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## Creatively Exploring Self: Applying Organic Inquiry, a Transpersonal and Intuitive Methodology

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### Abstract

This article explores the merit of using Organic Inquiry, a qualitative research approach that is most effectively applied to areas of psychological and spiritual growth. Organic Inquiry is a research approach where the psyche of the researcher becomes the instrument of the research, working in partnership with the experiences of participants and guided by liminal and spiritual influences. Organic Inquiry is presented as a unique methodology that can incorporate other non-traditional research methods, including intuitive, autoethnographic and creative techniques. The validity and application of Organic Inquiry, as well as its strengths and limitations are discussed in the light of the author's recent investigation into the nature of Self.

### Keywords

Practice-Led, Transpersonal Methods, Organic Inquiry, Mindfulness, Buddhism, Creative Research, Embodied Research, Intuitive Research, Self, Understanding Self, Identity, Art, Film, Life Writing, Autoethnography, Consciousness, Transformation

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## **Creatively Exploring Self: Applying Organic Inquiry, a Transpersonal and Intuitive Methodology**

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### **Introduction**

This paper will present an emerging approach to qualitative research, Organic Inquiry (Clements, 2011), that is ideally suited to topics related to psycho-spiritual growth. This methodology invites transformational change in the researcher, participants and readers, or audience that encounter it. Uniquely orientated toward trans-egoic, liminal, spiritual, embodied as well as intellectual material, Organic Inquiry is a transpersonal research method in which the psyche of the researcher becomes the subjective instrument of the research (Clements, 2004), while also working with experiences of participants, utilising story as the means of presenting findings that embody feeling as well as thinking-orientated outcomes. I will illustrate the use of Organic Inquiry based on my experience of a PhD investigation into the nature of Self (Bardsley, 2018), while first providing an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of my investigation and the terms used. I will conclude by discussing how effective an Organic Inquiry methodology is in exploring aspects of the Self that may be unconscious, spiritual and experiential in nature, while presenting some of the challenges and limitations of using such a method.

### **Researching the Self**

Rich and complex conceptual themes underlie the nature of Self and its investigation in scholarly research. These themes include theoretical frameworks for understanding identity, the structure of human psyche and the nature of consciousness. Self-identity is plastic and shaped by the lens through which we view the world (Mc Adams, 2001), which is, in turn shaped by the culture and time in which we are alive (Vattimo, 2002). Self-hood is a narrative identity (White & Denborough, 2011), irrevocably tied to the language in which it is expressed (Ricoeur, 2004) and subject to the fluid and ephemeral nature of memory that may possibly be unconsciously blocked or edited by political or cultural obligations (Ricoeur, 2004). Research

into the self is influenced by the dominant voice, usually one that is focused on brain-based, genetic or inherited components (Rolhf, 2016) easily measurable by positivist methods. Traditional methods channel research into the components of Self that are most accessible to quantitative methods (Willett et al., 2016) at the expense of lesser known and more ephemeral types of investigation and knowledge.

There are aspects of Self intrinsic to creativity, depth psychology, healing, and transformation, that fit less comfortably in quantitative methodologies and call for a qualitative method that is equipped to traverse less easily defined, transpersonal phenomena (Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992). Transpersonal theory incorporates consciousness that extends beyond the limits of the ego and personality (Grof, 2012); it is concerned with transformational experiences, the study of humanity's highest potential, intuitive and transcendent experiences (Anderson & Braud, 2011). The focus of transpersonal research, therefore, is on interconnectedness and universal stories, as well as the phenomenon of integration and wholeness. Transpersonal research delves into profound aspects of human experience, including unitive mystical states of consciousness, meditative awareness, experiences of wonder, ecstasy and alternative or expansive states of consciousness (Braud & Anderson, 1998). Transpersonal theory introduces an understanding of self as multiple and layered (Schwartz & Falconer, 2017). Freud's theory of human awareness included both conscious and unconscious (hidden) elements (Freud, 1963). Where Freud (1920) suggested that the unconscious was a receptacle for disowned and perhaps painful or confronting material, Jung (1963) posited that the human unconscious also contained the unlimited potential of human beings, and was a vessel for the most profound wisdom, creativity and knowledge. He proposed that it was through encouraging this embodied knowledge to emerge that a wisdom, universal in nature, transcending racial, cultural, temporal and linguistic limitations, could become conscious (Jung, 1981); and prove to be the greatest guide in transformational change (Grof, 2012).

