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**Use of material and biomorphic form to convey aspects
of gendered and cultural identity constructs with
emphasis on selected works by Nicholas Hlobo**

By

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ABSTRACT

In this study, I explore the way in which materials and biomorphic¹ forms are used in selected artworks to convey aspects of gendered² and cultural identity constructs. This is done with specific reference to Nicholas Hlobo's work and to the artwork I produce as part of the practical component of my research. I have chosen Hlobo's installation *Izithunzi* (2009)³ because it is a pertinent example of the way in which he uses biomorphic form⁴ and typifies his use of materials, both of which have some similarities to my work.

Although Hlobo's use of materials is widely discussed in the available literature on his work, little has been written on his use of biomorphic form. To address this gap in the literature, I look specifically at how Hlobo uses biomorphic form in *Izithunzi* to represent what I argue to be the hybridity of his gendered and cultural identity. In the practical component, I present a series of sculptures made from second-hand furniture, polystyrene, concrete, plastic, stuffing, fabric, thread, steel pipe and fibreglass. As Hlobo does in *Izithunzi*, I consciously make reference to biomorphic forms. However, whereas I argue that Hlobo uses these forms to represent his *hybrid* identity in which his gay and isiXhosa cultural

¹ Biomorphic forms or images in art may be defined as "ones that while abstract, nevertheless refer to, or evoke, living forms such as plants and the human body" (The Tate Guide to Modern Art Terms 2008:37). The word 'biomorphic' came into use in the 1930s to describe imagery in "abstract types of Surrealist painting and sculptures, particularly in the work of Joan Miró, Jean Arp, Yves Tanguy, Henry Moore and ... Louis Bourgeois" (Wilson & Lack 2008:38). Biomorphs are built irrationally, "but ... emulate the germinal forces of nature" (Biomorphic (Organic) Abstraction [sa]:[sp]).

² Pat Kirkham (1996:2,4) contends that to be gendered is to be sexed, and that "new meaning is created by gendering an object", while Susan Farrell and Judith Lorber (1991:33) discuss gender as a "powerful ideological device, which produces, reproduces, and legitimates the choices and limits that are predicated on sex category". The term 'gendered' differs from 'gender' as it is not defined as a sexual category but rather the consciously chosen gender that is bestowed on a subject.

³ *Izithunzi* means 'shadows' in isiXhosa. This installation forms part of two installation artworks from Hlobo's exhibition titled *Umtshotsho* that was held at the Standard Bank Gallery in May 2010. An *umtshotsho* is a "peer-regulated youth organisation of adolescents, which holds parties where mock-fighting, dancing and dating take place; a dry run, as it were, for lives of war and procreation" (Gevisser 2009:9). Although he was not part of the traditional *umtshotsho* rituals, as an adolescent Hlobo often fantasised about being part of them (Gevisser 2009:10) and recreated this ritual through his *Umtshotsho* installation.

⁴ As Hlobo does not use biomorphic form in all his works. I have therefore singled out the installation *Izithunzi* for discussion because all eight figures in the installation contain such forms.

identity combine, I use them to explore the construction of my *emergent* cultural and gendered identity. Unlike Hlobo's identity, which stems from processes of cross-cultural exchange to give rise to a newly created space of in-betweenness, my cultural identity stems from historically defined conceptions of Afrikaner cultural and female gendered identity under apartheid. I renegotiate my constructed identity that is in a constant 'state of becoming'.

My exploration of Hlobo's gay isiXhosa male identity is situated within the context of postcolonial and postmodern theory and the broader parameters of constructivist identity theory. To support this, Stuart Hall's (2003:236) constructivist theory of cultural identity as being unfixed, unstable, liminal, performative and emergent, informs my discussion. As Hlobo's artwork combines his isiXhosa heritage with his Western and gendered identity as a gay male, I argue that this combination is a manifestation of *Homi K Bhabha's* (1994) concept of the Third Space of Enunciation (hereafter 'the Third Space') which Bhabha associates with hybridity. In the Third Space, cultural identities are seen as being hybridised; it is from this hybridity that a new fluid position or liminal identity emerges. In the practical component, I present a series of sculptures made from furniture, polystyrene, paint and concrete. As Hlobo does in *Izithunzi*, I consciously make reference to biomorphic forms. However, whereas I argue that Hlobo uses these forms to represent his *hybrid* identity wherein his gay and isiXhosa cultural identity combine, I use them to explore the construction of my *emergent* cultural identity. Unlike Hlobo's identity, which arises from processes of cross-cultural exchange, to give rise to a newly created space of in-betweenness, my cultural identity stems from historically defined conceptions of Afrikaner identity under apartheid, but is being renegotiated, and is in a constant 'state of becoming'.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study is an exploration of the way in which I use materials and biomorphic forms in selected artworks to convey certain aspects of gendered and cultural identity constructs. It comprises two separate but inter-related components. In the theoretical component, which comprises this dissertation, I explore Nicholas Hlobo's use of materials and biomorphic forms in selected artworks and my own use of these types of forms and materials in the artwork that I have produced as part of the practical component of my research. The practical component comprises an exhibition, titled *Ontluikende on/ge-mak*, shown at the FADA Gallery from 12 January to 20 February 2015.

I have chosen to examine Hlobo's installation titled *Izithunzi* (2009)⁵ (Fig.1.1,1.2), which forms one part of two installation artworks from Hlobo's exhibition titled *Umtshotsho* (Standard Bank Gallery, 30 March-8 May 2010). My choice of this work is based on the fact that it is a pertinent example of the way in which he uses biomorphic form⁶ and typifies his use of materials, both of which have similarities (and differences) to my work.

⁵*Izithunzi* means 'shadows' in isiXhosa. An *mtshotsho* is a "peer-regulated youth organisation of adolescents, which holds parties where mock-fighting, dancing and dating take place; a dry run, as it were, for lives of war and procreation" (Gevisser 2009:9). Although he was not part of the traditional *mtshotsho* rituals, as an adolescent Hlobo often fantasised about being part of them and has recreated this ritual through his *Umtshotsho* installation (Gevisser 2009:10).

⁶ As Hlobo does not use biomorphic form in all his works, I have singled out the installation *Izithunzi* for discussion because all eight figures in the installation represent such forms.



Figure 1.1 Nicholas Hlobo (artist), *Izithunzi* detail 1, 2009. Rubber inner tubing, ribbon, organza, lace, found objects, steel and couch. Installation consists of eight sculptures. approx. 200 x 150 x 150 cm each (photograph courtesy of Stevenson Gallery).



Figure 1.2 Nicholas Hlobo (artist), *Izithunzi* detail 2, 2009. Rubber inner tubing, ribbon, organza, lace, found objects, steel and couch. Installation consists of eight sculptures. approx. 200 x 150 x 150 cm each (photograph courtesy of Stevenson Gallery).

Although Hlobo's use of materials is widely discussed in the literature available on his work, little has been written on his use of biomorphic form. I attempt to address this gap in the literature by looking specifically at how Hlobo uses biomorphic form in *Izithunzi* to represent, what I argue to be, the hybridity of his

gendered, westernised and cultural identities. In addition to contributing to the lack of literature on Hlobo's use of biomorphic form, I examine what I consider to be my emergent Afrikaner identity in light of other emerging South African post-apartheid Afrikaner identities. In this way, I make a contribution to the nascent field of what may be termed 'Afrikaner Identity Studies'. This field could be considered as a sub-category of the broader area of inquiry termed Critical Whiteness Studies, that has developed over the past thirty years, primarily in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States. In South Africa, Critical Whiteness Studies⁷ remains a relatively undeveloped field. Some research has been conducted in this area, particularly by Melissa Steyn (1999, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2011), Nicky Falkof (2011, 2013, 2014) and Leora Farber (2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). Academics that have contributed to the field of Afrikaner Identity Studies include Charl Alberts (2013) and Christi van der Westhuizen (see 2012, 2013, 2014). Van der Westhuizen (cited in Falkof & Farber 2013:13) has written on *ordentlikheid* — or 'ethnicised respectability' which, she observes, "(re)animates or disrupts normative *volksmoeder* white, middle class hetero-femininity". Alberts (cited in Falkof & Farber 2013:12) has presented a paper on redefining Afrikaner identities of school-going Afrikaner teenagers in dialogue with their parents in post-apartheid South Africa. In his study Alberts found that

[Afrikaner] identities are often rooted in the discredited apartheid past, but what also emerged were voices of whiteness and Afrikanerness that can be described as subject positions that transcend the ideology of whiteness and embrace solidarity across

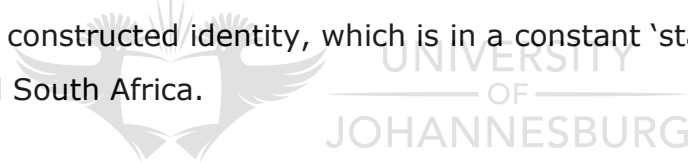
⁷Nicky Falkof and Leora Farber (2013:[sp]) note that

Global whiteness studies are relevant to post-apartheid South Africa as they question the mechanisms of power that support and sustain whiteness as an ideological construct and not a solely racial category; draw attention to and deconstruct the master narrative of whiteness; and engage with processes of de-authorising whiteness by revisiting subject positions from within the contexts of history, culture and power.

Furthermore, Richard Dyer (cited in Barnard 2012:1) notes that "within discourses of race whiteness is usually centralised, dominant, unraced and invisible – that is, whiteness is not directly addressed as a race, but functions as the norm". Desré Barnard (2012:1) goes further by describing whiteness as the construct to measure the "non-white Other".

racial lines (Alberts 2013:12) ... these youthful voices of ... renewal have the potential, if it can be supported and strengthened through social forces of different kinds, to make a contribution towards challenging discredited legacies of Afrikaner whiteness in the post-apartheid context (Alberts 2013:28).

In my practical work, I present a series of sculptures made from different combinations of the following materials: second-hand furniture, polystyrene, concrete, plastic, stuffing, fabric, thread, steel pipe and fibreglass. As Hlobo does in *Izithunzi*, I consciously make reference to biomorphic forms. However, I argue that Hlobo uses these forms to represent his *hybrid* identity in which the triad⁸ of his gay, traditional isiXhosa and Western cultural identities combine; I use biomorphic forms to explore the construction of my *emergent* cultural and gendered identity. I suggest that this emergent identity gives rise to a newly created space of 'in-betweenness'. Hlobo's hybrid identity stems from processes of cross-cultural exchange between contemporary Western culture and his post-colonial isiXhosa culture. My cultural identity stems from historically defined constructions of Afrikaner cultural and female gendered identity under apartheid. I renegotiate my constructed identity, which is in a constant 'state of becoming' in post-apartheid South Africa.



My exploration of Hlobo's gay, isiXhosa, and westernised male identity is situated within the context of post-colonial and post-modern theory and the broader parameters of constructivist identity theory. To support this, Stuart Hall's (2003:236) constructivist theory of cultural identity, as being unfixed, unstable, liminal, performative and emergent, informs my discussion. As Hlobo's artwork combines his isiXhosa heritage with his gendered identity as a westernised gay male, I suggest that this hybrid combination is a manifestation of Homi K Bhabha's (1994) concept of the 'Third Space of Enunciation' (hereafter 'the Third Space'). In the Third Space, cultural identities are seen as being hybridised. Bhabha (cited in Rutherford 1990:210) describes cultures as "symbol-forming" practices, and notes that through the "act of producing [the] icons and symbols, the myths and metaphors through which we live culture,

⁸ The three forms of identities that make up this triad are not discreet entities; they overlap with each other. I therefore interweave them throughout my discussion on his work.

must always – by virtue of the fact that they are forms of representation – have within them a kind of self-alienating limit”. Culture is always being translated or imitated; it is not complete within itself, and therefore, the meaning in culture is “constructed across the bar of difference and separation between signifier and the signified” (Rutherford 1990:210). Through the translation of a culture in “order to objectify a cultural meaning”, there is a “process of alienation and of secondariness *in relation to itself*” (Rutherford 1990:210). Bhabha (cited in Rutherford 1990:210) explains that with the translation of culture, meaning is created by imitation, copying, transfer and transformation, where the primacy of the original is no longer reinforced. Bhabha (cited in Rutherford 1990:211) maintains that cultural identities are seen as hybrid because of this “genealogy of difference and the idea of translation”. It is from this hybridity that a new fluid position or liminal identity emerges.

1.1 Background to the study: renegotiating Afrikaner identity

As a white Afrikaans-speaking⁹ heterosexual woman living and working in a contemporary urban environment in post-colonial, post-apartheid¹⁰ South Africa, I am conscious of how unstable and open-ended my emergent cultural and gendered identity is, and how it shifts in different social contexts. As an adult, I find myself constantly having to renegotiate my gendered Afrikaner identity, partly because of my need to locate myself within the rapidly and progressively transforming post-apartheid environment, and partly to come to terms with my Afrikaner legacy.

Growing up in my particular Afrikaner family, I was always aware that we were proudly Afrikaners, but did not understand this to infer that we were better than any other culture or race. In my home, historically entrenched gender

⁹ For the purposes of this study, the term ‘Afrikaner culture’ is used to refer to those white middle-class South Africans that speak Afrikaans as their home language. While ‘Afrikaner culture’ includes many South African communities besides the white middle class, I am referring specifically to the white middle class community from whence I come.

¹⁰ The predominantly Afrikaner National Party held political power from 1948 to 1994, promoting an essentialist agenda that enforced apartheid as a legislative policy in South Africa.

stereotypes were enforced; women were seen as nurturers and homemakers who created a favourable domestic environment for the patriarch. As a female, I was taught to work hard, but I was also taught that women should not engage in hard labour – their ‘work’ comprised activities such as needlework, cooking, and domestic work or child-rearing. Yet, ironically, the pursuit of higher education for both males and females was greatly supported and valued. Religion played a central part in our family, as it does in the majority of Afrikaner families, and every Sunday we attended the Dutch Reformed Church. In our Afrikaner culture, teenagers were expected to be confirmed in a church at sixteen or seventeen. I was given no choice in which religion I could follow and found this exposure to the sterile and conservative Dutch Reformed Church stifling. It was by learning about other religions such as Hinduism and Judaism that I could better understand the Christian faith.

From a young age I was aware of the notion of ‘politics’ but I was unaware of apartheid. My parents often fought about the political situation in South Africa. My mother took a more liberal stance about the upliftment of suppressed people during apartheid, while my father supported the status quo in accordance with his position as a National Party politician from the 1970s through to the early 1990s. As a child I was part of an organisation called ‘The Voortrekkers’, where we learnt about our Afrikaner heritage and basic survival skills. Looking back on my childhood, I now believe that many of the values communicated to me were contradictory. For example, a woman should work hard but not do hard labour because it is considered ‘unfeminine’; a woman should be educated yet at the same time be submissive to the patriarch; a woman had to fear, respect and submit to a white male, who was seen as the ultimate symbol of power, whilst simultaneously being sincerely loving and caring towards him.

Through my reading of post-colonial theory, it has become clear to me that the constructivist notion of constantly renegotiating one’s identity has particular relevance when applied to South Africans in a contemporary post-apartheid context. While the renegotiation of one’s identity is a global phenomenon, it is particularly relevant to South Africa because of the shift in political power that came about in 1994 with the transition to democracy. This shift has given South

African citizens, post-apartheid, the opportunity to reposition themselves within a new ideology.

I identify with Natasha Distiller's and Melissa Steyn's (2004:9) analysis of what they term the "renegotiation of identity" in post-apartheid South Africa since the first democratic government came into power in 1994. In using the term 'renegotiating identity', Distiller and Steyn (2004:7) refer to locating oneself anew, within one's culture and gendered identity, and in so doing, re-establish norms in the developing South African socio-political climate. They (Distiller & Steyn 2004:7) contend that great emphasis has been placed on the "new South Africa" being a "rainbow nation", in an attempt to create solidarity between the country's inhabitants. Yet, as they note, writing ten years after of democracy, it is questionable whether constructed ideologies, such as the "new South Africa" and the "African renaissance"¹¹ (Distiller & Steyn 2004:8) successfully describe the current South Africa. It is also debatable whether these terms are effective in positioning South Africans and South Africa positively as an 'African country' (Distiller & Steyn 2004:8), and whether or not they enable people of different cultures to come to terms with renegotiating their social identities or facilitate a sense of "national liberation" (Distiller & Steyn 2004:8).

I build on Distiller's and Steyn's notion of the 'renegotiation' of identity in relation to my Afrikaner identity, with a view to contributing to a new narrative of Afrikaner identity. There is evidence of a range of South African cultural practitioners who are grappling with their post-1994 Afrikaner identities. Their work is personalised, in that they look at specific, often autobiographic, reconsiderations of their Afrikaner heritage. Amongst this loosely defined group

¹¹ Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael (2000:58) describe the 'African Renaissance' as the "reigning metaphor for a new humanism in South Africa today". The term was popularised in the 1990's by the then South African president Thabo Mbeki and was later taken up by Desmond Tutu. Natasha Distiller's and Melissa Steyn (2004:8) describe the African Renaissance as "an attempt to engage with the problem of how to overcome the colonial construction of Africa". Furthermore, the "African Renaissance embodies both the aspirations and the contradictions of the 'new' 'nation'" (Distiller & Steyn 2004:8). The "Africanness" in the term 'African Renaissance' is described as "depend[ent] on a commitment to the continent and the concept of 'Africa', which carefully exclude[s] neither diasporic black African nor white South Africans" (Distiller & Steyn 2004:8).

are several Afrikaner artists who explore, through their work, their cultural positionalities in relation to contemporary South Africa.



Figure 1.3 Roelof van Wyk (artist), *Yolandi Vi\$\$er*, 2009-2011. Photograph, 800 x 600 cm (courtesy of artist).



Figure 1.4 Roelof van Wyk (artist), *Suzaan Heyns*, 2009-2011. Photograph, 800 x 600 cm (courtesy of artist).



Figure 1.5 Roelof van Wyk (artist), *Koos Groenewald*, 2009-2011. Photograph, 800 x 600 cm (courtesy of artist).

For instance, in his exhibition titled *Figures and Fictions: Roelof van Wyk* (Figs. 1.3–1.5), Roelof van Wyk presents a series of photographic portraits of what he calls the “new Afrikaner generation” (Figures and Fictions 2011:[sp]). Through his photographic portraits he documents his friends and acquaintances, some of whom are well-known South African public personae such as the musician Yolandi Vi\$\$er (lead female singer from the band *Die Antwoord*) and fashion designer Suzaan Heyns. His subjects are photographed in different positions; all are head and shoulders portraits of the naked subjects. In some cases, he takes photos of his subjects from both back and front and displays these images together, while in other cases, he places two differently positioned photos of the person’s back next to one another, or places two differently positioned frontal photographs together. All his subjects are positioned against a black background. The darkness of the background forms a dramatic contrast to the strongly lit and highlighted ‘white’ skins of the figures. This technique of high contrast between light and dark, termed ‘*chiaroscuro*’, was used by seventeenth-century Dutch portrait painters. Although van Wyk’s subjects are portrayed as strong individuals, they have an air of vulnerability about them that is conveyed through their exposed neck-lines and shoulders. By documenting these young Afrikaners in the twenty-first century, and portraying them as tough, strong beacons of hope, van Wyk challenges the prescribed conservative religious Afrikaner identity that he grew up with and the “myths of ... Afrikaner Nationalism” that he was taught to believe in as a child (Figures and Fictions 2011:[sp]). His subjects represent strong ‘individualism’, and a sense of autonomy, which goes against the fundamentalist Afrikaner white propagandist rhetoric that that leads to what may be described as a ‘herd mentality’. The photographs prompt the suggestion that that Afrikaner culture has, or is still in

the process of adapting and that those within it can contribute constructively to South African society.



