

Interconnectedness and process in Cleone Cull's visual art

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This paper is an interpretation of the recent work of the Eastern Cape, Port Elizabeth artist, Cleone Cull, through what one might call a 'close looking' at the works in question (that would parallel 'close reading' of a literary text). Such a 'looking' yields an interpretive grasp of her works which has the primary impression of a 'dynamic equilibrium' as its point of departure, which further lends itself to being interpreted through what it itself suggests in the guise of visually and chromatically instantiated markers. The preponderant, pervasive visual motif running through these works is that of *interconnectedness and process* – a percept (perceptual counterpart of 'concept') which further lends itself to a number of mutually resonating interpretations, framed in terms of familiar theoretical complexes, such as alchemy, Tantra, Jungian depth psychology and Zen Buddhism. But the most persuasive, and accommodating, philosophical-theoretical matrix suggested by the visual features of Cull's works is the philosophical ontology of Deleuze and Guattari, as articulated in *Anti-Oedipus*, which therefore comprises the major thread of this interpretive essay.

Key words: art, interconnectedness, process, alchemy, Cleone Cull, Deleuze, desiring-machines, Guattari, Jung, Tantra, Zen

Onderlinge verbintenis en proses in Cleone Cull se visuele kuns

Hierdie artikel is 'n interpretasie van die onlangse werk van die Oos-Kaapse kunstenaar, Cleone Cull, by wyse van wat moontlik as 'n 'fyn kyk' na die relevante werke bestempel kan word (wat parallel sou wees aan die 'fyn lees' van 'n literêre werk). 'n Sodanige 'fyn kyk' gee die primêre indruk van 'n 'dinamiese balans' as vertrekpunt, wat sigself egter verder daartoe leen om verstaan te word deur wat die kunswerke self aan die hand doen via chromatiese en visuele betekenaars. Die oorwegende visuele motief wat deur genoemde werke loop is *onderlinge verbintenis en prosesmatigheid* – 'n 'persep' (sintuiglik-waarneembare eweknie van 'konsep') wat sigself verder tot 'n aantal wedersyds bevestigende interpretasies in terme van bekende teoretiese komplekse leen, soos alchemie, Tantra, Jungiaanse diepte-psigologie en Zen-Boedhisme. Die mees oortuigende en omvattende filosofies-teoretiese verwysingsraamwerk wat egter deur die visuele eienskappe van Cull se kunswerke aan die hand gedoen word, is die filosofiese ontologie van Deleuze en Guattari, soos dit in *Anti-Oedipus* geformuleer is, en om daardie rede die belangrikste hermeneutiese motief van hierdie interpretatiewe essay uitmaak.

Sleutelwoorde: kuns, onderlinge verbintenis, proses, alchemie, Cleone Cull, Deleuze, begeertemasjiene, Guattari, Jung, Tantra, Zen

Eastern Cape artist, Cleone Cull's recent work attests to a mature, well-integrated and encompassing artistic vision on her part, as even someone with a merely intuitive grasp of art would be able to confirm at a visual level. There is a clear and demonstrable formal consonance between and among the artworks in question, some of which were recently on display at an exhibition – entitled *Walking between the Worlds* – in Port Elizabeth's Athenaeum. This essay is an attempt to formulate a critical response to what are arguably her most paradigmatic works in the exhibition, to wit, some of those in the series, *Ascension Manuals* and the ones comprising *Return of the Goddess*.

Before embarking on the interpretation, a note on my approach is necessary. In a certain sense, what I intend doing here is the reverse of the phenomenological approach, developed by Edmund Husserl, which requires that, to do justice to the understanding of a 'phenomenon' – whether it is art, or an ethical act, or a distinct kind of aesthetic object such as a nude study (or its perversion, pornography) – through 'intentional' analysis, one should peel away all theoretical, philosophical or ideological notions attached to, or associated with, the phenomenon or object

in question. In this way, Husserl believed, one would be able to reach an optimally *unbiased* account of the phenomenon through ‘pure’ intuition (see Megill 1985: 306). It is important to note, however, that ‘phenomenon’ does not here have the Kantian meaning of something that ‘appears’ in space and time – that is, a particular, concrete phenomenon; on the contrary, the concept ‘phenomenon’ denotes what Husserl regarded as the universal ‘eidetic’ (*eidos* or ‘form’-related) structure in terms of which all concrete manifestations of the ‘phenomenon’ in this sense may be understood. In fact, all understanding would, according to this argument, unavoidably depend on one’s ability to grasp just such an underlying, sustaining structure.