Jung used the term "Self" to refer to an archetypal organising principle navigating the path to wholeness through the conflicting aspects of the psyche, which he termed the "Self archetype" (written with a capital "S") or "transcendent function" (Jung, 1963). "Self" is also used to refer to the experience of wholeness, compassion and spaciousness (Schwartz & Falconer, 2017) one that Grof (1998) refers to as a "holotropic" experience (an expanded state of awareness that reflects the full potential of human consciousness, inclusive of mythic, collective embodied and spiritual states of awareness).

In Jungian theory, "shadow" or hidden parts of the psyche are buried in the unconscious (Jung, 2001). The act of bringing these hidden aspects to conscious awareness, guided by the Self, can lead to profound transformation (Van Eenwyk, 2013). The unacknowledged or difficult stories that we carry within powerfully drive our lives; thus, integrating shadow aspects of the self can facilitate an experience of wholeness (Grof, 1998). An investigation grounded in transpersonal theory is a means of integrating stories that emerge, and if witnessed mindfully, offers a transformative opportunity.

A detailed analysis of the nature of self as multiple and layered is beyond the scope of this article (refer Bardsley, 2018 for a more comprehensive discussion). However, the nature of exploring unconscious material, and the method of doing so, may become a means by which researchers can experience and facilitate transformation though the topical focus of their scholarly pursuits in manners that include spirit, body, feeling as well as mind (Netzer, 2012).

During transpersonal research, the boundary between conscious and unconscious material can dissolve, often during times of profound change or when surrendered to the flow of creative expression (Clements, 2004). Lajoie and Shapiro (1992) describe transpersonal methodologies as inclusive of personal and time bound states of consciousness while extending their orientation into areas that encompass personal reflection and felt-experience. Such methodologies utilise investigative techniques that reflect a universal consciousness, one that

often communicates through different languages including intuitive, creative and embodied knowledge. While reductionist methods test hypotheses and aim to establish truths through replicable and objective investigation of the material world, transpersonal methodologies reference an emergent wisdom, a knowledge and healing potential that pre-exists within the human psyche (Anderson & Braud, 2011).

In order to explore transpersonal phenomenon, a researcher needs to be supported by a methodology that embraces sacred, intuitive, and transformative aspects of research (Braud, 2004), one that gives voice to both personal and transpersonal stories—*Organic Inquiry* is such a method (Clements, 2011).

**Organic Inquiry methodology.** Organic Inquiry (Clements, 2004) was developed within the field of transpersonal psychology and shares many of its goals, primarily, the transformative approach to research and the understanding of multiple intelligences including personal, intuitive, and experiential intelligences.

Clements (2011) describes Organic Inquiry as a “living process” where the researcher’s own psyche is the instrument of investigation in conjunction with liminal and spiritual sources, and the stories of participants. Organic Inquiry methodology is psychological and spiritual in nature; its validity is deeply intertwined with the transformative capacity of the research to elicit profound psycho-spiritual growth in the researcher, participants and an audience exposed to the research (Clements, 2011).

Using a metaphor reminiscent of organic growth, Clements (2011) describes the Organic Inquiry process in the following stages:

*Sacred:* the preparation of the soil through cultivating a sacred perspective.

*Personal:* the planting of the seed through the lived experience of the researcher’s own spiritual growth and narrative.

*Chthonic:* the emerging root system. Like a living tree, the research process evolves and changes, fed by an underground life of subjective and spiritual sources.

*Related:* the tree grows. The “branches” of the participants’ stories inform the “trunk story” of the research.

*Transformative:* harvesting the fruit. The fruits of the organic process are the potential for profound transformation of both the researcher and readers. (Clements, 2011, p. 134)

Organic Inquiry is a process that employs the heart as well as the mind, and involves the researcher repeatedly cycling through a three-step process: *preparation*, *inspiration*, and *integration* with transformation as its goal (Clements, 2011).

Clements (2004) describes Organic Inquiry as a conceptual umbrella under which other qualitative methodologies can be used to cycle repeatedly through the three steps above, to explore what is known as “liminal” material.

