2021

Down the rabbit hole: An Exhibition – and – Alice in Wonderland engaging with the reflexive project of the self: An exegesis

Shana James
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Down the Rabbit Hole

An Exhibition

– and –

Alice in Wonderland Engaging with the Reflexive Project of the Self

An exegesis

This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the degree of

Master of Arts by Research

Shana James

Edith Cowan University
School of Arts & Humanities
2021
Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
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3 June 2021

Shana James
Abstract

Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland is a culturally significant text that is widely known across many cultures. In this Victorian story, a little girl follows the talking White Rabbit down a rabbit hole to uncover a fantastical parallel world. Alice in Wonderland has remained in print for over 150 years, highlighting its continued relevance to generations of readers. This exegesis investigates the making of visual artwork that responds to this significant story, exploring the symbology and metaphorical nature of the text and seeing the story as a “reflexive project of the self” (Giddens, 1991, p. 5).

I began this research having already created two exhibitions based on Alice in Wonderland and with a desire to understand the text in more depth. As I became immersed in the subject, I discovered the importance of contextualising my exploration with an understanding of the author, Lewis Carroll, and the English Victorian society that he was a part of. Moreover, seeing the story as both a hero’s journey and a kind of dictionary of Jungian symbols, this exegesis explores the self-actualisation of Alice through the theories of Giddens, Campbell and Jung. Using these three theories, I apply my knowledge to a close reading of the text and uncover a wealth of visual imagery. Through making artworks responding to the story, I have investigated the interplay between the individual, society, and self-actualisation of the individual.

Alice in Wonderland has been re-imagined extensively. Therefore, it is relevant for me to research how Alice has been reinterpreted over time by popular culture, including the domination of this imagery by The Walt Disney Company (Disney). Additionally, I investigate some of the visual artists who, like myself, have found an interconnection between the visual world and this remarkable piece of literature. From the many visual artists who have re-imagined the story, I have chosen to focus my attention on artists who have perceived Alice in relation to their own lifeworld and have reinterpreted the story to correspond
with their own concerns and experiences. These artists are Charles Blackman, Salvador Dali, Jenny Watson, Yayoi Kusama and Peter Blake.

I conducted this research having managed a sustained art practise over the last 30 years. I have explored my studio practice and recognised the inherent intelligence in the processes I use, and I have rediscovered my making as a collaboration with materials. I am a mid-career artist and have exhibited widely, including nine solo shows and numerous group exhibitions, and I have had artworks acquired by recognised collections. I have undertaken this research with the understanding that, at this time, I must engage more rigorously with my artwork and generate a critical and theoretical framework for my practice. The culmination of this practice-led research is my exhibition, *Down the Rabbit Hole*, at the Spectrum Project Space, Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia, where I continue to respond to the story with printmaking and installation, creating a dynamic space for viewers to contemplate themselves in relation to the story.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Nicola Kaye and Dr Lyndall Adams. Dr Kaye provided direction, an open mind and a generous attitude, especially at the beginning when I had no idea where the road was, let alone which direction to take. Dr Adams shared her uncompromising attention to detail and broad understanding. Both Dr Adams and Dr Kaye offered discussions around the curation of artwork during various exhibitions; this depth of knowledge will be of great benefit in the future. I would also like to thank Dr Paul Uhlmann for his interesting incites during group discussions, Vanessa Wallace (the printmaking technician) for her friendly help whenever it was required and Sherri Staltari (gallery director at Stala Contemporary) for always supporting me and my work. I am thankful to my fellow higher degree students, who are an encouraging bunch, always ready for a conversation about art and to help with queries about university life. I also give thanks to my students at the Fremantle Arts Centre; this study has sparked many interesting conversations about ideas, philosophy and making art.

I would like to thank my husband, Craig, who has continuously supported me in my art career and is always available to bounce ideas off. To my children: Sienna, your increased independence made this study possible; and Anais (who was still at high school when I embarked on this study and is now at university herself), I have enjoyed sitting at the kitchen table together while we both do our homework.
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Research Outputs

Group Exhibitions


Solo Exhibitions


Chapter 1. Introduction

My childhood enthusiasm for Alice came not from reading the original book, but from an American audio recording in the form of a long play (LP) record (The Charlotte Russe, 1971) (see Figure 1). My sister and I played it over and over until we knew most of it by heart.

![Image](image.jpg)

Figure 1.1. The *Alice in Wonderland* LP page 1, by The Charlotte Russe, 1971 (recorded by The Peter Pan Players and Orchestra), Peter Pan Records (exception to copyright: research or study; ss 40, 103C).

Many years later, during 2010, my daughter (who was in primary school) won *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, illustrated by Ingpen (Carroll, 2009) (see Figure 1.2). I read it to her—discovering the original text for the first time and realising that the version I had known as a child was abridged. Immediately, I
became aware of the superiority of the original compared to my childhood memories. I thoroughly enjoyed the humour and the subtlety of this intelligent piece of writing. At this time, I started drawing images responding to the text in my sketchbook; this was the beginning of my dedication to creating artwork about Alice (see Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.2. *Alice in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll, 2011 (illustrated by Robert Ingpen), Walker Books (exception to copyright: research or study; ss 40, 103C).
I have been a practising artist for 30 years. During this time, I was often inspired to create artworks using poetry and writing as a starting point, long before I became interested in artworks directly concerning *Alice in Wonderland*. My first body of work that focused specifically on *Alice in Wonderland* was an exhibition of linocuts titled, *Understanding Alice*, at the Firestation Print Studio (James, 2015d), an artist-run, printmaker space in Melbourne, Australia (see Figures 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6). This exhibition re-imagined symbolic elements from the story as a metaphor for contemporary life.
Figure 1.4. The Firestation Print Studio, an artist-run printmaker space in Armadale, Melbourne, Australia.
Figure 1.5. Invitation to the *Understanding Alice* exhibition at the Firestation Print Studio, Armadale, 2015. Copyright Firestation Print Studio.

Figure 1.6. Installed artwork by Shana James in the *Understanding Alice* exhibition at the Firestation Print Studio, Armadale, Australia, 2015, photographed by Shana James, 2015d.
During 2016, I continued to expand my *Alice in Wonderland* work with a new series of drypoint images titled, *Falling into Place*. The work used symbols from the story, responding to the psychological aspects of place. These works were made for a group show, *Seven Printmakers Respond to Place*, at the Heathcote Museum & Gallery in Perth, Western Australia (Braddock, 2016d) (see Figure 1.7).

Following these two exhibitions, it became essential that I broadened my understanding of *Alice in Wonderland*. Therefore, I have immersed myself in the cultural field of Alice and how it has been analysed. This has allowed me to examine my practice in relation to the text. Throughout this process, I have become aware of what the central tenets are for me and how I choose to interpret these ideas as visual art.

*Alice in Wonderland* is a culturally significant text—it is still in print over 150 years after it was first published. However, despite the prevalence of images and stories in popular culture, many reinterpretations of Alice and adaptations of the story run counter to the fundamental ideas of the original text. I will explore these ideas both in my artwork and in this exegesis with the aim of creating artwork that expands the interpretation of the story and questions the viewer to reassess their relationship with the story.
Aims

I aim to illuminate ideas from the story of *Alice in Wonderland*—relating them to contemporary society and seeing Alice through the lens of self-actualisation and as a hero’s journey—by creating artwork that responds to symbolic aspects of the original text. Both as a child and an adult I relate to Alice as an outsider in Wonderland, navigating a strange world, and reassessing her values and assumptions in response to her environment. In my practice-led research, I seek to create artworks that communicate a deeper understanding of elements of the *Alice in Wonderland* text, making them relevant to this time by relating aspects of the story to contemporary life. I aim to investigate these ideas by producing a body of work in a public exhibition and an accompanying exegesis.
Research Questions

The following research questions aim to explain how the story of *Alice in Wonderland* can be re-imagined in the studio:

- How can self-actualisation be investigated through the creation of artworks, symbolic images and visual metaphors that re-imagine the story of *Alice in Wonderland*?
- What is the potential for practice-led research to embody a sense of Wonderland in an exhibition of artworks?

I address these questions in my practice-led research, which will culminate in a solo exhibition titled, *Down the Rabbit Hole*, held during Fringe World at the Spectrum Project Space, Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Perth, Australia. It will include an ECU Galleries Residency, from 15 January to 12 February 2021, where members of the public can watch me while I create a laboratory for experimentation and art-making.

*Alice in Wonderland* provides a rich framework for developing artwork, its metaphorical content and visual symbolism offer the ideal starting point to create images concerned with self-actualisation. Wong (2009) asserted that it is a book about seeing, reading and playing. These elements are fundamental to the way the book has been reinterpreted, not only by artists but across disciplines:

In my view, the point of the Alice books, books filled with both pictures and conversations is to cause readers to speculate both mentally and visually, the Wonderland that Carroll and Tenniel collaboratively produced. Indeed, understanding Carroll's play on various levels of seeing and reading is a vital step not only towards fully appreciating Wonderland's structure but also towards explaining its prevailing success and influence across a wide range of disciplines. (Wong, 2009, p. 136)

It is a story that works on many levels, visually and cognitively. Its open-ended metaphors provide an ideal platform for an exhibition with a sense of Wonderland that also engages critically with the text (ideas that are just as pertinent now as they were in Victorian times). It can be challenging to
articulate the effect of visual art on society; I am interested in the communicative aspect of my work, translating an idea or experience. *Alice in Wonderland* is a popular cultural icon. Through this exhibition, I will create works that re-imagine Alice for a contemporary audience. These works intend to affect the audience by prompting them to question aspects of the story and relate it to their own experience. Through my practice, I investigate *Alice in Wonderland* as a story of self-actualisation, prompting the viewer to reflect on their own lifeworld.

At my exhibition, *Curiouser and Curiouser* (2019), the audience’s response to the work was personal and demonstrated that viewers had an emotional connection to the images. During my artist’s talk, I expanded on the work, *Liminal Space* (see Figure 7.3), which depicts multiple silhouettes of Alice falling. This is a piece about the liminal space between deciding to jump and not knowing the outcome (e.g., where you will land). Several people approached me to express that they identified with the artwork, which was expressing aspects of their own experience. This illustrated the metaphorical nature of my work and the way it communicates with the audience. This research opens ideas for discussion and visually connects the audience to the story.

**Chapter Outlines**

This exegesis explores the text and its symbology. It examines the story as a hero’s journey and a story of self-actualisation, embedding this discussion in the materiality of making in the studio. Chapter 2 contextualises Carroll and Victorian life, discussing how this society precipitated the writing of *Alice in Wonderland*. Through considering the historical context of the text and investigating the author’s life, the text can be interpreted in a more nuanced manner, revealing commonalities with contemporary culture.

In Chapter 3, I apply the hero’s journey to the *Alice in Wonderland* text exploring the concept through the writings of Joseph Campbell (1993), seeing Alice as a female protagonist on a quintessential hero’s journey. Alice embarks
on both an external journey into Wonderland and an internal journey into her own psyche. Additionally, I investigate the origin of Campbell’s theories from archetypes with Carl Jung, who mentions Alice in Wonderland in his book, Man and His Symbols (1978). Hero’s journey stories start with the hero embarking on an adventure—taking both an external journey to a strange land and an internal journey, learning from their adventures. They conclude with the hero returning from their quest with new knowledge and the self-actualisation of the main character, much like Alice in Wonderland. Alice also provides a poignant way to consider the theories of sociologist, Giddens, particularly the concept of self-actualisation (1991). Although these three theorists are from different disciplines, they have overarching similarities that I explore by applying their theories to Alice in Wonderland.

Chapter 4 is a close reading of the text, dealing more specifically with metaphorical elements of the story.

Chapter 5 observes some interpretations of Alice and how these influences have informed my practice. Further, I investigate other artists who have also created artworks based on the story. These artists have all re-imagined Alice to suit their own vision.

Chapter 6 analyses my practice-led research. I explore making through drawing, printmaking and artists’ books, seeing this as a rhizomatic structure (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980). Additionally, I critically examine my practice using Frayling’s ideas on practice-led research (1993) as a framework.

Chapter 7 discusses my exhibition: detailing the process of creating the artworks that have been completed to date and exploring plans for additional works to be included in the upcoming exhibition (2021). Generations of artists and illustrators have reinterpreted this text, which creates imaginative spaces for the reader to wander through. Through my research, I continue to discover new perspectives on this story. Predominately, I see Alice in Wonderland through the core theme of my artwork—self-actualisation—but also as a rich, layered and
multifaceted text that has become a visual resource. The ideas, images and metaphors contained in this text have inspired and motivated me to create the exhibition, *Down the Rabbit Hole*. I intend to question the viewer and encourage them to see themselves through the lens of Alice.
Chapter 2. Lewis Carroll the Writer and Charles Dodgson the Man

Introduction

When I embarked on this study, I thought that Carroll’s life would be cursory to my interest in the symbology of the story. However, during my research, I uncovered published misinformation, namely Garland (2008) and Shi (2016), that invariably affects the way the text is analysed; therefore, his biography is significant for this research. I have been making artwork based on the Alice in Wonderland story since 2015, and, on several occasions, at exhibitions of my artwork, people would ask me about Carroll: Was he a paedophile? Was he an opium smoker? Is it possible to make such an imaginative piece without the use of drugs?

I realised that if I was going to continue making artwork inspired by the story, I needed to understand more about the context of the story and the writer. Additionally, understanding the Victorian society that Carroll was a part of has enriched my knowledge of the text and fed into my art-making. In my 2019 exhibition of linocuts entitled, Curiouser and Curiouser, I used Victorian patterns and Victorian wallpapers as a metaphor for the repetitive patterns in life. The text was informed by the characteristics, behaviour and experiences of Carroll; this understanding has contributed to my artwork. A self-portrait of Carroll is shown in Figure 2.1.
Charles Dodgson was a mathematician and an Oxford don; however, he is better known by the pseudonym he wrote under, Lewis Carroll. Dodgson was a mathematics lecturer and a deacon in the Anglican Church but was equally interested in design, art and literature (Wakeling, 2011). He was a shy person with a stutter and an exacting nature that was sometimes interpreted as pedantic (Woolf, 2010). He was humorous, as his letters and the Alice books show, albeit reportedly a boring mathematics lecturer (Woolf, 2010). A photographer and a thinker, interested in the concept of time, he was involved in creating the international date line (Woolf, 2010). Dodgson loved inventing riddles and puzzles, both literary and mathematical (Woolf, 2010). He wrote mathematical textbooks, as well as poetry and stories (Woolf, 2010). Further, he was the author of *Alice in Wonderland* and its sequel *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. I will refer to Dodgson as Carroll from this point forward.

From an early age, Carroll loved art and literature (Woolf, 2010). As a child, he created a handmade family magazine with stories, book reviews and drawings
with contributions from other family members. Carroll was part of a large family, one of 11 children, the third oldest child and the oldest son. The family was poor; his father supported them through his work as a clergyman. “The family’s numerous aunts, uncles and cousins were close-knit” (Woolf, 2010, p. 12). Carroll’s creativity flourished in this poor but supportive family (Woolf, 2010). His love of entertaining the original Alice (Alice Liddell) and her sisters, which ultimately resulted in the Alice in Wonderland book, can be traced to Carroll’s childhood when he would organise imaginative games and devise plays for his sibling to enact (Woolf, 2010).

As an adult, Carroll would often catch a train to London to enjoy theatre and galleries. He was a frequent visitor at the Royal Academy and was friends with the famous art critic, John Ruskin, and the painters of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (Wakeling, 2011). Carroll “was keen to support new artists” (Wakeling, 2011, p. 42) and the money he gained from the popularity of the Alice books allowed him to buy artworks (Wakeling, 2011). Despite having drawn the first illustrations in his handwritten book for Alice Liddell, when it came to publishing his book Alice in Wonderland, Carroll was keen to employ a professional illustrator because he was unsatisfied with his own drawings. However, he continued to sketch and draw as a hobby, and his sketchbooks survive today (Wakeling, 2011).

Carroll became a skilled photographer and enjoyed the way Victorian photography combined aspects of science with creativity; the process suited his fastidious nature (Douglas-Fairhurst, 2015). Photography was new technology in the mid-1800s and “to produce a single print required the knowledge of a chemist, the eye of an artist and the patience of a saint” (Douglas-Fairhurst, 2015, p. 78). Carroll told his models stories to amuse them (particularly children) while they sat still for the photograph (Douglas-Fairhurst, 2015). Figures 2.2 and 2.3 show Carroll’s photographs of Alice Liddell as “the Beggar Maid” and Edith, Ina and Alice Liddell, respectively.
Figure 2.2. Alice Liddell as “the Beggar Maid”, by Lewis Carroll, 1858b.

Figure 2.3. Edith, Ina and Alice Liddell, by Lewis Carroll, 1858a.
Carroll’s Reputation and Speculation

Carroll enjoyed a good reputation while he was alive, and the first print run of the book sold out quickly (Gardner, 2015). He was considered an imaginative writer with great intelligence and a love for children (Woolf, 2010). However, in the early part of the twentieth century, his reputation changed and he became regarded as a recluse, a paedophile, and a neurotic sexual deviant (Woolf, 2010). I am interested in Carroll’s reputation because the audience for my artwork has questioned me about this. Carroll’s early history and this newer interpretation seemed contradictory to me. I examined three of the most recent biographies on Carroll, Woolf (2010), Fairhurst (2015) and Leach (1999), to learn whether there was any evidence of Carroll being a paedophile. Leach notes that:

Now, ten years on from the first discussion of the myth as concept, the elderly and specious image of the nervous clergyman, afraid of adulthood and adult experience, spending his non-life in a lonely unrequited love for a succession of small girls, has begun to give way to the historical reality on which proper analysis can begin. (as cited in Hollingsworth, 2009, p. xii)

Woolf (2010), Fairhurst (2015) and Leach (1999) researched Carroll, re-examining the source materials and previously unavailable information that was released by the Carroll estate; notably letters, which were initially interpreted as documenting incriminating friendships. Carroll was an amateur photographer; some of his photographs depicted Alice and other children nude or dressed in costumes, such as Alice Liddell as “the Beggar Maid” (see Figure 2.2), which by modern standards seem incriminating. It is imperative to contextualise such images with the attitudes of Victorian society. Carroll always got permission from the parents, and the nude shots represented a tiny portion of the photos he took Woolf (2010). Significantly, during Victorian times, pictures of nude children were even on Christmas cards—the view was that children were innocent and free of any sexual connotation (Cohen, 2015). Although it is not possible to know for certain, the most recent biographies on Carroll (Woolf, 2010;
Fairhurst, 2015; Leach, 1999) argued there is no evidence that he was a paedophile.

Carroll had female friends he was not married to, which in Victorian times was scandalous for a man in Carroll’s position—a deacon, who lectured at Oxford. Because of his position, the letters Carroll had sent to his actor, artist and adult female friends were withheld by the Carroll estate (Woolf, 2010). Carroll found these judgements restrictive and made up a character encompassing the moralisers of Victorian society, Mrs Grundy, and he quoted this fictitious character in jest. He wrote to a female friend about ways to avoid “the Mrs Grundy risk” (Woolf, 2010, p. 97); that is, the social risk of having a single woman at his house. Carroll called the fictitious character a “miserable old gossip” referring to all those who would gossip in such circumstances (Woolf, 2010, p. 98).

While Carroll had friends in the theatre, including actresses, it is poignant to note that Carroll’s father, a high Anglican minister, would not even attend the theatre (Woolf, 2010). The judgement and strict social rules of the time dictated that a man in Carroll’s position must remain proper. Therefore, these facts were kept carefully hidden; although, to a modern audience, they would help to humanise him (Woolf, 2010, p. 60). Without this information, Carroll was framed as having no adult friends (Woolf, 2010). Combining this with his friendships with children, which seemed to be the only social interaction he had, established Carroll as a deviant, who was attracted to children and unable to have adult relationships. This view was based on misinformation.

These aspects of Carroll’s life informed the text of his stories. The characters of *Alice in Wonderland* were based on real people who lived in Oxford, and the text was as much a social commentary as it was a children’s story (Gardner, 2015). Carroll’s disdain for social restrictions and judgement informed the text: “‘If everybody minded their own business’, the Duchess said with a hoarse growl, ‘the world would go around a good deal faster than it does’” (Carroll, 2004, p. 60).
By embedding my analysis of *Alice in Wonderland* with knowledge of the author and the time he was living within, the text can be understood in greater detail. The fact that the Carroll estate withheld information about Carroll’s friendships with adult women, artists and actors, but revealed Carroll’s photographs of nude children, is evidence of how different the values and morality of Victorian England were compared to our current time.

Figure 2.4. A Victorian advertisement for Laudanum (the brand name for opium).
There is also speculation that Carroll was an opium smoker. Proponents of this idea argue that such an imaginative story could not have been created without the influence of drugs (Parker, 2009). During Victorian times, opium houses were legal (Ruston, 2014), so there is no reason for there to be any record of whether Carroll went to one or not. In Britain, during the nineteenth century, opium was widely available from barbers, tobacconists and stationers, and was advertised under the brand name, Laudanum (see Figure 2.4).