While I have no *prima facie* argument with Husserl as far as the conditions of the possibility of understanding concrete, perceptually given entities in terms of a universal, rationally intuitable structure (which imparts to them their distinctiveness as ‘phenomena’) are concerned, here I want to work in the opposite direction. (One could radicalize his phenomenology, though, as Derrida has done [see Olivier 1988], in terms of the interplay between presence and absence.) Instead of getting rid of the theoretical, psychological or metaphysical theories or prejudices which obtrude themselves on the phenomenon of a certain kind of artwork (as manifested in particular artworks), I would like to proceed from a *prima facie* perceptual impression of the artworks to the idea-complexes or theoretical, philosophical interpretive schemas suggested by them. It may well be, I suspect, that the end result of the interpretation arrived at may not differ significantly from what a strict Husserlian phenomenological analysis would yield, except that it would be formulated along the conceptual contours of the theoretical perspectives suggested by the perceptual approach. Not that one could ever render a ‘pure’ or *absolutely* unbiased account or description of any object of perception, let alone an artwork – because such an account has to be linguistic, bias is built into it by means of the significations carried by words. After all, words (and images) always have their own comets’ tails of semiotic baggage or associated meanings, which is why Husserl insisted on starting a phenomenological investigation by getting rid of as much of this, to him obfuscating, baggage.

Gadamer (1982: 235-253) recognized this, and (unlike Husserl) attributed a positive heuristic value to such bias, or prejudice, insisting that this is precisely the point where an interpretation commences – one always begins, inescapably, from what is familiar (one’s unavoidable ‘bias’ or ‘prejudice’), and appropriates what is foreign or new in its light. From there the interpretive process follows a to-and-fro pattern (which Gadamer likens to the dynamic structure of playing a game), where every interpretive effort is tested against what has to be interpreted, until a satisfactory point of understanding is reached (usually in relation to the question, how it applies to one’s own life-situation). My own approach to Cull’s artworks is therefore more Gadamerian: it is informed by the acceptance of my own (theoretical) ‘prejudice’ (or pre-judgment) as inescapable point of departure, although I have to emphasize that this ‘prejudice’ is triggered, in the first place, by the visual material in question. And unavoidably so, I would contend; one cannot look ‘innocently’ at the world once one’s way of ‘looking’, ‘listening’, and so on, has been informed by specific theories (quite appropriately: a *theoros* was a spectator at an ancient Greek drama).

Hence, when confronting these artworks visually, what does one see? Complex objects, or perhaps more accurately, a concatenation of discernible objects, arranged in a kind of pseudo-symmetrical, ‘circular’ fashion. Not that they have a circular form; rather, one gets the impression that there is a kind of ‘circular’ or cyclical process taking place here. Some of these objects are tubular or cylindrical, while others have the appearance of mechanical devices of sorts. These are linked to other such objects, and also, indiscriminately, to more organic-looking objects, with the result that heads are connected to ‘pipes’, which are in turn linked to what resembles

other parts of either a machine or other biological organs of sorts. I use the phrase, ‘of sorts’, because the organic-looking objects (such as those resembling breasts or mammary organs, ‘leaking’ fluid), are not always recognizable as depictions of familiar organs; sometimes they seem like fantasy organs. Some of the artworks are brightly coloured, while in others the use of colour is very subtle, almost imperceptible, so that the impression ‘almost’ exists in their case that they are in black and white, or sepia. (I shall comment in these terms on specific artworks when I discuss them, below.)