Figure 1.6 Richarddt Strydom (artist), *Violator II*, from the *A Verbis ad Verbera – From Word to Blows*, 2009. Digital print on 100% cotton artist paper, 59.4 x 89.2 cm each (courtesy of artist).

Richarddt Strydom's *A Verbis as Verbera – from Words to Blows* (2009) (Fig. 1.6), is a series of double self-portraits in which he documents himself covered in self-inflicted scars and injuries. Strydom grew up during the apartheid regime where the Afrikaner male had absolute power and control. Currently, in the new democracy, the Afrikaner male has largely been stripped of that power. In Ang Lloyd's (2013:[sp]) interview with Strydom, Strydom insightfully describes and comments on his childhood:

In my experience my forefathers, the previous generation, were the only ones to speak – the only ones who were heard and the ones who forced their agency upon everyone and everything [...]. In their wake there are no spaces, not even the private, that remain untainted and undefiled. But I no longer consider their words as truth – their yarns of fancy and oppression. Their constructed identity and myths has long since become the object of my dismantling.

Strydom (cited in Lloyd 2013:[sp]) notes that when he was a child most Afrikaner males were taught to celebrate their masculinity and were encouraged, by their authorities (parents, teachers, ministers), to be racist in their speech

and behaviour. Now, as an adult, Strydom feels at “odds with the current reality”, commenting that he thinks that “certain Afrikaners today attempt to deal with their sense of fear and disillusionment by resorting to various psychological strategies such as the revival of crude racism”, or feeling that they are the only ones being persecuted (Strydom cited in Lloyd 2013:[sp]). Through the self-inflicted wounds, visible in the photographic series *A Verbis as Verbera*, Strydom (cited in Lloyd 2013:[sp]) explains that he “express[es] a symbolic cultural masochism, which stems from the frustration of being unable to establish an authentic identity that is free of hegemonic constructed myth”.



Figure 1.7 Photographer unknown, Why Die Antwoord’s “cookie thumper” should not be taken lightly (Die Antwoord 2014).

The band, *Die Antwoord* (Fig. 1.7), is another example of young Afrikaners creating new narratives for emergent Afrikaner identities through their music and performances. The three band members, the male lead Ninja, his female counterpart Yo-landi Vi\$fer and their music producer DJ High Tek, have created personas that are a fusion of ‘poor white’ Afrikaner culture and coloured gangster culture to create an entity they call ‘zef¹² culture’. Citing Sean Bryant, Amanda du Preez (2011:104) describes the Ninja as “a spectacle of emasculation that is also a reassertion of the masculine”. Du Preez (2011:104)

¹² Zef has become a counter-culture movement for young South Africans who appropriate the ‘white trash’ lifestyle. *Die Antwoord* and Jack Parrow are pioneers of this movement.

describes Vi\$\$er as an “acidic nymph, a Tank Girl with an Afrikaans accent and a severe she-mullet”. In the song titled *Wat pomp julle?* Vi\$\$er describes herself as both “shweet and ... twisted, like a *koeksuster*” (Die Antwoord music ... 2014). By referring to herself as a *koeksuster*,¹³ Vi\$\$er positions herself as a female Afrikaner. In her lyrics she describes herself as neither the angelic conservative *volksmoeder* nor the whore; she is rather her own kind of *zef* switches between these extremes. Du Preez (2011:111) describes *Die Antwoord* as using strategies of exaggeration to create a grotesque masquerade of ‘non-normative corporealities’ (Stephens cited in du Preez 2011:11), which are located beyond established westernised notions of acceptable aesthetic standards and attractiveness.

Furthermore, Du Preez (2011:11) describes *Die Antwoord* as using the register of the monstrous or grotesque, to “captivate their audiences through awe and amazement”. According to Frances Connelly (2012:82), the carnivalesque¹⁴ is a form of the grotesque that is characterised by tensions between “high and low culture”. Connelly (2012:82) describes the carnivalesque as the “voice of the outsider” and notes that “satire and transgression ... serves as a powerful agent of change”. I explore the notion of the carnivalesque and grotesque further in Chapter Two with reference to Hlobo’s use of biomorphic forms. By using strategies of the monstrous and grotesque, *Die Antwoord* engages their viewers by disconcerting and challenging normative values through their performances of constructed gendered identities.

Vi\$\$er performs her gender as a dichotomy of female stereotypes. She veers between the image of a sweet, innocent and playful juvenile, to that of the overtly sexual Lolita figure; childishly pornographic, using gangster raps that incorporate abusive language. Through this individualist performance of her gender, Vi\$\$er can be seen to be contributing to the complexity of the Afrikaner female gender constructions, adding to the limited range of existing stereotypes.

¹³ A *koeksuster* is a traditional Afrikaner sweetmeat made of dough that is plaited, deep-fried and then soaked in syrup. There is also a Cape Malay version of the *koeksuster* that varies from the Afrikaner version.

¹⁴ The carnivalesque “developed from medieval European folk tradition and street theatre” (Connelly 2012:82). At the time of the carnival “social hierarchies [were] upended” and chaos reigned (Connelly 2012:86).

Similarly, the Afrikaner rapper, Jack Parrow (Fig. 1.8) embraces his *zef* side through the clothes he wears and language that he uses. Annie Klopper (2008:211), states that young Afrikaner musicians started rebelling against the status quo of apartheid and Afrikaner nationalism in the late 1980s with the 'Voëlvry beweging' ('free as a bird movement'). The band Die Gereformeerde Blues Band (GGB) – which comprised Johannes Kerkorrel, Koos Kombuis and Bernoldus Niemand – used satire and parody, together with socio-political commentary, to engage young listeners in their Afrikaans rock and roll songs (Klopper 2008:11).



Figure 1.8 Antonie Robertson (photographer), *Jack Parrow*, undated. Photograph (courtesy of the artist).

I use biomorphic forms in my sculptures to convey the instability of what I am currently, at the time of writing, experiencing as my emergent cultural identity. To convey a sense of instability, my biomorphic forms penetrate second-hand furniture, rendering it unstable, uncomfortable and unusable. My intention is to render an object, which is usually associated with comfort and stability into an object of discomfort and unease. This will be expanded upon in Chapter Three.

The etymology of the word 'biomorphic' can be traced to the Greek words *bios*, meaning 'life' and *morphe*, which means 'form'. I choose to work with biomorphic, as opposed to geometric or realistic forms, because they lend themselves to an openness of interpretation. Although their meaning might be open-ended, and although they refer to an evolving state of flux and change, ironically, my biomorphic forms are solid static constructs made of concrete, polystyrene, steel pipe, fibreglass, plastic, stuffing, thread and fabric. Whereas Hlobo's identity may be considered hybrid, my Afrikaner identity might better be described as comprising a combination of multiple social, cultural, political and gendered constructions. I am presently analysing, evaluating and reconsidering these multiple constructs in my life. Psychologically, I am working through the values, traditions and cultural beliefs imparted to me as a child, and in the process I am working through these constructs more literally by making my artwork.

Hlobo's use of biomorphic forms in *Izithunzi* is similar to mine in that they allow for a multiplicity of readings. *Izithunzi* comprises a series of eight biomorphic figures. Their positioning is reminiscent of figures at a social gathering. I consider the formal aspects of *Izithunzi* as being biomorphic because the shapes of the figures are abstract and reminiscent of organic vegetal or humanoid forms. Although Hlobo's biomorphic forms are static, they hint at movement, implying that they are in flux, morphing from one state to another. The figures are constructed primarily from pieces of rubber inner tubing, stitched together with lace, organza and ribbons. Hlobo uses an array of coloured lace and ribbons – red, green, yellow, purple, blue and pink – to stitch the rubber inner tubing. The brightness of the colours is offset against the darkness of the black inner tubing.

As an Afrikaner woman I was raised according to the model of the stereotypical *volksmoeder*. Elsabé Brink (2008:7,8) explains that the idealised *volksmoeder* image was first created between 1919 and 1932, and was intended to convey the image of the 'perfect' Afrikaner woman and mother. The notion of the *volksmoeder* was first introduced in the widely read Afrikaans women's

magazine *Die Boerevrou*, shortly after the Anglo Boer War (1899-1902). The *volksmoeder* ideology encourages a woman to adopt conservative values; embrace the qualities of bravery, honesty, friendliness and contentment with her place in society; and show her devotedness to religion, domesticity, and hard work (Brink 2008:9). A *volksmoeder* is not overly ambitious and never places her own needs before those of her husband and children. After the Anglo Boer War, this model of Afrikaner womanhood was deployed in an attempt to rebuild the Afrikaner nation. Van der Westhuizen (2013:14) describes the act of *ordentlikheid* (translated as 'respectability') as what the 'Afrikaner' or *volksmoeder* used to distinguish themselves from being seen as 'barbaric' by the British colonisers.

Throughout the twentieth century, the *volksmoeder* stereotype changed to fit the times. Ria van der Merwe (2011:79) describes the *volksmoeder* construct in the nineteenth century as being partially based on idealised notions of Victorian womanhood in England. Van der Merwe's description of the *volksmoeder* differs from Brink's, as she perceives that the *volksmoeder* stereotype was already present during the time of the South African War (1899-1902). This female stereotype had the "ability and willingness to suffer and sacrifice for nation, husband and children"(van der Merwe 2011:79). During the South African War Afrikaner women differed from the English, they were an essential part of the workforce and not the passive women of English parlour rooms (van der Merwe 2011:79). After the South African War, the Afrikaner woman was enlisted to promote Afrikaner nationalism by being the workforce, organising and fundraising as part of the National Party's agenda (van der Merwe 2011:80). The *Volksmoeder* was the "centre point of the household and the primary unifying force to elevate the Afrikaner community" (van der Merwe 2011:99).

In grappling with my emergent female Afrikaner identity, I question the values and qualities of the *volksmoeder* that I was subjected to as a child and their relevance and validity in contemporary South Africa. I build on Distiller's and Steyn's notion of the 'renegotiation' of identity in relation to my Afrikaner identity. This is with a view to contributing to a new narrative of Afrikaner

identity that stands apart from the notorious legacy of the Afrikaner, which flourished during apartheid.

1.2 Rational for study

In global post-modern constructivist identity theory, identity is positioned as unfixed, constantly under construction, and performative (Wright cited in Distiller & Steyn 2004:5). Hall (1996) identifies two readings, according to which cultural identity may be defined. First, he defines cultural identity in essentialist terms as being "fixed or stable" (Hall 2003:233), that is, as assumed between individuals with a shared historical and cultural background. Second, in line with post-modern constructivist identity theory, Hall (2003:234) proposes that identities are "non-essentialist constructs, never uniform or stable, always reconceptualising as a process of identification".

According to Hall (2003:244), historical diasporic identities refer to "scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return". In post-colonial theory, the term 'historical diasporic identities' is problematised; it is recognised that "a diverse people with a diverse history" cannot be represented "through a single, hegemonic identity" (Hall 2003:244). In contemporary post-colonial readings by theorists such as Bhabha and Hall, identities are positively reinterpreted as being constantly reinvented; constructed through "transformation and difference" (Hall 2003:244). Similarly, individual and collective emergent post-apartheid South African identities have been transforming and evolving since the new majority rule. Farber (2012:17) describes the kinds of homogenous cultural identities prevalent during the apartheid era that are in the process of being rethought and "redefine[d] in terms of heterogeneity".

In exploring my post-apartheid heterosexual female Afrikaner identity and Hlobo's gay male westernised isiXhosa identity, I approach identity as having been influenced by personal and collective histories, yet simultaneously being in a constant state of flux. This study contributes to and expands existing interpretations of Hlobo's work, which, as stated previously, tend to focus on his

use of material by looking specifically at how his constructed cultural identity is represented in *Izithunzi* through his use of biomorphic form.

My practical component consists of four large-scale sculptures, which together make up the *Ontluikende on/ge-mak* exhibition. (The exhibition title translates into English as 'Emerging dis/comfort'). Four of the sculptures are discussed in Chapter Three. I use biomorphic form to convey the change in my constructed cultural and gendered identity and combine this with furniture pieces that relate to my Afrikaner legacy and childhood experience. The tension created by combining the form and furniture is intended to convey the liminal position of my emergent Afrikaner female identity.

1.3 Theoretical framework

In this section I outline and develop, in some detail, the theoretical framework of the study in order to provide a context for the way in which these theories are applied in my analyses of both Hlobo's and my own work in the following chapters.

This study is positioned in a post-colonial paradigm and is situated within the parameters of constructivist identity theory. In constructivist theory, identities are considered as being fragmented, fractured, emergent and performative (Farber 2012:11). Hence, identities are constructed across different positions, discourses and practices; they are "never singular" (Hall 1996:4), but rather, multiple constructions.

Bhabha's notion of the Third Space is a theoretical construct, which I draw upon to explore Hlobo's hybrid isiXhosa identity. Bhabha's conception of cultural hybridity and the Third Space, which he argues arises from processes of cross-cultural exchange by "renegotiating meaning to formulate a new self" (Bhabha cited in Rutherford 1990:116), is pertinent to my exploration of the way Hlobo constructs his cultural and gendered hybrid identity. Bhabha (cited in Rutherford 1990:116), explains that as a result of hybridity, a "new alliance formulates itself"; in this state different elements merge to form a new cultural entity which

is fluid and liminal. Bhabha (cited in Rutherford 1990:116) positions the Third Space as being at the interface between colonialism and post-colonialism.

In the nineteenth-century,¹⁵ the term 'hybridity' carried negative connotations, as it represented a kind of mongrelisation that disrupted racial purity. However, in post-colonial theory, hybridity is used positively to describe a generative space of productive cultural exchange and fusion. The term 'hybridity' is specifically used in this research because in post-colonial discourse "it signifies various kinds of productive cultural fusions" (Farber 2012:36) that I propose are also applicable in a South African context. Distiller and Steyn (2004) and Robert Young (1995), employ other terms such as 'creolisation',¹⁶ 'multiculturalism'¹⁷ and 'entanglement'¹⁸ to indicate cross-cultural fusion in post-apartheid South Africa.

To position my work, I use Bhabha's (1994) description of the Third Space which Bhabha associates with hybridity. In the Third Space, cultural identities are seen as being hybridised; it is from this hybridity that a new fluid position or liminal identity emerges. According to Frederick Jameson (cited in Bhabha 1994:318) "[t]he non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space" in which "the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates

¹⁵ In the nineteenth-century, the dominant view was that the races were of "different species". This promoted the conception of Africans as being of an inferior species to that of Caucasians, conveniently classifying them at the bottom of the "human family" (Young 1995:6,7).

¹⁶ Zimitri Erasmus (cited in Distiller & Steyn 2004:9) defines the term 'creolisation' as the site where cultural creativity emerges in a space of extreme marginality. Nuttall and Michael (2000:22) identifies 'creolisation' as being "[t]he process whereby individuals of different cultures, language and religions are thrown together and invent a new language, Creole, a new culture and a new organization".

¹⁷ Young (1995:5) explains multiculturalism as encouraging "different groups to reify their individual and different identities at their most different ... promoting commerce between cultures". According to Nuttall and Michael (2000:6), "multiculturalism is the term that stands closest, perhaps, to the notion of the 'rainbow nation' that has played a prominent role in structuring the cultural politics of the 1990s" in South Africa.

¹⁸ Nuttall (cited in Farber 2012:18), defines the term 'entanglement' as

a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of intimacy gained, even if it was resisted or ignored or uninvited. It is a term that may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human enfoldedness. It works with difference and sameness but also with their limits, and their predicaments, their moments of complication.

a tension peculiar to borderline existences". I experience these kinds of tensions when negotiating my own identity and I process them whilst making my practical work. Young (1995:26,27) discusses hybridity and explains Jacques Derrida's notion of "brisure", as "a breaking and a joining at the same time, in the same place". This explanation contributes to my understanding of hybridity as a state of tension.

I use Judith Butler's (1999:179) notion of cultural and gender identity being a performative construct as a theoretical tool to analyse *Izithunzi* and in my discussion of how I renegotiate my female Afrikaner identity. Butler (1999:178) positions gender as a repetition of "stylised acts" that "creat[e] gender", thereby proposing that gender is performed through a "collective agreement". According to Butler (1999:178), the polar genders of masculine and feminine are fictional but have become naturalised and are taken as normative. I draw a connection between Butler's theories of gender as being performed or masqueraded and Kopane Ratele's (2009:23) description of *Izithunzi* as self-presentation; Ratele describes the figures in *Izithunzi* as "ghostlike" forms that, through "masquerade", represent the fabrication of traditions and sexualities.

My position as an Afrikaner female artist feels limiting and at odds with the Afrikaner female construct of the conservative, meek, mild and obedient *volksmoeder* stereotype. I develop and contribute to what Butler (2004:219) terms "the gender complexity", where normative gender constructs are challenged and expanded. I specifically explore the complexity of the Afrikaner *volksmoeder*, by challenging the limiting social female values that have been constructed and used to support the patriarchal Afrikaner apartheid regime in my life and work. When I was growing up I was taught to be a 'lady' and it was instilled in me that 'ladies' only did certain types of work. This passive *volksmoeder* stereotype differs from the active, strong *volksmoeder* during the South African War. They did not do hard labour, they were mostly housewives who were there to support their husbands, look after the children, cook, clean and do needlework. In making my sculptures, I challenge this notion of gender stereotyping by undertaking work historically construed as 'masculine', such as welding and creating large sculptures from concrete, steel pipe, polystyrene and

fibreglass. This creates, for me, a space of tension wherein I feel 'unfeminine' and 'guilty' for employing these normative 'masculine' techniques, yet, at the same time, I feel the need to challenge the notion of gendered work. I also employ normative 'female' working techniques such as stitching with fabric to convey my femininity. Through the process of making my artworks I am able to 'perform' both male and female aspects of my gendered identity. I perform these gendered masculine and feminine roles as a woman who is of the female sex. It is through these gendered performances that I am able to break away from the limiting gendered stereotypes of my Afrikaner heritage.

I position myself as a post-feminist¹⁹ artist, who wants to activate and engage society by transforming the social landscape and recognising the diversity within gender norms. According to Jess Butler (2013:38) there "has never been unified, homogenous or singular feminism ... so it makes little sense to understand post-feminism as such". Rosalind Gill (cited in Butler 2013:44) explains that "post-feminism should be conceived [*sic*] as a sensibility that characterizes an ever-increasing number of popular cultural forms" as opposed to "being understood as an epistemological perspective, and historical shift, or (simply) a backlash against feminism". Butler (2013:44) notes that the most productive frameworks for understanding post-feminism are "the ones that emphasize gender equality and sexual difference, individual choice and empowerment, femininity as a bodily property, the shift from sexual objectification to sexual subjectification, and the commodification of difference". She (Butler 2013:44) continues that the "'post' of post-feminism does not signify feminism's death". Angela McRobbie (cited in Butler 2013:44) explains 'post-feminism' as becoming

a kind of substitute for or displacement of feminism as a

¹⁹ The modern feminist movement started in the early 1960's in America (Broude & Garrard 1994:276). Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (1994:88) explains feminism as an ideology that prompted "women [to] t[a]ke charge of their own lives and motivate[e] each other to do the same, which led to their individual and collective empowerment". Feminism was a political movement in the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Butler 2013:37). According to Jess Butler (2013:37), its resurgence in the 1960s and [19]70s, the 'feminist sex wars' of the 1980s and [19]90s, and ... the growing popularity of 'post-feminism' beginning in the mid-1980s and continuing into the present are each byproducts of ... this eighteenth and nineteenth-century construction of sex.

radical political movement in which earlier feminist demands for equal rights, collective activism, and the eradication of gender inequality are taken into account and then displaced by the post-feminist ideals of individualism, choice, and empowerment.