It was taken both recreationally and as a medicine (Ruston, 2014). It is highly plausible that Carroll used the drug, but I have been unable to find any evidence that he did. Although in “Chapter 5: Advice from a Caterpillar”, the Caterpillar is smoking a hookah—a device used for smoking opium, it is not possible to know, if or how much drugs influenced the creation of the story. The fact that Carroll had to go underground regarding his friendships is interesting when contrasted with the original title for the story, *Alice’s Adventures Underground*. Victorian society was highly structured, and both personal and social reputation was extraordinarily important. This was a time when someone could lose their job and their social status because of a rumoured scandal. What is most noticeable about the highly structured world that Carroll lived in is the comparative freedom of Wonderland. In my opinion, the rigid society that Carroll lived in gave rise to his making such a free and imaginative work.

During 1862, Carroll and his friend Reverend Robert Duckworth took Alice Liddell and her two sisters on a boating trip in a rowboat on the Thames near Oxford. During the trip, Carroll “told the fairy-tale of *Alice’s Adventures Underground*” (Gardner, 2015). The Liddell sisters had many boating trips with Carroll where snippets of what would become *Alice in Wonderland* were told (Gardner, 2015). Alice implored Carroll to write the story down for her. In Carroll’s own words:

> In a desperate attempt to strike out some new line of fairy lore, I had sent my heroine straight down a rabbit hole, to begin with, without the least idea what was to happen afterwards ... In writing it out I had many fresh
Carroll wrote the story by hand, drew his own pictures and presented it to Alice. He later asked if he could borrow it so he could write it again for publication, taking out the personal references to the Liddell family and adding new chapters. In consultation with the publisher, Macmillan, Carroll decided that his own drawings were not of a high enough standard if the book was to be published. Macmillan put Carroll in touch with Tenniel, who also illustrated for Punch magazine (Woolf, 2010). Carroll and Tenniel had a strained but cordial relationship, largely because of Carroll’s exacting nature and particular ideas about how his book was to be illustrated (Woolf, 2010). Once we know of Carroll’s childhood creativity and his interest in the arts, it is not surprising how important both the illustrations and the design of the first Alice in Wonderland book was to Carroll.

Carroll seemed acutely aware of how the structure of his book would affect the way the reader would experience the story—it was Carroll, not the publisher, driving decisions around typography, illustrations and pagination (Wong, 2009). During the creation of the story, Carroll changed the words to allow for the different placement of images: “It is interesting to see that Carroll makes significant allowances by altering the shape of the text to ‘fit its illustrations’” (Wong, 2009, p. 138). This demonstrates Carroll’s understanding of design and the importance of the visual experience. Additionally, Carroll stated, “If you don’t know what a Gryphon is, look at the picture” (Carroll, 1999, p. 112) (see Figure 2.6).
Figure 2.5. The original *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll, 1865, Macmillan.

Figure 2.6. *Gryphon*, by John Tenniel in *Through the Looking Glass*, by Lewis Carroll, 2004, p. 93, Pan Macmillan.
Carroll decided that every subsequent publication of the book should contain a picture of a Gryphon (Wong, 2009, p. 141) (see Figure 2.6). The visual pun used in “Chapter 3: A Caucus Race and a Long Tale with the Mouses Long Sad Tale” accentuates the tail/tale pun (see Figures 2.7 and 2.8). This may seem like a contemporary use of typography, but this image of emblematic or figured verse dates to the ancient Greeks (Gardner, 2015, p. 39). The literature, images and design of the book are inextricably linked and inform the meaning derived by the reader. I am particularly interested in this because artist’s books are a significant part of my practice; the book as an object, its materiality and the connotations that can be created by the design of a book are relevant to me. Carroll collaborated with both Tenniel and Macmillan to enhance the meaning through the reader’s experience of the text and, on more than one occasion, both were vexed by Carroll’s insistence on certain elements, which we can ascertain from existing letters between Carroll, Macmillan and Tenniel (Woolf, 2010).

Figure 2.7. Mouses Long Sad Tale typography, by Lewis Carroll, 2004, p. 33, Pan Macmillan, photographed by Shana James (2020).
The Victorian era was a fascinating time filled with contradictions—it was a religious time during which Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* (1859). It was a time of strict social structures, but also unprecedented change with the advent of the steam engine and the beginnings of modern photography. There was a dramatic social change with the rise of the middle class, international
trade and mechanisation but also of William Morris and the craft revival (Young, 2011). Although it was a time of terrible inequalities of poverty and privilege, wealth per capita was rising (Young, 2011). Real wages grew substantially, with increased wealth due to international trade and British colonialism. The Victorians reacted against the rationalism of the Georgian era, and a romanticism took hold (Young, 2011). The Pre-Raphaelite paintings are the epitome of the Victorian romantic aesthetic. With this change and the coexistence of new ideas, the topsy-turvy world of Wonderland seems perfect to be born out of a Victorian framework: “Nonsense, that arch-Victorian genre, is hardly affected by the changes ... it easily bursts out of the Victorian frame of mind and seems to easily address ours” (Wong, 2009, p. 137). Simultaneously, Alice is both of its time yet closely related to our contemporary audience and all those audiences in between. Houghton stated that, while the Alice books are essentially Victorian, they have gone on “to generate new meanings with every generation of readers” (as cited in Wong, 2009, p. 137). This relates directly to my practice because I have re-imagined the story and developed new meanings for a contemporary audience.

There is much speculation about Carroll and his private life. However, when we understand the writer within the Victorian context, we can appreciate how societal norms influenced Carroll. Alice in Wonderland is a whimsical and adventurous story that relates to the society of the time. However, it is an enduring story that has been endlessly re-imagined as I have done for the accompanying exhibition, Down the Rabbit Hole (2021).
Chapter 3. Alice as a Hero, Symbolism and Self-Actualisation

Introduction

Chapter 3 explores both Joseph Campbell (1993) and Carl Jung’s (1979) theories regarding the hero’s journey in relation to Anthony Giddens’s concept of the “reflexive project of the self” (1991, p. 5). The story of Alice in Wonderland has been repeatedly re-imagined over more than a century. I am intrigued by what makes the story relevant to a modern audience. Campbell was a professor of literature, an academic in the fields of comparative mythology and religion and was well known for his writing on the hero’s journey from his seminal work, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, first published in 1949 (Campbell, 1993). Campbell’s work was influenced by the psychologist, Jung, specifically his work on archetypes. Giddens’s writings are more recent, and I assert that, although he examines self-actualisation through the lens of sociology, his theories can also be applied to the story of Alice in Wonderland.

It is generally accepted that mythological stories tell greater truths through allegory (Jung, 1979). My research focuses on the allegorical and symbolic nature of Alice in Wonderland and its metaphorical qualities. Carroll intended to write an entertaining story that contained humour and parody; however, the story also has mythological qualities, notably the structure of the hero’s journey, and the archetypal symbols it uses. Both Jung (1979) and Campbell (1993) have written about the hero’s journey as a type of mythological story. Campbell referred to the hero’s journey as a monomyth because the structure reoccurs in so many different cultures. I understand Alice in Wonderland as a monomyth or hero’s journey. It is the symbolic aspects of Alice in Wonderland that I explore in my practice-led research—reinterpreting visual symbols into my artworks in relation to my own experience for a contemporary audience.
In his seminal text, *Man and His Symbols* (1979), Jung discussed the expression of the hero’s journey as a structure for mythological stories across cultures:

> The myth of the hero is the most common and best-known myth in the world. We find it in the classical mythology of Greece and Rome, in the middle ages in the Far East, and among contemporary primitive tribes. It also appears in our dreams. It has obvious dramatic appeal, and a less obvious, but none the less profound, psychological importance. (1978, p. 101)

Jung first articulated the archetype as a term to describe universal symbols in archaic stories, building on the term by Freud “archaic remnants” (1978, p. 32). This is important to me as a narrative artist who is interested in creating visually symbolic stories. Jung understood mythology and folk stories as important tools for enabling individuals to unite the opposites contained within the self and becoming a whole person, a process he called “individuation” (1978, p. 159). Campbell’s research on the hero’s journey proffered that the main character’s goal is to return to the real world after the quest with new wisdom (1993). Giddens would call this process becoming self-actualised (1991, p. 78).

**What is Self-Actualisation?**

While Jung understood the overall intention for the individual as individuation (1978, p. 159), for Giddens, the objective of the individual was self-actualisation. Self-actualisation is defined as “the realisation or fulfilment of one’s talents and potentialities, especially considered as a drive or need present in everyone” (n.d., Oxford Dictionary). The psychologist, Abraham Maslow, identified self-actualisation as the highest need in the hierarchy of human needs, commonly described in the image of a pyramid (McLeod, 2007) (see Figure 3.1).
However, this theory has been widely criticised for its wide-ranging assumptions and simplistic categories. The concept that categories on the lower levels of the pyramid must be fulfilled to move up to the higher levels is fundamentally flawed. In practice, life is far more complicated: If someone is not healthy (e.g., a chronic condition or a terminal illness), can they still self-actualise? In my opinion, these health conditions might contribute to self-actualisation rather than making it impossible. Similarly, living in poverty or with hunger does not negate the ability to achieve the higher categories on the pyramid:

Through examining cultures in which large numbers of people live in poverty (such as India), it is clear that people are still capable of higher order needs such as love and belongingness. However, this should not occur, as according to Maslow, people who have difficulty achieving very basic physiological needs (such as food, shelter etc.) are not capable of meeting higher growth needs. (McLeod, 2007, p. 1)

Giddens defined self-actualisation differently to Maslow, describing it as “a balance of opportunity and risk. Letting go of the past through the various techniques of becoming free from oppressive emotional habits generates a multiplicity of opportunities for self-development” (1991, p. 78). I think this is a more nuanced and holistic view of self-actualisation. In *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991), Giddens continued to analyse reflexivity; this was also the central tenet to his theory of structuration. He examined the reflexivity of the
individual as part of the process of self-actualisation. Giddens perceived the construction of the self as a reflective process. Further, he argued that individuals in late-modern societies must undertake this process as a matter of necessity (1991). Giddens defined the phrase, “reflexive project of the self” (1991, p. 5) as “the process whereby self-identity is constituted by the reflexive ordering of self-narratives” (1991, p. 244). The self-narratives that Giddens described are the stories we tell ourselves about who we are. This self-narrative is evident in “Chapter 2: The Pool of Tears” when Alice questions who she is and talks to herself about all the people she is not (Carroll, 1865) (see Chapter 4).

The Hero’s Journey

The idea of the hero’s journey was first popularised by Campbell, who studied myths and legends in great depth, illuminating the similarities rather than the differences in diverse cultures through different periods. The hero’s journey or the monomyth is a template for a category of story that transcends time and culture and is based on the idea of a main character (the hero) going on an adventure (Campbell, 1993). Interestingly, while Campbell considered Jung to be important to his work, he did not regard him “as a final definitive theorist” (CampbellFoundation, 2018).

The hero’s journey can be mapped through the events and adventures of the story. The hero goes through an internal process, mirroring the external journey that provides learning about him or herself. On return, the hero brings back the acquired wisdom to share with others. Campbell (1993) described the hero’s journey in three acts, which can have multiple parts. Although now widely described as 12 steps, Campbell originally outlined 17 stages in three parts. Not all hero’s journey stories will contain all parts; in fact, most do not contain every step. The steps progress as follows:
Chapter I: Departure
1. The call to adventure
2. Refusal of the call
3. Supernatural aid
4. The crossing of the first threshold
5. The belly of the whale

Chapter II: Initiation
1. The road of trials
2. The meeting of the goddess
3. Women as temptress
4. Atonement with father
5. Apotheosis
6. The ultimate boon

Chapter III: Return
1. Refusal of return
2. The magic flight
3. Rescue from without
4. The master of two worlds
5. Freedom to live.

(Campbell, 1993, p. ix)

Table 1 applies each of these steps to the story of *Alice in Wonderland*. However, Campbell himself thought his theories did not apply to stories with a female protagonist. After researching the hero’s journey extensively as it applies to a female protagonist, Murdock (2020) referenced talking directly to Campbell about this:

My desire to understand how the women’s journey relates to the journey of the hero first led me to talk with Joseph Campbell in 1981.

I wanted to hear Campbell’s views. I was surprised when he responded that women don’t need to make the journey. “In the whole mythological tradition, the woman is there. All she has to do is realize that she is the place that people are trying to get to. When a woman realizes what her
wonderful character is, she’s not going to get messed up with being pseudo-male”.

This answer stunned me: I found it deeply unsatisfying. The women I know and work with do want to be there, the place that people are trying to get to. They do not want to embody Penelope, waiting patiently, endlessly weaving and unweaving. They do not want to be the handmaidens of the dominant male culture, giving service to the gods. They do not want to follow the advice of fundamentalist preachers and return home. (Murdock, 2020, p. 1)

This interview with Campbell surprised me, as it did Murdock—as a young child, I was attracted to the hero’s journey stories with female protagonists. I think that Campbell had either never read or chose to ignore Alice in Wonderland, Jane Eyre, Anne of Green Gables or any of the books written by the Bronte sisters. I proffer that Campbell’s basic structure fits all these novels, which were all predate Campbell. Many stories of contemporary children’s fiction also follow the hero’s journey; for example, McKinlay’s young adult novel, A Single Stone (2015). Similarly, The Hunger Games series by Collins, which has also been made into films, has a female protagonist, Katniss Everdeen. These stories, both historical and contemporary, portray female protagonists who truly go on hero’s journeys, both internally (a psychological journey of self-actualisation) and externally (a physical journey of adventure into a strange land, a dangerous place or a parallel world), where they are faced by the “road of trials” and return with new wisdom (Campbell, 1993, p. 30).

I was also surprised by Murdock’s subsequent adaptation of the hero’s journey for female protagonists, which showed very little resemblance to the original (2020). Significantly, she viewed the hero’s journey as a metaphor for psychoanalysis rather than for a literary work. For me, her analysis has very little relevance to a work of literature or of any hero’s journey stories with a female protagonist (see diagram). A more in-depth discussion of this matter is beyond the scope of this research.

In contrast to both Campbell (1993) and Murdock (2020), I would prefer the hero’s journey stories with female protagonists to be recognised for what they
are: hero's journeys. They are not a subsection or adaptation of the male journey but hero’s journey stories in their own right—as much a part of the genre as any male story, as is evidenced by the aforementioned examples.

Table 1. Campbell’s steps for a hero’s journey analysed through the story of Alice in Wonderland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campbell’s steps of the hero’s journey</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Relevant section of Alice in Wonderland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Departure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The call to adventure</td>
<td>An event occurs in the ordinary world that starts the hero on their journey</td>
<td>Alice sees the talking White Rabbit and follows it down the rabbit hole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusal of the call</td>
<td>Many heroes are initially reluctant to leave the relative safety of normal life</td>
<td>Not relevant to Alice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supernatural aid</td>
<td>Meeting a mentor: a person, animal or being with supernatural powers may provide a magical object (e.g., amulet or elixir)</td>
<td>Animal mentors: the White Rabbit and Caterpillar; the “eat me” and “drink me” elixirs; and the magical fan provided by the White Rabbit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The crossing of the first threshold</td>
<td>The liminal space between the ordinary world and the parallel world</td>
<td>Falling down the rabbit hole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The belly of the whale</td>
<td>Absolute separation inside a chamber (e.g., a whale or raven, a cave, or another space)</td>
<td>The hallway filled with doors where Alice lands at the bottom of the rabbit hole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The road of trials</td>
<td>The hero is tested with difficulties that must be overcome</td>
<td>Many examples: choosing a direction, wanting to reach the garden but leaving the key on the table, being the wrong size, falling into a pool of her own tears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The meeting of the goddess</td>
<td>Meeting of a supernatural woman with wisdom, perhaps with objects to help; female perfection</td>
<td>Alice asks advice of the Cheshire Cat, who appears magically like a God/Goddess and supplies wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women as temptress</td>
<td>The hero receives temptation that may cause him/her to abandon the quest</td>
<td>The Mad Hatter where she could stay at always six o’clock and have an endless tea party. (Here the gender roles are reversed from Campbells assumption.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell’s steps of the hero’s journey</td>
<td>My interpretation</td>
<td>Relevant section of <em>Alice in Wonderland</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atonement with father</td>
<td>A fearsome father/mother figure whom the hero must either reconcile with or overcome</td>
<td>Alice must overcome the Queen of Hearts in the courtroom by standing up to her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apotheosis</td>
<td>Having overcome many trials and difficulties the hero now has the confidence to overcome harder challenges</td>
<td>Alice’s confidence increases throughout the story until she is ready to face difficulty in the courtroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ultimate boon</td>
<td>The achievement of the quest (e.g., the slaying of the dragon)</td>
<td>Alice knows herself and stands up to authority in the courtroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusal of return</td>
<td>Initially, the hero refuses to return to the normality of life before the quest</td>
<td>Not relevant to Alice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The magic flight</td>
<td>Returns to the normal world with either wisdom, an elixir or supernatural abilities to share</td>
<td>Alice shares the wisdom of her story with her sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescue from without</td>
<td>The hero is brought back from the parallel world with assistance from the ordinary world</td>
<td>When Alice awakens, she is back in the normal world and has only the memory of Wonderland; she is pulled back rather than choosing to return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossing the return threshold</td>
<td>Returns to the normal world</td>
<td>Alice wakes up next to her sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of two worlds</td>
<td>Retains the freedom to pass back and forth between the two worlds</td>
<td>Not obviously relevant to Alice, although perhaps in her memory and the retelling of the tale to her sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom to live</td>
<td>A more well-rounded life that encompasses the wisdom gained on the quest</td>
<td>Not explicit in the Alice story; as a child, I sensed that she would now be taking this new confidence into the world with her</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted from Campbell, 1993, pp. ix–x.

Table 1 demonstrates that *Alice in Wonderland* easily fits most of the categories of the hero’s journey template, disproving Campbell’s assertion that female characters could not be part of the hero’s journey genre (Murdock, 2020).
Hero’s journey stories permeate contemporary society. To me, they help us to access ancient wisdom about ourselves in relation to the world. Modern stories fulfil the same function as ancient stories, that is, to make sense of yourself in the world—the processes of individuation (Jung, 1978, p. 159) and self-actualisation (Giddens, 1991, p. 78). Whether it is Alice in Wonderland, The Hobbit or Star Wars or The Hunger Games trilogies, these stories fulfil a function for humanity. George Lucas read The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Campbell, 1993) before he wrote Star Wars. Lucas set out to write a hero’s journey for a modern audience and set it in space. Star Wars is filled with the archetypal characters and scenarios outlined by Campbell and used by mythological stories for centuries:

No book has come close to influencing contemporary movies as pervasively as Joseph Campbell’s The Hero with a Thousand Faces, wrote film critic Michael Vantura. Filmmakers such as Steven Spielberg, George Miller and George Lucas all credited Campbell with inspiration for the mythic underpinnings in their stories. (Cousineau, 1990, p. 175)

Carroll was writing long before Lucas, Giddens, Campbell or Jung; however, the structure of a hero’s journey has existed for as long as stories have been told. Carroll wrote an adventure story, with a young girl as the protagonist intended to entertain the Liddell sisters (Gardner, 2015). He would have been influenced by his classical education, which involved ancient Greek and Roman stories. Moreover, Carroll (as a deacon) would have had a familiarity with Bible stories, if not an in-depth knowledge (Woolf, 2010). While there is no record of Carroll himself citing these influences, evidently these related elements would have been part of his education (Woolf, 2010).

This exegesis establishes Alice as a hero, a little girl who lives an ordinary but upper-middle-class life in English Victorian society. In many hero’s journeys, the protagonist is reluctant and is encouraged by a mentor to embark on the adventure. This is not so in the case of Alice: “A blunder, apparently the merest chance, reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood” (Campbell, 1993, p. 51).
For Alice, a chance encounter with the White Rabbit acts as a catalyst to “crossing the first threshold” into a parallel world—Wonderland (Campbell, 1993, p. 77). Alice’s jump down the rabbit hole and subsequent fall is a space of transition between the familiar knowing of what was and the uncertainty of what comes next. Alice, the hero, is moving from the known to the unknown, which is the first stage in the hero’s journey. In *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell described the place the hero travels to as:

> a forest, a kingdom underground, beneath the waves, or above the sky, a secret island, a lofty mountain top or a profound dream state; but it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds and impossible delight. (1993, p. 58)

Wonderland fits this description of a mythical place. Going underground is a common trope in mythology—both Hindu and Buddhist traditions have stories that describe Tibet linked by tunnels to an underground world, a kingdom called Agatha (Boa, 1994). In India, this underground paradise is known by its Sanskrit name, Shambala (Boa, 1994, p. 130). While Wonderland is not a paradise as such, it is a strange parallel world.

