed elements of those narratives, with the hope of generating consciousness, insight and catharsis (McLeod 2007). British psychotherapist and essayist, Adam Phillips (1994: xx), states that people usually arrive at psychoanalysis because their narrative about their lives has become painful or is being challenged or changed. Engagement with writing or reading autobiography has long been regarded by psychoanalytic practitioners as an instrument of healing in the search to find and articulate one’s story (Smith & Watson 1998: 40). By extension, this can also apply to the autobiographical act of a visual artist. However, although autobiographical acts can function as therapeutic intervention that transform both narrator and the life story produced, they can also become a means of re-enforcing and perpetuating trauma and negative scripts or narratives (Smith & Watson 2001: 22, 23).

Diana Diamond (2009: 213, 219), referring to psychoanalytic perspectives of the fourth wave of feminism, recognises its combination of psychology, politics and spirituality. Spiritual autobiographies in various forms have been a recurrent and consistent part of autobiographical history, but references to spirituality also appear obliquely in other autobiographical modes (Smith & Watson 2001: 205). The turn towards spirituality brings

with it an acceptance of and awakening to our spiritual or quantum self beyond our corporeal self in space-time. This contributes to the complex layering of the autobiographical. As opposed to the sovereign enlightenment self that was highly individuated and separate from others, the spiritual self also recognises relational and cosmic connection.

Not only is the autobiographical connected to psychoanalysis and spirituality but is also recognised as an instrument for philosophical engagement. Autobiography is a way of exploring one's ontological and epistemological perspectives. It is a means of investigating meaning and meaning-making, of working out one's theoretical perspectives and frameworks. and processing one's curiosities into more articulate reasoning (Barrett & Bolt 2007: 1, 3; Cowley 2015; Di Summa-Knoop 2017).

In the face of the increasing diversity and complexity of the autobiographical, with its unabated proliferation and blending of modes and sites, Smith and Watson (2002: 4 - 7, 10 - 12) state that increasingly nuanced theorizing of the autobiographical is needed. In this context they highlight what they call two 'widely held suspicions' regarding women's autobiography that need consideration before engaging with the theorizing of the autobiographical, as an understanding of them provides context and clarity for further discussion.

The first suspicion, that women's autobiographies are 'merely personal', assumes they are not influenced by wider discursive regimes and cultural critique and have no relevance or application beyond the personal. This suspicion also perceives the autobiography to be a transparent window into the 'real life' of the autobiographer, a self-evident reflection of the artist/author. This presumes that the work is easily perceived and explained by biographical accounts of the artist. Self-referential works that are personal, however, do not imply transparency. Women's autobiography as a cultural practice, tends to be complex, dense, layered and infused with historical context, specific conventions, and intentional choice of medium or media and processes. It provides opportunity to negotiate the past, reflect on identity, and critique cultural norms and narratives. This desire to challenge and/ or influence society more widely reflects more than merely personal expression. The autobiographical is constantly changing and impossible to be reduced into simple explanation. As 'maker of her own display', the autobiographical artist also chooses what is encrypted and what is revealed (Smith & Watson 2002: 5, 8, 9). Further

complicating the reading of the autobiographical, there is also the projected and personal perspective of the viewer.

The second suspicion regarding autobiography that is addressed by Smith and Watson is the idea that it is 'excessively self-absorbed', or narcissistic, particularly when *women* artists make themselves the subject of their own work. In other words, women artists were seen to be too fixated on themselves and their bodies and unable to transcend to the universal. However, in context of patriarchal traditions within literary studies and art-history, where 'passive' women were predominantly represented by men authors/artists for men readers/patrons - that is, subject to '(male) gaze' - the focus on self by women became part of their reclaiming of self and of their resistance, intervention, agency and disruption of the patriarchal order (Smith & Watson 2002: 10 - 12, 14 - 18). This concept of the 'male gaze' was developed by Laura Mulvey (1975), a feminist theorist and film critic. It is used to describe a way of treating and depicting women's bodies as eroticised passive objects to be viewed from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity/the heterosexual male spectator and reflect the values of patriarchal society. The spectator is said to be voyeuristic, controlling, active and obsessive of erotic details (Oxford Reference 2020b). Mulvey's theories have been criticized and developed since then, even by herself, and the discourse on the gaze become more complicated. Victor Burgin (in Cruise 1997: 20, 21), for example, states that Mulvey suppressed the unconscious in her oversimplified dualism of woman as passive victim and male as voyeur. Catherine Nash (1996: 158) also argues against the passive role of the object. She says that looking is not one-sided: "looking does not produce static positions of identification, distance, voyeurism, narcissism or fetishism [as Mulvey suggests] but movement between these possible spectator positions for women and men". Although I acknowledge Mulvey's perspective, I tend to agree with these views that it polarizes the sexes, universally vilifies the male and victimises the female, and does not account for the female as viewer or for varied male or female responses.

Becoming aware of these long-standing and widely held suspicions of women's autobiographies has been both enlightening and liberating for me. They appear to have arisen as reactions to the expression of women's autobiographies emergent from the second wave of feminism when art of a reactionary nature made by women laying claim to their own bodies as sites for expressive and artistic resistance began to proliferate. Feminists at the time often produced art that focussed on bodily function and /or excrement, and bodies that were not perceived of as beautiful or acceptable, including the

aging body (Borzello 1997: 166, 167). I recognise the influence of these suspicions on my prior thinking and internal resistance to my own autobiographical exploration or expression. Insight to these suspicions also establishes awareness in my reading of the autobiographies of others, specifically those of the two women artists I discuss in chapter three.

A significant shift in perception of the autobiographical due to the influence of feminism was in the recognition that the telling of one's own life is invariably meshed with the telling of another or others' lives. Telling of another also by default reflects the identifications and perceptions of the narrator, whether implicit or explicit. The borders between autobiography and biography began to dissolve, leading to more layered and interesting autobiographical practice and theory. The term 'auto/biographical', used by Laura Marcus (1994: 273, 274), intentionally links autobiography and biography as opposed to keeping them discrete. Interpersonal and intrapersonal concerns of the autobiographer are meshed.

In reflecting the perceptions of the author, an autobiography acknowledges authorial subjectivity. As opposed to being perceived as an objective and authoritative account, and something that traditionally separated biography and autobiography, this subjectivity has become a crucial part of theorizing around the autobiographical (Marcus 1994: 273, 274; Smith & Watson 2001: 137).

Even before feminism's theoretical revolution of the autobiographical, subjectivity was recognised in autobiography studies. Janet Miller (2010: 61 - 62) states that before the 1970s, autobiography as literary genre and discourse, within curriculum studies at least, seemed to pair well with existential-phenomenological theories. Autobiography was recognised as fertile soil for consideration of ways in which learning could focus more on 'inner' perceptions and experiences as opposed to 'external' learning objectives. Students and teachers could investigate relations between academic studies, life history, and 'subjective meaningfulness' in ways that could be self-transforming. This inward focus and existential-phenomenological aspect of autobiography became significant factors in the development of autobiography theory itself and are at the crux of my own PBR.

Subjectivity in this sense refers to personal perception of and emotional response to a lived experience. This autobiographical subjectivity is communicated via the autobiographical act of self-narrating, whether explicitly or not. The apparently straightforward act of

writing, or making art, about one's own life becomes complex in the process of assuming roles as both observing subject and object of investigation, the observer and the observed (Smith & Watson 2001: 1).

Smith and Watson (2001: 15; 2002: 9) speak of the formation of personal subjectivity. The autobiographical subject is formed by what they refer to as 'the components' or 'constitutive processes' of subjectivity. These components – memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency – together make the act of life narrating extremely complex and far from 'transparent'. They have become foundational in theorizing acts of self-representation and will guide me in exploring and examining my own visual autobiography and those of Kollwitz and Cruise.

Memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency

Memory is referred to as the psychological dimension of autobiographical subjectivity. When memories are created, they are records of how we subjectively experience an event, not direct copies of the event itself. These subjective memories change over time. Remembering and retrieving memories also involves reinterpretation of the past, not mere retrieval thereof. The creation of autobiographical work within any specific moment and context depends on how we retrieve and collate those subjective, fragmented and permanently shifting memories within shifting context and time. This is corroborated by research in neuroscience, cognitive psychology and philosophy. Memory is further problematised by its collective, not just personal nature. Furthermore, what is remembered or not remembered, or obscured, and why so, also plays a significant role in autobiographical work. The act of remembering becomes part of the act of meaning making by the autobiographer (Smith & Watson 2001: 16 – 19, 24, 49; 2002: 9).

Memories are also cellular and embodied (Lakoff 2012), not merely cognitive, and the telling of traumatic/painful memories in life narratives is complex. On the one hand this can become a means of re-enforcing and perpetuating the traumatic experience, but on the other hand a means of processing through which both narrator and life story itself can be changed. This is recognised as the therapeutic effect of life narrating and speaks to agency (Smith & Watson 1998: 40; 2001: 22, 23).

The second component of subjectivity is the phenomenon of experience. This is called the temporal dimension of subjectivity. This aspect of lived experience is referred to as 'having an experience' and located within specific spacetime. Human experiences include

bodily, somatic, neurological, emotional and spiritual feelings. They also include sensory memories of events and images (Smith & Watson 2001: 26, 49).

Contrary to this understanding of experience, however, Joan W. Scott (cited in Smith & Watson 2001: 25; 2002: 10) argues: 'It is not individuals who have experience' but 'subjects who are constituted through experience'. From this perspective, experience is the process through which a person becomes a certain kind of person or subject, the means by which they are fashioned. This experience predates the autobiographical subject, not vice versa. In other words, we know ourselves based on certain inherited frameworks of thought, certain cultural registers or narratives, and certain identities and statuses available to us in the social realm. Michel Foucault referred to these as discursive regimes (Smith & Watson 2001: 25 - 26; 2002: 9 - 10). Recognising the role of discursive regimes in the formation of our embodied experience and concepts of self does, however, not negate the nature of felt experience within any moment in time. It also does not recognise the possibility of spiritual modes of experience that can disrupt these discursive regimes and waken consciousness of alternate frameworks of thinking and available choices and norms. There is value in recognising both understandings of experience.

In the context of discursive experience, it is important for the life-narrator to be self-reflexive about what s/he understands as his/her personal experience. If experience is also formed by inherited discursive regimes, Scott (cited in Smith & Watson 2001: 26) advocates that we recognise that what we call experience is 'always already an interpretation *and* in need of interpretation'. An autobiographer interprets their experience and can revise past interpretations of experience in the retelling of their story. This may be successive and reveal various changes in or stages of one's pattern of beliefs which are encoded into one's narrative. Possible changes may signal significant cultural transformations affecting how people know themselves at any particular historical moment (Smith & Watson 2001: 27). This also speaks to the issue of the personal becoming generalizable and vice versa.

Cognitive learning can and does bring awareness of alternative possible frameworks of thought and expose unconscious embedded and embodied discursive regimes. However, sometimes they are so ingrained in us and we are so unaware of them that we cannot perceive of other possible realities. This is where, in my experience, appreciation for more subtle ways of knowing and honest spiritual desire for shifts in perceptions are vital.

In self-narration, the author's experience is asserted as a primary form of evidence. This personal experience is what is deemed by the narrator to qualify him/her to tell the story. This sense of 'authority of experience' on the part of the autobiographer serves to invite or compel the reader to believe in the authenticity of the story and of the narrator. This authority of experience is claimed both implicitly and explicitly by life-narrations. The name of the autobiographer on the work is one way in which s/he is seen to implicitly offer a credible story of disclosure. Explicit appeals to the authority of experience are sometimes made based on sexual, racial, ethnic, national or religious identity claims. In the case of this PBR, I claim a level of authority as a woman experiencing midlife and loss, while yet opening myself spiritually and incubating a sense of possibility thinking. The authority of experience, however, may not always be recognised as it hinges on the individual, social and cultural context in which the autobiographical work is received. The autobiographer can also anticipate or perceive readers, real or imagined, to be open and receptive or resistant, unbelieving, sceptical and perhaps even hostile. This affects the way in which the life story or experience is disclosed. Different expressions of experience are deemed acceptable or not in different social or cultural contexts and moments in history. The establishing of a narrator/reader pact based on a relationship of mutual trust is foundational (Smith & Watson 2001: 27 - 29, 32).

Identity is the third component of subjectivity. It is also described as the spatial component of autobiographical subjectivity in that it denotes common or shared ground. Smith and Watson describe how autobiographical subjects identify themselves to the reader by means of identification with others, and differentiation from others. Identity, as commonality and difference within collectives, reflects the autobiographical subject's positioning. In this paradigm, identities emerge from categories such as sex, race, class, genealogy, nationality, politics and religion (Smith & Watson 2001: 32 - 33, 49). I acknowledge these spatial/corporeal indicators of identity and their capacity to generate a sense of commonality or difference in the mind of the reader. Yet I do not base my deepest sense of identity in or on them. As opposed to perceiving that I am a human being that sometimes has spiritual experiences, I hold that I am a spiritual being experiencing life within the womb of my corporeal existence. In this sense, I regard corporeal identity as not only spatial but also temporal. Nonetheless, I come from the perspective that beyond differentiating factors of sex, age, race, economic status, nationality and so forth, integral

to our human experience and coupled with our systems of identification, a greater commonality exists spiritually.

The name of the artist, part of the identity of the artist, is a sign of the autobiographical in ‘visual/ textual self-portraiture’. Autobiography is thus an active means of ‘naming’ or giving identity to the author (Smith & Watson 2002: 5). Women have therefore intentionally employed autobiography to articulate their own voice and take up their space not only in art, but in society at large. Telling one’s own story as a woman is seen as a feminist act by many (Bate 2018: 95). Perhaps this is why so many women have employed the autobiographical.

Embodiment is the fourth and material dimension of autobiographic subjectivity (Smith & Watson 2001: 37 - 38, 49). The term ‘embodiment’ is a complex one, originating in the work of the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1962). Phenomenology recognises the difference between the ‘subjective experience of one's own body’/ embodiment and ‘the objective or scientific picture of a body in physiological terms’. Subjective experience and the ‘specific ways we experience ourselves as embodied’ are not invalidated in research, but ‘… become prime data for theorizing about knowledge and experience’ (Oxford Reference 2020a). Merleau-Ponty referred to the ‘lived body’ as a social agent and said that all perception and experience of the world is embodied. Without our bodies, we can neither understand the world we live in, nor interact with each other or the environment around us. Everything we know, do, and are is mediated by the body. Our bodies are the means by which we interface with the external world and give subjective expression to ourselves (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo 2018: 3, 8).

The autobiographical body (narrator) is at the hub of transaction and the autobiographical narrative mines the embodied narrator self. Autobiographers’ bodies are sites of autobiographical knowledge and so autobiographies are sites of embodied knowledge (Lakoff 2012: 773) (Smith & Watson 2001: 37 - 38, 49). As we live in bodies and as bodies, they both shape and are shaped by our personal sense of identity, our experience, our memories.

Body and mind are entangled. Memory, for instance, is not a merely mental phenomenon, but exists on a somatic and cellular level. This embodied materiality of memory and consciousness is supported by physiological, biochemical, neurochemical and possibly quantum systems. Embodiment can be experienced positively or negatively, as

empowering or disempowering (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo 2018: 3). Trauma or victimisation, as mentioned, can become repressed silent embodied experience with continued power over how a person sees and experiences him/herself (Culbertson 1995: 169; Lakoff 2012: 773; Northrup 2009: 62, 63; Smith & Watson 2001: 37 - 38, 49).

The term embodiment is often used in the fields of women's studies, sociology, philosophy and psychology (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo 2018: 8). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as is 'a tangible or visible form of an idea, quality, or feeling (Lexico 2020a). Northrup (2009: 49, 50, 51, 76), speaks of how thoughts and emotions affect 'every single cell' in a person's body, becoming biochemical realities in our bodies. She reveals how specific emotional patterns are even associated with specific illnesses in specific parts of the body. Not only are conscious thoughts and feelings embodied in a cellular way, but so are subconscious thoughts and core beliefs. (Lakoff 2012: 773) (Smith & Watson 2001: 37 - 38, 49). Cognitive psychologists (e.g., Gibbs, 2006 in Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo 2018: 8) inversely use the term to refer to the effect the body has on shaping the mind. Piran, 2016; Piran & Teall, 2012 (in Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo 2018: 8) look at the effect of embodiment on, for example, the development of body image concerns, and positive aging. Yet this again could be linked back to the way the body is perceived/ thought of. Nonetheless, it appears that there is a body/mind loop. Ideas and thoughts, themselves embodied, become embodied in the body and the body likewise effects the shaping of the mind.

The onslaught of images and ideas of bodies in the mass and social media profoundly affect the sense of self and embodiment. Recognising that men have culturally been perceived as *having* bodies, while women have often been perceived *as* bodies, Chrisler and Johnston-Robledo (2018: 7, 8) explore the consequences of media perceptions on women and state that 'there is no mistaking the fact that a woman's self is embodied', pointing back to Mulvey's (1975) theory on the media-based objectification of women's bodies. They recognise a shift in female focus approximately half-way through the twentieth century from the internal to the external, from the soul to the body (referring to Brumberg's study, which is admittedly a Western USA based one focussing on younger girls). The focus on improvement of the 'moral aspects of the self' (being 'better people: more patient, kinder, gentler, more loving, more devoutly faithful, more trustworthy') shifted to focus on the external, the body (becoming more attractive, prettier, thinner and

today, sexier as well). The idea that is internalized as valuable, becomes the focus, the sought-after ideal embodiment, even if only in terms of dissonance with ones' own body for not conforming to a perceived prerequisite. Otherwise, the idea that generates that dissonance is rejected. Nonetheless, the body seems to have replaced the soul as 'the object of salvation' (Öberg & Tornstam 1999: 631 in Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo 2018: 4). The heavy weight of pressure to conform to external standards seems to perpetuate a sense of self-rejection in ones' own embodiment, whether in relation to ones' 'soul' or ones' 'body'. Feminists have often used the un-idealised female form as a tool of subversion to undermine patriarchal expectation - focus on bodily function/excrement, old bodies, bodies that do not generally fall in line with the social construction of 'beauty' (S & W, Borzello 1997: 166, 167).

With regards to the appearance of the body, Pierre Bourdieu (1984 in Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo 2018: 5) reported that members of higher socioeconomic strata focus more on the body's appearance, whereas those from lower socioeconomic strata focus more on its functionality. I would assert that the true 'self' of a person cannot be defined by their economic status and access to transforming their external 'self'.

Northrup (2009: xvi - xviii) looks specifically at midlife embodiment in women and the deeper transition that it offers. She states that the physiological and hormonal changes that take place in the perimenopausal female body, signalling an end to childbearing years, also rewire our nervous systems and increase intuition, opening us to entirely new possibilities. She challenges the cultural negative perceptions of midlife and the negative narratives women carry about themselves that often manifest with increased intensity at midlife if they have not previously been addressed. She sees midlife as an opportunity to rebirth oneself and one's embodied experience of self.

In exploring the body and embodiment as sites of both knowledge and the production of knowledge, Smith and Watson state that autobiographers find themselves involved in several roles. First, they negotiate cultural norms which determine the proper use of and relationship with bodies, their own or others, and what is perceived as acceptable. Second, they engage with, challenge and/or revive these cultural norms. Finally, they reproduce, blend, or critique cultural discourses that define and distinguish the normative and ab-normative body (Smith & Watson 2001: 41, 42).

Smith and Watson (2001: 38) speak of life narrators as being ‘multiply embodied’. They refer to the anatomical body, the body as a neurochemical system and the socio-political body based in cultural attitudes and discourses about public meanings of the body. They also refer to what Elizabeth Grosz calls the ‘imaginary body’, reflective of familial and social beliefs about the body. Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo (2018: 4) state that ‘a living body provides a home for the self’ and that ‘brain creates the mind, which produces the sense of self’ and ‘without a body, there is no self’. No reference by these authors is made to a quantum or spiritual body, although some may perceive this as part of the imaginary body. I perceive that the brain does not necessarily, by default of certain frameworks, perceive an expanded sense of self that includes a spiritual self, but that this spiritual self can be spiritually perceived by senses much like our physical senses. Although the noun, ‘embodiment’ is more recent, the verb, ‘to embody’ originates from earlier (1540s) in reference to ‘a soul or spirit invested with a physical form’ and only later (1660s) with reference to principles and ideas in physical form (Etymonline 2020). These link to the Christian doctrine of incarnation, the enfleshment of Divine word (John 1: 1, 14).

Northrup (2009: xvi, 50, 51, 58, 63, 64, 341) endorses an integrated spirit/mind/body approach. She states that our health and happiness depend more on our perception of life events than the events themselves and that our beliefs and attitudes are more powerful than our genes, even determining how genes are expressed. The idea that spirit is intimately part of human embodiment recognises the value of including spirituality in therapy to provide ‘whole person’ care and achieve better outcomes for those with depression, demoralization and experiencing existential crises, all of which have been relevant to me at midlife. In recognising the shift away from dichotomies like science/religion and therapy/spirituality towards a both/and synthesis, Russell D’Souza & Angelo Rodrigo (2004: 148, 149, 150) advocate spiritually augmented cognitive behaviour therapy (SACBT). This recognises not only the role of cognition and a person’s belief systems but validates the belief in a force greater than the self in the therapeutic process. It addresses embodied trauma, loss and illness by aiming to enable the patient to become self-therapist in order to facilitate positive shifts, empowerment, enhanced coping skills and purposeful engagement with life. Acceptance, forgiveness, hope and achieving meaning and purpose are key cognitive elements in this approach and behavioural practices include meditation, relaxation and prayer/ritual exercises, followed by record-keeping. This spirit/mind/body understanding of and approach to embodied experience supports my own. Furthermore,

the processes described seem to reflect those of immersion and mindful self-reflexivity required by PBR and heuristics.

The discussion on embodiment has become expanded and more complex by the discourse that separates biological sex from gender. However, this being an autobiographical investigation of a cisgender female, I will not engage in this dialogue in this PBR.

Agency speaks to the transformative dimension of autobiographical subjectivity. Autobiographical narratives tend to be read as proofs of human agency. Smith and Watson state that people prefer to think of humans as actors/agents in their own lives rather than powerless or passive, unconsciously transmitting inherited social scripts and models of identity. Traditional autobiography was taken as narration of agency, evidence of the freedom of choice of the narrator. The issue, however, is complex. If societal discursive systems shape memory, experience, identity and embodiment; and if life stories are told through available cultural scripts; and if people are governed by cultural strictures about public self-presentation, then how can it be said that the individual has agency or control over the stories they tell about themselves? Or where does agency lie? There are several contemporary theories of agency that have developed in response to these questions, but the scope of this additional research would be too wide for the scale of this research (Smith &Watson 2001: 42, 45, 49). Yet, I desire transformation and am interested in the transformative potential of self-narration in both narration and narrator and, by default, my agency as a creative, dynamic and spiritual being. In investigating autobiography as a creative fulcrum, particularly within a heuristic and practice-based framework, transformative potential is implied. A fulcrum by definition is a point on which something rests or balances, a pivotal point that provides leverage, a support or point of support on which a lever turns in raising or moving something. A fulcrum is something or someone that plays an essential role in an action or situation, is a means of exerting pressure and influence and is an '*agent* through which vital powers are exercised' (italics my own) (Cambridge Dictionary 2020; Collins Dictionary 2020; Lexico 2017; Merriam Webster 2020; Your Dictionary 2020). Heuristic and practice-based research allow for aspects of agency to emerge, as does the autobiographical act, itself dynamic and creative. The transformative power, for example, of acknowledging and soothing one's own emotions through compassion, forgiveness and love and of shifting patterns of perception and belief so that negative cycles of cognition, behaviour and embodied experience are altered is advocated by Northrup (2009: 41, 49 - 51, 54, 58, 63, 64, 339). Apart from psychoanalytic

and cognitive approaches that incorporate reflexivity and increased consciousness and intentionality of thought, my quest for personal agency is also based in more subtle and spiritual ways of knowing and perceiving.