It is from this active post-feminist position that I engage with the world.

1.4 Aims and objectives

My overarching aim in this dissertation is to show how formal means, such as the use of specific materials and biomorphic forms, can act as signifiers of cultural and gendered identities. This overarching aim is realised through the following objectives, which are to:

- analyse how Hlobo conveys aspects of his gay isiXhosa male identity in *Izithunzi* through his use of biomorphic forms
- explore how aspects of my heterosexual Afrikaner female identity are performed through creating my work, and conveyed through formal means
- analyse Hlobo's use of materials such as organza, lace and ribbon which are associated with feminine aspects of gendered identity
- examine the way Hlobo uses biomorphic form to convey a sense of instability in relation to fixed or normative cultural identity constructs
- locate Hlobo's work within the parameters of post-colonial theory and constructivist identity theory
- argue for the way in which hybridity in Hlobo's work can be associated with the Third Space.

The primary aim of my practical work is to explore how the use of material and biomorphic form can be used to convey aspects of my emergent cultural identity.

1.5 Literature review

1.5.1 *Biographical writings on Hlobo and his work*

I investigate the available literature on Hlobo's biography and writings on his work, in order to identify the themes that are relevant to his personal history and how they are reflected in his artworks. In the existing literature (see, for example, Buys 2008; Gevisser 2009; Gevisser, Ratele & Mergel 2009; Halliday 2009; Perryer 2006, 2008; Dodd & Maurice 2010; Jantjes 2009; Lundström 2009), the main themes in his works are identified as performance and masquerade. These themes are discussed in terms of his gendered and cultural identity, and the various ways in which he represents these identities by incorporating furniture, material and form.

Kerryn Greenburg's (2009:123) text on what motivated Hlobo to do performance art²⁰ clarifies Hlobo's need not only to exhibit but to also "animate his sculptures". Ratele (2009:22, 23) offers an insightful reading of Hlobo's artworks, in terms of the themes of impersonation and masquerade, which feature in both isiXhosa and gay culture. I agree with Jan-Erik Lundström's (2009:179) analysis, that Hlobo's gendered and cultural identity is closely intertwined with the context from which he is 'speaking' in his artworks. Ratele's (2009:20) text refers to traditional isiXhosa culture, in which gay culture is not accepted, and is even viewed as offensive. In contrast to this, Ratele quotes Hlobo as commenting that isiXhosa heritage celebrates "being a man" (Ratele 2009:20) and that, by being gay, he fully embraces this celebration of manliness that isiXhosa culture prizes. Hlobo (cited in Ratele 2009:19) himself claims to be a traditionalist, but often questions isiXhosa traditions in his work.

Lundström's (2009:174) description of Hlobo's use of form as "transgressive"; as disturbing the "relations between form and content, refusing or displacing binaries and opposites in their intricate play of space and matter" underpins my analysis of Hlobo's work. Lundström (2009:176) writes that Hlobo employs two distinctive techniques in his use of material, namely, folding and stitching, and that Hlobo makes folds in order to create difference "while maintain[ing] continuity". Lundström's (2009:174) notion that Hlobo's folds are created to imply narratives, which are hidden and unfolding, is valuable to my reading of *Izithunzi*. Furthermore, Lundström's (2009:174) discussion of how Hlobo turns

²⁰ Some of Hlobo's performances include *Dubula* (2007) at Galleria Extraspazio, Rome and *Ungamqhawuli* at the opening of *Kwatsityw'iziko* on 6 March 2008 at Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town (Gevisser *et al.* 2009:19,61).

stitching – an activity historically associated with the domestic and feminine spheres – into a more masculine practice, informs my reading of *Izithunzi*.

1.5.2 Post-colonial theory

This study is positioned within the parameters of post-colonial theory and constructivist identity theory. In order to identify the key concepts of hybridity and the performative nature of identity, I refer to literature on the construction of identity in a post-apartheid South African context. I draw on Hall and Paul du Gay's (1996:4) premise that identities are "constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions", to situate Hlobo's constructed, emergent cultural and gendered identity. Numerous texts provide an historical overview of hybridity. For the purpose of this study, I use Young's (1995) and Nicholas Papastergiadis's (1995) accounts of the term. Young (1995:9,10,26,27) provides an historical overview of the evolution of the term 'hybridity', from the nineteenth to the twentieth century; Papastergiadis (1995:9–18) summarises the history of cultural hybridity in colonial and post-colonial contexts and points to subtle differences in the ways in which the term is used in these contexts.

Butler's (1999 [1990]) writings, on the notion of cultural and gender identity as being performative, are used as tools to analyse *Izithunzi* (2009). In addition, Bhabha's 1994 text, which provides an in-depth discussion of the Third Space, forms a primary source, while Young (1995) and Papastergiadis (1995) are used as secondary sources. Bhabha (1994:211) defines cultural hybridity as a process wherein something original, "a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" is produced. Bhabha's Third Space is applied in my reading of Hlobo's artwork. This new space of "in-betweenness" (Farber 2012:37) "displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom" (Bhabha 1994:211).

Young discusses Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981:360,361) linguistic model of hybridity as a precursor to Bhabha's Third Space. Bakhtin's (1981:361) definition of organic hybridity is a theoretical construct that I use to explain the use of biomorphic forms in both Hlobo's and my own artwork.

I draw on Sarah Nuttall's and Cheryl-Ann Michael's (2000:6) writings, which provide an informed account of post-apartheid South African cultural politics. In addition, Distiller's and Steyn's (2004:9) analysis of the topical strategies that South Africans use to re-position themselves in an "increasingly Africanised South Africa"²¹ is particularly informative for my positioning of myself in the current socio-political context of post-apartheid South Africa.

1.5.3 Material and form as meaning

In my analysis of how material and form can be used to convey meaning in selected artworks, I rely on Simon Wilson's and Jessica Lack's (2008) definition of biomorphic form, as well as their historical summary of the use of biomorphic form in art. Apart from Wilson's and Lack's (2008) text, there is a paucity of literature on the use of biomorphic forms in visual representation.

HG Masters (2008:[sp]) discusses Mona Hatoum's use of furniture as a means of conveying the individual histories of the its previous owners. The furniture signifies the individual's life lived and the end of that life as well as the lives of other previous owners. In her analysis of Doris Salcedo's *Untitled Furniture* (1995), Mieke Bal (2010:78) echoes this notion of furniture being able to represent memories and the past. In Nancy Princethal's, Carlos Basualdo's and Andreas Huyssen's (2000:[sp]) discussion on Salcedo's furniture, they maintain that she distorts the original furniture forms in order to metaphorically "suffocate and silenc[e]" the furniture (Bal 2010:87). This metaphor provides a context for my explanation of how I distort form to convey a sense of discomfort. In her doctoral dissertation, Melanie Klein (2008) echoes Princethal, Basualdo and

²¹ The term 'Africanised', as used by Steyn (2004) in relation to South Africa, refers to ways in which Eurocentric and Western socio-political and cultural values and norms are no longer privileged.

Huysen's (2000:[sp]) notion of metaphorically "suffocat[ing] and silenc[ing]" furniture in her reading of Wim Botha's *Commune: Onomatopoeia* (2003) – a work in which Botha explores the decline of the white male's power in post-apartheid South Africa. Saunders, Hatoum, Salcedo and Botha's artworks set a precedent for my practical work.

1.6 Methodology

I adopt a qualitative paradigm with evidence and analyses from the relevant literature and visual texts (Henning, Smit & Van Rensburg 2007:3). The study is located within a post-modern, post-colonial theoretical framework. I realise my research through visual analyses, critical literature analyses, praxis and exploratory research.

Visual analysis is used as a tool to investigate Hlobo's work. Through a formal reading of *Izithunzi*, I make observations regarding its possible meaning. I use critical literature analysis to contextualise both Hlobo's and my own work within a post-colonial framework. Critical literature analysis includes textual analysis of the main texts written on Hlobo's work. Unfortunately, despite concerted efforts, I was unable to secure an interview with Hlobo directly, either through him or his agent.²² His position is that he rarely does interviews and he was, therefore, unwilling to accommodate me.

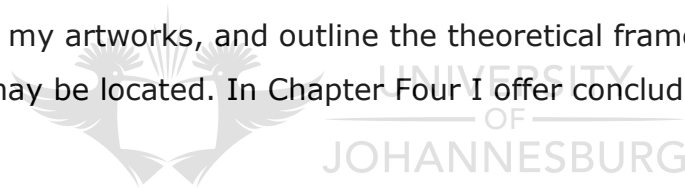
I use praxis (the cyclic relation between theory and practice which involves a degree of self-reflexivity) to inform my research. Lastly, I employ explorative research, in which the outcomes are not known or predetermined, in my art-making practice.

²² I contacted the Stevenson Gallery, who represent Hlobo's work, on numerous occasions, to try and set up an interview with him through them. Each time, they indicated he was very busy with exhibitions in South Africa and abroad and would not be able to do an interview with me. I also contacted Hlobo via social media sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook. Although he accepted my requests to become Facebook friends and LinkedIn contacts he did not reply to my e-mails requesting an interview.

1.7 Outline of chapters

In Chapter One, I introduce and provide background contextualisation. I outline the study's theoretical framework, the aims, objectives and methodologies used, and provide a brief literature review. The theoretical background of post-colonial identity theory, within the broader parameters of constructivist identity theory, is sketched, as is the construction of emergent Afrikaner identity in a post-apartheid context. In Chapter Two, I provide biographical and historical background information on Hlobo and his use of biomorphic form, and an historical and contemporary contextualisation of *Umtshotsho*. The way in which Hlobo conveys aspects of his gay isiXhosa male identity in the *Izithunzi* installation is addressed through a visual analysis of *Izithunzi*, which contains elements of fetishism. Hlobo's use of material, techniques and of biomorphic form as conveyers of content is explored.

In Chapter Three, I provide insight into my art-making processes; present a visual analysis of my artworks, and outline the theoretical framework within which my work may be located. In Chapter Four I offer concluding remarks.



CHAPTER TWO: *IZITHUNZI*

2.1 Introduction

The primary aim of this study is to demonstrate how using conventional formal means such as the use of specific materials and biomorphic forms, can act as signifiers of cultural and gendered identities. I address this aim using Hlobo's *Izithunzi* installation, and analysing how Hlobo conveys aspects of his hybridised relationship between his Western and isiXhosa cultural identities, and his gay isiXhosa²³ male identity. Hlobo won the Standard Bank Young Artist Award²⁴ in 2009. His touring exhibition, produced for the award, titled *Umtshotsho*, consists of two installations of artwork; *Izithunzi* and *Kubomvu*.

This primary aim is realised through an analysis of Hlobo's use of materials such as rubber inner tubing, organza, lace, ribbons and thread which are associated with feminine aspects of gendered identity. In order to contextualise Hlobo's *Umtshotsho* exhibition, I begin with a description of the traditional and contemporary practice of *Umtshotsho*, and sketch a brief background of the isiXhosa people. After providing a formal description of all eight sculptures in *Izithunzi*, I interpret the installation using visual and textual analysis. In the existing literature (see for example, Buys 2008; Gevisser 2009; Gevisser, Ratele & Mergel 2009; Halliday 2009; Perryer 2006, 2008; Dodd & Maurice 2010; Dodd 2011, Jantjes 2009; Lundström 2009), the main themes in his works are identified as performance and masquerade. As subthemes of the performative and masquerade, I look at notions of the monstrous, the carnivalesque, and the alien, as well as the cultural phenomena of Steampunk and Zombies and how these play out in the *Izithunzi* installation. These terms will be unpacked later in the chapter. These themes are discussed both in terms of his gendered and

²³ According to Zoë Reeve (2012:7) the prefix 'isi' of Xhosa refers to the Xhosa language.

²⁴ As part of the prize, Hlobo's *Umtshotsho* exhibition travelled to the Monument Gallery, Grahamstown in 2009; Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum, Port Elizabeth; and the Durban Art Gallery, Durban. In 2010 it was shown at the following galleries: the Oliewenhuis Art Museum in Bloemfontein; the Standard Bank Gallery in Johannesburg; and the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town.

cultural identity, and the way in which he represents them by using furniture, material and biomorphic form.

I examine the way Hlobo uses biomorphic form to convey a sense of instability in relation to fixed or normative cultural identity constructs. In my analysis of *Izithunzi*, I use Judith Butler's (1999:179) notion that cultural and gender identity, which is located in feminist discourse, is a performative construct.

2.2 The *Umtshotsho*

John Soga (1931:313-314) describes the *Umtshotsho* as a musical ritual, comprised of a "barbaric" musical series of sounds ranging from bass to baritone and tenor, in which boys from the age of twelve upwards participate before they are circumcised. William Hammond-Tooke (1975:238) explains that the pre-initiation ritual, also known as *Mtshotsho*, is often conducted by initiation schools. *Umtshotsho* takes place as a party or "fete" held in preparation for manhood (Soga 1931:311). *Umtshotsho* concerts are often accompanied by girls singing, and both parties dance throughout the night (Soga 1931:314).

Instead of a musical ritual, Zoë Reeve (2012:61) describes the *Umtshotsho* as a traditional dance. She views it as the equivalent of the contemporary "dance party of the younger generation", where the isiXhosa "solemnity of beer rituals" (Reeve 2011:57) are introduced to adolescents as a way for them to socialise. Reeve's (2011:16) research focuses on the "[a]maXhosa nation and how their traditional dancing and subsequently their culture, is altering". Due to this inevitable change in societies, and the fact that they are performing "their culture in public domains, such as the National Arts Festival" (Reeve 2011:16). Reeve (2011:53) argues that the *Umtshotsho* is a traditional ritual, which plays an important part in developing the "evolution of dancing/singing tradition" and a tradition which reinforces "[a]maXhosa memories because it is a purveyor of culture and recollection" (Reeve 2011:61). According to Reeve (2011:60), "cultural practices solidify a sense of belonging in a group or society".

Leslie Bank (2002:637) indicates that from the late 1970's, villagers in the Eastern Cape stopped performing *Umtshotsho*, as westernisation of tribal and farm life was initiated and supported by the headmen of villages. Bank (2002:637) discusses Koyana, a specific headman, who spearheaded the campaign against all "things traditional" during the 1960's and 1970's. He championed adopting "improved agricultural techniques" as opposed to the traditional methods, which he wanted to root out. Erik Bigalke (1982:187) explains that the *Umtshotsho* ritual stopped being performed in 1978.

According to both the isiXhosa males²⁵ that I interviewed, *Umtshotsho* is not practiced in contemporary society. (See Appendix B for the transcribed interviews and consent forms). Interviewee One (2014) explains that the *Umgidi* celebration takes place after the circumcision ceremony, and is similar to *Umtshotsho*. As mentioned previously, Interviewee One (2014) and Interviewee Two (2014) see isiXhosa initiation rituals as sacred and believe that as such, they should be shrouded in secrecy. Both Interviewees feared being victimised by their peers for discussing the initiation rituals, and therefore wished to remain anonymous. Initiation schools may undertake initiation rituals or a family may make arrangements for a small group to be initiated privately (Interviewee One 2014). *Umtshotsho* and *Umgidi* are both festive celebrations for initiates who go through the circumcision ritual that transitions them from boyhood to adulthood. Interviewee One (2014) notes the circumcision ritual takes one to two months. Anitra Nettleton (2014) notes that *Umtshotsho* and the initiation ritual and dress varies according to the isiXhosa subgroup.²⁶ On arrival at the circumcision ritual, initiates must remove their clothes. A rub or paste (which can be white or brown depending on which subgroup the initiates belong to) is rubbed over their bodies (Interviewee One 2014). The initiates are then circumcised by an *Ingcibi* (circumcision specialist). A group of people watch the circumcision and the initiate must "demonstrate his new manliness by not flinching or crying" (Hammond-Tooke 1974:230). For the first couple of days after the circumcision,

²⁵ The interviewees both went through the circumcision ritual and *Umgidi* and wished to remain anonymous. They are both Christians and art school graduates, and are familiar with Hlobo's artworks.

²⁶ It is unclear which isiXhosa subgroup Hlobo belongs to.

the initiates are left with no water and are given only samp to eat (Interviewee One 2014).

After the circumcision ritual is completed, the *Umgidi* celebration takes place (Interviewee Two 2014). At the *Umgidi*, elders speak about what they expect of an isiXhosa male (Interviewee One 2014). Interviewee One notes that there are controversies surrounding initiation rituals, because the *Ingcibis* are often corrupt and/or illegal and do not take adequate care of the initiates. Mia Malan (2013:[sp]) reports on initiates in the Eastern Cape who lost their manhood at initiation schools where they were not taken care of sufficiently. A former traditional nurse, who now trains traditional circumcisers, Patrick Dakwa (cited in Malan 2013:[sp]) explains that "prejudice may be so great that uncircumcised or 'improperly' circumcised men are attacked and beaten" by other isiXhosa males. Daniel Ncayiyana (2013:[sp]) explains that deaths or injuries suffered in circumcision schools in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape, are often down played so that the ritual does not die out. Furthermore, Dakwa (cited in Malan 2013:[sp]) explains that in the isiXhosa culture, medical circumcision is not viewed as "'proper' circumcision, as it is a Western method and there is a lot less pain involved due to the use of local anaesthetics". *Umgidi* is traditionally held at the home of the initiate (Interviewee One 2014).

2.3 Description of *Izithunzi*

Hlobo's *Izithunzi* installation comprises a series of eight biomorphic figural forms. The figures are not titled separately, but fall under the name of the installation *Izithunzi*. The lighting passes through red filters making it read as pink. The lighting creates a seedy sordidness to a scene reminiscent of a 'red light district'. Because the shapes of the figures in *Izithunzi* are abstract and reminiscent of organic vegetal or humanoid forms, I regard them as biomorphic. Although the biomorphic forms are static, they hint at movement; there is a sense that they are in flux, morphing from one state to another. The softness of the inner tubing and the way in which it is draped and interwoven creates a sense of fluidity in the abstract form. Because the materials are soft and rubbery the forms appear to be unstable and have a jelly-like quality. The eight figures are positioned in a

circle. Each shape is anthropomorphic; the figures pose ominously; some appear ghostlike; hovering, attacking; others dance in a circle or sit patiently on a sofa. Alexandra Dodd (2011:72) describes the setting as "salon style", and notes that it "conjures the restrained parlour-room antics and highly mannered mating games of nineteenth-century novels". The viewer is treated as a voyeur, privy to an exclusive scene; one that is usually kept under wraps. The viewer (as voyeur) watches the theatrical scene as it plays out in the parlour - a place where the "drama of domestic life" and "disruptions and disturbances" were experienced in Victorian times (Dodd 2011:72).