Moving from a description of the objects of visual perception to what they suggest at the level of ideas, one could proceed as follows. The visual counterparts of the idea of equilibrium or balance – albeit framed in complex, rather than simplistic terms – meet the eye in virtually every one of these works of art, but none more so than the pastel drawings in question. If equilibrium is implicated in the dense configuration of images and image-complexes encountered in these artworks, however, it seems to be always in conjunction with the visual embodiments of other ideas such as those of source, conduit, efflorescence, fruiting and excess, even excrement. And one should add that the ‘equilibrium’ in question here is not one of fixed symmetry, but a fluctuating one where visual dynamism is always on the verge of exceeding the complexity of generative chaos and lapsing into the disorder of moribund stasis.

Tracing the subtly coloured lineation(s) suggestive of these meanings with one’s eye, it appears that a theme which pervades the drawings is that of the interconnectedness, perhaps the ‘alchemical unity’, of everything, even ostensible opposites such as the organic and the mechanical. I have used the phrase, ‘alchemical unity’, advisedly, given the manner in which Cull’s imagery – in which allusions to the four elements of antiquity (water, air, earth and fire) abound – resonates with the ‘alchemical philosophy’ of the Renaissance philosopher and scientist, Paracelsus, whose medical practice was founded on his belief in the interrelatedness of everything in the universe, which he regarded as an encompassing organism.

From here it is but a small step to seeing a link between Cull’s art and the more recent notion of the ‘Gaia-hypothesis’, formulated by climate scientist James Lovelock (2010: 105-122), according to which the earth, or Gaia, far from being a neutral terrain accommodating living organisms, is itself a macro-organism affected by, and in turn affecting, the organisms that form part of its overarching ecological fabric. This idea was recently given striking cinematic embodiment in James Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009), where the dramatic action is played out against the backdrop of a planetary ecology in which the interconnectedness of plants, animals and humanoid species is an integral aspect of the unfolding narrative.

As in the case of *Avatar*, Cull’s artworks, too, derive their visual power from the images that constitute them. This is not an inconsequential fact, if one considers the distinctive character of images compared to ‘verbal’ language – while all signifiers, verbal as well as iconic, are essentially multivocal from one context of interpretation to the next, such a proliferation of meaning is particularly irrepressible in the case of images, precisely because they lack the syntagmatic, linearly sequential directive which tends to ‘focus’ or guide linguistic interpretation. In cinema the succession of images may still impart to them the syntagmatic interpretive aspect of narrative, but with painting or drawing one’s interpretive appropriation is largely dependent upon the non-sequential, paradigmatic register of meaning-association.

And yet, in the case of Cleone Cull’s work one does not simply encounter significations dependent upon associations. There is evidence of a kind of quasi-syntagmatic, quasi-narrative register too, precisely through the strong visual indication of something like a ‘source’, whence a

‘process’ of some kind ‘originates’, and to which point the process, in its final stages, eventually seems to return, so that the image-complex appears to comprise a cycle of sorts. Precisely what the component-stages of this processual cycle comprise, or represent, is difficult to state without fear of contradiction, given the multivocality of the images in question. To be sure, it is not difficult to discern the outline of faces, or eyes, or of strange, quasi-(al-)chemical instruments, or eyes framed by what could be the head of a lion, or perhaps hitherto-undiscovered monstrosities, as well as unmistakably sexual images. But what these images may signify, even if they are ‘recognized’, is a different question altogether, and depends crucially on the semiotic context, or hermeneutical horizon, in which they are inscribed, as long as one refrains resolutely from the temptation – so frequently yielded to by art critics – of foisting the cloak of one’s personal prejudices on the images in question. Instead, to be able to discern the voices of the meaning-laden complexes of signification before one, the critic should listen carefully, and attune him- or herself to the register in which they are communicating. And this may be difficult, especially when there are many voices, or iconic nuances – as here, in Cull’s works – to be registered and scrupulously decoded.