In sum, with this understanding of the complexity of the components of subjectivity, it is important to recognise that the dynamic, layered and complex self cannot be subsumed into a life narrative of the self or by the self. Readers of autobiography should be aware not to reduce the autobiographical subject to the autobiography presented or assume autobiographers are coherent or static selves telling unified, transparent or definitive stories of their lives. Smith and Watson (2001: 47) see the coherent self and the unified story as myths of identity. As mentioned, they also do not acknowledge a metaphysical or spiritual identity or consciousness that transcends time and space. Nonetheless, the transformative nature of autobiographical acts contributes to the dynamic nature of the self and the dynamic self contributes to transformative autobiographical acts.

Autobiographical subjectivity, at the nub of much autobiographical practice, theory and discourse, is at the core of my discussion of artists researched in the next chapter and my own work in chapter four.

Materiality

The medium or 'matter' of any art (its' materiality) is the means by which it exists physically in the world, but this physicality also then 'matters' or has a certain significance accredited to it by virtue of being or being called art. McLuhan's dictum, 'the medium is the message', recognises the complexity of the relationship between the message and the medium. The theory of materiality encourages us to see art in terms not only of what it means (content), but in terms of 'the vehicle or materiality through which it manifests itself (how it matters)'. Concept is communicated through the medium. The medium or means also implies, according to McLuhan, a 'change in scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs', bringing change or revolution. The significance of the medium becomes such that were it to be changed, the meaning and message of the artwork would be altered (Du Preez 2008: 30, 40).

My exploration of clay as a new medium for me to work with in this PBR (apart from my introduction to clay in my first year of university in 1986) is significantly meshed with the concepts I explore and its embodied materiality central to my choice of it as a medium.

Citing Arthur Danto, Du Preez (2008: 37) states that artworks are 'about what they embody'.

Clay is described as 'vital materiality' in the way that it engages the practitioner simultaneously and subjectively on many levels that are difficult to articulate (Bennett in Falin 2014: 2). Apart from touch and sight, the material can be sensed by taste, sound, smell and intuition, as well as a personal sense of connection to the clay, curiosity about it and continued inspiration by it. The relationship between maker and the materials is something mysterious, as not all people respond to working with clay in this way. Maker and materials become 'entangled' in time and space, often generating a sense of being 'outside' of time. Yet each step of the process of working with clay 'takes its own time' and cannot be rushed or bypassed (Falin 2014: 2, 3, 6, 7). This requires of the practitioner at times a speeding up, but many times a slowing down and becoming present to and merging with the process.

As a potently embodied material made naturally within the earth, clay has specific properties (for example plasticity) and processes (for example wedging/ kneading). These properties and processes provide the artist a tactile, kinesthetic, immersive and full-bodied experience in engaging with it. Working with clay is also recognised for its therapeutic effect. Its sensory qualities invite physicality and touch, its three dimensionality requires perceptual processing and problem solving, and the processual and soothing nature of engaging with the material (pounding, kneading, rolling, shaping, joining, smoothing and so forth) is recognised as self-soothing and self-regulating. Clay is documented to mediate in alleviating depression and trauma and facilitating an increased sense of well-being and the ability to express feelings verbally (Malchiodi 2017). Considering the starting point of this autobiographical journey and research project was one of loss and depression, these aspects of the materiality of clay are part of what has drawn me to it.

Various types of clay are referred to as various clay 'bodies' (Rawson in Livingstone & Petrie 2017: 56) By virtue of its embodied materiality, clay is a strongly metaphoric medium that has frequently been used to represent the human. This concept is a recurrent theme in many ancient traditions, including the Bible (Genesis 2: 7; Jeremiah 18: 3 – 6; 2 Corinthians 4: 7), where, in the Genesis narrative, God created man (referring here to humankind) from the dust of the earth (Genesis 2: 7). The Hebrew word translated 'dust' here implies clay, earth, mud, ground, ashes (Strong 1988: 90). Scientifically, research has

shown that clay 'might have been the birthplace of life on earth (o)r at least of the complex biochemicals that make life possible' (Cornell University 2013). Human bodies contain mineral elements and trace elements of the earth differently composed and weighted (Allen 2012). The language of humans as clay and God as master potter is reiterated throughout the Bible (e.g. Jeremiah 18: 3 – 6) and the Divine is seen as the one who forms us in our mother's womb (Psalm 139: 13 – 15).

The 'clay as human' metaphor applies in terms of both materiality and processes: from being formed within the dark 'womb' of the earth, through its soft, plastic and malleable stages to its dry, brittle phases and ultimately through its transformation through the firing process from a 'impermanent' to a 'permanent' state, clay to ceramic. Furthermore, the recognition of its strengths and possibilities meshed together with the unexpected and its fragility and capacity to break also allude to human qualities. The malleability of clay specifically alludes to neuroplasticity which is the ongoing capacity of the human brain to 'rewire' or reorganize itself by creating new neural pathways in response to learning, experience and/or injury (Lexico 2020b). Neurons (nerve cells) in the brain compensate by adjusting their activities and creating new connections or synapses in response to situations or to changes in their environment (Shiel 2020). SACBT's goal of transformation directly depends on the plasticity and malleability of the brain and this concept of transformation through renewing the mind, thoughts and attitudes is a biblical concept (Ephesians 4: 23; Romans 12: 2), linking back to the clay/human metaphor because of the malleable materiality of both.

The materiality of ceramic vessel which is regarded as a 'container' of meaning and a 'repository' for memories (Raby 2015: 33) is an extension of the clay as human metaphor. It speaks to the vessel-like containment of life or spirit, the divine spark of life within us (2 Corinthians 4: 7) (Raffa 2017). Clay vessel descriptors all refer to human body parts –foot, belly, shoulder, neck, mouth, lip (Forni in Livingstone & Petrie 2017: 33; Rawson in Livingstone & Petrie 2017: 56). More specifically, the feminine symbolism of the vessel is recognised in its womb and breast-like nature and function (Raffa 2017). Working with clay has been regarded by some as a potent metaphor for female fertility and human reproduction, with the moulding of clay paralleled to the moulding in the womb (Forni in Livingstone & Petrie 2017: 25, 27; Kilgore in Livingstone & Petrie 2017: 67). In Christianity, Mary is a vessel for new spiritual life (Luke 1: 26 – 38) (Raffa 2017).

Metaphor and emergent themes

The use of metaphor is widely acknowledged as a powerful way of enhancing our understanding by describing complex or abstract ideas with visual language (Gray & Malins 2004: 2, 67, 68).

The typical understanding of a metaphor is linguistic: a figure of speech in which one thing is represented or symbolized by something else through a word or phrase which implies similarity (Dictionary.com 2019). Iain McGilchrist (2009 :332) states that this view of metaphor is inherited from the Enlightenment and reduces the metaphoric to a linguistic device as opposed to appreciating it as an implicit vehicle of embodied thought.

The contemporary theory of metaphor proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (cited in McGilchrist 2009: 332) recognises metaphor as a far more deeply integrated mode of thought than merely that of conscious thought and language.

Lakoff (1993: 41) states that most thought is subconscious, and that metaphor, which is fundamentally conceptual as opposed to purely linguistic, arises from and exists within this subconscious embodied level. Cognitive embodiment involves not only the brain, or parts thereof, but the entire neural system and body, and it is with the whole body that we think metaphorically (McGilchrist 2009: 332, 773 – 775).

Metaphoric thought, in its embodied implicitness enables us to appreciate meaning as a whole, at once, and with our whole self, unconscious and conscious. New connections, possibilities and frameworks can be made on the embodied level. On an experiential level the two parts of a metaphor are not just similar, but, according to McGilchrist (2009: 116 – 117), the same, or one. This reflects the bridging capacity of metaphors, personally and interpersonally, as a unitive mostly unspoken language.

Lakoff (2013) asserts that metaphors, being so intrinsic to our embodied cognition, are frameworks that determine how we behave or interface with the world. As such, we in fact live by our metaphors.

This understanding of metaphor not only closes the gap between the perceived mind/body divide of more traditional research paradigms, but also adds weight to my use of metaphor in this PBR which emphasises materiality, experience and embodiment. Beyond the language of explication necessary for this dissertation, embodied metaphorical thought encourages increased awareness of my own subconscious metaphors and frameworks.

The heuristic nature of this PBR allows for emergent themes and metaphors. These themes emerge through lived experience, creative practice and reflection. In the case of this PBR, they are death, loss, mothering, menopause, barrenness and the body and will be woven through my discussion of the work of my chosen artists and my own work. The metaphors of human as clay, as vessel and as being formed out of the dust of the earth (Genesis 2: 7; Ecclesiastes 3: 20 & 12: 7; Job 10: 9; Jeremiah 18: 3, 4, 6; 1 Corinthians 15: 47, 48; John 9: 6; 2 Corinthians 4: 7), have been mentioned in my discussion on materiality. The metaphoric link between human reproduction and claywork has also been touched upon.

Biological motherhood is an integral part of the autobiographical artwork produced by both artists I research, whereas my own experience is one of childlessness and stepmotherhood. The metaphor of pregnancy is an emergent and recurrent theme in my PBR. This metaphor of incubation not only represents the creative process in my PBR, and an heuristic approach, but an incubation of psychological and spiritual life in an anticipation of something new. The metaphor of pregnancy and giving birth appears frequently in the Bible, describing creation, believer and even God as groaning or panting in anticipation and birth pangs for the new (Romans 8: 23, Galatians 4: 19, Revelation 12: 2, Isaiah 42: 14). It also links to the concepts of rebirthing of both self and creativity at midlife (Northrup 2009: xviii, 247). These, and other metaphors will be more fully interrogated in my reflexive chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined my theoretical framework for autobiographical subjectivity with emphasis on the components of subjectivity: memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency, with reference to writing by feminist scholars Smith and Watson and others. I have looked at the influence of feminism on the theorization and growing practice of the autobiographical, with specific recognition of psychoanalysis and spirituality. I have recognised the capacity of autobiography to provide a platform for existential-phenomenological and philosophical engagement with life and research as well as offer a therapeutic effect on both autobiographer and autobiography. I have also dealt with the two suspicions about women's autobiographies and come to see that these autobiographies are not 'merely personal' or 'excessively self-absorbed' as women reference themselves in their engagement with life and in the development of a voice. I have recognised the complexity of the autobiographical subject, the interconnected nature of the auto/biographical, and the use of visual/textual self-portraiture within increasingly

diverse modes of autobiography, wherein women are described as 'makers of their own display'.

I have looked at materiality and the role of an art medium in conveying a message, which is significant in my choice of clay as a medium and the discussion of my own work in chapter four. Metaphor and the embodied nature of metaphoric cognition have also been addressed as they too are integral to my PBR. I have finally pointed out, from an autobiographical perspective, the emergent themes and embodied metaphors which will be discussed in the following chapters: death, personal loss, midlife, motherhood, barrenness, creativity and the body.

Chapter Three: Two Women Artists

Introduction

Figure 5. Käthe Kollwitz in her atelier, 1935 (Jalon 2017)

Figure 6. Wilma Cruise in her studio (Wilma Cruise 2019a)

Having established a framework of autobiographical theory regarding subjective experience, the focus of this chapter is the two artists I set out to research and the ways in which they contribute to this investigation of autobiography as a creative fulcrum.

I will introduce their similarities and then deal with each artist individually, commencing each with a brief context and biography. Ways in which Kollwitz and Cruise represent and express their subjective and embodied experience in their artwork and related writings will be examined with specific focus on their work produced during midlife transition. I will look specifically at work that reflects their consideration of themselves as mothers and as creative agents, self-portraits done by each artist, as well as work that reflects personal loss, which is where my own PBR began. I will discuss the autobiographical nature of this work even though it was not produced within an explicitly autobiographical framework. Consideration will be given as to how they enrich my own thinking, processes, experience and expression and help me situate myself as a woman artist working with autobiography. Additionally, I will consider Cruise's curation and use of space.

Commonalities

Although at first glance disparate in context and time, Käthe Kollwitz (Germany 1867–1945) (Figure 5) and South African contemporary artist Wilma Cruise (b.1948) (Figure 6) have much in common. These similarities are relevant to my own research and experience.

Both artists implicitly and explicitly represent their embodied selves and psychological preoccupations. Both use the figure and self-portraiture as subject matter and site of experience as women, reflecting their perceptions of midlife, motherhood and aging in their work. Both address the theme of death and personal loss and consider their interconnectedness as humans. Both are recognized for their two and three-dimensional work, expressing ideas in both drawing and clay with 'masculine' forcefulness and determination. Having emerged from within highly conservative patriarchal societies to become nationally and internationally acclaimed artists, both broke technical and expressive ground in their chosen areas of practice. Although personally situated, their work becomes universal and political statements about being women, mothers and women artists within a tradition of art that favoured men and in the context of patriarchal socio-political climates.

Käthe Kollwitz (8 July 1867 – 22 April 1945: 77 years)

Kollwitz has long been a compelling and intriguing figure to me, a formidable artist who never seemed to fit neatly into the historic artistic canon of the early twentieth century (Prelinger 1992: 131; Witzling 1991: 149, 152).

Background and context

Käthe Schmidt was born in 1867 into an authoritarian social-political climate wherein. women were predominantly seen as inferior and expected to conform to limited roles determined by their biology. Two independent women's movements had developed from the mid-nineteenth century to champion issues such as better employment and educational opportunities (Slatkin 1993: 163).

Kollwitz' home context was a religious, socially aware, free-thinking one. Her father was a socialist, her uncle a doctor and her grandfather the spiritual leader of the Free Congregation (Slatkin 1993: 181; Witling 1991: 149 - 150). The emphasis was on moral and ethical behaviour that fostered a form of idealistic socialism. Recognised by her father for her talent and supported in her desire to pursue an artistic career, she trained in art in two schools that were run by the German women artists' professional association, as women were not granted access to male education systems, although she was taught predominantly by men (Kollwitz 1988: 37; Slatkin 1993: 181).

Kollwitz married Karl, an intellect and a socialist who went on to practice medicine amongst the working-class. The couple lived a very simple life with Karl's clinic and Kollwitz' studio under the same roof (Witling 1991: 150).

Kollwitz initially focussed on two-dimensional work in the form of drawing and printing, producing work of a socialist and revolutionary nature. She gravitated towards the proletariat because she saw their lives as authentic and beautiful despite their tremendous difficulties (Kollwitz 1988: 43, 44). She also taught art at a women's school but later went to Paris to study sculpture (Witling 1991: 151).

Her two sons, Hans and Peter, were born in the 1890s. She continued to work as an artist, thanks to the freedom provided by the support of her husband and housekeeper. She was also able to travel and once, having won a prize, took up a year's residency in Florence (Kollwitz 1988: 45; *The Art Story* 2019).

Kollwitz lived through two world wars in Germany, initially idealistic about the war effort, but after losing her second son, Peter, right at the beginning of WWI, soon began to despise what she saw as the futility of war and the loss of life, particularly the youth (Slatkin 1993: 181 - 182; Witzling 1991: 149 - 151).

In 1919 she became the first female artist appointed in over one hundred years as member and professor at the Prussian Academy of Arts (Käthe Kollwitz Museum Köln 2018). She was much later fired from this position, due to her open resistance and opposition to the rise of Nazism (Slatkin 1993: 181).

Kollwitz' work spanned a long career and bears witness to her lived experience and to her strength and facility as an artist. A touring exhibition, currently at the British museum (12 September 2019 – 12 January 2020) celebrates her continued impact, influence and relevance (The British Museum 2019).

According to Witzling (1991: 149, 152), Kollwitz tended to defy categorization and was never completely integrated into the main canon of Art History. Although she lived in the modern era, she rejected the idea of art-for-art's-sake (focus on aestheticism) feeling artmaking was part of her personal and social responsibility. In a period of modernity and abstraction, Kollwitz (1988: 85, 86) persisted with the figure which she sought to 'distil' and simplify through line, form and tone to convey emotion and expression. She also used exaggeration to heighten expression. It is because of her subjective and expressionistic

approach and style, especially in her woodcuts, that she has been associated with German Expressionism by some art historians, but Kollwitz did not specifically associate herself with them or have affinities with Der Blaue Reiter or Die Brüke groups. Although she was not immune to their influence, Kollwitz (1988: 68) worked independently from them, perceived their art as 'studio art' and felt she had little in common with them formally or ideologically (Prelinger 1992: 13, 21, 66, 80; The Art Story 2019). Because of her expressionistic approach, however, Alessandra Comini (cited in Prelinger 1992: 135), argued that Kollwitz should be recognized in a broader role as the 'mother of expressionism' somewhat like Edvard Munch has been called its 'father', and says that Kollwitz had been omitted from the canon because of her sex.

Autobiographical writings and artwork

Kollwitz could never have known that feminism's inclusion and use of diary entries and letters in autobiography studies (Bate 2018: 101) would make her private writing later a global phenomenon. These bear witness to the combination of psychology, politics and spirituality characteristic of fourth wave feminism, and account for her contemporary relevance (Diamond 2009: 213, 219; Slatkin 1993: 181).

Apart from her intentional and perhaps self-conscious memoirs, the diary entries and letters provide more sporadic, piecemeal glimpses into Kollwitz' lived experience, psyche and artmaking during the process, as opposed to retrospectively. Kollwitz began this reflective practice in her early forties. On re-reading them she once acknowledged that they only represented a half-truth. She explained how she had only written in difficult times and about her emotional struggles (Kollwitz 1988: 111).

Despite the selective nature of autobiographical writing and further editing by her son for publication and subsequent translation, her texts remain vital in providing Kollwitz an ongoing voice. They reveal Kollwitz' subjectivity, lived experience, inner conflicts, areas of impasse and ultimately, her own growth. Kollwitz's writings are extremely honest and self-reflective. They express vacillations in her confidence, emotional and artistic struggles, and frequent self-criticism yet they reveal a complex, decidedly intelligent person (Sheri 2018; Slatkin 1993: 182).

These diaries give insight to deep existential and spiritual questioning, grapples with her inherited religious framework and quest for an authentic, experiential spirituality and connection. Sometimes prayerful, sometimes deeply moved, sometimes feeling utterly

abandoned and disappointed by God, she frequently expresses her desire to be reunited with her deceased son, Peter. Her belief that the goal of humanity is to develop divinity and for a new creation to arise is also evident (Kollwitz 1988: 65, 66, 75, 76, 78, 82, 83, 89, 90, 103, 157).

Hans described his mother as constantly swinging between extended periods of depression and inability to work and much briefer periods of feeling that she was making progress. Kollwitz' artmaking was the means through which she contended with life. At the same time, she seemed to need time to process traumatic events, such as Peter's death, before she could find the strength and distance to commence working again (Kollwitz 1988: 6 – 7, 72 – 73, 157).

Lauter (1984: 55) recognises the connection between Kollwitz' (1988: 68) menopause, WWI, the loss of Peter and the public rejection of her first sculptural work. This period literally sliced Kollwitz' career in half and, according to Lauter, almost ended it. Depression settled on Kollwitz and she produced no new work for almost two years after Peter's death.

It was during this time that Kollwitz expressed in her diary her resolve to make the most of her talent and nurture this metaphoric '*seed that was placed in (her)*' (1988: 64, 146). She fervently desired to finish the work she felt she had to make as a response to Peter's death in 1914, in fact she felt obligated to do so. For Kollwitz, with her growing pacifism, this involved fulfilling a greater sense of purpose through her artmaking and became her social and cultural responsibility, as she believed that culture only rises as individuals within it arise. The pivotal commitment to cultivate her 'creative seed' reflects a setting of her intention to produce future work through which the personal would become universal (Lauter 1984: 56).

This metaphor for her creativity as her inner 'seed', equating creativity with motherhood, resonates with my own which will be discussed further in chapter four. Kollwitz' diary entry reflects her resolve to rise from her depression and to metaphorically re-birth herself and her creativity, which Northrup (2009: xvii, xviii, 27, 247) speaks of as a fundamental call of midlife. Interestingly, in 1916, forty-eight-year-old Kollwitz dreamt that she had a baby and refers to the sense of bliss at not having to 'give it away'. Although this could reveal her ongoing processing of the loss of Peter, it could relate to her creative productivity (Kollwitz 1988: 69).

Lauter (1984: 56, 58) also uses the terms transition, rebirth (both alluding to the childbearing process) and transformation in describing this period of Kollwitz' experience. It was not until 1922 that Kollwitz resumed artmaking at her former level of confidence and productivity. Lauter recognises this point as the re-emergence, re-birth and regeneration into the second half of her life and creative career. In November 1922, working with an international society opposing war, Kollwitz (1988: 104) writes of her contentment if her art serves purposes beyond itself to in exerting 'influence in these times when human beings are so perplexed and in need of help'. In other words, she felt in her work a sense of agency and believed in its capacity to speak a universal message.

Her work from 1916 to 1921 reflects this transition period, and the fulcrum of her creative practice. This transition took Kollwitz' art practice from the visual expression of personal loss, anguish and grief as a biological mother to a powerful statement and visual articulation of an archetypal strong and protective mother of every child (Lauter 1984: 56 - 57). Kollwitz' described how her embodied womanhood was integral to her artmaking and contributed her expressive artistic style which recognised the connectedness of all things. She felt she could 'extract the emotional content of everything', let it work on her 'and then give it outward form.' (Kollwitz 1988: 98).

Looking now at some of her artwork from this transition period, I consider ways in which her personal subjectivity manifested in her creative practice.

Figure 7. Käthe Kollwitz, *Self Portrait en Face*, 1910. Charcoal on grey-blue Ingres paper. Collection: The Cologne Kollwitz Collection © Käthe Kollwitz Museum Cologne (Käthe Kollwitz Museum Köln 2019)

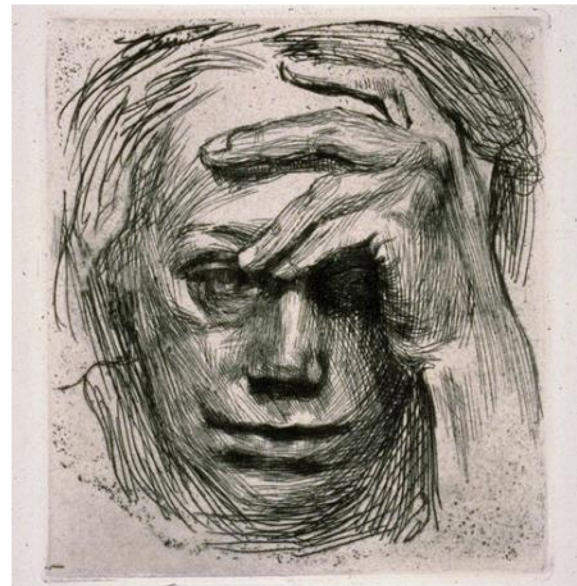


Figure 8. Käthe Kollwitz. *Self Portrait with Hand to Forehead*, 1910. Etching and drypoint. Collection: Museum of Modern Art © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York (MoMA 2019b)

Figure 9. Käthe Kollwitz. *Small Self Portrait*, 1920. Lithograph, 23,1 x 20,5 cm. Collection: Museum of Modern Art © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York (MoMA 2019a)

Kollwitz' produced numerous self-portraits (e.g. Figures 7 – 10) throughout her life which reveal her deeply self-reflective personality, mirror her intensity of gaze, psyche, character, and her awareness of aging. These self-portraits reflect Kollwitz' masterly draughtsmanship and her use of tone creates a three-dimensionality that well serves sculptural form. Frances Borzello (1998: 139) states how the mirror became 'a symbol for the search for truth behind the surface' for women visual artists. Kollwitz' frequently drawn private self-portraits often reveal a weary, discouraged or depressed Kollwitz, not the self-assured figure seen in her prints for public consumption (Käthe Kollwitz Museum Köln 2019). These self-portraits are literally mirror images of her soul, visual conversations with herself. As such they reflect her subjective personal experience, giving us insight to her perceptions of herself and documenting her consistent intensive self-questioning (Käthe Kollwitz Museum Köln 2019).