In Victorian times, there was considerable scientific speculation about what would happen if one were able to drop an object through the centre of the Earth. As a scholar and a mathematician, Carroll would have been aware of this scientific question and debate (Gardner, 1995). Following this, like the underground worlds of other allegorical stories, Wonderland is a place of parallel reality. In *The Way of Myth: Talking with Joseph Campbell*, Boa described going underground as a descent into one’s own psyche, to discover those parts of the self to which one has not been paying attention to (Boa, 1994, p. 130). This relates directly to Jung’s idea of individuation (Jung, 1978, p. 159). Similarly, Campbell asserted that “whatever your horizon, whatever the walls of your city, they have to explode for a larger life to come in” (as cited in Boa, 1994, p. 135).

There are direct similarities between Campbell’s ideas and those of Giddens; both models influence this research. What Campbell termed “crossing the
threshold” (1993, p. 97), Giddens called “making a fateful decision” (1991, p. 114). Campbell examined the commonality of the mythological story, informed by Jung, whereas Giddens investigated real examples of the choices taken in life. I contend that, conceptually, both explored the same theories from different angles—the former metaphorically and the latter in the real, external world. While Campbell considered this the first stage in the hero’s journey, Giddens examined the actuality of life’s events. For example, embarking on an adventure in a hero’s journey may equate, in real life, to changing one’s trajectory in life by moving location, taking a new job or beginning a course of study. One must be prepared to take risks to grow, to reach more of your potential and become self-actualised (Giddens, 1991, p. 78). Alice leaves the comfort of her Victorian life to follow the White Rabbit into Wonderland. From a Jungian perspective, she is journeying into her own unconscious (Boa, 1994, p. 130). When Alice is in Wonderland, she discovers many of the things that were important in her Victorian life are of little or no use. This causes her to reassess her values, questioning what she thought she knew:

For Jung, archetypes consist of universal, mythic characters that reside within the collective unconscious of people the world over. Archetypes represent fundamental human motifs of our experience as we evolved; consequentially, they evoke deep emotions. (Journal Psyche, n.d.)

Jung asserted that symbols have an important role in our society, particularly natural symbols that cross cultures and are deeply rooted in the ancient records of tribal societies; however, he held that we had lost our moral and spiritual identity through scientific rationalism (1978, p. 36). Jung argued that the modern tendency to see archetypal stories as superstitions, irrelevant to modern life, is mistaken. He did not use the term self-actualise; instead, he talked of becoming whole by integrating the conscious and the unconscious (Jung, 1978). Jung called this integration “individuation”—achieving a sense of the individual self, independent from the expectations and identities of others (Jung, 1978, p. 159). Over time, dreams make aspects of the unconscious mind conscious, allowing the aware individual to grow:
Thus, our dream life creates a meandering pattern in which individual stands become visible ... over a long period of time one can observe a sort of hidden regulating or directing tendency at work creating a slow, imperceptible process of psychic growth—the process of individuation. (Jung, 1978, p. 161)

Following Jung, it is plausible that Alice’s adventures in Wonderland take her through this process of individuation. The reader discovers at the end of Alice in Wonderland that the story is perhaps a dream. Jung described dreams as symbolic stories coming straight from the unconscious. He used Alice in Wonderland as an example of a reoccurring archetypal event in dreams—an individual changing size (1978). In Man and His Symbols, Jung used the Tenniel image of Alice when she is too large for the room (1978, p. 38) (see Figure 3.2).
Surrealist artists, including Dali and Magritte, interpreted *Alice in Wonderland* as a journey into the unconscious. During these journeys into the unconscious, many ideas are presented as metaphors; I expand on the use of animals as metaphors in the story in the section titled, “Animal Mentors and the Special Symbology of the White Rabbit”.

The philosophies of Campbell, Jung and Giddens are three different lenses through which I explore *Alice in Wonderland*. I argue that these philosophies,
although different in detail and terminology, have an overarching commonality (see Table 2).

Table 2. The commonality between Jung (1978), Campbell (1993) and Giddens (1991)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theorist</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Individuals goal</th>
<th>Method to obtain that goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jung</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Individuation: becoming whole by uniting (often unconscious) opposites</td>
<td>Understanding unconscious aspects of the self through symbology (e.g., dreams and mythological stories)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell</td>
<td>Literature: comparative mythology and religion</td>
<td>The hero returns from the quest with new wisdom to share</td>
<td>The hero’s journey: trials and adventures that help the hero understand themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giddens</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>Self-actualisation</td>
<td>To be a self-aware, autonomous agent, making decisions in the real world, realising one’s potential through taking risks (i.e., living the hero’s journey in one’s actual life)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 outlines the similarities between the theories of Jung, Campbell and Giddens. For Campbell, the goal was wisdom, and for Jung, the goal was individuation—uniting the conscious and the unconscious self to become whole. I argue that to become “individuated” (Jung, 1978, p. 159) is to know the self, and knowing yourself is an important precursor to wisdom. Giddens held that to become a self-aware, autonomous agent in the external world a person must understand unconscious aspects of the self, unite opposites in the psyche and have gained wisdom from the choices of the past. For me, these are interrelated qualities—one cannot fully occur without the other two. I explore the relationship between the internal and external self in my artwork, for example, in the drypoint image, *Internal* (see Figure 4.1).
Figure 4.1. *Internal (with William Morris Wallpaper)*, by Shana James, 2016b, Heathcote Museum & Gallery, Perth, Australia.
Animal Mentors and Symbology of the White Rabbit

In mythology, the hero is often helped by animals or supernatural beings. For Alice, the White Rabbit, Cheshire Cat, Mouse, Dodo and Mock Turtle (among others) are mentors that elicit a different type of wisdom, making her question and reassess her ideas and helping her with the challenges of her adventure (Carroll, 2004). Throughout the book, when Alice is feeling lost, the White Rabbit appears and, although he is not very engaging or friendly, Alice seems comforted by his familiarity. It is the White Rabbit whom Alice follows to reach Wonderland; she is intrigued by him. Moreover, because it is the White Rabbit who helps her into Wonderland, presumably he can help her out again. This may be why Alice always seems relieved to see the White Rabbit because he is a point of certainty in the nonsensical world of Wonderland.

When I made the linocuts for my solo exhibition, Understanding Alice, at the Firestation Print Studio in Armadale, Australia (James, 2015d), I saw the White Rabbit as a guide and a mentor for Alice. He was the creature who led her on this journey of self-discovery, and he operates in Wonderland in a kind of official capacity. The White Rabbit always knows his place and where he should be. Firstly, he knows how to reach Wonderland, he has a watch, and he knows he is late. From this, we can discern that time, appointments and structure are important concepts to the White Rabbit.

Conversely, Alice does not have to be anywhere at any particular time in Wonderland. Alice’s next contact with the White Rabbit is after growing large and crying a pool of tears. She sees him in a hurry again and muttering to himself, “The Duchess! Won’t she be savage if I keep her waiting” (Carroll, 2004, p. 20); from this, we know that the White Rabbit has an appointment with the Duchess, so he is well connected. When Alice tries to talk to him, he runs away, leaving the fan. When Alice fans herself, she grows smaller again. In this scene, the White Rabbit provides Alice with something she needs, reinforcing that he is an animal mentor and, as Campbell asserted, a common trope in a hero’s journey.
In contrast to Alice who is always changing sizes, wondering which direction to take and feeling surprised and confused by the different characters she meets, the White Rabbit has a strong sense of where he is going, where he should be and how to get there.

In “Chapter 4: The Rabbit Send in a Little Bill”, the White Rabbit mistakes Alice for a housemaid, calling her Mary Anne and is quite demanding and curt in his tone; however, he has a timid character elsewhere in the book (Gardner, 2015). Again, Carroll was commenting on the social structures of society—when the White Rabbit thinks Alice is his maid, he relates to her differently. This demonstrates that the White Rabbit is important enough to give orders to a maid. He also uses slightly patronising, upper-class language when speaking to a gardener: “Digging for apples indeed!” (Carroll, 2004, p. 40).

Later, Alice encounters the White Rabbit on the way to the croquet game. He advises her to be quiet because the Duchess is going to be executed. The White Rabbit has inside information, which he shares with Alice so that she does not get herself into trouble with the Queen; he is helping her to navigate Wonderland. In the final chapter, the White Rabbit smooths things over between Alice and the King in the courtroom, again helping Alice, although he is under no obligation to do so. The White Rabbit operates in an official capacity in the courtroom. He is an important character in Wonderland, both in his societal standing and his capacity to give Alice clues. He is not friends with Alice—in a way, he is too important for that—but he does help Alice in what seems to be an incidental way. The narrative unfolds like a dream, with some chapters being unrelated to what has gone before in the story.

Although other animals appear in only one chapter, the White Rabbit is the only animal that makes many appearances. His character has a special significance in my artwork. In my linocuts for the exhibition, Understanding Alice (James, 2015d), I equated the White Rabbit with Alice’s inner knowing: the “self” that she is on a quest to understand. Not only does the White Rabbit guide her to
Wonderland, but, in my series of artworks, he becomes a guide, a narrator and a provocateur. In *Desire Crosses the Line* (see Figure 3.3), Alice tries to trap the White Rabbit, not realising he is already with her. Again, this does not occur in the story but is a visual narrative that reworks the symbols from the text. In a catalogue essay about my linocuts in the *Understanding Alice* exhibition (James, 2015d), Spencer wrote: “Not the anxious, late for something, need to be elsewhere, too busy to talk White Rabbit—but the one who is where he needs to be for the story to continue along; for growth to unfold” (Spencer, 2015, p. 2). This is how significant the White Rabbit is for my work, and this is the way I chose to interpret the White Rabbit in this particular series of works.

![Figure 3.3. Desire Crosses the Line, by Shana James, 2015c, Collection of Monash University, Firestation Print Studio, Armadale, Australia.](image)

**Summary**

In my opinion, the enduring popularity of *Alice in Wonderland* is due to its hero’s journey structure and the archetypal symbols that make the story relevant to
people across time and culture. It is these traits that I use symbolically to re-imagine the story. I have analysed the text through the theories of Jung (1979), Campbell (1993) and Giddens (1991) and discovered the underlying commonality between each approach. During this research, I was surprised to uncover Campbell’s disregard for the hero’s journey with a female protagonist. Chapter 3 shows how *Alice in Wonderland* fits Campbell’s structure, demonstrating that hero’s journey stories are just as relevant with a female protagonist as they are with a male one.
Chapter 4. A Close Reading of Alice in Wonderland

Introduction

I have used Alice in Wonderland as a resource for my artwork. It is a story full of visual metaphors and symbols, which I have re-imagined in relation to my own ideas and experiences. Chapter 4 examines the story chronologically, discussing the elements that relate to the symbolic ideas of Campbell (1993), Jung (1979) and Giddens (1991) to understand the story deeply. Consequently, an expansive field of ideas emerges that provide insights into the creation of images and artwork.

“Chapter 1: Down the Rabbit Hole”

Chapter 3 discusses Alice’s jump as the first stage in the hero’s journey, what Campbell calls “crossing the first threshold” (1993, p. 71). Giddens used the term “fateful moments” (1991, p. 109) to describe those moments in which choices can change the trajectory of a life. In the original text, Alice chooses to jump; she does not fall by accident.

Contemporary society is not inherently riskier than in previous times. For example, in the developed world, we are much less likely to die of the plague or in childbirth (Giddens, 1991). We have safe drinking water, central heating and cooling. We are less likely to freeze, starve or die of thirst. However, we face many decisions that are not clear-cut and, routinely, experts disagree on the best course of action to follow (Giddens, 1991). Knowledge is no longer certain. In a pluralistic society, the milieux that we are exposed to are more diverse (Giddens, 1991). Additionally, we make these choices amidst a climate of enormous risks that we have no control over, and globalisation has ensured that these are risks.
we cannot avoid; for example, an ecological crisis or nuclear war (Giddens, 1991 p. 22). In the current time (as historically) we can add disease pandemics to the list of larger risks that are beyond our control. Fateful moments are decisions that threaten our ontological security, as Giddens asserted:

They are moments when the individual must launch out into something new, knowing that a decision made or a specific course of action followed, has an irreversible quality, or at least that it will be difficult thereafter to revert to the old paths. (1991, p. 114)

Examples of fateful decisions include getting married or divorced, leaving a job or embarking on a course of study (Giddens, 1991). These are not inherently risky choices, but the consequences of getting things wrong can be significant (Giddens, 1991).

I have made a series of works exploring Alice’s fall as a “fateful moment” (Giddens, 1991, p. 114), which I exhibited in a solo exhibition, Curiouser and Curiouser, at the Stala Contemporary Gallery in Perth, 2019, and in a group exhibition, Nexus, in Gallery 25 at ECU. In this series of works, I examine aspects of the liminal space of Alice falling as a place of transition between the familiar knowing of what was and the uncertainty of what comes next.

After the fall, Alice lands softly, and, arriving in Wonderland, she moves into the initiation phase of the journey, which Campbell called “the road of trials” (2004, p. 89) (see Table 2). The hero is confronted with tests and ordeals. Alice’s first challenge is a hallway of locked doors; these are obvious archetypal symbols. The term archetype is a Jungian term derived from “archaic remnants” and relates to what he called “primordial images” that reoccur across cultures (Jung, 1978, p. 57). Alice then discovers a golden key on the table; it is too small for most of the doors, but behind a curtain, she finds a tiny door that the key fits. The door opens to a beautiful garden. Alice “longed to get out of that dark hall and wander among those bright flowers and those cool fountains but she could not get her head through the doorway” (Carroll, 2004, p. 15). After drinking from a small bottle with the label, “drink me” (Carroll, 2004, p. 16), she shrinks. Now she is
the right size to fit through the door and enter the garden. However, she has left the key on the glass table and, although she can see it clearly, she is far too small to retrieve it. The right size in one context is the wrong size in another.

Carroll (2004) demonstrated that there is no definitive right size, and Alice must deal with the uncertainty of this. As a self-reflexive agent, Alice can reassess her identity in response to her environment. The key is also an archetypal symbol. The idea of a key, a device to unlock something inaccessible, is so prevalent that the symbology has become part of our everyday lexicon—the key to understanding an idea. The importance of the key is shown in its golden colour—it is the only way to reach that beautiful garden.

The garden is another archetypal symbol recurring in many different cultures, notably the Garden of Eden in Christianity, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, and the Garden of Hesperides in Greek mythology. A garden is beautiful and natural but not wild. Not the wild and potentially dangerous nature of the forest, the bush or the jungle; but “safe” nature—controlled, planted and organised. A century before Alice in Wonderland was written, a British landscape designer, Brown, proposed the ideal garden (Symes, 2017). Brown’s goal was to create a naturalistic feel within the garden, departing from the very formal gardens of Europe, such as the gardens in the Palace of Versailles (Symes, 2017). Natural-looking but not wild—retaining safety and control. Significantly, this is where Alice longs to be because Wonderland is anything but safe and controlled. The garden that Alice longs to reach is a formal English garden, manicured with neat grass, sculpted trees and a cool fountain. It is secure, seemingly predictable and beautiful. It is a place to be desired, and Alice is longing to be there. At Christchurch Oxford, where Carroll worked, there is a great deal of beautiful, manicured gardens. There was, and still is, an extremely private Deanery Garden, which is not open to the students or public. As the daughter of the Dean, Alice Liddell would have been allowed into this private garden (Symes, 2017, p. 48). Therefore, while Alice would have frequented the Garden, Carroll would
have had to be invited to enter this part of the grounds—for Carroll, it was an unattainable garden.

I have used the tropical gardens of Ubud, Bali, as the backdrop for Alice. This is a place I have visited annually, since 2013, to teach a linocut workshop. To me, it is exotic and different from the gardens I have known culturally. It did not concern me that these gardens were not true to the text of *Alice in Wonderland*. It was the otherness of the gardens that interested me, the exotic nature of it. When I heard the story as a child, the Victorian English garden was equally as exotic and unattainable to me. As a Western Australian and having spent my formative years in the Mediterranean climate of Perth, I found the tropical gardens of Ubud so separate and different to my experience that they reminded me of Alice trying to reach the unattainable English garden. For me, while I continue to live in Perth, a tropical garden will always be impossible. From the perspective of Campbell (1993), Alice’s first trial or quest is the difficulty of wanting to reach a beautiful garden but being the wrong size. In my work, I see this as a metaphor for the human condition—we desire things that are not available to us. For this reason, when I made my artwork for *Seven Printmakers Respond to Place* (Braddock, 2016d), I put the garden in a doorway inside Alice’s torso (see Figure 4.1).

By putting the doorway and garden inside Alice’s body, I shift the external events of the hero’s journey (Campbell, 1993) to the internal self (Jung, 1978). No matter what size Alice is, the garden is already there. *Internal* responds to our propensity in the Western world to look continually for external validation and answers in the physical world around us instead of looking at the internal self of Jung (1979). In my work, Alice is no longer stuck in the circumstances of her external world, the garden inside offering a pathway to another existence, an internal garden, part of what Jung (1978) called the unconscious self.

When Alice is the wrong size to fit into the garden, her problem is solved with another archetypal symbol. In this case, a magical elixir in the form of a bottle
marked “drink me” (Carroll, 2004, p. 16). In my final exhibition, I will create an installation of replica antique bottles with “drink me” labels and brightly coloured liquid inside. This has become a symbol of possibility for me, although, like Alice, we are not aware of what will happen when the liquid is consumed. In many mythological stories, the elixir can provide immortality or be an instrument of alchemy; it often enables some form of transition (Campbell, 1993). In Alice’s case, it simply appears magically, providing a way to create a physical transformation; that is, changing size. When she drinks the magical liquid, she shrinks, enabling her to enter the doorway, but she leaves the golden key on the table and is too small to retrieve it.

In my opinion this conundrum is something readers, both Victorian and contemporary, easily relate to because it is part of the human condition. It is these types of universally understood human dilemmas that enable the text to transcend the period in which it was written, having allegorical significance. This is paradoxical—for Alice, both situations are unsatisfactory. This predates Heller’s (1961) novel, Catch 22, by almost a century. The gravity of the situation is made even more weighty when Alice realises that she is complicit in creating this situation. Why had she not picked up the key before drinking the elixir? Alice was not to know that the elixir would make her shrink, yet it is still infuriating to her. This metaphor mirrors many situations in life, where one can see the mistake in retrospect. Had Carroll not chosen a glass table, Alice would not have been able to look up and see it from below. The certainty of her mistake is made concrete because she can see the key through the glass table—like the garden, visible yet unattainable, creating a poignant moment for the reader.

In my first exhibition of Alice works, Understanding Alice (James, 2015d), I created a work where I was unconsciously influenced by the Tenniel illustrations, despite not knowing the Tenniel illustrations as a child (see Figures 4.2 and 4.3). This demonstrates how deeply Carroll’s story and the Tenniel illustrations have infiltrated the contemporary imagination. Despite the significant differences in the two images, I had unconsciously quoted Tenniel.
Initially, the discovery of the similarities concerned me; however, once I became aware of the field of artworks made from the story, I realised my work was part of a much larger genre. It became a visual quotation, with my use of tropical gardens in the background of my linocuts and my modernised Alice, in a similar posture. In my linocut, Alice and the flamingo observe each other eye to eye on the same level; they view each other literally, eye to eye. I gave the flamingo a more human-looking eye to accentuate the evenness of the relationship, whereas Tenniel accentuated the struggle with the angry-looking flamingo.

![Image of Alice and the flamingo](image_url)

Figure 4.2. *Alice Had a Great Deal of Difficulty Managing Her Flamingo*, by Shana James, 2015 Collection of Monash University.
The scene where Alice leaves the key on the table is the first time that she changes size in the story. She changes sizes 12 times in total. The events that occur in the “Chapter 1: Down the Rabbit Hole” relate directly to Campbell’s “road of trials” (2004, p. 89), where “surprising barriers are passed again and again” (2004, p. 100). Alice has begun her quest.

“Chapter 2: The Pool of Tears”

In “Chapter 2: The Pool of Tears”, Alice continues to face difficulties (Carroll, 2004). As Alice changes size and feels uncomfortable with the changes, she talks to herself in the narrative form to re-centre; this relates directly to Giddens. Giddens asserted that the individual creates self-identity through the internal biography that they tell themselves (1991). Rather than identity being created by behaviour and interaction with others (as important as these things are) Giddens contended that the self is created by the individual’s “capacity [to] keep a
particular narrative going” (1991, p. 54). Like all narratives, this internal biography requires continual “creative input as a matter of course” (1991, p. 76). Giddens suggested that, while all individuals have multiple biographies, the one that is privileged is the one that is maintained by the individual over time (1991). One becomes the person that they repeatedly tell themselves “they are” (1991, p. 54).

In this self-talk, Alice defines herself by the other; by who she is not, rather than who she is. She begins with physical appearance, saying, “I am sure I am not Ada for her hair goes in such long ringlets and mine doesn’t go in ringlets at all” (Carroll, 2004, p. 22). Then, in terms of what she knows, “I’m sure I can’t be Mabel, for I know all sorts of things, and she, oh knows such a very little!” (Carroll, 2015, p. 26). She then tries to stabilise herself by recalling all the things she knows but realises she is getting the facts wrong. Is she still Alice if she does not know the things she used to? Feeling unsettled by this, she then tries reciting a poem, defining herself by her education.