The figures are constructed similarly in terms of form, scale and material detail. Each figure, with slight variations, is approximately 200 cm x 150 cm x 150 cm, and consists of an elongated phallic 'body' with a round head. They resemble ghosts, jellyfish or octopuses. All eight figures are made from Hlobo's signature materials: rubber inner tubing, organza, lace, found objects, ribbon, and steel. Their bodies are constructed from long black rubber inner tubing strips which are hand stitched with colourful ribbons. The surface qualities of the sculptures are similar, with only slight variations regarding the hand stitching in each sculpture. Other materials such as lace and found objects are incorporated individually into each artwork. The forms are reminiscent of Victorian gowns with opulent folds and ribbons; as Dodd (2011:73) puts it the figures bulge with the "excesses of Victorian taste". The folds and stitching keep the forms under wraps, hiding and conveying the restraint of Victorian sensibilities. The Victorian-styled parlour setting is marred by what Dodd (2011:73) describes as a "mood that is unsettling; effusions of black rubber evoking an off-limits salon-privé atmosphere that is strangely gothic, sinister and bewitching". By incorporating the Victorian couch, lampshade and table, Hlobo suggests the Victorian parlour room in the setting of the *Umtshotsho*. Some of the *Izithunzi* figures seem like they are wearing Victorian cloaks, while others can be seen to wear a ruff. Hlobo uses the nineteenth century sensibilities to uncover and understand his *Umtshotsho*. Dodd (2011:73) states that in *Umtshotsho*, Hlobo references the "complex enmeshment of European and African values", noting that the work appears to "conjure the spectral presence of an inherited set of European mores" where the figures

“articulate an embodied, physical sense of an entangled cultural inheritance”. In *Umtshotsho* the hybrid post-colonial African is entwined with the “stiff-upper-lip” Victorian conventions of the parlour room, which is “a place reserved for social interaction” (Dodd 2011:72,73). Victorian sensibilities play a part in South Africa’s colonial history, and, according to Dodd (2011:72), play a part in how the viewer might understand post-modern, post-colonial South Africa and it’s colonial inheritance. Such “less binary understandings of nineteenth-century social relations” are used to enhance understandings of the present and to promote productive identity forming for the future (Dodd 2011:72).

Two of the figures are seated, one on a couch and the other on an old chair. Three are suspended from the ceiling using steel chains and the other three stand on the floor. Two of the figures wear mask-like forms on their faces, constructed from lace with ribbon stitching. The colourful stitching creates a stark contrast to the black inner tubing. Hlobo uses an array of bright colours: red; green; yellow; purple, blue; as well as pink lace and ribbons, to neatly stitch the rubber inner tubing. The colourful stitching forms circular, organic and floral motifs, which creates texture as it breaks the smooth surface of the rubber inner tubing.

Next to *Izithunzi* is the artwork titled *Kubomvu* (2009), which consists of a Victorian-style lamp standing on a three-legged table. The lamp is reupholstered in rubber inner tube. The table legs are covered with rubber inner tubing stitched together to form a blob-like shape at the bottom. The pink light casts dramatic shadows over the sculptures creating the sense that the figures are in the process of morphing into other shapes and forms.

Hlobo’s *Izithunzi* figures can be read as bulging, alien, amorphous shapes, that resemble characters from a Science Fiction²⁷ film or novel. Their sense of being

²⁷ The literary genre of Science Fiction was started in 1929 by Hugo Gernsback, who was inspired by the writings of HG Wells and Jules Verne (Lombardo [sa]:2). Tom Lombardo ([sa]:11) defines Science Fictional qualities as mythical, archetypal, and cosmic, “informed by modern science, technology, and philosophical thinking, [that] provide a medium for the ongoing creation of futurist myths to guide, inspire, and warn us about the multitudinous possibilities of the future”.

'alien-like' is enhanced by their large, cumbersome, and archaic space suits. The pink light casts sinister and threatening shadows that add to the Science Fiction-like atmosphere.

In combining references to the Victorian era and the genre of Science Fiction, Hlobo's work could be read in terms of the cultural phenomenon called Steampunk. According to Rachel Bowser & Brian Croxall (2010:1), Steampunk seems to "illustrate, and ... perform, a kind of cultural memory work, wherein ... projections and fantasies about the Victorian era meet the tropes and techniques of science fiction, to produce a genre that revels in anachronism while exposing history's overlapping layers". Rachel Bowser and Brian Croxall (2010:5) explain that Steampunk does not solely reference the past, but creates a new model "in which technologies, aesthetics, and ideas mark different times simultaneously, instead of signposting different historical periods; anachronism is not anomalous but becomes the norm". Hlobo can be seen to use the post-modern phenomenon of Steampunk by interweaving references to the Science Fiction genre and Victorianism, to create a scenario that is both futuristic and anachronistic. This setting communicates within a complex intertextuality to understand *his Umtshotsho*; his 'coming out' as a gay isiXhosa male. The nuances of the pink light, the fetishised ribboned stitched rubber inner tubing subverts South Africa's colonial history through the reference to the Victorian and Hlobo's gendered identity.

Considering their sinister, threatening and disembodied qualities, Hlobo's figures could also be interpreted as being reminiscent of Zombies. Todd Platts (2013:547) defines Zombies as "corpses raised from the dead and imbued with a ravenous instinct to devour the living", noting that "[Z]ombies address fears that are both inherent to the human condition and specific to the time of their resurrection". Furthermore, Platts (2013:547) describes Zombies²⁸ as cultural products that "reveal something about the societies that created them ... patterns emerging from the content of cultural productions partly unsheathed

²⁸ Elizabeth Neail ([sa]:2) argues that

signification of the [Z]ombie is closely tied to the dominant, hegemonic discourses and ideologies that surround this creature as represented in different eras. This signification is so much more than reflection; it is a re-defining of the creature, making it the most versatile, enduring, and politically and socially useful ever to be found in film or literature.

underlying structural patterns of those societies". Zombies are also prevalent in the Science Fiction genre (Platts 2013:549). In referencing the Zombie figure, Hlobo may be referring to the various forms of social anxiety that are pertinent to post-apartheid South Africa where violence — be it in the public or domestic sphere — is rife. Hlobo's Zombie-like figures may also signify the "loss of personal autonomy"; one may speculate that he might see himself as a *cultural* Zombie because he did not go through *Umtshotsho*. Not having participated in this ritual may have left him feeling alienated and disconnected from his traditional isiXhosa culture, and torn between this culture and his westernised gendered identity.

2.4 Hlobo's *Umtshotsho*

In his *Izithunzi* installation, Hlobo creates a fantasy of the *Umtshotsho* ritual²⁹ by referring to some of the traditional practices such as dancing combining these with his specific coming of age. Mark Gevisser (2009:11) explains that because Hlobo was raised as a Christian, he did not participate in the *Umtshotsho* tradition. Gevisser (2009:15) explains that Hlobo therefore created his own *Umtshotsho* in order to be part of this ritual that he enviously wanted to participate in. Interviewee One (2014) clarifies that because Hlobo did not go through the initiation ritual and because he is gay, he cannot be accepted in isiXhosa culture. Hlobo's *Umtshotsho* exhibition, with its pink lights and dance circle, is reminiscent of a night club. According to Gevisser (2009:15), Hlobo portrays his *Umtshotsho* as the Johannesburg night scene where he "inserted" himself into gay culture. Dodd (2011:72) describes Hlobo's *Umtshotsho* as having unfolded at the "steamy confines of the Skyline, Johannesburg's iconic gay bar at the Harrison Reef Hotel on the corner of Pretoria and Twist streets in Hillbrow". This is where he could establish his gay identity by taking what he wanted from his isiXhosa culture, while rejecting traditions such as cross-dressing in gay culture (Gevisser 2009:15).

²⁹Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (cited in Bank 2002:647) define a ritual as a "dynamic social process that can fashion visions of worlds yet unborn, deploy the pragmatics of language to invest contemporary practice with new force, or call upon the power of poetics to subvert familiar forms of authority".

Maurice and Rebecca Dodd (2010:3) write that in contemporary times, the traditional *Umtshotsho* seldom takes place; young adults have found alternative ways of socialising in bars and clubs. Reeve suggests that the *Umtshotsho* was traditionally used to introduce alcohol, in particular beer drinking, to adolescents so that they could foster a healthy relationship with alcohol in a controlled environment. Hlobo's evocation of a nightclub setting might be read as referring to the adolescent pastime of drinking and dancing in clubs. This dying out of the traditional *Umtshotsho* is highlighted by the night club-like atmosphere. Again, the mixture of western and traditional culture is highlighted. Hlobo locates himself through *Izithunzi* in the Third Space, a liminal space where his hybrid gendered and cultural identity is reflected.

Hlobo's pride in being an isiXhosa is evident in his use of isiXhosa language in his titles. He does not translate his titles for viewers, and thus excludes non-isiXhosa speakers. As Pamela Allara (2010:33) notes, this deters Westerners from interpreting Hlobo's "visual and linguistic metaphors into their own parochial frame of reference". Gevisser (2009:10) notes that Hlobo likes the "way that in both *isiXhosa* and the gay vernacular there is a tendency to signify rather than to say outright; to use codes which will be heard [or read] in one way by the members of your clan, and entirely differently by outsiders". Ratele (2009:21) notes that Hlobo gives his artworks isiXhosa titles to celebrate his "South African identity and gender identity". This exclusion of translating the titles shows solidarity with his isiXhosa cultural roots.

2.5 Fetishism

Hlobo's use of rubber can be seen as hinting at a type of fetishism.³⁰ In ancient African history, iron and wood were used to make fetish sculptures, believed to encapsulate natural and power forces, to guide and guard the tribes or owners of the fetish sculptures against certain evils (Honour & Fleming 1999:764). African fetish sculptures are distinctly separate from the psychoanalytic concept of

³⁰ According to Valerie Steele (1996:5), Alfred Binet (1887) was the first person to use the word fetishism in the psychological sense. Articles about fetishism first appear in magazines during the early twentieth century (Steele 1996:54).

fetishism. Referring to the psychoanalytic use of the term, Valerie Steele (1996:5) defines 'fetishism' as being not only about sexuality but also about the perception of power. Steele (1996:14) quotes Sigmund Freud, who considers the fetish as a form of penis substitute, arising from the son's fears of the mother's 'castration' because he himself fears being castrated. Freud (cited in Steele 1996:15) describes the fetish object as a sign of "triumph over the threat of castration and protection against it". The *Izithunzi* sculptures can be described as phallic forms. Jacques Lacan (cited in Steele 1996:17) describes the phallus as a signifier of masculinity and the qualities of power, potency and erectness associated with it. Given Hlobo's suggestion of the phallus in his sculptural forms, the work may be interpreted as celebrating 'the masculine', not only as the male gender, but as his sexuality. This evocation of the powerful and potent male organ suggests that he is proud of being a male and is also celebrating being gay.

In the installation *Kubomvu*, black rubber inner tubing is draped tightly around the lampshade and secured with stitching, resembling a corset. The corset has inherent gender power constructs within sadomasochist theory and practice, and is popular in cross-dressing or drag in gay culture. In sadomasochistic culture, the tight-laced corset³¹ can be utilised to firstly inflict pain, secondly, to force the body into a more feminine shape and thirdly to enable "gender transformation" by its association with femininity (Steele 1996:63). Farber (2013:35) explains that in Victorian times the corset represented the "ideal form of feminine beauty, achieved by means of bodily constriction and containment". According to Farber (2013:35), the corset kept Victorian women physically disabled and immobile. These physical limitations reinforced the pathology of women's social position as the more fragile, weaker sex. Susan Bordo (cited in Farber 2013:35) explains that the rigidity of the corset supported the Victorian temperament of discipline and control. The allusion to a corset could also refer to a powerful dominatrix who wears her corset as "armour" (Steele 1996:63). According to Steele (1996:151) there are two types of rubber fetishes, namely "infantile" and "masochistic". Rubber is also a slang word for condom (Steele 1996:152). If

³¹ Marianne Thesander (cited in Farber 2013:35) notes that although the corset is associated with the Victorian era, it was first used in the Middle Ages and became popularised during the early Renaissance.

Hlobo's use of rubber is interpreted as a reference to condoms, it may suggest that he is commenting on South Africa's HIV and AIDS pandemic, and the need to practice safe sex using condoms as a preventative measure or perhaps the condom as a container of masculinity.

2.6 Gender as performance

Bill Thompson (1994:12) explains that in sadomasochism (S&M) practices, participants may take on roles of either inflicting or receiving pain, usually for sexual gratification. Nicole Eitmann ([sa]:114) notes that

complex power relations in S&M encounters are generally present, whereby the masochist, or 'bottom' appears to be at the mercy of the sadist, or 'top'. The participants have pre-arranged limits, usually determined by the masochist and enforced by the use of a 'safe' or 'stop' word.

Examples of power relationships are interchangeable from aggressor/victim; top/bottom; master/servant; dominant/subordinate; male/female.

Sadomasochistic role-playing can be associated with cross-dressing in gay culture, where it is used as a form of masquerade and for performing gender roles. Ratele (2009:22) understands performativity in isiXhosa culture by drawing parallels with gay culture especially in the drag performance. Hlobo (cited in Ratele 2009:23) explains that masquerade is part of the isiXhosa culture, a practice that resembles 'drag'³² performances in gay culture, and that he refers to the masquerade in both the isiXhosa and gay culture in his artwork.

The figures in the *Izithunzi* installation resemble a costume or second skin that is propped up by a steel armature and stuffed with plastic and other materials to keep its individual form. The rubber inner tubing covering the form may also refer to the blanket which initiates use to cover themselves during the initiation period (Interviewee One 2014). Some of the figures wear hooded cloaks and dresses similar to the cloaks and wraps that isiXhosas, influenced by European

³² Citing The Penguin Wordmaster Dictionary (1987), Roger Baker (1987:17) describes drag as "women's clothing worn by men". Baker (1987:18) considers drag as subversive, in that it "question[s] the role of gender and sexual identity" through anarchy and defiance.

culture, were wearing in the nineteenth century (Hammond-Tooke 1974:102). These outfits were “topped with complicated turbans of black cloth” (Hammond-Tooke 1974:102). Hlobo’s masked faces (Fig. 2.1,2.2), with their decorative textures of stitching, lace and loose ribbons, may, to the viewer, be reminiscent of nineteenth-century European inspired isiXhosa turbans.



Figure 2.1 Nicholas Hlobo (artist), *Izithunzi* detail 3, 2009. Rubber inner tubing, ribbon, organza, lace, found objects, steel and couch. Installation consists of eight sculptures. approx. 200 x 150 x 150 cm each (photograph courtesy of Stevenson Gallery).



Figure 2.2 Nicholas Hlobo (artist), *Izithunzi* detail 4, 2009. Rubber inner tubing, ribbon, organza, lace, found objects, steel and couch. Installation consists of eight sculptures. approx. 200 x 150 x 150 cm each (photograph courtesy of Stevenson Gallery).

The theatrical nature of the sculptures can be seen as impersonating, masquerading or performing. The forms are exaggerated, taking on dramatic poses, and can be interpreted as 'acting out'. *Umtshotsho* is reminiscent of a staged theatre setting where the viewer is not part of the production. The viewer is kept at a distance to witness and be entertained by Hlobo's *Umtshotsho* taking place.

Butler (1999:178) positions gender as being 'created' through the repetition of "stylised acts", and proposes that it is performed through a "collective agreement". According to Butler (1999:178), the polar genders of masculine and feminine are fictional but have become naturalised and are taken as normative. In *Izithunzi*, Hlobo challenges gender norms through the androgynous nature of the figures, in which he combines signifiers of stereotypical male and female characteristics. Reference is made to the masculine gender through the phallic form; femininity is signified through the use of stitching and the pink colour of the filtered lights, which cast dramatic shadows that encase the whole exhibition. Pink is stereotypically associated with the female gender and yet has been embraced by gay culture as symbolic of the gay/queer movement. The

exhibition atmosphere can be interpreted as referring to drag and masquerading, found in gay culture. Hlobo can therefore be seen to embrace what Butler (2004:31) calls "gender complexity", by challenging gender conceptions through his androgynous drag-like figures, in which female and male characteristics are combined.

Butler (2004:218) explains drag not only as a pleasurable performance and subversive spectacle, but also as "an allegorized spectacular and consequential way in which reality is both reproduced and contested". With the covering and masking of the figures, Hlobo hints at hidden narratives of the masquerade and drag that evokes Butler's notion of gender and culture as performance. Butler (2004:216) explains that drag is not only a way of performing gender, but "resignifying [it] through collective terms". Ratele (2009:23) describes *Izithunzi* as ghost-like figures that "masquerade", representing the fabrication of traditions and sexualities. Ratele's (2009:20) text refers to traditional isiXhosa culture, in which gay culture is not accepted, and is even viewed as offensive. Contrary to this, Ratele (2009:22) cites Hlobo's comment that isiXhosa heritage celebrates "being a man"; ironically Hlobo, by being gay, embraces this celebration of manliness that is privileged in isiXhosa culture.³³ Hlobo (cited in Ratele 2009:19) himself claims to be a traditionalist but often questions isiXhosa traditions in his work. The *Izithunzi* installation is an example of a work that portrays Hlobo's ambivalence to his isiXhosa culture. On the one hand, he proudly uses the isiXhosa language to title his artworks and reference isiXhosa traditions, yet, on the other hand, he subverts these rituals to portray his contemporary gay lifestyle. Berthold Pauw (1975:205) questions the "conflict or synthesis" between the Christian or "School" isiXhosa beliefs and the "Red" people or traditionalists, who can be seen to adopt two separate cultural traditions. This analogy speaks to the disconnection of normative gender roles and cultural practices between the 'Red' people and the 'School' people. The 'Red' isiXhosa people support initiations which improve and mature the conduct of relationships in a community, "especially those involving conflicts of interest" which promote settling conflict through the law instead of violence (Hammond-

³³ Soga (1931:48) notes that in the patriarchal, polygamist traditional isiXhosa culture, men are the heads of families and their wives are considered as subordinates. In the isiXhosa tradition a chief usually has at least ten wives.

Tooke 1974:235). Pauw (1975:11) describes the 'Red' people as "emotional" and "magical" as opposed to the 'School' people who are Christians, and embrace rationality and the intellect. Combining these two belief systems can put strain on an individual and cause inner conflict. Pauw (1975:208) suggests, that with the rise of Christianity in the nineteenth century, isiXhosa traditions were more accepted and were incorporated into the religious practices of second or third generation Christians. This merging of the 'traditional' and western traditions is referenced in Hlobo's *Umtshotsho*.

Interviewee One (2014) admitted that as a 'School' or Christian isiXhosa, there are certain traditional rituals that he cannot participate in during his initiation ceremony. For instance, he was unable to slaughter a goat because as a Christian, he cannot be seen to be worshipping his ancestors. Interviewee Two (2014) comments that traditionally, during *Umgidi* one may drink alcohol inside the yard, but because he is a Christian, he is only permitted to consume alcohol outside the yard.