Figure 10. Käthe Kollwitz. *Self Portrait*, 1921. Etching with aquatint, 21,7 x 26,6 cm. Collection Unknown © Spaightwood Galleries. (Spaightwood Galleries, Inc 2017)

Wanting to live an authentic life, Kollwitz searches for her 'real self' beyond physical representation. She expresses desire for the development and unfolding of herself and for freedom from everything that hinders her 'real self' (Kollwitz 1988: 78). At the nub of Kollwitz' self-portraits there was a deeply autobiographical quest to the core of her being regarding her sense of identity and a desire for a fully embodied expression of herself and her potential (Kollwitz 1988: 78).

My own self-portraits have often reflected such intensity of gaze (Figure 1) that those who know me have questioned why I represent myself in this manner, but apart from reflecting the act of concentration when looking into the mirror, my self-portraits have also always

been an expression of an inward and existential search. Self-portraits, or visual autobiographies, are not transparent renderings of subject, but provide insight to the lives of the women who made them. Smith and Watson (2002: 7) refer to Kollwitz' self-portraits as examples of serial exploration through time. Kollwitz repeatedly refers to her ageing in her diaries and is often said to represent herself as older than she was. She records her appearance dispassionately and unflatteringly, though reflective of an intense, caring and despairing woman (Borzello 1998: 19, 149, 150, 179).

Kollwitz's use of and sometimes exaggeration of the hands becomes a repeated tool for expression in her work in both two and three dimensions. As mentioned, Kollwitz' work has been identified as expressionist. German Expressionism was at its' height in the 1920s and one of its' aims was to express subjective emotion (MoMA 2018). Expressive mark-making and exaggeration of form or features were used to create emphasis and convey heightened emotion. Kollwitz used expressive line, tonal contrast and intentional cropping for focus, exaggeration to achieve her desired artistic expression of intense emotion (Prelinger 1992: 66). She sought a simplicity, an essence, a fluency of line, tone and expression and believed that the public/average spectator would accept true art if it were 'simple enough' (Kollwitz 1988: 68, 86).

Elizabeth Prelinger (1992: 13) states how critics have seldom studied the ways in which Kollwitz manipulated technique and resolved formal problems. She highlights Kollwitz's extensive re-iterative exploration of themes to work out formal elements and the heightening of expression and draws attention to Kollwitz's use of drawing, re-drawing and drawing into prints to re-consider the outcomes which lead to further development.

Figure 11. Käthe Kollwitz. *Crouching Woman with Child in Her Lap*, 1916. Coal on handmade paper © Collection: EWK, Bern (Kultur Online 2016)

Moving from the more conventional manner of self-portraiture, in the sense of facial representations of self, I consider some of Kollwitz' artwork from this period that incorporate the figure. Her repeated drawings of figures remained central to her practice and ultimately facilitated her capacity for emotional communication through her figurative work.

Kollwitz' figures were frequently integrated with the theme of motherhood (Figure 11). Although maternal images have been part of women's self-

portraiture for centuries this theme was appropriated by women with growing feminist consciousness in new ways (Borzello 1998: 18, 21). Kollwitz' powerful and repeated expressions of motherhood on a personal and more archetypal level, often referred to by feminist writers, are said to represent the finding of female voice and identity (Betterton 1996; Lauter 1984; Kollwitz 1988: 85; Slatkin 1993; Witzling 1991: 1 - 15).

Figure 12. Käthe Kollwitz. *Standing Mother Squeezing Infant to Face,* 1915. Charcoal and ink. Collection: Cologne Kollwitz © Käthe Kollwitz Museum Cologne (Käthe Kollwitz Museum Köln 2018)

For Kollwitz, this theme of motherhood, deeply rooted in the personal, is frequently interlinked with the theme of death. In contemplating the war two months before Peter's death, Kollwitz articulated her fears of the possibility of losing her sons (Sheri 2018).

Kollwitz produced this sketch (Figure 12) the year after Peter was killed in action as a way to process her grief (Käthe Kollwitz Museum Köln 2018). A diary entry reveals context and emotion behind this image as well as the process which allowed the image to emerge and disrupt her initial concept. Kollwitz (1988: 64, 67) speaks of her compulsion to change the image and let it bend over of its own will under her hands, 'no longer the erect woman it had been', bowing forward and holding her child as an offering. Later she spoke of how everything had changed forever and how impoverished she had become through the loss of her son.

Figure 13. Käthe Kollwitz. *Killed in Action,* 1921. Lithograph, 41,0 x 38,5 cm (plate). Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales © Art Gallery of New South Wales (Art Gallery NSW 2019)

Killed in action (Figure 13), reflects the ongoing processing of this devastating personal loss. Kollwitz (1988: 64 – 65, 71) had also begun conceptualizing and working on a sculptural piece

as a memorial for Peter. This is part of 'the seed' she felt she had to cultivate, as a promise to not let his death be in vain. She frequently prayed to live long enough to complete this piece and her work on it was a way of feeling Peter's presence, a form of spiritual connection, meditation or prayer. This is relevant to the discussion of my commemorative work of my father in chapter four.

Apart from trying to psychologically process her grief, perhaps part of the importance of this monument was for Kollwitz (1988: 63, 87, 121 – 123, 125) linked to a sense of obligation to Peter, as she had supported him in signing up for the war. Long periods of depression, creative block and self-doubt meant that her process took far longer than she initially intended, seventeen years in all, and in the process, her concept completely changed (Lauter 1984 55 - 60). At first, she conceived of it as a war memorial, a monument reflecting idealised sacrifice, with Peter's body as the focus between his parents. However, as her initial idealism about the war gave way to radical opposition to war, the emphasis shifted. The work (Figure 14), finally completed in 1931, ended up depicting only the parents - herself and Karl - kneeling separately with their experience of personal loss and embodied, internalised grief, and was eventually installed at the cemetery where Peter was buried in Belgium. Kollwitz' sense of purpose was so invested in this piece that when at last it was completed, she penned: 'Now that I have had the group cast in cement, I do not know how to go on'.

Figure 14. Käthe Kollwitz. *The Grieving Parents*, 1932. Stone. Originally in the Roggevelde Cemetery in Belgium; now in the Vladslo German War Cemetery (Clara Barton Museum 2016)

Technically, Kollwitz (1988: 111 – 113, 116 – 117) followed instinct and experimented in the process of making this piece, using it as a means of learning, which is how I also approached my creative work with clay. Her creative practice was naturally heuristic and practice-based. As with *Standing Mother Squeezing Infant to Face* (Figure 12), the subjective and immersive process led the way, with the well-incubated work almost directing its own need for materialisation or embodiment. In the process of making there was repeated loss, breakage (both accidental and intentional), reflection, re-calibration and re-interpretation, as well as periods of avoidance and creative block where unresolved

challenges had to incubate further and wait for a moment of insight. Without Kollwitz' reflections in her diary entries, we would have no access to this technical and psychological process, and it would be subsumed into the 'product'. Again, this is highly relevant to not only my processes but the value of my own visual/textual journals.

Kollwitz' sculptural work was executed first in clay, then copies made in plaster as models, which Kollwitz could continue to work into over an extended period, without the concerns of cracking and shrinkage that clay presents. From these, the different workshops would cast moulds and produce the final pieces in various media including bronze, zinc, stucco and plaster (Simple 2016). Working on the memorial for Peter, Kollwitz (1988: 83) mentioned that she was starting to understand working with plaster. She did not need not perfect the clay model before having it cast in plaster, as she could rework the plaster form before final casting. She castigates herself for taking what she considers a long time to realise this, but this encouraged me in my own process as I identify with this frustration but recognise that this is sometimes the nature of a heuristic practice-based approach.

Although often linked to the death of Peter, the recurrent theme of death in Kollwitz' work, emerged long before Peter's death (Betterton 1996: 42). According to Lauter (1984: 55), this theme of maternal grief and despair is evident from as early as 1896, the time of Peter's birth. I refer to two images produced earlier by Kollwitz. They were based on drawings and produced in various iterations in etching.

Figure 15. Käthe Kollwitz. *Death and Woman Wrestling for the Child,* 1910. Etching and drypoint, 40, 8 x 41, 1 cm (plate). Collection Unknown © DACS 2013 (German Expressionism Leicester 2019)

Figure 16. Käthe Kollwitz. *Woman with Dead Child,* 1903. Etching, 41,5 x 48 cm. Collection: The British Museum © Trustees of the British Museum (The British Museum 2019)

Death and Woman Wrestling for the Child, series (1910/1911) (Figure 15) was based on drawings done while Kollwitz' elder son, Hans, was seriously ill with diphtheria in 1908

(Käthe Kollwitz Museum Köln 2018). *Woman with a Dead Child* (1903) (Figure 16), on the other hand, is said to have reflected social not autobiographical concerns, though Kollwitz used herself and then seven-year old son Peter as models (Betterton 1996: 42). Psychoanalyst Alice Miller (cited in Betterton 1996: 42) located Kollwitz' obsession with the death of a child in the repressed experiences of Kollwitz' own mother. Kollwitz' (1988: 18) mother had lost two young children before Kollwitz' elder brother's birth, and also lost her lastborn. Miller argues that it is the shadow of her mother's loss and the loss of her young sibling that haunt Kollwitz' work. In this light, Kollwitz' image-making serves a psychotherapeutic function, but according to Miller's view still stem from an autobiographical framework. This reveals the complex, layered nature of the autobiographical. It is not transparent, even to the autobiographer, when traumatic embodied memories are possibly unconscious.

In her account of her early years, Kollwitz (1988: 19) wrote of the death of her youngest sibling: 'For me the death of Benjamin was associated with a complex of oppressive emotions'. Kollwitz linked this to her childhood perceptions of divine forces at play from various sources of literature she had been exposed to as a child, and somehow internalised a sense of responsibility for Benjamin's death: 'I … felt certain that this was my punishment for my unbelief… God was taking revenge … I believed myself to blame for my brother's death'. It is fair to say that Kollwitz' childhood traumatic and embodied memories continued to play out in Kollwitz' repeated representations of death. I wonder whether these repeated images reflect a processing or a reiteration of Kollwitz' inherited and embodied traumas, although her fears and experience of additional loss also seemed to reinforce them. This refers back to the potential of perpetuating trauma through the (visual) autobiographical narrative as opposed to accessing its therapeutic possibilities (Smith & Watson 2001: 23).

Betterton (1996: 24, 29, 34, 42, 45) also argues that Kollwitz articulates a complexity in the relationship between mother and artist. Whereas motherhood was seen to be in opposition to being an artist, Kollwitz represents maternal subjectivity as the very '*condition* of artistic production'. In other words, roles of mother and artist are entwined. Kollwitz' work was being produced in the context of heated debates about women's roles, sexuality, motherhood and women as professional artists. Although the nude is not a central subject in Kollwitz' mature work, when drawn, it is often linked to the mother figure. To combine the mother image and the nude, as an artist, was part of the

development of iconography that claimed ownership of female artistic identity, where the object of the gaze becomes active and empowered subject of her own work and offers her own psychological perspective to the viewer. For Kollwitz, this was always grounded in her experience of biological motherhood but also went beyond, as a means of personal agency and expression.

Although it can be argued that a universal (not purely personal) element of maternal grief and despair was always there in Kollwitz' female figures, along with the idea of a 'revolutionary female leader', Lauter (1984: 47, 55 -61) identifies a shift post Kollwitz' midlife nadir and transition period. She perceives a transition from more 'personal' representations of a grieving, despairing biological mother, to increasingly composite explicit graphic and sculpted representations of 'an archetypal mother', one whose caring transcends biological and personal motherhood. Lauter states that this is of psychological significance for other women, in becoming transcendent and powerful cultural protective forces as opposed to remaining victims of circumstance and biology.

Based on Kollwitz' equation of motherhood with artistic productivity (in her images of maternal nude, language of creativity as a 'seed' within her, and in her life as both mother and artist), Betterton (1996: 44) suggests that the image of a child's death stood for Kollwitz' 'continuing fear of loss of her own creative identity'. Kollwitz expressed sadness that her public acclaim occurred after her father's death and he was therefore unaware that she had successfully combined her roles as mother and artist (Kollwitz 1988: 41 - 42), although he had been delighted to see the work that subsequently brought her public recognition.

Wilma Cruise (b.1945)

My choice to research Cruise was stirred in part by the curiosity generated through having met her through a mutual friend in 2016 in her home and based in a desire to access the meaning in her artwork. Being a South African practicing artist, she also provides local and contemporary context to my discourse.

Background and context

In the year of Kollwitz's death (less than a month before the end of WWII in Europe) Cruise was born in South Africa which was on the brink of adopting apartheid policy. For 45 years she lived under this regime that categorised people (Gallery 2 2010). Raised an atheist during an era of Christian National education, Cruise was taught to question dogma

and the idea of fixed truths (Arnold 1997: 172). Her interest in the human psyche led her to study psychology in the sixties, and this fascination has fuelled her thinking and artmaking ever since. Cruise's (1997: 3) creative practice became a means of questioning public identities and exploring the subjective psychological nature of inner and outer worlds.

Cruise appropriated clay as a medium for artmaking back in the eighties, unorthodox and pioneering for large figurative sculpture at the time (Arnold 1996: 110, 111). In 1997, just post the democratization of South Africa, Cruise completed a Masters degree in Fine Art based on work she had produced from the late eighties into the mid-nineties, a period of transition not only for South Africa, but also for Cruise as she navigated midlife.

A well-known and respected South African artist, Cruise continues to exhibit extensively locally and internationally. She has done commissions in South Africa with several public works, including the National Monument to the Women of South Africa at the Union Buildings, Pretoria. Cruise also curates and writes extensively about ceramics. More recently she has completed a PhD (2016) *Thinking with Animals: An exploration of the animal turn through art making and metaphor* at the University of Stellenbosch, continuing to pursue themes that explore 'existential conditions of muteness – silent, internal battles in the search for meaning' (Wilma Cruise 2019a). She uses the body as a vehicle for the exploration of meaning as it is not only the site of experience but also provides a visual metaphor or link between conscious and unconscious worlds (Gallery 2 2010).

Autobiographical writing and artwork

I have selected artwork produced between 1988 and 1996 reflecting a period from Cruise's (1997: 4, 6, 92) mid-forties to just beyond fifty, similar to my age at the time of this PBR. Cruise's 1997 dissertation, *Artist as Subject, Subject as Object*, is a retrospective and theoretical reflection on the artwork produced during the preceding period. Of particular interest is that she addresses the dilemma of being both subject and object of her work, with her focus on the personal and experiential from feminist, existentialist and psychoanalytic perspectives. Her dissertation is by nature subjective, reflecting Cruise's perspectives and the elements of her lived/ autobiographical experience that she chooses to engage with and how she does so. This does not imply that it is definitive as this selective engagement with her lived experience is part of the life-narrator's internal dialogue with

her own processes, embodied memory and personal mode of telling her story at a specific point in time and space (Smith & Watson: 2001: 1; 2002: 9).

The expression of subjective experience, memory, embodiment, identity and agency make this body of work autobiographical in nature. Although this was not Cruise's (1997: 2) explicit intention, she acknowledges the inward-looking nature of her creative practice and that images of herself have been a constant in her work. The human image and particularly the self-portrait serve to provide a visual metaphor for Cruise's emotional, psychological and metaphysical concerns. Cruise considers her artworks as 'mediators of meaning', functioning to link interior consciousness and the external world and to define meaning in an incoherent world. This implicit autobiographical element in her work is my focus.

Cruise's embryonic feminist perspectives had been awakened reading Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* during the sixties as a student (Cruise 1997: 2, 3, 17, 18, 19, 26, 27) and had been stimulated in the seventies reading Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. Both books were instrumental in the second wave of feminism in shifting women out of passive roles and into 'positions of power' or agency. Cruise's emerging feminist perspectives were also given expression through her artwork itself from the late eighties, but at that stage her work was not conceived or made with feminist protest or didactic intentions. She states that her ambivalence at the time was linked to her rejection of some generic feminist positions, including the polarisation of the genders by the 'gaze theory' and its neglect of female artist and female viewer perspectives.

In unpublished working notes, Cruise (cited in Arnold 1996: 114) acknowledged being an artist expressing personal subjective female embodied experience and using the body as her means of expression. Arnold (1996: 111 - 113) recognised Cruise's sculpted bodies as vehicles for expression of her subjective responses, such as anger, fear or self-containment, and her self-portraits as records of conditions felt by herself as a creative woman. As Cruise's work presented a strong personal and subjective female perspective and advocated a female viewpoint, others identified its feminist nature (Cruise 1997: 11, 16-34).

Her position regarding feminism clarified subsequent to her interview with Arnold in 1995 and she positioned herself within the feminist discourse during her Masters research when she recognised the nuanced and diverse nature of feminism (Cruise 1997: 3, 16, 17, 18). Her theoretical framework comprised feminist, existentialist and psychoanalytical

perspectives, characteristic of the then second and now also fourth wave feminism (Diamond 2009: 213, 219).

In a chapter entitled *Object as Subject: a feminist perspective*, Cruise discusses artworks produced between 1988 and 1990. The piece that I focus on, Figure 17, is the one Cruise (1997: 27, 28) most expounds upon and directly links to autobiographical embodied and mostly subconscious memory.

Figure 17. Wilma Cruise, *Without Title With A Mirror*, 1988-1990. Ceramic, altered bed, box and mirror, 115 x 148 x 62 cm. Artist's Collection. (Cruise 1997 Vol II)

Figure 18. Capitoline She-Wolf. 11th century (wolf) and late-5th century (twins). Bronze, 75 x 114 cm. Collection: Capitoline Museum. (Musei Capitolini 2017).

Cruise (1997: 26 – 28, 36) acknowledges being inspired by an image of a sculpture of which she had a subliminal memory and had produced some drawings about two years before. The sculpture, Figure 18, symbolic of the birth of Rome, depicts a she-wolf suckling two babies. The human form that emerged from the process of Cruise's working with the embodied materiality of clay had developed, like a bitch in whelp, numerous dugs swollen with milk. Initially intended as a formal challenge to combine human and animal forms, not a feminist protest, the meaning of the work became clear to Cruise only on completion, as did the possibility of a feminist reading. Cruise describes the breasts, heavy with milk, as representing her personal sense of weighty responsibility experienced when her children were dependant and young and her family 'consumed the milk of (her) creative energy'. The finished piece becomes a richly metaphoric autobiographical artwork reflecting Cruise's retrospective perceptions and reflections on the embodied experience of motherhood and her creative practice, linking them both, as did Kollwitz.

Here we also see the emergent nature of the process of artmaking as a dialogue, conscious or not, between artist and artwork, the artwork itself becoming a metaphor of the artist. Cruise (1997: 27) states how important the process of making the piece was and describes

it as an extremely intimate experience, a searching through pre-conscious thought, or embodied memory. It was this making process that unearthed in her a female experience that would become recognised as feminist protest: ‘the sense of biological bondage… swollen breasts …suckling when self becomes subordinated to the role of nurturing’ (Cruise 1997: 28). The emergent visual metaphor, a manifestation of Cruise’s subconscious thinking, reflects the embodied nature of metaphoric thinking.

Figure 19. Wilma Cruise, *Self-portrait*, 1992. Ceramic on concrete base, 173 × 62 × 45 cm. Collection: Private. (Arnold 1996: Plates 55 and 56)

Figure 20. Wilma Cruise, *Self-portrait*, 1992. Ceramic on concrete base, 173 × 62 × 45 cm. Collection: Private (Cruise 1997 Vol II)

Self-portrait (1992) (Figures 19 & 20) emerged as part of a group of figures that were made as a subjective response to the politically motivated yet misguided murder of her nephew, Nicholas Cruise in 1990, and the events that followed. This group, collectively titled *Nicholas – October 1990*, includes *Durban Pieta* (1991 – 1993), *Yellow Christ* (1992-1993), and *The Three Shades* (1992 - 1993), each reflect a different aspect of Cruise’s personal response to this death. Discussed in a chapter entitled *The negative aspects of god: an existential question*, this cycle of works was for Cruise an exploration of existential and metaphysical questions, belief and non-belief, and the question of the freedom of moral choice (Cruise 1997: 47 – 56, 91).

Arnold (1996: 1) recognised Cruise's sculptures as frequently dealing with 'the paradoxical space theorised by denying the existence of God but acknowledging existence as the opposite of negation' a tension expressed in many of Cruise's sculptures and installations. In her paradoxical denial of the existence of God and yet need to dispel a God that in her eyes did not exist, her artmaking serves as a channel to express her internalised perceptions of a judgemental God of the State and institutional religion she had been exposed to.

Self-Portrait is the only figure in this group made with arms (Cruise 1997: 53). Shortly after its completion, Cruise wrote the following:

'the artist has power
She has arms
she controls
she is god
(for a small while)

but like god
she confronts evil
only in a place where
chaos reigns' (Cruise 1997: 53 from *Book 3, The Artist* (1995-1996)).

This link between image and text, both implicitly reflecting autobiographical subjectivity, is interesting. The text seems to add subjective meaning to the sculpture. The text also reiterates Cruise's framework of a non-existent judgemental god which she paradoxically uses as metaphor of her own self/identity and creative agency.

Self-portrait is recognised by Arnold (1996: 113) as Cruise's attempt to locate the source of her own personal creativity and express an internal feeling, rather than creating a representational likeness. Cruise (1997: 52 - 53) states that the intended expression was one of anger, but upon completion she recognised it could be read as vulnerability and defeat. This was an inversion of what was initially intended and seemed to her to reveal the subversion of her 'conscious authorial intention … by unconscious processes'. This shows that the life-narrator is often not aware of the complexity of his/her own subjective and embodied experience and reveals the limitations of explicating the intuitive. Cruise at the time perceived that her feeling of defencelessness had its source in anger. Anger is a complex emotion and, in my experience, apart from a response to offence, can be an externalisation of and coping mechanism for deeply subconscious vulnerability, fear or pain.

Arnold (1996: 113, 172) also read the crossed arms over the upper body as reflective of self-protection and vulnerability and perceived *Self-portrait* to also be about 'the female condition and its bodily origins'. She relates *Self-portrait* formally to Rodin's *Eve* (1881) who, expelled from the garden, also has her head bowed and her arms locked over her upper torso reflecting shame, self-exposure and alienation. Cruise's treatment of the naked form, however, is not an erotic or sensual exploration of nakedness, but a relatively crude expression of exposure and self-exposure. This could also be a result of a desire to diminish the possibility of feeding the 'male gaze' or making the piece sentimental. The cryptic treatment of the face, according to Arnold, reflects a sense of loss of identity.

Cruise's (1997: 73) approach is described by Arnold as 'classic sculptural expressionism'. Classicism relates to the tradition of the nude figure in Western art. In the medium of clay, the term Expressionism implies a gestural and impulsive approach to it, with the process itself evident and unconcealed on the surface of the clay. This gestural approach applied to the body conveys psychological tension and pain (Arnold 1996: 112). It is enhanced by Cruise's use of various tools to generate surface texture and mark-making on her figures. This application of marks generated by tools on her sculpted self-portrait curiously to me also portrays self-objectification and oppression.