Learning poetry by heart was commonplace in Victorian education. However, instead of reciting the correct words, Alice recites a parody of the original. The poem that begins, “How doth the little crocodile” (Carroll, 2004, p. 22), is a parody of the poem, “Against Idleness and Mischief” (1715) (cited in Gardner 2015, p. 27). The original poem praises the hard work and skill of the busy bee (Gardner, 2015). Conversely, the parody uses the crocodile as the example, whose motivations are perhaps not what the original writer intended. Instead of remembering the moralistic tale well known by Victorian children, Alice recites a poem of self-interest and deceit—a caricature of the original (Gardner, 2015). When she gets all these things wrong, she wonders if she is “Mabel after all” (Carroll, 2015, p. 26).

Throughout the book, Carroll examined the way context can change a situation, showing complex scenarios where there is no clear right or wrong. While the traditions of earlier societies have, to some extent, been replaced by expert
opinion in contemporary society, choices in post-traditional societies must be made without certainty (as in Wonderland). As Giddens stated, “there are relatively few situations where a decision as to what to do becomes clear as a result of experts’ advice” (1991, p. 114).

Alice then falls into what she thinks is the sea but realises is the pool of tears she cried when she was large (during “Chapter 1”). This relates to Giddens’s theory of structuration, where he investigated the structures of society and the individuals within that society, which he called agents (1984, p. xxii). Giddens bridged the gap between theorists who took a macro view, examining large systems like capitalism and patriarchy, and sociologists who looked at the micro, ordinary people going about their daily lives (Giddens, 1984). He demonstrated that, if people change their everyday practices and behaviours over time, whole systems can change (Giddens, 1984). Structures are the rules and resources that form the properties of social systems. Agents are the individuals that act within those structures (Giddens, 1984). The structures affect the agents, but over time the agents can also affect structures. This is a reflexive relationship where each affects the other, and neither has primacy. Giddens acknowledged that different groups or individuals have different levels of power; in fact, he recognised that modernity “produces difference, exclusion and marginalisation” (1991, p. 6). However, he argued that groups with less power have some choices and can still affect change over time. The interrelatedness of agents and structures in this theory provided a foundation for Giddens’s subsequent work, Modernity and Self-Identity (1991).

Wonderland changes Alice, but Alice also changes Wonderland—agents can also affect structures (Giddens, 1984). When Alice is very large, she cries and creates a pool of tears (Carroll, 2011). Later, when she is smaller, she falls into the pool along with many other creatures (Carroll, 2011). Like Giddens, Carroll examined the macro and the micro; large Alice cries and small Alice talks to a mouse while swimming in the pool of tears. Again, Alice must reassess her assumptions as she begins to see things from the mouse’s perspective. When she becomes small,
she reflexively responds to the world differently. In the pool, she meets some other animals, besides the mouse, who have all fallen into the pool. Each chapter presents Alice with more difficulties in her quest. Following Campbell’s formula, falling into a pool of tears represents a step along the “road of trials” (Campbell, 1993, p. 97): “Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials” (Campbell, 1993, p. 97). Changing size and then falling into a pool of tears is very much akin to the dream landscape that Campbell (1993) discussed.

Alice’s autonomy and decision-making processes are evident to the reader because we are privy to her thinking process, for example, “‘Would it be any use now’, thought Alice, ‘to speak to this mouse?’” (Carroll, 2004, p. 25). Several times she forgets herself and mentions her cat and, in turn, the mouse responds to her reflexively, “bristling all over, and [Alice] felt certain it must be really offended” (Carroll, 2004, p. 26). “In Alice’s world, … Dinah [the cat] is a symbol of friendly cuddliness, but in Wonderland, she is a monster” (Kincaid, 1973, p. 97). Once again, Alice, whose intention is to be polite and respectful, discovers the importance of context when she sees her cuddly cat from the mouse’s perspective. Alice is navigating these difficulties to be self-actualised. We all answer the questions, “what to do? how to act? and who to be? [on] some level or another … either discursively or with day-to-day social behaviour” (Giddens, 1991, p. 70). Through the lens of Campbell (1993), Alice is on the hero’s journey to bring the wisdom she gains from these trials. A Jungian analysis would see a body of water (the pool of tears) as an archetypal symbol for the unconscious mind. Perhaps all the creatures are different aspects of the self, which Alice must reconcile to achieve individuation (Jung, 1978).

“Chapter 3: The Caucus Race and a Long Tale”

In her interaction with the animals she meets in the pool of tears, Alice is often perplexed by the nonsensical nature of the rules that they espouse. When the
animals have a caucus race to dry off (Carroll, 2004, p. 28), Carroll was giving a parody of the rules of government and the use of committees to make decisions (Gardner, 2015). As Gardner asserted, “Carroll may have intended his caucus race to symbolise the fact that committee members generally do a great deal of running in circles getting nowhere” (2015, p. 36). This is a race unlike any that Alice has ever known, with no starting or finishing line: the animals “began running when they liked and left off when they liked, so it was not easy to know when the race was over” (Carroll, 2004, p. 30). Alice’s hero’s journey is one to understand the absurdity of the bureaucracy and complicated rules of Victorian life (or contemporary society); all games and societies have rules, and in this case, the object of the game is to work out the rules. I propose that Alice must understand the structure of the society she lives in so that she can be discerning in her decision-making and transcend the obstacles she encounters. In relation to Campbell’s (1993) proposition of the hero’s journey, Alice must “surpass surprising barriers again and again” (Campbell, 1993, p. 100).

“Chapter 4: The Rabbit Sends in a Little Bill”

When Alice is once again too large and trapped in a house, unable to free herself, she is saved once more by the equivalent of a magical elixir. Campbell termed this a “supernatural aid” (1993, p. 69), in this case, in the form of pebbles that gradually morph into little cakes. Eating them once again changes Alice’s size. I assert that this is another instance of Campbell’s “road of trials” (1988, p. 97). I assert the cakes are the magical substances that save her from being trapped because they make her small again.

“Chapter 5: Advice from a Caterpillar”

From my perspective, nowhere in the story is Alice’s “reflexive project of the self” (Giddens, 1991, p. 5) more obvious than when the Caterpillar asks her, “Who are you?” (Carroll, 2015, p. 57). Alice must reply that she does not know. When she
complains that, “Being so many sizes in one day is very confusing”, the Caterpillar contradicts her, saying, “It isn’t” (Carroll, 2015, p. 58). Carroll’s choice of the Caterpillar for this conversation—the creature most famous for its metamorphosis—makes the arguments about the difficulties of change even more poignant; as Giddens stated that “all such transitions involve loss (as well as usually potential gain)” (1991, p. 79). Individuals must be prepared to take risks associated with change if they are going to realise more of their potential.

In Jungian terms, the caterpillar is an archetypal symbol for change because its life cycle is well known across different cultures. Additionally, the Caterpillar is smoking a hookah, which is a device for smoking tobacco, cannabis or opium. While we do not know what the Caterpillar has in his hookah, we know he “addressed her in a languid, sleepy voice” (Carroll, 2004, p. 46).

Contemporary subcultures have speculated that Carroll was referring to the use of drugs as a method for knowing the self (Parker, 2010). However, this will remain speculation because there is no definitive historical information relating to this (see Chapter 1). After speaking with the Caterpillar, Alice is more perplexed than ever. Alice’s quest on this hero’s journey is not to be given the answer, but to find her own answer about who she is; the Caterpillar helps her understand this. The Caterpillar tells Alice that one side of the mushroom (possibly a hallucinogen) will make her grow taller and the other, shorter. Alarmingly, Alice’s neck grows and grows until her head is above the trees, showing that not all magical changes are reassuring and that all action involves risk. Her feeling of alarm passes when she is “delighted to find that her neck would bend about easily in any direction, like a serpent” (Carroll, 2004, p. 53).

Kincaid commented on this part of the story in his essay, which focused on Alice as an outsider:

This simile, like other Wonderland similes, is more than ornamental; it suggests a critical and subversive perspective on Alice. Although this perspective is generally submerged, it is present in both of Lewis Carroll’s great studies of the joys and dangers of human innocence. (1973, p. 92)
I agree with Kincaid that the similes in Wonderland are not purely decorative—they are important aspects of a metaphorical work of literature.

We know from Carroll’s letters that he was critical of certain aspects of Victorian society and that he was friends with artists and actors, whom he often met in secret because it was considered improper for someone in his position at Oxford (see Chapter 1) (Woolf, 2010). In “Chapter 5: Advice from a Caterpillar”, Carroll showed how difficult it is for Alice to navigate Wonderland and its nonsensical nature. There is evidence to show that Carroll found some of the rules of Victorian society equally nonsensical (Gardner, 2015).

“Chapter 6: Pig and Pepper”

“Chapter 6: Pig and Pepper” further highlights Alice’s autonomy on this quest: “For a minute or two she stood looking at the house and wondering what to do next” (Carroll, 2004, p. 56). Alice decides she should go in; however, getting in presents another difficulty. This time she is the correct size, but there is so much noise going on, that no one can hear her knock. Initially, Alice wishes to rely on advice from the frog footman and obey the rules of society rather than making her own decision, but he is of no help at all. Eventually, Alice says, “It’s no use talking to him, he is perfectly idiotic!” (Carroll, 2004, p. 58), dropping the social mores in favour of trusting her own intuition and intelligence. As the story develops and Alice learns more lessons on “the road of trials” (Campbell, 1968, p. 97), she learns increasingly to trust herself. This is what Campbell termed “apatheosis” (1968, p. 149), meaning Alice is gaining confidence in her quest.

This is the chapter where Alice is given a baby to hold that morphs into a pig. People turning into animals is a trope in mythology known as shapeshifting; the shapeshifter is an archetypal character (Campbell, 1968). As a scholar, Carroll would have likely been aware of this in Greek and classical Roman literature. Further, children were changed into animals as punishment in other classical myths. From Carroll’s writings, he was most interested in the element of
surprise. After the success of his book, Carroll created his own *Alice in Wonderland* merchandise, one of which was a postage stamp case (a small box for keeping stamps in). On the cover was the Tenniel illustration of Alice holding the baby, on the inside was Alice holding the pig (Gardner, 2015, p. 78). In the promotions for the postage stamp case, Carroll exclaimed, “If that doesn’t surprise you, why I suppose you wouldn’t be surprised if your own mother-in-law suddenly turned into a Gyroscope!” (Gardner, 2015, p. 78). Again, we do not know what Carroll intended here, but he was likely quoting:

A famous prank played on James I by the Countess of Buckingham. She arranged for his majesty to witness a baptism of what he thought was an infant in arms but was actually a pig, an animal that James I particularly loathed. (Gardner, 2015, p. 78)

Contemporary Victorian audiences may have understood this reference (Gardner, 2015, p. 78).

When Alice puts the pig down and “felt quite relieved to see it trot away quietly into the wood” (Carroll, 2011, p. 63), she looks up and sees the Cheshire Cat, who has appeared magically. I liken this to Campbell's step on the hero’s journey, “the meeting with the goddess” (Campbell, 1993, p. 109). The Cheshire Cat seems supernatural, being able to appear at will, and offers some of the most popularly quoted wisdom in the book:

> “Will you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”
> “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to”, said the Cat
> “I don’t much care where”, said Alice.
> “Then it doesn’t matter which way you go”, said the Cat. (Carroll, 2004, p. 64)

Carroll demonstrated the futility of deferring questions about self-actualisation and the direction one’s life should take to others. Again, this relates to Giddens questions, “what to do? how to act? and who to be?” (1991, p. 70), which are focal questions for people living in contemporary society (1991), just as they were for Victorians. Like Wonderland, society no longer provides a role based on our
family of origin; we have no choice but to construct our own identity. It is essential for one to have a direction to complete the journey and return to the ordinary world renewed and able to share the wisdom of their quest (Campbell, 1993, p. 238). If one has no overarching goal to achieve, as the Cheshire Cat says, “It doesn’t matter which way you go” (Carroll, 2004, p. 64). However, to Alice, it really does matter; hence, my framing of Alice as having agency. Like the Caterpillar, the Cheshire Cat enables Alice to become aware of this.

“Chapter 7: The Mad Tea Party”

“Chapter 7: The Mad Tea Party” was not in the original story handwritten for Alice Liddell but was added later by Carroll for the published book (Gardner, 2015). It (and other chapters in the story) is completely self-contained and similar to a scene from a dream; it bears very little resemblance to the other parts of the story. The Mad Hatter fulfils the role of Campbell’s “woman as the temptress”, tempting the hero to stop and stay rather than continue on the quest.

“Chapter 7” also examines time. Carroll was interested in time (as mentioned in Chapter 1 of this exegesis) (Woolf, 2010), and it is clear that there is no time at the tea party because “it’s always six o’clock now” (Carroll, 2004, p. 73). Therefore, it is implied that Alice could stay at this perpetual tea party. In “Chapter 7”, time has an elastic quality, as it does in dreams, and the nonsensical nature of the characters further contributes to the dreamlike experience. Jung stated:

A dream is quite unlike a story told by the conscious mind … Images that seem contradictory and ridiculous crowd in on the dreamer and the normal sense of time is lost, and commonplace things can assume a fascinating or threatening aspect. (1978, p. 27)

“Chapter 7” is quintessentially Carroll, with the juxtaposition of nonsense and order. Alice must choose between being polite and adhering to the social mores of a Victorian tea party and being true to herself by speaking openly and honestly.
about what she regards as true (Kincaid, 1973). In this instance, as in most of Wonderland, the reader identifies with Alice as an outsider. Again, Alice must choose how to respond in this unusual scenario. At the risk of offending her newly found friends, Alice chooses to be honest:

Indeed, the most interesting complexity attending Alice’s role is that she is often seen, as she is here, as an invader disrupting a warm and happy world. It is a world connected by a series of episodes, running through both books, episodes which when taken together establish an alternate image by which we measure the limits of Alice’s world—and of our own. (Kincaid, 1973, p. 97)

Kincaid (1973) posited Alice as an invader rather than just an outsider. Through “Chapter 7”, we not only measure the limits of Alice’s world but also of our own. It is the most frequently illustrated chapter from the story, and teapots and teacups have become visual symbols of Alice in Wonderland, even though this is the only chapter in which they occur. I have used the teapot and teacup in my artwork because these elements, like the girl in the iconic blue dress, have become synonymous with the story. I have also used a levitating teapot (see Figures 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6).
Figure 4.4. *What Alice Allows*, by Shana James, 2015c, Collection of Monash University, Firestation Print Studio, Armadale, Australia.

Figure 4.5. *What Alice Denies*, by Shana James, 2015f, Collection of Monash University, Firestation Print Studio, Armadale, Australia.
Figure 4.6. *Allow (with William Morris Wallpaper)* by Shana James, 2015b, Collection of Monash University, Firestation Print Studio, Armadale, Australia.
Levitating teapots do not occur at all in the story. However, to me, they also suggest a dreamlike quality, an absurdity with a kind of magical abundance. I am not interested in a literal illustration of the text but in the symbols that convey my meaning of self-actualisation. The tea party is symbolic of English Victorian society with its rules and conventions; however, the characters here are the antithesis of this. Alice is perplexed by the nonsensical nature of what they say, the riddle without an answer and the questioning tone of the Mad Hatter and the Dormouse. These are answers she does not have. Once again, Alice is forced to reassess her ideas and question her beliefs. The nonsensical nature of the story is illustrated when the Dormouse tells a story:

“They lived on treacle”, said the Dormouse after thinking a minute or two.

“They couldn’t have done that, you know”, Alice gently remarked; “they’d have been ill”.

“So they were”, said the Dormouse, “very ill”. Alice tried to fancy to herself what such an extraordinary way of living would be like, but it puzzled her too much, so she went on: “But why did they live at the bottom of a well?”

“Take some more tea”, the March Hare said to Alice very earnestly.

“I’ve had nothing yet so how can I take more?”

“You mean you can’t take less”, said the Hatter: “it’s very easy to take more than nothing”. (Carroll, 2004, p. 74)

Throughout the story, but specifically in “Chapter 7”, Alice refuses to go along with the nonsensical rules, asserting her opinion even at the risk of disrupting Wonderland and offending its characters, despite her obvious manners and politeness. Alice is on a hero’s journey, but she does not have to slay a dragon—her battle is with Victorian society, dealing with nonsense and her own internal battle to do the right thing:

But in rejecting this disorder, Alice is rejecting not only the terrifying underside of human consciousness, but the liberating imagination as well, not only the ironic world of Kafka, [but] the exuberant and expansive world of Don Quixote. For flexibility, surprise and disorder are the root of comedy as well as terror and Wonderland shows not only rootless hostility but free and uncompetitive joy. (Kincaid, 1973, p. 92)
“Chapter 7” completely inverts ideas of order, manners and decorum. When Alice introduces linear concepts, the characters consider her to be the strange one. This is the next step for Alice along Campbell’s “road of trials” (Campbell, 1993, p. 97).

“Chapter 8: The Queen’s Croquet Ground”

“Chapter 8: The Queen’s Croquet Ground” begins with gardeners (who are playing cards) painting white roses red (Carroll, 2004). The symbolism in this part of the story interests me; the concept of painting flowers while still planted in the ground intrigued me as a child. As an adult, and within the context of this research, I see it as a compelling symbol about change. The gardeners are worried that the Queen of Hearts will be angry at them because they have accidentally planted white roses when the Queen of Hearts has expressly asked for red roses. If the Queen finds out, they fear she will cut their heads off. In Wonderland, fixing a mistake is as easy as painting white roses red. In our physical world, it is not always that easy. This part of the story is also about fear, lack of transparency and whitewashing (or in this case red-washing) over mistakes; it is about wanting to change something but changing the surface instead of the substance. Planting the wrong rosebush is an easy mistake to make because generally, they are not in flower when planted. Similarly, we often choose things in life that we would perhaps not choose, given the benefit of hindsight. For my culminating Master of Arts by Research exhibition, Down the Rabbit Hole, I envisage artwork concerning these ideas, where a linocut pattern of white roses is repeated with the colour gradually changing to red.

When the Queen of Hearts arrives, the gardeners (the playing cards) throw themselves on the ground “flat upon their faces” (Carroll, 2004, p. 79) so that the Queen cannot identify them because all playing cards have the same pattern on their backs. In “Chapter 8”, the Queen is particularly angry: “The Queen turned crimson with fury, and, after glaring at her for a moment, like a wild beast, screamed ‘Off with her head!’ ”, which she frequently shouts throughout the story.
Although the Queen is a fearsome character, Alice stands up to her with a decisiveness and courage much stronger than she exhibits in previous chapters (such as during the caucus race or when speaking to the Caterpillar). Alice is gaining wisdom and courage from her adventures (Campbell, 1993).

After being incredibly angry at Alice, the Queen of Hearts invites Alice to play croquet. The nonsensical and dreamlike nature of the story continues, with a flamingo used as a mallet in the game. Like the caucus race earlier, the game is chaotic, with players playing at once instead of taking turns, “quarrelling all the while and fighting for hedgehogs” (Carroll, 2004, p. 84). Without an external structure, Alice must work out her own way through the game. These are like the decisions we all make in contemporary society; as outlined by Giddens (1991), we must make these choices amidst a climate of large risks that we have no control over. For Alice, it is having her head chopped off. For us, it could be an ecological crisis or a pandemic. In the pluralism of our current world, knowledge is even less certain than it was in Victorian England. In any given situation, experts disagree on the best course of action. Like Alice, we must all work it out in our own way.

The Queen is a dominant character, more so than the King, who is meek and submissive by comparison. Therefore, I interpret the Queen of Hearts as the father figure from Campbell’s “atonement of the father” (1993, p. 126), with the gender roles reversed. The Red Queen is the authority figure in this partnership and the entire story. Loud, aggressive and forthright, she is a strong female character taking the place of a father figure in the story.

“Chapter 9: The Mock Turtle’s Story” and “Chapter 10: The Lobster Quadrille”

Interspersed within Alice’s self-doubt and confusion are moments of assertiveness. For example, when she stands up to the Duchess: “‘Thinking
again?’ the Duchess asked, with another dig of her sharp little chin. ‘I have a right to think’, said Alice sharply”, (Carroll, as cited in Gardner, 2015, p. 110).

Alice’s confidence increases as she begins to understand herself in more depth and stands up to authority figures. This is another example of apotheosis (Campbell, 1993, p. 149). Shortly after their first encounter, the Queen of Hearts takes Alice to meet the Mock Turtle. The Mock Turtle is a Victorian joke, often not understood by contemporary audiences: “Mock Turtle soup was an imitation of green turtle soup, usually made from veal” (Gardner, 2015, p. 111). It was generally not made from the veal meat, but from the unused parts of the calf, like the tail, ears and trotters. Therefore, the Mock Turtle is in the shape of a turtle, with a turtle shell on his back and turtle flippers, but he has the head of a calf and trotters for his back feet and a calf’s tail—all the ingredients of Mock Turtle soup.