The term “limen” has been extensively used to refer to states of consciousness that move beyond ego bound, ordinary awareness (most prevalently the subject of qualitative research methods). “Limen” is often used to refer to a threshold or doorway; the use of the word in contemporary research can be traced to Turner (1966) and van Gennep’s (1960) work related to ritual rites of passage in indigenous cultures. Such rituals enabled a crossing of the boundary between everyday consciousness and non-ordinary states of consciousness (Grof,

2010). In this case, “limen” was used to describe the in-between, undifferentiated state that one enters when one’s identification with the everyday reality gives way to the mythic or ritual states of consciousness (Turner, 1966; van Gennep, 1960). Liminal stories are the realm of the symbolic, mythic and archetypal states of consciousness frequently explored by transpersonal research methods and rarely acknowledged in traditional scientific methodologies.

### **Liminal Research Methods**

Accessing a liminal awareness is the first step in Organic Inquiry. Liminal research methods can access previously hidden aspects of the self and may incorporate, for example, emergent, practice-led, intuitive and creative research methods that can transition from an ordinary state of consciousness (bound to concepts of identity, community, status, time, body and egoic definition) to the spiritual or transpersonal states of consciousness (Grof, 2010). Liminal information comes from such sources as meditation, spiritual experiences, dreams, heightened states of creativity and non-ordinary states of consciousness accessed through breathing techniques, focused physical practices, ritualised dance or movement. The integration of liminal states heralds an informative and expanded perspective allowing for healing and transformation in individual and collective consciousness (Clements, 2011).

#### **Step 1 – Preparation to Enter the Liminal**

Entry to the liminal space through Organic Inquiry can be either spontaneous or intentional, involving the following steps: (1) an intention or question; (2) a letting go of egoic identification; and (3) adopting an attitude of respect, reverence, and cooperation with the spiritual (Clements, 2011).

Clements (2011) proposes a number of exercises to assist researchers to access liminal states, including focused attention; meditation; contemplation on a particular text or topic; stories, utilising exploratory and fluid creative processes; sensory methods, such as dance, chanting, yoga, music, or breathing techniques; and intuitive methods (dreams, spontaneous insights and cultivating an openness to synchronistic opportunities).

#### **Step 2 – Inspiration**

Becoming immersed is the second state of Organic Inquiry. Within liminal, non-ordinary or transcendent states of consciousness, there are often sensations or signals that provide guidance and may include an expansive sense of identity, feelings of peace, unity, overwhelming empathetic sensations, lightness or tingling and the sense of “coming home” or rediscovering what is already known (Clements, 2011). Confirming signals can guide one through the immersion phase of the research process, signalling the liminal and emergent material that requires attention and is significant in terms of the research question.

#### **Step 3 - Integration**

The third and final step in the Organic Inquiry is “Integration” and refers to the returning to an ordinary state of consciousness, contained by the boundaries of the ego, informed by past research and academic knowledge. In Organic Inquiry, the research remains open to an emergent wisdom, one that can continue to evolve over time, informed by the experiential process in liminal consciousness. Clements (2011) suggests that story becomes paramount during the integration process due to its capacity to refer to transpersonal

experiences, which are universal and temporally unbound; through story, perspectives that were not apparent at the time can be revealed.

### **Personal Reflections on the use of Organic Inquiry**

Organic Inquiry research provides an opportunity for transformational change. Clements (2004) defines such change as “the restructuring of one’s worldview that provides some discrete degree of movement along one’s lifetime path toward further transpersonal development” (Clements, 2004, p .26)

Throughout the next sections, I will refer to my own research (Bardsley, 2018) to illustrate the efficacy of Organic Inquiry in exploring transpersonal aspects of Self and its capacity to elicit transformation.

My research explored the question: *What does it mean to know the self?* The investigation took place primarily through my personal reflexive process, but also incorporated a wider contemporary audience and utilized Organic Inquiry methodology. I hypothesized that there is merit in attending to stories of the Self that include transcendent and liminal experience and that attending to liminal stories may further develop our understanding of unconscious processes in the human psyche, offering a deeper understanding of human potential (Bardsley, 2018).

While my investigation was experiential, self-reflexive and led by my creative practice, it followed the three-step process of preparation, inspiration and integration in data collection and analysis as guided by Organic Inquiry (Clements, 2004). The creative arts illustrated and informed my exploration of the many layers of self, allowing for a personal, subjective, and embodied voice to emerge.

## **Impact**

### **Beginning States**

Clements (2011) suggests the researcher write a synopsis before commencing the data collection—a short story that sets the baseline for the researcher’s state of being, reflecting upon her personality, abilities, experiences, resources and how they relate to developing the research question and starting the investigation.