Figure 21. Wilma Cruise. *John's Wife (Yellow) (Blue) (White)*, 1995/6. *John's Wife (Yellow)* Fired clay (yellow pigment) and found objects, 101,5 x 84 x 45 cm; *John's Wife (White)* Fired clay (white pigment) and found objects, 110 x 85 x 66 cm; *John's Wife (Blue)* details unavailable. Collection of the artist © Wilma Cruise (Wilma Cruise 2019b)

Figure 22. Wilma Cruise. *John's Wife (Yellow)* Fired clay (yellow pigment) and found objects, 101,5 x 84 x 45 cm. Collection of the artist © Wilma Cruise (Wilma Cruise 2019b)

Cruise's (1997: 2) subjective bias became fully evident to herself in the series of ceramic sculptures, *John's Wife (1996)* (Figure 21). In this 1996 exhibition, *John's Wife: artist as*

subject; subject as object, Cruise (1997: 64, 65, 67, 69, 73, 74, 77, 91) built on her personal experience of death in an exploration of her personal and embodied understanding of aging and middle-aged female identity. It brought her and her subjective experience as a woman into the centre of her research. Fifty at the time of making the work, Cruise describes the exhibition as 'a personal document informed by a spirit of autobiography'. In spite of her autobiographical approach, however, she also paradoxically warns the viewer against assuming it is autobiography. Perhaps this is due to the vulnerability of this type of autobiographical act which provokes viewer speculation and reader/ viewer bias and projection, something Cruise repeatedly addresses in her dissertation. However, it is also an acknowledgement of the role of the unconscious and the ego in the creation of artwork. The framework through which Cruise (1997: 60 – 80) discusses these pieces in her dissertation is a psychoanalytic one and her personal perspective is that artmaking is an interplay 'between the forces of the ego and the subconscious', the rational and the imaginative, the explicit and the implicit.

The act of self-observation from a distance is implied in Cruise's (1997: 73) reference to herself as 'wife'. Being introduced as the wife of another was standard practice within the context of conservative social positioning and rigid roles of the mining community.

The three life-sized self-portraits were conscious expressions of emotive conditions, each figure exploring an aspect of subjective menopausal experience (Cruise 1997: 72 - 73).

John's Wife (yellow) (Figure 22) recognises the shifting nature of the subjective experience of the female aging process. Cruise (1997: 75 - 76) uses the term 'yellowing' to allude to a changing landscape. As opposed to her earlier *Self-Portrait* where arms meant power, now armless and headless, perhaps this alludes to a broken doll, and to no longer feeling powerful, useful, capable or having mental capacity, or to having been stripped of identity and objectified. Unfortunately, I do not have access to the autobiographical texts that were exhibited along with the work (Wilma Cruise 2019 b).

John's Wife (blue) (1995) (Figure 20) for Cruise (1997: 75) implies a sexual position that speaks to the polarities and ambiguities of control and obeisance, taking up and relinquishing of power, paradoxical for a married feminist. However, if I didn't have access to Cruise's explication of her concept, in my experience the position could also allude to a childlike curiosity and observation of tiny wonders, like flowers or bugs, or an intention to playfully engage with young children or my pets, or even spiritual petition.

Figure 23. Wilma Cruise. *John's Wife (White)*, 1995/6. Fired clay (white pigment) and found objects, 110 x 85 x 66 cm. Collection of the artist © Wilma Cruise (Cruise 1997 Vol II)

John's Wife (white) (1995) (Figure 21, 23, & 20) is of particular interest to my study. Here Cruise (1997: 75) shows herself as slumped in a chair with a sagging tummy and looks down to contemplate the source of her creativity. On her lap is a small *Pietà* which she has just birthed, representing herself and the wellspring of her creativity. Linking back to *Without Title, with a Mirror* where Cruise contemplated her creative energy being sapped by her young children, here she again contemplates her creativity. However, is Cruise here contemplating death (by using the term *Pietà*), or creative life and the birthing of her creative self, or linking them both? This is not clear in her dissertation. Nonetheless, menopausal loss of childbearing capacity also presents the opportunity for creative birthing of self and creativity (Northrup 2009: xvi, xviii, 247). Interestingly the posture of this figure alludes to Michelangelo's *Pietà*, traditionally viewed as representing death, but also by default pointing to (the) resurrection. This contemplation of midlife, self and source of creativity relates to some of my own work in chapter four, particularly *Despair*.

This piece was originally exhibited with an old tarnished mirror that generated a milky reflection of the figure, alluding to and reiterating the paradox of being both subject and object, viewer and viewed (Cruise 1997: 75).

Cruise's (1997: 73) three-dimensional pieces were supported by drawings, prints and artist's books with abundant poetry and writing, which is something I also intend to do in my exhibition. These heightened the focus of the project on the subjective experience of the artist for the viewer, yet Cruise's dissertation and website provide very limited access to this poetry and personal writing which foreground the paradox of being concurrently 'perceiving subject and perceived object' (working notes cited in Arnold 1996: 114):

'artist – as subject   as woman
nude – as object   as woman
portrait – as self   as woman'

Arnold (1996: 114) recognises that these words - artist, nude, portrait, subject, object, self, woman - are common themes in the artwork of women. When the subject is the object, when the artist and the represented are women, the need for a re-arrangement and merging of these words and concepts is generated. In this context the artist re-negotiates her identity, gains power/ agency over herself and thereby also over how women are portrayed. This desire to establish one's own identity and gain a sense of agency is arguably why women have frequently employed autobiography (Smith & Watson 2002: 5).

The nature of autobiographical research is such that the researcher is simultaneously subject and object of their own research. Both subjective and objective perspectives interweave as does unconscious and conscious thought. Cruise (1997: 63, 74), in appropriating this subject/object narrative, here speaks specifically to the materialization of the unconscious in concrete form, and to the dilemma created by the artist for herself in choosing to depict herself as a female nude and placing herself in the public domain and subject to a viewing audience. The artist as subject becomes the object, and is subjected to compounded subjectivity, that of the viewer. Within what Cruise calls this 'matrix of subjectivity' by the introduction of the viewer, the issues of voyeurism and potential '(male) gaze' arise (Smith & Watson 2002: 15). Cruise (1997: 18), however, wanted this body of work to reflect her active role as female artist and viewer, which she had felt the 'gaze theory' had neglected by perceiving the female only as passive object.

Cruise (cited in Arnold 1996: 114) recognised her experience of the body as conditioned by the 'male gaze' and perceived the female aging body as disruptive of that gaze. As a maker of her own display in the context of a history that has speculated about and objectified women, Cruise has chosen to adopt the use of serial, life-sized, menopausal self-portraits/bodies as a visual narrative to disrupt this speculation (Smith & Watson 2002: 5). Her curation and use of space are intended to engage the viewer.

The author/artist, reader/viewer relationship is a subject Cruise (1997: 28 - 29, 48 - 51, 68 – 69, 92) discusses throughout her dissertation, as it is a topic of interest and relevance to her. The questions and challenges of intentions, interpretations, misinterpretations, projection, attribution and assumptions regularly surfaced in critiques and reviews of her work. This reveals the non-transparent, complex and layered nature of autobiographical creative practice, even with Cruise's provision of texts and poems and an expressed desire

for dialogue (Smith & Watson 2002: 8, 9). She feels that truth is found in the space between autobiography and art.

This is all evidence of what Smith and Watson (2001: 41, 42) refer to as the inescapable dialogue that an autobiographical subject finds herself in: the negotiation of cultural scripts and identities within autobiographical subjectivity, cultural norms and strictures about the depiction of the body, and the voices of multiple and varied audiences or viewers.

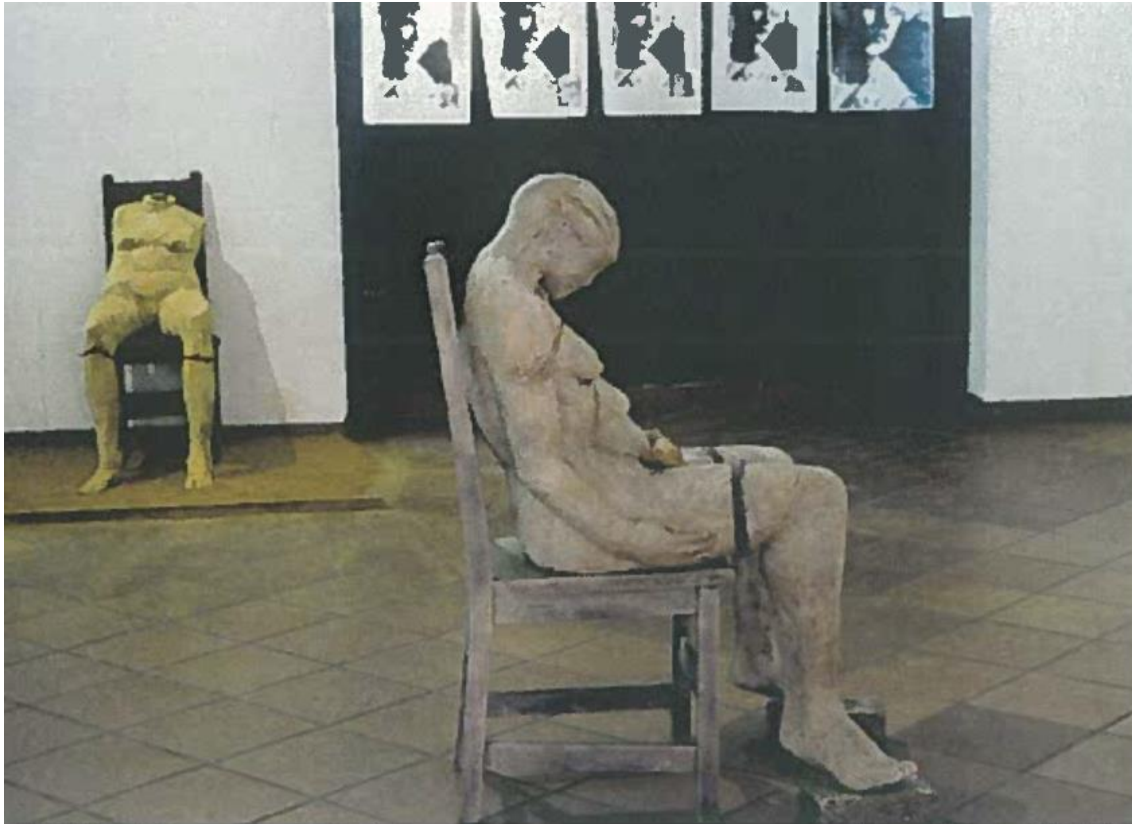


Figure 24. Wilma Cruise. *Youth Beauty…*, 1996 (View at First Gallery, 1996). 5 photocopies, 2 poems, pegs and string, 4 X A3 mounted on A0 and 1 x A0 print. Collection of the artist © Wilma Cruise (Cruise 1997 Vol II)

The two tools recognised by Smith and Watson as employed in autobiographical acts, serial self-presentation and the incorporation of text with visuals, are both evident in Cruise's work and my own. Cruise's (1997: 94) use of repeated photocopied drawings, as in *Youth, Beauty…* (1996) (Figure 24) is an example of how technologies of the last century have contributed to serial self-representations (Smith & Watson 2002: 5, 7, 9).

Although the use of text is recognised as a feminist tactic (Rankin cited in Cruise 1997: 76; Smith & Watson 2002: 5, 21), Cruise (1997: 76, 77) states that her incorporation of text into this exhibition was not deliberately feminist at the time. Cruise explains that her inspiration to include written work in her exhibition was generated by reading literary

autobiography, not from visual feminist documents, but this also ratifies the autobiographical nature of the work.

Written poetry formed an integral part of the exhibition. The writing of some of this was intensified by the immensely critical period of over a month with Cruise's mother in intensive care. The family was finally faced with the decision to terminate life support. Cruise took responsibility for this difficult decision and acknowledged the trauma thereof and how it haunted her. She states how she was able to distance herself from her feelings by articulating them through images and words. A poem written several months later acknowledges deep depression had set in (Cruise 1997: 78, 79):

'The Easter rabbit has gone
so too has the laughter of children
the sun still shines
and the air is April crisp
melancholy settles like a grey blanket
a portent of the winter yet to come'.

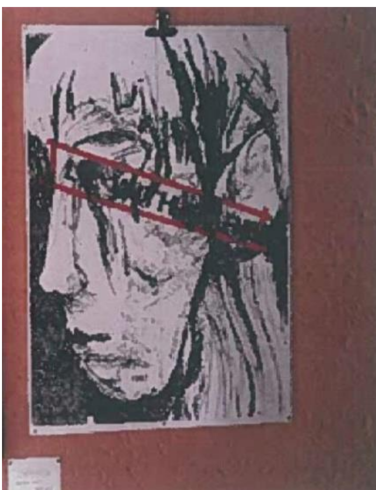


Figure 25. Wilma Cruise, *...le with care*, 1995-96. Photocopy, laminated and altered, 84 x 55 cm. Collection of the artist © Wilma Cruise (Cruise 1997 Vol II)

As a means of encouraging her viewer to be a sensitive, perhaps compassionate audience, Cruise (1997: 77) placed a visual admonishment at the entrance of the gallery. It took the form of a photocopied self-portrait with the text '… le with care' over it, like a fragile parcel with a directive for delivery stamped on (Figure 25).

Cruise (1997: 80) saw the exhibition as a cathartic means of coping with personal loss, agreeing with the description of it as a 'document about love, loss and middle age'. Questions of identity accompanied what she experienced as a period of crisis, which interestingly echoes the low-point or nadir that Kollwitz experienced.

While on the ventilator for thirty-nine days, Cruise's mother (depicted in Figure 26) could neither speak nor hear and communication became limited to the written word. Digital copies of numerous written notes from these 'conversations' over the last two days of Cruise's mother's life were exhibited in a later exhibition, Conversations (2000) (Figure 27). These conversations were loaded with the knowledge of her impending death (Schmahmann 2000).

Figure 26. Wilma Cruise. *The Nurse of The Mad*, 1990. Exhibition of ceramic figures and sixteen black & white drawings. University of South Africa, Pretoria (Wilma Cruise 2019c)

Figure 27. Wilma Cruise. *Conversations*, 2000. Exhibition of digital reproductions of original documents. University of South Africa, Pretoria (Schmahmann 2000)

Curation for Cruise is a very intentional staging of her work. The individual pieces, often exhibited on or with found objects or furniture, are curated into installations which specifically consider the spaces between them as much as the pieces themselves. This is where dialogue takes place and psychological tension is created; the environment into which the viewer is invited. Cruise frequently includes works on paper and text in her installations. Apart from large drawings and journal pages, Cruise also produces prints and frequently draws or writes directly onto the walls. As a 'maker of her own display' (Smith & Watson 2002: 5), Cruise frequently re-curates an exhibition in new spaces, considering how she can renegotiate the juxtaposition of artworks, use light, or dark, make use of outdoors and generally take full advantage of the new environment (Cruise 1997: 42 – 46, 77; Wilma Cruise 2019a). I find Cruise's intentional curation interesting and enhancing of her work and wish to employ similar approaches to the curation of my own body of work.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at artwork and writing by my research artists predominantly from their midlife period in which themes of death, personal loss, motherhood, menopause, selfhood and interconnectedness are dealt with from a personal perspective

reflective of auto/biographical subjectivity. I have also recognised their metaphorical linking of motherhood to their creative practice through the figurative depiction of self.

Although not intentionally autobiographical, Kollwitz' and Cruise's creative practice, deeply rooted in the personal and experiential, reveals the implicit nature of the autobiographical. Their work, both artistic and written, appears to have arisen out a personal need for expression, processing and articulation of a voice, both personal and universal. A universal voice seems to have emerged and matured post midlife for both artists.

The transitional point for Kollwitz seems to be associated with her survival of her personal nadir during WWI, at midlife, with the loss of her son and public rejection of her first sculptural work. This is an example of autobiography as a creative fulcrum, as what she subjectively experienced became fashioned or refashioned into a refined artistic direction with a more honed and universal message. Cruise's own low point at midlife with the concurrent loss of her mother was articulated in her MAFA dissertation. Her focus on the personal also seems to have provided her a platform upon which she has developed an increasingly universal voice in her subsequent work and PhD with focus on the rights of animals and the environment.

In the writing of her Masters dissertation, Cruise was articulating her worldviews which is what Kollwitz largely did in her diaries. These personal writings reveal the complex, layered and shifting nature of the autobiographical subject and the impossibility of the reduction of the autobiographer into explications of her writings or artwork. The vulnerability of the autobiographical subject and insight to their lived experience is something to be valued. It provides an invitation into dialogue and a means to build empathy and bridges of commonality with personal experience offering more universal identification. Their work and writing are infused with the concept of 'relationality', with their documentation and creative processing of personal loss reinforcing the fact that the auto/biographical is interwoven with the lives of others. The 'therapeutics of writing autobiography' is also a recurring theme, although I am unsure as to how much personal suffering and trauma was reiterated and how much actually processed (Smith & Watson 1998: 40, 2001: 22, 23).

I discovered in Kollwitz (1988: 103) a woman from a patriarchal and moralistic religious tradition who, like myself, wrestled with and sought out her own spiritual understanding.

My personal sense that at the core of her struggle within herself was her struggle with who she herself perceived God to be and the harsh sense of a moralising, judgemental God she inherited from childhood and her own experiential sense of disappointment with God. Although Cruise comes from an atheist background, references to God and personal expressions of her God-concepts interestingly still appear in her work.

Cruise and Kollwitz' visual/textual modes of processing opened my eyes to the ongoing value of creative self-reflection. Their artwork flows from rich interdisciplinarity of theory and artistic practice (Cosslett, Lury & Summerfield 2000: 1,17). Kollwitz and Cruise's media, their use of the figure and the face, their autobiographical and metaphorical approach and universal voice provide technical and conceptual links with my own practice. Like both women, I also draw on personal circumstances, such as mid-life transition, my recent role as a wife and stepmother, and the death of my father in 2016. These influences which have enriched my own processes, thinking, expression and experience will all become more evident in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: My heuristic autobiographical PBR

Introduction

In this reflexive chapter I will discuss my own autobiographic PBR. I will use my journals as my primary source material in order to critically reflect on pertinent aspects of my artworks. These journals provide information about my processes and journey during this research and serve as a witness to it. I will reflect on the subjective nature of autobiography (memory, identity, experience, embodiment and agency) and investigate it as a creative fulcrum in my own studio practice. I will also discuss materiality and metaphors relevant to my work.

Having adopted a flexible heuristic approach, with no predetermined outcomes, I will first provide an overview of heuristic phases as suggested by Moustakas. These provide the structure for the discussion of my chosen materials, emerging processes, themes and metaphors in this chapter, as well as the interwoven nature of my 2D and 3D creative practice. I will also acknowledge ways in which my research artists have enriched my work.

Aspects of curation will be considered in relation to the exhibition of my creative studio practice that will be examined in conjunction with this dissertation. Possibilities for further studies will be discussed and a conclusion will sum up my findings.

An overview of heuristic PBR

PBR and heuristics are not linear approaches to research and often the journey through an un-prescribed route to an indeterminate destination is described in terms of cycles, spirals or unravelling (Barret & Bolt 2002: 3; Ings 2011: 227). The natural phases and processes of a heuristic approach facilitated my research process and provided support to it. They were ongoing and operative to varying degrees in these cyclical processes. In retrospect, I am able to gain a bird’s eye-view of the research process, which is not possible when one is immersed in the process. From this retrospective perspective I will weave the discussion of heuristics into my reflexive writing, recognising the overall phases as they emerged in the process of my PBR. These phases served to guide me rather than as a prescribed or enforced framework (Figure 28).

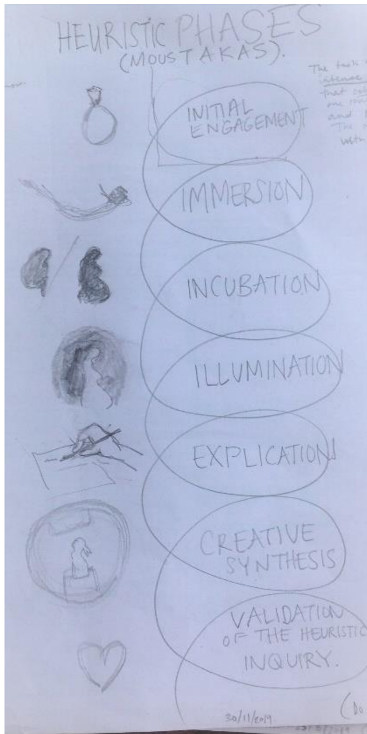


Figure 28. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Heuristics Phases,* 2019. Visual Journal page (unpublished and unpaginated)

The heuristic phases are:

- Initial Engagement
- Immersion
- Incubation
- Illumination
- Explication
- Creative Synthesis
- Validation of the Heuristic Inquiry

The creative pieces selected for discussion in this chapter are roughly but not strictly chronological in order to reflect the processual nature of and emergent themes within my research (Hiles 2001: 4; Sultan 2019: 10 – 13). I will weave discussion of the phases of heuristics into the reflexive narrative of my artwork. The ongoing processes, as opposed to phases, of heuristics (identification with the topic of inquiry, self-dialogue, tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling, focussing, and internal frame of reference) are integrated into the discussion of my work throughout.

Initial engagement

The heuristic process is birthed in a question, puzzlement, problem or challenge to the researcher on a quest to understand him/herself and the world in which he/she lives. This phase of heuristics requires the researcher to find a matter of personal interest, of passionate concern and of subjective experience or encounter that grips him/her. Internal questions emerge that want answers and set the inquirer on a journey of discovery (Hiles 2001: 4, 5; Sultan 2019: 10 - 11). Having just begun my PBR Masters when my father passed away, I was very preoccupied with the subject of death and memories of my father. Northrup (2009: 22, 23) says that loss is a recurrent theme at midlife. This initial encounter with and experience of personal loss in my research compelled me to engage with the phenomenon of death itself (Hiles 2001: 4; Sultan 2019: 10 - 11). This resulted in a cycle of work I have retrospectively called ‘Pops/ Lollipops’.

Pops/ Lollipops

The desire to process existential questions and personal loss through art made my father the subject of my artwork for an extended period. This work was based on drawings and photos and embodied memories of him, and my very act of remembering was part of my

meaning making (Lakoff 2012; Smith & Watson 2001: 16, 24). My identification with my father made the work implicitly auto/biographical, reflecting the interconnection between self and other, biography and autobiography (Hiles 2001: 3; Marcus 1994: 273, 274). I was grieving and not consistently creatively productive. In retrospect I realised that this sense of loss contributed to my choice of Kollwitz and Cruise as artists as their work reflects their own sense of loss and grief (Cruise 1997: 80; Kollwitz 1988: 71). A love for imagery had been nurtured in my experience in drawing and painting and I felt drawn to experimenting with the image in the tactile and therapeutic medium of clay (Malchiodi 2017). This prior knowledge of 2D expression enabled me to draw from a source of tacit knowledge at a time that I was both processing loss and finding my own way with a new medium (Gray & Malins 2004: 2, 22; Spencer 2017: 2, 99).

Figure 29 a, b & c. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Pops Seated*, 2016. Earthenware clay: Images of clay 'drawing' process with earthenware clay coils and slab rolled onto image

a. clay coils laid onto transparent film covering original drawing on paper

b. rolling slab over clay coil 'drawing'

c. clay 'drawing' inverted into Plaster of Paris mould to shape as vessel

Based on this tacit knowledge of drawing and gravitation towards the image, I intuitively found myself wanting to 'draw' with clay. I say 'draw' in terms of wanting to use line to generate an image, but in doing so with clay would be exploiting its soft, plastic and malleable qualities. Perhaps the sensory engagement with the materiality of clay facilitated a greater sense of physical connection to my father (Du Preez 2008: 37; Falin 2014: 7). I wanted to translate drawings that I had done of him on paper into clay by using thin clay coils as 'lines'. I began to 'draw' with these hand-rolled clay coils by placing them on a transparent plastic sheet (later sheer fabric) which had been placed over the original image (Figure 29 a). I found this hands-on and repetitive process of rolling clay coils and manipulating them into 'drawn' images grounding, meditative and therapeutic (Malchiodi 2017). Once complete, I then placed a rolled slab of clay on top of the 'clay-drawn' image

and rolled gently in order to press the clay slab into the clay image (Figure 29 b). This slab would serve as a 'background' for the image visually, but technically would hold the separate clay coils together and prevent them from drying out too quickly and warping. This image-enmeshed slab was then inverted and slumped into a Plaster of Paris vessel mould to edge, shape and dry (Figure 29 c).