The reason for such interpretive difficulty pertaining to many-voiced images, whether singly or in configured form, has to do with the way in which they interact with the conceptual and perceptual horizon of understanding that every perceiver unavoidably carries with her or him when they confront these artworks. What results in the shape of an interpretation is the outcome of an interaction between the horizon of meaning projected by the images, on the one hand, and the framework of pre-understanding that accompanies a viewer when she or he approaches the works of art. For this reason one has to be as receptive and judicious as possible when the ‘internal horizon’ of the artwork-constitutive images is first gauged.

In the process of arriving at a comprehension of the works in question, one should keep in mind that, although images cannot be reduced to (verbal) text or discourse, they have their very own discursivity, as Lyotard (1995: 12-17) has demonstrated so well in his work on figurality: the way that images are configured intimate specific power-relations, no less than language does. In addition to what has already been mentioned (Gaia, alchemical interconnectedness), some of the visually-discursive strands of Cleone’s works converge demonstrably on Eastern thought (Zen, Tantric beliefs and practices), Jungian depth psychology and the difficult poststructuralist thought of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (specifically in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*). What I mean by this, is that, even if the artist has never *consciously* had any of these theoretical or philosophical perspectives in mind before, or in the course of creating these works of art, the latter lend themselves to interpretation in their terms.

As in the case of Renaissance philosopher Paracelsus (Windelband 1958: 370-371), who affirmed the organic unity of (human) microcosm and the universe as macrocosm, Tantra (White 2000: 7-9), too, comprises a knowledge-based development and practice of worldly (including sexual) *rituals* designed to reach that which surpasses the mundane but is consonant with it. This is predicated on the assumption that the force or energy that pervades the universe is the same everywhere, from (the bodies of) individuals to the highest levels of spirituality. Zen Buddhism is closely related to this, with the important specification that it rejects theoretical or word-based knowledge in favour of *experiential* learning in combination with meditation. This aversion to theory and theoretical certainties explains its predilection for paradoxes, for example the instruction from a Zen master, to ‘Shut your mouth, close your lips, and say something’ (quoted in Nisker 1990: 49). The aspect of Zen that resonates most audibly with Cull’s art is formulated by Capra (1975: 141): ‘All things are seen as interdependent and inseparable parts of the cosmic whole; as different manifestations of the same ultimate reality’. In Cull’s work of

art one encounters the visual counterpart of this belief, also held by the Renaissance philosopher and alchemist, Paracelsus (referred to earlier).

Looking at Cull's drawings and paintings with these considerations regarding Zen and Tantra in mind, it is not difficult to draw a connection between their visibly processual and cyclical imagery of interconnectedness, on the one hand, and the emphasis, in Zen and Tantra, on experience (rather than theoretical learning), practice and ritual, aimed at bringing the individual closer to the universal matrix within which their individuality always finds its cosmic destination, as it were. To put it more concretely, the constitutive imagery of every one of Cleone Cull's artworks suggests that it may be conceived of as an occasion for the *enactment* of a ritual, or an experience-oriented meditation, that serves the 'practical' (that is, praxis-related) purpose of initiating the process of integrating the individual viewer with the rest of the universe as their spiritual home. The rest is up to each viewer.

Turning to the affinity between Cull's art and Jung's 'depth'-psychology of archetypes (Jung 1996: 43), one should note that it resonates with Jung's concept of 'archetypes' – the 'self', the 'shadow', the 'anima' and 'animus', the 'child', the 'sage', the 'trickster', the 'devil', and so on – which Jung believed to belong to the 'collective unconscious', and which denotes archaic, fundamental psychic models that are invariably found as structuring principles in the myths and art of every culture. They are also found in every person's psyche, to the extent that it is organized by the 'collective unconscious', as distinct from the personal unconscious, which is dependent on individual experience. The point about this is that, according to Jung, all art is susceptible to analysis in terms of these archetypal 'models' or symbols – and Cleone's art is no exception. Scrutinizing these works through a Jungian lens is likely to yield rich results.

However, what has been suggested so far requires a more encompassing philosophical framework to be fully comprehensible although such comprehension should not be conflated with the ritualistic and meditative aspect of each artwork as an occasion for providing the impetus for a process of enlightenment. I believe that one would be hard put to find a more appropriate set of ideas for doing justice to Cleone Cull's artistic vision than the process-oriented philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari as articulated, mainly (but not exclusively), in *Anti-Oedipus* (1983).