I began my research into Self after a severe health crisis, one that forced me to terminate my practice as a clinician and trauma therapist after almost twenty-five years. It seemed time to offer a compassionate presence toward my own stories. Stories of my selves (some previously hidden) flowed into the spaciousness that this investigation evoked and became windows into my inner world.

My inspiration for undertaking research into the nature of self was to move through the layers of self-narratives to seek the Self in its most expansive form, guided by my creative expression as an artist. Throughout my research (Bardsley, 2018), I sought to deepen my understanding of Self through reflecting on personal experiences and the stories of people I interviewed. The films and works that I created became a means of investigating, communicating, and inspiring an audience to reflect on their own experiences of knowing the Self.

In Organic Inquiry, the researcher is intrinsically and uniquely linked to the research methodology and outcome. While each researcher will cycle through her own investigative process of preparation, inspiration and integration, she will utilise specific techniques that fit most aptly with her research topic and style. Some of the liminal research methods that I found

most effective in my investigation of self (Bardsley, 2018) included creative research, auto-ethnography and intuitive methods, which I will explore in the following sections.

### **Useful Qualitative Methods for an Organic Inquiry into Self**

I utilised a number of qualitative research methods and perspectives in my Organic Inquiry into Self (Bardsley, 2018). I will briefly discuss the three main qualitative techniques that were most synergistic to the liminal and emergent territory I wanted to explore. These included: intuitive processes, practice-led creative research, and autoethnography.

**The use of intuitive processes in research methods.** Intuitive processes are highly effective in exploring aspects of self previously unconscious and less easily conceptually or linguistically defined. Such methods add experiential, subjective, and right brain methods of knowing to the intellectual rigor and linear deductive methods of traditional scientific research. Intuitive methods utilise the psyche of the observer as a vehicle for investigation, and challenge the conventional notion of a static worldview, separate from the researcher who observes it (Anderson & Braud, 2011).

In his extensive research into intuition, Bastick (1982) identified a number of characteristics that were common to intuitive experiences; some of these include sudden or immediate appearance in awareness, feelings of wonder, luminosity, and empathy. Anderson (Anderson & Braud, 2011, pp. 22-25) defined a further five intuitive processes as they pertain to transpersonal research:

**Unconscious, symbolic, or imaginal processes.** Cain (2013) argues for the value of qualities associated with introversion (humility, reflective, deep thinking, empathy, and high sensitivity) in western society that tends to idealise the qualities of extroversion (aggression, dominance, sociability, outgoingness, high energy) (Cain, 2013). Aron (2003) discusses a potentially related quality “high sensitivity,” identified as a more easily aroused nervous system leading “highly sensitive people” to be more acutely responsive to external and internal material. Similarly, Bernstein (2005) describes individuals who are very receptive to spiritual, embodied and psychic material, and postulates that such hypersensitivity is due to their ego state being particularly permeable to the Self and the collective unconscious through dreams, archetypal or numinous experiences, and active imagination (Jung, 1981). Each of these qualities—introversion, sensitivity, and permeability to the collective unconscious—are qualities that are not often employed in academic research but form central themes in transpersonal and intuitive investigations.

**Psychic or parapsychological experiences.** Psychic or parapsychological experiences include clairvoyance, telepathy, and pre-cognitive experiences (the ability to access information about a person or event even though separated by space and time).

**Sensory modes of intuition.** Sensory methods of “intuitive knowing” are shared through the five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. In addition to these, Anderson (2011) adds two further intuitive modes: proprioception—the sense of orientation through space — and a visceral sense—information passed through the viscera, joints, ligaments and muscles that communicate subliminal sensory awareness, signaling, for instance, beauty, danger, novelty and significance.

**Empathetic identification.** Empathetic knowing is described as the capacity to see the world through the eyes of the other, so that there is no “subject” and “object.” The researcher “looks around from inside the experience and witnesses the essential qualities of the other coming to life as the researcher’s own experience” (Anderson & Braud, 2011, p. 25).

**Researching through our wounds.** When referring to her thirty years of experience conducting and supervising research, Anderson states:



I am poignantly aware that a researcher's intuitive style tends to settle along the fault lines or wounds in the personality of the researcher in a manner akin to the concept of the wounded healer described by Catholic Priest Henri Nouwen (1990) and Roshi Joan Halifax (1983). For Nouwen, our human wounds are sites of both suffering and hospitality to the divine. (Anderson & Braud 2011, pp. 25-26)

In intuitive research, the inquirer's voice, authentically revealing her body, mind and spirit, allows these to be interpreted by others (Anderson & Braud, 2011). One of the desired qualities of a transpersonal researcher is to have the courage to sit with the tension of "not knowing," of sustaining a conversation between hidden and revealed aspects of the research so that intuitive and emergent wisdom can guide the investigation.