Often the drawing or 'decoration' of a vessel is added to its surface once the vessel has been made (Scott 2001: 7). My process, an inversion of this approach to producing imagery on clay vessels, emerged from my tacit knowledge of drawing, rather than a knowledge of clay processes.

Conceptually and metaphorically, the vessel is used as a 'container' of meaning and a 'repository' for memories (Raby 2015: 33). It also alludes to the corporeal body as a 'clay/ earthen vessel' (2 Corinthians 4: 7). Earthenware clay itself, by name and material nature, serves as a metaphor for corporeal embodiment, and is visually and metaphorically also representative of skin. It speaks to being formed of the earth and returning to the earth (Cornell University 2013) (Ecclesiastes 3; 20; 12: 17; Job 10: 9; Psalm 104: 29), an idea with which I was very preoccupied during the 'Lollipops' cycle of work.

Having begun to exploit the plastic qualities of clay to create 'lines' for 'drawing' a clay image, I wanted to further explore tonality in these images to simulate a sense of drawn or painted 'shading'. Here again, my prior knowledge in 2D was informing my approach to clay (Gray & Malins 2004: 2, 22). Various clays are different colours and tones by nature of what they are made up of, and these colours and hues are also changed through the firing process. Red earthenware gets its colour from natural oxides in the earth. For a sense of 'shading' in my images, I began experimenting with mixing red and white earthenware clays to produce quarter, half and three-quarter tones. The result in the 'product' was a gradual shift from predominantly 'linear-looking' images (Figure 30 a) to subtly toned 'finger-painted' ones (Figure 30 b). I use the term 'finger-painted' intentionally to allude to the tactile and childlike yet predominantly still 2D approach that I was taking to working with clay. More accurately, I was finger-working, blending and modelling the soft, plastic clay.

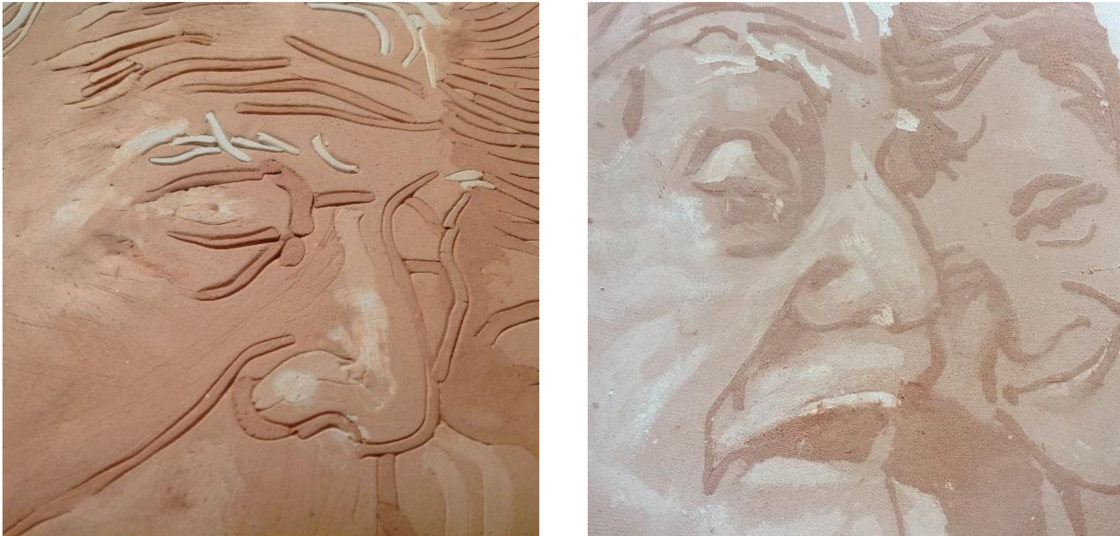


Figure 30 a & b. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Lollipops series* (details of vessels) 2016. Mixed earthenware, 1080˚C, 28cm diameter

a. detail showing more 'linear' approach to clay 'drawing'

b. detail showing more blended/ 'finger-painted' approach to clay 'drawing'

Working in this way, I was able to continue to add clay by hand into the image and build it up until there was no need to add a slab. This process required a yielding, a trust in the process and patience because in working in this way, the actual image gets 'lost' under the added layers of clay, until it is inverted and revealed at the end when placed into a mould. A new challenge was that the tone of fired clay varies depending not only on the percentage of oxides it contains but the temperature to which it is fired. It took me several iterations of this process to create a subtle tonal image in earthenware clay that resembled my tonal drawings using, for example, conté (Figure 31).

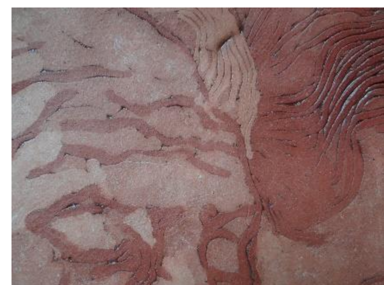


Figure 31 a. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Lollipops: Commemoration Vessel*, 2018. Mixed earthenware, 1120˚C, 37 cm diameter

b. *Lollipops* detail interior
c. *Lollipops* detail exterior

I saw the piece, *Lollipops: Commemorative Vessel* (Figure 31 a, b & c), as a successful culmination of the process, not only due to the subtle tonal range and warm skin-like tones I had succeeded in creating but because the image itself captured 'something' about my parents and their relationship. I knew I had created something special and it was accepted by Ceramics Southern Africa to be exhibited at the 2018 Corobrik National Ceramics Biennale in Cape Town. *Lollipops*, a commemorative vessel with its circular format, was a metaphor for my parents' love, their nearly fifty-three-year marriage, and the source of my own corporeal existence.

Figure 32. *Lollipops* detail showing damage from transportation

There are many points during the ceramic process where breakages and damage can occur, and this requires coming to terms with loss. Furthermore, fired ceramics is fragile and when my piece arrived back from Cape Town broken (Figure 32), I was devastated as this represented another tangible loss which reflected and reiterated the loss of my father.

The reiterative images in this cycle of work, were based on photographs I took of my parents and father shortly before he died. I was grasping after something intangible through the tangible reproduction of their images and with the physical materiality of clay. Perhaps, like Kollwitz, I was wanting to generate the sense of proximity and perpetuate embodied memories of him and working with clay was part of this desire for tangible connection. I also wanted to find my way of honouring my father for his life and his unconditional love.

Within this cycle of work, I also experimented with the concept of embossing and repetition which, inspired by Faye Spencer's (2017: 97) PhD thesis and work, alluded to the sense of absence and presence, memory and departure of a lost loved one. I needed to find an equivalent in ceramics for the print-making processes that she had used to produce an embossed image, but one that would offer me a fluid and spontaneous drawn line. I emulated the drawing process I had used with the clay coils, but instead, 'drew' with silicone onto the sheer fabric (Figure 33 a). Once dry, I could then emboss this silicone image onto clay (Figure 33 b). Using one of these wet clay slabs with the embossed image on it, I made a Plaster of Paris mould (Figures 33 c, d, e). I then used this Plaster of Paris mould, which could withstand heat in the kiln, to transfer the embossed image into glass

(Figures 33 f, 34). These ideas and discoveries were fruit of curiosity, following intuition and allowing my creative practice to direct me (Barrett & Bolt 2002: 3, 4, 143).

Figure 33 a, b, c, d, e & f. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur (2017), Process of embossing and repetition with Plaster of Paris mould and wet clay slabs

a. Silicone drawing on sheer fabric.

b. Silicone relief image embossed in clay.

c. Embossed clay made ready for Plaster of Paris mould.

d. Plaster of Paris poured into mould covering embossed clay image

e. Lifting embossed clay off Plaster of Paris relief mould

f. Glass on top of Plaster of Paris mould ready for firing in kiln

Apart from introducing glass, I also started working with white porcelain (Figure 35, 36). The white and translucent materials of porcelain and glass were specifically intended to

Figure 34. Glass with embossed image, 2017, 21cm diameter

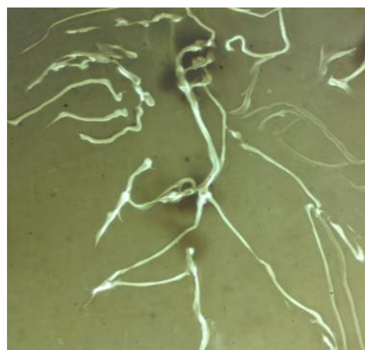


Figure 35. Translucent high fired embossed porcelain, 2018, variable dimensions

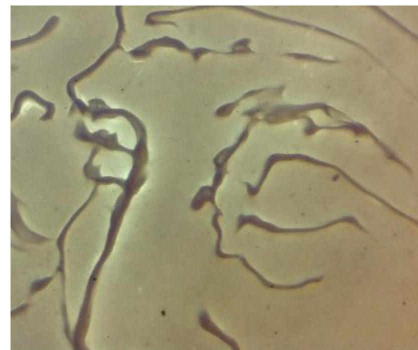


Figure 36. Translucent high fired relief printed porcelain, 2018, variable dimensions

symbolise the spirit and life beyond corporeal existence ‘that returns to God who gave it’ (Ecclesiastes 12: 7). White porcelain is a valuable clay that is fired to high temperatures and becomes translucent where very thin. It alludes to purity and strength, whereas the transparency of glass (Figure 34) speaks to me of spiritual light and no pretence or deceit.

For Spencer (2017: 2, 99), printing and writing were a new media, and after the loss of her triplets, she found she needed to engage with a new medium to express the depth and conflicting nature of her emotions. Furthermore, her variations of the repeated print became metaphors for the shifting nature of memories. My experience and adoption of a new artistic medium to process loss seems to parallel hers. Working with clay was taking me beyond what was familiar and offering me not only new creative and expressive opportunities, but new ways of thinking and being with my work. The materiality of clay was changing the pace and patterns of my creative engagement (Du Preez 2008: 30, 40). My creating of silicone drawings meant I could generate repeated variations of an embossed print in clay. It also facilitated the production of a mirror image which developed from my curiosity to explore the embossed (concave) or relief (convex) linear image (Figure 37), representative of different ways of seeing the same thing.

Figure 37. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur *Pops series* (2017-2018) Mirror relief and emboss, studio mix with oxides and transparent glaze 1080˚C, approx. 24cm diameter

The application of these silicone drawings extended to paper embossing and rubbings (Figure 38) which could be further altered with additional drawing with charcoal (Figure

39) and varied tones of earth (Figure 40), a reiterative metaphor of being made from and returning to the dust of the earth (Genesis 2: 7; Ecclesiastes 3: 20).

Figure 38. Rubbing from silicone drawing

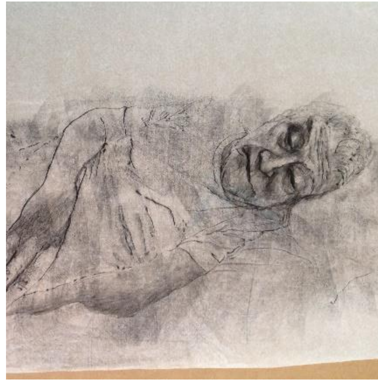


Figure 39. Drawing into rubbing with charcoal

Figure 40. Use of earth tones over rubbing

Working with clay had brought me in full circle back to the drawn image, and I began to search out colours and shades of earth and natural clays to draw with (Figures 41, 42).

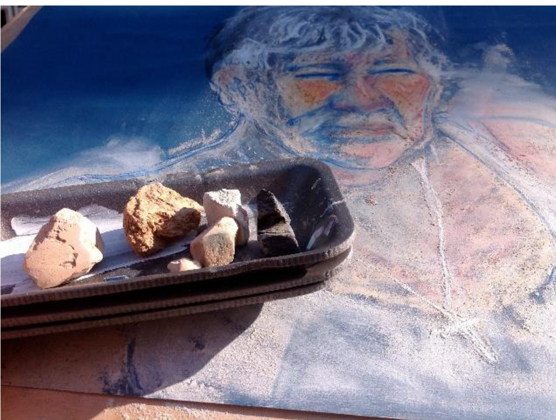


Figure 41. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Mum*, 2018 (with drawing materials). Mixed earth drawing on primed paper, 51cm x 77cm

Figure 42. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Pops in Earthenware*, 2018. Mixed earth and charcoal drawing on primed paper, 51cm x 77cm

Focus on my father's death in my creative practice demonstrates the enmeshed and implicit nature of auto/biography (Marcus 1994: 273, 274). Mechanical repetition kept me somehow detached from my own numbness, and avoidant of internal dissonance. Yet the connection between my father's death and my own sense of barrenness and mortality became increasingly evident. Heightened emotions of sadness and eruptions of rage associated with perimenopause (Northrup 2009: 22, 23, 46, 50, 57) were building up within me and affecting my relationships. Increasingly I became aware that working on images of my father was serving as a proxy for my own internal and complex sense of loss

and ‘barrenness’. I was being invited into the labyrinth of my internal journey and needed to venture there (Sultan 2019: 11). Finally, I began to look into the mirror literally and figuratively to face what was there.

Immersion

The initial questions that emerge through personal encounter become a way of being with self and life, of self-searching and looking for and perceiving connections. The inquirer must be willing to set aside the need for answers and begin to rather embody and live the questions. This requires engagement with the process while releasing any attachment to specific goals or outcomes. The researcher adopts a beginner’s mind, an attitude of a learner as opposed to an expert, and brings curiosity, openness, imagination and vulnerability as s/he is drawn into the unknown. All senses and modes of knowing begin to be drawn on, with a profound awareness of the attitude of a thought, not just the content. The question becomes a presence that lingers and, through engagement and further encounters, co-creates with the inquirer (Hiles 2001: 4; Sultan 2019: 11). For me many questions around my sense of identity arose in this phase.

Clay/ paper reflections: my foot in the water

This phase of my work was initially a tentative putting of my foot into the water rather than full immersion, yet the intention was there, and the process had begun. Still working at the interface of paper and clay, my past and my present, I shifted the focus from my father to me. My avoidance had been linked to a fear of what might emerge (Ings 2011: 232; Sultan 2019: 2). I intuitively began to ‘dump emotion’ into some large journal pages (Northrup 2009: 75). Not only had there been a fair amount of psychological avoidance of my internal dissonance, with resultant emotional instability, but there was also fear of touching my own pain beneath the growing anger (Northrup 2009: 46, 46, 48), fear of self-exposure or fear of exposure of others. My emotions of fear, sadness, disappointment, hurt and sense of self-rejection were clothing themselves in reactive anger. I began to mine my internalised and embodied narratives that I was identifying myself with and yet were part of my personal and psychological distress (McLeod 2007; Northrup 2009: 49, 233; Phillips 1994: xx). I knew I had to navigate them in order to find my own sense of equilibrium, identity and voice. Self-dialogue had begun (Hiles 2001: 3).

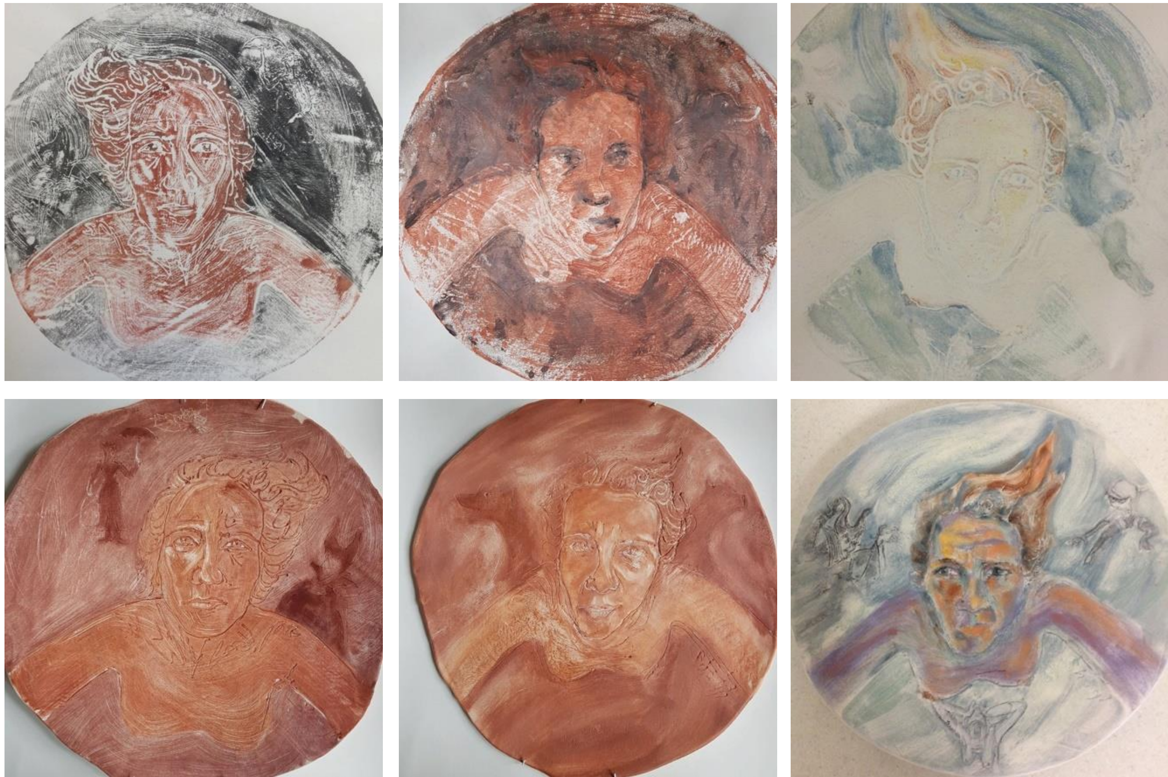


Figure 43. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Selfies Series*, 2017 - 2018, Clay, oxides, underglazes and paper

a, b, c (Top Row): Experimental 'clay prints' on paper lifted from images printed, drawn and painted on wet clay slabs with oxides and underglaze pigments, 47cm diameter; 45cm diameter

d, e, f (Bottom Row): Corresponding clay slabs once dried and bisque fired, 45cm diameter; 43cm diameter

The creative processes included experimental drawing, printing with my silicone drawings and painting with oxides and underglaze pigments onto wet clay and then creating prints on paper from these images (Figure 43). I had come to appreciate the soft surface of wet clay as an exciting one to work on. The use of an image drawn into clay and transferred onto paper reflects the nature of subconscious frameworks, perspectives and beliefs being mirrored or played out and reiterated in experience. Oxides and underglaze pigments not only emulated the earth tones I had been using, but are mediums used for painting onto clay for firing and produce a matt finish, more like skin than glaze. The watery and somewhat spontaneous process retrospectively alluded to drowning and a desire for emergence: chaos, creation and re-birth (Northrup 2009: xviii, 23, 247,). The serial nature of these self-portraits points back to those of Cruise and Kollwitz and corroborates Smith and Watson's (2002: 7) claim that this mode of self-portraiture is frequently used by women to 'tell a story through sequencing and juxtaposition'.

In this phase of my work, the process began to shift from focussing on predominantly technical issues of PBR, to an awareness of my psychological state of mind and internal

narratives concerning self. These 'selfies' represent an immersion into the psychological process of making, and personal narratives of experience and identity such as stepmothering, lost dreams and interpersonal conflict. Facilitated by their serial and repetitious nature, they are attempts to become aware of subconscious scripts and are encoded with symbols of my subjective experience (Smith & Watson 2002: 7, 8, 9). I began to realise that my subjective experience on an emotional and embodied level was being fashioned by the nature of my subjective frameworks of thought and perception. The 'stories' I was telling myself about myself and my circumstances were creating the embodiment and experience of them. The ideological romanticised stepmother paradigm of my childhood, which I desired, was disrupted by an awareness of my 'non-mother status' in relation to the status of a living biological mother. Betterton (1996: 5, 108, 119) speaks of the stepmother as a disruptive figure in what she calls the 'symbolic order', the traditional family unit, and I was battling with a sense of feeling on the outside. She also states that alongside the complexities around issues of motherhood in contemporary culture, childbearing and childlessness remain closely linked to women's individual sense of identity and self-worth. The theme of motherhood (in diverse and contradictory forms) has been recurrently explored by women in art but, according to Betterton, 'the experiences of childlessness and infertility have not'. I was beginning to explore my own sadness and reactivity around the issue of my stepmotherhood and sense of physical and psychological barrenness. The new opportunities afforded to me through my engagement with and exploration of the materiality of clay were beginning to lead the way forward and challenge and potentially re-shape psychological and embodied frameworks.

Three broken monuments to me/ Three monuments to broken me

Figure 44. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Molly*, 2016. Fenix clay raku fired, variable dimensions

I had done some earlier small sculptural 'sketches' of my dogs (Figure 44) and enjoyed the haptic experience of perceiving through my hands provided by clay sculpture (Gray & Malins 2004: 112). Modelling from life in clay was something I had long desired to do, and I had discovered in it a sense of 'drawing' in 3D, although a more hands-on, intimate, 'immediate' and tactile experience than drawing with a drawing medium. Wanting to work on a larger scale in 3D, I attempted some life-sized pieces in coiling and in slab building. This technique is a typical approach

to hand-building large sculptural pieces intended for firing, because building the sculpture hollow enables even drying of the clay which helps to prevent stress cracking. The clay walls need to be fairly even in thickness and joins carefully worked to prevent air being trapped in the clay which would cause the piece to explode during firing.

These pieces continued to reflect questions of identity. They were attempts to investigate and express embodied experience and emotion and to explore possible directions for further work. The 'Wicked Stepmother' is a notorious archetype popularised by Walt Disney (Petty 2017). Along with my grapple with the undefined nature of my role as stepmother and this 'Wicked Stepmother' archetype and that I had 'inherited' and internalised, I was thinking of depicting an onslaught of personal physical challenges that I was experiencing. I also wanted to make a bust of myself as this seemed to be an 'acceptable' artistic tradition. Figures 45, 46 and 47 represent different yet related aspects of these explorations and a growing respect for the uncontrolled, unintended and accidental elements that clay as a material presents, especially for someone new to the material, or newly re-engaging with it after thirty years.

Figure 45. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *monument 1*, 2017. Studio mix (exploded in kiln), 26cm x 41cm x31cm

Figure 46. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *monument 3*, Red terracotta with paper and grog (slid off pedestal), 28cm x 27cm

Figure 47. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *monument 2*, Red terracotta with paper and grog (flung onto floor), 50cm x 28cm

Figure 45, which was made whilst in recovery from surgery, exploded in the kiln and came to represent health issues: the negative embodiment of psychological and emotional struggles. Northrup (2009: 54) speaks of how unprocessed emotions that surface at menopause increase susceptibility to illness. The intended bust, which slid off its pedestal onto the floor whilst drying (Figure 46), retrospectively represented my desire and striving for artistic approval. It became a means of contemplation of my own death and ultimately contained within it a personal spiritual revelation (Galatians 2: 20). This was an inversion of my original intent. These effects of chance and accident in working with seemingly

uncontrollable materials and processes were significant and not only forced me to keep processing loss but to begin to see new possibilities, creatively and psychologically. The way I was seeking to create meaning by searching for and finding the redeeming value of loss is part of SACBT (D'Souza & Rodrigo 2004). Working with clay can be not only profoundly grounding, but also humbling and exposing (Ings 2011: 232; Sultan 2019: 12, 13). It was confronting me, challenging mental frameworks and my illusion of control, demanding of me an enlarged capacity, and requiring of me to learn to engage in and trust the process.