To the uninitiated, reading a text like *Anti-Oedipus* would probably be disconcerting, to say the least, given its metaphors of desiring-machines, organ-machines, bodies-without-organs, energy-flows, valorization of schizophrenia and 'schizzes', rejection of Oedipal identity and power, assertion of oneness between humanity and nature, and so on. When all of this is placed in relation to the discourse of psychoanalysis – which is integral to their text, anyway, and can therefore hardly be avoided – things start making some sense: this is Deleuze and Guattari's ontological take on the world and on human subjectivity, which underpins their proposed substitution of 'schizoanalysis' for psychoanalysis, which is, in their view, definitely passé.

A brutally condensed account of this will have to suffice here, but is necessary to be able to do interpretive justice to Cleone Cull's work – which is not to say that she consciously attempted to instantiate Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy in her work; far from it. An artist's vision can be compatible, if not coincide, with that of a philosopher or a novelist – and often does – without them being acquainted with each other's work at all. No one perspective on the world is the privileged domain of any human subject; besides, whatever the similarities, differences will remain.

For Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (1983: 1-8), there is no such thing as a static reality; everything is forever caught in a *process* of becoming, albeit a flux interspersed with moments of intermittent ‘rest’ or interruption of the process. Hence, reality is never-ending process, and, moreover, this is a process of incessant production. Such production takes the form of so-called ‘desiring-machines’ being linked to one another in all directions, but according to the law of binarity (two-ness). Everything we usually think of as being discrete things and objects, are clusters of desiring-machines – even a distinct, ‘identifiable’ individual is a concatenation of desiring-machines — heads, ears, eyes, noses, tongues, hands, fingers, legs, feet, sexual organs, organs for excretion, and so on: these are all desiring-machines, because all of them have some productive function aimed at – that is desiring – the fulfilment of some (never-ending) task. (The song, ‘I have life’, from the musical, *Hair*, includes lines which exemplify the clustering together of ‘desiring-machines’, such as: ‘I have my ears, I have my mouth, I have my teeth, I have my tongue, I have my liver...’) This is why they can say that the ‘schizophrenic’ is the ‘universal producer’, where their understanding of ‘schizophrenic’ is not the usual, clinical, one, but a term that emphasizes the ‘non-identical’ character of the supposedly enduring entities involved with the performance (that is, production, or process) of some task. In this sense, everyone who is ever engaged in some ‘productive’ activity or process – and that means everyone, even infants, whenever they as much as look at, drink, touch, or listen to something – is a ‘schizophrenic’, because no one is monolithically ‘one’, but is constituted by numerous ‘desiring-machines’ (eyes, ears, etc.). Desiring-production is a function of desiring-machines, and *vice versa*; hence all is *process*. The following excerpt from *Anti-Oedipus* sums things up as they are for Deleuze and Guattari (1983: 2):

There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the other and couples the machines together. Producing-machines, desiring-machines everywhere, schizophrenic machines, all of species life: the self and the non-self, outside and inside, no longer have any meaning whatsoever.

In effect, Deleuze and Guattari encourage us to stop thinking substantialistically, as if the world comprises independent, discrete objects, unconnected to one another and only occasionally being causally involved in fleeting contact with one another. In a manner reminiscent of the thinking of Spinoza, and more recently Bergson, their world is one of perpetual process, where things and individuals are the *illusory* productions of flows of desire, and where, moreover, the customary distinction between humanity and nature is null and void. In other words, according to them, humanity and nature (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 5):

...are one and the same essential reality, the producer-product. Production as process overtakes all idealistic categories and constitutes a cycle whose relationship to desire is that of an immanent principle. This is why desiring-production is the principal concern of a materialist psychiatry, which conceives of and deals with the schizo as *Homo natura*.