2.7 Material and techniques



Jan-Erik Lundström (2009:176) comments that physical material plays an important role in Hlobo's sculptures. He uses materials such as furniture, lace, organza and ribbons, which reference the domestic sphere. In traditional isiXhosa culture, grass stems are used for sewing – a practice that originated from basket making (Hammond-Tooke 174:119). As Hlobo does not use traditional isiXhosa craft materials such as skins and grass, which were used before European influence, but contemporary 'soft' stereotypically feminine materials like ribbons, organza, lace and rubber inner tubing, it seems that, through his choice of materials, he is referring to his westernised isiXhosa culture.

His technique of using embroidery and hand-stitching³⁴ references the historically feminised domain of the home (Parker 1984:2).

³⁴ In her account of the gendered history of embroidery, Rozsika Parker (1984:11, 21) notes that by the eighteenth century, embroidery was seen as a leisure activity for the

According to Parker (1984:209), embroidery is historically associated with femininity. Embroidery signifies daughters and mothers, as it “evokes the stereotype of the virgin in opposition to the whore, an infantilising representation of women’s sexuality”, as well as the availability of female sexuality, “both innately virginal and available for consumption (Parker 1984:2). Embroidery and other forms of needlework were historically classified as “women’s work”, and as such, was conceived of as a form of “low art” or ‘craft’, and as ‘merely decorative’. Hlobo’s use of embroidery can be interpreted as embracing pro-feminist ideology as a gay man; it seems as if he uses feminist techniques to express his feminine side. By using embroidery as a gay isiXhosa male on a Victorian style ball and claw couch, Hlobo’s subverts the inherently feminised embroidering used in the Victorian-era.

I find Lundström’s reading of Hlobo’s use of material insightful. He (Lundström 2009:174) describes Hlobo’s “deployment of embroidery and sewing techniques” in his sculptures as “sophisticated gestures which unite, link, mould, join together”. His incorporation of stitching techniques speaks of domestic feminine household activities (Lundström 2009:174); yet, as Lundström (2009:184) notes, Hlobo also uses the stitch to penetrate and transform his rubber material: “[t]he stitch is ... that which breaks the surface, ... penetrates the skin, ... pricks in order to connect, pierces in order to join ... indicative of the particular ... redeeming nature of Hlobo’s way of inviting and challenging the viewer”. The stitch that penetrates can be interpreted as referencing the male sexuality. Many writers (Lundström 2009; Dodd & Maurice 2010), consider the stitch as the way in which Hlobo adds and subtracts “in the process of construction of an identity” (Dodd & Maurice 2010:2). Hlobo uses circular patterns, particularly floral patterns on the couch sculpture (Fig 2.1.). In the seventeenth century, flowers

upper class woman and as evidence of her gentility, femininity, obedience, and love of the home. In Medieval times, both men and women were allowed to embroider. Parker (1984:17) explains in the seventeenth century, “[w]orking-class women were employed as sweated labour in trades associated with embroidery, and middle-class women became embroiders because the craft’s aristocratic and feminine associations made it an acceptable occupation”. In the Victorian era embroidery was thought of as an exclusively feminine activity (Parker 1984:17).

were often used to symbolise fertility (Parker 1984:92) and therefore could signify Hlobo's virile masculinity.

Although the forms are phallic, at the same time, because of their curves, they appear feminine and sensual, as the pink light casts dramatic shadows over the tumultuous black folds. The red stitching dominates and creates dramatic, bloodlike seams running down the sculptures. These seams may be reminiscent of bloodletting and menstruation. Judy Chicago (cited in Broude & Garrard 1994:55) associates menstruation with shame, and also as a signifier of human animalism. The red, 'blood-like' stitching can be interpreted as indicating sexual violence or bleeding wounds, both of which carry connotations of pain. In using these references to wounds, Hlobo might be suggesting that the *Umtshotsho* could wound one physically or mentally. If one considers that blood is symbolic of life and birth, Hlobo's work on the *Umtshotsho* exhibition may be interpreted as symbolising both the birth of his gay lifestyle and his links with contemporary isiXhosa culture.

In three of the *Izithunzi* installation figures, domestic objects such as furniture are incorporated. Domestic household objects such as the couch, table and chair, could be references to familiarity or objects of comfort in the home. They can be interpreted as signifying a sense of comfort or ease with which Hlobo approaches his 'coming out'. The significance of the furniture might refer to a certain time period, perhaps his childhood, and may be reminiscent of the furniture his grandmother had in his childhood home. This connects to his memories of being an adolescent and the traditional isiXhosa *Umtshotsho* ritual that he was never part of. The Victorian ball and claw furniture references distinctly European origins, which could also mark his background as a Christian isiXhosa, raised in ways aligned more with western culture.

2.8 Form as meaning

IsiXhosa culture does not encourage penetrative sex between boys and girls before marriage. Rather, teenagers are encouraged to perform *Ukusoma*, which is a form of non-penetrative sex that can be practiced between boys or boys

together with girls (Gevisser 2009:9). The suggestion of tangled bodies covered by the rubber panels can be interpreted as referring to the traditional isiXhosa practice of *Ukusoma*.

Lundström (2009:174) describes Hlobo's use of form as "transgressive"; as disturbing "relations between form and content, refusing or displacing binaries and opposites in their intricate play of space and matter". Lundström's description of Hlobo's use of form as transgressive, guides my analysis of Hlobo's work. According to Lundström (2009:176), Hlobo employs two distinctive techniques in his use of material, namely folding and stitching, and notes that Hlobo creates folds as a process to create difference "while maintain[ing] continuity". Lundström (2009:174) contends that Hlobo's folds imply narratives that are continually hidden and unfolding. The rubber blanket hides objects or human forms underneath it and supports the notion of the masquerade that covers up and hides. The underpinning narrative of masquerade, ties up with Butler's notion of identity being performed, wherein an individual chooses what to perform within societal norms. Lundström (2009:176) suggests that Hlobo's use of "the fold" is "a conceptual tool"; and "ontology of becoming, a multiplicity, or a process creating differences while maintaining continuity". He (Lundström 2009:179) states that the shapes Hlobo selects, privilege "movement as a leading principle, referencing life itself in perpetual metamorphosis from one condition or state to the next".

According to Lundström (2009:179), it is clear from the forms used in *Izithunzi* that the shapes are selected to imply movement and multiplicity as opposed to singularity; they are not 'fixed' bodies, but rather "emergent entit[ies] of becoming". Lundström (2009:174) contends that Hlobo "generate[s] meaning out of transgressive form unsettling or upturning the relations between form and content, refusing or displacing binaries and opposites in their intricate play of space and matter". Hlobo's strategy of using transgressive form is highly successful in signifying the morphing qualities of the artworks in *Izithunzi*. I refer to this transgressive form as 'biomorphic' because it references organic forms in flux.

The forms in *Izithunzi* may also be described as grotesque.³⁵ According to Frances Connelly (2012:12), grotesque forms can symbolise a “gap” between different realities. This “gap” is where the development of a culture destabilises the norm, creating a space for “new possibilities” (Connelly 2012:14,15). Connelly (2012:2) also describes grotesque images as being “in flux”. Hlobo’s sculptures in *Izithunzi* can be described as ‘grotesque’ because of their monstrous qualities and their abjectness, which “collapse the boundaries between subject and object” (Connelly 2012:116). I suggest that Hlobo uses the grotesque to create room for interpretation; to fashion a form of representation that pushes the boundaries of traditional isiXhosa culture and redefines hybrid identity in his terms. New meaning is created through the unfamiliar, and that gap, created through the fantastical and the grotesque, unsettles and demands reassessment of social and cultural norms. These monster-like forms, according to the Ancient Greek poets Horace and Vitruvius (cited in Connelly 2012:27), are “bastard forms that may provoke laughter, but they confound the conventions that convey meaning”. According to Jeffrey Cohen (cited in Connelly 2012:116), the monstrous is a sign that warns. Hlobo’s installation titled *Kubomvu* means “beware”. These monstrous forms threaten the norm.

Connelly (2012:85) notes Mikhail Bakhtin’s observation, that laughter at the carnivalesque is “inclusive and universal” as opposed to Charles Baudrillard’s argument, in which he proposes that laughter signifies superiority between individuals. Bakhtin discusses carnival during medieval times as a time of social freedom where breaking taboos was the norm. Connelly (2012:115) makes the distinction between the carnivalesque, and the abject/monstrous, where the monstrous and abject create a “fearful, liminal world that threatens the carefully

³⁵ According to Frances Connelly (2012:3), the notion of the grotesque was first used in the fifteenth century to describe the Roman ruins of Nero’s Golden Palace, the Domus Aurea. In the sixteenth century, the grotesque was described as “fanciful works of extreme artifice and virtuosity” (Connelly 2012:2). The meaning of the grotesque has changed over the ages. Connelly (2012:115) describes the contemporary association with the grotesque as “abject [and] monstrous”. John Ruskin (cited in Connelly 2012:151) defines the “grotesque” as being

the expression, in a moment, by a series of symbols thrown together in bold and fearless connections, of truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any verbal way, and of which the connection is left for the beholder to work out for himself the gaps, left or overleaped by the haste of the imagination, forming the grotesque character.

constructed veneer of identity". The carnivalesque uses "laughter and wit to open up new possibilities" (Connelly 2012:115). It can be argued that in his sculptures, Hlobo uses the grotesque as a strategy to make the work seem threatening, but in referring to the masquerade, he also suggests an element of the carnivalesque and the fact that they are artificial and constructed, not real.

2.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, the primary aim of this chapter has been addressed through my analysis of how Hlobo uses materials and biomorphic forms to convey aspects of his gay isiXhosa male identity in the *Izithunzi* installation. The main themes in Hlobo's work, performance and masquerade, are discussed both in terms of his gendered, westernised and cultural identity, and the way in which he represents them. In his gendered identity as gay, he makes reference to fetishism, sadomasochism and masquerade by using the rubber in *Izithunzi*.

The *Izithunzi* installation embodies qualities of the masquerade and is described through notions of the grotesque, the monstrous, the carnivalesque and the alien as well as contemporary cultural phenomena of Steampunk and Zombies. All these terms re-enforce the breaching of societal boundaries, and creating new frontiers of knowledge. Hlobo uses these characteristics as tools to unsettle his audience. He engages with the viewer through fear and the grotesque, prompting them to re-evaluate the way they look at isiXhosa culture, gay culture and gender.

In the next chapter, I present a visual analysis of my practical work, highlighting my art-making processes and the theories that underpin the work.

CHAPTER THREE: *ONTLUIKENDE ON/GE-MAK*

3.1 Introduction

For the practical component of this study, I have developed a body of work in which I explore my emergent post-apartheid heterosexual, female, Afrikaner identity. The work takes the form of four sculptures that make up the *Ontluikende on/ge-mak* exhibition. The sculptures are crafted from different combinations of the following materials: second-hand furniture, polystyrene, concrete, steel pipe, plastic, fabric, stuffing, thread and fibreglass. In them, I incorporate second-hand furniture with biomorphic forms. Tension is created between the interaction of the form and the furniture pieces, particularly at the points where the forms break through the furniture.

In this chapter, I provide a context for my broader art-making practice, offer insight into the processes used in making the four sculptures submitted for the practical component of this study, present a visual analysis of artworks that are part of the *Ontluikende on/ge-mak* exhibition, and discuss the themes that underpin the work. Furthermore, I look at the broader context of my work in relation to other artists such as Doris Salcedo, Mona Hatoum and Wim Botha who also create 'furniture art objects', in which they use furniture to convey meaning. Furniture when used in an art context may be seen as a signifier of functionality, comfort, memory and time. Like Hatoum, in my 'furniture art objects', I subvert these associations to convey their antithesis: dysfunction and discomfort. Like Salcedo and Botha, I use furniture that evokes particular childhood memories for me, and which signify a particular time period.

Hlobo's furniture is functional; it is used to support his sculptures, and on a visual level, to convey notions of protrusion and enveloping. I also explore notions of occupancy, protrusion and enveloping, but not by using the furniture as a functional object; rather, I incorporate biomorphic forms that protrude into, envelop and occupy the furniture, thereby making it dysfunctional.

3.2 Background

My preoccupation with furniture started when I was completing a BA Honours in Fine Arts at the University of Stellenbosch. I was interested in the design and manufacture of furniture as an art form and I used this interest as a theme for my research article and as a means of coming to terms with the latest developments in the field of furniture art.³⁶ Simultaneously I was grappling with the notion of comfort and discomfort; in the written component, I discussed how different artists render the functional chair as dysfunctional in their artwork.

In a previous research article (Schutte 2003), I focus on the artist Nina Saunders, who works with functional chairs and couches, and renders them unusable by changing their structure. The purpose of the article is to discuss the central differences between the functional chair and the chair as artwork. The scope of the article includes a discussion on the historical origins and development of the functional chair, with specific reference to Saunders's sculptures. Accordingly, I consider the tradition of the chair, while also analysing the artist's intention when transforming it into a sculpture. Although this article is not devoted to an academic study of my practical work, comparing the functional chair and Saunders's 'artwork chairs', inspired me to make my own 'artwork chairs' for my Honours in Fine Arts in 2003 (Fig. 3.1). My interest in furniture did not end with my degree. I furthered my studies in Wood Machining and Cabinetmaking at Furntech (Advanced Furniture Technologies) College in George, where I received my National Certificate in Furniture Making: Wood: Wood Machining and Cabinet Making at NQF Level 2 in 2005.

³⁶ I use this term to describe an art form where furniture is incorporated as part of an artwork or a new artwork is made.



Figure 3.1 Sophia van Wyk (artist), *Untitled 5*, 2003. Wire, thread, cello tape, fishing gut and plastic, 2003. 70 x 60 x 60 cm (photograph by author).

In the practical component of this study, I take my exploration of furniture further. In my practical work, second-hand furniture plays a central role in the multi-layered reading of the artworks. I specifically choose to work with domestic furniture that is suggestive of the home or conveys a sense of homeliness. In my sculptures, I use furniture to reference my particular Afrikaner legacy. The particular type of furniture that I choose to work with does not specifically signify Afrikaners, but I place this meaning onto the furniture because it connects to a time and specific childhood memories that I experienced as an Afrikaner child growing up during apartheid. I also read the furniture as carrying connotations of domesticity, a realm that has historically been gendered as female and associated with normative practices of Afrikaner women as home-makers.

My research (Schutte 2003) on Saunders's art chairs informs my analysis of my artworks in terms of the way in which I disturb the ergonomics of the chair so as to render it uncomfortable and dysfunctional. In the following section, I discuss Salcedo, Hatoum and Botha's work in relation to my practical work in order to locate my work within a broader South African and global art context. Thereafter I also look at artists Berndnaut Smilde and Cai Zhisong, who use clouds in their artwork, to contextualise my use of clouds as references for my biomorphic forms.



Figure 3.2 Mona Hatoum (artist), *Homebound*, 2000. Mixed-media installation with kitchen utensils, furniture, electric wire, light bulbs, computerized dimmer unit, amplifier and speakers, dimensions variable (photograph courtesy of artist and Documenta 11).

Hatoum's installation artwork titled *Homebound* (2000) (Fig. 3.2), shown at *Documenta 11* (2002), consists of a wire fence cordoning off an area that displays metal domestic furniture such as chairs, bedside tables, a dining table, a clothes rail, lamps, a cot and a bed without a mattress. Electrical cables snake between and over the furniture and connect to lamps that are positioned on top of the furniture and on the ground. Light bulbs are positioned sporadically throughout the display, on top of, and below, the furniture. The lights are connected to a dimmer switch which turns on and off at irregular intervals.

In *Homebound*, Hatoum creates a sense of danger by running and draping electrical cables through and around the pieces of furniture. The viewer is confronted with the potential for electrical shock, as the electrical current flows through the metal furniture. HG Masters's (2008:[sp]) explains that Hatoum uses the metaphor of electricity to convey the idea of the danger lurking in a home. Danger may be read as signifying electrocution or shock from electrical appliances as well as theft or violent crime in the home (Masters 2008:[sp]). This re-enforces the notion that the home is unsafe, leaving the viewer with a sense of impending danger. Unpacking Hatoum's artworks further, Masters (2008:[sp]) notes that her reference to danger or violence implies that presumably 'safe'

objects have the potential to be dangerous and carry the threat of violence. Hatoum (cited in Masters 2008:[sp]), explains that she uses selected furniture pieces that are examples of everyday objects with which she has an established relationship. She (Hatoum cited in Masters (2008:[sp])) comments that when she renders these 'everyday objects' dangerous by running electricity through them, she subverts the conventionally accepted meaning of comfort in the furniture, thereby implying that 'reality' is uncertain and questionable. Hatoum's personal experience of the domestic as being dangerous stems from the civil war that broke out in her home country of Lebanon in 1975 (Masters 2008:[sp]). At the time, she was in exile in London. The sense of danger that Hatoum conveys in her artworks signifies that, for her, Lebanon is a dangerous and violent place.

I read Hatoum's *Homebound*, as her commenting on consumer items such as furniture, which trap the consumer in the sense that the objects 'own the person' rather than the other way around. This notion of bourgeois ownership ties in with the idea that the home, because of the degree of responsibility that it carries, can be a trap, which dictates a person's behaviours. These domestic responsibilities may include ensuring an alarm system is installed to secure domestic items, taking out the rubbish, maintaining the garden and cleaning house.



Figure 3.3 Doris Salcedo (artist), *Untitled*, 1998. Wood, concrete and metal, 214 x 150 x 54.5 cm (photograph courtesy of artist and White Cube).

Salcedo's work, *Untitled* (1995) (Fig. 3.3) from her *Untitled* series, comprises a tall wooden cupboard filled to the brim with concrete. The back of a wooden chair and its hind legs protrude slightly from the concrete. The concrete is level with the hinges of the cupboard door but the door itself is missing. In her reading of Salcedo's work, Mieke Bal (2010:10,78) describes it as political and non-representational. Rather than outright representation, the furniture is a metaphor for an 'image of the past', which evokes narrative questions of who the owner/s were, what the cupboard was used for and how old the cupboard is. Bal (2010:79, 80) further explains that Salcedo's *Untitled* series refers to political violence that the owner of the cupboard was subjected to. The piece of furniture has been violated, and made dysfunctional by the concrete that has been poured into the functional section of the cupboard usually used for storage. With the

displacement of the cupboard from the domestic setting to a gallery, Bal (2010:80) suggests that the home has been violated. Bal (2010:87) explains that by paradoxically “suffocating and silencing” the cupboard, the perpetrator of the political violence suffered by the owner of the cupboard is metaphorically silenced. Salcedo accentuates this silencing of the perpetrator by covering up the victim’s property with concrete. This emphasises Salcedo’s negation of the violence that occurred against the owner of the furniture. In this way, according to Bal (2010:87), *Untitled* can be read as a metaphoric tomb for the victims of political violence in Columbia where Salcedo, a self-proclaimed Third World artist was born. Furthermore, Bal (2010:89) describes Salcedo’s work as having anthropomorphic qualities, and as being recognisable domestic objects, which are then able to “move” or connect to the viewer in a “physical and emotional sense”.



Figure 3.4 Wim Botha (artist), *Commune: Onomatopoeia*, 2003. Carved wood, stained lightboxes, stonecast, etching, installation, dimensions variable (photograph courtesy of artist and Michael Stevenson).