My attempt to sculpturally depict myself as the 'Wicked Stepmother' (Figure 47) (Petty 2017) brought with it a different revelation. As she materialised in physical form, as opposed to internalised perceptions or emotions, she became too powerfully embodied not only in the materiality of the clay, but in my own negative experience of myself. I was creating - and by firing would be concretizing - something I did not wish to reiterate, perpetuate psychologically or embody and I flung her to the floor in anger, self-loathing and subconscious fear (Northrup 2009: 54). Once flattened and distorted by landing on the floor, she interestingly began to more accurately reflect my sadness and I produced some prints with oxides from her distorted 'saddened' face. The exposing nature of an heuristic enquiry (Ings 2011: 232) is illustrated here. So is the profound transaction that can take place between maker and clay, where it is not only the maker that 'makes' but the materiality of the clay that participates and contributes too and has its own very real embodied presence (du Preez 2008: 30, 40; Falin 2014: 2, 3, 6, 7).

My reactive anger was part of my creative self-sabotaging and evidence of extreme internal self-judgement, embodied fears and grief (Northrup 2009: 50, 54, 57, 339). In my self-reflection through my visual journal process, and through reading Kollwitz' diaries, I became conscious that psychological states of mind served as gatekeepers often impeding my artistic production. Retrospectively I refer to these three pieces as 'three monuments to broken me'. Each reveals an aspect of the war within myself that longed for compassionate engagement and reconciliation: my relationship with my body and my health, my internalised unhelpful perceptions of my relational self and my desire for external/ artistic affirmation or approval.

I did not want to follow these possible themes further or reiterate the narratives they represented. Yet, along with the self-portrait images discussed, the process of working on

these pieces and the unexpected elements of the process became access points to personal psychoanalytic questions. My 'self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery' could become foregrounded in my research, as an heuristic approach allows the subjectivity and lived/living experience of the researcher to become the focus of the research (Hiles 2001: 3, 5; Ings 2011: 227; Sultan 2019: 2, 4). The heuristic PBR process, coupled with my engagement with clay, facilitated a growing consciousness of subconscious self-narratives and psychoanalytic self-reflexivity (McLeod 2007). However, it was one thing to recognise the narratives and self-beliefs that emerged, but another to perpetuate or reiterate them once I was aware of them (Diamond 2009: 213, 219; Miller 2010: 63; Phillips 1994: xx; Zammit 2017: 104). My focus of attention became one of creating meaning by searching for the redeeming value in loss and personal suffering (D'Souza & Rodrigo 2004).

If the autobiographical offers therapeutic possibility, the means of processing through which both narrator and life story itself can be changed, this was the direction I wanted to take. My engagement with the autobiographical was offering a sense of agency to myself as autobiographer (Smith & Watson 1998: 40; 2001: 22, 23).

In its depth of penetration, my heuristic autobiographical exploration was becoming a 'self-exposing' one: I was beginning to delve into my ontological and epistemological core beliefs, my most fundamental ideas of meaning, identity and knowledge. This is the 're-searching' of human experience advocated by heuristics (Hiles 2001: 2), the investigation of meaning and meaning-making and working out of theoretical perspectives that autobiographical inquiry can offer (Barrett & Bolt 2007: 1, 3; Cowley 2015; Di Summa-Knoop 2017). Not knowing in advance what would become exposed, revealed or discovered, it was becoming a vulnerable and emotional process and was a potential stumbling block for me as researcher. I frequently found myself tempted into creative avoidance (Ings 2011: 232; Sultan 2019: 12, 13).

Incubation

Incubation is where the inquirer retreats from the intensity of the research to allow for learning to take place on a more subtle level, allowing tacit knowledge and the intuitive to be nurtured. This brings clarity and extends understanding. Intuitive knowledge is allowed to grow, through periods of intimacy with and distance from the research question. This can be vulnerable, confusing, anxious and fear-inducing, and yet, if the inquirer is willing

to sit with the uncertainty of the process and surrender to it, it promises to bear serendipitous and unexpected fruit. The flexible dance between immersion and incubation, proximity and distance, holding and releasing is sustained and guided by internal feelings and subjective experience. It allows for internal knowledge to develop and emerge, along with the transformation of the inquirer (Hiles 2001: 4; Sultan 2019: 11 - 12).

'Pregnant' me at 50

Pregnancy was a preoccupation partially due to my childlessness, grief, personal circumstances and lost dreams (Betterton 1996: 5; Northrup 2009: 22, 54), but it also related to and became a metaphor for a growing curiosity about what I was 'incubating' on a psychological and spiritual level. Realising that my negative core beliefs and the state of my psyche were generating my experienced reality, I no longer wanted to embody my 'old narratives', victim to hoping for change in others or circumstances outside of my control. I wanted to find my own sense of hope and agency and take ownership of the only thing I could - my own attitudes and perceptions. If my perceptions and beliefs were incubating unhelpful narratives of identity and perpetuating painful memories and experience in embodied form, I alone had jurisdiction to incubate something new. I wanted to tell a new story, to become creator of my own autobiography, to find some sense of renewed possibility (Northrup 2009: 46; Smith & Watson 1998: 40; 2001: 22, 23).

Wanting a retreat from the intensity of the psychological self-inquiry I was processing, I longed to allow myself to follow a more subtle and spiritual way of knowing than the continued personal psychoanalysis alone. In researching human experience, heuristics validates spiritual experience and deeper or more subtle states of consciousness (Hiles 2001: 2, 3, 9, 10, 11; Sultan 2019: 6) and spirituality is frequently part of autobiographical work (Smith & Watson 2001: 205). I was becoming aware that at the core I was in a spiritual crisis, perceiving God as impotent and myself not only as biologically barren but psychologically and spiritually barren. Overwhelmed by my depression, I had prayed for a sense of renewed hope and a willingness to trust in the kindness of God, to trust the vulnerable process I found myself in and to yield to phenomenological experience that seemed to invite me into itself (Sultan 2019: 12). Mystery was summonsing and luring me 'to let go of the known and swim in an unknown current' (Moustakas in Sultan 2019: 15).

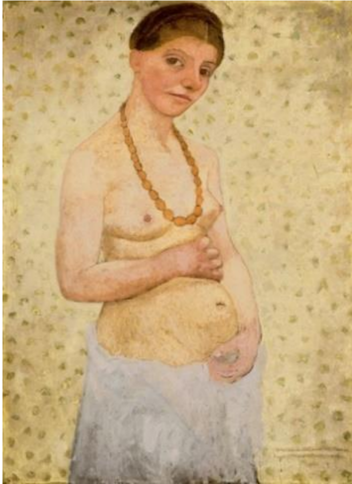


Figure 48. Paula Modersohn-Becker. *Self-Portrait on the sixth wedding anniversary*, 1906. Tempera on canvas, 101.8cm × 70.2cm. Collection: Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum. (Independent 2007)

A self-portrait by Paula Modersohn-Becker (a German contemporary artist of Kollwitz) depicting/imagining herself pregnant on her sixth wedding anniversary (Figure 48) encouraged me to produce my own version on my fifth wedding anniversary. I had felt the need to do so for a while, although it felt foolish and vulnerable producing such an image at fifty. Yet there was something illusive I was after and I felt strangely but gently compelled to do so. This image (Figure 49) importantly represented a 'yes' in my heart to yield to trust and full immersion into the process. I felt the image had to be a roughly life-sized representation of self and working on a large scale seemed to provide me with more internal as well as external room to move and breathe.

Like Kollwitz, I had had a dream of giving birth so vivid that I felt the embodiment of the experience when I woke up. Lauter (1984: 57) states that Kollwitz' psychological and spiritual crisis over the period of midlife resembles the crisis experienced by many women, and Kollwitz' resolution of her crisis was to embrace herself as a strong and loving matriarch of all. This is affirmed by Northrup's perspectives on menopause (2009: xviii).

Figure 49. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Mother/ Incubator of life*, 2018. Charcoal and earth on fabriano, 130cm x 150cm

a. In process on the wall

b. drawing with cotton gloves

c. on the ground, drawn on with earth

Retrospectively, through this image, I have gained more clarity about my need to face the pain I had been avoiding and to position myself as a mother and a matriarch or ‘Chavah’, instead of holding onto the perception of myself as a ‘non-mother’. ‘Chavah’ is ‘Eve’ in Hebrew, meaning ‘mother of all life’, and ‘embodies both the essence of life itself and the creative ability to grant that life to others’ (Crispe n.d.). I was choosing to ‘incubate’ a different reality, to perceive myself as fertile, not barren, and create an external visual symbol of this.

Figure 50. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, 2017. Hand-crushed earths as drawing medium

Metaphorically I became one with the charcoal and the clay with which I drew (Figure 50), submerging myself into the heuristic process and seeing myself as artistic medium in the hands of a greater artist and creator (Hollis 2005: 35, 88; Sultan 2019: 11, 12, 15). These rationalisations and explications should not displace the initial simple desire to engage mystery, the conception point of incubating a new way of relating not only to my PBR, but myself, others, life and God (Zammit 2017: 105 - 115).

The layered meanings and metaphors in this piece are embodied in this image through the materials used and the kinesthetic and tactile process of drawing I employed. Crushed earth and clods of earth again allude to the biblical narrative of origins and God’s creation of and compassionate engagement with us (Genesis 1: 1, 2, 27; 2: 7; Psalm 103: 14; 139: 13). Charcoal comes from the earth as well and speaks to process and to fire, a metaphor for difficulty and purification.

An intense experience of vulnerability and the sense of being figuratively exposed is why I depicted myself as naked. My loose sheet visual journals were hap-hazard silent witnesses to many of my internal struggles, ‘secret’ conversations and visual thinking (Figure 51).

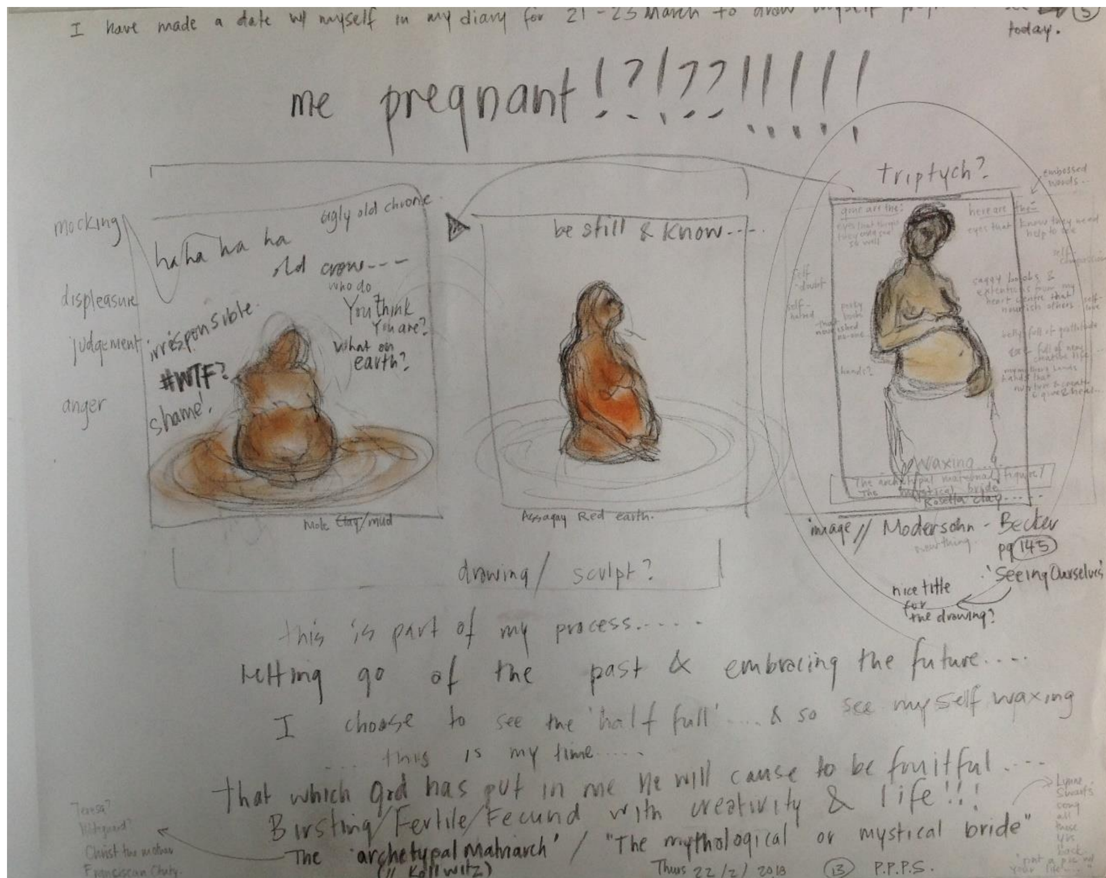


Figure 51. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, 2018. Visual journal page with sketches and thoughts regarding depiction of *Mother/ Incubator of life*

It was never my intention to include this piece as part of my presented body of work as it felt too vulnerable, a private and intimate engagement and expression of personal faith. One of the challenges of an heuristic approach is this unearthing of things that the researcher may not wish to make public. I kept this image hidden for a long time, preferring to avoid self-exposure. Internally, I felt caught between the cultural strictures of a conservative Christian background and certain discursive regimes of the academic world that I had re-entered. Because of the vulnerable and exposing nature of this journey, I was even tempted to try and fabricate a concurrent alternate creative practice and product which I could submit to serve the purposes of my Masters. However, the heuristic process and my personal quest for authenticity and honesty would also not allow me to do so. Heuristics implies responsibility, authenticity and voice (Ings 2011: 227, 232). The immersive and increasingly embodied nature of my research was such that I was becoming the site of the research, the real artwork in the making. My research and knowing was intrinsic, sensed and embodied but not easily articulated or explicated. This image (Figure 49 c) therefore became integral to my process, emphasizing the shift in emphasis and intent within myself as researcher, as did the pieces that followed it (Figures 52, 53).

Figure 52. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Self as Artist/ creator*, 2018. Charcoal and crushed earth, 130cm x 150cm

Figure 53. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, 2018. *As He is/ Christ rising/ One*, 2018. Crushed earth and earth clod, 130cm x 150cm

On the same scale as *Mother/ Incubator of life,* I also sketched myself as artist (Figure 52). My nakedness here depicted a desire for self-acceptance. Furthermore, having begun a sketch of Christ rising as a form of personal meditation, this image took on my female form in *As He is/ Christ rising* (Figure 53). Here the nakedness depicts not only vulnerability but perceived spiritual nakedness. In retrospect and in the naming of these pieces, I can see that in the making of these drawings I was claiming my identity as mother, artist and spiritual being identified in Christ: matriarch, maker and mystic (Galatians 2: 20; 2 Corinthians 5: 17). This in spite of my emotions at the time. The arrangement and re-arrangement of words - mother, incubator of life, artist, creator, life-giver, 'as Christ'- is similar to what Cruise had done in her work, and, as Arnold (1996: 114) says, frequent when the artist is the subject of her own work and processing issues of identity. In addition to processing my thoughts regarding identity and embodiment visually through these images and textually through their titles I also began to do so through poetry:

'A woman
brings forth life
Woman Mother Artist Creator
Matriarch Maker Mystic
As Christ
Life-giving one
Through intimacy
with life-giving
invisible
Seed'

(Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, unpublished notes, 2019)

My process and methodology was evolving through a growing awareness of what I, as researcher, perceived as 'knowable' - what can be researched and what questions can be answered by research - and through my awareness of the type of relationship between myself and what I deem as 'knowable' (Guba cited in Gray & Malins 2004: 71). I was now beginning to allow myself to follow this personal, spiritual and tacit way of knowing within the process of my Masters research. I perceived I was being offered an invitation to engage more deeply in the process of immersion and to become an incubator of something new and unforeseen (Hiles 2001: 3; Sultan 2019: 12). Because my artmaking is motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns which include spiritual perception and experience, I felt I could do nothing other than yield to this inner unction. Yet I was also negotiating internal and external cultural strictures regarding the depiction of the naked body, the exposure of my own (and imagined) body and navigating my way through the unknown. Furthermore, I was becoming curious about what inherited discursive regimes and paradigms were driving me and shaping my experience but unhelpfully so (Smith & Watson 2001: 26).

Perimenopause is associated with a significant change of life that women experience in their embodied selves. Northrup (2009: xvi) says that research into these physiological changes reveals that, apart from the hormonal shifts that take place signifying an end to childbearing years, re-wiring of the nervous system is quite literally taking place. She also asserts that due to the increase in life expectancy, menopause becomes the potential birthing place for a second life. Menopause is a crossroad in the life of a woman where she becomes 'torn between the old way she has always known and a new way' and can be transformative in healing in our bodies, minds and spirits. Northrup (2009: xvii, 64) asserts that a woman's search for meaning at this time takes on an urgency and she begins to experience herself as a potential vessel for Spirit. She also holds that the current 'movement of psychospiritual healing' in the world is made up largely of women approaching and in menopause This shift in the perception of menopause offers a new way of perceiving the menopausal self and Northrup's (2009: xviii, 23, 247) use of the metaphors of rebirth of self and birthing of one's own creativity at menopause became significant in my thinking and in my creative studio practice.

James Hollis PhD (2005: 35, 88), a Jungian analyst, also explores midlife transition, for both men and women. He sees what is commonly referred to as the 'midlife crisis' as an opportunity to finally grow up into maturity, to truly come to know who we are, and to

create a life with meaning. He recognises the turbulent emotional shifts that can take place and the need to confront the unhelpful perceptions we have accumulated and internalised in life, mostly subconscious patterns. If we are willing and honest with ourselves about these internalised narratives, we will recognise their destructive nature. Hollis also urges his reader to 'leave old assumptions behind, risk living amid the real ambiguities of life for a while and move toward a larger role in the conduct of (his/her) life than ever before'. This asks of his reader a willingness to go on an inward journey, which to me sounds very much like a heuristic approach to autobiographical PBR. If the ego prevails, says Hollis, change is forestalled, and spiritual stagnation or regression eventually ensues. A larger energy is at work in the universe that is not confined to operating within the cautious or conscious limits of our own paradigms and this was the energy I wanted to engage.

Illumination

'Wounds and passionate concerns' of the inquirer may be evoked by a heuristic approach (Moustakas cited in Sultan 2019: 13). Illumination includes a naturally occurring awakening, a breakthrough, to the open and receptive inquirer. It involves opening a door to new awareness, knowing in a deeper dimension, modifying old perceptions, synthesizing fragmented knowledge, or new discovery. This illumination encourages the continued immersion and incubation of the inquirer on his/her personal creative and existential journey. This phase holds within it universal application (Hiles 2001: 4; Sultan 2019: 12 - 13). For me illumination included a renewed sense of agency in my autobiographical creative practice and a shift towards a more positive experience of my own embodiment through a revived spirit.

Sculpture as my 'birthing buddy'

Clay sculpture represents embodiment to me in a way that 2D artwork cannot. This is due to the three-dimensional physicality of sculpture and the potently embodied materiality of clay which is produced in the earth and has strong metaphoric links to the human being. Clay requires fashioning and forming, much like our lives do. Also, human cognition is embodied, body and mind are entangled, and our bodies mediate our human experience (Chrisler & Johnston-Robledo 2018: 3, 8).

I still wanted to pursue a 3D creative expression of my own sense of embodiment and to move beyond my comfort zone largely reliant on my previous training in drawing and painting. Creating 3D self-portraits with clay highlights the complexity of the relationship

between the medium and my autobiographical and conceptual message. The content and materials are so meshed that the message could not remain the same were the medium to be changed. The 'vital materiality' of clay generates a connection between me as maker and the material that is dynamic in nature and yet hard to articulate and its embodied materiality comes to represent my own embodied materiality (Falin 2014: 2, 3). The medium also introduces 'change in scale or pace or pattern' which brings change or revolution in my own life, and so becomes its own creative force (McLuhan in Du Preez 2008: 30, 40).

Wanting my sculpture/artwork/metaphor of me to more accurately relate to my human scale (attempted in my 'three monuments'), I realised that I would have to overcome some challenges that working on this scale brings. *Swallow girl* (Figure 57 a & b), was produced out of this resolve.

Swallow girl

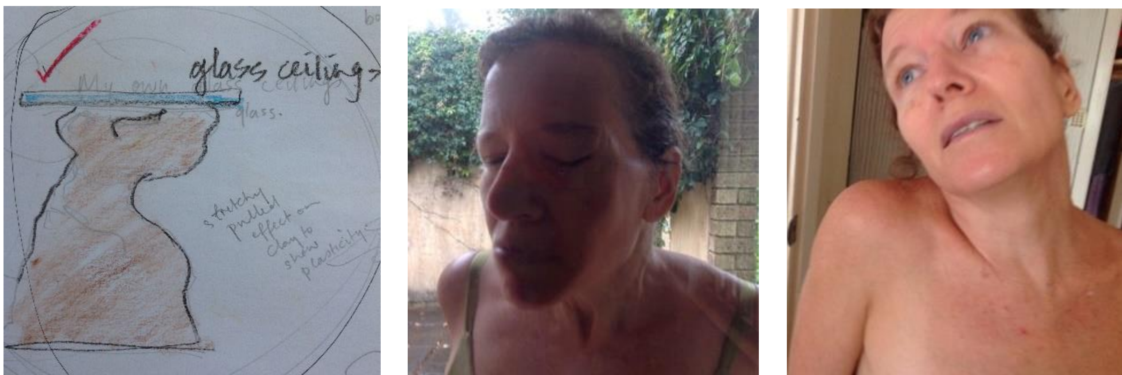


Figure 54. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Swallow girl concept sketch and reference photographs*, 2019. Visual journal 2019

My initial concept for this piece was for her to represent my internal struggle to break through my inner 'glass ceilings' or self-restricting narratives and frameworks (Zammit 2017: 101). I wanted her to be straining upwards with her face pressed against a sheet of glass (Figure 54). During the process, however, she, as a visual metaphor of my own self, seemed to request the freedom to reach up unhindered from an internal source to an unseen realm. I realised that I as maker had power over her/my materialisation. This was a profound moment of revelation as she mirrored myself back to me and revealed my agency in the process of my own becoming. To place the glass over her face would be to treat her with the same unkindness and self-limiting thought I was struggling with and perhaps would reiterate and keep me in the place I depicted. I had to let her be free as she desired

to be, reaching up for renewed hope and spiritual life, creating a new possibility and depicting an alternate experience, one I myself wished to embody (Figure 55).

Figure 55 a, b, c, d. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Swallow girl* process photographs, 2019. Showing the handbuilding process and in action thinking regarding the changed outcome from original intention

I was thinking in action through my engagement with clay Gray & Malins 2004: 74, 75). Working with the materiality of clay was also facilitating an embodied, physical expression of meditation and prayer, and a sense of hope and a reduction of helplessness were being experienced internally (D'Souza & Rodrigo 2004: 149, 150). Here my perception shifted from 'narration' to 'creation' of my autobiography. Word, thought and idea seemed to beg for incarnation. I wanted to see a physical materialization and manifestation of the concept, an embodiment of the abstract. The process took the lead and changed my way of relating to my artwork: requiring of me, as artist, compassion towards my representational *and* my embodied self as a developing artwork. As the artwork represented me, my changed approach also began a shift in the way I related to myself, giving me a sense of agency. The way the artwork took its seemingly own direction is much like Kollwitz' example in the *Offering* (Figure 12) and Cruise's *Without Title with a Mirror,* (Figure 17). I realised with greater clarity that my inner conversations and frameworks were the 'gatekeepers'

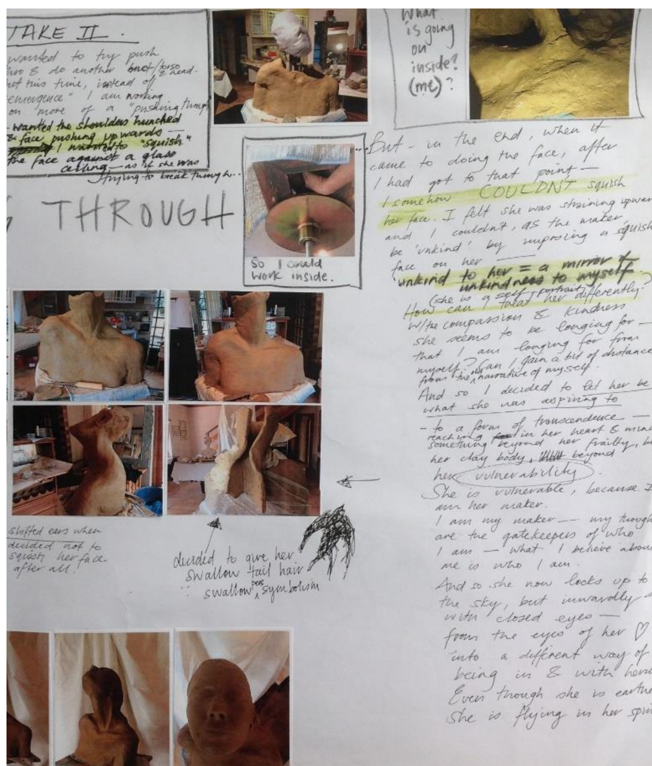


Figure 56. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Swallow Girl visual journal process, 2019. Visual Journal page depicting reflexive process (unpublished and unpaginated)

of my external creative practice and my reality as experienced. The shifting of my internal frameworks and capacity to be kinder to myself started to produce profoundly altered outcomes in terms of how I was willing to depict myself. The pliability of an heuristic approach was facilitating possibility of growth and transformation (Sultan 2019: 6, 7, 12).