In Intuitive methods may be valuable adjuncts to liminal research (Clements, 2011). Access to liminal consciousness may involve intuitive methods such as dreaming, spontaneous insights, images or feelings that come through meditation, creative flow; the use of evocative music or story can be another point of access. Csikszentmihalyi (2014), in his extensive research on creativity, describes "flow" as the time when the creator and the universe become one, outside distractions recede and one's consciousness is expansive, unhindered by criticism or judgment and immersed in the joy of creating. The experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) can be accompanied by ecstatic feeling states, which may inform the research. Through developing a more surrendered approach, it is possible to sustain the experience of flow by following the feelings in one's body. Pursuing an investigative thread because it "feels right" can become integral to the preparation and exploration process of Organic Inquiry (Bardsley, 2018). The use of intuitive and creative techniques can become a valuable tool in Organic Inquiry in giving voice to experiential or liminal phenomenon (Bardsley, 2018).

**Creative arts as a transpersonal language.** In working with research that includes liminal states of consciousness, the arts become a potent tool of expression (Van den Akker, 2014) and a powerful voice for liminal stories, numinous experiences and their transformative potential (Grof, 2015). Rothko wrote that art was "an anecdote of the spirit and the only means of making concrete the purpose of the spirit's varied quickness and stillness" (Rothko, 2006, p. 45). Rumi and Hafiz speak of a love affair with the divine, a transcendent longing to return to home to the source of all life through the language of prose (Barks, 2004; Ladinsky, 1999).

While intuitive, embodied and experiential investigation is not common in scientific research, it is central to creative practice and practice-led investigations. The arts are a symbiotic language for transpersonal states of consciousness; as Duxbury (2009) states, creative work does not necessarily follow a linear process, nor adhere to objectivity and logic. The artist may become a means by which wisdom emerges through their creative practice in a manner referred to as "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2007), the "emergence of wonder" (Medlock, 2015, p. 5), or "taking a leap of faith" (Duxbury, 2009, p. 98).

Van den Akker (2014) describes the potency of art-making as a means of investigating the deepest aspects of Self, engaging different ways of knowing, facilitating expression across disciplines and moving beyond the cultural or conceptual limitations of verbal languages. For this reason, art-based research is a potent means of exploring and communicating an investigation into self. The inclusion of visual, visceral and emotional expression can allow for the representation of intuitive and felt experiences in ways that are engaging and accessible to a wider audience (Hodgins & Boydell, 2014).

In his exploration of the creative process, Medlock (2015) conducted first person interviews with twenty artists comprising writers, poets, performers, musicians, visual artists, filmmakers and multi-media practitioners. His focus was to determine their experience of the creative process, using a phenomenological and grounded-theory framework. Two key

variables emerged from his qualitative analyses: “emergence” and “wonder.” Medlock (2015, p. 5) described “wonder” as the felt experience of the artist when they have their attention captured and they “fall in love” with a particular image, idea or feeling. He concluded that it is “wonder” that sustains the creative process to its successful completion, whereby it becomes embodied in the completed work, and transferred to the audience. The process by which “wonder” becomes embodied in the work, and the stages the artist goes through, were attributed to a variable he termed “emergence.”

From an analysis of artist interviews Medlock (2015) concludes that creative practitioners facilitate the emergence of their work, rather than force a work to fit a preconceived intention; while skill and knowledge influence the way creative work emerges, a sense of wonder, embodied in the creative process, inspires and sustains an artist’s creative practice. The writers and artists in Medlock’s (2015) study expressed the sense of acting as a channel for the creative work rather than being the source of it. According to Medlock (2015) the images and stories that emerged during the creative process can be identified according to three conceptual threads: (1) the individual—the artist’s life experiences and personal memories; (2) the collective—symbols and images from the history of literature, art, culture and collective social experience; and (3) transpersonal consciousness—a spiritual dimension, one that the artists referred to as embodied experiences of expansiveness, peace and unity (Medlock, 2015).