In *Commune: Onomatopoeia* (2003) (Fig. 3.4), Botha constructs a carefully orchestrated domestic scene within a gallery space, using tables, lead-light

windows, framed prints and mirrors. The domestic scene is suspended from the ceiling. German art historian Melanie Klein (2008:177) describes the space as a recognisably Western setting, in which the stoic furniture is reminiscent of transient memories of colonisation in the nineteenth century. In this collection, Botha subverts the inherent meaning of comfort in the furniture by introducing to this seemingly formal domestic scene menacing design elements in the form of hyenas. By disturbing the expected presentation of the furniture by suspending it from the ceiling and introducing these menacing elements, Botha creates an uncomfortable, and threatening domestic setting. One dead and rotting hyena is displayed on the stucco detail of the ceiling. In the two etched prints hanging on the make-believe wall, the hyenas are shown as intruders, destroying the coat of arms, and defecating and fornicating on a domestic object. Klein's (2008:101) reading suggests that the hyena is the signifier of the "desecrator of [apartheid] state ideology". She (Klein 2008:102,179) explains that Botha explores knowledge around the disassembling of the apartheid state, using the hyena as a sign of the decline and difficulties experienced by Afrikaner males adjusting to the new power relations in post-apartheid South Africa. This adjustment for the white Afrikaner males can be read in terms of Sigmund Freud's (cited in Bhabha 1994:14) notion of the *umheimlich* or unhomeliness. Freud (cited in Bhabha 1994:14) describes the *umheimlich* as "the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light". Botha's title suggests that, at first glance, the room that he constructed looks 'real', but on closer inspection, one realises that it is a construction, a visual *onomatopoeia*. My reading of the first word in the title, 'commune', can be interpreted as being suggestive of the Afrikaner cultural group navigating the power relations of post-apartheid South Africa. In my reading of *Commune: Onomatopoeia*, Botha uses the furniture to refer to the interactions and tensions between the Afrikaner male and the democratic political power that occur in post-apartheid South Africa. My reading is echoed by Gayatri Spivak's (cited in Klein 2008:101) description of the white man's position as one of "unease and unhomeliness" and "of a closed space that was long detached and preserved" (Klein 2008:101). The hegemonic white masculinity "turns against itself and makes visible the insanity, fragility and vulnerability of Afrikaner ideology" (Klein 2008:102).

Hatoum, Salcedo and Botha can be interpreted as using the furniture not only as signifiers of history, memory and the domestic, but also of silence. In all three artists' work the dense furniture 'stands in' for what is not there. In Salcedo's *Untitled*, particularly, the stoic furniture becomes a silent place holder for the loss of the victims and the absenteeism of the perpetrator.

3.3 Clouds as biomorphic forms

A cloud is defined as "a visible mass of condensed watery vapour, floating in the sky" (Cloud 2014). For as long as I can remember, I have practised *Nephelococcygia*.³⁷ Clouds have always fascinated me because of their elusive and liminal quality. I started using clouds as reference for the shape of biomorphic forms in my art making practice in my third year of study (2002). Since 2012, I have been part of the Cloud Appreciation Society³⁸ which has a membership of 35 000. In its manifesto, the Cloud Appreciation Society states that it "seek[s] to remind people that clouds are expressions of the atmosphere's moods, and can be read like those of a person's countenance" (2014 [sa]). Working from his or her frame of reference and imagination, the viewer can only read clouds subjectively.

My inclination towards using natural forms in my work started with line drawings of natural masses such as mountains and rocks and the contours of landscapes on a map. However, I subsequently found these forms to be too rigid and static and moved on to drawing the outlines of clouds. Apart from clouds, water masses and fire are the other constantly changing natural elements, the forms of which may be captured by camera or with sketches. From the shapes and forms

³⁷ The act of seeking and finding shapes in clouds is called *Nephelococcygia*. Jorge Fin (2002:[sp]) explains in Greek *nephelokokkygia* comes from *nephele* translated to cloud and *kokkyx* meaning cuckoo. In the Greek playwright Aristophanes's comedy *The Birds* (414 BC), *Necephelococcygia* is the name of an imaginary city planned to be built in the sky (Fin 2002:[sp]).

³⁸ The Cloud Appreciation Society is an international member-based organisation for the enjoyment and celebration of clouds.

in these cloud drawings I have designed and created the non-representational biomorphic forms used in my sculptures³⁹ (Fig. 3.5).



Figure 3.5 Sophia van Wyk (artist), *Untitled 2*, 2003. Wire, thread, cellotape, polystyrene and plastic, 120 x 100 x 100 cm (photograph by author).

The use of biomorphic forms, clouds in particular, hold multiple meanings for me. Because clouds are constantly changing, never static, I see them as signifying the constant changes in my constructed emergent Afrikaner female identity. My emergent identity is implied by the interaction of the cloud-like shapes with the furniture. Through this interaction and the tension created between the cloud shapes and the furniture, I explore my interaction with the world as well as my personal and cultural history.

The clouds that I choose to use in my artworks are taken from photographs of specific events in my life. These events include my first holiday with my then-boyfriend and now - husband in KwaZulu-Natal in 2010, and a picnic with my university roommate at the Pretoria Groenkloof Nature Reserve in 2013. I have an electronic collection of cloud photographs that are catalogued according to the event and year. When making an artwork, I search through the electronic

³⁹ The sculptures are works in progress and, at the time of documenting them for reproduction in this dissertation, they were not complete.

catalogue and choose a cloud shape from an event. I am usually drawn to the shape and detail of the cloud and because of the particular memory it evokes for me. Looking for shapes in clouds is something that I do automatically. I relate to Smilde's (cited in David Rosenberg 2013:[sp]) explanation that "[p]eople have always had strong metaphysical connections to clouds as they symbolize the ominous, fertility, luck and divinity".



Figure 3.6 Berndt Smilde (artist), *Nimbus Platform 57*, 2012. Digital C-type print (photograph courtesy of artist).

Smilde and Zhisong both use clouds in their artwork. In *Nimbus Platform 57* (Fig. 3.6), Smilde creates a cloud in an indoor environment, presumably 'platform fifty-seven', by combining frozen smoke and water vapour (Rosenberg 2013:[sp]). Smilde captures the clouds by photographing them, ensuring that he can share the images with a larger audience, and also alluding to the paradoxical nature of the cloud photographs (Rosenberg 2013:[sp]). Smilde (cited in Rosenberg 2013:[sp]), implies that there is danger because of the unnatural situation that is created by inserting a typically uncontrollable natural element, in this case a cloud⁴⁰, into a manmade structure. Smilde (cited in Rosenberg 2013:[sp]) denies that it is about the shape of the cloud; for him, it is rather

⁴⁰ Hlobo similarly uses shapes and forms that are open to interpretation. In my reading, he uses these forms to convey the notion of liminality and a sense of powerlessness. Jantjes (2011:68) describes Hlobo's forms in *Izithunzi as having a "mythological or supernatural quality"* because they display few clear human characteristics. Jantjes (2011:68) reads the figures in *Izithunzi* as "spirit beings, ancestors perhaps who seemed to be stripped of their once omniscient power to control social behaviour".

about subverting the normal and creating a duality in the situation. My reading on Smilde's *Nimbus Platform 57* explores the narrative of man's power and ingenuity that in creating a natural form using technology, which produces water vapour that becomes the cloud. But rather than seeing the threatening side as Smilde intended, I view it as a magnificent paradoxical feat between aspects of beauty and danger as well as nature versus the manmade.



Figure 3.7 Photographer unknown, Tea-cloud by Cai Zhisong (Tea Cloud 2014).

Zhisong's artwork, titled *Tea Cloud* (2011) (Fig 3.7), consists of seven artificial clouds, which are painted steel vessels that house both wind chimes and tea. When the clouds are moved by the wind or rocked, the clouds release an aroma of tea and the sound of wind chimes. Zhisong (cited in Zhang Zixuan 2011:[sp]), explains that he uses the form of clouds and tea to comment on traditional aspects of his Chinese culture. He (Zhisong cited in Zixuan 2011:[sp]) explains that his clouds have a favourable meaning for him and connect to Zen Buddhism, which emphasises the value of meditation and intuitive thoughts. My reading on Zhisong's *Tea Cloud* also extends to Smilde's work; I am fascinated by the dichotomous relationship between the use of contemporary technology to construct the cloud vessels that contain tea and wind chimes, to refer to the traditional Chinese culture. Peng Fen (cited in Li Zhixin 2011:[sp]) explains that Zhisong used smell to activate the viewers' senses to engage with Chinese

philosophy. My reading of Zhisong amplifies the paradoxical relationship between tradition and contemporary society and the merging of the two within *Cloud Tea*.

3.4 Visual analysis of artworks

In this section I undertake a visual analysis of the four sculptures exhibited as part of *Ontluikende on/ge-mak* exhibition. The measurements of the sculptures vary between 100 cm x 150 cm x 90 cm to 170 cm x 240 cm x 121 cm. All four sculptures are made from second-hand furniture; specifically, an armchair, coffee table, chair and bed. Each piece of furniture is intersected by a biomorphic shape (based on my selected cloud forms) which is made from polystyrene, and thereafter covered with concrete, fibreglass, steel pipe, thread, stuffing, fabric and or plastic.

3.4.1 *Rusbank revolusie*



Figure 3.8 Sophia van Wyk (artist), *Rusbank revolusie*, 2014. Leather armchair, concrete, plastic, thread, stuffing, faux leather, steel pipe and polystyrene, 75 x 200 x 250 cm, 2014 (photograph by Bob Cnoops).

The first sculpture is titled *Rusbank revolusie* (2014) (Fig. 3.8), which, translated into English means 'armchair revolution'. The sculpture consists of a black leather single-seater armchair, circa the late 1980s or early 1990s in a generic Italian

design. A black biomorphic cloud-like shape protrudes through both sides of the armchair, while two additional biomorphic shapes protrude from the front and the back of the chair. The front limb protrusion is upholstered in plastic vinyl. Where the ergonomics and function of the armchair is disrupted, tension is clearly created between the materials; because of the biomorphic shapes in front it is difficult to get to the seat of the chair to sit on it. The biomorphic form inside the seat creates a mound, rendering the armchair unusable. The biomorphic shape appears as if it is imbedded in the armchair, and is trying to break out. In this work, the ratio of biomorphic form to armchair is almost equal. In each sculpture, the way in which the biomorphic forms are assembled in relation to the furniture differs. In *Rusbank revolusie*, the protruding biomorphic shapes were made and then attached to the furniture with rods and bolts. The leather upholstery was cut into to create the illusion that the form is penetrating and breaking through the chair. I dyed the leather upholstery with black ink to enhance the colour. The different black textured materials that *Rusbank revolusie* consists of, namely, the biomorphic forms covered in black plastic bags (Fig. 3.9), the couch upholstered in leather, and the front limb upholstered in black vinyl, work together to create a congruent whole. My use of black plastic bags, reminiscent of Hlobo's rubber inner tubing, seems to almost suffocate the penetrating biomorphic forms making them appear threatening. My use of black plastic bags can be seen as suggestive of body bags and imply the covering up of dead bodies.



Figure 3.9 Sophia van Wyk (artist), *Rusbank revolusie* detail 1, 2014. Leather armchair, concrete, plastic, thread, stuffing, thread, steel pipe, faux leather and polystyrene, 75 x 200 x 250 cm (photograph by Bob Cnoops).

Like Hatoum, I also suggest the notion of danger or dysfunction through my use of biomorphic form that irreverently penetrates the furniture. The biomorphic form may be read as mauling the furniture in a 'dangerous' way, which leads to the destruction of the chair as an 'object of comfort'. As Salcedo does, I create an uncomfortable and menacing atmosphere through the subversive biomorphic forms that I introduce into the furniture, as well as the titles that I give to the artworks. Three of the titles refer to action being taken; a revolution, a break and a dethroning. These deeds suggest action, movement and change. The fourth title refers to a royal position held in society, a princess. While Salcedo's work is rooted in civil unrest and political murder, I explore the emergent nature of my Afrikaner female identity and the ongoing changes in my conception of my identity.

Like Salcedo, I specifically use second-hand furniture because, for me, through the memories and personal histories projected onto the furniture by its multiple owners, it becomes a signifier of life and death. Nancy Princenthal, Carlos Basualdo and Andreas Huyssen's (2000:[sp]) discussion on Salcedo's furniture, in which they maintain that she distorts the original furniture forms in order to metaphorically "suffocate and silenc[e]" the furniture (Bal 2010:87), provides a context for my explanation of how I distort form to convey a sense of discomfort. In a manner similar to that of Salcedo's, I too create tension and 'suffocate and

silence' my furniture by using the biomorphic forms to break through the furniture, rendering it dysfunctional. In both *Koffie breek* and *Prinses* I cover the biomorphic shapes with fabric. Like Salcedo (Bal 2010:87), I cover the form with panels made from fabric that are stitched together. The fabric covering conveys the sense the form within is hidden, being suppressed; or camouflaged.

3.4.2 *Koffie breek*



Figure 3.10 Sophia van Wyk (artist), *Koffie breek*, 2014. Coffee table, concrete, stuffing, fabric, thread, steel pipe and polystyrene, fibreglass 70 x 180 x 180 cm (photograph by Bob Cnoops).

The second sculpture is titled *Koffie breek* (2014), which translated into English means 'coffee break' (Fig 3.10). The biomorphic form is constructed in such a way that three legs support the weight of the sculpture and a trunk-like form stretches out from the front of the sculpture. The coffee table is made from Oregon pine in the cottage furniture style and was manufactured in the mid-1980s. The biomorphic form breaks through the table and splinters the tabletop where it protrudes (Fig. 3.11). The coffee table is locked into the biomorphic form. It hangs in mid-air, supported by the trunk of the form. One of the sides of the table is broken off and sits on top of the slanted trunk of the sculpture; it is positioned to seem as if it has fallen there. The biomorphic form is covered with

chequered green and white runners that were used on my wedding tables on 20 October 2012. Small fabric panels are cut and are hand stitched together to cover the whole form. I over-stitch sections of the panels with thread and create welts on the surface of the fabric to further emphasize the discomfort.

Similarly to *Rusbank revolusie*, *Koffie breek* was also constructed in parts, which made assembling difficult. Because the construction process is so organic, the structure cannot always practically planned in advance. This made assembling the different parts a challenge, particularly because the trunk in *Koffie breek* was too long. I subsequently reworked the trunk in order for it to fit the sculpture. In *Koffie breek* the coffee table was inserted into the biomorphic shape, the top and bottom part of which I constructed separately. I had to cut part of the way through the table to make it look as if the biomorphic form had broken through it. To get this effect I had to partly cut into the table with a router and then break through the thin layer of the wood on top, so that the wood would splinter at the points where the biomorphic form protrudes. The table had to be propped up and fashioned in such a way that it did not touch the form. Because *Rusbank revolusie*, *Koffie breek* and *Prinses* are large-scale sculptures, I found them physically challenging to work on alone.⁴¹

3.4.3 Onttroon

⁴¹ My husband was therefore enlisted to assist me with assembling them. Because of the size and the awkwardness of the forms, it takes at least three people to move *Rusbank revolusie* or *Koffie breek*.



Figure 3.11 Sophia van Wyk (artist), *Onttroon*, 2014. Chair, fabric, varnish, concrete, fibreglass and polystyrene, thread 100 x 150 x 90 cm (photograph by Bob Cnoops).

The third sculpture is titled *Onttroon* (2014) (Fig 3.11), which means 'de-throned' in English. The chair is upholstered in blue fabric. A biomorphic form is placed in the middle of the seat, creating the impression that its two tentacle-like shapes are being sucked into the chair. While another tentacle-like form 'drips' down, almost touching the floor and another snakes around to the front. I found that I could construct the biomorphic form in *Onttroon* as one piece, but the two tentacles had to be constructed as part of the chair.

The overstuffed cushion engulfs the biomorphic form. I had the chair reupholstered and made the cushion puffy and full so as to create a sense of drama around the way in which the tentacles appear to be in the process of being sucked into the chair. The chair back comprises two elongated slats, which

also appear as if they are being pulled into the biomorphic form. The two elongated wooden armrests also appear to be sucked into the biomorphic shape (Fig 3.12).



Figure 3.12 Sophia van Wyk (artist), *Onttroon* detail 1, 2014. Chair, fabric, varnish, concrete, fibreglass and polystyrene, thread, 100 x 150 x 90 cm (photograph by Bob Cnoops).

3.4.4 *Prinses*



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Figure 3.13 Sophia van Wyk (artist), *Prinses*, 2014. Bed, concrete, thread, fabric, stuffing, steel pipe and polystyrene, 140 x 170 x 250 cm (photograph by Bob Cnoops).

The fourth sculpture is titled *Prinses* (Fig. 3.13), which means 'princess' in English. In it, a large anthropomorphic biomorphic form appears to sink into a bed, breaking through the white steel pipe headboard. The bed was manufactured in the 1980s and is reminiscent of the type of beds found in bedrooms of young girls at the time that I was growing up. The biomorphic form, in the sculpture, is covered with a white, purple and pink floral patterned fabric with a light blue background. Panels of the fabric are stitched together with bright pink embroidery thread. The fabric seems to flow into the bed. I over-stitch sections of the floral fabric to create welts in various colours, adding to discomfort of the form and disrupting the surface (Fig:3.14).



Figure 3.14 Sophia van Wyk (artist), *Prinses* detail 1, 2014. Bed, concrete, thread, fabric, stuffing, steel pipe and polystyrene, 140 x 170 x 250 cm (photograph by Bob Cnoops).

In all four sculptures, the places where the biomorphic forms protrude are consciously included in the functional surface areas of the furniture. For instance, in *Rusbank revolusie*, the biomorphic form that causes the seating area to rise up at an angle compromises the seating. In *Koffie breek*, the coffee table is broken and placed in a slanted and elevated position, and thus it cannot be used. In *Onttroon* the biomorphic form protrudes into the seat so that nobody can sit on the chair. In *Prinses* the biomorphic form penetrates and sinks into the base of the bed, and breaks through the base of the bed.

Each work refers to a particular time in my childhood during the apartheid regime. The wooden armchair in *Onttroon* is significant to me because my father, a national party politician, used to sit on it. The coffee table in *Koffie breek* is a replica of the coffee table my parents had when I was growing up and which they still use today. The black leather armchair in *Rusbank revolusie* is a reminder of a childhood friend who had a similar armchair in their home. In *Prinses*, the type of bed is significant because it is called a 'princess bed'; the bed would have been made for a small girl or child; this is indicated by its size, and the pink flowers that decorate the baubles of the headboard.

Hence, for me, each piece of furniture carries a strong reference to my Afrikaner legacy, focusing specifically on the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Unlike Zhisong, who alludes to his culture through his reference to clouds, the clouds I use reference only the *emergent* nature of my constructed cultural Afrikaner identity. My use of clouds suggests the sense of liminality as conveyed in Bhabha's theory of the Third Space.