So whence the impression of a world of distinct, separate, objects? At any given time, desiring machines are linked to one another — the hand picks up a teacup (while the other hand holds the saucer), the nose smells the aroma of the tea, the eyes see its brownish colour, the tongue tastes its inimitable taste — according to the law of binarity (always one desiring-machine connected to another; the cup and the tea are desiring-machines as much as the hand, the eyes, the mouth, the tongue and the nose are, given their exigency for their respective functions or purposes). This connective binarity extends in all directions, so that multiple connections between desiring machines spread out rhizomatically everywhere – no desiring-machine connection is ever isolated.

Still, why do we experience things as being separate? The illusion of existing things and individuals arises when a third event interrupts binary couplings: for a moment, intermittently, when flows of desire, emitted by desiring-machines, are interrupted by other such flows from different desiring-machines, which could be organ-machines (when the eye is attracted by a beautiful woman walking past, and the tea-sipping stops temporarily), and at this moment, when everything stops for a moment before resuming, something resembling identity is produced – an undifferentiated thing, seemingly unchanged through time. This is what Deleuze and Guattari call ‘the body without organs’ (1983: 7-8), which is produced in the manner described, but is itself wholly unproductive:

Producing, a product: a producing/product identity. It is this identity that constitutes a third term in the linear series: an enormous undifferentiated object. Everything stops dead for a moment, everything freezes in place – and then the whole process will begin all over again. From a certain point of view it would be much better if nothing worked, if nothing functioned. Never being born, escaping the wheel of continual birth and rebirth, no mouth to suck with, no anus to shit through... Desiring-machines make us an organism; but at the very heart of this production, within the very production of this production, the body suffers from being organized in this way, from not having some other sort of organization, or no organization at all...The automata stop dead and set free the unorganized mass they once served to articulate. The full body without organs is the unproductive, the sterile, the unengendered, the unconsumable...The body without organs is non-productive; nonetheless it is produced, at a certain place and a certain time in the connective synthesis, as the identity of producing and the product...

This may seem cryptic, but if we consider that Lacan (Lee 1990: 82), too, has argued that one’s subjectivity is too complex to be grasped as ‘one’ thing, instead being complexly ‘stretched’ between three different registers – the ‘real’, the imaginary and the symbolic – then it is not that difficult to grasp Deleuze and Guattari’s meaning: that illusory entity that we regard as our ‘identity’ (what they call ‘the body without organs’) cannot function as a desiring-machine. Only combinations of desiring-machines can ever keep the flows of production, of energy, going, therefore what we think of as ‘me’ or ‘you’, ‘she’ or ‘he’, ‘it’, or ‘they’, are unavoidably always concatenations of desiring-machines.

Returning to Cull’s artworks with this brief characterization of Deleuze and Guattari’s ontology in mind, do they not seem to resonate or vibrate in sympathy with it? Visually, her art seems to exemplify the process of energy-flows described by the two French poststructuralists in *Anti-Oedipus*. Even their description of the process that intermittently generates the ‘body without organs’ sounds uncannily like a poetic evocation of one or more of her artworks. The gesso, pastel, gum arabic and ink works are all consonant with the ontology briefly outlined above – although not exclusively; the other interpretive frames I suggested also find resonance here – but the ones which most readily lend themselves to this interpretation, are *Fiery eyed I come to you* (Figure 1) and *Full Steam Ahead* (Figure 2) in the *Ascension Manuals* series. Before starting to take in the detail, in fact, Figure 2 (*Full Steam Ahead*) strikes one as an amorphous ‘body-without-organs’, until, that is, all the detail obtrudes itself: organic and machinic features such as firework-spinning-wheel-like shapes, truncated, imprisoned faces, humanoid and animalistic figures, (al-)chemical instruments and devices – all vaguely reminiscent of Hieronymus Bosch’s vision of hell, and the etchings of fantastical prisons imagined by Piranesi in the 18th century. Not only does everything seem to be interconnected and ‘in process’, but currents of various kinds run through its densely textured ‘body’.