When Alice meets the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle, “the creatures parody a silly and dark adult world” (Kincaid, 1973, p. 98). In this scene, Carroll was ridiculing schools and set lessons. Alice is firmly indoctrinated by the establishment and takes the moral high ground; however, the Mock Turtle strikes out “not only at repressive tyranny [of school] but at its present representative, the pompous Alice” (Kincaid, 1973, p. 98).

Alice feels out of her depth again in the “Chapter 10: The Lobster Quadrille”, when the Mock Turtle asks her if she has seen whiting. Alice responds enthusiastically: “‘Yes’, said Alice, ‘I’ve often seen them at dinn—’ she checked herself hastily” (Carroll, 2004, p. 102). Alice knows whiting as food; however, it becomes clear that the Mock Turtle is speaking of them as friends. Alice must rapidly revise her comments—once again seeing the same subject from a different perspective and altering her point of view. Like most people, Alice does not want to offend her new friends and wants to do and say the right thing. I argue that Alice’s response can be linked directly to Giddens’s (1991) ideas of reflexivity—constrained by societal norms, she edits what she was about to say in reaction to her environment.
“Chapter 11: Who Stole the Tarts?” and “Chapter 12: Alice’s Evidence”

As the story progresses, Alice’s assertiveness increases and she is at her most confident in the final two chapters, titled “Chapter 11: Who Stole the Tarts?” and “Chapter 12: Alice’s Evidence” (Carroll, 2004). These chapters represent Campbell’s “ultimate boon” (1993, p. 172). Alice’s wisdom and confidence are growing, and she realises the goal of her quest. In these two chapters, Alice is in a hyperbolically comical corrupt courtroom. There are several times where she stands up for herself and disagrees with authority. This also relates to one of Giddens (1991) central tenets: choices become meaningless to the individual without authenticity, without an authentic sense of the self. When Giddens discussed the authentic self, he was speaking of the true self “conquering emotional blocks and tensions that prevent us from understanding ourselves as we really are” (1991, p. 78). However, to be able to do this, one must separate the true self from ideas of the false selves, namely, those ideas that are adopted through the expectations of others or that we learnt in childhood (Giddens, 1991, p. 79).

By being true to herself, Alice creates personal growth when she asserts herself in the courtroom by speaking her mind and relinquishing her earlier propensity to submit to authority, even when she disagrees with it. Alice is attacked repeatedly by authority figures and stands up for herself with maturity and confidence, illuminating the illogical nature of the rules. In this scene, she stands up as the hero. Finally, she sees the guards for what they are—“‘Who cares for you?’ said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time). ‘You’re nothing but a pack of cards!’” (Carroll, 2004, pp. 124–25)—and she wakes up, beating back the cards that are flying at her.

As a child, I felt particularly empowered by Alice’s confidence in this scene. Not only does she stand up for a particular creature, but she states her truth in a courtroom, a formal place where people are likely to feel intimidated. When Alice
awakens, she says to her sister, “Oh, I’ve had such a curious dream!” Or was it? As a child, I did not believe Alice was dreaming because Wonderland was so real to me. Alice’s sister is deeply affected by the story. This is the final stage of the hero’s journey as described by Campbell as “crossing the return threshold” (1993, p. 217). The hero, Alice, returns to the ordinary world with new wisdom and knowledge, and she shares this wisdom with her sister.

**Summary**

For myself and my art practice, both the internal, the unconscious mind (Jung, 1978), and the external world, agents and structures affecting one another (Giddens, 1991), are equally important aspects of the self. I argue that these are different aspects of the same thing. This research demonstrates that one must become whole and acknowledge and integrate the shadows of the self (Jung, 1978) to become self-actualised (Giddens, 1991). The extent to which one can become individuated will relate directly to that individual’s capacity to self-actualise. Although they are two interrelated aspects, each is contingent upon the other.

The hero’s journey is one mechanism for achieving this. Alice is ubiquitous and enduring, not only in the many reinterpretations of her but because of her continued contemporary popularity. This research shows the story as a hero’s journey and, therefore, it is just as relevant to a contemporary audience as it was to Victorians. Like mythology, *Alice in Wonderland* is an allegorical story that tells us a deeper truth about ourselves, our humanity and our society. This close reading of Alice has revealed the underlying metaphors of the story and will inform my Master of Arts by Research exhibition, *Down the Rabbit Hole*. This story and this exhibition ask the audience (like Alice) to acknowledge the inconsistencies of individuals and societies, recognise absurdities, and delight in the nonsensical nature of the world.
Chapter 5. A Plethora of Alices

Introduction

The reinterpretation of Alice by both visual artists and popular culture is an immense subject. Chapter 5 examines some of the many iterations of Alice and popular culture in relation to Baudrillard (1998). Additionally, I investigate some of the visual artists who have also used Alice as inspiration for re-imagining the story from their own lifeworld. I discuss these artists in their order of influence (chronologically, according to when I became aware of them in my practice). The artists are Blackman, Watson, Kusama, Dali and Blake. This investigation has been enormously important to my practice in diversifying my personal view.

There have been 66 adaptations of Alice in Wonderland in film and television, and countless illustrated books. However, when Alice in Wonderland is placed within a Google images search, the depictions of Alice are mostly from The Walt Disney Company’s (Disney) movie (Geronimi et al., 1951) or the Burton film (2010), also owned by Disney. In addition to Disney’s Alice, there are a plethora of different Alices—the dark horror Alice, the sexy Alice, the drug-taking Alice and the adult colouring-in book Alice. One needs to scroll down the page quite a way to find any of the original illustrations by Tenniel. Despite the large number of artists and illustrators who have reinterpreted the story, their depictions of Alice are not shown. There are video games of Alice in Wonderland and countless depictions on all manner of merchandise. For me, this demonstrates that in the digital age, all characters are available for reinterpretation. Copies of Alice are ubiquitous and various; many have no relation to the original text (see Figure 5.1).
Figure 5.1. A plethora of Alices showing (exception to copyright: research or study; ss 40, 103C): (a) John Tenniel’s Alice in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll, 1865, Macmillan; (b) Alice in Wonderland Statute, by J. Scott Campbell’s Fairytale Fantasies, 2020; (c) *A Mad Tea Party*, by Arthur Rackham, 1907; (d) Disney’s Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*, by Geronimi et al., 1951, Walt Disney Productions; (e) *Alice: Madness Returns*, by Spicy Horse, 2011, Electronic Arts; (f) *Alice in Wonderland*, by Tim Burton, 2010, Walt Disney Pictures, Roth Films, The Zanuck Company, Team Todd; and (g) Q Posket of Alice, by Banpresto, 2020.
Alice and the Simulacra

The French sociologist and philosopher, Baudrillard, wrote extensively about copies in the modern world in his book, *Simulacra and Simulations* (1998). He defined copies using the term “simulacra” and explained three categories. The first category is a copy of the original, often a smaller model, for example, the perfect model of an iconic building—a faithful reproduction of the original. This can be observed in the way illustrators after Tenniel (e.g., Arthur Rackham at the beginning of the twentieth century) faithfully illustrated the text (see Figure 5.1). The second category includes productivists who are concerned with the technology of mechanical reproduction: the meaning is changed through the scale of mass production (Baudrillard, 1998). Baudrillard (1998) argued that an artwork’s value is diminished by taking the work out of its context and reproducing it on mass. Alice is mass-produced in the many new versions of the book available in print and the many digital reproductions.

The third category includes copies without an original (Baudrillard, 1998). This is evidenced in the Alice merchandise, video games and other digital reproductions. Copies of copies have become so prevalent in contemporary society that the original or even the idea of having an original becomes lost in the volume of imagery. This is certainly the case with Alice. The wide reach of the Disney version creates a situation in which other versions disappear so that many people do not know that the Disney version is even a copy. As Jameson (1990) observed, there are problems with our reliance on current versions, at the expense of our historical understanding. History no longer has any relationship to the lived experience, and instead, we live in a series of perpetual moments in the present (Jameson, 1990).

This was the case in my childhood, where my understanding of Alice originated from an abridged and Americanised LP record (see Figure 1.1). As a child, I did not know that I was not listening to the original. In my practice-led research, I have chosen to respond to the original, recognising it as the primary source. It
was the original that actually inspired me to make images. Although I was responding to an unfamiliar text, I was also influenced by childhood memories and associations. The story was at once familiar and unfamiliar—how very *Alice in Wonderland*!

**The Disney Version**

When Disney recreates a character, the Disney version tends to become the prominent image through sheer saturation. The book becomes the film, the lunch box, the figurines and the table lamp. Schickel (2019) wrote a polemical critique of the Disney Empire, *The Disney Version*, first published 50 years ago. This book commented on how Disney strips a story of its substance and essence. It then traced the life of Walt Disney in the context of the Disney empire. With Disney’s “intensive program of licencing dolls, toys and games based on the subjects [they] had a natural tendency to blanket the original” (Schickel, 1968, p. 110) due to their prevalence.

Schickel (2019) summarised Walt Disney as a businessman and a popularist, a shy and insecure man interested in the technical aspects of animation very early in the genre. He was known for being controlling in work and business, and for creating a successful empire through strategy and the licencing of popular stories. When Disney bought the rights to a character or a story, it was invariably sanitised and stripped of anything that may be unpalatable to a 1950s religious Midwestern United States audience. Walt Disney’s controlling character was evident to everyone who worked there. According to one visitor, although the Disney studio was serene, “there was a distinct change in the atmosphere when Disney entered the room” (Schickel, 1968, p. 334) and “when Uncle Walt came around anxiety came with him” (Schickel, 1968, p. 335). He created a world that was clean and controlled, and he could order his world “as precisely as he wanted to” both in the Disney studios and the theme parks (Schickel, 1968, p. 339). Baudrillard regarded the Disneyland theme parks as the
perfect example of the hyperreal because the simulated world of Disneyland highlights the fact that the surrounding city of Los Angeles is also not real:

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus, of saving the reality principle. (as cited in Poster, 1988, p. 166)

Baudrillard used the Disney theme parks for his model to illustrate the concept of the simulacra. Disneyland is no longer a copy of the various realities and stories it is based upon but has become hyperreality—a new kind of truth, more real than the real (Baudrillard, 1998). The Italian novelist Umberto Eco agreed with Baudrillard, regarding Disneyland as the apex of imitation and that, by comparison, reality will always feel inferior (1986). This overarching culture of Disney can be observed from the 1951 Alice in Wonderland film, with its surrounding merchandise (Geronimi et al., 1951).

Figure 5.2. Disney’s Alice in Alice in Wonderland, by Geronimi et al., 1951, Walt Disney Productions (exception to copyright: research or study; ss 40, 103C).
Disney’s Alice

The Disney empire created many animated films from classic children’s stories, taking the original and reworking them to fit the Disney vision (Schickel, 1968). Walt Disney exercised a great degree of control over the screenplays, visual rendering and aesthetic of his animated movies (Schickel, 1968). However, although he always read the screenplays, which had been reconstructed by Disney staff to fit the corporation’s doctrine, he never read any of the original texts that these works were adapted from (Schickel, 1968, p. 345). Walt Disney had very little regard for the integrity of the original texts that these stories were reinvented from:

As for the reduction of children’s classics that went out unobserved by Disney to dime store and drugstore racks, he seemed to care nothing as long as someone in the organization saw to it that they were clean and decent: these works were merely part of the total marketing concept. (Schickel, 1968, p. 345)

The success of Disney can be measured by the fact that Disney’s Alice (see Figure 5.2) is still the most prevalent in popular culture (as evidenced by a Google images search) 70 years after Alice in Wonderland crashed at the box office (Schickel, 1968). Walt Disney did not personally like the film, saying it was “filled with weird characters” (as cited in Schickel, 1968, p. 289). The character of Alice in the original text has autonomy, and the plot is free flowing. It is whimsical. From one chapter to the next, the story flows with each chapter being a dreamlike vignette with very little relationship to the chapter before. Just as in a dream, the story is unpredictable. The Disney artists were somehow “never able to convey the free, fantastical parody of conventional logic [that] is the reason for Alice’s existence and makes it a work of art” (Schickel, 1968, p. 289). Disney was unable to convey the essence of any of the classics they took. Further, according to Schickel (and I concur), this was not the organisation’s overarching goal.
In her critique of the Disney movie of *Alice in Wonderland* (Geronimi et al., 1951), Ross investigated how the Disney film undermined Carroll’s original story. She stated that “the Alice stories, present adventure as positive: whether wondrous or frightening, it leads the heroine in the direction of personal growth and control over her surroundings” (2004, p. 57). While the Disney movie started this way, with Alice enthusiastic for the adventure, it did not continue in the same vein; parts of plot and dialogue that support Alice as an intelligent autonomous character were omitted and new scenes were added. Ross noted, “after the mad tea party, in a section of plot invented for the movie, Disney’s Alice has had enough craziness and wants to go home” (Ross, 2004, p. 57). In the next scene, she was reduced to tears and was sitting down, waiting to be rescued. This was followed by the final scene in the courtroom, where, in the original Alice speaks up for herself; however, in the Disney version “the defiance and assertiveness of the line, ‘You’re only a pack of cards’, were lost, as she uttered it while fleeing for her life from the menacing gang of wonders she has created” (Ross, 2004, p. 57).

It is these differences, framing Alice as helpless instead of having agency, where the Disney version was the antithesis of the original. My research reveals *Alice in Wonderland* to be a story of self-actualisation. However, the Disney version shows none of this. As Ross asserted, “she is saved, not by facing them down with dawning maturity and confidence, like the ‘real’ Alice, but by waking up” (Ross, 2004, p. 57). While Carroll’s book embraced the wild anarchy of Wonderland, this was unacceptable in Walt Disney’s highly controlled, moralistic world. In the Disney movie, the craziness was to be avoided, and Alice had none of the autonomy and agency she displayed in the original story.

**Are You Blue? The Styling of Alice**

Carroll had very specific ideas about how Alice should look (Gardner, 2015). Alice Liddell had brown hair and a short bob (Gardner, 2015). However, Carroll deliberately wanted to create Alice as a new character, different from the child
that inspired him (Gardner, 2015). In Carroll’s illustrations, Alice had long wavy hair and a dress resembling the fashion of the day, which was similar to the Tenniel illustrations. However, the original illustrations have now become secondary to the Disney interpretation:

Disney’s 1951 Alice … must be the single, most influential post-Tenniel rendering of Alice, if not of all time. It’s the one which has done the most to fix her image, to wed her firmly to the blue dress and white pinafore and black shoes. (Vaclavik, 2019, p. 95)

The Disney animated film (Geronimi et al., 1951) was created close to 100 years after the original book was published in 1865. The artist responsible for the Disney recreation of Alice was Mary Blair. At first glance, the two looks created by Tenniel and Blair seem very similar, there is a timelessness here. Blair modernised Alice’s dress and made it less fussy. However, with almost 100 years between them, one would perhaps think the two interpretations would be more different (Buick, 2018). In silhouette, they were almost identical, and both interpretations related strongly to the fashion of the day. The quintessential 1950s style of dress with a fitted bodice and a full skirt is iconic (Buick, 2018). This dress, which became the look for the decade, followed Christian Dior: “Christian Dior’s 1947 sensational new look was hailed as a revolution following the austere heavily rationalised styles of World War II” (Buick, 2018, p. 94).

Fashion is cyclical, and designers find their inspiration from other sources, including history. Dior’s new look was referencing fashion from the 1860s (Buick, 2018). Blair developed her design from both Tenniel and Dior’s examples (Buick, 2018). Both Tenniel and Blair created an Alice who fitted a contemporary aesthetic (Buick, 2018).

Tenniel’s original illustrations of Alice were published in black and white, not as an aesthetic decision but because the available technology did not allow coloured books. In modern illustrations that use the Tenniel images, the colour added is almost invariably blue (Buick, 2018). However, the first authorised coloured versions of Alice in Wonderland (a series of posters for children’s nurseries) showed Alice in a yellow dress with blue trim (see Figure 5.3) (Gardner, 2015, p. 75).
17). I was surprised to learn this because the blue dress is so ingrained in the psyche of modern audiences. While Disney is often credited as being the origin of the blue dress, I have found several references predating Disney’s film (Geronimi et al., 1951) that coloured the dress blue, including a biscuit tin from 1903 (Delahunty & Schulz, 2011). An article titled, “Am I Blue”, (Burstein, 2010) catalogued the Alice in Wonderland illustrations, demonstrating several pre-Disney blue versions of Alice’s dress, along with the aforementioned yellow and even several examples of a red dress (see Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.3. The Nursery Alice (the first colour illustrations hand-painted with Watercolour), by John Tenniel, 1890.
Burstein attributed the prevalence of blue to a 1903 publication:

In 1903, Macmillan issued “The Little Folks’ Edition” of Wonderland and Looking Glass “adapted for very little folks from the original story”, in
which the 32 Tenniel illustrations [had] been simplified and redrawn, and then coloured. Alice wears a blue dress throughout, which is likely to have been the origin of this particular canard. (Burstein, 2010)

He further claimed that, when it was reprinted in 1907, “her dress is consistently red” (Burstein, 2010). However, it is not clear whether a marketer or a printer made this decision. “Then, in 1911, Macmillan released a combined Wonderland/Looking Glass ... and there, her dress is once again blue” (Burstein, 2010, p. 29). From the images, it seems that, after 1911, the dress has been predominately blue, although not exclusively.

Macmillan was the original publisher of Alice in Wonderland, but in “1907, when the copyright for Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland expired, countless illustrators set to work, devising their own versions. By late Autumn of that year, there were already at least 14 new illustrated editions on sale” (Delahunty & Schulz, 2011, p. 19). There have been many interpretations by artists who have dressed Alice in different colours, and there have been over 1,000 illustrators of Alice in Wonderland from all over the world (Gardner, 2015, p. 350). Illustrating a book of Alice in Wonderland gives creative freedom to the artist because the girl in the book is obviously Alice. However, take Alice out of the context of her book, and the blue dress becomes an icon that audiences easily recognise (Buick, 2018). Burstein attributed Macmillan’s 1903 edition as the first known rendering of the blue dress, and Disney solidified the image for the modern audience. The abridged LP record and book that I listened to as a child had Alice in a red pinafore dress (see Figure 1.1). Even as a child who had never watched the Disney movie, I assumed that the illustrator had made a mistake with the colour of the dress. The version I grew up with represented Alice differently to both the Tenniel and Disney versions. Although I would not have been able to articulate it at the time, this was my first understanding of the reinterpretation of a character.

Disney’s ability to modernise Alice while maintaining the original look:
confirms Alice as a style icon because it is so reliant on Alice’s past, yet simultaneously creates a sense of newness, a fresh take ... Alice’s little blue dress becomes a referent that designers, stylists and consumers return to again and again. (Buick, 2018, p. 94)

Atwood is known for her thorough research when designing costumes for films and was asked to work on the Burton version (2010). After much discussion, research and experimenting with different colours for Alice’s dress, she kept coming back to the blue. Both Burton and Atwood decided that there were some things about Alice that would create a feeling of connection with the audience and the expectation of the blue dress was one of them (Bram, 2018, p. 89).

I have also modernised the dress in my work, removing the white pinafore and sometimes even adding a stylised floral pattern. This was because I understood Alice as a relevant character and wanted to make her appear relevant to a contemporary audience. In printmaking, the images are often black and white, but when I did use colour, it had to be blue for the iconic connection. Culture has a way of seeping into decisions without you realising. However, the blue I chose was stronger and brighter than the Disney mid-blue. At one stage, I even changed the brand of ink I used because the blue was not intense enough. For me, Alice is a strong character that deserves the strong colour that the rich ultramarine signifies.

During 2019, I saw the West Australian Ballet’s production of Alice in Wonderland; she was wearing a blue and white dress. Whenever Alice is created outside the confines of her book, in high art or popular culture, she is almost always blue and white. Alice in her blue dress has become a style icon quoted in fashion, fantasy, photography and artwork—she has become one with the little blue dress (Buick, 2018). When artists like Blackman reinterpreted Alice, the iconic blue dress was fundamental to his imagery (McCaw, 2011). Further, when Alice simulators want to subvert Alice with the horror Alice or the sexy Alice, they are often quoting the Disney version, which in turn is quoting the original Tenniel Drawings. In my artwork, I reference the original text and investigate it in the context of the Victorian society it was a part of, reinventing in parallel to
the original. I must confess that the prevalence of Disney has also influenced me. In the studio, my practice-led research is informed by artists who have interpreted Alice and the historical context in their work—Disney is a part of this landscape.

Re-imagining Alice: Artists Who have Responded to the Text

In addition to the countless illustrators who have reinterpreted *Alice in Wonderland*, the text has significantly affected the visual arts. Many artists have re-imagined the story to suit their own vision. Chapter 5 is not intended to be a comprehensive review of all the artists who have used *Alice in Wonderland* as subject matter; rather, it concentrates specifically on artists that have resonated with me and influenced my art practice. Many artists “have absorbed and internalised [Carroll’s] fantasy worlds to such an extent that the literary source is barely distinguishable from their own artistic innovation” (Delahunty & Schulz, 2011, p. 14). Delahunty and Schulz were referring to the surrealists; however, I think it is true of all the artists that I refer to in Chapter 5.