My experience as an artist using Organic Inquiry was consistent with Medlock’s (2015) findings: creativity was directed by wonder and embodied experience, which frequently expanded beyond my individual understanding or conceptual intent (Bardsley, 2018).

**Autoethnography and self-reflexive practice.** Autoethnography is a form of embodied writing practice and qualitative research that Ellis defines not only as a way of knowing about the world but also a way of living consciously, emotionally and reflexively (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Custer (2014), writing of his own experience of autoethnographic writing, outlines its advantages. “It changes time” (Custer, 2014, p. 2): Like a dance without boundaries, it highlights the subjective nature of memory, allowing for a reformation of view and the possibility of the transformation of past events in the re-telling of them. It is transformative in that it offers an opportunity to reconstruct identity by re-interpreting and reconstructing the remembered event in the writing of it (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013). “It promotes vulnerability” (Custer, 2014, p. 3): The reliving of the events in embodied writing is orientated toward and encouraging of vulnerability, while engaging with the material as it emerges from our unconscious. “It fosters empathy in the researcher and audience” (Custer, 2014, p. 4): In recognizing the lens in which we view life events is one of many, auto-ethnography invites the writer and the audience to reflect on the nature of truth and the meaning derived from the experience. This can encourage a sympathetic resonance in the audience as well as empathy for other characters involved as potentially having different perspectives, meanings and truths. “It is innovative and creative” (Custer, 2014, p. 6): As a unique individual experience told creatively and imaginatively, it allows the writer to slow down, to look for resonance in their own body, promoting deep inquiry and re-interpretation through introspection. It is a person-centered tool, inspiring change, offering multiple ways of seeing the world. “It eliminates boundaries” (Custer, 2014, p. 7): Autoethnography uses metaphor, symbol and allegory to communicate across cultural divides, emphasizing a shared humanity through feeling and meaning making (Bochner, 2012). “It honours subjectivity” (Custer, 2014, p. 8): Autoethnography brings the reader into self-awareness and honours their potential to affect the world around them. By removing objectivity it facilitates authenticity. “It provides therapeutic benefit” (Custer, 2014, p. 9): Working through and working with story it allows for a new understanding of self.

Raab (2013) refers to the link between autoethnographic and transpersonal research

models particularly across the areas of self-discovery and transformation; both emphasise embodiment, spirituality, consciousness, and self-renewal. The vivid voice and self-reflection that are part of the autoethnographic process enable the readers to make a connection with the stories told, explore the resonance of issues shared, and potentially provide a map for coping with them in their own life experience (Raab, 2013)

Raab (2013) and Ellis & Bochner (2000) argue that a personal narrative provides a first-hand interaction of lived experience within a particular culture, and is the best way to examine its underpinnings, motives, beliefs and behaviours. Field notes refer to aspects of the research that occur alongside the creative process, contributing to the researcher making meaning of the experiences, such as personal journaling, thoughts, ideas, intuitions, dreams and interactions with others (Raab 2013).

Nielson (1990) highlights the importance of voices “less heard” in the dominant culture within which research takes place: stories that are hidden, unusual, vulnerable or exceptional, voices often drowned out in the increasingly demanding noisy, time-poor and materially focused world in which we reside. In autoethnography the researcher is challenged to make their own voice transparent, for it is her “eye,” shaped by her past experience, her training and willingness to see and be changed by the research, that guides the design, the choice of methodology, the gathering and editing of the stories as well as the interpretation of the findings (Raab, 2013).

In my Organic Inquiry into Self (Bardsley, 2018), I used autoethnographic reflections to accompany my creative process, forming the field notes for my research, speaking to the cultural and personal influences embedded in the self-reflexive investigation. Selecting and editing the written, film (Bardsley, 2017a) and visual narratives (Bardsley, 2017b) was an intuitive process, guided by a felt experience, a quality that Anderson describes as trust in an emergent wisdom and guidance (Anderson & Braud, 2011).

### **Transformative Outcomes and Validity**

Clements (2011) suggests that one of the key outcomes of an investigation utilising Organic Inquiry is transformational change for the researcher across three areas: (1) self awareness, (2) connection with liminal material or spirit, and (3) service to all life. Transformative outcome is further ascertained through the impact of the investigation on others, their reflections and responses to the work produced, as well as the potential for community and cultural change.