Although Figure 1 (*Fiery eyed I come to you*) is less amorphous at first sight – in fact, symmetrical – it also displays a species of organic-machinic concatenation of components, productive of a heterogeneous array of fluids and currents. Its title – *Fiery eyed I come to you*

– suggests that this composite image-configuration of ‘desiring-machines’ might be an artistic anatomy of passion, which would sit well with Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical vision of a schizophrenic, but endlessly generative universe.



Figure 1
from Series: Ascension Manuals, *Fiery Eyed I Come to You*,
pastel , ink, gesso and gum Arabic on board, 1.238 metre square (Cleone Cull).



Figure 2
from Series: Ascension Manuals, *Full Steam Ahead*,
pastel , ink, gesso and gum Arabic on board, 1.238 metre square (Cleone Cull).

Regarding the three *Return of the Goddess*-series works in pastel and ink, the four ancient elements (water, air, fire and earth) are pervasive, sometimes manifesting themselves in images suggestive of life-giving (and death-dealing) fluids, and redolent with mythologically suggestive imagery. 'Desiring-(organ-)machines' may likewise readily be perceived there, suggesting 'fertility' in a multifarious sense. Figure 3 and Figure 5 – *Exiled, the Goddess, returns full armed*, and *Queen of Heaven: Five-branched on fire* – simultaneously represent an accurate artistic intuition of the current ascendancy of the feminine principle, or (Jungian) *anima* (usually as encountered in the masculine unconscious), after centuries of suppression and oppression by the masculine principle or *animus* (the masculine principle, usually as encountered in the

feminine unconscious). Looking carefully at the other work in this group – Figure 4 (*Goddess does the hoochie coochie*) – one may discern there an androgynous union of sorts between these principles, hinting at a possible or desired reconciliation. This does not mean that these *Goddess*-works are not accessible via the heuristic path opened up by Deleuze and Guattari’s process-ontology. On the contrary, they virtually vibrate in sympathy with the French thinkers’ vision of interconnected desiring-machines – most conspicuously in the case of Figure 4 (*Goddess does the hoochie coochie*). Here the desiring-machines are almost exclusively organic (the exception being a vaguely mechanical-looking device where one imagines the goddess’s eyes would be).



Figure 3
from Series: *Return of the Goddess, Exiled, The Goddess Returns Full Armed*,
pastel, ink, gesso and gum arabic on fabriano, 1 metre x 995mm (Cleone Cull).



Figure 4
from Series: Return of the Goddess, *Goddess does the hoochie coochie*,
pastel and ink on fabriano, 1.293 metre x 995 mm (Cleone Cull).



Figure 5
from Series: *Return of the Goddess, Queen of Heaven: Five Branched on fire*,
pastel, ink, gesso and gum arabic on fabriano, 1 metre x 995mm (Cleone Cull).

One possible response on the part of readers might be: so what? What does this interpretation have to commend itself? Does it make Cleone Cull's art more accessible than it would otherwise be? My answer would be that, while this is not necessarily the case, the people at Cull's exhibition whom I have spoken to, and with whom I shared my interpretation, did affirm its hermeneutic fecundity as far as they were concerned. Some of them confessed to being baffled by the works in question, until they had an interpretive lens through which they could look at them. I should emphasize again that this does not mean that it is the *only* (multifocal) 'lens' available to viewers; there are many, but in each case the test is whether the discernible figures and shapes start making sense with the aid of its interpretive, focalising function.

Put differently, the interpretations put forward here will not meet with everyone's assent – how could they if everyone brings a different set of personal prejudices, experiences and beliefs to the artworks concerned? This is why I set out my preferred interpretive 'moulds' or frames beforehand, so that readers can 'look through' them at Cull's artworks if they so choose. They are not the only perspectives available to one, nor even privileged ones, however – they are merely the ones suggested to me by my own philosophical background. As such, I hope that they may just add a different dimension to the appreciation of what, in my humble assessment, are powerfully evocative works of art by Eastern Cape artist Cleone Cull.

Note

This paper is a significantly extended and referenced version of an essay that appeared in the catalogue accompanying Cleone Cull's exhibition at The Athenaeum, Port Elizabeth, titled *Walking between the Worlds*.

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