It is the way these artists have made the story their own that intrigues me. They are not simply reinterpreting the story but are dealing with the underlying concerns of a literary work. As Delahunty and Schulz wryly commented, even those reinterpretations that might be misinterpreting the text could be legitimate because they are “a fruitful echo of the polysemy of [Carroll’s] works, in which meaning is never a simple matter, but a rich field of contestation, multiplicity and play” (2011, p. 23). These artists have broadened the field of Alice images and used the story as a starting point to make their artwork. They have explored the symbolism of the story from their subjective perspective, as I have done and continue to do. It is this unique and personal interpretation that intrigues me and critically informs my research.
The first artist to influence my practice was the Australian painter Blackman, who repositioned Alice to tell his own story. In the 1950s, Blackman created a series of paintings based on *Alice in Wonderland* without having ever read the book (see Figures 5.5, 5.6 and 5.7). Blackman made his iconic Alice series of paintings during the time that his wife Barbara was gradually going blind. Unable to read to their children, she played a recording of *Alice in Wonderland*. Blackman had grown up in a household without books; he had not heard the story as a child and had never witnessed the Tenniel illustrations. The story infiltrated his painting because it mirrored his wife Barbara’s journey into the unknown world of blindness (McCaw, 2011).
Figure 5.6. *Goodbye Feet*, Charles Blackman, 1956b, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia (exception to copyright: research or study; ss 40, 103C).

Figure 5.7. *Triptych Alice*, Charles Blackman, 1957, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, Australia (exception to copyright: research or study; ss 40, 103C).

*Triptych Alice*, painted in 1957 (see Figure 5.7), was purchased by the Art Gallery of Western Australia (AGWA) in 1988. It was at this time that I first saw the piece and became aware of both the concept of creating artwork responding to Alice and Blackman as a painter. I was 19 years old and in the second year of
my undergraduate degree in fine art at Curtin University. I was mesmerised by this large-scale image that contained all the quintessential Alice tropes that I had known since childhood, which were etched into my memory from the endless replaying of that 1971 LP record (The Charlotte Russe, 1971). When I looked at the painting, my history with Alice as a child merged with Blackman’s imaginative understanding. I loved the work, and it inspired me to learn more about Blackman as a painter. Every time I visited the AGWA, I checked to see if the painting was on display; over the years it has been like a friend to me.

When I first viewed Alice Triptych (Blackman, 1957), the idea of making work inspired by Alice in Wonderland never occurred to me. At that time, my understanding was that Blackman had said it so well, anything I could say in an image would be superfluous. Perhaps I needed to be further away from my childhood to be able to make the Alice work I am making now. I made my first series of linocuts inspired by Alice 27 years after first viewing that painting. By this time, in 2015, I was aware of some other artists who had created work inspired by the story; when I was an undergraduate student in the late 1980s, I was only aware of Blackman’s work and, although I recall borrowing library books on Dali, I did not know his 1969 Alice artworks. Blackman’s painting has a strong sense of emotion, and this is an important part of my connection to it: “He reaches beyond the immediate and regional concerns. He was a creator who dared to tap into the vulnerable, the intuitive. His pictures in their great moments, have the power to disturb and haunt” (Shapcott & Burridge, 1989, p. xi). For me, the best of Blackman’s work has an emotional intensity that speaks to the human condition, and this is what I endeavour to do with my work.

Blackman: Life and Work

Blackman was born in Sydney in 1928. His father was an alcoholic and left the family when Blackman was just four years old. Blackman quoted his mother as an influence, iterating the importance of understanding emotions to be able to understand other people (Shapcott & Burridge, 1989). As a child, he drew
continuously (Shapcott & Burridge, 1989). He left school at the age of 13 and got a job at *The Sun* (Sydney) as a copy boy and illustrator (Shapcott & Burridge, 1989). A copy boy was a junior worker who physically ran typed newspaper stories to different parts of the building (Shapcott & Burridge, 1989). At 18, he travelled the east coast of Australia, doing itinerant work and drawing. I have included this information about Blackman's life because it shows that he was an outsider. Although there is no way of knowing, perhaps Blackman felt an affinity with Alice as an outsider.

Blackman then met Barbara Patterson, who would become critical to his development as an artist. In contrast to Blackman, who had left school early and was largely self-taught as a painter, she was educated and literary. When they met, Barbara was in her final year studying honours in child psychology at the University of Queensland (Shapcott & Burridge, 1989). They later married, moved to Melbourne and socialised with poets and painters (Shapcott & Burridge, 1989). Blackman was a contemporary of Sydney Nolan, Arthur Boyd and David Boyd. They worked and exhibited together, all working figuratively in opposition to the popular abstract expressionism. Blackman's first Alice inspired images were exhibited in 1957 at the Museum of Modern Art in Melbourne:

> They were a significant series in many ways for Blackman; in them, he found the first fully realised imaginative projection of his wife Barbara, as Alice, and in doing so he found the most fruitful possibilities of Alice as an image, the disoriented person, the one who negotiates with calm that is sometimes desolate, sometimes trusting and entirely without surprise. The topsy-turvy world of objects, dimensions, happenings. Barbara as Alice is a metaphor in paint, and these paintings, in exploring this metaphor, release in Blackman the artist the imaginative capacity to explore freely, without the worry of strict realism or logic, that world of experience. (Shapcott, 1967, p. 30)

Blackman used Alice as a vehicle to explore his personal challenges and those of the people around him. This is my connection with Blackman—I have also reinterpreted the story to suit my ideas and explore aspects of my life and those around me. I too see Alice as “the one who negotiates calm” in a nonsensical world (Shapcott, 1967, p. 30). Blackman was working as a cook at the time of
making the Alice works, and he stated the following: “So I took the rabbit into the kitchen with me as a kind of medium. The rabbit helped me in the kitchen, and I helped the rabbit when I went home” (as cited in McCaw, 2011, p. 70). This esoteric statement has parallels with my way of working with the Alice text; the White Rabbit takes on the quality of a muse when I create my artwork. I see the White Rabbit as Alice’s inner knowing, an animal mentor in Campbell’s hero’s journey (1993). Blackman found the freedom to be more exploratory and imaginative from the work. He departed from his previous work and indeed from the story. This is another affinity I feel with his body of work, which, like my own, uses the symbols from the story as metaphors; similarly, Blackman did not illustrate the text.

**Jenny Watson (1951)**

Watson was born in Melbourne. She uses *Alice in Wonderland* as a subject matter for her paintings. Watson painted *Alice in Tokyo* (see Figure 5.8) after visiting Tokyo and feeling like she had been dropped into another world (n.d., Art Gallery of NSW). Like Blackman, Watson positions her Alice as an outsider, making the best of difficult circumstances and having to negotiate a strange world. In *Alice in Tokyo* (Watson, 1984), she substituted Tokyo for Wonderland, corresponding with Parker’s (2010) notion that Wonderland has become synonymous with a strange reality. Having also lived in Tokyo, I can relate to Watson’s response. The experience of being in Tokyo is so different from that of any Australian city; it is easy to feel dislocated. I too experienced the feeling of being dropped into another world that is described by Watson’s painting. The painting formed part of a retrospective exhibition, *The Fabric of Fantasy*, curated by Anna Davis (Watson, 1984).

Throughout her career, Watson has made many paintings that position herself in a range of different scenarios, including fairy tales and children’s fictional storybooks. As Watson asserted: “I turned from the observation of the outside world to the recording of an inner space … I wanted to shatter the techniques I
had learnt ... to let a random uncontrolableness [sic] take hold of the work” (cited in Grishin, 2017, p. 1). She was describing her collaboration with the materials to make the work (see Chapter 4). Taylor (2014) described Watson as “nostalgic and imaginative, feminist and political, yet always personal”. The way Watson repositioned herself as Alice interests me because it corresponds to my way of using the text, taking my own experiences and using Alice as a metaphor.

Figure 5.8. Alice in Tokyo, Jenny Watson, 1984, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia (exception to copyright: research or study; ss 40, 103C).

Yayoi Kusama (1929)

Kusama’s works differ from the narrative focus of Blackman and Watson because she interprets the text through patterns, taking small elements from the story and turning them into icons in an illustrated version of Alice in Wonderland (see Figure 5.9). On the last page of the book, she stated, “I, Kusama, am the modern Alice in Wonderland” (Kusama, 2012, p. 182).
Figure 5.9. Internal page of *Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland: With Artwork by Yayoi Kusama*, by Lewis Carroll, 2012, Penguin Classics (exception to copyright: research or study; ss 40, 103C).

Figure 5.10. *Installation Room Denmark Retrospective*, by Yayoi Kusama, 2015 (exception to copyright: research or study; ss 40, 103C).
I consider Kusama’s installations a Wonderland of her own creation (see Figures 5.10 and 5.11). Her illustrated version (see Figure 5.9) was not a conventional illustration of events in the story. Instead, it was filled with pattern and icons—pumpkins, faces and mushrooms (Carroll, 2012). Stylistically, Kusama is obsessed with patterns, particularly dots. Her works seem to arise from a compulsion. I find them beautiful, mesmerising and all-encompassing.

Interestingly, the Japanese flag is a single red dot on a white background:

> Although the meaning of the circle comes from a Japanese tradition, the idea that they need to be multiplied to infinity is an original concept of Kusama’s own vision. Recalling her early experiences of spots after images in her vision, Kusama appears [to be] repeating the trauma she experienced as a youth, and in doing so, tempering it. (Ferrell, 2015, p. 5)

By Kusama’s own account, she had a traumatic childhood (Applin, 2012). Her mother was abusive and sent her to spy on her father’s extramarital affairs. She was just 16 when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Perhaps Kusama
creates these beautiful rooms as an escape from her childhood trauma. She discussed being obsessed with creating to lose herself:

I often suffered episodes of severe neurosis. I would cover a canvas with nets, then continue painting them on the table, on the floor and finally my own body. As I repeated this process over and over again, the nets began to expand to infinity. I forgot about myself as they enveloped me, clinging to my arms legs and clothes and filling the entire room. (as cited in Applin, 2012, p. 4).

Kusama’s neurosis caused her to use patterns in an embodied way, literally creating an immersive environment both physically and mentally (Applin, 2012). The repetitive aspects of pattern-making are therapeutic for Kusama because they offer her an escape from her memories. In my work, patterns create an immersive space as it does in Kusama’s; however, mine is devoid of trauma. Like Kusama, I enjoy the repetitive aspects of making to create the work. However, this is where the similarity ends. I create for the immersion in the process and, while I enjoy this, the idea of escape is not as imperative for me as it is for Kusama. I find Kusama’s installations enchanting. They have an otherworldliness that relates to my concept of Wonderland. There is an expansiveness, an open-ended quality that is in keeping with the essence of Wonderland in the text. When I approach Kusama’s work, I feel that, like Alice, we can begin to think that “very few things indeed [are] really impossible” (Carroll, 2004, p. 15). In addition to Kusama’s more recent installations and illustrated Alice in Wonderland book, she hosted a historical Alice in Wonderland Happening in 1968 (Delahunty & Schulz, 2011) (see Figures 5.12 and 5.13).
Figure 5.12. Media Release for *Alice in Wonderland Happening*, by Yayoi Kusama, 1968 (Delahunty & Schulz, 2011, p. 132).

Figure 5.13. Photograph of *Alice in Wonderland Happening*, by Yayoi Kusama, 1968 (Delahunty & Schulz, 2011, p. 132).
The event took place at the *Alice in Wonderland* statue in Central Park, New York and featured Kusama and her “troupe of nude dancers”, where “free tea [was] provided under the mushroom” (Delahunty & Schulz, 2011, p. 132). Again, Kusama saw herself as Alice:

> Like Alice, who went through the looking glass, I, Kusama, (who have lived for years in my famous specially built room entirely covered by mirrors) have opened up a world of fantasy and freedom ... You too can join my adventurous dance of life. (as cited in Delahunty & Schulz, 2011, p. 132)

Like Blackman, Kusama finds liberation in the story in which anything becomes possible. Kusama escaped by literally becoming Alice in this happening and enjoying the emancipation from the usual structures of life. However, I also recognise escapism for the viewer.

![Figure 5.14. Illustration by Yayoi Kusama in Alice in Wonderland, by Lewis Carroll, 2012, p. 177, Penguin Classics (exception to copyright: research or study; ss 40, 103C).](image-url)
Salvador Dali (1904 to 1989) and the Surrealists

Similar to Kusama, Dali illustrated a book of images for *Alice in Wonderland* in 1969, which was created as a limited edition of only 200 copies. The illustrations are intriguing and are an artistic reinterpretation of the story, rather than a pure illustration.¹ They are heliogravures (photo etching) made from the original gouache images by Dali. (see Figure 5.15).

The colours are vibrant, and the works are free and fluid, with the motif of a silhouetted girl with a skipping rope reoccurring through most of the images. Several of the works were also exhibited in a Tate Liverpool exhibition titled, *Alice in Wonderland, Through the Visual Arts*. Dali and the surrealists

¹ This book is available on YouTube (PeterHarringtonBooks, 2017).
repositioned Alice (Delahunty & Schulz, 2011). They considered Alice’s journey to Wonderland as a journey into the subconscious mind—the absurdities, plays on logic, confusion and dreamlike images lend themselves to a surrealist reading (Delahunty & Schulz, 2011). Integrating reality and fantasy was something Carroll did well, as did the surrealists. Surrealism was:

> The first art movement to seriously engage with Alice in the 20th century. In particular, the surrealist representations of dreams, which are constrained by neither the laws of nature nor the limitations of human reasoning, manifest parallels to the situations Alice experiences in her dream-travels in Wonderland ... Time and space seem to intermingle, and categories such as duration and distance become strangely unreliable. (Delahunty & Schulz, 2011, p. 14)

The surrealists were interested in the mind when it is unencumbered by societal norms and expectations; Carroll was also exploring this in his text, particularly when he parodied aspects of Victorian life (Gardner, 2015).

Another notable surrealist image includes Breton’s *Surrealist Tarot Deck* (see Figure 5.16). Using connotations of games and chance, Breton defined surrealism as, “the belief in the *superior reality* of certain forms of association heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of *the dream*, and in the disinterested *play of thought* ... [it] literally means above or beyond reality” (as cited in Salcman, 2011). Both Dali and Carroll played with time as a fluid concept; as Carroll asserts, “I daresay you never even spoke to time!” (Carroll, 2015, p. 72). Dali demonstrated this in his iconic painting, *The Persistence of Memory* (1931) (see Figure 5.17).
Figure 5.16. *Surrealist Tarot Deck*, Andre Breton, 1940 (exception to copyright: research or study; ss 40, 103C).

Figure 5.17. *The Persistence of Memory*, by Salvador Dali, 1931 (exception to copyright: research or study; ss 40, 103C).
One of the qualities of dreams is that they can seem to defy time. The melting clocks (see Figure 5.17) suggest that time is not the constant it appears to be in the material world. My interpretation of Dali’s work is that memories can persist even after time has long since passed. Why should some memories exist outside time in the mind when others disappear with time? Perhaps time is not the constant rational measure that we think it is. Indeed, Dali quoted his own painting when he used the melting clock with a tree going through it in *Mad Tea Party* (see Figure 5.18).

![Figure 5.18. Mad Tea Party (illustration for Chapter 7), by Salvador Dali, 1969b (exception to copyright: research or study; ss 40, 103C).](image)

Carroll also played with the concept of time in part of the story (Carroll, 2004). I have used this scene in my work, putting the Mad Hatter’s tea party into a boat (see Figure 5.19). At the tea party, time has stopped, as the Mad Hatter remarks, “It is always teatime, and we have no time to wash things between whiles” (Carroll, 2015, p. 73). Wonderland gave Carroll the freedom to move beyond boundaries. In my artwork, I also created an artwork inspired by Carroll
that explored the concept of time. To go on a journey without the constraints of time seemed alluring to me, which is why the symbolic boat is continuously moving as time stands still (see Figure 5.19).

Dali’s image for “Chapter 5: Advice from a Caterpillar” (see Figure 5.20) is an example of this contrast between reality and fantasy. Dali created a scene with washes of colour and a few black land formations in the background. He then introduced a very detailed and realistic caterpillar sitting atop a mushroom, which looks more like an atomic explosion. The image that has represented Alice throughout his illustrations—a simple black silhouette of a girl jumping rope and casting a shadow of herself—floats in the background beside the expressionistic rendering of the Caterpillar that emerges from a pipe that the more realistic Caterpillar is smoking:
The fact that Dali portrays Alice as a solid being who can cast a shadow implies the groundedness [sic] of her character, but the presence of the shadow itself as a rather ethereal, and even sinister, detail as shadows tend to change and sometimes disappear. His integration of the two different realms of reality and fantasy or dream is impressive. (Hiltz, 2011, p. 3)

This image of a girl with a skipping rope repeatedly appears in Dali’s *Alice in Wonderland* works, creating a rhythm and movement to the images. Dali’s image of Alice when she grows large inside the house (see Figure 5.15), with the large naturalistic arm coming out of the window, is quintessentially surrealist. There is a juxtaposition of the seemingly impossible elements that are shown at the beginning of Chapter 5.

I also juxtapose disparate elements to create a questioning attitude in the viewer. For example, I use the suspended teapot endlessly pouring tea in Now
it’s Always Six O’clock, and We Have No Time to Wash Things Between Whiles (see Figure 5.19) and in the linocuts from the Understanding Alice exhibition (James, 2015d). My interest in Dali focuses on his reinterpretation and retelling of the story. Despite being part of a book, his work did not merely illustrate the text. Castleman stated that “the difference between ‘illustrated books’ and ‘artist’s books’ is what makes them modern: the artist augments the text with images that do not necessarily define passages in the text” (MoMA, 1995).

Dali’s work added to the meaning of the text; drawing from his history and previous works, he intertwined his concerns about time, the unconscious mind, reality and fiction reinterpreting the Alice in Wonderland text.

**Peter Blake (1932)**

English pop artist, Blake, is most famous for co-creating the Beatles album cover for *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (n.d., Artnet). Many of his paintings include collaged elements in a similar way to his well-known album covers. During 1970, he moved from London to the countryside near Bath, where he created a series of watercolour paintings with collage based on Carroll’s second Alice book, *Through the Looking Glass* (Carroll, 2004) (see Figures 5.21 and 5.22). These works combined the nostalgic influence of the English countryside with the brightly coloured modernism of previous work to create a beautiful set of Alice images (n.d., Tate). The series was later reproduced as limited edition silk-screens, which are now in the collection of the Tate Gallery (n.d., Tate) (Figures 5.21 and 5.22 are two examples from this series). Blake’s Alice based artworks combined a naturalistic rendering of Alice and other characters with a still, staged quality in the composition and the English landscape in the background (see Figure 5.22). As with the other artists in this chapter, Blake combined his subjective experience of the local landscape with his response to the Alice story.
Figure 5.21. *Humpty Dumpty*, by Peter Blake, 1970b, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK.

Figure 5.22. *Alice in Wonderland*, by Peter Blake, 1970a, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK.
Hard outlines and flat areas of colour contribute to an illustrative quality in these works; however, the interpretation and artistic intent were more than just a visual explanation of the text. Blake’s other works also combined the English landscape with characters from English literature, notably Shakespeare (n.d., Tate). This is also true for me because I had often used literature as a starting point to make images, even before I started to create works relating to *Alice in Wonderland*.

**Summary**

Each of these artists has responded to the text in a way that is connected to materials and process. When Kusama, Blackman, Dali, Watson and Blake responded to the Alice text, they did so through the prism of their own subjective experiences. Their ideas, historical context and personal associations became an integrated part of the creation process, revealing new meanings within the Alice text; this approach relates directly to my creative research. I have found *Alice in Wonderland* to be a story filled with compelling ideas from which to make images. Each of the artists discussed in Chapter 5 used *Alice in Wonderland* in a personal way, interpreting the story from their own lifeworld as I have done. However, I am influenced both by the artists who have re-imagined the text and the inescapable influence of the popular culture that provides a backdrop to the more engaging work of these artists.
Chapter 6. I am an Artist. What Else Would I Do?

Introduction

I was perplexed when asked the question: Why practice-led research? Making is what I do; it has been an integral part of my life for as long as I can remember. I create my visual art in a studio as a consequence of two integrated aspects: my thinking process and the physical doing in the studio. The artwork is a corollary of the making process—a continual progression of adjustment and reflexivity, which creates artwork that could not have been created had it been pre-planned.