One cannot force this illumination to take place (Figure 56). According to McGilchrist (2009: 28; 2019: viii, ix), the way we perceive things, or 'attend' to them, alters the nature of the world we live in, as it 'changes *what kind of* a thing comes into being for us' and 'in that way it changes the world'. This recognises the agency we have in how we see/ attend to things, our attitude towards that thing, whether we are engaging with love, compassion and identification or with judgement and a perception of separation. This transformative potential can be manifested in every form of relationship we encounter and experience: intrapersonal, interpersonal or in engaging in activities and artmaking.

Figure 57 a & b. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Swallow Girl* (unfired), 2019. Red terra-cotta with paper and grog, 44cm x 40cm x 30cm

I also identified with *Swallow Girl* going into the kiln. The firing process exposes flaws in one's building and is potentially the undoing of many hours of work. However, it is in this process that clay is transformed forever into permanent ceramic. Having experienced so many 'losses' up to this point, I did not want another. *Swallow Girl* (Figure 57 a & b.) not only represented many hours of work and embodied a rich repository of personal

autobiographical process and experience, but in the firing process, also mirrored the fiery internal process I was experiencing (Falin 2014: 6, 7). I did not know how I myself would come through this metaphorical fire and wanted her survival of the 'fire' to symbolize my own.

Having hand-built *Swallow girl* with slabs and coils, as I had my '*three monuments*', I realised I wanted to find a way to hand build that I found more intuitive and less restricted to a fixed contour. Building this way requires a commitment to that contour, section by section from the base, allowing the clay to firm up in sections in order to carry the weight of the subsequent upper sections. It looks somewhat like the process of 3D printing plastic objects, but on a larger and hand-made scale. I wanted to be able to push and pull the clay more, like I had in my earlier smaller sculptures of my dogs. This 'push/pull' approach, I felt, would allow for an even more flexible and tactile hands-on approach to working with plastic clay, ideally retaining not only my fingerprints but gestures. For me, to work with soft, moist clay and retain 'the mark of the maker' was extremely important. It was important in my tactile engagement with the materiality of the clay, but also because it alludes to having been formed in the womb by God (Psalm 139: 13 – 16). The cool, smooth, pliable and sensual nature of clay invites the maker's touch. Working with my hands in clay feeds both my desire for tactility and therapeutic engagement (Malchiodi 2017) and facilitates a literal and implicit connection with the piece (Falin 2014: 2, 6, 7). I wanted the 'making of myself' to literally and figuratively reflect empathetic engagement with myself through the piece as proxy. This mode of engagement was also a means of what I have come to recognise as a form of SACBT, the rewiring of negative and restricting habituated frameworks of thought regarding self (D'Souza & Rodrigo 2004). The malleability of the physical and embodied medium of clay strongly represents neuroplasticity which speaks to regeneration, renewal, transformation, healing, creativity and possibility. Cognitively, spiritually and experientially, the deeper significance of clay as my medium of choice was becoming evident to me: a material means and expression of collaboration in reshaping core beliefs and remodelling my perception of and relationship with self, life and God (Romans 12: 2; Proverbs 23: 7)(Northrup 2009: 93; Zammit 2017: 105 - 115). Artistically and visually, I was also looking for some level of resonance between my drawings and sculptural work and felt that this desired gestural approach to sculpture would provide the key.

Birth and buddies

I found myself back at the pregnancy concept, a year after doing the drawing of myself pregnant. I felt she had to step off the page, representing the realm of ideas, into sculpted clay, representing embodiment. A symbol of me and my intent as a life-giving being to conceive, incubate and birth hope, she signalled the birthing of a new process or cycle of work and thought. This reflects the strong metaphoric link between making/ moulding with clay and female fertility and human reproduction (Forni in Livingstone & Petrie 2017: 25, 27; Kilgore in Livingstone & Petrie 2017: 67). In my case the birthing alluded to the re-birthing of self and a growing sense of possibility (Northrup 2009: xviii, 23, 247).

Making art literally and figuratively concretises my energy (spiritual, psychological, emotional and physical) in material form. The making process, intricately connected with my own becoming, has the potential to perpetuate or to regenerate, and I, as the creative agent can ultimately choose which.

Figure 58 a & b. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Birth*, (unfired) 2019. Red terra-cotta and grog, 24cm x 19cm x 20cm

a. *Birth* in progress **(wet)**

b. Depicting curve that developed **(dry)**

Wanting to find a way to hand-build that felt somehow more intuitive, I returned to a smaller scale of sculptural exploration. Remembering Michelangelo's Slaves emerging from blocks of marble, *Birth* began as a block of clay (Figure 58 a). As I worked with the soft clay it took on a curved form that I felt was representative of a wave, of movement, of energy, of life and the feminine (Figure 58 b).

Wanting to reiterate these ideas, *Birth* was followed by a few other small pieces including *Submersion* (Figure 59), *Emergence* (Figure 61), and *Pupa* (Figure 64), all working with a curve. The making of these pieces expressed my desire to generate a different way of perceiving myself through creating symbolic new narratives, as opposed to reiterating my old narratives. I had the increasing yet subtle intuitive inclination towards creating a new story and shifted personal experience through my creative practice. There was a sense that

I had the power to create a new reality for myself by making internal vision explicit. This is supported by Marcus' (1994: 274) reference to the key role of conceptualisation in autobiography. These small pieces became metaphors for interior states of thinking and feeling, and as vehicles for the exploration of meaning (Cruise 1997: 2).

Figure 59. *Submersion,* (unfired), 2019. Fenix clay, 22cm x32cm x 15cm

Figure 60. Process of hollowing *Submersion* sculpture

Figure 61. *Emergence*, 2019. bisque-fired Fenix clay

Working again on this scale, however, made it difficult to only work with only my fingers and hands and I had to use tools for the finer details. *Birth*, having been built with a solid lump of clay, was hollowed from the base for even drying, as was *Emergence* (Figure 61). I realised I wanted to work with a whole, not fragmented body and *Submergence* (Figure 59) was born. This 'whole body' could not be scraped out from the base and so was cut in half in order to be hollowed and then re-joined (Figure 60). I did not like this process of slicing and re-joining the piece as it felt too surgical and many of my initial gestural marks in the plastic clay were lost. *Pupa* (Figure 64), an image alluding to incubation, had appeared several times in my visual journals (Figure 62) and I decided to give her 3D form. I created a combustible paper core around which I could wrap the clay and form the sculpture (Figures 62 - 64).

Figure 62. Paper armature experiment for *Pupa*

Figure 63. Working clay around armature form

Figure 64. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, Pupa (unfired), 2019. Black charcoal sculpture clay, 24cm x 11cm x 12cm

It is of interest that, after having sculpted this group of figures with their eyes open, I decided to make them closed, like *Swallow girl*, to represent an internal sense of sight and more subtle way of perceiving. Allowing myself to physically shape different perceptions

of myself in material form was helping shift my internal perceptions of self, generating a sense of distance from my old narratives and the perception of myself as barren. Beyond technical preoccupations and considerations, and even beyond the psychological processes of conscientizing the subconscious, I was shifting to spiritual awareness and a desire to work from a place of centredness, interconnectedness and agency. A similar process was taking place in some charcoal and earth drawings.

Embryonic 'I'

Moustakas' perception was that the heuristic researcher is 'creating a story' (Hiles 2001: 5). If heuristic autobiographical research is creating a story, a question for me was becoming: what story am I creating and why? The story created is not just in the artmaking but in the lived and embodied experience of the artist. The wonder and power of autobiographical exploration, I was discovering, was not merely in the reflection of what is, but in the incubation of what could be – first within the self of the autobiographer.

Figure 65. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *Embryonic I: Who do I say I am?* (detail) 2019. Process depicting drawing with cotton glove and engagement of my somatic self with the picture plane. Charcoal and earth on fabriano, 100cm x70cm

Embryonic I: Who do I say I am? (Figures 65) explores this idea. The '*embryonic I'*, a term I coined during this autobiographical exploration, is a recognition of the mystery of self and consciousness. This visual narrative of self, past and present in both time and space, reflects my perception of my page as a womb and my co-creative power with the Divine. Images of myself as child and adult artist collaborate with my somatic self, suggesting a dimension of engagement beyond space-time as we know it (Zammit 2017: 103). The inclusion of my arms sketched onto the plane of the paper calls attention to my somatic experience and embodied self that cannot be reduced to the image/ representation of self but remains with me and is dynamic and changing. This affirms me as artist and creator, not only on the page or with clay but also in my own reality. The central image of myself naked alludes to a pupa (Figure 64) and the idea of unbecoming in order to become. This image reflects my metaphoric (re-)incubation of self (Smith & Watson 2001: 47).

Maquettes and Despair

I was inspired by *Pupa* (Figure 64) to further explore the technical options available to me in working with an internal combustible armature. This armature would ideally support moist, heavy clay as it dried were I to work on a larger scale, as well as facilitate the building of a hollow piece that could be fired. Perhaps it would also allow for the more intuitive approach to hand-building with clay that I was seeking for myself. I decided I needed some sort of skeletal structure that would not only provide support during the building process but also allow for shrinkage of the clay as it dried and during firing (Figure 66 a, b, c).

Figure 66. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, 2019. Experimental combustible armatures for maquettes and *Despair*

a. Armature of card and quilting.

b. Armature of wood and chicken wire, still to be wrapped in cotton wool

c. Armature of wooden skewers, wire, card and cotton wool for *Despair*

Although I did not want to reiterate, rehearse, perpetuate or concretize my ‘old narratives’ I felt that I needed to, with distance, create an artwork symbolic of the sense of barrenness and despair I had experienced emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. I felt it would not only provide a visual metaphor of my psyche, but would consolidate my learning, internally and technically. The figure that emerged was *Despair* (Figure 70). I was able to, in retrospect, engage compassionately and lovingly with myself, actual and metaphorical, in my artmaking. When I was in the psychological state depicted by *Despair*, I curiously could not make such a piece as the emotion was too raw and my tendency towards creative and self-sabotage too strong. The making of the piece demanded a level of emotional distance in order to gain clarity and to facilitate the patience, objectivity and problem-solving capacity required in the making.

Figure 67. Käthe Kollwitz, *Hunger*, 1922. Charcoal on paper. Collection Unknown (Zimmermann 2012)

I decided to base my symbolic menopausal self on an image by Kollwitz (Figure 67), which I had used previously on a clay vessel depicting myself (Figure 43 f). Kollwitz' image, in the context of post WWI depression, depicts hunger and the anguish of a mother with a starved dead child on her lap whereas my sculptural piece, with empty lap, depicts a sense of barrenness and despair. The chronic and debilitating migraines and neck pain I suffered from throughout this period are also encoded into the pose (Northrup 2009: 12, 37, 124). This time, to avoid generalizations of form, and as I was working slightly larger than my maquettes, I worked from photographic source material and drawings of myself (Figure 68).

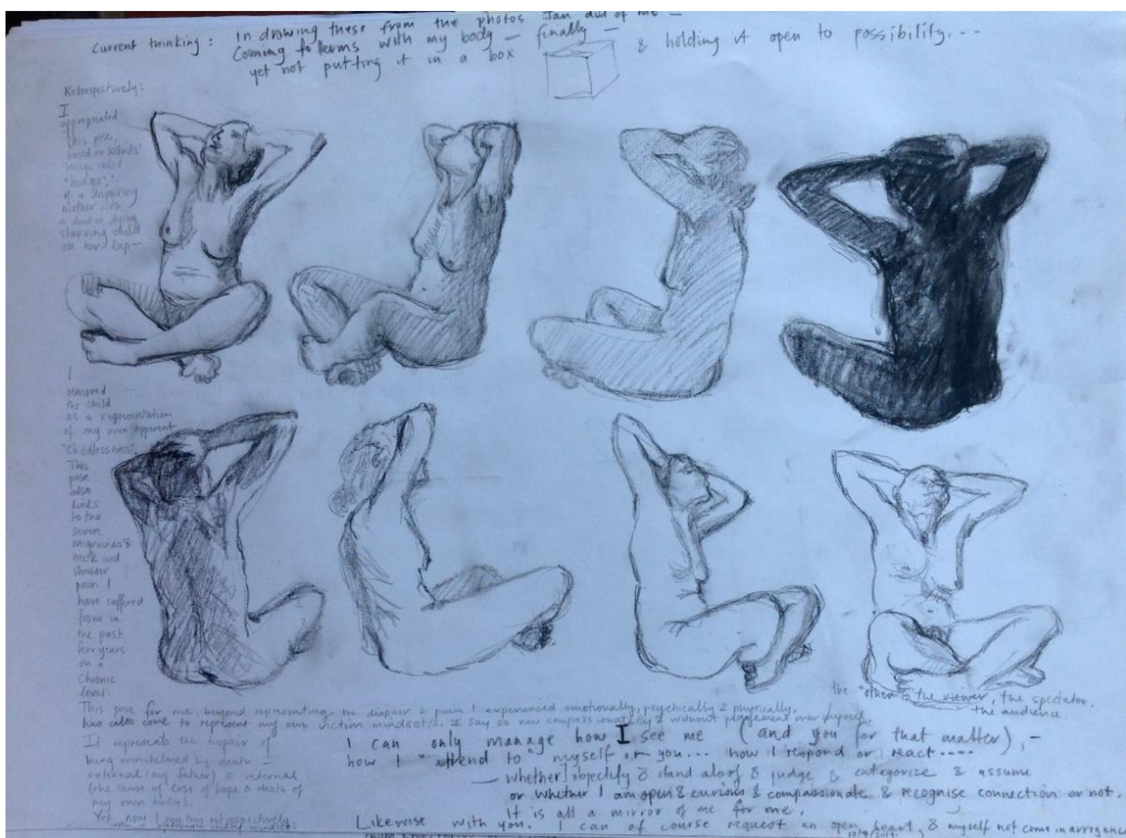


Figure 68. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, 2019. Visual journal page with sketches and thoughts regarding depiction of *Despair* (unpublished and unpaginated)

My visual journals had become central and seminal to incubating, processing and visualizing my ideas. At the nub of my metaphoric conversation with my work, my

research and myself, this visual/ textual sketchbook practice had become a primary and highly significant resource in my self-reflexive process. I was finding an increased 'fluency' in this process and it was taking on its own expressive voice, one that could not be diminished or subsumed by the product/ artwork (Barrett 2007: 5, 135; Gray & Malins 2004: 95, 153).

Figure 69 a & b. *Despair* in progress, 2019. Charcoal sculpture clay wrapped around combustible armature and shaped and formed by hand

Figure 70. Completed figure *Despair* (unfired) with supports.

PBR and heuristics, based in stimulating interest, trial and error, problem solving and the evaluation of possible answers, provided an open platform for my research process (Ings 2011: 227). Having become more accepting of loss in this process, I began to feel less attached to the outcomes and engaged in experimentation. Cracking or damage to utilitarian objects made with clay needs to be totally avoided whereas sculptural pieces are a different matter and able to be mended. In building sculptures with clay, kiln size is a consideration as it determines the scale to which one can build a sculpture in one piece. I took this into account when making the armature for *Despair* (Figure 66 c). With the armature complete, my approach was to gradually wrap this structure in moist slabs of clay, piece by piece, fashioning and forming the sculpture with my hands until the armature was completely covered by a layer of clay (Figures 69, 70). My active involvement with and exploration of clay was causing new learning to emerge from my engagement with it and the unpredictability of the outcomes of this embodied and practise-based way of learning was generating new ways of perceiving (Barrett & Bolt 2007: 3, 6, 143).

Considering *Despair* in retrospect, although technical challenges were faced and largely overcome, the comments of a colleague are worth mentioning. He said he found the piece too 'angstvol' and too literal. He felt it did not engage conversation but repelled. He also said I had depicted myself as far older than I am or look. I acknowledge these perspectives and recognise my tendency towards a hypercritical approach to myself. But again, the

piece depicts in material form a state of mind and embodied experience that was extremely real to me, where I did feel utterly 'angstvol', bereft, barren – in every sense of the word - and old. Yet these comments also reminded me of my own reluctance to build the piece in the first case, as well as my desire to invite dialogue.

The making of *Despair*, however, presented me a profound opportunity 'sit with' and validate the pain I had experienced, and to extend my inward dialogue of self compassion into a 'tangible' compassionate engagement with myself, embodied in my gentle yet firm approach to handling her in the building process. This reminds me of Northrup's (2009: 38, 46, 59, 75 - 76) view of midlife as an opportunity for women to love and 'mother' themselves into their 'self-healing' and 'self-transformation'. It was also an opportunity to commune spiritually and co-create with my Maker in a spiritual dimension or 'womb' from which mercies, compassion, love and regeneration flow:

'You formed my inward parts …
I am fearfully and wonderfully made …
My frame was not hidden from You, when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth' (Psalm 139: 13 – 16)

Figure 71. Me holding *Despair*

Figure 72. *Despair* Afterbirth-like plastic around left foot after first firing

Figure 73. *Despair*'s right foot from below showing squashed babylike nature

The fullness of this experience of me as artist loving me as artwork became evident after firing. It was only then that I could lift *Despair* off the kiln shelf that she had been drying on and was fired on and carry her for the first time. As she was heavy, with limbs protruding, the most practical way to do so was to hold her like a baby (Figure 71). In this process, I became aware of holding myself as a baby in arms, as if I as maker, had given birth to her-who-is-also-me. This sensation brought me back to Northrup's (2009: xviii, 23, 247) metaphors of re-birthing of self and creativity at midlife and reminded me of Cruise's *John's Wife: White* with the *Pièta* on her lap, when Cruise considers the source of

her creativity. I noticed that what remained of the thin plastic that kept *Despair*'s legs from sticking together in the making process now served visually as afterbirth (Figure 72).

Figure 74. *Despair* from below in labour/ a supine birthing position

When I placed her on the table to try remove some of the rough grog that was still attached to her base (to enable shrinkage during drying and firing on the kiln shelf), I saw the underparts of my figure for the first time. Due to my approach to making her, from underneath her feet looked squashed and babylike (Figure 73). Furthermore, from that angle I recognised her posture as one that alludes to birthing (Figure 74). She was simultaneously birthed and the one birthing (Northrup 2009: xviii, 23, 247).

Figure 75. *Despair* in position of prayer and petition.

I inverted her onto her elbows and knees to repair some damage and recognised a posture of prayer and petition (Figure 75). Having not seen her from either of these perspectives until this point I was suddenly aware of a profound grace. She mirrored something back to me which I was only able to perceive at that point. Whilst I, the subject, had been in a psychological place of absolute doubt and despair from my own perspective, from other perspectives I had been in labour and prayer all along.

Figure 76. *Despair* (detail) showing cracking on figure after second firing.

After a second firing to enrich her colour, which I wanted to allude to a charcoal sketch, some cracking appeared on her (Figure 76). By this stage in my process, I was no longer devastated by these challenges and 'losses' that come with working with clay, and finally started seeing the opportunity it provided for me. It was an opportunity to mend her, as me, with a new-found kindness towards myself and this would serve to represent my implicit experience. The process of making *Despair*, produced in a meditative and prayerful attitude, had transformed helplessness, overwhelm and existential despair and paradoxically created meaning, purpose, connectedness

and hope (D'Souza & Rodrigo 2004: 149, 150). This background information, like Kollwitz' diary entries, demonstrates the nature of the encrypted data of experience, process and reflection embedded in artworks produced.

Not only is the female nude often perceived as 'object of male gaze', produced 'by men for men', and therefore perceived as an oppressive act, but a woman entering into artmaking in the context of a Western male-centred tradition of artmaking can be perceived as colluding with that system (Smith & Watson 2002:15), unless they depict the woman as somehow undesirable to disrupt this '(male) gaze'. Cruise (1997: 2, 74), as subject and object of her work, presented herself as a menopausal woman, not culturally perceived to be an object of beauty or desire, and yet she recognises that voyeurism is a complex issue and age and decay can also hold viewer fascination. But rather than avoid the image or representation of the female nude to negate the '(male) gaze', Cruise's figurative sculptures became expressions of female perspective and agency and, like mine, speak of the body as site of experience, vehicle for the exploration of meaning, and as metaphor for state of being. What is perceived as the '(male) gaze' that objectifies women, I realised, can equally be the gaze of any aloof, judgemental, non-empathetic eye, including my own. For me, this process of depicting myself naked in sculpture was something I was doing for myself, reflective of a growing self-acceptance of my physical body, which Northrup (2009: 93, 230) says many women need to 'come home to'. My nakedness reflected my vulnerability, my desire to befriend my own body and to be more at home with my own sense of embodiment and beauty. The embodied materiality of clay was increasingly not only allowing me to become more present to my embodied self, but paradoxically also pointing me to a sense of mystery and incarnation of spirit within my corporeal embodiment. Although I would have preferred to keep the process private, it was being facilitated through my PBR and so would need to be presented and I could not dictate how the viewer would respond.

My beloved is mine I am his

My husband had, up to this stage in my PBR, only appeared in some small sketches along the way. Yet he had been there so consistently and lovingly providing me space for my autobiographical exploration. I wanted to make a visual expression of gratitude in acknowledgement and celebration of him, come full circle and again show the interconnected nature of the auto/biographical (Marcus 1994: 273, 274). This image also represented a return to mystery and love within my process and to source, as it is also a

metaphor for my relationship with God, the one with whom I am co-creator (Figure 77) (John 14: 12 – 14) (Zammit 2017: 19).