Memories I have of the leather armchair include the time I helped my father to canvas voters by putting up National party posters for the first democratic election in his constituency in Pietermaritzburg. The title, *Rusbank revolusie*, is a play on the meaning of the phrase 'armchair revolution' that refers to a person who might have strong liberal political views but does not actively participate in political struggle. Instead, s/he fights idealistic battles that have no real relevance to the political situation at hand. With this title I question my role as an emergent female Afrikaner in post-apartheid South Africa, and my need to play an active role in this society. I identify with Richardt Strydom's (cited in Lloyd 2013:[sp]) notion that "Afrikaners have long been unable to 'speak in a credible voice'" because of their Afrikaner legacy. Max du Preez (cited in Dubin 2012:204), describes the Afrikaners' feeling of "skaam-kwaad" ("ashamed angry") (translated by Dubin); similarly, John Matshikiza (cited in Dubin 2012:204) describes Afrikaners as being "disempowered" and in a "desert of isolation". Growing up I never felt proud to be Afrikaans; I felt a closer association with the English speakers in our neighbourhood. Although I feel betrayed and disillusioned by my Afrikaner legacy, I feel the need to move past it and to be an active participant rather than an armchair revolutionary.

The title *Koffie breek* is a play on the words 'coffee table' and 'broken'. Because the table is broken I have placed the word 'broken' instead of 'table' before the word 'coffee'. Thus, the title refers to the time that one takes to drink coffee and take a break from work to relax. The broken coffee table signifies the notion that I do not have to carry my Afrikaner legacy with me for the rest of my life. The breaking of the furniture signifies my 'breaking through' as well as breaking with my Afrikaner legacy and constructing a new empowered position as an emergent Afrikaner female. In addition, the period of relation that the title refers to implies that the respite is over and that my position should be one of activity and engagement. My use of the chequered table runners to surface the biomorphic form in this work is significant, as they refer directly to my wedding reception. For me, my wedding day represents the new position from which my emergent female Afrikaner identity emerges, as opposed to the Afrikaner legacy that is represented by the broken coffee table. The colours green and white with the wooden table suggest the idea of an outdoor dining experience or a picnic -- somewhere where one can take a coffee break.

In *Onttroon*, through the act of dethroning, a person's power and position in society is taken away from them. I intend this title to make specific reference to the Afrikaner's fall from power. The blue colour of the cushion signifies the idea of royalty, which, in turn, may be connected to the notion of Afrikaner royalty, power or the Afrikaner political elite that has been overpowered and put in their 'place'. The colour blue of the cushion is normatively gendered masculine. The colour pink in the patterned fabric is normatively gendered feminine. I use both these colours in *Onttroon* to signify my feminine complexity.

In *Prinses*, I use the title satirically to criticise my privileged Afrikaner upbringing and explore my current emergent position. The bed can be interpreted as a site of sexual experience or awakening. Paradoxically it also implies childish innocence. I feel religious and cultural sexual norms were placed on me at an early age, specifically by the Dutch Reformed Church. The church dictated that acceptable gendered *volksmoeder* sexual behaviour meant remaining chaste until marriage. It can be interpreted that the role of sex within the Dutch Reformed

Church was promoted for procreation in order to build the Afrikaner nation and not for recreation.

The way in which the biomorphic form merges with the bed implies my acceptance of my female gendered identity position that deviates from the conservative Afrikaner female stereotype. I use the floral patterned fabric, because to me it seems saturated by colour and the patterns of the flowers implying femininity. The fabric covers and suffocates the biomorphic form that it encases. The pattern on the fabric also resembles the kinds of patterns often found on South African domestic worker's uniforms. For me, it carries a reminder of the significant role our domestic worker/s played in my life as a privileged Afrikaans child during apartheid. The biomorphic form is also reminiscent of an overly large stuffed toy, possibly conveying the sense of childish innocence.

I draw parallels between Hlobo's *Umtshotsho*, in which he metaphorically celebrates his 'coming out' as a gay isiXhosa male and my 'coming of age'. In the Afrikaner culture, 'coming of age' is when you turn twenty-one and a party is held in your honour. For me, *Prinses* is about my acceptance of the metaphorical 'coming of age' of my emergent Afrikaner female identity, as an alternative to my prescriptive Afrikaner upbringing.

The scale of biomorphic form to furniture varies. I consciously use different sized forms so that there is either a balance between the ratio of furniture and biomorphic form, or the size of the form is dominant over the size of the furniture. In *Rusbank revolusie*, *Onttroon* and *Prinses*, the scale of the biomorphic form is almost equal to that of the armchair and chair. This implies that neither the furniture, which signifies my Afrikaner legacy and childhood memories, nor the biomorphic form, which for me signifies change, will destroy each other; rather, they live alongside each other. In *Prinses* both the mattress and bedding is covered with the same floral patterned fabric as the biomorphic form. This implies that the biomorphic form and bed can be interpreted as one entity. Tension is indicated by pink thread that is spun taught from the overstuffed fabric like a welt or scar. In both *Koffiebreek* and *Prinses* the welts conveyed by the over-stitched thread indicate tension and disruption of the fabric

and the surface. The uneven and subversive stitching signifies the break from the regulated construct of the *volksmoeder* stereotype.

In *Rusbank revolusie*, the biomorphic form sits snugly in the armchair. The armchair's upholstery is torn in places and the tension seems much greater in *Koffie breek* than in *Rusbank revolusie*. In *Koffie breek* the biomorphic form is almost four times larger than the coffee table. This implies that there is no chance of the coffee table emerging unscathed from its interaction with the biomorphic form because of the sheer scale difference. The breaking of the furniture implies the violent destruction of the coffee table. This signifies the dramatic end; that is, a 'break' from being an armchair revolutionary to an emergence in a new place, from which to interact. The violent breaking of the table implies that there is a price to pay for waiting or taking a 'break'. The biomorphic form, signifying change and my emerging identity, breaks and destroys my Afrikaner legacy leaving splinters behind. What is left is an unscathed forceful biomorphic form and the remnants of the coffee table. The coffee table might no longer be functional but it still forms part of the whole. I intend this to suggest that the historical event of apartheid might have been overcome, but it will always be a part of the collective memory of South Africa.

3.5 Art-making process

In this section I unpack my art-making process and practices. My art-making process starts with photographing clouds. I catalogue these cloud images according to the event or place that they signify for me and the year in which they were taken. I digitally manipulate the photos in order to find a simplified shape and then make drawings or paintings from the manipulated photos. Subsequently, I make a clay marquette of the abstracted cloud shape in order to see how the form can be interpreted three-dimensionally.

Thereafter I select a piece of furniture that is readily available or purchase one from a second-hand shop. This furniture relates to the themes of my work, that of my gender as performance and my emergent female Afrikaner identity post-apartheid and acts as a reference point to past events or a significant person

time. When choosing which piece to use, I consider the time period when the furniture was manufactured and scale of the furniture. Next I use drawings to plan the way in which the biomorphic form will be introduced into the furniture. My intention and the materials guide me as to how the objects will interact. I construct the sculpture and document the progress with photographs. Similarly to Salcedo, I subvert the inherent function of the furniture as a domestic object by making my furniture pieces into 'art objects' emphasizing meaning over functionality. Although still recognisable, the pieces of furniture become anthropomorphic as a result of the biomorphic forms that distort and break through them. Similar to Salcedo's work, the artworks are read on a physical and emotional level. Akin to both Salcedo and Botha and in order to convey meaning, I subvert the conventional functions of the furniture by inserting the biomorphic cloud forms into it.

In making the sculpture, I cut the polystyrene into individual biomorphic shapes with an electrical saw. I sculpt the pieces with a variety of steel wire brushes of different thicknesses to ensure smooth shapes. Although the polystyrene gives a coarse-textured finish the overall shape is smooth. Steel rods are inserted into the individual polystyrene shapes and then connected together by welding steel pipe or by insertion to form the overall biomorphic shape. I rework the polystyrene surface in order to make it smooth. I then mix the concrete for application. At the beginning of this sculpture-making process I make a slurry of marble dust, Duralatex and PPC cement and paint this onto the polystyrene shapes. Three to four layers are applied to give a thick coat, which can then be sanded to a smooth finish. I plaster the surface with Plaster Skim in order to fill in the holes and surface cracks.

Because no Duralatex was available for three months during the time I was making the sculptures, I used plaster in the sculpture *Onttroon*. The plaster works effectively but becomes very costly when covering large areas. When I have the rough concrete or plaster surface ready on the polystyrene shapes, I sand off most of the roughness with a belt sander or industrial mouse sander, depending on the quality of the desired finish. The sanding process is time-consuming. I sand a piece of sculpture first with an electrical sander, then patch the holes with plaster, sand the piece again and then patch the smaller holes

with Plaster Skim. Because of the brittleness of the plaster in Onttroon, I covered it with one layer of fibreglass and painted it with gelcoat – a resin based medium that allows for a smooth surface. For *Rusbank revolusie* and *Koffie breek* I only made use of the concrete slurry. In *Prinses* and *Onttroon*, the biomorphic form was covered with fibreglass to ensure that it was structurally sound.

In this series of sculptures, I struggled with the interaction between material such as the painted concrete, fibreglass and the wooden furniture, mattress, bedding and upholstery. I needed to be careful with the concrete and the wood because the wood would have scraped and broken the painted concrete if it had rested on it. The interaction between the painted concrete and upholstery was more forgiving, but I found both plaster and concrete unforgiving media. I chose concrete with paradoxical intentions, because although it is a strong rigid medium it is used to convey liquid, smoothness and movement. I was surprised at how easily the plaster and concrete would crack with the slightest movement. For this reason I covered the concrete with fibreglass to ensure support.

At first I painted the biomorphic forms white to highlight and accentuate their shapes. My decision to use the colour white for the sculptures was for formal reasons and did not have any connection to race. For me, the colour white is significant because it carries connotations of neutrality, freshness, a new beginning, balance and independence. Nita Leland (1985:17) explains that white is also the colour that the human eye sees when it senses light because it contains all the wavelengths of the visible spectrum. Materials that do not emit light themselves appear white if their surfaces reflect back most of the light that strikes them (Leland 1985:18).

However, I found that I could not achieve the smoothness of finish that I wanted on the white surfaces, and that the colour did not successfully accentuate the curves and form of the biomorphic forms. I also received comments that the colour white is racially loaded, which concerned me, as I did not want the sculptures to be read in this way. I therefore decided that because of this, not to use a white finish. I started covering the biomorphic forms with fabrics or painting them in different colours which resulted in a more successful surface

that described the form in a better way. I stitched fabric panels over their concrete and fibreglass bodies. I used similar stitching techniques to those used by Hlobo uses in his construction of *Izithunzi*, thereby creating a visual reference to his work.

3.6 Themes

My sculptures can be examined in multiple layers. The key themes explored in *Ontluikende on/ge-mak* are notions of my constructed cultural identity (Du Gay & Hall 1996), the use of biomorphic forms to signify the emergent nature of my post-apartheid Afrikaner identity, my identity as performance (Wright cited in Distiller & Steyn 2004:5) and my use of material as meaning. The exhibition title translates into English as 'Emerging dis/comfort'. The meaning refers to the paradoxical relationship of the comfort and discomfort of my emerging Afrikaner female identity post-apartheid. The conflicting relationship between feelings of comfort and discomfort stem firstly from grappling with my Afrikaner legacy and my longing to construct an emergent 'South African' identity that stands apart from this limiting inheritance. Secondly, from my position as a post-feminist, I grapple with breaking away from the limiting Afrikaner female *volksmoeder* stereotype, by employing both masculine and feminine work techniques whilst embracing feminine complexity at the same time. I also use 'harder' materials that may be associated with masculinity, such as concrete and fibreglass, as well as 'softer' materials such as fabric and thread that have, historically, been associated with femininity. Thus the word/s 'dis/comfort' refer to both my cultural and gendered identity constructs; as always being in a state of becoming, perpetually evolving, a liminal space, emerging, unfixed and unstable.

3.6.1 Emergent Afrikaner identity

The biomorphic forms signify the change of my constructed identity; they connect to specific life-changing memories and past experiences. I choose to work with biomorphic form, as opposed to geometric or realistic forms, because they lend themselves to an openness of interpretation. Although their meaning might be open-ended, my biomorphic forms are solid, static constructs made of

concrete, steel pipe, polystyrene and fibreglass. By disrupting the function of the furniture, the sculpture becomes a liminal space signifying an emergent hybrid identity. The point of contact created between furniture and biomorphic form produces a hybrid and liminal form. A space of tension is created signified by the tearing of the upholstery and breaking and adjusting of the furniture pieces. In *Rusbank revolusie* and *Koffie breek*, the object of comfort is destroyed. I use clouds as biomorphic forms because of their liminal and ephemeral quality. When I incorporate them into my sculpture the clouds form then become static. By using different coloured paints and patterned cloth on the biomorphic forms, I break the sense of static form and create a liminal space.

3.6.2 Gender as performance

In Chapter One, I unpacked the notion of my gender as performance and my position as an Afrikaner female artist as being at odds with the limiting *volksmoeder* stereotype of Afrikaner women. By actualising the sculptures using stereotypically masculine and feminine working methods, I perform and work through 'my' constructed gender. I perform the male stereotype by working in my overalls, and challenge myself physically by performing hard manual labour to construct the sculptures. My choice to do hard labour goes against my stereotypical Afrikaner upbringing where it was instilled in me that this was not work that 'ladies' do. This active position of choice enables me to create a new empowered position to speak from. By choosing to sculpt, I challenge the Afrikaner female stereotype and forcing my constructed Afrikaner identity to emerge. I perform the female stereotype by doing stitching together the fabric that covers the sculptures.

Through my recognition of gendered performance and stereotypes, I undergo what Butler (2004:133) describes as a "process of transformation". In my case, through this process of transformation there is a destruction of, or shift in, my conditioned female Afrikaner upbringing. My reading in identity studies and exploration in my practical work informs my understanding and recognition of gender complexity. I understand that the ideological created *volksmoeder*

stereotype is a construct and that the construction of my identity is far more “malleable and transformable” (Butler 2004:216).

Through the process of making my artwork, I question normative “notions of reality” in order for “new modes of reality [to be] instituted” (Butler 2004:217). For, as Butler (2004:218) explains, “through the practice of gender performativity, we not only see how the norms that govern reality are cited but grasp one of the mechanisms by which reality is reproduced and altered in the course of that reproduction”.



CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes my exploration of how the use of material and biomorphic forms can convey aspects of gendered and cultural identity. I have examined the use of such constructs in Hlobo's *Izithunzi* installation and selected artworks from my *Ontluikende on/ge-mak* exhibition. Both Hlobo and I emphasise the use of biomorphic form and materials in our artworks to convey meaning. By exploring my use of material in Chapter Three, I convey aspects of my emergent constructed Afrikaner, female, heterosexual identity in post-apartheid South Africa. Similarly, although Hlobo's artworks have a distinctive style, he also uses biomorphic shapes to convey aspects of his hybrid constructed western, gay, isiXhosa identity. This hybrid, liminal space, I argue, is a manifestation of Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of the Third Space from which a new fluid position and liminal identity emerges. This hybrid identity is situated within Stuart Hall's (2003:236) constructivist theory of cultural identity that is unfixed, unstable, liminal, performative and emergent.



4.2 Form and material as meaning

Through my visual comparison of Hlobo's *Izithunzi* (Chapter Two) and four of my sculptures, *Rusbank revolusie*, *Koffie breek*, *Onttroon* and *Prinses* (Chapter Three), the subversion of the normative gendered use of materials in redefining and contributing to a more complex reading of gender roles becomes clear. Hlobo's use of stereotypically 'soft', 'feminine' materials, such as rubber inner tubing, lace, ribbon and organza is in sharp contrast to the 'hard' materials that I use, such as concrete, steel pipe, polystyrene and fibreglass, which are stereotypically associated with 'masculinity'. I also use 'soft' material and cover the sculptures with fabric. These materials are carefully selected in order to redefine and portray our constructed gendered identities and the malleable complexity that borrows from both genders and references historical past. Hlobo, as a gay isiXhosa male, aligns himself with a pro-feminist ideology, which is demonstrated in his use of fine stitching to decorate and assemble his

sculptures, whereas I, as a heterosexual Afrikaans-speaking female, align myself with pro-feminist ideology by performing 'masculine' work such as welding an armature from steel pipes, carrying heavy sculptures and sculpting with power tools, as well as performing 'feminine' work such as stitching. The 'type' of work that I do can be attributed to the categories of both masculine and feminine. Both Hlobo and I therefore, in different ways, reverse or question the normative gender roles performed in our cultures.

Hlobo's use of materials, the rubber inner tubing in particular, is a clear reference to fetishism and masquerade. Hlobo's *Izithunzi* figures can be interpreted as being covered up by the draped rubber inner tubing that alludes to a theatrical costume and therefore 'putting on a show' or masquerading. In drag culture men perform and dress up as women, and Hlobo's installation figures link to drag culture, which in turn is indicative of his gay gendered identity that he 'performs'. Although both Hlobo and I use furniture in our sculptures, our conceptual aims differ. Lundström (2009:174) explains that Hlobo's use of furniture is connected to the home. In *Izithunzi*, Hlobo subverts the notion of the home as a normative feminine space by incorporating monstrous figures. While Hlobo uses furniture as functional objects, I render furniture uncomfortable and dysfunctional.

As discussed in Chapter Three, I incorporate furniture into my sculptures to convey aspects of the home, comfort and dysfunction, my Afrikaner legacy, personal memories and notions of life and death. As artists, we both attempt to create forms imbued with monstrous, alien, grotesque, carnivalesque and/or liminal qualities. These qualities are consciously foregrounded so as to challenge, destabilise and/or threaten constructed normative cultural and gendered identity roles. Some of Hlobo's figures have legs with feet, but overall, he uses blob-like biomorphic forms with no distinguishing human features. Jantjes (2011:68) describes these amorphous forms as "spirit beings, ancestors ... who seem to be stripped of their once omniscient power to control social behaviour". In contrast, I employ biomorphic forms to establish a sense of my own agency, which enables me to break free of my Afrikaner legacy.

Both Hlobo and I have named our artworks using our mother tongue. Hlobo uses isiXhosa words such as 'Izithunzi' ('shadows'); 'Kumbomvu' ('beware') and 'Umtshotsho' (which refers to an adolescent group). By using isiXhosa titles, Hlobo introduces isiXhosa culture into a "global art context" (Mergel 2009:31). As he does not translate the titles, the viewer is compelled to search for meaning within the works. Ratele (2009:21) explains that Hlobo is "celebrating his South African identity and gender identity" by using isiXhosa words for his titles, and maintains that Hlobo's use of isiXhosa titles "anchors his art and centres his creations" in isiXhosa culture.

When sculpting, it is important for me to engage with the materials and see where the interaction between the materials takes me. In my art-making practice, my interest is in creating tension between the materials I use, in order to convey meaning. This intention is illustrated in *Rusbank revolusie* and *Koffie breek*, where the interaction of the materials creates tension with the biomorphic forms protruding through the furniture. In *Onttroon*, the interaction between the biomorphic shapes and the furniture is more fluid, as the curved biomorphic form appears to be 'sucking in' the object of comfort. In *Prinses*, both fluidity and tension is present, with the biomorphic form breaking out and protruding from the bed. In *Prinses* and *Koffie breek* tension is shown by the stitched thread that is stretched taut because the biomorphic form is overstuffed.

4.3 Contribution of study

Since there is little written on Hlobo's use of biomorphic form, my study contributes to this gap in the literature. The study also contributes to broadening the research on gender complexity within an Afrikaner female paradigm.

In Chapter One I referred to works by *Die Antwoord*, Jack Parrow, Richardt Strydom and Roelof van Wyk in order to demonstrate how these cultural practitioners are dealing with aspects of their emergent Afrikaner identities. This exploration of emergent Afrikaner identities seems to be a relatively new phenomenon. My research contributes to what might be termed a nascent field of emergent Afrikaner identity studies, that may be situated within the loosely

termed field of study South African Critical Whiteness studies (unpacked in Chapter One).