It is created using tacit knowledge, as Bolt asserted that “this form of tacit knowledge provides a very specific way of understanding the world” (2010, p. 29); that is, an understanding through materials is integrated with a conceptual understanding. Carter expanded on this idea of a material understanding:

It happens when the artist dares to ask the simple, far-reaching questions. What matters? What is the material of thought? To ask these questions is to embark on an intellectual adventure peculiar to the making process. Critics and theorists interested in communicating ideas about things cannot emulate it. They remain outsiders, interpreters on the sidelines, usually trying to make sense of a creative process afterwards, purely on the basis of its outcome. They lack access to the process and, more fundamentally, they lack the vocabulary to explicate its intellectual character. (as cited in Adams, 2008, p. 17)

I concur with Carter because I find that the process of making artwork starts with the curiosity and desire to give material form to an idea. This is something that artists understand implicitly and finding the vocabulary to explain the process, which is layered and multifaceted, can be difficult, even for those of us who count ourselves as insiders (Carter, 2004). During the making, it is fundamental for me to remain open-minded and responsive to how specific materials react to one another in synchronistic ways. Bolt referred to this interaction in the studio as:
The concept of material thinking offers us a way of considering the relations that take place within the very process or tissue of making. In this conception the materials are not passive objects to be used instrumentally by the artist, but rather the materials and processes of production have their own intelligence that come into play in interaction with the artist's creative intelligence. (2010, p. 29)

Bolt’s articulation of the relationship between materials and practice is something that I regularly experience when making in the studio. Each medium has distinct qualities, and there is an interactive relationship between the intelligence of the materials and the artist's intelligence. This collaboration is fundamental to my practice—I am an artist. What else would I do?

As a visual artist and a maker, I understand firsthand Bolt’s (2010) descriptions of being challenged by an artwork: “The principles of my art education were no longer much use to me” (2010, p. 32). Like Bolt, I have had this experience repeatedly. My artwork arises from a collaboration between the medium and an intention to explore a particular idea. The medium and the idea become inextricably intertwined. Often, I must work beyond my art education and discover something new. In my experience, the extent of that collaboration is directly related to the success of the work.

If I try to dictate to the medium, in ways that are not intrinsic to the materiality of that medium, the work I create may look forced. This is a subjective understanding. It is a tacit knowing; my own knowing, rather than some type of empirical measure. Similarly, if I allow the medium to dictate the work, by relying on the historical conventions of that medium, the work will be mediocre at best. Becoming a slave to the skilfulness in the medium can also be problematic, and the work can look forced. Again, the success or lack thereof cannot be measured empirically; it is subjective. However, “this intuitive knowledge is closely related to what Bourdieu has theorised as ‘the logic of practice’” (Barrett, 2010, p. 4). In my experience, the path can go in any direction, but the making and the intention must walk hand in hand. The artwork is a by-product of that process. It is a synchronistic process where revelations can occur (Bolt, 2011).
Practice-Led Research

Practice-led research is a creative inquiry undertaken across the arts. As a visual artist, my process in the studio is driven by the needs of my practice. Practice-led research is intrinsic to who I am as an artist. In this creative process, imagination, critical thinking and creative artefacts construct alternative forms of knowledge (Gray & Malins, 2004). Through this knowledge, practice-led research affects and contributes to human understanding (Gray & Malins, 2004). Gray and Malins (2004) expanded on the notion of new knowledge, specifically what it means to be original. They listed 18 distinct definitions, three of which are particularly relevant to this research:

- making a new interpretation of someone else’s material or ideas
- adding to knowledge in a way that has not been done before
- bringing new evidence to bear on an old issue. (Gray & Malins, 2004, p. 190)

Gray and Malins (2004) also posited the notion of new knowledge as “another brick in the wall”, which explored the incremental nature of new knowledge and the importance of understanding the field through literature and practice reviews. This was particularly relevant for my practice when analysing other artists who explore the story of Alice in Wonderland through their artwork. Understanding my artistic field enables me to expand my understanding of the subject and create my own interpretation of the story in different ways with different media.

Notions of creativity and applied research have been understood for a long time (Sullivan, 2009). However, to merely transpose these ideas from other disciplines onto the visual arts or any field of creative endeavour is to diminish the role of the visual arts in society. Visual artists require their own integrated approach that relates directly to their creative process (Sullivan, 2009). Practice-led research is multifaceted, pluralistic and rhizomatic in structure. The artist derives knowledge through experience and the senses—through making (Sullivan, 2010). Making and the praxical nature of studio practice is a fundamental aspect of practice-led research. I concur with Makela and Routarine
who states that, “in the field of practice-led research, praxis has a more essential role: making is conceived to be the driving force behind the research and in certain modes of practice also the creator of ideas” (as cited in Sullivan, 2010, p. 48). This is what I experience. Praxis in art-making is the constant intersection of making and ideas, thinking and doing as an integrated action. Making is both the driving force and the generator of ideas. This is the underlying foundation of practice-led research.

Further, when an idea is translated into practice, it becomes something else. While making occurs with an idea in mind, that idea shifts when translated into action, one moves from the “known to the unknown as new knowledge is constructed” (Sullivan, 2010, p. 48). Practice-led research is informed by theory. This includes, but is not limited to, history, social context, philosophy, and literature. It is engaged with others. My work engages with both my peers (other contemporary artists), the audience and other artists who have responded to the Alice in Wonderland text. All these factors influence my work, both consciously and unconsciously. It is a dynamic and reflexive process driven by practice in the studio. It is another way of knowing; embodied, sensory and sometimes poetic. It encourages the viewer to question what they have long held true and to examine knowledge in a different way (Barrett & Bolt 2010; Sullivan, 2010).

Practice-Led Research as a Rhizome

My studio process of practice-led research is multifaceted, multilayered and defies linear description. For me, practice-led research is rhizomatic in its structure. The rhizome, as a theoretical framework, was developed by French philosophers, Deleuze and Guattari (1980). Deleuze and Guattari (1980) borrowed the botanical term rhizome, which is used to describe certain types of plants that send out roots and shoots from nodes, for example, couch grass, bamboo, mycelium and turmeric, and use it as a metaphor for their theory (see Figure 6.1).
Figure 6.1. *Mycelium Rhizome*, by Richard Giblett, 2008 (exception to copyright: research or study; ss 40, 103C).

The aspects of a rhizomatic structure are: there is no hierarchy, or there is no perceived hierarchy, that is, it has no start or finish, it is always in the middle; it allows for a multiplicity of views, ideas or approaches; and any point can connect to any other (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). Deleuze and Guattari explained their theory using the examples of the movement of ants looking for food or tourists walking around Amsterdam (Deleuze, 1994). These examples are not easily described using more conventional or linear approaches. However, just like my practice in the studio, they have their own rhythm and order. Deleuze used the example of a map that changes and is dynamic, as opposed to a tracing, which is fixed (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). This concept is proposed as a different way of examining structures, as opposed to the arboreal model—a hierarchical tree-like structure with a central point at the trunk and dualist categories with binary choices (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). Rather than progressing in a linear or hierarchical, a rhizomatic structure offers a myriad of possibilities where any point can join to any other; it is dynamic and changing. In my practice, one thing may gain precedence for a time and then shift to another or lose its importance completely as something else gains precedence.

Although Deleuze and Guattari were not referring to practice-led research, their analogy is the best descriptor I have found for my creative process in the studio.
I start my making process with a general idea and navigate through a myriad of possibilities, each one informing the next. I take a wrong turn, I backtrack, I change my idea and I respond to what I have made. The process dictates the next step, just like an illuminated rhizome structure layered in three dimensions. When I am finished, I look back and construct a linear narrative of the journey I have taken—the map I have traversed.

Where I have been is a tracing and where I am going is a dynamic rhizomatic structure because at any point I could make a different choice. Like Deleuze’s examples (e.g., the movement of ants), the process is always in the middle (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). Even if one says that an artwork is finished, and that may be so, the creative enquiry is not finished. One artwork leads to another and then another, with each step infused into the next and informed by what has gone before. Linear or circular models that describe practice-led research provide a guide to the creative process; however, they are less accurate for me.

When I am making in the studio, I am creating meaning from the creation of artwork. Whereas Deleuze was theorising his process of making meaning through philosophy: “I make, remake and unmake my concepts along a moving horizon, from an always decentred centre, from an always displaced periphery which repeats and differentiates them” (Deleuze, 1994, p. xix). This articulates my process in the studio. As a printmaker, I particularly like the concept of unmaking because there are elements in printmaking that relate specifically to making by taking away rather than adding. A linocut is created by taking away everything that is not the image. It is a subtractive process—literally the unmaking of an image. There are other ways to unmaking an image besides using subtractive processes. This can repeatedly occur in different iterations, making, remaking and unmaking the work (Deleuze, 1994).

When I am making an artwork, seemingly unrelated ideas will suddenly fit together. Connotations will emerge that I had not previously thought of, and as I
travel through the process, the artwork evolves along a trajectory that is not linear. Sometimes, an image may seem completely unsatisfactory after days or weeks of work, and then it will suddenly come together with one small change. The rhizomatic structure is intrinsic to my creative process and, although I do have an overarching structure to the way I work (beginning with the sketchbook), this is not always the case. Sometimes, I will launch into something halfway through a process (a decentred centre) when an idea comes to me, or I may draw directly onto the matrix (plate or block) and bypass the sketchbook. The more immersed I am in the process, the less linear the undertaking of making my artworks becomes, and the more synchronistic my actions become. “What else would I be indeed”, said Alice to the White Rabbit.

**Drink Me: An Apothecary of Methods**

Primarily the techniques of my studio practice consist of:

- printmaking (linocut and etching)
- making of artist’s books
- drawing
- mixed media
- painting.

Chapter 2 also discussed the methods that inform this research, for example, the Victorian era and the life of Lewis Carroll. Additionally, photography and video are integral to my practice for reference images and process. Practice-led research is so intertwined in art practice, both inside and outside the studio, that Frayling’s (1996) research (which dissects the concept into categories) is a useful structure for understanding the process in more depth:

- research into art and design
  - historical
  - aesthetic or perceptual
• varieties of theoretical perspectives (e.g., socio-economic or political)
  • research through art
    • materials (e.g., reflective additives for paint)
    • development work (e.g., customising)
  • action research (step by step documentation of studio experiments)
    • for art, where thinking is “embodied in the artefact, where the goal is not primarily verbal/numerically communicable knowledge but visual, iconic or imagistic communication”. (1996, p. 8)

Research into Art

“Research into Art” explores my process in relation to Frayling’s notion of research for practice (1996).

Historical Research

My research includes a historical analysis of Carroll, his life and the Victorian era. I also delved into the *Alice in Wonderland* book as a physical object, what inspired it and how it was made, including Carroll’s involvement in the typography and design of the book (Wong, 2009). I examined early photography and how this related to image-making of the time and Carroll himself. Carroll was a photographer who made up stories to entertain the children he photographed and to keep them sitting still during the arduous process (Woolf, 2010).

Aesthetic Research

I examined the Victorian aesthetic, the work of William Morris and the wallpaper and craft revival. I also researched printmaking from the era as a utilitarian process to create wallpaper and book illustrations. My study focused on how the Victorian aesthetic related to the society of the time (e.g., how
abolishing the wallpaper tax contributed to its increased popularity) (Rose, 1995).

Theoretical Perspectives

I explored the theories of Jung (1978), Campbell (1993) and Giddens (1991) and related these theories to both my artwork and the Alice in Wonderland text.

Research Through Art

Frayling’s research through art or research into the practice is also an important aspect of my work; here, thinking through the materials comes to the foreground (1996). Bolt stated that “tacit knowing and the generative potential of [the] process have the potential to reveal new insights” (2010, p. 31). This exegesis contributed to a more refined understanding of the text, allowing me to uncover information that gave me more scope for creating in the studio. It informed all the Alice in Wonderland artwork that I have made. Sometimes, this occurred subtly, in the background, and for other pieces, it was more direct and explicit. This is especially true for After Jumping Falling (see Figure 6.4) and Liminal Space (see Figure 7.3), which I explore later in Chapter 6; these works could not have been created without this historical understanding.

Action Research

Frayling’s assertions about action research have been largely replaced by the notion of an action research cycle. Fenton described taking the action theory (see Figure 6.2) and adapting it, in this case for performance; however, I think it is equally relevant to visual arts practice.

The application of action theory to creative practice can be nuanced by replacing Argyris and Schon’s emphasis on enhancing effectiveness with the more appropriate criteria of enhancing “playfulness”. Accordingly, I adapted the model of action theory by changing its core objectives to “playfulness” and “reflection” so that it better accommodated the
complexities and vagaries of performance making. (Mercer et al., 2012, p. 36)

Both the original diagram and Fenton’s adaptation are shown in Figure 6.2:

![Figure 6.2. Fenton’s action research diagram, by Fenton, 2007, as cited in Mercer et al., 2012 (exception to copyright: research or study; ss 40, 103C).](image)

Fenton’s notion of playful trial and playful error relate directly to my own practice-led research experience. Fenton adapted the model to a more qualitative understanding, which is infinitely more suitable for practice-led research in the creative arts. Moreover, its playful approach is more suitable to the aforementioned rhizomatic structure, with playful trials taking you down one path of the rhizome and playful errors another, enabling rethinking and reworking as different results occur. The practice-led research process necessitates many stages in the creation of a finished work. That is, each work in an exhibition informs the next in an endless stream of ideas.
Research for Art

A successfully exhibited artwork communicates holistically. Often, people who connect to an artwork do so in a way that defies written or verbal explanation. The artist’s thinking is, as Frayling stated, “embodied in the artefact” (1996, p. 8). Many times, people will connect to a work without understanding the contextualising influences; despite this, there is often communication, questioning or provocation. This is the communication that Frayling mentioned in the fourth point, a communication which goes beyond words (1996). This is salient in my own practice.

Studio Practice

I have a background as a printmaker, but also as a painter and a drawer. These processes are steeped in a tradition and history that cannot be separated from the meaning of the work. When I start a project, I begin by using a technique that relates to my ideas. While drawing is foundational to my process, other techniques are used as dictated by the demands of the studio.

Drawing

Drawing often aids the inception of my work, being the way ideas come into being. Consequently, keeping a visual diary or sketchbook is often fundamental to the making. Drawing in a visual diary is the first step in making the idea concrete or making the unknown, known. Petherbridge discussed the concept of “the thinking hand” (2010, p. 11), referring to a tacit knowledge that is embodied and seems to come directly from the hand and to a different type of thinking that comes into being through the process of drawing. She distinguished “mechanical skill [and the] thoughtful, emotive or idiosyncratic exercise of trained abilities” (2010, p. 11).
Ideas can emerge from the process of drawing itself, with the physical movement of the hand being a part of this. As Klee posited, “the pictorial work springs from movement, it is itself fixated movement and it is grasped in movement” (as cited in Petherbridge, 2010, p. 90). I feel that both Petherbridge and Klee speak to my experience—the initial sketches come into being through the process of drawing, without thinking in a conventional sense. Therefore, for me, drawing in a sketchbook or keeping a visual diary is imperative to the process of making. Of these early sketches, many will be discarded; however, some will become the starting point for a finished work, overlayed or developed with other processes that relate either physically or historically to the work. As each process is added, a different quality emerges. Like Adams, my studio practice holds a definite structure:

My approach to studio practice is methodical. Advanced planning is essential regarding size, scale and materials required. This begins for me with drawings, journal entries and preparing the grounds for the smaller preparatory studies. The selection of materials used in the studio has relevance at this point. The stories I tell guide these decisions. How I make decisions regarding which story and how they are told dictate my selection. Choices made in the studio imbed meaning into layers of the work. The size, shape, colour, surface, depth and construction of the picture plane are the base for meaning (or storytelling) when I design the work. The theoretical meaning is built on this foundation. (Adams, 2008, p. 23)

In my practice, I often start with drawings in my sketchbook, often, with smaller preparatory studies for a work. I may plan the scale or composition in my sketchbook and write notes about my idea. These choices become an intrinsic part of the work. While there is a definite structure to beginning a work, once the process is underway, these steps can change order and things can be added and omitted, depending on the medium and where the idea takes me. In Figure 6.3, the finished image of the etching has been developed from the initial idea in the sketchbook.
Victorian Wallpaper, Woodblock Printmaking and Patterns

Wallpaper became very popular in Victorian times due to the abolishing of the wallpaper tax in 1861, which made wallpaper affordable for the middle classes (Rose, 1995). At that time, the technology to create wallpaper used woodblock prints (Rose, 1995); essentially the same relief printing process that I use when I make a linocut. During my research, I uncovered videos of people printing woodblock wallpaper from the original Victorian blocks, meticulously creating colours from Victorian recipes that had been recorded with the carved blocks (V & A Museum). I am fascinated by the construction of Victorian wallpapers and how the weight of the line and the balance of black and white contribute to this process.

Woodblock printmaking is a relief method, a subtractive process where the artist cuts away the white areas, rolls the block with ink and prints the remaining areas. In Victorian times, this was done with wood (n.d., V & A Museum); later, in the twentieth century, linoleum flooring was used in place of wood for both the ease of carving and the lack of grain, giving a very uniform result. I found these
videos captivating; however, my approach is very different. I am interested in Victorian stylistic tropes, but in a contemporary setting. Therefore, I use colour in a way that is distinctly un-Victorian: replacing the subdued analogous palette of the Victorians with high key vibrant colours. For me, it was the metaphorical aspect of patterns when paired with their historical connotations that piqued my interest. Wallpaper in my artwork is metaphorical—this is the wallpaper of our life. Sometimes, like Alice, we need to disrupt this to become ourselves: our true selves, ourselves self-actualised. When I carved a floral pattern based on a Morris aesthetic, I intended to quote from this aesthetic, not to reproduce it; by adding bright colour, it became something different. Repetition is intrinsic to printmaking. As I created these works, there was an embodied pattern of repeated movements.
I am equally interested in being immersed in patterns. Metaphorically, the patterns of Victorian life were highly structured; social rules were strict (Young, 2011). Similarly, the psychological patterns we have, which I represent visually, are a fundamental tenet of my work. Wallpaper and patterns represent the
structure of society for me. They sit in the background, and you become so accustomed to them that you are no longer aware of they even exist. Many cultural aspects become normative in daily life, and my research asserts that becoming more self-actualised requires an understanding of the complexity of our everyday life and how certain models and power structures that we encounter everyday are constructed.

Further, the repetitive movements associated with the process of printmaking can be understood as physically embodied patterns. Wonderland shakes Alice out of the patterns of conventional seeing and thinking, and this is a primary concern of my creative research. I use patterns to create and disrupt expectations in a visual way. For example, in my artist’s book, as the viewer turns the page, each new image either confirms or disrupts expectations based on the page before. This also applies to other works relating to the psychological aspects of the story. When Alice is in Wonderland, her expectations are challenged in every way, both physically and psychologically, and these challenges cause her to self-actualise (Giddens, 1991).

**Artists’ Books**

In addition to etching as part of my research, I made several artist’s books that are an intrinsic element of my art practice: “The book is a potent element within the vocabularies of creative practice” (Mosely, n.d.).

In explaining the importance of the artist’s book, curator of the MoMA exhibition, *A Century of Artists’ Books* (1994), Riva Castleman stated:

> The difference between “illustrated books” and “artists’ books” is what makes them modern: the artist augments the text with images that do not necessarily define passages in the text. In this way, the reader-viewer may form personal responses to the images as well as to the text, thus, broadening the experience of the book ... The intention of the illustrator is
to clarify the text, while the intention of the artist is to create images that extend and/or enhance the text. (MoMA, 1995, para. 2)

This is particularly relevant to me because I also augment the text rather than illustrate it when examining Alice in Wonderland. It is also my intention to broaden the experience of the Alice in Wonderland book by making artist’s books that respond to the text in a way that extends and enhances re-imagining the story.

Figure 6.5. Falling into Place, artist’s book by Shana James, 2016a, inside cover, Printmakers Association of Western Australia, Fremantle, Australia

The making of artist’s books has been an important aspect of my practice over the last 10 years. As Bury asserted, “the artist’s book is a book or book-like object intended to be a work of art in itself, and over the appearance of which an artist has had a high degree of control” (1995, p. 1). The words “book-like” can be interpreted broadly. Artists’ books can be sculptural or conceptual objects, as well as more traditional book-like objects. All take some elements of the book and recreate it as an artwork; whether it be, words, covers or the episodic nature of the pages, to make an artists’ book is to re-imagine the book:
Artists’ books are artworks that use the form or the concept of the book. Free from the constraints of traditional publishing, they are about nothing so much as themselves. They can be handcrafted or commercially printed; unique; or in limited or unlimited editions. Forms range from the traditional codex to sculptural works, or they may have audio, video, installation, online and performance components. (State Library of Queensland, n.d.)

In my work, I have made conventional books with Coptic binding (see Figure 6.6), concertina books that occupy three-dimensional space (see Figure 6.7) and free-standing “pages”, which, although episodic in nature, are perhaps more akin to a sculpture than a conventional book (see Figure 6.8).

Figure 6.6. *Falling into Place*, artist’s book by Shana James, 2016a, Printmakers Association of Western Australia, Fremantle, Australia.
Figure 6.7. *Transform*, artist’s book by Shana James, 2015, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia.

Figure 6.8. *Ourself Behind Ourselves Concealed*, artist’s book by Shana James, 2017.
As part of this practice-led research, I have also made a book that explores ideas concerning Alice falling, taking the idea from *After Jumping Falling* (see Figure 6.4) and creating it differently as a book. I intended to let the episodic pages reveal the image in a unique way. In *Alice in Wonderland*, the element of surprise is used as a literary device (Mendelsohn, 2007). This analysis is relevant to the visual arts. It is particularly relevant to artists’ books, where each page turned reveals something different with the capacity to surprise the viewer with an image that is unknown from the page before.