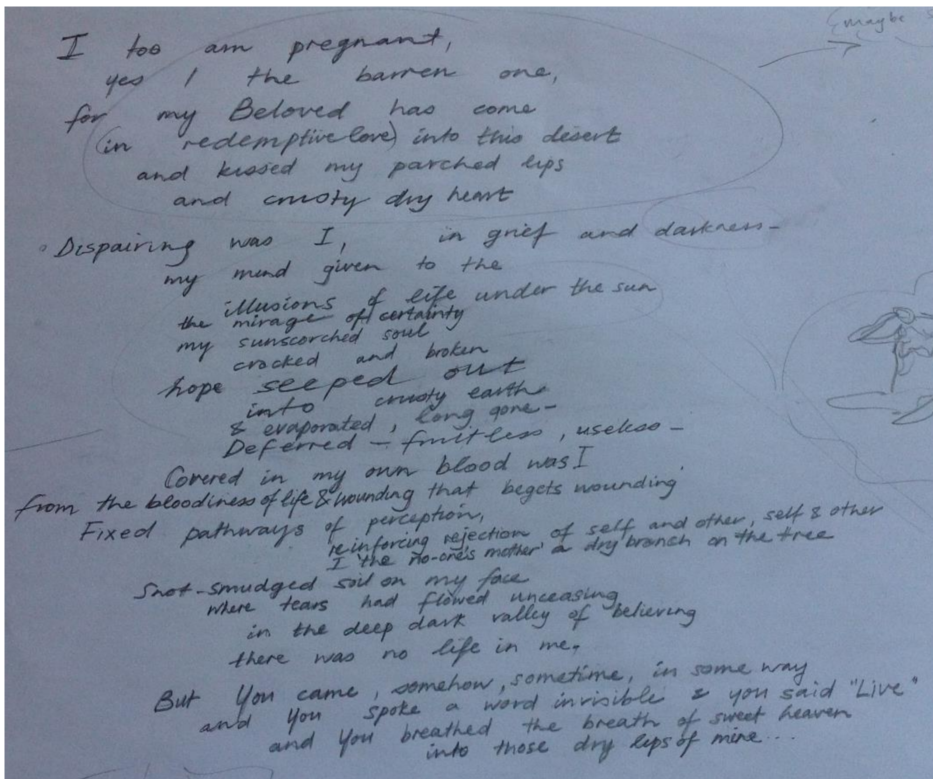
Figure 77. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *My beloved is mine and I am His,* 2019. Conte and earth on mulberry paper, 75cm x 143cm

a. *My beloved is mine and I am His* in process.

b. Working earth onto paper with cotton gloves

c. *My beloved is mine and I am His* (detail).

Increasingly towards the end of my PBR I found myself writing poetry in my visual journal (Figure 78). This textual mode of self-expression and articulation is perhaps evidence of the reparative processes generated by the therapeutic effect of working with both clay and autobiography that my PBR had provided me (Malchiodi 2017; Smith & Watson 1998: 40; 2001: 22, 23). As a means of re-negotiating words, meanings, connections and identities, poetry can help articulate a poetic and metaphoric (as opposed to explicit) language and voice. This is reflective of the visual/textual interface used by many women in their autobiographical creative practice (Smith & Watson 2002: 4, 16, 42).



I too am pregnant,
yes I the barren one,
for my Beloved has come
(in redemptive love) into this desert
and kissed my parched lips
and crusty dry heart
Dispairing was I, in grief and darkness –
my mind given to the
illusions of life under the sun
the mirage of certainty
my sunscorched soul
cracked and broken
hope seeped out
into crusty earth
& evaporated, long gone –
Deferred – fruitless, useless –
Covered in my own blood was I
from the bloodiness of life & wounding that begets wounding
Fixed pathways of perception,
reinforcing rejection of self and other, self & other
I 'the no-one's mother' a dry branch on the tree
Snot-smudged soil on my face
where tears had flowed unceasing
in the deep dark valley of believing
there was no life in me,
But You came, somehow, sometime, in some way
and You spoke a word invisible & you said "Live"
and You breathed the breath of sweet heaven
into those dry lips of mine…

Figure 78. Sheryl Thornton-Dibb le Tourneur, *I too*, poem in visual journal, 2019. (unpublished and unpaginated)

Explication

What has been awakened in the consciousness is examined and organised with the depiction of emergent core themes (Hiles 2001: 4). The explication of my process and what it has awakened in my consciousness has taken place within this chapter. The writing of this chapter is based on the extensive visual journals produced during this research and has provided me with the opportunity to reflect on embedded and embodied subjective experience provided by my heuristic autobiographical PBR process.

Creative Synthesis

This involves a creative putting together of the data, in my case my artworks, produced within this research in the form of a self-curated exhibition (Hiles 2001: 4). As final exhibition set up is subsequent to the submission of this dissertation, I include working concept photographs of curation for this discussion.

Exhibition of selected work

As the maker of my display, part of my engagement with aspects of my lived experience includes curation of the artwork produced within this autobiographical PBR (Smith & Watson 2002: 5, 9).

Figure 79. Exhibition trial run- Suspended paper and porcelain artwork

Figure 80. Exhibition trial run- Embossed porcelain on lightbox

Figure 81. Exhibition trial run- Charcoal and earth drawing of *Pops* on lightbox

In terms of curating my exhibition, I have expressed the desire for the message and meaning of my work to be enhanced by this process. I have considered the use of space, found objects and light. For practical reasons, I am using the Jack Heath Gallery at the CVA and therefore need to curate my exhibition in this space. The light and open area of the main gallery provides one space (Figures 79, 82, 83) and a more womb-like, less well-lit area where I can create focus with lighting effects provides the other (Figures 80, 81, 84). Although my various themes will be meshed and overlapping in my display, as they were in my process, various spaces within the larger galley will reflect the phases of my process, the cycles of work they represent, and emergent themes. In the main gallery, work

produced within my initial engagement with my PBR, the vessels with depictions of my parents/father, will be displayed more formally on plinths, yet floating on glass.

Work produced during my immersion, incubation and illumination phases, will begin to merge, but create a narrative that moves from the two to the three-dimensional. For the sculptural work, I do not wish to be restricted to formal plinths as I want to create an environment that is more reflective of a lived-in studio space. As Cruise does, I want to invite the viewer in to participate in a dialogue, and not just observe. I feel that the incorporation of found objects from my own environments (home and CVA) will contribute to this. The found objects used will also reinforce the emphasis on process and the idea that my embodied living experience and engagement with the world is the site of my lived and ongoing PBR. The use of sculpture stands for small sculptural pieces will speak to process and to myself metaphorically as clay. The large wooden crates will materially replace large plinths and enhance the focal points of the exhibition. I want to create something like a labyrinth for the viewer, culminating at *Swallow Girl* who looks upwards towards *My beloved is mine and I am his*, as reflective of where this process has led me to (Figure 82, 83).

Figure 82. Exhibition trial run- *Swallow girl* on found wooden crates looking up at *My beloved is mine and I am His* to create focal point in main gallery

Figure 83. Exhibition trial run- *Swallow girl* on found wooden crates; earth drawings on floor in background.

Figure 84. Exhibition trial run- *Despair* back-lit by lightbox in womb-like atmospherically lit side gallery

The images hung in the air and placed on the floor (Figures 79, 82, 83) will be devices to encourage different modes of looking, both physically and figuratively. The metaphorical embodiment of 'up' and 'down' come into play. I will position the large images *Christ Rising*, *Mother*, and *Self as artist* (Figures 49c, 52, 53) on the floor to represent my

vulnerability during the phases of total immersion and incubation as well as in the presentation of the work to the viewer (Figure 83). I also felt they were potentially too confrontational on the wall. On the floor they reflect a request for empathetic engagement, not subservience to the viewer. The lumps of earth or charcoal with which I draw quietly invite viewer participation, visual reminders of auto/biographical connectedness and that we are continuously in process of becoming (Marcus 1994: 237, 274).

The selectively lit small womb-like room will provide a more intense experience designed to evoke an empathetic response by the viewer. It will reflect parts of the whole PBR process and tie the end to the beginning, the beginning to the end, thus reflecting the cyclical nature of this research (Barret & Bolt 2002: 3; Ings 2011: 227). Earth drawings of my father will be accompanied by *Despair* who will sit in the half-light (Figure 84). The porcelain and glass pieces bearing my father's image will be lit from below to enhance their translucent/ 'spiritual' nature (Figure 80) and displayed to indicate a sense of rising upwards. Other pieces in this 'womb of becoming' will be *Dead self/me* and *Pupa/ Becoming me,* which contribute to the depiction of my key themes of death, loss and desire for rebirth and spiritual transcendence that have emerged through my PBR process.

I also wish to provide the viewer access to my visual journals and studio experimentation as they are a significant part in and record of my research process and exploration of the materiality of clay and need to be recognised as such (Barrett 2007: 135; Gray & Malins 2004: 95).

Validation of the heuristic enquiry

The validity of a heuristic inquiry is one of meaning. The question becomes whether the synthesis presents 'comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience' and must be placed within 'the context of the experiencer's own internal frame of reference'. (Hiles 2001: 3, 4, 5).

Having experienced this immersive process and come to this point at this time, I have experienced a profound inward sense of validation. A heuristic autobiographical inquiry validates itself if fully engaged with as the depth of discovery of the nature and meaning of experience is illuminating and transformative for the researcher. A growing sense of self-awareness and self-knowledge and the development of methods and procedures for further investigation are additional benefits (Moustakas in Hiles 2001: 4). Having experienced some of its fruit and knowing that I (as an artwork) am still in process, with ongoing and

expanding questions, I am deeply encouraged to continue in this form of heuristic practice-based autobiographical inquiry. It has unearthed creative wells and yielded beyond what has or can be explicated here on creative, psychological, emotional and spiritual levels.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed my autobiographical PBR process and creative practice in retrospect and through the lens of the heuristic phases (Hiles 2001: 4; Sultan 2019: 10 – 13). I have drawn out of my creative practice the emergent themes of death, loss, barrenness, (step)motherhood, immersion, incubation, illumination and rebirth that are embedded in my artworks and embodied in myself as autobiographer.

My research began with the personal low point of my beloved father's death. The need to process loss artistically reflects that of Käthe Kollwitz and Wilma Cruise, the artists I researched in chapter three. My exploration of the sensory, tactile and therapeutic medium of clay provided me with a tangible means of processing loss and a sense of ongoing connection to my father (Malchiodi 2017). This initial phase of my PBR was grounded in embodied memories of my father and in contemplation of the phenomenon of death, with dust, clay and the ceramic vessel used metaphorically. The creative process was absorbing, and I worked intuitively from tacit knowledge, with creative outputs produced during this cycle of work strongly influenced by my prior knowledge of drawing and painting (Gray & Malins 2004: 2, 22). This work also reflected the interconnected and implicit nature of auto/biographical subjectivity (Marcus 1994: 273, 274). The recognition that I was using my father as a proxy for my own internal sense of loss and psychological avoidance (related to my experience of midlife, barrenness and creative block) set me on an immersive existential-phenomenological autobiographical investigation.

As I shifted towards myself as subject of my work, my focus turned inwards to explore my internal narratives and frameworks that were fashioning my embodied experience. Questions of identity and agency began to emerge, largely related to my stepmotherhood, barrenness and midlife. I gradually realised that beneath the psychoanalytical, I was in a deeply spiritual crisis of faith and began to open myself to more subtle ways of knowing in my PBR (Hiles 2001: 10). I became willing to become submerged into the practice-based heuristic process, surrendering to it and identifying myself with the clay and the drawing materials of my creative practice. My media (clay, earth, charcoal and dust) became

metaphors of myself and the artworks produced became mirrors of me and tools for self-reflexivity (Schön cited in Gray & Malins 2004: 153; Barrett & Bolt 2007: 5).

The process was a vulnerable and self-exposing one, requiring me to navigate fears and intense emotion, and to relinquish control and preconceived ideas of outcomes (Sultan 2019: 13). Although I had immersed myself and begun to incubate internal and subtle new knowledge, illumination could not be forced but emerged serendipitously through the process and by working on 3D clay self-portraits.

Technically, I worked in an experimental way with clay in an attempt to find a personal and intuitive mode of expression with the medium. I felt that certain approaches that emerged (evident in *LolliPops* and *Despair*) successfully reflect this. Working with clay also influenced my drawing practice in the use of earth as a drawing medium. My choice of the medium of clay for this research project was integral to the autobiographical journey it facilitated. Clay provided an embodied materiality and metaphorical mirror of my own embodied experience and internal states of being. Along with its ‘vital materiality’, the processual nature of engagement with clay offered me a therapeutic effect and a sense of entanglement that I had not experienced through my drawing and painting (Falin 2014: 2, 3; Malchiodi 2017). The significance of the medium was such that the meaning and message of the artwork would be altered if the medium had been different (Du Preez 2008: 30, 40). In its own process of transformation, working with clay brought with it a new set of challenges, limitations, problems and possibilities and facilitated my own transformational process (Sultan 2019: 6, 7, 12). Approaching clay as a beginner gave me new eyes with which to see and engage with myself and ultimately helped me to let go of personal expectations of arriving at a particular destination in terms of my creative practice (Sultan 2019: 13). The capacity for ceramics to break was ironically necessary for breaking unhelpful frameworks in my own thinking and discovering more empathetic, self-accepting internal dialogue.

The merged identities of self as mother and artist (also in Kollwitz and Cruise’s work) and the idea of re-birthing of myself and my creativity (Northrup 2009: xviii, 23, 247), became expanded as I began perceiving myself as matriarch, artist/maker and as mystic. I gained a new sense of agency and co-creatorship though this process and experienced transformational shifts in my modes of relating to myself, my art, others, life and God (Zammit 2017: 102, 105 - 115).

The realisation that my psychological and spiritual internalised frameworks are gatekeepers to my personal expression of self and my creative practice made my visual journals valued platforms for self-reflexivity and as supporting documents to the process, ensuring that the research process is not subsumed by the 'product'. It was through my journaling that I became convinced that my self-concepts are inextricably connected to my God-concepts. I perceive that I, in collaboration with the Divine, have agency in either perpetuating or in re-creating my internal narratives and frameworks and the autobiographical artistic expression that they form.

My research has confirmed the capacity for autobiographical investigation to serve as a creative fulcrum, not only facilitating shifts and new directions in creative expression but also in the transformation of my approach to my artmaking and myself as artist (Smith & Watson 2001: 45, 47).

Further possibilities:

Autobiography, prevalent and pervasive as it is, has been proposed as a continued site for investigation (Smith & Watson 1998:37; 2002: 5) and heuristics is advocated as a proven ancient *and* extremely relevant current method of inquiry 'in need of being re-invented' (Hiles 2001: 6). They both have a natural fit with creative PBR.

On an academic, experiential and creative level, following on from the spiritual rebirthing experienced during this PBR process, I would like to explore mystical, as opposed to only natural, experience and embodiment. This includes what is called 'the law of the spirit of life' (Romans 8: 2) and 'mystic union' (Encyclopedia 2020). There is a resurgence of and interest in mysticism, which Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment possibly provides interpretation for, as in Jacqueline Yarbro's 2015 dissertation on Christian Medieval mystic, Hildegard von Bingen. The subjective components of autobiography (identity, experience, memory, embodiment and agency) addressed only superficially in this dissertation would be further explored through a phenomenological and mystic lens, and through PBR and heuristics which I have come to value as valid and effective approaches to deep learning. I would also like to explore the potential of the creative act to not only provide healing to the practitioner, but to the viewer, further exploring auto/biographical and creative interconnectedness and agency, not only as a theory but as transformative lived and embodied experience.

In terms of ‘product’, I would like to explore a more intuitive and integrated visual/ textual mode of presentation. This would apply to my creative studio work and curation as well as to a digital explication/ thesis in graphic novel format which could include a series of meditations. The latter is inspired by artist-researchers Nick Sousanis and Friedrich Derek Ventling, but motivated by my recognition of the central role of my visual journals in my practice. Sousanis was the first person at Columbia University to write a dissertation, *Unflattening* (2015), in comic book format (José 2017) and Ventling (2016), at Auckland University of Technology, took a similar graphic novel approach in his practice-led creative arts PhD thesis *Illuminativa: The resonance of the Unseen*. The latter was also based philosophically on a spiritual concept of a Medieval Christian mystic.

‘Pregnant’ me: New beginnings

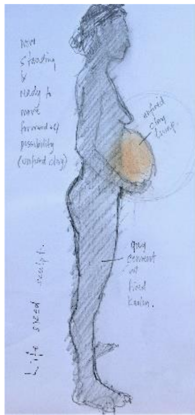


Figure 85. Concept sketch for cement sculpture

Figure 86. Process of building armature, with Peter Hall (sculptor).

Figure 87. Armature for cement sculpture

Technically, I would like to consolidate and further explore modes of 2D and 3D work begun in this PBR project and expand on it. This would include working with cement. Inspired to keep finding a personal expression of sculpting on a life-sized scale, I have begun a new sculpture experimenting with mixing fired kaolin (white clay powder) into cement to make a more sustainable form of cement (Bakera & Alexander 2018). I am excited by the possible marriage of clay and cement and wish to combine the two mediums in one piece that speaks of ongoing incubation of possibility and concretization of learning (Figures 85 – 87).

Conclusion

I set out to investigate autobiography as a creative fulcrum through a practice-based framework and found it to be a fertile site for inspiration, generation of ideas and processes, shifts and transitions within my creative studio practice. I found new artistic expressions and directions and discovered solutions to problems encountered through my subjective engagement and exploration with my chosen media and materials (Barrett & Bolt 2007: 6, 143). Beyond this, the immersive phenomenological approach offered by heuristics, where my own autobiographical lived/living experience could become the focus of the research, also provided an emotional, psychological and spiritual fulcrum (Hiles 2001: 3; Ings 2011: 227; Northrup 2009: xvi, xvii; Sultan 2019: 2, 4). This was made possible by 'self-search, self-dialogue, … self-discovery' and subtle and spiritual ways of knowing (Hiles 2001: 5, 9, 10, 11; Sultan 2019: 6). The research process itself became a tipping point with transformational effect on my lived experience and sense of identity, agency and embodiment (Sultan 2019: 6, 7, 12). In this way, the creative fulcrum facilitated by my autobiographical investigation, extended far beyond my artmaking and became an instrument of healing in the search to find and articulate my story (Smith & Watson 1998: 40). This became clear in retrospect, looking back at my practice-based autobiographical journey through the lens of the phases of heuristic inquiry (Hiles 2001: 4). Yet, by its very nature, this subjective and self-reflexive process has led to further questions and curiosities as opposed to definitive conclusions.

The theoretical framework of autobiography adopted was one that focussed specifically on the components of autobiographical subjectivity (memory, identity, experience, embodiment and agency) and the recognition of psychoanalytic, cognitive, spiritual, existential and philosophical aspects of the autobiographical act, apart from its therapeutic and creative possibilities (Diamond 2009: 213, 219; Smith & Watson 2001: 15 – 47, 205). These perspectives on autobiography, significantly influenced by feminist thought, facilitated an appreciation of the complexity of the autobiographical subject, the interconnected nature of the auto/biographical and the use of visual/textual modes of autobiography by women artists (Marcus 1994: 273, 274; Smith & Watson 2001: 48; 2002: 18 – 43). Feminist perspectives on autobiography have also advocated that autobiographical acts by women, wherein cultural, social, psychological, philosophical and spiritual scripts and discursive regimes are questioned, have socio-political voice and are not a merely personal or narcissistic pursuits (Smith & Watson 2002: 8 – 18). This

theoretical lens of autobiography was applied not only to my own creative practice but also to the artists I researched.

I discussed implicitly autobiographical creative artwork and writings produced by two women artists, Käthe Kollwitz and Wilma Cruise, at midlife in relation to my own practice and experience. Kollwitz' personal diaries (published posthumously by her son) and Cruise's (1997) Masters dissertation, even though extremely different genres of writing, one 'private' and one 'public', were used as supportive texts in the discussion of their artistic production. This was to ensure that their processes, experience and ideas were not lost to their artistic 'products' or limited to the interpretation of these artworks by others, although I myself was assuming an interpretive role in my research. These texts testified to the artists' lived experience and provided appreciation for the nuanced and complex, layered and dynamic character of their autobiographical subjectivity (Cruise 1997: 91; Kollwitz 1988; Smith & Watson 2001: 1). Their subjective experience of menopausal transition, personal loss and an awareness of the interconnected nature of the auto/biographical, expressed and embedded in their 2D and 3D creative studio practice and in their writing, provided support for my own and enriched my thinking, processes, experience and expression. Apart from shared focus on figurative work, shared themes of death, loss, midlife, creativity and motherhood (in my case, stepmotherhood) became evident. It became apparent that this period of their lives, experienced as a low-point, and their artmaking through this time served as a fulcrum for both women, a transition point that became a seedbed for the emergence of their subsequent universal message. Even though separated in space and time, culture and context, and with different artistic styles and personal expressions, universal applications and metaphors emerged. Both artists and mothers, their equation of motherhood and creativity provided the language for the concepts of incubation of creative 'seed' and birthing or rebirthing of self and creativity at midlife used in this PBR (Cruise 1997: 75; Lauter 1984: 56, 58; Kollwitz 1988: 64, 146; Northrup 2009: xvi - xviii, 23, 247). Within the subjective framework of their inward focus and existential questioning, both artists that I researched also unfolded their God-concepts, whether 'believing' or not and I came to perceive that this Creator/ Source instinct is deeply entangled with the autobiographical impulse (Cruise 1997: 91, Kollwitz 1988: 65, 66).

My own PBR began with the loss of my father and a preoccupation with death but gradually shifted inward, taking me on an existential-phenomenological quest that required

immersion into the heuristic process. This unearthed subconscious narratives and frameworks that shifted the focus of my creative practice from purely artistic outputs to psychological and spiritual shifts in perception. My autobiographical inquiry was both an inward investigation of core beliefs and attitudes and an investigation outward into social, cultural, religious and academic worlds and I became aware of certain inherited cultural scripts and regimes (Smith & Watson 2001: 25 - 26). The vulnerable, self-revealing nature of this self-reflexive psychoanalytical and spiritual autobiographical journey, depicted by naked self-portraits, was extremely challenging to negotiate and required long periods of incubation and contemplation (Ings 2011: 232; Sultan 2019: 12, 13). The journey, however, also provided for the emergence of serendipitous and insightful discovery and illumination and my research facilitated recreative as opposed to reiterative agency within myself as autobiographical subject (Smith & Watson 2001: 45).

Materiality, the interconnected nature of medium and message, and the use of metaphor were integral to the discussion. The significant shifts within my creative practice and transformation within my subjective experience were intricately interwoven with my exploration of the materiality of clay (Du Preez 2008: 30). Working with a new medium, specifically the tactile and vital medium of clay, required from me a different mindset with regards to time, process, material engagement, respect for its strengths and limitations, curiosity about its possibilities, awareness of the challenges, and an acceptance of loss in the process (Falin 2014: 6, 7). The disruptive nature of the introduction of clay into my practice forced me to adopt new approaches, problem solving capacities and acceptance of unpredictable processes, but also provided a therapeutic effect (Malchiodi 2017). The PBR process facilitated technical experimentation and the following of intuition, which allowed for my prior knowledge in drawing and painting to inform my approach to clay and for personal expressive approaches to the medium to be discovered (Barrett & Bolt 2007: 3, 6, 143; Gray & Malins 2004: 2, 22). Tacit and intuitive engagement with clay directly fed back into a more experimental engagement with my 2D work, including the use of earth as a drawing medium.

The documention of the actual and psychological processes of material engagement by means of visual and self-reflexive journaling made these journals invaluable tools for creative inquiry as process and ensured that this process could not be subsumed by the ‘final product’ of exhibition and explication, but integral to both. In this form of PBR,

where explication is required, my visual journals became primary sources (Barrett 2007: 135; Gray & Malins 2004: 95).

My use of metaphor recognised metaphoric cognition as embodied and implicit and not merely linguistic (Lakoff 1993: 41). The materiality of clay and its processes provided a rich metaphor for myself and my embodied experience. This was supported by the biblical narrative of being made from clay and the dynamic relationship between the maker and the made (Falin 2014: 6, 7). This clay/human metaphor extended to the plastic nature of both clay and the brain as well as to the ceramic vessel as container of spirit (Allen 2012; Raby 2015: 33; Raffa 2017). Consideration of the curation of my creative studio practice became important in its capacity to reflect the cyclical nature of the process, contribute to the meaning of the work and provide an engaged experience for the viewer that would ideally evoke empathetic response.

Based on the observer effect of quantum science, how we perceive something is a creative act in itself: it creates the world we live in (McGilchrist 2019: viii, ix). I perceive we are on the cusp of changing cultural scripts affecting how people know themselves at this particular historical moment, changes that will signal significant cultural transformation (Smith & Watson 2001: 1, 27). In this context, *autos bios graphe* becomes a significant means of much more than the acts of writing or making creative external expressions of what I perceive myself to be. My corporeal embodiment is not merely the textual surface upon which my past experience is written or site from which I mine autobiographical lived experience, but the practice-based emerging artwork in process of becoming.

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