Integration toward Self, as Clements (2004) describes it, may present as a great sense of self-awareness, a deeper insight into one’s abilities, resources and experiences and their personal and inherited stories. Integration toward spirit, she suggests, is greater openness and fluidity in moving into liminal consciousness, and being guided by the unconscious through dreams, creativity, insights, synchronicities, and intuitions. Integration toward spirit also refers to transcendent or mystical experiences, the sense of wonder, gratitude, and profound well-being. The last measurement of transformational change is integration through service (Clements, 2004) where the researcher’s worldview has shifted as a result of the research to become more inclusive of the welfare of all beings, the well-being of the planet, infused with compassionate action – a desire to do no harm and to benefit all life (Chodron, 2008).

An additional outcome and validity measure of an Organic Inquiry investigation is its capacity to elicit transformation change in others. This is measured through feedback gathered from participants in the study or the audience or readers who access the research outcomes. The notion that the transformative process of conducting research (or being moved by it) is at least as important as the findings, is an unusual concept in academic research study. To further

illustrate the transformative outcome and validity of Organic Inquiry research, I will refer to my own experience of using Organic Inquiry (Bardsley, 2018).

## Limitations

**Personal transformative outcomes and results.** I began my research (Bardsley, 2018) with a twofold purpose: (1) to explore the many narratives that may be attributed to our sense of who we are, and (2) to reflect upon the transformative potential of the emergent narratives. In retrospect, I discovered a third purpose, one that was less obvious to me at the beginning of the research—I sought to heal the sense of fragmentation that I was experiencing when I began the research, by deeply engaging with my personal narratives, and move toward a greater sense of well-being.

At the time I wrote my baseline narrative my illness had hijacked my life: I was in chronic pain, distressed at having no choice but to retire from a senior psychologist role in a tertiary education institution, which although stressful, had offered me a strong sense of purpose and belonging. In my baseline narrative, I described myself as feeling restless, anxious about the future, and “burnt out like a forest blackened by a slow consuming fire” (Bardsley, 2018, p. 133).

At the completion of the investigation, my state of self-acceptance, quality of life, psychological and physical wellbeing, had dramatically improved. Many factors may have contributed to this outcome, including the opportunity to move according to my own rhythms, and to remove myself from an organisational culture that had become unhealthy. The investigation allowed me to set my own pace, have the time to digest my experiences, make art, write stories, and reflect on the narratives that I had long converted or set aside. While this was, at times, distressing and re-stimulating, it was ultimately liberating. Periods of intensive research were interspersed with rest, time in nature and a simplified lifestyle.

The process of engaging in an organic, transpersonal methodology, using a creative language, revealed inherited patterns in my ways of thinking and being in the world and these insights subsequently offered me the opportunity to choose alternate ways of living. I was able to develop a sense of completion with many of my narratives and identify with them less intensely. As Chodron (2008) suggests, it is when we learn to see our patterns of thoughts as “thinking,” that we can de-identify with thoughts, slip beneath their story line and access the energy that lies beneath them. In doing so, we can witness the “awakened heart” (Chodron, 2008). This felt-experience of Self, both expansive and profound, was one that I began to access more frequently through my research. Paradoxically, by immersing myself in the self-narratives that had shaped my life, I was able to loosen their grip.

The creative outcomes of my research (Bardsley, 2018) included eleven fine art artworks, in excess of three hundred photographic images, extensive life-writing accounts, a short documentary film on the nature of self (Bardsley, 2017a), an art novel (Bardsley, 2017b) and an exhibition where the creative outcomes were accessed by an audience of over three hundred people. My exegesis analysed the emergent material in the theoretical frameworks of Buddhism and transpersonal psychology, providing insights into the emergence of liminal works that were both personally relevant as well as a collectively valuable in terms their contribution to knowledge of the nature of self. I concluded:

We have many selves, or many stories of the self, and many possible answers to the question: *Who are we?* Consciousness is possibly multiple in nature; self-narratives are layered with some stories being more conscious and others unconscious, hidden or exiled. I identified three categories of self in this investigation: 1) biographical selves (childhood and life memories), 2) liminal

selves (including ancestral, inherited, trauma and illness narratives, mythic or archetypal aspects of the self), and 3) a unified Self (an aspect of consciousness that can inform and guide the process of healing or transformation). (Bardsley, 2018, p. 132)

**Transformational impact of the creative products on wider audience.** As Clements (2011) predicted, I found that an Organic Inquiry investigation was a powerful agent for personal growth as well as offering a wider audience the possibility to reflect deeply on its emergent themes through the investigation's creative output. I witnessed how creative and intuitive research was able to touch people in deep and authentic ways and stimulate felt responses from audiences across a wide variety of settings.