I am particularly intrigued in seeing each page of a book as a moment in space and time. This is especially engaging when I am making an artist’s book. Time is a concept that Carroll plays with in *Alice in Wonderland*. The book gives the viewer a choice over how long they view one page before revealing the next. There is an active engagement. The viewer controls how they experience the work because they choose when to turn the page. While I find this conventional approach to the book engaging for some ideas, in my other books, I have subverted this expectation.

For some ideas, I prefer to view the book in its entirety at once, such as the concertina book. However, more conventionally bound books, with separate pages, have an intimacy as an object because the reader generally holds the book to turn the page. The reader has control over the timing and thus, affects their own experience of the book. I agree with Niffengger’s position regarding artists’ books and their historical context: “To make a book is to gain power over objects. Books are potent items. I knew even when I was a kid, there were whole worlds inside them” (as cited in Wasserman et al., 2007, p. 12). To me, some of the most successful artists’ books challenge ideas of what a book is; however, they all start with the idea of a book and the history that is embodied by a book. This is what makes it such a “potent item” (as cited in Wasserman et al., 2007, p. 12): the book is a cultural object that connects to thousands of years of history.
In the case of my book, *Ourselves behind Ourselves Concealed* (see Figure 6.8), I chose to destabilise the conventional structure of the book. This is an unconventional book, with a more sculptural aspect that references the paper dolls I played with as a child. However, I am not opposed to creating books of a more conventional iteration when the idea for the artwork requires it. Coptic binding dates to the third century; it is how the very first books were made (Turner, 2011). I enjoy the connotations of this historical aspect. When I stitch together the bindings, I feel the connection through history to the first people who crafted the first books. I am making the same embodied movements that they made. I first made books as a child, with felt markers and staples. Now, I make books using techniques steeped in history that are centuries old. As Niffenegger stated:

To make books is to create physical form for ideas. All artists do this of course, but the book has been a body of human thought for many centuries, and when we make unusual books, artists books, we are messing with that body. This can incite strong feelings in readers. We identify with books and when artists transgress against books, it is a serious thing. I make books from scratch, some of my favourite artists enjoy cutting up books with band saws. (as cited in Wasserman et al., 2007, p. 13)

Like Niffenegger, I have a reverence for the book as an object, which makes it even more poignant when that object has been shifted, either subtly or substantially. As with printmaking, when I make artists’ books, I am interested in the history of that object or process and the weight that it holds.

**Summary**

When making an artwork, the medium I choose is an intrinsic part of the process. Each process has its own nuances, history and physicality; I choose it because it relates to the idea in some way. For me, the process and the idea intertwine so that neither can be separated from the other. This is precisely the interplay that Bolt (2011) referred to in the intelligence of materials in practice-led research. My love for printmaking and its history, together with the tacit
knowledge I acquired over years of experience informs this process. In the practice-led research process, I continually make and respond to what I have made in a rhizomatic way, responding to materials and reinventing processes (Bolt, 2010; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). In all the artworks I create, the primacy of the idea must be acknowledged as the most important aspect of this process. The medium is chosen for its intrinsic qualities, and I collaborate with that medium to express my ideas. In this research, I examine the self-actualisation and the story of *Alice in Wonderland* as a metaphor for aspects of contemporary life. The artwork is a corollary of practice-led research in the studio, driven by the combination of the overarching idea and the making process in the studio.
Chapter 7. Down the Rabbit Hole

For this practice-led research, I have curated a solo exhibition of my Alice based works, entitled *Down the Rabbit Hole*, at the Spectrum Project Space, ECU. This exhibition includes the Fringe World Residency, 15 January to 12 February 2021, where I will make artwork in the gallery while it is open to the public. The title for the exhibition, *Down the Rabbit Hole*, is used for the currency this phrase has in our current time. It is synonymous with delving into a subject and becoming immersed in ideas beyond what is known—this is the overarching idea that all my works relate to. I intended to create an exhibition that inspires a feeling of Wonderland; whimsical at first glance but with a playful, dynamic engagement of the ideas from my research, namely self-actualisation and the hero’s journey. I intend to create an exhibition in which the audience can contemplate choices, decisions and self-identity through the lens of Alice.

I envisaged this exhibition as an immersive space, comprising both two-dimensional works and three-dimensional installations that invite the audience to engage with the work. The exhibition will include:

a. two 30-panel, large-scale linocuts (*Liminal Space and After Jumping Falling*).

b. a body of etchings salon hung on the wall that explores Alice falling and the choices she does or does not take.

c. several large-scale, hanging fabric works that are semi-transparent so that the images will be visible through the preceding image. Each panel will be just over 1 metre wide by 3 metres tall and will depict Alice falling. These will be in the front half of the space in the centre of the room.

d. an installation of small antique “drink me” bottles hanging suspended in mid-air.

e. a stop motion animation of Alice falling drawings.
f. in the long side room, an installation blocking off the windows and a series of lights on shelves reflecting images relating to the work in the main gallery.


g. several artists books, depicting falling medium etching and linocut.

**Studio Process**

**Two 30-Panel, Large-Scale Linocuts**

“Two 30-panel, large-scale linocuts” explores the making of two multi-panelled works to illuminate my process in the studio: (i) *After Jumping Falling* (see Figure 6.4); and (ii) *Liminal Space* (see Figure 7.3). These are mixed media works on paper, made from paper, coloured with drawing ink and linocuts with areas masked out. They each include 30 small panels. However, I did not intend on making two works on paper at 2.1 metres by 1.6 metres. Had I considered it, I would not have created these works at all—logistically, a work on paper of this size is impractical to exhibit and framing presents challenges; however, the idea works conceptually. This elucidates an example of a process where I allowed the work to dictate the logical next step.
This multi-panelled work started as an artist’s book, *Falling into Place* (see Figure 7.1), of more modest proportions, with the masked-out silhouette of Alice falling. My ideas for this work were metaphorical—Alice being a space to project my ideas onto. I decided that the book should be black and white, and then I chose to colour the endpapers (the pages on the inside of the front and back covers) to match the blue raw silk fabric covers (see Figure 6.5). Initially, the blue was too cool compared to the fabric, so I warmed it up by adding some magenta. The flow of the colour was intoxicating, and I chose to make the colour vary slightly over the surface. When the ink had dried, I printed the linocut pattern on top. I was very satisfied with the result. There was something about the looseness of the hand-painted drawing ink and the crisp, sharp linocut that worked well together, each acting as a foil for the other. The sharp, solid linocut created the feeling that the colour was brighter and more painterly.
I decided to combine the processes I had used in this book for a new work, expanding the silhouette technique with colour. I experimented with nine works, some of which were more successful than others. After analysing my work, I understood that the piece with no figure, only pattern (a test print that was not intended for exhibiting), combined beautifully with another image with the silhouette in similar colours. I lined the images up on a wall, considering whether these smaller pieces would work together as one piece. After further examination, I decided that gradating the colour would work better.

I began creating the coloured backgrounds for a larger piece. First, I drew small diagrams in my sketchbook, studying the movement of colour (see Figure 7.2). I sketched seven in each colour gradation, not knowing how many would be culled for the finished version. I drew image after image of falling figures and cut them out as paper silhouettes, placing them on the inked block. I realised that, although the pattern did not repeat, there was the illusion of an immersive space when the works were hung together with colour as a unifying aspect. This created connotations of Victorian wallpaper while enabling the work to amalgamate different aspects of the same event—falling and creating a unified non-linear narrative.
I specifically chose paper cut-outs that related to the hand-coloured paper and placed them according to the colours underneath before printing the linocut on top. This connects with Barrett’s analysis of the studio process: “The materials and methods used in the studio form part of the enquiry itself—often the process involves inventing new methods and using new or unconventional materials” (Barret, 2010, p. 191). While drawing, ink, linocut and masking are all conventional materials and processes, I had not used them in this way before. This approach to printmaking is experimental and inventive. It springs from my idea of creating a space where Alice was not—a liminal space. During the making of this work, certain aspects of traditional printmaking were followed while others were subverted as needed; the materials have their own intelligence (Bolt, 2010). Following Bolt, one could say that repetition is part of the intelligence of printmaking. In this work, it was not used to create an edition of prints in the conventional way but to create a single work.

There is always an element of discovery when doing something that you have not done before. I made seven images of each colour, with the expectation that I
would use less in the final piece. It was only after all the images were finished that I spread them out on the floor and stood on a chair to view them. The pieces had a greater effect when combined. They provided an immersive quality related to Victorian wallpapers and my ideas regarding patterns. At this stage, I took the 36 pieces into the studio at ECU because there was more space there. I assembled 30 on the wall so I could view them as they would be viewed in a gallery.

It is difficult to describe the process of choosing the order of these pieces. I placed the images next to each other until I established what worked best for me. This was a subjective process: just as a curator decides what works should hang where or a poet chooses one word over another. It is not random, but a considered choice as part of an overarching intention. This seemingly intuitive decision is informed by years of experience making these types of judgements. These judgements are part of my tacit knowledge. It is through the process of making, in all its nuances, that new ideas manifest. I concur with Polyani’s description of this process: “Though not explicit, ineffable or tacit, knowledge is always implicated in human activity and learning” (as cited in Barrett & Bolt, 2010, p. 4). Having now created one work comprised of multiple images, I wanted to explore creating other iterations of the idea. I made a second image this way, Liminal Space, playing with the colours and figures using my experience from creating the first work (see Figure 7.3).
Like Blackman’s painting, *Triptych Alice* (see Figure 5.7), the larger than human scale gave the work a presence that would not have occurred in a smaller work. For me, creating an image where the viewer must look upwards produces a more absorbing quality. This relates back to the idea of the Victorian wallpaper in
sheer physicality. The finished image captured the figure falling, always in that moment between jumping and landing (see Figure 7.3). These works borrow from Victorian wallpapers and patterns to create an immersive space, inquiring into the liminal space of Alice falling, a place of transition between the familiar knowing of what was and the uncertainty of what comes next.

Second Case Study: The Process of Etching

Once I had explored patterns with linocut, a thought occurred to me: I could use the soft ground in my etchings to create another field of patterns on which to superimpose another image of Alice falling. I had not made an etching for a couple of years, although I am very experienced in the process, and I teach etching at the Fremantle Arts Centre, Western Australia. However, understanding the process, demonstrating technique and mentoring students is not practice-led research, even though you are immersed in the subject. It is a different type of thinking.

Bolt stated that we must “give pre-eminence to [the] material practice of art” (2010, p. 31). There is no substitute for being alone with your thoughts in the print studio, making marks on a plate, dealing with a multiplicity of concerns and collaborating with the process to make an image. I decided to make a small image to reimmerse myself in the medium. This was necessary because I had been thinking in terms of relief printing (linocut) and etching requires, in some ways, an opposite kind thinking.

Copper (which is used in etching) is expensive on a larger scale. Therefore, it makes sense to create small works, just as sculptors make maquettes to solve problems on a small scale before creating a larger piece. Doing a study in the same medium enabled me to understand the subtlety of etching again for this series of images. I needed to rework the image and repeated the procedure three times to achieve the desired result (not unusual for the etching process). Reworking the image was a necessary component of reflexivity, engaging with
the work and its material creation. The work evolved through this continual process of making and responding.

While etching has its foundation in drawing and there are many similarities, there are also many differences: “Practical knowledge takes a number of forms, and it is this multiplicity that provides creative arts research with its distinctive character … tacit knowing and the generative potential of [the] process have the potential to reveal new insights” (Bolt, 2010, p. 31). It was this generative aspect of the process that I responded to, necessitating continued reworking and consequently, a different outcome. In this playful and collaborative mode of being immersed in the process, I decided to print the image ala poupee—a traditional method of wiping back the same plate with more than one colour (Figure 7.4). During the process of printing the plate, which is labour intensive, I became inspired to turn this image into an artist’s book; reprinting the image over and over without reinking it to create multiple images as a book, where the image would gradually fade into existence. Anecdotally, there is a famous quote attributed to Picasso: “Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working”. This is true for me because the more I work, the more ideas come to me. I find it necessary to record ideas in my sketchbook as soon they appear because they vanish just as easily as they come into being; this is where the value of a visual diary is paramount.
While making the small etching and planning the larger one, I was teaching two etching classes for which I demonstrated how to prepare the plate with the ground. I then had two blank plates prepared, but no image to place on them. I thought of the artist’s book that I made in 2014, *Transform*, now in the collection of Monash University, Melbourne (see Figure 6.7), and decided to build on that idea with the words embedded into the image. I embodied my meandering thoughts in my sketchbook and revisited my reference photos for the subject. Unable to find photos in my collection that worked for this new idea, I set up the scene again—one with the teapot pouring water into the cup, and one with the teapot pouring water onto an upturned cup. I then drew from these images, varying the position of the teapot to create interest when the images were placed side by side. While I was happy with the composition of the first print, I knew that the medium had the capacity for more depth. I decided to regrind the plate, redraw aspects of the image and re-etch areas of the image to create strength and depth. Figure 7.5 shows the finished reworked etching.
This continual reworking is an important aspect of creating a successful image. It is through experience with the medium that an artist knows when something could be more than what it is. Knowing the potential of that process is derived from two things: an experience of your previous work (or looking at other artwork) and putting one’s thoughts into practice. For me, this is not only drawing but all art-making processes that are primarily undertaken with what Petherbridge called “the thinking hand” (2010, p. 11).

Etching is a complex and involved subject. Video 1 shows me working in my studio to illuminate the process of grounding the plate drawing into the ground, etching and printing the plate.
Other Planned Artworks

The following works were, at the time of writing, in the initial stage of either making or planning. It is not my intention to be prescriptive here because, during the research, the artwork will develop from these initial ideas. These small windows into the beginning process are designed to outline my plans for the exhibition in January, which also includes the residency, which will allow time for exploration and engagement with these ideas.

Falling into Place: Large-Scale, Hanging Fabric Works

I intend to create three to five large-scale, hanging works. These works will be site-specific, with the length of the fabric being long enough to cascade onto the
floor in the front of the Spectrum Project Space, ECU. I aim to hang these fabric works, which are semi-transparent, so that the images will be visible through the preceding image. Each panel will be just over 1 metre wide by 3 metres tall and will depict Alice falling, painted in ink and acrylic. Because I have not made a fabric work like this before, I experimented with several different types of fabric to observe how it would take the charcoal and pastel, and have chosen the fabric for its translucent quality (see Figure 7.6).

Figure 7.6. *Transition* (in progress, hung in the studio), by Shana James, 2020.
Drink Me: Possibilities for the Installation

I have purchased 30 antique replica glass bottles that I will fill with coloured water and suspend from the roof. Using etching, I will make a plate of the phrase “Drink Me” and create tags for tying to the bottles, as was usual in Victorian times (Gardner, 2015). This is also the way the bottle was illustrated in the original Tenniel illustrations. I intend to create a partial circle of bottles hanging from the ceiling, so that when a person stands among them, they are floating in space all around their head, offering a myriad of choices.

In *Alice in Wonderland*, the bottle appears out of nowhere, beckoning Alice to drink: “It was all very well to say, ’Drink Me’, but the wise little Alice was not going to do that in a hurry. ’No, I’ll look first and see if it’s marked “poison” or not’” (Carroll, 2004, p. 16). After finding no mention of the word poison, Alice tries the potion, only then discovering that it changes her size. She is open to trying something, tempered with not being reckless. This artwork invites people to be open to trying something, even when you cannot be sure of the outcome. All around us, life is asking, “Will you join the dance?” (as the Mock Turtle sings) (Carroll, 2011, p. 102). This is especially relevant in a world responding to the COVID-19 pandemic when many of life’s experiences have been off-limits to us. It forces us to consider how we can drink life’s experiences while social-distancing.
Stop Motion Drawing of Alice Falling

I plan to create a stop motion animation using charcoal, with the lines added and erased. This is a medium that I have been interested in trying ever since seeing the charcoal animated drawings by Kentridge (2013). The underlying concepts of transformation and movement are ideally suited to this medium. This animated drawing will be projected onto the wall of the gallery.
Light Installation

In the side room of the gallery, I plan to block-out the windows with black plastic and create a series of shelves along the wall. Using simple square lamps, I will create a series of silhouettes with paper cut-outs and mirrors reflecting the lights onto the walls. For me, one of the important aspects of the text is the feeling it creates that reality is not what it seems. I intend that this design will convey that feeling by providing an imaginative space that creates a sense of possibility.
Artists’ Books

This exhibition will include several artist’s books; one will include the etchings discussed in Chapter 4. Artist’s books are a significant part of my practice, and I expect that more ideas for books will present themselves as I am creating the above works. This will also be something I work on during the residency because the artist’s books will benefit from playful trial and error (Fenton, as cited in Mercer et al., 2012).
Video 3. Video of Entire Exhibition Down the Rabbit Hole by Shana James 2021, Spectrum Project Space ECU.

Link to video:
Chapter 8. Conclusion

Through this research, I have created an exhibition that re-imagines the story of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll, 1865), augmenting and expanding the ideas contained in the original text, yet retaining the whimsical qualities. The magical, dreamlike nature of the story is fundamental to my connection with it, and, therefore, integral to my creation of artwork in the studio. It has been my desire, through this Master of Arts by Research, to create works that can be experienced on many levels—the craft, materials and making are inextricably intertwined with the ideas, connotations and meaning. This is a body of work designed to engage with the public. I intend that the audience will interpret it in relation to their own experiences and lifeworld. The understanding created by this research has refined and informed the artwork I have made during my studio practice through this research.

Initially, my journey in *Down the Rabbit Hole* led me to explore the intriguing life of Carroll and the Victorian society that he was a part of. Through investigating Carroll’s biographical information, I have been able to garner an understanding of his lifeworld. This has enabled me to inhabit the Victorian era metaphorically, and, hence, enrich my understanding of the text. From this position, I have deepened my knowledge beyond that espoused by popular culture and Disney’s adaptations. Being steeped in Carroll’s world has given me a more nuanced reading, which has consequently affected the artwork I create. Without this knowledge, I could not have created the works based on Victorian wallpaper and the liminal space of Alice as she falls down the rabbit hole.

The first research question examines *Alice in Wonderland* in relation to self-actualisation. I gained a unique insight into my own work and my motivations to create and communicate. I have become aware of the many faceted views on the symbology and origins of the text. Giddens’s (1991) writings concerning self-actualisation have focused the text in a new way for me, and I
have realised that much of my artwork, prior to the Alice artwork, has also been concerned with self-actualisation. I have explored Alice as a “reflexive project of the self” (Giddens, 1991, p. 5) and likened both the text and the artwork to the self-actualisation of the contemporary individual.

Visual symbols have always been an important aspect of my work, and a deeper knowledge of how the imagery fits into archetypal symbols (Jung, 1979) and Campbell’s (1993) discussions of the hero’s journey have been an important aspect of this research. I have rediscovered the story as a book of symbolic vignettes that explore different aspects of the self and the self in relation to society. Further, I have become aware of Campbell’s (1993) limitations regarding the hero’s journey stories with a female protagonist. I investigated the ways that the hero’s journey can indeed be applied to a female’s journey, illuminating this obvious omission. I have demonstrated that a feminist reading of Campbell is highly important because it affects how stories with female protagonists (both historical and contemporary) are understood. Consequently, Alice has agency in my artwork and the artworks discussed in Chapter 5; she is a hero who is on a journey of self-actualisation.

After predominately creating work concerning self-actualisation in the first part of my candidature, the second research question, which concerns creating a sense of Wonderland in the exhibition space, has particularly extended me. It has led me to create an exhibition that could be described as one large installation because it works together as a whole, creating a Wonderland experience (as Kusama’s installations do). This exhibition is designed to transform the space and surprise and delight the audience, creating a dynamic and immersive experience. This is a playful collection, with works of different sizes and mediums, and works hanging from the roof, floating in space for the viewer to discover. The Spectrum Project Space is a large open gallery; however, I consider it important to develop an exhibition where the works are not all visible from the entrance. The viewers enter the gallery, unable to anticipate what comes next—the layout will create a feeling of the unexpected. This
exhibition represents the intersection of my childhood experience of the abridged Alice in Wonderland recording, my adult experience of reading the original text to my daughters and my ideas around self-actualisation. These three lenses combine with the making process to become multifaceted artworks that illuminate the story in a new way.

Additionally, I have found it particularly elucidating to examine the field of artists who have responded to Alice, broadening the scope for my own making. The more my mind wandered through Wonderland. The more I thought of ways to express my ideas visually, expanding my previous practice. I have revealed numerous ways to re-imagine the story and its symbolic elements through printmaking, a method that has specific relevance to the Victorian era. I have embedded my tacit knowledge into the cultural landscape of Wonderland and created my culminating exhibition, Down the Rabbit Hole.

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“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to”, said the Cat.

(Carroll, 2004, p. 64)
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