4.4 Suggestions for further research

This study documents and positions my development as an artist from my undergraduate studies to the present time of writing. This exploration has enabled me to understand and articulate both my art-making process and the theory informing my work.

I intend to further my research by extending and developing the concepts that I have dealt with in this study, namely, my constructed emergent Afrikaner identity in post-apartheid South Africa, my gender performativity, and my use of material as meaning. I will also extend what I have already done in this study both materially, through continued sculptural work. At the start of this study, I developed on my art-making process from my Honours studies. The impetus to use biomorphic forms has remained constant, but I have changed the materials I use and my working techniques. My material changed from wire, cellotape and plastic, to concrete, fibreglass, steel pipe, stuffing, thread, polystyrene and fabric.

In the practical work, I also introduce furniture as found object into my artworks rather than make the furniture as I did previously. A key turning point in my practical work was when I started to break away from the clean white biomorphic surface that I initially envisioned and produced. The white form proved to be limiting, with new materials, other visual possibilities opened up leading to new conceptual directions and meanings. In these works I experimented with a range of different materials such as fabric, stuffing, concrete and fibreglass. In a range of sculptural works to follow, I will experiment with the surface of the forms by painting on them, and play with painted or patterned fabric to create optical illusions. Furthermore, I intend to experiment with different kinds of fabrics and ways of stuffing the forms and furniture. This research has therefore opened up a range of new conceptual, technical and material possibilities, that I am interested in pursuing.

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APPENDIX A

Nicholas Hlobo's biography

Nicholas Hlobo was born in 1975 in Cape Town. He was raised in the village of Newtown, outside the town of Idutywa in the Eastern Cape. According to Mark Gevisser (2010:13), Hlobo was raised by his strict grandmother who was a "traditional butcher and a taverner". As a child he was allowed to go into the tavern and listen to the "elders gossip" (Gevisser 2010:13). In 1994, he moved to Johannesburg and lodged with his aunt in Tembisa. In Johannesburg, he explored his coming out as a homosexual isiXhosa male through the gay club culture (Gevisser 2009:15). His art studies began at the Artist Proof Studio¹ and later he enrolled in the Fine Arts programme at the former Technikon Witwatersrand (now the University of Johannesburg).

After graduation from the University of Johannesburg in 2002, Hlobo became a full-time artist, winning the Tollman Award² in 2006. Sue Williamson explains that to Hlobo this was the "most significant moment" in his career because it made him realise what a contribution he could make to "South African culture" (2006:[sp]). As a world-renowned artist he has exhibited extensively in South Africa³ and abroad⁴. Hlobo was selected for the prestigious Rolex Mentor and Protégé Art Initiative where he was mentored by Sir Anish Kapoor in 2010. At the time of this research he was represented by the Stevenson Gallery.

¹ The Artist Proof Studio (APS) is an art education centre that specialises in printmaking through a variety of diverse partnerships with creative young artists, established professional artists, community groups, patrons and funders. The APS was started in 1991 by Kim Berman and Nhlahla Xaba (Artistproofstudio [sa]:[sp]).

² The Tollman Award is given to an exceptionally promising young artist and is donated by the Tollman family (Williamson 2006: [sp]).

³ Hlobo's South African solo exhibitions include *Umdudu* at the Aardklop arts festival in Potchefstroom in 2008, the *Ezele* exhibition at Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town in 2006. *Kwatsityw'iziko* at the Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town in 2008. *Uhambo* at Level 2 Gallery in 2007.

⁴ Hlobo's international solo exhibitions include *Intethe (A Sketch for an Opera)* at Locust Project in Miami in 2013 and *Nicholas Hlobo: Sculpture, Installation, Performance, Drawing* at National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design in Oslo in 2011.

APPENDIX B

Interview with Interviewee One_Transcribed

Job: Art teacher at Prestige College

Gender: Male

Age: 30

Culture: Xhosa

Date of interview: 30 August 2014

Place: Pretoria, North Park Mall

Time: 11:00

1. Describe the *Umtshotsho* ritual?

The practice of *Umtshotsho* remains to be buried. It does not want to be resurrected. The thing about Hlobo's *Umtshotsho*, I noticed the installation is split in two; *Izithunzi* and *Kubomvu*. I don't have a personal interest [sic] in Hlobo's work. When they speak of gays, it is not something I am interested in. There are a lot of contradictions in Xhosa culture. Being gay is not accepted in Xhosa culture. There is a thin line between Xhosa culture and religion.

Umtshotsho has a deeper meaning about the 'rite of passage' which is circumcision. The *Umtshotsho* celebration involves dancing and singing. Both males and females sing and dance together. It is undertaken for the transition between youth and adulthood. For young people to explore what it is to be an adult. It is done in a very festive and celebrated way. I am, not so clued up on it. I am part of the new people that do not go through the *Umtshotsho*.

The rituals make a large distinction between youth and adulthood that is why it is experienced as a 'rite of passage'. Initiation is very controversial in media and the public. It is a secretive thing. I went through the process where you become circumcised into manhood.

There are different kinds of dialects of Xhosa. Looking at amaPondo, amaHlubi and Mthembos. The language is the same, but there are subtle differences. I am a Hlubi. Hlubi subgroups have more association with Sotho speaking people and

how they do circumcision. Different subgroups have different dress codes. Even when you become a man there is a specific way you should dress.

Long time ago the great isiXhosa chief, Palo had two sons, his two sons had a disagreement. It caused the tribe to split and affected the Xhosa nation as a whole. The tribe split into those that live from Grahamstown to Lesotho and then Grahamstown down to Cape.

I went through circumcision. *Umtshotsho* has almost disappeared because of modern influences. When you go through circumcision there is a celebration you have *Umgidi*. It is where the family and everyone come together, after you have been initiated. There is a huge celebration because you are becoming a man. It is huge in Xhosa culture. You need to abandon the clothes that you wear. *Umgidi* is similar in a sense to the *Umtshotsho*. That is how the modern Xhosa people see it. At the *Umgidi* elders come to speak to your life. They speak about the expectations of being a Xhosa male and speak words of wisdoms. The circumcision ritual can be held at Initiation Schools but most families do it privately. Other cultures don't practice initiation anymore.

Umkhwetha is called the initiate. *Ingcibi* is the teacher or supervisor. These days some of the *Ingcibi* are corrupt as well as run illegal initiations. They go there just for money. They treat the boys very badly. Sometimes they go there drunk they don't do their job to look after the initiates. The Xhosa chiefs in the Eastern Cape decided to supervise the whole situation and organise the initiation school in order to preserve the culture. To ensure that the right ways are observed. When I was reading about *Umtshotsho* I know that it has disappeared because the modern influences have become so much.

My art research is to look at the play between being a modern and traditional Xhosa male. I am modern man, drinking this cappuccino, I have aspirations I want to see myself somewhere doing something. At the same time if I go through modern life and I struggle and I don't fit in I drift back to my culture. I

then feel traditional culture is where I belong. It is a dilemma. This is what interests me the most.

Interviewee Two lost touch with his home and roots in the Eastern Cape. A lot of people will say Xhosa men have too much pride in themselves. If you ask any Tshwane person they will described the Xhosa male as cheeky, stubborn and arrogant. In the Eastern Cape the Xhosa traditions are still strong. In the city of gold people lose touch with their roots. In the Eastern Cape you will see women still wearing traditional clothes.

2. What did you wear for the initiation ritual?

When you go to the school and arrive there, you remove your clothes entirely. It is done in a sacred way. They put a rub called *embola* all over your body. The rub can be white or brown depending on which clan you are from. When you arrive they circumcise you. A whole group of people will watch you because that is the test of a man when the process is done. It is test of a man. During the initiated ritual you don't wear anything. You have a blanket.

I am not going into detail. Certain things I cannot speak with you about. You stay there for couple of days without water. They give you samp without beans. The supervisors, they look after you and make sure everything is alright. The one who looks after you check on you. During this time you learn a specific language that only men can communicate. They teach you something. After that process is over you can drink water. The initiation separates you from the boys. The men have their unique identity apart from boys. Hlobo is an outcast because he is gay. Back home they don't recognize gay culture. During the ritual you stay in a hut your family builds, after the initiation ritual the hut is burnt to the ground. The process of initiation runs for a month or two. I was about 21 / 20 years old when I went through it. There is a lot of conflict between Christians and traditional Xhosa people. Look at older missionaries they regard all these traditions as witchcraft.

The *Umgidi* celebration is afterwards at home. *Umgidi* celebration they cover you with a blanket. At the ceremony you listen to elders what is expected of as a Xhosa male. People bring gifts that are domestic items like sheets and blankets, clothes, dishes, pots that you need in your new life. In my home it was done in a suburb area. My parent had to spread the word that there might be some noise. People came from, all over to celebrate. Depending on whether you are Christian or not you are given a woman. You are allowed to do your manly duties. So you will go with the woman depending on your values. The way it was done for me there were certain things that were not done. They did not slaughter a goat for me because I cannot be seen worshipping ancestors.

The Xhosa traditionalist and Christians have opposing values. The African independent churches (ZCC) try to incorporate both tradition and Christian values in their religion. Some of the churches argue that it is not authentic Christianity. A lot of people enjoy this mix. It makes sense for me to mix western Christian values with African beliefs. ZCC has a huge following. The artist Phillemon Hlungwani speaks about the play between religion and traditional values in his artwork.

In my Xhosa culture it does not matter how old you are, if you have not gone through the process of initiation you are not a man you are a boy. You will not get the respect you deserve. You are an outcast. I think that is why Hlobo does his artworks. He is gay and he has never gone through initiation, so he will never be accepted as a Xhosa male.

When my brothers were going through the initiation process I looked after them. My father is a senior pastor at the Charismatic Christian community fellowship.

3. What do you wear during *Umgidi*?

During the *Umgidi* celebrations your face is smeared. You wear a hat and a khaki suite. For different subgroups you will wear different types of hats. For my clan Mpondo you wear a smart hat. If you are a Hlubi you will wear a cowboy hat.

4. Was it a dramatic or traumatic?

The initiation process was traumatic. I was typical cheese boy. In our culture it is someone who speaks fluent English and has grown up almost as a white person is called a cheese boy or coconut.

5. Is it still relevant to the isiXhosa society?

Yes it is relevant because it is a 'rite of passage'.



**INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR M TECH RESEARCH PAPER
FOR POSTGRADUATE DEGREE MTECH: FINE ART**

STUDY TITLE:

Exploring the use of material and biomorphic form to convey aspects of gendered and cultural identity constructs with emphasis on selected works by Nicholas Hlobo

Research abstract

In this study, I explore the way in which materials and biomorphic¹ forms can be used in selected artworks to convey aspects of gendered and cultural identity constructs. This is done with specific reference to Nicholas Hlobo's work and to the artwork I produce as part of the practical component of my degree. I have chosen to examine Hlobo's installation titled *Izithunzi* (2009)². This installation forms part of two installation artworks from Hlobo's exhibition titled *Umtshotsho* (Standard Bank Gallery, 30 March-8 May 2010). *Izithunzi* it is a good example of Hlobo's use of biomorphic form and typical of his use of materials, which have some similarities with my work. Although Hlobo's use of materials has been widely discussed in the literature available on his work, very little has been written on his use of biomorphic form.

Researcher: Sophia van Wyk, M.Tech candidate, Visual Art, University of Johannesburg

Purpose of the Research: M.Tech (Fine Art)

Dear Mr Masiza

I would like to ask your permission to:

¹ For the purposes of this study I define 'biomorphic forms' as abstract forms that make reference to plant or human-type forms (*The Tate Guide to Modern Art Terms* 2008:37). The word 'biomorphic' came into use in the 1930s to describe the imagery in the "more abstract types of Surrealist painting and sculptures, particularly in the work of Joan Miró, Jean Arp, Yves Tanguy, Henry Moore and later on Louis Bourgeois" (Wilson & Lack 2008:38).

²*Izithunzi* means 'shadows' in isiXhosa. An *umtshotsho* is a "peer-regulated youth organisation of adolescents, which holds parties where mock-fighting, dancing and dating take place; a dry run, as it were, for lives of war and procreation" (Gevisser 2009:9). Although he was not part of the traditional *umtshotsho* rituals, as an adolescent Hlobo often fantasised about being part of them and has recreated this ritual through his *Umtshotsho* installation (Gevisser 2009:10).

- record the interview;
- transcribe the interview;
- critically analyse your comments.

Please indicate if you would prefer if I quote you directly or if I paraphrase your comments.

Please note the following:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This informed consent form is to ensure that you understand the purpose of your participation in the study and that your rights will be protected during the gathering of information through this interview. Kindly read the following conditions and if the terms are agreeable to you, acknowledge your consent to participate in the interview by signing at the end of the consent form.

Please note that your involvement in this study is voluntary and you may terminate the interview at any time.

1. The objectives of the interview are to discuss Umtshotsho and isiXhosa initiation ritual/s.
2. Therefore, your input will be required as an isiXhosa male initiate that has gone through the relevant initiation ritual.
3. Please indicate the following by crossing out the unwanted information – I would like to remain anonymous in the dissertation / ~~I give permission to use my full names in the dissertation.~~
4. If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Senior Lecturer in Visual Arts at University of Johannesburg Leora Farber at the following address: leoraf@uj.ac.za

.....*Brandwijk*.....

Signature of Researcher

I, Khulile Masiza, have read, understood and accept the terms described above and agree to voluntarily participate in the interview.

.....*[Signature]*.....

Signed

30/08/2014

Date

Pretoria

Place



Interview with Interviewee Two_Transcribed

Job: Custodian at Melrose House

Age: 28

Gender: Male

Culture: Xhosa

Date of interview: 31 Aug 2014

Place: Pretoria, Hatfield Plaza

Time: 13:00

1. Describe the *Umtshotsho* ritual?

I don't know that much about *Umtshotsho* because it is an old tradition that is not practiced anymore. It is when a boy goes to manhood. It is celebration that they make. Today they will make a celebration for him, in the morning before they take him to the mountain.

I did go through circumcision. *Umgidi* is the celebration that is held when you come back from the circumcision ritual in Limpopo. It does not replace *Umtshotsho*. They use to do both. Now they only do *Umgidi*. We all need something to be done for us. When you become a man you have to celebrate.

I was eighteen years old when I was circumcised. I am from Umtata in the Eastern Cape. In the Eastern Cape we have many isiXhosa tribes. We do not all do the same thing. I am from the Abathembo tribe. I was at an Initiation School. It is quite sensitive to discuss. The *Umtshotsho* ritual is not performed because of demographics. If you live in a township you will not be doing such things. Everything happens in the township.

2. What types of clothes do you wear during the initiation ritual?

The day after *Umgidi* you wear the khaki suite. You also get a smart hat.

I come from a Christian family. When you do *Umgidi* there are things you are not supposed to do because you are a Christian and not a traditionalist. During

Umgidi you can drink alcohol inside the yard. Since I am Christian, we need to drink the alcohol outside the yard. During *Umgidi* there is a lot of dancing singing and mocking. There are woman but not in the same room. When you are going through a lot you sing songs that ease your pain.

3. Is it dramatic or traumatic?

The initiation ritual was dramatic for me as an individual. If it does not go as planned it can become traumatic. I saw a document on TV of boys who went through the same initiation but they have lost their manhood.

4. Is it still relevant to the isiXhosa society?

Yes, because it is a 'rite of passage'. The 'rite of passage' part is very relevant to any young Xhosa male. In the way they treat you. Completely different from when you were a boy.

5. In IsiXhosa culture do people dress up in traditional garb?

Yes, there are traditional dress and I can see how there are parallels with drag culture.

6. Are there still Red isiXhosa people today?

There are still Red isiXhosa people in fact there are more Red people than School people.

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In this study, I explore the way in which materials and biomorphic¹ forms can be used in selected artworks to convey aspects of gendered and cultural identity constructs. This is done with specific reference to Nicholas Hlobo's work and to the artwork I produce as part of the practical component of my degree. I have chosen to examine Hlobo's installation titled *Izithunzi* (2009)². This installation forms part of two installation artworks from Hlobo's exhibition titled *Umtshotsho* (Standard Bank Gallery, 30 March-8 May 2010). *Izithunzi* is a good example of Hlobo's use of biomorphic form and typical of his use of materials, which have some similarities with my work. Although Hlobo's use of materials has been widely discussed in the literature available on his work, very little has been written on his use of biomorphic form.

Researcher: Sophia van Wyk, M.Tech candidate, Visual Art, University of Johannesburg

Purpose of the Research: M.Tech (Fine Art)

Dear Mr Ngcai

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² *Izithunzi* means 'shadows' in isiXhosa. An *umtshotsho* is a "peer-regulated youth organisation of adolescents, which holds parties where mock-fighting, dancing and dating take place; a dry run, as it were, for lives of war and procreation" (Gevisser 2009:9). Although he was not part of the traditional *umtshotsho* rituals, as an adolescent Hlobo often fantasised about being part of them and has recreated this ritual through his *Umtshotsho* installation (Gevisser 2009:10).

- record the interview;
- transcribe the interview;
- critically analyse your comments.

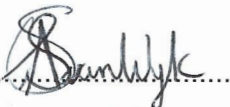
Please indicate if you would prefer if I quote you directly or if I paraphrase your comments.

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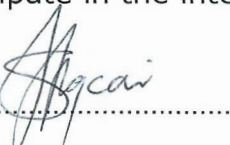
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.....


Signature of Researcher

I, SANELE NGCAI, have read, understood and accept the terms described above and agree to voluntarily participate in the interview.

.....


Signed

31 AUG 2014.....

Date

PRETORIA.....

Place



APPENDIX C

The sculptures included in the dissertation were not complete at the time of documenting them for reproduction. The sculptures (Fig. 1, fig. 2 and fig. 3) included in Appendix C show the completed sculptures exhibited at the *Ontluikende on/ge-mak* exhibition at FADA Gallery.



Figure 1 Sophia van Wyk (artist), *Koffie breek* and *Bal en Vuis* at FADA gallery, 2015 (photograph by Eugene Hön).



Figure 2 Sophia van Wyk (artist), *Ontluikende on/ge-mak* exhibition at FADA Gallery, 2015 (photograph by Eugene Hön).



Figure 3 Sophia van Wyk (artist), *Prinses* and *Rusbank revolusie* at FADA Gallery, 2014 (photograph by Eugene Hön).

The three artworks that were completed after the dissertation was handed in are *Bal en Vuis* (Fig. 4), *Ouma* (Fig 5) and *Landskap* (Fig 6).



Figure 4 Sophia van Wyk, *Bal en vuis*, 2014 - 2015. Fibreglass, fabric, ball and claw footstool and polystyrene, 40 x 45 x 35 cm (photograph by Eugene Hön).



Figure 5 Sophia van Wyk, *Ouma*, 2014 - 2015. Fibreglass, fabric, emboya side table and polystyrene, 36 x 52 x 45 cm (photograph by Eugene Hön).



Figure 6 Sophia van Wyk, *Landskap*, 2014 - 2015. Painting, fibreglass, thread, fabric, oil paint and polystyrene, 46 x 58 x 32 cm (photograph by artist).