The transformative impact on a wider audience was evident in their responses, expressing gratitude for the opportunity to reflect on the creative outcomes of the research and their relevance for particular members (refer Bardsley, 2018). Spiritual traditions use the term "service" to mean an act of helping imbued with compassion and kindness (Loue, 2017). In some ways my research and its creative products became an act of service, a tool that could enhance the transformation of many.

### **Challenges & Limitations in using Organic Inquiry and Self investigation**

There are many challenges when researching the self and utilising one's own psyche as a vehicle of investigation; the act of searching through one's life is both subjective and, in many ways, inconclusive. Memory is selective, rewritten through our own perceptual lens, modified by our self-concepts, which change throughout the developmental phases of our lives (Mc Adams, 2001). Our brain is evolving until the last moments of our life; our capacity to re-interpret our experience is equally plastic (Park & Bischof, 2013). In addition to being highly subjective, Organic Inquiry methods and their methodological components, such as intuitive and auto-ethnographic research, are inseparable from the personal, economic, gender and cultural experience of the researcher.

Braud (2004) highlights additional challenges embedded in the Organic Inquiry approach. It does not provide a definitive set of methods, structure or praxis. For some researchers this may be daunting, however, for other researchers (like myself), it is liberating to employ different non-traditional approaches that can lead to unique insights and outcomes. Organic Inquiry does call for a level of self-awareness, flexibility, and inspiration on the part of the researcher, one that requires a "letting go of egoic control." This may not a comfortable approach for some researchers or their academic institutions. There is an emphasis on the researcher, which may descend into self-absorption and lead to the limited applicability of outcomes. The most resourced Organic Inquiry researcher is someone with a degree of emotional and spiritual maturity, an established inner practice, such as mindfulness or meditation, that will ground the research process and refocus it toward collective merit and a more global applicability. Organic Inquiry is deeply linked to transpersonal, spiritual, emergent and depth psychology theories. It posits that an inherent wisdom exists within each human being and an important part of the organic research process is to allow this to emerge and to transform both the researcher and audience.

### **Conclusion**

Jung described individuation as the process of "becoming human," one that consists of "the putting together of many scattered units so as to reveal and clarify something that was always there" (Jung, 1958, p. 262). The perception that wisdom comes from a process of

moving inward is consistent with eastern and indigenous philosophies, as well as with theories that suggest there is a universal aspect to our consciousness (see Laszlo, 2014). In many indigenous and shamanic cultures, healing is an inner process with an external manifestation (Abram, 1997). Modern psychology has, on the whole, moved away from models of thinking that emphasise our interconnectedness with all life, encompassing stories of death, rebirth, spirit and transcendence. To the detriment of applied psychology, transpersonal aspects of self are often overlooked because they do not lend themselves to traditional reductionist methods of investigation (Bardsley, 2018).

When engaging with liminal or collective material, images, feelings and body sensations that emerge can be referenced by a fluid, visual, symbolic and subjective language (Jung, 2001). Organic Inquiry employing transpersonal, embodied and creative research methods can lead to a different kind of knowledge, valid because it touches an individual and an audience deeply, allowing for the integration of past and inherited material as well as contributing to a greater self-awareness. Such research invites a felt, embodied experience, a potent opportunity for transformation through learning to relate to these parts of us in new ways, informed by empathy and compassion, qualities that are embodied, rather than conceptual (Knox, 2003).

When exploring the nature of self, including liminal, transpersonal aspects of human consciousness, spiritual and embodied phenomena, Organic Inquiry is an excellent choice. As my research indicated (Bardsley, 2018), the self is layered; parts of us are buried beneath the limen of our consciousness and may be exiled or hidden because of their vulnerability (Schwartz & Falconer, 2017), while others reflect mythic or archetypal drives of the unconscious (Jung, 1989). Bringing liminal selves to our conscious awareness, integrating painful, inherited or previously unconscious narratives, can be personally transformative (Jung, 1976); sharing transpersonal and creative outcomes can also inspire an audience.

Methodology that utilises a creative voice, valuing intuitive, emergent wisdom, a method that is self-reflexive, personally and collectively transformative, is particularly effective in exploring the human psyche and has significant heuristic value in terms of consciousness research, therapy and healing. Organic Inquiry is such a method.

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